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

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## Morley Roberts’ Literary Career in the 1880s and 1890s

MARKUS NEACEY

Berlin

### I

Morley Charles Roberts is remembered today, if at all, as the best friend and biographer of both George Gissing and W. H. Hudson, and by a few scholars as the author of a landmark travel narrative, *The Western Avernus*.<sup>1</sup> While there remains great interest in the literature of the late-Victorian era and in many writers of that time from the obscure to the famous, Roberts has gone missing, not even deemed worthy of a mention in biographies of those he knew well such as John Galsworthy, Storm Jameson, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Gilbert Murray.<sup>2</sup> Yet few men have led as fascinating and diverse a life or written as varied a corpus of work. Clearly he wrote far too much – 83 books, over 300 short stories, and hundreds of articles. Among all these works only the three aforementioned books, not one of which has been in print for fifty years, would say anything to modern-day scholars. But why feel sorry for Morley Roberts, he has fared better than many of his contemporaries – after all, there are those three books. The same can’t be said for his forgotten friends Horace Annesley Vachell, Charles Marriott, or E. H. Lacon Watson, whose works gather thick layers of dust in dark corners of university libraries across the world.<sup>3</sup>

Today Roberts survives in Gissing studies, on sufferance, as a despised figure. Moreover, his literary career is usually seen in the same light as Algernon Gissing’s, George’s brother, namely as an unrewarding failure. The comparison and the verdict are unjust to Roberts. For to equate the ineffectual Algernon, whose thirty books published between 1888 and 1924 very rarely achieved a second or colonial edition, but never an American or foreign edition, with Roberts, whose works total more than 250 editions in his lifetime, is to greatly underestimate the latter’s literary achievement. John Sutherland is equally misinformed when asserting, as he does in *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*,<sup>4</sup> that “somewhat to the impecunious Gissing’s chagrin, Roberts was one of the best-paid novelists and short story

writers of the 1890s” and that “he married a well-off widow.”<sup>5</sup> As a response to Sutherland, this essay sets out to describe Roberts’ literary career and to give an estimation of his literary earnings in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Since, unlike George Gissing, he left no account books, calculations are based on the William Morris Colles Papers at Columbia University, the A. P. Watt Records at the University of North Carolina, his early literary agreements, his early correspondence, and his autobiographical writings. It must be stressed that his income for each year from 1887 to 1899 is to be regarded as an approximation only and realistically represents about 80 to 90 per cent of his actual income. Royalty payments for his books are excluded from the yearly total income because there are no existing records, as are sales of 40 stories, whose publication in periodicals are still to be traced. Finally, Roberts’ correspondence shows that up to 1891 he earned £3 per thousand words for articles and stories, from 1892 to the end of 1896 £3.3s, and from 1897 to 1900 £3.10s and sometimes £4. Where no record exists for the sale of an article or story, I have added up the number of words of these works and based the payment for them on the going rate at the time the story or article was published.

The accounts of Morley Roberts’ life in the few literary reference books mentioning him invariably relate that he was born on 29 December 1857, the son of a tax inspector, met Gissing at Owens College in 1874, took ship to Australia in September 1876 where he was employed on sheep farms for three years, worked in the War Office and India Office on his return to London, and then crossed to North America in 1884 where he endured two and a half years of toil and hardship before returning to England in November 1886. All such accounts agree that Roberts’ literary career began in April 1887 with the publication of *The Western Avernus*, a record of his years in America. Gissing’s correspondence in the collected edition of his letters would seem to confirm this last fact. Yet Roberts’ literary career, strictly speaking, had begun before he left for America. In his unpublished “Autobiography”<sup>6</sup> he gives a brief description of his early struggles in literary London. Here he explains that some time after returning from Australia, he came into contact – probably at the War Office – with Henri van Laun,<sup>7</sup> a London-based Dutchman in his early sixties renowned for his English translations of Molière and Taine. Van Laun had been engaged for some years as the French examiner for the Civil Service Commission and the War Office, but was also well-known in literary circles. Roberts explains, “I first met him after I came back from Australia, and the queer old boy somehow took a fancy to me and encouraged my verse making.

Indeed it was he who first got me anything published: a set of verses in a magazine which has long since disappeared called 'The Time.'<sup>8</sup> Van Laun had introduced him to Edmund Yates,<sup>9</sup> the editor of *Time*, and in July 1883 the following poem entitled "Sonnet" by a certain M. C. Roberts appeared in the pages of the monthly magazine:

Sonnet

Great Pan is dead, and his sweet pipes are still,  
The very echoes of his paeans are  
Like the remembrance of the evening star,  
Dropped suddenly behind some steadfast hill;  
The fountains still, where priests were wont to fill  
Jove's lavers, flow no longer; in the car  
Of Phoebus sits no ruler; near and far  
There is no greater god than man's own will  
Save love, who throned within the hearts of men  
Most godlike burns, not as the sun whose beams  
Die with the even, tho' they rise again,  
But in the dim night too, for in our dreams  
We oft-times see what so prophetic seems,  
That waking sad, we say "Ah, when! ah, when?"<sup>10</sup>

For his first published poems, Roberts writes, "I remember I got five shillings."<sup>11</sup> The second and last of the poems was published in September 1883:

Night

Ere the day departed quite  
"Bring" he said "out raiment white  
Opal shot with silver sheen,  
Softest rose and tenderest green,  
That ye deck the maiden Night."  
  
Seraph-like on wings of flame  
Tingeing the still seas with fire  
From the west the swift winds came,  
Brought cloud raiment to attire  
Her that kneeled till day was done  
In the shadow of the sun.  
  
But the colours changed and fled  
When Night came with bended head  
Wonderful with moon and star  
Diamond dewed as violets are  
Drooping in their grassy bed.

Humble tho' a diadem  
Crowned her with full many a gem  
Daughter of the sun, whom she  
Followed still so faithfully  
Stooping to his garment's hem,  
Like a maid of low degree.

Like a lover of great light,  
Silver heart of purity,  
Type of high humanity,  
Yearning for the infinite  
For the things that cannot be  
And a world no eye may see.<sup>12</sup>

According to his autobiographical writings, in these early days of his literary apprenticeship Roberts was much influenced by the poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti.<sup>13</sup> And as his letters from America reveal over the next few years he saw himself as a poet and as such tested himself on Gissing.

On his return from America in November 1886 he was so full of his experiences that Gissing suggested he write them down. First Roberts wrote an article called "Concerning Sheep" which he sent to the *Cornhill Magazine*.<sup>14</sup> It was accepted in January 1887 by the editor, James Payn,<sup>15</sup> though it was not published until December 1888. At the rate of £3 per thousand words, which he was usually paid then, he would have received £12 for the article. Mindful of Gissing's advice, Roberts set to work in December on *The Western Avernus*, which he completed in twenty-six days and sent on to Payn, who also acted as literary adviser to Smith, Elder & Co. When offered £50 for the copyright, Roberts accepted with glee and the book was published in one volume on 15 April in an edition of 1,500 copies selling at 5s 4d. In a recent article on Roberts' travelogue,<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Mouat writes, "It was Roberts' most successful book, although over the next half century he was to write another seventy."<sup>17</sup> He is correct in saying that the book was well received by critics. However, it was a financial failure as only 494 copies were sold in 1887 and the first year loss to the publisher was £93.6s.5d. On 24 March, just three weeks before the book appeared, Roberts had delivered a manuscript of "Poems and Sonnets" to Macmillan & Co. "A few days later," Gissing wrote to Algernon, "old Mr. [Alexander] Macmillan<sup>18</sup> called at his house [Roberts was then living with his family in Clapham], & invited him to dinner, showing great interest in him."<sup>19</sup> Macmillan's reader was less impressed:

Reader's Report Late March 1887

*Poems & Sonnets* by Morley Roberts, 14 The Grove, Clapham Common

I have read through most of these productions, and I cannot say that I find them refreshing, whatever else they may be. The writer seems, I should say, to have modelled himself on Rossetti or on 'The City of Dreadful Night.' It is all sombre, and artificially and violently so – not the spontaneous product of a sombre imagination, moved by realities. The monotony of the key becomes very oppressive, and for myself I do not find it impressive. I see all the gloomy images and hear all the strong words, but I do not seize the thought. I do not understand what it is all about, and there are a good many lines (especially the 14<sup>th</sup> line of many of the sonnets) which give me the suspicion that the writer does not clearly understand, either, what it is all about, but is composing verse without any real vocation. There is none of that touch with reality, which makes the 'City of Dreadful Night' so remarkable; while there is certainly none of the rich mellow colour or flavour that gives such charm to D. G. Rossetti. The verse is by no means commonplace; there is some fluency, perhaps a dozen of the pieces have poetic quality: but as a whole the volume is not exciting or pleasing; it is gloomy and strained; and I do not hear in it a real voice.<sup>20</sup>

At least he thought better of the poems than he did of Algernon Gissing's first literary effort, "Crakehill," the manuscript of a novel he had sent to Macmillan the previous December. The reader writes prophetically that it had "a certain picturesqueness" but "on the whole I should not hope much from any future attempt of the writer's. This at any rate is quite hopeless."<sup>21</sup> Roberts' manuscript was returned to him on 5 April. Fortunately Macmillan had shown the poems to Comyns Carr,<sup>22</sup> the editor of the *English Illustrated Magazine*, and he was so taken by them that he promised to publish some. In the event three of the poems were printed in the *English Illustrated Magazine* over the next fifteen months, for which Roberts received a guinea per poem.<sup>23</sup>

In the winter months Roberts had got himself involved with a young woman from Huddersfield, Fanny Matthewman,<sup>24</sup> who had come to London to study art. He seems to have asked her to marry him. However, as F. Wilson McComb explains, "The family thought this a highly unsuitable match; much better that she should marry a rich manufacturer of printing equipment in the shape of H. F. Kimber."<sup>25</sup> Fanny took her parents' advice and married Henry Kimber in June: the marriage produced Cecil Kimber the car engineer who founded the famous MG car company.<sup>26</sup> Now that he had some money in hand from his writings, Roberts consoled himself by forsaking London for Cornwall where he spent the summer boating and writing a morbid

novel about a loner who rescues a suicidal woman from the Thames. On 19 September he sent the novel entitled “John Romer, Pessimist” to Macmillan & Co. Four days later, after a row with his father over a bicycle he had damaged, he left home and took lodgings at 4 Danvers Street in Chelsea, his father having generously decided to provide him with an allowance of ten shillings a week (£26 per annum) – money enough to pay his weekly rent of four shillings and to support him without frills. On 27 September, George Lillie Craik,<sup>27</sup> Macmillan’s partner, promptly rejected “John Romer” (it would be reworked into the novel, *Maurice Quain*,<sup>28</sup> a decade hence). In his reader’s report Craik writes that “‘John Romer, Pessimist’ ... recalls the novels of George Gissing – both in plot and style, but it is more crude, and more contracted in scale than Gissing’s.”<sup>29</sup> The book would be sent in vain to several other publishers. This period of Roberts’ life, covering the next four years, in which he lived in and around the artist studios in Manresa Road, is described in his first published novel, *In Low Relief*.<sup>30</sup> On a typical day he rose at four in the afternoon, ate a scanty breakfast, visited the studios of his artist friends for companionship, returned home at ten or eleven, wrote steadily through the night until six in the morning, then fell into bed and woke again at four the next afternoon to begin another round of bohemian existence.

