

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

Anthony Powell and George Gissing

ANTHONY CURTIS

London

To the collector of Gissing references in the work of later British novelists the fiction of the old Etonian author Anthony Powell is perhaps an unlikely quarry. But reading recently his *O, How the Wheel Becomes It!*—the novella Powell published in 1983 after he had completed the final volume of *The Music of Time*—I discovered a reference to Gissing in relation to a novel written by one of the main characters. More of that in a moment.

Warming to the scent, I turned to *Miscellaneous Verdicts: Writings on Writers 1946-1989*, containing a collection of the lead book-reviews Powell wrote regularly for the *Daily Telegraph* and some longer pieces published elsewhere. There is no review of Gissing as such in the whole collection but my grateful recourse to the file of Gissing reviews kept by Pierre Coustillas revealed that Powell did review two Gissing works in the newspaper in 1961, the year that Gissing scholarship began to emerge from its family-induced doldrums. They were the *Letters to H. G. Wells* edited by Royal A. Gettmann and *The Letters of George Gissing to Eduard Bertz 1887-1903* edited by Arthur C. Young, forerunners of the great award-winning nine-volume edition of the letters from the Ohio University Press.

It is clear from these reviews that Powell's acquaintance with Gissing's work and biography was fairly minimal. In writing of the letters to Wells he takes Orwell's admiration for Gissing as his starting-point and skates over the prison sentence thus: "As a very young man Gissing had been involved in trouble about money which necessitated a year's exile in America." Six months later when Powell reviewed the letters to Bertz he is more explicit about what happened and his tone is much more confident: "There is an awful fascination about Gissing [he writes for his opening sentence]. Why did he make such a mess of his life? Wherever one places him as a novelist, his talent as a writer was obviously exceptional." He goes on to add: "There is something 'compulsive' about Gissing's whole career. It is as if he *wanted* to have a bad time. The fact that one of his friends was Mme.

Wanda von Sacher-Masoch, divorced wife of the writer who gave his name to masochism, seems perfectly apt.”

The Gissing references in the collection of articles add nothing to this judgment. The first is in a review of James Ogden’s study of Isaac D’Israeli (Oxford, 1969). Powell tells us that the Victorian prime minister’s father, “wrote a great many other books—poems, novels, stories, essays—as well as the *Curiosities of Literature* which was to be his *chef d’œuvre*. It passed into endless editions, became a favourite of Byron’s, and was introduced into one of the Stalky & Co. stories by Kipling, and into a novel by Gissing.”

There are indeed two references in Gissing’s fiction to D’Israeli’s accounts of writers, books and collectors. One in *The Unclassed* where the hero, Osmond Waymark, asks the prostitute Ida Starr with whom he falls in love if she has read the work! He aims to redeem her through literature as well as through love as Gissing tried, unsuccessfully, to do with Nell. This passage was among the cuts made by Gissing for the revised edition of 1895 when the novel was reduced from three volumes to one. There is also a reference in *Thyrza* where Gilbert Grail chances across D’Israeli’s work. To Gissing who believed in the life-transforming power of great literature, the *Curiosities* was a useful appetiser.

Gissing appears again in Powell’s *Verdicts* in a review of the *Letters of Stephen Crane* edited by R. W. Stallman (New York, 1960). Powell confesses to a distaste for Crane as a writer and a man but nonetheless admits that he “brought off a revolution in American literature by treating the Civil War [in *The Red Badge of Courage*] in realistic, rather than romantic, terms.” He then goes on to say: “He has, perhaps, more in common with Gissing—a violent Gissing, of course—than with Kipling, with whom his contemporaries compared him.” “A violent Gissing” is a contradiction in terms but Powell spoke truer than he knew. Crane’s early tale *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* is very Gissing-like in style and content.

After that Gissing appears in a review of *The Unknown Orwell* by Peter Stansky and William Abrahams (London, 1972). “Orwell’s method of novel-writing meant that he was using up his novelist’s material at a reckless rate and he himself realized—if one may speak flippantly—that the Gissing had to stop.” Oh dear, how many times has one heard that boring quip!

Finally Gissing emerges in Powell’s *Telegraph* verdict on Philip Larkin’s *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces, 1955-82* (a similar kind of book to Powell’s) in which he mentions a piece by Larkin on Francis

Thompson, the Roman Catholic poet who wrote “The Hound of Heaven.” “Incidentally, [writes Powell] has it ever been noted that Francis Thompson and George Gissing must have overlapped at Owen’s [sic] College, Manchester, from one angle a splendid pair of down-and-out literary alumni, even if Gissing was in his own way intensely respectable?”

He ties himself in knots making that comparison, and it is clear from Pierre Coustillas’s article in last October’s *Gissing Journal* that the Manchester worthies, Percy Withers, Allan Monkhouse and C. H. Herford who instigated and implemented the memorial tablet engraved by Eric Gill and the annual scholarship in honour of Gissing in the University, formerly Owens College, must have been aware of the “splendid pair” being students at Owens at the same time as their aim was to do for Gissing’s memory what had already been done for that of Thompson, a medical student for six years from 1877 onwards.

So much for the reviews, now for the novella. It presents two English novelists whose youth was spent in the brittle bright young things’ world of the London of the nineteen-twenties, G. F. H. Shadbald and Cedric Winterwade. The latter, killed during World War II, left behind some volumes of a diary. His publisher approaches Shadbald suggesting he edit it for publication, aiming to bring it out with a reprint of Winterwade’s best-known novel, *The Welsons of Omdurman Terrace*.

“The story [of this novel, Powell writes], set at the turn of the century, portrayed a lower-middle class London family of a kind Winterwade could at best have known only second-hand...

Shadbald, who detected faint echoes of H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, even at times George Gissing, privately considered the novelist’s writing to be ‘not only oldfashioned, derivative, facetious, pedestrian, but imbued with every vulgarity of mannerism and thought possible to accommodate within fictional form.’”

Shadbald’s low opinion of his friend’s novel has a sizeable element of professional jealousy in it exacerbated by the knowledge, learned from the diary, that during a pre-war weekend in Paris, Winterwade succeeded in bedding the fashionable glamorous bright young female thing with whom Shadbald only managed to remain on kissing terms.

If the reference to Gissing seems unappreciative, the novella itself may be seen as an unexpected tribute to Gissing. It is a small scale twentieth-century version of *New Grub Street* revealing how that street continued to exist from 1920 to 1980. Jasper Milvain and Alfred Yule have their counterparts in Winterwade and Shadbald. The novella belongs to the

whistle-blowing tradition of literature that exposes the hidden pressures at work in the writing and reviewing of literature. It begins in France with Balzac's *Les Illusions Perdues* and Maupassant's *Bel-Ami* and in England with *Pendennis*, *New Grub Street*, *Cakes and Ale*.

Just as Gissing characterised the various toilers in the vineyard of literary endeavour in his novel so likewise does Powell: Winterwade, the forgotten journeyman novelist, Shadbald the egregious hack de luxe, Grigham the provincial don, peddling structuralist gobbledegook, Jason Price, the publisher's editor, ingratiating himself with his authors in the bar of the Garrick Club, "Proserpine Gunning," pen name of Shadbald's latest wife who writes highly researched feminist detective stories, all of these people avid to appear on the television programme dominated by the frantic trauma-probing interviewer, Ron Cabbage. Powell's sardonic account of the self-regarding actions of these characters comes straight out of *New Grub Street*. Like Monsieur Jourdain, Powell was a Gissingite without knowing it.

The Last Years of Edith Underwood

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George Gissing's ill-fated marriage to Edith Underwood was well chronicled by Gissing himself in his diary and letters but very little is known about Edith after the final separation. This disastrous marriage entered its final phase in 1896 in spite of the birth of a second son, Alfred Charles, on 20th January. Edith cared more for Alfred than she did for her elder son, Walter, and her unkind treatment of the older boy was such that Gissing took the resolve, in April 1896, of entrusting him to his mother and sisters in Wakefield, where the latter had just opened a preparatory school for boys.¹ This decision inevitably led to further furious arguments between George and Edith and in February of the following year, driven from their home at Epsom by his wife's fury at hearing that his health was failing, George spent on doctor's orders a few months recuperating at Budleigh Salterton in Devon. At the end of May Gissing returned to Epsom in the hope that better relations could be established with Edith and that Walter might return to the family home. This was not to be and in September 1897 George wrote to his friend Clara Collet² telling her that he had decided to

leave Edith and intended going to Italy for the winter. Another friend of Gissing's, Eliza Orme, offered to accommodate Edith and Alfred in her own home, a decision she was later to regret.³

In February 1898 Gissing, then staying in Rome, heard from Eliza that she couldn't cope with Edith's appalling behaviour any longer and that she had found her four unfurnished rooms in northwest London.⁴ George wrote to his brother, Algernon, asking him to arrange to have some of the furniture in storage sent to these rooms at 90 Mansfield Road. By 1 April the removal of the furniture was completed and Edith had moved into the rooms. Meanwhile Gissing had consulted his solicitor, S.N.P. Brewster, who had drawn up an Agreement of Separation that included a provision for a payment of £1 a week for household expenses.⁵ On 6 May 1898, back in England, Gissing rented a house at 7 Clifton Terrace, Dorking, employed a housekeeper to look after him, and hoped fervently that his wife would not discover his whereabouts.⁶ At the beginning of August he received a letter from Eliza Orme telling him that Edith had attacked her landlord and his wife with a stick and that a policeman had to be called. Edith then left the house and took lodgings at another house in the same road.⁷ She later caused another scene at Mansfield Road on 21 August when the furniture was removed and taken into storage at Maple's Depository. As Mr. Watts, her landlord, put it in a letter to Gissing Edith had created a terrible uproar and had caused much damage to the plants in his garden. On 27 August Gissing went up to London to see his solicitor who informed him that his wife was now demanding a home of her own, custody of both children and a legal separation. Then what Gissing was dreading the most happened: Edith and Alfred turned up on 7 September at his rented house at Dorking.⁸ Edith had managed to get his address from Maple's Furniture Depository but to Gissing's great relief the meeting was reasonably amicable. He informed his wife that the parting was final and that he would not take Alfred away from her as long as she kept well. They had tea together and she and the little boy left for the railway station after Edith had promised not to come to Dorking again. Gissing noted in his diary that he did not speak a single word to the child and although he did not know it at the time he was never to see his younger son again. Eventually, Gissing's solicitor drew up some sort of an agreement for him to pay a weekly amount for Edith and Alfred's maintenance.

We do not know where Edith spent the next four years apart from two addresses, one taken from the 1901 census returns and the other from the records of her committal to a mental hospital in 1902. It would be safe to

predict that she had to move frequently if her erratic behaviour continued as before. In 1901 we find her renting two rooms at 19 Scarbrook Road, Croydon, the other four rooms in the house being occupied by Emma M. Young, a 32-year-old hospital nurse and Ethel A. C. Young a 20-year-old Post Office clerk. The return does not state what the relationship was between the two women, presumably they were sisters, and neither does it say anything about Edith's occupation or means of support. Alfred is listed as being five years old but the return omits to mention whether he was a scholar as is usual for children of that age. We have no way of knowing how long Edith lived at Scarbrook Road but by January of the following year she was lodging with a George James Cole and his wife at 7 Melbourne Square, Brixton.⁹ It seems that her mental condition continued to deteriorate and Mrs. Cole, who was subjected to continual verbal abuse from Edith, was also concerned about her treatment of Alfred. On 23 January 1902 the Coles contacted the police and Edith was removed to the Lambeth Infirmary.¹⁰ At the Infirmary she was examined by Dr. Marcus Henry Quarry, who came to the following conclusion on the Certificate of Medical Practitioner: "She is excited & strange in manner. She states that 'they' won't allow her to live long at any place, doing all sorts of things to turn her out, poisoning & assaulting her. In the street she states she is insulted & accused of being an immoral woman by strangers etc." Dr. Quarry also quoted Edith's landlord: "George James Cole, landlord, 7 Melbourne Square, Brixton states that she is very strange in manner & accuses his wife of trying to poison her by arsenic & carbolic acid. She says that she is followed in the street by men etc." Dr. Quarry declared her to be "Lunatic and a proper person to be taken charge of and detained under care and treatment." As the County of London Asylum was full at that time Dr. Quarry signed a reception order for her to be admitted to Hoxton House.¹¹ This was a private mental hospital in the London Borough of Hackney and one that accommodated both private and pauper residents, the fees for the paupers presumably being paid by the appropriate Board of Guardians. In the case of Edith Gissing her fees were 25 shillings per week. Writing to his sister Margaret on 2 May 1902 Gissing informed her that "it was discovered that, out of my weekly £2, E[dith] had put into the savings-bank about £120!! Of course she all but starved herself & poor little A[lfred] in the process. This money becomes available for her support."¹² At the same time as Edith was being dealt with at the Lambeth Infirmary it was discovered that Alfred was suffering from a urinary infection that required hospital treatment. After this treatment he was looked after for some time

by Eliza Orme who, through her sister, Mrs. Fox, who lived in Falmouth, then found a place for him with foster parents on a farm in Cornwall. Alfred was to be cared for by this family for about six years, before attending a school for two years in Exeter, and in 1910 being sent, like his brother earlier, as a boarder to Gresham's School, Holt, Norfolk.¹³

