

## From markets to metafiction: satires of the literary marketplace at the dawn of two new centuries

*Des marchés à la métafiction : satires du marché littéraire à l'aube de deux nouveaux siècles*

01 December 2012.

**Hywel Dix**

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PREO

# From markets to metafiction: satires of the literary marketplace at the dawn of two new centuries

*Des marchés à la métafiction : satires du marché littéraire à l'aube de deux nouveaux siècles*

## **Textes et contextes**

01 December 2012.

7 | 2012

**D'un début de siècle à l'autre : les littératures du début des XX<sup>e</sup> et XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles dans leur rapport au siècle précédent**

Hywel Dix

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1. A loss and a return: *News from Nowhere* and late nineteenth-century satire
  2. The prolongation of a career: satires of the marketplace in *New Grub Street*
  3. Readerly pleasures: *Hearts and Minds* and early twenty-first-century satire
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- Conclusion: From poetic vision to career of the writer
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- 1 According to Edward Said, the transition from nineteenth to twentieth-century literature is characterised by a drift from an emphasis on artistic vision towards a slightly different understanding of the career of the writer in a specific marketplace. Said associates the development of cultural modernity with a new mode of cultural questioning, which is typical both of the work of the important writers of modernist literature, and of modern cultural thinkers and philosophers more generally. For example, Said argues in *Beginnings* that in the

work of modern writers such as Eliot, Proust and Mallarmé there is a continual disruption of linear narrative, which can be related to those writers' textual strategies for unsettling accepted narrative structures and therefore for questioning the kinds of narrative closure associated with the kinds of narrative produced prior to the onset of modernism. In other words, modernist literature interrogates the assumptions that a text is a source of authority, and that a single narrative voice can be authoritative. At the same time, Said argues, a similar re-interrogation of grand narratives and validity claims can be found in the work of the important modernist cultural thinkers, so that in the work of Marx, Kierkegaard and especially Freud, there is a commitment to questioning that continually interrupts linear narrative and so enables a new kind of writing practice to emerge.

- 2 Said understood the onset of cultural modernism in a very specific way. To him, to make a new beginning is to intervene in a field that already exists, and to make current a set of ideas or body of material that pre-dates the new intervention. A new beginning, on this account, necessarily involves some kind of loss and some kind of return. Prior experience and previously existing work are re-visited in a new and dynamic way which is tantamount to a return to that work. At the same time, the process of re-making or re-discovering that work involves the individual in a process of superseding and in that specific sense losing sight of the original work.
- 3 This paper has two main aims. First, it seeks to test Said's hypothesis that the transition from nineteenth-century literature to twentieth-century literature is characterised by a shift from *poetic vision* to *career of the writer*. Implicitly, it will then go on to ask whether the more recent transition from twentieth to twenty-first-century literature can be considered a new beginning in Said's sense. In order to achieve these goals, the paper will provide a comparative reading of two pairs of satirical novels – one pair from the end of the nineteenth century, and one pair from the start of the twenty-first – in order to explore similarities, continuities and variations in cultural concern between the dawns of the two new centuries.
- 4 From the outset, therefore, it is necessary to say something about the social history of the concept of satire. In a study of the relationship between satire and realism in the nineteenth century, Aaron Matz has

argued that the satirical novel emerged towards the end of the Victorian period directly as a result of the tendency of Victorian realists to push the boundaries of what could be achieved in literary realism to their extreme edges. In the works of Hardy, Conrad and Gissing, Matz identifies a slightly new literary form, that of *satirical realism*, which he suggests, represents ‘a decisive fusion of 2 modes that had always existed in... close proximity’ (Matz 2010: 3). That is, the late Victorian practice of satirical realism, emerged both out of the earlier, eighteenth-century Augustan practice of poetic satire on the one hand, and the more dominant mid nineteenth-century form of the realist novel, on the other. Similarly, Metz suggests, just as the late nineteenth century saw a brief flowering of the new combination of two elements – satire and realism – that had previously been more distinct from each other, so also in the early twentieth century the short-lived practice of satirical realism used itself up, allowing Victorian realism to be superseded by new forms of anti-realist satire, and new kinds of dystopian writing.

- 5 William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890) and George Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1891) are prominent examples of novels that stand at the cusp Matz identifies between *satirical realism* and the different forms of modern satire that developed in the twentieth century. *News from Nowhere* is not strictly a satirical novel at all, and exists primarily in the dystopian tradition. Matz demonstrates that the modern return to dystopian writing, and modern kinds of satire, have a common origin in the attempts made by the late Victorian novelists to take their experiments in realism as far as they possibly could. The cultural capital of literary realism was itself used up in the process, Matz concludes, so that in the twentieth century new literary forms began to supersede those of both social realism and the short-lived *satirical realism*. This is precisely what happens in and after *New Grub Street*: the novel implicates its writer and reader in the process of creating satirical representation of a society from which they cannot distance themselves. Or to put it another way, it is a novel involved in the using up of the stock of cultural capital that it deploys. As Matz says, it is a kind of writing that is ‘aware of its own expiration – it might even be the conscious agent of its own demise’ (Matz 2010: 173).
- 6 All of this suggests that satire itself is not a stable category. Indeed, in a broad-ranging survey of satirical writing from Menippus to the late

twentieth-century, Charles A. Knight has demonstrated that satire cannot really be considered a genre or a form as such, but exists rather in a loose and varying tradition, stretching from dramatic satire in the world of the ancient Greeks, through the formal and poetic satires of the Augustan period, into the satirical realist novels of the late Victorian period, and hence capable of taking in diverse 'analogous or overlapping forms' (Knight 2004: 6).