If, following the publication of *The Western Avernus*, Roberts thought he had made his breakthrough as a writer, he was hugely mistaken. From the failure of “John Romer” and the writing of unsaleable short stories, he learned that writing fiction didn’t come as easily to him as autobiography. In April 1888, as he struggled to make a living, he looked on enviously at the appearance of Algernon Gissing’s first novel, *Joy Cometh in the Morning*.<sup>31</sup> By March the following year he was in bad case, disillusioned, and thinking seriously of giving up writing. At this point he got away to the countryside and by chance met an actress who managed a troupe of actors then taking a pantomime around the provinces. He joined the troupe for several weeks and was urged to take up acting as a career. Of this experience he writes,

[T]his time I came into contact with a young would be actress with a certain amount of money and a kind of passion for seeing herself upon the stage. Round her there were two or three who drained her blood when she had it and egged her on to run companies ... I happened to be in a provincial town where her company was acting; they were taking round the provinces this miserable pantomime. Somehow I stayed on in that town and helped them a little. I rehearsed with them. I even acted when one man left them as agent in advance and hired a place for them to rehearse in when they changed their programme. I bought scenery in Birmingham, I painted

scenery myself in the dismal warehouse where rehearsals took place. They were a queer company. Perhaps there were two in it, including the girl who managed it, who could be called ladies; the rest could not with kindness have any description given to them.<sup>32</sup>

He got over his depression and started a new novel, before scrapping it, and beginning yet another. Little did he realise then that he was wrestling with an art form that he would not handle competently for many years to come. He led throughout these years a precarious existence, but he managed to support himself by means of occasional journalistic work. Besides the three poems sold to Carr and one other to *Chambers's Journal*,<sup>33</sup> he published eight articles up to the end of 1889.<sup>34</sup> Three articles appeared in *Murray's Magazine* for which John Murray paid him 17s 6d per page, one, mentioned previously, was published in the *Cornhill*, one in the *Perth Western Mail*, and the remaining three, surprisingly, were commissioned by the *Scottish Art Review* at a miserly thirty shillings per article. John Torrington, the writer-hero of *In Low Relief*, is handed a similar post as art critic by one of his artist friends. Roberts probably got the position through the influence of the Scottish artist, A. D. McCormick,<sup>35</sup> who later illustrated several of his books. In his "Autobiography" Roberts candidly describes his time as an art critic,

I became the London art critic for the *Scottish Art Review* and learnt to write about art as if to the manner born ... I wrote about the men in Chelsea and about exhibitions, about sculpture of which I knew nothing and about miniatures of which I knew even less. When I had to deal with what I did not understand I read up the subject in the British Museum and was sometimes content to wait until one of the acknowledged critics had spoken.<sup>36</sup>

These were years of grinding poverty as Roberts records in his 1888 essay, "A Writer's Novitiate,"<sup>37</sup> and Gissing occasionally reminds us. In September 1889, for example, funds were so low that, as Gissing reports in letters to his family, Roberts interrupted the writing of *In Low Relief* to accept a commission to produce advertising poetry for the Sunlight Soap Company.<sup>38</sup> This would have been published anonymously either in the *Sunlight Almanac*<sup>39</sup> for 1889 or in the ephemeral Sunlight advertising magazine inserts. From January 1887 to the end of 1889, his income from writing (discounting what he received from Sunlight Soap) amounts to £106.8s or an average of £35.6s per year. If one excludes his £26 allowance from his father (which was probably discontinued in 1888), this means Roberts was living on close to 13s 7d per week during this time, thus confirming Gissing's view that he was living at subsistence level. In the

same period Gissing earned £410. So far, then, Roberts was just barely keeping himself afloat in the bustling literary marketplace of the late 1880s.

## II

As Roberts approaches his literary breakthrough, it will be useful to say something about his personality and his relation to the late-Victorian literary world. As is well known, for several years up to 1890 Gissing had tolerated Smith, Elder, one of the meanest publishers in the business. Accustomed to selling his copyrights outright,<sup>40</sup> he had as yet scarcely arrived at the annual income that he felt his work deserved. A few more years would pass before he was able to demand higher prices and see a significant increase in his earnings. By contrast Roberts was far more enterprising and aggressive in his dealings with the editors who manned the editorial offices in the Grub Street of the 1880s and 1890s. From the very start he had eschewed publication in three volumes. And after selling the copyright of *The Western Avernus* outright in 1887 (he disposed of most of his copyrights until the mid-1890s), he only signed publishing agreements that tied him to a percentage of royalties in future editions of any work thus sold. In these early days, to Gissing's consternation, he could be alarmingly plainspoken with editors. As a letter to Algernon in 1888 reveals, Gissing was appalled at Roberts for writing "to the editor [John Murray] demanding payment" for an article prior to publication, remarking that the "Editor replies very coldly – result, I doubt not, that no more articles will be accepted."<sup>41</sup> Yet Roberts' brusque pursuit of payment doesn't seem to have done him any harm as Murray continued to commission work from him over the next few years.

Tall, broad-shouldered, and distinguished by an upturned, brown moustache, Roberts was a towering presence in any company. Edith Wharton calls him in her autobiography (she met him in 1908), a "larger than life" figure.<sup>42</sup> Gissing, who understood him best, captures him as he was in a letter to his German friend, Eduard Bertz, from December 1892, remarking that "Roberts is essentially a popular man. He has thorough sympathy with the *robust* human being."<sup>43</sup> He was indeed the most masculine of men, and inclined on occasion to cultivate the appearance of a sailor before the mast. A few early photographs capture a frosty glint in his eyes, which would become more pronounced in middle age. McCormack, an Aberdeen reporter, who along with Gissing, Francis Gribble, Dr Kershaw Best, A. D. McCormick, and W. E. Mackenzie, was invited to a meal at the Authors' Club hosted by Roberts and Henry Hyde Champion<sup>44</sup> in late November 1893, has left this impression of him: "Then there was Morley Roberts. I



can imagine no one calling him ‘Mister.’ He is a big man, physically and mentally, and he stands so squarely on his feet, that to go up to him and say, ‘How do you do, Mister Roberts?’ seems absurdly funny.”<sup>45</sup> In essence, as Gissing said, Roberts craved popularity, and one could hardly think of a more gregarious man of letters than Morley Roberts in the years of his literary apprenticeship. Gifted at forming lasting friendships, he was also renowned for his ability at holding forth eloquently and knowledge-ably on every subject under the sun. In the late 1880s he had won many friends among the artists who swarmed around the various London studios, and in the early 1890s he seems to have travelled about London Town and the world like a Phineas Fogg. Whereas Roberts is now despised for his insensitive and condescending fictional portrait of Gissing, in these early years he was at his most likeable. Intent on gaining a firm footing in the literary world he mixed in many circles, joining, besides the Authors’ Club, the Society of Authors, the Rhymers’ Club (briefly), the Anglo-African Writers’ Club, the New Vagabonds’ Club, and the Royal Geographical Society. He renewed his acquaintance with van Laun, befriended the poets John Davidson and John Barlas, shared a flat with Henry Hyde Champion and Frederick Rolfe (alias Baron Corvo) for a time, joined the Rossetti socialist circle, went on a walking holiday with Robert Harborough Sherard in the Lake District, hobnobbed with George Bernard Shaw at a socialist congress in Zurich, and sought out Robert Louis Stevenson in Apia.<sup>46</sup>

In his “Autobiography” Roberts says of himself at this time that he was mad.<sup>47</sup> By this he means that (like his friend, Champion) he was tormented by what must then have seemed to him a hopeless love affair with a married woman and mother of three children, Alice Hamlyn,<sup>48</sup> a member of the well-known Selous family. They had first met in 1889 when Alice, lame in one leg since childhood and with premature white hair since her early twenties, had reached a crisis in her marriage with her invalid husband, Snowden Thomas Hamlyn, a stockbroker by profession.<sup>49</sup> He was the eldest son of the famous Shakespearean actor Thomas Sowerby Hamblin,<sup>50</sup> from whom he had inherited \$10,000 upon his premature death in 1853. Hamlyn, formerly a lieutenant in the 38<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment during the American Civil War, had suffered a serious gunshot wound at the battle of Bull Run, Virginia, in 1861. Carried from the field of battle by the Confederates, he was to endure a year’s captivity during which he was shunted from one prison to another, nearly dying of malnutrition. He was in poor health for the remainder of his life. According to Victorian convention, Alice was bound to him, as divorce would have been an impossibility. Away from

Alice – whom he was able to see occasionally in Brighton and Battersea – Roberts found time to be an incredibly versatile man of letters, variously assuming the mantle of novelist, short story writer, journalist, foreign correspondent, literary critic, essayist, poet, playwright, travel writer, and public speaker. Keen to ensure his survival in a competitive marketplace, aware of the burgeoning demand for short stories, and alert to the emergence of new magazines and publishers, he was quick to court the attention of up and coming editors and publishers such as Clement King Shorter, Jerome Klapka Jerome, and Arthur Henry Bullen.<sup>51</sup> And he did not care whether his writings were printed in low-brow magazines such as *The Sketch* or high-brow such as *Macmillan's Magazine* or anything in between for that matter, as long as he was paid adequately and his work was kept before the public. Like Gissing's Jasper Milvain, he adapted himself to the needs of the market and was soon producing fiction in a host of genres: adventure stories, love stories, weird stories, sea stories, science fiction, and westerns. Exceptionally for such a prolific writer of his day, he avoided using a pseudonym. Between 1890 and 1899 he produced 23 books which were published by thirteen different publishers, wrote 150 short stories, and scores of journalistic articles. Not until Eveleigh Nash<sup>52</sup> took up publishing in 1903 did he find a publisher for the long haul and even then he continued to publish with other firms.

Crucially for a newcomer in Grub Street, he knew how to keep himself in the public eye. For, unlike Gissing, Roberts welcomed interviews, readily composed fillers for *The Idler* on whatever current question or topic was going the rounds, or penned provocative articles on subjects as wide apart as cannibalism in the *Humanitarian* and "The Transvaal Question" in *To-Morrow*.<sup>53</sup> If he seemed to be ubiquitous, he was just as apt to disappear without taking a bye or leave, as he did in early April 1893. A fortnight later Gissing wrote in exasperation from Exeter to Bertz, "He *may* have gone to Africa, but no one knows. It is some eccentric freak of his. By his extraordinary behaviour of late he has made himself the talk of a large section of London society."<sup>54</sup> At the end of April Gissing received a note from Roberts out of the blue telling him to his astonishment to come and dine with him at an Exeter hotel. He was equally capable of engineering a publicity stunt as he did in early October 1892 when he was taken on at the London docks and arranged for a *Daily News* reporter to come to interview him whilst he was employed in painting the side of a ship. He told the reporter that he was doing the work "for local colour and for material for a tale which he had in view"<sup>55</sup> – this material would eventually be used for the Rotherhithe scenes in his 1897 novel, *Maurice Quain*. The story went

around the world. Some weeks later Raymond Blathwayt,<sup>56</sup> the well-known interviewer, sought him out at Rotherhithe Docks to verify the story and interview him for the *Novel Review*.<sup>57</sup> Like the *Daily News* reporter, he found him shipside, this time with his younger brother, Cecil, “second mate of the SS. Oria, the very ship his brother was busily engaged in beautifying.”<sup>58</sup> Roberts gave Blathwayt a different reason for his working there, saying, “I have come here simply because there are times when I get sick and tired of literature, and the cant of literature, and also because I like hard physical work, and work that is at the same time really *useful*.”<sup>59</sup> Regarding his writing habits, he told Blathwayt that he rarely composed “for more than two hours a day,” tended to write himself out in a month, and then would remain “frequently idle for three or four months at a time.”<sup>60</sup> He added that he was a fast writer, able to produce a 4,000 word story at a sitting. His surviving manuscripts bear this out. He wrote without pause until a story was finished and scarcely revised at all, which explains to some extent the carelessness of style and uneven quality of his work in these early years. Compared to Gissing, writing came easily to Roberts in short bursts of whirlwind creativity, but in between he needed and depended on months of leisure in wide open spaces to reinvigorate himself. In 1895 on his return from a five-week stay in Ullswater he had the following interview on his writing method with the *To-Day* “bookseller,” Ernest Bramah Smith.<sup>61</sup>

How is this for lightning-like rapidity of production? Mr. Morley Roberts was in my shop yesterday, looking exceedingly well after his recent trip to the Lake District. “You went up there to work?” I asked. “Well, yes.” “Get through much?” “A fairish amount.” “What do you call ‘a fairish amount’?” “Oh, in five weeks I wrote a novel of 90,000 words, revised one of 53,000 words, and in six succeeding days wrote six short stories aggregating 22,000 words. Yes, the Lake District is a very good place to work in.”<sup>62</sup>

Again, within days of being printed in the pages of *To-Day* the story had travelled around the world.

### III

Morley Roberts literary breakthrough came on 11 April 1890 with the sale of *In Low Relief*. Chapman & Hall published the book in September in two volumes and Roberts sold the copyright for £25 in advance of royalties (which it never earned) and half profits. The book was a minor success: there were positive reviews in the *Academy*, the *Graphic*, and the *Scotsman* and

within two years it had achieved a second edition and an American edition. More importantly for Roberts, he had published a work of fiction. Six months later, aided on shore by W. H. Hudson and a Reverend F. N. Harvey, he valiantly swam out and saved a young woman and two schoolgirls from drowning at Shoreham beach almost at the cost of his own life, for which act he received a parchment in vellum from the Royal Humane Society, their highest honorary award.<sup>63</sup> By December 1890, in what was undoubtedly a red letter year for Roberts, he was thriving. He had just completed six articles for John Murray at the rate of nine guineas each, and subsequently arranged to write six new articles on steamships to appear in *Murray's Magazine* over the next six months for the improved sum of £11.6s per article.<sup>64</sup> That same year he had also maintained his connection with the *Cornhill*, publishing two articles, and written four essays for the *Field* for £40.<sup>65</sup> Earlier in the year he had edited a travel book for an American millionaire, though nothing more is known about this. That aside his earnings for the year add up to £214. For the first time, then, Roberts had earned more than Gissing, who, ironically, despite writing *New Grub Street*, to cite Roger Milbrandt, “had no literary income – in fact, no income of any kind – in 1890.”<sup>66</sup>

