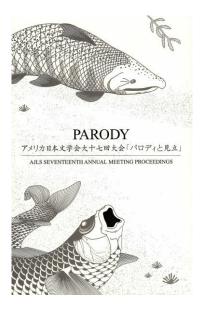
"Playing and Parodying the Detective in Sōseki's *Higan-sugi made*"

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PLAYING AND PARODYING THE DETECTIVE IN SŌSEKI'S HIGAN-SUGI MADE

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Like the other two novels of the so-called "late trilogy" that would follow it, Natsume Soseki's 1912 novel Higan-sugi made is composed of a series of linked short stories. The novel's first three sections are brought to us by a slightly ironic and omniscient third-person narrator and center around a naïve and unremarkable young man named Keitarō. Nothing much happens to Keitaro himself, but he does hear many fascinating stories, first from his neighbor Morimoto, a shady but likeable character who regales Keitarō with the tales of his adventures abroad in Hokkaido, Manchuria and other far-flung locales, and then from his college friend Sunaga, who tells Keitarō the story of his inner struggles and unsuccessful love life. Sunaga's first-person narrative and a supplemental account by his uncle Matsumoto make up the novel's last two sections. And just before these last sections is inserted a short section called "A Rainy Day" that recounts the effect on the family of Sunaga's uncle Taguchi of the sudden death of a baby girl. The general narrative arc of the novel, to the extent that there is one, is thus from the outside in, from the exterior drama of colonial expansion to the domestic interior of the family, and finally to the individualized drama of the psyche. As such it provides a quite comprehensive account, one could say, of the full spectrum of Japanese modernity. At the same time, by employing a number of different narrative strategies within the same text, Higan-sugi made works to dialogize and relativize each of these different points on the spectrum.

And yet despite this manifest complexity of the work as a whole, *Higan-sugi made* suffered for a long time from a decidedly lopsided critical reception. Until well into the postwar period most critics held the last two chapters, in which Sunaga and Matsumoto tell Sunaga's depressing story, to be the true meat of the novel. The first half, which centered on Keitarō, was considered fluff or entertainment at best, and the chapter on the death of the child Yuiko was mostly ignored. This trend was set early on by readers like Sōseki's disciple Komiya Toyotaka, who wrote in his introduction to the novel in the 1936 *Sōseki zenshū* that there was no reason to say anything at all about Keitarō's character as it

emerges in the first three sections.¹ As for the fourth ("A Rainy Day") he literally said nothing at all. More determinative still, perhaps, was Suzuki Miekichi's decision in 1914 to anthologize "Sunaga no hanashi" as a stand-alone short story in his *Gendai meisaku zenshū*.²

This privileging of Sunaga's story by the bundan is perhaps not surprising given that he is a classic example of that perennial favorite in modern Japanese literature: the alienated intellectual withdrawn into a punishing interiority. He belongs to the same type as Ichirō in Kōjin and Sensei in Kokoro, the two novels that would complete the late trilogy. Ichirō and Sensei also appear most vividly in the latter sections of their respective novels and they have also tended to claim the attention of critics, at the expense of the novels' earlier sections. Meanwhile the relative dearth of critical attention given to the superficial and "romantic" Keitarō also afflicts his two successors: Jirō (Ichirō's younger brother) in Kōjin and Watakushi, the young student who befriends Sensei in Kokoro. Just as a similarly exclusive focus on "Sensei's Testament" in readings of Kokoro has tended, as Komori Yoichi has written, to "cut the lifeline" $(seimei no sen)^3$ of the novel by depriving it of its narrative complexity and rendering it unnecessarily morbid, this privileging of Sunaga's story over the rest of the novel has put an undue emphasis on a sort of fetishized intellectual interiority and obscured the way the novel as a whole works to relativize and critique the whole gamut of modern subjectivity. Sunaga's story, like Sensei's letter, does not and can not stand alone. To make them do so (as have so many anthologizers and textbook editors as well as critics), is to miss their dialogic engagement with the rest of the novels in which they are so carefully embedded. The great irony of this unfortunate tendency to rip these narratives out of their contexts is that it actually aggravates in formal terms the very isolation that afflicts their protagonists. Sunaga, Ichirō, and Sensei are made even more alone and their stories much more intransigent when their accounts are torn from the bindings of the novels in which they belong.

