

Modern Japanese Literary Men Abandon Pen and Paper and Take up Cycling: The Precarity of Being-in-the-Saddle-in-Urban-Space

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Many theoretical insights into cycling narratives feature avid cyclists who take full advantage of the potentials of the bicycle. In this paper, I have shifted gears to read narratives about clumsy cyclists who remain more or less at the mercy of their bicycles' idiosyncrasies. In addition to admitting to their own athletic ineptitude, however, such cyclists suggest the contingencies of the structure and management of urban space. This process coincides with and corroborates the elevation of these narrators' self-reflexivity, recognition of others' eyes upon them, and desire for but renunciation of narrative authority. Precisely through their tumbles, crashes, and embarrassments, these inept cyclists demonstrate that neither space nor machine is transparent and self-explanatory. The law of space management (including road safety regulations) is written by administration, not given by nature. Still, it exists and persists, affecting those who operate in the space, such as cyclists.

This paper investigates parallels between cycling and narrating as activities that form and erode the human subject's integrity and authority. Cycling is not only the subject matter in this study but also a model for narration and knowledge-formation. Instead of merely offering entertainment and knowledge about cycling or cycling narratives, I examine how cycling contributes to the rhetoric of narration. Each of the three first-person narratives examined below presents and is presented by a narrator-protagonist who aspires to be a competent cyclist yet reveals his own

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limitations, vulnerability, and resignation in the face not only of these liabilities but also of the confounding form of space he cycles in. His renunciation of knowledge and control is applicable to his cycling and narration alike, for the narration progresses more or less concurrently with the events narrated, exploiting the format of the diary. Thus the narrator lacks knowledge of the content of his story, and the structure of his narrative lacks any clearly demarcated beginning or end. What he knows, or comes to know, is that he does not know anything in advance and cannot do anything about his lack of knowledge. He tends to reveal what one *cannot* do with the bicycle or how *not* to ride a bicycle. Through their shortcomings, failures, and conflicts with others, the three aspiring cyclists in these stories learn about themselves in terms of their relations to the exterior space and society, as well as to their bodies in a phenomenological sense. Cycling is not only a physical exercise but also cognitive and emotive, while narration does not happen in the mind alone but is also embodied. The two activities are thus not to be contrasted as independent of each other in a stable binary, or placed in a fixed position relative to each other.

1. Three Narratives on Cycling Lessons

Each of the three novice bicyclists in the stories I explore below develops precarious, somewhat comical social relations with strangers in the city that he gingerly navigates on a bicycle he has yet to “tame,” on streets that are not as even, flat, or open as they appeared to be when he traversed them as a pedestrian. Each of the three is a Japanese male intellectual living in urban space, single and without children, and seemingly without regular employment – and thus possessing great liberty in terms of his free time and whereabouts while lacking a sense of belonging to society. Such specifics affect each of these three narrator-protagonist’s way of thinking about physical exercise such as cycling, about himself as the human subject of a thinking mind, and about exterior space as a foreign environment (as opposed to the familiar interior space of his study with its desk, pen, and paper). The time frame of each story also depicts cycling in one of its distinct phases: in vogue (around the turn of the twentieth century, when Natsume Sōseki wrote); in standard use (in the 1930s, when Hagiwara Sakutarō wrote); and as an essential means of transportation (in and around 1945, when Ishikawa Jun wrote).

Jitensha nikki (Bicycle Diary, 1903) was written when its author Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) was 35 years old, living in a rented attic in London, where he is studying English, funded by the Ministry of Education of Japan. The narrator-protagonist, a Japanese intellectual who comes across as a caricature of the author, takes up cycling lessons at the strong recommendation of his English landlady, who is concerned about his lack of exercise due to long hours of confinement in his study.

On a certifiable day in a certifiable month in the autumn of 1902 I waved a white flag out of my bedroom window, begged the old woman at my boarding-house to accept my surrender [...] and the first term of our peace treaty, commanded me as follows, ‘Go and ride your bicycle!’

