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Sōseki and Buddhism

Reflections on His Later Works

PART ONE

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SŌSEKI STUDIES ABOUND, yet even were they as numerous as the sands of the Ganges they would far from exhaust the subject. Limiting oneself to the field of modern Japanese literature, Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916) looms large. But when considering modern Japanese literature *and Buddhism*, Sōseki's figure seems all of a sudden to fade into the distance, though not so completely as to disappear—there are, for instance, those ten days of zazen in his youth. Does this mean that, for him, Buddhism was nothing more than a minor part of an old landscape that sometimes loomed up as a distant view together with reminiscences of his past? Or is it rather that in his life the “looming large in Japan's modern literature” and the “fading into the distance when Buddhism enters the picture” form the actual depth of existence? For example, the zazen in the author's youth, which makes an appearance in the zazen of Shūsuke in *Mon* (The Gate, 1910), is interpreted in two very different ways in light of Sōseki's whole oeuvre: either as nothing more than a mere episode, or as a momentous event that exerted a lasting influence on his life, as a kind of ground tone.

When we treat Sōseki as a figure in modern literature, his significance as an author is vouchsafed by his literary output; but, when we add Buddhism to our point of view—since this bears directly on a

* This is the first installment of a translation of the author's “Natsume Sōseki—*Michikusa kara Meian e to Bukkyō*,” in *Nihon bungaku to Bukkyō*, ed. Konno Tōru, Satake Akihiro, and Ueda Shizuteru (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1995), pp. 57–106; the present installment comprises pp. 57–88 of the original version. We wish to thank the author for permission to publish it here. Footnotes are those provided by the author.

person's quality in life and death—we must come into contact with the person beyond the works he produced as an author. It is possible, however, that from there a new, be it indirect, light is thrown on the author and his oeuvre.

When we circumscribe our enquiry in this way by the vectors, "Japan's modern literature" and "Buddhism," we set up a magnetic field of two-directional questioning, as it were. On the one hand, we ask for the meaning of Buddhism in modern Japan, in light of a modern literature whose thrust could invalidate the very meaning of Buddhism. On the other hand, and in the other direction, we question the meaning of Japan's modernity and its literature in light of Buddhism. This is, of course, a framework that would require an investigation that is as broad in scope as it is intricate. In this essay, however, I want to restrict the parameters of the questioning to a size that makes it possible to get the person of Sōseki in view and to focus on a line of enquiry that can highlight Sōseki by way of the oeuvre, the author, and the person. On the side of "Japan's modernity," I shall concentrate on its original and basic ingredient: the problematic relationship of "the West and Japan [or Asia]." And as for Buddhism, I shall pay special attention to the problem of the "ego," to which Buddhism has been especially sensitive from Śākyamuni Buddha onwards all the way up to and including Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Buddhism has thoroughly x-rayed the ego-character of the human being and has devoted all efforts to make people awaken to the "non-ego," of which the ego is, as it were, the negative picture, and to "emptiness." This Buddhist "nonego" is not an ontological view to the effect that there would be no such thing as the ego. It is a self-awareness of "nonego," and as such constitutes the "true self." It so happens that the basic problem of Japan's modernity, "the West and Japan [or Asia]," connects with the question of Buddhism precisely at the point of this nonego—namely, to put it in an oversimplified way, in the encounter of the so-called modern ego and the true self as awareness of the nonego of Buddhism.

Within this limited framework of questions, we face the further problem of where or on what in Sōseki we are going to focus on. In the body of the essay I certainly want to treat Sōseki's problematic expression, *sokuten kyoshi* 則天去私 "One with heaven, free from the self" as one venue to explore Sōseki in his work, his authorship and his per-

sonality. This is a problem that has been discussed already in all kinds of ways but which by its very nature does not easily lend itself to a unified view or interpretation. The various interpretations of this point and their interlacings reflect in an especially vivid way the particular interests of the interpreters: the framework in which they see Sōseki and the image they want to create of him. *Sokuten kyoshi* is a phrase that expresses Sōseki's existential interests and also the methodical norm to which he subjected his own attitude as a writer when writing *Light and Darkness* (a work of the same character as modern European novels, and definitely looking thoroughly European). As an expression, however, it is deeply steeped in the spiritual tradition of the East. In this essay, I shall try to gradually clarify the different strands that are interwoven in this expression. With regard to the literary works, in my endeavor to find the key to this problem, I shall rely mainly on *Grass on the Wayside* [*Michikusa*, 1915] and *Light and Darkness* [*Meian*, 1916] (without any intention, however, of developing a literary theory).

I

“ONE with heaven, free from the self” is an intriguing phrase. When we hear it, we think of Sōseki; and when we hear the name Sōseki, we think of it. Among the books on Sōseki and Sōseki studies, there is hardly one that does not analyse the expression. The interpretations, however, go in all directions and, odd as it may seem, appear to constitute an index of the relationship of each interpreter to Sōseki. The irony is that, while it is such a basic phrase in connection with Sōseki, there exists no text from the pen of the writer himself about it. The only thing we have is an inscription of it on a scroll from Sōseki's own hand—a calligraphy that is tentatively dated to November 1916 and that came down to us, as it were, as the signature of Sōseki under his whole oeuvre.

Sōseki died on the ninth of the following December, and it was about one month earlier, at the Thursday Meeting of November 2 that he talked for the first time to his disciples about this phrase. He then spoke about it again, it seems, at the next Thursday Meeting (which was to become his last) on November 16. The phrase was then made known to the public, immediately after his death, by the reminiscences of his disciples that appeared in all the newspapers.

What exactly did Sōseki want to express by the phrase *sokuten kyoshi*? In the absence of any explanations by the author himself, it is appropriate to turn first to the testimonies of his disciples. These testimonies mostly overlap as to the basic meaning but occasionally diverge somewhat as to stress and nuance. Etymologically, the phrase is straightforward enough and does not allow any different readings. It has the classical form of a four-character saying, but is not to be found as such in the Sino-Japanese classics. It is therefore believed to have been coined by Sōseki himself.

On second thought, it is a strange thing that a phrase, which Sōseki happened to use casually (or so it seems) in conversations with his disciples (and there only) one month before his death, has become *the* word that epitomizes Sōseki, person and literature, or maybe the mystery that Sōseki is. Still, there must somewhere be a reason for this, just as it cannot be without reason that the phrase evoked such a plethora of interpretations.

However this may be, what was expressed by this new phrase must have made an impression on the disciples, and, owing to Sōseki's death one month later, the disciples evidently came to see it as the master's testament. We could say that this phrase, with the new meaning obtained by Sōseki's death, came to be charged with the symbolical power to summarize the meaning of Sōseki's life. However, to understand why Sōseki proffered the phrase in that way and what he wanted to say by it, in the context of his person and his work as a writer, interpretation is again needed. Presupposing that there was something special Sōseki wanted to convey by these words, I now want to enter into an interpretation of them, in light of the "hard" facts that they were coined by Sōseki himself and spoken for the first time one month before his death while he was in the process of writing his last and unfinished novel, *Light and Darkness*. Thereby I want to pay special attention to the basic issues: why and where the words *sokuten kyoshi* were spoken for the first time at that precise moment (namely, after finishing *Grass on the Wayside* and while writing *Light and Darkness*); why this neologism (which is, after all, only a new four-character phrase to express a very traditional content) came to be coined. And I want to investigate these questions within the above problematics of "modern Japanese literature and Buddhism."

I shall first turn to the testimonies by the disciples, since they were

the ones who originally divulged the phrase.¹ The converging points in these testimonies can be summarized under the three following headings: (1) the phrase as an expression of an existential way of human life; (2) the phrase as an expression of a quality of literary or artistic works; (3) the phrase as an expression of a general literary theory or the basic category of an art theory. In the following simple characterization of these points I shall put the main words of Sōseki, as transmitted by the disciples, in quotation marks.

The gist of what is said under the first heading is easiest to grasp: “face life with abandonment of the ego” or “what is called, in Zen terms, the state of concentration or samādhi.” In the second there is the question of “art without ego.” Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky “are extremely great as persons and artists,” but their works “did not leave the ego behind.” In Shakespeare and Austen, on the other hand, we find examples of “art without ego.” “*Light and Darkness* is written with such an attitude.” With regard to the third category, Sōseki once said that “he would be ready in one or two years to lecture at a university about a literary theory based on the *sokuten kyoshi* worldview.”

