Introduction

It has become quite fashionable in the past couple of decades in the humanities and social sciences to talk about ‘affect,’ in what some critics have called an ‘affective turn’ in cultural theory. Even in my field, which is modern Japanese literature, many scholars have turned their attention to ‘affect,’ and you could say that I have been ‘affected’ by this enthusiasm, which some of my colleagues and students have surely noticed. It may not be entirely obvious, however, how affect theory can be useful in understanding Natsume Sōseki and world literature, which is one of the questions I would like to address today. Hopefully, by the end of my lecture, I can convince you that there is a meaningful connection between them.

First of all, what is ‘affect’? How is it different from emotion, which is a more familiar term? The definition of affect and emotion varies depending on the discipline and the critic; however, it is beyond the scope of this talk to discuss this in more detail. So suffice it to say, that my sense of affect draws generally on theorists that I have read, some of whom are represented in the volume called Affect Theory Reader (Gregg and Seigworth 2010) and on others in literary studies. Let us look at how some of them distinguish affect from emotion. Brian Massumi, who is among the contributors of the aforementioned volume, defines emotion
as a “subjective content, the socioloinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience, which is from that point onward defined as personal,” whereas affect is feeling or “intensity disconnected from meaningful sequencing, from narration” (Massumi 2002, 28). The literary critic Jonathan Flatley gives concise definitions not only of affect, but also, emotion, mood, and structure of feeling in his “Glossary,” which is easily available online. According to him, “[w]here emotion suggests something that happens inside and tends toward outward expression, affect indicates something relational and transformative” (Flatley 2008, 12). Put differently, emotion has an inside-out movement, whereas affect has an outside-in movement, or rather, affect often stays outside, on the surface of your body, as it were. So affect, as it affects the body, is not an expression or representation of something ‘inside’—one has emotions, while one is affected by an affect. As the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio called emotion “feeling made conscious,” one can say that there is more cognition involved in emotion, whereas affect as ‘intensity’ is precognitive (Damasio 2000).

Most theorists agree that there are a number of so-called primary affects, basic, but powerful, feelings that are more or less universal, such as joy, anger, sorrow, fear, and shame. Often induced by sensory images, most commonly visual, affect emerges very quickly—it can hit the body like lightening, sometimes only to disappear moments later, or other times persists for a longer period of time. In other words, it is situation-dependent, meaning that it can attach to all kinds of other objects, including other affects or emotions. It can develop into something more cognitive and sophisticated later and become emotion, but affective responses are chaotic and directionless to begin with (in the sense that they have not yet been ‘digested’). The variation of things that affect can combine with and its possibility for permutation is almost limitless, and for that reason, its feedback mechanism is complex, and the trajectory is often difficult to predict.

1 Available online: http://www.english.ufl.edu/mrg/readings/Flatley%20-%20Intro.pdf. Antonio Damasio does not distinguish between affect and emotion, but what he refers to as “feeling emotion” and “feeling made conscious” roughly seems to correspond to Flatley’s “affect” and “emotion,” respectively. Jōcho, the term that Natsume Sōseki uses in his Theory of Literature is wider in its connotation, encompassing affect, emotion, and mood.
It should be noted that there is also a collective dimension in affect—the socially conditioned component in which one's affective response is often embedded. It induces the kind of reaction that a group of people with the same cultural background is likely to share. It is an affect which, through repetition, has become a more durable and habitual part of your reaction over time, not unlike what Raymond Williams has called a “structure of feeling”—a ‘collective feeling’ which a group of people with a common social denominator such as class, generation, education and gender are likely to share. Some banal examples are: Like when the Japanese people see crossing chopsticks on a rice bowl, their affective reaction tends to be negative, just like when Europeans hear Japanese people slurping their soup, they are likely to feel it is not pleasant. Another banal example of affect on the collective level is differences in our reactions toward Petter Northug in Norway and Sweden. Petter Northug is one of the best Norwegian cross-country skiers who loves to beat Swedish skiers, also known for his bad-mouthing about Swedes. Even though I am not even a fan of cross-country skiing, I often find myself cheering him on together with the Norwegian audience and the TV reporter, who all go berserk as he crushes his Swedish rivals in a spectacular spurt finish. To sum up, affect accommodates two opposite poles, one that is idiosyncratic and is restricted to a particular occasion and the other, which is more or less habitual or conditioned. But in so far as both one-time affect and the conditioned one are prompted by external forces, and are surface phenomena that do not necessarily point to your ‘personality,’ they are transferrable independently of the affected individual’s intention and have a certain degree of sociality in them.

