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British Women Poets of the Romantic Period: Cultural Colonialism and Gender in Japan

Eijun Senaha

English literature in Japan is another example of influence by Western cultural colonialism that dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. In 1854, when the United States forced the Japanese government to open its door to the rest of the world after more than three hundred years of closure, they felt threatened by the advanced western civilization and technology. The so-called Meiji Restoration began. Politically it was a transformation from feudalism to the Emperor system. In education, the government founded universities and encouraged its youngsters to study western culture. The Western books were chosen as textbooks to learn the western values, and native speakers were employed as “raw” informants. The Japanese way of life changed dramatically as it could be called a cultural colonialism that removed Japan’s own tradition and belief and replaced it with the Western culture and values.

English literature was also introduced to the classroom in the late nineteenth century, and literary cultural colonialism that neglected women writers was unknowingly accepted. Foreign teachers were not necessarily English proper, but they taught only male canons who they believed represented English literature. After they left Japan, Japanese teachers replaced them and innocently and/or ignorantly chose to continue their teachings. Along with the translation oriented pedagogy since then, English literature in Japan has been culturally passive concern-

ing western standard. Nowadays, though Japanese scholars support the rise of women's literature, they choose to avoid this "sub genre" in class saying, "There is no time to teach other figures": They tend to limit themselves to teaching only literary canons and make excuses for excluding less-known writers in their curriculum. The language barrier and lack of time appear to be the major reasons that they have been teaching "major figures" for more than a century. In a survey entitled the Romantic Women Writers Questionnaire (see appendix for an English version of the questionnaire), however, while these factors became clear and proved Japanese scholars' traditional passivism and submission to the western literary tradition, it also became clear that Japanese female professors tend to be more reluctant than their male counterparts to welcome women writers due to their "proper" gender roles.

However, these issues will become less problematic, owing to the recent criticism of traditional pedagogy and, more effectively, due to a series of publications of women writers' anthologies in Britain and the U. S. This new type of Western cultural colonialism that introduces more women writers in the authentic book form will allow the alarmed Japanese scholars to use them as textbooks, which will especially enable the conservative female professors to rely on this new tradition with confidence.

In the nineteenth century, foreign teachers in Japanese colleges taught almost all subjects and played a significant role in creating the sexist preconception in English literature. Therefore, the curriculum was simple enough: Foreign teachers supplied their students with western knowledge, and the students submissively listened to them as if they spoke God's voice. Therefore, the history of Japan's study of English literature would well be characterized by its tradition of passivism.

Japanese students innocently obeyed their teachers from Britain and the United States because “hearing was believing” since most Japanese students had never visited foreign countries. “Reading became believing” as the textbooks introduced only male writers. It is quite easy to imagine now that Japanese students, passively learning English literature, came to believe that there was no woman worthy of reading in English literature. With no doubt, the early Japanese English scholars and students believed in the male domination of British and American literatures as naturally as they believed Westernization was necessary for the uncivilized country of Japan.

For example, Sapporo Agricultural College, presently Hokkaido University, was founded in 1876 by hiring President William S. Clark of Massachusetts Agricultural College, the present University of Massachusetts-Amherst, as the Japanese college’s Vice President. Modeling its curriculum after the American university, the Japanese college became known as the best liberal arts college in Japan. In the book lists of the College Library from 1877 to 1878, there were, in addition to numerous natural science books, several Bible-related books and about thirty literary works from Classics to the Victorian writings, such as those by Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Walter Scott, Lord Byron, Thomas B. Macaulay, and Samuel Smiles. For English class, they used Francis H. Underwood’s *A Handbook of English Literature* published in 1879 by a Boston company, Lee and Shepard. Though it was originally published for American high school students, this 646-page textbook must have been challenging for the Japanese college students who had studied English for only a few years prior to entering the college. The textbook consisted of 106 British and American writers: among them are such writers of the British Romantic period as Walter Scott, Thomas Campbell, William Wordsworth, William Cowper, Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, Robert

Burns, P. B. Shelley, S. T. Coleridge, John Keats, Charles Lamb, and Lord Byron. The students must have been overwhelmed by the greatness of English literature, but they probably did not have time to question the absence of any woman writer in it. Thus, they started their scholarship importing the western literary standard, not knowing who was neglected on the other side of the globe. As a result, Japanese scholars became 'powerless' in terms of their knowledge and appreciation of women writers of English literature, and their English curriculum suffered from impotence in front of women writers.

