

Politics, Philosophy, and Myth in Natsume Soseki's First Trilogy

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"The world was in an uproar; he watched it, but he could not join it. His own world and the real world were aligned on a single plane, but nowhere did they touch. The real world would move on in its uproar and leave him behind. The thought filled him with a great unease."

Natsume Soseki, *Sanshiro*, 1908

The role of the literary artist in Japan's long history is an honored one in large measure due to the power of language and literature to lift consciousness through imagination. Among Japan's most gifted literary artists is Natsume Soseki (1867-1916), regarded by Nobel laureate Oe Kenzaburo as Japan's "national writer" (Oe 1995, 44). Soseki¹ resigned his position as professor of English literature at Tokyo Imperial University in 1907 in order to dedicate himself to writing fiction, in various genres. Among his earliest efforts was a trilogy which first appeared as serialized novels in the *Asahi* newspaper, for whom Soseki wrote. The first story in this trilogy is entitled simply *Sanshiro*, which refers to a young man's name. The second in the series is *Sorekara*, which means "and then." The last in the series is called simply *Mon*, or "gate." What follows is a study of these three novels as representing Soseki's effort to understand and communicate through his unique approach to fiction the rapidly changing dynamics in the "common *nous*"² of Japanese society and culture during the Meiji Period (1868-1912). Through his "sketches" Soseki explored the mythic, political, and philosophical dimensions of a very well-ordered society rushing perhaps too quickly toward something called modern Japan, a Japan that was for Soseki very difficult indeed to imagine. In his attempt to

imagine such a Japan , Soseki saw the erosion not only of fundamental truths as expressed in traditional Japanese myth and Zen Buddhist teachings, but also fundamental truths of the human condition.

The Political Landscape in Late Meiji

In most accounts, the story of modern Japan begins with the arrival of Commodore Matthew C. Perry in Edo Bay in July, 1853, and Perry's demands that Japan "open" her ports to American shipping needs and to trade. The subsequent Meiji Era (1868-1912) brought enormous changes to Japan, not least of which was a new form of government nominally anchored by the restoration (*go-isshin*) of the Emperor and legally defined by the Meiji Constitution of 1889 (*dai nippon teikoku kempou*). The Meiji leadership took as their guiding theme the idea of "*fukoku kyohei*" ("rich country, strong military"), a theme inspired by Western models of the modern state. Tokyo , which means "eastern capital," became the new capital of Japan at the beginning of the Meiji era and came to symbolize a "westerling" Japan . All three of the novels considered here are set in Tokyo, or mostly in Tokyo, and all include numerous references to political events both of the period in which the stories are set, roughly 1908 to 1910, and of the Meiji era as a whole. For one scholar, Soseki's work reflects the very "spirit" of Meiji (Fukuchi 1993).

But that spirit was far from one dimensional. As Joseph Pittau has pointed out, the first few years of Meiji were dominated by a desire for all things Western, "not only techniques but also customs, ideas and values." In a second phase, however, during the seventies and eighties, the hunger for reform along Western lines slowed and there was a desire among the leadership for a "new identity in politics," and, also, "in ideology and morals." During this later phase, the emphasis was more on building not just a "modern" state, but a "modern *Japanese* state." Three

fields of endeavor were given priority during this time: the political, the military, and the educational. Out of the endeavors in these fields, the Japanese leadership wove together the framework of a modern Japan which "kept the country united until the end of the second world war" (Pittau 1965, 253).

Among the most important figures in the making of the Meiji Constitution of 1889 were Ito Hirobumi, Inoue Kowashi, and Ikebe Yoshitaka.³ Ito was Japan's first prime minister and is widely regarded as the principal architect of the Constitution. He was among the young men from Choshu in western Honshu who studied with Yoshida Shoin⁴ at the famous *shoka sonjuku* school in Hagi. His *Commentaries on the Constitution of the Empire of Japan* is considered essential reading on the political and legal dynamics of the Meiji period. He was among those who went on the famous Iwakura Mission to the West in 1871 to study every aspect of Western civilization in eleven different countries. In 1882, Ito traveled to Europe to study Western constitutionalism, especially in Germany. He was Japanese resident general in Korea when he was assassinated in Manchuria, in 1909, by a Korean nationalist. This event is featured in Soseki's *Mon*. Inoue Kowashi stayed in Japan while Ito was overseas studying constitutionalism so that "the future constitution would not be contrary to the fundamental national polity." In this effort, Inoue was greatly assisted by Ikebe Yoshitaka who "was a famous scholar of Japanese classics and poetry." Inoue summed up his views on the challenge of forging a modern Japanese state in a poem: "Spinning thread from thousands of foreign herbs to weave it into a fine Yamato dress." For Inoue, the challenge was to accept "modern" ideas "without, however, changing the historical *kokutai*,⁵ which was unique and based on a tradition of 2,500 years" (Pittau 1965, 266, 267). The character Sanshiro, in the story of that name and first in Soseki's trilogy, captures the political landscape well: "Meiji thought had been reliving three hundred

years of Western history in the space of forty" (Natsume 1977, 18).

