

Natsume Sōseki, the Greatest Novelist in Modern Japan

21st November – 18th December 2013



県立神奈川近代文学館蔵

UCL Library Services and Tohoku University Library are holding the collaborative exhibition, "Natsume Sōseki, the Greatest Novelist in Modern Japan" to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of UK-Japan Academic Interaction.

Tohoku University has a long tradition as a national university in Japan, and the library is one of the largest and well-stocked libraries.

Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) is the most famous and respected novelist in Japan. He stayed in England for two years as a Japanese government scholarship student, and studied English literature at UCL for a short period.

Items on display are a part of the Natsume Sōseki Collection which Tohoku University library has as a rare and special collection, consisting of about 3,000 books that he collected and his extensive manuscripts.

Natsume Sōseki's Short Biography

Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) is not only the most eminent novelist, but also one of the pioneers of English literary studies in modern Japan.

He was born in Edo (Tokyo). At that time, Japan had faced the series of revolutionary changes called the Meiji Restoration, aiming to rebuild itself into a modern and western style nation-state. The drastic reformations of social structure in Japan also greatly influenced Sōseki's life and thoughts.

His early concern was Chinese classic literature. But, in his school days, he had a great ambition to be a prominent figure internationally, and so entered the English department of Tokyo Imperial University where he was the second student majoring in English.

For several years after graduation, he taught English in Tokyo and at the provincial schools, until an important turning point arrived in his life. The Government appointed him as the one of the first overseas students to research and study English in England from 1900 to 1902. His experiences in England provided an opportunity for him to deepen his understanding of the 'light and darkness' of Western civilization and modernization.

After his return to Japan in 1903, he taught at Tokyo Imperial University and elsewhere. He was also urged to write a serialized story *I Am a Cat* (*Wagahai-ha-Neko-dearu*, 1905) in a Haiku magazine. With this novel as a start, his prodigious talent as a novelist suddenly developed.

In 1907, he decided to resign from his teaching profession and enter a newspaper company, The Asahi Shimbun, as a novelist with an exclusive contract. Thereafter, he wrote serialized stories for the newspaper almost every year: *Gubijinso* (1908), *Sanshiro* (1909), *And Then* (*Sorekara*, 1910), *The Gate* (*Mon*, 1911), *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* (*Higansugimade*, 1912), *The Wayfarer* (*Kojin*, 1914), *Kokoro* (1914), *Grass on the Wayside* (*Michikusa*, 1915).

At first his novels were full of humour, but later he explored the depths of human psychology, isolation and egoism, and moreover analyzed the contradictions in Japanese society.

On December 9th 1916, Sōseki died of a stomach ulcer, leaving his last novel *Light and Darkness* (*Meian*, 1907) unfinished. Although his activities as a professional writer didn't last more than ten years, he wrote many masterpieces which have been read by generation after generation of Japanese readers. Even now his works give encouragement to many Japanese.

Sōseki's Life and Study in Britain

In 1900, he was sent by the Government to go to England to study English. On 8th September the same year, Sōseki left the port of Japan via Singapore, India, Egypt, Italy and France for London.

During his short stay in France, he went to the 5th Paris International Exposition several times, and he was surprised by the splendid spectacles there.

After his long journey of about two months, he arrived in London on 28th October. At the beginning of his time in England, he frequently visited many museums, theatres and the famous sights in the City, and in February 1901 he solemnly watched the funeral of Queen Victoria.

On his English study programme, he attended some classes of English language and literature given by Prof. William Paton Ker (1855-1923) at University College London, and took private lessons with the Shakespeare scholar William James Craig (1843-1906). After he stopped attending these he spent the rest of his time in England studying alone in his room.

The more his studies of English literature developed, the more he became preoccupied with a fundamental question; “What is Literature?” Sōseki wrote as follows in the ‘Preface’ of *Theory of Literature* (*Bungakuron*, 1907), which is his representative monograph on English literature;

[W]hat is called “literature” in the realm of the Chinese classics and what is called ‘literature’ in the English must belong to different categories and cannot be subsumed under a single definition.....

Facing this situation, I decided that I must, first of all, resolve the more essential question: What is literature? At the same time, I made up my mind to use my remaining year as a first stage in carrying out research on this problem.

(Natsume Sōseki, *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*, Edited by Michael K. Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda and Joseph A. Murphy. (Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 43-4.)

His desperate efforts to resolve the nature of literature affected him mentally and physically, and he had to return to Japan before he could accomplish his ambitions. His life and study in England might not have achieved what he had planned, but the parts of his struggle with English literature were traced in *Theory of Literature, Literary Criticism* (1909), and his works.

Sōseki's Works and English Literature

Sōseki was very conscious of the art of fiction and wrote the various works as an experiment.

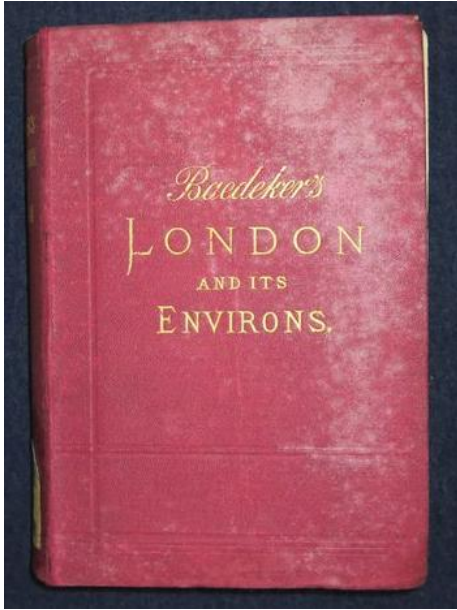
For example, his first novel, *I am a Cat*, adopts the first person narrative by a nameless cat, and the cat's point of view produces the alienation effects of laughing away the strange modes of life of a human being. Or, in a novella, *The Miner* (*Kofu*, 1908), he attempted the technique of 'Stream of Consciousness' narration based on the theory of American psychologist William James.

Many scholars have pointed out that his knowledge of English literature contributes to the methodological diversities in his novels. And quotation and allusion, or referring to pretext is one of the literary techniques which he often used for pleasure. Some scholars find in *I am a Cat* the influence of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* in its biting satire against a human society, or in others Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* from the point of the funny and rambling stories. He also wrote romantic stories modifying the Arthurian legend.

He remarked himself that his favorite English novelists were Jane Austen, George Meredith, George Eliot, and so on.

