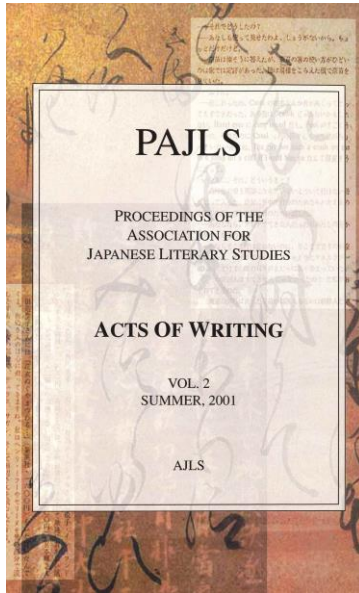


“Beyond the *Genbun Itchi* Movement: Natsume Sōseki’s Writing in *Kokoro*”

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BEYOND THE *GENBUN ITCHI* MOVEMENT:  
NATSUME SÔSEKI'S WRITING IN *KOKORO*

OHSAWA YOSHIHIRO

This paper aims at examining the striking “fictionality” of Natsume Sôseki (1867-1916)'s *Kokoro* (1914) by focusing on the artificiality of both style and structure foregrounded in the novel.<sup>1</sup>

CRITIQUE AGAINST SÔSEKI'S “ARTIFICIALITY”

Among the critiques of Sôseki's artificiality was that of Tanizaki Jun'ichirô (1886-1965), which indicated the weakness of Sôseki's style in *Mon* (*The Gate*, 1910) as follows:

I remember that somebody said, “Sôseki's style has become close to that of the Japan Naturalist School.” They are, however, grossly mistaken if they repeat the same opinion even after reading *Mon*. In *Mon*, “lies” are conspicuously depicted more often than in *And Then*. The “lies” are refined ideals which are cherished in the author's bosom but seem remote to us while they are at the same time the master's mature techniques.<sup>2</sup>

Because Tanizaki himself regarded fictionality as an indispensable element of literature, he did not find fault with the artificial style per se. Rather, he criticized Sôseki's stylistic immaturity in *Mon*, while praising the fictionality of *And Then* (1909):

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<sup>2</sup> Tanizaki, 1.

The master's novels are all constructs; however, in literature, great lies are privileged over small truths. *And Then* is, in this sense, a successful work while *Mon* is a failure.<sup>3</sup>

Such criticism of Sôseki's "artificiality" is found not only in Tanizaki's essays but also in many other articles written by Sôseki's contemporaries. Masamune Hakuchô (1879-1962), for example, expressed the following opinion in 1948, long after Sôseki's death.

If you compare Doppo [Kunikida Doppo 1871-1908] with Sôseki in their artistic abilities, Doppo, like other novelists of the Japan Naturalist School, lacks artistic creativity and does not rival Sôseki at all in versatility. Nevertheless, the sterile landscape in Doppo's works naturally represents his nonconstruct-oriented personality whereas Sôseki's works seem full of thin artificiality.<sup>4</sup>

Sôseki himself was deeply conscious of this type of criticism directed at his works and refuted the claim by saying that an author's main job is to create realistic characters and plausible plots, not to imitate the outside world.<sup>5</sup> Having studied European literature, Sôseki was able to understand, and subsequently relativize, the doctrine of mimesis in favor of his own literary style.

#### THE "UNNATURAL" IN *KOKORO*

Sôseki's reputation in contemporary Japan attests to the wisdom of his decision to relativize a mimetic style. His works have stood the test of time and enjoy a wide readership among both academics and the general public. Indeed, *Kokoro* remains one of the most popular literary works among young readers today who are still deeply moved by the force of the narration in *Kokoro*. Nonetheless, the narrative power

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Hakuchô, 385. Insertion mine.

<sup>5</sup> Sôseki, "Tayama Katai kun ni kotau," 161.

cannot totally erase the impression of an immature fictionality in the novel. Through a closer examination of the novel's structural fictionality and its literary effects, the reasons behind this impression will become clear.

