

GISSING AND UNHEALTH: AN ANALYSIS OF MEDICINE, DEATH, AND  
EUGENICS IN THE WORK OF GEORGE GISSING

by

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A thesis submitted to

The University of Birmingham

for the degree of

MPHIL (b) LITERATURE AND MODERNITY

Department of English Literature

College of Arts and Law

The University of Birmingham

September 2010

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

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## ABSTRACT

The study explores unhealth in the work of the *fin-de-siècle* realist writer George Gissing, whose novels are suffused with examples of illness and death. The aim is to discover whether he used unhealth as a way of prescribing a healthy, middle-class status quo. Character response to and author treatment of medicine, death and eugenics will be explored, reflecting how health and unhealth are controlled, feared and embraced.

Chapter one focuses on medicine and power relationships between unhealth and health through the work of Michel Foucault. Chapter two uses Sigmund Freud's death drive in documenting the protagonists' journey to death. Chapter three looks at the texts alongside the eugenic doctrines of Francis Galton, to see if Gissing's protagonists are part of a moral cull because of their unhealth.

In concluding his novels Gissing maintains a middle-class status quo as his unhealthy protagonists are removed. His protagonists resist doctoring as it is a form of power and can prolong lives that Gissing believes should be ended. The protagonists are on a marked journey to death because of their unhealth and their inherited traits mean they have to die. Gissing makes this a welcomed and blissful release for both the protagonists and remaining characters.

For my wonderful partner,

Toby.

Thank you for all of your support.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study explores unhealth alongside a selection of work by the *fin-de-siècle* realist writer George Gissing. The aim of the thesis is to argue that despite Gissing's acknowledgement of his protagonists' suffering, their unhealth ultimately leads to their deaths or complete enfeeblement, resulting in a middle-class status quo being maintained. Grylls discusses 'the paradox of Gissing' as the writer's 'grim' subject matter surprisingly produces 'vigorous' texts (1986: 6). I feel this sentiment could extend to include the journey Gissing's reader is taken on, whereby sympathy is won for the protagonists for them then not to endure and survive. In the thesis I will use the term 'unhealth' to cover bodily and mental illness and a morbid temperament. I feel this term offers a broader view of illness than 'illness' itself can, by including everything that is deemed non-healthy. I have chosen a selection of texts, which I will discuss in more detail further on in the introduction, including *The Nether World* (1889), *New Grub Street* (1891), *Born in Exile* (1892), *The Odd Women* (1893), 'The Medicine Man' (1895), *The Whirlpool* (1897), and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903). All texts are investigated throughout all of the chapters of the thesis. I will explore the topic using an interdisciplinary approach through three chapters; chapter one will look at medical advice, the second is concerned with death, and the third eugenics.

I have chosen to explore this topic alongside Gissing not only because his texts are suffused with unhealth and death, but also because of his own interesting biography. Physical health for the Victorians was closely aligned with moral health and Gissing also believed this, commenting 'I *know* that my health was destroyed by the moral torments underwent' (cited in Halperin, 1982: 287). Gissing's work can sometimes be described as depressing, and Collie

suggests this is because his work was deemed as ‘un-English’ (1979: vii), or maybe his bleak depictions of urban England are unpalatable to many. Virginia Woolf even wrote about Gissing, ‘[h]is books are very sad’ (cited in Wheeler, 1999: 192), suggesting the Gissing reading experience isn’t enjoyable. However, his work provides a wonderful context to the *fin de siècle* and the anxieties that permeated it. He was a great observer, and presented his views of London with nihilistic venom, successfully mapping an angst-ridden society, and his work is very typical of the literature of the *fin de siècle* with its ‘heavy emphasis [...] upon nervous disorder, disease and death’ (Cunningham, 1978: 49). Gissing’s life was incredibly colourful and had the same level of high drama of his fictional creations. He lost his place at University after stealing for his prostitute lover and future wife Nell. Nell, estranged from Gissing, died due to the effects of alcoholism in a slum. His second wife also met a sad end, being committed after prolonged mental illness. Gissing himself suffered from ill health both physically and mentally, and died of emphysema. With a life filled with such examples of illness, it is no surprise that infirmity and death pervade his writing. Delany suggests that ‘[t]he story of [Gissing’s] life is the story of his books’ (2008: xii). I feel this tumultuous biography adds another layer of interest to such a study. Gissing’s position in life was complicated and this is certainly reflected in the complexity of his texts. It is important however, not to allow biography to overshadow the collection of work, an issue raised by many critics (Collie, 1979: 16) (DeVine, 2005: 22), (Ryle and Bourne Taylor, 2005:1) and (Gilbert, 1997: 7), but only permit it to add an extra dimension to the arguments.

In a symposium titled ‘The Place of Realism in Fiction’, Gissing touches upon the blurring of lines between the role of realist writer and scientist,

Let the novelist take himself as seriously as the man of science; be his work to depict with rigid faithfulness the course of life, to expose the secrets of the mind, to show humanity in its external combat with fate (1895, cited in Korg, 1978: 84).

The ‘exposing of secrets’ is not only a physical unveiling but a telling and creation of narrative. This study is concerned with the narrative that unhealth produces, and chapter one focuses on this from a medical standpoint. I have chosen the work of Michel Foucault as a framework to achieve this, as he explored power, discourse, and knowledge alongside medical establishments, allowing the discovery of the power/knowledge relationships between health, unhealth, and medical thought within the texts. His theories enable understanding of medicine as discourse and a way of producing knowledge, which in turn reveals the subjugation of the unwell and uninitiated. I expand on Foucauldian thought by looking at patient response to this or in this case character response, which reveals how Gissing positions his protagonists. They may be powerless but their reactions to medical intervention may be powerful. The quote above highlights the authoritative role that a realist writer must assume in an effort to write with integrity and honesty. Gissing has been typified as a writer concerned with social ills and the failures of those who have the power to help (DeVine, 2005: 13), but he writes with a clinical eye for documenting details that could align itself with the medical gaze. I draw many examples from *The Nether World* here as it deals with London’s underclasses who are a section of the population that were seen as diseased for a Victorian readership, and thus deserving of heightened surveillance. The characters in this novel are already subjugated due to their class, and their unfavourable health only adds to the scrutiny they face. I argue that Gissing illustrates the plight of the unfortunate in his texts in a way that encourages reader sympathy, but in achieving this he has to adopt the language and techniques of the very establishments he seeks to criticise. ‘The Medicine Man’ is a scathing attack on a cynical, consumerist medical approach towards the wretched by following the

dwindling fortunes of one doctor's practice. I maintain that Gissing is keen to show how unhealth marginalises those experiencing it, and that medical advice and practices only serve to widen the divide and subordinate those suffering unhealth. *New Grub Street* provides exploration through its protagonist Edwin Reardon. His failure as a writer is compounded by his morbid temperament and failing health, driving wedges between him and his wife, and the burgeoning consumerist society of the *fin-de-siècle*. *Born in Exile*'s protagonist Godwin Peak also portrays the marked differences between those that are healthful and unhealthful. I believe that Gissing sees medical intervention as tampering with a natural and earlier determined path that these characters must follow.

Building from chapter one's exploration of where unhealth positions an individual, chapter two begins to look at the result of unhealth, recovery and death. I am using Freud's death drive as a tool to investigate death, as it provides ways of looking at the journey towards the ultimate end. In chapter one, medicine is shown to suppress and oppress, in chapter two what is being suppressed is explored, the death drive. The concept is applied to both the characters and the narrative itself, as the journey through narrative is an enactment of the death drive. I aim to highlight that the protagonists' demise is inevitable, by underlining how their journey is clearly marked as a journey to death. The chapter discovers *The Whirlpool*'s Alma Rolfe is stained as a woman needing death as a release, as her unconventional and troubled beginnings have made her life a constant swinging between ennui and unwieldy nervous energy. I argue that Gissing marks death as desired for the protagonists. Their lives are full of torture and struggle, promoting a drive and search towards death which is a permanent state of peace. I look at Virginia's alcoholism in *The Odd Women* as an example of seeking death or a death-like state. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* also provides a template of what

environments and states of mind Gissing believes offers his characters peace as the main protagonist documents his final days.

Chapter three investigates why these characters have been chosen to die alongside the emerging eugenic beliefs of the late Victorians, especially drawing on the work of Francis Galton. This chapter offers a view that the protagonists are somehow deserving of their ending. I argue that Gissing stains his protagonists marking their end as inevitable and justified. As chapter two looked at the characters' behaviour as a sign of their death to come, this chapter discovers their biological make-up as a factor in their demise. *New Grub Street*, *The Whirlpool*, *The Nether World*, and *The Odd Women* all present protagonists who are biologically, environmentally, and circumstantially disadvantaged, which for a Victorian readership would have signalled individuals of bad stock. I maintain that this end is not only inevitable but welcomed, which aids the notion of death being blissful under the death drive, but also that the removal of these characters is an effective cull. Whereas in chapter two, death was pleasurable for the protagonists, chapter three explores how the removal of the protagonists is beneficial for the community in the narrative. This translates to how the removal of certain individuals from the wider Victorian society would also aid the maintenance of a more healthful population. I believe that Gissing adopts the language of eugenics to underline how his protagonists are better off dead, and by fulfilling this promise for the most part in his texts, he fulfils Victorian eugenic fantasies. He unveils the torturous lives of those less fortunate than others only to kill them off at the end of his texts. I believe that just as Gissing himself fluctuated between classes, so too do his texts fluctuate between class sympathies; from highlighting the struggles of the underclass and unfortunates at the

beginning of his texts, to ridding the Earth of these 'burdens' at the end allowing the middle classes to flourish.

## CHAPTER ONE - GISSING AND MEDICINE: A FOUCAULDIAN READING

By drawing on Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Madness and Civilisation*, this chapter explores power relationships regarding health and unhealth in Gissing's novels. I argue that Gissing anticipates Foucault, presenting his unhealthy characters as disadvantaged, powerless, and medicine as an institution of power and knowledge exacerbates this rather than curing it. I explore Gissing's distrust of medical authority and how his representations of unhealth pose questions regarding scrutiny, subjectivity and power. I believe Foucault provides the perfect template for this approach, as he felt that a 'strict, militant, dogmatic medicalisation of society' had occurred and medicine had become 'quasi-religious' in the nineteenth-century (1963: 32). I argue Gissing doesn't promote any methods of intervention and that his unhealthy protagonists should be left to their own devices and destiny. This study will explore Gissing's treatment of his ailing protagonists using Foucault's theories of medical scrutiny, classification, unhealth's positioning of patient and doctor, and the model man.

Medical language 'directs our gaze into a world of constant visibility' (Foucault, 1963: x) culminating in a medical or clinical gaze. It is penetrating and powerful enabling the observer to view the mysterious inner workings of the body, and thus unsurprisingly characterised as masculine (Vrettos, 1995: 91). There is the potential to reveal the emotional body, something Victorian novelists exploited when representing unhealth. For example, Gissing's use of an omniscient narrator suggests the penetrating gaze of a physician. This is seen in *The Nether World*, where in its focus on London's underclass the narrator has seared through the flesh of London society exposing the diseased mass underneath. Halperin branded Gissing as an

‘observer’ (1982: 3), relaying to his readers the minutiae of his characters’ lives but never offering treatment or cure. Technological advances during the *fin de siècle* aided the pathological gaze with the production of the X-ray in 1895 (Cross, 2001: unpaginated). Gissing’s works are an X-ray of the breaks and fractures within Victorian society, and for Ryle and Bourne Taylor he continues the Condition of England debates from earlier in the period (2005: 2). Foucault believes ‘the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates’ (1963: 39), so it appears that Gissing has adopted this authoritarian, medical gaze upon his subjects.

All characters are described in a way that betrays their health, both physical and moral. Ordinarily patients are only the medium through which the text of disease is read (Foucault, 1963: 59), but Gissing gives these ‘mediums’ a voice to counter his all at once pathological approach. *The Nether World* observes London’s underclasses as they struggle for survival and the Hewett family are this struggle incarnate. ‘[T]o be ill is to produce narrative’ (Vrettos, 1995: 2), and when the reader first meets *The Nether World*’s John Hewett, the narrator says he is ‘worn out with anxiety and hardship’ (1889: 19), and this is emphasized through the visible signs on the body,

The lines engraven upon his face were of extraordinary depth and frequency; there seemed to be little flesh between the dry skin and the bones which sharply outlined his visage (1889: 19).

Following this scrutiny Gissing allows Hewett to inform the reader of his struggles finding work, so he is not just a body laid out on a slab for inspection but a man with a story.