The following well-known words (testified to by Matsuoka) show clearly that the first and second points are mutually connected. “In a nutshell, speaking from the act of seeing, all things are accepted on an equal footing, brought into a state of discrimination-*qua*-nondiscrimination.”² The context of that word is as follows: just before these words, Sōseki had been speaking of the human way of life, the quality of existence (while using also the Zen word *kyōchi* 境地) and saying that it was a question of “leaving the self of the so-called little ego behind,” to entrust oneself to something bigger, but had added the interesting remark: “I have the impression that, when one puts it into words in this way, there is still something lacking. . . . When one faces this, also a statement or ideal or ism, which ordinarily looks grand, becomes a minute thing, but, on the other hand, things that ordinarily look negligible, are given a new existence.” Then comes the sentence on non-

¹ Many testimonies can be found in the “Biographical Dictionary” in Miyoshi Yukio, ed., *Natsume Sōseki Jiten* [Sōseki Encyclopedia] (Tokyo: Gakutoshā, 1992), pp. 30–32; and in the “Sōseki and Jane Austen” chapter of the recently published work, Yōko Matsuoka McClain, *Sōseki as seen by a Granddaughter* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1995).

² See, e.g., Matsuoka Yōko, op. cit., p. 135.

discrimination, itself immediately followed by the statement on the attitude in writing *Light and Darkness* (an attitude which, in fact, becomes a concrete methodological principle). Here we can see a line running from the first to the second point.

By viewing the central points that appear in the testimonies, we may have confirmed the following surmise: by the phrase *sokuten kyoshi*, Sōseki tried to highlight a new connection or synthetic and unifying quality running through the three distinct levels of (A) human existence, (B) literary works, and (C) art theory. When he spoke of *sokuten kyoshi* in that vein, his disciples had the impression that something new was on the point of breaking through, and some seem to have asked themselves: "Will it come off?" One of them, Morita Sōhei, for instance, wrote in the newspaper of the day after the master's death: "From about two to three months before his death, Sōseki dwelt in a spiritual state which we now call *sokuten kyoshi* and which brought a significant change in his thinking."³ (It is, of course, left to our investigation and interpretation to decide whether there really was a change, whether there really was something new, and, if so, what exactly was new, and in which sense it was new.)

Of the three points mentioned above, the second one, (B) his literary works, will become a focal point since, judging from the time of its pronouncement, the phrase in question appears to have to do with Sōseki as a writer in the process of writing his *Light and Darkness*. As to the first point, which refers directly to Sōseki as a person, a person who is at the same time a writer, the relationship of point one and point two will be an important problem. The third point has stayed at the level of a stated intention;⁴ I shall therefore restrict my analysis mainly to points one and two.

The fundamental composition of the tangle of interpretations concerning Sōseki's *sokuten kyoshi* has recently found a simple and clear presentation in the following text by Konishi Jin'ichi.

[Let me review the authoritative opinions up to now.] After having wandered between life and death in 1910, Sōseki underwent a great spiritual turnabout, and *sokuten kyoshi* ex-

³ As quoted in *Sōseki jiten*, p. 31.

⁴ On this point I want to refer to the work of Okazaki Yoshie, who presents a well-considered interpretation and tries to elaborate this point further.



Sōseki

presses the state of mind he thereby reached (Matsuoka Jō). Thereafter the tendency appeared to interpret the later novels (*The Wayfarer*, *Kokoro*, *Grass on the Wayside*, and *Light and Darkness*) in connection with *sokuten kyoshi* (Komiya Toyotaka). Supported and strengthened by the authoritative scholar of Japanese literature, Okazaki Yoshie, this interpretation came to be treated almost as the established theory. Before it was criticized in the monumental opus of Etō Jun, there was even a time when nobody appeared to have the least doubt about it. However, even today, Etō's theory does not seem to be completely understood by everybody, so that it may be necessary to add some further "superfluous" explanation.⁵

Konishi recognizes Etō's critique to a great extent and himself develops a critique along the same lines. The representative figure of the so-

⁵ Konishi Jin'ichi, *Nihon bungeishi* [Literary Arts of Japan] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992), Vol. 5, p. 591.

called established theory, criticized by Etō, was Komiya Toyotaka, a central figure among the direct disciples of Sōseki, a man who for a long time was very close to his revered master and, after Sōseki's death, devoted all his efforts to the editing and annotating of the master's complete works. It was he who first tried to see points one and two in the interpretation of *sokuten kyoshi* together as a unity. According to his line of interpretation, the expression *sokuten kyoshi* signified an enlightened state of mind. Since Sōseki in his last years was living in that state of mind, *Light and Darkness* had to be seen as the objectification of that state of mind in a literary work. He thus stressed the *sokuten kyoshi* nature of Kiyoko and saw the salvation of Tsuda by Kiyoko as the basic motif of *Light and Darkness*. Etō called Komiya's interpretation "the Sōseki myth" and maintained that, in order to come to an understanding of the true meaning of Sōseki's literature, one must begin by thoroughly destroying that myth. According to him, Komiya's kind of interpretation is nothing but a "deification" of Sōseki by his "worshippers," the direct disciples; to interpret *Light and Darkness* in a kind of short circuit from the connected myth of Sōseki's alleged *sokuten kyoshi* state was a fruitless exercise in interpretation; an analysis of the work itself shows clearly that something like the salvation of Tsuda by Kiyoko is out of the question. "One cannot detect in *sokuten kyoshi* anything like a hallowed Eastern ideal; because Sōseki gave it the 'code name' (or 'imperial seal') *sokuten kyoshi*, everything was thrown into confusion by sentimental interpretations of that code name."⁶

Soseki himself knew how to make some of his expressions, like *sokuten kyoshi*, sound momentous to his disciples, and there are sufficient indications that he sometimes used this power deliberately.

There are moments when the disciples were beautifully caught in the net of Sōseki's sophistication.⁷

That is the rhetoric of demystification, and Etō's view on *sokuten kyoshi* is treated by Konishi as "one hypothesis."

As I shall have occasion to point out later, there are points wherein I

⁶ Etō Jun, *Natsume Sōseki* (definitive edition) (Tokyo: Shinchō bunko, 1979), p. 19.

⁷ Etō Jun, *ibid.*, pp. 16 and 14.

basically agree with this interpretation (or rather, enough to show structural similarity). Still, my nuances are different, and even very different where the position of *sokuten kyoshi* is concerned. Etō's view of Sōseki has no use for the phrase and proceeds as if Sōseki had never used it. And the Sōseki as envisioned by Etō "cannot be imagined as having come to rest in satori and having gone to his death in peace by reciting *sokuten kyoshi* as a kind of incantation or daimoku. He was not that kind of backward old fellow."⁸ The Sōseki who used the phrase is not supposed to have reached the quiet completion of satori. With regard to the ideal of human existence, he still was beset by the tension between ideal and reality, and he positively upheld that attitude of life as the right attitude in which to write *Light and Darkness*. In fact, the days of writing this final work were a continuation of great exertion and struggle.

I surely have much to learn from Etō's view of Sōseki, but on the point of *sokuten kyoshi* it seems to me that his reaction to the phrase is not very objective. It looks as if, in order to do away with the *sokuten kyoshi* myth, he is creating a countermyth himself. If, indeed, it was nothing but a myth, what is really needed is to break the myth and reconsider the question by returning to the sources. It is not the "worshipping disciples" who have linked Sōseki to the phrase. In fact, it was Sōseki himself who came up with the phrase. (Etō does not deny this, but attaches no importance to it—although, of course, attaching great importance to it does not by itself constitute the "mystification" criticized by him.) Therefore, as a methodological premise, I shall presuppose that Sōseki particularly wanted to express something when he used the phrase. And from there I want to track down Sōseki's basic intention from what he himself said about the phrase, according to the testimonies of his disciples directly after the master's death (and before the mystification started).