[...] I eventually succumbed and, in compliance with the old woman’s order, reluctantly went to Lavender Hill, where I was supposed to ride my bicycle or, rather, where I was supposed to fall off my bicycle. (Natsume, 1918a, p. 31; Natsume, 2004, p. 77)

He uses a rental bicycle and is coached by an English friend.

The original intended audience for this story was Sōseki’s best friend, the modern haiku master Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), who had been an avid amateur baseball player but was by then bedridden with tuberculosis and spinal caries.² Sōseki’s two installments of *Rondon shōsoku* (Letters from London, dated April 9, April 20, and April 26), published in the May and June 1901 issues of *Hototogisu*, a literary journal founded by Shiki, were originally three letters to Shiki and to Shiki’s disciple Takahama Kyoshi. Shiki states in a private letter to Sōseki how much he appreciated them, and how much he would like to read more of the same since he can no longer travel to the West to observe its manners and customs. Sōseki’s later “Bicycle Diary” is largely considered his response to this plea from Shiki. Shiki, however, did not live long enough to read “Bicycle Diary,” for he died on September 19, 1902.³ The piece was published in the July 1903 issue of *Hototogisu*, the same journal in which “Letters from London” had been published.

As its title indicates, “Bicycle Diary” takes the form of several entries (month and date declared forgotten) in chronological order. Each entry’s account is ostensibly composed on the same day that the events took place, thus limiting the scope of the diarist’s reflections. The narrator-protagonist makes a spectacle of himself not only to characters within the story he tells, but to his reader, for each entry ends with his being rendered almost speechless or incapable of interpreting the significance of what he has just described.

Under the same title of *Jitensha nikki*, Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886-1942) published an account of learning how to ride a bicycle in the sixth (November 1936) issue of the periodical *Jiseishō*, when he was 49 years old. Hagiwara is arguably the most important modernist poet in Japan. He is also known for his love of the art of photo-

² In his essay *Byōshō rokushaku* (Six Feet around the Sickbed, 1901), Shiki lists what he has only heard of that he wishes to see with his own eyes. The list includes “cycling race and vaulting.” Hiraide Takashi, a poet turned literary and art critic, points out in his *Yūho no gurafizumu* (*The Graphism of Flânerie*) that equivalents of those on Shiki’s “to see” list appear in Walter Benjamin’s *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert* (*Berlin Childhood around 1900*), including cycling. The novelty of the bicycle and the public fascination with it are obvious in the almost concurrent attention to the machine and human use of it by Shiki and Benjamin (Hiraide, 2007, pp. 107-110).

³ The piece is about a sequence of events deducible from the text to be in the autumn of 1902, though the dates are deliberately obliterated (*bōgatsu bōjitsu* 忘月忘日, or “month forgotten, date forgotten,” a pun on the idiomatic *bōgatsu bōjitsu* 某月某日, meaning “a certain day of a certain month”).

graphy, and walked around extensively taking pictures with his stereoscope (Hagiwara, 1994). The practices of photographing and walking may well be related to the practice of cycling in terms of the practitioner's curiosity about the experience of the body in space, the relation between the human body and machines, and the relations among peripatetic, optical, and textual practices.

The narrative is in the format of a diary, whose entries extends from December 20 to March 1 (with no specific year). «December 20th: I aspire to learn cycling from today» (Hagiwara, 1975, p. 655; my translation). The language in use is the sinicized classical Japanese of *kanbun kundoku-tai*, whose formal and solemn tone of speech creates the gap between the comical content and the lofty style. The narrator-protagonist lives in a city that may well be the author's native town of Maebashi, the capital of Gunma Prefecture, apparently with his father, a medical doctor who owns a practice there. His reason for taking up cycling is not explicitly given in the text. From Day 2, he is coached by his younger brother, whose scientific method of teaching makes perfect sense to him.

