

## **Sympathy for the Devil: or, When was the ending of *A Life's Morning* rewritten?**

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George Gissing (1857-1903) and James Payn (1830-98) found themselves on opposite sides of the literary divide opening between “Realism” and “Romance” in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and not only because they belonged to different generations. In Gissing criticism, Payn, in his role as both commissioning reader for Smith, Elder and Co., the publishers that issued the bulk of Gissing’s books up until *New Grub Street* (1891), and as literary editor of their monthly miscellany, *The Cornhill Magazine*, often stands accused of acting as a grave hindrance to his superior in the art of fiction. Though there are other specific complaints, generally concerning the meanness of the terms offered for publication rights,<sup>1</sup> the most damning charge against Payn has always been that he rudely forced Gissing to rewrite the closing chapters of *A Life's Morning* (1888) to bring about a happy ending.

The central character in this novel is the brilliant Oxford student Wifrid Athel, who falls in love with Emily Hood, a governess from an impoverished family in industrial Yorkshire. Though Emily responds, the suicide of her father leads her to renounce her love; after a lengthy interval Wifrid offers his hand to an old family friend, the glamorous Beatrice Redwing. The accusation against the editor is that he compelled the author to conclude the narrative not with Emily’s death but rather with her union with Wilfrid. This charge has recently been restated with considerable vigour among the “Notes on composition and publication” in the entry on the novel in Pierre Coustillas’s *Definitive Bibliography*. According to Coustillas, though *A Life's Morning* (under its original title of “Emily”) had been completed by the author and accepted by the publisher as early as November 1885,

Payn, with typical unconcern, did not say a word about the book for two years, but when he at length decided to run it as a serial from January to December, he did it with the proviso that Gissing changed the ending, a fantastic demand which made the poor author furious. If Gissing wished to receive the badly needed £50 mentioned in the memorandum of agreement, he must mutilate his story, that is, resuscitate his heroine and drag her to the altar. It is no wonder Payn’s behaviour has earned him in Gissing criticism a reputation for being a pretentious ass and an offensive philistine. (62)

This accusation is especially troubling since no less acute a biographer than Sir Leslie Stephen comes to a very different conclusion concerning Payn’s personal and professional qualities. Payn had succeeded Stephen as editor of the *Cornhill* in 1882 when the latter took on the responsibility of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, while the two had first met as undergraduates at Cambridge in the early 1850s. Stephen sums up his obituary assessment as follows:

He was absolutely incapable of any petty jealousy – of the spirit which makes a man regard kindness as merely a proper tribute to his own merits, or refuses to admit merits which obscure his own. In this respect at least he was

a model editor. He could, like other editors, make mistakes now and then; and was unique only in the frankness with which he admitted them. But no one could be more eager to recognise the merit of young and unknown authors, or more anxious to give them every possible advice and encouragement. Whatever Payn's own merits as an author, this at least may be said – that no one could more thoroughly embody the spirit of good feeling and cordial desire for helping each other which ought to be characteristic of what he always regarded as the most honourable profession. (“James Payn” 594)

The present paper re-examines the evidence regarding the ending of *A Life's Morning* to assess whether Coustillas's verdict is justified.<sup>2</sup> Although the episode is in itself a minor one, what is at stake in this event is not only the editor's reputation but also the integrity of one of the author's major works. As the subtitle suggests, a crucial question concerns the timing of the alleged mutilation.

There is little contemporary evidence proving when and indeed whether Gissing recast the ending. The relevant portion of the manuscript is missing and may well have been destroyed (Coustillas, *Bibliography* 61). A good deal less than the whole of Gissing's correspondence with Payn at Smith, Elder is extant, but neither there nor in the surviving letters to Gissing's family and friends is there any specific reference to the revision of the closing chapters of *A Life's Morning*. Gissing's private diary appears to begin only from the end of 1887 (from “Tuesd. Dec. 27”, Gissing, *Diary* 17), and, though the entries for the following year are by far the most comprehensive, no reference to the point at issue is found among them.<sup>3</sup> In his *Bibliography* Pierre Coustillas rightly notes both this lack of independent evidence of Payn's supposed *diktat* and the true source of the story: “No trace of the incident appears in his correspondence and private papers. Only [his friend and fellow novelist Morley] Roberts was a witness of Gissing's reaction” (62).

