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# An Apocalyptic yet Abject "Jubilee" Narrative in George Robert Gissing's *In the Year of Jubilee*: Mobility, Restoration, and Materiality

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**Abstract-** *George Robert Gissing's In the Year of Jubilee (1894) brings together complex, contradictory and ultimately subversive views of late Victorian society, where social mobility and class, property, women's rights, marriage, education, commerce, and advertising are problematized. Further, with the dramatic rate of social, economic, and political change that resulted from the Industrial Revolution, new banking and sources of capital, old ways of being and thinking simply cannot keep pace, resulting in the emergence of apocalyptic narratives on many fronts. Needless to say, the idea of "jubilee" is more or less antithetical to the idea of apocalypse, but ironically, Gissing's work is more informed by apocalypse and apocalyptic narratives than "jubilee" whether the concept of jubilee refers to liberation or an affirmation of monarchal reign. Gissing's "jubilee" juxtaposes self-congratulatory rhetoric (Victorian senses of self-actualization) with an underlying nihilism, particularly for women and those of lower classes. The fact that some of the women are able to break free and reinvent their worlds by means of education and a reinvented sense of self further reinforces the notion of apocalypse, particularly in the destruction of the "known" world and the emergence of a new one, essentially a "new heaven and earth."*

*The goal of this analysis is to conduct an analysis of Gissing's In the Year of Jubilee and to demonstrate how the core narratives in the text contain elements of the apocalyptic narrative. In doing so, one object is to gain an understanding of how Gissing uses the abject jubilee (or apocalyptic) narrative in order to explore the social relationships and psychological states of the characters, and to use them to make certain observations and commentaries on the state of English society, the impact of industrialization, new technologies and urban sprawl, and the realities of social class and mobility (or lack of upward mobility) in late Victorian England.*

**Keywords-***George Robert Gissing; Victorian England; Victorian Literature; Literary Criticism; Jubilee; Apocalyptic Narratives; Women In Literature; Social Mobility; Social Novel*

## 1. INTRODUCTION (Social Novels: A Context)

Gissing writes several decades after the early Victorian "social novels" such as Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil: The Two Nations* (1845), Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), and Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1954). The early social novels contained clear indictments of social inequality, terrible labor conditions, lack of suffrage, and lack of employment for women. Gissing's late Victorian backdrop is more complicated than the earlier times, and tremendous economic growth along technological innovation has occurred. So, it's not easy to say that Gissing is writing a simple dialectic. Instead, *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), Gissing writes a narrative in which the characters come to life in complex, often self-contradictory ways. They are never static, but instead, come to realize profound truths about themselves, or, if they do not themselves arrive at that realization, the reader does, and in doing so, feels a great satisfaction in the sense that the novel serves as a tool to better understand the world and human nature.

*In the Year of Jubilee* is a book about people and property, and how both are lost and gained in both material and metaphorical senses. That said, the text also is about change in society: the changing roles of women, the impact of technological and commercial innovations, and about education's form and impact in late Victorian times. Long out of print, *In the Year of Jubilee* is now available through sources that make public domain content available (Project Gutenberg, LibriVox.org, and various for-profit print-on-demand repackagers of pubic domain texts). That said, few critical analyses have been written, possibly because of an over-simplification of Gissing's themes, and also early scandal coupled with relative lack of success during his life. However, a close reading of the text yields satisfying structure, interpretive possibilities, and subtle interplays of characters, context, and social change. Gissing in no way deserves the "second-rate" or "second tier" label he has suffered under.

## 2. ABOUT "JUBILEE"

The novel begins in 1887, the year of the Golden Jubilee, which marked Queen Victoria's continuous reign for 50

years. The novel is foregrounded by the staggering social, technological, and political changes in England (and in the entire British Empire), and its story unfolds as it traces the convergences of people from different levels of society and their trajectories while examining their stories and their individual psychological makeup.

The Golden Jubilee is a contrived and commercialized spectacle, which aligns well with the new sense of enterprise driven by new forms of communication (advertising via billboards being one of them).

Jubilee also refers to the part of the Jewish law detailed in Leviticus 25:10:

> *"And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family."* (King James Bible "Authorized Version," Cambridge Edition)

Although the novel is populated with a number of characters, whose lives and trajectories intersect in ways that seem almost driven by the impulse of the Victorian age, the individuals live in deep isolation. Their experiences are illustrated in the beginning chapters of the book, when Nancy decides to visit the Jubilee, and where she and Luckworth Crewe are caught up in a great throng. The crowd is huge, and feeling is of energy, anonymity, and a surge of desire to behave in ways counter to one's obligations and/or breeding.

When the characters enter the Jubilee celebrations, they enter a chaotic, disordering maelstrom, and it sets into motion the sense of upheaval and a social system with change too massive and far-reaching to be resisted. While there are losses, the dynamism can lead to a sense of euphoria and infinite possibility. Certainly Luckworth Crewe experienced that, and, to a degree, does Nancy, who is a virtuous, married woman who masquerades as a fallen woman. Nancy's life is turned upside down, and people respond to her in ways that reflect a loss of social status. Nevertheless, the dynamic upheaval is something that ultimately liberates her.