- 7 Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, the kinds of satire that have been produced since the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have been different again. In a critical study entitled *Character and Satire in Postwar Fiction*, Ian Gregson has demonstrated that the new kinds of satire to have emerged in the course of the last generation can be considered what he calls 'post-human' satire (Gregson 2006: 132) because the psychological realism with which emotional affect was portrayed in the earlier periods has been bleached in a way that reduces human beings themselves to the status of 'a thing' or 'a machine' (Gregson 2006: 133). Examples Gregson gives of post-human satire are Martin Amis's *Money* (1984), *London Fields* (1989) and *The Information* (1995), and Will Self's *Great Apes* (1997) and *How the Dead Live* (2000).
- 8 The concept of post-human satire has useful implications for another recent variation on the satirical tradition, in which the object of satire is not only this or that individual person, but also the whole culture of representing public figures through different media narratives. In very recent variations of post-human satire, what is satirised is the practice of satire itself. It is a practice that can be described as satire upon satire, or meta-satirical satire, and it can be seen in such novels as Amanda Craig's *Hearts and Minds* (2009) and Sebastian Faulks's *A Week in December* (2009).
- 9 The satirical practice of Craig and Faulks demonstrates a basic thematic continuity with that of Gissing and Morris at the level of content: an agonistic desire to transgress the rules of a society, combined with an awareness of one's own limited position within that society. At the level of form, however, the practice of Craig and Faulks is subtly different. Combining a renewed interest in satirical representation with a meta-fictional and meta-satirical practice gives rise to a nascent fictional form, appropriate to the cultural, economic and political condi-

tions of the twenty-first century. That is to say, forms of satire recur with variation in different and varying social and historical contexts.

## 1. A loss and a return: News from Nowhere and late nineteenth-century satire

- 10 In *Beginnings* Edward Said argued that literary modernism represented a new beginning in the specific sense that the modernists intervened in a field – literature – that already existed prior to the late nineteenth century, and developed the literary practices of that field in new directions, both at the level of form and theme. In order to operate as a new departure in this sense, Said proposes three different ways in which the modernists diverged from their literary predecessors. First, Said suggests, it had become necessary with the onset of modernity to question what he calls the ‘dynastic principle’ – that is, the assumption that a text derives its own kind of authority from its status as a text (Said 1998: 138). To Said, the text is never an inert object and should not be considered complete in itself. Rather, moving away from the dynastic principle of textual production required a new understanding of how a text works as a space for the exploration of ideas in process. More specifically, in the case of the modernists, the text was seen as means of performing the diverse ideas and commitments existing on the part of the writer and which therefore comprise the writer’s career. On this reckoning, the text is not completed by the career of the writer; it is the other way around. That is, the act of publishing and releasing a text into the world is necessarily a public act which is tantamount to a public performance, and it is through the repetition of such acts and performances that the writer is able to perform that career. The new beginning of cultural and literary modernity requires that the text cease to be seen as authoritative and instead becomes both public and performative. The text made public exists consciously alongside other texts and other publics, so that the performance of the career renders questionable the assumption that a single text or a single narrative voice can be authoritative.

- 11 The second of Said’s criteria for understanding modernist writing as a new beginning can be related to this departure from the assumption

of authority in a single narrative voice. If the text is no longer seen as authoritative, the concept of the truth of a text becomes much more troubling and as a result, the challenge of modernity is precisely a challenge of how to approach the concept of truth in a new way. Said suggests that modernist writers such as Melville and Conrad approach truth only 'indirectly, by means of... mediation' (Said 1998: 90). Each employs textual strategies and frame narratives that place the narrative itself at several layers of apparent remove from the author, and hence raise implicit questions about the truth status of each level.

- 12 There is another reason why Said identifies the multiplication of different levels of narrative as a characteristic element of the onset of literary modernism. The transition from writing as a vocation based on poetic vision to writing as a career within an economic marketplace gives rise to what Said refers to as 'fear of the void' (Said 1998: 94). For the modernists, Said argues, the text is a way of minimising the pain of experience and of creating an alternative reality. But to do this, prior experience must be revisited and re-interrogated so that in this sense also a beginning is always a return to the already existing and a loss of what already exists. William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) is a good example of the kind of text Said refers to when he discusses the capacity of the author to use the text to minimise the pain of experience by imagining an alternative reality. It is a text that stands on the cusp of the transition from poetic vision to economic career, and as such embodies both a particular vision and an ironic emphasis on the materiality of cultural forms. This combination is also one of the reasons Matz identifies the satirical realism of the late Victorian period as a short-lived but distinctive form in its own right, both emerging out of the earlier and more distinct formal elements of satire and realism; and pointing the way to the new forms that were to emerge later.
- 13 In his account of cultural modernity, Said draws a distinction between what he calls 'traditional' and 'modernist' literary practices. In the former, Said argues, the writer is always present as a character in the narrative so that the narrative itself is also the book of the writer's personality: 'the Book of Life and the Book of Egoism – the novel – gradually become synonymous' (Said 1998: 141). Said refers to this traditional narrative practice as dynastic because it sets up the

author and hence the text as a source of authority. Swift and Johnson are examples Said gives of this kind of writing (Said 1998: 140). By contrast, and in order to fulfil the three conditions Said outlines for a new beginning, modernist writers had recourse to two techniques for resisting the dynastic principle. These can be referred to as a technique of 'consecutive explanation'; and the narrative freedom to go back to whatever has already been passed over in the narrative whenever it is expedient to do so (Said 1998: 140).

