Tayama Katai and Frank Norris:  
A Study in Contrasts (II)  

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Tayama Katai wrote *Futon* (The Quilt)¹ in 1907 and marked a step forward, paving the way for his course for the future, and after that year he produced the following stories in succession: *Ane* (The Elder Sister, 1908), *Sofubo* (The Grandparents, 1908), *Ani* (The Elder Brother, 1908), *Sei* (Life, 1908), *Tsuma* (The Wife, 1909), and *Chichi no Haka* (The Father's Grave, 1909). They were all centered on his family, and *Sei* was of particular notice.

*Sei*, describing the author's family life in the decade after 1897, discloses the events which concern the relationship between the old and new generations, visualizing the former's rise and fall in the vicissitude of time and marking deeply the tendency of human life. The people who played the most important part are a widow and her four children (three sons and one daughter), and the widow in particular was given prominence. Katai portrayed the bahavior pattern of his folks before and after their patriarchal mother's death. Next in importance is Katai's elder brother, who fell a victim to the cold-heartedness and cruelty of a society built on bureaucracy and old morality.

The widow, needless to say, is Katai's real mother and this choice of his mother could not be tolerated from the standpoint of feudalistic ethics. He felt an acute pain in writing of her, and aptly says: "I'm now caught between life and art,"² and "This is something I can't
emotionally control, but what could I do unless I break it through? With this thought in mind, I've decided to write candidly everything."³ Although the same flesh and blood, mother is mother and son is son. The encumbrance and bondage of the family system are usually antagonistic to one's ego, touching off many contradictions. These contradictions in his story, since they were facts of his own family, were moving and gave an additional charm to the book.

The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) brought tremendous development for Japanese industry and economy, evoking a controversy about social thought. This controversy, visibly brought to the surface with the close of the war, concerned the conflict between individualism, cosmopolitanism, and the Oriental family system.⁴ The conviction that the war's victory had been won by the family system, strongly supported by bureaucrats and politicians, spread widely throughout the country.⁵ The development of individualism was inevitable, however. Since this was certain, there was an attempt to strengthen the equilibrium between the family system and individualism that allows Japanese to function effectively and quite successfully, and this was a most crucial problem for intelligent people.

Against such a background, Japanese literature tried to disengage from the blind following of Western literature and, standing on its own legs and becoming more aware of Japanese conditions, sought to develop new techniques. In this context, the confrontation between the family system and individualism became very important for the literature of naturalism, the keynote of which was to establish autonomy. Other social problems were seen as less urgent.⁶

The tragedy of the household which literature mainly dealt with
before naturalism was that of women whose obedience was a prerequisite for any solution of the family problem. To this situation was added the pressures on men, who had to support their dependents, so that their tragedy became more serious. As the heads of families, they had a secret attachment to their family name or status, but at the same time demanded freedom and when successful, they were destined to become objects of scorn and moral castigation by others. Accordingly, warfare against the household meant a struggle within and outside of themselves. In order to express the emancipation of ego, Japanese naturalism had no other choice but to face the household problem, seeking a balance, which lay midway between values of individual and society; it was not an abstract issue but very substantial indeed.

While hoping for the emancipation of men and women from the household, the naturalists were obliged to accept the reality of family. In conventional fashion, not being capable of assuming responsibility for radical change in their new age, they rather depended on the household to continue with its former power and privileges. Looking on a petit bourgeois life with no bright prospects spiritually and materially, they had their nerves irritated and became insensible, finding a dull and dreary mood. The authority of the family system inherent in the long history of Japan over the last two thousand years stood in the way of the independence and development of an individual, a situation typical of Japanese society, and naturalism finally lost all positive interest in the authority of the country, which had been established by its tradition and its unique social stratification. It instead looked into the individual households and thus appealed to the people for their understanding in respect to its tenet. The construction of home based
on husband and wife as a unit, as suggested by Sei, therefore pointed to a new, if not a complete, solution to the household problem.

The Gilded Age of USA, which began after the Civil war, was an age of turmoil and change, unprecedented in American society. Be it religion, morality, or industrial economy, not a single old establishment of national life as a whole remained unchanged. The South, which had become exhausted with the war, dropped out of the competition of modernization, but the North underwent a remarkable change under the impact of industrialism, which had grown rapidly after the war. The scale on which new factories were constructed was expanded, and industrial centers, which had been limited to cities and towns in the Northeast before, found their way to the Midwest. With this move went stronger establishment of capitalism, centralization, and oligarchy—such was the process. The railroad, above all, controlled the flow of capital across the nation; it intruded more and more into the lives of the farmers under the special protection of the government. It also demanded high charges for the transportation of wheat, building up vast fortunes. Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) expresses the terrible tentacles of the railroad owners.

