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SOPHIA CELINA DIESEL

THE EVOLUTION OF THE MAN OF LETTERS:
GEORGE GISSING AND THE FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL IN *NEW GRUB STREET*

Porto Alegre
2017

PONTIFICIA UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL
FACULDADE DE LETRAS

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Dedicated to my mother, my husband and my brother for their support.

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I thank professor Pedro, who supported me in this new challenge.

People say that suffering ennobles one;
it’s a lie, it only makes one brutal.
(MAUGHAM, 1902)

ABSTRACT

The present dissertation deals with George Gissing's novel *New Grub Street*, written in England in 1891. It is a novel about the hardships of the literary industry and how much writers are connected or disconnected with the economical culture they live in. The Victorian age was the age of transition, the age of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer and of the inevitable social changes which came with the innovations brought up by science, social studies and the revolutions that followed. Despite some initial reserve, Victorian people were eager for innovation, even though newness also caused uneasiness. The wish to understand the world that surrounded them, how they got there and what the future reserved formed the basis for modern studies which are relevant until today. The main focus of the text is how Gissing's fictional characters deal with this world of changes, the competitive market, poverty and social alienation. Each of them reflects partly the author's own professional and personal choices and opinions in many different shades that come from resignation to utter revolt against the modern pressure for fast, cheap and easy literature. It is puzzling though to notice how pessimistic and even aggressive Gissing is towards his profession inside his imaginative world.

Key words: George Gissing. English literature. Charles Darwin. Herbert Spencer. Victorian Age. Literary industry.

RESUMO

A presente dissertação discute o romance *New Grub Street* de George Gissing, escrito na Inglaterra em 1891. Trata-se de um romance sobre as dificuldades da indústria literária e o quanto os escritores da época estão ou não inseridos na cultura econômica em que vivem. A era Vitoriana foi um tempo de transições, a era de Charles Darwin e Herbert Spencer, e das inevitáveis mudanças sociais causadas pelas inovações trazidas pela ciência, os estudos sociais e as revoluções que se seguiram a partir destas. Apesar de sua cautela inicial, o povo vitoriano tinha sede por descobertas, mesmo que elas causassem insegurança. O desejo de entender o mundo que os cercava, como haviam chegado até ali e o que o futuro reservava formaram a base para os estudos modernos que são relevantes até hoje. O principal foco do texto é entender como os personagens fictícios de Gissing lidam com esse mundo de mudanças, de mercado competitivo, pobreza e alienação social. Cada um deles reflete parcialmente as ideias e opiniões pessoais do autor em várias intensidades partindo da resignação até a revolta convicta contra a pressão do mundo moderno por uma literatura rápida, barata e fácil. A parte instigante se dá quando notamos o quão pessimista e mesmo agressivo Gissing é em relação a sua própria profissão dentro de seu mundo ficcional.

Palavras chave: George Gissing. Literatura Inglesa. Charles Darwin. Herbert Spencer. Era Vitoriana. Indústria literária.

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1 INTRODUCTION – THE DEATH OF THE HERO

What is the difference between the Grub Street of Samuel Johnson and the one of the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the city which is like Dickens's but not quite? Although the perception of the past may play tricks on us when a whole century seems to be compacted into slight and simple definitions, one must pay attention to the fact that a period like the Victorian age was the birth of many of the greatest advancements of history in many fields, and so generalizations or over-simplifications are dangerous things. In literary and social studies, the famous "age of transition", usually covers a stretch of thirty or forty years beginning with the ascendance of Queen Victoria in 1837 and marked by the achievements of the Victorians, which are then followed by "the Moderns" in the last twenty odd years. That description allows an understanding of at least two distinct phases of creativity which can be further detailed with more specific phases such as mid-Victorian, The Nineties, *Fin-de-Siècle,* etc., and with them many possibilities for classifications.[1] Yet, afterwards Edwardians and Georgians dealt with their own transitions, like the Great War and the literary Modernism. In the end, every age is an age of transitions.

Considering how writers can be labelled by the period they belong to, even such period divisions are abrupt and artificial, we can understand how important it is for writers to leave the past behind in order to build their own identity as part of the identity of a new age. In her essay *Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown* Virginia Woolf admits that transitions are not so marked as they are shown in books; yet, to make her point about the question of character creation, she proposes a "change in human character" in 1910; a date when human relations in terms of religion, conduct, politics and literature altered, according to her. Following her case, Woolf distinguishes Edwardian writers - Mr Wells, Mr Bennet and Mr Galsworthy - from Georgian writers - Mr Forster, Mr Lawrence and Mr Joyce.[2] She carefully places authors (older than herself) in this or that period, but none of them is called Victorian. Keating says that by considering writers like H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy, born in the mid-60s, Edwardians, she is not only placing the authors she admires out of the Victorian age, but also herself, since being a Victorian by her time was outdated and totally undesirable (she was nineteen when Queen Victoria died and twenty-eight in 1910). Even when differing her work from the work

[1] KEATING, Peter. *The haunted study*: a social history of the English novel, 1875 – 1914. London: Faber and Faber, 2008. p. 1-2.
[2] WOOLF, Virginia. *Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown*. London: Hogarth, 1924. p. 4-5. Available at <http://www.columbia.edu>. Accessed on: 14 Jan. 2016.

of older writers such as George Gissing and Thomas Hardy, Woolf is cautious not to be rude by calling them Victorians.[3] Not yet modernists, but already considered modern, the late Victorian writers (judging at least by the period in which Queen Victoria was still living) and the young Edwardians and Georgians still suffered from the great cultural impact of the Victorian age, and turned against that Victorian identity, regarding it as something obsolete; something that should not be part of their history. The new generations wanted to validate their own identity and ideologies at any cost, leaving the gas-lit age behind once and for all.

This urge to separate one's time from the preceding one is often the fuel needed to energise a new generation. The end of the nineteenth century is undeniably a very particular moment in the English history in which all the century achievements were being put into question. Among a series of tensions in the Empire, the fierce international competition had checked much of the English confidence which followed the industrial revolution and the economic supremacy of the middle decades of the century. The confidence in the imperial idea and the British military efficiency had been rocked with the Boer Wars between 1881 and 1902[4], and even the classic "Victorian values" which had marked the century were also being challenged, as we can see reflected in the literature of the period.[5] The powerful circulating libraries, so influential but at the same time restricting, were losing space to bookstores and their customers who felt more at liberty to buy their own books at cheap prices without previous approval. Also writers were expected to act more like businessmen, managing their works and their readers the same way they managed their money. The market expanded as never before and if on the one hand the public was becoming more childish and unprepared as a whole, on the other there were many more readers, with different tastes, and therefore more possibilities to get works published and try one's luck. Plus, novels were not the only possibility, whereas there was a great demand for writings of different kinds – newspaper articles, reviews, essays, short stories, etc. Those writings did not always count on undeniable quality, but they became so diluted in the great flood of literary work which poured fourth week after week, that at least they had the power to provide cheap entertainment for many as well as food on the table of those who lived by the pen.[6]

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[3] KEATING. p. 94.

[4] The Boer Wars were the wars between the British and the descendants of the Dutch settlers over the African colonies. They were just some of the troubles Britain was involved with in its colonies or would-be colonies during the century, culminating in series of wars. WILSON, A. N. *The Victorians*. London: Arrow, 2003. p. 353.

[5] DENNIS, Barbara. *The Victorian novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008. p. 46.

[6] The sentence The flood of literary work… is Jasper's. In: GISSING, George. *New Grub Street*. London: Penguin, 2012. p. 445. Digital edition.

In George Gissing's *New Grub Street*, published in 1891, the young journalist Jasper Milvain criticises Edwin Reardon for being an unpractical writer unable to profit with his writings and accuses him of selling his manuscripts as if he lived in Samuel Johnson's Grub Street. Milvain explains that "*our* Grub Street of to-day is quite a different place" … "it is supplied with telegraphic communication, it knows what literary fare is in demand in every part of the world, its inhabitants are men of business." As the chapter title says, Milvain is "a man of his day"; he is the picture of the modern man of letters who states clearly and shamelessly that "literature nowadays is a trade. Putting aside men of genius, who may succeed by mere cosmic force, your successful man of letters is your skilful tradesman". (p. 15). Therefore, in the new Grub Street, the romantic ideals related to literature must be put aside because now it is the age of commercialism. The new order seems accurate, since everybody needs money to live, but it also feels wrong to people like Reardon whose ideals are very different from Jasper's. If literature becomes a business like every other, how can it stand at the same time for art?

Grub Street has once been an actual street, in the eighteenth century, crammed with literary hacks or mediocre, needy writers who wrote for hire. The term *hack* was originated from the *hackney coaches*, pulled by horses and possible to hire at any street.[7] The hacks of Grub Street became known by the name of their street and there was even a Grub-Street Journal. In his dictionary Dr Samuel Johnson defines Grub Street as "originally the name of a street in Moorfields in London, much inhabited by writers of small histories, dictionaries, and temporary poems; whence any mean production is called grubstreet." The term became a metaphor for the commercial production of printed matter – miserable in profit, but rich in essence – regardless of whether such matter actually originated on the physical Grub Street or not.[8] "By the end of the nineteenth century, the name Grub Street conjured up a body of lore and a set of implicit beliefs concerning the place of literary writing in the world."[9]

When Jasper refers to the *new* nineteenth century Grub Street, he means that the old limited place has spread into a wider world, full of possibilities. According to Jasper, the modernity of telegraphs, trains and printing represent genuine progress for writers like him, who are sharp enough to spot the opportunities and are fast to incorporate new ideas. To John Goode, one of the most respected scholars on George Gissing, it is of no importance whether it

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[7] SELIG, Robert L. The valley of the shadow of books: alienation in Gissing's *New Grub Street*. In: *Nineteenth-century fiction*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Sep. 1970), p. 188-198. p. 189. Published by University of California Press. Available at <http://www.jstor.org>. Accessed on: 16 Jan. 2016.

[8] ENCICLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA. Grub street. s.v. Available at <http://global.britannica.com> Accessed on: 16 Jan. 2016.

[9] ARATA, Stephen. Introduction. In: GISSING, George. *New Grub Street*: Broadview edition. Toronto ON: Broadview, 2007. p. 11-30. p. 22.

is the old or the new one, but "Grub Street is a term which comes into full significance when the writer becomes committed to the market."[10] Indeed, all the work referred to Grub Street, independently of the time, quality or essence, is commercial work. The novel provokes us to question the true function of writing in a setting like this as it poses characters within the specific limits of the marketable writing while the true calling of literature seems to have been lost in the pursuit of money. Marian Yule, for instance, ponders on the use of so much literary business when one's writing should only exist to carry an urgent message for the world. Contrary to that, her father, Alfred Yule, recalls that the word literature itself, as they understand it, came into being only after writing had become committed to the market. It contains the essence of trade in its very conception. Therefore, literature being a trade is not an exclusive characteristic of the nineteenth century: it has always been a trade. When Jasper says that nowadays things are different he means that things are harder, faster and bigger. Unpractical writers like his friend Reardon are not likely to succeed if they do not adapt to the new picture. Reardon dreams of a market that does not exist anymore (if it ever existed): a market less complicated in which art is put in the first place and money is not the chief goal. The romantic image that people like Reardon have of the eighteenth century is often problematic and unreal, for neither the glory attributed to Johnson himself nor his extensive work prevent his utter poverty, making him a victim of the abusive market. Goode emphasises that there is no place for romantic dreams in *New Grub Street*. Writers fight a battle to get their daily bread and survive and they have but little time to think of their "true calling". What we take from *New Grub Street* in the end is that there is no real fight between art and market because any message that the author may have to tell his readers has been altogether lost in the struggle to keep this same writer alive.[11]

Thomas Carlyle in his time believed writers to be modern prophets. In his 1840 essay *The Hero as Man of Letters* he describes the writer as the "light of the world", its guiding priest, because he, unlike others, is able to see the "Divine idea of the world" underneath all superficialities.[12] Carlyle thought of literature as something sacred, in a way Reardon and Marian would probably agree. To him, the writer becomes a writer because he urges to give a message to the world; he writes because he is divinely guided to do so, not because he has compromised with the market. Carlyle admits that writers are poorly paid by their work, but

[10] GOODE, John. *George Gissing*: ideology and fiction. London: Vision, 1978. p. 120.
[11] GOODE. p. 120-121.
[12] CARLYLE, Thomas. Lecture V: The hero as a man of letters: Johnson, Rousseau, Burns. In: *On heroes and hero worship and the heroic in history*. Kindle digital edition p. 90-114. p. 90-91.

defends that the poverty is actually vital for their brilliancy. He claims that there is no evil in being poor; on the contrary "there ought to be Literary Man poor – to show whether they are genuine or not. Mendicant Orders, bodies of men doomed to beg, were instituted by the Christian Church; a most natural and even necessary development of the spirit of Christianity".[13] In a famous passage, he describes the unexpected heroic souls: "He with his copy-rights and copy-wrongs, in his squalid garret, in his rusty coat; ruling (for this is what he does), from his grave, after death, whole nations and generations who would, or would not, give him bread while living, - is a rather curious spectacle!"[14] It almost seems like mockery when he mentions the "copy-rights and copy-wrongs" in a period in which writers had little or no existent intellectual rights over their production, and only few could demand for better terms at publishers. The divinely curious spectacle was sustained at the cost of real sickness and the death of many.

On discussing Johnson, Rousseau and Burns, Carlyle emphasises that on the beaten road in which they toiled, many had to perish, "fashioning a path through the impossible", which proves how worthy survivors are.[15] The romantic ideal of the monastic writer implies that those superior men not only should not, but could not become involved in regular vulgar trade, since they offer such gift to mankind. Yet, he grieves the contradiction that forces the man of letters to negotiate the laws of supply and demand, bargaining in the marketplace, to subsist on what society thinks is fair to give him for his printed books.

Carlyle's lecture exaggerates the hero worship towards the writer. Nevertheless, as Richard Salmon points in his observation on the (de)structuring principle of the literary market, he is indicating a diminution of the objective capacity for hero worship which is specific to the conditions of cultural modernity.[16] Unlike his other heroes – the divinity, the prophet, the priest, the poet and even the king – the modern writer suffers from the "exchange mechanism of the market" which weakens both the traditional human capacity for worship and the heroic character itself. As we see from the lives of Johnson, Rousseau and Burns, the influence they should have on society, including on politics, is contrasted with the neglect and the lack of belief they receive from their public. Carlyle admits that heroes of modern times are among the normal people and share the same miseries and injustice.

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[13] CARLYLE. p. 97
[14] CARLYLE. p. 90
[15] CARLYLE. p. 92
[16] SALMON, Richard. Thomas Carlyle and the idolatry of the man of letters. In: *Journal of Victorian culture*, 2002 Spring, Vol.7(1), p.1-22. p. 10. Available at < http://web.b.ebscohost.com>. Accessed on: 18 Jan. 2016.

Writers are projected with the image of absolute integrity in the face of the debasing solicitations of the outside world, of publishers, editors, readers, money and fame. To George Gissing, this is the prototype of the artist exiled from contemporary culture who inhabits his literary world. He, like Carlyle, was concerned with the power of the true man of letters and with how much he could fight the unjust market and the horde of mediocre scribblers infesting it. The central crisis of *New Grub Street* took seed in this dilemma and grows into a more complicated question, since the hero-types in it like Edwin Reardon are not heroic enough to overcome the conflict.[17] He, who seems to meet the requirements of integrity attributed to the hero kind, is mocked by the narrator when he tells us that to finish the problematic *Margaret Home* novel, Reardon rose almost to a "heroic pitch" of effort. Later, we are totally discouraged to believe in the novelist's reaction because definitely "Reardon did not belong to the heroic class". (p. 131).

If for Carlyle the chaos in which his literary heroes find their business is the worst part of their lives, to George Gissing the chaos is the only element to be found: in *New Grub Street*, the literary class is inorganic and entirely secularised. There is no divine idea by which the social anomaly of the mendicant intellectual can be overturned.[18] Writers are people living apart from both the society to which they feel bonded intellectually and the one they are bonded financially. In other words, they are middle-class people living of working class wages and therefore they feel declassed – as Gissing himself felt – destitute of their rightful place in society. Here, despite Carlyle's complaints on the subject, as in the old Grub Street, the omnipotence of money has to be acknowledged; it has to be discussed and stressed at every moment, because it never leaves the characters' thoughts. It is permanently in the lives of those striving writers, and it frequently means the difference between living or dying. As Henry Rycroft, another Gissing striving writer, says, "You tell me money cannot buy the things most precious. Your commonplace proves that you have never known the lack of it."[19] Money is the divine light here, people's true guide and god. *New Grub Street* is full of people like Rycroft: novelists, journalists, literary agents and many others who cannot afford to ignore the power of money if they want to succeed in this economic fight for survival. The ones that defy it, suffer the consequences.

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[17] POOLE, Adrian. *Gissing in context*. London: Mcmillan, 1975. p. 106-7.
[18] GOODE. p. 123.
[19] GISSING, George. *The private papers of Henry Rycroft*. London: Constable, 1912. Available at <https://archive.org> Accessed on: 30 Jun. 2016. p. 31.

George Gissing is the only late-Victorian novelist to take on London as a full-time job, permanently questioning in his novels the problems of the smoky city life. Like Charles Dickens before him, Gissing depicted a historically inflected London in ways both intimate and panoramic, including his views on the social injustices created by the structure of the urban metropolis, and trusting it to his readers' imaginations. The difference is that Gissing, unlike Dickens, used his mixed ethnographic observation with a *fin de siècle* sense of hopeless decline to strip London down to its brick-and-mortar substrate, eliminating the romantic projections and creating a place of deprivation, ugliness, weary work, and degrading mass culture. What Dickens established in the mid-century, Gissing took to modernity. He saw the mass market negatively as a whole, and London as "killer of souls: a place where people toil endlessly and hopelessly in an attempt, never realised, to achieve some sort of peace, relief or pleasure."[20]

The present dissertation will discuss the gloomy fate designed for writers in Gissing's *New Grub Street*. These writers are the novelists, journalists, literary agents and their respective families and friends whose involvement with the literary market link them in a chain of common trials and frustrations. The changes in the literary market, so stressed by the criticism of the last decades of the Victorian age, actually happened gradually throughout the century, and were only part of a whole economic and cultural evolution that was taking place. Writers were not kept apart from civilization while the changes were happening; however, they felt strangers and even resistant to be taken as common traders because they were artists and should be treated like artists. Nevertheless, some of them were able to sniff changes and adapt, even at the cost of leaving the artistic principles behind. These people, like Jasper Milvain, care little for titles and ideals and are engaged in succeeding professionally, whatever it takes.

New Grub Street is a novel about the hardships of the literary industry and how much writers are connected or disconnected with the economical culture they live in. The Victorian age was the age of transition, the age of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer and inevitable social changes which followed the innovations brought up by science, social studies and the revolutions that followed. Despite some initial reserve, Victorian people were eager for innovation, even though newness also caused uneasiness. The wish to understand the world that surrounded them, how they got there and what the future reserved formed the basis for modern studies which are relevant until today. The main focus of the text will be how Gissing's fictional characters deal with this world of changes, the competitive market, poverty and social

[20] BODENHEIMER, Rosemarie. MANLEY, Lawrence (Ed.). London in the Victorian novel. In: *The Cambridge companion to the literature of London*. p. 142-159. p. 155-157.

alienation. Each of them reflects partly the author's own professional and personal choices and opinions in many different shades that come from resignation to utter revolt against the modern pressure for fast, cheap and easy literature. It is puzzling though to notice how pessimistic and even aggressive Gissing is towards his profession inside his imaginative world.

The first chapter will deal with the major criticism written on Gissing by some of the greatest scholars who have dedicated themselves to the study of his work. Adrian Poole, John Goode, David Grylls, John Halperin, among others, have, at some point, made a parallel between Gissing's struggling lives and Darwin's theory of natural selection, highly popular since its first publication in 1859. Gissing admired Darwin and pronounced *On the origin of species* to a be "a queer jumble of thoughts" which he used to give form to many of his novels such as *Demos*: a story of English socialism of 1886, and later *The nether world*, *Born in exile*, *The whirlpool* and *New Grub Street*. Despite many of Gissing's characters being displayed as stubborn and impractical like Godwin Peak and Edwin Reardon, Simon J. James stresses that the ability to adapt is the very desirable quality which is rewarded by his Darwinian evolutionary narrative. He says that "Gissing's imagination used the theory of evolution to justify his preconceptions of the hostility of the exterior world to the better self: natural selection proves that success is proof of something other than virtuous conduct".[21]

Darwin in Gissing's criticism usually comes in the form of a *Darwinian* or *Social Darwinian* attitude attributed to writers towards the literary market and the competition among themselves. Often there is little differentiation between the use of the two expressions, so sometimes authors clarify their points by explaining the role Darwin played in Gissing's imagination and in the Victorian imagination as a whole. To this, Gillian Beer advises us to be careful, since the fascination provoked by Darwin's theory from the beginning is due to the possibility of extending its implications and generating many different ideological potentialities, according to one's taste.[22] What this chapter seeks to discuss is what critics mean by using such expressions as *Darwinism* and *Social Darwinism* and how they (often superficially) differentiate one from the other. In addition, we shall discuss the possible Darwinian interpretations of *New Grub Street* and what implications of such ideology (or ideologies) we can draw from them.

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[21] JAMES, Simon J. *Unsettled accounts*: money and narrative in the novels of George Gissing. London: Anthem, 2003. p. 115.

[22] BEER, Gillian. Introduction. In DARWIN, Charles. *On the origin of species:* by means of natural selection or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life. Oxford: Oxford University, 2008. p. VII-XXV. p. VIII.

The second chapter will discuss the work of Herbert Spencer and his actual contribution to the sociological studies in the Victorian period. Spencer is often pointed as the father of social Darwinism, the one who took the natural selection to a higher level by applying it to the fight for survival in the city. The problem are the common misconceptions involving Darwinism in society and the misinterpretation of Spencer's work itself, which often points him as a supporter of a crude social arrangement where the survival of the fittest is the one and only objective, no matter what means are used to attain it. Andreski affirms that Spencer's philosophy was much more complex than it is usually considered. His application of the key concept of evolution follows the biological principle that societies, like living organisms, have originated from simple to complex forms. But Spencer was sensible enough to know that not all the rules of evolution applied to the social organization. For example, in nature more and less evolved species can coexist without the more developed organism threatening the life of the less developed. Lions and amoebas have different functions in the circle of life, and life moves on. However, in the realm of human social aggregates, more developed civilizations tend to absorb and exterminate the less developed and then replace them.[23] It is necessary to go deeper into Spencer's texts to understand his point of view, greatly underestimated nowadays, and see how clear was his view of society.

With the analysis of Spencer's major works in terms of social studies – *Social statics* and *The man versus the State* – it is possible to understand his work better and think of its impact in his time. Spencer was not a naive optimist. According to Macrae, he did not believe in real development of a given society: "The evolution of the totality of human society is the record of the failure of the vast majority of specific human societies. To Spencer human history is a charnel house, heaped with the cadavers of evolutionary failure. Only the fittest survive."[24] The picture does not lack neither grandeur, tragedy nor a great measure of truth, the difficulty is finding it cheerful. His straightforwardness attracted George Gissing, who was well-read in his texts. The main focus of this chapter will be to see Spencer's work in its historical context, leaving the social Darwinist misconceptions behind and thinking of how much it could have influenced Gissing in the writing of *New Grub Street*.

The third chapter goes definitely after the socio-historical context which produced a work like *New Grub Street*, the bildungsroman of the end of the century, as says Richard

[23] ANDRESKI, Stanislav (Ed.). Introductory essay: sociology, biology and psychology in Herbert Spencer. In: SPENCER, Herbert. *The making of sociology*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1972. p. 7-35. p. 8-9.
[24] MACRAE, Donald (Ed.). Introduction. In: SPENCER, Herbert. *The man versus the State*: four essays on politics and society. London: Penguin, 1969. p. 7-54. p. 29.

Salmon. A book about the literary life and efforts of writers to succeed like *David Copperfield* before it.[25] Only it lacks the optimistic view of Dickens, who believed that personal effort was the greatest key to social and professional advancement. The world of Gissing, on the other hand, is much more complicated. The end of the Victorian age was the period in which writers depended on a complex net of institutions that determined their success or failure. The reading public is larger because the schooling system has improved and so even the poor are learning to read and therefore to consume the printed word. The circulating libraries, so popular until a few years earlier, do not set parameters for good or bad literature anymore. Because of cheaper editions of books and the easier access to other kinds of cheap reading like periodicals and newspapers, the public is now master to choose what he likes best.

There is a growing hatred among highbrow writers – among them Gissing himself – for the stupidity of the masses, materialized in the form of the mass book market, and the vulgar tastes that, according to them, guide the book industry. Talking about evolution now is a synonym of brooding over the wrong turn humanity has taken. Population multiplied too much and the masses are destroying what had been built before by better men. Gissing lamented the public did not appreciate his work and preferred to buy cheap silly novels instead. He hated the masses, or "the mob", as he used to say, but at the same time pondered on their difficult situation basically for two reasons: he was poor as well and knew the difficulties of living with too little and also knew better than consider poverty a synonym of stupidity. This chapter is about the problematic relation between Gissing and his public, between, as John Carrey points out, the intellectuals and the masses.

Everything follows the main objective which is to analyse the novel *New Grub Street* and the socio-historical context behind it. Despite Gissing's fame among his contemporaries of being excessive pessimistic and grumpy, one thing is certain: he was honest and believed he was using his art to communicate how he saw life and what he believed about it. It is a complex analysis, to go through the background of a work so full of details as *New Grub Street*. There are many lines of research that can be followed and developed, however this brief dissertation cannot take all the possible roads, at least not for now. The chosen line of research is what connects the novel with Gissing's own convictions on human evolution and the social arrangement which could not in the nineteenth century be otherwise but explained in terms of natural selection.

[25] SALMON, Richard. *The formation of the Victorian literary profession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015.

2 THE POOR MAN IS A MAN LABOURING IN FETTERS

> As the Milvains sat down to breakfast the clock of Wattleborough parish church struck eight; it was two miles away, but the strokes were borne very distinctly on the west wind this autumn morning. Jasper, listening before he cracked an egg, remarked with cheerfulness:
>
> "There's a man being hanged in London at this moment."
>
> "Surely it isn't necessary to let us know that", said his sister Maud, coldly.
>
> "And in such tone too!" Protested his sister Dora.
>
> "Who is it?" Inquired Mrs Milvain, looking at her son with pained forehead.
>
> "I don't know. It happened to catch my eye in the paper yesterday that someone was to be hanged at Newgate this morning. There's a certain satisfaction in reflecting that it is not oneself."
>
> "That's your selfish way of looking at things," said Maud.
>
> "Well", returned Jasper, "seeing that the fact came into my head, what better use could I make of it? I could curse the brutality of an age that sanctioned such things; or I could grow doleful over the misery of the poor – fellow. But those emotions would be as little profitable to others as to myself. It just happened that I saw the thing in a light of consolation. Things are bad with me, but not so bad as *that*. I might be going out between Jack Ketch and the Chaplain to be hanged; instead of that, I am eating a really fresh egg, and very excellent buttered toast, with coffee as good as can be reasonably expected in this part of the world. – (Do try boiling the milk, mother.) – The tone in which I spoke was spontaneous; being so, it needs no justification." (p. 11).

Jasper Milvain has a very reasonable way to explain to his mother and sisters why he sees in a cheerful light the fact that a man is being hanged at that moment in London. When he is accused of selfishness by Maud he explains that he is cheerful simply because the man being hanged is not him. He could brood over the subject, revolt against society, but it would not do him any good, so the best way to look at it is from the angle of consolation. Jasper sees the world as a place where some people win and others lose, and that is how the world reaches its balance. To him society is competitive and we are greatly responsible for our own fate because not everyone can win, especially among the poor. As we see of Jasper in this first insight and more as we go on reading the novel, instead of fighting the inevitable or being emotional by it, he prefers to study the workings of his world to prevent himself ever from being the loosing part.

Jasper does not know neither cares about the reasons that brought that man to be hanged, yet, despite his cynical attitude, he does not hide that if circumstances were different, the hanging man *could* indeed be himself. Understanding the laws of the universe and, more specifically, the society in which one lives, may not be such an easy matter as Jasper wants his family to think. He displays a confident image, but he is aware that the rules of this game are not clear. Later he tells Marian that if it hadn't been for his quick adaptation when he moved to London at the age of eighteen, he, too, to use his own expression, would have "gone to the

dogs". Jasper fights the odds mainly in order to escape poverty. He says ¨Poverty is the root of all social ills; its existence accounts even for the ills that arise from wealth. The poor man is a man labouring in fetters. I declare there is no word in our language which sounds so hideous to me as 'poverty'". (p. 37-38).

The fear of "going to the dogs" is clear in most characters of *New Grub Street*. The novel, written by George Gissing and published in 1891, tells the story of a group of people in the eighties' London fighting to succeed in the literary world. But giving the literary world through the perspective of Gissing, it means waging a daily war against each and every obstacle, including people, institutions and even one's convictions, in order to survive. And survival in this case is not even necessarily becoming a respected author, it may be simply earning enough to eat. The awareness of Jasper on the subject is ironically accurate when he says he looks for nothing but "intellectual distinction", a pursuit attributed to artists whose concerns pass far from money matters. His sister Dora finds his comment strange and corrects him saying "Combined with financial success", and to this he replies "Why, that is what distinction means". (p. 498). He knows money dictates the rules in the modern market.

But Milvain is not the only one fighting this battle. Among the striving authors we also find the Reardons, the Yules, Harold Biffen, Whelpdale – each of them with their convictions and attitudes towards literature, the mass market and the corruption of the artist. John Halperin points that the central point of *New Grub Street* is "the clash between art and materialism – between the creative man wanting to do something worthwhile and the circumstances of his life which force him to be mediocre or die".[26] The problem is, as John Goode says, in *New Grub Street* the writer is denied the choice once his life is at stake. He needs money more than he needs the satisfaction to bring a message to the world, and so literature becomes a trade like any other.[27]

It is inevitable, in the end of the story, not to consider its outcome by distinguishing characters into the groups of winners and losers. Some characters are connected in a way that they seem like pendants: for each winner, there must be a complementary loser. Milvain and Reardon, Marian and Amy, Biffen and Whelpdale, Fadge and Yule. The action revolves around the problems of who will get the money and the mate, and how professional and domestic success can interfere with each other. There is an undeviating current of power driving through the narrative, "with which words such as 'progress' and 'the future' are associated, and all the

[26] HALPERIN, John. *Gissing:* a life in books. Oxford: Oxford University, 1987. p. 148.
[27] GOODE, John. *George Gissing*: ideology and fiction. London: Vision, 1978. p. 120.

important characters are seen decisively to succeed or to fail in adaptation to its force".[28] Among critics the most celebrated opposition between characters is clearly the one between Milvain and Reardon – representing the modern versus the outdated. On the one hand, there is the "new literary man", "the man of his time", who is the hard-working professional, unafraid to hire his labour at different levels for newspapers and magazines and to work mechanically and constantly; and on the other there is the romantic leisure writer, who writes only under perfect circumstances, without pressure, and who needs emotional support for inspiration. Such oppositions go much further than rewarding the deserving and punishing the non-deserving according to Victorian moral judgement. The novel's outcome actually frustrates the traditional Victorian endings and shows a realist view often taken as even more pessimistic than real life.

