Japanese Branch Report

Eri Satoh

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, Literature in English, British Isles Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/ger/381
On Saturday 28 November 2015, the Nineteenth Annual Convention of The George Eliot Fellowship of Japan was held at Obirin University.

The morning session started with an opening address by Maiko Otake (Oborin University). Two papers were presented in the morning session. The first was chaired by Hiroshi Ikezono (Yamaguchi University) and the second by Michiko Kurisu (Daito Bunka University).

The first paper by Shinsuke Hori (Nihon University) was entitled ‘Romola (1863): The Description of Nature and Social and Private Spaces in five “Recollections”’. He analyzed how Eliot acquired her writing techniques in the early novels as she developed her recognition of nature described in five ‘Recollections’. He pointed out that in ‘Recollections’ she gradually comes to describe landscape in detail and use such detailed description to project her subjectivity. He concluded that this way of writing, for example, likening life to the stream of a river, can be seen in novels like Romola as well as Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss.

The second paper was entitled ‘The Lack of Colonial Description and Enclosed Cosmopolitans in Middlemarch’ by Nanae Hama (Seinan Gakuin University). Focusing on ‘cosmopolitans’ in Middlemarch, i.e., the characters from outside the U.K., she explored what constitutes the ideal cosmopolitan for Eliot. Hama claimed that in this novel the ideal cosmopolitan is embodied in Will Ladislaw, who makes friends with foreigners and appreciates foreign culture such as art and poetry, in contrast to ‘enclosed’ or ‘insular’ cosmopolitans. She also claimed that, by marrying Will, Dorothea’s view of the world becomes much wider.

The afternoon session began with the presidential address by Midori Uematsu (Professor Emeritus of Wayo Women’s College), followed by a welcoming speech by Fumihiko Yano (Obirin University). After these addresses, the general meeting was chaired by Kei Yata (Tokyo Kasei University). The agenda included financial reports, the editor’s comments on the publication of The George Eliot Review of Japan and the announcement about newly-elected committee members. It was also reported that to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of The George Eliot Fellowship of Japan, the memorial project to leave Eliot’s thoughts to future generations in Japan would be launched this year (2016).

The meeting was followed by a symposium entitled ‘Rereading Adam Bede’. First, Hiroshi Oshima (Hyogo University of Teacher Education), the chair of the symposium, gave a paper entitled ‘One Aspect of the Reception of Adam Bede in the Victorian Period’. He showed Adam Bede’s popularity by giving some external evidence: it had been selling well for a long time, translated into other languages, performed in theatres, painted in watercolours, engraved on wood, and so on. He pointed out that Adam Bede reminded people in the Victorian Period of the nostalgia for good old England at the end of the eighteenth century (a reason for its popularity) and, unlike other novels at that time, this novel describes the psychology of characters realistically (another reason for its wider acceptance). Finally, Oshima mentioned the strict evangelicals’ criticism as another aspect of the reception of Adam Bede: they claimed that describing Hetty’s unexpected pregnancy would have a bad influence on young people in the Victorian England.

The third paper titled ‘The Vision of Ethical Humanitarianism in Adam Bede’ was
presented by Shintetsu Fukunaga (Professor Emeritus of Okayama University). By following Eliot’s essays that appeared in the Westminster Review from 1855 to 1856, he showed that Eliot changed from the stoic Christian to the moderate Humanist, after realizing that human nature should not be repressed by religion. According to Fukunaga, this change affected Eliot’s writing style in her novels: in Adam Bede, for example, Eliot describes the mental development of characters using nymphs in Greek myths and the workings of nature such as ‘a running brooklet’ as metaphors. He concluded that Eliot sees ‘nature’ as the key to represent her organic view of life, and that leads to the idea that ‘Nature has her language’ in Adam Bede.

In the fourth paper entitled ‘The Journey of Self-Discovery in Adam Bede – Collective Unconscious and the Process of Self-Actualization’, Ayako Tani (Ryukoku University) examined how the characters in Adam Bede are liberated from the ego, using the notion of Jung’s ‘Collective Unconscious’. According to Tani, Jung thinks that in order to actualize self, people need to integrate the self into the Collective Unconscious. She pointed out that the journey in this novel can be considered as a metaphor for reaching the Collective Unconscious. For example, in her journey to find Arthur, Hetty gradually throws away her ego and feels the fundamental joy of life. Adam also comes to realize the existence of universal suffering in his search for Hetty.

The last paper was ‘Knowledge and Carnival” in Adam Bede’ by Itsuyo Shimizu (Former Professor of Kinki University). According to her, Adam Bede is written based on the notions of knowledge and carnival (cf. Bakhtin, Foucault and Arnold). She pointed out that in his novel knowledge is personified as Adam and carnival (a traditional event where people of different classes harmonize) is realized in Arthur’s birthday feast. She also indicated that after he experienced suffering, knowledge made Adam’s ‘self’ harmonious with the society he lived in. She concluded that the following message by Eliot can be seen in Adam Bede: humanity is freed, dignified and diversified by knowledge and carnival.

After the symposium, Yuko Takahashi (Gakushuin University), who studies British art history, gave a special lecture on ‘George Eliot and the Art of the Italian Renaissance – Romola (1863)’, which was chaired by Kazuko Hisamori (Professor Emeritus of Ferris University). According to Takahashi, when Eliot visited the Continent in 1849 (and thereafter), she actually saw the works of the Italian Renaissance, which had been gaining popularity among the British people of the time. After showing some slides of works that appeared in Romola, she claimed that Eliot wrote Romola not to introduce the Italian Renaissance to the British people, but to develop the two opposing concepts of pagan ancient culture and Christian faith into a higher one that integrates both. Takahashi concluded that the opposition in Romola reflects the serious conflict between science and religion in the nineteenth century.

The convention was closed with a speech by Yumiko Hirono (Kyoto University). After the convention, the members of the Fellowship enjoyed warm and friendly discussion at an informal party.