In the case of *Higan Sugi Made*, the bleak and lonely story of Sunaga is brought to us by the relatively happy-go-lucky Keitarō. He is Sunaga's interlocutor and sits silently listening for most of the hundred or so pages in which the latter narrates his life. Because we have been following Keitarō around since the beginning of the novel, we are

¹ Komiya 1990, p. 11.

² See Nagao 1993, p. 140.

³ Komori 1988, p. 420.

accustomed to his wide-eyed view of the world, his fondness for stories, and his almost cat-like curiosity, and inevitably these characteristics of the novel's first focalizer have "primed" us as listeners to Sunaga's story. At the same time, we sense that Keitarō himself is being transformed to some degree by what he is hearing along with us. Thus Sunaga's story is not his alone. It is also part of a conversation with Keitarō and a continuation of the reader's encounter with the world of the novel. This dialogism is part of what distinguishes the late trilogy from the earlier one. *Sanshirō, Sore Kara*, and *Mon* are all more "monologic" in that they employ a single omniscient narrator. Before that, in everything from *Wagahai wa neko de aru* to *Botchan, Kusamakura*, and *Kōfu*, Sōseki preferred first person narratives. But with *Higan-sugi made*, he begins to employ *multiple* narrative voices and novelistic techniques and to put them into dialogue with each other.

One of those techniques is the subject of my paper today: namely the parody of the detective novel included in the second section of *Higan Sugi Made*, titled "At the Streetcar Stop." In this section Sōseki cites and parodies the conventions of the detective novel in order to introduce the major theme of the book: the question of how we can know and understand the world and the people in it. The answer that *Higan-sugi made* gives to this question has several parts, which I will get to soon, but it is clear that "spying on people" is not one of them. By including early on in the novel a kind of parody of this activity, Sōseki shows us just how impoverished it is as a means of knowing the world. Here, in the first volume of the late trilogy, Sōseki begins to model in narrative form what he was increasingly coming to see as the irreducible plurality of the world. In doing so, he also offers a critique of the modern faith in *vision* as a privileged means of accessing the truth. In the place of vision, he proposes *language*, and more specifically the dialogism of narrative.

Tagawa Keitarō, a recent college graduate, is unable to find work and asks for help from a certain Mr. Taguchi, a successful businessman and the uncle of his friend Sunaga. Keitarō has earlier told Sunaga that detective work was something that would interest him, although, as we will see later, he is not without some ambivalence about the profession. Perhaps because of this, Taguchi decides to ask Keitarō to "audition" for a job by playing detective. He writes Keitarō a letter explaining what he wants Keitarō to do. The letter is "written in simple words and contain[ing] no more information than was necessary for the purpose" and the narration gives us its content indirectly in the following terms.

"It stated that between four and five that very day a man about forty years old would alight at Ogawamachi from a streetcar coming from the direction of Mita. He would be wearing a black fedora and a salt-and-pepper coat. He would be tall and lean with a longish face and a mole between his eyebrows. With these characteristics to guide him, Keitarō was to spy on the man's movements during the next two hours and then report on them. This was all the letter contained."⁴

Keitarō is thrilled with this opportunity and feels like "the hero playing a lead role in a detective story fraught with danger (92, 94)." For a short interval he wonders whether there is not something "base" about spying on other people, but he soon overcomes his hesitation and sets out to accomplish the task. The scene of Keitaro's detective work includes a lavishly detailed depiction of the street cars, electric lights, police boxes, shop windows, and other material manifestations of modernity that has, incidentally, proven a treasure trove for scholars of Meiji urbanism from Maeda Ai onwards.⁵ But while Soseki dutifully (and beautifully) describes this urban scene as it enters Keitaro's field of vision, our amateur detective is trying hard to focus on the task at hand. Which is to say he is trying hard to see past all this in order to spot his man. Thus while the detective work provides the occasion for some of the novel's most detailed descriptions of the urban environment, they are ultimately deprived of any meaning in the narrative. And Keitarō is soon distracted from his observations by the appearance of a young woman who incites his curiosity and speculation as to her marital status. When the man with the mole eventually does show up he takes this very woman to dinner at a Western restaurant, where Keitaro tails them. They part after the meal and Keitarō follows the man again but eventually loses him.