The third piece I am to discuss, *Meigetsushu* (published in the April 1946 issue of *Mita bungaku*; trans., "Moon Gems"), was written by Ishikawa Jun (1899-1987) in March 1945, when he was around 46 years old. A native Tokyoite, like Sōseki, Ishikawa is often dubbed "the last *bunjin*" (literatus),⁴ suggesting that he did not seek commercial success or popularity among mass readers, was cultivated in multiple fields in the humanities, and was a highly sophisticated stylist. He did not have regular employment or a successful creative career for a number of years before the end of the World War II, much like the narrator-protagonist in his story. The central character tells the reader that he begins to practice cycling after he failed to secure a job due to the bicycle-riding required for a messenger position:

there flashed before my eyes a vision of young men dashing about the city proudly conducting company business on their bicycles! If only I had known how to ride a bicycle I might have pressed my case. [...]

It was then that "Boots" cut me to the core. "Can you ride a bicycle?"

His tone was pleasant enough, but he emitted a crude chortle as though he pitied me.

[...] this wretched state of affairs was due solely to my inability to ride a bicycle.

(Ishikawa, 1974, p. 35; Ishikawa, 1998, pp. 41-42, quoted here with slight modification)

The narrator-protagonist thus rents an old bicycle that has been mortgaged and will eventually become his own, and is coached by the bicycle-shop owner's teenaged daughter, who has a problem with her left foot (more on this later). Although not exactly a diary, and expanding considerably in terms of reflections on personal, literary, and historical contexts, the narrative progresses more or less chronologically, and the narrator-protagonist does not exhibit any advantage over the reader in terms of knowledge of events that are about to happen or situations that will unfold.

⁴ See Tanaka *et al.* (2021).

These three narratives all focus on a middle-aged narrator-protagonist who struggles to master the art of cycling. Other shared elements include the topographical awareness of space (narrow/wide, empty/crowded, flat/slanted, even/irregular) and an awareness of affordances (foot traffic, cyclists' routes, the passage of horses, dogs, and carriages, and specific uses and purposes of the space). Distinctions among the three include the aspiring cyclists' degrees of success (Natsume Sōseki's narrator abandons cycling, whereas Hagiwara Sakutarō and Ishikawa Jun's succeed in tackling intra-city and long-distance cycling); the stories' respective historical and geographic locations; and each protagonist's social relations formed before and during his cycling lessons.

2. Historical Contexts of Cycling

Before we begin the critical analysis of these three narratives, a brief overview of the technological and utilitarian historical context surrounding the bicycle is in order. Since the inception of the bicycle in the 1870s, several stages of transformation have taken place. In the late 1880s the structure of the vehicle thus became much the same as the one we now know. Between 1895 and 1897, the so-called bicycle boom swept «across a large portion of the globe» (Withers, 2018, p. 5). Between the late 1870s and early 1900s, many guidebooks, lists of bicycle manufacturers, and roadmaps for cycling tours were published, among them two works often cited by historians of cycling: Charles Spencer, *The Modern Bicycle: Containing Instructions for Beginners* (1877); and Charles Pratt, *The American Bicycler: A Manual for the Observer, the Learner, and the Expert* (1879).

In Japan, Matsui Shōyō (1870-1933, also called Masaharu) published a comprehensive guidebook on cycling entitled *Jitensha zensho* (Compendium of the Bicycle, 1902). Matsui was a disciple of Tsubouchi Shōyō, who is known for theorizing and practicing the genre of the novel, translating all Shakespeare's plays, and being a founding father of modern Japanese theatre. Like his mentor, Matsui translated many books from the English, and he also wrote a great number of plays for both *kabuki* and modern theatre. The method of teaching cycling in Matsui's book is noticeably different from that in Spencer's, perhaps reflecting the transformation of the machine during the quarter-century interval between the two books. Matsui's guidebook nevertheless covers similar essentials, such as step-by-step instructions for both the learner and their coach as to mounting and dismounting the bicycle, and it is possible that he consulted Spencer's work.⁵ Matsui's book makes it clear that by the turn of

⁵ In the foreword, Matsui humbly states: «How could I call myself as expert on the bicycle? The reason that I, uninformed, author this book is only because there have been many forerunners on the subject, and because readers of 'The Bicycle Column' of *Yorozu chōhō* endlessly urged me to. [...] My book was done mainly owing to various books in the field in Western countries, and to tales of various forerunners' experience» (*Chosha ga kantō no kotoba* [Foreword by Author], in Matsui, 1902, n.p.).

the twentieth century bicycles were widely used in Japan, especially by members of the elite who could afford expensive imported models and cycling trips that extended over a few days, often including return by train.⁶

3. Place for Practicing: Privacy and Communality

Because cycling is an outdoor activity, beginners must find an exterior space in which to practice that is shielded from public view.

