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**Marcus/Reflections in a Glass Door**

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## Introduction

### The Glass Doors of Natsume Sōseki

*As I look out from inside my glass doors, certain things  
catch my eye.*

*I was reminded of a haiku I'd written long ago: Three  
pines in the moonlight, casting uneven shadows.*

—Natsume Sōseki, from *Garasudo no uchi*

If there is such a thing as a Japanese cultural pantheon, Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) surely occupies a seat of honor. This is the renowned author of *I Am a Cat*, *Botchan*, and *Kokoro*, a writer who died of a bad stomach and whose work came to epitomize the spirit of the Meiji era (1868–1912). Born at the dawn of the Meiji and surviving its emperor by four years, Sōseki captured an essential quality of that era and of the modern condition itself. Donald Keene may have echoed the consensus view when he proclaimed Natsume Sōseki as the preeminent modern Japanese writer—a stature confirmed by the twenty-year span during which the man's iconic image adorned the Japanese thousand-yen note.<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary tastes in literature run in every conceivable direction, yet Sōseki's work remains both relevant and revelatory nearly a century after the author's death. He devoted the last decade of his life to crafting fiction of extraordinary subtlety and psychological depth. The novels have generated libraries of critical and appreciative commentary over the past century. They continue to attract a broad readership in Japan and are known worldwide in translation.<sup>2</sup> Although long fiction (*chōhen shōsetsu*) comprises the bulk of Sōseki's oeuvre, this was but one of his literary accomplishments. He was a poet of the very first rank, equally adept at haiku and Chinese verse (*kanshi*), and an accomplished watercolorist and calligrapher. He was

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the leading scholar of English literature in Meiji Japan. And like Mori Ōgai (1862–1922), his great contemporary, Sōseki was a public intellectual who held forth on literary, cultural, and political topics in the print media and on the lecture circuit. The subject of this book—Sōseki’s personal writing—displays yet another facet of his literary artistry, while serving as a mirror of the man.

For those preferring high drama and historical moment, Sōseki’s reminiscences and reflections will disappoint. In point of biographical fact, and in its various narrative transformations, his is a decidedly mundane life—which seems at odds with the man’s stature. A native of Edo, renamed Tokyo in 1868, Natsume Kinnosuke (his given name) was a neglected son of aging parents for whom the new arrival, at this stage in their lives, was both an annoyance and something of an embarrassment. Placed in foster care as an infant, then put up for adoption before his second birthday, Kinnosuke was reclaimed by his natal family some eight years later. The boy, whose real father was a nondescript local official who harbored little affection for his youngest son, did well in school and developed a fondness for theater and traditional entertainments. He showed signs of brilliance as a student in the elite Tokyo academies and was admitted to the prestigious Imperial University, where he studied English. His talents and tastes gradually inclined him toward literature.

Natsume Kinnosuke adopted a pen name—a standard rite of passage for the aspiring writer. He chose Sōseki, a Chinese locution that loosely translates as “gargling with stones.”<sup>3</sup> Then, for reasons not entirely clear, he accepted a teaching post in Matsuyama, on the island of Shikoku, then another post in Kumamoto, in even more remote Kyushu.<sup>4</sup> At age twenty-nine, the young teacher was betrothed to Nakane Kyōko, the nineteen-year-old daughter of an official in the legislative House of Peers. It was an arranged marriage, and the couple had little in common—not an unusual state of affairs. A daughter was born, and in 1900, with a second child on the way, the teacher found himself in a select cadre of young scholars chosen to study abroad at government expense. And so at age thirty-three, Natsume Kinnosuke left his family and departed for England, where he would spend two lonely years immersed in literary research while trying to manage on his meager stipend. In London, he experienced bouts of depression bordering on madness.

Back in his native land, Sōseki parlayed his impressive scholarly attainments into a prestigious academic post at the Imperial University. Poised to become Japan’s leading authority on British literature, Sōseki privately despaired of ever truly mastering it, and he doubted the effectiveness, and value, of his teaching. In the meantime, he pursued his own literary creations.

Turning from poetry to fiction, he achieved a resounding success with his maiden work, the satirical novel *Wagahai wa neko de aru* (I Am a Cat, 1905). Then, with the enormously popular *Botchan* (1906), a novel loosely based on his experiences in Matsuyama, his literary reputation was established. By this time, the up-and-coming scholar had soured on the academic life, and when offered a relatively lucrative position with the *Asahi shinbun*, a leading newspaper, he left the university to become Japan's first career novelist—an unprecedented move, given the generally unsavory reputation of the popular-fiction writer.