Unhealth is something that can be ‘read’ on the body, it ‘functions to communicate the inner life of the patient’ (Vrettos, 1995: 29), and those that read the signs of unhealth assume a powerful role. Illness not only produces narrative as it reveals the story of the body, but it also functions as a genre. The processes of becoming ill, viewing symptoms, seeking medical

attention and creating a sickroom are formulaic devices. Illness in itself provides another way for Gissing to give the voice I mentioned earlier to these characters. They don't fit the mould of the perfect Victorian, strong in mind and body, but this means they acquire more reader interest. These characters are fundamental to the creation of the Gissing brand. They are not only interesting and vital, but instantly recognisable as the creations of Gissing. To counter the beliefs of his era the realm of unhealth is an exclusive club for Gissing's characters, where the upper echelons of Victorian society are unwelcome. The upper classes have access to many platforms from which to divulge their narrative, unhealth may be a way for the lower classes to reveal the hardships of their lives, although as stated above those that read the signs have power over the narrative.

Health is similarly documented. The narrator records the 'robust health' of the upstanding Buckland Warricombe, friend to the protagonist Godwin Peak, and the 'glow of health' in fellow student the prosperous Bruno Chilvers in *Born in Exile* (1892: 2 and 7). Conversely, the narrator exposes the 'unhealthy complexion' of the unfortunate Peak who is from an 'unhealthy' background (1892: 6). These comparisons are made during an academic ceremony at their college, so they are already being scrutinised on their academic abilities as well as their healthful appearance. This intensifies the characters' subsequent narrative journeys, and invites readers to note the associations with different levels of health and unhealth. For example Peak is unhealthy so will come to an unhappy end. Foucault identifies that nineteenth-century medicine focuses on the 'definition of the model man' or 'healthy man' (1963: 34), or more pertinently 'normality' (1963: 35). For Victorians, the healthy body represented more than a disease-free vessel; it presented national strength and pride, a moral and hygienic character and good breeding stock. Foucault states that during the nineteenth

century medical discourse was arranged on the 'healthy/morbid opposition' (1963: 35).

Although Gissing replicates that dichotomy, the 'morbid' characters are his main protagonists and the ones the reader is to sympathise with the most. Gissing wants to expose the 'morbid' state as a result of unfortunate circumstances as well as an inherent character trait. Reardon in *New Grub Street* is constantly criticised for being 'morbid' due to his inability to apply himself to his writing (1891: 78 and 79). Like his protagonists, Gissing was said to have had a 'morbid temperament' (Grylls, 1986: 3), often thinking of suicide (Halperin, 1982: 277). The morbid thought process then, is a form of unhealth for the Victorians, a pursuit of death. The term 'morbid' was also a way of bunching artists and homosexuals together with 'lunatics, criminals, and other anti-social identities' (Cutting, 2005: 85). Alternatively, by adopting this mentality the characters are fighting against their 'duty' to be healthy. Unhealth in addition, endows a character with layers of interest. In Gissing's novels more time is given to his ailing characters as there is so much more to discuss, and so many more possibilities. Clara Hewett's accident results in geographical, professional, and marital changes that would otherwise have been incongruous with the incorrigibly stubborn Clara.

Unhealthy individuals are classified according to their ailment. Scientific classification for Foucault was about division, and in psychiatry this meant dividing the insane from the sane (Horrocks and Jevtic, 1997: 6). This notion was expanded in the nineteenth century when many diseases were 'identifi[ed], classifi[ed], and descri[bed]' (Haley, 1978: 5), resulting in a mentality where everything had its place. *The Nether World's* Mad Jack is an example of how his 'classification' has come to dictate his behaviour (1889: 43). Mad Jack sings and talks to himself, but Gissing interestingly makes one of his speeches resonate perfectly. As a fatally injured Bob staggers through Shooter's Gardens, Mad jack rants that an angel has

spoken to him stating '[y]ou are passing through a state of punishment' and '[t]his is Hell' (1889: 345), presenting the 'wisdom of fools' (Foucault, 1961: 19). Medical discourses are 'productive', they produce the very object they describe (Kendall and Wickham, 1999: 34). Some of the titles of Gissing's novels draw upon the idea of classification, *The Odd Women* is a good example, conveying the Victorian fascination with oddities. The title suggests that there is a 'norm', and although the reader may not be presented with this in character form, they are offered images of the 'abnormal' in Virginia's alcoholism (1893: 333), and Alice's never-ending list of ailments (337). Classification is a form of 'dividing and conquering', removing individuals with rebellious bodies from the community, but then the individual body itself is dissected into pieces of tissue, organs, membranes through pathological practices. Foucault states the doctor knows 'the internal structure of our bodies; but only in order to subtract it' (1963:8). The individual is no longer a whole, but reduced to the site of infection, posing the question of proprietorship during episodes of unhealth, as the infected areas now belong to those who seek to treat them. This confirms the sense of not 'feeling ourselves' when ill. *The Nether World's* Clara shuffles around alone in her room, suffering 'burning temples' and 'feverish lips' (1889: 293), reducing her to body parts. She is no longer the head-strong and independent individual the reader is shown earlier in the novel, but a selection of failing body parts following her attack. The body parts are a metonymic device representing the 'burning' anguish and pain Clara experiences in her decline. Gissing urges reader sympathy by likening Clara's existence to that of a caged animal in an effort to focus on the whole again and the passion and frustration that she must be experiencing (293).

The idea of 'dividing and conquering' is extended to how unhealthy individuals are treated through either exile or confinement. This can take the form of being confined to their bed for

rest, going to the seaside, or exiled to the peripheries of society. These are sentiments echoed by a physician in *Chambers's Journal* who prescribes all of the above for colds and influenza (1890: 51). Foucault states 'confinement is [...] justified, by the desire to avoid scandal' (1961: 62). During one of Reardon's fevers 'Amy would not let him rise from bed' (1861: 160), and as he becomes more morbid and his plans more mismatched with Amy's and polite society, Reardon becomes exiled from central London (1891: 379). There is a paradox here, in the sense that the ultimate aim of the medical gaze is to remove from sight the object of the gaze. Foucault goes further and explains this as '[the gaze] moves forward, [it] is really retreating' and he believes that for the gaze to acquire the truth of the disease, 'it must be allowed to win' (1963: 9). For Gissing's protagonists unhealth is triumphant so that Gissing can access a 'truth' and integrity for the narrative. They must die for the narrative to be complete and this is discussed further in chapter two.

This dominating gaze is keenly felt by Gissing's protagonists. Even to look upon oneself is to enact the medical gaze. Gissing attempts to explore what has become a cultural norm of 'scrutinising' and how it can become a weapon against oneself. The extreme of this is *The Nether World's* Clara Hewett who due to her horrific injuries is veiled (1889: 243). The events preceding the acid attack by Grace portray a woman scheming to gain the lead role in her touring company's play, toying with the understudy Grace. This overt and spiteful display of emotion is in stark contrast to the veiled Clara. Here she is a woman wearing her black heart on her sleeve, and with her role of actress she is tasked with depicting another person's emotions effectively, inviting the gaze. However after the accident the obnoxious emotional display has evaporated and she is hidden behind her veil but it is not enough to protect her from the ever-penetrating gaze. When her old admirer Sidney Kirkwood visits

‘she seemed as if she would have hidden her face even under its veil’ (1889: 284). Clara is aware of her abnormalities and how they position her within society, as she contemplates the future following her disfigurement. She cannot help but adopt society’s medical gaze upon herself and act accordingly through her veiling. She is also incredibly vulnerable here, as she is ‘unveiling’ the truth of her situation to Sidney. He is now her potential saviour as he is the only man who will have her now. This is interesting as Clara is naked emotionally, but bodily obscured. Her role has become inverted, the public, showy, but faux openness of her one-time profession has been replaced by a quiet and more heart-rending honesty from beneath the veil. Her disfigurement has forcefully removed her from unrealistic pursuits and her platform to a superficial scrutiny from a paying audience. Instead the veil is a self-reflexive tool enabling her to look in upon herself and recognise her true position in life. Gissing suggests that counter to the Victorian obsession with penetration of the human body and the visual, truth is a concept that can be more subtly revealed and not as a result of heightened scrutiny. Clara has experienced a journey from soliciting voyeurism: a sleazy gaze, to humility cloaked beneath her veil which has prompted her to be more honest and open. She may have removed herself from medical or societal scrutiny through her veil, but she is still scrutinised by the narrator and readers.

As stated earlier, Gissing is guilty of recreating the medical gaze of his time, but he does present challenges to its authority. In an attempt to obscure the gaze, there are many instances of fog especially throughout *New Grub Street* (1891: 458). Although this has factual accuracy we cannot dismiss its symbolic application. After Mrs Yule has told Marian her father is going blind, the fog oppresses the depressed Marian ‘poisoning her soul’ (1891: 458). It recreates her father’s gradual descent into blindness and as her vision is clouded her empathy

heightens. Her own unfortunate position is seen here, as prior to this episode the loss of her uncle's inheritance has resulted in the loss of Jasper Milvain's love (1891: 447). Fog darkens the gaze, and in some instances completely eclipses it. Despite using fog as a tool to challenge the gaze, its addition enables Gissing to remind the reader that he is master here. He presents what can be viewed and he can easily remove these objects or draw a veil across them. Gissing proclaims,

The Art of Fiction has this great ethical importance that it enables one to tell the truth about human beings in a way which is impossible in actual life (cited in Halperin, 1982: 1).

He is the one enacting the unmasking process; he is the physician with scalpel in hand peeling back the skin to reveal the mysteries underneath. Examples of this process can be seen explicitly in *The Nether World* when Clerkenwell is described. The reader is given tantalising details about a world which is normally shrouded in mystery. The narrator illustrates the 'ceaseless scattering of mud', the multitudes 'bent over their labour' and families in 'dim byways' (1889: 10-11). These images conjure up a surgical scene where blood replaces mud and the 'dim byways' are the dark spaces between organs. The narrative role cannot simply be one of detached observer, and through language production, objects, characters, and environments are created. The narrator is complicit in the Foucauldian visible and sayable system where language produces objects. This poses questions of how much the reader can trust the narrator, as they are part of a system of power. The reader is able to access this power as they are still able to see what the author has created. This is where Gissing shows strength in his awareness, and softens the narrator's language periodically, developing a bond between reader and narrator. This is seen in the inclusive tone of *New Grub Street*, where the narrator addresses the reader directly, for example in the article writer Alfred Yule's fight with the reputable editor Fadge, '[w]ell, you probably remember all about it' (1891: 126).

This promotes a sense of shared experiences and knowledge in Gissing's literary world, cementing the relationship between reader and text. He also gives his narrator an informal tone. In *The Nether World* the narrator refers to the characters as 'certain friends of ours' (1889: 104). The irony is that through Gissing's realist approach, he becomes a powerful orator of Victorian life, presenting what is ordinarily invisible through his narrator. He is one of the few who are able to read the signs on the body, inviting the reader to assume that powerful role too. Gissing's narrators are not medical professionals undermining the veracity of their observations. However, in adopting the medical gaze a powerful stance is assumed.

What is notable in Gissing's novels is the lack of doctors. He does offer a brief but disparaging view of physicians in a short story called 'The Medicine Man', but in an *oeuvre* that is over-brimming with disease, death and despair, the underdevelopment of medical professionals deserves address. This is attributed to Gissing's nihilism and dislike of all things modern (Collie, 1979: 2). There is the belief that the victims of unhealth have their experiences 'homogenize[d] (sic)' through medical language (Frank, 1997: 64), but Gissing gives his protagonists a voice, a means of representing individual experience and suffering. He subverts the notion of 'the patient [...] only [being] an external fact; [where] the medical reading must take him into account only to place him in parentheses' (Foucault, 1963: 8). This does raise questions as to where that leaves the 'medical gaze' and where the power comes from. Instead Gissing gives the dispensing of medical advice to characters outside of the medical profession. What qualifies these individuals is their money, status, or ability to fit neatly and work well within Victorian society. As Foucault states 'knowledge [is] a social privilege' (1963: 39). The ambitious capitalist Jasper Milvain and middle-class Amy Reardon from *New Grub Street* are two such examples, both imploring the ailing Reardon to take a

‘seaside holiday’ (1891: 106 and 228). Amy even documents a list of symptoms and interrogates her husband with questions similar to a doctor when he visits his ailing son,

How hot your breath is! [...] And how you tremble! Are you ill? [...] But you look so ill – you are shaking so. Is it a cold you have had long? (1891: 480-481).

They may not be the main protagonists, but they are given access to roles that are both powerful and respected in the Victorian community, which is in contrast to the protagonists, serving to undignify the protagonists’ position further. They are given the right to read the signs on the body and reveal what hides underneath.