One aspect of *Kokoro* which confuses modern readers is Sensei's attempt to conceal the motive for his suicide from his wife who, as a result of her ignorance, remains oblivious to his pain. Sensei asks the narrator "I" to remain silent regarding his intentions:

I want both the good and bad things in my past to serve as an example to others. But my wife is the one exception—I do not want her to know about any of this. My first wish is that her memory of me should be kept as unsullied as possible. So long as my wife is alive, I want you to keep everything I have told you a secret—even after I myself am dead.<sup>6</sup>

Reading this final passage, modern readers inevitably wonder why Sensei decides to withhold his feelings from his wife while revealing his innermost feelings to a stranger, the narrator "I," a young alumnus. Does Sensei betray his wife by keeping his secret and is it misogyny that compels him to keep her in the dark? Or, is there some sort of erotic connection between the two men which excludes the woman?

The problematic passage should not be interpreted from the perspective of a modern reader but from that of Sôseki's contemporaries. Sensei commits suicide, apparently using Nogi Maresuke (1849-1912)'s suicide as a model. Before deciding to commit suicide, Sensei jokingly says to his wife that he will sacrifice his life to the spirit of the Meiji era (233). Nogi's wife is named Shizuko, and Sensei's wife is Shizu (17). Given this information, the similarity between the two suicides becomes clear and the confusion surrounding Sensei's motives lessens.

Along with the notable similarity, differences between the two suicides are also relevant. General Nogi is a celebrity who has led a public life while Sensei is a recluse. History shows us that Nogi's *junshi* attracted widespread journalistic attention and became a public

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<sup>6</sup> Sôseki, *Kokoro*, trans. McClellan 1992, 235-36. English quotations from *Kokoro* hereafter will refer to this edition and will be noted parenthetically.

phenomenon while, in *Kokoro*, it seems that Sensei's *junshi* will sink into obscurity. Sensei himself does not intend to call others' attention to his death at all, and his only hope is to let the narrator "I" understand his true intentions. Finally, Nogi's wife followed her husband in committing suicide while, in *Kokoro*, Sensei does not share his intentions with his wife nor does he want her to follow the same course of action.

### SIMILAR AND DISSIMILAR PAIRINGS IN *KOKORO*

In *Kokoro*, characters and situations are carefully constructed so as to reflect and contrast one another. Take for example the lines drawn between the narrator's father and Emperor Meiji. The father suffers from kidney trouble and observes while reading a newspaper that His Majesty probably also shares his affliction (85). The narrator writes that his father is, at the last stage of his life, losing control of his body and is fated to die a miserable death: (Since the English translation deletes details of the situation, the original passage in Japanese is cited as follows.)

父は医者から安臥を命ぜられて以来、両便とも寝たま  
ま他の手で始末して貰っていた。潔癖な父は、最初の間  
こそ甚しくそれを忌み嫌ったが、身体が利かないので、  
已を得ずいやいや床の上で用を足した。それが病気の加  
減で頭がだんだん鈍くなるのか何だか、日を経るに従っ  
て、無精な排泄を意としないようになった。たまには蒲  
団や敷布を汚して、傍〔はた〕のものが眉を寄せるのに  
、当人は却って平気でいたりした。尤も尿の量は、病気  
の性質として、極めて少なくなった。<sup>7</sup>

Although His Majesty's death is not described in any way in the novel, logic dictates that Emperor Meiji almost certainly exhibited the same symptoms as the father when his life was about to end. But as in

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<sup>7</sup> Sôseki, *Kokoro* (Collected Works), 105. Insertion mine. The Chinese characters in quotations in Japanese are simplified and modern orthography is adopted. Japanese quotations from *Kokoro* hereafter will refer to this edition, unless otherwise specified, and will be noted parenthetically.

the case of General Nogi and Sensei, although the narrator's father and the Emperor meet similar ends, the two exist in different social classes.

