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**Shimazaki Tôson: The Maker of
Modern Japanese Literature**

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1997

**SHIMAZAKI TÔSON:
THE MAKER OF MODERN JAPANESE
LITERATURE**

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fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the development of Shimazaki Tôson (1872-1943) from his earliest work through to the final summit of his literary career, the novel *Yoake mae* (*Before the Dawn*). It examines the way in which the writer responded to the influx of Western culture and ideas that characterised early- to mid-Meiji Japan, and the way in which, in the course of integrating these influences, he evolved a view of nature and of man's place in it, and an approach to the craft of letters, that enabled him to produce compelling works of fiction and to earn his reputation as the father of modern Japanese literature.

In particular, the thesis identifies a variety of specific factors that successively influenced Tôson's development. The works of Rousseau and of the English Romantic poets, and the view of nature and of the individual's place within it found in Protestant Christianity, are identified as decisive influences on the poetry of his early manhood, a significant part also being played by his mentor of that time and leader of the Bungakkai group, Kitamura Tôkoku (1868-1894). Subsequent key influences are identified as: the emphasis on objective observation and enquiry found in both Western science (epitomised by Darwinism) and aesthetic theory (in particular the work of Ruskin), the painting of the French Impressionist Millet, and the writings of Turgenev and Dostoevsky. The thesis shows how, in absorbing and integrating these influences, Tôson consciously practised to develop his observational and descriptive technique, and demonstrates the results of this self-training in the works Tôson produced after turning from poetry to prose, particularly the powerful visual impact of his descriptive writing.

The thesis shows how subsequently Tôson combined the confessional impulse gained from Rousseau and the disciplined objectivity of the scientific spirit, to create powerful works of naturalistic autobiographical fiction. It demonstrates in particular Tôson's use of nature-description to achieve functional narrative goals, and not merely as decoration.

In considering his final masterpiece (written and serialised during the period 1929-1935), the thesis examines how Tôson applied the creative methods he had developed thus far to the writing of fiction set in the context of decisive events in Japan's modern history.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements	iii
A Note on Pronunciation	v
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Wakana Shû (Seedlings) - Early Success	6
Chapter 2 Hakai (The Broken Commandment) - From Poet To Novelist	33
Chapter 3 Yoake mae (Before The Dawn) - Ultimate Achievement	68
Conclusions	103
Bibliography	109

A Note on Pronunciation

There are various approaches to the transliteration of Japanese into the Roman alphabet (a process often rather awkwardly referred to as “romanization”).

The method employed in this thesis is essentially the same as the so-called Hepburn System, with the difference that long *o* and *u* are represented by the addition of a circumflex.

Generally speaking, the vowels in the Japanese words and names that appear in the text may be pronounced more or less as in Italian or New Zealand Maori (preferably without the stress-accent that English-speakers find hard to dispense with); and the syllable represented in the Hepburn System as *fu*, should ideally be sounded like *hu* (a shortened version of *who*), with an initial expulsion of breath between relaxed and slightly parted lips.

Shimazaki Tôson: the Maker of Modern Japanese Literature

INTRODUCTION

In the field of modern Japanese literature, Shimazaki Tôson¹, the author who is the subject of this thesis, may be considered as the father of both modern poetry and modern fiction. The scholar Ino Kenji has written: "The name of Shimazaki Tôson could be found on every page of the history of modern Japanese literature" (in: Higuchi, 1949, p. 4), and justifies that statement as follows:

"Modern Japanese writers who lived through the three eras of Meiji, Taishô and Shôwa² are by no means uncommon. But we rarely find any writer who can match Tôson in terms of the commanding position he has occupied in the literary world throughout and despite the ever-changing social conditions since the Meiji era and the dizzying rise and fall of literary movements."
(ibid., p.3)

Donald Keene writes: "There were the rare *shintaiishi* poets of interest before Shimazaki Tôson burst on the literary scene." Again: "Tôson may fairly be called the creator of modern Japanese poetry" (Keene 1984, vol.2 pp. 201; 204). Also: "The outstanding writer of the Naturalist movement was undoubtedly Shimazaki Tôson." (op. cit., vol. 1, p. 254).

As Keene pointed out, Tôson achieved a brilliant reputation in fiction as well as in poetry. Here I will summarise his half-century of creative life by reference only to his major works.

¹ Throughout this thesis, Japanese names are given in Japanese style: i.e., family name first.

² Meiji era 1868-1912; Taishô 1912-1926; the Shôwa era began in 1926 and was to continue until January 1989.

His maiden collection of poems, *Wakana Shû*, proclaimed a liberation of individual feeling, as the bright flowering of Romanticism in the 1890's. The novels *Hakai* (*The Broken Commandment*), *Haru* (*Spring*), and *Ie* (*The Family*), which were published from 1906 to 1911 and first established modern Realism in Japan, have been praised as the finest works of Japanese Naturalist literature. These works, together with *Shinsei* (*A New Life*) and *Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Toki* (*When the Cherries Ripen*), published in the Taishô era, depict the problem of individualism in relation to the feudal customs and the traditional Japanese family system, not in the form of the conventional so-called "I novel" (*watakushi shôsetsu* or *shishôsetsu*) but taken to the ultimate degree. Continuing into the Shôwa era, the voluminous novel *Yoake mae* (*Before the Dawn*), written from 1929 to 1935, may be seen as a summation of all his literary achievement, blending his abiding interest in society and history with his passion for unrelenting self-exploration. It is widely regarded as the pinnacle of modern Japanese literary achievement since the Meiji era.

Moreover, even in the period of literary sterility during the Pacific War, when many writers wretchedly yielded to the aggressive régime of the day and became its advocates, or complained in subdued tones of their ill fate, Tôson's *Tôhō no Mon* (*The Gate of the East*) alone confronted both writers and readers with unswerving authority. While writing the third chapter, he collapsed from a cerebral haemorrhage and died in 1943, aged 72.

When we read the major works mentioned above, we find that the description of nature constitutes a characteristic feature of Tôson's works. For him, description of nature based upon thorough observation was not merely a means of writing poems. Nature is portrayed to great effect in his fiction and occupies an important position in all his works. This approach to nature description can be found in his early short stories and essays, not to mention major works from *The Broken Commandment* to *Before the Dawn*. And even in his collections of poems, there are many excellent pieces that have nature as their subject.

The relationship between Tôson and nature is closely connected with his personal history. In considering how Tôson came to be regarded as the father of modern Japanese literature, it is useful to divide his life into three phases, which may be headed "Poet", "from Poet to Novelist", and "Novelist"; but at each point of transition he was powerfully influenced by nature as it surrounded him.

Born in 1872, Tôson spent his childhood in surroundings of rugged natural beauty: the Kiso valley in Nagano prefecture, Central Japan. Before the modern era the Nakasendô, the main road between Edo and Kyôto, ran through the Kiso valley; the village of Magome, where the family seat was located, was one of the post-stations (staging posts) on that road, and his father was the seventeenth manager of the station (a hereditary position). When Japan entered the modern era, just about when Tôson was born, the Shimazaki family, which had belonged to the élite of rural Tokugawa society, began to decline.

He left Magome at the age of nine to study in Tôkyô. At that time Japanese capitalism was developing, European culture was having an impact and a new cultural focus was evolving. One facet of the modern literature that came into being against this background was the *shintaiishi* (poetry of the new style).

The *shintaiishi* poets sought to break new ground, abandoning the waka³ (or tanka, as the form came to be called during the Meiji era) and haiku⁴ of traditional Japanese poetry. They even felt a sense of liberation as they described whatever had stirred their spirits as men of the new Meiji era, daringly breaking the rules of the old prosody.

It was as a writer of *shintaiishi* that Tôson achieved his first literary success with *Wakana Shû*. This collection of poems, written during his stay in the tree-clad city of Sendai, marked the start of modern poetry in Japanese literary history. Tôson's love poems expressed a modern morality and the feelings and emotions of modern people. They have greatly influenced all subsequent Japanese poets.

In Chapter 1, I discuss how Tôson came to be able to write *Wakana Shû* and to emerge as a poet among the many young people who were awakened to the modern spirit of the Meiji era.

The success of *Wakana Shû* was followed by three further successful collections: *Hitoha Fune* (*A Boat Tossed Like a Leaf*, 1898), which consisted mainly of prose sketches; the eighteen poems of *Natsukusa* (*Summer Grass*, 1898);

³ Waka: a five-line, 31-syllable poem in the pattern 5 - 7 - 5 - 7 - 7

⁴ Haiku: a three-line, 17-syllable poem in the pattern 5 - 7 - 5

and *Rakubai Shû* (*Fallen Plum Blossoms*, 1901). But then, bidding a permanent farewell to the world of poetry, Tôson turned his attention to prose and became a novelist.

In 1906 *The Broken Commandment* was published. Completed during a seven-year period living in the mountains at Komoro, it attracted much critical acclaim. Natsume Sôseki praised it as “the first novel of the Meiji era”. It was the first truly naturalistic Japanese novel. In Chapter 2, I discuss the background to Tôson’s evolution from poet to novelist. In that discussion, works written during the early stage of his development are considered as representing a period of careful preparation, in which description of nature became the foundation on which the path to his first successful novel, *The Broken Commandment*, was laid.

After *The Broken Commandment* Tôson wrote many novels, for example *Spring* and *The Family*. In 1913 he went to France, seeking to escape from a complicated relationship with a niece. There, as a foreigner, he felt alienated and, looking back toward Japan, realised how deep were the bonds that tied him to his homeland. His thoughts turned to his hometown of Kiso, and to his father. From a distance, he re-evaluated the meaning of the traditional relationship between father and child in Japanese culture, and critically re-examined the course of nineteenth-century Japanese history. This resulted in *Before the Dawn*, published some time after his return home. Like *The Broken Commandment*, this novel took seven years to complete. In part autobiographical, it is set in Magome Station in the Kiso valley, an important junction for eastern and western traffic. It describes the social upheaval and crisis confronted by generations of Japanese, but particularly that of his father’s generation, as a result of political reform in the nineteenth century. It has an established place as a leading work in Japanese modern literature.

Before the Dawn is a long novel written against the background of nineteenth-century Japanese history from Tôson’s father’s point of view. Together with his father, in a sense, modern Japanese history itself, the Kiso road, and the Kiso station also constitute key figures in the story. However, the natural landscape of Kiso is also an important element in this novel. Tôson minutely describes the natural scenery of his birthplace, portraying it as if seen through his father’s eyes.

In Chapter 3, the development of nature description and its significance in Tôson’s major novels published after *The Broken Commandment* (e.g. *Spring*, *The Family*, *A New Life*, *Before the Dawn*) will be discussed.

In summary, this thesis explores the background and other factors that gave birth to Tôson the father of modern Japanese literature, with particular reference to the rôle of nature in his writing, dividing his life into three parts—examining first Tôson the poet, then his evolution from poet to novelist, and lastly his subsequent development as a writer of fiction.

Chapter 1

Wakana Shû (Seedlings)

—Early Success—

The publication in 1897 of Tôson's first anthology, *Wakana Shû* (*Seedlings*), caused a sensation in the Japanese literary world. The work marked the starting point for modern Japanese poetry. With this success, Tôson established himself as one of the leading poets in modern Japan. In this chapter the background to the success of *Wakana Shû*, and the nature of the work itself, will be discussed.

Modern Japanese poetry is a product of modern Japanese society. It is the emergence of this society, in response to Western influences, which forms the background to *Wakana Shû*; so it may be appropriate first to look at modern Japanese society and how it developed.

The starting point for modern Japan was undoubtedly the anti-Tokugawa movement which culminated in 1867-68 in the Meiji Restoration. With that, the feudal system, based on the isolationist policy of the Tokugawa shôgunate, collapsed. The country was opened, and an influx of foreign culture began a process of significant social change. The Meiji Restoration was a period of transition from feudalism to a modern society.

Although the Tokugawa period saw significant social development, the politics, economy and culture of Tokugawa society remained within the confines of a feudal system. After the Meiji Restoration, however, the influence of the west left no aspect of Japanese society untouched. Literature was no exception. It can be said that, while the heritage of traditional Japanese literature continued into the new era, modern Western influences stimulated the emergence of literature of a new type.

Shimazaki Tôson's poems quite clearly reflect this new movement.

Against this background I shall address two interrelated questions: Firstly, how did Tôson come to terms with the new development of society and create new literature? and secondly: What kind of literature did he create?

Wakana Shû is Tôson's maiden piece of poetic work. It was published in August 1897 and was immediately given an enthusiastic reception by the rising generation of readers. Kanbara Ariake, a poet of that generation, wrote "When I first read *Wakana Shû*, I felt an inexpressible joy. My heart was trembling with excitement." (Kanbara, *Bunsho-sekai Zôkan Bunwa-shiwa*, 1907,10). The poet Tsuchii Bansui (1871-1952), another contemporary of Tôson, regarded *Wakana Shû* as "a masterpiece, marking a truly new era and epitomizing Japanese modern poetry in that literary dawn". (Miyoshi 1969, p. 316).

Arishima Ikuma (1882-1974), an artist and one of Tôson's closest friends, wrote: "It was Tôson who was the originator of the new poetry of the Meiji period" (Arishima 1967, p. 408).

Why did *Wakana Shû* win popularity among contemporaries like these? In the following paragraphs I will discuss the characteristics of *Wakana Shû* and follow the process by which Tôson came to write it.

The characteristics of *Wakana Shû* are that it frankly expresses the poet's feelings of love, is written in plain language, and contains descriptions of nature as seen through the very individual eyes of the poet. It was the first of these characteristics which chiefly caused the work to be received so well.

In addition, the poems convey a sense of freedom of spirit — something Tôson had encountered through Western books. The introduction of Western thought is an indispensable theme in any discussion of his work.

As stated above, the importation of Western culture had a tremendous impact on Japanese literature of that time. Keene states: "The Japanese of the Meiji era, rejecting the self-imposed isolation of the past, turned to the West for guidance in every field, including literature" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 36).

The government formed in 1868 pursued a policy of modernization and actively brought modern Western ideas and scholarship into Japan. Books

introducing Western culture and ideas to the people were published in the early Meiji period in order to raise the level of the people's culture and open their eyes to the culture of the world. In the early Meiji era, Western ideas of personal liberty and equality were introduced in *Gakumon no susume* (*Encouragement of Learning*, 1874), *Bunmeiron no Gairyaku* (*Outline of Civilization*, 1875), both by Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901), and *Minyaku-yakukai* (1882), a translation by Nakae Chômin (1847-1901) of Rousseau's *Le Contrat social*.

Translations of Western works of literature showed the Japanese people a fresh literary world and heightened the level of literary culture. *Aibiki* (1888)—Turgenev's *The Rendezvous*, translated by Futabatei Shimei (1864-1909)—and *Omokage* (*Vestiges*, 1889), the first important collection of translations of European poetry since 1882, edited and translated by Mori Ôgai (1862-1922), were typical works. Translations of European literature in the early Meiji era were a decisive factor stimulating the creation of a new Japanese literature (Keene, 1984, vol. 1, p.60).

Two other books strongly influenced Tôson. One of these was Rousseau's *Confessions* of 1770 (published in Japanese as *Zange-ki* in 1891). Tôson read the *Confessions* in English translation in 1894 at the age of twenty-three, at a time when he was struggling to find the meaning of life. He was deeply moved, and was later to write:

“I came to understand the modern way of thinking through the *Confessions*. I was influenced all my life by this spirit of seeking to view life free from restraint.”

(TZ 6⁵, *Shinkatamachi-yori* (*From Shinkatamachi*), p.10)

The other book was Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (originally published in 1859)⁶. Much later in his life Tôson was to write about the combined influence of these two books:

“The two books that motivated me to study the spirit of the

⁵ Throughout this thesis, the abbreviation TZ will be used to denote the Japanese edition of Tôson's works (*Tôson Zenshû*) as listed in the Bibliography (see bibliography entry for Shimazaki Tôson...1976). Numerals indicate the volume number being cited (eg: TZ 1). Page number cited also refer specifically to this edition. (It should be noted that there are numerous editions of Tôson's complete works, which vary in their arrangement into volumes and in pagination.)

modern age were Rousseau's *Confessions* and Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. Rousseau taught me how to look deeper into myself, and Darwin taught me the principles of the scientific spirit."

(*Kindai Bungei no Uzumaki (The Whirlpool of Modern Literature)*, an essay published in the magazine *Sekai Bungaku*, issue 9 for the year 1924, p. 96)

Tôson's reference to "the scientific spirit" is of great significance in the context of Meiji Japan and the intellectual and cultural developments that took place at that time. It hints at one of the key elements in Tôson's evolution as a writer that was to enable him to make such an original contribution to Japanese literature.

In Japan, from ancient times, man's natural environment had been used as material for literature and art, producing many fine works. But in the Japanese tradition, nature was nothing more than a source of inspiration for works of art, and was never approached as an object of scientific study.

The scientific view of nature is predicated on the view that there is uniformity in nature. However, in Japan there is a traditional line of thinking expressed in the aphorism "All things flow and nothing is permanent". In this view, nature is perceived as being essentially changeful; and this militated against treating nature scientifically. Moreover, there is an important difference between the West and traditional Japanese thinking as regards the perceived relationship between man and nature. In the West, human beings are seen as standing face to face with nature; in Japan man has traditionally been perceived as being immersed in nature and hence unable to grasp it objectively (Itô 1995, pp.351-367). As will be seen in Chapter 2, the Western emphasis on objective observation was to exert a profound formative influence on Tôson's artistic development. In his break with traditional Japanese thought lies one of the keys to his originality.

⁶ The theory of evolution was introduced to Japan in 1877 by Edward Sylvester Morse (1838-1925), an American scientist who came to Japan to investigate shell mounds. In 1877 Morse gave lectures on the theory of evolution at Tokyo University (then the only university in Japan). Morse's shell-mound investigations resulted in a treatise, a Japanese translation of which, published by Iwanami Bunko in 1983 under the title *Ômori Kaizuka*, is listed in the Bibliography (see entry for Morse). On page 15 of that volume will be found an editorial account of Morse's lectures and their impact, which is further discussed on pp. 40-41 below.

The influence of Rousseau's *Confessions* can be seen in *Wakana Shû*. Poems such as *Hatsukoi* (*First Love*) and *Okume*, express Tôson's own emotions; indeed, *Wakana Shû* owed its popularity among contemporaries to such explicit statements of personal feeling. Tôson expressed in plain language the emotion of love, and a whole gamut of emotional responses to life's splendours and miseries, in a way that struck responsive chords in the hearts of his readers.

The idea that, since the emotions of love are natural feelings, it is only natural to express them and unnatural to keep them hidden, is commonplace for us now. But in the Japanese literary world of the 1890s it was revolutionary. To understand why this was so we must consider briefly some aspects of the literary and moral legacy inherited from Tokugawa feudalism.

Needless to say, pre-modern Japanese writers also described the joys and sorrows of love. The unhappy lovers in Chikamatsu Monzaemon's plays, for example, choose to die together when they realise that they cannot live together. But Chikamatsu's men do not worship the women they fall in love with as goddesses or muses (Keene, 1984, vol. 1, p3). The love stories found in the literature of the Tokugawa period, such as Chikamatsu's works, are often set in the licensed quarters⁷.

The lovers' suicides portrayed by Chikamatsu come about as the inevitable conclusion of relationships that, in terms of the feudal values of Tokugawa society, are doomed. Generally speaking, in the Tokugawa period, love that disregarded the bounds of social class was regarded as sinful and immoral, and the law required that the parties to such a relationship were both to be put to death. Of course, Chikamatsu's works reflect the social conditions and the moral code of that era. They portray love as an offence against the morality of the Tokugawa period, and derive their power from the sense of conflict and contradiction that he evokes: on the one hand, love as *ninjô* (human feeling), springing from human nature that will not be denied; on the other, the overwhelming force of a feudal morality that, while acknowledging love as a legitimate human emotion, condemns freedom in love and marriage as sinful.

For example, in *Sonezaki Shinjû* (*The Love Suicides at Sonezaki*), Tokubei, a shop assistant who is in love with the prostitute Ohatsu, refuses to

⁷ Licensed quarters: areas of a city set aside exclusively for officially licensed brothels. The most famous example is the Yoshiwara in Edo/Tôkyô.

marry the girl chosen for him by his uncle. In despair over the consequences, which seem to involve their separation, Tokubei and Ohatsu commit suicide together (Keene 1976, p.254). Jihei, the hero of *Shinjû Ten no Amijima* (*The Love Suicides at Amijima*), Chikamatsu's masterpiece, is another Tokubei, but with two women in his life. He loves and needs both the prostitute Koharu and his wife Osan. Osan's father takes her away, declaring Jihei is unworthy to be her husband. Jihei now has no choice but to go through with a lover's suicide with Koharu. The conflict between obligation and human feelings, represented by a man who is torn between his personal desires and social obligations, is central to Chikamatsu's *sewamono*⁸ (Keene 1976, pp. 258-260).

Keene comments as follows on the love suicides in Chikamatsu's works : "Finally, Chikamatsu assures us, 'The lovers beyond a doubt will in the future attain Buddhahood.' Their suicides have become the means of salvation, and their whole lives given meaning (*sic*) by this one act" (Keene 1976 p. 256).

However, a love in which the lovers must die together is a distorted love; this in turn shows to what extent the society of the Tokugawa period was a distorted society. Keene writes of the impact of Chikamatsu's work on both Westerners and modern Japanese as follows: "Many examples are likely to irritate the Western reader, who wonders why such enormous importance is given to conventions; modern Japanese readers are likely to be repelled by the feudal mentality" (Keene 1976, p. 260).

The same comments apply equally to Tokugawa society and to the legacy of distorted human values that it bequeathed. Its feudal morality cast a long, repressive, inhibiting shadow over the Meiji period, making it a matter of course for people to keep feelings of love deeply secret and not to show any emotion.

Such was the emotional climate of the society in which Tôson's candidly expressive poems about love made their appearance.

But how, in such a society, was he able to create such works? The answer, I suggest, lies chiefly in the spiritual liberation he gained through the reading of Western thinkers. The discovery of romantic love, gained through readings of European literature, also imparted a distinctive quality to Tôson's writing. But we

⁸ *Sewamono*: a genre of drama based on contemporary life rather than on a historical theme.

should also consider the influence of the contemporary poet and critic Kitamura Tôkoku (1868-1894).

Tôson said of Tôkoku that he was “the one among our contemporaries who had the greatest vision”. Among the Bungakkai group of writers⁹ influenced by Tôkoku, it was Tôson who was the most strongly influenced and, after Tôkoku’s death, the most productive. He wrote in 1921, on the twenty-seventh anniversary of Tôkoku’s death: “I find it almost impossible to forget Tôkoku because, first of all, we became friends when I was young and impressionable. Moreover, I was so intimately associated with him that I felt compelled to gather together the writings he had left behind. Above all, it was because I had been so deeply influenced by him. I believe that he merited being called a true genius” (TZ.9, *Kitamura Tôkoku N ijûnanakaiki ni*, pp. 35-36).

Though his literary activity lasted only five years, his influence was extraordinary, and he is ranked by the Western critic Francis Mathy as one of the chief literary figures of the Meiji Period. Mathy writes: “Kitamura Tôkoku is an important figure in Meiji literary history. Tôkoku was the first writer in Japanese history to explore seriously the nature and potentialities of self and to try to integrate a philosophy of self into an over-all view of life. By reason of this new view of life, centered upon self and his theory of the inner life, Tôkoku was one of the first really modern Japanese writers” (Mathy in *Monumenta Nipponica*, XVIII, No.1, 1963, p. 1).