1891 began where 1890 had left off with Roberts making great strides forward in his pursuit of a self-supporting subsistence through his literary work. Yet his greatest coup upon entering the new year was not a literary work by his own hand, but his appearance in the “Coming Men” series in the *London Figaro*.<sup>67</sup> On hearing of this, Gissing wrote in his diary, “Some years ago the *Figaro* applied to me for my photograph, and I refused it.”<sup>68</sup> While there is a certain disdain in this comment, he followed Roberts’ career closely with a complicated mixture of admiration, exasperation, and scorn. Ironically, his brother Algernon was to appear as a “Coming Man” the following year.<sup>69</sup> The article was a major boost to Roberts’ readership. That same month of January, for the first time, a short story of his, “The Bronze Caster” was published, appearing in *Macmillan's Magazine*.<sup>70</sup> The story, which describes the experiences of a Swiss sculptor he knew in Manresa Road, so impressed the poet, John Davidson, that he asked van Laun to arrange a meeting with Roberts. The following Sunday in February 1891 when the two writers met they got on famously and shortly after (as Roberts explains in an *ur*-version of his article about the Rhymers’ Club),<sup>71</sup> Davidson invited him home to dinner with his family and another guest, W. B. Yeats. He then introduced him to the Rhymers’ Club at Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese in Fleet Street, where they went together several times. On the last occasion Davidson’s demand that four Scotsmen be elected and Roberts’ ostentatious

imitation of a “tough,” like those he portrays in many of his early stories, so infuriated the mostly diminutive regulars that they decided, after Davidson and Roberts had made their exit, to exclude them forthwith and to “have no more members.”<sup>72</sup> After this they rarely crossed paths. In later life Roberts would reminisce about Davidson in his unpublished book of essays “Farewell to Letters” in which he showed much understanding for him and appreciation of his poetry.<sup>73</sup> During these early months of 1891 Roberts’ detailed steamship articles had started to appear and were at once a success with readers and critics alike. Then in May he approached Lawrence & Bullen, a new publishing company, persuading them to bring out a volume of poetry, *Songs of Energy*, and a travel book, *Land-Travel and Sea-Faring*.<sup>74</sup> Both were published on 19 September 1891, the former at the firm’s expense on half profits, and the latter most likely earning him £50 (what he received for *The Western Avernus*). By the close of the year he had sold one more article to Murray for £11.6s, and received £18.18s from Macmillan for his short story, so that his total earnings come to about £80.<sup>75</sup> This may seem like a downturn but it has to be remembered that he was paid £70 by Murray in December 1890 for six articles which appeared in 1891. He had meanwhile secured another two-book deal with Lawrence & Bullen as well as arranged for them to publish a travel book by his brother, Cecil, entitled *Adrift in America*.<sup>76</sup>

Until the winter of 1891 Roberts had managed his literary affairs without the services of a literary agent. But with increasing literary business absorbing his time, he decided to pay the one guinea fee and join the Society of Authors, as Gissing belatedly notes in a letter to Bertz in December 1892.<sup>77</sup> Roberts joined the Society because members were able to make use of William Morris Colles’ Authors’ Syndicate, that is, as long as they met one specific requirement.<sup>78</sup> Among the eight points Colles listed in his regular advertisement in the Society’s journal, number seven stated that “authors are warned that no syndicating is possible for them until they have already attained a certain amount of popularity.”<sup>79</sup> That Colles welcomed Roberts’ approach proves that he had already attained a reputation of sorts. Colles, a big, burly, bearded man with an infectious laugh and easygoing manner, who on the one hand did much to clarify copyright legislation in his day, had on the other hand, as Robert A. Colby writes, “serious limitations as manager of a literary marketplace.”<sup>80</sup> He generally had minor writers on his books or fledgling stars who once they had enjoyed a measure of success flew the nest for choicer pickings with J. B. Pinker or A. P. Watt.<sup>81</sup> At first Roberts cultivated an informal relation-

ship with Colles, but in time it soured, and eventually he too became dissatisfied and jumped ship. For upwards of five years, though, he was to stay in close contact with him, whilst continuing to negotiate his own deals with editors and publishers at the Authors' Club<sup>82</sup> – an issue over which Colles was to cross swords with him. In truth Colles did his best for him, even readily advancing him funds when he was out of pocket. And from the first his assistance was an important impetus to Roberts' career. Straight away he established a fixed selling price of three guineas a thousand words, distributed his manuscripts widely among editors he knew, thereby increasing the demand for his work, arranged contracts with syndicates in Northern England, and was sometimes able to sell first, second, and third serial rights in stories. On the downside, despite using the renowned S. S. McClure Agency,<sup>83</sup> he rarely succeeded in syndicating Roberts' stories in America, and was on occasion reluctant or unable to serialise some of the later books he handled. The early correspondence reveals that it sometimes took one to two years for Colles to find publishers for Roberts' novels so that a work written in 1892 might not appear in book form for two or even three years.

1892 started well with the publication of *King Billy of Ballarat and Other Stories*,<sup>84</sup> containing 14 stories Roberts had written three years earlier but failed to sell to magazines. Bullen gave him £25 in advance of royalties. In England the book was a success, achieving in May a second edition by which time, because of his reminiscences about Australia in *Land-Travel and Sea-Faring*, he was being called the Australian Kipling. Heinemann subsequently issued continental and colonial editions, whilst a Chicago publisher brought out an American edition in 1893. May also saw another volume of stories emerge from his productive pen, *The Reputation of George Saxon and Other Stories*,<sup>85</sup> published by Cassell & Co in an English and colonial edition. He parted with the copyright for just £20 in advance of 10% royalties. There are no records stating how much Heinemann or Cassell paid for the overseas rights. Authors at this time usually received a royalty of 3d per copy sold on colonial editions. His fourth Lawrence & Bullen title, *The Mate of the Vancouver*,<sup>86</sup> a novel with a North American setting, followed in September. In later years A. H. Bullen liked to regale his friends with the story that Roberts entered his office, threw the manuscript upon the table, "pulled out a huge and ferocious knife" and "said savagely 'I want a hundred pounds on account for this.'"<sup>87</sup> Bullen said "that of course he agreed to it instantly. What else could he do?"<sup>88</sup>

It seems that he received far less for volumes of stories than for novels (though this was compensated for by the prior sale to periodicals of

individual serial rights in the stories). Correspondence from 1892 shows that Roberts was pressing hard to sell his short stories but was constantly forced to placate Mrs Grundy, however not without cynical humour. A typical letter to the Authors' Syndicate reads:

Post Office, Sandgate  
29.8.92

Dear Mr. [W. G.] Gregg,

I send you herewith –

A Face in the Bush  
Shearing at Wombat Mountain  
The Purification of Dolores Silva

I should think the first ought to suit anyone. There is a good deal of cursing in no. 2. & no. 3. is very unconventional. But I daresay you will be able to place them.

I hope to see you next week

Yours very sincerely  
Morley Roberts<sup>89</sup>

In his 1930 autobiography, Arthur Conan Doyle, no doubt recalling Roberts' bitter complaints concerning Mrs Grundy at the Authors' Club, writes in jest of an editor telling him, "I have received a story from Morley Roberts, 5000 words, mostly damns."<sup>90</sup>

Before turning to Colles, Roberts had found it difficult to dispose of his short stories: from his first two volumes of stories, only one story achieved serialisation in a periodical before book publication. But he was quick to realise that by selling the serial rights of short stories to periodicals and then collecting them in book form he could increase his literary earnings. Thus he collected practically every short story he ever wrote, and regularly put together reshuffled collections over the next forty years. Seeing Roberts' example, it is surprising that Gissing, who only published one volume of stories in his lifetime, didn't follow suit.

From 1892 Colles found it much easier to sell Roberts' stories as the market for them began to boom. Suddenly editors couldn't have enough of them and the demand would continue unabated for decades to come. Within weeks of taking on Roberts' productions Colles sold "The Bull-Punchers" to *Phil May's Winter Annual* and "Red Jim of the S.P." to the *Illustrated London News* for £15.15s each.<sup>91</sup> Later that year he then introduced Roberts' work to a new market by selling a series of "Traveller's Tales" for £40 to the W. F. Tillotson Fiction Bureau at Bolton.<sup>92</sup> These stories, which Tillotson syndicated in provincial newspapers throughout Nor-



thern England, were collected in *Red Earth* in 1894.<sup>93</sup> Over the next decade eight further works by Roberts would be serialised before book publication, mostly by newspaper syndicates in the north of England. In May, his one known article that year, “Morley Roberts on George Gissing,” had appeared in the *Novel Review* for which he earned £9.9s. As a result his income for the year (excepting what he received from Heinemann and Cassell for the continental and colonial editions) was a respectable £255. By now his books were being noticed in a broad spectrum of periodicals and newspapers, and he had acquired a decent following. But he was aware that the likes of David Christie Murray, W. Clark Russell, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Henry Rider Haggard and many others could demand far higher returns for their literary works.<sup>94</sup> Whereas Tillotson had paid Roberts £40 in 1892 for the serialisation of *Red Earth*, that same year he gave Murray £525 for *Bob Martin’s Little Girl*, Russell £650 for *Alone on a Wide, Wide Sea*, Braddon £500 for *All Along the River*, and Haggard £500 for *Montezuma’s Daughter*.<sup>95</sup> Roberts would not come near to approaching such earnings for single works even in his most rewarding years either side of the turn of the century.

In contrast to previous years 1893 was an expensive one for Roberts. In April he knocked about Southern Europe with Henry Hyde Champion, in May travelled to America for a month, in August to Europe for a further month, in October to Paris for a few weeks, and in December eloped with Mrs Hamlyn first to Genoa, and then to Leghorn (Livorno), where they spent Christmas together. After being compelled by her brother-in-law, Rodney Fennessy,<sup>96</sup> to part from her on moral grounds, he reluctantly returned to England to the flat in Kilburn he had been sharing with Champion since the latter’s return from Aberdeen in November. He was nonetheless as productive as ever. Beside the ten short stories for Tillotson, 14 further stories and eight articles found places in periodicals and newspapers (some appearing in Champion’s short-lived socialist newspaper, the *Aberdeen Standard*).<sup>97</sup> For these latter he received about £180 for the British serial rights. One of the Tillotson stories, “A Modern Slave,” was sold in June to *Lazy Land* for £12.12s.<sup>98</sup> 1893 is the one year in the 1890s during which he did not bring out a book. He did however sell a serial, *The Earth Mother*, to *To-Day* for £30, taking his income for the year up to £222.<sup>99</sup>

By 1894 Roberts’ star was undoubtedly ascending. He was still learning his trade, writing too fast, producing mainly middling work and potboilers

for quick bucks, but his was a name to be reckoned with. 1894 was also a year of emotional turmoil. In February, three weeks after the closure of the *Aberdeen Standard*, his close friend, Champion, hissed at by his labour compatriots and harried by creditors, emigrated to Australia for good, accompanied by Mrs Hamlyn, whom Fennessy had thought it best to place far out of Roberts' reach. Roberts' friendship with Champion would endure until his death in 1928. In England Champion had regularly reviewed his books for the *Australasian* and for *The Melbourne Age* and in Australia he would continue to do so. And when he started the marvellously highbrow Book Lover's Library in 1899 he made sure to order his friend's new books upon publication, while making constant mention of Roberts' (and Gissing's) doings and opinions in *The Book Lover*, the library journal, for many years to come. After Champion's departure, a depressed Roberts

shared the Kilburn flat for a month with the penniless Frederick Rolfe, who had joined them in February from Aberdeen, where Champion had befriended him and employed him on the *Aberdeen Standard*. Inevitably they did not get on. Roberts makes brief mention of this episode in his “Autobiography,” not seeming to marry the as yet unknown Rolfe he knew with the notorious eccentric calling himself “Baron Corvo” of a few years later. He writes,

He [Champion] went out to Australia and left me in the house with a companion whom he had picked up somehow or somewhere, a destitute person, an ab[ject] poet, a man who believed he had invented coloured photography. He had been educated for a priest, but was so mad that the Scotch College in Rome would not ordain him, stating that he had no vocation. He used to stink the house out with awful preparations of garlic. When I found I was left there alone with him I took some kind of a pull on myself and went away in to rooms, I think in Bloomsbury, and gradually got back to habits of work. I left the priest manqué in the house and do not quite know how long he stayed or what he did with it. I am quite certain he did not pay the three quarters rent which Champion had forgotten when he went abroad.<sup>100</sup>

Roberts’ memory is a little foggy here – he was actually preparing to leave for America at the time. Champion had left him some money to give to Rolfe “to be used for clothes and things,” but not to be given to him all at once.<sup>101</sup> He had also charged him with introducing Rolfe to Colles and Jerome K. Jerome, which it appears he did not do. Roberts had banked the money with Colles and sent Rolfe occasional small amounts. He had got on with his work nonetheless, for in early March he wrote one of his finest stories “The Miracle of the Black Cañon,” a tale of gold hunters, which Colles sold to *Chapman’s Magazine*.<sup>102</sup>

A fortnight later he sailed to America on a hurried trip round the world, not before leaving Rolfe to his dismay with a small cheque and telling him to sling his hook. As John Barnes explains in his biography of Champion, Rolfe “claimed later that Champion had intended that [he] should join him in Australia.”<sup>103</sup> On arrival at New York, Roberts received a stinging letter from Rolfe accusing him of withholding money owing to him and abandoning him.<sup>104</sup> But Roberts was preoccupied with another matter. He had come to New York to investigate Snowden Thomas Hamlyn’s past. It seems that before joining the Union Army in 1861, Hamblin, as he was known then, had taken up acting like his father before him. At the plush Players’ Club Library at 16 Gramercy Park, Roberts could only find out that he had once played a supporting role in a performance of “Macbeth” on 21 March 1861 in which

Charlotte Cushman played Lady Macbeth.<sup>105</sup> Roberts then wrote to Professor Brander Matthews,<sup>106</sup> the founder of the Players' Club, for his help in uncovering some details about Hamlyn's life in America before he emigrated to England in 1871. Intent on finding evidence that Hamlyn was a bigamist, Roberts next travelled by train to San Francisco to investigate the marriage registers there.<sup>107</sup> In mid-May, his detective work having been in vain, he took passage to Sydney. On 17 May 1894,<sup>108</sup> on its way through the South Seas, his boat having stopped for a few hours at Apia to deliver the post, Roberts took the opportunity to see if he could arrange a meeting with the island's most famous inhabitant. Within the hour he saw a tall, emaciated figure approach on a horse in the town centre, and he knew he had his man. Roberts and Robert Louis Stevenson repaired to the steamer where they spent the remaining three hours before the boat's departure talking and sipping lemonade in the saloon. Before taking his leave of Stevenson, he presented him with a copy of *The Western Avernus*. Roberts landed in Sydney in early June, took an express train to Melbourne, and was then reunited with Alice and Champion, who were staying at the house of Champion's lover, Adelaide Hogg.<sup>109</sup> Whilst there Roberts defended his actions to Champion regarding Rolfe. Within the month Fennessy was sending cables insisting that he and Alice return to Europe. Seeing no other course, they took a boat to Naples and journeyed on to Genoa to be met by Fennessy, who again forced Roberts to part from Alice, apparently for good. Roberts returned to England, while Alice set up quarters in Switzerland with her mother and sister. On getting back to London in July Roberts learned that his globe-trotting brother, Cecil,<sup>110</sup> was sick. He died at the end of the month, and Roberts determined to write his biography. For some reason he never did.