Put another way, affect is biological and learned, unpredictable and predictable, individual and collective, idiosyncratic and social. It is contingent and unpredictable in the sense that it is triggered in your chance encounter with outside sources. And the affective impact depends not only on the nature of the object you encounter, but also on the specific relationship you have with that object. If you are feeling sick, the sight of your favorite food, which usually fills you with joy may not trigger the same affect. If you are desperately hungry, on the other hand, even a Big Mac might give you great pleasure. If you see your girlfriend or boyfriend

---

2 Raymond Williams developed this concept to characterize the lived experience of the quality of life at a particular time and place (Williams 1977, 132-133).
at the center of attention, he or she might look even more attractive in your eyes. But if it is your rival or enemy who is at the center of attention, you are less likely to feel euphoric. The affective composition of each encounter is decisive, and to that extent, its impact can be quite unpredictable. There are many variables outside of your control that can influence the composition of each encounter.

And yet, there is a certain predictable, recognizable pattern in affect, as I said. First of all, because it is partly biologically and evolutionarily grounded—you get scared if you feel a threat to your life, for example. And secondly, because it is learned and conditioned, it is doubly embedded in something outside—namely, one's individual life experience in a corporeal sense (the memory of the past as experienced by the body), and a larger collective, social life in which one's individual life is necessarily embedded. Your life experiences, both on the individual and collective level, matter. If you have experienced a fire in your life, the affective impact of reading about a fire in literature is likely to be stronger. The same goes for those with any sort of traumatic experience. The impact of reading about certain traumatic events during World War II—Nanking massacre, comfort women, A-bomb in Hiroshima, are known to trigger different affective reactions in different people, depending on their experiences, and affective affinity.

These features of affect might strike you as rather commonsensical. What complicates the picture, however, is that affect is malleable, and it can quickly turn into something else. It easily folds into other things—other affects, or emotions, desires, or ideas—join forces with them and transforms into something that looks quite different. It means that detecting affective components in your feelings and thoughts is not always as easy as you might think. Affect can sneak into your feelings about things, ideas, and thoughts without registering on your cognition. A banal example would be jealousy or paranoia sneaking into what you delude yourself as your rational evaluation of your colleagues, friends, and enemies. These are typical examples of negative affects infesting your rational thinking.

3 In *Theory of Literature*, Sōseki discusses the role of affect/emotions (jōcho) in literature by referring to 'literature' as a sort of 'device' that elicits a certain affective reaction in the reader by simulating in a narrative form a particular life situation.

4 There is a cognitive component in jealousy and paranoia, which makes them a sophisticated kind of affect. Some might for that reason consider them emotion rather than affect.
It should, however, be noted that affect is not always negative. Far from it. In fact, you need affect to act rationally, too; affect helps reason and cognition to function properly. It is therefore not as if you can get rid of affect in order to become a rational person. You even need affect to have good sex (sexual drive is not enough). Affect has everything to do with interest in life itself. It is affect that keeps you interested in things or the world around you and helps you engage with whatever is happening around you, one way or the other (‘hate’ is a form of engagement, too). Without it, you cease to care as a human. So you must learn to live with it one way or the other.

