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SHOSEI-KATAGI AND ENGLISH LITERATURE

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When the Meiji Revolution put an end to the old Edo regime and gave birth to modern Japan, the idea of modernity or of civilization was materially identified with that of Western culture. Every branch of Western culture was sought for earnestly and whole-heartedly, although hastily and without much discrimination. A Western-mania was in vogue among all classes and throughout the country.

Culture is, however, a historical formation; it cannot flourish if hastily transplanted. The Meiji Era had to try again and again to see its own culture Westernized and matured. To reform literature was, of course, a most delicate task. Not a few tried to do it and failed. The history of Meiji literature shows clearly the sinuous process of the Westernization of our national mind.

Shōyō Tsubouchi¹ was one of the most distinguished pioneers of the era who introduced Western, especially English, literature to Japan. Trained in the study of English literature at Tokyo University, young Shōyō was well acquainted with the subject. He was a prominent English scholar, but naturally he knew the old Edo literature much better. His views could not but be influenced by it.

In his essay *Shōsetsu-shinzui*², Shōyō rejected the literary convention handed down from the preceding period, which was shallowly moralistic,³ and expounded a realistic view. The essay is generally believed to have been the first manifesto of the new literary aspirants of the age. Its weak point was the nature of the materials the author was compelled to use. Theoretically Shōyō sided with English literature, but practically he knew traditional Japanese literature too well. The tenor of the essay became, in effect, confused and inconsistent.

Shōyō published a novel named *Shosei-Katagi*⁴ about the same time. It apparently was intended to be a realization of his views in *Shōsetsu-shinzui*, and the confusion and inconsistency appeared even more strikingly in it, as may well be imagined.

This paper has been written to show how Shōyō, a young Mijian, realized his conception of the novel in the latter work, and, if possible, to inquire into one aspect of our early modern culture.

¹ He was born in 1859, nine years before the Meiji Restoration, and died in 1935.

² 小説神髓, literally, "The Essence of the Novel," published in the 18th and 19th years of Meiji (1885-6.)

³ The leading motto of men of letters in the latter years of the Edo Period was "kanzen-chōaku," literally, to urge good and to chastise evil. They drastically recast, and did not faithfully observe, the pattern of life for their professed moral.

⁴ 書生気質, literally, students' "humours."

In the preface to *Shosei-katagi* the author says:

I have recently published a work named *Shōsetsu-shinzui*, in which I boasted a great deal. In writing the present book, I have found to my shame that I cannot realize half of my theory there. However, I must assert that its purpose has been to describe, without any prejudice, life as it really is. I am afraid that those who cling to conventional morality will not favour the novel...

The novel was published serially from June of the eighteenth year of Meiji (1885) to January of the next year, before the publication of *Shōsetsu-shinzui* was completed. However, the actual writing of the essay seems to have been done much earlier. According to Prof. Izumi Yanagida, the greater part of what passes as *Shōsetsu-shinzui* today was written by September of the sixteenth year of Meiji (1883).⁵ Prof. Yanagida, who has a vast knowledge of Meiji literature, can be trusted. Shōyō's words in the preface quoted above have nothing contradictory as regards the dates of the two works.

The question is, then, how the "theory" in the essay is put in practice in the novel.

The story is roughly as follows:

Chapter I begins with a scene in which a *geisha*, Tanoji, bumps into a student of "a certain private school," Sanji Komachida, at Asukayama. Sanji is there to see cherry-blossoms with his friends, while Tanoji is accompanying her customers. They seem to know each other well. The fact is that Sanji's father Kōji, having been promoted to a considerable position in the new Government by virtue of his services for the cause during the Revolution, kept a mistress Otsune⁶ and adopted a foundling girl, Oyoshi. After a while he lost his position and severed his connections with Otsune. Otsune became a *geisha* and took Oyoshi with her. Oyoshi was trained to be a *geisha*, which she became in time, and was called Tanoji.

Sanji and Tanoji become mutually attached. He begins to frequent a *chaya* (restaurant where *geishas* serve) and neglects his studies. One of his friends, Tomoyoshi Moriyama, admonishes him and he vows abstinence. Before long Sanji attends a farewell party for another of his friends, Tōichi Ninna, who is to go abroad, and is forced to go to Yoshiwara. Seeing Tanoji there, he breaks his vow; his misconduct comes to be known to all the school. He is ordered to absent himself from school, but, working hard and with repentance, he gets the order withdrawn. Tanoji turns out to be Moriyama's sister who was separated from her family in the confusion of the Revolution and has long been searched for.

