

NATSUME SŌSEKI:

PREFACE TO

LITERARY CRITICISM

(1909)

Reflecting on our method here, we began the process of dissection with the emotion “it is interesting.” In this sense, this constitutes an appreciative stance. But once we began the analysis, we pursued only dissection. This required us to adopt a critical stance. Hence the process itself is neither solely emotional nor solely rational but is a combination of both. We have designated the first approach as appreciative and the second as critical, but this third one is somewhere in between and can thus be named the “critico-appreciative stance.”

Accordingly, we have three stances by which to approach literary production. The first one, the appreciative stance, has long been used by many critics, both from the East and West. This is particularly so for criticism of Chinese prose. This stance is more appropriate to an aficionado than a critic. For such a person it is enough to find a work interesting to enjoy it; they don’t require any explanation beyond finding it interesting. However, if we want to satisfy our own curiosity or attempt to improve people’s tastes, this is a most inconvenient and immature stance. Even in our time, there are people who simply say that a given work is elegant or fresh and think that this is a worthy criticism. Moreover, there are people who are satisfied by this. These people may have refined taste, but they cannot provide any reason or explanation. I must say that they are unfit to be critics.

The second stance is one that completely ignores taste and hence is a purely scientific approach. Using this approach, we never say something is well or badly done. If we are to evaluate a script, we say that the structure is such and such, the plot is such and such, the progress of the events and character development are such and such—but we never praise or criticize based on our taste. This is the polar opposite of the appreciative stance and is an approach that very few critics have adopted. In the rare cases it has been adopted, it seems to have been limited to dull people. Moreover, people generally do not fancy such an approach. They say that it lacks taste or that it is incomprehensible. But this is a different stance, and we must accept the fact that it features an objective attitude that precludes taste. We must also accept that such a stance is permissible in discussing literary works. In fact, leaving aside an analysis of a single work, this approach becomes especially useful in comparing two or more works, or comparing a series of works, which will become evident from what follows later.

The third stance is one that conventional critics have regularly adopted. When they become dissatisfied with the first stance, they all reach this stage, seeking to improve on it. It is, however, difficult to retain this

stance and approach everything through it with confidence. As a result, critics commonly revert to the first stance when they find themselves in a precarious position. Some also repeat their predecessors’ criticisms even when they themselves don’t feel the same. Even if one strictly adheres to the third stance, it is not easy accurately to practice it in the way we are describing. First, dissecting emotions is extremely difficult. Even when the emotions can be dissected, it is very difficult to point to the specific incidents that provoke such emotional reactions. We tend to produce layers of distant associations even when we reflect on a single word or character. It is as if we are building a thick stack of paper by gluing together layers of thin paper. Just as it is difficult to peel off each individual paper, it is often difficult to dissect the emotions that derive from a single word or character.

I have been discussing these three types of stances in our approach to a single work. When comparing two or more works, the process of analysis becomes more complex but the stances themselves do not change. For example, take the first stance. It would suffice to say something like, “This work is more interesting than, or inferior to, the other.” The second stance is much more tedious. We would first take the texts and divide them into categories, then select the similar elements and categorize them accordingly; the differing elements, too, would need to be included in their respective categories. The end product should clearly show the similarities and differences between the works. This constitutes the scientific approach through and through. For example, comparing two stage scripts, we would meticulously point out everything about them, ranging from their content to technical aspects, such as the number of acts and scenes. The comparison can be wide-ranging. We can discuss jealousy or love as a motive. We can examine the path along which a motive develops in a given work compared to that in another work. We can say the protagonist appears in all acts in one work but doesn’t appear in the middle section in another work. We can also discuss whether or not two works correspond in their temporal setting.

With the third stance, we would first identify which work we like better and then begin our dissection in order to answer the “how” question. In the earlier example it was one work we found interesting. We could not have found a work interesting without an evaluative set of criteria by which we judged it so. In this instance the set of criteria itself was inside us, the mind of the critic. What we had previously found interesting in our

reading or in the natural world subconsciously formed these criteria. Based on them, we had felt a text to be either interesting or boring and skillful or unrefined. In this sense, whether we take up one or two works does not make any difference. Yet when we externalize these mental criteria and use them to address two or more works, the comparison becomes even clearer and hence the degree of clarity stronger.