Exhibition Items

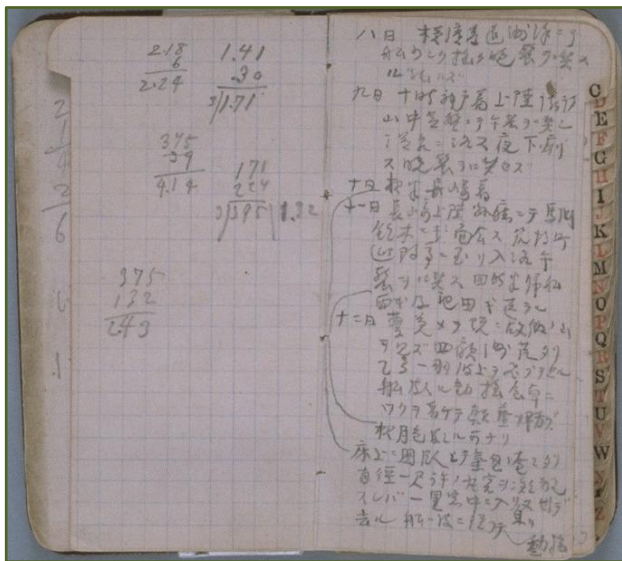
Baedeker's London and its Environs (Leipzig : Baedeker, 1898)



Baedeker is a guidebook for tourists. Sōseki used this book when he stayed in London. There remain many underlinings on the pages about the Tower of London especially. After returning to Japan, he wrote a short fantastic and visionary story ‘The Tower of London’ (1905).

(H16.0×W23.0×T2.5cm)

Diary of Drifting across the Sea



On 8th September 1900 he left Yokohama Port, and arrived at London on 28th October. On departure and arrival, he wrote down as follows; “When waking from a dream, I am far away from my familiar mountains. The vast and limitless ocean surrounds me.” (12th September 1900); “Left Paris for London. There was a hard and bitter wind on board. I arrived at London in the evening.” (28th October 1900).

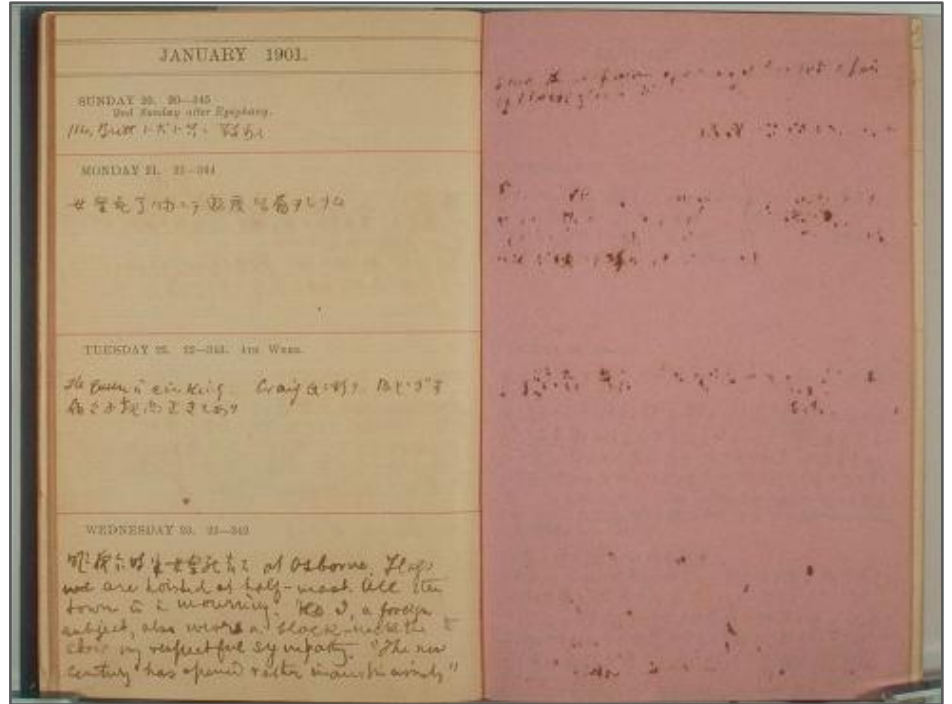
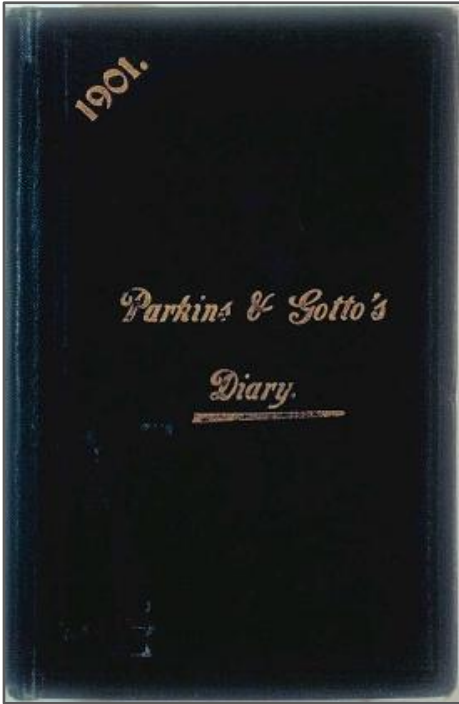
(H11.0×W12.0×T0.5cm)

Diary from England in 1901

The first year’s diary Sōseki wrote in England. He recorded his experiences in England in this diary, and also expressed his thoughts and criticism on Western civilization and modernization.