Roberts's recollection of the incident first appeared almost a decade after his friend's death and around a quarter of a century after the events in question, in the fourth chapter of *The Private Life of Henry Maitland* (1912), a fictionalised biography of Gissing:

“In the Morning” [“A Life's Morning”] ... was done before his wife died, and some people who do not know the inner history of the book may not regard it as a tragedy. In one sense, however, it was one of the greatest literary tragedies of Henry Maitland's [George Gissing's] life, according to his own statement to me.

At that time he was publishing books with the firm of Miller and Company [Smith, Elder and Company], and, of course, he knew John Glass [James Payn], who read for them, very well indeed. It seems that Glass, who had naturally enough, considering his period, certain old-fashioned ideas on the subject of books and their endings, absolutely and flatly declined to recommend his firm to publish “In the Morning,” unless Maitland re-wrote the natural tragic end of the book and made it turn out happily. I think nothing on earth, or in some hell for men of letters, could have made Maitland more angry and wretched. If there was one thing that he clung to during the whole of his working time, it was sincerity, and sincerity in

literary work implies an absolute freedom from alien and extrinsic influence. I can well remember what he said to me about Glass' suggestion. He abused him and the publishers; the public, England, the world, and the very universe. He almost burst into tears as he explained to me what he had been obliged to do for the sake of the great fifty pounds he was to get for the book. For at this time he only got fifty pounds for a long three-volume novel. He always wrote with the greatest pain and labour, but I do not suppose he ever put anything on paper in his life which cost him such acute mental suffering as the last three chapters which were written to John Glass' barbaric order. (90-92)

Roberts was to add a number of significant details to this account in his introduction to a new edition of *A Life's Morning* which appeared forty years after the original incident. There, in addition to referring to the participants by their proper names for the first time, he stated that he had witnessed Gissing's outrage just "a day or two" after the revisions had been carried out; that Payn had ordered the author "to dig up Emily Hood and make her corpse walk to the marriage bed"; and, noting the extant passage where Emily "puts her hand to her heart and complains of pain", that the cause of the heroine's death in the lost ending was "heart failure" (vi-viii).

Roberts, however, is hardly a trustworthy source. Much of *Henry Maitland* must have been written with little in the way of documentary support because early on he acknowledges that, though he engaged in a "prolonged, and practically uninterrupted correspondence" with the author from 1884, he has unaccountably lost all the letters received from Gissing prior to 1894 (45). Moreover, the Payn affair must have occurred not long before the death of Gissing's first wife Nell in late February 1888, an event treated in a passage recognised by Bishop, Morton and others, as among the more unreliable in Roberts's volume (58-62). Indeed, Gissing's own immediate recollections of the event, recorded in detail in his diary for 29 February and 1 March (Gissing, *Diary* 21-23), reveal a series of substantial disparities.

The only apparently independent, contemporary support for Roberts's accounts, in the literary and political weekly *The Outlook* (1898-1928), in fact yields negative evidence. In the issue for 2 January 1904, an unsigned obituary of Gissing referred to the enforced alteration of the ending of *A Life's Morning* "in order to please a public alleged to require prettiness". However, in the issue for 30 January 1904 the writer retracted the claim when neither the publishers nor the author's brother could provide confirmation: Smith, Elder held "no record of having advised Mr Gissing to reconstruct the ending" while Algernon could not "recall any remark of his on the point you wish to settle". It seems likely both that the original source of the information was Morley Roberts and that the obituary writer's claim was challenged by some third party, though the articles in question provide no confirmation of these points. Though Pierre Coustillas cites this evidence in the introduction to his edition of *A Life's Morning*, he concludes that the testimonies of Gissing's publishers and brother "have little weight when compared with Morley Roberts's words" (xxviii-xxix).