Since we have no written words by Sōseki himself about *sokuten kyoshi*, the problem shapes up as follows. While taking note of the inferred basic intention of the author, and going back to the flow of his works, the movement of his thought, and his way of life, is it so that all these trends converge and come to form a unity at a point that can only be expressed by the phrase *sokuten kyoshi*? I cannot, of course,

⁸ Etō Jun, *ibid.*, p. 302.

sufficiently develop my investigation in this essay, but I want at least to draw a rough sketch, while going into detail on a few points.

As is said in the above quote, Konishi himself, while basing himself on Etō and clarifying his line of thought, repeats the criticism of Komiya's "accepted theory." We must pay attention, however, to the fact that in his case it is already a post-Etō criticism, and one that is offered while commenting on later theories on *sokuten kyoshi* that also contain some degree of criticism of Etō (for example, the important contributions by Miyoshi Yukio and especially Satō Yasumasa, who interpret *sokuten kyoshi* as the methodology of *Light and Darkness*). We also cannot leave out of consideration the fact that, in the fifth volume of his recent and monumental work, *History of Japan's Literary Arts*, Konishi comes back, in the section on "Natsume Sōseki's World," to his earlier treatment of Sōseki and again criticizes Komiya's theory.

In sum, Etō Jun is well-known as a representative Sōseki scholar, not only for his historical debunking of the *sokuten kyoshi* myth, but also for later studies on Sōseki, and Konishi is one of the latest authorities. In the following, I want to determine the direction of my own interpretation of *sokuten kyoshi* while considering the interpretations of Etō and Konishi, in the hope that the problems indicated by these scholars will thereby find a solution.

One of the problems in the cluster of interpretations is whether Sōseki, in *Light and Darkness*, wanted to thematically depict salvation by *sokuten kyoshi* or not. On this point, I believe he did not intend that but rather, as his disciples testified, went on writing the novel in a *sokuten kyoshi* attitude or way. *Sokuten kyoshi* belongs, not to the contents of the novel, but to the way of writing or literary method used in writing it. Thus, one cannot say that, when he spoke of *sokuten kyoshi*, Sōseki was thinking of the salvation of Tsuda by Kiyoko as the theme of *Light and Darkness*. To that extent, Etō's objection to "those interpreters who recognized it as the principle of salvation in *Light and Darkness*"⁹ is well taken. However, the fact that *sokuten kyoshi* is not the principle of salvation in *Light and Darkness* as a literary work is not sufficient grounds for the conclusion that there is not, and cannot be, salvation contained in it. The only thing we can say is that the

⁹ Konishi Jin'ichi, op. cit., p. 592.

unfinished *Light and Darkness* is, to use the expression of Miyoshi Yukio, a kind of "picture of dark deeds by a hundred self-imprisoned demons," wherein salvation looks highly improbable or nearly impossible. If, therefore, one goes beyond this to conclude that "there is no salvation in sight"¹⁰ and thereby to criticize "the opinion that it must have been Sōseki's plan to bring salvation of the whole in the part that he still had to write," one involves in one's interpretation also the unwritten part—which is equally uncalled for as the conclusion of the "established theory."

If one approaches the problem from the side of the contents, one must reckon with the fact that the novel is unfinished. The part already written may invite speculation as to the final outcome but does not permit definite conclusions. Even supposing that Sōseki wrote with a definite plan in mind, he himself would have been the first to know that one cannot foresee how things will finally turn out. But there is also the opinion that Sōseki did not know how to conclude and therefore kept on expanding his novel. However this may be, as a guess at the outcome if not as an interpretation, one cannot definitely reject the possibility of Tsuda's salvation by Kiyoko. For that to happen Kiyoko must not necessarily be a *sokuten kyoshi* person; salvation can also be brought about by circumstances. In other words, we cannot preemptorily negate the possibility of interpreting *Light and Darkness* (including the unwritten part) as "the story of Tsuda's spiritual regeneration" (Karakai Junzō). And, on the other hand, it is very well possible to "imagine that a sudden catastrophe was bound to come, since this slow accumulation of secondary plots appears to have reached its limits" (Ōoka Shōhei).

When we take the words of Sōseki, who is said to have written *Light and Darkness* in a *sokuten kyoshi* attitude, as they are, then the decisive thing is that these words relate to a different level from the question of whether there is salvation or not in the written contents (including the part that he was still supposed to write), and that they are intended instead to characterize and highlight a particular way of writing of the writer Sōseki. It can be said that with these words the Sōseki who was writing *Light and Darkness* was clearly conscious of the method he was actually using in his writing. And, as far as it relates to

¹⁰ Konishi Jin'ichi, *ibid.*, p. 591.

this method, a consideration of *sokuten kyoshi* must be possible even with an unfinished content and without guessing or imagining the outcome, thus within the limits of the actually written part. It was the method Sōseki was actually using in his writing, and, as the method he himself approved of, it takes on a normative meaning vis-à-vis the act of writing.

Thus, he came to judge also other literary works, even the masterpieces of the greatest writers, as either "literature wherein an ego is left" or "literature without ego." In this vein, Morita Sōhei, for instance, has transmitted the following words of Sōseki: "There are instances wherein the personages in a work do not move by their own will, but are moved around like puppets by the will of the author. In these cases the ego of the author shows up."¹¹ What I have called above the "quality of a literary work" is, strictly speaking, the quality that comes from the method. The heart of the matter is the question: what kind of thing is, after all, this "without ego" (or with and without ego) as a concrete method (able to become a methodical guideline in the actual production of a work by an author) and what is its meaning (as to its place in the literature and art of various natures and qualities)? The expression "literature without ego" sounds very familiar to somebody with Buddhist sensitivities, but this does not suffice to make clear what is exactly meant by it.

Sōseki himself must have grasped and practiced it concretely. And this self-awareness found its expression in the phrase *sokuten kyoshi*. But this self-awareness would have contained also the awareness that much consideration and thinking was needed to grasp its meaning. In the testimonies of his disciples about making *sokuten kyoshi* the basic category of his literary theory, we find this attested to in the words "in one to two years" used by Sōseki. In fact, it would have required a number of years, which were not allotted to him anymore. A literary theory of this kind had to be created as a development of Sōseki's own self-awareness.

The problem facing us is a twofold one. One, how should we understand *sokuten kyoshi* as a method in the light of Sōseki? Two, why did this find expression in the words *sokuten kyoshi* in Sōseki? In search of a clue to the answers, I want to start my investigations a step further

¹¹ Morita Shōhei, in *Sōseki jiten*, p. 176.

back. One year before *Light and Darkness*, *Grass on the Wayside* was written, and two years before that (1913) in December Sōseki delivered a talk on “Imitation and Independence” at what was then the First High School. Among the things he said there about independence, the following sentences stand out:

Suppose there is a person who can depict the true reality of things exactly as they are. Imagine further that this person has done things that are bad from whatever angle you look at them. If this person succeeded in describing these things exactly as they are, without hiding or omitting anything, this person would be able to reach buddhahood precisely by the merits of that description. For the law he may have to go to prison but, in my opinion, his crimes are sufficiently purified by his descriptions. I firmly believe this.¹²

He then reckons this person among the truly independent and delineates that independence further by saying: “An independent spirit must be extremely strong, and this strength must be carried by thoughts and feelings that have a very deep background.” (By the way, Sōseki cites Shinran as such an independent person.)

Here, the fact that Sōseki speaks in this connection of “reaching buddhahood” may draw special attention. It appears in the context of “writing things as they are,” and this in turn has to do with the way of writing (what I called above “attitude” or “method”). In this case, the content is decisively determined by the way of writing, and a faithful (*ari no mama*) description comes about only by a faithful way of writing (*ari no mama ni*). This is truly a difficult thing, since it is deemed nearly impossible for the writing individual to leave behind his own views, views from his own standpoint and in his own interest. Here we must call to mind the “without ego” of “literary works without ego,” of which Sōseki later spoke to his disciples. The “as it is” way of writing is precisely the “without ego way.” And this can come about only when there are “strength of spirit” and “thoughts and feelings that have a very deep background.”