And by illuminating how complex and unpredictable the feedback mechanism in affect can be, affect theory can complicate and enrich our understanding of what makes humans do what they do. It provides us with a rich language to talk about human motivations, both in the world at large and in fictional worlds. Being able to better understand how the whole affect system works makes it possible for us to draw a more finely-grained picture of human motivations than what you get from, say, traditional psychoanalysis. Affects are much more wide-ranging and capacious than drives. Psychoanalysis focuses on a few ‘drives’ attaching to a limited number of objects. To put it very simply, you might say that for Freud, for example, there is only one kind of ‘drive’ that matters, namely, the libido, and all forms of human behavior are explained as either expressions, repressions, displacements, or sublimations of that drive. With affect theory, however, we can widen our scope of inquiry because there are many other things that matter to us than sex.

Now let me go back to my main argument. What is fascinating and challenging about affect, I believe, is the opacity of its operation for consciousness. Its wide-ranging reach and malleability makes it difficult for consciousness to keep up with its movement. Regardless of who you are, regardless of your IQ, there is no escaping from it. Out of the blue, it hits you like a lightning bolt, catches you unawares, and gets you unhinged, both positively and negatively. You get transported outside of your usual self. In other words, your affect can teach you how little control you actually have over yourself, and how vulnerable you can be, because it exposes you ‘naked,’ as it were, unprotected by your usual, cognitive guard. Affect teaches you that there is a lot going on in your brain that your consciousness cannot capture. This has one important
implication—that one's self-knowledge is necessarily partial. So partial that it can complicate the question of your agency. And this concerns both you and others. How are you, they, or we supposed to act responsibly when there is so much going on in our brain that we don’t know about? I don’t mean to suggest that we should get moral offenders off the hook, but it might teach us to act more 'humbly and generously' toward them, and to each other. As Judith Butler, an American philosopher, has suggested in her recent writings, a new ethics based on “our shared, and invariable partial blindness about ourselves” might emerge from this mutual humility and generosity (Butler 2005: 41), which I will come back to later in my talk.

_Sōseki, the affect theorist_

Let us turn our attention to Sōseki now. What many of us who work with Sōseki have realized and are excited about is the fact that Sōseki was an ingenuous ‘affect theorist,’ over 100 years ago, even though he expressed himself in the old-fashioned vocabulary of his time. The term he used was _jōcho_ in Japanese. It is actually wider in its connotation, encompassing affect, emotion, and mood. Most importantly, Sōseki seems to be thoroughly familiar with the important role that ‘affect’ plays in human interactions (including its permutations into emotion and mood) and uses that knowledge to draw a rich emotional landscape in his novels, _Kokoro_, for example. _Kokoro_, as many of you are aware, is one of the most canonical works of modern Japanese literature and has received so much attention that one might think its possibility for a new interpretation has been completely exhausted. And I believe it makes sense to test the usefulness of affect theory on this one. How does affect theory help us to shed new light on _Kokoro_? It can perhaps help us question the most standard reading of the novel by complicating our understanding of how the protagonist, Sensei, came to ‘betray’ his best friend, K, in the ways he did. Personally, I have always been puzzled by Sensei’s excessive sense of guilt and felt that there is something unconvincing about it. Does his so-called ‘betrayal’ really justify calling forth such a strong self-condemnation?

For those of you who have not read _Kokoro_, let me summarize what happens in the novel. The story revolves around Sensei (which means
‘teacher’ in Japanese), who decides to take his own life after many years of suffering from guilty feelings for having betrayed his best friend, K, when they were both young students. Both Sensei and K fall in love with their landlady’s daughter, Ojōsan, who they live together with in the same geshuku house. Sensei is tormented by paranoid feelings that K, who he feels is much more handsome and attractive than he is, is going to beat him in the game of love. Sensei grows suspicious that K may resolutely take a drastic action to make her ‘his,’ before Sensei gets a chance to test his luck. Sensei ends up doing exactly what he is afraid K might do to him. He launches on a ‘pre-emptive’ attack by asking the landlady for her daughter’s hand behind K’s back. The landlady accepts his marriage proposal and announces their engagement to everyone including K. Before Sensei gets a chance to apologize, or explain to K about his behavior, K takes his own life. Sensei marries the landlady’s daughter as planned, but is not happy at all because of his feelings of guilt. Many years later, as he hears the news about General Nogi’s seppuku to follow his lord, the Meiji Emperor, in death, Sensei, too, decides to take his own life, and leaves a testament to his young follower, who narrates Sensei’s story to us.

