

# The Gissing Journal

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

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## **Manchester 1911-1914 : Gissing Slandered and Extolled Homage to Percy Withers, C. H. Herford and A. N. Monkhouse**

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### I

There is a little known phase in the history of Gissing's posthumous life and works which has never been examined by historians of literature, either in books or articles, and of which very few people after the period concerned would seem to have been conscious. The unpleasant sides of the affair, as we may call it, were geographically circumscribed, but few contemporaries living in Manchester in 1913 are likely not to have heard of them. Admirers of Gissing a hundred years after the events may safely ignore them, yet as they belong to the never-ending history of human malevolence, stupidity and injustice they perhaps deserve to be put on record.

Gissing's expulsion from Owens College in 1876 may have been known in detail only to a minority of people in Manchester and Wakefield and wherever persons known to him had heard about a certain sore phase of his past life, but it is common knowledge that there has always been a certain type of individual, male or female, who gloats at any "irregularity" in a public personality's life, without any adequate acquaintance with the circumstances under which the fate of the person concerned was inexorably altered. Nowhere in the course of Gissing's career was his youthful quixotic behaviour alluded to in print. Few people outside his familiars were aware of the blot on his escutcheon and when they were, as was surely the case of the Lord Mayor of Manchester who, in 1903, on the occasion of a public commemoration, invited him to attend the ceremony, they certainly chose to ignore the writer's past, which had been more than amply lived down. The writers of some obituaries implicitly revealed that they knew of Gissing's misfortunes but they tactfully steered clear of the chastening events of 1876 and, if anything, expressed their pity and sympathy in gene-

ral terms. Apparently a reader of the *Manchester Guardian*, J. H. Hallam, of Southport, was the first person on 5 January 1904<sup>1</sup> to suggest that some form of memorial of Gissing's life and work should be provided in what used to be Owens College. However, unsurprisingly so soon after his death, the suggestion fell on deaf ears.

It was only in the second decade of the new century that Hallam's commendable idea was taken up by some Manchester intellectuals in a position to take decisive initiatives. Gissing had not been forgotten in Manchester. In his lifetime his books had been reviewed in the local press and his name was intermittently present in the minds of the staff of the university. There was among the group of journalists who worked for the *Manchester Guardian* a man who had long been an admirer of Gissing's work, Allan Noble Monkhouse, who could claim to have met Gissing in the mid-nineties (at the house of his relative the novelist M<sup>é</sup>nie Muriel Dowie, the first wife of Henry Norman, a journalist on the staff of the *Daily Chronicle*). Monkhouse had assiduously followed Gissing's career and had on various occasions commented on his novels, anonymously as was the common practice at the time. He was known to have a special admiration for *The Town Traveller*, a critical position which he repeatedly expressed over the years. It has been discovered that the review of *Veranilda* published in the *Manchester Guardian*, although unsigned, was by him, a harbinger of the long survey of Gissing's works first issued in the *Manchester Quarterly* in April 1905 and reprinted in *Gissing: the Critical Heritage* (1972, reprinted in 1985 and 1995). A hard-working man in his fifties, Monkhouse doubtless considered that it was not suitable for a literary figure like him to take the initiative in Manchester if some form of public homage was to be paid to Gissing, as the leading portion of the local intelligentsia believed it desirable. He was prepared to follow and to support, but not to lead, and his pen wielded some influence attached to his activities as a novelist, essayist and playwright. Discreet but efficient, he was in touch with dozens of personalities whose opinions mattered.

The earliest signs that a campaign destined to give Gissing full recognition in the university from which he had been expelled in 1876 are to be found in a letter from C. H. Herford to Percy Withers of 13 November 1911. Withers, ten years younger than Gissing, had been a medical student at Owens College, and after qualifying had married the youngest sister of William Summers, Gissing's great friend from his Lindow Grove days, who had died in India in 1893. He had had to give up medical practice after some years for health reasons, and after being made financially independent

by his wife's wealthy family, he devoted his time to literature, on which he lectured at Oxford, writing poetry and books such as *In a Cumberland Dale*. The idea of honouring Gissing's memory came in the wake of a similar project which he had initiated concerning the poet Francis Thompson, another former student of Owens College, from 1877 to 1884.

As appears in Gissing's *Collected Letters*, Herford was a contemporary of Gissing at Owens College—they both competed for the Shakespeare Scholarship, which Gissing won in 1875—and they knew each other for a few years. After leaving Owens, Herford went to Trinity College, Cambridge, and spent some time in Berlin. Although his major intellectual interest was English literature, his many publications show that he was also a distinguished Germanist. A professor of English language and literature at the University College of Wales (Aberystwyth) from 1887 to 1901, he had a considerable number of academic occupations in England and in the States before he settled for good in Manchester as Professor of English Literature in 1901. In his letter to Withers mentioned above, after praising the latter's efforts on Thompson's behalf, Herford went on: "I trust that we may do the same or more for Gissing later, the need is even more crying." But it was not until his next letter, dated 16 January 1912, that he pressed his correspondent to think of the Gissing memorial again although by then Withers could have claimed to have already done a good deal of preparatory work. Herford went backwards a little in his P. S.: "You alluded in your letter to the M[anchester] G[uardian] to the case of *Gissing*, who still has no memorial here. The V. C. [i.e. the Vice Chancellor, sir Alfred Hopkinson, who had occupied the post since 1898 and was to include Gissing's Prize Poem for 1874, "Ravenna," as well as his "Ode to Truth," in *A Selection of Verses from The Manchester University Magazine, 1868-1912*, Manchester University Press, 1913] was opposed, when I attempted something of this sort some years ago, to any movement being initiated by the *university*. But in a recent conversation I have ascertained that he would willingly assent to the proposal for a memorial in the university if the movement were initiated outside. So that no opposition need be feared to such a proposal, should you and others think well to make it feasible."<sup>2</sup>

## II

Herford's letter was potentially misleading for future generations. The records at Somerville College show that Withers, then living in Broadway, Worcestershire, had been busy collecting funds for some time. The sub-

stantial batch of responses he received or preserved deserve detailed attention. The replies range from January 1912 to March 1913, when the public appeal for subscriptions was published in the English press. It is important to notice that most of these letters—there were fourteen from A. C. Benson alone—were written before the formal appeal and before the *Manchester City News*, through the person of its editor, launched its odious campaign of vilification against Gissing on 8 March 1913.<sup>3</sup> Also before Morley Roberts' and Swinnerton's books were published in the autumn of 1912 by Eveleigh Nash and Martin Secker respectively. All these replies to Withers are now collected in an album held by the Somerville College Library. It is characteristic that most correspondents apologize for only being able to send a small sum, "a mite" in the language of Edward Clodd who, being "the friend of genius," must often have received appeals to his unquestionable generosity. Thomas Hardy showed himself typically anxious not to become involved in further correspondence. He replied to "J. Withers" [sic] on 7 March 1912: "I warmly commend your intention to endow a prize in Literature in the University of Manchester to the memory and honour of George Gissing. I am not very well read in Mr. Gissing's novels, but I think they were a sincere presentation of life." John Masfield, the future Poet Laureate, regretted not knowing Gissing's works well enough to sign the projected letter to the press—he would therefore try to remedy his ignorance. Wells assured Withers on 28 March that his own name was at his service as a possible member of the Gissing Committee, mentioning as an afterthought the Harrisons, Frederic and Austin,<sup>4</sup> Morley Roberts, Swinnerton and Seccombe as names worth thinking of for the Committee. C. E. Montague, who was both a writer and a Director of the Manchester Guardian Ltd and a keen Gissingite, gladly gave permission to use his name, as did John Galsworthy, writing from Devon on 12 May [1912], who warmly approved of the idea of "raising a fund to endow a Research Fellowship in Literature at the University of Manchester, in memory of George Gissing."

Monkhouse's warm response must be reproduced *in toto*. It was probably one of the earliest received by Withers and is dated from The Manchester Guardian, 3, Cross Street, Manchester, 29 January 1912:

Dear Dr. Withers,

I should be very much honoured to join the Gissing Committee if you think I am suitable and qualified; I have not any connection with the Uni-

versity. Gissing does seem to be a man for Manchester to honour; his books are fine and the man was almost finer.

You ask about likely people to interest themselves in the project. I suppose Liverpool is hardly concerned but O. Elton\* used to be keen on Gissing when he was in Manchester and Dr. Bonnier, the professor of French (I think) at the Liverpool University, once wrote a very interesting essay on him. There is A. S. Warman, the hon. sec. of the English Association here (Grammar School – Manchester). Was Lascelles Abercrombie at the Victoria University? I suppose Turner, who lectures on English literature there, would help. Would T. Seccombe who used to be there be a possible man for the Committee?

We are hoping to come back to Broadway some day and we should be delighted to come to see you.

With kind regards I am

Sincerely yours

A. N. Monkhouse

\*new professor of English literature at Liverpool<sup>5</sup>

Formerly at the University of Manchester, where he must have known Withers, Michael Ernest Sadler (1861-1943), by then Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, gladly supported the idea of a memorial, finding himself again among friends. His son, another Michael, who added an i to his surname, was to be the great collector and bibliographer to whom Gissing's name, among hundreds of others, is to this day attached.

Arnold Bennett, who had been an assiduous and generous reviewer of Gissing's novels at the turn of the century, did not disappoint his correspondent and indeed may well have been the most liberal subscriber in Withers' account books. His three letters, dated 14, 17 and 20 May 1912 harmonize with his copious comments in *Woman*, the *Academy* and *Hearth and Home*, and in his book *Fame and Fiction*. Although as a rule he objected to such schemes as that which was brewing in Manchester, he felt that for a writer like Gissing he must really make an exception. "It will give me pleasure to have my name put down on the committee." And he added impulsively: "I may tell you that I am an extremely ardent admirer of Gissing. I shall be glad to send a subscription in due course." His third letter, in which he discussed the possibility of meeting his correspondent at the Authors' Club, ended with a promise which must have stimulated Withers temporarily: "I will give you £15, unless you can persuade me that it is not enough."

