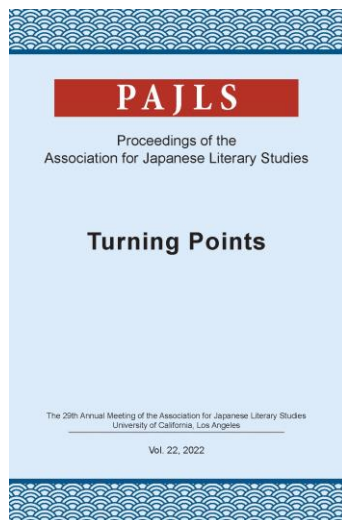


“Kunikida Doppo and the Phenomenological Turn
at the End of the Nineteenth Century: An Interface
between Empathetic Aesthetics and the
Modernization of Narrative Style”

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NARRATIVE STYLE**

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The early decades of the twentieth century saw theories of “empathy” flourishing in Japan. In a 1911 essay, Fukada Yasukazu, a scholar of aesthetics, described the state of his field as being in “the heyday of empathetic aesthetics.”² This was true for studies beyond the field of aesthetics, as well. The literary theory “New Naturalism (新自然主義 *shin-shizenshugi*)” coincided with the rise of this “empathetic” trend. At the center of this movement was Shimamura Hōgetsu, who took charge of reestablishing the literary magazine *Waseda bungaku* in January 1906. Hōgetsu had originally specialized in aesthetics. This experience likely determined the characteristics of his concept of “New Naturalism.” This paper will explore traces of Hōgetsu’s “New Naturalism” in works by Kunikida Doppo and Natsume Sōseki.

In her 2014 book *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism*, Meghan Marie Hammond identifies the shift toward modernism in England around the turn of the century as a change in interest from the morality of sympathy in Victorian novels to the aesthetics of empathy. Hammond does not cite examples from Japanese literature, but Japan was also shifting towards empathetic modernism in the same period. Aesthetics of empathy appeared in various forms in Japan-specific contexts from the late 1890s to the 1910s. This paper will argue that Kunikida Doppo was the author at the starting point of this paradigm in Japan.

Generally speaking, aesthetic “empathy” should be distinguished from “sympathy.” Sympathy for others is a moral attitude. It is not difficult to imagine the importance of sympathy in the nineteenth century, against the background of colonial expansion, increasing immigration, and the weakening of the class system. Empathy, on the other hand, is a kind of theory of subject-object identification. It is a fusional relation between the self and the other person, an aesthetic experience of sensing the other. I

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² Fukada Yasukazu, “Kanjiō inyū bigaku ni tsuite” 感情移入美学に就て (On Empathetic Aesthetics), *Gei bun* 2, no. 3 (Mar. 1911): 1–28.

assume that the social background of the radical desire to dissolve the social hierarchy in the late nineteenth century allowed for these empathic discourses to develop.

The German word *Einfühlung*, which means “to feel oneself into,” appeared in an 1873 article by Robert Vischer and was formulated as a concept by Theodor Lipps in Germany at the end of the nineteenth century. The English term “empathy” was coined by Edward Titchener in 1909. It did not enter Japan in the same period, but *Einfühlung*—which translated roughly into “感情移入 (*kanjō inyū*, ‘feeling-into’)” or more simply “同情 (*dōjō*, ‘fellow-feeling’)” in Japanese—circulated in Japan during the early twentieth century. Although the German term is not strictly equivalent to empathy, I will use the English word in this paper for convenience.

Hōgetsu formulated his theory of “New Naturalism” in 1908. However, Hōgetsu’s argument is complex,³ so I will return to it after first giving a clear literary example that will help us understand his argument. In this case, we can look to the literary theory of Tayama Katai, who was a close friend of Doppo from early on. Katai never mentioned “empathetic aesthetics,” but the structure of his idea bears some resemblance to that of Hōgetsu.