His most celebrated essay, *Ensei Shika to Josei* (*The Pessimist-Poet and Womanhood*, 1892), begins: “Love is the secret key to life. Only after love came into being did human society exist. If love were taken away, what color or flavor would life possess? Yet why is it that the strange creatures we call poets, of all men the most careful observers of human society, the most diligent probers of its innermost secrets, have egregiously sinned because of love?” (translation in Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 195)

Coming a mere twenty years after the Meiji Restoration, amid an intellectual ethos that trivialised love as a sort of game, a disorderly business of erotic emotions, such an utterance created astonishment. Tôkoku’s special reverence for “platonic” love, contrasted with carnal passion and transcending desire, was

⁹ Bungakkai group: a literary coterie associated with the magazine *Bungakkai* (“Literary World”), which first appeared in January 1893 and ceased publication in January 1898.

definitely not in the Japanese tradition.

Kinoshita Naoe (1869-1937), a well-known Christian socialist writer, stated that when he read the first sentence of Tōkoku's *The Pessimist-Poet and Womanhood* he felt as if a cannon had been fired at him. He recalled, "I believe that this was the first time in Japanese history that love had been seriously discussed in this way. Until then love — the relations between men and women — had been treated as something dirty" (Kinoshita 1976, p. 343)

When Tōson first read this essay, he also felt "a profound physical tremor like an electric shock". He wrote down his impressions in the novel *Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Toki* (*When the Cherries Ripen*), in which the character Sutekichi represents the author:

"As Sutekichi read this essay, he felt as if, with a wellnigh morbid nervous intensity, the author's words and his mental experience were interwoven together."

(TZ.5, Chapter 9, p. 533)

Both Tōson's fiction and Kinoshita's essay show the eager response of young men sensitive to the spell of Tōkoku's essay.

Two major sources of Tōkoku's ideas and of his ability to express them in words can be seen in his involvement with the Popular Rights Movement (like many other young intellectuals of the ex-samurai class, Tōkoku first sought a career in politics) and in the influence of Western culture, especially Christianity.

The Popular Rights Movement¹⁰ became an organised political force about 1880, articulating widespread disappointment in and dissatisfaction with the performance of the Meiji government, which since the Restoration had been functioning as an oligarchy, imposing its policies and taxing the people without having or seeking a popular mandate. The movement's principal aim was to campaign for the granting of a representative national assembly.¹¹

¹⁰ In Japanese: *Jiyū Minken Undō*

¹¹ For more detail about the Popular Rights Movement see: E.H Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State*, 1973, Greenwood Press, pp. 96-97)

The social and political thought of Rousseau featured prominently in the weapons with which the Popular Rights Movement attacked the Government and spread the ideas of liberty and equality among the people. It was through his participation in this movement that Tôkoku came into contact with this — to Japan — new stream of thought.

However, Tôkoku was repelled by the self-indulgent attitude he encountered among popular rights activists, and a decision to raise money for an expedition to Korea by committing a series of thefts so shocked him that he broke with the movement. Henceforth, he said, he would try, as Victor Hugo did in Europe, to influence political activities with his pen. He made this declaration in a letter dated August 18 1887 to Ishizaka Mina (*Kitamura Tôkoku Senshû*, p. 341¹²), who was later to become his wife.

Mina was a devout Presbyterian, and her Christian faith, combined with his growing love for her, profoundly influenced him. He writes: "I fell into the deepest love with Mina — the more I met her and exchanged words with her, the more I fell in love"; and again: "I was a person of no religious belief until August 21, 1887," referring to the awakening of faith that occurred soon after his affection for Mina had developed into full romantic ardour (*Kitamura Tôkoku Senshû*, pp. 342-3); and it is surely significant that in these passages he borrows the English word *love*, as if feeling that the corresponding native Japanese word could not express the nature of his feelings. It was the combined experience of the arousal of love and the awakening of religious feeling that produced his famous phrase: Love is the secret key to life.

The Pessimist Poet and Womanhood drew growing numbers of young students of literature to gather round Tôkoku. The Bungakkai group, in which he played a central role, became the initiator of the Japanese Romantic literary movement. Tôson too was a member of that group. Keene writes: "the movement represented an essential stage in the development of a specifically modern literature" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 187).

Beginning in the late 1880's, the Japanese Romantic literary movement sought to liberate human nature and to oppose the quasi-feudalistic order of the day. If Romanticism is defined in terms of the emphasis given to emotion, almost

¹² Page reference is to the Selected Works of Kitamura published by Iwanami Bunko, 1994, listed in the Bibliography under Kitamura.

every work of traditional Japanese literature such as Chikamatsu's works might be called Romantic. We can say that Japanese modern Romantic literature developed as a result of the influence of European literature, and that it differs from that of the pre-modern period in emphasizing not only human emotion but also the importance of the individual and of freedom. The Japanese Romantics found roots in their own past, but in fact were more deeply influenced by European culture, notably by Christianity. (Noyama 1995, p.15)

Hoshino Tenchi (1862-1950), who was the editor of the magazine *Bungakkai*, described his encounter with Christianity as follows: "I would yearn for the nobility of Christ and was deeply impressed by Christian doctrines that advocated love of one's neighbour. I was awakened to true humanitarian life; it was as if my awareness had been raised to new heights that enabled me to survey the conventions that circumscribe our life, and to see the need for a reform of both our society and our conception of the family" (Hoshino 1938, pp. 144-5).

There is no doubt that Tōkoku's and Tōson's works could not have been created if they had not converted to Christianity. (Okeya 1994, p. 18). In fact, the strongest bonds between the young aspiring writers of the *Bungakkai* group were to be found in Christian idealism, love of English Romantic poetry such as that of Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth, and, of course, their relationship with Tōkoku. Keene writes: "It is hard to be sure how deeply Christianity influenced Tōkoku's life and work, but it was through Christianity that he became a Romantic in a sense foreign to the romantics of the Japanese past" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 192).

Japanese translations of the Bible and of hymns exerted considerable influence over Tōson's works, particularly on his view of nature. Tōson's view of nature was different from the traditional Japanese view. In ancient Japanese poetry, nature had been an important stimulus to the imagination of poets. In the Tokugawa period, however, as the influence of Waka poetry dwindled, flowers, birds, and nature in general, had come to be treated as a decorative backdrop. But Tōson found in nature a source of imagery for the expression of emotion. This modern view of nature, which became for Tōson the conceptual basis of a new poetic creativity, was derived from the influence of Christianity as well as that of Rousseau's idea of a "Return to nature".¹³

¹³ The Gospels contain numerous parables drawn from nature - for example the parable of the lilies.

Thus the works of Tōkoku, Christianity, and acceptance of modern Western thought, combined to exert a profound influence on the formation of Tōson's ideas and contributed to the creation of *Wakana Shū*, the publication of which created a sensation.

Another factor contributing to the success of *Wakana Shū* was its simplicity and plainness of expression. As if drawing inspiration from the simple language of the parables, Tōson valued the language used in everyday life and sought above all to make the language of his poetry clear and simple.

While young writers all around him were striving to write "new" poetry, it seems that Tōson followed the example of Matsuo Bashō (1644-1696), of whom he was an ardent admirer.

Tōson wrote in *Iikura-dayori*: "I was not satisfied with just enjoying reading Bashō's poems. I decided to search for the thing Bashō sought after" (TZ 9, *Bungaku ni Kokorozashita Koro*, p. 91). He also wrote in *Nihon Kindai Bungaku no Hatten ni tsuite* (*About the Development of Modern Japanese Literature*): "Bashō was not only a poet who put his heart and soul into wandering and was well versed in the particulars of everyday life; he was also a creator who used the unsophisticated language of the common people to create a new poetic genre" (TZ 13, p. 417). Tōson tried to do in the realm of poetry what Bashō had tried to do in the realm of the Haiku.

Searching by trial and error for a new way of writing poetry, Tōson was troubled by differences of both form and sentiment between Western and traditional Japanese poetry. Doubts filled him when he tried to write. He wondered if some immutable rules of word usage were involved in the process whereby, despite the existence of *Chōka* (long poems) in the *Manyōshū*¹⁴, the only traditional verse-forms were short (for example the 31-syllable Tanka and the 17-syllable Haiku). Would he be able to write new poetry that was truly Japanese in language and style? Even if he could, would it be received by the public, would it find readers among the people? (TZ 13, *Ichii ni arite, Wakana-shū Jidai*, p. 109).

¹⁴ The *Man'yōshū* ("Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves") is the earliest extant collection of Japanese poetry. The earliest poems in the collection are a set of four ascribed to the Empress Iwanohime, who lived in the fourth century; the latest are dated New Year's Day of the Japanese year corresponding to AD 759.

After much experimenting, Tōson settled on the traditional Japanese seven-five syllable metre as the basis for his poems. “Though critics insist that a new poetic style is needed to express new ideas,” he was to write, “for writing poems in Japanese the most suitable style is seven-five syllables and five-seven syllables.” (TZ 16, *Inbun ni tsuite* (*About verse*), p. 347)

The critic Itō Sei considers that the most important feature of Tōson’s literature is its style: “His style was to use mainly the seven-five and the five-seven syllable metres (...) Probably the reason why he adhered to the traditional style of poetry was that he was living in the social framework of the Meiji era. It may be that the metre of seven and five syllables was suitable for the structure of the traditional Japanese language system and that that was still the case for the people in the Meiji era” (Itō 1993, pp. 11 - 12).

Readers in those days were delighted by the way in which his works fused the original Japanese language of the old social order together with simple words that showed human feelings.

Tōson’s work gained a wide audience because he “wrote poems that were like personal confessions even while conforming to the style of the old order” (Itō 1993, p. 13). His poems grew out of an attempt to blend Western ideas with Japanese feeling, and to express the result in the language of everyday life. He wrote: “For me, to create new poetry involved using words in a new way, to awaken sleeping words to new life” (TZ 1, *Sōshun* (*Early Spring*), p. 404). The result was the birth both of *Wakana Shū* and of Tōson the poet.

The significance of what Tōson was doing with language may not be immediately apparent to the modern English-speaking reader, who is accustomed to there being little more than superficial differences between literary English and the language used by ordinary people in everyday life. In the Japan of the 1890s, literary Japanese (*bungotai*) was, not only in vocabulary but also in syntax, in the preservation of old inflected forms, and in numerous other respects, very markedly different from ordinary spoken Japanese (*kōgotai*). It also tended towards quite indirect expression. Tōson’s use of everyday language has to be seen, in this context, as something which to his contemporaries would have been a radical and exciting innovation. In terms of the traditional literature of the period, Tōson was, literally, using new language.

At that time Tôson was 25 years of age. During the next five years three more anthologies were to follow, and the year 1904 would see the publication of his Collected Poems, *Tôson Shishû* (a collection of the four previous anthologies). But it was *Wakana Shû* that was to be his poetic masterpiece. It is significant not only in the context of Tôson's poetry but also in that of the history of modern Japanese poetry. As Tôson was to declare in his introduction to *Tôson Shishû* :

At last the time for a new poetry has come.
A beautiful new dawn is upon us.

— to which he added: "It has been written that 'Poetry is emotion recollected in tranquillity'. This is true of my poetry, which is a confession of conflict" (TZ 1, p. 525). This passage accurately expresses the essence of Tôson's poems and offers an important insight into the mental process of writing a poem.

In order to understand the significance of this passage more fully, we need to trace Tôson's life back four years before the publication of *Wakana Shû*. So far, I have discussed the characteristics of *Wakana Shû* in terms of the impact of Western thought (including Christianity), Tôson's relationship with Tôkoku, and the influence of traditional literary style. In the following paragraphs I will analyse the characteristics of *Wakana Shû* in terms of his personal background.

Of the fifty-one poems in *Wakana Shû*, forty-eight were written in Sendai and appeared in the journal *Bungakkai* from September 1896 to March 1897. Thus, we can say that *Wakana Shû* was created in Sendai, a city in the Tôhoku region of north-western Honshû.

It was in September 1896, one year before the publication of *Wakana Shû*, that Tôson left Tôkyô for Sendai to teach at the Tôhoku Gakuin. The preceding years had been a dark period in the life of the young writer-to-be, as can be seen in Tôson's autobiographical novels, *Haru* (Spring, 1908) and *Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Toki* (When the Cherries Ripen, 1919), which deal with the period preceding the author's departure for Sendai.

One year after graduating from Meiji Gakuin, he was offered a post as English teacher at its sister institution, Meiji Jogakkô (Meiji Girls' School). There

he soon fell deeply in love with one of his students, Satô Sukeko (1871-95). A year older than he, she was already betrothed — and this, combined with Tôson's poverty, doomed his love to unfulfillment. In less than five months the situation became emotionally intolerable for him, and he resigned. He sought peace of mind by spending nine months travelling to various parts of the country (travel was a traditional means of solace for many Japanese poets, such as Saigyô (1118-1190) and Bashô).

He returned from his travels in 1893, aged twenty-two, to a succession of griefs and misfortunes. In May 1894, Tôkoku committed suicide. In August 1895, Satô Sukeko, who had married, died during pregnancy. In September 1895, the house of his main family at Magome in Nagano Prefecture burnt down in an accident. Already heartbroken at the death of Sukeko, in addition Tôson now had to shoulder all the responsibilities of the family. His life was becoming more and more wretched.

Such were the circumstances in which Tôson departed, alone, for Sendai, thinking: "I do want to live — even I." (TZ 3, *Haru*, Chapter 132, p. 245). Later, in *Sôshun* (*Early Spring*), Tôson recalled his state of mind at that time:

"What a meaningless youth lay behind me at the time when I wrote *Wakana Shû*. At length I felt that I could stay in this old provincial capital, and that here I could escape from everything... A phrase would often occur to me: 'Poetry is emotion recollected in tranquillity'. My taciturn lips were gradually loosened. And then the poems began to flow out from within me."

(TZ.1, *Sendai Zatsushi*, p. 356)

Sendai became a "place of tranquillity" for Tôson when he arrived there after losing Tôkoku his beloved mentor, leaving family and friends behind him. The unfamiliar northern landscape gave the solitary poet quiet solitude and a limitless feeling of freedom, and the poems that began to flow had great lyrical beauty. One critic wrote of Tôson's lyricism of that period as follows: "It is surprising that *Wakana Shû* was created immediately after suffering such as Tôson described in *Haru*" (Doi 1936, p. 23).

The following passage in Chapter 131 of *Haru* is a scene from the night before Sutekichi, Tôson's fictional other self in the novel, leaves for Sendai:

"He packed up his things. All kinds of memories, both joyful and sad ones mixed together, passed through his mind. That night he felt a loneliness of a kind unimaginable except after a long period of anguish and tribulation."

But it is clear that Tôson's sufferings did not stifle his creative spark. In the Introduction to *Tôson Shishû* he writes:

"Grief and pain remain in my poems. I believe one should say what one's heart feels. Without hesitation. Even I have been saved, body and soul, by my own modest literary efforts.

"Who can rest complacent with the way they have lived? To strive to open the doors to new possibilities — this is the task, the duty of the young. Life manifests itself in energy; energy expresses itself in the speaking voice; the voice utters words. New words mean new life. I too have had times of loneliness and gloom; but I have continued in hope for life to start afresh."

(TZ 1, p. 526)

It was in Sendai that Tôson found, in "modest literary efforts", the salvation of body and soul of which he was to write in the words quoted above (an almost identical expression is also to be found in *Sôshun*, p. 453). It was in the "tranquillity" of Sendai, that he sought to express himself in "new words" and to discover "new life." There he was able to take a step back from the turmoil of reality and, "without hesitation", to express his emotional conflict in the poems that became *Wakana Shû*. He was to recall his time in Sendai as follows:

"After I arrived in Sendai I felt as dawn were beginning to break after a long night in my life. In fact I think of the year I lived in Sendai as a happy time. I felt that at last I had reached somewhere peaceful, where in tranquillity I could recall and reflect on all the dramatic emotional turmoil that I had lived through up till then. It was a journey in which I could leave behind all the things that had troubled my heart, detach myself

also from the influence of my forebears and seniors, and sift
through what it was that my youthful life so far amounted to.

(TZ 13, *Wakana Shû Jidai*, p. 112)

We see Tôson writing of his year in Sendai as a journey; and from olden times in Japan travelling has signified escape and freedom from everyday life and its tedium. It was that feeling of freedom that gave Tôson a sense of dawn arriving in his own life. The poems of *Wakana Shû* express, as it were, a young man's reflections on his youth as a transition from bitter winter to springtime; in this sense, they represent a "springtime of life" (Miyoshi 1994, pp. 353-4).

If we consider *Wakana Shû* as poetic autobiography, we may also see this aspect of the anthology symbolized in the poem *Kusamakura* (*Pillow of Grass*). The critic Kamei Katsuichirô points out in *Shimazaki Tôson Ron* (*A Treatise on Shimazaki Tôson*), "The very point of genesis of *Wakana Shû* was expressed in this poem." (Kamei 1954, p. 44). The title itself in fact signifies travel, expressing Tôson's view of himself as a traveller. Here is an extract:

I love the pathless wildernes—
is it because I have not yet found my way within me?
I wandered about with troubled mind
and came to the Miyagi plain at Sendai.

O Miyagi plain, home of my heart.
To me, perplexed and passionate,
dear was that wild plain
with its withered grass and faint sunshine.

To my solitary ears
the north wind sounded like a lyre;
to my sad eyes
colourless stones seemed like flowers

Ah! whom shall I tell of the sights of
so lonesome a plain on a winter's day,
whom but those who have tasted and known
the sadness of a companionless life?

(Konishi 1948, p. 426)

Kusamakura is a poem of 30 stanzas (120 lines). This short extract alone shows an honest self-portrait (Kamei 1954, p. 46) of Tôson the young poet, who left family and friends behind him and set off on his journey. After arriving in Sendai, “everything I saw was fresh. New nature, new sun and new youth” (TZ 1, *Sôshun*, p. 366). Although Rousseau with his cry of “Return to nature” influenced Tôson, amid the tranquillity of Sendai he did not only find meaning in mountains, rivers and natural beauty; in nature he also came to see the essence and principles of life. When he writes of “the northern wind” as the sound of “a lyre”, and of “the colorless stones” as “flowers”, these are not hallucinations but newly-minted images that spring from the heightened sensitivity of a poet discovering nature afresh. He confessed in *Sôshun* that “every small experience I had in Sendai produced a poem” (TZ 1, p. 366). *Kusamakura* concludes with this stanza:

On a rocky beach a boulder lies;
Climbing atop it, seawards I scan.
I feel spring-heralding clouds in the east,
The distant hiss of tide at dawn.

The poet hears the sound of the tide as a signal of the coming of spring, and the scene depicted in this stanza expresses his inner state of mind.

The next poem, *Shio no Ne* (*The Sound of the Tide*), expresses this vision more clearly:

There, on the bosom of the flowing tide,
A lyre is drifting; its deep melody
Summons a confluence of a myriad waves.
The time is ripe; now, gently from afar
The voice of the spring tide comes whispering.

The refreshing sound of the tide on a spring dawn was one that the poet himself often heard in reality:

“In the Nayori-chô in Sendai there was an inn called Miuraya

that took in boarders. For a year I found refuge in a quiet room at the back on the second floor. Most of *Wakana Shû* was written during that time in that upstairs room. I remember how I often used to get up early - vying with the stonemason in his shop next door to the inn - and seated myself at my desk. I could often hear the distant sound of the sea reaching my room from Arahama. Many of the poems in *Wakana Shû* that express feelings of being on a journey were written with that sound of the sea in my ears."

(TZ 13, p. 112)

In a similar vein, we find in *Sôshun*: "Before going to the Tôhoku I had never heard such a sound (...) I wrote these verses (i.e. *Wakana Shû*) beneath the window of my upstairs room in the Miura-ya" (TZ 1, p. 396)—a passage that shows us both the solitary author and his fresh discovery of nature in "the sound of the tide".

Later, in *Sôshun*, he wrote: "I envy people born near the sea. If I had my wish I would be reborn next to the deep-blue sea and hear the sound of the tide right from the time I was at my mother's breast."

Born in a forest area of Nagano Prefecture called Kiso, he had since boyhood had a strong yearning for the sea. It was not that he had had no experience of the sea in his youth; but when he arrived in the Tôhoku region the sight of sandy beaches stretching as far as the eye could see greatly moved him as he gazed on the ocean for the first time. From this encounter between his longing for the sea and the sea itself, beautiful lyric poetry was born. Just like the north wind, the sea too became a lyre, and the sound of the tide its music. As time passed, Tôson came to perceive the sound of the tide as cheerful and spring-like.

In both *Kusamakura* and *Shio no Ne*, the poet who is observing nature, and nature itself, become two halves of a single entity, and the poems express both the real spring of nature and the metaphorical spring of the poet's spiritual rebirth.

It was at Sendai that such discoveries of nature bore literary fruit; but even before then Tôson had already acquired a Christian view of nature and had developed a literary view of it through the Bible. Entering the Meiji Gakuin (a mission school) in 1887, Tôson received baptism the following year. This was

probably more of a token gesture than a sign of his having positively embraced the Christian faith; however, the fact remains that it was through Christianity that he came into contact with Western culture. As an important testimony to the direct influence of Christianity on Tôson, the critic Kamei Katsuichirô recalls the following from a conversation with the writer :

“I acquired a copy of the English translation of Renan's *Life of Christ*, and would often read it together with Ueda Bin and others. It is a book that had a great influence on me in my youth. Of course, people of strict Christian views say it is heretical, but I used to love reading it because of Renan's beautiful portrayal of Christ as a human being.”

(Kamei 1954, p. 310)

Renan (1823-92) wrote in his *History of the Origin of Christianity*: “His preaching was gentle and pleasing, breathing Nature and the perfume of the fields. He loved the flowers, and took from them his most charming lessons” (Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, Modern Library Edition p. 186), giving an poetic portrayal of the relationship between Christ and nature. (In writing this passage, Renan may have had in mind particularly the parable of the lilies: “Think of the lilies: they neither spin nor weave; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendour was not attired like one of them. If that is how God clothes the grass, which is growing in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown on the stove, how much more will he clothe you! How little faith you have!”¹⁵)

Renan's portrayal of Jesus in the image of a nature poet, and his minute description of the natural features of the Galilee area, together with the Bible itself, enabled Tôson to develop a new way of contemplating nature, in which nature was not merely an object to be looked at but was a medium through which to reach an understanding of the nature of human existence and of how human beings should truly live.

As well as the Bible, a hymn that Tôson sang many times in church had a great influence on him. (Itô 1969, pp. 129-130). His poem *Nigemizu* (*Mirage*), which was included in *Wakana Shû*, is a remarkable instance of Tôson's borrowing

¹⁵ Luke ch.12, vv 27, 28 (The Revised English Bible, 1989)

from a Japanese Christian hymn. Here, in translation, are two verses from *Nigemizu*:

When the sun sets, in the stillness
I shall dream,
And forget for a while
The cares of this world.

There, in the shade of the flowers,
Where none but you
Will know, I shall weep for love.

(TZ.1, p.60)

And here, again in translation, are the first two verses of the hymn, published by Uemura Masahisa (1857-1925) in 1888:

When the sun sets, in the stillness
I shall pray,
And forget for a while
The cares of this world.

With head bowed, in the shade of a tree
Where none but God
Will hear me,
I shall repent my sins.

(*Shinsen Sanbika*)

A comparison shows immediately that the poem is an adaptation of the hymn (Kamei 1954, pp. 30-33). But it was only Tôson who could write this poem, because Tôson alone among his Japanese literary contemporaries had acquired through the Bible a view of nature which could concisely express deep truths concerning the meaning of life through nature and in simple and fresh language such as is found in the hymn.

The idea of respect for nature and human nature led to the celebration of love, because it was love between men and women that constituted the origin and essence of human nature itself. This idea reflects the influence of Tôkoku's "Love is the secret key to life." Tôson expressed men's and women's feelings of love in poetry that was free from a traditional view of morality. *Hatsukoi* (*First Love*) is a

poem representative of this approach (TZ 1, p. 54).

When I saw you, your hair newly put up,
Under the bough of an apple tree,
I formed a picture of you as a girl in flowers,
Wearing a flower-comb above your forehead

When you reached out a soft white hand,
And gave me an apple—a fruit of autumn
Tinged with rose—then I knew
I was deep in love, my first love.