Connections between other characters are equally complex. Not only is the dying father compared to the emperor but his relationship with his elder son is also contrasted to that of the narrator with Sensei, his spiritual father. At the same time as the narrator tries to honor his filial duty, he is mesmerized by Sensei. Psychologically the narrator and Sensei share spiritual affinities, while his older brother and biological father hold a more common sense attitude toward the world. They are critical of Sensei's apathy and apparent idleness. The narrator's father says to his son:

"Tell me," said my father, not without sarcasm, "why is it that he does nothing? One would think that such a man as he, whom you seem to respect so highly, would find some kind of employment."

What he really meant to say, it seemed to me, was that any man worth his salt would find some useful occupation, and that only a ne'er-do-well would be content to live in idleness. (90)

The older brother criticizes Sensei as follows:

To his way of thinking, this man that I so admiringly referred to as "Sensei" must necessarily be a man of some importance and reputation. He was inclined to imagine that Sensei was at the very least a university lecturer. In this, he was no different from my father. He found it impossible to believe, and so did my father, that a man who was not known and did nothing could amount to very much. But while my father was quick to assume that only those with no ability at all would live in idleness, my brother seemed to think that men who refused to make use of their talents were worthless characters. (109-110)

Although the elder brother and father are biologically related to the narrator "I," they are spiritually strangers to him. The estrangement causes the narrator to stop tending his dying father and go to Tokyo to learn what has happened to Sensei. By neglecting his filial duty, the

narrator's relationships will damage the relationships with other family members. This potential rupture with family reminds us of Sensei's break with his relatives in his native town.

### REMINISCENT NARRATION IN *KOKORO*

Just as the characters in *Kokoro* are connected to one another by both similarities and differences, so do the structural elements of the text both echo and contradict one another. While the narrative aims can be characterized as reminiscent, the intended audience shifts from many to one. *Kokoro* begins:

I always called him "Sensei." I shall therefore refer to him simply as "Sensei," and not by his real name. It is not because I consider it more discreet, but it is because I find it more natural that I do so. Whenever the memory of him comes back to me now, I find that I think of him as "Sensei" still. And with pen in hand, I cannot bring myself to write of him in any other way. (1)

The tone of the novel's beginning in the first and second parts is clearly one of reminiscence. The narrator "I" writes his own memories of Sensei at a point in time when Sensei is already dead. His thoughts are directed to the past, not to the future. We are reminded here that the word "memory" is frequently used in this novel. We cannot tell how much time has passed since Sensei's death, but the comment regarding his own psychological immaturity in the past makes us feel that Sensei's death is not a recent incident:

...I never felt any desire to part from Sensei. Indeed, each time I suffered a rebuff, I wished more than ever to push our friendship further. I thought that with greater intimacy, I would perhaps find in him those things that I looked for. I was very young, it is true. But I think that I would not have behaved quite so simply towards others. I did not understand then why it was that I should behave thus towards Sensei only. But now, when Sensei is dead, I am beginning to understand. (7)

Although the narrator “I” writes about his past and his memories of Sensei in the form of a memoir, we cannot infer the readers from the text. In contrast, Sensei clearly offers his last testament to the narrator “I” and explains his purpose behind recounting the events of his life as follows:

....You see, apart from any sense of obligation, there is the simple reason that I want to write about my past. Since my past was experienced only by me, I might be excused if I regarded it as my property, and mine alone. And is it not natural that I should want to give this thing, which is mine, to someone before I die? At least, that is how I feel. On the other hand, I would rather see it destroyed, with my life, than offer it to someone who does not want it. In truth, if there had not been such a person as you, my past would never have become known, even indirectly, to anyone. To you alone, then, among the millions of Japanese, I wish to tell my past. (121-22)