Besides those characters, including several students, a *shōgi* (courtesan) named Kaodori, and a streetwalker named Otoyō, are introduced. Kaodori's birth is a mystery and her identity is temporarily confounded with that of Tanoji.

Students' life in the second decade of the Meiji Era is described at length;

⁵ Izumi Yanagida: *Meiji Literature, a Collection of Essays*, "How Was *Shōsetsu-Shinzui* Written?"

⁶ To keep a mistress was not at all scandalous then. It rather denoted the high position of one who did it. One's wife and mistress often lived in the same house.

their behaviour at their haunts, *gyūya* (*sukiyaki* eating-house), *yaba* (ostensibly an archery, practicing shop but, in truth, a house of ill fame), *yose* (variety-hall), *onsen* (bath) and even *yūri* (licensed quarters), is not omitted.

The students in the book are, as mentioned above, of "a certain private school." The chief materials, however, seem to have been the author's own experiences at Tokyo University at Hitotsubashi. He says that while writing the book he was thinking of some of his friends, but only of their "external peculiarities," that characteristics of two or three real students were gathered into one or other of the characters, and that he intended only to depict faithfully those somehow "naive, innocent and genteel" qualities which he observed in the university students of those days.⁷

The *shosei* (students) were full of energy and promise, characteristic of the then-rising generation.⁸ Shōyō's intention to describe the characteristically "naive, innocent" behaviour of *shosei*, rather than their personal scandals, was fundamentally relevant and realistic in a positive sense of the word. However, the result, the description itself, can by no means be said to be satisfactory.

There are obvious traces of mannerism found in the novel. For instance, the episode of Tanoji's birth and that of Kaodōri's are far-fetched and awkward. Sanji's love is, if not merely sensual, casual; it does not reveal much of his inner life. The characters, not only the minor figures but also the students and even the hero himself, have something of "character" but no personality.

The story begins as follows:⁹

How the world changes! When the Shōgunate Government flourished, the time was for *Samurai* (military class).¹⁰ Great Edo, their capital, however, changed its name to Tokyo in the course of time. Since then every year has seen an advancement of the age. The distinction of classes having been removed, the talented, whatever their birth, are promoted, achieve a high reputation among the chosen few, and drive their own, black-polished carriages. A son of a *nori*-man¹¹ wears a dignified pair of moustaches, while a *kuge* (aristocrat) having the noble name of So-and-so-*kōji*¹² is reduced to being a rikishaman and runs along a thoroughfare.

At the end of the chapter, Sanji, in deep reflection after seeing Tanoji unexpectedly, is greeted by one of his friends:

"Oh, it is you, Sugawa? Are you still here?" "I suspect you, Komachida. You know that *geisha*, don't you?" Sanji reddened in spite of himself, and awkwardly smiling, said, "No, I don't."

The author's attitude reminds one at once of Edo stories, especially those

⁷ "The author's Reminiscences." Appendix VI to *Shosei-katagi*, the authorized edition, published by Tokyodō.

⁸ Today the Japanese for "student" is *gakusei* and not *shosei*. The word *shosei* is characteristically Meijiian.
⁹ No correct idea of the style of a literary work can be given by a translation. To discuss that of *Shosei-katagi*, the original Japanese must be inquired into. It is merely for convenience's sake that a translation is given here.

¹⁰ In the original Japanese the "ō" of "ō Edo" (Great Edo) puns upon that of "bushi nomi toki ni ō (au)" (literally, only the Samurai class met the time.) It is an instance of *kakekotoba*, one of the techniques often used in Edo literature. Three instances of *Kakekotoba* are seen in the original of the short passage quoted here.

¹¹ *Nori* is a kind of dried and dressed seaweed, usually taken at breakfast. *Nori*-men sold it in the street, but they are no longer seen.

¹² *Kōji* means an alley. *Kuge* often called themselves So-and-so-*Kōji*, apparently after their abodes in Miyako, the old capital of Mikado. That a rikishaman So-and-so-*kōji* runs along a thoroughfare is a witticism of words, typically Edoesque

called *ninjōbon*.¹³ Originally a very popular kind of story towards the end of the Edo Period, *ninjōbon* still survived after the Restoration. In fact the novel was a *ninjōbon* then, whatever might be Shōyō's or any other enlightened author's idea of it. Shōyō must have had one constantly in mind while writing *Shosei-katagi*. As Prof. Homma of Waseda University pointed out, a conspicuous allusion to one of the current *ninjōbon*, *Makoto-kurabe*,¹⁴ is found in Chapter VIII of the novel. It seems to be the author's unconscious confession of what he thought of the story, if not of the novel, which he professed in *Shōsetsu-shinzui* to be a product of modern times as distinguished from the romance. It is no wonder that he intended to write a novel and managed to write a new kind of *ninjōbon*.