Katai’s 1911 essay—titled in Japanese “描写論 (*Byōsha ron*)”—would normally be translated as “Theory of Description” in English. Katai, however, first argues that we should not confuse the term “記述 (*kijutsu*)” with “描写 (*byōsha*),” which he says should be translated as “painting” in English. The *kijutsu* aspect of a narrative is the subjectivity of the “author” (“narrator” in our terms), while the *byōsha* aspect consists of objective observation. The former is the narrator’s “explanatory” words. The latter is a simple, vivid reproduction of reality from the perspective of the narrator. In fact, this classification corresponds to the basics of narrative theory—the distinction between diegesis (narration) and mimesis (imitation). However, there is an additional third layer here which Katai considers the most important, the representation of subjective “sensations” as they are absorbed by the narrator’s senses. Katai gives the following examples. On the left side are examples of tedious “descriptions” found in newspaper articles, etc., and on the right side are sentences that he has corrected into a *byōsha* style.

梅が咲いている。	→	白く梅が見える。
Plum blossoms are in bloom.		I can <u>see</u> white plum blossoms.

³ Especially, “Shizenshugi no kachi” 自然主義の価値 (The Value of Naturalism), *Waseda bungaku* (May 1908): 1–29.

かれは雨戸を閉めた。 → 雨戸を閉める音が聞こえた。
 He closed the shutters. I heard the sound of the shutters closing.

波の音がした。 → 波の音が聞こえた。
 There was a sound of waves. I heard the sound of waves.

The point of difference is obvious, especially when translated into English. The verbs of perception, “to see” and “to hear,” plus the subject “I,” are added. That means the sentence becomes a *byōsha* style description by passing through the senses of the narrator. Katai likens this layer to impressionism in painting, describing it as “the feeling that the author’s entire subjectivity comes into concrete representation.”⁴ In other words, *byōsha* paints a world filled with “the mood of seeing phenomena as phenomena.”⁵

In his theory, the types of writing are only *kijutsu* and *byōsha*. However, there are three layers of the “world” to be represented: the subjective (主観的 *shukanteki*), the objective (客観的 *kyakkanteki*), and the affective (情緒的 *jōshoteki*); see Figure 1. This discrepancy drove the ambivalence between narration and representation, and a theoretical idiosyncrasy that informed the discourses of “empathy” at the time.

The objectification of the object, which is the shutting off of subjectivity, will create the empathic “feeling-into” experience. Two seemingly opposing mental forces, objectification and subjective feeling, appear simultaneously here, giving rise to a contradiction. Therefore, in Hōgetsu’s case, to deal with this confusion, he calls this objectivity “pure objectivity (純客観 *jun-kyakkan*),”⁶ separating it from ordinary objectivity.

Hōgetsu argues in his 1908 essay “A Line Between Art and the Lived World” that the author (or narrator) must first get away from the directness of “their own interest” in the object.⁷ Drawing from Kantian aesthetics, this is nothing other than blocking the “will” with an attitude of “indifference.” In the phenomenal “world” of “pure objectivity” formed through this process, the agency of the “I” is erased, whereupon the subject of the other enters in its place.

⁴ Tayama Katai, “Byōsha ron” 描写論 (Theory of Description), *Waseda bungaku* (Apr. 1911): 107–124, 115.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 120, 123, 124.

⁶ The term derives directly from Schopenhauer.

⁷ Shimamura Hōgetsu, “Geijutsu to Jisseikatsu no aida ni yokotawaru issen” 芸術と実生活の界に横たはる一線 (A Line Between Art and the Lived World), *Waseda bungaku* (Sept. 1908): 1–24.

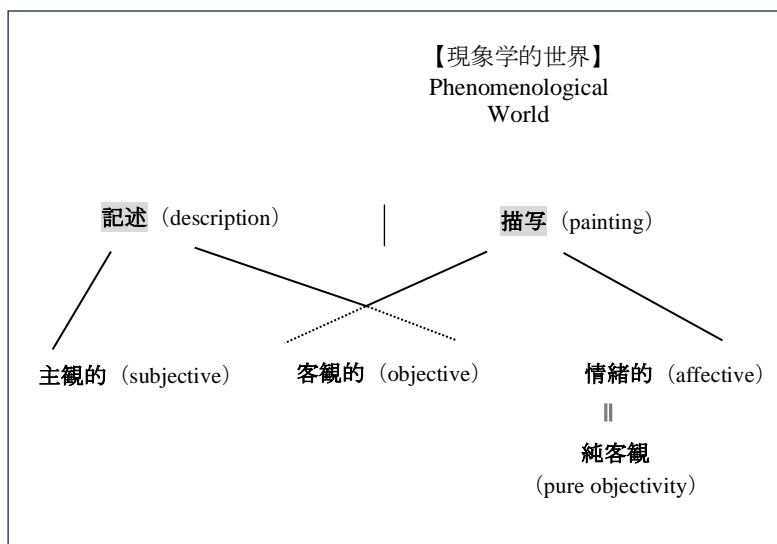


Figure 1

Without the initialization of perception through “indifference,” empathy will not be strong enough to achieve identification with the other. In order to transform “real-life” objects into “art,” it is essential to have an attitude of “looking at the object of representation from a distance.” Without this “distance,” however, Hōgetsu writes that “those who are sad simply weep, those who are angry immediately yell, and good literature and art will not be created.”⁸