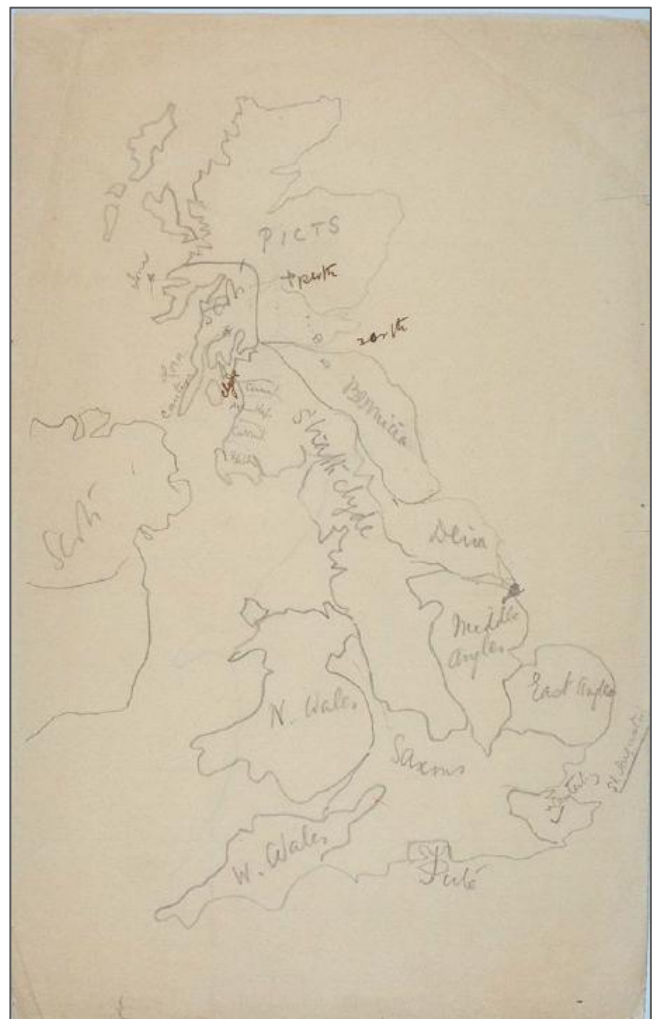
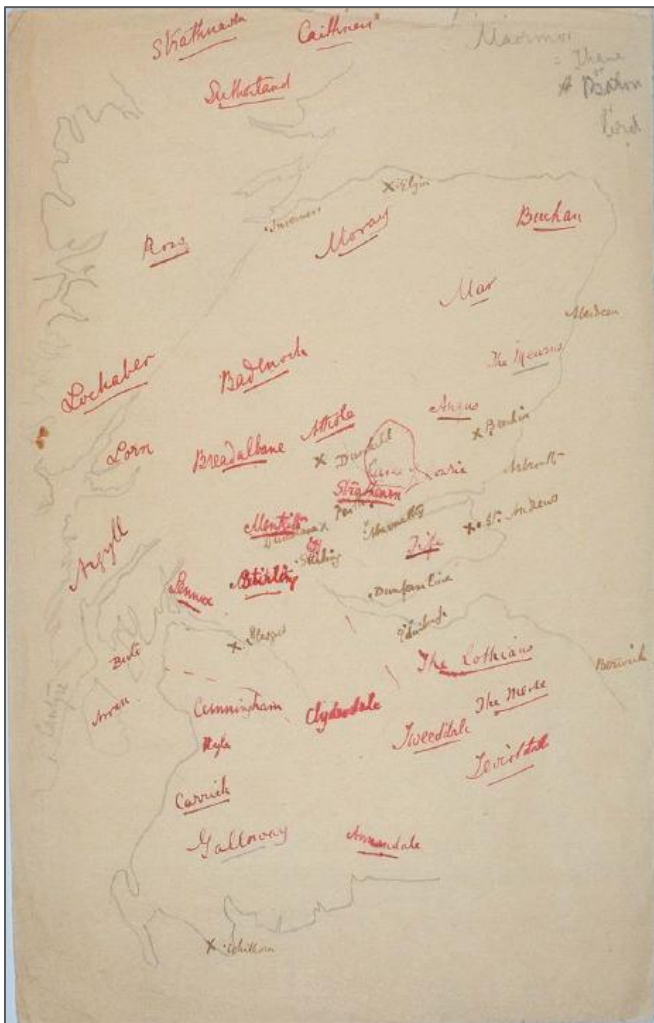
On 23th January 1901, the day after the death of Queen Victoria, he wrote down in English; “Flags are hoisted at half-mast. All the town is in mourning. I, a foreign subject, also wear a black-necktie to show my respectful sympathy. ‘The

new century has opened rather inauspiciously.' said the shopman of whom I bought a pair of black gloves this morning."



(H16.0×W21.0×T2cm)

Two Maps Sketched by Sōseki



A general map of Great Britain and a large scale map of Scotland, which Sōseki traced. In October 1902, Sōseki was invited to stay in Pitlochry by a Japanophile Scotsman for about ten days. The beautiful fall scenes there gave him great consolation and peace of mind, and later he wrote down his vivid memories in a short essay 'Past' (Mukashi, 1909).

(H21.0×W13.5cm, 2sheets)

List of Books Sōseki purchased during his Study in England

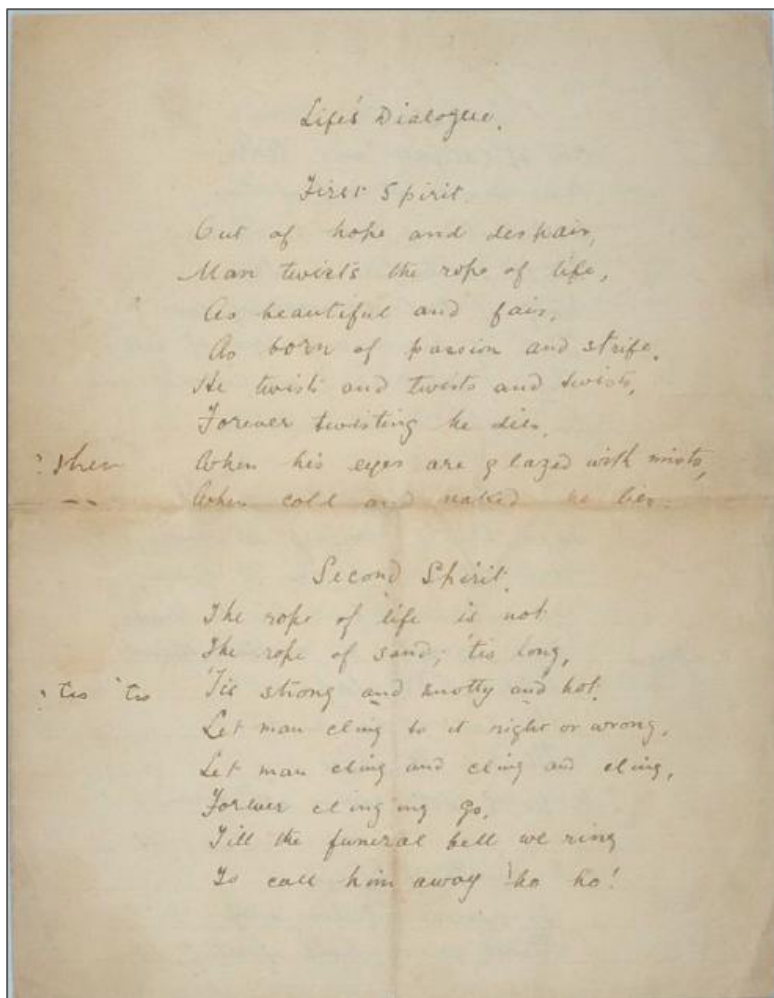
| | | |
|-----|-------------------|-------|
| 160 | Latin's Rhetoric | 1.00 |
| 161 | Latin's Grammar | 1.00 |
| 162 | Practical Grammar | 1.75 |
| 163 | Practical Grammar | 2.00 |
| 164 | Practical Grammar | 2.25 |
| 165 | Practical Grammar | 2.75 |
| 166 | Practical Grammar | 5.00 |
| 167 | Practical Grammar | 6.75 |
| 168 | Practical Grammar | 1.00 |
| 169 | Practical Grammar | 1.25 |
| 170 | Practical Grammar | 2.00 |
| 171 | Practical Grammar | 2.25 |
| 172 | Practical Grammar | 2.50 |
| 173 | Practical Grammar | 2.75 |
| 174 | Practical Grammar | 3.00 |
| 175 | Practical Grammar | 3.25 |
| 176 | Practical Grammar | 3.50 |
| 177 | Practical Grammar | 3.75 |
| 178 | Practical Grammar | 4.00 |
| 179 | Practical Grammar | 4.25 |
| | | 43.66 |

