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

Mapping Gissing’s *Workers in the Dawn*

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Making maps of novels has a long tradition. Some stories, such as *Treasure Island*, come with their own maps. Closer to Gissing’s London, Arthur Morrison’s *Child of the Jago* (1896) featured a frontispiece map of the “Jago,” plotting out a street pattern almost identical to that of the real “Nichol” in Shoreditch, but substituting Morrison’s names: the real “Mead Street” became “Honey Lane,” “Boundary Street” became “Edge Lane,” and so forth. Other novels received maps courtesy of their publishers – OUP’s “A Map of Mrs Dalloway’s London” and Penguin’s “Central London in the Mid-Twenties” are just simplified street maps of 1920s London to help readers unfamiliar with the metropolis to follow the routes of characters in *Mrs Dalloway* as they weave their way across the West End.¹ Blackwell’s map of “The London of Mrs Dalloway” is annotated with numbered references to incidents in the text. But none of these maps plot the characters’ walks. They merely mark locations that would allow readers to construct their own geographies of the novel.²

At the other analytical extreme are Franco Moretti’s maps of novels by Dickens, Balzac, Flaubert, and Conan Doyle, some simply marking the locations of key events or characters’ homes, but others more abstractly identifying clusters of characters in topographical and social space to produce Venn diagrams of overlapping or interpenetrating social worlds superimposed on maps of London and Paris, or charting, in the case of *Our Mutual Friend*, the movement of the narrative from one part of the city to another through successive monthly instalments.³ As important are the blank spaces that emerge and the divides that are rarely crossed. In this way, Moretti makes the argument for the evolution of Dickens’s London from a simple bi-polar poor east and comfortable west in *Oliver Twist* to a more

complex social geography by the time of *Our Mutual Friend*, especially involving the emergence of what Moretti terms a “third London.”⁴

The relevance of using maps not simply to record locations mentioned in texts but as analytical tools connecting the structure of novels to the structure of the cities in which they are set should be self-evident to Gissing scholars. Gissing’s London locations are usually real places, often precisely designated and drawn from his own experience; but more than this, they are selected with a purpose: not simply containers for the narrative but characters in their own right. Even in *Isabel Clarendon* (1886), not normally thought of as a London novel, and mainly set in imaginary rural environments, Gissing is very precise in his choice of London locations – “that desolate region through which stagnates the Regent’s Canal, the north end of Camden Town”; followed by rooms “in Highgate, not far from the pleasant road which leads across the valley to Hampstead; four rooms and an underground kitchen”; immediately contrasted with the Meres’s house in Chelsea: “a small house in a little square, between which and the river is a portion of Cheyne Walk. Three minutes’ walk brings you to the Albert Bridge ...”; and Gabriel’s home and studio “on the north side of Regent’s Park” looking west to “the smug, plebeian slope of Primrose Hill.”⁵ The role played by location is also very apparent in *The Unclassed*, in which Gissing changed some locations from the first edition (1884) when he revised the book a decade later. Slums in Westminster (1884) are shifted to the East End (1895), Pimlico becomes Fulham, Fulham becomes Tottenham. As I have argued elsewhere, we can speculate on why Gissing made these changes – the East End was certainly more in the public eye in 1895 than it had been a decade earlier, and Westminster had been “improved” by slum clearance, yet the novel remains set in the 1870s – but the effect is to change the spatial dynamics of the story, making for a more expansive, less constricted metropolis, where characters had to make more use of cabs and buses and coincidences in time and space might be thought less likely. Geographically, therefore, the novel is less “naturally” realistic in its revised version. Moreover, the meanings of some actions are changed: Slimy drinking himself to death in Limehouse seems less deliberate when he has only made the excursion from somewhere else in the East End than when he has travelled all the way from Westminster; but Harriet is not so early exposed as a liar when she tells her employer-cum-landlady that she is off to see a friend in Westminster, which is true in the first edition but false in the revised edition.⁶

Placing *Workers*

The publication of a new edition of *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), Gissing's sprawling, Dickensian first novel (reviewed by Malcolm Allen in the April 2010 issue of this journal), offers further scope for mapping, not only as a way of providing readers with the whereabouts of long lost locations, such as Adam & Eve Court, Little St Andrew Street, Crown Street and the Debtors' Prison, but also as a tool for exploring how Gissing sets space to work in his story.⁷ However, faced with less than perfect topographical information, mapping is an imprecise art. Like completing Mahler's tenth or Elgar's third symphonies, the mapmaker has to be granted some creative licence!

Some locations can be matched to the author's own experience: Gissing lived on Gower Place and Huntley Street shortly before writing *Workers*, so it seems reasonable to locate the lodgings occupied by Arthur Golding and Carrie, the girl he disastrously marries, roughly where their creator lived. Charlotte Place, the home and workplace of the radical printseller, Samuel Tollady, is such a short alley between Goodge Street and Rathbone Place that at any but the most detailed scale you can't put the dot in the wrong place! But Portland Place, where the society painter, Gresham, had his home, is a longer street, and there are few clues as to where on the street he might have lived. Fortunately, it hardly matters, since this was a street of consistently high-class property. Suburban locations towards the end of the novel are also represented economically in the text – no more than the place-names, Islington, Highbury, Hampstead and Highgate. The greatest problem is where to locate the 'East End' in which the respectable artisan, Venning, and his daughter, Lucy, lived and where the nonconformist clergyman, Mr Heatherley, had his chapel, which accommodates a night school for girls (like Lucy), run by the earnest but sickly Helen Norman, Mr Gresham's ward, who is the real love of Arthur's life.

It is evident, both in the novel and in other contemporary writing, that the "East End" was not as far east as we think of it today – Gissing alludes to the perception of West-Enders that Whitecross Street was "very far off in that shocking East End which it is quite improper to think of, let alone visit."⁸ The only East-End reference in his extant correspondence from pre-diary times (in his letter to his sister, Ellen, in February 1883) implies a location farther east of his usual travels – more like Whitechapel than Clerkenwell or Hoxton, but also suggests that he had not spent much time that far east before 1883.⁹ Fortunately, there are at least two clues in the

text of *Workers*. Helen commutes by train from Portland Place to her school in Heatherley's chapel, which implies she must have travelled by underground from Portland Road station (now Great Portland Street) east around what is now the Circle Line. Except that in 1870 when this part of the novel was set, the Metropolitan Railway extended only as far as Moorgate Street (today's Moorgate). From the station (not specified, but in "The City"), "It was not a very long walk to the chapel."¹⁰ Gissing was an avid walker but presumably he was mindful that this was not a long walk for Helen, so we might surmise that the chapel was no more than a few minutes' walk from Farringdon Road, Aldersgate Street (now Barbican) or Moorgate Street stations, probably the latter. Mr Heatherley's own home seems to have been in the opposite direction from the station, since it was not out of his way to accompany Helen back to the station at the end of her evening's classes, a walk which also took them past the Vennings' home. We also learn of Mr Heatherley that he lived "in a street a short distance from the City Road," although evidently not so directly connected to the main street for Helen not to have "some little difficulty discovering the address."¹¹ So we have a sequence of locations: Mr Heatherley's home – "The City" station – the Vennings' home – the chapel; all within a few minutes' walk.

Only a few streets away from Moorgate Station was South Place Chapel, since 1824 the home of the South Place Religious Society, a dissenting congregation that had already abandoned belief in hell and the doctrine of the Trinity and was well on the way from unitarianism to humanism. In 1888 their abandonment of belief in God was signified by a change of name to the South Place Ethical Society and in the late 1920s the society moved to its present home, Conway Hall (named after its American minister from 1864 to 1885 and again from 1892 to 1897, Moncure Daniel Conway) in Red Lion Square, Holborn.¹² In February 1879, Gissing attended a lecture by G. W. Foote, editor of *The Liberal*, on "Religion without a God," held at "South-place Institute."¹³ In contrast to South Place thinking, Mr Heatherley holds to conventional Christian doctrine, but unlike the Rev. Orlando Whiffle, Mrs Cumberbatch, or the unnamed Church of England clergyman to whom Helen first offers her services, he is not treated to Gissing's scorn. Indeed, when Helen quizzes Heatherley on his beliefs, the latter admits that "the doctrine of eternal punishment has no place in my creed."¹⁴ To this extent, at least, he shares the beliefs of the South Place society.

Map 1: Arthur's Residential Mobility

At the very least, I conclude, Gissing's visit to South Place played some part in situating Mr Heatherley, the Vennings and their chapel, in the vicinity of Moorgate and City Road, probably in Finsbury, to the north and east of Moorgate-City Road.

It is *possible*, of course, that their "East End" lay *west* of City Road, which would return us to the vicinity of Whitecross Street; and the description of courts and alleys which Heatherley shows to Helen is not so different from what Gissing has already described in the case of Adam & Eve Court, or was later to describe in the case of "Shooter's Gardens" in *The Nether World*, set in Clerkenwell. On the other hand, we might then have expected Gissing to allude to the proximity to Whitecross Street. The Vennings' own home is clearly *not* a slum, befitting Mr Venning's artisanal status, but we know from Charles Booth's survey at the end of the 1880s how close the "semi-criminal" (coloured black on Booth's map) resided to the "mixed" and the "comfortable" (coloured purple and pink).¹⁵

In general, the more geographically central the location, the more precisely Gissing delineated it. Apart from the homes of characters, numerous specific West End locations mentioned in the novel include Grafton Street and Crown Street (both roughly on the line of the current Charing Cross Road, a street improvement completed in 1887), Leicester Square, Soho Square and Torrington Square, the Middlesex Hospital, the British Museum, the National Gallery, the Prince of Wales Theatre (in Tottenham Street), the Alhambra (Leicester Square) and the Oxford Music Hall (corner of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road) (where, much later, Gissing either accompanied or picked up his second wife, despite having roundly condemned it in *Workers* as no place for respectable young ladies, certainly not on their own).¹⁶ Working our way towards the City, there are also references to Gray's Inn Square, Saffron Hill (of which, more below) and Paternoster Row. Less central, but quite specific locations include St Marylebone Workhouse, which Arthur passed on his way from Chapel Street (Edgware Road) (two more locations which figured prominently in Gissing's *later* life), the reservoir on Pentonville Road (Claremont Square, constructed as an open reservoir in the 1820s, covered over in 1852, but still functioning as a reservoir today), and Rotten Row, where Maud Gresham went riding, in Hyde Park. But more suburban locations – Arthur and Carrie's successive lodgings in Hampstead, Highgate and Camden Town, and Helen's home in "Holly Cottage," Highbury – are less easily reduced to points on a map. Arthur strayed as far as London Bridge, but the only character recorded as crossing the Thames to south London was Helen

who, after surveying the “mean and poverty-stricken” districts of Soho, Seven Dials, Drury Lane and Clare Market, extended her exploration “through all the unutterable vileness which is to be found on the other side of the river, then through everything most heart-breaking that the wide extent of the East End has to show,” comments that indicate both their author’s hazy knowledge of these parts of London and that the East End encompassed everywhere east of Clare Market, including both Saffron Hill and Clerkenwell.¹⁷

The most remote London location to be given a more precise setting was the church attended by Mrs Cumberbatch at the extremity of Mile End Road (presumably, somewhere east of the Regent’s Canal): an outlandish location for an outlandish church (the Semi-United Presbyterio-Episcopal Church!), far beyond even the “Oriental regions” of the near East End that Mr Gresham so frequently denigrates.¹⁸ Another unmappable location is the whereabouts of another outlandish church, “St Abinadab’s,” an “aristocratic church” where Mr Whiffle became incumbent, evidently somewhere in the fashionable West End since Helen is visited by fund-raising members of the congregation while she is living at Portland Place and the Waghorns attend the church while they live in the vicinity of Regent’s Park.¹⁹

In summary, it seems that Gissing’s way of conceptualising the metropolis is a kind of map projection that exaggerates the area between the river and Euston Road, and between the West End and the City, but marginalises everywhere beyond those limits, a nineteenth-century equivalent to the famous London Underground map designed by Harry Beck in 1933, in which east and south-east London hardly exist at all, and the distance between middle-class suburbs (especially to the north-west) and the centre seems no greater than one side of the Circle Line to the other.²⁰

Journeys: 1: Arthur’s successive homes

There are also two kinds of journeys that seem to me to be worth mapping – the individual journeys on which Gissing sent his characters at key points in the novel, and their lifetime trajectories. I will begin by focusing on Arthur’s, and the novel’s, trajectory, which starts in Adam & Eve Court, a slum court opening off Whitecross Street (Map 1). If Adam & Eve Court had not existed, it would have been reasonable enough for Gissing to have invented it: Adam & Eve is obviously an appropriate couple with which to begin an epic story, especially one concerned with growing up, good and evil, temptation, and the acquisition of (self)-

knowledge. More presciently, Adam & Eve Court was an appropriate starting point for a lifelong career in storytelling. But, remarkably, Gissing did not need to invent it. The court was one of several on either side of Whitecross Street that were scheduled for demolition in 1877 under the terms of the 1875 Cross Act.

