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“More than most men am I dependent on sympathy to bring out the best that is in me.”
Commonplace Book

“No more ardent admirer”: James Cuthbert Hadden on George Gissing in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*

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It is not uncommon for the reputation of popular writers to enter an eclipse in the years immediately following their death. Many vanish from literary memory for decades, and sometimes even centuries, before being rediscovered. Gissing presents an unusual case. Although “rediscovered” in the 1960s and 1970s mainly by John Spiers and his team of editors, who successfully promoted and made available Gissing’s work to an enlarged readership, Gissing’s works continued to be read and admired by a discerning circle of bookmen and collectors in the decades immediately following his death in 1903. To some extent devotion to Gissing was helped by the posthumous publication of his unfinished Roman novel *Veranilda* (1904), and of several volumes of his short stories in book form. Thomas Seccombe’s appreciative introduction to *The House of Cobwebs* (1906) did much to keep interest in Gissing alive. Yet Gissing’s reputation depended ultimately not on an attachment to posthumous publications, but on the perception of the literati that Gissing and his work mattered.

To this list of admirers and collectors of Gissing’s work must be added the name of James Cuthbert Hadden, who between 1901 and 1909 missed no opportunity to proclaim his admiration for Gissing in his “Readers and Writers” column in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle*. The *Wolverhampton Chronicle* was a 1d. weekly newspaper read in Staffordshire, Shropshire, and adjoining Midland counties. Hadden’s column made its first appearance in the issue of Wednesday, 13 March 1901. Unlike the paper’s previous “Books and Authors” column, which consisted of little more than publishers’ and booksellers’ announcements, Hadden’s “Readers and Writers” column featured personal comment and reflection, and displayed his enthusiasm and inside knowledge of the book world. In the early days of the column, Hadden introduced himself to his readers as “an occasional contributor” to the *Cornhill* “when Mr Payn was editor,”¹ and as author of a

monograph on Thomas Campbell for the “Famous Scots” series.² Hadden was in fact himself a Scot, born in the village of Banchory-Ternan near Aberdeen on 9 September 1861, this making him four years Gissing’s junior. He began his working life as a bookseller’s assistant in Aberdeen, before moving to London, where he studied music while working for the publishers George Routledge & Sons. He obtained a post as church organist first in Aberdeen, and then at St Michael’s Parish Church in Crieff in 1881. He finally abandoned music for a literary career in 1889 following the publication of monographs on Handel and Mendelssohn in 1888, and settled permanently in Edinburgh.

There is no evidence that Hadden knew Gissing personally ; nor do their writings for journals appear to have coincided. Hadden’s first article for Payn’s *Cornhill*—on “Paganiniana”—did not appear until 1891, three years after the serialisation of Gissing’s *A Life’s Morning* in the *Cornhill* in 1888. Two years also separated “A Lodger in Maze Pond,” Gissing’s last story for the *National Review* (February 1895), and Hadden’s first contribution to that journal, an article on “The Multiplication of Musicians,” in July 1897. However, they may have corresponded. In considering the possible connection between handwriting and character in his newspaper column on 24 July 1907, Hadden noted: “I remember being very struck by George Augustus Sala’s small writing, and wondering at the time whether his having been an engraver had any connection. But George Gissing wrote a very minute hand, too, and he had nothing to do with engraving.” Certainly, they appear to have known some of the same people in London literary circles, and some of Hadden’s knowledge about Gissing is likely to have come from gossip and anecdote as well as published sources. It is possible, for example, that James Payn, who read Gissing’s manuscripts for Smith and Elder, provided Hadden with the information about Gissing’s small handwriting. Among other common acquaintances was the Scottish poet John Davidson, whom Hadden had known when Davidson was a schoolmaster at Crieff, and with whom Gissing sometimes dined when he came up to London from Epsom.

Hadden first mentioned Gissing in his column on 19 June 1901 in an approving response to the success of *Our Friend the Charlatan*, which had appeared that year:

The success of Mr. George Gissing’s new novel, “The Charlatan,” seems to indicate that Mr. George Gissing has at length come into his own. It is not before time. Mr. Gissing’s life in London in early days was a long heart-grinding fight against poverty. When he was at work on “New Grub Street” his finances became quite exhausted. He finished the book in six weeks, working ten hours a day, speaking to

no one, and keeping himself alive by selling books off his shelves to second-hand dealers. "I sold the copyright for £150, and *ate* once more," he has since said. Mr. Gissing, I believe, lives in a small house at Epsom, and goes once a week to London where he rambles about the lower districts in search of character and incidents. His sole amusement is an occasional visit to the British Museum.

Speaking of methods of literary production Mr. Gissing says he has only one rule to work by. "It is simply to write of what I know best. The principle is vital, the life of literature. If my stories are pessimistic, it is only because my life is such. My early environments were sordid, the people were sordid, and my work is but a reflection of it all. Sadness? My books are full of it. Show me the masterpieces of art, literature, or music, and I will show you creations palpitating with sadness. Mine has been but the common lot, and there is no use saying much about it. I find my little happiness in the fields in summer, and am content when I think of the toiling millions who never see a blue sky, or feel the earth yield beneath their feet."³ After this, Mr. Gissing's readers will easily understand the gloom and the sternness of some of his stories. But Mr. Gissing knows what he is doing. Practically nobody but he has analysed faithfully and faithfully given us the significance of the life of the enormous lower middle class in the chief town environment of our pushing civilization. Among the second-rate novelists he is the solitary realist studying life attentively, while crowds of pseudo-realists are doing literary stage tricks to please the public.

In placing Gissing as a writer of the second rank, Hadden is adopting a contemporary estimation of an author whose works had not achieved a classic status, while at the same time emphasizing Gissing's uniqueness and superiority to other popular writers of the day. When the "Readers and Writers" column resumed on 10 September 1902 after a month's suspension, Hadden reprinted extracts from the article on Gissing the previous year. He was to repeat passages from it on several occasions as a filler for his column in the years that followed. It is possible that he had forgotten he had already used it, but it is much more likely that Hadden, after the fashion of successful raconteurs, liked repeating in different contexts what he knew his readers would enjoy hearing again. He recalled again Gissing's early hardships in London and the circumstances in which *New Grub Street* was composed on 10 December, in the context of a discussion of leisure:

I have been struck with the very pathetic remark made by Mr. George Gissing in a recent magazine article. Mr. Gissing speaks of the sudden hunger that comes over one for a certain book, and also of the hopelessness of ever finding time to read some books again. "Perhaps," he says, "when I lie waiting for the end, some of those lost books will come into my wandering thoughts, and I shall remember them as friends to whom I owed a kindness, friends passed upon the way. What a regret in that last farewell!"⁴

Of course Mr. Gissing is a pessimist; we see that from his novels, which are as cheerless as Haworth Parsonage was to Charlotte Brontë on a wet day. But what can you expect from a man whose life in London in early days was such a long, heart-grinding fight against poverty?...

Hadden then repeats the passage from the article of 19 June 1901.

Hadden revered *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), and the fictional diarist's reflections provided a starting-point for the columnist's own literary opinions in the early months of 1903. On 18 February, he invoked Gissing in a discussion of "the libelling of the profession of letters" by Grant Allen, Robert Buchanan, and Robert Louis Stevenson. Gissing is identified with Ryecroft in Hadden's account, which furthers the story of Gissing as the starving writer and hero as man-of-letters:

Now we have Mr. George Gissing uttering the same old wail in "The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft." Mr. Gissing has been in Grub-street, and I assume that there is something of his own autobiography in Ryecroft's sadly depressing story. Any way, this is what Ryecroft has to say after having been through the toils of the ink-stained world. Let us give him a paragraph to himself.

"With a lifetime of dread experience behind me, I say that he who encourages any young man or woman to look for his living to 'literature' commits no less than a crime. If my voice had any authority, I would cry this truth aloud wherever men could hear. Hateful as is the struggle for life in every form, this rough-and-tumble of the literary arena seems to me sordid and degrading beyond all others. Oh, your prices per thousand words ! Oh, your paragraphings and your interviewings ! And oh, the black despair that awaits those down-trodden in the fray !"⁵

This is the cry of a wayworn man of letters who for twenty years had just managed to keep the wolf from the door. Often he had to go without food, often he had to sell his books to procure a meal. The thing has been done before. I have done it myself, though it is many years ago. Robert Buchanan did it when he lived with David Gray in that "ghastly garret" in Stamford-street. Scores of men whose names are known to literature have gone hungry, and have robbed their shelves to satisfy their stomach's demands.

But Grub-street, so far as I can make out, is a thing of the past. The trouble now is that the path of literature is too easy. Is there, at this moment, Mr. Gissing asks, any boy of twenty, fully educated, but without means, without help, with nothing but the glow in the brain and steadfast courage in his heart, who sits in a London garret and writes for dear life ? I shouldn't care to say that there isn't ; yet, like Mr. Gissing, all that I have read and heard of late years about young writers shews them in a very different aspect.

No garreteers, these novelists and journalists awaiting their promotion. They never want a meal. They eat—and entertain their critics, too—at fashionable restaurants ; they are seen in expensive seats at the theatre ; they live in handsome flats—photographed for an illustrated paper on the first excuse. You read of them everywhere—of young Mr. This or young Miss That, whose latest story is "booming." But is there ever a hint of stern struggle, of the pinched stomach, of the frozen fingers ?

So much the better, you will say. I am not sure. The poet tells in song what he has learnt in sorrow. Some of the grandest things in our literature have been the work of men who have suffered. Starvation, it is true, does not necessarily produce fine literature, but one understands Mr. Gissing when he feels uneasy about these carpet-authors. If they have the right stuff in them one might even wish that some

calamity would overtake them which would leave them friendless in the streets. They would perish perhaps. But set that possibility against the all but certainty of their present prospect—fatty degeneration of the soul—and is it not acceptable ?

Hadden returned to *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* a week later on 25 February, in discussing talk in the literary world about a revival of Anthony Trollope:

There is a very contemptuous reference to Trollope in Mr. George Gissing's "Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft," to which I referred last week. Mr. Gissing affects to believe that the neglect into which Trollope has fallen is to be traced to the revelations of his autobiography. He thinks the "great, big, stupid public" may have been offended by that revelation of mechanical methods of making fiction. "A man with a watch before his eyes, penning exactly so many words every quarter of an hour—one imagines that this picture might haunt disagreeably the thoughts of even Mudie's steadiest subscriber, that it might come between him or her and any Trollopien work that lay upon the counter."⁶ So Mr. Gissing. [...]

I do not see why so much should be made of Trollope's so-called mechanical methods. I see, of course, that Trollope made a big mistake in telling anything about his methods. But take the case of Dickens, as even Mr. Gissing states it. In the pages of Forster the "great, big, stupid public" saw Dickens at his desk, learnt how long he sat there, were told that he could not get on without having certain little ornaments before his eyes, and that blue ink and a quill pen were indispensable to his writing. Did this information ever restrain the "steadiest subscriber" ? Does it affect the loyalty of the "great, big, stupid public" ? Not at all. An end to such nonsense ! The merits of Trollope's work, or anybody else's work, are not in the least affected by one's knowledge of how that work was produced. A novelist may write standing on his head if he likes, so long as he produces an interesting story.

In a notice of Hugo Ames' collection of essays, *Thirteen Thoughts: or, Studies in Small Philosophy*, in his column of 8 April 1903, Hadden quotes Ryecroft's view that "the vituperation of the English climate" is foolish, and concludes: "Mr. Gissing must be one of the happy people who, like the birds, are able to follow the summer all the year round. As I wrote elsewhere the other day, it is all very well to praise the British climate when you can fly from its rigours and vagaries to some blessed seat. ..."