In accord with established practice, Sōseki's work appeared in daily serialization, and only thereafter in book form. In his capacity as *Asahi* staff writer and literary editor, he was not restricted to novels. Having acquired a taste for the personal essay, a genre then known as *shōhin* (small works) Sōseki turned to such writing in the intervals between his serial fiction.

Experimenting with impressionistic description and haikuesque lyrical narrative, Sōseki gradually matured as a novelist. He achieved a major breakthrough with a novelistic trilogy—*Sanshirō* (1908), *Sorekara* (And Then, 1909), and *Mon* (The Gate, 1911)—that explores the world of educated Tokyoites and their essential loneliness. His own life settled into a stable, if tedious, domesticity. Plagued by chronic ill health and displaying a penchant for being difficult, peevish, and moody, the author reflected upon his own melancholy temperament through the lives of his literary alter egos.

Sōseki's reputation steadily grew. He developed a literary following, and his home became a gathering place for fellow writers and younger protégés. Otherwise sequestered in his study and beset by deadlines and unexpected callers, the busy author kept the family—his wife Kyōko, a brood of children, and assorted housekeepers—at arm's length. There were money problems, annoying solicitations, and piles of manuscripts to read. Such was the daily routine as retold in his *shōhin* episodes.

Natsume Sōseki's dyspepsia was both psychological and physical, and he spent his final years in and out of hospitals. In August 1910 he nearly died of a gastric hemorrhage, and the ensuing convalescence afforded a welcome opportunity for quiet reflection and reminiscence. It was around this time that the government sought to bestow a prestigious honorary doctorate upon the author. Wanting no part of such official recognition, he summarily turned it down.<sup>5</sup>

Unable to escape the insistent reminders of his own mortality, Sōseki became preoccupied with death and dying, signs of human frailty, the corrosive effects of modern selfhood, and the fragility of social relationships. He pondered the mixed blessings of individualism—a defining condition of

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modern society—and labored over the creation of characters who, caught in the grip of egocentrism and self-delusion, were fated to suffer the consequences. A man of deeply reflective temperament, Sōseki was fully aware of his own complex and conflicted nature, and his novels became stages for the pained interactions and psychological ploys that isolate individuals and set them against one another. His literary labors helped create a language for expressing the dislocations and frustrations of modern life. And in the process Natsume Sōseki emerged as Japan's first great psychological novelist.<sup>6</sup>

Sōseki's signature themes are brilliantly evoked in two widely acclaimed works—*Kokoro* (1914) and *Michikusa* (Grass on the Wayside, 1915). Kenzō, the autobiographical protagonist of the latter work, is strongly drawn to the past. He finds himself struggling to grasp its complexity, its specificity. Memory often fails him, but things do come to mind—an old friend, a scene from long ago, a poem, a voice. But the past itself is irretrievably gone. Kenzō frets and broods. Not at all easygoing or sociable, he cultivates a moody self-righteousness in the face of those who intrude upon his private space and offend his sensibilities. He is testy, impatient. His wife and children cannot understand him. He is in poor health as well, and things are rarely as they should be. The human condition, he concludes, is not susceptible to our understanding, much less our control. Himself thoroughly self-possessed, he decries the egotism and self-absorption that he sees all around him.

Finding some surcease in his poetic and artistic avocations, Natsume Sōseki embarked on his next serialized novel—yet another novelistic “anatomy” of a marriage, entitled *Meian* (Light and Darkness, 1916). But his physical condition deteriorated, and he passed away on the evening of December 9, 1916, having finished the 188th installment of this incomplete final work. News of the author's death inspired an outpouring of testimonials and literary eulogizing. His remains were interred in the cemetery at Zōshigaya, in Tokyo—the final resting place of Sensei, the lonely protagonist of *Kokoro* and Sōseki's best-known fictional alter ego.

### Writing the Self in Meiji Japan

Natsume Sōseki's personal writings should be placed in the context of *zuihitsu*—a time-honored genre of Japanese literary essay, which in turn owed much to a great Chinese essayistic tradition. One typically points to acclaimed works such as the eleventh-century *Pillow Book* by Sei Shōnagon and the fourteenth-century *Essays in Idleness* by Priest Kenkō.<sup>7</sup> Yet these and other seminal works became acknowledged as canonical only during the

Meiji period, when Japanese literature—*kokubungaku*—was itself being constructed as an academic discipline, in line with Western notions of literary history and theory. A more proximate body of self-expressive writing emerged during the Tokugawa period (1600–1868), when members of a burgeoning literati (*bunjin*) class experimented with various modes of discursive writing, including autobiographical narrative.<sup>8</sup> While generally reflecting the Confucian-centered outlook of the samurai elite, works such as Arai Hakuseki's *Tales Told Round a Brushwood Fire* managed to convey the narrator's personal voice in a convincing manner.<sup>9</sup>

Sōseki and his contemporaries were acquainted with the Japanese literary classics—*zuihitsu* and otherwise—and with the work of their Tokugawa predecessors. But the qualities of modern selfhood that most concerned them were not to be gleaned from such works. Rather, it was to Western sources and inspirations that they would turn.

