

Gorer v Lever: Edgar Gorer and William Hesketh Lever

Professor Nick Pearce
Department of History of Art, University of Glasgow

On the morning of 7th May, 1915, the *New York Times* carried the announcement of a lawsuit taken out in the U.S. Supreme Court by British art dealer Edgar Gorer against fellow art dealers Henry J. and Joseph J. Duveen of Duveen Brothers.¹ Later that afternoon, American composer Charles Ives was waiting on the platform of Hanover Square train station in New York, when the crowd spontaneously broke into singing the gospel hymn *The Sweet By and By*. News had been received in America of the sinking of the Cunard liner *RMS Lusitania* off the coast of Ireland by a German submarine just a few hours previously. 1201 men, women and children lost their lives in the catastrophe and the spontaneous hymn singing witnessed by Ives and captured in the powerful third movement of his *Second Orchestral Set*, was one of a series of personal and communal responses to the tragedy from all around the world.² One of those who perished on the *Lusitania* was Edgar Gorer. Gorer had initiated the lawsuit against the Duveens before boarding the 1st May sailing to return to London. According to some, Gorer was at the time fighting to save his reputation as perhaps the most

¹ 'Rival Sues Duveens Asks for \$575,000', *New York Times*, 7 May, 1915, p.1.

² Charles Ives, 'From Hanover Square North, at the End of a Tragic Day, the Voice of the People Again Arose', *Orchestral Set No.2*, 3rd movement (1919). Ives wrote: 'As I came on the platform, there was quite a crowd waiting for the trains, which had been blocked lower down, and while waiting there, a hand-organ, or hurdy-gurdy was playing in the street below. Some workmen sitting on the side of the tracks began to whistle the tune, and others began to sing or hum the refrain. A workman with a shovel over his shoulder came on the platform and joined in the chorus, and the next man, a Wall Street banker with white spats and a cane, joined in it, and finally it seemed to me that everybody was singing this tune, and they didn't seem to be singing in fun, but as a natural outlet for what their feelings had been going through all day long. There was a feeling of dignity all through this...the chorus sounded out as though every man in New York must be joining in it.' John Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *Charles E. Ives Memos*, London 1973, p.p.92-93.

successful international dealer in Chinese works of art then in business and against a rival – the Duveen Brothers – whom Gorer, ironically, had sought to emulate. Edgar Gorer's career was a remarkable one, not least in its meteoric rise, its often colourful episodes and its fateful end.

Beginnings

Edgar Ezekiel Gorer (1872-1915), was the son of Solomon Lewis Gorer (1842-1907), a one-time tobacconist, silversmith and jeweller (Fig.1).



Fig. 1. Edgar Gorer as a young man with his mother, wife and sister.

Although Solomon was born in Brighton, Sussex, the Gorer family had both Dutch and Russian ancestry and were probably part of an early wave of Jewish immigration in the late 18th and early 19th century, many of whom settled in

English ports and growing seaside resorts, such as Brighton.³ By 1871, Solomon was living in Kensington High Street and working as a tobacconist, but by 1886 he was listed as an 'electro plater, water gilder, working silver smith, jeweller and gold and silver refiner', with premises at 113 Edgware Road, London.⁴ The firm had expanded by 1889 to additional premises at 433 The Strand, which was a 'fancy jeweller' whose speciality was 'artificial diamonds lustrous as brilliant'.⁵ By 1895, the firm had located solely to The Strand and the following year Solomon made a move to 59 New Bond Street, where he opened as a silversmith alongside his son Edgar, who was listed as a dealer in 'oriental works of art'.⁶ By the time of the final move of both Solomon and Edgar to 170 New Bond Street in 1899, the 'Indo-China Curio Trading Company', as Edgar's side of the business had become, was occupying both 58 and 59 New Bond Street.⁷ In 1900, the two businesses became S. Gorer & Son, interior decorators providing 'specialité oriental decoration' and the Indo-China Curio Trading Company, the proprietor of which was Edgar Gorer.⁸

It is clear from this sequence of events that Edgar was the driving force behind the establishment of S. Gorer & Son (also known as the Indo-China Curio Trading Company), as both interior decorator and dealer in 'Oriental' works of art.

³ P.B. Medawar, 'Peter Alfred Gorer 1907-61', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, Vol.7, November 1961, p.p.95-109, p 95. For a discussion of early Jewish settlers in Brighton, see Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry*, Oxford 1992, p.p.19-20.

⁴ *Post Office London Directory for 1886*, London 1886, p.949.

⁵ *Post Office London Directory for 1889*, London 1889, p.977.

⁶ *Post Office London Directory for 1897*, London 1897, p.p.1068 and 1621.

⁷ *Post Office London Directory for 1899*, London 1899, p.p.597 and 1156. The move to 170 New Bond Street was too late to be included in the 1899 edition and so the new address is listed under 'New Names, Alterations and Names too Late to be Included', p.xxxiv.

⁸ *Post Office London Directory for 1900*, London 1900, p.p.598, 1160, 1985 and 2149.

By 1896, Edgar was in his mid-20s and already displaying the flare and ambition that would characterise his later career.⁹ In 1902, Edgar married Rachel Alice Cohen (1873-1954) and the two moved to a large detached house at 45 Netherhall Gardens in South Hampstead which would remain the family home for the rest of Edgar's life.¹⁰ Over the next few years, S. Gorer & Son maintained a steady, if unremarkable, position as a 'Fine Art Dealer, Chinese & Japanese Works of Art a Speciality', until about 1905, when there is a noticeable and systematic increase in activity and profile. It is likely that Edgar had been steadily taking charge of the business since his marriage. Solomon died in retirement in Eastbourne on 11th October, 1907.¹¹

Growing Success

S. Gorer & Son began to make their mark from about 1905. It was in this year that the firm was listed as making substantial purchases at the Huth Sale in May.¹² Louis Huth (1821-1905), was a merchant banker who collected Old Master and modern paintings, furniture as well as Chinese porcelain and was a friend and patron of James McNeill Whistler. On the first day of the Sale, art dealer Frank Partridge made history by topping the bidding in acquiring the now famous cobalt blue 'Hawthorn Jar' for £5,900 (Duveen was the under-bidder), but Gorer was successful in bidding on the second day when he acquired a pair of

⁹ Edgar had an elder brother, Lewis and sister, Annie. From being an assistant in his father's jewellery business, Lewis embarked upon his own career as a high-class caterer. See 1901 Census, RG13, 125, folio 142, page 55 and 1911 Census, RG14, p.140.

¹⁰ They were married at Hampstead Synagogue in December 1902.

