

SŌSEKI
(NATSUME SŌSEKI)
1867–1916

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NATSUME SŌSEKI is a Japanese icon. Almost a century after his death, discoveries of new facts about his life excited journalistic interest, and programs about his life or new dramatizations of his works continued to appear on television. Some of Sōseki's earlier works are read by all Japanese as part of the standard school curriculum, while the more challenging later novels are an indispensable rite of passage for any serious reader. Even non-readers in Japan recognize Sōseki as the face on the thousand-yen bill they use everyday.

By issuing the new bill in 1984, the Japanese government intended to honor Sōseki as a special contributor to Japanese culture, but if he had been alive to witness this "honor," Sōseki himself probably would have protested that his image was being exploited. He viewed the motives of governments with deep distrust and spent the last five years of his life denying that he was a Doctor of Letters, the title that the Ministry of Education tried to designate him with in 1911.

Sōseki was, in other words, something of a curmudgeon, which can be seen in the pen name that he chose for himself. When he started writing for publication (not fiction, but a haiku critique in Chinese verse, under the tutelage of his friend, the haiku poet Masaoka Shiki) in 1889 at the age of 22, Natsume Kinnosuke

did what virtually all Japanese writers had been doing for centuries and continued to do into the early twentieth century: he chose a two-character "first" name with traditional literary associations. The haiku poet Bashō had done the same thing in 1681. (See the General Introduction for more on these traditional pen names.)

Born in 1867, when Confucian ideas of education were still predominant, the young Natsume Kinnosuke was deeply schooled in the classic literature of China, and it was in a well-known Chinese story that he found the label with which he wanted to identify himself. *Sō* (Chinese *shu*) means "to rinse the mouth out, to gargle," and *seki* (Chinese *shi*) means "stone." According to the story, a young man, wishing poetically to announce his intention to seclude himself in the countryside, told a friend, "I shall pillow my head on the stream and rinse my mouth out with stones." When the friend pointed out that what he really must have meant was "I shall pillow my head on a stone and rinse my mouth out in the stream," the would-be poet stubbornly insisted that he had not made a mistake: by pillowing his head on the stream, he meant he would be washing his ears, and by rinsing his mouth out with stones, he would be brushing his teeth.

The budding, young haiku poet was delighted by the stubbornness and eccentricity

he saw in the story because they seemed to fit him so well. Sōseki wore the "Garglestone" label like a badge of honor even after he began producing the novels that established him as the single greatest modern Japanese writer and a truly original voice among those artists of the world who have most fully grasped the modern experience.

The same month that he chose his pen name (May 1889), Sōseki, a student at the elitist First Higher School, attended the inaugural meeting of a student organization called Dōtoku-kai (The Morals Society). The Society had been founded amid a wave of intense nationalism marked by the assassination of the Minister of Education, Mori Arinori, on 11 February for supposed offenses against the national gods, and by the founding of various societies dedicated to the preservation of the "national essence" (*kokusui*). Sōseki had been swept up in the patriotic mood enough to join the Morals Society, but the speeches he heard at the meeting gave him second thoughts, and he took the initiative to give his own speech, in which he said, "The nation may well be important, but we cannot possibly concern ourselves with the nation from morning to night as though possessed by it . . . What a horror if we had to eat for the nation, wash our faces for the nation, go to the toilet for the nation!" (*Sōseki zenshū* [SZ], vol. 16, pp. 612-613; tr. p. 313).

Like others of his time, Sōseki had youthful thoughts of making a life that would be of service to the nation, but he came eventually to realize that his personality quirks—even a touch of madness that he recognized—made him less suited to serving the nation than to serving his society (and perhaps mankind in general) by standing apart and offering his own critical assessment of life in the modern world. In the end, he became the writer most widely recognized as offering guidance in dealing with the great questions that all thinking young people face as they come to grips with their identity as mature members of society.

Histories of modern Japanese literature invariably assign Sōseki his own chapter while

often treating most other writers in groups or movements, and they always label him an "antinaturalist," in opposition to the school that dominated the literary scene after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, the time when his career as a novelist began. Although he did in fact criticize certain naturalist writers, his own mature novels shared much thematically and stylistically with theirs. He clearly saw himself aligned with this new generation of writers who were questioning traditional values, and he spoke out in defense of naturalists when government agencies strove to diminish their impact.

Central to the literary project of the naturalists and of Sōseki—and what made them all appear deeply suspicious to members of the establishment—was their exploration of the self. Neither in the naturalists nor in Sōseki, however, is there to be found a simple affirmation of the independent self in opposition to family or nation. For, having found the self, the writers quickly realized that this modern entity brought with it the pain of isolation.