Philosophical "Sketches"

Two particularly important characteristics of Soseki's literary art derive from his early dedication both to the "Philosophical Basis of Literary Art" and to an approach to writing called *shaseibun*, or "sketching." In both respects, Soseki's approach to the modern novel as art was substantially different from the dominant trends among young Japanese writers of the time. Soseki resisted naturalism, for example, a style popular among Western writers such as Flaubert, Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Dostoyevski and which was especially attractive to most aspiring Japanese writers during Meiji. Some scholars consider this naturalist approach to be the real origin of modern Japanese literature (Benl 1953, 33). Soseki, however, was more attracted to the Chinese and Japanese classics. Thomas Rimer argues that Soseki grew up during a time when Japanese students could still receive an education "that involved the study of traditional Chinese and Japanese literary texts" (Rimer 1978, 38). This is certainly one of the reasons why Soseki resisted the *genbunitchi*, the movement to base written Japanese on spoken Japanese. According to one scholar, this movement was "a long drawn-out battle to replace the difficult literary styles used in the Tokugawa period with a simple style which approximated the spoken language" (Twine 1978, 333). To support such a movement was to encourage what noted Japanese literary scholar Karatani Kojin calls "the invention of a new conception of writing as equivalent with speech" (Karatani 1993, 39). For Karatani, this movement was largely motivated by a desire for "the abolition of *kanji*" (Karatani 1993, 51). For a literary artist like Soseki, the *genbunitchi* could only dilute and ultimately destroy the important, traditional connections between myth and language. This is especially true with respect to the highly ideographic style of expression in

Japanese *kanji* (Chinese characters) which came to be used for more complex, scholarly expressions in the development of modern Japanese civilization. Concerns regarding cultural and linguistic confusions would be especially central to a scholar such as Soseki who wished to "probe the psychological origins of literature," to understand "what led to its appearance, development, and decline," and also what "social factors" brought literature into the world "and caused it to flourish or wither" (Karatani 1993, 12).

Prior to beginning his writing career, in fact, Natsume Soseki wrote and lectured on such topics as the "Philosophical Basis" of the literary art, "Substance and Form," and "Literature and Morality." At Tokyo Imperial University from 1903 to 1907, as Professor of English, Soseki additionally presented lectures with titles such as "On Literature," "The General Concept of Literature," and "Eighteenth-century English Literature." Soseki was especially conscientious among Japanese writers of his time in the search for "answers to questions on the nature of literature" (Ueda 1976, 1). Soseki believed that among the duties of the literary artist was one to "impact on the future of the human race." Also, the artist must cultivate "character and technique" (Yu 1969, 60). In his work, Soseki increasingly revealed a sensitivity to ecumenic pressures emanating from the West. This sensitivity is among the reasons for his turning to the writing of novels as opposed to his previous theoretical studies in search of the true meaning of literature. The *genbunitchi*, or movement to base written Japanese on the spoken language, noted above, is one example of such Western pressure.

As noted, Karatani Kojin has suggested that Soseki was greatly influenced in his style of writing by an approach called *shaseibun* ("sketching"). During his student days in Tokyo, Soseki was good friends with Masaoka Shiki. Shiki had developed this new approach to writing

and he and Soseki practiced it together in the composition of *haiku* poetry. Soseki apparently intended his first novel, *Wagahai wa neko de aru* (*I Am a Cat*), as an experiment in "sketching." He had expected to publish the work in a *haiku* journal called *The Cuckoo* (*Hototogisu*). This approach to writing was "an attempt to revitalize language in all its diversity." For Soseki, this new technique made possible the "liberation of diverse genres." In this style, for example, writers do not use the past tense; rather, they write only in the present and present progressive tenses. Karatani compares Soseki's use of the present tense with Albert Camus' use of the indicative. Also, Soseki relied heavily on a narrator in his works. This is true for all of Soseki's novels, according to Karatani, except his last two ♦ *Michikusa* (*Grass by the Wayside*) and *Meian* (*Light and Darkness*). Soseki compared this approach "in every way" to that of *haiku* poetry. And this made his style distinctive; in other words, not borrowed from the West (Karatani 1993, 179-182). All three of the stories in Soseki's first trilogy may be considered as "philosophical sketches."

The Woman in the Woods

In *Sanshiro*, the principal focus of the young man protagonist's attention is a young woman named Mineko. She is among an ensemble of characters in Tokyo, around 1908, in late Meiji, all of whom are either in or around Tokyo Imperial University, Japan's most prestigious institution of higher education. Sanshiro first sees Mineko while she is walking with a nurse at the pond in the center of the university campus. As Sanshiro becomes increasingly fascinated by Mineko through a series of mostly unplanned encounters he also learns that she is posing for a certain artist named Haraguchi whose painting, unveiled at the end of the novel, is called "Woman in the Woods" (*mori no onna*).⁶ In the concluding scene of the story, Sanshiro's friend

Yojiro asks him what he thinks of Haraguchi's painting. Sanshiro's response is that the title is wrong. And Soseki's last line in the novel is as follows: "*tada kuchi no nai de mayou hitsuji (sutorei shiipu) to kuri kaesu shita*" (Natsume 1993, 312). The 1977 English translation is ". . . to himself he muttered over and over, "Stray sheep. Stray sheep" (Natsume 1977, 212).

