

The Gissing Journal

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

“The Muse of the Halls”

GEORGE GISSING

[The availability of Gissing’s short stories has always been problematic for readers and collectors. Occasionally he himself received a letter from an admirer who had failed to trace this or that story in some magazine or newspaper in a library near his home. Could the author help? The old bibliographies were but moderately helpful and sometimes quite useless. In rare cases Gissing must have suspected that the request in hand was a mere ploy to obtain an autograph which might some day be converted into coin of the realm. But, with the passing of time, the nature of the problems related to the availability of Gissing’s short stories assumed new forms. Only one collection was published in his lifetime—*Human Odds and Ends* in late 1897 under the imprint of Lawrence and Bullen—and it took decades for other collections to achieve publication. The 115 stories listed in *George Gissing: The Definitive Bibliography* can all be found in volumes, or as reprints in this Journal (“Joseph” and “Simple Simon” are examples), except the following: “The Muse of the Halls” (*English Illustrated Magazine*, Christmas 1893, pp. 313-22), “A Midsummer Madness” (*English Illustrated Magazine*, December 1894, pp. 55-63), “By the Kerb,” the sixth title commissioned by Jerome K. Jerome for *To-Day* in a series entitled “Nobodies at Home” (4 May to 8 June 1895), and “At Nightfall,” which he wrote in the late spring of 1898 on his return from Italy and which appeared belatedly in *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine* in May 1900.

We reprint “The Muse of the Halls” because experience has taught us that very few of Gissing’s readers, past and present, have ever had an opportunity to read it. Its only publication on record took place over a hundred years ago and the reason why neither Gissing included it in *Human Odds and Ends* nor his brother Algernon in *The House of Cobwebs* nor his son Alfred in the two collections he edited in 1927 and 1938 is unknown. “The Muse of the Halls” was written from 23 to 26 September 1893 and it seems likely that the title was suggested to Gissing by his recollections of the Sala delle Muse (the Hall of the Muses) in the Vatican Museum in December 1888. Knowledge of this detail gives the story a satirical twist different from that of the narrative proper, the irony of which is highly characteristic of Gissing from the American period to his last short story of modern life. His interest in the music hall was briefly discussed by the late Sydney Lott in the present journal (“Gissing and London’s Music Halls,” October 2000, pp. 24-31). A full-length treatment of the subject should take into account all the miscellaneous information scattered in the diary, among which should be noted Gissing’s attendance of a performance of coster songs by the comedian Albert Chevalier (1860-1923) at the Pavilion on 4 April 1893, his going to a music hall on 21 May 1889, his attending a lecture on the immorality of the music hall on the following 11 October and his reading of John Davidson’s book *In a Music Hall* on 26 September 1893.— P. C.]

“The Muse of the Halls”

They were together in the parlour at Brixton, the faded little parlour with its scent of musk and gentility. Their attitudes declared a crisis in domestic drama. Mrs. Paget sat on the sofa, drooping, lachrymose; Hilda stood erect by the open piano, her trim figure full of aggressive energy, her brown eyes a-sparkle with defiant hope; facing her was Denis Bryant, hot and exhausted after his burst of rhetoric. On the table lay a violin and a heap of music.

“Of course I knew exactly what you would say,” remarked Hilda, with studious subdual of her voice. “It leaves me just where I was. Mamma dear, I do wish you wouldn’t cry; it’s so wretched and so unnecessary. I have simply made up my mind. Perhaps I shall fail; but I have a chance, and I mean to try. We have starved long enough in devotion to Art; now I am going to aim at filthy lucre.”

“You won’t make tuppence ha’penny!” cried Denis. “It isn’t in you, thank goodness!”

“Mr. Briggs thinks differently.”

“Mr. Briggs is a meddling old donkey, and I should like to punch his head.”

“Oh, Denis, don’t be violent!” pleaded Mrs. Paget. “Reason with the poor girl, and show her how hopeless it is.”

“You’ll disgrace yourself, and all for nothing,” exclaimed the musician, who had begun to pace the floor like a caged lion, his dark locks in picturesque disorder. It was a pity that the shining elbows of his coat, and the baggy knees of his trousers would force themselves on one’s attention; nature had dealt generously with him, and called aloud for a better costume.

“You are quite wrong,” the girl answered, with a tolerant smile. “Mr. Briggs has assured me that music-hall people are, on the whole, quite as respectable as the singers I have been associating with. He named several who go to church regularly. He says that the men are very fond of gardening—just like you, mamma. It isn’t as if I wanted to wear—to dress up in outlandish things; I shall come forward just as I do in concert-rooms—just! And my two songs are perfectly harmless.”

“Of course! And you might as well sing ‘Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross.’ First they’ll stare, and then they’ll hoot. You’ll be choked with tobacco. You’ll be sickened by the atmosphere of blackguardism before and behind the curtain. And when you have to give it up, there’ll be no more hope for you at respectable concerts.”

“I shall *not* have to give it up.”

“After the first night they won’t let you go on. You’ll drive money away.”

“Please reserve your insults till your prophecy has come true.”

“Oh, Hilda!” sounded the mother’s plaintive voice, “don’t quarrel with Denis.”

“I haven’t the least wish to quarrel with him. All the unpleasantness is on his side.”

“Do at least wait, darling, till he has finished his Cantata.”

“The Cantata? I won’t imitate Denis, and say that no one will give it a hearing, but we know it’s only too probable. If I were in his place, I should *chuck up* Art, and compose for the music-hall. He *could*, I’m sure of it.”

Denis Bryant sniffed the air.

“*Chuck up!* Who taught you that! And what reason have you to suppose that my talent is naturally vulgar?”

“I don’t want to call names, Denis, but when you first knew me you talked about a comic opera—indeed you did. And you whistled several bars to me one day—very jolly music. But since our engagement you’ve grown so awfully solemn. I suppose you meant to correct my frivolity.”

“When I first met you, I was busy with my Concerto in A flat—”

“And very flat it was—”

“Hilda!” protested Mrs. Paget.

But the musician interposed with magnanimity.

“No, no! let Hilda be as witty at my expense as she likes. I know she will be sorry—”

“I *am* sorry, Denis. It slipped from my tongue, and I didn’t mean it. But I can’t bear to see you struggling on in nasty, wretched, hateful poverty, teaching idiots, losing the best part of your life. I feel sure you could make hundreds and hundreds a year—I do. What’s the good of talking about Art? We’ll go in for Art when we have nice clothes and nice meals, and a house that wasn’t built to last only three years. Art won’t do anything for us. You’re not a Berlioz or a Wagner—you know you’re not. And I’m not a Patti—oh, far from it. I’m sick of half-hearted applause and insincere encouragement. I’d rather have the shouts and stamps of a music-hall audience. And above all I want money. I’m going to earn it—see if I don’t.”

“You can’t!”

“I can! And so could you. Do get your hair cut, Denis, and write a song like ‘For Ever and for Ever’—”

“Hang it, Hilda! You’re going too far.”

He shook the mane so flippantly referred to, and turned towards the window.

“You are forgetting your manners, my dear,” said Mrs. Paget.

“The corruption of the music-hall, already! I can’t help it. If I degrade myself, I am only following the general example of our time. Everybody, in every kind of art, is beginning to play to the gallery. We have to be democratic, or starve. And we don’t like starving. We’ve got to *climb down*—there’s a phrase for you, Denis! We have to *get a show*—there’s another! We must find tunes that’ll *knock ’em*—”

The musician seized his hat and strode from the room; a moment, and the front door sounded behind him.

Then Hilda was by her mother’s side, filial, consolatory.

“Don’t be horrified, mamma dear. That isn’t my natural way of talking, and it never will be—”

“Where *did* you get it from, darling?”

“Only from Mr. Briggs, good old man. He’s vulgar, but he means kindly. And I want to shake Denis out of his sobriety. He has been so dreadfully dull of late, and I know it’s all because he wants to keep up appearances before me. It really is true that he could write popular music if he liked, and he *ought* to. It’s his duty to make money.”

That same afternoon she kept an appointment at a South London music-hall, a place of small pretensions, but not without its record of emergent stars. Mr. Briggs was one of the directors; he often came down from his villa at Streatham and fussed about among the artists. By his agency Hilda Paget had obtained permission to appear for one evening, of course unremunerated. She was to be announced as Miss Lilian Dove. Mr. Briggs had made her a present of two new songs, which he got from Bright and Airlie, the well-known publishers and agents; they were sentimental, immaculate, reasonably melodious. He pleaded for a little dancing—just a step or two, with skirts raised barely to the ankle; but Hilda protested her inability.

She had a rehearsal, piano and violin representing the orchestra. It was a dreary business. Hilda experienced more of stage-fright in the gloomy hall than when she first sang before hundreds of people. The smell of stale tobacco and alcohol reminded her of Denis Bryant’s prophecies, but there was nothing else to alarm her, unless it were the strident vivacity of another *débutante*, who sang before her and met with marked approval. She could have imitated that style, but her songs called for something quite different. And already she wished that Mr. Briggs had made a bolder selection; there

was something in her that sprang towards the true music-hall ideal—the sprightly, the roguish, the malapert.

Mrs. Paget had insisted upon chaperonage, so Hilda was accompanied by a middle-aged lady of proved discretion, one Mrs. Parker. As they drove away together in a cab, both were silent. When at length their eyes met they laughed uneasily.

“Mr. Briggs was disappointed,” said Hilda.

“And Mr.—what’s his name—Scarborough didn’t say much,” the other murmured.

“Mr. Briggs talked of the dance like Mr. Weller of the *alibi*.”

“You couldn’t manage it?” suggested Mrs. Parker, slyly.

“If I fail without it, I shall have another try *with* it. There’s no harm—is there?”

“Just a little step-dance—oh, no!”

“Could I practise it by Monday?”

“On Sunday—oh dear!”

“I should have to take a lesson. Never mind. But that Miss Lancey! What a voice!”

“Ear-splitting. And her attitudes—the minx! But she will come on in—in tights, my dear.”

“I really don’t feel quite equal to *that*,” said Hilda, solemnly.

“Oh! Out of the question!”

“And yet—”

“Oh, Hilda! Hush!”

“But I’m going to succeed, you know, Mrs. Parker. You quite understand that?”

On Sunday afternoon Denis Bryant came to the house. Expecting his appearance, Hilda kept out of the way, and he did not ask to see her.

“Don’t distress yourself, dear Mrs. Paget,” he said. “She’s bound to fail utterly, and of course we shall all keep it quiet. I shall be there.”

“You will face it, Denis?”

He nodded grimly.

“But—but—you won’t think any worse of her—?”

“Impossible!”

The poor lady did not wholly lack humour. Her laugh awakened the musician, who laughed in turn, and they pealed at each other mirthfully.

“Well, well; you know what I mean. There’s some truth in what Hilda says; I *am* getting rather dull. But I see the end of my Cantata, and really it isn’t bad, and if Williamson keeps his promise to introduce me to Halle—

I shall have a word with her as she comes out to-morrow—just at the door of the cab.”

“Be merciful, Denis. I am afraid she is rather obstinate, and it would be so sad if—”

“Oh, all right!”

