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THE FUNCTION OF RELIGION IN SELECTED NOVELS OF GEORGE GISSING

by

LAWTON A. BREWER

Under the Direction of Paul Schmidt

ABSTRACT

George Gissing has experienced a fluctuating reputation among critics in the period of over one hundred years since his death in 1903. Curiously, during the last decade of his life, many critics put Gissing on a par with Thomas Hardy and George Meredith among writers living at that time. Early in his career, however, his reputation suffered from the notion that Gissing was simply a naturalist with a pessimistic, atheistic streak. To some extent, this appraisal has some merit. Gissing pronounced himself an unbeliever to family and to acquaintances such as Fredrick Harrison as early as 1880. Nonetheless, Gissing maintained an interest in religion throughout his life, a fact made plain by his use of religious material in his novels. Furthermore, he was far from merely dismissing religion, nor did he adopt a uniformly unsympathetic view of belief. My dissertation will demonstrate that, starting with his first published novel, Gissing made extensive use of religious subject matter in the form of imagery, symbolism, plot elements, and characterization. More significantly, he also examined the relationship between religion and capitalism. Often, one detects

in Gissing's work a sense of what I will call economic Calvinism, an idea that has received extensive explication by Max Weber and others. I will show that Gissing's characters are often divided into class and economic lines, a fact not in itself particularly novel, but one which finds expression in Gissing in terms very evocative of the Christian division of humanity into categories of damned and saved. I will also reveal patterns in Gissing's work that depict the ongoing dialogue between religious issues and other social concerns such as feminism, philanthropy, poverty, church affiliation, philosophy, and marriage. The dissertation covers selected novels from roughly the first half of Gissing's career in an attempt to bring to light the pervasiveness of religious reference in a representative assortment of Gissing's work. My paper will show that more concentrated attention to the use of religion in Gissing will contribute to a greater understanding of him as an artist. It will also suggest that more study in this area needs to be done.

INDEX WORDS: Gissing, Calvinism, Arminianism, Religion, Church, Philanthropy, Feminist space, Money, Economics, Christianity, Capitalism, Protestantism, Puritanism, Christ, Exploitation, Charity, Activism, Social Issues, "The New Woman," Marriage, Class, Poverty, Max Weber, Damnation, Salvation, Determinism, Accommodation, Commodification, Gender, Bible, New Testament, Old Testament, Faith, Belief, Darwin, Universal salvation, Savior, Martyr, Comte, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Election, *Workers in the Dawn*, *Isabel Clarendon*, *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, *Thryza*, *The Nether World*, *The Odd Women* .

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LAWTON A. BREWER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2010

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DEDICATION

To my children, Art and Abby. To Bettie Sellers, a marvelous poet and the most wonderful of teachers, the kind who really loved the books she taught and wrote. Primarily, I must thank Dr. Paul Schmidt for continuing to assure me that I would finally, despite my own doubts, finish my dissertation. From the beginning of my experience as a candidate for this degree, Dr. Schmidt has been instrumental in encouraging, advising, and guiding me through the process. He has quite literally promoted my work, once nominating a paper of mine for a departmental award. More crucially, he has made certain that I would not desert this endeavor. In my estimation, he has no peer as teacher, scholar, or friend.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	viii
 CHAPTERS	
1. Introduction	1
Gissing, Secularism, and Religion: An Initial Assessment	1
The Victorians and Religion	8
Money, Materialism, and Religion	11
Gissing, Carlyle, and the New God	14
Critical Commentary on Gissing and Religion	19
Money, Class, Feminist Identity	25
The Residuum of Calvinism	27
Zombie Protestantism	37
Money and the “Gospel of Success”	44
The Need For the Study	47
 2. Chapter One: The Ur-Novel: <i>Workers in the Dawn</i>	 49
Religion, Social Issues, and Money in <i>Workers in the Dawn</i>	49
Foundational Importance	53
The Critique of Philanthropy	54
Legends of the Fall	76
Arthur Golding and the Legions of the Damned	79

Apostles of a New Order	89
The Religious Crank and Feminine Space in <i>Workers in the Dawn</i>	97
3. Chapter Two: Early Novels of the Working Class	104
Class and its Demarcations	104
<i>The Unclassed: Determinism Light?</i>	105
The Redemptive Whore: Gissing's Fantasy Fulfilled	107
Hell Embraced	117
The Religion of Death	122
Woodstock's Capitalist Theology	130
<i>Demos: A Story of English Socialism</i>	133
<i>Thryza</i>	145
<i>The Nether World: Gissing's City of Dreadful Night</i>	148
4. Chapter Three: The Damned Domain of Feminine and Religious Space	161
Hell is a Woman's Realm but Man is the Devil: <i>Isabel Clarendon</i>	168
<i>Thryza: Religion as Feminine Refuge</i>	178
<i>The Odd Women, Gender and Identity</i>	182
5. Conclusion	192
6. Notes	199
Works Cited	251
Bibliography	269

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Calvinism and Arminianism	249
Table 2.	Religious Terminology	250

Introduction

Gissing, Secularism, and Religion: An Initial Assessment

George Gissing, considered by contemporary critics as one of the three most respected novelists of the 1890's along with Thomas Hardy and George Meredith, nonetheless elicited, as John Halperin notes in *Gissing: A Life in Books*, a very mixed critical reaction throughout his career (2). His novels have continued to experience an uneven response, with some readers claiming for Gissing a stature nearing greatness and others regarding him at best as a minor late Victorian novelist, to be remembered primarily for his treatment of the urban poor in earlier novels such as *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, *The Nether World*, *Demos*, and *Thryza*. Recently, however, appreciation of Gissing has acknowledged a wider range of interests in his works, even within these industrial novels. For instance, numerous feminist critics have discovered in Gissing a sophisticated treatment of issues involving women, although they sometimes find his position on these matters somewhat elusive. Overall, Gissing's reputation has grown steadily in the last fifty years, a trend that has accelerated significantly since the mid-1990s. Biographies and essays continue to appear at a steady rate, and it appears that Gissing has achieved a level of respect that will prove increasingly less susceptible to fluctuation. Gissing's work, in my view, justifies this improvement in the novelist's reputation. His novels demonstrate an assortment of concerns that Gissing presents with skill and complexity. One of these concerns, not sufficiently recognized, has to do with his management of religious issues, either through Gissing's direct evaluation of religion or through the way Gissing employs religious subjects and imagery to underscore or illuminate other social issues, issues with which the author grappled extensively. Fredric Jameson, while analyzing Gissing in *The Political Unconscious*, observes that "great realistic novelists ... are forced, by their own narrative and aesthetic vested interests,

into a repudiation of revolutionary change and an ultimate stake in the status quo” (193).

Certainly, Gissing evidences “narrative and aesthetic” preoccupations in his novels, and at times he repudiates “revolutionary change,” but not because of his “vested interests” (Jameson 193).

On the contrary, Gissing sometimes embraces radicalism, but he does not commit himself to ideologies; he reserves the right to dissent even from political activism. Never does Gissing endorse society or the prevailing economic arrangements, though, at times, he resigns himself to them. While his positions on social issues change, Gissing continually questions and challenges the presumptions of class wherever he finds these suppositions. He frequently conducts this inquiry through a simultaneous consideration of religion. Among other topics, economics, particularly as it entails the centrality of money, converses reciprocally with his handling of religion in a manner especially powerful throughout his early work. Though religion seems to have become less visible in the novels as Gissing’s career proceeded, it never disappears entirely. In fact, it continues to manifest in a multiplicity of situations. Like many another Victorian agnostic or atheist, Gissing engages with Christianity and with its Biblicist perspective on numerous levels. In particular, when the reader looks closely enough, she notices religious patterns and interests that recur quite persistently in Gissing’s work, even within Gissing’s tendency to shift back and forth in his apparent conclusions about these matters. These subjects include, but are not limited to, the presence of a de-spiritualized Calvinism which interrogates the connection between economics and religion, the use of religion by women to achieve limited autonomy, the depiction and evaluation of faith-based philanthropy, and a discussion of the relationship between religion and class.

John Sloan, in “The Literary Affinity of Gissing and Dostoevsky,” makes claims about George Gissing that, while overtly highlighting elements of Dostoevsky’s prose, offer insights

into religion in Gissing's novels. Sloan distinguishes the English novelist from Fyodor Dostoevsky philosophically while simultaneously identifying the parallels between the two writers. Both men, Sloan says, depict intellectual characters who "struggle for identity and true value in a world without God." Dostoevsky's characters, according to Sloan, desire a "self-deification" which will encompass "the whole of man's nature," while George Gissing's characters are "more characteristically secular" in that they "cling irrationally to an ideal of spacious culture that appears ineffectual against the forces of change" (447). His comparison of Gissing and Dostoevsky does point to an essential likeness between some of the tormented characters in their novels, but Sloan speaks oddly of Gissing's "portrayal of the antinomian crisis within the social and psychic domain" (448). Antinomianism, a heterodox Christian doctrine essentially emphasizing salvation by faith without any necessity whatsoever for good works, seems appropriate when speaking of Dostoevsky, who frequently wrote about religious doubt, and whose characters often exemplify this doctrine (Katz x-xi). At first glance, however, the mention of a marginally heretical Christian theory of redemption seems incongruous in reference to Gissing, a lifelong agnostic.¹ Sloan also references the "revising and reshaping" on the part of both Dostoevsky and Gissing of Dickens' "images of religion masking self-interest" in *Barnaby Rudge*. Finally, Sloan claims that Gissing's and Dostoevsky's mocking of visionary nineteenth century social schemes hinges "on the identification of all forms of radicalism with atheism" (449). Sloan says very little else of religious matters in Gissing, and, indeed, his use of the religious terminology has more to do with his contention that Gissing, like Dostoevsky, employs "images of oppression, individual freedom and moral and intellectual revolt" than with specifically religious issues, an accurate statement as far as it goes (443). Nonetheless, Sloan touches upon a subject that few critics address extensively, if at all: namely, that many of

Gissing's novels make use of religion to a remarkable degree and for a variety of purposes. But the reason that I mention Sloan's ideas at this juncture is that Sloan comes close, in his remarks about the combining of religion and self interest, to recognizing that Gissing's work sometimes pairs religious issues with social and economic concerns. Finally, Sloan's mention of antinomianism accords quite well with the argument that I will make about the multifaceted and contradictory presence in Gissing's novels of Calvinism as well as other Christian doctrines. Indeed, Calvinism, though not identical with antinomianism, contains the seeds from which this doctrine springs. I intend to make explicit some of the issues that Sloan and other critics merely suggest, as it were, in passing. I will examine how Gissing, not only in his work, but in his personal life, intermittently contemplated religion on a personal level, though he never embraced faith unreservedly, nor did he apparently agonize over his own spiritual status as did the Russian novelist. Because of Gissing's evident awareness of religion in his work, and because he clearly thought about Christianity in very complex ways, a study devoted completely to this aspect of Gissing's work is long overdue.

One of the things the reader should notice about Gissing in considering the function of religion in his work has to do with his evocation of religious and biblical language. By itself, this element of Gissing's work indicates the importance of religion in Gissing's novels. That few scholars have taken note of this fact puzzles me, because so much English literature contains some level of biblical resonance. As Northrop Frye points out in the Introduction to that unusual blend of literary criticism and biblical explication, *The Great Code*, "a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads" (xii). For readers of Gissing, this statement rings just as true for readers of, say, Thomas Hardy, James Thomson, George Eliot, Cardinal Newman, or almost any other Victorian

of repute, greater or lesser. This tendency, that of reflecting Biblical or otherwise Christian influences, surfaces especially in the early works of Gissing, but it is also detectable to a greater or lesser degree in the rest of his fiction as well. As P. F. Kropholler has demonstrated in “Notes on *Our Friend the Charlatan*,” “[a]lthough he was not a religious man, Gissing appears [in his novels] to have had a wide knowledge of the Bible” (14). This familiarity with the Bible strikes one immediately in *Workers in the Dawn*. Strange, then, that Pierre Coustillas contends in his Introduction to *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction* that Gissing’s use of the Bible in an early story “was by no means natural and spontaneous” because Gissing “had never been encouraged to read” that book (44). Encouraged or not, Gissing read the Bible, and he knew it well. His clumsiness (if it exists) in the instance to which Coustillas refers may stem from other reasons, but not from ignorance.²

Like other unbelievers of the Victorian period, Gissing gave serious thought to spiritual matters at various times throughout his career. As I have already indicated, in addition to his extensive background knowledge of the Christian scriptures, Gissing frequently articulated a more than casual personal interest in religious matters. A quick review of incidents and comments readily demonstrates the validity of this assertion. Gissing tutored the sons of Frederick Harrison, one of whom, Austin Harrison, reveals in an essay that Gissing considered becoming a Catholic during one early phase of his life (“George Gissing” 25). Jacob Korg relates in his *Critical Biography* of Gissing that, in 1879, at approximately the same period to which Harrison refers, Gissing gave a lecture to a group of workingmen in Paddington entitled “Faith and Reason.” Gissing planned to follow this talk, skeptical in nature, with another one to be called “The State Church From a Rationalist Point of View” (Korg 24). Though the focus of these addresses had to do with the eclipse of Christianity by scientific knowledge, they

demonstrate a vital early interest in religion from the point of view of a skeptic. This fascination with religion also periodically emerged in Gissing's "intellectual skirmishes on matters of religion and politics" with his brothers (25). According to Pierre Coustillas, the last book Gissing read was a history of Latin liturgy up to the time of Charlemagne ("In Search of Gissing Memories" 2). Moreover, as Coustillas notes, Gissing was reading this material, shortly before he died, in preparation for his novel *Veranilda* (2). The fact that Gissing was writing a book involving church history shows that he remained invested in religious themes to the very end of his life. Martha S. Vogeler cites another instance of Gissing's interest in theological questions. According to her essay "Hudson and Gissing," W. H. Hudson recounted, after Gissing's death, a detail from a letter in which Gissing had posed a question to him that indicated Gissing's ongoing consideration of the supernatural. In this letter, Gissing asked Hudson "if he believed in immortality." Vogeler adds, appropriately enough, that this query is "a question that seems strange from the creedless Gissing to the creedless Hudson" (455). E. F. Mattiason quotes his father, who knew Gissing, as claiming that Gissing was "a religious man at heart" ("Further Notes on Gissing" 3). If one takes for granted that Gissing's attitude towards numinous matters remained fixed, even beyond introspective speculation, throughout his life, such questions and comments might seem strange indeed. Rarely, however, can one locate Gissing's position on any issue with any degree of fixity. While Gabrielle Fleury's denial of the stories of a "deathbed conversion" of Gissing to Catholicism, complete with lurid visions of hell and professions of faith, is undoubtedly true, one can presume confidently that Gissing retained both an artistic and a private interest in religion throughout his career (Korg "Some Unpublished Letters" 2-3). This interest, which takes many forms and serves many functions, constitutes one of the most consistent, if occasionally subdued, motifs throughout his work.

Since I do not wish to be misunderstood in my claims about Gissing's attitude toward religion, I must emphasize that I concur with common consensus about Gissing and his religious views, which, as we have already seen, holds that Gissing rejected Christianity as regressive and substantially false. One cannot doubt the truth of this position, given certain definitive comments Gissing made at various points of his career both in his letters and in other writings. In a letter to his brother, dated February 10, 1879, Gissing expresses agreement with G. W. Foote, editor of *The Liberal*, who declared in a lecture that, as Gissing puts it, "the existence of the popularly-conceived god of miracles is so inherently improbable that we feel safe in rejecting the possibility" (*Collected Letters* I, 153). Needless to say, this miraculous god is the Christian one. Gissing did not consider himself in any form a Christian, nor did he affiliate with any Church, whether by Law established or otherwise. Writing to Frederic Harrison on July 23, 1880, Gissing declared flatly "I have never, since first I reasoned on such things, known one moment of enthusiasm for, one instant of belief in, the dogmas of religion" (*Collected Letters* I, 294). Although one concedes the essential truth of this declaration of disbelief, one must also recognize that Gissing, in his letters, often makes unqualified assertions on some occasions that he contradicts at other times when it suits him to do so. Though not a Christian, Gissing regarded religion with more than passing interest. Not only did he maintain this interest, his knowledge of religion partook nothing of the superficial, as several astute readers have acknowledged. In evident agreement with the view expressed by P. F. Kropholler, Robert Selig points out in "Gissing's Worldly Parable: 'The Foolish Virgin,'" that "even though Gissing rejected Christianity, he knew its texts quite well" (20). His novels contain both direct references and indirect allusions to Biblical and ecclesiastical matter and language to an extent that cannot be regarded as accidental or casual. Of course, the degree to which religion functions in Gissing's

work varies. Nonetheless, that admission notwithstanding, many of Gissing's religious or church characters, that is, characters who comment upon religion, characters who correspond to Biblical figures, or characters who adhere to specific religious views, perform significant roles in the thematic schemata of his work.

Fairly consistently, religious references and events in Gissing are compatible with certain social positions in several novels. In other words, Gissing's use of religion often positions itself alongside economic and class concerns of one kind or another. Very often, then, Gissing places his treatment of subjects like economics, feminist issues, class, labor, and culture in a dialogue, although sometimes in a cleverly obscure conversation indeed, with the Bible, the book that, as it did in the Victorian era, even today drives many Western assumptions about social matters.³ Again, in *The Great Code*, Northrup Frye put the importance of the Bible into perspective in pointing out that this collection of "little books" is "clearly a major element in our own imaginative tradition" (Introduction xviii). For instance, hell, as we shall see, becomes a persistent metaphor for the diurnal existence of the lowest levels of the working class. Often, Gissing pairs diabolism more generally with economic hardship on the one hand and capitalist predation on the other. Very infrequently indeed in Gissing do religious and socio-economic references fail to reverberate with one another on some level. As a result of this alignment, a study of the correlation between Gissing's treatment of economic, class, and social issues, along with his discourse, overt or otherwise, about religious concerns, opens revealing and surprising avenues of interpretation.

The Victorians and Religion

Gissing's manipulation of religious subjects should come as no surprise since, to some extent, Gissing's handling of religion reflects larger Victorian concerns of long standing. Faith,

as Matthew Arnold famously lamented in “Dover Beach,” had been on the ebb for some time, but, in spite of this alleged decline, religious debate occupied much of society’s attention in virtually every decade of the nineteenth century. Even when religious issues did not take center stage, they remained on the edge of awareness in virtually every area of discussion. For a great deal of the time, as a matter of fact, debates about religion remained at the forefront, rather than the periphery, of social controversy. For example, as Geoffrey Rowell explains in some detail in *Hell and the Victorians*, the extent to which the argument over the nature and existence of eternal punishment, to name one doctrine under consideration during that time, attracted the attention, not only of Christians of all stripes, but of thinkers like John Stuart Mill and poets such as Robert Browning (3). Rowell reminds us that George Eliot, an unbeliever in life after death, nonetheless stated that belief in the doctrine of God and immortality has profound importance in providing human motivation (4). R. M. Schieder, in his essay “Loss and Gain? The Theme of Conversion in Late Victorian Fiction.” illustrates the centrality of religious matters during the latter half of the Victorian era. In referring to an episode in a novel by Joseph Henry Shorthouse entitled *Sir Percival: A Story of the Past and of the Present*, Schieder comments on a remark made by a character about an acquaintance of hers who ““is an agnostic, you know”” (29). Schieder explains as follows:

What may strike the reader three quarters of a century later is the writer’s choice of agnosticism as an obviously representative topic of after-dinner conversation in fashionable country-house society. What may strike him even more forcibly is that the writer should be able to take it for granted that it would be attractive to the general nineteenth-century reading public. (29)

Shorthouse argues further: “For some eighty years, on both sides of the Atlantic, religion assumed a central role in fiction. This prominence was inevitable ... because religion was not a matter either to be taken for granted or to be ignored” (29-30). The novel Shorthouse cites, by the

way, appeared in 1886, just before Gissing's novels began to acquire, even in the opinion of determined detractors of Gissing like Frank Swinnerton, critical acclaim (*George Gissing* 95-6). By encompassing the entire century in his characterization of the Victorian period, Shorthouse suggests a central truth about the era. If one considers that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Wordsworth journeyed from pantheism to orthodoxy, that Tennyson grappled arduously with doubt in *In Memoriam*, that Newman and Hopkins converted to Catholicism in mid-century, that Swinburne pointedly and blasphemously inverted Christian dogma, and finally, that Huxley dismantled Biblical certainty from mid-century on, one is hard-pressed to find the writer whose concerns do not somehow touch upon religion.⁴ Even those, especially those, who made a point of debunking or attacking Christianity or the Church placed themselves *de facto* in the center of the debate. As Bernard M. G. Reardon points out in *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age*, "to criticize religion is obviously not to ignore it" (266). Hence, Gissing's religious subject matter – his attentiveness to the nuances and ramifications of faith, his use of biblical language, his analysis of the relationship between ecclesiastic and economic activity, and his critique of poverty and evangelical philanthropy – all find common ground with the preoccupations of other Victorian writers. Alice B. Markow, in "George Gissing: Advocate or Provocateur of the Women's Movement?" admits that Gissing's novels constitute "a veritable battleground of debate on the great Victorian obsessions – religious doubt, mass education, the plight of the working class poor, growing materialism, shifting class lines ..." even as she excoriates Gissing for his alleged detachment from such issues (69). Nonetheless, her assessment of Gissing identifies the major concerns of his work, and her grouping of these topics suggests their interrelatedness, particularly with religious disputes. If Gissing had ignored religion entirely in his work, he would have been one of a few true exceptions. The fact of the matter, though,

remains that Gissing's novels simply cannot be interpreted fully apart from their handling of religion.

Money, Materialism, and Religion

As Markow's remark indicates, the issue of religious doubt is connected thoroughly with the other major issues of the Victorian period. The observation that no one writes in a vacuum, a notion that constitutes one of the fundamental principles of not only Marxist criticism, is also simple common sense. In *Gissing: A Life in Books*, John Halperin, in commenting on the author, states flatly, "To read his books without a detailed knowledge of his biography is to read blindfolded." Halperin further claims, "Sometimes Gissing took a cue from the characters he created and imitated them himself [...]" (6). In other words, though his novels sometimes imitate his life, his life often, oddly enough, imitates his novels. While there are elements of truth in Halperin's observation that Gissing drew upon his experiences of poverty and marriage in many plot variations in his books, the assumptions so often made about Gissing based on elements of his life sometimes get in the way of one's ability to view his work dispassionately. Many critics speak of certain of Gissing's characters as though they exist conterminously with the author. Critics have asserted Gissing's identity with, among others, Arthur Golding, Godwin Peak, Harvey Rolfe, Will Warburton, and, perhaps with the greatest level of confidence, Henry Ryecroft. Some critics behave as though the opinions of these characters invariably mirror Gissing's opinions. Halperin, one of these critics, equates Gissing with Osmund Waymark in *The Unclassed* in spite of the fact that Halperin himself quotes Gissing, in a letter to his brother, as insisting "Waymark ... alone is responsible for his sentiments ... I cannot be responsible for what [my characters] say' (*Life in Books* 52). The problem with the autobiographical view, of course, lies in the fact that none of these characters is Gissing's exact doppelganger. Each of

them, no doubt, voices views Gissing held at one time or another, and sometimes one can reasonably assert that Gissing probably shares this or that opinion with them. Halperin obliquely admits as much (53). Gissing himself, however, often shifted his stance, sometimes within the same novel, on various issues, ranging from the manner of alleviating poverty, the nature of a successful marriage, the relative merits of class, and the role of women in society. Herein resides the danger of ascribing to him a fictional mouthpiece on any but tentative grounds. The deeper peril of identifying Gissing too closely with his characters, as I implied before, is that it prevents the reader from considering the possibility that Gissing's intentionality is not limited in this way. Gissing's novels are not authorial puppet shows, with Gissing as the differently named protagonist in each performance. Rather, they demonstrate a thematic complexity that calls for much closer investigation than reductionist assumptions about biographical content permit. Most of these assumptions have to do with Gissing's experience with women, but they also originate in a proscribed discussion of Gissing's use of religion. Emphatically, biographical factors do have a direct bearing on the content of Gissing's work. I will concede and exploit this point at times myself, but I will also contemplate alternative interpretations to the Character-as-Gissing snare. To do otherwise risks undervaluing and misconstruing this very important and multi-faceted voice of late Victorian fiction. Gissing's life took place within a certain socio-economic nexus, and in Gissing's case, this matrix had tremendous importance for the kind of material that the author found compelling. As Christine DeVine explains in *Class in Turn-of-the Century Novels*, an individual's "world-view" includes "what is possible to see and know in viewing the world at a specified historical moment, and what, therefore, it is possible to depict in a novel, in spite of *and* because of prevailing ideologies" (10-11). For Gissing, money and what money means to everything else in life became crucially important because money evolved into the most

determinative factor in British society of the nineteenth century.⁵ Furthermore, that confluence of external factors, occurring simultaneously with the incidentals of biographical events, resulted inevitably in the collision of Gissing's personal experience with money and the societal movements of the time. Even prior to Gissing's infamous dismissal from Owen College, an event so pivotal in the eventual formation of Gissing's career and character, the future novelist showed an awareness of the enormous importance of money in making possible the realization of one's dreams. For instance, in his *Critical Biography*, Jacob Korg observes that Gissing knew he would have to win prizes to continue school (10). Pierre Coustillas, again in his Introduction to *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction*, relates a revealing incident wherein Gissing's father "deplored" not being able to afford to purchase a library book that his son evidently wanted (41). Thus, the inherently scholarly Gissing, classicist at heart, saw from adolescence on that idealism itself could not survive without the facilitative power of money. In many ways, moreover, his much-discussed, disgraceful experience at Owen College, preceded by his early upbringing and followed by the agonizing artistic and economic struggle that continued with varying severity for two decades, had the indelible effect on fixating Gissing's attention on issues of class, poverty, and, most importantly, money. His incipient revolutionary sympathies ultimately faded, as did his illusions of saving the working class individually or *en masse*. But this fixation on the "tyranny of cash," as Coustillas calls it, never left him (Introduction 41). In fact, it was this autocracy of money that convinced Gissing that social amelioration could happen only in very limited circumstances, and that these circumstances must be accompanied by money. Consequently, not only did Gissing recognize the importance of money in his own life, he understood its application to life in the capitalist environment that determines value for virtually every social activity. As we shall see, the "tyranny of cash" does not exempt religion from its influence.

Gissing, Carlyle, and the New God

Money, after all, frequently determines or mitigates problems of class and poverty. Some critics regard class as a matter entirely separate from money, but in fact, Victorian intellectuals and novelists as least as far back as Dickens recognized that the lines between class and money had become blurred, if not indistinguishable, due in part to the mobility and displacement engendered by Industrial Capitalism.⁶ This mobility was vertical, but vertical movement is bi-directional; it means up *and* down. Certainly, the correlation between money and class was not exact, but it was often close enough, especially for Gissing. One could argue, at any rate, that by the last two decades of the nineteenth century, money increasingly trumped class in British society. To state the case plainly, money made class movement possible. Christine DeVine, in *Class in Turn-of-the-Century Novels*, maintains that, even though class divisions became even more pronounced by 1900, the newly wealthy increasingly “fought to sustain the class hierarchies for their own ends” (7, 10). This fact implies that money facilitated class interpenetration and mobility. These *arrivistes* did not want to eliminate the class from which they came; they wanted to join the next rung up. To be sure, class has a central place in Gissing’s novels, and it had a central place in Gissing’s awareness. Many of Gissing’s shabby genteel characters cling to class identification even in the absence of money. Figures like Bernard Kingcote in *Isabel Clarendon*, for example, resent their lack of money while stubbornly holding on to their belief in class-based superiority. Significantly, however, characters like Kingcote know that the main impediment to the realization of their desires lies in their lack of money, not to their real or imagined station. In other words, pride produced by class membership aside, Gissing characters never realize fully any of the material or spiritual joys of life unless money enables them to do so.

Gissing, undoubtedly, was aware too that money and status often corresponded to church affiliation, and that these considerations also related strongly to Victorian conceptions of morality and respectability. In fact, Gissing visits the issue of Church wealth numerous times in his novels. Hugh McLeod discusses in *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* the “association between Anglican church-going and wealth, between Nonconformity and modest prosperity” (26). More to the point, McLeod documents the growing pattern wherein “the concept of respectability, tied frequently to church membership, became more democratic, admitting of a measure of earned status” (218). By “earned status,” I take McLeod to refer to a status that one initially does not have but that one somehow acquires. In some instances, a growing body of the “more prosperous section of the working class” became motivated by a desire to achieve and maintain respectability through religious association and moral conformity (218-19). Standish Meachum, in “The Church in the Victorian City,” states flatly that “...the move from chapel to Church was no less a sign of social improvement than the move from semi-detached to villa” (363). Christine DeVine, in discussing Hardy’s “The Ruined Maid,” observes that “[i]ssues of morality, it seems were inextricably linked with class issues... .” Furthermore, Devine notes that having a certain level of morality often presupposes one’s having enough money (*Class in Turn-of-the Century Novels* 79). Though, as J. F. C. Harrison has pointed out the “The Victorian Gospel of Success,” self-help literature, itself an indication of the merging of religion and capitalism, often tempered the promises of realizing financial gain through the “religion of success,” with assurances that “it was character, not wealth, that mattered ultimately,” Gissing and writers like him knew enough of the brutal realities of poverty to reject this rather transparent rationalization (164). Ida Starr, in *The Unclassed*, may have had the virtue of honesty regarding her choice of prostitution as a profession, but she was able to leave this

mode of existence and to begin the practice of philanthropy in earnest only when she inherited money from her slumlord Grandfather. In her case, money, acquired indirectly through the unscrupulous rapacity of an entrepreneur, literally makes respectability possible. Certainly, Gissing portrays immoral people who also happen to be wealthy. Conversely, some of his characters, like Jane Snowden in *The Nether World*, reject wealth in order to preserve their integrity. Also, Gissing at times demonstrates pointedly that money cannot guarantee moral improvement, a fact that he knew experimentally from his own attempts to assist his first wife, Nell, to rise above her alcoholism and her notorious proclivity for prostitution.⁷ Despite these exceptions, however, one finds Gissing examining in his novels over and over again this idea that money can solve most problems, and he never quite abandons his lurking conviction that, in his case anyway, money can alleviate suffering. Although a character like Biffin in *New Grub Street* nobly chooses suicide rather than sacrifice his artistic standards for money, Gissing plays this choice against the prevailing Christian scheme of morality, in which suicide constituted a sin serious enough that it deprived the departed of the Prayer Book burial service (Rowell 12).

Overall, Gissing clearly recognizes statistically, as it were, that poverty generally equals squalor, drunkenness, prostitution, thievery, and violence. With money, one can more likely keep one's marriage intact, one can afford a pew in the church, one can provide security for one's children, and one can live in an atmosphere of comfort as opposed to one of abject degradation. The reader sees in Gissing a consistent correspondence between morality, working frequently in conjunction with its allies religion and the church, and money.

After all, money, as Simon James indicates in *Unsettled Accounts: Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing*, is increasingly a “signifier,” in Gissing's fiction, and everything it buys is “the signified” (12). Hence, both literally and linguistically, money is everything.

Money is God, a fact Carlyle blatantly, and not entirely facetiously, enunciated in *Past and Present*, a book which Gissing read with approval. Gissing, who lionized Carlyle “as a poet” and as a great man, thought that Carlyle’s work was intended to “inspire with a lofty enthusiasm” rather than to provide “practical direction” (*Collected Letters II*, 40).⁸ To that end, then, of providing this direction, Gissing’s early novels often constitute a working out of Carlylean rhetoric in everyday life. Significantly, readers considered the young Carlyle, according to Bernard M. G. Reardon, “as a religious writer,” though not an orthodox one (*Religious Thought* 277). Gissing, we will see, embarked sporadically on the quintessential quest of many Victorians, like Carlyle, who were disaffected by traditional religious tenets. That is, he was driven by the desire to replace Christianity with some other motivating creed. Diana Maltz has written a very illuminating essay entitled “Practical Aesthetics and Decadent Rationale in George Gissing” on the subject of one of Gissing’s flirtations with a substitute for religion: aestheticism. Typically, Gissing at first embraced the movement because it seemed to unify “beauty in life and social reform” (57). This statement, made in a letter to his brother Algernon in 1884, was followed in a subsequent letter in which he compared Ruskin to an Old Testament prophet. Gissing thought of aestheticism in religious terms, comparing it favorably, as Maltz points out, to Christianity in *The Unclassed*. Some decade and a half later, in 1898, Gissing had turned against the aesthetic movement, despairing of any use it might have had in raising the cultural level of the poor (57). Part of his change in attitude, Maltz claims, came from Gissing’s disillusionment with the working class and his unwillingness to associate himself with “the masses” (59). Maltz’s essay clarifies for the reader how Gissing, even in his embrace of aestheticism, “adopted bourgeois reformers’ short sided fantasy of cleaning up the working classes” by exposing them to culture and giving them a bath and clean clothes. What I find interesting about Maltz’s discussion is that

Gissing portrays the notion of “the aesthetic effecting a change of heart,” a conversion, usually a failed one (59). As it did in the case of other social reform movements, the Evangelical pattern of radical spiritual alteration clearly impressed itself into aestheticism. That he ultimately landed on a dark and inverted form of anti-faith, if only after several dalliances with social reform movements and with replacements for religion, derives in part, no doubt, from his early attachment to Carlyle. Perhaps at all events, if one had to identify the overarching cohesive theme of Gissing’s work, one could do no better than by quoting Carlyle’s *Past and Present* on “the Hell of the English.”

But indeed this Hell belongs naturally to the Gospel of Mammonism, which also has its corresponding Heaven. For there *is* one Reality among so many Phantasms; about one thing we are entirely in earnest: the making of money. [...] Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws of war, named ‘fair competition’ and so forth, it is a mutual hostility. We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that *Cash-payment* is not the sole relation of human beings (277)

Gissing’s novels embrace the “Reality” of Carlyle’s concept of Mammonism. They demonstrate Mammonism in action, so to speak. Here we see something very characteristic of both Carlyle and Gissing: a tendency to identify hell and other religious concepts with industrialism and consumerism. As critics such as Michael Wheeler have argued about Gissing in *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology*, “hell is a recurrent controlling metaphor,” and, in Gissing, it exists physically in the slums. Gissing’s “close examination of physical conditions in the slums of late-nineteenth-century London, and his more impressive psychological impoverishment in the depressing environment of mean streets, broadly correspond to the *poena sensus* [physical torment] and *poena damni* [absence of God] of the theologians” (202). Gissing makes it clear that this hell originates as a result of the gross class inequities inherent in nineteenth-century capitalism. Unlike Carlyle, however, who seemed to believe early in his

career that the chokehold of money could be ameliorated by a renovation, if not a full restoration, of ethical responsibility between the classes, Gissing often capitulates to an admission that the cash nexus is, if not, as Carlyle says, “the sole relation of human beings,” it is at least the primary one.⁹ Absent or present, money determines the nature of lived experience, of actuality, in Gissing’s novels. The making of money, or the possession of it by other means, empowers potential for discovering and experiencing meaning, and meaning manifests partly out of the need for God. Even though characters misuse money from time to time, that potential for finding teleological significance simply does not exist in a practical sense without access to, or possession of, money.

Critical Commentary on Gissing and Religion

Given, then, the obvious fact that Gissing handles religious questions with some dexterity, particularly as they relate to economic ones, the reader is at a loss to explain the relative paucity of concentrated critical attention to this topic. However, as I have said, the subject of religion in Gissing has attracted the notice of some critics even if the critical treatment of religion and its function in Gissing’s work, especially but not exclusively as it pertains to the questions I intend to investigate about class, money, labor, and other economic problems, is more often incidental than otherwise. Debbie Harrison, for instance, in “The Deadliest Enemy of the Poor?” in *The Gissing Journal* mentions an “inversion of Christian imagery” in relation to Gissing’s treatment of alcoholism in *The Nether World*, but she does not pursue the idea much further.¹⁰ One might say, then, that such discussions as do exist on Gissing and religion take place almost parenthetically, though certainly some commentary on this topic is substantial and provocative. However, as I have said already, I am aware of no work that devotes its entire attention to the role of religion in the novels of George Gissing, despite the fact that Gissing

criticism and scholarship since 1960 has undergone a significant explosion. Gissing can no longer be considered “neglected” thanks in large part to the restorative work of Jacob Korg and the prodigious efforts of the ubiquitous Pierre Coustillas. Still and all, the critical insights into Gissing and religion amount primarily to a few standard observations and assumptions. As far as they go, these insights are true, but no one has really analyzed the various components of religion as they fit together in the Gissing canon. Essentially, critics concede that Gissing is an atheist or agnostic (Delaney *George Gissing: A Life*, 35); that Gissing ignores or attacks religion (Korg “The Spiritual Theme of *Born in Exile*,” 141); that Gissing recognizes the manipulation of religion as a means of social control, as critics such as Chérifa Krifa Mbarek, in “Compassion and Selfishness in Gissing’s Slum Novels,” point out (5); that Gissing doubts the ability of the church to bring about social amelioration (DeVine “The Fiction of Class” 27); and that Gissing believes “religious zeal” to be “mind-numbing” and false (Coustillas “Gissing and the Theatre” 9). One early critic, Greenough White, speculates that Gissing may have been an unacknowledged Anglican, based on evidence he gleans from Gissing’s picture of the devout but reasonable Mrs. Morton in *The Whirlpool* (151). Writing in 1912, J. M. Kennedy, in *English Literature: 1880-1905*, remarks that Gissing “was sufficiently Christian to guess that some form of religion” might reduce human suffering (265-6). Kennedy also thinks that Gissing’s works are “depressing in the sense in which we speak of the Book of Job as depressing, or Dante ” (277). None of these statements, except possibly White’s, is categorically false, and, actually, I think his remark is tongue in cheek. In fact, Kennedy’s comments about Gissing reveal a fact that many critics ignore about him, that Gissing did not unilaterally condemn religion in some of its functional applications. The overall impression criticism about Gissing and religion convey, however, is misleading. Gissing’s attitude toward religion embraces more ambiguity, and his

work discloses more authorial interest than such pat summations as these suggest. An extensive review of some of the major criticism having to do with Gissing and religion would do little more than confirm in more detail the standard assumptions I mentioned above. Obviously, an incidental assessment of the content and validity of such extant critical commentary on Gissing will make it possible to posit further applications of theory to a wider range of his works, but a rigorous review of the material in and of itself is not really necessary. Suffice it to say that critical identification of Gissing's orientation toward religion, while essentially correct, does not take adequate account of the spectrum of approaches Gissing utilizes in his work. Again, Greenough White, writing in 1898 in an essay entitled "Novelist of the Hour," decries "[...] a view of life that dispenses with all reference to God [...]" in Gissing's works (142). Since Gissing does not entirely omit mention of God in his novels, White's interpretation falls somewhat wide of the truth. Admittedly, references to God are meager in Gissing's novels, but one might more accurately deduce from this scarcity that Gissing merely discounts the activity of God in the phenomenological realm of experience. More accurately, Gissing depicts the ways that money displaces this activity. Still, White's complaint does recognize the diminishment of religion in the materialist world of Gissing's novels, something White alludes to as Gissing's "[...] remorseless analysis of selfish and worldly motives and passions" (142). Jacob Korg, in "Division of Purpose in George Gissing," cites a frequently quoted letter to Gissing's brother Algernon in January 1880, in which Gissing specifically targets "[...] certain features of our present religious and social life [...]" as especially objectionable (67). Korg confirms the commonly known fact that, after his return to London following his time in America and before the publication of *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing "[...] was a poor young intellectual of revolutionary tendencies" (66). As such, Gissing would be expected to challenge religious

certainty. C. J. Francis, in “Gissing and Schopenhauer,” joins the consensus of criticism in recognizing Gissing’s solidly grounded “religious skepticism” that forms the basis of Godwin Peak’s viewpoint in the 1892 novel *Born in Exile* (110). The consistency in Gissing’s outlook regarding religion *per se*, as the observations of these widely separated critics demonstrate, remains relatively steady throughout his career.

Robert Selig, more than most critics, recognizes the importance of religion in Gissing’s work. Selig, in his biography *George Gissing*, notices that Gissing, from a very early age, wondered why his father could not shake his mother from her Anglican faith, a fact which paradoxically illustrates both Gissing’s rejection of Christianity and his ongoing interest in it (2). His novels, in fact, often pose the same question: why has religion survived? Selig discusses religious issues at some length, not only as they appear in the obvious books having to do with these matters, such as *The Emancipated* and *Born in Exile*, but also in novels in which religion plays an apparently minor role, such as *New Grub Street* (49-52, 63-66, 61-62). He mentions briefly the pairing of advertising with theology in *In the Year of Jubilee*, though he does not take this opportunity to elaborate extensively on what I believe constitutes an extremely intriguing tendency in Gissing: the pairing of religion and money in the novels (81). Of course, some very outstanding studies of money itself in Gissing’s work do exist. Simon J. James, in *Unsettled Accounts: Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing*, traces the legacy of money-obsession in Dickens all the way to Gissing’s scrutiny of the subject throughout his career. James has virtually nothing to say, however, about religion in Gissing’s narrative, nor does he say much about the relationship between religion and money detectable in much of the author’s fiction. Paul Delaney, in *George Gissing: A Life*, comments that the author at the age of twenty-one conducted his “[...] musings on human destiny [...] from “a godless world” formed from the

background of Strauss, Darwin, and Schopenhauer (35). Delaney summarizes the influence of Schopenhauer on Gissing by recounting Gissing's eventual rejection of Positivism in "The Hope of Pessimism," an essay that also discounts any hope in either Christianity or, for good measure, scientific progress (62).¹¹ Interestingly, positivism, as Charles D. Cashdollar makes plain, has affinities with Christianity on several levels. It emphasizes selfless altruism, human solidarity, the fusion of divine and human natures, and the concept of humanity as children of God (*The Transformation of Theology* 15). For Positivism, God, in fact, became "Collective Humanity" (12). About the institutionalized state church, Delaney says, Gissing "[...] waxed indignant about the powers and privileges of the Church of England" (34). Tellingly, Delaney notes, what Gissing liked least about the established Church "was how rich it was" (37). One cannot help but notice again that in Gissing's mind religious issues and monetary ones connect. Delaney and others, though, while they tend to confirm that in Gissing's novels, the author's discourse about personal and institutional religion very often relates in some way to money and class, they do not link these issues unambiguously or consistently.

Clearly, Gissing recognizes the way capitalism entwines itself around most manifestations of religious expression. Gissing seems to have held an idea similar to the one expressed by Marx in "The Jewish Question." While not precisely calling for an abolishment of the church, Marx does call for its reduction to the level of "other elements of civil society" ("The Jewish Question" 48). Put another way, Gissing and Marx both advocate the stripping away of church privilege. Keeping in mind the widespread existence of abuses such as pew renting, discussed by K. S. Inglis in *Churches and the Working Class in Victorian England*, one cannot wonder at Gissing's outrage.¹² This practice, according to Inglis, did not relax its hold until 1900, but even its discontinuation failed to spur working class attendance in the Church of England, so

indelibly did the association of class and money with the Established Church remain fixed in the minds of the working class (55). Such clear indications of social partiality no doubt encouraged Gissing in his advocacy of shredding State favoritism from the Church. Writing to his brother Algernon in 1879, Gissing flatly recommends “Deprive the Church of all claim on the State” (*Collected Letters* 1, 149). Failing the implementation of that measure, Gissing approves of the individual’s exploitation of the Church as a form of redistributing the wealth, so to speak. Paul Delaney recounts Gissing’s own endorsement of mercantile aims behind Church ambition. Writing to his brother, Algernon, who was, incredibly, even more out at pocket on a regular basis than he was, Gissing endorses, in Delaney’s words, “using religion as the path to a more comfortable and secure life” (*George Gissing: A Life* 264). While Delaney sees this as an indication that Gissing recognized in the nineties that orthodoxy no longer mattered in the Church, that there were “no more Godwin Peaks” (264), I think that a case could be made for quite another argument. Since Gissing long disapproved of the immense wealth controlled by the Church of England, could not his approval of using preferment for personal gain constitute a form of protest? By all means, use the resources of the Church, which at all events are appropriated from the people at large, for the support of those who cannot find employment elsewhere. After all, this behavior had long been common practice among the clergy. Jacob Korg, in “The Spiritual Theme of *Born in Exile*,” cites this novel in a way that lends credence to my theory. Korg claims that Godwin Peak himself, in behaving deceptively, acts merely in keeping with his convictions. This “moral imperative,” as Korg puts it, is “to gain as much of life’s good as possible” (136). Again, none of this commentary should be taken to imply that Gissing agitated for the disappearance of religion, but rather that he recognizes clearly the kinds of interactions that occur between religion and economic activity. The wealth of the Church of

England, procured by mandatory tithes and state sanction, always offended Gissing's sense of justice. Whatever distaste Gissing had for the proletarian and the lumpen-proletariat, he never lost his sense of sympathy for their plight. In 1903, near the end of his life, Gissing wrote in his *Commonplace Book*, "I cannot look at the hands of a toiling man or woman without feeling deeply wretched. To compare my own with them, shames me" (54). Gissing's letters and novels invite fresh readings about the novelist's complex approach to religious matters, especially as they relate to economic ones.

Money, Class, Feminist Identity

I need to formulate some refinements to my argument that Gissing demonstrates a linkage between religion and capital. Several studies analyzing the interaction of women and religion in the nineteenth century have documented, as Sue Morgan has said in her Introduction to *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain: 1750-1900*, "the parallel development of the organized women's movement and a massive expansion of female religious activity" (2). Some of this research has to do with the role religion plays in the acquisition of self-identity by female characters. For Gissing, money questions often exist side by side with his treatment of women and religion. In *Unsettled Accounts*, Simon James, while not addressing the relationship of money and religion *per se*, does comment pertinently on Gissing's need to provide "a realm of value [...] beyond the money-ordered reality that he portrays with such fidelity" (148). At times, this attempt to locate value finds expression in religious-oriented language or in the context of religious elements of incident or character, particularly in the instance of Gissing's portrayal of certain female characters. To some extent, Ruth Jenkins' observation that, during a period when "religious discourse became fused with dissent and doubt, secular literature became saturated with biblical allusions" applies to Gissing (*Reclaiming Myths of Power* 26). As I have noted

already, examples of this rhetorical trend abound in certain of Gissing's novels, most markedly in *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, *Thryza*, and *The Nether World*. Obviously, as Emma Liggins and others have clearly established, Gissing ties his analysis of various aspects of the "woman question" in ways almost inseparable from the economic status of women. In *George Gissing, the Working Woman, and Urban Culture*, Liggins maintains credibly, among other things, that Gissing's "portrayal of both the working mother, and of the pleasure-loving work-girl, indicates his recognition of alternative models of working-class femininity" (31).

Class, as Margaret Mitchell reminds us in "Gissing's Moral Mischief: Prostitutes and Narrative Resolution," is not "a condition that exists in isolation," but instead a "relation" (413). Clearly, this "relation" of class, which I take to possess gendered and personal dimensions, depends largely on money. Gissing writes the connection of the economic status of women into other social and cultural phenomena such as marital issues, public involvement, vocational access, educational opportunities, and religious expression. The struggle of women to find a self-determined role is closely linked in Gissing to all of these social processes, and religion is no exception. Gissing knew that, as Julie Melnyk points out in *Victorian Religion: Faith and Life in Britain*, "religion was for Victorian women one of the few areas of life in which they could claim equality – even superiority – and religious activity was one of the few socially approved outlets for their talent, energy, and creativity" (123). Several female characters in Gissing use and respond to religion in just such ways as Melnyk describes, ways that partially mark out their distinctiveness. Even so, the kind of religious activity Gissing's women characters indulge in are, with few notable exceptions, limited by class and money. Financial circumstances, in addition, frequently determine the choices women can make in the marketplace, and as David Kramer comments in "George Gissing and Women's Work," "the need for single women to find work

could be desperate” (317). Most critics, like Molly Youngkin, acknowledge that Gissing explores various levels of female “agency,” and they point out that this topic resonated with “liberal-feminist critics of the 1890s” (“All She Knew Was That She Wanted to Live” 72). They see equally that this autonomy hinges on women having, as Nancy does in *In the Year of Jubilee*, “financial opportunities” (73). Complicating this necessity, as Lise Shapiro Sanders explains in *Consuming Fantasies*, Victorians often made ethical assumptions about women who engaged in mercantile activity, discerning a “metonymic link between the shopgirl and the prostitute” (144). This kind of judgment made matters difficult for women attempting to carve out a niche for themselves apart from restrictive domesticity. Nonetheless, in Gissing, virtually everything, including personality, hinges on money or the lack of it. Therefore, women were caught in an untenable situation. Without money, they could not assert absolute independence even when they desired to do so. Personality, of course, consists of a multiplicity of factors; often, religious attitudes find a place among these elements, and, in a number of novels, Gissing associates religious behavior with several female characters from different economic and class circumstances. In most cases, this affiliation relates directly to a crucial element of their identity. Gissing, then, uses monetary and religious allusions, frequently contiguous with one another, in a way which is consistent with a discernible artistic methodology, in order to facilitate his examination of female individuality. This technique lends to his novels an added dimension of both charged ambiguity and relevance to issues confronting women in the last two decades of the nineteenth century and beyond.

The Residuum of Calvinism

One of the contentions I intend to pursue, then, has to do with the apparent use of religion as a means of reading Gissing’s views on other subjects. We know from his *Commonplace Book*

that Gissing meditated on religious issues extensively. Some of his responses to Christianity were negative ones; others revealed some level of approval.¹³ Religious terminology and religious references function in his novels as signs that exist in communication with other signs.¹⁴ As I have said, remarkable correlations exist in Gissing's work between religious references and economic ones. Although these connections do not form an inflexible rule, consistent patterns emerge nevertheless. In fact, I contend that Gissing's well-established pessimism, an outlook often attributed, alternately, to his reading of Schopenhauer on the one hand, and to his unfortunate but innate defeatism on the other, has much to do with an essentially fallen view of man, filtered through a deliberately secularizing lens. Some would, and many no doubt will, argue that such a monster as secular, atheistic Calvinism is a contradiction in terms, but that beast is precisely the one I intend to unleash. To my comfort, other critics have posited versions of this idea in some form or another. Geoffrey Rowell states flatly that "[m]uch Christian eschatology in the nineteenth century was the eschatology of debased Calvinism, and the reaction to it was in part the reaction to a determinist theology of divine decrees" (16-17). In his astonishing and insightful *Damnation and Deviance*, psychologist Mordechai Rotenburg applies the theory that Max Weber first proposed which states that, due to the lingering effects of Calvinism, individual economic failure equates to damnation, the most alienating determinist category of all (11). As we shall see, this sense of doom pervades Gissing in his personal life and in his fiction. On top of the generalized ubiquity of Calvinism in Western culture, Gissing undeniably and unequivocally knew Calvin first hand. In his *Commonplace Book*, sometime between January 1892 and October 1893, Gissing claims that "The three great *Prefaces* are: Calvin's to his *Institutes*, Thauanus's to his *History*, & Polybius's to his" (37). In another place, Gissing writes "What a delusion it is to imagine that the days of sheer Puritanism are over!" (47). Gissing's culturally and personally

acquired sense of determinism is the factor I have in mind when I argue that Gissing, and other novelists for that matter, inherited their pessimism through this form of Christianity in particular. J. Hillis Miller, though he may not have intended to do so, identifies in *The Disappearance of God* one fractured rendering of this vestigial Calvinism in discussing the alternatives inherent in Matthew Arnold's reworking of Christianity. One of those alternatives admits of an ongoing splitting of this world with its "origin," a concept that summons all manner of Christian themes.

On the other hand, it is possible that the multitudinous world has no divine origin or else has completely broken with that origin. If that is so, then the world must be defined materialistically, as the aimless combination and recombination of elements which have existed as an isolated brute mass from all time. [...] If such is the situation, then no retrogressive remounting of the stream of life will ever reach anything essentially different from the present condition of things. (226)

Arnold's discussion of the possibilities inherent within his dual modalities of a Godless universe or a universe which has become separated from some original divinity may not, as first glance, seem to have anything to do with Calvinism at all. In fact, however, the situation Arnold describes corresponds, as I will argue shortly, with an implicit but inevitable result of Calvinism: a sense of the chaos underlying the consciousness that humans cannot know their destiny. In some ways, Calvinism constitutes a variation of what I believe to be a Western, if not universal, cultural archetype. This recurrent pattern sometimes has a religious basis, but not always. Broadly speaking, Calvinism corresponds to what the Greeks called fate and what the Germanic myths denominated *wyrd*. Calvinism superimposes, it is true, an anthropomorphic and paternalistic agency onto this concept while somehow managing to inject the conflicting ideas of morality and personal responsibility (which is effectively nullified but not existentially eradicated) into the basic assumption that humankind cannot ultimately control, verify, or even know its own ultimate prospects. As proof of the essential ubiquity of these concepts, admittedly

nuanced according to culture, I can cite the medieval, Christian, yet obviously pre-Calvinist model of the Wheel of Fortune, a device used to explain accident within a belief system that insists on a personal Deity who controls everything. My account of the resemblance between these ideas does not insist on total correspondence. It merely points to a connection and to some basic human response to the apparent meaninglessness of existence. Calvinism produced an especially nasty and hopeless version of this archetype, at least in the desiccated form suggested by Rowell and others.

