

“Presenting lovely dreams to every child in Japan”

In 2008, “Anne of Green Gables” celebrates its 100th anniversary as a noted worldwide written masterpiece. In Japan, Beginning with the NHK TV program this year, we held many events to celebrate this anniversary. This is because we also have many avid readers of this novel in Japan.



Green Gables house

Why has this novel come to be read so widely in Japan? To me, many factors are involved as follows.

First, I believe the main reason for the novel’s popularity is because of the superiority of the novel itself. Anne’s charming character fascinates everyone. In the story, through nursing Anne, the elder brother Matthew and the younger sister

Marrila include much spiritual and humanistic value. The splendid description of the beautiful sceneries of Prince Edward Island is also incredible.

Secondly, I found the novel to be wonderfully translated. Mrs. Hanako Muraoka translated her masterpiece for the first time into Japanese, a short while after the Pacific War. During the war, Mrs. Muraoka was given a book titled “Anne of Green Gables” by a missionary from Canada. Subsequently, she devoted her life to



translating the book into Japanese. Because of the light control law enacted by military government during the war, Muraoka did her work under a dim light, taking great care not to let the light outside of the house. When she heard the warning sirens that informed the enemy’s attack, Mrs. Muraoka would close all the doors and windows of her house.

It was a time when English was regarded as the “enemy’s language” in Japan. But Muraoka’s strong will to present dreams to children in Japan made her proceed with her translation regardless of great risks. She could be discovered and tried for treason. Thanks to her indomitable courage, this gate of literature was opened. The Japanese version of the book was first published in 1952, just a few years after the end of the war.

Thirdly, in addition of the translation itself being surely superb, the most outstanding of all, I believe, was the title, "Akage no An"(means "Anne of red(orange) hair". If it had been a straight literal translation, I believe, titles such as "Anne of Green Gables" or "Anne who lived in a house of green span of" would never have attracted as many Japanese readers. It is said that Muraoka herself even considered several other translations of the title like "A girl beside the window", "A girl who leans to a window" and "A dreaming girl".

Muraoka's daughter was a student at a university then. She recommended to her mother strongly by saying, " "Akage no An" is a perfect title for our Japanese readers. Please use it!" Incidentally, the word "Akage" could also mean "blond hair" (back then, girls who had black hair admired blond hair as fashionable). The sound of "AKAGE NO AN", with the repetition of the "A" vowel sound, to me, is quite melodious.

Everyone is attracted by Anne's courage.

In the novel, Anne has the heart of a virgin. She is one who adores beautiful things. Although she experiences innumerable failures she paves her way positively and never loses hope. Anne makes the most use of her imaginative power. The readers are much impressed and encouraged by her.



To me, the final chapter is the prime of this novel. Anne, after competing with numerous other applicants, is able to get a scholarship to enter the university. It promises that her future would be opened so vastly and



successfully. However, unexpectedly, Matthew dies suddenly and Marrila, Matthew's sister, is faced with a severe financial hardship. Despite of the difficult decision, Anne makes up her mind to stay at the village to support Marrila, giving up the university, to reciprocate for brothers who had brought her up with great cordial affection.

Montgomery's house

We cannot foresee our future. Even though, at times, our life seems favorable, it is inevitable that we may unexpectedly face some incident or obstacle on our way. We may run into a snag at a corner or come to a crossroad. On such occasions, "Let's pave our way, taking everything positively, just like Anne...". I believe this is the message that

Montgomery, the author of this novel, wants to convey to every reader.

Other episodes of Anne's encounters also attract our Japanese readers. For example, Anne hits Gilbert on the head with a Sekiban, a small handy blackboard made of stone. (Gilbert is in her class at the primary school and teases her, calling "Carrot, carrot", pointing at her red hair.) This Sekiban incident reminds me of my school days just after the war, when scarcity was rampant in every field in Japan.

Once, Anne climbs to the roof of the house of her closest friend, Diana, to show her friends around how daring she is. Anne ends up falling down from the roof and breaks her leg. This story is very much similar to "Bocchan", one of the masterpieces of Soseki Natsume, a noted Japanese novelist who was read by many. Bocchan was a young middle school teacher. He was so competitive that he dared to jump down from the second floor of the school to show his "courage" and broke his legs. This likeliness makes us feel familiar with the work of Anne of Green Gables.

I believe that Anne of Green Gables should be read not only by young girls but also by middle-aged women, men, elderly people and, as a matter of fact, all adults. To me, it's worthwhile to read it the first time or to reread it again and again.

We had dreams when we were children. We took challenges to achieve dreams when



Beautiful scenery of Prince Edward Island

we were young. However, when we become old, we are likely to lose these dreams. I see people in their later years whither not only in their bodies but also in their minds. Anne can return these people towards a fresher sense of spirit and a more exciting youthful heart. I pray many of us will make reading "Akage no An" a rejuvenating experience as I did.