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## Conference Report George Eliot and Her Work: Anakara Turkey, March 1999

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## CONFERENCE REPORT

### George Eliot and Her Work: Ankara Turkey, March 1999

by Laurence Raw

George Eliot's works are not well-known in Turkey, except for *The Mill on the Floss*, which is regularly studied in university departments of English Literature as part of an introductory course to the English novel, and *Silas Marner*, which is occasionally included in postgraduate courses in nineteenth-century literature. There have been only four published translations of her novels – three of *The Mill on the Floss* (in 1970, 1975 and 1981) and one of *Silas Marner* (1977), plus an introductory guide to her work, which appeared as long ago as 1949.

The main aim of the two-day 'George Eliot and Her Work' conference, organized by Middle East Technical University, Ankara, in March 1999, was to encourage greater interest in her work. Over eighty participants listened to twelve papers presented by academics from Turkey, Britain and Jordan, which focused on a variety of issues. Some of the more noteworthy papers included Armagan Erdogan, a PhD student at the University of Warwick, who talked on 'Mothers and Daughters in *The Mill on the Floss*'; Berrin Aksoy, Associate Professor of Translation Studies at Hacettepe University, Ankara, who gave a very interesting talk on translating *the Mill on the Floss* into Turkish: Gülbün Onur of Selçuk University, Konya, on 'Happiness as a matter of soul: *Middlemarch*'; and a remarkable pair of papers given by Clare Brandabur and Hassan Athamneh of Yarmouk University, Jordan, on 'The Essence of Christianity' and 'Orientalism' in *Daniel Deronda*. Other papers, given by Ünal Norman ('Consummate Narcissism in *Romola*'), and Meral Çileli ('Values in *Felix Holt*') of Middle East Technical University, provided useful introductions to two of George Eliot's lesser-known novels.

This conference was aimed at students, as well as staff of English Literature departments; to attract their interest, a video was shown of the BBC production of *Silas Marner*, together with six short programmes on 'Material on the life and work of George Eliot', originally made by BBC Education. The principal guest speaker from Britain, sponsored by the British Council, was Christine James of the British Film Institute who gave two representations of how *Middlemarch* was transformed by Andrew Davies (the screenwriter) and Anthony Page (the director) into a successful 6-part BBC series in 1993.

Throughout the conference, a five-minute presentation was shown on 'George Eliot Country'. This was made up of a series of photographs, plus accompanying commentary, of the major sites associated with George Eliot in the Nuneaton and Bedworth area. For their assistance in compiling this presentation, the organizers are indebted to Bill and Kathleen Adams of the George Eliot Fellowship, and Rose Selwyn of the Nuneaton Borough Council Marketing Department.

So what of the future of George Eliot in Turkey? Several participants expressed a desire to incorporate more George Eliot novels in under- and postgraduate English Literature curricula. Others wanted to obtain copies of the television adaptations, plus support materials (both visual and written) for their classroom teaching. Although it is too early yet to consider establish-

ing a Turkish branch of the George Eliot Fellowship (as exists, for instance, in Japan), it is clear that there is a need for further conferences and seminars, in order to sustain and expand interest in her work.

The proceedings of this conference will be available in early 2000. Anyone interested in purchasing a copy should contact Margaret Sönmez at the Department of English, Faculty of Education, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey (e-mail: marmez@tutor.fedu.metu.edu.tr).