Before we take up the specific issue of when the ending of *A Life's Morning* could have been rewritten to the editor's "barbaric order", there are a couple of general contexts that need to be established. Firstly, while all Gissing's surviving

business letters to Payn are written with perfect civility, in private the author seems to have betrayed his annoyance with and contempt for the editor with some frequency. On 24 April 1887, for example, well before he was notified that *A Life's Morning* would appear in the *Cornhill*, Gissing wrote to his brother Algernon: "I grieve to say that on the same day as 'Thyrza' appears a cheap ed.<sup>n</sup> of [Payn's novel] 'The Heir of the Ages.' It is bad to be advertised on the same page with the weakest trash of modern times" (Gissing, *Letters* v 107).<sup>4</sup> In his diary entry for 7 August 1891, Gissing's despair at Payn's unwillingness to make a better offer for his next work due to the "financial failure" of *New Grub Street* is compounded with his habitual irritation at the editor's notorious handwriting: "A day of dull misery, due to Payn's damned communication. If only I could really read what the man writes!" (Gissing, *Diary* 253). At the same time we should recall that other early publishers of Gissing's novels, notably George Bentley and Frederick Chapman, were by no means exempt from the author's private indignation and derision.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, the mid-1880s offer a number of other cases where Gissing suffered varying degrees of financial and/or artistic frustration when his latest novel was judged unsuitable for serial publication. On 24 February 1886, when *Demos* was still incomplete, on learning from Payn that the novel would not appear in the *Cornhill* but as a triple-decker straight away, Gissing hastened to assure him both that there would be "nothing whatever of an objectionable nature" in the unwritten portion and that the narrative would "certainly end cheerfully" (Gissing, *Letters* iii 8). On 16 December of the same year, after receiving critical comments from Payn on the opening volume of *Thyrza*, to the effect that even the best scenes seemed to "lack the 'go' of those in *Demos*" and therefore that the novel would "not suit the *Cornhill*," the novelist was so deflated that he confided to his brother that he "really [did] not feel able to finish the book" (Gissing, *Letters* iii 70). In this instance, of course, the work was completed and eventually appeared in three volumes from Smith, Elder in late April 1887. Things were rather different with "Clement Dorricott" just a few months later. In this case the already finished manuscript was abandoned (and later presumably destroyed) after it was rejected by George Bentley for serial publication in *Temple Bar*, this although the publisher seems to have offered to pay generously for the volume rights. Gissing wrote baldly to his brother on 3 July: "B. says story unsuitable for 'T.B.' Quite expected; I shall never hit the serial vein. It shall lie by for present" (Gissing, *Letters* iii 130).

All this suggests the distinct possibility that Morley Roberts's recollections of the Payn affair might have unintentionally conflated or confused the publishing histories of *A Life's Morning* and one or more other works. Indeed he makes a similar slip on another occasion: in his introduction to *A Life's Morning*, he remarks that "the book shows as clear marks of the forced alteration as Dickens' *Mutual Friend*" (vii), presumably confusing that work with *Great Expectations*. A more speculative hypothesis might be that Roberts felt such a need to play the role of John Forster to Gissing's Dickens that, in the absence of a parallel to the seminal "blacking warehouse" confession, he was compelled to invent one. But whatever the reasons behind the unreliability of Roberts's evidence, it cannot simply be accepted at face value.

