

A Fateful Encounter: Bill Sibley, Sōseki, and *Mon*
Ted Fowler

First of all I'd like to thank Norma Field for her enlightened initiative in putting this little conference together. (Actually, it turned out not to be so little!) I'm especially appreciative of her efforts, since I was unable to attend the memorial service for Bill last June.

I'd also like to acknowledge the presence of Bill's sister, Jill, whom Bill spoke of in his final year thus: "My guardian angel/Nurse Ratched . . . She is really something, and I am truly fortunate." The reference to *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* is jocular, I'm sure!

The death of my first wife a dozen years ago, after a very difficult illness, has taught me, in ways that I simply couldn't imagine at first, that mourning is a long-term affair. It has also taught me that the way in which ones goes about mourning evolves over time, and the very fabric of grief is altered in the process. If I'd been able to attend the memorial last year, the reflections I might have offered then would have differed considerably from my offering today. Today's event is a conference, not a service, I keep telling myself, and scholarly rigor, of the sort befitting this institution, should be foremost in my mind—should be, but . . . well, we'll just have to see.

In readying this talk I culled memory after memory with something not unlike scholarly rigor—I mined my old correspondence with Bill in preparation—this in the interest of reflecting on a life, and a career, in which I had a bit part. Standing though I am before you at the end of the conference day, I don't pretend to have known Bill better, or to have been privileged with greater access to his take on literature and life, than others in this room—far from it. I am merely responding to a request by our convener to lend something to the proceedings; and being very much in Bill's debt, I hastened to oblige.

I beg your indulgence in some personal history. Two score and one year ago, after graduating from a small college on the West Coast, I journeyed two-thirds of the way across this vast continent to begin my graduate education in Japanese literature at the University of Michigan. Why Michigan, you may ask. Well, it certainly wasn't because of Bill. I was fortunate enough to be able to choose between two graduate institutions, Columbia and Michigan, which at the time actually meant choosing between Donald Keene and Edward Seidensticker—or so I thought. I knew both of those names from their translations of Japanese fiction and from some of their essays that I'd happened on while in college. I favored Seidensticker over Keene because the former's translations, particularly of Kawabata Yasunari's Nobel Prize-winning *Snow Country* and Shiga Naoya's short story "At Kinosaki," spoke to me with greater power than any other translations from the Japanese that I had read.

As we all know, however, what you see on paper is not necessarily what you get in person; I went to Michigan to study with the renowned translator, but what I got was . . . Bill Sibley! Like me, Bill had just arrived in Ann Arbor after a short stint at the University of Rochester. He'd been hired on a short-term contract and had not yet finished his dissertation on Shiga Naoya, the writer I knew from Seidensticker's translation and whose work, among others, I, too, would grapple with during my years of windmill-tilting research on the so-called "I-novel."

Even at the time, and not just in retrospect, I knew it was a good thing that it was Bill I got. It was only after a good twenty years of misunderstandings and several miscues on my part before I could think of Ed Seidensticker as anything like a friend; I became friends with Bill, meanwhile, that very first year. Another way to put it is: Ed Seidensticker may have lured me to Michigan (without his ever knowing it, of course, in those halcyon days entirely free of student recruitment), but Bill Sibley got me through it. And for that alone I am eternally in his debt.

This youthful mentor who became my friend was all of twenty-nine years old; I was still a boy of twenty-two. At first I didn't know whether to call him "Professor," "Sir," or "Sensei," so I tended not to address him at all. Yet Bill was nothing if not engaging. The genuine warmth and solicitude that went with the obviously deep learning soon undercut my insistence on formality. Patrician, yet approachable; exacting, yet magnanimous; visibly attached to high culture, yet puckishly attuned to the world of pop: depending on the day you visited him, he might entertain you with Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* or Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale."

Students in an undergraduate survey class on modern Japanese literature that I took from him would sometimes snigger like grade school kids when Bill, who typically slouched in his chair at right angles to the class (he hated to stand at the podium), lapsed into sometimes lengthy silences. You may be familiar with them. These pauses were distinctive—not because I haven't employed them myself in front of a class, but because their impetus was so different from mine. In my case, I am typically fumbling for the next word, or grasping in a panic for the thought I've lost, all too many times, to oblivion. The pauses in Bill's case had a different purpose; he would calmly collect his thoughts and then, as if there had never been a break, resume his lecture right where he'd left off, with all the trademark locutions and inimitable syntax.

