

The Modern Japanese Novel

A Close Bond of Understanding Would Be Effected If the Literature of Nippon Were Widely Read Here

By F. R. ELDRIDGE

The evolution of the modern novel in Japan has been attended by a return to realism and an abandonment of the Chinese classical tradition that characterized the transformation in Japanese art as far back as 1000 A.D. Preceding it came a period of assimilation of Western literature that extended from 1885 back to the opening of Japan by Perry in 1854, and beyond that in the two hundred years of isolation from all social contact with the outside world, Japan contented itself with the development of a classicism of its own.

In 1885, four years before the promulgation of the Constitution marking Japan's emergence as a modern State, Tsubouchi Shoyo, who had done yeoman service in translating Shakespeare into Japanese, dis-

speech of the people, avoiding all literary idioms and forms. He eschewed unusual Chinese expressions and words, adopting only those words, derived it is true from the Chinese sounds of the ideographs, which had become naturalized in the colloquial.

For nineteen years after the publication of *Ukigumo* we hear nothing of Futabei. He seemed to have eschewed literature and except for a remarkable translation of one of Turgenev's shorter stories, he supported himself during all this time with teaching and prosaic translations for the Official Gazette. In 1906 he blossomed forth with *Sono-omokage* ("His Semblance"), which he published serially in the newspaper *Asahi*. This has appeared in English as "The Adopted Son."

In June, 1907, while convalescing from a severe illness his third and last novel, *Heibon* ("Mediocrity") appeared serially in *Asahi*. This is also available in English (The Hokuseido Press, Kanda, Tokyo, Japan) and is largely autobiographical. It reveals a sensitive and troubled mind,—a mind troubled by the naturalism that beset Japanese letters after the Japanese-Russian war. The decade of romanticism after the war with China in 1895 had now brought its reaction.

Following Futabei, Soseki Natsume became easily the most significant novelist of the early twentieth century in Japan. Under his brush the Japanese novel completed its transition from the classical mold and in at least ten novels, one of them running into twelve editions, this penetrating novelist paints a picture of modern Japan that reveals the very soul of the people. Unfortunately only a few of his works are available in English but Kusamakura ("Unhuman Tour") (Published in English by the Japan Times, Hibiya Park, Tokyo, Japan), is perhaps one of his best.

It seems a pity that so few modern Japanese novels have been rendered into English. No closer bond, perhaps, can be established between any two peoples than a mutual appreciation of each other's literature. The Japanese have had ample opportunity to assimilate the works of both English and American novelists and besides they have our motion-pictures, which many of them now enjoy in the form of English sound pictures. The other side of the door, however, is unfortunately closed. We know very little about Japanese life, Japanese literature or Japanese philosophy and thought. What we have gleaned from Lafcadio Hearn comes more under the head of romantic idealism than practical realism. A wide and fruitful field seems therefore to be open to the practical idealist. Let him see that we read the modern Japanese novel and there will be established a bond of understanding so close that war-mongers may prate in vain.



Courtesy of Columbia University Library

Soseki Natsume, famous Japanese novelist

tinctly broke with the past in a plea for realism and published a modern novel which dealt with student life in Tokyo.

The spell of classicism had been broken and after that literary discussions were concerned with what type of language should be used in writing the modern novel. Should modern stories be told as that great story-teller, Encho, told them, in the colloquial, dropping all literary words and honorifics, or should concessions still be made to the classical form while using the realistic concept? Some authors, like Tokutomi Roka, who wrote *Omoide no Ki* ("Reminiscences") and *Hotoigisu* ("Night-ingle"), continued classical in concept but changed to colloquial in style.

The same was true of Aeba Koson's *Muratake* ("Jungle Bamboo"). Futabei Shimei, disciple of Shoyo's, published his *Ukigumo* ("Clouds in the Rainy Season") in 1887, showed the influence of Turgenev, Gogol, Dostoyevsky and Goncharov and accomplished a remarkable transition of their style almost literally into Japanese. He adopted the Russian method of detailed description and wrote in the ordinary

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Reign of Juno.—"Plump bodies is a new phase in style's anatomy," says an exchange. The phase that launched a thousand hips.—*Albany News*.

Must Have Stepped on Her Toe.—FAIR YOUNG THING (to friend)—"Not only has Jack broken my heart and wrecked my whole life, but he has spoiled my entire evening."—*Boston Transcript*.

Watch Out for the Pins.—A shirt advertisement asks the question, "What is the thing you look for in a shirt?"

Barracuda Pete answers that one: Buttons.—*San Diego Union*.

Well Known Vanishing Act.—"Mamma, when the fire goes out where does it go?"

"My dear boy, I don't know. You might just as well ask me where your father goes when he goes out."—*Vancouver Province*.

Try Nitroglycerine.—WEEK-END GUEST (on Wednesday)—"Really, old chap, I haven't the nerve to impose upon your hospitality longer. Could I ask you for a bottle of nerve tonic?"—*Boston Transcript*.