Let us thus return to the question of the timing of the supposed alterations in the light of Gissing's own statements scattered among his private papers. According

to letters to both his brother Algernon and his sister Ellen of 4 November 1887, it could only have been a day or two earlier that Payn had first given notification that the novel was shortly scheduled for serialisation in the *Cornhill*. Given that the publishers had held the manuscript for so long, this was indeed extremely short notice, leading Gissing to speculate that the editor had “neglected to provide a new serial, & [found] himself at the last moment driven to take whatever [came] to hand” (Gissing, *Letters* iii 158). This hypothesis gains support from other evidence.<sup>6</sup> With Payn’s belated notification came an urgent request for a change of title from the original “Emily”, so that, after a couple of false dawns, “A Life’s Morning” was decided on by the middle of the month (iii 161-2). But already by 7 November the manuscript was with the printers (iii 161), and before 22 November the author received the proofs of what was probably Chapters 1-2, the first monthly instalment (iii 166). Gissing records receiving the proofs of the third instalment on 30 December (Gissing, *Diary* 17), up to the end of the eighth by 25 March 1888 (Gissing, *Letters* iii 193), and to the end of the serial by 2 June (Gissing, *Diary* 30). In the first two of these four cases it is clear that the proofs were corrected within a day or two. Though the author was then desperately trying to grind out four pages a day of the second volume of *The Nether World*, the last serial proof sheets of *A Life’s Morning* were still returned in little more than a week (Gissing, *Diary* 31).

The initial sense of rush is compounded when we take into account Gissing’s other professional activities around this time. Both the correspondence and the diary agree that, from the summer of 1887 until 7 February 1888 when the author confessed to himself that he was “wholly dissatisfied” with the narrative and had abandoned it (Gissing, *Diary* 21), Gissing was struggling mightily to compose a new three-volume novel. This was initially entitled “Dust and Dew” but towards the end of the year was renamed “The Insurgents”. His letters to Ellen report him “nothing like at the end of Vol 1 yet” on 2 October, “not yet at middle of 2.<sup>d</sup> Vol” on 13 November, “in the 3.<sup>d</sup> Vol. of my new novel, – in spite of the difficulties” on 6 December, but on 1 January 1888 “going back ... from the third Vol.” to try to revise the unsatisfactory opening (Gissing, *Letters* iii 153, 162, 168, 172). Moreover, virtually throughout the last two months of 1887 Gissing had to give private lessons not only in the mornings to Walter Grahame as usual, but also, unexpectedly, in the evenings to Bernard Harrison. His private papers suggest that during this period his predominant psychological state was a sense of frustration at having to work on the new novel “at weary intervals” (to Ellen, 13 November 87, Gissing, *Letters* iii 162). He seems, though, to have been more distracted by the teaching commitments than by the importunity of James Payn.

At what point then could the editor have demanded that the final chapters be recast and during what period could Gissing have composed a new happy ending? In the context of this extremely tight schedule, it is difficult to come up with a convincing answer. Given that they had held the complete manuscript for so long, the magazine publishers would have had no legal standing to demand a revised ending after the author received payment in full (at the end of December 1887), or indeed any practical incentive to do so once the first instalment was in type (by mid November). Payn could then hardly have demanded a new ending at any other point than that at which he required the new title – in early November 1887. If we accept Roberts’s account, the author’s task must have involved the composition of more than 11,000 words, comprising three substantially new chapters of a novel which had been laid aside for a long period. Gissing could hardly have accomplished such arduous and

distasteful labour in much less than a week, time which both the detail of the diary entries for 1888 and the publishing schedule of the serial itself suggest could only have been found well before the end of 1887.

The theory that Gissing might have “revised his story as the printers were setting up the twelve instalments”, advanced by Pierre Coustillas in the *Gissing Newsletter* for 1978, is also untenable. There Coustillas discusses Gissing’s letter to Payn of 25 November 1887, putting forward the argument that it is significant because “it is the only one from Gissing that confirms – at least partly, since the ending is unfortunately not referred to here – the story of the novel’s revision for which Roberts was hitherto the sole authority” (Coustillas, “Thomas Seccombe” 28). However this document, the author’s only extant letter to the editor throughout the period in question, offers a different reading from that advanced by Coustillas. Here is the letter in full:

Dear Mr. Payn,

The phrase is an affected one; I ought to have altered it, as I have now done. I was given to such things just at that time.