To return to Calvinism as a historical process that surfaces in literary and other artifacts, then, Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* establishes rather firmly the presence of an influential if arguably unconscious Calvinist strain in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Watt demonstrates the pervasion throughout the novel of ideas basic to Calvinism, such as "untiring stewardship of the material gifts of God" (73), "spiritual introspection" in the individual's attempt to determine "election and reprobation" (75), and the emphasis on direct, rather than mediated, experience of God (74). A close reading of the novel reveals that Watt's basic premise is correct, despite the qualifications placed on Watt's reading by Michael McKeon in *The Origins of the English Novel*. Indeed, McKeon bases his objections to Watt's ideas primarily on his observation that "middle class individualism originated not in eighteenth – but in thirteenth-century England" (3). McKeon's argument that the novel continued to demonstrate the "problem of the persistence of the romance and the aristocracy" (4) does not negate my contention, based largely on Watt, that the development of the novel *during and after* the eighteenth century shows the strong (note that I do say "exclusive") influence of a Calvinist economic consciousness. McKeon himself allows that "Watt is judicious and illuminating on the ambivalence of Defoe's Calvinist otherworldliness ..." (2). Neither does McKeon's argument that Calvinism (and Lutheranism)

originally emphasized, not only election, but “a mode of activity” in validating sainthood, nullify Watt’s assertions about Calvinism and election (McKeon 192). Furthermore, I think that McKeon’s contention here also supports Max Weber’s thought about the Protestant ethic, a matter to which I will return. Whether or not Defoe intended to incorporate Calvinist ideas into the experiences of his protagonist, Crusoe, these tenets, however imperfectly and inconsistently, permeate this, a truly prototypical realist and bourgeoisie novel. Watt brilliantly delineates the effects of the Puritan emphasis on individuality, of “possessing one’s soul intact from a sinful world.” This individuality resulted in “a more absolute, secular and personal alienation from society” (91). Watt also recognizes the exploitative aspects of this genus of individualized and alienated humanity, an emphasis that one finds present in Gissing and so many other Victorian novelists. In Watt’s estimation, “what really occupies man is something that makes him solitary wherever he is, and too aware of the interested nature of any relationship with other human beings to find any consolation there” (91). One must not fail to notice the capitalist implications of the word “interested” here, for I believe with Watt that Defoe clearly understood the relation of self interest to the evolving dominant capitalist model to the plight of his protagonist. This plight, I believe, continued to exert influence in the development of the novel throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “Interest,” became indeed a catchphrase that encompassed subject matter as various as marriage, religion, and economic activity. Watt discusses the “particularizing approach to character” and “the thought processes within the individual’s consciousness” that began to dominate the philosophies of Descartes and Locke, and consequently, among other things, realist fiction, placing huge emphasis on “personal identity” (18). What Watt and others address indirectly, albeit less clearly, is the extent to which Calvinism in particular and the distinctive perspective common to many brands of Biblically

based, Protestant Christianity create an inevitable level of chaos and uncertainty in the experience both of believers and of others who live within the Western tradition. Geoffrey Rowell speaks directly to this very point. Rowell says that whenever the adherent to the doctrine of predestination could not testify to “personal assurance of salvation,” he or she perceived “the eternal decrees of God” as “a determinist system.” Under these circumstances, “[t]he government of the universe could easily appear mechanistic and impersonal ...” (27).

The Protestant insistence on the individual’s responsibility to interpret Scripture for herself results in incredible psychic pressure. J. Hillis Miller hits upon a profound insight when he locates the source of the progressive fragmentation of personal consciousness and social consensus in the rise of Protestantism generally, and he situates the “dispersal of the cultural unity of man, God, nature, and language within the demise of the collective Catholic accord” (*The Disappearance of God* 3). Luther’s famous insistence on the necessity for the believer to decide truth for oneself in the capacity of one’s own priest makes for greater autonomy, but it comes at the expense of peace of mind and certainty. Historically, it also led to at least two ambivalent consequences in European society. In the first place, it fostered increased self-questioning and doubt, resulting in the related growth of self-consciousness, a trend which Rousseau’s writings arguably germinated and epitomized. Charles D. Cashdollar supports this notion, claiming that Protestantism brought “...dissent, questioning, negation, and dissolution...” that could not be reined in, leading to the Enlightenment on one hand and “anarchy” on the other (10). Secondly, it encouraged the testing of hypotheses in a manner consistent with the modern scientific method. Alongside of, and probably in spite of these decentralizing tendencies, the Bible, though diminished in stature, continued to exert influence, confronting the reader with many admonitions that seem resoundingly clear in both their theological import and in their

behavioral implications. Unfortunately, clarity in one biblical passage is undermined by ambiguity in another. All Bible-believing Christians find it necessary to ignore, rationalize, or render hyperbolic dozens of mutually exclusive statements. Compare, as one example of passages difficult to reconcile, Luke 9:59-62 and Exodus 20:12. Modern objections that the New Testament supersedes the Old would not have made any difference to the typical Christian of the nineteenth century. They regarded, as many still do, the New Testament as fulfilling, not replacing nor negating, the Old Testament. Besides, one could cite numerous contradictory passages within the New Testament without too much trouble. Hebrews 6:4-6 seems to say that believers can lose their salvation irrevocably. Romans 10:9-11 implies otherwise.¹⁵ At times, reconciliation of contradiction or ambiguity is easier to accomplish than others. Also, as Walter E. Houghton reminds us in *The Victorian Frame of Mind*, unbelievers in the Victorian period cheerfully used the Bible's inaccuracies and contradictions against Christianity, but they simultaneously had to endure the pressure created by opposing a larger social consensus which privileged the Bible (398-399). To some extent then, agnostics and atheists were just as submerged in Biblicism as adherents to faith. Frank Kermode, in *The Genesis of Secrecy*, has most elegantly described the two schools, which, broadly speaking, persist to this day, of gospel interpretation. These opposing hermeneutic camps were produced plausibly, I believe, during the maelstrom of nineteenth-century religious debate. Kermode has also captured the difficulties encountered by each group.

Yet we continue to distinguish those within, who know the truth before the parable breaks in and corrupts it, and those without, to whom it is not given to do so. For the former there is nothing in the stories but the appearance of explanations [...]. Yet to them also the stories are opaque. They may be content that narratives which have the air of open proclamations are in fact obscurely oracular; but in the end they too are prevented from making definitive interpretations. (125)

These groups, one of whom based its knowledge on what it considered, scientific evidence notwithstanding, the reliability of Scripture, and the other on geological and biological evidence, correspond roughly to analogous classifications today. Kermode, incidentally, writes as one who interprets the Gospels' record of the crucifixion "as historical accounts," but who, at the same time, claims to be a "secular critic" whose observations have no relevance "for Christian belief" (102). In taking this stance, he falls within the tradition of the German higher criticism so influential during the Victorian period. One can readily discern the applications of the psychology of Biblical dissonance to Defoe's portrayal of Crusoe, as my reading of Watt suggests. Spiritually and physically isolated, Crusoe must decipher Biblical conundrums without even the assistance of fellow believers. He is frequently unable to determine the scripturally "correct" way to respond to complex moral issues such as cannibalism. This inability results in confusion, and confusion ends in intellectual and practical chaos. This chaos must be resolved in some way. Much the same thing, albeit typically in a material framework, happens to Gissing's characters by virtue of their abandonment in a secularized society still interlaced with the vestiges of religious faith. Gissing confronts his characters with problems other than cannibalism, although in his capitalist competitive hell, some individuals come very near to consuming one another. Ironically, Calvinistic attitudes provide for both the cause and the cure of the disorder of meaninglessness. It produces a chaotic universe presided over by an ultimately capricious Deity but it does, at the same time, explain this universe, however circular the reasoning behind the explanation may appear. God's actions, one remembers, are attributable in Calvinism to no cause other than His will alone (*Calvin Institutes II*: 453). From the human standpoint, this will often looks inscrutable and unpredictable, even unjust, a matter Paul addresses in the ninth

chapter of Romans. Unbelievers suffer from the inscrutability of the universe as well, but they also endure the disadvantage of not having someone to blame. Still, in much Western fiction, I believe, election, the central tenet of Calvinism, becomes a theological expression of chaos in which the universe is at once indecipherable and, after a fashion, indifferent to human behavior. Calvinism posits a God who is unknown except through a puzzling, contradictory document whose pronouncements often anticipate Orwellian doublespeak. This God chooses who lives and who dies, who is saved and who is damned, all for reasons only He understands and which He does not choose to justify or explain. The Christian, forced to rely on the Bible, cannot but be aware of this aspect of God's nature; therefore, he must blunder about hopefully, interpreting God's will after the fact of experience. This *post facto* method of ordering events and attributing meaning constitutes the only order possible to the Bible-believing Christian, especially but not exclusively the Calvinist. Psychologically, this situation differs little from the one in which the individual adheres to a purposeless and godless view of existence. In either instance, one has no control over one's destiny. Life becomes chaotic and uncertain in a universe wherein true freedom is unattainable. Events are arbitrary; humans must interpret them the best they can. Much of Gissing's work mirrors this dichotomous teleological arrangement in ways that, although not always obvious, are nonetheless compelling and suggestive. In fact, although Gissing defines his world materialistically, a vision in which society can never really change, his fictional situation resembles, whether he knows it or not (and I think he does), the state of humankind as subject to the rigid prelapsarian decrees of the Calvinistic God. At its core, after all, Calvinism is a static system wherein things never vary from their original established status, a status that is essentially and primally evil. At the same time, from the human perspective, the very inertia of destiny renders creation inchoate and indecipherable. This situation leads to an

experiential situation analogous to a narrative theory Frederic Jameson describes in *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson quite credibly argues that the partially superseded Newtonian “billiard ball model of cause and effect” has not been completely nullified by the more modern “indeterminacy principle” (25). Rather, in Western consciousness, these ideas continue to be held in tension, allowing for the novelist’s ability to “secretly imply or project narratives ... of the historical sequence in which such individual periods take their place...” (28). This hypothesis accounts for the way in which Calvinism and other forms of Christianity can, and, during the Victorian period, did, continue to exert influence in literary texts, since, as Jameson puts it, “a sequence of historical events or texts and artifacts is rewritten in terms of some deeper, underlying, and more ‘fundamental’ narrative, of a hidden master narrative which is the allegorical key or figural content of the first sequence of empirical materials” (28). Referring to the way Althusserian criticism reveals the “clashing and contradictory elements” in a supposedly “unified text,” Jameson provides a very solid theoretical framework for my contention that Calvinist ideas such as original sin, election, atonement, grace, and perseverance can find their way into purportedly secular or agnostic works. If in no other way, Christianity, through rationalism, which, Max Weber argues, descended from the principle of strict calculation of profit, a concept that originated from the Puritan sense of accountability to God, survives in much nineteenth century literature (76). Almost every major Victorian writer of ideas posed a response to these and other foundational Christian concepts, whether by reaction, allusion, or support. Whatever one thinks of the details of Weber’s theories, one must admit that, in Gissing’s money-oriented scheme of things, acquisitiveness and competition, themselves products of the Protestant-derived spirit of capitalism (Weber 75, 170-183), often comprise both the sin and the only redemption possible for the majority of humankind. In fact, although my

ideas find support in Weber's thought, I believe that my contention about the Christian elements in Gissing's work would stand reasonably securely without him.

Zombie Protestantism (Calvinism again)

Max Weber, as we have already seen, has spoken directly to the pattern of the retention of Protestant virtues, such as personal duty, within British and American cultures even when the supernatural specifics of Protestant belief have been discarded. Protestantism is dead, long live Protestantism. Weber's ideas, of course, address not so much the alienation of the individual that I have already discussed as one result of Calvinism, but rather the manner in which Protestantism has produced a paradoxically godless hypercapitalism. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber remarks that "people filled with the spirit of capitalism to-day tend to be indifferent, if not hostile, to the Church" (70). Gissing's works, I think, reflect this ambiguity. At any rate, Weber's larger argument that capitalism, or as he prefers, the "spirit of capitalism" flourishes most readily in a culture based on a Puritan (read Calvinist) foundation, finds ample reflection in much Victorian fiction, including Gissing's (44-45). Gissing, though no advocate of capitalism, nonetheless wrote within the context of a capitalist culture and was raised in a nominally, if divided, Protestant home. Relevant also to this discussion are certain remarks of Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson, in characterizing an observation made by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, addresses the issue of "structural limitation and ideological closure," which keeps the bourgeoisie intellectual from moving beyond bourgeoisie assumptions (52). Not surprisingly, then, Gissing retained a background orientation to the Protestant values that paradoxically caused the diminishment of faith in its evolving emphasis on material wealth, an emphasis that stemmed from Puritan notions of election. In several documents written between 1880 and 1882 before Gissing reached his twenty-fifth birthday, the author indicates

significant interest in religious issues. Writing to Algernon in February 11, 1881, Gissing expresses a distinction between his rejection of the extra-normal aspects of Christianity and his acknowledgment of its moral value, commenting on his conviction that, while “Revelation” is useless, one might still embrace “[...] the name of Christian as significant of a noble code of ethics, dismissing all supernatural sanction as historical error [...]” (*Collected Letters II*, 14). Gissing, in the same letter, goes to some pains to emphasize that his embrace of Positivism is not the “dogmatic Atheism” of a Bradlaugh (*Collected Letters II*, 14). This insistence, perhaps unconsciously, serves to distance Gissing from absolute hostility to religion, but it also indicates his unconscious embrace of bourgeois morality. Of course, other Victorians, notably George Eliot, held similar views, and for similar reasons. Having read Strauss and other detractors of Biblical literalism, many Victorians nonetheless concluded that Biblical morality might retain validity in some instances, whereas Biblical historical fact did not. Traditionally, one of the major problems with interpreting Gissing has always been what some critics have denominated his tendency to shift positions.¹⁶ Gissing is at times a dichotomy, or perhaps he is, not in a demonic but in an ideological sense, legion. By this I do not mean that Gissing entertained belief, but that he did not always take an unequivocally negative view of religion. In an early letter to his brother Algernon, dated 16 May 1880, Gissing wrote in a reasonable, almost conciliatory vein about his agnosticism and those who held to faith.

But remember, one of my principles is that *absolute* truth is – at present, at least, - unattainable & I do not *condemn* those who think otherwise; merely differ from them. Herein you are unjust to me. Yet again, in a matter like this, the burden of proof certainly rests upon the Supernaturalists. An agnostic, like myself, i.e., - one who says of things beyond his senses he *knows & can know nothing*, - is very justified in refusing to be converted by those who, you will surely grant me, are convinced merely by their *sentiment*. [...] I only wished you to sympathize with me, & believe *I* was genuinely convinced. Above all, *condemnation* of opponents,

as long as they confine themselves to intellectual regions, is a word out of my vocabulary. (Collected Letters 1, 273)

At other times, as in an unpublished essay he wrote entitled “The Hope of Pessimism,” Gissing tried to qualify his posture about Christianity in ways which strike one as an attempt to separate its current character, perverted by capitalism, from its primitive form.

Christianity in its modern form of optimistic Protestantism is a delusion and a snare. In accommodating itself, step by step, to the growth of material civilization, this so-called religion of Christ has directly encouraged the spirit of egotism which inevitably accompanies an optimistic faith; its latest outcome is the predominance of commercial competition, with its doctrine of “Every man for himself, and the Devil take the hindmost.” What has the Christianity of today in common with the teachings of a prophet whose birth from a virgin mother, and whose own virginity, symbolized that renunciation of the world of flesh which was the strait and narrow way to the kingdom of heaven? It is in the pessimistic philosophy as developed by Schopenhauer that we find the true successor of pure Christianity. [...] The establishment of the kingdom of righteousness can only ensue upon the destruction of egotism, and egotism only perishes together with optimism, together with “the will to live.” (96)

Although at first glance, Gissing’s embrace of pessimism seems to verge on outright nihilism, a position most critics ascribe to Gissing at face value, one detects a very profound understanding of the contrast between authentic Christianity and the trivializing, self-serving adaptations to Christianity made by some Victorians, adaptations made for the sake of justifying commercialism and consumerism and serving to eviscerate the New Testament emphasis on self-denial and renunciation. One notices also here the combining in Gissing’s awareness of economic and religious activity. Ironically, Gissing’s pessimistic view of life corresponds more closely to Biblical Christianity than does the Victorian capitalist appropriation of religion which did more to destroy genuine primitive Christianity than ever science did. The New Testament contains a strain of asceticism and worldly repudiation that Gissing mimics very closely in “The Hope of Pessimism.” Although his remarks evince a certain amount of parody, Gissing speaks of a time

when humanity will regard death as a boon, an end to the miseries of existence: “The grave will become a symbol of joy; those who have departed will be spoken of as the happy ones, and the tears of the mourner will be checked by his bitter reason” (97). Though absent any promise of an afterlife, this declaration, which in and of itself resonates with Biblical cadences, conforms to the Christian view of this world as a vale of tears. Jacob Korg points out that, even more astonishingly, Gissing argues in “The Hope of Pessimism” that “even after people have been educated out of their religious ideas, they will still think in religious terms unconsciously.” Not only that, but science “will ultimately confront the unknowable, thus inspiring a sense of wonder that can only result in a return to mysticism” (52). Science, in other words, will lead humankind back to faith, not away from it. Gissing’s clever manipulation of a fundamentally New Testament concept, the refutation of earthly attachment, in the very act of denying its corollary, personal immortality, combined with his admission of the ineradicable nature of religious belief, typifies the subtlety of Gissing’s handling of religion in the rest of his work. It also denotes a certain level of attitudinal ambiguity. Gissing struggles with the residual social effects of Puritanism as Weber describes them, but he discerns the anti-materialist and subversive elements of Biblical teaching that Calvinism, in its decayed form, tends to suppress. If one can conclude nothing else, one can certainly see that Gissing’s interest in religious questions adheres closely to Gissing’s perception of the capitalist program.

To a great extent, then, the numerous manifestations of the linkage of economics and religion in Gissing’s novels have to do with the unique combination of interests and events in Gissing’s life. However, these elements also depend upon the existence of at least two broad cultural trends that culminated in the nineteenth century, not only in Britain but in Europe as a whole. One of these trends clearly involved the transfusion of Calvinism into disparate political,

religious, philosophical, and economic areas. This state of affairs, which had been evolving at least since the time of the Reformation, particularly in England, also accounts for the resilience of Christian or pseudo-Christian ideology in the face of competing intellectual developments. In other words, it explains in part why, in spite of the growth of rationalism and science on the one hand and the revival of pantheism, mysticism, and alternative religions, usually Eastern, on the other, Christianity refused to die altogether. This tendency involved several processes, including those of mutation, fragmentation and assimilation. I have already mentioned Max Weber and his explanation of the persistence of Protestant ethics despite the waning of creedal adherence to Protestant doctrine (*Protestant Ethic* 70). To a degree, Weber's remarks pertain also to the subject presently under discussion: the survival of Christianity in general, at least in remnant form, and of the Calvinistic strains of it specifically. Although I do not intend to review this phenomenon in detail, I do need to confirm its existence because, as should be clear by now, it occupies a more or less central place in my argument about Gissing and religion. At all times, the endurance of certain aspects of Christian belief plays a role in my insistence that religion serves many functions in a significant part of Gissing's work. Furthermore, Gissing explores many stances towards Christianity, towards the church, towards spirituality, and towards practitioners of faith.

Before embarking on a study of the use, significance, and meaning of religion in selected novels of George Gissing, I must elaborate on one final point about this historical tendency that bears directly on manifestations of religious interest in nineteenth-century literature at large, and especially as it appears in fiction. The ensuing discussion will go far in enhancing what I have already said about the way Christianity, seemingly foundering amid a multitude of competing ideologies and social movements, nonetheless continued to exert a powerful influence, both

subliminally and directly, on British culture as a whole and on literature as one of the constituents of that culture. More importantly, the following consideration also proposes one more explanation as to why Gissing connected economics and religion in his mind. Terry Eagleton, in *Literary Theory*, recounts quite convincingly the transformation of literature, in both its denotative implications and in its functional operations, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Eagleton reminds us that the word “ideology” means “the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in” (14). He clarifies further that ideology implies “those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power” (15). Eagleton traces the shifting of literature from its eighteenth century role as a “vital instrument” in inculcating into “the increasingly powerful but spiritually rather raw middle classes” values such as “polite social manners” and “common cultural standards” (17). With the threatening revolutionary developments in France and the consolidation of “the utilitarian ideology of early industrial capitalist England,” literature underwent a change in emphasis and purpose (18-19). In part because of the Romantic reaction to the reduction of “human relations to market exchanges,” a phenomenon Gissing understood and documented a century later in his novels, literature became “a whole alternate ideology” which valorized non-utilitarian conceptions of imagination and creativity (19). As Eagleton puts it, without “a proper place within the social movements which might actually have transformed industrial capitalism into a just society, the writer was increasingly driven back into the solitariness of his own creative mind” (20). One result of this isolation was that the artist-writer became the revolutionary but increasingly impotent outcast. The other was that the artist became deliberately irrelevant, focusing on what became, in the latter half of the century, the “art for art’s sake” ideal (21).

Literature, and indeed all forms of artistic expression, “was becoming a commodity like anything else ...” (20). These transformations accelerated the estrangement of literature from social relevance, the position it had held to some extent since, interestingly enough, the Puritan Revolution, a phenomenon documented by Michael Walzer in *Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics*. Essentially, Walzer argues that “it was the Calvinists who first switched the emphasis of political thought from the prince to the saint (or the band of saints) and then constructed a theoretical justification for independent political action” (2). Amazingly, the Puritans formed a pattern of revolutionist behavior that survived, or found emulation in secular form, in movements as diverse and contradictory as Romanticism, Positivism, Marxism, Socialism, Evangelicalism, and Fabianism, to name a few. In Gissing, one can detect in his novels, sometimes in the manner of an archeologist eliciting evidence from fossil, the effects of all of these factors. Certainly, Gissing is aware of both the intractable rigidity of Calvinism in the traces of it left in religious habit and in personal psychology and the intrinsic dynamism of Calvinism as it appears in its secularized disguises. At times, Gissing seems responsive to the link between the religious impulse and the artistic one, both of which encompassed and produced social morbidity. He also makes the connection between religious behavior and the economic and social environment in which that behavior manifests. And yet, over and beyond his position within the wider developments just described, Gissing also manipulates religious matter in unique and idiosyncratic ways. In other words, Gissing’s location within the historical and cultural superstructure does not define or limit him as an artist. Obviously, as a result of his complicated mix of outlook regarding both religion itself and its adherents, as well as his place in the larger context of nineteenth century British civilization, Gissing’s dissection of the

relationship between religion, psychology, economics and the other elements of the cultural edifice demonstrates a striking level of profundity.

Money and the “Gospel of Success”

Gissing’s novels, then, often suggest an aspiritual Calvinism wherein deity is replaced in its determining function by the social signifier of material: money. In pure Calvinism, the acquisition of money evolved into a duty that revolved around the concept of stewardship, of glorifying God (Weber 170).¹⁷ In Gissing, money itself becomes the end, not the means. Money dictates social salvation and damnation, and in a very literal sense, it commands matter. In a manner of speaking, some Victorians had already provided the basis for this construct. Among others, J. G. C. Harrison, in “The Victorian Gospel of Success” points out the ways in which the success literature of the era often co-opted and assimilated Puritan morality. In this literature, as in the dominant materialistic culture, “[t]he combination of certain moral qualities with a few simple techniques of living would produce those habits which would, almost inevitably, lead to success” (160). Gissing definitely, yet sardonically, connects ideas of salvation to economic status. The difference between Gissing’s version of the gospel of success and the dominant Victorian ethic is that he ties the pursuit of money to his evocation of fallenness. Gissing, as we shall see, documents the separation of religious, artistic, and literary value that began before the turn of the nineteenth century. Humankind in Gissing is irrevocably fallen because it cannot exist in any sense, literally or spiritually, apart from economic exchange: it must give thought to tomorrow, because, in Gissing’s world, evil is not only sufficient unto the day thereof, it exists in surplus.¹⁸ Matthew 6:34, which I have mangled considerably, states “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day

is the evil thereof.” This kind of usage conforms to a common Gissing technique: the pairing of Biblical passages with plot situations tied to economic issues.

In certain novels, religion plays a direct and major role in the plot, theme, characterization, and symbolism. One does not have to look for the residua of Christianity in these works. In others, one detects the presence of religion in more understated constituents. His reputation for depressing bleakness, though over-emphasized, stems from the fact that his initial critics often deplored his lack of faith or at least his failure to adhere consistently to any affirmation of traditional morality. Nonetheless, the traces of Christianity surface often in Gissing’s writing, as it does more obviously in, for example, Hardy’s novels and poems. In addition, astute readers notice a strain of discontinuous but consistent moralizing in Gissing, detectable but pervasive enough to disorient the reader aware of Gissing’s non-theological assertions. Although lack of faith does not preclude morality, Gissing’s approach sometimes verges on preachiness. Paul Delaney, for example, remarks that Gissing was “[...] as ferociously moralistic as any Presbyterian elder” (*George Gissing: A Life* 65). This trace of moral tendentiousness could not have been otherwise in a man whose mother professed a devout faith, however much Gissing, for the record, may have rejected it.¹⁹ Much of the catastrophic delusion Gissing personally held of saving a prostitute, not to mention the recurring appearance of prostitutes and their would-be saviors in his novels, originates, I contend, in lingering, secularized Protestant-Evangelical belief in salvation and damnation.²⁰ Mordechai Rotenberg, in *Damnation and Deviance: The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Failure*, has argued convincingly in this regard.

More specifically, I have proposed that just as the Protestant Ethic had a general impact on the Western World in terms of economic development and increased achievement [...] the covert belief that deviance and failure are symptoms of an

innate and irreversible state of damnation is equally pervasive in Western culture, since both tenets are traceable to Calvin's influential doctrine of predestination. (23)

Ironically, his ultimate rejection of utopian or Positivist schemes of social salvation stem from the same source, a contention to which I will give further attention as it applies to Gissing. Furthermore, in his own apparently conflicted compulsion to separate himself from "respectable" society, Gissing lived out his own penance, so to speak, for his sexual misdeeds. Diana Maltz, among others, has noted Gissing's "heightened sense of shame over the transgression of his heterosexual cross-class relationships" ("Bohemia's Bo(a)rders" 8). Undeniably, though the equivalence is not exact, many of Gissing's characters sense, to varying degrees of accuracy, an unacknowledged but palpable pairing of respectability and religion. Despite the fact that he miscalculates the importance of doing so, Godwin Peak (often hastily taken as one of Gissing's doubles) makes the fatal assumption that, in order to attain to inclusion in a higher class, he must profess a faith he does not possess. Again, one sees here the link between class/money and religion/morality in Gissing's novels, a link that operates significantly and repeatedly in Gissing's awareness. Though it by no means happens on a regular basis, Gissing's characters, in the hoary tradition of much Victorian fiction, often experience punishment for their misdeeds. They drink themselves to death, they become drug addicts, they are disfigured by acid, they get murdered, they commit suicide, they run afoul of the law, they lose their economic status, and, in short, they receive what a professing Evangelical might call the wages of sin. However, in Gissing, the wages of sin usually equate to some form of economic disaster or to some lesser financial inadequacy. Admittedly, Gissing goes to great pains to show that some of the misfortunes which befall his characters result randomly or from powerful and adverse economic conditions beyond their control. I contend nevertheless that on occasion, Gissing allows

opposition to operate in some of the disastrous events which happen to his characters. Some of them, in other words, seem to get what a moralistically-minded Christian might characterize as what they deserve. Some of them, of course, do not. Jacob Korg, in “The Spiritual Theme of *Born in Exile*,” speaks indirectly to this split in Gissing’s consciousness when he notes that, while Gissing learned “[...]to think for himself in matters of religion, he never lost a gnawing sense of personal duty that drove him to make heroic efforts as a student and as a novelist” (132). This characteristic of his really negates the sort of objection to Gissing’s work that Constance Harsh identifies and refutes in “Gissing’s *In the Year of Jubilee*.” Though Gissing comes across as rather “snobbish and crass” in his letters, his works are not “doomed to failure by their author’s incapacity for self-control and self-transcendence” (854). Gissing became a very controlling writer, remarkably so in light of the fact that he wrote under great financial pressure. For all the reasons I have reviewed above, Gissing retained certain concepts and reactions that illustrate the presence of the residuum of Calvinism. To his credit, he was not entirely unaware of this tension, and he used it on occasion to his advantage for the deliberate embellishment of his fictional approach.

The Need for the Study

To summarize, then, Gissing scholarship in particular and Victorian studies in general would benefit from a more extensive investigation of the role of religion in Gissing’s fiction than has heretofore been attempted. I believe that I can establish the fact that this need arises from various causes. Firstly, and most obviously, religious issues do play a significant part in various rhetorical strategies in many of Gissing’s novels. At times, religious terminology and reference saturate the very rhetoric and syntax of Gissing’s prose. Secondly, religious allusion in Gissing often coincides with economic concerns, inviting a fundamentally, but not exclusively, Marxist

critical approach in explicating Gissing's position on economic and class issues. Thirdly, Gissing sometimes uses religious imagery and incident alongside his assessment of women's issues, as well as of other social topics. Finally, the incidental commentary on religion makes it clear that Gissing's attitude toward Christianity was not merely dismissive; rather, it was highly analytical, allusive, and provocative. Sometimes, it was even sympathetic. Religion remained to Gissing a palpable force thematically, socially, and, even personally, as it did for other Victorians who rejected it for cerebral reasons. As Markus Neacey observes in "Lost Illusions and the Will to Die in *New Grub Street*," "late Victorian man was witness to the end of a two thousand year tradition of almost unquestioned belief in Christianity" (3). Neacey's essential point about the resonance of history behind Christianity makes sense. One can reject Christian faith, but one cannot, to make use of a modern analogy, rid oneself of all of the tracking cookies from the Western past implanted in one's intellectual hard drive. Indeed, if one subtracts the religious substance from the works of many Victorian writers, one has removed a significant thematic and structural component from discussion. Gissing's use of religion, therefore, falls solidly within this aspect of Victorian consciousness. It is distinguished, however, by a stronger emphasis on the economic relationships between religion and socio-economic concerns.

Chapter One

The Ur-novel: *Workers in the Dawn*¹

Religion, Social Issues, and Money in *Workers in the Dawn*

One of the debates surrounding Gissing has to do with his attitude towards various aspects of social reform such as the woman question, poverty, class, labor, education, and activism, subjects which dominate the events of *Workers in the Dawn*. In this novel, religious questions and elements often surround the discussion of social concerns. In fact, Gissing originally entitled the novel *Far, Far Away*, explaining to his brother Algernon in a letter of November 3, 1879 that this title was taken from a hymn and that the novel “is very greatly directed to social problems” (*Collected Letters I*, 215).² Though Gissing addresses religion in the frame of reference of other social issues, the centrality of money in a capitalist society often impinges upon the author’s consideration of religion *and* its relation to other issues. In this regard, Lewis D. Moore, in “Money as Language and Idea in George Gissing’s Fiction,” correctly points out that Gissing “writes of the social and psychological tensions and concerns that money engenders ...” (17). Though they certainly involve the psychological complexities of gender/sex relationships, the expansion of women into new roles in the workplace, the education of women, and other issues, feminist issues, for example, frequently merge in some way with Gissing’s obsession with money. This reciprocal relationship exists between money and religion in Gissing partly because of the overall Western deformation of the Protestant emphasis on work. That is, due to the phenomenon Max Weber has documented wherein the Protestant ethic, which began in the moral imperative to obey the biblical injunction to work hard in one’s calling as a means of keeping Christ’s injunction to “give an account of every penny,” Calvinism degenerated to the point that the augmentation of the penny became an end in itself (*The Protestant Ethic* 170-176).

Mortechai Rotenberg, as I mentioned in the last chapter, extends Weber's argument about the end result of capitalism to the field of psychology: "if a person did not succeed economically, or if he or others were not convinced that his efforts were fruitful, such 'failure' would supply living proof that he was damned" (11). Put another way, a strong tendency to associate social and financial success with the intrinsic worth of the individual colors Western awareness. In Gissing, a version of this Calvinist-capitalist paradigm results in a situation wherein money means everything, a fact that Simon James observes in *Unsettled Accounts: Money and Narrative in the Novels of George Gissing*. James says that Gissing knows how "conspicuousness is both the means of success and the measure of it" (104). As a consequence of the predominant position economic matters occupy in Gissing's novels, then, the author's handling of religion often has as much to do with monetary questions as with theological or teleological ones. Though at times he contemplates theological questions in isolation, this approach constitutes the exception. Continually in the background of Gissing's analysis, the workings of Calvinism, more or less decayed and particularly as they relate to economic and social realities, continue to exert an influence on the social and personal behavior that Gissing appraises in his work.

Very often, then, Gissing invests his scrutiny of religious concerns with an appreciation for the inefaceable connection between this and any other cultural manifestation and the economic forces which regulate the practice of such materializations. Hence, *Workers in the Dawn* establishes, among other things, a pattern of religion in an ongoing dialogue with capitalism that Gissing produced in several novels throughout the eighties, nineties and into the twentieth century. In other words, Gissing enlists Calvinism and other Christian doctrines in his portrayal of a mechanistic and impersonal economy, one that determines the destinies of its characters in much the same way as the implacable God of the Old Testament. Other components

of Calvinism operate psychologically in an almost concealed but indelible way. Throughout this chapter, I will delineate several of these elements. One of these, Gissing's curiously adeistic view of humanity as fallen, centers around Gissing's evident fascination with the story of the Fall itself, which appears throughout the novel at almost every turn, in references to Eden, to Adam and Eve, to the serpent, and to the curse on labor and childbirth in Genesis. After all, Gissing locates the first part of the novel, in the geography suggested in its terminology, between Genesis and Matthew: between Adam and Eve Court (with its association with the Edenic fall and its pun on judgment) and Whitecross (with its allusion to the substitutionary atonement of the crucifixion). From a slightly different but nonetheless Biblical perspective, *Workers in the Dawn* begins in the hell of the slums and ends in the abyss of nihilistic suicidal despair. Needless to say, Gissing conflates Biblical depictions of the Fall with his delineation of the degradation and hopelessness produced in a relatively unrestrained capitalist environment.

Another recurrent Christian motif in the novel involves Gissing's utilization of Christ figures or substitutes, wherein Gissing recapitulates details recognizable as analogous to the earthly mission of Christ, his suffering and crucifixion, but never his resurrection. Among other roles and parallels found in the New Testament, oblique substitutes for Christ become in *Workers in the Dawn* the would-be reclaimers of fallen women, social crusaders, and the advocates for the poor. Gissing's novel does not allegorize, however. Therefore, these avatars for Christ do not operate consistently or predictably. In fact, this inconsistency, which applies to Gissing's use of Christian imagery generally in this novel, sometimes becomes confusing, requiring the reader to pay attention in order to trace Gissing's shifting use of it. Gissing does not confine himself, in other words, to formula. Despite this merging of roles, the novel shows the extent to which

religious material pervades Gissing's thought at this point in his career in situations that suggest connections with social realities.

Another important theme in *Workers in the Dawn* has to do with the way Gissing critiques the essentially Evangelical enterprise of philanthropy, an activity that he already suspects as misguided and possibly harmful. This evaluation weaves its way in and out of several other thematic aspects of the novel. It impacts several characters and situations, making it difficult to deal with as a discrete or isolated entity. Philanthropy, of course, is not the only fundamentally Christian activity Gissing scrutinizes. Gissing targets the Church itself for examination. He provides examples of High Church, Broad Church, and Dissenting ministers, whose theological, social, and ecclesiastical positions vary widely. Some clerics reveal indifference or outright hypocrisy in their views of church responsibility to the poor, for instance. As David Grylls has noted, one character, Orlando Whiffle, reveals his own class snobbery in the guise of fastidious High Church ritualism and overly fussy legalism, traits that Whiffle reveals even in "his forced pronunciation of the words 'The Church'" (22). On the other hand, at least one dissenting cleric, Reverend Heatherley, manifests sincerity and unorthodoxy in his adherence to the doctrine of universal salvation, one of the hotly debated issues in Victorian society, both within the Church of England and between denominations of various stripes. He is the only minister in the novel to show any concern for the oppressed working class, but even so, he adheres to a view of class that resonates with Calvinist dualism. So, while Gissing manipulates religion in *Workers in the Dawn* in a manner that impinges upon economic matters, he nonetheless manages to contemplate various doctrinal and ecclesiastical subjects, hardly ever in total isolation from their relationship to capitalism, but at least in a manner that demonstrates his

vital interest in them and his sophisticated understanding of their nature and complexity for their own sakes.

Foundational Importance

Because of its limited circulation, and because, as mentioned above, Gissing published the novel himself, one is tempted to dismiss *Workers in the Dawn* after only cursory consideration. Indeed, much criticism relegates it to minor status among Gissing's novels because of its melodramatic elements, the allegedly uneven quality of its diction and rhetoric, and its strident yet insecure endorsement of radicalism. For instance, Robert Selig, in *George Gissing*, faults *Workers in the Dawn* for combining "realism and idealism in jarringly incongruous ways" (23). Selig most dislikes the mixture of styles in the novel, modes of expression distinct to "low," "high," and "plain" characters, a trait Selig finds indicative of Gissing's class insecurity (25). In my view, however, Gissing's use of these gradations of individuals in the novel points again to the palimpsest of Calvinism behind their representation. Gissing, as I will demonstrate, sometimes stylizes the characters in keeping with the rigid demarcations of saved and elect. Other critics wonder why, in the novels published after *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing seemingly abandons his activist stance. Jacob and Cynthia Korg, in their notes to *George Gissing on Fiction*, conclude that Gissing, in his subsequent fiction, turned away from the clamorous tone of the social protest in *Workers in the Dawn* for artistic reasons. In their opinion, Gissing "came to see that even the sincerest hatred for social injustice is not convertible into literary value" (33). This remark, which implies that taking a social position is somehow unliterary, ignores one or two facts. First of all, taking a social position does not necessarily mean abandoning literary value. Secondly, even though Gissing did turn away from the stridency of *Workers in the Dawn*, he did not give up on ideas of social improvement altogether, at least not

all at once or consistently. Instead, while he may have backed away from unqualified civic advocacy, he continued to explore, in novels like *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, *Thryza*, *The Odd Women*, *The Emancipated*, *Born in Exile*, and others, aspects of a variety of social issues and the interaction of these issues with economic forces, and, very often, with religion. For several reasons, then, *Workers in the Dawn* is indispensable in any complete appraisal of Gissing. Some of these reasons correspond, ironically, to the very objections raised against the novel. The book does indeed explore radical politics, confirming that Gissing sympathized with reform and with the plight of the working class at this point in his career. At times, *Workers in the Dawn* flirts with melodrama, but no more so than many other activist novels, and certainly no more than many non-activist books widely regarded as classics. Judiciously used, melodrama can prove a positive technique; else Dickens would receive but minor notice as a second-rate novelist. In any case, one critic's melodrama is another's realism. Some of the episodes regarded as sensational, moreover, as well as much of the fulminating language of the original text, work quite effectively as the idiom of militant social activism. In other words, this first novel displays literary merit on its own terms.³

The Critique of Philanthropy

One of the major concerns demonstrated in this novel revolves around the practice and purpose of philanthropy, an issue which surfaces in numerous novels throughout Gissing's career. As in Victorian reality, philanthropy in the novel has strong associations with Evangelicalism. Obviously, the rise of the "social gospel," as it has come to be known, entailed sincere and often effective efforts by Christians to improve the economic and moral condition of the poor. However, Gissing's portrayal of Christianity in the novels, along with his appropriation of religious imagery and discourse in general, often, though not always, takes a direct and critical

form. In other words, one need not always look for a “hidden master narrative,” to borrow the phrase again from Frederic Jameson, in order to see exactly what Gissing is about (*The Political Unconscious* 28). In *Workers in the Dawn*, numerous instances of direct critique take place, together with a dissection of the relationship between religious, pseudo-religious, or quasi-religious activity and economic behavior. One manifestation of this economic-religious matrix in the novel appears in Gissing’s portrayal of philanthropic endeavors. I am aware, though, that within Gissing’s direct appraisals, countercurrents inevitably flow.

In an essay entitled “Blatherwicks and Busybodies: Gissing on the Culture of Philanthropic Slumming,” Diana Maltz discusses at length the charitable efforts of the Society of Organizing Charitable Relief and Repressing Mendacity, also known as the Charity Organization Society, as these endeavors relate to *Workers in the Dawn*. Maltz points out that Gissing seems to endorse the exertions of such societies in their attempt “[...] to affirm institutional checks on almsgiving [...]” (15). Maltz also explains how the relationship between Gissing and Clara Collet, a social worker, later allowed Gissing to “observe clashes in philanthropic theory and practice” (17). Korg explains that Collet’s “attitude toward social problems was a blend of sympathy and practical method resembling that of the Fabian Society and the Charity Organization Society” (192). Collet also tendered “detailed statistical reports on economic matters” and wrote extensively on “the social and economic position of women.” She had reviewed, prior to meeting Gissing, several of his novels in *The Queen* (192). After their initial meeting, they maintained a copious correspondence, as a glance at the cumulative index of the *Collected Letters* confirms. In his biography of Gissing, Jacob Korg tells us that Gissing did not meet Collet until June of 1893. His exposure to the abuses of charity under Collet, however, does not indicate that Gissing changed his views about philanthropy at a point considerably after he

had written *Workers in the Dawn*. Indeed, I will show that his attitude towards this practice already exhibits his awareness of inconsistencies in relief efforts. At the same time, his relationship with Collet indicates that Gissing remained interested in philanthropy long after some critics contend that his curiosity subsided in that form of social activism (*Critical Biography* 192). In other words, his viewpoint on the subject, as it did on most others, oscillated. However that may be, Gissing knew that a good deal of the impetus behind groups like the C. O. S. certainly came from Evangelical, often dissenting, sources, as the history of Salvation Army's mission to prostitutes and the "deserving poor" demonstrates (Chadwick II: 296). As Lauren Goodlad points out in "Making the Working Man Like Me," the concept of philanthropy in England, in spite of the Poor Laws, had consistently remained attached throughout the nineteenth century to both the idea of "Christian and civic community" and "deserving and culpable poverty," the term she uses to indicate the truncated phrase used by the Victorians with which most of us are more familiar, "the deserving poor" (593-594). Zarena Aslami, in "The Space of Optimism," indicates that, even during the last decade of the nineteenth century, "placing optimism in objects such as philanthropy and religion was ordinary, if not uncontested" (55). In keeping with this prevailing attitude, the unbeliever Helen Norman joins her efforts to those of the dissenting minister Mr. Heatherley, a detail Maltz discusses as indicative of her function in *Workers in the Dawn* as "a voice of the C. O. S." despite Helen's religious skepticism ("Blatherwicks and Busybodies" 19). Helen, like many workers in the C. O. S., learns quickly that some of the poor, in this case the Cricks, take advantage of charity in order to indulge in their vicious and immoral habits, a fact that Mr. Heatherley is quick to corroborate (*Workers* II: 218-220). In addition to shedding light on Gissing's construal of philanthropy, attention to the novel's appraisal of the motivations and effectiveness of the purportedly Christian elements in

this situation reveals the alignment of religion and economic concerns in the novel. The notion of, in Goodlad's phrase, "the character-building effects of personalized charity," certainly persists in the depiction of philanthropy in *Workers in the Dawn*" (594). But so does, as Gillian Tyndall observes about Helen Norman, "the essentially self-enhancing vanity of her schemes for East End girls" (*The Born Exile* 115). Marcia Jacobson, in "Convention and Innovation in *The Princess Cassamassima*," voices a slightly less critical but nevertheless dismissive view of Helen. Jacobson affirms that Helen's philosophical studies lead her to the conviction that "the rich have a special responsibility to the poor" (242). However, Helen and other members of her class share "the ultimate aim of making the workers over in their own image" (245). Even less flattering, Pierre Coustillas claims in "Gissing's Feminine Portraiture" that Helen is "the daughter of an Anglican clergyman who has become an agnostic" who uses her inheritance to indulge in "slumming" (103). Philanthropy, therefore, serves for Gissing as both an indicator of the strong compassionate impulses of crusading Christian reformers and, concurrently, a reflection of class condescension. Helen displays both of these traits, even if, as Maltz maintains, she does learn from her mistakes, going from giving indiscriminately to the poor to helping the sick and "teaching the working girls" ("Blatherwicks" 20). David Grylls goes so far as to assert that Helen's charitable activity improves "her own moral nature" (*Paradox* 27). Such improvement hardly seems necessary, since Helen's morality never falls into serious question. Even if one grants that she does improve morally, however, one must recognize that Helen does not fully escape from either her religious or her class background.

Curiously, Helen's nature seems to undergo little change throughout the novel. As a child, Helen shows the same tendency to philanthropy to which she devotes herself as an adult. During a picnic excursion in the woods in which a ragged beggar accosts the young Helen and

her friend Maud Gresham, Helen causes the loss of Maud's purse by foolishly revealing that Maud has money that she, Helen, would willingly give him (I: 203-205). After he steals the purse and runs away, Maud, who later marries disastrously and falls into disgrace, remarks that "I was sure he was a bad man. I could tell from his face" (I: 205). Helen, who had given him a penny she solicited from Maud, expresses disappointment in his "ungrateful" behavior, a theme that she revisits in her adult experience with the poor (I: 205). Prior to the theft, Helen and Maud had been discussing Helen's desire to build a school for the poor, "[a]nd if they're good I shall often give them money to take home to buy everything they want" (202). Gissing flatly states that this anecdote goes to demonstrate the "difference between the characters of the two children" (199). In itself, this declaration has profoundly Calvinist overtones in that Gissing sees the basic nature of these children as already settled. Neither of them will change essentially. Maud is more astute at recognizing basic evil because she has a corrupted disposition herself. Helen wants to save the poor, but she wants to do so from a decided position of class and moral superiority. She reserves for herself the right to determine the worthiness of the poor. The reader might keep in mind that Helen responds very willingly to Tollady's analysis of the poor. His explanation of the necessity of inculcating religious faith among the poor convinces the adult Helen that Christianity, though substantively false, has merit as a means of social control. This realization allows Helen to feel superior in her practice of philanthropy. Gissing, authorial tongue firmly in cheek, says this in so many words: "Helen was an example of that most enspiriting rule in the moral order of the world, that no one can endeavor to do good to others without at the same time actually benefitting himself" (II: 228-229). Mabel Donnelly says that Gissing "insists upon presenting Helen Norman, a beautiful philanthropist, as a paragon" (*Grave Comedian* 68). I disagree. Clearly, Gissing's portrait of Helen, while not overtly derogatory, does not omit a depiction of

her subtle personal or class weaknesses. Gissing, then, presents through Helen a complicated picture of the issues connecting Christianity with the economic issues of philanthropy, and, as a result of this connection, with the causes and remedies of poverty. Helen Norman functions as a fulcrum for evaluating these concerns in Gissing's work.

Gissing demonstrably intertwines within his analysis of philanthropy a multitude of related issues involving the broader question of whether or not such efforts will result in the amelioration of class privation, a debate that raged throughout the Victorian period. One of the reasons that I place so much emphasis on a discussion of the complexities of social activism as they appear in *Workers in the Dawn* with a synopsis of the religious and philosophical career of Helen Norman is that her practice of philanthropy both coincides with, and runs counter to, the blueprint established by Evangelical, and largely female, social reformers. This blueprint dates back to most directly to the 1850s, when, according to Suzanne Rickard, in "Victorian Women with Causes: Writing, Religion, and Action," women "with a social conscience and a public cause to champion" who were "overwhelmingly motivated by religious faith and spirituality as well as by [their] 'women-centered' concerns" began to affirm the right to public activism in conjunction with and sometimes independent of men (141). Actually, as Joyce Goodman and Camilla Leach point out in "At the center of a circle whose circumference spans all nations," this public engagement with philanthropic and community causes began even earlier, and it accelerated as the century progressed (65). Up to a point, Helen Norman certainly fits into this tradition of female social commitment, but, as I have shown, she simultaneously contradicts and affirms the religious trend in the movement. One early critic, Kate Woodbridge Michaelis, remarks astutely that Helen "probably saw too much of clergymen, and so tried what was to her but a new form of religion" ("Who is George Gissing?" 271). Gissing indicates further her

inability to shake off religious trappings entirely in her affiliation with philanthropic effort, which for the Victorians was essentially a project of salvation, in his portrayal of Helen, as I shall discuss more fully later, as a Christ figure and a Madonna. Strikingly, in most of Gissing's novels, Christ himself is rarely mentioned by name. In *Workers in the Dawn*, Christ as a subject surfaces only four times. Each instance involves Helen Norman, an avowed unbeliever, who nonetheless undertakes relief work with the Dissenting clergyman Mr. Heatherley in full knowledge of his determination to impart his beliefs to the poor. A discussion of Helen's association with Christ and Christianity anticipates some of what I intend to say about religious space and feminism in chapter six. In spite of this fact, or perhaps because of it, the analysis of Helen as an androgynous Christ/Madonna, a participant in the nineteenth century trend of predominantly Christian philanthropy, and, at the same time, a deliberate apostate from faith, must take place in the context of *Workers in the Dawn*. I take it for granted that, by this time, the reader understands that I see an indelible connection between philanthropy and some form of religious practice. In addition, I expect the reader to keep in mind that, although compassion undoubtedly motivated many philanthropic activities, charity often becomes an expression of classism in that it lends itself to the Calvinist duality that divides rich and poor, the fundamental class distinction from which all other gradations arise. Consequently, philanthropy is an inevitable manifestation of capitalism. Indeed, strictly speaking, even though it surfaced at earlier, pre-capitalist periods of history, philanthropy takes on its most divisive form within a capitalist system, since, by definition, the practice of philanthropy emphasizes class divisions. In other words, capitalism sometimes injects a sense of status superiority into the practice of charity that, while it has always been present, seems much more heightened within a Christian context. As we have already seen, Western capitalism results largely within a Christian, mostly Protestant,

environment. My discussion of Helen Norman's pseudo-Christianity incorporates a consideration of other religious and social issues that, while not directly economic in nature, certainly exist within conditions which cannot be understood entirely apart from money and class questions.

Part of the reason, then, that Gissing gives a rather mixed view of philanthropy by assigning to Helen, an avowed unbeliever, the primary burden of carrying on the charitable efforts in the novel stems from his awareness of the nature of philanthropic activity ongoing at the time *Workers in the Dawn* was conceived and written. Helen, though not entirely unique, goes somewhat against the grain, as I have indicated, of Victorian crusaders for social change. According to Kristen G. Doern, who writes about the temperance movement, "At the heart of many key social reform movements of the nineteenth century was the evangelical notion of creating a just, moral society through *personal* Christian conversion and salvation" ("Equal Questions" 159). Helen renounces her Christianity, of course, but substantiation of her religious deconversion falls far short of total believability, since she accedes so comfortably to a scheme of imparting her benevolence under Christian sponsorship. Admittedly, to some extent, Gissing uses Helen as an exponent of his belief "in the possibility of intellectual & moral progress" apart from dogma (*Collected Letters*, Vol. 1: 282). At the same time, since Gissing does not manage to separate Helen completely from Christianity, she is to an extent a Christian missionary of sorts, as Heatherley implies (II: 38). Critics such as Chérifa Krifa Mbarek, who see a differentiation between Helen's practice and that of male philanthropists, sometimes overlook this contradiction in Helen's philosophical composition. Mbarek says that Helen "displays a kind of efficient philanthropy" that her male counterparts fail to match (13). She excepts Reverend Heatherley from this generalization, but she does not stress the fact that Helen conducts her charitable activity under his guidance, thereby, as I have shown already, becoming an adjunct of his

missionary endeavors. Gissing, then, repeatedly makes use of the contemporary Christian philanthropic agenda, sometimes openly lampooning it and sometimes granting it an unstable, perhaps unintentional, credibility. In some passages he goes even farther in showing the ways in which Christianity requires class dichotomy. It assumes that, if I may reference again the words of Mark 14:7, “ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good.” While I understand that this verse encourages generosity, I also discern that, in some sense, it points to the inevitability of economic and class distinctions.