The Cross Act, steered through parliament by Disraeli's Home Secretary, Richard Cross, granted powers to local authorities (such as the Metropolitan Board of Works in London) to compulsorily purchase and clear *areas* (as opposed to individual properties) designated as unfit for human habitation. The local authority was required to pay compensation at market values (i.e. what the land was worth when the slum had been cleared away, which was generally substantially more than under its current use), and to arrange for housing on the same site to accommodate as many persons as had been displaced, assuming occupancy levels of two persons per room. The local authority was not permitted to retain ownership of the site or the housing erected on it so, in practice, cleared sites were offered to private housing agencies – usually philanthropic trusts, like Peabody, or limited-dividend housing companies, like the Improved Industrial Dwellings Company – that were willing to meet the rehousing obligations. Given that the sites had previously been occupied by densely packed, insanitary dwellings, usually two or three storeys in height, the only way that redevelopment could provide sanitary accommodation for as many people as had lived there before was by building upwards, typically five- or six-storey “block dwellings.” The terms of compensation, and the inability of philanthropic agencies to pay market rates for centrally located sites for working-class housing, invariably meant a substantial subsidy on the part of the local authority employing the legislation. This made it imperative that the boundaries of the “slums” were drawn as tightly as possible, especially avoiding any commercial properties, such as breweries or small workshops where the loss of business and “goodwill” entailed extra compensation.²¹

In the case of Whitecross Street the Medical Officer of Health for St Luke's proposed the clearance of areas in the district in official representations in November 1875 and November 1876, a local inquiry was held in April 1877, and a slightly reduced clearance area was confirmed by act of parliament on 23rd July 1877. Officially, 3,687 persons were to be displaced, although the real number was probably substantially higher. Clearance proceeded in sections, starting with the *west* side of Whitecross Street, which was cleared during 1880. The rest of the site, including Adam & Eve Court on the east side of Whitecross Street, was cleared in 1881. New streets,

including what is now Dufferin Street, which runs along the south side of the line of Adam & Eve Court, were laid out in 1883. In total, the Metropolitan Board of Works spent £391,303 in purchasing land, clearing the site and laying out new streets, and received in return £76,360 (including £36,782 from the Peabody Donation Fund). The Peabody Trust took possession of the first area to be cleared (i.e. to the west) in December 1880, and of the remainder during 1881 and 1882. By April 1883, Peabody had completed 6 blocks of dwellings; and they reported that a grand total of 33 blocks of dwellings were occupied by January 1884.²²

We can conclude, therefore, that Adam & Eve Court was still in existence when *Workers in the Dawn* was published, but that it was cleared, probably about a year after the book appeared, and was redeveloped as Peabody Buildings by the end of 1883.

This still does not tell us *how* familiar Gissing was with the real Adam & Eve Court. *The Times* (17th, 23rd, 26th April 1877) carried lengthy reports of the inquiry that preceded implementation of the scheme. Other newspapers featured briefer reports, and *The Standard* ran several articles on “London Courts and Alleys,” including one (2nd Sept. 1875) devoted exclusively to Golden Lane, the street immediately west of Whitecross Street and also affected by the clearance scheme.²³ However, none of these reports singled out Adam & Eve Court and, in any case, they all predated Gissing’s arrival in London in October 1877. I have not (yet) tracked down any newspaper articles naming the court, so Gissing must have discovered it for himself, perhaps through his reading of the “Books on London Streets” listed on page 32 of his “American Notebook,” or in the course of his exploration of “the holes of London” alluded to in a letter from his brother, William, in June 1878.²⁴ William’s anxiety – “It must be very interesting examining the holes of London, as long as you don’t catch a fever” – not only reflects the fragile state of his own health, but finds an exaggerated echo in Gresham’s attitude to Helen’s getting interested in the East End. Speaking to Mr Heatherley: “Let her by all means disgust herself with a peep into these eastern dens of yours. I only hope she won’t bring us some infectious disease here, that’s all.”²⁵

From Adam & Eve Court, Arthur moved first to Little St Andrew Street (Seven Dials) and then to Charlotte Place. The means of enacting the first of these moves seems to me the least geographically believable part of the novel. Arthur had been assaulted by his “employer,” Bill Blatherwick, whose character is much like Bill Sikes’s in *Oliver Twist*, but took advantage of Bill’s drunken stupor to escape, from somewhere in the

vicinity of Saffron Hill, another allusion to *Oliver Twist*, whence he was rescued by Ned Quirk, daytime costermonger and resident of Little St Andrew Street, Seven Dials, who happened to be passing, presumably on his way back from his evening job selling baked potatoes at the corner of Old Street and City Road (the nearest major road intersection to Whitecross Street).²⁶ It is understandable that Ned's route home would take him near Saffron Hill; less believable that he would have chosen to ply his part-time trade so far from home, when there must have been numerous pitches in the West End or Covent Garden.

Given the eastward movement of "East End" during the course of the nineteenth century, Whitecross Street in 1860 can be equated with Saffron Hill in the 1830s, the former just over half a mile east of the latter. Having stopped off in Saffron Hill for a farewell drink, Gissing could at last establish his own geography in the area in which he was more at home, a T-shaped locale extending north up Tottenham Court Road and west-east along the line of the 'New Road' (Marylebone Road – Euston Road – Pentonville Road – City Road), the shabby margins of West End and City.

From Little St Andrew Street it is much more believable that Arthur should go on an errand that took him past Mr Tollady's shop in Charlotte Place. Socially and geographically, Charlotte Place was much like Colville Place, where Gissing lived for about nine months in 1878.²⁷ One is just west of Charlotte Street, the other immediately east. But unlike Colville Place, which is oriented east-west, the north-south orientation of Charlotte Place also offered a geographically logical route for Mr Gresham to follow, wanting to avoid the crowds on main roads through the West End, on his way home from the Strand to his house on Portland Place.²⁸ So Mr Gresham could see Arthur's artwork displayed in Tollady's window and the reconnection between Helen and Arthur was made possible.

Arthur's next moves, first to Gower Place, then to Huntley Street, and then to Islington, even more closely paralleled Gissing's own moves during 1878 and 1879.²⁹ Only Edward Street, off Hampstead Road, was omitted, and Hampstead Road played other roles than residence in *Workers*.³⁰ But we should pause for a moment in Gower Place and Huntley Street.

Gissing first situates Arthur and Carrie in separate rooms in the vulgar Mrs Pettindund's lodging house in Gower Place. Next, he moves them, first singly and then united in marital discord, to Huntley Street. Arthur marries Carrie in the hope of rescuing her from the bad company she has fallen into while lodging at Mrs Pettindund's. They move into Mrs Oaks' very respectable lodgings where Carrie not only starts to invite her friends round

while Arthur is at work, but also shows signs of the addiction to alcohol which plagued Gissing's own first wife. It's not long before Mrs Oaks confronts Arthur: "I shall be obliged to ask you to find other lodgings ... the character of my house is being damaged. These girls that come so often to see your wife have such a very – unrespectable appearance ... I shall have my house empty if it goes on."³¹ This is set around 1870 and written in 1879. Twenty years later, Charles Booth's research assistant, George Duckworth, visited Bloomsbury in the company of a local police officer, in the process of updating the Booth poverty map. When they got to Huntley Street, Duckworth wrote: "no prostitutes. In a working-class street like this the inhabitants won't let any prostitutes come, if they do, they complain to the agent at once and he turns them out."³²

Arthur's later moves replicated the footloose and coincidental nature of working-class mobility in Victorian London. When Carrie leaves him for the temptations of Soho, he moves to a garret in Islington. From there he is directed by a chance encounter while sitting at the reservoir in Pentonville Road (Claremont Square) to seek employment on Edgware Road, the farthest west that the novel ventured, and he found lodgings in Chapel Street.³³ Chapel Street resurfaced in Gissing's life a decade later as the site of cheap restaurants to which he would adjourn from his flat in Cornwall Residences; and as a result of these visits he was to discover Oxford & Cambridge Mansions, newly erected in the early 1880s just south of Chapel Street, and destined to play a critical role in *The Whirlpool*.³⁴

Arthur's next move took him back from the far west to the East End, to lodgings with the Vennings, but only thanks to his coincidental rescue by his working-class radical friend, Will Noble, whose own lodgings on a sidestreet south of the Strand were conveniently on Arthur's route intending to commit suicide by drowning himself in the Thames. To be fair, Gissing depicts Arthur as deliberately visiting several sites in his personal history as he rambled from Chapel Street to the Thames, and almost willing Noble to emerge from his lodgings at just the right moment, an unlikely "act of God" for the rationalist Gissing to contrive, although, as things turn out, it is only a temporary stay of execution, so perhaps not such a beneficent act after all.³⁵ But it is also fortuitous that in a city of four million people, Noble, living in the West End, should be so familiar with the Vennings, living in the East End.

Finally, during the course of 1872, Arthur, reunited with Carrie, moved house so often that the narrator could not be bothered to enumerate all their lodgings: first to two rooms "in a quiet little street in Hampstead," then to

Highgate, then “repeatedly, coming at each time nearer to the town, for the sake of the increased privacy which – paradoxical as the assertion seems – a crowded neighbourhood secured for them.”³⁶ This is one of Gissing’s most acute geographical observations, indicating the different forms of privacy in the nineteenth-century city.³⁷ We can contrast the privacy of suburban domesticity, exemplified by Helen’s residence in “Holly Cottage,” Highbury, a privacy which depended on respectability, with the privacy afforded by neighbours who turned a blind eye or were simply oblivious to nonconforming behaviour, which was the privacy that Gissing craved in his own life with Nell, and that Arthur desired in his life with Carrie. The suburbs were often represented as “anonymous” (implying that they displayed few unique characteristics which differentiated one suburb or one suburban street from another), but in the density and transiency of the inner city, it was the population who could be anonymous, who could “disappear” from the consciousness of their neighbours, much as Nathaniel Hawthorne had first sketched in his short story, “Wakefield” (1835).³⁸

Arthur had also tried Hampstead and Highgate because they were close to “nature” and he hoped the natural world would have a reforming influence on Carrie. But Carrie’s reaction was to rate “the grandeur of a sunset” as only “almost as pretty as the theaytre”; “when amid delightful country scenes she yearned for the lights of the shops and the coarse tumult of the pavement.”³⁹ Another advantage of Hampstead and Highgate was their remoteness from Carrie’s old haunts and old friends: geography mattered in terms of time and distance from Soho, where she had been living while she and Arthur had been apart. Their return to the more “private” environment of Camden Town also restored Carrie’s access to temptation. It is geographically reasonable that, straying back into Tottenham Court Road from Camden Town, Carrie is reunited with her friend from Soho days, Polly Hemp.⁴⁰

From lodgings in Camden Town, Arthur determined to make a new start, by way of an anonymous – and presumably very private – hotel in Charing Cross. Unlike “Wakefield,” Arthur means his disappearance to be permanent. Thence by trains to Manchester and Liverpool, and a crossing on the Cunarder “Parthia” from Liverpool to America, Arthur finally disappears in the waters of Niagara.