When Gissing does add medical professionals to his texts, they are husks, formulaic additions to sickrooms, or simply ineffectual. Under the General Medical Council the late nineteenth-century saw the beginning of medicine as a unified profession, where students would share a similar university or hospital based education to a recognised standard (Cherry, 1996: 28). However, the medical professionals present in the texts are questionable individuals. The druggist sent on behalf of the ‘medical man’ dismisses Jane’s ailment, and states that she’ll ‘soon pull round’ and just ‘[s]end for medicines’ (1889: 40). Gissing’s father was a chemist or ‘poor man’s doctor’ dispensing medicines to doctors and the public (Tindall, 1974:50), imbuing Gissing with knowledge of the professional medical hierarchy. Gissing was incredibly fond of his father Thomas and wanted to mirror his efforts (Delany, 2008: 3). Thomas’s death when Gissing was young was seen as a failure on his father’s part (Tindall, 1974: 53), which may begin to explain the ineffectual doctors. Gissing develops the theme of consumerist medicine further in his short story ‘The Medicine Man’, where the protagonist Dr Bobbett’s line of diagnostic questioning runs ‘[y]ou there again? [...] Got the money?’ (1895: unpaginated). This uninterested, consumerist approach is presented as typical of the

medical professions, but realist novelists also adopt this practice. Gissing may highlight the plight of the urban poor in his work, but essentially he needs to earn a living from his efforts. Despite Gissing's attempts to distance himself from such capitalist practices, he is part of this process. Both professions espouse noble motives, but are invariably money-making ventures.

*New Grub Street*'s Alfred Yule ends up consulting a surgeon who has fallen on hard times about his eye problem (1891: 444). Gissing can only allow the medical professional's assessment to be correct through the addition of his personal misfortune. In a hubristic twist, he is successful in his diagnosis because he no longer belongs to the lofty group of surgeons. His vulnerability and urging of Alfred to seek 'a more competent man' for verification produces reader sympathy and a more genuine bedside manner than we have seen from the other examples of physicians (1891: 445). His medical power has been tempered, and he is humble, and hence given a name and affability (1891: 445). Due to his 'fall' he is no longer part of the 'quasi-religious' medical profession and is therefore more sympathetic to others' suffering.

Even the 'suave' doctor who attends to Willie and Reardon in *New Grub Street* is unable to save either (1891: 483). During his initial investigations into Reardon's case, he orders him '[d]on't speak a word more than you can help' (1891: 483). Amy echoes this advice, when Biffen comes to visit, '[b]ut don't let him try to speak much' (1891: 489). This adds to the punishment felt in confinement, Reardon is trapped in what becomes his death bed and there are attempts to stifle his voice. Foucault marks medical professionals as part of systems of power, and some nineteenth-century medical practices have been characterised as 'aggressive' (Vrettos, 1995: 88). Foucault's studies have also identified that medical 'intervention' could

be ‘an act of violence’ (1963: 8). Reardon’s silence underlines the notion of disease coming from a bad character, as he could open his mouth and utter degenerate evils. A rebellious body equals a rebellious mind and Reardon’s chosen career marks him as an aesthete and his lack of willingness to adapt to the market means he needs to be silenced. For Foucault the patient in the hands of the doctor is just a ‘structure’ to be observed (1963: 8). Illness is a form of narrative and as the physician’s role is to remove/cure the illness, so it is another way of oppressing expression and character by removing the unfortunate’s method of narrative. There is the belief that ‘ill persons delegate responsibility for their health to physicians’ and results in the patient being compliant in the medical effort and effectively silenced (Frank, 1997: 15). As Reardon is forbidden to tell his story, it is left to the narrator to present his plight, echoing the role of Gissing relating the struggles of the underclasses.

An interesting, but still underdeveloped medical figure, is *Born in Exile*’s Janet Moxey, a doctor who has studied at The Women’s Medical School but who is prone to ‘breakdown[s]’ (1892: 256). The London School of Medicine for Women was founded by Sophia Jex-Blake in 1874 and may have been the inspiration for Janet’s place of study. Unfortunately it didn’t offer its graduates the same prestigious future as male graduates in the same area of study (The Open University (a), unpaginated). Women were depicted as susceptible to neuromimesis in essence ‘nervous mimicry’, aiding the argument that men made better doctors (Vrettos, 1995: 89) and Gissing echoes these beliefs through Janet’s hysteria. Some commentators note how Gissing both ‘ideali[s]es’ and ‘despise[s]’ women (Grylls, 1986: xi), and here Janet is granted the position of doctor but is shown to be ineffectual because she is a woman. Although a small number of women were allowed to study medicine by the end of the nineteenth-century following the 1876 Enabling Act, universities could still preclude

women from studying (The Open University (b), unpaginated). Despite her training, Janet would have difficulty practicing and gaining credibility. This characterisation gives more credence to an overtly powerful and masculine medical presence and gaze.

Foucault's studies neglect patient responses to the medical gaze (Lupton, 1997: 103), but this is of great importance to this study and producing a wider investigation of power. Ultimately Gissing's characters experiencing unhealth ignore advice from medical or authority figures, and choose self-diagnosis and self-doctoring instead. Like his characters, Gissing ignored medical advice and continued to work despite his doctor's best efforts, enabling him to invest his characters with his own experience (Halperin, 1982: 318). Gissing's characters experiencing unhealth aren't powerful, so this tiny rebellion of ignoring the voice of authority affords them control over their bodies, as Biffen states 'I keep myself alive' (1891: 243). A proponent of the 'medicalisation critique', Ivan Illich, argues that medicine works against its own aims by making people ill through the side-effects of drugs (1976: 12) and removes the 'lay' person's 'capacity for autonomy' in managing their own health care (1975, cited in Lupton, 1997: 95-96). The advice given to Reardon by Amy and Jasper isn't anything he wouldn't already know, but he chooses not to follow it in an effort, as Illich suggests, to control his own healthcare.

For the Victorians the procurement of health became an obsession and consumerist pursuit,

No topic more occupied the Victorian mind than Health- [...] In the name of Health, Victorians flocked to the seaside, tramped about in the Alps or Cotswolds, dieted, took pills, sweated themselves in Turkish baths, adopted this "system" of medicine or that. [...] Victorians worshipped the goddess Hygeia, sought out her laws, and disciplined themselves to obey them (Haley, 1978: 3).

The Victorian attainment of good health was about adhering to a strict set of rules, with cleanliness being paramount. What is telling in Haley's example is how the prescribed treatments of unhealth are only accessible to the affluent, for example travel and the purchase of 'pills'. The lower classes are not only at a disadvantage in terms of securing nourishment and living in sanitary environments that could result in better health, but they are also precluded from being part of the fashionable social movement of obtaining good health. These views are explored in the work of Gissing, as the poor are truly wretched creatures with no ability to procure sound medical advice, let alone dabble in the latest health-inducing methods. As *New Grub Street*'s Reardon points out, '[t]o the rich, illness has none of the worst horrors only understood by the poor' (1891: 483). In *The Nether World* the narrator describes the wretched Hewett children and their surroundings

The children were not dirty nor uncared for, but their clothing hung very loosely upon them; their flesh was unhealthy, their voices had an unnatural sound (1889: 16).

Gissing suggests that despite the Hewetts being incredibly poor, they are proud and endeavour to keep their children clean, which is probably at great financial cost to them. Gissing highlights how that being clean is not necessarily a means to prevent unhealth, as the children's 'flesh was unhealthy' and their voices 'unnatural'. As Victorian medicine sought to penetrate further into the human body, so too is Gissing in trying to imply there is more to the poor's physical condition than personal responsibility over their own hygiene. They may be able to remove the surface layers of grime with soap and water, but there is still the filth of a system that encourages a society of haves and have-nots, a system that is 'unnatural'. For Henry Ryecroft the effects of the countryside are 'supernatural' after the grimness of poor London lodgings (1903: 11), echoing the Victorian belief that the sea and countryside were immensely salubrious. A Victorian physician writing in *Chambers's Journal* on colds and influenza marks the parallel between health and cleanliness,

[W]e warn our readers to keep their health up to par, and not to neglect hygienic laws and rules (1890: 51).

The narrator in *New Grub Street* exclaims how the poor are unable to follow these laws as it is ‘costly’ to be clean (1891: 279). The poor then are always destined to fail in looking after their health. Health for the Victorians and the characters is marked as just another middle-class accoutrement.

For a Victorian readership, somatic and psychological ills run parallel with moral ills making the acquisition of reader sympathy in Gissing’s work difficult. Gissing wants his readership to sympathise with his protagonists, but acknowledges this may not always be easily achieved, as the narrator explains in *New Grub Street*,

The chances are that you have neither understanding nor sympathy for men such as Edwin and Harold Biffen [...] why don’t they bestir themselves, [...] in short, take a leaf from the book of Jasper Milvain? [...] But try to imagine a personality wholly unfitted for the rough and tumble of the world’s labour market (1891: 462).

He accepts the Milvain way of viewing the world is fashionable, but pleads that despite Reardon and Biffen’s unwillingness to follow trends and medical advice, they are good men who are merely products of the cruel society that they fight and struggle against (1891: 462). In this sense, Gissing and Foucault are comfortable bedfellows, as Foucault has sympathy for those ‘excluded by mainstream standards’ (Gutting, 2005: 6), and although Gissing’s views are by no means as clear, his work endeavours to present the plight of Britain’s less fortunate. He is keen to avoid marking unhealth as simply a product of ‘bad blood’, but Gissing also engages critically with Darwinism, and the question of inheritance is important to him. These are themes discussed in chapters two and three. What is fundamental for Gissing’s characters is their unsuitability to what they are doing in life. He is aware that medicine is another way of controlling the body and underlining poverty, and explores this relationship within his

texts. Medical practices are shown to be ineffective in Gissing's texts and only serve to control and segregate bodies on a political level rather than support and cure weakened bodies. Medicine interrupts the path towards the protagonists' ultimate goal which is death. The medical establishment as Foucault argues is an institution of power and is part of a system instructing what is right and wrong, healthy and unhealthy. In addressing these issues, Gissing must adopt medical discourse and practices, Gissing's ability and success in producing reader sympathy is key to countering what could otherwise be seen as a total complicity with Victorian medical discourse. Realist fiction by its very nature constructs a relationship similar to doctor and patient, as the narrator assumes a powerful and knowledgeable role, with a view to presenting hidden 'truths' to the readership. His rather grubby descriptions could also place him in the realm of the Victorian hospital practitioners, who had an 'unhealthy' fascination with oddities. These characters are not 'circus freaks' per se, but are given thoughts, voices, and more importantly a platform to reader sympathy. What could be questioned is that by inviting the readers' sympathy, Gissing is inviting the reader to enact observation, and thus a manner of 'medical gaze'. By drawing attention to the complexity of this relationship as the acknowledgement that the reader may not sympathise with Biffen and Reardon from *New Grub Street*, Gissing is able to deflect any serious accusations of complicity, but of course the realist novelist needs to be aware of these occupational pitfalls, and Gissing has shown a sensitivity and consciousness of this.

In the next chapter, I will build on the ideas discussed here by drawing on Freud's death drive as defined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. I will use the death drive as a way to address and explain the behaviour of Gissing's 'morbid' characters. The death drive can be described as a natural phenomenon, and one that can be interrupted or obstructed by medicine. The

chapter investigates whether the characters actively seek out unhealth. I will also explore the work of Schopenhauer to some extent, as he influenced and inspired both Gissing and Freud. This is also in an effort to build on the work completed in chapter one, by beginning to provide answers to why Gissing may eschew medicine and mainstream beliefs regarding health.

## CHAPTER 2 – GISSING AND THE DEATH DRIVE

This chapter explores Gissing's characters using Freud's death drive. The death drive is 'a powerful tendency inherent in every living organism to restore a prior state' (Freud, 1920: 76), culminating in an unconscious desire for death. The theory is typified by the unpleasure/pleasure dichotomy, where the mind's aim is to reduce tensions which result in unpleasure and the consequence of the reduction is pleasure (Freud, 1920: 46). This translates in a drive for death as death is the ultimate reduction in tensions. The theory was born out of Freud's dissatisfaction with using the pleasure principle to explain his patients' tendency to repeat traumatic events, hence the title of the main essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920). The theory is discussed primarily in Freud's essays 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', 'The Ego and the Id' (1923), and 'On the Introduction of Narcissism' (1914). The first essay posited the death drive as a biological phenomenon, deriving from animalistic and historical urges (Freud, 1920: 77). 'The Ego and the Id' takes a psychological approach, looking at mental illness in relation to the theory. Freud's 'tentative' presentation of his hypothesis hasn't helped in securing support for the death drive (1920: 46). This is partially why it is controversial and maligned by critics, and because it is an antithesis to the belief that humankind wants to preserve life (Boothby, 1991: 1), but as Freud points out this is only part of the journey to the ultimate aim which is death (Lear, 2000: 83). In this context, the theory is reminiscent of Victorian fears regarding degeneration, as death 'challenge[s] [...] our systems of meaning, order, governance and civilization' (Bronfen and Goodwin, 1993: 4). Essentially, people struggle through life to reach the blissful telos that is death. This was a view also held by Schopenhauer who was admired by Gissing (Halperin, 1982: 8), and could be said to be the discoverer of a proto-death drive. His 'will to live' premise anticipates

Freud's drives encompassing 'striving, impulse, instinct, interest, desire, emotion' (Parker, 1928: xvi). Freud acknowledges Schopenhauer's influence on his theory (Gay, 1988: 391 and 401). Unpleasure comes in many guises: repetition of traumatic experiences, hysteria, and morbidity, and these are the signposts I explore alongside the protagonists arguing they are on a set and marked journey to death. Chapter two explains the causes and motivations of the unfortunate in Gissing's texts, building on the discoveries of chapter one. It looks at how the ominous sense of death pervades throughout creating an inevitability to the outcomes of the protagonists' journeys. Chapter one investigated the anti-medical view of Gissing and how medicine obstructs and oppresses, and this chapter focuses on what is being obstructed: the death drive. Foucault's studies are primarily concerned with institutional power and how this is used to subordinate people, what this chapter does is move the focus to the power of the human drives. The death drive documents the journey towards death and essentially this is the path that Gissing's morbid protagonists are on. Schopenhauer believed that life was a struggle and that it would be better if we hadn't existed (Janaway (a), 1999: 1), and there is a real sense of this throughout Gissing's work, where the reader is presented with existences not lives. The death drive is also seen in narrative, as the reader experiences heightened emotions through the text striving for an end that will of course come. I will explore the death drive in both character and narrative analysis. As fiction provides a journey for both character and reader alike, the death drive is a way of reading this journey. The theory looks towards death or the end of the text as its main goal, so not only does it enable the scholar to look at death as an event in itself but also map the path to get there.