He discovered at what hour Miss Lilian Dove was to come on, and nine o’clock on Monday evening found him seated at the back of the area, amid rowdy clerks and mechanics. At this hall there was still a chairman, who hammered and gave out the singers’ names. When the expected pseudonym struck on his ear, Denis trembled and perspired. There was a moment’s delay, and he fancied Hilda had fled. But even then she stood before him, smiling, seemingly self-possessed—the dear, brave girl! the charming Hilda! He choked; his eyes watered. He knew only that the voice he loved was singing—so sweetly, so prettily; and then he began to clap with all his might. There was very little applause; he clapped the louder. A young fel-low by his side made a sneering remark about the singer, and Denis turned furiously; but it had to be borne with. He himself, thanks to his umbrageous locks, had already been an object of facetious comment.

Again the orchestra squeaked and jangled, and again she appeared. But there was a change. She stood in quite another attitude, not unsuitable to sentimentality, yet just a trifle audacious. And she sang with far more *brio*; she moved her pretty little head in bird-like fashion; she—good heavens! he thought she was going to dance; but no, she had somehow suggested the possibility, shown how daintily she could walk a few paces and back. There followed much more applause, but Denis did not join in it. His heart was fluttering; he felt uncomfortable, indignant.

Hurriedly he made his way to the exit, where an empty cab had just drawn up; but it was some minutes before the figures he awaited came forth. As soon as they were in the cab, he rushed out of ambush, checking the driver with a hand.

“What did I tell you?” he gurgled at the window. “Failure! Absolute failure!”

“It wasn’t!” answered a faint voice.

“It was! I heard what the people were saying.”

“But you didn’t hear what Mr. Scarborough said,” came out of the dark interior, from amid wraps and mufflers.

“Of course he let you down gently!”

“Did he?—*He’s offered me an engagement!*”

Denis fell back; the cab clattered away. He was conscious only of a rag-

amuffin's voice, which sang mockingly, "If you cawn't afford a shyve, git yer 'air cut!" Intended for him, of course, but he cared not.

A day or two later, he was informed of details. Mr. Scarborough, not displeased but dubious, had stipulated for a dance. Hilda offered instead to abandon the line of pure sentiment, and get some *lively* songs. Subject to approval of these ditties, she was to have a week's engagement, with extension of time and increase of payment if her performance "caught on." Denis learnt this from Mrs. Paget; Hilda declined to talk with him on the subject at all, though otherwise friendly. So he wrote letters.

"What are we to understand by *lively* songs? I will not insult you by presuming that you understand that fellow Scarborough's stipulation. Happily, you will never suit him—never."

There came no answer, and he wrote again.

"Your mother—whom you are distressing beyond measure—tells me that the impertinent scoundrel Briggs is negotiating on your behalf for certain songs with Bright and Airlie. I object altogether to your putting yourself into Mr. Briggs's hands in this way. I object, Hilda! And I insist that you shall sing no song in public which I have not previously heard. Pray reply to this."

But she did not. And thereupon Denis became mute.

When he had kept away from the house at Brixton for more than a week, there one day arrived for him a packet containing two songs, with music, in manuscript, and a note from Hilda. "Dear Denis," she wrote, "I propose to sing the rubbish enclosed. Do you object to it? If you do merely because it is rubbish, I can't listen; if you have any more serious fault to find, I shall consider it."

The letter softened him. He read the songs carefully, and, save that rubbish was a term of compliment to apply to them, saw no matter of objection.

"My poor Hilda," he wrote in returning them, "sing if you must. But the pity of it! However, I know it will be a wretched failure, and I shall be there to see."

They met next day. Hilda was in excellent spirits, but by tacit agreement no word dropped from either of them on the momentous subject. Bryant talked about his Cantata, and played selections from it, which the girl professed to admire very much.

Yet of late the Cantata had occupied little of his time. It happened that, on the evening when he received Hilda's songs, a friend of his, Williamson the journalist, looked in to have a talk with him.

“Now what do you think of *this*?” Denis exclaimed, with a bitter laugh. “How is *this* for music?”

He sat down at the piano and sang a verse or two from the manuscript sheet. Williamson laughed heartily, and seemed much delighted.

“I knew you could do it, old man. Are the words yours as well?”

“What! You imagine that *I* am responsible for this garbage?”

“Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought you were coming round to a sensible view of the situation. Let me tell you, you would make more by one such song than by a gross of Cantatas. And you have it in you, that’s the worst of it. One or two of the airs in that abortive opera of yours were wonderfully catching—tum, tum, tumtidy, tum—how did it go?”

Bryant sat for a minute or two with his hands idle on the keys; then he began to pick out a few notes carelessly.

“That’s it!” cried the other. “Go on; it tickles me.”

After playing through the melody, Bryant fell into abstraction. Was it not true that the first duty of a man who has won a girl’s love is to earn money, that he may marry and support her? Was it not *his* fault that Hilda had taken to music-hall singing, wearied of pursuing success in a higher walk? But since the rapturous moment of his betrothal, he had scorned everything save the empyrean of Art. The melody he was now reviving had been abhorrent to his amorous idealism. Yet, if it would sell for money as a separate song, what right had he to be so fastidious? Why not woo the muse of the suburban drawing-room, nay, even the muse of the halls?

He turned abruptly.

“Look here, Williamson, could you write me some trash for this jingle?”

“If I applied my mighty intellect, there’s no knowing.”

“Do so. Do it now.”

“Then play it again and again.”

In ten minutes the journalist had excogitated some lines. He announced their completion with a shout of laughter. They were the chorus of a song which he might complete at his leisure, and ran thus:

“We’ve a nice little home at Stamford Hill,

With plenty of room for three.

My Peter’s screw is two pound two,

And he brings it all to me.

He never gets jealous

Of all the fellows

That talk of his blooming Rose.

I’m awful sweet

On dear old Pete,
And I don't care a button who knows."

Bryant's solemnity was overcome; he joined in his friend's uproarious merriment. They sang the chorus together; repeated it; bellowed it till the ceiling rang again.

"Great Scott!" shrieked Williamson at length, "here's the new song of the hour! I cry halves, mind you! I'll get the verses done to-night, and post them to you in the morning. It's to be called 'My Peter.'"

Said and done. Two days later Denis Bryant called upon Messrs. Bright and Airlie, to whom—that is to say, to one Samuel Budge, their fleshly representative—he played and sang "My Peter," in the privacy of a little back room always redolent of whisky. Mr. Budge appeared irresponsive, cold. After much boggling, he offered a five-pound note for the copyright. Denis, however, was prepared for these tactics. He had no intention of selling the copyright. There was a long conversation, stuffed with slang and technicalities. It ended in a promise from the musician to call again after a few hours. On his doing so, he was presented to a young woman who had only just begun her career at the halls, but already saw her way, as she put it, to "knock 'em all round." Miss Lancey was her name. She wanted a rattling good song. Never mind the words; the tune was everything. To her did Denis Bryant play and sing "My Peter," and Miss Lancey, seizing Mr. Budge by the waist, waltzed wildly with him about the room.

A quarter of an hour, and the business was settled. Miss Lancey would sing the song; Bright and Airlie would publish it; Denis Bryant—who called himself Thomson—would retain the copyright.

And in a week it was heard for the first time, at the Pavilion. In a fortnight Miss Lancey was doing four "turns" every night. An evening paper had interviewed her; she was on the way to fortune.

Hilda Paget, meanwhile was going through her week's engagement at the southern hall. She did not make a great hit, but each evening the audience seemed to like her a little better. After hearing her once, Denis kept apart from her in silent wrath; she sang with horrible cleverness; he hated to recall her voice, her appearance. Near the end of the week he wrote.

"Hasn't this joke gone far enough? Hilda, dearest Hilda, you are torturing me. Listen: I think I see my way to make some money. Will you give up singing and trust me for a little?"

There came an answer:

"After my turn last night, I went with Mrs. Parker to the Canterbury, and heard 'My Peter.' After *that*, can you ask me to give up my chances? If you

haven't heard it, go to-night. Bella Lancey had a first hearing from Mr. Scarborough on the very day when *I* went to him, and now see! Oh, why, why, won't you write me a song like 'My Peter'? You could, silly boy; I know you could—and I should make fifty pounds a week."

Williamson the journalist had a flat, and to his care were addressed business communications for his friend "Mr. Thomson." Bryant's anxiety to remain unknown seemed to him unaccountable folly; his own authorship of the words of "My Peter" he was ready enough to proclaim, and to enjoy the glory thereof. He knew of his friend's engagement to Miss Paget, but had never met that young lady, and of course was unaware that she sang at a music-hall. Twitted with the absurdity of his sensitiveness, Denis avowed at length that he would be ashamed to let Miss Paget know what he had done.

"High art, and all that kind of stuff, eh?" returned Williamson. "You've been posing, old fellow—I see. But she'll have to know, you know. Another song or two, and there'll be no reason why you shouldn't marry. Better have done with all pretence; far worse to be found out afterwards. If she's really the kind of girl you describe, she'll have sense enough to be devilish proud of you."

But Denis was obliged to shroud in his bosom the true reason for silence, and it gave him restless nights. Yes, Hilda must know some day; and how would she take it that he had offered "My Peter" to a stranger instead of to her? Might she not even conceive horrible jealousies, suspicions? It was a wretched fix to be in.

Now that the temptation to follow up his success proved irresistible, he was mortified by discovering with what facility he could turn out the kind of article demanded by musical commerce. "My Peter" was not to be a solitary *chef d'œuvre*; already he had jotted down a couple of melodies which Williamson esteemed every bit as "fetching"; they wanted only words, and these the journalist would soon supply. One, they decided, should make appeal to the halls, the other to the suburban drawing-room. Denis spent many an hour of gloomy self-contempt. He felt that it was all over with him as a serious composer; he would be tinkled into notoriety, perhaps into fortune. Well, the fortune he could do with. Hilda must be snatched from her abominable career, and the sooner the better.

He went to see Mrs. Paget in the evening. Mrs. Parker was sitting with her.

"Don't you accompany Hilda now?" he asked of the chaperon.

"She thinks it unnecessary."

Mrs. Paget shook her head and looked miserable.

“You know she has a second engagement, Denis?”

“Where?”

“At a place called the Canterbury—have you heard of it?”

Mrs. Parker smiled. The musician ground his teeth and looked desperately about the room. At the Canterbury Bella Lancey was making a nightly *furor* with “My Peter.” Hilda probably spoke with her, and might ask about the composer of that grand work; happily he was safe under the mask of Thomson. But she must know—she must know—

“You see she *is* successful, continued Mrs. Paget, with an odd mixture of lamentation and pride. “I’m afraid you are responsible for it, Denis. Hilda is rather self-willed; she determined to prove that you were wrong.”

“I want to tell you something,” said Denis, after a pause. “The other day I hinted in a note to Hilda that I saw my way to make some money. The fact is, I have been doing some things of a—of a more popular kind, and one of them promises to be a success—”

Mrs. Paget uttered an exclamation of delight. The musician had on his tongue a complete avowal, but at this moment Mrs. Parker interfered with one of her sly remarks.

“That’s what Hilda calls *climbing down*—isn’t it?”

He could not face the ignominy. His confession must be made to Hilda herself, in private, with hidden face.

“Does she sing at the Canterbury early or late?” he asked.

“About ten, and gets home at half-past.”