Theoretically speaking, Norris received an important impulse to a new way of writing from the novels of Émile Zola, to whose work he responded strongly. Born of a wealthy Chicago merchant, he knew nothing about the realism peculiar to the Midwest. Moving from his boyhood in France to his college life in California, however, he turned to the French writer and adopted him as a guide and teacher. *The Octopus* was the first volume of a trilogy called *The Epic of the Wheat*. He took a bold leap forward, turning his eyes to society, and exposed
the actual affairs of the railroad which, expanding its feet like an octopus, had squeezed life out of the people. His aim was true and *The Octopus* had sociological significance. With the farms in California as a backdrop, it was centered on the dramatic movement of the railroad and the farmers, "an event symbolizing the conflict between distributors and producers, more widely the issue between the Trusts and the People, still more widely between centralized industry and individual production." Their fight conveyed the inevitable victory of the railroad; it became controversial because of the inner drama of intense collision and conflict which arose between biological and deterministic "nature" and "nature" as idealized in America, where there were natural resources in abundance and relatively few people.

In *The Octopus* there are two main strands. One presents Magnus Derrick and his ruin, which comes after his struggle with the railroad fought against his own will. This is the warp. The episodes of three young men make the woof. These two aspects are the fabrics of the story. In the case of Magnus, old authority diminishes and his household, once prosperous, collapses before the railroad. The position of Magnus can be compared to that of Katai's mother as given in *Sei*.

Katai, who knew what was meant by objective description as shown in the wide reputation gained by *Futon*, was taking the tide at the flood and quickly wrote several short stories. While he was doing so, his elder brother Mitoya (who appears as Ryo in *Sei*) died, having experienced the pain and discomfort that came of the feud between his mother and wife and having had the misfortune to lose his job after his father was killed in action in 1877. Katai depicted him in *Ani* first and then in *Sei*, the plan of which had been nursed in his mind over
a long period of time. Mother and brother, although dead, were both his blood relations, and it was indeed a great pain for him to paint them objectively, a pain which he felt as if he were being "skinned."9 The mother was by nature kindly and strong-minded, but after the Meiji Restoration (1868) when the samurai lost their regular income in consequence of the abolishment of their institution, her family suffered hardships. What was more, her husband died early in life and she had not only to take care of her parents-in-law, who were hard to deal with, but also worked to give her children a good education. A feeling of dissatisfaction—the end of her endurance had been reached—warped her to a stubborn and irritated woman of "dreary temperament"10 which had sunk deep into her mind. Her children, from whom she had expected a lot, did not turn out well: one was a low-ranking official, another a dreamer who was good for nothing, and the third a poor merchant's wife in the country. Her beautiful dreams thus crumbled one after another, making her hysterical; her only hopes were pinned on her third son, an army officer. When she saw other old women praying with their beads at temples or taking care of their grandchildren leisurely, she naturally wondered why her fortunes were so poor. Her mind had been deeply absorbed in pressing problems of daily life. She could now bask in the sun without feeling anxiety whenever she wished to, but it was in vain because her sensitive mind was too strong for her to remain calm. That was her inborn nature, but "environment"11 was also responsible for her mental state. The thought that she was not looked down on by others simply because she was a widow made her nervous. Earlier, she bravely bore her affliction during the time when women should be modest and reserved under any
circumstances. However, absolute obedience avenges itself, becoming inhuman, and demands the same amount of obedience from others when one becomes ruler in turn. Thus the old widow took to hurling Confucian maxims and feudalistic precepts on filial piety at the heads of her children. Things could have been smoothed out in a feudal age, but the times had changed so much that all her complaint, anxiety, and dreary life ran off the track.