Logically speaking, if we adopt a given stance on two or more works and extend it across time, it becomes a stance with which we can approach the history of literature. In effect, our three stances can all be used to approach literature from a historical perspective. The first stance, however, is not suited to a lecture on literary history because one would simply take up each work and say it is either interesting or boring. In our society there are people who are well read and have refined tastes but are unable to explain anything when asked about the works. This is because they adopt this first stance to read literary works. In fact, this is an author's stance. It is sufficient for the author, but it proves insufficient for compiling history or critiquing a work. The differences between a critic and an author are too numerous to summarize in a word, but this is one of them. An author does not have to think about the "how"—I am not saying that he shouldn't—since he instinctively finds something interesting and writes about it. Readers, too, find it interesting. This fulfills the task of the author and he can let a critic take care of the "how." Someone callously said that one becomes a critic when one fails to become an author. People often still say this, but this isn't necessarily true. It is certainly not true that only those who fail to become authors become critics. And even if it were true, they differ in what they do, so the failure should not be considered a disgrace. Just because someone says that a man rides a bicycle because he failed to ride a horse, it does not blemish the reputation of the bicycle rider. Some people are suited to certain things and some to other things. It would be interesting to think further about the difference between an author and a critic, but since this isn't the place to do so, I'll just stop here in this introduction.

To return to the earlier discussion, the first stance is closer to that of an author and not that of a critic. It is thus not an appropriate stance to adopt when examining literature historically. That leaves only two to consider. Between them, the critico-appreciative stance never leaves our own likes and dislikes behind. Whatever work we examine, we begin our analysis with the feelings provoked by it. As such, the evaluative set of criteria is

always within us, within our present selves. Thus, we evaluate works that appeared in history based on our present-day preferences. For example, let's say we feel that eighteenth-century English poetry is unnatural, pretentious, and boring. We then refer to specific verses and poems that are boring, highlight various poets, and show examples accordingly. We may then venture a historical comparison of works and say that the degree of unnaturalness is stronger in *x* than in *y* and provide evidence to back this up. For example, we may say that the unnaturalness diminished toward the end of the eighteenth century and outline our reasons for that. In such a manner, the taste we acquired in the present remains the sole criterion, always shaping our criticism.

The third stance is a purely critical one. This stance is not founded on taste but is one that studies literature from a historical perspective primarily to satisfy our intellectual curiosity. Through historical examination, it seeks clear and comprehensive understanding of the complex phenomenon called literature. Accordingly, if we are evaluating eighteenth-century verse, we do not show our own likes and dislikes. Just as a physicist examines the natural world, we bracket off our taste and dissect the works' characteristics and synthesize them. We then seek to gain knowledge of the conditions under which such characteristics appeared, whether they be social or political conditions or cultural preferences. There are various forms of "knowledge" that can be acquired. Some may seek to understand the writer through the work, while others may attempt to discern the historical conditions through the work. Some may put their effort into finding the cause and effect between two works, while still others may seek out the principles of cause and effect between a given work and its social conditions. Whatever we seek, the primary motive is the desire to know—to clarify the complex—and not whether we like or dislike a certain work. Approached from this stance, literature constitutes a social phenomenon; such criticism thus describes the importance of literature as a social factor.

Now let us reflect on the two stances. The starting point of the critico-appreciative stance may be our emotions, but the subsequent procedure is scientific. It won't be satisfactory if it is not carried out scientifically, so we can say that it ought to be scientific even if we don't have many successful cases. The critical stance is purely scientific. Even if the existing criticism is not scientific, ideally it, too, ought to be scientific.

Having come this far, I hope that I have largely dispelled whatever confusion you may have had concerning literature, literary criticism, and

literary history. To summarize, the terms “literature” and “science” are generally used to denote two different human activities. Contrary to the common misunderstanding of the literary, not only *do* literary criticism and literary history involve many scientific elements, but literary history can be entirely scientific.