When the sigh I failed to hide
Lightly stirred your hair,
From the cup of love you gently offered
I sipped my fill.

Under the bough of the apple tree
A lane had grown before we knew.
You ask, who was the first to tread it?—
A simple question that shakes my heart.

(Ninomiya 1957, pp. 16-17)

It is said that the imagined addressee in this poem was modeled on his childhood friend who lived in the house next door at his birthplace Kiso Magome (Kikuchi 1977, p. 30). It is Ofumi-san who was described as a young daughter of the family next door in his work *Osanaki-hi (In Childhood)*, in which we find the following passage: “To put it bluntly, I first felt childlike passion for a girl. I had hugged Ofumi-san tightly” (TZ 5, p. 389). Such memories of Tōson’s childhood are the motif of this poem. It goes without saying that in addition his love for Satō Sukeko is overlaid on it, so that the poem can be said to grow from a fusion of conflicting elements: the happy memory of his childhood love on the one hand, and his unhappy experience of unrequited love for Sukeko on the other.

The “flower-comb” of the first stanza was a special product of his birthplace, Kiso, and symbolized women in the Meiji period. “An apple” stands for Western love and is a symbol of love and wisdom. “An apple” is repeated three times in this poem; however, we should note in particular its appearance in the

second stanza, where “and gave me an apple” signifies a proposal. The giving of an apple signifies the giving of love (we may also see here an allusion to the story of Adam and Eve, reflecting a literary influence of Christianity, or at least of Christian scripture). Moreover, the giving of the apple by the woman to the man (reversing the convention whereby, certainly at the time the poem was written, proposals (or propositions) were made by men to women), shows us a woman awakened to love and taking the initiative in expressing her emotions.

In the third stanza the poetic mood changes, suggesting a more mature, rather than a first, love. “When the sigh I failed to hide/lightly stirred your hair” hints at the man’s anguish of wondering whether or not his love will be returned (or possibly Tōson’s own suffering on account of his unrequited love for Satō Sukeko). In the next line, after much painful hesitation, he confesses his love, and the woman accepts it; and the stanza concludes with the joy of fulfilled love (“From the cup of love you gently offered. I sipped my fill.”)

In the fourth stanza, the poet’s recollections go back again to his childhood. The lines “Under the bough of the apple tree/ A lane had grown before we knew. You ask, who was the first to tread it?” derive from an incident which Tōson in *Osanaki-hi* recalls thus: “Without realizing it, I began to search for a place where I could meet alone with the daughter of the family next door. We walked beneath the boughs of the apple trees that stood between mulberry fields” (TZ 5, p. 388). The recollected love of the poet’s childhood, and the present love for the woman of the poem (perhaps Satō Sukeko), are thus intimately blended together to form a new, pure strain of lyric confession (Itō 1987, pp. 143-4).

The mood of the whole poem is coloured, in the original, by repetition of the expression *someshi* (“for the first time”), conveying the innocence of first love. In *Osanaki-hi* Tōson recalled those days as follows: “I was a young boy in love for the first time, with a girl only eight years of age” (TZ 5, p. 401). In *Hatsukoi* that memory is not merely recreated but is transformed into the rich poetic expression of an emotional experience common to young people of all eras: the delicate, tremulous, bashful attraction felt by a young boy towards a young girl.

Wakana Shū opens with a section entitled *Six Virgins*. Each of the six poems in this section bears the name of a woman as its title, and is to be understood as being spoken by her. The words Tōson gives each of these women to speak are unbridled declarations of love and expressions of youthful passion. One of the six

poems bears the name *Okume*.

I ran away from home for love of you.
 Standing on this bank of the river,
 Wanting to cross to the other bank ,
 I saw singing plovers at dusk.

Love made me desert my parents.
 The fire of passion keeps on burning in my heart.
 Oh, river breeze blowing on the hair at the temples,
 Please at least have pity on me in my state.

The river's waves are dark and the current rapid
 Rushing water breaks on the rocks.
 But those waters would dry up
 In the everlasting flames of my love for you.

However high the river is
 Because of yesterday's ceaseless rain,
 It cannot match the torrents of tears
 That nightly flow from my eyes.

Please understand my love;
 It is not like a painting of birds and flowers.
 It is as an impression in a mirror,
 A letter written on sand, the whispering of the wind in the trees.

Please understand my love.
 I want to touch your manly hand and then,
 Ah, I could not refrain from imprinting
 This lipstick of mine on your mouth.

If love is my shrine,
 And you are the god of that shrine,
 Then, would I not offer my life
 On your altar?

Ah, river! Let your waves break as high as they will!
 While I have life, I will swim defying them,
 Driven by the passion that fills me
 For my one divine beloved.

My heart, that vessel brimful of love,
 My limbs, my whole body, all are afire.
 My passions swirl this way and that,
 Like the thousand strands of my waving hair

(TZ 1, pp. 9-11)

Virtually every word of this poem is a declaration of passionate love — a love that is literally ardent (“burning”— l. 6). The woman Okume insists that her love is not a fanciful exaggeration or a simple infatuation (7th stanza). It is a love that drives her to cast aside strong conventional bonds (“Love made me desert my parents” — l. 5), and her expression of it is very directly physical (“Ah, I could not refrain from imprinting / This lipstick of mine on your mouth.” — 6th stanza).

Significantly, among the words Tôson gives Okume to say are these: “my love is not like a painting of birds and flowers”. This directly parallels Tôson’s view of nature (discussed above) as “not merely an object to be looked at”, and illustrates his linking of respect for nature with the celebration of love.

The direct and powerful emotional expressiveness seen here contrasts strongly with the quiet mood of *Hatsukoi*. Itô Shinkichi quotes the lines “If love is my shrine / And you are the god of that shrine...”, and concludes: “These lines state an absolute consciousness of love. It expresses a new conception of life and morality. *Okume* was an important poem in presenting the new morality of a new era through passionate love” (Itô 1985, P.21). The “new morality of a new era” identified by Itô opposed traditional doctrine and morality in advocating reverence for human nature.

The modern spirit of Tôson’s love poems, proclaiming a Romantic liberation of individual feeling, challenged the traditional morality inherited from the Tokugawa feudal period, with powerful and open declarations of love such as had been quite unimaginable in Japanese society until that time. By expressing love, the most intense of all human feelings, Tôson sought to give concrete expression to the liberation of human nature, in opposition to traditional customs and values. The

spirit of *Wakana Shû* was representative of the emotional climate that prevailed among the rising generation of those days. Itô Shinkichi had the following to say: "The poems of *Wakana Shû* such as *Hatsukoi* and *Okume* were in tune with the spirit of their time — a spirit of escape from traditional morality" (Itô 1985, p. 166). He thus highlights the significance of *Wakana Shû* as the genesis-point for modern Japanese poetry.

The move to Sendai, enabling Tôson to find refuge from a distressing life situation, gave him an environment in which suppressed elements in his personality could burst into flower, resulting in *Wakana Shû*. In that sense it can be said that those poems might never have come into being had he not made that journey.

An examination of the poems in *Wakana Shû* reveals three principal influences involved in their creation: firstly, the influence of Tôkoku; secondly, that of Christianity; thirdly, that of Western literature and thought.

With regard to the influence of Tôkoku: Tôson himself recalls in *Kinô-ototoi* (*Yesterday and the Day Before*): "It was Kitamura Tôkoku who showed me the world of new poetry. Looking back now, I think that it was because I met him in my young days that his influence came to me again and again. Whoever reads Tôkoku's works cannot fail to be struck by the active spirit of Tôkoku's poetry through the many fragments he left to us" (TZ 9, p. 86). Tôson's friendship with Tôkoku was cut short after two years by the latter's suicide in May 1894. However, his affection and respect for this friend grew with the years, and he continued to discover new meaning in Tôkoku's brief leadership as the guiding light for the young Meiji writers. Tôkoku's spirit was inherited by Tôson. In *Haru*, Tôson portrayed in the character Kishimoto his own determination as a young writer:

"Kishimoto thought he wanted to take his own way. There are many untouched domains in front of us (. . .) wide-ranging domains (. . .) Aoki had made an attempt to open up a part of them, but he had died leaving only unfinished works. Kishimoto was encouraged by Aoki's ideas and wished to build on the foundations laid by Aoki and steadily continue his work" (TZ 3, Chapter 112, p. 208).

As the fictional Kishimoto took on the rôle of heir to the fictional Aoki, so did the live poet Tôson seek to be the heir of his revered friend and mentor Tôkoku. If Tôkoku can be said to have represented the ideal essence of modern literature at the dawn of the Meiji period, then it may be said that Tôson displayed the mature

realization of that ideal.

Turning to the influence of Christianity, it has already been noted that Tôson's first encounter with Christianity was at the age of fifteen, when in September 1887 he entered Meiji Gakuin, a Christian institution where English was taught. The school had an atmosphere of emancipation recalled by Tôson in *Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Toki*: "It seemed that at Meiji Gakuin there was nothing I could not do if I wished to do it" (TZ 5, Chapter 1, p. 431).

A significant effect of the impact of Christianity (particularly Protestantism) in the Meiji period was that it fostered a spirit of introspection and individualism and of freedom, as well as an emphasis on taking a rational view of the world. It was, so to speak, a religion that offered a philosophy of life, and this contributed significantly to the passionate Romanticism espoused and developed by the writers of the Bungakkai group. Ultimately, however, Tôson's approach to Christianity was without any deep religious commitment, and the most salient illustration of the influence of Christianity in *Wakana Shû* is the influence of hymns, in particular the hymn *Nigemizu*.

Turning to the third factor, the influence of western literature and thought: firstly, Tôson's aim in entering the Meiji Gakuin had been to intensify his study of English. He read western literature in the original. In *Shinkatamachi-yori* he writes: "I would often go to the school library and immerse myself in a collection of biographies of Western poets and writers. In those days, I would often read and talk about Byron, Shakespeare and Goethe" (TZ 6, *Meiji Gakuin no Gakusô*, p. 87). Later he was especially influenced by Rousseau's *Confessions*. He stated in *Rousseau no Zange no Naka ni Miidashitaru Jiko* (*My Self Discovered in Rousseau's Confessions*): "When I was twenty three years old, I first read Rousseau's work" (TZ 6, p. 9). (This would have been in 1894, two years before he left for Sendai.) As previously mentioned, Tôson wrote that the two books that had motivated him to study the spirit of the modern age had been Rousseau's *Confessions* and Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. Rousseau's work had a great literary influence on him, stimulating the self-confessional element in his writing. Its influence can also be seen in the celebration of youth, freedom, love and sensuality found in *Wakana Shû*.

Later, he wrote in *Shinkatamachi-yori*: "It was when I went to Sendai at the age of twenty-five, in 1896, that the book that should be called my maiden work

was published. I felt that my life gradually dawned in Sendai. In *Wakana Shû*, I tried to express in verse the feeling that at last, in Sendai, the dawn had arrived” (TZ 6, *Meiji Gakuin no Gakusô*, p. 88).

Thus, while Meiji Japan was moving towards the establishment of a new political order, Tôson also was groping towards a new literature. The appearance of *Wakana Shû* established him as a poet. As the writer Inoue Yasushi (1907-1991) has observed: “It goes saying that the dawn of Japanese modern poetry originated in *Wakana Shû*” (Inoue 1985, p. 424).

Chapter 2

Hakai (The Broken Commandment) — From Poet To Novelist—

In Chapter 1 I considered how, while Japanese society started to modernize under the influence of Western culture, Tôson, as if matching his steps to the new development of society, created literature of a new kind.

However, in March 1906, having hitherto published only poetry and non-fictional prose, Tôson published his first novel, *Hakai* (*The Broken Commandment*) and entered the vanguard of Naturalist writing (*Shizen-shugi-bungaku*) in Japan.

In this chapter I examine the manner and background of Tôson's evolution from poet to novelist, with particular reference to the novel *Hakai* and the essays *Chikumagawa no Suketchi* (*Chikuma River Sketches*).

After the first success of *Wakana Shû*, Tôson published *Hitoha Fune* (*A Boat Tossed like a Leaf*, 1898), which consisted mainly of prose sketches. He spent the summer of 1898 at his sister's house, in the Kiso valley, Nagano Prefecture, and finished writing the eighteen poems of *Natsukusa* (*Summer Grass*, 1898). In 1901 he moved to Komoro, a small town in Nagano, and published *Rakubai Shû* (*Fallen Plum Blossoms*, 1901).

Each time Tôson returned to the bosom of Nature he wrote many poems, just as *Wakana Shû* was created in Sendai; as noted in Chapter 1, for him, under the influence of Christianity and of Rousseau, nature had become a source of imagery for the expression of emotion. After Tôson became a novelist, this view of nature continued to form the conceptual basis of his subsequent works, in particular of his fiction.

In the following paragraphs I will discuss how Tôson developed this view of

nature after *Wakana Shû*, and follow the process through which he evolved as a novelist.

According to his memoirs, Tôson first became conscious of nature in his Meiji Gakuin days:

“From when I was 17 to when I was 20, I lived at the Meiji Gakuin, located in Shirogane Imazato-chô, where it was wooded and quiet. As Gotenyama, a hill near Meiji Gakuin, was open to the public at that time, I used to walk the valleys, hills and shady paths around there in my spare time. It was just then that nature struck me for the first time...

“One summer, when we had a summer school at Meiji Gakuin, the late Mr. Onishi gave a lecture. As a social gathering was held at Gotenyama after the lecture, I went there with my friend and saw the sunset from between the woods. I think it was at that time that the sunset as an object of aesthetic appreciation truly struck me.”

(TZ 6, *Meiji Gakuin no Gakusô* (*Life at Meiji Gakuin*), p. 86)

According to a chronological record of Tôson's life, this summer school was held in August 1890 (Itô 1976, p. 612). Tôson was so deeply affected at the sight of the beauty of the sunset that he was later to reproduce the scene in detail in a novel.

“Suddenly and unexpectedly, a beautiful scene opened his eyes. The beauty of the sunset struck him for the first time. The colour of the sky was already changing. Sutekichi ran to his friend, Suga, wishing to share his surprise with him. As the two boys stood on the right of the hill, the sky changed colour again. The heavens were a sea of scarlet flame. A vast world, of which he was unaware until that day, flashed before him. As he turned back to the dormitory along the lonely path, Sutekichi's heart was filled with

indescribable joy.”

(TZ5, *Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Toki (When the Cherries Ripen)*,
Chapter 3, p. 464)

In this novel, the character of “his friend, Suga” represents Togawa Shūkotsu, who was a scholar of English literature and a member of the Bungakkai group. This description is very important as a record of Tôson’s experience of first becoming aware of the beauty of nature. He wrote about this experience: “I had never been aware of nature as an object of aesthetic appreciation before. I was inspired by nature as, for the first time, the magnificence and beauty of sunset struck my eyes” (TZ 6, *Waga Shôgai no Fuyu (The Winter of My Life)*, pp. 501-2). Itô Kazuo writes, “This was a valuable experience, marking a time not only of a radical change in Tôson’s view of nature, but also of the awakening of his self” (Itô, 1969, p.133).

Soon after moving to Sendai in 1896, Tôson received word of the death of his mother, and returned to his birthplace, Kiso valley, for the funeral service. It was his second return to his hometown since he had left for Tôkyô while still a child, and he wrote about it in the essay *Kisodani Nikki (Kiso valley Diary)*.

In this work, although it includes a description of his mother’s funeral service, which was the purpose of his homecoming, the chief theme is rather a description of nature as seen in the Kiso valley, through which Tôson travelled back to Tôkyô after the service. The natural surroundings of his birthplace, rather than the memory of his mother, were what most deeply impressed his mind; and the result is a minute natural description of Kiso and a detailed portrayal of the human feelings of the people in his home town. In short, this work is a travel note in the style of a diary. The descriptions of nature it contains suggest that Tôson was looking at nature from a new point of view.

“The beauty of the view of Kiso River is in the contrast between the blue of the waves, which look as if they have been dyed, and the great white rocks.”

(TZ 1, p. 162)

“Autumn was coming to an end, and the mountains of Kiso took on a desolate appearance. We went down into a gorge, climbed up a slope and crossed some hills along the river. When we looked down at the river from high up, we could see a

picturesque view; the beauty of autumn colours. The mountains formed ranks like waves of the ocean. To our right they were dyed yellow, and to our left in green, while those nearest to us were dyed red. Sunlight shone through clouds dyed deep purple.

“Before we arrived at Nojiri station, we saw the beautiful sunset reflected in Komagatake. The colour of this sunset was pure purple. (...) Komagatake alone was coloured like a bellflower because all the high mountains around Komagatake were dark. I was struck by the picturesqueness of the scene, with Komagatake shining in the clear light of a peaceful sky.”

(TZ1, pp. 162-4)

These descriptions of the Kiso River, the mountains of Kiso, and a beautiful sunset, were very detailed, unlike the descriptions in *Sakura no mi no Jukusuru Toki*. In particular, even the colours of the landscape — blue, white, yellow, green, red, purple and so on — were registered in detail. Tôson looked at the natural surroundings of his birthplace, found the beauty of colour and expressed it in words. This accorded with Rousseau's dictum, “See nature directly”, and a reflection of Tôson's awakening to nature as it really was. In the following year *Wakana Shû* was published.

Such was the process by which Tôson's view of nature developed up to the time when he became famous as a poet. Let us now consider how it developed further.

In 1897 Tôson returned to Tôkyô from Sendai; two years later he moved again, to Komoro in Nagano Prefecture, an obscure town in the foothills of Mount Asama. In April 1899 he accepted an invitation from his former teacher and minister, Kimura Kumaji, to teach English and Japanese at Komoro School, a small secondary institution founded and directed by Kimura. He returned to Tôkyô in the same month to marry Hata Fuyuko, the daughter of Hata Keiji, a wholesale merchant of fish nets in Hakodate, Hokkaidô. The marriage had been arranged by his friend Iwamoto. Tôson was then twenty-seven. The couple moved into their first house in Komoro, where they began an extremely frugal life together.

Tôson lived in Komoro for seven years until 1905. It was during this time

that he deserted poetry for the novel. Especially after his fourth collection of poems, *Rakubai Shû*, was published, he began to prepare for writing in prose, during a period he himself called “my three years of silence”.

Why did he turn from poetry to prose fiction?

Among the factors particularly to be noted in addressing this question are the many people he came to know, and the many Western books that he read, in the course of his seven years at Komoro.

“Tolstoy’s *Cossacks* and *Anna Karenina*, Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, and *Memoirs from the Dead House*, Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and Ibsen’s *John Gabriel Borkmann* became my favourites. (...) I spent seven years in the mountains. I will never forget receiving Osanai Kaoru, Arishima Ikuma, Aoki Shigeru, Tayama Katai, and Yanagita Kunio in the house in Babaura during those years.”

(TZ 5, pp. 589, 592; translation by William Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, pp. 123, 126)

Among other books, John Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* (originally published in 1906), Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* and Turgenev’s *A Sportsman’s Sketches*¹⁶ strongly influenced Tôson. Among the people who influenced him, the artist Miyake Katsumi (1874-1954) is an important figure.

In *Modern Painters* the English art critic Ruskin (1819—1900) discussed the fundamental principles of art from a scientific standpoint. Tôson’s first encounter with this work occurred during his time at the Meiji Jogakkô days (1892); that experience was later recreated in the form of autobiographical fiction as follows:

“Among the many different books which that senior colleague, following his particular taste, had collected [in his office at Meiji Jogakkô] there were some five Western books in old and worn paper covers. ‘I found Ruskin.’ Sutekichi said, as if he had found an unexpected book on the shelf. He imagined Mr.

¹⁶ In some English translations of this Turgenev work, the title is rendered as *A Hunter’s Sketches*.

Yoshimoto, so busy with his various administrative chores, still finding time to read books such as *Modern Painters*.¹⁷

(TZ5, *Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Toki*, Chapter 11, pp. 550-551)

Four years later, when Tôson moved to Sendai in 1896, he had translated Chapter Thirteen of Volume Three of *Modern Painters* into Japanese, and this translation appeared in the magazine *Tôhoku Bungaku* under the title *Ôshû Kodai no Sansui Ga wo Ronzu*. At the beginning of this essay, he wrote: "I came to this place after passing through Shirakawa. This translation of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* was one of various pieces that I wrote for one reason or other" (TZ16, p. 379). This statement clearly indicates at least that he had read Ruskin's works by the time he arrived in Sendai.

During his Komoro period, Ruskin's books came to be numbered among Tôson's favourite books. He carried them with him when travelling; he records, for example, that: "In April of last year when I left Tôkyô for Shinano, I packed the six volumes of *Modern Painters* into a wicker trunk" (TZ 1, *Kumo* (Clouds), p. 252).¹⁸

The essay *Kumo* is a study of the clouds in Komoro, which Tôson had set himself the daily task of observing and recording. It was written on the basis of what he had learned from Ruskin's observation of nature — in particular the fourth paragraph of the third chapter of Volume One of *Modern Painters*.

He wrote: "Having translated the fourth paragraph, *Concerning Clouds*, of Volume One, Chapter Three of *Modern Painters*, I thought that some time I would like to convey its minute mode of observation (...) After reading Ruskin's interpretation of clouds, I turned my attention to them for the first time" (TZ 1, *Kumo*, pp. 252-254).

In *Kumo*, he wrote his observations not only of clouds but also of other natural phenomena such as the change of seasons and the sunset scene referred to

¹⁷ As mentioned in Chapter 1, the character Sutekichi represents the author. The character Mr. Yoshimoto represents Iwamoto Yoshiharu, who was the administrator of the Meiji Jogakkô.

¹⁸ *Kumo* first appeared in August 1900 and was reprinted in *Rakubai Shû*, which was published in the following year.

previously (recalled from his Meiji Gakuin days), which also featured in *Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Toki*.

“Looking back, I recall that a sunset I had seen long ago, and which had remained imprinted in my memory, rose before my mind’s eye like a beautiful vision. It was a sunset that I had seen at Gotenyama in Takanawa.”

(TZ 1, p. 257)

Tôson continued to observe clouds for one year, at the end of which he wrote: “Ah, only after that one year did I reach the least understanding of the simple, subtle elegance of Ruskin’s words” (TZ 1, p. 264).

Many scholars (e.g. Senuma Shigeki, Itô Kazuo, and Cecilia Seigle) value *Kumo* as a record of experimental observations that shows us the fruit of Tôson’s investigative nature, and as a significant first study in his preparatory period when he was trying his hand at prose.

In his observation of nature, Ruskin was not the only significant influence. There was also Tôson’s painter-friend Miyake Katsumi, of whom he wrote: “The painter Miyake Katsumi and I moved to live in Komoro within a few months of each other. We found solace in visiting each other and talking about art. He had gone around Europe and visited famous art galleries and painstakingly searched out works by painters such as Millet and Corot. At the time I wrote this essay, I was significantly influenced by what he had to say” (TZ 1, p. 264).

Miyake also wrote about Tôson: “I was surprised to see that Mr. Shimazaki, although he was not a painter, wrote every day in a notebook his observations of the changes in the clouds, like someone keeping a diary” (Miyake 1976, pp. 370-371).

Tôson wrote in *Afterword to the “Chikuma River Sketches”*:

“It was just then that the watercolour artist Miyake Katsumi built his new house in Fukuromachi. He lived there for about a year, coming over in his spare time to teach in the Komoro Gijuku. His art developed greatly while he was in Komoro. At his suggestion I even acquired an easel which I would occasionally take out into the countryside in an effort to enrich my mind

through what nature had to teach me.”

(TZ5, p.587; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, pp. 121-122)

Here he is clearly writing about the time when he started to study clouds. It would seem that, following in Miyake's footsteps, he was seeking through sketching to see nature with an artist's eyes.

Thus, suggestions from Miyake, combined with an awakening to nature under the influence of Ruskin's positive methodology, led Tôson to radical innovation in his approach to observing nature. However, we should not forget that Darwin's thought also had a deep influence on Tôson's scientific spirit.