On 15 April, Hadden took issue with a negative notice of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* in the *Publishers' Circular*:

One hears a great deal about the vagaries of criticism. They are indeed amusing, to say the least. There has been no more bepraised book of the spring publishing season than Mr. George Gissing's "The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft." Hundreds of columns have been devoted to it: the reviewers have recognised it as almost a work of genius. Yet here is a reviewer in the *Publishers' Circular* declaring that he has "found it a trifle mawkish and not a little boring."

The obvious retort is that the *Publishers' Circular* reviewer is incapable of appreciating such a work, just as the bludgeonly reviewer of the *Quarterly* was incapable of appreciating Keats. I make no boast—I simply state a fact—when I say that I

read every word of "Henry Ryecroft" with the most earnest attention. The book, in short, took possession of me. Like Charles Lamb in a certain case, I should want to examine the bumps of the man who finds it "a trifle mawkish and not a little boring."

Hadden's devotion to *Ryecroft* was marked by his close identification with its elements of nostalgia and resistance to the modern world. "Edisons and Marconis may thrill the world with astounding novelties," Hadden wrote on 19 August 1903,

They astound me, as they astound every one else, but straight-way, like Mr. George Gissing, I forget my astonishment, and am in every respect the man I was before. The thing has simply no concern for me, and I care not a volt if to-morrow the proclaimed discovery be proved a journalist's mistake or invention.⁷

Gissing's death in December 1903 came as a shock to Hadden, and several paragraphs of his column of 13 January 1904 were devoted to Gissing:

The death of Mr. George Gissing has come as a painful surprise, for though he had long been known to suffer from indifferent health there was no hint of a serious illness, and he was only forty-seven. The hard struggles of his early days must have told on a constitution hereditarily far from strong. Mr. Gissing had himself experienced the Grub Street of which he wrote. As a young man he fought a long heart-grinding fight against poverty, and at one crisis in his career kept himself alive only by selling books off his shelves.

Critics and readers complained of the gloom and melancholy and unrelieved pessimism of his books. But Mr. Gissing from the first adopted the vital principle of art which bids a man write what he knows best. "If my stories are pessimistic," he once said, "it is only because my life is such. My environments were sordid, the people were sordid, and my work is but a reflection of it all." Mr. Gissing found his little happiness in the fields in summer, and was content when he thought of the toiling millions in the towns, who never see a blue sky or feel the earth yield beneath their feet.

Questions of speed and routine as they affect writers crop up very frequently. A year or so ago Mr. Gissing recalled the effects of Dickens's literary persistence on himself when he was making his first attempts in fiction. "Much of my day," he said, "was spent in writing, and often enough it happened that such writing had to be done amid circumstances little favourable to play of the imagination, or intentness of the mind. Then it was that the *Life of Dickens* came to my help."

"I took down Forster," continued Mr. Gissing, "and read at random, sure to come upon something which restored my spirits and renewed the zest which had failed me. A man of method, too, with no belief in the theory of casual inspiration. Fine artist as he is, he goes to work regularly, punctually; one hears of breakfast advanced by a quarter of an hour that the morning's session may be more fruitful. Well, this it was that stirred me, not to imitate Dickens as a novelist, but to follow afar off his example as a worker."⁸

Much is continually being said, and rightly said, about the pleasures of reading. But general remarks on the subject are nearly always tedious. How much better and deeper, if also sadder, is the little rhapsody on books in Mr. George Gissing's "An

Author at Grass." Mr. Gissing speaks of the sudden hunger that comes over one for a certain book, and also of the hopelessness of ever finding time to read some books again. "Perhaps when I lie waiting for the end some of those books will come into my wandering thoughts, and I shall remember them as friends to whom I owed a kindness, friends passed upon the way. What a regret in that last farewell !" These words have now a special pathos. It would be interesting to know what "lost books" came into Mr. Gissing's mind as he lay waiting for the end.⁹

Hadden did not lose his attachment to Gissing's work and continued to refer to him in his column. The announcement in 1905 of a cheap edition of *By the Ionian Sea* (1901) prompted the following enthusiastic notice on 22 February that year:

I am glad to see that we are to have a cheap edition of the late Mr. George Gissing's fine book, "By the Ionian Sea." Mr. Gissing had no more ardent admirer than the present penman, who had a standing order with his bookseller to send him everything of Mr. Gissing's as it appeared. "By the Ionian Sea" arrived ; so did the bill—half a sovereign [in fact 16 shillings]. I paid ; now the volume will be obtainable at five shillings. Everything, even the cheap book, comes to the man who waits.

I hope "By the Ionian Sea" will have a large sale in its new form. Many people think ill of the Italians. Read Gissing, and all their faults will be whelmed in forgiveness. Remember what they have suffered, what they have achieved in spite of wrong. Brute races have flung themselves, one after another, upon this sweet and glorious land ; conquest and slavery, from age to age, have been the people's lot.

Tread where one will, the soil has been drenched with blood. An immemorial woe sounds even through the lilting notes of Italian gaiety. It is a country wearied and regretful, looking ever backward to the things of old ; trivial in its latter life, and unable to hope sincerely for the future. Legitimately enough, one may condemn the rulers of Italy, those who take upon themselves to share her political life, and recklessly load her with burdens insupportable.

"But among the simple on Italian soil a wandering stranger has no right to nurse national superiorities, to indulge a contemptuous impatience. It is the touch of tourist vulgarity. Listen to a Calabrian peasant singing as he follows his oxen along the furrow, or as he shakes the branches of his olive tree. That wailing amid the ancient silence, that long lament solacing ill-rewarded toil, comes from the heart of Italy herself, and wakes the memory of mankind." This is Mr. George Gissing ; this you may read of Italy in "By the Ionian Sea."

During the years 1906 and 1907, Hadden was much preoccupied with the tension between the spiritual and commercial sides of the literary life. On 21 February 1906, he returned to the subject of complaints by writers themselves, quoting again Ryecroft's famous lament for those "down-trodden in the fray" (Spring, XVIII), and concluding:

Aye, indeed ! And alas ! How many do get trodden in the fray ! These we might easily expect to turn round and rail at "the cursed travail of the pen." But the successful ones, those who earn anything from £500 to £1,000 a year or more—those we do not expect to hear the whining complaints of the disappointed.

On 7 March 1906, in response to Clement Shorter's optimistic view of "the growing taste for good literature," Hadden referred his readers to the "striking discussion of this very subject in one of the late Mr. George Gissing's books," and concluded less sanguinely:

The public which reads, in any sense of the word worth considering, is very, very small: the public which would feel no lack if all the book-printing ceased tomorrow is enormous. Gather from all the ends of the British Empire the men and women who purchase literature as a matter of course (and in literature I don't include fiction), who habitually seek it in public libraries, in short who regard it as a necessity of life, and like George Gissing, I am much mistaken if they would not comfortably assemble in the Albert Hall.¹⁰

The entries for 1907 demonstrate Hadden's undiminished devotion to Gissing and his work. Responding to a journal article in January on the most interesting books of 1906 by "eminent writers of the day," Hadden on 23 January declared his own favourite to be A. C. Benson's *Through a College Window*, proclaiming: "On my shelves Mr. Benson stands next to the late Mr. George Gissing's 'Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft,' a book which appeals to me more directly than any other book published since the century opened." On 14 March the previous year, in describing his own library of 4,000 volumes, Hadden had referred to the "interesting passage" in *Henry Ryecroft* in which the diarist claims to know every one of his books "by its scent."¹¹ On 6 February 1907, a press anecdote about using smell as a method for testing the value of a library book again turned his thoughts to Ryecroft's statement. In the account of Ryecroft's library that follows, Hadden makes no distinction between Gissing himself and his fictional creation:

I gather that Gissing's books mostly belonged to his father [only a small minority did], which means that the bulk of them would be bound in anything but our unromantic, odourless cloth.

He instances expressly his father's great Cambridge Shakespeare. Before he was old enough to read Shakespeare with understanding he was allowed, as a treat, to take down one of the volumes from the bookcase and reverently to turn the leaves. "The volumes smell exactly as they did in that old time," he says, writing many years later; "and what a strange tenderness comes upon me when I hold one of them in hand."¹² And yet it was this same George Gissing who confessed that, so long as a volume held together, he did not much trouble as to its outer appearance.¹³ So many men, so many minds. The more I like the inside of a book, the more I want the outside to be presentable.

Further reflections on the conflict between "Literature and earning one's living" prompted the following illustration from *Ryecroft* in the column a week later on 13 February 1907:

George Gissing has an apt illustration in this connection. If my shoemaker, he said, in effect, turn me out an excellent pair of boots, and I, in some mood of cantankerous unreason, throw them back upon his hands, the man has just cause of complaint. But your poem, your novel—who bargained with you for it? If it is honest journeywork, yet lacks purchasers, at least [most] you may call yourself a hapless tradesman. If it come from on high, with what decency do you fret and fume because it is not paid for in heavy cash?

For the work of man's mind there is one test and one alone—the judgment of generations yet unborn. If you have written a great book, the world, be assured, will come to know of it. But you don't care for posthumous glory? You want to enjoy fame in a comfortable armchair? Ah! that is quite another thing. Have the courage of your desire. Admit yourself a merchant, and protest to gods and men that the merchandise you offer is of better quality than much which sells for a higher [high] price. You may be right, and [indeed] it is hard [upon you] that Fashion does not turn to your stall.¹⁴

Meredith's eightieth birthday celebrations reminded Hadden on 27 February that it was Meredith who read *The Unclassed* for Chapman and Hall, and impressed Gissing “with the conviction that he knew the story far better than the writer did himself.” Six weeks later, on 10 April, Hadden referred again to Gissing in the context of a paragraphist who had complained that “writers of fiction [...] do not deal kindly with Suburbia.” Modern writers, Hadden notes,

represent Suburbia as the home of the Philistine and Suburbia is not always that. Mr. Pett Ridge¹⁵ has said some pleasant things about Suburbia seeing what lies below the surface and knowing that the real London is the London which is Suburbia as opposed to the London of Belgravia and Mayfair.

But, as the paragraphist says, the writings of Mr. Pett Ridge do not prevail over those of Mr. George Gissing, whose picture of Suburbia is that indelibly imprinted on the mental retina of those who do not know London and on that of the very many people who do. The Gissing picture is drab and sordid, and may account for much of the writing against London which comes from the provinces. But Gissing was an embittered man with whom things had not gone well.