That year he published two books. The contract for the first of these, *The Purification of Dolores Silva and Other Stories*,<sup>111</sup> a volume of just 31,000 words, which appeared in May 1894 in an edition of 1,000 copies, is a curiosity. Roberts waived an advance, agreeing instead to accept a royalty of 2d in the shilling per copy sold at 3s 6d. Reviews were mixed and the book failed to achieve a second edition. In October Lawrence & Bullen brought out *Red Earth*, for which Roberts was probably paid £25. The book sold well without going into a second edition. It was the last book Roberts published with the firm. In the autumn Roberts was ill and financially *in extremis*. Some months previously, his doctor<sup>112</sup> had told him that he only had a few years to live and that he should get away from London. In this mood he hastily penned a novel, *The Degradation of Geoffrey Alwith*,<sup>113</sup> about a man who is also told he is soon to die: it is the most relentlessly morbid story he

ever conceived. In October, by now somewhat desperate, he wrote to Colles asking for some money, but was bluntly told to apply to the Royal Literary Fund. Roberts replied that he would rather cut his throat and asked Colles if he could arrange for him to write a weekly column for *Chums*, the weekly boys' magazine, on various subjects such as life in the colonies, animals, football, and rugby. Then on 26 November Colles obtained £50 in advance of royalties for *Geoffrey Alwith*, which was to be published in 1895. He had also placed five stories and two essays for a return of £51, taking Roberts' income for 1894 up to £155 including his share of receipts for *Dolores Silva* (assuming that 1,000 copies were sold resulting in total receipts of £175 with £29.3s.4d accruing to the author).<sup>114</sup> The sale of *Geoffrey Alwith* seems to have bailed Roberts out and he spent December recuperating in Naples, where he contrived to meet up with Alice again.

Although 1895 was a less travelled year, it was a productive one. After Colles had failed to sell the serial rights of a group of linked stories entitled *The Adventures of a Ship's Doctor*, Roberts personally negotiated with Tillotson selling them for £40.<sup>115</sup> In February *The Degradation of Geoffrey Alwith* came out simultaneously in England and in America and was not much liked. In May Ward & Downey published *The Master of the Silver Sea*<sup>116</sup> in a first edition of 3,000 copies selling in cloth at 1s 6d and in paperback at 1s. Roberts received £50 in advance of royalties, which it never earned as the company went bust in 1897 before all the copies could be sold. Towards the end of June he went to the Lake District with Alice, now housed with her mother at Battersea, staying five weeks in Ullswater. In August, shortly after his return to London, *The Adventures of a Ship's Doctor*<sup>117</sup> was published by Ward & Downey and much praised. H. G. Wells, who reviewed the book for *The Saturday Review*, writes, "These 'yarns' are good—and one or two are 'powerful'—despite the rind of quite unnecessary and very uninteresting dialogue surrounding each."<sup>118</sup> Roberts gained £50 for the book. At the end of August, a short novel he had completed two years previously, *The Courage of Pauline Camacho*,<sup>119</sup> began to be serialised in the *Illustrated London News*. Colles had encountered much trouble in disposing of the serial rights: *To-Day* and Fisher Unwin had rejected it in 1894. Clement King Shorter, who had bought some of Roberts' short stories for the *Sketch* and with whom he was on familiar terms, agreed to purchase the serial rights early in 1895 for £63. During its five-week run in *The Illustrated London News* the story was handsomely got up with illustrations by R. Caton Woodville. A further novel, a strange story about a caddish clubman who, wanting a child, can't choose between the barren woman he loves and a working-class woman carrying his child, entitled *A Question of Instinct: An*

*Analytical Study*,<sup>120</sup> appeared to much disdain in November. The *Athenæum* critic began his review ominously, “It is most sincerely to be hoped that Mr. Morley Roberts will never again attempt an ‘analytical study’ of this kind” and ended it by saying, “In short, this is a disagreeable book, unrelieved by any merit.”<sup>121</sup> No less derogatively and harshly, the critic for the *Speaker* wrote, “It is long enough to contain an inordinate amount of twaddle and a sufficient quantity of dirt to befoul a horsepond.”<sup>122</sup> Roberts had anticipated a resounding success and was deeply depressed by the negative reviews. By this time he was regularly corresponding with Henry Hyde Champion. And now, much discouraged by the failure of his latest novel, the low sales of his books, and the meagre living he earned by his pen, he was seriously contemplating giving up writing and starting a new life in Australia. Champion was urging him to come over to test the waters, promising a much better and healthier lifestyle. No less relevantly, there were signs in recent years that Roberts and Gissing were gradually drifting apart. Despite Roberts’ best efforts to stay in touch, they had met infrequently, and too often Gissing had seemed reluctant to meet him (the deterioration of his marriage was assuredly to blame for this). This would become matter for discussion in their correspondence the following March.<sup>123</sup> For the present this may have been one other reason prompting him to leave England. On 3 November Gissing *had* written mildly praising *A Question of Instinct*. Roberts had sold the copyright for only £50 in advance of royalties. The contract, as Mary Ann Gillies explains, “contained the clause ‘Fourthly, The copyright of the said book shall remain the property of the Publishers.’”<sup>124</sup> This was typical of many contracts in the early 1890s, but in Roberts’ case it was to be the last book he sold outright. Further to this Colles managed to sell six short stories and three articles for just over £75 at the usual rate of three guineas per thousand words.<sup>125</sup> In 1895 Roberts earned £328.

(To be continued)

<sup>1</sup> Morley Roberts, *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912); *W. H. Hudson: A Portrait* (London: Eveleigh Nash & Grayson, 1924); *The Western Avernus* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1887).

<sup>2</sup> John Galsworthy (1867-1933), novelist and playwright; Margaret Storm Jameson (1891-1986), novelist and critic; Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), physician and writer; George Gilbert Aimé Murray (1866-1957), classical scholar.

<sup>3</sup> Horace Annesley Vachell (1861-1955), novelist and playwright; Charles Marriott (1869-1957), novelist and art critic; Edmund Henry Lacon Watson (1865-1948), novelist, critic, and essayist.

<sup>4</sup> John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Harlow: Longman, 2009), p. 547.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> The unpublished “Autobiography,” held in the Morley Roberts Papers, Ms. Coll. 726, Box 8, Folder 158, at the University of Pennsylvania, is a 43-page typewritten account of his childhood and early literary friendships. There is also a 21-page earlier draft which only describes his childhood.

<sup>7</sup> Henri van Laun (1820-1896), literary translator and teacher.

<sup>8</sup> Unpublished “Autobiography,” p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Edmund Yates (1831-1894), novelist, dramatist, and editor.

<sup>10</sup> “Sonnet,” *Time*, IX, July 1883, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup> Unpublished “Autobiography,” p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> “Night,” *Time*, IX, September 1883, p. 351.

<sup>13</sup> Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), poet, painter, and illustrator.

<sup>14</sup> “Concerning Sheep,” *Cornhill Magazine*, LIX, December 1888, pp. 582-90.

<sup>15</sup> James Payn (1830-1898), novelist and editor.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Mouat, “Morley Roberts in the Western Avernus,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 93:1, Winter 2001-2002, pp. 26-36.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. Mouat is also wrong in stating that the last edition of the book was the 1924 Everyman edition. J. M. Dent & Sons brought out an edition in 1941 in their “Literature of Yesterday & To-Day” series.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Macmillan (1818-1896), co-founder of Macmillan & Co.

<sup>19</sup> Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, 1886-1888*, Volume Three (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992), p. 99.

<sup>20</sup> British Library, Add. Mss.55940, pp. 96-7.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph William Comyns Carr (1849-1916), drama and art critic, author, editor, and theatre manager.

<sup>23</sup> “Love the Eternal,” *English Illustrated Magazine*, IV, July 1887, p. 684; “Lethe,” *English Illustrated Magazine*, V, April 1888, p. 459; “The Old Tryst,” *English Illustrated Magazine*, V, August 1888, p. 761.

<sup>24</sup> Fanny Newhouse Kimber (1858-1914).

<sup>25</sup> F. Wilson McComb, *M.G. by McComb* (Princes Risborough, Bucks: Shire Publications Ltd), pp. 17-18.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Kimber (1858-1919); Cecil Kimber (1888-1945), automobile engineer and inventor of the two-seated MG sports car.

<sup>27</sup> George Lillie Craik (1837-1905), publisher, and husband of Dinah Mulock Craik (1826-1887), the bestselling novelist and poet.

<sup>28</sup> *Maurice Quain* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1897).

<sup>29</sup> “John Romer, Pessimist,” Reader’s Report by George Lillie Craik, British Library, Add. Mss. 55940, pp. 181-83.

<sup>30</sup> *In Low Relief, A Bohemian Transcript*, two vols (London: Chapman & Hall, 1890).

<sup>31</sup> *Joy Cometh in the Morning: A Country Tale*, two vols (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1888).

<sup>32</sup> Unpublished “Autobiography,” pp. 39-40.

<sup>33</sup> “Life in Death,” *Chambers’s Journal*, 6:312, 21 December 1889, p. 816.

<sup>34</sup> “Hunger and Thirst in Australia,” *Murray’s Magazine*, IV, August 1888, pp. 237-50; “The Pastels at the Grosvenor,” *Scottish Art Review*, 1:7, December 1888, pp. 178-80; “The Stuart Exhibition,” *Scottish Art Review*, 1:9, February 1889, 267-68; “The Hardships of

Travelling in the Interior,” *Western Mail* (Perth, Australia), 11 May 1889, p. 23; “Two Voyages: A Steerage Passage,” *Murray’s Magazine*, V, June 1889, pp. 803-09; “Two Voyages: In the Fo’c’sle,” *Murray’s Magazine*, VI, July 1889, pp. 189-95; “A Colony of Artists,” *Scottish Art Review*, 2:3, August 1889, pp. 72-7.

<sup>35</sup> Arthur David McCormick (1860-1943), genre painter and illustrator.

<sup>36</sup> Unpublished “Autobiography,” pp. 30-1.

<sup>37</sup> Pierre Coustillas, “A Writer’s Novitiate: An Unpublished Essay by Morley Roberts,” *Gissing Journal*, XXIX, July 1993, pp. 16-26.

<sup>38</sup> See letter to Margaret, 29 September 1889, and letter to Algernon, 30 September 1889, in *Collected Letters of George Gissing, 1889-1891*, Volume Four, pp. 117 and 119.

<sup>39</sup> Lever Brothers, *The “Sunlight” Almanac* (Port Sunlight: Lever Bros Ltd., 1889).

<sup>40</sup> After selling *Demos* outright in 1886 and regretting having no part in the profits of new cheap editions, Gissing decided the following year to retain the copyright of *Thyrza* in order to have his share in royalties. But whereas before Smith, Elder had immediately brought out cheap editions following the first editions of novels Gissing sold to them outright, on this occasion they held back from doing so. But when Gissing had reluctantly sold the copyright in 1891, Smith, Elder brought out a cheap edition within months. Having failed to gain any real profit from the royalty system with *Thyrza*, Gissing reverted back to selling his works outright. For Smith, Elder’s shabby treatment of Gissing with regard to *Thyrza* see Frederick N. Nesta, “The *Thyrza* Contract and Two Unpublished Letters,” *Gissing Journal*, XL, January 2004, pp. 35-42.

<sup>41</sup> *Collected Letters of George Gissing, 1886-1888*, Volume Three, p. 222.

<sup>42</sup> Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance: An Autobiography* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1934), p. 252.

