2010

Japanese Branch Report- 2009

Yohko Nagai

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/579

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in The George Eliot Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
JAPANESE BRANCH REPORT

By Yohko Nagai

Overlooking the meandering Edo River and the panoramic view of the Tokyo skyline, the thirteenth annual convention of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan was held at the scenic campus of Wayo Women's University on Saturday, 28 November 2009.

After an opening remark by Mizue Aida of Nihon University, a welcome address was made by Midori Uematsu, a professor of Wayo Women's University. This year we had the privilege of listening to four papers in the morning session. The first two papers were chaired by Akiko Kimura, of Waseda University and the last two papers by Itsuyo Shimizu of Kinki University.

In the first paper, entitled ‘“Mr Gilfil’s Love-Story” Reconsidered: Heroine Speaking Through the Eyes and Voice’, Eri Yoshimura (Graduate School of Kobe College) focused on Caterina’s symbolic dark eyes and how they manifest the heroine’s strong will to liberate herself. Although Caterina’s eyes, like her voice, present her vulnerability, they also reflect her volition most effectively. Ms Yoshimura concluded that Eliot’s depiction of Caterina’s eyes present her not as a heroine confined to a patriarchal social standard, but a heroine who will struggle and fight back to the end.

The second paper, entitled ‘Maggie Tulliver’s Walk of Physical Space: The Act of Her Will and Sense of Guilt and Privacy’, was presented by Shinsuke Hori (Graduate School of Nihon University). While it is common to trace Maggie’s moral progress, Mr Hori examined Maggie’s widening vision, the act of her will, and her sense of guilt and privacy through her movement in various physical spaces: the attic, the space outside home, Dunlow Common, Red Deeps, Mr Tulliver’s sickroom, and the bazaar. He concluded that the Red Deeps is the physical space where Maggie most influentially exerts her will.

The third paper, entitled ‘The Influence of Schopenhauer’s Philosophy of Renunciation on Eliot’s Earlier and Later Works: The Mill on the Floss and Middlemarch’, was read by Chiyo Fujiwara (Research Student at Kobe College). Critics in the past have primarily associated Schopenhauer with Eliot’s later years, especially after 1872 when she read Schopenhauer’s Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (The World as Will and Idea). Ms Fujiwara in her paper analyzed the influence of Schopenhauer on Eliot’s earlier work, The Mill on the Floss, and her later work, Middlemarch, paying special attention to the heroines’ plot of renunciation of the will.

The fourth paper, ‘Living in the Realm of Intimacy: Various Possibilities Given to Romola’, was presented by Mikako Kinoshita (Lecturer of The Jikei University School of Medicine). Using Hannah Arendt and Jürgen Habermas’s influential concepts of the public sphere, Ms. Kinoshita presented a detailed analysis of the major characters of Romola and showed how the influence of these characters help Romola to discover a new realm of intimacy – a realm which is grounded on human fellowship.

After an hour break, the afternoon session began with an address by Yoshitsugu Uchida, the president of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan, followed by a welcome speech by Motoko Sakamoto, the president of Wayo Women’s University. In a general meeting presided over by
Yoshie Maeda (Kinki University), financial reports and publications of the Fellowship were announced, and the board of trustees and steering committee were re-elected.

The topic for this year’s symposium was ‘George Eliot and Christianity’. As the discussion leader, Shintetsu Fukunaga, a professor of Okayama University, began the symposium by explaining the significance of the revival of evangelicalism in the history of Britain and the legacy of Eliot’s novels in relation to it. The introduction was followed by Manami Tamura, an associate professor of Toyohashi University of Technology, presenting a paper on ‘Eliot and Evangelicalism’. Referring to Eliot’s critical remarks against Evangelical novelists in the Westminster Review and her review of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Dred, she examined the depiction of religious faith (especially evangelicalism) in Scenes of Clerical Life. Though Eliot presents a typical picture of clergymen in the work, it was argued that her portrayal of religious faith, with its pathos and humour, is indispensable in depicting a community which she cherished. The third presentation was made by Hiroshi Oshima, a professor of Hyogo University of Teacher Education. In his paper, entitled ‘Typology: George Eliot and Christian Culture’, he focused on the relationship between typology and Eliot’s novels, making close reference to ‘The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton’, Adam Bede, and Daniel Deronda. Through close analysis, he explained how Eliot modifies the traditional typology to develop her characters like Adam and Deronda and how this has enabled her to idealize her characters without infringing on her commitment to realism, thus achieving the ‘ideal realism’ of her characters. Because the Victorian typology was transformed to a more humanistic form by Eliot, Professor Oshima argued that the typological thinking managed to live on in her works even when the traditional typology faced a decline. The final presentation was made by Haruho Murayama, a professor of Saniku Gakuin College. In his paper, entitled ‘Literary Approaches to the Bible and Biblical Approaches to Literature’, Professor Murayama, first of all, examined Eliot’s works as a forerunner of biblical literature. After making reference to the issue of typology, he used the two novels, Silas Marner and Adam Bede, to emphasize how much Eliot’s works are deeply rooted in the Bible and Christian morality – agape.

This year we had the privilege of welcoming Yoshihiko Kutsukake, an emeritus professor of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, for the final special lecture, under the chairmanship of Professor Shun Fukazawa. A renowned scholar of comparative literature and Western classics, Professor Kutsukake inspired the audience with his account of ‘Erasmus and the Three English Literary Scholars: The Friendship of Thomas More, John Colet, and John Fisher’. Although Erasmus is definitely one of the most famous humanists in the Western world, his works are still less familiar among Japanese scholars. Professor Kutsukake drew our attention to the fact that Erasmus, though he never belonged firmly in any one particular place, had very close ties with England through his lifelong friendship with the three Tudor humanists. It was suggested through his lecture that England was the place where Erasmus had found the inspiration and the seed for his intellectual and literary expression.

After a fruitful session, the conference ended with a closing speech by Kiyoko Tsuda. The fact that 76 scholars and students attended this year’s convention deserves special mention, and among those, 42 people stayed to enjoy the reception following the conference. With this many people participating, we ended the general conference with high hopes and expectations for the future of George Eliot studies in Japan.