“Without ego” means a negation of the “I” (the self of “selfish”

¹² Miyoshi Yukio, ed., *Sōseki bunmei ronshū* [Sōseki's Collected Essays on Culture] (Tokyo: Iwanami bunko, 1986), pp. 165–166.

and the subject that sees everything from its own standpoint), a powerful self-negation. Moreover, for this self-negation to be the real thing and not to be "privatized" again into an aggrandizement of the ego, it must, by passing through thoughts and feelings with a deep background, be absorbed and dissolved into that background. It is only when the self-negation becomes natural that writing "as it is" becomes possible. That would be the reason why Sōseki went so far as to say that "precisely by its merits one can reach buddhahood or become a Buddha." "Becoming a Buddha" is an expression that is also lightly used in everyday Japanese, but I believe that, in this case, Sōseki is using it in a strong sense. Since the Great Illness at Shuzen-ji, Sōseki understood that to become selfless is to reach buddhahood.

We cannot but conclude that what Sōseki means by "writing as it is" is something that we cannot define without reference to religion. By the same token, the question whether such a thing is really possible becomes acute. On the one hand, as a method it must be concrete; for Sōseki it is not merely a spiritual prescription. It becomes a concrete problem, and a matter of vivid experimental interest, through the question of how the Sōseki who speaks of "writing as it is" actually writes novels. In which way did Sōseki write which kind of novel? I believe that the words which he used in his "Imitation and Independence" talk, "writing as it is," brought us in the vicinity of his *sokuten kyoshi*. Let us have a look at *Grass on the Wayside*, the novel Sōseki wrote before *Light and Darkness*. How is it there with "writing without ego, as it is"?

II

AMONG Sōseki scholars it is widely recognized that the quality of Sōseki's novels changed with *Grass on the Wayside*. But when it comes to defining that change, opinions diverge and differences in nuance according to the standpoint of interpretation come to the fore. Etō, for instance, says: "One speaks of a change in *Grass on the Wayside*, but it is nothing more than a transition from a Meredith world to a Jane Austen world."¹³ I shall weigh this opinion after having looked the situation over. Konishi writes: "The facts appearing in the work show that

¹³ Etō Jun, op. cit., p. 17.

a rather big change has taken place in Sōseki."¹⁴ And as an introduction to his treatment of *Grass on the Wayside*, he draws attention to the following two points in that change.

The first point is that the motif of culture critique disappears. As a motif, the opposition of Eastern and Western civilizations is gradually interiorized. In *Kokoro* (1914) it still appears as a nostalgia for the old civilization but thereafter it does not show up anymore (which does not mean that Sōseki would have rejected Eastern civilization). . . . He then makes the "ego," a motif that was already important from before, into the sole central motif. The second point is that now he goes all the way in adopting a purely Western attitude. From *Grass on the Wayside* on, only personages who do not show any of the Eastern fortes or virtues come onto the stage in his novels; and in their presentation Sōseki uses Western literary methods.¹⁵

Having defined the "change" in this way, Konishi moves into his analysis and interpretation of *Grass on the Wayside*. He finds the basic characteristic of the novel in "the ego motif being made to pervade the whole work,"¹⁶ and then speaks of personages "that could be encountered anywhere," events "that are not dramatic in the least," and "the eye of the author that observes these personages and events being on the level of the ordinary person." He concludes "that in this novel Sōseki for the first time produced a work of the same quality as the nineteenth century realistic novels of Europe and America."¹⁷ Konishi further defines the main theme of the novel as "barren nature" (something which, according to him, is overlooked by many interpreters). In this novel, Sōseki would have "attempted an indictment of an egoistic mentality that makes it impossible to live according to nature."¹⁸

The reason why people (in the novel, Kenzō and his wife, Kenzō and his father-in-law, etc.) do not understand one

¹⁴ Konishi Jin'ichi, op. cit., p. 586.

¹⁵ Konishi Jin'ichi, ibid., p. 586.

¹⁶ Konishi Jin'ichi, ibid.

¹⁷ Konishi Jin'ichi, ibid., p. 587.

¹⁸ Konishi Jin'ichi, ibid., p. 587.

another is that they go against nature. However, human relations degenerate if they follow nature. . . . Nature cannot become a principle for the solution of events in human society. [In that sense "nature is barren."] . . . The final chapter, wherein Kenzō ends up by saying "in this world there is almost nothing that finds a neat solution. Once they come up things go on forever," rightly grasps the fate of human beings who cannot live naturally or in accordance with Heaven.¹⁹

On the autobiographical aspect of *Grass on the Wayside* Konishi comments as follows: "Although Sōseki stands as the model here, the Sōseki who paints himself as Kenzō is not the same as the painted Sōseki."

Since the writing was done from nine to twelve years after the life experience of Sōseki that corresponds to the situations depicted in the work (Sōseki was then immersed in an eerie mood of depression), he must have been able to write with a certain "distance" from his own self in the depths of that abysmal depressive mood. That Kenzō's depression is depicted so true to life is proof that, at the time of writing, Sōseki's state of mind was such that he could already view his own depression in an objective way. When seen from that same frozen state of mind. . . .²⁰

The quotations have become a bit long, but I have thought it best to provide Konishi's own words, since therein, in my opinion, all the problematic points of *Grass on the Wayside* are presented in a clear fashion. Among these we can grant the following: it can provisionally be said that "this novel is a work of the same quality as the nineteenth century novels of Europe and America;" that "the painting Sōseki is not the same as the painted Sōseki," and that there is here a "distance" from himself. The question is, however, whether the conclusions Konishi draws on the basis of these considerations are appropriate. Would not the work bespeak things basically different from those adduced by Konishi (especially in its way of speaking)?

¹⁹ Konishi Jin'ichi, *ibid.*, p. 588.

²⁰ Konishi Jin'ichi, *ibid.*, p. 587.

Grass on the Wayside begins with the words: "Kenzō came back from afar." These words refer us to Sōseki's life immediately after his return from studies abroad. This does not mean, however, that he is writing here an autobiography in a naturalistic sense or in the vein of an "I novel." As it has actually been proposed by Ōoka Shōhei, it could even be said that the work, as a novel, is pure fiction. It is not the case, however, that it is not autobiographical at all, and even Ōoka himself treats the novel in a chapter entitled "On the Uses of Autobiography." Running ahead of my conclusion, I could say that *Grass on the Wayside*, as to its literary genre, must be seen as an autobiography written in an "un-self-transmitting" way; an autobiographical nonautobiography. It is a novel written with "nonself" as the reality of the human, including the writer himself. What does this mean?

As to its basic composition, the content of the novel is like a piece of cloth woven by the daily lives of the protagonists: Kenzō (modeled after Sōseki) and Osumi (his wife) forming the horizontal threads, and Kenzō and the elderly Shimada (a personage suddenly appearing from the past, the stepfather of the young Kenzō) forming the vertical threads. Limiting myself to the relationship between Kenzō and Osumi in order to get the character of the prose better in view, I would say that the novel depicts the life of a couple (this most intimate personal relationship of persons facing one another throughout their daily lives); the reality of a couple evoked and produced by the reactions of the couple to one another and to the situations of everyday, which are everyday but at the same time invaded now and again by not so everyday happenings.

It is certainly not an idealized picture of a couple. We get a realistic description of a situation wherein two egos, each of which never reveals itself completely to the other, confront and antagonize one another—something which can be said to be one true aspect of the married life. In the novel, the reality at each moment of "Kenzō and Osumi" is described, not only as it is lived and seen by Kenzō (in this case, one could speak of an autobiography), but at the same time as it is lived and seen by Osumi (we also learn how Kenzō appears in Osumi's eyes). These two viewpoints are constantly interwoven and penetrate one another. Let me cite one typical example that clearly shows this characteristic way of writing the novel.

Kenzō had decided to work a bit longer. The efforts which he made as a result of that decision soon converted each month into a few bank notes, which he handed to his wife. At these times, his wife's face did not particularly show any pleasure, however. She thought: "What a pity! I certainly would be able to show pleasure in my face, if only he would say a few friendly words when he gives those bills to me." Kenzō, on the other hand, thought: "I would be able to add a few friendly words, if only she would show some pleasure when she receives those bills." In this way, the money raised to foresee to the material needs failed to become a means to meet the spiritual needs existing between these two.