If these themes—rebellion, generational conflict, self-discovery, loneliness—sound somewhat adolescent, then perhaps the late Meiji period can be seen as a time of national adolescence. And if Sōseki was the writer who articulated these problems of his time with the greatest clarity and forcefulness, then perhaps he can be viewed as an artist of the stature of a Dostoyevsky, whose deep sensitivity to his age and nation yielded works that transcend both. Each new generation of Japanese readers rediscovers Sōseki. And Western readers who discover Sōseki find in him a modern intellect doing battle in familiar territory.

Childhood and Society

When he was born in Edo (later Tokyo) on 9 February 1867, Natsume Kinnosuke had already lost the chance to grow up in the warm and hugely complicated embrace of three prosperous families. The Natsume family had been of samurai stock a few generations before, but the family fortunes had probably improved thanks

to their "descent" to mere townsman status. Kinnosuke's grandfather had come to the Shōgun's capital, Edo, where he was granted the right to clear overgrown land, and set himself up as a local administrator called *nanushi*. When, in 1852, he dropped dead, drunk, in one of the local restaurants that depended on his permission to do business, his thirty-six-year old son, Natsume Kohē Naokatsu, succeeded to the family headship—and never touched a drop of sake for the rest of his life. Kohē reinforced the family's wealth and prominence as chief representative of a union of twenty Edo *nanushi*. The Natsumes were referred to by locals with respect as "Genka," a term for the family home's imposing front entry (*genka=genkan*), which was decorated with symbols of their authority: a lance, a *sasumata* forked pole used to hold down criminals by the neck, and a *sodegarami* barbed pole used to snag the clothing of fleeing offenders. Perhaps because they were not samurai, however, the Natsume house does not appear on maps of the day.

Kohē had two daughters by his first wife, who died in 1853 at the age of 29. From this point, the record becomes convoluted and not always clear, but it is well worth tracing as an example of the kind of transactions that figured prominently (and, to some extent, still do) in Japanese family relations and in the life and works of Natsume Sōseki. (Ages are given here in the Western style: birthday to birthday.)

Kohē remarried in 1854 at the age of 36 (or possibly in 1855 at 37, though the earlier date is thought to be more likely). His new wife, Chie, aged 27, was the third daughter of a pawnshop owner/moneylender who had married into his wife's family and taken the name Fukuda. Chie, however, came to the Natsume family not as the daughter of her father, but as the adopted third daughter of her eldest half sister's husband, a successful charcoal dealer originally named Takahashi but who himself was officially adopted into the Fukuda family when he married Chie's half sister, Kaku. (Kaku was the daughter of their mother's first husband and had herself become a Fukuda through adoption.)

The adoption into the younger Fukuda family may have been a way to clean up Chie's complicated past. After a period of domestic service in the home of a domain lord, Chie had married into the family of a pawnbroker like her own, but the strange relationship between her husband and his stepmother had prompted her to leave him and go to live with Hisa, her middle sister. Hisa had also retained the Fukuda name when she married and adopted her husband, whose original name had been Izubashi. The Izubashis were proprietors of a house of prostitution, which they lost to Hisa's father when they failed to pay off the money he had lent them against it. Hisa got both a business and a husband out of the deal. Chie was the only one of the three sisters not to adopt her husband but to take his surname. Through the three sisters, the Natsume, Izubashi, and Takahashi families grew so close they were said to be almost like one big family, children from one going to stay with others for days and weeks at a time.

Chie gave Natsume Kohē Naokatsu six children in addition to the two he had from his late wife. They were born between 1856 and 1867, but the fourth and fifth died in childhood (infancy in one case), and two others, both consumptives, died at the ages of thirty-one and twenty-eight, respectively, within a few months of each other in 1887. The sixth and last was Kinnosuke, the future Sōseki, born on a day designated by the astrological charts as Kanoe-saru or "Elder Brother of Metal." According to Taoist belief, people born on that day can be hugely successful, but one slip and they are likely to become great thieves. The best way to ward off the curse is to give the newborn a name having the character for "metal" (*kin*) in it, and so the Natsumes named their last child Kin, with the male "-nosuke" suffix attached. Given these measures to ward off ill fortune, Kinnosuke should have been well enough prepared to take his comfortable place in the big, prosperous Natsume-Izubashi-Takahashi clan, but too many years had gone by between the birth of Chie's first child and her last. Everything was different by that time.