This is not, I trust, a revise; for I see that a ludicrous misprint just above stands uncorrected.

I will certainly avoid alteration save when there is something really painful. It is not likely there will be many such instances when the story gets well going.

I thank you for your good opinion of my style in general.

Yours very truly, | George Gissing (Gissing, *Letters* iii 167)

The most likely context is that Gissing, having received page proofs of the first serial instalment of *A Life’s Morning*, has already returned them corrected. The editor has probably sent back a single page querying a particular phrase, which the author readily agrees to alter, although he retaliates by underlining an unfortunate printing error. Moreover, the letter allows three telling inferences: firstly, that the serial type was set up directly from the manuscript originally submitted and without subsequent revisions by the author; secondly, that the editor wanted the author to keep his revisions on the proofs to a minimum; and thirdly, that the revisions in question concerned microscopic issues of style rather than macroscopic issues of plotting.

There remains one last area in the author’s private papers that might be expected to shed light on the timing of the alleged revisions: Gissing’s comments in his personal correspondence and his private diary on the qualities of *A Life’s Morning* prior to and during its serial publication. These prove to be both fairly frequent and markedly inconsistent, swinging wildly between utter dismissal (“the whole is feeble”, to Ellen, 13 November, Gissing, *Letters* iii 162) and grudging satisfaction (“it reads better than I expected”, to his sister-in-law Catherine, 22 November, iii 166). However, it is possible to observe another significance in this pattern than merely the action of a psychological pendulum. The negative assessments tend to occur when Gissing is able to concentrate his artistic energies on the new, incomplete narrative but anticipates the distraction of having to deal with a further serial instalment of the old, finished story. The more positive appraisals mostly come after a sustained period of working on the serial proofs when he engages once again with the dynamics of a tale almost forgotten. What does remain consistent, however, is Gissing’s perception

that the mode of instalment publication itself is inextricably bound to inferior work at the same time that it generates superior profit – “vile” is the adjective used on more than one occasion in response to this situation (e.g., to Ellen, 1 January 1888, iii 172). Yet there is no suggestion that the author’s distaste for serialisation is related specifically to a forced change in the closure of his own serial novel.

Indeed, there are two letters, written on consecutive days in late March when Gissing had just read the proofs up to Chapter 16, at the end of which Emily renounces her lover with the lie “I do not love you”, where the author seems to speak with positive emotions about the ending of the narrative. To Ellen he writes:

By the bye, now that I have read the proofs of “A Life’s Morning” to the end of the August number, I begin to see that the story is by no means contemptible. It is the method of publication which is at fault, – a vile method. Wait till you can judge the work as a whole; my artistic instincts have not failed me. (25 March 1888, Gissing, *Letters* iii 193)

On the following day, in a sprightly letter that is unfortunately incomplete due to the excision of a portion of the notepaper, Gissing replies to Miss E. T. Scott, an otherwise unidentified correspondent who has written from Paris in praise of the novel running in the *Cornhill* – “An odd letter, but it interests me”, the author notes in his diary (Gissing, *Diary* 25). The relevant sentences read:

I will first answer your question with regard to Emily’s fate. No, she does not die, – wherein, I dare say, I shall surprise many of my readers, who look for gloom as the inevitable close of my stories. [*here the text is defective*] (Gissing, *Letters* iii 196)

For Coustillas, the revelation to Miss Scott “reads like a refusal to make a confession to a stranger” (63), but such a reading is forced by his acceptance of Roberts’s account of the ending. Against this, the untrustworthiness of Roberts’s account combined with the other circumstantial evidence noted above, suggest that Gissing’s somewhat upbeat tone in the letter reflects a positive view of the ending.