Reference has already been made in Chapter 1 to Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. As previously mentioned, Edward Sylvester Morse (1838-1925) was very effective in introducing evolutionary theory to Japan. His 1877 lectures on the theory of evolution at Tôkyô University¹⁹ were translated as *Dôbutsu Shinkaron* (*The Theory of Evolution of Animals*) by Ishikawa Chiyomatsu and published in 1883. After the theory of evolution was introduced to Japan, it aroused interest among people in many fields, and many books on the subject were published. 1896 saw the publication of a Japanese translation of *The Origin of Species: Seibutsu-shigen* (*Shugen Ron*) (*The Origin of Living Things*), by Tachibana Tetsusaburô. Other publications of the period included *Shinka Shin Ron* (*A New Theory of Evolution*, 1891) by Ishikawa Chiyomatsu; *Shinka Kôwa* (*Lectures on the Theory of Evolution*, 1904) and *Shinka to Jinse* (*Evolution and Life*, 1911) written Oka Asajirô.

Responses in Japan to the theory of evolution were not confined to the field of natural sciences but also spread into the realm of the humanities. Thus, for example, philosopher and Tôkyô University president Katô Hiroyuki (1836-1916), was prompted to change his standpoint of natural human rights to an emphasis on the social Darwinism of the survival of the fittest in his work, *Jinken-Shinsetsu* (*New Theory of Human Rights*, 1882) (Hirota and others, 1975, p. 335). Darwinian ideas exerted a powerful impact in many fields of thought and revolutionized people's understanding of human nature and their view of human beings.

This was no less true of Tôson. He wrote: “On that mountain” (i.e. in Komoro) “I read Darwin before I read Balzac. I was deeply influenced by

¹⁹ See above, p. 9 (footnote).

Darwin's works." (TZ9, *Iikura dayori Kinô-ototoi*, p.88). More specifically he relates: "I was moved by the flourishing spirit of inquiry into the natural world in Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*" (TZ 5, p. 589; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 123).

As stated above, Tôson carefully prepared for his transition from poetry to the novel. The change was not an abrupt one. A chronological record of Tôson's career tells us: "In August 1900 *Kumo* was published, and then, after studying methods of observing nature, he determined to move in the direction of prose writing" (Itô 1976, p. 620).

In June 1900 Tôson stopped writing poetry. In April 1906, shortly after writing his first novel, he had this to say about the reasons for his transition:

"I write novels because they are the best medium for what I want to say. I would not say that I stopped writing poetry, but rather that I have reached this point as a result of carrying on writing. (...) I seriously try to write novels because the novel form expresses my thoughts the best."

(TZ6, *Ryokuin zatsuwa* (*Random Talk Beneath the Trees*), pp. 485-6)

The critic Miyoshi Yukio writes concerning the reasons for Tôson's transition as follows: "Tôson complained of the limitations of sound and of vocabulary inherent in Japanese poetic language, which must necessarily limit the variety of moods the poet may express" (Miyoshi 1990, p. 55). He quotes a passage from Tôson's essay *Gagen to Shiika* (*Diction and Poetry*), published in April 1899: "It is difficult to express remarkable beauty and grace in verse. We cannot express magnificent beauty in verse, let alone delicate shades of meaning, such as terror, abhorrence, grudge, jealousy and gloom" (TZ 1, p. 338).

In this essay, Tôson discusses the disadvantages of poetry from the viewpoint of expression. He points out that it is very difficult to express complex and sombre emotions in verse. He then observes: "There seem to be quite a few people in Japan today who have turned from poetry to prose; I suppose they found they could not express themselves satisfactorily in verse" (TZ 6, *Ryokuin zatsuwa*, p. 485).

Thus, Tôson declared "I loved poetry as one might love a lover; and just as

one might part from a lover, so I parted from poetry” (TZ 6, *Introduction to Sannin no Shojo*, p. 176).

The fact that *Gagen to Shiika*, in which he discussed the limits of poetry, was printed at the end of *Rakubai Shû* seems to herald this parting; *Rakubai Shû* was his last collection of poems before he turned from poetry to the novel. In *Afterword to the “Chikuma River Sketches”* he wrote:

“After I published my fourth volume of poetry I was beset by a determination to see things more correctly, a determination so intense that I dropped into silence for some three years. Then I found myself writing these sketches. Entering them into my notebook became a daily exercise.”

(TZ 5, p. 587; William Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p.121)

“These sketches” refers to the *Chikuma River Sketches*, which Tôson started to write after he published *Kumo* , but which was published much later, in 1912. This work marks the start of his full-scale study of the art of prose writing.

Tôson accepted Millet’s opinion that “If you want to remember well what you have seen, you have to practice seeing simply first” (TZ 6, *Shasei (Sketching)*, p.33), and came to the opinion that both art and literature have sketching as a point in common. He wrote “I pursued a method of sketching as ‘practice in seeing’ (*mono wo miru keiko*)... I profited tremendously from sketching. First, it helped me to observe things well; secondly, it helped me to remember things well. When I lived in Shinshû I used to write my cloud diary. Thus, thanks to practice in sketching, I think I was able to develop some degree of acquaintance with nature” (TZ 6, p. 34).

As previously noted, Tôson learned a new approach to nature through the observation of clouds. Out of respect for Millet’s ideas, he sketched things in detail again and again. “When I sketch the forest, I try to describe that power with which the glittering leaves and dark shadows can move and delight the human heart” (*ibid.*). *Chikuma River Sketches* was a result of these efforts.

In considering *Chikuma River Sketches* as a set of studies in the description of nature, scholars such as Itô Shinkichi and Itô Kazuo point out the influence of Darwin and Turgenev. In addition to Ruskin and Darwin, Turgenev figures importantly among the writers who influenced Tôson during his Komoro period.

The first work of Turgenev that Tôson read was Futabatei Shimei's translation of *The Trys t* (*Aibiki* in the Japanese version). Of this book Tôson wrote:

“When *Aibiki* appeared in the magazine *Kokumin no Tomo*, I was a student at the Meiji Gakuin. From that time on, the name of Mr Futabatei was engraved on my heart. And not on mine alone; it was the same with all my friends. When Yanagida Kunio was still a young man he would recite to me the passage from *Aibiki* that begins: ‘Oh! It is autumn!’. I learned that passage by heart. Kunikida Doppo writes in *Musashino* that he used to recite that translation of Turgenev.”

(TZ 6, p. 90)

Elsewhere too he recalls: “I cannot think of the works of Turgenev without remembering that time in my youth when we first became acquainted with that Russian novelist through English translations of his work. I remember the two volumes of *A Sportsman's Sketches* in their reddish-brown covers, and how we immersed ourselves in them. All my friends read him with great enthusiasm” (TZ 9, *Ruujin to Bakirofu*, p. 19).

From this can be seen what a profound impact *Aibiki* exerted on Tôson and other young men of his generation.

Tôson was deeply moved by Turgenev's descriptions of the Russian landscape, such as:

“I was sitting in a birchwood in autumn, about the middle of September. From early morning a fine rain had been falling, with intervals from time to time of warm sunshine; the weather was unsettled. (. . .) I sat looking about and listening. The leaves faintly rustled over my head; from the sound of them alone one could tell what time of year it was. (. . .) Wet with the rain, the copse in its inmost recesses was for ever changing as the sun shone or hid behind a cloud.”

(Turgenev, *A Sportsman's Sketches*, translated by Constance Garnett, Heinemann Edition of 1906, vol. 2, p. 92)²⁰.

²⁰ It seems likely to have been an earlier edition of the Garnett translation that Tôson read.

Although it was at Meiji Gakuin that he first encountered *Aibiki*, it was not until much later, in his Komoro period, that Turgenev's influence clearly manifested itself. In a letter to Tayama Katai dated 26 October 1901, he wrote:

"I would always wish to have *A Sportsman's Sketches* at my side, and to take it with me whenever I travel, to refresh me after the rigours of my journey (...) I feel a consoling quality in the natural landscape against which Turgenev's characters appear. Perhaps because of its profound artistry, when I read *A Sportsman's Sketches* I feel as if I am looking at a picture whose power to arouse sentiment has, contrarily, the effect of creating a vast feeling of loneliness."

(TZ 17, p. 60)

A Sportsman's Sketches was Tôson's favourite book. The beautiful descriptions of nature in this book had a considerable influence on his observation of nature as "practice in seeing". This influence, as well as the scientific spirit of Darwin, is apparent in *Chikuma River Sketches*.

Of this influence Itô Shinkichi writes: "As with *A Hunter's Sketches*, a particular feature of *Chikuma River Sketches* lies in the beauty of its nature-description. But the description is not only of natural scenery; together with nature itself we also see portrayed the lives of farming people. This was true in the case of *A Hunter's Sketches*; likewise in *Chikuma River Sketches* Tôson proceeds from nature-description to a portrayal of human life in all its depth and variety." (Itô 1985, p. 456)

As Itô points out, and as the title of the work suggests, *Chikuma River Sketches* is a collection of sketches in which Tôson describes the natural landscape and the lives of people in the Chikuma River basin. It comprises twelve chapters and seventy-five essays. Scenery, the natural environment and other local natural features, and the great effect they combine to exert on people's lives, are depicted in a manner founded on detailed observation and study.

One need only glance through the list of contents and the titles alone call to mind scenes in the mountain villages of Shinshû and the changes through which the

landscape passes with the passage of the seasons. For example: *The Pasture at the Foot of Mt. Eboshi*; *Early Summer in the Old Castle Grounds*; *September Rice Fields*; *Fallen Leaves*; *The Farmer's Life*; *Harvest*; *Christmas in the Snow Country*; *The Slaughterhouse*; *Along the Chikuma River*; *A Sea of Snow*; *Dwellers in the Mountains*; and *Spring in the Mountains*.

I would now like to consider selected samples taken from the sketches themselves, showing the result Tôson achieved through his detailed observations.

- “There is a panoramic view of the surrounding area from this vast, open hillside. We can even see the flowing waters of the Chikuma River at the bottom of the distant valley.”

(TZ 5, p. 10; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 9)

- “It has a dizzying speed even where the clear green water seems to flow as smoothly as oil. When you look upriver, you see the water breaking into white foam over the dark shapes of the rocks as it hurtles down toward you and flows on downstream, swift as an arrow, to fetch up against the red cliffs at Goribuchi with an awful force.”

(TZ 5, p. 42; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 33)

- “The first frost comes each year around the twentieth of October. I want to show this mountain frost to you, accustomed as you are to the groves and level fields of Musashino and to the light frosts of the city which can seem so pleasant. Just look at the leaves in this mulberry field after the frost has struck three or four times. The leaves are so shriveled and scorched that the very soil around them seems inflamed — an awful sight. It's the frost that really shows the fierce and terrifying power of winter. It seems much more gentle once the snow comes; deeply fallen snow brings a feeling of peace to the land.”

(TZ 5, p.73; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 54)

- “The kogarashi or ‘tree strippers’ — the chilling winds of early winter — have begun to blow.

"I am startled into wakefulness this mid-November morning by a sound like the pounding of surf. It is the wind hurtling through the skies, seeming to slacken from time to time, then suddenly starting up again. The doors and the shoji rattle, particularly those on the south side since they are also being pounded by fallen leaves. In the rare intervals of calm the flow of the Chikuma River seems louder than ever.

"Fallen leaves come flying into the room when I open the shoji. The sky is utterly clear except for a few white clouds but the willows along the creek in back seem to be waving their long hair in the fierce gale. Frost-blasted leaves blow back and forth across the mulberry field that has already been stripped bare."

(TZ 5, p. 74; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 55)

- "The evening bell sounds from the Kogakuji. Mt. Asama gradually grows dark and the lesser mountains that have been glowing in the sunset now take on a leaden hue. Only the white smoke rising from the very peak is visible in the deep purple sky. Suddenly the bell rings out again, seeming to make everything bright again for just as instant. A child passes beside me laden with wild green vegetables, and others — it's impossible to tell if they are men or women — hurry past me down the lane. A wild, unkempt-looking woman without a coat or undersash comes running past. Her outer sash appears to be completely undone.

"A single bright star appears in the south, then another, some distance away. The two stars are brilliant in the purple evening sky. The tips of the mountains glow yellow in the skies off to the west, then quickly change to a scorched brown as they reflect the last sunlight onto the countryside. The head cloths and bent hips of the three women still at work catch this light for a moment. Even the tip of the boy's nose glistens. Now the rice paddies are wrapped in gray and the countryside in a deeper gray, while the branches of the zelkova trees in the Hachiman

grove vanish into the darkening browns.”

(TZ 5, p. 84; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 63)

- “I leave the girls and strike out on my own. Lamplight is beginning to show here and there among the snowbanks. I look up toward the gray skies that are now touched with scarlet as though a distant conflagration were colouring the sky. It is sunset. Smokelike wisps of snow come blowing by — something you will see only in a place like this. It is quite gloomy here; it feels as though something has been pulled over your head.”
(TZ5, p.121; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 91)

Among the sketches, *Harvest* is most highly esteemed. Description of the growing dusk runs like a persistent thread through the fabric of Tôson's portrayal of the human characters and their lives amid the carefully sketched “panoramic view of the surrounding area”, “flowing waters of the Chikuma River”, “mountain frost”, “tree strippers”, “evening sky”, and “smokelike wisps of snow”.

Itô Shinkichi praised the detail rendered in the *Sketches* in these words: “The author endeavours to capture the mute testimony of even the slightest natural phenomena” (Itô 1983, p.389).

Tôson wrote in his preface to the *Sketches*: “Isn't there some way to make myself more fresh and pure — more simple?” (Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 3). It was in the spirit of those words that he had gone to Komoro in search of achieving a regeneration of himself both as a human being and as a writer. The means he found for achieving this lay in what he called “Practice in seeing”: the discipline of observing and sketching in detail the natural surroundings of the Chikuma River area and the people who lived there. For Tôson, this method of objective observation and portrayal was the path to a fresh understanding of nature and of himself.

It was in *Chikuma River Sketches* that Tôson sought to experience, on the basis of objective description, a new approach to viewing nature and a new conception of human beings (including himself).

William Naff wrote in his Translator's Introduction: “In these sketches from life in Komoro and the surrounding countryside, Tôson has provided vivid and

lasting impressions of the way in which the timeless and universal human questions manifested themselves at this stage of the history of this once-remote mountain town. At the same time, he has documented some of the assets and liabilities not only of Japanese rural life at the beginning of this century, but also of rural life anywhere at any time.” (Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. XXVII)

This evaluation pays tribute to Tôson’s approach to the creation of his sketches. He wrote in *Miru Koto to Kaku Koto (Observing and Writing)*: “There are not a few who have tried to regenerate themselves by observing things, and have opened up a new path for themselves” (TZ 6, p. 142). He himself achieved this by making carefully observed and objectively accurate word-pictures. The subjects he sketched were clouds and the natural landscape of the Chikuma River basin. He described what he was seeking to do in these words: “To describe a thing means to look at it attentively and recall it accurately from one’s memory” (ibid. p. 143).

In fact, he said, “thanks to practice in sketching, I think I was able to develop some degree of acquaintance with nature” (TZ 6, p. 34). He elaborated: “It was in my *Wakana Shû* period that nature presented itself to me as something to be experienced rather than merely looked at; but it was when I was twenty-eight and living in Komoro that nature had a great influence on me” (TZ 6, *Nanimono wo ka Waga Shôgai ni Ataeshi Tabi (A Journey That Gave Something to My Life)*, p. 533) In addition, he wrote “I came to write novels in Komoro. Life in the highlands, and the lives of farming people — these were among the many things that made me write novels” (ibid.).

Having reached this point after a long period of preparation, Tôson completed his transformation from poet to novelist. Sanekata Kiyoshi, a scholar of Japanese literature, pointed out “Contemplation of nature is the outstanding characteristic of Tôson’s literary art, and its roots lie in *Chikuma River Sketches* (Sanekata 1986, p. 179).

The description of nature in this work had a great influence on his fiction, from an early collection of short stories through to *The Broken Commandment*.

Needless to say, Tôson’s fame as a novelist mainly rests on *The Broken Commandment*. But he published some short stories before writing this masterpiece. After *The Broken Commandment* was published, he collected some of his short stories and published them in book form under the title *Ryokuyô Shû (Green Leaves*,

1907). In the preface to this collection he wrote:

“It was in Spring 1898 when I moved to the northern part of Shinshû. I had lived in Komoro for seven years as a country schoolmaster, gazing out over wild highland landscape. It was at that time that I began to recognise the real nature of ‘the countryside’. I thereupon made up my mind to try to describe my immediate surroundings just as I saw and felt them. I began with simple literary sketches of farmers.

“*Wara Zôri* (*The Straw Shoes*—M.A.) is the first attempt, and deals mainly with people’s actual living conditions in a mountain village along the upper reaches of the Chikuma. It should be said that, if the Chikuma area is rural, then this village, situated in the back country of Minami Saku [the southern Saku], is even more remotely so. And then I attempted to write some short novels using as settings towns and villages along the middle and lower reaches of the Chikuma. Thus, for example, *Suisai Gaka* (*The Watercolourist*—M.A.) is set in Kita Saku, *Rôjo* (*The Old Maid*—M.A.) is set in Chiisagata, *Asameshi* (*The Breakfast*—M.A.) is set in Kami Minochi, and *Hakai* is set in Iiyama in Shimo Minochi. Iiyama is a long way downstream on the Chikuma. (...) In the works I have written so far, the plot is limited to one set of events in one place, so that all my works except a few could be treated as stories set along the Chikuma river.”

(TZ 2, p. 303)

This preface shows us that not only his early short stories but also even *The Broken Commandment* grew out of the literary sketching he did at Komoro. In other words, it can be said that *The Broken Commandment* is the culmination of a line of development that extends from *Chikuma River Sketches* through the subsequent short stories and novellas, including the banned *Kyû-shujin* (*The Former Master*).²¹

Generally, *Kyû-shujin* and *Wara Zôri* (both published in 1902) are considered as Tôson’s maiden works of fiction. Tôson himself called these works “Twins that I

²¹ *Kyû-shujin* and *Wara Zôri* both attracted official disfavour because the former dealt with adultery and the latter with rape; the magazine issue containing *Kyû-shujin* was banned.

first wrote" (TZ 17, p. 68). There is a minority view that *Utatane* (*A Cat Nap*, 1897) is Tôson's maiden work of fiction. But it was written before *Wakana Shû*, and is regarded by most scholars as an immature apprentice piece not to be counted as belonging to the main canon.

In contrast with the official disapproval of *Kyû-shujin* and *Wara Zôri*, the response of the literary world to the two stories was favourable, and Tôson wrote several more novellas marked by strong local colour. They were: *Oyaji* (*The Old Man*), *Rôjo*, both published in 1903, and *Suisai Gaka* of 1904. Of these the last is generally held to be most successful (Seigle 1971, pp. 14-15).

We can find points of similarity between some of these works and *Chikuma River Sketches*. Some textual examples are:

- "So Komoro is a silkworm-raising district, where even the priests in the temples raise silkworms. There are mulberry leaves behind family Buddhist altars. Every household does it."

(TZ 2, *Kyû-shujin*, p. 485)

- "Once the spring silkworm crop is finished, it is time for the Gion festival. You can count on your fingers the people in this town who do not raise silkworms. Even the priests in the temples gain the greater part of their income this way."

(TZ 5, *On the Eve of the Festival*, p. 33; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 27)

- "This weather is a sign of snow. In the afternoon, dark snow clouds are piling up all over the sky."

(TZ 2, *Kyû-shujin*, p. 501)

- "Dark snow clouds are piling up ahead. I begin to feel as though I am gradually penetrating into the very depths of the snow country. Snow begins to fall just as we pull out of one station."

(TZ 5, *Along the Chikuma River*, p. 118; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 88)

- “A fine, powdery snow seemed grey like a low-lying fog.”
(TZ 2, “*Kyû -shujin*”, p. 502)

- “A fine, powdery snow that heaps up like salt is a specialty of this area.”
(TZ 5, *Christmas in the Snow Country*, p.101; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 75)

- “The Chikuma River is a great river that flows through this valley. The native customs and local dialect along the river seemed to be a little different from those along its lower reaches. As we go along the banks upstream, the Chikuma River could more properly be thought of as a mountain stream rather than as a great river (...) On the left bank of the river there are huge boulders that have washed down from the mountains. The river banks here and there are thick with scrub willow, rushes and so on. The right bank of the river are thick with maple, lacquer trees, white birch, and oak.”

(TZ 2, *Wara Zôri*, p. 401)

- “We go along the banks upstream to a place called Managashi where the character of the stream changes once more. There is now a great litter of huge boulders that have washed down from the mountains, and the Chikuma River that flows through them could more properly be thought of as a mountain stream rather than as a great river (...) The river banks are thick with scrub willow, rushes, maple, lacquer trees, white birch, and oak.”

(TZ 5, *The Kôshû Highway*, p. 64; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 48)

- “When I look at the shake roofs²² weighted with heavy stones against the winter snows, it makes me realise what a hard life they have deep in the mountains.”

(TZ 2, *Wara Zôri*, p. 401)

²² “Shake roof”: an American expression, synonymous with “shingle roof”, here borrowed from Naff in order to underline the point of similarity between *Wara Zôri* and *Chikuma River Sketches*.

- “Shake roofs weighted with heavy stones against the winter snows, just as they are in the Kiso valley.”

(TZ 5, *A Night in a Mountain Village*, p. 65; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches* p. 49)

Such descriptions make local colour stand out. In the published version of *Chikuma River Sketches* (which, it will be recalled, appeared in print six years later than even *The Broken Commandment*, although written considerably earlier), Tôson wrote: “In an earlier story I wrote about the region in this way” (TZ 5, *In the Highlands*, p. 67; William Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 51), and then quoted a paragraph from *Wara Zôri*. A mountain village scene that Tôson had observed was used in *Wara Zôri* exactly as he recalled it in reality. Similarly, Tôson used *Chikuma River Sketches* as a source of material for *Suisai Gaka*, as exemplified in the following two quotations:

- “It is a panorama.²³ The view of Shinshû is a panorama.”

(TZ 2, *Suisai Gaka*, p. 339)

- “There is a panoramic view of the surrounding area from this vast, open hillside. We can even see the flowing waters of the Chikuma River at the bottom of the distant valley.”

(TZ 5, p. 10; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p. 9)

This “panoramic” presentation of Shinshû recurs in other works also, including *The Broken Commandment*.

The hero of *Suisai Gaka* is a young painter by the name of Denkichi. The character Denkichi represents the author. The story was based on a letter written by Tôson’s wife to her former lover and on Tôson’s own love for the pianist Tachibana Itoe (1873-1939), both of which relationships reappear in Chapters V and VI of *Ie*.

In fact, if one considers *Ie* to be typical of his autobiographical novels, it can be said that Tôson was already writing autobiographical fiction at the time of *Suisai Gaka*. That is entirely the result of Tôson’s practice of observing things and

²³ Significantly, Tôson here uses the borrowed English word *panorama*.

making literary sketches.

In *Suisai Gaka* we see a new approach to nature description, in which it is used functionally, to create an atmosphere that matches, and thereby conveys to the reader, the emotional state of a character or characters:

“In August as the hill was covered with the green of the trees, the leaves of oak and of *kunugi*²⁴, chestnut trees, and wild cherry trees appeared to darken. It was a gloomy impenetrable day; the heavy sky seemed to warn of the approach of a frightful thunderstorm. Dark clouds had already been piling up over the Tateshina ranges....

“The weather gradually became much darker. Denkichi’s feeling was even darker than this sky. Ideas sad and ruinous bubbled up to the surface of his mind. Tears of loneliness streamed down.”

(TZ 2, *Suisai Gaka*, pp. 359-360)

At this point in the narrative Denkichi is facing divorce and the collapse of his family; the imagery of the weather reflects his feelings, as it also reflects those recalled by Tôson from an identical situation in his own life.