| | | |
|---------|--|------|
| No. 180 | Gray, English Prose Selections | 1.25 |
| 181 | Priding, Elements of Sociology | 1.75 |
| 182 | Huckle, Anglo-Saxon Grammar | 1.25 |
| 183 | Hagel, English Poet | 1.50 |
| 184 | " Spirit of the Age | 2.50 |
| 185 | Mills, Utilitarianism | 1.25 |
| 186 | " The Origin of Language | 2.25 |
| 187 | Moore, Lalla Rookh | 3.25 |
| 188 | Vergil, Lucretius, Cicero | 1.25 |
| 189 | Spencer and Thomson, Evolution of Life | 3.00 |
| 190 | P. M. Huxley, Physiology and Zoology | 1.75 |
| 191 | Ch. Darwin, The Descent of Man | 1.75 |
| 192 | J. M. Gwynne, Education and Society | 1.75 |
| 193 | Lombroso, The Man of Genius | 1.75 |
| 194 | W. G. Sumner, The Game Plan | 5.00 |
| 195 | C. L. H. Morgan, Comparative Psychology | 3.00 |
| 196 | Cooper, History of the American West from 1763 to 1812 | 1.75 |
| 197 | Sumner, Religion System of Huxley | 2.00 |
| 198 | Ward, Dramatic Literature | 1.75 |

Sōseki decided to read the canon of English literature widely during his study in England. But his student grant was not enough to afford many of the books he needed, so he had to save money on food, clothing and rent to buy about 500 volumes in two years. He bought these books mainly at a second-hand bookshop in the city. The lists include not only English literature — like Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Jane Austen, Rudyard Kipling, the English Romantic poets etc. — but also philosophy, sociology, psychology and textbooks of sciences.

(H23.0×W36.0×T0.2cm) (H20.0×W32.0×T2.0cm)

Life's Dialogue (Sōseki's Poem)



Sōseki wrote the poem in England. Shakespeare scholar William James Craig, Soseki's private tutor in England, pointed out the similarity with the poetry of William Blake from its illusionary atmosphere.

(H23.0×W17.8cm)

FIRST SPIRIT

Out of hope and despair, / Man
 twists the rope of life, / As beautiful
 and fair, / As born of passion and
 strife. / He twists and twists and
 twists. / Forever twisting he dies, /
 Then his eyes are glazed with mists,
 / Then cold and naked he lies.

SECOND SPIRIT

The rope of life is not / The rope of
 sand; 'tis long, / 'Tis strong, 'tis
 knotty. 'tis hot. / Let man cling to it
 right or wrong, / Let man cling and
 cling and cling, / Forever cling go, /
 Till the funeral bell we ring / To call
 him away ho ho!

Sōseki's Visiting Card and the Case



Soseki's real name, Natsume Kinnosuke, is used in English or Japanese on both sides of the card.

(Case: H10.0×W6.6×T0.5cm, Card: H4.5×W7.8cm)

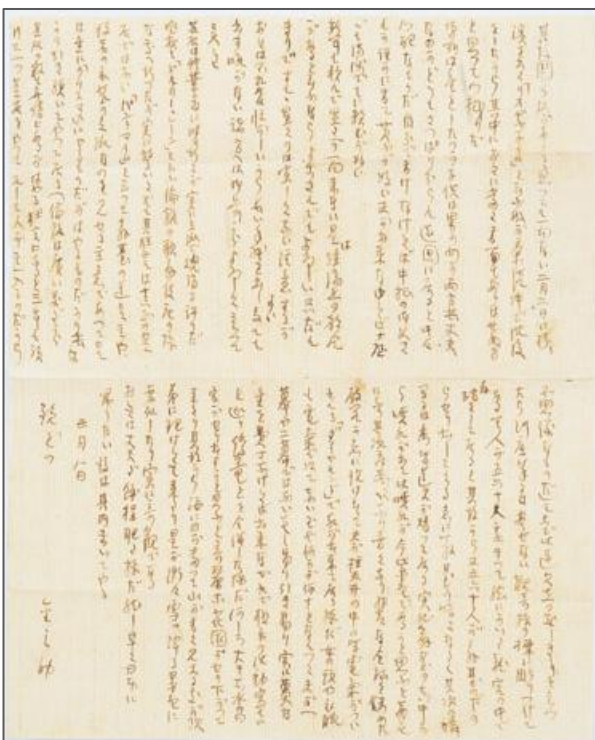
Watercolour of the Magdalen Tower, Oxford University by Sōseki



Sōseki had a profound knowledge of visual arts and often painted himself for pleasure. The watercolour is a copy of the Magdalen Tower, Oxford University, which Sōseki drew referring to a figure in an arts magazine *Studio* No. 31 (15th February 1904).