¹¹ 'Deaths', *The Times*, 12 October, 1907, p.1.

¹² The Sale conducted by Christie, Manson & Wood, took place over three days: 18, 19 and 23 May, 1905.

powder-blue with *famille verte* enamel dishes for 360 guineas.¹³ Porcelains of the Kangxi (1662-1722), Yongzheng (1723-35) and Qianlong (1736-95), periods would dominate the market both in Britain and America up until the First World War and this predominantly 'millionaire's taste' was what dealers such as Gorer and Duveen promoted and supplied (Fig.2).



Fig. 2. A blue-and-white Chinese porcelain garniture of three jars and two beakers. Kangxi period (LL 96-100). Example of a typical Kangxi piece.

By May the following year, Gorer had purchased the Trapnell Collection of Chinese porcelain, which, as the advertisement announced, may be viewed 'on presentation of a visiting card only'.¹⁴ This was one of Edgar's innovations. No longer was it necessary to make an appointment or pay a fee; this was an opportunity for the lady or gentleman, perhaps new to collecting, to come and browse what promised to be an extensive display. Edgar also published a catalogue of the Trapnell Collection, the first of a series of lavishly illustrated sales catalogues he produced.¹⁵ Like Duveen, he recognised the importance of

¹³ 'Huth Sale', *The Times*, 19 May, 1905, p 12.

¹⁴ 'Art Exhibition', etc, *The Times*, 15 May, 1906, p.2. Alfred Trapnell (1838-1917), was a ship's captain, born in Bristol and the son of a metal smelter. This was just one of Trapnell's collections of Chinese and European porcelains which he built up and sold throughout his life. See his entry on the Chinese Art Research into Provenance (CARP) site: <http://www.hatii.arts.gla.ac.uk/admn/php/carp/search.php>.

¹⁵ S. Gorer, *Trapnell Collection of Old Chinese Porcelain*, London, 1906.

these publications as both promotional material but also as a way of producing a standard reference which collectors might use as a benchmark against which they could measure their own collection and perhaps add to it. S. N. Behrman recalled Mrs William Randolph Hearst as saying that her husband and his friends had a fondness for catalogues: 'They were going after anything that had a book to it.'¹⁶ Duveen recognised this, so did Edgar Gorer, who would issue a string of similar publications between 1906 and 1914.

The 'positioning' of S. Gorer & Son had begun and continued with a lavish spread in the April 1906 issue of *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, the leading art journal in Britain.¹⁷ Presented as a visit by an anonymous author to the Gorer premises at 170 New Bond Street, it was in all likelihood, a piece prepared by Edgar himself, appearing as it does as part of the front advertising matter of the Magazine before the articles proper begin. This was again a part of Edgar's new promotional strategy. In the pages Gorer offered the collector the opportunity to buy top quality items with very little effort. 'A firm such as Messrs. S. Gorer & Son – in other words, The Indo-China Curio Trading Company – of 170 New Bond Street, London, W., who are direct importers of every description of high-class Oriental works of art, serves to effect an excellent purpose between the source of export and the buyer...'¹⁸ The article continued: 'Messrs Gorer deal only in the finest examples of old and modern curios and objects of art from

¹⁶ S.N. Behrman, *Duveen*, London, 1952, p.68.

¹⁷ 'Eastern and Far Eastern Curios: A Visit to the Gorer Galleries', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol.9, No.37, April, 1906, p.p.22-24.

¹⁸ 'Eastern and Far Eastern Curios', p.22.

China, Japan and India. There is no other similar house in London which in any way approaches them either as regards their immense stock or their scope of influence. The works of art are exhibited on three splendid floors, and represent a probate value of £100,000.’ There then follows a brief history of ceramic making in both China and Japan and a list of the range of wares on display, which included bronzes, lacquer, enamels and ivory.¹⁹ Finally, there is mention of Gorer as cabinet makers and as interior decorators. The firm will undertake to provide display cabinets in keeping with the objects they sell: ‘Messrs. Gorer are also high-class decorators: they not only execute work in any style, but they make a speciality of using their great knowledge of Oriental art in utilizing many of the schemes and suggestions taken from the most beautiful objects’.²⁰ Two watercolour illustrations are included as examples (Fig.3) and show a style of display that reflects an Aesthetic Movement – Chinese Chippendale hybrid, popular before the Great War. Gorer’s skill in interior decoration, emulated that of the firm’s greatest rival: Duveen. Joel Joseph Duveen (1843-1908), the founder of the Duveen empire, had recognised the importance of providing a complete service for his clients, setting off the objects they sold to best advantage. As James Henry Duveen observed, although this work was not greatly remunerative, it did reinforce Duveen’s taste and that included his taste in the works of art he sold.²¹

¹⁹ ‘Eastern and Far Eastern Curios’, p.p.22-23.

²⁰ ‘Eastern and Far Eastern Curios’, p.23.

²¹ James Henry Duveen, *The Rise of the House of Duveen*, London, 1957, p.88.



Fig. 3. 'A Study'. Watercolour of a proposed room design by Gorer. Illustrated in the Burlington Magazine. April, 1906.

Edgar clearly recognised the importance of this and while Duveen promoted the 'Dutch and Flemish Renaissance styles' that included heavy panelling that suited the Old Master paintings they predominantly sold, Gorer sought to engage with, as he saw it, a style more appropriate to the objects he sold.²² Gorer boasted many satisfied customers, which included the governments of Australia, Southern Nigeria, the Gold Coast and the British government, 'on the occasion of their exhibit at the great Glasgow Exhibition.'²³ In the early years Gorer promoted this aspect of their service on their letter-head where they were described as 'Cabinet Maker & Decorator'.²⁴

The offer of a complete service was a gambit used on William Lever, when Gorer approached him in 1909. This was not the first time that Gorer had approached Lever. In 1906, Lever was offered a piece from the former Lelong Collection in

²² Duveen, *The Rise*, p 88; 'Eastern and Far Eastern Curios', p.24.

²³ Eastern and Far Eastern Curios, p.24. The Glasgow International Exhibition took place in 1901.

²⁴ Letter from Edgar Gorer to William Lever, 19 May, 1909, Gorer Papers, Lady Lever Art Gallery (LLAG) Archives, 17.2/H. Gorer 4691, hereafter cited as Gorer Papers.