This sombre reflection marked the beginning of a reconsideration of Gissing's future reputation as a writer on Hadden's part, one that accurately reflects the terms on which Gissing's reputation as a serious and enduring writer would for a long time depend—the sense of Gissing as a man whose personal suffering coloured and enriched his fiction, and who more than any writer of his generation established the literary lens through which later writers came to see the modern urban and suburban worlds. Hadden recognised in Gissing's focus on the sordid realities of the modern world a craving for escape rather than a self-indulgent morbidity. “I am rather with George Gissing, who, moody spirit as he was, grudged the very trees their shadows because they robbed him of so much sunshine!” Hadden declared

on 19 June 1907, in a discussion of a statement in eighteenth-century poet William Cowper's letters that he preferred to write "when icicles depend from all the leaves of the Parnassian laurel."¹⁶ Hadden made two further references to Gissing that year—the comment on Gissing's small handwriting on 24 July to which we have already referred, and a quotation from *Ryecroft*: "Come, once more before I die I will read *Don Quixote*"—in discussing differences in literary taste on 11 September 1907.¹⁷

Hadden's final assessment of Gissing's standing as a writer after a lifetime of devotion is reflected in his entries for 1908. Answering a reader's enquiry as to the truth of the story that George Meredith had once been a publisher's reader, Hadden confirmed on 27 May that Meredith had "read" for Chapman and Hall and re-told the tale of Meredith's meeting with Gissing to discuss the manuscript of *The Unclassed*. Hadden's verdict that "'The Unclassed' is too sombre a book to be popular, and the subject is painful, but in some respects I doubt whether Gissing ever really equalled it," proclaimed emphatically his appreciation of Gissing's early realistic aims. The announcement that some of Gissing's works, including *Henry Ryecroft*, were to be issued in 6d form, prompted him on 26 August 1908 to declare Gissing to be "a genuine master of modern literature":

It is in "The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft" that Gissing's mental progress, hampered by his surroundings, is most graphically portrayed. "Henry Ryecroft" is a thoughtful book, full of the long, long thoughts of youth, yet not without grasping the prize in some form, if not exactly as it was dreamt. Since its appearance, Gissing has come into the ken of book-readers as a genuine master of modern literature. It won popularity through sheer force of the personality behind it.

Hadden's final reflections on Gissing appeared in the *Wolverhampton Chronicle* on 20 January 1909, where he drew attention to the connection between the disastrous earthquake in Calabria and Sicily on 28 December 1908 and Gissing's account of his visit to Reggio in *By the Ionian Sea*:

Gissing found Reggio, rebuilt after the ruinous earthquake of 1783, clean and sweet in that visit of ten years ago. It had then, he says, the aspect of a newly-built city, curving its regular streets, amphitheatre-wise, upon the slope that rises between shore and mountain.

Apart from the harbour, Gissing noted few signs of activity in Reggio. The one long street, Corso Garibaldi, had little traffic; most of the shops closed after night-fall, and then there was no sound of wheels. "All would be perfectly still but for the occasional cry of lads who sell newspapers." The town, as Gissing saw it, was indeed strangely quiet, considering its size and aspect of importance. He had to search for a restaurant, and he doubted if there was more than one café in the place.

Gissing saw Reggio on a Sunday, "a day of market." Crowds of country-folk had come into the town with the produce of field and garden. All the open spaces were occupied with temporary stalls. At hand stood innumerable donkeys, tethered

till business should be over. The produce exhibited was of very fine quality, especially the vegetables. Gissing says he noticed cauliflowers measuring more than a foot across the white.

Of costume the traveller says there is little to be observed, “though the long soft cap worn by most of the men, hanging bag-like over one ear almost to the shoulder, is picturesque.” The female water-carriers, a long skin cask resting lengthwise upon their padded heads, “hold attention as they go to and from [the] fountains.” Good-looking people, grave of manner, and doing their business without noise.

Reggio is the subject of Gissing’s closing chapter. “It was my last sight of the Calabrian hillsmen ; to the end they held my interest and my respect,” he says, writing of the figures just mentioned. The book ends thus: “Alone and quiet, I heard the washing of the waves ; I saw the evening fall on cloud-wreathed Etna, and twinkling lights come forth upon Scylla and Charybdis ; and, as I looked my last towards the Ionian Sea, I wished it were mine to wander endlessly amid the silence of the ancient world, to-day and all its sounds forgotten.”

Shortly after that was written Gissing was dead. What would his feelings have been if he had lived to learn of the dreadful calamity which has befallen that land of romance, the mere name of which made him young again ? I hope there is a cheap edition of “By the Ionian Sea,” for it is the very book to read while this calamity is fresh in our minds. I paid half-a-guinea for my copy (the original edition), and I would not part with it now for three times that amount.

Hadden’s final extract reflects the high literary and aesthetic value he attached to Gissing’s work. Hadden continued to write the “Readers and Writers” column until his death on 2 May 1914 at the age of 52. Although there is no further reference to Gissing in his column after 1909, it must have been gratifying for this enthusiastic propagandist of Gissing’s life and work to have seen the publication of Morley Roberts’s fictionalised biography of Gissing, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, and Frank Swinnerton’s *George Gissing: A Critical Study*—both issued in 1912—, full-length studies which signalled the beginning of an acceptance of Gissing as a major literary figure.

¹James Payn (1830-1898), in early life a contributor to Dickens’s *Household Words*, edited the *Cornhill Magazine* from 1883 to 1896. Payn read Gissing’s manuscripts for Smith, Elder & Co., who published five of Gissing’s novels—*Demos* (1886), *Thyrza* (1887), *A Life’s Morning* (1888), *The Nether World* (1889), and *New Grub Street* (1891).

²Hadden published over twenty books, ranging from studies of the major composers to *The Boy’s Life of Nelson* (1905) and a biography of *Prince Charles Edward* (1913). In literature, besides his study of *Thomas Campbell* (1899), he was also the author of *The Story of James Hogg, the “Ettrick Shepherd,” with Selections from his Poetical Works* (1893) and *George Thompson, the Friend of Burns, His Life and Correspondence* (1898).

³Hadden’s source for Gissing’s autobiographical statements in this extract is likely to have been an article entitled “Mr. George Gissing at Home,” which appeared in the *Academy* for 5 March 1898, p. 258. This consisted for the most part of quotations from an article

on Gissing by John Northern Hilliard in the American *Book Buyer* for February 1898. Gissing wrote to the editor of the *Academy*, C. Lewis Hind, disowning the statements attributed to him in the *Book Buyer* article: see Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Volume VII (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995), pp. 73-74. An account of the relationship between Gissing and the American journalist John Northern Hilliard (1872-1935) can be found in Pierre Coustillas, "A Confession Unwisely Revealed: The Uneasy Relationship between Gissing and John Northern Hilliard," *Gissing Journal*, January 1993, pp. 1-20.

⁴"An Author at Grass," *Fortnightly Review*, Volume LXXII, November 1902. This was the third part of the serialised version of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, published in book form the following year. The quotation is from Autumn, II.

⁵*The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, Spring, XVIII.

⁶*Ibid.*, Autumn, XXII.

⁷The reference here would seem to be to *Ryecroft*, Winter, XVIII, where Ryecroft declares: "It's all about 'science'—and therefore doesn't concern me."

⁸Hadden's source here is likely to have been "Dickens in Memory: A Personal View," in the *New York Critic*, January 1902. An earlier version, with slightly different wording, appeared in *Literature*, 21 December 1901.

⁹*Ryecroft*, Autumn, II.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, Spring, XXII.

¹¹*Ibid.*, Spring, XII.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*, Spring, I.

¹⁵Pett Ridge depicted the monotony of suburbia in his novels *A Clever Wife* (1895), and *Outside the Radius* (1899); his most popular novel was *Mord Em'ly* (1898), a sentimental fiction of slum life.

¹⁶Hadden's reference in this passage would appear to be to *Ryecroft*, Spring, IX.

¹⁷*Ryecroft*, Winter, XVII.

"The Decently Ignoble – or, the Ignobly Decent ?" George Gissing's Fictional Clerks

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I

George Gissing's position as the foremost chronicler of the late Victorian clerk in serious British fiction appears an undisputed one. Reviewing this period we can identify no authors, other than those whose work was concentrated on comic or genre fiction, who shared Gissing's interest and energy in documenting the experience of the new clerks and the wider lower middle classes as they emerged in the modern era. Even during Gissing's

lifetime his status in relation to this group was apparently recognised by the critics and reading public alike. The anonymous *Spectator* review of his 1894 novel *In the Year of Jubilee* merely confirmed a truth that had become self-evident, when proclaiming Gissing's literary standing thus:

Fifteen or twenty years ago, there was a vacant place in English fiction, waiting for a competent writer to fill it. [...] The class which waited for a delineator was a large and important one,—that vaguely outlined lower middle section of society which, in the matter of physical comfort, approximates to the caste above it, and in its lack of the delicate requirements of life has something in common with the caste below it, but which is, nevertheless, so recognisably differentiated from both, that confused classification is impossible even to the most superficial observer. The families of the imperfectly educated but fairly well-paid manager or clerk, of the tradesman who has “got on” pecuniarily but hardly “gone up” socially, and, to speak generally, of the typical ratepayers in an unfashionable London suburb, had not, perhaps, been entirely neglected, for Dickens and others had given them occasional attention ; but they lacked a novelist of their own who should devote himself mainly or exclusively to them, and do for them what had been done by others for the classes and the masses.

They have at last found one in Mr George Gissing, who, for some years, and in various volumes, has delineated the members of this particular social grade—their manners and customs, their modes of thought and life, their relations to each other and to those who stand just above or just below them on the social ladder.¹

This assessment appears only to have solidified in the years since the revival of critical interest in Gissing's work in the 1960s. But any evaluation of Gissing's role in defining the effect on the individual of the social and economic changes that took place at the end of the nineteenth century must apprehend the qualities in his work that make this appraisal problematic. A measure of the difficulty in assessing Gissing's legacy was heralded by Frank Swinnerton, when he, in 1912, undertook the first full critical study of this writer's work. Swinnerton, himself a shrewd observer of the clerk class, was curiously blind to the inclusion of this social category in Gissing's work:

It is very surprising, when one considers the whole of his work, that Gissing should be persistently described as the realistic historian of the lower classes, and particularly of the lower middle-class. [...] Of clerks, and of the ordinary wage-earning members of the lower middle class, he seems to have made practically no use in his novels ; and where they appear [...] they are generally so eccentric as to give the books no value as social studies.²

Swinnerton's argument can be reconciled with that of the *Spectator* critic only when we take into account the selective nature of Gissing's depiction of the group. Unlike Swinnerton, Gissing was largely unfamiliar with the reality of office life,³ and he therefore tends to present his clerk characters

exclusively in their domestic sphere; one has little sense in his work, for example, of the existence of office routine, relationships with co-workers, or the physical experience of clerical work. While this relative absence of scenes involving clerical work in Gissing's fiction perhaps accounts for Swinnerton's inability to recognise characters belonging to this group in his predecessor's work, we must also attempt to account for Swinnerton's conviction regarding the eccentricity of Gissing's clerk characters. This conviction arguably anticipates the later critical recognition of Gissing's tendency towards subjectivity in construction of character and situation ; a position encapsulated in Walter Allen's memorable description of Gissing's fiction as "too personal, the powerful expression, one cannot help feeling, of a grudge."⁴ Even before Gissing's biography became familiar to critics, however, his recurrent use of certain themes—principally sex, class, and money—alerted his contemporaries to the potential for partiality to influence his fiction. A review in the *Manchester Guardian* of Gissing's novel *Eve's Ransom* seemed instinctively to sense the writer's lack of objectivity in character formulation: "Is it really true, one asks oneself, that the average clerk leads the consciously repressed starved life of Maurice Hilliard before his emancipation ? In other words, is the case selected by Mr Gissing for presentation typical ? [...] But in the end the conviction that Maurice Hilliard is and always will be an exception wins the day."⁵