After those native teachers left Japan, Japanese took over their positions and spent most of their time in translation. The method was effective until the mid-twentieth century for the under-developing country trying to catch up with the West. During the rapid economic growth between the 1960s and 80s, English became one of the most popular fields and the number of students, especially female students, increased, along with high expectations for social success with the practical international language. But, teachers continued to rely on the traditional method even after Japan became one of the world's leading nations. Gradually, they grew quite disappointed with its old-fashioned impractical translation pedagogy and probably with its anachronistic literary approaches. The number of English students is currently decreasing, and students are more interested in history and sociology in which such updated topics as feminism are openly discussed.

In the late 80s and 90s, the situation appears to have changed. Feminist literary theory is recognized as a major approach. More Japanese scholars discuss these formerly unknown women writers in order to introduce her stories, and women writers are drawing more attention. Such critical methods as new historicism, ecocriticism, and men's studies, are also being introduced as soon as they draw attention

among the western scholars. In Japan's largest English Literary Society Conference in 1997, for example, Mary W. Shelley's *Frankenstein* enjoyed a heated discussion at her bicentennial symposium. In its 1998 conference, Stephen Greenblatt was a keynote speaker.

However, this tendency does not necessarily reflect what is taught in the classroom. Although Japanese scholars do support women writers' importance, they are unsure, especially when choosing a text for their class, if women writers are as "readable" as the male canons. In a survey on the British women writers of the Romantic period conducted at the 1997 Japan British Romanticism Conference, this ambivalence became clear. There were about 100 participants at that conference held in October, and about forty of them answered the questionnaire. In general, male teachers tended to be more ambitious studying the Romantic women writers, and their new knowledge is reflected in their teaching curriculum. Meanwhile, women teachers, though they understand the importance of women's studies, show some anxiety and often decide to choose a more orthodox curriculum.

In the "Romantic Women Writers Questionnaire," the first questions were meant to gauge Japanese scholars' consciousness of the changing definition of the period. On the span of the British Romantic period, the answer varied from a traditional 1798-1832 span to 1750-1850, 1789-1837, and 1778-1830, but these variations were started mostly by men. Most women scholars chose to say 1798 to 1832. The next question asked if they thought women's literature is important and support the rise of feminist criticism: Both men and women scholars answered they do. As keywords to define the Romantic period, both men and women chose, as expected, "French Revolution," "Imagination," and "Nature." However, while men's choice varied in 17 keywords from "Organicism" to "the Feminist Movement", women scholars chose only ten keywords, such as

“Rousseau,” “Religion,” and “Enclosure Movement.” No one marked “Feminist Movement.” Reflecting these differences, male teachers said they introduce almost all keywords in the list to their students, while female teachers limit themselves in the classroom to the conventional keywords as suggested above.

The teachers were almost evenly divided by the question about whether they teach only the Big 6 in class or not. 55 percent of all teachers choose to teach only the Big 6, and they appear to be reluctant to step out. But, men and women teachers responded differently: over 70 percent of female teachers teach only the Big 6, while the same 70 percent of male teachers introduce additional poets.

Among those male and female teachers who teach the Big 6 and other figures in the Romantic period (45% of all), the # 1 choice was interestingly enough Mary Wollstonecraft, followed by John Clare and Charles Lamb and eight other women writers. However, when I looked into the result more closely, I found that over 70 percent of male teachers choose more women writers than men writers, and the men’s choice of women writers ended up with almost all women writers on the list. Female teachers, on the other hand, selected both men and women writers evenly and listed Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt, and William Hazlitt as their # 1 choices along with only a few women writers such as Dorothy Wordsworth and Jane Austen.

The next question asked about the reason why women writers had been neglected in the English literary history. Over 60 percent responded that the neglect was due to something arbitrary or to the traditional male-oriented criticism that was not able to fairly evaluate women’s literature. 85 percent of those who were considerate to the women writers’ history thought that women’s writings are as good as men’s and that it is essential to know about women in order to understand any

history, therefore, agreeing on the importance of teaching women writers in the future.

However, this does not mean women writers are being taught in Japan's classrooms. There was a certain number of people, 30 percent of all, who did not think women writers should be taught in the classroom. 25 percent believe that women's literature is a mere popular literature and, as an academic subject, inferior to the Big 6. The majority of them say that they already have enough Romantic writers, i.e. the Big 6, to teach in the Japanese classroom. In Japan's typical college classroom, students meet for 90 minutes once a week for fifteen weeks a semester, spending more time on translation than literary evaluations: in a poetry class, they usually translate only a few poems in each meeting; in a novel class they translate one or two novels in two semesters. In such a limited environment, studying more than six poets may be already tough enough for both teachers and students.