<sup>43</sup> *Collected Letters of George Gissing, 1892-1895*, Volume Five, p. 77.

<sup>44</sup> Francis Henry Gribble (1862-1946), novelist and critic; Dr Kershaw Thorpe Best (1841-1917), B.A. 1862, M.A. 1867 (Oxford), professor of languages; William Andrew Mackenzie (1870-1942), artist, journalist, poet, writer of detective stories, and former Secretary-General of the Save the Children International Union (SCIU); Henry Hyde Champion (1859-1928), socialist, editor, and loyal friend of Roberts’ all his life.

<sup>45</sup> Ubique [McCormack], “Our London Letter,” *Aberdeen Standard*, 9 December 1893, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> John Davidson (1857-1909), poet, playwright, and novelist; John Evelyn Barlas (1860-1914), socialist and decadent poet (pseudonym: Evelyn Douglas); Frederick Rolfe (1860-1913), writer and eccentric; Robert Harbrough Sherard (1861-1943), writer, journalist, and biographer.

<sup>47</sup> See “Autobiography,” p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Alice Bruce Roberts (1851-1911), daughter of Angiolo Robson Selous (1811-1883), dramatist and stock jobber at the London Stock Exchange, and Emily Selous, *née* Sherborn (1828-1911).

<sup>49</sup> Actually born as Thomas Snowden Hamblin (1841-1896). It is likely that Alice’s father had found work for Hamlyn at the Stock Exchange in the early 1880s. The 1881 census shows Snowden Hamblin living with the Selous family in Gloucester Road as a boarder and employed at the Stock Exchange.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Sowerby Hamblin (1800-1853), English actor, theatre manager, and womaniser, who, after an unsuccessful stage career in England, emigrated to America in 1825 and made his reputation there in tragic Shakespearean roles.



<sup>51</sup> Clement King Shorter (1857-1926), journalist, editor, and critic; Jerome Klappa Jerome (1859-1927), writer and editor; Arthur Henry Bullen (1857-1920), publisher, editor, and literary historian.

<sup>52</sup> James Eveleigh Nash (1873-1956), literary agent, publisher, and writer.

<sup>53</sup> "The True Function of Cannibalism," *Humanitarian*, IV, April 1894, pp. 283-89; "The Transvaal Question IV. The Case for England and the Empire," *To-Morrow*, I, February 1896, pp. 140-46.

<sup>54</sup> *Collected Letters, 1892-1895*, Volume Five, pp.105-06.

<sup>55</sup> Anon., "This Morning's News," *Daily News*, 1 October 1892, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Raymond Blathwayt (1852-1935), journalist.

<sup>57</sup> Raymond Blathwayt, "A Chat with Mr. Morley Roberts," *Novel Review*, November 1892, pp. 698-708.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 701-02.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 702.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 704-05.

<sup>61</sup> Ernest Bramah Smith (1868-1942), writer and humorist.

<sup>62</sup> Ernest Bramah Smith, "The Diary of a Bookseller," *To-Day*, 31 August 1895, p. 103.

<sup>63</sup> From the London Metropolitan Archives, Royal Humane Society Records, Case No: 25135. Rev. Frank N. Harvey (1864-1939) was a clergyman schoolmaster at Handel College, Southampton at the time of the incident, later the resident priest at Fawley, Hampshire, and he represented Hampshire Cricket Club as a wicket keeper around the turn of the century. He and W. H. Hudson received testimonials on parchment. The three rescued girls were Louise Nancy Aumonier (1871-1951), daughter of James Aumonier (1832-1911), the artist, who was then based at Shoreham, Ethel May Lee *née* Downey (1879-1953), and Brenda Elvira Pictor de Montigny *née* Langton (1878-1936). Ethel and Brenda both lived in Shoreham, the latter with her aunt, Sarah Langton, a neighbour of the Aumonier family. Roberts, who already knew Aumonier slightly, was presented by him with a pastel sketch of a Sussex Downs Farm as a token of his gratitude for saving his daughter's life.

<sup>64</sup> These articles were published in *Murray's Magazine* in 1890: "Buses and 'Busmen,'" VII, February, pp. 220-30; "Cabs and Cabmen," VII, March, pp. 377-86; "Waiters and Restaurants," VII, April, pp. 534-46; "Agitators and Demagogues," VII, May, pp. 673-82; "London River," VIII, July, pp. 76-84; "The Streets of London," VIII, December, pp.764-72; and 1891: "Great Steamship Lines I: The Western Ocean," IX, January, pp. 80-92; "Great Steamship Lines II: Steamships at Home in the Mersey," IX, February, pp. 254-68; "Great Steamship Lines III: The South Atlantic and Magellan's Straits," IX, March, pp. 398-413; "Great Steamship Lines IV: To the Cape of Good Hope," IX, May, pp. 660-70; "Great Steamship Lines V: The Mediterranean and Black Sea," IX, June, pp. 795-804; "Great Steamship Lines VI: East Through the Suez Canal," X, August, pp. 237-45.

<sup>65</sup> "Honey Hunting in Australia," *Field*, 18 January 1890, p. 82; "Hard Citizens," *Cornhill Magazine*, XIV, February 1890, pp. 143-48; "Kittle Cattle," *Cornhill Magazine*, XIV, February 1890, pp. 202-10; "On a Californian Ranch," *Field*, 5 July 1890, pp. 41-2; "Nature's Gold Mining," *Field*, 18 October 1890, p. 574; "Railroad Wars in the West," *Field*, 22 November 1890, p. 781.

<sup>66</sup> Roger Milbrandt, "How Secure was George Gissing? A Study of Gissing's Income between 1889 and 1903," followed by a "Revision of George Gissing's 'Account of Books,'" *Gissing Journal*, XLV, No. 1, January 2009, p. 6.

<sup>67</sup> Anon., "Coming Men: Mr. Morley Roberts," *London Figaro*, 10 January 1891, p. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Pierre Coustillas, ed., *London and the Life of Literature in Late Victorian England: The Diary of George Gissing, Novelist* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978), p. 233.

<sup>69</sup> Anon., "Figaro's Coming Men: Mr. Algernon Gissing," *London Figaro*, 27 April 1892, pp. 3-4.

<sup>70</sup> "The Bronze Caster," *Macmillan's Magazine*, LXIII, January 1891, pp. 233-40.

<sup>71</sup> The unpublished "Autobiography" in the Morley Roberts Papers at the University of Pennsylvania includes a section that is an earlier, fuller treatment of his article "The Rhymers' Club," *John O'London's Weekly*, XXIX, 30 September 1933, pp. 901-02, and 908.

<sup>72</sup> Unpublished "Autobiography," p. 24.

<sup>73</sup> Chapter four is devoted to John Davidson in the unpublished "Farewell to Letters," Morley Roberts Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Pennsylvania. There are also chapters on Gissing, George Meredith, Henry James, Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham, W. H. Hudson, Gilbert Murray, John Barlas, John Galsworthy, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Arthur Conan Doyle.

<sup>74</sup> *Songs of Energy* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1891); and *Land-Travel and Sea-Faring* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1891).

<sup>75</sup> "Towards the Willandra Billabong," *Murray's Magazine*, IX, April 1891, pp. 533-45.

<sup>76</sup> *Adrift in America, or Work and Adventure in the States* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1891).

<sup>77</sup> *Collected Letters of George Gissing, 1892-1895*, Volume Five, p. 77.

<sup>78</sup> William Morris Colles (1865-1926), literary agent and founder of the Authors' Syndicate.

<sup>79</sup> Robert A. Colby, "'What Fools Authors Be!': The Authors' Syndicate, 1890-1920," *University of Texas Library Chronicle*, New Series, No. 35, 1986, p. 60.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>81</sup> James Brand Pinker (1863-1922); Alexander Pollock Watt (1834-1914).

<sup>82</sup> Roberts used the Authors' Club as his home and business address for many years well into the twentieth century. It also functioned as an ideal meeting place to socialise with other writers, editors, and publishers, who were often members themselves, and to cut deals with them. Roberts was undoubtedly chief among those taking advantage of such practices.

<sup>83</sup> S. S. McClure was the major American literary agency in the 1880s and 1890s. The company was run by Samuel Sidney McClure (1857-1949), a self-made man, who often had dealings in England with Tillotson's and A. P. Watt & Son for the syndication of works in America. McClure also issued the influential *McClure's Magazine* between 1893 and 1929, which published stories by the most prominent authors of the day such as Conan Doyle, Kipling, Henry James, and Mark Twain.

<sup>84</sup> *King Billy of Ballarat and Other Stories* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1892).

<sup>85</sup> *The Reputation of George Saxon and Other Stories* (London: Cassell & Co., 1892).

<sup>86</sup> *The Mate of the Vancouver* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1892).

<sup>87</sup> Unpublished "Autobiography," p. 33.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> From Morley Roberts to Mr Gregg, 29 August 1892, Letters to William Morris Colles 1890-1926 (Collection 2007), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

<sup>90</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (London: John Murray, 1930), p. 307.

<sup>91</sup> "The Bull-Punchers," *Phil May's Annual*, Winter 1892, pp. 49-60; "Red Jim of the S.P.," *Illustrated London News*, XIX, Summer Number 1892, pp. 34-5, 38, and 39.

<sup>92</sup> Thus the 10 “Traveller’s Tales” appeared in 1893 in the *Leicestershire Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury*, always on p. 4, as follows: “No. 1: Wide Bay Bar,” 4 March; “No. 2: Madame Morphine,” 11 March; “No. 3: A Modern Slave,” 18 March; “No. 4: The Fore-Runner,” 25 March; “No. 5: The Measuring of the Dhow: A Slave Tale,” 1 April; “No. 6: Snakes, the Man-O’-Warsman,” 8 April; “No. 7: Dead Finish,” 15 April; “No. 8: ’Ooxli,” 22 April; “No. 9: When She May,” 29 April; “No. 10: The Humorist of Sweetwater,” 6 May.

<sup>93</sup> Morley Roberts, *Red Earth* (London: Lawrence & Bullen, 1894).

<sup>94</sup> David Christie Murray (1847-1907), novelist and journalist; William Clark Russell (1844-1911), American novelist and journalist; Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915), bestselling novelist; Sir Henry Rider Haggard (1856-1925), popular adventure writer.

<sup>95</sup> For fees paid by Tillotson see Graham Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 89.

<sup>96</sup> Rodney John Fennessy (1837-1915), manager of the River Plate Bank of London and Buenos Aires, and husband of Emily Fennessy *née* Selous (1849-1905), Alice’s sister.

<sup>97</sup> All published in 1893: “Wattle Blossom,” *Sketch*, 1 February, pp. 35-6; “The Wedger-Off,” *Weekly Sun*, 19 March, p. 4; “The Knife,” *Weekly Sun*, 16 April, p. 3; “Panic,” *Illustrated London News*, CII, 12 June, pp. 35-8; “Shearing at Wombat Mountain,” *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 18 June, p. 6; “Faro Charlie,” *Pall Mall Budget*, 7 September, page unknown, and *Queenslander*, 21 October, p. 799; “A Good Woman,” *Humanitarian*, November, p. 400; “The Anarchist,” (collected as “A Weak Brother” in *The Great Jester*), *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 November, p. 3; “A Quiet Man,” *Aberdeen Standard*, 7 November, p. 4; “Fishing at Flynn’s Ford,” *Aberdeen Standard*, 9 November, p. 7; “A Face in the Bush,” *Graphic*, Christmas Number, 27 November, p. 17; “King Billy of Ballarat,” *Aberdeen Standard*, 23 December, p. 4; “A Domestic Tragedy,” *Aberdeen Standard*, 30 December 1893 to 20 January 1894, pp. 4-5, pp. 4-5, and pp. 4-5; “The Truth,” *The Vagabond’s Summer Annual*, ed. by G. B. Burgin, (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1893), pp. 49-65; “Law and Disease,” *Torch*, 3:1, 15 January, pp. 7-8; “The Idlers’ Club: On Good Resolutions,” *Idler*, II, June, p. 718; “The Idlers’ Club: Is Love a Practical Reality or a Pleasing Fiction?” *Idler*, III, July, pp. 113-14; “Some Portuguese Sketches,” *Cornhill Magazine*, LXIX, August, pp. 196-206; “My First Book: The Western Avernus,” *Idler*, III, August, pp. 91-9; “The Socialist Congress,” *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 12 August, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> “A Modern Slave,” *Lazy Land*, 1:2, June 1893, pp. 74-78.

<sup>99</sup> “The Earth Mother,” *To-Day*, I, 13 January 1894, pp. 1-3; 20 January 1894, pp. 28-31; 27 January 1894, pp. 28-31; 3 February 1894, pp. 5-7; and 10 February 1894, pp. 28-29.

<sup>100</sup> Unpublished “Autobiography,” pp. 22-23.

<sup>101</sup> Donald Weeks, *Corvo* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1971), p. 113.

<sup>102</sup> “The Miracle of the Black Cañon,” *Chapman’s Magazine*, II, October 1895, pp. 185-200.

<sup>103</sup> John Barnes, *Socialist Champion, Portrait of the Gentleman as Crusader* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd., 2006), pp. 195-96.