The standard reading of this novel has been predominantly moralistic. Taking Sensei’s words that if he were to “die a loyal follower’s death, the lord [he] was following to the grave would be the spirit of the Meiji era itself” (232), the Japanese reader has read it as Sensei’s critique of egotism in modern Japan—a warning that the Japanese should not forget the spiritual virtues of the Meiji era symbolized by General Nogi. If you think about the historical context, which the novel has been read in, it is not really surprising. Kokoro has been read like ‘the Bible’ for critique of individualism in a modern, Westernized, age filled with ‘freedom and self-sufficiency,” which Japanese intellectuals were afraid would morally corrupt young people. It is not a coincidence that Sensei’s confession in Kokoro has been used as a standard text in Japanese school for years and years. And here comes my point. The merit of affect theory is that it can give us ways of liberating Kokoro from what I consider the tyranny of such moralistic reading, which has more or less continuously dominated the Japanese literary criticism.

When you read Sensei’s portrayal of how this triangular love relationship unfolds in this crowded, Japanese, geshuku house closely and get an
insight into the affective atmosphere that surrounded Sensei and K, you begin to wonder whether Sensei really ‘betrayed’ K, like Sensei argues. When you carefully study the layout of the house (which is explained in the novel), you see that there is hardly any privacy. The small, one-story house is partitioned by sliding doors made of paper (fusuma), and it is easy to hear the conversations and movements of others. If you imagine two young, naïve, bookish men, and a young beautiful woman, all unmarried, living in this crowded geshuku house, it is not difficult to see that it is an ideal setting for a triangular love drama to unfold. And the drama unfolds under the surveillance of the landlady, the mother, who seldom goes out, vigilantly guarding her daughter. The landlady, on the lookout for a prospective husband for her daughter, is an interested party in their love affairs, even though she never says anything explicit. To complicate the matter, there are several, affective “structures of feeling” (besides the mother’s often untimely presence) that get in the way, by preventing them from openly talking about ‘love.’ The question to be asked is then to what degree should Sensei be held accountable for what he did, or did not do. There is plenty of room for speculation and doubt here. It is quite possible to see the whole chain of events as an unfortunate accident caused by minor, ‘ugly’ feelings (doubt, irritation, and paranoia) caused by a frustrating situation, which made bad things worse for Sensei. I am not necessarily saying Sensei was faultless, but, by paying close attention to the role of affect at each decisive juncture in the unfolding of the narrative, you can perhaps get a more nuanced picture of the course of events that ended so tragically.

To make a long story short, one can say that in Kokoro, the occasion-dependent affect and the more stable, habitual kind of affect—a “structure of feeling”—entangle and intertwine in a complex manner to form this and that affective moment, intervening in the characters’ interactions in the novel. The complex affects, both idiosyncratic and collective, interfere with Sensei’s efforts to communicate his feelings both to K and to Ojōsan, which turns out to have decisive and fatal consequences for them all. There is not enough time in this lecture to elaborate on them, but I can give you some examples from the text to give you an idea of what I mean. First of all, there are several, frustrating “structures of feelings” at

5 The colorful facial expressions of the characters in the animated version of Kokoro beautifully demonstrate the emotional drama going on inside their ‘heart.’
work, which Sensei could not but be a part of, which aggravate the triangular deadlock surrounding Sensei, K, and the daughter. Some of them concern the kind of feeling that prevailed among young men and women of the early twentieth century Japan, both of which made it difficult to talk about ‘private matters of the heart’: one of them is the affective atmosphere among young college students of Sensei’s generation, which he comments on himself.