Finally, we must consider the textual evidence from the published version of the novel itself which, following Morley Roberts’s lead, Pierre Coustillas has put forward to support the theory of the changed ending. This was first presented in the Harvester edition of *A Life’s Morning*: “At least four distinct hints at what the original ending was to be – the death by heart failure of Emily on the eve of marrying Wilfrid Athel – are still to be found in the last two chapters he left untouched” (xvi). Unfortunately, both there and in “Notes on composition and publication” (Coustillas, *Bibliography* 62), Coustillas merely cites the location of the passages in question but does not analyze them. I will do so here as far as space permits. Located in the penultimate instalment of the serial in the November *Cornhill*, these hints relate to Emily’s physical symptoms when she re-enters the narrative around seven years after renouncing her lover. Twice in these chapters Emily seems to suffer an attack of fainting accompanied by *angina pectoris*. The first occurs when Emily rushes home to her lodgings following her unexpected meeting with Wilfrid in Bushy Park (ch. 22, 548). Following the narration of the attack itself come several pages of description filling in the intervening years, including the following statement:

Then there came to her the knowledge that her bodily strength was threatened by disease. She had fainting fits, and in the comfort administered by those about her she read plainly what was meant to be concealed. At times this was a relief; at least she might hope to be spared long years of weary desolation, and death, come when he might, would be a friend. In other hours the all but certainty of her doom was a thought so terrible that reason well-nigh failed before it. Was there no home for her for ever, nothing but the grave to rest her tired heart? Why had fate dealt with her so cruelly? She looked round and saw none upon whom had fallen a curse so unrelieved.

(ch. 22, 552)

The later attack occurs after Wilfrid, forgetting his vows to Beatrice, renews his declaration of love to Emily during their second meeting in Bushy Park (ch. 23, 559). Emily succeeds in removing Wilfrid's anxiety by reassuring him of her love and willingness to obey his wish for an immediate marriage, but a few lines later the narrator comments:

For the moment she had forgotten everything but love and love's rapture. It was as though life spread before her in limitless glory; she thought nothing of the dark foe with whose ever-watchful, ever-threatening presence she had become so familiar.

They talked long; only the lengthening and deepening shadow of the trees reminded them at length that hours had passed whilst they sat here.

'The boat will have gone,' Emily said.

'Never mind. We will get a conveyance at the hotel. And you must have refreshment of some kind. Shall we see what they can give us to eat at the King's Arms? To be sure we will. It will be our first meal together.'

They rose.

'Emily!'

'Yes, Wilfrid?'

'I can trust you? You will not fail me?'

'Not if I am living, Wilfrid.'

(ch. 23, 560)

Here hints of Emily's death can perhaps be seen both in the lengthening shadows and in the meal together (the first but perhaps also the last), as well as in the terms of her final promise. Yet such arguments from textual evidence are rarely conclusive, and it seems to me that these intimations of mortality admit of other explanations.

From Emily's reappearance to the end of the narrative, Gissing consistently encourages the reader to recognise a relation between the physical and emotional state of her heart. After promising a second time to marry Wilfrid, she returns to her task as a teacher in a new spirit: "the heart she had brought to her work was far other than that which for long years had laboriously pulsed the flagging moments of her life" (ch. 24, 644). Intimations of Emily's death thus regularly cast their shadow in the chapters allegedly rewritten. A complex instance can be found when, distracted with shame at what he has done to Beatrice, Wilfrid wanders late by the river towards Hammersmith: "The influence of a great water flowing from darkness into darkness was strong upon him; he was seeking for a hope in the transitoriness of all things earthly" (ch. 24, 641). The resonance of these words is still apparent when, moments later, he unexpectedly encounters Emily leaning over the parapet looking down into

the “dark flow”, and receives this ambiguous assurance: “If I had not met you, Wilfrid, ... I think my end must have been there – there, below us. I have often come here at night. It is always a lonely place, and at high tide the water is deep” (ch. 24, 641). The tone of celebration remains distinctly muted throughout the final chapters, the wedding itself is handled “off-stage” in only a couple of lines, and the theme of mortality is recalled even in the final words of the narrative given to Emily herself: “Wilfrid, my own, my husband – my love till I die!” (ch. 26, 664). A denouement centering on the death of the heroine on the eve of her marriage would surely have struck a far more sensational note.