Unhealth enables the individual to be closer to death, gaining an element of knowing death however incomplete. As Cutting proclaims '[w]e never experience death itself, since we are

always still alive in the final moments of dying' (2005: 3). In a burgeoning secular environment in the late nineteenth-century, death no longer promised a 'life' beyond death but complete oblivion with no God, no heaven or afterlife, so to desire this end was to desire nothingness. However, Freud stated that it had become 'more complex' for an individual to reach their 'death-goal', that there were more intricate routes leading up to death (1920: 79). In essence, modern life made it difficult for people to satisfy their desire for death. As discussed in chapter one the medical profession had become more unified and standardised during the *fin de siècle*, resulting in a more focused medical effort (Cherry, 1996: 28). Their endeavour was to prolong life and treat death as unwelcome and something that could be fended off, working against what Freud saw as natural drives and urges. Despite this mentality, late Victorian novelists presented 'various styles of dying' for an expanding readership (Stewart, cited in Cutting, 2005: 3). As examined in chapter one, Gissing's lack of medical professionals helps to add to the sense of death being inevitable, and even welcomed.

Before investigating the death drive alongside the protagonists, I want to explore the prophetic promise of death which provides a narrative backdrop to the texts. *The Nether World*'s Mrs Hewett looks 'as if she had herself risen from a coffin' (1889: 38), as she tries to defend Jane against Clem's threats to shut her in with her grandmother's coffin. Mrs Hewett has recently given birth and the effort has sucked the life-blood out of her, and when the reader first meets her, her baby is at her breast, prompting the narrator to ask whether 'the poor woman could supply sustenance to another being' (1889: 16). She has suffered a societal death but has yet to experience her biological death at this stage, resulting in a strange limbo, an undead state. The dead often return as they have not been killed properly, and for these characters their death is only partial at this stage. They don't exist for polite society but

their biology has yet to catch up with this initial death. Clara's future attacker in *The Nether World* Grace is described as 'bloodless' (1889: 208), presenting a body that has been through lividity. Grace coughs up blood through illness (1889: 207), but this both portrays a body dying through unhealth and a body that is preparing itself for death through a living embalming process. A preserved body is uncanny as it captures the image of the living in death. Kristeva typifies the cadaver as both 'cesspool and death' (1982: 3), something uncomfortable, abject, 'death infecting life' (4). Of course these figures *aren't* corpses, but more terrifyingly an in-between, 'draw[ing] attention to the fragility' of life (Kristeva, 1982: 4). They are prophetic visitations illustrating the demise yet to come. This in-between uncanny state is an identity crisis seen in unhealth as it takes the original object and changes it slightly. Those experiencing this crisis create a sense of dread; they are metonymic for impending doom and the inevitability of unhealth and death. London is a ghost town, saturated by death, but for many of the ghost-like figures their death drive is unsatisfied. These unsatisfied deaths heighten and anticipate the satisfaction and release to come through the protagonists' deaths. The end of the narrative is essentially what provides meaning for what has passed (Brooks, 1995: 22) and Gissing offers the ultimate end only to his main protagonists. The relentless torture for the other characters heightens the tension alongside the anxiety of the protagonists, but also provides a contrast to the inevitable release of the main characters. They are in a perilous state of limbo; a living death, but Gissing offers them a narrative as a way of grounding them in history which isn't always available for the undead.

To take this marked journey to death, a character must be ill-fit to life and thus susceptible to the more extreme aspects of the death drive. This is most certainly true of Gissing's

protagonists. This strange existence, a symptomatic malaise of modern life, of feeling out of place from social death is something Freud acknowledged,

[He] derided civilization for asking too much of people. In general he thought that the middle classes were victimized by their own attempts to live beyond their psyches' means (Edmundson, 2003: xi).

This mirrors the persistent theme of Gissing's work, where his protagonists are constantly battling their unsuitability to their chosen lives. This theme underpins the characters' motivations and what eventually leads to many of their ruins, or death. Gissing saw modern society as enervating and corrupting and mental illness was thought to be a product of this (Bourne Taylor, 2007: 18). In the novels we see society, especially in London, as pressured and particularly cruel to those seemingly 'unfit' for purpose. This is seen in *The Nether World*, as Clara Hewett battles with her underclass background. Her father has mistakenly directed her education to that of someone beyond her class, serving to make his daughter wretchedly unhappy (1889: 81-82). Gissing had this experience too, educated for one class but eventually inhabiting another (Halperin, 1982: 5). Clara tells Sidney Kirkwood that she will not return home to her father and on returning to her lodgings, cuts her hand on a pane of glass. The narrator describes her mentality,

It is a phase of exasperated egotism common enough in original natures frustrated by circumstance – never so pronounced as in those who suffer from the social disease (1889: 94).

The choice of the term 'social disease' is interesting, suggesting a wider cultural melancholy, but also one that feeds into the idea of degeneration. Her mindset at this point is one of wanting 'to plunge herself into ruin' in an effort to 'sate her instincts of defiance' (1889: 94). 'Satiating instincts' is fundamentally what drives push for and this suggests the satisfaction Freud believes we will find in death. Clara is remarkable as Gissing doesn't allow her death drive to be satisfied but she is stained by death through her scarring. This

serves only to add to her torture, as she has a visible sign of how close she was to satisfaction, to death. Clara's scarring marks her as Other, and this is also seen in the protagonists' death instincts which act as indentations within the texts, drawing reader attention, marking them out further. Her unsuitability to her life is a visible manifestation of the death drive.

*New Grub Street*'s Edwin Reardon is a larger case in point. His friend Jasper introduces him through a framework of unsuitability to his chosen life, maintaining Reardon would make more money 'if his mind were at rest and he'd married a work-girl' (1891: 37), sentiments later echoed by Reardon (1891: 474). The reader soon realises Reardon has inherited bad traits and is doomed to repeat these. His father was a failure in business who became unhappily married to a woman above his station (1891: 87). Henry Maudsley, a pioneer of *fin-de-siècle* psychological study, felt that illness was a 'punishment' for past sin, a belief Gissing explores in his texts (Bourne Taylor, 2007: 20). Here, the sins of Reardon's father are visited upon him in an inherited nightmare. Reardon's desperation for artistic prowess underlines many of his problems. Sadly, Reardon is striving for genius but is only capable of mediocrity (1891: 84), and as Schopenhauer states 'life is a *disappointment*' (1913: 14). Milvain urges his friend to adapt to the market giving Reardon a title for his next novel 'The Weird Sisters' (1891: 106), (an almost prophetic nod towards *The Odd Women*). This is in an effort to focus Reardon's creativity towards the sensationalist appetites of the readers. The title is in stark contrast to that of Reardon's failed novel *The Optimist*, which brings to mind romanticism, idealism, a more philosophical approach to novel-writing (1891: 109). This title also presents an interesting marker to Reardon's journey to death. *The Optimist* is life-affirming but conversely it points to the bliss in the inevitability of death. Reardon's overly cerebral approach is what marks him as a failure and what exacerbates his anxiety regarding this.

Reardon's 'obsessional neurosis [...] disrupts the work process' by making him distracted and focus on 'things unnecessarily' (Freud, 1926: 155).

Clara and Reardon don't belong to the society that has produced them, so the only desire that can be successfully met is death. Society rejects them and as a result of this they seek pleasure and satisfaction in the most solitary of pursuits, death. Of course, as discussed earlier Clara doesn't satisfy her death drive, but she periodically acknowledges the unconscious desire for death within as she contemplates jumping from the tenement, 'she dreaded to quit the tenement, lest a power distinct from will should seize and hurl her to destruction' (1889: 275). For Reardon, he constantly wants to 'have done with life and responsibilities altogether' (1891: 151). *The Odd Women*'s Monica recognises the terror of the social death that her sisters have experienced and confides in Mildred 'I had rather, oh far rather, kill myself than live such a life at their age' (1893:125). The death drive is about 'breaking' or 'preventing' unions (Heimann, 1952: 325), and here the unsuitability of these characters to their lives is what stops them from becoming part of 'normal' Victorian society. They are haemorrhaging from the body politic. The desire for the end mirrors the readers' desire too, as the reader ultimately wants to finish the text, resulting in matched sympathies between reader and protagonist. The reader also wants to cling to the text as it is an object of pleasure, so there is always a tension between these feelings whilst reading.

Unsuitability to life results in hysteria and/or neurasthenia which are the manifestation of both repetition and unpleasure. They are also symptoms of frustrated death drives. Freud posits that a protective barrier exists in the mind preventing an overload of stimulus, traumatic neurosis 'result[s] from an extensive breach of the protective barrier' (1920: 70). Hysteria is

characterised as emotional excess, and neurasthenia by lethargy and depression. Both sets of symptoms have been ascribed to either condition. Hysteria is seen as a female or working-class complaint (Showalter, 1997: 15), but Gissing doesn't distinguish between the conditions, implying that his sufferers are like himself, between classes. Gissing believes that a 'psychological analysis of character [is] necessary now-a-days' (1883, cited in Korg, 1978: 29), and by focusing on his protagonists' mental unrest offers tantalising glimpses of the inner workings of the human condition for the reader. *The Whirlpool*'s Alma is one example, fluctuating between high energy (1897: 270) and exhaustion (170). Victorian doctors had difficulty classifying and treating neuroses and at any given time the malady was a sign of 'evolutionary progress' or 'hereditary taint' (Vrettos, 1995: 51-52). In relation to the death drive, this fluctuation represents the heightened tensions of unpleasure with a release of energy at the end, a mini-death as it were. Failure to reach death results in hysteria. Alma experiences a phase where she can't pick up the violin, as 'the sound of music grew hateful to her, as if mocking at her ruined ambition' (1897: 68). To heighten the cruelty of her predicament she hears music when she is 'over-wearied' and slowly descending into ruin (1897: 263), marking Alma's atrophy as decadent. Gissing gives the reader examples of atavistic returns, but here he promotes the idea of the degenerate aesthete due to Alma's grand dreams of living the artist's life. After this episode, her headache is said to have left behind a 'nervous disorder' (1897: 263-264), which Wood notes as neurasthenia (2005: 176).

Episodes of hysteria and neurasthenia in the texts show a flux between moods, from high energy to low energy. The periods of frustration or unpleasurable binding are followed by a pleasurable release in death. *New Grub Street*'s Edwin Reardon's 'mental suffering' is etched all over his countenance (1891: 77). He constantly works when very ill (1891: 160, 179, and

222), heightening the tensions he experiences when his body and mind are already at breaking point. Gissing lists Reardon's illnesses from 'influenzas, sore throats [to] lumbagoes' reinforcing the repetitive nature of his predicament, especially as the ailments have been occurring '[f]or several years' (1891: 160). Gissing advised his brother Algernon to

'[D]o your best to hold out against mental trouble. If I had yielded to it, my work would have ceased some years back' (1883, cited in Korg, 1978: 31).

He recognises the difficulties of writing whilst mentally strained. The difficulty of Reardon continuing his writing whilst in this state is remarkable, especially as Freud states 'organic illness' and 'organic pain' results in a lack of interest in external things ((a), 1914: 11).

Reardon is in conflict with a natural state to retreat and rest when ill. Victorian nervous disease, especially in men could be seen as 'trivial' and of the 'sufferer's imagination' (Chambers, 1880: 225), but Gissing is keen to show how unbearable Reardon's life is.

Gissing's good friend H. G. Wells wrote that 'the *genre* of Gissing's novels is nervous exhaustion' (cited in Halperin, 1982: 7), marking the protagonists as in a dangerous degenerative state. *The Whirlpool*'s Harvey Rolfe talks of over-excitement and work being a cultural malaise,

There's the whirlpool of the furiously busy. Round and round they go; brains humming till they melt or explode (1897: 157).