<sup>104</sup> See Henry Pelling, “Corvo and Labour Politics,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 February 1969, p. 137.

<sup>105</sup> Charlotte Saunders Cushman (1816-1876), famous American tragic actress who courted scandal by openly living in a lesbian relationship.

<sup>106</sup> James Brander Matthews (1852-1929), writer and professor of dramatics. See Morley Roberts to Matthews, 6 April 1894, Box 17, Brander Matthews Papers, 1827-1967, Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York City.

<sup>107</sup> The few facts known about Snowden Thomas Hamlyn do support the possibility of a previous marriage and a subsequent bigamous marriage to Alice Selous. Why did he change his name several times: at various times in his life he was called Thomas S. Hamblin, Thomas Hamlin, Snowden Hamblyn, and Snowden Thomas Hamlyn. And why did he leave America in 1871?

<sup>108</sup> Although Roberts says he visited Stevenson in late May or early June, the visit can be dated exactly as the volume of *The Western Avernus* he presented to him has the inscription “17.5.94. To Robert Louis Stevenson, from Morley Roberts.” See Frank Karlake, *Book Auction Records*, Volume Twelve (London: Karlake & Co., 1915), p. 259. Later, in November 1894, just weeks before Stevenson’s death, Roberts sent him a copy of *Red Earth*.

<sup>109</sup> Adelaide Lashbrooke Hogg *née* Elder (1854-1930) was married to Henry Roughten Hogg (1849-1923), the manager of a Melbourne merchant firm, Hogg Robinson & Co.

<sup>110</sup> Cecil Roberts (1860-1894).

<sup>111</sup> *The Purification of Dolores Silva and Other Stories* (London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1894).

<sup>112</sup> Dr Tom Robinson (1848-1916) was Roberts’ doctor at this time. Robinson was an art collector and had first met Roberts at one of the artist studios in Manresa Road in the late 1880s.

<sup>113</sup> *The Degradation of Geoffrey Alwith* (London: Downey & Co., 1895).

<sup>114</sup> All published in 1894: “Green River City,” *Aberdeen Standard*, 27 January, pp. 4-5; “Father and Son,” *Aberdeen Standard*, 3 February, pp. 4-5; “A Warm Lemonade” (collected as “At Waldo” in *Strong Men and True*), *To-Day*, II, 24 February, p. 89; “The Man-Eater,” *Idler*, IV, March, pp. 295-301; “Like a Man,” *Phil May’s Illustrated Winter Annual*, IV, pp. 45-8; See note 49 for “The True Function of Cannibalism”; “The Idlers’ Club: Duels and Duelling,” *Idler*, V, September, p. 217.

<sup>115</sup> “The Adventures of a Ship’s Doctor,” *Bolton Journal and Guardian*, 1895, page unknown.

<sup>116</sup> *The Master of the Silver Sea, A Tale* (London: Ward & Downey, 1895).

<sup>117</sup> *The Adventures of a Ship’s Doctor* (London: Downey & Co., 1895).

<sup>118</sup> H. G. Wells, “The Adventures of a Ship’s Doctor,” *Saturday Review*, LXXX, No. 2081, 14 September 1895, p. 356.

<sup>119</sup> “The Courage of Pauline Camacho,” *Illustrated London News*, CVII, 31 August to 28 September 1895, pp. 265-67, 297-99, 329-32, 361-63, and 393-94.

<sup>120</sup> *A Question of Instinct, An Analytical Study* (London: H. Henry & Co., 1895).

<sup>121</sup> Anon., “A Question of Instinct,” *Athenæum*, 3560, 18 January 1896, p. 83.

<sup>122</sup> Anon., “A Question of Instinct,” *Speaker*, XIII, 4 January 1896, p. 23.

<sup>123</sup> See Gissing’s letter to Roberts dated 17 March 1896 in the *Collected Letters of George Gissing, 1895-1897*, Volume Six, p. 110.

<sup>124</sup> Mary Ann Gillies, *The Professional Literary Agent in Britain, 1880-1920* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press Inc., 2007), p. 52.

<sup>125</sup> All published in 1895: “Far Off,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 12 March, p. 4; “The Taking of Eagle Pass,” *Supplement to the Manchester Weekly Times*, 17 May, p. 3; “The Arbitrator,” *English Illustrated Magazine*, XIV, October, pp. 89-94; “The Master of the Story,” *Weekly Sun Literary Supplement*, 30 November, p. 6; “The Figure-Head of the ‘White Prince,’” *English Illustrated Magazine*, XIV, December, pp. 243-49; “With Stevenson Last May,” *Saturday Review*, LXXIX, No. 2046, 12 January, pp. 38-9; “The Sailors’ Home at Hull,” *Hull Times*, 25 May, pp. 7-8; “The Idlers’ Club: A Question for Writers,” *Idler*, VII, July, p. 704.

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## Four Novels of George Gissing's by Edith Searle Grossmann

edited by MATTHEW WOOLLARD  
University of Essex

The contemporary critical response to Gissing's fiction has recently been opened up through the mass digitisation of newspapers and many previously unrecorded reviews have been rediscovered. One of the most fruitful sources of "new" reviews is in the newspapers of New Zealand where, to this writer's knowledge, over 20 notices and reviews have recently been traced.<sup>1</sup> Many of these reviews are plot summaries, some provide some real criticism. One longer critical piece, published in the *Otago Witness* in two parts on 21 and 28 April 1892,<sup>2</sup> deserves special attention as it discusses four of Gissing's novels. Its significance stems from its treatment of Gissing's works as a conscious programme advancing social reform.

The author of this piece, Edith Searle Grossmann (8 September 1863-27 February 1931) was a school teacher, journalist, novelist and by all accounts one of New Zealand's first feminists. The bones of her life and works can be found in Kirstine Moffat's biographical and critical sketch in a special issue of *Kōtare: New Zealand Notes and Queries*.<sup>3</sup> She published four novels: *Angela: A Messenger* (under her maiden name Edith Searle) (1890), *In Revolt* (1893), *A Knight of the Holy Ghost* (1907) and *The Heart of the Bush* (1910). From 1885-1890 she taught at Wellington Girls' High School during which time she also published essays in magazines. In 1890 she married and as Grossmann she continued to publish articles and reviews.

This critical piece discusses four of Gissing's novels: *Demos*, *Thyrza*, *The Nether World*, and *New Grub Street*. The last three of the novels would have been easily available to her as colonial editions had been published but there is no evidence that *Demos* had been published in New Zealand or Australia. A review of that novel had appeared in the *Otago Daily Times* on 12 May 1890, which neglected to mention the publisher.<sup>4</sup> The following day's edition notes the book had been supplied by Messrs Wise, Caffin, and Co., Dunedin publishers, but there is no record of their having published *Demos*.<sup>5</sup> Grossmann was clearly aware that Gissing had written other novels, but either considered them as irrelevant to the main thrust of her argument or simply did not have access to them.

## Four Novels of George Gissing's by Edith Searle Grossmann<sup>6</sup>

### I

To the average colonial the name of George Gissing is more or less unfamiliar. Yet four of the novels offered to the public—*Demos*, *The Nether World*, *New Grub Street*, and *Thyrza*—are on one of the most widely-debated subjects of the present day. They are not romances; the surroundings at least are not even fictions. They are treatises on the poverty of London—that problem which has evoked so many idealistic and materialistic theories in the religious and philanthropic world. Nor is this subject one beyond the limits of colonial interest. The evolution or insolubility of that vast mass of savage crime and misery is a question of the most vital importance to the colonies. For we have started on the same social laws as those of the Old World, and if there be no remedy for poverty the future of our own towns will be like the present of London; and the progress of all civilisation will mean nothing but increase of luxury for the few, and worse and worse slavery and barbarism, among the mass of men and women—barbarism no longer content with animal unconsciousness, but more than half conscious: all the more terrible because into it are plunged from time to time many born and bred in the most highly-developed refinements and self-consciousness; barbarism embittered by the sharpness of contrast, and degraded, not raised, by keener intellect, hopeless aspirations, and despairing efforts at resistance.

Was the slavery of the antique world worse than this?—the much-abhorred slavery of the negro race?—the serfdom of feudal times? Owners had at least some interest in their human chattels. The best of them might even feel some sense of duty and responsibility towards those by whose service in peace or in war they lived and were great. But what bond is there between a lady and the needlewoman, whose youth and nerve and health are sacrificed to adorn one she has never seen? What between the lord and his tailor?—the rich proprietor and his under-paid clerk? None whatever. The producers are one class, the consumers another—gods of Olympus, as Gissing himself suggests, but gods rather according to Epicurus than according to Homer.

Face to face with the fact of poverty there are two alternatives before us—a system of *laissez faire*, which may mean indifference or flat despair, or the working out of some theory and means of remedy. London but offers us in mass what we see in fractions in our chief colonial towns, yet the

conditions of society are there so definitely marked, the drama on so huge a scale, that it is from London we expect some definite conclusion.

What, then, is the actual state of society in London? From our earliest childhood we have been familiar with the ghost of that distant poverty. Prints, books, tracts, newspapers, religious societies, and periodicals, treatises, novels, lectures, sermons, poems, and songs urge it upon us till it haunts our imagination and chills our very lives. Even if we could consider it as in no way touching the future of the colonies, mechanical inventions have so united the English Empire that we can by no means stand apart. Yet in spite of the continual presence of this poverty before our minds we conceive it in a vague and shapeless form—it lies upon us as a vast, unrelieved, unvarying mass, a mere impalpable darkness. Religious propagandists are accountable for this. Apart from Dickens the religious point of view is the prevailing one—much later on in life than that period of youth when our impressions were derived from the tuneful wailings of angel crossing-sweepers in middle-class parlours and drawing rooms. In the periodicals of Dr Barnardo, the Salvation Army, and various denominational missions, we get the same constantly recurring types. They make only two distinct ranks, the rich and the poor; and of the poor only two classes, the sinner—confirmed or converted—and the innocent victim. Such a picture appeals immediately to the susceptible. Yet it is so opposed to all intimate knowledge of average humanity that the intellect must be more or less clouded by sentiment before accepting it. Of the reproduction in coarser and more elemental forms of all the varied passions, sentiments, instincts, and circumstances that we personally experience; of the existence of innumerable characters, pleasures—savage or innocent—pains, jealousies, social distinctions and humour—of the humour so broad in self-consciousness, so subtle in unconsciousness; of all the features in this “nether world” we get scarcely the faintest glimpse.

It is this nether world into which Gissing introduces. Even Besant’s sketches are comparatively superficial and theoretic. But Gissing’s first object is to set before us the actualities of London poverty. Each “novel” presents some special phase of the lower strata of society. This working out of one form at a time is done as deliberately as it was by Balzac, and if Gissing has no such connected system as had the artist who planned the “Comédie Humaine,” his works yet are closely related to each other.

His titles have at once the suggestiveness and the freedom from flagrant sensationalism which are the immediate marks of genius. *Demos* is a description of the people, the mob, bringing prominently forward the

ineradicable distinctions between them and the cultured class. It shows us the people in practical rebellion, which wants only concentration to result in something more than isolated riots and uproars. The prominent character is a leader of the people, a socialist who has received some education, but no culture. Brought up among London artisans, Richard Mutimer has acquired pre-eminence by rude force of character when the sudden death of an uncle leaves him heir to an estate in the country. How will wealth affect this man of the people? Will a capitalist carry out socialistic schemes, or if he does, how far will they go towards satisfying "Demos"? Can the gulf between the people and the aristocracy be bridged over? When the means are in his hand, Richard sets to work to carry out his schemes, and show what a capitalist should be. He brings workmen away from London, and sets up model cottages and mining works. The beautiful quiet dales are defaced with his mines and buildings. Yet already he has deserted his class. As a great proprietor he cannot marry the workgirl to whom he has been engaged, and forsaking Emma Vine he marries a lady. Their marriage, in which there is no union, typifies the impossible attempt to join together two opposite classes. When the later will of his uncle is discovered he is dispossessed and returns to London, ruined and embittered. But among socialists he is now a suspected man; suspicion is at last worked up into a fury by stories of his heartless desertion of Emma, and he is killed by a stone thrown in a street row—neither martyr nor criminal.

It is not for the plot that any of these novels deserve careful thought—it is for the incidental pictures of surroundings, vivid and coarsely graphic. Gissing is a novelist not so much of character as of society. His books give the impression of numbers of lives closely touching each other, pressing upon and interfering the one with the other, and around them still greater multitudes, though amongst this densely crowded mass each woman and each man has a cruel and hapless solitude of heart and soul.

