

Natsume Sōseki's English Translation of *Hōjōki*: Characteristics and Strategies¹

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This paper examines the English-language translation of *Hōjōki* by famed novelist Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916). Sōseki's pioneering translation moved away from previous interpretive readings of the classic, which focused on its Buddhist elements, disaster narratives, and theme of reclusion. Rather, Sōseki's interest lay in reading *Hōjōki* as a Romantic Victorian work on nature, to which end he likened its author, Kamo no Chōmei (1153 or 1155–1216), to English poet William Wordsworth (1770–1850). Sōseki's English literature professor, James Main Dixon (1856–1933), played a crucial role in the crafting of this novel and radical interpretation, yet the translation and essay present unique views on translation as well, namely that translation simultaneously comprises a critical element of cultural circulation and yet is of dubious efficacy as a mechanism of transference between cultures and languages. In addition to bringing such matters to light, this critical analysis of Sōseki's *Hōjōki* translation and essay also shows how important perspectives on translation that would appear later in the novelist's career actually took shape during his university days.

Keywords: Sōseki and translation, Japanese literary circulation, reception of *Hōjōki*, Kamo no Chōmei, medieval Japanese literature

Introduction

The English translation of *Hōjōki* 方丈記 (An Account of My Hut, 1212) by Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916), in the year 1891, marks one of the earliest efforts to translate Japanese literary works into Western languages; it is also among the initial foreign-language translation attempts of a Japanese work by a Japanese person. Studying Sōseki's translation affords a glimpse into the making of Sōseki, arguably the greatest Japanese novelist representing the Meiji era, and sheds important light on the journey of *Hōjōki*, a classical Japanese work, beyond its native borders. Few studies exist on this topic in any language, and scholarship on *Hōjōki* in Japanese and English often relegates this particular translation

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to the footnotes.² Some scholars attribute the lack of interest in Sōseki's *Hōjōki* translation to the indifference displayed by Sōseki's early disciples, an attitude that subsequent scholars simply followed.³ What Willis Barnstone describes as the “shame of translation” also helps to explain the lowly position of the translation within Sōseki's oeuvre.⁴ Alternatively, we might connect the disinterest with the fact that Sōseki undertook the translation during his university days, a period that has not yet received adequate scholarly attention.

The precise reasons for the neglect of Sōseki's translation may be unclear, but there are many key questions that remain unanswered due to this academic apathy. What, for instance, drew Sōseki to read a medieval text famous for its Buddhist leanings particularly regarding the notion of impermanence, or *mujōkan* 無常觀, in terms of Victorian-era romantic writings on nature? More fundamentally, what led Sōseki, who for the most part of his career was apprehensive about the efficacy of translation, to take on such a task in the first place? What did the younger Sōseki think of translation as a textual practice? To engage and unravel these questions, my argument unfolds in three parts. First, I construct a brief historiography of *Hōjōki* and its interpretations. In the second section, I discuss Sōseki's novel interpretation of the classic and the factors that likely shaped it. The final section of the paper explores Sōseki's thoughts on translation, with reference to his *Hōjōki* translation. I specifically focus on a small but critical essay authored by Sōseki about *Hōjōki* that formed part of his translation project, and I also consider such matters as textual additions, omissions, and stylistic features. The approach I adopt here allows us to explore not only the world of the young Sōseki—his views on translation and the philosophy of literature—but also, and more generally, the reception history of *Hōjōki* in the Western world and the role of translation during Japan's modern transition.

1. The Historical Reception of *Hōjōki*

With a readership history extending over eight hundred years, Kamo no Chōmei's 鴨長明 *Hōjōki* is an undeniable classic in the history of Japanese literature.⁵ Generations of authors, scholars, and ordinary readers have evoked the work time and again, and continue to do so. The earliest mention of *Hōjōki* may be traced to *Kankyo no tomo* 閑居友 (1222), a collection of Buddhist tales that was compiled roughly ten years after *Hōjōki*'s composition.⁶ Many medieval works, including *Jikkishō* 十訓抄 (1252), *Bunkidan* 文机談 (1272), *Heike monogatari* 平家物語 (thirteenth century), *Shūsōshō* 拾藻鈔 (1334), *Hitorigoto* ひとりごと (1467), *Tōsai zuibitsu* 東齋隨筆 (fifteenth century), *Saigyō monogatari* 西行物語 (late Kamakura era), subsequently referred to it. *Hōjōki* began to receive scholarly attention early in the Edo period (1603–1868), resulting in the production of several annotated texts. Moreover, several parodies that imitated *Hōjōki*'s disaster narratives emerged at that time as symbols of criticism against the Tokugawa administration's inefficiency in handling

2 Shimonishi Zenzaburō (1983, 1990, 1994 and 1996) has published most of the research on Sōseki's *Hōjōki* translation, yet not on the reception of *Hōjōki* or the possible factors shaping Sōseki's interpretation of it. He has also not discussed Sōseki's views on translation. For other brief treatments of Sōseki's *Hōjōki* translation, see Morikawa 1992, Matsuoka 1998, Matsumoto 1999, Sakamoto 2002, Matsui 2012, and Matsui 2013.

3 Refer to Shimonishi 1983, p. 23.

4 Barnstone 1993, p. 9.

5 Imamura 1997. See also Suzuki 2016, p. 204.

6 Imanari 1991, pp. 33–34; Imamura 1997, p. 159.

such natural disasters as famine and fire. The popularity of *Hōjōki* flourished when it was included as part of school curricula during the Meiji period (1868–1910). It continues to be part of the middle and high school curriculum today. Many prominent figures from the modern era, literary and otherwise, found the work compelling enough to comment upon it again and again. Apart from Sōseki, these include, for example, novelists Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介 (1891–1927), Satō Haruo 佐藤春夫 (1892–1964), and Hotta Yoshie 堀田善衛 (1918–1998), cartoonist Mizuki Shigeru 水木しげる (1922–2015), and architect Kuma Kengo 隈研吾 (1954–).