Paris, which he firmly rejected.²⁵ Gorer maintained an infrequent correspondence thereafter, suggesting pieces and sending a copy of J. F. Blacker's *Chats on Oriental Porcelain*, which had just been published (and which Edgar reveals he has edited), all without success. Then in 1909 he tried another approach by suggesting the importance of display for any collector. This letter provides the clearest description of Gorer's interior decorating service: 'For some years past', he wrote, 'I have done a great deal of high-class decorative and cabinet work for my various clients, but I have not made a prominent feature of this as I originally started the workshops as a hobby and because I found it was absolutely impossible to get effective show cabinets made properly in this country... The work entrusted to me has increased so much that I have found it necessary to fit up show-rooms on these premises, and I have engaged Mr. Albert Van der Velde, who was for many years with Messrs. Hampton and Messrs. Roumy, to take charge of this department'. He continues: 'Mr. Van der Velde is a most competent decorator, having thorough knowledge of all the styles of the different periods, and for artistic draperies and hangings he could not be equalled. I should be gratified if at any time you may have any decorative or cabinet work if you will allow him to call upon you with the object of taking particulars so as to submit designs and estimates for what you may require done. I may say that in no instance will charges be made for these drawings or estimates.'²⁶ Later that year Gorer sent Lever some samples of his work, a portfolio of illustrations,

²⁵ Edgar Gorer to William Lever, 19 Feb, 1906; rejection letter from Lever to Gorer, 21 February, 1906, Gorer Papers.

²⁶ Edgar Gorer to William Lever, 19 May, 1909, Gorer Papers.

probably not dissimilar to those reproduced in the *Burlington Magazine* article.²⁷ Whether Gorer was aware of Lever's passion for design and planning or not, this was a trump card to play. More than the process of collecting itself, Lever seemed to obtain the greatest pleasure from conceiving and achieving the perfect display, whatever the material.

Although Lever made no immediate response to Gorer's letters, the seed was planted and the following summer he purchased a blue & white beaker vase for £350.²⁸ This was from the Sir William Bennett Collection, a part of which Gorer had just secured and which went on show during May and June of 1910. The exhibition was accompanied by an illustrated catalogue written jointly by Edgar and his client (Fig.4).²⁹ Sir William Bennett (1852-1931), was an eminent London surgeon who had built up a distinguished collection of predominantly Kangxi period ceramics and had been a client of Duveen Brothers.³⁰ The acquisition of such a collection must have delighted Edgar, not least because it was to be the platform from which he launched his entrée into the American market. Gorer is said to have been instrumental in taking the best of the Sir William Bennett collection to the U.S. where it formed the nucleus of some of the finest American collections.³¹

²⁷ Edgar Gorer to William Lever, 5 November, 1909, Gorer Papers.

²⁸ Edgar Gorer to William Lever, 6 June, 1910, Gorer Papers.

²⁹ Edgar Gorer and Sir William Henry Bennett, *A Collection of Rare Old Chinese Porcelains Collected by Sir William Bennett KCVO*, London, 1910.

³⁰ For further details see his entry on CARP:
<http://www.hatii.arts.gla.ac.uk/admn/php/carp/search.php>.

³¹ CARP entry.



Fig. 4. Supper set from the Sir William Bennett Collection.

The Richard Bennett Affair

The collection of another Bennett, this time Richard, would be Gorer's next major acquisition, but one fraught with difficulty, not least as regards his relationship with William Lever. In a letter of 19th May, 1911, Gorer invited Lever to view privately the Richard Bennett collection of Chinese porcelain he had just acquired.³² He followed up with a further letter of 6th June, in which he made it clear that this collection should not be confused with that of Sir William Bennett, for fine as this may have been, 'is entirely eclipsed by the present one, and it is admitted by such competent authorities as Mr. Claude Phillips, Mr. Roger Fry,

³² Edgar Gorer to William Lever, 19 May, 1911, Gorer Papers. Gorer succeeded received a number of distinguished guests at the Private View on 24 May, including the Duchess of Northumberland, Lords Balcarras, Basing, Boston and Kitchener, the Countess of Harewood, the Chinese Minister and the Spanish and Russian Ambassadors, 'Court Circular', *The Times*, 25 May, 1911, p.13.

and other art critics to excel even the great Salting collection (Fig.5).³³ The Richard Bennett collection was celebrated at the time as being 'classic in style' and benefitting, it was claimed, from many pieces that had been directly imported from China.³⁴ Bennett himself was owner of a chemical and bleaching manufacturing company in Great Lever, near Bolton in Lancashire, but was in the process of retiring to Thornby Hall in Northamptonshire at the time he sold his collection.³⁵ Lever called upon Gorer un-announced the day following Gorer's letter, at a time when Queen Mary was also viewing the collection and Edgar was unable to see him personally. One of Lever's unmarried sisters (Emily or Alice), also visited on 8th June and gave Edgar the opportunity to encourage Lever to make a second visit: 'I suggested to her that I would be very grateful if, on the occasion of your next visit, you could give me an hour's notice by telephone. My object in asking this is that I should like to have nobody in the galleries but yourself and any friends you may wish to bring with you, so that I could show you freely and comfortably the beautiful things.'³⁶ As added bait he sent Lever a copy of the *Illustrated London News*, which carried a report of the collection and the latest *Burlington Magazine*, which contained a review of the collection by Roger

³³ Edgar Gorer to William Lever, 6 June, 1911, Gorer Papers.

³⁴ W.G. Gulland, *Chinese Porcelain*, Vol.2, London, 1902, Preface, p.xxxi.

³⁵ See Richard Bennett entry on CARP. Despite their closeness geographically, it is not known whether Lever was acquainted with Bennett as a businessman before this date. A few years earlier Bennett had formed a collection of rare books which he sold through Sotheby's and acquired by J.Pierpont Morgan.

³⁶ Edgar Gorer to William Lever, 8 June, 1911, Gorer Papers.

Fry.³⁷ Sometime in June, Lever decided to purchase the collection complete, although as will be explained, not outright.



Fig. 5. Ginger jar with cover RB No.1 (LL 72). Piece from the Richard Bennett collection catalogue

In the meantime, that June William Lever was raised to a baronetcy in King George V's Coronation Honours list and was now Sir William.³⁸ Whether Lever's new social status influenced his decision to purchase the Bennett collection complete, will probably never be known for certain. However, Queen Mary's obvious interest may have been instrumental. The Queen was an avid collector of Chinese works of art and her presence at the Gorer galleries to see the Bennett exhibition did not go unnoticed by Lever. Not only did he arrive on the day the Queen was viewing the collection, but it was a topic in Lever's

³⁷ 'Masterpieces of Chinese Ceramic Art', *Illustrated London News*, 27 May, 1911, p.p.770 and 792; Roger Fry, 'Richard Bennett Collection of Chinese Porcelain', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol.19, No.99, June, 1911, p.p.132-37.