Anyway, it was a very good thing I had Bill as a friend that first year. Anyone less than a friend wouldn't have tolerated my impositions. Not many professors would see fit to offer lifts around town to a wheel-less student. Bill did, and only partly because he wanted to show off his muscle-bound sport coupe. ("I didn't buy it because of all the horses," he told me with his raspy laugh, "but as the dealer says, 'You've got the power when you need it'.") Insufferable brat though I seemed to have been back then (this according to Ed Seidensticker), I just hope I remembered to thank Bill for all the rides. Even fewer professors, no doubt, would be so rash as to share their water pipe with students at parties they threw for friends. Fewer still, I imagine, would allow a lame attempt at creative writing to satisfy a class assignment. But Bill actually let me get away with submitting, in place of the final essay for that spring-term course on modern Japanese literature, a short story about a failed moon landing that I had drafted and refused to stick back in the drawer. I see it now as the ultimate exercise in escape—the culmination of two semesters of running away from serious graduate study—but as they used to say in those days, I was pretty fucked up at the time.

The time coincided with a most tumultuous period in my youth and in our history. That year—from the summer of 1969, when a man first landed on the moon (thus my short story), to the following spring, when the Kent State massacre left four Vietnam War protesters dead—was a difficult year for both of us—for all of us then. I had naively chosen to enter graduate school right after college, out of an unfocused interest in Japanese and a very focused desire to avoid the draft; the only credential I was truly intent on was the ID card of a conscientious objector. That I had come into the field far too early was evidenced by my movements over the next half-decade after just ten months in Ann Arbor: a year in Japan, ostensibly for language study; a year in Europe, to get away from Japan and from the States; three years of freelancing in Tokyo; and, if you add it up, still another year's worth of moving from one uncertain existence to the next.

Bill, too, looked at Michigan as nothing more than a crossroads, at least during the time I was there. After fleeing the preppy halls of Princeton he received his B.A., somewhat belatedly, from Harvard. He was working on his Chicago dissertation, but seemingly not very hard at it. (The "fucking *rombun*" is how he referred to it in correspondence.) He confessed to me and probably many others his reservations about staying in the field. I attended a party he gave at his

house in A² (as we called Ann Arbor) for friends and graduate students to celebrate the end of the school year, which we did with the help of some wine, cheese, and the aforementioned water pipe. I don't think it was the "weed" that made him blurt out during the all-night affair that he was thinking of leaving Ann Arbor at the end of his two-year stint, which was to say that he might be gone by the time I finished my year of language study. He entertained thoughts of dropping his studies altogether and teaching—not in a university but in secondary school—and of traveling, or "bumming," as he called it. He also talked of pursuing Japanese literature on the side, as an avocation, rather than under the pressure of being a "bona-fide scholar." He wanted to work, in other words, according to his own clock. He could afford to do so, he said, at least for the time being, and he was adamant about devoting his life to a variety of pastimes.

He may have meant it—he probably meant it—but there was no doubting his deep affection for Japanese literature and literature in general, and in pursuit of that particular love he took me for quite a ride. After I left Michigan to study in Japan Bill caught up with me in Tokyo and turned me on to the city. I've learned a lot from Ed Seidensticker's *Kafū the Scribbler*, but it was Bill who, four decades ago, led me on a magical mystery tour of Nagai Kafū's stomping grounds east of the river. He escorted me around the floating lumber yards of Kiba and by remnants of the Susaki brothel district (which was re-located in the Meiji period from where it had formerly been situated in Tokyo University's back yard). He insisted that we pay tribute to seemingly every shrine and temple dotting the aqueous grid of Fukagawa. We gazed up from the back-alley shanties and boats plying the oily canals to the distant high rises west of the river in Kasumigaseki and Hamamatsu-chō. Later he chaperoned my first literary foray to Asakusa, where we dined at the Arizona restaurant of *hayashi*-rice fame and one of Nagai Kafū's favorite postwar haunts. Then, at the instigation of some young corporate types who befriended us at a venerable watering hole on Asakusa's west side (Aramasa, for those of you in the know), we engaged in that prototypical Kafū activity: a cabaret romp. There we were surrounded by a bevy of cooing sirens who rotated between customers with dizzying frequency; who protested, "Oh, you naughty boy!" with every peek at their scanty outfits even as they pinched us on the inside thigh; and who were constantly ordering drinks in an effort to pad the bill. I probably enjoyed myself there more than Bill did. No matter; it was memorable all the same.

