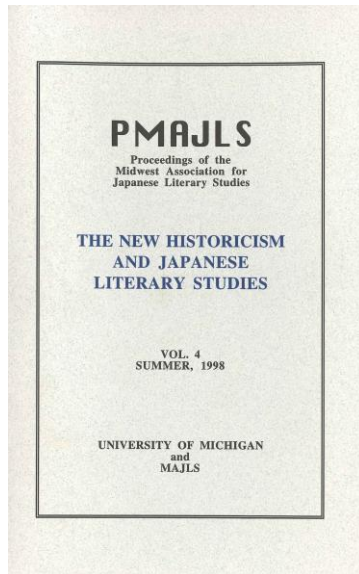


“The Depiction of Non-Japanese in Sōseki’s  
Novels”

Handa Atsuko

*Proceedings of the Midwest Association for  
Japanese Literary Studies* 4 (1998): 170–179.



*PMAJLS* 4:  
*The New Historicism and Japanese Literary Studies.*  
Ed. Eiji Sekine.

## **The Depiction of Non-Japanese in Sōseki's Novels:**

HANDA ATSUKO

Tokyo Gakugei University

### **Hampstead Heath**

First of all, I must explain the life and the cross-cultural experience that Sōseki Natsume had in London about 100 years ago, because the depiction of Non-Japanese in his novels is actually based on both of them.

Once I stayed in London for three years to teach Japanese. London is a lovely city in which one can enjoy many flowers from spring through summer, even though it is overcast for most of the year. Sōseki Natsume used to take walks in the parks. There are five huge parks in London: Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, Green Park, St. James Park, and Regent's Park. These parks are Royal Parks and open to the public now. The British people are famous for being the best gardeners and Sōseki was interested in English gardens. He wrote an essay about English gardens and we find some names of the parks in his diary.

According to his book "Theory of Literature"(1906), the life of London was never as enjoyable as he had expected in Japan. He wrote, "the two years I spent in London comprised the worst days of my life... I felt miserable, as if I were a tiny poodle among wild wolves." During the two years that Sōseki Natsume stayed in London, he felt relaxed and content only when he walked in the parks. Especially, Sōseki was very fond of walking in Hampstead Heath, which is located in the northern part of London. He wrote about this park in his diary twice (Nov. 23, 1900, and Jan. 10, 1901). Sōseki lived in West Hampstead for about one month. Later, searching for a new flat, Sōseki put an advertisement in the newspaper in which he named the northern

part around Hampstead as the place he wanted most to live again.

Hampstead is not a part of Central London, which has the aforementioned five Royal Parks. Now I should explain the geography of London a bit. London, which is officially called Greater London, consists of the City of London and its surrounding 32 boroughs. Greater London covers 610 square miles and the most important financial and political area is called Central London. Central London is also divided into the City, the West End, and South Bank.

Hampstead, as I have mentioned, is not a part of Central London but on the northern border of Greater London. Formerly known as the 'Hampstead Tube', the Northern Line of the underground links Central London and Hampstead. Golders Green, which is close to Hampstead on the same line, was advertised as an ideal place without urban problems that Londoners suffered from at that time, such as air pollution. This district was a favorite residential area for rich people, especially writers and musicians.

The River Thames runs through the middle of Central London, which is 50 feet above the river. Many historical buildings, including the Tower of London and the Houses of Parliament are clustered around both sides of the river. In other words, while Central London is geographically the lowest point of Greater London, it is also politically the highest. On the contrary, Hampstead is far from the highest political center of London but located physically on the highest point in Greater London. In fact, from Hampstead Heath, which is 430 feet high, you can enjoy a panoramic view of City, including the skyline of the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Sōseki Natsume went sightseeing at St. Paul's Cathedral on November 17th, 1900. The height of the dome is about 370 feet.

From Hampstead Heath, Sōseki saw the dome, which he had once looked up to as a symbolic building of modern Western culture, under his feet. In addition, he was flattered to meet a policeman who had visited Japan and spoke well of Japanese culture. Sōseki wrote in his diary entry of January 10th, 1901, that he had a very satisfying day.

### **Superiority and Inferiority Complex**

Sōseki had contradictory feelings: on one hand, as a Japanese elite who had been chosen by the Ministry of Education to go to England, and having graduated from the University of Tokyo, Sōseki had a superiority complex; on the other hand, he had an inferiority complex about the prosperity of Western culture, society and people. In his diary on January 5th, 1901, he said, "a short, peculiar and dirty man was approaching me, and then I realized it was myself in the mirror on the street."