He would meet her at the exit to-night, and come home with her. It was now a little after nine. Hurriedly he took leave, and journeyed on a tram to Westminster Bridge Road. Though mid-December, it was a clear and pleasant night; he enjoyed the keen air; in spite of himself, he could not but feel the solace, the exhilaration of making money. Why not have two existences, be Thomson of the halls, the organs, the popular echoes, and Denis Bryant of the serious public? Not impossible, perhaps.

Hilda Paget—Miss Lilian Dove—was at this moment speeding to the Canterbury by another route. She arrived while Denis was still on the tram.

Her progress in popular favour could not be mistaken. There was something peculiarly piquant in the grafting of a studied vulgarity upon her natural refinement: it told with the upper class of music-hall devotees. She was pretty; she had a dainty figure; her voice, an agreeable contralto, had received excellent training, and in artistic execution she far surpassed her rivals of the blatant stage. But the songs she was singing lacked genuine

“go.” Bright and Airlie had offered her one which they considered very promising. Hilda frowned over it; she understood its possibilities, but—

Moreover, that kind of thing was not indispensable. The successes of this year had been very innocent—“My Peter,” for instance. It was undeniable that Bella Lancey emphasised certain words and phrases; but she could have dispensed with such allurements. The tune, the tune was everything. You might jabber the most atrocious idiocy, provided you had a rattling good tune.

She did not acquaint her mother with every detail of music-hall life that came under her observation; it was needless. In getting rid of Mrs. Parker, she knew quite well what she was about. Hilda preferred to face everything in the courage of her honesty. She had moments of moral sickness, of unutterable disgust. In singing, she never looked at her audience, though she might seem to do so; a glimpse of certain faces had very soon taught her to avoid that discouraging quail.

One thing that troubled her was the doubt every evening whether Denis Bryant might be among her audience. Sometimes she forgot all about him, and then made her best effects; if he came into her mind whilst she was singing, at once she felt a timidity, a restraint, and the performance lost something of its piquancy. For other people who knew her, she cared little or nothing. Very soon it must get about among her acquaintances that she had taken this incredible step, but no matter. At concerts she could never achieve reputation, never earn much money. Hilda wished to feel herself somebody, and to get out of genteel pauperdom. The way was now opening before her.

To-night, though Denis was actually present, she did not once think of him. Bella Lancey reached the hall just as Hilda was going on, and they talked for a minute or two in the interval after the first song. Miss Lancey was—as she herself would have expressed it—“not a bad sort”; she relished her sudden triumph enormously, and it made her good-natured to the girl whom she had met when both were being tested by Mr. Scarborough.

“Have you another turn?” she asked.

“No; I’ve done after this.”

“Stop and hear me sing ‘My Peter’—will you?”

Hilda was not above learning from one whom nature had manifestly equipped for this kind of thing. She willingly stayed, and from a post of vantage within the wings, studied once more Miss Lancey’s wonderful methods. Afterwards they had more talk, whilst Bella was wrapping herself up for departure, and they left the place together. Just as they came forth—as

usual a little cluster of people waited to catch sight of the artists—Miss Lancey exclaimed:

“Hullo, there’s Mr. Thomson! I want to speak to him.”

She made a dart. Hilda, fixed in astonishment, saw her offer a familiar hand to no other than Denis Bryant. A mistake, of course. Denis, whose presence here was no matter for surprise, resembled some Mr. Thomson. But he was smiling; he was shaking hands;—and then he became aware of *her*. Miss Lancey wanted him to come and talk at the window of her carriage; he followed; he talked. There was a loud laugh, and the carriage drove away.

Denis, grimly defiant of circumstance, turned to look for Hilda. She was in her cab, which waited.

“You want an explanation,” he said, putting his head through the open window. It was well that Hilda could not see the distorting grin on his features.

“Just as you please, Mr. Thomson,” came for reply.

He turned the handle, waved to the driver, jumped into the cab. They rattled away southward.

“Hilda!”

“Yes, Mr. Thomson.”

“I am the composer of ‘My Peter.’”

“I guessed as much.”

At first she had not associated the name with the song. But she remembered. She had seen the published copy, “Music by Thomson.”

He paused a moment, then said firmly:

“I know nothing of Miss Lancey—out of business.”

“You needn’t assure me of that.”

“Thank you, Hilda.”

There was silence. He tried to take her hand, but she withdrew it.

“You’re ashamed of me, dear—”

“Yes, I am.”

“I was tempted so sorely. My friend Williamson made the words, and said I was bound to make money by it. I gave in. You yourself—”

“Oh, I’m not ashamed of ‘My Peter,’ not a bit of it. But to think that you let some one else have such a song! It was cruel, monstrous! I have been struggling so—”

Denis changed his place. He made room for himself by Hilda. There was a little confusion, then silence again.

“Have you another ready?” she asked at length.

“Yes.”

“You’ll go over it with me to-night?”

“No, I’m hanged if I will.”

“It’s for Miss Lancey?”

“For anyone in the world but *you*.—Now look here, Hilda. I *can* make money. But I swear most solemnly that, unless you leave the music-hall at once, I’ll never write another song. Make your choice. If you go on singing you break with me, and, what’s more, you prevent me from earning a living.”

“That’s all rubbish—”

He stood up, leaned from the window, and stopped the cab.

“Good-night, Hilda! Your decision in writing to-morrow.”

He got out. A voice called faintly to him, but he closed the door and marched off.

On the morrow, by an afternoon post, Denis received a note, which ran thus:

“Send me a written confession that *you were wrong when you said I was a failure*, and it shall be as you please.”

His nervousness subsided. He laughed aloud, and began to whistle “My Peter.”

The index to the papers of Henry Ryecroft

HAZEL K. BELL

George Gissing’s late work, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903), is described in *The Cambridge History of English Literature* as lying “in form, somewhere between the *journal intime* and the diary, reflection and observation being expanded to the length of brief essays,” and in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* as “a mock-autobiography.” As the purported autobiographer is a fictitious character, the eponymous Ryecroft, the book partakes also of the nature of fiction.

The first edition, from Archibald Constable in 1903, 293 pages of text, is provided with a four-page index, which remained present in all Constable’s impressions of the book until 1918, except for a sixpenny reprint they published in 1908 and reprinted in 1913, index-less. A reset “presentation edition,” of 280 pages, first published in 1912 and reprinted in 1915

and 1939, had the same index on pages 277-80. From 1921 to 1930 new editions had a reset text, with index on pages 269-71. The subsequent English editions (1953 to 1987) had no index, except the 1982 and 1983 Harvester editions, which were photographic reprints of the first edition.

There had been few previous indexes to works of fiction. In 1751 Samuel Richardson, at the request of Samuel Johnson, had compiled an Index Rerum to the 3rd edition of his novel *Clarissa*, and in 1754 he provided for *Sir Charles Grandison* an “Index Historical and Characteristical of the Seven Volumes of this Work.” In 1805 Isaac d’Israeli added “An Illuminating Index” of 22 pages at the end of the third volume of his amazingly-titled novel, *Flim-flams! Or, the life and errors of my uncle, and the amours of my aunt! With illustrations and obscurities, by messieurs tag, rag, and bobtail. With an illuminating index! In three volumes, with nine plates* (published by John Murray) – only for this novelty to be greeted in *Critical Review* (3rd ser. 4, Feb 1805) with: “These five prefaces, ... and illuminating index (as this new expedient to swell a novel is absurdly called), entirely supersede the use of any text; and indeed we could have spared it without a sigh.” In 1811 d’Israeli provided an “Index to the Notes which particularly relate to the Jesuits” at the end of his novel, *Despotism: or the fall of the Jesuits. A political romance, illustrated by historical anecdotes* (John Murray). The A. & C. Black editions of 1886-87 of Sir Walter Scott’s *The Waverley novels* included short indexes, chiefly of proper names. In 1889 Lewis Carroll provided a whimsical index to *Sylvie and Bruno* (Macmillan) and in 1893 to *Sylvie and Bruno concluded*.

There seem to be two possible reasons for Gissing’s taking the unusual course of including an index in his fictitious memoir. One must be to emphasize, draw further attention to, some of his favourite topics and opinions there treated of, such as: Agnosticism; Author, the unsuccessful; Books, love of; Civilization, prospects of; Conscriptio; Democracy in England; English virtues; Novel-writing; Prudery, English; Publisher and author; Quarrelling, universality of; Spring, thoughts of; and the joke he recounts, Steamboats, advertisement of. Then the 19-line entry for Ryecroft himself, which includes the subheading, “self-criticism,” surely gave Gissing a splendid opportunity to devise subjective subheads for his presumable self-representative, such as, “no cosmopolite,” “apology for his comfort,” “anti-democratic temper,” “delight in giving,” “desire of knowledge,” “hatred of science.”

Another reason to include an index in a spurious biography is to lend it an apparent authenticity. Virginia Woolf did this with her entirely fictitious

Orlando (Hogarth Press, 1928) in which the protagonist, Orlando, lives for 400 years and turns from man to woman. Leon Edel, in *Writing lives, principia biographica*, writes of *Orlando*: “In keeping with its nature the volume is endowed with an index. The pretence of scholarship and exactitude is maintained to the end.” Woolf’s “playfulness about *Orlando*’s category met difficulties; booksellers, confused by its apparent status as biography, as indicated on the title page, and supported by its possession of an index, refused to sell it as fiction. Nevertheless, overcoming at least that joke, *Orlando* sold well.”¹

Similarly, Ranulph Fiennes included indexes (and maps and photographs) in his “factional novels,” *The Feather Men* (1993) and *The Sett* (1996 – Little Brown), to add to the impression of actual factuality. The original, hardback editions have “Fact or fiction?” on the covers. When *The Feather Men* was brought out in paperback a year later, the publishers presented it as fiction, removing the maps, photos and index accordingly.

So – those are perhaps the reasons for the inclusion of the index in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. There is another factor, besides its being an index to a fictional text, that makes it interesting to a professional indexer such as myself: it is an example of a late 19th-century index. To see how far this differs from biographical indexes of today, I scanned in the original index from my 1903 edition of the book, and worked through it, inserting entries, details and further references that seemed to me lacking – by 21st-century, proper biographical standards.

I found the chief differences between the original index and my revision/expansion to be that Gissing used capital initials for all entries, whether common or proper nouns, inserted commas at the end of entries before page numbers, and usually gave only the first page number where the topic was mentioned, rarely extending the reference to the next or subsequent pages when the text continued to treat of the same topic. He usually gives only surnames in the index, when only these occur in the text; a modern indexer would insert forenames in the index entries. These are probably characteristics of the indexing of the period. I added many more entries: Gissing probably selected those topics he wanted emphasized, rather than attempting or intending a thorough analysis of the whole text into index form. There are some slips in alphabetical order – Comfort following Conscriptio, Paestum following Painting, and the final entry, Xenophon, following Youth.

A previous critic of this index, Robert Irwin, much disliked the book (“If the novel is not very good in the first place, even the best sort of index

will not rescue the book from mediocrity or worse”) but does at least allow that this index matches the tenor of the text – one criterion for a good index, writing, “A glance at the index suffices to show the novel to be bookmanly, tweedy, insular, complacent stuff. ... The index of Gissing’s novel is boring, but it is no more so than the text it is appended to.”²

But it seems a real shame that this curious index has apparently become even rarer than the book to which it was appended!