In conclusion, then, there is not a single item of documentary or internal evidence that unequivocally supports Morley Roberts’s belated testimony while there is a significant accumulation of circumstantial evidence that suggests that it is highly unlikely to be accurate. Such a balance of evidence warrants the judgement that, in all probability, Gissing was not pressed to rewrite the ending of the novel by James Payn or anyone else, and indeed never did so. Rather, the published version of *A Life’s Morning* needs to be read as a faithful representation of the author’s original intentions, a reading that invites us to reconsider Gissing’s particular inflection of the relations between “Realism” and “Romance” in the 1880s.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a recent, well-documented example, see Nesta 35-42, which includes a transcript and discussion of Gissing’s previously unpublished letter to Smith, Elder of 8 February 1887.

<sup>2</sup> The broader issues of print culture in question – the transformation of Victorian book and serial publishing in the last decades of the nineteenth century and its relation to the ideological divide between Realists and Romantics – are discussed in detail in a companion article, Graham Law, “A Vile Way of Publishing”: Gissing and Serials’, *Victorian Review* 33:1 (April 2007) 71-86.

<sup>3</sup> The number of printed pages devoted to each of the sixteen years from 1887 to 1902 is as follows: 1, 97, 75, 45, 31, 28, 32, 33, 40, 33, 47, 31, 13, 12, 5, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Payn’s *The Heir of the Ages* is a romantic tale in the “Dick Whittington” mode, about a poor country governess who writes a best-selling novel and becomes the talk of the town, thus striking a stark contrast with Gissing’s impoverished governess Emily in *A Life’s Morning*. The two novels seem both to have been written around the same time. Payn’s first appeared in instalments in the *Illustrated London News* and a number of weekly provincial newspapers in the first half of 1886, before being published in three volumes from Smith, Elder shortly before the end of the serial run.

<sup>5</sup> When the publication of the short tale “Letty Coe” in *Temple Bar* is deferred, for example, Gissing calls Bentley “Scoundrel!” (to Ellen, 26 September 1884, Gissing, *Letters* ii 259), later suggesting he might be “imbecile” (to Algernon, 24 April 1887, iii 106). With some frequency Chapman is described variously as “blackguard” (e.g. to Algernon, 10 October 1885, ii 364), “ruffian” (e.g. to Ellen, 15 November 1886, ii 367), and “scoundrel” (e.g. to Ellen, 8 May 1886, iii 37). Indeed, Payn is occasionally compared favourably to Chapman – in the last-mentioned letter, for instance.

<sup>6</sup> The bound volumes of the *Cornhill* show that the prevailing pattern of fiction serialisation in the magazine around this period was two full-length novels appearing simultaneously, with one running from January to December and the other starting

around the middle of the year, with any interim filled in with short stories. Yet no new novel took over after Henry Rider Haggards's *Jess* came to an end in April 1887, while Sabine Baring-Gould's *The Gaverocks* ran as scheduled throughout the year from January to December. Without the first episode of *A Life's Morning*, the January 1888 issue of *Cornhill* would thus have been entirely devoid of serial fiction. Though the editor's own serial novels appeared with some regularity in the magazine, there was an unusually lengthy gap between *The Talk of the Town* (July 1884-February 1885) and *The Burnt Million* (July 1889-June 1890). From January to June 1888, Payn's new serial *The Mystery of Mirbridge* ran in the illustrated weekly the *Graphic*, a journal that would pay considerably more than *Cornhill*. (In its first decade from 1860, *Cornhill* was undoubtedly the most prestigious and remunerative venue for serial fiction. By the mid-1880s the lavish illustrations had gone, the price had dropped to sixpence, and the circulation was down to little more than ten thousand.) In the absence of documentary evidence, it is perhaps tempting to speculate that it might have been the transfer of the editor's own novel to a more lucrative journal which created the gap that *A Life's Morning* was suddenly required to fill.

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