For comparison with the weather imagery I have just quoted, here is a passage from *Chikuma River Sketches*:

“Once into November it suddenly becomes much colder. I get up on the morning of the third, the emperor’s birthday, to find everything covered with frost (...) It is a day when the heavy skies take on an ashen color from the fog. I suddenly want to go back to warm my hands at the kitchen fire. The chill gnaws at my toes right through my tabi and I feel the dreaded approach of winter. In these mountains one must endure a winter that lasts from November through March, almost five months. It is essential to be prepared for such long winters.”

(TZ 5, *Fallen Leaves* 2, p. 74; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, pp. 54-55)

In those mountain villages, heavy, ashen-coloured skies were a sign of

²⁴ *Kunugi*: a tree of the oak family, *Quercus acutissima*.

approaching winter. The need to prepare months in advance for the long winter is expressed in the word “dreaded.” In *Suisai Gaka*, Tōson replaced the ashen coloured skies heralding winter with the heavy summer skies, heralding a thunderstorm, that create the scene of Denkichi’s suffering. Tōson not only describes nature in detail, but also links the natural phenomena he describes to the personal feelings of his characters. This precisely exemplifies what is meant by critics who refer to Tōson’s establishing a modern view of nature which enabled him to discover phenomena afresh and express them in new ways (see Itō 1969, p.258).

As mentioned above, Tōson’s first major work of fiction, *The Broken Commandment*, is the fruit of a number of factors; Turgenev’s descriptions of the Russian climate, Ruskin’s and Darwin’s scientific observation of nature, the modern view of nature that they established, and Tōson’s practice of literary sketching.

The novel finally appeared in March 1906 in an edition of fifteen hundred copies, published at the author’s expense. It sold out immediately. Ten days after publication, a second printing was ordered. Critical acclaim was unanimous; Tōson’s reputation as a novelist was established with this one book.

Masamune Hakuchō (1879-1955), who may be seen as a representative Japanese Naturalist author, wrote: “Tōson was already renowned as a poet; one is compelled to say that, with *The Broken Commandment* he first showed his value as a novelist” (in ‘*Hakai*’ *wo Yomu*; see Ōka 1992, p. 7)

Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) also praised the novel: “It is a masterpiece among the fiction of the Meiji era. I think it is the first novel worthy of the name to have appeared in the Meiji era” (Letter to Morita Sōhei dated April 3, 1906, quoted in *Sōseki Zenshū* Vol.22, 1996, p. 486).²⁵

Shimamura Hōgetsu (1871-1918), the best-known critic of the late Meiji era and the Naturalist movement, wrote: “I am deeply moved by the fact that for the first time the Japanese literary world has reached a new turning point in this work. We can say that the spirit conveyed in the controversial novels of modern European naturalism has for the first time found an equal in the world of Japanese letters” (Shimamura 1906, p. 128).

²⁵ See bibliography entry for Natsume Sōseki

Yoshida points out: "It seemed that these reviews gave historic rank to this work" (Yoshida 1989, p. 63). Praise of *The Broken Commandment* raised Tôson's status and established him as a representative writer of his day.

Seigle writes: "Tôson's first novel, an important step in his recognition as a novelist, was 'Hakai' (*The Broken Commandment*), (. . .) 'Hakai' won acclaim from both the literary world and the public as the first modern Japanese novel comparable to those of Europe" (Seigle 1976, p. XI).

Keene writes: "The newspapers and magazines were filled with discussions of *The Broken Commandment*, and a stage dramatization was at once prepared by Osanai Kaoru (1881-1928), who was a pioneer of the Japanese modern drama. Naturalism had been established as a major force in Japanese literature" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 256).

The plot of *The Broken Commandment* is as follows:

Segawa Ushimatsu is a young man of the *eta* class²⁶. By keeping secret the fact of his origins he has managed to go through the prefectural normal college in Nagano without mishap, and is now a schoolteacher in the fair-sized town of Iiyama, which is also in Shinshû. His father, determined that Ushimatsu escape the humiliation suffered by his fellow *eta*, withdraws from society altogether, living as a solitary herdsman in order to sever his own ties with the *eta* community. He makes Ushimatsu vow in return that he will never tell anyone of his origins. The main theme of the novel is concerned with the strain this deception places on Ushimatsu, and his decision finally to confess his secret. The title refers to Ushimatsu's breaking of his father's commandment.

Although *The Broken Commandment* is not an autobiographical novel, it contains many psychological echoes of the author's own experiences. While Tôson conveyed his feeling in Ushimatsu, he himself was beginning to be reflected in the story of Ushimatsu's early life. For example, in chapter 9 and 11, Otsuma, Ushimatsu's childhood friend, appears, Ushimatsu recollects that they walked amid apple trees together and confessed their first love to each other. This statement fits in with Tôson's poem *Hatsukoi* discussed in Chapter 1 above (Wada 1993, p. 4).

²⁶ a social class whose members were considered by most Japanese to be "polluted" and unfit to associate with ordinary human beings.

We can perceive that *The Broken Commandment* is greatly influenced not only by Rousseau's *Confessions* but also by Dostoevski's *Crime and Punishment*. In fact, just before he began to write *The Broken Commandment*, Tôson wrote in a letter "I finished reading *Crime and Punishment*" (TZ 17, p. 75; letter to Tayama Katai dated November 19, 1903). On this point, Keene observes: "Another factor gave depth to his portrayal of Ushimatsu and his acquaintances: Tôson modeled them on *Crime and Punishment*. His borrowings from Dostoevski may even have extended to the central theme: the salvation the hero finds in confessing his secret" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 259).

His borrowing was successful, with the result that *The Broken Commandment* may without exaggeration be called the first truly modern Japanese novel in the sense in which *Crime and Punishment* is also seen as a modern novel.

As mentioned above, the central issue in this novel is Ushimatsu's reluctance to betray his father's injunction. Critical opinion is divided as to whether the main theme of the novel is the social problem of the eta class or the problem of self-confession and attendant suffering. Tôson's intention was the latter.

In an essay, *Yûwa mondai to Bungei* (*The Eta Problem and Literature*), written in 1928, Tôson wrote: "I intended to write about the liberation and regeneration of a young educator who had been born a member of the *eta* class..... The main intent of my book was to describe how the hero came to break the solemn vow he made to his father. For this reason, I should like this book to be read essentially as the study of the relations between a father and son, even though I have added many other characters and incidents by way of background" (TZ 9, p. 604; translated in Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 256)

After Keene read this essay, he wrote; "This statement, if indeed it accurately represented Tôson's thoughts at the time he was writing the novel, might account for its curious lack of social content, despite the conspicuously social nature of the theme" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 256). As Edwin McClellan has commented, "Tôson is more interested in Ushimatsu the *eta* than in the *eta* class as a whole" (McClellan 1969, p. 80).

These opinions follow Wada Kingo's interpretation: "The theme of this work lays special emphasis on 'confession', and 'the *eta* class' is used only as a means of

giving weight to 'confession' ” (Wada, *'Hakai' no Shiteki Ichi*, quoted in Yoshida 1989, p. 51)). I agree with this judgement.

However, I would also draw attention to the following passage:

“I placed the hero in many settings — for example, a slaughterhouse in a mountain village, a harvest in autumn — (...) in order to give my work verisimilitude. I think the description of local colour is perhaps a little too prominent, but my true intention lay in using local colour as a means of making the hero appear a more significant figure.”

(TZ 9, p. 604)

As Tôson said, detailed description recurs in many scenes throughout the novel. Not only does he minutely describe Iiyama, the main setting of the story; he also depicts in detail the Chikuma River, the Komoro area, and the slaughterhouse — scenes which he had already described in *Chikuma River Sketches*. Much of the nature-description found in *Kumo*, *Chikuma River Sketches*, and other early fiction is incorporated into *The Broken Commandment* and contributes significantly to the progress of the story.

Among such passages the most characteristic are those describing winter. Tôson wrote *The Broken Commandment* in Komoro but set the scene in Iiyama — of all towns in Shinshû the one with the most snow and the hardest winter living conditions. Tôson describes Iiyama at the beginning of the book as follows:

“Not surprisingly, Buddhism having flourished here more than in any other part of Shinshu, the sight was like the past itself unfolding before your eyes — everything old, and everything, from the shingle tiles of the queer, squat northern houses and their wide downsweeping eaves protecting them against the snow to the soaring temple roofs and the topmost branches of the trees that showed themselves here and there above the mass of humbler buildings, seeming wrapped in a faint mist of incense.”

(TZ 2, p.3; translation by Kenneth Strong, *The Broken Commandment*, Chapter 1, p. 3)

Here, a passage like “protecting them against the snow” hints that Iiyama is in

winter-snow country . Descriptions of bitterly cold winter scenes appear in nineteen out of twenty-three chapters. Typical instances of Tôson's word-pictures of winter in Iiyama are:

- "...their wide downsweeping eaves protecting them against the snow..." (i bid.)
- "a severe frost" (TZ 2, Chapter 5, p. 60)
- "It was a windless night, piercingly cold." (TZ 2, Chapter 6, p. 73)
- "Leaves drifted from the upper branches of the chestnut trees lining the track." (TZ 2, Chapter 9, p. 111)
- "the cold wind" (TZ 2, Chapter 12, p. 145)
- "sleet" (TZ 2, Chapter 12, p. 146)
- "The wall of snow clouds, ashen, massive, impenetrable..." (TZ 2, Chapter 12, p. 149)
- "the reed screens that would help keep off the snow" (TZ 2, Chapter 12, p. 152)
- "straw snow-hats... the long overhanging eaves that served to keep off the snow, known locally as gangi...the famous Iiyama 'snow mountain' " (TZ 2, Chapter 16, pp. 199-200)
- "the massive snowfalls" (TZ 2, Chapter 18, p. 226)
- "(a river-bank looking like) a long white strip of sea" (TZ 2, Chapter 19, p. 250)
- "the town in its shroud of snow" (TZ 2, Chapter 21, p. 263)
- "all mantled now in snow" (TZ 2, Chapter 23, p. 299)

Such descriptions enhance the overall pictorial effect of the novel and heighten the lyrical quality of the writing.

Tôson accurately describes not only snowy landscapes (e.g. "a town dug out of the snow") but also unique features that add poetic charm to snow country, such as: sledges; groups of men and women hard at work clearing snow; children throwing snowballs; people wearing snowshoes. He also describes sounds, e.g.: "his clogs slicing through the crisp snow"; "listening to the sledge as it slid over the snow."

In this work, the description of nature in winter is not the mere creation of scenery. It has two functions: to hint at coming events and to enhance the portrayal of Ushimatsu's varying emotions and states of mind.

For example, Chapter 5 opens with "a severe frost" which is explained as "a warning of the approach of the long winter that the mountain country must endure". Later in this chapter Ushimatsu learns through an announcement in a Tokyo paper of his mentor Inoko Rentarô's serious illness, and is shocked and saddened. From this chapter events develop rapidly: via the death of Ushimatsu's father, Ushimatsu's return to his birthplace, and the detection of his antecedents, the story progresses to Ushimatsu's confession and the breaking of his father's commandment. This dark future is symbolized by the "severe frost" with which Chapter 5 begins.

Chapter 12 opens with a scene of cold wind:

"Down here the cold wind had stripped many of the trees, leaving even their topmost branches bare and bringing a forlorn, wintry air to the upland scene. The long harsh Shinshû winter, the very thought of which makes one shiver, had come at last."

(TZ 12, p. 145; Strong, *The Broken Commandment*, p. 125)

In this chapter, Takayanagi's wife, who knows Ushimatsu's antecedents, appears. In the next chapter, Takayanagi, who is a parliamentary candidate, tells Ushimatsu that he knows Ushimatsu's antecedents. It pains Ushimatsu that the secret has come out, because of the vow he had made to his father. With the coming of winter, Ushimatsu faces a hard bitter struggle that is as harsh for him as the winter season itself — and again the description of winter matches the hero's emotional state.

Needless to say, the descriptions of nature are adapted from scenes in *Chikuma River Sketches*. Furthermore, the links between scenic surroundings and Ushimatsu's psychology reflect similar links that were deeply personal to the author.

I will now compare passages of nature description in *The Broken Commandment* with corresponding passages in *Chikuma River Sketches*.

"Gradually, as he tramped the grey earth of the Northern Highway

in bright sunshine, now climbing gentle hills, now winding through fields of mulberry or straggling villages, sweating, his throat parched, socks and leggings white with dust, Ushimatsu began, paradoxically, to feel refreshed. Branches of persimmon trees by the roadside sagged under their load of ripening yellow globes; in one field, soy pods swelled; millet heads drooped, full-eared, in another; in others, already harvested, green shoots of wheat were sprouting. He heard farmers singing, birds chirruping—for the joy of “little June,” as the mountain dwellers call their Indian summer.”

(Strong, *The Broken Commandment*, Chapter 7, p. 71)

This is the scene in which Ushimatsu receives news of his father's death and returns to his birthplace Nezu from Iiyama. In *Chikuma River Sketches* Tôson describes “little June” as follows:

“The weather keeps changing. This is not so noticeable on the warm Musashi plain but here one feels it keenly. Cold days will be followed by astonishingly warm ones, and then it will get even colder than before. High in the mountains though we are, we never sink straight down into winter. The days during the transition from fall to winter are one of the most refreshing and unforgettable times in this region. Their popular name, ‘Little June,’ makes clear how pleasant they are.”

(TZ5, pp.77-78; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p.57, Chapter 7)

The description of an Indian summer in *The Broken Commandment* overlaps with “hillsides in Little June” in *Chikuma River Sketches*. In *The Broken Commandment*, “little June” and the sensations associated with it become symbolic of Ushimatsu's feeling of relief at leaving Iiyama, where he has lived concealing his origins; before the first of the two descriptions of “little June” quoted above, we find this passage:

“Yet even for him every step away from Iiyama seemed a step toward freedom.”

(TZ2, p.83; Strong, *The Broken Commandment*, Chapter 7, p.71)

This relief is similar to the feeling that Tôson experienced in Sendai of “spring in my life”.

Chapter 18 opens as follows:

“The massive snowfalls the district experienced every year came at last, blanketing every house and street in the town. More than four feet had fallen in the night, and abruptly Iiyama changed its aspect, presenting everywhere scenes truly characteristic of the harsh northern winter. There being no longer any place left to pile the snow where it would be out of the way, it was heaped up in the middle of every street in a continuous “snow mountain,” both sides of which were scraped smooth and beaten firm, so that if you stood back a little, the “mountain” looked exactly like a long white wall. More snow was then heaped on the top and trampled flat, then more, and so on, till it reached the level of the eaves. Iiyama might have been a town dug out of the snow.”

(TZ 2, p. 226; Strong, *The Broken Commandment*, Chapter 18, p. 190)

This statement almost perfectly matches the sketch of the beginning of *A Sea of Snow*, Chapter 10 of *Chikuma River Sketches*:

“It is said that from here on over into Echigo four feet of snow can fall in a single night. Iiyama itself proves to be a town completely buried in snow. It might be better to say that it is a town that has been excavated from the snow. That impression is reinforced by the towering banks of snow that have been built up along the streets. The snow that has been cleared from the roofs is gathered together and stacked up higher than the eaves of the houses to form a white wall running down the middle of each street. Broad porchlike extensions have been built out from the eaves of the houses and people bustle back and forth through them.”

(TZ 5, p. 121; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, pp. 90-91, Chapter X)

In January 1904, Tôson travelled downriver from Komoro to Iiyama. This trip laid the foundations of *The Broken Commandment*. In Chapter 18, following the opening quoted above, the scene in which Takayanagi and a member of the town council talk about Ushimatsu's *eta* origins occurs. Subsequently this rumour is spread by word of mouth from the councillor through a younger man to a probationary teacher. The description of the town completely buried in snow effectively symbolizes Ushimatsu's situation of being inextricably hemmed in by the rumour.

In Chapter 21 the phrase "That he should break his father's solemn commandment" (TZ 2, p. 264; Strong, p. 220) first appears, and Tôson writes as follows: "the thought filled him with sadness, and with defiant courage, too" (ibid.).

Just previously, in Chapter 20, the death of Inoko Rentarô, whom Ushimatsu highly respected, and Ushimatsu's determination to confess his origins, are described. This is most certainly influenced by Rousseau's thought.

In fact, in Chapter 19, "Ushimatsu repented. What had possessed him to go in for so much study, why had he hankered so after notions of freedom and justice? If he had never known that he too was a man like other men, contempt and insult might have been easier to bear. Why had he been born so nearly human, when a life among the beasts of the moor and mountain would have been freer of pain?" (TZ 2, p. 252; Strong, pp. 210-211).

In the same chapter, Tôson describes Ushimatsu struggling towards his decision to confess:

"Where did he mean to go, he asked himself after he had walked two or three blocks. Trudging aimlessly along the snow-deep road, impelled by terror and despair, he moved as if caught in a nightmare. Men were working here and there clearing up the snow left behind by the big fall, which would not melt now until the spring. Some were sweeping the bigger drifts from the wooden roofs, sending them crashing with a frightening thud onto the street below. More than once Ushimatsu trembled at the sound. And not at that sound alone; for every time he saw people gossiping, he could not stop himself suspecting, with a shiver, that it was him they were discussing."

(TZ 2, p. 249; Strong, p. 208)

Here we see Ushimatsu sceptical about those around him and suffering from despair and fear. He arrives at the bank of the Chikuma River, brooding still on the riddle of his whole life:

“Before long he came out on the bank of the Chikuma River, overlooking a wide stretch of the riverbed which the water, now confined to a central channel, would not cover till the spring thaw. Lower Ferry, the spot was called, though there was a pontoon bridge now instead of a ferry. Travellers crossing to and from Shimotakai made a long black line against the surrounding snow. Some pulled heavily laden sledges. The exposed section of the riverbed stretched away into the distance like a long white strip of sea; along its edge, reeds and willow trees wilted, half-hidden under a pall of snow. From the mountains to the north, toward Echigo — Kosha, Kazawara, Nakanosawa, and the rest — to the village on the farther bank, and the trees in the forest nearby, everything lay buried under snow, and silent save for the faint clucking of hens from the village opposite.”

(TZ 2, p. 250; Strong, p. 209)

The “long white strip of sea” that meets Ushimatsu’s eyes was actually seen by Tôson, and described in *Chikuma River Sketches*, as “a sea of snow”:

“The sleet begins again. I go down to the boat landing on the banks of the Chikuma River. On the long pontoon bridge that undulates off to the far bank I see that the only touch of brown is the single line of footprints crossing it. From time to time I meet men wearing high straw snow boots, but there are few passersby. Takayashiro, Kazahara, Nakanosawa, and the other peaks that stand along the Shinano-Echigo line are only vaguely discernible and the distant villages are lost in the snow. The melancholy waters of the Chikuma River flow silently past.

“Yet when I walk out onto the pontoon bridge, the snow crunching under my feet, I find that the waters are moving as swiftly as an arrow. Looking out from here over the floodplain, there is nothing to be seen but a sea of snow — that’s it, a white sea! And this

whiteness is no ordinary whiteness; it is a fathomless, melancholy whiteness. It is a whiteness that makes one shiver to look at it."

(TZ 5, p.122; Naff, *Chikuma River Sketches*, p.91)

Ushimatsu's anguish at having been brought to the verge of collapse by a deep sense of isolation, of estrangement from the people around him, is well matched by the desolation of the scene. The "sea of snow" which Tôson experienced in Iiyama impressed him strongly and was also used in the autobiographical short novel *Tokkan* (*The Charge*, 1913). This story also concerns an experience in Komoro. The following is the scene of a snowy road where on the way the hero visits a friend to borrow money in order to publish a book he has written:

"In a snow field that seemed like a long white strip of sea, I felt that I was close to death. I did not think only my body was cold. My heart was as cold as ice."

(TZ 5, p. 293)

Later, Tôson recollected this scene as follows:

"I can recall the cold at that time, when I felt my joints freeze one by one . I can recall seeing a deserted snowy road and thinking that it looked as desolate as I felt. I can recall various experiences; frequent dizzy spells as if I were falling asleep; a choking sensation that made me feel as if I were about to collapse; a shudder that I had never experienced before; and a sea of snow in which I felt myself be close to death. Not only my body but also my heart was cold."

(TZ 8, *Umi e (To the Sea)*, p. 12)

In *The Broken Commandment* the "white sea" expresses Ushimatsu's feelings. It is as if the snow itself is advancing on him, coldly pitiless, terrifying, bringing a presentiment of death. The fear that Ushimatsu experiences is one that Tôson had experienced also and described in the passage above. The character Ushimatsu represents Tôson, and Ushimatsu's struggle reflects Tôson's dark personal struggle. The descriptions of winter in mountainous country, such as Iiyama and Komoro, effectively express his own feelings.

Immediately after *The Broken Commandment* was published, many book

reviews about it appeared. Among them, Kojima Usui's review is worthy of note:

"If Inoko Rentarô, Segawa Ushimatsu, and Oshiho were removed from *The Broken Commandment*, it would not thereby lose all substance. The simple life of a mountain village, the collision between old customs and new ideas, and the friction of class distinctions, would still provide drama on the stage even in the absence of the stars."

(Kojima 1984, p. 669)

Kojima also observed:

"When I read the descriptions of nature in '*The Broken Commandment*,' I sat wide-eyed, feeling that this was something I had long been waiting for. (...) The author brings out the true natural colours of Shinshû. (...) The colours and light of nature in Northern Shinshû sparkle on every page."

(ibid., pp. 671-672)

Masamune also evaluated *The Broken Commandment* from the same point of view as Kojima. He wrote: "The scenes in the Shinshû district are minutely described. On this point, nobody can in any way equal this author's ability" (Masamune, '*Hakai*' wo Yomu, 1906, quoted in: Ôka 1992, p.77).

It was precisely in this that the distinctiveness of *The Broken Commandment* lay. Especially successful was Tôson's use of nature-description as a means of making the hero appear a more significant figure.

Many influences had combined together to produce the novelist Shimazaki Tôson. That of Ruskin and Darwin, as shown in *Kumo*; the work of Turgenev, through which he learned his technique of natural description; the practice in literary sketching exemplified by *Chikum River Sketches*: together, these factors laid the foundation for Tôson's fictional masterworks.

This chapter concludes with an endeavour to place Tôson's literary development during the 1890s and the early twentieth century in the context of Japanese fiction-writing of that time.

Under the influence of Western culture many Japanese writers of that time strove to imitate Western literature, but yet were unable to grasp Western culture and project it into their works. This was particularly evident in their treatment of nature. Ozaki Kôyô (1867-1903), the most prominent figure in the literary world of the early Meiji era, is a case in point. In his famous novel *Konjiki Yasha* (*The Demon Gold*), the newspaper serialization of which spanned the period 1897-1903, we find this characteristic passage:

“We looked up, and there to the west stood Mt. Fuji and Mt. Kijûroku, apparelled in verdant array. Gentle zephyrs soothingly filled the balmy air, and the Yoshii Falls, cascading down from Sode-no-Sawa, resembled an immense, flowing length of white silk draped from crest to foot of the craggy precipice.”

(*Kôyô Zenshû*, vol. 7, p. 399)

With its florid verbal ornamentation (contrasting with the relatively plain and straightforward, but powerful, scenic word-pictures in which Tôson came to excel), the Japanese original of this passage is characteristic of the ornate literary prose style known as *Bibun* (美文 — literally, “beautiful writing”) that was fashionable in the 20’s and 30’s of the Meiji era (1887-1906). As a piece of scenic description it has undeniable charm and elegance. Yet it serves no narrative purpose; it merely describes a piece of landscape — without even letting the reader know from where the characters in the story viewed it. It is decorative, but no more than decorative.