The reason why I am providing such a lengthy discussion on this issue is because I have encountered many people who say: “Literature is not science. There is no way one can study literature scientifically.” This line of argument is like saying flowers are not science and hence there is no way to study flowers scientifically. Or it is like saying that birds are not science and therefore there is no way to study birds scientifically. Of course, flowers are not science, but botany is. Birds are not science, but zoology is. Literature is not science, but literary criticism and history are both science. At the very least, they must be approached, in part, scientifically. Whether or not one succeeds in doing so is, of course, entirely another issue.

As we have discussed, criticism and the historical study of literature can roughly be divided into two general approaches, which can be further subdivided in countless ways. The sheer number of approaches attests to the complexity of the endeavor. Strictly speaking, it gives the lie to any preposterous claims I might make about being able to explain something as daunting as eighteenth-century literature. To give my lecture after having raised these issues is like telling you in advance that I’m going to tell a tall tale; depending on how you look at it, it’s rather comical. In fact, looking at works of literary historians and critics up to the present, there aren’t any who have successfully carried out such a study. They have merely strung together what are nothing more than notes and memos. I am surprised that both the writers and readers have been satisfied with them. First, their stances are unclear. While one section offers a criticism based on the critico-appreciative stance, the following section provides purely appreciative remarks. Just when I think a section is purely critical, it moves on to the critico-appreciative stance. I can only suspect that the writer is offering disjointed comments to the reader. To take another case, one critic claims that we must focus on a work’s characters, while another says that we should try to deduce the historical period from the work. No one explains which is more appropriate. Nor does anyone explain if both are good or both unreasonable. Even if both may be fine, there is no one who will offer descriptions of other possible methods to look at literature. They

simply read a book and feel something. Then they read another book and feel yet another thing. But what remains ambiguous is the relationship between the two works, their relative importance, and where the works are situated within the whole field.

Looking at the existing scholarly works, we can say that critics have either critiqued literature in vague terms or have been so confused that they haven’t been able to treat literature with clarity and precision. If that is the case for university-level specialists, it should come as no surprise that my lecture—given by such an unlearned man—lacks clarity, originality, or any coherent method. Not that I’m proud of it, but I feel like I need to say it. Therefore, I am certain that you will not be satisfied with my lecture course—nor will I. If I had five or ten years, I might be able to approach texts in ways that would give me relative satisfaction, but when I am pressed for time, as I am, and must begin right after the summer break, there is no way that I can write anything proper.

Now, what stance am I going to adopt in discussing eighteenth-century literature? No critic or literary historian has been able to answer this question with any clarity, and so my own stance will likewise be ambiguous. Just like my predecessors, I may take the appreciative stance in some cases, the critico-appreciative stance in others, and at times possibly even the purely critical stance. I wish there were some fixed principle that guided my shifts in stance in response to specific moments and situations, but I lack any fixed view or appropriate materials, and so I will shift when it seems necessary. This is all rather discouraging, but since the existing historians have done so based on similar circumstances, I hope you will forgive me for doing likewise.

There is one more thing I’d like to point out in relation to what I have said thus far. I don’t think anyone discussing the history of foreign literature has said this before. I said earlier that I will not be able to offer originality in criticism or method in discussing eighteenth-century literature. If I don’t have original ideas, I must offer secondhand ideas. In terms of what we have discussed thus far, I can offer secondhand ideas from the appreciative stance. I can offer secondhand ideas based on the critico-appreciative stance. Even based on the critical stance, it is possible to offer secondhand ideas. Offering secondhand ideas simply means regurgitating someone else’s ideas, but there is an inherent contradiction in doing so with the critico-appreciative stance. Why is this so? Because, as I stated earlier, the starting point of the critico-appreciative stance is one’s

own taste; we then proceed scientifically to explicate this foundational taste. The criticism, in other words, is a validation of our taste, our own criteria. Just as I stated earlier, this taste resides in oneself, that is, in the present-day self. Thus, if hypothetically I were to say that I'll adopt this stance in lecturing on eighteenth-century literature, this also means that I am going to use my own present taste as the criteria by which to evaluate it. If I apply my taste, which is very specific to me, in my critique of eighteenth-century literature—whether it be Johnson, Pope, Fielding, or Sterne—and evaluate their work based on this criteria, it would be my criticism and not anyone else's. If my criticism is specific to me, it cannot be someone else's. I would be providing you with secondhand criticism if I take other critics, such as Dobson and Stephen, and introduce you to their criticism of eighteenth-century literature based on their own current tastes.<sup>3</sup> This, however, would not constitute a critico-appreciative stance on my part. It may comprise a critico-appreciative stance, but it is not my own because it merely replicates someone else's stance.

