

On Natsume Sōseki's *Meian* 明暗 (Light and Darkness)

NISHITANI KEIJI

I WAS very attracted to *Meian* when I first read it a long time ago. I say “a long time ago,” but I was around your age, and I have reread it once or twice since then. This novel, I believe, is Sōseki's best work in that it is the most developed of his *oeuvre* and treats the themes that he had explored in his previous works in a more nuanced and detailed way. Of course, since the novel was never completed, it ends more by raising questions than by offering conclusions. Today, I wish to think about what these basic questions in *Meian* are. I must first state, however, that, because I have not read studies on Sōseki, my reading of the work is solely my personal interpretation.

These fundamental themes of *Meian* emerge more or less in the first eight sections. As you might already know, the problem begins with the surgery on hemorrhoids that one of the protagonists, Tsuda, undergoes. Tsuda and his wife, Onobu, are most likely the protagonists in this novel and their relationship its central problem. Related to and intertwined with this are various other relationships that surround it. During Tsuda's hospitalization, the doctor tells him:

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Nishitani Keiji, “Natsume sōseki meian ni tsuite” 夏目漱石明暗について, *Shūkyō to hishūkyō no aida* 宗教と非宗教の間, Tokyo: Iwanami gendai bunko, 2001.

“It’s just that it won’t do merely to clean the opening as I have been doing. The flesh would never join that way, so there’s nothing left to do but change the method I’ve been using and perform a basic operation without delay.”

“What exactly do you mean by ‘a basic operation’?”

“An incision. To make an incision and bring the fistula and intestine together. Then the two sides which are now separated should be cured once and for all.”¹

This passage deals symbolically with the main theme of this novel. Here, a basic operation, the need to make an incision, and natural healing processes play a central role. If it is tubercular, the lesion will gradually grow deeper and will not heal even if the opening is treated. However, when Tsuda asks the doctor, “I wouldn’t happen to be tubercular, would I?” the doctor responds, “No, you’re not.”² This means that, if he undergoes the operation to treat the root cause, his hemorrhoids will truly heal. In sum, the first chapter discusses the nature of Tsuda’s illness.

Section Two depicts Tsuda’s various thoughts on the notion of change, which is first brought up when he muses over how he began to feel pain from the hemorrhoids out of the blue on the way back from cherry blossom viewing. Tsuda starts thinking that one would never know when or how one’s own body would undergo a change. Not only that, one does not even know what kind of changes are occurring in one’s body right at this very moment. This realization frightens him, but he continues on with his musing and comes to realize that one would never know when and how changes take place in the spiritual world either. Then, it occurs to him that he has actually witnessed such a moment. Needless to say, here, he is referring to his relationship with Kiyoko, the problem underlying the main theme of the novel.

Why did she marry him? Undoubtedly because she wanted to. But still she certainly shouldn’t have. And why did *I* marry the woman *I* did? Again undoubtedly because I wanted to. And yet earlier I hadn’t wanted to.³

¹ Natsume Sōseki, *Light and Darkness*, trans. by V. H. Viglielmo. New York: Perigee, 1971, pp. 1–2. All quotes, unless otherwise noted, are from this translation. The names of the two female characters are rendered as O-Nobu and O-Hide in this, but I have written their names as Ohide and Onobu in the main text of this essay, based on a more recent convention. [Translator’s Note]

² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Right before this passage, Tsuda recalls what his friend said about coincidence (*gūzen* 偶然).

“That’s why we often say something’s a coincidence, but what we call a coincidence, according to Poincaré’s theory, is simply the term we use when the causes are so complex we can’t discover them easily. For example, for Napoleon to be born, the combination of a certain special egg and spermatozoon was necessary, but when we try to think a bit further about what conditions were necessary for such a combination to take place, we can hardly imagine them.”

He could not overlook what his friend had said or consider it merely a new fragment of knowledge. He sought instead to apply it exactly to his own case. As he did so, he could imagine some dark, mysterious force pushing him to the left when he had to go right, and pulling him back when he had to advance. And yet he had never before felt that he had been restrained in his actions by anyone. He did not doubt that everything he had said and done had been of his own free will.⁴

After this, the aforementioned passage in which Tsuda wonders why Kiyoko married another man follows. What is portrayed here is Tsuda’s vague recognition of the problematic relationship between one’s free will and the dark, mysterious force—or put another way, the power of fate that lurks behind one’s “will” (*ishi* 意志). The tension between these two forces is the central, philosophical theme of this novel. Of course, I am speaking conceptually here, and in terms of the actual content of the novel, this theme is depicted through different human relations in which there is a gap between reality and what ought to have been—be it that between Tsuda and Kiyoko or between Tsuda and Onobu. Reality, of course, is a product of one’s own free will. In the case of Kiyoko, she had married another man for no other reason than her own desire to do so. However, it was not as if she had had no other choice. In the case of Tsuda, he had married Onobu certainly based on his own decision. Yet, he had never felt the desire to marry her. As these examples indicate, there is an area of uncertainty in these relationships, created by a kind of duality. For instance, he had thought he would marry Kiyoko but he did not. Ultimately, this dilemma points to coincidence as explicated by Poincaré—the extreme complexity that transcends human understanding. This is the conclusion that Tsuda reaches during his train ride on the way back from the

⁴ Ibid., pp. 3–4.

hospital. In conceptual terms, what is being addressed here is a question concerning freedom, will, and intention, which are directly countered by the dark, mysterious force. I think we can call such a force “destiny” (*unmei* 運命), and in fact, this word is used in this work.

