Japanese Branch Report 2001

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The fifth annual convention of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan was held at Tokai University in Kanagawa on Saturday, 1 December 2001. The morning session began with a welcome speech by Kyoichi Ono, Chief of the Foreign Language Center of Tokai University. He said that George Eliot and Shigeyoshi Matsumae, the founder of Tokai University, had some similarities: both of them lived through a turbulent age; both sustained an interest in religion and humanity; both had insight into the significance of modern civilization.

The first paper was presented by Tomoko Kanda, an assistant at Nihon University. She analysed ‘The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton’ in the light of gossip. She thought that, through being involved in the narrator’s gossiping about characters, the reader was made to perceive gossip as coloured by self-content. In the second paper, Maiko Otake, a part-time lecturer at Tsuda College, suggested that Silas Marner did not have so much to do with nostalgia for the past as with the view of contemporary society and science. She pointed out that George Eliot regarded the slow imperceptible change in the society as ideal. In the third paper, Akiko Sekiguchi, a part-time lecturer at Tokai University, compared the poignant humour in Middlemarch with the mild humour in Cranford. She explained that this had something to do with the difference between the two societies: Cranford was a sort of utopia, separated from the outside world while Middlemarch was pluralistic and unstable, closely connected with the real world. The fourth paper by Chieko Watanabe, a professor at Bunka Women’s University, was ‘Bildungsideen beyond Goethe’s Faust – George Eliot’s messages left in the relationship between Gwendolen and her mother in Daniel Deronda’. She argued that, though the Gwendolen-plot was based on Faust, its conclusion surpassed Faust and established the original Bildungsideen.

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, and Shizuko Kawamoto, a professor at Tsuda College, gave an address as vice-president of the Fellowship. Hiroshi Oshima, a professor at Hyogo University of Teacher Education, reported on the project to complete a bibliography of George Eliot in Japan.

After the general meeting, there was a symposium on Silas Marner. It was introduced by the chairman, Nobuo Tsuru, an emeritus professor at Meiji Gakuin University. First, Kimitaka Hara, a professor at Nihon University, remarked that what Wordsworth called ‘wise passiveness’ was highly valued and regarded as a cure for the intellect possessed with interpretation. Next, Kazuko Hisamori, a professor at Ferris University, pointed out that the rhetoric of arbitration, a part of Anglicanism, united the people in Raveloe in contrast with the harsh exclusive administration in Lantern Yard. Thirdly, Noriko Kubota, a professor at Tsuru University, read Silas Marner in terms of the sensation novel. She argued that Godfrey’s desire for bigamy, a recurrent motif in the sensation novel, was hinted by his clandestine marriage and that Nancy represented one of the women institutionalized into the family, a lot of whom had been engrossed in reading sensation novels to escape from it temporarily. Finally, Norimitsu
Ayuzawa, a professor at Tokyo Woman’s Christian University, commented that *Silas Marner* departed from convention. He observed that Eppie was not a usual heroine but a functional character, mediating between Silas and what had been lost in the past.

The final special lecture was on ‘Contemporary British Novelists and the Victorian Age’ given by Yoshiyuki Fujikawa, a professor at Komazawa University. He discussed the tendency for contemporary novelists to reevaluate the Victorian novel and to model themselves upon it. Released from the pressure of historicism – the past as authority – contemporary novelists could enjoy seeing into the past as a different world and establish the technique of their own historical novels. Professor Fujikawa also referred to the Young Fogey movement and A. S. Byatt’s recent attempt at pastiche based on intertextuality.

The convention was closed with a speech by Ineko Kondo, an emeritus professor at Tsuda College. After that, we enjoyed an informal dinner party in the cafeteria of the same university. Sixty-four people participated in the convention and forty-five attended the party.