Here one can see the determinism of Zola’s “heredity” and “environment.” Although the mother knew that she was a virtual image of the times as the social system underwent a change after the Restoration, her vanity of life still seized her and caused both uneasiness and discontent, which tormented her; the atmosphere within her home was, therefore, naturally and constantly steeped in gloom. This image of her is drawn in Sei and her anxiety increased more and more after she was stricken by cancer. Physical pain excruciates the mind, paralyzing its normal functions. She became more irascible, more ill-tempered, and more difficult to please. What is hereditary and circumstantial conditions the mind, and the novel is designed to portray a change in the mentality, the change expressed by Zola’s Thérèse Raquin. This is the major theme of the story. The mother, who had sacrificed her personal interest to the household, began to lord it over them as an assailant, and her “dreary temperament” is directed toward her eldest son’s wife. The first wife dies due to overwork soon after childbirth and the second is forced to divorce because her baby is unwittingly suffocated with the sheer weight of her own body. The story opens with the wedding ceremony of a third wife, who is in constant fear of her mother-in-law’s angry look whenever she shows something
of her affection toward her husband, and ends with the scene in which both husband and wife finally relax themselves after their mother's death, feeling that they are now master in their own house.

The Octopus was written after the Mussel Slough affair in 1880 and develops with Magnus Derrick, fondly known as "Governor," who owns a large farm, as the protagonist. He is noble-minded and a man of large scale, as suggested by his personal name. He is smooth-shaven, thin-lipped, with a broad chin and a prominent hawk-like nose—the characteristics of the family. He aspires to become a politician when young, but is not successful. He works in a mine, and, hearing that the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad will lease their land to farmers, decides to reside on a farm. He is a gentleman of the old type, who dreams of making a fortune at a stroke and thinks that life is a gamble.

"To control men had ever been his ambition; submission of any kind, his greatest horror." His farming is successful, but a dispute arises with the Railroad which is attempting greedily to gain the land and the wheat, and the conflict over the price of land and the cost of transportation of the wheat leads to a lawsuit. To win the suit, the ranchers offer a bribe and form a League, unanimously choosing Magnus chairman, although he is unwilling. They finally decides to send Lyman, eldest son of Magnus, to the state railroad commission. The shame of the crooked business Magnus has done is to him a thing unspeakable. More than once, he has resolved to break with the whole affair by resigning his position, allowing the others to proceed without him. But now it is too late. He is hopelessly caught in the mesh. He is blinded, dizzied, and pushed along he knows not where. He resigns himself to whatever comes.
Harran, second son of Magnus, works hard under his father. "To his eye, both were perfect specimens of their class, intelligent, well-looking, resourceful. He was intensely proud of them. He was never happier. . . . more alert and buoyant than when in the company of his two sons." He honestly believes that no finer examples of young manhood exist throughout the entire nation. Lyman, however, betrays his father for his own political ambition—to become Governor of the State—and throws the League into utter confusion. Magnus is dumbfounded and realizes that the foundation is now gone from under his feet and feels that, worst of all, "the consciousness of lost self-respect, the knowledge of a prestige vanishing, a dignity impaired" as his command is weakened. There is no success for him now. He groans aloud, covering his head with his clasped hands. He speculates desperately and is utterly shattered.

The description of the mother's life in Sei does not go beyond her house. The struggle within her house seems to have nothing to do with what happens to society. As a consequence, her prerogatives as sovereign are given full play, deepening the darkness of the Japanese family system. Magnus is placed in a painful dilemma by social implications. Gradually and reluctantly against every instinct and the fearful pleadings of his wife, he yields: a fatal error. Lyman's defection finally brings him low. Even with his sovereignty, he cannot dissuade his son from pressing to have his ambition realized. It is a tragedy that Magnus has become lethargic in holding his own power and has acquiesced to Lyman and then to the Railroad.

Three of Zola's novels, in particular, Germinal, La Bête humaine, and La Terre, seem to have influenced The Octopus. Both Germinal and The Octopus investigate the struggle between capital and labor. In
Zola's novel the conflict between the miners and the mining company ends with the ruin of the former. Similarly, the fight between the farmers and the Railroad results in several of the farmers being killed in an armed battle. It is no use for the miners and farmers to oppose the companies backed by capital, because capital means strength. When one tries to examine the significance of *The Octopus* as a novel of American naturalism, however, it would be meaningless to show similarities mechanically between these novels. Instead, it would be far better to contemplate the confrontation between Zola's concept of nature and that of most writers in America. The most important point in Norris is that he was an American and a Californian and therefore was intrinsically optimistic, believing in progress by the grace of God, and yet was influenced by French naturalism, notably by Zola, as an artist.