Correspondence with Arthur Christopher Benson (1862-1925) was less pleasant; indeed it would have tried the patience of a saint! He had intro-

duced Gissing to readers of his own works—he had corresponded with him on a few occasions, notably about *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, which he had imitated a little too closely in *The Upton Letters* (1907)—a fact which may account for the invitation made to him by the Gissing committee in Manchester to write an article on the novelist's work, publication of which would coincide with that of the appeal in the *Manchester Guardian*. A. C. Benson's personality was a curious one. He was the eldest surviving son of E. W. Benson (1829-1896), a one-time archbishop of Canterbury, and the brother of E. F. Benson (1867-1940), the witty author of the notorious *Dodo*, and of R. H. Benson (1871-1914), yet another novelist, who veered to Roman Catholicism and wrote some Catholic apologia. The *Oxford Companion to English Literature* tactfully alludes to A. C. Benson's "deeply depressive tendencies" as if they had manifested themselves after he became master of Magdalene College, Cambridge in 1915, but it is clear that many months before the project of a Gissing memorial was launched, he no longer was, as Gissing would have said had he read the letters with which he swamped Withers' desk, *compos mentis*. The only thing about which he did not contradict himself in his continual niggings and irrelevant digressions was his admiration for Gissing's works. He agreed to write an article for the *Manchester Guardian*, then withdrew it and finally offered it again; he approved the idea of the memorial, then rejected it to praise it again; testily refused to do things that no one had suggested he should or might do. He forgot what he had said and done as regards proof-reading, and when he read his rather jejune piece in print, admitted that he had entirely forgotten the line he took. Last but not least he regretted that his name was not listed at the end of the appeal while he had belatedly expressed the wish that it should be left out!

No other trace of his tiresome shilly-shallying survives except his own letters. The appeal, signed by Arnold Bennett, James Brockbank, Edward Clodd, Oliver Elton, John Galsworthy, C. H. Herford, A. N. Monkhouse, C. E. Montague, M. E. Sadler, Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, Thomas Seccombe, A. W. Ward, Master of Peterhouse, H. G. Wells, Percy Withers, Hon. Treasurer, was printed in the following form:

To the Editor of the Manchester Guardian

Sir,— It has been thought by some among the large and increasing number of those who honour George Gissing and his work that the time has come when some permanent memorial of him should be provided. The recognition which came to him only towards the close of his life spent largely in a long struggle against adversity is now secure; he has a place,

distinct and apart, but indefeasibly his own, among the writers of his age, and those who know something more of him than his books will desire to commemorate the man as well as the writer. It is proposed that the memorial should take the form of a scholarship for the encouragement of literary studies, and that this should be attached to the University of Manchester, where, under its earlier style of the Owens College, his own student days were passed, and his first literary distinctions won. The University authorities have signified their cordial assent to the proposal. It is hoped that the sum raised may not be less than £2,000. Of this, £200 has already been promised. Donations, large or small, are invited, and may be sent to the honorary treasurer, at Kilsant House, Broadway, Worcestershire.— We are, Sir, &c

The letter was published in the number for 5 March 1913, p. 7, accompanied in the same number by Benson's essay on Gissing, p. 14, a modest achievement, and a leading article on p. 6. The appeal was also published under the title "A Memorial to George Gissing" in *The Times* (5 March, p. 11), the *Yorkshire Post* (5 March, p. 6), the *Star* (5 March, p. 4), and the *Manchester Courier* (6 March, p. 6), which carried on the same page a long article by Withers, "George Gissing, Novelist," unsigned but the authorship of which is established by his papers at Somerville College. The same newspaper commented on the brave cultural initiative in a leader in its number for 5 March, p. 6, which was reprinted two days later, p. 4. Withers' evocation of Gissing's world was a temperate, sensitive one, a well-balanced assessment combining admiration and respect which could let no reader doubt that here was a novelist whose work had been conceived not only for the present but for the generations yet unborn. A work "done solemnly, and with unflinching regard for truth, truth at whatever cost to the creatures of his art, at whatever charge on his reader's endurance. It is done, never for the sake of effect, or out of simple wilfulness, least of all as an appeal to feeling, but from the full experience of one who has himself suffered, suffered and endured, and still looks on the things that are with unflinching eyes, undismayed heart [...] His purpose was to give the life he knew and had himself lived so many blank and wasteful years, and to give it just as he had known it; and his hope was in the serious reader." Assuredly Withers spoke the language of future generations when, in his conclusion, he observed that Gissing's books are "for grown men and women who are not made queasy by uncomfortable truths, and who have a taste for fine literary craftsmanship. There is not one but gives us a wider and nearer view of life, and a new concern in some of its mysteries, a

deeper pity for its less picturesque but not less tragic sufferings and exactions.”<sup>6</sup>

### III

The writing of the public appeal printed above had not been an easy task, a common enough experience when several hands are requested to hold the same pen. Details are lacking concerning the objections and additions that were made, but it appears that Adolphus Ward, who had been one of Gissing’s professors for several years in the 1870s, was not quite the benefactor of his former student that he claimed to have been and which a number of his colleagues thought he had been. The correspondence he had had with Gissing in 1903 after receiving a presentation copy of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* throws dubious light on his capacity to understand Gissing’s remark about Goethe, his criticism having been proved unjustified, and now he was suspected of having tampered with the text of the appeal on the eve of its publication. A letter from Herford to Withers dated 14 February 1913 implies as much. Ward, whose opinion had of course been sought because he had once been a Professor and the Principal of Owens College, was not much liked in some quarters. His name roused suspicion in several of his former colleagues. Even before the notion of a prize in English Literature was properly set afloat, Oliver Elton, a keen supporter of Gissing’s artistic reputation, wrote to Withers to approve of the scheme from the University of Liverpool on 4 March 1912: “It is an admirable and pious scheme. I have always wished for the day when someone would discourse on Gissing (Herford for choice) *in* Owens. A prize in Eng. Lit. is just the right thing. [...] As to old Ward, his refusal is characteristic. I believe however that at the time of G. G.’s early disaster A. W. W. stood his friend and fought for him as best he might, as a favourite and promising pupil. G.’s *work*, as I know, he always refused to appreciate duly.” Elton wished he knew whether it was Ward who had barred “heroic,” but he thought Adolphus, as he again called him on 8 February 1913, might have been answerable for “mistaken.”

Ward’s contradictions are obvious. As he couldn’t possibly have forgotten that he was a member of the discipline committee which had voted for the expulsion of Gissing and had, *de facto*, sent him to prison, he was anxious, now that his former student had strong posthumous apologists, to depict himself as a man who had behaved humanely. Had he taken into account other facts than young Gissing being caught red-handed? Had he



realised that the culprit had, through mistaken idealism, stolen a few shillings by charity which might help him to redeem a girl of the streets about whom no one at Owens or in the town cared? Had he duly weighed the essential fact that Gissing was a fatherless youth, quite alone in a town where social inequalities were positively hideous and noticeable in all the streets around the college? Viewing Gissing's sentimental attachment to Nell as a manifestation of depravity was a gross error that the master of Peterhouse, over thirty years after the "scandal," was still unable to understand. The notion of extenuating circumstances was extraneous to his mental world. It looks in retrospect as if, in 1913, he felt constrained to approve of the plans conceived by Withers, Herford and their friends, but was secretly desirous of making some minor reservations of which only he himself could appreciate the significance.

The two main prime movers of the scheme came across other obstacles apart from the major and most vulgar one to be exposed anon. Extracts from Herford's two more letters to Withers enable posterity to follow developments in a confidential manner. On 14 February 1913 Herford wrote to Withers in cautious terms, thinking (mistakenly as it proved) that their most serious difficulties were now behind them: "You certainly have deserved well of Gissing's *manes*, and if anything comes of it all it will be wholly due to you." Because of a lecture he had to give at Aberystwyth on the 21<sup>st</sup>, he would be unable to attend a meeting organised by his friend about the Gissing Memorial, but the reasonable man he was "would fall in with anything that is jointly devised." His last paragraph again shows Ward as an objectionable busybody: "As for Ward's position, I should not be for *surrendering* anything, but the form which he would accept does not give G. a lower place [the change suggested was from "among the greater writers of his age" to "among the writers"], it merely does not explicitly claim the higher, leaving the phrase to be interpreted as each reader chooses. And I think his signature is important, especially for people here. That is my view, but I quite enter into your reluctance to modify anything as it were at dictation."

By the last day of March the atmosphere had darkened again. Herford had by then been depressed by the ignoble campaign against Gissing launched by the local weekly, the *Manchester City News*, on the 8<sup>th</sup>:

"I am very much concerned at the serious inroads which this enterprise, so generously undertaken by you, has made upon your leisure and thought. It looks as if it were after all too soon, and G's affairs too recent, for the attempt to have a fair chance. I am sorry Manchester has not done better;

the controversy excited by the M. C. N. is not favourable to the success of any scheme. No doubt however the Committee will send their contributions when you have occasion for them. I enclose mine herewith.

As regards Miss Hick's letter, I dislike, as you doubtless do, the intrusion of bishops and their confidantes in the matter. But I must say I think the claim of the two sisters to a share in the fund seems to me to be very strong. Were they merely sisters it might be otherwise; but they have made a home for one of G.'s sons since '98 [actually 1896], and for the other for at least several years; a most substantial service and, as I know from his letters to the lady I referred to, one of his executors, one so troublesome that, about 1901, they were on the point of throwing it up. Against this I have a letter from Algernon G. to this lady, deprecating loftily and enthusiastically the idea of *any* money from the fund coming to the family, and warmly supporting the idea of the M/c memorial. This came before your enclosure from Miss H., and I was inclined to accept it; but I much doubt now whether A. G. is entitled to speak for the family, which seems to have helped him too in its better days. Miss Gissing is to stay with my correspondent (Miss C. Collet, I may as well say) in April, and they will no doubt arrive at some conclusion. I am to call on Miss C. on Sunday next."<sup>7</sup>

Occasionally Withers must have been troubled by the responses to the Appeal that he received from writers who had shown in their writings the high esteem in which they held Gissing's artistic achievement. One such person was Thomas Seccombe, whose critical and biographical writings on the object of his admiration were not yet totally discredited. From his home address 18 Perryn Road, Acton W., he had written to Withers as early as 19 April 1912: "I am much interested in the scheme that you have propounded in regard to a Gissing Memorial; it is a good thing for professors to look upon those whom they have expelled!<sup>8</sup> I did not know Gissing personally of course, but I am very interested in his work." Whereupon, after modestly declaring himself "quite agreeable to have [his] name added to the Committee," he expressed views unlikely to win the approval of the initiators of the project: "I think that the endowment might well be limited to a Prize every three years on the Inter-relations between Literature and History, either classical or modern, not limited to English." And, as though his eccentricity had not yet given itself full play, he went a little further off the track of common sense: "Gissing wrote too well for the medium that he adopted, but I think that fragments of his work will occupy a very high position among the products of English prose masters."

More appropriate was Gabrielle Fleury's warm approval of the rehabilitation of and homage to the man whom she rightly regarded as her husband.