Although the truth of this assumption, as it reflects upon Gissing's clerk characters, encourages us to exercise caution when discussing this element of his work, it should not force us to follow Swinnerton's lead in discounting the whole as valueless. Although Gissing's major fictional clerks were evidently exceptional, even eccentric, they remain both a vital resource in our attempt to comprehend the social evolution of the office worker, and moreover, the key to our understanding of the way in which this development was represented in fiction. Gissing's depictions of clerk characters such as James Hood, Charles Scawthorne, Edwin Reardon, and Arthur Peachey, retain their value as social studies, because the experiences of these individuals, whilst dictated and amplified by their author's personal preoccupations, are still capable of illuminating essential facets of their subjects' lives. This is particularly true of Gissing's insistent evocation of the class snobbery to which the clerk appeared increasingly subjected at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Notwithstanding Gissing's acute sensibility (which manifests itself in a tendency to draw his clerk characters as embittered social exiles), we should not underestimate his ability to recognise the real presence and extent of class prejudice dur-

ing this era ; at least one recent critic has argued that Gissing's heightened awareness of the clerk's social position increases rather than diminishes the value of his meditations.⁶ When assessing these elements of his work we must recognise the significance of Gissing's lower middle class background and his extensive experience of this milieu in the years following the Forster Education Act of 1870. These credentials offered the writer an authoritative platform from which to undertake empirical research for his work. Unlike those earlier novelists such as Walter Besant and William Hale White (Mark Rutherford), who had also focused upon office clerks in their work, Gissing was a young and a relatively poor man when he was writing about this sector of society. These qualities, and his long experience of boarding-house life, must surely have afforded him an insight and intimacy with the "hopeless clerk"⁷ unavailable to Besant and Hale White. Gissing's unusual proximity was lent an additional piquancy by feelings that his indigence, which continued throughout the first half of his writing career, would force him to take up a clerical job, just as Edwin Reardon was to do in *New Grub Street*. Writing to his brother in 1880, Gissing noted his concern that he might be forced into clerksdom: "I write hard at small tales, of which I have several in the hands of Magazine editors. If none of these are taken, I shall be *au désespoir*. Then I must very seriously begin to think of some business or other, even if it be the position of draper's clerk."⁸ This anxiety about his future ensured that the spectre of office work would imbue his early fictional clerks with both intensely personal and emotional qualities, as well as that degree of clear-eyed calculation possessed by the fatalistic prospective victim.

The authority with which Gissing views this section of society is arguably recognised in the extent to which he influenced the generation of writers who came after him. It is a measure of the degree of Gissing's impact on his followers that the French and Russian authors by whom he was influenced were also to colour the work of his successors. The impression, in the work of these ensuing writers, of the presence of continental naturalism as filtered through Gissing's pen, is acknowledged, either explicitly or implicitly, by authors such as Arnold Bennett, Edwin Pugh, W. Somerset Maugham, Shan F. Bullock,⁹ and equally by the anonymous author of *The Story of a London Clerk* (1896).¹⁰ But it is perhaps the breadth of Gissing's influence on the literature which came to deal with the theme of the exiled and isolated clerk that is most surprising. Although we might anticipate his mark on the writing of his friend, the early modernist poet, John Davidson, much less obvious, and largely unremarked upon critically, are the echoes

of Gissing's work discerned in the writing of E. M. Forster and T. S. Eliot. Both Forster's Leonard Bast in *Howards End* and those clerks who appear in the first section of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, arguably have their roots in Gissing's work. Gissing was able to exercise an authority that was attractive both to late Victorian realism and the following century's literary modernism, because his own career encompassed a great diversity of perspectives. This is best illustrated in the movement in his work between those sympathetic clerks encountered in his earlier, and probably more familiar work, which drew their inspiration from Gissing's sense of social indignation, and those other clerks, discovered in the short stories and novels of the mid- to late nineties, who display a marked tendency towards the comic and/or the cynically ironic. Particularly revealing as an index of the changing nature of Gissing's general attitude is his inclination in the latter phase to readdress the often tragic themes of the earlier period in a distinctly sardonic vein. The extent to which Gissing's approach had shifted is underscored by a correspondence printed in the *Daily Chronicle* following the publication of his 1898 novel *The Town Traveller*. Far from celebrating the novelist as a champion of the lower middle classes (as the earlier *Spectator* review had suggested), these letters, largely written by office workers in response to Gissing's characterisation of Christopher Parish, were highly critical of a writer whose work they felt epitomised the supercilious attitude of contemporary English writers towards clerks. This rare opportunity to gauge the reaction of clerical workers to their fictional counterparts indicates a sensitivity to condescension that a younger Gissing might have been expected to recognise. Instead, Gissing's close interest in the letters¹¹ appeared motivated by his desire for publicity and thus profit for the novel, rather than his social conscience. It is perhaps this image of Gissing relishing the impassioned correspondence of clerks who felt themselves, like those in his earlier fiction, to be the victims of unanswerable prejudice, that reinforces the complexity of his role in the depiction of the emerging clerk class in this era, and, in doing so, bespeaks its centrality.

II

While it is an oversimplification to discuss Gissing's clerk characters as representing either sympathetic or intolerant tendencies, his career does, without the employment of critical sophistry, split into two neat halves, the dividing line being drawn in 1893. The implication of this imposed dichotomy—that a specific event occurred during this year to encourage Gissing's cynicism towards a group he had previously appeared energetically to

defend—is, of course, insupportable. John Halperin’s biography of the writer convincingly demonstrates that the change in his attitude took place more gradually, as one would expect from an individual whose natural tendency was towards moderation rather than radicalism: “Gissing was in spirit and impulse—if not always in income—a member of the conservative middle class.”¹² But the claim that Gissing had the capacity to create such antipathetic clerks in his later fiction seems, on the evidence of the earlier work, to suggest an unimaginable progression. Gissing’s readiness, in the texts published prior to 1893, to cast as clerks those characters whose attitudes and situation closely resembled his own, confirmed his feelings of proximity to the group during this period. Writing to his brother following the publication of his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), he had unambiguously stated his intention as a novelist to educate and reform:

I mean to bring home to people the ghastly condition (material, mental & moral) of our poor classes, to show the hideous injustice of our whole system of society, to give light upon the plan of altering it. [...] I shall never write a book which does not keep all these ends in view.¹³

That Gissing included “hopeless clerks” amongst these “poor classes” was evident in his first major clerk character, James Hood, who appears in *A Life’s Morning* (written 1885, published 1888).¹⁴ Hood, although superficially a respectable member of his community, is really a figure whose entire life is spent under the shadow of relative poverty. The summary of his working life, spent as “a struggle amid the chicaneries and despicabilities of commerce” (p. 135), outlines what Gissing considered might, by the 1880s, represent the “typical” story of a modern clerk’s existence:

His education was of the slightest ; at twelve years of age he was already supporting himself, or, one would say, keeping himself above the point of starvation, and at three-and-twenty ... [he] was ludicrously bankrupt, a petty business he had established being sold up for a debt something short of as many pounds as he had years. He drifted into indefinite mercantile clerkships, an existence possibly preferable to that of the fourth circle of Inferno ... [later he] established himself in business, or rather in several businesses ... a commission agency, a life insurance agency and a fire insurance ditto ... [later still] abandoned his office, and obtained a place in the counting-house of a worsted-mill, under the firm of Dagworthy and Son. His salary was small, but the blessing of it was its certainty ; the precariousness of his existence had all but driven poor Hood mad. (pp. 64, 67).

Although Gissing suggests that his position in the worsted-mill was something of a sanctuary after the Dantesque complexion of his previous working life, he loses no opportunity to emphasise the restricted quality of life available to an individual on Hood’s meagre income. This topic, to which

Gissing consistently returns in the first half of his career, is unsubtly drawn into all facets of Hood's characterisation: physically, we are informed that "he generally looked like one who had passed through a night of sleepless grief. [...] The whole look of the man was saddening ; to pass him in the street as a stranger was to experience a momentary heaviness of heart. [...] When he smiled it was obviously with effort—a painful smile" (p. 71) ; mentally, his indigence has robbed him of "the conscious dignity of manhood" (p. 135) ; and in the general course of his life, poverty is proved to be the enemy of promise: "It was more than likely that the man might, with fair treatment, have really done something in one or other branch of physics" (p. 97). In this way Gissing's delineation of Hood resembles the blend of indignation and social education evident in those clerks depicted by Besant and Hale White ; and indeed the echoes of Besant's plea on behalf of the "hopeless clerks" would have been fresh in Gissing's mind in 1885, he having read *All in a Garden Fair* with "really extreme delight" only months earlier.¹⁵ But Gissing's emphasis in his representation of the poor clerk makes important departures from those that underpinned either Hale White's Mark Rutherford or Besant's Allan Engledew. Of particular import in recognising this distinction is that Hood is shown to be a career clerk, rather than a declassed individual who is forced into an office because of reversals in his (or his family's) economic fortunes. This makes Hood's appearance, as a precursor of the new wave of Board school educated clerks, something of a literary breakthrough. V. S. Pritchett recognised the significance of this lowly clerk's appearance when he argued that the character of Hood represented the arresting discovery "that in all character there sits a mind, and that the mind of the dullest is not dull because, at its very lowest, it will at least reflect the social dilemma into which it is born."¹⁶

While Pritchett's assertion, if fully endorsed, appears to offer a disproportionate weight to a relatively slight character, his latter claim is easier to embrace. If one focuses on the social dilemma evident in the concept of respectability, as reflected in the predicament of Hood, the novelty of this theme in the context of the literature of the 1880s appears readily apparent. Neither Besant nor Hale White had placed much emphasis on this aspect of the poor clerk's existence, but for Gissing, the need for a character of this class to maintain an outward respectability was seen as a major determining—and destructive—factor. A measure of Gissing's consideration of the effect of social convention is indicated by his decision to employ Hood's fear of his loss of respectability as the starting point in a chain of events

which goes on to provide the eventual motivation for his suicide. Whilst the novel at the latter point of the chain descends into melodrama (with Hood being blackmailed by Dagworthy, his tyrannical employer), the events that precede are revealing. These involve Hood losing his silk hat on a train when on his firm's business and being compelled, by convention, to purchase a replacement: "it was impossible to go through Hebsworth [Leeds] with uncovered head, or to present himself hatless at the office of Legge Brothers" (p.134). Hood's situation is complicated because he is forced to use his employer's money to buy the new hat, and when he fails to replace the cash, he allows Dagworthy to effect his scheme of blackmail. This episode, ostensibly an unnecessarily laboured contrivance, arguably provides a more solid motivation for the plot than might now appear plausible.¹⁷ George Orwell recognised the problems inherent in attempting a reasoned appreciation of this portion of Gissing's plot when writing in the 1940s about Hood's hat:

This is an interesting example of the changes in outlook that can suddenly make an all-powerful taboo seem ridiculous. Today, if you had somehow contrived to lose your trousers, you would probably embezzle money rather than walk about in your underpants. In the 'eighties the necessity would have seemed equally strong in the case of a hat. Even thirty or forty years ago, indeed, bare-headed men were booed at in the street.¹⁸

These comments have implications for Gissing's work that can be extended beyond the immediate consideration of the clerk's clothes. At the very least they remind us that convention, an arbitrary force, is subject to abrupt changes (Orwell goes on to remark that hatlessness later became respectable "for no very clear reason"), and that these changes can severely impede our understanding of even relatively recent periods of time. As they impact on the clerk, our understanding of the effect of respectability is further corrupted and diluted by the tendency of fiction to treat this theme as a source of comedy rather than tragedy ; recognising a clerk's lost hat as a familiar comic motif, it is understandably problematic to reassess it as a tragic symbol. For this reason we are perhaps inclined to undervalue Gissing's conviction regarding the negative and destructive power of social convention. But while the effect on the clerk of the need to maintain certain standards on a limited budget is difficult to assess, the insistence in the comic literature of this era of the centrality of this requirement suggests that its capacity to influence behaviour and inspire neuroticism was considerable. Accordingly, Gissing's own anxiety in relation to issues of class deserves the kind of consideration that its apparent eccentricity has tended to suppress.