The victim next to the wife in Katai's story is Ryo, the eldest son. When young, he burns ardently with desire for "fame," and inspires his younger brothers with "ideals as a man" and "a noble spirit of going one's own way." But, because of his intense emotional confrontations in the poor life of a low-ranking official and his complicated household feud, he becomes contented with a passive existence. Obviously he does not have authority to speak and carry out his commitments. Sandwiched between mother and wife, he is always assailed from his mother by criticism and abuse: "There's something in life besides sleeping with your wife, isn't there? You seem to be sleeping with her, forgetting that your mother is suffering. Can you look Confucius full in the face?" When he faces his third marriage, he evinces no particular emotion over the prospects—an attitude of mind which surprises his younger brothers. Soon after their mother passes
away, he says to them: "Well, this is an important funeral because we owe her a lot, and I sincerely want to ask you a little bit of favor if possible." This suggests that his way of life has become conventional. Emotionally he thinks he has to do something in return for her kindness, but practically he acts in a diplomatic way, showing the mentality of other people placed in the same circumstances. All the attendants return home after his mother's funeral is over, and when he is left alone with his wife, he reminisces, while feeling sorry for his two previous wives: "Many young couple often go to a temple festival together or go shopping at a department store; they are free to enjoy if they choose.... But we've never experienced such a happy thing before. We're miserable day in, day out, often scolded by Mother and drawn in a family feud." This is a good example of how he tried to get out from under the umbrella of his mother and to enter into a world of his own.

Against the image of the mother which was drawn through the eldest son there is another image of her given through Sennosuke, the second son, who seems to be the author's alter ego. Although he understands critically his mother's warped temperament and her feudalistic ways of thinking, he looks upon them as unavoidable when taking into consideration the hazardous path along which she has walked with difficulty and the result of her early training in the culture peculiar to her own age, which is impossible to overcome. So he thinks that he has to repay by gratitude the hardships of her long career in which she could bring up single-handedly her sons and daughter. This is why he wants his wife to be dutiful to her mother-in-law. The wife, who is naive and obedient, tries hard to respond to the wishes of her husband although
she is occasionally afraid of the old woman.

The mother always has a drink at supper to escape from her solitary life. Her stern look is flushed with sake. Sacarstic and unreasonable scolding broke forth from the mouth of the old woman who was usually melancholy, and Ryo and his wife had to bear the brunt of her criticism. ... Sennosuke, upon seeing this, used to finish supper hurriedly and go into his study. His brother and wife had expected him to do something to save the situation, but his romantic mind was much too sensitive for such a disgraceful scene as that. When he saw her mother’s stern look and a dark lamplight, he was seized with unendurable sorrow, feeling as if the day of doom approached. ... Hot tears began to roll from his eyes.24

Sennosuke is weak but free since he is a second son. He tries to balance things and adapt to them, resisting any tendency toward bold leadership as egotistic and servile.

In writing The Octopus, Norris stayed in California for four months in 1899 and went into the strife between the wheat growers and the railroad, and the most important images are, naturally enough, given to the wheat and the railroad; these two images are most closely related to Presley, Annixter, and Vanamee. Among them it is Presley, a young poet, who appears in the opening chapter and is charged with the responsibility of bearing the author’s message.25 He views the whole drama of the struggle with the octopus. He is present at every crisis, witnesses all the agonies, suffers them all vicariously, burns with indignation, but emerges at last a solitary, ineffectual dreamer. One is reminded, in the reflections of the poet, of the two images of Ryo and Sennosuke: the former’s irresoluteness of the intellectual and the latter’s
selfish ineffectiveness of the literary man. An eastern college graduate, the poet wishes to write an epic of the grand and romantic West while in California. He is described as "essentially a dreamer, not a man of affairs."26 After all, whatever he writes, and in whatever fashion, he is determined that "his poem should be of the West, that world's frontier of Romance, ... where the tumultuous life ran like fire from dawn to dark, and from dark to dawn again, primitive, brutal, honest, and without fear."27 To him the frontier was an area where a new race, a new people—hardy, brave, and passionate—were building an empire.

