

Kanbara Ariake and the Cult of Rossetti in Japan

Over the past ten years Dante Gabriel Rossetti has become known through several exhibitions and publications in Japan. However, there was a period when Rossetti's name was uttered with much more affection than nowadays: in the late Meiji Era a craze - the "cult of Rossetti" - prevailed among certain members of the literary youth, who would read the poems of Rossetti and harbor a romantic and mysterious dream of love. The goal of this paper is to trace the process of Rossetti's reception in Japan and inquire into Rossetti's influence on modern Japanese poetry at the turn of the century, particularly through the work of Kanbara Ariake (1876-1952), a poet and a leading figure in the promulgation of the cult of Rossetti.

The first introduction of Rossetti to Japan was more than one hundred years ago. It was in May 1891 that Rossetti was first referred to as "a Neo-Romantic poet" in a review of contemporary English literature in the literary journal *Shigaramizôshi* (Mori, 33). The review was written by the founder of the magazine, Mori Ôgai, who was a well-known novelist and one of the great authorities on modern European literature. But it seems the piece was too slight to attract many readers' attention. Following this, a longer article by "U. K." (Kaneko Umaji) appeared in another influential journal, the *Waseda-Bungaku*, in December 1893 (70-74). Although it was surely the first detailed account of Rossetti, it was merely an abridged translation of an article by W. Basil Worsfold entitled "The Poetry of D. G. Rossetti." Thus, the introduction of the Pre-Raphaelites to Japan began with that of Rossetti as a poet, and the notion that the Pre-Raphaelites were exclusively represented by the poet remained widely accepted throughout the Meiji era.

Anyone who studies the cult of Rossetti in the late Meiji era will be obliged to take into consideration the activity of the Bungakukai [Literary World] circle, which played an important part in the development of the cult. The *Bungakukai*, a literary coterie magazine with a strong inclination to Romanticism, was first published in January 1893, and

most of the members - Hoshino Tenchi, Hoshino Sekiei, Kitamura Tôkoku, Hirata Tokuboku, Shimazaki Tôson, Shûkotsu Togawa, and Baba Kochô - were enthusiastic and young (in their early twenties).

At first this coterie showed a strongly politico-religious tinge under the leadership of Kitamura Tôkoku (1868-1894). However, after he committed suicide in May 1894, the group redirected its interests toward the study of the Renaissance and gradually focused on art and literature, keeping aloof from the troubles of the real world. They were led in this by Hirata Tokuboku (1873-1943) and Ueda Bin (1874-1916), a member who joined in the spring of 1894. These two young dilettantes were ardent admirers of Walter Pater.

Shimazaki Tôson (1872-1943), who later became known as a great poet and novelist, recollected the turning point of the Bungakukai as follows (*Early Spring*, 119):

After we lamented Kitamura's untimely death, it seems to me, it was a natural course of events that we kept ourselves away from the Christian agony and were attracted to the Arts of the Renaissance. The discovery of the Renaissance was a matter of great importance to us all. Kitamura died without knowing the epoch. . . . It was also in this epoch that we had a heated argument over the poetry of Shelley, Keats, and Rossetti.

At the end of 1894 the coterie eagerly began to read Rossetti's poems in a volume Hirata had obtained. It may have been the essay on Rossetti in *Appreciations* by Walter Pater that led them to the poet. Their interest in the Renaissance naturally led them to Pater's famous work *The Renaissance*, and through his writings they may have encountered Rossetti. Furthermore, as Hirata, Ueda, and Togawa were competing with one another in introducing Dante Alighieri to the Japanese reading public from