But there is a world of meaning in Soseki's last line. It is powerfully suggestive of a "cosmion, illuminated with meaning from within by the human beings who continuously create and bear it as the mode and condition of their self realization" (Voegelin 1969, 28), and of the faded mythologies imbedded in language⁷. The language as written by Soseki is particularly transparent in evoking Japan's unique mythic traditions and, indeed, a Japanese *historiogenesis*.⁸ Within the story, Soseki's last line points back to two earlier "sketches." The first of these sketches is an encounter with Mineko in a quiet place within Tokyo on the banks of a little river, the Ogawa, which is also Sanshiro's family name. There, Mineko asks Sanshiro if he knows how to say "lost child" (*maigo*) in English. He does not. Mineko instructs him that one would say "stray sheep." And this is exactly how her words are written in the published English translation by Jay Rubin (Natsume 1977, 94). In the original Japanese version, however, Soseki writes the words "*mayoeru ko*," accompanied by the *katakana* "*sutorei shiipu*". *Katakana* is a phonetic syllabary for foreign terms such as the English "stray" and "sheep." *Katakana* and the indigenous *hiragana* syllabaries are frequently placed immediately beside particularly difficult, unorthodox, or somewhat archaic Chinese characters (*kanji*). When Mineko first asks Sanshiro if he knows how to say "lost child", Soseki writes "*maigo*," which consists of two Chinese characters and clearly means "lost child" (Natsume 1993, 136). But when she answers her own question, noted above, Soseki writes "*mayoeru ko*." The verb "*mayou*" here is written in the potential form and is best translated "might be lost." And the *katakana* accompanying these

words is "*sutorei shiipu*". In other words, as in the English "stray", the use of the Japanese "*mayoeru*" places the emphasis on the "potential." Whereas there is a strongly Christian connotation to the English "stray sheep" which evokes the story in Matthew of the one who will be found,⁹ that is, saved, there is only the potential "might be lost" in Soseki's Japanese original. At the end of this scene, Mineko is crossing a narrow, shallow brook and loses her footing on a rock. She falls against Sanshiro and Soseki writes "*mayoeru ko (sutorei shiipu) to Mineko ga kuchi no nai de iitta.*" The published English translation is "'stray sheep,' she murmured to herself" (Natsume 1977, 95). But Soseki's meaning is clearly "might be a lost child," or, more clearly, "'maybe (I) am a lost child' (*sutorei shiipu*), she murmured to herself." This nuance becomes particularly significant at the novel's end where Mineko has just married a Christian.

The other, or second, earlier sketch is the narration of Hirota sensei's dream. Sanshiro has gone to visit his friend Hirota sensei who is taking a nap. Upon waking, Hirota sensei explains that he was dreaming of a girl of maybe twelve or thirteen who he had only met once twenty years before and had never spoken to. In the dream he is walking in the middle of a large wood ("*ooki na mori no naka o aruite iru*") when he encounters her (Natsume 1993, 283). He recognizes her from the funeral in 1889, the year of the Meiji Constitution, of Mori Arinori, who had been assassinated. Hirota sensei was then a student attached to a guard unit for the funeral parade route when the girl passed. In the dream, she says that he has "changed." He replies that she has not. He also says to her "you are a painting". She replies to him "you are a poem." Each of these two sketches is critical to the concluding scene in the novel and its meaning.

Regarding the first earlier scene, with Mineko, one needs to be aware both of the meanings suggested by the Chinese characters used in her full name and, also, of a tendency in

the Japanese novel in general to portray "types" rather than "living individuals" (Miyoshi 1974, xi-xvi). Mineko's full name is Satomi Mineko, Satomi being the family name. The two characters *sato* and *mi*, together, mean "to see one's home village." Yet, *sato* has a more powerful connotation than the English "home village" and may be translated also as "the country" or "parents' home" (Nelson 1994, 902). There are few images more evocative of strong feeling within Japanese tradition than that of *furusato*, or "old home village." Even today, a popular folk song of that name is sung at virtually any gathering where nostalgic feeling for Japan and Japaneseness is sought. The name Mineko, similarly, evokes deep stirrings of ancient Japan. The three characters mean, respectively, "beauty" (*mi*), "ancestral altar" (*ne*), and child (*ko*). So, as a "type," Mineko embodies the archetypal suggestion, something of a "picture," of the founding deity of Japan, *amaterasu omikami*, and of the traditional tale *taketori monogatari*, the tale of the bamboo cutter and his daughter *kaguyahime*, the shining princess. Within the Japanese literary tradition, the tale of the bamboo cutter is considered the "most famous of the early Japanese tales" (Rimer 1978, 66) and the "ancestor of all romances" (McCullough 1990, 28). Mineko symbolizes, in short, nothing less than the common *nous* of traditional Japanese society with a deeply felt aesthetic sense at its center, a sense sometimes conceptualized as *mono no aware* (deep pathos).