- 14 This is precisely what happens in *News from Nowhere*. In the style of medieval dream poetry, Morris's protagonist falls asleep and finds himself in a world that is both familiar and strange. It is a version of 1890 projected onto the twenty-first century, setting up a scenario in which the dialogue of the 'dreamer' with the characters he encounters enables Morris to give fictional realisation to some of the potential changes that might come about in the imagined future of his society. The dreamer has Morris's own name, William, so that the character is both dynastic in Said's earlier sense of the term, and anti-dynastic in the sense that he uses his dialogues to question the evolution of the structures of the society around him. In other words, *News from Nowhere* is neither typical of the formal poetic satire of the Augustan period, nor of the experiments in literary realism that characterised the mid nineteenth century. Fusing both in a new way, it can be considered an example of Matz's *satirical realism*. As such, it has a satirical object, but this is not so much one or more individuals; rather it is the social structure of late nineteenth-century capitalist society as a whole. The real object of Morris's dystopian writing is the willed transformation of that society
- 15 For example, during the long conversation with Old Hammond on the subject of 'how the change came' (Morris 1890: 132) William learns that the occasion for revolution was a 'great meeting summoned by the workmen leaders' in Trafalgar Square to discuss ways in which the imbalance between rich and poor could be addressed (Morris 1890: 140). This meeting was violently disrupted by the 'bourgeois guard' whose armed swoop on the assembly left five 'trampled to death on the spot' with many more people 'hurt' and 'some hundred of prisoners cast into gaol' (Morris 1890: 140). The event in question is projected onto the year 1952, so that at the time of publication Morris appears to have envisaged revolutionary change to exist at a distance



of approximately sixty years in the future. The novel itself is set well into the twenty-first century so that Old Hammond is one of the few figures able to recall what supposedly had happened to bring about revolutionary change and what capitalist society had been like before it.

- 16 This combination of pre-revolutionary capitalist structures with a wishful retrospective account of their transformation enables Morris to present satire as a utopian vision. As Said suggests, the new questioning that came about with cultural modernity required both a technique of 'consecutive explanation' and the capacity to go back over prior narratives in order to interrogate them, thereby disrupting the linear logic of narrative itself. The vision of the future presented by Morris is simultaneously presented by Old Hammond as a vision of the past. Despite the futuristic projection, therefore, the satire itself is chiefly concerned with the present and the immediate pre-history of Morris's own society. For this reason, the violent quelling of the assembly that is portrayed as starting the revolution in 1952 can more properly be seen as a satire on events such as the 1819 Peterloo Massacre, in which a large public meeting agitating for economic and social reform was broken up by soldiers with many trampled to death or killed by bayonets. This comparison is pointed up when Old Hammond says of the Trafalgar Square event that 'a similar meeting had been treated in the same way a few days before at a place called Manchester' (Morris 1890: 140). Manchester was the location of the Peterloo massacre.
- 17 Just as Morris's projection onto the future enables him to present a vision of his present and immediate past, so too his vision for a post-capitalist society ironically has the effect of drawing attention to the materialistic nature of his own society and to the capitalist economy he imagines negating. Morris imagines a marketplace beyond all markets and an economy beyond economics. In the projected future, labour is freely given rather than extracted by an inhuman system, so that everyone is involved in work that is stimulating and satisfying, with the less pleasurable chores necessary to a society shared out equally. This combination of satisfaction and stimulation gives to the work and to the workers a particular beauty that Morris believed was absent from both in the drudgery of capitalist society of the 1890s. His dreamer is struck by the physical beauty of the objects produced

in the society, and by its people. The bridge over the river Thames strikes the dreamer as a 'wonder of a bridge' (Morris 1890: 48) and this gives way shortly afterwards to an equally enthusiastic marveling at the beauty of the women who live nearby: 'kind and happy-looking in expression of face... and thoroughly healthy-looking' (Morris 1890: 53). This is different from physical beauty in the twenty-first century cosmetic sense, and relates the attributes of the individual to the well-being of the society in which they willingly co-operate. Elsewhere, Morris drew a distinction between what he referred to as 'useful work' and 'useless toil' (Morris 1884: 287) and it would be true to suggest that the post-capitalist world envisioned by *News from Nowhere* imagines the replacement of one by another.

- 18 The text's emphasis on how common welfare is related to freedom from cruel labour has important implications for the status of writing itself within the work. *News from Nowhere* was published at the moment of transition between writing as poetic vision and writing as fulfilment of a career, so that the text points in both directions. Within Morris's poetic vision, writing is useless if it is not beautiful, where beauty is again defined by its capacity to contribute to the common good of society. Thus when his dreamer dines with Hammond and Clara at the Hall of the British Museum, he thinks it incongruous that the works of art and literature displayed there do not depict contemporary life, and are instead projected back onto scenes from myth, legend and romance. He induces Clara to ask why this is, and receives a politicised explanation: the practice of leaving ordinary people and ordinary lives out of art and literature, and therefore of failing to see the beauty in those lives, has been inherited from the pre-revolutionary days and has become a habit so deeply ingrained that it has not yet been sloughed off. In other words, Morris depicts by implication a sense of beauty in writing premised on a socially inclusive range that is democratic in principle. This sense of beauty in democracy applies both to the content of written matter in *Nowhere* and to the physical act of writing itself. If people cannot physically write in a beautiful script, they are less likely to gain satisfaction from what they write and this in turn impinges on the general beauty of the society. Thus Hammond tells William, 'what's the use of a lot of ugly writing being done, when rough printing can be done so easily. You understand that handsome writing we like, and many people will

write their books out when they make them or get them written; I mean books of which only a few copies are needed' (Morris 1890: 66).