With the multiple meanings of *Jubilee*, there is a sense that the book is about restoration of property and people, and so it is on many levels, not only with respect to inheritances (which are lost to Nancy Lord and to Lionel Tarrant, but restored to Horace Lord) and people/relationships (Mrs. Damerel's restoration as mother to Horace, the relationship between Nancy and Lionel, even if vexed).

Queen Victoria's Jubilee celebrated a number of advances during the 50 years of her reign. First and foremost, it celebrated the uniting of technology, financial wherewithal, and cohesive political unity, which allowed the emergence of great works of technology and consequent industrialization. All of the accomplishments of the Victorian age were done on a massive scale. Political will, an emerging bureaucratic structure, and new technology had the effect of motivating and rewarding talented individuals from throughout the realm. The most immediate impact was to pave the way for social mobility.

## 3. SOCIAL MOBILITY

Gissing's novel embodies mobility: the economic (and to a degree, social) mobility of what used to be a rigid caste system, and the psychological and emotional mobility of individuals whose self-serving beliefs about their status or superiority undergo a great change. For Gissing, it is not simply a matter of the arrogant or supercilious getting their comeuppance. It's also about those who thought themselves low being able to rise.

The narrative centers around the story of Nancy Lord, the daughter of a successful businessman, whose company specializes in pianos and musical instruments. Wanting to provide the best, her father pays for many years of schooling and education, far beyond what was considered normal given their middle class life. Nancy and her brother, Horace, have been raised to believe their mother dead, when in reality she was a member of the gentry who was unhappy in her marriage. She was something of a showy spendthrift, a "woman of the world," who abandoned her husband and her two children. Her husband obtained a divorce and never remarried. Instead, he is looked after by a loyal servant, Mary Woodruff, whom he so respects that he elevates her to the role of housekeeper.

Nancy is beautiful and radiates good health, having benefitted from a healthy diet and a generous allowance, which allow her to achieve elegance of attire. She is educated, elegant, and much admired in her community. Nevertheless, she is also resented by some, who think she is pretentious. A complex character, Nancy is also keenly aware of her limitations with respect to knowledge and experience of the world. She is also an independent thinker who wants to use her mind and her intellect in ways that move far beyond the conventional boundaries of women's possibilities of the time. However, as opposed to the characters in Gissing's novel about England's unmarried women, *The Odd Women*, Nancy is no suffragette. She does, however, question society's limitations on women, particularly in the way that poverty (and the social and structural institutions that cause it) degrades, humiliates, and ultimately kills women and children.

Tarrant and Nancy first meet each other and find each other to be disagreeable. Tarrant, educated at Oxford, and whose grandfather had earned a fortune (squandered by his son, Tarrant's father), and whose grandmother will presumably leave him with a comfortable income, considers himself to be an entirely distinct higher social sphere than Nancy, and instantly concludes that her education is a sham. Nancy dislikes his arrogance, rather ironic, since she is often disliked by her acquaintances for her own belief in her own superiority.

As in his other novels, including *The Odd Women* and *New Grub Street*, Gissing offers a sharp critique of the education received by people of all social strata. Tarrant's education has consisted of a "liberal education" in which

he has been immersed in classical literature, with an emphasis on Roman and Greek texts that may or may not have much bearing in the way that they lead their lives, with perhaps the exception of inculcating a sense of honor and sacrifice.

Nancy's education, which was expensive and of which she has great pride, has left her largely unknowledgeable of geography (she has no idea where the Bahamas is), no knowledge of science, but an ability to memorize lists of names. She does have a rapid intelligence and does read (for example, reading all the books in the local circulating library while in Cornwall).

Gissing points out the prevailing stereotype of women and education – Jessica Morgan is driven to madness while studying to pass exams to earn her degree at London University. Her breakdown is not necessarily because of the impropriety of women attempting to obtain degrees, but because of the lack of true support. Samuel Barmby's words echo in her mind, and essentially drain her of all self-confidence. Jessica, who has been working as a governess for Tarrant's nieces, reveals the emptiness of that education system as well. The young nieces have no knowledge of classics, geography, math or history, but are very conversant in the shocking news of the world (gleaned, it is supposed, from the sensationalistic newspapers), and know about "theatres and race-courses, of 'the new murderer' at Tussaud's, of police-news, of notorious spendthrifts and demi-reps" (Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*)[3].

Samuel Barmby, who, at age 21, considers himself to be enlightened and to have a superior education for being self-taught, is revealed, in reality, to be profoundly lacking in actual knowledge, and obnoxiously so. He has no attention span due to his addiction to newspapers and the only two literary works he has read in entirety are *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*:

> "*Save for Pilgrim's Progress and Robinson Crusoe, he had read no English classic; since boyhood, indeed, he had probably read no book at all, for much diet of newspapers rendered him all but incapable of sustained attention"* (Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee).*

Samuel is, in a comical way, a freethinker, who decides to leave his family's dissenter religious preferences and join the Church of England. For all his self-education and determination to create his own religion, Barmby is, in the end, a conflicted and contradictory person. While he spares Nancy and keeps the secret that would lead her to lose her inheritance, he rather surprisingly does not stoop to extortion, although one might expect it, given that he was hoping to marry her some day.