The “Parthia” was a regular on transatlantic crossings between Liverpool and Boston and New York from its launch in 1870 until its transfer to other duties in 1883, with a capacity of 150 first-class and, more relevant to both Gissing and Arthur, 1031 third-class passengers.⁴¹ The final chapter of

Workers begins in Liverpool a few days before Christmas, 1872, as the “Parthia” leaves for New York. *The Times* reported that the “Parthia” called at Queenstown, Ireland, on 22nd December 1872 en route to New York, indicating that the vessel really did leave from Liverpool a few days before Christmas.⁴² Pierre Coustillas speculated in his Introduction to the Harvester edition of *Workers* that the “Parthia” may have been familiar to Gissing as the vessel which conveyed him from Liverpool to Boston in 1876.⁴³ The “Parthia” sailed from Liverpool to Boston on 29th August, arriving in Boston on 10th September, and Bouwe Postmus notes in his Introduction to Gissing’s “American Notebook” that “Mr Gissing” was named on the passenger list published in the *Boston Evening Transcript* on 11th September.⁴⁴

Journeys: 2: Some London walks

I have devoted most of this paper to the geography of Arthur’s life in London but, as I indicated earlier, there are also individual journeys on which Gissing sends his characters, and thinking about them, too, offers valuable insights into how Gissing utilised space and place, and how he conceived of London’s social geography. Consider, for example, Arthur and Tollady’s Sunday afternoon walk from Charlotte Place eastward to Whitecross Street (Map 2). The western part of this route is left unspecified, merely “City-wards.”⁴⁵ This returns us again to *Oliver Twist*, for it is an intriguing mirror-image of Oliver’s early morning “expedition” with Bill Sikes, which Dickens charts in great detail, through Bethnal Green, Finsbury and Smithfield, all the way to Holborn. Then, in Moretti’s words, “the novel skips several miles” before continuing through the outer suburbs of west London.⁴⁶ Gissing’s version in the reverse direction – an education in poverty rather than a plundering of wealth – skips the mile from its starting point in Charlotte Place to Smithfield, before picking up the route “crossing Smithfield Market” and then following its protagonists’ progress eastward “in great detail.”

In the mid-1860s, when this scene is set, the old live-meat market, which Oliver had experienced – an amalgam of filth, mire, reeking bodies, whistling, barking, bellowing, bleating, grunting, squealing, swearing, quarrelling, whooping and yelling – had been closed for a decade. The date of Arthur and Tollady’s walk is not specified, but it seems likely to have been before November 1868 when Horace Jones’s new Central Market buildings had been completed.⁴⁷ Smithfield would have been waste ground

(or, at most, a building site), probably empty and devoid of life on a Sunday afternoon, an ideal *tabula rasa* for Tollady's homily on the "advance" of humanity, and on how the martyrs of Smithfield – Protestants burnt at the stake under "bloody Mary" in the 1550s – were to be pitied rather than admired for adhering to their – to Tollady – irrational beliefs.⁴⁸ Moving on through Little Britain, a necessary deviation from a due eastward route, reflecting the labyrinth of alleys between Smithfield and Aldersgate Street, into Barbican, then Beech Street, they arrive at Whitecross Street. For Gissing and Arthur, this offers the opportunity to reprise the story so far, as necessary punctuation in the sprawling expanse of *Workers* as it was for Wagner, periodically, in the course of the "Ring" (first performed in its entirety at Bayreuth in August 1876, less than a year before Wagner's visit to England in May 1877, an event anticipated in William's letter to George the previous month).⁴⁹ But for Tollady, Whitecross Street signifies the Debtors' Prison, opened in 1815 but near to closure by the time of Arthur and Tollady's walk. For Tollady, debt is to prove fatal. He dies of a heart attack when his home and shop is threatened with repossession.⁵⁰

In revisions of *Workers* that Gissing began to sketch in the 1890s, the whole of the content of this walk is deleted. Instead, after starting out "City-wards," we learn that "they kept on till they reached the high street of Whitechapel," and it is there rather than in "the more open neighbourhood of Old Street" that Tollady offers his next exhortation to Arthur to "Paint a faithful picture of this crowd we have watched, be a successor of Hogarth ..."⁵¹ This is an excision and a relocation identical to those in *The Unclassed*, updating the geography of poverty from its 1860s-70s to its 1890s setting.⁵²

On another of Arthur's walks – his first suicide mission from Chapel Street to the Thames south of the Strand – he passes the Marylebone Road workhouse at "the time when the 'casuals' were beginning to assemble in order to seek admittance for the night," a scene that had been vividly depicted by Luke Fildes, first in his engraving, "Houseless and Hungry," published in the first issue of *The Graphic* in December 1869, and then in an oil painting, "Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward," exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1874.⁵³ The article accompanying the engraving stressed that these were real people drawn from life, each with their own tragic history. For Gissing, and Arthur, fear of having to resort to the workhouse was a very personal anxiety: "Never, never!"⁵⁴

Map 2: Arthur and Mr Tollady's Walk through Smithfield

Next, Arthur turns down Tottenham Court Road, left to revisit Huntley Street (his home with Carrie), right to Charlotte Place (Tollady and Pether), and so to a street between the Strand and the river (Noble), paying his last respects to each in turn. This north-south route, impossible to plot in its details in the period before Charing Cross Road was cut through the area, simplifying the labyrinth of narrow streets and alleys, constitutes a critical hinge in the geography of London. It is also the route followed, in reverse, by Gresham going from the Strand to Portland Place via Rathbone Place, and by Arthur going from Little St Andrew Street to Rathbone Place, and – if he ever bothered to attend lectures – by Augustus Whiffle going between his lodgings on University Street and King's College. It returns us to Moretti's idea of a "third London."

Gissing's "Third London"

Moretti comments on *Oliver Twist*: "Two half-Londons, that do not add up to a whole." The two halves "may touch briefly and in secret, like Rose and Nancy, at midnight, on the no-man's land of London Bridge: but it's only a moment (that will cost Nancy's life). If a novel focuses on one half of London, it simply cannot *see* the other half, nor represent the crossing of the border between them."⁵⁵ But in later novels, Dickens unifies the two

halves, finding – again to quote Moretti – that “the result is *more* than the sum of its parts. London becomes not only a larger city (obviously enough), but a more *complex* one; allowing for richer, more unpredictable interactions.”⁵⁶ Moretti’s “third London” is a geographical wedge that holds the extremes of East End and West End together, and a social wedge of the growing middle class, “*a class in the middle*.”⁵⁷

In *Workers in the Dawn*, Gissing’s “third London” extends through Bloomsbury and Fitzrovia to Covent Garden and the Strand. It is also a liminal zone, far more impermeable to the rich than to the poor. There is a self-imposed ban on the part of the middle classes about crossing the divide – on grounds of “repulsion.” We cannot imagine that Mr Gresham, fearful of “the Orient,” has ever *visited* the East End, while Mrs Cumberbatch seems to have a kind of transit visa allowing her to reach the far end of Mile End Road *by omnibus* without ever having to alight en route – much like Engels’s Manchester merchants who commuted between suburban home and city-centre office without ever seeing or coming into contact with the slums hidden behind the main streets along which they travelled by bus or carriage.⁵⁸ Charles Booth’s Poverty Map shows Whitechapel Road and Commercial Road coloured in the pinks and reds of tradesmen’s prosperity; the blues and blacks of poverty are hidden away on the back streets. But it’s equally the case that the puritan middle-class outliers in the East End are repelled by the loose-living reputation of West Enders. Mr Heatherley is as ignorant of Portland Place as Mr Gresham is of Whitecross Street.⁵⁹ Among the working classes, however, the boundary is much more permeable. Will Noble (living south of the Strand) and the Vennings (East End) are in close contact; and Carrie, Mrs Pole and Polly Hemp have no inhibitions about travelling anywhere east or north of Soho. The rich are more mobile nationally and on the continent: Helen, Maud and their fathers variously make trips to Dorset, Scarborough in Yorkshire, Tübingen in Germany, Paris, Mentone in the south of France and, prospectively, Russia. Yet the poor are more mobile *within* London, but also, at least the men, globally: as a young man, Tollady went travelling for “three whole years” through Europe, Africa, Asia and North America.⁶⁰ Arthur replicates the American part of his journey at the close of the novel. Each is searching for the “happy land, far, far away,” *homecomings* which they never achieve.⁶¹

For Gissing, geography was a matter of factual knowledge;⁶² but – probably not consciously – he practised geography on almost every page of his writing. *Workers in the Dawn* may not be imbued with the logic of the railway timetable as were later books like *The Odd Women* and *The*

Whirlpool,⁶³ but it is still a novel in which geography shapes the plot, and in which interpretation can be informed by our knowledge of geography.

¹ The Oxford World's Classics edition of *Mrs Dalloway* (2000), based on the Hogarth Press edition of 1942, includes a map on pages lx-lxi; in the Penguin edition (1992), the map is on pages vi-vii.

² The Blackwell edition of *Mrs Dalloway* (for Shakespeare Head Press, 1996) includes an annotated map on p. xxxiv. Note that there *are* some quite crude published maps of the characters' journeys, in D. Dowling, *Mrs. Dalloway: Mapping Streams of Consciousness* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1991), pp. 53-5, and online in E. K. Sparks, "The London Walks of *Mrs Dalloway*," <http://hubcap.clemson.edu/~sparks/TVSeminar/dallwalkmap.html> (consulted 22 June 2010).

³ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), Chapter 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵ George Gissing, *Isabel Clarendon* (1886), Vol. II, pp. 91, 118, 120, 163. Gissing himself never lived as far north as the north end of Camden Town, but he would have known the area from his time spent in lodgings in Edward Street (June-Nov. 1879) and Rutland Street (Sept.-Dec. 1884), both just west of Hampstead Road; while the Chelsea location is precisely where Gissing lived – Oakley Crescent – from September 1882 to May 1884. Note, too, Gabriel's two paintings: "a portion of an East End market-street at night"; and "a little girl standing before a shop-window, and looking at an open illustrated paper which was exposed there" (p. 171). The first of these seems informed by Gissing's visit to the East End in February 1883, but is also matched by illustrations of East-End scenes reproduced in, for example, the *Graphic*. The latter recalls paintings by genre artists such as Macduff, Houghton, or even Frith.

⁶ Richard Dennis, "George Gissing and the 'Other' East End" in Christine Huguet (ed.), *Writing Otherness: The Pathways of George Gissing's Imagination* (Haren, NL: Equilibris, in press).

⁷ George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn* (ed. Debbie Harrison) (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2010). Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 5, p. 57.

⁹ Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young and Pierre Coustillas (eds), *The Collected Letters of George Gissing Volume II* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1991), p. 121 (Letter to Ellen, 27 February 1883).

¹⁰ *Workers*, Chapter 25, p. 301. The line was opened to Liverpool Street in 1875 and to Aldgate in 1876: see Christian Wolmar, *The Subterranean Railway* (London, 2004). It is possible, therefore, that Gissing, who did not conduct research for *Workers* in the way that he did for later slum novels such as *Thyrza* and *The Nether World*, might have assumed that Helen could travel all the way to Aldgate, which was within easy walking distance of Whitechapel; but the implication of his 1883 letter is that he was not familiar with Whitechapel in 1879 when he was writing *Workers*.

¹¹ *Workers*, Chapter 18, p. 199.

¹² History of the South Place Ethical Society, <http://www.ethicalsoc.org.uk/spes/about> (consulted 22 June 2010).

¹³ Mattheisen *et al.*, *Collected Letters of George Gissing Volume I* (1990), pp. 153-5 (Letter to Algernon, 19 February 1879).

¹⁴ *Workers*, Chapter 25, p. 295.

¹⁵ For online versions of Charles Booth's Poverty Map, see <http://www.umich.edu/~risotto/> (1889 map) and <http://booth.lse.ac.uk/> (1899 revision). Unfortunately, both maps postdate programmes of slum clearance and of railway construction (such as the building of Liverpool Street Station in the early 1870s), which also targeted slums; and Booth omitted to survey areas inside the City of London. Nevertheless, the maps give a good sense of the continuing proximity of rich and poor in late nineteenth-century inner London.

