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## Japanese Branch Report 2003

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## JAPANESE BRANCH REPORT

By Yoshie Abe

The seventh annual convention of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan was held at Nihon University in Tokyo, on Saturday 29 November 2003.

The morning session began with an opening address by Kimitaka Hara, a vice-president of the Japanese Branch and a professor at Nihon University. In the morning, three members read their papers under the chairmanship of Noriko Kubota, a professor at Tsuru Bunka University and Kyoko Kishimoto, a professor at Kyoto Sangyo University.

The first paper, “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton” – the beginning of conflict’ was presented by Naomi Ohno, a lecturer at Toyo University. She analysed the four main characters, Amos Barton, his wife Milly, his daughter Patty, and the Countess and explained Eliot’s way of thinking about her novels. She concluded that Eliot became a novelist who approached the investigation of man, while feeling hope and fear in writing novels and fighting against conflict in her real life. The second paper, ‘Allegory in “Brother Jacob” and *Silas Marner*’ was presented by Toshie Maeda, a lecturer at Kansai University. She tried to reassess ‘Brother Jacob’ which had been underestimated for being a short story and an allegory. She examined the description of the central character, David, and the meaning of the profession of a selling sweets. Furthermore, she pointed out that the problem of the new age brought about by the Industrial Revolution, and the situation of people living at that time in the next novel, *Silas Marner*. The third paper, ‘From *Middlemarch* to *Daniel Deronda*’ was presented by Shota Nakajima, an assistant professor at Tokushima Bunri University. He introduced the dispute between Andrew Davies who has dramatized a lot of English literature for movies or videos, and Jeanette Winterson who has criticized Davies’s dramatization. Also he pointed out the problems of dramatizing *Daniel Deronda*, comparing it with *Middlemarch*, and the influence and effect of dramatizing Eliot’s works.

The afternoon session began with the general meeting, presided over by Yoshitsugu Uchida, the vice-president of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan and a professor at Kansai Gaidai University. The board of trustees and steering committee were re-elected. The Japanese Branch elected Kazuo Fujikawa, an emeritus professor at Okayama University as a new head of steering committee, and Kimitaka Hara, a professor at Nihon University, as a new head official of the Japanese Branch. Masaru Koshimizu, the vice-chief of the College of Humanities and Sciences at Nihon University, made a speech of welcome.

After the general meeting, there was a symposium on *Scenes of Clerical Life*. It was introduced by the chairperson Midori Uematsu, a professor at Wayo Women’s University. First, Midori Yamaguchi, Japan Society for the Promotion of Science explained the change of a pastor and parsonage which appeared in the three short stories of *Scenes of Clerical Life*. After the abolition of ‘plurality’, a pastor’s family came to play an important role to fill the gap between a pastor and his parishioners. Also a pastor’s family was required to contribute to the community. As a result, a parsonage changed into ‘an industrialized family’ and represented an ideal family. She concluded that Eliot evaluated these changes to some extent. Secondly, Miwako Sonoda, a professor at Kagawa Nutrition University remarked that to know the ecology of eating habits was a way of understanding the novels. She pointed out that by

writing about eating habits, George Eliot connected her fiction with the actual world and criticized the Victorian age and the religion of the time. She concluded that *Scenes of Clerical Life* had intense strength and George Eliot put a high value on eating in her works. Thirdly, Keiji Tanida, an assistant professor at Tokyo Kasei University, suggested that 'Janet's Repentance' had interesting aspects, such as change in the female image, and pointers towards the subjects of Eliot's subsequent novels. He explained the meaning of alcoholism and domestic violence in 'Janet's Repentance', especially for Dempster and Janet, considering what drinking and violence meant from the viewpoint of masculinity and femininity, a ruler and a slave, dependence and independence. Last, Midori Uematsu explained what a parsonage meant. She remarked that a parsonage was the place where collective memory was rooted and was regarded as a symbol of the memory of a community. George Eliot intended to write the feelings of a community, but in fact she wrote the feelings of an individual. Professor Uematsu also clarified the meaning of a parsonage in literature and history. After the animated discussion between the panelists and the audience, the chairperson suggested how to find delight in *Scenes of Clerical Life* to the audience.

The final special lecture on 'The British and George Eliot' was given by Takeshi Onodera, an emeritus professor at Yokohama City University, under the chairmanship of Professor Kimitake Hars. Professor Onodera remarked that the reason today's readers found Eliot's novels different arose from each feature of George Eliot and the British. He pointed out that there was weariness in her works, but that was very important. He remarked that at the bottom of this weariness, there were universal truth and ordinary wisdom, which meant that things surely change. George Eliot lamented change and the British have the same feelings as George Eliot. However, at the same time she accepted progress or reform. Professor Onodera concluded that when we read Eliot's novels, we need extensive knowledge, profound culture, acute analysing power, strong imagination and susceptibility. The audience was completely enthralled by his wonderful lecture.

The convention closed with a speech by Kazuo Fujikawa, an emeritus professor at Okayama University. After that the members enjoyed an informal dinner party, and had a great and intellectual time all day long.