Neither Luckworth Crewe nor Beatrice French has completed a liberal education. However, they learn how to navigate the new economy and take advantage of advertising, trade, and new ways of doing business. Luckworth Crewe has dreams of seeing advertising everywhere, while Beatrice French launches a business that sells what we would say were "knockoffs" of designer dresses. Both businesses are clearly destined to be successful, and Gissing implies success requires a deeply uncivilized core.

Crewe's uncivilized core is illustrated by the way he relishes a melee that takes place when a drunken mob erupts in violence in conjunction with a sporting event. Beatrice reveals herself to have the same rough inner landscape as she and Crewe laugh and take satisfaction from recounting Beatrice's sister, Ada Peachey, and her collapse into madness after accusing her husband of cheating, and driving one of the servants to attempt suicide by cutting her neck with scissors.

Ada degenerates into madness:

> *"they found her, armed with something heavy, smashing every breakable object in her bedroom—mirrors, toilet-ware, pictures, chimney-piece ornaments"* (Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*).

Beatrice wrestles her to the ground and forces her to calm down and to go to bed. Gissing portrays Beatrice as heartless and mercenary. However, she is not the only heartless and mercenary character; Mrs. Demeral, Fanny French, and Beatrice French are equally focused on advancing themselves by marrying for money. Gissing suggests that women have little choice – those who do not marry for money must become governesses or perhaps may support themselves by writing novels (which are then scoffed at by "serious" writers), or by becoming servants (as in the case of Mary Woodruff).

## 4. MARRIAGE AND MISALLIANCE

As in many of Gissing's works, the narrative serves to illustrate how the rigid institution of marriage – especially one embarked upon in the pursuit of financial gain – causes people to become duplicitous, controlling, haughty, abusive, and to ultimately snap while in its shackles. Suffice it to say that there are no happy marriages in *In the Year of Jubilee*, although the marriage of the protagonists approaches a rapprochement with the institution itself. In Gissing's other novels, namely *New Grub Street*, there is at least one marriage in which both parties possess a shared vision, mission, and joy at what they can do together toward achieving their dreams and a sense of a life fully realized.

While Gissing constructs a critique against the institution and practices of marriage, in doing so, he uses the institution as a vehicle for transformation. The narrative moves forward and in pursuing or escaping the potential for marriage, the characters in the novel show how they view life.

Nancy rejects the advances of men who clearly would like to marry her. She considers them to be repellent, and herself to be somehow above them. They look at her beauty and education as a great feather in their cap; both are eager to ride the great updraft of Victorian change. One, Samuel Barmby, is the son of her father's business partner, and a deeply self-satisfied, rather egotistical

pontificator, who schemes and connives to have an extortive hold over Nancy, even as he announces that he would never use his power / knowledge against her, because he has developed his own religion, and his own ethical code.

She also rejects the attention of Luckworth Crewe, an energetic, enterprising, and innovative businessman who identifies the emerging potential of advertising and promotion. Luckworth sees the opportunities in conjunction with commercialization and the emergence of new business. He's an encouraging, optimistic figure whose speech is peppered with Americanisms, and who, as an orphan from Leeds, was raised by a generous, kind man, and has made himself into shining star in the "new" Britain. He is ambitious, and part of his dream involves marrying a beautiful woman and commissioning her portrait to be hung in the National Gallery. When he describes his dream, Nancy makes a jest of it, and she further pulls away from him as he describes his belief that in marriage, the woman should always be a far distant second to the husband, and he is and should be king in his demesne.

Gissing's novels are often populated by characters who fall in love with individuals far outside their normal sphere and the social hierarchy. There is a sense of hopeless longing for what one can never have, which animates the narrative and introduces a deep bittersweetness that very much characterizes his novels. *In the Year of Jubilee* is no exception. Lionel Tarrant was raised to be a gentleman, received his education at Oxford, and considers himself to be of the upper class. His grandmother, however, displays no real education, and his family achieved its wealth through some unnamed but highly lucrative enterprise. The connection to trade and business has been conveniently forgotten. Like many younger sons, he has no money of his own and is singularly devoid of enterprise.

When Lionel first meets Nancy, he is scrupulously polite in the way that the lord of a manor would demonstrate noblesse oblige to the friend of his relatives' governess. His bearing and demeanor pique (and mildly humiliate) Nancy, who does not relish having the tables turned on her, and losing her accustomed place of status within her own realm.

Nancy Lord and Lionel Tarrant initially dislike each other, but it turns to something else. Nancy is infatuated and fascinated, while Lionel does not resist. He finds himself fascinated by her, attracted and yet repulsed by what he considers to be Nancy's inferior social position and brain. Considering how intelligent, independent, and sensitive Nancy is, Lionel's view of her is, in the view of the reader (empowered by an omniscient narrative), unwarranted and even fairly absurd.