Below appears the full index to *The Private Papers*, with all original entries unchanged; my additions are shown in bold (including the extension of page ranges). The first entry for Ryecroft is all Gissing’s; the second (in bold type) is all mine.

¹Philip Bradley. Indexes to works of fiction. *The Indexer*, October 1989, 16/4.246.

²Robert Irwin. Your novel needs indexing. *New Writing* 9, ed. J. Fowles and A. L. Kennedy; Vintage/British Council, 2000.

The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft
by George Gissing
Archibald Constable, 1903

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The Gissings' Wakefield Circle

II – The Milner family

ANTONY PETYT
Wakefield

William Ralph Milner, resident surgeon to the convict department at the West Riding Prison at Wakefield and his sister, Mary Susan, George Gissing's first schoolteacher, were born in London. Their father, Ralph Milner, was a member of an old Wakefield family and engaged in the spirit trade. He moved to London sometime before 1810, no doubt in search of better prospects than those to be found in Wakefield. He does not seem to have prospered because he is almost certainly the Ralph Milner listed in Pigot's directory for London, 1839, as the landlord of the Pine Apple public house in St. George's Road in Southwark.¹

Ralph was married at least twice. By his first wife, Mary, he had four

John Binks
(1826-1890)

W. R. Milner
(1810-1868)

children whom we know about. Three of them, William Ralph, Thomas Henry and Phoebe were all baptised on 10 December 1813 at St. George the Martyr's church, Southwark, while Mary Susan was baptised at the same church on 7 March 1817. By his second wife, Ann, he had at least two children, Ralph (born 1833) and Helen, again baptised at St. George the Martyr's on November 26th 1834. Mary Susan Milner died in 1887 at the home of her half-sister, Amelia, who according to the 1881 census returns would have been born in 1850. It may be that Ralph and Ann had this daughter much later than their other two children or it is possible that Ralph had married for a third time.

We know that William Ralph Milner was born in London on 27 April 1810 because it is inscribed on his gravestone in Wakefield cemetery. He first considered a career in the legal profession but in 1826 he decided to move to Wakefield to be apprenticed to his father's cousin, Benjamin Walker, who was in general practice in premises at Westgate End.² In 1831 Milner, back in London, passed his examination before the Apothecaries' Society. He intended to take the examination of the College of Surgeons but was persuaded to return to Wakefield to take up the post of House Surgeon at the Wakefield Dispensary. Then in 1835 he settled at Batley Carr, about eight miles from Wakefield, to work in general practice. After two years at Batley he went to Paris where he studied scientific subjects for about a year. This time in France made a great impression on Milner; he had a good knowledge of the French language and regularly purchased and made use of French scientific literature. At 28, in 1838, Milner became a member of the Royal College of Surgeons, then entered into general practice in Rochdale, Lancashire, where he stayed for four years before returning to Wakefield to take up the practice of Dr. Samuel Houldsworth who had been forced to retire by reason of poor health. The profits from the practice were small and in 1847 he was glad to be appointed by the Government as surgeon to the new convict department at the Wakefield House of Correction. In that year the West Riding Magistrates³ had rebuilt the old prison at Wakefield and had made available to the Secretary of State for the Home Department 412 cells for the occupation by convicts under sentence of transportation. In the same building was accommodation for 320 prisoners sent there from local courts. Milner was provided with a house within the prison walls.

Milner's duties as resident surgeon included examining every convict on admission, making enquiries about every convict's health each month and seeing them on a daily basis when ill. He had to visit daily any convict

being kept in solitary confinement and to be in attendance when any physical punishments were being administered.⁴ He also had a great deal of responsibility for the prison diet, and paid much attention to this part of his duties. This led to his being appointed by the Government, along with Dr. Edward Smith, to prepare an essay on prison diet; the essay was considered to be of great importance and was published for general use. Dr. Milner also attended the officers and servants of the prison when they were unwell and made reports upon the nature of their illnesses to the visiting justices and governor. Occasionally he had to give evidence in court as in the case of William Haslam, who hanged himself from a beam on the canvas loom in his cell in January 1849. The newspaper could not resist reporting that the poor man occupied cell number 13.⁵

There can be no doubt that Milner was a very competent doctor but it would appear that his main interest in life was his scientific experiments. The subjects he studied ranged from public health to meteorology. In 1851 William Ranger had been appointed by the General Board of Health to make a report into '*Sewerage, drainage and supply of water and the sanitary condition of the inhabitants of Wakefield.*' Ranger called a meeting at the Court House at Wakefield on 21 May 1851⁶ and took evidence from various people in the town. Milner reported that he had conducted a survey of the town in 1847 and had made a report on the sanitary conditions prevailing at the time. He stated that he had examined all the deaths in the previous ten years and arranged them in eight classes. His enquiry showed that cholera was most prevalent in areas of poor drainage; also that industry and the mines contaminated the water supply. He went on to give evidence that "a yard in Kirkgate, containing about eight houses; the nightsoil from the adjoining yard oozed through the wall of one of the houses in this place, and the health of the occupants had been affected in consequence; they complain also of the offensive smell caused by this nuisance." This evidence from work conducted by Milner in his spare time and at his own expense impressed Ranger and he quotes it at length in his final report.⁷

Whilst Milner worked hard on his investigations into public health and dietary problems he was also very interested in the more spectacular aspects of science. He conducted meteorological experiments within the prison walls and each year gave several public lectures, complete with practical experiments, often for the benefit of local organisations. He was particularly supportive of the work of the Lancasterian School in Wakefield of which he was chairman of the managing body from 1856 until his death in 1868. The Royal Lancasterian Society was formed in 1808 to support the

work of Joseph Lancaster, who had published a book in 1803 describing the work of his school in London. Lancaster believed that the older boys should help teach the younger ones; he also believed that while the Christian faith should be taught in schools it should not be on the teaching of any particular church. The Lancasterian School in Wakefield had first opened in 1812 just for boys but two years later a girls' department was opened. It was not until 1854 that infants were admitted.⁸ In 1862 the annual report of the Lancasterian School tells us that "*Mr. Milner gave a course of six very interesting lectures on Anatomy and Physiology in the Infants room at a charge of four shillings. Attendance was very good and left a considerable profit for the schools.*" In the same year he gave two Oxyhydrogen Exhibitions in the Music Saloon for the benefit of the school and again in December 1864 it was reported that "*An Exhibition of photographs by the oxyhydrogen light was got up in the Music Saloon, descriptions of views in Switzerland and Savoy being given by Mr. Milner and explanations of some of Hogarth's pictures being read by Mr. Gissing.*" It would appear that "Oxyhydrogen light exhibition" was just another term for a magic lantern show using hired slides accompanied by notes.

Dr. Milner was a leading member of the Wakefield Microscopical Society which was first formed in 1854 and established on a new basis in 1859. The society was limited to ten members at any one time; T. W. Gissing was a member until his death in 1870. Meetings were held every fortnight during the greater part of the year, at the houses of members in rotation, when questions of microscopical interest were investigated and discussed, a special subject being assigned for each evening. Meetings were also occasionally held within the Wakefield Prison, where William Milner resided, and where they had access to the laboratory attached to the prison hospital. Apart from its private meetings it gave exhibitions and displays in the town. Milner must have spent a great deal of his spare money on scientific instruments because after his death it was found that he owned eleven microscopes, one telescope and a chronometer. After his death his friends Thomas Waller Gissing, John Binks and Thomas Walker put up these instruments, plus his library of 1,134 volumes, for sale.

During his Wakefield years Milner was a member of almost every non-sectarian literary, scientific or educational institution in the town. As early as 1828 he was a member of the Wakefield Literary and Debating Society; he was soon presenting his own papers and one of his early efforts had the remarkable title of "*On that part of the natural history of man which relates to his real or supposed deterioration in age, size, and strength.*" He was a

member of the Mechanics' Institution for many years, served on the committee and was elected vice-president on three occasions. He regularly gave lectures to the members and sometimes to the general public as a means of raising money for the Institution. When the Wakefield Exhibition of 1865 was suggested he was elected vice-president of the executive committee. Following the success of the exhibition the surplus money was used to establish the Wakefield Industrial and Fine Art Institution in 1866 and Dr. Milner was elected as vice-chairman of the council and a trustee. A member of the managing committee of the Clayton Hospital, he was, as we have seen, an active supporter of the Wakefield Lancasterian School and the Wakefield Microscopical Society, besides being a member of many other large public organisations such as the Ray Society and the Anthropological Society.⁹ He was said to be a Liberal in politics and had temporarily left the party after a dispute about education. It does not seem that politics played a very large part in his life. He was a nominal member of the Church of England, having been baptised at St. George the Martyr's Church in Southwark, but it is not known whether he ever attended church on a regular basis.

In 1867 the Government removed the convicts from Wakefield Prison and as a consequence his post as resident surgeon ceased to exist but he was awarded a pension for his past services. However the West Riding Magistrates requested him to remain and become surgeon to the prisoners sent to Wakefield from other counties. He accepted the proposed arrangement and was able to remain in the prison house he had occupied for the preceding twenty years.

William Ralph Milner died at his house in the prison grounds on 17 August 1868 as a result of a stroke on the 6th of August. He had previously suffered a stroke in 1866 from which he had not fully recovered. He was buried in Wakefield Cemetery on 20 August 1868. Within barely eighteen months his old friend Thomas Waller Gissing was buried in the next grave plot.

When William Milner was appointed resident surgeon at the prison he was, as we have seen, granted a house within the prison walls. We do not know what Milner's domestic arrangements were in the early days but the 1851 census returns show him, an unmarried man, living entirely alone. Presumably servants who came in on a daily basis cared for him. By the time of the 1861 census this had changed; living with him was his unmarried sister, Mary Susan, aged 44 and described as a schoolmistress. Also resident in the house was Elizabeth Bilbrock, a seventeen-year-old domes-

tic servant. Mary Milner had arrived in Wakefield a few years earlier as a notice inserted in the *Wakefield Journal* indicates. “*Miss Milner, West Riding Prison, has consented to receive items for sale at the Mechanics’ Institution Bazaar and Exhibition to be held October 1855 in aid of the Building Purchase Fund.*”¹⁰ No doubt her brother encouraged her to be involved in the social and educational life of Wakefield. Both brother and sister were members of the managing body of the Lancasterian School in Wakefield. This school opened in 1812 but by early 1856 it was experiencing difficulties and it was closed down for a few months, later opening on a new basis. On the committee were, amongst others, William Milner (Chairman), John Binks, Henry Benington, Thomas Waller Gissing and Samuel Wilderspin. The ladies committee included Miss Milner and the Misses Benington.¹¹ The Milners took their duties very seriously: William served from 1858 until his death and Mary also from 1858 until at least 1882 when they stopped listing the ladies names in the annual reports.