It is difficult to pinpoint a single reason underlying *Hōjōki*'s popularity, although the brevity of the work—hardly thirty pages—and its easy-to-understand narrative have surely contributed to its widespread fame. The reception history of *Hōjōki*, however, suggests that its three conspicuous themes might have been the main draw over the centuries. The *Hōjōki* was best known for its exploration of the Buddhist concept of impermanence (*mujōkan*) until the Meiji era at least. Medieval writers, for example, repeatedly highlighted this. Indeed, the popularity of impermanence in the religious and literary discourses of medieval Japan may have partly prompted Chōmei to write *Hōjōki*.⁷ Japan's frequent natural disasters and civil wars during the medieval period provided ample occasions for writers to reference *Hōjōki*, as in *Heike monogatari* and *Jikkishō*.⁸ In addition to direct references to various Buddhist allegories throughout, *Hōjōki* depicts in animated detail how Chōmei abandoned the capital city of Kyoto to spend the last part of his life as a Buddhist recluse on Mt. Hino 日野山. So strong is *Hōjōki*'s Buddhist flavor that an abridged version (*ryakuhon Hōjōki* 略本 方丈記) that omitted the disaster descriptions all together was even produced. This version of the work was especially popular among Buddhist followers who idealized Chōmei's reclusion and considered the work a sacred religious text.⁹

In the work's detailed descriptions of Chōmei's reclusion in a tiny mountain hut on Mt. Hino, we find another theme frequently highlighted by *Hōjōki* readers over the centuries. *Hōjōki* was even accorded a special place in the medieval genre of "recluse literature" (*inja no bungaku* 隠者文学). Despite being Buddhist, Chōmei was lackadaisical in his spiritual regime, preferring to engage in mundane activities such as composing *waka* poems and music. He did not consider indulging in music and poetry to be sacrilegious, but rather a means for seeking salvation in the tumultuous context of medieval Japan. Chōmei's manner of reclusive living came to be considered something of a model for subsequent generations, garnering praise from the authors of *Kankyo no tomo* and *Hitorigoto* among others.

Disaster narrative is the third most popular theme in *Hōjōki* that evoked immense interest from readers. Chōmei recounts five natural and man-made disasters in *Hōjōki* as symbols of material ephemerality in fact. Disaster-related depictions occupy more than half of the work's total space. In addition to medieval works like *Heike monogatari*, several Edo-era works were produced under the direct influence of *Hōjōki*'s disaster narratives. For instance, books written in *kana* (*kanazōshi* 仮名草子) such as *Kanameishi* (かなめいし, 1662) and *Inu Hōjōki* (犬方丈記, 1682) imitate *Hōjōki*'s disaster accounts but present them

7 See Nishida 1970.

8 The author of *Heike monogatari* adopted several disaster narratives from *Hōjōki* as examples of ephemerality, and the opening lines of *Jikkishō* illustrate the universality of impermanence à la *Hōjōki*. For more on this, see Sacki 1986.

9 Taguchi 1978.

in contemporary terms. As previous studies suggest, the famous *Meireki* 明暦 inferno of 1657 triggered the production of a series of annotated versions of *Hōjōki*, for the authors of these texts discern that the disaster narratives of this work will find wide readership in the aftermath of the great fire.¹⁰ Subsequently, many literary figures from the Meiji era onward, including the aforementioned Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Uchida Hyakken 内田百閒, and Hotta Yoshie, likened their own disaster experiences to that of *Hōjōki*. Akutagawa's *Honjō ryōgoku* 本所両国 (1927) depicts the aftermath of the Great Kantō earthquake of 1923. Uchida and Hotta recalled *Hōjōki* while recollecting their own World War II experiences. More recently, a number of scholars have revisited *Hōjōki*'s disaster accounts from an ecocritical perspective following the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami disasters. As evident from the said examples, *Hōjōki*'s readers often equate their own circumstances to the work's narratives which shaped their interpretation of the work.¹¹

Rather than being mutually exclusive, however, the three themes discussed above—impermanence, reclusion, and disaster—often overlap and are frequently discussed in concert by *Hōjōki*'s readers. Sōseki, on the other hand, rejected all these historical interpretations, presenting instead an altogether new reading.

2. Sōseki's Essay and Reading of *Hōjōki*

2-1. Constructing the Interpretative Schema

When Sōseki translated *Hōjōki* at the request of his English literature professor, James Main Dixon, in 1891, he rendered the title in English as “A Translation of Hojio=ki with a Short Essay on It.” The essay is barely six pages long but provides a rare glimpse into the mind of the young Sōseki, one that reflects his concerns about the fundamental issues involving literature and translation practices, albeit in a rudimentary manner. Sōseki devotes nearly the entire essay to expressing his thoughts on diverse matters such as literary works, authors, the process whereby certain works become popular and, thus, worthy of translation (while others do not). References in the essay to *Hōjōki* or its author are few and far between. Sōseki, at the time an undergraduate student, seems to have used the essay as a venue to showcase his critical and academic understanding, and to impress Dixon. The translation may have been a mere “class assignment” for Dixon, as some scholars have suggested, yet it was also an opportunity for Sōseki to demonstrate his academic acumen and seriousness.¹²

For reasons discussed in the third section of the paper, Sōseki did not translate the *Hōjōki* in its entirety; he considered it unnecessary to treat all the disaster narratives. His efforts, nevertheless, mark the first attempt to translate *Hōjōki* into a foreign language. Sōseki deserves recognition for his role in the early transmission of Japanese literature beyond the borders of Japan. It should be noted that Dixon used Sōseki's translation later to produce a new English-language version of *Hōjōki*, which was published in the *Transaction of the Asiatic Society of Japan* in 1893, and thus made widely available to a foreign readership.¹³

10 Yanase 1969.

11 See, for example, Kato and Allen 2014 for an ecocritical examination of *Hōjōki*. For *Hōjōki*'s contemporariness, refer to Araki 2014, p. 261.