Avenues of self-expression—intersecting and diverging styles, influences, genres—crisscross the Meiji literary map and complicate its history. In order better to appreciate Sōseki's personal writings, let us briefly examine the larger social and cultural context that fostered the emergence of literary selfhood through reminiscence and reflection.<sup>10</sup>

#### Backdrop: Cities, Schools, Jobs, Families

The Meiji transformation was accomplished in large measure through industrialization and urbanization. Cities built on Western models would be the embodiment of Japanese modernity and manifest symbols of the “civilization and enlightenment”—*bunmei kaika*—trumpeted early on as a national mission. The erstwhile shogunal center of Edo, with its fortified castle and labyrinthine design, was reinvented as Tokyo—the imperial capital and seat of its new institutions of government, education, finance, and commerce. A national rail system, devised and inaugurated in the early 1870s, would physically unite the nation, enabling those long isolated in rural areas to move elsewhere. Together with the advent of the telegraph, then the telephone, modern transportation and communication radically altered the lives of the mass of the Japanese people.

The Meiji era also witnessed a vast social transformation—the creation of a national citizenry in place of the feudal patchwork of domains and regions and the samurai-centered hierarchy of power and privilege. The modern state required a skilled, educated workforce and a new model of family life. Men got jobs, went to work, and received wages; their wives stayed home and tended to the children and the domestic sphere. The life of city dwellers increasingly hinged upon a money-driven consumer economy and a drive to succeed, but

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a countervailing spirit of harmony and cooperation was promoted as part of a state-sponsored social doctrine. Here, the notion of *katei*—a new term for the modern household—came to represent the Meiji reformulation of Japanese social relations. At its center was the family unit inhabiting a home, engaging in shared activities, promoting social virtues, and sustaining itself through appropriate domestic economies.

While the “traditional” extended family and its patriarchal dominance continued to be vested with both legal and moral authority, a new value that privileged privacy, autonomy, and “a room of one’s own” became prevalent. Meiji literature—and Sōseki’s work, in particular—would strongly reflect this tension between the authoritarian ethos, which was sustained by both law and custom, and a nascent individualism that sought to break free from repression and arbitrary constraint.<sup>11</sup>

The Meiji leaders understood that modern education, inspired by Western models and ideals, would be key to their civilizing mission. Boys and girls were to be educated in line with a new egalitarian ethos, but a strong gender bias effectively dictated separate tracks and divergent views of oneself vis-à-vis society. At the educational pinnacle was the university. For years there was only one—the Imperial University in Tokyo, whose graduates would assume positions of prominence. As an early alumnus, Natsume Sōseki in effect entered the Meiji intellectual elite, although he would hold elitism per se in contempt. Through his *shōhin* reminiscence, he would recast school experiences and relationships as a nostalgic evocation of coming of age in the early Meiji.

### Backdrop: The *Bundan* and Literary Journalism

By the 1880s, Tokyo was the undisputed center of modern Japan’s literary and artistic life—effectively displacing Kyoto, which had long been a mecca for what could now be called “traditional Japan.” Aspiring young writers—the so-called *bungaku seinen*—congregated in Tokyo, and for reasons of necessity and shared affinity, they would seek affiliation with the small coterie and salons that appeared—and in many cases just as quickly disappeared—at the turn of the century. Getting published was, of course, the shared goal, and the sine qua non of a literary career. Hence, the coterie, centering upon a dominant figure who served as editor and literary arbiter, typically produced a periodical that would showcase the work of the respective circle. This putative literary community—the aggregation of writers, coterie, and literary adjuncts (publishers, editors, illustrators, journalists, etc.)—is referred to as the *bundan*. As an institution, it has been likened to a guild system, which organized the activities and careers of writers through the journalistic orientation of its constituent groupings.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast with the present-day situation of Japanese writers, who are essentially free agents in the literary marketplace, aspiring Meiji writers were understandably drawn to the coterie system. Here the notion of *oyabun-kobun* (parent-child) has been applied to exemplify a master-disciple reciprocity that *bundan* coteries are said to have fostered.<sup>13</sup> This is a problematic notion, which threatens to play into convenient stereotypes of a uniquely Japanese group dynamic, thus obscuring the agency of complex economic and social forces and the way these forces changed over time.<sup>14</sup> A nuanced historical and institutional understanding of the Meiji media is of the essence here.