The author of *Makoto-kurabe* is said to have been Shunsui Tamenaga II, successor to the originator of *ninjōbon*, Shunsui I. Needless to say, Shōyō had no intention to imitate this notorious story-teller, Shunsui I, but for all that there is a striking resemblance between *Shosei-katagi* and Shunsui's works, for instance, *Umegoyomi*,¹⁵ his best-known story and a representative work of the genre.

Umegoyomi begins as follows:

Daffodils have need of a sedge-hat thrown away in a field.¹⁷ A poor house like a frost-shelter for daffodils, if not a hat itself, hedged in with sparse *masaki* (a kind of evergreen), fields outside dotted with thin ice—even such a poor, sequestered, rented house may be better than a fine residence in a big town for those who are accustomed to it, if they “thaw” towards each other. This is Naka-no-gō,¹⁸ between truth and falsehood, having only five or six houses, one of which, scantily furnished, seems to have recently been taken by one who has got a new start in life. He, eighteen or nineteen years old, seems to have sunk in fortune, though he is not mean in appearance...A woman: “Hello, hello, may I come in?” The master of the house: “Who is it that calls?” The woman: “Oh, the voice is surely that of the young Master!”

The hero of the story is Tanjirō, adopted son of the master of a licensed house, Karakotoya's, at Koigafuchi, Kamakura.¹⁹ He has been driven away by the wicked manager of the house and lives a poor life at Naka-no-gō. The *geisha* Yonehachi, originally kept at Karakotoya's but now living at Futagawa,

¹³ *Ninjōbon*, literally, book of human feelings, flourished in the fourth and fifth decades of the nineteenth century. The “*ninjō* (human feelings)” is an idea contrasted with *isū*, refinement of those who were well-versed in the manners of *yūri*. Spontaneity of feelings is emphasized. Cf. Isoji Asō: *An Introduction to the Edo Novel*, Chap. VII, i.

¹⁴ Asao Iwakiri *Makoto-kurabe* (浅尾岩切真実鏡), literally, “rivalry to keep the truth of Asao and Iwakiri,” published in April 1883, previously printed in a newspaper. Cf. Hisao Homma: *A History of Meiji Literature*, Vol. I, Pt. I, Chap. IV, v. a.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*
¹⁶ 梅見替美, literally, “plum-blossom calendar,” published in 1832. The resemblance between *Umegoyomi* and *Shosei-katagi* is more striking than that between *Makoto-kurabe* and the latter. *Makoto-kurabe*, a coarse and rambling narrative, can hardly be called a literary work.

¹⁷ The original is ambiguous. It may be an allusion or a quotation. Prof. Hisashi Furukawa of Tokyo Woman's Christian College, who edited the text of the Iwanami Library, says that he cannot confirm it. The whole of the quoted passage being loose in context, with *kakikotoba* and other far-fetched expressions, the translation cannot be said to be exact.

¹⁸ A proper noun which means, literally, “middle village.”

¹⁹ A fictitious name of Edo often used by Edo authors. Koigafuchi is an equivalent to Yoshiwara of Edo, and Futagawa to Fukagawa.

and Ochō, Karakotoya's daughter and Tanjirō's fiancée, are both deeply attached to him and do him affectionate services. Adakichi, another *geisha* at Futagawa, loves him too. Besides them, various characters, the usual frequenters of *yūri*, are introduced. The mystery concerning the births of the principal characters is eventually explained, and Tanjirō marries Ochō, keeping Yonehachi as mistress.

.. The story, especially its *dénouement*, shows clearly what the hero's love is. It is outrageously sensual and easy-going, his inner life being poor. The characters, including him, have no personality in the strict sense of the word. The mystery of their births is too exaggerated. The story is, in a word, a cheap fiction, not an accurate description of real life, be it historically "pre-modern" or not.