Sanshiro expresses this sense most clearly in his thoughts while one day watching Haraguchi as he paints Mineko's portrait. For Sanshiro, Mineko is herself "a picture" and "sealed in silence." It was as if Haraguchi was "not painting" Mineko at all, but "copying a painting of mysterious depth, using all his energy to make a mediocre picture that lacked precisely this depth." And somehow it was as if the second Mineko were slowly merging with the first such that soon, on the verge of "melding into one," the "river of time would suddenly shift its course

and flow into eternity" (Natsume 1977, 171). Later, at the museum, with knowledge that Mineko has since married a Christian, Sanshiro tells his friend Yojiro that the title of the painting is wrong and we read Soseki's last line quoted above. It is the same "inner" speech as Mineko's at the little river. Sanshiro is talking to himself. But Soseki, for the first time, does not write "*mayoeru ko*;" instead, he writes "*mayou hitsuji*" using two characters which literally mean "lost sheep." There is no doubt in his mind that a "sheep" (*hitsuji*) is "lost." And the powerful suggestion is that not only is it Mineko who is lost, but all that she represents in archetypal terms. The radical, or root,¹⁰ in the Chinese character for beauty, the (*mi*) in Mineko, means "sheep", "*hitsuji*" in Japanese. The complete character for *mi*, or *utsuku(shii)* 尪 the more common (*kunyomi*), traditional Japanese for "beautiful" 尪 is a combination of the characters for "sheep" and "big." So what Sanshiro is really saying to himself is that the picture is surely "big", but without the "sheep." Hence, his title of "lost sheep." When Sanshiro first sees the picture in Haraguchi's studio he says only "*naru hodo ooki na mono desu na*" 尪 "it really is big isn't it" (Natsume 1993, 250). Not only is the picture not beautiful, it is a depiction of having lost the roots of the very common *nous* that is the unique Japanese aesthetic sensibility. This common *nous* is reflected in numerous concepts which build from the radical for "sheep." Examples are *gi*, meaning justice or righteousness, *gijin*, righteous man, *gishi*, meaning loyal retainer and highly evocative of the famous 47 *ronin* of the *Chushingura* tale, *gimu*, duty or obligation, *giri*, sense of duty, *seigi*, another way of referring to justice, and even *gikai*, the national assembly. This is the context of noted Japan scholar George Sansom's point in the inaugural article for *Monumenta Nipponica* published in 1938. He noted there the great difficulty in finding "equivalence in terminology" when translating between English and Japanese, a difficulty "not only in philosophy but in everyday discussion" (Sansom 1938, 43). He also observed, in the

same article, that one of the most interesting problems for the Western student of Japanese history and culture is "how to explain the growth and persistence of a strong aesthetic bent throughout all Japanese history" (Sansom 1938, 46). Donald Richie, noted film critic and longtime observer of Japanese culture, has made the observation that "aesthetic qualifications become moral qualifications in Japan ; beauty becomes honesty" (Richie 1987, 79, 80). In Sanshiro's title for Mineko's portrait, "lost sheep," the reader is reminded of a comment by Hirota sensei, who always seemed to Sanshiro something of a "Shinto priest" (Natsume 1977, 10). The comment was simply "Japan is going to perish" (Natsume 1977, 15).

And this points to a reconsideration of the second "earlier scene" where Hirota sensei had a dream. He said to the young female in the woods "you are a painting" (*e*). This is the true picture of the "woman in the woods" for Soseki, and it is the picture of the shining princess archetype deep within Hirota sensei's psyche revealed only in a dream and "shaped" by a vision at a funeral attendant to the birth of a modern Japanese state twenty years earlier. Haraguchi's painting is too "large" and, as symbol, opaque. The girl in Hirota's dream, as symbol, is transparent but deep within the subconscious. The artist Haraguchi has midwived only the "big" from all that is suggestive in the Chinese character for beauty. The root, or radical, of the character, the "sheep," is "lost." Soseki has taken a Christian parable, that of the "lost sheep" in Matthew 18.12, and given it a distinctively Japanese reading with deeply tragic overtones.

Hirota sensei is a "poet," not a painter, who is "made of philosophy" (Natsume 1977, 60) such that when he smoked he "blew from his nostrils" the "smoke of philosophy." But his nickname reveals a problem. He was known as the "great darkness" (Natsume 1977, 97). The common *nous* shaped by a *historiogenesis* unique to Japan and evolved over centuries was

fading deeper into the subconscious of sensei like Hirota and literary artists like Natsume Soseki. What would the psychic substance of a society without the psychic moorings of Shinto myth to restrain a slide into "bigness" from Western, ecumenic pressure look like? This is the subject of *Sorekara (And Then)*.

The Man in the Mirror

The Chinese characters in the name for Sanshiro mean, respectively, "three" (*san*) "four" (*shi*) and "person(s)" (*ro*). The clear suggestion is that the young man named Sanshiro is three or four persons and not an integral personality. He is a young man in search of an identity amidst the "urgent life force of a changing society" (Natsume 1977, 37). The protagonist in *Sorekara*, by contrast, is a little older, a little more settled, in a material sense, and is called Daisuke. *Dai* means "period" or "generation" and *suke* literally means "assistant" or helper. It is the same character used in "assistant professor" or "assistant director." More importantly, during Meiji, it was a common "suffix" in men's names and highly suggestive of the rising middle class, or bourgeoisie. The main character in *Mon*, the third novel in the trilogy, is the similarly suffixed Sosuke. Daisuke, then, is somewhat symbolic of everyman in the Japanese society of 1909, and the sense in which he "helps" unfolds in the story. He could be considered an older Sanshiro, according to "type", but narrower according to development. Where Sanshiro is a student with a beginner's mind who explores the common *nous* of Meiji society befitting a student at the country's most prestigious institution of higher education, Daisuke is a bachelor preoccupied with his physical condition, his father's influence, and a certain young lady named Michiyo. The reader is drawn from a collective subconscious of the common *nous* in Sanshiro, to a personal world of the ego in *Sorekara*.