The year after Kohē became family head in 1852, Commodore Matthew Perry arrived from America in a warship and demanded that Japan open its doors to the outside world. At a loss to deal with this unprecedented threat, the Tokugawa system of government that supported Kohē's authority began to crumble, slowly at first, but with accelerating speed as each month went by. The year Kohē probably married Chie, 1854, Perry was back and the Tokugawas acquiesced, leading to plots and counterplots between Tokugawa supporters and those loyal to the emperor, but relatively little bloodshed, despite the ubiquity of swords and swordsmen.

By the time Kinnosuke was born in February 1867, Chie was forty and Kohē forty-nine—in an era when those ages were much closer to the normal end of life, and certainly well past any respectable time to be having children. The day before Kinnosuke was born, a former ward of Kohē's by the name of Shiohara (Sōseki's spelling of the name, rather than "Shiobara") visited the house to ask about adopting him. Before that could be worked out, the infant was sent to the relative of a Natsume family maid to nurse but was brought home soon after by his sixteen-year-old half sister, Fusa. Sōseki himself tells the family story that she had seen him one night in a basket mixed in with the junk being sold in the stand run by his nurse's family. Fusa's compassion earned her nothing but a good scolding from Kohē. Milk was obtained thereafter from a cooperative neighbor lady. In the months following Sōseki's birth, political events continued to become more intense, culminating in the "restoration" of the emperor to power and the inauguration of an era of "enlightened rule" called Meiji in October 1868, when Sōseki was nearing two.

The restoration did little to reduce Natsume family authority in their area. The new government kept Kohē in place and gave him a position of local leadership in the city, renamed Tokyo, to replace the *nanushi* title he had held in Edo under the Tokugawa shogunate. He then renamed a nearby street Na-

tsume Hill and the surrounding neighborhood Kikuichō, referring to the chrysanthemum (*kiku*) and well (*i*) motifs in the Natsume family crest. Both place names survive today in Tokyo's Shinjuku ward. The government also offered Kohē some free land nearby, but he passed it up for fear of the expense of fencing it in, a decision that later gave rise to sardonic family jokes about how they could have all been on easy street. One thing that did change, however, was Kohē's name. In 1872 the government decreed that all those with two names, such as Kohē Naokatsu, must henceforth use only one. At that time he decided in favor of his personal name, Naokatsu, rather than his "middle name," which was more an indication of rank than an individualized appellation.

The Natsumes seem to have kept the new baby for a few months before giving him up for adoption to the Shioharas. The infant was at least unconscious of how he was being traded around, but as he grew up in the family of his feuding adoptive parents, watching their marriage fall apart, he twice had the experience of being returned to the Natsume house, the second time permanently at the age of eight, when he learned that the old "grandparents" who lived there were actually his mother and father. Officially, however, Sōseki remained the adopted son of the Shioharas, and he went by the name of Shiohara Kinnosuke until the age of twenty, a legalistic oversight that caused his childhood friends some confusion and caused him some pain in later years. Sōseki recalled that he had been happy to be back with his real family, though his father was hard on him and unloving. His mother treated him warmly and occasionally took him to the theater, but she lived only six more years, dying just before Sōseki turned fourteen in 1881. A surviving photograph of her suggests the harshness and brevity of life in those days: though she died at fifty-four, she looks like a woman in her mid-seventies: it is small wonder the boy took her to be his grandmother.

Sōseki's novel *Michikusa* (1915; *Grass on the Wayside*, 1969) tells the painful story of

the re-emergence in the mature Sōseki's life of his erstwhile adoptive father, who hoped to exploit their past relationship to squeeze some money out of him. Knowing full well that he is being exploited, the protagonist, Kenzō, decides to give him money for a while, but other relatives make their own demands on him as well, including his father-in-law:

They had briefly stretched out their hands, one man to give, and the other to take, then had immediately withdrawn them. Kenzō's wife stood on the side, watching the impersonal transaction and saying nothing.

(SZ, vol. 10, p. 229; tr. p. 121)

The scene is a grim poetic distillation of all the coldness and calculation that Sōseki had experienced in human relations, beginning from the time he was an infant.

