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Getting to the Heart of the Matter: Sōseki's Excursion into the Split Subject and Translation's Rescue of the Humanities[1]

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Introduction: The Crisis in the Contemporary Humanities in North America

The current crisis in the humanities in the North American academy has forced us to examine carefully our worth as scholars and teachers of literature, cinema, history, music, fine arts, philosophy, gender studies, and other fields that neoliberal instrumentalists often disparage as the "soft" disciplines.[2] But, I would like to suggest that the true crisis we face as a literate society is not, in fact, the crisis that we think we are facing, or at least it is not the central or primary crisis. The superficial but highly disruptive crisis thrust upon us involving such things as the impression of diminishing enrollments and suspicions of irrelevance and utility is one of *perceived* crisis: what is it that we do that students really need in the competitive world they will soon enter as adults? What skills do we offer that will enable them to successfully fend for themselves "out there"? What is the transferability of our subject matter for the marketplace and the public square beyond campus? These questions imposed on us in an ever increasingly commodified global culture of reified identities have unleashed a paroxysm of soul-searching, debate, and defense of the merit of the humanities and arts in our current academic community in North America, and increasingly world-wide. Indeed, even in Japan six years ago there was a sudden call to slash undergraduate faculties in the humanities and social sciences across the nation in an effort to "better meet society's needs," an initiative they subsequently backed away from in the wake of vociferous hue and cry. Looking at the academic institution as a whole going forward, Sidonie Smith, for example, counsels us to recognize that we are in a period of diffusion in which the "distributed university" finds itself opening campuses worldwide, especially in Asia and the Middle East. She continues by admonishing

us to recognize that "knowledge environments" are changing and can no longer be confined to the "brick and mortar" architecture that largely has constituted the academy for some five hundred years. How prophetic her words from pre-COVID 2016 are now, when in just a few short years they almost seem too obvious for comment. But even today, and I say this as much to myself as to anyone else, many of us have not thought as deeply as Smith has when she invokes Johanna Drucker's injunction: "The design of digital tools for scholarship is an intellectual responsibility, not a technical task…." (Smith 53). There is indeed much we can do to extend our academic reach both in terms of physical and digital geography. Despite that, I remain convinced that our current predicament either is not the one we think it is or at least that the crisis in which we find ourselves is not comprehended in its full implication.

Although this could be an existential challenge to us, I suggest to you that it is by and large a *false crisis*, or perhaps more precisely a misperceived crisis. It has scarce basis in reality although its effects run the risk of fueling a deflationary atmosphere of spiral entropy in the humanities. Admittedly, it is no longer clear that skills learned in the study of the humanities are necessities for virtually all occupations that require thinking. Nor can it be presumed that the value of such skills is prima facia evident to those outside the academy. This misunderstanding is to some extent our own fault, a problem of presentation which we must address in a more fulsome manner. *The true crisis*, the ineluctable crisis, is one of potential and irrevocable loss, the loss of core faculties that train students in a variety of ways: as Ph.D. experts who themselves will succeed us someday or lead community organizations such as K through 12 schools, libraries, foundations, and public organizations; as undergraduate majors who go into professional fields such as law, government, business, healthcare, high tech, and engineering; as minors who enhance their own specialization in virtually any field with some cultural, historical, linguistic, or aesthetic understanding; or merely as those with a personal artistic, musical, or cultural interest and aptitude who recognize that our lives are not solely made up of getting from point A to point B, that life is not a utility and humans are not tools. The potential loss of this human resource is a crisis that supersedes the individual and immediate heartbreak of a tenure track job not secured, the loss of a position with the retirement or departure of a colleague,

or the conversion of a faculty line from permanent to contingent. The crisis we currently face is the erasure of an entire sector of human inquiry; it is a *cultural revolution* on whose precipice we currently teeter. Indeed, we are facing a moment in history where we may lose knowledge and skills on a generational level that could reverberate at a later date as something no longer recoverable. In other words, it is bad enough that there are fewer jobs with each passing year in the humanities. On top of that, we need to grasp that we could be losing understanding and techniques of analysis that are best sustained through continuous, uninterrupted, pursuit—things that could suffer terminally with the massive gap that is likely to emerge if we continue to allow academia to divest itself of the humanities. In order to avert *this* crisis, the crisis of a gap much like that created by a cultural revolution, we still must combat the perceived crisis of relevance and utility mentioned above.

I will provide one example of how what we do is of crucial benefit for us in a world that with the internet, international trade, communicable diseases that do not respect border stops, climate change, and non-volitional migration, we desperately require more robust cross-cultural understanding, not less. Concomitantly, I will make a case for the imperative of literary translation and reading widely in literature translated into English. I will turn to one of the great novels of the 20th century, *Kokoro* 心, to illustrate this. Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867-1916), the doyen of modern Japanese fiction, published his novel *Kokoro* (which could be rendered as "the heart of things" or directly and plainly as "heart," although most translators have left the title untranslated) in 1914.[3] The narrative structure, the use of not just one but two first-person narrators, the descriptions of relations between friends, relations with one's parents, siblings, and marital relations was unprecedented in Japanese literature, and highly unusual in world literature for that matter. We could look to a text such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), among others, for an example of two things that find resonance in *Kokoro*: the virtually impenetrable horror that lurks within the heart and mind of a human; and the interaction with another, in both literary texts a *narrative* other who serves as a guide for the reader into the depths of an evil consciousness.[4] In the penultimate section of this essay I will offer a reading against the grain of this conventional interpretation of the novel that requires us to hold in abeyance the very notion of what an

individual consciousness is in the realistic novel. For various reasons, the novel presents us with an instructive example of early modern Japanese selfhood in its multifaceted complexity and contradictions. Unlocking its puzzling significance as a literary work offers us deep insight into the origins of modern Japanese society and identity, and thus into what makes the fascinating and consequential nation of Japan tick, not to mention the cultural ramifications of the global modernity project.[5]