With the 1890s, the scope of literary journalism expanded. Major publishers entered the literary field, as did the newspapers. (Sōseki's move to the *Asahi* is a watershed in this development.) Commercial publishing expanded on all fronts, and the small-circulation coterie magazine—together with the coterie system per se—became increasingly marginalized. Bookstores flourished, and the reading public had a wealth of options. Within a decade, the mass-circulation periodical would become a mainstay, and the writerly career more than ever hinged upon access to the new print media. Inhabiting what amounted to an ecological niche within a rapidly modernizing society, Meiji writers were well attuned to the “networking” aspect of this society and to the rules and conventions that governed the buying and selling of books and manuscripts.<sup>15</sup>

### Chatting in Print

One noteworthy development was the appearance in literary periodicals of personal accounts by name writers. Individuals were interviewed on set topics, and their remarks were transcribed in shorthand notation by the interviewer and later converted into a *danwa* (literary chat). An informal conversational style became a staple of the Meiji *bundan*.<sup>16</sup> Encouraged to speak to their readers on personal as well as literary matters, some writers flatly refused to be drawn into what they regarded as a demeaning publicity stunt. Gradually, though, the boundary separating the public and private sphere was effectively blurred, as was the distinction between writer and journalist. By the end of the Meiji period, the old coterie readerships were being replaced by a media-driven national readership.<sup>17</sup> Writers served as editors and critics, careers were sustained by manuscript fees and honoraria, and everyone was beholden, to a lesser or greater extent, to a business model whereby writing would appear in print, on time, and in the proper format. Sōseki's literary career, underwritten, in effect, by the Tokyo Asahi corporation, is illustrative of the new paradigm. And his own published *danwa* contributed to the *bundan* “chatroom” ambience.

### Romanticism, Naturalism, and Modern Selfhood

To mix several religious metaphors, modern selfhood can be said to have possessed a holy grail significance within the Meiji *bundan*, and it can equally be likened to a Zen paradox that bedeviled and bemused writers and intellectuals. Given the interest in literary expressions of selfhood, the appeal of Western-inspired movements that elevated the subjectivity and autonomy of the individual was inevitable. Romanticism (*rōmanshugi*), in its many forms and genres, found fertile soil within the *bundan*. Pioneering efforts by Mori Ōgai and Shimazaki Tōson, drawn respectively from German and British models, have ranked among the early entries into the Meiji literary canon.<sup>18</sup>

Another mid-Meiji landmark was the appearance of an unprecedented work of fiction—*Ukigumo* (Drifting Cloud, 1886–1889)—by a little-known writer named Futabatei Shimei (1864–1909). Subsequently touted as Japan’s first modern novel, *Ukigumo* featured a brooding, introspective protagonist—Utsumi Bunzō—who would become a prototype of literary interiority and subjectivity.<sup>19</sup> “Bunzō” is an eponym of sorts, signaling a dominant trait of introversion and ineffectuality among Japanese literary protagonists—callow young men, painfully self-conscious and socially awkward, who struggle to bridge the gap between self and other—typically in the form of ill-starred romantic encounters.

Futabatei’s work heralded another important development as well—the search for a modern literary language, known as *genbun itchi*—that would replace the hodgepodge of outmoded literary forms and ornate styles that had held sway for centuries and that impeded the emergence of a truly national readership. Futabatei experimented with variants of *genbun itchi* in *Ukigumo*, and the work in effect challenged other writers to rethink their own narrative techniques. Sōseki’s novels—especially his later work—can be said to represent the culmination of *genbun itchi* as a common goal of the Meiji *bundan*.<sup>20</sup>

Japanese romanticism had its heyday in the 1890s before giving way, as the standard account goes, to the so-called naturalist school (*shizenshugi*). This new movement, associated with the writings of Tōson and Tayama Katai (1871–1930), enjoyed a brief heyday in the first decade of the twentieth century. Initially inspired by Zolaesque notions of a “scientific” literature that would offer a dispassionate, objective view of social conditions, naturalism was creatively “misread” within the *bundan*. What emerged was a literary credo of subjectivity, which attributed authenticity to ostensibly unvarnished, sincere confessions of inner torment.<sup>21</sup> Notwithstanding the widespread disdain aimed at the naturalists’ tendency toward tawdry self-exposure, a certain confessional impulse took root within the *bundan*. As we will see, Sōseki’s *shōhin* should be understood within this context.