There is one instance in which this contradiction wouldn't be an issue. This is when the English critics' critico-appreciative stance and my own stance coincidentally correspond with one another, leading us to produce similar criticisms. As a matter of practice, this may still constitute secondhand criticism because the originator of the criticism is an Englishman. Even if another critic produced it by himself, as long as someone else has already publicly presented the idea, this critic cannot claim originality. From the public's point of view, this is secondhand criticism. Simultaneously, however, from my perspective it is in no way an imitation or a copy. The criticism is, after all, purely based on my own critico-appreciative stance. In this case my criticism would be both secondhand and original simultaneously.

If such correspondence is possible, we need to distinguish between two types. The first is coincidental correspondence. For example, let's say that there are two men—*x* and *y*—and they both get an upset stomach by eating soba noodles. Such correspondence occurs without any basis for correspondence. It is very rare precisely because there is no basis for it. The second is necessary correspondence. For example, if their own child were to die, *x* would feel grief and so would *y*. The same can be said of reading literature. There must be something that produces the same reaction in both Europeans and Asians. If their feelings naturally correspond for a reason, there is a necessary correspondence, one that is distinctly different from the first.

For us to assume that necessary correspondence is possible, we must also assume the universality of taste. Without the universality of taste, necessary correspondence cannot be conceived. Now, we cannot judge the value of this proposition without asking whether the universality of taste applies to all tastes, only to part of them, or to none of them. In fact, I was going to address this issue of universality in the lecture course I gave last year, but I ran out of time and didn't get around to it. It would be very convenient if I can use this time to go into detail, but since this lecture is not on the theory of literature, it is not the place for a detailed discussion. Instead, I'll simply mention several things that are on my mind. They are all rather commonplace, so it's not something that you need to pay close attention to. What is important is the conclusion, so do listen with that in mind.

To say that all tastes are universal is the view of a fool. This is easily seen merely by reflecting upon reality. To put it simply, there are those who are interested in living in a city and others who are attracted to life in the countryside. There is nothing that says you must like the city or that you must like the countryside. For one to find a place elegant or vulgar, lofty or low, is based on individual preferences. Even if such distinctions applied to the city and the countryside, in point of fact people don't necessarily prefer elegance. Vulgar and earthy are both a matter of taste. As long as there are people who like the vulgar, we cannot say that taste is universal in all aspects. However, this is not to say that tastes are all individually unique and that they do not partially overlap. This, too, can easily be seen by reflecting on reality. Here is another familiar example. Most people take pleasure in listening to a bird sing. Even if they are not moved by a singing bird, people no doubt feel pleased when they see a parent loving a child and feel pleasure seeing a husband and wife getting along with each other. This appears to be equally true in the West and in the East, as well as in the past and present. Of course, with the transformations brought about by time, the degree to which these events affect our feelings may differ. Even if our tastes for these things are not universal, there must be something that is. First of all, don't we correspond based on the fact that we are all human beings? We correspond based on the fact that men and women join together. We correspond based on the fact that it is the woman who gives birth. With all these correspondences, we won't simply be speculating if we assume that a partial correspondence exists, even if we can't claim that our tastes all correspond. Insofar as there is such a universal

partial correspondence, our criticisms of a given work, based on the critico-appreciative stance, will arrive at the same conclusions. Here necessary correspondence must occur.