The realism in this novel is not a mere bag of tricks, but it is used to highlight the contrast between the will to survive of some with the disposition to failure of others. Gissing's skilled use of counterpoint and the hard-packed narrative are the reasons for praise bestowed by the most fastidious critics on *New Grub Street*.[29] According to Adrian Poole the counterpoint entails a sophisticated proposition based on how fitted each character is to succeed under the pressures of modern life:

> There is a strong evolutionary thesis underlying the narrative of *New Grub Street*, according to which physical victory and moral degeneration are interconnected. It is nevertheless part of the novel's strength that it resists the correlative equation of physical defeat with moral nobility.[30]

This evolutionary thesis is easily linked to Charles Darwin and his theory of natural selection. "Darwinian" is an expression often raised in papers and essays on *New Grub Street* or other works by Gissing, as well as "social Darwinism". The differences in the uses between the two expressions are not always clear, as they are often applied to mean the same thing: Darwin's studies on biology applied on the understanding of social life, but they do not usually go much further than that. It is almost as if Darwin and his evolutionary theory were so popular and its application on society so obvious, that explanations would be unnecessary. We can take Mrs Edmund Yule's case as an example: the narrator tells us that just like other London people, the lady's expending absurdly exceeds the due proportion of her income, so she overworks her only two ill-paid servants and starves her dressmaker out in order to keep appearances for the

[28] POOLE, Adrian. *Gissing in context*. London: Macmillan, 1975. p. 146.
[29] DONELLY, Mabel Collins. *George Gissing*: grave comedian. Cambridge MA: Harvard University, 1954. p. 161.
[30] POOLE. p. 146.

eyes of friends and neighbours. He then defends her saying that the woman is not heartless in the strict sense of the word, that she knows her behaviour is shameful, "but life was a battle. She must either crush or be crushed." (p. 235). David Grylls points her behaviour to be Darwinian – more than that, Malthusian – for she is part of the "spiralling population", suffering from the shortage of food and territory, which consequently leads to the "struggle for existence, and, of course, the elimination of the weakest".[31] Simple as it is put, it seems exaggerated to think that Mrs Edmund Yule is biologically superior to her dressmaker. The middle-class background and the society to which she belongs is what enables her to be superior to the other women who are servants, and so crush them not for a matter of real survival, but for social appearances. Other critics prefer to use the expression Social Darwinism to analyse the same situation, as Goode does in his book *George Gissing*: ideology and fiction. He explains social Darwinism to be the crudest application of Darwin's biological theory on social life and is careful throughout the essay in using one term or the other. Both definitions illustrate the same point.

To Goode, *New Grub Street* has less to do with literature itself and more with trade, work and the conditions and remuneration of work. The way characters are forced to surrender to social Darwinism is indeed an ideologically deplored result, yet the great question of the novel is not the debasement of literature in the market, but the struggle of the literary producer to secure himself a living. It will be discussed in the following pages about how Charles Darwin and his theory of natural selection can serve the purpose of understanding why some people achieve success in the novel while others fail.

2.1 THE TRAGEDY OF THE INTELLECTUAL WORKER

> "Milvain's temperament is very different from mine. He is naturally light-hearted and hopeful; I am naturally the opposite. What you and he say is true enough; the misfortune is that I *can't* act upon it. I am no uncompromising artistic pedant; I am quite willing to try and do the kind of work that will sell; under the circumstances, it would be a kind of insanity if I refused. But power doesn't answer to the will. My efforts are utterly vain; I supposed the prospect of pennilessness is itself a hindrance; the fear haunts me. With such terrible real things pressing upon me, my imagination can shape nothing substantial. When I have laboured out a story, I suddenly see it in a light of such contemptible triviality that to work at it is an impossible thing." (p.55).

[31] GRYLLS, David. *The paradox of Gissing*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1986. p. 64.

Edwin Reardon's speech is clearly very different from Milvain's, which we saw in the beginning of this chapter. Only a few years older than Jasper, Reardon seems completely defeated and hopeless. Comparisons irritate him, especially when they come from his wife Amy, compelling him to defend himself with what he points as natural in both writers. The younger journalist is "naturally light-hearted and hopeful" while the novelist is "naturally the opposite", say heavy-hearted and pessimistic. It is something extremely discouraging to tell his wife about the financial crisis the Reardons find themselves in. Amy is appalled by her husband's "unmanliness", as she says, and criticises him: "You are much weaker than I imagined. Difficulties crush you, instead of rousing you to struggle". (p. 54). But Reardon tries to convince his wife that he *cannot* act upon stronger forces holding upon him and that even knowing how poverty haunts them, "power doesn't answer to the will". The explanation of *natural* reasons enrages Amy because to her it sounds as an excuse of her husband not to face his responsibilities. Amy admires the way Jasper sees things and believes in struggle to move the obstacles and win in life. Through her point of view and her reactions we see the antagonism between the two writers more evidently.

Reardon wants to say he is not equipped with the necessary tools to react, and so he seems to accept failure naturally, as if waiting to be discarded. In *On the origin of species*, Charles Darwin describes natural selection as a power "as immeasurably superior to man's feeble efforts, as the works of Nature are to those of art".[32] The struggle for life acts upon animal and plant species, and certain variations may bring advantages or disadvantages in the complex relations with other beings. The development of positive variations tends to work for the preservation of the individual and may be inherited by the offspring, while the disadvantages tend to lead to extinction. Those variations are not voluntarily aroused in the individual, they are *natural*, therefore Darwin calls it natural selection. Reardon's sense of himself matches Darwin's theory of evolution in a most basic way, biologically speaking. Nature seems to be slowly crushing him away. He counts on an extremely delicate health which inflicts him with a succession of influenzas, sore throats throughout every winter, besides his suffering with lumbago pains. To Edwin Reardon, natural selection is the villain itself, and he understands as inevitable to be defeated in the battle.

The narrator reinforces Reardon's morbid temperament when he describes his poor life in London before we meet him. He ironizes when telling us that, many times, on the verge of dying of hunger or cold, Reardon knew something practical must be done to change his

[32] DARWIN, Charles. *The origin of species*: by means of natural selection or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life. Oxford: Oxford University, 2008. p. 50.

situation, "but practicality was not his strong point". He speaks of Reardon the way the novelist would speak of himself: "The lack of stated occupation encouraged his *natural* tendency to dream and procrastinate and hope for the improbable." (p. 63-64). One day his life changed and he became a published novelist, but instead of improving his prospects, the change made things worse. Then married and with a child, he is unable to keep writing at a steady pace, but refuses to give up on his literary principles. He says: "That is an unpardonable sin! to make a trade of art!" (p. 55). In this inner fight, Reardon's brain gets weary with months of fruitless and harassing endeavour and suffers to think of something that would appeal to the mass of readers – thinking of such plot is "alien to the natural workings of his imagination" – and then he is tormented by nightmares and the oppression of brain and heart that will soon be intolerable. Again, Reardon defends himself arguing that the cause for his failure is an unbalanced nature:

> That half-year abroad, and the extraordinary shock of happiness which followed at once upon it, have disturbed the balance of my nature. It was adjusted to circumstances of hardship, privation, struggle. A temperament like mine can't pass through such a violent change of conditions without being greatly affected. (p. 82).

The shock of happiness which followed the half-year abroad was his marriage, which is the explanation for his inability for struggle. Ironically, he says that his natural condition is of hardship, privation and ironically … struggle. So, should it be understood that Reardon is a natural loser or simply a selfish individual who can only fight for himself alone? Stephen E. Severn agrees with John Peck when he says that the reader is never allowed to lose sight of Reardon's egotism, selfishness, and his readiness to blame others for his failures.[33] Reardon regrets his marriage and thinks that had he been wise he would have spared Amy of such a fate, but he immediately excuses himself saying that he was convinced the arrangement could not work even before they got married. He went on as if Amy was the one forcing marriage upon him; as if anything could be done. He thinks: "I behaved with the grossest selfishness", but quickly he becomes the victim again with "I might have known that such happiness was never meant for me". (p. 83). Every force seems to be stronger than Reardon. Yet, Severn also highlights that the worst aspects of his personality are not told directly by the narrator, but are left to be interpreted through the character's actions and comments.[34] In other words, despite his many weaknesses, it is not easy judging Reardon when readers ponder over the integrity of

[33] SEVERN, Stephen E. Quasi-professional culture, conservative ideology, and the narrative structure of George Gissing's *New Grub Street*. *JNT Journal of narrative theory*. vol. 40, number 2. Summer, 2010. p. 156–188. p. 165. Available at < https://muse.jhu.edu> Accessed on: 28 Jun. 2015.
[34] SEVERN. p. 165.

his art which he wants to defend and his resistance to the seemingly obvious duty to make all his efforts result in money. The reader sympathises with his plight even though it is sometimes hard to understand.

Reardon is often said to be Gissing's true alter ego in *New Grub Street*. This is due partly to, as mentioned in the introduction, Gissing's own life and convictions being too much connected with his work. In fact, it is difficult to separate his experiences, his personal and professional trials from what he wrote because the life of George Gissing was a permanent struggle for life. Like Reardon's, his literary career developed slowly in terms of recognition either from the critics, but especially by the public who never raised him to the status of best-selling author. Many reasons for this were given along the years: a writer who did not care for the market, a weak person who could not negotiate reasonably with his publishers, a man who did not know how to separate fiction from real life and because of it never achieved financial security nor true peace of mind. The writers in *New Grub Street*, more than in any of his other novels, share with their creator not only the fact that they are also writers, but their trials, objectives, illusions and disillusions related to the literary business. Halperin stresses that each of the leading literary men of the novel represents some aspect of Gissing as artist and, of course, part of the brilliancy of the novel derives from the novelist's unstinting use of his own experiences and feelings to tell the story – or rather, the stories.[35] The omniscient narrator of *New Grub Street* works as the expression of the author's frustrations and fears regarding the literary market. He seldom punishes characters with words or slips into their minds and exposes their insecurities in order to testify the dangers of commercialism in art.

Harold Biffen, Reardon's trusted friend and literary realist is an even more extremist example of resistance to commercialism. After meeting by chance at a library once when Biffen asked for Reardon's books in Reardon's presence for his surprise, both became great friends. They share their tastes for Greek meters and the classics as well as their London life hardships. Biffen, who is also a writer, honestly praises Reardon for what he conquered, including the gift of a beautiful wife to share his lot. Biffen is a lonely man who lives in "dire poverty", in "the oddest places" and who has, according to the narrator, "seen harder trials than even Reardon himself" (p. 144). He lives of tuitions whenever he can get pupils and his greatest challenge is not to live of literature, but literally *living* while producing literature.[36] As Biffen absolutely disregards market demands, he even mocks his own literary ambitions with his book, *Mr Bailey, Grocer*, which he promises will be great, but also "unutterably tedious". Biffen is the artist

[35] HALPERIN. p. 141-142.
[36] GRYLLS. p. 82.

ahead of his time, writing a book on absolute realism (or naturalism) to give voice to, as he calls them, the "ignobly decent": "the essentially unheroic" people living common working-class lives, like the vast majority "who are at the mercy of paltry circumstances". (p. 144-145). Gissing abhorred the naturalism of the French popular writers like Zola, which he called gross, and repugnant to his taste.[37] Biffen's commercial disaster shows how England was not ready for such extreme innovation and so *Mr Bailey* was doomed to be a failure from the very beginning. As Jasper reviews it later, a "powerful and original" book, but more likely than not, as he tells Dora, it will be swamped in the floor of literature that pours books week after week before it has the chance to establish itself. (p. 445).

Biffen, as well as Reardon, share Gissing's feeling that commercialism was prominent among the degradations of the city and that the money that came from it was repulsive. Once, in a letter advising his brother Algernon on novel writing, Gissing wrote: "Keep apart, keep apart, and preserve one's soul alive … It is ill to have been born in these times, but one can make a world within the world."[38] Keeping apart from the sordidness of modern commercial culture while still earning respect and financial rewards was a Bohemian dream connected to the romanticized memory of old Grub Street, which, if one day were true, would never come back.[39] According to Grylls, Gissing deplored commercialism because it incited strife, devastated nature and because it appealed to the mob, destroying civilization and raising brutality.[40] Here, Grylls also stresses, lies one of Gissing's greatest paradoxes: he regarded commercialism as an anti-natural force, alien to the natural course of life – an idea that contradicted his other belief, that commercialism was natural because it inflamed men's most predatory instincts. According to it, the brutality caused by the social fight was simply a modern version of men's basic uncivilized nature. However, the divided mind on the subject was not exclusive of George Gissing. The Victorian period was the time when the two conceptions of nature shared people's thoughts since the popularization of the theories of evolution. On the one hand there was still a belief in innocence and peace based on religious dogmas and on the other, of a Darwinian view, the belief that strife had biological origins and that "the clash and conflict in human life are natural, instinctive, unavoidable".[41] Therefore commercialism as a whole would be simply the evolution of human struggle for survival. In *New Grub Street* there

[37] HALPERIN. p. 145.
[38] DELANY, Paul. *George Gissing*: a life. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008. p. 93.
[39] ARATA, Stephen. Introduction. In: GISSING, George. *New Grub Street*: Broadview edition. Toronto ON: Broadview, 2007. p. 11-30. p. 27.
[40] GRYLLS. p. 63-64.
[41] GRYLLS. p. 64.

are no signs that it is possible to keep apart and still succeed, as in the bohemian utopia. It is emphasized on the quickening ascent of Milvain contrasted to the accelerating decline of Reardon that the artistic life is an illusion and that the new Grub Street is not Dr Johnson's Grub Street anymore; it is now a place actually spread all over the city where one has to struggle to build a real professional life from the raw materials drawn from his century's misreadings of the literary culture of the century before.[42]

And if there is a place where the natural selection theory combined with commercialism can be tested, this place is London. The city is the best and the worst choice that people like Reardon and Biffen can make in their lives. The best because London keeps them alive; it is the place where they went to follow their dreams and it is where they earn their bread. Worst because it denies them a full life – they do survive, but at the cost of permanent struggle which rewards them with little happiness and no hope. London draws one's energies out, but on the other hand leaving it means giving up the fight. When Reardon realizes he cannot have distinction, love and money in London, he abandons his literary pursuits and the commercial centre and moves to Islington in the suburbs. There he "is no longer part of the struggle to survive". His health declines from that moment and his life is ended when he leaves the city altogether to meet Amy and Willie in the country.[43] Life was miserable, but it could only happen in the tyrannical London. To Biffen it is not very different. When he decides to put an end to his own life, he goes all the way down to Putney to die in a park across the Thames, leaving the centre. London is a one-way ticket to the Dickensian-named Sykes as well. The hack writer spoiled his literary prospects when he left his column in a journal to write three volume novels. The three-decker was giving its last breath in the end of the century, losing space to the one-volume novel and the short story. Suddenly Sykes's career declined and became a matter of scrapping and recycling what he wrote in the past to get some money and spend every penny drinking his life away. He lives in a squalid situation between the streets and the jail and, as Biffen believes, the man will perish sooner or later either in the hospital or the workhouse.

Darwin once wrote that it was a sorrowful but certain truth that no place was equal to the dirty smoky London for aiding one in natural history pursuits. In his lodgings in Great Marlborough Street, after his famous voyage on the Beagle, he wrote that London was the most appropriate place for his research, as if the whole evolutionary nature could be studied and viewed in that city.[44] Peter Ackroyd explains that "by the mid-1840s London had become

[42] ARATA. p. 30-31.
[43] GOODE. p. 110.
[44] ACKROYD, Peter. *London*: the biography. London: Vintage, 2001. p. 511-512.

known as the greatest city on the earth, the capital of Empire, the centre of international trade and finance, a vast world market into which the world poured". But at the beginning of the twentieth century historians like Henry Johnson considered the megalopolis in other terms and the social differences exhaustively pointed by Dickens and Friedrich Engels were finally taken into account. Ackroyd points that through the examination of contemporary photographs and drawings rose a new conception of London. Those photographs displayed women, children, and tramps sitting resignedly in the streets with their arms crossed, street-sellers depicted against dull backgrounds, aged and maimed people in rags living in filthy conditions. The paintings too denounced the city's disregard to its poor whose faces are often turned to shadows, unseen as they were in the real streets. The struggling life represented by those people crushed by the city inspired the works of nineteenth century mythographers such as Marx and Darwin.[45]

But London is not a synonym of misery to some of the characters in *New Grub Street*. For those people, once you start playing the game according to its rules the city will bring you good fortune and prosperity. After his unfortunate American venture where he found only unemployment and peanuts, Whelpdale returns to London and finally succeeds with the innovative (if not, at least well-timed) paper "Chit-chat"; Jasper Milvain spends his holidays in Finden, but he is eager to return to London and "plunge into the fight again", and even his sisters Maud and Dora find opportunities to leave the wretched life of governesses behind when they go to London. Different attitudes towards the city bring different outcomes reflecting the way characters face it. To Marian Yule, for example, everything about London is repulsive. The country air of Finden improves her health, but in her return to the modern city everything becomes gloomy again. The electric lights in the reading room hurt her eyes and the thick yellow fog gets into her throat, choking her. When Jasper accompanies her to the omnibus stop they can barely see or speak so thick and dirty the fog is. London oppresses her because it is represented in the British Museum and the work she loathes. There is nothing else in the girl's life except books, omnibuses and toil. Marian cannot be happy there because she does feel the urge to fight the oppression back.

In Dickens' London the cruelty of the city could be overcome with goodness, but in Gissing, a successful ending is not a matter of good defeating evil anymore. John Goode writes that Darwin's name draws the line between Dickens and Gissing. He says: "The optimistic struggle for success and recognition, the pleas for private benevolence, the belief in reform, give away to the pessimistic struggle for bare survival, the sense of a world in which oppression

[45] ACKROYD. p. 573.

is systematic and inescapable."[46] In the mid-century Charles Dickens fought different enemies, among them an old order of feudalism and mercantilism. He saw glory in the defects of breeding and supported rebellion against political privilege. Yet his point of view was compatible with industrial capitalism, partly because, according to Goode, he did not understand it, what implies a certain lack of sociological detachment except for his opposition to the new Poor Law. George Gissing gives us a world in which the oppression is not limited to life episodes. Instead, the miseries of the poor are part of the daily war of the wage earner.[47] Evolutionary concepts were everywhere by Gissing's time, often raising more questions than answering them by drawing parallels between biological and social struggle. Peter Keating says that one of the causes for that Victorian insecurity in the end of the century was the simultaneous birth and the death of many political and intellectual ideas and beliefs. People knew that a new form of society would emerge from political reform and Darwinism, but they also knew that this new form was still to be determined.[48]

Leo Henkin, in his book *Darwinism in the English Novel 1860-1910*, explains how the struggling writers in *New Grub Street* have no choice but to adapt to the given environment of modern commerce or else succumb to the cruel consequences:

> *New Grub Street* paints the struggle both among books and among men in the literary world of Gissing's day. Natural selection plays the role of villain; for the adaptation of writers to their environment and to prevailing conditions is the basis of the action… Those authors who can change their writing to suit the fickle public taste for the new will survive and live… Others, those poor souls with ideals who have set themselves rigid rules of composition, can exist only so long as the public favours their particular brand of literature.[49]

Henkin demonstrates Gissing's novel under a very clear application of Darwin's natural theory, except that in this social environment, contrary to the natural one, the individual has the power to make his way into being selected. The struggle for survival in this understanding cannot be passive as Reardon sees it, but something at the reach of the strongest of will, those ones who are aware of their position in relation to the social world and are able to adapt to new conditions. Instead of groups and generations adapting and changing through generations, it becomes something more individualistic and relies on one's ability to feel the environment and

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[46] GOODE. p. 26.
[47] GOODE. p. 25-26.
[48] KEATING, Peter. *The haunted study*: a social history of the English novel, 1875 – 1914. London: Faber and Faber, 2008. p. 3.
[49] HENKIN, Leo. *Darwinism in the English novel 1860-1910*: the impact of evolution on Victorian fiction. New York: Russell and Russell, 1963. p. 230 quoted in MOORE, Lewis D. *The fiction of George Gissing*: a critical analysis. London: McFarland and Co, 2008. Kindle digital edition. position 261.

be quick to change in very changeable times. This conception drew fruitfully on nineteenth-century individualism in its insistence that the potentiality for change is borne by the individual, and that it is by means of the individual organism that evolutionary change comes about.[50] The clash between Edwin Reardon and Jasper Milvain takes place because the former defends that it does not matter what we do, nature will follow its predetermined course, while the latter advocates the modern philosophy that struggle is personal and only the conscientiously stronger will survive. It is a matter of aggressiveness against passivity.

Reardon and Biffen are driven by circumstances. They talk about Sykes, whose drinking vice had probably ruined the man definitely, since Biffen has not seen him for a while. Like the effect the hanging man on the newspaper had on Jasper, Reardon feels cheerful to hear of Sykes's tragic life. He reveals proudly that he would never be a drunkard because he could not afford it. He then asks Biffen: "Doesn't it strike you that you and I are very respectable persons? We really have no vices. Put us on a social pedestal, and we should be shining lights of morality. I sometimes wonder at our inoffensiveness." He wonders why they never revolt themselves and attack public property or lose their minds simply forgetting about the problems. To this the realist answers: "Because we are passive beings, and were meant to enjoy life very quietly. As we can't enjoy, we just suffer quietly, that's all." (p. 360). What Reardon means and is even stressed by Biffen's response is that if they do not fight, why don't they let themselves go to the life of vices and carelessness? Either their dependence on a cosmic superior force is so strong on the verge of being irritating or they definitely share some knowledge that other characters do not.

The narrator provokes further by asking the reader directly how irritating men like them are. He calls them inert, flabby, weakly, envious, foolishly obstinate, etc. He says we readers want to shake and kick them, make them understand that they need to fight; they need to borrow a page of Jasper Milvain's book. But then he pulls the reader back:

> But try to imagine a personality wholly unfitted for the rough and tumble of the world's labour-market. From the familiar point of view these men were worthless; view them in possible relation to a humane order of society, and they are admirable citizens. Nothing is easier than to condemn a type of character which is unequal to the coarse demands of life as it suits the average men. These two were richly endowed with the kindly and the imaginative virtues; if fate threw amid incongruous circumstances, is their endowment of less value? You scorn their passivity; but it was their nature and their merit to be passive. Gifted with independent means, each of them would have taken quite a different aspect in your eyes. The sum of their faults

[50] BEER, Gillian. Introduction. In DARWIN, Charles. *On the origin of species*: by means of natural selection or the preservation of favored races in the struggle for life. Oxford: Oxford University, 2008. p. VII-XXV. p. XVIII.

> was their inability to earn money; but indeed, that inability does not call for unmingled disdain. (p. 417).

Capitalism is what makes them worthless, not the natural law. Money could change them in our eyes and makes us see them as gifted instead of useless men because we are capitalists too. This is why Reardon and Biffen expose Gissing's ambiguous views on the fight for survival in the commercial world. They are mocked but are also placed as rare models of integrity because they choose not to give up on their convictions. Paul Delany says that Gissing saw man as both part of nature and someone who tries constantly to subdue it. However, he points that egoism and aggression are not justified by the existence of universal struggle because man has the power to create a sphere of order around himself.[51] It does not mean that it will bring happiness of acceptance, though. Gissing too chose to keep apart and was well aware that such honesty to his convictions would never bring him great financial return since the public in general disliked his pessimism towards money, love and life. The final argument of *New Grub Street* confirms that anyone who is sensitive and loyal will fail both economically and in the market of love – and in it we can also include Marian Yule. Yet these characters are aware that their weakness and indecision are largely to blame for their failures. The nature of the literary system in the novel, says Delany, is Darwinian and it is rather simple to understand: "Women want a husband who has money, readers want trivial entertainment". Writers who can provide the entertainment, like the unscrupulous Jasper Milvain, will be able to buy a desirable wife.[52] Nobody has the power to defy the system, they can either adapt to it or fail.

2.2 THE AGE OF TRADE

New Grub Street was criticised on its publication in 1891 for ignoring the happy side of literature. The world of large incomes, of beautiful offices – like the one belonging to the writer Reardon visits before he ventured in the profession himself – are left aside.[53] Instead we have the gloomy reading room of the British Museum, the foggy city surrounding everyone and the crushing effect of poverty on the unfortunate. We understand that there is a parallel world inhabited by people who earn good money with literature. The world of writers like Ralph Warbury and editors like Jedwood and Fadge. These people are successful in the literary world,

[51] DELANY. p. 332.
[52] DELANY. p. 184-185.
[53] CROSS, Nigel. *The common writer:* life in the nineteenth-century Grub Street. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988. p. 204.

but we do not see them, we only hear of them. We know that Warbury is one of the best-selling authors of the time and that Jedwood married a woman novelist whose success helps him finance his own successful literary editorship. These people exist with the purpose of exposing the contrast between different spheres of the same profession, the inside and the outside of the circle. Gissing was not interested in showing us the cheerful side of literature, but instead the side he lived in himself since he became a writer. Poole says that the literary world in *New Grub Street* is seen through an oblique angle, limited to the point of view of a few figures hovering uneasily around the fringe of the truly relevant portion of the market, the portion that pushes the literary industry forward. Jasper's aspiration is to gain entrance to this higher level.[54] Achieving it is difficult though, since it still involves old restrictions of class. Yet such restrictions are less difficult to overcome than in the past because in modern society, when well used, money can count more than a family name. Jasper knows his ascendance would happen faster if he had more money to recommend his intellect. He complains:

> My instincts are strongly social, yet I can't be at my ease in society, simply because I can't do justice to myself. Want of money makes me the inferior of the people I talk with, though I might be superior to them in most things. I am ignorant in many ways, and merely because I am poor. (p. 324).

Jasper is aware that he chose a strategic profession which may have the power to raise him socially because it is accepted, and even expected, that literary people come from poverty. But unlike Whelpdale, who almost starved to death in America, or Reardon with his past of poverty, Jasper ironically mentions it to be rather humiliating that he had always has enough to eat and has never been through serious hardships. He says, "It must be so gratifying to say to young fellows who are just beginning: 'Ah, I remember when I was within an ace of starving to death', and then come out with Grub Street reminiscences of the most appalling kind." (p. 383). Such visions of an honourable life of poverty in the service of literature invoke the stereotypes of old Grub Street where the worst hardships become sweet memories. The commitment to writing as a vocation and of a romantic nobility not only justifies but ennobles any poverty or starvation to death.[55] None of such discourse with its romantic stereotypes represent Jasper's reality and even less his objectives. He wants to make money out of literary work firstly to escape poverty and secondly to build a solid career which enables him to secure a steady and high income. To achieve this, he needs to defeat enemies represented by his

[54] POOLE. p. 139.
[55] ARATA. p. 22.

middle-class country background, his lack of prior acquaintances in the literary market, and all the competition. He has to make a path for his own, pretty much like Alfred Yule did some two or three decades earlier, but in a market that works faster now. In order to be published, he has to make a name among the literary people first. Jasper says: "Men won't succeed in literature that they may get into society, but will get into society that they may succeed in literature." (p. 35). In other words, he needs money to make money, but since he does not have it to invest on himself directly or indirectly by giving, for example, fanciful dinners, he bets on his social talent to make the right friends.

Here we can mark the greatest difference between Jasper Milvain and Alfred Yule according to what success means to both of them. Yule considers himself an intellectual who is interested in literature more than he is in money. He writes for people who share the same intellectual tastes as himself and believes in the literary importance of what he (or Marian) writes, while Jasper despises the people he writes for and even mocks them for being stupid enough to consume the things he writes. He tells Marian he does not write for writing's sake, but that his aims are solely driven by money: "All my plans and efforts will have money in view – all." (p. 122). Survival in *New Grub Street* is clearly related to the ability to make money. And this is what Jasper refers to when he tells his mother and sister that he is a stronger man than Reardon. (p. 13). He means that he, Jasper, is a man capable of evaluating actions and attitudes in terms of their effectiveness. "And what is effective is what leads to success. Success means seeing the social world as a given environment to which one has to adapt."[56]

Contrarily to what we would expect, Jasper is not satirized or attacked by Gissing, but instead he represents a side of the writer that was never developed: the active business man. The attack instead is against the modern tendency to turn literature into a trade. Jasper is the great apostle of practicality in the market that treats books as mere commodities and emphasises that "this is the age of trade".[57] Unpractical people like Reardon or Biffen are criticized much more for their inability to profit from what they write than for the kind of literature they produce. The successful writer has to be a good business man who can sell his product several times over when he puts it in the market; "only the impractical are left behind".[58] If he cares to work, the practical artist must be able to sell a range of two novels a year, in a steady pace of work. The problem is that for a writer like Reardon, literature cannot be reduced to a matter of marketing and gross output. He cannot stand the idea of thinking in marketable demands and so blames

[56] GOODE. p. 114.
[57] HALPERIN. p. 145.
[58] HALPERIN. p. 147.

the market for impeding him to do something that he could do even considering or not the market pressures, which is writing two novels a year and selling them at a good price. This is why Joshua Taft remarks that we should not take Reardon's and Biffen's failure as Gissing's accusation of hostility from the British literary market towards realist fiction, but it rather demonstrates the dangers of defying it.[59] It was not impossible to make profit with realist fiction by the end of the century, considering it attended a more selective public. In the case of Reardon, he refuses to write shorter, more popular novels, and as for Biffen, he commits literary suicide with his super realistic novel *Mr. Bailey, Grocer*. Nigel Cross explains that by the 1880's the mass public, the public that could make someone rich, wanted something less monochromatic and less faithful than the exact representation of their own lower-class lives. Sex and crime were English readers' favourites, contrasting with the extraordinary success of realists like Émile Zola in France which were not strong enough to cross the channel.[60] Gissing was frequently compared to Zola as his English counterpart, but refused the title.

By the mid-1880s, the period in which *New Grub Street* takes place, all the great Victorian "lions" were dead or dying, and the market was much more varied in the hands of new and more numerable publishing houses. Books did not get exactly cheap, but sales increased significantly with the paperback one-volume editions taking the place of the expensive three-deckers. The giant circulating libraries like Mudie's, which were greatly responsible for the use of the three volume system, determined for decades not only what their readers should or should not read but the value of literature itself. That old library subscriber was being replaced by "the mob", as Gissing called them, a public at least ten times as large, and that would gravitate towards the new mass media of cheap magazines and daily newspapers.[61] The new power of choice allowed to readers would hardly favour highbrow writers like George Gissing, and so they were constantly under the pressure of writing easier and remunerative novels at the cost of their integrity. In a time when serious writers were never so poor while the mediocre ones were never so rich, they predicted that the genuine work of art would completely fail to take with a childish public made of readers who only wanted to amuse themselves.[62]. The new board schools and the education act of 1870 were blamed for creating such an unprepared public, referred in *New Grub Street* as "the quarter-educated": "the great

[59] TAFT, Joshua. *New Grub Street* and the survival of realism. *English literature in transition, 1880-1920*, Vol. 54, number 3, 2011, p. 362-381. p. 365. Published by ELT Press. Available at <http//muse.jhu.edu/journals/elt> Accessed on: 9 Dec. 2015.
[60] CROSS. p. 221.
[61] DELANY. p. 113.
[62] CROSS. p. 216-218.

new generation that is being turned out by the Board schools, the young men and women who can just read, but are incapable of sustained attention". Whelpdale explains that these people only want something short to read during the bus trip; they want bits of news, bits of gossip, but nothing that will take much effort; they want only "chit-chat". (p. 449). Again the difference between the practical and the impractical is that while the younger men are profiting with this public, Alfred Yule, like Gissing and Conrad, dreams about the time when the word literature meant high intellect. He tells Marian: "In Johnson's day it was pretty much equivalent to our 'culture'. You remember his saying, 'It is surprising how little literature people have'." (p. 390).

In the time of the sensational press, the gossip columns and cheap newspapers, Jasper sarcastically talks to Maud about how steadily he had worked that day and how much he had produced. She asks him:

> -And what's the value of it all?
> -Probably from ten to twelve guineas, if I calculated.
> -I meant, what was the literary value of it, said his sister, with a smile.
> -Equal to that of the contents of a mouldy nut.
> -Pretty much what I thought (p. 182).