Decoding Natsume Sōseki's *Kokoro*

Natsume Sōseki's best known novel is a tale of one man's irrepressible captivation with another, of jealousy, financial cheating, questions of inheritance, laziness, indulgence in sophistry to some extent, vanity, and, ultimately, treachery and betrayal. We can learn a great deal from it, not least of which is to choose your roommates carefully, a topic of abiding interest to students, and conversely that we cannot choose our relatives. Both groups are to be regarded with the utmost caution and even a healthy dose of mistrust. *Kokoro* is a single-ended framed narrative divided into three parts, written in the first-person voice with an "I" narrator who refers to himself in the original by the Japanese first-person singular pronoun Watakushi 私.[6] What is peculiar about it is that there are actually two "I" narrators. There is a second "Watakushi" who takes over the narrative midway, and that is "Sensei" 先生. Neither is assigned a name (nor are most of the other characters in the book assigned identifiable names).[7] Thus, critics are at a bit of a loss as to how to refer to the two narrators, with many out of convenience calling the first the "Young Watakushi" or simply "Watakushi" and the other "Sensei," as Young Watakushi calls him, or in some instances as the "Older Watakushi." The distinctive structure of the work combined with the bifurcated "I" narrators lead us, as Ken Ito points out, to "contemplate how much of meaning is form" (19). I'll come back to this point later. This unnamed first-person narrator Watakushi opens the novel with a description of his visit to the beach near Kamakura where he meets a most important man in his life, whom he simply calls "Sensei," which literally means "teacher" but could be understood more generally as a term of respect for someone older than oneself and from whom one can learn.

The first 75-page section of the novel depicts Young Watakushi's growing fascination with and relationship with Sensei, who

is guarded but does not rebuff the "I" narrator. Sensei is married with no children, and the narrator is quite a bit younger. There is no explicit suggestion of sexual attraction, but the building emotional attachment is evident, one could even say puzzling or inexplicable. Even Sensei wonders aloud at points about the "I" narrator's attachment to Sensei, surmising that it is the result of a love that has no object (Sōseki 25). He chides the young devotee, gently shunning him and discouraging his attachment with a foreboding prediction: "I do not want your admiration now, because I do not want your insults in the future" (39).[8] At this point, the reader cannot know what Sensei means except that, as the "I" narrator foreshadows, there is a "frightening tragedy" in Sensei's past and at the heart of his being (24). The magnetic power of this attraction, depicted by the Young Watakushi in exquisite detail, is the source of much scholarly discussion, including suggestions that the novel is homosocial or homoerotic. In two book chapters that both summarize previous scholarship and move beyond it, Keith Vincent outlines the "continuum" on which the various accounts of the male-male bond in the novel from Stephen Dodd's "minoritizing and explicitly homoerotic" interpretation on one end to the classic psychoanalytic study by Doi Takeo who "supplied a powerfully universalizing and homosocial reading" of the work can be plotted (Vincent 89). I would argue that the message of the novel certainly is not a universal one, but not due to the homosocial quality of the narrative or possible homoerotic implications. I prefer to sidestep that aspect of the reading of this work mainly because so many others before me such as Dodd and Vincent have already done an excellent job of theorizing this point and I doubt I have much meaningful to add. What I ultimately want to get at, though, is still an issue of historical and cultural particularity because the novel presents us with such a catastrophic example of the clash between the traditional Confucian notion of filiality *xiao* 孝 and modern individualism, between the underlying cultural logic of East Asia which, albeit very large in population, can still be regarded as a particular, and the globalizing ideology of individual subjectivity that serves as part of a legitimating discourse for modernity and cultural imperialism, which fancies itself a universal. This conflict between the particular and the universal epitomizes the postcolonial predicament of East-West ideology in the modern era.

If it were the case that the novel was merely an interface between

two individual subjectivities, two narrative voices that come together to personify the relationship between Young Watakushi and Sensei, that alone would be a fascinating study in social psychology. It also would enable Young Watakushi to recede into the framework of the novel and function almost exclusively as a perceiver, aligning him even more closely with the reader than he already is. Similarly, this would allow Sōseki to construct a work even closer in import to that of a Conrad novel that seeks to present the reader with a psychological case study. Watakushi could be effaced for the most part, and the reader's attention could be trained in an unencumbered way upon the plight of Sensei and why exactly it is that the mystery of his existence and the psychological portrait of him are so fascinating. But the author does not leave it at that. Instead, Sōseki introduces an intervening section into the novel that perhaps functions as a transition between the first section of the novel, "Sensei and I," and the final section, "Sensei and His Testament."