The idealized model of relationships in Japan is one of intuitive sincerity and unquestioning devotion, of loyalty beyond intellect, but the ideal has been fashioned precisely because so much calculation goes on in daily life in Japan. A Japanese person is rarely free at any point in the day from the process of weighing and measuring of value in human relationships—the value of gifts, the percentage of that value which must be given back in return, the value of favors done, the degree of obligation or voluntariness behind that favor, the depth and duration of a bow, the respect level of a verb ending. The conflict between duty and human feeling (*giri-ninjō*) that comprised the ethical core of much Tokugawa-period drama was a dynamic of calculation, as often spelled out in long scenes parsing who owes what to whom, with human lives not infrequently the medium of exchange. There is no way to tell what melodramas of *giri* versus *ninjō* lay behind the human tangle of the Natsumes, the Izubashis, and the Takahashis with all their divorces, remarriages, adoptions, and half-siblings, but one thing is certain: the change in period label from "Tokugawa" to "Meiji" did nothing to modify the ingrained habits of calculation that remained vital in Japanese inter-

personal relations into the twenty-first century. Sōseki's novels deal with questions that transcend nationality, but they portray some of the darkest aspects of human exchange the world over by capturing this open secret of Japanese society. Sōseki wrote the following simple cry of the heart in early February 1915, for the last of his memoirs, *Garasudo no uchi* (1915; *Within My Glass Doors*, 1928):

Should I believe what others tell me, and interpret all their words and actions at face value? . . . I do not want to trust evil people, but neither do I want to harm those who are good . . . If there were an omniscient, omnipotent god in this world, I would kneel before that god and pray for it to release me from this anguish . . . But as things stand now, I can only be a fool deceived by others or a bundle of suspicions incapable of opening myself to anyone, filled with unease, unclarity, and unhappiness. How unfortunate is man if this is to continue his whole life long!

(SZ, vol. 12, pp. 598–600)

Whether or not Sōseki moved from this tortured honesty to a quasi-religious stance of *sokuten kyoshi* ("follow Heaven and abandon the self": apparently an original phrase of Sōseki's) in the final months of his life, as some of his "disciples" asserted, the body of works he left behind involved no such peaceful sidestepping of the issue of the self and its relation to others in society. He had been a member of the first generation of Japanese to learn from the West that the self was an entity of value beyond social categories—lord, vassal, father, son, husband, wife, mother, daughter—but to learn also that knowledge of the self, once attained, could never be given back. The stimulus of self-discovery was invariably accompanied by a shattering of the unconscious ties with the enfolding community that provide assurance of continuity and belonging, leaving in their place a painful awareness of transaction. Sōseki's early childhood probably sensitized him to this fact of life and so helped

more people dependent on him than ever. He arranged to have a doctor certify him as suffering from nervous prostration so that he could leave his post in distant Kumamoto, and he took the two jobs offered to him in Tokyo beginning 1 April: teaching English twenty hours a week at the First Higher School and lecturing three hours a week at the Imperial University. To this combined income of ¥125 per month, he added ¥30 per month the following April by taking on three more hours a week of teaching at another university. The income was good but the family could never make ends meet, and the strain on his nerves was tremendous. His wife Kyōko became pregnant with their third child, but this did not prevent their relationship from deteriorating to the point where he sent her back to her parents for two months. A third daughter was born in November just after she returned to him.

Sōseki reworked the lectures that he delivered at the Imperial University in Tokyo, and published them as *Bungakuron*. This work presents a fine-grained analysis of the tools of literature that Sōseki brought to bear when the urging of friends and the expense of life in Tokyo convinced him to write fiction as a way to supplement his academic income. Here is where he worked out the psychological impact of colors that he consciously exploited in his fiction, as well as techniques involving painterly composition, angles, point of view, perspective, movement, stillness, and so forth. (See the translator's Afterword to *Sanshirō*.)

As Matsui Sakuko has observed in her detailed study, *Natsume Sōseki as a Critic of English Literature*, "Sōseki . . . discusses literature from the reader's standpoint . . . in terms of laws of psychology." (p. 120). The psychologist who had the greatest influence on Sōseki was William James (1842–1910), brother of novelist Henry, and the fountainhead of the theory of the "stream-of-consciousness" that influenced such western psychological novelists as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Under James's influence, Sōseki came to think of reading as a union of the reader's "succession of consciousness" (*ishiki no renzoku*) with the author's (SZ, vol. 19, pp. 312, 319).

If *Bungakuron* is a fair representation of Sōseki's lectures at the university, it is no wonder that students complained about his dry, "scientific" analyses after what must have been the rhapsodic presentations of his romantic predecessor, Lafcadio Hearn. The remarkable thing is that, in creating his own original fiction, Sōseki did not write novels like a professor. Or rather, it might be more accurate to say that he quickly became a good enough writer to exploit his academic discoveries without being obvious about them.