One day, while walking in the San Joaquin Valley, his emotions are swept by a sudden uplift, a sense of exhilaration, of physical exaltation. He feels that he is one with nature, happy and contented. However, he is involuntarily involved in the endless strife between the ranchers and the railroad; he is made sick at heart. When he learns of the tricky countermeasure by the wheat farmers, he is upset, filled with infinite disgust and weariness. Presley, however, does not blame Magnus, but regards the moral catastrophe that overtakes him as one more crime to be charged against the railroad. The wheat, an incarnation of natural dynamism, covering the earth from horizon to horizon and growing high from the ground gives him his only comfort. "And there before him, mile after mile, illimitable, ... lay the Wheat.... There it lay, a vast, silent ocean, shimmering a pallid green under the moon and under the stars; a mighty force, the strength of nations, the life of the world."28 The wrangling between the ranchers and the railroad "dwindled to paltry insignificance before this sight."29 And yet the moment when he thinks he is to grasp his song in all its fullness, an interloper comes to break his spell: a locomotive. It "shot by him with a roar, filling
the air with the reek of hot oil, vomiting smoke and sparks."^{30} It charged right into the midst of a herd of sheep, merciless and inexorable. To the right and left, all the width of the right of way, the little bodies were flung; backs were snapped against the fence posts; brains knocked out. It was a slaughter, a massacre of innocents. The hideous ruin in the engine's path drove all thought of his poem from his mind. The inspiration vanished like a mist. Here Norris the naturalist used the "iron monster"^{31} as catalyst to shatter Presley's dream, eclipsing the image of indigenous nature in America. In this sense, Norris the naturalist succeeded in denying Norris the American in the above scene.

In Katai's novel, the third son, Hideo, is more egotistical than Sennosuke. As an army officer, under the national policy of wealth and military strength of Japan, he was in the most advantageous position to climb the ladder of success. Upon him his mother lavished her love. Sennosuke rejected it moderately, but Hideo did so bluntly. Sennosuke, according to his thinking, did not regard an army officer as prestigious. "See what I'll do. I'll write a masterpiece, which will astonish the people. I'll let my name remain in the history of Meiji literature."^{32} He thus denied the army, stressing the literary world as much better. The idea of rejecting the Establishment persisted strongly in him, which made him a writer and an anti-Establishmentarian. Hideo, without his mother knowing it, falls in love with a girl. After sexual intimacy with her, he marries her against her parents' opposition after his mother dies. The power of the family system on which the old mother solely depended was virtually gone. The world represented by both Sennosuke and Hideo signified a blunt declaration by the sons to
strike a final blow at the old ideals of their mother.

Lyman, in The Octopus, sells out to the Railroad, driving his father into a tight corner. Genslinger, the venal editor of the local newspaper, the railroad organ, blackmails and then doublecrosses Magnus. The authority held by Magnus is completely gone. The visionary image resting on his tenacity for power and glory in past years miserably breaks down now. Gambler that he is, he at last risks his greatest stake, his personal honor, in the greatest game of his life, and loses miserably and irredeemably. "It was gone—that old-time power of mastery, that faculty of command."\(^{33}\) The ground crumbles beneath his feet. Authority is gone. It has come—his fall, his ruin. Moreover, the Railroad puts more pressure on the wheat growers and plots to win back the land from them. Both parties choose to settle the dispute by shooting, which ends with many victims on both sides. Harran is one of them. Magnus's life ends here, deserted by his friends, his dishonesty known, an old man, broken, discarded, discredited, and abandoned. And both his house and farm go to the Railroad. He can hardly take care of himself and becomes a hollow man. "He had the appearance of a man nearer eighty than sixty;"\(^ {34}\) he is a pitiable, cringing ruin of a man.

Katai's protagonist finally expresses his ties to family, "Mother! Mother! Mother to whom I'm deeply indebted. My dearest and beloved Mother! Thinking that I'll have to say good-bye to her, I feel oppressed in the chest and am moved to tears."\(^ {35}\) The indulgence seen in this statement is clearly contradictory for Sennosuke who aspires to self-dependence in the modernization movement, but it may be characteristic of Katai to do this without scruple that he is being indulgent.
"Mother is gone. I'm alone." Seeing her husband weeping, O-ume, his wife, began to feel sad. She had no words to comfort him. "I'm alone!" he repeated, "There's no one else on whom I can count. We two have to walk through the world together!" . . . They felt so keen a sorrow that they awoke to the stern realities of life. A stronger affection than ever began to prevail over them.36