Edith remained at Hoxton House for just 19 months before being transferred to Fisherton House Mental Hospital, near Salisbury, Wiltshire on 13 September 1904.¹⁴ Why she was moved is not clear but Fisherton House had a long history of taking in patients from overcrowded mental hospitals in other parts of the country. Edith was a private patient but it is not known for certain who was paying her fees. The £120 found in her bank account must have been all spent by 1904 but under the terms of George Gissing's will the income from a third of his residual estate, and the capital sum involved if the need arose, was to be used for the maintenance of his wife.¹⁵ No medical notes from Edith's time at Hoxton House have been located but some from Fisherton House still exist.¹⁶ These notes commence with a résumé of the reasons for her committal to a mental hospital and go on to give a description of her condition both physically and mentally on the day of her admission: she is aged 30 years; married; no occupation; Ch. of E. Not known whether present is first attack. S[ocial] C[lass] unknown, not E[pileptic], S[yphilitic]¹⁷ or D[ementia]. F[amily H[istory]] unknown. The admission notes go on to state that physically, "Patient is a tall fairly well-built woman with black hair, dark brown eyes, small equal pupils, straight nose, tongue clean, teeth good. First sound of heart somewhat accentuated, lungs & abdom[inal] organs normal." Mentally, "Says she has a paper which states she is perfectly sane; it was sent to her by her husband's lawyer two years ago, altho' it is five years since the lawyer saw her. He found out she was sane by inquiring from the different people with whom she used to lodge, all of whom said, 'She lived like a person truly sane.'" For the remainder of 1904 Edith was seen by the resident doctor each month and in the following years about every three months. The notes naturally concentrate on her mental condition but usually contain a remark about her physical condition, which during her time at Fisherton House was generally very good.

September 24th 1904. Deluded and at times excited; sits by herself in out of the way corners; does not speak.

October 27th 1904. No mental improvement.

November 20th 1904. Is very deluded & at times violent & excited when she throws dishes at other patients & strikes them.

December 13th 1904. Full of delusions of persecution; also fancies she is the wife of the late George Gissing the novelist whom she says is not dead etc.¹⁸

March 12th 1905. Very deluded & at times excited, threatening & dangerous.

June 15th 1905. Has been quieter & better behaved since the last note but continues full of delusions, will not believe her husband is dead, says she got carbolic acid in her tea previous to coming here etc.

September 18th 1905. Still persists in all her delusions, is obstinate & troublesome at times.

December 11th 1905. Has a quiet depressed air, states that she tasted carbolic acid in her tea, that her husband is in this asylum & that he writes on the ward door.

March 6th 1906. Persists in the delusions above & states that she is annoyed by other patients who taunt her etc.

June 20th 1906. Patient has been exceedingly noisy & troublesome on account of her delusions of persecution & visual & auditory hallucinations.

September 16th 1906. Patient remains extremely deluded & her hallucinations cause her to be troublesome.

December 15th 1906. No mental or physical change.

March 15th 1907. Her tactile hallucinations seem to have disappeared but is otherwise unchanged.

June 25th 1907. Remains deluded, she apparently conceals her hallucinations of touch.

September 22nd 1907. Suspicious, complains of the electricity in her feet, noisy at times.

December 10th 1907. Remains deluded, occasionally gets attacks of excitement when she becomes noisy & abusive.

March 10th 1908. Has recently been excitable & noisy & is under a course of Pot. Brom.¹⁹

June 5th 1908. No special mental change, has periodic attacks of excitement.

September 1st 1908. Excitable at times, incoherent & wandering in conversation.

December 5th 1908. Remains deluded, occasional attacks of excitement when she becomes noisy and abusive.

March 10th 1909. Continues to be deluded & excited.

June 5th 1909. Shows no special mental change.

September 5th 1909. Delusional, periodic attacks of excitement.

December 2nd 1909. Continues to be deluded & excited.

May 14th 1910. Is still deluded about her husband being alive but thinks now the "poisoning" was a mistake & that the carbolic acid was only used for cleaning purposes & not to poison her. Is quiet & reserved & clean but is occasionally violent.

June 7th 1910. Excited at times, very reserved.

Two months after this entry Edith was lucid enough to write to her sister-in-law, Ellen Gissing, in an attempt to enlist her help in being released from the mental hospital.

Fisherton House Asylum.

Dear Miss Gissing,

I am not writing to ask you to come to see me but to come and make it possible for me to pass out at the end of this year. I have been ten years among the Insane.

I hope the Boys are quite well and yourself also. Hoping to see or hear from you soon.

With love.

From

Edith.

Ellen Gissing received the letter on 8 August 1910 and immediately sent it to Clara Collet. The first paragraph of her own letter suggests that this was not the first time Edith had written to her asking for help.

"I am enclosing this letter which I received this morning, it reminds me of the sad doings of many many years ago when I used frequently to receive somewhat similar letters. I thought I would just ask you whether it is at all

possible that she might recover her reason & whether you know at all what the Doctors think. Of course I do not send any reply to this letter. It reminds one however of the sad complications in front with regard to the boys.”²⁰

We do not know whether Clara Collet made any enquiries at Fisherton House about Edith’s state of health; we do know, however, that Edith remained in a mental hospital until her death seven years later.

September 6th 1910. No change in mental condition. Health good.

November 6th 1910. She is usually quiet & reserved keeping much to herself but occasionally she is abusive & restless, her conversation is incoherent. She has delusions & often her conduct is irrational.

Here the medical notes end at the bottom of the page with the statement “Transferred to Vol. LXXVI. Fol. 264.” Unfortunately this volume no longer exists and the last reference to Edith at Fisherton House is in the Register of Discharges when on 9 March 1912 she is transferred to the Dorset County Asylum near the village of Charminster and three miles from Dorchester.²¹

No reason is given for her transfer to Dorset along with five other women. Edith was admitted as a private patient into Herrison Charminster, a new house with its own grounds, attached to the County Asylum, built for private patients in 1904.²² The medical notes about her at Herrison Charminster commence with the statement that she is private patient number 937 and is suffering from Delusional Insanity.²³

EDITH GISSING. 40, admitted 9th March 1912 (Transferred from Fisherton House where she spent 8 years prior to which she spent 2 years at Hoxton House, Lambeth).

She is conscious and aware of her surroundings, answers questions sensibly but seems to entertain some delusions about her husband & children & also on food. Asks constantly in a very childish manner to see a solicitor in order to be discharged, but mostly tries to avoid M.D. Taciturn & solitary. Health fair.

April 10th 1912. Has been expressing numerous delusions recently if her husband is here, she has recognised him in a male patient etc. etc. (her husband has been dead for some years but she refuses to admit it.)

July 12th 1912. Has been troublesome, abusive and cursing recently on subject of her delusions about her husband & her detention here.

The Women's Wing of Herrison Charminster

October 20th 1912. Delusions as fixed as ever. Becomes a little excited & abusive at times. General health fair.

January 20th 1913. No improvement or change of any kind to record.

April 17th 1913. This patient who, on account of her numerous delusions of persecution has refused every sort of attention from members of the staff, went to bed complaining of pain in her left side 5 days ago. Temp. has been up to 99.6 on two occasions but otherwise she has kept about normal, Resp. fast 25, Pulse c. 100. No cough or sputum. After a good deal of persuasion she submitted quietly to examination. Whole of left side of chest dull to percussion, but breath sounds audible almost all over, except in front where it is only faintly audible. Bronchophony & pectoriloquy well marked at base near first axillary fold. Fine crepitations can occasionally be heard. A little bronchitis and râles and rhonci in right side. Diagnosis – probably a dry? fibroid phthisis.²⁴ She does not look wasted. She attributes her illness to poison and is very abusive at times.

July 16th 1913. She has been much better recently, being out in the garden most of the day. She is still a little dyspnoeic. Very deluded as before & is still very foulmouthed.

October 27th 1913. Very abusive on the subject of her delusions & that her husband is here. Health better.

January 25th 1914. Still very abusive without apparent cause. Delusions as before. Health fair.

April 28th 1914. General health is much better as she spends almost the whole day out of doors. Mental condition is as bad as ever.

October 2nd 1914. Is quite demented, takes no notice of anybody or anything.

November 20th 1914. She seems quite lost and is unable to realise her present surroundings. In moderate health.

April 7th 1915. Ideas confused. Perception disordered. In fair health.

May 18th 1915. [This two-word entry is undecipherable.]

September 7th 1916. At times she is abusive. She is very deluded and states that she is poisoned. There is a tumour in one of her breasts. She is sullen and solitary.

January 10th 1917. A hopeless case of delusional insanity – abusive and disagreeable. Says her husband is here.

February 19th 1917. Confined to bed meantime. Temp. 100.2, Resp. 24, does not take food well. Resents examination.

February 20th 1917. She was supposed to be phthisical but no signs of pulmonary tuberculosis can be made out.

February 22nd 1917. Albumen in urine, complains of pains in chest but is probably due to tumour in her breast.

February 24th 1917. She seems much weaker and more helpless today. Takes nothing but soda water and brandy.

February 26th 1917. It has been necessary to pass the catheter for the last three days. She frequently vomits. Temp. 99.6, Pulse 128.

February 27th 1917. She died today at 10.50 p.m.

Following Edith's death a post mortem was held and the findings were,

- 1) Tumour in left breast.
- 2) Bowel congested in parts, no sign of enteric fever or dysentery.
- 3) Spleen enlarged, weighs 8 ounces, surface of organ studded over with white spots (tubercles).
- 4) Lungs – normal.
- 5) Heart – normal.

The cause of death given on the death certificate, signed by G. Ernest Peachell, the Medical Officer at Herrison Charminster, was Organic Brain Disease. There are two other rather ambiguous statements on the medical certificate. Her age is given as 45 years, but Edith was born on 28 January 1867, therefore she died just a month after her 50th birthday. It seems strange that nobody ever asked her for her date of birth. In the column for occupation it states that she was “of Fisherton House, Salisbury, Wife of --- Gissing occupation unknown.” They may well have used the Fisherton House address because that is where she was “living” prior to her transfer to Herrison Charminster. Earlier researchers have made the mistake of believing that Edith died at Fisherton House. Why they should have done so is not easily explained when column 1 on the certificate (When and where died) clearly states “Twenty seventh February 1917 Herrison, Charminster R.D.” Edith was buried at St. Mary's Church, Charminster on 6 March 1917; the curate, Rev. J. W. Papworth, conducted the service.²⁵

It is difficult not to feel some sympathy for Edith. After all she was mentally ill and may well have been so even before her marriage to George Gissing. Quite simply they should never have married and if they had not, both would have been saved much heartache and misery.

¹ Pierre Coustillas, ed., *Diary of George Gissing*, p. 408, and letter to Clara Collet of 23 April 1896, *Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 6, pp. 117-18.

² Clara Elizabeth Collet (1860-1948), M.A., Labour correspondent of the Board of Trade. She was one of Gissing's close friends for the last ten years of his life and after his death was an executor of his will and one of the legal guardians of his sons. See *Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 6, p. 339.

³ Eliza Orme (1848-1937). She was a conveyancer and heavily involved with the feminist movement. Gissing met her in 1894 and they became friends; she was to be a great help to him during the breakdown of his marriage.

⁴ These rooms were in the house of Walter George Watts, a detective employed by J. Kemp & Co., 10 Argyll Street, London. See *Diary of George Gissing*, p. 484.