Sōseki's "Bicycle Diary" spells out a similar consideration, in the narrator-protagonist's reply to a question from his cycling coach:

"Where shall we go for a ride?"

"Where? Well, as I'm riding today for the first time I'd like somewhere with as little traffic as possible and where the road is not too bad and where I won't be laughed at if I fall off," I say. (Natsume, 1918a, p. 32; Natsume, 2004, p. 78)

A desirable location is also one of the first matters to be settled in Hagiwara Sakutarō's "Bicycle Diary": «So I rented one [bicycle] and practiced [riding it] in a vacant lot [*akichi*] in the neighbourhood» (Hagiwara, 1975, p. 655). Ishikawa Jun's "Moon Gems" begins similarly:

Today, namely, New Year's Day, is the occasion of my first lesson.

To the rear of my lodgings is a small vacant lot [*akichi*]. There, one used bike and an instructor await me. The person who has volunteered to give me lessons is a little girl who lives in the neighborhood. (Ishikawa, 1974, p. 36; Ishikawa, 1998, p. 42)

Ishikawa's narrator-protagonist later elaborates on the choice of the practice space: «the back lot was a quiet place removed from the glamor of the world, and I felt little embarrassment in practicing there» (Ishikawa, 1974, p. 40; Ishikawa, 1998, p. 45).

A beginning cyclist in turn-of-the-century London (as depicted in Sōseki's "Bicycle Diary") had to practice cycling on the street, selecting a relatively quiet time or area, whereas 1930s Maebashi and Tokyo in 1945 still had vacant lots (*akichi*) in urban residential or quasi-residential space. Moreover, a London policeman reminds Sōseki's cyclist of the planned purpose of each territory of space, as dictated by administration, and of where it is permissible to practice cycling, in contrast to the free space that is still available decades later in Maebashi, and even in Tokyo, that could be used for impromptu cycling practice:

⁶ For more on the history of the bicycle in Japan, see Nihon jitenshashi kenkyūkai, 2020. Though it is from a later period, Shiga Naoya's *Jitensha* (Bicycle, 1951) offers an idea of the marketing of imported bicycles in Japan; see Shiga (1973).

Those familiar with the layout of the older, densely built-up parts of downtown Tokyo will recall how, if one followed the covers of the drainage ditches along a back alley, at the point where the alley narrowed and appeared to dead-end, often one discovered a large vacant lot. [...] For quite some time it had been vacant, and it saw little human traffic except in the hot summer months when a sumo ring was improvised and the children of the neighborhood came in the evenings to practice wrestling. Thus it was a lively spot until the fall. By this time of year, however, the ring had been plowed under, and alongside the vegetable patch planted by the neighborhood patriotic association, small foxholes had been dug in the ground as bomb shelters. Fortunately, there was just enough space to practice riding a bicycle, and the plowing along the edges had the salutary effect of softening the earth so that I was unlikely to injure myself in a fall. (Ishikawa, 1974, pp. 36-37; Ishikawa, 1998, pp. 42-43)

Ishikawa's narrator is explicitly addressing readers, including those who are geographically or topographically familiar with the setting of the story he narrates, in stark contrast to Sōseki's narrator, who presumes the reader's ignorance of London when he mentions place names (Clapham Commons, Lavender Hill, Wimbledon, etc.). In content, however, Ishikawa's narrative does generously provide details of a vacant lot in Tokyo up to 1945, which helps readers not familiar with this category of urban space.