(H14.2×W9.0cm)

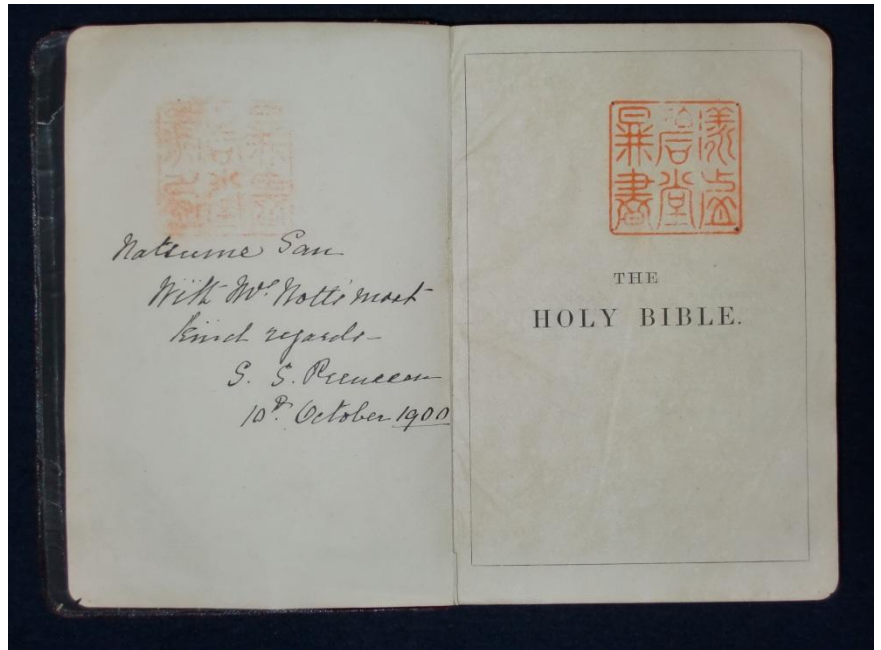
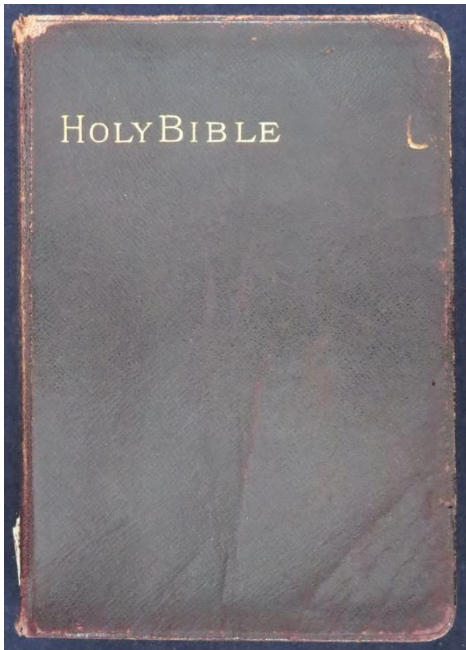
Letter from Sōseki to his Wife, Kyoko dated 8th March 1901



Sōseki frequently informed his wife Kyoko in Tokyo about his latest news by letters full of affection. The letter dated 8th March 1901 says that he was very anxious about the health of her and their newborn baby, and also that he had been very surprised by a magnificent play at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. Moreover, in the letter dated 8th May 1901, he said with happiness that he had displayed a portrait of Kyoko and their baby on the wall above his fireplace, and that his landlady and her sister praised them in the portrait for being very cute and lovely.

(H25.5×W19.0cm)

Holy Bible (Oxford University Press, 1898)

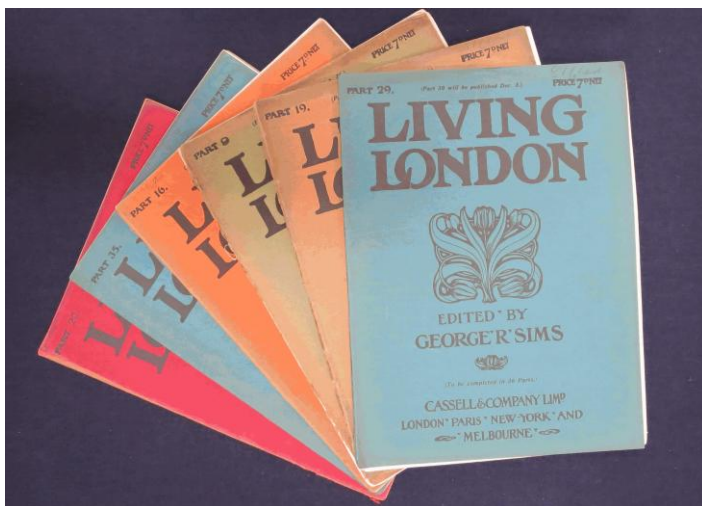


The Bible is a gift which was dedicated to Sōseki on the way to England by Mrs. Knott, whose daughter had been engaged in missionary work in Japan. They had known each other in Kumamoto. She wrote an introduction for Sōseki to her acquaintance at Cambridge University.

There are his underlinings and marks. He sometimes quoted the phrases from the Bible in his novels, such as *Sanshiro* (1908).

(H21.0×W29.0×T4.0cm)

Living London



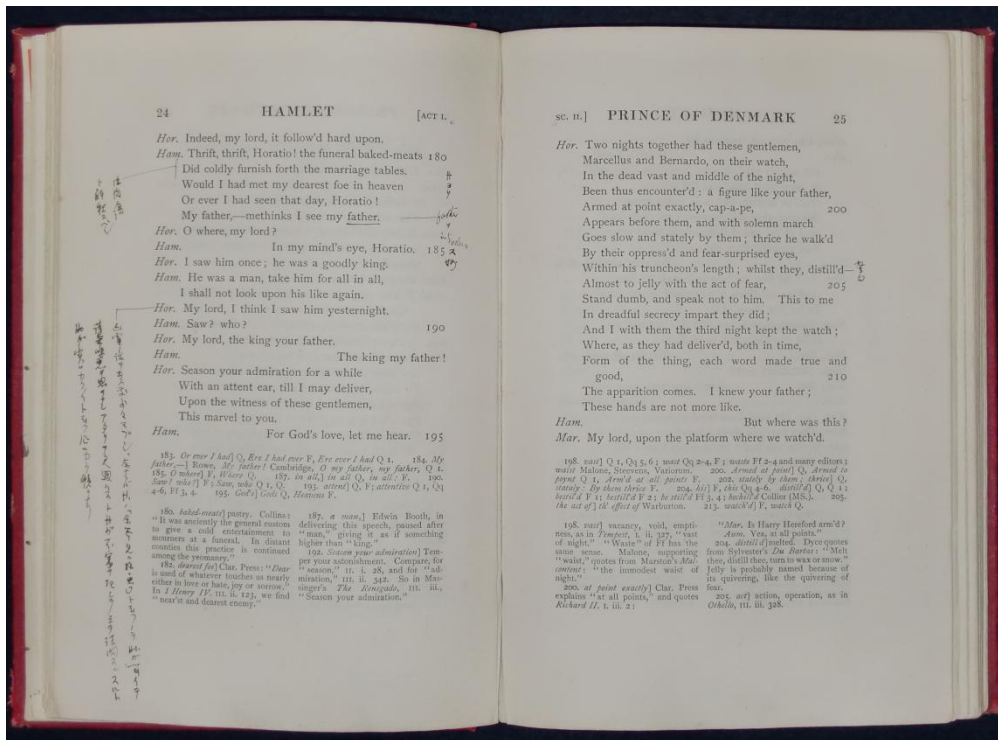
Living London is a periodical which was issued by the publisher Cassell to give information about culture and society in London. Sōseki was subscribing to it during his stay in England.