⁵ Gissing had retained the services of Eliza Orme's solicitor, S.N.P. Brewster of 11 New Inn, Strand, London. Gissing wished to raise the payment to 25/-.

⁶ *Diary of George Gissing*, p. 492. See also Markus Neacey, “The Admirable Kate Boughton: George Gissing’s Housekeeper in Dorking,” *Gissing Journal*, January 2008, pp. 6-28.

⁷ *Diary of George Gissing*, p. 499.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 501.

⁹ In 1901 George James Cole, aged 35, was living just a few hundred yards away from Melbourne Square at 3 Vassell Road, Brixton; he was described on the census return as a private coachman. Also listed was his wife Jane, aged 38, two children, Lilian aged 9 and Charles aged 5. They also had a boarder, Henry Crew, aged 25.

¹⁰ *Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 8, p. 324.

¹¹ The papers relating to Edith’s examination at the Lambeth Infirmary and the “Order for the Reception of a Pauper Lunatic,” all bearing various dates in late January 1902, are held at the Dorset History Centre, Dorchester. ref. NG/HH/MR/4/4/5 & 6.

¹² *Collected Letters of George Gissing*, vol. 8, p. 381.

¹³ The family with whom Alfred lived at Treverva Farm, near Falmouth, was that of one Alfred James Smith. Gissing’s younger son attended Gresham’s School from January 1910 to July 1914.

¹⁴ Finch’s Fisherton House, near Salisbury, Wiltshire was a private madhouse founded about 1815. At one time it was the largest private asylum in the country. It later became the Fisherton House Asylum but changed its name again in the 1930s when it became The Old Manor Hospital. It remained in private hands until 1954, when it was taken over by the Ministry of Health.

¹⁵ The fees for Edith’s stay in hospital could only have come from George Gissing’s estate. No doubt Clara Collet, as one of Gissing’s executors, would have made a contribution from her pocket if the need arose.

¹⁶ Edith’s medical notes from her time at Fisherton House are held at the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, ref. J7/190/69.

¹⁷ This statement does not help the case of those who persist in saying that George Gissing suffered from syphilis. Surely if he had contracted the disease he would have passed it on to Edith.

¹⁸ This note suggests that the hospital authorities were not aware of her true identity.

¹⁹ Potassium Bromide suppresses the nervous system and was used as a sedative.

²⁰ Copies of these letters are held at the Modern Record Centre, The Library, Warwick University, ref. 29/3/8/1.

²¹ The Register of Discharges from Fisherton House is held at the Wiltshire and Swindon Archives, ref. J7/176/6.

²² The Dorset County Asylum was opened in 1864 for 230 patients; the cost including 56 acres of land was about £44,000. In 1895 an extension was built

increasing the accommodation to 720 patients. A new house for private patients, with its own grounds, known as Herrison, was erected in 1904.

²³ These medical notes are held at the Dorset History Centre, ref. NG/HH/CHR/4/4/5.

²⁴ These are all medical terms used during an examination of the respiratory system.

²⁵ St. Mary's Church, Charminster, Burial register 1916-17, page 23, entry 180.

On Virginia Woolf's First Two Gissing Reviews and Parallel Chapters in *New Grub Street* and *The Voyage Out*

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Virginia Woolf—an important literary critic as well as a famous modern novelist—wrote four review-essays on Gissing: the first, in 1907 least known and most favorable; the second, in 1912 still highly favorable and somewhat better known (Kirkpatrick 138, 141). But more Gissing scholars have probably read Woolf's often reprinted 1923 and 1927 reviews of Gissing's life and works (Kirkpatrick 157, 165). These balance her continued appreciation of his writing with more stress on what she now saw as his limitations. Her somewhat changed emphasis perhaps may link with her own changing literary methods, as she rejected a late-Victorian focus on the outward material world and moved towards her own modernist subjectivity. At any rate, she remained interested in Gissing for most of her career. In her earliest phase she admired him very much as a writer from a lower social status than her own who had nevertheless overcome huge obstacles to create enduring literary works. Relevantly, too, in the light of Woolf's recurrent bipolar depressions and Gissing's deep and recurrent depressions (Caramagno 33-74; Selig 5-15), affinities of mood might also have drawn Miss Stephen—not yet Virginia Woolf—to Gissing's works. Yet neither the critics of Woolf nor of Gissing seem to have noticed certain striking resemblances between the death-haunted twenty-fifth chapter of Woolf's novel *The Voyage Out* (1915) and his death-haunted thirty-second chapter of *New Grub Street* (1891).

Her most laudatory Gissing review appeared unsigned in 1907 by the then Virginia Stephen in the Anglo-Catholic journal the *Guardian* (Kirkpatrick 138). Beginning in late 1904, the unbelieving young woman had

provided this high-church weekly with many reviews, mainly through an acquaintance of her friend Violet Dickinson—a fortuitous link that helped Miss Stephen get published there before other journals would take her work (McNeillie 1: xi-xiii). Roughly one and a half months later, when even the *Times Literary Supplement* had begun to publish her reviews (Woolf, *Passionate Apprentice* 238 and 238n35), she could joke about the “righteous old Guardian”:

Really I never read such pedantic commonplace as the Guardianese: it takes up a line of a Governess, and maiden Lady, and high church Parson mixed: how they ever got such a black little goat in their fold, I can't conceive.¹ (Woolf, *Letters* 1: 178).

Yet even within the *Guardian*'s “high church . . . fold,” she could praise Gissing's *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (1903)—in its way, a meditative work but one without any religion.

She begins by commending *Ryecroft* as “a true book that” will “endure” (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 358). Although she notes that some reviewers had considered it a barely disguised autobiography (cf. Coustillas and Partridge 416-18; Coustillas 4), she argues that possible links between the outer lives of Gissing and of Ryecroft do not much matter. She regards as far more important the book's vivid expression, through its first-person character, of Gissing's inward thoughts and feelings. She finds a “sober and tranquil” “charm” in the work's prose and in its “flawless integrity.” She admires Gissing's evocation of a love of reading, of a wish to write what pleases one instead of what pleases the market, and of a welcome retirement to the green English countryside, accompanied only by cherished books. She concludes that “most of us” could learn from this “exquisitely literate” work how to live in peace and “mind”-“ranging” “freedom” (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 131-34). Unlike Woolf's later Gissing essays but especially the two from the 1920s, this one contains nothing but praise.

If her 1907 *Henry Ryecroft* review has become all but forgotten, many Gissing scholars probably know her still very positive but slightly more qualified second essay on his work: her *TLS* review in 1912 of eight of Gissing's newly reissued books. In 1972 Pierre Coustillas and Colin Partridge appropriately chose this essay for reprinting (529-34). In spite of a brief reservation towards the end, Miss Stephen here considers George Gissing “a born writer” of continuing importance. In 1911 Sidgwick and Jackson had reissued his *The Odd Women*, *Eve's Ransom*, *The Whirlpool*, *The Unclassed*, *The Emancipated*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, *Denzil Quarrier*,

and the short story collection *Human Odds and Ends* (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 361n1). Significantly, though, Miss Stephen goes beyond just these reprints. She mentions two of Gissing's very finest novels not included in this batch: *Born in Exile*, briefly noted as available now in a railway-bookstall edition for only sevenpence, and noted at greater length, *New Grub Street*. She regards it as a "sad" but thoughtful and convincing depiction of an author with "fine character and intelligence" but very little money who faces "the additional agony of loving good writing" that he can no longer achieve. She also notes the integrity of the novelist Harold Biffen, the protagonist's closest friend, who insists on faithfully portraying the many "repulsive features of common decent life" (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 356-58). Six years later in her *Diary*, Woolf would still admire George Gissing enough to apply a specific *New Grub Street* phrase to her household servant's annoying behavior: "Poverty degrades, as Gissing said"—an exact quotation from Reardon's words to Amy (Woolf, *Diary* 1: 91; Gissing, *New Grub Street* 186).² And by 1912, Miss Stephen had read more Gissing novels than the eight assigned to her as well as *New Grub Street*. She refers also to *The Nether World* (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 357, 359). But more important than this glancing mention, she quotes from *Demos* two especially well-chosen passages. The first describes genteel Adela's anguished perception of her working-class "scowling" husband as utterly beneath her and "inca-pable of understanding her idlest thought" (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 357-58); Gissing, *Demos*, ch. 26: 350-51). The other quotation portrays a grim overcrowded East London cemetery during a working-class funeral. It seems clear that Miss Stephen chose this second *Demos* passage because of its evocatively melancholy prose: "the waste limits of that dread East," "the stark and eyeless emblem of mortality," and "for them is no day, only the brief twilight of a winter sky between the former and the latter night" (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 360; Gissing, *Demos*, ch. 16: 221). As an evolving creator herself of a brilliantly lyrical style, she praises this passage as "characteristic of" Gissing's "terse workmanlike prose, glowing at the heart with a kind of flameless fire. . ." (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 360).³

On the other hand, one might wonder why this early-1900s feminist in the making never mentions the single Gissing novel among these reissues that deals explicitly with the new women's movement: *The Odd Women*, clearly a favorite Gissing work among various feminists of our time. Perhaps she thought that it lacked some of the "flameless fire" of his very best prose, but, of course, one cannot know her unstated motives for

passing over this book. In any case, she praises his novels in general and not just one for portraying both women and men as intelligently reflective. “His men and women think,” as she puts it succinctly (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 359). This implies gender equality of mind. Relevantly, too, she admires the “extraordinary fineness” of Gissing’s depictions of “friendship,” instead of love, between one thoughtful “man and another” and one thoughtful “woman and another” (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 359). Again this implies equality of the sexes.

Above all, Virginia Stephen connects his characters’ perceptiveness about poverty’s whips and scorns with what she sees as his enduring special attraction for a sensitive minority of readers. “We can imagine,” she declares, “that he is the favorite novelist of a great many middle-aged, skeptical, rather depressed men and women who when they read want thought and understanding of life as it is. . .”—the “hard and dreary” way that they themselves see existence (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 356).⁴ She stresses his details about the hardships of impoverished living: the “sordid lodging houses” and degraded and degrading behavior of the poor (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 357). She also notes his insights about just how difficult it is to achieve either intelligence or love for those without “money,” “space,” or “leisure” (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 357).

Still, Miss Stephen in 1912 singles out one limitation of the many Gissing novels that she admires. She offers very briefly her only negative criticism:

. . . He wrote his best only when he was describing struggles and miseries and noble sufferings. . . . Directly he dealt with men and women living at ease he lost his grip; he did not see; directly he changed his sober prosaic prose for a loftier style he was without merit. He had a world of his own as real, as hard, as convincing as though it were made of earth and stone—nay, far more so—but it was a small world. (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 360).

But she hastens to add that she thinks his finest novels “unsinkable” over time and “cannot imagine that they will perish.” She concludes her praise eloquently: thoughtful special readers of Gissing will “always . . . exclaim, ‘This man understood!’” (Woolf, *Essays* 1: 361.)

Just as in her first two essays on Gissing, her own early fiction displays some sad affinities with the works of his that she admired, even though she later moved fictional worlds away from him. In 1907, when she wrote her *Ryecroft* essay, she had already begun *The Voyage Out* (1915), her first novel. In 1912, as she discussed Gissing’s newly reissued books, she was

still working hard at *The Voyage Out* (Sage xii-xiii). Even though she depicts persons from a more privileged class than Gissing usually does, her climactic twenty-fifth chapter about Rachel Vinrace's sordid death from illness and scorching fever resembles in several ways *New Grub Street's* depiction of Reardon's death from severe lung congestion in Gissing's climactic thirty-second chapter.