This survey also revealed that female orthodoxy and male liberalism are characteristics of Japan's traditional gender typology, and this is causing one of the more serious situations in introducing women's literature: Female teachers choose more orthodox methods in class while male scholars choose somewhat more liberal methods. In a series of questions on the Romanticism curriculum, I expected female teachers to understand and accept more on teaching women writers, but their reluctance is more distinct than male teachers'. One female professor specifically said, "If women writers are truly as good as the Big 6, why do we need to separate women from men? Why do women writers need affirmative action and political correctness? Good works have survived in history, and women's writing didn't. That's simply because they were inferior. Therefore, in the future, they should not be included only because they are women." Her statement may be representing other female voices that have sur-

vived in Japan's traditional academia. The reason for the male scholars' more liberal attitudes and female scholars' preoccupation with tradition is likely due to gender stereotypes: While men are allowed to be independent and ambitious, women are expected to be more traditional and conservative. Like those women writers of the early Romantic period who were accepted to society by their proper feminine topics, Japanese female professors also (un)consciously chose the proper field of study of traditional canons and are repeating it in their classroom.

The Romantic Women Writers Questionnaire uncovers that the Japanese English curriculum is still influenced by Western cultural colonialism as well as Japanese gender tradition sustained by "proper women" teachers, but the recent scholarship in the west and the tradition of Japanese literature throw light on the future of English literature in Japan. Japan's translation oriented pedagogy has long been criticized and seems to be coming to an end, and more students are exposed to and interested in women's literature than ever before. Furthermore, a series of publications of anthologies and textbooks on women's literature in the U.K. and U.S. can become another voice of, this time, a Goddess to Japanese scholars who have traditionally welcomed western teachings.

In the nineteenth century, Japanese could have accepted British women writers as readily as they did in their own national literature, if their English teachers had introduced women writers along with male writers. It is because Japanese literary tradition was born in the women's sphere with the invention of Japanese calligraphy, while men regarded it as "sissy" and followed Chinese characters to pursue careers in the public sphere such as trade and politics. As a result, women writers produced quite a few masterpieces, and critics have admired women's contribution to literary history. For example, Lady Murasaki

who wrote *The Tale of Genji* in the late tenth century, is known as not only Japan's, but also the world's, first woman writer. Komachi Ono has been as much appreciated as Lady Murasaki. In fact, one nobleman, a contemporary of Lady Murasaki, confessed in his well-known essay that it was embarrassing for a man like him to write something that should belong to women. Thus, like women writers in Japan's national literature, women writers in English literature will likely be accepted as they become more familiar to Japanese readers and analyzed more frequently at an academic level.

A great number of Japanese students are losing interest in English literature because of the translation method. The translation industry is also accelerating the situation because more translation is published in Japan than in any other country: The bestsellers abroad are immediately translated into Japanese and often become available at bookstores within days after the original publication. Meanwhile, in the classroom, students are spending more time in translating English precisely line by line without discussing the overall messages of the text.

The social situation is also changing as the gender issue has become inevitably a hot topic. The introduction of women's literature can meet social expectations, though many English scholars of Japan still believe in "pure literature" and may frown at the politics involved in women's writings. In my classes on literature and films, more students are becoming aware of women's history and learning their political conditions and aestheticism. Some are seriously considering pursuing academic positions. They are realizing that literature is such a practical field of study and can become a moving force of women's rights after graduation. In fact, at a recent one-day symposium on women and mass media at Hokkaido University, there were 800 applications for 300 seats. The circumstances are open to further development of the field, and I am

optimistic concerning Japan's future women's studies in literature.

Recent publications on women writers by British as well as American scholars will create a new standard in Japan and unbind the Japanese curriculum from its disgraceful tradition. First, it is because Japanese traditionally, since the nineteenth century, have followed the western standard rather obediently and tend to be more confident with the foreign authenticity than with their own ideas. Second, it's because professors, who have been eager to teach but unable to find a proper textbook and guidebook, can count on anthologies and other publications to use in the classroom. Japan's tradition of English pedagogy created by the nineteenth-century western standard can be improved again by the western standard of, this time, the twenty-first century.

