

## George Gissing And 'New Grub Street'

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### ÖZET

*Her ne zaman 19. veya 20. yüzyıl İngiliz Edebiyatından George isimli bir yazardan söz edilse birisinin ilk aklına gelen yazar ya George Orwell ya da George Eliot'tur. Oysa, ilk adı George olan ve sadece İngiltere'de değil dışarıda da hatırısayılır bir üne sahip olan diğer yazarlar da vardır. Bunlar George Meredith (1828-1909), George Moore (1852-1933) ve George Gissing'tir. Bu incelemede en ünlü yapıtı olan 'New Grub Caddesi' ile birlikte George Gissing ele alınmıştır.*

*Realist bir yazar olarak karşınıza çıkan George Gissing, biçem ve yöntem açısından Victoria Devri'nin özelliklerini sürdürse de, orta sınıfm uyumsuz, dışlanmış, yaşam mücadelesinde yorgun düşmüş kişilerini ele alır. Londra yaşamının iç karartıcı tarafını resmeder. 'New Grub Caddesi' başlıklı romanında ise kendi yaşam öyküsünü dile getirir.*

### SUMMARY

*Whenever an author named George in the 19th. and 20th. century is in question, the first authors who come to mind are either George Orwell or George Eliot. Whereas, there are other writers whose first names are George and have a considerable fame not only in the United Kingdom but also outside. They are George Meredith (1828-1909), George Moore (1852-1933) and George Gissing. Of them I am going to write about George Gissing together with his best novel 'New Grub Street' in this study.*

*As a realist writer, George Gissing kept Victorian form and method. However, he depicted the outcasts and misfits of society. He dealt with the dreary aspects of London life. We see his own life story in the novel entitled 'New Grub Street'.*

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## **The Life of George Gissing**

The novelist George Robert Gissing was born in Wakefield, Yorkshire, in 1857. He was educated at a Quaker boarding school in Cheshire, and at Owen's College, Manchester. He was expelled and imprisoned for a month for stealing. This event happened when he was at college. When he was there, he met a seventeen-year-old prostitute and made every effort to reclaim her, but he was caught, and sentenced to a month's imprisonment.

When Gissing left prison, he emigrated to America. He tried to earn his living as a writer and teacher, but he was unsuccessful. Consequently, he was on the point of starvation and suicide. This is the most important subject in the novel entitled 'New Grub Street' in which the novelist Edwin Reardon, who is thought to be the author's self-portrait, fails essentially because of a mistaken marriage, but also because he cannot compromise his principles.

Gissing had to return England at the age of twenty. He married the young prostitute. The marriage was a miserable one because of his wife's alcoholism. In 1888 Gissing's estranged wife died of drink. The experience of seeing her lying in a squalid room deeply affected Gissing. He was affected so much so that his next novel 'The Nether World (1889)' is the most sordid and pessimistic of all his works. After this novel, Gissing visited Greece and Italy, and 'The Emancipated' (1890) is set partly in Italy. From then on, most of his novels were about middle-class life. As a rule, he wrote about the effect of contemporary conditions on sensitive individuals.

In 1891 Gissing married another uneducated girl. It was an unhappy marriage as well. She insulted him all the time. She often beat their children. Gissing tried to stand all these circumstances for their children's sake. However, in 1897 they separated and his wife eventually went insane. His novel 'In the Year of Jubilee' (1897) indirectly reflects the miseries of his second marriage. He dealt with aspects of women's aspirations to education and independence in the novel entitled 'The Odd Women'. Of his well-known novels, 'The Unclassed' shows the effect of poverty upon human character, 'Demos' shows that the depressed classes cannot build a juster world. Throughout almost all his works, George Gissing portrays the corruptions of society. After all, he is regarded to be a realist novelist.

Towards the end of his life he met a cultured French woman named Gabrielle Fleury. He lived with her for the last five years of his life. His last years were his happiest. He died of consumption in 1903 when he was only forty-six.

### **New Grub Street**

'New Grub Street' was his ninth novel and published in 1891. Through this novel George Gissing acquired a popular reputation.

Since the eighteenth century Grub Street had traditionally been the home of journalists who wrote for the sake of earning money not of art. To tell the truth, artistic merit was out of their concern. The circulation of periodicals and papers printing trivia and sensational pieces had vastly increased. Writers were in a dilemma as to whether to write of high artistic quality at the expense of leading a miserable life, or write sensational trash to make a good living. 'New Grub Street' is chiefly concerned with the negative effect of poverty on the artistic temperament.