As the novel progresses, and the fascination for Sensei deepens, the health of the narrator's aging father deteriorates back home in rural Japan. The narrator is forced to return home briefly in Part One and again midway in the novel. Reference to Watakushi's family and especially the ailing father back in the rural provinces gives Sōseki the opportunity to put Sensei and his wife on the record with respect to filiality, as more than once they ask after the father and urge Watakushi to take good care of him. The care he does extend to his father, perfunctory but nevertheless dutiful, is depicted in a middle section and comprises 40 pages. This considerably shorter section, titled "My Parents and I," is still of crucial importance. It provides the character of Young Watakushi with his own backstory, a layer of characterization and experience, and behooves us to ask how he can justify his actions: his relationship with Sensei, whom his parents view in a utilitarian light, is someone who can help their son get a respectable professional appointment; Watakushi's insistence on returning to Tokyo which, aside from what emotional or intellectual benefits it supplies to Watakushi, has not profited him in ways that the family presumed it would. At home, Watakushi's attention must be upon his father, who is inexorably though gradually dying, and upon his mother, who clearly is going to suffer from the loss of her husband, sole familial companion, and breadwinner. In an earlier era, the children, particularly the sons or

at least one of them, would remain close to the family home and tend to the parents in their elderly years. Neither Watakushi nor his brother, who lives in far-off Kyūshū, envision themselves doing this. Lingering over the situation, then, is the unspoken question of the future of the mother who, traditionally and practically speaking, cannot be expected to care for herself after the passing of the husband and father. Toward the end of Part Two, the narrator receives a letter from Sensei and immediately drops everything, including the aid to his convalescing father who lies on his deathbed as well as any thoughts of his elderly mother, leaving both behind as he rushes to board a train bound for Tokyo in search of Sensei. All he does is hastily scratch out a note to his parents at the train station before departing. This is hardly the conduct of a devoted son.

The third and final section of nearly 120 pages is completely composed of the letter written by Sensei. At this point in the novel, still cast in a first-person point of view, the narrative abruptly shifts to the voice of Sensei. Young Watakushi, the original first-person narrator, takes a seat next to us and moves from being a producer of narrative *for us as readers* to partake of Sensei's narrative as a consumer alongside us. As he reads the letter, the letter is inserted into the novel verbatim so the reader is almost peering over his shoulder as we learn that Sensei already presumably has committed suicide. The letter is an exhaustive account of Sensei's life set in a confessional mode, revealing to the original narrator, and us, the treachery of Sensei and the horrible secret that lays at the center of his life. There is copious detail and insight into the minutiae of human behavior and relationships in this section. The point of the section is to reveal that in actuality Sensei was responsible for the death of a friend earlier in his life, a friend known only as K.

During his studies in Tokyo, Sensei boarded with an elderly woman (Okusan) and her daughter (Ojōsan). Sensei's childhood friend K subsequently came to be his roommate in the house. Sensei's motivation for urging Okusan to allow K to move into the house, against Okusan's own better judgment, likely was a sense of empathy. Both K and Sensei experienced childhood trauma: Sensei's came after both his parents died when he was a teenager and an uncle, designated as his guardian, cheated Sensei out of his entire inheritance; K's came later, punished by his foster parents for not acceding to their demands

that he study to be a doctor.[9] One day, K told Sensei that he was in love with the young woman called Ojōsan and planned to ask the mother for her hand in marriage. He confided this information to Sensei, but didn't realize that Sensei too had fallen for the young woman. Hearing this admission sent Sensei into a panic as he only then realized his own private fantasy of marrying Ojōsan was concealed so securely that it was not apparent to K or anyone else for that matter. Sensei heretofore could not devise a way to spring this on the mother and daughter, nor did he have the courage to do so. At this moment, Sensei was faced with an enormous quandary as the person who had sown the seeds of the challenge to his marital fantasy by persuading Okusan to welcome K into the home in the first place, an act of generosity. The moral dilemma that faces Sensei is reinforced by the fact that despite Sensei's generosity to the friend K in getting him into the house, Sensei had come to despise K for the latter's oblivious and infuriating behavior. The resentment that Sensei holds toward K is as tightly concealed as Sensei's affection for Ojōsan.

Sensei must now decide whether to remain faithful to his friend or to betray K and beat him to the punch. Sensei first tries to undermine K's resolve. K is, by Sensei's account, a supremely idiosyncratic and, one could say, infuriating individual, wholly unconscious of the irritating and even selfish implications of his behavior upon others, especially his main benefactor at this point, Sensei. K comes from a religious family and despite the traumas of his youth he is leading what he considers a life of sincere devotion and material denial. But in an unconditional pursuit of an ascetic life, K unwittingly discounts Sensei's feelings multiple times, making decisions that inconvenience his friend and benefactor. To Sensei, K exudes an air of philosophical and religious superiority, as if he both better understands the lofty tomes of moral philosophy as found, for example, in the work of the Buddhist priest and philosopher Nichiren 日蓮 (1222-1282), and that he has perfected a certain noble personal conduct in the world. Sensei comes to loath K's arrogance, which perhaps eases his ability to turn on the friend. Sensei's strategy is to simultaneously undermine K's affection for the young woman by throwing back at K all of his pronouncements as to how he should lead a life of principled abstemiousness while getting the drop on his friend by asking the elderly woman for her daughter's hand in marriage before K has a chance to do so. In the late Meiji era

in which formal values and decorum still reined, it is not untypical that the intentions of either of the boarders to elevate themselves to the level of a suitor would be kept a close secret until such time as a formal and proper revelation were to be made. Now pressed for time, Sensei no longer had the luxury of figuring out how he might reveal his intensions and had to act quickly. At the earliest opportunity that he could engineer, Sensei raised the topic of marriage with Okusan. It would have been considered an act of impropriety to ask Ojōsan herself directly and insensitive to the status of the mother. After all, the marriage would be a materially consequential one for both of the women, since Okusan was a widow with just one daughter and no sons. If there were a father still in the picture and one or more sons, the situation might be somewhat more lax. Totally unaware of K's intentions, the mother agreed to allow the daughter to marry Sensei. The young woman naturally was the very woman whom Young Watakushi had gotten to know as Sensei's wife in the first half of the book.