While general readers make up the target audience of the first and second parts, the narrator in Sensei’s testament addresses only the listener “I.” As in the second act of ghost Noh plays, only Sensei recounts his past while only “I” is expected to listen to him. Readers of *Kokoro* are supposed to overhear Sensei’s voice and be charmed by the power in the narration like the audience of Noh plays. If we compare the narration of the first and second parts with that of the third part, we can say that the latter is more centripetal than the former; that is to say, the power of the third narrative originates in the narrator “Sensei” and the narration itself is strongly under his magnetic force. We can find evidence for the increased power of the narrator in the decreasing frequency of direct quotations, as seen in the following passage:

Kは低い声で勉強かと聞きました。私は一寸調べものがあるのだと答えました。それでもKはまだその顔を私から放しません。同じ低い調子で一所に散歩をしないかというのです。私は少し待っていればしてもいいと答えました。彼は待っていると云った儘、すぐ私の前の空席に腰を卸しました。(中略)私は已を得ず読みかけた雑



誌を伏せて、立ち上がろうとしました。Kは落付き払っ  
てもう済んだのかと聞きます。私は何うでもいいのだと  
答えて、雑誌を返すと共に、Kと図書館を出ました。  
(199-200)

In comparison to the third part of *Kokoro*, the first and second parts are structured so as not to strongly draw our attention to the presence of the narrator. In a conversation involving Sensei, his wife, and the narrator "I," direct quotations are used to create a feeling of immediacy:

奥さんと先生の間には下のような会話が始まった。  
「珍しい事。私に呑めと仰しゃった事は滅多にないの  
にね」  
「御前は嫌だからさ。然したまには飲むといいよ。い  
い心持になるよ」  
「些ともならないわ。苦しいぎり。でも貴夫は大変  
御愉快そうね。少し御酒を召上ると」  
「時によると大変愉快になる。然し何時でもという訳  
には行かない」(20)

As seen in the passage above, the narrator plays the role of a shower rather than a teller. Another way of marking the difference between the parts is by describing the third as diegetic and the first and second as mimetic. The shift from mimesis to diegesis directs the reader's focus to the narrator "Sensei." Granted readers only hear Sensei's side of the story, but there is also a force in the narration to which readers feel themselves drawn. They are positioned to accept the sincerity of the testament as a whole, not to carefully question its truthfulness. As in the second act of ghost Noh plays, the second character in the narrative, that is, the narrator "I," and the readers are only expected to listen to the words of the first character, that is, Sensei. In reality, a person's statement can be corroborated by multiple witnesses in order to ensure its veracity. But in the novel, the sincerity of Sensei is guaranteed by an artificial narrative force.

The artificiality of the novel goes beyond its form. Sensei's story centers on the guilt he feels concerning K's suicide. Sensei tells the

story of his past after the schoolmate has been dead for a long time. Therefore, like the story told by the narrator "I," that of Sensei is grounded in memories. And the coincidence proceeds further in the narration. Sensei apparently prompts K to kill himself by saying that anyone who has no spiritual aspirations is an idiot (205). "I," in turn, seems to lead Sensei on a path towards death by asking Sensei to spread out his past like a picture scroll before the narrator's eyes (122). In the two stories, something in the relationships between the narrator and the principal characters trigger the latter's death. The structure of the work can be said to be like nested boxes. The narrator of the first and second part receives Sensei's last testament and reads the letter, in which readers can recognize similar but slightly different structures. The repetition of such structures and characterizations is thus remarkable in *Kokoro*.<sup>8</sup> The similarities and differences are either contextual or intratextual. The repetition makes us feel that this is an artistic—in a way, artificial—creation rather than a faithful reproduction of the actual world.