## 2. The prolongation of a career: satires of the marketplace in *New Grub Street*

- 19 If *News from Nowhere* dramatises the transition from capitalist to egalitarian society, and from poetic vision to career of the writer, it does so in a very particular way. In the future Morris imagines, writing has become unnecessary if it is not democratic so that the writer himself implicitly is involved in making himself redundant and the cultural capital of Morris's satire uses itself up. It is of great significance that the lengthiest section of the novel, William's dialogue with Old Hammond, takes place in the British Museum – which is retained in *Nowhere* after the revolution as a monument to the iniquities of the society that has been replaced and to how writing itself was implicated in the perpetuation of those iniquities.
- 20 George Gissing's 1891 novel *New Grub Street* presents a complementary view of the British Museum and of writing more generally. In Gissing's portrayal, the museum has become tantamount to a factory of writing, where workers carry out the research that will enable them to 'manufacture... printed stuff... for the day's market' (Gissing 1891: 137), thereby physically instantiating the imbrication of writing with the perpetuation of a capitalist economy that is consigned to the past in Morris's utopian vision. In Gissing's work, all writing is utilitarian, but no longer exists to advance the common good. Writing is presented as a means to an end within the structures of the market economy, and not as a way of imagining the dissolution of that economy. Edwin Reardon and his friend Biffen both work themselves to death. The journalist Jasper Milvain is a social climber prepared to marry for money to serve his career. The critic and journal editor Alfred Yule must contend with the stampede of much younger and productively energetic writers so that he is confined to obscurity and failure. Only Whelpdale, the failed writer who sets himself up as a literary agent really succeeds in the market economy of textual production, and his success clearly embodies the transition from writing as

artistic vision (at which he fails) to writing as a network of productive relations involved in the extension of a career.

- 21 In his discussion of this transition from nineteenth to twentieth-century literature in *Beginnings*, Edward Said outlines four distinct stages in the career of the newly emerging writer for the market, which can be used to map out the structure of *New Grub Street*. The first of these is the stage that Said refers to as the writer's life as *active writer*. By this he means that stage where writing exists as an ambition, or vocation, rather than a fully realised experience. The vocation to write at this beginning stage of a writer's career has roots in the earlier, pre-modernist period of literary history which Said characterises as being based more on poetic vision than on the fulfilment of a career within an economic marketplace. For the writer at this beginning stage of a career, time spent physically writing and promoting the written work conflicts with the inactive moments of his or her life – where 'inactive' refers to those periods when it is not possible to devote time or effort to writing because pressures of society impinge. Said says of writers such as Conrad, T.E. Lawrence, Oscar Wilde and Gerard Manley Hopkins that 'to none of them did writing come easily' precisely because in every case writing was a secondary activity that followed on from 'and in most ways conflicted with' a different kind of life or a different kind of career (Said 1998: 237). Writing, in other words, follows on from the prior life and to start to write is to set down a testament to an achieved career in the making, where the prior career itself is necessarily both revisited and superseded. In *New Grub Street*, Gissing gives fictional realisation to this beginning stage in the career of a modern writer in the figure of Jasper Milvain: 'My word, what a day I have had! I've just been trying what I really could do in one day if I worked my hardest' (Gissing 1891: 213). Jasper works in a burst of frenetic activity to launch his career while also caught up in the humdrum activities of keeping himself afloat. 'A year ago... I shouldn't have believed myself capable of such activities... I might keep up the high pressure if I tried. But then I couldn't dispose of all the work' (Gissing 1891: 214).
- 22 Following on from this beginning stage, the second stage that Said suggests is characteristic of a writer's trajectory is what he calls the paratextual stage. In this period, the different fragments of writing, both by the individual author and by those other writers whose work

he has read in the development of his own idiom, operate in conjunction with each other to compose an entire career. Said identifies Kafka as an example of such a writer, because Kafka spreads the figure of 'K' across all of his work, so that ultimately, rather than this or that character, the figure of Kafka himself becomes his own most significant creation (Said 1998: 252).

- 23 In *New Grub Street*, Gissing portrays the paratextual stage of the writer's career through the figures of Biffen and Whelpdale. Whelpdale has not managed to achieve critical success as a writer, but has established a 'literary advisership' (Gissing 1891: 247) in which customers pay him to recommend manuscripts to publishers, and which gradually burgeons into a profitable enterprise that is both based on his status as a writer, and which actively enhances that status in its turn. Biffen is working on a new form of critical realism in his draft of a projected novel about the life of 'Mr Bailey, Grocer' (Gissing 1891: 243), and supplements his income by teaching English composition to Baker, a clerk hoping to pass the entrance examination for the Civil Service. Ironically, the work of the clerk is more highly remunerated than the work of the tutor, so that when Baker attends his lessons in Biffen's attic room, there is an incongruity between Baker's status as paying customer and the humble circumstances in which the tutorials take place. Biffen is able to reconcile this incongruity through recourse to his specialist status as a writer: 'It doesn't make any difference to him that I live in a garret like this; I'm a man of education, and he can separate this fact from my surroundings' (Gissing 1891: 243). Like Whelpdale, Biffen's pursuit of a career in writing is enhanced by his performance of that role in the eyes of the public, and can be considered paratextual in Said's sense.
- 24 In writing about the development of a career through paratextual relationships, Said argues in *Beginnings* that the different paratexts that compose an overall career are linked to the individual style of the writer in question. The individual style is comprised both of a writer's linguistic idiom; and his or her ability, once a reasonable success is achieved, to quote and refer to his or her own earlier works. At the third stage of a career in progress, therefore, Said suggests that there is a productive tension between 'originality and habit' (Said 1998: 255) because the writer in question has developed a known and recognisable way of speaking so that when he writes, he is always writing in

the same mode again. The text as bearer of the writer's individual style thus becomes a 'sign that stands for the prolongation... of a career' (Said 1998: 257).