In 'New Grub Street' the novelist Edwin Reardon represents the author's self-portrait. Edwin Reardon fails essentially, as might be expected, because of poverty and a mistaken marriage just as George Gissing did in his real life. In spite of all these difficulties he cannot compromise his principles. There are lots of events, words and indications in the story which justify this fact. For example, when his wife Amy advises him to put aside all his strict ideas about what is worthy and what is unworthy, Edwin Reardon strictly objects to it. This part goes in the novel in the following way

(His wife Amy says)

'You know Mr. Milvain is always saying that the long novel has its day, and that in future people will write shilling books. Why not try? Give yourself a week to invent a sensational plot and then a fortnight for the writing . . . .

. . . . the plot may be as silly as you like, providing it holds the attention of vulgar readers. Think of 'The Holow Statue', what could be more idiotic? Yet it sells by thousands'<sup>1</sup>.

Thereupon, Edwin Reardon says; 'I don't think I can bring myself to that'. He also proposes to his wife to leave their flat and take cheaper rooms. We observe that instead of compromising his principles he is ready to suffer more. There are numerous words, comments and conversations in 'New Grub Street' depicting this situation. For Instance, on page 154 we see the following comment and observation;

' . . . could he take Amy and the child to live in a garret? On less than a hundred a year it was scarcely possible to maintain outward decency. Already his own clothing began to declare him poverty-stricken . . .'<sup>2</sup>.

"Amy was of terner from home than had been her custom, Occasionally she went away soon after breakfast, and spendt the whole day at her mother(s house. "It saves food" she said with a better laugh . . ."<sup>2</sup>.

In 'New Grub Street' Biffen is another author who is as fastidious as him. He is also a victim. As for Alfred Yule, who is another character in 'New Grub Street, he is in the same position. He is an embittered and unappreciated scholar. These three are contrasted with Jasper Milvain. Jasper Milvain has no real interest in literature as an art form. Here the striking point is that Jasper Milvain makes a very good living although he has no flair for literature.

Marriage is another predominant theme in the novel. As might be expected, its presentation reflects George Gissing's own emotional experience. Edwin Reardon has married the beautiful and intellectual Amy at a time when his first two novels had been well accepted. In the course of time, the Reardon has a baby and Edwin Reardon has difficulty in meeting their needs because he finds it

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<sup>1</sup> Gissing, George. 'New Grub Street'. Wordsworth Editions Limited Cumberland House, hertfordshire, UK, 1996., P. 42

<sup>2</sup> Gissing, George. 'New Grub Street'. Wordsworth Editions limited Cumberland House, Hortfordshire, UK, 1996. P. 154.

increasingly hard to write anything marketable without compromising his principles. As a consequence of this situation, fortunes dwindle. Amy seems discontent with the way she lives. Jasper Milvain often gives advice on Reardon's marriage. He says a writer should delay matrimony until his reputation and income are well established. The portrait of Albert Yule is also utterly miserable. Poverty is shown to undermine not only the artistic spirit, but human charity too. In this case, 'New Grub Street' points out that marriage is not a viable option for the committed artist.

Pierre Coustillas comments on Reardon's novel as follows;

"Reardon's novel is accepted, but on terms that make it only too evident that the publisher has no confidence in it, and which merely suffice to pay off his debts and to postpone the impending crisis in his affairs . . . . Alfred Yule tells Marian That if she marries Jasper he will have nothing further to do with her, and she resolves to leave home. Then come to terrible blows"<sup>3</sup>.

In the book entitled 'An Introduction to 50 British Novels 1600-1900' Gilbert Phelps sums up the characters in 'New Grub Street' with the following words.

"Consequently, in a modern industrialized society, characters like Reardon, Biffen, Marian and Alfred Yule, have a symbolic universal value; their sorrows and their resentments are those of countless thousands who know that they are not being allowed to fulfil their capacities for a fully human life. 'New Grub Street' is above all the novel of the lonely, the uprooted, the rejected, and the exiled"<sup>4</sup>.

'New Grub Street' is a novel of pessimistic realism where a sense of frustrated idealism pervades. The jealousies, intrigues and struggles of literary world are depicted. The novel also contains great humour, compassion and moving accounts of friendship, selfless devotion and dedication to excellence. His profound humanity makes 'New Grub Street' a compelling story.

## REFERENCES

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3. PHELPS, Gilbert. 'An Introduction to 50 British Novels 1600-1900'. Pan Books Ltd., London, 1980.

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<sup>3</sup> Coustillas, Pierre. 'Collected Articles on George Gissing. Pan Literature Guides, London, 1968. p. 509.

<sup>4</sup> Phelps, Gilbert. 'An Introduction to 50 British Novels 1600-1900' Pan Books Ltd., London, 1980, p. 512.