³⁸ 20 June, 1911.

subsequent exchange of letters with Gorer. 'You are quite right, Her Majesty has quite a knowledge of Chinese porcelain, and discussed very fully with me the merits of many of the pieces. I think it not unlikely she will come again.'³⁹ Queen Mary obviously expressed her concern over the dispersal of the collection and even its migration abroad, as Gorer wrote, what would be a controversial letter, to the Queen immediately after Lever's purchase of the Bennett collection stating that it would be on permanent public view at Hulme Hall, Port Sunlight: 'Mr. Edgar Gorer feels that he may inform Her Majesty of this fact in view of the interest Her Majesty expressed when inspecting the Collection, and it will be perhaps a great gratification to know that this marvellous assemblage of art remains in our Country'.⁴⁰ Such a loss was a distinct possibility as expressed in the *Burlington Magazine* article: 'Thus what was probably the last great private collection of early Chinese porcelain in England is doomed to dispersal or exile in America'.⁴¹ Whether purely a promotional strategy on Gorer's part, or a genuine attempt to preserve the collection intact and in England, or a combination of both, it worked and Lever commenced plans to have the collection installed at Hulme Hall, a community building situated at the heart of Port Sunlight, the village Lever had built for his workers (Fig.6).⁴²

³⁹ Edgar Gorer to William Lever, 10 June, 1911, Gorer Papers.

⁴⁰ Edgar Gorer to Her Majesty the Queen, 7 July, 1911, Gorer Papers.

⁴¹ 'Masterpieces of Chinese Ceramic Art', p.770. According to the article, the proceeds from the exhibition were to be donated to the National Art Collection Fund.

⁴² Hulme Hall was completed in 1901 as a canteen for his female staff, but by 1910 had become a precursor of the Lady Lever Art Gallery. See Edward Hubbard and Michael Shippobottom, *A Guide to Port Sunlight Village*, Liverpool, 1988 (rev.ed., 2005), p 46; Edmund Williams, *Port Sunlight: The First Hundred Years, 1888-1988*, Lever Brothers Ltd, 1988, p.50. Image from: *Yesterday's Wirral: Port Sunlight A Pictorial History 1888 to 1953*, by Ian Bournemouth and Gavin Hunter. First Published 2002, Reprinted 2009. p. 39.



Fig. 6. Hulme Hall - this view was taken in 1902

Lever's purchase of the Bennett Collection for a phenomenal sum of £275,000, was by no means straightforward and would eventually lead both Lever and Gorer to the brink of a court case. The contract between Lever and Gorer was a curious one and was what Lever himself described as an 'Option Purchase Agreement', whereby he paid Gorer in twenty monthly instalments of £13,750, free of interest over five years, after the fourth instalment of which he would be given the option to return the collection to Gorer. The price included the delivery and installation '...of the entire Collection by the end of August next [1911], supplying the necessary show Cabinets, in Hulme Hall, Port Sunlight.'⁴³ Lever explained in a letter to Richard Bennett that this expedient was necessary for a number of reasons, not least his inability to pay the full purchase price immediately because of his business commitments in Africa and also because he wished to examine the porcelain carefully and put his own valuation upon it, something he had not hitherto had the opportunity to do. Gorer, he said, had won

⁴³ Letter of Agreement, 6 July 1911, Gorer Papers, LLAG Archives. For a full discussion see also Oliver Impey, 'Lever as a Collector of Chinese Porcelain', *Journal of the History of Collections*, Vol.4, No.2, 1992, p.p.234-235. A further letter from Gorer to Lever of 13 July, 1911, also reveals that he had paid Bennett an initial £75,000 for the collection and that it was Bennett who agreed to the deferral payment scheme for the balance.

his confidence because of the confidence that Gorer in turn had shown in both the quality of the porcelain and its value.⁴⁴

Both Lever and Gorer entered into the installation and display of the collection with some gusto over the next few months. By 7th July, Gorer had received plans of Hulme Hall from Lever's architect and was concerned to receive correct information as regards the space available: 'My desire is for this collection of yours to be displayed in the best possible manner, both for educational purposes and for the most advantageous way of showing these beautiful objects...' Lever's reply illustrates clearly his engagement with the whole process: 'I have marked the gallery in which I propose to place the collection of China with red ink crosses in each corner. It is the main gallery in the Hulme Hall. The walls are covered with Eighteenth Century pictures, and round the side there are pieces of English Furniture of the Eighteenth Century, cabinets and commodes and various specimens of Chinese porcelain, blue and white, and powdered blue. You will note that the gallery measures approximately 45 feet wide by 95 feet long. It is top lighted, as you will remember.'⁴⁵ Later in July he sent Gorer fresh plans he had prepared which showed the position of a pillar not originally included and the layout with additional cases and again at the beginning of September he was concerned over the safety of one of the shelf fixings and case design.⁴⁶ Lever's enthusiasm and eye for detail recall the origins of Port Sunlight, where sketches

⁴⁴ Lever to Richard Bennett, 27 October, 1911, Gorer Papers.

⁴⁵ Lever to Gorer, 10 July, 1911, Gorer Papers. It is clear from Gorer's reply on 13 July, that Lever was closely involved, even to the approval of the design of the display cases. The 'Gorer cases' as they became known, are still in use at the Lady Lever Art Gallery.

⁴⁶ Lever to Gorer, 26 July, 5 and 9 September, 1911, Gorer Papers.

executed in red and black ink on foolscap survive of his original conception of the site and its potential, to be finished by his architect William Owen (Fig.7).⁴⁷ Lever had always been good at drawing and had, at one time, aspired to be an architect.



Fig. 7. A China display in Gorer cabinets.

The installation of the Bennett collection in Hulme Hall took place during September. However Lever was already concerned about press speculation relating to his purchase of the Collection. A letter from Lever to Gorer on 14th July recorded his initial concerns over a leak to the press. This was followed by a letter from Gorer of 6th September informing Lever that Duveen of Liverpool had learnt of his purchase. Throughout October there were further leaks. On 5th October, Lever was forced to issue a denial of ownership to the *Liverpool Daily*

⁴⁷ Adam Macqueen, *The King of Sunlight: How William Lever Cleaned up the World*, London, 2004, p.60. See also Williams, *Port Sunlight*, p.9.