Thus, instead of seeing everything "from the self," also the self itself is seen; and not within the framework of a self-objectification whereby "the self sees the self" (in that case, we would have to do with an autobiography), nor simply as a third person (the I can eventually become a third person for itself, or at least take on the guise of a third person, but also in this case we would have an autobiography). Rather, also the self as seen by another who is not I, who comes into contact with the I, and confronts the I, is taken up into the picture. The picture emerges, not in the third person, but precisely in and from the whirlpool of self and other. In this way, Sōseki concretely pursues the act of "writing without ego," by means of depicting the self from the side of the other, "who is not I" but the partner whom I come up against and who comes up against me.

The kind of interpretation that considers the presence of the "eye of the other" (who is an intimate partner) to be one of the characteristics of *Grass on the Wayside* has been proposed by Yoshimoto Takaaki and Satō Yasumasa in their book *Sōsekian Themes*.²¹ Satō writes: "*Grass on the Wayside* was already written in a style that interiorizes the eye of the wife, of which his wife Kyōko later spoke, and also the eye of the intimate other that criticizes the self" (p. 225). Therein Satō

²¹ Yoshimoto Takaaki and Satō Yasumasa, *Sōsekiteki shudai* [Sosekian Themes] (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1986). One month earlier Satō had already published an important work in Sōseki studies, *Natsume Sōseki ron* [Sōseki Theories] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 1986).

sees the "maturity of the novelist" and adds that "the methodology of *Light and Darkness* originates only after passing through this *Grass on the Wayside* stage."

In *Grass on the Wayside*, Sōseki does not write about himself. He depicts the interface of humans, himself included; he describes the condition of that interface as one of "self and self," each pushing its ego, in a way which, in the words of his "Imitation and Independence" talk can be called "as it is," and, in the line of his "one with heaven, free from the self" principle, "without ego." There is an interesting passage wherein he uses a rubber band as an image to describe the "self and self" interface of husband and wife. By dint of bumping into one another, the two egos go farther and farther away from one another; however, they can suddenly unite again, like a rubber band one lets loose after it has been stretched to the point of breaking. There is sufficient reason to say that this very dynamics of self and self is the real hero of *Grass on the Wayside*. On this point, we must say that this novel represents a basic turnabout in the standpoint of writing. In the earlier novels, namely, everything, including the parent-child and husband-wife relationships, was depicted from the sole standpoint of the male hero—in *And Then*, Daisuke; in *Mon*, Sōsuke.

According to Konishi (see the earlier quotation), the "ego" motif pervades the whole of *Grass on the Wayside*. It is true that the "ego" is put into question, but what Sōseki describes is not the ego but rather the reciprocal dynamics of ego and ego. There is a fundamental difference between depicting the ego and depicting the ego-ego relationship. A description of ego and ego can be approached only from the "and" that binds them. The "rather big change" of which Konishi speaks must be sought in this point. What Yoshimoto, in his conversation with Saitō, has in view is precisely this state of affairs.

Grass on the Wayside for the first time finds the place from which to depict things with a mutually relativizing eye: the standpoint of Kenzō and also that of his wife are both relativized . . . ; the place from where both Kenzō and his wife are seen with the same (evenhanded) eye.²²

As to its conclusion, the novel does not end with the words of Kenzō

²² Yoshimoto and Satō, *ibid.*, pp. 233 and 235.

that Konishi quotes. These words themselves are part of an exchange between Kenzō and his wife, who reacts to them as follows: "His wife did not answer, but instead took the baby in her arms and murmured, while kissing the baby's forehead several times: 'My good child, we do not understand what father can possibly mean by that, do we?'" With that the novel ends. Thus, Sōseki ends his novel on an "ego and ego" note, by depicting Kenzō's words also from the side of his wife. Konishi dwells on the basic "nonunderstanding" among people but still interprets the novel by focusing on Kenzō, in accordance with his standpoint of seeing the "ego" as the "trunk motif" of the novel.

In the same vein, Konishi states that "barren nature" is the theme of *Grass on the Wayside*. Can this really be said? Is it true that the novel "attempts an indictment of an egoistic mentality that makes it impossible to live according to nature," by depicting the ego? I think not. By depicting a "self and self" relationship (which is far from a beautiful and smooth thing) from both sides, Sōseki discovered a non-self-centered way of being in the very act of describing, and the opening of the place (beyond both egos) wherein the dynamism itself of the self and self originates is reflected in the "and" of the self and self. Thus, rather than an "indictment," one gets a premonition of "a principle of solution" (to use here a term employed by Konishi himself). Yoshimoto too sensed in *Grass on the Wayside* "a place that Sōseki newly discovered," a place that enabled him to describe things with an eye that "mutually relativizes" both Kenzō and Osumi, "a place in which one can, on the whole, assume something like salvation, even when for every one of the personages one brings on the scene there seems, at first sight, to be no salvation available anywhere."²³

Seen from the side of the reader, this means an access to that open space in which self and self are described from both sides, a chance to create and experience, while reading, a distance from his/her own self-centeredness. In case the reader is a married person, he/she can borrow that eye that permits one to see how the partner sees oneself and experience a distance from the self as it were purely "hermeneutically" (be it only in the element of reading). True, if one focuses only on the ego, one can speak of "an egoistic mentality that makes it impossible to live naturally," and one must say that "nature is barren." However,

²³ Yoshimoto and Satō, *ibid.*, p. 244.

when two "egos that sin against nature" are depicted as "self *and* self," one can sense in that "and" something that can be called "nature of a higher order"—a nature that embraces and pervades both "anti-natural" egos. This "nature of a higher order" is not thematized by Sōseki; it is not part of the written content. It is reflected in the written work by virtue of the way of writing and can be sensed through the work.

The openness of the place wherein "self and self" "are located," an openness that reaches from "nature of a higher order" all the way to "heaven," is reflected in the "and." "Self and self" is pervaded by an "air" (emptiness-spirit), that one might call the warmth of a tiny (in this case "tiny" suffices) and quiet (not *qua* feeling, but *qua* existence) affirmation. And it happens from time to time to the personages in the novel, Kenzō as well as Osumi, that all of a sudden, on some occasion, they become warm to the other, the partner. That is the truth, and the true image, of "self and self."

If one assumes that Sōseki said that he was writing his next novel, *Light and Darkness*, "in an attitude of following heaven while forgetting the self," it can be said that we are now moving in a direction wherein we can understand that. Also in regard to *Light and Darkness* Konishi has declared that "there is no salvation in sight anywhere." This would mean that salvation is not described. A description of salvation is not really needed; it suffices if it can be felt by the reader. The attitude of writing is reflected in the work, and there is a salvation that can be sensed faintly from the open spaces between the lines, although it does not appear as content of the work. (In these open spaces there may be reflected the invisible heaven of the "in accordance with heaven" of the attitude of writing.) There is actual and true salvation precisely in the form of that "faintly feeling." Supposing then that some reader (like, for instance, Komiya Toyotaka) understands the salvation sensed in this way by attributing it to Kiyoko, one can say that the interpretation is off the mark, but there is no call to go so far as to say that what is perceived in this way of reading is mistaken.

Further, Konishi proposes that Sōseki created the figure of Kenzō "with himself as the model," but that "the depicting Sōseki was not the same as the depicted (in the form of Kenzō) Sōseki." I agree that we can speak here of a "distance." But the explanation Konishi gives here—"because it is now nine to twelve years later . . . he must have

been able to depict things at a distance from himself. It is a proof that he was now in such a state of mind as to be able to view his own depression objectively"—is insufficient. A span of a few years would indeed have been necessary, but this does not mean that Sōseki gained this "distance" by the lapse of time only. The "distance" in question is not simply one of the kind where the present self can detach itself from its former self and thereby come to an objective view, thanks to a lapse of time. There is much more to it: he gained the power to write at a "distance" from the self, "without ego," by treating the "self and self" as "self and self," and moreover making himself the model of one of these selves. In a word, he became able for the first time to write in this way by gaining "distance" from the self-centeredness of his writing self.

This is a thing of a different level from the present being able to see the past objectively—something that becomes possible only if it implies a "distance" even from the present self. When one thus depicts oneself at a distance from the self, one does not depict the self only. "At a distance from the self" implies that one gets away from the attitude of "the self seeing the self" and is able to depict the partner who "is not the self" and oneself from the standpoint of the other, the partner. This is what is meant by depicting "self and self." Above, I have tried out the expression "nonautobiographical autobiography," but here I am led to speak, instead of autobiography, of "auto-heterobiography." Precisely in this point resides the basic turnabout in Sōseki's way of writing. (Can this be said to be "nothing more than a change from a Meredith world to an Austen world"?)