This is during a conversation with Mary Abbott who has been getting requests from parents for her to take over the care of their children because they 'upset[...]' their lives (1897: 156).

This behaviour is repeated through Alma who will neglect her children because of her decadent lifestyle. To defend against this malaise and to satisfy her death drive Alma starts relying on opiates to reach 'blessed unconsciousness' (1897: 305). Her over-excited mind is unable to reach a state of rest and peace on its own, so she has to seek something beyond her for relaxation. Glover believes her life is the 'manifestation of the death drive' (2005: 88) and

her addiction is the continual desire for oblivion. Any addiction suggests a desire to escape oneself, even if momentarily, and of course there is a cycle of repetition. Her doctor exposes her habit to Harvey or rather he tells him he's made an 'unpleasant discovery' (1897: 386), and her secret lifestyle eventually kills her giving her the ultimate satisfaction following another night of 'insomnia' and 'great anguish' (448). *The Odd Women's* Virginia also seeks oblivion through her alcoholism. Her first drink follows a panic attack, an example of the life drives torturing her (1893: 22), and she seeks a moment of release and oblivion to destroy them. The narrative presents a woman with a rather bleak future ahead and her drinking is the sign that she too acknowledges this fact. The alcohol provides sustenance that she can't find in her meagre meals, job prospects or relationships. The reader has seen the endless cycle of mental health problems that result from the protagonists' journey to death, but there are also cycles of physical behaviour that affirm this journey further. The idea of a cycle of behaviour or repetition is one of the key components of the death drive. Many of the protagonists display a masochistic cycle of behaviour, which is both painful and destructive. Freud 'believed that we are all inclined – many of us are doomed – to repeat, and what we repeat is disaster' (Edmundson, 2003: vii). Freud considered this was in an effort to gain control over traumatic events, but is also heightened unpleasure (1920: 54). What Freud calls 'unpleasure' results from repetition (1920: 58).

*New Grub Street's* Reardon's physical repetition comes through in his writing as he constantly starts novels and doesn't finish them (1891: 79 and 153). When looking at the first page of his novel, Reardon is reminded of the extreme effort and pain that went into its creation (1891: 233). This cycle of behaviour serves to reinforce Reardon's fear that he is a failure but still he pursues this career, repeating these trials *ad infinitum*. This state is limbo,

as stated earlier it cements the dead/alive existence. Freud believed that repetition derived from repression ((b), 1914: 38). This 'binding' is painful as it is a 'postponement in the discharge of energy' which heightens the tension (Brooks, 1995: 101). For Schopenhauer 'life is a task to be done' (1913: 15), and as with any task it is difficult and exhausting.

Maximising the release both Reardon and the reader will feel when he dies, even when he is on his deathbed his mind returns to those painful moments of excessive struggle,

For the most part the sufferer's mind was occupied with revival of the distress he had undergone whilst making those last efforts to write something worthy of himself (1891: 487).

Even in his final moments, Reardon is clearly at the mercy of the life and death drives. He experiences a last burst of repetitive hysteria before he passes to peace.

Alma Rolfe in *The Whirlpool* is also victim of such behaviour, as her husband Harvey notes she is in the habit of becoming bored with her creative pursuits such as watercolours, and takes them up enthusiastically only to lose interest shortly after (1897: 136). Brooks states that 'turning back from immediate pleasure, [...] ensure[s] that the ultimate pleasurable discharge will be more complete' (1995: 101-102). This is both in the sense for characters and readers, and Alma's stop-start existence both frustrates and anticipates the release to come. She fluctuates between nervous energy and exhaustion, a degenerative state. This state is one of disorder, encapsulating the idea of entropy, and like entropy the death drive can only move in one direction, following the arrow of time. This cycle of repetitive behaviour troubles Harvey, prompting him to ponder over 'questions of heredity' (1897: 136). Like Reardon, Alma isn't from promising stock. Her father and mother literally wore themselves out. Her father Bennet Frothingham shoots himself after ruining his company Britannia Loans (1897: 44). Her mother 'had excited herself beyond measure' during a theatre visit

(1897: 136). As the title *The Whirlpool* implies, there is an inevitability to Alma's demise; there is the entrance into the vortex, culminating in a life-drive induced turbulent and nauseating journey to only one outcome.

There is also repetition in the different kinds of death portrayed. On meeting with Jasper Milvain and his sister Dora, Whelpdale exclaims that Reardon is 'the ghost of his old self'

(1891: 305). Reardon proclaims,

The man Edwin Reardon, whose name was sometime spoken in a tone of interest, is really and actually dead. And what remains of me is resigned to that. I have an odd fancy that it will make death itself easier; it is as if only half of me had now to die (1891: 473).

Within Reardon's speech manifests the notion of the death drive, where living is dying. There is a sense here of a double death, acknowledging the repetitive elements of the death drive. Death is a solitary endeavour, a feeling of abjection in the sense of being marginalised but also in this example feeling caught between life and death. Reardon is dead, non-existent, in his usefulness in Victorian Britain, to his wife, and in terms of his art. His initial death is a social one that predicts his biological death. In essence it is a return but without the return. Both Schopenhauer and Freud likened life to dying, and here Reardon contemplates his failure as a writer, acknowledging this belief. Freud states that repetition enables the individual to master their painful experience, and for Gissing's characters it acts as an affirmation of the journey to death. It is their desire to die and by repeating they signify an effort towards death.

Both Alma and Reardon in the masochistic self-sabotage of their careers are also driving their potential for 'life beyond death' into an unmarked grave. By scuppering their careers, their

legacy won't be intact, in effect marking their end as extinction rather than death. The behaviour is regressive in the sense that they don't complete anything, they only find themselves back at the beginning again. Reardon is a victim of 'endless circling, perpetual beginning, followed by frustration', suggesting his efforts produce no satisfaction (1891: 153). The narrator states 'he was on the border-land of imbecility', where through his repetition and unhealth he is close to the prior state, regressing to a more primitive being (1891: 153), which could be read as either the effeminate aesthete or the child-like atavist. As Reardon is a writer, and thus an artist, the effeminate aesthete is more appropriate here. This signifies his abjection even further, and also how he could be viewed as part of a social disease that was undermining British strength. He is stained by death through his failures and behaviour which is against the progressive, life-affirming vitality of the Imperial project.

These fluctuations and repetitions show swings between unpleasure and pleasure. Working in connection with unpleasure, is of course pleasure. Freud expresses pleasure as the decrease in 'excitation' (1920: 46). Pleasure also offers stability, whereas unpleasure moves towards instability. Freud believed that the psychic system 'seeks to release the tension of accumulated excitations and to promote an equilibrium of psychic energies' (Boothby, 1991: 2). This management of energy draws from thermodynamic laws, which focus on the conservation and efficiency of energy. Pleasure, then, is a state of rest, or the approach to it. Death is described as the 'day of final pacification' after a 'struggle onward from compromise to compromise' in *The Nether World* (1889: 386). The nostalgic Henry Ryecroft also muses that 'quiet' and 'thoughtful stillness' would make the world a happier and better place (1903: 6). Pleasure is the release of energy, and the most satisfying release is death.

To end both the characters' and readers' journey is the event itself, death. It is the pinnacle of pleasure in Freud's theory. What is interesting is where Gissing's protagonists die; Reardon, Alma, Monica, Ryecroft, and Peak all die away from central London, affirming a return to the beginning. The countryside has a strong affiliation with nature, which in turn is feminine, suggesting the womb. Gissing doesn't discuss the appearance of the resulting cadavers, in effect lending more credence to the state of nothingness, extinction. This also gives more to the belief of death being welcome, blissful releases, as the less palatable aspects of death like the corpses are dismissed. The 'grim' instead is seen in life. Alma's death is fascinating, as it may as well be in parenthesis. It is as if she is absent from the event, as she doesn't appear at breakfast and the chapter closes with the doctor uttering '[w]e warned her' (1897: 448). The cadavers for Gissing are those that remain to wander the streets of London. These deaths also occur towards the end of the novels, signifying the return of the book as object with the spine no longer under tension to a closed state; a death drive in text form. Both Freud and Schopenhauer typified death as a 'release' (Jacquette, 1999: 293), and as the novels end the reader experiences a release from the anxiety of worrying about the characters. Gissing controversially marks this release as bitter sweet for the reader. The death of the narrative provides no peace, resolution for the reader, as there is no happy ending. Gissing may present a peace for his protagonists through their deaths, but this doesn't necessarily translate into total satisfaction for the reader.

For Kermode apocalyptic endings in fiction 'satisfy our needs' (1968: 5), and this can extend to both narrative and character endings. There is something neat, final and complete about following a protagonist right up to their death, however moving or upsetting that may be. Kermode believes that an end in fiction is a 'figure for [our] own deaths' (1968: 7). The

reader feels somehow that they have glimpsed at death. Gissing promotes this inevitability in an effort to obtain reader satisfaction, even though as discussed earlier this isn't overwhelming. Walter Benjamin believes that fiction gives us 'the knowledge of death which is denied to us in our own lives' (Brooks, 1995: 22). Characters already experiencing unhealth go through a process. Firstly, they seek out more complicated and difficult situations, and then seek peace. This aiming towards heightened excitement could be to heighten the pleasure even more when the final release arrives. Instead of coming from factors outside, the protagonists' deaths are caused from within, marking their demise as inevitable. Death is the only way they can find peace, be that from their environment, family, inherited traits, and failures, and constant 'striving' (Janaway (b), 1999: 333). For Schopenhauer 'striving' displayed dissatisfaction or deficiency in life, and that death resulted in the cessation of these antagonisms (Janaway (b), 1999: 333). For the most part Gissing implies morbid attitudes are inherited only to be compounded by environment and circumstance. Gissing shows this is unavoidable, there are no quick fixes to their troubles and unhealth. They are at odds with society, and their lives are troubled, erratic; Eros and Thanatos battling together until the end is reached. This is something acknowledged by another supporter of the death drive Melanie Klein, who recognised 'eternal struggle between love and death trends' (1952: 272). Death is the most humane and dignified end, and in the cases of those who commit suicide, it may offer the last semblance of self-respect in the sense that these characters exercise more control than they could in their everyday lives. Suicide for a Victorian readership is 'a pathological deviation from the norm and thus a case of social morbidity' (Cutting, 2005: 145). Gissing believes like Schopenhauer freedom is death (Dollimore, 1998: 173). As Bella Royston in *The Odd Women* states in her suicide note, 'she chose death' (1893: 142), it is a state that is desired. His protagonists' discomfort is

relentless, and with no satisfactory solution to their problems Gissing knowingly posits death as their only escape route. As Freud discovers with the death drive, there is a marked and acknowledged journey to death for these characters. All of their narrative signposts point to one ending, death. The reader's experience of reading a novel is also a way of enacting the death drive, striving onwards towards the end, following the heightened emotions of the twists and turns of the plot until a closure is reached. Some may argue that Gissing's novels rarely offer a satisfying resolution, but the cycle of the story is complete nonetheless. Phillips describes the death drive as 'the silent unsettler of our lives, and not merely the nihilist lurking in our souls' (1999: 74), and Gissing is the nihilist directing the drives and urges of his novels. Both *New Grub Street*'s Reardon and Biffen depart this world uttering Shakespeare's

We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep (cited in Gissing, 1891: 490 and 592).

In both its Shakespearian context and in *New Grub Street*, there is the belief that one begins and then returns to sleep, completing the cycle. This quote also self-consciously draws attention to the writer's art. Prospero has represented Shakespeare as orchestrator of what has passed in the play, and Gissing here addresses the fragility of his characters' lives, as he can easily dispose of his creations, but at the same time he is trying to make sense of death. Brooks muses that folktales are narratives as 'thinking', 'reasoning about a situation' (1995: 9). Gissing's deaths aren't senseless, they are desired, welcomed, needed. Nature is embraced as the all-knowing exactor of life and death marking Gissing's deaths as both necessity and necessary.

In chapter three I will explore the notion of eugenics, and take Gissing's statement that '[o]ne cause of national degradation, now-a-days, is the success of medicine in keeping alive the unfit' as a prompt (cited in Glover, 2005: 90). Medical authority and philanthropy are explored as areas that work against nature and the greater national good. A pioneer of eugenic thought, Francis Galton, claims that any philanthropic intervention is detrimental to the development of the English population (Richardson, 2003: 61). I will explore who gets ill and who dies in the texts, and as chapter two explored the inevitability of this, chapter three will focus on whether these characters are part of a moral or deserving cull. Chapter two stated that the protagonists' deaths were inevitable because of inherited traits, elements that couldn't be changed or there could be no intervention where the outcome could be favourable. The unfortunates are marked as coming from bad stock. They are an example of eugenics at work, as they are unable and barred from procreating successfully. Where chapter two began to introduce the idea of 'bad stock', chapter three will penetrate further and look at Victorian attitudes towards these beliefs.