Sorely tried as she was to be by the publication of Roberts's indelicately romanticized biography of Gissing, she could still hope, at the stage of the new Manchester affair, that there were in England men and women—like her friend Clara Collet—who were determined to do Gissing justice as both an individual and a writer. From her Parisian home at no. 6 rue des Ursulines she expressed her gratitude to Withers and her confidence that Gissing would have been gratified in the highest degree.<sup>9</sup> Edmund Gosse and Lord Milner, who had just read the appeal in *The Times*, sent cheques. It seemed that daily life was going to offer a signal example of what Gissing, thinking of the Brontë sisters, had called the revenges of time, a thought which had often haunted him on his deathbed. But after the publication of the appeal in the press and a renewal of it on 6 March by the side of Percy Withers' well thought-out article in the *Manchester Courier*, in which the hope was expressed that no less than £2,000 might be collected with the cordial assent of the University authorities to the proposal, brighter prospects were abruptly shattered.

#### IV

There were at the time some highly respectable newspapers in Manchester, the *Guardian*, now a national daily, and the *Courier*, which was discontinued in 1916, but also a weekly, the *Manchester City News*, founded in 1864 and still alive to the present day. It was edited by one John Cuming Walters, a self-educated man of fifty who had for long years been confined to humble journalistic tasks and who was preparing an M.A. thesis on Hazlitt under the supervision of C. H. Herford. He was a prolific scribbler who on the eve of his death in 1933 claimed to have written some 50,000 articles and book reviews and who, before submitting his thesis, was in obvious quest of notoriety. He imagined that a scurrilous attack on Gissing would increase his own fame at the expense of his subject and for weeks, after launching a debate which revealed his miserable knowledge of a writer whose stature put his own scribblings in the shade, and publishing readers' letters to the editor which were increasingly hostile to his own hare-brained views, he had to give up the fight to which he had condemned himself. A pretentious coward, he at least learnt, after slandering Gissing with the support of some quarter-educated readers of his paper, that irresponsible publishing was self-degrading as well as a plague in his profession. The journalist tried to convince his readers that Gissing's life had been "immoral" from beginning to end and that his work, with the possible

exception of the critical study of Dickens, about whom he was to write a book (which critics have ignored), was of little value. "If Gissing's youthful sins had been merely a passing phase we could, in charity, have drawn the veil and consented to forget them. But he himself would not allow them to be forgotten, and his life ended almost as squalidly as it began. Talent in writing books does not redeem character." Neither the man, whom he only knew through mean gossip, nor the writer, with whose work he was only vaguely acquainted through third-rate sources, found grace in his eyes. Neither was worthy of any commemoration: "We regret to say it, but the truth ought to be faced—he has no valid claim to such distinctions in either capacity." After recalling with relish young Gissing's downfall at Owens College, the editor of the paper depicted the struggling artist in a lurid light: "Gissing's career in London was also disreputable, and those who know the details can only shudder when they contemplate the existence that he led, not always out of sheer necessity. To worship Gissing as a hero seems, therefore, perverse and unwarranted." He predicted that most of Gissing's works would be forgotten "twenty years hence," and appealed to the University to reconsider the question of the memorial, encouraging students to decline all prospects of competing for a scholarship bearing Gissing's name, and "to associate an irretrievably besmirched name with the love and encouragement of letters."

Blowing his own trumpet, Walters intensified his asinine campaign of hatred in the next number of his paltry paper.<sup>10</sup> According to his traducer, Gissing had led a life of crime and after his expulsion from Owens College "did little to redeem his moral turpitude." He quoted at length and with gloating approval from the review of *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* published by the Nonconformist activist W. Robertson Nicoll in his gossipy *British Weekly*, against whom Clodd had warned Gissing in the summer of 1900. In the eyes of Walters Gissing was a "second-rate" "felon" and it was scandalous that the University of Manchester should now be prepared to honour his works, which the *City News'* editor, in persistent assaults, did his best to debase. So as to add fuel to the flame he had solicited the opinions of what he called "leading men," quoting in his introduction that of Gissing's so-called biographer Frank Swinnerton, according to whom the disappointment and trials of Gissing's early life were due to Gissing himself rather than the world. With the self-confidence fostered by ignorance Walters asserted that "he could have got out of the mire had he wished." To him it was patent that Gissing had perversely wallowed in abject poverty. The caption of his incendiary piece, which covered three

columns of the paper—"Gissing Scholarship: Remarkable Outburst of Opinion. What Will the University Do? What Correspondents Think?"—was an invitation to unthinking readers to indulge in intolerance, but if he did receive some replies wholly or partly of the kind he expected—Alderman Plummer, chairman of the Manchester Libraries Committee, who had co-signed the Mayor's invitation to Gissing ten years earlier, agreed with the position taken by the *City News*, but recognised at the same time the unique character of Gissing's works—he also had to print some which were polite counterblasts. One such came from Dr. Thomas Newbigging: "You ask me to express an opinion on this matter. At first I hesitated to comply, but a maturer judgment impels me to write. I do not agree with your article. The aberrations of genius recede into the dim past. When they are known they awaken pity. Motives are not always on the surface. The writings remain and by these the man must be judged. It has ever been so. I should not object to hold a 'Gissing Scholarship' if I thought it was fairly won. Some of the worst sinners are now accredited saints. One example out of many may suffice. Saint Augustine (of the Confessions), to wit; whose conduct to a poor paramour needs a lengthy apologia."

From one Walter Butterworth came an equally firm rebuttal: "My idea would be that Gissing's physical life is a thing of the past now, and the question is, 'Has he left behind him work of enduring value?' If there are a sufficient number of people to whom his literary work appeals, why should they not express their appreciation by endowing a means of education and enlightenment? It is the finer part of Gissing that would be kept in memory—the struggle and the travail of his mind, the production of his higher faculties—not the lapses and failures of his unhappy life. I think that any student enjoying the advantage of a Gissing scholarship would feel pity and sympathy if he read of Gissing's career, and certainly this feeling would do him no harm." "Mr. Butterworth observed," the embarrassed editor continued, "that if we were to discourage tributes to the memory of all men of high achievements—writers, musicians, artists—who had led irregular lives there would be a remarkable obliteration of many great names." Having invited absurd answers by his own absurd campaign, Walters was amply repaid by a few correspondents, including one A. Y., who noted with indignation that in one of his novels, *The Unclassed* it would seem, "we actually have the enormity of two courtesans as characters," whereupon he pilloried Gissing as "one who rarely entered a church and detested the top hat," having a dig *en passant* at Shaw and at Wells, one of whose books had been banned from Manchester libraries. The man

had rejoiced to read the editor's assurance that Gissing's books would be dead in another twenty years! But, as regards all that Walters wrote, he wondered whether the *Manchester City News* could be trusted: "A lurking doubt remains, however, due to my uncertainty as to the reliability of your source of information."

As time passed Walters felt that his repeated undignified attacks on Gissing and what used to be his university earned him more and more severe expostulations of a rising quality. The opposition to his unintelligent reasoning would seem to have caused some light to descend into his thick skull. He now wished to show that he was desirous of reflecting the two sides of the controversy. In the number for 22 March, the first letter of the four he published put the question which now burnt his conscience in the interrogative form: "Is the Time Ripe?" The author of the letter, Charles Hughes, had decided to sit on the fence, declaring that one man's meat was another man's poison. He defined his capacities implicitly by admitting that he found Gissing's novels tedious and almost unreadable, while, again in self-revealing terms, he pronounced *By the Ionian Sea* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* the "somewhat laboured concoctions of an experienced man of letters. Still quite agreeable reading: inferior Galsworthy, superior Benson."

The second letter, signed J. W., came from a man of superior culture who gave Walters a lesson in reasoning and a key to a more intelligent interpretation of young Gissing's behaviour at Owens. Entitled "In Defence of Gissing," it read:

Sir,—In your opposition to the proposed "Gissing Scholarship" you stamp the erring student as one of the most corrupt characters known to fame. If we discard prejudice—and even sentiment—we shall find that at the root of his downfall there was a misguided spirit of philanthropy which resulted in breaking the man in Gissing. What happened afterwards was but the result of a broken spirit, and was all that might be expected from one who had been dragged down into hell by a hopeless woman whose soul the student sought to save.

But after all—granted that his private life would not serve as an example to other students—surely the scholarship would be established not as a token of esteem to his private life but to George Gissing the scholar! Whatever your editorial may suggest to the contrary, the fact remains with a large number of men of learning that he was a brilliant scholar, and worthy of remembering as a scholar. In this case we might apply the Jekyll and Hyde theory, for Jekyll's crimes were really committed with a definite aim, to perform a service to someone. Gissing sold his honour and his name and

became branded as a felon not for his own personal gain, but to provide extravagant dress for a fallen woman whom he thought to rescue.

Your cheap assertion that the proposal is being supported by betting papers and questionable agencies is not worthy of your paper. Whenever a subscription is needed, it is accepted by all manner of institutions without closely investigating the source from which the giver derived it, and because sporting men and papers may be amongst the subscribers it is unfair to use the prejudice levelled against them as an argument against the object to which they have subscribed.

The third letter, a vulgar approval of a vulgar editorial campaign, is not worth reviving, but the fourth gave the purblind Walters a lesson in journalistic dignity and indeed drew public attention to the unenlightened role played by the authorities of Owens College in ruining Gissing's academic career in 1876. It is worth reprinting in full:

Gissing and "Honour"

Sir,—“The honour of Manchester University is at stake.” So you begin your cruel outburst on the dead George Gissing.

With your opinion of his work I have no concern; it is enough for me that many men of high literary attainment are not of your opinion. But you have undertaken a crusade of burning invective against the “man.” To vindicate, is it? or save? the honour of Manchester University—from what?

When you have once more dragged from his tomb the “man” and shown in glaring colour all his ghastly misery, what have you effected for that honour which you say is at stake? Or is it that you fear that time and a wider experience may have softened the judgment meted out to this youth by the authorities of his college and that there may have been something which touches its “honour”? I wonder!

Let me tell you of the earlier George Gissing whom I knew as a school-boy—he a big, clever boy, the pride of the school—I a small ignorant one of no account. Yet, sir, I have in my heart after all these years the memory of that big boy's many kindnesses, his ever-ready sympathy and help, his kindly smile, his freedom from any petty meanness, his large-hearted, generous nature.

He left us to take up the scholarship he had so brilliantly won at Owens College; and how proud we were of him!

This youth, with no experience of the world, with little knowledge of the value of money, removed from the watchful care and guidance which had thus far shielded him, is attracted to this great city by the prizes he has won, and then left to his own devices to make or mar his life.

Were some such thoughts as these in your mind when you penned that first line “the honour of Manchester University is at stake”? Were you

thinking that possibly this great University has some responsibility in attracting youths to this city, which unfulfilled may touch its "honour"? I wonder!

Then came the awful fall, and his college, "painful as it may be" to them, stripped him of all his honours and cast out this great-hearted orphan boy, and doing so thrust him to the nethermost hell of misery and despair.