It strikes me now that the people I knew back then were all a bit peculiar—no one around me ever spoke about private matters of the heart…. I will leave it to you to judge whether it was a lingering effect from the Confucianism of an earlier time or simply a form of shyness. (179)

What he means by “the people I knew back then” are all college-educated men, and “we” in the passage refers to the members of the homosocial community whose bond was cultivated at school. Sensei “squirmed with impotent frustration” at his inability to “speak [his] heart” (178), but never got around to doing it. “Inability to speak [one’s] heart” is one of the most common characteristics of Sōseki’s college-educated male protagonists.

Another structure of feelings concerns young women of respectable society, to which the landlady’s daughter, Ojōsan, belongs. Codes of behavior, restricting unmarried women of good society, were many at the time. These women were expected to be affectionate and subservient at the same time. As Sensei suspects, Japanese “girls lacked courage to be frank and honest” in matters concerning their heart in the presence of men. One can even argue that when asked for an opinion, they laughed instead. Laughing was one way of expressing themselves without being too direct. It was an amiable, or even coquettish way of responding without taking the ‘lead,’ and as a gesture most likely tied to the “structure of feeling” that expects reservation in women. Sensei mentions that laughing at “silly things” is a “bad habit” that he dislikes, but acknowledges that it is something that “all young ladies do.”

Sensei accidentally observes K and Ojōsan talking to each other alone on three occasions, as he walks past them both in and outside the house. Not knowing whether they were together by chance or on purpose,

---

6 Needless to say, students at Tokyo Imperial University in 1914 were all male.
Sensei tries to probe into the circumstances of their meeting. On all three occasions, Ojōsan laughs instead of helping him with explanations.

... Ojōsan simply laughed. I disliked women who laugh in response that way. All young ladies do it, of course, but Ojōsan had a tendency to laugh at silly things (173).
A week later I again passed through the room when Ojōsan and K were talking there together. This time she laughed as soon as she caught sight of me (174).
I could not really question him further, but over dinner I felt an urge to ask Ojōsan the same question. Her response was to laugh in the way I disliked... (188).

The same kind of "structure of feelings" among young girls that make them laugh rather than respond is surely on Sensei's mind when he concludes that Japanese girls would not give a candid response to a proposal of marriage directly from the suitor. Finally, there is a "structure of feeling" around the fashionably Western 'ideology of love,' which was just being popularized among intellectuals at the time, with which Sensei most certainly was smitten. Sensei's problem ultimately boils down to his dilemma that as a progressive intellectual, he aspires to marry for love, even though the circumstances surrounding his marriage are not quite 'ready' for it. His dilemma is that he cares about Ojōsan's feelings about him, even though he lives in an environment that hardly gives young people opportunities to talk about 'love.'

Here, one can argue that Sensei's problem is the sort of dilemma that arises when a form of social organization that supports the status quo, the patriarchal family (ie) order of things in Kokoro, meets other social forms with different principles such as 'ideology of love in marriage' and the two collide. The socially conditioned, attitudinal affect is formed over time by social forces that restrain the free circulation of affects by shaping them into a more socially acceptable form; so the two poles of affect, the spontaneous and the social, are continuous, even if they create tensions. They are supposed to work together, as it were, to regulate and stabilize one's social life. With a lot of social changes taking place in the Meiji period, however, the two poles of affect collide and create conflicts,
which is what happens in Sensei’s case. Sensei’s homosocial inhibition about speaking openly about love for women, and young women’s restraint should not be a problem within the patriarchal order of things where men and women are willing to stay put in their assigned social places. The opacity of Ojōsan’s mind would not matter if he were a more conventional, worldly man of the Meiji period. The problem occurs when the old patriarchal system is challenged by new forms of social life based on principles that contradict the old ones. Sensei lets himself be guided by his old affective habits and is prevented from making proper strategic adjustments. In other words, the social pole of affect, nurtured in Sensei as he grew up, survives into the new social regime, and lingers on. It is this holdover affect that intervenes in Sensei’s attempt to form a new social relationship. Swimming in the sea of contradictory affects that lead him into opposite directions, Sensei is unable to break the ice, and is stuck in dysphoria, which quite physically undermines his power to act.