Jasper is cynical, but he does not pretend to write anything that will stay for the next generations. He is honest to say that what he writes is rubbish, "but rubbish of a very special kind, of fine quality" (p. 184). As he writes for many different kinds of periodicals and knows many people also related to the business, Jasper quickly finds a special kind of literary work for his sisters to try their pen on: the religious books for children, books which, according to him, "sell like hot cakes" (p. 450). Maud quickly gives up the project and gets married, but Dora works as steadily as her brother and in the end succeeds too. The point is that the market was open for the adaptable ones. Cross highlights that by the end of 1880s, literature was the full time occupation of different would-be-writers, including novelists, critics and book reviewers.[63] In the world of male writers, Dora is one example of a female writer who progresses in the novel. She finds a niche in writing for educated young girls in magazines without sacrificing her integrity. Her success is both artistic and financial.[64]

Returning to how Darwin can be used to analyse such fluctuation of values in the novel, John Goode's explains on social Darwinism: Its concepts pervades many of Gissing's novels and the social Darwinist vocabulary "is not uncommon". Yet, Goode refers to Herbert Spencer to make clear what he means:

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[63] CROSS. p. 210.
[64] TAFT. p. 378.

> Social Darwinism, at least the way it manifests itself in the work of Herbert Spencer whose most overtly ideological essay, *Man versus the State*, … is an obvious vindication of straightforward militant capitalism, but with its ironic repercussions. For capitalism is only starkly 'naturalistic' in the phase in which it has not yet accomplished the control over the social apparati of oppression. Once it has conquered society it becomes the master also of the social machinery which relies on mystification and codes of behaviour to exact the subjection of its members.[65]

Goode knows the expression is dangerous and so focuses on Spencer and the paradox of a capitalist system that can both manifest itself naturally in men's social environment and also be an artificial tool to manipulate the masses. Any other interpretation is not supposed to be drawn. In *New Grub Street*, social Darwinism means the ability to adapt to the commercial world, as Jasper does and critics agree without much explanation. Being strong does not mean to be physically strong, but intellectually. Being intellectually superior is neither a privilege nor a heroic feature, but an attribute available to the rational mind. Goode highlights as Social Darwinian Jasper's observation that "the struggle for existence among books is nowadays as severe as among men", since it shows the application of the scientific spirit to social organization and the capitalist ideology. In Edwin Reardon's case, he calls attention to his self-defeating attitude which apparently demonstrates a naturalist view, connected with Darwin's theory about how stronger natural selection is compared to the individual will. To Goode, Reardon's facing his own inability to adapt is actually linked with his explicit acceptance of the social Darwinist rationality as much as Jasper's because he understands his failure to be in the economic sphere. The difference between him and Milvain does not lie in the lack of comprehension about market matters, but in the novelist's denial of rational freedom to change the situation.[66]

The problem about using the term social Darwinism is because it can be misleading. Its origin is unknown, but it has been traced according to its occurrences in specialized journals by Geoffrey M. Hodgson in a 2004 article published in the *Journal of historical sociology*.[67] Not only the term was obviously not created by Darwin himself, but it has often been used to describe ideas that have either little connection with his ideas or are not exclusively represented by them. Throughout the years the label of social Darwinism has been used to promote diverse ideologies, such as anarchism, liberalism and socialism, commonly as a form of abuse or

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[65] GOODE. p. 63-64.
[66] GOODE. p. 115-117.
[67] HODGSON, Geoffrey M. Social Darwinism in Anglophone academic journals: a contribution to the history of the term. *Journal of historical sociology*, vol. 17, n. 4, December 2004. p. 428-463. Available at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com> Accessed on: 17 Feb. 2016.

accusation from leftists towards their opponents. Many of the horrors of the twentieth century such as Nazism and tragedies like the holocaust amazingly found grounds for its purposes in Darwin's work. Yet, there was never a self-declared school of social Darwinists. Rather, the term was created in the course of an ongoing debate over the uses of biology to understand social affairs. As Hofstadter identified, social Darwinism does not represent any school's own ideas, instead it is the random usage of key phrases such as "natural selection", "struggle for existence" and "survival of the fittest" to defend second-hand and ill interpreted ideas on evolutionism.[68]

Gillian Beer explains the fascination caused by Darwin's book and the distortions it allows:

> Different readers can find their hopes and fears confirmed by extending the implications of Darwin's thought in one direction or another; and, it would later prove, those readers might be individualists, Fascists, Marxists, imperialists, or anarchists – or indeed, quietists. There is something fascinating and perturbing in a text that, while pursuing, in Darwin's words, "one long argument", ballasted by multiple evidences, can generate such a variety of ideological potentialities.[69]

Unlike other scientific papers of the time, *On the origin of species* is free of difficult language and is full of examples which allowed its appreciation by many different kinds of readers, so Darwinism became a synonym for evolutionism in the broadest ways. Due to its multiplicity of interpretations, it has been likened to the Holy Bible: "People could raid it for what they wanted, and use it in any possible cause."[70] By the 1860's Darwin's name and the terms natural selection and evolutionism had already been firmly established in the minds of the public at large. Even allowing that *On the origin of species* was not a sudden overthrow of deeply held beliefs, but rather marked a culminating point in a lengthy period of scientific and historical investigation, the speed of its acceptance remains surprising. "The diffused nature of Darwinism or evolutionism, the way it produced so quickly both a particular view of the world and a terminology to describe that view, indicates an unusual readiness for so radical a theory."[71]

It is important to notice that Darwin's text became so popular partly because of its language full of Victorian literary baggage. The use of metaphors, imagery, idioms and

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[68] HODGSON p. 429-430.
[69] BEER. p. VIII.
[70] CROOK, Paul. Social Darwinism: the concept. *Darwin's coat-tails*, 2007, p. 29-44. p. 31. Available at <http://web.b.ebscohost.com> Accessed on: 17 Feb. 2016.
[71] KEATING. p. 111.

concepts are clearly taken from a rich English literary tradition, and just like literature, may present different interpretations throughout time.[72] Darwin's concept of struggle, for example, may have been understood in a simplistic, unidimensional way in its social Darwinian use. Paul Crook says that Darwin's "key term 'struggle for existence', which later he claimed to be a metaphor, was a culturally loaded phase, ambiguous and rich in connotations for his Victorian readers".[73]

Hodgson defends that the use of the expression social Darwinism is very scarce in specialized English-written papers until the 1940s. During the second World War, the ideals of Nazism related social Darwinism to racism, elimination of the weakest and all the barbarism which motivated it. Afterwards, with the rejection of Nazism, social Darwinism acquired new interpretations, introducing Herbert Spencer and his American deputy William Graham Sumner as the deemed pioneers of the ill-defined creed.[74] Spencer was the one who invented the phrase "survival of the fittest", and despite his popularity increase with the inclusion of it in further editions of *On the origin of species*, he did not like to be called Darwinian, since he believed to have published a valid theory of evolution prior to Darwin's. Still by their time the names of Darwin and Spencer were linked, making of Spencer the philosopher of Darwinism, while biological Darwinism was widely supposed to entail Spencerian ethics, politics and economy.[75] Spencer's phrase was incorporated in Darwin's text after the fifth edition of *On the origin of species* for editorial purposes. It substituted the term natural selection in key passages, but the choice seemed to have been unfortunate. According to Beer, it contradicted Darwin's idea of a natural selection because "'survival of the fittest' implies, tautologically, that those who survive are the 'fit', the 'superior' examples. Having survived proves them fit to survive; that other signification of 'fitness' as 'aptness', also crucial to Darwin's argument, is lost".[76] Neither Darwin nor Spencer were the only ones to share common Victorian evolutionary thought. Despite that, Spencer became in the twentieth century directly labelled as the father of social Darwinism.

By analysing the prefaces of Lewis D. Moore and the list of books and articles about George Gissing we learn that after his slight success in his life time, the author passed through a period of great obscurity which ended in the 1960s with the studies of Jacob Korg, who wrote

[72] CROOK. p. 34.
[73] CROOK. p. 38.
[74] HODGSON p. 432.
[75] MACRAE, Donald (Ed.). Introduction. In: SPENCER, Herbert. *The man versus the State*: four essays on politics and society. London: Penguin, 1969. p. 22.
[76] BEER. p. XIX.

George Gissing: a critical biography, and Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge's *Gissing*: the critical heritage, followed by Poole, Goode and the others.[77] In this new interest on Gissing, Darwin's name appears frequently, either by the name of Darwinism or social Darwinism. Goode's famous book, *George Gissing*: ideology and fiction, which I mentioned before, was published in 1978; Adrian Poole's *Gissing in context* in 1975, John Halperin's *Gissing*: a life in books in 1982 and David Grylls' *The paradox of Gissing* in 1986, among other important works. More recent critics such as Simon J. James – *Unsettled accounts*, 2003 – and Paul Delany – *Gissing*: a life, 2008 – still rely on Darwin to understand Gissing's pessimistic imagination. James, in 2003, says: "In Jasper's own social Darwinist terms, his hard work, intellect and willingness to compromise with public taste should assure him of the most conspicuous success". Since the criticism on Gissing is not very large and one critic often quotes the other, it is almost like Darwinism and social Darwinism have already acquired their particular meaning in Gissing's work. Before that revival little was spoken about Darwin in this context. In 1912 Frank Swinnerton writes *George Gissing*: a critical study and does not mention Darwin or Darwinism even once. May Yates in *George Gissing an appreciation*, of 1922, mentions Darwin once to explain Gissing's position towards religion. She says he grew to maturity in "a generation which reluctantly and somewhat hazily compromised with the Darwinian theory, seeking only to prove that Darwin's theory was foreseen in the first chapter of Genesis" and therefore there was no point in the conflict between religious and scientific creeds.[78] It is surely the kind of intellectual dishonesty that Gissing would abhor, but surely has nothing to do with any of the novels and the discussion on the survival of the fittest.

It is true that the fierce competition and art-destroying implications associated with the fight for survival which are clear enough in the novel go against Gissing's most rigid artistic convictions. At the same time, he believed that people were responsible for their choices and respective consequences once life in the city became more and more difficult and there was not space, food or money for everybody. Gissing's pessimism in showing good people perishing while the ones who make them suffer prosper supports the idea that, as a realist, he believed to be showing life as it was. He justifies his views pointing to all the pain and suffering in the nineteenth century, while it suits his personality to see the world in negative terms. He found inspiration in the thoughts of social change based on Darwin's ideas regarding the evolution in

[77] MOORE, Lewis D. *The fiction of George Gissing*: a critical analysis. London: McFarland and Co, 2008. Kindle digital edition. position 24-31.
[78] YATES, May. *George Gissing*: an appreciation. Manchester: University of Manchester, 1922. p. 28. Available at <https://archive.org>. Accessed on: 6 Jul. 2015.

the natural world and reflected the language of Darwinism and social Darwinism in his novels – struggle for survival, survival of the fittest, etc. However, he still did not seem to believe in any general tendencies toward human betterment, only in struggle directed to personal ambitions.[79]

In the end of the narrative the rewards are distributed to the few who were able to overcome romantic and intellectual weaknesses while the losers are exiled and only spoken of. Jasper marries Amy and her ten thousand pounds' inheritance and gets the editorship he wanted so much, while Marian ends up deserted by him, becoming a provincial librarian to support her mother and blind father, and Reardon and Biffen are dead. Whether natural or conscientiously fought battle, there is no mercy to the ones left behind. Such cruelty involved in the conception of natural selection shadowed the Victorian religious faith and optimism in progress and the future, as it became very difficult to derive a moral consciousness in harmony involving history and natural selection. Darwin once confessed he could not persuade himself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars, or that a cat would play with mice for fun.[80] The moral that Dickens always discoursed about in his stories was now falling apart: the fairy-tale like endings with the good being rewarded and the bad dying in disgrace lost space to stories and endings with little place for repentances and redemption. The doubt and discomfort resulted from the popularization of evolutionism and natural selection popularization, which exposed the greatest doubts and fars of a new era.

2.3 THE EVIL OF THE TIME

Alfred Yule was probably the seed to *New Grub Street*. The project of a novel about literary men or *A man of letters*, which was the original title, had its first sketches done in 1890 but only came to life more than one year later. Just like Reardon, Yule started his career writing articles on general intellectual subjects in the popular press since the 1850s. He tried almost every kind of literary work, however, after a promising start he never achieved the success he aspired, the dreamed editorship never came, and so he gave himself away to bitterness, brooding over his failures. Yule blames the epidemic of hack-work for the degeneration of literature, the

[79] MOORE. position 2588.
[80] KUCICH, John. DAVID, Deidre (Ed.). Intellectual debate in the Victorian novel. In: *The Cambridge companion to the Victorian novel.* Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002. p. 212-233. p. 224.

same aspects involving the hyper-popularization of literary culture so despised by Gissing himself. He says that "the evil of the time is the multiplication of 'ephemerides'. Hence a demand for essays, descriptive articles, fragments of criticism, out of all proportion to the supply or even tolerable work." (p. 42).

Yule's suffering is much caused by self-dramatization. He sees himself as a victim of an unnatural environment which had degraded him from the rightful place he should occupy: "I live here like an animal in a hole, and go blinking about if by chance I find myself among the people with whom I ought naturally to associate" (p. 107). His anger is caused by his lack of professional opportunities, which are, according to him, caused by poverty and his "unpresentable wife": To him, people like his rival Fadge prosper not only because they are dishonest but also because they have married well. He follows the same principle that guides Jasper which says that being able to "go into society" is a result of having an admirable and rich wife with whom he would be able to give dinners and entertain important people at their house. It is the same principle followed by Jasper who has no money of himself and so needs to marry well to do it. From their point of view, wives are not only personal life companions, but an important social complement to improve the prospects of struggling men. Yule married while still very young and, as he could not wait until it was possible to support a middle-class wife, he married a work-girl who accepted to share his poverty. Gissing was about to take the same step during the production of *New Grub Street* and then married the work girl Edith Underwood, whose humble origins suited both his "physical needs" and his empty wallet. Gissing did not believe a higher class woman would ever unite with him and believed a less educated wife would at least be easier to deal with. He expected Edith to be a submissive and patient wife like Mrs Yule, but the result was very different.[81] Like Gissing, Yule quickly gave away the idea of improving his wife and started blaming her for everything that went wrong in his life. Because of her uneducated background he cannot entertain friends at home and stays out of the social circles he believes should be natural for him. Mrs Yule is treated cruelly: he patronizes her, ignores her, and enslaves her in domestic work; she is not allowed to see others or others to see her and is even forbidden to take part in the bringing up of her daughter as if her ignorance were contagious.[82] But unlike Gissing's wife in real life, Mrs Yule suffers silently

[81] Gissing told his friend Eduard Bertz in a letter, "I had made the acquaintance of a work girl who will perhaps come live with me", and "I must consider nothing but physical needs", which demonstrates how convinced he was he would never be truly happy in love. The citation is in MATTHESIAN, Paul; YOUNG, Arthur C.; COUSTILLAS, Pierre. *The collected letters of George Gissing*. Athens OH: Ohio University, 1990-1997. Vol. 4, p. 243 quoted by ARATA. p. 10.
[82] HALPERIN. p. 146-147.

and accepts throughout the years that she is not good enough for her husband. Marian tries to defend Alfred by telling her mother that "it is poverty that made him worse than he naturally is. It has that effect on almost everybody". She believes that he would improve with money since he is naturally warm-hearted and generous (p. 288). Mrs Yule, however, is less optimistic about it.

Yule is a victim of a commercial system that is eliminating professionals of the past. He and Reardon follow a similar path in the story: both are personally and professionally frustrated, consequently they get depressed, become sick and die in poverty without inspiring any reaction or demonstration of remorse on the part of a universal force. They die and life follows its course as if they had never existed. Strangely at some point both he and Reardon seem to enjoy their pitiable situation. Reardon stares at his poor image in shop mirrors "with pleasurable contempt" and does not care to be seen in his worn out clothes while Yule complains to his daughter with great drama: "My life has been one bitter struggle, and if now … that only the hard side of life has been shown to me; small wonder if I have become hard myself. Desert me; go your own way, as the young always do." (p. 335 and 285). Grylls says that those in a pitiable situation like them, instead of hiding their problems, tend to draw attention to themselves because it is "their best means of survival".[83] In other words, it is what they can do to try to get help from others. But Yule, the "monster of domestic asperity", never wins the readers' sympathies as Reardon does. He, who has very little pleasures in life, is a positive adept of self-compassion and selfishly tries to drag Marian into his sufferings too. In the end his blindness comes as the materialization of his worst fears. To Grylls, Yule is pathetic in every sense of the word.[84]

But much more than a satiric representation of failure, Yule is the character who explores seriously the possibility of pursuing in a contemporary setting the vision of the old Grub Street, even more than Reardon. He lives in the past age, which is easily confirmed by the kind of writing he and his friends produce: historical drama, Spanish poetry, etc. The narrator reinforces that since young age Yule's genuine ambition for knowledge "devoured him" and so he worked doggedly on languages, metrical translations, plays and everything he could try his pen on. In other words, "his literary ideals were formed on the study of Boswell". (p. 96). This description of his early life draws a parallel between him and young Samuel Johnson, reporting to a period when a man like him could indeed build a solid career. He became an accomplished intellectual whose work has been published along the years, so we understand that even if he does not have all the readers he desired, there were readers enough to keep him and his family.

[83] GRYLLS. p. 88.
[84] GRYLLS. p. 89.

The problem is that despite all of it, Yule is crippled by ambition, which makes him see his life-work as a failure. Arata says that Gissing never presents Yule's work either as contemptible or negligible, but it is Yule's pedantry, his peevishness and the many limitations of his talent which blind him to an honourable career, genuinely linked to intellectual work that few writers in the novel could be proud of.[85] It is the sincerity of his love for literature and his commitment to a work of quality that breaks the parallel between him and Reardon and links him strangely to Harold Biffen. While Reardon entered the novel business not for any deep urge to bring a message to the world, but because he decided to try his pen on something that he could sell, Biffen is completely devoted to a specific kind of writing from the beginning, independently of how worthy the commercial world thinks of it. He is even more extremist than Yule because for Yule, unlike for Biffen, all his knowledge and dedication not only deserve attention, but they also deserve to be rewarded, both with money and respect from society.

Yule knew before Jasper that writing was a trade and neither he nor the younger journalist are ashamed of writing for the marketplace. Nevertheless, the market is different now and if Yule's cultivated public still exists, it is far from being the majority. Instead it is only a small part of the whole mass public which Jasper wants to grasp. He comes as Yule's natural heir in the journalistic field, taking an accurate measure of the audience and so reaching further than the older man ever reached.[86] Their greatest difference is that while Yule respected his audience and saw the people he wrote for as intellectually equals, Jasper would never associate with his. He says: "I shall always despise the people I write for. But my path will be that of success." Jasper's reward will not be for genuine literary talent, but for commercial smartness. Although he is not a pretender, appearances are still important because they are part of his strategy to rise in society. Jasper writes for people whom he considers stupid, who like to flatter themselves with seemingly intellectual reading, but in truth are only obviously vulgar. A public who does not want to bother to think but pretends to do so. On the light of what was mentioned before, that Biffen is the exaggeration of Yule and the old Grub Street spirit, Whelpdale can be considered the exaggeration of Jasper on the opposite side. Whelpdale does not pretend to be anything he is not; neither does he bother for appearances. He openly earns money advising writers about how to write and publish novels even though he was unsuccessful writing and publishing his own. He writes suspicious guidebooks on the same subject and happily withdraws the money he can get from them. His paper, "Chit-Chat" is directly addressed to people of little education who look for uncomplicated and superficial information. He succeeds

[85] ARATA. p. 32.
[86] ARATA. p. 33.

because he is able to identify this public which may lack education, but still has some money to spend and does not bother to read popular papers. Both Whelpdale and Jasper started profiting over the exploitation of their public after realizing cleverly enough that they did not have genius to get rich with serious work. They give the public not what they need, but what they want.

It is through those changes in the market that we can notice how the economic power is also in transition in *New Grub Street*. In Gissing's earlier novel, *The nether world*, power was fixed and permanently in the hands of people we never saw and were much above the characters whose poverty would clearly remain unchanged. Now in *New Grub Street* the powerful people are, if not reachable, at least visible. They come from different backgrounds and often raise themselves from below. People like Jasper see clearly the possibility of becoming a Fadge or a Jedwood, especially if the way could be made shorter by marrying somebody like the daughter of the rich advertisement agent Manton Rupert.[87] As mentioned earlier, the main cause for this changing of power in the literary business is, according to Yule, "the multiplication of ephemerides" – that is the popularity of literature about literature. Whelpdale writes about writing, criticism and essays about books become more important than the books themselves, Jasper offers his readers an article about readers called "the common reader", Amy reads essays about Darwin and Spencer, but she never reads their bulky books. Oddly, the greatest example of the literary failure metamorphosed into success is the novel *New Grub Street* itself, Gissing's best-selling novel.[88]

The reader does not believe in Yule's capacity to adapt to the modern market as much as his daughter Marian does. By the time she denies him the money to create a new literary periodical we are as sure as she is that he does not possess the necessary commercial eye for that. Nevertheless, it is his brutal response to Marian which definitely convinces us that Yule's time is over. Brutality is a sin among the ones who want to win in the civilized world. The more the civilized man is convinced to be part of an evolutionary history and that he is descended from lower animals, the more he feels the necessity to distance himself from savagery. When Darwin's theory is applied to the social sphere, being a brute or displaying animal instincts debases one before civilized others. Jasper tells Marian's uncle that the main purpose of literature is to spread civilisation. This claim sounds false on the lips of a man who only uses literature as a mere tool for earning money and despises his audience. Yet, Jasper is an intelligent man climbing professionally to reach his goals and he wants to display the image of

[87] POOLE. p. 140.
[88] GRYLLS. p. 91.

a man of intellect, instead of a brute. When Biffen and Reardon die, he feels guilty and tells Marian: "There are two of my companions fallen in the battle. I ought to think myself a lucky fellow". Marian then encourages him by saying that he is still advancing while others have failed because he is better fitted to fight his way. To this he replies: "More of a brute, you mean." With this response it seems like Jasper's mask of cool detachment has fallen and he is afraid Marian can see his true self, that he is nothing more than a beast trampling over his friends' bodies as he did before with the hanging man in the newspaper. To someone so proud of his intelligence, it is degrading to feel like one of Darwin's horned bulls or game-cocks in *On the origin of species* fighting irrationally for territory and food.

Brutal instincts also rise in the sensible Reardon in an argument with Amy. He tells her about the new job as a clerk and hints he is leaving the literary business altogether. When she plainly refuses to be the wife of a clerk paid twenty-five shillings a week, Reardon becomes for a moment "a mere husband defied by his wife, the male stung to exertion on his brute force against the physical weaker sex". But instead of hitting Amy he tries to impose his male supremacy by telling her that she has no choice. Amy's appearance changes, she looks older and almost scares him as "she glared like the animal that defends itself with tooth and claw". (p. 228). Women like Amy are from a generation that started questioning such authority from men, especially from one who could not support her. She openly defies her husband and, according to James Haydock, is responsible for creating an environment of agony around them which prevents him from doing any work, separation becoming inevitable.[89]

Reardon married Amy because he wanted to have an intellectually equal wife. He loved her intelligence and "strength of character", but poverty turned her elegant feature into hardness and her intelligence against him. The problem, as the narrator says, is that by receiving support to grow intellectually, she ended up growing independent enough to think by herself regardless of her husband. As Haydock says, Reardon probably realized when it was too late that "unless a husband is strong enough to dominate his wife, inevitably she will dominate him".[90] The wrecked marriage made the novelist think that he would have done much better if he had chosen a work girl for a wife, just like Yule did, because she would be submissive and glad for the little he could offer. Biffen, always a realist, speaks with Gissing's voice when he tells his friend that such business would be degrading. A poor girl would marry him believing he was a gentleman in temporary difficult circumstances, but would expect to be richer in the future. Disappointed

[89] HAYDOCK, James. *The woman question and George Gissing*. Bloomington: Author House, 2015. Digital edition. p. 76.
[90] HAYDOCK. p. 96.

by the false prospect, she would torment him with jealousy and vulgar violence. (p. 362). Amy, too, married Reardon because of intellectual affinity, but once poverty knocks at their door her reaction is to think of herself first. She does not stand any kind of aggressive behaviour from him, so the more he forces her, the less she will respect him. In a moment like that of the fight, she acted as if her husband was an uncivilized brute. On the other hand, her criticisms towards him, accusing his behaviour to be "unmanly", make it implicit that she expects more aggressiveness from him. She would like her husband to be more like the competitive (or brute?) Jasper. The balance she means is difficult to attain and almost nonsensical.

When it comes to sexual selection in *New Grub Street*, characters need to choose between natural instincts and the rational ones. The perfect mate according to personal preference is usually very different from the best one in financial terms. In *On the origin of species*, Darwin explains what sexual selection means: less rigorous than natural selection, "this form of selection depends, not on a struggle for existence in relation to other organic beings or to external conditions, but on a struggle between the individual of one sex, generally the males, for the possession of the other sex".[91] Such definition is generally applied to animals and, by association, to men. In *The descent of men*, he is more specific and writes about sexual selection directing his argument to human relations, considering the social roles attributed to men and women. Here he determines there is sexual struggle of two kinds:

> In the one it is between individuals of the same sex, generally the males, in order to drive away or kill their rivals, the females remaining passive; whilst in the other, the struggle is likewise between the individuals of the same sex, in order to excite or charm those of the opposite sex, generally the females, which no longer remain passive, but select the more agreeable partners. This latter kind of selection is closely analogous to that which man unintentionally, yet effectually, brings to bear on his domesticated productions, when he preserves during a long period the most pleasing or useful individuals, without any wish to modify the breed.[92]

According to this second model, men are not simply like other animals beating competition down to attract women, whose prompt response is implicitly natural. Nancy Armstrong points that in modifying his theory, Darwin separates into two spheres the fight for survival: men compete against each other for food and territory, but when it comes to finding a mate it is not about fighting other men, but exercising seduction abilities into exciting and charming their partners. Therefore, the female response is not obvious.[93] Physical beauty and

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[91] DARWIN. *On the origin of species*. p. 83.
[92] DARWIN, Charles. *The decent of man*. London: Penguin, 2004. p. 684-685.
[93] ARMSTRONG, Nancy. DAVID, Deidre (Ed.). Gender and the Victorian novel. In: *The Cambridge companion to the Victorian nove*l. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002. p. 97-124. p. 101.

ingenuity to conquer a wife became as important as the brute abilities taken for survival and so men need to be both "the agents of ruthless nature" and the sophisticated bearers of refinement and delicacy. Armstrong stresses that Darwin creates a false equivalence between the genders when he lays on women the responsibility for choosing her mate as "the most agreeable man" among the successful competitors. So, besides being supposed to select among the most affluent since she usually needed to be supported, in case the husband was incapable of providing for his family it would be the woman's fault because she had made the choice. It demonstrates how "the law of natural selection allowed Victorians to understand a capitalist economy as a machine that worked according to its own version of nature's law, namely that the victor in economic competition was the fittest for social domination".[94]

The triangle composed of Reardon, Amy and Jasper exposes that paradox. When Amy accepted Reardon's marriage proposal, she did it because she thought he would be a man of importance in the literary world. Amy, her mother, the Carters are people who like to flatter themselves for being fashionably related with literature. They read novels and like to say they know literary men. The narrator says that Reardon never impressed as "a man likely to push forward where the battle called for rude vigour", but Amy was in love and convinced herself that he would become a distinguished man in society. When money began to be a preoccupation, her illusions dissipated and Reardon's literary intellect did not suffice anymore to support her love. She leaves him and marries Jasper because she wants a successful husband. Pritchett says that it is natural that Amy wanted to marry a great man and also natural that her love does not last with Reardon's failure. She is feminine, but realistic about life's needs. Under difficult circumstances she becomes an alien creature to her husband and develops an intellect of her own. She then marries Jasper with her eyes open and with a "delicate lack of scruple".[95] If it is her responsibility as a woman to choose an appropriate husband, so Amy does what it takes to assure her future and survival.

Returning to the principle of counterparts, Amy's opposite is Marian. The cousins are psychologically as opposite as Jasper and Reardon. Just like Reardon expects from Amy, Marian seeks for love and support in Jasper, as well as the escape from her father and her daily literary drudge. Both Reardon and Marian are rejected by their partners when they cannot fulfil their promise of money. Like Amy, who married Reardon expecting for future social

[94] ARMSTRONG. p. 102.
[95] PRITCHETT, V. S. *Grub Street*. In: GISSING, George. *New Grub Street*. London: Penguin, 2012. pp. 505-509. p. 509.

distinction, Jasper proposes to Marian clearly in the promise of her legacy.[96] Yet, we can notice the failure in Jasper's well-planned life project. He is sexually attracted by Marian since they first met in Finden when he tried to avoid her claiming "she's dangerous". And it is because of this attraction he almost commits the mistake of marrying her for so little as five hundred pounds. Jasper overcomes what he considers a weakness and jilts her to marry Amy and the ten thousand, which is not such a higher sum, but according to his perception, Amy is provided with better social qualities that will help him achieve his objectives. Marian is more reserved and cares less about social status. She wanted love, and that Jasper could not provide. The young journalist is so focused on selecting a mate based on the professional and social advantages she could bring him that he even proposes to miss Rupert, the daughter of the advertising agent Manton Rupert, while still engaged to Marian. He states clearly from the beginning that he would marry for money. In other words, he would never commit the misstep of marrying the first girl he met – like Alfred Yule did – for mere physical needs. If a mate has to be found, it has to fulfil modern standards of affinity, which, according to Jasper, should no longer take romance into the account:

> The days of romantic love are gone by. The scientific spirit has put an end to that kind of self-deception. Romantic love was inextricably blended with all sorts of superstition – belief in personal immortality, in superior beings, in – all the rest of it. What we think of now is moral and intellectual and physical compatibility; I mean, if we are reasonable people (p. 302).

Romantic love dies away with old illusions regarding marriage and children. In *New Grub Street* characters do not seem to care much for offspring. Reardon does not hide his lack of enthusiasm for his son Willie, and other children in the novel are simply non-existent. Among adult sons and daughters, there is more preoccupation – Jasper's mother is worried about the future of her children who "had nothing of their own" and Amy's mother loved her daughter with "profound tenderness". Despite such cases and for Alfred Yule, who looks for intellectual equity on his daughter instead of his wife, in general marriage is not linked to the desire to perpetuate the species, but to immediate sexual or financial fulfilment. Although less rough than natural selection, sexual selection should not be underestimated, for its role in preservation of life is very significant. It rewards the best adapted males with the greatest number of offspring, while losers decease in numbers and may desert the struggle for survival altogether.[97] The traditional family is suffering the consequences of a whole new way of regarding life and

[96] GRYLLS. p. 85.
[97] DARWIN. *On the origin of species*. p. 98.

family and the new values of civilized culture. Family above all, was about to change as deeply as never before.

By analysing how the general criticism on *New Grub Street* regards the struggles of characters to succeed in the troubled literary market of the end of the nineteenth century in England there is, as remarked by Adrian Poole, a strong evolutionary thesis undermining the narrative. It compels everyone to take part in the fight for survival or else perish, trampled by others. Nevertheless, George Gissing goes further than that and although strongly influenced by the evolutionist thought which permeates the whole century, prints his mark by interpreting the evolutionist fight in his own personal colours. The book reveals his devotion for literature contrasted with the disappointments consequent of a bad relationship with the market which made him bitter towards it. The feeling that a true artist cannot please the tastes of an ill-educated and spoiled mass of readers come out fictionally in the dramatic picture of the artist who dies unrecognized while the mediocre professional is recompensed with the achievement of his goals. Evolutionism comes as a sad truth of a new era and Darwin as the spokesman of such disillusion. The evolutionist problem, if it can be put this way, meant much more than comparing human society to the natural one, originating whole new ideologies which interfered with politics and religion and gave strength to social sciences. It is difficult to judge how much Reardon, Yule, Marian and Biffen are to blame for their failures as much as Jasper, Amy and Whelpdale for their success in a book no longer guided by the Victorian moral system of rewarding and punishing according to one's ethics and sensibility. If money is indeed the only outcome that matters now, then the result was fair, for the best fitted have survived.