The story begins with a dream sequence in which Daisuke hears the approach of steps to his gate outside and "sees" a "pair of large clogs suspended from the sky." When the footsteps grow dim, the clogs disappear and Daisuke awakes (Natsume 1977, 1). This is not the dream of sensei. It is the dream of a very self-conscious man. It is the consciousness of a man for whom immediate physical stimuli are all important. There seems to be no particular significance to the vision of the wooden clogs beyond the fact that they are "large." Similarly, a camellia blossom, a "large blossom, which was nearly as large as a baby's head", had fallen to the floor during the night making a sound like "a rubber ball" that had "bounced off the ceiling." Just to make sure all was well amidst these night sounds, Daisuke placed his hand over his heart to feel "the blood pulsing correctly at the edge of his ribs." Then he went back to sleep (Natsume 1977, 1).

Daisuke was obsessed with his physical health. In Shinto, the mirror is a powerful symbol for self-reflection. In literature, in film, in the arts in general, mirrors often signal poignant moments of deep reflection. In Shinto mythology, the sacred mirror *yata no kagami* was used to lure *Amaterasu omikami* out of the cave into which she fled causing chaos and darkness in the world. This mirror, with some sacred, curved jewels, and a sacred sword are the three symbols of authority for the Japanese Emperor. In *Sorekara*, however, when Daisuke stands before the mirror, he sees only himself:

Daisuke peered into the mirror. His motions were precisely those of a woman powdering her face. And, in fact, he took such pride in his body that had there been the need, he would not have hesitated to powder his face. More than anything he disliked the shriveled body and wizened features of a Buddhist holy man, and whenever he turned to the mirror, he was thankful that at least he had not been born with such a face. If people called him a dandy, he was not in the least disturbed. To this

extent had he moved beyond the old Japan (Natsume 1977, 2,3).

Neither Shinto nor Buddhist influences moved Daisuke beyond his immediate reflection in the mirror.

In traditional Japanese culture, in the "old Japan " of Japanese history, the arrival of Buddhism from Korea in the 6th century represented less a competition with the native Shinto religion than a complement. Over the centuries, and through changes brought by Tendai, Shingon, Jodoshu, Shinshu, Nichiren, and Zen schools, Buddhism and Shinto grew together and became somewhat syncretistic. Even the challenge of a Confucian influence during the Edo period and the development of a *kokugaku* (national learning) movement in late Edo failed significantly to alter what was called the *ryoubu Shinto*, or dual Shinto system. By this system Buddhist priests would largely control Shinto shrines. All of this changed, however, with the Meiji Restoration (*go-isshin*). In 1868, an Imperial decree commanded the removal of all Buddhist images from Shinto shrines. A movement followed called *haibutsu kishaku*, "abolish the Buddha and Buddhism". These events led to the demise of a Buddhist influence in Japan during the rest of the Meiji period. These were cultural developments of tremendous consequence. As Daisetz T. Suzuki has observed, the Buddhist tradition in Japan , particularly the Zen influence, was of critical importance in shaping a distinctive Japanese culture. The arts, the development of the *bushido* (way of the warrior), interpretations of Confucius in Japan, and particularly unique artistic traditions such as *sado* (the way of tea) and *haiku* poetry all derive from or are uniquely shaped by a Zen influence. This influence is also evident in the evolution of Japanese aesthetic concepts such as *wabi* (subdued taste), *sabi* (elegant simplicity), and *mono no aware* (a kind of deep pathos). Over time, Zen teachings came to permeate virtually every dimension of Japanese life. For Suzuki, Zen had entered "internally into every phase of the

cultural life of the people" (Suzuki 1959, 21). For the character Daisuke, none of this is of importance. There is only the "wizened features of a Buddhist holy man."

Similarly, Michiyo, who is Daisuke's best friend Hiraoka's wife, personifies nothing of the shining princess archetype rooted in Shinto myth. She is something of an obsession: "Only Michiyo weighed on his mind somewhat" (Natsume 1982, 92). He had failed to acknowledge his feelings for Michiyo years earlier and had helped encourage the wedding with Hiraoka. But upon the two of them reentering his life, Daisuke begins to nurture the old feelings for Michiyo. She has a heart problem and, like Oyono in *Mon*, is childless and will probably not have children. Yet, Daisuke is consumed with her love. Everyone else in his life, his father, his brother, his sister in law, in fact, "all of society," were "his enemies" (Natsume 1982, 255). Daisuke was not completely without interest in the larger society. He was conscious of the fact that civilization had taken the "collective we" and "transformed it into isolated individuals." Also, moderns did not "weep." Daisuke "had yet to meet the individual who, as he stood groaning beneath the oppression of Occidental civilization in the seething arena of the struggle for survival, was still able to shed genuine tears for another" (Natsume 1982, 102). In the place of a capacity to weep, the life appetites had grown to prominence. Daisuke understood that "the striking growth of the life appetites was, in effect, a tidal wave that had swept from European shores" (Natsume 1982, 104). But he is unable to make connections with a larger, common *nous*. There is little aesthetic sensibility and no consciousness of a "woman in the woods." Daisuke is representative, instead, of *egophany* and a "refusal to apperceive."¹¹