Rachel dies in an oceanfront tourist town of South America. Reardon dies in sea-edged Brighton—a favorite destination for vacationers. As the feverish Reardon wakes up, he hears a “divine” “rising tide” on the beach, “the music of the breakers,” and “the sea's eternal melody” (*New Grub Street* 417)—only a momentary comfort, though. In *The Voyage Out*, Rachel's fiancé but not the ill young woman herself finds brief serenity in the ocean's sounds and breezes: “The waves beat on the shores far away, and the soft wind passed through the branches of the trees, seeming to encircle him with peace and security. . .” (*Voyage Out* 399). As Reardon grows even more ill, he has delirious dreams about past months of living nightmare when he struggled unsuccessfully to write good fiction—harsh dreams softened only briefly by wish-fulfilling ones of sailing on in radiance to his beloved Greece (*New Grub Street* 420, 418). As Rachel's illness grows worse, she has outright hallucinations of terror. Sinister elderly women play cards in a “damp” oozing tunnel beneath the Thames. One of them grips a menacing knife. Rachel's later delirious visions reflect her own hopeless illness more specifically: drowning in the ocean or becoming just a “drift of melting snow” beneath the mountaintops of her knees (*Voyage Out* 386, 388, 397-98, 404). Gissing stresses the appallingly bad timing of Reardon's fatal illness, which comes just as he and Amy reconcile after having lived apart (*New Grub Street* 413-15). Woolf emphasizes the even worse timing of Rachel's fatal illness, for it starts just weeks after she and Terence Hewet have become happily engaged (*Voyage Out* 380-413). As death approaches in *New Grub Street*, Reardon quotes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: “We are such stuff as dreams are made on . . .” (*New Grub Street* 423). As Rachel's fatal illness begins, she remembers lines from Milton's *Comus* that foreshadow her own approaching experience of death as drowning: “Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave, / In twisted braids of lilies knitting / The loose train of thy amber dropping hair . . .” (*Voyage Out* 384).

Along with these various resemblances, the parallel chapters in Gissing and Woolf also display, of course, distinct and complex differences. Al-

though Reardon becomes delirious, he continues just to dream rather than to hallucinate, and his dreaming, if intense, never matches the wildness of Rachel's feverish visions. With novelistic effectiveness, Gissing does take us beyond Reardon's dying thoughts into the minds of both Amy and Biffen as they watch Reardon's illness and then grieve for their loss. But Woolf goes beyond Gissing in her concrete yet also intense evocation of Hewet's mournful thoughts after Rachel has died: "As he saw the passage outside the room, and the table with the cups and plates, it suddenly came over him that here was a world in which he would never see Rachel again" (*Voyage Out* 413). Interestingly, in a typed early version of *The Voyage Out* with the later-rejected title *Melymbrosia*, Woolf used even terser prose than Gissing's in her corresponding twenty-ninth draft-chapter: her own attempt at "flameless fire." Yet this earlier version of Rachel's climactic death gives the reader less experience of the characters' inner lives than Woolf's final draft and, indeed, less than *New Grub Street* does (*Melymbrosia* 322-33; *New Grub Street* 417-24).

On balance, though, the parallels between Gissing's chapter and that of Woolf remain quite striking in spite of any differences. Through the thoughts of Harold Biffen, Reardon's best friend, Gissing expresses an anguished resentment about the unfairness of life and death. Biffen finds that he cannot "think with resignation of the injustice which triumphs so flagrantly in the destinies of men" (*New Grub Street* 423). Rachel's fiancé arrives at the same dark view of human existence:

He had never realized before that underneath every action, underneath the life of every day, pain lies, quiescent, but ready to devour; he seemed to be able to see suffering, as if it were a fire, curling up over the edges of all action, eating away the lives of men and women. . . . Now he knew for himself that life is hard and full of suffering. (*Voyage Out* 402)

To summarize both the critical and creative links between sad young Virginia Stephen and sad George Gissing, one can add five words to her own praise of him: "this man understood!" and so did this woman!

¹Over the years Virginia Stephen—later Virginia Woolf—often playfully called herself "goat," but "black" here refers clearly to her lack of religious beliefs.

²The editor of Woolf's *Diary*, Anne Olivier Bell, indexes this under "Gissing, Robert," using here his middle rather than his first name—not her only mistake about Gissing and his family. In Volume 4 she and her assistant from Volume 2 on, Andrew McNeillie, index Gissing's younger son as "Gissing, Charles"—replacing *his* first name with his middle one too, though also referring to him just above as "Gissing, A. E. C.," as if listing two separate persons. The index of this volume also omits George Gissing himself in spite of citing *By*

the Ionian Sea in connection with his son and also in spite of its appearing in a page 150 footnote—a major Gissing work that the index fails to list anywhere. Yet the footnote does correctly identify as just a recycled essay Woolf’s “Introduction” to the 1933 edition of Gissing’s *By the Ionian Sea*: a Woolf piece first published in the *Nation & Athenæum* (1927) as a review of the selected *Letters* of Gissing to his family and then republished three separate times with three different titles. But the *Diary*’s editors do not mention a still more striking oddity: in spite of allowing this essay’s later reuse to introduce *By the Ionian Sea*, Woolf never read this fine Gissing work (Woolf, *Letters* 5: 112). In view of its impressive prose, its vivid imagery, and its sympathetic depiction of Italians who befriended him, one supposes that Woolf would have admired it at any time in her career. At any rate, it seems clear that she cared rather more about Gissing than some of her editors later did.

³ Significantly, she continued to admire this graveyard passage for at least twenty years, so that she quoted its more eloquent second half four later times in print (though she did not reuse the other *Demos* passage, about Adela’s scorn for her husband). She reprinted the same segment of the “flameless fire” passage as part of her 1927 *Nation & Athenæum* review of Gissing’s selected *Letters*; as part of the same essay recycled to introduce *Selections Autobiographical and Imaginative* by Gissing (1929); in Woolf’s own *Second Common Reader* (1932) 198-203 as “George Gissing,” with just minor changes but not of the halved quotation; and finally with the very same halved “flameless fire” passage to introduce Cape’s Travellers’ Library edition of *By the Ionian Sea* (1933) (Woolf, *Diary* 4: 150 and *Letters* 5: 165 and 165n1).

⁴ For quite some time in Western medicine, *depression* had increasingly rivaled the classical Greek medical term *melancholia* in descriptions of both sad temperaments and mental illnesses. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century *depression* had pretty much edged out *melancholia*, although with somewhat different connotations (Healy 76, 95; Kraepelin, 5, 118-25, 140, 204). At any event, one suspects that the probably manic-depressive or bipolar Woolf sometimes felt a special empathy for the “flameless fire” of an often-depressed Gissing (Caramagno 33-74; Tindall *Born*_239-48; Tindall “Haunted” 62-74; Selig 5-15).

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George Gissing's Voyage to America and the Hazardous Career of the "Good ship 'Parthia'"

MARKUS NEACEY

On 29 August 1876 George Gissing arrived at Liverpool harbour under the most inauspicious of circumstances to take ship to America. Having been recently expelled from Owens College (later to become the University of Manchester) for stealing from his fellow students, and having spent the month of June in a Manchester prison, he was facing up to an uncertain future far away from the homeland in which he had become *persona non grata*. Yet, however anxious he must have been about his fate in the weeks and months ahead, blissful ignorance fortunately spared him even further trepidation on his journey to America. For what Gissing didn't know when he stepped aboard *R.M.S. Parthia* was that he would be crossing the Atlantic Ocean on a ship which had in all too recent times dallied with disaster on several memorable occasions.

Little is known of Gissing's fateful journey across the Atlantic apart from a few terse shipping reports and brief accounts in his fictional writings. *The Times* noted the ship's departure from Queenstown for Boston on 30 August 1876 and the *Boston Evening Transcript* reported that the Cunard steamship "arrived at Cunard wharf, East Boston, at 7.30 A.M. Sunday, [10 September,] having on board the English mails and 168 cabin and 149 steerage passengers."¹ Gissing's name appears among the list of passengers printed on the front page of the newspaper. In a letter to his brother, William, dated 5 October, Gissing belatedly describes his experience on the *Parthia*:

By the bye, you can have no idea what the Atlantic is unless you have crossed it. Of course there are always lots of vessels going between America & Europe & yet there is so much room that we only saw about half a dozen during the whole voyage. Then the waves are something glorious. There is always a long swell, so long that our steamer, which you know would be by no means small, did not fill up the space between the crests of two waves. One or two days it was decidedly rough; it was impossible to stand on deck without holding by a rope, & the waves were then so high that we never could see farther round us than the distance of about three waves, & very often could see nothing beyond one. I woke up in my berth one night, & found myself being knocked from one side to the other like a sort of shuttlecock & the basins &c were all dancing jigs over the cabin. I am happy to say I was not once sick.²

Considering his recent traumatic experiences and his present circumstances, it is something wonderful to discover with what spirit of adventure the

18-year-old was confronting his strange and unknown destiny. In his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, published in 1880, Gissing provides a dramatic account of his voyage from Liverpool to Boston and his exhilaration at sight of the storm-pitched sea:

The time is about mid-day, and the scene – not the streets of London, but the banks of the River Mersey, amid all the bustle and confusion of the Liverpool docks. The clocks, at all events, tell us that it is mid-day, but, judging from surrounding appearances, it might rather be supposed to be midnight. For everything is wrapped in the densest of fogs, a thick, rolling, dark-brown mass of stifling vapour, scarcely allowing one to see as far as the hand will stretch, and making the ear the only possible guide to a knowledge of what is going on around one. And the ear is not left without occupation. Every imaginable cry of the human voice, incessant shrill whistles from steamboats near and far, the dull roar of vehicles landwards, the steady, endless tramping of feet upon the wooden landing-place, the occasional crash or thud of heavy baggage from the shoulders of porters, all these and a hundred other indescribable and unrecognisable noises combine to make, as it were, a muffled Babel. And hark! a new sound, close at hand, suddenly rises above all the others, forcing attention to itself alone. It is the loud and long clanging of a bell, a clanging impatient and almost fierce. It sounds from the deck of the boat which is waiting to carry passengers out to the good ship “Parthia,” Cunard steamer, of one knows not how many thousand tons burden, now lying two or three miles down the stream in the midst of the dense fog, whence it will in a few hours be working its way into the purer air of the Atlantic.

The bell is now ringing for the second time, and will give but one more warning before the boat starts. Despite the fearful day, a considerable number of passengers have already collected in the little saloon, where they sit in the midst of piles of miscellaneous luggage, most of them very silent and a few looking already somewhat pale and dismayed. There are women among them, and one or two children, driven across the ocean at this time of the year by Heaven knows what strange whim or necessity; but the passengers for the most part have the air of men of business, individuals who sit reading their letters or their newspapers with the most unconcerned air by the light of the swinging oil-lamps. One baby there is amid the company, which lifts up its shrill little voice in emulation of the clanging bell, and at moments decidedly succeeds in making the more noise of the two, at all events to the ears of those in the saloon.

As the bell at length became silent a new comer stepped on board, a tall young man, wrapped up in a great overcoat, carrying in one hand a small portmanteau, in the other a carpet-bag. On entering the saloon he looked round in the semi-darkness with a somewhat shy air, and, after a moment's hesitation, seated himself in a vacant corner; then, when he had surveyed once or twice the faces of those who were to be his fellow passengers, by degrees sank into abstractedness. Those who had the curiosity to inspect his face closely could see that it was rather handsome in outline, but severely pale and careworn in expression. He appeared nervous, too, for at every unexpected sound he started slightly and for a moment his face wore a pained expres-

sion. He had put the portmanteau and carpet bag at his feet. The former alone bore a direction, in handwriting, which ran thus: – “*A. Golding, Passenger to New York.*”

After a delay which appeared to be endless to those waiting in the saloon, the loud bell clanged for the last time, and the boat moved off into the darkness. Half-an-hour’s careful voyaging brought it beneath the shadow of an immense hull, in the side of which appeared a large square of reddish light, through which the passengers forthwith made their way on to the body of the “*Parthia.*” Arthur Golding – for the young man described is no other than our old acquaintance – was one of the last to go on board. After a long straying about pitch-dark and narrow passages, after ascending and descending innumerable almost perpendicular stairs, after endless collisions with wanderers like himself, after repeated questionings, to which unintelligible answers were returned, he at length found himself at the door of his own state-room where he was glad enough to throw down his burdens and rest for a few minutes. The state-room had berths for two, one on the top of the other, and Arthur saw that the top one was already occupied, at all events someone had deposited his luggage there in sign of taking possession. Having reconnoitred the locality as well as he was able, he once more made his way through the labyrinth of passages and staircases up on to the deck. In half an hour the great ship suddenly vibrated to the motion of her machinery, the sluggish river at the stern was all at once lashed into angry wave and foam by the revolution of the screw, and the “*Parthia*” had begun her voyage.