What qualifications or experience Mary Milner had as a schoolteacher is not known. When she arrived in Wakefield she was in her mid-thirties and may well have taught in a school in the Southwark area, where she was born. In 1858 she decided to run her own school but it was not a new venture because it had been started the previous year by a Mrs. T. S. Read. In the *Wakefield Journal* dated 26 June 1857 the latter had placed an announcement: “*INFANT EDUCATION. The system of Infant Education, on the plans of Mr. Wilderspin and others, has been found eminently successful among the children of the poor, while those who have interested themselves in Infant Schools and aided in providing their advantages for others, have often felt at a loss to procure the same for their own young children. Mrs. T. S. READ proposes shortly to open a select Infant School in Wakefield, for training Young Children from the ages of three or four to seven or eight. Reading, Spelling, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, History, with elements of Geometry, will be taught. Interesting Object Lessons on different subjects will also be given from time to time. Terms: -£1 per quarter for one pupil, or 15s. each for two or more in the same family. A quarter’s notice required before the removal of a pupil. 113, Westgate, June 22nd, 1857.*”¹² This was followed by a notice in the same newspaper on the 31st July announcing that the school would open for the first time on “*Monday, August 10th, in the large and airy School-room in the gardens in Back Lane which she has taken for the present.*”¹³ On this occasion her address was given as Mrs. Bulmer’s, Drury Lane. Nothing is known about Mrs. Read; she cannot have been in Wakefield for very long because she does not

appear on the 1851 census return and she had left the town in 1858.

For unknown reasons Mrs. Read's school was only to last for one year. In June 1858 we find the following notice in the *Wakefield Journal*. "INFANT EDUCATION. MISS MILNER begs to inform the inhabitants of Wakefield that she has taken the School-room in Back Lane, lately occupied by Mrs. Read, (who is leaving the town), where she proposes to carry on the INFANT SCHOOL, the duties of which will commence on TUESDAY, July 20th, 1858. Terms, 10s 6d per quarter."¹⁴ There can be no doubt that Miss Milner intended to continue to run the school on the principles laid down by Samuel Wilderspin but it is noticeable that she reduced the quarterly fee by half.

Samuel Wilderspin was well known to Mary Milner; she would have met him at functions held at the Mechanics' Institution and she served with him on the managing committee of the Lancasterian School. He lived in Westgate in Wakefield, quite near to the prison, and probably visited William and Mary at their house there. He may well have encouraged her to take over the school in Back Lane.

Wilderspin¹⁵ was born at Hornsey, London in 1791. His father was a follower of Swedenborg and a member of the New Church of Jerusalem. In about 1819, whilst serving as a clerk to the minister of a New Jerusalem church in south London, Samuel met James Buchanan, a fellow Swedenborgian, who had come to London to open an Infants School. When a similar school was opened in Spitalfields in 1820 Buchanan recommended Wilderspin and his wife as master and mistress. Wilderspin developed a new method of educating large groups of children from two to six years of age. In 1823 he published his first book *On the Importance of Educating the Infant Children of the Poor*.

Wilderspin's school attracted many visitors and led to the forming of the Infant School Society, a middle-class philanthropic organisation. In 1824 Wilderspin became the society's agent, travelling throughout Britain founding infant schools on his model. After twelve years of travelling during which he helped to establish 270 infant schools he accepted a series of educational engagements. These engagements included organising a system of non-denominational schools in Liverpool, but his progressive methods aroused the opposition of the churches. In 1838 he was invited by the commissioners of national education in Ireland to take charge of the model schools in Dublin; however, after a disagreement with one of the Roman Catholic commissioners, his contract was not renewed. On his return from Dublin in 1839 he found that his difficulties in Ireland and his absence

from the education scene in England had diminished his reputation and neither the state nor the church were prepared to employ him.

In the 1840s his lack of employment forced him almost to the point of destitution. He was saved by the intervention and patronage of Daniel and Mary Gaskell of Lupset Hall, Wakefield. After a short time as the master of an infant school in Lincolnshire he retired to Wakefield in 1848. In Wakefield he spent a busy retirement as a prominent member of the Mechanics' Institution and as a member of various committees, including that of the Lancasterian School. In 1846 he had been granted a civil-list pension of £100 per year and he also received an annuity of £40 from the interest on £1818 collected as a "national tribute" by the efforts of the Gaskells. He died at Wakefield on 10 March 1866.¹⁶

By all accounts Miss Milner was quite successful as a schoolmistress, her school was centrally placed and she would have the confidence of local parents. Almost certainly all three of Thomas Waller Gissing's sons received their early education from her. No doubt his boys would have received a good education at the Lancasterian School of which he was an ardent supporter, but the fact that Miss Milner was a friend and that her school was a private one would have swayed his judgement. George Gissing did very well at Miss Milner's school; this was probably due more to his innate abilities than to her teaching. His sister, Ellen, in appendix C of *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family* repeats a story told to her by her mother: "*when he was eight years old, the elderly lady who kept a small school in Wakefield to which he had been sent, came and said that she had taught him all she could, and begged that he might be sent on to another school, as she felt that his time was being wasted.*"¹⁷ Miss Milner retired from teaching in 1875 but she continued to live in Wakefield in her small house at Westgate End. When her brother William died in 1868 she had to vacate the house within the prison walls and she was given the tenancy of a terrace house in Kemp's Yard. The yard was named after Dr. Benjamin Kemp who owned the nearby Westgate End House. Kemp was the nephew of Dr. Benjamin Walker, the cousin of Mary Milner's father, the man to whom William Milner was apprenticed in 1826.

William Milner left his entire estate to his sister Mary, a sum, according to the probate document, of under £1,000. Much of this money was invested in Railway Stocks and she sought the advice of five friends of her brother to help her with her investments. These friends were John Binks, Thomas Waller Gissing, Samuel Holdsworth, Thomas Walker and William Briggs. These five men were named in her Will as trustees, but only two of

them, John Binks and Thomas Walker who were also named as the executors, survived her. It is interesting to see that much of the railway stock was sold and most of the money lent out as mortgages on property in Wakefield and district. A sum of £300 was lent to William Chadwick in 1880 and secured on land and a dwelling house in Smirthwaite Street, Wakefield. Chadwick was an old friend of Mary Milner; he held the post of headmaster of the Lancasterian School for 42 years from 1857 to 1899.

We do not know which church Mary Milner attended if any. She was a baptised member of the Church of England and there were several churches close to where she lived in Westgate. A new church, St. Michael's, was built only a few yards from her home in Kemp's Yard and she may well have worshipped there. This church was consecrated in May 1861 whilst she was still living with her brother in the house in the prison grounds. Neither William nor Mary was listed amongst the local dignitaries present at the ceremony which included many of the officials from the prison and several members of the medical profession.

Mary Milner died in 1887 at the home of her half-sister Amelia Edkin, in Stockwell near Clapham. The *Wakefield Express* of 24 December 1887 carried her death announcement. "*MILNER, on the 13th inst. At Edithna Street, Stockwell, Mary Susan Milner, late of Westgate End, Wakefield, aged 70. Interred at Newhead Cemetery.*" Amelia was much younger than Mary, being born in 1850; she was married to Arthur Edkin, a pawnbroker's manager; they are listed in the 1881 census for Lambeth with a young son named Arthur, born in 1873. Mary's half brother, Ralph, was still living at the time of her death. In 1881 he was also living in Lambeth with his wife Elizabeth and a son aged 21, also named Ralph. Both father and son were employed in the printing trade. Mary left £100 to John Binks, who was one of her executors, and in a codicil to her will had declared: "*I give and appoint unto Margaret Emily Gissing and Ellen Sophia Gissing children of my late friend Thomas Waller Gissing the sum of One hundred pounds in equal shares.*" She left all her household furniture, wearing apparel and personal articles to her half-sister Amelia. The residue of her estate was to be shared between Amelia Edkin and Ralph Milner. When probate was granted to John Binks in 1888 the gross value of the personal estate was given as £1597-7-8d.

George Gissing mentions Mary Milner twice in his letters. In a letter sent to his sister Ellen, dated 14 October 1883 he says "*...this afternoon I had a fine walk, right over Clapham Common, which you no doubt know by name. By the bye, did not Miss Milner use to talk much of Clapham? I seem*

to have a sort of vague prenatal recollection of it. Is the old lady still in the land of the living? After all, I owe her much; as do all to their first teachers. Most probably she has forgotten my name.”¹⁸ And in 1888, after Miss Milner had died, he writes to Ellen “That Miss Milner left you some money rejoices me extremely. A small sum, but not, as you say, to be despised; & indeed it indicates a good feeling in the poor old woman. Rather a dolorous life, hers, I fear; at all events towards the end. Well she might have disposed of her possessions in a much less profitable way to the world at large.”¹⁹ Mary Milner probably saw much of the Gissing sisters and their mother after she gave up the school. She still served on the managing body of the Lancasterian School, where one of the new lady members of the committee was Lucy Bruce, a close friend of the Gissing family. It would have been most surprising if she had forgotten the name of George Gissing.

¹*Directory of London and its Suburbs*, Pigot’s and Co., 1839, p. 281.

²Obituary, *Wakefield Free Press*, 4 August 1868, p. 5, cols 3 and 4.

³J. Horsfall Turner, *The Annals of the Wakefield House of Correction*, Bingley, 1904.

⁴Regulations for Government of Prisons, Wakefield, 1866.

⁵*Wakefield Journal & West Riding Herald*, 5 January 1849, p. 3, col. 4.

⁶*Ibid.*, 23 May 1851, p. 7, col. 5.

⁷William Ranger, *Report to the General Board of Health on a preliminary inquiry into the sewerage, drainage and supply of water and the sanitary condition of the inhabitants of Wakefield*, 1852.

⁸Harold Speak and Jean Forrester, *Education in Wakefield 1275-1970*, Wakefield Historical Society, 1970.

⁹Two scholarly societies: the Ray Society was founded in 1844 in honour of John Ray (1627-1705), the eminent naturalist, for the publication of works on natural history, while the Anthropological Society had for its founder, in 1863, Dr. James Hunt (1833-1869), an ethnologist.

¹⁰*Wakefield Journal & Examiner*, 7 June 1855, p. 4, col. 1.

¹¹Reports of the Managing Committee of the Wakefield Lancasterian School.

¹²*Wakefield Journal & Examiner*, 26 June 1857, p. 4, col. 2.

¹³*Ibid.*, 31 July 1857, p. 4, col. 3.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 11 June 1858, p. 4, col. 4.

¹⁵*Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁶*Wakefield Free Press*, 17 March 1866, p. 5, col. 5.

¹⁷Algernon and Ellen Gissing, *Letters of George Gissing to Members of his Family*, London 1927.

¹⁸*Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 2, p. 170.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 184.

Book Reviews

John Spiers (ed.), *Gissing and the City: Cultural Crisis and the Making of Books in Late Victorian England*, Basingstoke: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2006.

These essays, which emerge from the Centenary conference on Gissing held at the University of London in 2003, constitute the third collection on Gissing in five years, following Bouwe Postmus' collection, *A Garland for Gissing* (Rodopi, 2001) and Martin Ryle and Jenny Bourne Taylor's volume: *George Gissing: Voices of the Unclassed* (Ashgate, 2005).

The collection under review is inaugurated by a wide-ranging, synoptic introduction by the editor, John Spiers, "Why does Gissing matter?", in which he sets up a number of valuable contexts for approaching the subject of Gissing and the city, presented in such a way as to be of assistance both to readers coming to this area for the first time and to more practised scholars working in this dynamic area of literary study. John Spiers, of course, has a longstanding association with Gissing, principally in his capacity as publisher of scholarly editions of twenty of Gissing's novels (by 1987) and of the *Diary* (1978). The availability of these Harvester Press editions proved to be of singular value to scholars of Gissing, helping to prompt a marked growth of critical attention to his work in the 1970s (a subject highlighted in Scott McCracken's essay for this volume).