The major events in many of the scenes Sensei recalls from the past, particularly those involving his ‘cowardly’ behavior toward K, seem to have taken place while Sensei is immersed in the sea of affect, unable to reflect properly on the consequences of his conduct. A delay before his cognition seriously kicks in seems to be inevitable, as there is an inherent time lag between the affective registering of the outside impact and the cognitive processing of the initial reactions. Sensei oscillates between these two levels of consciousness, but always with a delay that makes his response seem either ‘too late’ or ‘untimely,’ missing his opportunities to talk to K. And all these agonizing moments of affective oscillation, in its grimmest details, come to the fore in Sensei’s confession, in his letter to the I-narrator. Owning up to the limit of his own self-knowledge, he ruminates on his regret, shame, and guilt, exposing his emotional vulnerability and impressionability to his reader. My argument is that there is more to Kokoro than a simplistic moral message that ‘egotism is a No, No’ or ‘love is sinful.’ Even though Sensei condemns himself quite harshly, in line with the spirit of the Meiji period, in whose affective ethos he was brought up in, we should not forget that Sensei does not represent.

---

7 Caroline Levine has an insightful discussion of colliding social forms in her recent book (Levine 2015).

8 As Antonio Damasio writes: “we are always hopelessly late for consciousness and because we all suffer from the same tardiness no one notices it” (2000, 129).
the whole of the novel, nor Sōseki, the author. We do not need to do the same as Sensei does.

Needless to say, there are many unresolved questions in *Kokoro*, as well as many other details that I have not been able to touch on today. However, I hope that my humble attempt at analyzing it in terms of affect can invite us to consider an alternative reading of this canonical novel. What can resonate anew with the reader of 2016 is what might be called a rich phenomenology of *emotion* in *Kokoro*, with its insightful portrayal of the dramatically contingent and free nature of affect and the malleability of human motivation—the aspect of the novel which has been overshadowed by the ‘moral’ weight of Sensei’s self-condemnation. Sensei exposes his past self, quite mercilessly, at his most vulnerable and impressionable moments, as if to remind us of our mutual dependence—that we are “given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life,” to borrow Judith Butler’s words. *Kokoro* may, in fact, give us an opportunity to rethink the “terms of ethical relationality,” for which the first step might be to acknowledge our own limited self-knowledge, so that we can learn to be more humble and generous toward others. We can perhaps envisage an ethics based on “our shared, and invariable partial blindness about ourselves” as Butler suggests in her recent writings—an ethics which does not demand that we remain selfsame at every moment of our life, and which is not always intent on passing judgment (Butler 2005, 41). We see abundant evidence in the media every day that this propensity of ours to judge and condemn has not attenuated, and in that sense, we can say that *Kokoro* has a very up-to-date, timely message for all of us, to warn against our propensity to judge, in spite of what Sensei says.

**World Literature?**

Last but not least, what sort of insight does this reading of Sōseki give us, in terms of affect, concerning world literature, our last key-term? What might be the connection? I said earlier that Sōseki was an ingenuous affect theorist. To put it simply, ‘affect theory’ made it possible for Sōseki to formulate a model of reading that puts the reader at the center, rather than the work itself. In other words, it opened up a way of thinking about his own ‘positionality’ as a scholar of English literature in Japan
from the world literature perspective. It was his way of avoiding the pit-
fall of essentialist understanding of literature and culture. Let me explain.