At the time when the fashion for such writing was at its height, Tôson struck out on his own path in a radically different direction. Influenced by the ideas of Rousseau, Darwin and other Western writers and thinkers, he learned to observe nature objectively and to use such observation as the basis of his literary treatment of nature. This new approach to the portrayal of natural beauty first manifested itself in *Wakana Shû*, *Kisodani Nikki* and *Chikuma River Sketches*. As shown in this chapter, Tôson went much further in his subsequent fiction, in which, far from being merely decorative, nature-description is given a functional role in driving the narrative by, for example, creating moods that convey to the reader the emotions and states of mind of characters in key situations.

Tôson's nature-description was based on a new view of nature, which underpinned his venture into prose fiction — an endeavour which met with great success in *The Broken Commandment*. It is precisely in this venture that we can see how *The Broken Commandment* pioneered new territory in modern Japanese literature.

Chapter 3

Yoake mae (Before the Dawn) — Ultimate Achievement—

Having established his reputation with *The Broken Commandment*, Tôson turned to a more congenial form of expression, fiction that was realistic but subjective and that dealt with ordinary daily experiences. His second major novel, *Haru* (*Spring*, 1908), portrayed a group of Tôson's friends in the springtime of their lives, depicted as he remembered them. It was followed by *Ie* (*The Family*, 1910-1911), *Shinsei* (*A New Life*, 1918-1919) and *Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Toki* (*When the Cherries Ripen*, 1919). *Spring* was the first of his autobiographical novels, though *Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Toki* chronicled a still earlier period of his life.

Thus, in short, it can be said that *Sakura no Mi no Jukusuru Toki*, *Haru*, *Ie* and *Shinsei*, are autobiographical novels that record Tôson's experience in chronological order from adolescence through to the prime of his life, from 1890 (when he was aged 19) to 1918 (age 47).

Keene described this approach to writing as follows: "Tôson, having looked up at the stars as a poet, and having looked at the world around him in *The Broken Commandment*, was to look down at his own feet when writing his later novels" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, pp. 86-87).

It was through these four novels that Tôson progressed towards the writing of his masterpiece, *Yoake mae* (*Before the Dawn*, 1929-1935). After completing *The Family*, he wrote about his approach to writing as follows:

"When I wrote *Ie*, I constructed it block by block with sentences as if I were building a house. I excluded all that occurred out-of-doors, and tried to limit events to those inside the house. I

described the house from the kitchen, from the entrance vestibule, and from the inner courtyard. I wrote about the river only after walking into a room where I could hear its sound.”

(TZ 13. *Ori ni Furete (Now and Then)*, p. 121)

This shows clearly that, in his practice of observing phenomena as a preparation for writing and expression, Tôson had become even more thorough and precise than during the period leading to the writing of *Chikuma River Sketches* and *The Broken Commandment*. Experiential fiction-writing, with himself as subject, required that he strive to portray faithfully the person he had been in those days. This in turn necessitated more minute and realistic description both of the psychological landscape within himself, and of scenes forming the background to the narrative.

When reading in detail the works he wrote after *The Broken Commandment*, one feels his skill in the observation and expression of nature becoming more accomplished with every work, until, in *Before the Dawn*, it comes to play a vitally important rôle.

In this chapter, I explore this progressive development.

Spring appeared, as previously mentioned, in 1908. In this work Tôson tries to capture in retrospect the emotions of his early manhood in the days of the *Bungakkai* magazine and the group associated with it. The novel's principal characters are Kishimoto Sutekichi (the name Tôson used for himself in three novels) and Aoki Shun'ichi, who is obviously Kitamura Tôkoku (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 260).

In this he is judged to have succeeded. Edwin McClellan writes: “In trying to write truthfully and lyrically about his own youth, Tôson was bringing to it the truthfulness of the poet” (McClellan 1969, pp. 100-101). Keene comments that: “The naive enthusiasm of the members of the Bungakkai group is well conveyed” (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 260). His success in describing the behaviour and the psychology of characters more concretely and realistically was achieved by using his own life experience as the setting of the story. Even while the novel was still in progress, Tôson wrote thus about the technical considerations underlying his choice

of an autobiographical approach to creating fiction:

“When I wrote *The Broken Commandment*, I had a lot of difficulty over trivia. This time, I mean to avoid problems like that.”

(TZ6. ‘Haru’ Shippitsu-chû no Danwa (*A Talk While Writing ‘Spring’*), p. 509)

By “trivia” Tôson was referring to the mechanics of narrative structure. In short, in *The Broken Commandment* he found it difficult to construct a fictitious world as the setting for the story. He therefore set the scene of *Spring* in his real life.

Keene writes: “Perhaps his difficulties with the dramatic scenes in *The Broken Commandment* led him to choose the easier course of Naturalistic description” (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 261).

Tôson wrote as follows about his intention in writing this work:

“I think the title of this novel is perhaps rather over-laden with meaning. It does not merely signify Spring as the season, but is a metaphor in a threefold sense: firstly, symbolizing the first awakening of ideals; secondly, standing for the early fruits of artistic activity; thirdly, as a symbol of the first flowering of adult life. Firstly I attempted to write about a young man who dies after being deceived in the springtime of his ideals. Secondly I tried to write about another young man who fails in the quest for an artistic spring time. Thirdly I tried to portray a young man arriving at the spring time of life.”

(TZ 6, p. 509)

The young man who dies young represents Kitamura Tôkoku, and the young man who fails represents Tôson. The young man who reaches the spring time of life also represents Tôson.²⁷

As Tôson expressed it, the characters in *Spring* are “portrayed as a group”

²⁷ In *Spring*, Tôson did not exhaust all that he had to write about the last of these three characters.

against the background of his own life experience as a young man.

Keene writes: “*Spring* possesses ... interest as a source of biographical materials for Tôson’s life. His involvement with the Bungakkai group, his first years as a teacher, his financial troubles arising from the imprudent business dealings that sent his brother to jail, and his first love, are all described faithfully, insofar as we can verify the details.” But he adds: “However...if his career had stopped short at this point it is doubtful if *Spring* would still be read” (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 261).

In writing *Spring* Tôson sought to render a faithful description of experience; and he prepared for this task with great thoroughness. Later he wrote: “I spent one whole year preparing to write *Spring*” (TZ 13, *Mittsu no Chôhen wo Kaita Tôji no Koto* (*On the Writing of Three Novels*), p. 116). In the same essay he also describes an instance of the meticulous observation that was a key element in this training of himself for the task ahead:

“Before writing *Spring* in 1908, I made the same trip along the Tôkaidô road that I had made in 1893 as a young man, because I wanted to evoke images of my friends and other memories of those days in my mind... But I did not gain much from this trip... In those day there was a stagecoach which led to Mishima. When I got on the stagecoach with my friends, flies came and rested on our kimono... When I made the same trip eleven or twelve years later, the only image that I could recapture was of those swarms of flies.”

(ibid.)

In the novel, that single recaptured image turns into this:

“Two days later, in the morning, the four youths left the inn of Yoshihara for Hakone. There is a stage coach linking Numazu and Mishima. Aoki handled the ribbons playfully. The road was the same one Kishimoto had walked on foot at the beginning of his journey. Flies swarmed on everyone’s kimono.”

(TZ 3, *Spring*, Chapter 6, pp. 14-15)

Albeit seemingly trivial, this image of the flies crystalized the entire

memory of his previous journey. This was the kind of experiential essence that brought him a sense of reality, and he was satisfied. He wrote later; "I am sure that even those flies brought more of a feeling of reality into *Haru*" (TZ 13, p. 116).

This approach to writing forms the basis not only of *Spring* but of all his subsequent novels. When we read *Spring*, we can find many descriptions of nature, especially descriptions featuring water, such as lakes, ponds, the sea and rivers. Water-related examples appear in nearly one third of all the chapters (thirty-seven out of a hundred and thirty-two). Thus it can be said that *Spring* is a work in which water constitutes an important developmental motif (Kobayashi 1986, pp. 70-71).

In particular, there are many descriptions of rivers. The following three examples are representative:

- "Beyond the green foliage of the garden that trembled in the fresh breeze, the rapids of the Hayakawa rushed between rocky banks, whipping up masses of foam. Leaning on the railing, Kishimoto watched it in amazement."

(TZ 3, *Spring*, Chapter 10, p. 25)

- "Before Kishimoto's eyes lay that same view of the Sumida River that seemed never to change no matter when he came to look. The tide was at the full. Boats with their sails hoisted passed quietly one after the other between the trees."

(TZ 3, *Spring*, Chapter 51, p. 99)

- "There was a place in the shadow of a row of willow trees by the riverside where Kishimoto used to meditate. He went there and imagined her reading his letter of farewell. The water of the Sumida River flowed coldly past in the same way now as it had done when he had set out on that journey, as it had done also when he had met his benefactor on his return. Kishimoto wept beneath the willow trees."

(TZ 3, *Spring*, Chapter 83, p. 157)

In all these three scenes rivers form a backdrop for Tôson's portrayal of the hero, Kishimoto. Especially in the latter part of this story the Sumida River forms the main scene of the action.

Tôson wrote in *Spring*: "His benefactor's house stood beside the Sumida River" (TZ 3, *Spring*, Chapter 47, p. 93). This fictional benefactor had an original in real life: Yoshimura Tadamichi, whom throughout his life Tôson called his *onjin* (benefactor). Yoshimura was a friend of Tôson's second oldest brother Hirosuke. Tôson stayed with the Yoshimuras from age 12 to age 20, a period which included seven years in the house beside the Sumida River to which the family moved in 1886. He was treated with much affection and care.

The Sumida River is thus closely connected with the writer's real life, and he returned to it when he began writing *Spring*. "On October 2, 1906, I moved from Nishi Okubo to Shinkatamachi in Asakusa-ku. At my new house, I started to write a second novel. My new house was near the Sumida River. For me, the area from around Ryôgoku to beside the Sumida River was full of memories, from when I was a boy through to young manhood. There was my benefactor Yoshimura's house too, at Hama-chô in Nihonbashi. In addition to such deep associations, the first floor, although it was small, was very comfortable, and refreshed my heart. I started to write *Spring* with the new feeling of having moved to my new house near the river where I could see the sky of the whole city" (TZ 13, pp. 115-116).

At the age of 35, after his northern sojourn in Sendai and the years in Komoro, this return to the warm cradle of his formative years must have felt like a homecoming. The river's deep and comforting emotional significance for him is revealed in many references that appear in essays written during the writing of *Spring*.

For example: "I feel comfortable when I take a walk under the willow trees between the Ryôgoku Bridge and the Umayu Bridge along the east side of the Sumida River" (TZ6, *Tabako Sanbon (Three Cigarettes)*, p. 508).

Again: "Although the water is dirty, I think that the colour of sunrise reflected in the Sumida River, which I saw from the riverside of Hama-chô in the early morning of summer, is interesting because of the special feature of the canal" (TZ6, *Tokai no Jôchô (The City and its Moods)*, pp. 535-6).

In the light of the above, it is not surprising that in *Spring* the vicinity of the

Sumida River is minutely described. It was for Tôson a symbol of Tôkyô, which is the main locality of the narrative; it also becomes a symbol of the inner state of mind of the hero, Kishimoto, thus also underlining the author's identification with his central character.

As indicated in a quotation introduced early in this chapter (TZ 13, *Ori ni Furete (Now and Then)*, p. 121), minute description based on observation is even more strikingly evident in his approach to the writing of *The Family*, a work described by Keene as being "in a similar vein to *Spring* but in every way more successful" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 261).

Based firmly on objective description of reality, *The Family* has been called an outstanding example of Japanese naturalism, and the following critical comments testify to its reputation:

Masamune Hakuchô: "When I read 'the Family', I could not help but conclude that, both in scale and in quality, it was one of great work of the Meiji era" (Masamune, *Shimazaki Tôson Ron*, quoted in Itô 1983, p. 239).

Senuma Shigeki: "*The Family* is a unique masterpiece forming a great high peak of Tôson's literature and a literary monument to Japanese naturalism" (Senuma, 1987, p. 217).

Arishima Ikuma: "*The Family* is not only the masterpiece among the works Tôson wrote during the Meiji era but is also a towering literary monument of the period" (Arishima 1967, p. 414).

McClellan: "From the purely technical point of view, it is probably his most successful work: in it, we see a particular technique being applied with more consistency and perhaps more effectiveness than in any of his other novels" (McClellan 1969, p. 101).

The novel *Ie* covers a period of twelve years from 1898 to 1910, and recounts the disintegration of the Koizumi and Hashimoto families. The former in reality is the Shimazaki family, formerly of Magome, which had removed to Tôkyô in 1893, and the latter is the Takase family, of Kiso-Fukushima, Nagano prefecture, into which Tôson's elder sister Sonoko married.²⁸

Keene observes: "It is a dark work (...); not only does it describe many tragic events in the lives of two families but it leaves the reader with a sense of the profound gloom of the houses and the family relationships (...) It conveys with intensity and at times poetic beauty the life of a traditional Japanese family at the moment when it was being destroyed by the new Japan." He writes too of the narrative technique of the novel, the reader "in the end being left with an overpowering impression of reality, a reality that refuses the contrived excitement of scenes of dramatic conflict" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 263).

Tôson's objective description made a great contribution to this sense of reality. McClellan writes: "For the author of *The House*, the details of the backdrop are as important as what the actors do or say" (McClellan 1969, p. 101).

This approach to writing is evident in the opening paragraphs of *The Family*.

"The kitchen of the Hashimoto house was full of activity with lunch preparations. Ordinarily, six male employees, from head clerk to office boy, had to be fed; but now there were Tokyo guests too. Including the family, thirteen had to be served. It was not easy for Otane, mistress of the house, to cook three times a day for such a large number but she had gradually become accustomed to feeding so many, and managed quite well with the help of her daughter and a maid.

"The spacious irori²⁹ room had polished cupboards and a spotless wooden floor. The prepared food was carried from the kitchen and served at the irori, where a fire burned even in summer and over which hung a soot-covered bamboo pothanger suspended from the ceiling. Soft shafts of light from a skylight entered the old-fashioned, imposing structure, and through an open panel in the skylight a patch of clear blue sky could be seen."

(TZ 4, Chapter 1, p. 5; translation by Cecilia S. Seigle,
The Family, p. 1)

²⁸ The *Shimazaki Tôson Jiten* (Itô 1976, p. 743) contains a genealogical chart of the two real families, adding in parentheses the names of the characters appearing in *Ie* that correspond to the real-life individuals.

²⁹ *Irori*: a traditional Japanese type of fireplace, sunk into the floor.

In this “excellent narrative opening” (Hirano 1967, p. 1), the character Koizumi Sankichi, who is Tôson’s other self in the novel, arrives at the Hashimotos in Kiso Fukushima for a stay which will last two months. “The Tokyo guests” are Sankichi and the son of his friend. Tôson leads the reader to the kitchen and then to the spacious irori room, introducing various characters on the way. Here, the reader can grasp the actual living conditions of an old respectable family. In this work the Hashimotos’ house is described as Tôson saw its model in real life, namely the house of the Takase family.

This technique pervades *The Family* from beginning to end. A particular characteristic of the novel’s detailed scene-setting is to be found in the author’s treatment of the natural environment.

Like *Spring*, *The Family* contains many descriptions of rivers. The scene moves successively from Kiso to Tôkyô and thence to Komoro. Each locale has its own river, the sight and sound of which are described exactly as the author saw and heard them, with the sound of a train in the Shinshû mountains forming an occasional counterpoint with that of a Sumida steamship.

Some instances of Tôson’s word-painting of rivers in *The Family* are reproduced and commented on below; the English-language source is the translation *The Family* by Cecilia S. Seigle (Seigle 1976).

- 1 “Sankichi, come and see,” Otane said as she gave him a tour of the house. (...) “I can hear the sound of the Kiso River!” Sankichi exclaimed after listening intently.

(TZ 4, Chapter 1, pp. 8-9; Seigle, pp. 3-4)

- 2 Returning to the guest room, Sankichi opened the sliding doors so that he could see the slope of the mountain across the valley. Shota placed a large lacquered papier-mache table in the centre of the spacious room. (...) He had become so accustomed to the sound of the Kiso River in the valley, it made no fresh impression on him. And he was tired of the gloom of the forests. Was he to be cloistered in these mountains all his life? The mere thought was hard to bear. Sometimes, in the middle of a conversation, he

cocked his head and listened, and his eyes took on a dreamy look as if he were drawn to the sound of the mountain stream.

(TZ 4, Chapter 2, p. 25; Seigle, pp. 16-17)

The exact description in both these passages derives from the fact that Tôson had come to the guest room of the Takase house and actually listened to the sound of the Kiso River. When he wrote, as mentioned early in this chapter, that “I wrote about the river only after walking into a room where I could hear its sound.” (TZ 13, p. 121), he was referring to precisely these scenes. (This observation applies also to example 8 below.)

-3 A train whistle from the direction of the station pierced the mountain air and reached the sliding doors of the south room. It reminded Sankichi of the steamer whistle on Sumida River, and at times it made him feel as if he was near the river in Tokyo. But as he listened more carefully, he realized it could be nothing but the sound of a mountain train. He told Oyuki about this and stood on the veranda listening, all ears, like a man marooned on an island waiting for a ship to come into harbour.

(TZ 4, Chapter 6, p. 90; Seigle, p. 70)

-4 “The mountain over there that looks slightly grayish purple,” said Sankichi, pointing, “is Yatsugatake. Then way over on this side you see the mountain with autumn colour. The river at the foot of the cliff is the Chikuma.”

“Is the mountain always purplish like that? I thought it would be much drier here.”

“It looks different today. There’s a lot of humidity. Usually the mountains are much closer.”

(TZ 4, Chapter 7, p. 130; Seigle pp. 99-100)

This description is of the Chikuma River in Komoro and is the result of practice sketching that he did there.

- 5 His story took Sankichi back to the house by the murmuring Kiso River. He could visualize the Hashimoto house, just as it was the summer he stayed there.

(TZ 4, Chapter 11, p. 202; Seigle, pp. 154-155)

In this scene Sankichi recollects Kiso when he is in Tôkyô. It is significant that Tôson evokes the sound of the river rather than merely refer to it by name alone. This sensory evocation underlines the significance of the river within the novel. The road and the river intersect in the narrow Kiso valley, giving rise to the saying that "Nobody who passes through the Kiso valley can fail to hear the sound of the Kiso River." Thus the river is inseparable from the experience of travelling along or living in the Kiso valley, and its sound was for Tôson powerfully symbolic of his birthplace.

- 6 On each visit Sankichi remarked that the upstairs room had the atmosphere of a waterfront pavilion, with their fine view of the river. Lights on the opposite bank sparkled gaily in the rippling water.

(TZ 4, Chapter 16, p. 308; Seigle, p. 236)

The river in this and the next passage is the Sumida River, which, as mentioned above in connection with *Haru*, symbolized Tôkyô for Tôson.

- 7 They could see the Sumida River from that point. Graceful white seagulls hovered above, and on the opposite shore a cluster of houses with smoke rising from the chimneys was visible through the veil of polluted air.

"Even the smell of the river is different now. It's not like the old days," Sankichi mused, looking at the water.

(TZ 4, Chapter 18, p. 346; Seigle, p. 264)

- 8 Sankichi went to the front, where the young couple lived. In that very room he had spent a summer with Naoki. The garden had not changed, and from here he could hear clearly the sound of the Kiso River in the valley below.

(TZ 4, Chapter 19, p. 379; Seigle, p. 288)

(See the comment on examples 1 and 2 above).

-9 A large forest stretched before them, the Kiso River was visible through the trees, and inviting teahouses stood along the way.

(TZ 4, Chapter 19, p. 385; Seigle, p. 292)

These nature descriptions are not so important for the evolution of the story, as the scenery of the river is not described independently but only as the backdrop for the characters. However, the description of a particular river contributes powerfully to establishing the scene of the action at a given point in the narrative. Thus, a description of the Kiso River tells us that the scene has moved to Kiso; similarly, when we encounter a description of the Sumida River we know that the action has shifted to Tôkyô. Similarly, describing the murmuring Kiso River, or the slightly greyish purple mountain over the Chikuma River, or the water of the Sumida River, helps us to visualise Sankichi and other characters more clearly. The interweaving of the action of the characters and the natural backdrop to those actions strengthens the story's verisimilitude. The source of this narrative power lies in nothing other than Tôson's attention to the task of rendering faithfully what he himself had seen and heard. The more scrupulous Tôson became in the discipline of observation and description of nature, the greater became the sense of reality that he was able to convey in his fiction.

McClellan writes that "*The House* is ... primarily a novel of description, where the author tries to describe accurately only that which his eyes see and his ears hear, and to express his emotions implicitly through detached observations of the surface scene" (McClellan 1969, p. 101).

The same may also be said of *Shinsei* (*A New Life*). Tôson began writing *A New Life* in 1918 and finished it in 1919. We can say that it is a continuation of *The Family*. In autobiographical terms, it covers the period from 1911 to 1918.

Keene relates that: "A few months after Tôson completed the first half of *The Family* in May 1910, his wife died in childbirth, leaving him with four small children. (...) He managed to complete *The Family* in 1911. (...) Tôson kept with him only his two older sons, but even so the care of the children was too much for a man. Two nieces came to live with him. The older of the nieces left in June 1912 to be married, and soon afterward Tôson succumbed to his loneliness and the proximity of a young woman. He and his niece became lovers. One day the niece informed him that she was pregnant. (...) Finally he came to the conclusion that his only

course was to go abroad, beyond the reach of censure.

"The circumstances of Tôson's affair with his niece, his journey to Paris and residence in France, and his return to Japan in 1916 after three years abroad are related in the novel *Shinsei*" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 264).

The novel "was attacked after its publication by many critics, who pointed out that Tôson's absorption with his own woes had made him shockingly insensitive to the repercussions of his public confession on his niece and the members of his brother's family" (ibid., p. 265).

This is the reason why Akutagawa Ryûnosuke wrote: "Even Rousseau's *Confessions* was full of heroic lies. Especially *A New Life* — he had never before encountered such a sly old hypocrite as the hero of *A New Life*." (Akutagawa Ryûnosuke, *Aru ahô no isshô* (*The Life of an Idiot*), Chapter 46 *Uso* (*Lies*), Akutagawa Ryûnosuke *Zenshû*, vol. 4, p. 64).

Seigle writes: "*Shinsei* was an explosive work. It had taken him years of probing before he at length decided to confess publicly his scandalous love affair with his own niece" (Seigle 1971, p. 21).

McClellan writes: "It is an account of a single major experience in the author's private life. It is a confession, or a justification perhaps, of his illicit relationship with one of his nieces" (McClellan 1969, p. 123).

Keene writes: "Tôson's confession was extremely frank." (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 265). As he suggests, there is no doubting the novel's remarkably unvarnished candour.

The realism of the novel lies in the verisimilitude with which the complications in the hero's life are described, and in a descriptive power that conveys to the reader a sense of being present at the scene of the action. Although there are many changes of scene, taking in Tôkyô, Paris, Limoges and elsewhere, precise psychological description and skilful scene-setting ensure that the sense of *being there* is never lost, and that the truthfulness of the author's confession is fully conveyed.

In this novel as in previous works, descriptions of rivers are used effectively

both in scene-setting and in narrating the action. Tôson is especially impressive in the river scenes set in France.

Keene wrote: "*A New Life* is probably most successful in the sections devoted to describing the isolation and sense of alienation that Tôson experienced while living in France" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, pp. 264-265). This experience is described explicitly in, for example: "Kishimoto experienced a strong feeling of having travelled far from his home country" (TZ 7, Part 1, Chapter 105, p. 200).

In this scene, Kishimoto (Tôson once more gives this name to his fictional alter ego) remembers Japan when he sees a river flowing through some out-of-the-way rural part of France, but it is not so much a matter of Kishimoto *actively recalling* as it is of his *being passively reminded* of his home country because he associates the river's appearance with the Sumida River.

Whenever Tôson felt unbearably sad and homesick, there was the Seine always right before his eyes, and the sight made him pine for home. Kishimoto's recollections of home truthfully reflect the mental state of Tôson himself in those days of sojourn abroad; and in this novel rivers and memories flow, as it were, in parallel.