The strange unfolding of events: the precipitous marriage of Lionel and Nancy at the seaside, the realization that, by her father's will signed coincidentally the very day of her marriage, Nancy will inherit nothing if she marries before age 26, her pregnancy and childbirth, the need to conceal both marriage and child, Lionel's flight to America for more than a year, and the gradual unveiling of their secret drive the narrative. They also trigger changes in Nancy and Lionel and compel them to make choices. Both choose the honorable, higher way, and demonstrate a deep commitment to each other and the welfare of their family. In the end, Lionel gains a deep love for his wife, along with respect. Nancy is humbled and pragmatic; although there is a rather sickening sense that she perhaps humbles herself too much, particularly in her willingness to acquiesce to her husband's "superior" vision regarding the novel manuscript she wrote (which one senses is probably very commercial and only Lionel's literary snobbery is getting in the way).

So, the ending is ostensibly a happy one, but the reader is not likely to feel joy or happiness. Instead, the ending triggers a reflective mood, and the reader can reconsider all the parallels in the narrative. There are many, and they reflect and/or shed light on the central dynamic of the psychological journey of Nancy Lord.

## 5. SELF-DESTRUCTION AND SOCIAL CHANGE: A CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL MOBILITY?

The characters who illustrate the nouveau riche with energy for self-advancement and enterprise, who are loud, overdressed, and whose decisions will either lead them to great success or great physical or psychological illness:

- *Mrs. Ada Peachey:* Sister of Beatrice and Fanny French. She has married a man who manufactures quack medicines, which are ultimately revealed to be toxic. She is loud, lazy, quarrelsome, and ultimately is institutionalized for insanity.
- *Beatrice French*: Quarrelsome, quick-witted, poorly educated, but with business sense and ambition. She runs an enterprise selling low-cost knock-offs of Parisian dress, and is wildly successful.
- *Fanny French:* Quarrelsome, mercenary, and extremely promiscuous. Horace Lord is infatuated with her. She eventually marries Horace Lord (after he breaks his loveless engagement with an heiress) and dies of consumption. He dies quickly after that. He has, however, profited in his acquaintance with Fanny (and Mrs. Peachey) because through them, he meets the enterprising Luckworth Crewe, who partners with Horace, and develops a successful enterprise.
- *Miss Jessica Morgan:* Friend of Nancy who works as a governess, but who wants to attain her degree from the University of London. Her studies and accompanying malnutrition and sleep deprivation finally lead to a collapse. Her feelings toward Nancy are a combination of fawning sycophancy and spite. At the end, she joins the Salvation Army and unleashes a moralizing, condemnatory diatribe against Nancy.
- *Mrs. Damerel:* She reappears in the life of Nancy and Horace after their father dies. She presents

herself as the aunt and only living relative, which is partially true. She is the only living relative, but is, in fact, their mother. Her attempts to protect and mother them are tainted with self-interest (a spendthrift, she is running out of money). Her breeding and presence as a lady are an ironic counterpart to her "woman of the world" selfishness. Gissing does not caricaturize her. Instead, her flaws humanize her because they place in stark contrast her moments of self-sacrifice and efforts to defend her children.

- *Samuel Barmby:* A moralizing, self-absorbed, self-congratulating pontificator. He is not presented in a very positive light; a Victorian type whose upward mobility has given him a bully pulpit. However, he does show some compassion, and thus is never wholly villainous.

While some of the characters, such as Mrs. Ada Peachey, are portrayed in a uniformly negative way, most are more multi-faceted. For example, the highly amoral, sensation-seeking Fanny, whose behavior in France is promiscuous, loses her health and contracts what appears to be consumption, ultimately dying. She is both cruel and dishonest, and yet there is a profound pathos in her last days which seems to echo Gissing's own life and his troubled relationships, first to a prostitute he tried to rescue, and second to a woman who ultimately is deemed mentally ill.

## 6. VICTORIAN APOCALYPSES: TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN COMMUNICATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHANGE

The persistent intrusion of advertising, marketing, and hyping characterizes the novel: even the title, *In the Year of Jubilee* embodies the promotion of a contrived event: the "Jubilee" was Queen Victoria's 50th anniversary which took place in 1887, and which marks the beginning of the narrative of the novel which spans approximately two and a half years. Ironically, "jubilee" also refers to the "Sabbath Sabbath" year in Jewish or Biblical history, in which property is to be returned to its rightful owner.

There is more than a hint of the apocalyptic in the notion of "jubilee" as it appears in this novel, and the overwhelming sense of flux and chaos that mark the Jubilee celebrations described in the text put things (and identity) into what is possibly (but never completely made certain) their proper order. For the subjects of the realm of the British Empire, it has been 50 years of prosperity, but also 50 years of extreme change wrought by the twin drivers of technology and socio-economic transformation, which have created upheavals in social hierarchies and also in the distribution of wealth.

Gissing's view of the role of social mobility in the transformation of society is vexed at best. He does not see the destruction of the class system as necessarily leading to a better world. In many ways, Gissing expresses skepticism about the possibility of a peaceful, orderly transition from a miserable, bipartite world (an "upper" world and a "nether" world), to one where the truly decent and kind-hearted prevail.