I do not venture to call in question the action of those authorities to vindicate their "honour," but I do venture to suggest that they had a responsibility beyond mere intellectual training—a responsibility which is recognised by our older colleges.

Perhaps then you are right, "the honour of Manchester University is at stake" if when it holds out great inducements for youths to come within its walls it takes no thought for their moral welfare, and only sits in judgment on their fall. But its "honour" will not suffer by a proposal for a memorial to George Gissing if it quickens that sense of responsibility to the hundreds of youths cast into the vortex of this city, and saves only one from a hideous misery such as Gissing's.

H. Stafford Golland<sup>11</sup>

Dunstan, Ellesmere, Eccles

This protest of a man who proclaimed his indignation and showed how little he cared for Walters' editorial manners and vulgarity could have marked the end of this disgraceful affair, but he tried to hoist himself a little higher on the road to ridicule. He sought the assistance of one Father Day of the Church of the Holy Name; it was in vain as Day washed his ecclesiastical hands of the controversial affair: the matter, he was sure, would receive capable consideration in the proper quarter! From another man, Thomas Barnett, Walters received, not at all the approval he hoped for, but a letter to the credit of George Gissing because his books were clean ones unlike those of many contemporary novelists, who wrote works of fiction of a questionable character for profit. He rejoiced that his writings had been highly eulogized by Courtney, Bennett, Harrison and Swinburne, while he himself praised *The Odd Women* and *Will Warburton* and gave an attractive Gissing quotation for the editor to meditate upon.

With these non-committal responses the controversy ended and it is characteristic that no echo of the scurrilous campaign has been traced in the Lancashire press. No member of the university thought it compatible with his dignity to fly in the face of the indelicate editor who, as C. H. Herford could testify, was in their eyes only an M.A. student whose hunger for celebrity had led him to overreach himself. No item of the abundant correspondence discussing Gissing in the late winter and early spring of 1913



alludes to Walters' outrageous behaviour. The conspiracy of silence was fraught with unexpressed consternation and reprobation. No correspondence between Withers and Herford for the period has been preserved with the sole exception of the letter of 31 March 1913 from the latter to the former in which Miss Hick, Algernon Gissing and Clara Collet are mentioned. Miss Collet is sure to have heard through Herford in early April of Walters' attempt to play havoc with Percy Withers' noble enterprise. Strangely enough the only trace of the temporary but vain opposition to the project that has been discovered was in Shan F. Bullock's "London Letter" to the *Chicago Evening Post* for 4 April 1913, but Bullock had been, and possibly still was, a friend of C. K. Shorter, and every scrap of "scandalous" news that broke out in England promptly crossed the Atlantic.

## V

It is impossible to say exactly when the affair of the Gissing Memorial was at long last concluded, or when it was decided to spend the funds collected on a small scholarship and a tablet inside the University, but a letter from Herford to Withers, dated 8 December 1914 from Herford's home address, 5 Parkfield Road, Didsbury, Manchester, offers more than a clue. Thanks to the new Vice-Chancellor, Frederick Ernest Weiss, academic chicanery had died out and Herford could write more hopefully:

I quite agree that the sum you have got together is an inadequate return for your immense and self-sacrificing labours. Still, we have gained our point with the Council, and the tablet [to be the work of the well-known sculptor Eric Gill] will be hung as honourably as we can desire. I forgot whether I told you that its place will be one near which the editor of the *City News* has to pass on his way to a lecture of mine which he is attending! It would be piquant to invite him to unveil it. However it will doubtless be better to attempt no ceremony at all. But if you would like to come and see it when it is set up, we shall be delighted to take you in.

In the meantime we may be grateful to your energy for taking this up when you did. Had it been left till now, one fears that G. G. wd have been without a monument in the new England that will follow the war.

I don't in the least deserve your kind words. But I may just say that Weiss, the present V. C., has been and is a much better friend to us in this matter than the ex-V. C.<sup>12</sup> He could of course, in his official letters to you, only express the Council's mind.

Satisfaction is also to be found in a few letters of the period from courageous personalities who watched with suppressed anger the develop-

ment of events among the people who had thought that the college authorities in the old days had been as guilty as the poor idealist boy whom they had victimized to a quite unreasonable extent. Charles Edward Montague (1867-1928), to whom Oliver Elton was to devote a book in 1929, deserves a place of honour among them. Montague wrote to Withers on 19 September 1913: "The Gissing enterprise was a most valiant attempt at the impossible, I fear. How it drew all the stupid and vulgar souls! But there were joys like the outburst in the 'Daily Mail' from one Basil Clark[e], a former reporter of ours. He had seemed at once a bumptious Philistine and, behold, there he was, humane and generous and understanding—the sort of revelation from which one is always getting encouragement." [This was (Sir) Basil Clarke, 1879-1947, identified in *Who Was Who* and in *Kelly's Handbook* for 1931.]<sup>13</sup> Montague returned to the past difficulties encountered by the project of the Gissing Memorial on 17 July 1914 in another letter to Withers: "It would be angering, if one did not know the official academic mind. Thanks be, there are many academic persons who have it not. I vote for Herford's proposal as it comes nearest to saving the Council from its own funk and folly." Then on 8 December of the same year: "Fine about the tablet. I really think the £257 is a good lot to extract in honour of a writer who was such a terror to vulgar souls as Gissing. I look forward to seeing the tablet in place."

Such words must have warmed the heart of Percy Withers, as had done a memorable article by James Douglas published in the *Star*—a Liberal newspaper founded by T. P. O'Connor, of which Douglas (1867-1940) was to become editor—over a year before, when he had heard of the project:

George Gissing was for a time a student at Owens College, Manchester, and I think Owens College owes his memory some reparation for the hard measure it meted out to his youthful frailty. He nobly repaid its harshness by his lifework, for the name of Gissing is now one of its chief glories in its larger growth, the University of Manchester. The universities have not been very happy in their dealings with men of genius, and it is a good sign that the University of Manchester is associated with the proposal to endow a Gissing Scholarship. The moving spirit in the appeal is a Manchester citizen, Dr. Percy Withers, and he is backed up by the flower of Manchester men of letters and scholars. Out of the £2,000 needed, £200 have already been secured, and it surely ought to be easy to raise the balance of £1,800 and outside it. I think that the Gissing Memorial ought to be supported by writing men, for if ever there was a case of heroic fidelity to the literary conscience, it was Gissing's. He never wrote down to the market. He never

boiled the pot. Those who know how hard it is to resist the temptation to boil the pot ought to be eager to keep the memory of Gissing green.

I think readers owe Gissing something, for he fought hard in their interest as well as in the interest of literary conscience. It is not good for the public to get what it wants or is supposed to want, and therefore every shilling given to the Gissing Memorial is a protest against the cult of profitable popularity. The public has its sins to answer for, and its cardinal sin is its failure to recognise genius while it is alive. A donation to the Gissing Memorial is a kind of conscience money. There is another reason that ought to loosen your purse-strings. Literature in this country is seldom publicly honoured. It is still the civic Cinderella. Gissing is really a test case. It would be a disgrace to our generation if it were to be parsimonious in paying its tribute to genius which in so many ways was rare and in some ways unique. English fiction is weak in the one quality which was strong in Gissing—the power of telling the truth about life. I do not know how much Mr. Galsworthy owes to Gissing, but there is no doubt that he was his precursor. It is consoling to feel that no practitioner of truth dies without heirs, and our gratitude to Gissing ought to be deepened by the knowledge that his great battle for veracity in art was fought for our health. (“Books and Bookmen,” 8 March 1913, p. 4)

There remains to pay homage to one of the most ardent supporters of Gissing in this difficult phase of his posthumous life, namely Allan Noble Monkhouse. By the time he wrote the two letters printed for the first time hereafter, the protracted agreement given by the authorities was still tainted by the opposition of a minority of diehard opponents who tried to delay the materialization of the Memorial, and one of those diehards was a man whom historians of the university, with one exception, have ignored. It is this man, Charles Hughes, the author of the letter to the *Manchester City News* quoted above, whom Monkhouse mentions indignantly in his letter of 14 July 1914 to Withers. He is described by Edward Fiddes in his 1937 volume, *Chapters in the History of Owens College and of Manchester University 1851-1914*, as “a great prop of the drama in its palmy days in Manchester and an active participator in college and university affairs, generally known,” Fiddes added ambiguously, as “the genial man with the cross bench mind.” Alerted by his friend to the danger embodied by Hughes, Monkhouse was driven into a rage:

Does this mean that the University will take the money for the exhibition while declining the memorial tablet? It seems incredible and my vote would be to decline to give them a penny on such terms. The alternative would be to return all the money and make a jolly good row about it, I

suppose. I'm game for that but there are two people to be considered particularly: 1<sup>st</sup> you and 2<sup>nd</sup> Herford. The "semi-private" arrangement seems to me a disgusting compromise. Who is at the back of this? Do they let that wretched bounder C. Hughes rule them? Weiss is a decent man, I think, but I don't know whether he has any power or, indeed, what his inclination is.

Montague is holidaying and I think he will be away at least a week but no doubt your letter will be sent on to him.

My desire is, then, for the most uncompromising policy consistent with a tolerable state of things for you and Herford.

Monkhouse's next letter, a fortnight later, shows that the obscurantist opposition to the project was gasping its last. F. E. Weiss, as we know, had succeeded Alfred Hopkinson. Portraits of them and of A. W. Ward can be found in H. B. Charlton's *Portrait of a University 1851-1951* (Manchester, 1951).

I don't know how the Gissing affair stands now but I think I should tell you about a talk I had with Weiss to-day—he is a neighbour of mine at Disley. He made a point of approaching me on the subject and though our conversation was private in the sense that we could not make public capital about it I should suppose that he is willing and even, perhaps, desirous that its substance should be reported to you. Of course his attitude was impartial and I did not think it judicious to go further than a simple expression of my own opinion which you know—that we should be wrong to give the money, or any part of it to the university unless the tablet was accepted and accepted without compromise. As to the strenuous minority in opposition [to] the University Council—I suggested that it was a very small one and Weiss did not deny it—I said frankly that it should be overridden. Weiss said that, practically, it had been. It seems that a feeble attempt at compromise has been made on their behalf—a most ridiculous attempt—but that the majority of the Council will certainly back us if we are firm. Probably by this time you know more of this than I do but I feel sure that our policy should be the firm one and that there will be no effectual opposition. Weiss is off to Norway for a month to-morrow and I suppose we cannot do anything authoritative as a Gissing Committee immediately—though certainly you might do for us what you thought good.

I hope you are not being badly bothered. Montague is back but I haven't seen him yet.

[P.S.] Weiss practically agreed that we could not be expected to do anything but insist on "all or nothing"!