Although Gissing could not anticipate the difficulty that his future readers would experience when attempting to interpret the concept of lower middle class respectability in the late Victorian period, he was aware of the potential ignorance of his own middle class audience on this matter. In his attempt to address this lack of knowledge, Gissing demonstrates how passionately he felt about the topic, and evinces the degree to which he empathised, at this juncture, with the clerk's position. This is particularly true when, after Hood's suicide, he discusses the need for the "respectable" clerk to live, in effect, a double life. He conveys this predicament by using a device which Besant had originally employed in *All in a Garden Fair*. This device used the mistaken assumptions of a schoolmaster, M. Philipon, as a cue to present the narrator's more accurate assessment of the "hopeless clerk," and in so doing provided a direct piece of social didacticism. Gissing follows Besant's format, employing the belated enlightenment of Mrs. Baxendale, a politician's wife, to delineate Hood's true situation. Here Mrs. Baxendale, established in the text as a wise judge, describes her concern at her earlier failure of recognition:

Now think of this poor man. He had a clerkship in a mill, and received a salary of disgraceful smallness ; he never knew what it was to be free of anxiety. The laws of political economy will have it so, says my husband ; if Mr. Hood refused, there were fifty other men ready to take the place. [...] It is dreadful to think of what those poor people must have gone through. They were so perfectly quiet under it that no one gave a thought to their position. [...] Oh, don't we live absurdly artificial lives ? Now why should a family who, through no fault of their own, are in the most wretched straits, shut themselves up and hide it like a disgrace ? Don't you think we hold a great many very nonsensical ideas about self-respect and independence and so on ? (pp. 209, 210)

The need, ultimately discerned by Mrs. Baxendale, for the respectable clerk to hide guiltily all signs of his poverty beneath a veneer of relative plenty, was for Gissing the central tragedy of the clerk's life. For him, the lower middle class's perception of the shameful nature of their predicament and their willingness to accept considerable sacrifice in a desire to mask it, was what made the topic an emphatically tragic one.¹⁹ Gissing goes as far as to suggest that the acute self-awareness bred by the clerk's tenuous position made his relative indigence more difficult to bear than the more obvious hardships of the working classes. In a characteristic comment, Hood's daughter corrects her father, who, when observing colliers near his house suggests "One might have had a harder life," by retorting: "I think there's a fallacy in that [...] Their life is probably not hard at all. [...] They are really happy, for they know nothing of their own degradation" (p. 75). Although

this appears to be hyperbole on Gissing's part, his other writings show that these thoughts in fact represented his sincere feelings on the subject. Whilst this advocacy leads Gissing to appear as an empathetic champion of the hopeless clerk's cause, it also alerts us to his capacity for extremism and inflation ; his ability to dismiss the sufferings of the poor at a stroke was clearly a dangerous precedent. With the character of Hood, it seems, Gissing managed to prefigure both the passionate and prejudicial aspects of his complex nature. The extent to which the latter quality is in evidence even when—and perhaps particularly when—Gissing is at his most zealous offers a valuable pointer to his later shift in perspective.

It was Gissing's fervent and highly personal evocation of the role of self-awareness in the modern clerk's existence that also characterised his depiction of Charles Scawthorne in *The Nether World* (1889).²⁰ Scawthorne appears initially as a character deliberately and distinctly distanced from the pathetic Hood ; whereas Hood is trapped on the bottom rung of the clerical ladder with no potential for improvement of fortune, Scawthorne appears contrastingly to represent the dynamic and upwardly mobile clerk of his day. The latter clerk, having begun his working life with limited opportunities—leaving school at fourteen to become a copying clerk in a solicitor's office²¹—, had harnessed “a wonderful power of application to study ... [to work] himself up to a position which had at first seemed unattainable” (p. 194). This position of articled clerk leads the way for him to accept a junior partnership in the firm, a prospective advancement which serves as “a testimony of the high regard in which Scawthorne was held by his employer” (p. 270). But instead of using this remarkable example of clerkly success to illustrate the potential for the modern and industrious Board school clerk, Gissing draws from it a message establishing the illusory nature of the promotion. That is to say, whilst Scawthorne's story might appear to endorse the potential of the new clerk in his ambition to attain the desired comfort and respectability of the established middle classes, it actually demonstrates what for Gissing was an incontrovertible fact: the individual's entrapment in his original social class. The following description of Scawthorne in his lodgings suggests that while he is a more successful clerk than Hood, the frustration inherent in the double life he is compelled by his situation to lead, leaves him little removed from his more lowly counterpart:

The room in which our friend sat at breakfast was of such very modest appearance that it seemed to argue but poor remuneration for the services rendered by him in the office of Messrs. Percival & Peel. [...] Paltry debts harassed him ; inabilities fretted his temperament and his pride ; it irked him to have no better abode than this

musty corner to which he could never invite an acquaintance. And then, notwithstanding his mental endowments, his keen social sense, his native tact, in all London not one refined home was open to him, not one domestic circle of educated people could he approach and find a welcome. [...] The double existence he was compelled to lead—that of a laborious and clear-brained man of business in office hours, that of a hungry rascal in the time which was his own—not only impressed him with a sense of danger, but made him profoundly dissatisfied with the unreality of what he called his enjoyments. What, he asked himself, had condemned him to this kind of career? Simply the weight under which he started, his poor origin, his miserable youth. However carefully regulated his private life had been, his position to-day could not have been other than it was. (p. 269)

While both Hood and Scawthorne are engineered to offer an ultimately similar indictment of the clerk's two lives, Scawthorne additionally becomes spokesperson for Gissing's more specific frustration regarding social exclusion. The irony of Scawthorne's situation, as a young and intelligent man inextricably trapped in exile, offers Gissing the opportunity to define what for him was a signature-character. Gissing understood the centrality of those individuals who carried his personal "grudge" in his fiction, but implicitly argued that the motif, rather than representing an indulgence on his part, was instead the reflection of an experience that would prove readily identifiable by others.²² But Gissing's determination to tailor Scawthorne's complaints so closely to his own seems to undermine this argument for a wider application; John Halperin's description of Scawthorne as "a highly self-indulgent picture of the novelist's own position before the publication of *Demos*"²³ appears close to the mark. This is particularly emphasised by Gissing's use of Scawthorne to illustrate one of his dominant themes, that of the impossibility of the exiled individual making a reasonable marriage match. As narrator, Gissing asks of Scawthorne, "Suppose he had wished to marry; where, pray, was he to find his wife? A barmaid? Why, yes, other men of his standing wedded barmaids and girls from the houses of business, and so on; but they had neither his tastes nor his brains. Never had it been his lot to exchange a word with an educated woman—save in the office on rare occasions" (pp. 269-70). These thoughts offer a direct reflection on Gissing's frustration at the position he felt himself to be in then,²⁴ and to which he continued to feel himself subjected, until he finally received the money and recognition that began to liberate him from this neurotic constraint.²⁵ Until this time Gissing remained convinced—as his own disastrous marriages confirm—that he could never wed an educated woman from the class above his own. His obsession with this solemnly and rigidly held philosophy, encouraged him to record it in Scawthorne's character as if it was the unavoidable if

iniquitous inheritance of the class. And indeed, in fairness to Gissing, it was undoubtedly true that exogamous marriages which united lower middle class clerks with wives from the established middle classes were unusual prior to the latter half of the twentieth century. But in accepting this, it is equally unusual to identify members of the clerk caste (other than Gissing) for whom this situation amounted to a blight on their lives; none of the autobiographical records of clerks or ex-clerks that I have identified appear to dwell on this problem.²⁶ Gissing's relentless pursuit of this theme as a governing feature of the life of his clerks (a concern pursued in his novels and many of his short stories) inevitably therefore affords it a disproportionate weight that draws the focus away from the other numerous issues of the day that did impact upon the modern clerk's life.

This tendency by Gissing to inflate his private anxieties, thus making them assume wider significance than they might deserve, was perpetuated by the ensuing generation of writers, who, being sympathetic to his approach, naturally incorporated the dilemmas he evoked into their own work. In effect this meant that a character such as Scawthorne was quickly converted from a freak into an archetype. We can clearly observe this inheritance in two later fictional clerks: Osmond Ormsby in *The Story of a London Clerk* (1896) and Richard Larch in Arnold Bennett's *A Man from the North* (1899).²⁷ Ormsby's pedigree is implied in his confirmation of the incompatibility of noble ideals and ignoble commerce: "many lives that started forth with love of truth and hate of wrong, with enthusiasm for right and hope in humanity, such as would have made useful and strong men, spent themselves [instead] on objects mean and selfish and [those men subsequently] sank to mere cynics, libertines and money makers" (p. 214). The "London Clerk" and his isolation in modern London life is prefigured by Scawthorne: "what he paid for the success was loss of all his pure ideals, of his sincerity, of his disinterestedness, of the fine perceptions to which he was born" (p. 194). Arnold Bennett's clerk Richard Larch is perhaps even more closely related to Scawthorne and his fellow Gissing alter-egos. Indeed, Gissing's shadow over Bennett's first novel is specifically acknowledged when Larch encounters his clerk colleague, Mr. Aked, reading Gissing's novels in the British Museum reading-room. Aked, with whom Larch later plans to write a book entitled *Psychology of the Suburbs*, is studying Gissing's works "not for the mere fun of reading 'em of course, because I've read 'em before. I wanted them for a special purpose [...] and I couldn't get them, at least several of them" (p. 57). This tribute to Gissing's impressive reputation in the mid-1890s is further enhanced in

Bennett's characterisation of Larch as a Gissingesque social exile, a position evident in Larch's thoughts regarding his lodgings: "the meanness of the room, of his clothes, of his supper, nauseated him" (pp. 34-35); and equally in his feelings of isolation: "It concerned no living person whether he did evil or good" (p. 48). But the influence of Gissing is more evident in Bennett's repetition of the exogamous marriage motif. Larch's frustration at his inability to encounter "suitable" female company might easily be Gissing's own: "with the exception of his landlady and his landlady's daughter, she [Aked's disappointingly uncultured niece] was the first woman whom Richard had met in London" (p. 68). And Bennett's conclusion in *A Man from the North* recapitulates the sort of deadly compromise that Gissing and many of his fictional substitutes were forced to make, in marrying an "unsuitable" woman out of a sense of desperation. This comes about for Larch when his growing sexual frustration encourages him to shelve his earlier fantasy of a "charming wife" capable of "giving a dinner-party to a carefully selected company of literary celebrities" (pp. 68-69), and he instead contemplates a union with the waitress he sees daily in a City restaurant: "She was a plain girl, possessing few attractions, except the supreme one of being a woman. She was below him in station. [...] Though she could not enter into his mental or emotional life, did she not exhale for him a certain gracious influence?" (p. 178). The extent of Gissing's influence here could not be clearer.