Later, in the section titled "The Report," Keitarō visits Taguchi to give an account of what he has seen. But unlike Sherlock Holmes, who could deduce virtually anything about a person from the most "trifling" detail, Keitarō is left with nothing more than scattered visual impressions. When Taguchi asks of the man with the mole "Who could he be? What do you guess him to be?" Keitarō is completely stumped.

⁴ Natsume 1985, p. 92. For the Japanese, see Natsume, 1994, p. 94. I will quote Ochiai and Goldstein's translation throughout. Henceforth page numbers will be given in the text, followed by the page number of the Japanese in Natsume, 1994. ⁵ See Maeda 1991 and Takagi 1991.

The image of the man in the black fedora dressed in his saltand-pepper cloak with its open collar vividly appeared before Keitarō's eyes. He had a clear vision of everything about the man—his appearance, his way of speaking, his walk—yet he could come out with no reply to Taguchi's question.

"I don't have the slightest idea (142 / 147)."

Keitarō is even less capable of reaching any conclusions for Taguchi about the woman.

"In rapid succession there welled to the surface of his memory the leather gloves, the white scarf, the beautiful smiling face, and the long coat, yet all these together did not provide him with enough evidence to reply (142-143 / 148)."

Keitarō's observations, he is finally forced to admit, "were of no practical value (145 / 152)." They "turned out as meager as if he had opened his hand before Taguchi's nose and had shown him a fistful of intangible grey cloud (140 / 146)." For a reader accustomed to reading detective fiction, and "led on" by Soseki up to this point, this comes as something a shock. The fedora hat and the mysterious woman have put us in the mood for some brilliant feat of raciocination. But all of Keitarō's careful observations have left us no wiser than we were before. What's more, it turns out that Taguchi knew both of these people quite well and was only pretending not to in order to test Keitaro. The woman is his own daughter Chiyoko and the man his brother-in-law Matsumoto (Sunaga's cousin and maternal uncle). Both of them will figure prominently in the narrative that follows, where we and Keitarō will learn a great deal about them. But this time it will be, as the narrator tells us in the novel's conclusion, "by way of his eardrum (315 / 346)" and not through the eye. In other words, Keitarō will hear stories about them. And we will listen along with him. Listening, the text seems to suggest, is the best way to learn about the world and the people in it. Visual evidence alone is worth precious little, particularly when it is collected by a detective.

It might be useful to compare for a moment the argument that Sōseki seems to be making about the relation between detectives and novelistic narrative to another well known treatment of the question, D. A. Miller's 1989 book, *The Novel and the Police*. In Miller's classically Foucauldian argument, the nineteenth-century novel itself is a device that helps

demarcate two spheres: the "world of delinquency" like that of Fagin's band in *Oliver Twist*, and the "middle-class world of private life" in which Oliver is happily ensconced by the end of that novel. Those who inhabit the former world are the proper objects of detectives and the penal system, while people like Oliver's benefactor Mr. Brownlow, occupying a world in which, "everything was so quiet, neat, and orderly; everybody was kind and gentle (6)" know how to police themselves. For Miller, the novel, like the middle class community it represents, always rejects the figure of the detective, with his crass intrusions and class-equalizing suspicions, in favor of the far more powerful and palatable "policing power…inscribed in the ordinary practices and institutions of the world from the start (47)."⁶

The "detective function" is also ultimately rejected in Higan Sugi Made and this rejection does have something to do with class. When Keitarō finally gets a good look at the man with the mole he notes that "the face possessed the dignity of a gentleman," and "there was something noble in his bearing." In short, "there was nothing in this gentleman's manner or physiognomy that justified his being spied upon." It is also at this point that Keitaro "...began to have renewed doubts about whether it was morally right to have accepted such a job (120 / 124)." That the question of the 'morality' of detective work should become an issue at this point in the text, when (or because) its object is a 'gentleman,' does suggest that Soseki's novel might be contributing to what Miller describes as the transfer of overt detective and policing functions away from the police themselves and into the hands of a selfpolicing, novel-reading middle-class. In fact the novel's abandonment of the detective novel form after the first three sections is similar to what Miller discusses paradigmatically in Wilkie Collins's, The Moonstone, in which the detective is literally fired half-way through and the crime is solved by the members of the community themselves, the denizens of a large country manor house. What Miller writes about this novel might apply directly to Higan Sugi Made. "The text, we have seen, invokes the norms of detective fiction precisely to rework and pass beyond them. It moves from a story of police action to a story of human relationships in less 'specialized' contexts (51)." But the difference, of course, is that in Higan Sugi Made there is no crime to be solved at all. And while Miller sees the "reworking" of the norms of detective fiction as a means of bringing the detective function (via the novel) into the last nooks and