Even though no words about this perfidy were spoken between Sensei and K, it is hard to imagine the deceit was not obvious to both of them. It wasn't much later that, to Sensei's mortification and the bafflement of the two women, K took his life by plunging the point of a fountain pen into his neck, severing the carotid artery. He did this right in the bedroom, separated by a thin sliding door, in which he and Sensei lived. As one can imagine, the suicide left a huge mess with a large puddle of blood covering the tatami mats in the center of the room. Harboring his secret, Sensei went ahead and married the young woman, recognizing to himself that the manner in which he effected this relationship rested on the total and blatant betrayal of his childhood friend, a fact only known to him and to the deceased. It appears quite clear that all the interiority that pours out from the letter is equally unknown to his wife, or to anyone else for that matter. The "I" narrator, and we, as we read over Young Watakushi's shoulder as it were, discover this together in a gradually revelatory narrative in which suspense factors in significantly. We come to share with the I-narrator the awful secret of Sensei's duplicity. It is as if to say that one can be as close as one can to another person and never know the psychological and emotional world in which they reside.

This dimension of the story also has generated much

comment, because one must ask what sort of a society it is that could support such a situation where the women are relegated to scenery props within the literary work. Ojōsan has the largest role in the novel of all the women, but she is in the dark as to why Sensei has receded into himself in marriage. It also is somewhat baffling to her why Sensei continues to pay obeisance to the memory of K at his grave in Zōshigaya each month, only attributing it to Sensei's unstinting loyalty to his old friend. She may have her suspicions but she never voices them, remaining true to the metaphorical significance of her fitting name, "Shizu" – "to be silent." Ojōsan's incognizance in the first half of the novel puts her in the company of the reader, but as the reader delves deeply into Part Three an ironic distance develops between her and us. We begin to see her place in Part One in a different light, as an actor in a drama who knows little of the terms or stakes of the drama in which she appears. Our insight into the drama of Part One comes to us after the fact as a form of *nachträglichkeit*, retroactive or deferred, recognition that clarifies for us Sensei's mysterious behavior and reclusion, to use Freud's notion of how trauma can be recalled, confronted, and worked through, and finally mastered. Partially like Ojōsan, both Okusan and Young Watakushi's own mother are for the most part supporting characters in the narrative, although some necessary details of their lives are revealed. The status of Ojōsan and concomitant gender issues are explored briefly by Sharalyn Orbaugh and more extensively by Doris Bargen in separate essays.[10] The focus, nevertheless, is on the (male) psyche and the depths to which one can plunge. As far as I know, the sort of disemboweling of the human psyche that is displayed in the course of the third section of *Kokoro* has never occurred before in Japanese literature, part of the East Asian tradition where psychological interiority tends to be enshrouded or shielded from the reader. The work paved the way for more such psychological anatomy lessons to come in Japanese literature, as well as Chinese and perhaps in Korean too, although I do not have the authority to comment on the Korean situation.

The single-ended frame that I mentioned before, which leaves the conclusion of the work in the minds of some critics to be open-ended, is an important issue to which we are compelled to return. To some, this is a structural weakness of the work. There is no resumption of the point of view of the original "I" narrator. There

is no effort at reflection or interpretation by Young Watakushi, no attempt to ruminate with the reader on the shared knowledge that the frame narrator and the reader now both have. Equally absent is what happened after Young Watakushi finished reading the letter. He was on the train to Tokyo. Where did he go? What were his interactions with the wife, if any? Did he cable home to his family and explain his rash behavior, which undoubtedly in the context would be viewed as impulsive, irresponsible, and inappropriate? Did he maintain the secrets contained in the letter that Sensei disclosed? We know nothing of these things. We are left with an abrupt conclusion that Young Watakushi and we tacitly share, forced to imagine for ourselves what happens to him as well as what possible interpretation or "lesson" he derives from the experience of getting to know Sensei. We know nothing of how the gruesome events affect his life as he grows into full adulthood. We never again hear from Sensei's wife Shizu.

Except for the front-end framing of the letter that constitutes sections one and two, the narrative is left entirely unmediated to us so that we can encounter it directly just as Young Watakushi does. We are left to ponder its consequences alone. Although the nature of this closure or lack thereof may be jarring to some and is the source of criticism from some scholars,[11] in my view it is an act of fanatical discipline on the part of the author, for Sōseki suppresses the inclination to moralize, interpret, domesticate, naturalize, or otherwise dictate to us how we should interpret Sensei's confession. As an author of disciplined understatement and precision, he does not allow us off the hook by even suggesting how we should think. As far as precedents are concerned, there are none in Japan that have been unearthed by Japanese literary scholars, which accounts for part of the esteem of the book. With respect to world literature, we can identify some antecedents and situate Sōseki's novel in the context of early modern fiction and the dissection of the human psyche as well as fascination with the limits of perception. These would include Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864), Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1901) and *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912), Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* (1913) (the first section of *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*), Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915), James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). All these works concern themselves with the human psyche

and perception, offering a phenomenological account of things that does not—cannot—separate perception from objects or vice versa. Most of these works also eviscerate a priori notions of morality and ethics. Each represents an innovation in the composition of narrative. Most underscore the hidden and inaccessible nature of the realm of consciousness.