#### "TRANSLATIONESE" STYLE IN *KOKORO*

Artificiality in *Kokoro* does not end on the narrative and structural levels. The most notable example of artificiality can be found in the text's stylistic choices. In the following sentence from the second part of the novel, we see an example of "translationese" style:

私は繊維の強い包み紙を引き搔くように裂き破った。中から出たものは、縦横に引いた罫の中へ行儀よく書いた原稿様のものであった。そうして封じる便宜のために四つ折に畳まれてあった。私は癖のついた西洋紙を、逆に折り返して読み易いように平たくした。

私の心は此多量の紙と印気が、私に何事を語るのだろうかと思って驚いた。(114)

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<sup>8</sup> Linda Hutcheon (32) characterizes parody as repetition with difference. The aim of this paper is not, however, to indicate the parodicity in this novel by using this excessively comprehensive concept.

The stilted and false sound of the last sentence is caused by the use of an inanimate subject. This style was employed by many writers during the Meiji period and the strangeness still lingers today. Natsume Sôseki studied English literature in London and explored the traditional style in *Gubijinsô* (1907), but he made a different stylistic attempt in this work. His use of the “translationese” style was a conscious choice to make the sentence artificial. In the manuscript of *Kokoro* (MS 1), he first wrote: “I wondered what had happened.” Then he restructured the sentence by creating an inanimate subject that transformed a straightforward sentence into something strange.

Another example of “translationese” can be found in Sensei’s letter.

仕舞に私は凝として居られなくなりました。無理に凝としていれば、Kの部屋へ飛び込みたくなるのです。私は仕方なしに立って縁側へ出ました。其所から茶の間へ来て、何という目的もなく、鉄瓶の湯を湯呑に注いで一杯呑みました。それから玄関へ出ました。私はわざとKの室を回避するようにして、斯んな風に自分を往来の真中に見出したのです。(194)

The use of the pronoun *jibun* as a direct object evokes a feeling of strangeness in expression. Sôseki created the unnatural sentence by restructuring the first version (See MS 2). He first probably wrote: “Thus I intentionally made a detour round K’s room and went out to the street.” The second version is, however, more sophisticated and artificial: “By intentionally making a detour round K’s room, I came to find myself out in the middle of the street.” In English classes given in junior high schools in Japan, clumsy Japanese translations are sometimes unavoidable in the work of beginners, but students are gradually expected to refine their translations. They are constantly asked to revise sentences written in the translationese style to sound more natural. Sôseki, however, chooses to move in the opposite direction. He wants the sentence to appear more stylized.

A third illustration of his attempt to stylize his prose can be seen in the use of an adjectival phrase modifying the pronoun “I” in the first part of the novel:

しばらくして海の中で起き上がる様に姿勢を改めた先生は、「もう帰りませんか」と云って私を促がした。比較的強い体質を有った私は、もっと海の中で遊んでいたかった。(9)

He first begins to use “I” and Sensei as subjects without including modifying relative clauses, but seemingly on second thought he complicates the sentence (See MS 3). At first glance, the sentence appears to be revised according to a translationese style, but the accompaniment of “I” by a defining relative clause does not conform to European grammatical rules. The English translation clearly avoids depicting the strangeness in the Japanese source text by using a non-defining relative clause: I, who was young and hardy, wanted very much to stay (p. 6). One more example involving a defining relative clause preceding the pronoun “I” can be found in the second part:

その時兄が廊下伝いにはいって来て、一通の郵便を無言のまま私の手に渡した。空いた方の左手を出して、その郵便を受け取った私はすぐ不審を起した。(112-13)

Initially, Sôseki wrote the pronoun “I” as the first word of the sentence but restructured it by adding a defining relative clause to the subject (See MS 4). The reason that he avoids beginning with “I” is clear; in the original draft he begins three sentences out of four with the subject “I” and the repetition sounds clumsy to him. In the final version only the first sentence of the paragraph begins with “I.”

Sôseki’s decision to remove the monotonous repetition of “I” was a stylistic one, but the revision leaves us with an unnatural sounding text. Sôseki undoubtedly felt the strangeness, unnaturalness, and artificiality of expression but chose not to modify his prose further.