... The voyage proved long and stormy, yet from the first morning of his going up on deck to look out on to the Atlantic to the coming to anchor in the docks at New York, Arthur’s body and soul were pervaded with exuberance of health such as he had never enjoyed. When he lay in his berth at night, listening to the lash and thunder of the waves against the sides of the vessel; to the cracking and straining of the masts and cordage, to the shrill whistle upon deck, now and then making itself heard above the duller noises, his heart was filled with a wild wish that the winds might sweep yet more fiercely upon the heaving water, that the ocean might swell up to mountainous waves, such deep delight did he experience in the midst of the grand new scene. Throughout the day, no stress of weather could suffice to keep him below. It was his chief pleasure to sit in the stern, in the shelter of the wheel-house, from whence he could overlook the whole length of the ship as it plunged down the sides of the huge water-gulfs. How little she looked, for all her thousands of tons burden, and what a mere mite she would have made in the gullet of the insatiable deep! Then, to turn and look down into the frothy hell beneath the stern; to watch for minutes the fierce whirlpool where the untiring screw was struggling amid a thousand conflicting currents, and then to feel the vessel rising upwards, upwards, till at length a mountain of deep green water surged from beneath her, showing a surface smooth and solid-looking as ice, threatening the very sky in its upward striving. Day after day the same spectacle lay before his eye from morning to night, and yet he never wearied of watching it. Though towards evening the wave-splashed deck became too slippery to stand upon, though the ropes were stiff with ice, though the wind cut through the darkening air with the swift keenness of steel, yet not till he was obliged would Arthur descend to the saloon, the picture was too engrossing in its majesty. He almost believed that the mind expanded in the mere act of watching; he felt capable of greater thoughts than formerly; the thought of his security in the

midst of such terrors gave him a loftier and truer conception of human powers than he had yet attained to.³

Fictional though this account is, it rings true, and must be assumed to approximate Gissing's own experience of the thirteen-day crossing. Evidently, his many deep meditations upon the magnificent spectacle of the surging sea that daily held his gaze enabled Gissing to focus upon the future with renewed hope and instilled in him the confidence and belief that he could master any difficulty that lay ahead. Meanwhile, it would appear that, apart from enduring a two-day storm, his time on board the Cunard flagship was otherwise without major incident. In this respect he was certainly more fortunate than many another voyager who had travelled or was to travel on *R.M.S. Parthia*.

This three-masted, 375 feet long Cunard steamship (in comparison *RMS Titanic* was 882 feet long!) weighing in at 3,167 tons gross and with room for 150 first class and 1,031 third-class (steerage) passengers, was built at a cost of £94,970 by William Denny & Bros., in 1869-1870 at Dumbarton in Scotland. Originally called *SS Victoria*, but promptly renamed *SS Parthia* and later *R.M.S. Parthia*, she was launched from there amidst great fanfare on 10 September 1870 and made her maiden voyage with Captain William Watson, the veteran Cunard seaman, at the helm from Liverpool to New York on 17 December that year averaging a speed of 13 knots. On her arrival at New York Harbour on New Year's Eve, the *New York Times'* shipping correspondent was afforded a tour of the ship. He writes:

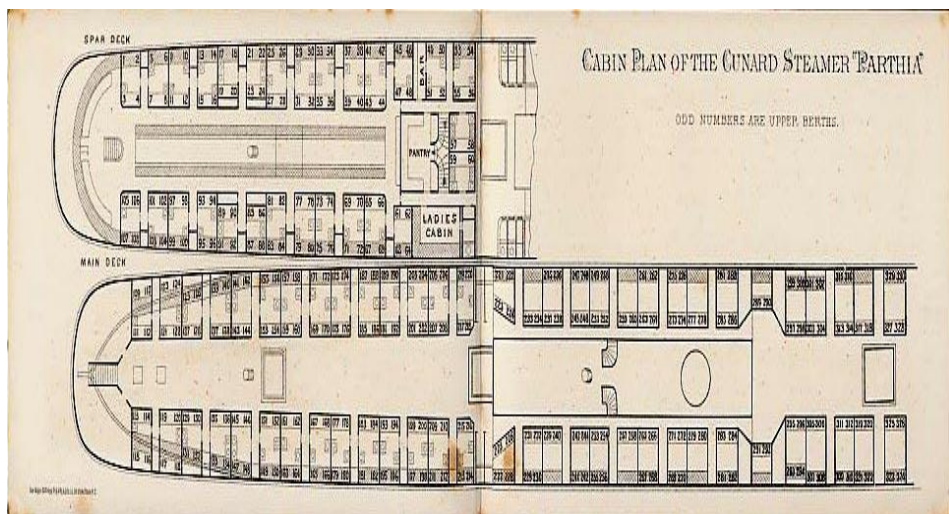
All the officers' rooms, together with a comfortable smoking-room and a ladies' drawing room, are on the upper deck. Her first cabin, which is 7½ feet between decks and 110 feet long, is finished in rose-wood with panels of birdseye maple. The upholstery is in maroon and dark green, and the woodwork of the tables and sofas is artistically carved and gilded. The state-rooms of the first cabin are highly finished.⁴

Travelling third class, Gissing, one assumes, will have seen or experienced few of these luxuries.

For the next thirteen years *RMS Parthia* ran a service for the emigrant trade on both the New York and Boston routes, making altogether 119 voyages. According to the Cunard Archive at Liverpool University, "the ship was a flush-deck, open-bridged vessel and the best ship in the Cunard fleet at the time." Like her celebrated successor in the Cunard line, *RMS Titanic*, she started life in high esteem. However, her fame was of short duration and her appearance in the shipping news often a matter of alarm rather than pride. Two factors brought about this sudden change in the



R.M.S. Parthia in 1877



Cabin Plan of R.M.S. Parthia

shipping community's perception of *RMS Parthia*. Firstly, she was all too quickly superseded by faster, more magnificent vessels. Secondly, between December 1870 and December 1883, the period of her employment as a Cunard passenger liner, she was involved in six incidents at sea – although in two of these she came to the rescue of other vessels. Only those rare passengers who took an interest in the daily shipping news could possibly have been aware of her dramatic career. For all that, unlike *RMS Titanic*, as we shall see, she was undoubtedly fortunate in her misfortune.

The first incident in which *RMS Parthia* was involved occurred just ten months after her maiden voyage. On 16 October 1872, on a return journey from New York she collided with the Bombay-bound steamer, *The Mera*, just as she was making her course through the Channel towards Liverpool harbour. While *The Mera* was forced to return to dock with a major dent in her bow, *RMS Parthia* sustained only minor damage. Blame was duly apportioned as always seems to be the way after such mishaps. Thus Pilot error on her part was given as the cause of the accident. Under two years later, at 3 p.m. on 28 July 1874, she was heading stream upwards set fair for Queenstown and New York, when the worst fire in the history of Liverpool Docks erupted. Coincidentally, the huge *S.S. Spain*, the very same ship on which Gissing voyaged homeward in September 1877 from his year-long exile in America, was just then leading the way towards the open sea with the *Parthia* in pursuit. Within minutes of the departure of *RMS Parthia*, the cry of "Fire!" was heard and soon after the whole landing stage was consumed in flames. According to *The Times* reporter, her passengers would have gained a tremendous vantage point for viewing the conflagration:

It was from the river that the full extent of the fire could best be seen. The spectacle was grand and would have been terribly so had darkness prevailed instead of the sky being clear and almost unclouded. The wind was light from the north-west, but gradually freshening, and it carried the smoke with it southwards. At this time a portion of the stage to the southward of the embankment was burning brightly, the flames being red and clear, with comparatively little smoke, while the northern half was wrapped in impenetrable smoke, through which lurid flames played only at intervals.⁵

The fire was extinguished during the night, but not before the landing stage refreshment rooms, the left-luggage depot, the customs offices, the life-boat shed, and the stagemaster's house had been reduced to ashes.

Three months later, on 25 October 1874, the *RMS Parthia* was involved in the first of its two most famous incidents. In many respects one could

call its collision that day with the *Adriatic*, a seemingly inevitable meeting of two ill-starred ships. In an online article devoted to the history of this the largest of the White Star Ocean Liners at that time, the writer refers to the *Adriatic* as follows: “If ever there was a ship thought to be ‘cursed,’ this particular vessel would certainly fit the bill. It is interesting that there is no mention in newspapers or historical documents of anyone considering *Adriatic* to be a cursed ship and refusing to sail on her.”⁶ Obviously, as mentioned before, only the most avid follower of the shipping correspondents’ laconic reports could possibly have formed an awareness of any one ship’s reputation (thankfully Gissing was not one to study the shipping news); and clearly it was not in the interests of the shipping community to broadcast its reservations about their ships. According to *The Times*’ correspondent, both ships were leaving New York Harbour when a heavy current led to the *Parthia* drifting slightly off line. And before the ship’s pilot could realign her course, she abruptly veered right alongside the *Adriatic*, and scraped against the whole length of her side, thus pushing one of the flukes on the hanging anchors all the way through her hull. The *New York Times* gave the following report of the incident:

The accident occurred as the steamers were proceeding down the bay en route for Europe. The *Parthia* was slightly in advance of the *Adriatic*, and suddenly making a turn to the right the latter was unable to change her course in time to avoid a collision, and was struck on her port side by the *Parthia*, carrying away about thirty feet of her timbers, and disabling her so badly as to preclude the possibility of continuing the voyage.⁷

RMS Parthia sustained slight damage and continued on her way. She was lucky in her encounter with the “cursed” White Star Liner. Six months later, in March 1875, the *Adriatic* rammed straight into the American schooner, *Columbus*, in New York Harbour, causing her to sink; then in December that year, whilst passing through St George’s Channel off the Welsh coast, she ran down the sailing vessel, *The Harvest Queen*, and struck her so violently from behind that she sank within minutes with the loss of all life.

As luck would have it, by the time Gissing boarded the *Parthia* on 29 August 1876, she had been enjoying a couple of calmer years on the high seas, and had recently acquired a new captain, the distinguished Horatio McKay. The hiatus in her dramatic career ended on 19 March 1880. However, on this occasion her crews’ actions were entirely praiseworthy. As *The Times* reported:

The Mary A. Myshrall of St. John, New Brunswick, from Middlesbrough, with pig-iron for Baltimore, was fallen in with on March 19, in lat. 50 N., long. 18 W., flying signals of distress, by the Parthia steamer, from New York, which took off her crew and sent a volunteer crew on board. The Parthia then took the vessel in tow, but after towing her for two days the tow-rope broke, and as the vessel was taking more water and there was a strong south-east breeze, with a heavy swell, concluded she would not float many hours, and after taking off the volunteer crew, left her in 51 N. 13 W.⁸

Eight months later, on 28 November 1880, *RMS Parthia* came to the rescue of a second vessel. *The Shipping News* section of *The Times* gave the circumstances as follows:

The Parthia, which arrived at Queenstown yesterday, reports that “at 9.30 a.m. November 28, in lat. 50 N., long. 20 W., bore down upon a vessel showing signals of distress, which proved to be the James Edwards, barque, of Liverpool, from Quebec, with rudder gone. She signalled wish to abandon, but had no means of doing so. After considerable difficulty and danger, owing to the high sea running, a boat from the Parthia, under charge of third officer, rescued the whole crew, 22 in number, and at 1.40 p.m. proceeded on our course.”⁹

While both these deeds redound to her credit, it was not long before all the good work was overshadowed by a further major accident.