Conflicting Conceptions of the Subject Position: A Philosophical Postmortem

The unusual structure of the novel--with two different first-person narrators interposed with a middle section that involves caring for the dying father--is innovative. It has been the source of a sizeable quantity of scholarship and literary analysis. As far as I can tell from my own inexpert review of the critical literature, the scholarship on *Kokoro* takes the narrative at face value in that the basic assumption is that the "action" of the novel is a direct reflection of social reality. The profound critique in these readings is trained on the social interaction of two characters, "Watakushi" and "Sensei," with the one obsessed with discovering and relating the secret of the other and the other initially exhibiting an aloof countenance but eventually confessing everything to his younger friend. I am going to advance a qualitatively different kind of reading, an allegorical exegesis in which we must hold in abeyance the mimetic presumptions on which the narrative is predicated so that we may contemplate the two narrators not as particular individuals "out there in reality" as corporeal selves but rather as dyadic tendencies emblematic of the modern Japanese psyche in conflict with itself. What I suggest is that it demonstrates a split in the modern Japanese subject at the door of global culture. Gone are the days of large, extended families in Confucian society that were predominantly rural and where one's identity was synonymous with one's responsibilities: to be a filial son; to take a wife; to beget children; to honor one's parents and worship one's ancestors. This sort of relational, traditional subject formation was giving way to the individual self that had already emerged in Western Europe and North America. Individualism, a strong sense of identity independent from others, with needs, rights, and autonomy, was the new dispensation thrust upon Meiji Japan as the government under the Meiji Emperor sought to modernize, in fact produce, a modern industrial nation in response to the threat of Western imperialism. Similarly, the individualistic

identity arising at this particular conjuncture necessitated a new ethical dispensation where moral action increasingly has relied on one's own experience and less upon the dictates of an a priori value system.

There is a parallel between what is happening in the insignificant lives of our dyadic narrator(s) and the state which surfaces in the depiction of the death of the Meiji Emperor (mentioned in all three sections) and the concomitant suicide of one of his most esteemed, if flawed, generals (General Nogi Maresuke 乃木希典; 1849-1912). General Nogi is known for a great humiliation mentioned in the novel: the loss of the imperial banner during the ultimately victorious suppression of the Satsuma Rebellion (1877), even though his exploits during the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 were considered successful, possibly even heroic. The historical context of the Satsuma Rebellion is momentous not just for Japan and this novel but for an understanding of global modernity, for it represented the last stand of Samurai society in the face of a rapidly and forcibly modernizing Japanese society, political system, and economy. Out of respect for the emperor, Nogi committed suicide in 1912, when the novel is set, a matter of national interest at the time. Young Watakushi's father comments wistfully on the passing of the Meiji Emperor as well as his faithful general, but the signifier is ambiguous: is he a symbol of the passing of a great regime or of the next step in a measured march toward modernity? My argument here comes closest to without doing total justice to the sophisticated probe into the inner reaches of subjectivity that James Fujii applies to the novel in his "spicy" theorization of Japanese literature, canon formation, and *Kokoro*. Excavating the source of suffering so common to Sōseki's protagonists, Fujii finds "the disjunction of East meeting West, with its most profound manifestation in the figure of the 'modern individual'." (223)[12]

We cannot answer the question of the status of the Meiji Emperor's and General Nogi's passing now, but we can examine how they play out on the level of individuals. The fashioning of an emergent individual subject in Japan in the Meiji Period functioned in the service of the proto-capitalist/imperialist state that was in the making, offering new reified consciousnesses that could be employed and deployed in the project of modernity on many levels. This new individualism might be vogue and enticing, especially to urban intellections. Indeed, *Kokoro* contains much comment on the issues of

property, wealth, money, divisions of such, the tensions between rural and urban, and a generational gulf between the older, rural-oriented, folk and the younger, urban-based, bookish, individuals who cherished their lives in the city but were also constantly seeking the material means to support their lives away from their extended families. The cultural logic of the older generation is not represented in flattering terms in the novel. The passing of Sensei's parents, we learn in his letter, results in his family's inheritance being entrusted to his uncle until Sensei is of an age that he can take control of it. But the uncle squanders Sensei's rightful inheritance. K's foster parents persecute and torment him as he doggedly asserts his idealistic renunciation of material value. Yet K himself succumbs to the conventional desire of obtaining a wife in Ojōsan, a pedestrian desire that Sensei uses to needle him. Young Watakushi's parents exhibit no interest in what his son wants for his own life. They are nice enough people, but they have no grand aspirations in life for themselves or their offspring. Even Okusan, who otherwise appears to be a humble and laudable character in the work, accepts the marriage proposal of Sensei on behalf of her daughter almost as a matter of insouciance, quipping "Who am I to say, 'you may have her'? She is, as you know, a wretched, fatherless child" (212). Ojōsan's own feelings on the matter not only are not consulted but are not even imagined to be worthy of consultation. In other words, there is a hollowness at the heart of this traditional culture that in some cases might be called venal. Values are not understood as benevolent but as contractual. Could the modern individual be a moral rejoinder to this?

Individualism presented its own problems. Individual subjectivity as we see in the novel meant that people were naturally isolated from one another, atomized with intimacy out of reach—even with years of cohabitation. The individualism in *Kokoro* that ends in isolation is prophetic of what was to come in Japan and East Asia in general. The predicament of the modern individual self, in competition with others, fighting for survival against other individuals but in turn fueling capitalism has only become more pronounced in the intervening 100 years. Nowadays, capitalism and competition are the name of the game. That this leads to secrecy, betrayal, loneliness, lack of communication, and self-contradictory behavior, with characters both receding from society and simultaneously pining for human