- 25 This prolonged stage of the writer's career is based on the mobilisation of signature as hallmark or indicator of quality, and can be seen in *New Grub Street* in Gissing's portrayal of Alfred Yule's 'moderate income' as a writer of 'volumes and articles which bore his signature' (Gissing 1891: 111). Gissing conscientiously provides a pre-history of this third stage in Yule's career, retrospectively narrating Yule's progress from author to sub-editor and then director of a journal called *All Sorts* and then to the editorship of *The Balance*. At the start of this rise, Yule had worked with such industry and energy that his proprietor 'never knew a man who could work so many consecutive hours' (Gissing 1891: 123). In other words, Yule has successfully advanced beyond the first, or launch, stage and moved also beyond the paratextual stage to that point at which his name as signature or hallmark effectively enables him to prolong his own career. Gissing contrasts this with the fortunes of Biffen, whose reputation as a writer does not command such attention and whose career is not so effectively prolonged as a result. Gissing points up this comparison by putting into the mouth of the arriviste Milvain the words, 'if only we could get it [Biffen's manuscript] mentioned in a leader or two, and so on, old Biffen's fame would be established with the better sort of readers' (Gissing 1891: 492).
- 26 It is because Biffen has failed to convert his name into an effective sign within the literary marketplace that he is unable to prolong his career. In his outline of the four different stages of the career of a professional writer, Said suggests that the conversion of name into signature can help the writer achieve success in the marketplace, but with the risk that it can also impose constraints on creativity. Possibly owing to the limitations imposed by these constraints, and because writing is not a career that many if any writers ever consciously retire from, the fourth and final stage that Said outlines is that point at which a writer senses that his career is coming to an end, and tries to sum up or recapitulate the career in writing despite the apprehension that most of his best work is probably already behind him. Yeats's 'Circle Animals' Desertion' or Swift's poem on his own death are examples of writing that Said identifies at this fourth

stage of the career (Said 1998: 260). The downfall of Biffen, Yule and Reardon in *New Grub Street* all instantiate that stage.

- 27 If Reardon has moved beyond the launch stage of his career by the time the action of the novel opens, it is clear that his novel 'On neutral Ground' is destined to be the high point of that career, and that he has achieved a level of popular and critical success that will never again be repeated. As a result of his inability to repeat that success, Reardon's financial circumstances become straitened; he becomes estranged from his wife Amy and moves into cramped, unsanitary housing – all with the conscious knowledge that his best work is already behind him. Thus at the climax of an argument with Amy over mismanagement of the family's economy he asserts, 'I am not only an ordinary man, Amy! If I never write another line, that won't undo what I have done. It's little enough to be sure, but you know what I am' (Gissing 1891: 229). The words form an implicit acknowledgement that his writing as a career has reached a dead end, and as a result, Reardon is forced back onto a defensive assertion of writing as a vocation – the very stage Gissing depicts him attempting and failing to shake off.
- 28 At different points in the novel, Gissing portrays Reardon at the first stage where he is launching his career, and at the fourth stage where he knows that the zenith of that career is behind him but is nevertheless unable to give up. This enables Gissing to mobilise the twin narrative techniques of consecutive explanation combined with non-linear interruption that Said suggests is characteristic of the onset of the modernist literary imagination. *New Grub Street* can be seen as a novel about writing novels; it is a text that foregrounds its own status as a work in progress where the writing itself is 'about writing' (Gissing 1891: 137). Gissing is unable to take the imaginative leap of Morris, and uses his satire to portray the failure of individual aspirations rather than satirising social structures in order to envision their willed transformation as Morris does. As a result, Gissing is unable to envisage any alternative to the market economy of which his textual production is consciously a part, and this underlines the extent to which the transition from the literature of the nineteenth century to that of the twentieth is a transition from poetic vision to economic marketplace. A question this leaves unanswered is whether or not the

transition from twentieth to twenty-first century literature can be seen as another new beginning, and if so, on what terms?

### 3. Readerly pleasures: *Hearts and Minds* and early twenty-first-century satire

- 29 As the critical genealogy of satire developed by Knight and complicated by Matz demonstrates, satire ranks among the most ancient and venerated of literary forms. In the twenty-first century, satire is available in a range of media: on film and television, via the internet, in the print media and (still) in fiction. Its targets, from politicians to actors and from business leaders to sportsmen, are presented as the flawed leaders in their chosen fields. What is often absent from critical analysis of satirical representation is a sense of how that representation is constructed and conveyed. In other words, sources of satire play a part in constructing the very culture that they offer to satirise. For this reason, to write a literary satire is also necessarily to create a text that is at least partly about the production of text, so that there is a level of thematic continuity from the late nineteenth-century satires of Morris and Gissing to the fictional practice of twenty-first-century satire. This can be seen from an examination of Amanda Craig's 2009 novel *Hearts and Minds*, and Sebastian Faulks's novel *A Week in December*, published the same year.
- 30 *Hearts and Minds* is set in a fictionalised London between the terrorist attacks of 2005 and the start of the worldwide banking crisis in 2008. It presents a London that is consciously part of a series of global networks, both legal and illicit, and does so through the eyes of a succession of outsiders. The lawyer Polly Noble investigates the disappearance of her Russian nanny, Iryna, and gets drawn into the life of her Zimbabwean refugee taxi driver Job. Job attempts to rescue a Ukrainian victim of human trafficking and enforced prostitution called Anna. Anna is imprisoned in a ground floor flat below the home of Katie, a young American seeking a new life working for a London magazine, the *Rambler*. Katie in turn becomes involved with her editor's estranged South African son Ian; and the millionaire proprietor of her magazine, Roger Trench, so that the novel creates a kaleido-



scopic effect, with every rotation bringing the characters into a new alignment with each other.