Bill was already a published critic by this time and several of my rides with him were via the printed page. Despite his own reservations it was clear that he was no dilettante but someone at the top of his game, as his 1968 article in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* on Japanese naturalism attests. This succinct essay lays out the origins, tenets, and course of this most important literary movement as none had done before in English. It impresses with the exactitude that the author brings to his subject, and with the sheer erudition exhibited by someone who had completed his baccalaureate barely three years earlier. It wasn't until at least a decade beyond my B.A., including two years of study on my own plus two more years at Berkeley (I did finally return to graduate school) that I reached the level where I could truly appreciate Bill's work and begin to absorb the many vernacular texts it cited, none of which were available in English at the time he wrote it. The essay is very much a product of the New Criticism, yet it reveals an abiding concern with history, gender, and the social that anticipates several vectors of critical theory which were just beginning to emerge. His observations on naturalist literature's take on family and the patriarchy, the position of women, and the relationship of the country and the city remain useful to this day. (As a matter of fact I did notice that the essay managed to find its way into the bibliography of a fairly recent monograph on Shimazaki Tōson by a certain member of this campus's East Asian faculty.)

Bill's review article on *Failure of Freedom* by Arima Tatsuo, which came out in 1971, is another example of his early work and which was included in the online mailing. It is a tour-de-force that jolts the reader with its unforgettable opening line, reverberating with the thunderous cadence and rhythmic power of a Beethoven symphony: "This is an impatient book." The riff here on the *honka* (originating motif) of "important book" is a stroke of genius, which might be dismissed by unsympathetic readers as a facile putdown were this seven-beat overture not sustained, paragraph after finely honed paragraph, by one of the most cogent overviews of Taisho-period Japanese literary and intellectual history that had been produced. If Mr. Arima had any designs on leaving the Foreign Service where he was employed and entering the academy they were squelched by this review, which completely overshadowed what was not, in fact, a bad book; meanwhile, this same review earned its author tenure at Michigan. An extraordinary feat even for its time—a research monograph, then, too, being the centerpiece of most tenure case portfolios.

Bill did go on to publish a monograph in 1979, shortly after moving to Chicago. This, too, is an astonishing work, one that, I submit, is the loss of anyone in this room who hasn't read it. *The Shiga Hero* is the only dissertation (yes, his "fucking *rombun*"!) that I know of in which the sole revisions for the purpose of publication consisted merely of deleting a very informative section on style in the Japanese language and adding translations to his appendix of short stories. The body of the dissertation went virtually untouched. There was no reason to touch it. So how do I know this? I actually compared the two texts when the book first came out, being not just curious but also in the midst of my own dissertation work at the time. It won't surprise you to learn that I was just like everyone else, not like Bill, when it came to publication. I ended up performing major surgery on my thesis and revising it, sentence by sentence, from start to finish.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. My association with Bill began upon enrollment in my first graduate seminar: a semester-long reading of a novel by Natsume Sōseki, whom all in this room surely know as perhaps modern Japan's most important writer. This was in the fall of 1969. I didn't know much about Sōseki at the time, having I think read *Kokoro*, one of the few works in a decent translation, and not much else. A flurry of Sōseki translations appeared from about this time over the period of a decade, culminating in a translation of *Sorekara (And Then)* by yet another EALC faculty member on this campus. Anyway, five or six of us made the weekly trek to the Gunn Building off State Street, a claptrap row of offices sitting atop a strip of shops, which the university was renting in order to house the outpost known as Far Eastern Languages.

It was, in fact, *Sorekara* that we read, an intelligent and compelling work that pushed my knowledge of Japanese and of literature to the limit. I was as daunted by Sōseki's plethora of allusions to unfamiliar Western writers—the Andreevs and the D'Annunzios—as by the density of the prose. In this seminar Bill introduced us to the evolutionary narrative theories of Percy Lubbock, whose arguments in *The Craft of Fiction* about showing and telling and about point of view I have wrestled with ever since. He introduced us as well to the fiction of Henry James, the author whom Lubbock championed and whom Bill knew profoundly. I remember emptying my wallet—or so it felt—for the Lubbock book, which I purchased new at the university bookstore for the lofty sum of one dollar and forty-five cents.