Spiers was also responsible, with Pierre Coustillas, for a groundbreaking National Book League exhibition in 1971, "The Rediscovery of George Gissing." This fact is noted in Coustillas' own essay, "Gissing: A Life in Death – A Cavalcade of Gissing Criticism in the Last Hundred Years." Coustillas valuably traces the important but vexed question of the critical response to Gissing in the twentieth century, making it possible to see, for example, the "wide spectrum" (213) of press comment on Gissing's death in December 1903. Coustillas takes as read the serious, early contributors to Gissing studies, such as Arthur Waugh and Allan Monkhouse, and brings on board lesser-known figures, such as old schoolfriends of the author, sifting out, in the process, the inveterate and indelicate gossipers, Nicoll and Shorter, the condescending Morley Roberts and insensitive Frank Swinnerton. The passages on his chequered reception from the 1920s to the 1940s make particularly riveting reading and Coustillas is right to highlight the undervalued critical contribution of critics and writers of the 1950s – William Plomer, V. S. Pritchett and Walter Allen.

Another source of bibliographical satisfaction is provided by Bouwe Postmus' important and scrupulous account of how the Gissing *Scrapbook*, of which he is the editor, throws light on "the nature of [Gissing's] working

methods” (200). Postmus is able to show in instructive detail “the workings of Gissing’s creative faculty” (205) in the example of the genesis of his story “The Fate of Humphrey Snell” and demonstrates, convincingly, how “the initial creative impulse was developed through a masterly exploitation and fusion of disparate materials previously collected and preserved in the *Scrapbook*” (206).

An essay marked by original research of a different kind is Richard Dennis’s “Buildings, Residences, and Mansions: George Gissing’s ‘prejudice against flats.’” Dennis introduces a fascinating socio-geographical perspective on flat dwelling, triangulating Gissing’s own abode of six years – Cornwall Residences, located, suggestively between Baker Street station and Regent’s Park – with the working-class Farringdon Road Buildings of *The Nether World* and Oxford and Cambridge Mansions, occupied by the rentier Carnabys in *The Whirlpool*. Research in Census enumerators’ books, District Surveyor’s Returns and trade publications such as *The Builder*, confirms that Gissing is unsurprisingly faithful to the social composition of these dwellings. Dennis includes the oddly satisfying finding that Oxford and Cambridge Mansions contained a “substantial colonial and continental representation” (53) and that in the novel the Carnabys had previously been resident in Honolulu and Queensland. He notes that while Gissing harboured prejudice against flats his own ideal residence, “*Col-leges* for unmarried intellectual men” resembled in all essentials flat-living, but without the troubling, intrusive women (60).

Intrusive women, of the late-nineteenth century city, women who crossed or renegotiated the boundaries between the private and the public sphere, between domesticity and paid work, between respectable and “unrespectable” spheres, have been intensively investigated in fiction and fact over the past decade by critics and historians, including Rachel Bowlby, Judith Walkowitz, Deborah Epstein Nord, Sally Ledger and Deborah Parsons. The largest group of essays in this volume, not surprisingly, is devoted to tracing further these trajectories in a range of Gissing’s novels and short stories.

For well over a decade the gender politics of space has been a significant component in assessments of Gissing’s engagement with the urban, and several essays in this collection engage further with this topic. The restricted access for women to public space is one of Emma Liggins’s concerns in her essay “‘Citizens of London?’ Working Women, Leisure and Urban Space in Gissing’s Fiction.” Liggins examines the restrictions placed on “working women denied leisured opportunities because of their limited

earning power” with reference to “Phoebe,” “Lou and Liz,” *Demos*, *The Unclassed* and *The Nether World*. She concludes that Gissing’s considerable empathy and understanding of their predicament parallels “his own sense of marginalisation as a citizen, struggling to pay his way in the newly commercialised city” (107). The Bank Holiday scene of *charivari* depicted in “Lou and Liz” and *The Nether World* proves to be no release at all and that when working women turn to drink they are viewed as doubly unrespectable.

The temporary, illusory but politically suggestive disruption which the Bank Holiday represents is also examined in Luisa Villa’s essay “Gissing’s *Saturnalia*: Urban Crowds, Carnavalesque Subversion and the Crisis of Paternal Authority.” She notes the “impression” of “euphoric expansion through the internal barriers which cut across and organise urban space” (66-7) and observes how, in its tones of apocalyptic despair, Gissing’s narrator voices the “overwhelming yearnings which animate the modern crowd” which the Bank Holiday “provisionally releases” and “re-contains” (68). Villa prompts the thought that the narrator, too, has crossed from the quotidian over to rhetorical excess, stimulated by the crowd’s energies, even as he tries to contain them through the “conservative, classicist stance” (68).

“Woman as an invader” is the subject of Mary Barfoot’s lecture in *The Odd Women*, as Josephine McQuail reminds us in her essay “‘Woman as an Invader’: Travel and Travail in George Gissing’s *The Odd Women*.” McQuail examines the conditions and patterns of transit for women across the city and the pitfalls and possibilities for unchaperoned women like Monica Madden, while Elizabeth F. Evans in “‘Counter-jumpers’ and ‘Queens of the Street’: The Shop Girl of Gissing and his Contemporaries” concentrates on the social and moral instability of the shop girl, building on the work of Sally Ledger on this topic. In Evans’s words Gissing “dramatizes the threats of ambiguous class status, morality and femininity represented by women’s new participation in the public sphere” (115). Similar threats pursue the inhabitants of London’s growing suburbs, as instanced in Lara Baker Whelan’s essay “The Clash of Space and Culture: Gissing and the Rise of the ‘New’ Suburban.” Whelan shows how the space of the suburb in Gissing is marked by two opposed ideas of living, the old “ideal of privacy, quiet and respectability” and “social climbing, camouflaged poverty (of mind and pocket) and sexual impropriety” (153).

In her study of *The Nether World* and *The Unclassed*, “‘Children of the Street’: Reconfiguring Gender in Gissing’s London,” Margaret E. Mitchell

suggests that “gender is ... constructed by the city, and is at the same time central to the city’s imagined possibilities” (129). Such an observation applies to several of the essays under consideration here, including Laura Vorachek’s study of the burden of contradictory expectations carried by the female musician (arising from Gissing’s portrayal of Alma Rolfe in *The Whirlpool*), “Rebellion in The Metropolis: George Gissing’s New Woman Musician,” and Meaghan Clarke’s study of the practices of female art journalists (Elizabeth Pennell, Fenwick Miller and Alice Meynell) in “New Woman on Grub Street: Art in the City.” While Clarke only marginally touches on Gissing, her essay very helpfully contributes to (in the editor’s words) a reintegration of “the work and writing of women as art writers within the history of modernity” (24).

Alice Meynell, for one, proves to be, like Jasper Milvain, a consummate freelance strategist, juggling, in Clarke’s words, “numerous freelance art reviews and articles.” All serious novelists are, of course, serious about newspapers. The extent of Gissing’s knowledge and immersion in a business he decried is the subject of Simon J. James’s essay “In Public: George Gissing, Newspapers and the City.” James’s productive starting point is that “the association between modernity, the city, and the violation of the self is common throughout Gissing’s work” (190). He shows how newspapers are integrated in numerous ways in Gissing’s fictions, literalised as agents of social contagion, offering the spectacle of “uneducated choice” (193), unstable and contradictory, since “the publicity of the medium compromises its claim to accuracy” (191), prompting (in *The Whirlpool*) insecurity, paranoia and a pervasive sense of “something going out of control” (195).

Another agent in the urban landscape replete with metonymic and metaphorical potential for Gissing is the understated, yet suggestive presence of what Christine Huguet calls “the privileged urban sign” of the river (169). In her essay, “‘Muddy depths’: the Thames in Gissing’s Fiction,” she examines the river as a social marker, showing how it helps “delineate class-linked areas” of the city (163), and maps, east-west, the passage to “an increasingly adequate place of recreation” (165). Huguet is good on Gissing’s “scenes of riverside introspection” (167) which enact states of interiority, charged often with despair, and offer changed narrative perspectives. She also brings out Gissing’s formal attention to the surface, depth and breadth of the river in crisp and attentive readings.

Mary Hammond’s “‘Amid the Dear Old Horrors’: Memory, London, and Literary Labour in *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*” and John

Sloan's "Gissing, Literary Bohemia, and the Metropolitan Circle," use Gissing's negotiations with the city to further our understanding of his situation as a writer in relation to the Victorian realism he inherited and the twentieth century modernism to which he was moving, his indeterminate aesthetic position and his own particular relationship to writing communities. For Hammond, Gissing's ambivalence about London is connected to his concern for "the future of writing." *Ryecroft* with its "privileging of the private over the public sphere, the emphasis on self over society" announces "a fragmenting consciousness" in which the city offers itself not through the "surface plurality of realism" but aestheticised through "an intensely personal relationship with time and space" (177). *Ryecroft*, by this reading, marks a large formal step forward in the disruption of "notions of social and linguistic communities" (which realist fiction tends to retain), already disintegrating, strikingly, in *New Grub Street* (174). John Sloan also detects a disavowal of community, in the writer's theoretical and personal (dis)engagement with the attractions of the coterie in his subtle teasing-out of Gissing's "uncertain sense of distance from and attraction to Bohemia" (78). For Sloan, Gissing is "too traditional in his education and instincts to embrace the progressive aspects of the new aestheticism...or recognise the potential of the coterie as an oppositional intellectual coalition in the new expanding market place" (83).

Finally, in the most critically ambitious essay in the volume, "Between Dreamworlds and Real Worlds: Gissing's London," Scott McCracken draws on Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project* to open up a new critical direction for re-reading Gissing's adventures with the urban. McCracken urges that Gissing be read in terms of the concept of "phantasmagoria," the product of "the new commodity culture that emerged after the French Revolution" (94) and which describes the "dreamworlds" of the modern city, "the reflective surfaces of Victorian commodity culture, a dynamic, if conservative approach to modernity, a city divided yet navigable" (98). McCracken's use of Benjamin serves a related and wider critical purpose which is to suggest how the "phantasmagoric" in Gissing's texts (86) might supplement the important work of Raymond Williams, John Goode and Fredric Jameson. Each critic, he argues, has made the experience of the city central to Gissing's distinctiveness as a writer, in "one of the most fruitful periods of both cultural Marxism and of Gissing criticism" (88). McCracken's shrewd placing of these critics does not exclude drawing attention to their blind spots and enables him to direct attention towards how new readings of the "cities of Gissing's imagination," in McCracken's phrase,

might be undertaken.— William Greenslade, University of the West of England

Christine DeVine, *Class in Turn-of-the-Century Novels of Gissing, James, Hardy and Wells*, Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005.