⁶ Miller 1988, p. 47.

crannies of everyday life, Sōseki, I would argue, wants to banish the detective altogether. While Miller is invested in what Eve Sedgwick calls "...the gorgeous work of the Foucauldian paranoid, transforming the simultaneous chaoses of institutions into a consecutive, drop-dead elegant diagram of spiraling escapes and recaptures,"⁷ Sōseki is up to something very different. Not only does *Higan Sugi Made* reject the notion that visual evidence suffices to know the "truth" of a person or situation, but by employing multiple narrators and putting them into dialogue with each other it also rejects the possibility of a single, authoritative *narrative* account. While Miller argued that the nineteenth-century novel, with its omniscient narration and pretensions to totality, itself became a form of policing and discipline, Sōseki (or at least his texts) seems aware of this aspect of the novel and on the hunt for a mode of fiction that would contest it.

His first target of attack was the new faith in the "visual" that had emerged in late Meiji. Keitarō has already told Sunaga that he could never seriously contemplate being a detective. Here is his explanation why:

By the very nature of his profession a detective is a diver who plunges from the surface of society to its depths. Almost no other profession is so suitable for grabbing hold of human mysteries. ...Nevertheless, it is undeniable that his original purpose lies in disclosing the sins and crimes of others, that his profession is based on the malignant intention of trapping his subjects. Keitarō could not bring himself to do such inhumane actions. All he wanted was to study human beings—no, rather, to look with wonder and admiration at the incredible machinery of humanity operating in the darkess of night (41 / 39).

Keitarō wants to study human beings, but he does not want to spy on them. He wants to look "with wonder and admiration" rather than the paranoid and policing gaze of the detective. And he wants to do so, strangely enough, "in the darkness of night." Obviously one cannot see much in the dark, so what does it mean that Keitarō wants to watch "the incredible machinery of humanity" in the dark?

The time in which Soseki was writing this was a time of increased police repression and surveillance in the wake of the Great Treason

⁷ Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" 2003, p. 132.

incident of 1911, which was no doubt in the background of Keitaro's (and Soseki's) aversion to the work of the detective. At the same time, according to Shiba Shirō, this was also the moment when the electric light bulb was replacing the gas lamp. In 1910, Tokyo Dentō counted 500,000 electric lights in Tokyo. By 1913 that number had increased to 1.2 million, and the sudden increase is registered in Higan-sugi made by frequent descriptions of electric lights.⁸ In the very first scene of the novel the young Keitarō, whose face is flushed with the beer he has consumed out of boredom and frustration over not being able to find a job, covers over his embarrassment in front of the maid by joking that it is "too precious a color to keep this long under an electric lamp (10 / 3)." A couple of paragraphs later, when he wakes up late the next morning and meets his neighbor Morimoto in the public bath, the latter wonders aloud why Keitaro's light (denki) was not on the night before. And later when Keitarō first meets his friend Sunaga's uncle Taguchi, who he hopes will find him a job, Taguchi emerges onto the porch of his house "with the electric light behind [him so that] his features were not distinctly visible (58 / 57)."

As Shiba points out, Sōseki's preoccupation with lighting in *Higan* reflects not only the historical fact of the increasing popularity of electric lighting, but also a major shift in the way vision itself was understood and experienced. If the soft glow of a gas or oil lamp tended to draw people together in an enveloping halo, the electric bulb had an altogether harsher effect. As the three examples I cited above indicate, it could make one feel exposed, it was useful for surveillance, and it introduced a sharp subject/object distinction between the viewer and the viewed. While the electric light was of course welcomed by many in Japan as a sign of and a means to enlightenment (*bunmei*), for Sōseki the new regime of visuality it ushered in was not to be welcomed uncritically. Perhaps this is why Keitarō prefers to watch in the dark.