Post and Mercury, claiming the collection was on loan and he was not the lender. Later that month, Lever's acquaintance and fellow collector, James Orrock (1829-1913), met Gorer. Although Gorer later denied that he had disclosed Lever's name to Orrock, Lever had received information from one of Orrock's friends, the artist Sir James Linton (1840-1916), that gave him suspicions: 'I do not know what passed in conversation between yourself and Mr James Orrock, but I do not think that Mr Orrock has any secrets which he keeps from Sir James Linton.'⁴⁸ A begging letter that Lever had received from a Mr H. Harvey Robins of Bath on the 5th October, questioning the morality of expending such a huge sum on porcelain, did not help matters either.

All the while, Gorer was himself becoming agitated. Amid the speculation, he was keen for Lever to acknowledge ownership. Such a move would not only make it difficult for Lever to invoke the option to return the collection after the fourth instalment, but it would, as Gorer saw it, confirm the collection's quality and significance. As he wrote to Lever: 'To be quite frank, the difficulty as far as I am concerned could only arise in the event of your availing yourself at the end of the year of your option to return the collection for me to re-sell. In this event, and with matters left as they now stand, I know I should find very great difficulty in doing business with it.'⁴⁹ Lever remained adamant that he would not change his position, 'or modify in any way the agreement', inflaming Gorer's agitation, which only became worse when Lever criticised him for revealing the sale to the Queen

⁴⁸ Lever to Gorer, 9 October, 1911, Gorer Papers.

⁴⁹ Gorer to Lever, 7 October, 1911, Gorer Papers.

so peremptorily, literally on the day following the signing of the agreement.⁵⁰ Gorer pointed out that he had copied the letter to Lever and that he had agreed to inform the Queen, which Lever was quick to deny: 'I cannot agree with you that I had consented to your immediately informing the Queen at the time of our interview, which took place within a few minutes of the signing of the Agreement'.⁵¹ A veiled threat of legal action by Gorer was modified and the two men eventually met and came to terms towards the end of October and there the matter rested. Gorer was about to leave for America and Lever for South Africa.

Gorer v Lever

Part of Gorer's obvious agitation had been fed by a rumour, circulating at the time, that two figures representing the Buddhist deity *Vajrapani* in the Bennett collection, purporting to be Ming period, were in fact modern. These figures were promoted by Gorer as being the jewels in the Bennett collection, advertised in the *Illustrated News* article as being on a par artistically with the Venus de Milo (Fig.8).⁵² James Henry Duveen related that Gorer described them as 'The Malevolent Gods' because of the trouble they were causing him, and Duveen himself claimed that figures like these 'had come comparatively recently from the same kiln as that which supplied a similar figure bought by Bob Partridge at

⁵⁰ Lever to Gorer, 11 October, 1911, Gorer Papers.

⁵¹ Gorer to Lever, 12 October and Lever to Gorer, 13 October, 1911, Gorer Papers.

⁵² 'Masterpieces of Chinese Ceramic Art', p.770.

Maple's for a matter of £18.⁵³ It may have been J. H. Duveen who first spread



Fig. 8. One of a pair of Vajrapani figures, supposedly described by Gorer as 'The Malevolent Gods'.

the rumour as he was named by Gorer as someone who knew of Lever's purchase early on and who wrote to Lever claiming that his name was being maligned in connection with the leaking of Lever's name.⁵⁴ Duveen may not have been the culprit, as another dealer, Thomas Larkin, wrote to Lever in very portentous terms in July, intimating that he wanted to speak to Lever privately as a long and trusted friend and they both arranged to meet at Lever's London home, The Hill, Hampstead later that week.⁵⁵ We do not know what was said

⁵³ James Henry Duveen, *Secrets of an Art Dealer*, London, 1937, p.261. Duveen provides a full, if sometimes inaccurate, account of the Lever-Gorer affair, see p.p.263-68. He also claimed that the figures had originally been acquired by his cousin, probably Henry, who, once he realised they were doubtful, had sold them quickly 'as speculative goods', p.p.265-66.

⁵⁴ Gorer to Lever, 6 September, 1911; Jack Duveen to Lever, 26 October, 1911, Gorer Papers.

⁵⁵ Thomas Larkin to Lever, 17 July, 1911, Gorer Papers.

during the meeting but Gorer, who was to meet Lever the day following Larkin's visit, had been questioned about the authenticity of the figures and a pair of yellow vases and felt it necessary to follow up his verbal reply with a written one: 'The figures are undeniably of the Ming period, in original state, and as regards the porcelain of the very highest type. Further, that they are the greatest examples of Chinese ceramic art extant.'⁵⁶ Lever obviously remained unconvinced as later in November he asked Gorer to offer duplicates for sale from the Bennett Collection and the 'two large Ming figures'.⁵⁷

These 'Malevolent Gods' would dog Gorer over the next few years, but in the short-term, he had more immediate problems with which to contend. On 6th January 1912, Lever and his wife, Elizabeth, embarked upon a visit to South Africa. Lever Brothers had already invested in new works at Congella, near Durban and were now expanding with a new factory at Salt River, Cape Town.⁵⁸ Lever, or rather Elizabeth, was to open it. On the voyage over, Lever had plenty of time to consider things, not least his huge expenditure the Bennett Collection. On 20th January, from on board the *RMS Armadale Castle*, Lever wrote to Gorer that 'after the fullest consideration', he would not be purchasing the Bennett Collection.⁵⁹ This was a bombshell for Gorer, who wrote back pointing out to Lever that this was a pre-emptive decision as the fourth instalment had not yet

⁵⁶ Gorer to Lever, 24 July, 1911, Gorer Papers.

⁵⁷ Lever to Gorer, 13 November, 1911, Gorer Papers.

⁵⁸ See William Hulme Lever, *Viscount Leverhulme By His Son*, London, 1927, p.p.151-52.

⁵⁹ Lever to Gorer, 20 January, 1912, Gorer Papers.

been made as per the Agreement.⁶⁰ Lever responded by explaining that his letter was intended to be the earliest intimation that he was going to exercise his right after the fourth instalment to be relieved of the Collection.⁶¹ In quick succession, Lever made his third and fourth instalments, the fourth instalment being accompanied by an instruction to sell the whole of the Collection.⁶²

On 8th July, 1912, Gorer initiated legal proceedings against Lever: 'Having regard to your specific statements that you had not purchased the Collection you have as our Client has pointed out in the course of his correspondence with you, so seriously prejudiced his position as to forfeit the right to call upon him to sell the Collection and he has instructed us to institute proceedings.'⁶³ The Counsel engaged were two legal heavyweights: F. E. Smith (later Lord Birkenhead) acting for Lever and Sir Edward Carson, who had made his reputation in the notorious Oscar Wilde case in 1895, for Gorer. However, at the eleventh hour on 19th April, 1913, Edgar Gorer withdrew his action, although custody of the Collection prior to its re-sale was a matter for the courts to decide and Mr. Justice Darling found in Gorer's favour.⁶⁴ It was at this moment that, through his solicitors, Lever requested that he be allowed to select a portion of the collection for retention, which Gorer agreed to.⁶⁵ Fifty-one items were retained by Lever, the value of which amounted to the £55,000 Lever had already paid in instalments. Gorer

⁶⁰ Gorer to Lever, 16 February, 1912, Gorer Papers.

