

Mitsuharu Matsuoka, ed., *Society and Culture in the Late Victorian Age with Special Reference to Gissing: In the Year of the Sesquicentennial of His Birth*, Hiroshima: Keisuisha, 2007. xiii+540 pp.

In commemoration of the sesquicentennial of Gissing's birth, a substantial study of the long-neglected novelist and his era was issued last year in Japan. The late Victorian age is analyzed from five angles—society, era, gender, author, and ideologies—Gissing constituting the core of the socio-cultural study. The book is no doubt a treasure trove of knowledge. The following are summaries of the 26 chapters, including the biographical introduction:

Pierre Coustillas's Introduction consists in a short biography of Gissing (trans. by Mitsuharu Matsuoka) whom he sees as a man of two worlds: the world of bitter destitution and frustration which he was forced to endure, and the world of classical literature in which his imagination sought a refuge. He then surveys Gissing's life, incorporating biographical facts in chronological order. The reader is reminded that, in Japan, Gissing's value was first recognized by the intelligentsia of the 1920s and the author concludes his account by observing that the genial, shy, and altruistic Gissing was a pacifist and humanistic intellectual who represented the conscience of his time.

Part One: Society. In Chapter 1: "Education: Form and Substance," Shigeru Koike first argues that the reform of the educational system in 19th-century England was intended to emphasize the importance of scientific methodologies, and then discusses *Workers in the Dawn*, *Born in Exile*, *The Emancipated*, and *New Grub Street* as images of Gissing's view of education. In these Bildungsromane, the novelist gives no positive reward to his protagonists for their spiritual growth: even if they receive education, they fail to rise socially and become spiritual exiles. In addition, so as to attract the general public whose diversity of interests had been expanded because of the popularization of education, writers could not but adopt a pragmatic policy. Gissing's messages are generally pessimistic.

Chapter 2: Takao Tomiyama, "Religion: Why Didn't Gissing Write about it?" first explains that the chief motifs of Gissing's social-problem novels which focus on poverty-stricken people's crimes and criminal psychology are their struggles for jobs and the conversion of inherited property into money. Quoting from *The Nether World*, the author then shows that Gissing's stance towards religion is many-faceted and supportive of no particular religious sect. This attitude recalls the novelist's own attitude

towards fiction in which his concerns are sometimes too many-faceted for the reader to identify his authorial intention.

Gissing's depiction of lower-class people helped him establish his position as a novelist. His concern then moved to lower-middle class people. Characters of either category, however diligent they may be, can attain happiness only within their own class if at all. Those who have been given a chance to rise socially are regarded as outsiders by their peers, and rejected by people in the class above theirs. Such disturbing circumstances are disclosed through analyses of *Born in Exile*, *The Paying Guest*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, in Megumi Arai's Chapter 3: "Social Strata: The Rise of the Lower-Middle Class."

In Chapter 4, "Poverty: How to Relieve the Poor?," Hiroko Ishizuka offers a survey of charity history in 19th-century England, and examines the responses of Gissing's characters to philanthropic actions. There is something common in them—their voluntary choice of a troublesome life in poverty. It stems from their pride, which is the reflection of Gissing's pride.

In Mitsuharu Matsuoka's Chapter 5 ("The City: 'Paradise Is Always for Him Where He Is Not'") the critic argues that, even if Gissing was antagonized by the metropolitan bustle and yearned to live in the country, he could not but seek for intellectual and cultural stimuli in the metropolis. The author makes a socio-historical survey of the development of London to reveal its true state, and concludes that London is the object of the novelist's contempt for its evilness and of his admiration for its centrality in spiritual activities.

Part Two: Era. In late 19th-century England, there was a tendency to seek truth in the conjunction of science and religion, for instance in a "theist positivism regarding science as the means of saving human beings" and in "Darwinism incorporated into creationist science and cosmology." With the help of his vast knowledge of the ideologies of the day, Toshikatsu Murayama describes Gissing's doubt about such a movement in his Chapter 6: "Science: Against Evolution."

In Chapter 7: "Crime: Criminal and Violent Transgression of the Border," Fumie Tamai first investigates criminology, which was widespread in late 19th-century England, then traces Gissing's depiction of (a) crimes committed by destitute working-class people, (b) violent behaviour among the middle class, and (c) imperialism as the State crime.