While the subjective and arguably self-indulgent characterisation of Scawthorne ultimately reinforces Swinnerton's concerns about the relative value of Gissing's clerk characters, Edwin Reardon in *New Grub Street* (1891)²⁸ seems contrapuntally to speak for their worth. Although the central themes with which the author is concerned in the novel—exogamous marriage (again), the need to maintain standards of respectability in the face of relative poverty (again), and the occupation of writing—have obvious autobiographical relevance, Reardon nevertheless seems to offer a more objectified interpretation of these "grudges" than those that were witnessed in the depictions of either Hood or Scawthorne. Whereas these earlier characters are principally designed to objectify (respectively) Gissing's indignation and frustration, Reardon's social function in the novel is more subtly and thus successfully interwoven with his developing character. This maturity of characterisation, however, has its roots in a familiar scenario in which the young Reardon is forced by circumstances into "the best that could be done for [him]": a place in an estate agent's office (p. 87). But, later in the text, Gissing has Reardon, on receipt of a legacy of two hundred

pounds, leaving his provincial office to attempt to become a writer in the metropo-lis ; this is a choice of career that looks both back to Besant's Allan Engle-dew, and forward to Bennett's Larch *et al.* Reardon's biography then closely follows that of his author, including poverty and near starvation in London boarding houses, during a period entirely lacking in material suc-cess. At this stage, Gissing modifies his own experience to incorporate, for Reardon, the choice that he himself had anticipated making in 1880—that of work in a business office. Intriguingly, however, in a move that displays the development of Reardon over those earlier clerks, this enforced accept-ance is treated by Gissing less as a cause for tragic reflection—the Dantes-que circle of hell as evoked in *A Life's Morning*—and more as a benign relief. During his three years as a hospital clerk, Reardon comes to appre-ciate the benefits of work “easily learnt and not burdensome,”and its ability to stimulate his impulse to write, which had all but evaporated during his period of “semi starvation.” But, following this time of stability, in which Reardon manages to complete a novel, he is again tempted, after receiving a further inheritance, to “recover his freedom” (p. 92). This second spell of full-time authorship brings with it both the critical plaudits (following the publication of his novel), that he had desired, and also the wife—signifi-cantly his social superior—whom he had naively regarded as “the crown of a successful literary career” (p. 95). Reardon's career, however, proves to be anything but successful, and his temperamental inability to produce a regu-lar income from his work results in a desperate financial crisis. Unable to contemplate an immediate resolution to his literary impotence, Reardon pragmatically suggests a return to his office desk,²⁹ a move which, in an unconscious echo of Mark Rutherford, he considers to be a potentially “blessed deliverance” (p. 260). This logical step is complicated only by his wife's inability to come to terms with an action by her husband that she considers would represent a social suicide. It is her reaction to Reardon's suggestion that provides Gissing's most persuasive exposure of the nature and depth of late Victorian class snobbery. Here, the sense of hyperbole encountered in the earlier clerk characters is dissolved in brilliant contex-tualisation. The following passages of dialogue offer some flavour of the clash of opposing philosophies held by Reardon and his wife:

‘Do you only love the author in me ? Don't you think of me apart from all that I may do or not do ? If I had to earn my living as a clerk, would that make me a clerk in soul ?’

‘You shall not fall to that ! It would be too bitter a shame to lose all you have gained in these long years of work.’ (p. 229)

‘Amy, are you my wife, or not ?’

‘I am certainly not the wife of a clerk who is paid so much a week.’ (p. 261)

Amy Reardon’s rigid interpretation of the significance of the term “clerk” when discussed in connection with the concept of a weekly wage as opposed to a salary, has, perhaps, like Hood’s hat, lost its significance as an all-powerful taboo. But an examination of the attitudes towards waged clerks, evident in the work of the liberal intellectual writers of the Edwardian and early Georgian era,³⁰ hints at the substance of Gissing’s convictions. Amy Reardon’s attitude towards the general concept of clerkdom, coupled with those numerous later condescending literary depictions of the affected and encroaching clerk, expose something of the culture of middle class prejudice that existed prior to the Great War. The modern wage-earning clerk, while not necessarily bemoaning his inability to marry an expensively educated woman, or mix with intellectual company (like Scawthorne), would, one suspects, be disturbed by the disdain shown towards him by the class above ; this is a supposition reinforced by the *Daily Chronicle* correspondence discussed later in this article. It is this culture of snobbery that *New Grub Street* eloquently and persuasively delineates, at a time when its familiarity and acceptance appeared to require little comment. Swinnerton, writing in 1912, and suggesting that Gissing’s work had nothing to tell us about the era’s social life, was probably too close to the scenes and settings described by the earlier writer. As a product of the clerk class himself, Swinnerton would have taken for granted Amy Reardon’s attitude to her husband’s voluntary decision to declass his family, and similarly assumed that her refusal to countenance his proposal to return to the office was a natural, if lamentable one, for a woman of her class. This proximity made it impossible for Swinnerton to appreciate how the value of a clerk character such as Reardon might mature. Although Reardon’s engagement with office work is an unusual one, and a distinctively Gissingesque one, it does articulate the endemic culture of social prejudice in late Victorian Britain. This underlying situation, so extraordinarily evoked in the destructive marriage of the Reardons, seems to overcome, albeit temporarily, those reservations regarding the issue of subjectivity in Gissing’s fiction. In *New Grub Street*, Gissing showed himself to be capable of a more balanced depiction of a clerk’s life that evinced both its benign possibilities (as witnessed in Reardon’s relieved reversion to his earlier office occupation: “he was back once more in the days of no reputation, a harmless clerk, a decent wage-earner” (p. 293)), together with an index (provided by Amy Reardon) of the clerk’s social status in the early nineties. Taking these

positive qualities into account, it perhaps appears bewildering that the character of Reardon proved something of a watershed in Gissing's relationship with the clerks. Those later Gissing clerks that I go on to discuss suggest a significant shift in his attitude towards the growing army of white collar workers in the metropolis.

(to be concluded)

¹Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge, eds., *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972, p. 238. Review of 9 February 1895, pp. 205-06.

²Frank Swinnerton, *George Gissing: A Critical Study*, Martin Secker, 1924 (1912), p. 49.

³In a letter to his brother Algernon of 24 October 1880, Gissing himself confirmed his lack of familiarity with this scene: "But what kind of work am I fit for? They won't take me in a business-office, for I know nothing of such things." Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, Vol. I, 1990, p. 304.

⁴Walter Allen, *The English Novel*, Pelican Books, 1974 (1954), p. 287.

⁵*Gissing: The Critical Heritage*, p. 249. Unsigned review, 30 April 1895, p. 10.

⁶John Halperin's biography of Gissing, which examines the links between the writer's life and work, argues that "Gissing as novelist is most successful when he is most autobiographical." *Gissing: A Life in Books*, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 159.

⁷Walter Besant had depicted the life of the modern "hopeless" clerk in the first volume of his three-decker novel *All in a Garden Fair* (1883); and William Hale White's *Deliverance* (1885) had similarly portrayed the bleak existence of Mark Rutherford, forced by his financial situation into a London clerkship.

⁸Letter of 7 February 1880, *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 238.

⁹Shan F. Bullock was typical in acknowledging his debt to Gissing, following his predecessor's death in 1903. Writing in the *Chicago Evening Post*, Bullock argued of Gissing's novels that "A good dozen of them are in the first rank of fiction," adding that "His real tragedies were not the everyday tragedies of poverty and neglect, of striving and despairing; they were tragedies of the soul and mind and conscience. [...] Even at his grayest it is always a delight to read him." Quoted from Robert L. Selig's article "Gissing and Shan F. Bullock: The First Reference in the Chicago Press to Gissing's Chicago Fiction and Adventures," *Gissing Journal*, October 1992, p. 4.

¹⁰Anonymous, *The Story of A London Clerk: A Faithful Narrative Faithfully Told*, The Leadenhall Press, 1896.

¹¹Between 29 September and 6 October 1898, Gissing noted the *Daily Chronicle* correspondence in his diary, remarking on the second day that the letters published were "mostly abusive of me." Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, Harvester Press, 1978, pp. 502-03.

¹²*Gissing: A Life in Books*, p. 62.

¹³Letter to Algernon of 3 November 1880, *Collected Letters*, Vol. I, p. 307.

¹⁴Quotations are from the Harvester Press edition (1984).

¹⁵It seems quite possible, even probable, that Gissing had also read the Mark Rutherford books at this time. However, they are not mentioned in his correspondence and he destroyed

the diary he kept prior to late 1887. His reading of two of Hale White's later and perhaps lesser works was not recorded until 1896 (*Diary*, pp. 410, 412).

¹⁶"Books in General," *New Statesman*, 8 November 1947, p. 372.

¹⁷That this convention was widely enforced, and was continued into the twentieth century, is indicated by the experience of Leonard Bast in E. M. Forster's *Howards End*: "He discovered that he was going bareheaded down Regent Street. [...] Few were about at this hour, but all whom he passed looked at him with a hostility that was the more impressive because it was unconscious. He put his hat on." Penguin Books, 1989 (1910), p. 131.

¹⁸Peter Davison, ed., *The Complete Works of George Orwell: Volume Nineteen: It is What I Think 1947-1948*, Secker & Warburg, 1998, p. 348. Article entitled "George Gissing," written May-June 1948.

¹⁹Orwell argues that this motif stands as the dominant theme in Gissing's work: "Gissing's novels are a protest against the form of self-torture that goes by the name of respectability." *Complete Works*, p. 347.

²⁰Quotations are from the Everyman's Library edition (1973).

²¹Scawthorne's entry into clerkdom is described by using a deterministic formula that Gissing continued to employ: "the clerkship was the best opening that could be procured for him" (p. 194); similarly, Reardon in *New Grub Street*, on leaving school, found that "the best that could be done for [him] was to place him in the office of an estate agent" (p. 88); and for Humplebee, in the eponymous short story, "a place in a manufacturer's office seemed the best thing that could be aimed at" (*The House of Cobwebs*, Constable, 1931, p. 143).

²²Writing to his friend and fellow novelist Morley Roberts on 10 February 1895, he made an assertion that I will return to later in this article: "the most characteristic, the most important, part of my work is that which deals with a class of young men distinctive of our time—well educated, fairly bred, *but without money*. It is this fact [...] of the *poverty* of my people which tells against their recognition as civilized beings" (*Collected Letters*, Vol. V, 1994, p. 296). Later on in his writing career Gissing might have narrowed his consideration of what constituted a good education and fair breeding, but in 1889 these qualities were still possible in the Board school educated son of an Islington dyer.

²³*Gissing: A Life in Books*, p. 111.

²⁴We might profitably compare Scawthorne's position with Gissing's as Gissing described it in the diary entry for 17 June 1888: "I have lived in London ten years, and now, on a day like this when I am very lonely and depressed, there is not one single house in which I should be welcome if I presented myself, not one family—nay, not one person—who would certainly receive me with good will" (*Diary*, p. 32).

²⁵In *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), Gissing similarly uses Arthur Peachey, the former clerk and later junior partner in a disinfectant manufacturer's, to recapitulate the frustration of his second marriage. Once again the intensity of Gissing's recent experience encourages him to imply that the appalling nature of the relationship defined in this text is a common suburban phenomenon.

²⁶One of the clerks who wrote to the *Daily Chronicle* (29 September 1898, p. 6) to complain about the characterisation of Christopher Parish contradicted Gissing's assertion regarding clerk marriages. Claiming to speak for himself and his fellow minor clerks, he stated: "we do not seek our wives from the in many ways estimable but somewhat uncertain class of young women employed as barmaids and program sellers."

²⁷Quotations are from the Methuen edition (1920).

²⁸Quotations are from the Penguin Books edition (1983).

²⁹In an aside contrasting with that made earlier by Hood's daughter, Reardon again confirms Gissing's thoughts on the comparatively benign aspect of the clerk's existence: "How I envy those clerks who go by to their offices in the morning ! There's the day's work cut out for them ; no question of mood and feeling ; they just have to work *at* something, and when the evening comes, they have earned their wages, they are free to rest and enjoy themselves. What an insane thing it is to make literature one's only means of support !" (p. 81).