3 THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE

It is evident in the previous chapter that although critics tend to resort to expressions such as Darwinism and social Darwinism to explain the imaginative world of George Gissing, the analyses are superficial and often unprecise about how much they are based directly on the texts written by Darwin or appeal to the many social ideologies which refer to them. Their work is no doubt of great importance in the formation of a body of criticism on Gissing, but some subjects are little developed because critics prefer to discuss the novels themselves – plot, characters and Gissing's ideologies – more deeply. The fight for survival in the social environment is one of those subjects which are discussed lightly, and the frequent inclusion of the name of Darwin presupposes more than it explains. Unfortunately, recent criticism on Gissing is not as rich as it could be, and then much of that discussion is left untouched. It is surely not an easy task to debate the influence of Darwin's name because we must consider that it implies much more than his research on natural life. Rather it involves all the frenzy generated by evolutionism which marked the Victorian age so deeply that it reflected in almost every aspect of life as we understand it until today. The little development on the discussion of Darwinism in Gissing by modern critics may be attributed to the fact that those changes which turned the Victorian life upside down are so obviously accepted today that to reflect too much over them seems unnecessary or repetitive.

Darwin's book *On the origin of species* was a great success since its first publication in 1859, selling a whole edition of 1,250 copies in one day. It was the best-seller of the age, generating numberless pamphlets, debates, books, speeches, sermons and in general too many quarrels for a book based on observation. But Darwin's research, more than describing the workings of nature, "seemed to define the age to itself".[98] He disseminated the evolutionary ideas recurrent in the mid-century by combining recent geologic studies to his own studies on natural life and made them attractive and accessible to the public at large. The great success of *On the origin of species* is taken as the cornerstone of natural evolutionism, but more than that, it offered an incredibly plausible explanation for social evolution as well. However, Gregory Claeys disagrees that Darwin's natural theory was adjusted into the social theory the way it is usually accepted. He says the influence between natural and social studies was mutual and calls attention to something that Darwin himself admitted, that the idea of "only the best fit will survive" came to him when he read the "Essay on Population", by Reverend T. R. Malthus, of

[98] WILSON, A. N. *The Victorians*. London: Arrow, 2003. p. 226.

1798, one of his inspirations for the theory of natural selection.[99] Therefore, when natural reverted to social life, it was not actually a totally new arrangement, but a renewal of something that had been in development for some time. He says:

> Darwin's discoveries occasioned no revolution on social theory, but instead involved remapping, with the assistance of a theory of the biological inheritance of character traits, a pre-existing structure of ideas based largely, though not exclusively, upon Malthusian and economic metaphor of the 'struggle for existence'.[100]

In his essay, Malthus thinks of man in biological terms, as someone who must supply body needs first of all. He writes that the food provision is what checks population rates and represents our ultimate trigger for struggle. According to him, "Reason" always asks a man whether he can provide for the beings he brings into the world. Thus:

> If he attends to this natural suggestion, the restriction too frequently produces vice. If he hears it not, the human race will be constantly endeavouring to increase beyond the means of subsistence. But as, by that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, population can never actually increase beyond the lowest nourishment capable of supporting it, a strong check on population, from the difficulty of acquiring food, must be constantly in operation. This difficulty must fall somewhere, and must necessarily be severely felt in some or other of the various forms of misery, or the fear of misery, by a large portion of mankind.[101]

Malthus wrote about man and the natural struggle to subsist in a society that faces the increase of population with fear. And to understand the possible consequences of that increase he draws a parallel between humans and other forms of life. His work was popular not only with Darwin, but also among other naturalists such as Alfred Russel Wallace, whose theory on natural selection was developed separately from Darwin's, but still came to very similar conclusions at almost the same period.[102] Now it is interesting to notice that when David Grylls refers to Mrs Edmund Yule's behaviour as more than Darwinian, but Malthusian, he goes to the very roots of the discussion, before the comparison between men and other animals became so popular and polemic. In Malthus's essay, he puts it very simply: men need a certain amount of food to survive and support their descendants, otherwise life is not possible. When the food supply is not enough, life continuance is restricted. In a restricting environment such as the

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[99] CLAEYS, Gregory. 'Survival of the fittest' and the origins of social Darwinism. *Journal of the history of ideas*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Apr., 2000), p. 223-240. p. 223. Published by University of Pennsylvania Press. Available at <http://www.jstor.org> Accessed on: 27 Jan. 2016.
[100] CLAEYS. p. 228.
[101] MALTHUS, T. R. *An essay on population*. London: J.M. Dent, 1914. p. 24. Available at <https://archive.org> Accessed on 18 Mar. 2016.
[102] WILSON. p. 224.

populous London, people naturally defend what belongs to them, or what they believe to be their right to possess, because there are many limitations in terms of space and provisions. Claeys says that there was more than simple coincidence in the relations of social and political doctrines when associated with the theory of natural selection. He challenges the view that the logic of discovery in the natural sciences induced parallel or derivative concepts in the social sciences. Moreover, he suggests that the concept of social Darwinism resulted from many shifts of thought in Victorian England to which Darwin himself responded and therefore influenced in his own development throughout the years.[103]

In an age of scientific triumphalism like ours, it is difficult to recapture the spirit of Victorian England before Darwin and the success of his theory. He was very bold in standing before the powerful Church and clergy, and the orthodoxy supportive Parliament and Press, with a theory that did away with the necessity of believing in God. Religious reactions against evolutionism were based on the fear of a world in constant change instead of the one fully considered over God's creative power. A. N. Wilson stresses that Marx and Engels saw in Darwin the making of the *laissez-faire* as a capitalist ideology – progress through struggle – but a close examination of Darwin or Spencer by later generations of philosophers and scientists shows that little remains in support of such ideologies.[104] He also argues that the impressive fact that makes Darwin's name so popular until today is due to very different reasons of those political ideologies drawn from him in the past. Nowadays Darwin is important for ideas that took very long for people to understand and now take hold of the modern world: the interrelatedness of natural forms – the notion that we all live in the same planet and our survival depends on each other. This explains why Darwin's name has grown in importance in our generation while his contemporary thinkers like Spencer, Comte and even Marx are half-forgotten, and their works mostly unread or available through the reading of other thinkers.[105]

3.1 HERBERT SPENCER

Spencer's fame started in 1851 with the publication of *Social statics*, when he became enormously admired on both sides of the Atlantic as the man who wanted to reconcile science with religion. His name was a synonym of the brand of positivism which dominated social

[103] CLAEYS. p. 224-225.
[104] WILSON. p. 232.
[105] WILSON. p. 230.

studies in the second half of the nineteenth century - the same positivism that was supposed to have superseded the old and narrow utilitarianism by calling in the aid of comparative documentation and the theory of evolution to understand history and its workings beyond traditional views. Yet, after a successful career of half a century, Spencer's name started fading in the sociological and academic circles, and around the 1930s he was nearly forgotten.[106] Why has Herbert Spencer been forgotten? Why do not people care anymore for a philosopher who was extremely famous and respected by his time? Iain Stewart says that the most common answers to those questions are that social science has evolved beyond him or that he was too much connected with revolution and later with Nazi collectivism to be taken seriously now. But Stewart also argues that deeply at the bottom of social studies it is only the name of Spencer that has vanished, not his ideas. Just like Darwin, he helped build the understanding of life as it is known today, but unlike the naturalist, his name did not become an ethereal symbol connected to it. Spencer can indeed be linked to Darwin, or even, in a limited sense, be called a social Darwinist, not because he drew his theory from Darwin's, but because both agreed that evolution consisted in the "survival of the fittest" in a way or other.[107] The phrase that ended being shared by them implies more than simple editorial marketing.

To understand Spencer, we have to consider some important aspects: First, he was not a flawless man. Yet he was assured and candid about his premises and displayed his ideas nakedly. He believed to have solved the problems he proposes regarding politics, value and power, for he had an intense, positive and dogmatic mind and brought passion to all he did. Second, he has to be understood as a product of three complex connected factors: the severe and provincial religious Non-conformity; the specific moment in history of natural science and ideology of science; and the specific moment when technology and the industrial organization of society dictated a new pace of life.[108] From this we can analyse his thoughts and how they inhabited the late Victorian imagination of a writer like George Gissing.

But why Herbert Spencer? He was chosen for the following analysis because his is the name that undermines the expression social Darwinism which is often found in Gissing

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[106] STEWART, Iain. Commandeering time: the ideological status of time in the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer. *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Sept 2011, vol. 57(3), p.389-402. p. 391. Available at <http://web.b.ebscohost.com> Accessed on: 16 Mar. 2016. Also Peter Burke writes that new history is greatly indebted to sociologists such as Spencer, Comte and Marx for their interest in history through alternative views. They were contemptuous of the traditional way to make History based on major events, but were more interested in the structures that moved along time. BURKE, Peter (Ed.). *New perspectives on historical writing*. Cambridge: Polity, 2005. p. 8.

[107] STEWART. p. 393.

[108] MACRAE, Donald (ed.). SPENCER, Herbert. *The man versus the state*: four essays on politics and society. London: Penguin, 1969. p. 7-54. p. 11.

criticism, although it is seldom said. Adding to that, the frequent citations of him in texts on social Darwinism and his importance in the foundation of sociology point that he was intensely present in Victorian life. His apparition among the suspicious modern readings of Amy Reardon in *New Grub Street* and in personal letters and journals indicate that Herbert Spencer also inhabited the imagination of George Gissing and so he is one of the keys to understand this *fin de siècle* emblematic period and the literature then produced.

One of the letters was written in January of 1879 to his brother Algernon and in it Gissing refers to Herbert Spencer as "perhaps our greatest living philosopher".[109] The letter was written by the young tutor aged 21 who had not published any novel yet and was still to start a serious positivist learning supported by his future mentor Frederic Harrison. In that letter Gissing expresses an interest for Spencer that continued throughout his life, although his ideologies in the overall changed along the time. He was well read in Spencer and often wrote in his commonplace book sayings by him. Once, quoting the philosopher he wrote "there is no political alchemy by which you can get golden conduct out of leaden instincts", and added: "Precisely, and the whole answer to Socialism is: that if society were ready for pure socialism, it would not be such as it now is".[110] This was written at least five years after the letter above and demonstrated Gissing's disillusion with socialism which happened shortly after the publication of his first book, *Workers in the dawn* of 1880. To Grylls, the adding means that Gissing looks at Spencer for support to his belief that human nature was incorrigible, classes were fixed and the utopia of a socialist nation would never come true.[111] The essay "The coming slavery", where the quoted sentence is from, was published in *The man versus the State* of 1884 that will be discussed in full later. The aim of this chapter is to debate Spencer's ideology towards the social arrangement and what can be taken from it in our understanding of Gissing's pessimism and harshness towards the literary poor people of *New Grub Street*.

However, the aim to discuss Herbert Spencer presents the problem of selecting which of his texts should enter the discussion. The greatest part of his work was firstly published in newspapers such as the *Westminster Review* and later released in volumes; other parts exist now only in books of fragments selected according to subject and which vary depending on the edition and the publishing company. His production is considerably vast, and he often revisited

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[109] The letter to Algernon is quoted in MOORE, Lewis D. *The fiction of George Gissing*: a critical analysis. London: McFarland and Co, 2008. Kindle digital edition. p. 236.
[110] Gissing quoted a sentence of the essay The coming slavery in: SPENCER, Herbert. *The man versus the State*: four essays on politics and society. MACRAE, Donald (Ed.). London: Penguin, 1969. p. 110. Gissing's adding note is in his commonplace book, p. 26, cited in GRYLLS, David. *The paradox of Gissing*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1986. p. 44.
[111] GRYLLS, David. *The paradox of Gissing*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1986. p. 44.

and expanded older essays, so there are different versions of the same works. The availability is scarce as well, especially because many volumes have not been published in many years. Firstly, the idea was to choose two works that could be compared and demonstrate Spencer's development by touching similar subjects. Secondly, those works should have been published before *New Grub Street* and be of easy access, so that they have been possibly read by someone interested in Spencer like Gissing. *Social Statics* was chosen because it is Spencer's breakthrough book in which he first explains his premises in 1851. The discussion will be complemented with the popular *The man versus the state* of 1884, from which the young Gissing copied the sentence mentioned above. Spencer's other essays and books will be used to reinforce or contrast ideas along the discussion when necessary. Both works will be read in full, but not everything will be discussed because this essay will not be lengthy enough. Subjects like education and politics which do not add much to the evolution theme will be less stressed.

The world of *New Grub Street* and its struggling writers will provide a sort of practical application for Spencerian theory in the particularly pessimistic interpretation of Gissing. Of course Spencer was not the novelist's only influence, but as John Goode said, Gissing did not have a complicated intellectual formation, which he describes as a good thing because more than an intellectual Gissing was a novelist, much more influenced by the daily life mixed with aestheticism, class elitism and his own life experiences.[112] Gissing really wanted to discuss the problems he lived and saw in front of him. More or less influential – the truth will never be known – it is possible to see much of Spencer in Gissing, especially when he emphasises how personal betterment influences little in a world ruled by stronger forces and that suffering is both unavoidable and necessary in human life.

3.1.1 *Social Statics*

> He had set it before him to become a celebrated man, and he was not unaware that the attainment of that end would cost him quite exceptional labour, seeing that nature had not favoured him with brilliant parts. No matter; his name should be spoken among men – unless he killed himself in the struggle of success (p. 97).

To Alfred Yule there was no other alternative but to succeed, as seen in the fragment above. And to succeed means to become a celebrated man, to be distinguished among others. He knows the incompatibility between his talents and the demands of the market and that this

[112] GOODE, John. *George Gissing*: ideology and fiction. London: Vision, 1978. p. 16.

limitation makes things harder for him. Yet, he fights with the abilities he has, difficult as it may be. George Gissing supported the Spencerian view that each one should not depend on anything but oneself to attain one's objectives and that attitude would be the fairest social arrangement.

Social Statics, or *The conditions essential to human happiness specified, and the first of them developed*, was published in 1851 when Spencer was thirty years old. The work paved the philosophical path he followed in a long career until his death in 1903. Richard L. Schoenwald says that all the ideas and attitudes to which Spencer held tenaciously more than half a century long were originated in the topics of this book. He vehemently advocated for the right of man to do whatever he pleases with himself. Interferences, either singly or in collective form such as the State, can only threaten what man has of most essential in him: his character.[113] To Schoenwald, the Spencer at thirty was not much different from the Spencer of sixty but for his psychological development which reached its bitterest point in 1884 with the publishing of *The man versus the State*. Spencer believed that suffering was unavoidable, and that it brought either wisdom or death, but trying to avoid suffering was meaningless because there was no alternative but to accept it. "The chief danger [Spencer] saw did not lie in bodily discomfort, but consisted rather of the frustration of productive talents everlastingly being schemed by misguided dabblers in morality and politics".[114] He believed the restrictions imposed by the state prevented man from growing to a higher evolutionary level. He starts *Social statics* by asking how the problems of humanity can be solved in the form of a dialogue:

> "Let your rule be, the greatest happiness to the greatest number," interposes another authority.
> "That, like the other, is no rule at all," it is replied; "but rather an enunciation of the problem to be solved. It is your 'greatest happiness' of which we have been so long and so fruitlessly in search; albeit we never gave it a name. You tell us nothing new; you merely give words to your want. […]"[115]

> When the sticking clocks summoned him remorselessly to rise and work he often reeled with dizziness. It seemed to him that the greatest happiness attainable would be to creep into some dark, warm corner, out of sight and memory of men, and lie there torpid, with a blessed half consciousness that death was slowly overcoming him. Of all the sufferings collected into each four-and-twenty hours this of rising to a new day was the worst (p.190).

[113] SCHOENWALD, Richard L. Town guano and social statics. *Victorian Studies*, 1968, Vol.12 (1), p.691-711. p. 691. Available at <http://search.proquest.com> Accessed on: 22 Mar. 2016.
[114] SCHOENWALD. p. 692.
[115] SPENCER, Herbert. ELIOT, Charles William (Ed.). *Social statics*. In: SPENCER, Herbert. *The complete works of Herbert Spencer*. [No city specified]: Amazon Kindle, 2011. position 39497.

What is happiness to the people in the *New Grub Street*? In the second quote Edwin Reardon remembers his youth when he was engaged as a tutor and had a life of squalor both physical and mental. Happiness then meant to lie in a torpid state, out of the sight of men. Death was desirable compared to that. But happiness has different definitions to different people and this is what Spencer writes about in *Social statics*. It begins with a dialogue about happiness also quoted partially above. What is happiness and what can be done to escape life's miseries? Spencer states that rules, principles and axioms are only valuable if the words which express them have a definite meaning, otherwise the constructions will vary and a rule cannot be attained. When we announce "the greatest happiness to the greatest number" as the canon of social morality, it is supposed that mankind is unanimous in their definition of happiness.[116]

The conceptions of happiness vary because people are not constant, they change through the time and vary according to social environments, geographical position, taste, etc. In an age like the Victorian age, can happiness be the simple accumulation of wealth? Or should it be the letting of wealth aside and attaining to art, to philosophy? The possibilities are many, but they could hardly be decided by the State. A number of acts of Parliament have been sanctioned throughout the years in order to diminish suffering and secure the happiness of the largest number, but people would still complain about regulations such as the Poor Laws.[117] There can never be unity in opinion. Laws like the Poor Laws take people into consideration at large and never as individuals or consider what the individual happiness is. The State is "a necessary evil" that is not as necessary as it seems. The more the State interferes in people's lives the less they are free to find their happiness and evolve to a point in which government would not be needed anymore. John Mcvea points here how such stress on individual happiness leads to the idea that Spencer is an emphatic individualist. He says that most of the agitation about individualism in Spencer is actually a misinterpretation of his ideas that resulted in misleading social Darwinist ideologies. He says that – and we can confirm reading *Social statics* – individualism does not mean that each one has to look for his own happiness regardless of the other, but that individuals have many ideas of what happiness means and each social phenomenon starts from the individual will.[118] Therefore, if people were given equal freedom, progress would come as the sum of altruistic individual desires. Much of the individual moral sense is common to many people, thus many people have the same aims in terms of happiness - this is why once they are

[116] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 39542.
[117] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 39659.
[118] MCVEA, John. Herbert Spencer: providing libertarian foundations? *Business and society review*, 2001, Vol.106(3), p. 225-240. p. 231. Available at < http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com> Accessed on: 16 Mar. 2016.

free they tend to gather in groups. When people are assembled accordingly to their personal will there is no necessity of a State regulating them and deciding what they want.[119] Morality cannot be regulated, people are naturally directed by their personal wishes.

In *New Grub Street* we have a group of people who are apparently fighting for the same thing: literature. Intellectually they belong to a higher class than their wallets denounce, but they are not able to circulate among their intellectually equals because they lack the money. Consequently, we see that those marginal writers interact mostly among themselves. They indeed gather according to common traits. However, inside that group there is fierce competition because apparently there is no place for everyone in the literary market, so natural selection works in this group to restrict its members to an appropriate number. The sensation of competition is clear when we view it in the light that for one to succeed, the other must fail. But do Milvain and Reardon really seek the same kind of happiness? To Reardon happiness is to be loved and supported, but when he does not provide for his family Amy looks at him in contempt because he had "spoilt her hopes of happiness". Fame and money are the aims of Jasper, while to Marian the prospect of happiness was only to be beside him. Social position is indispensable for Amy and Jasper in order to keep their love alive, consequently when they cannot have the financial return their affections end. They are morally different from the passive and introverts Reardon and Marian, whose unfitness for the battle help draw an interesting parallel. The two original couples contrast integrity and worldliness with unmatched parts, so they cannot be seen as examples of morality versus vice until the partners are changed.[120] Reardon and Marian never meet, their lot is to be discarded, but when Jasper and Amy are united in the end we see that their common interests help them go forward.

Everyone is guided by their own moral law and fight for what they personally want, without being morally right or wrong. Amy, for instance, is said to "naturally" shrink from her husband when they are in poverty. Her behaviour is not morally outrageous as it is socially commonplace. It is the way she understands the world. For Gissing, it is not only about class, instead it is about the individuals within the class who have their own values, gather according to them, and struggle to gain economic advantage or whatever it takes to make them happy.[121]

Spencer believes that evil is a result of the non-adaptation of constitution to given conditions. Where the non-adaptation exists there is a constant challenge to adapt, otherwise

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[119] MCVEA. p. 232.
[120] GRYLLS. p. 87.
[121] JAMES, Simon J. *Unsettled accounts*: money and narrative in the novels of George Gissing. London: Anthem, 2003. p. 85.

the non-adapted tend to be extinguished.[122] In natural terms men adapt to the environment like other living beings, but the social life is more problematic. Spencer says that man is still mentally and physically attached to old predatory instincts when in order to guarantee one's welfare the group must be sacrificed. He says that every harm human beings cause to others are in one way or another related to that principle. Respect and comradeship can only be reached once people are left to adapt to new circumstances and then overcome it. Chapter two often returns to Jasper's assurances that one must adapt and the world belongs to the adaptable. In Spencer's understanding, the appropriateness of a system and a whole species depends on the circumstances. The world is always changing and it is our duty to change with it, to adapt with the purpose of surviving.[123] When Jasper talks about his motivations, he mentions that "there is no word in our language which sounds so hideous to [him] as 'poverty'" (p. 37). Amy also warned Reardon that she would not bear poverty. Although Jasper and Amy seem repulsive to the reader in the end, it is important to remark that when they mean poverty, they mean real poverty. The people with whom they are familiar, like Biffen, are literally starving to death and that is surely frightening. In a scale of priorities, a full stomach defeats love. They want to run from poverty whatever it takes. In Spencer's argument, evil would be beaten and men be perfectly adapted once the primitive instincts were left aside.[124] To Spencer, once provided with freedom, in virtue of "the law of adaptation", competition would change into a community feeling. To Gissing, the primitive instincts of individualism not only remained but were worsted by modern social chains which present themselves in the form of money and class. He saw little space for freedom do be increased once people become more and more attached to false promises of happiness represented by such false gods. Spencer was also against class distinction and warned that the pursuit of money should always be the pursuit of food, for clothing, for a house, etc., but money should never be pursued for its own sake, for only misers do it.[125]

Every man should be free to do all his wills, except when he deprives other men from theirs. For example, equal freedom means everyone can use the earth and possess part of it as long as the other has the same. Spencer speaks of those rights as natural because the desire to possess is part of human nature.[126] Among the natural rights men have, like the right of property, of free speech, exchange and others, Spencer also points to the rights of women. He says that

[122] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 40613.
[123] MCVEA. p. 229.
[124] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 40686.
[125] SPENCER, Herbert. ELIOT, Charles William (Ed.). *Principals of ethics*. In: SPENCER, Herbert. *The complete works of Herbert Spencer*. [No city specified]: Amazon Kindle, 2011. position 14673.
[126] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 41807.

when he refers to men, the word must be understood as men and women since "equity knows no difference of sex".[127] He criticises the view which says that women have no rights and are wholly at the mercy of men: "their happiness, their liberties, their lives, at men's disposal; or, in other words, that they were meant to be treated as creatures of inferior order".[128] Many problems regarding the rights of women present themselves to be solved, including the rights to hold their own property instead of giving it to their husbands. In equating women to man Spencer is bold and he even argues that women are mentally as capable as man by giving the examples of great queens as well as women philosophers and popular writers. He adds that women do not develop their full character because they are less exposed to education than men. Women suffer with the lack of stimuli of their faculties.

The argument that the brain must be exercised in order to develop has much in common with the phrenological model, popular among scientists and medical men in the mid nineteenth century. According to phrenology, the brain was composed of particular and independent organs, indicated in the bumps on the skull, which varies in strength depending on the size of each bump.[129] Phrenologists noted that different faculties could either act in combination or conflict depending on the situation and therefore the mind was something much more complex and contradictory than it has ever been considered. Notably outdated nowadays, in the Victorian period phrenology provoked a revolution when researchers like George Combe affirmed that the powers of the mind were not immutable, and that they could be developed according to stimulus and individual effort. He declared that there was no limit to human advancement once the mind was correctly trained. It gave Combe's adherents and social reformers theoretical support to campaign for reforms and legislative change regarding education, as well as the treatments offered to prisoners in penal institutions and patients of mental asylums.[130] Once mind development was at the reach of everyone, so class and sex no longer made one inferior to another, and so women and the poor also should have the right to study.

Spencer was not an admirer of the phrenological movement. His direct comments on the subject are little complimentary: In *Principles of Psychology*, he says that phrenology cannot be considered a complete system of psychology: "At best, phrenology can be but an appendix to psychology proper".[131] The greatest problem about it was that phrenologists

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[127] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 42323.
[128] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 42327.
[129] SHUTTLEWORTH, Sally. *Charlotte Bronte and Victorian psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004. Kindle edition. position 799-811.
[130] SHUTTLEWORTH. position 828-850.
[131] SPENCER, Herbert. ELIOT, Charles William (Ed.). *The principles of psychology*. In: SPENCER, Herbert. *The complete works of Herbert Spencer*. [No city specified]: Amazon Kindle, 2011. position 11831

presented their body of doctrines as if it could substitute everything that had been known about psychology so far. The concrete shape of their reasoning contrasted with the abstract doctrine of physiologists and seemed too crude and unscientific for Spencer's taste. He does not invalidate it completely though. In his discourse for freedom, the right to exercise the faculties is one of the most important to every citizen, including women, whose alleged inferiority of the mind is "by no means self-evident".[132]

Spencer criticises violence and abusive authority of men towards women and again reinforces the idea that the never-ceasing processes of adaptation would gradually remove the obstacles to "domestic rectitude". He professes equal freedom to both sexes and even suggests that women should take part in public questions. Nevertheless, Spencer does not go so far, and it would be hardly expected that he did in 1851, as to mention divorce when he talks about the abusive attitude of some husbands. He does not mention it later in his work either.

But to some women like Amy Reardon, in 1881, divorce is a way to happiness. She asks Edith Carter: "Isn't it a most ridiculous thing that married people who both wish to separate can't do so, and be quite free again?". Edith, who has grown used to think of Amy as a modern woman, answers that although reasonable, divorce "would lead to all sorts of troubles". To this Amy answers:

> So people say about every new step of civilization. What would have been thought twenty years ago of a proposal to make all married women independent of their husbands in money matters? All sorts of absurd dangers were foreseen, no doubt. And it's the same now about divorce. In America people can get divorced if they don't suit each other – at all events in some of the States – and does any harm come of it? Just the opposite I should think. (p. 350)

The situation of divorce in England in the period was as it follows: it could only be requested by men until 1857 and only in case of proved adultery. After 1857 a woman could obtain divorce on the grounds of adultery, coupled bigamy, incest or cruelty. That same year the Married Women's Property Bill was defeated leaving women with the right to get divorced although with little power over their money. In 1870 the Bill passed allowing women to retain their own earnings. In 1873 divorced women were given access to their children aged between seven and sixteen and in 1878 women whose husbands were convicts were given the access to their children under ten. In 1882, women were granted the right to dispose of their property and in 1886, the last change before Gissing wrote *New Grub Street*, women were entitled to become

[132] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 42385.

the child's guardian in case of the death of their husbands.[133] In real life, Edith Gissing never asked for divorce, but Gissing himself would look for every possible way to obtain it in 1898 when he fell in love with Gabrielle Fleury. He consulted with friends about the possibilities and even considered getting divorced in America without telling his wife. In the end he gave up the idea because of the costs he could not afford and the fear to lose contact with his sons.[134] In the novel Amy feels free to decide whether she wants to go back to her husband or not once her legacy is secured with her because of the Married women's property law. Before the passing of that Bill the couple would have to get together again for her to have her money.

Amy supports her argument in defence of divorce by telling Mrs Carter how things work in America. This is the kind of behaviour that impresses Edith and makes her agree with everything her intelligent and informed friend says. Amy's independence from Reardon takes place, according to the narrator, because she was intellectually trained by a husband who allowed her to develop the natural tendencies of her mind. After their marriage she ceased to read with the eyes of passion and soon turned away from novels and even the classic literature Reardon loved so much, which later helped illustrate the divergence between them. Once she is free of Reardon, Amy becomes a reader of "solid periodicals" and the so-called "specialism popularized". It is probably from this kind of sources she gets to know about divorce laws in America and also acquires a good acquaintance with the works of Darwin and Spencer. The narrator says she could not undertake their volumes, but her knowledge on the main theories and illustrations was quite respectable. "She was becoming a typical woman of the new time, the woman who has developed concurrently with journalistic enterprise" (p. 354-355).

She, like every main character of *New Grub Street*, speaks Gissing's voice at some level. Amy's role seems to be both to criticise the difficulties to obtain divorce and support women's rights, yet she has also the function of exposing the silly intellectuality of some women who Gissing despised. Her preference for second-hand information demonstrates she is more concerned in looking smart than being a real intellectual woman. In the final scene Amy performs the exact social role Jasper expects from her: she is the charming, intelligent and beautiful hostess. She can talk about different subjects and help display the image of sophistication he desires. On the overall, however, she does not go much further than the old "accomplished young ladies" of mid-Victorian novels whose intelligence was measured in how

[133] FLANDERS, Judith. *The Victorian house*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004. p. 196.
[134] HAYDOCK, James. *The woman question and George Gissing*. Bloomington IN: Author House, 2015. Digital edition. p. 76.

well they could sing and play the piano. She actually plays the piano and sings for Jasper in the end of the final chapter. A polished surface is still of great importance to advance in society.

Adrian Poole says that Amy's intellectual expansion after she leaves Reardon is neutralized by the artificial intellectuality of the contemporary periodicals. To justify why she still "wins" in the end, he explains: "The prevailing thesis of the novel dictates that personal qualities such as 'sensitivity' or even 'maturity' are mere nuances beside the biological capacity for 'success' or 'failure'. One belongs either with the 'stronger' or the 'weaker' side".[135] To Poole, not every part of the success is dependable on character's free will and rational confrontation of the battle for survival as Goode says, but he supports that much of the novel's outcome is indeed a result of natural tendencies, as Reardon would agree.

Returning to Spencer, in the famous part of *Social Statics* called "the right to ignore the State", he reinforces that "no human laws are of any validity if contrary to the laws of nature" and if laws violate the right of equal freedom to all, the citizen has the right to ignore the State.[136] He recognises that men are still selfish and far from the perfect moral being they were supposed to become. Directly or indirectly people still look for their own advantage either by "hook or by crook".[137] This is why to secure the whole society, power must be given to the whole society. And to those who criticise the lack of wisdom of the masses, Spencer points to the paltry circumstances many people live and the prejudice they suffer in the eyes of the middle class gentleman who can afford to entertain friends and give dinners.[138] He says that if one argues that the working classes are unable to be admitted in the pale of the constitution because they are ignorant, it would be expected the existing voters to be enlightened people, which is not true.[139] Political freedom is an external result of an internal sentiment entirely dependent on individual moral sense; "and it is only when this is supreme in its influence that so high a form of social organization as a democracy can be maintained".[140]

Spencer attacks the Poor Laws and sanitary legislations with vehemence because charity spoils natural organization of society. Ian Stewart calls attention to Spencer's attitude towards the meddling State and the way it stunts the growth of the individual and consequently of the human race by the artificial and inadequate premise that everyone is supposed to be kept alive, independently of how. Social evolution would be the constant progress towards a society

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[135] POOLE, Adrian. *Gissing in context*. London: Mcmillan, 1975. p. 147-148.
[136] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 43314.
[137] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 43467.
[138] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 43680.
[139] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 43773.
[140] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 43960.

inhabited by perfect moral individuals without the drawback of the multiplication of such "inferior samples" who are supported daily.[141]

Going back now to Darwin's text, he criticises how man spoils nature's selection by helping domesticated weaker animals to survive and breed instead of allowing natural selection to work. Man-made selection is imperfect and favours ill-formed beings to survive.[142] In the preface of *The principles of ethics*, written in 1893, Spencer reminds the reader that Darwin's theory of natural selection was published in 1859 while *Social statics* came in 1851, which means that the doctrine of organic evolution in its application to human character and intelligence and to society is of earlier date than *On the origin of species*.[143] Nonetheless, he mentions that the process of natural selection – made clear by "Mr Darwin" – indicates that divergence between groups and individuals cause the expansion of one and the disappearance of the other, except in cases in which artificial selection is caused by human meddling.[144] Returning to the Poor Laws, he is incisive to say that the State has to allow people to fight with the powers they possess because there will always be violation of natural rights whenever it interferes. If the State takes from one to give to the other, it is violating its duty towards the one from whom it has taken. The State should focus on only two obligations when it comes to securing its population's rights: firstly, it must protect one citizen from the other, punishing robbery and every other infliction of the other's freedom and rights; and secondly, it must protect the country from external menace. Apart from those, any kind of interference is not acceptable and must be avoided in order to allow humanity to evolve at its own pace.