12 Shimonishi 1983, p. 24.

13 Dixon 1892a, pp. 193–204; Dixon 1892b, pp. 205–15.

Sōseki opens his essay with a discussion of two fundamental literary issues: categories of authors and characteristics of their works. He then spends more than half of the essay explaining his philosophy of literature. Sōseki makes no reference to *Hōjōki* until the latter half of the third page out of a total of six pages. A cursory reading of the first part of the essay offers the impression of a simple introduction; a closer look, however, reveals that the introductory remarks are vital to his overall interpretation of the classic. That is, they function as a literary schema upon which Sōseki develops his arguments. The essay begins as follows:

The literary products of a genius contain everything. They are a mirror in which every one finds his image, reflected with startling exactitude. [...] The works of a talented man, on the other hand, contain nothing. There we find fine words, finely linked together. [...] But then they are only set up for show. [...] Again there is a class of literary production which stands half-way between the above two and which will perhaps be most clearly defined by the name “works of enthusiasm.” Books of this class are not meant for all men in all conditions, as are those of a genius, nor are they written from the egoistic object of being read, nor as a pastime of leisure hours, as those of a talent, but they are the outcome of some strong conviction which satiating the author’s mind finds his outlet either in form of a literary composition or in that of natural eloquence.¹⁴

Writing in impeccable English, Sōseki groups authors and their works into three different categories: the genius, the talented, and those authors who fall somewhere in between the two categories. Literary productions of the “genius,” according to Sōseki, are of the finest quality, and all readers can enjoy them in any situation: they transcend individual preferences and times. The works of “talented” authors, on the other hand, receive only momentary attention. In Sōseki’s view, their fine words and sentiments are linked together for show, and slip from the mind like a mirage soon after striking the reader. The works of the in-between group, Sōseki continues, are born spontaneously from the strong internal urges of their authors. These works may not be suitable for everybody in all conditions, yet at their best they are tantamount to works of genius; at their worst, they still attract some readers. *Hōjōki*, according to Sōseki, belongs to the in-between category: it is neither a genius-level, outstanding piece, nor a talented author’s mediocre work.

We can gauge that this tripartite categorization was of great importance to Sōseki. First, these categories developed into much more robust academic propositions in his later works. In *Bungakuron* 文学論 (1907), for instance, Sōseki presents a detailed debate on the various categories of authors and the characteristics of their respective works. *Bungakuron* also features the subject of human genius and its relationship with creativity, which appeared in embryonic form in his *Hōjōki* essay. Sōseki’s interest in human intelligence and creativity remained a career-long obsession, and seems connected to the heated academic debates on

¹⁴ Natsume 1996b, pp. 373–51.

the topic in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, Sōseki's personal book collection housed at Tohoku University contains an 1891 edition of Cesare Lombroso's *The Man of Genius*, an influential work on anthropological criminology that contains detailed treatments of human intelligence. 1891 is, incidentally, the year in which Sōseki translated *Hōjōki*. Thomas Carlyle, a major figure in Lombroso's volume, seems to have exerted a profound influence on Sōseki as well. Sōseki visited Carlyle's museum in London during his studies there, and even penned an essay about his visit. Second, and more relevant to the argument here, the aforementioned categorization served as the analytical platform upon which Sōseki built his new interpretation of *Hōjōki*. As I will argue, this literary schema permitted Sōseki to disregard *Hōjōki*'s historical interpretations and propose a new reading of his own.

2-2. Reading *Hōjōki* as a Romantic Nature Work

Sōseki positions *Hōjōki* in a middle category of literary works that were authored by neither a genius nor a talented author, then evaluates Chōmei's way of life in the following manner:

An apparition, possibly, the following piece [*Hōjōki*] may seem to most of us, inasmuch as only a few can nowadays resist its angry isolation and sullen estrangement from mankind, still fewer can recognise their own features reflected in it. Philosophical arguments too may be urged against the author's narrow-minded pessimism, his one-sided view of life, his complete renunciation of social and family bonds.¹⁶

Sōseki here criticizes Chōmei's reclusion and even labels him a misanthrope, an altogether unheard-of characterization of the twelfth-century Buddhist recluse. At no point in the long reception history of *Hōjōki* do we find any mention of Chōmei disliking humanity. The generally accepted view of Chōmei's leaving the capital city Kyoto, and entering a life of reclusion frames his actions as a response to his failure to secure a priestly position in a family shrine, as his predecessors had done. We can understand Sōseki's choice of terminology by looking at nineteenth-century Western literature, in which misanthropy constituted a major theme.¹⁷ The word "misanthrope" appears in Sōseki's notes and letters from his university days, which has led scholars to argue that his own troubled childhood and family problems may have influenced his decision to brand Chōmei as such.¹⁸ This particular argument is curious, however, as *Hōjōki* had already been canonized for its Buddhist tropes of reclusion and solitariness. Nevertheless, Sōseki reconstrued Chōmei's

15 See chapter five of *Bungakuron* on the theme of "genius." For a detailed discussion on this subject matter, see Takahashi 2010 and 2011. It is well known that both Kant and Schopenhauer, two Western philosophers interested in human cognition and intelligence, exerted a profound influence on Sōseki. On this, see Park 2003 and Mochizuki 2012. A detailed discussion on the Western debate over this matter can be found in Higgins 2007, pp. 12–20.

16 Natsume 1996b, p. 371 (126). Author's note: p. 371 and p. 126 are the Japanese and English pagination respectively. Same applies hereafter.