She'd No Mechanical Tastes.—BETTY (who has been served with a wing of chicken)—"Mother, can't I have another bit? This is nothing but hinges."—*Toronto Globe*.

Nuisance Infolonel!—IN Louisville once lived a colonel Who went out on rambles noctolonel. A polecat and he Once failed to agree— He now makes his rambles diolonel. —*Christian Science Monitor*.

Neighborly Politeness.—The story is told that when Bishop Candler was riding on a train out West, a big, strapping, rough fellow came in and sat down beside him. Sizing up the Methodist prelate, he exclaimed, "Where in hell have I seen you before?" To which Bishop Candler replied, "I don't know; what part of hell are you from?"—*The Augusta Catholic Bulletin*.

What Price a Pint of Citronella?—With the cooperation of THE LITERARY DIGEST, the *Boston Transcript*, the *Washington Star* and other newspapers we have succeeded in discovering "What in heck would you give a Nudist for Christmas." THE DIGEST suggests a wrist watch, *The Transcript* a full-length mirror and *The Star* a back scratcher. Mosquito netting and photograph albums are other suggestions, which we pass along for what they may be worth.—*R. C. in the Springfield Union*.

Throwing the Bull.—"Now, girls," said the restaurant manager, "I want you all to look your best to-day. Add a little dab of powder to your cheeks and take a bit more care with your hair."

"Something special on?" asked the head waitress.

"No," informed the manager. "The beef's tough."—*Epworth Herald*.



BOY SCOUT: "Do you mind sitting apart for just one moment? I'm walking on a compass bearing."

—*The Humorist* (London)

High Visibility.—The schoolmistress was giving her class of young pupils a test on a recent natural history lesson.

"Now, Bobby Jones," she said, "tell me where the elephant is found."

The boy hesitated for a moment; then his face lit up.

"The elephant, teacher," he said, "is such a large animal it is scarcely ever lost."—*Montreal Star*.

The Dev'lish Nineties.—Living is cheaper in some ways. People used to pay \$1.50 to see the gals dressed as they are now.—*Newark (Ohio) Advocate*.

Shell Shock.—FIRST DAME—"Wonder what's wrong with that tall blonde guy over there. Just a minute ago he was getting awful friendly, and then all of a sudden he turned pale, walked away, and won't even look at me any more."

2ND DITTO—"Maybe he saw me come in. He's my husband."—*Sun Dial*.

Quoth the Raven.—In Hartford, Connecticut, there is an auto hearse with the license number U-2.—*Letter from a Spice of Life fan*.

Try Him With a Peanut.—GIRL—"Every time I look at you I think of a great man."

BOY FRIEND—"You flatter me. Who is it?"

GIRL—"Darwin."—*Montreal Star*.

Moses Said It First.—A bashful curate found the young ladies in the parish too helpful. At last it became so embarrassing that he left.

Not long afterwards he met the curate who had succeeded him.

"Well," he asked, "how do you get on with the ladies?"

"Oh, very well indeed," said the other.

"There is safety in numbers, you know."

"Ah!" was the instant reply. "I only found it in Exodus."—*Montreal Gazette*.

Slips That Pass in the Night

Closing the Debate.—Baritone solo, "It is Enough from Elijah"—Mr. Floyd Eaddy. —*St. Petersburg (Fla.) church bulletin*.

Add War Horrors.—The United States Army awarded shoe contracts B—Shoe Company, St. Louis, Mo., terms net—31,250 pairs at \$2.76.—*Philadelphia paper*.

Bracing Weather for Old Nick.—Unsettled to-night and Thursday, snow probable, not much change in temptation.—*Lead (S. D.) paper*.

Super-Salesmanship.—But diet, as well as climate, and temperament, also, are important factors in the wholesome, attractive appearance of sin.—*Beauty notes in a Los Angeles paper*.

Down With It!—Lunching in 1933 reached proportions of a national menace with more victims than at any year since 1926 and with mob violence spreading into areas hitherto regarded as immune.—*New York paper*.

Couldn't Take It.—

MURDERED MAN
SKIPPED OUT
OF HOSPITAL

—*Santa Fé paper*.

Honi Soit Qui Mal y Pense.—

LOST—FOUND—STRAYED

Lost—Pink satin slip on State Street between Broadway and Douglas.

—*Alton (Ill.) paper*.

Quick! Page Mr. Wirt.—Vincent Astor, New York millionaire, greeting President Roosevelt on his arrival at the dock at Jacksonville, Fla., to board Astor's yacht for a crime in southern waters.—*Caption in a Boston paper*.

This Beats Hitler.—The petition circulated here favoring suffering for women has met with somewhat of favor, five of the blanks having been filed, and it is hoped that more of our citizens will take the trouble to sign.—"25 Years Ago" in a Keyport (N. J.) paper.