Sōseki Natsume

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Translated by Edwin McClellan

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Kokoro

Sōseki Natsume (1867–1916) is widely considered the foremost novelist of the Meiji period (1868–1914). After graduating from Tokyo Imperial University in 1893, Sōseki taught high school before spending two years in England on a Japanese government scholarship. He returned to lecture in English literature at the university. Numerous nervous disorders forced him to give up teaching in 1908 and he became a full-time writer for the *Asahi* newspaper. In addition to fourteen novels, Sōseki wrote haiku, poems in the Chinese style, academic papers on literary theory, essays, autobiographical sketches and fairy tales.

FOREWORD

IT WAS during the Meiji era, which lasted from 1868 to 1912, that Japan emerged as a modern nation; and it was towards the latter part of this period that the modern Japanese novel reached its maturity, and true masters of what was essentially a western literary form began to appear. Of these novelists, Natsume Soseki was perhaps the most profound and the most versatile.

Soseki was born in Tokyo in 1867, when the city was still known by its old name of Yedo. He was educated at the Imperial University, where he studied English literature. In 1896, he joined the staff of the Fifth National College in Kumamoto, and in 1900, he was sent to England as a government scholar. He returned to Japan in 1903, and in April of the same year, he succeeded Lafcadio Hearn as lecturer in English literature at the Imperial University. He was dissatisfied with academic life, and in 1907 decided to devote all his time to writing novels and essays.

Soseki wrote *Kokoro* in 1914, two years after the death of Emperor Meiji, and two years before his own death. It was written at the peak of his career, when his reputation as a novelist was already established. In it, as in all his other important novels, Soseki is concerned with man's loneliness in the modern world. It is in one of his other novels that the protagonist cries out: "How can I escape, except through faith, madness, or death?" And for Sensei, the protagonist of *Kokoro,* the only means of escape from his loneliness is death.

The suicide of General Nogi, which is referred to in Parts II and III of *Kokoro,* is, I think, of some significance to us in our understanding of the novel and of Soseki. The incident caused a great sensation at the time. He and Admiral Togo were probably the best-known heroes of the Russo-Japanese War. As a young officer, he had lost his banner to the enemy in the Satsuma Rebellion. Thirty-five years later, immediately after the death of Emperor Meiji, he killed himself. He had waited until he could no longer serve his emperor to redeem his honor. Soseki was too modern in his outlook to be fully in sympathy with the general; and so is Sensei. Despite Soseki's attitude toward the old-fashioned notion of honor, however, he could not help feeling that he was in some way a part of the world that had produced General Nogi. That is why in this novel, the passing of the Meiji era is mourned by Sensei. "On the night of the Imperial Funeral I sat in my study and listened to the booming of the cannon. To me, it sounded like the last lament for the passing of an age."

Kokoro is told in the first person all the way through. For this reason, the style is intentionally simple. In the original, there is beauty beneath the surface simplicity, especially in the third part. I can only hope that at least a little of the beauty has remained in the translation. I have tried, at any rate, to retain the simplicity.

The best rendering of the Japanese word *"kokoro"* that I have seen is Lafcadio Hearn's, which is: "the heart of things."

Without the great kindness of the members of the Committee on Social Thought, of The University of Chicago, I could never have done this translation. I want to thank my wife also for her help.

EDWIN MCCLELLAN

CONTENTS

Sensei and I

I ALWAYS called him "Sensei."[1] I shall therefore refer to him simply as "Sensei," and not by his real name. It is not because I consider it more discreet, but it is because I find it more natural that I do so. Whenever the memory of him comes back to me now, I find that I think of him as "Sensei" still. And,with pen in hand, I cannot bring myself to write of him in any other way.

It was at Kamakura, during the summer holidays, that I first met Sensei. I was then a very young student. I went there at the insistence of a friend of mine, who had gone to Kamakura to swim. We were not together for long. It had taken me a few days to get together enough money to cover the necessary expenses, and it was only three days after my arrival that my friend received a telegram from home demanding his return. His mother, the telegram explained, was ill. My friend, however, did not believe this. For some time his par-

[1] The English word "teacher" which comes closest in meaning to the Japanese word *sensei* is not satisfactory here. The French word *maître* would express better what is meant by *sensei*.

ents had been trying to persuade him, much against his will, to marry a certain girl. According to our modern outlook, he was really too young to marry. Moreover, he was not in the least fond of the girl. It was in order to avoid an unpleasant situation that instead of going home, as he normally would have done, he had gone to the resort near Tokyo to spend his holidays. He showed me the telegram, and asked me what he should do. I did not know what to tell him. It was, however, clear that if his mother was truly ill, he should go home. And so he decided to leave after all. I, who had taken so much trouble to join my friend, was left alone.

There were many days left before the beginning of term, and I was free either to stay in Kamakura or to go home. I decided to stay. My friend was from a wealthy family in the Central Provinces, and had no financial worries. But being a young student, his standard of living was much the same as my own. I was therefore not obliged, when I found myself alone, to change my lodgings.