Helen rejects Christianity after undertaking a deliberate course of study of several of the standard skeptical nineteenth-century books and thinkers. Understandably, Helen, as the daughter of a Church of England clergyman, begins as a devout Christian. She acquires this duality, indeed, almost by virtue of her father’s influence. Early in the novel *Edward Norman*, her father and Arthur Golding’s first guardian, declares to Gilbert Gresham his own lack of faith in Christian doctrine:

Do you know what I ought to do, Gilbert Gresham, if I would earn the privilege of considering myself an honest man? I should walk down to the church next Sunday morning as I am, devoid of ecclesiastical mummery, and proclaim aloud to the congregation: “Behold! Here am I, Edward Norman, who have been your pastor for so-and-so many years, preaching the Gospel to you day after day without in reality believing a word of what I preached! (I: 209)

Reverend Norman, a disillusioned Church of England cleric forced by straitened economic circumstances to remain in a vocation in which he no longer believes, anticipates several Gissing clergymen of his type.⁴ Of course, Norman is not as forthcoming with his daughter as he is with his confidante, the commercially successful artist Gresham, and he raises her in a half-heartedly orthodox manner. Admittedly, Helen does not need much converting at this point, nor does she seem to have needed much education. As a curly-headed girl, virtually an infant, Helen poses to

her father questions about the nature of God and the Devil in a manner reminiscent of the adolescent Jesus among the “doctors” in Luke 2. Samples abound of her childish conversations with her father that illustrate the early combination of Comtean positivism and Christianity in her character. In one exchange, Helen discusses or asks questions regarding such issues as the inherent truth of pagan religion, the moral implications of belief in the devil, the existence and nature of God (and she seems to comprehend the suspiciously Platonic explanation her father gives her of this topic), and the possibility of belief in monotheism via polytheism. For such a child, the tackling of Comte, Darwin, and Schopenhauer as an adult would hardly have been much of a challenge (I: 50-52). As a child, however, after her father’s death, and to some extent as a result of this event, Helen undergoes “[w]hat sectarian Christians would style a conversion” (I: 268).

Of a sudden she became discontented with the occupations of her life. It came upon her with the force of a revelation that she had hitherto lived in absolute neglect of the veritable end of existence, namely, devout prayer and praise to the all-powerful Being, upon whose existence she had as yet scarcely reflected, but whom she now conceived of, with all the energy of a powerful imagination, as the distinct and personal God. (268)

At first, Gissing leads the reader to believe that Helen will remain faithful to her recently acquired Protestant piety. For example, Helen resists the efforts of her French Catholic friends to convert her. Nevertheless, her Evangelical faith gradually declines as a result of several factors: Gresham’s attempts to distract her into ordinary activities, the inconsistent and superficial religiosity of the Whiffles, and most tellingly, her reading of Strauss’ *Leben Jesu* (vol. 1, 270, 276-283, 299-302). The latter document incites her to study in Germany, where she submits herself to a thorough investigation of the validity of Christianity. Along with Christian apologetics, she reads Comte, Schopenhauer, and Darwin.⁵ One early critic, in an unsigned

Spectator review, makes fun of Helen's substitution of "an earnest Christianity for an equally earnest atheism" (*Gissing: The Critical Heritage* 61). This judgment misses one important point. Single-handedly, Helen breaks, at least temporarily, the pattern Ruth Y. Jenkins calls the "patriarchal appropriation of the sacred" by taking upon herself responsibility for her own spiritual condition (*Reclaiming Myths of Power* 19). In the masculine prototype, women are expected to "become Christian martyrs under androcentric hegemony" (19). Notwithstanding the fact that many nineteenth-century intellectual males underwent a crisis of faith, women were expected to continue to impart orthodox teaching in the home, thereby "instructing their own exploitation" (*Reclaiming Myths of Power* 22). Helen, fracturing this mold, reads independently, like a man, as it were, although she does call upon several male teachers and mentors for advice. She evolves her own spirituality, which seems to consist of an interpretation of Schopenhauer as one who encourages compassion for the poor. John Sloan, in *Gissing: The Cultural Heritage*, describes Helen's "rational faith" as an "eclectic fusion of Schopenhauer's ethics and Comte's science of human life" (23). To some extent, however, the matter of Helen's faith is somewhat simpler. Schopenhauer, apparently, is not in Helen's view primarily a pessimist, but a philosopher who teaches "that we should lose the consciousness of self in care for others, in fact identify ourselves with all our fellows, see only one great *self* in the whole world" (I: 325). Though she does not seem to realize it, she has transformed Schopenhauer into a prophet whose vaguely Transcendentalist but Messianic Gospel she substitutes for the New Testament version. He is a modern Jesus teaching a gospel of humanistic pity. In fashioning her own version of Comte's religion of humanity in her own terms, she does indeed, as Jenkins claims for certain women writers of the Victorian period, rework "[...] Judeo-Christian narratives" in order to challenge patriarchy, which forms part of the cultural and economic nexus of the social order

(*Reclaiming Myths of Power* 25). However, she does not fully escape from the patriarchal blueprint because, as I have indicated already, she accedes too completely to male religious guidance. The reader can forgive this compromise because Helen has few organizational alternatives and even fewer female models to emulate. When she embarks upon her philanthropic quest, two possible sponsors for her philanthropic plans reject her before she finds acceptance from the dissenting social activist Mr. Heatherley, and both of those rejections come from Church of England clergymen (*Workers in the Dawn* II: 9). When Heatherley asks her if she could not find some religious charitable organization she would consent to work for, she replies that she prefers to “work alone” (II: 17). Immediately after she makes this statement, she places herself explicitly under Heatherley’s direction: “I shall require much advice from you” (II: 17). Still, in a larger sense, her concession originates in her inability to eradicate from her new philosophy the stubborn traces of Christianity. To Helen, Schopenhauer and Jesus merge all too readily. Helen eventually does become a martyr, although not, nominally at least, a Christian one. Nonetheless, Gissing places Helen’s career firmly within the framework of both Christian (and Victorian) terminology and procedure by positioning her charity work within a male-directed, Christian framework.

Mention of Christ occurs at least four times in *Workers in the Dawn*. To emphasize a point I have already made, never, to my knowledge, does anyone in the novel use this title outside of the presence of Helen Norman. For that matter, no one other than Mr. Heatherley ever utters this word directly, although the novel does reference the founder of Christian faith by way of various sobriquets. In each instance of the use of “Christ” in conversation, Gissing goes to great lengths to lend a sacral quality to the dialogue and thereby to Helen Norman. After discussing their initial plans to alleviate poverty, for instance, Helen declares to Mr. Heatherley,

“It is *justice* to these poor sufferers to share my wealth with them” (II: 38). To this, Heatherley replies, “Miss Norman, though you deny the authority of Christ, you nevertheless are eager in His service” (II: 38). She then writes a letter which “throbbed” with “fine enthusiasm,” terms which play into evangelical language and, somewhat incongruously, into physical passion (38).

Significantly, Helen does not disavow Heatherley’s identification of her with Christian service. In fact, during their previous discussion, Helen describes to Heatherley her “religion” of meeting the physical and educational needs of the poor, leaving to the minister the prerogative of doing his best to “make them religious; and, whilst you may do good in this, you certainly do no active harm” (II: 16). Helen’s work for Heatherley is complicit in its endorsement of religion, however equivocal her efforts to distance herself theologically and philosophically from Christian belief. Appropriately, Gissing calls one of the chapters wherein Helen and Heatherley agree on a plan of action “A Hand to the Plough,” a title which directly underscores the theme of serving Christ.⁶ Helen has put her hand to the plough of poor relief under the auspices of religion.

Another location of Christ and Helen in the same context occurs in a discussion between Helen and Mr. Heatherley, one that involves economic and religious ramifications. This passage also connects to the issue of philanthropy. Helen, who has experienced success as the teacher of a group of working girls, expresses concern over “that horrible difference of caste between us.” Heatherley, ever on the alert for an opportunity to convert Helen, agrees that her class status forms “a sad obstacle” that can only be overcome by “the influence of Christianity” (II: 224). He goes on to claim that only the realization that “one Christ came down to earth to die for all” can erase the suspicion the poor have for the wealthy (226). Heatherley’s influence has its effect on Helen.

Fresh from the study of ecclesiastical history, with all its hideous barbarities, its ghastly beliefs, its brutal condemnations of what is noblest in man, it was but natural that her young and enthusiastic mind should look upon Christianity as an enemy to be combated and destroyed, of no possible use to the world, but rather of unutterable harm. But experience of life since she had been in London, and, above all, conversation with Mr. Heatherley, had greatly modified her opinions. Though her reason still forbade her as strongly as ever to relinquish her intellectual freedom for the bondage of dogmas, she was beginning to understand that Christianity has its reason for existence, and to doubt whether, even if it were possible, it would be wise to suddenly exterminate it. (II: 227-228)

In other words, Helen has reached a point of accommodation with Christianity as a means of control, a stance which conflicts with any anti-patriarchal agenda she may entertain in other respects. Christianity, in Heatherley's exposition of it, reconciles the poor to their status and ameliorates their distrust of rich philanthropists. Helen belongs to this category, for all her diffidence about it. Her growing patronization of the poorer classes crystallizes quite clearly in this passage.

After all, was there not a very close analogy between the mental condition of these denizens of the slums and alleys and that of the men of earlier ages, who found religion absolutely necessary for them, and so created it if they had not it ready to hand? Was not every child naturally impressed with religious beliefs, and was it not very possible that the history of the world was but a steady growth to maturity, corresponding to the growth of the individual mind? [...] Helen was an example of that most enspiriting rule in the moral order of the world, that no one can endeavor to do good to others without at the same time actually benefiting himself (228-29).

One might be tempted to read this kind of narrative as Gissing's thinly disguised editorializing, relegating Christianity to the same level as medieval superstition. However, I believe that Helen's increased willingness to regard the poor in the same light as "the men of earlier ages" and as children "naturally impressed with religious beliefs" demonstrates an ironic portrayal of the prevalent Victorian idea that places the poor, other "less developed" nations, alien races, and, given Helen's work with girls, women generally, into a category that justifies their exploitation.

These groups of people are dependent, unevolved, sometimes dangerous and profoundly infantile.⁷ Mr. Heatherley, for all his protestations of sympathy for the poor, divides them into groups that can be helped and those that cannot (220). Furthermore, he rationalizes to Helen the ultimate failures he knows will take place by pointing to “certainty of a future life of perfection” (II: 222). When Helen, her curiosity aroused by this comment, asks him about his position on eternal punishment, he explains that he believes in the ultimate “purification of all souls,” and not in an eternal Hell (222). Though relieved, Helen wonders quite reasonably why Heatherley labors “to bring about an end which is already predetermined.” In a response that echoes Mr. Tollady’s fatalistic view, a subject to which I shall return, he replies that he works “in obedience to the spirit which most distinctly pervades the revealed will of God, to do good to others ...” (222).

This odd mixture of the doctrines of Universal Salvation and Calvinism seems at first disjointed and irrelevant to my contention about Helen’s affinity to Christ or to Christianity.⁸ On the contrary, Gissing conveys, by the insertion of this discussion, several ideas that relate to Christianity, philanthropy, and Calvinism, ideas which crystallize around the contentions of my study. First of all, the reader sees again the manner in which Calvinism forces the dialogue about human nature into rigidly dualistic categories. Though he tries to soften the Calvinist view that God designed some persons for perdition by assigning a limit to the sufferings of the damned, Heatherley nonetheless thinks in terms of two predestined groups and an overarching, inevitable plan which neither he nor anyone else can alter in any real sense. He can merely accede to this plan and play the part he believes God has assigned him. The fact that Gissing does not ascribe to Heatherley the Arminian theory of free will demonstrates the dominance of the Calvinist view of humanity, with its inherent and inflexible duality of lost and saved, from which Gissing cannot

seem to detach his characters. Of course, by emphasizing this Calvinist dichotomy, Gissing puts into play other agendas. For example, the opinion that everything will work out for the poor in the end contributes to the self-serving smugness of those Victorian social theorists who wished to justify and maintain social divisions, a situation wherein the philanthropic efforts of wealthy Christians served to foster social control. This is one of the reasons that Helen, even though she rejects Christianity intellectually, is all too happy to work within Christian mechanisms. She can continue to masquerade, unconsciously, as a secular Christ under the supposition that society will, to paraphrase Mark 14:7, harbor some of the poor with it always. Heatherley, who seems more of a social activist than he really is, absolves her of class blame by saying that only Christianity can provide reconciliation within an inflexible class system, a statement which presupposes that the class system should be maintained. Perform good deeds, he says in essence, and God will ultimately make everything right (II: 224). Helen, apparently, seems very willing to accept this state of affairs.

Perhaps the more pertinent point to be made here is that Helen's question about a religious stance reveals her abiding interest in doctrinal controversies, an interest that seems entirely superfluous for a follower of Comte and Schopenhauer. Why should she care whether or not Reverend Heatherley believes in the eternity of Hell as long as he supports her own earthly "ministry" to the poor? I suppose one could reply that the idea of Hell offends her aesthetic sensibilities, but if she rejects the substantive reality of Christianity *in toto*, such a distinction should hardly make any difference to her. Heatherly's compassion seems to consist in precisely the same thing Helen's does: a concern for the physical welfare of the poor. Even if he adhered to a belief in Hell, his motive would no doubt be to rescue sinners from it. Instead, he thinks that everyone will be saved eventually, and that his labor on behalf of the poor falls within a

deterministic theological perspective. Helen, in her willingness to accommodate her beliefs, ultimately embraces class condescension when, late in the novel, she pretends to be a Christian for the sake of the working girl Lucy Venning, a pretence of which Heatherley approves (III: 229, 232). She assumes that the working poor do not possess the education to understand sophisticated scientific theories, Comtean or otherwise. They need Christianity to maintain morality.⁹

Gissing, in writing to Algernon in 1880 about *Workers in the Dawn*, tried to explain his perspective on religion in the novel in a way that touches upon my discussion of Helen Norman.

As regards religious matters, I plainly seek to show the nobility of a faith dispensing with all that we are accustomed to call religion, & having for its only creed a belief in the possibility of intellectual & moral progress. Hence it follows that I attack (somewhat savagely) the modern development of Ritualism, which, of course, is the absolute antithesis of my faith. (*Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, 282)

This “creed” of “intellectual & moral progress” of course, is identical with Helen’s, but the novel does not make clear that Helen achieves any such progress as Gissing intimates in the letter. Aside from the fact that Gissing was always at pains to defend himself from his family’s displeasure over his religious views, Gissing’s use of the words “faith” and “creed” in the letter to Algernon does shed light on Helen’s adaptation to Christianity.¹⁰ On the one hand, the reader can sense Gissing’s own frustration, through Helen, with the hopelessness of changing the lower classes *en masse* through education. Gillian Tindall, in *The Born Exile*, alleges that Gissing, between the publication of *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Nether World*, “had been debating with himself principles of philanthropy which he did not question in the early days, and had considerably modified his views” (106). We have seen evidence, on the contrary, that this debate occurs earlier, within the pages of Gissing’s first published novel. In fact, Helen is not the only one who experiences disillusionment with some aspects of philanthropy. Arthur Golding, though

he tries, does not rescue anyone either, not even himself. His attempts to use education to save his wife fail miserably. Arthur's rejection of philanthropy, love, and art ends in his suicide. Helen's work on behalf of the "deserving poor" shows some evidence of success, but very little. Gerald Schmidt, in "George Gissing's Psychology of 'Female Imbecility,'" asserts that Helen's success with her female pupils contrasts with Arthur's failure with Carrie (336). However, neither Helen nor Arthur saves anyone who would not have been saved anyway. In other words, Helen merely saves the girls who want to be saved. I doubt that, as Gissing presents her, she would have exerted any more effective influence on Carrie, who is damned both through her exploitation and her origins, than Arthur does.¹¹

Gissing persists somewhat too emphatically in his fused portrayal of Helen as agnostic, apostate, martyr, Christ, and Madonna. Even Arthur Golding speaks of her in terms that suggest her association with Christology. At one point, in a letter to Helen, Golding refers to her as his "Love," his "Hope," and his "Devotion," echoing I Corinthians 13 in its invocation of "Faith, Hope, and Love" (III: 254, 255, 257). He asks Helen, "for will you not indeed be my salvation, in a truer sense than that heaven in which I know neither of us put our trust?" (257). Earlier in the novel, immediately before an interview with Arthur, in which Helen liberates him from any vestiges of his determination to desert his art in favor of ministering to the poor, Gissing describes her in terms of some sort of apotheosis.

As she reclined in her great chair, her hands folded before her, her eyes fixed with a gaze expressive of calm inward joy upon the glowing fire, which, in the shadowed room, often cast a faint rosy radiance upon her brow, and deepened into dark gold the richness of her brown hair, she much resembled some sweet and placid-faced Madonna gazing herself into beatific reverie before an infant Christ. (III: 171)

Oddly enough, this Madonna simultaneously recalls Christ in Gethsemane. Christ, in contemplating his Crucifixion, sweats blood of anguish (Matthew 26:39). Helen has lain awake all night, aware that the “blood upon her hand and upon her lips” means certain death by consumption. Even worse, she is tormented by the idea that her life’s work was “fated to burn only during a few years of dark striving, of toiling in the gloom of misapplied efforts and fallacious hopes [...]” (III: 172). This futility reflects to some extent on the failure of the philanthropic enterprise in the novel generally, a fact that indicates Gissing’s lack of confidence, even at this point in his career, in efforts to help the poor. In addition, despite her efforts to free Arthur from sacrificing his art, he ultimately throws himself, first, onto the pillory of his marriage to Carrie and, finally, into the waters of Niagara Falls. I especially wish to emphasize that Helen and Arthur do not fail merely because they face an unjust social system, though of course they do oppose just such a structure. They fail because they cannot change the essential natures of the people they attempt to help. Arthur, in particular, cannot even change his own character, a fact that makes his suicide ultimately unavoidable.

Gissing provides another, rather pointed illustration of the dangers involved in helping the poor indiscriminately in his treatment of the Blatherwicks, a mother and son confidence team from the slums. Diana Maltz, in “Blatherwicks and Busybodies,” cites as an example of the need for philanthropic restraint the episode in the novel wherein Bill Blatherwick, a drunk, “[...] feigns blindness and lameness in order to collect alms from the West End bourgeoisie [...]” (15). Gissing’s portrayal of Blatherwick attaches the working class poor to the ongoing recurrence of Calvinist dualism in the novel. He uses the failures of his protagonist, Arthur Golding, as an example of the thwarted outcome of circumscribed efforts to save others through limited philanthropy, social activism, and art. Even as a child, Arthur experiences frustration when he

undergoes contact with members of the working class. Arthur's initial encounter with philanthropy begins with his experience under the brutal tutelage of Bill Blatherwick. Prior to meeting Bill and his mother, Arthur had run away from Mr. Norman, the rector who had taken upon himself the responsibility of rearing the boy after Arthur's father died in a garret near the slum district of Whitecross. After locating his father's old neighborhood, Arthur finds himself at the mercy of his their former landlady, Mrs. Blatherwick and her son Bill (I: 90-95). His action in running away, on a personal and instinctive level, anticipates his adult denunciation of philanthropy, as well as his unconscious self-identification with the economically doomed. Tellingly, he runs away from a representative of organized religion while simultaneously distancing himself from the comfortable middle class existence he could have shared under Reverend Norman's protection. Significant, also, is the fact that he initially embraces the lowest and most repulsive elements of the working class, likely because he associates his dead father with the debased environs of the slums, even though his father belongs properly to the middle class. His identification with his father, nonetheless, clearly has Calvinist overtones. He regards himself as a rightful member of the underclass, gravitating to its most despicable members. As if to underscore my point, Maltz, again in "Blatherwicks and Busybodies," calls the termagant proprietress, who competes with Carrie Mitchell in this regard, one of the "irredeemably coarse and improvident" members of the lower classes in the novel (20). This predatory woman and her son concoct a plan to use Arthur in Bill's scheme of begging. Again and again, as this instance illustrates, Gissing equates predation with the lowest forms of market competition such as those practiced by the Blatherwicks.

In an earlier part of the novel, Mrs. Blatherwick has already revealed herself as interested only in the acquisition of money. After conducting Mr. Norman to the dying father's room, her

first question has to do with the responsibility for the dying man's rent: "If anythink 'appens to him, sir ... d'ye think, sir, he 'as any friends as wouldn't like to see poor people suffer by him, and as 'ud pay his back rent" (I: 13). When Arthur returns to her in an impracticable desire to live in the place where he had lived with his father, she immediately takes the little money he has (I: 92). Later, she proposes that he accompany Bill, who disguises himself as the "victim of a Explogion," as the sign he carries proclaims (I: 103). The sign, incidentally, specifically targets "Christien Friends" (I: 103). Arthur's task consists of singing a hymn which references the parable of Jesus in Matthew 6:26 about "the lilies of the field" and "the little birds of the air" for which God provides (I: 98). The gist of the parable, of course, has to do with God's provision of the necessities of life even in the absence of labor, an ironic theme from several points of view. Bill pointedly refuses conventional labor, but one can question his employability in any event, given his alcoholism. Of course, in hallowed Dickensian fashion, Bill abuses Arthur physically on these begging expeditions. In addition, Bill participates in his own abuse, spending much of his earnings at various pubs getting drunk (I: 104). Hence, Bill stands for exploiter and exploited, as do many of the inhabitants of Whitecross. Gissing makes Blatherwick's dual status clear in his description of Bill spending the proceeds of his mendicancy getting drunk on Christmas Eve in "the very heart of the hell" of Whitecross. Gissing imagines Bill suddenly thrown onto the living room carpets of those rich alms-givers as "a novel excitement for these Christmas guests" (I, 108). Gissing then speculates, rhetorically, if any of the wealthy would recognize their share of culpability for the condition of the East End if such recognition were provided to them "with the force of a God-sent revelation," (108). Interestingly, he does not specify the exact nature of this culpability, perhaps because of the implication that Bill, not potentially as in the fantasy about a drunken Bill in the parlors of the wealthy, but actually in his capacity as beggar, serves as a

source of entertainment for which the rich pay, in lieu of providing him and his class with real opportunities. Maltz notes that “silly upper-class gentlemen and ladies” of the period were often satirized for “descending into the abyss for a cheap thrill” (“Blatherwicks” 21). By criticizing this incidental, off-hand Philanthropy-as-Entertainment, Gissing implies that the wealthy are to blame for making it possible for Bill to indulge his drunkenness by giving him money out of misguided Christian charity. Furthermore, they encourage his exploitation by an institution that, after all, is one link in a complex capitalist enterprise: the pub.

Obviously, then, Gissing suggests that alcohol itself is one of the means by which the system ensures the existence of an exploited underclass. The “gin-palaces” attract, on Christmas Eve, men fighting over drink, “a band of women, raving mad with drink,” and “children, all but naked, wrangling and fighting for the possession of a jug of liquor” (107). The only social force present in this scene, wherein the reader witnesses “poverty cheating poverty for its last pence,” is the policeman. Significantly, Gissing proclaims pointedly that this panorama of “vice and crime” proves that “roots of humanity spring from the seed of evil,” an explicit allusion to the biblical concept of original sin (107). The reader experiences some confusion, then, as to what or whom Gissing blames for the degradation of the lower classes. One can plausibly attribute this state of affairs to any one of a number of causes: the self-induced drunkenness of the poor, class exploitation, reductionist capitalist competition, or Edenic transgression. The only real certainty about the narrator’s position is that he considers unacceptable the contrast between the din and squalor of Whitecross and the “voices lifted up in hymn and praise” to God’s Son in “London churches,” not to mention the celebrations in “great houses of the West End” (107-8). His sympathy for the plight of the occupants of Whitecross, however, does not assist him in determining how, or even if, they can be improved. Adrian Poole captures the essence of the

account of the Blatherwicks and the other inhabitants of Whitecross in observing simply that “...the narrative offers to expose the fallacy of orthodox religious and humanitarian responses to this scene of misery” (*Gissing in Context* 61).

Legends of the Fall

Gissing does not restrict his utilization of religious material in service to his critique of philanthropy. Indeed, *Workers in the Dawn* contains so many references to Christian belief that the difficulty for the critic in approaching the topic lies in selecting what to exclude from the discussion. Some reviewers commit outright blunders in their assertions about the subject. For instance, Michael Collie makes a statement with which I take issue because it tacitly assumes the impossibility of an analysis of Gissing’s use of religious symbolism. He maintains that Gissing’s style in *Workers in the Dawn* lacks metaphoric power, in keeping somehow with the author’s “overall nihilism” (*The Alien Art* 21, 22). Gissing’s use of symbol and figurative language in general, though sparse, clearly plays a significant part in his technique throughout his novels, particularly in this one. Directly germane to the use of allusion and symbol in *Workers in the Dawn*, an incident cited by Collie himself references a recurrent cluster of religious images in the novel. This constellation of representations, having to do with the Garden of Eden and the Fall as depicted in Genesis, constitutes a promising area of study of Gissing’s use of religious material. Moreover, it reveals the way Gissing connects religion and social commentary in *Workers in the Dawn*. For this reason, one might well examine a few of the instances of Gissing’s enlistment of the Genesis story in particular and the Old Testament in general. The episode that interests Collie, in which Carrie Mitchell (Golding) has found a means of employment apart from her usual, more overt, pursuit of prostitution, but nonetheless one that transgresses Victorian standards of decency, occurs on one of the many occasions when Arthur tries to reclaim her (*The*

Alien Art 22). To this episode, I will return later. For reasons of narrative sequence, I will begin at a point much earlier in the novel.

Something clearly resonated with Gissing as regards Genesis and other parts of the Old Testament. Not long after submitting *Workers in the Dawn* for publication, he wrote to Algernon, on January 2, 1880, of a story he wrote called “Cain and Abel,” about a modern fratricide (*Collected Letters* 1, 229). The story, significantly, depicts as one of its villains one Eli Charnock, a rich stockbroker who determines the narrator’s destiny by perversely naming him Cain (“Cain and Abel” 191). The caricature, through Eli, of a God who decrees sin in the very act of creation, is characteristic of Gissing’s tendency to turn Christian myth against itself. “Cain and Abel” also stands as a clear indication of Gissing’s habit of placing religious and economic discourse side by side. Gissing’s disgust with capitalism manifests within the story’s identification of God with an arrogant and rapacious representative of speculation. Though he spoke deprecatingly about the story, Gissing remarked to his brother with obvious pride “I assure you it is dreadfully effective” (229). In another letter, dated September 8, 1883 (approximately three years after publishing *Workers in the Dawn*), Gissing recommended to Algernon “[m]uch reading of the Bible ... especially the Old Test” to improve his brother’s literary style (*Collected Letters* II: 156). Gissing himself, following his own advice, reverted frequently to Old Testament material in fashioning plot, symbol, and rhetorical devices for his works. Adrian Poole notes that, just a few years before writing *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing, while in Chicago, had penned a story about a wayward girl like Carrie/Nell, set in a bleak industrial city, called “Sins of the Fathers” (*Gissing in Context* 62). From this early story to his later novels, one can cite indications of a correlation in Gissing’s awareness of biblical and religious material on the one hand and the corruption inherent within industrial capitalism on the other. In his letters and in stories such as

this one, Gissing demonstrates that he admires the Bible from an artistic point of view, while, at the same time, he dismisses the revelatory, and suspects the moral, aspects of Scripture. Jacob Korg, in “The Main Source of ‘The Ryecroft Papers,’” states that Gissing “remarks on the beauty of a chapter in Genesis” in the midst of complaining about “religious casuistry” (172). In the context of this split perception, then, several aspects characteristic of the Old Testament fascinated the author. For one thing, as evidence in *Workers in the Dawn* attests, Gissing portrays the plight of the working class in terms which reverberate with Biblical anathema, diabolicism, and ancestral blight. Partly, too, the reason for the prevalence of biblical language in Gissing’s work stems from what Patricia Ingham calls the “biblical register,” which she identifies as “a variant in the conflicting discourses that make up the language of social description throughout the century” (*The Language of Gender and Class* 9). Ingham claims that this language sometimes mediates between the language of class and the language of religion (9). Gissing certainly invests the religiously-oriented conversation of his characters with what Ingham calls the “rhetoric of power,” particularly when one of these characters has a political or social agenda to pursue. On top of this appropriation of Christian linguistic commonality, Gissing shows a simple fondness for the nuances of religious language that conveniently fits nicely into his own interest in “the group-based nature of a class system” (9).

Another point of interest pertaining to Gissing’s fascination with the Bible lies in the way, as Adrian Poole explains, that Gissing demonstrates in the *Workers in the Dawn* a “deep instinctive knowledge of the fallacy of any notion of moral and social improvement that relies solely on an external shaping or teaching [...]” (*Gissing in Context* 63). This resistance of people, especially members of the working classes, to change, fixes society in a perpetually fallen status, making Gissing’s continual references to Genesis especially appropriate. As it regards

philanthropy, this view lends an additional layer of distrust of its efficacy. Underscoring Gissing's suspicion of the lower orders is his repeated description of the appearance of the depraved denizens of hellish neighborhoods. In Genesis and in the Old Testament generally, an implacable Yahweh, known only to a privileged few, inflicts punishment on people for reasons known only to Himself, operating much like impersonal economic forces in Gissing's novels which deal with the working class. Examples abound of Gissing's use of the formula of biblical lapsarianism to examine or highlight social problems and to provide a frame for observing human behavior.

Arthur Golding and the Legions of the Damned

Many examples of Gissing's fascination with Biblical detail and imagery can be cited throughout *Workers in the Dawn*. Usually, though not invariably, this fascination reveals itself in Gissing's treatment of capitalist activity. The first paragraph of the novel gives the setting as Saturday night, before the Sabbath, which Gissing calls the "Truce of God" (I: 1). The language of this first paragraph sounds very much like biblically-oriented hymnology, utilizing phrases such as "the sweet assurance of a morrow unenslaved" with pointed irony, given the protracted description of a literally hellish economic slavery which follows (I: 1-15). After some ten pages of this depiction of commercial perdition, the demonic inhabitants of Whitecross show themselves complicit in their acceptance of the hybrid capitalist, Calvinist, and Darwinist view of existence that Gissing depicts. As they prey upon one another in trade, a gentleman whom Gissing soon identifies as Reverend Norman turns into "Adam and Eve Court," a location mentioned both here at the beginning of the novel and much later, when Arthur returns to the site of his father's death. So many other images surrounding Adam and Eve court confirm the association with Genesis that the name of the place almost becomes superfluous.¹² In the first

chapter, in both instances when Gissing mentions this locality, he uses words denoting squalor and misery (10). After being accosted by a child for breaking a pot of liquor she is carrying, Reverend Norman, who has come to find Arthur, exclaims ““Good God! [...] what a hell I have got into” (11). This place, in which Gissing places much of the initial interest of the novel, signifies the Old Testament (and hyper-Calvinist) theology of sin and punishment. Gissing encloses much of the first part of the novel, up to the point wherein Arthur falls in love with Carrie, in a reference to the geography of this industrial slum. Later, after he marries Carrie, whom he finds wandering the streets of this neighborhood with her dead baby (II: 314-315), Arthur can be said to “fall” in several respects. Arthur returns to the location of economic hell, or, alternatively, to the site of his original fall, spurning the chance that living with Reverend Norman gives him to enjoy a level of the paradise of privilege. Arthur perversely makes this kind of choice several times throughout the novel, yet he behaves as though compelled by some external force.

I have alluded on numerous occasions to Gissing’s description of the inhabitants of Whitecross and Adam and Eve Court and to the associations the author stresses between this description and the Calvinist emphasis on human depravity as established in the Old Testament. Therefore, by way of affirming this connection, I will revisit briefly the novel’s initial portrait of this district. In doing so, I will also show that Arthur Golding’s origins, or what the reader knows of them, attach him to the class represented by Whitecross and its environs. Finally, a fuller account of the economic degradation of this slum verifies the connection between it and the hell of capitalist competition on the most squalid level. In its entirety, the delineation of Whitecross supports my contention that Gissing did not start with an unqualified position of faith in efforts to relieve the poor. Rather, he entertained, very early on, grave doubts about these efforts,

whether philanthropic or politically activist in nature. This ambivalence goes a long way in helping the reader understand the behavior of Arthur Golding.

Simply put, those unfortunates who reside in Whitecross and Adam and Eve Court are either damned or diabolic. Accordingly, the activities in which they engage are likewise debased and demonic. When the novel opens, imagery of hell merges with the imagery of the marketplace. Stalls and booths line the streets, “each illuminated with flaring naphtha-lamps ... filling the air around with a sickly odour, and throwing a weird light upon multitudinous faces” (I: 1-2). Men and women of all sexes and ages cry out “in every variety of intense key – from the shrillest conceivable piping to a thunderous roar, which well-nigh deafens one – the prices and the merits of their wares” (2). This kind of description goes on for several paragraphs, emphasizing the “decayed, filthy, often an evil” aspect of the dwellings, the “horrible darkness,” and the “unspeakable abominations” illuminated by gas lamps (2). Buying and selling goes on in this Dante-esque scene, as does cheating, cursing, and the obscure dying of infants screaming within “dens” (3). The narrator singles out several individuals for contempt or pity, including one wherein a little girl selling salt, only to face “a brutal beating when she returns to the foul nest which she calls home” (5-6). Drunken men and women gamble and engage, respectively, in purchasing and selling sex, “mauling each other with vile caresses” (6). To the observer, one of the most fascinating aspects of these, the damned, is that they either do not know that they are damned or that they simply accept their outcast status as a given. Also, they do not realize that they have accepted zestfully the necessity of bartering their very humanity for money.

It must be confessed that the majority do not seem unhappy; they jest with each other amid their squalor; they have an evident pleasure in buying and selling; they would be surprised if you pitied them. And the very fact that they are unconscious of their degradation afflicts one with all the keener pity. We suffer them to become brutes in our midst, and inhabit dens which clean animals would shun, to

derive joys from sources from which a cultivated mind shrinks as from a pestilential vapour. And can we console ourselves with the reflection that they do not feel their misery? (8-9)

Even as the narrator expresses horror and pity, he also quite clearly expresses a repugnance mingled with the underlying suspicion that these people belong to an order of life beneath “clean animals.” The “cultivated mind” rejects their enjoyments as one would a “pestilential vapor.” The reader need not expend much effort in recalling that the Old Testament God often sends pestilence as judgment. The very involvement of these degraded humans in mercantile exchange constitutes transgression and rapacity in the context of this passage. Their existence partakes of an unconscious recognition of the appropriateness of their condition, which is bestial. The not-quite-rhetorical question at the end of the selection indicates that the speaker does indeed place himself in a category apart from these “brutes,” a category that tallies quite neatly with the inherently Calvinist distinctions with which I have been concerned. “They,” the speaker says essentially, are not like “us.” By nature, they belong to an entirely different caste. Clearly, anyone coming from this class or from this place must by necessity be excluded from the possibility of improvement. This fact explains why, in the rationale of the novel, Arthur, who emerges from Whitecross, cannot save Carrie. In fact, as Margaret Mitchell as observed, Carrie operates as an “agent of containment,” keeping Arthur from moving up in class (“Gissing’s Moral Mischief” 414). Even apart from Carrie’s pernicious influence, Arthur cannot effectively participate through his interest in art in the activities of the class above him. Additionally, Arthur cannot effect any change in society through his activism. Finally, as Mitchell again points out, Arthur cannot ally himself with Helen, who belongs to a higher class (414).

Arthur himself is the target of charitable effort, but nothing rescues him from his ultimate failure. When Arthur Golding’s guardian, the rector Mr. Norman, tries to arrange Arthur’s

education, Gissing describes the event, like other events and characters in *Workers in the Dawn*, in the context and language of commerce and exchange. He thereby illustrates the relentlessness of capitalist reality in its intrusion into every aspect of existence and consciousness. Religion, juxtaposed with Gissing's commentary on consumption and production economics, plays here an important role, as it does in several instances in the novel. Significantly, many of these incidents occur in relation to church figures. On this occasion, Mr. Norman takes Arthur to be tutored to the curate, Mr. Orlando Whiffle.¹³ Arthur, though pliant enough, tells his benefactor that his mother had told him "that learning was no good, and didn't bring in any money" (54). This refrain, which establishes the association, in this case pointedly a negative one, between education and profit, is echoed later through another of Arthur's sponsors, Mike Rumball. This individual declaims against education as evidence of "the pride of hintellect" (150). Furthermore, Rumball regrets the loss of "the weekly sixpence" that Arthur sacrifices in order to attend school (149-50). Likewise, Whiffle filters Arthur's initial exposure to education through the strainer of the curate's hope that Arthur will ultimately make an impressive clerical figure, not for the sake of any spiritual outcome, but for the monetary and class-related advantages such a position entails.¹⁴ To this end, he tells Mr. Norman that "Arthur Golding will one day rule a diocese, and to Orlando Whiffle will be due the credit of having instilled into his mind the fundamental principles of the great Establishment he is to adorn!" (62). In passages like this one, Gissing infuses the text with words associated with mercantile activity side by side with religious situations and characters. In this case, "credit" implies not only the recognition "due" for an action but also the background idea of the granting of monetary favor alongside the Christian idea of grace as well. After all, Gissing explains that Whiffle's imagination revolves around "his own hypothetical course up the scale of clerical dignities, till, in sweet fancy, he saw himself

pocketing the first year's income of a bishop's see" (I: 64). Links like this one between economic transactions, diction, and plot recur throughout Gissing's work and career. In this case, intellectual and spiritual pursuits find their value in monetary terms. "Pre-eminence in the Church was for Mr. Whiffle the goal of all earthly wishes," Gissing explains, and he adds that Whiffle hopes that one day the "Church would recognize the abilities of its faithful servant, and Orlando Whiffle would, even in this life, find his reward" (64). Gissing's fiction nearly always ties the capitalist appraisal of use-value ("reward") of any object or activity to exploitation, simultaneously divorcing these things from any consideration of their intrinsic or spiritual worth.

Nature itself, which in *Workers in the Dawn* is instilled with evidence of the results of the Fall, finds no exception to the general rule in Gissing's work that worth derives from use-value and that Gissing symbolizes economic degradation through religious terminology. In approaching "what should have been a garden" in Whiffle's yard, Norman and Arthur see "the hideous abortion of a tree" which is used as the center of a series of clothes lines (55-56). While, inside the house, Whiffle beats his son Augustus, Norman and Arthur hear dead leaves rustle and children screaming (56). They discover that the other children are engaged in trying to "empty" the container of jam and to steal the sugar (56-57). Augustus, incidentally, precipitated his punishment by "emptying the milk pot" (59). The picture here suggests the subjugation of nature and of the opportunistic competition for the possession of its products. It also shows their depletion, occurring pointedly in a setting wherein Mr. Norman hopes Arthur will attain an education. Ironically, the Rector himself states that "[a] man is very little *use* (italics mine) in the world if he has not a good deal of knowledge," a statement that, although it reverses the import of the earlier statement made by Arthur's mother, nonetheless connects education to "use" (54). Subtly but perceptibly, this passage also connects to a corrupted picture of Eden, complete

with a ruined garden, a cursed tree, snake-like clotheslines (evoking the serpent of the Garden certainly, but also reminding the reader of Adam's concern with nakedness after the Fall), the introduction of the death of nature, and expelled, transgressive children competing with one another, like Cain and Abel, over the products, produced by labor (complete with a glance at the "sweat of the brow" of the curate as he beats Augustus), of that ruined nature. The confluence of these off-centered, skewed glimpses from Genesis alongside of Gissing's references to profit and production are quite intentional. Here, they prefigure Arthur/Adam's loss of innocence, complete with an "abortion" of a tree in the context of the acquisition of knowledge (of good and evil, perhaps?) and his eventual self-expulsion from the safe environs of the Rector's protection. As I have mentioned, this expulsion also precipitates Arthur's first removal, later repeated as a result of his disastrous marriage to Carrie, from what might have become, through a union with Helen, his deliverance from the limitations of his class. Arthur becomes an Adam separated from his birth father, married to an apocryphal Lillith rather than a Biblical Eve, archetypes which Gissing repeats quite often in his novels. Another of Gissing's Eves in this novel, Helen Norman, not only pursues knowledge in lieu of faith, she bears the name of the representative of Greek pagan womanhood and beauty, who, like Eve, precipitated the fall of a race and the destruction of many men in a struggle involving the interference of numerous deities.

I have mentioned several times Arthur's intermittent attempts to save Carrie Mitchell, the prototypical fallen woman of *Workers in the Dawn*. Emma Liggins describes these efforts less charitably, referring to Arthur's activities as a form of "stalking" ("Her Appearance in Public" 41). Whether or not his behavior can be fairly described in these terms, Arthur certainly expends much labor in trying vainly to get Carrie to conform to his notions of wifely conduct. In doing so, he casts himself as savior. Michael Collie quotes at length a passage containing an allusion to

Adam and Eve that enlists a description of Carrie as an example of Gissing's early failure to connect "environment and behavior" in his characters (23). I believe, on the contrary, that the incident fits in with a consistent strategy Gissing uses throughout the novel. This strategy appropriates religious allusion in a larger attempt to dissect the exploitative agenda of the economic system. In addition, this incident highlights Arthur's role as would-be redeemer. On this occasion, Arthur Golding has gone on yet another search for his runaway wife, whom he finds quite by accident in a room "situated in a very shabby back street" (358). Standing on a platform with another woman, both "apparently naked, but in reality clothed in tight-fitting tissue of flesh-colour," Carrie holds an apple in a "Tableaux Vivant" of Adam and Eve. Gissing remarks that "surely not the severest moralist could have devised a means of showing more clearly the hideousness of vice" (359). The scene effectively delineates the perversion capitalism inflicts on its co-opted partner, religious mythology. In effect, one of the most foundational Judeo-Christian narratives has become a medium for voyeurism. The story of Adam and Eve, stripped of its verbal content and hence of its original religious significance, has become a gender-switching, possibly bisexual, obscenity, "indecent in character" (359).¹⁵ Carrie's commodification not only transforms her into an object for sale, something she has already become anyway, but it also places her on visual exhibition for multiple male consumers, with the underlying suggestion of group sexual activity, if not multiple rape. The essentially pornographic nature of the pantomime includes another subtle glimpse of Calvinism in Gissing's description of "the revolving platform where the shivering wretches went through their appointed parts ..." (359). The reader can hardly miss the combination of the secular deterministic matrix of economics in which Carrie finds herself trapped and the religious suggestion of pre-lapsarian depravity of which Carrie finds herself the exponent. Here, the Fall connects solidly with

sexuality and commerce. To confirm this connection, the reader need only note that Arthur pays the proprietor both for the “privilege” of viewing Carrie in private and for taking her away with him (360-361). Ironically, Arthur has in a sense paid for Carrie already, when he first rescued her from freezing to death. As noted earlier, Arthur, as Christ, fails ultimately to redeem Carrie, who enacts the Fall numerous times as a drunk and morally depraved Eve. Carrie involves Arthur in her decline just as clearly as Eve enlisted Adam in her sin. Somehow, Carrie manages to appropriate parts of Arthur’s identity, thereby both recapitulating the Biblical account of Eve’s creation from Adam and reversing it at the same time. After all, Arthur’s personality develops in response to Carrie’s behavior. She has determined the course of his life by preventing him from realizing his artistic and romantic dreams. He becomes an accomplice to his own relegation to damnation. Arthur has become fused to Carrie, attaching his psyche to her own. Like Carrie, he remains imprisoned within class constraints. Like Carrie, he descends, at least once, into a period of drunken debauchery. Like Carrie, or rather, one might even say, because of her, he rejects participation in intellectual or creative activity. By succumbing to the temptation of a relationship with someone of the “debased” classes, Arthur has indeed become linked with this partner, sharing the curse of her societal fallenness. His sin, which in Gissing’s scheme of things lies beyond any redemption short of release through death (in itself one of the consequences of the Fall), consists in his identification with the economically damned. Arthur, on more than one occasion, goes so far as to sanction this identification. In one sense, Arthur quite literally endorses Carrie’s promiscuity when he tries to come to her aid after her illegitimate pregnancy. This point may indeed mark his symbolic Fall, in which her sexuality taints him, into the “nether world” of economic and class determinism. Ironically, the fact that his motives in trying to rescue Carrie originate in some higher idealistic impulse makes no difference. Once he chooses to

associate his destiny with hers, Arthur confirms his affiliation with the demonic denizens of Whitecross. Far from saving her, he succeeds only in facilitating her progress towards final condemnation and in initiating his own secular perdition.

Arthur's ultimate fate substantiates my contention that *Workers in the Dawn* relegates this character to the legions of the socially damned. I refer here to Arthur Golding's suicide at Niagara Falls which occurs at the end of the novel. The description of this event contains barely veiled references to Christian theology and puns on the word "Fall." Gissing invests Arthur's death with a sense of inevitability, tinged with suggestions of religious mystery. To convey my point, I will quote from the passage at length.

He strove with memory to gain back the full taste of his childish sufferings from those dim, far-off days when his father still lived – those sufferings, how light they now seemed, viewed amid the consciousness of present despair All the dim forms of those he had known and loved best passed before his eyes, all, all gone forever. Mr. Tollady, the guardian of his youth, the model of heroic constancy set up before him for his guidance in life – long since dead. How clearly he now saw that the old man's death had been the beginning of his misery, though at the time he had believed it to be the commencement of his true life. And she who, through good and evil, had never in reality ceased to be his ideal – she who had been noble and worthy effort personified . . . Helen Norman was gone. And she being gone, what remained? [...] Why had he ever lived? In vain he surveyed his life for the traces of any positive result, of any real good accomplished, any real end gained – he could find none. Failure was written upon him irrevocably. Why should he live?

Moving as though mechanically, whilst his countenance still showed him to be sunk in thought, he drew nearer to the edge of the cliffs, and began to descend them by the path which leads to the foot of the Falls. [...] So long and so fixedly had he gazed, that the plunging water had begun to exercise a terrible fascination over him; involuntarily he drew nearer and nearer. The deep musical voice from out the hidden depths seemed to call to him irresistably (sic), and he followed. A wild and mad longing to probe the dread mysteries veiled beneath that curtain of ever-rising spray took despotic hold upon him; with a delicious joy he contemplated a struggle with the roaring whirlpools, with a fierce longing yearned to experience their unimaginable horrors. He stood upon a vast mass of mingled ice and snow, and his garments were drenched with the rising vapour. [...] For a moment his blood boiled, his pulses leaped, his brain was on fire with

the fierce joy of madness; in the next he shrieked in a voice which overcame that of the Falls, "Helen! Helen!" and plunged into the abyss. (III: 440-442)

Several aspects of this description connect solidly to Christian tradition. The Dantean combination of fire and ice as elements experienced by the damned in hell emerge in the depictions of "ice and snow," "rising vapour," and the internal fire within Arthur's "blood" and "brain" (442). The reference to the "abyss" calls to mind the abyss of Revelation 9, 11, 17, and 20, not to mention Luke 8 and others. The combination of the words "Falls" and "abyss" reinforces the Biblical concepts lurking behind these terms. The Fall predicates the abyss of final judgment in Christian tradition. That Arthur embraces his figurative damnation prefigures similar actions of characters like Slimy in *The Unclassed*. Hence, he experiences "fierce joy" at the volitional performance of his existence: the acceptance of his own damnation (442). The futility of Arthur's life, one remembers, arises mostly from his inability to effect any tangible economic improvement in the lives of Carrie and others. He therefore moves "mechanically" towards the Falls, condemned by some powerful force that dictates his failure (441). His view that his life means nothing tallies with the Calvinist notion of the innate depravity of humanity, a state of being in which, apart from grace, humans are incapable of performing good. The secularized form of perdition that Golding undergoes mirrors the failure of his mentors and colleagues, the other would-be apostles of revolutionary change.

Apostles of a New Order

The nineteenth century exploded with utopian visions designed to remedy the oppression typified by Gissing's depiction of the poor in *Workers in the Dawn*. Creators of perfect societies, reformers of economic injustice and of humanity at large, inventors of political schemes and solutions – all of these jostled for the opportunity to usher in some form of millenarian society.

Many of these schemes evoked, or copied specifically, religious patterns. Comte's Religion of Humanity, Marx's workers' paradise, and Robert Owens' communal experiments comprise but a few examples of idealistic plans designed to bring about social justice. Indeed, even Samuel Taylor Coleridge's inconsequential flirtation with "Pantisocracy" epitomizes both the Romantic and the Victorian fascination with finding remedies, reforming society, or founding new societies on the basis of some new incarnation of what is essentially a Biblical model. In *Workers in the Dawn*, we have already seen how Gissing evaluates the efforts of the bourgeoisie to bring about the amelioration of social ills through philanthropy from within. Philanthropy, however, can only lessen, not eradicate, injustice. Its purpose, ultimately, is to maintain the status quo, to alter it perhaps, but not to eliminate it. Some radical social movements also try to bring about change, but they typically advocate a degree of change that amounts to transformation. Some proponents of radical capitalism qualify as revolutionaries in that they embrace such an unflinching version of social Darwinism that they, in effect, advocate the makeover of society through the purging of undesirable types. Again, virtually all of these movements seek either to repudiate or to shadow very closely the dichotomous arrangement of Calvinism, which relegates everyone to the categories of saved and damned. If only through their attempts to adjust the categories themselves, radical, utopian, and reformist systems operate on the assumption that the existing social order relegates some individuals to economic perdition. *Workers in the Dawn* illustrates how even the organizational structure of factions devoted to reconstituting society recapitulates the New Testament cell group. In this model, the revolutionary leader functions as Christ the spokesperson of the new order and sometimes as the political martyr. At times, the leader bears more direct similarity with the model of Old Testament prophet, a tradition into which Christ fell in his earthly mission of admonishment and reform. In like fashion, the immediate followers of

this leader serve in a hierarchical, usually patriarchal, structure similar to that of the apostles. Arthur Golding is a failed Christ, a failed “New Adam.” He and Helen are not, however, the only substitutes for Christ in the novel. At least two other figures recall components of the New Testament depiction of Christ, John the Baptist, or of the Old Testament characterization of outcast prophet: Samuel Tollady and Will Noble.

Samuel Tollady, who becomes for Arthur Golding a surrogate father, holds pronounced views about social justice, labor, and economics. His appearance in *Workers in the Dawn* occurs at a pivotal juncture in Arthur’s life. Gissing’s portrayal of him aligns him clearly with the prophet/Christ paradigm that recurs throughout the novel. At least one early critic indirectly acknowledged Tollady’s and Noble’s redemptive roles in remarking “As long as men like Samuel Tollady and William noble are to be met with why need we despair?” (“George Gissing as a Novelist” 110). Accordingly, Tollady’s interaction with Arthur recapitulates the relationship between master and disciple. Arthur applies for a position as printer’s apprentice in response to a printed advertisement on Tollady’s shop window. After consulting with Arthur’s former employer, Ned Quick, who supports Arthur’s pursuit of the “gospel of ‘getting on,’” Tollady takes Arthur into his establishment. Ned links this reference to a gospel to “other gospels” that are “not unfrequently sadly misinterpreted” (I: 166). Later, Mark Challenger, one of Tollady’s friends who has been ruined by a lawsuit in which he challenged an unjust tax, articulates Tollady’s position as prophet. Challenger asks Tollady if the poor will ever experience justice in the economic system: “Are we going to be always ground beneath the money-bags of these smooth-tongued publicans and sinners” (175)? Tollady, the atheist, replies in terms that repudiate society as the culprit but which simultaneously echo Biblical concepts of sin. “It was the system, not the man, that was at fault” Tollady declares. “Stride dead at a blow the passions and the vices

and the pestiferous creeds of Society – then let them make a martyr of you if they can” (175-176)! Tollady’s apparent appropriation of Rousseau’s condemnation of society nonetheless mentions “passions” and “vices” which can logically only pertain to the individuals within that society. Challenger marvels at Sam’s stoic attitude in the face of suffering, but remarks that his calm acceptance of personal injustice, a very Christlike trait, stems from his status as an unmarried man, also a prophetic marker (176). Furthermore, Challenger’s admonishment that Sam teach Arthur “the cause of his miseries and the cure” connects Tollady again with the Christian visionary role (177). In essence, Tollady will teach Arthur what Milton purports to teach the reader of *Paradise Lost*: “...all our woe, / With loss of *Eden*, till one greater Man/ Restore us” (Book I: 354, ll. 3-6). This sort of literary echo, coupled with Challenger’s injunction that Tollady, in keeping with Proverbs 22:6, “Train [Arthur] in the way he should go,” that is, as “a Radical... a Revolutionist” demonstrates powerfully Gissing’s intricate weaving of Christian and Biblical elements throughout *Workers in the Dawn* (177). The multiple implications of these religious ingredients open numerous perspectives into social, political, and economic issues. More importantly, they point to the persistence of Christian configurations throughout the cultural superstructure and to the formulations antagonistic to it.