"Sketches" featuring the color red play a central role in both *Sorekara* and *Sanshiro*. In *Sanshiro*, for example, the protagonist is in his room peering out the window at a house in flames

somewhere in the distance. In one sense, the fire's red flares symbolize anxiety and danger. In a larger sense, however, it may also signify for Sanshiro something of a "red destiny." There is a sense in which the anxiety is more deeply rooted and, specifically, rooted in the long, complex experience in Japan with the Buddhist religious tradition. Traditional Mahayana Buddhism has an eschatological component according to which there are three ages, one of the Buddha, one of the dharma, and one of decay and destruction. The last period is called *mappo*. During the Heian and early Kamakura periods, there was a widespread belief that the age of *mappo* had arrived. The early Kamakura Period is the time of the full maturation of Buddhism in Japan, a time when a number of reform movements and several heroic leaders appeared on the scene. Among major tendencies during this period was a return to the Lotus Sutra as the source of inspiration and guidance, a tendency especially pronounced in the work of Nichiren (1222-1282). Nichiren also taught that the times in which he lived and worked represented the last days; that is, *mappo*. There is a popular scene in the Lotus Sutra of a "burning house" which symbolizes the coming of *mappo*. It is quite conceivable that Soseki perceived his own times as sharing these dark features of the earlier Heian and Kamakura periods and that the burning house in *Sanshiro* is intended to symbolize this connection. At the conclusion of *Sorekara*, second novel in the trilogy, the protagonist Daisuke is himself "burning." The "red destiny" of which Sanshiro becomes conscious in the novel *Sanshiro* becomes explicit in the final scene of the sequel, *Sorekara*. There, Daisuke essentially goes mad, his head burning away in visions and images of red objects: "Finally, the whole world turned red. And with Daisuke's head at the center, it began to spin around and around, breathing tongues of fire. Daisuke decided to go on riding until his head was completely burnt away" (Natsume 1978, 257).

Beyond the Temple Gate

The protagonist in *Mon (Gate)* is Nonaka Sosuke. The Chinese characters for Nonaka mean, respectively, "a field" (*no*) and "inside" (*naka*).¹² The characters for Sosuke are "*sou*," meaning "religion," and the same "*suke*" as in Daisuke in *Sorekara*. As Daisuke is a kind of bourgeois exemplar writ large, Sosuke is a somewhat similar type confronted with religion. Sosuke is a minor civil servant on a modest income who is married with no children and living in Tokyo. As with Sanshiro and Daisuke, Sosuke "breathed the air of Tokyo." Unlike the other two protagonists, however, Sosuke was "always so fatigued in mind and body that he traveled in a daze, completely unaware of his surroundings." When riding the streetcar for Marunouchi every day, where he worked, he would "in his disgust" become the same as those around him; that is, "like a machine." In his earlier days, he used to love books, but that was part of a life "that had passed forever" (Natsume 1982, 11-14). Sosuke lives with his wife Oyone in a house that is set furthest back from the street in the little area of Tokyo where they live. The house also symbolizes their isolation from the larger society, an isolation brought on by an indiscrete act several years before when Sosuke was a student in Kyoto. Every evening they would sit together by a lamp in the light of which "Sosuke was conscious only of Oyone, and Oyone only of Sosuke" (Natsume 1982, 61).

The characters for Oyone's name signify "narrow" and "child." And in the narrowing circle that defined his life, and Oyone's, Sosuke became indifferent to the larger political world of which he and Oyone were a part under the Meiji Constitution and forgetful even of the most basic elements of a conscious life. With respect to politics, Sosuke was aware of the great statesman Ito Hirobumi's assassination in Manchuria on October 26, 1909, but was "unmoved. . . by the whole affair" (Natsume 1982, 21). With respect to consciousness, he sometimes had trouble remembering even basic Chinese characters. He asked Oyone once what the character

was for *kin* in *kinrai* (these days; of late). He could not remember even the character for *kon* in *konnichi*, which is the largest part of *konnichi wa*, the most common greeting in Japan most often translated as simply "hello." And this experience with *anoia*¹³ did not seem to trouble him or Oyone who "passed the incident off casually" (Natsume 1982, 6,7). As for Oyone, she was very sickly and had lost three children. She blamed herself, often felt her life one of "tortuous endurance" and "did not reveal these feelings even to her husband." She once went to a fortune teller who told her "you can never have a child." The reason, she was told, was that she had done a "terrible deed" to another and "the sin is still working itself out." Together, Sosuke and Oyone "kept the souls of mountain hermits" (Natsume 1982, 130-134). Sosuke and Oyone "had no faith with which to recognize a God or to encounter a Buddha." They "kept their eyes fixed on each other instead" (Natsume 1982, 169).