¹⁶ *Workers*, Chapters 29-30, pp. 355-6. On Gissing's later experience of the Oxford Music Hall, see Pierre Coustillas (ed.), *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Hassocks: Harvester, 1978), p. 226 (24 Sept. 1890); for alternative interpretations of this event, see Mattheisen *et al.*, *Collected Letters of George Gissing Volume IV* (1993), p. 241; Paul Delany, *George Gissing: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2008), p. 177.

¹⁷ *Workers*, Chapter 17, p. 190.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 26, pp. 304-5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapters 19-20 and 31, pp. 217, 222, 369, 376.

²⁰ David L. Pike, "Modernist space and the transformation of Underground London" in Pamela K. Gilbert (ed.), *Imagined Londons* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 101-19; Ken Garland, *Mr Beck's Underground Map* (Harrow: Capital Transport Publishing, 1994).

²¹ On the Cross Act, see Anthony S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977); J. A. Yelling, *Slums and Slum Clearance in Victorian London* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

²² London County Council, *The Housing Question in London* (London: P. S. King and Son, 1900), pp. 135-40; Peabody Donation Fund, *Governors Minutes and Annual Reports*, London Metropolitan Archives, ACC/3445/PT/01/007/01.

²³ "Artisans' Dwellings Act," *The Times*, 17 April 1877, p. 4, 23 April 1877, p. 4, 26 April 1877, p. 6; "The Evictions in St Luke's," *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 15 April 1877; "Improvement of St Luke's," *Standard*, 16 April 1877, p. 3; "London's Courts and Alleys," *Standard*, 20 August 1875, p. 2, 25 August 1875, p. 2 (Old Nichol Street), 28 August 1875, p. 3 (Seven Dials), 2 Sept. 1875, p. 3 (Golden Lane).

²⁴ Bouwe Postmus (ed.), *An Exile's Cunning: Some Private Papers of George Gissing* (Wormerveer, NL: Stichting Uitgeverij Noord-Holland, 1999), p. 58; Mattheisen *et al.*, *Collected Letters Volume I*, p. 94 (Letter from William, 16 June 1878). See also p. 293 (Letter to Frederic Harrison, 23 July 1880), for Gissing's assurance of the authenticity of his accounts of low life, having walked "along Whitecross Street or around Seven Dials late on Saturday night."

²⁵ *Workers*, Chapter 17, p. 198.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapters 5 and 6, pp. 58-9, 64-5.

²⁷ For Gissing's own accounts of Colville Place, see "The Last Half-Crown" in Pierre Coustillas (ed.), *George Gissing: Essays and Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 179-85; George Gissing, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (London: Constable, 1903), Spring X.

²⁸ *Workers*, Chapter 15, p. 167.

²⁹ Robin Woolven, "George Gissing's London Residences 1877-1891," *Gissing Journal*, October 2004, pp. 5-15.

³⁰ For example, as the route of Tollady's funeral, *Workers*, Chapter 23, p. 270.

³¹ *Workers*, Chapter 34, p. 416.

³² Charles Booth Online Archive (<http://booth.lse.ac.uk/>) Police Notebooks, B355, p. 119; see also Richard Dennis, "The place of Bloomsbury in the novels of George Gissing," *Opticon1826*, 7 (Autumn 2009), online at

http://www.ucl.ac.uk/opticon1826/archive/issue7/Articles/Article_Dennis_Gissing.pdf.

³³ *Workers*, Chapter 35, pp. 433-4.

³⁴ Coustillas (ed.), *The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, pp. 29 (27 May 1888), 144 (18 March 1889), 151 (18 May 1889), 160 (20 August 1889); Mattheisen *et al.*, *Collected Letters Volume IV*, p. 129 (Letter to Margaret, 20 October 1889).

³⁵ *Workers*, Chapter 35, pp. 437-41.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 45, pp. 561, 569-70.

³⁷ Donald J. Olsen, *The Growth of Victorian London* (London: Batsford, 1976).

³⁸ Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Wakefield," *The New England Magazine* (May 1835), reprinted in *Twice-Told Tales Volume I* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1900), pp. 172-86.

³⁹ *Workers*, Chapter 45, p. 564.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 45, pp. 570-1.

⁴¹ "Ships named Parthia," http://www.parthia.com/ships/parthia_01.htm (consulted 27 June 2010).

⁴² *The Times*, 23 December 1872, p. 3.

⁴³ Pierre Coustillas, Introduction to *Workers in the Dawn* (Brighton: Harvester, 1985), p. xxii.

⁴⁴ *Liverpool Mercury*, 22 August 1876; Postmus, *An Exile's Cunning*, p. 5. For recent research on the "Parthia" which goes far beyond my own scanning of online newspapers, see Markus Neacey, "George Gissing's Voyage to America and the Hazardous Career of the 'Good ship Parthia,'" *Gissing Journal*, July 2010, pp. 23-33.

⁴⁵ *Workers*, Chapter 11, p. 119.

⁴⁶ Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, p. 86. Dickens has Oliver and Sikes starting from the vicinity of Bishopsgate: "Turning down Sun Street and Crown Street, and crossing Finsbury Square, Mr Sikes struck, by way of Chiswell Street, into Barbican: thence into Long Lane, and so into Smithfield..." (*Oliver Twist*, Chapter XXI, "The Expedition").

⁴⁷ Walter Thornbury, *Old and New London Volume 2* (London: Cassell, 1878), pp. 491-6; online at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=45117>

⁴⁸ *Workers*, Chapter 11, p. 121.

⁴⁹ Mattheisen *et al.*, *Collected Letters Volume I*, pp. 58-60 (Letter from William, 16 April 1877); Anne D. Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (Cranbury NJ: Associated University Presses, 1979), Chapter 1. For Gissing's own, later, interest in Wagner, see Mattheisen *et al.*, *Collected Letters Volume III* (1992) pp. 117-23.

⁵⁰ *Workers*, Chapters 11 and 22, pp. 122, 256-61; Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), pp. 219-20.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 11, pp. 122-3. On Gissing's deletions, see Coustillas's notes to the Harvester edition, pp. 159, 163.

⁵² Dickens had re-located Fagin from Saffron Hill to Whitechapel in the course of *Oliver Twist* (and Oliver's "expedition" had *begun* from Sikes's home in Bethnal Green). So it might be thought that in alluding to Whitechapel, Gissing was renewing his debt to Dickens. But if this was the case we would have expected the references to Whitechapel to have been included in the *original* versions of *Workers* and *The Unclassed*. Note, too, that Dickens does not use the term "East End" to embrace Whitechapel or Bethnal Green. His only use of "East-end" in a novel, in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), is to describe a "deserted mansion" in Thames Street, i.e. in the vicinity of London Bridge, effectively confirming the westerly

location of “East End” at this time. On Gissing’s revisions to *The Unclassed*, see Dennis, “George Gissing and the ‘Other’ East End.”

⁵³ *Workers*, Chapter 35, p. 437; Julian Treuherz, *Hard Times: Social Realism in Victorian Art* (London: Lund Humphries, 1987), Chapters 7 and 10.

⁵⁴ *Workers*, Chapter 35, p. 437.

⁵⁵ Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel*, pp. 84-6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁵⁸ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Grafton, 1969), pp. 79-80.

⁵⁹ *Workers*, Chapter 17, p. 195.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 22, pp. 252-3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Chapters 5, 11 and 27, pp. 54, 122 and 325: the words of a Sunday School hymn sung by children playing in Whitecross Street, from which Gissing derived his original title for the novel: *Far, Far Away*. For Gissing’s own thoughts on this title, see Mattheisen *et al.*, *Collected Letters Volume I*, p. 215 (Letter to Algernon, 3 Nov. 1879) and p. 229 (Letter to Algernon, 2 Jan. 1880).

⁶² See, for example, Mattheisen *et al.*, *Collected Letters Volume I*, p. 32 (Letter to Arthur Bowes, 24 May 1874), p. 135 (Letter to Algernon, 17 Dec. 1878). Until circumstances forced him to sell them, Gissing had his own collection of Ordnance Survey maps: Mattheisen *et al.*, *Collected Letters Volume IV*, p. 311 (Letter to Algernon, 25 July 1891).

⁶³ Lynne Hapgood, “The literature of the suburbs: versions of repression in the novels of George Gissing, Arthur Conan Doyle and William Pett Ridge, 1890-1899,” *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 5 (2000), pp. 303-5.

Literary London 2010

An abridged version of the above article was read at the Interdisciplinary Conference hosted by the Institute of English Studies in London, 7-9 July 2010. The Conference, entitled “Representations of London in Literature,” included a session devoted to Gissing (9 July, 2 to 3.30 p.m.). The two other papers read during the session are printed below.

Exteriors, interiors and interiority in *Workers in the Dawn*

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“Walk with me, reader, into Whitecross Street.” With this ominous invitation, the narrator of *Workers in the Dawn* uses reportage to conjure an eyewitness account of a raucous late-night London street market, where the poor and needy jostle for space with the drunkards and prostitutes. From

Whitecross Street he leads us into a bare room in the ironically named Adam and Eve Court where the young Arthur Golding watches his beloved father die in poverty and squalor, under the less than loving gaze of the drunken and avaricious landlady, Mrs Blatherwick. Arthur emerges from the slums, gains an ad-hoc education, discovers art and socialism, and sets forth on a brilliant career alternately as an artist and as a radical activist. Both prospects are wrecked because he is repeatedly torn between his sexual obsession with the sensuous Carrie Mitchell and his soulful adoration of the ethereal Helen Norman.

There is poignancy in this novel, but anger too: throughout *Workers* despair and fury compete for narrative dominance, reflecting Gissing's ambivalent state of mind. For while he blames degeneration and pauperism on the insalubrious slums, he also expresses repulsion towards the uneducated poor, most of whom he depicts as wholly incapable of rising above their vicious lifestyles. Particularly savage are Gissing's descriptions of immoral and rapacious landladies, low-life semi-criminals, and habitual drunkards. For a young author enthralled by the potential for art and radical politics to civilise and reform, Gissing emerges at the end of *Workers* as anti-democratic, anti-socialist and elitist.

In *Workers* London is both a literal and literary construct. The novel reflects the anxieties of a metropolis troubled by the growing contagion of pauperism in the east, threatened by an increasingly radical working-class, and weakened by an effete generation of middle-class apostates, cynics, hypocrites, and rakes. To follow Richard Dennis's brilliant analysis of the geographical implications of *Workers*, in this paper I explore the relationship between exterior locations, interiors and interiority. Through the prominent connections between the painterly portrait of environment and the psychological portrayal of character, Gissing delivers a searing indictment of the primitive power of poverty and lust to subsume the civilising influence of art, education and philanthropy.

Of Gissing's early novels, *Workers* is considered to be the most autobiographical, reflecting the ways in which his youthful prospects of a scholarly career were blighted when, driven by his sexual appetite, he transgressed the boundaries of social rectitude. Gissing's liaison with Nell Harrison, a prostitute with a penchant for drink, led him to steal from his college to fund her habits. He was caught and expelled, spent a month in prison, and then went to America to try his hand at journalism. When this venture failed he returned to England, where he renewed his relationship with Nell. To the horror of his family and friends, Reader, he married her.

Gissing's grand scheme to educate and reform Nell proved futile but this harrowing episode provided electrifying material for the plot of *Workers*, in which Arthur Golding's aspiration to acquire the middle-class status with which his adored Helen was born competes with his attempts to educate and reform Carrie, whom he saves from the streets – not once but twice.

