Japanese Branch Report 2007

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JAPANESE BRANCH REPORT

By Maiko Ohtake

The eleventh annual convention of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan was held at Chuo University on Saturday 24 November 2007.

The morning session began with an opening address by Miwa Ohta (Chuo University). Four papers were presented in the morning; the first two were introduced and commented upon by Michiko Kurisu (Daito Bunka University), and the last two by Shigeko Tomita (Koshien University).

The first paper was titled ‘Rethinking Adam Bede – Why Does No One Help Hetty?’ by Mayumi Fujita (Kwansei Gakuin University). Starting with a question about the severe treatment of Hetty, Ms Fujita examined the moral implications of ‘comfort’ and ‘work’ in the novel. After pointing out the particular importance placed upon ‘work’ in the contemporary society of the time, she concluded that Hetty’s exclusion from the text was inevitable because unlike Adam and Dinah who derived comfort from their work, Hetty wished to lead a comfortable life without working for it.

The second paper, ‘Bildungsroman and Letters: From Pride and Prejudice to Daniel Deronda’ was presented by Yuko Nakamura (Keio University). Ms Nakamura compared George Eliot’s Daniel Deronda with Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre and Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, from the viewpoint of the Bildungsroman, using Bakhtin’s theory. Focusing on Gwendolen’s final letter to Daniel, she concluded that Gwendolen’s narrative showed the dynamism of the Bildungsroman.

The third speaker, Shota Nakajima (Tokushima Bunri University) read a paper titled ‘Tryan’s Repentance – A Case of Terminal Care in “Janet’s Repentance”’. Mr Nakajima proposed reading ‘Janet’s Repentance’ as a story of Tryan, who suffered from a sense of guilt over the death of a woman he once loved. He argued Tryan’s confession of his past to Janet enabled him to overcome his sense of guilt and devote the rest of his life to support Janet’s regeneration. With an emphasis upon the reciprocity of their cure, he concluded that the story presented an ideal case of terminal care.

The fourth paper, ‘Dinah Morris, Elizabeth Evans and Female Methodist Preachers at the Turn of the Century’, was presented by Manami Tamura (Toyohashi University of Technology). She argued that Dinah in Adam Bede was depicted both seriously and favourably as a Methodist preacher unlike most Methodist characters who were mocked in other contemporary novels. She explored the social and religious background of Dinah’s character by examining materials on early Methodists and real Methodist female preachers around 1800, including Eliot’s own aunt, Elizabeth Evans.

The afternoon session began with an address by Yoshitsugu Uchida (Professor Emeritus of Tezukayama Gakuin University), the President of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan, which was followed by a welcome speech by Shigehiko Uno, the Dean of the Faculty of Letters in Chuo University. After the addresses, the general meeting was presided over by Toshie Maeda.
(Kansai University). The agenda included financial reports, publications of the Fellowship, and the election of the board of Trustees and steering committee. In addition to the re-elected trustees and committee, Itsuyo Shimizu (Kinki University) and Shigeru Fujita (Rissho University) were elected as new trustees, and Mizue Aida (Nihon University) as a new committee member. It was also reported that the publication of a bibliography of works on George Eliot published in Japan was being considered. The bibliography has been compiled by the Fellowship’s bibliography committee over the past several years and includes works as old as those published in the Taisho Era (1912-1926).

After the general meeting, Miyuki Amano (Hiroshima Prefectural University), chair of the symposium, ‘Reading The Spanish Gypsy’, presented a brief survey of the critical history of the work. Professor Amano pointed out the importance of Eliot’s creative intention that had motivated her to write this dramatic poem, and suggested the possibility of its re-evaluation.

Mizue Aida (Nihon University) read a paper titled ‘The Meaning of the End of the Fifteenth Century’. By tracing the historical memories aroused by various scenery and buildings in Spain, Ms Aida examined Eliot’s intention in choosing late fifteenth-century Spain as a background for her work. She argued such a historical/topographical setting was most desirable for Eliot to explore the theme of race and nation because Spain was changing its religious/racial policy dramatically at this time.

Keiji Yata (Tokyo Kasei University) compared the ‘marriage rite’ at the end of The Spanish Gypsy, and the marriage of Daniel and Mirah in Daniel Deronda. Professor Yata argued the two ‘marriages’ highlighted the different ways in which George Eliot dealt with the conflict between personal affection and public obligation. Comparing Don Silva’s unresolved conflict and strong sense of being an outsider in the Gypsy tribe with Daniel Deronda’s complete absorption into the Jewish community, he concluded the former presented a more serious study of the conflict.

Hidetada Mukai (Matsuyama University) analysed the stereotyped images of Gypsies in English literature, particularly in the novels of Jane Austen and George Eliot. Professor Mukai pointed out Gypsies were often associated with such sensations as terror, wonder or undefinable yearning, and that their brief appearance was often used to turn plots rather than to present them realistically. He argued The Spanish Gypsy was Eliot’s unique attempt to present Gypsies not as functional characters but as characters through which the central human drama of the work was represented.

After a short break, a special lecture by Takao Tomiyama (Aoyama Gakuin University) was given, which was introduced by Suguru Fukasawa (Professor Emeritus of Chuo University). In the lecture titled ‘George Eliot and Religious Literature’, Professor Tomiyama pointed out a change of perspective in studying religious novels in recent years. He stated that instead of discussing theological implications of particular texts, more attention is now being paid to day-to-day religious practices as a part of Victorian popular culture. He argued religious identities of lay people in those days were known through routine religious practices written in various texts such as novels, biographies, and handbooks. He suggested such a new perspective would enable scholars of George Eliot to locate her novels in a broader cultural context.
The conference ended with a closing address by Kiyoko Tsuda (Tezukayama University). After the conference, the members enjoyed warm and friendly talks at an informal party. Sixty-three people attended the conference, thirty-eight of whom attended the party.