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Naomi Ohno

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JAPANESE BRANCH REPORT

By Naomi Ohno

On Saturday 4 December 2010, the Fourteenth Annual Convention of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan was held at Okayama University.

The morning session began with an opening remark by Hiroshi Oshima (Hyogo University of Teacher Education), followed by a Welcome Address by Shintetsu Fukunaga (Okayama University). In the morning, we had three papers presented. The first two papers were introduced and commented upon by Shota Nakajima (Tokushima Bunri University), and the third by Mizue Aida (Nihon University).

The first paper was ‘The Seductive Power of Eyes – Re-examining Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss’ by Eri Yoshimura (Kobe Jogakuin College). The purpose of her presentation was to re-examine Maggie through the description of her eyes and her exchange of looks with Philip and Stephen. Her eyes falling on Philip represented a sense of pity for him, and when she looked down on his deformed figure, her look seemed even to suggest her superiority to him. As for Stephen, she tempted him with her attractive eyes, and the memory of them tortures him even after her death. Maggie could be defined as a heroine whose eyes never lose their power to attract.

The second paper was ‘A point of View and Unreality in “The Lifted Veil”’ by Kazue Hayase (Bukkyo University). She pointed out that, as this work is a first-person narrative, the readers had the same point of view as the protagonist and were under the false impression that unreality is reality. The first-person narrative in this story enables Eliot to offer the deep psychological and philosophical description which makes this story particularly remarkable. Therefore, ‘The Lifted Veil’, though a short novel, had a great influence upon her later works.

The third paper was ‘Reading The Mill on the Floss from E. M. Forster’s Artistic Point of View’ by Chiyuki Kanamaru (Aichi Bunkyo University). She remarked first that, according to E. M. Forster, fiction is truer than history because it goes beyond the evidence. As for George Eliot, Forster considers her personal commitment in The Mill on the Floss. Kanamaru says that the reading of The Mill on the Floss from his artistic point of views leads us to find ‘something beyond the evidence’ in Maggie’s death. In the end Maggie and Tom achieved a full reconciliation with each another. This denouement shows, Professor Kanamaru concludes, that Eliot accepted the love of God associated with human compassion in spite of the doubt she cast on Christianity.

The afternoon session began with an address by Yoshitsugu Uchida, President of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan. After his Address, the general meeting was held, presided over by Maiko Ohtake (J. F. Oberlin University) in which the 2009 statement of account and this year’s publications from the Fellowship were reported by respective committee members. At the end of the session, Yuko Tsuji (Doshisha University) made a special speech on behalf of the Milton Society of Japan, mentioning the coming publication of the Japanese translation of A. Nardo’s George Eliot’s Dialogue with Milton.
After the general meeting ensued the symposium entitled ‘Eliot and Europe’, with Miwa Ota (Chuo University) as the chair. Professor Ota began the symposium by putting the question, ‘What subjects are to be discussed about George Eliot and Europe now in Japan, in the light of the fruitful symposium held at University of Warwick in 1995, the result of which was published in book form from Ashgate in 1997?’ And she introduced three energetic scholars, all in their twenties, in our society, Ken’ichi Kurata, Nanae Hama and Chiyo Fujiwara, and asked them to approach the subject from their own fresh points of view.

First, Ken’ichi Kurata (Tokyo University), in discussing The Mill on the Floss, referred to Marcel Proust who commented in one of his letters that two pages of The Mill on the Floss could reduce him to tears. As is well known, many critics have discussed the influence this novel exerted on A la recherche du temps perdu. Where previous criticisms tend to focus on the significance of childhood memory in these criticisms, Kurata’s contention was that a continuity must above all be seen in the negative aspect of ‘time lost’, which was what most probably made Proust weep, rather than in the positive aspect of ‘time regained’. The Mill on the Floss is essentially a tragedy of the vicious circle of desire, and a major part of Proust’s work is also dedicated to the depiction of such tragedies.

Nanae Hama (Fukuoka Women’s University) discussed the artists appearing in George Eliot’s works. It can be said that there are no English artists in George Eliot’s works. Considering her works after Romola (1863), the stories are set in or connected with countries outside England, and the nationalities of her characters are diversified. Even in the case of Middlemarch (1871-2), which is set in contemporary rural England, George Eliot sweetens the plot by putting into it some artists from Germany, Poland and France. Juan in The Spanish Gypsy (1868) and Klesmer in Daniel Deronda (1876) advocate ‘a fusion of races’ through the arts, which reveals George Eliot’s expectation of the universality that any genuine art should have. Clearly, George Eliot uses these artists as key players, who sweep into the English community like an exotic breeze and aim at building a unit beyond the limitation of one particular ethnicity or nationality.

Chiyo Fujiwara (Kobe Jogakuin College) mentioned that George Eliot, as a chief editor of The Westminster Review, greatly contributed to introducing Schopenhauer to the nineteenth-century England. Thanks to her contribution, D. H. Lawrence could read the English translation of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. Strongly impressed by Schopenhauer’s discussion of human instincts, Lawrence used it when he interpreted The Mill on the Floss. Lawrence imitated Eliot’s plot setting and wrote his first novel, The White Peacock. In her presentation, Fujiwara demonstrated how Lawrence created Lettie as a heroine analogous to Maggie, by shedding light on the essences he captured from both The Mill on the Floss and Schopenhauer’s ‘Metaphysics of Love’.

This year we had the privilege of welcoming Ririko Tezuka (Emeritus Professor of Aoyama Gakuin University), for the final special lecture entitled ‘George Eliot and Music’, under the chairmanship of Midori Uematsu (Wayo Women’s University). Tezuka talked briefly of Eliot’s role of pianist at private musical parties, and of her appreciation of various kinds of European music. Her writings naturally reflects her musical life. Especially, music is closely related to the theme of love; Professor Tezuka referred to ‘Che faro’ of Orfeo leading Caterina to a new life with Mr Gilfil, the duet ‘Graceful Consort’ preparing ironically the ordeal of Lucy, the duet
in *Masaniello* opening the scene of ‘sexual selection’, the gondolier’s song in *Othello* uniting Deronda to Mirah through ‘dolore’, and some other instances. In the end, recorded performances of three of the above-mentioned pieces were given, to help the audience confirm the author’s detailed description of music.

The Convention ended with closing remarks by Kiyoko Tsuda. Fifty-three members and students attended this year’s Convention, and from among them forty members stayed to enjoy the reception after the Convention.