In 1996 at the fifth annual Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers Conference roundtable session "Where Do We Go From Here? Reflections, Impressions, and Directions for the Future" at the University South Carolina, Paula R. Feldman roused us to pursue more negotiations for publishing and publicizing women's writings. I believe that was the turning point of our mission from rescuing neglected women writers to letting people listen to women's voices. After successful individual studies, the last decade of the twentieth century became the period of collecting women's writings. In fact, in addition to various reprints of the contemporary anthologies and Norton's anthologies, we experienced a series of new publications in the last five years: Jennifer Breen's *Women Romantic Poets 1785-1832: An Anthology* (1994), Andrew Ashfield's *Romantic Women Poets 1770-1838: An Anthology* (1995), Duncan Wu's *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology* (1997), Feldman's *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era* (1997), and Harriet Devine Jump's *Women's Writing of the Romantic Period 1789-1836: An Anthology* (1997). Furthermore, MLA included *Women Poets of the Romantic*

Period (1997) in its *Approaches to Teaching* series. In response to these publications of textbooks and guidebooks, the roundtable topic at the 1998 BWW Conference at the University of North Carolina was “Teaching Women Writers.” In a victorious mood concerning the twentieth century’s contribution to women’s studies, we discussed our task for the next century. It was to expand the reading audience and give them opportunities to enjoy and evaluate women’s literature.

As long as Japan’s tradition of innocent devotion to western literary standards since the nineteenth century continues, the introduction of new standard textbooks will be accepted rather willingly because Japan’s tradition of national literature has accepted women writers for centuries. Teachers, who have been willing but unable to teach what and how, would not be troubled because they can easily consult with these anthologies and guidebooks.

Japanese scholars have ignorantly suffered since the 1870s from the disease of cultural colonialism in English literature, as they could only listen to the voice of male gods. Japanese scholars have been obedient to western literary criticism and spent generations passively absorbing the knowledge produced by the androcentric western canon makers. Since women’s studies appeared and became inevitable along with its political movement, many Japanese scholars are beginning to listen to the voices of female gods.

Unlike the nineteenth century, Japanese scholars and students are more aware of the rest of the world and are willing to be involved in these issues. Women’s literature is a great means to learn more about not only their history but of our postmodern world. Now that enough feminist anthologies and compelling guidebooks are available in English literature, Japanese scholars will not remain powerless, impotent, and apologetic to

their women's studies. On the contrary, the academism of Japan's English literature will rise and may produce a major critic who will lead the new scholarship in the twenty-first century. Like the 1998 conference concluded, we have at least offered a fair chance to the reading audience and are finally giving them a choice.

Appendix

Romantic Women Writers Questionnaire

Questions about you

Male Female Age:

Position: Professor, Asc. Prof., Ast. Prof. Instructor, Grad. Student,
Other ()

School: Co-ed, Men's, Women's, Junior Col., Community Col.,
Other ()

From what year to what year do you believe is the British Romantic Period?

Reason:

Currently, who and/or what in the Romantic period are you interested? If it is more than one, please circle the one that interests you most.

What do you think of the recent re-examination of the Romantic canons, or the so-called Big 6 (W. Blake, S. T. Coleridge, W. Wordsworth, Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley, J. Keats)? Please circle one that fits you best.

- a It is very desirable, and, in fact, I am one of these revisionists.
- b It is desirable, but I am not much interested.
- c I am confused by this movement and don't know what to do with it.
- d I am annoyed by this and think it gives negative influence on literary studies.
- e I am not interested at all, so I don't pay any attention to it.

Others:

What do you think of the rise of feminist criticism and of the Romantic women writers? Please circle one that fits you best.

- a It is very desirable, and, in fact, I am one of these revisionists.
- b It is desirable, but I am not much interested.

British Women Poets of the Romantic Period: Cultural Colonialism and Gender in Japan

- c I am confused by this movement and don't know what to do with it.
- d I am annoyed by this and think it gives negative influence on literary studies.
- e I am not interested at all, so I don't pay any attention to it.

Others:

What do you think of a probable change of the definition of "Romanticism" due to the recent rise of the Romantic women writers? Please circle one that fits you best.

- a It is very desirable, and, in fact, I am one of these revisionists.
- b It is desirable, but I am not much interested.
- c I am confused by this movement and don't know what to do with it.
- d I am annoyed by this and think it gives negative influence on literary studies.
- e I am not interested at all, so I don't pay any attention to it.

Others:

What key words do you use for your own definition of the Romantic Era? You can circle as many as you like.

US Independence, Industrial Revolution French Revolution, Rousseau
Locke, Classicism, Neoclassicism, British Empiricism, Nature,
Imagination, Organicism, Transcendentalism, Realism, Gothicism,
Feminist Movement, Religion, Symbolism, German Dialectic,
Enclosure Movement, Napoleonic Wars, 1832 Reform Bill

Others:

In order to explain the Romantic Era to your students, what keyword do you use? You can circle as many as you like.