### Psychology, *Shōhin*, Memory

Unlike the naturalists, who were attempting to “be themselves” through a crafted artlessness, Sōseki sought a narrative means of constructing a psychological persona that would simulate the ongoing shifts of mood and attention, the associational triggers and synapses, and the complex introspective voicing that marks the interface between an individual and his world. An interested student of Western psychology, which was among the academic disciplines that comprised the new curriculum of higher education, Sōseki put his keen understanding of human cognition—conditioned by his own deeply introspective temper—in the service of his literary craft.<sup>22</sup> As argued by Howard Hibbett and others, it was the acuity of Sōseki’s ongoing self-examination that enabled him to craft protagonists with such fluent interior voices.<sup>23</sup> His achievement was a discourse of “thinking out loud”—of reflecting on one’s circumstance, pursuing lines of association to remembered encounters and episodes, and musing upon the meaning of it all. As a literary complement to the novelistic mainstream, the personal essay, in series, would allow for a free discursive movement through remembered episodes and seemingly random reflection.

Again, such literary ephemera abounded in the late-Meiji media, occupying a group of vaguely synonymous genre categories that encompassed the lyrical, impressionistic, confessional, and philosophical essay. These shared what can be termed an “authenticity effect”—a sense of authorial presence, even in overtly fictionalized episodes.<sup>24</sup> Sōseki’s work in this vein was assigned to the *shōhin* category, which roughly corresponds to the Western notion of belles lettres.<sup>25</sup> Derived from a prominent Chinese essayistic genre of the Ming dynasty,<sup>26</sup> the *shōhin* literary vignette was resurrected in the early years of the twentieth century as part of the *bundan*’s embrace of the personal voice. Sōseki was but one of many writers drawn to what had come to be regarded as a congenial mode of literary expression.<sup>27</sup>

It should be noted that *shōhin* is merely one of a number of modern essayistic styles employed by Meiji writers. In contrast with the explicitly personal voice expressed through *shōhin* and related subgenres, there emerged a major category of essayistic writing that fostered objective, analytical expression and critical inquiry. Sōseki published many such essays, marked by a dispassionate, intellectual discourse, throughout his career. In sum, however, the modern Japanese essay form—*kindai zuibitsu*—clearly reflects the strong current of literary selfhood and self-expression, in all of its psychological dimension, that took hold within the Meiji *bundan*.<sup>28</sup> And again, the widespread adoption of the personal voice relates to the contextual factors noted above—an expanding literary journalism, the institution of a modern national curricu-

lum, and a discourse of individualism that played out in the social, political, and economic lives of the Japanese citizenry. Also, expanding opportunities for travel, both within Japan and overseas, beginning with the 1890s helped foster a new genre of modern travel writing (*kikō bungaku*), which became an important vehicle of literary self-expression.

Sōseki published his *shōhin* episodes, both individually and in series, as literary intermezzi in between the novelistic serializations, which spanned 1906–1916. An early inspiration was his tutelage with the poet Masaoka Shiki. This began with haiku composition but extended to *shaseibun*—a category of literary sketch mastered by Shiki that entailed closely observed renderings of the visual field. In Sōseki’s hands, this mode of narrative sketching would be applied to personal reminiscence.<sup>29</sup>

The first noteworthy work in this vein, *Bunchō* (Java Sparrow), appeared in June 1908. It concerns the sad fate of a pet bird taken into the Natsume home. The story, with its minutely detailed depiction of the small bird and its curious habits, marks the first appearance of the slightly querulous first-person writer-narrator, who would be a mainstay of subsequent *shōhin*.

What followed this realistic portrayal of the writer in his domestic milieu is arguably the most inventive—and surely the best known—of Sōseki’s personal writings—*Yume jūya* (Ten Nights of Dream, 1908). These richly imagistic and surreal dreamscapes, readily subject to psychoanalytical interpretation, have emerged for some as keys to the author’s inner life.<sup>30</sup> This, in turn, has obscured their literary artifice, which reflects the author’s concern, in his earlier fictional and essayistic writing, for coalescing the introspective voice of his narrator and a vivid imagistic landscape.<sup>31</sup>

#### Literary Études: *Eijitsu shōhin*

The *Dream* serialization was well received, and the editor of the Osaka *Asahi* requested something along the same lines. Sōseki responded with a more ambitious series, entitled *Eijitsu shōhin* (Spring Miscellany, 1909).<sup>32</sup> This is a true miscellany—a *mélange*, in twenty-five episodes, of fictive and personal vignettes.

One set of episodes, reflecting the domestic realism of *Bunchō*, is set in the home and presents various family tableaux. We read of visits by literary cronies, a spunky girl next door who exacts her small revenge on a neighborhood bully, the harried writer at his desk on a wintry day when the baby won’t stop crying, the children marching through the house dressed up in mommy’s clothing. At a gathering of the literary circle, an eccentric young man pays an unexpected visit. He has brought along a pheasant, which he insists on stewing and serving as a communal dinner.