Sōseki did not become a novelist until rather late; he was thirty-eight
when he wrote his debut work, Wagahai wa neko de aru (I am a Cat). He
started out as a Professor of English literature, and he famously strug-
gled to come to terms with it because for him much of it seemed ‘foreign’
and alien. He liked some authors better than others, Jane Austin and
Ibsen, to name a few, and learned a lot about modern narrative techni-
cues from their works. Yet, at the same time, he admits that he has a
problem with some of their works, especially those that have strong
female protagonists in them. He did not find the headstrong Hedda
Gabler to his liking, for example—he could not stand her, whom he
thought acted mean and terrible toward her husband without good
reason. On the other hand, he found haiku, noh plays, rakugo, and
Chinese poetry to be more pleasant and much more to his liking, and
started wondering why people have different emotional reactions to, or
tastes as he called them, different literatures (he had a fantastic command
of English, so the language was not the problem). He came up with a
hypothesis that it had to do with affect—a hypothesis that literature is a
device that elicits affects in the reader differently, because their life
experiences are different. As noted earlier, to the extent affect is biologi-
cally grounded in our body, some of it is ‘universal.’ And that is, of
course, the taken-for-grantedness of literature’s universal appeal across
language and culture. Nonetheless, as we have seen, a lot of our affective
reactions are conditioned through our interactions with the environment.
It is, thus, the culturally specific part of literature that he has tried to
come to terms with, through developing his own theory of affect.

Sōseki looks at literature as a written ‘device’ that elicits a certain
affective reaction in the reader by simulating in a narrative form, a parti-
cular life experience. If that life experience is familiar to you in your life
or in your culture, it is easier to identify with it, and the emotional im-
pact is stronger. The affect-based approach to literature makes it possible
to understand that the Japanese reader’s reaction to Shakespeare is diffe-
rent from the English readers’ reaction. Its implication is that if the
Japanese readers do not appreciate Shakespeare in the same way as the
English readers do, it is not their fault. It is not a sign of their unsophisti-
cation, or underdeveloped sense of culture. This, of course, was a rare
insight in the Meiji period when everyone was concerned with ‘catching up’ with the West. Japanese writers and critics at the time were preoccupied not only with emulating the modern novel, but reading it the way Europeans did. Sōseki was quick to detect Eurocentrism in this attitude and tried to develop a different model of literary appreciation. By grounding his theory of literature in affect, which is both universal and culturally specific at the same time, Sōseki finds a way to avoid the pitfalls of essentialist understanding of culture and national literary traditions.

Sōseki, in fact, went even further and suggested that it might be an advantage that the Japanese reader is not too well acquainted with English culture and history when he reads English literature: “We do not have the same past as [the English people], and thus are not bound by the causality of that past, and are not restricted in the same way as they are,” he said, according to his student’s lecture notes. Not being restricted in the same way gives the Japanese reader a fresh perspective, shaped by different critical traditions and assumptions than the English reader.

The obvious correlate here, of course, is that the Japanese reader has no special purchase on the interpretation of Japanese literature either. His or her perspective is different, not privileged. So whoever you are, the English reader or the Japanese reader, you do not read from some transcendental cosmopolitan perspective, but you read from a certain ‘position’ with specific life experiences from somewhere, and as someone. Sōseki’s perspective is similar to many recent approaches to world literature. In other words, the stance that Sōseki describes in his writings nicely anticipates recent formulations of what might constitute the field of ‘world literature.’