On 7 January 1882 *RMS Parthia* left Liverpool still under the command of the highly competent and highly esteemed Captain Horatio McKay with only 31 cabin and 63 steerage passengers. At eight o'clock in the morning of the 20 January, having made a safe and uneventful voyage across the Atlantic, she entered Sandy Hook and steadily made her way downstream towards the quarantine bay at New York Harbour. Already most of her passengers had rushed up to the main deck to catch sight of loved ones waiting on the landing stage. Presently, the vast 3, 717 tons gross French steamship, *St Germain*, which was six hundred meters ahead of her, arrived at quarantine and dropped anchor. At this point, just minutes away from journey's end, the *Parthia's* pilot, Walter Redden, made the inexplicable decision to manoeuvre the vessel onto the port side of the docking steamship. Suddenly, the latter swung round violently with the tide, at which point the horrified passengers on both ships realised that the *Parthia* was about to crash straight into the bows of the French vessel. The *New York Times'* reporter described the scene as follows:

As those on the Parthia saw the big French ship sweeping around upon them there was a moment of excitement. The idea of being shipwrecked within so short a distance of New York, after having crossed the broad Atlantic in safety, was by no

means a pleasant one. The young pilot saw what must occur unless he took prompt action, and he ran the *Parthia* ashore, escaping by a few feet a crash with the *St. Germain* ... when the *Parthia* struck the rocks she rebounded and trembled as though about to fall apart. Then she calmly settled down and the natives of Staten Island from far and near came to the shore and gazed with astonishment at the great ship ... The officers of the *St. Germain* thought that the pilot of the *Parthia* had exhibited very bad seamanship, and this seemed to be the opinion of all who had any knowledge of the scene.¹⁰

Fourteen months after this near catastrophe the *Parthia* became front-page news in much more explosive headlines. During the trial of the Dynamite conspirators, who had been planning an attack on government buildings when apprehended, two stewards of the Cunard vessel identified Dr. Thomas Gallagher, Bernard Gallagher, and William Ansburch, three of the six accused, as having voyaged from New York on board the *Parthia* in March 1883. Four of the men were sentenced to penal servitude for the term of their natural lives (they were subsequently released in 1896), but Bernard Gallagher and Ansburch were discharged due to lack of evidence binding them with the other perpetrators.

Later that year the Cunard Steamship Company decided to take the *Parthia* out of service. And so, in December 1883, she made her last voyage from Boston to Liverpool. She was subsequently laid up in the Mersey, until being sold to another British shipping company for use as a passenger and cattle freight ship.

The illustrious Captain Horatio McKay, later Commodore of the Cunard Fleet, took command of various other Cunard vessels until his retirement in 1901 after a 47-year career. In August, shortly before retiring, McKay was given the great honour of becoming the first captain of a sailing vessel to send a wireless message in mid-ocean to the *New World*. On 12 August, whilst skippering the *Lucania* from Liverpool on its way to New York, Commodore McKay stood by as Marconi operator, Lockyer, transmitted his message to Lightship No. 66 at Siasconset Station in Nantucket, Massachusetts. McKay's message was received as follows: "All well on board. We are 237 miles from Sandy Hook. Expect to reach New York Harbor Saturday. McKay."¹¹ He was in the news again on 8 January 1912, when his death was reported in the *New York Times* obituary column. However, this announcement was somewhat premature, for in fact, as the *New York Times* the next day promptly confirmed, it was his brother Alexander (1835-1912), also a long-serving Cunard sea captain (as was their father with 50 years before the mast), who had died. Three months later, after the

loss of *RMS Titanic*, the *New York Times* immediately consulted Commodore McKay about the catastrophe and his interview took up the whole of page two of the newspaper. He is remembered for saying that a captain's duty was to look after his ship and not waste time talking nonsense to passengers and as Gissing can vouch he certainly lived up to those words on the one occasion their paths crossed. The grizzled, old-style Scottish captain died in 1923 at the age of 86.



Captain Horatio McKay (1837-1923) of *RMS Parthia*

In the summer of 1885, McKay's former charge, the *Parthia*, was refitted and briefly used as a troopship in Egypt on the ill-fated mission to rescue General Gordon of Khartoum. Then she was sent to Australia with cargo and a large number of emigrants and thereafter provided a passenger and mail service from Vancouver to the Far East. In 1892 she was taken over by the North Pacific Steamship Company, given a thorough overhaul, and renamed *Victoria*. Over the next seven decades there were numerous changes of ownership and renamings. During these years the former Cunard vessel saw employment in the Spanish-American War, the Russo-

Japanese War, the First World War, and the Second World War. In between the two world wars she served the Alaskan Steamship Company as an arctic cruiser. Then, in 1950, the ship's original bell was returned to Cunard and placed on the *Parthia's* successor, *Parthia II*.¹² In 1956, under her latest name, *Straits Maru*, and Japanese ownership, the remnant of the veteran vessel on which George Gissing safely crossed to America 80 years earlier, was towed across the Pacific to Osaka, Japan, where, on 16 October, she was demolished.

¹ Bouwe Postmus, *George Gissing's American Notebook: Notes – G.R.G. – 1877* (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), p. 3.

² Paul F. Mattheisen, Arthur C. Young, and Pierre Coustillas, eds., *The Collected Letters of George Gissing, Volume One, 1863-1880* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1990), p. 46.

³ George Gissing (1880), *Workers in the Dawn* (Brighton: Harvester Press Ltd, 1985), Volume II, pp. 419-21 and pp. 428-29.

⁴ *The New York Times*, 3 January 1871.

⁵ *The Times*, 29 July 1874, p. 5.

⁶ Anon, "The White Star Liner *Adriatic*: A Ship with a Curse, or Just Numerous Cases of Negligence?" at <http://www.titanic-whitestarships.com/Adriatic%201st.htm>.

⁷ *The New York Times*, 26 October 1874.

⁸ *The Times*, 23 March 1880, p. 12.

⁹ *The Times*, 1 December 1880, p. 11.

¹⁰ *The New York Times*, 21 January 1882.

¹¹ Captain John Lacouture, "Siasconset Wireless Stations" in *Nantucket*, Vol. 38, no. 3 (Fall 1990), p. 37.

¹² *The Times*, 25 November 1950, p. 8.

George Gissing was a "feminist" writer. His theme was woman. If he had a message, it was this—the place and position of women in the State and society, her lifelessness in this condition of bondage and the need of release. His neglect at that time was due to the unpopularity of this theme which he presented in chill and lugubrious colours after the manner of the Russians. His realism was not understood. His motive failed to penetrate. Yet in his way he sought to do in England what Ibsen was doing with astonishing success in Norway. Ibsen may be called the father of the "new" woman; though his genius was confined to the theatre and to the minute and wholly unsensational interpretation of everyday life of a strictly provincial character, his message spread abroad with truly dramatic universalism which even knocked a breach in the Victorian ramparts of London. Austin Harrison, *Pandora's Hope: A Study of Woman*, London: Heinemann, 1925, pp. 28-29.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL GEORGE GISSING CONFERENCE

“Gissing’s World within the World: Art and the Artist”

MONDAY 28 TO WEDNESDAY 30 MARCH 2011

YORK UNIVERSITY, UK

With the support of CECILLE Research Centre, University of Lille

CALL FOR PAPERS

The specific focus of the York Gissing Conference will be an often-overlooked aspect of Gissing’s artistic philosophy. While many readers have emphasized Gissing’s almost sociological engagement with material conditions, Gissing saw himself as a more detached devotee of art “pure & simple.” In a famous letter to his brother Algernon (22 September 1885), he observed that the artist should “keep apart, & preserve [his] soul alive” because the natural environment of the artist is “the shade,” where he “can make a world within the world.” Papers are therefore particularly sought on all aspects of Gissing as an artist, notably his engagement with late Victorian aesthetics and obsessive “detachment from the vulgarities of the day.” Topics may also include, but are not limited to the following:

- Absorbing non-verbal aesthetics into the fictional constructs: the world as picture; ekphrasis; the visual arts in Gissing
- Artistic leanings, amateur and professional: representational strategies
- Gissing and Aestheticism
- Exploring generic boundaries: Gissing and the *Künstlerroman*
- Not his line of work? Gissing, drama and poetry
- Classical Gissing
- Gissing as Critic

This conference will feature a session on “**Teaching Gissing in the Twenty-first Century.**” If you are interested in participating in this panel, please provide the organiser with a brief description of your particular

approach to teaching Gissing. You may apply both to deliver a paper and to participate in the teaching session.

Please submit abstracts of 300 words for 20-minute papers with a brief biographical note and/or applications to be involved in the Teaching panel to Nicky Losseff, University of York (nl5@york.ac.uk) no later than **15 November 2010**. Please include the following personal details with your abstract: name and institutional affiliation, email address, postal address, telephone and mobile phone numbers, and A/V requirements (if any).

Participants will be notified of their acceptance by 15 January 2011 (or earlier, for those who require official letters of invitation for the purpose of obtaining support from their home institutions). Further details about registration costs, travel arrangements and accommodation (ensuite single bedrooms available on campus) will be available on the conference website after the summer:

<http://www.york.ac.uk/music/conferences/gissing>

Conference highlights:

- Conference dinner to be followed by a piano concert (by students from the Music Department of the University of York – Gabrielle Fleury repertoire)
- An optional excursion to the nearby city of Wakefield, birthplace of the author. Anthony Petyt, of The Gissing Trust, will organise a visit to the Gissing Centre and a tour of Gissing’s Wakefield.
- Gissing-related book stalls (notably The Idle Booksellers)

Conference Organiser: Dr Nicky Losseff (University of York)

Advisory Committee: Prof M. D. Allen (University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley); Prof Maria-Teresa Chialant (University of Salerno); Prof Pierre Coustillas (University of Lille); Prof Constance Harsh (Colgate University); Dr Christine Huguet (University of Lille); Dr Simon J. James (Durham University); Anthony Petyt (The Gissing Trust, Wakefield); Dr Bouwe Postmus (University of Amsterdam).

Gissing Abused and Betrayed: an Angry Review

PIERRE COUSTILLAS

Writing a full-length review of Paul Delany's biography of Gissing (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008), of which no copy was sent to this *Journal*, would be a waste of time as the volume cannot claim to belong to respectable literature. It can only be described as a by-product of the gutter press and seems to have been published with one aim in view—throwing a torrent of abuse at a novelist who was one of the most original of his age and whose works have been praised on an international scale. At the root of the problem lies a glaring fact: Delany hates Gissing with a rabid hatred. Attempting to compile a catalogue of his base methods and their consequences would be time-consuming to an inordinate extent. Time being a precious commodity, one must be content to give a few examples selected from among hundreds with which the pages of the book are soiled. At the bottom of the hierarchy one naturally comes across orthographic blunders of the commonest kind, thus Mrs. Humphrey Ward (p. 189), John Speirs (p. 380), *maiole* for *maiale* (Italian for pork), the Strait of Messina, unidiomatic singular (p. 281), Chateau de Chasnays for Château du Chasnay (p. 423); French accents are distributed haphazardly or cancelled (Larrea is an example). On p. 163 we are treated with Madame le Breton for Mademoiselle Le Breton; on p. 423 Adele Berger is called Burger. Dr. Reboul becomes Raboul, and M. Genty, the teacher of classics, becomes Gentz. The spelling of words or names unfamiliar to the biographer is unpredictable. Would Virginia Woolf have recognized her father where he is rebaptised Lesley (p. 52)? Wilfred Athel is not a Gissing character, and the biographer betrays his poor knowledge of the members of the Gissing family when he confuses the novelist's elder sister Margaret with their mother Margaret despite the opportunity given him by the editors of the *Collected Letters* to avoid a mistake made at the publishers' in Volume I and corrected in Volume II. Stanley Kirkwood is a careless invention of the careless biographer as is the spelling Grahame for Cunninghame Graham. We are told that Tennyson died aged 93 and that Everard Barfoot's bride is one Constance Brissenden. In due course, losing his way in the maze he has created, Delany shows the all too obvious limits of his Gissing culture when he asks what Gissing means by "sexual anarchy"! Short of reading the letter to Bertz of 2 June 1893 he might profitably ask Elaine Showalter to enlighten him.

Delany has plundered his predecessors, the present writer in particular, with a constancy that he feels obliged to acknowledge. The depth of his ignorance and the malicious nature of his intentions are unwittingly exposed when on p. 76 he inanely suggests that Morley Roberts was *not* an “evil-tongued biographer.” One of the most disgusting Delanyesque devices used to belittle Gissing can be spotted on dozens of pages. It consists in introducing a derogatory assumption for which not a scrap of evidence is extant and, once the damage has been devastatingly done, in cravenly admitting that maybe after all we cannot be sure. The biographer’s *intention de nuire* rules the game. Examples abound; dozens of times Delany shows the white feather. Like Halperin in his notoriously tainted biography, he cannot imagine a man and a woman together in the same house without forcing them into the same bed. The distressing vulgarity of the biographer beggars description. Naturally Mrs. Gaussen, who was so generous to Gissing, is one of the main victims of the traducer. Some jocular individuals will laugh at the insistence with which the narrator heaps suspicion on suspicion, earning meanwhile their steadily growing dislike. A number of familiar figures in Gissing’s life incur Delany’s mistrust: Arthur Bowes and William Summers’s sister in particular. To scholars familiar with the *Commonplace Book*, Delany is irresistibly reminiscent of those fellow boarders of Gissing at the Villa Souvenir in Arcachon, Cognat and Anthier: “They are petty, envious, always jeering or sneering at someone or other.” These are names Delany is sure to have come across during his shallow research, since on p. 355 he mentions a third fellow boarder, Farronault, whose name, by the way, he failed to transcribe correctly. Reading correctly common first names is a feat of which he is not invariably capable—see Ellen for Ella Gaussen or Edmund for Edward Clodd, for instance.