Flipping through its yellowed pages in advance of this talk, my eyes took in a wealth of marginalia—lines, check marks, and exclamation points—but also references, in bold ink, to *Sorekara* and its protagonist. To Lubbock's comment about a character in a James novel who "is seen in the company of the different people who affect her . . . but in all their intercourse the real burden of her story is veiled under the trembling, wavering delicacy of her immediate thought," I

scribble in the margin: “Compare with *Sorekara*.” To Lubbock’s narrative dictum that “the author, [once] having decided to share the point of view of his character, should not proceed to set up another of his own,” I scribble again: “So with the ‘I-novel,’ but what about *Sorekara*?” And next to his discussion of Jane Austen, in which he categorically declares, “these conditions in which Emma finds herself will have been chosen by the author because they appeared to throw light on her, to call out her natural qualities, to give her the best opportunity of disclosing what she is,” I cleverly note to myself: “Likewise with Daisuke”!

Daisuke and I parted company at semester’s close; in the spring term I enrolled in Ed Seidensticker’s seminar on Kawabata and joined the company of Shingo and the members of his postwar family who populate *The Sound of the Mountain*. Ed’s translation hadn’t yet come out and was therefore still out of reach for those of us clutching at any straw with which to wade through the Japanese text. And yet, as evocative as I found Kawabata’s Showa-era nostalgia to be, I felt myself listing toward late Meiji, and the naturalist movement, and some of the authors Bill wrote about in his *Harvard Journal* essay. Bill never oversaw my work on the *watakushi shōsetsu* (“I-novel”); I read on my own for several years while freelancing in Tokyo, and then moved back to my home state, and to Berkeley, to work with Masao Miyoshi, who held his nose while supervising a project he obviously detested. (If you knew Masao, you’ll understand why I say this, and why it is very much to his credit that he tolerated a project that was so contrary to his own critical instincts.) Yet without Bill’s initial guidance, I can’t imagine myself ending up in the area I did. Which way would I have headed, I often wonder, had I not worked with Bill?

Reflecting on such things, I stand in awe of the role that chance plays in one’s life. If you’ll allow me to digress, it played a role in my case from *before* day one. My grandfather was a rector in the Anglican Church who migrated from England to Canada and the United States, and whose last ministry was in Salt Lake City, of all places—Bill told me it sounded like the being the rabbi in Cairo, but that’s another story. After my grandfather completed tours of duty in Saskatchewan and Alaska, he was dispatched to Hawaii. Fortune seemed to frown on him, however, and he missed the boat. I use the phrase literally. But then fortune smiled, for the ship he failed to board got caught in a storm and sank on the high seas. The ship he did finally board landed him safely in Honolulu, where he shepherded his parish before moving to Salt Lake. I am alive because of that fluke, and that’s why I’m perhaps more inured than most to that phrase about missing the boat, which suggests only impatience and anxiety and missed opportunity.

Be that as it may, chance and flukes of fate have continued to play a crucial role. When I applied to an exchange program in high school, I was aware that participants couldn’t select their country of preference, but I fully expected to be living with a family, ideally in the Austrian or Swiss Alps, and speaking the German I learned in school. Then I received a letter from the head office informing me, to my utter astonishment, that I would be spending the summer in—Japan?! . . . I have already recounted my fateful choice of Michigan over Columbia. Later, during my years of self-imposed exile following that year in Ann Arbor, I traveled to Europe, spending time in Berlin and then London, which is where I got to know my first wife. It is also where I met a dear friend who worked with me at a Japanese restaurant off Piccadilly Circus and whose death thirty-some years later led me, rather miraculously, to my second wife.

My association with Bill, as noted earlier, began with a reading of *Sorekara*; forty years later the cycle of association ends with a reading of Sōseki’s *Mon*, which Bill translated and which I was asked to go over prior to its publication. I see this turn of events as yet another manifestation of Chance, or should I say Destiny, in life; and because I do, I find myself quite receptive to the sometimes bizarre twists and turns that chance works on the story’s plot.

A few words, then, about *Mon* and its place in Natsume Sōseki's oeuvre. After returning from two years of study in London and spending the next four writing on the side while lecturing at the First Higher School and later Tokyo Imperial University (which is to say the nation's premier institutions of higher learning), Sōseki launched a new career as a full-time writer, joining the *Asahi Newspaper* staff as editor of the literary page and regularly contributing his own fiction. His two loosely organized trilogies were first serialized in the *Asahi*. *Mon*, which was published exactly a century ago, is the concluding work of the first trilogy and follows the aforementioned *Sorekara*. It features the mundane lives of Sōsuke and his wife Oyone. For all his differences from Daisuke in *Sorekara*, Sōsuke recalls the earlier character, being married to someone resembling the woman whom Daisuke attempts to lure away from his best friend.