communion, can be seen in Tokyo as well as in Beijing, Seoul, and throughout urban East Asia. That Sōseki made no attempt to smooth this over at the end of the novel, but left us there to deal with the pain and puzzlement *on our own* without the interpretive mediation of a final frame, crystalizes the modern condition. We are *alone* to make sense of Sensei's testament of personal horror. Watakushi does not resume the narrative voice to ease the burden or offer camaraderie. The shocking fact that the situation with the father, abandoned on his deathbed, is unceremoniously dropped from the narrative and never returned to is a demonstration that filiality, once the cornerstone of Confucian ethics and identity in East Asia, has disintegrated.[13] The ending that some find unsatisfying is precisely the point. It forces us to experience the desolation of loss on our own, providing what Andrew Gibson has called an "anagnorisis" or a "jolt" bestowing insight into the malaise of modern society (44). We learn this about Japanese society and its induction into global modernity not from reading the newspaper but from reading this fabulous novel in its translated form. I have specifically chosen it because I am not an authority on Japanese literature, language, or society. I have no entry into the work other than the one other non-experts have, which is through translation. The act of reading world literature in translation is the embodiment of inquiry into human knowledge that transcends each of our own spheres of knowledge, expertise, and linguistic ability. Perhaps we can achieve proficiency in one language other than our own. Some can become fluent in two, or three, or four. But no one can master them all, and for that reason we are dependent on translation as a means of reading great works of world literature. The reasons for doing so are multifarious, but what I am trying to do here is demonstrate that one dividend of doing so is enhanced cultural understanding, not just of a particular society but of how this society fits into the global context—an important issue for understanding where we all are as global citizens today. This cultural understanding operates on a different level from such things as appreciating a seasonal festival, enjoying good Japanese food, or relaxing in the serene refuge of a well-preserved temple or castle, as restorative as such activities may be. This cultural understanding involves proffering up to the reader the unvarnished horror of true human crisis, something we all face but which exists in different permutations throughout the world. Just as this cultural

understanding is not a superficial imbibement of tourist-level simple pleasures, it also is not something that can be swept under the carpet of a universalizing cultural logic either. It is a particularity, an outpost, an instantiation of the intersection of two discursive chains with one another. Watakushi and Sensei represent the polarities of lonesome individualism and over-encumbered communality at one and the same time.

We have to keep in mind that culture and identity are not static. *Kokoro* serves up one encounter at a particular historical moment. It is an image of something in a slice in time, something in constant motion. Culture and identity continue to change over time. Thus, the novel gives us some of the snippets of traditional culture, as shown in the relationships with the parents and also in the way gender relations are characterized in the work. It provides us with examples of propriety, ritual, decorum, politeness, and honor. But it also showcases dishonor, treachery, and the hollowness of ritual. The novel is a snapshot in time, in other words, of the moving target that any culture is, not a naive portrayal of something that will never change or perhaps did change but is done changing. It is a glance at society *in change itself*. It is the artistic creation of an author, himself an individual, an intellectual who molds his representation of this culture and society in transformation for us, the reader. Natsume Sōseki recognized the complexity of early modern Japanese society, and he reorganized it and presented it to us in this unusual narrative prism. What we can glean from his work is not a view through a transparent window onto the reality of Japanese society. That is beyond phenomenology. Rather, it is one very insightful and articulate author's perspective on this dynamic society at a particular moment in time. It is precisely this insight that we receive from him. Through the process of thinking about the modern Japanese novel and discussing it, we are given the tools to better understand the foundation and complicated nature of Japan as it is today. And this is just one solitary example of the value of studying literature in translation, a critical component of the humanities.

Conclusion: Translation, the Humanities, and Decentering World Literature

The scholar David Damrosch has to be given credit for bringing the idea of world literature front and center in humanities discourse in the North American academy. Unlike most scholars

of previous generations, Damrosch's notion of "world literature" does not stop at Western Europe and North America above the Mexican border. In radically expanding the borders to truly contain *the world*, Damrosch should be congratulated both for this broader understanding but something more: an implicit appreciation for the reading and teaching of literature in translation, for no one student or teacher can be expected to master all the world's languages. No scholar can apprehend all of world literature in its original idiom. My reading above is explicitly a reading conducted by a *non-expert* in Japanese literature. I have come to my own understanding of Natsume Sōseki's novel *Kokoro* through a dialectical praxis that has included my own careful and repeated readings of the translation, a reading of much English-language scholarship on the work, and listening to the responses of students in undergraduate courses in which I have taught it. Upon reflection, I would say that teaching literature in translation outside the comfort zone of my own scholarly expertise has made me realize how much more receptive I am to the views of others, both scholars and students. When it comes to Chinese literature, I am apt to rely on my own judgment, my unmediated reading of the original text, and of course decades of training and study. Admittedly, I still keep up with the scholarship in my own areas of specialization and learn from it, but I am far more at ease developing my own views and advancing them in my teaching and writing. Not so, naturally, with Japanese. This is not necessarily a bad thing. It depends on the text and author, to be sure, but in the case of this one, there is no shortage of learned interpretation. I have benefited greatly from this.

Where I would differ from Damrosch is on his notion of "peripheral" reading in which he highlights non-Western authors such as Chikamatsu from Japan and Lu Xun from China. His discussion "Reading across Cultures" is an admirable one, but one that still at least provisionally rests on a paradigm of center-periphery which I believe we must dispel. The reading of non-Western texts such as Chinese and Japanese (and many others, for that matter) should not, as Damrosch appears to imply, root themselves in influence study or even contrast study (73-78). What we need to strive for is a fully decentered understanding of world literature, if that is even possible. And, unfortunately, this is a long way off, because it will require an entire rethinking of the humanities in the North American academic

institution, a social structure in which Western European or *Eurocentric* and American *Anglonormative* culture still reign supreme. The cultures of the world constitute a far more complex and multifaceted array than that which is represented by the humanities in most North American institutions today. Even as those of us who have fought tooth and nail for three decades to try to bring Chinese and Japanese studies up to as close as possible of a level as those of English, Spanish, French, German, Italian, and Russian (including Anglophonic, Hispanophonic, and Francophonic), we have done precious little as a profession to expand the pie farther to include Korea, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and so on. How can we hope to get the critics of the humanities off our backs if we cannot do a better job of representing the cultures of the world, not just in elite universities but in all institutions of higher learning? Unfortunately, I am very pessimistic about the potential for such an expansion. But at least we can teach in translation.