There are overtly fictional episodes as well. One tells of a woman who goes to the theater and witnesses a fallen-down drunk shouting down the crowd of bystanders. A habitué of curio shops buys a dust-covered Mona Lisa, which he ends up selling to the trashman. There is an old man who reluctantly parts with a cherished scroll—a family heirloom—to get enough money to purchase a marker for his wife’s grave and a schoolteacher in the provinces who is reminded of his dead mother.

A set of related episodes concern the author’s experiences in London. There is an eerie, Poe-like quality to several of these—macabre accounts of being alone in the forbidding foreign metropolis, consumed by the fog and losing oneself in a sea of strange faces. Sōseki’s narrator betrays a sense of racial inferiority, casting himself as the impecunious Oriental, short of stature, surrounded by a race of tall Aryans.

With the London episodes, Sōseki demonstrates an affinity for literary melancholia. The city, with its dark streets and suffocating fog, becomes the stage for a stifling, rankling self-obsession. The artistic effect here is striking, irrespective of any claims one might make regarding the underlying psychopathology. But the London reminiscences are not uniformly dark and depressing. The final *Eijitsu* episode centers on the Shakespearean scholar William Craig, with whom Sōseki had a weekly tutorial. The portrayal of the tightfisted, absentminded professor is comically irreverent yet strangely moving.

#### A Writer in the Colonies: *Mankan tokorodokoro*

Following the *Eijitsu* project, Sōseki would not again experiment quite so freely with modes of storytelling—autobiographical or otherwise. His next major venture into personal writing would be a travel journal—*Mankan tokorodokoro* (Here and There in Manchuria and Korea, 1909)—a record of the author’s month-long trip. Having been invited by Nakamura Zekō, director of the Southern Manchurian Railway and an old boyhood friend, Sōseki is taken on a grand tour of Japanese-run factories, offices, and warehouses. He meets the upper crust of the colonial administration, runs into familiar faces, decries run-down hotel facilities, and balks at the food.<sup>33</sup>

The touring author, taking in the alien terrain of the Manchurian countryside, embarks on a series of surreal encounters—an army of coolies hauling huge bags of soybeans, Sisyphus-like, up the stairs of a giant storage facility; a chance visit to a local opium den; an old Chinaman (the equivalent pejorative term is used) run over by a careening carriage, lying injured and bleeding in the road. In short, this is not a pleasure trip—and Sōseki’s account draws to a close before he crosses into Korean territory. *Mankan* tells of a sickly man

on a difficult journey, wondering what he is doing in this desolate land—the fog-shrouded streets of London transformed, as it were, into the Manchurian wasteland.<sup>34</sup>

### An Anatomy of Memory: *Omoidasu koto nado*

Whatever else can be said regarding his tour of the colonies and its literary reportage, Sōseki's trip did wreak havoc with his delicate stomach, and it was during the subsequent period of hospitalization, which lasted eight months, that Sōseki composed his next *shōhin* series—*Omoidasu koto nado* (Recollections, 1911). Written from a hospital bed, the thirty-two episodes reflect upon illness and convalescence. This is a serious, at times intense, work—an amalgam of diary-style narrative and philosophical reflection. In keeping with the title, and in line with the earlier *shōhin* experiments, the narrator ponders memory and its intrinsic imperfections. We move from utterly mundane concerns to musings on life and death, remembrances of youth, and learned commentary.

Proceeding chronologically, *Omoidasu* centers upon the dramatic events of one fateful day—August 24, 1910—when the author nearly died of an attack of cerebral anemia (*nōhinketsu*). This event has entered the annals of Sōseki biography as *Shuzenji taikan*—the crisis at Shuzenji. Hospitalized until February 1911, Sōseki took to writing about his long confinement. Playing with the very act of recollection, he recounts his daily routine—his food intake, the round of medication, the day's visitors. The sickroom itself is an object of reflection and an enclosed frame of reference, emerging as a kind of sanctuary.

The author's "living experience of death" posed large philosophical questions, which are broadly explored. The raw data of memory, which prove insufficient and flawed, are augmented with journal entries made during the Shuzenji stay. And gaps in his own account are filled in with citations from his wife's diary. Memory, in other words, has become a collaborative act, and despite concerns regarding one's tenuous claims to knowledge of the past, Sōseki's acts of remembrance are coherent and impressively detailed.