There is one other form of taste that is conducive to necessary correspondence. This is one that becomes especially important when studying foreign literature. Precisely because this form of taste is universal, we can, with reasonable conviction, expect to find a necessary correspondence with foreigners even as we make a relatively independent evaluation of works written in a foreign language. This taste responds to none other than the order, length, and structure of materials used in literary works. The taste I have been discussing until now responded to the content of the materials themselves, but that which I am discussing now responds to the relation and arrangement of materials. Let's take Delacroix's *Dante et Virgile* as an example. Dante and Virgil are standing on a boat, and we can see their well-proportioned profiles and facial expressions. The ghost and spirits, portrayed among what appear to be waves or flames, gather round them, and we see how they surround the two characters at the center. It is all very well balanced. If, at first glance, it appears complete and lacks nothing, arousing a satisfying sense that it is well constructed, then this painting appeals to our taste based on the arrangement of the materials. This taste is a universal one and is no different in the West and the East. It is universal because all it takes is a word of advice from a person of discernment and we are instantly enlightened as to its beauty. Even if there were a person who would stridently go against it, all we need do is ask him if he prefers an artistic work that lacks a center, one that is dispersed and lacking coherence, or one that is muddled. Go one step further and ask if he'd prefer a work that portrays things that are unnecessary or depicts the necessary in an incoherent manner. No one would answer in the affirmative. Of course, people don't necessarily agree on what is dispersed, tiresome, or unsatisfying. However, as long as a person is cultivated, in the majority of cases they will be persuaded if the man of good taste makes an effort to explain things. As such, there are ample grounds to claim that this is universal even if there might be a few exceptions.

However, within the Delacroix painting there lies among the ghosts a woman whose appearance is extremely unpleasant, even more distasteful than that of Kasane.<sup>4</sup> She lies there, beneath the boat, face up. If, in looking at this ghost, one feels that it's dreadful and that the painting would be better off without it, one's taste is responding to the material itself. (It goes

without saying that such taste is also manifested in the beauty and ugliness, good and bad, truth and falsity, splendor and dullness of the materials, but it would be too tedious to provide examples for all, so I'll omit them.)

I suspect these two types of taste will become clearer once I discuss them with reference to literary works. Take Alexander Dumas's *Black Tulip*, for example.<sup>5</sup> If I say this work is bad—its structure is too contrived, almost like a cheap trick; it may be clever, but it is extremely artificial and unnatural—my taste is not responding to the materials themselves but to their order and arrangement. If I say that the characters' motives are not well developed, that they are too simplistically portrayed, my dissatisfaction derives from the characters in the work—hence the materials themselves. Here is another example. I take Maupassant's *Une Vie* and say it has no focus.<sup>6</sup> I cannot tell whether the main theme is the relationship between the husband and wife or the affection between a parent and child. They are both independent and do not properly combine with one another to produce a single work. Again, this is a criticism based not on my taste regarding the materials themselves but the way the materials are arranged.

I can cite other examples, but I'll stop here, assuming that people have understood. Tastes that respond to the arrangement of materials are, at least relatively speaking, unbound by local emotions and customs and hence universal. Individual tastes may differ in degree but they do not differ in kind. As long as you have a relatively cultivated taste—even as a Japanese—you can rely on your own taste as the standard criterion because there is no other kind, and you should be able to persuade a foreigner to agree with your views. Hence, this isn't merely about necessary correspondence. It is an important form of taste because, even if a foreigner and a Japanese should reach opposite conclusions, it allows each of us to claim validity and point out the other's mistake.

For these reasons, necessary correspondences occur in reading literary works, but because universality cannot be claimed for the whole range of taste—either because the realm of universality is not that large or because, even when there is universality, its degree varies, depending on historical period and nationality—necessary correspondence does not occur that easily or extensively. (This is especially the case with Western poetry, although not so much with novels.) Furthermore, there is one thing that interferes with this correspondence: Certain things in literature

are constructed through simple elements. It is possible that those simple elements produce refined verse and prose. However, simple things tend to be lacking in variation. Without variation, people get tired of them. Moreover, social conditions and the human mind—the main source of materials for literature—become increasingly complex every day. Because of this, the literature of our latter-day world tends to become more complex, just as it tends to seek out variation, thereby leaving behind basic universal taste. Here's an example of something becoming complex. The phenomenon of a man and a woman falling in love is one that attracts all human beings universally. However, there can be many conditions surrounding the man and woman in love. For example, if a man loves a woman who has a husband, things become a little more complicated. If things become complicated, they may simultaneously lose universality. People in one country may find it interesting to see a man fall in love with a woman with a husband, but people in another country may not like the fact that she has a husband. And those in yet another country may feel that it is too banal and hence not worthy of literary production. Furthermore, let's say that a man and a woman are in love and war breaks out, and the man tries to stay with the woman instead of going off to war. In one historical period people may like the fact that he abandons war, while in another historical period they may not like it. In one period it may appear surprising, while in another it may be commonplace. We can also imagine an example in which the desire for variation leads away from universal taste. If a writer portrays a scene in which a character, astonished by the light of an electric lamp, jumps up and down in excitement and delight and says, "There is love, there is life, there is every emotion and every form of art in this light," the sense of this will certainly not be shared by the general public.