In doing this, Ishikawa's narrator recounts how the vacant lot has been serially reinvented by local residents. The "vacant" space is characterized not by any specific usage but by its versatility, availability for improvisational activities, and immediate connection to residents' bodies (for wrestling, for growing food, for providing protection from bombs). Spatial activities and social relations are incidentally formed to make the vacant lot (a kind of "terrain vague" in the terminology of Ignasi de Solà-Morales) a place to belong to. Neither space nor community is static or definitive of each other. The two form and transform each other as needed. Michel de Certeau's «spatial practices» form «social relations» as well as making a space (de Certeau, 1974).

4. Spectacle and Spectators of Cycling

Indeed, an incidental community is formed and dissolved through the private activity of practicing bicycle riding in the public space of the street, precisely because the riders' practice runs entertain people in the area. The location of cycling lessons being exterior, this physical activity of beginning riders, though not initially meant as a spectacle, ironically is deemed so, and tends to attract spectators:

Here and there people stop and watch. Some grin as they pass. Beneath the oak tree opposite, a nanny sits with a child on a bench and for a while now has been greatly impressed watching me. What exactly she is impressed with I have no idea. Probably she is fascinated by the manly sight of me, dripping with sweat, fighting furiously with the

bicycle. Now that my world has become enriched by having such an agreeable friend in it, I find I have no regrets about having grazed my shin in two or three places. [...]

I start trundling down like the wind from the top of the slope. Whereupon – a strange thing – from inside one of the residences on the left some prankster, admiring my driving, applauded. I hardly had time to think how bizarre this was before my vehicle was already on the middle section of the slope. Now I encountered something extraordinary: about fifty schoolgirls coming in procession from the opposite direction. [...] there is no question of my putting on airs or anything of that kind. [...] I narrowly manage to squeeze along the side of the female army. Whoosh! (Natsume, 1918a, pp. 34-36; Natsume, 2004, pp. 79-82)

As Ishikawa's description of the vacant lot indicates, as secluded as such a place might be, surrounded by the backs of houses and shops, these are not without windows or access from adjacent buildings. Thus the enclosed space quickly becomes a theatre – open to the neighbors, if not to outsiders walking by on the front street. However quiet it may at the outset of the novice's carefully scheduled practice time, his efforts easily becomes prey to public scrutiny:

At times I collapsed on the ground as I struggled to catch my breath. And, as if that were only the beginning of my torment, there came children who, gathering from every quarter of the neighborhood, formed a circle around me and the bike. They watched, talking and laughing noisily all the while.

There were so many that one wondered where they had been hiding until now. [...]

I did not welcome the sight of them. (Ishikawa, 1974, pp. 38-39; Ishikawa, 1998, pp. 44-45)

Children, however, gradually grow tired of watching "I" practice. Adults remain indifferent, as they lead more purposive lives, in which a vacant lot serves no point and the sight of a cycling lesson provides no gain.

As the general public leaves the narrator-cyclist of Ishikawa's "Moon Gems" alone to focus on his practice, an incidental yet specially qualified spectator (or non-spectator) emerges in the story:

Though I say old, there was nothing remotely aged about the man. He was tall; his back, straight; and a soft black felt hat made his silky white hair seem almost youthful. He wore a great black frock coat over a suit of imported black tweed of the sort that had been available in Japan before the start of the war. On his feet, however, were a pair of low clogs that looked terribly worn. Sometimes he carried an umbrella or a leather Kodak bag as he walked at a brisk clip and cut through the dry leaves of the bamboo grass. For the moment, let me identify this gentleman as, simply, Mr. Gūge, "the Lotus." (Ishikawa, 1974, p. 40; Ishikawa, 1998, pp. 45-46, quoted here with slight modification)