This, however, does not mean that Sōseki reached deliverance (or, to use the earlier expression, attained buddhahood) as a human being. There is a gap between the quality of Sōseki's existence and what he can do as a novelist "in the element of writing." The "without ego," of which he was capable in his writing, became an ideal for his human existence. It thus led to an awareness of a gap in his present existence between ideal and reality and therefore presented him with the task of closing that gap. If one loses sight of the dynamism at work in that gap between writing and existence, one is apt to "divinize" Sōseki. But, on the other hand, the iconoclastic criticism of that divinization is apt to become a criticism based on the same oversight.

What can be said about *Grass on the Wayside* is that Sōseki as a

writer, in the element of writing, had become capable of the "as it is" of "self and self;" in other words, of depicting the "ego and ego" "as it is," "without ego." Here the words of "Imitation and Independence" take on reality. It is, therefore, not sufficient to say that "the eye of the observing author was on the level of ordinary people." In other contexts, Konishi himself speaks of "a state of mind that can see things objectively" and "a cool state of mind." "The level of ordinary people" is the everyday horizon wherein people and events appear, and what can be observed there are only everyday things. What is depicted in the novel is everyday life in that sense. However, the eye of the author who observes and depicts it is "without ego," not clouded by "ego." That is not the eye of ordinary people. The everyday things of the level of ordinary people are now seen "as they are," as if with a "Buddha eye." Buddhism calls this "everydayness" (*heijō*): the fact of the struggle of "ego and ego" appearing in an unclouded way, not as something dramatic, but as an everyday, and precisely therefore basic event.

Still, granting all this, how was this method of pursuing the "without ego, as it is" by way of the other, the partner, concretely attained as a method? Did Sōseki use a special method to obtain that method? Or did he perhaps come at it by a stroke of luck after a period of trial and error? In this case, we must answer these questions in the negative. The problem here lies beyond the level of methods. As long as we speak of methods, we are, after all, in the reign of the "ego." A method that contains a negation of "from the side of the ego" does not first begin or emerge as a method; its origin as a method is conceivable only as the subsequent "methodification" of a prior basic experience of "without ego" or "without I." Such a basic experience must not necessarily be an actually continuing state. (If one sees it as a continuing state, one would have to say that Sōseki "became enlightened," and precisely this would be imaginary.) Once the original reality (*Urfaktum*) of "without ego" (and at the same time the insight that this precisely is the true self) is given (the basic experience), it knows a slackening in the existential reality in space and time and comes to appear as ideal. Its reactualization then becomes a task. That is a state of opposition between "ideal and reality," but in this case the ideal is not merely ideal; it has been given a moment of actual reality, and there-

fore the reactualization of the ideal from out of the actual existence comes to shape itself into a method in the self-awareness.

In the primary sense and on a first level, this becomes an existential "path." (As a matter of fact, at that time, from before writing *Grass on the Wayside* and while writing *Light and Darkness*, Sōseki clearly mentions a "path" in his letters, varying his expressions according to the addressee: "I am on the point of entering the path," "intending a path," "working at the path.") At the same time, not in a secondary sense but on a second level, it becomes a method for Sōseki as a writer. In his case, the basic experience wherein the *Urfaktum* was given must go back to the "grave illness at Shuzen-ji." After having experienced there "thirty minutes of death," Sōseki starts writing things such as "death is more noble than life" (*Within My Glass Doors*, No. 8). Meaning that in death one is without self, life lived in the understanding that "death is more noble than life" becomes Sōseki's way of life, his life as a human being who is also a writer. (The Sōseki who had grasped the "without ego" as the real thing will then become extraordinarily sensitive to all the subterfuges of the ego or I. While bringing mercilessly to light these subterfuges in his own existence, he comes to measure the quality of literary works by the presence or absence of ego.)

This life becomes a life toward the reactualization of the nonself grasped in death (which is at the same time the true self); a life of living while dying, dying while living. And this is certainly not something that exerted its influence only on the "escapist from life" that was Sōseki, quite apart from him as a novelist (Etō's view, p. 18); it is something that happened to Sōseki as one human person with inclusion of his life as a novelist. Therefore, Sōseki's life as a drive toward reactualization of the nonego is lived in his personal existence and also in his way of writing as a novelist, on two different but not unconnected levels. On the path of existence, it expresses itself as follows: In the awareness that "I want to say that one enters into the realm of the absolute only in death, and it seems to me that this absolute is nobler than the world of relative things,"²⁴ or again "that one can become one's own true

²⁴ Letter 1907. From here on I shall refer to the letters with the numbers as found in *Sōseki zenshū* [Collected Works] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1957).

self only in death," not only to live unto death a life that ends with death, but to walk a path that penetrates into death. It is, of course, not a question of "life after death," but a question of the realization of the "without ego." As a writer, it is a question of painting things "as they are," "in one and the same impartial stroke," while adapting to the movements and pace of the "self and self" of the personages that appear in the novel.

When, at the time of a great sickness, which brings one to the threshold of death, the self appears as nothing from this angle of death, also the relationships of self and other undergo a sea change in that space of "no self." While the own "self" and the other "self" bump into one another, and in an "ec-stasis" from that moment the "self" is forgotten and escapes from itself, it opens up into a space where self and other are together, where the self comes to be seen from the side of the other, and where it also happens that one becomes able for the first time to truly see the other. Still, it can of course not be that the ideal becomes reality in the life of Sōseki or of any one of us. In *Nikki oyobi danpen* [Diary and Fragments] one can find a great number of these realities that militate against the ideal. Decisive is that life as "ideal and reality" comes to take on the quality of being turned in a definite direction.

In the above I have tried to evoke the context out of which Sōseki comes to speak of *sokuten kyoshi*. From it we might be able to draw the following sketch. The fact that Sōseki calls a literary method by such an untheoretical term indicates that this method is linked to an existential path and, moreover, that he himself considers this to be important. An existential path has its own level and language of self-understanding. The most important thing in that respect for the aged Sōseki was Chinese-style poetry (although in his last years this constitutes what can only be called hymns of praise to the Buddha, rather than simply Chinese verse). Now, when we focus on *sokuten kyoshi* as a literary method and limit ourselves to the novels written with that method, it looks as if it produces the "same quality" as found in Western modern novels and would not need any Oriental words for its explanation. Etō certainly sees it that way. And does not Konishi say that "Sōseki goes here all the way in a Western attitude . . . and uses Western artistic methods"?²⁵

Still, we must duly consider that Sōseki himself, who was then well

versed in English literature, must have had his reasons to characterize this method precisely by the Oriental term *sokuten kyoshi*. It would have been these reasons he was going to explain in the "literary theory he wanted to develop in one or two years." On a certain level (in this case, the literary work) the novels may have been of the same quality as Western ones, and if his enquiry and pronouncements had been limited to this level, words of Western origin might have sufficed. But, when he tried to define things from a more embracing, three-dimensional context (which in this case involves existence, literary work, and theory), *Sōseki chose an Eastern expression rather than a Western technical term*. We can see as one of the reasons for this that he wanted to include the link with the existential path we just spoke of (and which was for him, as I shall explain later, Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist—especially clearly Zen). One more reason may be sought on the level of a "theory" of literature and art (*Sōseki did not realize this project of his, but we can well understand his intention and interest*). *Sōseki had in view a theory of art that would make it possible to consider also these Eastern art forms which are not taken into consideration in Western art theories (just as one could wish to design a new poetics that would embrace also haiku and haiku theory, renku and renku theory—all things not covered by Western theories of poetry)*.

Sōseki would have felt that words of Western origin were not sufficient to characterize a universal interconnection embracing not only the "vertical" interconnection of existence, literary work, and theory, but also the horizontal interconnection of East and West. Contrary to what is often thought, "Western" does not as such mean universal for all humanity. Of course, Eastern particularity does not suffice as such either. Also traditional Oriental terms fall short of the target. Building a theory that also embraces Western situations is a new task that was unknown to the traditional Orient. In this way, in order to be able in principle to engage in a new task that was undreamt of in the Eastern tradition, while having that Eastern tradition as his background, and moreover to pursue that task while expressing and upholding the link with the level of human existence (something which Western theories of literature and art do not consider—on this point Sōseki clearly stands in the Eastern tradition), Sōseki must have looked

²⁵ Konishi Jin'ichi, op. cit., p. 586.

for a new word that nevertheless intimates a link with the Eastern tradition.