I believe that *Meian* can be divided roughly into two parts. The first begins with the doctor’s diagnosis of Tsuda’s condition and his hospitalization. During his weeklong stay in the hospital, various events take place. He is released at the end of this hectic week and here, the first part concludes. Then the second part, which centers on Tsuda’s relationship with Kiyoko, unfolds when he goes to a hot spring to visit her. At the beginning of this part, the phrase “the flame of destiny” (*unmei no shukka* 運命の宿火) appears. Also, in the scene in which Tsuda travels to the inn are the words “fate” (*shukumei* 宿命) and “destiny.” Tsuda and Kiyoko were supposed to have married, but suddenly, she had had a change of heart and married another man. Yet Tsuda continues to pursue Kiyoko single-mindedly even after her marriage.

He had never once forgotten her in the almost one year that had elapsed since they had parted. Indeed even as he was being jolted in a horse-cart along a night road in that way he was undoubtedly pursuing her image intently. Earlier, the driver, apparently fearing that it was getting late, had wantonly and frequently cracked his whip against the buttocks of the gaunt horse, even though Tsuda had wished that he would stop doing so. Was not Tsuda, in pursuing the image of that lost woman, if his true intent be frankly described, very like this gaunt horse? But if the pathetic animal in front of him, breathing heavily through its nostrils, was actually Tsuda himself, who then was the one who was applying the cruel whip?⁵

Mrs. Yoshikawa, who urged Tsuda to visit Kiyoko, may have instigated such a metaphorical lashing of him, yet she is not the one who is actually hitting him. It could be that Tsuda himself is applying the whip, but this is not very clear. What is certain, however, is that there is something that is cracking the whip to drive on the gaunt horse. This relates back to the beginning of the first part—ultimately, Tsuda comes to believe that he has no other choice but to follow and reach the flame of destiny.

Such a conviction shows that a dramatic transformation has taken place in Tsuda between the two parts. What unites them, however, is the dark, mys-

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

terious force called destiny, which pulls an individual regardless of his or her will and drives him or her (or the person) on to someplace whether he or she likes it or not. *Meian* is concerned with the tension between this force and free will—the tension that manifests itself in the novel as a problem between men and women. What is at stake here is “authenticity” (*shinjitsu* 真実) in human relations. This work is concerned with true love (*hontō no aijō* 本当の愛情) between a man and a woman or a relationship between them based on love. However, more generally speaking, this question concerning relations between men and women encompasses not only that of a married couple but also that between an older brother and his sister or that between friends. Relationships between parents and children, husband and wife, siblings, and friends are all basic forms of human relations, and all of these entail difficulties arising from truly intimate interactions between human beings, which raise the question of authenticity.

Authenticity in human relations concerns faith (*shin* 信), the question of which is brought up much later in the novel when a look in Kiyoko's eyes reminds Tsuda of the past.

“Ah, those were the eyes!”

Past scenes, repeated any number of times between them, came distinctly to his mind. Kiyoko had at that time believed in this one man named Tsuda. Therefore, she had looked up to him for all knowledge. She had sought from him the resolution of all doubt. She had seemed to take up the future which she herself did not understand, and had cast it upon him. Thus, even though her eyes had moved they had been at rest. As they had asked him for something they had had the brightness of faith and peace.⁶

An authentic human relationship consists of faith, and how this comes into being is more difficult to understand than it actually appears. The pursuit of such understanding, I believe, is the central theme of *Meian*.

In the passage above, faith is equated with peace. Indeed, it is only when there is faith that one can feel reassured in a relationship, and the notion of reassurance also appears frequently in this novel. For example, when Onobu wishes to depend on her husband or wants to do so in the true sense of the word, she is hoping for reassurance. It is only when anxiety is removed and calm arrives that one can truly feel reassured. One must be without worries

⁶ Ibid., p. 373.

in order to be calm, and this is why Kiyoko's eyes appeared tranquil even when they were moving. In other words, the trust she had in Tsuda manifested itself through the tranquility of her eyes, which in turn arose from the feeling of this reassurance. In the past, she had had faith in Tsuda, but she had had a change of heart—herein lies the problem. She had believed him completely, had sought all of her knowledge from him, and had relied on him to solve all of her problems. She had cast the future she had not understood upon him. She had depended on Tsuda because he was supposed to be an intelligent and wise man. And he had been offering her solutions as she had expected, but after a while, Kiyoko suddenly slipped away. That she escaped means that she had ceased to trust him. Something in her had become dissatisfied with what Tsuda could offer her.