Sōsuke and Oyone lead a reclusive existence in the recesses of Tokyo's "high city," he working as a petty bureaucrat, she keeping house. Winter is upon them. They have returned from the provinces after a lengthy exile following the scandal of their illicit relationship, which has resulted in her former partner and his former best friend's leaving Japan to seek his fortune on the continent. Meanwhile, Sōsuke is saddled with the burden of caring for his brother, ten years his junior, who is finishing higher school and hopes to enter university. Sōsuke's parents have been dead for some years, and now the uncle who cared for his brother has died, leaving the family finances in disarray. Sōsuke becomes friendly with his landlord, who was formerly but a distant presence atop the bluff that towers above the rental dwellings. He gratefully accepts the landlord's offer to take in his brother as a live-in servant, thus enabling his brother's education, only to learn that the landlord is expecting a visit by his own brother (someone of apparently dubious character) from the continent and that he may be accompanied by none other than the man whom Sōsuke and Oyone had betrayed. In a panic, Sōsuke absents himself from the landlord's proposed gathering and ends up taking a sick-leave at a Zen temple, without telling even his wife the real reason for his action. The ten-day sojourn, occupied with awkward attempts at meditation, leaves him spiritually unfulfilled. He returns home to discover much to his relief that the landlord's brother and his cohort have already come and gone, apparently for good. The novel ends seemingly as it begins, with Sōsuke on the veranda chatting with Oyone. She marvels at the balmy weather of spring; he cautions that winter will return soon enough.

The novel's title can be translated as "the gate," and the gate most readers recall in *Mon* is the imposing edifice that fronts the Kamakura Zen temple visited by Sōsuke toward the end of the novel. But this attribution, like so many others concerning *Mon*, actually short-changes what is in fact a much more complex narrative. Many gates are depicted in *Mon*, each with its significance: those to Sōsuke's own house and his landlord's house; the gate to the dentist's, where Sōsuke, waiting his turn with a magazine, reads a homily about "plunging ahead" toward success and a Zen verse about the moonrise, which, taken together, hint at his potential for a new self-awareness, *not necessarily* through meditation; a gate to the fortune teller whom Oyone, in a spiritual crisis of her own, visits in hopes of determining whether she can ever have children; and the gate to the house of Sōsuke's former friend, where he first meets his wife-to-be and to which I shall return.

Another common but problematic attribution is of Sōsuke and Oyone as a middle-aged couple. True, there is a certain patina about these characters whose world-weariness is palpable. Internal evidence, however, makes it clear that Sōsuke is just over thirty years old. This fact is important when thinking about the possibility of change; a younger couple's future is more fluid, after all, than that of a middle-aged one. That Sōsuke is practically the same age as Daisuke

compels us to rethink the way we typically read *Mon*, namely, as a sequel to *Sorekara*; we are, in fact, presented not so much with a continuation of events as with a parallel universe.

Yet another common if misleading attribution is the narrative's privileging of Sōsuke. Protagonist though he is, it is Oyone who, through her bedrock stability, her gentle admonitions, and her emotional support, is Sōsuke's guiding force, and, as her name suggests (御米), his very sustenance. Oyone's physical illness and mental anguish, caused, respectively, by her brother-in-law's presence in the house and her unsuccessful childbirths, anticipate Sōsuke's own spiritual predicament. Oyone reminds Sōsuke how to write a Chinese graph: 近来 ('recent')—and a telling one it is; for it references, as does the other graph 今日 ('today/now') that Sōsuke has difficulty recalling, the here and now, as Maeda Ai notes in his shrewd essay on *Mon*, which Bill translated expertly. Kumakura Chiyuki, in his 『漱石の変身』 argues that Oyone pointedly glosses 近 as the 近 in 近江 (おほみ), turning the compound back on Sōsuke: 大御 (おほみ) / 御身 (おんみ). It is Oyone, moreover, who initiates the sale of an heirloom, the Hōitsu screen, which brings Sōsuke and his landlord together. And it is Oyone who insists that Sōsuke, upon returning from the temple, visit the local bath and re-assume his 'normal self,' aptly holding up to her husband's unkempt face a hand mirror—one of *many* mirrors in this most reflective novel.