Thus ended the battle between the narrow-minded traditionalists who could not see that Gissing's youthful delinquency was a far more complex problem than the Principal of the College in 1876, J. G. Greenwood,

admittedly a timid man much attached to appearances, and A. W. Ward, whose belief in his own infallibility has become subject to revision, could ever imagine, AND all the enlightened souls that fought for greater justice and reparation. The outbreak of the Great War, in which Walter Gissing was to be killed on 1 July 1916, soon obliterated the academic disturbances of pre-war days.

Eric Gill's tablet was to be the first that was put up on a wall or inside a building in honour of Gissing. The next initiative of a similar kind was taken by the Wakefield local authorities in 1932. On that occasion Ellen Gissing unveiled a plaque on the front of the house where her brother was born, and a new street on the outskirts of the town was later given the novelist's name. Then, in the late 1950s, Denise Le Mallier, Gabrielle Fleury's cousin, had a plaque put up at 13 rue de Siam, Paris. In turn the London County Council honoured Gissing with a blue plaque in Chelsea in 1975. Lastly, a decade ago, at the instigation of the late Francesco Badolato, a group of Italian enthusiasts commemorated his stays at Catanzaro and Crotona during his journey by the Ionian Sea with tablets outside the former hotels Gissing had put up at.

As for the small Gissing scholarship which was endowed at the University of Manchester, it is still extant as a prize for excellence in the first year.

[For assistance while writing this article I wish to thank Miss Pauline Adams of Somerville College, Oxford, Professor Martha Vogeler who drew my attention to a letter from Percy Withers to Frederic Harrison held by the London School of Economics, to Andrew Meredith and George Turnbull, both of the Manchester Central Library, for sending me photocopies of articles in the *Manchester City News* and other newspapers. Markus Neacey kindly checked for me Lord Milner's address in London in 1913.]

<sup>1</sup> P. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Neither Withers nor Herford is unknown in serious Gissing studies and both can be found in *Who Was Who*. Interestingly several poems by Withers were reprinted from the Owens College magazine in the volume prefaced by Alfred Hopkinson mentioned above in the text. His personality is generously described in *LifeSpan* (Peter Owen, 1994), the autobiography of his daughter, Audrey Withers, who died in 2001. She was one of my correspondents at the time I was beginning to collect material for the present article. In her book, written years after she had been editing the periodical *Vogue* for some twenty years, she had much to say about her family, notably her mother Mary Summers, the youngest member of the Summers family. A good photograph of Percy Withers in the early 1930s is reproduced on p. 98. On the Summers family see *The Summers of Shotton*, by Brian Redhead and Sheila Gooddie (Hodder and Stoughton, 1987), which contains photographs of its members, all known to Gissing. William Summers remained in touch with Gissing in the early days of his career as a writer; he almost certainly read *Workers in the Dawn* and the two men followed each other's careers until Summers, then a Liberal M.P., died of smallpox on 1 January 1893 in Allahabad. Later in the year (see Gissing's diary) William's sister, Mrs. Hannah Buckley, wrote to Gissing, asking whether he would write a memoir of her brother to serve as an introduction to a collection of his writings. Gissing gladly agreed but the project never materialized.

<sup>3</sup> "Project of Dishonour: Protest against the Gissing Memorial," pp. 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> A letter from Percy Withers to Frederic Harrison, dated 10 April 1912 from his Broadway home, Kilsant House, is held by the library of the London School of Economics. Withers asked Harrison whether he would agree to join the committee for establishing a memorial to Gissing in the University of Manchester. No answer is known to have been preserved. Whether the Harrisons contributed to the fund is not known either.

<sup>5</sup> As can be seen later in this article Oliver Elton (1861-1945) was duly contacted by Withers. He was a very active academic and published a considerable number of literary studies, among which a memoir of C. E. Montague in 1929 and a volume of Lascelles Abercrombie in 1939, both men being present in this article.—Dr. Charles Bonnier (1863-1926), author of *Milieux d'art* (Liverpool Lyceum Press, 1910), which contains a concise, stimulating essay on Gissing, pp. 17-22, to which Monkhouse alluded appreciatively in his *Manchester Quarterly* article for April 1905, reprinted in *Gissing: The Critical Heritage*. It is obvious that Bonnier's essay first appeared in a French publication before Monkhouse lectured on Gissing to the local Literary Club in December 1904 (his 1905 article being based on his lecture). Recently a volume devoted to Bonnier by Gilles Candar appeared under the imprint of the Presses du Septentrion, *Les Souvenirs de Charles Bonnier: un intellectuel socialiste européen à la Belle Epoque* (2001).—Lascelles Abercrombie (1881-1938) taught in a number of English universities, but apparently not at the Victoria University (Manchester).—Thomas Seccombe is essentially known in Gissing studies as the

author of the introductory survey in Gissing's second collection of short stories, *The House of Cobwebs* (1906), and for the Gissing entry in the old *Dictionary of National Biography* (1912), both of which teem with factual errors.—Warman and Turner have not been identified.

<sup>6</sup> The appeal, "A Memorial to George Gissing," was also published in the *Spectator* (8 March, p. 401), and the *Sphere* (15 March, p. 288), and it was announced in *Everyman* (14 March, p. 690). It must be borne in mind that, as Morley Roberts's *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, had been published as recently as October 1912, closely followed by Swinnerton's hostile critical study, many reviews appeared in dailies and weeklies, not only in England and the United States, but also in Australia and New Zealand. Occasionally readers wrote to newspapers on the subject. Examples will be found in the *Manchester Guardian* (comment by A. Y. on A. C. Benson's article under the title "Miscellany," 7 March 1913, p. 5); "Correspondence: George Gissing," further comment by D. Nathan, in the *Manchester Guardian*, 8 March, p. 5; A. W. Schüddekopf (Leeds), "Echo des Auslands.—Englischer Brief," *Literarisches Echo*, 15 April, col. 1005; Solomon Eagle (pseudonym of J. C. Squire, editor of the newly founded *New Statesman*), "Current Literature: Books in General," *New Statesman*, 14 June, p. 310 and 28 June, p. 375. Withers vigorously rejected Eagle's arguments in a letter which was quoted in his second piece: "I do not know by what right, or on whose authority, you drag into print the private affairs of those of Gissing's relatives still living. This is no affair of the Committee's, except that as individuals they must feel its impropriety, and, because of more intimate knowledge, regret the needless pain thereby caused. But in case your remarks, if left unnoticed, should prejudice this Memorial to a writer held in increasing honour, and designed by warm admirers—many of them personal friends—to repair some of the earlier stupid neglect, I trust you will allow me to say that both the idea of a Memorial and especially the form it has taken have the warm approval of those ladies—the dead man's relatives—whose privacy you molest."

<sup>7</sup> Miss Hick, who had written to Withers, was Ethel Hick (1865-1929), a great friend of the Gissing sisters and one of the daughters of Matthew Bussey Hick.—While Algernon can only be praised—for once!—for his refusal to have his family receive part of the fund, Herford's reservations about him being entitled to speak for his family, which must have been inspired by all he had learnt of him through Clara Collet, were fully justified. Algernon, his wife and five children continued to live in great poverty. His last novel was published in 1913.

<sup>8</sup> This, as suggested above, was precisely what A. W. Ward could not bring himself to do with humility.

<sup>9</sup> Her letter, dated 10 February 1912, was a reply to one from Withers of 31 January.

<sup>10</sup> 15 March 1913, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> It has been possible to identify Henry Stafford Golland (1859-1936), a cotton cloth manufacturer, who was for 33 years Honorary Secretary of the Manchester Athenæum Club and a highly esteemed local personality. An article about him, accompanied by a photograph, appeared as no. 5 in a series of articles on "Manchester Personalities" in the *Manchester City News* for 10 January 1935. He was a Liberal and a philanthropist. L. G. Larmuth, chairman of the National Business Man's Association, wrote in an obituary of him which appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* for 18 March 1936: "Until the last he remained one of the finest examples of perseverance in a just cause. Always ready to give advice and help to those in need, he was a man whose word was his bond and who kept steadfastly to his principles in all circumstances." It is worth noting that shortly after Golland's death, 23

years after his vigorous defence of Gissing, one “T. B.” (perhaps Thomas Barnett, mentioned in the present article), who must have known him personally and been aware of his activities, concluded an article which has been preserved as a press-cutting: “While a student at Owens College [actually at Lindow Grove School, Alderley Edge], Mr. Golland became acquainted with George Gissing, the novelist, and during a controversy on the question of a Gissing Scholarship paid a noble tribute to that writer. He spoke with gratitude of Gissing’s helpfulness with students younger than himself who were in difficulties over their classical studies.”

<sup>12</sup> This was Sir Alfred Hopkinson, 1851-1939, Vice-Chancellor from 1898 to the spring of 1913. He was a former student of Owens College.

<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately his piece in the *Daily Mail* has not been traced.

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### **Arthur C. Clarke Looking Backward 1967-1898 and Morley Roberts Anticipating: A Literary Oddity**

MARKUS NEACEY

This is a long story, 69 years in the making. It started in 1898. Yet, for the distinguished English science fiction writer, Sir Arthur C. Clarke, who died in March 2008 at the age of 90, his metafictional odyssey began in 1947 when he read an anthologised story called “The Anticipator.”<sup>1</sup> In the mid-1960s, with this tale in mind, he wrote “The Longest Science-Fiction Story Ever Told.”<sup>2</sup> This story is a brief letter from an editor, Morris K. Mobius, addressed to a Mr Jinx as follows:

Dear Mr Jinx,

I’m afraid your idea is not at all original. Stories about writers whose work is always plagiarised even *before* they can complete it go back at least to H.G. Wells’s ‘The Anticipator’. About once a week I receive a manuscript beginning:

Dear Mr Jinx:

I’m afraid your idea is ...<sup>3</sup>

The letter recurs infinitely. As the intertextual allusion to Wells implies, this story is a playful refashioning of a Wellsian idea. According to Clarke, the plot of “The Anticipator” revolves around two writers, one whose story ideas are anticipated and published by the other before the former can complete them. Clarke’s story first appeared in the October 1966 number of *Galaxy* though renamed “A Recursion in Metastories” by the magazine editor.<sup>4</sup>

Soon after publication, however, Clarke received a letter from Leslie A. Gritten,<sup>5</sup> a connoisseur of Wellsian science fiction since the late 1890s, who



wrote that he knew of no such work by H. G. Wells. Consequently, he could say with authority, that Wells did not write “The Anticipator.” Stung by this information and scarcely believing he could have made such a howler in his otherwise clever story, Clarke went along to Colombo Public Library<sup>6</sup> and pored through the contents pages of the autographed Atlantic Edition of H. G. Wells’ works. And indeed, he had to admit that Gritten was right: there was no such story by Wells. Despite being embarrassed by the trick his memory had played on him, he was thankful that his correspondent was the only one of his readers to have spotted the mistake – though he wondered sadly why no other fan of Wells had queried his text. Intent upon finding out the true author of “The Anticipator,” he set about doing some further research. At length he found that he had originally read the story in a 1947 science-fiction anthology.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Gritten was able to tell him that its author was Morley Roberts, and the story had first appeared in *Keeper of the Waters and Other Stories* in 1898 (it was included later in Roberts’ 1907 collection, *The Grinder’s Wheel*). But how had he convinced himself that the story was by H. G. Wells? After much thought he came to the conclusion that he may have confused the title of Roberts’ story with one by Wells called “The Accelerator,” which was originally published in the *Strand Magazine* in 1901.<sup>8</sup> In fact, Clarke errs again as the full title is “The New Accelerator;”<sup>9</sup> and although having nothing to do with a writer anticipating or plagiarising another, the story is about a drug which speeds up one’s ability to accomplish things in a short span of time (while everyone else moves in slow motion): thus enabling one, as it were, to be ahead of the game. Alternatively, Clarke may have confused Roberts’ title with one of Wells’ most popular non-fictional books, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human life and Thought*, which appeared in 1901 and is usually known by the shorter title, *Anticipations*.<sup>10</sup> It is a book of essays, in which Wells predicts with fascinating foresight what life would be like in the year 2000.