- 31 Craig's main point is that although her characters may think that they live in isolation, they are frequently brought into contact with a whole crowd of other people of whose lives they know nothing. For her reader, one of the pleasures provided by her satire is the pleasure of trying to identify which fictional character corresponds to which public figure in society and therefore working out precisely who is being satirised by whom. At a party held at the *Rambler* offices, for example, Katie identifies a 'tiny, wrinkled actress who is in a current production at the National Theatre' and 'an Indian novelist of immense distinction and even more immense ego' (Craig 2009: 276). These appear to be satirical portrayals of the actress Judie Dench and the writer Salman Rushdie.
- 32 Consistent with the earlier work of Morris and Gissing, Craig's satire draws attention to the status of writing as such. Lest this point should be overlooked, Craig prefaces the novel with a by-line taken from Gissing's 1903 autobiographical novel, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*: 'It is the mind which creates the world about us, and even though we stand side by side in the same meadow, my eyes will never see what is beheld by yours.' These words suggest that there is no unmediated access to reality; rather how the individual perceives his or her relationship to the surrounding society involves a complex interaction of sense perception and material modes of communication which work together to inform the world views that they appear to reflect objectively. Gissing's fictional practice portrays the involvement of writing in the mediation of reality. By introducing her novel with an extract from his work explicitly thematising the perception of reality in writing, Craig appears to indicate that her work too will interrogate the relationship between writing and the creation of the very perceptions of reality that the writing offers to portray. In other words, Craig uses Gissing's words to provide oblique commentary on her own work, and to indicate that there is a continuity of cultural concern between the two different periods in which the different writers were active.
- 33 Both Gissing and Craig demonstrate that satire plays a part in creating its own objects. They do this by employing the twin narrative

techniques that Said suggested were typical of the onset of cultural modernity: the technique of consecutive explanation, and the simultaneous capacity to interrupt linear time frames and continually go back over what had already been narrated. Gissing achieves this by portraying figures such as Reardon and Yule, who, within the narrative are both at the launch stage of their careers and at the final stage where those careers are dying away. Consistent with her continuing interest in the status of writing within society, Craig too portrays the employees of her fictional magazine at different stages of their career.

- 34 When Katie moves to London to work for the *Rambler*, for example, she does so because she has broken off her engagement to a wealthy fiancé. The social status and position that seemed to be awaiting her as a society heiress suddenly disappear from view, so that at that start of the novel she is 'just Katie Perry, a Cinderella in reverse who has lost her career, her fiancé and her bloom' (Craig 2009: 41). The metaphor of Cinderella in reverse suggests that Craig believes there are distinct and different stages that exist in a writer's career, and that they are to be approached in a fairly linear direction, moving from one to another.
- 35 The change in register from a romantic setting to a professional one points to a different element of Craig's satire, possibly more particular to the recent forms that satire has taken: it includes an element of gender reflexivity. This is in contrast to the dominant modes of satire in the classical, Augustan and Victorian worlds, in which, Charles Knight suggests, there is a 'virtual absence' of female satirists (Knight 2004: 7). Moreover, that Craig's female protagonist should satirise her male colleagues at the publishing company is highly significant, because, Knight argues, it was the twentieth century's 'emergence of women as reporters and columnists' that enabled women to 'assume a place as journalistic satirists' (Knight 2004: 7). It is only being in the satire business that makes it possible to create satires of that business.
- 36 The irony with which *Hearts and Minds* opens is that having given up on her career as a society heiress, Katie in fact engages on the first step of her new professional career at the magazine. To achieve success, she feels that she 'ought to know more' about 'the British media,

with its feuds, alliances, personalities and obsessions' but she simply 'doesn't have the time or the energy' (Craig 2009: 77). In other words, like Jasper Milvain in *New Grub Street*, or Alfred Yule in his younger days, Katie is at the first of Said's four stages of a writer's career – the stage at which active work is pressing and urgent on the one hand, and undermined by the business of economic and material survival on the other. Katie needs to work in order to develop her career, but needs also to devote time to establishing her home and network of friends and acquaintances, which directly conflicts with the need to work.

- 37 If Craig portrays Katie at the first of Said's four stages of a career, then the opposite is true of her portrayal of Katie's senior colleague, Mark Crawley. Crawley had once been married to the daughter of the former proprietor of the *Rambler*, Max de Monde, and his divorce has presented a serious obstacle to his career: 'where most of the young people on the staff are on the way up, the opposite is true of Crawley' (Craig 2009: 83). That is to say, where many of the employees of the magazine are moving through the first three stages of a professional career, reaching for the point at which their own names will serve as a signature for the prolongation of that career, Crawley is at the fourth stage, knowing that his best work is behind him yet still feeling the compunction to write. Writing may be a business, but it is one from which very few professionals consciously retire, even when their best work has already been completed. If this was true at the dawn of the twentieth century, it is still true at the dawn of the twenty-first.

## 4. Markets and metafiction in *A Week in December*

- 38 In *Hearts and Minds*, Amanda Craig combines the narrative pleasure of identifying who is being caricatured with a more serious portrayal of the role played by writing in generating the very objects that it appears to satirise. The same combination exists in Sebastian Faulks's novel, *A Week in December*. Like William Morris's *News from Nowhere* from the period immediately prior to the twentieth century, *A Week in December* can be seen as an attempt to write a new kind of condi-

tion of England novel. Consistent with the state of the nation when it was written in the early twenty-first century, Faulks's two main plot lines centre on the morally dubious dealings of city hedge fund manager John Veals, and the recruitment into an Islamic terrorist cell of Glaswegian youth Hassan al-Rashid. The novel is set over seven days in December 2007 during which Sophie Topping, wife of the country's most recent, most ambitious and most wealthy Conservative politician, prepares a dinner party for a number of other North London millionaires. 'She hadn't deliberately sought out rich people as her guests. All the others... were people she had met – a simple cross-section – at the school gates over the last ten years' (Faulks 2009: 372).