In *The Nether World* (1889), Gissing describes a not unusual melee in a bar in London slum as Pennyloaf Candy's husband, Bob Hewett (who has married "beneath him") attacks a rival, Jack Bartley, who has made a comment on Pennyloaf's rather tacky attire. In Gissing's view, the only hope for transformation is apocalypse:

> *"For, work as you will, there is no chance of a new and better world until the old be utterly destroyed. Destroy, sweep away, prepare the ground; then shall music the holy, music the civiliser, breathe over the renewed earth, and with Orphean magic raise in perfected beauty the towers of the City of Man."* (Gissing, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4301/4301-h/4301-h.htm#chap08)

Social mobility is possible in ways it never was before, except in times of plague and extended war, and fortunes can be made and lost more quickly and in more ways than ever before. Gissing understands the power of mob psychology and advertising, and the way in which the public flock to the skillfully advertised products. The enterprising young Luckworth Crewes uses advertising to trigger hysterical mass behavior, which resonate with the economic bubbles that occurred in the Netherlands during Tulipomania and in France with speculation in stock accompanying the Mississippi Scheme (described in Charles MacKay's 1852 *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds).* Luckworth Crewes is energized by the "madness of crowds" which is evidenced by his glee at the Dionysian spectacle arising during mob hooliganism.

Gissing's description of Crewes's dreams of plastering billboards containing advertising that compels individuals to action, and also the availability of easy credit, which allows individuals to purchase pianos and impress their families are only two examples of the Gissing's anxiety about the negative effects of a democracy that expresses itself through consumption and consumerism. Gissing is echoing Thomas Carlyle's views:

> *"Truly they are strange results to which this of leaving all to 'Cash;' of quietly shutting up the God's Temple, and gradually opening wide-open the Mammon's Temple, with 'Laissez-faire, and Every man for himself,'—have led us in these days! We have Upper, speaking Classes, who indeed do 'speak' as never man spake before; the withered flimsiness, the godless baseness and barrenness of whose Speech might of itself indicate what kind of Doing and practical Governing went on under it!"* (Carlyle, 1843, Chapter XIII, "Democracy")

Gissing's narrative expresses ambivalence toward money. While poverty is considered the prime reason for degradation and degrading behaviors and choices, the

pursuit of money as a kind of amoral pursuit that causes a permanent erasure of ethics, values, and compassion, ultimately defiles. Gissing was by no means alone in his ambivalence; Christopher Herbert (2002) discusses how Victorian thinkers echo the biblical notion of the pursuit of "filthy lucre" as having the capacity to despoil and permanently taint a person.

Gissing's depiction of Luckworth Crewes is not satirical; if anything there is a kind of admiration of his persistent genious, and also an awareness that the primum mobile underlying it is an deep-seated joy ad seeing destruction (as in the mob scene). Fanny, the most enterprising of the French sisters, actually recounts with relish the descent into madness of her sister, Ada, and her extreme violence.

And yet, that said, while Gissing's narrative does evoke a sense of satire (as in the roughly contemporaneous work of Anthony Trollope, *The Way We Live Now*), Gissing's narrative celebrates and plunges into (rather than standing apart from) the edgy, complex, and contradictory behaviors and beliefs of people at a pivotal and confusing moment in history.

Causality and causal chains form the central mechanism of Gissing's interweaving plots in *In the Year of Jubilee.* They trigger the transfer of property, but also of self, identity, and the creation of business schemes and scams, to the point that the interplay of the real and the false constitutes a central dynamic in the narrative. Not only is education seen to be a sham, but also the stories people tell each other, as well as relationships, values, products, advertising, religion, and more.

The falseness of advertising and language, and yet the false discourse's ability to generate a new world characterizes the narrative of not just *In the Year of Jubilee*, but also other Victorian novels that deal with commerce, advertising, and promotion. Anthony Trollope's *The Struggles of Brown, Jones & Robinson* (1868) traces the rather comic misadventures of a new haberdashery shop brought high then low by the absurd spectacles of an advertising campaign devised by a very bright and ambitious orphan who taught himself to read and write (very eloquently and creatively) from the placards and signs he works with in his employment as a "bill-sticker". In one memorable scene, Robinson advertises that the grand opening of their new store (Nine Times Nine Is Eighty-One), will feature an amazing inventory of rare goods from around the world, including "eight thousand real African monkey muffs; six thousand ditto, ditto, ditto, very superior, with long fine hair.(Trollope, *The Struggles of Brown, Jones and Robinson*).

Similarly, Trollope creates an unforgettable figure in the form of a genius swindler Augustus Melmotte in *The Way We Live Now* (1875) whose claims about the great railroad project to go from Veracruz, Mexico to Salt Lake City echo the railway scams and stock market panics that occurred in England.

Identity can be invented and reinvented; in fact, the fact that technology can create such dramatic changes, and new concepts of marketing and financing can so profoundly alter what people perceive as "real," the entire world is at risk of being catapulted into a state of ontological uncertainty and anxiety.