As a marginal man who resided in the marginal place, Hampstead Heath, Sōseki Natsume could fairly face and accept both Western and Japanese culture. Having been different from other Japanese, Sōseki deeply sympathized with Chinese residents who lived in London at that time (see Sōseki's diary entry of March 15th, 1901), because they were also marginal people in the Western society. In fact, Sōseki was not free from prejudice toward Chinese people, as he depicts them inequitably in his novels "And Then"(1909) or "The Wayfarer"(1912).

Sōseki had been given a scholarship of 1800 yen per year (150 yen per month) from the Japanese Ministry of Education. 1800 yen, which was worth 180 pounds, was not a small amount of money; it was the same amount as the gross income of an upper-level government employee. So if Sōseki had wanted, he could have enjoyed his life in London without worrying about being short of money. However he spent more

than 5 pounds a month (60 pounds a year) on books. The amount he spent a month for books was the same amount of money that a blue-collar worker could earn per month. To buy and collect books was for him a point of pride as a scholar. Doing so reminded him of his elite status at home.

Sōseki Natsume seems to have been able to speak English very fluently. On his way to England, Sōseki was often praised for his English by an old English lady who was a prior acquaintance he happened to meet on the ship. In British society, one can identify the class and educational background of others through their pronunciation of English. The movie "My Fair Lady" is a famous film centered around this fact.

Sōseki was always checking his English pronunciation. Of course, he could not speak English as perfectly as native English speakers, and he was sometimes asked rude questions about his knowledge of English words. But rather than being fluent in English conversation, he was very familiar with English literature. He often discussed English literature with landladies. He looked for a landlord who had literary taste when he was looking for his fifth flat.

Sōseki did not enjoy his stay in England, however he wrote several novels which were based on his life and cross-cultural experience in England, of which "Tower of London"(1905) is a representative example.

After coming back to Japan, Sōseki often described in his novels the behavior and thinking of non-Japanese and the relationship between Western countries and Japan. In his works such as "I Am a Cat"(1905) and "Red Poppy"(1907), he criticized modern Japanese civilization. He despised Japanese who ignored the value of their culture and tried to imitate Western people. He also felt contempt for Western people who were arrogant about the prosperity of their countries.

### **Culture Shock in England**

As we can easily imagine, Sōseki Natsume suffered from significant culture shock in England. In addition, he had no place in which he felt he belonged because he had to move to new flats five times in one year, 1900-1901.

To speak more generally, cultural shock is said to have seven stages as follows (Kume, 1996):

Stage One (Honeymoon phase); everything seems new and wonderful, and people also seem kind to you.

Stage Two (Struggle phase); you face difficulties everywhere, feeling stress and fatigue. You try to overcome difficulties but it does not work.

Stage Three (Discord phase); the situation is getting worse and worse.

Stage Four (Adaptation phase); you can understand the new society and culture. You don't have many problems.

Stage Five (Rebound phase); you once again recognize the complication of culture.

Stage Six (Ambivalence phase); you are looking forward to going back to your country at the same time you do not want to leave your new friends and environment.

Stage Seven (Unexpected Shock phase); although you have come back home, you cannot adjust to your own culture. Sometimes you feel shocked by your own culture.

The extent of culture shock depends on one's personality. Some people can easily overcome this type of obstacle, while for others it takes more time to do so. Sōseki may have been impressed by the English life-style but his Honeymoon phase, which was the term when he stayed in Hampstead, was too short for him to enjoy.

After coming back to Japan, Sōseki felt nostalgia for his life in England. In "Tower of London", which is questionably an autobiography, he wrote, "First impressions are too precious to be destroyed by the second. It is best to visit the Tower only once." This narrator decided neither to visit there again nor to talk about it in order to maintain the romantic fantasy he had built on his first visit. Not only in the "Tower of London", but also other novels, which are based on his experience in London, Sōseki gathered materials from English history and the legend of King Arthur. These novels were written during his seventh stage Unexpected-shock.

### The Depiction of Non-Japanese

"An Index to Terms in the Literature of Sōseki Natsume"(1986) shows that he wrote more about Western people such as Europeans and Americans than he did about Asian people such as Chinese and Koreans. About five or six years after his return from England, Sōseki depicted non-Japanese more often. In addition, compared with his late literary works, the depiction of non-Japanese is very different.