Doing full justice to this apparently short book would require abnormally long critical comment. Its author is not unknown to readers of this journal, in which she has published several stimulating articles on Gissing's works; she has edited the Grayswood Press edition of John Forster's *Life of Dickens*, originally prepared by Gissing for Chapman and Hall, and she has given abundant evidence that her approach to his work is at once refreshingly personal and profitably appreciative of her predecessors' work. Her understanding of Gissing's specificity is deep and few present-day commentators are more genuinely prepared to do him justice. We need not fear that she will try to "organize" him and to reduce his works to a protracted analysis of his personal quarrel with the world. She can afford to ignore those biographers and critics who have simplistically represented him as a mere specialist of his own case. Her book is not a new version, chronologically circumscribed, of Gissing in context; it has—from the structural point of view—complexities that are not suggested by the title. It offers much more than is announced in the table of contents, which is a first extension of the title page. Chapter I is essentially a study of *The Nether World*, that is, as Gissing strictly planned it, a picture of the lower classes in a district of London wedged between the West End and the East End. Chapter II deals with international terrorism as Henry James saw it, more through reports in the press than through personal observation and depicted it in *The Princess Casamassima*. Chapter III offers a dissection of Hardy's treatment of gender, morality and class in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and chapter IV concerns Wells's best as well as best known and formally most innovative novel, *Tono-Bungay*. It is not indifferent to know that Gissing read James's and Hardy's novels but passed no comment on *The Princess*, and that in the chapter of *Tono-Bungay* in which the death of Edward Ponderevo is related, Wells somewhat tendentiously recycled the circumstances of Gissing's death in the Pyrenees. But the four chapters have much more to offer than discussions of the four sharply different novels; indeed they begin with historical, social and literary considerations on the backgrounds of the respective narratives, even though these introductions, whose useful-

ness and interest are not to be doubted, give one the impression of being adjuncts written at the publishers' request.

They are at least as interesting and informative as the pages strictly devoted to the four novels under consideration. Leaving out anything of this apparently extraneous material would have been a great pity. It is in fact much to the point and the reviewer would be guilty of serious omission if he failed to stress its relevance and vividness. The pages about philanthropic societies and Charles Booth's monumental study of the living conditions of the London poor are a natural complement to the discussion of *The Nether World*. The weak point of Booth's method and copiously expounded findings is not far to seek; like us Gissing must have found Booth's statistics "dry stuff." Besides, it is only fair to add what twentieth-century experience has confirmed, namely, as Christine DeVine wryly observes, that "his statistics tell him the story he wants to hear." Indeed it would seem that the wealthy professional statistician and philanthropist realised the limitations of his own usefulness. They appear in the well-known passage where *Demos* is mentioned, a passage which did not escape the notice of Gissing, nor probably of his future friend Clara Collet: "It is not easy for any outsider to gain a sufficient insight into the lives of these people," Booth wrote. "The descriptions of them in the books we read are for the most part as unlike the truth as are descriptions of aristocratic life in the books they read. [...] something may be gleaned from a few books, such for instance as 'Demos.'" Had his multi-volume enquiry begun to appear a couple of years later, Booth could have added *Thyrza* and *The Nether World*. Gissing did not expect from the great man more than this discreet reference to his work. He wisely dismissed the scientific possibility of a statistician's approach and if he later read Clara Collet's official reports for the Board of Trade, his opinion of her work, like her own indeed, always remained tinged with a measure of salutary scepticism. With laudable wisdom, he once wrote apropos of realism in fiction that "the novelist works, and must work, subjectively [...] a demand for objectivity in fiction is worse than meaningless, for apart from the personality of the workman no literary art can exist."

Equally valuable is the comment on the classical allusions in the chapter entitled "Io Saturnalia," which functions as a narrative and descriptive climax in the evocation of the rowdy amusement at the Crystal Palace on the August Bank Holiday. Here one wonders whether Christine DeVine is aware that she had a predecessor in the evaluation of the classical elements in Gissing's art, Samuel Vogt Gapp, who in 1936 published a whole vol-

ume on the subject. Whatever the answer may be, one must credit her with the brief but telling parallel she establishes between the mitigation of despair in the last paragraphs of *Middlemarch* and *The Nether World*, a few lines which allow some gleam of hope justified in George Eliot's case by her sympathy for positivism.

The pages devoted to *The Princess Casamassima*, which Henry James regarded as his most naturalistic novel, are enlivened by the initial dramatic account given of the Phoenix Park murders, of which the narrative offers no equivalent. Christine DeVine puts her finger on one of the sources of the trouble with this novel which strikes one as an oddity in Jamesian fiction when she writes: "In *The Princess Casamassima*, James *appears* [her emphasis] to be engaging with history itself, and yet it is the *Times* that James actually references." The judgments passed on the book by Lionel Trilling and John Lucas may seem to contradict each other but in fact they are complementary, and indeed the reason why the novel is in various respects disappointing, is to be found elsewhere as is made clear by in-depth comparisons with Gissing's, Hardy's and Wells's novels studied in the present volume. James has no *empathy* with his subject. *The Princess Casamassima* is essentially a rhetorical construction. Gissing knew life in the slums because he had been a denizen of the slums; Hardy had a first-hand knowledge of the Dorset rustics based on fifty years' observation; Wells's origins and evolution were the recognizable raw material of the refined elements which constitute the backbone of *Tono-Bungay*, but James did not have the shadow of a real contact with such people as he strove to imagine with press-cuttings from *The Times* on his desk. Besides he is as vague about the aims of anarchism as about the thoughts and activities of his genial but in no way impressive protagonist Hyacinth Robinson. If Christine DeVine agrees with this view of James's novel her agreement is only apparent between the lines of her book, not in her comment.

Among the strongest passages in the volume are the pages concerning *Adam Bede* and *Tess*, two novels which irresistibly invite comparisons with each other and which show Hardy, if one leaves aside their other works, to be the superior—and ideologically bolder—artist. Another is the shrewd analysis of the quarrel between James and Wells, which reminds us how inevitable was the collision between the "superior person" James thought himself to be and the impudent, ill-mannered, intellectual cockney that Wells remained to the end of his life, except perhaps when he felt at the end of his tether. Or, to take one more example among so many of which the book is chock-full, this assessment of George and Edward Ponderevo seen

as overreachers: “Edward is the ultimate class climber and the embodiment of rampant capitalism. But he could also be viewed as an example of what happens when the lower-middle-class man is given the opportunity to take advantage of the capitalist system. Despite all his achievement, he is in some ways still the lower-middle-class buffoon of Victorian literature and in the end he cannot exist in the new world order. George, on the other hand, is a different kind of lower-middle-class overreacher—a far more twentieth-century version. His technological skills place him in the future rather than the past; he is the coming face of his class.” Gissing, we feel, had he lived a decade longer, would have agreed. On the theme of overreachers he had opinions to which the passing of time has not given the lie; in his last few years he was convinced that Wells was overreaching himself and, although he never said so openly, he considered that his friend’s works of what came to be called science fiction were a form of artistic quackery. Indeed there is scarcely any doubt that Wells himself thought so, but he was not prepared to make such an admission.

Reading this book with Gissing’s work in mind naturally leads one to raise questions that only the author can answer. Did Christine DeVine realise, when she noticed Wells’s use of Gissing’s phrase “the nether world,” that Wells in this novel was amusing himself (innocently enough) by using other words and phrases which Gissing readers as early as 1909 could regard as part and parcel of his artistic property? Can it be an accident that we read such things as “it is a wonderful place, George, a whirlpool”; “how is Life’s Morning, Ponderevo?”; “a very deaf paying guest”; or again phrases like “city clerk” and “the trick of my memory”?

If ever the book is reprinted, some misprints could be profitably corrected. On pp. 13 and 107, the French phrase “nouveau riche” is used, but only the plural form “nouveaux riches” can make sense; French use is again curiously violated on p. 114 when “*haute* literary establishment” will cause some raising of foreign eyebrows. And so will the extraordinary statement (on p. 43) that Gissing met Clara Collet in 1903 after the publication of *The Nether World*. Are the printers as opposed to author and publishers the guilty party? Lastly the double obsolete genitive on p. 40, “on the anniversary of her grandfather’s his death,” is a non-standard linguistic curiosity which unaccountably complicates the reader’s task.

The illustrations have been cleverly chosen. The two from *Punch*, “Spirits of Anarchy” and “Irish Frankenstein,” are a fit illustration of the ready-made ideas of the period and of *Punch*’s editor’s *bêtes noires*. Henry Wallis’s well-known representation of Chatterton was a fairly obvious

choice for *The Princess Casamassima*, whose hero ultimately does away with himself. George Clausen's painting "Winter work" adequately brings to mind some of the most painful scenes in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. William Quiller Orchardson's picture is evocative indeed of what the English used to call in French "Mariage de convenance," and a photograph by Bassano, the photographer of the rich, shows us Edward VII about 1871, the antithesis of poverty and an inveterate philanderer. However, the pick of the bunch is the reproduction on the dust-jacket, "St. Martin-in-the-Fields" by William Logsdail, painted while Gissing was writing *The Nether World*. We see a small flower girl in the foreground, an elegantly dressed lady, a cab and a dog on the left, a mounted policeman and a newsboy on the right, with the church in the background. This was indeed turn-of-the-century London. • Pierre Coustillas

George Gissing, *Il riscatto di Eva*, translated, edited and introduced by Maria Teresa Chialant, Naples: Liguori Editore, 2005, with an Afterword by Laura Di Michele.

Liguori Editore in Naples has published, in an attractive paperback, a parallel text edition of *Eve's Ransom (Il Riscatto di Eva)*. The Italian translation, by Maria Teresa Chialant, who also contributes a critical introduction to the novel, is based on the Dover edition of the novel which reproduces the Lawrence and Bullen edition of 1895. The translation is extremely faithful to the original, thanks to the solutions opted for which convey well the tone of the novel particularly in the descriptive language regarding the urban and industrial spaces which Chialant comments upon as being intrinsic to the way this novel works and acquires its own particular aura. This reviewer came across very few printing errors of omission and only a couple of cases of mistranslation. The book is the ninth in a series called Angelica, under the direction of Professor Laura Di Michele, who also contributes an Afterword.

Chialant's introduction is thorough and highly useful because it is generously informative for those who may be new to Gissing and to this novel in particular. She provides concise and detailed information about the critical reception accorded to the novel and to the place it occupies in Gissing's career. It does ample justice to the issues that the novel seeks to address, while also managing to place it in the wider context of Gissing's overall achievement, drawing attention to the fact that while it may not be central to the work as a whole – H.G. Wells appears to be the only distin-

guished figure to have considered it the best and least appreciated – it is significant because of its consistent alignment with the concerns that we are used to encountering in the Gissing novels which have been subjected to more constant critical attention. Yet *Eve's Ransom* also has, importantly, distinguishing characteristics of its own which render it unique and not least among these is the space and minute scrutiny Gissing reserves for the complex and ambiguous female type that Chialant identifies as an important subject for attention in the late nineteenth century novel.