- 39 Faulks's main theme is how people in contemporary London have become atomised, disconnected from each other in their daily lives and therefore lacking in emotional contact or any sense of mutual co-existence. The irony of a 'cross-section' of 'millionaires' suggests that what he really wants of his characters is that they should be shocked out of their divided, compartmentalised and competing existences into a fuller awareness of the lives of others. For this reason, many of the novel's thematic commitments are conveyed through its apparently minor characters.
- 40 Hassan is not invited to Sophie Topping's salubrious dinner, but ironically, his father Farooq al-Rashid spends the week preparing for a visit to Buckingham Palace where he is to receive an OBE for services to the lime pickle industry. Time and again, Faulks portrays lives that are greedy and divisive where they should exist in solidarity, only to hint at some deeper social or cultural inclusion in the most unlikely places.
- 41 Faulks's satire presents a series of puzzles, and as with Craig, trying to hunt up the original figure being satirised provides much of the text's narrative pleasure. There is a strong sense of irony in Farooq al-Rashid's receiving an OBE from the royal family when the businessman on whom he might have been modelled, Mohamed Al-Fayed was in reality snubbed by the Queen, Duke of Edinburgh, Queen Mother and Prince of Wales, who withdrew their royal warrants from Harrods, the fashionable department store owned by Fayed. There is also a strong identification between Lisa, the presenter of television game

show *It's Madness* who had 'been lead singer with a successful but short-lived band called Girls From Behind' and Cheryl Cole, sometime singer with the pop group *Girls Aloud* and presenter of televised talent competition *X Factor* (Faulks 2009: 42).

42 *It's Madness* is imagined as televised competition in which psychiatric patients compete for the right to hospital treatment. One of its contestants is a 'bi-polar woman' who explains to her audience that at times 'she was caught in a downswing that could last for months' (Faulks 2009: 42). This appears to be a caricature of Susan Boyle, who competed in another televised talent competition, *Britain's Got Talent*, in 2009 and became a media and marketing phenomenon, known as much for overcoming serious learning difficulties as for her own performances. In his fictional version of the contest and its entrants, Faulks takes to a logical extreme what is already implicit in the structure of such cultural products. Susan Boyle became successful – the media were quick to point out – despite the disadvantage of having learning difficulties, so that those very difficulties became part of the narrative of her success. Contestants in Faulks's world cannot succeed in spite of their psychiatric problems; on the contrary, they must enact those very problems if they are to succeed in the competition that they have entered. Faulks wishes readers to see that such cultural programming is both voyeuristic and exploitative, taking advantage of vulnerable people to provide inexpensive entertainment while offering limited reward to the people who are exploited.

43 The same is true of how Faulks satirises literary society through the character of the reviewer R. Tranter. Like Gissing's Edwin Reardon, Tranter has been embittered by material failure as a writer and like Gissing's Alfred Yule he attempts to compensate by writing reviews of other people's books. Faulks signals his narrative continuity with the earlier period when he describes Tranter's home, an old Victorian factory workers' terrace of the kind described in Morris's *News from Nowhere*: 'modest houses built for another London, a place long gone' whose 'first tenants' were 'manual workers who commuted to the smog-producing factories of Bermondsey or Poplar, then returned at night to their modest white enclave' (Faulks 2009: 18). Morris's dreamer sought to wish away the need for workers to engage in the smog-producing toil that Faulks's writer idealises in *A Week in December*. Ironically, therefore, where *News from Nowhere* was

future-orientated and used an imagined future to make a comment about the world of 1890, Faulks's fiction is retrospective and unable to project any future at all. This might be related to the fact that Faulks writes in a society in which the primary determinant of all social relationships is economic, so that the anti-capitalist revolution that Morris located only sixty years in the future has become more or less unimaginable.

- 44 The entrenched preponderance of capitalist practices has important implications for how Faulks is able to portray the nature and role of writing within the capitalist economy. Faulks portrays it as just one of a series of co-existent areas of economic activity, which also include the manufacture of lime pickles, the selling of broadcasting rights and merchandising opportunities related to professional sports, the commodification of public art and the commercialisation of entertainment. By presenting the writer Tranter alongside his portrayal of the art gallery, the television channel and internet publishing, Faulks is able to satirise all those things. At the same time, museums and galleries, television broadcasting and the internet are all themselves powerful potential sources of satire.
- 45 For example, during 2008 the department store Marks and Spencer ran a series of television advertisements using the slogan, 'This is not just food. (This is M and S food).' The advertisements playfully mocked the tendency of self-styled celebrity chefs to use hyperbole and exaggerated language when describing their recipes on television programmes about cookery. In *A Week in December*, Faulks has his financier John Veals cease all exports of cocoa from plantations in Africa, reckoning that a long unavailability of the product will cause a long-term price increase: 'This is not just Belgian chocolate, this is the last fucking Belgian chocolate you'll eat for six months' (Faulks 2009: 239). In other words, Faulks puts into the mouth of his character words that explicitly parody the television advertisements broadcast by Marks and Spencer. However, the advertisements themselves were already a parody of the culture of celebrity chefs, so that Faulks in effect has created a parody of a parody.
- 46 In other words, where Morris and Gissing at the earlier period produced writing that was about the status of writing itself, Faulks takes the commercial imperative implied in their work to a logical extreme,

producing not only writing about writing, but also and more specifically, parody of parody and satire of satire. As the advertisements might have said, Faulks's novel is not just fiction, it is fiction about the production of fiction as commodity in a world where nothing has value beyond the marketplace of which it is a part. For this reason, the kind of fictional practice Faulks employs can be described as meta-satirical fiction.