#### FOREGROUNDING LITERARINESS AND FICTIONALITY IN *KOKORO*

By way of conclusion, let us move to the final question: why did Sôseki decide to create those “unnatural” sentences? The question should be examined from the viewpoint of both literary and stylistic

history in Japan. As is well known, the Japan Naturalist School preferred to treat confessions as part of a literary genre. Many authors wrote about their lives in their literary works. Readers also expected to read about the innermost selves of novelists in their work. Working against the literary grain of the time, Sôseki wrote *Kokoro* as fiction, not as a faithful representation of his past life. The fictional nature necessarily requires artificiality both in form and content. Using these "unnatural" sentences, Sôseki managed to create a literary work which was not a biographical memoir. Rather than follow the model set by the Japanese Naturalists, he decided to forge his own style.

We can say, moreover, that Sôseki fully understood the difference between speaking and writing. In the 1880s the unbridgeable gap between spoken and written Japanese was keenly recognized and many writers attempted to create a colloquial Japanese style. Futabatei Shimei (1864-1909) managed to translate and write original work in colloquial Japanese. Numerous authors followed his lead and the *genbun itchi* movement was prevalent in Meiji Japan. In this movement, the creation of a new spoken and written Japanese was approached from several angles. Some tried to make spoken Japanese literary while others attempted to colloquialize written Japanese. Whatever position the author adopted, it was generally agreed that the dichotomy between the written and spoken language was not a sign of a healthy culture. Their efforts yielded the creation of a modern Japanese style. Sôseki began to write his works after the modern Japanese style had been realized through trial and error and was helped by the achievements of his literary precursors. Sôseki did not, however, simply identify writing with speaking. He intentionally differentiated between them by attempting to delve into the possibilities of several literary styles and employing artificial sentences and phrases. Sôseki was conscious of highlighting literariness in expression. His stylistic efforts certainly helped move beyond the *genbun itchi* movement to shape a new literariness in modern Japanese literature.

MS 1

MS 2

MS 3 is a vertical manuscript page. At the top, there is an illustration of a bird in flight within a rounded rectangular frame. Below this, the page is organized into a grid with three main columns. The rightmost column contains vertical text: 「し」, 「ば」, 「い」, 「し」, 「れ」, 「海」, 「中」, 「で」, 「ち」, 「が」, 「あ」. The middle column contains a large, dark, textured drawing of a wing or tail feather. The leftmost column contains vertical text: 「い」, 「だ」, 「ん」, 「じ」, 「ぶ」, 「る」, 「う」, 「つ」, 「う」, 「し」, 「ま」, 「ま」, 「う」, 「う」, 「ま」, 「は」. To the right of the grid, there are handwritten notes in vertical text: 「それは海の中を改めたい」と 「云え」. A bracket on the right side of the grid encompasses the middle and right columns.

MS 3

MS 4 is a vertical manuscript page. At the top, there is an illustration of a bird in flight within a rounded rectangular frame. Below this, the page is organized into a grid with three main columns. The rightmost column contains vertical text: 「は」, 「す」, 「い」, 「し」, 「ん」, 「は」, 「い」, 「し」, 「れ」, 「海」, 「中」, 「で」, 「ち」, 「が」, 「あ」. The middle column contains a large, dark, textured drawing of a fish. The leftmost column contains vertical text: 「い」, 「だ」, 「ん」, 「じ」, 「ぶ」, 「る」, 「う」, 「つ」, 「う」, 「し」, 「ま」, 「ま」, 「う」, 「う」, 「ま」, 「は」. To the right of the grid, there are several handwritten notes and drawings. A drawing of a fish is labeled 「さけ」. Another drawing is labeled 「あ」. A large vertical drawing is labeled 「は」, 「い」, 「し」, 「れ」, 「海」, 「中」, 「で」, 「ち」, 「が」, 「あ」. There are also several small circles and lines scattered around the text.

MS 4

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