There was genuine passion driving Sōseki to write, which can be seen even in his theoretical statements on the function of the novel. The idea of a union of minds—of the reader's "succession of consciousness" with the author's—could not but appeal to a personality that had grown up with a strong sense of separateness:

Works of literature are, by their very nature, nonspecialist books. They are written to criticize or depict matters of common concern to all men. They bring people together, stripped naked, regardless of profession or class, and break down all such walls that separate us. Thus I believe them to be the most worthy and least harmful means for binding us together as human beings

("Dōraku to shokugyō" [1911; Pastime and profession], SZ, vol. 16, pp. 407–408).

Sōseki even coined his own term for this unifying function of literature, *kangenteki kanka*, which means something like "restorative influence," and which he explained as an experience beyond space and time in which the distinction between the reader and the writer breaks down entirely. ("Bungei no tetsugakuteki kiso" [1907; The philosophical foundations of the literary art], SZ, vol. 16, pp. 132–133, 136–137).

In spite of his highly intellectualized approach to writing, Sōseki was never mechanical about his craft, and he never stopped experimenting with his art. The result was a body of works that show thematic and techni-

cal consistency but also a continual process of growth and development.

Explosive Debut: *I Am a Cat*

Anyone who had read only the Sōseki novels featured in textbooks might be overwhelmed by the fact that there are so many studies of the author that use terms like "anguish" and "suffering" and "pain" in their titles. But it was above all his rich sense of humor to which Sōseki gave free rein in his early works. Sōseki's mother is often credited with having exposed him to the lively colloquial humor of the *yose* or variety theater, such that traces of the comic Rakugo storytellers' style can be noted in Sōseki's own comic writings. By the time he started writing, however, he had read widely and deeply in Sterne and Swift—had in fact written some substantial scholarly analyses of their works—and much of the crack-brained humor seen in his own works could as well be said to have English roots. The two are probably inseparable in Sōseki, and perhaps the most that can be said is that they both validated the tendency of his probing intellect to see absurdity in the world around him.

The part of the world that he first subjected to his penetrating wit was the one closest to him: his own academic life. He did this in a comic story that appeared in the New Year's 1905 issue of the magazine *Hototogisu*, which was published by some of the haiku-writing friends in whose company he had adopted the "Sōseki" pen-name sixteen years earlier. The title he gave it, "*Wagahai wa neko de aru*," is usually translated "I Am a Cat," but with its pompous four-syllable first-person pronoun and super-serious written-style verb carrying echoes of self-important politicians, it might better be represented as something like "Gentlemen, I Stand before You, a Cat." (Sōseki himself suggested use of the royal "we" [SZ, vol. 26, p. 284].) There is not much more to this plotless piece than the gag of having a scruffy stray introduce himself in such exaggerated terms, and many pages are devoted to his pratfalls in the human world, with only

puns and lively (but low-minded) jokes to carry the reader along. The joke-filled, Edo-flavored style was enough to arouse a demand for more, however, and Sōseki wrote a much longer sequel for the following month's issue, still not intending to turn it into anything like a novel. By the third installment, however—the first one to be printed with a chapter number—things were beginning to develop, and the comic portraits of the human beings observed by the cat were beginning to take on a genuinely satirical edge. Sōseki continued writing sequels for the magazine all that year and into the next until it emerged as a long, loosely plotted, ever-prolix and often funny critique of greed and affectation in Meiji society, the novel *Wagahai wa neko de aru* (1905–1906; *I Am a Cat*, 1972, 1979, 1986). Sōseki's language surged out in what seemed like an unstoppable—and is a virtually untranslatable—flow.

The nameless feline narrator lives in the home of a Sōseki-like higher school teacher of English, who himself is not given a name until chapter 3, where it is revealed to be "Kushami." This sounds like "Sneeze" but is written with characters suggesting "the agony of life in this world." Kushami tends to doze in his study and drool on his books. He disarms his wife's complaints about their tight finances by showing her a white hair he has yanked from his nostril while she is talking to him (the detailed description of this hair-pulling, in chapter 3, is hilarious and disgusting at the same time). Many jokes are made about Kushami's weak stomach and his lack of a doctoral degree, but some of the banter between Kushami and his wife can be downright creepy in retrospect. When he says he might still get a doctorate because "a certain Greek, Isocrates, produced major literary works at the age of ninety-four," she interrupts his further learned examples with, "Don't be silly. How can you possibly expect, with your stomach troubles, to live that long?" (*Nihon kindai bungaku taikei*: Natsume Sōseki shū [NKBT], vol. 24, p. 138; tr. pp. 185–186).