In 1967, meanwhile, having accounted for his mistake to his satisfaction, Clarke penned a short commentary entitled “Herbert George Morley Roberts Wells, Esq.”<sup>11</sup> This commentary (which, though clearly not a story, is included in his *Collected Stories* as a companion piece or key to “The Longest Science-Fiction Story Ever Told”) was straightaway printed in the science-fiction magazine, *If*,<sup>12</sup> as the guest editorial and published in book form five years later in his famous short story collection, *The Wind from the Sun*.<sup>13</sup> In his conclusion Clarke gives some thought to Morley Roberts,

confessing that he knows nothing about him. He also wonders whether he was inspired by Wells' *Time Machine* and admits surprise that "such an ingenious writer"<sup>14</sup> did not become better known. Then, tongue in cheek, the awful thought occurs to him: what if Roberts had been murdered in a dark alley? Clarke obviously did not know that despite later coming to hate him fiercely, Wells did not kill Roberts. Though, in 1903, he or rather his beef-tea, certainly did for his best friend, George Gissing. But that is another story.

Interestingly and significantly, in April 1897 Gissing presented Roberts with a copy of his latest novel, *The Whirlpool*.<sup>15</sup> In the copy now owned by the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds, Roberts noted:

When GG was finishing this a book of mine with the same title was nearly finished and was announced as forthcoming. I got instantly a pleading and almost pathetic letter from G asking me to forgo my right. Of course I did so...<sup>16</sup>

Determined to put himself in a magnanimous light, Roberts all too readily tells an untruth. Fortunately, an entry dated 31 December 1896 from Gissing's *Diary*, which was published in 1978, offers us the corrective to Roberts' account:

Thursd. Dec. 31. Bright day and warm. Went to town, where Hudson and Roberts lunched with me. By a remarkable coincidence, Roberts has just proposed to his publishers, as title of his new book, "The Whirlpool." Happily, I have priority, but thing is a nuisance.<sup>17</sup>

There was no "pleading" letter as Roberts met Gissing and W. H. Hudson for lunch at a London restaurant. It was whilst conversing there that he learned from Gissing to his irritation that they had hit upon the same title for their next books. As it appears from the diary entry and his own note (why else had he made the note?), Roberts was rather disgruntled at having to concede priority to Gissing, who had after all proposed the title to his publisher sooner than he to his. More intriguingly, as the note in his copy of *The Whirlpool* goes on to explain, his grievance was aggravated by further conflict over the title of his new novel: "... My Book came out as Maurice Quain<sup>18</sup> after another piece of trouble with W. J. Locke as I took the title *The Derelicts*.<sup>19</sup> Again I gave way..."<sup>20</sup> Hence twice in the space of a few months Roberts was anticipated by rival writers in his choice of title for his new work. Indeed, he was so sorely put out that he decided, at some point during 1897, to make literary use of his frustrating experience. The result was "The Anticipator," which would appear the following year in *The*

*Keeper of the Waters and Other Stories*. Later he would revenge himself on *The Whirlpool*, the novel which had originally put his nose out of joint, by denouncing it as an utter failure in his 1912 fictional biography of Gissing. One should like to know his opinion of W. J. Locke's *Derelicts*?

Arthur C. Clarke obviously found out very little about Morley Roberts and apparently knew nothing of his significance to Gissing Studies (there were no revisions to his commentary after its first publication to suggest that he learned more about him later). Though he died recently, he may have been unaware of the interest "Herbert George Morley Roberts Wells, Esq." has aroused in his readers. Numerous Arthur C. Clarke fan sites and blogs on the Internet refer to this work. Some of them question its inclusion in *The Collected Stories* and wonder whether it is a story, essay, or commentary, while others attempt to explain its origins. Exegesis of the text and in particular of the title of Clarke's commentary can be found on several *Usenet* discussion threads. At the same time some of these web sites and still others relating to science fiction reveal that Roberts' original story "The Anticipator" has acquired cult status among science-fiction aficionados. Readers seem attracted by the template it offered twentieth-century science-fiction writers of recursive fiction, and especially by the theme of plagiarism. It is worth noting that along with "The Fog" and "The Blood Fetish," it is the most anthologised of Roberts' uncanny stories. As long ago as 1928, the famous crime writer, Dorothy L. Sayers decided to include it in an anthology she was preparing for Victor Gollancz (later Clarke's publisher). She wrote to the copyright holders, Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd:

I am at present engaged in editing... a collection of "Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, & Horror." The volume will consist of over 1000 pages, and I am trying to make it a really representative collection of tales, each a masterpiece in its own kind.

I am anxious to include "The Anticipator" from "The Grinder's Wheel" by Morley Roberts, published by you. I have the author's permission to include it, and should be greatly obliged if you would kindly add your formal permission to his.<sup>21</sup>

Sayers' 1229-page door stopper appeared in 1929, and went into many editions over the next four decades.<sup>22</sup> Roberts' story has also been translated into Spanish twice, in 1958 in a huge two-volume anthology of stories of terror and mystery,<sup>23</sup> and again in 1993 as the title story of a similar collection.<sup>24</sup> Gissing's readers will be surprised to learn that the story is readily available on the Internet as a free *pdf* file:

<http://www.horrormasters.com/Text/a0738.pdf>.

Since it is to be hoped that some of Clarke's fans will read this article, it will be useful to say a few words about Morley Roberts. He was born in London in 1857 and died there at Belsize Park in 1942. Altogether he wrote about 30 novels, well over two hundred short stories, two biographies, three volumes of poetry, a volume of plays, seven travel narratives, and a number of non-fictional works on medicine, biology, and politics. In his younger days he saw himself as a Bohemian and frequented his friends' artist studios in Chelsea and Hampstead. From about 1890 he joined a number of

clubs in and around London, including the Authors' Club, and, as a result, over the next fifty years associated with many of the prominent British writers of late-Victorian and Edwardian England, such as George Bernard Shaw, Thomas Hardy, Henry James, and John Galsworthy. Much like Somerset Maugham, moreover, he was an inveterate traveller in America, South America, Canada, Australia, Africa, the South Seas, and the Caribbean. Today his novels are all but forgotten. He is remembered as Gissing's notorious first biographer,<sup>25</sup> as the naturalist, W. H. Hudson's,<sup>26</sup> best friend and biographer, and for his very first literary effort from 1887, *The Western Avernus: Toil and Travel in Further North America*,<sup>27</sup> an autobiographical account of his travels from 1884 to 1886. But now it would seem that his name is becoming more widely known in various anthologies to horror fans as the author of "The Fog,"<sup>28</sup> to vampire fans as the author of "The Blood Fetish,"<sup>29</sup> and to science-fiction fans, as the author of "The Anticipator."

As an appropriate end piece to this history of Clarke's commentary, I wish to draw attention to a strange recurrence of exactly the same mistake in attributing authorship to "The Anticipator." I cite Jack Matthews,<sup>30</sup> the American novelist, from his 1994 article in the *Antioch Review*:

But a still greater discovery awaited me, for upon first opening Broun's book and glancing at the table of contents, I saw that its twelfth piece is titled "Jack the Giant Killer." I turned to it immediately and read it—whereupon my suspicion was confirmed, for this is not an essay about Jack the Giant Killer—an academic study of its underlying psychology or folklore elements, as one might expect—but the story itself, retold with a different focus. It is, in short, a work of the imagination, one in which the well-known events are seen from a perspective broader than that of the youthful hero. Here, too, I could see a personal connection.

Because I had only recently written my own variant story about Jack the Giant Killer, and had only days before reread it in the galleys of a new and forthcoming collection (*Dirty Tricks*, Johns Hopkins, 1990; this story originally appeared in the *Mississippi Valley Review*). My version of the fairy tale is titled "The Stolen Harp," and it focuses largely on the realm of the giants, invidiously comparing their large, vague innocence to the small, intense virulence of humans as we know them. While our two versions of the old tale are alike in certain ways, I did not finish reading Heywood Broun's feeling demoralized. I did not feel anything like the hero of a story I read long ago, which, if I remember correctly, was by H. G. Wells and was titled "The Anticipator." It was about a passionately creative, multi-talented man who tried to express himself in various art forms but failed at each because his every attempt at creation was anticipated by some mysterious stranger, whom our hero eventually—after years of frustration—decides to kill—only to be shot dead himself by this very same nemesis, having been anticipated in that, too. (I had assumed this story was by H. G. Wells, but a brief search failed to validate such an assumption. All I know is: I think I read it somewhere, sometime).<sup>31</sup>

As a bibliophile, collector of rare books, and incumbent professor at Ohio University where the nine-volume edition of Gissing's *Collected Letters* was published,<sup>32</sup> Matthews ought to have been beforehand in identifying the correct author. For all that, he finds himself in good company.

The following are the texts of both Morley Roberts' story and Arthur C. Clarke's commentary. I would like to thank Gollancz, an imprint of the Orion Publishing Group, for permission to publish Sir Arthur C. Clarke's "Herbert George Morley Roberts Wells, Esq." from *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* (London: Gollancz, 2002), pages 873-874.

### "The Anticipator"

"Of course, I admit it isn't plagiarism," said Carter Esplan, savagely; "it's fate, it's the devil, but is it the less irritating on that account? No, no!"

