

# The Triangles of Sin : Soseki's Kokoro and Hawthorne's "Roger Malvin's Burial" (In Honour of Professor Yukito Nakano On the Occasion of His Retirement)

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## The Triangles of Sin : Sōseki's *Kokoro* and Hawthorne's "Roger Malvin's Burial"

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The question of whether Natsume Sōseki read Nathaniel Hawthorne's novels and stories has often stirred critical discussion among Japanese comparatists. Among Sōseki's library books is a copy of Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*, and there are several references to Hawthorne in Sōseki's writings. In his *Kokoro*, furthermore, Sōseki has created a protagonist who, suffering intensely from an awareness of human sinfulness, approximates Hawthorne's puritanic heroes.

This study will demonstrate the thematic similarity between *Kokoro* and Hawthorne's "Roger Malvin's Burial," concentrating upon the protagonists' interpersonal relationships. The triangular relationship in *Kokoro* (K-Sensei-Ojōsan) closely parallels the one in Hawthorne's story (Roger-Reuben-Dorcas), in that both relationships involve not only the problems of love, egoism, and a guilty conscience, but also failed ideals of friendship and marital lives.

Underlying the thematic affinity of the two stories is the close resemblance of the psychological situations of the two protagonists. Reuben and Sensei, when confronted with the deaths of their close friends, both experience a guilty conscience, which arises from the keen awareness of their selfishness. The profound sense of guilt, furthermore, leads them to sacrificial acts of atonement : Sensei's suicide and Reuben's murder of his son, Cyrus. The two actions similarly illustrate a ritualistic pattern of behaviors motivated by psychological compulsion.

The two protagonists' lives are intensely complicated by their marital relationships. Ojōsan's innocence and love, like Dorcas', produce extremely cruel effects upon Sensei, while this emotional circumstance is intensified by the dramatic power of verbal irony. Furthermore, Reuben

and Sensei similarly suffer from spiritual isolation from their wives because of their secret guilt. Thus, this comparative study will not only illuminate the imaginative and creative process of the two stories, but also demonstrate a universal human situation as represented in two totally different cultural traditions.