Much of the give-and-take between husband and wife is in the form of good-natured ribbing

that gives an impression of intimacy and affection. He kids her about her short stature and the beginnings of a bald spot on the crown of her head caused by her matronly chignon. He makes no secret of the fact, however, that this was an arranged marriage, something qualitatively different from the love relationships that are discussed from time to time. Kushami is always telling his wife that she is an ignorant woman and he uses obscure Western references to put her down, but she invariably ends up making him look like a hollow, pretentious tyrant with less than complete confidence in his mastery of English, and her logic is always more sensible and down-to-earth than that of her husband. The farcical world of *I Am a Cat*, in other words, is merely the obverse side of one of Sōseki's most devastating portraits of human miscommunication and suffering, *Grass on the Wayside*, which covers the same anguished period in Sōseki's life, concentrating on the painful relationship of a husband and wife.

Unlike the protagonist of *Grass on the Wayside*, Kushami is constantly being visited by friends, most of them former students, and their silly conversations—some of them appealing set pieces derived from Greek legends or other tales that had caught Sōseki's fancy—comprise the bulk of the book, with the wife commenting now and then that their stories sound like pieces from the *yose* theater. The self-appointed intellectuals who drift through Kushami's house are a harmless and funny but sometimes pitiful lot, "boasting of borrowed clothes, preening with glued-on peacock feathers," as Sōseki described himself in his lecture on individualism, living in constant fear that someone might have read a book or learned a foreign word of which they are ignorant. Again, the farce has a potential darker side, as many of their airy theories touch upon death, suicide, murder, hanging, plague-carrying rats, the absurdity of belief in an omnipotent god, the ongoing Russo-Japanese War, recent literary developments (with mention of one "inscrutable" story by some fellow named Sōseki), the occult, the uncon-

scious, William James, psychosomatic illness, the increase (for better or worse) in women's independence under the new regime, and marital discord.

There is a long burlesque on the war in terms of rat hunting in chapter 5, written just after Japan's destruction of the Baltic Fleet in May 1905, and the jingoist euphoria of victory rampant when Sōseki was writing chapter 6 in September inspires in Kushami a bitter poem lambasting the indefinable, intangible "Japanese Spirit" (*Yamato-damashii*) that everyone in the country supposedly possesses, from Admiral Tōgō, destroyer of the Baltic fleet, down to the meanest swindler and murderer. Sōseki even hints at his own measures to dodge the military by writing his name with characters meaning "sent registration," which he had done—to Hokkaidō, whose citizens were exempt from the draft—at the age of twenty-five (NKBT, vol. 24, pp. 249, 506; tr., p. 190). He did not become a citizen of Tokyo again until September 1913.

Sōseki's antipathy for war hysteria came out in full force in a story he published in January 1906, the same month as the largely slapstick chapters 7 and 8 of *I Am a Cat* and four months after the end of the Russo-Japanese War, which had been fought from February 1904 to September 1905 over the question of which of those two imperial powers would dominate parts of Manchuria and Korea. The tone of the opening of "Shumi no iden" (1906, "The Heredity of Taste," 1974) is nothing short of ferocious:

Under the influence of the weather, even the gods run mad. A voice came shouting from within the clouds, "Slaughter men. Let loose the hungry dogs." This voice shook the sea of Japan into turbulence and rang as far as the ends of Manchuria. In immediate response to that voice, the Japanese and the Russians between them created a massive slaughter-house, two hundred miles long and two hundred miles wide, in the plains of Northern Manchuria.

(SZ, vol. 2, p. 185; tr. p. 117).

The panorama of war fills the rest of the page, increasing in fury and goriness. It turns out to be the fantasy of a bookworm who stumbles upon a huge crowd welcoming a general resembling Nogi Maresuke, "hero" of Port Arthur, and his troops back to Tokyo. The man is both touched and repulsed by the patriotic display, but finally he finds himself comically incapable of joining the crowd's heartfelt cries of "Banzai!" This sixty-page story combines an oddly distanced academic humor with vivid descriptions of the horrific sacrifices made by Japanese troops attacking Hill 203 overlooking Port Arthur, one of whom was the narrator's lovable best friend. It is one of the most gripping and, finally, enigmatic creations to have come from Sōseki's apparently indefatigable pen at this stage when he was writing *I Am a Cat* and what seems like a hundred other things all at once. He had obviously let the genie out of the bottle after all those years as an academic, and he could not stop himself.