This is an indication of his strong dependency structure moving toward greater autonomy and individualization. From his elder brother, even after the mother's death, there is nothing new to be expected. Sei, seen from Sennosuke's view, shows a conversion from a world of fancy and indulgence to that of grim realities in which he is determined to be born again as a modern man. A common and barren life, however, awaits him. The sense of dreariness felt by the mother and also experienced by Ryo is now impending for Sennosuke, too, and that was what Japan was confronting at that time.37

Presley, on the other hand, is conceived as a poet and an intellectual. Troubled by irresoluteness, he is represented as an outsider. He has the makings of an epic poet of the West, but there is an inner uncertainty in the man. While watching the gruesome social struggle, he grows more and more impatient. Instead of seeking the "True Romance,"38 as he calls it, he only finds the ugly intrigue of the Railroad. Although believing he must live close to the people, he cannot deny that they are animals, the creatures of habit, and the pawns of social forces. His epic fails, but he becomes famous for a shorter, socially-directed poem. Nonetheless, he is destined to discover that literature is unsatisfactory, and is shown turning to an anarchist. He declares to
Caraher, a saloon keeper, "By God, I, too, I'm a Red!" He then throws a bomb at Behrman, representative of the Railroad, but, a typical intellectual, he fails in violence. That Behrman, invulnerable to other men, is killed later, during a moment of triumph, by natural forces beyond his control emphasizes the irony of the story. Presley also makes an agitation speech at a meeting of the farmers, which is subjected to their rough criticism. His conduct of life lacks an absolute principle; but he dares any danger in defense of what he conceives to be natural beauty.

Sei describes the friction between two generations, as seen above, but there is no open antagonism or confrontation between them. There is only a "sense of resignation." The three brothers and sister like one another, but because they are all poor, they try instinctively to protect their respective rights. Their egotism does not develop into an open conflict, however. Hideo, indulging in his love affair with youthful freedom and frankness, makes a striking contrast to his elder brothers, and he loves his mother with pure affection. No wonder, therefore, that she holds him dearest and has great hopes for his future. The wife of the eldest son, however, entertains a relatively distant feeling toward her and consciously does not exert herself to become familiar with her. Even so, her attitude is not recalcitrant. In short, she is simply insensitive. The Mother's tyranny over her family, even when it increases in vehemence with her distorted temperament, is repaid by awe or submissiveness and, in the worst case, by escape from her. The main theme of this novel lies in this point because Katai wants to show, with a sense of resignation, what happened to the older generation which had once maintained vested special interests.
The daughter, whose attitude toward life is similar to that of her mother, cannot be reconciled with her husband and, ostensibly to take care of her sick mother, returns. She misunderstands the situation in thinking that, being now in her mother's home, she still possesses a corresponding measure of authority. After her mother's death (that is, the disappearance of absolute authority) she picks a quarrel with the eldest son's wife, a newcomer in the home, over the distribution of her mother's possessions and has to leave. The other young people mourn the mother's passing but also feel at ease for the first time. A happy atmosphere then seems possible. Everything and everybody undergo changes.

Sennosuke in particular is invigorated. He throws off his sentimental and conventional attitude, and emerges as one who takes a strikingly positive stance. The action balances the mother's total retreat from the absolute power she has wielded over her family, a retreat completed by "death" or "time." No one could stand in revolt against her. The rise and fall of the old generation is brought about, not through the power of the next generation to end the former's alleged abuses and build up a bright new age, but through the workings of such natural agents as "death" or "time." If this is so, "death" or "time" will also come to these young people. In the closing chapter, the wives of the three brothers, together with their children, all dressed up beautifully, go to have a group photograph taken. Later when the photograph arrives, they take out an old photograph of their mother, gazing on it long and meditatively. This is taken as showing a victory over an old generation, but also explains a sense of danger they feel—a sense which has driven them to accept the fact that their triumph is
temporary and that fate revolves in a circle. On this score, Sei does not merely describe the change of the old and new generations, but the ultimate aspect of human life—the rise and fall, the joys and sorrows, the lights and shadows of existence. Hence the title "Life" because Katai's interpretation of the subject matter was based on this point.42

Sei delineates realistically and skillfully the various aspects of the interplay of forces feudalistic and modern. It also presents ups and downs of life in a complicated family, and the novel thus is worthy of special attention as the record of the tragic passage of human events. Despite the success of the sensitive and penetrating treatment of the subject, however, the author's interpretation of the story rests on a "sense of mutability."43 The natural consequence of this is that it shows his limit as a realist. Time changes and an old generation is succeeded by a new one. In theory, for a naturalist, this should not be explained merely on the strength of such accidental phenomena as the mother's illness and death. Instead, this should be associated with the process of building up a modern nation. However, in this aspect is reflected the inadequacy of Katai's grasp on the ideology—naturalism—through which he chose to work. He lacked enthusiasm about deepening his analytical approach and focused only on a phenomenal and individual state of the mind. Therefore, actuality was not invigorating, social implications missing, and transcendentalism predominating. Although Sei is minute in description, it may be arbitrary and superficial.