17 For instance, Hippolyte Taine's *The History of English Literature* (1872), which discusses misanthropy, is held in Sōseki's collection. Similarly, Sōseki was a great admirer of George Meredith's *Egoist* (1879), which also discussed the subject in detail.

18 Sōseki, in a letter dated 9 August 1890 and addressed to his friend Masaoka Shiki, uses the term "misanthropic disease 病" to describe his present state. See Shimonishi 1994b. Also refer to Natsume 1996a, pp. 21–24.

reclusion in terms of a “narrow-minded pessimism.”¹⁹ This manner of interpretation, applied to the threefold literary schema discussed above, elevates a “genius” like William Wordsworth (1770–1850) to a much higher position. Chōmei’s lifestyle choices, at least for Sōseki, were not praiseworthy.

Sōseki’s motivation for categorizing authors becomes apparent when he offers a comparison of Chōmei and Wordsworth later in the essay. Despite the obvious differences between a twelfth-century Buddhist recluse in Japan and a nineteenth-century Romantic poet in England, the essay draws distinct parallels between the two men. Sōseki was less interested in traditional interpretations of *Hōjōki*, and he does not seem to have been moved by its religious elements or disaster narratives; rather, he consciously constructed a new reading of the work and Wordsworth was the lens through which he did it.

With all that, the work recommends itself to some of us for two reasons: first, for the grave but not defiant tone with which the author explains the proper way of living, and represents the folly of pursuing shadows of happiness; second for his naïve admiration of nature as something capable of giving him temporary pleasure, and his due respect for what was noble in his predecessors.²⁰

Here, Sōseki offers two justifications for the reader to pay heed to the *Hōjōki*: first, Chōmei’s modest way of life and refusal to pursue worldly happiness; and second, his “naïve admiration of nature.” For many, or even most, Chōmei’s reclusion made for one of the work’s most compelling themes, and his secluded life came to be seen as something of a model for aspiring recluses. The ingenuity of Sōseki’s interpretation, however, lies in his novel characterization of Chōmei as a nature lover. Sōseki must have been aware of *Hōjōki*’s earlier interpretations, as one of the two source texts he used for translation, *Hōjōki ryūsuishō* 方丈記流水抄 (1719), contains perhaps the most exhaustive corpus of annotations and commentaries of all versions.²¹ It is thus difficult to believe that Sōseki was unaware of the work’s historical interpretations. While his ignoring of the earlier interpretations of the work is intriguing, his allusion to Victorian views of nature in his interpretation of Chōmei’s thoughts is what makes his interpretation unique. His emphasis on Chōmei’s love of nature is certainly intentional; Sōseki later compares Chōmei’s view of nature with that of Wordsworth as a means of defending his decision to explicate Chōmei as nature lover.

After presenting Chōmei as a nature lover, Sōseki explains how he lacks a Romantic Wordsworthian view of nature, which was comprehensive and humane:

19 Natsume 1996b, p. 371 (126).

20 Natsume 1996b, p. 371 (126).

21 One of the two source texts that Sōseki referred to for the translation was an Edo-era annotated version called *Hōjōki ryūsuishō*. This text is one of the most comprehensive annotated versions of *Hōjōki* ever produced with references to all the historical interpretations of the work, making it impossible to believe that Sōseki was unaware of other readings of *Hōjōki*. For further details, see Shimonishi 1990.

It is an inconsistency that a man Chōmei who is so decidedly pessimistic in tendency should turn to inanimate nature as the only object of his sympathy. For physical environments, however sublime and beautiful, can never meet our sympathy with sympathy. [...] After all, nature is dead. Unless we recognize in her the presence of a spirit, as Wordsworth does, we cannot prefer her to man, nay we cannot bring her on the same level as the latter, as our object of sympathy.²²

Sōseki first brands Chōmei as a misanthrope; now he observes that Chōmei embraced the physical qualities of nature for consolation. Chōmei's utterly material view of nature means for Sōseki that he lacked the ability to recognize its spirit, as Wordsworth had. Wordsworth conceived of nature as a manifestation of divine spirit, something deeply infused with animism. As with Sōseki, who yearned for an animate and spirited nature, Wordsworth's view of nature was highly humanized.

In truth, the notion that Chōmei sought solace in an inanimate nature was a deliberate strategy—a plan crafted by Sōseki to fit *Hōjōki* into his own interpretative agenda. However, Sōseki never clearly states which descriptions of *Hōjōki* his interpretation is based on, and neither the text itself nor other works that reference it contain descriptions of nature that match Sōseki's charges. To the contrary, Chōmei's account of the surroundings of his mountain hut, for instance natural scenes like the purple clouds, boughs of wisteria flowers, and the direction of West all carry religious connotations. Considered in light of popular medieval Buddhist discourses, Sōseki's "material nature" in fact points to Chōmei's Buddhist leanings. Discourse on inherent enlightenment (*hongaku* 本覚), which proposed that all animate and inanimate objects of nature are inherently enlightened and hence considered as the Buddha, flourished in the medieval Tendai school of Buddhism, of which Chōmei was a patron.²³ Similarly, discourse on the enlightenment of inanimate objects (*sōmoku jōbutsu* 草木成佛; lit. Buddhahood of grasses and trees) also became popular in the medieval period. Chōmei likely inserted popular Buddhist allegories as a form of "expedient means" (*hōben* 方便), intended to guide readers on the Buddhist path. This is a far cry from what Sōseki criticized as a merely physical environment.²⁴ But why did Sōseki choose to ignore the distinctive Buddhist elements of *Hōjōki* and read it in terms of romantic nature writing?