If we lower the bar in terms of what counts as expertise and allow ourselves as teachers to consider ourselves more as inquirers into the cultural unknown just as students are, encouraging them to share in the exploration free of assumptions of expertise, so that the classroom experience is more of an egalitarian one of mutual learning and investigation, we can thereby broaden our perspective and allow entry into our worlds of literature that which heretofore would likely be excluded because "I would not presume to teach it!" Let's come down from the high horse of specialized knowledge and conceive of at least some of what we do as collective learning activities. Reading carefully as well as presenting our views orally and in writing in clear, cogent, fashion are themselves skills that can still be inculcated into our students. It would be an exciting challenge to ourselves to offer some courses, not all mind you, that cover material of which we have no privileged knowledge or training. In the course of this kind of heuristic teaching and learning experience, translation will display its true fruits: problematic but nevertheless transformative opportunities for insight into cultures other than "our own." Thus, what I am advocating in this essay is that we all take some time this summer to read at least one or two literary works in translation from languages that we cannot speak or read. My expectation is that reading and teaching in translation offers many insights and is at least one component to what we can call a rescue of the humanities, a paramount task of our times.

Notes

[1]I would like to thank Joy Landeira for her years of kindness, support, and collegiality and for giving me the honor of sharing my thoughts on this topic. I delivered a considerably shorter oral version of this essay as the Sterling Keynote Lecture at the annual conference of the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association on Thursday, October 10, 2019 in El Paso, Texas, and although the number of people present at the time was too many to thank individually, I wish to express my gratitude to those who listened intently and especially those who engaged with me in thoughtful dialogue after the lecture. An earlier form of the talk was given on Wednesday, April 10, 2019 as part of the Brown Bag Asian Studies biweekly seminar at the University of Alberta, sponsored by the Prince Takamado Japan Centre. I am indebted to the PTJC Director Dr. Aya Fujiwara for hosting that presentation. I want to add a note of thanks to my colleagues and all the students who attended. I also want to thank John Treat and Seth Jacobowitz for an interesting and impromptu conversation on the novel over dinner in Mexico City. All omissions and infelicities are solely my own responsibility.

[2] In a far-flung example, Aleksandar Matković and Marjan Ivković supply us with a useful definition of "neoliberal instrumentalism" that reveals the fact that such "discourse [rests on] the premise that the only way out of the economic crisis and stagnation is to make the system of socioeconomic reproduction more efficient at the cost of democratic procedures and public debate" (32). Although their sociological study is trained upon the political culture of eastern Europe, the fact that they detect a clear line between efficiency on the one hand and the diminution of democratic procedures and public debate on the other, what academics often call "shared governance," certainly has an unsettling resonance for us. I think of instrumentalism in the humanities as the proposition that what we do should be justified in terms of clear social use-value when at all possible, a position I believe we should both resist and embrace at the same time. We should resist it, because the humanities should *not* be reduced to simple use-value, just as life itself should not. Humans are free to be as useless as they should wish to be. Moreover, how is use-value to be determined? In the humanities, a course or two in rigorous philosophical readings may only surface in terms of use-value for a student decades after the

student has left school--when presented with a particularly difficult problem or a recondite text that has nothing to link it to the original experience some decades ago and even whose very anticipation was beyond imagination. And yet that college experience turns out to have come in handy much after the fact. There is no scientific way I know of for gauging when the lightbulb will go off. But we also should embrace the utilitarian view to some extent, because there are great, and I would think obvious, advantages to training in humanistic endeavors that render fruits immediately. There should be no shame in indicating to our budgetary overlords that training in philosophy, history, languages, literary studies, cinema studies, and so on, make our graduates better thinkers, more effective writers, more discerning readers, and more proficient problem-solvers.

[3] The Chinese translation of the novel, interestingly, employs a two-character rendering *Xinjing* 心境, which in turn means something in English akin to "the realm of the mind" or "the realm of the heart." *Xin* literally means "heart," but traditionally in Chinese and Japanese it has pertained to discussions of the mind.

[4] Several of Conrad's major works take an encounter and a subsequent narration by one of the characters to others as the main theme. *Lord Jim*, for example, is a psychological study of Jim, a shipmate who is afflicted by guilt for not following proper maritime protocol and abandoning ship with his captain. Like *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* is narrated by Marlow. And like *Kokoro*, this novel is split between a narration to others and a letter at the end. But the difference is that in *Kokoro*, the two narrators are different. I discuss this in detail below.

[5] I say this as neither a scholar of Japan nor as someone with a partisan design to promote things Japanese. Rather, I choose the example of *Kokoro* precisely because it is a text that I, like most of the readers of this essay, can only apprehend in English translation (or in my case in Chinese translation), because my Japanese language skills are not sufficient to do it justice in the "original" Japanese. Although I took a few years of Japanese language in graduate school and would have loved to have attained fluency in it, I never did. In an effort to turn the tables on the presumption of the power of the text in the original language, however, I am arguing that the translation has its own power, a different kind of power: its reach. A work in English translation has much greater reach than a work in almost any other language in its

original form, because so many more millions of people can read it. Part of what I am advancing is the idea that we need to dispense in part with the notion of expertise, we need to dismiss the view that the original text must be privileged in the final analysis over its translation. We cannot learn all languages, but we are selling ourselves short by discounting the reading of literature in translation. Of course, it helps if those translations are of a high quality. My limited understanding says that McClellan's translation is exemplary, for the most part. Moreover, I do not predicate my assertions on the basis of reading the novel alone; I have surveyed the English-language scholarship as well. Thus, when I say the novel aids us in unlocking the mysteries of Japanese society and identity, as well as the place of Japan in the global modernity project, I have in mind Alan Tansman's account of *Kokoro* as "Japan's iconic novel of modernity" (9).