For these reasons, necessary correspondence based on universality of taste is quite rare (leaving aside those arising from the arrangement of materials). There is also one more hurdle besides this when we take up foreign literature as the object of criticism: it is language. By differences in language I do not mean that Japanese and English differ in structure or in grammar. Language has "delicate shades of meaning" as well as tone. Since this doesn't explain anything, I'll provide an easy example and discuss it further. As you know, in Japan there is a literary form called haiku, a poetic form composed of seventeen syllables. The issue at hand can be understood very easily with this form. Comparing two verses composed on the same topic, with the same materials, and using entirely the same de-

sign, it often happens that while one seems delightful, the other seems less so or, at times, even distasteful. If you analyze this carefully, it is possible to discover the reasons behind such reactions. I will proceed with my discussion under the assumption that this is true in haiku.

Looking at the two very similar verses, general readers, such as a hairdresser or a liquor store owner, might not recognize the difference. They would assume they are the same verse and think of them as equally worthy. Haiku, of course, is composed in Japanese. Even when they read verses on the same theme, composed in Japanese, Japanese people—people who use the Japanese language and read Japanese on a daily basis—can react in such a different manner. There is a reason for this. Some are perceptive to haiku language because they are familiar with it. As a result, they can make out the nuanced shades and tones that haiku language expresses. But others simply do not have the ability to discern them. For such a person "Ah! the clear moon" sounds the same as "Hey, the clear moon." Take another example. A person may say, "You are beautiful." Depending on context and tone, this statement can be taken seriously or as ridicule, a compliment or a simple joke. It can be said obnoxiously or even sincerely. Here's a better example. An actor plays the role of Hamlet. Leaving aside the overall interpretation, if he selects certain lines to show Hamlet's indignation, it is possible to express such indignation. If instead he uses them to show his humorous side, he can do so. The actor would not be changing any of the lines.

These issues help us to reassess our study of foreign literature. Japanese people do not have enough practice in English to make out the nuanced shades or tones. Thus, there will be times when a foreigner might say that a given expression is obnoxious, whereas we don't find it so. There will be times when we gloss over as a common phrase what is actually lofty and divine. Japanese people are not very perceptive about these things and hence are probably not as acute as those scholars in England. But this can lead to a bad habit. Somewhere at the back of their minds Japanese people believe that the English people's evaluation of the work is correct because they are taking up a work produced in England and offering a native evaluation of a native product. Evaluating a Japanese work is one thing, but they think that there can be no mistake in what the English say about English literature. It is like believing, without giving it a second thought, the words of a kimono shop clerk because one knows nothing about kimonos.

Without a doubt this problem arises from the difference in languages. You're unfamiliar with the language. You don't feel like saying something bold. It's also a little off-putting. Even if it doesn't put you off, you don't quite know where to start. It seems fuzzy, as if you're looking at someone's face through a silk cloth. You worry about making evaluations based on your own feelings. You would actually be a step ahead if you had feelings about it, but you often don't. That is why you want to believe as true the reading of a person who understands in clearer and more accurate terms. One who understands and sees clearly is not necessarily one who can clearly feel and decipher emotions accurately, but people generally leap to that mistaken conclusion without realizing it.