Tôson wrote four essays *Heiwa no Pari* (*Paris at Peace*), *Sensô to Pari* (*Paris and the War*), *Étranger* (*A Stranger*) and *Umi e* (*To the Sea*) during the time he lived in France. Each contains descriptions of rivers; indeed, for Tôson, one could say that it is by means of rivers that much of his emotion is conveyed.

In the writing of these essays we can perhaps detect another parallel with an earlier significant period in the writer's life. Just as we saw how in the writing of the *Chikuma River Sketches* Tôson was developing towards the creation of *The Broken Commandment*, so here we see him developing through these later essays towards the writing of *A New Life*, which draws on his writing about the Seine and the Vienne rivers that play an important emotional part in the life of the fictional Kishimoto, as they did in that of the real Tôson in France.

Some examples of Tôson's word-painting of rivers in *A New Life* are given below. Only the first concerns the Sumida river; the rest of the scenes are French.

- 1 As he looked at the water of the Sumida river, forming whirlpools as it flowed toward the Ryôgoku railway bridge, the sight seemed to flow into his eyes.

(TZ 7, Part 1, Chapter 2, p. 20)

- 2 The clear water of the Seine flowed between low banks lined with trees. On the slopes of the far side of the river the red tiled roofs of houses resembling villas could be seen here and there, lapped in an atmosphere redolent of the suburbs.

(TZ 7, Part 1, Chapter 59, p. 122)

- 3 Kishimoto felt that there on the banks of the river Vienne he had had his first proper rest since coming to France.

(TZ 7, Part 1, Chapter 97, p. 186)

- 4 One day, Kishimoto came to the foot of the same bridge again. Now almost every day, yellow leaves were falling from the rows of plane trees. There, where the national highway continued, from the top of a stone wall located near the bridge one could see both banks of the Vienne River as well as the stone tower of the temple of Saint Etienne which stood between the national highway and the row of the trees. On days when for some reason or other Kishimoto felt tired and in need of a rest from work, he used to take himself to the small coffee shop at the foot of the bridge. While savouring a strong cup of the hot coffee they served there, he would amuse himself by passing the time in solitude watching the stone pillar of the water pump at the corner of the street, seeing the women putting down their water jars as they gathered together, observing the rural customs of the old women who sat there knitting.

(TZ 7, Part 1, Chapter 100, p. 190)

- 5 Kishimoto and his friend walked to the broad Rue du Châtelet. They could see people coming and going with a very Parisian air. They reached the banks of the Seine and went over the bridge to the island in the middle of the river, which was called the Ile-Saint-Louis. From there they came out at a place where they could see the back of Notre Dame. They could see the

black shadow of someone fishing beside the foot of the stone wall. The water of the Seine also flowed with a lonely look.

(TZ 7, Part 1, Chapter 107, p. 203)

- 6 It seemed to him utterly incredible to think that, in two or maybe two-and-a-half months' time at the latest, he would be able to look upon the long-familiar Sumida River with the same eyes with which now he watched the clear water of the Seine flowing under the stone bridge.

(TZ 7, Part 2, Chapter 6, p. 250)

- 7 The stretch from the foot of the Pont d'Austerlitz to the middle island where people could see Notre Dame was Kishimoto's favourite. For the past three years he had come to the bank of the river to forget his anxiety of life. At times when he had become unbearably homesick, missing everything in his home country; at those desolate times when his money got so low that he thought he would have to fast for a few days; at times when he had closed off his heart to all but one name he longed to cry aloud - not that of the father who had died when he was a child, nor that of his wife who had died after twelve years of marriage, but of the first love of those sensitive days of pure youthful emotion — at such times it was always to this stretch of water that he had come. The Seine flowed coldly and quietly below the high stone wall as usual. He looked towards the river on his right as he walked along the pavement on the bank lined with fresh green trees in the direction of the part of town where his hotel was.

(TZ 7, Part 2, Chapter 7, p. 250)

- 8 His eyes were greeted again by the Sumida River that he had longed for when on the banks of the Saône, the Vienne, and the Garonne. With the same eyes that had looked on the waters of the Seine from the foot of the stone Pont d'Austerlitz he beheld the Sumida River, which he had never forgotten during three years' absence, forming whirlpools as the current flowed from the river's upper reaches.

(TZ 7, Part 2, Chapter 30, p. 291)

As mentioned above, when in France Tôson associated rivers with the Sumida and with his home country. Just after coming home to Japan, Tôson addressed the Sumida River as follows:

“River, river, water of the Sumida River! Your old acquaintance who has known you since his young days has returned to your bosom. I always remembered you when I stood on the banks of the Saône, the Vienne and the Garonne. When I saw the waters of the Seine from the foot of the Pont d’Austerlitz in Paris, too, I missed you. I am delighted to be able to return to your banks and behold your waters.”

(TZ8, *Umi e (To the Sea)*, Chapter 20, p. 184)

For Tôson, describing nature as it appeared before his eyes was done not for its own sake but to create settings for the the action and psychology of characters. Meticulous description of reality gave greater impact to the candour of his confession, and attracted readers.

Tôson’s observation and minute description of nature, which first came to public view in *The Broken Commandment*, continued to develop through *Spring*, *The Family* and *A New Life*, and reached the full flower of complete mastery in *Before the Dawn*, his last completed novel, on which he began working in 1927 and which he finished in 1935.

Before the Dawn is an unusually long work of ambitious intent. It portrays Japan as it changed during the turbulent times before and after the Meiji Restoration, using as the central figure Tôson’s own father.

The novel covers the thirty-three years from June 1853, when the “Black Ships” of Commodore Perry reached the shores of Japan, up to November 1886 . The protagonist, Aoyama Hanzô, is closely modelled on Tôson’s father, and the story is of his life from the age of twenty-three until his insanity and death, at the age of fifty-six. Hanzô is portrayed against the background of a rapidly evolving country.

The story is not easy to summarise. Keene writes as follows:

“The emphasis is not on the plot but on the epical surge embracing Hanzô and the Japan before and after the “dawn” of the new era. The first half of the novel is devoted to the period at the end of the shogunate. Hanzô, the son of the most prosperous man in the town of Magome, a post station on the Kiso Road, has a social position midway between that of the privileged samurai class and the peasantry, but his sympathy with the hardships endured by the latter causes him to take their part during the turbulent days of the 1860s. He studies the philosophy of Hirata Atsutane, the Shintô nationalist who advocated a return to the purity and decency of Japan before the introduction of Chinese thought had corrupted men’s ways. This enthusiasm stirred in Hanzô hopes for a restoration of imperial rule and the destruction of the ‘medieval’ ways represented by the shogunate. Much of the effectiveness of the first half of *Before the Dawn* is due to the reader’s awareness that Hanzô is doomed to be disillusioned by the new government once the longed-for restoration has occurred³⁰; this is the subject of the second half of the book.

“Hanzô’s disillusion is many-sided. First, he is dismayed to discover that the peasants, for whom he has fought, are apathetic about the new regime and concerned only with their daily lives. Though he is eager to help them, they refuse to accept him as one of their own and do not understand his ideals. Later, when Hanzô obtains an official post, he attempts to alleviate the hardship of the peasants’ lives by securing for them the right to cut timber from the local forests, but he is dismissed by his superior, a bureaucrat of the new style who exhibits none of the ancient concern for the welfare of the peasants. In the end he is driven to drink and even to madness.”

(Keene 1984, vol. 1, pp. 268-269)

This novel is generally regarded as Tôson’s masterpiece. and has been highly

³⁰ Non-Japanese not familiar with Japanese history of that period would not have the same foreknowledge.

acclaimed both in Japan and abroad. A selection of critical comments follows.

Miyoshi Yukio: “*Before the Dawn* is not only the masterpiece that crowned his later years; it is also one of the master-works of modern historical literature in Japan.” (Miyoshi, 1994, p. 361)

Itô Shinkichi: “This work achieved exceptional stature and deserves to be called a monumentally great work.” (Itô, 1983, p. 473)

Senuma Shigeki: “In every sense, *Before the Dawn* is a summation of Tôson’s entire literary output and is nothing less than a great monument in the canon of our modern literature.” (Senuma, 1987, p. 341)

Naff: “*Before the Dawn* looks back on the adventure, turmoil, and tragedy of mid-nineteenth century Japan with a clear and unsentimental vision, but it speaks of those times in tones of tact, humility, and deference. It is a celebration of the humanity of its characters and the richness, complexity, and diversity of the lives they lived during the final years of the Tokugawa shogunate and the first two decades of the Meiji era. For all the weight of its historical concerns, it maintains its lyrical tone even when the subject is external threat, internal political turmoil, the grinding hardship of maintaining the old post system, or the bitter disappointments that the new age brought to so many of those who had worked hardest and sacrificed most to bring it into being.” (Naff 1987, INTRODUCTION, p. xxxii)

Tôson spent a two-year period of preparation for the writing of this novel, walking around the Kiso valley and collecting much historical material. Detailed memoranda of his notes (called *Notes for ‘Before the Dawn’*) were used throughout the work itself. In ‘*Yoake mae’ wo dasu ni tsuite (About Writing ‘Before the Dawn’)*’ he wrote: “I have done nothing more than to apply my usual method of investigating and recording things, and to present the results” (TZ 13, p. 325). “My usual method” means: writing on the basis of observing and sketching, just as he had done in the case of *Chikuma River Sketches* and *The Broken Commandment*, basing his fiction on a respect for evidence. In this case it meant that, in depicting history from the last days of the Tokugawa Shogunate to the Meiji Restoration, and in portraying persons and events, Tôson sought to write a novel as precisely and minutely faithful as possible to the facts and the materials.

Tôson's essay *Oboegaki* (*A Memorandum*) expresses this very clearly:

"In order to write *Before the Dawn* I had to read all kinds of old records that had some bearing on this type of work.

(...)

"By early in 1927, I had already mapped out the plan of *Before the Dawn*. But I did not yet have enough courage to travel down the road that would lead me back into my father's era. This was because, although it seemed that my grandfather and father had left many written records of their long life of involvement with the Kiso road, my father's collection of books had been lost in the big fire that occurred in our village before the Sino-Japanese War³¹, so that there were not so many old records left in our house to help me in my investigation. It was the Daikoku-ya³² diaries that gave me the confidence to take up my pen. That year, I spent the whole summer making a précis of the diaries left by a former master of the Daikoku-ya; and then I began the preparation for my long task."

(TZ 13, p. 293)

Tôson wrote up many materials besides the Daikoku-ya diaries: "the old records of the Matsuhara family, headmen in Ôtaki village, or of the Tsuchiya family, headmen at Oiwake station on the Nakasendô, or from the Yamazaki of Shinji village, Ueshina country, Shinano, as well as the historical records from the Kiso-Fukushima station, the tax records and *honjin*³³ diaries from Tsumago, and the household records of the Yawataya belonging to the Hachiya family of Magome" (TZ 13, p. 291).

Thanks to these materials, Tôson was able to gain a clear understanding of the everyday events and incidents that occurred on the Kiso road, which was the main setting of this novel.

³¹ The Sino-Japanese War began in 1894.

³² Daikoku-ya: the house of a business family that lived near to the Shimazaki family home.

³³ *Honjin*. An official post-station (staging-post), such as were maintained at key points on the highways of Tokugawa Japan.

"To approach history from the written word," he explained, "is my way of getting close to graspable truth" (TZ 13, p. 293). He was referring here to the records mentioned above; however, later he discussed his own use of the written word to convey history in these terms: "I tried to write this novel using language as simple and close to every day life as possible" (TZ 13, p. 325).

Particularly since history and historical background were such essential features of this novel, it was important that he seek to find simple language to convey historical factors that readers might otherwise find hard to understand.

The critic Aono Suekichi writes: "Compared with *A New Life* and other works, *Before the Dawn* reads more smoothly because Tôson was able to eliminate a certain stiffness of style" (Aono 1973, p. 463).

Aono also writes: "Although history is a major factor in *Before the Dawn*, there is no doubt that this novel is neither a popular historical novel of the kind which arbitrarily transforms history and exaggerates parts of it, nor does it belong to the kind of historical literature that simply records out of an interest in history itself. This novel, while deliberately written in simple everyday language, is suffused with the nobility of pure literature." (ibid., p. 465)

Western critics agree on this point. Keene writes: "The work is conceived along deliberately paced lines with ample space devoted to the narration of the historical background for the events described. The style throughout is simple, bare and understated; nothing now remains of the lyricism for which Tôson first gained celebrity, though an austere, almost epic quality emerges. The descriptions of nature have grandeur" (Keene 1984, vol. 1, p. 268).

(In the last sentence of this quotation, we see a recognition that, although immersed in historical records, Tôson had lost none of his sense of the intrinsic value of nature).

Needless to say the theme of *Before the Dawn* is the tragic and dramatic life of the hero Aoyama Hanzô, but there are other major factors beside this: the social unrest in Japan during the thirty-year period from 1853 that witnessed the Meiji restoration; changes in the country's traffic system represented by Kiso Magome station; the old family system represented by the Aoyamas; and local manners and customs.

Itô observes: "In the course of writing about life in the Kiso valley, Tôson on innumerable occasions describes disturbances in Japan and abroad which closely resemble the social unrest of a revolutionary period. And amid those confused scenes he is able to pursue a clear path of historical purpose" (Itô 1983, p. 514).

In the many pages Tôson allots to the narration of history, the stylistic impression is clear and simple. However, when his focus moves toward the Magome station and the outskirts of Kiso, the narration becomes graceful and the expression more vivid. His descriptions of nature in the Kiso valley convey a particularly strong impression, the impact on the reader becoming more deeply moving with each passing moment.

The opening sentences of the Prologue of *Before the Dawn* offer an especially fine literary gem.

"The Kiso road lies entirely in the mountains. In some places it cuts across the face of a precipice. In others it follows the banks of the Kiso river, far above the stream. Elsewhere it winds around a ridge and into another valley. All of it runs through dense forest. The eleven Kiso post stations are scattered along the bottom of the Kiso valley from the town of Sakurazawa in the east to the Jikkyoku pass in the west, a distance of fifty miles. The road has shifted and the old routes have vanished into the mountainsides. Even the famous hanging bridge of ivy where the traveler once had to entrust himself to the swaying strands has disappeared. A solid bridge had replaced it in the later years of the Tokugawa era."

(TZ 11, Prologue, p. 3; translation by William Naff, *Before the Dawn*, p. 7)³⁴

This paragraph has now become so famous that it is always quoted when people speak of Kiso. Critics too have admired the sense of depth that is conveyed in this opening passage.

³⁴ In all the following quotations from *Before the Dawn*, the translation used is that of Naff.

Kamei Katsuichirô writes: "It can safely be say that here Tôson's prose achieves a supreme peak of maturity. (...) The Prologue, in which he progresses from describing the natural landscape of Kiso to depicting the scene at the post station, is especially fine" (Kamei, 1954, p. 261).

Here, the author shows the reader that nature at Kiso is not only part of the scene of this novel but, together with the Kiso road, is also, as it were, a major character in the narrative. (Note: In fact, Tôson explained "the eleven Kiso post stations" and "Magome" in detail as follows: "The eleven post stations of the Kiso are generally divided into three groups. Magome, Tsumago, Midono, and Nojiri are called the lower four stations while Suwara, Agematsu, and Fukushima form the middle three. The upper four stations are Miyanokoshi, Yabuhara, Narai, and Niekawa" (TZ 11, 3-2³⁵, pp. 97-98; Naff, p. 71).

The beginning reveals that forest and road have an important place in this novel. The forest and mountains of the Kiso valley are so important that Tôson's first intended title for the work was *Shinrin (Forest)*. But the Kiso River, which also runs through dense forest along with the road, is also important.

Travellers on the Kiso road passed through this valley seeing the fresh green of the Kiso mountains and the blue of the Kiso River, and with the sound of the river in their ears. All who live there benefit from the water of rivers. Therefore, as well as the Kiso River, many other rivers which are tributaries of the Kiso River are also described in *Before the Dawn*.

Tôson's river descriptions in *Before the Dawn* come in five types: Firstly, there are descriptions reflecting Hanzô's state of mind. Secondly we find descriptions showing the local terrain. Thirdly, there are instances where description of a river is used to establish the season. In a fourth type, the descriptions function as guideposts showing the location of places mentioned in the story. Finally, there are river descriptions designed to help the reader to visualise the scene of some action. In the following paragraphs I consider instances of each type of river-description.

Taking firstly the type of river description used by Tôson to reflect Hanzô's state of mind, an impressive instance is the scene in which Hanzô walks from the

³⁵ The two volumes of *Yoake mae* comprise respectively TZ11 and TZ12. Each chapter is divided by Tôson into sections. In this and the following quotations, the relevant chapter number is given followed by a hyphen, followed by the appropriate section number. Thus, "3-2" represents Chapter 3, Section 2.

Chikuma prefecture local office immediately after having been dismissed from his employment with the words: "As of this day, you may consider yourself relieved of all duties as manager of Magome station":

"Feeling as he had never felt before, Hanzô passed by the site where the Yamamura residence had so recently stood. Grass and weeds were already beginning to cover the grounds. He walked through them, trying to remember where the three great halls had stood, where the main courtyard had been, where the library used to be. Then he walked across the main bridge. The swift current of the Kiso river caught his eye, the sparkle of its ripples, the stones beneath the surface."

(TZ 12, 8-5, p. 286; Naff, p. 580).

It is important to bear in mind the political background to this scene. Hanzô had expected that the coming of the new Meiji era would lead to the establishing of an ideal political state. This has not happened; Hanzô's hopes have been betrayed. The new age has led to a decline in circumstances for his family; but Hanzô, in acting according to his concern for his country has given no thought to his own family's problems. He has been striving to liberate the Kiso forest from the government in order to protect the livelihood of the people living in the Kiso valley. His selfless, disinterested action on behalf of the people has not found favour with the authorities and has produced the worst possible result for him: his dismissal. Stunned by this turn of events, he stares at the current of the Kiso River, asking himself: "Is this what the Restoration was supposed to be?" The clear current of the Kiso River represents Hanzô's mind. At the same time it is a scene that must appear ironical to the shocked Hanzô, whose regret at the outcome of the Restoration reflects Tôson's own feelings.

Next, I consider some river-descriptions intended to depict the local terrain.

"They were gradually approaching the Fukushima barrier. Treading on the ceaselessly falling leaves, the three moved ever deeper into the mountains. Just when it seemed that they had reached the end of the valley, another valley would appear beyond, with blue smoke rising above the shingled roof of the teahouse hidden there. When they crossed the hanging bridge and the ford where the Kiso is joined by a major tributary, the

river began to show the characteristics of its upper reaches. The road gradually descended into the bottom of the valley. After crossing another bridge, they came to the place where the road to Mt. Ontake branched off. Ahead was the castle town of Fukushima. 'Is this where the barrier is?' Sakichi called from the rear, his face solemn."

(TZ 11,3-2, p. 101; Naff, pp. 73-74)

"An old priest's house leaning against the steep slope high above the Ôtaki river awaited Hanzô and Katsushige. The building served as both local shrine and lodging for people preparing to undertake austerities on the mountain. There was no bridge over the river. Logs had been cut from the mountain and bound together for a raft to serve the needs of residents and visitors."

(TZ 11, 7-3, pp. 270-271; Naff, p. 192)

"He approached the hanging bridge. Here the valley was much narrower than it was near Tsumago, and the road was closer to the river than on most of the highway. Travelers coming from the west would have to work their way along the banks as they descended the steep, damp slope. Beneath a cliff covered with moss grass, they would discover a teahouse."

(TZ12, 8-4, p. 275; Naff, p. 573).

In these scenes we see respectively Kiso Fukushima, which is the central station of the Kiso Road, and two other famous places in the Kiso valley: Ôtaki and the hanging bridge. The descriptions of the Kiso River help the reader to visualise the terrain more clearly. For example, the Fukushima barrier is described in very concrete terms:

"The Fukushima barrier was also known as the Kiso Barrier. It was located on the outskirts of town, just across the river from the great gate of the Yamamura estate. Here, in the days of watching for 'departing women and entering guns,' travelers from the west were searched to see if they were carrying firearms, and travelers from the east to see if there were women among them. (...) In his house overlooking the Fukushima barrier,

they called on Uematsu Shosuke. (...) Shosuke, was entrusted with the maintenance of the barrier. He was also an instructor in firearms and one of the leading samurai of Fukushima. (...) 'Well, have a good trip! By the way, you both have your passports, don't you? This barrier is famous for its strictness. Not even daimyo's maids can pass through if they don't have their papers. Anyway, I'll escort you through.' (...) Then, wearing broad trousers, a formal jacket with crests, and two swords in his sash, he led them to the barrier. On one side of the checkpoint was the abrupt slope of the mountain; on the other, the precipitous banks of the Kiso river."

(TZ 11, 3-2, pp. 101-102; Naff, p. 74)

This paragraph shows us that the Fukushima barrier was well sited, making use of the natural precipitous topography, between the steep slope of the mountain and the swift current of the Kiso River. In fact, the house of the Takases (who become the Hashimotos in *The Family* and the Uematsus in *Before the Dawn*) adjoins the barrier. These minute descriptions were the result of Tôson's sketching. These scenes, such as the barrier, the Yamamura residence and the castle town of Fukushima, are situated within a small area that is centred on the Kiso River and spreads out before the eye when viewed from the Takase house.

Ôtaki, a village situated at the entrance to a sacred mountain, Mt. Ontake, which is called a natural symbol of the Kiso valley, is a sacred place to which Hanzô makes a pilgrimage to pray for his father's recovery. Tôson describes Ôtaki village in *Before the Dawn* as follows: "Ôtaki village was at the foot of Mt. Ontake, where the main shrine for the Kiso district was located" (TZ 11, 7-2, p. 264; Naff, pp. 187-188).

A few pages later, Hanzô arrives in the village:

"At last! Hanzô found himself in this mountain village among mountain village where even his distracted mind might be able to find repose. The nights seemed especially deep in Ôtaki. The dimly lighted houses along the bottom of the dark valley, the night mists boiling up along the river---everything seemed utterly still. Hanzô was pleased to be among these quiet forests when

the misty moon of the fourth month was in the sky.”

(TZ 11, 7-3, p. 272; Naff, p. 193)

Tôson visited Ôtaki village and made observations there. It can safely be said that, although as previously stated Hanzô is modelled on Tôson's father, Tôson put much of himself also into this character. His descriptions of the river, the night mists boiling up along the river, and the lonely sound of the river accurately convey the simple, quiet atmosphere of Ôtaki. “The lonely sound of the river” as well as “the dimly lit house” and “the night mists boiling up along the river” convey a clear picture of Ôtaki lying deep in the heart of the mountains.

“The hanging bridge” was such a dangerous place that Matsuo Bashô composed a noted haiku: “Kakehashi ya/Inochi wo karamu /Tsutakazura.” (“Ah, that hanging bridge, where life hangs on a strand of ivy”). In a similar vein, Tôson writes: “The famous hanging bridge of ivy where the traveler once had to entrust himself to the swaying strands” (TZ 11, Introduction-1, p. 3; Naff, p. 7).

From the hanging bridge, a person can look down into the swift current of the Kiso River. One feels Tôson's experience of doing that behind this passage:

“After parting from Juheiji at the edge of Tsumago, Hanzô and Katsushige followed the highway toward the interior. They left Suwara early the next morning and pressed on, reaching the hanging bridge about noon. The Kiso River gathering the water of melting snow flows among the myriad of rocks.”

(TZ 11, 7-3, p. 270; Naff, p. 191)

Hanzô's eyes rest upon the swift current of the Kiso River flowing through the narrow valley, and what he sees is what Tôson also has seen. The more detailed and unembellished Tôson makes his description of the river, the more Hanzô acquires real presence.

Thirdly, I consider two examples of river-descriptions designed to express changes of season in the Kiso valley.