(H29.0×W43.0×T4.0cm)

Hamlet, in the Works of Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1899)

Sōseki lectured on the dramas of Shakespeare at Tokyo Imperial University after returning to Japan. In the works of Shakespeare which Sōseki possessed, there are many underlinings, marks and notes which show the traces of his careful

and attentive reading. On the margin of *Hamlet*, Sōseki said that the scene is not good in which Horatio told the story of watching the ghost of Hamlet's late father, and that he would be able to write the scene more skillfully and realistically.



(H21.0×W31.0×T2.5cm)

Our Beloved Master, Sōseki (Sōseki-sensei)

The cartoon was drawn by Okamoto Ippei (1886-1948), who was known as a caricaturist to create the unique style of cartoons with essays. It has captured Sōseki's character and his cat very well, which is probably the model for his first novel *I am a cat* (1907). Sōseki loved Ippei's cartoons and prose.



(H32.0×W45.0cm)

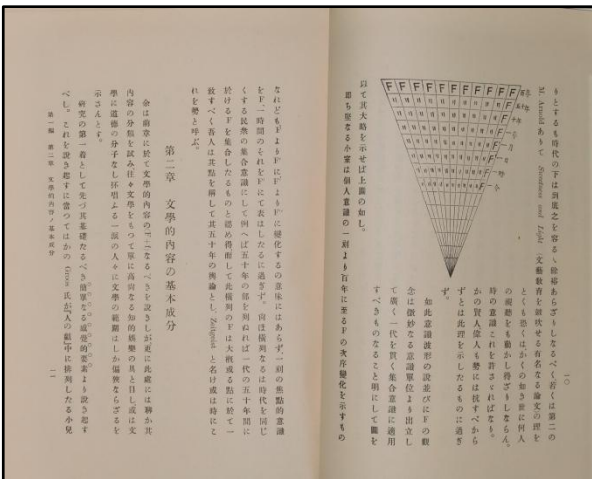
Sōseki's Works

I am a Cat (Wagahai-ha-Neko-de-arū, 1905-1906)



Sōseki was recommended by his friend to write his first novel *I am a Cat*. Although he originally intended to complete it as a single short story, he was persuaded to continue writing the novel until the tenth story. The first-person narrative by a nameless cat produces the effects of laughing away the oddness of human beings. It is often compared to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

Theory of Literature (Bungaku-ron, 1907)

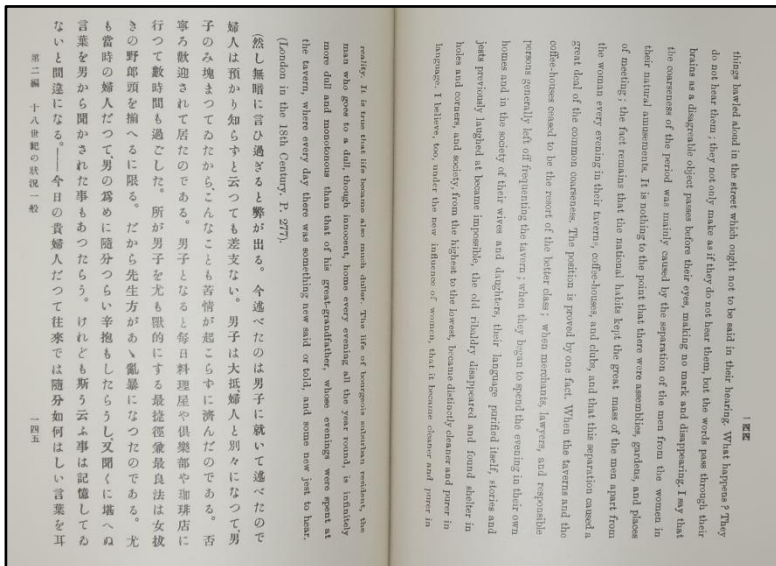


The book is Sōseki's monograph of English literature, mainly based on his studies in England and his lectures at Tokyo Imperial University.

Sōseki faced the fundamental question of “What is literature?”. In the book, he tried to approach literature in a psychological or philosophical way. Presenting the very unique proposition, he says:

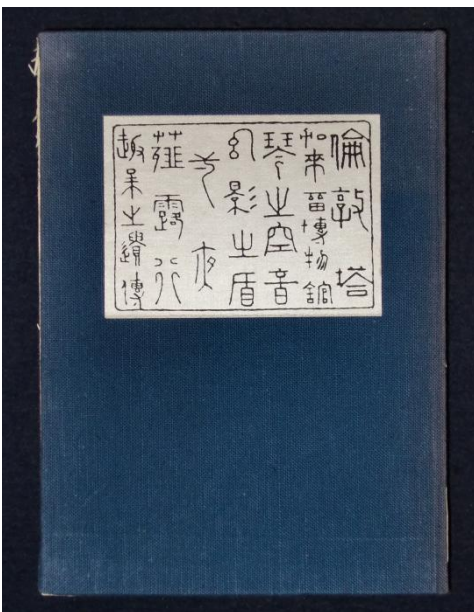
“One can perhaps approach the form of literary substance with the expression (F+f). F here indicates impressions or ideas at the focal point of consciousness, while f signifies the emotions that attend them. In this case, the formula stated above signifies impressions and ideas in two aspects, that is to say, as a compound of cognitive factor F (“large F”), and the emotional factor f (“small f”).” Natsume Sōseki, *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*, Edited by Michael K. Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda and Joseph A. Murphy, (Columbia University Press, 2009), p.52