What Sōseki says about his own approach to English literature, in fact, reminds us of what the well-known world literature scholar Franco Moretti has dubbed “distant reading” in his writings on world literature. Moretti famously proposes what he calls “distant reading” in translation, which is not far from the kind of reading our students are doing all the time—Swedish or Finnish readers reading Sōseki’s Kokoro in translation, or Norwegian or Danish readers reading Yi Kwangsu’s The Heartless (Mujong) or Murakami Haruki in translation. Moretti suggests that it is sometimes the distance that makes certain features of the work more visible in a way that is not so obvious for the national readers, who might be biased by all sorts of preconceived notions about how they should be
Uninhibited and unrestricted, “distant reading” can liberate reading from institutionalized ‘biases’ entrenched in a specific national historiography. And not least, reading in translation makes it possible to cover more works. You can read a lot of works across language and culture, which necessarily gives you a comparative perspective. You can see certain patterns in terms of literary ‘devices, themes, and tropes’ or ‘genres’ that you can easily miss, if you are looking too closely at one work. Moretti, however, does not deny the merit of ‘close reading’ that requires a linguistic competence by national readers. That is where the “study of world literature must yield to the specialist of the national literature,” he says. Here I would add that the “specialist” does not need to be a national one, to accommodate one kind of reading that is not included in Moretti’s scheme, which is a ‘close reading from a distance’—the kind of reading Sōseki was doing with English literature. Or the kind of reading Japanologists all over the world do, as they closely read in their original language from a distance. Rephrasing Moretti a little, we may therefore suggest that specialists and non-specialists across national borders, who can read from different distances, collaborate, doing both ‘distant’ and ‘close’ reading” in a ‘sort of cosmic and inevitable division of labor.’

Some concluding remarks about Sōseki

Let me make some concluding remarks before I end my talk today. As one of the last generations in Japan to be ‘literate’ in classical Chinese, as a haiku poet, a writer of shaseibun, a novelist, and a scholar of British literature, Sōseki’s work is generically diverse and polyglossic to its core. Particularly noteworthy is the hybrid form of his novels. His position on the margins of the emergent world literary system forced him to forge a

---

9 Sōseki’s monumental *Theory of Literature* from 1906 is a work he wrote while he was a professor of English literature at Tokyo Imperial University and is a thorough examination of how different components in literature awaken different ‘affects’ and emotions in the reader, citing examples from English as well as Japanese and Chinese literature. Sōseki’s open-ended and fluid understanding of the practice of reading makes us realize his prescience, and how his *Theory of Literature* ‘foreshadowed’ reception theory, affect theory, and world literature of a century later.
cosmopolitan language through a local idiom and to render Japan's experience of modernity unevenly in the global genre of the novel. This enabled him to critique and de-familiarize both modernity and the novel. Even though I do not have enough knowledge of the history of modern Korean literature, I would assume that what I have just said about Sōseki applies to someone like Yi Kwangsu (1892-1950), a Korean, contemporary writer to Sōseki, who was active as a novelist in the early 20th century. I have just finished reading his Mujong (The Heartless, 1910–1919), which I understand is considered to be the first modern Korean novel. I was quite struck by the “hybrid and polyglossic” nature of the work. The Heartless, in fact, reminds me not only of Futabatei’s Drifting Clouds, the first modern Japanese novel, but many other novels from the Meiji period: Mori Ōgai’s Youth, Tayama Kōta’s Quilt, and Sōseki’s Kokoro as well as Poppy Seeds. They are by turns, melodramatic, sentimental, and didactic, and yet modern at the same time. They all deal with similar, recognizable, themes of ‘modernity’ in local idiom—love marriage, generational shift, homosociality, affects, just to name a few, and they do that ‘unevenly,’ in a way that beautifully throws into relief how they struggled to come to terms with their fate as a writer on the margins of the emergent world literary system. Their ‘unevenness’ should be embraced as a token of their honest struggle and should not be dismissed as a sign of immaturity as a modern novelist, as some critics have argued.

**Acknowledgement**

This manuscript is based on the keynote lecture that I gave at the NAJAKS conference in Stockholm. Please note that the sections on Sōseki’s Kokoro and world literature draw partly on the following articles: “The Affect that disorients Kokoro” by myself and “Introduction: Sōseki and the World” co-authored with Alan Tansman and J. Keith Vincent in Review of Japanese Culture and Society, forthcoming in 2017. The first section on affect is a summary of my own understanding of it based on many sources, some of which are indicated in the reference list. I am especially grateful to J. Keith Vincent who kindly shared his “Tanizaki’s Affective Profile” presented at the 2014 AAS (Association for Asian Studies) Meeting, which inspired me to think about the role of affect in literature.
References