The narrator-cyclist identifies the old gentleman who walks by on higher ground next to the vacant lot as a famed man of letters, "Gūge 藕花." Ishikawa's respectful caricature of Gūge, with a tall lean body clad in Western clothes yet oddly sporting

a pair of Japanese clogs, matches Nagai Kafū's (1879-1959; born Nagai Sōkichi) self-portrayal in his writing as well as his appearance in photographs. The name Gūge, meaning "Lotus Flower," carries an association with the historical author's pseudonym Kafū (Breeze over Lotuses). Renshikan, the name of Gūge's residence in the story, rhymes with Henkikan, the name of Kafū's residence. These and other details that echo characteristics known to apply to Kafū provide a thin layer of disguise for the historical man of letters. Whereas Kafū was already a celebrated author in 1944-45, when Ishikawa wrote "Moon Gems", Ishikawa himself was yet to become one. The facts that Kafū and Ishikawa were both Tokyoites, translators of Western literature, and literati with a penchant for the aesthetics of Edo-period townsmen may thus account for the heightened admiration and competitiveness toward the caricature of Gūge on the part of the narrator-cyclist in "Moon Gems", who is himself a caricature of Ishikawa.⁷ The narrator's elevated self-consciousness vis-à-vis Gūge's status and his high opinion of him are remarkable in the following passage, in which he quickly forfeits his indifference:

he passes by the lot on his constitutionals unmindful of my lessons at the bottom of the cliff, likewise I have continued to ride my bike with blithesome disregard for whatever his opinions in the matter might be. [...] one could perhaps claim that the relationship between his clogs and my bicycle is not entirely tenuous. The course that he has run in a decade I must compress into a few hours. (Ishikawa, 1974, pp. 41-42; Ishikawa, 1998, pp. 46-47)

Here the literary newcomer's respect for and urge to catch up with his forerunner are explicit, and are presented effectively by way of the synecdoches of footwear and vehicle. The narrator-protagonist's admiration for and putative detachment from Gūge evolve around the contrast between his worn clogs and the narrator-protagonist's bicycle.⁸

5. Forming and Dissolving a Tableau of the Flâneur versus the Cyclist

In fact, Nagai Kafū in his youth explored his environment by bicycle. Kafū's collection of stories, *Amerika monogatari* (American Stories, 1908) includes *Noji no kaeri* "A Return through the Meadow", which describes its narrator-protagonist's day-long bicycle trip in Tacoma, Washington, on the Northwest Coast of the US. Matching a scene in the story is a photograph taken of Kafū in the State of Washington, in which

⁷ For Ishikawa's well-known mixture of admiration, inferiority complex, and eventual despise for Kafū, see Ishikawa, 1990.

⁸ Far more attention is paid in Ishikawa's "Moon Gems" to feet and footwear than to any other body part or its prosthesis: the job interviewer's polished rubber boots; the narrator-protagonist's canvas shoes; the boots he desires; and the bicyclist girl's uneven feet. On this, among other observations on materiality and movement in "Moon Gem", see Takahashi, 1988, p. 186.

he stands beside a bicycle with his hands on its handlebars, accompanied by a friend also with a bicycle.⁹ In his journal, *Saiyū nisshi shō* (Journal of a Journey to the West, 1919), Kafū documents his bicycle rides in the entries for April 8, 9, and May 14, 1904, all of which are for long-distance rides.¹⁰ Thus we can deduce that Kafū was an avid cyclist while in Washington State. Yet there is no mention of cycling in this diary once he left the Seattle area.

Back in Tokyo, Kafū was known as a flâneur. His mode of exploration of urban space there was predominantly, if not exclusively, on foot – so much so that his choice of footwear, *hiyori geta*, clogs for sunny days, became a synecdoche for and synonymous with his flânerie, and also the title of his essay about the city of his birth.¹¹ Although biographical questions are not pursued here, Kafū's choice of walking over cycling in Tokyo may elucidate the portrayal of Gūge in Ishikawa's story "Moon Gems". Had the scenes in question indeed taken place in reality, Kafū, himself an accomplished cyclist, could not have failed to note the clumsiness of the protagonist as he practiced riding in the vacant lot, and would have felt some sentiment – perhaps pity, or disdain:

From time to time I have raised my eyes and studied the face of the Master of Liaison House. Was it an illusion? Did I not see him stop and take a look at me? Perhaps a link exists between us after all. (Ishikawa, 1974, p. 42; Ishikawa, 1998, pp. 47-48)