The pretentious wiseacre betrays himself even before he starts to bombard Gissing with miserable charges on the pages numbered with roman numerals. He tries to impress his readers with details which are sheer inventions of his. If he had seen one original copy of the *English Illustrated Magazine*, he would not tell us that its covers were orange. On p. xiii he unconsciously reveals that his account of Gissing’s life is going to be a farrago of mendacious information; he imagines that he can tell lies with total impunity if they suit his general purpose. The twenty-two handwritten pages on which I have listed his many mistakes, deliberate or not, dispose of any puny contestation that might arise. On p. xiii Delany

writes that Gissing was a bad liar—a singular insult proffered by a biographer who has made himself guilty of hundreds of lies, inaccurate statements and numberless innuendoes. When he cannot find in books or, very rarely, articles material which could serve as projectiles, he invents it. (Consultation of old periodicals must be extremely difficult in Vancouver, a fact which could not be offered as an excuse by a serious biographer.) Genealogical research or mere checking is below Delany's dignity, it being so much easier to put forward irresponsible assertions than to look for relevant information on the subject in Gissing's *Collected Letters*, for instance. That Gissing's first name was possibly given by Thomas Waller Gissing to his eldest son to pay homage to Byron could pass for a slip if it were not a gratuitous statement. Had Delany read the genealogical survey in Volume I of the *Collected Letters*, he would have found two George Gissings, one who was the son of Tobias, lived from 1817 to 1877 and was the author's great-uncle, the other (1835-1886), an uncle of his, whom he may have met in Wakefield some time before TWG's death—and we know how first names were used again and again in Victorian families and earlier. Laziness is a bad shield, as any apprentice biographer may know. Even when he is covering well-trodden ground, the moralizing biographer sometimes loses his bearings before he reaches the preliminary stage of the achievement of Gissing's father. Has he ever read the *Gissing Newsletter*, later *Journal*? One suspects that subscribing to it was infra dig and therefore not included in Mr. Delany's programme—a most regrettable omission, as he would have found in it remarkable articles which would have provided answers to questions which he inevitably asked himself at some time or other—articles by Clifford Brook, Robert L. Selig, Anthony Petyt and Markus Neacey among other writers. Accusing Gissing's mother of probably never having read any of her eldest son's novels is one more irresponsible statement. As late as 1902, George would not have sent her a presentation copy of his edition of Forster's *Life of Dickens* if he had feared she might not read the volume. He sent her a copy of *Ryecroft* the following year, and he had earlier presented her and her daughters with at least nine of his novels.

Readers anxious to know the exact state of Thomas Gissing's affairs at the time of his death had better turn to more reliable sources—the late Clifford Brook's writings are one of them. Pretending to know is one thing, offering authoritative figures is another. For some mysterious reason Delany, hoping that no one will attempt to check whether his reckonings

are satisfactory, does his best to prove that the Gissings were much richer than one had supposed after the death of the head of the family, but in order to denigrate George (this is only one device among many), he would have us believe that he failed to refund his sorely tried mother on the few occasions when he had to borrow from her while waiting for some payment due to him. This dishonest innuendo should be nailed to the counter. Any small sum he borrowed from his mother was promptly repaid. Hinting the opposite is a calumny. After George's death Clara Collet assured Gabrielle of his scrupulousness in money matters, and H. G. Wells himself confirmed this in his letter to Gosse of 4 January 1904: "in money matters he was a most scrupulous man. That's not so common as it might be in our profession. He was one of the most clean-minded and decent of men."

Pruriency is one of the salient characteristics of the book. In numberless places sexual matters are obtruded on the reader, and Delany's tone throughout the volume is that of the censor. The French phrase *obsédé sexuel* admirably suits the case. One frequently catches the narrator trying to strain the sense of passages scattered in the novelist's correspondence, and if nothing suitable to his purpose offers itself therein, some quotation from a novel is regarded as convincing evidence. Gissing's silence on a subject in which the biographer is lasciviously interested is converted into evidence of the novelist's guilt. The recurrent obsession about syphilis, which led a satirical reviewer to write that the book should have been subtitled "A Syphilitic Life," attains gigantic proportions. Delany has certainly spent more time on his quest for symptoms, manifestations and consequences of a disease of which Gissing is not known to have been affected than on numberless areas of his life he should have investigated, for instance who was young Gissing's benefactor in Chicago? what has recent research revealed about Mrs. Boughton? to what extent was the novelist's work read in St. Jean-de-Luz and Ciboure in 1902-1903? These are questions an inhabitant of Vancouver probably thinks of no interest. Henry Hick had anticipated that some ill-intentioned future critic or biographer might make some inappropriate remark about the patch of skin disease that affected Gissing's right temple in late 1902, and he took special care to brush aside the suspicion of the half-educated that the iodide of potassium which had removed the unsightly patch was also used in the treatment of syphilis. But Delany's jubilation whenever he thinks he can disparage Gissing is absolutely indecent, besides being unworthy of an academic who claims to be a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Is

such a distinction, one may wonder, compatible with a furious determination to sully a man's memory as well as his distinguished achievement, compared with which his own is microscopic? Any insult from his most notorious predecessor Michael Collie, who also taught in a Canadian university, is thought to be worth picking up and reviving. On p. 58 he excludes himself from the class of civilized biographers when he writes that "Gissing sometimes lost control altogether and beat Nell with a stair-rod (these were wood and metal, above three feet long, used to hold down stair-carpets). He was no better than most of his contemporaries in believing that women and children should be beaten into submission when all else failed." The reader's indignation cannot fail to grow, when the origin of Messrs Collie and Delany's maddening falsehood is revealed. It will be found in a letter of Gissing to his brother Algernon of 7 June 1882 in which he wrote: "You will be amused to hear that certain carpet-rods are still *in situ* on my staircase—just as you saw them last," that is during a recent visit Algernon had paid him. Here the two slanderers stand confused, the allusion being to the carelessness of Gissing's landlady. When he fears that a better informed critic might teach him what accuracy means, Delany seeks refuge in obliquity. Thus on p. 52: "There may have been some fire to go with the smoke," a typical Delanyesque innuendo.

Gissing, the man but also the artist, is curiously taken to task for making the wrong decisions. One comes across such phrases as: "it should have been easy for him" to do this or that, or "it never seemed to occur to him..." the critic having convinced himself of his own superior intelligence and pre-eminent intellectual faculties, his own repetitions being in his eyes as many proofs that his opinion is the only right one. Ah! one hears some readers sigh, if only Gissing had been given adequate advice by such a wise man as Delany! In other fields than the matter-of-fact aspects of Gissing's life, attentive readers may confidently expect to be arrested by fantastic statements which are as many indices to the biographer's detestable methods and unreliability. Early on in the volume his "superior" criticism of the novelist's methods of composition in his youth attests to abysmal ignorance in a man whose hubris assumes comical dimensions. One could imagine that he has never read a Gissing letter on the progress of his work or his diary, dealing with the author's difficulties in writing the early chapters of this or that novel to his satisfaction. What about the two excellent articles by Marilyn B. Saveson on Gissing's "indispensable false starts"? And what about all that Gabrielle wrote on his meditations on his

books prior to the actual writing? Where does Delany's incompetence begin and end? The deficiencies of his knowledge of his subject are often revolting and one wonders how Weidenfeld and Nicolson came to publish such a book. How could a man in his senses, however limited, forget himself to the point of writing that "never in his life would [Gissing] succeed in buying cheap and selling dear" (p. 39), a vulgar commercial viewpoint if any? A man who declares that *Demos* was reissued in 1886 with the author's name on the title page thereby reveals not only that he has never seen the early editions of the novel, but that consulting the only full-length bibliography of Gissing's works was incompatible with his deficient energy. The subjacent idea which prevails in the most part of the book is that Gissing was a fool to part with the copyright of his early books and some others—a cheap and mindless standpoint worthy of a fat-walleted academic who should meditate on the meaning of the verb "to starve." It happens that Gissing was generous by nature—an uncommon quality noted by Gabrielle Fleury: "Once at Arcachon, G. told me that he had never been able to refuse any demand of money if he knew he cld by it afford someone pleasure. His first thought then was 'I shall have to work more, that is all,'" (p. 282 in Vol. IX of the *Collected Letters*). Comparing this touching evidence of Gissing's fundamental unselfishness with his biographer's many-faceted aggressive meanness amounts to giving a lesson in human dignity. Contrary to some of his censors, Gissing had a conscience and could easily make a difference between honest work and imposture. The French proverb "Calomniez, calomniez, il en restera toujours quelque chose" is the unwritten motto of the book. Applying this recipe ascribed to Beaumarchais has inspired Delany throughout his diatribe. Gissing most certainly would have refused to consider the injustice of the following words applied to him as author of *By the Ionian Sea*, a travel narrative remarkable for its evocation of ancient sites as well as for its picture of the poverty and suffering of the lower classes in the deep Italian South: "The beauty of the great temple at Paestum [note the singular] was more important to him than any sufferings by the people of today" [*sic* again]. The humanitarian note ringing here is surely enjoyable.

The humdrum ritual of denigration goes on steadily as the narrative proceeds, but off and on poor Delany is out of his depth as for instance when he lets his ignorance submerge him, declaring that Gissing's two sisters died in Wakefield, or again when he boldly states that fewer than 400 copies of *The Emancipated* were sold (whereas the publisher's records

say 492), or again when the slanderer forgets he is writing for readers who do not care much for the gutter press: "Did English publishers pass the word around that Gissing would always accept £150 for a book?" Such miserable questioning does duty for reliable information. Would the incompetent biographer be prepared to repeat and demonstrate that American editions sold better than English ones at the end of Gissing's career, or indeed at any time of it (p. 196)? The mendacious narrator imagines that his readers will take him on trust, that with regard to facts he can falsify almost any documents with impunity. In an early chapter for instance he describes some parts of Wakefield as if the town were familiar to him, but a local reader has easily proved that Delany has thrown dust in his readers' eyes. Furthermore the mention of the prison in the early pages has been introduced, we suppose, as a premonitory sign of the Manchester episode, but the remover of imaginary grievances has overlooked the possibility that someone might catch him red-handed. An accumulation of such words as "perhaps," "possibly," "may," "might," "almost certainly" placed before offensive, fanciful or grotesque assumptions is not acceptable in serious biographical work. It has not occurred to Delany that Gissing was not writing for the lowest class of readers and that he hoped to be read by the elite of generations yet unborn. Sacrificing the ultimate fate of a novel for the sake of immediate profit, losing the respect of his more intelligent readers was not for Gissing a prospect compatible with his dignity. Delany is painfully incapable of understanding this, blinded as he is by his love of big money. Imagining that a writer's life is systematically transferred into his works is characteristic of uneducated readers; it is also a simplistic conception of the art of fiction. Crooked logic nullifies the value of Delany's comments. Thus the number of second-hand copies of *In the Year of Jubilee* issued by Appleton cannot be accounted for by the bowdlerization of the text. Who among the public knew of Appleton's own crooked methods? Besides, with the cocksureness of a slanderer-cum-ignoramus, Delany declares that in the photograph of Gissing taken among the Swiss mountains, Gabrielle was scissored out by Margaret and Ellen Gissing. Unfortunately for the detractor's unenviable reputation, it was Gabrielle herself who chose not to appear by Gissing's side. The photograph concerned drifted into Xavier Pétremand's collection via Gabrielle and his grandfather Alfred and was at no time in Wakefield or Leeds.