The Sōseki whose name is written with the characters meaning "sent-registration" in *I Am a Cat* is supposedly the author of "Ichiya" (1905; One night), a dreamy piece that no one understands—including the author himself, and for good reason: the actual story called "Ichiya" is so crammed with colors, fragrances, sounds, and self-consciously "poetic" imagery that the main reaction to it was one of puzzlement. In it, two men, one with beard, one without, and a woman with sad eyes spend a night together, saying beautiful things and finally sinking into sleep and forgetfulness.

The satire of *I Am a Cat*, thus, covers a broad field, ranging from pretentious intellectuals to phony nationalism to Sōseki's own more fantastic writings. *I Am a Cat* also contains much ranting against the arrogance of the rich and powerful, a theme that resurfaced repeatedly and inevitably in Sōseki's more mature fiction as it probed the cold transactions of human relations. Kushami's rich neighbors, the Kanedas ("Moneyfield" or "It's Money"), who live in an ostentatiously large house and have "one of those *telephone* things I've heard so much about" (NKBT, vol. 24, p.

146; cf. tr. p. 201), use their wealth to buy the loyalties of the locals to spy on Kushami and generally make his life miserable. One can almost hear Kushami's indignation in Sōseki's own lecture on individualism given nine years later when he warned his wealthy young audience at the Peers' School to beware of crushing others' individuality through abuses of their power and money.

The closest thing to a plot in the novel traces the hopeless suit of one of Kushami's former students for the hand of the conceited daughter of the rich Kaneda family. When it comes to lambasting the rich, Sōseki routinely stoops to low humor. The mother's gigantic nose earns her the nickname Nosegirl (*Hanako*) and inspires endless tiresome nose jokes plus a lengthy disquisition on noses. Scholars, as useless as they are, always come off looking better than businessmen.

Sōseki's letters and his wife Kyōko's memoirs record the tremendous fun that Sōseki had writing *I Am a Cat*. When he read his new installments aloud, his young *Hototogisu* associates would roll over with laughter, and he derived joy from writing at all hours of the day and night. The more he wrote, the more he wanted to write, and the more he begrudged the hours he had to spend preparing his lectures. The summer vacation of 1905 was particularly frustrating in that regard. He wrote to several friends, expressing his desire to stop teaching and begin writing full-time. His frustration almost certainly played a part in the marked change in tone in the chapters of *I Am a Cat* that Sōseki wrote from the end of that year into the next, as the narrative moves away from the cat and his silly antics to focus on Kushami and his struggles to attain a measure of spiritual peace in a world full of unreliable humans. Chapter 9, which appeared in March 1906, is as bitter and intense and internalized as anything Sōseki ever wrote, so extreme in its negativity that the most scathing expressions are presented as those of an institutionalized lunatic, who writes to Kushami in the following vein:

Your closest friends might betray you. Your very parents may treat you with indiffer-

ence. Even your own true love might cast you off. No man, naturally, can put his trust in wealth or worldly honors. Lands and peerages can vanish in the twinkling of an eye. The lifetime of scholarship treasured in your head will go moldy in the end. On what, then, do you intend to rely? What is there in this whole wide world on which you dare depend? God? God is but a clay figure fabricated by man in the depths of despair, a mere stinking corpse of congealed excrement evacuated from the bowels of men scared shitless.

(NKBT, vol. 24, p. 337; revised from tr. pp. 112–113).

Instead of ignoring this letter, as he has just done with a solicitation for yet another Russo-Japanese War victory celebration, Kushami finds himself moved to read it again and again. The cat tells us, "A man like my master, who has spent his whole life faking explanations for English words he doesn't know, naturally wants to wrench some meaning out of such a piece of mumbo-jumbo" (NKBT, vol. 24, pp. 338–339; revised from tr. p. 15).

The cat, who can read Kushami's thoughts *because* he is a cat (though "Don't ask me how"), goes on to trace a long internal debate that Kushami holds with himself, pitting Western positivism with its inevitable frustrations against the comforting Eastern passivism that he has been hearing about from his philosopher friend Yagi Dokusen, and which attracts him as the one promise of relief from the individualistic jungle of Japan's modern civilization. The more Dokusen opens his mouth, however, the more he reveals himself to be the Zen Buddhist charlatan that he is accused of being by Kushami's rational young friend Meitei, who blames Dokusen's mumbo-jumbo for having caused the above letter-writer's insanity. Kushami worries that his attraction to the madman's words may reveal some degree of madness in himself, and like the hypochondriac Daisuke of *Sore kara* (1909; *And Then*, 1978), one of Sōseki's greatest novels of psychological self-examination, he begins testing

his pulse and looking for signs of physical and mental illness. He begins to wonder if "human society is no more than a massing of lunatics," and the few sane people are the ones locked up in asylums, and he concludes, "I just don't understand anything anymore" (NKBT, vol. 24, pp. 361–362; tr. pp. 156–157). The strain of trying to understand makes him fall asleep. The cat's derision of his intellectual failings can do little to lighten this portrait of a depressive personality for whom sleep offers the only relief. Thus in chapter 9 of *I Am a Cat*, which begins with Kushami examining his pock-marked face in the mirror, and ends with his utter mental confusion, Sōseki has put the finishing touches on the portrait of the hero who appears again and again in his novels with different names—if far fewer jokes.