*Thyrza* is a less remarkable book—the weakest of the four. It is in its main outline a love story, the life of an individual who may indeed be the type of a number, but whose unhappiness is to some extent artificial. There is not about *Thyrza*'s fate the grim sense of doom that weighs down Clara Hewett, Edwin Reardon, or Richard Mutimer. *Thyrza* embodies the soft luxurious artist nature, susceptible to impressions, craving for love and applause, for beauty and variety. A beautiful creature gifted with a wonderful voice, she has been fostered among the uncongenial hardship, the drudgery and scant pleasures of London workgirls. By the devotion of her elder sister Lydia, *Thyrza* becomes engaged to Gilbert Grail, an artisan who



without genius has a thirst for knowledge, and who having no leisure has given up his hours of sleep to study. But the girl's beauty and grace attract a man of a different class—Walter Egremont, owner of the Lambeth candle factory, where Grail is condemned to spend his life in dreary and unwholesome toil. Egremont is an idealist trying to awaken in his men a sense of beauty by a series of lectures on literature. But all that he accomplishes is the wreck of Gilbert Grail's life. The two men have formed an unusually strong friendship till love springs up between Egremont and Thyrsa. Her despairing passion drives her from her home just before the wedding day. Suspicion falls on Egremont, and even when Thyrsa is found friendship between the two men is no longer possible. The lectures have been useless. Still Egremont can marry Thyrsa, and fired with that hope the girl studies and cultivates her voice. But he mistrusts himself and keeps away till he hears she is dead. In this novel too are vigorous sketches, powerful, though mainly repulsive—Totty Nancarrow, the free, rough, kind-hearted girl; the "Little Shop with the Great Heart"; the "friendly lead"; Dalmaine, friend of the working man (of whom Gissing remarks the only working man he really cared for was himself); old Boddy, with his violin; Sarah Gandle in her coffee shop.

## II

The two books which raise Gissing to the rank of genius have their scope well indicated by their names—*The Nether World* and *New Grub Street*. Between these two it is difficult to decide the claim for superiority. As a detailed piece of realism, coarse and often revolting, but without any sign of exaggeration and weakness, *The Nether World* deserves to be put beside the hell on earth that Marcus Clark described.<sup>7</sup> Even the grossness of physical horror in the "Inferno" becomes absorbed in contemplation of an ideal purpose; but the two modern writers discard the unseen regions and the ideals of faith.

Gissing lays his scene in Clerkenwell, and in still lower regions round about. The opening scenes pass from a London cemetery to a beer shop, and thence to a lodging kept by a Mrs Peckover and her daughter "Clementiner." The description of this work girl "Clem.,"—her "frank brutality, her lust for sanguinary domination, her coarsely magnificent face and form"—a creature of "a rank, evilly-fostered growth in the putrid soil of that nether world," has a strength and an originality superior to anything else of Gissing's creations. Upstairs are her lodgers: Mrs Hewett, a blood-

less, sapless woman, nursing a feeble infant; her husband, an embittered socialist who has known ease and comfort; his daughter Clara, a handsome clever girl of strong will, and intense, devouring ambition. Clara leaves home to become an actress, but at the moment when, after years of drudgery, a chance is given her of taking the leading part, vitriol is thrown over her by her rival, so that after terrible illness she survives only as a constant sufferer, her face burnt and unsightly till death. Clara is but one among many whose fates end in tragic distress and ruin. Bob, her brother, corrupted by Clem., killed while escaping from the police; Grace Rudd, Clara's former friend, who, having destroyed her rival's life, throws herself down to be crushed by the train; poor devoted servile "Penny-loaf," Bob's wife, whose babies die of cold and hunger; Kirkwood, with artistic instincts, crushed and wasted, destined to pass his days working and waiting on a sufferer half maddened by pain and wrecked ambitions.

But what *New Grub Street* lacks in realistic power it makes up for in literary style. The language is incisive to a point beyond that reached in the other three novels. Dealing with a society of necessity intellectual, the dialogue is epigrammatic, with a certain terse cynical humour—as in Jasper Milvain's axiom, "You have to become famous before you can secure the attention which would give fame"; his remark to his sister, "It is a pity you are not rich, you would have a distinct reputation for wit"; Biffen's phrase, "The ignobly decent."

Apart from style there is an interest in this book, closest indeed to writers. The subject is the actual life among literary people, the famous and wealthy exceptions, the unknown mass of hack writers who toil and drudge from day to day and year to year "under the shadow of the dome" in London fog or London heat. Here, as in *The Nether World*, the plot, if it can be called a plot, is complicated by the stories of many lives connected by chance or necessity. Perhaps the most striking incidents are those in the life of Edwin Reardon, a man of solid education who by chance makes a hit by one of his novels, and in the flush of his successes marries a beautiful but unsympathetic girl. After marriage the impulse to write entirely departs. Pressed by poverty he forces himself to work whose inferiority is a torment to him. His brain seems dried up; he produces his miserable failures at the cost of mental and physical torture, his wife meanwhile blaming him in her heart for the hardships and privations into which he has dragged her. After distraction and desires for suicide he finally accepts a clerkship, thus utterly estranging Amy, his wife. She leaves him, and summonses him to her only when by the deathbed of their child. When he comes he is himself dying.

She nurses him with a revival of tenderness; but the next event we hear of in her life is her marriage with the rising young journalist, Jasper Milvain, who has deserted another girl to ally himself to the now wealthy widow. The book closes with something like a profane duet of love between the pair, called forth by a sudden pecuniary success of Jasper's. Not less ironically tragical is the suicide of Harold Biffen, and the misery of Alfred Yule, the conscientious but bitter critic attacked in destitute old age by blindness.

It is to such works as these and not to the over-strained sentiment of *A Life's Morning* that Gissing will owe his fame. He is at his best an uncompromising realist—not with that realism which delights in mere ugliness, but that which comes to a strong nature forced to see the utmost degradation of humanity. He has no panacea. One by one he sets forth all the theoretical sovereign remedies of others, and pitilessly works them out to their inglorious end—socialism in *Demos*; idealism in *Thyrza*; education and habits of thrift, economy, and charity in *The Nether World*; talent in *New Grub Street*—all human struggles of heart and brain, and will only add to the torments of that *peine forte et dure* of poverty. Religion cannot help them. Religion is not conceivable in Gissing's world. Love frets itself into hate in the degrading cares of wretched homes; pleasure—Besant's remedy—is useless. They have pleasures of their own days at the Crystal Palace ending in drunken street fights, coarse suppers, evenings in dram shops. The rich do them more harm than good; they cannot understand these half-savage, half-civilised men and women, who yet are of like passions with themselves.

There is a possible remedy for individual cases—"money, the root of all good," as Gissing calls it; but this is worse than no help for the mass. Yet is he right even for the individual? Has he not himself hinted at the miseries, anxieties, and sins of the rich? Is not that world of opulence, beautiful, blissful, and good, only because it is at so remote a distance from those who long for it?

The world he sees is the world of the materialist. He knows nothing of lives which in the midst of toil and pain are "faithful prayers"; he has no conception of those loves that "endure in higher love." The picture he draws, true enough of a part, is not true of the whole. Unconsciously whilst labouring faithfully at those material forms he can see, he preaches a great sermon on the absolute need of something—faith, religion, or philosophy—beyond the limits of sense. Showing us the bare details of life, he gives an emphatic warning against his own materialistic creed.

Perhaps not so vainly as Gissing thinks are efforts made to relieve the poor. Let them but be sincere, let them but spring, not out of self-righteousness or *ennui* or sentimentalism, but of a true love human or divine, and though they may not move the whole social fabric, there will be some lives they have not failed to touch and bless. Even Gissing hints at this. The sacrifice and love of one is a beneficent influence to all around. No scheme is needed—it works unconsciously. It is the growing spirit of fellowship—that spirit which recognises its responsible kinship to every human life near it. It is to the emergence of this spirit from sectarianism to universality—to this, if to anything—we shall owe the solution of “the social problem.”

<sup>1</sup> To date the following notices and reviews have been identified from the Papers Past Website ([www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz](http://www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz)): *Demos: Te Aroha News*, 21 May 1887, p. 4; *Otago Daily Times*, 12 May 1890, p. 3; *Thyrza: Star* (New Zealand), 5 August 1891, p. 2; *Otago Daily Times*, 5 September 1891, p.5; *A Life's Morning: Auckland Star*, 12 January 1889, p. 8; *The Nether World: Auckland Star*, 1 June 1889, p. 3; *Te Aroha News*, 5 June 1889, p. 4; *Star* (New Zealand), 10 June 1889, p. 2; *Otago Daily Times*, 22 March 1890, p. 5; *The Emancipated: Otago Daily Times*, 2 February 1895, p. 3; *New Grub Street: Star* (New Zealand), 9 December 1891, p. 4; *Otago Witness*, 19 May 1892, p. 25; *Denzil Quarrier: Otago Daily Times*, 13 July 1895, p. 3; *The Odd Women: Otago Daily Times*, 1 July 1893, p. 5; *In the Year of Jubilee: Star* (New Zealand), 28 February 1895, p. 2; *The Whirlpool: Otago Daily Times*, 11 September 1897, p. 3; *Human Odds and Ends: Auckland Star*, 22 January 1898, p. 2; *Star* (New Zealand), 3 February 1898, p. 2; *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study: Auckland Star*, 18 June 1898, p. 2; *The Town Traveller: Otago Witness*, 29 December 1898, p. 43; *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft: Auckland Star*, 22 August 1903, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Otago Witness*, 21 April 1892, p. 40 and 28 April 1892, p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Kirstine Moffat, “Edith Searle Grossmann, 1863-1931,” *Kōtare: New Zealand Notes and Queries*. Special Issue – Essays in New Zealand Literary Biography Series One: “Women Prose Writers to World War I,” 2007 [electronic journal] <http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-Whi071Kota-t1-g1-t4.html>

<sup>4</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 12 May 1890, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 13 May 1890, p. 2, col. 5.

<sup>6</sup> In the original publication of both parts of this essay, Mrs. Grossmann’s name was spelled Groseman.

<sup>7</sup> Marcus Clarke (1846-1881), Australian author of *For the Term of His Natural Life*.

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## Book Reviews

### “Does one like Italy?”

*Neapel und der Süden. Fotografien 1848-1900.* Sammlung Siegert. Herausgegeben von Herbert W. Rott und Dietmar Siegert. Mit Texten von Dorothea Ritter und Annette Hojer. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011. 190 pp. ISBN 978-3-7757-3162-1. €39.80.

[Naples and the South. Photographs 1848-1900. Siegert Collection]

This catalogue of an exhibition which recently took place in Munich teaches us a wonderful lesson on ways of perceiving, of imagining, and it makes us wonder why we should die the proverbial death after seeing Naples. Is it because of the unbearable beauty of the city's location, its environment, its panoramas? How are we to know unless we go there and take with us this carefully produced, large-format volume (24,5 x 30,5 cm)? It presents the work of twenty photographers from five countries and displays 120 plates, 80 of which derive from the prodigious activity of the German-born Giorgio Sommer (1837-1914), the highly talented, renowned and successful *entrepreneur* of the camera.

The four parts of the volume—Naples and Surroundings (42 pp.), Pompeii and Vesuvius (28 pp.), Capri and the Sorrento Peninsula (22 pp.), Sicily (38 pp.)—invite us on a trip into a bygone world, as distant from present-day *Mezzogiorno* as can be, and yet vivid in our imaginations and dreams of a seemingly sane, carefree age, something we tend to long for in moments of pardonable ignorance. For what do those 120 photographs tell us in their diversity? Those still lifes—are they still alive within us readers and travellers? The longings for, and the expectations and demands of the particular—in short, the projections—that are ours before our southbound trip may fairly quickly wither away in the light of reality, and will be in conflict with sights enjoyed and insights gained during our visit. Take for instance the eruption of Vesuvius on 26 April 1872, documented by Sommer in a quick succession of photographs (taken at 3, 4, 4:30, and 5 pm); it is indeed overwhelming to watch and breathtaking by its sheer expansion, but it was surely and literally breathtaking for the people experiencing this natural spectacle on their doorsteps and fearing for their lives. Or again the laundry flapping in the wind of Via della Marina photographed also by Sommer about 1878: can we still smell its freshness, or is it already soiled with soot particles from the nearby harbour? Look also at some *maccheroni* eaters, Sommer's of 1865, and Giacomo Brogi's hand-coloured ones of 1880: these natives must have been asked to pose, thereby serving the photographers' needs to produce a well-selling genre

picture. Or are we to take seriously the atmosphere suggested by the hand-coloured *Dolce far niente* snapshot by the Alinari Brothers? Hardly, for we sense the poverty is being displayed, and we are embarrassed by the artificiality of the scene rather than able to enjoy the seemingly relaxed attitude of the youngsters.

Inseparable from this southern Italian paradise is the notion of death, as depicted by several of Sommer's photographs taken after the earthquake of 28 July 1883. Equally impressive is a series called "Impronte umane" (Human traces) taken by Sommer about 1870 showing eight plaster-cast models or Pompeians and a dog killed in the noted volcano disaster of 79 AD. Their bodies resemble sculptures in a museum garden, carefully arranged so as to remind us of how fragile and endangered life then was in spite of, and in view of, the surrounding Mediterranean beauty. Indeed, idyll and sheer misery, so we are told in many photographs, exist side by side. The views of Sicily, however, have an additional air of scientific study; exposure time and the choice of *sujet* make many of the motifs—views of Palermo and Catania; ruins of temples; a cathedral of the 7th century; street scenes from the liberation struggle in 1860—look sterile and sober, almost lifeless.