My inn was in a rather out-of-the-way district of Kamakura, and if one wished to indulge in such fashionable pastimes as playing billiards and eating ice cream, one had to walk a long way across rice fields. If one went by rickshaw, it cost twenty sen. Remote as the district was, however, many rich families had built their villas there. It was quite near the sea also, which was convenient for swimmers such as myself.

I walked to the sea every day, between thatched cottages that were old and smoke-blackened. The beach was always crowded with men and women, and at times the sea, like a public bath, would be covered with a mass of black heads. I never ceased to wonder how so many city holiday-makers could squeeze themselves into so small a town. Alone in this

noisy and happy crowd, I managed to enjoy myself, dozing on the beach or splashing about in the water.

It was in the midst of this confusion that I found Sensei. In those days, there were two tea houses on the beach. For no particular reason, I had come to patronize one of them. Unlike those people with their great villas in the Hase area who had their own bathing huts, we in our part of the beach were obliged to make use of these tea houses which served also as communal changing rooms. In them the bathers would drink tea, rest, have their bathing suits rinsed, wash the salt from their bodies, and leave their hats and sunshades for safe-keeping. I owned no bathing suit to change into, but I was afraid of being robbed, and so I regularly left my things in the tea house before going into the water.

*

Sensei had just taken his clothes off and was about to go for a swim when I first laid eyes on him in the tea house. I had already had my swim, and was letting the wind blow gently on my wet body. Between us, there were numerous black heads moving about. I was in a relaxed frame of mind, and there was such a crowd on the beach that I should never have noticed him had he not been accompanied by a Westerner.

The Westerner, with his extremely pale skin, had already attracted my attention when I approached the tea house. He was standing with folded arms, facing the sea: carelessly thrown down on the stool by his side was a Japanese summer dress which he had been wearing. He had on him only a pair of drawers such as we were accustomed to wear. I found this particularly strange. Two days previously I had gone to

Yuigahama, and sitting on top of a small dune close to the rear entrance of a Western-style hotel I had whiled away the time watching the Westerners bathe. All of them had their torsos, arms, and thighs well-covered. The women especially seemed overly modest. Most of them were wearing brightly colored rubber caps which could be seen bobbing conspicuously amongst the waves. After having observed such a scene, it was natural that I should think this Westerner, who stood so lightly clad in our midst, quite extraordinary.

As I watched, he turned his head to the side and spoke a few words to a Japanese, who happened to be bending down to pick up a small towel which he had dropped on the sand. The Japanese then tied the towel around his head, and immediately began to walk towards the sea. This man was Sensei.

From sheer curiosity, I stood and watched the two men walk side by side towards the sea. They strode determinedly into the water and, making their way through the noisy crowd, finally reached a quieter and deeper part of the sea. Then they began to swim out, and did not stop until their heads had almost disappeared from my sight. They turned around and swam straight back to the beach. At the tea house, they dried themselves without washing the salt off with fresh water from the well, and, quickly donning their clothes, they walked away.

After their departure I sat down, and, lighting a cigarette, I began idly to wonder about Sensei. I could not help feeling that I had seen him somewhere before, but failed to recollect where or when I had met him.

I was a bored young man then, and for lack of anything better to do I went to the tea house the following day at exactly the same hour, hoping to see Sensei again. This time,

he arrived without the Westerner, wearing a straw hat. After carefully placing his spectacles on a nearby table and then tying his hand towel around his head, he once more walked quickly down the beach. And when I saw him wading through the same noisy crowd, and then swim out all alone, I was suddenly overcome with the desire to follow him. I splashed through the shallow water until I was far enough out, and then began to swim towards Sensei. Contrary to my expectation, however, he made his way back to the beach in a sort of arc, rather than in a straight line. I was further disappointed when I returned, dripping wet, to the tea house: he had already dressed, and was on his way out.

*

I saw Sensei again the next day, when I went to the beach at the same hour; and again on the following day. But no opportunity arose for a conversation, or even a casual greeting, between us. His attitude, besides, seemed somewhat unsociable. He would arrive punctually at the usual hour, and depart as punctually after his swim. He was always aloof, and no matter how gay the crowd around him might be he seemed totally indifferent to his surroundings. The Westerner, with whom he had first come, never showed himself again. Sensei was always alone.

One day, however, after his usual swim, Sensei was about to put on his summer dress which he had left on the bench, when he noticed that the dress, for some reason, was covered with sand. As he was shaking his dress, I saw his spectacles, which had been lying beneath it, fall to the ground. He seemed not to miss them until he had finished tying his

belt. When he began suddenly to look for them, I approached, and bending down, I picked up his spectacles from under the bench. "Thank you," he said, as I handed them to him.

The next day, I followed Sensei into the sea, and swam after him. When we had gone more than a couple of hundred yards out, Sensei turned and spoke to me. The sea stretched, wide and blue, all around us, and there seemed to be no one near us. The bright sun shone on the water and the mountains, as far as the eye could see. My whole body seemed to be filled with a sense of freedom and joy, and I splashed about wildly in the sea. Sensei had stopped moving, and was floating quietly on his back. I then imitated him. The dazzling blue of the sky beat against my face, and I felt as though little, bright darts were being thrown into my eyes. And I cried out, "What fun this is!"