In his novels, Sōseki rarely ever praised the Western people for their attitudes. One exception is "Sanshirō"(1908), in which the character Hirota sensei said that Western people were beautiful. In fact Sōseki often made fun of them and sometimes took a critical attitude toward them. In his early works, Western people, whose nationalities were not mentioned, were always opposed to the people of Eastern countries, especially Japanese. The roles of Western people in his novels were catalytic. He used them to stimulate discussion about modern civilization between Japanese argumentative characters.

The Western people in Sōseki's early novels were ordinary examples of the prosperity of modern civilization in the

twentieth century. The topic of Western civilization was an argument for argument's sake, so Sōseki probably did not represent the true image of Western people. Needless to say, such a depiction of non-Japanese might have been a stereotypical understanding of foreign cultures.

Let me give more examples. In the novel "Sanshirō", Sōseki said that American citizens had no qualms about demanding money from others. He thought that the Western countries had great economic power and Western people were economic animals, as the Japanese themselves are now called. In the novel "I Am a Cat", there appear some German couples who want to buy "Inrō (tobacco case) of gold lacquer which was not for sale at the exhibition hall. In this scene, a Japanese man who is too proud of his German language proficiency disgraces himself because he cannot understand their language. In another novel "And Then", a British ambassador loses his money on the Japanese stock market and puts pressure on the Japanese government to pay him back. These depictions may be connected to Sōseki's experience of being short of money when in England.

In his late works such as "To the Spring Equinox and Beyond" (1912), "Kokoro" (1914), and "Light and Darkness" (1916), we find it difficult to point out his criticisms of civilization. Sōseki selected from among his pleasant memories in England and expressed nostalgia for his two-year stay in London. Even bad memories changed to good ones for him. In "Light and Darkness", the two characters who have spent time in England, were looking back on their past and feeling nostalgic even about the old-fashioned double-decker buses. They also talk about a Japanese man who rode on a British man's shoulders in a crowd of people to look at the parade of the coronation of King Edward. His nickname is Monkey and this person reflects



the figure of Sōseki Natsume that he saw in the mirror on the street so many years before. In fact, Sōseki saw the funeral of Queen Victoria.

### Conclusion

Non-Japanese characters have had no leading roles in Japanese modern literature, so literary critics have not made them a focus of their studies. The hatred and the dissatisfactions that Sōseki felt toward Japanese and Western cultures gradually disappeared. An examination of the history of modern Japanese literature with reference to the novels of Sōseki Natsume offers important clues to the process of internationalization in Japan.

### Bibliography:

- Clout, Hugh (Ed.). "The Times, London History Atlas" Times Books, 1991
- Barker, Felix and Jackson, Peter. "London 2000 Years of a City and Its People" Cassell and Compan Ltd, 1974
- Hall, Michael and Harding, Julia (Eds.). "London Parks and Gardens" Ernest Frankl and The Pevensey Press, 1986
- Park, R.E. "Human Migration and the Marginal Man" American Journal of Sociology 33, 1928
- Mitchell, R. Brian (Ed.). "British Historical Statistics" Cambridge University Press, 1988
- Kume Teruyuki. 'Cultural Shock and the Process of Adaptation', Furuta Gyō, ed. "Cross Cultural Communication" Yūhikakusensho, 1996
- 久米昭元「カルチャーショックと適応過程」(吉田暁監修『異文化コミュニケーション』有斐閣選書、1996)

## Appendix

"An Index to Terms in the Literature of Natsume Sōseki", 1986

(『作家用語索引 夏目漱石 別巻』)

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	total
American		1				1	1		1				4
Chinese		1		1			3	1	1	2			9
Egyptian		2					1						3
English	2			4	2		3					1	12
European		3		1			1						5
Foreigner						1	2				1	1	5
German		6				1							7
Greek		4				1							5
Indian		1					1						2
Italian						1							1
Jew		1			2								3
Korean												1	1
Persian		2											2
Portu- guese					1								1
Roman		3				1							4
Westner		14	2	1		12	1	1	7	2	7	1	48
Total	2	38	2	7	5	18	13	2	9	4	8	4	112

I...The Tower of London (倫敦塔), 1905

II...I Am a Cat (吾輩は猫である), 1905-06

- III...Botchan (坊ちゃん), 1906
- IV...The Three-Cornered World (草枕), 1906
- V...Red Poppy (虞美人草), 1907
- VI...Sanshirō (三四郎), 1908
- VII...And Then (それから), 1909
- VIII...Mon (門), 1910
- IX...To the Spring Equinox and Beyond (彼岸過迄), 1912
- X...The Wayfarer (行人), 1912-13
- XI...Kokoro (こころ), 1914
- XII...Light and Darkness (明暗), 1916