Like Arthur, Helen and Carrie are social misfits: displaced by upbringing and temperament, they have no natural home. Helen's formidable intellect and independence compel her to lead a life that is literally and metaphorically outcast. She devotes her time and her money to serving the poor, who largely distrust her; and she recoils from the frivolous society of her peers, epitomised by her guardian – an artist and a dandy – and his shallow daughter Maud. Carrie is the fallen woman, whose life bears witness to the permanent psychological damage inflicted by her dependence on her vulgar aunt and landlady, Mrs Pettindund, and her homeless life on the streets just before and after giving birth to an illegitimate child. Carrie is a palimpsest and not the *tabula rasa* on which Arthur assumes he can sketch an impression of his ideal woman: the scars of her past are too deep and cannot be erased or overwritten. Arthur's happiest times are when he is working as an assistant to Mr Tollady, the print-shop owner, whose discrete philanthropic works among the families in his neighbourhood are understated but more effective than Helen's. Once Arthur aspires to rise above his adopted home with Tollady in Charlotte Place, things begin to go badly wrong. Ultimately Arthur, Carrie and Helen are heartbreakingly alienated and alone, discontented with – and disconnected from – the class into which they were born, yet unable to discover a sustainable alternative.

As Richard has demonstrated, the London of *Workers* represents a series of districts connected by significant journeys, which interweave a logistical and spatial web into the warp of the narrative's fabric. Each street, with its distinctive architecture, its class-specific social conventions, and its idiosyncratic inhabitants, is described with precision and in language and imagery that tells us as much about the observer as the observed. Despite the confusion about the location of East End, most of the middle-class characters associated with the West End know little about it and care even less. Mr Gresham – Arthur's quondam mentor and rival for Helen's love – refers to the East End as an oriental territory teeming with beings so degraded that they resemble animals, one of the few opinions he voices with which Gissing appears to concur. When Helen ventures east to carry out her philanthropic work it signifies her quiet but persistent determination

to flout social conventions. It also reflects the growing sense of freedom enjoyed by the middle-class female philanthropist in this period.

Journeys in the novel take the protagonists across social and gendered boundaries with deliberate authorial intent. Mr Heatherley, the nonconformist minister with whom Helen works, escorts the ardent young philanthropist on a tour of the slums of his parish in order to test her mettle in the face of human degradation. She passes with distinction and so Heatherley allows her to walk the foul streets and enter the even fouler dens of the paupers unaccompanied. There she learns that she can bring relief to deserving cases but that drunken paupers like the Cricks treat her gifts of clothes and furniture as commodities, which can be pawned and used to buy alcohol, even though their children are all but naked and starving. The disappearance of items in the Cricks' room, purchased with Helen's money, is a visible indication of their preference for alcohol over family life.

Gissing has no answer to the pressing and complex question of urban degeneration but on one point he is clear: poverty is not a prerequisite for a despicable lifestyle. The Blatherwicks, the Pettindunds, Mrs Pole, and Polly Hemp are bestial, cruel, unspeakably vulgar, and undoubtedly beyond reclamation; but they are certainly not starving. In Gower Place, where Arthur rents a room from Mrs Pettindund, the landlady's repellent family are portrayed by Gissing as vulgar and uncultured: they "could not be called poor," but squandered their money "in surfeit and vice," oblivious to any sense of "their mental and moral debasement" (p. 281). The Pettindunds revel in selfish greed and excess – exemplified by their gorging and swilling over Christmas. Rendered almost senseless with food and drink, Mrs Pettindund turns her niece Carrie from the door, as the homeless girl stands shivering in the snow clutching her dying baby to her breast. When Bill Blatherwick, Mrs Pole and Polly Hemp go in search of easy money they travel freely and with impunity across the capital, with blatant disregard for the socio-geographical boundaries of the middle classes. Unlike Arthur, Carrie and Helen, these low-life characters are content in their homes in the nether world and they have no desire to better themselves. It is an atavistic homing instinct Arthur once understood only too well. For when the clergyman Mr Norman offers the orphaned boy a sanctuary in the bucolic paradise of Bloomford, Arthur finds the environment culturally hostile and flees back to Adam and Eve Court – the only home he has known – and into the welcoming arms of Mrs Blatherwick, who puts him to work as the stooge of her alcoholic son Bill, a petty criminal and sadistic bully. In due course Carrie is also driven instinctively away from the

healthy environment of her lodgings with Arthur in Hampstead and back to the public houses and the vicious friends she associates with “home.”

Arthur’s literal and metaphorical journey through life marks this novel as a *Bildungsroman* – a Pilgrim’s Progress similar to that of Dickens’s Oliver but with a twist. When he runs away from Bloomford and back to London, Arthur greets his old home in Adam and Eve Court with delight:

Very foul did its hideous face peep forth from the covering of slush and grime and all unutterable abominations; but to Arthur it meant home, and he hailed its appearance.¹ (p. 48)

Arthur escapes from the Blatherwicks and then from the Pettindunds but ironically when he takes a room for Carrie in Huntley Street he puts her at the mercy of Mrs Pole, yet another vulgar landlady. Here Mrs Pole’s daughter, Ann, takes Carrie to the Oxford Music Hall (at the junction of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road), “a place,” Arthur reflects, “in which no woman who valued her reputation would care to be seen” (p. 356).

Once married Arthur becomes a serial lodger as a result of Carrie’s low-life friends and her regular intoxication. Initially Arthur is puzzled about the source of his wife’s drinking money, “but before long he began to notice the disappearance of sundry articles from the room, and he had no more wonder on the subject” (p. 415). In due course Mrs Oaks, the one respectable landlady in the novel, tells Arthur: “I shall be obliged to ask you to find other lodgings [...] the character of my house is being damaged. These girls that come so often to see your wife have such a very – unrespectable appearance [...] I shall have my house empty if it goes on” (p. 416).

On Booth’s Poverty Map both Gower Place and Huntley Street were coloured pink – fairly comfortable – which might appear at variance with Gissing’s depiction of slovenly vice. But Gissing and Nell had been forced to leave Gower Place “in consequence of some unpleasantness” he tells his brother in a letter. Booth’s researchers, updating the original poverty survey in 1898, noted of Huntley Street: “no prostitutes. In a working-class street like this the inhabitants won’t let any prostitutes come, if they do, they complain to the agent at once and he turns them out” (Booth Online B355, 119).

In the final part of *Workers* we find Arthur scouring the streets in search of his runaway wife, whom he finds in a club-cum-brothel. Recalling Arthur’s origins and also the biblical Fall, Carrie is posing all but naked in a tableau vivant of Adam and Eve. She is reduced to entertaining an

“assemblage of gross and brutal-featured men, whose few remarks were the foulest indecencies” (p. 559).

To give his wife a second chance of reform Arthur deliberately chooses lodgings out of central London, in Hampstead, where he hopes that – deprived of her old haunts and her old friends – she will not be tempted to drink. But Carrie soon succumbs again and the couple have to move:

Owing to her disreputable conduct [in Hampstead], Arthur was compelled to change his abode repeatedly, coming at each time nearer to the town, for the sake of the increased privacy which – paradoxical as the assertion seems – a crowded neighbourhood secured for them. (p. 570)

They end up in Camden where Carrie discovers that:

... since the furniture of their rooms was now Arthur’s own, it now was easier to find the means of procuring drink than it had been before. Arthur noticed day by day that articles disappeared ... (p. 570)

It seems that Carrie is constitutionally incapable of yielding up the vices that will lead her to an early and ignoble death. Yet despite the differences in their characters, there are similarities between Arthur and Carrie too: both have secrets and both leave clues. In their first lodgings in Huntley Street Arthur discovers Carrie’s supply of brandy, which she has hidden in a medicine bottle, and he quickly makes the connection between his wife’s drinking habits and the smell of the peppermint lozenges she sucks to sweeten her breath. He also discovers the jewellery she acquires from her lover, Augustus Whiffle: “a large jet necklace, a gold brooch, and a silver bracelet” – the only new items in the diminishing household inventory (p. 418).

For her part Carrie’s instinctive jealousy prompts her to find the key to Arthur’s box of private possessions and she confronts him with Helen’s portrait. In the Hampstead lodgings when Arthur paints a picture of the Pleading of Portia, he uses Carrie as a faceless “female form” – an aesthetic imitation of her role in the tableau vivant. But it is the Helen of his imagination whom Arthur depicts as Portia – “the incarnation of lofty purity” (p. 563). It is Helen’s face and Helen’s eyes, which illuminate the “finest shades of subtle thought and feeling” in the portrait (p. 563), whereas he has long since associated Carrie’s “gleaming eye” with intoxication – “the infallible index of her wrong-doing” (p. 415). In this painting of Portia Arthur conflates the most admirable qualities of the two women in his life in a telling manner: he clothes the sensual attractions of his wife with the luminous beauty and fine intellect of Helen.

As Arthur's domestic sphere is blighted by scenes of drunkenness and bitter recrimination, Helen moves from Gresham's materialistic home in Portland Place to the seclusion and tranquillity of Holly Cottage in Highbury. A chance encounter reunites the star-crossed lovers but Helen discovers Arthur's marriage to Carrie and ends the relationship. Arthur's only hope at this point is that Carrie will die – as surely she must, given her vicious lifestyle – thus freeing him to marry the woman he worships. He hopes in vain.

In depicting the appalling domestic brutality of London's feckless and poor, Gissing was to influence a new generation of angry young men, including D. H. Lawrence and George Orwell. Gissing is very much a novelist of his time, as Orwell observes:

His world is the grey world of London in the 'eighties, with its gas lamps flickering in the everlasting fog, its dingy overcoats and high-crowned bowler hats, its Sunday gloom tempered by drunkenness, its unbearable "furnished apartments", and, above all, its desperate struggle against poverty by a middle class which was poor chiefly because it had remained "respectable".²

Orwell observes wryly that Gissing's plots could be summarised in three words – "not enough money" (*ibid.*). More than this, I suggest that *Workers* crystallises Gissing's position as the master chronicler of Victorian prudery. Orwell again:

Behind his rage and querulousness there lay a perception that the horrors of life in late-Victorian England were largely unnecessary. The grime, the stupidity, the ugliness, the sex-starvation, the furtive debauchery, the vulgarity, the bad manners, the censoriousness — these things were unnecessary, since the puritanism of which they were a relic no longer upheld the structure of society.³

Arthur Golding has no place in Victorian London and by the end of the novel he is dead, as are the two women who dominated his short life. Helen succumbs to tuberculosis, a congenital condition exacerbated by her martyrdom to philanthropic works among the unsanitary slums of the East End. Carrie, we assume, succumbs to alcoholism and venereal disease, a martyr to the deadliest enemies of the female poor. The novel ends with Arthur's suicide when he signals his refusal to live in a world where Helen is not: the freezing torrents of Niagara Falls by moonlight represent a fitting end for this victim of Victorian sexual and social hypocrisy and flawed martyr to the Romantic sublime.

¹ George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2010). Page numbers in the rest of the text refer to this edition.

² George Orwell, "'Not Enough Money': A Sketch of George Gissing," *Tribune*, 2 April 1943.

³ George Orwell, "George Gissing." Written in 1948 but first published in the *London Magazine*, June 1960.

Clerkenwell as Hell – Gissing's "nether world"

ANDREW WHITEHEAD
London

At the junction of Clerkenwell Close and Sans Walk in what is now a fashionable district of central London, there's a stout three-storey Victorian corner house which is remarkable for having no window on either of its walls overlooking the street.¹ It's the most substantial relic, above ground at least, of one of London's most notorious jails. The prison was the scene of the "Clerkenwell outrage" when, in 1867, Irish Republicans blew up the walls and much of the surrounding area in an unsuccessful attempt to free one of their leaders. That corner building was the chief warder's house.²

The prison – which closed in 1886, three years before George Gissing's *The Nether World* was published – sets the tone for this bleak novel of working-class Clerkenwell. At its opening, a haggard Michael Snowdon, having walked the bounds of the burial ground of St James, Clerkenwell, comes across the arched gateway to the jail, and above it something half concealed in the dusk:

It was the sculptured counterfeit of a human face, that of a man distraught with agony. The eyes stared wildly from their sockets, the hair straggled in maniac disorder, the forehead was wrung with torture, the cheeks sunken, the throat fearfully wasted, and from the wide lips there seemed to be issuing a horrible cry. Above this hideous effigy was carved the legend: 'MIDDLESEX HOUSE OF DETENTION.'³

The imagery of Clerkenwell as the abode of the dead and the damned – with the graveyard, the prison walls, the tortured face – is heightened by Snowdon's arrival at the Peckover household in Clerkenwell Close: "dark and cavernous," Gissing says, and home to a corpse awaiting burial. Clem Peckover – what a Dickensian name for a harridan of the slums – has been reared, says Gissing, in the "putrid soil of that nether world."⁴ A book that opens by one cemetery closes in another, at Michael Snowdon's grave at Abney Park in Stoke Newington. The recurring refrain is of a populace trapped, entombed, in a cycle of suffering.