⁶¹ Lever to Gorer, 27 February, 1912, Gorer Papers.

⁶² The third instalment was made on 4 April, the fourth on 4 July, 1912.

⁶³ Harris, Chetham & Cohen, Solicitors, to Lever, 8 July, 1912, Gorer Papers.

⁶⁴ 'Law Reports, May 23: Summary of the Day's Cases' *The Times*, 23 May, 1913 p.37 and 'The King's Bench Division: The Richard Bennett Collection, Gorer v Lever', *The Times*, 24 May, 1913, p.37.

⁶⁵ Simpson North Harley & Co., to Gorer, 24 May, 1913; Gorer agreed on 3 June, Gorer Papers.

shipped most of the remaining part of the Bennett Collection off to America, where he was building a steady reputation. This final episode in Gorer's career will be discussed below.

'Sheer Cleverness and Courage'

The Bennett Collection debacle virtually ended Lever's relationship with Gorer. There were the occasional exchanges of letters prompted ostensibly by opportunities to purchase, when, for example, in March 1914, Gorer wrote to ask whether Lever was interested in reselling the black vase with dragon from the Bennett Collection which John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937) was keen to acquire. With some satisfaction he boasted to Lever that 'I sold the entire collection of my Black porcelains to Mr Rockefeller'.⁶⁶ Lever declined to sell. Early the following year, Gorer again made a tentative enquiry as to whether Lever would be interested in acquiring the Morgan Collection.⁶⁷ Lever was not.

The extraordinary events surrounding the Bennett Collection provide some interesting pointers to Gorer's character and his relationship with his clients. As already discussed, Gorer was ambitious and talented. He had, as James Henry Duveen observed, 'forced himself into a leading position amongst London art dealers by sheer cleverness and courage', but he was often rash.⁶⁸ According to Duveen, Gorer had admitted as much: "One of the greatest factors in my

⁶⁶ Gorer to Lever, 14 March, 1914, Gorer Papers.

⁶⁷ Gorer to Lever, 12 January, 1915, Gorer Papers. The American financier, John Pierpont Morgan died in 1913 and his son, John, wanted to sell his father's Chinese porcelain collection to pay New York State inheritance tax. Henry Duveen, not Gorer, eventually acquired the collection and sold it piecemeal to J.D. Rockefeller, Henry Clay Frick and P.A.B. Widener. See Gerald Reitlinger, *The Economics of Taste*, Vol.2, London, 1963, p.p.213-14.

⁶⁸ Duveen, *Secrets*, p.260.

success”, he once told me, “has been courage in buying and selling. I have always admired your late uncle, Sir Joseph Duveen; I take him as my pattern”.⁶⁹ Gorer’s emulation of Sir Joseph Duveen may also have had its roots in both men’s origins – they were Jewish. In Edwardian Britain and in America, being a Jew placed you in an ambiguous position, made all the more so by a significant Jewish representation in a growing plutocracy which was supplanting the traditional landed aristocracy. The internationalisation of business and opportunities for real talent brought many Jewish businessmen to the fore. King Edward VII’s biographer, T. H. S. Escott was typical when he observed that the Social control of London was divided ‘between the Semite and the Yankee’, but he was quick to acknowledge that this brought advantages: ‘such humanising elements that leaven London today largely come from the Jewish element... Say what you will, the Jews are the salt of smart Society’ and without their patronage ‘English art and music could scarcely live in the English capital...’⁷⁰ Other comments were less generous, particularly when the King was seen to be surrounding himself with powerful Jewish businessmen. Lord Balcarres, from an old Scottish family, noted that ‘at Aldershot they called out “King of the Jews”... there is much dormant anti-semitism...’⁷¹

The tightrope that both Gorer and the Duveens had to walk was that they needed to appeal to both old and new money and to steer themselves through a gamut of

⁶⁹ Duveen, *Secrets*, p.261.

⁷⁰ T.H.S. Escott, *King Edward and His Court*, London, 1903, p.224-5, quoted in J. Mordaunt Crook, *The Rise of the Nouveau Riches*, London, 1999, p.155.

⁷¹ Quoted in Mordaunt Crook, *The Rise*, p.156.

prejudices that ran through British society in its widest sense. They represented both rising talent and business and they also served it, feeding off and encouraging its growing excess. H. G. Wells caught the mood of the period perfectly in his commentary upon the fall of traditional English Society, *Tono-Bungay*, 'We became part of what is nowadays quite an important element in the confusion of our world, that multitude of economically ascendant people who are learning how to spend money. It is made up of financial people, the owners of the businesses that are eating up their competitors, inventors of new sources of wealth such as ourselves; it includes nearly all America as one sees it on the European stage. It is a various multitude having only this in common; they are all moving, and particularly their womenkind are moving, from conditions in which means were insistently finite, things were few and customs simple, towards a limitless expenditure and the sphere of attraction of Bond Street, Fifth Avenue, and Paris. Their general effect is one of progressive revelation, of limitless rope.'⁷²

As Meryle Secrest has written of Sir Joseph Duveen's son, Joseph Joel (later Lord Duveen of Millbank), he did not pretend he was not a Jew. 'His father had transcended his origins and social handicaps and been accepted in the highest circles, and so would he'.⁷³ She also notes that although he had been married in a synagogue, there was no evidence that he was observant.⁷⁴ Gorer mirrored Duveen as much in his life as he did in his career. Edgar was actually born

⁷² H.G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay*, London, 1909 (reprinted 1964), p.212.

⁷³ Meryle Secrest, *Duveen: A Life in Art*, Chicago, 2004, p.350.

⁷⁴ Secrest, *Duveen*, p.151.