### CHAPTER THREE - GISSING AND EUGENICS

This chapter continues from chapter two by exploring further who dies in the texts and whether this represents a moral cull. Chapter two explored the possible motivations behind characters' behaviour through the lens of Freud's death drive, and began to discover whether this was hereditary. It concluded that the characters struggle with their unsuitability to their chosen lives which marks a journey to a welcomed death. This chapter argues that Gissing reproduces eugenic and degenerative thought to justify and produce the inevitability of his protagonists' deaths. The topic of eugenics has received recent attention in the *New Formations* series (Burdett, 2007: 7-12), and is still an area for more investigation in literature. Chapter two's discussion of death viewed it as pleasurable for the protagonists, whereas in this chapter death is seen in eugenic terms as justice for those that remain, a necessary procedure. I argue in this chapter that despite engaging reader sympathy for his protagonists, and seemingly offering them the most humane end through death, Gissing is supporting eugenic dogma by allowing his healthy middle-class characters to lead a blissful family life, even extending his views into the realm of the negative by eventually culling the unhealthy. The eugenic message that encourages reproduction amongst the 'healthy' middle classes is called positive eugenics (Mazumdar, 1992: 3), as opposed to the negative eugenic message of mass extermination. Gissing's protagonists experience a death penalty as they are a 'biological danger to others' (Foucault, 1976: 137-138). I explore the texts alongside eugenic beliefs as propounded by eugenicist and statistician Francis Galton. A cousin of Charles Darwin's, Galton 'coined' the term eugenics in 1883 to describe the improvement of stock (Richardson, 2003: 2). The Eugenics Society proper wasn't founded until 1907, and brought together members of Victorian organisations such as the Moral Education Society,

the Charity Organisation Society, and other groups concerned with such issues as the care of the 'feeble-minded' and preventing alcoholism (Mazumdar, 1992: 7-9). I expose who Gissing shows as good or bad stock, representing wider Victorian concerns regarding the state of the nation's inhabitants. Good stock, as the term suggests, captures traits that are beneficial to the national cause, such as strength and health. Bad stock is anything working against this, so anyone deemed unhealthy. This group was usually made up of those from the lower classes. It was felt that these traits were the result of inheritance. For the Victorians, the idea of eugenics was wrapped up in class anxieties (Richardson, 2003: xvii), and Gissing was 'obsessed' with 'class' (Halperin, 1982: 4). Chapter three partially takes its structure from aims outlined in an essay by Galton on positive eugenics titled 'Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims' (1904). He states that studies must be done on identifying the most useful classes, what circumstances contribute towards large and thriving families, and what influences produce good and bad marriages (1904: 38-41). I will investigate these concerns in Gissing's texts to show his Galtonian leanings.

By exploring what Gissing and many Victorians saw as good stock, I will look at the classes Galton deemed as useful. This group were seen to contribute the most to the national effort, similar to chapter one's observations of medicine's 'model man' (Foucault, 1963: 34).

Whether an individual falls into the category of bad or good stock is not only a question of unhealth but also one of usefulness, and one follows the other in Gissing's novels.

Unsurprisingly the best examples of good stock in Gissing's work can be found in the novels concerned with the middle classes. Galton thought there should be a 'caste' of those who were 'hereditarily remarkable' to encourage breeding amongst this group (Forrest, 1974: 135), and Gissing too may allow different classes to be acquaintances but he shows that true success

in partnerships and relationships in same class pairings. This idea goes beyond class by suggesting any character that is deemed impractical, decadent, or of course suffering unhealth, is bad stock. *New Grub Street* presents the best examples of these lessons. Reardon's marriage to Amy is defined as a bad match and one that takes the 'gloriously strong' Amy from '[n]ot [having] a day of illness in her life' (1891: 95), to becoming 'worn out', 'thin and pale' during her marriage to Reardon (278 and 280). Amy belongs to the middle classes and complicit with middle-class and nationalistic efforts, capitalism, and wanting to be a good mother. Gissing illustrates problems with cross-class and more pertinently cross-stock partnerships. Cross-stock partnerships refer to the mixing of seemingly good groups of British Victorian society such as the hard-working middle classes, and less favourable groups including the poor and those that are deemed deviant. This was seen as an issue to many Victorians including Gissing as this mixing would compromise the breeding of a healthy race (Richardson, 2003: 26). Especially in light of Amy's deterioration to possible degenerative neurasthenic symptoms, Gissing shows how good stock is unable to lift the bad, bad stock instead drags down the good. Reardon's friend Biffen summarises their unsuitability for modern life, 'we have both of us too little practicality' and that means they are of no use to British causes and are disposable (1891: 476). Gissing marks Amy as superior to her husband in her class, practicality and health which helps to intensify Reardon's abjection but also illustrates more deep-seated ideas regarding eugenics, as both characters have very different endings. This shows Amy to be of good stock. Their futures begin entwined as a married couple, only for this connection to unravel with Reardon dying following prolonged mental anguish, and Amy marrying the ardent capitalist Milvain in a successful and happy match. Gissing argues there is no surprise in these endings as they are determined by inherited biology.

For Galton eugenics was a national project, where protecting the good stock was an Imperial responsibility, as he felt Britons,

[P]lant our stock all over the world and lay the foundation of the dispositions and capacities of future millions of the human race (1901: 34).

In *The Whirlpool* there are many references to colonial strength and health in contrast to Alma's degeneration. This was very much in the minds of prominent Victorians, with one army official decrying the falling height of soldiers and claiming that '[i]t is no use having an Empire, without an Imperial Race' (Rosebury, cited in Vrettos, 1995: 124). Hugh Carnaby is described as 'powerful' someone who with a bit more intellect would have been 'the best type of conquering, civilising Briton' (1897: 8-9). Rolfe and Carnaby share memories of hunting Ibex in Cyprus in a display of British masculine power and usefulness (1897: 11). The image simultaneously brings to mind the 'useful' early man hunting to provide for his family, but also the 'useless', decadent loafer aimlessly hunting for sport. Gissing's narrative yearns for a simpler more productive time, whilst subtly suggesting the fears of having a nation full of the 'useless'. In this context, the narrator is producing the male antithesis to the soon-to-be introduced females. These powerful, fine examples of British manhood are at risk from degenerative, 'languid' females such as Alma and the aptly named Mrs Strangeways (1897: 264). As noted earlier, cross-stock relationships are doomed and dangerous, and the mix of Rolfe's British hunter and Alma's hysterical aesthete is a catastrophic cocktail. Rolfe doesn't succumb to modern life as his wife does (Wood, 2005: 173), suggesting that due to their heightened emotions and fragility females are more susceptible to mental unrest. In fact when the reader first meets Rolfe, he concurs with eugenic thought and states that we don't want to fill the world with too many people and 'let us be healthy' (1897: 13). This statement

highlights Rolfe's awareness of the pitfalls of modern life as opposed to Alma's frivolity. As further proof of Alma's lack of national effort, Carnaby thinks

[w]hat business had she to be running at large about London, giving concerts, making herself ill and ugly, whilst her little son was left to a governess and servants? (1897: 279).

*The Whirlpool* presents a microcosm, revealing the distinction between Britain's good and bad stock through Rolfe's past employment. Rolfe's old job at the emigration office was about distinguishing between good and bad stock, and deciding who was fit to be a 'colonist', but all of his cases are wretched creatures (1897: 22-23), playing into the fear that the British race was degenerating. Rolfe has it in his power to effectively rid the nation of its bad stock, leaving behind the 'best of British', but in sending out Britain's refuse to populate the colonies the Imperial programme is undermined. The role of author mirrors Rolfe's old employment, in that Gissing also has to distinguish between good and bad stock in his narrative and act accordingly. Like Rolfe, Gissing has to make a judgement and justify his subsequent action. The protagonists' deaths are justified by their behaviour due to inherited traits.

Galton felt that the nation's useless or bad stock required observation and like Charles Booth who urged that the poor should be split so the hardworking could get on (Richardson, 2003: 21), Galton split the population based on their 'civic worth' (Forrest, 1974: 250). This represents how useful they are to the nation and whether they are a drain on resources. This is also true of Gissing's characters. For Gissing, any character that has experienced ill-usage, unhealth, poverty, or any acutely stressful experience is unable to fully relegate those incidents to the past. They are permanently stained and these traumas have become part of their biology. For Victorians, the health of one body came to stand for the health of the whole

social body (Vrettos, 1995: 125), and any individual imbalance could disrupt the national equilibrium. These disturbances can't be fixed and it is futile to try. As Sidney Kirkwood reflects on Clara's predicament to Jane's grandfather in *The Nether World*, he asks '[h]ow can she help her nature?' (1889: 102). The statement alone captures Darwin's approach to nature, where it is fixed, incontestable. If Clara could help her nature, she would be the subject of a Lamarckian view, and one that Gissing clearly dismisses. In addition to her nature, the extreme conditions of Clara's upbringing are a constant burden to her, forcing her on a journey to escape them, leading to disappointment. *The Nether World*'s Jane Snowdon is another example, as she is unable to escape her childhood sufferings in adulthood (1889: 135). Both characters are deemed bad stock, and their traumatic childhoods are not only a symptom of feeble beginnings but also a way to compound the obstacles of wanting to escape them. Gissing constantly refers to Jane's 'hysteria' (1889: 136), fainting fits and inability to cope with any exertion, making the connection between these episodes and her childhood suffering (224). Jane's subsequent push into burdensome philanthropy is representative of the burden placed on Britain through its ailing inhabitants. Her journey subverts the sentimental rags to riches tale expected by those used to a Dickensian narrative, marking Gissing as a more realistic novelist. Gissing's bleak subject matter and narrative development belongs to its *fin-de-siècle* surroundings, with its fears, frustrations, and focus on 'the end'.

The most disposable and useless of Britain's bad stock were the urban poor or 'residuum' (Greenslade, 2010: 23). Victorians believed that disease sprang forth from filth and travelled in miasmas, and originated from the diseased and dangerous poor classes (Haley, 1978: 10). The Victorian East End for many was as 'alien and unknown as Africa' (DeVine, 2005: 15), depicting the urban poor as racially other. Galton agrees with Booth's assessment of this

class as not ‘render[ing] any useful service’ and ‘creat[ing] no wealth’ (1901: 19). The urban poor are often described in terms of vermin and pestilence, especially in *The Nether World*, captured *en masse* with terms such as ‘swarm’ (1889: 110). Adding to the idea of the poor as vermin is a discourse of a reproductively potent group of people producing ‘one baby, two babies, three babies’ (1889: 56). This presents a eugenic nightmare where the wrong pool of stock breeds uncontrollably and one that Gissing reproduces. Here John Hewett struggles to provide for his growing family and Gissing shows how even for Hewett as a father, his family are as parasitic on him as they are seen to be on the nation. For a middle-class readership these sordid representations ‘offered a titillating glance’ into the hidden corners of London (Allen, 2008: 2). Gissing’s close friend H. G. Wells presents in *The Time Machine* ‘[t]he biologization of poverty’ (Richardson, 2003: 21-22), where the Morlocks are the savage future of Britain’s underclass, and the Eloi the enervated upper classes. Gissing viewed class in ‘biological terms’ too (Glover, 2005: 80), and by making poverty a biological trait, reform or aid is rendered futile. In *The Nether World* the narrator states that Clem Peckover has been grown from ‘putrid soil’ to become an ‘evilly-fostered growth’ (1889: 8), as though the very fabric of her being is as indecent as her attitude, and what Gissing is suggesting here is that the two go hand in hand. Gissing replicates eugenic ideas regarding the lower classes to justify his divisions. Despite acknowledging the problems facing the urban poor, Gissing still adopts eugenic discourse in describing these individuals.

Between Lombroso’s criminals and atavistic throwbacks, and Nordau’s decadent aesthetes, degeneration encompasses all classes, and all classes in the novels display the degenerative symptoms of exhaustion (Nordau, 1895: 40). The first law of thermodynamics, ‘the conservation of energy’ was discovered in the 1840s and made Victorians aware of energy

consumption in body and mind (Vrettos, 1995: 23). The characters suffer from fatigue stemming from either over-work or over-excitement, highlighting the late Victorian fear of the nation wearing itself out. *New Grub Street*'s Reardon is one such example. His friend Jasper Milvain describes him as 'over-worked' and consequently someone who is more likely to commit suicide (1891: 36). He is 'unfit for the rough and tumble' of the modern world (462), and for Galton, men of good stock were 'glorying in the rough-and-tumble' of life not shying away from it like Reardon (cited in Forrest, 1974: 93). The example continues with how both Reardon and Biffen are 'worthless' and this introduces the now imminent deaths of both characters (1891: 462). This reiterates eugenic dogma where a higher stock of human beings is desired. Gissing suggests that when those who are 'unfit' try to strive for what is beyond their means, they will suffer and make themselves ill. This implies a personal responsibility for their own destruction as well as a pre-determined susceptibility to such episodes.