Though Sosuke lived a narrow existence, his younger brother Koroku reminded him of his old, lively self. As a young man, Sosuke was self-indulgent, a "perfect exemplar of the young man of the world of that day." He was "quick witted, but had little inclination to study" (Natsume 1982, 136). He was always seeking for some new pleasure and had many friends. His best friend was Yasui, and it was through Yasui that Sosuke met Oyone, the event that changed his life. Sosuke betrayed his best friend to secure Oyone's affections for himself. This experience in Kyoto drained Sosuke of all vitality and changed him into the particularly narrow man described above. Over time, Sosuke developed a sense of "the deep chasm that separates self and other" (Natsume 1982, 74).

One day, totally unexpectedly, the betrayed friend Yasui appears at the house next door to Sosuke and Oyone. Yasui is unaware of this coincidence. Sosuke decides to escape to

Kamakura in search of some peace of mind, in search of some religious answer to his torments. The temple to which he goes belongs to the *Rinzai* sect of Zen Buddhism. It was at the *Rinzai* temples in Kyoto and Kamakura that the "creative assimilation" of a "new cultural substance and its independent development" (from China) began to take place in Japan during the early Kamakura period (Dumoulin 1963, 149). Sosuke's guide at the temple is Gido. Among Gido's gifts to Sosuke is a little book which describes "the stages a man practicing Zen must pass through, from the most shallow to the most profound." The psychological states at each stage are also described. Gido tells Sosuke the story of the monk who was "too sinful ever to reach *satori* (enlightenment)," who felt "lower than dung." And yet, Gido adds, "look at the enlightenment he finally achieved!" Sosuke, however, felt "ignorant and impotent." He had come to the temple to "have the gate opened to him." The only greeting he received, however, was: "It's no use knocking. Open the gate yourself and enter." Sosuke, however, seemed to have been "fated from birth to stand forever outside the gate, unable to pass through" (Natsume 1982, 200-204). He knew he could never open it.

Exile, Anamnesis, and the Storyteller

In Japanese history, Sugawara no Michizane has symbolized the scholar in exile for a thousand years.¹⁴ As Hirota sensei is exiled, in *Sanshiro*, from the center of intellectual life at Tokyo Imperial University, so also are literary artists like Natsume Soseki exiled from the larger life of Japanese society. And as the common *nous* of the larger society quickened in its dissolution in late Meiji, Soseki abandoned his teaching post at the university and began to write serialized novels for the *Asahi* newspaper ♦ an effort, perhaps, to bring the literary art back into the mainstream and the literary artist out of exile. Soseki believed that the artist must always

seek through art to render "the beautiful, the true, the good, and the sublime" (Yu 1969, 60). Among his earliest efforts in this regard were *Sanshiro*, *Sorekara*, and *Mon*, his first trilogy. *Sanshiro* is the most analytical in its exploration of myth and legend, of the origin and cause, or *historiogenesis*, of Japanese social order. The "woman in the woods" of Hirota's dream is a transparent symbol of the shining princess archetype of Japanese tradition which expresses the aesthetic center of Japanese consciousness and social order, a center institutionally represented by the Emperor and the Imperial House. The "woman in the woods" of Haraguchi's art is opaque, except as an oversized corruption of Japanese sensibility. The proper title for the piece is "lost sheep," a precise rendering of the *kanji* character for "beauty" reducing the meaning to simply "big." *Sorekara* is more exploratory than analytical. It probes the corners of consciousness in what is left without the traditional common *nous*. It explores the mind of Daisuke, a mind preoccupied with the nuances of physical existence, political pressures from the West, pressures from his father as representative of an oppressive Japanese past, and Michiyo who is representative only of Daisuke's personal lost opportunities. This mind, in the end, burns away in a red destiny suggesting the coming of *mappo*, the final days of Buddhist teaching. In *Mon*, we have a turn to religion by someone not unlike Daisuke. But there is nothing beyond the temple gate for one who cannot even open it. In the end, Sosuke, like his predecessor in *Sorekara*, remains primarily conscious only of his physical reality. At story's end, he has winter on his mind as he "continued to cut his nails" (Natsume 1982, 213). *Mon*, in its probing of connections between *egophany* and theology is the most philosophic of the three stories. In these stories Natsume Soseki examines the erosion of Japanese civilization's common *nous*, explores the consequences of that erosion, and seeks answers for the future of that civilization. Ultimately, however, Soseki has great difficulty imagining a modern Japan . The prospect seems

to lie beyond his imagination. Two years before his death in 1916, Soseki will pen his masterpiece, *Kokoro*. *Kokoro* is an enormously delicate story. There is nothing of "size" in it. In the story, the character Sensei takes his own life. But Soseki leaves just the slightest room to imagine hope. Sensei makes of his young friend a dying request: "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" (Natsume 1999, 248). Perhaps by protecting *ojosan*, Sensei's wife and archetypal symbol in the story, there is the hint of a prospect for reducing the pressure of the "large" in life, and making room, at least, for the "woman in the woods" and the missing "sheep" to be found through *anamnesis*, not forgetting.

