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## Japanese Branch Report- 2013

Ayako Tani

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## JAPANESE BRANCH REPORT

By Ayako Tani

On Saturday 7 December 2013, the Seventeenth Annual Convention of The George Eliot Fellowship of Japan was held at Keio University.

The morning session started with an opening address by Maiko Otake (Obirin University). Three papers were presented in the morning session. The first two were commented on by Toyotsugu Matsui (Daido University) and the third by Hideo Takano (Komazawa University).

The first speaker was Nanae Hama (Seinan Gakuin University), whose subject was 'The Hero Worship and the Imperial Consciousness: How George Eliot Described Heroes among Children'. In her presentation on *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Hama argued that a sense of imperial consciousness was imprinted onto children and that this was revealed by their words and actions. In the episode concerning Maggie's desire to be the gypsy queen, for example, it is revealed that she regards gypsies as barbarians and tries to civilize them by becoming a female Columbus. In the end, Hama concluded that George Eliot did not support this imperial stance, but, instead, she took the opportunity to expose these unfair opinions through the childrens' failures.

The second speaker was Eri Kobayashi (Seikei University), who discussed 'Feminism Displaced into Nationalism in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876)'. Exploring the similarity between female characters and the Jewish race in terms of oppression, Kobayashi argued that, while Daniel, a Jew, found hope in the promise of a new land, Gwendolen, an oppressed British woman remained helpless. It is Daniel, rather than Gwendolen, who is liberated from oppressive British society and achieves self-fulfilment abroad. The novel provides the hope of a promised land for Jewish people at the very end of the story, but it also discloses an uneasiness that another British imperialist has sailed to the East.

The third speaker was Akiko Higuchi (formerly a professor at Kagoshima Kokusai University), whose topic was 'Marianne Evans, *Edward Neville*: From Historical Facts to Imaginative Creation'. Higuchi dealt with *Edward Neville*, which Marian Evans wrote in a notebook at the age of fourteen. Showing that Marian did not actually visit Chepstow, but that she based her story solely on descriptions, maps and prints from William Coxe's *An Historical Tour in Monmouthshire* (1801), Higuchi admired the achievement of young Marian's imagination in creating the novel.

The afternoon session began with an address by Seiko Tsuda (Tezukayama University), President of the George Eliot Fellowship in Japan, which was followed by a welcoming speech by Keiko Kawachi (Keio University). After these addresses, the general meeting was chaired by Yoshie Maeda (Kansai University). The agenda included financial reports, the editor's comments on the publication of *The George Eliot Review of Japan*, and the announcement of new directors of The George Eliot Fellowship of Japan.

After the general meeting, a symposium entitled 'George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Women Writers' was presented by four speakers. After Yoshie Abe (Shoin University), the chair of the symposium, outlined the general background of women's issues in Victorian society, the speakers discussed this theme from different perspectives. The first speaker, Michiko Soya (Kobe Kaisei Joshi Gakuin University), discussed the influence of Jane Austen

on George Eliot. Soya focused on Dorothea Brooke from Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Marianne Dashwood from Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, and considered the extraordinary fate of each character. She showed that Eliot's works, like Austen's, retroactively exude the potentiality and meaning of a unique Austenian perspective on the past.

Mieko Matsumoto (Aichi Prefectural University), the second speaker, compared Harriet Martineau's *Deerbrook* and Eliot's *Middlemarch* to examine descriptions and attitudes towards the middle-class in these novels, in particular, a country doctor and a governess.

Chiyuki Kanamaru (Aichi Bunkyo University), the third speaker, compared two women writers, George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, and explored their attitudes towards social outcasts like the unmarried mothers in *Adam Bede* and *Ruth*. When creating these characters, both writers describe the causes and consequences of seduction by 'gentlemen'.

The final speaker, Akiko Sato (Nihon University), focused on Quakerish heroines in *Jane Eyre* and *Middlemarch*. In Jane's case, Quakerish attire made up for the shortcomings of her appearance; on the other hand, for Dorothea, it brought her beauty into relief. At the same time, their dress plays an important role in showing their refusal to become Victorian ornamental wives, for example, as depicted in 'the Angel in the House' in Coventry Patmore's poem. Their mode of dress symbolizes Jane and Dorothea's strong independence.

At the close of the convention, a special lecture on 'How to Interpret *La Divina Commedia*' was given by Michio Fujitani (Keio University), and introduced by Mizue Aida (Nihon University). Fujitani argued that *La Divina Commedia*, Dante's famous poem, can be interpreted in terms of an almanac. The poem has four levels of meaning: literal, allegorical, moral, and astronomical. Dante believes beneath the surface of any incident lies 'the truth' indicated by God. Emphasizing the astronomical interpretation, Fujitani revealed that the dates and the years noted in the poem are deliberately calculated and this shows that Dante's ordeal is divine providence.

The convention ended with a speech by Shintetsu Fukunaga (Okayama University), and following that, the members of the Fellowship enjoyed friendly discussions at an informal event.