Although Tollady does manifest messianic traits, he also functions as a forerunner to Will Noble, who actually leads a group of radical workers. In fact, Will’s circle of labor activists consists of twelve followers, making him in some ways a more exact replication of the New Testament model of Christ than Tollady. Furthermore, Will often tries to rescue Arthur after Tollady dies. Nonetheless, Tollady enunciates a doctrine of atheistic millenarianism-apocalypticism that serves as a prelude to the reader’s introduction to Noble and as a precursor of

a very similar doctrine held by Reverend Heatherley. Therefore, because of the limitations of space, I will train the preponderance of my analysis on Tollady rather than Noble.

In some ways, Tollady represents an amalgamation of John the Baptist and Christ. After the exchange with Mark Challenger and John Pether, another disillusioned member of the working class who advocates revolutionary violence, Tollady remarks to Arthur, “For the night cometh wherein no man can work” (I: 178). This quotation from John 9:4 references a statement Jesus made after having healed a man born blind. Certainly, the connotations of the previous discussion between Tollady, Mark Challenger, and John Pether, whose names recall two of the apostles, have to do with the blindness of the social system. But this remark also would have suggested to a Biblically literate Victorian the coming of death and the end of the age. In using allusive phrases such as this one, Gissing underscores Tollady’s role as spiritual guide to Arthur. In several other ways, Gissing positions Tollady in this posture. Tollady sees Arthur as “a child of human pain and sorrow” who nonetheless has retained “a yearning for the fruits of knowledge,” an obvious if mixed reference to the forbidden tree in Genesis (I: 179). For the reader, this allusion ties Arthur to the Fall again, but to Tollady, Arthur represents a “human soul and not as a mere piece of useful machinery in his shop” (180). Appropriately, from the ascetic, vegetarian Tollady, Arthur learns frugality and mercy: Tollady has “checked” young girls from “ruin” and has anonymously rescued “toiling wives and mothers, cursed with husbands whose lives were spent alternately in the gin-palace and the gaol” (I: 181-2). On one occasion, after hearing a hymn sung by “a band of little girls,” and after Arthur points out to him the site of his father’s death, Tollady launches into an extended atheistic sermon that goes on for the better part of six pages. In this diatribe, Tollady points out the “vice and crime” in the faces of the inhabitants of Adam and Eve Court (I: 245). He comments on the disfigured faces of the

degenerate young children, blighted morally and physically by their poverty (I: 246). He urges Arthur to use his artistic talent as “a successor of Hogarth” to portray these reprobates in order to expose the social evil that produces them (247). In the discourse that follows, Tollady provides Arthur with a curious mixture of activist revolutionary advocacy and jarring determinist rant. At one point, he decries the lack of education, the filth, and the “servitude” that produces the horrible conditions of Whitecross (247-248). In virtually the same breath, he describes the people as “a breed” of “absolute Calibans” (I: 248). Then, he expounds on his theory of history, which seems to contain elements of several philosophical, political, and religious views, including Marxist historical determinism, Hegelian dialecticism, Christian revelation, and sheer hopeless fatalism.

These things are an absolute necessity; it is as absurd to charge any human being with the fault, as it would be to throw upon mankind the blame of a drougthy summer or a severe winter. Even you, Arthur, are perhaps saying in your mind that I am inconsistent, inasmuch as I one moment advocate the powerlessness of man to alter the course of history, and the next moment rail at the existing state of affairs, and protest that it might be better. But it is not so. Who is it effects the changes of history, if not man himself, acting, as I insist, in obedience to a law of which he know not the author, but which he cannot resist? [...] We are the makers of history, Arthur, and it is the shooting of the seeds of future events which makes us restless. [...] The future is our own, and if we truly follow out those impulses which make our hearts burst with their impetuosity, we may be sure that we are truly working out the will of fate. There may be men at this day who long for a return to the despotism of the Inquisition as fiercely as I do for unlimited freedom of conscience. Well, let them strive their best to gain their ends. *It is their allotted part* (italics mine). (248-249)

This lengthy disquisition represents but a part of Tollady’s oration to Arthur. Truly, it combines so many theories that I hesitate in naming them all for fear of missing a few. References to laws of history and revolutionary action certainly recall Marx. The conflict between thesis and antithesis takes Marxist dialecticism back a step to Hegel.¹⁶ Citations of the “powerlessness of man” and laws that cannot be opposed evoke both pagan fatalism and Calvinist theology. Amidst

all of these varieties of determinism, Tollady speaks of “impulses” and “freedom of conscience.” Overall, however, Tollady’s prophetic stance centers around the idea that everyone plays some “allotted part,” a concept that fits neatly into the palimpsest of Calvinism over which Gissing constructs *Workers in the Dawn*. From Tollady’s proclamation, which seems to advocate political action, one can conclude only that the results of any such effort rely on some inscrutable higher power, not on individual initiative.

Tollady also excoriates government, philanthropy, and organized religion in their turn. Of Government, he condemns the shortsighted “etiquette of courts” that prizes procedure over “a people’s wail for food” (I: 249). He also decries policies that exploit the poor for the benefit of the wealthy, “or in the slaughter of hostile wretches, poor and ignorant as themselves” (248-9). Having thus dismissed the government as an indifferent, warmongering profiteering fellow traveler with the rich, he turns his attention to the wealthy themselves. In as eloquent a cry for justice as can be found anywhere in Gissing’s work, Tollady attacks “private wealth and influence, rotting in pestilential idleness, or active only in schemes for the still further brutalization of the mob” (I: 250).

Did you ever reflect that there are men in England whose private wealth would suffice to buy up every one of the vile slums we have just been traversing, and build fresh, healthy streets in their place, and the men still remain wealthy? To me it is one of the most fearful marvels of the time, that among such countless millionaires scarcely one arises in a generation actuated with the faintest shade of philanthropic motives, and *not* one worthy of the name of a true philanthropist. (I: 250)

Gissing seems through Tollady to be calling for authentic philanthropy with a willing, if partial, redistribution of wealth, but his character expresses little faith in its possibility. Nor does he have any confidence in the orthodox clergy. In his estimation, religion, especially the Established

Church, functions as an accomplice to the combined neglect and abuse of the poor by the wealthy and the government.

I declare, I wonder how our preachers can walk the streets at the present day and not shrink in confusion and shame from the sights which meet their eyes on every hand. How many of them are there who in their sermons dare to speak out to the rich members of their congregation and rebuke them manfully for neglect of their opportunities? Jesus of Nazareth dared to do it; but then He received no payment for His sermons; and they would tell you that He was a god, which clearly explains why He could be bolder than ordinary men! [...] Priests of the Almighty, forsooth! Nay, rather the hypocritical augurs of a wasting superstition, the very wrecks of which will in a few more centuries be hidden amidst the undistinguishable chaos of things that were.” (I: 251-252)

Tollady again pronounces his doctrine of inevitability, but Gissing makes it clear that this secular prophet’s views have not had the impact on Arthur that his mentor no doubt desired. To these exhortations, Arthur responds emotionally, though he cannot reconcile himself to confining his artistic talent to depictions of the sufferings of the poor: “Beauty was the goddess that he worshipped at the inmost shrine of his being, and to the bodying forth of visible shapes of beauty his life must be devoted, or he must cast aside the pencil for ever” (I: 255). Tollady’s acolyte is not worthy of his master, to whom all of one’s energies and advantages should be directed to alleviating social inequity.

As I have suggested before, aspects of Tollady’s philosophy mirrors almost exactly Reverend Heatherley’s theology. Since both of these men apparently advocate for social change, it is instructive to examine their views side by side. In a discussion of hell initiated by Helen, Reverend Heatherley disavows belief in “eternal punishment” (II: 221). He adheres to the conviction that “all souls *will* ultimately be likened in purity to their Creator...” (222). When Helen questions the minister about his motive in attempting “to bring about an end which his already predetermined,” Heatherley replies that he works “in obedience to the spirit which most

distinctly pervades the revealed will of God” (222). He declares, “I follow an impulse which irresistibly actuates me, an impulse which I feel to be the will of my Creator. I do so because I cannot do otherwise” (223). Like Samuel Tollady, Heatherley believes that an external force guides the events of history and that human beings can but play the role assigned to them. Furthermore, in spite of the surface optimism that both men express in historical and divine inevitability respectively, Tollady and Heatherley hold a low opinion of those to whom they direct their efforts. Tollady’s descriptions of the poverty that has brutalized the citizens of Whitecross and Adam and Eve Court rival those one might encounter in the reports of social workers. Heatherley tells Helen to despair of making the poor understand the doctrine of human equality apart from his theology of redemption through Christ: “As well try to make their minds comprehend a metaphysical problem, as to put before them the fact of the equality and brotherhood of men as you understand it, Miss Norman, and expect it will aid you to win their confidence” (II: 226). At the core, Heatherley the inner city missionary and Tollady the social activist share an essentially Calvinist outlook.

The Religious Crank and Feminist Space in *Workers of the Dawn*

Earlier, I mentioned Helen Norman’s attempts to achieve self-definition through her attempts to acquire education and her participation in philanthropy. She falls short of these goals largely because of her inability to eradicate the vestiges of Christian belief in her own thinking and to her more significant failure to operate outside of a Christian context. In addition, Helen remains firmly ensconced in her sense of class superiority. Helen is not the only female character, though, who attempts to find a kind of operational space in the novel. Though she destroys herself in the process of doing so, Carrie, in her rebellion against Arthur’s prissy attempt to tame her behavior, functions, if not entirely independently, at least within parameters that she chooses

for herself. At this point, however, I wish to introduce a type of female agency that Gissing uses more than once in his novels. Though I do not intend a necessarily disparaging connotation in my choice of terms, the reader might think of this character as “the female religious crank.” This woman manages to insinuate herself into a limited sphere of activity not altogether determined by the respectable dictates of middle class religion, economic necessity, or social conformity. Occasionally, critics dismiss these characters without giving them due consideration because, quite rightly, they realize that Gissing is critical of the negative aspects of their religious beliefs. In spite of this disapproval, however, one can discern behind his critique of fanaticism that Gissing recognizes that these women succeed in rebelling against orthodoxy and in constructing to some degree their own identities. Mrs. Cumberbatch, the dissenting sectarian aunt of the successful and worldly artist Gilbert Gresham, demonstrates an ability to affirm a personal distinctiveness, which, although irritating and in some ways regressive, nevertheless places her in a category of her own fashioning. At the same time, Gissing provides in his portrayal of Mrs. Cumberbatch a further evidence of his awareness of Calvinism.

Frank Kermode, in *The Genesis of Secrecy*, elaborates at one point on the parables of Jesus as an example of arcane teaching. He explains that, according to Mark 4:11-12, Christ intended that the parables hide the truth from “outsiders.” Curiously enough, as Kermode notes, Jesus’ motive in speaking in parables is to ensure that these potential interlopers do not repent in order to be saved (2). Put another way, Christ specifically wants these people to be damned. As Kermode puts it, “[to] divine the true, the latent sense, you need to be of the elect, of the institution” (3). This principle lies behind Calvinism, and it truly animates the doctrines espoused by Mrs. Cumberbatch. In a conversation with Helen, Mrs. Cumberbatch, who has just come to reside with Mr. Gresham, Helen’s guardian, reveals that she is a member of a new branch of the

“Semi-United Presbyrio-Episcopal Church” (II: 232). Helen, whose freshly acquired agnosticism has led her to abhor Christianity as barbaric while leaving her to sympathize with individual Christians, has only recently concluded a discussion with Mr. Heatherly about their respective objectives in philanthropic endeavor (II: 231-232). Understandably, she can barely conceal her distaste for Mrs. Cumberbatch, who becomes housekeeper and chaperone. When Helen remarks that she has not heard of the “sect,” Mrs. Cumberbatch replies “with a smiling condescension.”

So I have heard people speak of us before. Some even call our faith a schism. But of course, you know, we are the only true Church? After all I'm not surprised that you are unacquainted with us. We do not care much to make converts. We alone are the elect, and if it pleases our Master to turn to us one of those who are going the broad way we accept the offering gladly. Otherwise, we can acquiesce in the Lord's will. (232-233)

To this declaration, which seems to hint that Helen may in fact be one of those “going the broad way, Helen offers “...a smile at the cheerfulness with which Mrs. Cumberbatch acquiesced in the damnation of that not inconsiderable portion of mankind...” not belonging to this church (II: 233). Significantly, Mrs. Cumberbatch shows no signs of intimidation. She smiles back (233). Subsequent events show Mrs. Cumberbatch functioning as a subversive, becoming a spy and informant on Maud Waghorn when this childhood friend of Helen's involves herself in a scandalous affair with the carnal divinity student Augustus Whiffle, who has previously fathered Carrie's child. In a kind of seditious class-based attack, she colludes with the servants of other households in order to acquire damaging information as she continues to attend meetings of what Matthew Arnold would have termed her “hole and corner” church. Helen continues to despise Mrs. Cumberbatch, but she is forced to tolerate her while under the guardianship of Gilbert Gresham.

In some measure, Mrs. Cumberbatch fits the pattern of intriguer and busybody which so commonly infiltrates fictional Victorian households. Her irritating manner of speech and her smug assurance of election clearly indicate Gissing's critical view of her doctrinal stance. However, although Gissing does not portray her sympathetically, she does acquire a certain level of power, partly through her religious beliefs. For example, the intensely secular artist Gresham hands over the management of his household to her, and he entrusts her with the task of supervising Helen, with whom he has become enamored. Cumberbatch's class status is unclear; most probably she is a widower of the middle class whose financial situation does not allow her to live alone. The reader can infer this because she abandons her house in order to live with a nephew she has never met (II: 231). In spite of this fact, she and Gilbert, who does not normally consort with sincerely religious figures, soon form an alliance. It is true that Gilbert had been the sympathetic confidant of Reverend Norman, but Norman grew increasingly unhappy with his calling as an Anglican clergyman. However, Gilbert's enlistment of Mrs. Cumberbatch illustrates again the male double standard regarding religion and women. That is, women, especially in any domestic capacity, were often expected to maintain a measure of religious observance.¹⁷ As the household surrogate for wife and mother, Mrs. Cumberbatch, no doubt, is aware of this requirement, but she succeeds in rebelling against the standard pattern of orthodoxy, thereby achieving, as I have said, some autonomy over her own personality. In an apparent effort to emphasize her lower class/economic status, Gissing allows us to observe that her means seem limited, since upon arrival to London, she solicits money from Helen to pay the cab (232). Nonetheless, her ability to command resources from others, as well as her adherence to a sect outside of the mainstream, places her in a position of economic and social authority that many women in her case would not have dared to assert. In fact, her obnoxious religious views,

because they are obnoxious, shield her from the unpleasant powerlessness a dependent female relative might otherwise have had to endure, and as such these views inspire others who occupy a somewhat higher gradation of class with a desire to avoid and, failing that, to defer to her. Helen, the narrator informs us, experiences a powerful “aversion” for Mrs. Cumberbatch, to the point that her aunt’s very company causes Helen “continual irritation” (II: 241). Helen, of course, is a dependent to some extent, but her emancipation will come when she reaches the age of twenty one. Hence, Mrs. Cumberbatch exercises control over her social superior with what amounts to impunity, since “Mr. Grehsam knew that in Mrs. Cumberbatch he had someone on whom he could thoroughly rely...” (III, 133). Further illustrating Mrs. Cumberbatch’s access to higher class circles than the one she apparently occupies is her ability to penetrate into the affairs of Helen’s childhood friend, Maud Gresham, who has made an infelicitous marriage with the scoundrel Mr. Waghorn. In fact, she remains in communication with Maud, winning Maud’s confidence to the extent that she obtains knowledge of her elopement with Augustus Whiffle before Helen does (III: 348-349). When the news of the scandal hits the papers, Mrs. Cumberbatch gleefully adumbrates the affair to Helen. After serving in a role which facilitates the affair, Mrs. Cumberbatch, “had the pleasure of pointing out the following passage in a daily paper: – “Waghorn v. Waghorn and Whiffle”” (III, 352). That Whiffle, upon learning of the publicity surrounding the event, refers to the “devil” and uses expressions such as “damnation” indicates that he and Maud accord quite well with Cumberbatch’s concept of election (351). Ironically, Helen, whose denunciation of religion should bring liberation, finds herself at the mercy of someone whose religious views happily contemplate the damnation of humanity at large and that of her erstwhile friend in particular. Distasteful as she might be, Mrs. Cumberbatch exercises power partly through her impregnable religious determinism, which keeps Helen at bay

and which cooperates with the inevitable spiritual destruction of one of the lost, Maud Waghorn. Her triumphs take on an especially pleasant aspect to Mrs. Cumberbatch, since they involve a victory over her social betters. In a way, her religion has achieved in reality a theology of class equality in Christ, whereas Reverend Heatherly's version of the same thing results, as the reader will remember, in confirming class suppression. Gissing leaves the reader once again to contemplate the power of Calvinism to control behavior, even apart from the secularized economic version Weber delineates so convincingly.¹⁸ We will encounter variations of Mrs. Cumberbatch in other novels. These women do not always originate from the same class as their fictional predecessor, but they use their religious beliefs to establish themselves as actors in their own realm.

As extensive as my treatment of Gissing's use of religion in *Workers in the Dawn* has been, I have not by any means exhausted the subject. However, my examination of religion in the novel has sufficiently demonstrated the scope and complexity of the topic. In the next chapters, especially the ones which concern the "working class" novels that followed quickly upon *Workers in the Dawn*, the reader will find many instances wherein Gissing reworks several of the religious and economic motifs of his first published novel. Gissing continues in these books to explore ideas having to do with class identity, economic oppression, female empowerment, and social justice, all related to some extent to his utilization and presentation of religion. Though Gissing revisits religious issues throughout his career, his direct use of religion peaks in *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, *The Nether World*, and *Thryza*. I will focus, then, on these works in the sections of my investigation immediately following, leaving *Isabel Clarendon*, Gissing's third published work, for consideration later, primarily in my chapter on feminism and religious issues. Even though *Clarendon* was Gissing's third published novel, it did not involve religious

terminology to the same extent as its predecessors. This novel shows, in its attenuated use of religion, that the more extensive presence of religious material in the other early novels that came after it was a matter of artistic choice. It is wedged, in other words, between *The Unclassed* and *Demos*. On these novels then, I will expend considerable attention in order to show how Gissing, continued to use some of the same material in the same way as he did in *Workers in the Dawn* in some instances, and how he departed from his handling of religion in others.

Chapter Two – Early Novels of the Working Class

Class and its Demarcations

During the first seven years of his career as a novelist, Gissing continued to examine in his novels the problems of class and poverty, especially those predicaments in which the working class found itself in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Gissing also conducted tentative fictional excursions into areas pertaining to the possibility of class mobility. The conclusions he reaches concerning this issue vary, of course, as some characters manage to penetrate into higher levels of class status through money. Their ability to remain in this position depends largely, Gissing implies, on their right to be there in the first place. I will show that characters such as Ida Starr, who rises from prostitution to middle class property owner, arguably belongs in that category to begin with by virtue of her kinship with the entrepreneur Abraham Woodstock, even though at times she places herself among the socially lost. Conversely, Richard Mutimer, in *Demos*, who wants originally to effect labor reform with the money he receives from a legacy, marries into a social category above him, but then descends, not merely back into the lower orders, but into ignominy, a descent facilitated by the religious wife that he hopes will cement his affiliation with the hereditary gentry of Wanley. In a variation of the class-switching theme, Jane Snowden, in *The Nether World*, clings to her relative poverty rather than subscribe to a scheme fostered by her grandfather to raise the poor through charity and education. Even the innocent Thryza, as the putative protagonist of the novel bearing her name, falls back into the working class from which she came after a brief flirtation with the idealistic reformer Walter Egremont.¹ The inability or unwillingness of these characters and others to achieve a true rise in status reflects the stagnation caused by what can only be termed economic determinism. Obviously, Gissing could not shake the notion of the inflexibility of the economic order. Indebted

to the ideas of Max Weber and Mordechai Rotenberg, I have made bold to refer to this sense of class rigidity as capitalistic Calvinism, in which the damned, by and large, remain damned. I will argue that Gissing's use of religion, though certainly not exclusively rendered in service to this idea, obviously mitigates in favor of the view that money becomes God in that it is the only force that can save anyone. Even so, it does not invariably save even those who possess it, especially if they belong to an order that, in some intrinsic manner, does not deserve it. I will also discuss other elements of Gissing's use of religion in these novels as it applies to social trends relevant to these components, but the reader will discern even at these moments that, somewhere in the vicinity of these side expeditions, economic matters will hover nearby. Peripherally or centrally, money usually intrudes into the discussion of religion in Gissing's work.

The Unclassed: Determinism Light?

Margaret Mitchell, in "Gissing's Moral Mischief: Prostitutes and Narrative Resolution," claims that *The Unclassed* amounts to a departure from the class and gender determinism so apparent in *Workers in the Dawn* and other novels (420-421). In asserting this idea, Mitchell in fact recognizes a key element in Gissing's writing with which I have been concerned.

Determinism, that is, in one form or another, dominates Gissing's thinking. Usually, as I have already argued, one can trace Calvinistic tendencies in Gissing's rendering of mechanistic economic forces and in his depiction of stubborn class divisions. Not fully realizing this aspect of Gissing's mentality, a certain school of criticism has tried, with some justification, to relegate Gissing's works to a sub-category of late realism or Zola-esque naturalism. Recently, Deborah Parsons has voiced a version of this pigeon-holing, saying that both Zola and Gissing "embrace the naturalist aesthetic in their depiction of an organic urban milieu, their social-scientific focus on the influence of heredity and environment, and their relation of personal histories to the

broader social and political climate of city and nation” (“Whirlpools of Modernity” 108).² Other critics, such as William A. Madden, have noticed that Gissing and other writers of “despair” like James Thomson seem limited to “a middle-class view of society” because of “their incapacity to conceive an alternative” (“The Victorian Sensibility” 90). This assessment contains a measure of truth in that Gissing views money as the main arbiter of human destiny (and the primary, though not the only, indicator of class status), a conception held, consciously or not, by the dominant British middle class. As the reader knows by now, I contend that indeed the middle class and their chroniclers, Gissing and Thomson among them, in fact cannot “conceive an alternative” to pessimism both because of their preoccupation with the primacy of money and because of the submerged Protestantism active in their work. In light of Gissing’s fascination with determinism in general, Mitchell’s claim that *The Unclassed* represents a departure from other novels in its lessening of class and gender fixity raises several interesting questions. The most compelling of these involve an analysis of just how far the novel does go in allowing its characters a degree of class mobility and freedom of action, especially in the context of my consideration of the religious elements in the novel and of the ways in which these elements correlate with economic and social questions. I think that my reading will demonstrate that, as usual, Gissing declines to assert more than a tentative position in favor of human freedom. As always, any happiness experienced by the characters of a Gissing novel links up in some way with their access to money.³ I hasten to add that money *allows* happiness, though it does not ensure it. This state of affairs limits, it seems to me, the amount and quality of freedom or volition available to a character. Furthermore, as I have argued throughout this study, Money-as-God behaves, as it were, very much like a Calvinist version of deity. Significantly, Gissing’s original title for *The Unclassed*, which was *The Burden of Life*, indicates anything but autonomy (*Collected Letters II*:

119). On the contrary, both titles suggest a certain amount of restriction. To be unclassed implies not just freedom, as Mitchell seems to believe; it also entails the idea of arbitrary exclusion. Two questions, then, present themselves in a reading of the novel, and the second of these depends on the first. Does *The Unclassed* constitute a significant departure in its level of concentration on determinism? If so, to what extent does Gissing allow his characters to act independently?

The Redemptive Whore: Gissing's Fantasy Fulfilled

Mitchell refers especially to the differences between the female characters in the novel, and her argument hinges around the idea that Ida Starr in *The Unclassed* experiences a transformation that propels her into both middle class respectability and altruistic morality (423). This change stands in stark contrast to the fate of her predecessor in prostitution, Carrie Mitchell/Golding, in *Workers in the Dawn*. At the same time, it connects her to Helen Norman, from that same novel, in that both Helen and Ida, figured by Gissing as ostensibly pure in some construction of the word, conduct philanthropic enterprises. Both women also seek their own space of action. As Mitchell explains, "Ida's reconfigured femininity in *The Unclassed* is accompanied by an elevation in class" (424). Though Mitchell does not concern herself with the religious implications of Ida's transformation, her observations bear indirectly on my position that Gissing makes use of religious patterns that often match economic and class issues. In fact, Gissing gathers around Ida Starr a number of biblical, Christian, and otherwise spiritual motifs that sometimes reaffirm, sometimes contradict, and sometimes augment various arguments I have put forward about Gissing's use of religion in his novels. Inevitably, a discussion of Ida will entail subsidiary discussions of other characters, especially Osmund Waymark, whose own career sometimes denotes complications involving religion and economics. Both of these forces, of course, act either in support of a determinist interpretation or against it.

Before I delineate the significance of Ida Starr and her relationship to the general thesis of my discussion, I should point out that Gissing's portrayal of her has gained for the author a great deal of adverse criticism and some praise. In some respects, this diversity of reaction stems from the wider debate about prostitution in Victorian society in the latter half of the century. Patricia Ingham, in *The Language of Gender and Class*, provides a possible explanation for the skepticism surrounding Gissing's characterization of Ida Starr, an explanation that posits class bias as its very basis. Since the early years of the nineteenth century, considerable suspicion existed regarding the propensity to female criminality among the working classes, who were "irrational, immoral, and in need of restraint" (26). Ingham also notes, citing Henry Mayhew specifically, that experts doubted the possibility, or at least the likelihood, of a woman from the middle classes descending into prostitution through economic misfortune, primarily because Victorians assumed that such a woman possessed intrinsically higher morals than her class inferiors (24). Though, as Lloyd Fernando implies in "*New Women*" in *the Late Victorian Novel*, the pervasiveness and intensity of this attitude lessened somewhat in the years intervening between the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1866 and 1869 and the publication of *The Unclassed* in 1884, novelists could still discover that frank discussion of sexual matters could bring severe consequences (6-9). Female sexuality in general remained suspect. Elaine Showalter, in *Sexual Anarchy* (a phrase she borrows from Gissing), explains that, even as physicians in the 1880s began to recognize "women's capacity for sexual pleasure," the view that "women's chief superiority to man lay in her greater spirituality and passionlessness" still enjoyed widespread acceptance (21-21). Working class women, as Ingham has pointed out, might be liable to sexual promiscuity and prostitution, but not the middle class "angel in the house" (23-24). If a writer depicted middle class women as susceptible to prostitution or other forms of

immorality, as Gissing did, he might well have expected adverse response. Early appraisals of *The Unclassed* demonstrate this risk. In an unsigned review of June 1884 in the *Evening News*, the writer treated *The Unclassed* with what appears to be sarcastic contempt disguised as praise.

And the Caliban of the slums is as good as his word. Mr. Gissing has succeeded in lifting the veil from the life of a section of the world of London concerning which serious novelists have too long kept silence, and he has done his work with so much good feeling and good taste that no reader will be offended, while all will be the richer for some authentic information, much needed in these days of social reform Mr. Gissing is thoroughly acquainted with the main subject on which he writes, but while we thank him for the data, we regard the inferences which he frames into a philosophy of life as entirely erroneous. When, for instance, he touches Christianity, it is, though we doubt not he writes in perfect good faith, to travesty it. Again, the notion that the mind of a prostitute can remain pure and unsullied in the midst of her profession is simply contrary to fact, however well it may fit in with this or that theory. (68)

Notably, the reviewer explicitly cites Gissing's treatment of Christianity, lending further credibility to my overall argument that religion forms a significant role in Gissing's fiction and that it connects with social and economic matters. Regarding *The Unclassed*, a more caustic and direct anonymous critic in an 1885 *Punch* review entitled "Gissing the Rod," writes "Praised be the gods for thy foulness, Gissing! but also that, as we fondly hope, there are not very many like thee" (73). One commentator, Arthur R. R. Barker, in another 1884 review in the *Academy*, also faults, not Gissing's morality, but his lack of "verisimilitude" in portraying "a long-continued platonic attachment between a normal young man – even of aesthetic tastes – and a London prostitute" (70). Interestingly, Barker seems to think the author of *The Unclassed* is a woman. By and large, Victorians continued to be largely convinced that morality remained the province of middle-class Christian women with little or no sexual interest. No middle-class woman would stoop to prostitution, and if she did so, she would certainly not regain respectability as Ida Starr does in Gissing's novel.

Victorian ambivalence towards prostitution stemmed from fear of class instability, but also, I believe, from the mixed messages about prostitutes in the Bible. Injunctions that prostitutes and adulterers endure death by stoning abound in the Old Testament. In fact, in Deuteronomy 22, God instructs that even victims of rape who do not cry out must suffer this form of capital punishment. The well known image, in Revelation 2:22, of the harlot who incites fornication, formed the basis of many an admonishing Victorian sermon. A seductive woman was a “Jezebel” in common parlance. On the other hand, prostitutes in the Bible play remarkably positive and redemptive roles in both the Old and New Testaments. Rahab the Harlot, who, in the book of Joshua, helped save Jericho, is exalted in both James 2:25 and Hebrews 11:31 as an exemplar of salvation by works and salvation by faith, respectively. In Luke 7: 38-50, Jesus tells the parable of the woman, “which was a sinner,” who anoints his feet with oil and becomes an emblem of one who loves Christ more than other sinners because of the extensiveness of her sin. In John 8, Jesus rescues from stoning a woman caught in adultery (who may or may not be Mary Magdalene). Given Gissing’s personal and fictional fascination with prostitutes and his extensive knowledge of Scripture, I do not think it unreasonable to assume that his treatment of them sometimes reflects Biblical resonances. In fact, most Western depictions of sympathetic prostitutes contain some awareness of these fallen paradigms. That having been said, *Ida Starr* conforms to the Biblical prototype of the virtuous prostitute in several ways. Indeed, one item of interest related to a discussion of *Ida Starr* has to do with the affinities between her story, as opposed to the stories of other prostitutes in Gissing’s work, and the “fallen women” of the Bible.

Though I do not contend that Gissing fashions from *Ida Starr* an exact replica of a Biblical prostitute, she does fit the mold of what I might call the “redemptive whore.” In other

words, she experiences a conversion of sorts, a cleansing, and then she attempts to impart her restorative powers to others. In fact, Ida undertakes, on her own initiative, a baptism of sorts, bathing naked in the sea in the darkness of night (145). After that incident, she gets work as a laundress, a profession that specializes in cleanliness. At the same time, she tries to abandon her life of prostitution, although she is thwarted temporarily by the vicious machinations of Harriet Casti (*Unclassed* 189-90). Margaret Mitchell names one aspect of Ida's recuperative but radicalizing effects. Mitchell asserts that Ida fashions "a new order, one where class boundaries are permeable, and the prostitute, far from being ejected from the house, is established at its head" (425). This idea accords well with my claim that Ida does exemplify for Gissing a purging of the evils of the social order. In some ways, one of her initial conversations with Waymark, in which Ida details her descent into and renunciation of prostitution, reformulates, in a restrained and secular fashion, the Evangelical and revivalist conversion testimonial.⁴ During this exchange, Gissing manages, as well, to insert other elements of Christian theology of some considerable scope. For this purpose, he uses Waymark as a vehicle for conveying subtle religious concepts, however confusing these become in that character's jumbled use of terms. Waymark, who persists in imagining for Ida a romantic past, has already, at the time this conversation takes place, been captivated by her charms, especially by what he attributes to her as her purity: "My ideal woman is the one who, knowing the darkest secret of life, keeps yet a pure mind, as you do, Ida" (131). In some respects, Gissing seems to be mocking his own earlier idealistic and disastrous attempts to spiritualize and save the woman who was to become his own prostitute-wife, Nell. Alternatively, Gissing may indeed see in Ida, the only truly middle class prostitute he depicts in his fiction, as an indication that heredity, another term for destiny, makes all the difference in ascertaining true class and moral status, a view that puts the reader right back into a

consideration of Calvinist determinism. In any event, following Waymark's declaration, Ida launches into the story of her life, including a recapitulation of her childhood struggles with shame over her mother, who was also a prostitute, and a detailed account of her wretched poverty. In her report of her fall into prostitution, one of the numerous reproductions or variations of the Fall in Gissing's novels, Ida describes herself as initially happy, not understanding human nature. At first, this portrayal resembles the Romantic concept of innate goodness. Soon enough, however, Ida's version of events sound very much like the orthodox Christian view of original sin: "I have learned by heart everything that is bad in the world" (131). Although she does not come to this realization until she reaches the age of eleven, she finally comes to learn of the essential evil of existence: "Nothing in meanness or vileness or wretchedness is a secret to me" (141). Ida's narrative revolves primarily around her moral descent, but her deterioration encompasses a loss of class and financial status. In fact, her primary sin, and also her punishment, is poverty itself. Evil and misery stem from the fact that she is poor. Here, Gissing plays with the tension between Rousseau's concept of societal contagion and the Calvinistic one of original sin, but Ida makes it clear, at this point, that she regards herself as fallen.⁵ Whether Gissing regards her in the same light remains a matter of contention, and Ida seems to equivocate somewhat on the matter of free will and determinism. Even as she delineates the harsh necessity that compelled her to become a prostitute, she accepts, in a strangely unapologetic fashion, her lapse as an indication of the weakness of her character.

I was reckless; what happened to me mattered little, as long as I had not to face hard work. I needed rest. For one in my position there was, I saw well enough, only one way of getting it. I took that way. (139)

Not surprisingly, Ida's description of her adoption of prostitution brings several potential religious concepts to the foreground. In one sense, Ida implies in this statement a decidedly

fatalistic stance. She sees only “one way” of action for her. Morality, under the circumstances with which she is faced, is not even a possibility. In the orthodox Christian signification that underlies much of Gissing’s work, she is, at this point, outside of grace. While she does express an aversion to “hard work,” the facts of her situation have eliminated that option at any rate. She has been excluded from legitimate participation in economic activity. Plausibly, and from the opposite end of the theological spectrum, Ida’s rejection of hard work might ironically position her more solidly in the role of the redemptive prostitute that I proposed earlier, since it obliquely involves the removal of one the curses of the Fall. After all, as we shall see, Ida later does work to alleviate the harsh conditions of poor children, and she stimulates other social improvements. At the same time, one could argue that this rejection of the imposition of hardship in labor in Genesis 3:19, wherein God tells Adam that “[i]n the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” constitutes a part of her sin. Furthermore, the idea of labor evokes the entire discussion of the Calvinistic notion of work in a calling. Finally, Gissing certainly exposes, through Ida, the extremely restricted economic possibilities confronting women. Clearly, the topical density of Gissing’s treatment of the discussion between Waymark and Ida once again demonstrates the author’s ability to conduct a larger debate involving economic, social, and personal issues which are often infused with complicated and often contradictory religious reverberations.

As a foil of sorts to Ida’s story, Waymark’s contribution to the dialogue provides alternative perspectives on matters relating to the interplay between religious, philosophical concepts on the one hand and economic topics on the other. Waymark, who has been ostentatiously attentive, has been nonetheless, all throughout their conversation, injecting into Ida’s tale constructions of his own imagining. For one thing, he keeps interrupting with what he means to be passionate and supportive statements such as, in reference to Ida’s dead mother,

“Think how long she has been resting ...” (132). On still another occasion, he blurts, “That was fine, that was heroic!” (133). In addition, he has brought to the encounter his evolving notions of economic competition and what might be construed as quasi-Schopenhauerean pessimism, ideas that seem invested also with a discordant mixture of Romantic idealism and sardonically but inconsistently expressed Christian imagery. Because of Waymark’s disunited declarations and because he ultimately sacrifices his idealism for a salary as a rent-collector, I cannot agree with John Sloan’s appraisal of him. Sloan, in “Gissing, Literary Bohemia, and the Metropolitan Circle,” ranks Ida Starr, “the prostitute with a cherished ideal of selfhood,” and Waymark as equals in their ability to balance “bourgeois and bohemian instincts” and in their “strong, well-balanced natures” (79). Ida displays strength and idealism, but Waymark typically demonstrates a fairly shallow propensity for appropriating, somewhat incoherently, quasi-intellectual notions. In addition, Waymark has an aptitude for adapting quite cynically to economic convenience. In one outburst, occurring after Ida, in response to a rather tedious lecture on the need for leisure, makes the rather pragmatic comment “We must learn to forget our troubles,” Waymark waxes incoherently lyrical.

Why yes, and those troubles are the fit reward of our folly. We have not been content to live in the simple happiness of our senses. We must be learned and wise forsooth. We were not content to enjoy the beauty of the greater and the lesser light. We must understand whence they come and whither they go – after that what they are made of and how much they weigh. We thought for such a long time that our toil would end in something; that we might become as gods knowing good and evil. Now we are at the end of our tether, we see clearly enough that it has all been worse than vain; how good if we could unlearn it all, scatter the building of phantasmal knowledge in which we dwell so uncomfortably! It is too late. The gods never take back their gift; we wearied them with our prayers to grant us this one, and now they sit in the clouds and mock us. (130)

Ida, understandably “scarcely understood” her companion’s meaning, partly because Waymark’s rambling, when examined closely, contains a discrepant mixture of neo-pagan idealism and Christian rhetoric. The reader barely takes in the epicurean exhortation to “live in the simple happiness of our senses” before being incongruously confronted with allusions to the Fall, or so we assume on the basis of Waymark’s echo of Genesis 3:5 in his statement that humans have become “gods knowing good and evil” (130). Waymark even gives the reader a glance at Ecclesiastes 12:8 with his insistence on the vanity of knowledge, then shifts to a declaration that ignorance of such knowledge would be preferable. Waymark does not specify what he means by this statement, and the reader certainly does not know. Does he mean “phantasmal knowledge,” “knowledge of good and evil,” or somehow both? Finally, he makes reference to “the gods” whose gifts cannot be refused and who mock us for having granted them. After enduring a further disquisition on the desirability of dying when “joy seems supreme and stable,” Ida, fortunately, brings the conversation back to a grimmer, but more practical, level by asking (one is tempted to think, hopefully) if Waymark has ever considered suicide (130). This question the reader welcomes if for no other reason than to escape from Waymark’s silly and pretentious eclecticism. She then begins her story, parts of which we have just reviewed. Though religious issues are not under direct discussion in passages such as the ones immediately under consideration, Gissing infuses into the background of his writing an echo of the kinds of conversations about religion current in the Victorian era. Waymark’s digression certainly resembles much of the absurd religious syncretism that characterized debate in that period.⁶

As “redemptive whore,” Ida functions as martyr and savior in *The Unclassed*. After trying, as an adult, to befriend her childhood nemesis, Harriet Smales, she undergoes at Harriet’s instigation imprisonment for a theft she has not committed. Harriet, a completely disgusting

character, has perpetrated a number of impostures on other characters, all of them motivated by economic considerations. She has tricked Julian Casti, Waymark's impoverished artist friend, into marriage, for instance. As a child, Harriet had tormented Ida with taunts about Ida's mother's reputation as a person who "got her living in the streets" (5). Harriet's conception of individual worth, as I have said elsewhere, demonstrates that she "cannot distinguish human personality from economic activity" (Brewer 13). She represents, along with the primitive capitalists of Whitecross in *Workers in the Dawn*, the lowest kind of mercantile predation. Ida serves a prison sentence because Harriet, of whom Julian says, "her devilish malice is equal to anything," accuses her of stealing a piece of jewelry from her (*Unclassed* 196). After Ida is released from prison and reconciled to Abraham Woodstock, her grandfather, she initiates a search for Waymark, who has been robbed and imprisoned in a dark room by Slimy, one of Woodstock's tenants. Gissing describes Waymark at the moment of his rescue as "motionless," "blind," voiceless, and as unable to move as "a dead man" (249). Ida revives him, Lazarus-like, to life, and "All he could do was press his hand to her heart" (250). Later, when she inherits the tenements from Woodstock, she makes improvements and attempts to better the lives of the tenants, particularly the children. She obviously belongs in that recurrent pattern of "madonnas or magdalens" that critics such as Annette Federico have detected throughout Gissing's work (22). To be accurate, I suppose, one must interpret Ida Starr as Magdalen *and* Madonna, since she embodies the most successful rendering of the Gissing fantasy of virtuous whore in his fiction. She may be the only prostitute in Gissing's work that manages a complete reformation, confirming her higher moral standing by applying herself to helping children and the poor.

As always in a Gissing novel, some anomalies in the rendering of this portrait come to light. Oddly, though Gissing informs the reader that the inhabitants of the tenements are cleaner

and their lot somewhat improved after Ida inherits their dwellings, she accomplishes this overall regeneration by expelling “such as could by no means overcome their love of filth, moral and material...” (309-310). In other words, she expels the renters who cannot be changed. Once again, I see evidence of the underlying Calvinist conviction that some people fall beyond the pale of economic and moral salvation. Furthermore, Gissing links these categories, the “moral and material” pointedly together. Once again, the reader has encountered the damned. Therefore, even though he suggests a happy romantic ending in the final paragraph of *The Unclassed*, I cannot concur that Gissing gives a substantially rosier picture of economic reality in this novel than he does in the other early novels. Actually, even the supposed romantic ending merely suggests that Ida and Waymark will be together. It does not guarantee such an outcome.

Although Gissing informs the reader that Waymark has not married Maud Enderby after all, and that he writes Ida to tell her as much, the author cannot bring himself to show Ida and Waymark reunited. Instead, the novel ends with Ida writing Waymark a letter. The reader can probably assume, since Ida’s face shows “the pallor of a sudden joy almost too great to be borne,” that the couple will finally be united. Nonetheless, doubt remains.⁷ His depiction of Slimy, an account of which follows below, confirms my view almost definitively that Gissing has not abandoned his conception of deterministic and capitalistic hell.

Hell Embraced

I have already established, in some measure by following critics such as Michael Wheeler, that Gissing frequently identifies the concept of hell with the plight of the industrial, urban working class (179). Wheeler, in *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology*, makes the observation that writers like Gissing, “continued to find in the language traditionally associated with hell a repertoire of resonances” that enabled them to locate “hell on

earth” in a number of “versions” (196). One of the most striking examples of this motif occurs in *The Unclassed*. Many of the characters in this work, such as Osmond Waymark and Ida Starr, come from a lower rung of the middle class ladder, but several characters appear who derive from the proletariat. In particular, Slimy embodies most of the qualities that Gissing found particularly repellent about the lowest orders of the working class. In large part, Slimy recapitulates as an individual the wretched denizens of Whitecross in *Workers in the Dawn*. That is to say, Slimy represents the most hopeless of the laboring poor, and, as such, Gissing renders him in terms that border on the monstrous, the grotesque, and the diabolic. In doing so, however, Gissing indicates not just his instinctive class-based disgust, but also his recognition of the irreversible economic condition that fosters Slimy’s situation. Gissing reveals that one of the most ironic realities about both Slimy and the inhabitants of Whitecross and Adam and Eve Court lies in their embrace of capitalistic predation and exploitation, albeit on a more primitive, nakedly Darwinist level than that of their middle class counterparts. Gissing, to a certain extent because of his revulsion at the way capitalism reduces human interaction to the cash nexus, fears and despises characters like Slimy while simultaneously portraying them as victimized and pathetic. Jacob Korg, in his biography of Gissing, makes much the same point about this ambivalence: “His sympathy with the poor and oppressed was contradicted by his hatred of the barbarism their living conditions produced in them” (261). For, make no mistake, Slimy is one of Gissing’s many damned characters, one of those individuals who, as Korg notes, endures “the destruction of human character in the crushing mill of social evils” (261). As I have argued in “George Gissing’s Manifesto: *The Odd Women* and *The Unclassed*,” Slimy epitomizes the results of “class fixity and of the economic forces that often prevent class movement” (Brewer 14). Even though Slimy lacks the power of speech throughout much of the novel, he becomes “the

degraded member of the underclass who emerges progressively and linguistically as the spokesperson of that category” (Brewer 14). Slimy expresses the message of his own literal and figurative damnation through a direct skirmish with the forces that oppress him and, finally, through tormented language saturated with the vocabulary of capitalistic and religious exploitation. As I will demonstrate, Gissing invests Slimy with the most horrific traits of the underclass. At the same time, he grants Slimy a dignity that seems to originate partly from Milton’s Satan in that Gissing’s working class devil ultimately invokes and embraces his damned status.

More than any other character in Gissing’s fiction, Slimy experiences a nearly total loss of human identity. Gissing portrays Slimy through images that verge on the inhuman. The novel’s first depiction of Slimy occurs in a bar, an economic and exploitative location that recurs in Gissing’s early fiction.

Leaning on the counter, in one of the compartments, was something which a philanthropist might perhaps have had the courage to claim as a human being; a very tall creature, with bent shoulders, and head seeming to grow straight out of its chest; thick, grizzled hair hiding almost every vestige of feature, with the exception of one dreadful red eye, its fellow being dead and sightless. He had laid on the counter, with palms downward as if concealing something, two huge hairy paws. (66)

More akin to a Cyclops than a man, and more ravenous than either, Slimy possesses a name which itself “elicits associations of the Darwinian slime from which primeval life emerged” (Brewer 14). Normally, Slimy lacks money, but even when he has enough money to buy liquor, other individuals “place Slimy almost outside of the circle of economic activity, and, hence, of humanity” (Brewer 14). The bartender refuses to sell him alcohol. His landlord, Abraham Woodstock, communicates with Slimy in monosyllables when he collects rent, demanding merely, “Rent, Slimy” (*Unclassed* 100). In collaboration with this implicit silencing, Slimy

simply jabs a finger in the direction of the money. In attempting to earn money for alcohol by standing on his head and singing in front of the pub, Slimy undergoes further humiliation when others cram mud into his mouth (*Unclassed* 186), frustrating his attempt “to find remuneration through this comical and inverted idiom” (Brewer 14). Not to be mistaken with the utterly abject, Slimy plies a trade with his knife-grinding machine (symbolic, obviously, of the grudge he holds against his social betters), but, as he tells Woodstock, “There never was sich times since old Scratch died ... No chance for an honest man” (101). Slimy associates his own fortunes directly with the fortunes of the devil, who has died, no doubt, along with God, but who, to Slimy, symbolizes the power of subjugation in a mercantile context. He also recognizes the futility of his own efforts in his assessment that he has “[n]o chance” (101). Further indications of his identification with fiendish activity appear in his living quarters, in which the walls “were all scribbled over with obscene words and drawings” (101). As I indicate in “George Gissing’s Manifesto,” “Slimy sees the world of trade through one eye, but his seemingly insignificant declarations at this point, consisting of negations and unspoken profanities, comprise in themselves a commentary on the capitalistic system that has consigned him to what Gissing calls in another novel ‘the nether world.’” (14). From this “nether world,” as critics such as Deborah Nord has argued, “there is no way out” (194), except in a manner similar to the escape Slimy fashions for himself.

Notwithstanding his marginalization, Slimy attains some level of self determination even in the midst of his damnation. In fact, one might claim that Slimy orchestrates his own destiny, something that few characters in Gissing ever achieve. On one occasion, Waymark, who has taken over the duties as rent collector for the slumlord Woodstock, visits Slimy in the tenant’s room. Without warning, Slimy kidnaps, restrains, and robs the rent collector in order to buy

liquor (*Unclassed* 230-232). As he secures Waymark to the floor with chains, Slimy finds his voice at last, “the voice of the underclass at its worst” (Brewer 15). As the exponent of the oppressed, Slimy eloquently discourses on economic inequity in general and on his situation in particular. As Slimy sees it, his problem lies in the insufficiency of his personal supply of alcohol, a state of affairs he plans to remedy by buying enough liquor to drink himself to death.

My four friends ain't what they used for to be, an' 'cos I ain't got enough of 'em. It's unsatisfaction, that's what it is, as brings the burnin' i' th'inside, and the devils in the 'ead. Now I've got money, an' for wunst in my life I'll be satisfied an' 'appy. And then I'll go where there's *real* burnin' an' *real* devils – an' let em make the most o' Slimy. (233)

Clearly, Slimy has constructed for himself an inverted Calvinistic version of the capitalistic nightmare. Though I risk the charge of conceit in doing so, I believe that my appraisal of Slimy's capitalistic venture in “George Gissing's Manifesto” captures succinctly the connection Gissing makes between capitalism and the degradation of the working class.

This reference to making the most of oneself forms another of the instances wherein Gissing comments indirectly upon the nature of the unregulated capitalist system through concepts embedded in the novel's language. Even in hell, Slimy will be subject to the exigencies of use by a set of devils other than Abraham Woodstock and his agent. In fact, destructive consumption is of the essence of Slimy's language in this quotation: the consumption of liquor, produced by entrepreneurs and used as a mechanism of suppression, perhaps elimination, of the underclass; the consumption of self as epitomized by Slimy's burning insides, achieving his implicit cooperation with his own destruction; and, most importantly, the idea of consumption as the goal of existence and of money as the means of attaining this goal. Slimy's spoken illustration of the rationale behind his crime falls into line with the reigning rationale of capitalism itself. Ironically, even though Slimy tries to escape his miserable existence on the margins of society, and although he gains a voice, he essentially endorses his own annihilation as both an instrument and a product of capitalist resource depletion. He becomes, not a rebel fighting against economic oppression, but a robber baron whose industry is self-immolation. (15)

Although I still believe that Slimy falls short of any real success in his endeavor to carve out an identity separate from his role as an economic functionary, I think now that he acquires the virtue

of seeing clearly the inevitability of his own destruction within the class and cash nexus of his society. His choice, to join forces with hell, even as hell consumes him, implies that he goes to his damnation with no illusions of salvation here or hereafter. A remark by John Sloan in “The Literary Affinity of Gissing and Dostoevsky” has pertinence to Slimy’s condition. Sloan observes that in Gissing “it is possible for the humiliated and oppressed to embrace and even enjoy their suffering” (445). Though it sounds nonsensical to say so, Slimy’s choice is to accept that he has no choice, and he welcomes gleefully the chance to undergo damnation by alcohol. If anything, he chooses to accelerate the process of “his own annihilation” (Brewer 15). Furthermore, Slimy uses money, Gissing’s substitute for God, for his own purposes, and in spite of the filthy, animalistic, incoherent nature of his existence, he affirms his right to embrace his own squalor as a form of protest. If this outcry against the injustice of his life falls short of the outrageous majesty of Milton’s Satan, it does so because Slimy, a human, can only achieve diabolic stature by succumbing to the satanic energies of capitalism, through offering himself sacrificially to the forces he sees as controlling the quality of being itself.

The Religion of Death

Whereas Slimy, the representative of the most exploited and debased of the working poor, embraces Hell, two female characters of lower middle class stature embrace death. Throughout this study, I have contemplated the issue of feminist space. At a later juncture, I will examine more thoroughly this and other feminist concerns as Gissing presents them. Since others have thoroughly commented on the growing efforts of women to gain widened scope in social and economic spheres, I will concentrate mostly on the ways in which female characters in Gissing use religion to carve out at least a fragment of their identity. Furthermore, I will notice how this utilization of religion serves to assist women in penetrating the other areas of life. I have taken a

quick glimpse of this subject in the introduction and in Chapter I. In both *Workers in the Dawn* and in *The Unclassed*, the reader finds precursors or prototype of this phenomenon, not only in the obvious examples of Helen Norman and Ida Starr, but in certain minor female characters to which Gissing unambiguously attaches a religious identity. One of these characters, already considered, is Mrs. Cumberbatch, whose attachment to extreme doctrines illustrates a fanatical and rather quirky form of Calvinism. I have shown how her religious preoccupations limits her in some respects and, at the same time, grants her a certain power and freedom of movement that she otherwise might not have attained as the dependent aunt of a rather worldly artist. In *The Unclassed*, the reader encounters a similar figure in Miss Bygrave, the aunt of Maud Enderby. Although she possesses some elements in common with Mrs. Cumberbatch, Miss Bygrave exhibits several variations on Gissing's "religious aunt" theme.