Ezekiel Edgar, but seems to have inverted the order certainly by the time he entered business and the original name of the firm S. Gorer & Son, soon became simply Gorer as the business became more successful. Again, although Edgar was married at Hampstead Synagogue in 1902, there is no evidence that he was practicing. His wife, Rachel Alice Cohen, known as Rée, had trained at the Slade School of Art as a sculptor and was a close friend of, and correspondent with, the writer and poet Edith Sitwell (1887-1964), as were her sons, Geoffrey, Peter and Richard.⁷⁵ This long-standing relationship with Edith Sitwell provides a good example of how well the Gorer's had assimilated into upper-class English life, as does the education of their sons, two of whom attended Charterhouse, the third, Westminster and all of whom went on to Cambridge and distinguished careers.⁷⁶

In business Gorer's emulation of Duveen can be seen in the way in which he attempted to manipulate the market – in his case for Chinese works of art and porcelain in particular. His promotion of the Bennett Collection is a case in point, but he attempted to replicate the effect with other collections, notably that of George R. Davies (Fig.9), which he acquired in 1913 and which was accompanied by a lavishly illustrated catalogue and the Henry Sampson collection, consisting of 943 pieces of predominantly Qing porcelain and

⁷⁵ See Victoria Glendinning, *Edith Sitwell: A Unicorn Among Lions*, Oxford, 1981.

⁷⁶ Geoffrey Gorer (1905-85) was a writer and social anthropologist, Peter (1907-61), an immunologist and Richard (1913-94), a horticulturalist.

considered to be the finest private collection' in America, which he purchased in January 1914 for an estimated £220,000.⁷⁷



Fig.9. Pair of Gourd-shaped vases decorated in underglaze cobalt blue, from the George R. Davies Collection.

He also made newsworthy purchases at Christie's in June 1914, paying 4,800 guineas for a *famille noire* beaker vase, the highest price ever paid for such a piece in England and 4,400 guineas for another beaker with yellow ground.⁷⁸ This continued his advocacy of brilliant and eye-catching Qing porcelains, which he had attempted to boost a few years earlier with the publication of his (and James F. Blacker's) *Chinese Porcelain and Hard Stones*, produced by antiquarian booksellers Bernard Quaritch in a finely illustrated two-volume

⁷⁷ George Reynolds Davies (1844-1918), was a Cheshire cotton merchant. Henry Sampson (1838-1914), was President of Alden Sampson & Sons, oilcloth manufacturers in New York. See 'Sale of a Porcelain Collection (From Our Correspondent)', *The Times*, 17 January, 1914, p.7 and 'Art Notes. Sampson Collection of Chinese Porcelains to be Shown Here', *New York Times*, 16 January, 1914, p.8.

⁷⁸ 'High Prices for Porcelain – 4,800 guineas for a Chinese Beaker', *The Times*, 18 June, 1914, p.10.

edition.⁷⁹ Obviously intended to be the last-word on the subject, the book was nevertheless heavily criticised by R. L. Hobson of the British Museum, who damned the text as being ‘hardly worthy of the brilliant objects which it describes’ and criticised the authors, with some academic *hauteur*, for being optimistic in their attributions and using such meaningless terms as ‘Ming Period’, which ‘though prevalent in auction catalogues and trade descriptions, their appearance in any serious work is to be deprecated’.⁸⁰ Gorer bridled at such criticism and replied somewhat aggressively to Hobson, who nevertheless stood his ground.⁸¹

Gorer v Duveen

Like Duveen, Gorer seemed to court controversy and the two would meet head-on in the months leading up to Gorer’s death on the *Lusitania*. By 1911, Gorer was making noticeable inroads into the American market. It was at around this time he established a working relationship with jeweller Michael Dreicer in New York.⁸² Dreicer & Co. was by 1911 a highly successful and fashionable jeweller with premises at 560 Fifth Avenue, an address, in terms of prestige, on a par with

⁷⁹ Edgar Gorer & J.F. Blacker, *Chinese Porcelain and Hard Stones*, 2 volumes, London, 1911.

⁸⁰ ‘Reviews and Notices’, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol.20, No.105, December, 1911, p.p.177-79.

⁸¹ ‘Reviews and Notices’, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol.20, No.107, February, 1912, p.p.290-93.

⁸² At the end of 1910, Gorer was exhibiting at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York, confirming a 1911 date for his link-up with Dreicer & Co. See ‘Chinese Porcelains on View’, *New York Times*, 18 November, 1910, p.10.

Bond Street.⁸³ It seems likely that Gorer may have had existing contacts with Dreicers through his jeweller father, Solomon, although Michael Dreicer was known as a connoisseur of Chinese jade and porcelain. From about 1911, Gorer's letterhead advertised Dreicer as the 'Sole Agent for the United States and Canada' and it was there that Gorer exhibited the George R. Davies collection in 1913.⁸⁴ He also planned to exhibit the Henry Sampson collection at Dreicer's and it was for this reason that Edgar embarked upon his journey to New York in January 1915. However, at the back of his mind was another matter: one that would engage Gorer and his admired rivals Henry and Joseph Joel Duveen in open conflict.

Unfortunately for Gorer, the controversy surrounding the pair of figures depicting *Vajrapani* which had been a part of the Richard Bennett Collection and which Gorer apparently labelled the 'Malevolent Gods', continued to dog him. The sale of the remainder of the Bennett Collection returned by Lever took place in New York during 1913 and included the *Vajrapani* figures. Gorer believed that his American rivals were using the disputed attribution of the figures to try and 'kill' his best sales and undermine his reputation.⁸⁵ It came to a head early in 1914 when Joseph Joel Duveen was alleged to have condemned as fake a yellow-ground vase that Gorer was about to sell to one of America's most influential

⁸³ Dreicer & Co., was established by Michael Dreicer's father, Jacob and became known for its Parisian style cut diamonds. It was at its most successful between 1910 and 1921, when Michael Dreicer died. Cartier's took over the stock of the company in 1924.

⁸⁴ 'Chinese Porcelain in the Davies Collection', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol.23, No.123, June, 1913, p.p.162-67; 'Chinese Porcelain. Purchase of a Well-Known Collection', *The Times*, 20 February, 1913, p.9.

⁸⁵ Duveen, *Secrets*, p.269.

collectors, Henry Clay Frick (1849-1919). According to newspaper reports, Duveen said to Frick and his wife: 'That vase is not a genuine antique, does not belong to the Kang Hsi period, but has been manufactured within the last seven years, and is an imitation of the genuine article, and is spurious. Gorer has been imposed upon.'⁸⁶ As Gorer pointed out, this statement not only questioned the veracity of his dealership, but also his knowledge as a specialist. It also destroyed his relationship with Frick, who, Gorer claimed, refused to buy a further vase on offer to him because of Duveen's criticisms and so deprived him of this and any future profits.⁸⁷ Gorer cited other occasions when J. J. Duveen made disparaging remarks of his abilities, such as when he said to Carmen Messmore: 'Gorer knows nothing about porcelains. The real judges are ourselves, my Uncle Henry and me, and we intend stopping Gorer putting these fakes on the market.'⁸⁸ Messmore was also witness to Duveen's re-iterated allegation that the two *Vajrapani* figures were 'modern...and not over fifteen years old.'⁸⁹

Gorer's case against Henry Duveen, for which he was claiming \$75,000 in damages, rested upon a single but similar allegation that Duveen had declared that a pair of green vases Gorer was selling were modern and that Gorer was 'dealing in fake things.'⁹⁰ The case was to be heard in the U.S. Supreme Court because Gorer's reputation was being impugned specifically in America. The

⁸⁶ 'Rival Sues Duveens'.