In the second chapter a superficial view implied that Darwinism meant the application of Darwin's natural selection theory on human society. When discussing Edwin Reardon, it was stated that he considered himself totally controlled by a natural power which seemed to wish for his extinguishment. At the same time social Darwinism – the way it is usually put, superficially – is represented in the figure of Jasper Milvain, a man who does not wait upon nature. He hates poverty and decides that his destiny will be different from his friends' whose poverty degraded day after day. Social Darwinism, the way it is put by Goode, implies that both Reardon and Jasper understand their economic situation, but the difference between them is that the novelist does not accept that he has the rational power to change it while the journalist

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[141] STEWART. p. 396.
[142] DARWIN, Charles. *On the origin of species*: by means of natural selection or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life. Oxford: Oxford University, 2008. p. 65-66.
[143] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 12069.
[144] SPENCER, Herbert. ELIOT, Charles William (Ed.). *First principles*. In: SPENCER, Herbert. *The complete works of Herbert Spencer*. [No city specified]: Amazon Kindle, 2011. position 36444.

takes control over his life.[145] Along the book there are many examples of people who succeed and others who do not, but not all of them expose the antagonism and the outcome of determined behaviour so explicitly as them both. For example, even though Amy wishes to be well-off in life, she is basically passive. Her actions are to abandon one husband and accept the other; oppositely, Alfred Yule worked diligently his whole life, yet loses everything and dies in misery. Yule is limited, but so is Jasper, which means that the decisive factors cannot be only perseverance. As discussed earlier, the ability to make money counts more than anything in the new Grub Street, however, as Jasper well knows, in case the odds are against you, even if you are conscious of the fight and indeed fight for what you want, you too may "go to the dogs".

The social Darwinism generally attributed to Herbert Spencer preaches individualism, but as seen in chapter two, there have been many and divergent definitions of what social Darwinism is and was, including that it is no doctrine at all, but the random use of key phrases such as "survival of the fittest" as thinkers see fit. When Spencer affirms that people have to be let to manage their own lives without interference it seems that only the Jaspers and Whelpdales will survive. Both because they are smart, and especially because they are naturally adaptable. As Poole says, the prevailing thesis is that from the beginning one belongs either to the group of winners or losers and that personal evolution counts very little in the overall. The winners are able to adapt because they are natural winners, rather than being winners because they are able to adapt.[146] Considering this, Spencer is much more a naturalist than he is usually credited for, and the adoption of the phrase "survival of the fittest" did not corrupt Darwin's natural selection thesis as Gillian Beer affirmed since Spencer considers the intrinsic factors which lead to survival as well as Darwin.[147]

Can Herbert Spencer still be called an individualist? Mcvea says this is a common mistake. He explains that Spencer saw men as part of a species that was part of an ecosystem that was part of a universe which are all operated by the same principals. The "dog-eat-dog" competition easily attributed to social Darwinism runs far from his theory. Although the fundamental economic unit will always be the individual, the true social phenomena rise only in the collective. Thus, given equal freedom to pursue individual goals, happiness and progress would be the result of the sum of individual wills. It happens because many personal goals are

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[145] GOODE. p. 115-117.
[146] POOLE, Adrian. *Gissing in context*. London: Mcmillan, 1975. p. 148.
[147] According to Beer, Spencer's phrase contradicted Darwin because the simple fact of surviving proved one's fitness, while for Darwin survival was a matter of unfolding the best variations which culminated in survival. Beer's complaint does not consider that Spencer took the intrinsic factors into account as the most important in his survival theory. BEER, Gillian. Introduction. DARWIN, Charles. *On the origin of species*. p. VII-XXV. p. XIX.

shared by a determined group and the more society evolves, the more naturally dependent citizens will be of each other.[148] When Jasper reviews positively *Mr Bailey, Grocer* he tells Dora that "if a writer has friends connected with the press, it is the plain duty of those friends to do their utmost to help him" (p. 445). And this is how he, Jasper, rises in his career, lending favours and receiving favours from those who can help him. The real individualists like Reardon and Yule are left to loneliness and ultimately seem to beg for attention out of pity.

Spencer is pessimistic when he speaks so crudely that society must be purified from "those who are, in some respect or other, essentially faulty" and stresses that there is no alternative but to accept that the universe has laws and those laws are inflexible, ever active and have no exceptions.[149] On the other hand he seems more optimistic than many when he describes a way for humanity to reach a level of evolution that would result in the betterment of the human race. Despite his scientific background he sometimes seems to be guided by the divine idea of human perfection instead of actual theories of evolution. Against this theory, Macrae says that:

> Spencer did not think that the progressive development of any given society was at all likely. The evolution of the totality of human society is the record of the failure of the vast majority of specific human societies. To Spencer human history is a charnel house, heaped with the cadavers of evolutionary failure. Only the fittest will survive.[150]

Spencer displays his most pessimistic vein when he affirms that evolution is the evolution of needs meeting ends, that is, everything that evolves does so because it is someway a necessary piece in the mechanism of future; otherwise it stays behind.

3.1.2 *The man versus the State*

> I don't think I should be unhappy in the workhouse. I should have a certain satisfaction in the thought that I had forced society to support me. And then the absolute freedom from care! Why, it's very much the same as being a man of independent fortune (p. 374).

[148] MCVEA. p. 231.
[149] SPENCER. *Social statics*. position 40294.
[150] MACRAE. p. 29.

Harold Biffen is ironical about Reardon's worst fear: to end up in the workhouse. He even mocks the fact that after everything that can go wrong in a man's life, he can be somewhat rewarded by being kept alive by the government. Of course Biffen would never accept that, and so he expresses Gissing's disdain towards poverty laws, just like Spencer's. Charles Dickens also expressed his scorn about poverty laws and the people who accepted to be supported by them. In 1837 he criticised the treatment of children in workhouses in *Oliver Twist*, and in *Our Mutual Friend* of 1865 the poor Betty Higden remains a decent person by fleeing public charity while the ones who seek it are compared to "vermin". Although Dickens was not a social theorist, he lamented the inadequacy of the successive systems of poor relief.[151] Gissing constantly feared the workhouse would be the end of his line. He lived near Marylebone, just like Reardon, and also like the fictional novelist, was constantly haunted by its bells and the omens of failure brought with them. The workhouse was, according to Delany, Victorian society's tribute to social Darwinism, for it materialized failure into an institution.[152]

In the preface of the first edition of *The man versus the State*, Spencer writes that nothing has occurred to alter the belief that he expressed in 1860 in a Westminster Review article called "Parliamentary reform: the dangers and the safeguards". The thesis remains that "unless due precautions were taken, increase of freedom in form would be followed by decrease of freedom in fact". He complains that regulations and dictatorial measures have been multiplying, restraining citizens in directions where they were not restricted before. Taxation has diminished people's freedom even more by lessening a portion of their earnings, which they should be able to spend as they pleased, to be spent as public agents think appropriate.[153] Now thirty-three years after the first edition of *Social Statics* Spencer harps on the same strings in his liveliest as well as most polemical work.

Donald Macrae, in the introduction of *The man versus the State*, affirms that to Spencer

> Society will always do best left to its own laws: the state can only mar, not make. Public provision (as distinct from private, individual charity) for the poor and needy, for the victims of disaster, disease and age, can only be destructive of other values both higher and in the long run more important.[154]

Men and society are in permanent evolution and in search of equilibrium, which does not mean that they will reach it eventually. The continuous struggle is what makes life move

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[151] CAREY, John. *The violent effigy*: a study of Dickens' imagination. London: Faber and Faber, 1991. p. 9.
[152] DELANY, Paul. *George Gissing*: a life. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008. p. 165.
[153] SPENCER, Herbert. MACRAE, Donald (Ed.). *The man versus the State*: four essays on politics and society. London: Penguin, 1969. p. 59.
[154] MACRAE. p. 15-16.

on. Spencer preaches a social *laissez-faire* in order to allow nature to select its best specimens: let people deal with their own problems and they will naturally be selected in the fight for survival. Yet, it is important to remember that Spencer's belief in natural laws and the continuing of history was blended with the Victorian concept of world machine, in which everything seemed to work mechanically and infallibly. It resulted from the intoxication of technology present in the nineteenth century English life. The world could not be, though, without the heavy machinery of trains, factories and concrete in it from the beginning of the century, as well as all the laws to regulate the city life which came with them. It seemed completely justified and beyond refutation that since we live in a lawful universe, life and society were part of a great machine, and that the laws of economics were as certain and beyond repeal as the law of universal gravitation.[155] It does not mean Spencer rejects the emphasis on the natural workings of the universe, on the contrary, in this work he is even more assertive about the inevitability of disgrace if the wisdom of nature were ignored. And if the modern city were the environment where life takes place, then it is the environment people would have to adapt to.

In the four essays which compose the book, Spencer discusses that and other problems. Politics and the way the State passes regulations and bills without knowledge of their consequences are the main criticism. How the population suffers within those badly-planned chains is the terrible consequence. Some of the discussions repeat or reinforce older claims, others go further into them, but the main revolt is still the excess of restraints to human evolution. Yes, Spencer still believes in it so much time later. The four famous essays that compose *The man versus the State* will be discussed according to their main topics and the subjects which can help in the comprehension of Spencer's theory, as well as the subjects which we can apply to our fictional society of *New Grub Street*.

In "The new Toryism" Spencer criticises the two political parties, Tories and Whigs (Liberals), because they have exchanged places. Representing respectively militant and industrial types, the two used to be differentiated for defining the systems of compulsory against voluntary cooperation, or the monarchical versus the commercial. He points that the true Liberalism stood for individual freedom versus State-coercion, but modern Liberals had lost sight of it. As its power grew in the country, "Liberalism has to an increasing extent adopted the policy of dictating the actions of citizens, and, by consequence, diminishing the range

[155] MACRAE. p. 18.

throughout which their actions remain free".[156] Mcvea explains that to Spencer "the triumph of Liberalism had been to overcome the coercive control of the militaristic state ruled by the Crown", but once the individual had been made free to cooperate on a voluntary basis, he was in danger of being enslaved again under the influence of the new government.[157] However, Mcvea also calls attention that Spencer's criticism towards the coercive government does not mean his unbounded support to free-market and corporate capitalism as many think. It happens firstly because joint-stock companies contravene personal freedom with the same militaristic premise of the conservative government; secondly because it infringes the natural rights of workers with their concentration of power and ownership, and thirdly because such structures possess the same democratic and bureaucratic failings that will result in the same coercion caused by government.[158] Human progress is dependent on the division between labour and individual enterprise, and so morality and economy must develop hand-in-hand.

In the second essay, "The coming slavery", Spencer is harsh and incisive about the poor:

> The kinship of pity to love is shown among other ways in this, that it idealizes its subject. Sympathy with one in suffering supresses, for the time being, remembrance of his transgressions. The feeling which vents itself in "poor fellow!" on seeing one in agony, excludes the thought of "bad fellow", which might at another time arise. Naturally, then, if the wretched are unknown or but vaguely known, all the demerits they may have are ignored; and thus it happens that when the miseries of the poor are dilated upon, they are thought of as the miseries of the deserving poor, instead of being thought of as the miseries of the undeserving poor, which in large measure they should be. Those whose hardships are set forth in pamphlets and proclaimed in sermons and speeches which echo throughout society, are assumed to be all worthy souls, grievously wronged; and none of them are thought of as bearing the penalties of their misdeeds.[159]

After discussing how government should behold society and behave towards it in the first essay, now he points at the people and their difficulty in following the paths of evolution. In the beginning of it, as copied above, he complains that when men are poor they automatically become good and worthy in the eyes of the nation, and the circumstances that provoked such misery are ignored whatever they are. He demonstrates impatience towards social enterprises which echo throughout society trying to call attention to the plights of the poor. According to what we have seen about Spencer to this point, his claim here does not lead to the thought that by leaving the poor people to themselves they will all improve and cease being poor. No, he is

[156] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 67.
[157] MCVEA. p. 233.
[158] MCVEA. p. 234.
[159] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 82.

reinforcing the premise of *Social Statics* where he says that the weaker have to be left to their own hardships and so be naturally eliminated for the future. What does the "bearing the penalties of their misdeeds" mean then? Are their misdeeds intrinsic in their natures, enduring from generation to generation, and so Spencer believes that there is no other way for poor people but to always err?

The essay goes on describing the kind of people who begs in the streets and are pitied because they are said to have no work. "Say rather that they refuse work or quickly turn themselves out of it?"[160] The "good-for-nothings" live on the "good-for-somethings" – the vagrants, prostitutes and criminals, or on the way of criminality – the burdens to the hard-working parents who live honestly. Here Spencer separates the total poor into the classes of vagabonds and the hard-working people, or simply unfortunates – like the girl Reardon talks to at the hospital: "I'm unfortunate, sir" (p. 361). When it comes to the vagabonds he asks why all the misery connected with misconduct should not be brought upon them and the ones associated with them. He provokes the reader by stating that there is a false belief in society that "all social suffering is removable, and that it is the duty of somebody or other to remove it".[161] To this he answers that the universal law of nature commands that "the creature not energetic enough to maintain itself must die". This premise is reinforced by the Christian enunciation that "if any would not work neither should he eat", yet it is hardly accepted by the Christians themselves whose current assumptions are that there should be no suffering at all.

Here Spencer does not separate the worthy from the unworthy anymore. He blames the present and past generation of legislators who administered the old Poor Law which was responsible for producing a permanent body of tramps who ramble from union to union and for maintaining criminals continually thrown back to society to commit more and more crimes. He makes an exception for poor children and admits that they should be protected since they cannot be blamed for their parents' sins. Again he complains about how worse society becomes with so many charity and artificial remedies which accustom people to be benefited by them.[162]

He does not go back to the hard-working parents. What about them? Is it really possible to separate the deserving from the undeserving? Even if we could, it is hard to say whether they could be saved. There are many conceptions (or misconceptions) about what makes one worthy. For example, the unfortunate girl Reardon sees at the hospital is "good-looking and very quiet, she was poorly-dressed, but as neat as could be" (p. 361). Cleanness and quietness are

[160] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 82.
[161] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 83.
[162] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 84.

traditionally signs of goodness in the Victorian novel, especially for women. In Dickens, Ruth Pinch is famous for her happiness in her little doll-house: "Pleasant little Ruth! Cheerful, tidy, bustling, quiet little Ruth!".[163] In *Principles of ethics*, of 1892, Spencer himself writes about a "woman, poor but clean and tidy who saw that the emissaries of church favoured the good-for nothings".[164] Here Spencer not only differentiates the poor but also criticises charity – in this case, religious charity – to privilege the unworthy, whoever they are. After the discoveries of Louis Pasteur and Dr John Snow who identified the source of the cholera outbreak in 1854, the population was aware of the existence of germs and living organisms present in the air and the water. Personal hygiene became highly valuable both with germ and miasma theories of disease. A clean body neither generates bad airs nor harboured germs.[165] However, to Gissing the clean aspect can be misleading. In *The Nether World*, Jane instructs the poor Pennyloaf to keep her house and her babies clean, but it is useless.[166] In the squalid conditions and in the place she lives, it is quite impossible. The unclean place is not a sign of bad character, but a result of ignorance and lack of means. In *New Grub Street*, Amy rejoices on how clean her mother's house is and how good it is to be back to such a home:

> It is often said by people who are exquisitely ignorant on the matter, that cleanliness is a luxury within the reach even of the poorest. Very far from that; only with the utmost difficulty, with wearisome exertion, with harassing sacrifice, can people who are pinched for money preserve a moderate purity in their persons and their surroundings (p. 244).

Cleanliness does not display character, as Biffen well knows. The realist reproaches Reardon in thinking that the unfortunate humble girl would make a perfect wife and says: "I distrust such appearances" (p. 361).

Returning to Spencer's essay, he comments over an interesting allegory: when the railways were first opened in Spain, peasants standing on the tracks were frequently run over and the engine-drivers were blamed for not stopping. Those peasants lacked the sense of momentum of those unknown large things moving at high speed. The incident reminds of so-called "practical politicians" whose minds are incapable of understanding that social measures do not stop when they intend them to. As poor rates multiply, so does the demand from the government to withdraw money from the tax payers to support such people. He states politicians lack the habit of observing the general course of recent changes and where they are carrying

[163] DICKENS. Charles. *Martin Chuzzlewit*. London: Penguin, 2012. p. 570.
[164] SPENCER. *Principals of ethics*. position 27964.
[165] GOODMAN, Ruth. *How to be a Victorian*. London: Penguin, 2014. p. 20-21.
[166] GISSING, George. *The nether world*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2008. p. 131.

society and then ask themselves what kind of structure they tend to produce with their actions.[167] One thing in his opinion has to be understood: suffering cannot be prevented; and much of it is curative for it serves as prevention of a future remedy. It is a mistake to think that every evil can be removed: "the truth being that, with the existing defects of human nature, many evils can only be thrust out of one place or form into another place or form – often being increased by the change".[168] Worse than that is to think that it is the responsibility of the State to eliminate every possible kind of evil. The influence of such thoughts conspires to decrease responsibility for individual action. As mentioned earlier, Spencer believed that a non-coercive cooperative society starts from the individual pursuit of happiness, but that people were not ready for that. This is why they were not ready for socialism. And now comes the part which made Gissing even copy it to his commonplace book.

> There seems no getting people to accept the truth, which nevertheless is conspicuous enough, that the welfare of a society and the justice of its arrangements are at bottom dependent on the characters of its members; and that improvement in character which results from carrying on peaceful industry under the restraints imposed by an orderly social life.[169]

Both socialists and the so-called Liberals, whoever they are, are deceiving themselves when they prepare the way for social reform, for "the defective natures of citizens will show themselves in the bad acting of whatever social structure they arranged into. There is no political alchemy by which you can get golden conduct out of leaden instincts".[170]

Such hard philosophy may throw some light on our understanding of Gissing's pessimism, however it still makes us think that Reardon, Biffen, Marian deserved a different fate. They could probably have had a different fate were they a little more cooperative, even when the extent of their control over their lives and personal fates is still blurred.

"The sins of legislators" is the third essay. In it Spencer returns to important points of *Social Statics* to reinforce that "if man is shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin, it is unquestionable that Government is begotten of aggression and by aggression".[171] For him, social problems started when coercive subordination started. He complains that legislators know too little about the things they decide about with their laws; they act like professionals

[167] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 91.
[168] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 93.
[169] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 110.
[170] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 110.
[171] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 112.

who were never trained to perform activities they were supposed to master. For example, on the one hand they impose taxes raising prices of materials to build houses and on the other establish regulations that check and forbid the production of wretched dwellings.

The problem according to Spencer is that the citizen worships the sources of power, persisting in ascribing to the idol made by his own hands.[172] How to solve it? Who should lead the country? The answer is guidance by collective wisdom, with a selection of the best men of the nation whose best powers are enlightened by the knowledge of the time to deal with the matters before them. These men would be distinguished by their linguistic, literary and historical acquirements, but the true requirement from a legislator would be a "systematic study of natural causation as displayed among human beings socially aggregated".[173] Although the consciousness of causation is not an expected key to progress, Spencer affirms that it has become clear enough that the existence of causal relations has to be taken into account before any meddling decision.

Regarding those considerations, we can make and interesting comparison between Spencer's philosophy and Auguste Comte's, who also predicted that the world would be ruled by intellectuals. Spencer is even addressed as the English counterpart of the French philosopher, but despite both being positivists, Spencer rejected such comparison on the grounds that he had created a complete and viable theory of social structure while Comte was responsible for no more than an outline of a sociological ideal.[174] Not everybody agrees with that. Gissing was famously an admirer of the work of Comte, greatly influenced by his first literary supporter, Frederic Harrison. Comte coined the term "sociology" to indicate the understanding of the social process. It involved applying the scientific method learned by observing the natural world on the social world and then eliminating social problems. Gissing was delighted in his Comtean studies by the 1880s and considered Comte the "supplement of Darwin".[175] To Delany, Comte appealed to Gissing so much because of his elitist utopianism. In his perfect society, the "old strongholds of privilege would be swept away and society would be ruled by unselfish intellectuals, chosen by merit rather than birth".[176] In the third chapter the philosophic background of George Gissing will receive attention in more detail.

Back to "The sins of legislators", Spencer says that it is indisputable that human beings are at some extent modifiable, both physically and mentally. Just like he remarks about the

[172] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 129.
[173] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 132.
[174] MACRAE. p. 21.
[175] DELANY. p. 36.
[176] DELANY. p. 37.

necessity of training the brain faculties in *Social statics*, now he reinforces that the more a faculty is used – now both bodily or mentally - the more it develops; and the less a faculty is used, the less powerful it gets along time. Broader modifications are inheritable and serve the general adaptation of a species to the living conditions. The drawback is that people, be them the citizens or the legislators, tend to look for the easiest ways to deal with their affairs and daily problems and so instead of finding solutions to those problems, they just repeat them generation over generation.[177] Man has to understand his role as part of a greater thing, and stop seeking easy gratification in order to build a society based on spontaneous cooperation. Here Spencer insists in people adjusting to natural laws of selection, and reinforces that although society does not tend to condemn aid given to the weak because the action is associated with a greater sense of responsibility, it does cause mischief.

Adaptation has to be acknowledged as a necessary tool for survival and the constant struggle on it will result in the betterment of future generations. It is man's responsibility not only to lose his savageness, but also to apply all his power in the modification of his intellect to become qualified to the tasks he must perform in the modern world, otherwise he will perish. Only the fittest will survive and nature will always prevail. He complements that the principle is truly derived from the lives of brutes, for the reasons which motivate the struggle for survival are always the same: fight for food and territory and mates.[178] It is not surprising that Goode said this book was Spencer's

> most lucid rationalization of a free capitalist ethic based on the assumption that social action could only impede the 'natural' law of the survival of the fittest and that therefore any attempt to rectify natural process of selection – physiological or economic – was an unwarrantable interference which could only intensify the operation of that law by appearing to delay it.[179]

To finish, Spencer says that society is not a plastic mass, but an organic body where the phenomenon of human life originates and roots every phenomenon at large. Legislators who are incapable of reasoning in the right direction of what they legislate commit an error of reasoning and must be guilty of a crime against society.[180]

In the earlier essay Spencer criticises the belief that suffering is unnatural and it is the responsibility of someone – usually the State – to remove it. In this essay again Spencer says that the weak should not be helped, for the sooner they are discarded, the better human society

[177] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 133-134.
[178] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 142.
[179] GOODE. p. 185.
[180] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 149-150.

will evolve. Such hard mentality of Spencer has been criticised too. The Russian Prince Kropotkin wrote in his book *Mutual Aid* that even among the least sociable animals the survival of a species is connected with the mutual protection of the group.[181] Perhaps the problem is that Spencer shocks with what he thinks to be the first and most difficult step towards the dreamed evolution which is to acknowledge that some people should be left behind. It clashes against people's common sense because it seems too radical, too crude. The spontaneous cooperation he preaches to be the natural outcome of a more rationalized population is described as a society where there would be mutual help, since one would be dependent on the other in a good way. Spencer supports the mutual protection of the group, the difference is that his mutuality is a two-way road, instead of only one obtaining help and the other being stripped from his property.

It is easier when we think of society as a whole, and it is probably the way Spencer thought, but when it comes to the individuals of flesh and bones it becomes very difficult to decide which ones are unworthy and should be left behind. In a novel like *New Grub Street*, the deserving and the undeserving can be defined under different lights, according to goodness, honesty, devotion to family, devotion to money etc. As we saw about Darwin, the individualist Victorian society tended to interpret and stress the points which supported its individualism and focused on the popular money-race. Some aspects of the theories which did not fit the interested areas were either ignored or discovered much time later: for instance, Darwin wanted people to feel responsible for their doings regarding nature, and Spencer believed in collectivism more than is usually admitted. A different society would esteem different values.

Jasper Milvain too has a theory about how only through collectivism it is possible to advance: "modesty helps a man in no department of modern life. People take you at your own evaluation. It's the men who declare boldly that they need no help to whom practical help comes from all sides" (p. 44). He says this because he thinks that someone who asks for help will never get it. He, like Spencer, does not believe in begging, but in reciprocal assistance. A man needs to be independent, and so when his desires aggregate to others' desires and bring others advantages he will naturally be helped by that specific group. In another moment, when he is planning what to do with Marian's money, he says:

> At present I am spoken of as a "smart young fellow", and that kind of thing, but no one would offer me an editorship, or any other serious help. Wait till I show that I have helped myself, and hands will be stretched to me from every side. 'Tis the way of the world. I shall belong to a club; I shall give nice, quiet little dinners to selected people; I shall let it be understood by all and sundry that I have a social position.

[181] ANDRESKI, Stanislav (Ed.). Introductory essay: sociology, biology and psychology in Herbert Spencer. In: SPENCER, Herbert. *The making of sociology*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1972. p. 7-35. p. 26.

> Thenceforth I am quite a different man, a man to be taken into account. And what will you bet me that I don't stand in the foremost rank of literary reputabilities ten years hence?" (p. 378).

On the other hand, we have Reardon and the other individualists whose success or failure do not interest anybody (anybody who could actually help them). They act like Gissing suggested to his brother, they "keep apart" from the commercialist and corruptive society to keep themselves whole, incorruptible. The problem is that Gissing suggested that in keeping apart one avoids connection and therefore avoids… suffering. But suffering finds those characters mercilessly anyway.

"The great political superstition", the last essay, claims the divine right of kings has been substituted for the divine right of parliament.[182] In it Spencer continues to criticise the limitless power of legislators inherited through the old belief hold by Tories which connected political power to divine power. Here Spencer reinforces his political views and stresses the wrong doings of the State again. It is needless to go through all his argument which little has to add to the main discussion, except for some interesting topics: He goes further with the *Social Statics* premise of rights by pointing that authors have natural rights over their production, as well as people have rights over anything they might produce or acquire. The right of property has to be granted and protected by the Government in order to provide that citizens can live in society with one another without the menace of losing what belongs to them. The rights problem becomes more complicated in *The man versus the State* because he reflects that if all the rights granted by the State were solely based on the natural human rights there would not be divergence between the laws of one country and another.[183] It is surely becoming a challenge to grant everybody's rights in a big city like London. Yet, in spite of those divergences which apply to minor subjects, there is a considerable correspondence when it comes to greater claims. Theft, homicide, adultery are aggressions similarly interdicted by different (civilized) nations, asserting that citizens may not be injured in determined ways.[184]

Some adjustments in the law are requested from time to time though. The system which promotes equity such as this accepts the claims of people who feel offended by it. He says that the changes in the law are made in pursuance of current ideas concerning the requirements of justice, but are not always derived from the law, instead are opposing to it. For example, the act

[182] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 151.
[183] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 166.
[184] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 167.

which gives to a married woman the right of property of her earnings, "evidently originated in the consciousness that the natural connexion between labour expended and benefit enjoyed, is one which should be maintained in all cases. The reformed law did not create the right, but recognition of the [natural] right created the reformed law".[185] Here Spencer does not declare being in favour or not of the Married women's property bill, but as he defends equality, including women, we suppose he would not be against it.

When politics and society become too attached to laws and demands and meaningless rights, Spencer turns our attention back to nature. He wants people to understand that evolution does not mean constant balance, but the constant search for it. Whenever there is unbalance there is a constant quest for equilibrium, and that is what will guide humans to evolve.[186] He is emphatic in saying there is no ethical warrant for the actions by which the whole life is maintained if we adopt pessimism as a creed and thus accept the implication that life is in general an evil that should come to an end. On the other hand, if we understand that suffering is part of our lot in order to provide learning and wisdom and so lead us to a future ameliorated all the suffering and pain are justified. People who believe that everyone has to be protected from suffering because life is valuable should take the responsibility to end up with suffering to themselves. Our moral intelligence should guide us better than that. But it is very important to pay attention to the ethical character of such proposition: "The ethical character arises only with the distinction between what the individual may do in carrying on his life-sustaining activities, and what he may not do".[187] It is unethical thought to perform doings which interfere with the doings of others.

In *New Grub Street* Biffen once more tries to lecture his hard-headed friend. Both men are in a cab, going to the train station because Reardon has to take the next train to see Amy and his son Willie who is sick with diphtheria. They are sick too. Reardon has a strong cold and lung congestion that will bring him to his end soon and Biffen has just recovered from the fire episode in his lodgings. Still, patiently the realist tries to convince Reardon to give up on his pride and return to his wife:

> 'What are we – you and I?' pursued the other. 'We have no belief in immortality; we are convinced that this life is all; we know that human happiness is the origin and the end of all moral considerations. What right have we to make ourselves and others miserable for the sake of an obstinate idealism? It is our duty to make the best of circumstances. Why will you go cutting your loaf with a razor when you have a serviceable bread-knife?' (p. 432).

[185] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 170.
[186] MCVEA. p. 226.
[187] SPENCER. *The man versus the State*. p. 171.

Neither Reardon nor Biffen want to trample over people's bodies to reach some ambitious top, yet Reardon is provoking unnecessary suffering in the opinion of his friend when he refuses to go back to Amy. According to his friend, he is refusing to accept the solution to his sufferings life is naturally giving to him. He would not be getting anything that is not his by accepting his wife again. So his suffering in this case becomes unjustified. One should always do one's best to go on with life.

Those writers are harmless as we saw in the previous chapter. They do not meddle with anyone; they do not do anything. The problem is that their apathy may be harmful. Biffen tells Reardon at some point that he gave up marrying once in order to avoid tragic consequences – to him and the girl. The same consequences he predicted had Reardon married the work girl he met at the hospital. Biffen is aware that suffering is part of life, yet he believes that is their responsibility to do the best of circumstances. By making the best of circumstances he is justifying the harshness of life by producing good out of it. To him, Reardon is attached to the kind of idealism that will not help him in anything unless he learns from it and moves forward. Otherwise, there are no reasons for his life to be maintained.

Of course when Spencer writes about social struggle he thinks of society as a whole. His individuals are rather generic and would never display such detailed character as those people in the novel. When he talks of evolution, he means long-term evolution, running through generations and making no exceptions for misdoings. The individual improvement to him means little, it is more like a good legacy one can leave for the next generation. Under that light, when we think of Biffen and Reardon and the sadness of their lives it becomes difficult to make a point about the reason for their existence. They neither mean to leave anything for a future generation, nor know how the lives of people like them may improve with it. The making the best of circumstance seems more like a manner of leaving others' way free, for they have no right to make their wives, almost-wives or friends unhappy because of obstinate idealisms. The label of selfishness placed on them loses strength under such circumstances.

Herbert Spencer was a man of many views. He wrote about biology, evolution, politics, education, ethics, and even music. He wished to see society as a whole to understand how it worked, how it got to where it was and then use the knowledge to predict the future. Spencer's liberalism meant to break with old and useless chains that held civilization back, beating about the same problems over and over and making them every time worse instead of looking for solutions. Old conservatism, superstitions and religious dogmas were some of the factors that held people from learning about their responsibilities in this world and committing to its improvement. His ideas were firmly stated but sometimes difficult to put in practice: he

believed that neither class nor sex attested for anyone's intelligence and so supported that all should have the right to vote, to education and to take part in the political decisions of the country. Those who do not care about working, about learning or participating should be left to themselves to be taken care of naturally by the law of survival. He knew it and supported that there was no other alternative but the deaths of many: the elimination of the weakest was necessary if human kind wanted to improve. Yet, distinguishing the week from the poor was a difficulty Spencer shared with Gissing, whose conflict will be discussed in the next chapter. As mentioned in the beginning, Spencer was not flawless. What impresses the most in him is his candour and how he really trusted that he was right: Only the fittest shall survive to carry on nature's will.