³⁰Writers belonging to this group would include E. M. Forster, John Galsworthy, Rose Macaulay, Arthur Machen, May Sinclair, John Beresford and M. Urquhart.

A Note and a Query from T. W. Gissing

BOUWE POSTMUS
University of Amsterdam

When on 19 May 1896, over a quarter of a century since the death of his remarkable father, George Gissing was consulting an old (1889) copy of the *Journal of Botany*, he was greatly pleased to come upon his name in a "Biographical Index of British Botanists."¹ The next day he wrote to his brother Algernon to share his pride and pleasure in their father's much admired botanical reputation. T. W. Gissing's versatility, in fields as different as botany, poetry, and politics, has long been recognized as a source of lasting inspiration to his sons. We offer his two (recently discovered) contributions to *Notes and Queries* as further proof of his idiomatic and antiquarian interests, later to be taken up enthusiastically by his sons, who in 1867 and 1868 may just have been old enough to appreciate with pride their father's name appearing in print.

Notes and Queries, 3rd Series, vol. XI, 2 February 1867, p. 106.

"DEAF AS A BEETLE" (3rd S. xi. 34.)—Referring to MR. BLADE'S query, I should say that the saying, "As deaf as a beetle," does not apply to the insect at all. In Suffolk a large wooden mallet, with a handle from two to three feet long, is called a *beetle*, and is specially used for driving wedges into wood for the purpose of "riving" or splitting it. "As deaf as a beetle" no doubt refers to this wooden instrument, than which there can be nothing deafer.

"A beetle and wedges" (generally coupled) will be found in almost every household in East Suffolk.

The above use of the word *beetle* is given by Bailey, who likewise gives another form of the word, "boytle," which is a nearer approach to its Saxon origin.

T. W. GISSING.

Wakefield.

Notes and Queries, 3rd Series, vol. III, 30 May 1868, p. 431.

DOG SMITH'S SURREY CHARITIES.— I give a note, taken from an old map of Surrey, which may perhaps be interesting to some of your readers. Is it true ? The map bears no date.

"One Mr. Smyth, a London Silver Smith (called Dog Smith, from a dog which always followed him,) having acquired a large Estate, left his business and took to the Trade of begging, in which he continued many years ; Travelling thro' the Towns and villages of the County, &c. At his Death, he left in Charity to the poor of all the Market Towns of Surrey 50^l p^r annum each ; and to every other parish in the County, except Mitcham, 6^l or 8^l yearly more or less, at the discretion of his Trustees. The reason of his excluding Mitcham from a share in his Bounty was, because he was whipped as a common Vagrant by the inhabitants thro' their Town."

T. W. GISSING.

Wakefield.

[Mr. Henry Smith was a native of Wandsworth in Surrey, born about 1548, and died on Jan. 30, 1627-8, in his seventy-ninth year. He was by trade a silversmith, resided in Silver Street, Cheapside, and was elected Alderman of Farringdon Without, 1608. He was possessed of considerable property both in land and money ; and having lost his wife, by whom he had no children, he disposed of his wealth to charitable uses. He was buried in Wandsworth church, where he has a slab with a Latin, and a mural monument with an English epitaph. A pedlar who gave an acre of land to the parish of Lambeth, still called Pedlar's Acre, is painted in the window of that church with a dog ; and it is not unlikely that this portraiture may have been mistaken for Mr. Smith, and thus gave rise to the vulgar tradition of his having been a beggar followed by a dog, and having been whipped out of Mitcham, which he, it is said, excluded from a participation of his bounty. In 1802, William Bray, Esq., the treasurer to Smith's charities, published a pamphlet entitled "Collections relating to Henry Smith, Esq., some time Alderman of London ; the Estates by him given to Charitable

Uses, and the Trustees appointed by him.” Consult also Aubrey’s *Antiquities of Surrey*, and Dale’s *Harwich and Dovercourt*, p. 89, &c.]

¹Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *Collected Letters of George Gissing*, Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, vol. VI, 1995, p. 126.

The Electronic Gissing: A Further Update

PETER MORTON
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It is a testimony to the explosive growth of literary resources on the web that my first report, over five years ago, on what presence Gissing had on the internet in April 1997 already reads rather quaintly.¹ No one now needs to be informed what the web is or what a browser does. A scholar working in any field who needs to check a fact or confirm a reference looks on the net first, and feels mildly aggrieved if it is not forthcoming. Already some quite respectable journals are now available in online format only, and that is a trend that is likely to accelerate as the cost of paper subscriptions rises.

Google has now cemented its formidable reputation as the search engine of choice for academics. It reports just under ten thousand sites which mention the name George Gissing, though adding the terms “novelist” and “author” to the search reduces the number to about 500. Even so, very few inquirers are likely to bother to look elsewhere. (I reported finding just 200 sites mentioning Gissing in 1997, and I had to use five different search engines to find them.) The speed and inclusiveness of Google also allows one to obtain some sense of the “popularity” of Gissing on the web relative to other late-Victorian writers. George Meredith (plus the extra two terms above) produces 800+ hits and George Moore about 400. But this is small beer compared to, say, Hardy or James, both of whom have hits of several thousands.

A trawl through a sampling of Google’s hits reveals what a huge amount of redundancy exists on the web. Once one has weeded out the cross-references, the potted biographical sketches, the offerings from the Amazon bookshop and sites selling term papers to students too idle to do their own reading and thinking, the actual haul is much less impressive. Proudly and rightly at the head of the listings is Mitsuharu Matsuoka’s *Gissing in Cyberspace*.² This large, well-organised site, which has been continuously updated and expanded over several years, now consists of an extensive list of links to other sites, a bibliography of critical works in chronological

order, several biographical outlines, a list of contents of this journal, and a message board. Some of the links are broken (the ones to *UnCover*, for instance), but keeping links up to date is a headache for any webmaster.

The triumph of Prof. Matsuoka's site, however, is its full-text online versions of practically all of Gissing's output from *Workers in the Dawn* to *The Immortal Dickens*. The completion of this huge task has made it possible to track down almost any quotation, and although the scanned pages are far from error-free (Matsuoka is still asking for proof-reading help) the value of his long labours is obvious enough. Five years ago not a single work of Gissing's was available on the internet, but now almost everything is in digital format. Indeed, Matsuoka has some competition. It comes from the well-known Project Gutenberg e-texts, which offers 21 of Gissing's novels in a plain text format; whether they are more accurate I am not sure.³ For a small fee another company will even download a text of *New Grub Street* to your Palm pocket organiser, so you can read it between business appointments.⁴

The present writer's site figures next on Google.⁵ Although this is certainly in the second league compared to *Cyberspace*, and has not been updated for some time due to pressure of work, it does contain rather more original material: the full text of various reviews and articles, and a celebratory essay on Gissing's achievement, with illustrative passages, as well as the only online version of Morley Roberts' *Henry Maitland*. The material in the entry on Gissing in the well-known *Victorian Web* is mostly drawn from this site.⁶ One or two of Gissing's associates have their own dedicated web pages: Clara Collet, for instance.⁷

The *Victoria* discussion group, or listserv, has preserved a very high quality of discussion over the last ten years, and there are very few conundrums which the massed intelligence of its several thousand members cannot solve.⁸ Gissing frequently appears in its postings. Growing ever more useful with the passage of time, the *Victoria* archives now form a massive repository of requests for information, answers, and hints, notes and queries on every aspect of the period. These archives are readily searchable according to many different criteria, and they give what is probably the best available insight into Gissing's current reputation, at least within academia. There have been 402 postings which mention Gissing, or an average of about 40 a year since it began.⁹ This exceeds the number of postings for Meredith, Moore and, rather surprisingly, both Conrad and Wells. Topics in 2002 alone have ranged from literary representations of foot-races to how to use *The Nether World* as a guidebook on a London walking tour.

Victoria is, of course, only one of thousands of listservs covering every field of human activity and interest. The search engine Deja News has now been taken over by Google Groups,¹⁰ but the latter still thoroughly indexes the huge archive of material which has appeared on listservs dating back to the early '90s, and it includes several hundred gossipy items on Gissing, though little of interest to the serious student.

If your interests are mainly bibliographical rather than critical, the internet is an invaluable tool, for it has revolutionised the used and rare book trade. Those who are looking for particular editions of Gissing are likely to go first to *Abebooks*.¹¹ There were more than 1,200 Gissing items for sale, including a three-page autograph letter and a copy of Gissing's father's *Flora of Wakefield*, which must be scarce if not particularly valuable. It's certainly a case of "buyer beware" on *Abebooks*. One dealer offers a copy of *Thyrza*, described as "the first edition...1927." For those with deep pockets the Boston Book Co. is still offering its collection of 171 Gissing items, including a first edition of *Workers in the Dawn*. The price now is \$US30,000 and the sellers are obviously patient people as they have been waiting for a buyer for five years.¹² Another dealer is offering the three-page autograph letter for \$3,500.

Perhaps because one expects so much more of the web's resources these days, the results of this survey are rather disappointing. There are a few exceptions, but the depth of treatment of Gissing's life and work is generally pretty superficial. Very little substantial criticism is openly available, and many of Gissing's titles do not figure at all except as items in a list. To find anything really solid, one needs a subscription to some of the first-class literary databases, like *LITIR*¹³ or the *MLA Bibliography* (which quickly allows one to discover that 546 indexed books and articles have had "Gissing" in their titles since 1991); or, for full-text, on-line articles, *Project Muse*, the most convenient of them all.

Where the web really scores, though, is in the rapidity and efficiency with which news and information can be disseminated. The news that *New Grub Street* was to be serialised on BBC Radio 4 in September 2002 circulated quickly on *The Readers' Paradise* forum and in many other places.¹⁴ American listeners who bemoaned the fact that they couldn't receive the BBC were quickly informed how they could get this dramatisation live off a radio website accessible anywhere. Someone then wanted to know how they could record each episode directly on to their computer! The internet is welding together literature and technology as never before.

¹“‘Hapless flies caught in a huge web’ ? More about Gissing resources on the Internet,” *Gissing Journal*, Vol. 33, April 1997, pp. 25-29.

²<http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Gissing.html>

³<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/author?name=Gissing%2C%20George>

⁴<http://www.ebookmall.com/alpha-titles/n-titles/New-Grub-Street.htm>

⁵http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/english/Gissing/Gissing_HomePage.htm

⁶<http://65.107.211.206/gissing/gissingov.html>

⁷<http://www.clara-collet.co.uk/>

⁸listserv@listserv.indiana.edu

⁹<http://listserv.indiana.edu/cgi-bin/wa?S1=victoria>

¹⁰<http://groups.google.com/groups>

¹¹<http://dogbert.abebooks.com/servlet/BookSearchPL>

¹²<http://www.rarebook.com/website/gissing.html>

¹³<http://www.victoriandatabase.com/>

¹⁴<http://www.glyphs.com/forums/paradise/>

Notes and News

Logically enough, it seems that the centenary of Gissing’s death will be viewed by a number of publishers as an occasion for reprinting some of his works. Under “Recent Publications” is listed *Demos* in two volumes, a resuscitation of the old Tauchnitz edition, for which we refer the reader to the big bibliographical history by William B. Todd and Ann Bowden published in 1988. Four more facsimile reprints are available in Elibron Classics, *New Grub Street*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, and *The Crown of Life*, all at \$16.95, as well as *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study*, which sells at \$15.95. *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* can be purchased as an e-book. In the long list of books published by the firm are to be found three titles by Morley Roberts, whom publishers have ignored since the reissue of *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* in 1959: *The Plunderers* (Elibron Classics, \$16.95), *A Son of Empire* (Elibron Classics, \$16.95), which John Sutherland in his *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* calls his most successful book, and *King Billy of Ballarat* (e-book, \$1.25).