The *Omoidasu* series, by turns cynical and cheerful, mundane and pensive, intimate and scholarly, weaves many strands of reminiscence. Yet its most salient feature lies not in the prose narrative but in the poetic postscript with which each episode ends. Consisting of both haiku and *kanshi*, these verse codas provide an exquisite lyrical synopsis of the respective episode while pointing to the author's deep and abiding poetic sensibilities.<sup>35</sup>

**Inside Glass Doors: *Garasudo no uchi***

Sōseki's final *shōhin* collection, serialized in the *Asahi* a year before his death, is a culmination of his literary personalia. Entitled *Garasudo no uchi* (Inside My Glass Doors, 1915), this collection of thirty-nine episodes is flanked by his two novelistic masterpieces, *Kokoro* and *Michikusa*. The authorial narrator, speaking in many voices, essentially recapitulates the key themes that mark his mature fiction.

The reader is once again ushered into the author's book-lined study as he reflects upon his present situation and relates episodes from the past—a past regarded from what seems a great distance. He recalls an old boyhood friend, Kii-chan, in connection with some antiquarian books the friend sold to him. There are the high-school classmate remembered for his intuitive brilliance and a pair of ne'er-do-well cousins who would come by the house to make merry and sponge off the family. The narrator recalls his oldest brother, a sickly young man who ended up having an affair with a geisha before dying of a lung disorder. There are wistful memories of the old neighborhood in Babashita, just down the road, with its quaint shops and rusticated charm, its narrow lanes and dark bamboo groves—all done in by the inexorable course of modernization.

Sōseki's parents are at best a marginal presence, evoking ambivalent feelings. The father emerges as an austere, petty old man. The mother, who elicits an instinctive if disembodied affection, is remembered with difficulty. Imagistic fragments remain—a pair of eyeglasses, a well-worn blue kimono. A gesture of affection is reserved for a maid, her name and appearance long since forgotten, but whose special act of kindness is vividly recalled. Struggling to conjure up some pattern from the patchwork of ephemeral traces, the narrator muses on the fragility of memory, on our imperfect connection with the past.

Episodes from the more recent past are related in considerable detail. One concerns the family dog, Hector, and his sad demise. Another tells of a woman, in suicidal despair, who comes by to seek counsel. Tapping into a vein of self-parody, Sōseki writes of victimization by actual burglars and by the more insidious kind—predatory reporters and pestering readers.

The *Garasudo* episodes are woven together by the introspective voice of their authorial narrator as he traverses the landscape of memory. Reminders of death and dying abound. Friends and relatives are gone, yet he remains—a bemused observer, a reluctant survivor. The mind itself seems incapable of retrieving anything more than scraps of the past. The totality of things is beyond one's grasp. People—oneself included—do strange things, hurtful

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things, and one cannot ultimately do much to improve upon the human condition.

But the world within glass doors affords, as well, a safe haven and a measure of solace. From this quiet space, one can observe the clamorous world outside—with its wars, its political turmoil, its clash and clatter. The minimalist credo of the small, the slow, and the understated strikes a responsive chord, calling to mind an aphorism famously associated with Natsume Sōseki—*sokuten kyoshi*, which means something to the effect of “follow the dictates of heaven, forsake the self.”

Sōseki’s literature, in its exploration of psychological states and problematic relationships, both reflects and epitomizes a crucial aspect of Japanese literary modernity. And the interior monologue that engages his characters—and his *shōhin* narrator—bespeaks an emblematic quality of loneliness and disillusionment associated with the age itself. As I’ve suggested, convincingly personal accounts are readily accepted as autobiographical data, whereby the figure of a troubled protagonist is identified with the author himself.<sup>36</sup> But larger questions are raised here. How is any narrative read as “psychological”? How do narrative cues—interior monologue, crafted dialogue, plot contrivance, imagery, and so forth—yield the effect of psychological substance and depth? Similar questions can be asked, too, of the specific visual cues in a painting or photograph that create an impression of wholeness, of individuality.

Applied to Sōseki’s personal writing, “psychological effect” points to acts of memory, to a narrator “caught in the act” of remembering—or attempting to remember. Then again, the *shōhin* genre itself grants a virtual license to reminisce, and notwithstanding the higher wisdom that recognizes the impossibility of a genuinely retrievable past, and of memory as its reliable agent, we are driven to recapture and reinvent that which is lost.<sup>37</sup> For Natsume Sōseki and his colleagues, much would be lost in the course of their lives. The Meiji itself—the look and feel of its earlier years—would become an object of retrospection, be it clinically detached or ripe with nostalgic longing. Modernity, and the institutions that helped create it, would be both blessing and curse.