4 THE DIGNITY OF LITERATURE

> 'But the plot may be as silly as you like, providing it holds the attention of vulgar readers. Think of "The Hollow Statue"; what could be more idiotic? Yet it sells by thousands.' (p. 59).
>
> 'When I write I think of my best readers, not of the mob.'[188]

The population of England and Wales increased from seven million to nine million between 1760 to 1801. In the first half of the nineteenth century it reached 17.9 million and by 1901 it was 32.5 million, more than three times what it had been a hundred years earlier.[189] Philosophers and intellectuals could barely hide their uneasiness regarding this growth of population, especially in the large cities, and its consequences. Not that it happened from day to night or that it could not be explained, yet the fact was that such demographic expansion had never been witnessed before and every institution of the country, be it social or governmental, had to adapt to the masses. In the age of Darwin, evolutionism and natural selection offered the key to understand human nature, but many people were intrigued by what they considered an excessive number of human specimens with seemingly little selection working over them. The man-made institutions, from charity funds to the Government itself, were being criticized for protecting and supporting the poor instead of leaving them free to fight for their survival as Spencer proposed, and thus encouraging them to multiply, filling the world with inferior orders of people.

Education acts were condemned by those who believed the masses should not be allowed the access to culture, especially because they did not have the capacity to appreciate it. Class issues clashed with a so-called scientific thought which involved selection based on the supposed intellectual inferiority of the poor. A novel like *New Grub Street* is in many ways a picture of that conflict between the intellectuals and the masses, and it demonstrates how George Gissing stood before it. A common thought among the intellectuals of the end of the Victorian age, including him, was that good taste was being dissolved in the pool of people and it became a matter of dignity to keep apart from it.

When Herbert Spencer proposed to leave people be and let nature take its part in selecting the fittest he thought the less the State interfered the better humans would be. Even at

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[188] GISSING, George. Arthur C. (Ed.). *The letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz*, 1887-1903. YOUNG. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1961. p. 196. quoted in KORG, Jacob. *George Gissing*: a critical biography. London: Methuen and Co, 1965. p. 107.

[189] ALTICK, Richard. D. *The English common reader*: a social history of the mass reading public 1800 – 1900. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957. p. 81.

the cost of death and suffering, to him nature was perfection in itself and was the best and only guide civilization could put itself in the hands. Spencer did not take part in a later and more radical vein of discourse towards the masses which seemed to blend fear and hatred such as displayed by Friedrich Nietzsche, D. H. Lawrence and others. The revolt of the masses, as named by Ortega y Gasset, represented evolution taking a wrong turn and running definitely out of control. It therefore represented an actual threat to civilization which nature could no longer solve. The crowds were no longer in their place, but spreading and taking over places that rightfully belonged to superior minorities. Crowds related to barbarism, to the return to savagery such intellectuals and Spencer himself feared so much. The difference was that Spencer would not have gone as far as George Bernard Shaw when in the 1930s he suggested the extermination of the useless excess of population in order to protect human advancement: "… if we desire a certain type of civilization and culture, we must exterminate the sort of people who do not fit into it."[190] The suggestion that the fittest should not be selected by nature anymore but by superior men went beyond social Darwinism and led us to sad and well-known episodes of our history with the Nazi empowerment and its concentration fields some decades later. Anyway, by the end of the century the fear of the masses shaped the thought of a very dark future when vulgarity would destroy everything humanity has ever built, including literature.

George Gissing caught himself in an inner conflict of convictions in the beginning of his career when he, an educated but poor young man, goes to London and has to live in cheap garrets for many years. Throughout his literary life, he studied Charles Darwin, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer and others; he was strongly guided through positivism by Frederic Harrison, but soon gave himself away to the pessimism of Arthur Schopenhauer, whose bleak view of life matched his own. Gissing deplored the religious conformism from the past and defended a clearer and realistic view of life. Despite his perpetual poverty, he considered himself an aristocrat by heart and mind and so despised the vulgarity of "the mob", as he used to say. To him, democratic practices such as the board school system levelled society down by providing education to a kind of people who had solely materialistic motives; who was incapable of understanding true beauty and art.[191] When he wrote *New Grub Street*, Gissing demonstrated the contempt he felt towards the ignorant, the said "quarter-educated" Whelpdale refers to so gladly. The masses make people like Whelpdale and Jasper Milvain rich in the end. According

[190] SHAW, George Bernard. *Plays political*: the apple cart, on the rocks, Geneva. London: Penguin, 1986. p. 146.
[191] CAREY, John. *The intellectuals and the masses*: pride and prejudice among the literary intelligentsia, 1880 – 1939. London: Faber and Faber, 1992. p. 93.

to him, they are the same unintelligent people who cannot appreciate a good work of art and destroy the lives of real artists like Edwin Reardon and Harold Biffen. The problem was not exactly being poor, but ignorant. Gissing tried to separate them, however, he knew a member of the mass would hardly be able to attain distinction and would quickly be absorbed by social limitations. To the despair of Gissing, the power of the mob was enormous; it controlled urban life and the literary market, rewarding mostly the ones who flatter its vulgar taste.

On the one hand, like when he mocks the "quarter-educated", Gissing seems to think of his mob like a horde of animals, incapable of a rational thought; but on the other, he is still the writer who became known for his novels about the poor. Poverty was not an abstract matter to Gissing, for he felt in the flesh what it was to be poor and frustrated by bare necessities which for the rich are mere trifles. He does not simply show the poor in novels like *The nether world* or *Demos*, but his accuracy lies in reporting the individual miseries and tragedies of their lives in detail. As John Carey highlights, there were two George Gissings: one who snarled about the brutishness of the masses and another one who repudiated such insensible views. There is no point in asking which one was the real Gissing because "it is clear he found both activities necessary for stabilizing his personality and sustaining his creative work".[192] The explicit effects of poverty present in Gissing's novels could not be, according to Carey, the work of any other English novelist but him. For example, he knew how shop assistants' feet went dead after many hours standing in their long shifts; or how unemployed men dye their hair in order to look younger before entering job queues; or that when prostitutes need medical treatment and are asked in the hospital about their profession they use some euphemism like "I'm unfortunate, sir." There are things of everyday life one can only learn when living the same reality.

This ambiguity of Gissing towards man as individual and as part of the mass is only one of the paradoxes that surround him and make of him a character as interesting as his fictional ones. Yet, there was much more than that because Gissing, like Spencer in the previous chapter, was a product of both his intellectual formation and the period in which he lived. He was a recluse man and very selective with his friends. His commonplace book and the letters he sent to friends and family are today the greatest source to understand his ideologies, but during his life little was known about him and the little he said made him famous mostly for his grumpiness. The press was a specific problem he detested and the disregard was often mutual. Gissing deplored journalism as the greatest banalization of literature, scorned critics and avoided reading criticism of his novels as much as he could because he believed all of them to

[192] CAREY. *The intellectuals and the masses*. p. 115.

be hostile or stupid. Coustillas and Partridge agree that many critics failed to see the qualities of Gissing's novels at the time of their publication and were aggressive or extremely derogatory, but they also point that there were others who did recognize his talent. Nowadays with the advantage of retrospect, it is possible to judge his critical reception in a more balanced way and conclude that his contemporaries were not as incapable of understanding his cause as he believed them to be.[193]

Under the influence of his time Gissing wrote what Richard Salmon considers the bildungsroman of the late-Victorian age. A novel of apprenticeship such as Dickens's *David Copperfield* – a narrative of the life and professional path of a writer or writers. The difference lies in the level of involvement between writer and society: while Dickens focuses on the writer David and the main premise that self-development leads to a higher degree of cultural authority and social integration, Gissing conjures a world in which the writer cannot be thought as an individual fighting only his own limitations anymore. His development has to be in accordance with a mass market which has more power to determine his success of failure than his personal effort, independently of the writer being for or against commercialization. Salmon states that by the end of the nineteenth century nobody saw the writer as a genius anymore. The disenchantment provoked by the professionalization of the activity had definitely broken the dialectical bond of the hero as a man of letters.[194]

This chapter is about how George Gissing dealt with the problem involving the intellectual work of the writer and the masses which increased the number of readers and at the same time changed the direction of literature. It begins focusing on the education of the masses and the formation of the profession of letters and how Gissing's own education and formation as a writer led him to his attitude in *New Grub Street*. Then it goes to the complicated relation between Gissing as an intellectual and the masses. It discusses how he left his socialist phase and positivism behind for a pessimistic view of life and art which left very little or nothing to hope for, making the fight for survival empty of reason. The denial of the will opposes the urge to fight and so helps us comprehend how he created his most pessimistic literary heroes whose lives inspire little sympathy from the materialistic world, but make the reader think that they know something better than that. The aim here is not to make a list of Gissing's influences, but to assess how he interpreted the society in which he lived according to his principles and how much of it can be seen in his work, more specifically in *New Grub Street*.

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[193] COUSTILLAS, Pierre; PARTRIDGE, Colin. *George Gissing*: critical heritage. London: Routledge, 2013. p. 4.
[194] SALMON, Richard. *The formation of the Victorian literary profession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015. p. 220.

The evolution of the profession of letters and its public comes as an important element to understand writers' attitudes towards both readers and themselves. The mass market can be both magnificent and scary depending on the way it is regarded. In the middle of the century Dickens figured as one of the most important claimers for authors' rights, independence and their recognition as professional intellectual workers. He fought for the dignity of literature as a profession because he, more than any of his contemporaries, wanted to be recognized as nothing else but an author.[195] His high popularity among readers supported his influence on society including political matters such as his fight for better copyright regulations. However, by the end of the century things had changed. Instead of supporter, the public seemed to have become the villain for serious writers who could not find readers enough amidst the crowd and shared them with many other writers. Popularity became a synonym of silliness and lack of skill because the public would only choose the least intelligent readings to elect as their favourite. Gissing is one of the late-nineteenth century authors who struggled not to sacrifice his art in order to satisfy a public he did not respect, an attitude which never rewarded him with financial success. This chapter presents the conflicting relation between George Gissing and his socio-historical background, considering the books of Richard Salmon, J. W. Saunders and John Gross among others which discuss the history of the English letters and identify the major challenges and drawbacks of the authors' fight for their dignity. Specifically, about Gissing, the critical biographies written by Jacob Korg, John Halperin and the latest Paul Delany's explore the author's conflicting feelings towards the world and period in which he lived. In the end, Gissing's reading of the Polish philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, whose philosophy influenced his fatalistic views, allows an interesting reflexion about the reservation of the most tragic fates to the characters whose personalities resemble more his own.

4.1 EDUCATION AND LITERARY LIFE

> "It is a disgraceful thing he doesn't earn as much as he needs. We are sacrificed to him, as we always have been. Why should we be pinching and stinting to keep him in idleness?"
> "But you can't really call it idleness, Maud. He is studying his profession." (p. 17).

[195] SALMON, Richard. *The formation of the Victorian literary profession*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2015. p. 102-103.

The writer as a professional worker was still something difficult to understand even by the end of the nineteenth century. Paul Delany narrates an amusing episode which happened the day Gissing visited an Exeter registrar to request a marriage licence. When asked about his profession he answered "literary man", but seeing the clerk's confusion, the registrar said "put gentleman".[196] The reason for the difficulty laid in the task itself which still resembled more a leisure activity derived from certain man or woman of genius than an actual labour that can be learned, developed and that serves as one's means of survival. As seen in the paragraph above, in the beginning of *New Grub Street* Maud believes her brother Jasper to be living in idleness instead of pursuing a real profession. Their mother, either because she believes in her son's potential or because she is avoiding to agree with the common sense expressed by Maud, defends him and uses the word profession to affirm how serious he is about his studies. Reardon, Jasper's opposite in terms of literary principles, shares with him a similar history of life. He, too, left the countryside and a middle-class family with no connections with the literary world to try his chance in London. But the reason why both go to London with the fixed idea to become literary men is not clearly explained. They might have been tempted by the kind of ambition that made the young Gissing take the same step after his return from America in 1877, which in some way or other made a literary career in London seem promising. They, as well as other main characters of Gissing's novels with similar traces, reflect the author's ironical view regarding "a class of young men distinctive of [their] time – well-educated, fairly bred, but without money" looking for their identity as well as the means to earn a living.[197]

As a boy George Gissing had an education above the average for the children of the same region of Wakefield, Yorkshire. His father, Thomas Gissing, was a respected chemist and one of the executives of the committee of the Mechanics Institution of the region. Those institutions were the centre of culture and politics in a period when the Government neither provided free libraries or education. They gave lectures on professional subjects, courses, and provided access to books and periodicals. Being of a middle-class family, neither George, the eldest son, nor his siblings played with the working-class children. He frequented the best local schools until his father's death when he and his two brothers were sent to a boarding school in Alderly Edge. There, despite the limitations of a provincial school the boy excelled in many subjects due to his dogged dedication and ambition. A succession of excellent results in exams and national examinations granted the boy a number of prizes and scholarships which took him

[196] DELANY, Paul. *George Gissing*: a life. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008. p. 183.
[197] GISSING, George. *Letter to Roberts*, February 10, 1895 (Berg Collection) quoted in KORG, Jacob. *George Gissing*: a critical biography. London: Methuen, 1965. p. 263.

to the local university, Owens College, at the age of fourteen. Owens College was a symbol of Victorian Manchester, open to nonconformists like his founder John Owens and particularly friendly to scientific studies.[198] Gissing was being prepared for a brilliant academic career, that would probably have been his destiny were it not for the incident that changed his life forever.

Away from his family, he lived alone in lodgings in Manchester and had but a few friends. When he was eighteen he got involved with the prostitute Nell Harrison and spent everything he had trying to save her from her vices – drinking and prostitution. Soon his money ended and Gissing started stealing money and things from the College's cloak room. He was eventually caught by a detective hired by the school and sent for a time in prison. His wish to give Nell a respectable living never worked and now he had been destitute of all his prizes and scholarships.[199] After the incident everything changed. He was sent to America by his family to avoid embarrassments and specially to prevent him from seeing Nell again. Like Whelpdale, Gissing had a hard life across the Atlantic, where at least he published some short stories, his first literary works. Back to England, he went to London and soon found Nell again, quite unexplainably, and they got married.

Much of Gissing's choices are difficult to explain, since he seemed always to look for the worst way to solve his problems. Problems, like Nell, which are unlikely to have an explanation in itself. He never expressed great love for her, yet for her sake a brilliant career had been suddenly spoilt and a life Gissing never wished for started. Poverty and a sense of being "declassed" became his burden and the main themes of most of his novels. If Nell was really the only one to blame for such changes is hard to tell. To Moore, even if Gissing had never met her, he would have diverted from the academic life one way or other because the emotional instability he demonstrated in letters and journals would have prevented him to go on.[200] The theory makes sense when we consider that after the death of Nell, he married Edith Underwood, a working-class girl whose personality and education were again very different from his own and so a second unsuited and unhappy marriage followed, predictably to the people who knew him. Professionally Gissing also seemed to choose the most difficult and improbable ways to go on with his career, burying his chances to improve in income and peace of mind, which match his temperament significantly to his fictional counterparts Reardon or Harold Biffen. Gissing seemed not only pessimistic but masochistic in many ways.

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[198] DELANY. p. 2-8.
[199] HALPERIN, John. *Gissing*: a life in books. Oxford: Oxford University, 1987. p. 15-17.
[200] MOORE, Lewis D. *The fiction of George Gissing*: a critical analysis. London: McFarland and Co, 2008. Kindle digital edition. position 92.

About Reardon we know that "he was the son of a man who followed many different pursuits, and in none had done much more than earn a livelihood". (p. 61) When his son was still a child he ventured in a new business and established himself as a photographer, again always losing the capital he invested. The mother is depicted as more educated than his father but nonetheless a passionate and worldly woman, contrasting with the father's whimsical and idealistic temperament. Like Gissing's, Reardon' father figure is stronger than the mother for being superior to mundane materialisms. Despite being incapable of providing his family with a solid income, he made sure his son studied in the best schools, where the boy learned foreign languages dead and alive and "at eighteen he had far better acquaintance with the ancient classics than most lads who have been expressly prepared for a university". (p. 62). The narrator ironically completes saying that the drawback about it all was that this kind of knowledge could hardly get him a future profession since nothing he learned was of practical use.

The painful sarcasm regarding classical education, the same pursuits the young George had been so strongly dedicated to for many years, indicate the absurd Gissing saw between true knowledge and what society demanded and praised. The problem was to be raised to be a thinking man, to be educated to inhabit a higher intellectual sphere, and then suddenly be forced to live another type of life where a practical money-earning activity was demanded. Even worse than this was to realize that a higher social status had never been within reach for him. Education in this sense seems like a cruel joke. As Halperin affirms, Gissing believed that it would be better to be less educated, less fastidious, and thus less dissatisfied than to live the torture of being an educated man in such imperfect world.[201] As to the imperfect world, it is a world that failed to recognize what it should give its intellectuals according to what the intellectuals themselves saw fit. People like Reardon were not meant to be in extreme poverty provided they kept in their sphere. But when he, who never had prospects of reaching further, got a glimpse of a cultured world he could never be part of and then is dumped back to his poverty, it feels like outrageous violence. Reardon understands his displacement in London. He tells Biffen he might have been happy had he stayed in the countryside:

> "I should be in an estate-agent's office, earning a sufficient salary, and most likely married to some unambitious country girl. I should have lived an intelligible life, instead of only trying to live, aiming at modes of life beyond my reach. My mistake was that of numberless men nowadays. Because I was conscious of brains, I thought that the only place for me was London…It's a huge misfortune, this will-o'-the-wisp attraction exercised by London on young men of brains. They come here to be degraded, or to perish, when their true sphere is a life of peaceful remoteness." (p. 428-429).

[201] HALPERIN. p. 5.

The conception that London is the only place for people with brains make both Reardon and Biffen leave probable simpler and happier lives in the country. This passage expresses a wish Gissing had to leave London, which he eventually did, but soon came back, missing the literary material the city provided him. In Reardon's case it is not clear if London is the scenery of his novels or if he tries to use the London life as literary inspiration. What we know is that his displacement is enhanced by the lack of response he receives from readers and that it is caused by the fact that his books are too psychological to appeal to the materialistic multitude. The novels deal "with no particular class of society (unless one makes a distinct class of people who have brains)" and lack local colour. They are directed to a very small parcel of the population of refined readers whose tastes are able to recognise their strong characterization. (p. 67). In short, according to the modern society in which he lives, Reardon is a professional disaster thanks to an excellent but inappropriate education. He is much more punished than rewarded by life for his brains. Yet, Gissing's attitude towards Reardon still seems cruel and much based on the personal grudge he himself held towards the book industry. It is also hard to believe that despite his frustrations, Gissing would really prefer to be less educated in order to be less dissatisfied. It is easier to think that for him brains were an ironic burden of a poor man although hard to neglect.

To Gissing, the problem was to encourage people to think that everyone was able to reach higher. Through the narrator of *New Grub Street*, he explains why it was wrong to excite people's brains more than necessary, using the Milvain children as an example:

> The truth was that nature had endowed them with a larger share of brains than was common in their circle, and had added that touch of pride which harmonised so ill with the restrictions of poverty. Their life had a tone of melancholy; the painful reserve which characterises a certain clearly defined class in the present day. Had they been born twenty years earlier, the children of that veterinarian surgeon would have grown up to a very different, and in all probability a much happier, existence, for their education would have been limited to the strictly needful, and – certainly in the case of the girls – nothing would have encouraged them to look beyond the simple life possible to a poor man's offspring. (p. 44).

Like in Reardon's case, their displaced superiority seems to be both nature's fault, that endowed them with more brains than usual, and school education's for opening their eyes and making them dislike their comfortable reality which suits them best. The sisters hate teaching music and governessing (a typical nineteenth-century occupation of educated but poor women) and Jasper cannot stand the country. He went to college after finishing grammar school, but had to leave it when his father died. Now he knows he has to find his own way and the brilliant idea is to go to London because he feels equal to the challenge. All three go to London in search of

a better life and a suitable occupation. Because of Jasper's talent to succeed, things develop fairly well for them, considering that Maud in the end chooses the old-fashioned loveless marriage in order to assure her future instead of the unstable career of a writer. But things could have been very different. If Jasper lacked the natural disposition to overcome the difficulties, they might perfectly have "gone to the dogs" with disastrous results. But then, now "conscious of brains", if they had stayed in Finden, living a country life, they would have been unhappy forever. Gissing witnessed such cases happening frequently in real life and those are the cases in which he believed education spoiled many good prospects. The brains can be given by nature, but society was a stronger force driven by money that had the power to inhibit the fulfilment of natural gifts. Gissing knew that intelligence was not the fruit of wealth, however, even genuine education, unless rooted in leisure and financial security, would only generate longings that could never be assured. Gissing believed that intellectual and cultural self-improvement was of supreme importance for a human being, "yet the fruits of such improvement would always be blighted for those condemned to poverty. The two qualities, poverty and intellect, appeared to be in perpetual conflict: the result was perpetual exile."[202]

Despite such consideration, David Grylls points that above all Gissing believed that very few were capable of real education. The major problem about the mass of half-educated people he abhorred so much was that it seemed the effort was wasted on them. To him, the Government's attempt at mass education would be as useless as Arthur Golding's desperate endeavour to improve his work-class wife's literacy in his first novel *Workers in the Dawn*. Jacob Korg summarizes Gissing's lack of faith in education as a social remedy: "Conceived in a commercial spirit, wasted upon hopeless human material, it would only make more efficient helots of the poor and put vulgarity on a higher level, resulting in the lowering of public taste and the general debasement of civilization."[203] Gissing feared that empowering the masses with basic education would degrade the value of education itself and corrupt the evolution of society by pulling it backwards in the direction of barbarism. To nineteenth-century intellectuals, the masses intruded the places created by civilization for the best people without either the natural sensibility nor the adequate training to understand civilized culture.

The new mass reading audience could hardly be blamed for their reading choices; many of them were buying books for the first time. Peter Keating stresses that by the last decades of the century it was clear that between the forces of electoral reform and Darwinism was emerging a new kind of society. Conservatives, Liberals, Fabians, Marxists, Socialists,

[202] GRYLLS, David. *The paradox of Gissing*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1986. p. 114-115.
[203] KORG. p. 105.

Anarchists, and, most importantly, the economic and cultural manipulators of the emergent mass-market agreed that they were also in transition. For the first time in history the crowd was going to determine the future.[204] Richard Altick explains that "the history of the mass reading audience is, in fact, the history of English democracy seen from a new angle". From the beginning of the century, the industrial life, with its dismal surroundings and the crushing of the individuality, made it vital that people had a new way of escaping routine which made books and periodicals the obvious answer.[205] Yet, there were many obstacles to be overcome before the right to at least read and write were granted to the poor. Mass-schooling was primarily regarded as a tool to safeguard man's minds against thoughts of rebellion, since it was agreed that instructed people are easier to control. The guidelines to be followed were religious and utilitarian: one must have the minimum education to feel part of the social fabric, and plus understand his work and so improve as a worker. The aims of literacy had anything in view of possible cultural improvement of the nation at large or the satisfaction of the individual. Altick explains that "in the age's educational theory of humanitarianism generally, a man or a woman of the masses was regarded solely as an atom of society, not as a person. To go beyond that

> …would be to confound the ranks of society upon which the general happiness of the lower orders, no less than those that are more elevated, depends; since by indiscriminate education those destined for laborious occupations would become discontented and unhappy in an inferior situation of life, which, however, when fortified by virtue, and stimulated by industry, is not less happy than what is experienced by those who move in a higher sphere, of whose cares they are ignorant, and with many of those anxieties and distresses they are never assailed.[206]

Despite political and religious fear, the Parliament eventually understood the necessity of popular schooling in order to wet down the smouldering ambers of discontent. Also, as Adam Smith had observed long before, the labouring classes where people work at narrowly specialized tasks all day long, need to be provided with some intellectual training, otherwise they tend to lose their mental flexibility. The gradual increase of the rates of literacy in England reached its climax with the 1870 Forster Act, establishing governmental responsibility for education. By the last decades of the century reading was something at the reach of most people in the country and even the poorest children of the countryside were being taught to read.[207]

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[204] KEATING, Peter. *The haunted study*: a social history of the English novel, 1875 – 1914. London: Faber and Faber, 2008. p. 5.
[205] ALTICK. p. 3.
[206] COLQUHOUN, Patrick. *A new and appropriate system of education for the labouring people*. Edition not specified, 1806. p. 12-13, quoted in ALTICK. p. 143-144.
[207] ALTICK. p. 171.

The literary industry grew to accompany popular tastes and improved along the time with a larger offer of cheap-edition novels, periodicals and newspapers to all tastes and prices.

The disregard of intellectuals for the popular, by the last decades of the century, was not about moral concern anymore, but the literary culture. They thought people read the wrong things and all that useless reading would lead them to nowhere, except that they were degenerating the serious purpose of literature.[208] Many Victorian writers shared Gissing's feeling that nearly everybody reads, but only a small minority read wisely or well. In *The private papers of Henry Ryecroft*, the main character says that "the public which would feel no lack if all book-printing ceased tomorrow, is enormous".[209] In *New Grub Street*, Reardon's despair about the illusions that brought him to London in the first place also echoes Gissing in a letter to his friend Eduard Bertz which is a cry that rang throughout his whole life: "Where are the good cultured people?"[210] Again, his position is not only about personal bleakness and the characteristic morbidity Gissing is usually taken for, but a feeling that was reaching literary criticism in general: that education and literary taste were two different things. To him, there were very few people from any class who had the necessary maturity and sensibility and who really cared about serious literature to form judgements of any value. Most of the readers were ignorant and naturally insensitive and so schools could do nothing to improve them.[211] Vulgar readers had to be forgotten and left to their bad taste while serious writers should only care about the best public, even if it were much smaller.

Herbert Spencer, in his highly influential works on education, criticizes the pretence of schools of forming intellectuals. To him, just like to Gissing, only natural sensibility (supported by financial means) can save one from utter ignorance. Because of this schools should stop teaching purposeless things with no practical usage such as Latin and Greek only to come to terms with parents who believe that by giving their sons a gentleman's education, they will assure them a social position.[212] Reardon's father probably did think like that. Spencer supports that education must be useful and practical in order to secure the necessities of life and minister self-preservation. The most important knowledge will be always what nature teaches us, our instincts which tell us we need to live and be safe. A baby breastfeeds without being taught to

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[208] ALTICK. p. 368.
[209] GISSING, George. *The private papers of Henry Rycroft*. Sem livro. p. 37.
[210] GISSING, George. *The letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz*, 1887-1903. YOUNG, Arthur C. (Ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1961. p. 25 quoted in POOLE, Adrian. *Gissing in context*. London: Macmillan, 1975. p. 138.
[211] GROSS, John. *The rise and fall of the man of letters*: aspects of English literary life since 1800. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973. p. 219.
[212] SPENCER, Herbert. *Essays on education*. ELIOT, Charles William (Ed.). No city specified: Amazon Kindle, 2011. position 48463.

do so, our body tells us when we are cold or hungry, etc.[213] Apart from that, education has to prepare young people for their future professions, since it is how they will grant their survival in modern society. He dismisses the classics and supports scientific knowledge. Curiously, Macrae points that the little value Spencer gave to the classics is due to the fact that he himself had very little formal education, being educated mostly by his father and uncle.[214] Spencer's theories inspired the creation of the technical secondary school, one of the most characteristic educational innovations of the late-Victorian period, offering secondary schooling to selected modest station children. The initiative combined Spencer's ideas and Britain's necessity of forming technologists in order to regain the ground she had lately lost in her race against America and European countries.[215]

Spencer defends that children, even the poorest, must have their right to be educated granted because it allows them the "general liberty to exercise their faculties" and the freedom demanded by equity. Yet Spencer warns that development of the mind can never overshadow the development of the body. Children become week, sick and depressed because their parents force on them hours of study indoors, believe much more in symbols of knowledge represented by books than in knowledge itself. Books to Spencer are second-hand information, and should be only an alternative when knowledge cannot be acquired directly. Instead, children need practical learning: they need to learn what grants their self-preservation, developing natural instincts; they need to learn a practical profession because it is necessary for them to earn money in the future; and for all this physical exercise is necessary to prevent diseases and stretches life expectancy.[216] He complains that "the physical education for children is thus, in various ways, seriously faulty".

Children eat too much and exercise little in modern civilization where the care of the body was substituted for a superfluous care for the mind. He says this conception must change.[217] John Yule in *New Grub Street* is a great supporter of Spencer's philosophy on education. He disagrees with Jasper that literature is the agent of civilization and complains:

> "What do you mean by civilization? Do you call it civilizing men to make them weak, flabby creatures, with ruined eyes and dyspeptic stomachs? Who is it that reads most of the stuff that's poured out daily by the ton from the printing-press? Just the men and women who ought to spend their leisure hours in open-air exercise; the people who earn their bread by sedentary pursuits, and who need to live as soon as they are

[213] SPENCER. *Essays on education*. position 48601.
[214] MACRAE, Donald (ed.). Introduction. In: SPENCER, Herbert. *The man versus the State*: four essays on politics and society. London: Penguin, 1969. p. 14.
[215] ALTICK. p. 187.
[216] SPENCER. *Essays on education*. position 48909-48983.
[217] SPENCER. *Essays on education*. position 51750-51767.

> free of the desk or the counter, not to moon over small print. Your Board schools, your popular press, your spread of education! Machinery for ruining the country, that's what I call it." (p. 29).

He also believes that Governmental interference here is in order. He says: "There is no such way of civilising the masses of the people as by fixed military service. Before mental training must come training of the body." (p. 29).

Although radical and rather senile in the novel's context, John Yule's argument strikes as reasonable too. In accordance with his concept, the writer is a grown-up child who developed too much the intellectual part and by forgetting the physical part, became unfit to grant self-preservation. The mind is part of the necessary tools to survive, but it is not the only one. There must be a fit body to support the brain. It can be noticed in some moments of *New Grub Street* how writers suffer for being physically feeble. Reardon's sleepless nights stand like "a kind of fighting between physical weariness and wakeful toil of the mind". His mental suffering provokes all the physical pain caused by his sore throats and lumbago crisis. When he complains to Amy she is not more supportive at the moments he is suffering she asks: "Physical suffering?" and he answers: "Physical and mental." Alfred Yule too knows the results of long literary toil: "It was not inexplicable that dyspepsia, and many another ill that literary flesh is heir to, racked him sore." Jasper, still in Finden, goes to a garden behind his house and sees a poor worn-out horse, all skin and bones, with sores upon its back and legs, which was there probably recovering a little before more labour be extracted from him. The image of the horse comes apparently without any reason in the beginning of the novel and it does not provoke any reaction on the part of Jasper. To Robert L. Selig the hurt hackney horse symbolizes the hack writer, worn-out and tired in the face of modernity. Hackney coaches are being replaced by the new trains like the one Jasper sees just before the horse appears; and as for the writer, he is on the verge to be replaced by a new model too, the Jasper kind.[218] After the meeting with John Yule, Jasper is amused by the old man's decisive way of speaking and asks the man's brother, Alfred Yule, if he is serious about what he says. Alfred answers with all the annoyance such comments as his cause to men of letters like him: "I think so. It's amusing now and then, but gets rather tiresome when you hear it often." (p. 31).

[218] SELIG. Robert L. The valley of the shadow of books: alienation in Gissing's *New Grub Street*. *Nineteenth-century fiction*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Sep., 1970), p. 188-198. p. 189. Published by University of California. Available at <http://www.jstor.org>. Accessed on: 16 Jan. 2016.

4.2 LETTERS AND THE MASSES

> "Those paragraphs on the Rota Club strike me as singularly happy", he said, tapping the manuscript with the mouthpiece of his pipe. "Perhaps you might say a word or two more words about Cyriac Skinner; one mustn't be too allusive with general readers, their ignorance is incredible." (p. 390).