2-3. Dixon's Role in Shaping Sōseki's Interpretation

Shifts in a work's interpretation do not signal a problem or error, per se. Long ago, Roland Barthes freed the reader from the authorial control of the historical writer.²⁵ Barthes proposed that, although the author pens a text, the reader puts together the story from the text during the reading process. Likewise, the reader's individual circumstances leave an imprint on the new narrative thus construed. Interpreted in the aforesaid way, Sōseki's reading of *Hōjōki* as a work of nature is important of its own accord; but the factors lying behind this original interpretation are equally crucial, as they mark a shift in the work's

22 Natsume 1996b, pp. 371–70 (126–27).

23 Stone 1995.

24 See Sueki 2015 for a detailed discussion of *sōmoku jōbutsu*. For the concept of *hōben* in medieval Japanese Buddhism, refer to Leighton 2006, pp. 202–205.

25 Barthes 1977.

readership history. Several works published subsequently in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America and England, for example, follow Sōseki's interpretation of *Hōjōki*.²⁶ It may appear that Sōseki's reading of *Hōjōki* was merely an outcome of his English literature studies at university, but there was another crucial factor that determined his interpretation. Although Sōseki pioneered the new reading, it was his English literature professor Dixon who likely provided the invisible force majeure behind it. Unfortunately, no documentary evidence exists that directly discusses Dixon's request to Sōseki, nor did Sōseki leave much information about the prompt for the translation project. Yet circumstantial evidence suggests that our hypothesis may not be wrong.

Gideon Toury's notion of "norms" that arise in the act of translation proves helpful in this regard.²⁷ Toury shows that translation involves at least two sets of norm-systems, that is, at least two languages and two cultural traditions. He states that the translator has usually two options to choose from. Either they faithfully follow the source text, preserving its associated linguistic and cultural norms, or prioritize the norms active in the target culture instead. Adopting the first stance helps to ensure that the translation conforms to the source text's basic linguistic system, but it may cause incompatibilities with the target norms and practices. Opting for the second stance entails a shift away from the source text, but one that can enhance the chance of the translation's acceptability in the target culture. Let us apply this theoretical framework to Sōseki's *Hōjōki*, which was governed to a certain extent by the expectations of Dixon.

It seems clear that Sōseki's translation strategy was geared toward acceptability. That is, Sōseki sought to interpret *Hōjōki* in a manner easily accessible for Dixon's different cultural milieu, and what better way than to present the work by way of comparison with English literature, which was Dixon's area of expertise. This explains why Sōseki makes extensive use of quotations in his translation from popular English literary works, such as Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Goldsmith's *The Hermit*. It formed part of his attempt to draw a parallel between *Hōjōki* and these works. He quotes relevant parts from these works that portray the themes of mundane ephemerality and reclusion, two motifs also prominent in *Hōjōki*. We might even say that Sōseki's choice of interpretation was requisite to facilitate Dixon's understanding of an alien work. Sōseki's concern about whether his translation would help Dixon fully appreciate such a popular Japanese work is evident:

After all, my claim as regards this translation is fully vindicated if it proves itself readable. For its literary finish and elegance, I leave it to others to satisfy you.²⁸

Doubt and uncertainty over the efficacy of translation, which manifests itself briefly in his *Hōjōki* essay and then again in later works, plagued Sōseki throughout his life. He worried that foreign readers would find it difficult to comprehend an alien work like *Hōjōki*, owing

26 A series of works followed Sōseki's interpretation of *Hōjōki*. These include, for example, *Sunrise Stories: A Glance at the Literature of Japan* (1896), *Hōjōki: A Japanese Thoreau of the Twelfth Century* (1905), and *Myths and Legends of Japan* (1912).

27 Toury 1995. Further, Andrew Chesterman's "expectancy norms" in acts of translation stipulates that a translator's strategies are inevitably shaped by the expectations of the perceived readers. See Chesterman 2016, pp. 79–84.

28 Natsume 1996b, p. 368 (129).

to Japan's radical cultural and linguistic differences. Therefore, Sōseki likely interpreted *Hōjōki* as a work of nature out of consideration for the expectations of the target reader.

Why though did Sōseki regard Chōmei as inferior to Wordsworth? Sōseki's vulnerability as a student might have played a role in this regard. A comparison of Sōseki's essay and Dixon's article mentioned below reveals that the arguments which Dixon covered were identical to those appearing in Sōseki's essay.²⁹ For instance, the primary focus of Dixon's article, "Chōmei and Wordsworth: A Literary Parallel," was "nature," as it was in Sōseki's essay. Dixon discusses at great length how the treatment of nature with its spiritual connotation was a defining aspect of English literary traditions. He further proposes that the portrayal of nature in English literature, from the Elizabethan era through the Romantic age, radically differed from that of Chōmei's milieu. Dixon's criticism of Chōmei as a misanthrope and his view of nature as material also duplicate Sōseki's earlier charges. Surely it is no coincidence that Dixon re-presented nearly all of Sōseki's arguments. It is apparent that Dixon used Sōseki as a native informant to further his own scholarly reputation by appropriating the latter's ideas. Perhaps Dixon even instructed Sōseki to cover these specific themes in his translation assignment. Dixon's search for "cultural equivalence" in the Orient, to borrow Inaga Shigemi's words, was perhaps what influenced Sōseki's interpretation.³⁰ Keeping this in mind, we may now move to discuss Sōseki's thoughts on translation practice, as they appear in his *Hōjōki* essay.

3. Sōseki on Translation as Textual Practice

3-1. *Japanese Language and Culture as Hieroglyphic*

Owing to a long-standing lacuna of academic interest in Sōseki's *Hōjōki* translation, few serious studies have examined his ideas on translation in general.³¹ Available sources do suggest, however, that he recognized the critical role translation played in the sphere of cultural circulation, even if he simultaneously maintained an incredulous stance towards the practice. As already noted, Sōseki doubted the efficacy of translation in communicating cultural nuances across linguistic barriers. We find several instances throughout Sōseki's career that demonstrate his apprehension. Michael Bourdaghs argues that the unequal world order of the early twentieth century caused Sōseki's abhorrence of translation and reluctance to join the evolving body of "world literature."³² In his discussion of *Bungakuron* in the context of world literature, Bourdaghs references the fate of Rabindranath Tagore, Asia's first Noble Prize winner for literature, at the hands of his European colonial masters as an example of why Sōseki did not want his work to become part of Eurocentric "world

29 Dixon 1892a.

30 Inaga 2017, p. 298.

31 Kawai Shōichirō has written about Sōseki's thoughts on translation in reference to an article in the *Asahi shinbun* in which he criticized Tsubouchi Shōyō's staged performance of *Hamlet*. See Kawai 2008.