There is yet another mistaken supposition that arises from the difficulty of working in different languages. This is the common assumption that foreigners possess the standard by which to evaluate foreign literature, whereas we don't, and thus we must abide by their theory. When we believe this, not only do we adhere to the theories with which we agree, but also to those that seem rather unreasonable. This is what happens. Until now you thought a certain way about a given work, but, listening to the criticism of Mr. X—which is very different from yours and which appears rather forced to you—you conclude that what he feels must be correct since he is a native critic. You then think that what you felt before must have been a mistaken and vulgar feeling, and since it is a mistaken feeling, it must be corrected. Humans are strange creatures. You then begin to discard the feelings you had until then and move toward what you *think* is right. In effect, when you take up your study of foreign literature, your own feelings disappear and only those of the foreign critic remain. In fact, there are those whose feelings don't actually change but who pretend that they have. This is one pitfall that we easily encounter in studying foreign literature—which is, to some extent, understandable.

But if we think about this more closely, isn't this the same as assuming that the universality of taste applies to everything? If we can be sure that every aspect of our taste is universal, then there would be nothing wrong with thinking this way. As I mentioned earlier, however, universality of taste only applies to certain aspects of taste. When we try to apply it beyond them, we will end up falling into a fundamental fallacy. It is thus possible to say that the many people who are studying foreign literature, misled and confused by the language barrier, are forced to believe blindly that taste is entirely universal.

How, then, can we read foreign literature with the critico-appreciative stance? I believe there are two methods. The first is to analyze exactly how we feel about a given work without thinking of the language barrier, without worrying about clarity or ambiguity, without thinking about whether it corresponds to the Westerners' opinion. This is the most audacious and unabashed approach, and it produces a natural and honest criticism devoid of any falsehood. This criticism may at times be the polar opposite of that produced by Westerners. Just because your criticism contradicts a Westerner's, it does not mean that you are shallow-minded. This belief has become a widely held bad habit present among those who study foreign literature today. We ought to reflect deeply on this issue and correct it. When Aston wrote his *History of Japanese Literature* or Chamberlain analyzed Japanese rhetoric, they approached them from the English perspective and thereby produced legitimate criticism.<sup>7</sup> The language may be different, but the material content is literature. As long as literature remains the object of criticism, and as long as we use taste as the evaluative criterion, we must not relinquish our own taste and subject ourselves to someone else's. When we do so, we lose our own. If we lose our own taste, we lose the right to evaluate not only foreign literature but also the literature of our own country.

Taste, though universal in part, is primarily local. (We don't necessarily have to ask why; it is simply a fact that can't be denied.) What this means is that taste is shaped by the history, social legends, particular institutions, and customs belonging to a given society. If these varying factors comprise taste, and if these factors differ throughout the world, the tastes resulting from these different factors must also naturally differ. Of course, with the increase in world travel and the growth in human communication and interaction, taste is becoming unified. It is becoming universal. European countries like England, France, and Germany have undoubtedly been affected by this universalizing force. After Japan began interacting with foreign nations, it, too, has become affected by this universalizing force. Although Japan has undoubtedly begun to be affected by this force, it has yet to get through even the first stage of the process. Today there is still a chasm that separates us and them. For example, in the West the kiss is a common form of greeting between husband and wife, as well as between relatives, and the Westerners' taste is based on such a custom. In Japan, until the Restoration a kiss was equivalent to a man and a woman going to bed with one another. Even now kissing is not something that

ought to be done in public, especially among the ranks of educated society. However, Japanese poets of *shintaiishi*, discovering the word “kiss” in Western verses, use it without reservation in the Japanese context, where the general taste differs considerably.<sup>8</sup> The general public’s sense of what this word signifies does not correspond to what the poets of *shintaiishi* mean by it. As such, their verses seem unpleasant and deceptive. Even a trifling example such as this makes the current situation clear.

When we evaluate a work produced by people with different tastes, we still ought to apply the taste that we’ve acquired until now. Listening to our criticism, foreigners who think a kiss to be an innocent matter may well be surprised by our national character, but they will not consider our criticism to be immature. As such, we have ample reason to employ our own standard to evaluate foreign literature; even a Westerner cannot criticize our logic. Of course, if you take this method too far, without reading the text closely and rigorously, you could end up with sloppy criticism. Yet I think this is a risk worth taking. We ought to employ this method, especially under the current conditions that prevail in Japan. I am not sure whether I am up to the task, but I’d like to employ this method if possible.