As I said previously, to trust means to be at peace and to feel at ease. In *Meian*, the concept of peace (*heiwa* 平和) is conveyed through the notion of the ordinary (*hei* 平). The narrative on the ordinary reaches its peak when Tsuda's sister (Ohide) visits him during his hospital stay and has an argument with him. What is at stake here is the trust between siblings. His sister demands that Tsuda fulfill his role as an older brother, while he expects her to act like a proper younger sister, but both of them have difficulties fulfilling these expectations. In the midst of this argument, Onobu comes into the room, and after his sister leaves, Tsuda and Onobu feel as though they are a "truly married couple," as it were. This is the scene in which the concept of the ordinary appears.

"It seems that it won't do any good."

"Really? What do you mean?"

"It seems that no matter how much I ask Father he won't send us any more money."

Tsuda's way of speaking was strangely filled with sincerity. From being filled with rancour towards O-Hide he had suddenly become direct and straightforward towards O-Nobu. Moreover, he himself was completely unaware of this development. This unaffected manner of his made O-Nobu happy, and she answered in a warm tone as if to console him. Even her manner of speaking showed that she had become her normal self without realizing it.

"Even so, it doesn't matter. We'll manage somehow."⁷

⁷ Ibid., p. 192.

That he had become straightforward without recognizing the fact points to the notions of “innocence” (*mushin* 無心) and “naturalness” (*shizen* 自然).⁸ Indeed, Sōseki uses such words frequently.

It is around this time that the secret between Tsuda and Onobu—the problem concerning Kiyoko—becomes evident. Although it is not clear at this point which woman is involved, what is revealed is that there is some kind of secret. Ohide tells Tsuda, “While you’re caring so much for O-Nobu there’s still someone else you’re concerned about.”⁹ Upon overhearing this comment, Onobu feels as if she has no other choice but to enter the room. Depicted here is a very tense scene. Her suspicion that her husband may have been keeping a secret from her is confirmed. Unsettling feelings caused by this doubt had been straining her relationship with Tsuda. But when it becomes certain that a secret in fact does exist, she returns to her ordinary self—even in the words she uses—and the tone of her voice becomes warm. In this way, the ordinariness of peace is conveyed through the straightforward husband and her ordinary self.

It is not easy to have full trust in one another. *Meian* explores ways to reach this ideal state through the notion of ordinariness or usualness (*heizei* 平生)—concepts which are very Eastern. This paradigm indicates, to some extent, that the truth lies in the ordinary. Needless to say, the character *wa* 和—meaning harmony—as found in the kanji compound “peace” (*heiwa* 平和), is the same one as used in another compound “harmony” (*wagō* 和合), which also appears in the novel. Onobu’s uncle tells Onobu in the scene in which he gives her money,

“O-Nobu, when there’s a yin-yang discord, this is the most effective medicine. In most cases, if you just take one dose, it quickly restores you to health.”

As she looked up at her uncle, who was standing, she resisted weakly: “But we’re not a case of yin-yang discord. We’re really in complete harmony, I tell you.”¹⁰

The balance between yin and yang refers to harmony as found in a marital relationship, and money is given as a wonder drug to achieve it. Such concord

⁸ In Nishitani’s sense, *shizen* suggests both “nature” and “naturalness.” However, in a Jōdoshinshū context, *jinen* is used to denote the latter concept. [Editor’s Note]

⁹ *Light and Darkness*, p. 190.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

or peace points to a tranquil state in which there are no disturbances; this is the harmoniousness that is linked to trust. It is only at the point of such tranquility that authenticity in human relations is achieved.

Now, this work attempts to address how trust comes into being on two dimensions—in fact, these two levels apply to all human relations. One of them deals with general societal standards. In the case of a couple, for instance, one can judge, based on such general standards, whether it is compatible or whether its family is stable and peaceful. In other words, it is possible to address the question of trust and peace in human relationships through these conventional terms. What Tsuda and Onobu are seeking in their relationship is based on such standards for the most part.

Returning to the opening scenes of *Meian*, Tsuda goes back and forth in his mind on the problem concerning destiny and free will, and by the time he gets off the train and returns home, he feels lost. After this, an interaction between Onobu and himself is depicted. The former senses some kind of coldness from her husband, with his words' being sarcastic. Tsuda, too, is fearful of his wife's attitude. The word "coldness" appears repeatedly in this scene as both of them sense it from the other. The depictions point insistently to this tension—neither responds to the other, she keeps looking down and does not look back at her husband, and he opens the sliding doors without saying a word. All of these—the coldness, the silence, and her not looking back—hint at gaps in marital or even human relations.

Then money becomes necessary for Tsuda's hospitalization. He tries to acquire it from his father, while Onobu attempts to secure it from her uncle. Here, money plays a central role. Both Tsuda and Onobu use words like "vanity" (*mie* 見栄) and "appearances" (*taimen* 体面). He is afraid that his wife might look down on his family for its unwillingness to lend it to them. Onobu, on the other hand, is worried that people might think that they are poor if they borrow money. Up until this point, others had thought she was lucky to have married well and that her life had no difficulties or worries. Tsuda had bought her a ring, too. Therefore, she insists that she cannot borrow money after pretending that she was leading a fairly comfortable and fulfilled life. Here, Sōseki describes the situation as having to do with keeping up appearances or allowing vanity to get in the way. There are ordinary social expectations that a wife would have of her husband and vice versa, as there are for a brother, a sister, a parent, or a child, and a certain discontent arises when these expectations are not met. Onobu's dissatisfaction stems from the fact that her husband is standoffish and does not reciprocate her kindness. Tsuda, too, is

dissatisfied, though in a different sense. In this way, they are both mired in vanity and appearances. What is being problematized here is a relationship between people who are caught up in conceits, ego, and pride. One might argue that these elements compose the positions of the “self” (*ga* 我). Here, each individual is placing the self at the center, and in fact, such egocentricity constitutes one dimension of human relations.

Therefore, in addition to the nature of Tsuda's and Onobu's relationship, who they are as individuals must be addressed. Although I do not think his character is discussed in detail at the beginning of the novel, Onobu's is depicted very clearly.

Since O-Nobu had a very fair complexion, her well-formed eyebrows stood out even more clearly. She also made a habit of twitching them. Unfortunately her eyes were too narrow, and her one-fold eyelids were rather uninteresting. But the pupils flashing within them were the deepest black, and therefore she used them to very good advantage. Occasionally she even adopted an expression which might almost have been called despotic. At times Tsuda could not help being captivated by the gleam from those small eyes, but at other times, for no reason at all, he was suddenly repelled by it.

When he casually raised his head and looked at her, he felt a kind of weird power dwelling momentarily in her eyes. It was a strange brilliance, utterly out of keeping with the tender words she had just been using. His mind, in attempting to frame an answer to her words, was somewhat confused by this glance. Then she suddenly smiled, showing her beautiful teeth. As she did so, the expression in her eyes disappeared without a trace.¹¹

Here, two sides of Onobu are depicted—one that uses sweet words with beautiful smiles, while the other displays a mysterious power. The concept of the smile appears again when Kiyoko's is discussed, but Onobu's in this scene is that on a superficial level just as her sweet words are. When Onobu smiles, the mysterious look in her eyes disappears without a trace, but it resurfaces at certain moments without warning. In other words, she possesses two personalities, which she herself is unable to control, and she struggles as a result of this in her relationship with Tsuda. I believe that her jet-black eyes and their mysteriousness indicate that she is a very passionate woman.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

At the beginning of the novel, Onobu is placed at the very center. Of course, Tsuda is as well, but in terms of what is being depicted, she is more so. I think that the author's true interest here lies in portraying Onobu. Sōseki had depicted characters that nurtured secret passions of various kinds prior to writing *Meian*, and this novel, too, is driven by a passion—and this time, it is in Onobu. On a superficial level, this passion is manifested in the ways I have already mentioned, showing that Onobu is a very vain woman who values keeping up appearances. She is egotistical and proud, and is confident that she is able to attract her husband through her cleverness; therefore she passionately pursues his affections. At the end, she mentions her desire to feel secure in the relationship and to depend on her husband. In other words, she wants to trust in him. She wants to be able to believe in him. In terms of the notion of love, she speaks of perfect or unconditional love. There are many scenes in which she talks about love, but to bring up one example, Onobu tells Tsugiko, the daughter of her uncle, Okamoto, that she is able to make a person love her through her own capacity to love. What is being discussed here is actually the notion of passion or determination. In fact, the latter word does appear several times. For instance, the beginning of Section Eighty states, “A strong determination filled O-Nobu’s entire body. When she awoke the following morning, there was nothing further removed from her than timidity.”¹² For Onobu, love is equated with her own willpower.

Tsugiko thinks that all is well between Tsuda and Onobu and that he loves her. The latter, in turn, encourages her to think so. With this backdrop, the following conversation takes place between the two women:

“The reason I’m happy is simply this: it’s just that I was able to choose my husband myself. It’s because I didn’t marry on the advice of others. Do you understand?”

Tsugiko looked rather forlorn.

“Then a person like me doesn’t have any hope at all of being happy, does she?”

O-Nobu had to say something. But she could not speak immediately. Finally words began to pour forth from her involuntarily in an excited and urgent tone: “Oh, but you do, you do! By just loving someone and making him love you. If only you do that, you have untold possibilities of being happy.”¹³

¹² Ibid., p. 143.

¹³ Ibid., p. 130.

Choosing a marriage partner on one's own, as Tsuda and Onobu have done, is a modern practice. [It must be remembered that this is taking place in the late nineteenth century.] As mentioned before, marrying a person whom one wants to marry means that this marriage partner is chosen from among many other candidates. Tsuda chose Onobu, and vice versa. As a result, many believe that they are blessed, and they, too, believe that they are indeed happy. In the novel, many discussions revolve around how they got married. In one such instance, which takes place at the home of Tsuda's uncle, Fujii, Tsuda's aunt, who married into the family not based on love but through an old-fashioned arranged marriage, speaks of the resolve she had when she first arrived there. She asks Tsuda,

“Yoshio, tell me, what kind of attitude did you have when you got married?”

“Well, I certainly didn't do it in a joking manner. I'm not very happy being considered merely a trivial person, even if I may appear rather lighthearted at times.”

“Of course you were serious. Yes, I'm sure you were, but still there are various degrees of seriousness.”¹⁴

In this conversation, Tsuda's aunt is asking him whether or not he was truly serious in marrying Onobu, although Tsuda claims that he married her because he liked her. Later, the issue of integrity is brought up as well. Generally, it is believed that this new form of marriage in which one chooses a partner on his or her own, based on love, leads to a genuine romantic relationship. Yet, such an assumption is quite superficial. Despite this general assumption, Tsuda's aunt criticizes him for his seeming lack of sincerity or seriousness, indicating that there are various problems even at this level.

Onobu passionately seeks Tsuda's affections, but his basic character prevents his reciprocating. Unlike Onobu, who is very passionate, Tsuda is a confident, intellectual smart aleck. Onobu, too, is self-centered and strong-willed, but the difference is that his vanity stems from his intellect—he is a cultured intellectual, who, for example, tries to read a book on economics in German. Indeed, he values education greatly; not only does he derive his confidence from his own education, but he also likes to display it. Such is his character. Also, later in the novel, he is described as a handsome man who is proud of his smooth skin. In the scene in the second part of the novel in which he becomes lost in the hallway of the inn, he is described as follows:

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

He was quite a handsome man, with regular features and a complexion that was so smooth as to seem almost wasted on a man. Having always been rather self-assured of his good looks, he could remember only having his assurance confirmed by every encounter with a mirror.¹⁵

Others speak ill of him and claim that he will not be satisfied unless every single woman falls in love with him. Tsuda is an intellectual—or a calculating man, if we were to put the same in a negative term—who is also proud of his attractiveness. At the bottom of such a character is a secret that he does not want to reveal to Onobu. Herein lies Tsuda's fundamental problem. If he did not have this secret, he would be considered just another confident person among many others of this kind. However, he had the woman whom he loved escape from him for a reason that remains unknown to him. This is a secret from his past that haunts him.

Tsuda keeps the fact that he is unable to forget Kiyoko a secret, building an insurmountable wall between himself and Onobu, which neither of them is able to break down. The word "barrier" (*sekisho* 関所) is used to describe this. It is stated, "This was the most important barrier; therefore, he could not let Onobu pass it no matter what."¹⁶ Initially, Onobu does not know of this "barrier." However, as she tries to forge an authentic relationship with Tsuda—or to put it differently, as she seeks to bring the relationship to the point where they can truly love each other—she becomes aware of it. The passion with which she seeks such a relationship is referred to as perfect or unconditional love. Related to this passion in the novel is the notion of death, which implies that it would be better to die than to fail to achieve perfect or genuine love, based on reciprocity.

The word "courage" also appears in *Meian*. For instance, there is a scene in which Tsuda tells Onobu, who insists that she is willing to meet Kobayashi in order to drive him away, "You're quite courageous underneath that womanly exterior of yours, aren't you?"¹⁷ Then, in the scene in which Onobu

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

¹⁶ This passage has been rendered into English by the translator of this article herself. It is taken from: *Meian*, in *Sōseki Zenshū*, vol. 11, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1994, p. 297. Viglielmo translates this as: "Since this was precisely the most difficult point for him to understand himself, he could not very well expect O-Nobu to understand it" (*Light and Darkness*, p. 293).

¹⁷ *Light and Darkness*, p. 297.

becomes aware of Tsuda's secret but is yet to find out what exactly it is, the following conversation takes place.

"That's all right. But you just watch one of these days."

He was slightly surprised as he retorted, "*What* do you want me to watch?"

"It doesn't matter, but just watch one of these days."

"All right, I will, but what in the world are you going to do?"

"Well, I can't say until the problem actually arises."

"Doesn't the fact you can't say really mean that you don't know yourself?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Somehow it all seems ridiculous. It's the vaguest kind of prediction imaginable."

"Nevertheless I'm saying this prediction will soon come true so you just watch."

He gave a disapproving sniff. Conversely her attitude gradually became more serious.

"I mean it. I don't know why but lately I've always been thinking about it. I'm certain the time will some day come when I'll for once have to show all the courage I have inside me."

"'Some day'? 'For once'? That's why I say it's a kind of fantasy."

"No, I don't mean some day years from now or once in my lifetime. I mean soon. I mean once some day in the near future."

"You're just making it worse. I assure you I won't be too happy on that day in the near future when you show me this reckless courage of yours."

"No, it's *for* you, I tell you. Haven't I been saying that all along? I'd show courage *for* you."¹⁸

He calls her prediction a fantasy, characterizes her courage as reckless, and does not take her seriously, telling her it is not becoming for a woman to be so courageous. Onobu replies that she needs to be so, for her husband's sake. Here, her passion is seeking genuine love, and in the process, leaves the superficial realm for one which is much deeper. What becomes a problem for her

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 298.

passion in this pursuit is the doubt that she has in her relationship with Tsuda. She senses that there is some hidden secret about which she knows nothing and that he is gradually changing from the person she thought he was at the beginning of their marriage. It could be that he actually is changing, but it could also be that different sides of him that were previously unknown to her are beginning to surface. I believe it is both. What is important here, however, is that, as Tsuda changes, Onobu's suspicion that he might have a secret grows. Then comes the scene in which she learns of the secret while he is in the hospital. Eavesdropping on the conversation between Tsuda and his sister, she learns that there is someone else that her husband cherishes. In other words, her doubt is confirmed. This scene links together the various relationships in the novel in that it brings the relationship between the siblings into a conjugal one. From Ohide's perspective, Tsuda seems to place more importance on his wife than on either his sister or their parents. This belief ultimately shatters their relationship as siblings. She states,

"I'm merely saying the things as they appear to me; it isn't that I want you to act in a certain way. That time has already passed. To tell the truth, that state of things ended today. Actually, it ended just this minute. It ended, and you weren't even aware of it. There's nothing for me to do but resign myself to [*innen*] . . ." ¹⁹

With this said, Ohide abandons her relationship with Tsuda as a sibling. The term *innen* 因縁²⁰ that is used in this passage is quite old and is associated with the notion of destiny and, more specifically in this case, with various problems presented in the novel. Ohide, here, is accepting the failure of her relationship with Tsuda as a matter of *innen*. In contrast with this is the marital relationship between Tsuda and Onobu, which improves temporarily. When she presents Tsuda the money that was given to her by her uncle, the couple's relationship briefly displays its tranquil side. In other words, a harmonious relationship that transcends vanity and appearances emerges between them.

Then the friendship between Kobayashi and Tsuda enters the picture. Onobu's doubt is triggered when Kobayashi implies that Tsuda has a secret. That is, the latter's secret surfaces through his friendship with Kobayashi and the relationship between Ohide and Onobu. In other words, the relationship

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 202.

²⁰ Nishitani equates the words *unmei* and *innen* to refer to "destiny." However, the latter term should be translated as *karma*-cause and effect-a Buddhist concept. [Editor's Note]

between the two men, and that between the siblings are intertwined with a marital one. Onobu becomes aware of Tsuda's secret through her interactions with Kobayashi and Ohide, and her suspicion is ultimately confirmed when she eavesdrops on Tsuda's conversation with Ohide in the hospital. The topic of this conversation was money—Ohide had brought it for Tsuda's hospital stay, and Tsuda and Ohide argue whether he should accept it or not.

“Yoshio, why don't you accept what I've brought without making a fuss?”

“Fuss or no fuss, and whether I accept it or not is not the problem. You haven't offered it to me yet, have you?”

“I can't offer it to you because you haven't said you'll accept it.”

“As I look at it, I haven't accepted it because you haven't offered it.”

“But if you don't act as though you want to accept it that's most unpleasant to me.”

“Well, what should we do then?”²¹

Then the conversation continues:

“What in the world do I have to do to please you—I'm sure I don't know. Wouldn't it be better if you just explained more clearly what condition you attach to my accepting it?”

“I'm not setting up any condition at all. If you just accept it graciously, that's all I ask. In short, if you accept it in a brotherly way, that's all I require. And if you'd only once tell Father you're sincerely sorry, there wouldn't be any problem.”²²

Tsuda is repulsed by what he sees as Ohide's patronizing attitude, though she denies this. This gap in their perceptions stems from sisterly and brotherly expectations. At the end, she gives up and bursts out that Tsuda is thinking only of himself. Of course, on the surface, they are still siblings, but on a deeper, truly human level, or in terms of authentic relationships between siblings, their relationship has broken down.

The friendship between Tsuda and Kobayashi also finally falls apart. In the scene in which Tsuda sees Kobayashi in order to hand him money before the latter leaves for Korea, he tells Tsuda, “[In] the same way you despise me I

²¹ *Light and Darkness*, pp. 195–6.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 197–8.

despise you.”²³ With this, their friendship collapses, despite the fact that Tsuda is giving Kobayashi a portion of the money which Onobu had acquired from her uncle and which greatly affected Tsuda’s relationships with his sister and his wife earlier in the hospital. Tsuda’s friendship with Kobayashi breaks down at the most basic level in the midst of a negotiation concerning finance. In other words, money is at work again when Tsuda tells Kobayashi that he will not be seeing him off and leaves him without turning back. The latter, in turn, hands the money to a young painter in a dramatic way. Indeed, money is at work throughout all these relationships. In the marriage, money enters the picture when Tsuda and Onobu discuss how they should secure it for his hospital stay. Their relationship settles for the most part when Onobu receives the money from her uncle and presents it to Tsuda, while it triggers the collapse of Tsuda’s relationship with Ohide. Then, when a portion of this money enters Tsuda’s friendship with Kobayashi, this relationship falls apart. In other words, in this novel, relationships are intertwined and eventually transformed one after another through money, so moving the entire narrative forward and toward the secret that is gradually revealed as it progresses. The second part of *Meian* unravels as this secret at the core of the marital relationship gradually becomes apparent. Again, this fundamental problem has to do with the authenticity of human relations, or what this novel terms faith or peace.

In this way, problems on the superficial level, such as those involving finance, are inevitably linked to issues at a deeper one. And in this novel, problems on the latter level involve what Onobu calls perfect or unconditional love. This love, in turn, is related to death, as I have mentioned before, in that she is willing to do anything to achieve such love, and to the courage that allows her to tell Tsuda to “just watch one of these days.” For him, however, the fundamental problem has to do with the lack of clarity in his relationship with Kiyoko. His desire to achieve this shapes the core—or the inner dimension—of his perspective. At the beginning of the second part of the novel, by pursuing Kiyoko, Tsuda starts sensing some element of destiny. As his relationship with her has not been revealed to Onobu, he tries to keep his wife in the dark as much as possible. Yet though he attempts to do this, Onobu, in her pursuit of genuine love, tries to seek complete clarity. Herein lies some kind of mysterious force or destiny. In other words, in a part of the human will—or at the depth of the human psyche, to use contemporary terminology—another strong force is at work. Here, the problem concerning “nature” (*shizen*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

自然) comes to the fore, and although this concept is difficult to define, I think that *Meian* uses it in two different ways.

One way in which it is used relates to the notion of punishment. The connection may seem odd, but the term “nature” is sometimes seen in the sense of heaven (*ten* 天), which is actually used in the novel. From Onobu’s perspective, her passionate side may appear as being driven by her own will. Yet in the novel, it is also referred to as her nature, which, in turn, is shattered mercilessly by a larger nature that confronts it. On one level, Onobu’s passion is linked to vanity or appearances, and in this sense, it is self-centered. However, this selfish passion is dragged around by this larger nature, which is at work inside of her and appears as a force that eventually destroys her self-centered passion. Destiny, from the perspective of the ego, is a negative force in that it destroys and punishes the self.

Another way in which the concept of nature is used in *Meian* is in the sense of complete transcendence of will, which enables one to reach, for the first time, the state of repose and relief. In this peaceful state, one forgets the self or rather is not conscious of it. Here, the position of one’s ego gives way to that of innocence—the transformation of which one remains unaware. Such innocence is manifested in Kiyoko, who is close to nature (*shizen-rashii* 自然らしい) and lacks affectation. As I have argued above, in *Meian*, the concept of “nature” is used in both a positive and negative sense. When one decides to do something because one wants to—for instance, marrying because one wants to marry, one is choosing within one’s own power as much as the situation permits. In the novel, others criticize Tsuda and Onobu for expecting too much. Tsuda’s aunt, for instance, tells him, “Yoshio, I think you’re much too extravagant.”²⁴ Onobu, too, is told that it is unreasonable to expect that she be the only one whom her husband loves. In other words, they were so particular in selecting their partners that others are left with the impression that their demands are excessive. Such a will to choose—or freedom—does not last, however. The pursuit of freedom and happiness, or even freedom itself, leads to dissatisfaction and gives rise to the sense that one is not fulfilled despite having married freely. From the depth of such dissatisfaction appears the dark, mysterious force—destiny, if you will—that takes hold of oneself. In the case of Tsuda, this becomes evident while traveling to Kiyoko’s place. When he muses over why he is going there, he realizes that he is being driven by destiny. He still feels unfulfilled and dissatisfied on a fundamental

²⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

level, despite the fact that he has been pursuing happiness by making choices within what might even be deemed excessive personal freedom. The same is true of Onobu.

At the core of this discrepancy are two levels of human relations—one that consists of those that can be defined in terms of general societal terms, and the other that is deeper and goes beyond such generalizations. Authenticity in human relationships must be sought on the latter level; this is where genuine trust has to be pursued and where fundamental doubts need to be cleared up. Although it is impossible to tell what is going to happen to Tsuda and Onobu at the end since the novel was never completed, if we could adopt a formalist perspective, it would make sense for her to become innocent like Kiyoko. Being self-centered and strong-willed, Onobu tries to make Tsuda love her by loving him first. In other words, her love is driven by a conscious will, which manifests itself in the techniques she employs in her pursuit of his affections.

As he turned the corner and entered the narrow lane, Tsuda recognized his wife O-Nobu standing in front of their gate. She was looking his way, but as soon as his shadow emerged from the corner she turned to face straight ahead. She then placed her delicate white hands on her forehead as if shading her eyes, and appeared to be looking up at something. She did not change her position until Tsuda had come very close to her.

“Well, what are you looking at?”

As soon as O-Nobu heard his voice, she turned to him in great surprise.

“Oh, you startled me!—But I’m glad you’re back.”

As she spoke, she brought together all the brilliance her eyes possessed and cast the full force of it on him.²⁵

Then there is another scene:

With much the same mental attitude Tsuda walked to the gate of his home. He was about to put his hand on the lattice door of the entrance, but before he could open it, the interior sliding-door opened swiftly, and the figure of O-Nobu appeared in front of him

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

before he was aware of it. Somewhat surprised, he looked at her lightly made-up face, in profile.²⁶

In both of the above episodes, Onobu attempts to etch her existence onto the mind of Tsuda by using an element of surprise as a technique. While she is simply doing her best to be loved, her attempts involve willful manipulation. Tsuda knows that Onobu is trying to do this, so in order not to be tricked, he consciously rebels against her and acts as if he is not interested. The fact that he feels attracted to her at the same time as he is repelled shows that her passionate love has become willful. Such nature of her love, in turn, is associated with her self-centered character, which is the source of both the mysterious power and the brilliance of her eyes. If the self-centeredness of her passion breaks down—in other words, if she becomes innocent like Kiyoko, and consequently more “natural” in a sense—Tsuda and Onobu will be able to build a genuine relationship. In this scenario, however, Tsuda, too, must change. In order for him to be as devoted as Onobu is, he must rid himself of, and transcend, his vanity, pride, and the intellect-based self-centeredness. It is by changing in this way and by returning to the “natural” state that their problem is going to be resolved. I think the novel foreshadows that their relationship is heading in such a direction. What is being demonstrated here is the concept that is generally termed “leaving oneself while entrusting in great nature” (*sokuten kyoshi* 則天去私).

In *Meian*, specific human beings named Tsuda and Onobu and various other people around them come together. Or to put it in a more abstract way, a relationship between siblings and that between friends become intertwined with a marriage, all of which, in turn, get entangled through monetary problems and so drive the narrative forward as a unified whole. At the basis of the relationship between Tsuda and Onobu is the former's secret, whose effects are apparent even on the superficial level. This secret gradually comes to light, creating a schism of sorts. For Tsuda, his relationship with Kiyoko is very much like Max Ernst's concept of the unconscious.²⁷ That this relationship emerges as a part of Tsuda's destiny, which he single-mindedly pursues, indicates that his relationship with Onobu has collapsed. Also, as I stated earlier,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁷ Influenced by Freud, the German surrealist painter Max Ernst (1891–1976) explored the unconscious mind in his art. While saying this, Nishitani does not clarify who this “Ernst” actually is and does not mention anything about the unconscious either. [Translator's Note]

his relationship with his sister and his friendship with Kobayashi fall apart as well. The underlying problem in the novel is completely revealed at this point, and the second part of the novel was supposed to continue to address it but unfortunately was never completed. The structure of *Meian* is very effective, and its theme is well explored. As a literary work, I think it compares very favorably even with works of great Western authors in its pursuit of the basis of human relations.

For instance, Søren Kierkegaard dealt extensively with a similar problem, by focusing on his own life and exploring romantic relationships—and by extension, human relations—using his relationship with his fiancée, Regine Olsen, as a starting-point. For him, the concepts of integrity and trust serve as a lens into human relations, which is apparent in his earlier works, such as *Repetition*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *Either/Or*. While Kierkegaard argues that genuine human relations, based on trust, need to arise from the positions of true existence in a religious sense, Sōseki believes these emerge naturally from a state that transcends will, intellect, and other ego-centered elements. As long as one places the self at the center, all relationships, such as between friends, siblings or romantic associations, eventually fall apart and fail to last.

Various problems are tied to the issues of will and nature. Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche also argued that these concepts are fundamental. The latter believed that nature has the “will to power” and argued that, if a dream could serve to calm the will of nature, representing Apollo, then nature’s “will to power” would be Dionysus. For Nietzsche, this is at the basis of all human beings. His view that nature has the “will to power” differs significantly from the way in which Sōseki sees nature and will. Their views of dreams also diverge. In *Meian*, the notion of dreams appears toward the end, in the scene in which Tsuda associates himself and those around him to a dream.

Although there are significant differences in how various notions are used in their individual conceptualizations, both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard share an interest with Sōseki in their inquiries into human relations—an underlying theme of Sōseki’s works. There is a common thread running through their conceptualizations in that they all attempt to grasp what constitutes authentic human relations. Sōseki’s ideas are very Eastern, but yet his focus is not that far off from what the other two thinkers were pursuing. Such a convergence is inevitable so long as one is human. How, therefore, do human relations become genuine? What does it mean for a relationship to be harmonious? And to where do relationships lead us? These questions inevitably arise in any relationship—be it one between a couple, siblings, or friends. In *Meian*, Sōseki

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grapples with the problem of where human relations are headed, through capturing the whole gambit of these by weaving together the various relationships that affect one another. This, I believe, is the gist of *Meian*.

(Translated by Manabe Mayumi)

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