But there is also something here, I think, about narrative itself. Reading that last passage I was reminded of an essay by J. Hillis Miller that critiques the use of terms like "focalization" and "point of view" for the purpose of describing literary narrative. As visual metaphors, Miller argues, these terms "evade the fact that novels are made of words" and imply that "the object of narration is there to be seen. It is just a matter of getting it into focus."⁹ This way of thinking about narration would be

⁸ Shiba 1998, p. 79.

⁹ Miller 2005, p. 110.

much closer to that of the Japanese naturalists, who sought to represent reality "as it is" and relied heavily on the notion of a pre-existent reality that they would simply record like a camera taking a photograph. But Sōseki was acutely aware that, however "realistic" it might be, fictional narrative was fundamentally performative and not mimetic. And no matter how clearly an object might appear in one's vision, only language could make it manifest in fiction.

Miller cites Soseki's contemporary Henry James's preface to The Awkward Age, in which James describes the unusual narrative method he employed in that novel, famously eschewing his preferred method of "going behind," using free-indirect discourse to access the minds of his characters. In this novel James reported only what they said and did, after the manner of a "stage play." Miller begins by speculating that one reason he might have done this is that one of the novel's protagonists, who mysteriously refuses to marry a woman despite the promise of an impressive dowry, is actually "gay."¹⁰ If we were allowed inside his head, Miller reasons, his secret (and possibly James's own) would be revealed. But however tempting this neat correlation of content to narrative form might be, Miller goes on to argue that there are also plenty of indications in the text that Vanderbank is in fact as heterosexual as the next guy. The conclusion Miller reaches after all of this is to say that The Awkward Age is "undecidable" in meaning. "A set of incompatible and contradictory answers to the basic question of why Vanderbank refuses to marry Nanda, can be adduced. Each can be supported by citations, but no decisive evidence is given endorsing a choice among them."¹¹ Thus Miller's "detective work" on James and his novel turns out, like Keitaro's, not to yield any useful information. And this, of course, is the point.

Higan Sugi Made also includes a marriage that doesn't happen for mysterious reasons. The woman Keitarō has been spying on (whose name is Chiyoko) turns out to be not only the daughter of the man who sent him on this mission, but also the woman that his friend Sunaga was

¹⁰ The term "gay" is obviously anachronistic in this context, but Miller uses it nonetheless, perhaps in order to poke a little fun at what he seems to suggest is a problematically presentist reading of sexuality in James by gay critics eager to identify him as a "gay" author. Miller, of course, would not subscribe to such a reading, but neither is he interested in pursuing the question of sexuality in James's life and work beyond simply labeling it "undecidable." For a superb reading that takes sexuality in James seriously while steering clear of identitarian appropriation and rejection, see Sedgwick, "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James *the Art of the Novel*," 2003.

¹¹ Miller 2005, p. 134.

promised to marry from a very young age. Keitaro's first thoughts about her, as he spies on her and conceals himself behind a police box, are speculations over whether she is married or not. And the rest of the novel will turn out to be about why she does not end up marrying Sunaga. Sunaga claims that he will not make her happy because he has no interest in succeeding in the world and because he is too dark and brooding. But since the novel by this point has shifted to first-person narration, we only have Sunaga's word to go on for this. There are indications in the text, moreover, that suggest that Sunaga might actually be homosexual. He seems a bit too fixated on a certain Takagi, an outgoing sporty type who is his rival for Chiyoko. One passage reads, "I silently observed the welldeveloped muscles around his athletic shoulders, which moved vigorously with the swinging of his arms as he hurried down the steps (247 / 268)." Elsewhere he refers a little wistfully to "that robust physique of his (234 / 253)" And when they first meet, "at the moment I saw him, I envied his good looks (231 / 250)." Of course this almost homoerotic attention to Takagi's looks could also be explained simply as a result of his jealousy. Or it could be both at the same time. Although Chiyoko often seems exasperated with Sunaga and uninterested in marrying him, in places we get the sense that she really does love him, not the least in her furious outburst at the end of Sunaga's story where she calls him a coward. As Sato Izumi has pointed out, Chiyoko doesn't get a section of the novel in her own voice, but the way this first-person accusation closes Sunaga's story virtually negates all of his elaborate rationalizing and intellectualizing.¹² As a result we cannot help but wonder if Sunaga loved her after all but was just too much of a coward to say so or to compete for her.