Graham Law, in Chapter 8: "Publishing: Gissing and Serials" (trans. by Sakiko Nonomura), shows how in the late Victorian era the publication of fiction shifted from three-volumes to serials. Dissatisfied with both styles of dispensation and frustrated by the proprietors' and editors' control over

the literary market, Gissing conducted an isolated search for his ideal form of publication. The author details publishing circumstances in the late 19th-century to elucidate the novelist's solitary struggle.

In Chapter 9: "Influence: 'Lonesome Must Be the Floating Swan,'" Ryota Kanayama first compares Gissing's literary style with Dickens's, secondly points out his sympathy towards Carlyle's proud independence, and thirdly examines his admiration for Meredith as a great artist. The author next explains that the reason for his popularity in Japan lies in the empathy of the Japanese with his appreciation of the cultivated mind.

Chapter 10 (Mihoko Ishida, "Englishness: Aspects of Nostalgia for 'the South'") argues that Gissing's yearning for southern Italy and southern England stems from his deep respect for ancient civilization and his pride in Anglo-Saxon civilization, and that this duality is the key to his respect for England as the country of his roots, or Englishness.

Part Three: Gender. In Chapter 11: "Feminism: Gissing and the 'New Woman,'" Ryoko Ota offers a feminist reading of some writings by Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, and Gissing, and traces the images of the New Woman depicted in *Mansfield Park*, *Born in Exile*, and *The Odd Women*.

The late 19th century, when the traditional values concerning woman's way of life and common sexual morality began to be mixed with the new ones, has been called the Age of Sexual Anarchy. In Chapter 12: "Sexuality: The Age of 'Sexual Anarchy,'" Motoko Nakada argues that Gissing's female characters reflect the spirit of the times and can be categorized as the old type and the new.

In Chapter 13: "The Body: The 'Degenerate' in the Fin de Siècle," Mihoko Takeda interprets Gissing's works in terms of gender theory. In *New Grub Street*, between those writers who ride on the current and those who do not, the successful are regarded as manly. In *The Whirlpool*, the female body is considered as the spot of collision between the conventional rules of society and the chance of emancipation.

The focal point of argument in Chapter 14: "Marriage, or a Contradictory Relationship" is to read *The Odd Women*, *In the Year of Jubilee*, and *Eve's Ransom* from the viewpoint of matrimonial unhappiness and single adults' loneliness. Akiko Kimura thus spotlights Gissing's descriptions of marital problems in the late Victorian era, such as the conflict of values between Patriarchy and Feminism, economic difficulties in married life, and the lack of marriageable men.

Chapter 15: Takanobu Tanaka, "Misogyny: Male Confusion and Resistance." The late 19th century was an era when the patriarchal value of the man-woman relationship was being replaced by feminist values. The author

focuses on Barfoot in *The Odd Women* and Rolfe in *The Whirlpool* to examine men's responses to the transition, thus bringing to light Gissing's ambivalence: he criticizes patriarchy, but at the same time feels anxiety about the expansion of feminism.

Part Four: The Author. In Chapter 16: "The Self: Reading, Writing, and the Body," Midori Niino, regarding Gissing's works as the core of reflection of his true self, attempts to find his true nature in them. For the writers in *New Grub Street*, writing is a vehicle of self-depression. For the protagonist of *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, reading is one of self-satisfaction. However, it is the sensuous self-satisfaction brought by the activation of the five senses, not the spiritual self-contentment afforded through the appreciation of intellectual books. This is because his complacency lies in the chaotic state of conflicts between reason and emotion, spirit and flesh, wisdom and impulse. After all, both writing and reading bring him emptiness rather than self-fulfilment.

In Chapter 17: "Exile: In Search of a Lost Home," Ayaka Komiya seeks the origins of Gissing's consciousness of exile in the life of the protagonist of *Born in Exile*. According to her, they are his unstable identification both with the middle class and with the working class, his predilection for classic literature, and his life-long yearning for the possession of his own home. The photos of Gissing's London lodgings taken by the author herself help the reader's understanding of her argument.

Bouwe Postmus, in Chapter 18: "Travel: An Exile's Homecoming" (trans. by Takashi Kozawa), considers Gissing's travels to Italy as an exile's homecoming to the classic land he has so long admired from afar, and discusses the significance of their impact on his life and works, supported by biographical facts and quotations from *By the Ionian Sea*.