One can argue that the only thing that keeps it from falling into absolute madness and /or chaos is what Julia Kristeva has referred to as "abjection" or "the abject" in *Powers of Horror* (1982). What critics have called "naturalism" in Gissing could easily be viewed as abjection – a forced contact with the materiality of death, with the body fluids, sickness, and suffering that accompany it. When Ada Peachey descends into madness, the blood that is spilled as she smashes glass anchors the narrative, and the larger madness of a world that pretends to be able to reconstruct itself with images, advertising, and false promises of patent medicines. Similarly, when Nancy's father and then her brother start to become sickly, their terminal illnesses are described in terms of the inevitability of death, even in the young or the relatively lucky.

Similar to the case of Robinson, Trollope's bill-poster turned advertiser, Luckworth Crewes's view of advertising is that it is designed to be a spectacle and to attract people to an event, and that all publicity that excites curiosity is positive. This view is, in some ways, a perversion of Bentham's felicific calculus and utilitarianism. After all, advertising does produce happiness (however fleeting the aroused expectations), although it does not last. Bentham's notions of utilitarianism could easily apply (albeit parodically or satirically) to Gissing and Trollope alike:

> *"By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered" .. "if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual*" (Bentham, 1907, *An introduction to the principles of morals and legislation*).

Gissing's ambivalence toward advertising, while perceived as comical and perverse in the deliberate prevarications embodied within it, is also a driver of apocalyptic meltdowns and destruction, illustrated in the way that a highly publicized boxing match triggered a fight, and hooliganism. Whether the hooliganism is purposeful or simply a Dionysian accelerant to social change (or a return to social stratification) is not clear.

Nevertheless, the use of specious, seductive words and signs (billboards) to hold out the promise of a more equal distribution of happiness is, if nothing else, utilitarian.

## 7. WOMEN AND EDUCATION IN IN THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

While Gissing has been characterized as being a champion of women's rights and women's education, his views as expressed *In the Year of Jubilee* are often rather contradictory.

Gissing populates his novels with men who admire educated, intelligent women; both Amy and Marianne in *New Grub Street* are desired for their conversation and knowledge. Further, in *The Odd Women*, Gissing supports establishing schools and programs of education that allow women to support themselves in the same professions as men.

In this belief, Gissing's views align with those of John Stuart Mill in *The Subjugation of Women* (1869): I consider it presumption in anyone to pretend to decide what women are or are not, can or cannot be, by natural constitution. They have always hitherto been kept, as far as regards spontaneous development, in so unnatural a state, that their nature cannot but have been greatly distorted and disguised; and no one can safely pronounce that if women's nature were left to choose its direction as freely as men's, and if no artificial bent were attempted to be given to it except that required by the conditions of human society, and given to both sexes alike, there would be any material difference, or perhaps any difference at all, in the character and capacities which would unfold themselves. (Mill, 1869, p 107)[7].

While Mill suggests that it's possible that if women had the same education as men, they could be equally proficient, Gissing demonstrates the outcome of the deeply inferior education given to women that is touted as being very "haute du monde" and ideal for upward mobility.

Further, he depicts the education that girls and young women receive as fairly useless, and even harmful inasmuch as it gives them an elevated sense of their own degree of learning.

In the world that Gissing describes, it is very difficult for individuals to rise up above their origins. In the case of the French sisters, their father was a Camberwell builder, and Ada has bought a share in a business that manufactures and markets disinfectant (which does not in reality have any power whatsoever to kill germs), they are portrayed as almost comically déclassé: "The sisters "spoke a peculiar tongue, the product of sham education and mock refinement grafted upon a stock of robust vulgarity" (Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*).

Gissing describes their education as ultimately empty:

> *"Ada had frequented an 'establishment for young ladies' up to the close of her seventeenth year; the other two had pursued culture at a still more pretentious institute until they were eighteen. All could 'play the piano;' all declared—and believed—that they 'knew French.' Beatrice had 'done' Political Economy; Fanny had 'been through' Inorganic Chemistry and Botany. The truth was, of course, that their minds, characters, propensities had remained absolutely proof against such educational influence as had been brought to bear upon them*." (Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*)

However, given Beatrice's success in launching a business, and the fact that she "understood the nature of investments, and liked to talk about stocks and shares with her male acquaintances" (Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*)[3], she possesses a generative energy, and, in partnership with the person Gissing portrays as her counterpart, Luckworth Crewe, it is clear that Gissing considers both men and women as partners in the transformation of the world. In certain ways, the partnership between Beatrice and Luckworth parallel the ultimate union of Amy and Milvain, a "terribly modern young man" and their shared vision of achieving influence and power in the literary world.

Nancy Lord is depicted as having received the most extensive education at a "day-school" where she took courses until age eighteen. After that time, she continued to read and to attend lectures, and to talk about preparing for examinations.

Stephen Lord has a poor view of the modern world and of women's education, even as he pays for his daughter's educational aspirations: "Wherever you look now-a-days there's sham and rottenness; … They're educated; oh yes, they're educated! What sort of wives do they make, with their education? What sort of mothers are they? Before long, there'll be no such thing as a home. They don't know what the word means." (Gissing, 1894, *In the Year of Jubilee)[3]*. Nancy proves her father's words quite wrong and is, in fact, a very devoted mother.