The "mannerism" in *Shosei-katagi*, as mentioned above, was undoubtedly handed down from such a *ninjōbon* as *Umegoyomi*.²⁰ Shōyō's interest in it is seen throughout the novel. For instance, in Chap. V Tōichi Ninna calls to Sanji, "Why, here is a Tanjirō," and when Sanji replies, "Is it you, Ninna? You also take me for a novel," he corrects the words: "No, I don't. I take you for a character in a novel."²¹

The name Tanjirō was a common noun, meaning a good-natured Lovelace, then, but here Shunsui's story itself is not forgotten. Sanji is a Tanjirō in the same situation as the original character's, being loved by a girl he was brought up with—without any convincing reason.

Another name in *Umegoyomi*, Adakichi, is mentioned. (Chap. X.)

Shōyō had, however, no intention to imitate Shunsui, as was said before. He says in an article contributed to a newspaper²² that Dickens and later English novelists dispassionately described the mode of life around them; and that they were not specious moralists like the story-tellers of the Tamenaga school who, in fact, "catered to the lascivious taste of the public." In another article to the same paper²³ he says that Shunsui knew "human feelings" well, but, "clinging to formal morality, he often devised a *dénouement* inconsistent with human nature."

Shōyō's conception of a novel or a novelist was different from the conventional one, having been founded on his knowledge of English literature.

Who was his model novelist then?

There are not a few English authors alluded to in *Shosei-katagi*. Among them, Byron, Milton and Shakespeare are not novelists, and must be left out of consideration here. Bulwer-Lytton's *Rienzi* is mentioned more than once. (Chaps. XI, XIV.) Shōyō himself translated it about the same time that he wrote *Shosei-katagi*.²⁴ However, the story, based on the career of Cola di Rienzi, a fourteenth-century Roman tribune, is not a *sewamono*, a story of contemporary

²⁰ The title *Shosei-katagi* seems, however, to be modeled on that of so-called *katagimono*, e.g. *Seken Musukō-katagi* (literally, sons' "humours" in the world, 1715), *Seken Musume-katagi* (daughters' "humours" in the world, 1716), etc.

²¹ Sanji and his friend take *Umegoyomi* for a typical novel (*shōsetsu*), whatever the author Shōyō might think of the novel.

²² *Jiyū-no-tomoshibi* (*The Light of Liberty*), July 30 and 31, 1885. The article was slightly revised and affixed to Chap. X (Number nine) of *Shosei-katagi*.

²³ August 4, 1885.

²⁴ Published in February, 1885.

everyday life, which Shōyō distinguished categorically from a *jidaimono*, a historical novel, in *Shōsetsu-shinzui*.²⁵

In the newspaper article quoted above Shōyō adds the words:

Dickens described to life the manner of pickpockets.

The allusion must be to Fagin's gang in *Oliver Twist*. *Shosei-katagi* is, however, quite different from that both in form and substance. Shōyō must have read that famous story and been impressed by it, but he can not have learned much from it.

There is no definite evidence, either external or internal, that shows the direct influence of any English novel upon *Shosei-katagi*, but, directly or not, Shōyō must have been influenced by some English novelists he had read. In fact, he had a few in mind ready to recommend. He did not hesitate to name Scott, Bulwer-Lytton and George Eliot, and call them "masters of modern fiction" in *Shōsetsu-shinzui*.²⁶

Of those three authors, George Eliot probably deserves the words best, considering that the kind of fiction she wrote was *sewamono*, as Shōyō called it. He mentions her again in one of the newspaper articles quoted above,²⁷ naming her along with Bret Harte as a typical "artistic" novelist.

To say that Shōyō imitated a particular work of George Eliot's is a mistake, but it cannot be denied that he looked upon her as an author of what he thought the novel, *sewamono*, should be.

George Eliot died in 1880. Her authorized biography,²⁸ *George Eliot's Life, as Related in her Letters and Journals*, edited by her husband, J. W. Cross, was published five years later, that is, in the year in which the publication of *Shosei-katagi* was begun, and contained much high praise. Another life of George Eliot by Oscar Browning,²⁹ perhaps the most popular of her biographies at the end of the last century, was published soon after. Whatever tribute her husband might pay to her memory, the author of the latter also did her homage in such high terms as follows:

It is possible that "Adam Bede," "Middlemarch," and "Daniel Deronda" may eventually have their place rather beside "Hamlet" and "Macbeth" than beside "Tom Jones" and "Clarissa Harlowe."³⁰

Middlemarch is generally regarded as one of the masterpieces of English fiction,³¹ but no one who knows anything of English literature thinks that it should be placed beside any of Shakespeare's four great tragedies rather than the two representative eighteenth century novels. Neither *Adam Bede* nor *Daniel Deronda*, not so happy in idea or execution, is by any means worth the praise. That George Eliot was so regarded seems incredible today. Such was nevertheless the case

²⁵ *Shōsetsu-shinzui*, I, "The Kinds of the Novel."