“Everything here in this mountain village was behind the times when compared with the neighbouring province. Even the spring that came into the Kiso river from the west each year, bringing

out the buds on the zelkova along the river banks, took a full month to penetrate the hinterlands. Everything was late in arriving here.”

(TZ 11, 2-1, p. 55; Naff, p. 43)

“Hanzô and Heibei moved slowly along a road running with melted snow. The farther they walked the brighter the skies above the valley somehow seemed to become. It was the time of year when the early spring coming up the Kiso river from the west seemed to be hesitating among the fields of young winter barley, as yet making no new growth in the still frozen soil. But when they reached Midono, they noticed that the buds on the plum trees, which in Fukushima had still been small and hard, were beginning to swell.”

(TZ 12, 3-3, p. 93; Naff, p. 451)

“The neighboring province” in the first of these two passages means Mino, and “everything” includes learning, religion, trade and the arts. Here, Tôson draws a parallel between the slow propagation of these things and the slow spread of early spring coming up the Kiso River from the west. The long north-south extent of the Kiso valley is reflected in the fact that spring arrives at Fukushima and at Midono at different times. The view of nature spreading along the Kiso River conveys the early spring. Describing changes of season signals a shift in narrative time.

Fourthly, I consider river-descriptions used as guideposts to the location of places named in the narrative. The novel contains many place names; in particular, names of places of the Kiso valley appear one after another, making it all too easy for the reader to become almost literally lost. Tôson guides us along the paths his characters take by describing the rivers linking various places to each other.

Two instances of this type of river-description in *Before the Dawn* are:

“People began to leave the mountain very early the next morning. Pilgrims from the most distant provinces got up while it was still dark to prepare for their journey home. Their robes and sashes were white, their headbands were white. Presently, Hanzô too took leave of his hosts and went out to join the pilgrims

descending the mountain. He could hear the bells jingling from their waists as they strode along the mountain road ahead of him carrying the new walking staffs that would serve as their souvenir of this pilgrimage. (. . .) Hanzô followed the Ôtaki river down from the slopes of Mt. Ontake to Fukushima.”

(TZ 12, 8-4 , p. 284 ; Naff, p. 579)

“Hanzô could not keep his guest in the storehouse for long. He told Masaka that he would have to leave Magome before dark, or at the very least during the night, and be shown the road to Seinaiji. Their fellow disciple Hara Nobuyoshi lived there, and if he reached the town of Seinaiji he would be on the road to Ina. Hanzô put a direct question to Masaka. ‘Kureta, is this your first time on the Kiso road?’ ‘I’ve gone over the Gombei road to Ina but this is my first time here.’ ‘In that case you had better do this. If you go from here toward Tsumago, there is a place called Hashiba. When you cross the bridge there, the road divides into two. The right fork is the Ina road ... If you just pick up the Araragi river and follow it on to the southeast, you will be all right.’ ”

(TZ 11, 6-5, pp. 251-252; Naff, pp. 177-178)

The Kiso River has many tributaries, of which the Ôtaki River and the Araragi River are typical. Tôson describes the former as : “The river flowing down from Mt. Ontake.” (TZ 12, 13-1, p. 408; Naff, p. 667). As will be seen in the following examples, both these tributaries are among Tôson’s “guidepost” rivers.

Like Mt Fuji, Mt. Ontake has long been seen in Japan as a sacred mountain, being worshipped by many people. It is a symbol of the Kiso valley, and is closely associated with Hanzô in this novel. Although it stands alone, rising to over 3,000 meters, people cannot easily see its majesty, because it is surrounded by other mountains that form a part of the Japan Alps.

Tôson guides the reader along the road from the Kiso valley to Mt. Ontake by describing the Ôtaki River, showing us that the road from the slopes of Mt. Ontake to Fukushima, which is located in the centre of the Kiso valley, is reached by way

of the river. Thanks to this “guided tour”, in the second of the two examples quoted above, after Hanzô tells Kureta to “pick up the Araragi river and follow it on to the southeast”, the reader will be able to follow Kureta on his journey as he follows Hanzô’s directions, hurrying on his way from Kiso to Ina deep in the forest-clad mountains.

Tôson writes: “Here in this constricted land the Araragi river, a tributary of the Kiso, raced down the steep valley and over the frozen stones with the force of an avalanche. There near Tsumago was the bridge and from there the highway led into Ina” (TZ 11, 11-2, p. 424; Naff, p. 298).

Finally, I consider river-descriptions that serve the purpose of giving a scene greater verisimilitude. In the key scenes of this novel, Tôson’s description of the setting becomes more detailed. One example of this is the locality of Tsumago, the importance of which in terms of its association with key personalities in the narrative can be seen in the following passage:

“The younger sister of Aoyama Juheiji of Tsumago, the neighboring honjin, had been selected as Hanzô’s future wife. (...) Not only did the two families bear the same surname, Aoyama, but it had been passed down in the traditions of both families that they were descended from Aoyama Kenmotsu, who had come from Miura in Sagami province to settle at Tsumago.”

(TZ 11, 1-2, pp. 35-36; Naff, p. 30)

“Juheiji’s village was located on the river and near the Shizumo and Araragi forests in one of the most beautiful valleys in all the Kiso. In going to Magome one’s back was turned to the entrance of this valley and the highway led five miles over the pass. It was a great pleasure for Otami, who seldom left the house, to walk over this mountain road in the company of her brother. The summer forest stood along both sides of the road, and beyond rose mountain after mountain. Between Tumaga and Magome was the Shiragi guard station, set up to watch for illegal cutting as part of the forest conservation policy of Owari han.”

(TZ 11, 6-2, p. 203; Naff, p. 143)

“Leaving Tsumago, Hanzô could no longer see the blue waters of the Kiso. The road left the deep valley and headed up through the heavily forested mountains. The farther he climbed the closer he came to the western end of the Kiso country.”

(TZ 12, 6-6, p. 220; Naff, p. 537)

Here we see Tôson's description of the beauty of Tsumago and its location being achieved through a description of the river.

The best example of scene-setting through the description of a river is the description of Magome, Tôson's birthplace.

“Magome was one of the eleven Kiso post stations. It was located at the end of the long valley, at the western entrance of the Kiso road and near the boundary of Mino province. A traveler coming from Mino would ascend Jikkyoku pass and at the summit of this tortuous stretch of mountain road would catch his first glimpse of the post station.”

(TZ 11, Prologue, Part 1, p. 4; Naff, p. 8)

Tôson wrote elsewhere of Magome: “This village looked like a castle and was built on a pass where there were many rocks and stones. The homes of the residents were built on low stone walls along either side of the road. Everywhere I looked, I saw nothing but slopes” (TZ 9, *Mizu no Hanashi (Speaking of water)*, in *Furusato (My Hometown)*, p. 281).

Magome had little drinking water because it alone, of the eleven post stations of the Kiso road, was built on steep slopes. That fact also appears many times in his fiction. Thus, in *Before the Dawn*:

“Magome itself had little drinking water, but in the mountains behind the village there was a small spring with the sweet water that one finds only in high country. This water was brought down in a flume to a great basin that served as the village reservoir, overflowing with sweet mountain coolness. Women from houses that did not have their own well would go out with buckets and carrying poles to this reservoir. Below the bank at

the southern edge of Magome, along the narrow path in the shade of cedars and elms, the women would gather on their way to get water.”

(TZ 12, 10-1, p. 317; Naff, p. 602)

The description of this small spring and its sweet water appears in this novel many times.

A small stream ran through a water course in the mountains, providing a valuable source of water for the people of Magome. It tended to escape the notice of travellers, but it was important to the locals, and it was Tôson's favourite place. Here are some of its appearances in *Before the Dawn*:

“There was a shallow watercourse and a culvert. A small stream ran through it.”

(TZ 12, Epilogue, Part 4, p. 521; Naff, p. 750)

“There were countless things to remind one of just how deep in the mountains Magome was. Deer lived in the village forest, and the timid animals would often come down to drink from the Orisaka river in the southeast corner of the village.

(TZ 11, Prologue, Part 3, p. 7; Naff, p. 10)

“At the bottom of the valley, known only to the local people, the Orisaka river tumbled down in its steep course from Mt. Otaru.”

(TZ 12, 14-2, p. 460; Naff, p. 708)

As the critic Shinoda Hajime points out, the austere beauty of nature gives this novel its essential appeal, and the descriptions of the Kiso River are especially remarkable. He quotes the following passage in writing about his impressions of *Before the Dawn*:

“The Kiso River gathers together the water of melting snow as it flows and swirls between innumerable rocks. There is a resting house. Thrushes were singing. The mountain road leading up to Ôtaki was on the opposite bank. People intending to climb Mt. Ontake would take this road which passed through the villages

of the villages of Koshitachi, Shimojo, and Kuroda before finally reaching the vicinity of the Tokiwa ford. Hanzô and Katsushige left the highway and turned off into a deep, heavily forested valley. The leaf buds on the deciduous trees were just beginning to open. Life was returning to the forest all around them as they moved on. When they reached the Sawahodo pass, marking the first league of the climb, they found a spot set aside for distant worship and from it they could see Mt. Ontake all the way from Marishiten to the inner temple. 'Katsushige! There's Mt. Ontake! It's still covered with snow,' exclaimed Hanzô. The mountains stood in rank upon rank of superimposed triangular forms, each with its own steepness of pitch and with Tsurugigamine, the 'sword peak,' soaring up at the apex of the awesome mass. In the hidden fastness were solitude and calm. Here people could gaze up at the form of a great mountain that would prevail amidst the endless changes of the human world. It was said that the bones of early climbers such as the twelfth-century priest Kakumyo Gyoja were buried at the edge of the precipice at its summit. 'Let's hurry, master!' said Katsushige, but he was not the only eager one. Hanzô too was struck by the solemn dignity of the mountains and he could not linger here. He was impatient to press on to Ôtaki."

(TZ 11, 7-3, p. 270; first sentence translated by M.A., the remainder taken from Naff, p. 191).

Shinoda comments further: "Anyone reading *Before the Dawn* will be deeply impressed with the freshness of Tôson's descriptions of nature. Furthermore, the author's boundless and deep feelings towards nature, which can clearly be felt underlying his descriptions, bring readers to a deep state of rapture" (in Itô 1967, pp. 244-245).

Tôson describes the Kiso River in *Before the Dawn* in much more detail than he did the Sumida River and the Seine in *Spring*, *The Family*, and *A New Life*. His strong attachment to this river derives from the fact that the Kiso valley, the main scene of this novel, was his birthplace. He lived there only until the age of nine; but was nevertheless to write: "My home town is a remote lonely mountain village, but it is where I spent those unique, never-to-be-recaptured years of childhood, and so for me it is an unforgettable place that awakens a sense of longing in my

heart" (TZ 9, *Kokyô wo Omou Kokoro (The Heart Remembers Home)*, p. 564).

In his childhood, the image of water left a deep impression upon him. He writes: "I have to acknowledge that my birthplace has had a strong effect on my life (. . .) My hometown had little water. Having been born in a place that was poor in water gave me an unusually strong attachment to it. This feeling has followed me for half a lifetime so far, and it sometimes surprises me that the deep impression I received in my childhood has affected my life for such a long time (. . .) It seems to me that the idea that water is very important was deeply imprinted on my mind from childhood. Perhaps for that reason, the thing that I found most enjoyable in my childhood was to go to places where there was a lot of water and to look at it" (ibid., pp. 564-565).

He continues: "Speaking of my impressions when travelling from one unfamiliar locality to another, unconsciously it was water which claimed my attention. Really I think that my feelings of enjoyment at seeing the current of a river, and my being especially moved by places where I saw people drawing water, arose from the deep impression retained in my mind from childhood; I came to value water and enjoy looking at it because I was born in a mountain village like Magome where there was so little of it" (ibid., pp. 565-566).

In short, wherever he went, Tôson was unconsciously drawn to water and observed it — whether it was the Chikuma River in Komoro, the Sumida in Tôkyô, the Seine in Paris or the Kiso River in Kiso. And this detailed observation and description in turn gave more verisimilitude to his work. Tôson described rivers in deft and precise words, bringing scenes into sharp relief and giving his characters life. In *Before the Dawn* he achieved this goal with admirable effect.

Tôson's contemporary Tokuda Shûsei (1871-1943), who may be regarded as a representative of Japanese Naturalist authors, wrote about "Before the Dawn.": "Whatever may be said, this novel is not lacking in substance. This work has many vital ingredients; the great enthusiasm of a mature artist; the local colour of mountainous countryside such as Kiso—imbued, it may be said, with a gravity amounting to melancholy; a powerful spirit of inquiry and understanding, and plentiful emotion. All these are things that we cannot expect much of from Japanese authors now" (in Ôka, 1992, p. 78).

Tôson's river descriptions in *Spring, The Family* and *A New Life* can be seen

as an extended study in preparation for his descriptions of the Kiso River in *Before the Dawn*.

The critic Kobayashi Hideo wrote about *Before the Dawn*: "Whether in the natural scenery of Kiso or in the atmosphere of the city, the characters are so closely woven into their settings that there is no perceptible outline separating character from background. (. . .) All the characters are vividly alive. There are no notional characters in this novel" (Kobayashi 1987, p. 308).

In *Before the Dawn*, everything was melted into one with the natural scenery of Kiso. Tôson brought his large cast of characters to life in their magnificent historical background, placing the whole within a landscape which he had observed with his own eyes. Then, using simple and straightforward language, he infused the narrative with the flavour of reality, drawing the reader more closely into the story. This was precisely the effect he had sought to achieve in this work through nature-description.

Conclusion

As has been shown, two principal strands run through the canon of Tôson's work from beginning to end. One of these strands is autobiography; the other consists of the presence of nature as a force surrounding and influencing human life. Both are testimony to the thoroughness with which Tôson embraced and integrated what may often be thought to be two opposing currents of Western thought; the Romantic spirit on the one hand, and the scientific spirit on the other.

This process can be seen as occurring in stages. For the young writer of *Wakana Shû*, then aged twenty-five, who had not yet encountered Darwinism, the influence of the English Romantic poets, and also of Rousseau, can be seen as clearly predominant, with the emphasis being strongly laid on *confession*, on candid exposure of the poet's inner emotions — particularly the torments of unfulfilled love. Yet already nature is powerfully present — not merely as a decorative backdrop (as in traditional Japanese art and literature), but as an essential ingredient of human experience and also (as in the parables of Jesus) as a source of insight and enlightenment. Here can be seen the workings of a third Western influence that was especially strong among the members of the group of writers with whom Tôson was particularly associated at this time: that of Christianity — especially Protestant Christianity, with its emphasis on individual identity and responsibility. Indeed, as has been shown in Chapter 1, it was the simplicity of language found in the Parables, and in Christian hymns, that led Tôson to break with the traditions of Japanese literary language and create verse that, with a new, direct voice, in everyday words and phrases, spoke plainly and powerfully to the human heart.

The important rôle of Kitamura Tôkoku as a mediator of Western thought to Tôson and his contemporaries at this time was discussed in Chapter 1. Tôkoku's short but intensely active and creative life would have been spectacular in any country and in any age; it is not to be wondered at that, in the Japan of the late 1880s and early 1890s,

he cast such a powerful and lifelong spell over Tôson and other young writers.

Tôson's encounter with the scientific spirit, as embodied in Darwinism on the one hand and the work of the art critic Ruskin on the other, can be seen as a point of departure for the next stage of Tôson's development — a phase best represented by his first successful novel, *The Broken Commandment*. As has been shown in Chapter 2, this resulted in Tôson's abandoning poetry as an inadequate means for achieving what he wished to accomplish; it also led him to develop systematically a disciplined scientific technique of objective observation and description of his natural surroundings.

Even amid the emotional outpourings represented by *Wakana Shû*, Tôson had demonstrated a craftsman's care, as well as stylistic originality, in the shaping of his verse. In this second phase of his career, we see him consciously developing the skills and tools he will need for the future practice of his craft. Taking lessons not only from Ruskin but also from French impressionism, not to mention the nature-description he found in the work of Turgenev, we see Tôson day after day going out to observe and record in the light of day what he sees and hears in the natural world around him, sharpening his senses and his descriptive faculty — going, for example, to sit on a riverbank and observe the river, the trees and plants in detail; recording day after day the changing cloudscape, the shifting play of light and colour. In this *sketching*, as he called it, he was in effect putting himself through a training course to prepare for the literary tasks that lay ahead. But in the writing that resulted, he was also producing material that, after further reworking, would find its place in the masterworks for which he is now famous. The craftsman was also a hoarder who did not waste the fruits of his apprenticeship.

Just as, in *Wakana Shû*, Western influences (e.g. Rousseau, the English Romantics, Christianity) led Tôson to break with the traditional style of poetic diction, so too, in this second phase of his career, a new set of Western influences (e.g. Ruskin, Darwin, Turgenev), and the resulting self-imposed discipline of objective observation, brought about Tôson's move further away from the ornamental *Bibun* that portrayed natural beauty according to traditional conceptual norms and in the direction of a descriptive technique based on what the naked eye really saw.

Tôson's fresh approach to nature-description, would not have been possible without the influence of the Western scientific spirit, which views man as standing, as it were, face to face with unchanging nature and able to observe it objectively, as distinct from the traditional Japanese view of man immersed in a constantly changing natural

environment and unable to view it detachedly.³⁶

This new realism fostered a trend of thought that sought to consider the workings of human beings objectively and scientifically, and developed into an approach that recognized the human instinctive element and aimed at portraying human nature in all its aspects, including the ugly. This approach developed during the writing of *Kumo* and *Chikuma River Sketches*, and came to a first full flowering in the novel *The Broken Commandment*, which not only brought the now thirty-four-year-old Tôson immediate success as a writer of naturalistic fiction but also established him as the creator of a modern Japanese literature based on a new understanding of nature as well as of the self.

The vividness with which Tôson was able to bring his scenes to life was the result of the years he had spent sketching up in the mountains. When Tôson describes a scene, he is skilfully recreating an authentic personal experience, and it is thanks to this combination of authenticity and skill that the reader is able to share his vision — even to the extent of sharing his terror at being engulfed in a sea of snow.

In *The Broken Commandment*, while the setting of the narrative was intimately familiar to Tôson, the situation of the main character was imaginary. The next major development in Tôson's career as a writer was his turning to autobiographical fiction in which both the settings of the narrative and the situations of the characters themselves were derived from his own direct experience.

Although his first venture in this genre, *Spring*, was not particularly distinguished, his preparation for the task of writing it, as well as the writing itself, proved to be an important stepping-stone towards great literary achievement. In seeking to recreate faithfully the experience of his young, formative days in the group that surrounded Tôkoku, he was not content to rely solely on "emotion recollected in tranquillity"; in collecting data for use as material in the narrative, he even revisited places that had played a part in his life in those days, seeking to recapture their appearance, atmosphere and ambience.

However, another important dimension of the creative process that resulted in *Spring* lay precisely in the fact that much of the psychological data he needed was to be found within himself. Hitherto he had learned to observe his surroundings objectively

³⁶ See the discussion of this topic on pages 9-10 above

and in detail; the challenge he now faced was to turn that observing gaze inward upon himself, without losing objectivity. This approach to writing forms the basis not only of *Spring* but of all his subsequent novels, in which the confessional vein of his early writing is shaped and controlled by the disciplined technique and objectivity that had made *The Broken Commandment* possible. The result is writing that is often quite plain in style, with none of the flamboyance of his earlier poetry³⁷, but which works powerfully to draw the reader into the events of the narrative. Progressing from *Spring* through *The Family* and *A New Life*, Tôson continued to develop in mastery of his craft until, in *Before the Dawn*, he was to achieve what is generally viewed not only as a personal *chef d'œuvre* but as the supreme masterpiece of modern Japanese literature.

To return to *Spring*: in this first venture into autobiographical fiction Tôson displays another trait that was to flow, as it were, through his subsequent major works, in that many times he employs imagery related to water³⁸. His use of such imagery (which doubtless sprang from his childhood in a locality where water was scarce) was to develop in subsequent works, to the point where, in *Before the Dawn*, the rivers in the locality that is the setting for the action play a variety of important narrative functions. It is important to emphasise the functional use of nature-description in Tôson's mature work. He brings before the reader's eyes much scenic beauty; but his purpose in doing so is never for the sake of mere decoration (in contrast with the *Bibun* school of *belles lettres*); his minute detail and vividly visual rendering of scenes is designed to intensify the reader's own sense of being, as it were, actually on stage as an extra in the unfolding drama.

Perhaps herein lies that which generations of readers have come to cherish in Tôson's fiction: in the way in which he leads them on a journey into the world that he brings to life, so that, transported beyond themselves, they share the experiences of Tôson's characters.

This was achieved in large part through the diligent way in which Tôson developed an eye for detail, such that his contemporary the poet Ôta Mizuho (1876-1955) was to write: "His eyes grasp even small trifles that ordinary men and women have overlooked, and when that happens, deep meanings and hidden secrets come to light. He is not a man who merely describes phenomena. By his description

³⁷ E.g. *Okume*, discussed in Chapter 1 above.

³⁸ It should be pointed out here that, whereas in English the word *spring* includes within its range of meanings both the season and a source of water, this is not the case in Japanese; the word *haru* denotes only the season.

of phenomena, he seeks to conjure up the meanings concealed beneath them" (TZ 18, *Nagame iru Tôson-shi*, p. 134).

In his last great work, *Before the Dawn*, Tôson brought this acutely developed perception and powerful descriptive gift to bear on the period of historic social and political upheaval that had given birth to the Japan into which he himself in turn had been born, and in the tumultuous wake of which he and his young fellow-artists, buffeted by conflicting cultural currents (the image of his own *Boat Tossed like a Leaf* springs to mind), had struggled to find direction and identity³⁹. An important factor in his motivation to write *Before the Dawn* was undoubtedly the experience of his self-imposed exile and the resulting realization of the strength of his Japanese roots. In writing it, he performed for his compatriots the vital service of presenting an authoritative picture of at least part of the path by which their country had become what it was.

As he himself said, the method he employed in preparing to write this monumental novel was the same as that which he had employed in his earlier fiction: to carry out meticulous research, to collect and study relevant data, so that he became as intimately familiar with the historical background, and its impact on people's daily lives, as he was with his beloved Shinshû countryside.

Tôson wrote to his second son Keiji, who cherished an ambition to become an artist:

"At any rate, it is important not to neglect your studies even for one day, to work constantly at developing technique of expression, and to take nature for your teacher."

(TZ 17, p. 412: letter dated August 9 1926)

"You would understand that a man who treats nature kindly will receive corresponding rewards."

(TZ 17, pp. 420-421: letter dated November 12 1926)

This advice derived from the lessons Tôson's own experience had taught him during years of closely observing and describing nature. It was an exhortation he had more than once administered to himself.

³⁹It was precisely this cultural confusion, and the inner turmoil it engendered, that is said to have had a decisive influence in bringing about Tôkoku's early suicide.

The biologist Imanishi Kinji (1902-1992) expressed a view of nature in the field of natural science as follows; "It is necessary to establish a way of looking at nature in ourselves" (Imanishi 1986, p. 194). Tôson established a new view of nature that continues to be accepted as valid even in the present era.

Tôson had spent his formative years in a cultural whirlpool created by the sudden and massive influx of Western culture and ideas, and the rush of hectic change that resulted. Literature was no exception to this upheaval, in which many writers struggled to find a mode of expression in tune with the new age. Happily, Tôson not only responded positively to Western culture, but was able to digest it, as Tôkoku had failed to do, and to make it his own. He was able to combine and to integrate the emotional individualism of the English Romantics and of Rousseau, the moral individualism of Protestant Christianity, new views of nature found in Christianity and Western science, and the commitment of the scientific spirit to disciplined and objective observation of phenomena; and out of this process of integration he was able to create a body of richly original works whose greatness won ready recognition among both fellow writers and the reading public. It is for this achievement that he is acknowledged as the father of modern Japanese literature.

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