## Conclusion: From poetic vision to career of the writer

- 47 Edward Said's argument was that the main development in literature between the nineteenth century and the twentieth was the transition from *poetic vision* to *career of the writer*. Standing at the moment of departure for this transition, George Gissing and William Morris both draw attention to the economic materiality of writing for the marketplace in their work. In Gissing's *New Grub Street*, Reardon and Milvain work themselves to death so that the cultural capital derived from their status as publicly recognisable writers uses itself up. Morris's dreamer envisages a situation in which writing has become functionally unnecessary because it is involved in the perpetuation of an industrial society that has become obsolescent within the dream projected by the text, so that for a different reason, cultural capital again uses itself up.
- 48 By the early twenty-first century, the status of writing as an expendable commodity for the marketplace has ceased to be novel in the way that Said argued it was at the start of the twentieth. Instead, writing is thoroughly shot through with commercial and economic practices so that Amanda Craig portrays her aspiring writer setting off at the first of the four stages Said identifies in the career of the professional writer. It is difficult to assess whether or not the transition from twentieth to twenty-first century literature can be seen as another new beginning like the onset of modernism. Certainly, in the continuing prevalence of writing about the production of writing for the professional marketplace that we find in both Craig and Faulks, there is a continuity of cultural concern from the dawn of the earlier century. Similar satires on satire itself can be found in a seam of recent writing including Angela Carter's *Wise Children* (1992), Ian McE-

wan's *Amsterdam* (1998), Iain Banks's *Dead Air* (2002), Jim Crace's *Six* (2003) and Jonathan Buckley's *Telescope* (2011). The continuing prevalence of writing about the profession of writing appears to militate against a consideration of the twenty-first century as another new dawn, and implies instead that the new work produced is rather a logical extension and continuation of the literary marketplace that had already been fully assembled.

- 49 On the other hand, to answer the question whether or not the twenty-first century can be seen as another new departure it is useful to return to Edward Said's criteria for judging the nature of a new beginning. On Said's account of modernism, modernist writing was new for the specific reason that it intervened in a field – writing – that already existed, and in the process of doing so, revived that whole field and made it current for a new generation of readers and writers. Said's sense of a new beginning therefore hinges simultaneously on a return to what already exists, and, in the process of making it current, the relative loss of what already exists. In this sense, the satire about satire that we find in the work of Craig and Faulks in the early twenty-first century can be seen as a logical extension of the writing about writing that we find in the work of Gissing and Morris at the start of the twentieth. It is a new beginning in the precise sense that it represents both a return to the writing practice of the earlier period, and a loss of what is being returned to.

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## English

This paper provides a comparative reading of two pairs of satirical novels – one pair from the end of the nineteenth century, and one pair from the start of the twenty-first – in order to explore similarities, continuities and variations in satirical practice between the dawns of two new centuries.

George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891) for example, is a novel about the writing of novels. It implicates its writer and readers in the process of creating satirical representations of a society from which they cannot distance themselves. Or, it is a novel involved in the using up of the very stock of cultural capital that it deploys. This contrasts with William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), where satire is employed as a connective device, projecting onto a desired future a fictional dissolution of social, political and economic hierarchies.

The paper suggests that more recent novels by Sebastian Faulks and Amanda Craig use satire to create a sense of the world that is caught somewhat between the two poles of entrapment and social transformation embodied by Gissing and Morris. Craig's *Hearts and Minds* (2009) and Faulks's *Week in December* (2009) satirise the public culture of contemporary London. At one level, as was the case for Gissing and Morris, the pleasure offered by these texts for the reader is trying to decode or identify which public figure is being satirised in the fiction. At another level, however, the novels by Craig and Faulks satirise not only this or that individual figure, but also the whole culture of representing public figures through different media narratives. In other words, what is satirised is the practice of satire itself. It is a practice that can be described as satire upon satire, or meta-satirical satire.

The paper concludes by suggesting that the satirical practice of Craig and Faulks demonstrates a basic thematic continuity with that of Gissing and Morris at the level of content: an agonistic desire to transgress the rules of a society, combined with an awareness of one's own limited position within that society. At the level of form, however, the practice of Craig and Faulks is subtly different. Combining a renewed interest in satirical representation with a meta-fictional and meta-satirical practice gives rise to a nascent fictional form, appropriate to the cultural, economic and political conditions of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Français

Cet article propose une analyse comparée de deux romans satiriques de la fin du <sup>xix</sup><sup>e</sup> siècle et de deux autres textes contemporains. D'une époque à l'autre, ce sont les similitudes, les continuités et les variations de l'écriture satirique qui sont interrogées. *New Grub Street* (1891), de George Gissing, est un roman métafictionnel qui engage son lecteur dans la création de représentations satiriques, par opposition à *News from Nowhere* (1890) de William Morris, qui s'emploie à proposer une dissolution fictive des hiérarchies sociale, politique et économique.

L'auteur suggère que les récents romans de Sebastian Faulks et de Amanda Craig reposent sur une écriture satirique à mi-chemin entre l'incitation et la mise à contribution prônées par Gissing, et l'idéal de transformation sociale évoqué par Morris. Dans *Hearts and Minds* (2009) et *Week in December* (2009), la culture populaire londonienne est l'objet de la satire. Si, tout comme chez Gissing et Morris, ces textes offrent au lecteur le plaisir du décodage et de l'identification des personnages satirisés, c'est également le procédé même de la représentation satirique dans différents media que ces romans remettent en question. On parlera alors de satire métasatirique.

Cette étude démontre que la satire chez Craig et Faulks s'inscrit, après Gissing et Morris, dans une continuité thématique (le désir agnostique de transgresser les normes sociales), tandis que l'écriture et les choix narratifs de ces romans contemporains font le choix de se faire l'écho du contexte culturel, économique et politique du <sup>xxi</sup><sup>e</sup> siècle.

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