Literary Criticism (Bungaku-Hyoron, 1909)



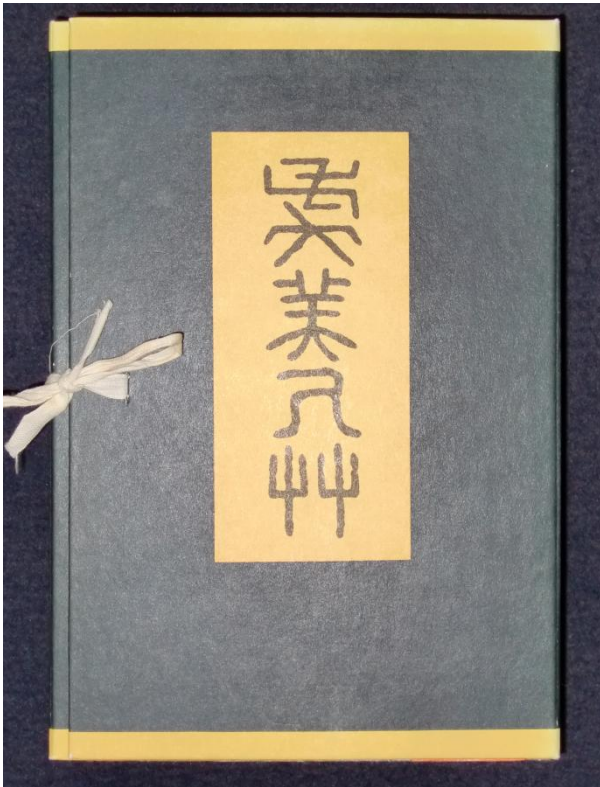
This is the one of the earliest books of English literature in Japan, which is based on the transcript of his lectures at Tokyo Imperial University. Discussing the history, politics, city conditions and social circumstances, and arts and academic developments in the 18th century, he commented on English literature at that time, such as Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope and Daniel Defoe.

The Tower of London, Carlyle's House, The Shield of Illusion, Kairo-Ko and Other Stories (Yōkyo-Shu, 1906)



Sōseki wrote these short stories while teaching at Tokyo Imperial University and other schools. *Yōkyo-Shu* (Yōkyo means floating in the emptiness by Chinese) collects his seven short stories. Modifying his experiences in England, he wrote 'The Tower of London' and 'Carlyle's house'. 'The Shield of Illusion' (Maboroshi-no-Tate) and 'Kairo-Ko' (Kairo means ephemeral life like the dew on the leaves of a lily by old Chinese poem) treat the poetical and romantic themes and materials of the tales of chivalry in the Middle Ages, such as the Arthurian legends. The short stories reflect his experiences in England and his knowledge about English literature.

Gubijinso (1907)



Sōseki's first novel as a professional writer hired by a newspaper company, the Asahi Shimbun in 1907. *Gubijinso* means a red poppy, which symbolizes the beautiful and vainglorious heroin Fujio. Her longing for love ends in the tragedy of her death. The prose style is poetic but abstruse using Chinese words frequently. It is also pointed out that the images of femmes fatale in the arts of fin de siècle Europe are cast over the character of Fujio.

Sanshiro (1908)



The novel is a representative work of Bildungsroman in modern Japanese literature. Sanshiro, who is a country-born adolescent, comes to Tokyo in order to enter Tokyo Imperial University. Feeling at a loss with his new circumstances in the big city, he is eventually attracted to a mysterious girl, Mineko.

Sōseki tried to make use of images of visual arts in his novels. He was interested in 19th European arts, especially Pre-Raphaelite. In his novels *Gubijinso* or *Sanshiro*, mysterious and sensual heroines appear who are reminiscent of the femmes fatale of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's

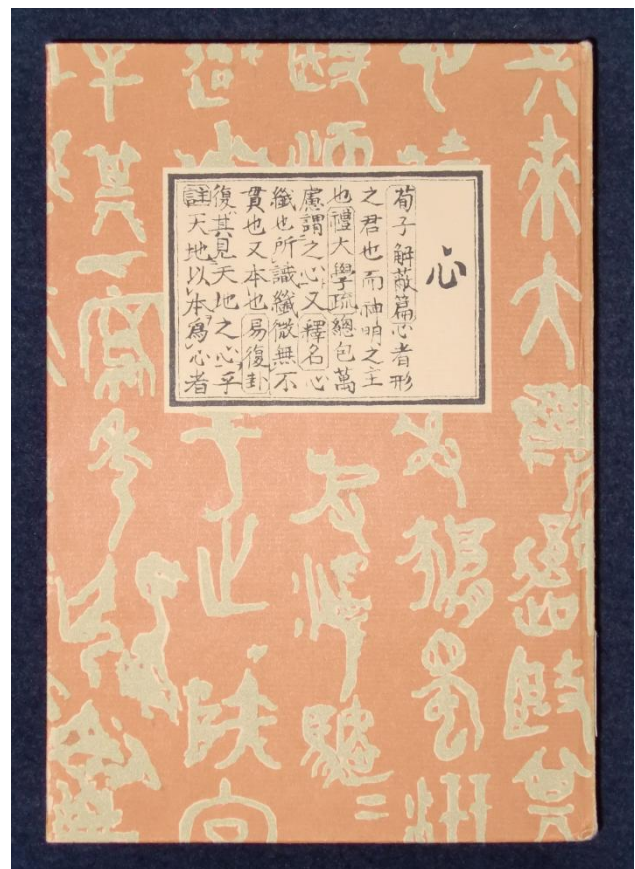
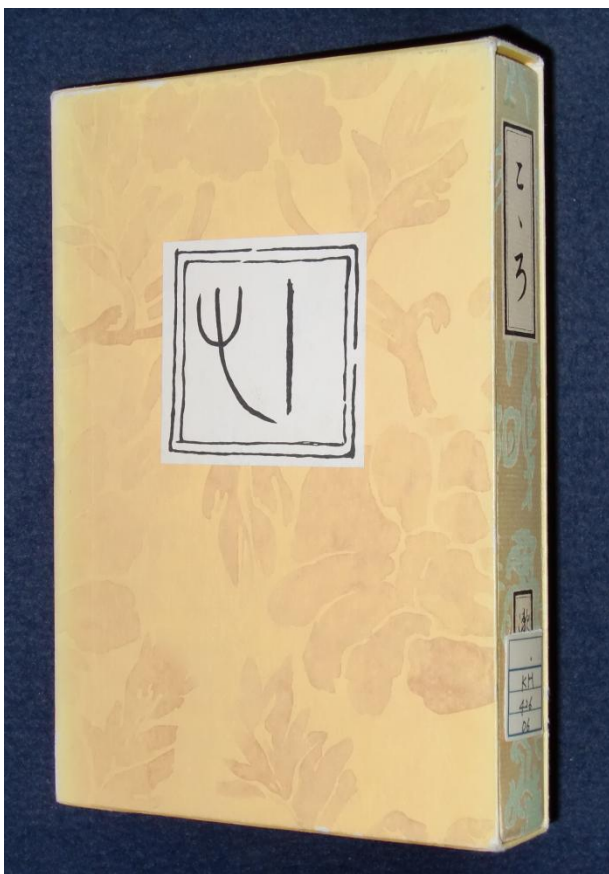
paintings.