Lionel Tarrant is no less critical of women's education at that time: "Lord represented a type; to study her as a sample of the pretentious half-educated class was interesting; this sort of girl was turned out in thousands every year, from so-called High Schools; if they managed to pass some examination or other, their conceit grew boundless. Craftily, he had tested her knowledge; it seemed all sham. She would marry some hapless clerk, and bring him to bankruptcy by the exigencies of her 'refinement'" (Gissing, 1894, *In the Year of Jubilee)*. Gissing's view of women is largely compassionate, however, and they are limited by the state of education itself, even as they are also limited in the ways that they can keep from falling into penury and degradation.

As an educated woman, Nancy is capable of participating in the new world order, which sees the roles of women expanding, albeit unevenly and following an unclear path. Her husband is a professional writer, and Nancy herself writes a novel that she has ambitions to sell. Rather tragically, by the end of the novel, Nancy seems to have lost her original belief in the capacity of education to result in self-determination. Instead, she muses that it might be best not to educate the "lower" classes, because it only creates a longing for what one can never have. Nancy even becomes fatalistic about nature's imposed limitations. Women are sacrificed to the next generation, as they spend the best years of their lives raising children (either their own or others' children), and they look back and wonder what they might have done with those years.

Her friend, Jessica, has even higher ambitions and is studying for an exam that will let her matriculate as a degree-seeking student at the London University. Her motives are portrayed as an extension of an essential

vanity, as she endeavors "to become B.A., to have her name in the newspapers, to be regarded as one of the clever, the uncommon women—for this Jessica was willing to labour early and late, regardless of failing health, regardless even of ruined complexion and hair that grew thin beneath the comb" (Gissing, 1894, *In the Year of Jubilee)[3]*.

Jessica desires a degree to demonstrate her intellectual worth; she considers the beautiful and relatively privileged Nancy Lord both a friend and a rival. However, her quest is doomed because she must study by herself and after her work as a governess of over for the day. She has had difficulty with Greek, algebra, and chemistry. To her surprise, Nancy Lord was not able to help with algebra: "I was showing Nancy Lord the Algebra paper set last summer, and she confessed she could hardly do a single question" (Gissing, 1894, *In the Year of Jubilee)[3]*, a discovery which makes her feel better about herself.

Jessica's sense of confidence does not last, however: "in certain 'subjects' she was worse than shaky. Her Greek—her Chemistry—her Algebra—" (Gissing, 1894, *In the Year of Jubilee)[3]*. However, Jessica does not relent and continues toward her goal. Nowhere does she receive support, however. No one in her family has been through the same situation, and her acquaintances are critical, and their words destroy her self-confidence: "She saw the face of Samuel Barmby, and heard his tones—'The delicacy of a young lady's nervous system unfits her for such a strain.'" (Gissing, 1894, *In the Year of Jubilee)[3]*.

In a very painful scene in the book, Gissing shows the reader how Jessica persists in studying in a frantic, obsessive way, until she faces the exams, and not surprisingly, collapses after taking them. The text suggests that it is not women's constitution or mind that makes intellectual achievement impossible, but instead, the flawed and incomplete approach that passes for women's education (the "memorizing names" in Nancy's case).

Avoiding education altogether is not an option, however. Uneducated women are easily bamboozled in Gissing's London, and it drives them to make very poor decisions. For example, Emma, a "nurse girl" in the Peachey household, steals from Ada Peachey's purse because she is fearful of the consequences of not paying the usurious amounts for the cheap jewelry ("gewgaws") she bought from the "jewelry talleyman."

Uneducated women are also the prime target for the newly launched "South London Fashionable Dress Supply Association," which seems to be a combination of wholesale "club" (a la "Sam's Club" in the 21st century), relationship marketing (a la Amway), and knock-off manufacturer (a la fake Louis Vuitton bags). If anything, literacy (and the reading of "penny novelettes" and "cheap miscellanies") makes women and men even more vulnerable, particularly if the marketer understands the psychology of their target market. As Beatrice planned her new business, she "knew the public to which her advertisements appealed; she understood exactly the baits that would prove irresistible to its folly and greed" (Gissing, 1894, *In the Year of Jubilee)[3]*.

The world at the time of the Jubilee is a reading world, but one with a short attention span. Instead of bemoaning the new state of affairs, Beatrice and Luckworth embrace it and understand how to merge business and publicity. So, women would be given "hand-bills, leaflets, nicely printed little pamphlets, gorgeously designed placards" developed by Luckworth Crewe and his new publicity / marketing company. Luckworth and Beatrice know precisely how to use literacy as a tool for their own ends, and education becomes at best a double-edged sword.

The view of men's education is no less critical. For example, the pontificating Samuel Barmby is "Quite uneducated, in any legitimate sense of the word, he had yet learnt that such a thing as education existed, and, by dint of busy perusal of penny popularities, had even become familiar with names and phrases, with modes of thought and of ambition, appertaining to a world for ever closed against him" (Gissing, 1894, *In the Year of Jubilee)[3]*.

## 8. VICTORIAN GENRES: NATURALISM AND SENSATION NOVELS

Much is often made of Literary Naturalism's connection to Darwin's ideas of inevitable evolutionary progression as applied to the lives of individuals. The notion of true freedom of choice and self-determination is problematized. Gissing, although often categorized as a literary Naturalist, does not create narratives that adhere to evolutionary determinism. Instead, the causal chains arise from individual decisions, and the decisions themselves are deterministic, and set into motion specific chains of events, rather than the overall context or zeitgeist. The environment can be a constraint or a catalyst – all depends on how the individuals in the narratives choose to confront it.