32 Bourdaghs 2012, pp. 2–7. On nineteenth-century world literature, see Damrosch 2003 and Casanova 2004. Even though Sōseki was reluctant to join the contemporaneous "world literature," he did not mind gifting a signed copy of his famous *I am a Cat* (1905) to James Carleton Young (1856–1918, mentioned as "Mr. Young" in *Sōseki zenshū* 1996b, p. 284), an American bibliophile who was on a mission to build a library of world literature that would house the "best in contemporary literature" from around the world. But when Young's project failed, his collection of books along with Sōseki's autographed copy of *I am a Cat* was auctioned, which somehow found a way to its current location in the Harvard Library. Refer to "Inscribed Books from the Library Collected by James Carleton Young, part 2." (The Anderson Galleries, Inc., New York, Nov. 1916), p. 59, for Young's collections and mention about Sōseki's book.

literature.” Tagore’s brief acclaim in Europe was a direct result of contemporary modernists like Ezra Pound and W. B. Yeats highly exoticising the former’s works. But it was the same modernists who called Tagore a “sheer fraud” that led to his star quickly fading away from the European literary horizon.³³ Sōseki, therefore, wished for his works to forever remain as “hieroglyphics” to the Occident.

In a well-known episode from Sōseki’s later career, the novelist criticizes a Japanese version of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* that was translated by and staged under the direction of Tsubouchi Shōyō 坪内逍遙 (1859–1935). Sōseki commented in a 1911 *Asahi shinbun* column that the mere translating of an English work would not move Japanese audiences in the same way that the original English version would an English audience. Following is a brief excerpt from his essay.

Dr. Tsubouchi’s translation is an example of translational fidelity. Unless one experiences the immense difficulties encountered to produce a translation, he will find it difficult even to imagine the level of efforts that Dr. Tsubouchi might have put to bring this translation to fruition. I admire him for his wonderful efforts. However, I greatly deplore his complete lack of consideration of his audiences caused by the extreme level of fidelity he showed towards Shakespeare’s original work. [...] Shakespeare’s dramas, due to their very nature, make a Japanese translation impossible. If someone still tries to translate them, it is just like ignoring the feelings of the Japanese people. While translating a work is still fine in itself, his attempt to satisfy our artistic tastes through this translation is like committing an absurdity. It is as absurd as a claim that a person who never tasted alcohol would drink wine just because he was offered wine in place of Japanese saké. Dr. Tsubouchi should have chosen one among the two available options: either he remains faithful to Shakespeare’s works, and forgets about staging Shakespeare’s drama, or becomes an unfaithful translator to conduct Shakespeare’s drama.³⁴

In sum, Sōseki considers the “aesthetic satisfaction” of the target audience of paramount concern to the translator; this was the primary ground for his criticism of Tsubouchi’s performance. Sōseki further alleges that translation has inherent limitations, which hinder the effective transference of complex cultural and artistic nuances that the author has infused into a work of art. He proffers the radical view that a piece of translation cannot satisfy the target audience’s aesthetic urges unless it manipulates the source text and expresses concern for the “fidelity” of the source text and message of the author. For Sōseki, the inherent limitations of translation forces a translator either to stay loyal to the source text, sacrificing in the process the desire to meet the literary aesthetics of his implied target audience, or to manipulate the source text for the sake of the target audience. He was thus convinced of the impossibility of recreating the original literary effect of a piece of work as it was conceived by the author. These were the thoughts of a mature Sōseki after his reputation as an esteemed literary figure had been established.

³³ Rogers 2016, pp. 248–59.

³⁴ Translation by the present author. See Natsume 1995 for the Japanese original.

The foregoing incident sheds light on Sōseki's views toward translation practice as they appeared in his *Hōjōki* essay. Sōseki closes the essay with the following remarks:

In rendering this little piece into English, I have taken some pains to preserve the Japanese construction as far as possible. But owing to the radical difference both of the nature of language and the mode of expression, I was obliged, now and then, to take liberties and to make omissions and insertions. Some annotations have also been inserted where it seemed necessary. If they be of the slightest use in the way of clearing up the difficulties of the text, my object is gained. After all, my claim as regards this translation is fully vindicated, if it proves itself readable. For its literary finish and elegance, I leave it to others to satisfy you.³⁵

The “pains” Sōseki speaks of here are none other than the “immense difficulties” he refers to in the *Asahi shinbun* article cited above, and the reason why he appreciated Tsubouchi's efforts. Yet it is the “radical difference both of the nature of language and the mode of expression” across languages that makes translation a difficult task. In Sōseki's view, the translator must from the outset clarify his or her objective—whether to remain faithful to the source text or make the translation “readable” to the target audience by making “omissions and insertions.” Recalling Toury's translation norms, we can see that Sōseki chose to frame his translation in such a way as to fit the cultural and linguistic norms of the target culture. He chose to craft a translation that would be comprehensible to his target reader, Professor Dixon, and accordingly made various semantic and syntactic adjustments. Comparing passages from Sōseki's English translation with the Japanese source text will further demonstrate his reader-oriented translation strategy:

Sōseki translation: Walls standing side by side, tilings vying with one another in loftiness, these are from generations past the abodes of high and low in a mighty town. But none of them has resisted the destructive work of time. Some stand in ruins, others are replaced by new structures. Their possessors too share the same fate with them.³⁶

Hōjōki ryūsuishō: 玉しきの都の中に。むねをならべいらかをあらそへる。たかきいやしき人のすまいは。代々をへてつきせぬものなれど。これをまことかとたづぬれば。むかしありし家はまれなり。或は去年やぶれてことしハつれり。あるハ大家はほろひて小家となる。すむ人も是におなじ。³⁷

Hōjōki shinchū (方丈記: 新註): 玉敷の都のうちに、棟を並べ、薨をあらそへる、たかき、いやしき、人の住居ハ、代々をへて、尽きせぬものなれど、是を、まことかとたづぬれば、むかしありし家ハまれなり。あるハ、去年やぶれて今年ハ作り、あるハ、大家ほろびて小家となる。すむ人も、是におなじ。³⁸

It will be apparent that Sōseki has inserted sentences for which no corresponding expression exists in the two source texts he based his translation on. For instance, no equivalent in

35 Natsume 1996b, p. 361 (129).

36 Natsume 1996b, p. 361 (129).

37 Yanase 1969, p. 241.

38 Takeda 1891, p. 1.

Japanese of the English sentence “But none of them has resisted the destructive work of time” can be found in either work. Perhaps he added the sentence explicitly to show the Buddhist notion of “impermanence” so apparent in *Hōjōki*'s overall narrative, though he himself did not find the theme central to the work. Another example of Sōseki's concern for conveying meaning to his implied reader can be found in his translation of “或は去年やぶれてことしはつくれり。あるハ大家はほろひて小家となる” as “Some stand in ruins, others are replaced by new structures,” which clearly differs from the source text. Sōseki significantly condenses the Japanese and omits certain expressions referring to time and the scale of dwellings available in the source text. Perhaps he sought to avoid semantic redundancy and add thematic clarity? In another instance, he expresses doubt about a Japanese metaphor being intelligible at all to the English audience, noting that because the Japanese expression was “very fine,” something inextricably intertwined to Japanese cultural notions that he could not help but modify it to make it comprehensible in English.³⁹ Sōseki likens the practice of translation as an art form, a creative production which is achievable only by straying from the source text.

Sōseki considered cultures and languages as difficult to comprehend, and translation as an inadequate tool to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers. The historical nature of texts, a topic that he examined extensively in his *Bungakuron*, further adds to the complexity. Sōseki states that sociopolitical and historical dynamics shape intellectual currents or the zeitgeist of a particular culture at a specific point of time. The zeitgeist determines the reception of literary works and their authors. Even great individuals like Shakespeare cannot defy the force (*ikioi* 勢い) of the age in which they live.⁴⁰ Therefore, Sōseki posits that the twentieth-century Japanese audience will certainly find a literary work written for a seventeenth-century British audience difficult to understand. Thus, convinced that a mere translation of his works could never convey complex Japanese cultural notions to foreign readers, Sōseki felt great reluctance at having his own works translated into foreign languages; his works were authored with Japanese audiences in mind. Sōseki plainly expressed these views while he was still a student, and they stayed with him for the rest of his life.

3-2. Dismembering the Source Text

Scholarly opinion regarding Chōmei's intended message in *Hōjōki* may be mixed, but most research regards the Buddhist notion of impermanence as an important theme.⁴¹ Chōmei emphasizes mundane ephemerality and directs attention to the (Buddhist) notion of reclusion. In the first part of the work, Chōmei graphically illustrates five natural and man-made disasters which he personally witnessed in his youth, presenting them as live examples of worldly evanescence. Such experiences forced Chōmei to realize the universal truth of impermanence, which in turn triggered his resolution to abandon the world and seek refuge

39 He rendered the Japanese ここに、六十の露消えがたに及びて、更に末葉の宿りを結べる事あり as “Now when the dew of sixty years was on the point of vanishing, once again did it condense upon a tiny leaf” and doubts whether the English translation of the Japanese metaphor “六十の露消え” is comprehensible to an English audience. Natsume 1996b, p. 357 (141).

40 Natsume 1995a, p. 27–34.

41 Some scholars doubt Chōmei's spiritual aspirations, claiming that Chōmei merely lived a life of pleasures centered around music and poetry. Beginning with Imanari Genshō (1974), however, a select group of scholars aver that Chōmei was a devout believer of Buddhism based on various Buddhist terms and concepts sprinkled throughout the text, among which *mujōkan* is most prominent.

in mountainous solitude. Chōmei then details how blessed he felt in his tiny mountain hut, free from mundane vagaries. He draws a stark contrast between the life of people in the capital city of Kyoto and his life as a recluse full of practical benefits and bliss. Thus we may consider the work as comprising primarily two main motifs embedded into a single narrative: one concerning the difficulties associated with city life, and a second highlighting the merits of reclusion. Neither motif can be ignored; they are both crucial in understanding Chōmei's quest for eternal happiness.

Sōseki's translation, which interprets *Hōjōki* as a Victorian romantic work of nature, seems to have artificially fractured the aforesaid narrative. *Hōjōki* is certainly more than a work on nature—nearly half of it centers upon cities and disasters—and yet Sōseki chooses to overlook key narrative themes in his interpretative framework. He explains away the significance of disaster narratives, for example, in the following manner:

Several paragraphs which follow are devoted to an account of the removal of the capital to Settsu in 1180, of the famine during Yōkwa (1181), of the pestilence in the same year, the earthquake in the second year of Genreki. All these however are not essential to the true purport of the piece, so that we can dispense with them with little hesitation.⁴²

Sōseki's valorization of the Wordsworthian view of nature and humanism and his preference for a reader-oriented translation strategy to facilitate smooth reading by an English-language audience leads him to discount all but two of *Hōjōki*'s disaster stories as beyond the "true purport of the piece."⁴³ After all, graphic depictions of chaos, horror, and death do not easily align with beautiful works on nature. So might it be possible that Dixon himself had little taste for the theme of disaster, which his later article did not touch on at all? His primary interest was the subjects of nature and reclusion. It seems that in order to meet Dixon's expectations, explicit or implicit, Sōseki interpreted *Hōjōki* in terms of Romantic nature and seclusion, at the cost of overlooking other key themes of the text, such as disaster.