George Gissing, a northerner, came to London as a social outcast. He was a stranger in an immense city which he explored ceaselessly, which fed his creativity, and about which he had little good to say. The London of *The Nether World* is grim, sulphurous and suffocates the human spirit. There's little of the picaresque humour of Dickens's jaunts into London slums. It is not a work of social reform, for while the author's anger sears through his story, it is burdened by a despairing resignation rather than a prescription to achieve change. All the most obvious remedies – political radicalism, philanthropy, self-help, slum clearance – are tried during the course of the novel and found wanting.

The novel's title has two meanings. It is the out of view, out of mind, universe of the urban poor. Almost every character in *The Nether World* has his or her roots in the working class. It is also the hellish world of the dead. An incidental character called Mad Jack, a crazed street preacher, gives voice to this metaphor: "There is no escape for you. From poor you shall become poorer; the older you grow the lower shall you sink in want and misery ... This is Hell – Hell – Hell!"⁵ The location of his prophecy is the most infernal of Gissing's slums, Shooter's Gardens, a "black horror," where each room houses a separate family, and where wife beating and drunkenness are the order of things.

The story of *The Nether World* concerns Michael Snowdon's desire to use the wealth with which he returned from the colonies to help London's poor. His granddaughter, Jane, is raised to execute her grandfather's philanthropic ambitions. Sidney Kirkwood, a working man of integrity, is enlisted in the venture. A series of contrivances which owe much to Victorian melodrama – an unsigned will, disguised identities, a veiled face, a scheming lawyer – deprive Jane of her inheritance. Sidney and Jane come across as honourable but insipid characters. In true Gissing style (there is something of the author in this) they are confined by a sense of duty. They are soul mates, but cannot live their lives together.

An early review of *The Nether World* described George Gissing as "a modern Dante"⁶ – a prescient comment. Gissing, a classicist at heart, had read Dante attentively as a means of learning Italian. "Ye Gods, what glorious matter!" he declared in a letter.⁷ It's probably where the novel's title came from. The phrase "the nether world" appears in Henry Cary's influential translation of Dante, with which Gissing was familiar.⁸ The novelist was not the first to make the association between Dante's realm of the tormented and the streets and courts of Clerkenwell. A local clergyman, William Dawson had, in the mid-1880s, likened the noises emanating from

the deep trench built for the underground railway to “the shrieks and groans of the lost souls in the lowest circle of Dante’s ‘Inferno.’”⁹

There’s an inescapable sense that Gissing alighted on his setting and theme and then populated the story, rather than the other way round. *The Nether World’s* depiction of the urban environment is more convincing than its account of those who dwell in it. The underworld Gissing describes is circumscribed. Much of the action takes place within a quarter-of-a-mile of the opening scene, and almost all within a mile or two. He is precise in his topography, as if this exactness demonstrates the authenticity of his urban landscape. Shooter’s Gardens is the only important setting which can’t be found in a gazetteer. The word “Clerkenwell” appears seventy-four times.

Most of Gissing’s fiction is imbued with a powerful sense of London – in part because he knew the poorer parts of the city intimately. George Gissing moved to London as a nineteen-year-old in the autumn of 1877. He was a Yorkshireman, a product of the provincial middle class. By the time he came south, his life was in a groove from which he could not, or would not, escape. He had been expelled from college in Manchester for stealing money and had served one month in jail. The theft was to help support a young prostitute, Nell Harrison, who became Gissing’s wife, and with whom he endured a miserable few years in London garrets – not themselves slums of the Shooter’s Gardens kind, but uncomfortably close vantage points. That tragic relationship tainted him, and provided much of the fire and fury in his early work. Gissing’s five novels of the London poor, of which *The Nether World* was the last, the bleakest and the most accomplished, were all the product of his first decade or so in the city – written while living with Nell, during their uneasy separation, or amid the catharsis of her drink-ridden decline.

“I have a book in my head which no one else could write,” George Gissing confided to his sister in 1886, “a book which will contain the very spirit of London working-class life.”¹⁰ Nell Harrison’s death two years later provided the impulse behind the novel that most lived up to his goal. She succumbed to what may well have been syphilis at the age of thirty. Gissing went to her room in a dingy lodging house in Lambeth to see the body:

She lay on the bed covered with a sheet [he wrote in his diary]. I looked long, long at her face, but could not recognize it. ...

But as I stood beside that bed, I felt that my life henceforth had a firmer purpose. Henceforth I never cease to bear testimony against the accursed social order that

brings about things of this kind. I feel that she will help me more in her death than she balked me during her life. Poor, poor thing!¹¹

Gissing had been toying with a novel set in Clerkenwell. “I have something in hand which I hope to turn to some vigorous purpose,” he wrote to Thomas Hardy in the summer of 1887, “a story that has grown up in recent ramblings about Clerkenwell, – dark, but with evening sunlight to close.”¹² Prior to Nell’s death, repeated attempts to embark on a fresh book had proved stillborn. Within three weeks, Gissing has begun to write *The Nether World* and it took just four months to complete.

“I am satisfied on the whole with the completed parts,” Gissing told his sister-in-law in April 1888. “It deals exclusively with the lower classes.”¹³ This unrelenting focus on the impoverished sets *The Nether World* apart from his other novels. Many of those written before and after concern the chains of social convention, and feature men and women who straddle social classes or are caught awkwardly between them. But here, he makes a working man the central character – albeit one who bears some traits in common with his creator. As he set to work, Gissing returned again and again to walk the streets he had chosen for his story.

Gissing never lived in Clerkenwell, but some of his London homes were strolling distance away. George and Nell took refuge in a succession of drab rented rooms. One was at 5 Hanover Street (the building is still standing, it’s now 60 Noel Road) backing on to the Regent’s Canal. They moved there in November 1879 – about the moment that the story told in *The Nether World* opens – and stayed for over a year. The street is described in the novel as “a quiet byway ... Squalor is here kept at arm’s length”¹⁴ – so a level or two above the grim depths of Gissing’s underworld just to the south in Clerkenwell.

The area that he alighted upon as his setting, a densely populated locality, had by the 1880s become overwhelmingly working class – “many of the well-to-do residents of the parish have been gradually leaving their houses, which become occupied by a poorer class of people,” reported the local Medical Officer of Health in 1883. Clerkenwell had been associated with highly skilled artisan trades, watchmaking in particular, but also jewellery and precious metal work, and specialist printing and bookbinding. “Here every alley is thronged with small industries,” records the novelist, “all but every door and window exhibits the advertisement of a craft that is carried on within.”¹⁵

By the 1880s, standardisation and mechanisation were making craft skills redundant, forcing many who had once enjoyed high wages and

status to take on any work they could find. Gissing reflects the pain and dislocation of the declining years of artisan inner London, and performs a task few of his contemporary novelists were sufficiently confident to attempt – taking the reader inside the workplace. Bob Hewett works in a die-sinking workshop making moulds. For Bob’s father, Gissing explains, “it was no slight gratification that he had been able to apprentice his son to a craft which permitted him always to wear a collar” – though Gissing observes that die-sinking “is not the craft it once was; cheap methods, vulgarising here as everywhere.”¹⁶ Hewett junior uses his skills to make counterfeit coins. Hewett senior is reduced to responding to an advert for an odd-job man and even then finds himself in a mêlée of 500 desperate jobseekers.

The transition from a proud, craft-based economy to attic workshops for those with skills still in demand, and casualised labour for the rest, is captured in one of the novel’s most celebrated and vivid passages. “It was the hour of the unyoking of men. In the highways and byways of Clerkenwell there was a thronging of released toilers,” it opens:

... In Clerkenwell the demand is not so much for rude strength as for the cunning fingers and the contriving brain. The inscriptions on the house-fronts would make you believe that you were in a region of gold and silver and precious stones. In the recesses of dim byways, where sunshine and free air are forgotten things, where families herd together in dear-rented garrets and cellars, craftsmen are for ever handling jewellery, shaping bright ornaments for the necks and arms of such as are born to the joy of life. Wealth inestimable is ever flowing through these workshops, and the hands that have been stained with gold-dust may, as likely as not, some day extend themselves in petition for a crust.¹⁷

There is a compassion and social concern in Gissing’s account of his underworld which alleviates a pessimism that otherwise threatens to overwhelm the reader.

At times, Gissing veers towards polemic and exaggeration, as in his description of slum housing. Shooter’s Gardens stands in a long tradition of the classic literary slum. Yet he takes the trouble to look beyond the veneer of dilapidation to acknowledge the role of middle-men in making poor housing profitable. These house farmers, as they were called, used local political influence to obstruct the enforcement of public health regulations. The landmark Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes of the mid-1880s paid particular attention to the role of these house farmers in letting insanitary housing in Clerkenwell, and local clergy, landlords and officials – though not the slum dwellers themselves – were called to give evidence.

The Royal Commission was part of a wave of social concern about outcast London which developed from the early 1880s, reflected in the writings of concerned clerics, sensationalist journalists and social investigators. Gissing's novels of London poverty, all products of the 1880s, were not born from the same reflex, but they fed into the same process. The vogue for slum novels gathered pace in the following decade, complemented by Charles Booth's revelatory *Life and Labour of the People in London* – published from 1889 onwards – which sought to map the city's poverty and criminality. Gissing helped set the tone for the sensationalist slum fictions of the closing years of the century, though he privately dismissed Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* as “poor stuff.”

The clearing of the worst slums and the construction in their place of model dwellings, multi-storey blocks of workers' flats, was one of the most conspicuous responses to concern about poor housing. In the novel, Sidney Kirkwood moves into newly-built industrial dwellings on one of Clerkenwell's main roads – a building which Gissing finds repulsive:

What terrible barracks, those Farringdon Road Buildings! Vast, sheer walls, unbroken by even an attempt at ornament; row above row of windows in the mud-coloured surface, upwards, upwards, lifeless eyes, murky openings that tell of bareness, disorder, comfortlessness within. One is tempted to say that Shooter's Gardens are a preferable abode. ... Barracks, in truth; housing for the army of industrialism.¹⁸

The dousing down of the human spirit horrifies Gissing even more than the contagion of the old courts and alleys.

If *The Nether World* is testimony against the “accursed social order,” it is also contemptuous of those who seek to overthrow it. All five of Gissing's novels of working class London are concerned in some degree with popular politics and unbelief. When writing his first published novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, he described himself as “a mouthpiece of the advanced Radical party.” It was a brief interlude. If Clerkenwell's name was known in late nineteenth century London, it was as a hotbed of working class radicalism. The district's craftsmen had fostered a culture of radicalism which still found powerful expression in the 1880s – within both liberal radical and socialist traditions. Clerkenwell Green was a well-known forum for left-wing oratory.¹⁹ Gissing spent a Sunday evening there in 1887, and wrote that it was “a great assembly-place for radical meetings, & the like. A more disheartening scene it is difficult to imagine, – the vulgar, blatant scoundrels! ... May we not live long enough to see Democracy get all the power it expects!–”²⁰

For all the sense of hopelessness, Gissing was able to find the “evening sunlight to close” that he had spoken of to Thomas Hardy. At the end of the novel, Sidney Kirkwood and Jane Snowdon meet at the grave of her grandfather: “at least their lives would remain a protest against those brute forces of society which fill with wreck the abysses of the nether world.”²¹ Simply surviving uncorrupted constituted a challenge to the social order that tolerated such injustice. And telling the story of the nether world helped Gissing gain some closure on years of personal misery. His biographer, Paul Delany, has argued that in the process of writing the novel, “Gissing paid off his debt to Nell’s memory, and decided that he need no longer walk the streets of outcast London.”²² He went on to write many more successful London novels, but never again chose to focus on the London poor.