Realism was originally a weapon for young writers to insist on their position. There is something strange in Katai's realism in that; it is implicated with fatalism or transcendentalism. His way of thinking
and the realism used by a naturalist do not correspond well with each other. He still was wavering even at the time of the maturity of modern realism, for he was not thoroughgoing to absorb modern thought, the nucleus of which is to respect humanism. He shifted from Zola to Maupassant and from Maupassant to Flaubert and the Goncourts. Of the latter he was an ardent admirer, and finally he reacted against Zola. The modern triumph depicted in Sei is not strenuously achieved by the rising generation. It is given them before they are aware of it; therefore it is not substantial. It is doomed to transiency. After all, the last several years of the Meiji period (1868–1912) were not ripe enough for the development of modernism.

In *The Octopus*, Presley's supposed inconsistencies reach a climax when he meets Shelgrim, president of the Railroad. The young poet, who believed it was Shelgrim who killed Annixter and ruined Magnus, now receives unusual impressions from him. The president, whom he believes to be an ogre, a brute, and a terrible man of blood and iron, is later seen as a sentimentalist and an art critic. Presley is morally bewildered when told that both the wheat and the Railroad are merely "one force" and it is "conditions, not men" that are to blame. "Norris's point was that the great world force of the wheat will not be owned or controlled by either. It is free and powerful." Shelgrim here uses "natural forces" as a rationalization for his own irresponsibility. The Railroad, once thought to destroy the pursuit of life, freedom, and happiness and to be the enemy of the people, begins to be accepted. In other words, nature is something pure and unspoiled to the Americans and, in order to keep it so, the railroad is resisted; but at the same time it is doubtless both a weapon of civilization and
a symbol of the progress of mankind.

Norris desired to engage the reader's emotions to fear and hate trusts, not industrialism or the machine.⁴⁸ His theme is that "all things, surely, inevitably, resistlessly work together for good."⁴⁹ Here is the basis of American optimism, an optimism based on the opposing ideals of cultural primitivism and industrial progress. The contradictions seen in Presley's actions are not unusual with most Americans. The Octopus acknowledges nature as a conscious, living, positive power, which is presented by both the wheat as "symbol of fruitfulness and benign natural force"⁵⁰ and—as counterforce—the railroad which transports it. An admiration both for the "natural" life and for railroad and their machinery is inevitable as far as one is American. This controversy could not have created a wide popular interest if Norris the naturalist had not existed.

Three stages of varied change revealed by Presley—a passionate love of the vanishing West, a social awakening, and loneliness—are without doubt the main currents running through The Octopus. In this connection, the novel is a pioneering experiment in which an intellectual is interested in social problems and suffers disillusion. And the eulogy for the wheat is expressed in the last chapter: "Men—motes in the sunshine—perished, were shot down in the very noon of life...But the WHEAT remained. Untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic, resistless, moved onward in its appointed grooves."⁵¹ This essentially concerns educating the poet to recognize the insignificance of the individual in comparison to the operation of the great, benevolent forces of nature: recognition to restore
the lost ground of his existence when he gave up social participation, and to grope in the loneliness and disillusion he felt when he was defeated in his struggle with raw actuality. Annixter's communion with nature runs parallel to the growth of the wheat; Vanamce, a lonely shepherd, tries to escape to nature and is saved by the holy resurrection of life symbolized by the cycle of the life of the wheat—these two episodes bring one to conclude that Norris's final objective is to extol the wheat and nature. The economic and social contradictions and tragedies are set against the conventional imagery of benevolent nature. The forces of society, the "natural" life, and productivity—these heterogeneous elements are forcibly contrasted with one another and united into a composite pattern, which sounds dogmatic and unconvincing. Investigating the Mussel Slough affair and keeping Germinal in mind, the author went beyond the boundary of determinism, and both nature worship and optimism began to pour from his lips as though a dam inside him had broken. Determinism, inversely, invited the ejection of ecstatic and positive adoration for nature. The Octopus is thus an instance of the mingling in him of contrary elements.