When Gissing went to London in search of a literary career he did the same as his characters Milvain and Reardon. Even though neither real nor fictional writers seemed to know exactly where such ambition would take them, they bet all they had got in that dream. Gissing kept very distant from his family from then on and there was probably a mutual regret between them involving the feeling that all the efforts in order to grant him the best education were wasted on such an uncertain profession like the one he now pursued. Compared to his old ambitions it did not seem a profession at all. Halperin says that his mother was not sorry to see him packing his things and moving to the big city, since his departure meant a relief for the household of a troublesome son whose name was a permanent feature in the neighbours' whispers. "He knew that he could expect no help or even encouragement from his family, though he remained on relatively good terms with his brothers".[219]

The extension and validity of literature as a profession became a subject of discussion since the first half of the nineteenth century when, according to Richard Salmon, there has been a gradual "disenchantment" of the author. This disenchantment consists in the end of the eighteenth-century romantic discourse which established that authorship was a consecrated action and only man of natural genius, almost unhuman, were capable of such spiritual task. Carlyle, who attributed the sacerdotal character to writers, was a serious defender of organizing a collective body of literary men in a "Literary Guild", but never went further than proposing it. Like many others, he would not consider ordinary Victorian writers included in such magnificent group. However, for most writers, writing had no secret, no spiritual explication coming from within the writer's soul, but came from daily life. This was the kind of writer who lived in late-nineteenth century world of publishers, publishing houses, circulating libraries and public tastes; besides all of it, such writers had families to feed and shelter that depended on the money they made with writing.[220] The worldliness about this nineteenth-century man of letters is what Salmon calls disenchantment of the author.

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[219] HALPERIN. p. 25-26.
[220] SALMON. *The formation of the Victorian literary profession*. p. 9.

By mid-century, writers like Charles Dickens had contributed to change the image of the writer in society. Writers wanted to be recognised as intellectual professionals, whose work was dependent neither of patronage nor of supernatural genius. On the other hand, they did not want to be seen as the hacks of Johnson's Grub Street where creative autonomy was lost in hired work. The debates on the meaning of professional authorship were based on what were the differences and similarities between literary labour and other recognized professions. The polemic part was that authors offered a capital of intellectual nature and wanted to receive in exchange concrete fruits of their labour. This anomalous arrangement left writers in an ambiguous position: They were "capable of being aligned either with the 'non-alienated' work of middle-class professionals, a form of mental labour deemed inseparable from the self, or with the alienated labour of the working classes, a base material practice to which it is always in danger of being reduced."[221] To J. W. Saunders, the conflict remains because art and professionalism belong to incompatible spheres. He explains that the word profession connotes a willingness to serve the community with a service or a good that is not only important to this community, but also necessary. An artist cannot be compared to a lawyer or a doctor whose social justification is self-evident. The artist is different because his role is to go against the common view of life, to defy people's resistance to change and ask them to see life with fresh eyes. In order to perform his actual service to community the professional artist has to have faith in himself and wait, if necessary, for recognition of his work only in posterity. Saunders admits the balance is delicate and particularly difficult to maintain in the nineteenth century when artistry and salesmanship pulled men in contrary directions. Many writers still had independent means or a second job to allow them to keep writing.[222] Literary funds and associations were created to help writers and to fight for copyrights which by the end of the Victorian period still favoured further publishers instead of authors. Literary life resembled in little the secular mission Carlyle preached. "The absence of institutionalized structures of professional status cut authors adrift in a disturbingly unregulated, laissez-faire literary marketplace, a world of atomized individuals battling against one another for economic survival".[223] The ironic consequence was that many of the most fastidious writers were as poor as the mass they disliked so much because they preferred the more popular authors.

An increasing polarization between "high" and "low" interpretations of professional authority relates closely to the reader separated in intellectual and vulgar and distinguished the

[221] SALMON. *The formation of the Victorian literary profession*. p. 11-14.
[222] SAUNDERS, J. W. *The profession of the English letters*. London: Routledge, 1964. p. 174-175.
[223] SALMON. *The formation of the Victorian literary profession*. p. 210.

late-Victorian debate from that of earlier decades. When Gissing joined the Society of Authors in 1890, he accused its members of being nothing more than a "mere gathering of tradesmen", referring to the aggressively material interests which supposedly came from a higher order of professional values, whether articulated by gentlemanly publishers of fellow authors.[224] While popular writers not only believed in the public's taste but also defended it because it was responsible for their increasing income, the antidemocratic writers like Gissing and James believed the true artist should lead the public's taste instead of being led by it. In case the response is weak, the author should simply ignore the public altogether. For them, being professional does not mean selling oneself out. It is interesting that this difference between popular and unpopular passed far from mid-Victorian writers' concerns, such as Dickens or George Eliot: "Serious literature brimming with moral and social issues, had made no apology for its popularity."[225] Nobody would criticize *Oliver Twist* because its social criticism was widely accepted by a receptive audience. Now with the increase of public and a larger number of options, anything that resembled the old Victorian didacticism tended to be rejected.

Gissing had a very brief phase in the beginning of his career in which he believed he had a social mission; that his writing could help with social reform. The result was *Workers in the dawn*, in 1880, a period when much of the serious fiction was judged according to constrictions of internationalist criteria like "art for social reform", "art for moral purpose", etc. Less than a year later he changed his mind and wanted to dissociate himself from this eighties philosophy of realistic writing. He declared his allegiance to "art for art's sake" and defended that the word "realism", usually associated with the literature for a purpose, should be regarded as "nothing more than artistic sincerity in the portrayal of contemporary life", without a purpose in it. Poole calls attention to this conflict because it shows how different realism was in England in comparison to its understanding in the rest of Europe: "In Britain, the debate over it is rarely concerned with form or method, the writer's relation to his material, but primarily with the relation between the writer and his readers."[226] In *New Grub Street*, Gissing's view of realism is stressed in the authors who, like him, do not produce art to fulfil any social purpose, but only for art's own sake. Neither Reardon nor Biffen are trying to reform society through their work because art cannot have a purpose.

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[224] SALMON. *The formation of the Victorian literary profession*. p. 218.
[225] CROSS, Nigel. *The common writer*: life in the nineteenth-century Grub Street. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988. p. 216.
[226] POOLE, Adrian. *Gissing in context*. London: Macmillan, 1975. p. 118-119.

Among the popular writers, being them real in the view of Gissing or fictional in the novel, the commercial potential of a work is more valued than the art itself or any social message that might be communicated. In *New Grub Street* writing is never seen as a mode of social communication, but deliberately a trade like any other. The disenchantment, as Salmon says, went too far and the literature that once was said to come from divine inspiration now seemed to have been reduced to a common labour, like writers, or at least some of them, feared so much. Suddenly there were too many purposeless books for too many people who did not really care for them. Literature seems entirely purposeless this way. Like Marian Yule, Gissing feels condemned to the nonsense of the modern literary market. She thinks: "The library which should emancipate us from ignorance, as the factory should emancipate us from material deprivation, only condemning us to darkness".[227] Marian stops her work at the British Museum, hopeless for the future:

> She kept asking herself what was the use and purpose of such a life as she was condemned to lead. When already there was more good literature in the world than any mortal could cope with in his lifetime, here was she exhausting herself in the manufacture of printed stuff which no one even pretended to be more than a commodity for the day's market. What unspeakable folly! To write – was not that the joy and the privilege of one who had an urgent message for the world? Her father, she knew well, had no such message; he had abandoned all thought of original production, and only wrote about writing. She herself would throw away her pen with joy but for the need of earning money. And all these people about her, what aim had they save to make new books out of those already existing, that yet newer books might in turn be made out of theirs? This huge library, growing into wilderness, threatening to become a trackless desert of print – how intolerably it weighed upon the spirit! (p. 109).

George Gissing was convinced that the masses were responsible for the nonsense surrounding literature and all the "cultural evils" he saw around him. In a letter to Bertz, in 1892, he complains about "the extending and deepening vulgarity" of the masses which he blames both on the board-school system and the American influence. Vulgarity is everywhere, in the poor and in the middle class. To escape it, he supported more and more the idea that soon the population would be divided into two distinctive groups: the natural aristocrats and the masses. The word aristocracy would lose its old meaning and so being an aristocrat would be a matter of mind and manners instead of birth.[228] The idea was not exclusive of Gissing. It appeared among intellectuals as a response against the revolt of the masses because they desperately needed something to corroborate their superiority in comparison to the crowd. Also in a letter, Gissing tells his brother Algernon: "I confess I get more and more aristocratic in my

[227] GOODE, John. *George Gissing*: ideology and fiction. London: Vision, 1978. p. 119-120.
[228] GISSING, George. *Letters to Bertz*. p. 151-152, quoted in CAREY. *The intellectuals and the masses*. p. 93.

learnings, and cannot excuse faults of manner in consideration of the end."[229] What exactly made of someone a natural aristocrat was never very clear though. One of the most accepted suggestions was that there was some kind of secret kind of knowledge only intellectuals possessed, making of them superior beings.[230] John Carey explains that much of the purpose of modernist art and literature involved this desire to set the intellectual apart from the masses. Art was supposed to be incomprehensible to them, aiming not only to glorify the intellectual, but also to demonstrate the stupidity of the crowd. Since no one could prevent the masses from attaining literacy, at least artists could make art too difficult for them to understand. Modernism then runs basically like this: Everything that the masses seemed to approve or like, such as the mid-century romantic realism in literature, should be abandoned; instead, irrationality and obscurity were cultivated. In short, everything that roused the interest of the masses was wrong, making the true art and artist connected to the ability to outrage and puzzle the masses.[231]

But what is this "mass"? The word seems simple because it defines a large group of people, but who are those people and what were the criteria used by intellectuals to reduce someone to the condition of being part of the mass? Ortega y Gasset says society is divided into minorities and masses. The minority is composed of specially qualified individuals while the mass is made by the average man. So the mass to him is not only a matter of quantity, but quality: "It becomes the common social quality, man as undifferentiated from other men, but as repeating in himself a generic type." On the other hand, the coincidence that characterizes the minority group is that its members have ideas, desires and ideals that exclude them from the large numbers and among themselves.[232] What he expresses here is a common idea shared about the masses and which helps understand how they were seen: being part of the mass meant having one's individuality denied. The man of the mass was common and unambitious, while the minorities had individual ideas, they could think for themselves, while the member of the mass could not. This is exactly what writers like Gissing complained about; because they saw the large number of readers of popular literature as people incapable of thinking for themselves; people who could only copy what others did around them. Carey points how convenient such conception of mass is: "Its function, as a linguistic device, is to eliminate the human status of the majority of people – or, at any rate, to deprive them of those distinctive features that make

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[229] GISSING, George. MATHEISEN, Paul. F.; YOUNG, Arthur; COUSTILLAS, Pierre (Ed.). *The collected letters of George Gissing*. Nine vol. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1990-1997. Vol II. p. 227 quoted in DELANY. p. 92.
[230] CAREY. *The intellectuals and the masses*. p. 71.
[231] CAREY. *The intellectuals and the masses*. p. 17-18.
[232] ORTEGA Y GASSET, José. *The revolt of the masses*. Anonymous authorized translation. London: W. W. Norton, 1993. p. 13-14.

users of the term, in their own esteem, superior."[233] The problem is that intellectuals qualify people according to their own standards and to what they think proper in terms of dreams, ambitions, etc. The other becomes a stupid being, common and inferior simply because he pursues different things or is simply unknown. The image of the mass as an outrageous number of repeated people, of common and animal-like men, supports the idea of surplus of population: the useless crowd, fruit of laws that support its existence and unbridled multiplication.

Herbert Spencer calls masses the ignorant people who believe that they have the right to be supported by the State – the tramps who ask for money in the streets, the "good-for-nothings". The commonplace appearance and behaviour of the poor does little to support their individuality: their thin clothes, dirty children, drunkard husband, loud voice, etc.[234] As we saw in the previous chapter, Spencer does not think all the poor to be unworthy, but his suggestions of social laissez-faire would obviously do much more harm to the ones that have less. Yet, to him, this was the way things should be, leaving people to fight for survival. In *New Grub Street* the masses are the readers who read the famous novels like Ralph Warbury's - as Edith Carter - and the popular press made of "Chit-chats". We do not see much of the public because the book focuses on the marginal writers, still we know the public is there, intrinsically being responsible for the tragedy of the intellectual worker.

The turning of people into a conglomerate not only remove their individuality but their humanity as well. To Nietzsche the mob was commonly compared to a herd of animals, poisonous flies, weed, etc. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he writes: "'Especially nowadays', answered the voluntary beggar: 'today when all that is base has become insurgent and coy and in its own way haughty: namely, in the mob's way'."[235] Or: "Get out of the way of all such unconditional men! That is poor sick kind, a mob-kind: they look at life sadly; they have the evil eye for this earth."[236] Nietzsche emerges as one of the earliest products of mass culture, as its natural antagonist. He preached men were not equal, and the main cause for the degeneration of Europe was the mistaken belief that they were. To him, the true noble man was egoistic, for he despised pity and charity.[237] The immense popularity of Nietzsche suggests how much panic the masses aroused among the European intelligentsia in the late-nineteenth, early twentieth century. He, like others, supported that the masses were made of people of an inferior order,

[233] CAREY. *The intellectuals and the masses*. p. 1.
[234] SPENCER, Herbert. ELIOT, Charles William (Ed.). *Principles of ethics*. [No city specified]: Amazon Kindle, 2011. position 28636.
[235] NIETZSCHE, Friedrich. *Thus spoke Zarathustra*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2008. p. 235.
[236] NIETZSCHE. p. 257.
[237] CAREY. *The intellectuals and the masses*. p. 72.

who were less alive and even soulless because their lives were merely physical.[238] D. H. Lawrence, one of Nietzsche's followers, criticises the automatic way the masses live their lives: "Like unsexed people, the mass of mankind is soulless. …Most people are dead, and scurrying and talking in the sleep of death."[239] The thought of reducing people to numbers of lifeless bodies consuming the natural resources and occupying places that do not belong to them is the beginning of a justification that to be rid of them would not be a crime, but even a favour to the world and its better inhabitants.

Authors like George Gissing, Henry James and Joseph Conrad were convinced that to survive in the literary world of the period one must become a "literary prostitute" and please the brutishness of the masses.[240] There is no other way to succeed but to write trash because the masses are stupid. Reardon's essay on Diogenes Laertius fails to be accepted for publication because "the mass of readers will be frightened by his name", as Amy says. To this, Reardon answers: "Well, we have to recognize that the mass of readers will never care for anything I do." (p. 158). Reardon is too sensitive for the mass, in other words, he belongs to an intellectual minority whose interests can never be lowered to the level of the masses. On another occasion he discusses with Biffen the hatred he sometimes feels for the popular authors. He says it would be small-minded to think of them with rancour. Yet, if their works were weighted against Reardon's and Biffen's, their places should be justly changed. Again, Biffen replies reasonably:

> What does it matter? We are different types of intellectual workers. I think of them savagely now and then, but only when hunger gets a trifle too keen. Their work answers a demand; ours – or mine at all events – doesn't. They are in touch with the reading multitude; they have the sentiments of the respectable; they write for their class. Well, you had *your* circle of readers, and, if things hadn't gone against you, by this time you certainly could have counted on your three or four hundred a year. (p. 368).

He supports that there are people enough to appreciate different kinds of books, but it is harder for the less popular because, just like the most popular, they also want to live for their profession. It does not mean it is easy for popular writers either. They also have their competition, their personal problems. It is a matter of finding one's right place, even if the place is not the one believed to be fair. When it comes to Jasper, we know Gissing indeed sees him as the modern market man, whose ambition will eventually lead to success, even if it is painful for him to admit it. However, Gissing does not allow Jasper to have everything: he will never

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[238] CAREY. *The intellectuals and the masses*. p. 4.
[239] LAWRENCE, D. H. *Kangaroo*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971. p. 294. Quoted in CAREY. p. 11.
[240] Saunders calls a "literary prostitute" the writer who sell his integrity and honesty in order to pursue popularity. SAUNDERS. p. 147.

be a talented novelist and he knows it. He is nothing more than a tradesman, which to Gissing was the mark of mediocrity. Jasper admits openly that he is not talented for solid literature. He tells Maud his line will not be novels: "I have failed in that direction; I'm not cut out for the work. It's a pity, of course; there's a great deal of money in it." (p. 15). He means popular novels, of course, for his interest is to make money. Yet he says he tried to write novels but failed; it shows even more his adaptability: once he discovered he was not fit for something he moved on to the next alternative. He might not be a genius, but one does not have to be a genius to progress in the field of letters anymore, only a good tradesman.

Carey says "Gissing seems to be the first English writer to formulate the intellectual's case against mass culture, and he formulated it so thoroughly that nothing essential has been added to it since. The case has not been developed or advanced; it has simply been repeated."[241] It is, of course, difficult to deny Gissing's scorn for mass culture in the pages of *New Grub Street*. He clearly saw humanity was taking a wrong turn somehow caused by man's inability to deal with his own kind. His elitism was often seen as pure snobbishness, because Gissing honestly believed that culture meant pedantic classicism and nature worship. Goode says that most critics blame such limitations of vision for spoiling Gissing's claim of realism, discredited because of his particular prejudices. He agrees with Carey that were it not for his faults, Gissing would have never done what he did in literature. If it were not for the specific nature of the meditations which seem limiting or disabling, he would not have been unique in his feeling and interpretation of life. The sources available to him were diverse and many times dubious, but formed his own way to fight the alienation so typical of the end of the Victorian period and the intractability he perceived in a world which had no specific place for the intellectual anymore. Gissing's space was simple, based on positivism, evolutionism, and the philosophy of Schopenhauer among others, and the pessimism and bleakness usually linked to his image display his perspective of the world.[242]

Returning to the beginning of his career, the twenty-two-year-old Gissing sent his first novel *Workers in the Dawn* to Fredric Harrison in 1880, who was a firm positivist, follower of Auguste Comte, Mill, Spencer and Darwin. Harrison believed the development of sciences had profound implications for political and social reform. He advocated reform instead of revolution and supported popular education, improved working conditions and liberal labour legislation.[243] When he read *Workers in the Dawn* he felt he had found a young author with the same interests

[241] CAREY. *The intellectuals and the masses*. p. 93-94.
[242] GOODE. p. 15-16.
[243] KORG. p. 5.

and quickly wanted to meet him. After meeting Harrison, Gissing was soon invited to teach his sons and started frequenting his house. Comte's "Religion of Humanity", as positivism was called, was a vigorous rationalism based on scientific knowledge which defied the crucial religious doctrines of the existence of God, the accuracy of the Bible and the immortality of the soul. Gissing had adopted agnosticism early in life, much influenced by his father, an admirer of Darwin, and so positivism called his attention immediately. He felt the times in which he lived encouraged moral originality and he was aware that the established ethical system was being deeply probed by the new scientific knowledge.[244]

The problem was that Gissing's enthusiasm for social reform lasted little, and with it his enthusiasm for positivism. His reading of the same writers whose thoughts made Harrison so hopeful for socialism was much less optimistic. He started seeing positivism as a "mere mindless, groundless hoping-for-the-best" effort wasted on a society in which the disposition to change did not exist. This was what Spencer meant by affirming that he understood how society should be dealt in order to evolve, at the same time admitting that it would not actually work because people would never comply with the necessary efforts for it, being them too attached to primitive instincts. The result of Gissing's disappointment was the essay "The hope of pessimism", which is considered by Halperin a remarkable expression of the pessimism as we would think of it nowadays. This essay was never published because Gissing was afraid to offend Harrison (and lose his job) and so it remained unknown for many years. In it he suggests social reform is crippled because modern society forced one to decide between helping others or devoting oneself to personal interests, such as art. It is unmanageable to be true to both objectives because art and social reform are incompatible. He says that "There is only one kind of worldly optimism which justifies itself in the light of reason, and that is the optimism of the artist". Only in art good prevails over evil and the natural selfishness of men is sublimated into pictures of real significance and beauty, which means, only art can be a worthwhile pursuit of life. The worldly search for pleasure and happiness is meaningless because in the end only "the grave will become a symbol of joy; those who have departed will be spoken of as the happy ones".[245] The artists stand out from the masses, they are naturally apart from each other, so there cannot be a doctrine which serves both the artistic and the popular. Gissing argues that when it comes to the masses, neither the religion of God nor the religion of humanity proposed by the positivists would make the world a better place. Even if one day gloomy Christianity was finally

[244] KORG. p. 13-14.
[245] GISSING, George. The hope of pessimism. In GISSING, George. *George Gissing*: essays and fiction. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1970. p. 82 quoted in HALPERIN. p. 47-48.

replaced by the sunny scientific positivism, the masses would not be able to deal with the emptiness left by faith. It would only cause a great flow of egotism and so a world without God would not be cheerful, but nihilistic. By taking from people the basic doctrines of religion, like telling them to love their neighbour, people would plunge fiercely into what Spencer called the battle of life and the result would be barbarism. Delany quotes part of the essay "The hope of pessimism":

> Let [the religion of earthly optimism] constitute a man's creed, and, consciously or unconsciously, he will inevitably make it his first object to secure possession of his birth right. The social results which directly issue from such a conviction in the individual are only too plain before our eyes. Hence this scheme of commercial competition tempered by the police-code, to which we are pleased to give the name of a social order. … Does not science – the very newest – assure us that only the fittest shall survive? If we tread upon a feeble competitor and have the misfortune to crush the life out of him, we are merely illustrating the law of natural selection.[246]

Gissing believed that the main reason why society did not return to complete savagery once and for all was its dependence on the religious dogmas which still hold some control over the masses. Like real education, Gissing believed few people were capable of overcoming religion, and even if they could, nothing would be gained by destroying common people's faith once there was nothing better than this for them to believe in. They should be allowed to keep their faith, to believe in God, which at least allow them to be less aware of the hopelessness of life. Schopenhauer says that "religion is the metaphysics of the people, which they absolutely must be allowed to keep…for men have an absolute need for an interpretation of life, and it has to be one they are capable of understanding". He adds, referring to his intellectual reader: "For you, with your learning and culture, have no idea how tortuous and roundabout a route is required to take profound truths to the masses of people, with their lack of them".[247] Gissing must have identified himself in such thought because he clearly started to believe that the masses had to be dealt with in a different way from the minorities. He would agree with Schopenhauer that "What matters before all else is to restrain the rude and evil dispositions of the mass of people and so prevent them from perpetrating acts of violence, cruelty and infamy and the more extreme forms of injustice".[248] Religion is a device which helps to keep the crowds under control and in their place, setting a clear line between them and the minorities.

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[246] GISSING, George. The hope of pessimism. In GISSING, George. *George Gissing*: essays and fiction. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1970. p. 82 quoted in DELANY. p. 62.
[247] SCHOPENHAUER, Arthur. Translated and edited by R. J. HOLLINGDALE. *Essays and aphorisms*. London: Penguin, 2004. p. 96.
[248] SCHOPENHAUER. *Essays and aphorisms* p. 101.

The hope of pessimism was written nine years before *New Grub Street* and it shows, as Delany points, Gissing giving up the idea that one's fate can be mastered through scientific knowledge. The world will always be too much for the individual and so the progressive optimism of Comte is just a succession of the Christian illusion, not a triumph over it. Happiness would never result, either by believing in God or in science. So "instead of plunging into the battle of life, we should cultivate our perception of man's weakness, learn thoroughly the pathos inherent in a struggle between the finite and the infinite. We are shipmates, tossed on the ocean of eternity, and one fate awaits us all. Let this excite our tenderness".[249] The intellectual is aware that life has no happy ending because his eyes are open to the alienation that blinds the masses. By giving up on positivism, Gissing also deserts social reform. He tells his brother Algernon in a letter that his reformist phase represented a moment of his life when he still understood himself imperfectly: "That zeal on behalf of the suffering masses was nothing more nor less than disguised zeal on behalf of my own starved passions… I identified with the poor and ignorant; I did not make their cause my own, but my own cause theirs."[250]

4.3 WILL TO FIGHT

This pessimism, "the weariness of being", is clearly related to Gissing's studies on Schopenhauer, whose philosophy helped him justify the necessity of gloominess to produce his art. As the protagonist of *The unclassed*, the novel he wrote after *Workers in the dawn*, affirms: "Art, nowadays, must be the mouthpiece of misery, for misery is the key-note of modem life".[251] And there has not been a name equal to Schopenhauer's in the effort to justify the pessimistic outlook of life. The very basis of his philosophy is the ethical assertion that the will – the will to live, to overcome difficulties, to survive – is evil and must be denied. To Schopenhauer, every individual is an independent ego whose interest in staying alive surpasses every other, including the consideration of the same life interest of others. The result is a perpetual conflict of self-interest which engenders suffering as the normal and inescapable condition of survival.[252] Happiness, instead of being the natural state of life, as one might think, is just a momentary pause of suffering, the true natural state of life.

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[249] GISSING, George. The hope of pessimism, quoted in DELANY. 62.
[250] HALPERIN. p. 53.
[251] GISSING, George. *The unclassed*. p. 151.
[252] HOLLINGDALE, R. J. Introduction. In: SCHOPENHAUER, Arthur. *Essays and aphorisms*. London: Penguin, 2004. p. 9-40. p. 22.

Despite his philosophy being written in the beginning of the century and in Germany, a country where industrialization came slowly, his thoughts translated a particular feeling raised by the end of the Victorian age that many English philosophers had difficulty to articulate: that the optimism of progress, so characteristic of the period, was somehow groundless. It is difficult to imagine nowadays how much turmoil was caused by all the incalculable inventions and technological evolution of the Victorian age because we have passed the period in which things like trains, painless dentistry and the telegraphic communications that Jaspers appreciates so much were new and promising. To a mind like Schopenhauer's, the progress was questionable because it was unpredictable, and so technology might well lead humanity for worse instead of better.[253]

Will to Schopenhauer is evil, and we suffer because we wish to live: "The life of the individual is a constant struggle, and not merely a metaphorical one against want or boredom, but also an actual struggle against other people. He discovers adversaries everywhere, lives in continual conflict and dies with sword in hand."[254] Boredom is the absence of pain, which is also what we call happiness. The will urges man to seek happiness by fulfilling basically the same needs of other animals: the need for food, protection from cold and rain, sexual gratification, etc. However, as man's nervous system is more highly charged than the nervous system of the other animals, he is harder to satisfy because his needs are intensified. His sources of pleasure and suffering are also more complex due to his consciousness of ambition, shame, etc., like other animals. Knowledge is painful. Man is conscious of the past, future and of upcoming death, also unlike the animal to whom life is only the present. Reason is what causes man pain, but it also allows him to deny the urges of will if he is strong, otherwise all the pain is simply aimless cruelty to oneself.[255]

In Gissing's novels, the will is often a source of pain, usually related with sexual needs. Lovers like Marian Yule suffer because they are motivated by a sense of blind and urgent compulsion to fulfil feelings of passion. And Jasper almost does what he calls a mistake by marrying her when he follows his own sexual urges. Marian's father, Alfred, marries a working-class girl who he did not love because "the time had come he could not do without a wife" (p. 97). People are ruled by their instincts and frequently regret their choices. Reardon marries Amy in a tempest of love and lust which blinds him and makes him go against his reason. Intellect and reason are in conflict with the will because the material world teases people to

[253] HOLLINGDALE. p. 36.
[254] SCHOPENHAUER. *Essays and aphorisms*. p. 42.
[255] SCHOPENHAUER. *Essays and aphorisms* p. 43-44.

want more and more, to possess and satisfy their desires. In the end, months after Reardon and Amy's separation, Reardon tries to convince Biffen he is learning to deny his will and now suffering less for his wife. He says: "I rather think I regard the matter more sanely than ever yet. I am quite free of sexual bias." (p. 361) He also tells him: "The one happy result of my experiences is that they have cured me of ambition". (p. 430). Without ambition or sexual urges Reardon thinks he will suffer less, this is why he insists on being free of will and thus happier, or at least, less unhappy. Later he resists his friend's insistence to go back to Amy because he believes that by doing this he would satisfy his will, and so provoke more suffering to both of them. Reardon seems to have learned the Schopenhauerian lesson that the more he denies his desires, the less he suffers. Also in a Schopenhauerian fashion, he always expects the worse of life, so he chooses between different sufferings.

Knowledge makes man conscious of the urges of his will, and so denying it is a proof of superior intellect. Not only in comparison between man and other beings, but among men themselves. Schopenhauer already defended that not every man has the same degree of consciousness and that there are several degrees of awareness. While some men are barely aware of their own existence and are guided by the urges of their will, almost like animals or savages in tribes, others are more conscious, like merchants and then above them, the scholars. Poets and philosophers are on the top, conscious of their existence in such a degree that it goes beyond all servitude to the will and rather holds them up to the investigation and contemplation of its activities in others.[256] This point supports late-Victorian intellectuals' concepts about the different levels of life in people and that certain people were less valuable because there was less life and soul in them.

Reardon's discipline and denial, which some characters misinterpret as insanity, are actually reinforcing the differences between the intellectual he is and the masses he cannot be part of. Ortega y Gasset explains that the true nobility of life is based on discipline. A noble life is defined by the demands it makes on the noble man – by setting on him obligations, not rights. A noble man is willing to pass through difficulties and he is not afraid of necessity because "life has no savour for him unless he makes it consist in service to something transcendental". He sees his privileges as conquests of his discipline and perseverance.[257] On the other hand, the masses do not accept discipline and think themselves always in the right to demand for their pleasures to be fulfilled because, according to Ortega y Gasset, the man of the masses does not understand how the material and social organization of a country work, so they see them as

[256] SCHOPENHAUER. *Essays and aphorisms*. p. 174-175.
[257] ORTEGA Y GASSET. p. 63.

inexhaustible sources of food and shelter, and everything else he needs.[258] Reardon's willingness to suffer may look like masochism to the reader, but to him it feels like purification after so much submission to the will, especially in the recent period of his life, during his marriage, when he felt he was being forced to demand for more than he needed. His discipline now means to display intelligence, sensibility and the selfishness attributed by Nietzsche to the intellectual, by setting himself on rational thought and keeping apart from the worldly desires and the people who value them.

Speaking of self-denial, in all the novel there is one name that comes to mind strongly, which is Harold Biffen. Nobody in *New Grub Street* depicts the words resilience and denial like him. Perhaps among all the characters who represent some part of Gissing's personality – Reardon defending his art, Jasper striving to sell his work, Marian complaining about the nonsense of the literary market, etc. – Biffen is the one who represents the ultimate translation of Schopenhauer in the text with his pessimism about commerce, money, love, literature and struggle related to survival. To him, there is no possible happiness for the artist. He must exercise his power of self-denial and live for his art, the only optimist angle of life. Biffen looks like a skeleton, he eats his bread and dripping with fork and knife because "it makes it more substantial". (p. 212). He is clearly cold without his coat he pawned, wearing his overcoat indoors, but when Reardon innocently asks him to take his coat off, he answers "Not this evening, thanks". (p. 142). Biffen is a man of natural delicacy who refuses to expose himself as well as his friends and students and he never makes a show of his problems – on the contrary, he hides them. He teaches in his garret like young Gissing did, but does not get contaminated by poverty. Like Gissing too, he is proud when his students recognize him for his intellect. Mr Baker, for example, is the "robust, hard-featured, black-haired young man" who is struggling to learn "the art of compersition" because he wants to pass the examination to the Outdoor Customs Department. Mr Baker does not want to pay his teacher in the presence of Reardon and asks Biffen to go outside. Biffen later tells the novelist that Mr Baker displays "a very unusual delicacy in a man of that standing", that is, a poor person of little schooling. Biffen remarks: "You notice how respectfully he spoke to me? It doesn't make any difference to him that I live in a garret like this; I'm a man of education, and he can separate this fact from my surroundings." (p. 210). Gissing's own snobbishness can be questioned from this point of view. According to his sister Ellen his seclusion and selfishness was more a form of protection from the contamination of his poor surroundings. She wrote after his death:

[258] ORTEGA Y GASSET. p. 59-60.