After a while, Sensei moved to an upright position and said, "Shall we go back?" I, who was young and hardy, wanted very much to stay. But I answered willingly enough, "Yes, let us go back." And we returned to the shore together.

That was the beginning of our friendship. But I did not yet know where Sensei lived.

It was, I think, on the afternoon of the third day following our swim together that Sensei, when we met at the tea house, suddenly asked me, "Do you intend to stay in Kamakura long?" I had really no idea how much longer I would be in Kamakura, so I said, "I don't know." I then saw that Sensei was grinning, and I suddenly became embarrassed. I could not help blurting out, "And you, Sensei?" It was then that I began to call him "Sensei."

That evening, I visited Sensei at his lodgings. He was not staying at an ordinary inn, but had his rooms in a mansion-

like building within the grounds of a large temple. I saw that he had no ties of any kind with the other people staying there. He smiled wryly at the way I persisted in addressing him as "Sensei," and I found myself explaining that it was my habit to so address my elders. I asked him about the Westerner, and he told me that his friend was no longer in Kamakura. His friend, I was told, was somewhat eccentric. He spoke to me of other things concerning the Westerner too, and then remarked that it was strange that he, who had so few acquaintances among his fellow Japanese, should have become intimate with a foreigner. Finally, before leaving, I said to Sensei that I felt I had met him somewhere before but that I could not remember where or when. I was young, and as I said this I hoped, and indeed expected, that he would confess to the same feeling. But after pondering awhile, Sensei said to me, "I cannot remember ever having met you before. Are you not mistaken?" And I was filled with a new and deep sense of disappointment.

*

I returned to Tokyo at the end of the month. Sensei had left the resort long before me. As we were taking leave of each other, I had asked him, "Would it be all right if I visited you at your home now and then?" And he had answered quite simply, "Yes, of course." I had been under the impression that we were intimate friends, and had somehow expected a warmer reply. My self-confidence, I remember, was rather shaken then.

Often, during my association with Sensei, I was disappointed in this way. Sometimes, Sensei seemed to know that

I had been hurt, and sometimes, he seemed not to know. But no matter how often I experienced such trifling disappointments, I never felt any desire to part from Sensei. Indeed, each time I suffered a rebuff, I wished more than ever to push our friendship further. I thought that with greater intimacy, I would perhaps find in him those things that I looked for. I was very young, it is true. But I think that I would not have behaved quite so simply towards others. I did not understand then why it was that I should behave thus towards Sensei only. But now, when Sensei is dead, I am beginning to understand. It was not that Sensei disliked me at first. His curt and cold ways were not designed to express his dislike of me, but they were meant rather as a warning to me that I would not want him as a friend. It was because he despised himself that he refused to accept openheartedly the intimacy of others. I feel great pity for him.

I intended of course to visit Sensei when I returned to Tokyo. There were still two weeks left before the beginning of lectures, and I thought I would visit him during that time. A few days after my return, however, I began to feel less inclined to do so. The atmosphere of the great city affected me a great deal, bringing back memories. Every time I saw a student in the streets, I found myself awaiting the coming of the new academic year with a feeling of hope and tense excitement. For a while, I forgot all about Sensei.

A month or so after the start of lectures, I became more relaxed. At the same time, I began to walk about the streets discontentedly and to look around my room with a feeling that something was lacking in my life. I began to think of Sensei, and I found that I wanted to see him again.

The first time I went to his home, Sensei was out. I remem-

ber that I went again the following Sunday. It was a lovely day, and the sky was so blue that I was filled with a sense of well-being. Again, he was not at home. In Kamakura, Sensei had told me that he spent most of his time at home; indeed, he had even told me that he disliked to go out. Remembering this, I felt an unreasonable resentment at having twice failed to find him. I therefore hesitated in the front hall, staring at the maid who had informed me of her master's absence. She seemed to remember that I had called before and left my card. Asking me to wait, she went away. A lady then appeared, whom I took to be the mistress of the house. She was beautiful.

Very courteously, she told me of Sensei's whereabouts. I learned that every month, on the same day, it was Sensei's custom to take flowers to a certain grave in the cemetery at Zoshigaya. "He left here," said the lady regretfully, "hardly more than ten minutes ago." I thanked her and left. Before I had gone very far towards the busier part of town, I decided that it would be a pleasant walk to Zoshigaya. Besides, I might meet Sensei, I thought. I turned around and started to walk in the direction of Zoshigaya.

From the left side of a field I entered the cemetery and proceeded along a broad avenue bordered on each side by maple trees. There was a tea house at the end of the avenue, and I saw coming out of it someone that looked like Sensei. I walked towards him until I could see the sunlight reflected on the frame of his spectacles. Then suddenly I cried out aloud, "Sensei!" Sensei stopped, and saw me. "How in the world . . . ?" he said. Then again, "How in the world . . . ?" His words, repeated, seemed to have a strange echo-like effect in the stillness of the afternoon. I did not know what to say.

"Did you follow me? How . . . ?"