We have, of course, no way of knowing whether Sōseki came up with these words as a result of long reflection or whether they welled up all of a sudden in him as words fitting his mood after he had given up thinking about things. *Sokuten* and *kyoshi* are both words taken directly from the Eastern tradition, but the phrase *sokuten kyoshi* is a neologism (probably coined by Sōseki himself). We can then understand that Sōseki felt that it fitted the occasion, if it is true that he was looking for a term to express the all-encompassing interrelationship he had in mind. The acute feeling of existence in Sōseki can be associated with Zen, but in this case, to express something that can embrace the interconnection of many things, the (Confucian) term *Ten* 天 [heaven] is most fitting. The word can stand for a wide mantle that envelops all of Oriental tradition, and also appears to have the potential to become the image for a unity enveloping East and West. However, to try to understand *sokuten kyoshi* by way of philology or its origin in the history of thought is not appropriate in this case. It does not fit Sōseki's mentality. Let us look at it a moment from the side of Zen. "Zen is (present in what is) not Zen" and does not need Zen words. And anyway Zen considers Lao-tzu's words as part of its own legacy, and also uses Confucian expressions quite freely. The *Zenrin kushū* [Collection of Zen words] contains expressions from the *Analects of Confucius*, and more recently, in Imagita Kōsen's *Zenkai ichiran* [A Wave on the Zen Sea], Zen expresses itself in Confucian terms. And D. T. Suzuki was able to express Zen in everyday spoken English.

Sōseki, who had lived the gap, or rather the struggle and friction, between Eastern culture and Western, especially modern, culture, to the point of being worn thin by it, still envisaged a unity that embraces an interconnection of these disparate cultures of East and West (for the simple reason that this is the world wherein he himself lived, and indeed all modern Japanese live) and, at the same time and interwoven with it, the multidimensional reality of human existence (in Sōseki's terms: human being-writer-scholar). The final result, insight, and vista at which he arrived in this attempt—namely, of locating the possible principle of that unification (which was a matter of life and death for his own identity) in an Eastern idea—can be read from the word *sokuten kyoshi*. That the Sōseki, who was writing, completely according to

Western esthetic principles (identical with the characteristic artistic methods of Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*) *Light and Darkness*, a work which Konishi calls "a work to be judged as first-rate by Western standards,"²⁶ spoke of *sokuten kyoshi* suggests that by these words he wanted to express something that also embraces the writing of such a Western work. If we judge that *sokuten kyoshi* has been made into a myth by the disciples, our efforts at demystification may not be such that they render the words of Sōseki himself redundant.

I think that we have come to a point where we can take a stand toward Etō's opinion on *sokuten kyoshi*. Above I have introduced Etō's opinion on the change that happened in *Grass on the Wayside*: that "it was after all nothing more than a passage from a Meredith-like world to a Jane Austen-like world." "Nothing more" is a rather strong expression, and Etō must have meant it to be. Jane Austen is the Western novelist to whom Sōseki refers most often, and, especially in connection with *sokuten kyoshi*, we learn from the testimonies of the disciples that Sōseki cited her as a representative figure among the persons who write "without ego." From there Etō concludes: "As a form appearing in literary works, *sokuten kyoshi* is nothing more than an Austen- or Goldsmith-like perspective."²⁷ The repetition of the strong "nothing more than" belongs to the rhetoric of demystification, but the objective content of Etō's message is indeed: in Sōseki's *sokuten kyoshi* there is implied nothing more than what is already realized in Austen, nothing beside or beyond what can be said about Austen; and imagining more in those words is falling into the *sokuten kyoshi* myth. Of what kind of perspective is Etō speaking in the following?

If I may offer a hypothesis with regard to the perspective of *sokuten kyoshi*, it signifies a kind of fairness or pity which the author shows towards the personages in his works. This necessarily requires an objectification of the inner self of the author. This attitude can already be found, if you want, in *Grass on the Wayside* and is rather clearly there in *Light and Darkness*.

Let me add one more thing. *Sokuten kyoshi* . . . at the

²⁶ Konishi Jin'ichi, op. cit., p. 591.

²⁷ Etō Jun, op. cit., p. 17.

same time was a symbol of the hiding place that Sōseki's heart was forever looking for since his childhood. This escapist tendency forms the bass note of the life of the author from beginning to end. . . .²⁸

It is only the first half of the quotation that has a bearing on the "perspective." To the relationship of the second half—this suddenly added "one more thing"—to this I shall come back later.

In my opinion, Etō's view on the question is determined by a framework that consists first of all of his motive of demystification, and further of the following three points or presuppositions implied in his way of viewing the problem. First, his view of "the great sickness at Shuzen-ji":

I do not think that the great sickness at Shuzen-ji had so much impact on the turnabout (in *Grass on the Wayside*). Rather than in this novel, its influence is felt in the short stories such as *Within My Glass Doors*. In other words, this illness is an incident that is reflected, not in the life-loving Sōseki who writes the great novels, but in the inner depths of the Sōseki who tries to run away from life.²⁹

Let me immediately react to this. I doubt whether it is appropriate to clearly distinguish in the Sōseki who wrote, after going through that deadly illness, "I am living while dying all the while,"³⁰ between the writer of great novels and the man who wants to escape from life. It is true that there is a difference between novels and short stories as vehicles of language, and Sōseki himself will have made a distinction while writing, but the death experienced during the grave illness must have reached the very axis of the whole personality of the "writing" Sōseki, and it is unimaginable that it would not have affected the "writing attitude" of the novel-writing Sōseki. There is no need for it, however, to enter the content of the novels. In Etō, the illness is seen in an all too methodically organized way, and the shocking power of the illness that can also affect the very being of the novelist is treated too lightly.

²⁸ Etō Jun, *ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁹ Etō Jun, *ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁰ Letter 1868.

Second, there is the question of the evaluation of Sōseki's Zen experience.

Sōseki was oversensitive to begin with. . . . In order to overcome that debility, Sōseki practiced Zen at the Engaku-ji in Kamakura. But this amounted to nothing more than the discovery that "he was somebody who could neither pass the gate, nor stand not passing the gate. In a word, he was one of these unhappy persons who have to await the sunset loitering under the gate." (*Mon*)³¹

We may first remark that Etō again winds up things with the strong "nothing more than." He comes to the above judgment, because he views the text of *Mon* as referring directly to Sōseki himself. There is no doubt that this text is concretely based on Sōseki's own Zen experience, but it is not likely that what is written in a novel is everything of what Sōseki experienced in his Zen practice. The experience is only depicted as far as it fits within the framework of the novel. More importantly, from the basic nature of experience, especially experiences such as Zen practice that are exposed to existential problems, one must say that it is not limited to the time of the event but develops as it were under the influence of various circumstances. Zen for Sōseki was not something that is "nothing more than" the depicted Zen practice of Shūsuke. It was more than a simple episode for the Sōseki who, in his last years, became familiar with Ryōkan and had a special relationship with two Zen trainees. I believe that both these views—one, that the shocking power of the grave illness did not reach Sōseki as writer of great novels, and two, that Zen had only an episodic significance for Sōseki—in combination and reinforcing one another, are responsible for a particular bias to Etō's basic understanding of Sōseki.

But a third big problem complicates matters further. It is the question of the "Japanese" or "oriental" character of artistic works.