> There was a principle deeply imbedded in his nature which caused him to prefer that he himself should suffer rather than bring suffering upon others; and in this lay the secret of the life which to outsiders appeared only steeped in gloom, but out of which, for those who knew him, there shone a gleam of imperishable gold.[259]

Living in his garret, Biffen does not rebel against life and, as discussed in chapter two, says it is one's role to make the best of things. He does not believe in the afterlife because, like his creator, he does not believe in God – science has destroyed theological and metaphysical ideas in the intellectual man, but still could not explain the problems of essences, first causes and other mysteries surrounding the conception of God. Korg writes about the emptiness caused by science on the intellectual man who is left to his own guidance:

> If there were no afterlife and no system of rewards and punishments to face after death, man, as the supreme product of evolution and the only possessor of rational intelligence, was free to plan his actions according to his own understanding. Thus, self-realization and service to humanity became the basis of morality.[260]

Herbert Spencer proposes in *First principles* that religion and science could come to terms if both sides recognized that there was more than is at the reach of humanity to understand. Everyone could be free to move on more lightly if it were accepted that some kinds of knowledge were inaccessible to either.[261] Despite all the struggle to rationalize over it, the emptiness left by religion was indeed a problem to the intellectuals such as Gissing, whose agnostic view of life ended up as conflicting as the view of an orthodox Christian. To accept Spencer's theory that there was a divine order which was inaccessible to man, instead of providing relief, was to Gissing torture. According to Korg, "it meant only that man was doomed to pitiful ignorance and loneliness in a harsh universe he could never understand".[262] So again comparing Gissing and his character Harold Biffen, behind the calm surface of both lays an inner turmoil of doubts concerning the emptiness of the intellectual man.

Biffen's suicide in the end matches the Darwinian theory of characters connected like pendants expressed by both Grylls and Poole and discussed in the first chapter. For one of them to win, the other one has to lose. Biffen keeps on persevering in penury after Reardon's death, the fire incident and the end of the process of writing *Mr Bailey, grocer* – which he probably feels more than the public's rejection itself. He is desperate because he is rejected by Amy, who

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[259] Quoted in HALPERIN. p. 9.
[260] KORG. p. 171.
[261] SPENCER, Herbert. *Essays on education*. position 49344.
[262] KORG. p. 177.

no longer sees the point of his visits once Reardon is gone. His chances with Amy are as non-existent just like his chances to have the love of any other woman that would be of interest to him. When Whelpdale, whose history of failure and rejection is much like his own, finally announces his marriage to Dora Milvain, Biffen decides that things are over for him. His death becomes the reason for conversation between Jasper and Amy, leading them to finally admit the mutual attraction.[263] Biffen leaves the way, he is eliminated by commercial and sexual selection, and so life moves on with its winners.

To some critics Biffen's suicide is meaningless and does not match his sensible and resilient temperament. But it can be explained based on Schopenhauer complaints about what he calls one of the "universally popular and firmly accredited errors" that "suicide is a cowardly act". He says people repeat it in "parrot fashion" just because when they heard it in the first place they thought it wise-sounding.[264] He continues:

> What is usually set forth as duties to ourselves is foremost a rationale against suicide based on prejudice, strong bias, and the shallowest reasons. To the human alone, who unlike the animal, is not restricted to mere bodily suffering in the present, but also is given over to the incomparably greater pain of intellectual suffering, borrowed from the future and past, nature grants as compensation the privilege of ending his life when it is suitable, even before nature itself puts an end to it, and as a result, unlike the animal, which necessarily lives as long as it can, the human lives as long as he will.[265]

Suicide in Gissing is often a melodramatic solution to characters' problems in early stories. More specifically by drowning in the freezing water. *Denzil Quarrier* and the short stories "Sins of the fathers" and "All for love" follow the pattern. He himself complained much about life in his commonplace book: "Few men, I am sure, have led so bitter a life." And near Nell's death he mentioned thoughts of suicide in letters to his brother: "Two days of blank misery; incapable of work; feeling almost ready for suicide."[266] Yet his biographers do not report any actual attempt of suicide, even though it would seem expected from someone with such a gloomy view of life. May Yates, in her 1912 appreciation of Gissing, explains this apparent contradiction in the author's personality, which can in a way help understand Biffen's. She says Gissing's spirit was not revolutionary, and his conservative instincts were stronger in him than the revolt caused by his miseries. He did not possess the strength to fight the inequities of the world, instead he could only eat his own heart in despair and protest in silence. And this

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[263] GRYLLS. p. 92-93.
[264] SCHOPENHAUER. *Essays and aphorisms* p. 125.
[265] SCHOPENHAUER, Arthur. Translated and edited by CARTWRIGHT, David E.; ERDMANN, Edward E. *The two fundamental problems of ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2010.
[266] DELANY. p. 133-134.

is what he did in his novels. Many of his characters are frustrated like him, yet their tragedy does not lead them to suicide but to life. That is his true realism: according to Yates, men do not commit suicide when things go wrong, rather they pray, they fight, they revolt, according to their upbringing and take refuge in religion or simple optimism, also depending on what they believe. Gissing's heroes, on the other hand, are pessimists from the cradle, so they do not count on hope as a reason to keep on living in the face of disaster; life goes on naturally bleak to them.[267] What does make Reardon live day after day without the love he wants and needs so much or the inspiration which he does not expect to have back either? What does make Biffen go on, without the hope of being loved one day or traveling to Greece with his friend? The beginning of chapter twenty-five explains the power of commiserating oneself and the differences between both that are more evident towards the end of the novel:

> Refuge from despair is often found in the passion of self-pity and that spirit of obstinate resistance which it engenders. In certain natures the extreme of self-pity is intolerable, and leads to self-destruction; but there are less fortunate beings whom the vehemence of their revolt against fate strengthens to endure in suffering. These latter are rather imaginative than passionate; the stages of their woe impress them as the acts of a drama, which they cannot bring themselves to cut short, so various are the possibilities of its dark motive. The intellectual man who kills himself is most often brought to that decision by conviction of his insignificance; self-pity merges in self-scorn, and the humiliated soul is intolerant of existence. He who survives under like conditions does so because misery magnifies him in his own estimate. (p. 331).

If we compare our two fictional novelists and the real one, then yes, Gissing seems to be much more of a Reardon with their self-scorn and self-pity feeding their miseries and enhancing their suffering as the acts of a drama. Biffen fits best as the intellectual who cannot feel compassion for himself. He is too proud to let people know about how cold and hungry he is. He is in mortal pain when he has to ask his brother for help after the fire, even though the brother is better-off than him and glad to be of use. Biffen cannot stand the exposure and it leads him to self-destruction. His loneliness finally convinces him of his insignificance and that he has no claim among those people he knows or the readers of books whatsoever.

Korg says that if Gissing's novels have a dominant theme it is the crushing of human character by social evils. To Gissing, the social institutions man worked so hard to build and to maintain were after all hostile to dignity, honour, intellect and sensibility.[268] It is impossible for the sensible intellectual not to be degraded by the spirit of the age which favoured the vulgar

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[267] YATES, May. *George Gissing*: an appreciation. Manchester: University of Manchester, 1922. Available at < https://archive.org>. Accessed on: 6 July. 2015. p. 50-51.
[268] KORG. p. 261.

things driven by the wants and the needs of the majority. That majority, or the masses, would never help with any improvement of mankind; on the contrary, its existence endangered civilization and pushed society back to barbarism. To Gissing, reform theorists like Frederic Harrison failed to see that the future was dark and there was no political alchemy by which you could get golden conduct out of leaden instincts, as Spencer says.[269] The people would just never be ready for social reform. Gissing abhorred the ignorance of the masses, their tastes and how they contributed for the degradation of things that they were not supposed to meddle with like art and specially literature. However, it is important to notice that the masses and the poor are not necessarily the same to him. Like other intellectuals of his age, he despised the idea that everybody had the same mental capacity and so education should reach a level with the board-school system in which everyone would have access to any printed media and artistic understanding. On the other hand, he knew that among the poor there were many who had greater sensibility, like himself, whose poverty marked his whole life. The notion of mass in Gissing seems often problematic and confusing, exactly because of this side of him which, even if for a short period, identified with the plights of the poor. It was hard to identify the common man, harder was to understand him, so as Gissing deviated from social matters, the masses became an agglomeration of faceless human beings, defined by its incapacity to rational thinking. Literature and the serious writer, the one who truly cared for the dignity of literature, suffered with the unfair mass market. If Gissing failed to see the intention of a benevolent divine power in the human drama, as Korg says, it is because his own experiences and convictions denied him that. The Godless world which started with Darwin took root in him and pointed to a present and future where the brutes only could claim victory.

[269] SPENCER, Herbert. MACRAE, Donald (Ed.). *The man versus the State*: four essays on politics and society. London: Penguin, 1969. p. 110.

5 CONCLUSION – THE PRICE OF EVOLUTION

The final scene of *New Grub Street*, the neat and happy scene in which the new couple Jasper and Amy celebrate their success, their ten thousand pounds and Jasper's editorship, is a clear rebuke of the traditional ending of a Victorian novel. Jasper and Amy are not exactly villains, but the reader feels awkward in seeing that their individualism was not punished. And where are Reardon, Biffen, Marian and maybe even Alfred Yule and their second chance? Well, Yule would not have survived a Dickensian novel anyway, because he does not regret his behaviour, but how awkward the other absences feel. Even considering the outcome of the novel the way it is, the final scene should at least belong to Marian in her sad and lonely provincial library. Instead, Gissing not only rewards the "better fit" Jasper and Amy and shows their happiness, but also gives them the final chapter while Marian is nevermore seen. At first sight this final scene goes against the internal logic of the novel, once Gissing's sympathies should be turned to Marian instead of Jasper and his victorious speech. Stephen E. Severn argues that the final scene could never be Marian's because it is Jasper's success what represents the logical conclusion to the overall narrative pattern of the novel. It is Gissing's non-ironized endorsement of Jasper's skilled worldview and intelligence placed in a realist socio-economic context that responds to the culture of commercialism that prevailed in Britain in the 1880s.[270] Poole also affirms that the ending indeed agrees with the internal logic of the novel and that it is in accordance with Gissing's thought. Sadistic or not, he explains that the final scene demonstrates how Jasper and Amy now find themselves as "winners" and part of a charmed circle which allows them to behave differently towards the "losers" like the exiled Marian. Their remarks about her – "only a clever school-girl" and "with ink stains on her fingers" – strike us as particularly unjust, but in fact only corroborate their superior position and their success in the fight for survival.[271]

Winning in the modern literary market, as well as in modern life, is linked to the ability to make money. *New Grub Street* translates the hardships of modern life into the language of money more strongly than any other Gissing novel. The word "money" is directly said eighty-nine times, and indirectly it pervades the whole text. Robert L. Selig stresses that characters tend to live between two symbols that guide their lives. The first one is the printed word: paper

[270] SEVERN, Stephen E. Quasi-professional culture, conservative ideology, and the narrative structure of George Gissing's *New Grub Street*. *JNT Journal of narrative theory*. Vol. 40, number 2. Summer, 2010. p. 156–188. p. 158. Available at < https://muse.jhu.edu> Accessed on: 28 Jun. 2015.
[271] POOLE, Adrian. *Gissing in context*. London: Macmillan, 1975. p. 154-155

production, newspapers, periodicals and books are in what they read, talk about, think about, produce. Even when characters are silent they have books or newspapers in their hands. The second symbol is money, and it is responsible for the materialization of that printed word. Characters discover they cannot live by words alone, and in order to buy bread they have to transform their literary talent into money. The result is that they are as much obsessed by money as they are by literature. The ones ascending like Jasper worry about what they earn and the ones descending like Yule worry about what they will never attain.[272] There is an anti-idealistic principle running throughout the novel saying that "in a society that values only money, neither love or art can flourish without significant cash".[273]

Reardon and Amy's relationship foreshadows this integration between money and all life's activities and the necessity of possessing it to be happy and successful. In their first dialogue money or the lack of it comes in a series of metaphors reflecting their difficult moment and representing everything in terms of money: holidays, business, security, art, fear, value, power, family, housing and social position. Nothing exists without money. Moore says "survival comes with money, and the novel's many allusions to Darwin, Spencer, and the struggle for existence emphasise the metaphorical portrait of money as sustenance".[274]

Mid-Victorians like Dickens used money commonly as a device to unveil greed in bad people and to reward the good people in the end, promoting the fairy-tale ending. In realist novels money has to be present to justify the world's economy and is one of the most present themes in Victorian fiction, being it more or less visible. Late-Victorians like George Gissing and H. G. Wells were as aware as their predecessor that although little could be achieved without money, in it also lay the root of much that was evil, whether in the shape of poverty or in the excessive pursuit of riches. The Victorian period was an age of unprecedented prosperity, but the existing social structures were failing to adapt at the same speed of the economy and so those authors feared that the economic value and social or moral value could not coincide. They contested the popular ideology that the individualist search for monetary self-interest would lead to an increase in one's moral happiness.[275]

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[272] SELIG, Robert L. The Valley of the Shadow of Books: Alienation in Gissing's *New Grub Street*. *Nineteenth century fiction*, Vol. 25, number 2, Sep., 1970, pp. 188-198. p. 196. Published by University of California Press. Available at <http://www.jstor.org> Accessed on: 16 Jan. 2016.
[273] SELIG, Robert L. *George Gissing*. London: Prentice Hall International, 1995. p. 46.
[274] MOORE, Lewis D. *The fiction of George Gissing*: a critical analysis. London: McFarland and Co, 2008. Kindle digital edition. position 1324-1326.
[275] JAMES, Simon J. *Unsettled accounts*: money and narrative in the novels of George Gissing. London: Anthem, 2003. p. 3-5.

The culture of "making money" is one of the main reasons for George Gissing's disillusion about modern life. He, like thousands of other Victorians, read Charles Darwin and tried to figure out how evolutionism and natural selection could be used to understand human behaviour in society. Despite being present everywhere, the power of money seemed to be a strange quality to testify for one's fitness. Yet, the impact of economics seemed natural enough in human relations since it awakened primitive instincts of competition and individualism so characteristic of mankind, only in modern terms. Gissing took the commercialism of the end of the century as a mark of man's latent brutishness and abhorred it because it affronted what he had of most precious in his life: art. The demands of the literary market valued little but the amount of profit that could be made out of its investments. Books became mere commodities sold by the bulk and were frequently as disposable as the news on a newspaper. Gissing reflected on the works of Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte and Schopenhauer, among others, to develop material for his novels, as well as to build his own understanding about the unbalance he felt with the ascension of the masses of readers and their popular tastes over the sensible and the artistic.

Evolutionism and Darwin's theory of natural selection surely raised many questions regarding the individual's value in modern society. Survival was regarded as a matter of adaptation to the economic circumstances available, which could lead to both professional and domestic success. In the practical view of Jasper Milvain, it seemed like a game, although some rules of this game were blurred. Somehow it took both personal abilities and luck to grant one's next generation, supposedly the main goal in the battle for survival. According to Nancy Armstrong, it is interesting to notice that even Darwin slightly "adapted" his own statements along time in order to answer some complicated questions. For example, when it comes to sexual selection in *The descent of men*, the successor of *On the origin of species*, Darwin bends the rules by distributing the responsibilities between man and woman for a successful marriage. Economic advantages are attached to marital fitness because a man has to provide for his family, yet, it is women's duty to select the best partner. Men had to be both the brute, "the agent of ruthless nature" confirming his position of warrior and provider, and the agreeable, charming and rich enough individual to conquer his future wife.[276] That happened because the Victorian had this sense that nature might have its own rules, but still, not even nature could ignore or defy the power of established social patterns.

[276] ARMSTRONG, Nancy. DAVID, Deidre (Ed.). Gender and the Victorian novel. In: *The Cambridge companion to the Victorian novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002. p. 97-124. p. 101.

Things were complicated for sure. In *New Grub Street* men and women struggle to survive in the modern city with its rules and demands that often go against one's moral values. Sometimes it is difficult for characters to understand what society expects from them and they are surprised with the cruelty of the fight for survival. The selection of the better fit takes into account mostly the adaptability of each to the materialistic values elected by the majority. Critics like Adrian Poole believe the best way to illustrate how the book presents a Darwinian thesis of the fight for survival is to focus on the characters' arcs which move either up or down throughout the story. They act as if connected like pendants and when one wins in the battle of life, another necessarily has to lose. It can be seen when we compare the stories of Reardon and Jasper, Marian and Amy, Yule and Fadge, etc. The intriguing part is that the losers, the writers who end up in the most tragic ways, are exactly the ones who value art the most and refuse to sell themselves to the unbridled pursuit of money. Indeed, it does not go against the logic presented by the novel, but feels wrong. Gissing looks like a sadistic man whose disagreements with the book industry turned him into a bitter writer. As if it were his desire to punish everyone who was like him and teach them a lesson about the dangers of becoming a literary man in the London of the end of the nineteenth century.

But then, considering Gissing's intellectual formation and his own history, we learn that his evolutionary interest is rooted in the desire to understand humanity in a more complex way. Herbert Spencer was one of his sources. He was the man who developed sociological studies based on the evolutionary theory. Like Darwin, he pointed that evolution in general is the never-ending search for balance; a force that goes beyond man's power – and humanity in its modern social configuration is not an exception. Such continuous pursuit of equilibrium involves a cruel but necessary selection of the best individuals, according to their adaptability to the given environment. In the end the fittest survives and procreates. It does not mean perfection will ever be attained or adaptation completely accomplished because mankind is too slow to evolve morally at the same pace it increases in numbers. The problem is that instead of allowing nature to guide humanity, men keep on creating artificial forms of interference which not only prevent society from evolving but also pull us back, leading to more suffering than they tried to prevent. The interference is usually based on the misleading judgement which says that suffering is unnatural and that the weak should be protected. Spencer criticises those men-made institutions, including the State itself, for creating artificial modes of sustaining the life of people who are unfit to survive and thus creating a burden to the others. To Spencer, people should be left by themselves to suffer their lot.

In the debate of chapters two and three we saw that there are two basic conflicts in *New Grub Street*: the first is about how to separate the fit from the unfit and understand why some survive and others do not; the second, complementing the first, is how much people are the masters of their own destinies; how much they have the power to choose or not to survive. For example, the main comparison between Reardon and Jasper is much influenced by the way Amy sees and judges both of them. To her, Reardon is a weak man, who simply does not want to follow the steps of his smarter friend and learn a good lesson about how to win in life. She calls him "unmanly" and wishes him to be more aggressive because she is convinced surviving is a matter of fighting for what you want. Amy clearly displays the commonly accepted premise that we make our choices and we can adapt to circumstances if we wish to. The narrator tends to agree with her commonplace opinion and teases the reader to criticise Reardon too. Plus, the practical Jasper also believes in the same modern view of social selection. He knows himself, the abilities he possesses and the ones he lacks, then plans carefully his path and works steadily. He is envied and mostly admired by the ones who wish to succeed as well because he is the model of the modern man of business, someone who is capable to gain money. Although he is not necessarily a bad person, Jasper nurtures morally suspicious detachment and cynicism desirable in the modern businessman. On the other hand, Reardon is a man who believes in predisposition. He understands his financial situation, he knows how dissatisfied his wife is and suffers for being irresponsible enough to marry her once he feels he has no right to happiness. He is called selfish and is surely an example any of the money-hunger characters wants to follow. He is as a writer who needs affection and support and whose talent only rises in leisure. Like Jasper, Reardon knows himself too. Only he does not fit the social Darwinist model. Through this light, Reardon's situation asks for only one remedy: he is a loser and must be eliminated to give way to the more deserving.

That social Darwinist model was full of flaws, though. Theoretically speaking, it never existed, neither by the time of Gissing nor ever since. It was the adaptation, or the misuse, of many of Darwin's and Spencer's terms in the preaching of a dog-eat-dog ideology of social competition which valued singly the fact of winning, independently of the means to attain it. Many of such beliefs remain among us until today, but have little to do with the way Darwin describes natural selection or the ways Spencer believed society should follow. To Darwin, natural selection was about natural advantages one individual had or developed over others which allowed him to survive instead of the others. It was all about predisposition and nothing about changing one's nature in order to adapt to an imposed circumstance. Neither did Spencer, despite much of what has been said about his theories, believe that adapting was a matter of

going against one's nature. On the contrary, he was certain that there was no other alternative to humanity to evolve, but to allow each one to follow one's instincts and so society tended to arrange itself naturally. As Poole again says, the prevailing thesis of the novel is that from the beginning one belongs either to the group of winners or losers and that personal development counts very little in the overall. The winners are able to adapt because they are natural winners, rather than being winners because they are able to adapt.[277] If we go back to Jasper's description above, we notice that he does not build his personality from the scratch, but he rather uses rationality to enhance the characteristics he thinks best appropriate and tries to subdue the ones which cannot help him attain what he wants. His personal development has little effect for humanity in the overall, but it grants his survival towards the future generation.

Now if we think of Reardon and his friend Harold Biffen, as well as Alfred Yule, they are accused of being unable to take practical decisions in order to stop suffering and escape their problems. Their elimination does not only feel inevitable, but necessary to grant the evolution of the species. The matter of predisposition seems solved and we understand the mechanism of the novel. Yet, it leaves an emptiness when we consider the value of the things those characters fight for. They are true to their art and art was the thing Gissing valued the most. The problem is that, being those characters as good and talented as they may be, they are not valued by society and, in their case, the literary market. It does not mean they are wrong or useless in a higher moral level, but that they do not fit in that specific social model. Fitness becomes the coincidence of belonging to that society in terms of being predisposed to it. The "desirable" personality traces are gifts given to some which do not include the artistic type. The nineteenth-century writer, the one committed to the high literature, is doomed to be regarded as an inferior specimen, underrated and on the verge of dying of hunger.

To George Gissing it was not a simple matter of passive people against active people. The drama was about sensibility being trampled by materialism. And society was terribly materialistic to his taste. Gissing thought the development of the best people was threatened by wrong values of a population which was as stupid as it was large. The masses were taking over the economic and intellectual control of England by the end of the Victorian age, brutalizing society and betraying everything that civilization had attained so far. A student of Schopenhauer, Gissing was convinced the masses were slaves of their "will" – the "will" that to Schopenhauer is "the true core of the human individual": The force of sheer striving, not rational, but blind instinct which drives us to pursuit of ends; "the most basic of which are

[277] POOLE, Adrian. *Gissing in context*. London: Macmillan, 1975. p. 148.

keeping ourselves alive and reproducing the species".[278] The masses worried about nothing but their physical needs and desires, just like animals whose aims cannot reach further than the fulfilment of the moment. The poor were the largest representation of the masses due to their numbers and the estrangement they provoked on most intellectuals. They were seen as a faceless multitude which reproduced the same pattern of commonness repeatedly and without limits. To Gissing, the necessity to protect himself from the contamination of the mob was even more important than to other intellectuals because he experienced poverty like few ever did. But although he always tried to detach himself from the suffering of the poor, he knew that poverty and brains were different things. The problem was that brains would never be a match to poverty, since the lack of money had the power to pulverize the hopes and happiness of the best of men and women. It is a common question among Gissing's critics to ponder on what degrades more the human being in the writer's point of view: the accumulation of money or the absence of it.

It was with Schopenhauer that Gissing tried to appease his contradictory feelings towards the masses, by focusing on a pessimistic view of life in which nothing could really be done to prevent that lack of natural equilibrium to take hold on humankind. Early in his life he accepted that conditions like poverty and specially ignorance were hardly revertible. Those were the results of years and years of misguided choices of a population that tended for the worst. He could not deny that the masses had their role in society: they existed to secure the place of higher classes, like paws on a chess game, facing the worse and being eliminated in order to protect the best ones. The revolt of the masses consisted in the rejection of that role and the demand of the poor for more equality. The poor did not want to be taught to be happy with their lot, like Spencer suggested. They wanted more, and that meant a threat to the middle class. Gissing concluded that the best choice an intelligent man could make was to keep apart from the masses with all his forces. Society was disordered and there was only one kind of optimism that was worthwhile: the optimism of art. Only in art good prevailed over evil and so only the artist possessed the sensibility to see beyond the concrete and the vulgar.[279] The ignorant should be left with his ignorance and the artist should give up on him.

New Grub Street is the story of writers who are not the masters of their lives, even when they think they are. Firstly, because according to natural selection one is naturally fit or not to

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[278] CARTWRIGHT, David E.; ERDMANN, Edward E. Introduction. In: SCHOPENHAUER, Arthur. *The two fundamental problems of ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2010. p. IX-XXXIX. p. XVIII.

[279] GISSING, George. The hope of pessimism. In GISSING, George. *George Gissing*: essays and fiction. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1970. p. 82 quoted in HALPERIN, John. *Gissing: a life in books*. Oxford: Oxford University, 1987. p. 47-48.

survive and secondly because it became much more difficult for writers to control their careers in the modern market. At least not the way mid-Victorians used to do. Not that the literary market had been easy before, but even large audiences such as Dickens's or George Eliot's used to be more homogeneous. There were fewer books on the market and the reading public was smaller. Once the public grew enormously because of the board-school system and reading material became more accessible, which was the case by the end of the century, the diversification felt like a betrayal to serious writers. The mass public was considered childish, careless and thus responsible for enriching third-rate writers like Whelpdale who flattered their ignorance with purposely stupid writing. We know that on the one hand, Reardon's books are deep and intellectual and that he cares about what he writes; we know that *Mr Bailey, grocer* is a novel ahead of its time, carefully written by Biffen, and on the other hand, Jasper writes rubbish, as he himself admits, despises his readers and still succeeds. It happens because *New Grub Street* is not *David Copperfield*. Here succeeding is not a matter of personal effort and ethics anymore, but dynamism and flexibility.

Literature seemed to have evolved into a dark level where it is trapped and doomed. The profession of letters decays as Alfred Yule would agree. Nobody cares about intellectual subjects anymore: his daughter is sick of the literary toil; and the new journalism comes in the form of Jasper, running over the moral principles on which the profession was built. Gissing gives Yule, Marian, Reardon and Biffen very sad endings, supporting his view that the golden days of literature have past. He might be accused of exaggeration, of being too pessimistic, but to Gissing, the enlargement of the public could never be seen on a positive light. The claims that it allowed a greater variety of genres to find their readers or that the popular reader of today might look for something deeper in the future did not convince him. Of course, popular literature would always have more significant sales, however, it does not mean less popular authors could not get on as well. If Reardon had kept a steady pace, producing two or three novels a year, he would have prospered without changing his style. Alfred Yule too, if he recognized how he supported himself and his family throughout the years, writing about the intellectual subjects he likes, he would not be as dissatisfied as he is. Instead he despises the importance of his life work because it did not make him neither rich nor famous. Those writers lose their fight not due to incompetence, but to an incoherent behaviour, based on demands that go against their nature. Reardon, for instance, is taken to be mad after his desertion of the literary life. Nobody understands him, including the narrator. Despite the harshness, Gissing opted for this view of things because he believed he was being honest about what he saw around him. His intention was not to simply document reality, but to use realism to amplify what he

felt. As Moore explains, realism in literature is the use of the concrete on the surface, shaped by the imagination of the author in the attempt to understand the physical, institutional, intellectual, and emotional aspects of a social structure.[280]

Contradicting Spencer, social Darwinist approaches tend to preach individualism as the most effective means of survival. Spencer did not believe in individualism as a factor that would lead humanity to a higher evolutionary level. On the contrary, although he says that changes start from the individual will, they only appear when that individual will is associated with others of the same kind, and then through spontaneous collectivism society could really evolve. From this point of view, again Reardon is in disadvantage compared to Jasper because Jasper builds a net of contacts with people who can help him and others he might help, while Reardon is an individualist who refuses help in any form. This is actually why Reardon, as well as Biffen, do not fit the commercial model of modern society. They are cruelly called by the narrator at one point flabby, weakly and foolishly obstinate, among other adjectives, and he asks the reader how much he feels irritated by their passivity (p. 417). Their selfishness and individualism bring suffering not only to themselves but to the people who depend on them or who love them. They are socially useless. However, as we saw in the last chapter, the intellectual, as well as the artist, is expected to be an individualist, and art is supposed to be useless. Art is not supposed to have any social purpose; neither is the artist supposed to act in any social role. The intellectual is aware that the masses are not, and hardly will ever be, ready for a socialist model because their attachment to primitive instincts is too evident, so he gives up on them. Although neither Reardon nor Biffen demonstrate great contempt for the mob the way Jasper does, they choose to keep apart and never blend in it. When Reardon asks Biffen why they do revolt against the unfair system which punishes them for their superiority of brains, Biffen answers: "Because we are passive beings, and were meant to enjoy life quietly. As we can't enjoy, we just suffer quietly, that's all." (p. 360). The seeming punishment of the artists for their love of art in a world that does not see value in it is actually the corroboration of their higher moral level compared to the ones who consider them fools. They deny all the materialism of the modern world because it has no importance to them. Still they suffer both because they are aware of the unfair rejection and because they simply have body needs like everyone else. Like Carlyle says, the writer must be poor and hungry to prove his integrity and his truthfulness to such a noble cause as literature. In terms of poverty, Gissing's heroes are true martyrs.

[280] MOORE, Lewis D. *The fiction of George Gissing*: a critical analysis. London: McFarland and Co, 2008. Kindle digital edition. position 138-143.

Spencer explains that suffering should not be regarded as something unnatural that should be prevented at any cost. Suffering is an essential part of life and of the struggle for survival. He says that by denying it or demanding authorities to erase it – as if that were possible – it can only be enhanced. By trying to prevent suffering through artificial and ineffective means mankind has been prevented from evolving intellectually and morally. According to Schopenhauer, suffering is caused by man's submission to the will, to the physical desires through the abdication of rationality. The will is indeed intrinsic in everyone's nature and the more we abide to it the more we suffer. When people are guided by their will, they are like oversensitive animals who instinctively fight for their own interests, regardless of other people's interests. Life becomes nothing more than a savage fight for survival and man loses his claim to rationality. This is what happens to the masses, whose interests, according to nineteenth-century intellectuals, are merely physical and momentary. They suffer so much because their only interest is fulfilling their desires. Being thus, their suffering never ends because the will is never satisfied and as soon one desire is fulfilled another comes in its place.

There are two things that the intellectual man must understand: one, suffering is intrinsic in our nature and it drives our instincts through a never-ending fight to stop suffering, but suffering will never end. Two, the only way to diminish suffering is denying the will and abdicating the fight for survival by abdicating the irrational instincts. Then we can finally understand what drives our Gissing heroes through their path of apathy. Both Reardon and Biffen see suffering as part of life and neither of them think the material things the world can give them would soothe it. Reardon's desperation is caused by choices he made and now he considers wrong because once he married he was forced to compromise in conquering things, material things which do not move his intellectual spirit. He is a man used to hardships, to suffering, but he suffers for his art and it does not destroy him, it moves him onward. In the end, Reardon gets tired of the material demands over him; he knows he is not cut for this fight, and gives up on it even if it means losing Amy forever. Then he dedicates himself to denying all the desires of his will in order to try to keep himself together, but it is too late. The social selection does not forgive such weakness. Biffen follows a similar path. He does not complain about the harshness of life, he had been through harder trials than his friend, says the narrator. (p. 143). He lives his life hopelessly without religious or any other faith in any improvement of his condition. He, like his friend, is not a communitarian person, he will not join humanity's efforts for evolution because he does not believe in it. He abdicates his life in the end because he cannot stand the pity of people on him, as if he wished to be different from what he is only to stand in an admirable position for modern standards.

The clash of values is what makes the fight for survival cruel when combined with literature. The men of letters, at least the ones who really care about it, have different interests in life which contradict the modern values dictated by money. The problem was not an exclusivity of the last decades of the nineteenth century, but the case surely increased with the high population rates. More and more people acquired the right to learn how to read and write and it naturally provoked reactions on the ones who believed literature to be sacred and belonging to a minority of superior people. Like them, Gissing did not believe literature should or could have a social purpose: art should stand for art's sake, free of social and marketable demands. The poor and the ignorant should be left with their religious faith, and their materialistic desires while the true literature could not depreciate itself to satisfy vulgar tastes. The true man of letters may not be a hero anymore, but he keeps his integrity no matter what.

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