But to return to the gate of the house where Sōsuke's old friend lives. In a masterfully rendered retrospective sequence better than half-way into the novel, the reader finally becomes privy, more through imagery than authorial telling (Percy Lubbock would have approved), to the nature of the relationship between Sōsuke, Oyone, and their former friend and partner Yasui. Here Sōsuke visits Yasui's rented house for the first time; he has yet to set foot in the door, has yet to set eyes on Oyone:

Near the front gate Sōsuke noticed a single willow tree that did not appear to be the property of any house in particular but whose drooping branches looked as though they might whip up against Yasui's eaves in the wind.

Upon re-reading *Mon*, it becomes apparent that the willow represents Oyone and that this seemingly casual description symbolically lays out her situation: that of a woman who in her heart does not yet belong to anyone in particular and who is destined to disturb the home, and life, of Yasui.

It is just this sort of deft foreshadowing that makes the novel far more than a tale of one man's last-minute, panic-driven, and seemingly failed search for enlightenment. It is also what gives the many chance occurrences in the text anything but a random feel. Chance, generally, in Sōseki's fiction, comes to feel very much like destiny, as the characters themselves are quite aware. And yet, even as Chance plays a very large role in *Mon*, there is, in fact, much in the narrative that is not in there by chance at all:

Item 1: The aforementioned Chinese graphs that Sōsuke tries to recall at the novel's beginning (近来 'recent'/'recently' and 今日 'today'/'now') are sprinkled throughout the narrative and generate the suspenseful feeling of something on the verge of happening.

Item 2: A variety of bamboo 孟宗 on the bluff above Sōsuke's house, likened to a "monk's close-cropped head," is linked to Sōsuke's own name 宗助, the name of Mencius 孟子, author of a suggestive phrase invoked by Sōsuke's temple host (see below), and a phrase with a cognate graph 猛進 suggesting a potential for action and, yes, enlightenment. On display here is an intense and unflagging interest in the visual; for Sōseki, literature is to be seen, not just heard.

Item 3: The repeated appearance of dharma figures: Sōsuke himself at the beginning, curled on the veranda; the daruma balloon he buys on his Sunday walk; the rubber-ball-sized bun, served at his landlord's; the Zen Master, who appears to be limbless in the darkened chamber during Sōsuke's awkward *mondō* 問答 (interview; catechism) with him at the temple.

Item 4: The proverb-like counsel (from the *Book of Mencius*) of Gidō, Sōsuke's host, which is repeatedly born out: 道は近きになり、却ってこれを遠きに求む ("The Way is near yet we insist on seeking it from afar"). Gidō's sage advice is the ultimate expression of a leitmotif that runs throughout the narrative. It is thus no coincidence that Sōsuke's temple retreat, nestled against a bluff, recalls the steep embankment that backs his own home; his treks up the bluff for an audience with the Master recall the uphill hikes to his landlord, who seems a kind of lay mentor; the unassuming Gidō, Sōsuke's model practitioner at the temple, recalls the unassuming *domestic* practitioner Oyone; the *kōan* or "problem" issued by the Master ("What is our original appearance prior to the birth of our parents?") certainly recalls the riddle that Sōsuke has already posed to himself at the barber's as he gazes at his own reflection: "Who is this person...staring out from the mirror?" Significantly, Sōsuke's bumbling exchange with the Master is later echoed by a more positive "interview," which the narrator expressly describes as a *mondō* in order to establish a link. The exchange, overheard by Sōsuke on the novel's last page, is between two men at the baths, one of them a priest, concerning a nightingale's unpracticed cry at the beginning of spring. The scene is replete with signs of rebirth (starting with the graph for bath—洗湯 in place of 銭湯) and in turn echoes a kind of "wake-up call" by a crowing cock that Sōsuke hears at the very beginning of the novel. All of this imagery suggests that Sōsuke's path to self-awareness and right action is *not* a long way off but right under his nose. And it is up to the reader to catch on—more than it is up to the narrator to inform. (My arguments here are indebted to Kumakura Chiyuki's book.)