In *The Whirlpool* Alma experiences over-tiredness (1897: 170), worryingly calling to mind her mother's death from over-excitement (136). Wood believes the novel 'situate[s] narratives of nervous breakdown at the problematic intersection of biological theories of determinism and cultural anxieties' that stem from the pressures of modern life (2005: 167). Her musical ambitions also put her amongst the dangerous group of decadent aesthetes. Her father's business is described in degenerative terms, as the Britannia loan company is said to have served its 'pestilent course' (1897: 45). It exhausts its clients' life-blood by losing their money, creating more dependents on an already faltering society. It is a degenerative nightmare of corruption and disease destroying all like the whirlpool. Galton believes that those suffering mental unhealth are 'the most dangerous class of all' (1909: 82), and Alma is

not only a victim of the whirlpool, but is the nucleus of one too, as she has the potential to drag her husband, son and friends down with her like her father's business. Gissing again agrees with Galton's assessment of those suffering mental turmoil and by describing how her behaviour affects her family and friends, the severity of having people with these conditions within the community is shown to the readers. This bolsters Gissing's cause and supports his extreme aim to kill off his dangerous breed of protagonists.

Virginia's vegetarianism in *The Odd Women* is a sign of an under-nourished frame showing an irresponsible attitude to the maintenance of Britain's strength (1893: 12). The narrator talks of 'the poverty, or vitiation, of her blood' (1893: 14), suggesting her body is lacking nourishment and her very life-blood is a weakened mix affecting her looks and strength. The sisters are from a faltering stock. Their mother is dead, suffering from 'secret anxieties' before she died, perhaps acknowledging the girls' far from prosperous future (1893: 6). Their father, the romantic Doctor Madden, is shown to be ill-suited for his profession as physician, lacking a common sense approach to his daughters' upbringing (1893: 6). During a discussion with Mary Barfoot after deciding to take Monica on for training, Rhoda Nunn thinks Virginia and Alice are 'useful for nothing' which is the ultimate insult in eugenic terms (1893: 60). Their fate is sealed by continual poor health as Rhoda observes, and this in turn marks them as the product of their impractical upbringing. Their father has not only passed on his defects biologically, but also through his teachings. He reads Tennyson's *The Lotos-Eaters* to his daughters (1893: 9), where the visitors to the land 'pass into a permanent state of dreamy inertia' after consuming the local food (372). This predicts the state that Alice and Virginia will find themselves in later on in the novel and their meagre diet enervates them like the visitors in Tennyson's land. For Gissing, the 'blood will out' eventually and his

protagonists can't escape their destiny (Tindall, 1974: p.44). Gissing describes how bad stock results in a lack of common sense compounded by environment, which in this example is Doctor Madden's tuition of his daughters. Virginia and Alice are ageing rapidly, constantly suffering from ill health (1893: 13-14). They are weak women in every sense unable to pull themselves out of their rut. They have been unable to secure a 'mate' and thus are unable to reproduce. Their other sisters are dead: Gertrude dies of consumption, Martha drowns after the boat she is in overturns, and over-worked Isabel drowns herself in a bath (1893: 15-16), and of course Monica dies later in the novel. All of these girls have the ability to breathe taken away from them, or in the case of Gertrude, the mechanism through which she breathes, her lungs, are diseased. They are consumed completely by water, bloodied sputum, and modern life. To consume is to destroy, or to experience a transformation, bringing to mind the whirlpool experienced by Alma Rolfe. As they add to the debris in the vortex, so too does their 'consumption' become contagious, threatening to pull down others with them. It is an image of how unhealth doesn't just consume the sufferer, but consumes the carers', and most importantly the nation's time and resources. Virginia, Alice, and Monica become consumed by their lives, merely existing as this fate is in their biological make-up. For the readers, their demise is metonymic of how modern life is engulfing the whole nation and enervating the race, which is something Gissing explores explicitly in *The Whirlpool* and is discussed in chapter two and earlier in this chapter. Virginia is consumed by her alcoholism and the guilt of trying to conceal her addiction (1893: 127). Alice is consumed by her ailments rendering her inactive (1893: 25). For Gissing the 'consumption' is layered, destroying and transforming on many different levels. They are the personification of entropy; they are becoming more and more useless and for Gissing and eugenicists this marks them as unfit for procreating.

What is noticeable in Gissing's work is the absence of mothers, either through death, or being unfit, morally or physically. Mothers are in a position of great responsibility eugenically, as they share everything with the gestating foetus. What is in the mother's blood is effectively in the baby's, therefore even in their absence in the texts their presence is felt. This is seen to dramatic effect in Alma in *The Whirlpool* as discussed earlier. Heredity is an ever-present spectre in Gissing's novels and one that survives the death of the protagonist's mothers or indeed the protagonist themselves as mothers. Alma dismisses her role as mother to concentrate on her fledgling music career. Her dismissal of her prescribed role plays into Victorian fears of degeneration, in a culture that held the 'nuclear family [as] the highest achievement of evolution' (Wood, 2005: 169). Victorian female health was also predicated on being a good mother and having no mental health problems (Vrettos, 1995: 127). In effect middle-class motherhood was fetishised to promote eugenic doctrine. Gissing read the inventor of the term 'survival of the fittest' Herbert Spencer's *Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical* (1861) before writing *The Whirlpool*, which shows how roles outside of motherhood overtax the female system (Greenslade, 2010: 134). Unusually for Gissing he does show an example of perfect motherhood and womanliness in *The Whirlpool*'s Mrs Morton, who had 'the beauty of perfect health', a woman who is 'pure', useful and happy in her prescribed role (1897: 324), acting as an antithesis to Alma. Again, Gissing supports the eugenic role of dedicated mother, who will nurture healthy, useful children, as opposed to the bad stock mother producing unhealthy, useless children.

To underline Gissing's negative eugenic cull further, the protagonists' progeny don't fare any better. Victorian child mortality rates were high at 30% for the under fives in the 1880s

(Greenslade, 2010: 43). This is reflected in the realism of Gissing's work, but whose children die in the novels suggests wider concerns regarding hereditary traits. In *The Whirlpool* Alma and Harvey's new baby daughter dies (1897: 392), connecting her death to Alma's addiction. Nordau believes the addict 'begets enfeebled children, hereditarily fatigued or degenerated' who will become addicts (1895: 41). Gissing halts this cycle through the deaths of both Alma and the baby. In a chapter called 'On the Manner of Development of Man from some Lower Form', Darwin writes of the rare and extremes of human selection in Sparta where the 'well-formed' and vigorous' are 'preserved', and the unfit are 'left to perish' (1879: 47). In effect, this is replicated in Gissing's texts and is seen in the case of Alma's newborn daughter who isn't even named, making her demise more palatable as an unnamed is more easily disposable (1897: 387). Harvey constantly worries about his son's future, especially in light of his new discoveries about Alma's stock, staring at his son Hughie as though he had seen something 'dreadful' (1897: 144). The boy is shown to be 'nervous' because of his parentage especially his degenerative mother (1897: 383). Hughie is spared ultimately as his mother has had no influence on his upbringing. The narrator is keen to show the reader that Hughie is Harvey's not Alma's, and the novel ends with father and son '[h]and in hand' walking in the 'sunshine' (1897: 453). This affirms that it is Harvey's guidance that is paramount, but as in other examples, the hereditary taints are there and can be awakened. Galton believes that hereditary qualities could disappear in one individual but reappear generations later with traits existing in 'latent form' (cited in Forrest, 1974: 105). Despite the uncharacteristically sweet ending to the novel, there are echoes of the past that have yet to be rediscovered, perhaps to re-emerge in Hughie's children. Hughie is worryingly described as 'weary' and 'tired' even after Alma's death and playing with Morton's children seems to exhaust him (1897: 451). The

reader acknowledges how these traits echo the degenerative fatigue of his mother and Gissing affirms how once from bad stock, always from bad stock.

*New Grub Street*'s Reardon finds it difficult to sleep despite being exhausted through the extreme effort required to write (1891: 380). Gissing marks this as a worrying and hereditary problem, as Reardon's baby son also can't sleep (1891: p.155). Reardon is said to have more 'fear' than 'pleasure' regarding his son's development (1891: 227). His son Willie eventually dies of diphtheria (1891: 485), effectively eradicating the degenerative line. All evidence of Reardon's existence is wiped out, and with a particular edge of cruelty as his son dies shortly before his own death, so he is aware of the erasure of his legacy. His novels may still remain, but the narrator has already marked them as failures, in essence they are the deformed children that carry Reardon's legacy. Willie has to die where Hughie survives so that Amy can make a full connection with Milvain and relegate Reardon to the past. Willie is a carrier of Reardon's genes as evidenced in his sleep pattern and illness and must be culled. Gissing implies Willie will only turn out like his father, suffering, marrying badly, becoming a useless burden.

Galton investigated what contributed towards the thriving family amongst those he deemed as good stock, but he also felt that charitable organisations could be creating conditions that enabled the bad stock to thrive and reproduce unchecked as well. Gissing, like many Victorian commentators, felt that philanthropy could be more detrimental than helpful. Conversely, many still clung to Lamarckian beliefs that environment manipulation could result in better stock (Nye, 1985: 57), a belief that Gissing's narrators mark as naive. Both views highlight the complexity of feeling towards social problems during this time. In *The*

*Nether World* the narrator's assessment of the soup kitchens is clearly in line with Galton's views of philanthropy keeping alive the unfit, or those 'incapable of improvement' (Booth, cited in Galton, 1901: 20),

One would think that hosts of the weaker combatants might surely find it seasonable to let themselves be trodden out of existence, and so make room for those of more useful sinew (1889: 248).

The language used above illustrates that the strong in mind, body, and perhaps means should be allowed to flourish. Charitable efforts are wasted on those who will never be able to pull themselves out of their unfortunate position because of their inherited biology. The efforts will have to continue *ad infinitum* and are seen to encourage apathy amongst the recipients, an expectation that others more fortunate than themselves will always help them. Philanthropy is a pacifier, a way of possibly averting revolt by surreptitiously controlling the urban poor. Halperin's assessment of this novel states that it promotes how '[i]t is wrong to tamper with a social fabric which by its nature is unalterable and in any social system there will be rich and poor' (1982: 111).

Mary Barfoot's enterprise in *The Odd Women* can be seen as philanthropic, but it is incredibly selective, only concerned with educated people's children (1893: 28). Victorian female philanthropists would assess who was deserving of their charity by appearance (Maltz, 2005: 16) and Barfoot's young ladies just need a bit of polish to enable them to regain health and become valuable British citizens. For Barfoot and many Victorians only a select few have the inherent qualities to benefit from this philanthropic process. Too much effort would be required to turn around the fortunes of the seemingly un-teachable working-class or 'underclass' girl due to their inherited biology. As discussed in chapter two there is an inevitability regarding the outcome for the protagonists, and amidst a dialogue between Rhoda

and Mary, Rhoda categorises the Maddens as ‘branded’ and part of the ‘ragged regiment’ (1893: 61). Even for the Maddens who are the daughters of a doctor and thus fulfil Mary’s criteria, their status is complicated by their unhealth and impracticality. Rhoda scoffs that ‘[i]t’s a terrible responsibility to do anything at all’ concerning the Maddens (1893: 61), conveying a belief that they are a lost cause, but Gissing does spare them by giving them a purpose. Darwin, through his experiments on domesticated animals and man, felt that the effects of changed environment or conditions were inconclusive (1879: 49-50). Even Charles Booth felt during his famous work *Life and Labour of the People of London*, that his role was not to offer solutions (1902-3: 110), avoiding any philanthropic intervention. Here, Gissing argues that there are no solutions to bad stock and unhealth, destiny must be allowed to take its course.

Gissing removes many of his protagonists, but the reader is complicit in this selection. They decide to read on even in the knowledge that the protagonists’ demise is inevitable. Gissing draws upon the ambivalent feelings of the reader, their sympathy and the desire for the narrative end, which in Gissing’s works translates as the end of the protagonist. This tension is what makes the works engaging. Life is an unbearable struggle for many and for Gissing and many eugenicists it is wrong to maintain an environment where many suffer needlessly. For Victorian eugenicists the reduction of the lower classes and increase of the middle classes would result in a stronger Britain (Richardson, 2003: 3), and Gissing reproduces this ideal. Galton believes that improving the race could be achieved by ‘selective breeding’ resulting in certain gene pools dying out (Forrest, 1974: 85). Towards the end of *New Grub Street* Amy and Milvain are to marry (1891: 546), and the reader is led to believe that they will produce healthy children. Gissing is not known for providing resolutions at the end of his novels, but

here the reader deduces that following the removal of the human ‘detritus’ of Reardon and Biffen, the middle-class characters are left to do their civic duties unimpeded. This is by no means a ‘happy ending’, as mentioned in previous chapters the sympathy lies with Edwin Reardon, but what it does do is cement a natural order. The feeble die off so they can’t procreate and the strong triumph. Gissing’s protagonists die in a culling of unhealthy and degenerative individuals. Galton even talks of children from lower classes in terms of how much of a drain on the economy they would be throughout their lives (1901: 11-12), and how this must focus people’s attention on the ‘highest classes’ as the nation’s saviours (17). *The Odd Women*’s Alice and Virginia are spared the same fate as their sisters, as they become useful through looking after Monica’s child with Rhoda’s guidance. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, they are allowed to live because they are in effect sterile, their plainness in Victorian literary terms will result in no suitors and thus no children.