The world is full of false ideas, and the fancy of there being such a thing as "Japanese literature" is one of them. It is already odd to put up the distinction of "Western literature" and "Japanese literature." In this world there exist only literature and nonliterature.³²

³¹ Etō Jun, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

We meet here again with the "only" or "nothing more than." The above three points are all essentially related to "Sōseki as a problem," both in his humanity and his authorship, and, as accentuated by his rhetoric, on each of these points Etō shows strongly that he definitely has a particular preconception. In the Eastern scheme of "slaying the false and establishing the right," Etō's interpretation has demystification as its "slaying the false," and for its "establishing the right" eyes "the knowledge of how much hardship it takes to write literature in this country," or again the clarification of "the lessons we can learn from Sōseki," of "the lessons bestowed on us by that rare event: how literature was written in the Japanese cultural climate."³³ "How much hardship it takes to write literature in this country" is also my basic point of interest. Only, in Etō's case, the interest seems to be focused on the hardships to be endured for the writing of "literature in the Western sense." Still, thereby the hardship of the inner frictions and struggles caused by the writing of "Western literature" in a non-western cultural climate (I use here Etō's word "cultural climate," but in reality a deeper-rooted matter is at stake: a nonwestern tradition) is not necessarily taken seriously.

What then about Etō's pronouncements that "the distinction between Western literature and Japanese literature" is odd, and that "there is only literature and nonliterature"? I recognize that there is a certain level on which one can say this (but submit, on the other hand, that there are cases wherein expressions such as "Greek literature" and "Chinese classical literature" are meaningful with regard to the quality of the literature), but the question is what Etō understands here under "literature." Where does he take that understanding from? What is serving as the model here? A little before our quotes Etō had written:

I mean that many Japanese authors do not write literature, at least in the Western sense. . . .³⁴ It must therefore be a supplementary task for Japan's literary critics to discern which authors and which works deserve the name of literature and which do not.³⁵

³² Etō Jun, *ibid.*, p. 12.

³³ Etō Jun, *ibid.*, pp. 12 and 19.

³⁴ Here Etō starts a new paragraph, but the line of thought continues.

³⁵ Etō Jun, *ibid.*, p. 11.

From this context it appears that, when he is speaking of literature, Etō is thinking of "literature in the Western sense." Half a page later he then says that it is odd to distinguish between Western literature and Japanese literature, and that there is only the distinction of literature and nonliterature. Taking Sōseki as his model, he then puts up his problematics: the general difficulty of writing literature in Japan, and the way it was actually done by Sōseki within the Japanese climate. Is not the question narrowed down here to the hardships involved in the point that, in order to be able to write Western literature, this only true literature, in a nonwestern country, one must overcome the obstacles inherent in one's nonwestern culture? The efforts needed to overcome the difficulties involved in progressing in the direction of the West in the East-West gorge? The sufferings of Sōseki in that East-West gorge must have been intense, indeed; but it was not a suffering that could be healed by Westernization. (I cannot imagine that Etō would not have known that. The Etō who wrote "how he succeeded in writing literature in the Japanese cultural climate" is himself affected by the problem of the Japanese cultural climate. Only, just as for him it is nothing more than a cultural climate that is recalcitrant to Literature with a capital L, it is at least reduced to something on the level of discussion. Or would the bias resulting from his will to demystification be the true responsible factor?) Let me introduce a single example of a view that differs from that of Etō on this point. Miyoshi Yukio sees in Sōseki "the attitude of a writer who, as one of a small number of modern intellectuals-writers, was very familiar with the West on a high level but, as a counterweight, awakened in himself an antiwestern feeling; to say it in my own terms, an antimodernist attitude."³⁶

On the basis of the above three points or presuppositions that form the bridgehead of his demystifying efforts, Etō himself, taking *sokuten kyoshi* as one "perspective," offers the earlier quoted view. Its point of departure is: "it is nothing more than a transition to a Jane Austen-like world." The meaning of that "Austen-like world" is then most probably expressed in the sentence "fairness or pity toward the personages in the novel." Taking it provisionally in that sense, we must say that Sōseki's transition to an Austen-like world did not occur within the parameters of the Western tradition, but against the background of a

³⁶ Miyoshi Yukio, in *Natsume Sōseki jiten*, p. 8.

nonwestern tradition. Consequently we shall have to rephrase things in the following way: along a certain route, a transition to a world, which in Western terms can be said to be an Austen-like world, took place. Even if it is true that, as a novelist, Sōseki took the Austen-like world as a model, we must still consider that the transition in fact took form by a specific route, different from the path along which that transition may take place in the West.

If one takes only the resulting Austen-like world into consideration, one might be entitled to speak of "nothing more than a transition to an Austen-like world." However, in Sōseki's case, the route or detour to that transition went through places unknown to an Austen-like world, and Sōseki himself spoke of *sokuten kyoshi* while attaching great importance both to the path that traverses such places and to the nature of the Austen-like world reached by that path and, moreover, seeing both as linked to one another. This path or "detour," then, must be said to pass precisely through the sense of death engendered by the grave illness—of which Etō said that it does not affect the writer of full-length novels—and the Zen question about the original nature of the self that faces life-death. What Sōseki entrusted to the phrase *sokuten kyoshi* was not "nothing more than an Austen-like world," but precisely something more, inclusive of the Austen-like world that had become realisable as a literary work. If one considers only the Austen-like world, one may be right to refer to fairness and pity as qualities of the work (in another place Etō speaks of "a softness appearing"³⁷). But Sōseki himself understands his expression as embracing also the route toward the transition that enabled him to write in that way as "something precious." It was a question of the attainment of a method of writing, but this itself originated in events that go beyond the questions of method. Did not Etō himself, in his explanation of the "perspective," say that "this necessarily requires the objectification of the innermost self of the author"? In Sōseki's case, the fairness and pity derive from a way of being that can be expressed as "without ego," beyond all so-called objectification, which can still be considered as a literary device. That "without ego" became possible, subjectively speaking, in and through death, and consequently for the writer, by acquiring the eye to see oneself from the side of the other. In other words, it became possible by a "detour."

³⁷ Etō Jun, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

By the way, Matsuoka Yōko devotes the long first chapter of the above-quoted book to a consideration of "Sōseki and Jane Austen." Matsuoka writes there that Sōseki was deeply impressed by "the natural unforced way of writing and the excellency of an art born from keen observation" in Austen's works; and that Sōseki "learnt the art of objectivity" from Austen. In this way she agrees with Etō's view that Sōseki "looked up to Austen as to his master" but then offers the following remarkable consideration.

In this way and in the end result, Austen and Sōseki resemble one another in their cool objectivity, but there is a basic difference in the process whereby each reached that characteristic objectivity. Jane Austen believed in the intellect, and evaluated things thereby. Sōseki, on the other hand, reached his evaluations by identifying himself with nature or nothingness. That identification with nature is reached, not by intellect but solely by intuition.³⁸

Matsuoka's "basic difference in process" corresponds to what I said above about the route or detour.

The question is whether or not one considers this route or process as important. When the only thing that matters is the arrival at an Austen-like world, one may be justified in not paying attention to the route. In Sōseki's case, the route runs through a dimension that is different from the world of novels, through the "ultimate concerns" of human existence. On that level, it is not a detour, but rather a direct path, which at the same time is a detour for the writer. With regard to Sōseki's *sokuten kyoshi*, we must consider both levels and their interconnection.

Etō, who declared that *sokuten kyoshi* "in the form wherein it appears in the novels is nothing more than an Austen-like perspective," in his actual explanation, suddenly, as an afterthought as it were, sees *sokuten kyoshi* as "the symbol of the hiding place that Sōseki was always looking for since his childhood." I do not want to go into the question of whether it is appropriate to speak of a hiding place in connection with Sōseki but only want to draw attention to the fact that Etō too refers to the existential aspect. Thus, even in Etō's view, *sokuten*

³⁸ Matsuoka Yōko, *op. cit.*, p. 149. Matsuoka's next chapter, "Sōseki and Oliver Goldsmith," considers Sōseki's *sokuten kyoshi*.

kyoshi is in fact not only a perspective that determines the nature of a literary work but is also something that involves the “heart” of the writer. If that is true, would not it be that to thematize the connection between the two aspects, which Etō simply puts side by side by means of “at the same time”—namely, “the nature of the perspective that appears in the works” and “the hiding place of the heart” (this would belong to what I above referred to as the “detour”)—would be the appropriate way to come to an understanding of Sōseki’s *sokuten kyoshi*? Indeed, it is precisely from the point of connection between the two that Sōseki spoke of *sokuten kyoshi*. And when one pays sufficient attention to that point of connection, would one not come to understand it as a detour which, while transcending the literary world by a passage through the life-death sphere, brings fairness and pity to the literary world—rather than as a “hiding place” required by an “escapist tendency”?

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