Many presentation copies of Gissing’s novels have reached what may perhaps be regarded as permanent homes, but for better and for worse some collectors have a habit or yield to the temptation of swapping their literary wares for others which in their eyes are more attractive or valuable. Only by accident have we heard recently that the presentation copy of *Denzil Quarrier* that Gissing sent to Adele Berger (1866-1900), the translator of

New Grub Street into German, had changed hands. The existence of this copy is attested by the diary entry for 5 March 1892. Adele Berger did not translate *Denzil Quarrier* as she had planned, and indeed the novel is one of those that have never been translated into any language.

The archæologist Domenico Marino, who is the great-grandson of Giulio Marino, has kindly sent us a back number of *La Provincia KR* for February 1995, which contains an article on Gissing in Crotona by Mario Riganello. The full title is “Riflessioni sul grande umanista inglese che venne nella nostra città nel 1897: Crotona, la sindrome di Gissing ; Drammatica attualità delle sue considerazioni” (p. 8), which can be translated as follows: “Observations on the great English humanist who visited our city in 1897: Crotona, the Gissing syndrome ; the dramatic topical interest of his comments.” The relevance of Gissing’s considerations on, among other subjects, the cultural level of the mayor of the city in 1897, is cleverly analysed in this excellent article which shows how carefully some Calabrians have read the chapters on old Cotrone in *By the Ionian Sea*. The contrast between the obscurantist, condescending mayor and the genial, courteous and professionally capable gardener is emphasized with gusto by the author of the article. In 1995 the identity of the gardener was not yet publicly known. Some of our Italian readers should inform Signor Riganello if he can be easily joined.

The new book by Carla Capece Minutolo entitled *Catanzaro: Città di Storia e di Cultura* is both topographical and historical and contains much valuable information which any reader of *By the Ionian Sea* anxious to know more about the town will find extremely useful. It is the work of a historian familiar with the city and, as the four-page bibliography shows, with all that has been written on the subject in the last two hundred years. In addition to p. 234 with its photograph of the Gissing plaque unveiled on 23 October 1999, the volume has much to offer that could enrich, pictorially and otherwise, a commentary on Gissing’s book. A large number of old photographs have been reproduced: the Porta di mare (a 1900 postcard), a later postcard showing the theatre and the chiesa dell’Immacolata, the panorama from the Villa Margherita, the entrance to the same villa, a panorama of the town as it was in 1900, the Albergo Centrale in 1905, the town hall, again in 1905, the Corso Vittorio Emanuele in 1920, the railway station near the Ionian Sea in 1917 and the funicolare in its early days with the town at the top of the hill in the background. Part of the book is a

dictionary of the famous local, national or foreign personalities whose names were given to streets and other public places in Catanzaro. Particularly interesting is the entry on the director of the Museum in the Villa Trieste who showed his treasures to Gissing, Oreste Dito, and who brought him, from the vice-consul Pasquale Cricelli, a copy of the *Transactions of the Accademia di Catanzaro*, a publication containing a paper on Cassiodorus which still has to be traced. In chapter XIII (I Palazzi) are entries on Il Giardino Pubblico, Villa Trieste, on the Museo Provinciale and on the Farmacia Leone, with a long quotation from *By the Ionian Sea*. Among the biographical entries on people whose names were given to local streets are those on Campanella, Pythagoras, Settembrini (whom Gissing read) and Giordano Bruno, who was burnt alive on the Campo dei Fiori in Rome by order of the Holy Office in 1600, and to whose recently erected statue Gissing made a point of paying homage in 1898. Unsurprisingly, the French archæologist François Lenormant, who praised the Catanzaresi so eloquently in *La Grande-Grèce*, also has a street named after him.

A positive/negative note. About a year ago, we belatedly hear, Ohio University Press advertised a sale price of \$29.00 for *With Gissing in Italy*, that entertaining, informal account of the time that Brian Ború Dunne spent with Gissing first at Siena, then in Rome, in late 1897 and early 1898. The *Dictionary of Literary Biography* for 2002 was to contain an article about Gissing for the centenary of his death. For unclear reasons the commitment has been cancelled.

Peter Morton, whose new update on Gissing and the Internet is printed above, has published the latest Victorian Fiction Research Guide, *Grant Allen (1848-1899): A Bibliography*. This is no. 31 in the series. It comes close after the article he published last year, "Grant Allen: A Centenary Reassessment," *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 44, no. 4 (2001), pp. 404-40, and Barbara Arnett Melchiori, *Grant Allen: The Downward Path which Leads to Fiction*, Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2000. The relationships between Allen and Gissing are mainly known through Gissing's correspondence and papers. Peter Morton does not allow us to hope that we shall ever know on the subject more than we do now. Gissing sent Allen a signed copy of the first one-volume edition of *In the Year of Jubilee*. Will the biography of Grant Allen that Dr. Morton is currently writing disclose hitherto unknown material ?

Anthony Petyt, the Hon. Sec. of the Gissing Trust, has found a reprint of a book of local interest, in which T. W. Gissing appears in the list of subscribers, *Rambles about Morley, with Descriptive and Historic Sketches*, by William Smith, Jun., President of Morley Mechanics' Institute (1866 ; reprinted M.T.D. Rigg Publications, 1990). T. W. Gissing's name is unexpected in this book, the title of which reminds one of William Stott Banks's *Wanderings about Wakefield* (1871, reprinted 1983), and indeed Banks is present in the list of subscribers from other places than Morley as are John Binks and Dr. W. R. Milner, also friends of Gissing's father.

In an article entitled "It's time for a mulligan" which appeared in the *Guardian* for 15 August 2002 David McKie had the following two paragraphs on Gissing, which will possibly make better sense if David McKie's definition of the word "mulligan" is first transcribed for the benefit of non-golfers: a dispensation that allows a player who has botched a shot to have a second go.

As they grow older, people have cause to reflect on what their lives might have been had they handled things differently, had they had the chance of a replay. There's a book by George Gissing called *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* that is usually assigned to a territory somewhere between novel and autobiography. In fact it's a kind of would-be mulligan: it describes a life that might have been Gissing's but for the terrible botches he made, most of all in his dealings with women—though even then, this alternative life would have required the legacy that alone allows Ryecroft to live as he likes, where he chooses.

The book was published in the year of the author's death and is full of a sense of his impending end. In a preface, Gissing writes of the death of Ryecroft: "It had always been his wish to die suddenly ; he dreaded the thought of illness. On a summer evening, after a long walk in very hot weather, he lay down upon the sofa in his study, and there—as his calm face declared—passed from slumber into the great silence." Here, too, Gissing was to be disappointed. His own death, at 46, was terrible.

Mr. Martin Holmes, of Barnes, draws our attention to a passage on Gissing in P. G. Wodehouse's 1961 novel, *Ice in the Bedroom*. In it a popular female novelist, Leila Yorke, suddenly decides that she wants to turn to a more serious style, like that of George Gissing, much to the alarm and dependency of her publisher ! Wodehouse was about eighty when his novel was published, and Mr. Holmes suspects that the allusion to Gissing's name was prompted by some awareness of the revival of interest in Gissing which accompanied the publication of the letters to Wells and Bertz. In our next number we should like to publish a list of novels such as Wells's *The Wheels of Chance*, Arnold Bennett's *A Man from the North* and Orwell's *A*

Clergyman's Daughter in which Gissing is mentioned. We should be grateful to readers who might be willing to share their knowledge with us.

Simon James, of Durham, who is busy writing a book on Gissing, has sent us articles which appeared in the last few months in the *Observer Review* for 11 August and the *Guardian* on 11 October 2002. The first, entitled "Don't call me stupid," is a bathetic attempt by Euan Ferguson to prove that those who "wail" about Britain getting dumber are missing the point. "We're actually getting smarter." A letter from Gissing to Bertz (1 May 1892) in strong criticism of the school-board system is quoted in the course of the discussion. Later, apropos of what has been called dumbocracy, Ferguson observes that "Gissing must have been grinning in his grave." The *Guardian* article is by D. J. Taylor. In "Publish and be damned" he is once more eloquent on literary quarrelling in "the valley of the shadow of books."

In our last number we wrote that Cyril Wyatt, of Deloraine, Tasmania, had discovered a first day cover on which appeared the familiar photograph featuring Gissing, Hornung, Conan Doyle and Wells in Rome. We offer a reproduction of this scarce item on the opposite page.

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *Demos: A Story of English Socialism*, 2 vols., Chestnut Hill, MA: Adamant Media Corporation (Elibron Classics), [2002]. This Elibron Classics Replica Edition is an unabridged facsimile of the edition published by Bernard Tauchnitz, Leipzig, in 1886. Greenish grey card covers. \$16.95 per volume. The publishers' postal address is 50 Cutler Lane, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467.

George Gissing, *New Grub Street*, Introduction by Francine Prose ; notes by Audrey Bilger. New York: The Modern Library, 2002. \$13.95. Pictorial Paperback. ISBN 0-375-76110-1. The volume includes a biographical note, an introduction, a note on the text, the contents of the three original vol-

umes, textual notes, a bibliography and a reading group guide, a list of members of the Modern Library Editorial Board, and a note on the type.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Walter Hooper, ed., *C. S. Lewis: Collected Letters*, Volume One: Family Letters 1905-1931, London: HarperCollins, 2000, pp. 377-78 and 440. Comments on the passage on cooking in *Henry Ryecroft*.

Carla Capece Minutolo, *Catanzaro: Città di Storia e di Cultura*, Catanzaro: Edizioni Edil Project, 2001. This is a new book on Catanzaro, Gissing's favourite Calabrian town, and it contains much information of Gissing's interest that is to be found in none of the volumes on the subject we have described in this journal since 1998. For details, see the paragraph on the book under "Notes and News."

D. J. Taylor, "Publish and be damned," *Guardian* (Comment Section), 11 October 2002. A candid view of Grub Street in the early twenty-first century. See also the autumn 2002 number of *Pretext*, a review published by the University of East Anglia twice a year in May and November. D. J. Taylor is the guest editor of the November number. He has not forgotten Gissing.

Constance Harsh, "Flowers on a Dunghill in *The Nether World*," *Victorian Newsletter*, No. 102, Fall 2002, pp. 9-15.

Robert L. Selig, "Letters to the Editor: 'New Grub Street,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 November 2002, p. 19. See "Gissing on the Air" in our October issue.

Jonathan Yardley, "*New Grub Street* by George Gissing," *Washington Post*, 24 November 2002, p. BW02 [*sic*]. Review of the Modern Library edition which had appeared twelve days earlier.

Stefania Sollazzi, "La sfida di Italia Nostra" [The Challenge of Italia Nostra], *Il Crotonese*, 26-28 November 2002, p. 13. Crotona a hundred years after Gissing's dramatic stay in the city. Teresa Liguori, the President of the Regional Council of the cultural association Italia Nostra, published an article on the "Parco letterario intitolato a Gissing" in the November issue of the *Bollettino* of the Association.

Keith Lister, "*Half My Life*": *The Story of Sabine Baring-Gould and Grace*, Horbury, Wakefield: Charnwood Publications, 2002. Gissing, who mentions Baring-Gould in his letters and diary, appears with his father on pp. 34, 76-79 and 136. The text is accompanied by 80 illustrations. In connection with this book an article by Anthony Petyt should be consulted, "Wakefield Associations in *Our Friend the Charlatan*," *Gissing Newsletter*, October 1987, pp. 19-24.