And he ran his hand through his hair till it stood on end. He shook with febrile excitement, a red spot burned on either cheek, and his bitten lip quivered.

"Confound Burford and his parents and his ancestors! The tools to him that can handle them," he added after a pause, during which his friend Vincent curiously considered him.

"It's your own fault, my dear wild man," said he; "you are too lazy. Besides, remember these things—these notions, motives—are in the air. Originality is only the art of catching early worms. Why don't you do the things as soon as you invent them?"

"Now you talk like a bourgeois, like a commercial traveller," returned Esplan, angrily. "Why doesn't an apple-tree yield apples when the blossoms are fertilised? Why wait for summer, and the influences of wind and sky? Why don't live chickens burst new-laid eggs? Shall parturition tread sudden on conception? Didn't the mountain labour to bring forth a mouse? And shall—"

"Your works of genius do not require a portion of the eternity to which they are destined?"

"Stuff!" snarled Esplan; "but you know my method. I catch the suggestion, the floating thistledown of thought, the title, maybe; and then I leave it, perhaps without a note, to the brain, to the subliminal consciousness, the sub-conscious self. The story grows in the dark of the inner, perpetual, sleepless soul. It may be rejected by the artistic tribunal sitting

there; it may be bidden to stand aside. I, the outer I, the husk-case of heredities, know nothing of it, but one day I take the pen and the hand writes it. This is the automatism of art, and I—I am nothing, the last only of the concealed individualities within me. Perhaps a dumb ancestor attains speech, and yet the Complex Ego Esplan must be anticipated in this way!”

He rose and paced the lonely club smoking-room with irregular steps. His nerves were evidently quivering, his brain was wild. But Vincent, who was a physician, saw deeper. For Esplan’s speech was jerky, at times he missed the right word; the locomotor centres were not under control.

“What of morphine?” he thought. “I wonder if he’s at it again, and is to-day without his quantum.” But Esplan burst out once more.

“I should not care so much if Burford did them well, but he doesn’t know how to write a story. Look at this last thing of mine—of his. I saw it leaping and alive; it ran and sang, a very Maenad; it had red blood. With him it wasn’t even born dead; it squeaks puppetry, and leaks sawdust, and moves like a lay figure, and smells of most manifest manufacture. But I can’t do it now. He has spoilt it for ever. It’s the third time. Curse him, and my luck! I work when I must.”

“Your calling is very serious to you,” said Vincent, lazily. “After all, what does it matter? What are stories? Are they not opiates for cowards’ lives? I would rather invent some little instrument, or build a plank bridge across a muddy stream, than write the best of them.”

Esplan turned on him.

“Well, well,” he almost shouted; “the man who invented chloroform was great, and the makers of it are useful. Call stories chloral, morphia, bromides, if you will, but we give ease.”

“When it might be better to use blisters.”

“Rot!” answered Esplan, rudely. “In any case, your talk is idle. I am I, writers are writers — small, if you will, but a result and a force. Give me a rest. Don’t talk ideal poppycock!”

He ordered liqueur brandy. After drinking it his aspect changed a little, and he smiled.

“Perhaps it won’t occur again. If it does, I shall feel that Burford is very much in my way. I shall have to—”

“Remove him?” asked Vincent.

“No, but work quicker. I have something to write soon. It would just suit him to spoil.”

The talk changed, and soon afterwards the friends parted. Esplan went to his chambers in Bloomsbury. He paced his sitting-room idly for a few minutes, but after a while he began to feel the impulse in his brain; his fingers itched, the semi-automatic mood came on. He sat down and wrote, at first slowly, then quicker, and at last furiously.

It was three in the afternoon when he commenced work. At ten o'clock he was still at his desk, and the big table on which it stood was strewn with tobacco-ashes and many pipes. His hair again stood on end, for at intervals he ran his damp hands through it. His eyes altered like opals; at times they sparkled and almost blazed, and then grew dim. He changed at each sentence; he mouthed his written talk audibly; each thought was reflected in his pale, mobile face. He laughed and then groaned; at the crisis, tears ran down and blurred the already undecipherable script. But at eleven he rose, stiff in every limb, and staggering. With difficulty he picked the unpagged leaves from the floor, and sorted them in due order. He fell into his chair.

"It's good, it's good!" he said, chuckling; "what a queer devil I am! My dumb ancestors pipe oddly in me. It's strange, devilish strange; man's but a mouthpiece, and crazy at that. How long has this last thing been hatching? The story is old, yet new. Gibbon shall have it. It will just suit him. Little beast, little horror, little hog, with a divine gold ring of appreciation in his grubbing snout."

He drank half a tumbler of whisky, and tumbled into bed. His mind ran riot.

"My ego's a bit fissured," he said. "I ought to be careful."

And ere he fell asleep he talked conscious nonsense. Incongruous ideas linked themselves together, he sneered at his brain's folly, and yet he was afraid. He used morphine at last in such a big dose that it touched the optic centre and subjective lightnings flashed in his dark room. He dreamed of an "At Home," where he met big, brutal Burford wearing a great diamond in his shirt-front.

"Bought by my conveyed thoughts," he said. But looking down he perceived that he had yet a greater jewel of his own, and soon his soul melted in the contemplation of its rays, till his consciousness was dissipated by a divine absorption into the very Nirvana of Light.

When he woke the next day, it was already late in the afternoon. He was overcome by yesterday's labour, and, though much less irritable, he walked feebly. The trouble of posting his story to Gibbon seemed almost too much



for him, but he sent it, and took a cab to his club, where he sat almost comatose for many hours.

Two days afterwards he received a note from the editor, returning his story. It was good, but—

“Burford sent me a tale with the same motive weeks ago, and I accepted it.”

Esplan smashed his thin white hand on his mantelpiece, and made it bleed. That night he got drunk on champagne, and the brilliant wine seemed to nip and bite and twist every nerve and brain cell. His irritability grew so extreme that he lay in wait for subtle, unconceived insults, and meditated morbidly on the aspect of innocent strangers. He gave the waiter double what was necessary, not because it was particularly deserved, but because he felt that the slightest sign of discontent on the man’s part might lead to an uncontrollable outburst of anger on his own.

Next day, he met Burford in Piccadilly, and cut him dead with a bitter sneer.

“I daren’t speak to him—I daren’t!” he muttered.

And Burford, who could not quite understand, felt outraged. He himself hated Esplan with the hatred of an outpaced, outsailed rival. He knew his own work lacked the diabolical certainty of Esplan’s—it wanted the fine phrase, the right red word of colour, the rush and onward march to due finality, the bitter, exact conviction, the knowledge of humanity that lies in inheritance, the exalted experience that proves received intuitions. He was, he knew, a successful failure, and his ambition was greater even than Esplan’s. For he was greedy, grasping, esurient, and his hollowness was obvious even before Esplan proved it with his ringing touch.

“He takes what I have done, and does it better. It’s malice, malice,” he urged to himself.

And when Esplan placed his last story, and the world remembered, only to forget in its white-hot brilliance, the cold paste of Burford’s Paris jewel, he felt hell surge within him. But he beat his thoughts down for a while, and went on his little, laboured way.

The success of this story and Burford’s bitter eclipse helped Esplan greatly, and he might have got saner if other influences working for misery in his life had not hurt him. For a certain woman died, one whom none knew to be his friend, and he clung to morphine, which, in its increase, helped to throw him later.

And at last the crash did come, for Burford had two stories, better far than his usual work, in a magazine that Esplan looked on as his own. They were on Esplan's very motives; he had them almost ready to write. The sting of this last bitter blow drove him off his tottering balance; he conceived murder, and plotted it brutally, and then subtly, and became dominated by it, till his life was the flower of the insane motive. It altered nothing that a reviewer pointed out the close resemblance between the two men's work, and, exalting Esplan's genius, placed one writer beyond all cavil, the other below all place.

But that drove Burford crazy. It was so bitterly true. He ground his teeth, and hating his own work, hated worse the man who destroyed his own conceit. He wanted to do harm. How should he do it?

Esplan had long since gone under. He was a homicidal maniac, with one man before him. He conceived and wrote schemes. His stories ran to murder. He read and imagined means. At times he was in danger of believing he had already done the deed. One wild day he almost gave himself up for this proleptic death. Thus his imagination burnt and flamed before his conceived path.

"I'll do it, I'll do it," he muttered; and at the club the men talked about him.

"To-morrow," he said, and then he put it off. He must consider the art of it. He left it to bourgeon in his fertile brain. And at last, just as he wrote, action, lighted up by strange circumstances, began to loom big before him. Such a murder would wake a vivid world, and be an epoch in crime. If the red earth were convulsed in war, even then would it stay to hear that incredible, true story, and, soliciting deeper knowledge, seek out the method and growth of means and motive. He chuckled audibly in the street, and laughed thin laughter in his room of fleeting visions. At night he walked the lonely streets near at hand, considering eagerly the rush of his own divided thoughts, and leaning against the railings of the leafy gardens, he saw ghosts in the moon shadows and beckoned them to converse. He became a nightbird and was rarely seen.

"To-morrow," he said at last. To-morrow he would really take the first step. He rubbed his hands and laughed as he pondered near home, in his own lonely square, the finer last details which his imagination multiplied.

"Stay, enough, enough!" he cried to his separate mad mind; "it is already done."

And the shadows were very dark about him. He turned to go home.

Then came immortality to him in strange shape. For it seemed as though his ardent and confined soul burst out of his narrow brain and sparked marvellously. Lights showered about him, and from a rose sky lightnings flashed, and he heard awful thunder. The heavens opened in a white blaze, and he saw unimaginable things. He reeled, put his hand to his stricken head, and fell heavily in a pool of his own blood.

And the Anticipator, horribly afraid, ran down a by-street.

“Herbert George Morley Roberts Wells, Esq.”

A couple of years ago I wrote a tale accurately entitled “The Longest Science-Fiction Story Ever Told,” which Fred Pohl duly published on a single page of his magazine. (Because editors have to justify their existence somehow, he renamed it “A Recursion in Metastories.” You’ll find it in *Galaxy* for October 1966.) Near the beginning of this metastory, but an infinite number of words from its end, I referred to ‘The Anticipator’ by H. G. Wells.

Though I encountered this short fantasy some twenty years ago, and have never read it since, it left a vivid impression on my mind. It concerned two writers, one of whom had all his best stories published by the other – *before* he could even complete them himself. At last, in desperation, he decided that murder was the only cure for this chronic (literally) plagiarism.

But, of course, once again his rival beat him to it, and the story ends with the words “the anticipator, horribly afraid, ran down a by-street.”