Italy is for the biographer *terra incognita*. Daniele Cristofaro's groundbreaking book is ignored in this biography. Gissing did not begin his

Calabrian journey at Cosenza, but at Paola. Contrary to appearances, Cassiodorus was *not* a senator; and it makes one angry to read a certain derogatory remark about Emilio Cuzzocrea, a brave Italian volunteer who fell in Reggio, a victim of Bourbon tyranny. As for the image of the biographer as peeping Tom in the initial chapters, it simply reflects an immature knowledge of the elementary tools of research. Admitting his ignorance of some fact of limited interest rarely if ever occurs to this pretender of biographical investigation. If Gissing once visited Lincoln in 1900, the reason, he thinks, must necessarily be that he had in mind some writing on Cromwell! Because the present writer admits that, despite extensive research, he has not succeeded in tracing in the English press Eduard Bertz's advertisement from which originated his friendship with Gissing, Delany suggests that Gissing may well have placed the advertisement himself (disregarding Arthur Young's statement that he was given the information about the circumstances of the meeting between Bertz and Gissing by Alfred Gissing). And why hint that Gissing took good care to settle in Brixton so as to be as far as possible from his wife's relatives in Camberwell when it is well known that Edith did not get on well with them and that his prime reason for moving to Brixton was the proximity of the large, recently opened, free Tate Library? Etc, etc.

But here this rambling evocation of the sinister biographical farce must end. As we said at the start, Delany has written a scurrilous account of Gissing's life, trying to reduce him to a pulp. He must have been even more naïve than he himself knew if for a split second he believed that no counterblast would ever reach him. He has disgraced himself, and his publishers are gravely responsible. No complaint will be acceptable; the reply would be supplied by Molière's proverbial words: 'Tu l'as voulu, Georges Dandin.'

Notes and News

The most curious and valuable Italian publication on Gissing in the last few years is certainly the beautifully produced volume we have received from Vincenzo Pepe of Nocera Inferiore, a town in Campania, between Naples and Salerno. It is a quarto pictorial volume of over 100 pages entitled *XXIV Certamen Horatianum*, a sumptuous special publication which accompanies the latest *Certamen Horatianum*, that is a national contest of

Latin translations which takes place every year at Venosa, a town to whose name that of Horace is indelibly attached. Among other articles devoted to classical culture, on pp. 52-58, is printed the Italian version of the article (originally published in the July 2009 number of the *Gissing Journal*) by Vincenzo Pepe, who is briefly identified as *Traduttore. Saggista*, that is translator and essayist, “Gissing e Orazio” [Gissing and Horace], with a photo of Gissing taken in H. G. Wells’s home in 1901, shortly before his English doctors sent him to the East Anglian Sanatorium at Nayland. This is the place to repeat what Gissing’s devotees who are not altogether ignorant of Latin literature are fully aware of—that proof of his admiration for the Latin poet occurs again and again in his works and private papers. He had at least two copies of Horace’s works and one of them was often in his pocket on Sundays, as Gabrielle Fleury remembered. Could he know of Signor Pepe’s article, Gissing would not remain indifferent. The publisher is Osanna Edizioni of Venosa.

Another writer greatly esteemed by Gissing was Zola. His name appears in each of the nine volumes of *Collected Letters*, as a rule several times, and it would not be looked for in vain in the *Diary*. We can safely say that he read at least *Le Docteur Pascal*, *L’Argent*, *La Débâcle*, *Au Bonheur des Dames*, *Une Page d’Amour*, *Rome*, and *Paris*, this last title in Italian. Of *L’Argent*, a subject on which he himself was an expert, he wrote to Bertz “in some respects that is wonderful” and to Clara Collet, after reading *La Débâcle* in 1896: “Oh, but he is a big strong man, say what one will!” He found *Rome* “an immense book” and said so to his brother Algernon, who was apparently blind to literary merit when it was placed under his eyes: “Rome” is a great book—great in two senses, for it runs to 750 close pages. I have read every word of it with satisfaction. There are wonderful descriptive passages. Lord, how the man toils! Few men living have laboured so for the last twenty years.” And he was fascinated by Zola’s personality as much as by his works. Fortunately he lived long enough to appreciate and praise Zola’s crucial role in the Dreyfus affair in its early stages. Like all respectable people Gissing was a Dreyfusard but very few historians in France and in England nowadays are aware of this. In a letter to Bertz of 30 October 1899, Gabrielle wrote of Gissing: “I should like him to meet Zola and I shall induce him to do so as hard as I can.” But no step towards such a meeting was ever taken.

On 6 June of this year Malcolm Allen, “the world’s tallest George Gissing expert” (for so he was denominated), gave an hour’s interview on Gissing as part of Wisconsin Public Radio’s “University of the Air” series. Interviewed by Emily Auerbach and Norman Gilliland, Malcolm tried to provide a general biographical and literary survey for an educated but non-specialist audience, talking about the reasons behind his own predilection for Gissing, Gissing’s life, pessimism, and marriages, the nature of his novels, the reasons for his relative lack of financial success, the vagaries of his reputation, and other germane matters. The interview can be heard at

http://www.wpr.org/webcasting/audioarchives_display.cfm?Code=uoa

In the event of the link failing to work, google “Wisconsin public radio gissing” and that should lead you to the relevant section of WPR’s archives. It is rumoured that a transcript of the interview will appear in a later issue of the *Journal*.

Simon James, whose critical study of Gissing, *Unsettled Accounts*, was one of the major items published on the occasion of the centenary, has published an article on two contemporaries of Gissing who wrote on his work, Wells and Bennett. The reference is John Shapcott, 2010. *Some Versions of Realism: Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells*, Arnold Bennett Society, pp. 23-30. John Shapcott is known as a prominent Bennett specialist.

Some ten years ago, when after the publication of the *Collected Letters* Gissing’s unconventional friend John Wood Shortridge became the subject of serious critical attention, a foreign painter of his acquaintance, practically unknown in Western Europe, Nikola Masic, remained an editorial enigma. Now an English correspondent, Sally Hayles, who lives in Barnsley, Yorkshire, the home town of J. W. Shortridge, has identified Masic as a Croatian artist (1852-1902). The two men had met on Capri in the early 1880s.

Christine Huguet informs us (1) that Cambridge U.P. will publish *Satire in an Age of Realism* by Aaron Matz in August. The book focuses on George Eliot, Hardy, Gissing (to whom chapter 3 is devoted), Conrad, and the theatre of Ibsen. Some readers will remember Mr. Matz’s article “George Gissing’s Ambivalent Realism,” which appeared in *Nineteenth-*

Century Literature for September 2004. (2) that Ashgate published in 2009 *Victorian Vulgarity: Taste in Verbal and Visual Culture*, ed. Susan David Bernstein and Elsie B. Michie. The book contains chapters on Dickens, George Eliot, Gissing and Trollope. The publishers' catalogue reads in part: "Neither dismissing nor reveling in vulgarity's myriad temptations, the contributors invite readers to consider the concept's implications for today's writers and artists."

Recent Publications

Articles, etc.

Ranald C. Michie, *Guilty Money. The City of London in Victorian and Edwardian Culture, 1815-1914*, London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009. Contains many passages on Gissing and quotations from *Born in Exile*, *The Whirlpool*, *The Crown of Life*, *The Nether World* and *Will Warburton*.

David Crackanthorpe, "The Yellow Book and John Buchan," *John Buchan Journal*, Spring 2010, Issue 42, pp. 9-16. Contains a passage on Gissing's short story "The Foolish Virgin," published in the January 1896 number of *The Yellow Book*.

Anon., "Cook's Bounty," *Wakefield Express*, 30 April, 2010, p. 28. On the gift to the Gissing Centre of a hairbrush and a tablecloth that belonged to Kate Boughton, Gissing's housekeeper in his Dorking days.

Tailpiece

We offer as a tailpiece a passage from a book by Edward Clodd which Gissing may have read but to which he never refers in his correspondence or private papers. Both men and Gissing's father before him were interested in superstitions—a cognate subject—and corresponded jocularly on the subject.

The following passage occurs in *The Childhood of the World* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1914), first published in 1872. The whole volume, of which these are a few pages of chapter 24 ("Belief in Magic and Witchcraft"), is well

worth reading or rereading. It is highly typical of the author, an enlightened rationalist.

All the rites and ceremonies that mankind practise have for their object the winning of the favour, or warding-off the wrath, of gods and lesser spirits. And as the man who was the chief of the tribe became so because he was the strongest in body, the most fearless hunter and the bravest fighter, so the man who was most shrewd and agile of brain, who laid claim to "occult" that is, to hidden power, became the magic-worker. The tribesfolk believed that he had power over the unseen and dreaded; he may sometimes have believed it himself, and hence their ready yielding to that power. Magic-worker, wizard or sorcerer, "medicine man" or priest, for he is called by one or other of these names in different countries, he persuaded the people that he could make rain or sunshine, cause or cure diseases, which, like death itself, are believed by savage races to be the work of evil spirits; foretell events, cast spells and charms over men and women, so that they often died through sheer fright; bewitch them by getting possession of their hair-cuttings or nail-parings, or saliva, or, what seems to us oddest of all, finding out their name, which is in savage belief, a part of a man's self, and therefore kept hidden lest black magic be worked by him who gets to know it; change himself into animals and plants; work himself into a frenzy, which to others was proof that he was in close touch with unseen powers. In short, there is, among the lower races, no event in their lives which does not fall to the magic-worker to control, because he works on their hopes and fears. White Magic is when he uses his power for a good purpose; Black Magic is when he uses it for a bad one. And the essence of magic itself is belief in numberless spirits everywhere who possess non-natural power, linked to the belief that the sorcerer has power to make these spirits do his bidding. So he has a very good time, and plenty to do. Ages back, when one man did many things, he was both sorcerer and priest, but in the course of time it fell to the one to work all the marvels of the magic art, and to the priest to offer sacrifices and prayers, and otherwise lead the people in their worship of their gods. Medicine-men, rain-makers, wizards, conjurers, and sorcerers, these have abounded everywhere; and even among us now there are found, under other names, people who think that they have power with the unseen and that they know more about the unknown than has ever been or will be given to man to find out.

This belief in magical arts, which is firmly rooted among the lowest tribes of mankind, has only within the last two hundred years died out among civilized people, and even lingers still in out-of-the-way places among the foolish and ignorant, who are always ready to see a miracle in everything that they cannot understand. Connected with it is the horrid belief in witchcraft, through which many thousands of innocent people have been burned! The last victim in England was a poor man who was swum by a mob just sixty years ago. The suspected person was flung into water, and the guilt was proved if he or she floated.

Witchcraft spread with a belief in the devil, who being looked upon as the enemy of God and man, was regarded as the cause of all the evil in the world, which he worked either by himself or by the aid of agents. It was held that persons had sold themselves to him, he in return promising that they should for the time being lack nothing, and should have power to torment man and woman and child and beast. If anyone, therefore, felt strange pains; if any sad loss came; it was believed to be the malicious work of witches. It was they who caused the devastating storm; the ruin to the crops; the sudden death of the cattle; and when anyone pined away in sickness, it was because some old witch had cast her evil eye upon him or made a waxen image of him and set it before the fire, that the sick man might waste away as it melted. The poor creatures who were charged with thus being in league with the devil were sought for chiefly among helpless old women. To have a wrinkled face, a hairy lip, a squint eye, a hobbling gait, a squeaking voice, a scolding tongue; to live alone: these were thought proofs enough, and to these miserable victims torture was applied so cruelly that death was a welcome release.

...

Taboo. Before we leave Magic, something must be said about taboo (a word borrowed from the Polynesians). This means the setting of something apart which must not be touched or eaten or trespassed upon; or the hedging round of certain men, as chiefs or priests, so that they may be kept wholly apart from the common people. Those who broke taboo were threatened with curses and severe punishment, the effect of which often was that the offender fell sick and died of sheer funk. As an example of this, some New Zealand natives found and used a tinder-box, not knowing who was the owner, and when they heard that it belonged to their chief they all died of fright.

...

It was round chiefs and priests and sacred places that the taboo is made a ring-fence. Chiefs were looked upon as gods: no one dare touch them, they were believed to have magic powers. In the East and in ancient Rome Emperors were worshipped as gods, and long after then people continued to believe in the divine right of kings. Sorcerers or medicine-men, are sacred, and still more so, the places where the spirits dwell: a belief which still lives on in the idea that a church is a sacred place, and that a house is not.

But taboo, while it did much mischief, for the belief in the power of a curse has brought terror and real harm to numberless innocent people, did some good in safeguarding life and property where these were insecure, and in paving the way for the laws which are made by every people for the common good.