Some examples may underline what makes this volume so special—with its mix of still lifes, character (or genre) portraits and above all, social documentation. The first focus refers to two photographs both depicting Santa Lucia, the harbour boulevard briefly mentioned in chapter 1 of Gissing's travel narrative. One photograph taken about 1860 shows an almost deserted wide street, with hardly anybody to be seen and only one horse-drawn cart—the void may reflect the early morning hour or be a consequence of long exposure. We are left with the vision of a theatre stage, not of a thoroughfare in the vicinity of an important harbour. The second photograph taken after 1886 resembles much more the scene Gissing will have beheld when first visiting Naples not long thereafter and so vividly described in detail in his letters of November 1888: the place buzzes with life, a market is going on, carts are being pushed about, and even more important, streetcars pass along the *largo*.

The second example is a documentary-like series of ten full-page photographs of people—single individuals, couples, groups—taken by Sommer between 1865 and 1875; it leaves the viewer somewhat puzzled for these photographs seem to have been carefully arranged in a studio-like environment as one may conclude from the way the persons portrayed look straight at the camera; some of them do so quite ironically. The plates

(entitled “*Lazzarone*,” “*Tarantella Dancers*,” “*Pifferari*,” “*Pickpocket*,” ““*Si traduce il francese*,” “*Maroni Sellers*,” “*Night Watchman*,” “*Bungler*,” “*Maccheroni Eaters*,” “*Street Urchins Eating Bacon Rinds*”) betray a prejudiced attitude on the part of the photographer who presents us a set of—so-called typical?—characters, thereby guiding our way of seeing rather than enlightening us about the Neapolitan way of life. The people are positioned rather than caught at an unobserved moment.

The overall impression we are left with of this splendid and unique collection of photographs is a divided one. On the one hand, we are tempted to set forth immediately for the South and see the ancient sights with our own eyes—in spite of what is known of the cultural conditions of present-day Italy. On the other hand, we are held back by a kind of shadow hovering above, or penetrating, most plates, making us wonder what we are supposed to be doing there—visit townscapes and landscapes just for the sake of visiting them? Melancholy, even sadness colour the photographs, and they recall that sense of history which, with regard to things (southern) Italian, has hardly ever been so masterly expressed as by George Gissing in his letter to Catherine Wells of 3 October 1897: “Does one *like* Italy? The fact is, I always feel it a terrible country; its unspeakable beauty is inseparable from the darkest thoughts ... here one *remembers* so much more than in other countries. Age after age of strife and tyranny, of vast calamities, of unimaginable suffering in the palace & the hut. You feel something pitiless in the blue sky that has looked so tranquilly on all this. ... Yes, yes, one likes Italy; but in a very special sense of the word.”—The volume as such does not require further recommendation for Italophiles and amateurs of visualized history alike—it is a must-have.— Wulfhard Stahl, Bern

[The reviewer informs us that unfortunately the catalogue is no longer available.]

Francesco Marroni, *Victorian Disharmonies: A Reconsideration of Nineteenth-Century English Fiction*, Rome: The John Cabot University Press, 2010, distributed by the University of Delaware Press.

This volume is a selective exploration of a few Victorian novels which, we are told in the Acknowledgments, was first conducted in an Italian volume published under the imprint of Carocci, the Roman publisher, in 2002. Behind this attractively got up and, on the whole, well printed volume looms up a problem well known to scholars whose native language is not

English and whom circumstances practically compel to publish their work or at least part of it in the most easily understood language in the world.

The central subject of the book is an attractive one, so vast indeed that the whole of Victorian life would qualify for presence in its pages. Wherever men (and women) are present harmony seems to partake of wishful thinking. Quarrelling is reputed to be quasi-institutional—at international, national and domestic level. It is consequently no surprise to see that the scope of the author's study is drastically reduced and that it has shrunk to a handful of novelists and their work. A few of the big names have survived the process of compression. The vastness of the enquiry is reflected in the opening lines of the introduction where we are immediately plunged *in medias res*: "The Victorians felt continually besieged by the specter of disharmony and, in response to this dominant fear, transformed their lives into a tireless search for order."

Chapter 1 is devoted to *A Tale of Two Cities*: Dickens and the Guillotine, chapter 2 analyzes the question of death and the labyrinth of the Letter in Wilkie Collins's work, chapter 3 *Cousin Phillis*: Illness as Language, which reminds us that Francesco Marroni was once very actively interested in Elizabeth Gaskell, who is also the subject of chapter 4, and whose short stories are well worth reading. The last two chapters deal respectively with *The Whirlpool* and *Jude the Obscure*, the latter novel being of special interest to readers of this journal on account of Gissing's severe criticism of the incident that sparks off the first major narrative incident.

Francesco Marroni must surely be aware that his book invites a very close reading and some readers familiar with the history of Gissing's life and with the reception of his works will probably frown at his allusion to Henry James's remark about the artistic value of *The Whirlpool*. Is Marroni conscious that James's rather offensive article was reduced to a pulp by a modern critic who read the novel much more carefully than James did? For decades one critic at least had some unexpressed doubt about James's understanding of Gissing, and had reached the conclusion that James's mental rumblings, besides betraying self-satisfaction, were destined to throw smoke on a matter (the solidity of Gissing's novel) which he had not bothered to think of seriously. This is the place to emphasize again the illuminating assessment of *The Whirlpool* by Janice Deledalle-Rhodes in the present journal. Those critics who expressed their agreement with James about the fact that Gissing's novels, this one in particular, were remarkable for the degree of saturation with their subject they revealed, have been content to echo him unthinkingly.



Also at the beginning of the chapter about Gissing, we read that A. H. Bullen was Gissing's editor. Is this only a regrettable translator's blunder? Or are we to understand that at this late stage of Gissing studies, the crucial role played by Bullen in Gissing's professional life is still a source of confusion? It is to be feared that (1) the difference between a publisher and an editor is still unclear in some scholars' minds abroad; (2) that the Italian version of the book was read and later revised somewhat carelessly. As for H. G. Wells, whom Professor Marroni regards as an authority on Gissing, one wonders whether the fantastic error Wells made about *The Whirlpool* is known to the critic. Gissing's novel is emphatically not an apology for imperialism, as Wells has it, but a condemnation of it! Indeed, when Gissing read Wells's long review article on his works and the passage on imperialism, he was horrified, and said so!

There is a more general aspect of the book which is sure to embarrass some readers—its questionable readability. A critic, it seems to us, should never lose sight of the probable response of the persons he addresses, and we know of very few readers who would not object to being bombarded with pedantic words such as axiological, hermeneutic and episteme. A volume the aim of which is to throw light on the Victorian texts under discussion, should be cleansed of abstruse considerations that are as many obstacles in the unsophisticated reader's way. Disregarding this elementary rule of a noble game amounts to sawing off the fragile branch on which the critic is sitting. The publishers, Italian and American, that is the John Cabot University Press of Rome and their distributors the University of Delaware Press should have seen this clearly. The depth of the critic's message is certainly not increased by the obscurity of its verbal rendering. What are we to make (this occurs in a note to chapter 2 on Wilkie Collins) of this sentence beginning with "Of course": "sensation fiction was marked by what I would define as epistemic nondisjunction between a realistic technique of representation and a fantastic and *unheimliche* dimension..." Or of this: "the semantic field represented by the destructive vorticosity [in *The Whirlpool*] is the result, on a topological level, of a clash between internal and external space." Such things jar with carelessnesses of the common kind. Which is correct: Totowa or Towota? Jenny Calder or Jenni Calder? Howard's End or Howards End?

The book is a markedly slanted study of a selection of major Victorian novels, and most readers will find it difficult to assimilate. The only serious problem with it is its rather aggressive methodology, which, we venture to think, demands much from readers willing to struggle with its obtrusive jar-

gon. These reservations being made, it must be emphasized that Professor Marroni's book will remain a highly sophisticated example of scholarship written by a respected Italian academic who has done much to render accessible to Italian readers, notably through his translations, significant aspects of English literature. If the younger generations are prepared to keep at hand an up-to-date dictionary of literary terms when reading the book, they will probably clear some semantic hurdles much more easily than critics who find it difficult to renew their critical methods.—  
Pierre Coustillas

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### Notes and News

It is a common practice in the English press when the New Year looms ahead to consult a selection of cultural “big guns” on the “Books of the Year” they have enjoyed in the last twelve months. The *Times Literary Supplement* being no exception to the rule, we were not surprised on 2 December 2011 to see in it that D. J. Taylor, who is known to readers of this journal as a “Gissing buff,” mentioned *The Heroic Life of George Gissing* as a book of the year, but he could not resist the temptation of having a dig at the biographer for his so-called censoriousness. We thank him nonetheless though in turn we are tempted to ask him a few questions. Does he mean that the biographer should remain absolutely invisible? Would he have liked the biographer to conceal the rascally behaviour of men like George Bentley, who eventually managed to lose the manuscript and the proofs of *Mrs. Grundy's Enemies*, or to praise James Payn, the fatly paid reader of Smith, Elder, for his sham honesty? Would he have liked the biographer to describe the Gissing of Wakefield as intelligent-open-minded individuals? The word “obscurantist” frightens his coy pen. Alas for the timidities of critics! But it is only fair to say that Taylor's long review article on Volumes I and II of *The Heroic Life of George Gissing* in the *Literary Review*, once his first paragraph, a ragbag of ill-controlled obsolete echoes, has been read and forgotten, offers ample compensation for the ill-considered jab at the so-called censoriousness contained in the book.

In the wake of the *TLS* paragraph of 2 December 2011, *Private Eye* for 12 December echoed Taylor's qualified praise of Volume I of the Gissing biography and this entailed a protest from a true admirer of Gissing's literary achievement, Catherine Isolde Eisner, whose letter to the editor was

published on 25 January (p. 16): “Sir, I do take issue with your singling out of D. J. Taylor for pretentiousness in his review of Professor Coustillas’s magisterial *Life of George Gissing* (Part 1) under your terms for inclusion within the ‘obscurely highbrow’ category of literary reviews for 2011 (PE no. 1304). Professor Coustillas is the chronicler most venerated by Gissingites and a plainer speaking critic of this 19<sup>th</sup> century master one could not find. Anyhow, the works of Gissing are anything but obscurely highbrow. It’s because they are subtle dramas of social realism written in perfected plain English prose that they are so admired.”

The exhumation of Gissing material from old Australian and New Zealand newspapers now consultable on line continues. It confirms the difficulties of journalists down under over a hundred years ago to pass enlightened judgments on contemporaneous literature.

Our readers will have understood that the photograph on p. 40 of our January 2012 number is one of Ernst Konrad Plitt (1854-1928), c. 1890. The printers accidentally left out this information.

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## Recent Publications

### Book

George Gissing, *Collected Short Stories*, Volume One. Edited and introduced by Pierre Coustillas, with the assistance of Barbara Rawlinson and H el ene Coustillas. Grayswood, Surrey, England: Grayswood Press, 2011. Pp. xxxix + 310. ISBN 978-0-9546247-8-1. £30 or £70 for the 3 volumes of the collection (see special offer in our January issue).

The frontispiece shows Samuel Medill (1841-1883), editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, venerated by posterity as young Gissing’s benefactor in 1877 when he published in his newspaper “The Sins of the Fathers.” The illustrations are also of exceptional interest. The first shows Bamborough Castle, the second, also reproduced on the dust jacket, is a photograph of Monkshouse, where Gissing spent holidays in his father’s lifetime. The third and fourth show respectively kittiwakes on the Farne Islands and cormorants in the same place. They should all be viewed in connection with “An English Coast-Picture.”

The volume contains a general introduction on Gissing's short fiction, an introduction to Volume One, a childhood story entitled "The Grandfather's New Year's Story," the American short stories, and the earliest stories Gissing wrote on his return from the States. The last story, belatedly published by Bentley in 1891, is "Letty Coe."

Articles, reviews, etc.

Malcolm Allen, Review of *Demos*, ed. Debbie Harrison, *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, vol. 119, Spring 2011, pp. 142-46.

D. J. Taylor, "On New Grub Street: The Heroic Life of George Gissing," *Literary Review* (London, formerly Edinburgh), December 2011, pp. 32-35.

Anon., "Commended," *Private Eye*, 12 December 2011, page unknown. On D. J. Taylor's short piece on *The Heroic Life of George Gissing* in the *TLS* for 2 December, followed on 25 January 2012 by a letter to the editor of *Private Eye* from Catherine Isolde Eisner.

Fiona Coll, Review of vol. I of *The Heroic Life of George Gissing*, January 2012, <http://floatingacademy.wordpress.com>, a Victorian Studies blog.

Martha Vogeler, Review of vol. I of *The Heroic Life of George Gissing*, *Choice*, February 2012. Page unknown.

Samantha Matthews, "In Full Colour," *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 February 2012, p. 10. Review of Forster's Life of Dickens in which the author confuses the dates of publication of *Charles Dickens: a Critical Study* with Gissing's abridged edition of Forster's Life.

Pierre Coustillas, Letter to the editor of the *TLS*, 9 March 2012, p. 6. A letter on the above confusion.

Simon J. James, *Maps of Utopia: H. G. Wells, Modernity and the End of Culture*, Oxford University Press, 2012. Gissing is referred to on many pages.