And yet, Sōseki's reading of *Hōjōki* was not solely concerned with Dixon's expectations. Sōseki, aware of *Hōjōki*'s canonical status in Japan, concomitantly critiqued Chōmei's view of nature as inferior to Wordsworth and maintained that Chōmei deserved appreciation.

In spite all its drawbacks, the author is always possessed with grave sincerity and has nothing in him which we may call sportive carelessness. If he cannot stand critical analysis, he is at least entitled to no small degree of eulogy for his spotless conduct and ascetic life which he led among the hills of Toyama, unstained from the obnoxious influence of this Mammon-worshipping, pleasure hunting ugly world. [...] Let a Bellamy laugh at this poor recluse from his Utopian region of material triumph; let a Wordsworth pity him who looked at nature merely as objective and could not find in it a motion and spirit, rolling through all things; let all those whose virtue consists of

⁴² Natsume 1996b, p. 359 (138).

⁴³ Textual manipulation in the process of translation is an age-old, global phenomenon. For a recent discussion on this subject, see Rooke 2013, pp. 401–409.

sallying out and seeking adversary, turn upon him as an object of ridicule; for all that he would never have wavered from his conviction.⁴⁴

It is unclear whether Sōseki's mention of the "obnoxious influence of mammon worshiping, pleasure seeking ugly world" here is intended as a veiled attack on the Western-influenced worship of industrialization and wealth, a recurring theme in many of his works.⁴⁵ There is no doubt, however, that for Sōseki Chōmei nevertheless deserves recognition for his exemplary ascetic lifestyle which, as Sōseki saw it, could never be appreciated in the Occident. He postulates that occidentals such as Edward Bellamy (1850–1898) would perhaps despise Chōmei's attitude towards nature and human society from the lofty perspective of utopian material achievements, but their critiques would have no bearing on Chōmei's chosen path.⁴⁶ With these evaluations, Sōseki made certain that Chōmei received respect as an Oriental ideal. Further, here again we catch an early glimpse of the East-West dichotomy that several of his later works would bring to light.

Nonetheless, Sōseki's reading of *Hōjōki* as a work of nature and his presentation of Chōmei as a misanthrope reverberate in some of his famous works. He later explores the view of nature as a refuge from the drudgery of modern life in *Kusamakura* 草枕 (1906). His portrayal of the novel's main protagonist—the artist who abandons city life to wander into the mountains—resembles a misanthropic Chōmei, as interpreted in his essay. Similarly, misanthropy defines the characters of Hirota in *Sanshirō* 三四郎 (1908) and Sensei in *Kokoro* (1914). Scholars have also suggested intertextual connections between *Hōjōki* and Sōseki's *The Tower of London* (1905).⁴⁷ Moreover, in *Bungakuron* he critically explores the problems of language and culture, two crucial parameters that shape the reception of literary works and their authors, which are also briefly discussed in his essay and translation of *Hōjōki*. Thus, his translation of *Hōjōki* and the accompanying essay provide us with valuable insights, even though in rudimentary form, into the mind of the future novelist.

Concluding Remarks

The close examination of Natsume Sōseki's English translation of *Hōjōki* and its accompanying essay allows us to discern the thoughts of the younger Sōseki who would become a world-renowned literary figure. As argued above, *Hōjōki* was traditionally appreciated for three main themes: the Buddhist notion of impermanence, disaster narratives, and the protagonist's reclusive lifestyle. Seemingly uninterested in engaging these subjects, however, Sōseki read *Hōjōki* as a work of nature. This radical rereading can best be understood as an attempt to satisfy the expectations of Dixon, Sōseki's English literature professor at the Imperial University of Tokyo. After all, Dixon requested the translation

⁴⁴ Natsume 1996b, p. 369 (128).

⁴⁵ Sōseki's *Kokoro* こゝろ (1914) vividly depicts the themes of modernity and urbanization. It is a theme that was very close to Sōseki's heart, and he has criticized the effect of Western-influenced modernization on several occasions. Likewise, the characters "Kiyo" in *Botchan* 坊っちゃん (1906) and the artist in *Kusamakura* (1906) also show his discontent with Western-style industrialization and modernity.

⁴⁶ American novelist Edward Bellamy, in his *Looking Backward: 2000–1887* (1888), portrayed a futurist and developed utopian society based on socialist ideals of cooperative egalitarianism. Sōseki's reference to Bellamy in the essay serves as a contrast between Bellamy's materialistic society and Chōmei's plain lifestyle.

⁴⁷ Masuda 2017, pp. 120–28.

and perhaps even instructed his student to create a specific type of interpretation, although this cannot be confirmed in extant sources. The final product facilitated Dixon's ready comprehension of a foreign work with what must have been unfamiliar content. At the same time, Sōseki emphasized in his essay the culturally and linguistically specific nature of literature and viewed translations as works of art. In Sōseki's view, it was incumbent on the translator to insert or omit portions of the original text, bearing in mind the norms and expectations of the target audience. Sōseki himself thus omitted *Hōjōki*'s disaster accounts in his translation, lest they distort the desired interpretation of the work. Sōseki's English translation of *Hōjōki* and the accompanying essay unveil for the first time, albeit in fragmented form, several perspectives that would resurface in his later works. An often-overlooked translation project is thus revealed as a window into the making of Sōseki, one that deserves more scholarly attention.

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