So depending on which passages one focuses on, Sunaga might be either too much of a downer, too gay, or too cowardly to marry Chiyoko. But that is not all. The novel also includes an even more fundamental critique of the very notion of a spontaneous and intrinsic love for another person. More than any other of Sōseki's novels before it, *Higan Sugi Made* treats love and desire as a structural effect rather than an innate feeling. Sunaga experiences his love for Chiyoko as the product of the homosocial triangle, and his painful awareness of this makes it impossible for him to act.

¹² Satō 2002, p. 200.

During those two days I seem to have been enticed by a woman I had no intention of marrying. And as long as that Takagi kept hanging around the least bit in my sight, I was in real fear of being enticed to the very end against my will. I've already said I competing with him, but to prevent wasn't any misunderstanding, I'm repeating it again. I must assert that if the three of us in our triangular struggle went wild in a whirlpool of desire or love or tenderness, the force that would move me to act would certainly not be the spirit of competition trying to triumph over Takagi. I affirm that this is the same nervous reaction which makes one who looks down from a high tower feel, along with the sensation of awe, that he can't help but jump (253-254 / 275-276)."

This remarkable passage provides abundant evidence that Sunaga understands subjectivity and desire in almost proto-structuralist terms. It is not his innate desire, but the situation, or "structure" in which he is placed that makes Sunaga want to marry Chiyoko and compete with Takagi. While his constant, almost pedantic assertions that he is "not competing," that he "has no intention of marrying Chiyoko" sound in some respects like a classic case of denial, the passage also describes a person swept up into a narrative that is not in his control. Like Keitarō, who realizes only belatedly that the detective novel of which he thinks he is the protagonist is actually being written by someone else, Sunaga fears that he has been written into someone else's story. So it is not surprising when, a paragraph later, he compares the situation to a novel.

"I'm such a weakling I'm unable to bear a novel that fully incites its readers. And still less am I able to put into practice the actions in that novel. The moment I discovered my sentiments were turning into a kind of novel, I became astonished and returned to Tokyo (254 / 276)."

Later on Sunaga tells Keitarō about a novel by the Russian writer Andreev in which a man is driven to murder his rival for a woman out of jealousy. After a lengthy summary of this harrowing story, Sunaga says he found himself daydreaming about "taking a heavy paperweight and striking Takagi from the top of his skull to the bottom, all before Chiyoko's eyes (262 / 284)." But it is the *novel* and not his "actual" love or jealousy that spurs him onto this fantasy. He is afraid of being swayed by situations and by fictions, of losing his sense of who he *really* is. But

just as was the case with *The Awkward Age*, Sōseki's novel remains undecidable on this point and many others. Its dialogic narrative style precludes our knowing who Sunaga is and exactly what has prevented his marriage to Chiyoko. And it makes that unknowability palpable for the reader by enacting or performing it through multiple conflicting narratives. By juxtaposing Andreev's novel with Sunaga's Story and Chiyoko's accusation of cowardice, all on the tail of Keitarō's parodic detective work, the novel raises many more questions than it answers.

When James described his plan for *The Awkward Age*, he used the metaphor of "lamps" to describe the "occasions in the history and intercourse of the characters concerned" that would each light one aspect of "my situation, my subject in itself." While the subject itself would never come completely to light, James was happy with this because he saw something productive and performative in the Occasions, or the lamps, themselves. He writes, "I reveled in this notion of the Occasion as a thing by itself, really and completely a scenic thing, and could scarcely name it, crouching amid the thick arcana of my plan, with a large enough O."¹³

The enormous letter "O" that James imagines capping his Occasions suggests both the embracing self-sufficiency of fiction and the opening of the mouth to speak. It has its parallel in Sōseki's novel near the end, when we read that "all the knowledge and feeling Keitarō had recently received about life came by way of his eardrum (315 / 346)," from proceeding here and there among various people and listening to their tales. Keitarō's detective work, Sunaga's story, and all the other narratives in *Higan Sugi Made* are like James's Occasions, or lamps. Not electric lights, but soft glowing gas lamps. They do not add up to a single totality or illuminate a single truth. But in themselves and in their mutual reverberations they create a far richer and more complex world than any detective could uncover.

¹³ Quoted in Miller 2005, p. 127.

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