This explanation brings to mind Natsume Sōseki’s essay “*Shaseibun* (写生文),” published in 1907. I would argue that Sōseki’s “sketching” (*shasei*) concept for novels was indeed a variant of a theory of empathy. Unlike the “sketches” of nature initiated by Masaoka Shiki, Sōseki’s theory focuses on the relationship between the “narrator” and the characters (other humans). In other words, what is at issue for Sōseki is the interpersonal relationship. Sōseki succinctly describes this characteristic as “the attitude of an adult looking at a small child.”⁹ Just because a child cries, it doesn’t make sense for adults to cry with them. The attitude of sketching is to keep a distance and treat the child with compassion and humor. Because it asserts “distance” here, it sounds as if it rejects empathy,

⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁹ Natsume Sōseki, “Shaseibun” (写生文), *Yomiuri Shinbun* (Jan. 20, 1907).

but if we compare it with Hōgetsu's theory, we can see that the structure is very similar. Sōseki emphasized that “sketching literature” was “something that has been born out of haiku” and by no means “imported.” He expressed significant pride by saying, “Among the masterpieces of the West, I cannot find anything that has been written with this attitude.”¹⁰ For Sōseki, who was familiar with Victorian literature, this “sketching” was a new, Japan-ized mode of empathy that should go beyond sympathetic narration.

This paper aims to show that this distinctive aesthetic can be traced back at least a decade further than “New Naturalism.” Kunikida Doppo's 1898 novel *Unforgettable People* (忘れえぬ人々 *Wasure enu hitobito*) is one text representative of this lineage. Karatani Kōjin argues in the first chapter of *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, titled “The Discovery of Landscape,” that Doppo's text embodied the decisive epistemological “inversion” of the 1890s, one that lead to a self-evident configuration where inner experience and outer world are separated.¹¹ However, it is ironic that Karatani's argument itself was based on a kind of “inversion,” or a “forgetting” of the possibility of perceiving Doppo's literature as the latest modernist literature at the time. I intend to re-invert Karatani's reading of Doppo's texts through the theory of “empathy.”

Hōgetsu published his first paper on aesthetics, “On the Nature of Aesthetic Consciousness,”¹² in late 1894. Although it is not a literary critique, the empathic framework that forms “New Naturalism” is all present. Just like he asserts that the key to aesthetics is “*dōjō*” (“fellow feeling”), the central topic of discussion is the experience of “*kanjō inyū*,” or “feeling-into.”

First, Hōgetsu divides *dōjō* into “compassion” (同悲の情 *dōhi no jō*) and “pity” (憐憫の情 *renbin no jō*). He then defines “true sympathy” (真同情 *shin dōjō*) and “quasi-sympathy” (準同情 *jun dōjō*)—or alternatively, “reactive sympathy” (反応的同情 *hannōteki dōjō*)—respectively; see Figure 2. The former corresponds to “empathy” and the latter to “sympathy.” In addition, about a decade later, he even renamed them *ikan* (移感) and *dōkan* (同感) respectively. This is because *dōjō* often inevitably means “sympathy” in the Japanese sense of the word. Incidentally,

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, trans. Brett de Bary (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1993), 22–25.

¹² “Shinbiteki ishiki no seishitsu o ronzu” 審美的意識の性質を論ず (On the Nature of Aesthetic Consciousness), *Waseda bungaku* (Sept. to Dec. 1894). This article was based on Hōgetsu's graduation thesis submitted to Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō (now Waseda University).