For example, take the verses by Pope and his followers. Despite their popularity at the time of their production, the contemporary English public considers their verses to be artificial and quite unnatural. We therefore know that the contemporary English public does not have the taste for Pope’s poetry. However, just because the contemporary English public says one thing, there is no reason why the contemporary Japanese public should say the same thing about Pope’s verse. To say this is to apply uncritically the idea of the universality of taste to the verse of Pope and his followers. That Pope’s verses enjoyed such popularity in the eighteenth century shows that they corresponded well with eighteenth-century taste. In other words, Pope’s poetry seemed natural in the eighteenth century, though it may not have seemed so in the nineteenth. That Pope adhered to eighteenth- but not to nineteenth-century taste is a historical fact, but whether we Japanese will feel like the people in the eighteenth century or those in the nineteenth remains an open question. We may feel something unique, but nothing like the people in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century England. This, too, is still to be determined. In any case, we can’t say anything until we examine our own feelings for the poetry, based on our own taste.

[*The Poems of*] *Ossian* was published at the end of the eighteenth century. People say that it’s a fake by Macpherson, but it was extremely popular when it first came out.<sup>9</sup> Goethe and Napoleon both loved it. The English now take an interest in *Ossian* only as a historical phenomenon. There is even one critic who specifically noted that he couldn’t bear to read it all the way through. *Ossian*, in other words, suited the popular consciousness of its contemporaries but not that of today. When we Japanese read *Ossian*, whether we would correspond to the taste of those in the eighteenth century or to those of today is yet to be determined. Just because its contemporaries lauded it, there is no reason for us to commend it. Just because those in the present disparage it, there is no reason for us to parrot that. We ought to evaluate it based on our own feelings (insofar as our feelings are actually provoked by it).

As I have said repeatedly, we have yet to evaluate foreign literature in a way that is honest to ourselves because of the language barrier and some other misunderstandings. We have either been too timid or have lacked enthusiasm. It is thus my hope that you will all be true to yourselves as you study foreign literature—and I, too, will try to remain as steadfast as possible. However, this is quite a tedious endeavor. We must read the works closely and thoroughly analyze the feelings evoked by them. As such, we can’t possibly cover eighteenth-century literature within a year or two. We must proceed slowly. Please keep that in mind.

One other method possible under the critico-appreciative stance is to survey the works of Westerners—their feelings and their analyses of literary works of their own country—and to use them as a reference. These do not represent your own feelings but rather someone else’s. The feelings provoked by the texts that they describe may not be your own, but they can help to cultivate yours and become a comparative reference point. Moreover, they are also an object of great curiosity. A work is produced under specific social conditions. We might ask: How did the people who lived within that society react to the work? How did they feel and analyze it? How do their feelings and analysis differ from our own? If they differ, in what respects do our tastes and theirs differ? From what social condition do such differences arise? To clarify these things is extremely beneficial in expanding our own perspective. In addition, if you introduce another criticism of the work produced fifty years later, showing how things changed over fifty years, it is possible to discern the change in taste within one nation. And if we can figure out why such differences occurred, we can discuss that as well.

When we look at transformation of taste this way, we see that taste undergoes a process of natural development, and that the taste of the earlier period is a necessary precondition for the present taste to take shape. In effect, if the taste of the earlier period had not been thus, the taste of the subsequent years might not be thus either. Since Japan has had a certain taste in the past, and since our present-day taste is a natural development of that, our contemporary taste will not necessarily correspond to contemporary English taste. Just because they don't correspond, there is no need to be embarrassed by it. This is something we can begin to understand as we survey the works of Western critics. Thus, although this method may appear to be a simple introduction of the secondhand critico-appreciative stance, one that does not derive from one's own feelings, if carried out competently it can constitute a method of great interest. As long as my meager knowledge permits—and as long as time permits—I would like to try this method as well. It is a misconception to say that it is too routine or dull simply to survey other people's theories. To survey a large body of work and to introduce it in clear terms is a skill in itself. If this is merely routine, then descriptive sciences that simply categorize natural phenomena are equally routine. Lecturing on literature is similar. A routine lecture is often valuable, but it is hard to produce a valuable lecture given the way I approach things, so please keep that in mind, too.

Translated by Atsuko Ueda

NATSUME SŌSEKI:  
 PREFACE TO  
LITERARY CRITICISM  
 (1909)