One can say that the emergence of two very different genres – realism vs. a gothic-inflected romanticism – is echoed in the twenty-first century as well, as we witness the popularity of reality television as well as vampire films and soap operas.

What is perhaps most interesting to note is the fact that the genres contain the same elements, but the way in which they are approached and the emotional response differs greatly.

In many respects, *In the Year of Jubilee* shares elements with the sensation novel which emerged in the 1860s and which was still going strong in the 1880s and 90s. There are secrets and secret motivations, but there is not the same sense of lurking menace as in the sensation novels. In fact, in Gissing's novel, the secrets are mechanisms that trigger decision-making which sets off a causal chain. The denouement of the chain is often a sense of resignation (Horace and Fanny's ultimate marriage, and also their mutual deaths of consumption is one example).

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861) has a secret at the center as well: the fact that Lady Audley

is still married to George Talboys, who left for Australia to earn a fortune after his mercenary wife lost interest when they ran out of money. Her secret is her marriage, and also her son, Georgey, whom she keeps hidden away. Lady Audley is homicidal and quite possibly mad; and while there is certainly madness in *In the Year of Jubilee*, it is brought on by dissipation (Ada Peachey) and excessive, obsessive study (Jessica Morgan).

Mrs. Henry Woods' *East Lynne* (1862) has an echo of the spectre of degraded women: Lady Isabel, an earl's daughter, leaves her husband and children to run away with a dissipated aristocratic womanizer. She returns after being abandoned, and then being disfigured in a railway accident in which her child is killed. Lady Isabel gains employment as her real children's governess. In the meantime, other secrets include the identity of a murderer and people who are in the secret. Mrs. Damerel could potentially be viewed as a Lady Isabel in the sense that she returns in the hopes of being close to her children and effecting redemption. Unlike Lady Isabel, however, Mrs. Damerel is pragmatic, if not downright mercenary: "[Mrs. Damerel's] own resources were coming to an end, and but for the certainty that Horace would not grudge her an ample provision, she must at this moment have been racking her brains (even as through the summer) for help against the evil that drew near" (Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*).

Secrets surrounding illegitimacy and marriage are a common feature of Wilkie Collins's sensation novels. In *The Dead Secret* (1856), which takes place in Cornwall, Rosamund Treverton finds that she is not the daughter of Mrs. Treverton of Porthgenna Tower, but of her servant, Sarah Leeson, who was engaged to marry the father of her child, a local miner until he died in a mine accident. In *No Name* (1862) Magdalen Vanstone seeks to right the wrongs caused because her parents were not married when Magdalen was born. Both Magdalen and Mrs. Damerel have to fend for themselves, and Magdalen's pluckiness (and outrageous masquerades) are an attempt to right what is wrong. In contrast, Mrs. Damerel is portrayed as spoiled and demanding of luxury: her "father had been a country gentleman; horse-racing and such things had brought him down, and from her twelfth year his daughter lived—I never quite knew how, but on charity of some kind" (Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee*).

## 9. JUBILEE NARRATIVE: THE APOCALYPTIC NARRATIVE RENDERED ABJECT

*In the Year of Jubilee* addresses many of the anxieties of the age about propriety, acceptance or rejection in a culture and community where mores are changing due to a widening scope of enfranchisement, and the new experience of democracy, which exist in a context of enabling (and also poisoning, toxifying) technological change and urban growth. The sensation novel creates a heightened feeling of dread or horror of exposure, while the naturalistic novel emphasizes *mimesis* in the realistic imitation of behaviors, even as it probes inner motivations. Whether some of the driving forces are ineluctable, unchanging forces of nature is at least introduced as a possibility, if not wholly embraced (or dismissed / problematized).

The euphoria of potential is always tinged with disappointment and loss, and a longing for what might have been. There are echoes of abandonment, and one can argue that the characters engineer a way to keep abandonment alive, along with self-destructive gestures and behaviors that are never insuperable.

Gissing's narratives are both Dionysian and apocalyptic, and yet they are tempered with resignation, which could be a consequence of the intense psychological realism that characterizes Gissing's form of naturalism. There are destructive forces, and even a certain frisson upon witnessing the vectors of change, whether they be Ada Peachey's violent madness or the violent hooliganism of a mob scene. At the same time, however, there are limits to the personal change that can be effected. In Gissing's world, poverty and financial exigencies are always the grand mediators of intent / intention, and the most noble goals are subverted by the very real presence of hunger, malnutrition, the workhouse in St. Marylbone, or literal starvation. Thus, the violent and energetic transformation held out by an apocalyptic narrative is rendered abject because it does not have the power to accelerate the process of taking one to utopia, or a new heaven or new earth. Instead, *In the Year of Jubilee*, the potential transformation and the apocalyptic (or restoration) narrative contains a kernel of horror and abjection inasmuch as it traumatically reminds us of our own materiality.

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