Now I would have sworn on a stack of Bibles that this story was written by H. G. Wells. However, some months after its appearance I received a letter from Leslie A. Gritten, of Everett, Washington, saying that he couldn’t locate it. And Mr Gritten has been a Wells fan for a long, long time; he clearly recalls the serialisation of “The War of the Worlds” in the *Strand Magazine* at the end of the 1890s. As one of the Master’s cockney characters would say, “Gor blimey.”

Refusing to believe that my mental filing system had played such a dirty trick on me, I quickly searched through the twenty-odd volumes of the autographed Atlantic Edition in the Columbo Public Library. (By a charming coincidence, the British Council had just arranged a Wells Centenary Exhibition, and the library entrance was festooned with photos illustrating his background and career.) I soon found that Mr Gritten was right: there was no such story as “The Anticipator” in the collected works. Yet in the

months since TLSFSET was published, not one other reader has queried the reference. I find this depressing; where are all the Wells fans these days?

Now my erudite informant has solved at least part of the mystery. “The Anticipator” was written by one Morley Roberts; it was first published in 1898 in *The Keeper of the Waters and Other Stories*. I probably encountered it in a Doubleday anthology, *Travellers in Time* (1947), edited by Philip Van Doren Stern.

Yet several problems remain. First of all, why was I so convinced that the story was by Wells? I can only suggest – and it seems pretty farfetched, even for my grasshopper mind – that the similarity of words had made me link it subconsciously with “The Accelerator.”

I would also like to know why the story has stuck so vividly in my memory. Perhaps, like all writers, I am peculiarly sensitive to the dangers of plagiarism. So far (touch wood) I have been lucky; but I have notes for several tales I’m afraid to write until I can be quite sure they’re original. (There’s this couple, see, who land their spaceship on a new world after their planet has been blown up, and when they’ve started things all over again you find – surprise, surprise! – that they’re called Adam and Eve ...)

One worth-while result of my error was to start me skimming through Wells’s short stories again, and I was surprised to find what a relatively small proportion could be called science fiction, or even fantasy. Although I was well aware that only a fraction of his hundred-odd published volumes were SF, I had forgotten that this was also true of the short stories. A depressing quantity are dramas and comedies of Edwardian life (“The Jilting of Jane”), rather painful attempts at humour (“My First Aeroplane”), near-autobiography (“A Slip Under the Microscope”), or pure sadism (“The Cone”). Undoubtedly, I am biased, but among these tales such masterpieces as “The Star,” “The Crystal Egg,” “The Flowering of the Strange Orchid,” and, above all, “The Country of the Blind” blaze like diamonds amid costume jewellery.

But back to Morley Roberts. I know nothing whatsoever about him, and wonder if his little excursion in time was itself inspired by “The Time Machine,” published just a couple of years before “The Anticipator.” I also wonder which story was actually *written* – not published – first.

And why did such an ingenious writer not make more of a name for himself? Perhaps ...

I have just been struck by a perfectly horrid thought. If H. G. Wells's contemporary Morley Roberts was ever found murdered in a dark alley. I simply don't want to know about it.

<sup>1</sup> Morley Roberts, "The Anticipator" in *Keeper of the Waters and Other Stories* (London: Skeffington & Son, 1898).

<sup>2</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, "The Longest Story Ever Told" in *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke* (London: Gollancz, 2000), p. 854.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, "A Recursion in Metastories" in *Galaxy*, Vol. 25, No. 1, October 1966, p.78.

<sup>5</sup> Leslie Alfred Gritten, (1887-1975), was born in Hendon, Middlesex and emigrated to Canada before the First World War. He fought for the Canadian army during that conflict. Later he moved to America and was a long-time resident of Everett, Snohomish County, in Washington, USA, where he died.

<sup>6</sup> In Colombo, Sri Lanka.

<sup>7</sup> Philip Van Doren Stern, ed., *Travellers in Time* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co, 1947).

<sup>8</sup> H. G. Wells, "The New Accelerator" in *Strand Magazine*, Vol XXII, No. 132, December 1901. First collected in *Twelve Stories and a Dream* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1903).

<sup>9</sup> H. G. Wells, "The New Accelerator" in *The Complete Short Stories of H. G. Wells*, ed. John Hammond (London: J. M. Dent, 1998), pp. 487-497.

<sup>10</sup> H. G. Wells, *Anticipations of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1901, although dated 1902).

<sup>11</sup> *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke*, pp. 873-874.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, "Herbert George Morley Roberts Wells, Esq." in *If*, Vol. 17, No. 12, December 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, "Herbert George Morley Roberts Wells, Esq." in *The Wind from the Sun* (London: Gollancz, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> *The Collected Stories of Arthur C. Clarke*, p. 874.

<sup>15</sup> George Gissing, *The Whirlpool* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1897). The first edition appeared in April 1897.

<sup>16</sup> Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume Six, 1895-1897* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1995), p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), pp. 430-431.

<sup>18</sup> Morley Roberts, *Maurice Quain* (London: Hutchinson & Co, 1897). The first edition appeared in April 1897.

<sup>19</sup> W. J. Locke, *Derelicts* (London and New York: John Lane, 1897). The book appeared in October 1897.

<sup>20</sup> *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume Six, 1895-1897*, p. 60.

<sup>21</sup>Quoted from the copy of a manuscript letter from Dorothy L. Sayers to Messrs. Thos. Nelson & Sons Ltd, dated 2 May 1928. MSS.318/3/DLS/479 in The Modern Records Centre, The Library, The University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL.

<sup>22</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers, ed., *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1929).

<sup>23</sup> Juan J. Lopez Ibor, ed., “El hombre que se anticipaba” in *Antología de cuentos de misterio y terror* (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1958, two vols.).

<sup>24</sup> Rodolfo Jorge Walsh, trans. and ed., “El anticipador” in *El anticipador y otros cuentos de mente* (Madrid: Zugarto Ediciones, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912).

<sup>26</sup> William Henry Hudson (1838-1923).

<sup>27</sup> Morley Roberts, *The Western Avernus: Toil and Travel in Further North America* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1887).

<sup>28</sup> Morley Roberts, “The Fog” in *The Grinder’s Wheel* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1907), pp. 37-66.

<sup>29</sup> Morley Roberts, “The Blood Fetish” in *Midsummer Madness* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1909).

<sup>30</sup> Jack Matthews (1925- ), American literary novelist and distinguished professor of English at Ohio University, Athens.

<sup>31</sup> Jack Matthews, “The Original Giant and the Jack of Games” in *Antioch Review*, 22 March 1994.

<sup>32</sup> Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Nine Volumes, 1863-1903* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1990-1996).

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## Notes and News

James Haydock, whose name is associated with some pioneering research in the early days of the Gissing revival, has published a novel based on the life of George Gissing, entitled *Beacon’s River*, Andrew Beacon being the name of the protagonist. This volume comes in the wake of similar efforts, the earliest of which was Morley Roberts’s *The Private Life of Henry Maitland*, a volume which was of some use about a hundred years ago, until serious work began to be done on a writer now regarded as one of the leading late Victorian novelists. James Haydock’s book, a paperback selling at \$18.60, may be ordered directly from the AuthorHouse Book Store at a discount (authorhouse.com) or from any local bookshop that will order it for the purchaser.

Hazel K. Bell ([HKBell@dsl.pipex.com](mailto:HKBell@dsl.pipex.com)) informs us that she has found a passage on *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* in a book published this

year by Castle Hill Press, T. E. Lawrence, *Letters*, Vol. IV, *Correspondence with Bernard and Charlotte Shaw*, 1920-1935. We remember reading the letter from T. E. Lawrence to Charlotte Shaw of 2 February 1934 : “What Gissing says and feels is so exactly what I know is coming to pass when I leave the R.A.F. and fall into quietness at Clouds Hill; and in the light of knowledge I see so clearly that what I once took for contentment is resignation; and what I thought was happiness is sense of failure.”

Markus Neacey has discovered an unrecorded reprint of “Phoebe” in the *Living Age* for 5 April 1884, pp. 28-37. This discovery at least means that William Frederick Poole’s old *Index to Periodical Literature*, which has been so serviceable for decades, is not entirely reliable. Over the years *Living Age* is known to have reprinted many short texts by or about Gissing and “Phoebe” escaped the notice of compilers.

Dr. Frederick Nesta, University Librarian in Hong Kong, informs us that the University of Michigan has scanned and indexed both Gissing’s diary and his Collected Letters. Here are the links:

Collected Letters of George Gissing

<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/002218939>

London and the Life of Literature in late Victorian England

<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000218827>

The full text is not available but you can search the text for items that may not be in the index, in particular place names. There are many more Gissing titles available, some in full-text for readers living in the States where they are out of copyright, many more available for searching.

Abebooks.com have published some shrewd comments on *New Grub Street*. The comments have been sent by readers of the audio edition of the novel to which we referred in our last number. A reader, who calls himself Fuzzbottle, admitted in 2005 that he was stunned by how much he enjoyed it. “Gissing’s prose and characterization hold up remarkably well. He’s sort of an urban Hardy, though far more accessible to today’s reader. I’d recommend this to any serious reader. Oh, and this novel is ripe for adaptation. A BBC miniseries would be great.”

Derivative literature continues to flourish. As previously reported, Elise Blackwell’s *Grub* (Toby Press, 2007) is one of James Haydock’s prede-

cessors. We doubt whether such books have many readers. *Grub* is priced at \$24.95, which is a good deal more than the “real thing,” that is Gissing’s novel itself, which is so easily obtainable in the World’s Classics or at a pinch in the Penguin edition with an introduction and notes by Bernard Bergonzi, editorial material which the editorial staff of the firm has never deigned to update since 1968. In some respects the editorial material is hopelessly dated.

Domenico Marino, currently Director of the National Archaeological Museum of Crotona, whose ancestor Gissing met in the local cemetery, informs us that an exhibition, “O Dei di Krotona,” is currently held at the museum about the archaeological past of the city. It will close on 31 December 2009.

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### Recent Publications

Articles, reviews, etc

Rob Spence, “Book Reviews,” *European English Messenger*, Spring 2009, pp. 88-89. Review of Scott McCracken’s *Masculinities: Modern Fiction and the Urban Public Sphere*.

Rosemarie Bodenheimer, “Give us a break,” *London Review of Books* (9 July 2009, pp. 18-20). A letter to the editor by Eric Hunter of Rhode Island about this review was published on 27 August, p. 5.

John Mullan, “Ten of the best novels about novelists,” *Guardian*, 25 July 2009, page unknown. *New Grub Street* is no. 3, but what are we to think of *David Copperfield* (no. 1) and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (no. 2) as novels about novelists?

John Sutherland, “The ten best novels about literary second-raters in order of merit,” *The Times* (Saturday Review Supplement), 15 August 2009, p. 11. *New Grub Street* is placed first, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* second, and Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* third.