As is the case with Mrs. Cumberbatch, the reader is tempted to dismiss Miss Bygrave as perhaps Gissing's clumsy attempt to provide a readily satirized figure along the lines of Dickens' Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House*. Gissing's character, however, has the distinction of encompassing both more and less significance than that of Mrs. Jellyby. Miss Bygrave seems less memorable than a character like Jellyby because of the restraint Gissing uses in her portrayal. Nevertheless, Miss Bygrave impacts the thematic content of *The Unclassed* more than Mrs. Jellyby does in *Bleak House* because Jellyby is decidedly a caricature. To be sure, Dickens uses her to excoriate the inappropriate practice of philanthropy by making this practitioner of it appear ridiculous in her hypocritical unconcern for her own family. Bygrave, on the other hand, in spite of the reader's initial impression, functions, in a concentrated way, in deadly earnest as an indication of several problems associated with religion in *The Unclassed*. Also, Miss Bygrave and her niece

become involved in philanthropy, although the reader sees little of it in the action of the novel itself.

Having distinguished Gissing's purpose from Dickens' in this particular instance, one does notice that Gissing, like Dickens, frequently shows a fondness – some might say weakness – for giving his characters suggestive names. I need hardly point out the direct and negative impression the name Bygrave conveys. Symbolically, this woman lives, as it were, beside the grave in several respects. When the reader first encounters Miss Bygrave, Gissing describes her surroundings in a way that emphasizes her connection with death. Dark, quiet, constricted, cold, damp, sparsely decorated and furnished, the rooms in which she resides remind one of a tomb or perhaps a funeral parlour. Such ornaments as do appear consist of “pictures representing the saddest incidents in the life of Christ.” Specifically, these pictures depict the “Crucifixion,” the “Agony in the Garden,” and, pointedly, “an Entombment” (32). Conspicuous by its absence, the Resurrection is not represented. The room is kept in “perfect order and cleanliness,” but speaks of “unspeakable desolation,” just as one might expect of a memorial to someone dead (32). Otherwise, a meal of bread and milk comprise the only signs of life in the room other than Bygrave and her niece themselves. Even in this meal, the reader is reminded of the Last Supper. To add to the spectral quality of the scene, Maud, who is at this time a child, notices the “breath from their lips” as they partake of their repast (33). On this occasion, Miss Bygrave expounds on her reasons for not allowing Maud to celebrate Christmas as others do. Predictably, these reasons have to do with the fact that Christ came to liberate humanity from sin, not to encourage vice. Bygrave's theology provides for sin, which to her consists in the enjoyment of any pleasure, to become ever more powerful as one grows older. Her description of this viewpoint illustrates the twisted aspect of an ascetic Pietism that enjoins against earthly attachment.

The sin which Christ came to free us was – fondness for the world, enjoyment of what we call pleasure, desire for happiness on earth. He Himself came to set us the example of one to whom the world was nothing, who could put aside every joy, and make His life a life of sorrows. Even that was not enough. When the time had come, and He had finished the teaching of the disciples whom He chose, He most willingly underwent the most cruel of all deaths, to prove that His teaching had been the truth, and to show us that we must face any most dreadful suffering rather than desert what we believe to be right. (34-5)

Clearly, Miss Bygrave's belief falls on the opposite end of the continuum of the kind of desiccated, rationalized, de-spiritualized Calvinism Weber and others have identified. However, Gissing depicts her form of Christianity as even less palatable than the variety associated with rampant commercialism. In fact, Bygrave, in her denunciation of the flesh, repudiates acquisitiveness rather completely, but at the expense of life itself. She tells Maud, "If you feel fond of life, you must force yourself to hate it, for life is sin" (35). Ironically, this severity was not out of keeping with some early branches of Calvinism, which after all, concerned itself with assurances of salvation through self-denial, hard work, and even asceticism.⁸

Miss Bygrave's teaching does not fail to produce its desired effect in Maud Enderby's life. Like her aunt, Maud possesses a last name that relegates her, in pun-like fashion, to Being's end. Obviously, Gissing means to show that Maud's religion cripples her, rendering her incapable of participation in some of the experiences of life. Nevertheless, although it keeps her from marrying Waymark, the negating power of Maud's and her aunt's faith helps these women to achieve an identity apart from masculine direction. I will elaborate further on these conflicting manifestations of Maud's religion in the paragraphs which follow.

One of the most mystifying plot elements of *The Unclassed* revolves around the relationship between Maud Enderby and Osmund Waymark. Their view of reality cannot be more in conflict. Waymark expresses to his friend Julian Casti a nakedly materialistic philosophy

in which money replaces religion, if not God Himself. In fact, money has the power to make a human into a god.

What can claim precedence, in all this world, over hard cash? It is the fruitful soil wherein is nourished the root of the tree of life; it is the vivifying principle of human activity. Upon it luxuriate art, letters, science; rob them of its sustenance, and they droop like withering leaves. Money means virtue; the lack of it is vice. The devil loves no lurking-place like an empty purse. Give me a thousand pounds tomorrow, and I become the most virtuous man in England. [...] What cannot be purchased with coin of the realm? First and foremost, freedom. The moneyed man is the sole king; the herds of the penniless are but as slaves before his footstool. He breathes with a sense of proprietorship in the whole globe-enveloping atmosphere; for is it not in his power to inhale it wheresoever he pleases? He puts his hand in his pocket, and bids with security for every joy of body and mind; even death he faces with the comforting consciousness that his defeat will only coincide with that of human science. (53)

Money, to Waymark, brings salvation. It is the highest good, and it even brings comfort at the moment of death. Yet he conceives an attraction for Maud which seems to originate out of his recognition in her of the very misery that Waymark would like to avoid. When he first speaks to her of her troublesome pupils, she responds with the cryptic remark, "They are full of life" (73). Of course, life is the very thing from which her aunt has tried to deliver her. Later, Waymark seeks her out and establishes a correspondence with her that eventually leads to a romantic relationship. His attraction to her derives from his belief that she is a "being from a higher world" (83). Soon after talking with Maud, Waymark gives money to a prostitute out of pity, an act observed by a woman who turns out to be Ida, to whom he is also immediately attracted and with whom he immediately becomes entangled (85-92). Throughout the novel, Waymark wavers back and forth between these two women. At one point, although he is sexually and intellectually intoxicated with Ida, he decides to pursue Maud because she is more spiritual and because marrying Ida would involve too many complications. In addition, he experiences confusion

between pity for Maud and arousal caused by that very pity (265). In some way, too, Maud's spirituality draws Waymark by way of contrast with his own love of the sensual:

The more Waymark saw of Maud Enderby, the more completely did he yield to the fascination of her character. In her presence he enjoyed a strange calm of spirit. For the first time he knew a woman who by no word of look or motion could stir in him a cynical thought. Here was something higher than himself, a nature which he had to confess transcended the limits of his judgment, a soul with insight possibly for ever denied to himself. (156)

Waymark's decision to marry Maud, then, cannot be explained away by claiming that the rent collector remains ignorant of her theological views. The two lovers discuss this matter at length, and Maud writes Waymark a lengthy letter outlining her beliefs in detail. As a governess to the Eppings, Maud has occasion to critique the family's High Church ritualism, which she finds incomprehensible, not to mention worldly: "Surely, if Christianity means anything it means asceticism" (113). In true Bygrave fashion, Maud goes on to say that "the world at large" has departed from the true faith of "Renunciation" (113-114). In direct contrast to Waymark's pronouncements to Casti earlier, Maud declares that "in their poverty and nakedness lay means of grace and salvation such as the rich can scarcely by any means attain to" (114). The creedal discrepancy between Maud and Waymark deepens later when they discuss sin, Buddhism, Schopenhauer, Adam, Prometheus, Hercules, pessimism, self-consciousness, and nobility (223-227). The most marked departure in their opinions involves their divergent view of sin. Waymark quite plainly tells Maud that the concept of sin "... has been a word without significance to me." Rather, he believes in "the doctrine of philosophical necessity" and rejects "religious consolation" (225). The reader should be not surprised at this sentiment, since it reflects yet another variation of determinist thought in Gissing's novels. Waymark puts this belief into practice, reflecting to himself that, although he knows that when he sees Ida, he will feel

revulsion for Maud, he must act in the moment as he is acting. That is, he must commit himself to Maud for reasons he cannot express: “Well, there was no help. Whatever would be, would be” (227). Yet, in spite of their significant differences of theological perspective, Maud declares herself devoted to Waymark, stating, “I have no greater happiness than to have a share in your aims” (226). Later, however, Maud torments herself with the thought that her love for him is “sin, and its very strength the testimony of her soul’s loss” (227). For the moment, she too behaves as though directed by some higher power. Still, in Maud’s spiritual economy, the presence of happiness indicates the presence of evil. In her heart, she has remained faithful to the teaching of her aunt, something that has been foreseen for the entire course of the novel:

After that Christmas night when she [Bygrave] addressed Maud for the first time on matters of religion, she had said no second word; she waited the effect of her teaching, and the girl’s spontaneous recurrence to the subject. There was something in the very air of the still, chill house favorable to ascetic gravity. A young girl, living under such circumstances, must either pine away, eating her own heart, or become a mystic, and find her daily food in religious meditation. (149)

The reader learns finally that Maud indeed prefers her spiritual food to marital bliss.

When Maud finally decides to break off her engagement with Waymark, she confirms that she has chosen to adhere to Miss Bygrave’s theology. Once again, she expresses her decision in epistolary form. One wonders if her preference for sharing her religious ideas in letters, possibly of a Pauline derivation, comes from her Biblicist background. At any rate, she tells Waymark that “...happiness is now what I dare not wish for” and that “...it would enslave my soul” (305). She explains that, in her love for Waymark, she has “gone so grievously astray” (306). This temptation has summoned from God various visitations wherein Maud has “been cast in to abysses of horror...” (306). While one breathes a sigh of relief that neither of these incompatible people will end up torturing one another like most of Gissing’s wedded couples,

one also is at a loss to discover why either of them contemplated the union in the first place. One possible explanation suggests itself in Gissing's emphasis on the deterministic proclivities of both Waymark and Maud. Maud finds an explanation for everything in God's interventionist judgments, while Waymark locates meaning in his belief in fate. Until Maud's innate distrust of happiness finally overcomes her brush with romance, Waymark seems resigned to allow himself to be swept along by the random series of events that confront him. For such an apparently virile, sexual male, Waymark behaves in a very passive fashion. The upshot of the affair is that Maud decides, with Miss Bygrave, "to join a sisterhood in a midland town, where their lives would be devoted to charity." The reference to charity, coming as it does immediately after Gissing has described Ida's doubtful charitable activities, leaves the reader with the distinct impression of waste. Incidentally, Gissing tells us that Maud and Bygrave "become members of 'the true Church'" (312). Gissing does not inform the reader whether this assembly is identical with that of Mrs. Cumberbatch in *Workers in the Dawn*, but one is inclined to think so.

In contemplating the implications of the triangle involving Waymark, Ida, and Maud, the reader is initially at a loss to reconcile the differences implicit in their stance on the relationship between economic and religious matters. I have laid bare the incompatibility of Waymark and Maud theologically, and I have hinted that their viewpoints regarding poverty and wealth diverge as well. Maud's rejection of life implies a renunciation of money. Indeed, she is one of the few religious characters in Gissing who do not somehow connect spirituality with materialism. Waymark, from the beginning of our acquaintance with him, suffers from no illusions about the power of money, as I pointed out earlier in discussing his declaration of the centrality of money in his conversation with Julian Casti. One might conclude that Ida's attraction to charitable enterprises lines up with that of Maud, who ultimately rejects Waymark for a life of self denial

and philanthropy. On further reflection, however, the reader discerns that Ida, unlike Maud, never endorses a philosophy of self-abnegation. She conducts her philanthropic activities without renouncing her inheritance, whereas Maud cannot accept any form of advancement since to do so would involve a violation of her religious fear of offending God. Maud's Puritanism originates in the more Pietistic and devotional religion that suspects wealth and which adheres more closely to the New Testament model suggested by the parable in which Jesus told the rich young ruler to give his money to the poor in order to secure his salvation.⁹ It is not of the variety that I have identified, in keeping with the criticism of Weber and others, that sees wealth as a sign of God's favor. I suggest that, if the reader concludes that Waymark and Ida eventually end up together after the conclusion of the events of the novel, he or she might reason that their union constitutes an appropriate meeting of the minds, since their impulses to effect social regeneration coincide more closely than in the case of Waymark and Maud.

In the section which follows, I will argue that Abraham Woodstock provides the reader with an example of the most secular and materialistic version of what might be called Darwinist Christianity in the novel. His gospel conflates the vulgarization of the notion of the survival of the fittest with the attempts of religious apologists to join that idea with Christian or otherwise Deistic thought. Such amalgamations, in fact, did occur with some regularity in certain theological circles, as I make clear below. Hence, when I speak of Darwinism and Calvinism in one breath, I am not the first to yoke these unequal beasts.

Woodstock's Capitalist Theology

To this point, I have mentioned Abraham Woodstock only in passing. However, I must give the slumlord millionaire, as the spokesperson of the capitalist-Darwinist ideology, some attention. That he undergoes a sort of Scroogean conversion in that he finally rescues his

biological granddaughter from poverty and the street, and that he allows her to initiate reforms among his renters, does not spare him from a kind of justice: he dies of smallpox caught from the wretched tenants he tries, ironically and belatedly, and at Ida's instigation, to assist (280-281). Still, Gissing allows the old man a brief period of enjoyment of "the attractions of domesticity" (250-251). I think that Gissing does have in mind a combination of Ralph Nickleby, the Cheerybles, both characters from *Nicolas Nickleby*, and Ebenezer Scrooge, in his construction of Woodstock. Nickleby, after all, has a relative, Smike, who has been hidden away in a Yorkshire school, just as Woodstock has a daughter and granddaughter that he has rejected for most of the novel. Scrooge, of course, is a personification of greed, but he also has past secrets and failures to conceal like those of Woodstock. Gissing recognizes that the Cheerybles constitute the model of philanthropy that encapsulates Dickens' solution to social problems: the rich should be kind to people and give them money. Though Gissing admired Dickens, he did not entirely subscribe to this view of charity. Woodstock embodies Gissing's refutation of that model.

Woodstock, though no doubt exemplifying some elements of these or other Dickensian capitalists, articulates the amalgam of Christian apologetics and what passed for scientific Darwinism. John Halperin, in his biography of Gissing, mentions the efforts of the "zealous practitioners" of the church to make peace with the sciences and the "new commercialism" (167). In some ways, Woodstock's rationale stands at the antipode of Maud Enderby's gospel of poverty through self-abnegation with a gospel of prosperity through strength. He formulates one of the harsher versions of Christian accommodation to laissez-faire capitalism current in theological circles at the time. In recruiting Waymark as a rent collector, Woodstock argues for the necessity of participation in the cold business of money making and "government."

There must be government, and there must be order, say what you like. It's nature that the strong should rule over the weak, and show them what's for their own good. What else are we here for? If you're going to be a parson, well and good; then cry down the world as much as you please, and think only about heaven and hell. But as far as I can make out, there's government there too. The devil rebelled and was kicked out. Serve him right. If he wasn't strong enough to hold his own, he'd ought to have kept quiet. (125)

Woodstock's adaptation of the Fall entails his interpretation of the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. He makes this conviction explicit when he remarks further, "In private contract a man has only a right to what he's strong enough to exact" (125). Though a bit cockeyed, Woodstock's suggestion that God and the Devil find themselves subject to capitalist competition does not differ substantially from some theological positions that were bandied about during that time. As James C. Livingston has pointed out, "The religious responses [to Darwin] frequently were anti-Darwinian, but they also were neo-Darwinian as well" (*Religious Thought* 157). Thinkers like W. B. Carpenter emphasized the role of "will" in evolution, and, claimed that, once one acknowledges that "purposive and self-determining power," Darwinism poses no threat to a theistic view of humanity (*Religious Thought* 171). The power of will forms the impetus for Woodstock's theory of marketplace competition. Ironically, as we have seen, Slimy adopts a very similar stance when he decides to rob Waymark in order to take through strength what he feels belongs to him. In the final analysis, Gissing uses Woodstock as an expression of the conflation of capitalism and a perverted gospel. His "conversion," if one can call it that, results from his belated forgiveness of his granddaughter, Ida, through whom he sees the error of his ways. Her redemptive effect on him does not save him completely, however. Furthermore, one might conclude, as I have shown, that Ida, who makes a distinction between those members of the working class who can be reclaimed and those who cannot, resembles her grandfather philosophically more than at first meets the eye. Those individuals who do not demonstrate the

marks of “the deserving poor” get kicked out of Ida’s tenements and back into the hell of someone else’s slums. In the nebulous circles of capitalist Hell, after all, such people belong in Gissing’s multiple versions of the *Divine Comedy*. In considering *Demos*, I will take notice of other renditions of perdition.

Demos: A Story of English Socialism

In *Demos*, Gissing evaluates an attempt to turn an industrial hell into a socialist heaven. *Demos: A Story of English Socialism*, published in 1886, was the fourth of Gissing’s novels to appear in print and the third of his four works which dealt with the problems of the industrial working class. It appeared somewhat later in the same year as *Isabel Clarendon* (which was written in 1885, along with *A Life’s Morning*, with which I am not concerned), a novel which handles problems of class and money, but whose characters derive from the “shabby genteel,” middle, and upper classes. *Demos*, then, returns to the same ground Gissing attempted to cover in *Workers in the Dawn* and *The Unclassed*, although one might say that the latter novel tries to show individuals in the process of class transition. In *Demos*, Gissing approaches quite directly the function, or non-function as the case may be, of religion in the lives of the working class, and he also provides another glimpse of the Anglican clergy, this time from the pastoral perspective.

I can demonstrate fairly easily that *Demos* operates within a matrix of religious constructs. Scarcely does Gissing reveal that Wanley, a tranquil village protected by Stanbury Hill “from a region blasted with mine and factory and furnace,” lies in a “fair green valley” and borders a “wood” and a “shallow stream, a tributary of the Severn,” that she also learns that, nearby, sits Belwick, the site of an old abbey. This relic of Catholicism “had the misfortune to be erected above the thickest coal-seam in England” (1). Gissing explicitly connects Belwick, and “its hundred and fifty fire-vomiting blast-furnaces,” with hell, which he circuitously refers to as

“a certain igneous realm of which [the good abbots] thought much in their sojourn upon earth”

(1). At this early juncture of the novel, Gissing has replaced the original, more adaptive, Christian faith of the land with the end results of the Capitalist-Calvinist coalition to which I have referred throughout this paper. Wanley, at the outset of the novel, has resisted the fate of Belwick, in that it has somehow retained its “foolish greenery” rather than the “smoke and flames” of its neighbor. Wanley has connections with Eden, certainly, but it also has affinities with the pagan pastoral of antiquity, which in Gissing’s mind precedes and supersedes the Biblical garden. To this curious combination of paradises, Gissing juxtaposes the monotonic and exclusively Judeo-Christian Gehenna-Hell of fire and brimstone. Belwick represents the working class and the industrial system to which it is tied, whether through capitalist or socialist configurations. As such, it continues to wage war throughout the novel on Wanley through Richard Mutimer and other radicals who wish to wrest this halcyon refuge of the privileged from its keepers. Hell, in other words, tries very hard to invade and appropriate the class Heaven/Elysium of Wanley. Concerning Wanley itself, and the ancestral home of the Eldons, “purchased by a Mr. Mutimer, a Belwick ironmaster,” Gissing writes,

Fortunately no changes were made in the structure by its new owner. Not far from it you see the church and the vicarage, these also unmolested in their quiet age. Wanley, it is to be feared, lags far behind the times – painfully so, when one knows for a certainty that the valley upon which it looks conceals treasures of coal, of ironstone – blackband, to be technical – and of fireclay. Some ten years ago it seemed as if better things were in store; there was a chance that the vale might for ever cast off its foolish greenery, and begin vomiting smoke and flames in humble imitation of its metropolis beyond the hills. There are men in Belwick who have an angry feeling whenever Wanley is mentioned to them. (2).

These men of Belwick, as well as other representatives of progress, reappear throughout the novel, putting Wanley under siege.

Other intriguing references to a benign Christianity, one in keeping with the atmosphere of an aristocratic rural past, surface in various places throughout the first chapter. This bucolic ambience is threatened, though, by disturbing indications that the demonic industrial forces of progress are gaining a foothold in Wanley. Mrs. Waltham, of a “good” family with vestigial aristocratic standing, notices on a Good Friday the eruptions of “some engineering enterprise” just outside of Wanley (3). This subtle suggestion of the emergence from earth of some threatening force contrasts effectively with the evocation of the imminent resurrection of Christ at Easter. Like Yeats in “The Second Coming,” Gissing evokes the image of some “rough beast” about to be born in place of Christ. In fact, Mrs. Mowling, a friend of Mrs. Waltham, identifies this beast. She fears that the Eldon property will go (as it temporarily does) “to the working class people in London; the roughest of the rough, they say!” (15). She goes on to decry the “intolerable” changes in Wanley that will result from “the rag-tag-and-bobtail they will bring with them” (15). Later, Gissing himself, as the narrator, leers at these ruffians, remarking that they are as ready for the advances of socialism as they are for “translation to supernal spheres,” a comment that solidifies his association of them with the lost. (416). Mrs. Mowling’s and Mrs. Waltham’s fear “of barbaric onset” stems from the uncertainty surrounding the inheritance of the Eldon estate (15), and, in fact, this question forms one of the central themes of the book in that possession passes back and forth between Richard Mutimer, the working class socialist reformer, and Hubert Eldon, the aristocratic descendent of the original landed gentry. I need hardly point out, that, once again, in Richard Mutimer and his working class minions, I see damned people (and elect ones as well, in Hubert).

Two other characters who appear in the first chapter figure prominently throughout the novel. One of these, Adela Waltham, eventually marries Richard Mutimer for complicated

reasons: the money he receives in the inheritance from old Mutimer, a misguided faith in his radical ideas, and the urging of her mother. Significantly, while in church, she finds the original will which leads to the restoration of the Eldon property to Hubert. One of the reasons she is able to commit an act that damages her husband and herself (other than the fact that she realizes too late that she does not love him) is that her religion has provided her with a means of opposing male domination with her conscience, a trait her brother intuits. At the beginning of the novel, her brother, also of radical tendencies, playfully insinuates that Adela has partiality towards all things pertaining to the Established Church. When she asserts that she likes the new vicar, Mr. Wyvern, her brother Alfred exclaims, ““Oh, you would like any man in parsonical livery”” (11). While this observation may point to Adela’s adherence to orthodoxy, it also indicates her determination to decide her religious and philosophical stances for herself. At the same time, it associates her with what, in the scheme of this novel, constitutes the forces of pastoral/Edenic preservation.

Gissing describes Wyvern as a man who “seldom gave the whole of his attention to the matter outwardly calling for it” (6). Indeed, Wyvern seems more intellectual and spiritual than most of Gissing’s Church of England clergy. However, Gissing ultimately portrays the man as a defender of the idyllic, aristocratic status quo, more in tune with the country parson personified in the poetry of, say, Herrick. Indeed, Mrs. Waltham observes to herself “that Mr. Wyvern was aristocratic in his views” (7). Despite this preference, Wyvern is not like Orlando Whiffle in *Workers in the Dawn*, whose High Church leanings stem from his desire for ecclesiastic and financial advancement. Rather, Gissing paints Wyvern as a true apologist for the orthodox/Broad Church segment of the Church of England. As such, he is also a defender of the class divisions inherent in the society wherein the landed gentry maintains control of the town and countryside.

Decidedly, Wyvern functions as an opponent of the incursions of industry and the inevitable intrusions of the working class that capitalism both creates and exploits for its own perpetuation.

One of the most intriguing factors involving religion that arises in a reading of *Demos* lies in the emergence of emaciated Calvinism in Gissing's portrayal of some of his characters, particularly of Richard Mutimer. The reader glimpses another striking development of this trait in Gissing's overall world view. Gissing's rendering of the failure of Mutimer's socialist experiment has much to do with the novelist's perhaps unconscious acceptance of the Biblical account, seen, of course, through the Calvinist filter, of humanity's fallen nature. Unconsciously or not, Gissing demonstrates to near certainty in the novel the strong presence of predestination in the guise of societal damnation. Such an interpretation gives an alternative explanation for Gissing's alleged reactionary stance regarding socialism in the novel. Many critics claim with perfect justification that Gissing himself announced his intention of showing through *Demos* the untenable nature of socialism and socialists. For example, Adrian Poole, in *Gissing in Context*, points out that Gissing had ample justification for "skepticism about the personal qualities of many of the leading socialists in the eighties" (70). After reviewing the evidence in the novel, one can conclude, as Alan Lelchuk does for other reasons, in "'Demos': The Ordeal of the Two Gissings," that Gissing does not reject the "essential goals of socialism" although he does entertain doubts as to its "implementation." Lelchuk says further, and I agree, that *Demos* proves "that Socialism does provide a moral vision and a political theory that seeks to correct injustices" (373). Why, then, does Gissing abandon practical hope in socialism in *Demos* and then, in subsequent novels, why does he "abandon the socialist cause" entirely? (373). Lelchuk correctly attributes Gissing's defection to his pessimism, more specifically to his distrust of individuals, but he does not trace this distrust to anything other than simple human imperfection (371). Poole

faults Gissing because he did not “do justice to the variety and complexity of such historical figures as Morris, Hundman, Aveling or Burns” in his attack, through Richard Mutimer, on the personal failings of socialist leaders (70-71). In my view, Poole quite misses a pertinent point. Gissing’s problem with socialism, democracy, or any other social system portrayed in his fiction, does not reside exclusively in his political preferences. Rather, this desertion of socialism originates from Gissing’s apparent belief that some people cannot change, that these individuals carry within themselves certain flaws such as greed, lust, pride, disloyalty and the like, and that this combination of intractability of nature and essential evil pollute the purest intentions of anyone who wants to reform either self or society. Call this belief pessimism, but it is pessimism redolent with trace Calvinist assumptions of not only predestination, but also original sin and total depravity. In short, though he would most likely have blanched at the thought, Gissing mimics the idea that society cannot be repaired because the people that make up society are, for lack of a more appropriate word, sinful. As particularly suspect, the lower classes contain most of these fallen individuals. Admittedly, as Richard Pearson points out, Gissing’s view of the working class sometimes borrowed theories from anthropology and ethnography, subjects in which he was interested, as a way of visualizing the lower class as “savages” (36). However, one must remember, with Mordechai Rotenberg, that such theories, along with social Darwinism and Lombrosean assumptions of inherent criminality, parallel very closely a Calvinist dualism that consigned entire “dangerous classes” of people to social hopelessness (*Damnation and Deviance* 13-14). That these theories opposed Christian doctrine in many respects does not prevent them from mirroring the dichotomy that Calvinism embodies. In other purportedly atheist or “scientific” theories, the arbiter of destiny may be genetics or some form of acquired tendency to crime. Some people have fewer evil (or evolutionary regressive, or criminal, if one wishes to

think in Darwinist or Lombrosean terms) qualities than others, and Gissing suspects them less; he even grants these sensitive characters, like Henry Ryecroft, a superior moral status. These people are Gissing's version of the elect, but they too are fundamentally helpless in doing any lasting or positive good. This view, of course, corresponds to orthodox Christian belief and finds special nurturing in the Calvinist version of it. Apart from God, humans cannot achieve true goodness. They are innately evil. Since in Gissing's debased Calvinism, God does not really exist, the only arbiter of good and evil is money. Mutimer's career illustrates this fact. Though he gains economic favor, he belongs to the doomed economic class. Hence, his intrinsic nature causes him to fail/fall. He cannot hang on to money. As Jacob Korg points out in *George Gissing: A Critical Biography*, Gissing uses Mutimer to illustrate "proletarian character" in which the author sees "spiritual sterility" (87). The possession of a "character" associated with class can be nothing other than determinist, and frequently, in Gissing, this determinism derives from the Calvinist/Capitalist nexus. In imposing Darwinist or other scientific theories on top of this nexus, Gissing merely reveals the difficulty in breaking away from the original pattern.

Gissing compresses several Biblical elements into the behavior and personality of Richard Mutimer. One of these patterns has Mutimer playing the role of a failed working class martyr. Gissing portrays Mutimer as an aspiring class savior, who by inheritance plans to redeem, as it were, the community of Wanley from social inequity. His plan, as Alan Lelchuk and others have noted, to construct a Marxian worker's paradise by using, ironically enough, the capital he has acquired from his uncle, initially meets with success. He brings about improvements in housing, sanitation, and working conditions. Also, he sees to it that the workers have an interest in the company for which they work through shared investments (Lelchuk 366). Though Lelchuk

speaks of Mutimer's "socialist faith," however, he does not directly address the religious components of Gissing's portrayal of this radical reformer (363).

In fact, Gissing openly references religion and its relationship to the working class in this novel, most notably through the pronouncements of Richard Mutimer himself. In the very pivotal eighth chapter, Gissing outlines the parameters of the various religious viewpoints in the novel. The reader will notice that all of these religious positions correspond to social, class, and economic stances. Gissing clarifies the opinions held by Adela, her brother Alfred, Wyvern, and, finally, Mutimer. For the sake of clarity, I will provide a synopsis of their views. Alfred, the self-proclaimed radical, scoffs at religion, making fun of his mother, for instance, for her observance of the Sabbath: "It'll be Sunday and *therefore* we are not to talk about improving the lot of the human race" (84). He spends his time "railing at capitalists, priests, and women, his mother and sister serving for illustrations of the vices prevalent in the last-mentioned class" (85). Alfred is given to the posings expected of the impassioned radical of the day, struggling "to hit upon sufficiently trenchant epithets or comparisons" (85). Adela, at this point in the novel, has not embraced socialism, but she has conceived a vacillating attraction for Mutimer, partly on the basis of her mistaken notion of his idealism and partly because her mother encourages it. Earlier, in an exchange with Hubert Eldon, she remarked approvingly of Mutimer's intention to give the workers "just payment, not mere starvation wages" (82). Adela, unquestionably, professes Christianity, defending her mother's Sabbath-keeping to her brother, pointing out that "we have to think of other things besides bodily comforts" (85). Gissing pointedly identifies her with "puritanism," and gives as one of her reasons for marrying Mutimer a desire to convert him (156, 160). At another point in the novel, Alfred observes that "there's so much religion mixed up with her doings, and I can't stand that" (177). Wyvern, the vicar, whom I identified earlier with the

interests of the landed classes, treads a careful line in negotiating his way between the polarized, socially charged economic and religious positions of the novel. When challenged by Mrs. Mewling as to his position on socialism, Wyvern states “I am a Christian madam ...and have nothing to do with economic doctrines” (87). In this statement, though he equivocates somewhat in his “attitude of scrupulous neutrality,” Wyvern maintains his Broad Church approach without compromising his deeper commitment to the eventual restoration of the aristocracy in their rightful place of advantage. Of Mutimer himself, we learn that the would-be radical has begun to entertain accommodationist ideas about social demarcations, finding it advantageous to seek a union with a class above his own. Having disappointed the hopes of the churchgoing elite in declining to attend church services on a particular Sunday, Mutimer considers his options while contemplating his next move.

In the meantime Richard enjoyed himself, with as little thought of the Wanley gossips as of – shall we say, the old curtained pew in Wanley Church? He was perfectly aware that the Walthams did not represent the highest gentility, that there was a considerable interval, for example, between Mrs. Waltham and Mrs. Westlake; but the fact remained that he had never yet been on intimate terms with a family so refined. (89).

Mutimer has a firm grasp on the realities of the social possibilities inherent in his possible alliance with the Walthams. While he has not yet determined to marry Adela, and while he continues to assert his skeptical stance, he has begun to entertain the possibility of compromise for the sake of social advancement. Nonetheless, in a discussion with Adela and her mother, he presents the case of the working class in their rejection of Established Church religion, or for that matter, of religion in general.

Religion is a luxury; the working man has no luxuries. Now, you speak of the free evenings; people always do, when they're asking why the working classes don't educate themselves. Do you understand what that free evening means? He gets home, say, at six o'clock, tired out; he has to be up again perhaps at five next

morning. What can he do but just lie about half asleep? Why, that's the whole principle of capitalist employment; it's calculated exactly how long a man can be made to work in a day without making him incapable of beginning again on the day following – just as it's calculated exactly how little a man can live upon, in the regulation of wages. [...] What religion can such men have? Religion, I suppose, means thankfulness for life and its pleasures – at all events, that's a great part of it – and what has a wage-earner to be thankful for? (96)

In spite of this eloquent and accurate assessment of the plight of the working poor, Mutimer has begun to consider the advantages of aligning himself with the class that insists on judging the working class in terms of the unreasonable expectations he has just identified. Ultimately, he becomes obsessed with the desire to affiliate himself with this class, a desire which compromises his status as savior-reformer in the novel. I believe that Gissing mourns this fall from proletarian grace, although I agree with the consensus of most critics that he also expresses a distrust of the lower classes. Mutimer cannot be a successful savior because he embodies the basic Calvinist principle of inherent depravity. Despite the purity of his initial wish to bring economic salvation to his class, he himself is tainted with an inferiority that renders him incapable of remaining faithful to either to himself or to his class. Even his wife, Adela, realizes finally that Mutimer's immorality (he misuses funds and abandons his fiancée Emma Vine for Adela), comes from, as Korg puts it, “class difference” (*Critical Biography* 88).

In keeping with Mutimer's paradoxical and dual association with martyr/savior and the unredeemable working class, Gissing gives Mutimer the occupation of mechanic. I suppose making him a carpenter would have been somewhat too obvious. Besides, that occupation would have detached Mutimer from his affiliation with the industrial drones he wants to save. Furthermore, it would have identified him with an earlier artisan class. Nonetheless, Mutimer, like Christ, comes from the common people, the working class. Also like Christ, he possesses intelligence and knowledge of a specified and esoteric kind atypical of his class. Lelchuk notes

that the reader is impressed with Mutimer's "knowledge of Malthus and Robert Owen, Thomas Paine, and Voltaire" (362). Despite these qualifications, however, Mutimer possesses fatal traits that cause him to become his own Judas. Jacob Korg extends these taints to Mutimer's entire family. In Korg's view, these characteristics consist of the "selfishness, narrowness, dishonesty, and weakness of will" generally of the poor: "...the poverty of the poor debases them beyond remedy and makes them incapable of self-rule" (*Critical Biography* 84). Korg's turn of phrase here lands squarely in the middle of a major point of this paper: most of the members of the working class, especially the poor, are indeed congenitally "beyond remedy" in Gissing's framework. Simon James, in a similar vein, states that "the heroes' initial poverty is contrasted with their subsequently dangerous wish-fulfilling wealth" (*Unsettled Accounts* 23). Their desire to obtain wealth is dangerous because they are not suited to possess it. Mutimer cannot hold on to money, in part, because of his own incongruous desire to buy his way into a class for which he is not constitutionally fit. This desire also interferes with his original plan to create a New Wanley that Korg claims Gissing patterned after the communities envisioned by Robert Owens and others (*Critical Biography* 84-85).

Another of Mutimer's failings involves his attraction to a woman he does not deserve and his aspiration to a class status he cannot attain. Ironically, Mutimer marries a wife who delivers him to his enemies, bringing about his return to the working class, though she nobly tries to defend his reputation afterwards (463). Money becomes a virtual entity unto itself, finding its way to its rightful place, through Mutimer's wife Adela, back to the aristocratic Hubert Eldon. Adela, refusing Richard Mutimer's pleas to conceal her discovery of the original will, reveals the existence of the document, which favors Hubert, to the public. After Richard's death, Hubert proposes to Adela, and thereby restores the class continuity that Mutimer had broken. She yields

to his proposal, and “the untruth of years fell from her like a veil, and she had achieved her womanhood” (477). Gissing, apparently, would have the reader to assume that her marriage to Mutimer had been an untruth, a violation of class purity. The curious ending, wherein Adela “had achieved her womanhood,” defies easy explication outside of this assumption, and it remains awkward even within this reading. What is the nature of this “womanhood” that Adela “had achieved,” and precisely when had she achieved it? In one sense, she is simply following the money, as she had done with Mutimer. Hence, I can only conjecture that she has now followed it to its true source. Considering the beginning of the chapter, which pictures Wanley restored to a bucolic Eden, one might suppose that Gissing has returned everything to a prelapsarian state, except that Eldon abandons Wanley after he has renovated it.

A deep breath of country air. It is springtime, and the valley of Wanley is bursting into green and flowery life, peacefully glad as if the foot of Demos had never come that way. Incredible that the fume of furnaces ever desecrated that fleecy-sown sky of tenderest blue, that hammers clanged and engines roared where now the thrush utters his song so joyously. Hubert Eldon has been as good as his word. In all the valley no trace is left of what was called New Wanley. (461-462)

Like other critics, I confess that I am a bit taken aback at these miraculous transformations, both of Wanley and Adela. Prior to his proposal to Adela, Hubert expresses strong disapproval of her fall into socialism: “Why did she marry him [Mutimer] at all? What led her to give herself, heart and soul, to Socialism...?” (464). He has to be coaxed into forgiving her by the vicar, the representative of a vaguely pastoral Established church. After all, she was led into socialism by her idealism, born of the Church of England, Christian proclivities identified in the first chapter of the novel. Nonetheless, Eldon yields, and gives Adela a chance to achieve “her womanhood,” which seems to mean that she abandons activism in favor of allowing Eldon to draw “her to his heart in passionate triumph” (477).

Notably, however, in spite of Eden's return to Wanley, some of the workers and socialists who might have benefited from Mutimer's reforms refuse to give up their radicalism. One young man, "that lad of Bolton's," continues, according to vicar Wyvern, to foster "revolutionary" discontent at "Belwick pothouses, and appears on an average once a fortnight before the magistrates for being drunk and disorderly" (462). In this remark, Gissing plants the idea that all is not well in Wanley after all. The damned have been suppressed, but not yet annihilated. The forces of industrial hell, socialist or capitalist, simmer in these pothouses in Belwick, that antithesis to Wanley that we encountered in the first chapter of *Demos*, threatening to despoil the countryside once again, just as they did at the beginning of the novel. The weak, wishful religious force typified by Wyvern, a throwback to a kind of semi-Christian pantheism, cannot withstand the Blakean "dark Satanic Mills," of the future, either in their socialist or capitalist guises. Given the almost laughable nature of the idyllic, romantic ending, I suspect that Gissing has provided the reader with a parody. At most, Gissing indulges, in this last chapter, in a fantasy of unfallen stasis. He knows, and his characters know, that Wanley cannot long resist the onslaught of *Demos*, which, in the final analysis, refers not just to the festering and recalcitrant mob, but to the inevitable triumph of commerce and industry over the old aristocratic and agricultural order.

Thryza

Although I will reserve most of my commentary on *Thryza* for a subsequent chapter, I will briefly take stock of Gissing's treatment of class demarcations in this work, which bridges some of the distance between the bleak world of *Demos* and *The Nether World*. Many of the same themes of hellish industrial blight that occur in *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, and *The Nether World* appear also in *Thryza*, as do the motifs of class interpenetration. However, because certain characters in *Thryza* accord well with my discussion of religion as a realm of spiritual, economic,

and personal autonomy in “The Damned Domain of Feminist Space,” I believe that deferring the discussion of this aspect of the novel makes sense. In addition, I can adequately cover the material having to do with the conflict between class incursion and Capitalist and Calvinist exclusivity within the brief treatment which follows.

Thryza, published in 1887, recapitulates *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, and *Demos* in its representation of the lowest stratum of the working class as unredeemable. Gissing takes up the theme of innate class inferiority again in *The Nether World*, a matter I will discuss in the next section. In *Thryza*, Gissing wastes no time in having Walter Egremont, known to his friends as “the Idealist,” articulate that idea of class intractability in explaining his plan of establishing a group of “social reformers” by effecting “the spiritual education of the upper artisan and mechanic class” through teaching them to appreciate literature (10, 14). This group of “well-conducted and intelligent fellows” will then influence those “below” them by the same “personal influence” that Egremont proposes to use on these worthy artisans (15). On these men, who have “no religion,” Egremont will hand pick “a certain small number of men” to attend his lectures on “certain interesting English books” that will somehow instill a “love of literature, pure and simple” in these select few (16). The exclusionary nature of Egremont’s plan assumes that “the mud on the bottom of society” can only be helped by “the vast changes to be wrought by time [that] will cleanse that foulness” (14). For the time being, these members of the economically and culturally damned levels of the lower working class must remain to wallow in their filth. They do not possess the saving grace of the “instincts of decency,” combined with an inability to “fall into privation” that their artisan and mechanic betters own. I will not belabor the obvious demarcations into which Gissing has placed these men, nor will I continue to examine in detail the ongoing depiction of class difference as somehow a matter of biological or spiritual

inheritance. Interestingly, though, Egremont himself is only one generation removed from these hardy workmen, his father having risen from “house-painter” to wealthy manufacturer through a combination of marriage into capital and fortuitous entrepreneurial effort (9-10). Walter, inheriting his father’s fortune, escapes from the necessity of making a living, goes to Oxford, dabbles in poetry, and makes “alliances with men of standing” in academics and men “whose place in the world relieved them from the necessity of establishing a claim to intellect” (10). His unmerited social and economic position therefore allows him to concoct ways to improve society, a pastime which means, in his case, ways to interfere in the lives of those he considers beneath him. Like Richard Mutimer, Walter sees himself as a reformer, but his efforts do not fail because he is a class interloper like Mutimer. Walter, after all, has been fully accepted by families like the Ormondes and the Newthorpes because he has not had to earn his own money. Mrs. Ormonde says that he is more removed from members of the working class “than many a man who counts kindred among the peerage” (342). Accordingly, he fails in his attempts to effect change because he tries to impose cultural traits on the working class that do not belong to them. More to the point, the worthy artisans of this class do not particularly want to become literary dilettantes. Characters like Jo Bunce, the atheist propagandist, Gilbert Grail, the self-taught intellectual, and Luke Ackroyd, the labor agitator, have an interest in the reading of various kinds of books. However, with the possible exception of Grail, whom Egremont initially recruits to be the librarian of his reading room, these working class men do not endorse Egremont’s plan to teach them the great works of English literature. Even Grail accedes to Egremont’s plan primarily as a way to escape from his life of drudgery. The others, like Ackroyd, suspect Egremont’s scheme to indoctrinate them through literature as ““Sops to the dog that’s beginning to show his teeth”” (25). They certainly would not succumb to Egremont’s prissy desire to “teach them to feel the

purpose of such a book as ‘Sesame and Lilies’” in place of the works of “half-taught revolutionists, social and religious” that they no doubt prefer (15). Gissing, I dare say, knows that Ruskin has more appeal for reformers like Egremont than for agitators like Luke Ackroyd, who will no doubt stick with his Marx and with his emerging labor unions.

The Nether World: Gissing’s City of Dreadful Night

In *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, and, to a lesser extent and from a different perspective, *Thryza*, Gissing explores several versions of capitalist hell. In *The Unclassed*, he shows the dregs of the lower classes for what he believes they are. That is to say, they remain beyond social and economic redemption. *Thryza* also demonstrates that the separations between classes cannot easily be overcome. In *Demos*, he chronicles the failure of socialist efforts to turn hell into a worker’s heaven. Appropriately, the very title of Gissing’s *The Nether World* returns the working class to its normative place in hell. In “George Gissing’s *The Nether World*,” as John Goode claims, the title reflects “working-class London and Hell itself.” Goode adds that the description of the Middlesex House of Detention in the opening chapters of the novel signifies a “permanent Dantean condition of life” (210, 211).¹⁰ Goode is not the only critic aware of the apparent echoes of Dante in Gissing’s work. Michael Wheeler, in the impressive *Heaven, Hell and the Victorians*, points out that, regarding *Demos*, “Dante, the presiding genius of nineteenth-century social commentary, is present here too, where the author-narrator in *Workers in the Dawn* writes like a Henry Mayhew in the role of Virgil in the *Inferno*...” (202). Though Goode does not say so directly, money rules as, depending upon the construction one prefers, the Christian god or the Christian devil in this earthly perdition, a place where the God of the Bible has been either defeated or replaced. Indeed, the failure of religion to resist capitalism in general and the replacement of God by money figures prominently in the novel as a recurring metaphor, a

metaphor pointing to the surreal fusion of hell and proletarian existence. As specific examples of this function, I will briefly mention several characters. I will then turn to an analysis of yet another deranged character, analogous to Slimy in *The Unclassed*, who expresses a protest against the inflexible gradations of class and money in what he identifies unambiguously as hell.

Goode and others cite Mrs. Candy, whose appeal to God to help her stop her inveterate drinking fails against the “nation of shopkeepers,” whose interest, of course, lies in keeping Mrs. Candy drunk and in debt (213-14). These critics correctly align Mrs. Candy and the other members of her family with the doomed underclass. Her daughter, Pennyloaf, marries Bob Hewett, who eventually turns to counterfeiting in an attempt to obtain a living and who accordingly dies at the hands of the law. In a chapter entitled “Io Saturnalia,” a reference to the debauched celebrations of the “Italic ... god of agriculture ... identified with the Greek Cronos” (“Saturn,” *OED* 1), Gissing describes the day of their wedding in terms of a depraved amalgamation of pagan and Christian rituals.¹¹ The “Saturnalia” in question, takes place, not in December, as do the Roman holidays in reference, but in August, when the “slaves of industrialism” will celebrate the marriage. Gissing juxtaposes the “temples of Alcohol,” presided over by the “awaking publican” in honor of “the Sun-God, inspirer of thirst.” The worshipers of this God, the underclass, “come in [their] thousands, jingling the coins that will purchase [them] this one day of tragical mirth” (104). In addition to the juxtaposition of worship and commerce, Gissing places the question of class within the context of the marriage between Bob, who regards himself of a social level above his espoused, and Pennyloaf, whose mother pointedly avoids drunkenness long enough for the ceremony to proceed in “a church in Clerkenwell” (104). To the participants in the wedding, no distinction exists between the raucous celebrations in which they participate and the supposedly solemn Christian rite of matrimony. Both activities partake of the

signifiers of such levels of money and status as the limited means of the families can afford. Part of the significance of this blending of pagan and Christian elements in the chapter has to do with Gissing's awareness of the aspiritual nature of the event. The entire episode partakes of low and vulgar displays of expense and excess, a working class parody of the more solemn but no less ostentatious ceremonies characteristic of their social betters. Gissing describes Pennyloaf's attire, for instance, in terms that refer to cost and exhibition, fraudulent and paltry as they are.

Pennyloaf shone in most unwonted apparel. Everything was new except her boots – it had been determined that these only needed soleing. Her broad-brimmed hat of yellow straw was graced with the reddest feather purchasable in the City Road; she had a dolman of most fashionable cut, blue, lustrous; blue likewise was her dress, hung about with bows and streamers. And the gleaming ring on the scrubby small finger! On that hand most assuredly Pennyloaf would wear no glove. How proud she was of her ring! How she turned it round and round when nobody was looking! Gold, Pennyloaf, real gold! The pawnbroker would lend her seven-and-sixpence on it, any time. (105)

The festivities which follow the ceremony, which takes place significantly on a Bank Holiday, underline the pathetic attempt to render the occasion memorable through expenditure and excess.¹² Drinking, playing games at the “Paliss,” fighting, watching fireworks, and riding home on the railway provide the highlights of what Gissing calls “a great review of the People” (107-109). Gissing's evocation of the connection between the predatory economic system, to which the wedding party belongs, and the imperialist-racist agenda of the period constitutes one of the most damning commentaries in the novel. After participating in other activities, Pennyloaf, Bob, and their entourage experience other entertainment.

Behold on every hand such sports as are dearest to the Briton, those which call for strength of sinew and exactitude of aim. The philosophic mind would have noted with interest how ingeniously these games were made to appeal to the patriotism of the mob. Did you choose to ‘shy’ sticks in the contest for cocoa-nuts, behold your object was a wooden model of the treacherous Afghan or the base African. If you took up the mallet to smite upon a spring and make proof of how far you could send a ball flying upwards, your blow descended upon the head of some

other recent foeman. Try your fist at the indicator of muscularity, and with zeal you smote full in the stomach of a guy made to represent a Russian. (107)

In this debased atmosphere of the Crystal Palace, once a showplace of industrial ingenuity, the members of this wedding group participate in an economic system which depends on the exploitation of other nations and the dehumanization of other peoples. Ironically, the celebrants of marriage, supposedly a holy ritual, end their holiday in brawling and drunkenness, as fully victimized and plundered as the Afghans, Africans, and Russians they are taught to regard as inferior. Gissing depicts the degraded condition of the working class English in expressions of disgust and pity.

See how worn-out the poor girls are becoming, how they gape, what listless eyes most of them have! The stoop in the shoulders so universal among them merely means over-toil in the workroom. Not one in a thousand shows the elements of taste in dress; vulgarity and worse glares in all but every costume. Observe the middle-aged women; it would be small surprise that their good looks had vanished, but whence comes it they are animal, repulsive, absolutely vicious in ugliness? Mark the men in their turn; four in every six have visages so deformed by ill-health that they excite disgust; their hair is cut down to within half an inch of the scalp; their legs are twisted out of shape by evil conditions of life from birth upwards. (109)

Gissing, as usual, cannot avoid demonizing the victims of capitalism. I need hardly point out the reference to hereditary taint in this passage, in which Gissing uses words such as “gape,” “listless,” “animal,” “repulsive,” “vicious,” “ugliness,” “deformed,” “disgust,” “twisted,” and “evil” to describe their condition. And yet, he sympathizes with them, noting that at the end of the holiday, Pennyloaf finds herself confronted, as she had anticipated, with the necessity of pawning her wedding ring, the symbol of holy union between man and wife in Christian England (113).

Mrs. Candy, Pennyloaf’s mother, eventually gets drunk during the wedding festivities of her daughter. Having “taken the pledge when her husband consented to return and live with her,”

she nonetheless “did not at the same time transfer herself to a country where there are no beer-shops and no Bank-holidays.” Without such a “decisive change” in the state of things, Gissing asks, “what hope for her?” (113). Gissing obviously blames the economic system, as represented by the pubs and the Bank holiday, for Mrs. Candy’s situation. In her victimization by the collusion of capitalism and alcohol, Mrs. Candy suffers a fate akin to that of Slimy in *The Unclassed*, except that Slimy finally articulates and accepts his damnation, while Mrs. Candy can only feebly pray for a deliverance she does not gain.

Money, diabolical in some instances, is also the only God capable of delivering anyone from poverty, if not sin. Like God, moreover, money is arbitrary as well as all powerful. Indeed, the novel revolves primarily around the effects produced by the money Michael Snowden has earned prior to his return from Australia. With a wealth he did not have when he abandoned his children years earlier, Michael concocts an activist version of missionary outreach to the poor in which his daughter Jane figures prominently. Jane, during his absence, has been left to the uncertain mercies of the mercenary plebian family, the Peckovers, of whom Clem, a rapacious and blatantly greedy representative of the vulgar, lost underclass, is particularly cruel to her. Though he thinks he is helping the poor by attempting to coerce his granddaughter Jane into implementing his plan for rescuing them, he is really spreading the gospel of money as the ultimate savior. As we have seen in *Workers in the Dawn*, philanthropy can only be conducted by the wealthy, and the wealthy are those who exploit. They take away, and then they give, in inverted, but somehow appropriate, order to the God who gives then takes away. They, as embodiments of Money made flesh, replace God. By this I mean that they save some, but not others. When someone like Snowden tries to put a visionary plan of social remediation into action, he fails because he does not take into account the unchangeable nature of Gissing’s most

debased poor. Jane Snowden experiences an emotional crucifixion at her God-like grandfather's behest, echoing closely Christ's "Let this cup pass from me" in her plea of renunciation: "I can't! Grandfather, don't ask it of me! Give it all to someone else – to some one else!" (308). Jane, though not especially religious, renounces the money that would place her in an advantageous position over her former tormenters in a manner somewhat reminiscent of, though not exactly identical to, Maud Enderby in *The Unclassed*. Both women, for instance, reject marriage as a means of escape from class or economic restrictions, and they both reject organized philanthropy in favor of personal charity. Not only does Jane realize that she cannot personally live up to the mission Michael has imposed on her, she realizes that her efforts must be focused on individuals, rather than an entire class. As the novel ends, she tells the reformed reprobate Scawthorne, who wants to marry her and enable her to rise in class, "I have friends I am very fond of. Thank you for your kindness – but I can't change" (390). Jane does continue to conduct philanthropy, but on a private scale. In this way, she avoids the programmatic version of social action formulated by her grandfather's overly manipulative scheme, which involves yet another organizational, secular version of the Evangelical model I delineated in Chapter One. In Michael's vision of poor relief, Jane is to become an ascetic devotee to charity. She does not accede to this plan. Rather, she implements her private version of it. Of this version, and of Jane's determination to avoid involvement in systematized charity, Susan Cook, in "Envisioning Reform in Gissing's *The Nether World*," speculates that "[i]t is, furthermore, in Jane's performative act as a charitable social worker that Gissing locates a tentatively optimistic, metaphoric vision of potential social reform" (460). If so, Gissing emphatically places this potential within a de-institutionalized structure. Michael Snowden, though he constructs a private variation of this model, supposedly driven from inside a working-class framework, nonetheless derives his philanthropic pattern

from the other social plans of the day. Michael Snowden may not be a religious man, but he, like Helen Norman, embraces a plan based on the relief efforts constructed by Christian groups, formats that collude with the prevailing Capitalist-Calvinist separation of class and economic status. At the very least, as Goode points out, Michael Snowden is a “priest of destruction controlling human lives and denying them development” (219). Jane does not want to partake of the paternal substance of her grandfather, becoming his surrogate in propagating an unsuccessful attempt to become the life-dispensing God Capital. Instead, she bases her efforts to help the poor on her recognition of need and personal sympathy, not on social divisions. She breaks away from the precedent of greed that taints both her father and grandfather. Jane’s actual father, Joseph, becomes her rival for the money. Joseph marries and then abandons Jane’s enemy, Clem Peckover, and he also abandons, for the second time, Jane, leaving her a small pittance from the money he inherits from Michael. He becomes in the novel a Satan-Judas, who sells his soul for money. For in Gissing, God and the Devil coalesce into the hybrid god Cash. That is, the powers and prerogatives of both of these powerful entities become subsumed under Money, the Baal to which disciples like Joseph and Michael Snowden sacrifice, under one pretext or another, their very children. To Gissing, expressions and situations equating the devil, God, and money are not accidental. They become in his works a central metaphor for industrial capitalism.