Compared to novels like *Born In Exile*, *Eve's Ransom* is relatively short and is the product of a twenty-five day burst of creative activity. Chialant's contraposition of Jacob Korg's comment that the novel displays an "unaccustomed deftness" and Michael Collie's dismissive definition of it as a "potboiler" provides, I feel, a useful key to our interpretation of its achievement. It is a fast moving, episodic read with frequent and rapid changes, as Chialant notes, of almost exclusively urban locations. As opposed to *The Odd Women* or *New Grub Street*, which adopt the technique of studying the fortunes and progress of two protagonist couples, it focuses principally on Hilliard's obsession with Eve. This hones the reader's attention to the concerns which are constant in Gissing's writing, exile and the solitude of life lived in the margins, the fear of poverty, stifled aspiration, the pain of love and its compromises. On this occasion, Gissing's approach involves the reader in Hilliard's struggle to understand Eve, the object of his love and symbol of his desire to possess, lived in classic Gissing style as a form of male aspiration to attain some form of ransom against the vicissitudes of life and personal alienation which afflict his unclassed characters. Chialant tellingly links Gissing's depiction of the gloomy urban spaces of the novel's industrial wasteland to the figure of Hilliard whose life "stretches before him like an arid waste."

In her consideration of Gissing's well known description of the most characteristic part of his work which regards "a class of young men distinctive of our time – well-educated, fairly bred, *but without money*," who are "martyred by the fact of possessing uncommon endowments" – she offers an interesting and important shift in focus, identifying in the unclassed male an impulse to rescue women in danger, but seeing this develop into a desire to ransom her. Therefore the impulse to aid Ida Starr on the part of Osmond Waymark acquires more intriguing connotations when we see the same impulse at work with regard to a woman like Eve. As Chialant observes, the male protagonist's rivalry with a more prosperous and cynical contender for the woman, in this case Narramore, acquires a new com-

plexity in this novel because of the nature of the woman who is the object of desire. The 'New Woman' Eve, is identifiably admirable and worthy of 'saving,' but Chialant identifies in Hilliard a paternalistic approach towards Eve (and other women in the novel), exerted through economic control, which is inevitably in conflict with the sense of respect that he feels for Eve's independence. This contributes to the atmosphere of ambiguity and suspicion which permeates the story. The final part of the introduction, dedicated to London and the 'New Woman,' discusses the emergence of a new female figure who lives in the metropolis but, in contrast to the Victorian ethos which prefigures her as an angel of the hearth, is now identifiable both as a worker and a consumer in the modern sense. Her ambition, like that of many of her male predecessors in the history of the novel, who move from the country to the city, is to acquire economic and personal freedom, and Hilliard is confused and startled by the self-assurance and knowledge with which Eve lives city life because his paternal, guardian-like impulses are thwarted and come to appear redundant and irrelevant.

Chialant closes her introduction recalling the concluding part of the novel in which we see Hilliard in arcadian seclusion from the troubling vicissitudes of the urban. Laura Di Michele sees Eve and Hilliard as having no further need of each other, in the sense that both have been "ransomed," yet Hilliard, though Gissing describes him as a "free man in his own conceit" who sings to himself of the joy of life, seems to have no other destination if not that of Ryecroftian removal from the sphere of life, and of love, which has been presented in so many of his other novels as being the crown of life. • Michael Cronin, University of Cosenza

Notes and News

We first wish to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of the tragic death of Walter Gissing in the battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916. Ten years ago we published a substantial article on the life and death of Gissing's elder son in our July number, pp. 13-23, with two illustrations of the impressive Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme and of Gommecourt British Cemetery No. 2. All the sources available were used and it is perhaps significant that no new material has been brought to light in the last decade about Walter's sad fate.

Anyone who wishes to refresh his memory should consult an illustrated article on the internet at <http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/somme.htm>

This five-page account makes distressing reading. We reproduce some disconnected but highly significant passages:

The Battle of the Somme is famous chiefly on account of the loss of 58,000 British troops (one third of them killed) on the first day of the battle, 1 July 1916, which to this day remains a one-day record. The attack was launched upon a 30 kilometre front, from north of the Somme river between Arras and Albert, and ran from 1 July until 18 November, at which point it was called off. ...

The attack was preceded by an eight-day preliminary bombardment of the German lines, beginning on Saturday 24 June.

The expectation was that the ferocity of the bombardment would entirely destroy all forward German defences, enabling the attacking British troops to practically walk across No Man's Land and take possession of the German front lines from the battered and dazed German troops. 1,500 British guns, together with a similar number of French guns, were employed in the bombardment. ...

However the advance artillery bombardment failed to destroy either the German front line barbed wire or the heavily-built concrete bunkers the Germans had carefully and robustly constructed. Much of the munitions used by the British proved to be 'duds' – badly constructed and ineffective. Many charges did not go off; even to-day farmers of the Western Front unearth many tons of unexploded 'iron harvest' each year. ...

The attack itself began at 07:30 on 1 July with the detonation of a series of 17 mines. ...

The first attacking wave of the offensive went over the top from Gommecourt to the French left flank just south of Montauban. The attack was by no means a surprise to the German forces. Quite aside from being freely discussed in French coffee shops and in letters home from the front, the chief effect of the eight-day preliminary bombardment served merely to alert the German army to imminent attack. ... strikingly little progress [was made] on 1 July or in the days and weeks that followed. ...

The British troops were for the most part forced back into their trenches by the effectiveness of the German machine gun response.

Many troops were killed or wounded the moment they stepped out of the front lines into No Man's Land. Many men walked slowly towards the German lines, laden down with supplies, expecting little or no opposition. They made for incredibly easy targets for the German machine-gunners. ...

[Three weeks later British Commander in Chief, Sir Douglas Haig] was convinced – as were the Germans – that the enemy was on the point of exhaustion and that a breakthrough was imminent. Thus the offensive was maintained throughout the summer and into November. The British saw few victories however; such as Pozières, captured by two Australian divisions on 23 July; and those that were secured were not followed up. ...

Despite the slow but progressive British advance, poor weather – snow –

brought a halt to the Somme offensive on 18 November. During the attack the British and French had gained 12 kilometres of ground, the taking of which resulted in 420,000 estimated British casualties, including many of the volunteer 'pal's' battalions, plus a further 200,000 French casualties. German casualties were estimated to run at around 500,000.

Sir Douglas Haig's conduct of the battle caused – and still causes – great controversy. Critics argued that his inflexible approach merely repeated flawed tactics; others argue that Haig's hand was forced in that the Somme offensive was necessary in order to relieve the French at Verdun.

The editor and his wife were unable to attend on 1 July the poignant commemoration led by Prince Charles at the Thiepval Memorial, reports and images of which some of our readers will have found in the press or on television, but they once more visited the next day Gommecourt Cemetery no. 2, where Walter Gissing's remains are said to have been buried, and the Memorial to the Missing on which his name is one of the 73,357 to be read. In his address on 1 July the Prince assuredly used the words we expected when he decried the “unimaginable” slaughter and “unutterable hell” of the battle. Let us all remember.

On 4 April Ros Stinton, former librarian and social worker, currently secondhand and antiquarian bookseller who is responsible for the business side of the *Gissing Journal*, gave a talk as representative of the Gissing Trust to the Friends of the John Rylands Library on “George Gissing at Owens College: The Prizewinner who went to Prison.” The Friends had raised some money towards the recent purchase by the Library of C. C. Kohler's Gissing Collection. Some forty people attended. Ros's talk began with a characteristic quotation from the opening chapter of *Born in Exile*, after which she sketched the family background and George's early school years when he was a pupil of Miss Milner and of Joseph Harrison, the man who first taught him Latin and Greek. As she related the main events of those early years, before and immediately after Thomas Waller Gissing's death in December 1870, she had an opportunity to remind her audience of George's early academic successes at Lindow Grove School, where his best friends were Arthur Bowes, Tom Sykes and the sons of the locally well-known Stalybridge ironmaster John Summers. Then Ros evoked the four years of the star student at Owens, initiated by the brilliant success in the Oxford Junior Local Examination in 1872 when he was placed twelfth out of more than 1,000 candidates and first in the Manchester district, a feat to which was attached the awarding of a scholarship for free tuition at Owens

for three years, a period crowned by his winning the Shakespeare Scholarship and by his being named first in the whole of England for Latin and English in the first B.A. examination. The talk was inevitably concluded by the sad relation of Gissing's disgrace consequent upon his petty thefts committed so as to support the young prostitute he had fallen in love with, and was determined to redeem, followed by his imprisonment in Bellevue Prison, and by echoes of his experiences in his works.

Some time ago we published a list of novels in which Gissing and/or his works are mentioned. Now Hazel Bell, a contributor to the present number of the *Journal*, supplies two more references, both in novels by Elizabeth Taylor (1912-1975):

In her *A Game of Hide and Seek*, published 1951, p. 197 of Vintage edition, a failed actor is describing his lodgings, which are squalid: he ends, "The bath has a green stain running down under the geyser and—am I depressing you? It is rather like George Gissing perhaps—I eat my meals at the wash-stand too, and rather nasty they are."

In *Mrs. Palfrey at the Claremont*, published 1971, chapter 5, an equally poverty-stricken writer living in equally squalid lodgings takes his washing to the coin-operated launderette which "had overhead fluorescent lighting, which enabled him to read easily his George Gissing."

These references confirm that stereotyped impressions of Gissing are very common in the literary world. How many of Gissing's novels and short stories had Elizabeth Taylor read?

Second International George Moore Conference
"George Moore: Across Borders"
30-31 March 2007 – University of Lille III, France
Deadline for submission of proposals: 15 October 2006
For further details Gissing readers should contact Christine
Huguet: cemhuguet@hotmail.com

Last April, Cyril Wyatt drew our attention to a website on which a most unexpected Roland Gissing item was offered for sale: a model steam locomotive, tender, switchlights and track entirely built by Algernon's elder son (1895-1967), all of them in perfect working order. An amazing find! exclaimed the seller of this item, unique in private hands. Other pieces built

by Roland are now in the Glenbow Museum in Calgary—they show that he was an accomplished machinist as well as a talented landscape painter.

Recent Publications

Volume

Emma Liggins, *George Gissing, the Working Woman, and Urban Culture*, Aldershot, Hampshire and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.

Articles, reviews, etc.

Marta Salís, editor and translator, *Cuentos de amor victorianos*, Barcelona: Alba Editorial, 2004. A beautifully produced anthology of love short stories of the Victorian age. This volume, first published in October 2004 was reissued in February 2005. It contains Gissing's late short story, "The Scrupulous Father," pp. 227-44, preceded by an introductory biographical note. The Spanish title is "El padre escrupuloso." Simon J. James and Manuel Huguet also reported that the Spanish translation of this story was available as an e-book.

Emma Liggins, "Book Reviews," *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 48 (2005), no. 1, pp. 97-100. Review of Simon J. James's critical study of Gissing, *Unsettled Accounts*.

Arlene Young, "Character and the Modern City: George Gissing's Urban Negotiations," *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 49 (2006), no. 1, pp. 49-62.

Christine Huguet, "Art et histoire: l'Excès dans *Demos* de George Gissing," *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, no. 63, April 2006, pp. 111-22. The same number contains a review by the same writer of Christine DeVine's edition of Forster's *Life of Dickens*, abridged and revised by Gissing (Grayswood Press), pp. 491-94.

Anon., "One of the most brilliant pupils Owens College ever had," *Your Manchester* (The University of Manchester Alumni Magazine), May 2006, pp. 30-31, with photographs of Gissing and Gabrielle Fleury, also the plaque which reads: "To the memory of George Robert Gissing 1857-1903 Student of Owens College 1872-1876."