Sanshiro, *And Then* (*Sorekara*, 1909), and *The Gate* (Mon, 1910) are often called Sōseki's first trilogy.

Kokoro (1914)

Kokoro, which in Japanese has multiple meanings such as heart, mind, emotion, psyche or spirit, is a most famous and popular but mysterious work of Sōseki's. Moreover it is regarded as one of a literary canon in modern Japanese literature. *To the Spring Equinox and Beyond* (*Higansugimade*, 1912), *The Wayfarer* (*Kōjin*, 1912-1913) and *Kokoro* is called the late trilogy.

The novel is composed of three parts. Part one and two mainly describes the relationship between the narrator "I", a youth, and his private mentor, Sensei, which means a teacher in Japanese. "I" becomes attracted to Sensei's deep and mysterious mentality which is indicated to be related to his past. Sensei doesn't tell "I" about his past easily, but in part three, Sensei confesses his sin and sufferings by leaving his will to "I" before his suicide. *Kokoro* contains diverse themes such as friendship, betrayal, love, solitude, martyrdom and so on. There are many controversies on the valid interpretations of the novel by scholars and critics even now.



Natsume Sōseki's Chronology

| Year | Age | Soseki's life and work |
|------|-----|---|
| 1867 | 0 | Birth of Natsume Kinnosuke (Soseki) |
| 1868 | 1 | Adopted by another family. |
| 1884 | 17 | Enters Tokyo University Preschool. |
| 1885 | 18 | [Birth of the cabinet system in Japan] |
| 1888 | 21 | January: Returns to Natsume family register. |
| 1889 | 22 | May: Uses the pen name Soseki for the first time. |
| 1890 | 23 | [July: The first election of the House of Representatives] |
| | | September: Enters The Imperial University, Department of English Literature. |
| 1893 | 26 | July: Enters The Graduate School of Imperial University. |
| 1894 | 27 | [August: The Sino-Japanese War (-1895)] |
| 1895 | 28 | April: Leaves Tokyo to become a part-time teacher at Ehime prefecture junior high school. |
| 1896 | 29 | April: Leaves to become a teacher of Kumamoto prefecture 5th Higher School. |
| | | June: Marries Kyoko. |
| 1899 | 32 | May: Birth of first daughter, Fudeko. |
| 1900 | 33 | May: The Ministry of Education sends Soseki to study in Britain. |
| | | September: Sails from The Port of Yokohama. |
| | | October: Arrives in London. |
| | | Attends the Lecture of William Paton Ker at UCL and takes private lessons from Shakespeare scholar William James Craig. |
| 1901 | 34 | [January: Queen Victoria dies] |
| 1902 | 35 | [January: Anglo-Japanese Alliance] |
| | | October: Trip to Pitlochry in Scotland. |
| | | December: Leaves Britain. |
| 1903 | 36 | January: Returns to Japan. |
| | | April: Serves as a lecturer of The Department of English literature, The 1st Higher School and Tokyo Imperial University. |
| 1904 | 37 | [February: Russo-Japanese War (-1905)] |
| 1905 | 38 | January: Intermittently publishes <i>I am a Cat</i> (-August 1905) |
| | | January: <i>The Tower of London</i> |
| | | January: <i>Carlyle Museum</i> |
| | | April: <i>The Shield of Illusion</i> |
| | | November: <i>Kairo-ko</i> |
| 1906 | 39 | April: <i>Botchan</i> |
| 1907 | 40 | April: Resigns from Tokyo Imperial University and enters the Asahi Shimbun as a professional novelist |
| | | May: <i>Theory of Literature</i> |
| | | June to October: <i>Gubijinso</i> |
| 1908 | 41 | January to April: <i>The Miner</i> |
| | | September to December: <i>Sanshiro</i> |
| 1909 | 42 | June to October: <i>And Then</i> |
| | | From September to October: Trips to Manchuria and Korea. |
| | | [October: The ex-prime minister Ito Hirobumi is shot in Korea] |
| 1910 | 43 | March to June: <i>The Gate</i> |
| | | June: Enters a hospital for stomach ulcer. |
| | | August: Moves to Izu Shuzenji Hot Spring for medical treatment. Spits blood and condition becomes critical. |
| 1911 | 44 | February: Declines doctoral degree. |
| | | November: Fifth daughter, Hinako, dies suddenly. |
| 1912 | 45 | January to April: <i>To the Spring Equinox and Beyond</i> |
| | | [July: Emperor Meiji passes away and Emperor Taisho accedes to the throne] |
| | | December to November: <i>The Wayfarer</i> |
| 1914 | 47 | April to August: <i>Kokoro</i> |
| | | [August: World War I] |
| 1915 | 48 | June to September: <i>Grass on the Wayside</i> |
| 1916 | 49 | May to December: <i>Light and Darkness</i> (unfinished) |
| | | Dies on December 9th. |



Soseki's First Novel, *I am a Cat's* Cover

Acknowledgements

The exhibition has been curated by Tohoku University Library and UCL Library Services Exhibitions Group: Mika Yokoyama, Hitomi Fukui, Toyokazu Kidoura (Tohoku University Library), and Kate Cheney (UCL Library Services). We are grateful to Kanagawa Museum of Modern Literature for the permission to use the portrait of Natsume Sōseki.

This catalogue and the text has been written by Toyokazu Kidoura with the help from Kate Cheney and Tomoyuki Ogawa (Tohoku University).

Tohoku University Library: <http://tul.library.tohoku.ac.jp/>

Natsume Sōseki Collection : http://tul.library.tohoku.ac.jp/modules/coll/index.php?cat_id=8