Most often, Gissing portrays Christianity as having become an accomplice of capitalism as a result of its degradation through Calvinistic determinism. This degradation evolved through the distorted Puritan/Calvinist emphasis on wealth and success, on the one hand, as a sign of salvation and failure, on the other, as an indication of damnation. This phenomenon has been ably discussed by Mortechnai Rotenberg, as we have seen before (39). Occasionally, however, Gissing entertains a version of Christianity that hearkens back to the New Testament model of

anti-capitalist (or anti-mercantile, anti-wealth, and so on) rhetoric. I have mentioned this aspect of Gissing's appraisal of Christianity as it appears in his essay "The Hope of Pessimism," and it manifests in *The Nether World* in various places as well. One translation of this aspect of primitive Christianity surfaces in the proclamations in the novel of the deranged prophet, Mad Jack. This character, in some guise or other, recurs intermittently throughout Gissing, sometimes less articulately, as in the case of Slimy in *The Unclassed*. In all instances, money eclipses even those characters who find a voice for its denunciation. As they do Slimy, the crowd regards Jack as most likely "an idiot" whose ragged appearance and constant preaching recalls John the Baptist. Like Slimy's voice, which is mute until Slimy finally finds prophetic expression just prior to his self-induced death, Jack's speech is compromised at times both by his tendency to raise "his voice in a terrific blare" and his pronounced penchant for quoting Scripture. Jack's preaching and singing, significantly, has to compete with the costermonger's cries imploring that passerby purchase his wares, a competition which underscores the battle between religion and consumerist competition. (43). On the first three occasions the reader encounters Jack, Gissing confirms his symbolic role as prophet in part by following the description of him with a depiction of the sufferings of the working class. In the first instance, Jane Snowden lies ill and "delirious" in the Hewett's "back-room" (43). In the second, to the accompaniment in the street of Jack's usual psalm "'All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him forever'" (Psalm 103:22), Pennyloaf Candy climbs to her family's room in order to commiserate with her alcoholic mother over the legal and personal troubles she is experiencing as a result of the behavior of an abusive husband and over her inability to pay rent and other necessities (75). On the third occasion of our acquaintance with Mad Jack, in a chapter entitled "Mad Jack's Dream," Bob Hewitt, trying to evade the police, hears Jack reciting Scriptural admonitions such as "'Let

him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” and ““What is the principal thing ... Wisdom is the principal thing,” verses that eerily foreshadow Bob’s ultimate doom (1 Cor. 10:12; Prov. 4:7). The rest of Jack’s speech is “gibberish” in French, denoting again the ineffectuality of his apparent warnings (337). Certainly, the Calvinistic strain I have been tracking periodically throughout this investigation appears here in that the economically damned remain damned.

Christine DeVine, in *Class in Turn of the Century Novels of Gissing, James, Hardy, and Wells*, contends that Mad Jack, “a seemingly allegorical character who plays no obvious role in the plot” nonetheless “symbolizes the madness of the world around him and the irrelevance of the Church when speaking to this world” (24). DeVine’s position certainly has merit, and her thoughts about symbolism, not only as it pertains to Jack, underline something very central about Gissing’s ongoing use of religious material. In this vein, DeVine also comments upon Gissing’s representations of the relative stature of St. James’ Anglican and St. Peters’ Catholic Church in London and on their geographical relationship and their respective level of importance or insignificance to the poor areas of Clerkenwell (24-25). Unlike DeVine, I think that Jack does have relevance to the plot and that his role suggests a more complicated attitude toward religion in *The Nether World* than DeVine admits. Inarguably, the novel shows that Christianity has failed the working class, mostly because of the affiliation of the Established Church with the prosperous middle class and its seeming complicity in relegating the laboring poor to the hellish regions of the slums. Despite the inability of the characters to escape from their industrial hell, Gissing, as I indicated above, does suggest an alternative role for religion in his delineation of Mad Jack. Mark Knight and Emma Mason, in *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*, have noticed this unusual option to the Weberian Puritan model I have been considering throughout much of this discussion. Jack, they argue, “marks a potential return to a subversive religion”

rather than as “a synonym for bourgeois respectability,” that is, as an endorsement of conventional economic values (173). Mad Jack, according to Knight and Mason, represents in his statements equating hell with the working class experience “a continuation of earlier religious activity” that these critics associate with Christian “philanthropic and religious organizations” which tried to reform the abuses of capitalism, and “to articulate a vision of social transformation” (175). Since I have already shown that Gissing’s feelings about philanthropy wavered between ambivalence and outright contempt, and since I have also argued that, to some extent, philanthropy itself perpetuates class divisions even as it ameliorates some of the harsher effects of poverty, I am not sure I agree that Jack’s tirades necessarily signify an endorsement of that form of Evangelicalism.¹³ I can accede to the view, however, that Jack goes counter to “cultural assimilation” in his role as outcast prophet, even though he is ineffective in that he can identify “social ills” but he cannot cure them (Knight and Mason 176-177). Jack articulates his final message near the end of *The Nether World*. Standing before an unusually interested mob, Jack relates a vision he had in which an angel related to him the true nature of existence in Clerkenwell and other industrial slums.

Don’t laugh! Don’t any of you laugh; for as sure as I live it was an angel stood in the room and spoke to me. There was a light such as none of you ever saw, and the angel stood in the midst of it. And he said to me: “Listen, whilst I reveal to you the truth, that you may know who you are and what you are; and this is done for a great purpose.” And I fell down on my knees; but never a word could I have spoken. Then the angel said: “You are passing through a state of punishment. You, and all the poor among whom you live; all those who are in suffering of body and darkness of mind, were once rich people, with every blessing the world can bestow, with every opportunity of happiness in yourselves and of making others happy. Because you made an ill use of your wealth, because you were selfish and hard-hearted and oppressive and sinful – in every kind of indulgence – therefore after death you received the reward of wickedness. This life you are now leading is that of the damned; this place to which you are confined is Hell! There is no escape for you. From poor you shall become poorer; the older you grow the lower you shall sink in want and misery; at the end there is

waiting for you, one and all, a death in abandonment and despair. This is Hell – Hell – Hell! (345)

This remarkable, contradictory passage condenses so much religious and economic commentary that I can take time merely to summarize some of the ideas it contains. In its insistence on inevitable damnation, and on the emphasis on the permanence of this damnation, the speech reiterates the Calvinist view of predestination. At the same time, the excerpt implies that the damned deserve their fate due to actions they committed, an idea that Calvinism definitely, if paradoxically, endorses, but one which also entails the notion of free will expressed by some forms of Arminianism, in which the individual may reject or accept the universal offer of salvation as he or she prefers.¹⁴ Gissing, through Jack, also briefly glances at the idea of possible limits to the duration of damnation in the phrase “[y]ou are passing through a state of punishment” (345). Some question lingers as to whether death will end this punishment, a question made more complicated theologically by the indication that the poor have been reincarnated from a previous life of wealth in order to suffer judgment for the sins committed in that existence. Reincarnation, most students of the Bible will agree, does not accord with the Bible’s teaching on life after death.¹⁵ Regardless of the slant one puts on Jack’s scriptural exegesis, one cannot evade the conclusion that the poor will never experience in this life any improvement in their condition. Given the fact that Gissing discounts the notion of immortality, the reader has to return to what he or she already knows: the poor we have with us always.¹⁶ They are always, in our experience, damned and poor. At best, Mad Jack’s theology reflects the Nietzschean doctrine of eternal recurrence, a nightmare vision which in itself constitutes yet another agnostic version of Calvinist determinism.¹⁷ Still, Jack’s repudiation of wealth and those

who possess it comes closer to Christ's devastating verdicts on the wealthy than we usually find in Gissing's work.¹⁸

John Halperin, in "Gissing's Urban Neurasthenia," calls *The Nether World* "the greatest slum-life novel in English" (184). Halperin goes on to note that "Gissing in *The Nether World* cannot resist putting some characters on a train travelling from the city to the country in order to underline once again the contrast between the urban slums and what lies beyond them" (184). Halperin cites a passage in the novel which specifically references London as "'a city of the damned'" and "'a nameless populace cruelly exposed by the unwonted light of heaven'" (185). Though he does not say so, Halperin's observation and his quotation of the passage in question (see *Nether World*, p. 74) points directly to the core religious duality that runs throughout Gissing's work: the separation of humanity by capitalism into those who have access to the things that make life bearable and those who can only see these things from afar. In a way, these damned denizens of the slums suffer what Mad Jack claims is the fate of the rich, an idea that Gissing has appropriated from Luke 16. In this New Testament passage, the rich man, in hell, witnesses the welcoming of the poor man Lazarus into Abraham's bosom. Gissing has, through the agency of Mad Jack, twisted this parable beyond recognition. The reader knows that, despite Jack's assertions to the contrary, and, regrettably, in spite of his condemnation of the rich, it is the poor who witness the blessings that they cannot have. Furthermore, they will never experience these blessings. They are caught in the nightmare of the material, in both the philosophical and the economic sense of the word, of the Nether World, not of some future life, but of the eternal present. In some form or another, this deterministic outlook surfaces over and over in Gissing's novels.

One of the frustrations I have encountered in detailing Gissing's use of religion in his novels consists of my inability to discuss every aspect of this subject. Each of the early novels that deal with the issues involving class and money are replete with religious references that I have not been able to mention, let alone examine in any detail. I have tried instead to identify areas of commonality in *Workers in the Dawn*, *The Unclassed*, *Demos*, *Thryza*, and *The Nether World*, pausing from time to time to look at other salient issues that I deem most important. In my next two chapters, I will depart from considering Gissing's novels in strict chronological order so that I can scrutinize themes having to do with religion and its applications in Gissing to feminine space and to Gissing's assessment of other religious, philosophical, and ecclesiastical concerns. The reader will discern that hell, in particular, surfaces from time to time in environments apart from the industrial slums. He will see that region as a theological refuge at times for women of elevated social status and as a lair for demonic males.

Chapter Three – The Damned Domain of Feminine and Religious Space

For female characters in the novels of George Gissing, as in Victorian society in general in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, finding definition and identification in economic, social, familial, sexual, marital, and spiritual realms recurs as a problem, part of the larger “woman question” with which that period so strenuously wrestled.¹ Emma Liggins, in “Her Appearance in Public: Sexual Danger, the Urban Space, and the Working Woman,” refers to the sexual ambiguities that Gissing describes in his novels, beginning with the challenge represented by prostitutes, whose “urban confidence and mobility in the streets invite censure from men [...]” (31). These women appear in several novels in various guises, most notably in *Workers in the Dawn* as the irredeemable and drunken Carrie and, by contrast, in *The Unclassed* as the self-educated and unapologetic prostitute Ida Starr, who ultimately becomes socially respectable. However, as Liggins explains, women in Gissing, including shop girls and performers of any kind, invite censure also from participation in other public professions which in any way “trade on their physical attractions” (32). In this category, Liggins includes Alma Rolfe, an aspiring musician in *The Whirlpool*, and Clara Hewett, an actress in *The Nether World* (32). Of course, one could mention the plight of Monica Madden, of *The Odd Women*, who was herself a shop girl before meeting Mr. Widdowson. Indeed, I will examine Monica’s situation in some detail in this chapter. Then there are the other Madden sisters, who essentially wait for Monica to marry and thereby offer them some collateral assistance since they have no talents or abilities they can employ on behalf of their own support. In *Thryza*, the title character compromises herself twice in a public setting. She sings in a tavern, although she does so reluctantly and unprofessionally. Later, she surreptitiously meets Walter Egremont in his library for working men, ultimately falling under suspicion of immorality as a result of this rendezvous. Like Liggins, critics such as

Jenni Calder have also shown interest in societal suspicion of female sexuality. In “Cash and the Sex Nexus,” Calder comments on the role money plays in arbitrating the kind of sexual behavior that Gissing and other novelists present for social contemplation. In an observation I find extremely pertinent to my discussion of the interaction between money and virtually every other social and personal activity in Gissing’s work, Calder recognizes that, in Gissing, “the emotional cannot be separated from the economic” (45). As far as sex is concerned, society, Calder thinks, pays less attention to “expressions of carnality” than it does to evaluating the erotic “in terms of cash and property” (46). Especially arresting, in my view, is Calder’s comment that “Christian, or Calvinist, repression led to the exploitation and repression of women” (47). In this regard, one recalls again Weber’s argument that Calvinism produced Western capitalism.² One can see how Calder’s claim interacts with Weber’s theory. Calvinism, ironically, ultimately produced the objectification of sex.³ Calder’s statement also suggests that money and religion act in conjunction with one another within novels of this period (47).

As we have seen, then, the negotiation of public territory in general has serious ramifications for women in Gissing’s fiction. Nevertheless, numerous women in Gissing’s novels venture into public, sometimes of necessity and sometimes in a pursuit of freedom. Either way, except for very proscribed exceptions, they risk criticism. However, Calder and other critics do not seem to notice that women in Gissing’s novels sometimes find ways to claim space for themselves that do not involve venturing into the public gaze, a phenomenon upon which I will elaborate further. By and large, though, women do manage to negotiate public spaces, respectably or not, in Gissing’s novels, and some characters lie far enough below middle class ranking that they do not have to care about their status. Some women, that is, do put themselves into communal places, usually vocational, that are subject to male scrutiny. Other women, while they

do not put themselves on public display, nonetheless find ways to penetrate ideological, economic, or psychological areas. Often, they do so by employing some aspect of their religious beliefs. These women will take up much of my attention in this chapter, although I will also consider, to a lesser extent, women who venture into the open social realm.

Women traffic on their physical allurements legitimately, of course, as does Isabel Maddison, in *Isabel Clarendon*, the daughter of an impecunious country solicitor (13). Isabel marries Mr. Eustace Clarendon after a “season” of exposure to the London social circle, sponsored by Lady Kent, who thinks Isabel a candidate for society rather than for a position as governess (13-15). As a result of her virtual social promotion through marriage, Isabel Clarendon takes part in fox hunting expeditions with other males of her class, suffering physical but not social harm. This kind of activity falls within an allowable range of public participation, as does Helen Norman’s ability to wander the streets of the East End in pursuit of subjects upon which to exercise her charitable inclinations, with no appreciable damage to her reputation. As Suzanne Rickard has pointed out in “Victorian Women With Causes: Writing, Religion, and Action,” Helen’s non-fictional counterparts had been preceded in the ability to move in public partly by “female pioneers of an earlier generation” who pushed for “prison reform, education and social purity” (141). Most of these women found their motivation in “a mix of idealism, religious faith, and professionalism” (Rickard 141). This situation, as far as it pertains to religion and professionalism, constitutes in part a departure from Helen’s case. In the first place, she, despite Gissing’s blurring of the religious lines, is by her own acclamation an agnostic. Secondly, she acquires the permission of her male guardian to conduct her philanthropic efforts. Finally, she places herself under Christian sponsorship. Undoubtedly, the issue of feminine penetration into spheres traditionally inhabited by men persists in Gissing as a major item of interest. As with

most social issues, Gissing's interpretation of such forays varies from novel to novel, and sometimes within the same book. At times the author seems supportive of such expansion, and at other times he seems derisive or, at the least, dubious. In the main, however, taking a stance on religion in Gissing's novels often becomes for his women characters an area of feminine liberation and identity. As we have already seen, even when gains in those categories entail idiosyncratic or marginalized space, as with Mrs. Cumberbatch in *Workers in the Dawn* and Miss Bygrave in *The Unclassed*, women are at least able to exercise some volition in deciding how they are interpreted and where they can operate. They choose their own mode of existence within the realm of religious practice.

The relationship between religious questions and women takes up a considerable amount of attention in Gissing's novels, especially as it involves matters of autonomy and economics. One obvious motif involving female space, which has received more than cursory critical notice, has to do with the liminal parameters of marital freedom. As Adrian Poole explains in *Gissing in Context*, Gissing, using space as a means of measuring experience, employs "[r]ooms and streets" to contain "characteristic dramas of married hell" (45). In doing so, Gissing indicates the confining nature of many marriages for both partners, and, significantly, many of his female characters reject marriage because it hinders them from attaining to their own notions of agency and purpose. As we shall see, Maud Enderby, for religious reasons, falls into this category. Some critics see the function of religion in Gissing's novels as a negative force in terms of its effects on women. Until recently, in fact, critics almost uniformly characterized Gissing's relegation of women to the religious sphere as his way of consigning them to inferior status. Constance Harsh, in "George Gissing's *Thryza*: Romantic Love and Ideological Co-Conspiracy," asserts that Gissing "explores three forms of idealism that might offer an alternative [to materialism]:

religion, culture, and love” (2). She goes on to claim that each of these choices fail (2). Françoise Dupeyron, in his essay “*The Emancipated: A Comedy in Italy*,” speaks of the “trap of religious hypocrisy” in which Miriam Baske finds herself as a child, “compelled to become a paragon of faith and virtue” because she had no other choice at the time (18). Religion, in the estimation of such critics, restricts women, and, in doing so, serves as a means of maintaining their subservient or subsidiary status. I admit that, as is usual with Gissing, the charge that women often occupy limited and marginal space is true. Sometimes, and Gissing seems to realize this fact, these demarcated spaces are the only ones available to women. In fact, however much Gissing at times sympathizes with the plight of women, he does sometimes seem dismissive and distrustful of them. In ““Woman as an Invader’: Travel and Travail in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*,” Josephine A. McQuail remarks that “Gissing comes off both as an advocate for women’s rights and as a misogynist” (139). McQuail’s assertion does not stand in isolation. In *The Odd Women* and other books, Gissing explores ambiguity as it pertains to feminist concerns, and, inevitably, he confuses any reader who insists on identifying his “stance” on these issues. Elizabeth F. Evans, among many others, contends that Gissing’s analysis of the shop girl in books like *In the Year of Jubilee* wavers between interest and qualified approval of the new freedom of women to move in public and the perception of sexual compromise incurred by such movement (““Counter Jumpers’ and ‘Queens of the Street’” 116). Alice B. Markow, in “George Gissing: Advocate or Provocateur of the Women’s Movement?” sides with those who see Gissing as a paternalistic traditionalist. Using Gissing’s rather infamous letter to Eduard Bertz, in which Gissing compares the ““typical woman’” to a ““male *idiot*”” as the fulcrum for her argument, Markow argues that Gissing “subverts the new woman” through a plot action (59). She then cites examples from his novels that prove to her that Gissing “did not very much think beyond the negative arguments

and stereotypes of his age” about feminist issues (72). Interestingly, Markow enunciates the view I find most plausible, that “Gissing may have been too pluralistic, or perhaps nihilistic, to adopt a single point of view” (59). Despite this insight, Markow concludes that Gissing “was never passionately or profoundly concerned with the movements of his time” (69).⁴ As they apply to female religious figures in Gissing’s novels, however, comments like these ignore evidence that Gissing considers and presents an alternate possibility: religion for women sometimes forms the basis of self-government and rebellion against capitalist and paternalistic schemes.

Undeniably, religion does sometimes work to restrict women in Gissing’s novels, as it did in reality. Linda Wilson, in “‘Afraid to be Singular’: Marianne Farningham and the Role of Women, 1857-1909,” agrees with the conclusions of some feminist critics who point out “that much evangelical teaching supported and perpetuated an ideology in which women’s role was first and foremost in the home” (118). On women fell the necessity to vocalize within the home the Christian tenets that served to check their range of action. However, Wilson believes that evangelicalism also produced a countercurrent to this trend, one which emphasized an “imperative to follow an individual call from God” (118). Ruth Jenkins reiterates Wilson’s line of reasoning about the conflicting results of intense religious conviction. In her extremely illuminating book, *Reclaiming Myths of Power*, Jenkins recounts the ways in which both the Established Church and Evangelicalism worked in some ways to confirm the patriarchal nature of Victorian religion. Women, according to Jenkins, “found themselves in a community that spiritually circumscribed their salvation by patriarchal mediators” (17). Jenkins explains that the religious crisis experienced by men, the Arnoldian loss of faith, did not mean a relinquishment of the idea that women needed a spiritual “mediator” (16). Nor did it mean on any significant level that women could abdicate their status as purveyors of religious instruction in the home (22).

Ironically, women, though they could not participate in the unpleasant and un-Christian activities necessary to capitalistic success, could and did fund capitalistic ventures by handing over their dowries to their husbands (18). Because religion for men was pictured as active and “militant,” enabling them to do battle in the economic arena, and because religion for women was regarded as suitable only for the domestic, private, and passive realms of “influence,” Christian women, as such, were largely excluded ideologically and practically from participation in the public domain (20). Jenkins relates a phrase from Barbara Taylor’s *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, in which Taylor states ““An ideal of femininity which combined holy love with social subordination not only served to suppress women, it also tamed and contained the anticapitalistic implications of Christianity itself”” (20-21). The thrust of Jenkins’ argument, however, is that certain women writers such as George Eliot, Florence Nightingale, Charlotte Brontë, and Elizabeth Gaskell began to question a situation wherein they “found themselves with talents and abilities, which were traditionally validated only in men, but no sanctioned place to develop and pursue them satisfactorily” (18). Writers like these “reappropriated the substance and the language of the Judeo-Christian narrative to authorize their subversion of patriarchal institutions” (25). The evidence indicates that by the time Gissing began to write, this reappropriation had been developing in the social consciousness, as well as in literary practice, for quite a while. As a result, one can see in Gissing examples of female characters that essentially do the same thing, albeit usually on a smaller and more personal scale, that these writers had long since done. That is, they claim religious space, often without masculine consent. Indeed, many religious women in Gissing’s fiction manage to irritate establishment males extensively. Jenkins says that the women writers under her consideration “revise not just the literary canon but also its theological function” (29). Sue Morgan, in her Introduction to *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain:*

1750-1900, points out that this phenomenon, wherein Victorian women utilized religion as “an autonomous female social space that afforded women the chance to exercise real historical agency and power,” has long been noticed by historians. (10). Martha Vicinus, in “‘The Gift of Love’: Nineteenth-Century Religion and Lesbian Passion,” explains plausibly that women also gained power through developing “their often highly effective alternative religions and theologies, including spiritualism, theosophy, the Quakers, Christian Science and other lesser known denominations” (73). Likewise, several Gissing characters claim the right to exercise their own theological prerogatives in order to mark themselves apart from the belief systems sanctioned by males. To some extent, albeit in another context, we have seen this element in our discussion of *Workers in the Dawn*. Obviously, the subject as it surfaces in other novels warrants a more explicit and extensive discussion. I will show that women from the working, middle, and upper classes often use religion, not to subordinate themselves to masculine control, but to affirm their own ability to define themselves and, in some fashion, to control their lives.

Hell is a Woman’s Realm, but Man is the Devil: *Isabel Clarendon*

Isabel Clarendon, though on the surface largely free from religious content, contains nonetheless some rather interesting situations impacted by religion. The novel presents two characters who accomplish on a minor scale what Jenkins claims for the four writers in her study, the claiming of religious ground in order to accomplish the “subversion of patriarchal institutions” (25). At first glance, one might read Gissing’s portrayal of these characters as dismissive. In the view of Ada Warren, through whom the reader first learns of the peculiar religious fixations of these figures, Irene Saltash and her protégé Lady Florence Cootes are mere cranks. “I have seen [Irene Saltash] grow red in the face in support of faith in eternal damnation,” Ada remarks, adding “If that goes, she has nothing to live for” (36). The reader remembers that

another eccentric, Mrs. Cumberbatch, in *Workers in the Dawn*, shared this delight in hell. Perhaps these women admire hell because it provides them with a way of visualizing their oppressors in a context subject to the most extreme of limitations. While other young ladies talk to eligible young bachelors and play lawn tennis, Irene and Lady Cootes discuss “pronounced views on the constitution of the world to come and seemingly desiring to compensate themselves for a gloomy future by enjoyment of a present fruitful of consolations” (36). These consolations do not extend to the pursuit of young men or to engagement in acceptably aristocratic activities. Instead, they apparently consist of the contemplation of hell for its own sake. Gissing reveals that these two young women “seldom quitted each other.” They find a mutual bond “greatly indebted to ecclesiastical cement” (36). If the novel said nothing further of these girls, the reader might well discount this description as narrative window dressing, perhaps by way of Gissing’s attempt to reveal something of the frivolity and inconsequentiality of upper-class social life. On the contrary, Gissing returns to these hyper-religious young ladies in a later scene. In this subsequent description, Gissing supplies the information that Mr. Saltash of Dunsey Priors, as a member of the fox-hunting aristocratic set and an MP to boot, dislikes his daughter’s religious proclivities. To him, Irene, his only child, “had degenerated from the type whereby her father leisured to be represented” (103). He regards her interest in religion as “tomfoolery,” and he notes regretfully that she has no interest in hunting, being “given over to ecclesiastical interests” (103). Gissing reveals that Lady Florence Cootes and Irene Saltash, both from landed upper crust families, seem to have acquired their religious interests mutually, it being impossible to determine who “infected” whom (103). Clearly, these women have carved for themselves a unified escape from the marginalized, trivial space allotted for them by their class. Admittedly, their evasion of this space involves another marginalization into exclusivist doctrine, but it is a peripheral territory

they have chosen as their own. Interestingly, this liminal niche is hell itself, albeit a hell they relish as their own private social geography. Even the terminology of infection that Gissing employs regarding them places these women outside of normative social behavior. They have, in effect, quarantined themselves. Gissing implies that Irene is something of another species from her own mother, a traditionally conditioned woman who could not have imparted to her daughter this “contagion” of schismatic belief (103). To her father, and to her mother no doubt as well, Irene is an aberration, failing to play out the meager role allotted for the only female offspring of country squires. To the offense of not being male, Irene has added a further insult by defining herself as not-quite-female. To be sure, men do converse with her, but on topics that she determines. For instance, at one gathering, she converses with Lord Winterset, an aspirant to Isabel Clarendon’s hand, “on the subject of a recent Ritualist trial” (104). He soon deserts this discussion. Soon after that, her “playful young religionist” friend, Lady Cootes, after asking Isabel about the hunting outing projected for the next day, leaves Isabel when the gentlemen arrive, and wanders “off into the warmer regions” (105). Obviously, Lady Florence Cootes prefers her private hell to the hell Isabel is enduring, that of conflicting romantic entanglements: “[Isabel] was in terror lest some flagrant weakness should entirely overcome her, a hysterical burst of tears, or a fit of faintness” (106). These feelings subside as she encounters Lord Winterset, but Isabel comes close to a crisis because “she could not fan herself” (106). Isabel, unlike Lady Cootes, does not find comfort in “warmer regions.” In a conversation with Kingcote shortly afterwards, Isabel confirms that a literal hell of sorts might be preferable to the agony of social complications she has to face. She can hardly convince herself that the day “will ever come to an end” (108). When Kingcote mentions a legend of “impious huntsmen” condemned to ride forever, Isabel remarks that such a fate might not be so objectionable: “Ah, it is good to get rid of

the world” (108). Her tension had been the result of the choice she has to make between Kingcote, whom she loves and who is virtually penniless, and Winterset, whose wealth and social position attract her.

This situation, that of having to choose between money or class status and love, is a typical one in Gissing’s novels. In *Isabel Clarendon*, this dilemma confronts Ada and her suitor Vincent Lacour as well as Isabel. In *Workers in the Dawn*, Arthur chooses loyalty to Carrie over Helen Norman. In the same novel, Maud Gresham cynically chooses the abusive John Waghorn for his money, but has an affair with the impecunious and rascally Augustus Whiffle. In *The Nether World*, Sidney Kirkwood becomes shackled to Clara Hewett out of a sense of duty, giving up a chance to marry the girl he prefers, Jane Snowdon, at a time when she might have become an heiress. No matter the choice, misery is the result. Hell, in some form, cannot easily be escaped in Gissing, and he does not restrict the sufferings of hell to the proletariat. Hell exists for other classes as well, though sometimes hell becomes a place of refuge from the banality of middle class existence. Refreshingly, Irene Saltash and Lady Cootes choose their own hell, observe the present hell of other characters, and, through their chosen theology, get the additional comfort of contemplating the eventual perdition of even more of the damned.

One notices that, in Irene’s case, the name Saltash possibly references multiple Biblical elements. She is of the New Testament “salt” that has, ironically, lost its social savor if not its preservative qualities.⁵ However, she preserves, as it were, her own integrity. “Ash” reminds one of penance, an appropriate action for one so preoccupied with damnation. From an Old Testament perspective, Saltash combines the elements involved in the fate of a notably damned female, Lot’s wife, who, for disobeying the injunctions of both her husband and her husband’s patriarchal god Yahweh, turns into a pillar of salt.⁶ She undergoes this transformation because

she looks longingly back at a prototypical image of hell, Sodom, which is reduced to ashes. Irene and Lot's wife both prefer to inhabit condemned space as an alternative to the space imposed upon them by males, god or human. Perhaps, too, they become "fixed," from society's point of view, but at least they achieve permanent identity. Simultaneously, Irene's religious interests free her from the arid commonplaceness of her father's way of life. Given Gissing's extensive knowledge of the Bible, I do not think that an association such as the one I have suggested between Lot's wife and Irene is out of the question. I cannot prove it definitively, but it is rather more likely than not. After all, Gissing never actually uses the word "Hell" in the novel. Nevertheless, through circumlocution, he suggests various temporal versions of it, and he inhabits his novel with the devil.

References to Hell, the devil, and damnation, transmuted into modern form, occur with regularity in Gissing, beginning, as we have seen, with *Workers in the Dawn*. Even casual use of these terms or their cognates seems to crop up frequently. In *Isabel Clarendon*, these allusions, although sparingly and sometimes indirectly used, often have profound implications for women characters. Interestingly, although the word "hell" itself never, apparently, appears in the novel, "damnation," "damned," "demon," and "deuce/devil" do function symbolically and obliquely to indicate that realm. To Kingcote, before he and Isabel declare their love for one another, "the rattling of a window or door, the endless drip of rain, the wind moaning in the chimney – became to him the voice of a tormenting demon" (vol. 1, 112). Kingcote and his artist friend Gabriel speak to one another of "going to the devil" through idleness, and Kingcote quite literally needs work (228). This remark occurs after the relationship between Kingcote and Isabel has deteriorated. On another occasion, Gabriel states that his illustrations for a novel are "damned nonsense," presumably because they are done with mere profit in mind (188). Vincent Lacour

refers to Mrs. Bruce Page as “the very devil,” and indeed she had been complicit in a plot to separate him from Ada Warren and what he had believed to be her fortune (237). Early in the novel, while contemplating his future course of action in obtaining money, Vincent prophetically remarks that “there’s the very deuce brewing” (38). Soon afterwards he rejects the idea of laboring in the law for a mere hundred pounds a year, exclaiming “the deuce [I] would” in response to Robert Asquith’s suggestion that he should attempt this vocation (39).

Vincent, incidentally, often stands in for the devil in ways that work out badly for women in the novel. In the scene wherein he makes his jilting of Rhoda Meres official, Vincent presides over his apartment almost as a decadent prince of darkness ruling over hell. After having risen on one of “these dark mornings” in his chamber, Vincent, dressed in black velvet, watches “heavily laden omnibuses” carrying “poor wretches” to work in “Stygian darkness” in an atmosphere full of “foul vapour” (121). These wretches, of course, are being ferried by some omnibus driving Charon to the hell from which they cannot escape: their jobs. In the exchange with Rhoda, in which Vincent admits that he courted Ada at the same time he conducted his liaison with Rhoda, Gissing mentions the word “fire” in conjunction with some position, invitation, or action of Vincent’s seven times (121-126). Vincent seems adamant about remaining close to the fire or placing Rhoda near it. At one point, Vincent, who has inflicted suffering on Rhoda, experiences suffering himself, the suffering of his own brutality: “[...] his face was a picture of passionate torment, the veins at his temple blue and swollen, his lips dry and quivering” (125). The reader may remember that Christ’s description of hell involves thirst, fire, and worms, the latter in this case evoked by the swollen veins in Vincent’s head. In Mark 9:48, Jesus describes hell as a place as “[w]here their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” If they occurred in isolation, these images surrounding Lacour might be coincidental. Since fire, worm imagery, and darkness

inform this entire passage, however, I am inclined to think coincidence not likely. Vincent is a man who inflicts the pains of hell on his female victims while simultaneously enduring (and even embodying) them himself. Not surprisingly, hell *qua* Lacour equates with economics, although in this case, hell results from personal greed rather than industrial blight. It also attaches itself to the infliction of pain on women, suggesting that Gissing understands quite clearly that the economic system targets women of all classes, not just the underclass generally. Vincent indeed is a picture of demonic plotting and calculation; his rejection of Rhoda is precipitated by his desire to obtain Ada's purported wealth. In this regard, Gissing connects Vincent to both Satan and Pluto, since Pluto presided over the underworld and functioned as the god of wealth. This association makes sense, considering Gissing's overall preoccupation with the devastating power of money and class inequity. After all, the gradations in Dante's Hell and in classical Hades equate generically, (and Gissing knew both of these literary places well) to the economic gradations in capitalist society. Gissing's portrayal of Vincent and of each of the other references to diabolic agency invariably occurs in a context of financial need of some sort, and these situations almost always involve the exploitation of women. Women in the novel, then, either orchestrate their own hell, as do Irene Saltash and Lady Cootes, or they inhabit the hells created by men, as do Ada, Isabel, and Rhoda. These hells may be negation, the lack of something, namely love. In fact, they usually do embody some sort of absence. Alternately, the torture may be positive in nature, such as the active cruelty Vincent inflicts on Rhoda.

Ada's anti-religious stance, in spite of her experience with Vincent Lacour, ultimately opposes the genteel expectations of her male acquaintances, as the reader discerns in her remarks to Robert Asquith. In one instance, Asquith, assuming as much from her reading of Comte, asks Ada whether she is a Positivist, to which she replies "No; merely an Atheist" (27). When he

playfully suggests “Agnostic” as a more accurate, and probably, a less caustic, designation, Ada states that “it comes to very much the same thing” and explains that “agnostic” “has been coined principally to save respectability.” She then insists that she has no sympathy with respectability “whatever” (27).⁷ This comment elicits silence from her male companion and provides the reader with another example of how women are able to use religious topics to limit men. While Irene Saltash and Lady Florence Cootes use an inverted theology of their own construction to accomplish the discomfiture of male expectations, Ada uses atheism to upset the staid opinions of males who have consigned women to the role of angel in the house, a role she is emphatically not ready to fill. However, Ada almost succumbs to the oily and predictably cynical blandishments of Vincent Lacour, upon whom she nearly bequeaths her fortune. Hence, in this as in other ways, she compromises the appearance she cultivates as outside of patriarchal social expectations. One must remember, too, that her father, Mr. Clarendon, had conferred upon her the wealth she enjoys, in spite of her illegitimacy. Again, Ada lingers for much of the novel somewhere between autonomy and dependence. Attitudinally, she wants to exercise control over her own fate, and her attraction towards Vincent ironically originates in this desire. She wants to frustrate Isabel, her guardian, by proving to her that she can attract a man. This very motivation, obviously, stems from the patriarchal idea that women, to be of any value, must be able to marry. Ada, therefore, finds herself in a quandary. She almost fails to find her way out of it. However, Ada finally confirms her status as an autonomous female by renouncing her inheritance and trusting another woman, Isabel, with the fortune Mr. Clarendon had left to Ada. Thereby, she escapes from the unhealthy connection to Lacour and thwarts the patriarchal system her father represents by allowing Isabel to administer the money however she sees fit. Isabel eventually marries Asquith, whose financial situation matches her own. One might interpret this outcome as

a validation of Ada's rejection of social expectations and the ironic fulfillment of her earlier statements of unorthodoxy. Her jilting by Lacour, which ironically saves her from his financial designs on her, constitutes a social and romantic snub from which she recovers by renouncing her money entirely. Gissing suggests that her religious views, moreover, has undergone a change. In her discussion with her friend and cultural mentor, Mr. Meres, who has guided her literary talents, she solicits his help in legally handing over her money to Isabel. While concocting this sacrificial idea, she looks at a copy of Raphael's Madonna, whose "divine face was glowed around with halo, and seemed to smile" (241). She expresses her renunciation of wealth in religious language, and she confesses to having "that mood in which simple, every-day matters are seen in their miraculous light" (241). This mysterious epiphany involves not only her rejection of wealth, but also her denunciation of sexual identity. In her attempt to understand Isabel's marriage to her father, Ida exclaims "I wish I were not a woman . . . It is that which makes me judge her hardly." In some sense, her discomfort with her own femininity disguises the real issue: her refutation of male dominance, a perspective which dictates that which is "woman" (242). Ida has embraced independence through a subtly altered, but authentic, religious sensitivity and through her determination to have a literary career. Unlike Helen Norman, Ida does not artificially mimic male agnostic patterns, nor does she subscribe to orthodoxy out of acquiescence or necessity. Instead, Gissing implies that she finds a spiritual center that does not embrace male expectations. She discovers a religious space, possibly not an entirely Christian one, which allows her to respond to the miracle within the mundane. The fact that she focuses on a representation of the Madonna rather than on Christ indicates her gendered and idiosyncratic adoption of numinous awareness.

John Halperin, in "How to Read Gissing," emphasizes that "it is as impossible to consider women apart from questions of class in Gissing's work as it is to consider questions of class apart from money" (68). This assertion constitutes a major premise and admission of this paper. However, *Isabel Clarendon* shows that class and money, even when possessed by women, can be targeted and controlled by men who do not possess either advantage, or who possess one but not the other. Women, more so than men, can be exploited because they possess money. Men can grant women of a lower class a certain rise in status or money, as did Isabel's first husband, but they can also arrange things legally so that they can deprive them of these advantages, as, again Mr. Clarendon had done in the disposition of his will. Of course, without money and without husbands, the lot of women becomes dismal indeed. Sometimes, just as Gissing uses religion in his commentary on money, he uses money as a barometer which measures the function and role of religion. As Robert Selig notes in "Gissing's Worldly Parable," "[...] a miserable salary of ten pounds a year [...]" and a place to live [...] counts a great deal more than religion's purely transcendental credit" (23). Money always matters more than religion in Gissing's novels, because without money, survival itself becomes impossible. For that matter, without *enough* money, existence, while barely sustainable, becomes emotionally and intellectually insupportable. Of course, this state of affairs applies to everything in Gissing's fictional world, not just religion. In fact, virtually nothing can happen in Gissing's novels without money. Simon J. James has pointed out in *Unsettled Accounts* that "[...] in many of Gissing's novels poverty causes a functional inertia that retards further development of plot" (69). In Gissing's work, nothing can happen to a character, outside of starvation, unless money allows it to happen. Furthermore, one can even say that every action in Gissing's novels takes place in proportion to the amount of money available in any given situation. Needless to say, spirituality itself, if such a

thing can be said to exist for Gissing's characters, is regulated by money. No one can afford to be religious apart from money. To be sure, poor religious characters do exist in Gissing, but they remain ineffectual outside of a very restricted perimeter of influence. However, for women characters in Gissing's fiction, even limited control over their own lives becomes remarkable. In *Thryza*, two women from the working class manage their lives with the assistance of their religious beliefs.

Thryza: Religion as Refuge

Constance Harsh finds, as I mentioned earlier, that religion in Gissing's *Thryza* constitutes a retrogressive and primitive force of which only weak-minded women avail themselves. Harsh says that Gissing portrays Christianity as "unintellectual" in *Thryza*: "Mary Bower's evangelical faith is an irrelevant curiosity, while Lydia Trent's final embrace of Christianity is an anachronism from which *Thryza* averts her eyes" ("George Gissing's *Thryza* 2). I would like to consider briefly Harsh's assertion from the point of view I have suggested throughout my study, that is, from the position that religion indeed functions, in both positive and negative ways, as one of the few means by which women can seize some control of their lives and minds. At times, I may indeed agree that Christianity, by Gissing's standards, is "unintellectual," as Harsh says. However, I wish to plumb the larger relevance of that statement. The value of religion as a means of economic and social independence, however limited or even illusory, sometimes supersedes the question of its legitimacy as a cerebral exercise. Besides, *Thryza* herself never really qualifies as a judge of the mental worth of a concept. Rather, she admires intellectuality while failing to understand it. Her status as a member of the working class, combined with her lack of money, disqualifies her from participation in the cultural and romantic pursuits to which she is drawn. Because her role in the novel has less to do with

religious issues than with personal ones, I will not discuss her further in this study, though she does demonstrate again the rigid, neo-Calvinist limitations that class and money place on the individual. The two women whose religious views Constance Harsh dismisses in the novel as irrelevant, however, deserve some attention as examples of religious characters in Gissing's work who rely on religion as a means of evaluating themselves and others. In other words, religion becomes for them a defense against exploitation and a measurement whereby they can judge male motivation and control male initiatives. That the functioning of this defense sometimes fails to operate efficiently does not negate the fact that Christianity is their refuge of choice. Their belief, moreover, does not seem compelled into action exclusively by male prerogative.

Mary Bower, the daughter of a "wholesomely vulgar" mother and a relatively prosperous warehouse foreman (all of whom reside on Paradise Street, incidentally), has carved a religious identity for herself in distinction from her parents' indifference to matters of that sort (26-27). Her mild bigotry towards Catholics, while unpalatable, allows her to hold forth publicly in contrast to "her wonted reticence" in an open debate with a man (31). Catholics, she claims during an argument with the radical Ackroyd, can "do wrong" and then "confess [these wrongs] to the priest" (31). She holds her ground, too, against old Mr. Boddy, who claims that "faith's the great thing" rather than "form" (31). John Halperin calls Mary "a low church fanatic," and he notes that her family is guilty of "the most hideous grasping materialism," charges that in some respects are quite true (*A Life in Books* 92). Whatever one might say against Mary's distrust of Catholicism and her family's cunning acquisitiveness, one has to grant that her resistance to complacency gives her some level of intellectual independence, especially as she has acquired her viewpoint apart from immediate male social consensus. Evidently, her evaluation of ethics requires that she reject masculine mediation in favor of conscience. Furthermore, both she and

Lydia Trent, Thryza's sister, disapprove, as dangerous to morals and reputation, of Thryza's participation in public displays of singing in male-dominated venues such as public houses. Hence, they distrust the freedom with which Totty Nancarrow, a suspected Catholic befriended by Thryza, frequents places like these (39). Seen in this light, in which Mary expresses suspicion of locations controlled by males, her anti-Catholicism becomes understandable. After all, she references confession, a practice that depends, in the minds of many Victorian Protestants, upon the disclosure of secrets to males whom Dissenters and Anglicans often suspected of impropriety.⁸

Both Mary Bowers and Lydia Trent, despite their opposition to consorting with the questionable company to be found in pubs, an attitude that they would have shared with female-dominated Temperance societies,⁹ practice the kind of personal charity which Gissing never seems to portray negatively in any of his novels. On one occasion, they provide old Mr. Boddy with a new winter coat, and Lydia declares to Thryza "we can always manage to save something" (116). In contradistinction to the popular songs she sings in the pub, Thryza consents on this occasion to sing a "hymn-tune" that Lydia "had grown fond of in chapel" (116). Subtly but perceptibly, Gissing associates dissenting religion with sincere expressions of personal charity, reminiscent of the kind Jane Snowden prefers in *The Nether World* after she rejects the plan concocted by her grandfather. Furthermore, they provide for a man more vulnerable than themselves. Clearly, this action upends the Victorian assumption that men should provide for women. These two women, Lydia and Mary, function within a set of religious beliefs that permit them to exercise some control over their economic and personal lives.

Lydia's religion does not incapacitate her. Far from being ineffective, Lydia Trent exercises both initiative and discretion when she discovers Thryza's passion for Egremont. She

extracts information from Ackroyd, in whom she had become romantically interested. In acting in the interests of her sister, she suppresses her jealousy of Totty and her disapproval of Ackroyd's earlier descent into drunkenness. She elicits a confession from Thryza without condemning her sister. All the time, she maintains her awareness that the class difference between Thryza and Egremont will make a relationship between them impossible, reasoning that "[a] gentleman did not fall in love with a work-girl, not in the honest sense" (272). Although later in the novel, Egremont temporarily entertains the idea of love for Thryza, Lydia's class-based assessment of him proves accurate. After he undergoes a separation from her, he abandons his plans to marry her. Instead, he marries a woman he regards as his equal (490). Lydia, though a Christian, has a firm grasp on the realities of class impenetrability. Her ability to interpret these realities renders her judgment superior to that of Thryza, who dies soon after she learns that Egremont has decided not to marry her (474). Finally, Lydia's religious faith eclipses the skepticism of Luke Ackroyd. After Thryza's burial, Lydia asks Ackroyd, "Do you wish me to believe, Luke, that I shall never see my sister again?" (476). His response indicates a deference to a wisdom derived in large part from her faith: "I've often talked as if I knew things for certain, when I know nothing. You're better in yourself than I am, and you may feel more of the truth" (476). Lydia is no angel in the house. In fact, she never marries. Nonetheless, her nonconformist Christianity gives her the ability to think intuitively and independently of the men in the novel, both of her own class and that of her alleged betters. More than that, she acts on her convictions. In addition, she does not rely on marriage to rescue her from her status: "The next morning [after Thryza's funeral], Lydia went to her work as usual" (476). I cannot but conclude that Lydia Trent embodies one of the few religious characters in his novels that Gissing seems to admire, a working class woman who is not somehow deranged or eccentric like her social superior Mrs.

Cumberbatch. At the very least, he depicts her as a female character who, with dignity, claims space and exercises power largely, if not entirely, through religious identity. While one might object that her character in and of itself may account for her integrity and strength, one nevertheless must acknowledge that, in her case, religious faith informs character.

The Odd Women, Gender, and Identity

When women do choose marriage as a means of securing economic security, as Monica Madden does in *The Odd Women*, Gissing explores the efforts they make to maintain a sense of self. Often, the kinds of choices they make threaten Victorian certainties about marriage. By the time that Gissing published the novel, marriage laws had changed somewhat in favor of divorced women, and this state of things encouraged some Victorians and threatened others. Owen Chadwick relates that opposition to even the restrictive divorce law in effect at that time persisted in groups such as the Central Council, organized in 1893, which successfully opposed efforts to make divorce easier (*The Victorian Church I*: 193). Divorce, which had been legal since 1857, still occurred only rarely in comparison to the rising number of marriages even the year before *The Odd Women* was published in 1891. At that time, Chadwick tells us, only 500 divorces were recorded (*The Victorian Church I*: 484). In spite of such reforms, as Elaine Showalter states, writing in a review of Jeni Calder's *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction*, that for the most part women "were in no position economically or legally to advocate radical change in the marriage system" (94). Nina Auerbach, in *Woman and the Demon*, however, claims that *The Odd Women* is "infused with a stronger, if bitter, faith in the new age ..." (147). She further calls the novel "... a more heroic account of pioneering single women who are harbingers of the death of marriage, presiding over an ennobled future of work and solitary faith" (147).

Auerbach, most likely, has Rhoda Nunn and Mary Barfoot in mind when she grants these accolades to Gissing's novel.

In the context Auerbach references, though with mixed success, Monica Madden also challenges marital stagnancy in a way that enlists, minimally perhaps, but tangibly nonetheless, both religious and economic substance. In my essay "George Gissing's Manifesto: *The Odd Women* and *The Unclassed*," I touch upon this subject in ways that I shall occasionally revisit here. Monica, in her acceptance of the middle-aged but financially stable Mr. Widdowson, does so in a manner that indicates her corresponding acceptance of her own status as a commodity. In fact, as Josephine McQuail points out, her surreptitious acquiescence to Widdowson's courtship constitutes a transgression of Victorian propriety not much less disreputable than her work in the morally compromising environment in the draper's shop ("Woman as an Invader" 147). Rachel Bowlby comments in *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* on the connections between women as commodities and consumers, as well as on those that exist between commerce and prostitution (Bowlby 27). Her remarks bear directly on Gissing's depiction of Monica, who evaluates Widdowson as one might evaluate a horse one intends to buy. Conversely, she allows herself to be appraised and purchased, so to speak, by her future husband. Monica makes her monetary agenda perfectly clear when she rejects Mr. Bullivant's suit on the very practical basis of his inability to support a wife (*The Odd Women* 30). However, as I remarked in my essay on Gissing, "The reduction of Monica to commodity finds attenuation after her marriage when she attempts to assert a level of volition that resists Widdowson's controlling concept of women" (5). Patricia Comitini, in "A Feminist Fantasy: Conflicting Ideologies in *The Odd Women*," refers to "...the ideological construction of a particular social reality that masks a real social desire" that the novel puts into play (530). Comitini's essay

concerns the way “fantasy attempts to bridge the gap created between the patriarchic ideology and the domestic ideology” (532). I believe that one of these social desires involves the yearning women experience to create their own sense of self, apart from the patriarchic and consumerist objectification of women. Though she never completely succeeds in this attempt to resist her own reduction to product, Monica does insist on a measure of identity when she first resists Widdowson’s formulation of her as a delicacy he has somehow purchased, and, failing that, when she finally separates from her husband.

During courtship, Monica demonstrates that she understands her status as an article of trade. Gissing uses a reference to religion to underscore the emptiness of Monica’s own investment, in human terms, in her acceptance of Widdowson’s offer. In a scene wherein Monica accompanies Widdowson on a ride on the river, Gissing ensures that the reader comprehends the aspiritual nature of their relationship. Because my argument in “George Gissing’s Manifesto” has already covered this ground, I take the liberty of reproducing it at some length. The parenthetical citations refer, unless otherwise indicated, to page numbers in *The Odd Women*.

Significantly, Monica, to Widdowson, is a “treat” that has been “provided” for his birthday (46). As if to confirm this offhand and unconscious characterization of her as an item to be consumed for his enjoyment, Monica gives him a present, a “brown paper parcel” that contains the copy of “The Christian Year” given to her by her sisters (46). We know that Monica gives little thought to religion, that “[...] she had fallen into neglect of public worship [...]” because of the example of her shop-girl companions (33). Religion has no intrinsic value to her. Therefore, in giving Widdowson the book, she essentially gives him a symbol of her emptiness, of her spiritual bankruptcy. To look at it another way, Monica gives him nothing that really belongs to her in any intimate sense. Originally, when her sisters had given her the book for her birthday, she accepted it without enthusiasm, merely equating it reductionistically with its monetary value and with the sacrifice that its expenditure represented. On that occasion, she says, “[...] you oughtn’t to have spent money on me [...],” though she offers a half-hearted promise to read “[...] some of it now and then” (31). After giving Widdowson the book, Monica relates the narrative of her life from “Sunday to Sunday [...] as if the subject had no great *interest* (italics mine) for her” (47). That brown parcel

represents, more than any other symbol in the novel, the objectification of Monica's existence. In giving to him an item to which she ascribes nothing beyond its cost, Monica fails to give anything of herself of any consequence to her future husband. (6)

Monica's demotion of *The Christian Year* to a utilitarian object of barter correlates with her manipulation of religion as a means of deceiving her sisters as to her activities on the Sunday she meets Widdowson for the trip to Battersea. Prior to her arranged meeting with Widdowson, Monica attended a church service so that she could provide an alibi to her sisters (36). To Monica, neither religion nor marriage has anything to do with spirituality. Rather, both of these sanctified activities translate into mere economic transactions. Gissing surely understood the fact that this gift, "The Christian Year," was not always a trifling and arbitrary item. He no doubt knew that John Keble's book was once a highly regarded and quoted work of devotion. However, by the time Gissing published *The Odd Women* in 1893, it had certainly undergone a decline. Owen Chadwick points out that "If a man quoted *The Christian Year* among a group of churchmen in the sixties or seventies, several of those present could have finished the stanza." By the nineties, "it was observed that the younger no longer knew it like their elders, though families continued to recommend it, like the collect, for Sunday reading" (II: 215). That Gissing chose this book as Monica's gift, then, clearly indicates his intention to convey the general decline of religious faith alongside of Monica's indifference to the work. *The Christian Year* had undergone a diminishment as a religious touchstone, winding up as an empty emblem of expense and exchange, a fact that Monica implicitly asserts when earlier, at her birthday party, she equated the money her sisters spent on it to the expenditure they had made for her cake: "But you are ruining yourselves, foolish people!" (31).