Notes

1. The present story deals with a middle-aged man struggling with a love affair with his beautiful young student. With a wife and three children to support, the protagonist, whose dream for a married life has already collapsed, is troubled by fatigue and ennui, and inadvertently falls in love with a beautiful woman student who lives with his family in order to receive lessons from him. Herein lies his mental agony, for the protagonist is none other than Katai himself. On the one hand, he tries to pose as a teacher, but on the other, cannot avoid feeling sexual desire as an ordinary man. Wavering between love
for his student and a feeling of security in his home life, he is robbed of his sweetheart by a third person. At first he envies the third person, then he worries, and finally he cries hard. The protagonist, although reason and self-consciousness sway in his mind, hates, curses, and suffers himself, unable to extricate himself from his relations with a young woman.

The author attempted to depict the truth of a man suffering because of the rigidity of social conventions. Katai also attempted objectively to describe the ugly psychology and feelings of his own without adding color to the developments of the story. This is why the story won much fame. From it arose a new tendency in which writers wanted to concentrate on things around them, apart from the merits and demerits of the things themselves. Although the story gained popularity, opinions were divided in the literary field: some critics welcomed and admired his bold attempt while others objected to and scoffed at his humiliation. Be that as it may, one can safely say that Futon was an epoch-making work in that it created a new literary style under the name of naturalism. Cf. Goto Ryo, *Naturalism and the Literature of Aesthetic School* (Tokyo: Shibun-do, 1974), pp. 65-66; Ikari Akira, *Kenryūsha* (Friends of the Inkstone Society) and *Naturalism: A Study* (Tokyo: Ōfu-sha, 1975), pp. 362-369.


4. With the introduction of science and technology from Western countries, both individualism and liberalism began to reach Japanese society. Among the intelligent people and the politicians who had supported the new Meiji Government, however, there was the consensus of opinion that the new Western ideas would destroy the foundation of Japanese society. They believed that it would become chaotic unless individuals made mutual concessions and, standing on this judgment, they tried to strengthen the family system in order to block individuals from being selfish. As is known, the Imperial Rescript on Education promulgated in 1890 could be interpreted as an outright endorsement of the Japanese family system modelled after Confucianism. And the tradition of
group loyalty which had widely prevailed in Japanese society was well accepted as providing a basis for the family system.


7. An opinion prevails that this difference comes from the national character fostered by individualism in Western countries and emotionalism of the Yamato race, i.e. the ethical doctrine that man's inborn nature is good. When authoritarianism, still impinging on the Japanese people, is added, the difference between “they” and “we” becomes larger.


11. Ibid., p. 253.


13. Ibid., p. 921.


15. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 11.

16. Ibid., p. 171.

17. Lars Åhnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1961), p. 294; Cf. “It is traces, rather, of several of Zola's best novels—L'Assomoir, Germinal, La Terre—which are to be found in The Octopus.” (Ernest Marchand, Frank Norris: A Study [Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1942], p. 217); “The Octopus is in the naturalistic tradition in its delineation of the broad sweep of economic forces. It is naturalistic in the Zola tradition, and its qualities may be further elucidated by comparison with those of Zola's novel which it most closely resembles, Germinal.” (Charles C. Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream [Westport, Conn.:
19. Ibid., p. 207.
20. Ibid., pp. 207-208.
22. Ibid., p. 353.
23. Ibid., p. 374.
24. Ibid., p. 204.
25. Cf. "Since the poet Presley is the chief commentator on the story, since he is a detached spectator in the conflict, and since the novel begins and ends with his observations, it is a natural assumption that he speaks for the novelist." (Frank Norris, The Octopus (New York: The New American Library of World Literature, Inc. 1964), with an Afterword by Oscar Cargill, p. 466.)
29. Ibid., p. 161.
31. Ibid., p. 47; 48; 173.
32. Tayama Katai, op. cit., p. 203.
34. Ibid., p. 331.
35. Tayama Katai, op. cit., p. 329.
36. Ibid., p. 377.
42. Ibid., p. 365; Ino Kenji, op. cit., p. 330.
376.
45. Ibid., p. 285.
52. Cf. "But we must note that these conclusions do not satisfactorily answer the problem as posed in the novel." (Charles C. Walcutt, op. cit., p. 149.)