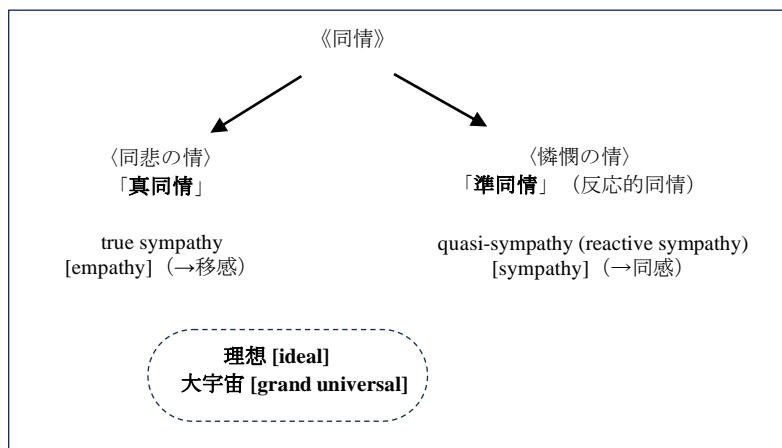


Figure 2

Hōgetsu does not reference Lipps, who had yet to become well-known in the field. Hōgetsu turned to historical names such as Schopenhauer or Kant to develop his theory, which implies that this trend was emerging on a global scale, regardless of the presence of Lipps or Volkelt who are directly associated with “empathetic aesthetics.”

As for this first paper by Hōgetsu, I will only mention the concept of the “ideal” (理想 *risō*) which disappears in his later theories. The point of intersection at which the “purely objective,” “selfless” feeling is congruent with that of the other represents “the essence of the thing that is the thing.”¹³ It is called the (absolute) “ideal” (or 大宇宙 *dai uchū*, ‘the grand universal’). The depth of the aesthetic pleasure of “empathy” depends on how much the “ideal” reveals itself. The “ideal” cannot appear unless the split between the “self” and the “other” is great. Therefore, it is more desirable to fuse with a human being than with nature because it is more difficult to overcome this distance. The “ideal” approximates the “grand universal” only through empathizing with a human being. However, a stranger is preferable to a close relative because morality prevents “true sympathy” from emerging in the case of known people. In addition, “sadness” in tragedy has the highest artistic value for the same reason. The aesthetic pleasure in tragedy is more remarkable because it requires enormous energy to keep a moral distance while feeling for the character. The misalignment of opposing mental forces makes the “ideal” more

¹³ *Ibid.*, 41–42 (Oct. 10, 1894)

apparent. It is important to note that this “ideal” is very similar to Doppo’s idea of “the grand nature” (大自然 *daishizen*).¹⁴ Doppo described this idea as the essence of his literature in his final essay in 1908,¹⁵ an essay where he expressed his strong agreement with Hōgetsu’s view of Wordsworth.¹⁶

Let me get back to *Unforgettable People*. To summarize the story, Otsu, an unknown literary man, and Akiyama, an unknown painter, meet at an inn and talk with each other throughout the night. Otsu tells Akiyama about the “unforgettable people” that he has written down as “sketches” during his travels. By “unforgettable people,” Otsu does not mean someone who should not be forgotten because they are someone to whom you feel indebted. It refers to total strangers imprinted in his mind when he suddenly encounters them on a trip or in his daily life. This “unforgettable person” is always present in a vast scene, like a small black figure, and cannot be remembered without the scene’s context. Otsu gives three examples of his own experience, but I would like to show only the first example cited by Karatani (edited here for length):

Before long the ship passed not fifteen hundred yards from the beach of a small island off to the right and I stepped to the rail, gazing absentmindedly at the island. There seemed to be no fields or houses, only groves of small, low pines scattered over the hillside. It was low tide. The damp surface of the hushed and deserted beach glistened in the sun, and now and then a long streak—perhaps the playing of little waves at the water’s edge—shone like a naked sword, then dissolved... And as I watched I caught sight of a lone figure on a sunlit beach. I could tell it was a man, not a woman or a child. He seemed to be picking things up repeatedly and putting them into a basket or pail. He would take two or three steps, squat down, and pick something up. I

¹⁴ The term itself seems to derive from “the subjectivity of the grand nature (大自然の主観 *daishizen no shukan*)” used by Tayama Katai in his 1901 essay “Shukan kyakkan no ben” 主観客観の弁 (Subject-Object Argument). However, the idea seems to have been inspired by Doppo’s view of literature in the first place.

¹⁵ “Fukashigi naru daishizen: wādzuwāsu no shizenshugi to yo” 不可思議なる大自然—ワーズワースの自然主義と余— (The Mysterious Grand Nature: Wordsworth’s Naturalism and Myself), *Waseda bungaku* (February 1908): 89–92.