These and other examples too numerous to cite belie readers' common dismissal of *Mon* as an event-less, even haphazard narrative. One of my students, after reading *Mon*, raised the proverbial "Where's-the-beef?" question and asked me point blank: "Where's the drama?" – This in contrast to *Kokoro*, which I'd also assigned and which features no less than five deaths, three of them suicides, and one of those essentially driving the narrative. Sōseki's art in *Mon* is subtler than in *Kokoro*. In place of drama is elision: the fierce rivalry played out between Sensei and K over Ojōsan (or, for that matter, Daisuke and Hiraoka over Michiyo in *Sorekara*) is merely hinted at in the case of Sōsuke and Yasui over Oyone. A climactic showdown between Sōsuke and Yasui at the landlord's home is studiously avoided. The link between news of the former Korea Governor-general Ito Hirobumi's assassination and Sōsuke's provincial wanderings to Hiroshima and Fukuoka, two cities deeply involved in Japan's imperialist thrust on the continent, is again only hinted at.

Readers critical of *Mon* tend to fix on a hackneyed dramatic vision rather than appreciate the actual drama, which lies outside the conventions of theatrical denouement and is instead tightly woven into the fabric of daily life. The drama *is* there—in the interplay of chance and destiny in the lives of a couple for whom the narrator feels great affection, and in the swirling constellation of images and sounds that are mirrored and refracted and echoed throughout the text. Such elements leave no doubt in my mind about Sōseki's abiding interest in design—design that is anything but cold and bloodless and, in fact, an exceptional example of the author's theories about the affective power of literature. They all combine to make *Mon*, as Edwin McClellan rightly pointed out, not only "the warmest of Sōseki's novels," but also, I think (and despite the preponderance of opinion to the contrary), one of the most affirmative. Sōsuke and

Oyone may appear to have regressed to their former state at the narrative's conclusion, but the potential for a new awareness, and a new future, has been clearly established. It is this strong sense of what is to come, even as the characters dwell on their past, which gives *Mon* an understated sense of optimism and is one reason, I'd like to think, why Bill elected to translate this gem of a work.

*

*

*

I have reminisced about my early association with Bill at the expense of the later years. But the hour allotted me is fast nearing its end, and so I'll have to skip over more recent rides, literal and figurative, that Bill offered: like the white-knuckle lift he gave me, long after he'd moved to Chicago, to O'Hare through a blinding snowstorm—in mid-April, mind you!—after an AAS convention; or the ride in a hired car—after he had duly introduced the driver, as was his habit—to a fine restaurant in Montecito, one patronized by Oprah Winfrey and others, where he treated me and my wife Yukari to dinner some months before he died. Over the years I asked Bill—no, begged him—to visit me on the West Coast. But he considered California not entirely civilized, and generally flew right over me to other destinations in the Pacific. Santa Barbara was a compromise; Irvine, to the last, remained beneath contempt.

What, then, did I learn from Bill? It was through him more than anyone that I nurtured a sense of the wonder, and not just the 'strangeness,' of a foreign tongue. I came to appreciate as well that correspondence could be an art form every bit as much as poetry or fiction. (The printed handout of my email correspondence with Bill attests to that fact.) Finally, I have grown up, and grown old, ever mindful that there is more to life than Japanese literature. There is also Italian cooking, prepared lovingly over the stove or eaten out; there is swimming in the surf; there are leisurely phone calls to distant friends, bolts from the blue usually late in the day that end as suddenly as they begin; and, yes, literature, but please, please make room for Mann and Forster and Proust as well as Sōseki and Shiga; and, of course, music and more music.

When Natsume Sōseki joined the *Asahi*, he wrote of his unlikely career move from the elite status of professor to the slightly vulgar occupation of newspaperman (I quote from Rachael Hutchinson's translation in *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings* edited by Michael Bourdaghs and others):

There is a saying that goes: "Heart is won by heart." For the sake of the *Asahi* newspaper, which placed this eccentric in an environment perfectly suited to eccentrics, it is now my happy duty to work to the best of my eccentric ability.

If we replace "Asahi" with "University of Chicago," we can perhaps see why Bill, who, as I've related, seriously contemplated leaving the academy forty years ago when still at Michigan, stayed in the field as long as he did. This place, from what I know about it and from what he told me, was perhaps better suited than any other to that very special kind of eccentric Bill was, and I, for one, am grateful.

I thank you all for the chance to share something of what Bill Sibley meant to me. And to Bill I say, thanks, once again, for the great ride.