Then again, the *shōhin* reflections are not uniformly ponderous and dark. Many are breezy sketches of the here and now, or of some passing fancy. Through Sōseki’s “figures of thought,” the reader is brought into the narrative reenactment of being reflective. And while there are many objects of reflection, one is drawn to the presence of a thinking, feeling person who is both rooted in his world, in all its imperfection, and open to the whims and fancies of the moment.

## Concerning This Book

Literary studies have been marked by a certain Balkanization of theoretical positions and “discourse domains” that have effectively excluded the general reader and rankled the specialist. Our quest for the scholarly high ground has tended to obscure the pleasures of reading that beckoned us in the first place and that we presumably try to foster in our students. Non-Western literatures have been relatively late in adapting prevailing theory, and there has been a healthy resistance of late to the willy-nilly application of theory in order to establish one’s bona fides in the academic market.

It is my hope that this book will be both accessible and enjoyable. Its constituent chapters will center on the themes and concerns articulated above, and each will incorporate illustrative episodes drawn from the *shōhin* collections and paired with interpretive commentary.<sup>38</sup> As the title makes clear, memory and melancholy will figure as recurrent motifs. And a concerted effort will be made to situate the writer and his work in the relevant contexts—historical, social, economic, as well as cultural.<sup>39</sup>

Chapter 1 will examine Sōseki’s literary retellings of his experiences in England. The textual selections will demonstrate the author’s variations on the theme of loneliness and instability, which comprise what I’ve termed a rhetoric of melancholy. Testimony from those familiar with Sōseki’s experiences will shed light upon his state of mind during those two years abroad. Chapter 2 shifts to Sōseki’s literary reminiscences of—and memorial to—the Tokyo of his childhood. Selected *shōhin* episodes will highlight the intersection of memory and nostalgia in the construction of a landscape that, together with one’s youth, has long since vanished. Pursuing Sōseki’s reflections on the Tokyo of his early years, chapter 3 will present accounts concerning family and friends, which are marked by an ebb and flow of precise detail, hazy recollection, and a muted nostalgia.

With chapter 4, the focus of Sōseki’s reminiscence shifts to family, and one’s role as husband and father. Here, depictions in both the *shōhin* and the autobiographical fiction point to an uneasy *modus vivendi* with one’s domestic circumstance and an ongoing tension between egocentrism and empathy. By way of contrast, chapter 5 consists of episodes that present Sōseki’s writer persona as he muses upon his career and the larger world as seen through the glass doors of his study. The themes of loneliness and introversion explored in chapter 1 are revisited here through accounts of individuals who make demands upon his time and intrude upon his private space.

Providing a corrective to the “isolate” persona, with its intimations of misanthropy and self-obsession, chapter 6 turns to Sōseki’s many literary

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affiliations. Selected *shōhin* episodes recall early mentors, *bundan* colleagues and protégés, and assorted eccentrics and oddballs. A journalistic category of memorial reminiscence will be studied as a vehicle for reflections upon prominent literary lives and, inevitably, one's own mortality.

Chapter 7 reflects back upon Sōseki's literature of reminiscence and goes on to explore the manner in which this iconic figure has himself been remembered and reappropriated over the years by family members, literary people, and the popular media. A postscript will present some personal thoughts on Natsume Sōseki and on the course of this book project.

As I hope to demonstrate, Sōseki's personal writings provide a kaleidoscopic view of the author's private and public faces and illuminate his larger concerns as a novelist and culture critic. But quite apart from this, and from the *shōhin*'s value as source material for the biographer and literary historian, I wish to convey an appreciation for the art of the personal essay, a genre richly deserving of its place in the sun.

One more thing, in connection with the editorial aspect of this project. Having culled Natsume Sōseki's *shōhin* collections, I've assigned the selected episodes to this or that chapter of the book in line with the above schema. (All of the *Garasudo* and *Omoidasu* episode titles are my own; none were titled in the original. But the *Eijitsu* episodes were titled, and the episodes I've included bear the translated titles.) What has been thus sacrificed is the integrity of the source works—the original ordering of episodes, with its shifting voice, mood, image, and theme—in short, the artistry of assemblage and sequencing. As with other Japanese literary miniatures—haiku, most famously—Sōseki's *shōhin* accounts are embedded with others of their kind, with which they relate in a kind of aesthetic synergy. Regrettably, something of this higher-order artistry has been lost here. I trust that something equally worthwhile will have been gained.

Finally, I should note that all translations from the *shōhin* collections are my own. But for each excerpt, I have cited the corresponding translation drawn from works published over the course of my writing and research.

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Kurt Vonnegut once remarked that writing a book is akin to driving at night. The headlights illuminate only a short piece of road, but you end up getting where you need to go. Vonnegut's observation epitomizes the process that has eventuated in this book.