[6] By "single-ended framed narrative," I mean that the work consists of a narrative embedded within a narrative (framed) in which the beginning section(s) of the text (in this case Parts One and Two) frame the following section or Part Three, but that there is no similar closing frame at the end of the narrative. Thus, it is "single-ended." Gérard Genette calls this "frame narrative" or "frame story" (228). Mieke Bal builds upon Genette's notions of "metadiscourse" in a lucid explication of how narratives are framed within each other. See her "Notes on Narrative Embedding."

[7] Sensei's wife actually is on rare occasion referred to by her name Shizu, which although a fairly common female given name in Japanese is perhaps ironic since it literally means "to be quiet," a detail that did not escape the attention of either Sharalyn Orbaugh or Doris Bargen. In the final section of the book, which takes place before the first two parts in real time, she is referred to only as Ojōsan.

[8] Soseki sprinkles this first section with brief, enigmatic, and prophetic remarks that whet the curiosity of the reader, as if the narrative work is a mystery novel in a way. Early in the novel it was clear that Sensei's distance was not due to arrogance or hauteur but "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" (7).

[9]Drawing on studies in PTSD and trauma, David Stahl argues that the trauma evident in the novel is actually mapped onto the

nation of Japan, combining an analysis of the psychology of Sensei with reflections on the status of General Nogi, discussed below, and the passing of the Meiji Emperor. Stahl displays an intimate and detailed understanding of psychological trauma studies while at the same time extrapolating to social critique. He goes on to argue that the trauma experienced by Sensei "infects" the I-narrator Watakushi, although the articulation of the trauma through narrative ultimately allows Watakushi to break the repetition in which Sensei himself is trapped.

[10] Orbaugh cautions us against overreading Sōseki as being too misogynist of a writer, although his pessimism toward heterosexual relationships is well demonstrated and pervades his work. Orbaugh reminds us that his last novel *Grass on the Wayside* is no less melancholy and pessimistic than his other narratives, but that his "portrayal of the unspoken grievances" the couple in the novel harbor is "balanced," establishing that "Sōseki was capable of depicting the realities of life for women under the gender systems of Meiji Japan, whatever his private feelings might have been" (91). Bargen presses the tension between silence and testimony that hovers around the character of Shizu, pointing out that Shizu is the first to broach the topic of suicide, is the first to say anything about the death of Sensei's friend K, and she expresses consternation over Sensei's emotional and sexual inaccessibility, this all despite being unaware of the reasons behind K.'s suicide (184-87).

[11] Vincent touches upon the perceived "lack of a satisfactory ending" to the novel, showing that there is a difference of opinion among the readers on the ending. Some attempt to resolve the problematic ending while others "are happy to let Soseki have his indeterminate endings" (118). Vincent further contends that the indeterminacy actually opens up consideration of dyadic relationships other than the conventional marital bond (118).

[12] Taken on its own terms, *Kokoro* invites readings of the binary encounter between Watakushi and Sensei, but I'm raising it a notch by pondering this classic confrontation allegorically, as two tendencies of the notion of subjectivity in Japan's transition to the modern world. This may seem abstract enough, but Fujii's argument is much more complex and especially relevant to students who wish to have a thorough comprehension of the historical milieu of late Tokugawa and Meiji society, of class composition in Japan, of the status of social values, and on a textual plane of the occlusion of Japan's quintessential status in the East-West encounter, for the binary predicament necessitates our setting aside issues like the complex, multifaceted, and intrinsically hostile relationships within East Asia, as opposed to the more basic West versus East binary which itself is an echo of the tradition versus modernity binary. Fujii

reminds us of the particular historical conjunction out of which the production of this "canonical" text arises: Japan's imperialist activities and designs on the rest of East and Southeast Asia, which in turn require certain presumptions about Japanese modernity as well as a vaunted self-view of its capacities as a custodial nation. The view of Japan as a modern country brought about through nation-building in the late Tokugawa and Meiji Periods fosters Japan's "colonialist" claims on its neighbors, and requires "a kind of social contract to occlude such differences as those of class and political allegiance in Japanese society" (229). This kind of enabling occlusion that Fujii pinpoints as being at the nerve center of *Kokoro*'s narrative of the human condition is underscored by the sanitized image of General Nogi in the text, portrayed as the loyal public servant who ends his own life in homage to the liege. Soseki's Nogi, Fujii argues, ignores the complicated and uneven career of the military leader, an omission that allows for *Kokoro*'s "complicit silence concerning Japanese adventurism on the continent" (233). Fujii's rigorous historicization of Soseki's text is imperative for a complete understanding of the novel as a canonical work in a literary tradition that did not question Japan's imperialist status. For my more simplistic and less ambitious aims, examining Watakushi and Sensei as subjective polarities is abstraction enough.

[13] Taking a different standpoint on the topic of "framing" from what I have discussed in this essay, David Pollack excavates the philosophical underpinnings that are exemplified in the battle between good and evil in the novel by showing how the confrontation represents a modern incarnation of the disagreement between Mencius and Xunzi on the issue of human nature. Pollack sees the besieged nature of the self in *Kokoro* as a "translation" of "an ancient Chinese concept into a modern and entirely Japanese world of meaning" (427). To the ordinary Japanese reader, this connection between the ancient and the modern does not need to be made explicit. The notion is already instilled in the minds of Japanese people. When they see the issue embodied in a drama such as this, they know what it is about.

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