Sōseki published two more chapters to bring *I Am a Cat* to a close, one in April and the last one in August, between which he wrote one of his most memorable struggles between modern civilization and Eastern aestheticism, *Kusamakura* (1906; *The Three-Cornered World*, 1965). Indeed, he was writing with such intensity that the April installment of *I Am a Cat* appeared in the same issue of *Hototogisu* as the complete text of his short novel *Botchan* (1906; *Botchan*, 1972), and the two final chapters of *I Am a Cat* were among the longest and most energetic of the entire work. The family finances had improved enough by October 1906—aided perhaps by the death of his father-in-law in September—that Sōseki was able to quit his third job teaching at Meiji University. This was the month when the random visits of former students and other young Sōseki admirers reflected in *I Am a Cat* became formalized as the "Thursday Society" (*Mokuyōkai*), though Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, the most famous "disciple," did not join the group until 1915.

In chapter 10, which begins on the morning after Kushami's confusing mental struggle, Sōseki is clearly testing his ability to write in a straightforward realistic vein, as he describes the day's activities of Kushami, his wife, and three small daughters—the latter's cute antics

viewed both in fond detail and in terms of what trouble they will be for Kushami when the day comes for him to marry them off. Chapter 11 is a hilarious experiment in storytelling, as one of Kushami's young friends tells the tantalizing story of his passionate determination to overcome old-fashioned masculine prejudices in his village against Western high culture by buying and then hiding and then finally *not* playing a violin.

In chapter 11, Kushami gives his gloomiest assessment yet of the curse of modern Japanese civilization, which, he says, is marked by the excessive growth of individualism, which in turn he blames, with wonderful illogic, for the upsurge in the number of detectives poking into everyone's private lives. His group agree that, a thousand years in the future, suicide will become the routine way to die and that divorce will be universal; already, people are so uninterested in each other that they do not bother reading each other's literature, a trend already well advanced in England as can be seen in the works of Henry James.

The final chapter portrays one last gathering of Kushami's group of friends, and is thus a summation of virtually all the issues that have been raised piecemeal in the course of this rambling writer's workshop. For, bound between covers, *I Am a Cat* is nothing so much as a compilation of first drafts, unruly pages that contain the seeds of everything that Sōseki would write in the ten years left to him. The closeted scholar Kushami himself, sometimes even with mustache and clouds of tobacco smoke, appears again and again in Sōseki's fiction, still torn between the painful transactions of modern society and the soothing calm of withdrawal and detachment. The problems of modern civilization and individualism and money form the backbone of virtually all of Sōseki's novels and much of his non-fiction. Even Sōseki's supposed ultimate solution to life's problems, *sokuten kyoshi* ("follow Heaven and abandon the self"), has its precursor here. When Kushami bemoans the "curse" of modern man's restless self-absorption, the philosopher Dokusen insists that

"the only cure lies in learning to forget the Self" (NKBT, vol. 24, p. 459; tr. pp. 318-319).

Other themes, however, would not be much pursued. Kushami's sharp critique of jingoism and the use of force became a central theme in *Botchan*, and *The Three-Cornered World* would end with a sad and angry farewell to a soldier leaving for the Russo-Japanese War, but Sōseki did not further develop war as a theme in his fiction and demonstrated no sensitivity to Japanese continental depredations.

While serializing his cat-story-turned-novel, it has been noted, Sōseki wrote several short stories and one short novel. The shorter pieces tended to be academic riffs on material such as the Arthurian legends or experiences Sōseki had had in London. "Rondon tō" (1905; "The Tower of London," 1992), for example, is a twenty-five-page rhapsody on English history presented as a series of visions experienced by a Sōseki-like narrator as he toured the tower. Full of personal and place names from ghastly historical events connected with the tower, it is saved from being a mere exercise in self-indulgent pedantry by Sōseki's ability to conjure up vivid images of murder and mayhem that seem to issue forth from some dark cavern of the psyche.

MODERN JAPANESE WRITERS

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