

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO THE REPRINT OF *REREADING SŌSEKI*

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Literary critics in recent years have expressed some fatigue with the dominance, in much critical writing, of the “hermeneutics of suspicion,” aimed at uncovering how the subjects are unwittingly formed and “positioned” in contexts understood in ideological terms. Many have sought to sketch out alternative shapes of a positive aesthetics more attuned to the affective and absorbing aspects of reading or of life in general, as variously exemplified, among others, by Eve Sedgwick (reparatory reading), Rita Felski (positive aesthetics), Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus (surface reading), as well as by affect theorists such as Lauren Berlant and Brian Massumi.

In Massumi’s succinct summary, overemphasis on positionality in cultural theory has “boxed” the subject “into its site on the culture map,” a “gridlock,” as it were, and made us downplay, if not ignore, the dynamic flows of affect which move the subject from one position to another on the culture map. In retrospect, I can say that much of my approach in *Rereading Sōseki* was inspired by this positionality model, possibly at the expense of a richer account of the “affective movement and qualitative transformations that happen in between” positions.¹

Needless to say, as is true with any sort of writing, the book was embedded in its historical context and as a result, it illuminates, for better or worse, the specific concerns and interests which were at stake in the scholarship on modern Japanese literature in the early 1990s. It aimed chiefly at providing a corrective to the a-historical reading of Natsume Sōseki prevalent at the time, both among *kokubungakusha* in Japan and Japanologists outside it—a-historical reading in the sense that certain tenets of the modern, such as “cultural liberalism,” “interiority,” and the “realistic novel,” were utterly taken for granted as the universally given, with a view of Sōseki as the champion of the modern who managed to achieve what other, not thoroughly “modern” Japanese authors failed. In other words, I focused on modernity as a problem rather than a given, as it appears in both the content and the form of Sōseki’s works. Problematizing various “positions” in which the subjects (the characters, the reader, and the author) were embedded within the matrix of the modern seemed therefore imperative at the time. Many subsequent works by Japanese and non-Japanese scholars went on to elaborate on these questions, but few of these were available when I started my research.

Even in the years since my book appeared in 1998, not much has been written in English on *Kōjin (The Wayfarer)*, *Meian (Light and Dark)* and *Botchan*, the novels that I discuss in *Rereading*

Sōseki,² and I still believe my interpretation based on “positionality” is valid, even if some of it may appear more commonsensical now than eighteen years ago. “Positionality” has hardly lost its explanatory power.

Returning to the aforementioned interest in alternative ways of reading, I would argue that it is not so much that we have “moved on” from a hermeneutics of suspicion, or that we have outgrown it. My point here is not to deny what the examination of cultural codes of positioning and ideology have given us. Rather, I would suggest that the merit of renewed focus on affect lies in the potential to actually support the positionality model by explicating, in more detail, on a micro-level, the oscillation of the subject within a given position, as well as between positions. We should also bear in mind that the interest in the flows of affect finds a resonance in Sōseki’s own approach to literature in his *Bungakuron (Theory of Literature, 1907)*. Inspired by this insight, my current, new research on Sōseki aims to examine how affect combines with positionality, complicating the trajectory of the path along which the subject moves.³

Another topic my book addressed which I might bring to attention is the question of genre. There was then a lot of debate on questions of genre (*shishōsetsu*, *shōsetsu*, and the novel) with focus on narratology, and it seemed important to understand how Sōseki’s novels were positioned within that debate. This is again related to the overall theme of the book, which was to problematize the modern, particularly the form of the realist novel in the early twentieth century, with which Sōseki experimented in many of his novels, most notably in *Meian*.

Even though Tomi Suzuki’s book (1996)⁴ declared that the *shishōsetsu* (and implicitly other genres) is more a mode of reading than a product of specific formal features of the texts themselves, a need for formal analysis is still present, as her thesis itself depends very much upon it (one needs it to deny its relevance, as it were). Especially in the field of world literature, research on genre that relies on formal analysis seems to be thriving.⁵ It is perhaps more productive to see hybridity as an inherent feature of any genre, to accept the novel as a necessarily fluid and various one, and to understand narratology as a practical way of bringing to light how different narrative currents gather force in a given text.

Even if the project of problematizing the modern may not seem so urgent any more, narratology remains a useful tool in illuminating how literature, a two-dimensional art form consisting of printed words, continues to affect us, and have an impact in real life. With its straightforward attention to the

“surface of the text,” the narratological approach has the advantage of helping us focus on what happens in the text by fleshing out the character interaction on a formal level. Sōseki had exceptional insight into the rhetorical mechanism of writing and its emotional impact on the reader—an insight which Sōseki not only discussed in his *Bungakuron*, but also put into practice in his novel writing. I do not doubt that it is thanks to this acumen that his literature continues to appeal to the reader across time and place, almost a hundred years after his death.

In the eighteen years since *Rereading Sōseki* was first published, a considerable amount of secondary literature on Sōseki has appeared. I have provided at the end of my preface an updated bibliography of books on Sōseki scholarship with a focus on the newer materials in English and Japanese that are not mentioned in my bibliography in *Rereading Sōseki*. Because of the sheer amount of the materials available, my list in Japanese is necessarily very selective. Also worth mentioning is that the year, 2016, marks the hundred year anniversary of Sōseki’s death and there have been a number of events commemorating him in the past few years,

and more are under way; International Sōseki symposiums at the University of Michigan (2014), at Waseda University (2015), and at Ferris University co-organized by Iwanami shoten (forthcoming in 2016), just to name a few. Outside academia, new novels, manga, animation films and plays modeled on Sōseki’s novels or the author himself continue to see the light of day. One cannot help being struck by an unabated interest which Sōseki seems to generate after so many years. This reprint of my book joins in the trend.

Last but not least, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to those who have helped directly or indirectly realize the project of reprinting my book; Keith Vincent for recommending my book and writing an introduction, John Treat for kindly taking the initiative to talk to the Council on East Asian Studies (CEAS) at Yale, Irmela Hijjya-Kirschner, the editor of the series in which my book originally appeared, for letting this happen, and the members of the CEAS for supporting the project. Special thanks are due to Aaron Gerow for taking care of all the practicality and pursuing the project to its end.

ENDNOTES

¹ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect and Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 2-3.

² William Ridgeway discusses these works in his *A Critical Study of the Novels of Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916)* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005). Also, John Nathan’s new translation of *Meian* in 2013 is a noteworthy event that gives a valuable contribution to the understanding of the novel in English.

³ See “The Affect that Disorients *Kokoro*,” *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, forthcoming in 2017.

⁴ Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

⁵ See Wai-chee Dimock, “Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents,” *Narrative* 14, no. 1 (2006). See also “The Long Nineteenth Century of the Japanese Novel” by Jonathan Zwicker, in *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography and Culture*, edited by Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

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