¹ A modified version of this paper is available at the London Fictions website: <http://www.londonfictions.com/>

² The history of the site and its buildings is recounted in Philip Temple (ed.), *Survey of London vol. XLVI: South and East Clerkenwell*, New Haven and London, 2008, pp. 54-61.

³ George Gissing, *The Nether World*, p. 2. All references are to the Harvester Press edition of 1974 which is itself a reproduction of the first one-volume edition of the novel published in 1890.

⁴ *The Nether World*, p. 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁶ Unsigned review, *Court Journal*, 27 April 1889, republished in Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge (eds), *Gissing: the Critical Heritage*, London, 1972, pp. 136-37.

⁷ Letter to Algernon Gissing, 13 August 1885 in *The Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 2, pp. 333-34.

⁸ Henry Cary’s translation of Dante was published in 1814. In his letter to his brother Algernon, Gissing commented: “It is preposterous to read it [Dante’s ‘Inferno’] in a translation, though Cary is as good as any translator could be.”

⁹ Rev. William Dawson, *A Mid-London Parish: short history of the parish of S. John’s, Clerkenwell*, London, 1885, p. 41.

¹⁰ Letter to Ellen Gissing, 31 July 1886, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 48-49.

¹¹ Pierre Coustillas (ed.), *London and the Life of Literature in late Victorian England: the Diary of George Gissing, Novelist*, Hassocks, 1978, pp. 22-23. Entry for 1 March 1888.

¹² Letter to Thomas Hardy, 25 July 1887, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 138-39.

¹³ Letter to Catherine Gissing, 15 April 1888, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 200-01.

¹⁴ *The Nether World*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹⁹ Andrew Whitehead, “Red London: radicals and socialists in late-Victorian Clerkenwell,” *Socialist History*, 18, 2000, pp. 1-31.

²⁰ Letter to Margaret Gissing, 27 August 1887, *Collected Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 144-45.

²¹ *The Nether World*, p. 392. These are the closing words of the novel.

²² Paul Delany, *George Gissing: A Life*, London, 2008, p. 144.

Gissing's Copy of Lecky's *History of European Morals*

PIERRE COUSTILLAS

If Gissing had not opted for a literary career, as he once said to Gabrielle Fleury, he might have become an artist, but most likely his way in life would have been just as difficult as it was in literature, considering that, in the prevailing Victorian atmosphere, it did not pay to be original and truthful, as is painfully evidenced by the fate of impressionist painters in the 1870s. Still, living by one's pen was an uphill prospect even if, as he did, he tried his hand at the most potentially remunerative form of literature, namely fiction. Asking what other field of human knowledge might have appealed to him is doubtless an idle question in the eyes of readers to whom only reality matters, yet with so much evidence available, one cannot help thinking that Gissing, had fate decided otherwise, could have become a talented historian. "Why do I give so much of my time to the reading of history?" he has Henry Ryecroft wonder, a question he probably asked himself more than once, as he was an avid reader of historians, from Tacitus and Livy to Thucydides and Herodotus, to Gibbon and Gregorovius, to Mommsen and Schliemann, to name only a few. Delving into the past was one of his lifelong passions, as appears in numberless writings of his published or unpublished, and one of his sources of information has—of necessity one might say—remained untapped for the simple reason that it is not publicly available. What is left of his library consists of books he read and, in a number of cases, annotated in ink or pencil.

One of these books is *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne* by William Edward Hartpole Lecky, M.A., eighth edition, revised, in two volumes, published by Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888. The ownership is attested by Gissing's signature on the half-title of Vol. I and the two volumes contain some sixty marginal pencillings of varying length, ranging from one or two lines to several paragraphs. These pencillings concern such subjects as religions, ancient philosophers, superstitions, Stoicism, the Roman Empire, slavery, death and the condition of women, a question into which Lecky carried on his inquiry through a whole chapter. Of the 32 passages that arrested Gissing's attention in volume I, 29

occur in the second chapter, “The Pagan Empire”—covering pp. 161-335—which was sure to be the one that would interest him most, given his extensive knowledge of Greek and Latin civilization. The Stoics and their attitude to death appear on many pages and in a long paragraph dealing with Marcus Aurelius, to whom he devoted a section in the Rycroft Papers (Autumn XIII), Gissing drew a double line—the only occasion in the whole book—against this quotation from the old emperor-philosopher: “There is but one thing of real value—to cultivate truth and justice, and to live without anger in the midst of lying and unjust men.” In volume II, which contains only two chapters, “From Constantine to Charlemagne,” pp. 1-274, and “The Position of Women,” pp. 275-372, Gissing used his pencil on nineteen occasions in the former, and seven in the latter. The influence of early Christianity on the moral condition of the Byzantine and Western Empires is discussed at great length and so is Monachism, monasteries and monks, a subject Gissing was deeply interested in, and which led him later to read Montalembert’s big work on *Les Moines d’Occident*. Here he duly pencilled on p. 183: “To the studious it [life in a monastery] offered the only opportunity then existing in the world of seeing many books and passing a life of study.” St. Benedict is mentioned and we know how Gissing turned his knowledge of him and his work to account in *Veranilda*.

Lecky (1838-1903) was a distinguished Irish historian, one of whose major works was a monumental study of England in the eighteenth century. A recent biographical entry in Wikipedia describes this eight-volume history as “lucid in style, extensive in its use of source material, and, above all, impartial throughout.” There is no doubt that the *History of European Morals* (first published in 1869) was one of Gissing’s favourite books. He copied out in his *Commonplace Book*, in the early 1890s, part of the long paragraph on the prostitute he had marked in pencil in the present copy, and it is clear that he had read the book in the previous decade, since he recommended it warmly to Algernon on 27 September 1884, together with Lecky’s earlier book, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*. And to Bertz, whom he had told about the historical novel he had in mind, he wrote in August 1897: it “will involve a great deal of reading. Lecky—whom you mentioned—I had already read with much care; he is very useful for that period.”

The following passage, the longest to have riveted Gissing’s attention, and with the contents of which, for family reasons among others, he obviously agreed, occurs on pp. 354-56 of volume II in the edition which

passed into the hands of Gabrielle Fleury, then in the early 1980s, into my own hands:

“The domestic unhappiness arising from differences of belief was probably almost or altogether unknown in the world before the introduction of Christianity; for, although differences of opinion may have before existed, the same momentous consequences were not attached to them. It has been the especial bane of periods of great religious change, such as the conversion of the Roman Empire, or the Reformation, or our own day when far more serious questions than those which agitated the sixteenth century are occupying the attention of a large proportion of thinkers and scholars, and when the deep and widening chasm between the religious opinions of most highly educated men, and of the immense majority of women, is painfully apparent. While a multitude of scientific discoveries, critical and historical researches, and educational reforms have brought thinking men face to face with religious problems of extreme importance, women have been almost absolutely excluded from their influence. Their minds are usually by nature less capable than those of men of impartiality and suspense, and the almost complete omission from female education of those studies which most discipline and strengthen the intellect increases the difference, while at the same time it has been usually made a main object to imbue them with a passionate faith in traditional opinions, and to preserve them from all contact with opposing views. But contracted knowledge and imperfect sympathy are not the sole fruits of this education. It has always been the peculiarity of a certain kind of theological teaching that it inverts all the normal principles of judgment, and absolutely destroys intellectual diffidence. On other subjects we find, if not a respect for honest conviction, at least some sense of the amount of knowledge that is requisite to entitle men to express an opinion on grave controversies. A complete ignorance of the subject-matter of a dispute restrains the confidence of dogmatism; and an ignorant person, who is aware that, by much reading and thinking in spheres of which he has himself no knowledge, his educated neighbour has modified or rejected opinions which that ignorant person had been taught, will, at least if he is a man of sense or modesty, abstain from compassionating the benighted condition of his more instructed friend. But on theological questions this has never been so. Unflinching belief being taught as the first of duties, and all doubt being usually stigmatised as criminal or damnable, a state of mind is formed to which we find no parallel in other fields. Many men and most women, though completely ignorant of the very

rudiments of biblical criticism, historical research, or scientific discoveries, though they have never read a single page, or understood a single proposition of the writings of those whom they condemn, and have absolutely no rational knowledge either of the arguments by which their faith is defended, or of those by which it has been impugned, will nevertheless adjudicate with the utmost confidence upon every polemical question; denounce, hate, pity, or pray for the conversion of all who dissent from what they have been taught; assume, as a matter beyond the faintest possibility of doubt, that the opinions they have received without enquiry must be true, and that the opinions which others have arrived at by enquiry must be false, and make it a main object of their lives to assail what they call heresy in every way in their power, except by examining the grounds on which it rests. It is probable that the great majority of voices that swell the clamour against every book which is regarded as heretical are the voices of those who would deem it criminal even to open that book, or to enter into any real, searching, and impartial investigation of the subject to which it relates. Innumerable pulpits support this tone of thought, and represent, with a fervid rhetoric well fitted to excite the nerves and imaginations of women, the deplorable condition of all who deviate from a certain type of opinions or of emotions; a blind propagandism or a secret wretchedness penetrates into countless households, poisoning the peace of families, chilling the mutual confidence of husband and wife, adding immeasurably to the difficulties which every searcher into truth has to encounter, and diffusing far and wide intellectual timidity, disingenuousness, and hypocrisy.”

Book Review

Maria Teresa Chialant (ed.), *Eve's Ransom, George Gissing e le sfide del romanzo tardo-vittoriano* (Rome: Aracne, 2010).

To very few of Gissing's works, considered individually, has a whole volume of critical essays been devoted since earnest interest in the author took the form of a revival fifty years ago. Peter Keating's monograph on *New Grub Street* is indeed the only example that spontaneously comes to mind. *The Odd Women* could easily have been honoured in the same way or in what publishers decades ago chose to call a dossier, but most publishers still looked upon Gissing as a bugbear and when Norton were contacted, the firm's representative in London, probably taunted by his colleagues in

New York, beat a prudent retreat and waved aside a prospect which had originally appealed to him. So a whole volume of essays on *Eve's Ransom*, a novel which was at all times regarded as a minor one, but is viewed more and more as a very complex story, comes to us as a pleasant surprise, and it does not reach us from London or New York but from Rome. Besides the general editor has been known to the Gissing confraternity for years, since the days when she was a student at the University of Washington at Seattle.

The contributors to this attractively got up volume are practically all well known as devoted analysts of Gissing's work. Maria Teresa Chialant has recruited nine collaborators, and half the book consists of essays in English signed by Patrick Parrinder, Constance Harsh, Arlene Young and Emanuela Ettorre, but the most original is probably that on the two Londons by Paola D'Ercole, who read an excellent paper at the Lille Conference two years ago and who is currently translating *The Nether World* into Italian. It will be interesting to learn what title she will use for the book as all translators have found Gissing's choice, with its literary and social connotations, a sizable difficulty in their way. Perhaps some phrase from the *Inferno* in Dante's *Divina Commedia*—of which Gissing had a three-volume copy still in existence—might prove suitable.

As a rule the personality of Eve Madeley puzzled early reviewers but Frank Swinnerton, whose hostility to Gissing has largely contributed to his own downfall among critics, pronounced the novel "remarkable." That he is ignored in the bibliography is not a subject for complaint, but perhaps the forty-odd contemporary reviews of the novel in the English, American and Australian press deserved some consideration.

It is pleasant to renew one's acquaintance with Carlo Pagetti, whose first contact on record with Gissing was through the revolution in publishing which occurred in the mid-1890s and which he discussed at length in his study of the New Battle of Books. The title of his article, "La rivincita di Eva," is more explicit than the original, but is it not too much so? When a French periodical mistakenly announced the publication of Georges Art's translation as *La Revanche d'Eve*, Gissing disapproved of it, and indeed one may wonder whether the narrator wished his readers to understand that Eve Madeley's self-anchoring in matrimonial waters was to be seen as a victory. Anyone who has in mind the whole of Gissing's work might well think that the heroine's marriage to Robert Narramore has a chance of proving a pyrrhic victory. Gissing, near the end of the story, uses the verb "to ransom," an echo of the title, but the word has unpleasant connotations. What Eve covets is not love—she is never described as being in love—but

material comfort, the sole guarantee of which is Narramore's so far prosperous trade in brass bedsteads, unpoetic pieces of furniture if any. Gissing has not depicted an especially engaging young woman but a schemer who plays a waiting game with well-bred discretion and is served by chance.