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I, "The Development of the Novel." Dumas is also mentioned, but omitted here, being a French author.

²⁷ *Jiyū-no-tomoshibi*, August 4, 1885.

²⁸ However new materials have come to light since then. Cf. Prof. Haight's *George Eliot and John Chapman and George Eliot Letters*, Lawrence and Elisabeth Hanson's *Marian Evans and George Eliot*, etc.

²⁹ One of the "Great Writers" series, published in 1892. Her fame fell soon afterward; ten years later, in 1902, Leslie Stephen had to play an advocate's part in another popular life in the "English Men of Letters" series. Today she is reassessed and regarded as one of the greatest novelists of the latter half of the nineteenth century.

³⁰ Oscar Browning: *Life and Writings of George Eliot*, Chap. I.

³¹ Cf. Lettice Cooper: *George Eliot*, Robert Speaight: *George Eliot*, Chap. VIII, etc.

at the end of the last century.

Oscar Browning says that *Adam Bede* was the most popular of all George Eliot's novels then.³² Shōyō must have taken it for one of her greatest works, if not the greatest. It will perhaps not be irrelevant to compare it with *Shosei-katagi*.

Adam Bede is too well-known to be explained in detail here. Its theme is clear enough to those who have read it through once—the restoration of lost fidelity by means of the performance of duty and love due to fellow human beings. On the other hand, the scenes and characters in the story are said to have been, on the whole, derived from the author's memories. The life in it was materially her own, though it is not her autobiography, and that is the reason why the theme, a moral lesson, was worked up with vigour and the story became something more than a fable. It is not without false elaborations, but what is told in it mainly rings true.

Shosei-katagi has no theme in the same sense that *Adam Bede* has one. Or rather, Shōyō lost sight of one by rejecting a moral in this ambitious *étude* of his in accordance with his "theory." Thus, his novel could not but be loose in form and weak in effect, though he used familiar materials and devised a complicated plot.

Shosei-katagi is not an imitation of *Adam Bede*. Sanji Komachida is not intended to correspond to Adam Bede, nor Tanoji to Hetty Sorrel. If Shōyō had imitated it, he might have failed utterly, and Meiji literature might have had no Sanji and no Tanoji. *Shosei-katagi* would have been a different story from what it is, unreadable perhaps—at any rate, not a *ninjōbon* without a moral.

Shōyō, who studied English literature, ought to have understood the true meaning of such words of George Eliot's as:

So I am content to tell my simple story, without trying to make things better than they were...³³

He ought to have understood that *Adam Bede*, if a "simple story," is not a copy of fragments of life, but a study of it, based on the insight into individual minds, the author's own as well as her fellow human being's, and the investigation of morality, the question of how to live.

Shosei-katagi is an epoch-making novel in the history of Meiji literature. Shōyō's plan to renovate literary convention and to establish a new kind of fiction, the "modern" novel, as he took it, was boldly put in practice in it.

Shōyō the renovator was sincere and efficient—more efficient than any other contemporary men of letters. What he accomplished, however, is far from consummate, as has been explained, and the chief reason may be attributed to his imperfect knowledge of English literature, on which he founded his "theory." However, whatever knowledge he might have had, it was all he could acquire

³² Browning, *op. cit.*, Chap. V.

³³ *Adam Bede*, Bk. II, Chap. XVII.

at that time,³⁴ circumstanced as he was.

Who was better circumstanced at the beginning of the Meiji Era?³⁵ The era had to make many futile attempts to produce its own literature, the novel among all its *genres*, deserving the name of true "modern" culture.

³⁴ Of course Shōyō's knowledge of English literature deepened in time, but he took to drama and gave up writing novels. His achievement is stated in full in his authorized biography by Izumi Yanagida and Shigetoshi Kawatake.

³⁵ Shōyō was trained in the study of English literature, as was noted before. He belonged to and graduated at the faculty of letters, Tokyo University. The faculty was a small one, not differentiated yet as it was later. Shōyō belonged to the department of history (political economy and philosophy, since the second year of his attendance) and politics. Cf. Izumi Yanagida and Shigetoshi Kawatake: *Shōyō Tsubouchi*, Chap. III, xviii-xxv.