¹⁶ Hōgetsu’s view of literary history was that Wordsworth was not a romanticist but essentially a naturalist writer, which leads to “New Naturalist” empathy. This may have been influenced somewhat by the twenty-five-year-old Sōseki’s lecture “The English Poet’s Idea of Mountains and Rivers,” which he delivered in January 1893. It is possible to argue that the young Sōseki was the starting point of the era of Japanese literary empathy.

watched carefully as he wandered along the deserted little beach beneath the hill. As the ship drew further away, the man's form became a black dot, and soon the beach, the hills, and the island all faded into the mist. Almost ten years have passed, and I have thought many times of this man at the edge of the island, the man whose face I never saw. He is one of those I cannot forget.¹⁷

In this example, we should immediately notice the people Otsu sketches are “strangers” with whom he has no connection, so there is no room for sympathy based on knowledge of their circumstances. Nevertheless, his mental identification with the people in question generates nostalgia and a sense of “sadness.” It is nothing but a variation on Hōgetsu’s empathic aesthetics. The fact that the feeling associated with this aesthetics is “sadness” can be confirmed by comparing Doppo’s short story “The Sadness of a Boy” (1901), which deals with the same subject matter. Moreover, Otsu, the central character of *Unforgettable People* who discovers the beauty of this new “empathy,” is a literary man, and his artistic sensibility surpasses that of the painter, Akiyama, who is known to be talented at visually “sketching” scenes. In other words, this is an unconscious artistic debate between two different types of artists. Doppo’s pride as a writer becomes evident in the novel’s ending, when Otsu completely forgets Akiyama at a later date.

It is important to emphasize that a sense of distance is still necessary for this “unforgettable” experience. All of the examples Otsu gives are set in Kyushu or Shikoku, far away from Tokyo, on a journey, and are taken from a medium or distant angle, as if captured in the frame of a wide-angle lens. What is the significance of this composition? By contrasting the finite, solitary, and powerless human being with nature, the narrator creates a sense of sadness and makes the person the target of empathy. It is precisely the moment when the “grand nature” (which is equal to Hōgetsu’s “ideal”) is perceived. The “grand nature” is not a landscape. It is almost a photographic beauty based on phenomenological reduction. From this point forward, a type of novel where a diegetic world appears as a whole phenomenon to the protagonist narrator gradually reached its zenith. Doppo ushered in narrative paradigm shifts and made way for various styles of novels from the early twentieth century to the Taishō period, such as plotless novels, dreaming novels, I-novels, and state-of-mind novels (心境小説 *shinkyō shōsetsu*).

¹⁷ This translation taken from Jay Rubin, “Five Stories by Kunikida Doppo,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 27, no. 3 (Autumn 1982), 273–341.

Finally, I would like to briefly mention that Doppo's obsession with "fellow feeling" (*dōjō*) had been consistently manifested since the beginning of his writing career. Doppo made his name as a writer during the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) as a military correspondent for the *Kokumin Shinbun* newspaper. His writings are imbued with *dōjō* for the Qing people. These writings are more tinged with moral sympathy than empathy, and the distance between him and the people makes it difficult to see them as anything more than a part of the "landscape." However, at least we can see that Doppo's fundamental nature was to "feel-with" those people he wrote about.

In *Unforgettable People*, Doppo took the method of aesthetic contemplation of nature that he had established in *Musashino* (published a few months earlier) and applied it to people who are simply passing by but not necessarily unhappy. From this point on, Doppo wrote about various ordinary people who deserved empathy. He also pioneered the style of I-novels, in which he depicted life as he experienced it. If the subject "I" writes about the object "I," the subject and the object will surely become one and the same, which will become perfect empathic literature. This may be in fact the reason why I-novels became mainstream in the Japanese literary world. It was born as a continuation of the pursuit of empathetic aesthetics in literature at the beginning of 20th century.

In this sense, *Unforgettable People* certainly occupies a decisive turning point in the history of modern literature, as pointed out by Karatani. It is important to remember, however, that the turning point is not as a mark of the Japanese literary world getting through "modernity" during its growth process, but as the beginning of the search for Japanese modernist methods to heal and dissolve the fault of "modernity" that failed to stop the separation of subject and object.