Monica's experience illustrates the efforts that one woman makes to escape from the category implied by the novel's title, *The Odd Women*. These women were, as the significantly-named activist in the novel, Rhoda Nunn, describes them, a "great reserve" of potential but untrained labor (41). Monica fails in the sense that marriage, while it provides a means of escaping direct participation in the kind of drudgery offered by occupations open to women, does so by forcing the woman into the enslaving categories of restrictive domesticity and the resultant objectification that marriage frequently demanded. Erin Williams, in *Female Celibacy in the Fiction of Gissing and Dixon*, confirms an association between the novel and the attempts of women to find space through the rejection of marriage and of sexual connections of any kind. Williams explains that "...the concept of celibacy – female celibacy, to be exact – attained the level of social menace in the mid-1890s, a period when women activists and New Women novelists not only enumerated the injustices of marriage but also employed socialist rhetoric" in encouraging women to "abstain from marital union altogether" (259). Gissing documents, in fictional terms, the controversial celibacy movement which, though secular, had obvious parallels to religiously-based orders. While Williams frequently cites the instances of religious idiom that I find suggestive of Gissing's underlying awareness of religion, she mentions them in a context of "social Darwinism" rather than in a category that relates to theological constructs (265). Therefore, though I will use many of the same illustrations she uses, my emphasis departs from Williams in that I will discuss, not only Darwinism, but also other societal and cultural issues that Gissing colors with a religious brush. Indeed, my consideration of social Darwinism interprets it as a secular variety of Calvinist determinism.

In so many ways, the celibacy movement, as Gissing depicts it, contains the residuum of Calvinism that recurs so persistently throughout his work. In fact, Gissing saturates nearly every

mention of Rhoda Nunn and her project to reclaim these women, whom “pessimists” characterize as “useless, lost, futile lives,” with Christian language or allusion. Usually, but not always, these Christian elements are infected with the Calvinist virus, a fact which, in turn, means that they will have economic ramifications. Obviously, Rhoda’s attempts to reformulate the aforementioned terminology of social damnation place her in the dialogue about those who fall into the “saved/damned” dichotomy that we have seen already. In her conversation with Monica on the occasion of Monica’s birthday (which, by the way, is Widdowson’s birthday as well), Rhoda identifies herself as a woman with a mission. Clearly, her last name is a link to her identification with Christian notions of consecration and celibacy, although the association of the word “nun” ties her appropriately to what Protestant Victorians would have regarded as the alien and usurping religion of Catholicism. She defines her mission as an effort “[t]o make women hard-hearted” (40). This phrase evokes several religious connotations that Gissing puts into play throughout the novel. In Christian parlance, “hard-hearted” betokens impenitence of the kind brought to mind by the account of Pharaoh in Exodus, whose heart God hardened intentionally. In Hebrews 3:8, believers are urged not to harden their hearts as the Jews did while wandering in the desert. Hence, the term “hard-hearted” equates to “the damned.” On some level, Rhoda is aware of the damned status society ascribes to the “odd women” of society. Their unmarried condition relegates them to this category in several ways. For one thing, their inability or unwillingness to find a husband renders them incomplete in that they cannot fulfill the cultural expectations that marriage entails: service to a husband and procreation. For another, they find their economic opportunities limited. They are economically cut off from productive activities. Often, as many critics have pointed out and as characters such as Ida Starr demonstrate, they must turn to prostitution or other forms of public activity that relegate them to an outcast status.

In fact, at least two female characters in the novel fall into this caste. Miss Eade, a shopgirl companion and erstwhile (albeit imaginary) rival of Monica for the attentions of Mr. Bullivant, pursues several men and is able to get money “whenever she had need of it” (54). Later, Bella Royston, one of the girls that Rhoda and Mary Barfoot try to train for a career, commits suicide after an extramarital affair causes her to despair of regaining her “position” (142). Bella’s fate occasions an argument between Mary, who had been assisting her financially, and Rhoda.

Following her own philosophy of “hardness,” Rhoda declares that towards the fallen Bella “I *felt* no compassion,” a position Mary criticizes as a violation of Rhoda’s essential femininity (149-150). To Rhoda, this is precisely the point. She insists that unmarried women oppose the identity thrust upon them by society, to “harden their hearts,” so to speak, against conformity to the old and inoperative models like the angel in the house. In a sense, then, she encourages women to embrace their pariah status by seeking careers and rejecting marriage. Paradoxically, her version of the “saved/damned” dichotomy demands a punishment that is just as strict for those who violate sexual strictures as the one demanded by the socially sanctioned code. She has somehow inverted the Calvinist model of morality so that the damned become more virtuous than the elect. Her plan radically challenges the Christian system by refusing to accept the dualistic classification which revolves around sexuality and gender as a means of determining identity.

The Western inheritance of this gender differentiation derives from Genesis, in which Eve, literally extracted from Adam, simultaneously becomes subordinated to him and, furthermore, defined in relationship to his needs.¹⁰ Rhoda’s alternative to these controlling paradigms rejects, in its insistence on celibacy as a means of liberation, the very concept of fertility itself, a primary Biblical and Victorian directive. As a result, the celibacy Rhoda advocates, far from constituting a manifestation of spiritual devotion, targets fundamental Victorian assumptions about sexuality

and gender. As a response to the economic disablement of women, Rhoda Nunn formulates a plan of activism which re-assigns the perceived function of women from servile fecundity to biologically sterile but useful market-based production. Ironically, this arrangement, although it addresses the dilemma faced by unmarried women in this period, eventually became the standard model for a later form of exploitation. This development, in which women in fact supplant or supplement men in the industrial labor superstructure, occurred not because capitalist society responded to the needs of women to become self-supporting, but because female labor was cheaper and more plentiful.¹¹ Ironically, Rhoda's scheme makes her a capitalist visionary of sorts and an unwitting supporter of female market subservience.

Mary Barfoot shares with Rhoda Nunn a desire to improve the lot of women in the economic battlefield. However, her doctrine allows for the retention of what she sees as the basic "womanhood" that Rhoda has sacrificed. In her argument with Rhoda over Bella Royston, Mary accuses her protégé of "wandering from the true way" of compassion and sisterhood (149). The "hardness," Rhoda both advocates and displays, according to Mary, is unnatural to "a very noble character" (150). Rhoda has constructed her own alternative Calvinism in which Bella demonstrates by her fall into sexuality that she is not a "sister" (150). She adopts the very terminology that has heretofore relegated the "odd women" to ostracism. Bella simply is not one of the elect, as Rhoda had made clear earlier when she and Mary first differ on Bella's condition. She tells Mary emphatically:

You never proposed keeping a reformatory. Your aim is to help chosen girls, whose promise is to be of some use in the world. This Miss Royston represents the profitless average – no, she is below the average. Are you so blind as to imagine that any good will ever come of such a person? If you wish to save her from the streets, do so by all means. But to put her among your chosen pupils is to threaten your whole undertaking. Let it once become known – and it *would* become known – that a girl of that character came here, and your usefulness is at

an end. In a year's time you will have to choose between giving up the school altogether and making it a refuge for outcasts. (63-64)

Gissing infuses Rhoda's remarks with such a high level of Calvinist doctrine that I will probably miss something in my summary of the determinist elements of this passage. The rejection of the idea of reform calls to mind both the Calvinist idea of depravity and the more generally Christian view of the inability of the sinner to change himself or herself for the better. The focus of Rhoda's discourse is on only those odd women who are "chosen, not "outcasts." Miss Royston, whose character is fixed and unalterable, is "of no use," "profitless," "below the average." Her presence would contaminate the "chosen girls," a contention that brings to mind the parable of leavened and unleavened bread or references to wolves among the sheep.¹² No "good will ever come of such a person." Bella's relegation to the outcasts of society stems not just from her propensity to sexual misconduct, but to her very nature, irreclaimably debased, fallen, damned. The reader cannot avoid the Calvinist psychology behind the implications of this passage. One is either good or bad, elect or damned, profitable or useless. Furthermore, one's status is tied to economic productivity. No intermediate categories exist. No effort can change the situation. Gissing's positioning of economic hopelessness within the Calvinist framework of predestination and election once again illustrates the association in the novels between deterministic religion and deterministic capitalism.

Because the cards are so stacked against women in his novels, Gissing's depiction of women who gain any autonomy at all, however minor, is noteworthy. Throughout his work, Gissing portrays women who attempt to fashion some freedom for themselves in a stubbornly patriarchal society. Not all of them succeed, but some of them manage to choose certain avenues of behavior and thought for themselves, in however limited a degree. In the three novels just

reviewed, women sometimes attain a level of independence through subverting religious norms. At other times, they reject religion altogether, as does Monica Madden, except as a convenience they employ to accomplish their ends. In still other instances, women adhere to orthodox, although Dissenting, religion, in order to maintain a stable and moral identity. I have restricted this chapter to a discussion of only three novels: *Isabel Clarendon*, *Thryza*, and *The Odd Women*, for two reasons. The first one has to do with the fact that the first two of these novels are sufficiently separated in date of publication from the last to illustrate that Gissing maintained an interest in “the woman question” over a significant period of time. *Isabel Clarendon* appeared in 1886 and *Thryza* in 1887, whereas *The Odd Women* was published in 1893, with five novels intervening between those years. I think it significant too that the publication of *Isabel Clarendon* came only a few years after significant changes in the law, such as the Women’s Property Act and the first version of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1882, helped accelerate debate over the woman question (Federico 19). Likewise, *The Odd Women* appeared several years after the Maintenance of Wife’s Act of 1886 and in the same year as the second version of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1893 (Federico 19). Hence, these novels form touchstones for the legal outcomes of the discussions of women’s rights. The second reason is simply that I have treated the subject matter of this chapter elsewhere in this paper. Gissing’s handling of subjects involving women evidences considerable variety, complexity, and depth. I have not, however, come close to exhausting the subject. Indeed, despite the length of my investigation, I have dealt with a sizable, but limited, fraction of the material involving religion in the works of George Gissing. In doing so, however, I have opened up areas of potential interest for further critical study.

Conclusion

George Gissing, technically, at least, never lost faith because, as Jacob Korg has noted, he never claimed to have possessed one, certainly not of the Christian variety (*Critical Biography* 24). However, as John Spiers notes in his “Introduction: Why Does Gissing Matter,” “Gissing, like many, was uncertain and sometimes self-contradictory” (25). Though I have argued that Gissing seriously entertained ideas about religion in various contexts and on various levels, he consistently stated his position about his own lack of belief. In a letter to H. G. Wells in February 1902, Gissing responded to a lecture in which Wells claimed a new found faith in cosmic meaning.

Is it really, then, your conviction that the material doom of the Earth does not involve the doom of earthly life? – Anyhow, your declared belief in the ‘coherency and purpose’ of things is pleasant to me. For I myself cannot doubt for one moment that purpose there *is*. On the other hand, I do doubt whether we – in any sense of the pronoun – shall ever be granted an understanding of that purpose. *George Gissing and H. G. Wells* (204)

I suppose that, rather than one of unbelief, Gissing’s stance might better be termed “the impossibility of belief,” since he asserts above that a knowledge of the purpose behind the universe cannot be ascertained. Gissing, Korg says, “felt with equal force the attraction and the impossibility of faith” (175). I anticipate that some readers might simply declare this position agnostic. I contend, however, that agnosticism allows for the possibility of the eventual discovery of meaning. Although, curiously, Gissing does state that he does believe that meaning exists, he does not allow for the eventuality that humans will ever ascertain of what the “purpose” of “things” might consist (204). In an earlier letter to Wells in 1901, Gissing averred that he had “grown to shrink utterly from the use of such terms” as God (*George Gissing and H. G. Wells* 197). For that matter, other than a brief flirtation with Positivism, Gissing seems, as many critics

have pointed out, especially pessimistic, even in an age noted for doubt.¹ He started, probably due to the influence of his father, as Robert Selig reminds us in “Gissing’s Worldly Parable,” from a position of religious disbelief, and this stance never essentially changed, even though Gissing did allow himself to contemplate various ideas about faith (20). In fact, as Korg notes, after finishing *The Emancipated*, in 1889, Gissing “turned for a while to religious problems,” reading a book by Jens Peter Jacobsen entitled *Niels Lyhne*, which Korg describes as “a sympathetic study of an atheist who is attracted by the consolations of religion” (*Critical Biography* 141). He followed up by “turning to Canon Liddon’s *Some Elements of Religion*” (141). Still, for Gissing, assuredly, no deathbed conversion occurred. Ultimately, Gissing could not reconcile his sense of alienation in an inscrutable universe with these intermittent yearnings for faith. Indeed, in that same year, as Korg points out, his reading of science in the British Museum confirmed Gissing’s “determinist tendency” and “intuitive fatalism” (145). Nothing essentially changed in the remaining years before his death in 1903. However, as his ongoing novelistic management of religious matters demonstrates, he was never either neutral or indifferent to religious concerns. His use in numerous instances of religious terminology, in and of itself, testifies to Gissing’s ongoing awareness of the persistence and importance of the Christian ideology within both society and individual behavior. To the extent that Gissing allowed this awareness to function in his works, one can maintain that the novels demonstrate an uneven but discernible development in Gissing’s attitude towards Christianity and faith in general. Within the list of these references, however, one finds a confirmation, in the form of a negation, of Gissing’s lack of faith, in that he seldom mentions the object of Christian belief. The word “Christ” rarely appears, at least in allusion to the second person of the Trinity, in Gissing’s novels. Even as a historical figure, Jesus Christ remains primarily out of sight. At the same time,

Christianity, religion, doctrine, the church, believers themselves: these components of Gissing's novels do in fact figure significantly as objects of sociological, linguistic, and symbolic significance. Especially telling in this regard, and despite his formal rejection of certainty, Gissing infuses into his novels the residuum of Calvinism that I discussed in the Introduction to this study. Determinism certainly surfaces in Gissing's novels, but it hardly ever takes any form other than an economic one. Furthermore, and especially within this determinism, individuals in Gissing's fictional constructions fall into categories roughly correspondent to the divisions inherent within the Calvinist system of predestination. In other words, Gissing's gospel, or rather his anti-gospel, stresses the centrality of Mammon, who cannot be served simultaneously with the Christian God.

Obviously, Gissing's treatment of religion entails other elements and agendas. To a degree smaller than I would have preferred, my investigation of the presence and function of religion has touched upon subjects such as the practice of philanthropy in its religious contexts and origins, the relationship of the working class to the church, the interaction of sexual behavior and religion, and the characteristic social stances taken by clergy of the Established Church, as well as by those from the Dissenting ranks. However, one of the most provocative and compelling areas of interest having to do with religion in Gissing involves the issue of feminine space and religion. This topic, as I have shown, covers a range of responses by women to the economic and cultural strictures placed on them by Victorian society. By using religion as a means of self-definition and by employing religion as a mechanism whereby they can gain entrance into meaningful public activity, women in Gissing's novels exercise varying levels of control over their spiritual, social, intellectual, and sexual identities. Some of these women fall into the "crank" category, while others find less dogmatic but nonetheless effective methods of

attaining a degree of control over their lives through religious means. In the sense that these women take on themselves the responsibility to fashion their own interpretation of life out of faith or its rejection, they prefigure the existentialism of the twentieth century. Even eccentric characters like Miss Cumberbatch and Mrs. Bygrave, in their hyper-Calvinist applications of doctrine to their interactions with others and in their negation or manipulation of Capitalist values or masculine restrictions, discover an ability to work outside of the limiting forces imposed upon them by patriarchy and other social conditions. Women like Irene Saltash, in *Isabel Clarendon*, consign men, along with the paternalistic expectations of their own class, to a hell of their own visioning. In effect, these women turn orthodoxy against its alignment with male power. In works like *Thryza*, Dissenting believers like Lydia Trent negotiate their way through the economic wilderness which exploits them with an impressive display of grace, compassion, and autonomy. Indeed, Lydia manages to function well enough to survive without male assistance. Considering the plight of most characters from the lower stratum of the working class in Gissing's work, this accomplishment deserves notice. Gissing's use of religion, then, explores many manifestations of faith.

Nonetheless, the primary weight of Gissing's writing concentrates on money. Not surprisingly, therefore, money exerts power over every aspect of diurnal experience, including Christianity. Christopher Herbert avers in "Filthy Lucre: Victorian Ideas of Money," that money underwent in the nineteenth century a "divinization" (189). Herbert claims that one can find during the Victorian period

[...] an abundance of literary evidence that makes clear how widely perceived it was at the time that religious imagination and emotion - the passion for righteousness, sanctity, worshipful adoration - were prone in this age to transmute themselves into or redirect themselves toward the passion for accumulating wealth, which thus took on an aura of a kind of displaced spirituality (189).

Of course, Herbert's remarks reflect what Max Weber has said repeatedly about Capitalism and Protestantism, but they also point to a more comprehensive and stunning conclusion. Gissing replaces God by the economic system itself. Though Gissing sometimes denominates this system "Providence," or fate, it nonetheless operates as a stand-in for God, a fact Gissing intimates in many places throughout his novels. God is not necessarily dead, but he does take a back seat to money, a far more effective, potent force. One cannot serve both God and Mammon, but, in Gissing's novels, if one is faced with a choice, one must serve Mammon, for God as an operative energy cannot function without the assistance of this mediating devil. God, if he or any of his residual surrogate insignia (decency, morality, charity) exists, is impotent. Even Hell is run on a capitalist programme, as Slimy, as I have shown, demonstrates in *The Unclassed*. So, if Gissing can, like other skeptical Victorians, be said to have been on a search for a replacement for God, the only substitute he finds possessing any real substance and power is Money. Other substitutes for orthodox religion, such as socialism, had already failed in the larger culture, as Marxist Stephen Yeo has pointed out (6-7). For several reasons that I have delineated elsewhere at some length, they failed for Gissing early on in his career. The forces which exist to serve Money, on the other hand, constitute perhaps a minor pantheon – class, labor, production, profit, and so on. John Goode suggests this idea when he calls *The Nether World* a novel that presents a world "in which money is omnipotent and the individual has only the choice between worshipping it or being sacrificed to it" ("George Gissing's *The Nether World*" 240). Accordingly, Gissing, to whom capital often exists in a subversive and ascendant correspondence with belief, documents this divinization repeatedly. As I have demonstrated above, this correspondence is strikingly evident in *The Unclassed*, a novel in which capitalism, for a degraded alcoholic named Slimy,

among other characters, appropriates and manages Hell, even more so than it does in *The Nether World*. Hell, in fact, materializes remarkably often in Gissing's novels, especially as it relates to the dystopic results of the cash nexus, or as Max Weber preferred to call it, the "iron cage" (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* 181). Other critics have noticed the diabolism in Gissing's portrayal of Money as God. Goode, in "George Gissing's *The Nether World*," explicitly refers to the economic and social forces that conspire to crush the poor in Gissing's novels as "the prince of darkness" (236). In light of Satan's aspirations after godhead, this moniker is apt. Religious manifestations recurrently correspond with economic ones in Gissing, illustrating the process of religious dislocation and dysfunction that Herbert identifies. As I have noted, Simon J. James, in *Unsettled Accounts*, notes that money is a "universal signifier" because everything money buys is the signified (12). Hence, in a manner of speaking, money is everything, the All, God. Interestingly, as James also points out, correctly, in my view, through inheritance, money can reinstate the original order. In effect, it can bring back what characters have lost (14). The word inheritance, in and of itself, evokes the Christian scheme of redemption. In a sense, then, money does what Christ does in Christian theology: it "redeems" that which has been forfeited. Waymark, in *The Unclassed*, says as much: "What can claim precedence, in all this world, over hard cash? It is the fruitful soil wherein is nourished the root of the tree of life; it is the vivifying principle of human activity" (53). This reduction of every human pursuit constitutes the ultimate expression of materialism as the basis of all worldly reality, and in Gissing's work this reality is created, controlled, and exchanged by Money.

John Goode, in "George Gissing's *The Nether World*," asserts that no values exist in the Nether World, a place that Gissing visits in several of the works I have considered.

One of the particular ironies of the novel, then, is that class relationships are present only in that a concretely realized world is determined by its subservience to a remote abstraction, which, because it is depersonalised, seems to be a metaphysical and therefore irresistible Schopenhauerian will. The nether world has only a relative function; in absolute terms it seems meaningless. There is no absolute social justification of either Stephen [Candy] or his mother. They mean rents and profits. (214).

The “remote abstraction” to which Goode refers in this passage, though, is not remote and it is not an abstraction. This “irresistible” force is simply money. Otherwise, Goode’s observation applies to Gissing’s characters unilaterally. They mean money. Their existence finds value and validation in money. In Gissing’s fiction, money forms, from humanity’s standpoint at any rate, the only valid metaphysics that survives the Victorian crisis of faith. It becomes such an overpowering force in Gissing’s work (as it was in his life) that nearly every page contains some reference, direct or indirect, to it. Gissing’s novels, to be sure, contain a multi-faceted religious apparatus; notwithstanding this fact, it is an apparatus that, like virtually every other factor, yields to Money, the only god of any real power in his work.²

Notes

Introduction

¹ Critics widely admit that Gissing maintained an agnostic stance throughout his career. Some critics connect his distaste for Christianity with his social agenda. For instance, critics such as Chérifa Krifa Mbarek, in “Compassion and Selfishness in Gissing’s Slum Novels,” note that Gissing’s “rejection of religious dogma” comes from his belief that “religion perpetuated poverty” (5). I do not subscribe without reservation to the latter part of this statement because sometimes, as my discussion will demonstrate, Gissing held more ambivalent feelings about the occasional salutary effects of religion on social behavior and morality. I take no issue, however, with the widespread acknowledgment that Gissing rejected the substance of Christian religion. As Robert Selig notes in “Gissing’s Worldly Parable: ‘The Foolish Virgins,’” Gissing “remained essentially opposed to religion” all his adult life (20). Selig makes this point quite often, and he sees, as I do, that this opposition consists in rejecting the tenets of Christianity, not in avoiding the subject altogether. Gissing used religion over and over when it served his purposes. I contend that Gissing’s works contain both direct and indirect critiques of religious issues. Certainly, he recognizes the subtle gradations of sincerity and hypocrisy in his religious characters: one cannot find a blanket condemnation of the motives and actions of all Christians in Gissing’s novels. Actually, one finds that Gissing endorses certain Christian positions, a fact to which I shall return more than once.

² Gissing did not think the story, “Cain and Abel,” a clumsy one. He bragged about it to Algernon in a letter dated Jan 2, 1880. He thought it admirably Poe-esque (*Collected Letters I*: 229). See page 71 above for a further description of the plot.

³ Of course I understand the obvious fact that many intellectual Victorians assumed a vitiated view of orthodox Christianity when they did not reject it entirely. Nonetheless, for the most part, they retained a sense of official propriety regarding marriage, sexuality, and moral behavior in general. One may possibly object to this generalization, citing the provocative posings of the Decadents and the artful rantings of deliberate blasphemers like James Thomson or the equally artful and deliberate displays of degeneracy in the life and work of Algernon Swinburne. However, even the Decadents sometimes lapsed into Biblicist morality, accidental or otherwise. I regard Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as one of the most moralistic, if not to say didactic, books ever written, and some parts of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* and *De Profundis* owe much to devotional literature in both tone and content. Consider this passage from the latter work.

Where there is sorrow there is holy ground. Some day people will realize what that means. They will know nothing of life until they do. _____ and natures like his can realize it. When I was brought down from my prison to the Court of Bankruptcy, between two policemen, _____ waited in the long dreary corridor that, before the whole crowd, whom an action so sweet and simple hushed into silence, he might gravely raise his hat to me, as, handcuffed and with bowed head, I passed him by. Men have gone to heaven for smaller things than that. It was in this spirit, and with the mode of love, that the saints knelt down to wash the feet of the poor, or stooped to kiss the leper on the cheek. (510)

⁴ T. H. Huxley, as Jerome Hamilton Buckley notes in *The Victorian Temper*, "brought a moral earnestness" to the contest over Darwin with Bishop Wilberforce. His famous comments about preferring a "poor ape for an ancestor" to an intellectually dishonest cleric reverberated through Oxford and beyond (187).

⁵ In *Capital*, Marx traces the development of money as the sole indicator of value. Commodities and labor increasingly translate into the arbitrary symbol represented by money,

which is a commodity itself. However, all other commodities find their value expressed in money.

Commodities find their own value already completely represented, without any initiative on their part, in another commodity existing in company with them. These objects, gold and silver, just as they come out of the bowels of the earth, are forthwith the direct incarnation of all human labor. Hence the magic of money. In the form of society now under consideration, the behavior of men in the social process of production is purely atomic. Hence their relations to each other in production assume a material character independent of their control and conscious individual action. These facts manifest themselves at first by products as a general rule taking the form of commodities. We have seen how the progressive development of a society of commodity-producers stamps one privileged commodity with the character of money. (57)

Marx insinuates here the idea that money has superseded every other indicator of value, even “the form of society” and “the behavior of men in the social process of production.” Money has become the primary sign of worth. Money is the “one privileged commodity” under which everything else, even human activity, is subsumed (56-57).

⁶ Raymond Williams, in *The Country and the City*, mentions the “decisive transformations” caused by the Industrial Revolution in the “relations between country and city” (2).

The Industrial Revolution not only transformed both city and country; it was based on a highly developed agrarian capitalism, with a very early disappearance of the traditional peasantry. In the imperialist phase of our history the nature of the rural economy, in Britain and in its colonies, was again transformed very early; dependence on a domestic agriculture dwindled to very low proportions, with no more than four per cent of economically active men now engaged in farming, and in this society which had already become the first predominantly urban-dwelling people in the long history of human settlements. (2)

In his remarks about the disappearance of the rural peasantry and his acknowledgment of the population shift to urban areas, Williams implicitly recognizes, not only the possibility, but the reality of class readjustment.

One novel in which Dickens plays with the notion of class mobility is *Our Mutual Friend*. The Veneerings may have been, in Dickens' phrase, "bran new" (6), and their acceptance into the inner clique of true nobility never completely materializes, but they did penetrate into a level of accessibility to upper-class circles that they would not have been able to achieve without at least the appearance of the possession of money. As the novel shows, one can buy a coat of arms and fabricate a pedigree, and, of course, one can lose these marks of upper class membership just as easily.

⁷ This story has been told so often by so many critics and biographers as hardly to require repetition. However, since critics use Gissing's relationship to Helen (Nell) Gissing, née Harrison, to explain so much about the author's life and works, a brief synopsis of her history might serve as a point of reference for future discussions of her. Paul Delaney describes Nell's disastrous effect on Gissing, noting that when Gissing met her when he was a student at Owen College, she was already, at seventeen, an alcoholic, "finding in drink a refuge from the pain of a prostitute's life" (14). Gissing stole to try to rescue her and consequently got himself expelled from the school (17). After he returned from the United States, he lived with Nell for six years, and she continued to drink and, intermittently, to practice her trade. Delaney thinks she infected Gissing with syphilis (15). In fact, she died, most probably, of the disease at the age of thirty, after a final separation that occurred only after Gissing failed numerous times to manage her behavior (135). The torment Gissing endured as a result of his liaison with Nell no doubt colored his view of women and deepened his own sense of guilt. Even after his separation from her, which lasted over five years, Gissing seemed both relieved and stricken upon going to identify her body and seeing her miserable living quarters after she died. In a letter to Algernon on Saturday, March 3, 1888, Gissing wrote, "I saw her yesterday in the coffin, & had a wonderful

sense of rest & peace in looking at her. No more wretched blind struggling for her, no more suffering under the world's curses" (*Letters* III: 188). In a letter dated two days earlier, he had told Algernon, "No need to pain you by describing the wretched place to which I was summoned; I have seen much poverty & wretchedness, but never anything that so assailed me" (*Letters* III: 187). In his diary, *London and the Life in Literature of Late Victorian England*, Gissing wrote at length of the scene of Nell's death. So tremendously affected was Gissing at the abject poverty of Nell's room and the horror of her corpse – the absence of food, the sparse furnishings, the temperance pledge cards, medicine bottles and prescriptions, Nell's dreadful corpse with its perfect white teeth – that Gissing exclaimed "I feel that she will help me more in her death than she balked me in life. Poor, poor thing" (23)! Clearly, Gissing was powerfully affected by the event of her death, this tortured woman who had so informed the content of his life and work: "Henceforth I never cease to bear testimony against the accursed social order that brings about things of this kind" (23).

⁸ As late as 1903, in a letter to Edward Clodd, Gissing defended Carlyle from those who gloried in scurrilous details about Carlyle's personal life. Significantly, Gissing was particularly outraged with the emphasis on Carlyle's troubled marriage, claiming that the public needed only to know that "like most marriages," Carlyle's was "half a blessing & half a burden" (*Collected Letters* IX, 96). Of course, Gissing, given his own struggles in the conjugal arena, had personal reasons to sympathize with Carlyle's marital difficulties. Gissing recommended Carlyle persistently as reading material to his siblings and associates, remarking, for example, to his sister Margaret that *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* be read "many times & deeply pondered over" (*Collected Letters* II, 64). Gissing did occasionally qualify his

endorsement of Carlyle. Gissing regretted Carlyle's dismissal of Darwin's *Origin of Species* as "an illustration of human stupidity" (*Collected Letters II*, 23).

⁹ Another temperamental affinity that Carlyle and Gissing shared involves their ambivalence towards the working class. Gissing initially adopted a fervent revolutionist position that became attenuated over time by his inherent distrust of the poor. Ellen Gissing, his sister, wrote in "George Gissing: A Character Sketch," that "a fierce Socialism was strong within him in these early years; he was certain that an equal amount of good might be got out of any class if each were but rightly treated" (19). Clearly, in this statement, Ellen implicitly acknowledges something that many critics widely recognize, that Gissing's socialism consisted more of a sense of fairness than in a stable political stance. Austin Harrison grants Gissing less credit than Ellen, claiming that Gissing was "no Socialist reformer" and, more damning, that Gissing's "social enthusiasm was purely literary" (29, 30). Frank Swinnerton, as Robert Shafer relates, was even harsher, stating that Gissing has no affection for other human beings (40). This statement is preposterous, as my discussion will show. Gissing did in fact say things, as he did in a letter to H. G. Wells in November, 1901, that sound misanthropic: "I must not pretend to care very much about the future of the human race" (*George Gissing and H. G. Wells* 196). However, the rest of the sentence indicates the reason for this stance: "...come what may, folly and misery are sure to be the prevalent features of life" (196). Hopelessness, not indifference, caused Gissing's pessimism. Gissing at times expressed diffidence and sometimes horror towards some members of the working class, but he also demonstrated compassion. However, Gissing held, as I will argue elsewhere, a view of humanity in general as "fallen" in almost a supra-lapsarian sense not entirely distinct from its affiliation with Christian Calvinism. This fatalism, which is not quite classical and not quite biblical, but a little of both, caused him finally to doubt the efficacy of

social remedies. One can argue that Carlyle mirrored and preceded Gissing (and others) in this tendency. Even at his sunniest, Carlyle was no lover of democracy. Like Gissing, Carlyle possessed a rather rigid view of class relationships. In “Chartism,” Carlyle characterizes the worker as “[a]n ever-toiling inferior” who, after all, merely wants “a superior that should lovingly and wisely govern ...” (166). Of democracy specifically, Carlyle said that it “is, by the nature of it, a self-cancelling business; and gives in the long run a net result of *zero*” (190). However, both Carlyle and Gissing regarded fair treatment of the lower by the upper classes as a duty. Ultimately, though, Gissing realized the permeability of class by money, a trend that he progressively documents in his novels. In this he both joins and departs from Carlyle. Both men bewail the power of money, but Gissing refuses to admit of any way to avoid its ascendancy, its dominance of every aspect of life. Carlyle grew intolerant and practically fascist. Gissing, in a manner facilitated by an uncompromising intellect opposed to sentiment, merely yielded, over time, to his native gloominess.

To justify my dislike of Frank Swinnerton, I might quote one of his typical assessments of Gissing. In this analysis of Gissing’s subject matter, Swinnerton does not even bother, as he is wont to do, to damn Gissing with faint praise. Instead, he condemns Gissing for his outlook, which is not sunny enough to suit Swinnerton.

The sense of life as a maelstrom, resistless and inexorable, is Gissing’s bugbear; failure, grief, inability to struggle against odds, sad handicaps of temperament, endless compromise with the idea of happiness again and again we find him expressing these things, until his world seems peopled only by satisfied vulgarians and those to whom social intercourse is abhorrent. (89)

Aside from the fact that Swinnerton’s appraisal of Gissing’s characters is truncated and laughably simplistic, one might ask the critic why he finds a fictional world containing “satisfied vulgarians” so objectionable. The fictional and actual worlds, as attested by many Victorian

novelists, including Hardy, Meredith, and Eliot, not to mention the rather celebrated essayist Matthew Arnold, do indeed include these people. They exist in abundance precisely because of what Gissing and others noted about rampant capitalism: it produced them. Significantly, Swinnerton goes on to say that Gissing was “a conscious malcontent, not a revolutionary, because he was just as much a social as a religious agnostic...” (89). In this observation, Swinnerton, remarkably but accidentally, has hit upon a true insight. Gissing did eventually reject revolutionary methods, he did exhibit discomfort in the context of social disparity, and he did profess disbelief in religion. However, at the bottom of Gissing’s “agnosticism” and despair lay the conviction that nothing, ultimately, can effect a change in a person’s ultimate social or moral status. Broadly speaking, one is either “saved” or “damned,” if not in the spiritual sense, then in the secular one.

¹⁰ Harrison also cites, in the same essay, textual evocation of the Genesis curse on labor (23). Biblical echoes like this sound repeatedly throughout Gissing’s novels.

¹¹ While I do not deny that Gissing was influenced by Schopenhauer, I agree with Ralph Goodale who contends in “Schopenhauer and Pessimism in Nineteenth Century Literature” that critics have vastly overrepresented the philosopher’s influence on Victorian pessimism. In fact, Goodale claims that Schopenhauer had no “...more than a contributory influence...” on European writers of the nineteenth century generally (241). Outside of someone with a particular intellectual curiosity about Germany, a British writer, Goodale points out, “could hardly have known of Schopenhauer’s teachings before 1853” (242). Obviously, Gissing, whose first novel appeared in 1880, was well acquainted with Schopenhauer. Still, as Goodale’s discussion of the roots of pessimism points out, several other sources of pessimistic thought ran current throughout the nineteenth century and indeed from much farther back in history. Christianity itself contains a

strain of pessimism about earthly life, as does its predecessor Judaism (witness Ecclesiastes). Buddhism, which entered into European consciousness as early as 1844, regards this world as illusion (Goodale 242). Goodale also strikes a convincing note when he observes that between 1879 and 1900, rather than discerning “a continuation of Schopenhauer’s arguments,” one sees even in writers who allude to Schopenhauer’s positions “a continuation of the perplexities of Byron, Carlyle, Tennyson, and Arnold” (244). I might mention that, as regards Christianity, Calvinism does not paint a particularly rosy view, either of humanity’s terrestrial life or of the individual’s eternal prospects. Having granted Goodale’s point, I acknowledge that Gissing references Schopenhauer more than once in his letters (I: 255; IV: 83, 85, 258). He also cites Schopenhauer as one of Helen Norman’s guiding lights in *Workers in the Dawn* (I: 324-325). Nonetheless, pessimism prowls about, prominently or surreptitiously, throughout Western history. The fatalistic Anglo-Saxon viewpoint expressed in works such as “The Battle of Maldon,” “The Wanderer,” and “The Wayfarer” proves that gloominess early imbedded itself into British temperament. From this disposition, it never roamed very far.

¹² Inglis downplays the effects of pew renting on working class church attendance, suggesting that the abeyance of this practice does not seem to have resulted in stimulating attendance among laboring people (55-6). I think that Inglis discounts the fact that it had existed for so long that gauging the effect of its overdue removal would have been compromised by the fact that the final action was too little, too late anyway. As Hugh McLeod points out in *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, church attendance among these classes had been a subject of notice by the odd clergyman and, more vaguely, by members of the middle class since the 1830s (12). McLeod also remarks that evangelism and outreach efforts were doomed to failure “as long as the churches remained fundamentally committed to the capitalist

system” (11). At the root of poor working class attendance of the Anglican Church lay this perception of class distinctions. Pew renting reinforced this perception. McLeod explains the matter best.

The best known of the means by which social distinctions were maintained within the church was the system of pew-rents. This was very widely used throughout the nineteenth century, even by the most proletarian denominations such as the Primitive Methodists. In itself it need not have been offensive. But the problems arose when there were sharp gradations in rents, with associated differentials in the quality of seating, or when no free seats were provided for those unable to pay. In the early nineteenth century, some churches were deliberately attracting the rich by excluding the poor, and others were achieving the same result without necessarily intending it. (59)

Obviously, this kind of pandering to the wealthier middle class would not have gone unnoticed by the poor. However, as I have said elsewhere, once members of the working class rose through financial success to the next rung of the ladder, they became very protective of class demarcations, often, no doubt, seeking to rent their own pews.

¹³ The astonishing variety of observations Gissing made in his *Commonplace Book* puts to rest the notion that he gave scant serious consideration to matters of faith. The dates Gissing made these remarks vary widely, and sometimes they cannot be determined. Suffice it to say that the comments cover a period, according to Jacob Korg’s Introduction to the *Commonplace Book*, from July 1887 to the year of Gissing’s death in 1903. Below I will provide a sampling of Gissing’s thoughts about the content and practice of religion. For convenience’s sake, I include Korg’s page number followed by the indicated page in Gissing’s original.

“Religious sentiment, *as such*, by no means irritates me. It is the bad & poor & intolerant utterance of it that I cannot endure. Some *hymns*, well sung, please me much” (47; 18).

Gissing quotes Cowper: “All my themes of misery may be summed up in one word, He who made me regrets that ever he did. Many years have passed since I learned this terrible truth

from Himself.” Gissing goes on to express his disgust with Cowper’s sentiments: “Mad, of course, but a logical result of his dogmas” (47; 12). I hardly need stress the importance of this passage in terms of its implications concerning Gissing’s understanding of Calvinism, as well as of his loathing of the doctrine.

Gissing exclaims that the phrase “Lord have mercy on us” “alone is enough to disgust one with the church service.” In a glance specifically directed at Calvinistic determinism, Gissing goes on to editorialize “Praying mercy from a supposed all-wise being, the supposed maker and disposer of all” (48; 33).

Nor were Gissing’s musings confined to Protestantism. One passage reads “The Roman Cath. Doctrine of “invincible ignorance”, which makes it possible to hope for the salvation of certain heretics” (49; 47).

Finally, in an acerbic jibe that proves quite clearly a point I have been at pains to make, that is, Gissing’s tendency to think of religion and economics in tandem, Gissing relates the following:

The lesson I hear read at morning service at St. Paul’s – Luke XIX 12-26. This parable, with its talk of “pounds” & “usury”, & praise of the profitable servants, sounded oddly out of place addressed to people in the city of London. Difficult for an ordinary hearer to take the figurative rather than the literal sense. (49; 35)

That Gissing attended a service at St. Paul’s Cathedral is perhaps not surprising. That he would record the substance of a sermon that employed talk of money is downright predictable. Gissing’s numerous statements about religion in the *Commonplace Book* reveal subtlety and depth, and they show that the novelist’s thinking about these matters was neither incidental nor careless. In Gissing’s *Commonplace Book*, Gabrielle Fleury attributed to Gissing the following statement: “If I hold any religion at all, it is *Manichæism*” (68). In *The Dictionary of Theories*, Manichæism is

defined as a dualistic Persian religion founded in the third century CE by Mani in which good and evil function independently. It once influenced Augustine and, later, “the Albigensian creed of medieval France.” Apparently, the Albigensian adherents of this creed followed severe ascetic practices (327). According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, this religion posited a near equality of power between God and “The King of Darkness” (“Manichaeism”). The cosmogony is complicated, and it is probably not particularly illuminating as regards Gissing, for whom the significance of the religion lay, no doubt, in the ongoing struggle between powers of good and evil, in which was implied a dubious outcome. In effect, this religion, which incidentally emphasizes knowledge as a means of salvation, also stresses the uncertain nature of humanity’s destiny. In fact, I wonder if Gissing actually had in mind Zoroastrianism, from which Manichaeism drew much of its substance.

¹⁴ As much as I dread doing so, I suppose I must clarify what I mean by “signs.” Strictly speaking, if I am using terminology consistent with Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*, I mean by “sign” the combination of “signifier,” or sound image and “signified,” or concept (66). The sign is the “arbitrary” bond between the signifier and the signified (67). According to Saussure, “[t]he signifier ... is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it” (71). The obvious flaw, in my view, in Saussure’s theory, is that in fact linguistic signifiers do change over time as a result of minute individual changes that are ultimately accepted by a majority of users. Hence, they are not “unchangeable” and limited to “an existing idiom” (72). True, one receives an idiom initially and to that extent cannot influence or change what he or she is given. Words mean what they mean at the moment they are transmitted, and there is no logical reason for the German word for “sister” to be preferred to the English. However, I am curious to observe how Saussure accounts for the fact that both of these

languages developed from common sources. Change did occur, and continues to do so, even in a single linguistic community. To explain this, Saussure talks about inevitable “shifts” in the relationship between the signifier and the signified. These shifts do occur, but not usually as a result of individual effort, although this statement must be challenged given our tendency to adopt catch phrases coined by wizards of the internet and by television personalities. Generally, though, I suppose, as Saussure claims, that change obeys laws that defy individual influence (76). I know that I am missing something, which is why, after all is said and done, I regard a sign as roughly the same thing as a symbol, which is also an “arbitrary” designation for something it is not. My “old school” habits of interpretation make me a bit uncomfortable, which is another way of saying incompetent, around fancy linguistic theory.

¹⁵ These difficulties can, did, and do create a great deal of spiritual suspense in the minds of adherents of Protestant Christianity. In fact, the verses I cited above from Hebrews and Romans highlight one of the most divisive arguments in Protestantism: free will vs. predestination. John Wesley, an Arminian, held, as do most Protestants, that salvation comes as a free gift of God through Christ. One is free to respond to this gift or not. No one is saved through works. Calvinism holds this position of salvation by grace through faith as well, but it emphasizes that no one can respond to grace unless God enables him or her to do so. Geoffrey Rowell, in *Hell and the Victorians*, states that this emphasis on predestination “can easily become antinomian” and that “pietist groups ... often reacted against the impersonal determinism of Calvinist theology.” These Arminian groups held that “to restrict the salvation won by Christ’s atoning death to those men already predestined to salvation limited God’s love, and believed that Christ died for all men...” (27). Humans could choose to accept this offer and live a holy life thereafter (27-8). For a clarifying and simple discussion of the distinction between Calvinism and

Arminianism, or Semi-Pelagianism, see *The Five Points of Calvinism* by Edwin H. Palmer.

Palmer explains that “according to the Arminian, the reason one accepts and another rejects the gospel is that *man* decides; but according to the Calvinist, it is that *God* decides (60).

To be fair, Arminianism provides but little relief for the uncertain sinner, since, at least in the Wesleyan version of it, although one can certainly choose to accept God’s free offer of salvation through Christ, one can subsequently lose that salvation again, as the verses from Hebrews I cited above show. In addition, the Arminian suffers just as much from lack of salvation assurance as the Calvinist. In fact, in some strains of Arminian doctrine, one can commit the unpardonable sin of turning away from Christ after receiving salvation, thereby committing the “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost” spoken of in Matthew 12:31. As Weber points out, in Methodism “grace can be lost” (*Protestant Ethic* 142). I leave to the reader to decide which form of irreversible damnation engenders more terror: the Calvinistic concept of predestination or the Arminian one of freely chosen but nonetheless irreversible sin.

Having pointed out the differences between Arminian and Calvinist views of salvation/damnation, I would like to note that Weber’s theory undergoes very little damage by accounting for positing some Arminian counterbalance to Calvinism. As Weber notes, both traditions emphasize devotion to work in a calling as a means of demonstrating one’s position in a state of grace (143, 172). Wesley, it is true, warned against the dangers of accumulating wealth, but he still advocated doing so (175).

¹⁶To illustrate the way Gissing could change directions, one might look at the example of his vacillating viewpoint on social activism. Jacob Korg, in his Introduction to Gissing’s “Notes on Social Democracy,” argues that Gissing in 1878 held socialist views in “more or less doctrinaire form” at that time (i). *Workers in the Dawn*, Korg goes on to say, was “a novel of

vigorous social protest” (iii). After Gissing published *Demos* in 1886, according to John Halperin in *Gissing: A Life in Books*, the author’s “name was often associated with hostility to the working classes and anti-democratic sentiments” (76)

¹⁷ It is not within the scope of my dissertation to recapitulate in detail the arguments demonstrating the connection between Calvinism and capitalism already so well articulated by Weber and others. The means by which Calvinism degenerated from a stance involving rejection of the world through the self-denial of work in a calling to the rationalistic and secular embrace of worldly economic activity has received full and convincing explication by these scholars. For the most part, then, I assume that the reader possesses a basic understanding of Weber’s thesis, particularly as it appears in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. It remains for me merely to trace in Gissing’s novels the presence of late Calvinistic materialism wherever I find it, which is something other critics have not attempted to any significant degree. Although from time to time, I might revisit the core components of the conclusions of Weber and of thinkers like the lesser-known Mordechai Rotenberg, I will try very hard not to exhaust the reader with unnecessary details.

¹⁸ In volume one of *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing uses this very verse in the context of Reverend Norman’s fortuitous departure from the clerical position he despises. “Oh ye gods, was not the cup of bliss too full? What if he were slowly but surely sinking to the grave beneath a remorseless disease; at least he would derive the maximum of enjoyment from those suns which would rise upon him, and what more could he wish? Man is mortal, and sufficient for the day is the evil thereof” (224).

¹⁹ In “Gissing’s Feminine Portraiture,” Coustillas alleges that Gissing “had little affection” for his mother. She “showed little interest in the things of the mind” and “was content

to follow tradition.” She wanted nothing more than to “fulfill her domestic duties, to practice the religion inherited from family tradition or adhered to by a stubborn spirit” and to raise her family “according to rigid moral principles” (130). One has to wonder why Coustillas speculates about the reason Gissing’s mother practiced religion if he does not even know whether she did so out of tradition or stubbornness. Later, paradoxically, Coustillas argues that “Gissing’s novels are teeming with domestically incapable women dreaming of vulgar entertainments” and lacking in “moral system.” To Gissing’s apparent disapproval, “church-going has become to them a mere perfunctory habit devoid of any spiritual commitment...” (136). If Gissing’s mother “embodied some of the defects he soon came to abhor in woman,” how can Coustillas have it both ways? If Gissing despised his mother, he could not have done so because of her defect in “moral character” or her addiction to “vulgar entertainments.” Neither could he have faulted her for her domestic incompetence. It is true that Gissing was, as Mabel Collins Donnelly put it, “ambivalent” towards his mother, and he certainly preferred his father (*Grave Comedian* 15-16). His ambivalence, however, does not imply the kind of revulsion that Coustillas seems to suggest, nor does it originate from her rather conventional Victorian feminine behavior. As a schoolboy, Gissing wrote affectionate letters to his mother (see *Collected Letters* I, 11-14). Oddly, some of Gissing’s letters to his mother seem to be omitted from the *Collected Letters*. Either that, or they are lost. For instance, while in America Gissing received letters from his brother William, who mentions in one that “I have just received from Mother, your letter to her” and in another that he “received a letter from Mother, in which she says she has heard from you” (*Collected Letters* I 54, 60). The letters Gissing must have written at this time to his mother do not appear in the collection. At any rate, Gissing, in his letters to siblings, often references his mother with conventional, if not fervid, attachment. Late in life, according to Delaney’s biography, Gissing

told Gabrielle Fleury candidly that he and his mother were ““excellent friends,”” though they had little in common intellectually (303). John Halperin, in *Gissing: A Life in Books*, claims that Gissing “was never close” to his mother and that “he never liked her very much,” presumably because she was “more religious than her husband” (13). Halperin also concludes that Gissing “was never very close to any members of his family” (13-14). Apparently, Halperin excludes George Gissing’s father from this proscription, since Thomas Gissing was Gissing’s “guide, philosopher, and best friend (14). I find it difficult to determine where Halperin gets some of his information, since he, like many other critics, often makes assumptions about Gissing that seem to derive from the novelist’s fictional characters: “At fifteen, if we take Harvey Rolfe in *The Whirlpool* as a portrait of the novelist at that age, Gissing was loutish, ungainly, scholarly, conceited, bashful – and tormented by his bashfulness” (15). I am not sure why I should take Harvey Rolfe, in preference to other Gissing characters, as a model of Gissing at fifteen.

Gillian Tindall, in *The Born Exile*, presents a much more balanced view of Gissing and his mother, pointing out that Donnelly’s “interpretation of Gissing’s relationship to his mother ... owes more to mid-twentieth-century Freudianism than to nineteenth-century realities.” Tindall notes that “Wakefield [where his mother resided] remained a place of refuge for him when life in London seemed particularly depressing” (57). Her religion would hardly have bothered him, since, as Tindall explains, “a degree of religious conviction was still regarded as part of the equipment of the ‘nice’ woman, and becoming to a lady, particularly a mother” (60). Neither did the young George feel that his mother was uninterested in him, since “the papers from Gissing’s childhood contain poems written by him for her...” (61).

Incidentally, Gissing’s ambivalence extended even to his idolized father. Delaney relates in his biography of Gissing that as late as 1896, Gissing complained that his father gave him too

little discipline, resulting in the triumph of his son's "bad impulses, from which his father should have saved him" (247). Interestingly, according to Korg's biography of Gissing, the young husband sold a watch his father left him for money to give to Nell (12). If I were Mabel Donnelly, I would psychoanalyze this action quite to the detriment of the argument that Gissing worshipped his father's memory. To make the question explicit: why would Gissing part with a sentimental keepsake like a father's watch in order to enable the drunken misbehavior of his wife?

²⁰ Gillian Tindall, in *The Born Exile*, notes that the lower-class "female-as-destroyer," typified by Carrie Mitchell, Harriet Smales, and Clem Peckover "strikingly pre-figured Edith Underwood, whom Gissing did not marry until 1891" (68-9). She explains further that Gissing's original attraction to Nell Harrison, his first wife, was what he said it was: "he wished to save her" (76).

Chapter 1

¹ I refer to *Workers in the Dawn* as Gissing's first novel, and indeed it is his first published novel. However, as Marilyn Saveson explains in "More of Gissing's Indispensable False Starts and Discarded Novels," Gissing wrote earlier and subsequent novels that he did not publish (2). According to Saveson, Gissing may have written or begun as many as 39 "lost" works, presumably novels (1).

² Significantly, the original title of *Workers in the Dawn*, which was *Far, Far Away*, referring to a heavenly land, suggests the validity of one aspect of my argument – that Gissing linked religious ideas with ideas having to do with social problems.