Constance Harsh, who entitled her piece "Fantasies of Recuperation in *Eve's Ransom*," expresses serious doubts about the feasibility of Hilliard's plans, stressing the limitations of life in a world that Gissing had watched at close quarters when he was collecting material for the admittedly optimistic full-length novel he provisionally called "The Iron Gods." She appropriately observes that "Gissing underscores the ubiquity of constraint in modern life by presenting many versions of a single social scenario," giving a number of examples which convince her readers that total personal freedom cannot exist in worlds as different as Dudley and Paris. She then easily veers to Gissing's basic belief that human nature is an enigma, the key to which remains unalterably elusive and which, when apparently found, still has to be reconsidered. To all appearances Hilliard ultimately fails, but unconventional readers may well wonder whether fate has not dealt fairly with him as it spares him the unenviable prospect of marrying an empty shell, a fact of which Narramore, who is not overburdened with brains, is quintessentially unaware. Yet ambiguity rules the game to the end. We leave Hilliard free only "in his own conceit," a word which discreetly expresses the distance that the narrator has created between his male protagonist and himself. Constance Harsh's prudent interpretation is, as one could have guessed, approved by the *O.E.D.*

As she readily admits, Arlene Young has added some paragraphs on *Eve's Ransom* to an article published in 2001 in which she discussed a number of Gissing characters of the 1890s on whose backs the label "lower middle class" has been stuck. Her remarks about Dengate break new ground. If it is true that the novel contains no really likable character, it is still truer that a braggart and liar like him deserves a good deal less than indifference, and we relish Hilliard's temporary release from debasing poverty with the smile with which we welcome poetic justice.

Laura Di Michele, of the University of Aquila, has written for the second time on Gissing after devoting much time and energy to the Elizabethan theatre and Shakespeare. She now takes a close look at an aspect of *Eve's Ransom*—its "modernity"—in the wake of some American academics for whom Gissing principally meant fictional images of female life at the turn of the nineteenth century. She quotes at some length from the brilliant pages on which we see Hilliard take artless Patty Ringrose round

the centre of Birmingham, a superb piece of ideological debunking and a courageous denunciation of the seamy side of popular education which Disraeli had in mind when, after the vote of the 1867 Reform Act, he perceptively exclaimed: "Now we must educate our masters." Modernity, here as elsewhere in Gissing's fiction, goes hand in hand with materialism, which antagonized so many thinkers of the period and which had been held up to execration in some episodes of *Demos*. Ecology is another concern of Laura Di Michele's, and the problem, which was uppermost quite often in Gissing's mind, is reflected here through Hilliard's interest in architecture. The last paragraph of the novel, in which Hilliard is seen in a natural environment, can be read as a temporary liberation from the agencies which obsessed the narrator, doubtless more stridently in "The Iron Gods" than in its eventual "avatar," namely the story of the apparently enigmatic Eve. Lest his socio-cultural message should be misunderstood, Gissing owned—for Bertz's benefit and later for Gabrielle Fleury's—that he was fond of ironical endings, a multi-tiered irony in the case of *Eve's Ransom*, as Laura Di Michele implies.

Tom Ue's piece glances in another direction. His interesting essay places *Eve's Ransom* by the side of *Lady Audley's Secret*, a crushingly sensational best-seller of the early 1860s by Mary E. Braddon. Gissing read the novel in 1889 and replied to his brother who asked him for his opinion: "Yes, Miss Braddon is often good enough. Her lack, I take it, is of originality in matter and manner. She handles the old themes with a great deal of literary ability."

After her introduction in English Maria Teresa Chialant returns in Italian to the story of Miss Madeley and her three successive lovers, approached this time from a comparative angle, a method suggested by the popularity in the mid-1890s of novels that dealt with woman's changing status at a time when the widow at Windsor, as Kipling called the ageing queen, still thought and reasoned as she had done at mid-century. We are first reminded that women, as prolifically and often more aggressively than men, aired their many grievances about their subjection in articles and fiction, long or short. The names of Olive Schreiner, Mona Caird, Sarah Grand, George Egerton, Ella Hepworth Dixon (to the last of whose weekly periodical, *The Englishwoman*, Gissing was in vain invited to contribute) deserve consideration over against those of Hardy, Gissing, Moore, Bennett and Wells. They constitute a prelude to the thorough discussion of Eve's predicaments and of the atmosphere of mystery which shrouds her. In this sexually mixed company Gissing carefully kept at a distance from extremes.

For instance if Ella Hepworth Dixon in her only novel, *The Story of a Modern Woman*, to which John Sutherland gave high praise, protested vigorously against woman's dependence on men, Gissing's best known New Woman novel, *The Odd Women*, never reads like propaganda. We find nowhere in it authorial appeals to solidarity among women. Their need of assistance is at no time blazoned forth, though the helplessness of poor Victorian women with no sufficient means of subsistence is under no circumstances glossed over. Gissing would have jibbed at the thought of being seen in competition with novelists bent on swimming with the tide, whether genuine feminists or mere opportunists.

It would seem that when she tried to find a suitable subject for an essay on *Eve's Ransom*, Emanuela Ettore had already convinced herself that Eve Madeley could be regarded as the winner of the battle of the sexes, her argument being that she is endowed with characteristics which are essentially masculine. But this amounts to overlooking the fact discreetly put in relief by Constance Harsh, that Hilliard, right from his discovery of the mysterious photograph which has set the story in motion, has been fighting a losing battle. Besides, the demonstration does not gain in plausibility from its frequent resorting to heavy abstractions and generalizations. The problems with which Eve is confronted are both concrete and emotional. She has known from the beginning that if she is to enjoy material safety she must marry money, as the Victorians put it and this is somehow, however tortuously, what she succeeds in doing. This would not be denied by Emanuela Ettore but in her article, the penultimate in the book, the development of which is delayed by biblical considerations of questionable interest, she too often leads us astray from the right track. Some spelling mistakes and aberrant phrases should have been corrected at proof stage.

With Francesco Marroni, to whom we owe a number of articles on Gissing and a translation of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, we go back to Eve as Hilliard first saw her on the photograph that Mrs Brewer showed him. As he himself eventually realizes, appearance and reality cannot be reconciled, and the reader, who has seen the young woman from so many angles, bids her farewell without her complexity surviving her marriage to Narramore.

Lastly Maria Teresa Chialant must be thanked again for dedicating the volume to Jacob Korg and to the present writer—as well as to Gissing himself through the felicitous choice of the illustration reproduced on the front cover, which is so aptly evocative of the essential role played by the British Museum in the author's career. The 8-page bibliography with which the

volume ends should prove a valuable starting point for scholars who wish to carry the critical discussion of *Eve's Ransom* one step further.— Pierre Coustillas

Notes and News

In the flow of miscellaneous news that reaches us every month rarely do we come across such a gem as that forwarded by Richard Dennis last August. A colleague of his at UCL has brought his attention to the packaging for Twinings English Breakfast Tea (100 Tea Bags), which includes an uplifting quotation inside the lid of every box. His current box is inscribed: “The mere chink of cups and saucers tunes the mind to happy repose.” It is attributed to George Gissing in the Ryecroft Papers. The exact reference is Winter VI. Richard Dennis comments: “Perhaps even Gissing would forgive the use of his prose for commercial ends, though I imagine it were real tea by the spoonful rather than tea bags.”

Malcolm Allen sends us the various references to Gissing in James Eli Adams’s *A History of Victorian Literature* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 294, 348-49, 376, 391-92. The name of Gissing’s first wife is given incorrectly in the book. Prof. Allen also draws our attention to a significant allusion to Gissing in the English novelist Susan Howatch’s *Glittering Images* (New York: Knopf, 1987, p. 45).

In a slightly different category—that of modern novels containing characters bearing Gissing’s name—a novel by Ian Rankin should be mentioned. In *Doors Open* (Orion, 2008) one of the three main male characters is named Robert Gissing, an irascible art professor about to retire from Edinburgh College of Art. The three men are all art lovers, and Gissing resents the fact that great works are kept hidden away.

Colin Lovelace, who from his home in the Basque Country occasionally visits the Gissing sites at St. Jean-de-Luz, Ciboure and Ispoure—and takes the opportunity for laying flowers on Gissing’s grave—has come across a long review article by Robert Gottlieb, “Who Was Charles Dickens?” in the *New York Review* for 10 June 2010, pp. 46-48. Gissing is mentioned in it twice and opposed to Chesterton. Gottlieb’s starting point is the new book by Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens*, not to be confused with his former volume, *Dickens and Women* (Stanford University Press, 1983).

The *Times Literary Supplement* for 30 July was almost a Gissing number. On p. 16 under the heading “Then and Now,” the most part of Gissing’s 1902 article on Swinburne and Dickens was reprinted. On p. 25 Christine Ferguson reviewed the recently published new edition of *Workers in the Dawn* (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2010), while J. C., alias James Campbell, devoted some paragraphs in his gossip columns on the back page to the *Gissing Journal* and its editor’s review of Paul Delany’s biography of Gissing, which competent critics have discussed unsparingly. As usual his interest in Gissing and our *Journal* is combined with rather loose reporting of its contents. On the present occasion he refrains from saying that the severity of the review is justified by the carelessness of Delany’s treatment of his subject.

In our last number a photograph of RMS Parthia II was accidentally reproduced instead of RMS Parthia I. We now correct our unfortunate error:

Recent Publications

Volumes

George Gissing, *Isabel Clarendon*, edited and introduced by Pierre Coustillas. Grayswood, Surrey: Grayswood Press, 2010. Pp. xxxviii + 331.

Hardback with illustrated dust-jacket. Published price £30. £25 for subscribers to this *Journal* using the order leaflet. Contents: frontispiece: George Gissing, 1884; p. xxxviii, facsimile of first MS page; preface, introduction, reset text; textual notes, bibliography; appendix one: Gissing's "The Place of Realism in Fiction"; appendix two: Ten first edition reviews of 1886; appendix three: Gissing's unfinished revisions. ISBN 978-0-9546247-6-7.

Maria Teresa Chialant (ed.), *Eve's Ransom: George Gissing e le sfide del romanzo tardo-vittoriano*. Rome: Aracne, 2010, pp. 213. Studi di anglistica, no. 22. Series edited by Francesco Marroni. €12.00. The book contains two illustrations besides that on the front cover, "The British Museum and Montague Street" (1905) by Vilhelm Hammershøi. The editor contributed an essay in addition to the introduction; the other essays are the work of Carlo Pagetti, Patrick Parrinder, Constance Harsh, Arlene D. Young, Paola D'Ercole, Laura Di Michele, Tom Ue, Emanuela Ettorre and Francesco Marroni. ISBN 978-88-548-3217-6.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Ruth Livesey, *RaVoN*, August 2009, issue no. 55. Review of *Spellbound: George Gissing*, ed. Christine Huguet (Haren, Netherlands: Equilibris, 2008). A remarkable review of the eleven short stories and the accompanying critical essays contained in the Festschrift presented to the editor of the *Gissing Journal* and his wife two years ago. *RaVoN* is an electronic journal devoted to Romantic and Victorian Literature. It began as *Romanticism on the Net* in February 1996, and expanded its scope in August 2007 to include Victorian literature. It is published four times a year.

Fabienne Gaspari, "'This is Hell—Hell—Hell!' Les Éléments dans *The Nether World* de George Gissing," *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, April 2010, no. 71, pp. 113-26.

Maria Su Wang, "'A Clearly Defined Class in the Present Day': Collective Representation and Social Identity in Gissing's *The Odd Women*." A paper read at a Conference of the International Society for the Study of Narrative, 8-11 April 2010, Cleveland, Ohio.