Just before the scene in *Sanshiro* where Mineko says to herself that she "might" be lost, Sanshiro and Mineko are in fact a bit lost in the middle of Tokyo . They have just left a doll show. She asks him "where are we now?" He says they are "on the way to Tennoji in Yanaka. It's exactly the opposite direction from home." She says, "I don't feel well" and "isn't there some quiet place we could go?" (Natsume 1977, 90) They can't go forward, and can't go back. And this is where they find a place to rest and speak of "stray sheep." Also, in a later scene, a student stands to make a speech at a large dinner gathering. He says that the youth of today "can no longer endure the new oppression from the West" nor the "oppression of the old Japan " (Natsume 1977, 108). They too cannot seem to go either forward or back. These scenes dramatize the primary issue for Soseki; that is, how to preserve the hard won middle way, or *chuuyou* of Japanese, largely *zen* Buddhist tradition.¹⁵ Sanshiro sees the loss of a common culture, Daisuke goes mad under the pressure, and Sosuke virtually loses consciousness of anything beyond his lengthening nails. What emerges from Soseki's first trilogy is, even for Japan 's best storyteller, the virtual impossibility even of imagining such a middle way in a post-

Meiji, modern Japan .

End Notes

¹Natsume is the family name. Natsume Soseki's given name is Kinnosuke. He chose Soseki which means "to rinse one's mouth with stones." It is unusual in Japanese tradition to refer to someone by their given name. But Natsume Soseki is always referred to as simply Soseki. Throughout this essay Japanese names will be presented in the traditional indigenous style of family name first. Also, with respect to putting *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji* into *romaji*, or English, terms readily identifiable such as *bushido*, the way of the warrior, will conform to widely accepted usage in which the "o" is not lengthened phonetically to "ou" to suggest the long "o" sound of the original. In writing names such as Sosuke, in *Mon*, the same approach, used in the official translations, will be followed. When drawing attention to individual characters within names, however, such as "so" in "Sosuke," the more accurate "*sou*," to indicate the long "o" sound, will be used. This is to facilitate those who wish to look up the characters in (Nelson 1994).

²In a letter to Robert Heilman from Munich in 1959, Eric Voegelin, following Aristotle, defined the "essence of politics" as the "*philia politike*, the friendship which institutes a cooperative community among men." Further, this "friendship is possible among men insofar as they participate in the common *nous*, in the spirit or mind" (Embry 2004, 194).

³There were, of course, many others. Additional notables of the period included Fukuzawa Yukichi, Saionji Kimochi, Itagaki Taisuke, Okuma Shigenobu, Saigo Takamori, Okubo Toshimichi, Kido Takayoshi and the German scholar Carl Friedrich Hermann Roessler.

⁴Yoshida Shoin (1830-1859) was an enormous influence on the young men of Western Honshu during the early years of Meiji. He early envisioned a Japan with the emperor restored to the center of power and authority. He was tried, convicted, and executed by the Tokugawa shogunate in 1859 and became something of a rallying symbol for dissatisfied samurai who wanted to "honor the emperor, and expel the barbarian" (*sonno joi*).

⁵*Kokutai* refers to a mystic bond between the Japanese people and the emperor and is usually associated with the period 1890-1945, that is, the period during the Meiji Constitution.

⁶Jay Rubin translates the phrase *mori no onna* as "Girl in the Forest" in the English translation of *Sanshiro* published in 1977 (Natsume 1977, 210). Among the primary arguments in this essay is that there is a particular depth and mystery to the symbol of *mori no onna* which is captured more by the term "woman" than "girl" and that this depth is clearly intended by Soseki.

⁷See Ernst Cassirer's comments on F. W. J. Schelling in (Cassirer 1953, 85).

⁸*Historiogenesis* is a concept developed by Eric Voegelin in his later works, particularly

in *The Ecumenic Age*. There, Voegelin defines *historiogenesis* as "a speculation on the origins and cause of social order." It is a "rather complex symbolism" and it includes "historiography, mythopoesis, and noetic speculation" as "components" (Voegelin 1974, 59, 60).

⁹The parable of the lost sheep reads as follows in the *King James Bible*: "How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?" (Matthew 18.12).

¹⁰A radical is one of 214 basic elements used to classify both Chinese and Japanese characters in dictionaries. It is the basis for looking up characters in these dictionaries. The character for "sheep", *hitsuji*, is radical number 123 in (Nelson 1994, 720).

¹¹This is Eric Voegelin's translation of Heimito von Doderer's *Apperzeptionsverweigerung* in the *Daemonen*. See (Voegelin 1987, 46, 47).

¹²The first character can also be read as *ya*, as in *yajin* meaning rustic person and highly suggestive of "common people." See (Nelson 1994, 903, character 4814).

¹³*Anoia* "most clearly expresses the state of oblivion as a deformation of noetic consciousness" (Voegelin 1987, 45).

¹⁴Sugawara no Michizane (845-903) was a court scholar in the Heian court who was exiled to Kyushu in southern Japan by a jealous member of the Fujiwara family. Today he is revered as a god of scholarship and learning to whom students pray for help on exams.

¹⁵Nelson defines *chuuyou* as "mean, golden mean, moderation, middle path; Doctrine of the Mean" (Nelson 1994, 57). According to one scholar, Soseki understood this "way" to be one in which man "becomes present to heaven and heaven to man" (Biddle 1973, 393). This concept of *chuuyou* might be favorably compared to Plato's concept of *metaxy*. On the Platonic *metaxy* see (Voegelin 1987, 27, 28).

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