Gissing shows how his characters’ plans fail supporting eugenic beliefs. Destiny and fate are stronger than any effort to change, and more importantly, biology is more powerful than such efforts. Perhaps confusingly, Gissing posits the characters’ afflictions as both the result of heredity and environment, where the former is compounded by the latter. Gissing’s concern lies with the man-made environment, especially the urban environment, sharing Galton’s views that ‘towns sterilise vigour’ (1901: 27). The narrative suggests that apathy is the best policy, but really all of these problems can’t be surmounted. Gissing shows the problems but doesn’t present solutions, because he doesn’t believe there are any. This does depict a novelist reproducing the prescribed order of things. He creates a narrative natural selection where the weak and unhealthy are gradually picked off to leave behind those who are dutiful and robust. He recreates Foucault’s sovereign power where he has ‘the right to decide life

and death' (1976: 135). For a man who had experienced poverty and unhealth, the alternatives to the cull are unspeakable because they simply prolong the suffering. What undermines an assessment of Gissing as completely heartless in his use of eugenic thought is where he directs his readers' sympathy. The reader follows and sympathises with his protagonists, who are ultimately antiheroes. Their struggle is what the reader is led to admire and this struggle is the repetition and mental anguish explored in the death drive in chapter two. The struggle is somehow noble despite the inevitability of the end. Gissing's protagonists can't be accused of not trying, however ineffectual or meagre that effort may seem. To try is to admit some sliver of hope for the protagonists, and this is in spite of hereditary taints, the death drive or a brutal environment. Gissing could be accused of being sadistic through this treatment, and this is something the readers are aware of as the narrative points towards the inevitable downfall of the characters, for example Milvain's prophetic sense that Reardon 'will come to grief' (1891: 36). Tragedy is a much enjoyed genre, and this pain is part of the pleasure for the readers. The characters may be culled, but the reader is moved by their demise, irrespective of personal responsibility, inheritance, and poverty. Sympathy is gained because the reader is not only shown the mistakes, but the stories behind them and this lends the protagonists a greater humanity. There were fears regarding the dangers of reading particular fiction (Vrettos, 2005: 96-97), and Gissing's descriptions of the sordid corners of London would have aligned him with the 'literary canal-dredging' of Zola that Nordau despises so much (1895: 13). Some critics felt works such as *The Nether World* were 'educational' in their depictions of the urban poor and could subsequently lead to 'reform' (Allen, 2008: 145). It is as if the fiction connects the sordid or biologically deviant mind of the author with the innocent readership, and thus the narrative must be culled too. Gissing as creator is the aberrant father whose progeny, in this case the text must be subject to

the same fate as his protagonists. Just as Frothingham's tainted blood flows through the veins of Alma, so too do Gissing's creative juices flow through the text and the text must end like the protagonists. The texts explicitly follow the lives of the protagonists as in fact they are the physical manifestation of their lives, so their death is in effect the narrative's death, welcomed, needed. The end comes, and the filth is removed. For readers, the death of the protagonists is needed to fulfil their own eugenic desires of a thriving middle class, and Gissing's approach allows the destruction of the unfit.

## CONCLUSION

All creatures would agree that it was better to be healthy than sick, vigorous than weak, well fitted than ill-fitted for their part in life. In short that it was better to be good rather than bad specimens of their kind, whatever that kind might be. (Galton, 1904: 36).

This investigation proves Gissing agrees with Galton's sentiments, but it is a complex conclusion reached regarding Gissing's relationship with medicine, illness, and death, prompting further research. Gissing's works promote the idea that it is 'better to be healthy than sick', and there are consequences for being a bad specimen. Death is both mercy and punishment. He is aware of human suffering and is eager to present it but then kills off those that struggle, maintaining a middle-class status quo. Gissing's own mutable status may begin to explain the conflicting treatment of his characters. Henry James asserts Gissing was 'marked out for [...] an unhappy ending' (1901, cited in Halperin, 1982: 7), and both he and his novels satisfy this prophecy. The *fin de siècle* of course plays a strong role. This was a time of a nostalgic grip on the past due to the perceived horrors of modern life, but also one that welcomed progress, innovation, and invention. This is definitely seen in Gissing's work, as the reader is shown an intense sentimentalism towards the rural, and yet there are examples of embracing the developing new world order, as seen in the forward-thinking views regarding the roles for women in *The Odd Women*.

Gissing's nihilism is present throughout his work, and in this study there is evidence of a pessimistic attitude towards medicine, philanthropy, and social reform. Foucault's studies enabled me to view medicine as a system of power, helping to explain its treatment in the texts. Gissing's attitude not only derives from an opposition to authority, but from beliefs

regarding biological determinism, and just how little these establishments can actually achieve. Gissing admires and wants his readership to admire the struggle that his protagonists endure, but only if it is temporary and all of these establishments are seen to tamper with nature in prolonging suffering unnecessarily and without dignity. The dignity his characters sought throughout their troubled lives is only achieved through death. It is a result that is as nature and of course Gissing intended it, unimpeded in its journey, providing a peaceful rest and release from suffering. Chapter one focused primarily on the power relationships of health and unhealth, and the treatment of the medical profession in the novels. There is a distrust of doctors, and they rarely seem able to give successful aid or comfort to those in need. Part of this failure is down to where Gissing wants to direct his narrative, in that his brand is established and these characters are to die, but also to prove that nature and biology are not elements that can be controlled or fended off. Medicine prevents what the characters really need, which is death. By not following medical advice, the characters have control of their bodies away from the body politic, as unhealth has already positioned them at the peripheries of society. The protagonists' deaths are the result of biological determinism and to a lesser degree personal choice. Biology can't be surmounted and Gissing shows how his protagonists are more accepting of this predicament than those around them who would try to remedy their issues. This acceptance is seen in their desire for death, which is a solution with dignity and results. As discussed in the study, the preservation of health was seen as a patriotic duty and despite the author directing the readers' sympathy towards the unhealthy protagonists, he acknowledges and praises the strong Englishmen of Harvey Rolfe and Hugh Carnaby in *The Whirlpool* (1897: 10). He undermines that message by feminising Rolfe by making him his son's main carer (1897: 341), and by making Carnaby a murderer (291). Here there is an example amongst many of a contradictory view or one that twists and turns

with the development of the narrative. This is quite a clever ploy as it challenges black and white standpoints that can be seen in medicine, social commentary, or opinions on what constitutes patriotic behaviour, as nothing is static, everything has the potential to be 'unhealthy'. Chapter three discovered latent inherited traits are always lurking in the shadows, so a seemingly healthy individual can be struck down by ancestral evils. Of course the terms healthy and unhealthy are constructs but have far-reaching ramifications nonetheless. Gissing challenges these constructs as seen in chapter one, however he continues this dichotomy in his texts, and as shown in the eventual demise of his protagonists the challenge to these constructs could be seen as meagre, tokenistic at best. The healthy/unhealthy dichotomy is both a medical and political construct that is fundamental to the teachings of the eugenicists. In fact due to the endings delivered to the protagonists, we could go as far as stating that Gissing's texts display an element of eugenic fantasy. What softens this is how desirable Gissing makes death. This is what marks death more as mercy than complete punishment in this context.

Chapters two and three sought to offer reasoning behind why the protagonists were killed off. In chapter two, it was concluded that for Gissing's characters it would be better if they had never existed and they are explicitly on a journey to death, and can't and shouldn't be derailed. Freud's death drive enabled me to map this journey towards death. The protagonists have already experienced a societal death through unhealth which results in a great struggle, and the biological death is inevitable and welcomed. Death is constructed as a natural, serene opposite to the characters' lives unnatural. Gissing embraces nature in a geographical sense as well as in Darwin's concept of nature. The representations of the countryside in the novels are sentimental, poetic, as opposed to the urban sprawl's gritty

realism. Henry Ryecroft talks of the ‘intense [...] delight’ he feels when in the countryside (1903: 12), a feeling of the sublime, countering the unpleasure and despair felt in the city. The novels promote a belief that nature in any of its incarnations should be revered and left to its work. On top of biological determinism, environment and circumstance compound what is already a difficult life. Ryecroft espouses at the novella’s end that ‘[t]o live in quiet content is surely a piece of good citizenship’ (1903: 133). To be without struggle in life is not only good for the individual but as the word ‘citizenship’ suggests, this state is better for the nation. As seen throughout the study, individual ‘struggle’ equates to societal burdens such as neglect within families, unhappy relationships, and over-strained resources and charities. Certainly hard work is admired in the texts and the wider Victorian community but not if ultimately that effort is at the expense of others. Chapter three presents how Gissing shows that death of the unhealthy is not only better for the character but also those that remain behind. Gissing has a Galtonian view, where he looks at the usefulness of the protagonists, but then extends into a negative eugenics and exacts a cull if they aren’t deemed useful. The characters are permanently stained and deserve their end. Despite this, Gissing still maintains reader sympathy, as it is the characters’ nature that has ultimately led them on this path. There is nobility in suffering but also there is nothing noble in resisting society for the Victorians. Struggling is hard work and this ethic that is instilled in Gissing’s protagonists inspires admiration, in spite of it representing a reaction to authority. To sympathise and admire these efforts is to care about the narrative and read on. This is how Gissing procures reader sympathy.

Gissing is often described as an ‘observer’, someone who may show the plight of others, but not necessarily presenting solid solutions or calling his readership to arms. The reader must

remember that what he reveals is manipulated for his own benefit. By the end of his novels, a middle-class status quo has been maintained, but the destination isn't what is important here, rather the journey. For however brief a moment a victim's plight is shared, and the reader is made aware of how those experiencing unhealth are marked out to be gazed upon, herded, marginalised, patronised, until they are removed from their struggle. As discussed in chapter one, Gissing does replicate these techniques in order to reveal his observations to the readers. Despite acknowledging the inevitable, the readers want the protagonists to survive, and Gissing exploits this by keeping the reader on the journey. Some have accused Gissing of being a 'reactionary' writer (DeVine, 2005: 22), but this is unfair as the voice of those experiencing unhealth is given time and space. Dr Madden in *The Odd Women* points out to his daughter Alice '[h]uman beings are not destined to struggle for ever like beasts of prey' (1893: 6), and this is the mantra Gissing follows in his treatment of his protagonists as their struggle is ended with the end of the narrative.

The novel's final chapters are interesting as they summarise Gissing's arguments and as stated earlier in the study, ends 'determine meaning' (Brooks, 1995: 22). The last few paragraphs of *Born in Exile* capture Godwin Peak's death, stamping both the death of protagonist and the narrative. Brooks suggests readers 'are frustrated by narrative interminable' (1995: 23), so in ending the narrative with character deaths, Gissing is offering the reader a more complete satisfaction. Of course this may not be the case as there is no happy ending. Gissing, like Freud, may be implying that true satisfaction is only found in the ultimate ending. It provides meaning to the life/narrative that has gone before. *New Grub Street*'s Milvain tells Whelpdale that Biffen and Reardon 'were bound to go to the dogs' and '[l]et us be sorry for them, but let us recognise *causas rerum*' (1891: 544), as though as argued in the study, their demise was as

inevitable to other characters as the reader. The last chapter of *New Grub Street* is called 'Rewards' cementing how everyone got what they deserved. The last chapter of *The Odd Women* also strikes a similar note with the title 'A New Beginning', but in typical Gissing style the last line undermines the optimism with Rhoda's remark about Monica's baby, '[p]oor little child' (1893: 371). The absence of men makes this conclusion queer. Despite revealing the injustices rife in Britain at this time, the future that Gissing has created for his remaining characters is one of conforming and being complicit in the systems of power that he has sought to criticise. Nevertheless, Gissing chooses to tell the story of the Reardons of his texts as opposed to the newly wedded Milvains, as they offer so much more interest and depth. There is somehow a faith that the unfit can be removed, but the reality is that they continue to haunt those left behind, so are never really eliminated, for example Reardon's works are a latent inheritance in text form. The ghosts of inheritance linger nearby despite the loss of the degenerating protagonists. Milvain sums up the view felt throughout the novels that those experiencing unhealth are useless and bound to come to a sticky end. The loss is mourned but it opens the way to a Galtonian strong stock of middle classes to maintain the health of the British race. Gissing is a supporter of eugenics, but that support isn't as wholehearted as it could be. He painstakingly builds protagonists that the reader sympathises with instead of creating demonised characters that the reader is completely happy to see obliterated. He justifies their deaths through eugenic discourse but can't quite carry out a complete character assassination and instead humanises the unfit, and this tension is what makes his texts so interesting and engaging for the reader.

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