³ Michael Collie, in *The Alien Art*, regards *Workers in the Dawn* as pivotal in understanding Gissing as regards the "[...] strong features of his later work [...]," an assessment with which I obviously agree (27). Collie, however, in tracing the revisions between the first and longer version of the novel and the shorter revised version that Gissing never saw published, argues that the posthumous version published in 1935 should be considered the copy-text (40). He thereby discards some of the very substance in the novel which identifies several of Gissing's early attitudes toward religious issues and capitalism, a deletion that compromises a full reading of Gissing. In this willingness to discard what some critics characterize as an overly vociferous tone and as overstatement in Gissing's writing, Collie aligns his position with that of those readers who find distasteful Gissing's early penchant for revolutionary diatribe. As Collie himself admits, Gissing may have removed some of the original material to eliminate morally objectionable passages or simply to shorten the book (31, 30). Such deletions have nothing to do with Gissing's original intentions and everything to do with expediency, a criterion I do not consider useful in evaluating Gissing's stance on religion, money, or any other significant social

issue. *Workers in the Dawn*, despite Gissing's later evolution into a more sophisticated and complex artist, unearths persistent preoccupations about economic and religious subjects that cannot be understood adequately apart from the examination of them in the novel. In these early demonstrations of interest in such issues, though his positions are not fixed, they are provocatively germinal. Raymond Williams's comment in *The Country and the City* about Gissing arranging "an observed present" in keeping with "a feeling about the past, an idea about the future" applies to *Workers in the Dawn* and to certain other novels (78). To some extent, as Williams says, "[...] the exposure and the suffering of the writer, in his own social situation, are identified with the facts of a social history that is beyond him" (78). For Gissing, the first four or five novels embody his own efforts to conceptualize, in the late 1870s and early 1880s, his struggle with class and other issues that were "beyond him." This fact accounts partly for the difficulty in pinning him down on these problems, but it also testifies again to the extent to which these problems remained matters of ongoing speculation and re-appraisal. Consequently, to delete material Gissing included in the first edition of *Workers in the Dawn*, as Collie wants to do, compromises our understanding of this process. For that reason, I will work exclusively from a re-issued version of the first edition of the novel.

⁴ Examples of Anglican clergy in Gissing who express assorted degrees of unorthodoxy ranging from barely discernable paganism to troublesome doubt to outright disillusion and even to blatant and cynical disbelief include the vicar Wyvern in *Demos*, the rector Vissian in *Isabel Clarendon*, and the Reverend Lashmar in *Our Friend the Charlatan*. Bruno Chilvers, in *Born in Exile*, might be included in this grouping, although the reader might see him as merely a representative of Broad Church latitudinarianism. More likely, he represents the dishonest amalgamation of junk science and junk religion that often resulted from attempts to reconcile the

two. In attempting to impress Sidwell Warricombe, he provides the following banal platitude: “Yes, scientific discovery has done more for religion than all the ages of pious imagination. A theory of Galileo or Newton is more to the so than a psalm of David” (378). Not all of those who tried to reconcile science with religion were hypocritical blusterers like Childers, but Gissing clearly lampoons in this novel the ludicrous results of some of the desperate syncretism of the era. For an excellent discussion of the ways, legitimate and otherwise, that theologians tried to come to grips with science, see James C. Livingston’s *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age*. To be fair to these theologians, as Livingston notes, agnostics such as Leslie Stephen, W. K. Clifford, and T. H. Huxley “...were not thoroughly agnostic about their own foundational beliefs” (27). By this, Livingston means that these thinkers utilized dogmatic judgments themselves, sometimes appropriating religious language, as did Clifford in speaking of human history as “a mystic progress under the guidance of divine Nature” (43). This kind of thing is redolent with earlier, non-scientific expressions of pantheism. Huxley, though, as Livingston points out, in a manner “ironic and characteristically provocative,” coined the phrase “scientific Calvinism” to identify the conflation of the notion of Providence to with the idea of purposive evolution (42). Hence, George Douglas Campbell, Duke of Argyll, proposed in 1887 a theory that allowed for what might be called pre-fabricated structures or “germs” whose purpose surfaced later in evolutionary history as an organism might need them (54). God, for a lack of a better word, creates through evolution, not through fiat. We all know that Tennyson played with the same idea, particularly in *In Memoriam*. However, these scientific versions of Providence sound less like the gentler Tennysonian faith in an ultimately benign plan than an adeistic Calvinist determinism that crops up in some fashion in the most unexpected places.

⁵ Helen Norman's reading closely mirrors George Eliot's, a fact that I find interesting in light of the evangelical background and ultimate apostasy of both Gissing's character and the venerable Victorian novelist. Eliot translated Strauss' *Das Leben Jesu*, an act which Kathryn Hughes implies rescued the work from oblivion in England (*George Eliot: The Last Victorian* 71). In a period when Eliot edited *The Leader*, she presided over the reviews of Darwin and Schopenhauer, two of Helen's favorites (111). Comte, who also figures prominently in Helen's development, influenced Eliot, who possessed "obvious sympathy for Comte's sociological writings" (259). Eliot and Helen share even a reluctance or inability to part with Christianity entirely. As she was translating Strauss, Eliot "placed a cast of the Risen Christ" beside her desk. According to Hughes, "This was her way of reasserting the mystery and hopeful joy of the New Testament narratives which continued to sustain her long after she had given up orthodox Christianity" (71). Gissing read Eliot with approval from a very early date, writing to his brother in 1876 that Algernon should read *Daniel Deronda* because it "is very good" (*Letters* I: 52). He also read Strauss, of course, mentioning to Algernon in January 1879 that Strauss' "The Old and the New Faith" is "a grand book" (I: 146). In anticipating the publication of *Workers in the Dawn*, he warns Algernon that the only likely readers for the novel "must be among the strictly intellectual classes – such people, for instance, as read George Eliot..." (I: 240). When he heard that Eliot had died, he told Algernon that "[t]he news comes upon one with a shock..." (I: 319). He ranked her with Dickens and Thackeray as among the irreplaceable (II: 13). While I cannot demonstrate that Gissing had Eliot in mind as a pattern for Helen, I think that the similarities between them in their intellectual training and their retention of residual Evangelical fervor are striking.

⁶ The verse from which this chapter is taken comes from Luke 9:62 (KJV): “And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

⁷ In *Rule of Darkness*, a definitive treatment of imperialism, Patrick Brantlinger traces the essentially racist attitudes behind this theory of affluent white male superiority. According to Brantlinger, “racist theories of history” were articulated early in the nineteenth century by Robert Knox and Thomas Carlyle, and they became solidified in British consciousness in the later decades of the period (23). In this view, “dark races” are “physically and mentally inferior” to Anglo-Saxons (22). As doubts about the Empire grew, so did fears of internal degeneration, racial decline, and so on. Books such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* reflected these notions of the decline of Anglo-Saxon “stock” and of invasion from inferior types (232-233). As P. J. Keating suggests, this notion of degeneracy within the race finds expression even in William Booth’s *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, which “brought the Salvation Army much nearer to the view of settlers and missionaries” (114). According to Keating, some of Arthur Morrison’s work reflects the worry that attempting to improve the lives of the poor by providing better buildings or other social projects is doomed. Keating quotes Morrison in his 1889 sketch “Whitechapel” as noting ““no house can alter the character of its inmates”” (169). The reader can locate much the same sentiment in Morrison’s *Child of the Jago*. On the other hand, Keating points out that Charles Booth’s study *Life and Labour of the People* argues that most working class inhabitants of the East End belonged to the respectable middle class and not to the “suffering poor and debased” (119). Still, such categorization indicates a dichotomous view of human worth based on some level of affluence. If one is poor, one is “debased.” If one has some level of material comfort, one is “respectable.”

Booth further broke down “causes of poverty” into groupings that had greater or lesser identification with morality. Examples of such labeling include terms such as “loafers,” “drunkenness,” and other kinds of “character weakness or innate idleness” (Keating 119). Even though Booth placed only a small fraction of the working class in “section A,” or habitual criminals (Keating 117), his technique of classification mirrors the idea that some people are just plain bad. Much of Gissing’s treatment of the working class poor reflects this kind of ambiguity about whether congenitally defective people can be helped. Interestingly, Booth and Gissing intersected directly. Booth felt that Gissing’s novels were “...especially valuable for their trustworthy picture of working class life...” (Keating 31).

⁸ Helen’s question about Heatherley’s beliefs about hell constitutes a reminder that this debate circulated quite vigorously even in the post-Darwin, post-Comte, theological era. Certain liberal and Broad Church factions dismissed the idea of hell out of hand. Indeed, Geoffrey Best, in “Evangelicalism and the Victorians,” states that “...with an eye on the disagreeable aspects of the case, I dispose quickly of ‘hell-fire’” (48). Best’s representation of the matter is a bit overstated. Geoffrey Rowell notes that preaching about hell was “common,” because “the threat of everlasting punishment was in many instances the implicit sanction of both social morality and missions to the heathens” (*Hell and the Victorians* 1). Michael Wheeler reminds us that Elizabeth Gaskell, a Unitarian who rejected the idea of hell, gathered criticism for “her failure finally to condemn even her more reprehensible characters” (111). Wheeler recognizes the “...tension between a longing for a more hopeful and less dark eschatology, and a fear lest the weakening of belief in judgment and some kind of punishment should have a damaging effect on the morals both of believers and unbelievers” (76-77). As the century progressed, however, Universalism, a doctrine spurred forward by Unitarians like F. W. Newman, became more appealing “with the

decline of Calvinism” (Rowell 57). Some later Tractarians like H. M. Luckock adopted a purgatorial or probationary version of universal salvation (Rowell 107). Newman retained the doctrine of eternal punishment, but rather reluctantly (162). Even Evangelicals were alleged by some observers to move “towards Universalism as they approached death...” (149). Given the difficulties orthodox Christianity, whether in its Calvinist, Arminian, or Catholic versions, presents in avoiding Hell, one should not be surprised that, in an increasingly secular age, Victorians might well grasp at a concept of universal salvation. Again, Anne Brontë, in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, had long since given eloquent fictional voice to the doctrine through Helen Huntingdon. Nonetheless, as Rowell points out in discussing Coleridge’s rejection of both Universalism and Calvinism, universalism ultimately relies on determinism in its denial of “freedom of choice between good and evil...” (66).

⁹ K. S. Inglis calls into question the notion that education had anything to do with the resistance of the urban working classes to religious observance. In attempting to explain the large numbers of industrial workers who simply did not go to church, evangelical apologists made several erroneous assumptions. First, they claimed that before the industrial revolution, “evangelical religion was accepted universally and with enthusiasm” (*Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* 2). Inglis then elaborates as follows on the false explanations given for non-attendance.

Other writers have assumed that the alienation of the working classes cannot have preceded the loss of faith among the middle classes provoked by movements after 1850 in the natural sciences and in biblical criticism. Again, Protestant authors have made claims far beyond their evidence about the hold of evangelical religion, especially in its Methodist forms, on the new population; and they have gone unchallenged by radical historians happy to have support for the argument that 1848 passed without a revolution because evangelicalism had chloroformed the people. There is in other accounts an assumption that since religious belief is irrational, it was to be expected both that the working classes would remain

devout as long as they were ignorant, and that they would shake off superstition as soon as education opened their minds – a hypothesis which does not explain, among other things, why so many working-class people stayed away from public worship long before systematic secular education was available to all. (2)

Helen Norman subscribes to the idea that the poor need religion until they can obtain enough education to enable them to discard it without ill effects. This reasoning enables her to justify her pretense of belief for Lucy Venning's sake (III: 229). Also at work in Helen's ability to dissemble faith, however, is the fact that, as she tells Arthur late in the novel, "The difference between my own point of view and that of a pious Christian who says that everything is for the best, is not really so great as it might first sight appear" (III: 226). In fact, aside from her possible (and I emphasize this word) rejection of the belief in Christ as divine son of God, Helen's point of view differs not at all from that of a pious Christian. At the least, she could probably join a Unitarian church without much suffering of conscience.

¹⁰ Paul Delaney, in his biography of Gissing, relates that Gissing's sisters tried hard to change his beliefs, but that he "did not challenge their beliefs directly" (*Gissing: A Life* 160). This struggle went on for quite some time, Delaney says, but Gissing finally had "to accept that he could not change his sister's opinion" even by encouraging them to travel. They were too much "part of a misguided religious culture" (161). In his *Commonplace Book*, Gissing relates his sister's pleas that he reconsider his disbelief in the Bible. She argues that, just as she believes in the "existence of all the beautiful things [he has] seen & told [her] of in foreign countries," he should not "deny spiritual things [he has] never seen or felt." To this, Gissing writes privately, "How impossible to reply to such stuff as this" (48).

¹¹ Of Arthur's efforts to raise Carrie from the limitations of her class, Adrian Poole remarks, "No wonder that Carrie goes back to her drink – though for Arthur and Gissing, this is

seen as confirming her innate hopelessness” (*Gissing in Context* 63). Of course, Carrie’s “innate hopelessness” is exactly the point. It is an inborn condition that no one can change.

¹² Jacques Lacan, in “The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious,” remarks that “...no signification can be sustained except by reference to another signification” (415). In *Gissing*, the significations, as I understand the term, not only refer to one another, but they do so also in a way that resembles the rebounding of ping-pong balls in a shaken box. Terminology from the Bible and Apocrypha references Revelation, the Fall, Atonement, original sin, the Abyss, the devil, Christ-Adam, Eve-Mary-Lillith, predestination, election, the Garden, the Crucifixion, Hell, and a multitude of other terms concurrently. These terms reflect on one another in what can often be a confusing and conflating manner. Carrie reminds us of Eve, but she also calls to mind Mary as mother, albeit with a dead child. Carrie is reminiscent also of the mother of Moses and Jesus, seeking to shelter her child from Pharaoh and Herod, respectively. Carrie is also Jezebel and the Whore of Babylon. *Gissing* shows Carrie as the driven victim of her own fallen nature as well as of external economic forces, duped by the hypocritical cleric Augustus Whiffle, who represents both the established Church and the middle class. As I have suggested elsewhere, Arthur’s plunge into the abyss of Niagara ends the Genesis-to-Revelation cycle that began with our introduction to him in Adam and Eve Court, which leads to Whitecross, and so on. We cannot call *Gissing*’s use of Biblical imagery typology, since typology remains fairly stable in its system of equivalence of specific incidents and characters and in its prophetic functions. Tollady is a Christ figure, but he merges philosophically and functionally with Noble, who eventually eclipses him altogether. Even more puzzling, as my argument has demonstrated, the atheist Tollady and the dissenting evangelical Reverend Heatherley articulate virtually the same determinist faith. The very fluidity of *Gissing*’s use of Christian imagery and theological

concepts occasionally constitutes a kind of deconstructive enterprise, wherein terminology becomes so fused and so referential as to defy exclusive syntactical assignment. Lacan stated that “the structure of the signifier is, as is commonly said of language, that it is articulated” (418). Ruth Jenkins explains Lacan’s division of language as consisting of the “symbolic” and the “imaginary” (36). The symbolic “operates within the conventions of grammar and syntax,” while the imaginary “operates outside these rules” and “becomes revolutionary” because it consists of “the presymbolic language of the preoedipal period” (36). In Gissing, the language sometimes allows a straightforward interpretation. At other times, though, the apparent structure, the articulated structure, collapses into the indecipherable chaos of terminology that reduces meaning through multiplying its possibilities. This chaos might not properly be called “preoedipal” but it does regress sometimes to an incoherent fusion of terminology.

¹³ P. F. Kropholler, in “On the Names of Gissing’s Characters,” thinks that Gissing gives Whiffle a “high-flown Italian Christian name” to signal his dislike of the character, whereas he assigns a “far more respectable” name to Reverend Heatherley (6). While I am not sure that Heatherley qualifies as necessarily more respectable than Orlando Whiffle, I do think that Gissing in general demonstrates a strong awareness of his vocabulary in both denotative and connotative terms.

¹⁴ Gissing worries about the Church of England as an engine and beneficiary of the State as much as Marx does about state-sponsored religion in Germany when he says “In the Christian Germanic state the dominance of religion is the religion of dominance” (“On the Jewish Question” 49). Gissing’s feeling about the Established Church derives from the recognition of its tremendous economic power. At times, he very much resented that power. In a letter to Algernon dated Feb. 6, 1879, he breaks down the earnings of the Church and the salaries of some of its

clergy, lists Church abuses, and recommends its severance from the State (*Letters*, Vol. 1, 147-9).

¹⁵ I use the word “depravity” here in connection with bisexuality only because the “tableaux” is a contrived sexual situation designed to entertain the “gross and brutal-featured men” who pay for the spectacle. As such, the behaviors depicted are exploitative.

¹⁶ For an early appraisal by Marx of Hegel’s version of dialectics, see “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” pp. 96 -112.

¹⁷ Walter Houghton, while pointing out that feminists made some inroads into gaining access to broader social activity, also notes that “... mainly on the shoulders of its priestess, the wife and mother, fell the burden of stemming the amoral and irreligious drift of modern industrial society” (348). Both liberals and conservatives, Houghton says, opposed “emancipation” in part “...to prevent the irreparable loss of a vital moral influence” (352).

¹⁸ One does wonder at the incredible psychological power Calvinistic doctrine exerts over its believers. Even more amazing, however, is the way those under the influence of Calvinists and members of other Christian sects feel compelled to exert power over others. This impulse originates partly from what Georgia B. Christopher, in *Milton and the Science of the Saints*, identifies as the belief in reason as “the highest human power” but which nonetheless subjects itself to “the divine voice that gives civil life its definition” (150). Americans tend to believe that the Puritans came to the New World to practice religious freedom, a conviction that is only partly true. More accurately, the Puritans came to the New World so that they could establish their religious ideal, the creation of a New Jerusalem, through their own political mechanisms. To gain an appreciation of how lightly Puritans in general regarded the rights of people who held beliefs other than theirs, simply peruse William Bradford’s account of how God provides for the needs

of his settlement by allowing the Puritans to steal food stores from the native inhabitants, or as Bradford less politely terms them, “savage barbarians” (93, 91). Later treaties with the Indians can be viewed as arrangements of expediency (99-100). For a glance at how tolerant the Puritans were of dissenters or of people not of their community, see William Bradford’s highly suspect account of Thomas Merton of Merrymount (*Of Plymouth Plantation* 122-125). Obviously, Bradford’s band operated under extreme threats to their survival, but the interaction between Puritan and Native American improved primarily because the original inhabitants gradually moved away. I cite as another example of the Calvinist impulse to power the events of the revolution of 1640 in England (Walzer 3), followed by what only be described as a theocracy under Cromwell. Even acknowledging the abuses of the opposing adherents to royalty, and admitting the influence of Puritanism on increasing the power of Parliament (Walzer 3), it is instructive to note that the English tired pretty quickly of Puritan rule. To be fair, Walzer, in *Revolution of the Saints*, credits the Puritans with becoming the first political radicals, “oppositional men,” as he terms them. After dismantling older political systems, the Puritan sets himself to “the literal reforming of human society to the creation of a Holy Commonwealth” (2-3). Calvin himself reigned over Geneva by proxy, trying his best to implement Old Testament law, urging the execution of Michael Servetus for harboring religious views different from his (Ellerbe 99-100). John T. McNeil, a defender of Calvin, admits that “Calvin held traditional beliefs about witchcraft, was involved in the prosecutions, and did nothing to assuage this irrational cruelty” (172). Another Calvin apologist, David Sloan Wilson, denies that Calvin exercised the inflexible rule over Geneva his detractors claim of him (*Darwin’s Cathedral* 91). Also sympathetic to Calvin, William J. Bouwsma reasons that, due to his fear of chaos, Calvin “...was unable to purge himself of attitudes that were, in him, sometimes more rigid than those

of the papal church, and that he who had so vigorously denounced the ‘tyranny’ of Rome was sometimes perceived as the tyrant of Geneva” (215). Wilson correctly points out that predestination had long been part of Christian teaching, and that only after Calvin died did it become the distinctive of Calvinism (90). Debate over Calvin continues to swirl back and forth. In *The Mind of the Bible Believer*, Edmund D. Cohen calls Calvin’s tenure in Geneva a “reign of terror” (127). Furthermore, Cohen relates that “[a]t the height of the Calvin theocracy in Geneva, the heresy prisoners were kept handcuffed in their cells to prevent them from committing suicide to avoid the torture chambers” (13-14). Clearly, Protestantism of this variety has little to recommend itself over Catholicism, or other religions for that matter, in terms of the measures its most committed followers will take in order to secure political power. As I see it, the problem with Calvinism lies in the fact that although it produces some progressive results in both political and economic fields, it becomes stagnant and repressive over time, especially when it retains traces of religious rigidity. Furthermore, it seldom, even in its early stages, shrinks from coercion and violence.

Chapter 2

¹ Although *Thryza* definitely falls into the category of Gissing's early working class novels, I will reserve some of my remarks about this novel for my chapter on "The Damned Domain of Feminist Space."

² Interestingly, Gissing himself made an effort to defend himself from the charge of imitating Zola when he appealed to Fredrick Harrison on behalf of *Workers in the Dawn*, claiming "I have not yet happened to lay hands on anything of Zola's" (*Collected Letters I*: 293). As Parsons' essay shows, Gissing, even posthumously, has not shaken this perceived critical association with the French naturalist author. Nor am I suggesting that Gissing and Zola do not share definite similarities, particularly in the choice of bourgeoisie and working class characters for study.

³ Jonathan Rose raises an interesting and amusing point about Gissing's dislike of capitalism and the corresponding reliance on money which it fosters. In "Was Capitalism Good for Victorian Literature?" Rose asks,

But what happens to an author who is sheltered from capitalism? In Gissing's final novel, he vegetates; Henry Ryecroft retires to a cozy solitary country bachelorhood, reads all day, and writes about reading and vegetating. This, for Gissing, is the ideal to which all writers should aspire. (402)

Gissing, as Rose points out, admitted that such a life was indeed devoutly to be wished. He hated the constant competition for money (402). John Halperin also emphasizes the relentlessness of money and its pervasive effects in Gissing's work: "No other novelist has written so movingly of the pulverizing effects of poverty and the money-race on the sentient spirit and of the ways in which human feelings can be degraded by economic pressures" (*A Life in Books* 5). Given such an awareness, Gissing could scarcely have veered far from the conviction that human freedom

itself depends on money. Money, as Simon James suggests, even creates the “environment that allows love to survive” (*Unsettled Accounts* 5).

⁴ Admittedly, such testimonials characterized the proceedings of groups like the Salvation Army and the Methodists much more than they did the staid proceedings of the Established Church. K. S. Inglis relates that, in the early, wild days of the Army, Randal Davidson, who ultimately became the Archbishop of Canterbury, found ““offensive”” a letter written by a ten-year-old girl to a Salvation Army publication directed at children wherein the little girl boasts that she, her brothers, and ““baby May”” have all been ““saved”” (189). Often, the redeemed of the lower classes testified to having been delivered from sinful activities, among which “smoking was prominent in accounts by Salvationists of their life before conversion” (Inglis 185). According to Owen Chadwick, Primitive Methodists often gained disapproval even from other Dissenting revivalists for “passionate shouts” issued under conviction (I: 379). Interestingly, in early Methodist circles, the testimonial format sometimes allowed women to preach publicly, as Linda Wilson notes in “Nonconformist Obituaries: How Stereotyped Was Their View of Women?” (154-155). In some accounts, Wilson says, Nonconformist women related stories of their preconversion and post-conversion lives, although the sins from which they were saved were rather mild (151). One has to conclude that testimonials remained primarily the province of Dissenting and Nonconformist believers. Certainly, Ida Starr’s story might have been too authentic for conversion literature, but her description of her rise from prostitution might have passed muster in extreme Salvation Army culture.

⁵ Rousseau, who advocated a return to nature and who seemed to have rejected the notion of original sin, nevertheless grappled with fears about salvation. He reports in his *Confessions* that, while [i]n the midst of my studies and of a life as innocent as any man could lead, I was still

frequently disturbed by the fear of Hell, no matter what anyone might say” (312). He solved the problem by throwing a stone at a tree, telling himself that if he hit his target, he was saved, and, if not, he was damned. He hit the tree and claims, “Since then I have never again doubted my salvation” (312). In a way, Rousseau’s experiment contains the essence of Calvinism: from the human perspective, salvation seems very much a “hit or miss” proposition, and just as arbitrary as the outcome of Rousseau’s gambit.

⁶ Perhaps my choice of the word “absurd” strikes the reader as a bit harsh. Some works of anthropology, like Sir James George Fraser’s *Golden Bough*, tried to trace common elements behind all religious belief, a common preoccupation throughout the century, as Eliot’s Casaubon in *Middlemarch* demonstrates with his never-completed *Key to All Mythologies*. In his review of James C. Livingston’s *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age*, Jeffrey Cox records that some theologians tried to “...develop a natural history of religion, generally along evolutionary grounds, that incorporated Christian ideas of revelation and the fall...” (506). Furthermore, these ideas “conceded considerable amounts of truth to non-Christian religions” (506). While no doubt noble and sincere, these attempts to reconcile religion, science, myth, and philosophy often result in the kind of unfocused amalgam Waymark employs to impress Ida.

⁷ Felicitous endings do not come easily to Gissing. John Halperin, in “How to Read Gissing,” quotes Henry James and V. S. Pritchett, respectively, as saying that “...Gissing was a man ‘quite particularly marked out for what is called in his and my profession an unhappy ending’ and ‘Gissing loves unhappiness’” (63).

⁸ As usual, Weber explains the original Puritan ascetic impulse most cogently. It is, for the most part, fundamentally different in its primary emphasis from the life-abnegation of Miss Bygrave, but it does bear some similarities.

The Puritan, like every rational type of asceticism, tried to enable a man to maintain and act upon his constant motives, especially those which it taught him itself, against the emotions. In this formal psychological sense of the term it tried to make him into a personality. Contrary to many popular ideas, the end of this asceticism was to be able to lead an alert, intelligent life; the most urgent task the destruction of spontaneous, impulsive enjoyment, the most important means was to bring order into the conduct of its adherents. (119)

This description makes clear the relationship between Miss Bygrave's urge to eliminate "spontaneous, impulsive enjoyment" and that of the Calvinist Puritans. However, one can readily see the difference in the ultimate goal of Puritan asceticism and Bygrave's. Bygrave yearns for death. The Puritans sought to "impose order into the conduct of its adherents" for the purposes of this life. Some of these purposes fostered community cohesiveness. However, this emphasis on order eventually contributed to the success of capitalism in that it fostered thrift and devotion to business.

⁹ Most Victorians might well have sympathized with this rich young ruler. Jesus said to him, according to Luke 18:22, "Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Despite all attempts to deny the clear meaning of this passage, one cannot escape its anti-capitalist directive. To the adherent of the doctrine of inerrancy, and indeed to anyone interested in discerning in the teachings of Jesus any kind of consistency, this verse gives no end of trouble. At times, as any Victorian familiar with the Bible would have noticed, Jesus speaks very approvingly of profit making, as in his parable in Matthew 14 about the exacting investor who demands a return with interest on money lent to his servants. As the reader may recall, the servant who yielded no profit from the money entrusted to him by the "lord" is stripped of the original talent and likened to those who, at the end of the age, are thrown, according to verse 29, "into the outer darkness" among others who will experience "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Of course, defenders of

Christianity come up with a variety of apologies, some plausible and some spurious, for this kind of discrepancy, just as they do in the case of the apparent debate over free will and predestination. Thankfully, it is not within the purview of my discussion to resolve these matters. I have the luxury of merely pointing them out, a luxury Gissing allows himself from time to time as well, although he does so more often by implication rather than commentary.

¹⁰ Gissing wrote to his sister “Nelly” in a letter dated in August 1885 that he was “reading Dante & Petrarch in the original” (*Letters* 2: 331). He probably started this project in July of that year, indicating as much in *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England* (15). If it does not exist already, a study of Gissing and his appropriation of Dante would contribute significantly to the significant body of work that others have done on Dante’s influence on Victorian literature. Alas, I do not have time to conduct such research in this dissertation.

¹¹ The *OED* defines “Saturnalia” as “The festival of Saturn, held in the middle of December, observed as a time of general unrestrained merrymaking, extending even to the slaves” (sb. 1) and as “[a] period of unrestrained license and revelry” (sb.2).

¹² In a letter to his sister Margaret in May, 1882, Gissing writes

It is Bank Holiday today, & the streets are overcrowded with swarms of people. Never is so clearly to be seen the vulgarity of the people as at these holiday-times. There [sic] notion of a holiday is to rush in crowds to some sweltering place, such as the Crystal Palace, & there eat & drink & quarrel themselves into stupidity. Miserable children are lugged about yelling at the top of their voices, & are beaten because they yell. Troups [troops] of hideous creatures drive wildly about the town in gigs, donkey-carts, cabbage-carts, dirt-carts, & think it enjoyment. The pleasure of peace & quietness, of rest for body & mind is not understood. [...] Places like Hampstead Heath & the various parks & commons are packed with screeching drunkards, one general mass of dust & heat & rage & exhaustion. Yet this is the best kind of holiday the people are capable of. (II: 87)

In April 1888, he wrote to Ellen that he visited the Crystal Palace again and took notes (III: 198). Clearly, he used these experiences in *The Nether World*, published in 1889, for the material in the

passages I quote in this section of my paper. The reader can tell that Gissing struggles with his distaste for the masses and with his apparent sense of their limited capacity for cultivation.

¹³ In this view, I join DeVine and others in agreeing that Gissing's novels after *Workers in the Dawn* demonstrate a general distrust of philanthropy. She cites the soup-kitchen episode in *The Nether World*, in which a middle class woman attempts to distribute and prepare food along business lines, as evidence of his belief that much philanthropy perpetuates class rigidity and that it reinforces both dependence and resentment (25).

¹⁴ When I say that Calvinism paradoxically accepts the notion that sinners are responsible for their actions even though they are predestined to hell, I merely state the facts. The damned, though they have no opportunity to avoid damnation, still deserve it because of their willing participation in sin. To his credit, Calvin did not try to explain this apparent contradiction. As William J. Bouwsma explains, Calvin "was intensely opposed to speculation on the subject..." (173). Yet Calvin believed in "self-reformation through human effort" (Bouwsma 88). Obviously, the reason Calvin did not like to argue about predestination is that, from the human perspective, the doctrine can never make sense morally. Calvin himself thought it "terrible," and he hated the disrepute that the belief brought to the gospel (Bouwsma 173). For a side by side comparison of Calvinism and Armenianism, see Table I.

¹⁵ Almost without exception, evangelical and fundamentalist Christians cite Hebrews 9:27 as the proof text for the finality of this life and the invalidity of reincarnation: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."

¹⁶ In Mark 14:7, Jesus declares "For ye have the poor with you always, and whenever you will you may do them good: but me you have not always." Gissing references this verse often,

both directly and implicitly in his work. Through this allusion, Gissing ironically suggests that the poor, economically, are damned. Nothing can alleviate their condition.

¹⁷ Nietzsche alludes to the concept of eternal recurrence in several places. To this idea, he attaches mystical, religious, and philosophical meaning. Since Nietzsche is nothing if not cryptic, I feel I must quote him at some length from a number of his works. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he claims that his thinking about pessimism has penetrated beyond “the half-Christian, half-German narrowness and simplicity in which it has finally presented itself to our century ...” (259). He continues as follows.

[w]hoever has really, with an Asiatic and supra-Asiatic eye, looked into, down into the most world-denying of all possible ways of thinking – beyond good and evil and no longer, like the Buddha and Schopenhauer, under the spell and delusion of morality – may just thereby, without really meaning to do so, have opened his eyes to the opposite ideal; the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, and world-affirming human being who has not only come to terms and learned to get along with whatever was and is, but who wants to have *what was and is* repeated into all eternity, shouting insatiably *da capo* – not only to himself but to the whole play and spectacle, and not only to a spectacle but at bottom to him who needs precisely this spectacle – and who makes it necessary because again and again he needs himself – and makes himself necessary – What? And this wouldn’t be *circulus vitiosus deus*? (258)

This unending repetition of history, this “vicious circle of God,” replicates a type of determinist hell. In commenting on “The Birth of Tragedy” in *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche declares that this “doctrine” is “the unconditional and infinitely repeated circular course of all things...” (729-730). Finally, in his commentary on “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” in *Ecce Homo*, he speaks of this “hardest, most terrible insight into reality” as one which must nonetheless be embraced (762). Rudolph A. Makkreel explains that Nietzsche thought of this concept “as a fact we must accept because of the infinitude of time” and that it originated out of Stoic philosophy and Nietzsche’s “intuitive experiences that raise it to the level of a Dionysian insight” (562). No doubt,

Makkreel's explanation is correct, but the doctrine of eternal recurrence also resembles in its mechanistic inevitability a degenerated form of Calvinist predestination. It is well-known that Nietzsche's family was Lutheran, which, although not a branch of Calvinism, certainly adhered in Nietzsche's day to strict Biblical literalism. In April, 1897, Gissing wrote to Eduard Bertz that "the likeness of the state of things" conforms "to Nietzsche's ideals" because Nietzsche is a "mouthpiece of all that is worst in the *actual* tendencies of our present life" (*Letters* VI: 266). As late as May 7, 1900, Gissing referred to Nietzsche in another letter to Bertz as "a Man-worshipper in the larger sense..." (VIII: 46). My point is simply that Gissing was familiar with Nietzsche, and that the novelist had to have been familiar with the doctrine of eternal recurrence. This fact may mean nothing in and of itself, but Gissing's knowledge of Nietzsche does add another brick to the overall deterministic framework behind much of Gissing's thought.

¹⁸ "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:25). Christ's message about wealth sometimes verges on approval, as I pointed out earlier, but the preponderance of the New Testament teaching on the subject weighs in against the greed and injustice of the most egregious forms of capitalism. For some reason, Jesus categorizes the practices of the wealthy as prudent while usually seeming to condemn the wealthy themselves. Typically he relegates them to almost certain damnation, as in this passage and in the parable of the rich man in hell and of the rich man who dies suddenly, unprepared for eternity (Luke 16; Luke 12). I have already admitted that I do not understand this apparent contradiction, and I have already withdrawn myself from any responsibility in explaining things like this. Suffice it to say that perhaps Christ wanted to accentuate effective business practices while condemning the acquisition of wealth for its own sake. The Puritans, I feel it safe to say, would have seen the verse in that light. Nonetheless, as we have seen already,

Gissing knew that capitalistic forces created the perversion we call the Victorian gospel of success, in which wealth denotes the favored status of its possessor. Jack's pronouncements amount to a recognition of this fact.

Chapter 3

¹ Elaine Showalter notes that the phrase “The Woman Question” reflects the fact that “men saw the sexual revolution only in terms of heterosexuality and women’s roles” (*Sexual Anarchy* 48). Showalter relates how Olive Schreiner, author of *The Story of an African Farm*, asked the founder of the Men and Women’s club and the author of a paper on “The Woman Question,” Karl Pearson, why he neglected to consider the other side of the issue: the changing role of men (48-49). According to Showalter, “Schreiner was optimistic about the idea that a New Man was emerging to join the New Woman and that together they would create an ideal society” (49). Gissing, though he does examine the woman question from a variety of angles, also occasionally demonstrates that he gives some attention to the adjustments men have to undertake in the changing dynamic of gender relationships. Overall, however, his ideal regarding interaction between men and women seems to conform to his depiction of Henry Ryecroft’s existence. Ryecroft has a woman to take care of him, a housekeeper, while he devotes himself to reading and contemplation. In his Introduction to *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, John Steward Collis points out that Gissing frees Ryecroft from the “tyranny” of “poverty,” “women,” and “toil” (xiii, xv, xvii). Gissing certainly never freed himself completely from any of these curses, though Collis tells us that he found a limited measure of happiness with Gabrielle Fleury after his second wife, Edith Underwood, died (xi).

² Since I have not cited Weber at length since the early chapters of my paper, I remind the reader that Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, clearly delineates the implications of the Calvinist concept of profitability in both the public and private applications of it.

It is true that the usefulness of a calling, and thus its favor in the sight of God, is measured primarily in moral terms, and thus in terms of the importance of the goods produced in it for the community. But a further, and, above all, in practice the most important, criterion is found in private profitableness. For if that God, whose hand the Puritan sees in all the occurrences of life, shows one of His elect a chance of profit, he must do it with a purpose. Hence the faithful Christian must follow the call by taking advantage of the opportunity. (162)

The eventual misapplication of this principle, which legitimized profit through virtually any means, made it possible to justify almost any form of exploitation.

³ In *The Protestant Ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber says remarkably little about the place of women in the capitalist exploitation of labor. At one point, he cites the difficulty of converting single women laborers to any “methods of work inherited or once learned in favor of more efficient ones” unless these women come from “a religious, especially a Pietistic, background” (62). Even this brief statement ties Christianity to economic profitability, however. Of marriage, Weber points out merely that, to the Puritans, sexual behavior even within that institution should be directed to procreation alone (158). Procreation, in turn, ensured for the Puritans, as many historians have observed, future laborers, at least in the agricultural area. It also produced apprentices in other professions. However, in *The Sociology of Religion*, Weber has much more to say about sexuality, religion, and economics.

To be sure, sexual relations were never free of religious or economic regulations at any known point of the evolutionary sequence, but originally they were far less surrounded by bonds of convention, which gradually attach themselves to the original economic restrictions until they subsequently become the decisive restrictions on sexuality. (242)

Weber claims that the “absolute proscription of prostitution dates only from the end of the fifteenth century” (*Sociology* 242). In other words, as the Protestant Reformation picked up steam, marriage became for women the only legal and moral mechanism through which they could “profit” from their sexuality. Certainly, the restrictions of custom began to loosen

somewhat in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, but, as Lloyd Fernando has pointed out, “problem novelists” like Gissing and Hardy seemed less concerned with “individual sexual or psychological motivation” than with “free sexual union” (133). Fernando observes that the suggestion of such a union “amounts to a fundamental falsification” because the “heroines” in their novels did not want “relationships” that depended on “the fluctuations of desire.” Rather, they wanted something very much like marriage, whatever the name (133). I cannot speak for Hardy, but I think that Gissing, while he may have been persistently attracted to this kind of “free” arrangement, very deliberately demonstrates in his novels the falsity of the male fantasy of sex without some form of economic connection. In fact, he seemed compelled to enact marriage in his own life, usually to his detriment. Usually, the economic aspect of marriage found support in moral and religious conventions. Any woman who wanted anything else would have been most likely, mad, at least in the view of Victorian society at large. Marriage, love, and sex always involve money in Gissing’s novels, which is not to say that characters do not marry for love in Gissing’s fiction. If they do, however, they do so only if they can afford to, or think they can afford to, do so. Otherwise, their marital failure follows inevitably.

⁴ This statement fails to access accurately Gissing’s relationship to social issues. Gissing, admittedly, did not advocate consistently for any cause, particularly after his early flirtation with socialism, Comtism, and other radical movements. Nonetheless, he did remain interested in social matters. I need say nothing more than that every novel he wrote deals with multiple social issues. To the common objection that Gissing eventually desired nothing more than comfort and stability, I reply, “Who doesn’t?” Marx himself desired these things, and not just for himself, but for all workers, indeed for all humanity. Though Gissing visualized himself in a state of freedom from economic necessity in terms that he understood, that is, material comfort, he did so out of a

yearning for freedom. Erich Fromm, in refuting common misconceptions about Marx, says that his “aim was that of the spiritual emancipation of man, of his liberation from the chains of economic determination, of restituting him in his human wholeness, of enabling him to find unity and harmony with his fellow man and with nature” (3). Gissing longed for the same thing, but he did not subscribe to merely economic schemes of achieving that harmony. He saw, indeed, that this emancipation could not reach everyone in the capitalist system to which he belonged. He realized, that until things change in ways that defy current revolutionist schemes, some members of society can never achieve that freedom. In fact, some do not want to, as he demonstrates in novels such as *Thryza*, whose misguided reformer Egremont tries and fails to raise the working class through teaching them literature. Those who do not have sufficient leisure and money, and many who do have these things, can never reach that potential of “unity and harmony” with their fellows because they cannot or will not immerse themselves in the only medium that, in Gissing’s eyes, makes such a unity possible: the communion of books, especially classical ones. Scott McCracken, in “From Performance to Public Sphere,” has noticed the same thing about Gissing. In discussing public space and commercial exchange, McCracken identifies a literary ideal of “public culture” that frees itself from purely consumerist considerations. He goes on to identify Gissing’s conception of this ideal.

As a social critic, Gissing seemed to share that thesis. His narratives of alienated intellectuals express a yearning for an earlier phase of cultural life, a kind of golden age, not specifically embodied in the early eighteenth century, but reaching back even further into Greek and Roman antiquity. (53)

Of course, this ideal cannot be realized or reclaimed, if it ever even existed, and Gissing, unlike the fictional Egremont, knew this. Still, to Gissing, this vision became the only viable one.

Another problem with the view that Gissing does not have an appreciation of the importance of social issues has to do with his theory of art. In 1900, when Gissing had long solidified his ideas about literature, he wrote an essay in which he criticized didactic trends in the naturalism of both French and English writers.

Literature (in the special sense) is everywhere affected by a restless preoccupation with things alien to its sphere – for the moment, nowhere so markedly as in France, where particular reasons enhance the universal disquietude. A group of leading authors strive to direct the destinies of their country in a time of grave disorder. M. Zola, in the leisure left him by political strife, writes fiction vehemently didactic. M. Bourget turns from psychology of the boudoir to support the cause of religion. M. Maurice Barrès publishes a series of novels significantly entitled ‘Le Roman de l’Energie Nationale’ – in truth scarce novels at all, but moralized studies of recent French history. [...] From art, from letters, these men have turned to preaching. Literature in itself no longer satisfies them. They seek to communicate, with all the vigour they can use, a social or political creed, a moral or spiritual conviction. (95).

Gissing goes on to argue that English writers were committing the same blunder as the French. In fact, English “fiction,” Gissing says, had “always been more or less a vehicle of moral teaching ...” (95). He clearly dislikes this kind of thing, remarking “In the argumentative and exhortative novel we are not concerned with persons, but with types” (96). Even when he tried to impose political ideas in his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing found that his characters mattered more to him than the ideas for which they stood. Despite his disapproval of didacticism in novels, as well as his disgust with the “industry” that writing novels had become, Gissing acknowledges that novels do reflect the “interest of the time” which in his view “is ethical, and religious ...” (95, 96). However, Gissing, at this point near the end of his life and career (he had but three years to live), felt that the great hope of progress and science had let civilization down.

Physical science, which vaunted so large a promise, stands bankrupt before the human soul; it has quickened hunger, yet offers no food; it has stung the multitudes with a base ambition, and smirched the ideal even of those who try to hold aloof. The man of science has allied himself with the man of the shop; his

discoveries have their market value, and for the present no other. A day may come when all this knowledge will be transmuted into spiritual gain; to that end, we look for the new power in literature, which shall sum and intensify and direct the striving of a transitional age. (96)

I find it instructive here to note that Gissing's tone acquires an almost messianic quality. He rejects dogmatic literature because he has rejected all of the options available in a society ruled by capitalism. The claim that he has not considered these options, or that he is not interested in social issues, does not hold up, as the following assessment of the major intellectual trends of the nineteenth century demonstrates.

Our great preachers of the mid-century seem very far behind us; they were, in fact, retrospective. Carlyle, puritan disciple of German philosophy, wrathfully ignored the modern world; Ruskin, puritan worshipper of beauty, recognized the forces amid which he lived only to despise them and to despair. Their voices are not silent; they speak under the senseless turmoil, and truths to which they have given noblest utterance will pass into the teaching of him we wait for. The academic irony of Matthew Arnold addressed itself to a smaller circle, but his message will not be forgotten when men once more have leisure for things of the mind. Culture, he well saw, was growing all but impossible beyond the guarded closets of a fortunate few; yet culture, as Arnold understood it, must needs enter into the new civilization. [...] Huxley's grasp of philosophic idealism might have been a force for good had he but seen that this fundamental perception was in every sense more valuable, at more importance to the world at large, than the most conscientious study of phenomenon. No otherwise, indeed, can men be unburdened of a materialism growing ever more sordid as its power extends than by coming to understand that all 'science' has for its ultimate discovery the futility, the meaninglessness, of a materialistic view of life. [...] When at length there shall come the inevitable reaction against tyrannic worldliness, it will be seen that the modern mind has, with infinite labour, merely succeeded in re-establishing a truth ages ago known and acted upon. (96-97)

This startling, explicit, and powerful indictment of materialism and "tyrannic worldliness" encompasses everything the reader needs to know about Gissing's social theory. A man who recognizes the emptiness of life in a hyper-capitalist culture cannot embrace this or that popular cause because he knows that any measures taken to ameliorate individual evils will fail to address that larger issue of meaninglessness. This futility, mind you, does not extend to the

universe at large, merely to the commercial society in which Gissing found himself. Gissing's identification of the puritan element in the thinking of Carlyle and Ruskin demonstrates once again the relevance of the Calvinist idea to Gissing's perception of reality, in which only a "fortunate few" will ever be able to enjoy the higher life of the mind (96). Gissing cannot stop himself from thinking in these exclusionary terms. The unlocking of human potential that Marx envisioned will never apply to more than a select cadre, as far as Gissing is concerned.

⁵ See Mark 9:50.

⁶ The story of Lot's wife is told in Genesis 19. After Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt, apparently in defiance of the disruptive interference of a hyper-patriarchal Yahweh, a drunken Lot sleeps with his daughters, who had arranged this sexual tryst in order to conceive children. Evidently, the example of Sodom's destruction had not taught Lot's daughters much about the dangers of violating sexual prohibitions.

⁷ Ada's connection of Comtean philosophy, Positivism, atheism, agnosticism, and other displacements of religion reflects Gissing's own development as a thinker. In his biography of Gissing, Paul Delaney says that the young Gissing tried to indoctrinate Algernon in Comtean positivism, "... becoming the kind of crank who would later be satirized in his own novels" (37). However, Gissing's novels show that the novelist caught on very quickly to the fact that positivism, a deliberate attempt to replace Christianity with Auguste Comte's "religion of humanity," had begun to exhaust its force in the last few decades of the century. Charles D. Cashdollar, in *The Transformation of Theology: 1830-1890*, says that Comte's thinking about the creation of a new science, sociology, "reached its peak" in the 1870s and early 1880's" (13). Interest and advocacy of Comtean theory, spurred first by John Stuart Mill in the 1840's and then by Harriet Martineau's condensed translation of *Cours de philosophie positive* in 1853, had been

growing, influencing secular and theological thinkers (37, 62). As Cashdollar explains, Comte thought “that a new ethical and moral foundation was necessary if humanity was going to deal successfully with the developing industrial society” (9). Essentially, Comte reduced human knowledge to “phenomena and their relationships to each other” (Cashdollar 11). This reduction means that causation is wholly materialistic, not supernatural. I think that Gissing rejected Positivism as much because of its rather transparent reproduction of Christian elements than its reductionist materialism. In any event, from May 1884 to March 18, 1902, Gissing mentions Comte only in three letters. In the 1902 letter, he briefly discusses with his friend Eduard Bertz the question of whether Comte invented the word “altruism” or not (VIII: 362).

⁸ Though the Tractarians and other High Church Anglicans sometimes looked favorably on confession, most English Protestants, especially Dissenters, considered the practice suspicious for a variety of reasons, though Owen Chadwick contends that “[i]n the history of Protestantism the practice of confession was less rare than was sometimes supposed” (I: 503). Usually, the objection to confession centered on its alleged affiliation with “Popery.” Bishop Blomfield tried to suppress it for this reason (Chadwick I: 215). Opponents to confession tried very hard to perpetuate the belief that filthy minded clerics, both Catholic and Protestant, followed indecent agendas in the confessional. In this regard, Chadwick relates an interesting event, in which Anglican curates, in 1858, posed “improper questions” to “profligate women in two parishes” (I: 503). When Bishop Wilberforce issued a statement that the “Church of England authorised private confession,” he encountered “a torrent of abuse from the national press” (I: 504). Given this sort of volatility surrounding confession and Catholicism, which continued to excite trouble throughout the rest of the century, Mary Bowers’ anti-Catholic bias is regrettable, but understandable.

⁹ According to Henrietta Twycross-Martin, temperance literature such as the kind produced by Sarah Stickney Ellis in the 1840s, had been established as “a discourse of power, where male authority is dethroned and female devotion elevated, fused with a Christian discourse of the passive victim, suffering and serving in order to redeem” (17). The objection of Mary and Lydia to drinking and public houses, because of their subtle opposition to male power and because of their Christianity, definitely falls into this tradition.

¹⁰ Genesis 2:18-24 describes the process through which God gave Eve to Adam as “an help meet” (v.18). Adam himself declares Eve an extension of himself, saying “This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (23). In Judeo-Christian tradition, woman’s identity cannot be distinguished from the man to whom she belongs.

¹¹ David Grylls writes in *The Paradox of Gissing* that Gissing regarded work for hire as appropriate for “working class wives, compelled to eke out their husband’s wage, or for genteel females without a partner...” (159). He goes on to remark that “most of his main female characters either do not have a job at all, or have a traditionally ‘feminine’ job” (159). These jobs include teaching, “governessing,” prostitution, factory work, acting, and artistic endeavors (159). Grylls notes accurately that Gissing “accepted female employment as an economic necessity” but “was not enthralled by paid labour for others on the part of either women or men” (159). Like most Victorians, Gissing thought that education and work did not accord well with motherhood (Grylls 158-159).

¹² See Luke 10:3, Acts 20:29, Matthew 10:16, and Matthew 7:15 for several examples of the New Testament’s emphasis on the dichotomy between the elect and the non-elect.

Conclusion

¹ John Halperin, in *Gissing: A Life in Books*, attributes Gissing's pessimism to his native gloominess and to "...a vision partly shaped by his reading of Schopenhauer..." (8). I have discussed above in my notes to my Introduction alternative attributions of the multifarious sources of pessimism in late Victorian literature.

² The Biblical passage from which I took the original title (*The Gospel of Mammon*) of my study (and from which Carlyle took the term first, of course) is Matthew 6:24, in which Jesus declares "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Characters in Gissing's novels rarely have a choice. Their lives revolve around the power of capital in one or another of its configurations. They serve Mammon, like it or not. Gissing's novels indeed constitute a Gospel of Mammon.

TABLE I

*Calvinism	#Arminianism
1. Unconditional Election - "...Election is founded on God's purpose 'before the foundation of the world'"	1. "...the eternal decree of salvation refers to those who shall believe and persevere in the faith"
2. Limited Atonement - "...the efficacy of Christ's atonement extends to the elect only"	2. "...Christ died for all men, though believers only are benefited"
3. Total Depravity - "...the Fall has left man in a state of corruption and helplessness; his gleams of natural light are of no value for salvation"	3. "...man can do nothing truly good until he is born again through the Holy Spirit"
4. Irresistible Grace - "...regeneration is an inward renewal of the soul and of the will and is wholly a work of God, 'powerful, delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable'	4. "...grace is not irresistible
5. The Perseverance of the Saints - "...God so preserves the elect, ever renewing their repentance, patience, humility, gratitude, and good works, that, despite their sins, they do not finally fall away from grace"	5. "...the faithful are assisted by grace in temptation and are kept from falling if they desire Christ's help and are 'not inactive'"
*These canons, or points, were formulated during the Synod of Dort between November 13, 1618 and May 28, 1619 (McNeill 265).	#These doctrines were framed chiefly by John Utenbogaert in the "basic document of the Arminian party" in 1610 (McNeill 264).

Shown above: The five points of Calvinism compared/contrasted with the five points of Arminianism. The information is derived from *The History and Character of Calvinism* by John T. McNeill.

Table II – Religious Terminology*

	<i>Workers in the Dawn</i> 1880	<i>The Unclassed</i> 1884	<i>Isabel Clarendon</i> 1886	<i>Demos</i> 1886	<i>Thryza</i> 1887	<i>The Nether World</i> 1889	<i>The Odd Women</i> 1893	<i>Will Warburton</i> 1905
Christ	4	7	0	0	1	0	0	0
Christian	8	7	1	10	7	0	8	0
Church	113	7	14	42	17	13	21	6
Damned, Damnation, Damn	23	5	4	4	0	5	0	1
Devil/Deuce/Satan	25/3/0	9/2/0	4/2/0	7/1	2/1/0	4/0/0	0/1/1	7/9/0
Divine	8	1	4	1	2	2	0	0
God	63	20	6	3	2	8	4	1
Heaven	23	9	17	3	7	6	12	7
Hell	7	7	0	1	1	4	0	2
Jesus	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Perdition	0	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
Salvation	4	4	1	2	0	3	1	1

*In the chart above, I have used several novels from various points in Gissing's career. I have chosen certain religiously-oriented terms, indicating the number of times they are used in each novel. I am indebted to Mitsuoharu Matsuoka's Hyper-Concordance from *The Victorian Literary Studies Archive* on the Victorian Web (<http://victorian.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/index.html>). This collation is unfinished, so I tried to use only novels that Matsuoka seems to have completed. Even in cases wherein Gissing uses words in a non-theological way, he often ensures that the context suggests connections between religious ideas and economic or social ones. Sometimes, assuredly, he uses the word in a purely secular way. "Salvation" is often used neutrally, a fact significant in itself, since characters do not often experience salvation in any sense of the word. The use of "God" dwindles significantly and later is often used as an interjection. I have combined variants of "damn" in one figure, but I have indicated the use of devil/deuce/Satan as separate numbers. "Christ" and "Jesus" barely exist as words in Gissing's vocabulary, while variants of "devil/deuce" remain somewhat consistent, though "Satan" appears only once more than "Jesus."

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