⁸⁷ 'Rival Sues Duveens'.

⁸⁸ 'Rival Sues Duveens'. Carmen Messmore was a fellow dealer from the Knoedler Galleries, New York.

⁸⁹ 'Rival Sues Duveens'.

⁹⁰ 'Rival Sues Duveens'.

New York Times of 8th May carried a rebuttal of these allegations from Duveen Brothers. Both Joseph J. and Henry Duveen claimed that they were not trying to discredit Gorer or undermine his standing among collectors but simply giving expert advice to their clients, which was ‘a major part of their business.’⁹¹ Duveen’s counsel claimed that clients often requested expert advice from Duveen Brothers and this was given ‘without regard to the identity of the owner of the objects, whom they frequently do not know’, and that it was their duty to ensure the genuineness of objects to prevent the undermining of the market.⁹² As the report astutely noted, by intimation, this should also be a concern of Gorer. The issue of whether Joseph and Henry Duveen had specifically condemned the articles mentioned by Gorer in his lawsuit, was neatly sidestepped: ‘they will be the subject matter of the litigation, and will properly be dealt with in court and at the proper time.’⁹³

Ending

Gorer never had his day in court. At the time that the *New York Times* report was published, he was already dead. He and a group of other British art dealers, including Gerald Arthur Letts, Martin van Straaten and Frank Partridge, had decided to return to Britain on the *Lusitania* departing from New York on 1st May, 1915. Seven days later, at 2.10pm off the Old Head of Kinsale, Ireland, the ship was torpedoed by a German submarine, the U-20. Within 18 minutes the ship had sunk. Of the 1,959 passengers and crew on board, only 761 survived, one of

⁹¹ ‘Experts, Not Rivals is Duveen Defense’, *New York Times*, 8 May, 1915, p.5.

⁹² ‘Experts, Not Rivals’.

⁹³ ‘Experts, Not Rivals’.

which was Gorer's friend and companion on the voyage, Frank Partridge.⁹⁴ James Henry Duveen relates a characteristically dramatic account of Gorer's selflessness during the last minutes of the sinking, giving away both of his lifebelts.⁹⁵ Eye-witness accounts tell of his bravery in saving opera singer Josephine Brandell, to whom Gorer gave one of his lifebelts and told her to be brave.⁹⁶ Edgar Gorer's body was never recovered. The case against Duveen Brothers collapsed.

Despite certain doom-laden claims of Gorer's near ruin, his Estate at his death was valued at \$215,760 in America alone while in his Will, his widow, Rachel, was left an outright payment of £5,000 and income for life from a trust fund of £50,000.⁹⁷ He also held 'regular stock' valued at \$162,287. Details of his 'half ownership' of stock with Dreicer & Co., which included the residue of the Sampson and Davies collections, also indicate how it was possible for Gorer to outlay considerable sums on the purchase of individual pieces and collections.⁹⁸ As if to haunt Gorer in his grave, the pair of *Vajrapani* figures top the list of items deemed of uncertain authenticity, along with the yellow ground vase and the pair of green vases, implicated by the Duveen Brothers.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ For a detailed account of the *Lusitania* and her last voyage, see J. Kent Layton, *Lusitania: An Illustrated Biography of the Ship of Splendour*, 2007.

⁹⁵ Duveen, *Secrets*, p.p.270-71.

⁹⁶ The Lusitania Resource:

http://www.rmslusitania.info/pages/saloon_class/brandell_josephine.html.

⁹⁷ 'Gorer's Estate: \$215,760. Estate of London Art Dealer Lost on Lusitania Appraised', *New York Times*, 27 July, 1915, p.18.

⁹⁸ 'Gorer's Estate'.

⁹⁹ 'Gorer's Estate'.

James Henry Duveen described Edgar Gorer as 'a great-hearted London dealer...who was a bold winner and a brave loser' – a generous epitaph.¹⁰⁰ Gorer's human qualities were recalled in the short obituary in the *Burlington Magazine*.¹⁰¹ It praised him for his equitable and far-seeing mind, acknowledged his support for the *Magazine* in the past and his acceptance of the need for it to exercise independence as regards its endorsement of the adverts it carried – a reference no doubt to Gorer's run-in with R. L. Hobson.¹⁰² From today's perspective, it is more difficult to assess Gorer as a dealer in Chinese art. He was perhaps the first dealer to promote himself as a specialist in Chinese and Japanese art at the outset, eventually concentrating upon Chinese art. The range of works he sold were however limited. In line with the prevailing taste of the period before the First World War, Gorer dealt in porcelains of the late-17th and 18th centuries together with 18th century jades and hardstones. Objects he dated to earlier periods, such as Song and Ming, were highly suspect at a time when there were few verifiable examples available in the West. Had he lived, he would have experienced a dramatic shift in both the type of objects available and the range in periods. Even by 1915, when R. L. Hobson published his *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*, examples of Han and Tang ceramics were already coming out of China and impacting upon both the private collector and museum institutions, as were a host of other artefacts.¹⁰³ Whether Edgar Gorer would have been able to make the shift and encompass this greater range and diversity

¹⁰⁰ Duveen, *Secrets*, p.271

¹⁰¹ 'Mr Edgar Gorer', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol.27, No.147, June, 1915, p.128.

¹⁰² 'Mr Edgar Gorer', p.128.

¹⁰³ See R.L. Hobson, *Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*, London, 1915.

will never be known, but every indication is that he would. Nevertheless, there was, as Gerald Reitlinger noted, 'something symbolical in the manner of his death, since the torpedoing of the *Lusitania* was destined to bring the whole world into the war and in the end destroy three empires. Of course, it did not destroy the millionaire empires, but somehow millionaire taste emerged with a new look. Henceforward a hostess, who changed her walls, ceiling, carpets, furniture and curtains to celadon green in order to match two Ming dishes, would have to hide even the telephone directory.'¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴

Reitlinger, *Economics*, Vol.2, p.215.