US Independence, Industrial Revolution French Revolution, Rousseau
Locke, Classicism, Neoclassicism, British Empiricism, Nature,
Imagination, Organicism, Transcendentalism, Realism, Gothicism,
Feminist Movement, Religion, Symbolism, German Dialectic,
Enclosure Movement, Napoleonic Wars, 1832 Reform Bill

Others:

In your Romanticism class, are you referring only to the Big 6?

Yes

No

If "No," who have you used in the class?

Men Benjamin Bailey Thomas Lovell Beddoes Thomas Campbell

北大文学研究科紀要

Thomas Carlyle John Clare Charles Cowden Clarke George Crabbe
Thomas De Quincey Benjamine Robert Haydon William Hazlitt
Leigh Hunt Francis Jeffrey Charles Lamb Walter Savage Landor
J. G. Lockhart Thomas Moore Thomas Love Peacock
H. D. Rawnsley, Sir Walter Scott Robert Southey Sir Henry Taylor
Edward John Trelawny Richard Woodhouse
Others:

Women Harriet Abrams Jane Austen Joanna Baillie Anna Letitia Barbauld
Charlotte Brontë Emily Brontë Sara Coleridge Maria Edgeworth
Felicia Heman Lady Caroline Lamb Letitia Landon
Isabera Lickbarrow Janet Little Caroline Norton Henrietta O'Neill
Amelia Opie Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) Ann Radcliff
Mary Robinson Anna Sewards Mary B. Shelley Charlotte Smith
Jane Taylor Helen Maria Williams Mary Wollstonecraft
Dorothy Wordsworth
Others:

In the Romanticism studies, why do you think the women writers have been less appreciated than the Big 6? Please circle one that fits you best.

a Something arbitrary has prevented the women writers from a fair evaluation.
Explain:

b Traditional literary criticisms does/can not fairly evaluate women's writings.

c Women's literature is essentially a popular literature and cannot be regarded as objects of serious research.

d Women's writings are simply inferior to the works by the Big 6.

Others:

Do you think that the women writers should occupy the same position as the Big 6 in the future? Please circle one that fits you best.

Yes

No

If "Yes", why?

a Both men and women are equal, so the number should be equal.

b The women's writings are as good as men's in their theme and techniques.

c We need to teach history of women as there are more female students in literature classes.

British Women Poets of the Romantic Period: Cultural Colonialism and Gender in Japan

- d It is essential to know also about women, in order to understand any history.
- e Women's literature is superior to men's due to their unique themes and techniques.

Others:

If "No", why not?

- a Women's literature is, in general, inferior to men's.
- b The rise of women's literature is temporary and narrow-sighted due to the rise of the feminist movement and will not last long.
- c We already have enough Romantic writers.
- d Adding the women writers will deform the image of the Romanticism.
- e There are no needs.

Others:

In your curriculum, if asked to add five more to the Big 6, who will you choose?

Men Benjamin Bailey Thomas Lovell Beddoes Thomas Campbell
Thomas Carlyle John Clare Charles Cowden Clarke George Crabbe
Thomas De Quincey Benjamin Robert Haydon William Hazlitt
Leigh Hunt Francis Jeffrey Charles Lamb Walter Savage Landor
J. G. Lockhart Thomas Moore Thomas Love Peacock
H. D. Rawnsley, Sir Walter Scott Robert Southey Sir Henry Taylor
Edward John Trelawny Richard Woodhouse

Others:

Women Harriet Abrams Jane Austen Joanna Baillie Anna Letitia Barbauld
Charlotte Brontë Emily Brontë Sara Coleridge Maria Edgeworth
Felicia Heman Lady Caroline Lamb Letitia Landon
Isabera Lickbarrow Janet Little Caroline Norton Henrietta O'Neill
Amelia Opie Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) Ann Radcliff
Mary Robinson Anna Sewards Mary B. Shelley Charlotte Smith
Jane Taylor Helen Maria Williams Mary Wollstonecraft
Dorothy Wordsworth

Others:

Do you have students who write theses or dissertations on the women writers of the Romantic Era?

北大文学研究科紀要

Yes

No

If “Yes”, how many and on whom?

Any comments?

Thank you very much for your time and effort in answering these questions. I hope this study will give us a chance to find our direction. I would also like to ask you a favor, if it is ok, of writing your name and address for further study.

Name:

School:

Address:

Phone Number:

Fax Number:

E-Mail Address: