

Sōseki and Buddhism

Reflections on His Later Works

PART TWO

UEDA SHIZUTERU

III

AS TO ITS LITERARY GENRE, I have attempted to consider *Grass on the Wayside* as an autobiography written as nonautobiography. As such it succeeds in depicting the human reality that includes one's own self as it is, with its human interface of "self" and "self" intact. As nonautobiography written from this twin perspective of "self" and "self," it can well be considered to be a work of pure fiction. At the same time, however, in view of the fact that the things being depicted by the author include himself while being modeled after himself—in other words, in view of the fact that the author himself is being depicted in one of the selves of the "self" and "self"—one cannot really say that it is not autobiographical, only that it is not an autobiography in the ordinary sense. One could say that it is an autoheterobiography and precisely as such it is a true autobiography—this for the simple reason that the self is originally self-and-other.

From its aspect as nonautobiography that succeeds in depicting the human reality that includes one's self without ego as "self" and "self"

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from the standpoint of both selves, *Grass on the Wayside* paved the way for Sōseki to proceed to the next novel, *Light and Darkness*, providing him with an insight into the "attitude toward writing" proper to a novelist. As a writer and by writing Sōseki went on to develop what has become possible by way of writing even beyond the framework of nonautobiography. Thus he came to offer us *Light and Darkness*.

Let us first consider the aspect of autobiography. Autobiography is basically a ready-made form of self-understanding with regard to human existence. In the case of this particular autobiography, since it is written "without ego" as an autoheterobiography, the human existence that comes to self-awareness sees in this self-awareness its original "without I" (e.g., egoless) form (that which Sōseki, after his illness, often tried to envisage by the term "nonego," or again, going even further back, that which he was asked by the Zen kōan, "Your original face before even your parents were born," that is, when there is as yet no "I"). In this way, *Grass on the Wayside* became for Sōseki an existential path by which he could reaccess the revelation of his original reality as a human being. Thus he went on to pursue that which had become possible in the element of writing, in his very autobiography (not, this time, the autoheterobiography), namely, in his very "being" as a human being.

I believe that Sōseki (or, I might say, *this* Sōseki) truly meant what he wrote in his letters at the time.

I have now set my mind on entering the path.

I am a dumb fellow who at the age of fifty became aware for the first time of the path to pursue.

I have the intention of practicing the path.¹

One could go so far as to say that this one word "path" had for Sōseki the same weight as his final masterpiece, *Light and Darkness*.

Writing *Grass on the Wayside* had for Sōseki the basic and decisive significance that in it a space opened up where his authorship and his human existence came to be linked by the same "without I." Thus, an original situation was established in which the quality of his literary work, written by a methodological concretization of "without I," and

¹ Letters 1642, 2155, and 2154, respectively.

his existential path, which made the "without I" (nonego) the ideal, flowed together and clarified one another. (Still, there was a gap between the two levels. What was realized in the element of writing became ideal on the level of existence. There it became the task of walking toward the ideal, while repenting the reality that did not fit the ideal.) It can be said that, in that way, Sōseki discovered at the same time a way of writing literature and a path by which to live—these not as two separate things but linked together at a basic point. This must have been a decisive thing for him. From the beginning Sōseki was not the kind of writer for whom the literary work was the only thing that mattered, for whom living (in the sense, not of simply continuing to exist, but of truly living while searching for the meaning of life) was no problem when writing novels.

This is sufficiently attested to by the fact that morality is profoundly involved in the theme of all his works. Morality is, in the first place, a problem of living, and a problem that is basically problematical; a problem that, while appearing to constitute the very essence of being human, is such that one falls into the fundamental dilemma of going against nature, whether one obeys it or breaks its rules; when following it, one falls into the dilemma by the very following (as, for instance, Daisuke of *And Then*); when going against it, by the very going against (as, for example, Sensei of *Kokoro*). A problem that, while being the very stuff of humanity, turns the human as such into a problem. This is enough to make its solution into the biggest worry for the human being. In any event, it was such for Sōseki. In this context, too, *Grass on the Wayside* offered a path toward a solution by its "without I" principle. (For Sōseki, the reality of the "without I" was, on the one hand, "literature without I" and, on the other hand, and in mutual correspondence with it, the fact of walking the path of forever repeating and reactualizing nonego.)

That in *Light and Darkness*, then, Sōseki succeeded in depicting the "nocturnal parade of the hundred devils of self-centeredness," without inserting the problem of morality, can be ascribed to the fact that he had found a solution (beyond morality) that allows one to bring these thousand devils on the scene without harm. (Not, to repeat myself, that he wrote down this solution as such.)

In this way, *Grass on the Wayside* meant for Sōseki the coming to light of a point wherein, objectively, the path to literary activity and,

subjectively, the path to true human existence are one, a point wherein the attitude of writing and the attitude of living flow together in the "without I." Precisely because this point was concretely reached, the two paths were free to go each its own way from then on (and thus the insight was gained that he was free to write novels). The bold march of the novelist in the element of writing and the humble and sincere walk of the human being that enters and practices the path, while corresponding to one another and finding a kind of serenity in that correspondence, can now go their own separate ways. Thus, Sōseki, on the former level, becomes able to depict the "nocturnal parade of the hundred devils" and, on the latter level, can now write, "I see only blind alleys. I am ashamed,"² can clearly say, "I want to follow the path," and can call young Zen trainees "precious human beings."

It is precisely at this time that Sōseki utters the phrase *sokuten kyoshi* 則天去私 "One with heaven, free from the self." It was the expression of an attitude toward writing (what critics interpret as literary method) as an author for whom writing is his element and, at the same time, it was a guidepost he put up for himself on the existential path he was walking. It was spoken in each of these two directions, and, decisively important for Sōseki, with the implication that both directions flow together and correspond to one another. It was only at that time that he had become able to clearly speak a phrase of that intent. At that time, namely, when writing *Light and Darkness*, Sōseki spoke the phrase *sokuten kyoshi*, fully aware of its implications as an "attitude toward writing" (literary method) and in order to consciously put that attitude to the fore, while aware of it as a phrase that could at the same time carry an existential message—and in saying it would have wanted to say all this. It carried the meaning of the point of arrival of a long pilgrimage—an arrival at a point from which one can truly embark. Sōseki speaks of "intending the path," of "entering the path." On the one hand, he was thinking of producing in one or two years a completely new concept of literary theory of which *sokuten kyoshi* would be the basic category. As such, *sokuten kyoshi* was to be a milestone from which to depart anew.

At the same time, however, Sōseki, once gravely ill, could not but have had a premonition of a resurgence of his illness. In a letter of 1914

² Letter 2154.

he wrote, "I am living while dying all the time,"³ and on New Year's day of 1915, the year when *Grass on the Wayside* was written, he wrote to Terada Torahiko, "I may die." It was at his home during the Thursday Meeting of November 2, 1916—an especially sublime meeting, Matsuoka Jō tells us, with not too many attendants—that Sōseki uttered the phrase for the first time. Thus, it became in fact a phrase spoken a bit more than a month before his death. Sōseki may have intended it as a testament to his intimate disciples, delivered in an inconspicuous way.

IV

WHEN TURNING FIRST to the existential level, we can say that *sokuten kyoshi* had become Sōseki's ideal. However, from the nature itself of an ideal, and especially from the fact that this ideal existed in Sōseki, it would be inappropriate to add directly that Sōseki's reality did not correspond to this ideal or was rather in conflict with it; that far from *sokuten kyoshi*, Sōseki was an "ego" person; and thus to consider this ideal as a mere ideal.

Let us first consider the nature of an ideal in a general and fundamental way. The very idea of an ideal precludes that the ideal a person holds would ever become the reality of that person. Of course, to have an ideal means to make efforts to realize the ideal and thus to walk toward the ideal. One cannot say, therefore, that an ideal is senseless if it is not made into reality. The meaning of an ideal, the actual significance of an ideal for the reality of the human being, lies in the fact that the very act of walking toward the ideal already determines the reality of that person. (For this reason, the kind of ideal one has is decisive for the person.) The very fact of walking toward an ideal (for Sōseki, "the intention of becoming nonego") has already a real and decisive meaning for the person. It means, at the same time, that the reality of the self is being illuminated by the light coming from the ideal and that the actual self is made to reflect on itself. (Sōseki exposes his ego rather mercilessly: "I am full of deceit in whatever I do."⁴)

The real self is itself while containing this reflection on itself. Herein,

³ Letter 1868.

⁴ Letter 2154.

the light whereby the self reflects on the self is the ideal the person has, but it is a light that comes from somewhere beyond the actual self. Or, seen from the opposite side, the way of being of the self is such that it fundamentally reaches beyond itself. In fact the very "reality" or "actuality" of the self comes to the fore only within the "ideal vs. reality" duality of the self. And this results from the unique structure of the self-awareness of the self, of the self as self-awareness. In self-awareness, unlike that deriving from the knowledge of things, the self appears as dual to the self: the self that is known (and which becomes the actual self) and the self that, in knowing the self, transcends the known self and thus appears in its transcendent way of being (this becomes the ideal self or the ideal of the self). In self-awareness, the more one walks toward the ideal, the darker the reality of the self reflected in the light of that ideal. This is to be understood from the nature of self-awareness (this also is a question of "light and darkness"). It does not mean that the self has drifted farther away from the ideal; it means that one's self-awareness has deepened.

In the final analysis, the self that thus knows the self is able to know only by transcending the self. This "transcending," moreover, transcends also the "knowing self." That the self knows the self by the light coming from that "transcendent" place constitutes true self-awareness. This is made possible not simply by the fact that the knowing self transcends the known self, but by the fact that the self essentially transcends itself; self-transcendence ("ec-stasy") is a property of the self. The self is the self only by being self-transcendent. If we put that for a moment in religious terms, we could say, for instance, that the self is truly the self when it sees itself as a "self before God." This means that the space wherein the self sees itself is an infinite space that reaches unto God and implies that the self is of itself self-transcendingly open to such an infinite space. From *Grass on the Wayside* we could take the following example. Faced with old man Shimada, who came asking for money and gave no indication of leaving, Kenzō thought, "He has gotten very old." But then he started thinking how he himself would age. "He disliked the word 'God,' but at that moment the word 'God' certainly came up in his mind. He strongly got the impression that if God saw his whole life with his divine eye, it might not look too different from the entire life of that covetous old man." In order to see itself, the self sees with God's eye, that is, by a light that comes from be-

yond the self—that is self-awareness. Depending on the cultural tradition, instead of the expressions “before God” or “with God’s eye,” words like “heaven,” “nature,” “nothingness” and such are used by some people.

But the reality of the self is, in fact, an even more complicated and contorted one. Namely, it can happen (and, in fact, it does happen in nearly all cases) that this self, which by itself is self-transcendent, shuts off this self-transcendence and thereby becomes the self of self-consciousness; this is basically a state of non-self-awareness. The self that is a self by self-awareness becomes fundamentally non-self-aware (what Buddhism would call *avidyā*, basic ignorance). Therein lies the profound ambiguity of human existence. (Also the fact that, in the self-reflection of the human being, the self appears as a duality spanning the gap between the “real and the ideal” is a result of this basic situation. It means that being human is problematic from the very beginning.)

To consider an ideal only from the perspective of whether it is realized or to what degree it is realized betrays an illusory view of the ideal, because the fact of having an ideal itself has already a real significance: having an ideal is the result of the fundamental structure of human existence. Consequently, there cannot but be a distance or gap between the real and the ideal. This gap itself has meaning: from it (because the ideal as ideal forever clamors for realization) the movement from the self toward the self originates. One can say that, precisely because of that movement, that dynamic tension between the reality and the ideal, the self is a truly real self.

Above, I have considered what kind of reality the dynamic tension between reality and ideal constitutes for the human being, without as yet touching on the content of *sokuten kyoshi*. Thereby it should become clear that in reality the decisive thing is what kind of ideal one has. We may be allowed to assume for the moment that, in Sōseki’s case, the *sokuten kyoshi* in question was the ideal. However, while it is true that Sōseki expressed his ideal, an ideal which he had imposed upon himself, in the words *sokuten kyoshi*, these words have in fact a broader connotation and, if we want to point out the life wire of human existence in Sōseki, we must after all speak of Zen.

When speaking of the nature of an ideal, we must in each case consider first what kind of ideal it is and, secondly, how the ideal was ac-

tually conceived. In Sōseki's case we must take the following three points into account. One, the ideal was distilled out of his own experience, and its constant reactivation became his existential task. Two, the fact that it did not evaporate again into thin air as something impossible to reach was due to his encounter with people who actually walked the path toward the concretization of that ideal. Three, there was in Sōseki's reality a problem that enabled him to receive it as an ideal. (I refer here to Sōseki's problems with his "ego"—his ego being prone to go into a tailspin. An ambiguous oscillation between negation and affirmation of the "modern self" also enters the picture.)

In connection with the first point, there was the experience that brought him to say that "death is more precious than life." The big event in that process was the so-called great illness at Shūzen-ji, in August 1910, when a stomach ulcer made him vomit blood and lose consciousness. This illness kept him bedridden for a long time. Sōseki spoke of it as "thirty minutes of death"⁵ and "coming back to life." "Was it like the echo of a picket being driven into the bay in autumn?—this is a verse I happened to write some ten days after I came back to life."⁶ After having understood that death, wherein there is no ego, is more precious than life, Sōseki was able, for instance, to say to the people who nursed him, "It is really not right that you have to go to all that trouble for somebody like me."

With regard to the second point, the fact that, in his last years, he became familiar with the Buddhist poet Ryōkan is important, but we must certainly not fail to mention that, at that same time, he especially sought the company of two Zen trainees. This is an interesting and important detail in Sōseki's last years. One might say that he saw in these two persons a model or image for the reactualization of the ideal that he had distilled from his experiences. From the twenty-five or so letters by Sōseki that are preserved, we learn that in April 1914 he got into correspondence with two Zen trainees, Kimura Genjō and Tomizawa Keidō, of the famous Jōfuku-ji Zen temple of Kobe, and that this contact became more and more intimate. The correspondence began with a letter from the trainees telling Sōseki that they had read his *I Am a Cat* while meditating in the woods and had found it very interesting, but

⁵ Cf. no. 15 of his *Omoidasu koto nado* [Things I Recall, etc.].

⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 5.

the letters that Sōseki wrote to the pair are very different in quality and mood from the other letters he wrote at that time. The Sōseki who wrote these letters is so gentle and uncomplicated as to sound almost like a different person. He felt himself deeply attuned to these trainees. Sōseki's wife tells that, after his death, she discovered that Sōseki had carefully saved the letters from these two in a special locket for them alone.

I am going to practice the path as much as I can and with all my intent and resolution. I have become aware that all my doings lead nowhere. I am full of deceit in everything I do. I am ashamed. I want to have become a bit more of a worthy man when we next meet. You are twenty-one and I am fifty, a difference of a bit more than twenty-seven years. But when it comes to power of concentration and practice, you have much more of it, thanks to your sitting in zazen.⁷

Thanks very much for the *manjū* (dumplings). "Worshipping *manjū*, things clearing up—Autumn. How round are these *manjū*, given to me by [roundheaded] monks." . . . I may be saying strange things, but I am a fool who had to reach fifty before he became aware of the path to follow. I deeply revere your understanding of things. You are people who are infinitely more precious than the young people who come to my house.⁸

(On a sightseeing trip to Tokyo, the two trainees lodged in Sōseki's house and got acquainted also with his wife and children. In her *Memoirs of Sōseki*, his wife describes these events.)

V

WE HAVE HAD a look at the problem of "ideal and reality" in the human being on the Way, but there is one more important matter. Human existence itself is self-aware, but this self-awareness is pursued by language. In human existence, there is a special linguistic system with

⁷ Letter 2154, addressed to Kimura.

⁸ Letter 2155, addressed to Tomizawa.

its own unique level of language. Between the human existence that is self-aware by and through the act of speech and the spoken words themselves there is a quiet but tension-laden dynamism at work. This is so because, in the self-awareness of the existence as the act of speaking, there is at the same time the awareness that the core of a human being's existence is "inexpressible." From there, the primordial words of human existence take on a character that is expressed by sayings such as "Silence itself speaking," "Not speaking while speaking, speaking while not speaking," "Speech and silence are one" and so on. In Zen, poetry plays a big role as the primary linguistic system of that existential self-awareness. In Sōseki's case, the writing of poetry has its first foundation in the training in Chinese-style poems he received in his youth, but it is especially after the life-and-death experience of the great illness at Shūzen-ji, and apparently instigated by this experience, that his writing of Chinese verse became very frequent. And in his later years, while actively writing poetry, he also familiarized himself especially with Ryōkan's books and poems.

Even so, after writing such things every day for nearly a hundred days, I got into a very down-to-earth frame of mind. Therefore, since three or four days ago, I have put poetry writing on my afternoon schedule. . . . "Light and darkness interpenetrate" is a compound used by Zen people.⁹

Thus wrote Sōseki in his last years in a letter addressed to both Kume and Akutagawa. And so it became widely known that, while writing *Light and Darkness*, Sōseki in parallel wrote many Chinese poems. "It was for him a world of refinement that counterbalanced the sordidness of *Light and Darkness*."¹⁰ In this connection, the fundamental problems are: the meaning the writing of Chinese poetry had for Sōseki, and the quality of these poems. From the expressions in the above letter ("because I got into a very down-to-earth frame of mind") and in a somewhat later letter to the same addressees ("[Every afternoon I write one poem.] I myself find it very interesting. I am rather good at it, and I am glad when a poem is born."¹¹) one might possibly conclude that

⁹ Letter 2123, August 21, 1916. The novel originally appeared as a serial in a newspaper, so Sōseki had to produce an installment every day.

¹⁰ Miyoshi Yukio, in *Sōseki jiten*, p. 177.

¹¹ Letter of September 1, 1916.

this poetry meant for Sōseki a kind of game for the sake of diversion, but in that case one would miss the real figure of the poetry-writing Sōseki. Finding joy in creation is of course only natural but, as Iida Rigyō says, “The poems Sōseki created while writing *Light and Darkness* were like a lifeline for a man who had a premonition of death.”¹² According to Iida, Sōseki’s Chinese poems are essentially Zen poetry, and he shows by concrete examples that a number of the best poems are based on poems by Ryōkan.

All kinds of opinions, even contradictory ones, have been voiced about Sōseki’s Chinese poems: about their nature, their quality, their function, and especially about the role they played in the writing of *Light and Darkness*. I want to illustrate this state of affairs by quoting some of the opinions on the last poems by Sōseki—poems written immediately before his last sickness, and which could therefore be considered as his “parting poems.” But let me first write down the first two and last two seven-character verses of a classical eight-verse poem, written on the night of November 20 “without title.”

*The footprints of truth are dim and hard to trace,
Unprejudiced, carefree, I want to wander through old and new.*

*Eyes and ears have become forgetful, the body is falling away,
Calling out alone in the open sky—the song of white clouds.*

I shall now list some evaluations of the poem at random:

A superb poetical atmosphere that wonderfully expresses the *sokuten kyoshi* state of mind.

The author’s ego has dropped off. He has become a diaphanous vapor that rises to the sky. . . .

Like a duet of ego and nature. . . . An attempt to leave the ego behind by all-out exertion of the ego. . . .

There falls a shadow of death over this masterpiece, but the clarity and power of the words is unbelievable.

¹² Iida, who is not only a specialist in Chinese poetry, but also knows Zen very well and has familiarized himself with Zen poetry by writing modern annotated translations of poems by Ryōkan and Daichi, recently published *Shinyaku-Sōseki shishū* [A Collection of Sōseki’s Poems: A New Translation] (Tokyo: Kashiwa shobō 1994).

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It shows the face of an author who attempts to continue on the path of "interpenetrating light and darkness," while giving an impression of deep fatigue and loneliness.

Seeing "the shape of the collapsed self" in the cold face of nature.

The impatience of a man who longs for the path but does not find it.

It evokes only the salvation of the individual or "self" and has no room for the "other," humankind or society as a whole. The fact that the above poem ends with "crying out alone in the open sky" shows this.

I am at a loss to explain why opinions should vary so widely. My opinion, however, is that Sōseki's poems, and especially those of his last years, are basically Zen poetry. Those who refuse to see them as Zen poetry appear to have an idealistic vision of Zen poetry and Zen as such and to think that Zen poetry is something that gives diaphanous expression to an unadulterated state of satori, but such an idea of Zen and Zen poetry is pure fantasy. Real Zen life is to live life-and-death while entangled in the various states and moods of human life. Does not Dōgen say: "The ancients also practiced while melancholy"? Thus there can be true Zen poems in which a higher self-awareness (expressed by Sōseki, for instance, as "Death is more precious than life" or "One can become one's true self only after death") leaves room for expressions of weakness, deep fatigue, and even collapse.

In this way, two heterogeneous language systems, belonging to different levels and each with its own nature, become part of Sōseki's language: the Chinese poems that sing paeans of the scenery on the path, and the novels that describe the "self" and "self" of people "as it is," as the real interhuman predicament. And the alternation between these two levels of language—now writing his novel, now writing Chinese poetry—, which widened and deepened his self-awareness, became his very life: a language articulating the living-and-dying of life as if with the rhythm of inhaling and exhaling of breath, one moment depicting it insofar as it is alive and describing the human situation "without ego," but certainly not as something alien from itself, but rather identifying with it to the point of becoming profane; another moment, singing of

this same life, that becomes tense and illusory with the premonition of death.

The above quoted Miyoshi must have had something similar in mind when he wrote:

The scenery of the Chinese poetry and the down-to-earth reality (of *Light and Darkness*) are the two vertical poles of the same "I." I want to understand the Chinese compound *sokuten kyoshi* as the symbolic embracing of the movement of spirit that goes back and forth between these two poles.¹³

However, Miyoshi gives this bipolar movement a special twist:

Chinese poetry may be a therapy for everydayness, but it is important to remark that Sōseki did not attempt to transcend the profanity of *Light and Darkness* by means of it. While appeasing the difficult-to-please art critics by means of Chinese painting and poetry, he stuck to writing *Light and Darkness*, in other words, opted for the profane. The refinement of Chinese poetry stood in the service of the everydayness of the novel, not the other way around. In the last year of his life (1916), Sōseki needed this Chinese poetry to shield him from the dangerous siren call to Eastern religious transcendence.¹⁴

"The refinement of Chinese poetry stood in the service of the everydayness of *Light and Darkness*, not the other way around." This is clearly a one-way determination of the situation. Does not this amount to attaching the movement between the two poles to the single pole of *Light and Darkness*? Miyoshi sees things this way, because, while speaking of two poles, he situates the position of Chinese verse in Sōseki at a lower point than the novel, right from the beginning.

Light and Darkness is a medium of expression wherein he must persevere in order to be true to his vocation as a novelist, while Chinese poetry is an avocation or hobby which "he can leave out the moment he gets enough of it."¹⁵ [For

¹³ Miyoshi, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

¹⁴ Miyoshi, *ibid.*

¹⁵ This is a quotation from the letter to Kume and Akutagawa, which I cited earlier. It is not supposed to have the weight of a mode of expression to which one can entrust

this reason:] [t]he Chinese poetry of his final year was needed by Sōseki in order to keep his *Light and Darkness* world from falling into the abyss of *sokuten kyoshi*. Then for the first time the poet in him participated in Sōseki's world of expression.¹⁶

“To keep from falling into *sokuten kyoshi*”—what could that mean? And “a hobby that can be left out the moment one tires of it, and not expected to have the weight of expression one can entrust one's whole subjectivity to”—is not that all too one-sided as a characterization of the role of Chinese verse in Sōseki's literary production? True, “I can leave it out the moment I get enough of it” are certainly Sōseki's own words, as addressed to Kume and Akutagawa. But, in order to judge the meaning of those words, one must consider to whom they were addressed. Is it not often the case that one adapts one's way of saying things to the level of the addressee, especially in the case of intimate and important matters? And in this case we have Sōseki's “true words” about his eagerness to “enter the path” and “practice the path”—a matter extremely important to him and about which he spoke to only a few people.

And there is one more thing to consider: What Sōseki told Kume and Akutagawa, “I shall stop it directly when I get enough of it,” is something that essentially belongs to the world of poetry. It is a characteristic of the realm of poetry as a quality of language. It is not appropriate, therefore, to read directly from it the relative weight of Sōseki's subjective interest in writing *Light and Darkness* and in composing poetry. It is not a question of relative importance but, essentially, of the difference in quality and system of language between prose and poetry (in Sōseki's case, Chinese poetry intended as an expression of the “path”). The Sōseki who both wrote novels and composed Chinese poetry must have known this very well. If, after writing “I shall stop it once I have enough of it,” he were soon afterwards to have given up writing poetry, there might be something to Miyoshi's presentation. In fact, however, Sōseki went on writing many Chinese poems, each of which

one's whole subjectivity (Miyoshi Yukio, *Ōgai to Sōseki: Meiji no Œtosu* [Mori Ōgai and Natsume Sōseki: The Ethos of the Meiji Era] Tokyo: Rikitomi shobō, 1983, p. 235).

¹⁶ Miyoshi, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

tries to tell us something. His last poem was written two days before he went to his deathbed. Writing, "if I get tired of it, I shall give it up," he uses as it were the "between the lines" proper to poetry to suggest "but tomorrow in the afternoon. . . ." Supposing that, during all the time he was writing *Light and Darkness*, he had composed only one Chinese poem, it might still be possible to say, from the nature itself of poetry, that this poem could be the equivalent of the novel as to the quality of language.

Sōseki was not especially a poet. He did not compose Chinese poetry as a poet. When writing poetry, Sōseki was in a place that would have been invisible to a Sōseki fixed in his capacity as a novelist and looking at the poems from there. While walking the path, he simply sung of the landscape of the path. It was the Sōseki who aspired to the path, since he had bodily grasped that "death is more precious than life," and was confronted with the question of who he himself could be when shedding the novelist in death, who sang songs of the path. Of course, there was the everyday and profane, but to conclude from that that "the Chinese poems in the afternoon" were there simply to enable him to continue writing *Light and Darkness* and that "the refinement of the Chinese poems [merely] stood in the service of the profanity of the novel" is favoring the novel all too one-sidedly. When composing poetry in the afternoon after having been drawn into the profane, Sōseki dwelt on a level different from that of *Light and Darkness*. Both from the perspective of the quality of poetical language and from that of the subjective stance of the poetry-writing Sōseki, we are bound to say, I think, that Sōseki's poetry had its own significance, not reducible to a means for writing the novel.

The poetry writing may also have worked as an antidote against profanity, but the source of that working lies on a different level. And precisely for that reason we can truly speak of the "two poles" Miyoshi also speaks of. Only then does it become truly meaningful to speak of "a movement of the spirit back and forth between those two poles." For this is a situation that cannot be envisaged from the single pole of *Light and Darkness*, but requires to be seen also from the pole of poetry writing.

The question is whether one considers Sōseki's Chinese poetry solely from its relationship with *Light and Darkness* (in that case, an interpretation of that relationship such as Miyoshi presents is possible), or con-

siders the specific position of the Chinese poems in Sōseki (as songs of the path articulating the most primal words of human existence) from a background that is invisible from *Light and Darkness*. And this is connected with how much weight one gives to the "path" in Sōseki's life. In the paragraph before the sections quoted by me, Miyoshi calls the relationship of novel and poetry "a dualism."

It is clear that the Chinese poetry was needed by Sōseki as a kind of catharsis of the spirit, or rather as a consolation for his aesthetic feelings and sensitivity. If one considers that the "profanity" (required by *Light and Darkness*) is compounded and heightened by the poison of the West, the aesthetic order of refinement in the artistic spirit of the East becomes sweet medicine. . . . This dualism tells us that Sōseki, who as an intellectual-novelist could not escape the influence of the West, had grown into a cantankerous aesthete who could not stand the intrusion of the West.¹⁷

If the Chinese poetry in Sōseki had only been a matter of Eastern artistic spirit, aesthetics, and sensitivity, Miyoshi could be right. And in that case, indeed, one would have to conclude that the refinement of the Chinese verse stood in the service of the everydayness of *Light and Darkness*, and that Sōseki needed it in order to be able to continue writing the novel. As poetry, Chinese verse has, of course, to do with artistic spirit, but the question is whether one should consider Sōseki's writing of Chinese poetry to be only that.

When it comes to the novel *Light and Darkness* itself, I would admit that Miyoshi's interpretation x-rays its nature profoundly. Among the points he makes, I find the following especially noteworthy:

In *Light and Darkness* Sōseki relinquishes for the first time his judge's eye. (As indicated earlier, I personally am of the opinion that this basically happened in *Grass on the Wayside*.) He now confronts the totality of a reality that harbors a gigantic, impenetrable enigma. Without showing any sign of haste, he tries to discern the life of human beings that wander about, each hugging its own "ego." He fixes his eyes unremittingly on the intricate structure of a reality wherein human

¹⁷ Miyoshi, *ibid.*, p. 235.

beings clash with and support one another. His sounding lead penetrates into the deepest layers of reality.¹⁸

It leads one to think that the "interpenetration of light and darkness" that Sōseki saw contained a profound nihilism. He did not believe any more in such things as a transcendent ethics. The only thing he saw was an unfathomable reality steeped in darkness.¹⁹

That is exactly how it must have appeared to Sōseki. But the problem is, what then? I do not refer here to the sequel and final outcome that were never written. Precisely because it is a question of Sōseki's being able to depict "light and darkness" in this way, the function of the Chinese poetry, the significance of the "path" and, indeed, even *sokuten kyoshi* must be put into question anew.

Earlier we have seen how Sōseki succeeded in depicting "without ego" the human situation of "self" and "self," as the interface of humans, himself included. And we saw how, by passing through the detour of seeing oneself with the eye of the other or the partner, the "without ego" did not stay on the level of spiritual determination, but became concrete as a literary method. In a word, we can say that Sōseki reaped great fruit from *Grass on the Wayside*, both in regard to his existential path and in regard to his methodology as a novelist. As a novelist, it is thanks to this new method, though outgrowing it again, that he was able to write *Light and Darkness*. In its way of writing, *Grass on the Wayside* represents a great leap forward to a new standpoint, but as to the depicted matter of its contents, it is relatively simple. As to its scheme, the "self" and "self" is basically made up, horizontally, by the relation of Kenzō and Osumi, and vertically, by that of Kenzō and Shimada. By the fact that Kenzō is situated on the crossing of these horizontal and vertical lines, *Grass on the Wayside*, which is not an autobiography as to its way of writing, shows itself to be autobiographical.

Light and Darkness transcends this autobiographical character of the nonautobiography; that is, without intermingling the author as model, and by greatly widening the scope of the method obtained in *Grass on the Wayside*, it goes on to depict the situation of the human in-

¹⁸ Miyoshi, *ibid.*, p. 197.

¹⁹ Miyoshi, *ibid.*, p. 209.

terface as an impenetrable, complicated, opaque, and formless three-dimensional but fluid body, wherein an indefinite number of "self" and "self" come into contact, bump into one another, and overlap in an everchanging mosaic of partnerships. And even a single "self" and "self" does not innerly constitute a true reciprocity: from both sides it is lived as a "self and other," and thereby the unpredictability of the "other" throws the relationship into disorder time after time. Human reality is not simply a continuity; one does not know what will come up next or how things are going to develop. Or, it might be better to say that it is reality precisely because it is that way. Precisely *that* is the human reality, and as such it can be said to be a reality "that harbors an impenetrable enigma, a profound nihilism."

This human situation, described by Sōseki in *Light and Darkness*, makes many an interpreter say that "there is no salvation" in the novel. But Sōseki himself did not intend to depict the absence of salvation. (To begin with, if one insists on using the word "salvation," one must know that salvation is not something that "is" or exists.) "Without ego," i.e., without inserting his personal ideas, "without haste, and with his eyes unremittingly on reality," he simply tries, to the very end, "to discern the life of human beings that wander about [bumping into one another], each hugging its own ego." In that description by Sōseki, reality gradually shows its deeply enigmatic character; the true face of reality gradually appears, while from these depths nihilism becomes visible.

What does it mean, after all, this ability to depict reality in that way? That is our true question. Such reality transcends the methods of the novelist. It is a question of the place Sōseki is standing upon when he thus depicts reality while leaving the enigma intact and up to the point where nihilism becomes visible. The following words by Yoshimoto show the nature of the problem rather well.

Sōseki all by himself came up with that ethereal place, that single space wherein all these things could be described. I think that that must have been Sōseki's definitive place.²⁰

It is indeed possible to say that that place is ethereal or "floats in the air." Yoshimoto speaks of *sokuten kyoshi* in the following vein:

²⁰ Yoshimoto Takaaki and Satō Yasumasa, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

When we move, then, to *Light and Darkness*, . . . of all the characters that appear in that novel, none shows any salvation, even less than Kenzō and his wife in *Grass on the Wayside*; they are all people in connection with whom one cannot even think of "heaven." In all this, one gets more and more the feeling that, for such an impartial description of only hard-to-save people to be possible, there must indeed be something near to heaven in the writer. Therefore, if one takes the phrase *sokuten kyoshi* seriously at its face value, it is not impossible to think of Sōseki's place of *sokuten kyoshi* as that which *Light and Darkness* describes. . . . The characters may provoke relatively big incidents, and all kind of things may happen, but the writer who describes all this is endowed with an eye that equalizes and, in a sense, unifies the characters. There is no doubt that this eye is present here in a more radical sense than in *Grass on the Wayside*. We can, therefore, call this Sōseki's final enigma.²¹

Yoshimoto thus sees the enigma on the side of Sōseki's being able to depict a reality that is bottomless and filled with enigma, a reality from the bottom of which nihility rises up. That enigma is factually solved by his being able to write *Light and Darkness*, but the problem thereby becomes all the bigger: where did Sōseki have to stand to write in this way? If then, in Yoshimoto's footsteps, we "take *sokuten kyoshi* seriously," we can answer: that is where he stood, and we see again that "there"—the place where Sōseki stands as a novelist and his place of life-and-death as a human being—are congruent with one another. Only he who looks death in the face and sees things from death can go on describing such a reality in that way, "without any sign of haste" and "without for a moment taking his eyes off it."

THE FIFTH YEAR of Taishō (1916), November 16, Sōseki speaks for the second time of *sokuten kyoshi* during what would turn out to be the last Thursday Meeting. On the evening of November 20, he composed his last Chinese poem, which ends with the verse, "Calling out alone in the open sky—the song of white clouds." On the morning of Novem-

²¹ Yoshimoto and Satō, *ibid.*, pp. 245-246.

ber 21, he wrote his 188th (and last) installment of *Light and Darkness*. On November 22, he laid himself down on his deathbed. On the afternoon of December 9, he “seemed to be assailed by great pain and, baring his breast, saying, ‘Throw water on me here, please, or I may die,’”²² he went into a coma and died that same evening at 6:45. That is how Sōseki died. Thereby the “thirty minutes of death” of the great illness at Shūzen-ji found its completion, beyond time. Practicing *sokuten kyoshi* in the interpenetration of light and darkness, calling out alone in empty space—the song of white clouds.

His novel, *Light and Darkness*, at which he had kept working every day in the morning, was left unfinished and has been read in that shape up to now—the fact of its being unfinished evoking extra interest as to how things would have evolved and come to a conclusion. Where did he go, the Sōseki who composed Chinese poems in the afternoon, “calling out alone in empty space—the song of white clouds”? To listen to that song of the white clouds would be one more way to familiarize ourselves with Sōseki. We cannot hear it the way we read the written *Light and Darkness*, but there were people who heard the song of the white clouds that was Sōseki, even without knowing this verse. When Sōseki died on the ninth of December, “there immediately came telegrams of condolence from two people.”²³ These two people were the two Zen trainees, Genjō and Keidō by their Zen names. One telegram read:

First leaving with the sweet-smelling herbs,
then coming back with the fallen flowers.
(*Hekiganshū*)

“Since this was one of the poems that Sōseki loved to quote, it touched me all the more deeply.”²⁴ During his life Sōseki had asked the two Zen monks: “When I die, please recite sūtras over my coffin.” “True to their word, the two came all the way from Kobe, stayed in Sōseki’s house, and recited sūtras for seventeen days, and especially at the funeral on the twelfth. Then they left.”²⁵

²² Komiya Toyotaka, *Natsume Sōseki* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1938), p. 881.

²³ Natsume Kyōko, *Sōseki no omoide* [Reminiscences of Sōseki] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1929), p. 341.

²⁴ Natsume, *ibid.*

²⁵ Komiya, *op. cit.*, p. 884.

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On November 1, the day before the Thursday Meeting where he first spoke of *sokuten kyoshi* to his disciples, Sōseki had composed a Chinese poem “for Zen man Keidō,” and the day before that (October 31) another poem “for Zen man Genjō,” and had sent them off together with the dedication: “Zen man, I do not know whether you will receive this gift. . . .” Let me quote the impressive poem sent to Zen man Keidō:

*You rest in rounded fullness, a circle,
I paint, a stone under a pine tree.
Don't say I do not know the taste of Zen,
I am originally a guest of the mountain retreat.*

The Collected Works of Natsume Sōseki have been appearing one after another and have nearly reached perfect form. Sōseki has a durable existence in his Collected Works, but another Sōseki lives on ethereally as “the song of white clouds, sung alone in the open sky.”

TRANSLATED BY JAN VAN BRAGT