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JAPANESE BRANCH REPORT

By Eri Kobayashi

On 29 November 2014, at the 18th General Meeting of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan, three papers on George Eliot's novels were read in the morning session. In the afternoon, a symposium on Eliot's poems was held and in the evening session a keynote speech was given by Professor Minoru Kawakita.

Chaired by Professor Kimitaka Hara (Nihon University), the morning session saw our first speaker, Masako Ishii (Kyoto University), discussing *The Mill on the Floss* from the standpoint of the destiny of Maggie Tulliver, especially in relation to her conflict with the socially restrictive norms of a provincial town in England. Entitled 'Yearning for a Love', her presentation clarified how the heroine's vulnerability seems attractive to her cousin's fiancé but the heroine nevertheless refuses to elope with him because of her sense of insecurity or her unstable identity that she has had since childhood. The second speaker, Takako Takamoto (National Fisheries University), spoke about 'Moral Dilemmas in George Eliot's *Romola* (1862-63) and Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005)'. She pointed out the dilemmas both Henry Perowne (the protagonist in *Saturday*) and Savonarola (in *Romola*) have when each of them needs to make a political choice. She concluded that utilitarian solutions seem irrelevant when the life of a human being is at stake. Our third presenter, Hideo Takano (Komazawa University), talked about 'The Cross-Cultural World of "Bouddha's Tale" in Chapter 37 of *Daniel Deronda*'. In his reading of the novel, he argued that George Eliot has a universal-truth-seeking imagination and that leads to Deronda talking of 'the transmutation of self' in the same chapter. He concluded that George Eliot has a sense of mission as a writer which leads her to depict her protagonist as morally free to seek a better world.

In the afternoon session, a symposium entitled 'Read the Poetry of George Eliot' was held, chaired by Miwa Ota (Chuo University), and three presenters read their papers. Ota introduced Eliot's poetry as 'full of topics that are hard to find in her fiction'. Following Ota's introduction, Mizue Aida (Nihon University) considered the meaning of 'Mordecai's Hebrew Verses' in *Daniel Deronda* from the viewpoint of the novel's topography. She paid particular attention to four places: the ghetto in Frankfurt; Blackfriars Bridge in London; Genoa in Italy; the bridge between the old city and the new city in Ronda. She said that some of the poems Eliot inserted in the novel reveal her vivid emotions that had not so far been clearly expressed in her earlier novels. The third speaker was Miyuki Amano (Prefectural University of Hiroshima) and her title was 'Poetry, Journey, and Religion: George Eliot's Experiments in "Agatha"'. She demonstrated Eliot's experiments in 'Agatha' and examined how the poet deliberately utilizes the customs of Catholicism, the worship of the Virgin Mary, paintings, pictorial descriptions and religious musical effects. In a sense, she argues, 'Agatha' can be regarded as a kind of 'antiphony' dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Agatha herself. Amano also pointed out that the theme of death in the poem appears important not only in relation to Eliot's other poems ('Self and Life', 'Arion', or 'The Death of Moses') but also to Charlotte Brontë's essay, 'The Death of Moses'. Our last speaker at this symposium was Shinsuke Hori (Nihon University) and he considered three of George Eliot's poems ('A Minor Prophet', 'In a London Drawingroom', and 'Agatha') in relation to *Middlemarch*. He said that the mirror image used in 'A Minor Prophet' helps to arouse readers' sympathy and points to a direct relationship

between individuals and society in the second poem. He said the Blessed Lady image in 'Agatha' seemed not so 'deified' as it was in *Middlemarch*.

The keynote speaker for the special lecture of the 18th General Meeting of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan was one of the prominent scholars of British History in Japan, Professor Minoru Kawakita (emeritus professor of Osaka University), who gave us a stimulating lecture entitled, 'The World of Private Acts: Industrial Revolution and Squirearchy'. He traced the history of English landed society from the 16th to the 20th century and concluded that such a landed society has not gone away even today. After the reception in a campus restaurant, the 18th general meeting of the George Eliot Fellowship of Japan ended successfully.