Chapter 19: Yumiko Hirono, "The Art of Fiction: Gissing's Narrative Technique and Characterization," analyzes Gissing's art of fiction in *The Nether World*, *The Odd Women*, and *The Whirlpool*—representative novels of the early, middle, and later periods of his career with a view to elucidating his narrative methods systematically. The author's conclusion is that Gissing is an innovative novelist who wrote for his own satisfaction whereas novelists traditionally wrote to satisfy the cultural demands of society.

In Chapter 20: "Autobiography: Separation of the Writing Self and the Written Self," Yuji Miyamaru first defines the difference between autobiography and autobiographical works, then, in Section 3, discusses a selection of the autobiographical elements in *New Grub Street* and *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. The critic defines the fin de siècle as the period when the purpose of fiction shifted from a focus on the reader's

enlightenment to one on the author's introspection, and insists that Gissing's place was at the dawn of this new era.

Part Five: Ideologies. In Chapter 21: "Realism: The Unnaturalness of Being Naturalistic," Hideo Kajiyama traces the development of Gissing's realism in *New Grub Street*, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, and some short stories as his analysis targets. It ranges from social realism connected with the evocation of the labourers' living conditions to naturalism based on the principle of the survival of the fittest. Having noticed the limitations derived from the popularization of literature, Gissing directs his realistic method to self-introspective description, or so-called resignation realism.

Chapter 22 (Jacob Korg, "Humanism: An Exile from the Age," trans. by Aya Yatsugi) clarifies the comprehensive features of the Gissing oeuvre through investigation into his biography and works, as well as through a comparison with contemporary writers. The chapter contains plenty of meaningful remarks, such as "Urban life in Gissing's novels is a counterpart of Hardy's nature; both are indifferent or hostile to human beings"; "Gissing's realism is not so powerful as Zola's naturalism"; and "Gissing is more influenced by George Eliot's realism than by Zola's."

In Chapter 23: "Aestheticism: The Pursuit of Ideals through Beauty," Akemi Yoshida discusses the conflicts between aestheticism and Christian morality in Gissing's novels of the early and middle stages of his career, incorporating her wide-ranging knowledge of the then art world. The author studies the evolution of the novelist's concern from "art for life's sake" to "art for art's sake," then attempts to show that the new notion of the late Victorian era—"Cultivation of the aesthetic sense stimulates the rise of moral sense"—is embodied in Gissing's characters.

Chapter 24 (Yukimitsu Namiki, "Classicism: Portrait of a Classicist") focuses on two functions of Gissing's classicism: a means of escaping from everyday reality, and the mental pole from which to consider inhumane reality. The author acknowledges Gissing's evolution from one form to the other in his works, and analyses the reflection of the second type of classicism in his historical novel of Roman and Goth, *Veranilda*. The spirit of the mid-sixth century described in the story is something that would be worth retrieving by Victorian society, which has lost its spiritual bearings.

In Chapter 25: "Pacifism: A Temperament in the Light of History" (trans. by Manami Tamura), Pierre Coustillas spotlights Gissing as a peace lover through his extensive reading of the novelist's oeuvre and biographical sources. After explaining the influence of his pacifist father, Gissing's innate gentleness and tenderness, anti-imperialism, and agnostic criticism

of the death penalty, the author concludes that the significance of Gissing's rashly-committed crime in his Owens College days and his subsequent tribulations is that they taught him reason, wisdom, humaneness, and gave him an exacting conscience.

To the closing section of the volume is attached Akiko Takei's helpful chronology of Gissing which shows the political, social, and ideological events corresponding to the main phases of his life. Some key terms and phrases which appear in the different chapters with their varied approaches—"love of the classics," "naturalist realism," "agnosticism," "living in a period of transition between old and new values," "exile," "writing for personal satisfaction," and "novelist of self-introspection"—reveal Gissing's major characteristics. Coming after *The World of George Gissing* (Tokyo: Eiho-sya, 2003)—a collection of fourteen essays also edited by Mitsuharu Matsuoka—this new collection of articles by eminent Gissing scholars, Japanese and foreign, is a significant contribution to the study of the novelist and late Victorian culture.

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(This review appeared in the *Gissing Journal* for July 2008, on pp. 57-63)