

Books by George Gissing

Although George Gissing wrote around 100 short stories, several works of criticism and a travel book, it is his novels for which he is valued, and the 2018 exhibition presents these novels in order of publication.

Workers in the Dawn [1880] was George Gissing's first novel. The first of his five 'proletarian' novels, it opens in a squalid slum, but is mainly set in the poor, but more respectable areas of Bloomsbury. *The Unclassed* [1884] was shocking for the time in having a heroine who is a prostitute and who is held up as a moral exemplar. *Demos* [1886], Gissing's first successful novel, is built around the failed love between two people of different classes. *Thyrza* [1887] is also tale of doomed love between a local girl and the middle-class philanthropist who sets up a working-men's institute and library in Lambeth. *The Nether World*, the last of Gissing's five 'working-class' novels, is a brutal presentation of the hardship and degradation of proletarian life in London, and the impossibility of escape from it. In these five 'slum' novels Gissing created a new type of social fiction.

In *Isabel Clarendon* [1886] the male protagonist falls in love with a woman socially his superior and philosophically incompatible; the story examines the disintegration of their relationship. *A Life's Morning* [1888] will be of interest to those who know the Wakefield area since, although the place names are changed, it is set in a clearly recognizable, though unflatteringly portrayed, Wakefield. *The Emancipated* [1890] marks Gissing's move away from fiction of the very poor; it is misogynistic in its portrayal of the sanctity of art and the struggles of (male) artists with philistines, particularly philistine women.

New Grub Street [1891] cemented Gissing's reputation and remains his best-known work, depicting the struggle for life, the jealousies and intrigues, of the literary world of his time, and writers' struggles to maintain artistic integrity while earning a living from their art. It also dramatizes the blighting effects of poverty and an ambitious, socially superior wife on artistic endeavour.

Denzil Quarrier (1892), the story of a young man persuaded to stand as parliamentary candidate in a provincial constituency, is built upon the Victorian trope of the guilty secret and the threat of exposure. *Born in Exile* (also 1892) follows the life of a young man from leaving school to establishing himself in the world. *The Odd Women* (1893) tells of three unmarried sisters, dealing compassionately with the challenges and restraints on unmarried females or "odd women", relegated to a world of second-rate jobs. *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894) addresses the problems of courtship and marriage, the nature of marriage and the role and position of women, presenting a picture of the pretentiousness, shallowness and vulgarity of the newly-comfortable lower-middle classes.

Three novellas follow - *Eve's Ransom* (1895) deals with Gissing's obsession and resentment at the need for the artist to be forced to work, when he should be free for a life of travel and leisure. *Sleeping Fires* (1895) features a flawed aristocratic heroine, its theme being that she should not have rejected the hero for having fathered an illegitimate child. *The Paying Guest* (1896) again explores subtle social mores, centering on the comic conflict between a poor but respectable couple's fearful gentility and their comfortably-off, but low-born, lodger's spirited vulgarity.

The Whirlpool (1897) is a 'sensation' novel with much melodrama and is the story of fashionable extramarital intrigues with a compelling central female character. *The Town Traveller* (1898) is the Gissing's only work which sets out to be funny, aiming at broad Cockney farce. *The Crown of Life* (1899) shows the worst side of 'Imperialism, [...] that hateful spirit which, by its greed and arrogance, threatens such disturbance to the peace of the world' and marks a return to the poor idealistic male protagonist who falls in love with a wealthy young woman. *Our Friend the Charlatan* (1901) satirizes males, whose gentlemanly manners, superior minds, and brilliant eloquence win them ideal women, ideal wealth, and sometimes even ideal seats in Parliament. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903) is taken by most readers to be largely autobiographical, or perhaps wishful thinking, in relating the imaginary journal of a recluse, who enjoys release from poverty and worry, amid books, memories, and reflection. *Veranilda* (1904), published posthumously, is set in classical Rome. *Will Warburton* (1904), also published posthumously, the tale of a well-born young man who becomes poor and sets himself up as a grocer, focuses on the pitfalls of living in a class not one's own.

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