The half-imaginary exchange of gaze here between "I" and Gūge enables us to ask philosophical questions. Who is watching whom? Who is judging whom? Do the positions they occupy in relation to each other (higher on the cliff versus lower in the vacant lot) translate into the hierarchy between the two? What about the contrast between the speed of Gūge's strides and the slowness of the narrator-cyclist's wheels? The progress of the flâneur versus that of the cyclist? (Human) foot traffic versus (mechanical) wheels? Japanese clothing versus Western attire? Though both characters are in motion and are reticent about acknowledging their awareness of the other man's presence, the tension between the two – thus fortified by multiple layers of contrast – appears to form, within the logic of the narrative, an exaggerated static stance, reminiscent of *mie* ("pose") in *kabuki* theatre.

What is narratologically noteworthy here is that, in addition to the gaze cast upon Gūge, the narrator-protagonist has another gaze, cast from the outside upon the whole scene to frame a tableau that features Gūge on the top of the cliff, with himself at the bottom. He looks at this tableau both as a character within it and as the

⁹ See Nagai Kafū zō (*ryūgaku ji, kohan no jitensha*) (A portrait of Nagai Kafū [bicycles on the lakeside, during his study abroad], n.d.), a photograph archived in Edo-Tokyo Museum. <https://www.edohakuarchives.jp/detail-13348.html>

¹⁰ Nagai, 1992, p. 302. More on bicycling in *Noji no kaeri* and the story's resonance with *Saiyū nisshi shō*, see Follaco, 2017, pp. 56-57, and p. 87, respectively.

¹¹ Nagai (1915). Kafū does not mention cycling even when he reminisces his childhood experience of the urban space of Tokyo.

producer of it – that is, both at a specific point from within the scene and upon the entire narrative scene from a distance.

6. Disabilities as Contingencies

The bicycle becomes adjacent and essential to the body of a rider in Ishikawa's "Moon Gems". The bicycle as a prosthesis to the body of the young girl whose father rents bikes is celebrated as follows:

Admittedly, she dragged her left foot a bit when she attempted to move in a hurry, but under normal circumstances the limp was scarcely noticeable, and it did not seem to bother her in the least. To the contrary, once she mounted the bicycle, which was her natural forte, she would throw her hands in the air, and like a cherry petal fluttering upon the breeze, she would go round and round in circles, cutting an arc on the ground that grew progressively smaller. She possessed the fundamental and unquestioned poise of an equestrienne. Indeed anyone who has ever had the opportunity to observe the girl as she rode her bike will surely agree it constituted her true set of legs. (Ishikawa, 1974, p. 38; Ishikawa, 1998, pp. 43-44)

Here the bicycle serves as an equalizer for the "disabled". The "lame" girl becomes an «equestrienne» with «her true set of legs» that are provided by the bicycle. «True» is a key adjective here – the bicycle, the machine, is not artificial but natural, not fake but authentic, not external but an integral part of the woman's body.

7. Collision-Bound: Bicycles Contending in Public Space with Other Modes of Transportation

As has been amply documented, the streets of London around 1900 were full of vehicles, revealing the transitional nature of the historical period: omnibuses, carriages, carts, bicycles, and horses contended in the crowded space with pedestrians. In Sōseki's "Bicycle Diary", the narrator-protagonist, whose cycling skills are presumably improving, takes his bicycle to a busier street. On one occasion, Sōseki's narrator-cyclist must negotiate not only with another bicyclist coming toward him, but also with a nearby horse-tram and a cart, parked to create between themselves a narrow margin of error for the narrator-cyclist to navigate:

My bicycle is now safely over Lavender Hill and is riding into the very centre of the maelstrom. Over there a horse-tram has stopped, facing towards me. On its right an extremely large wagon has stopped, facing the other direction. Between them about four foot [*sic*]. I am speeding along on my vehicle ready to squeeze through the four-foot gap. The front wheel of my vehicle has come alongside the front leg of the tram-horse, that is to say, my body has entered the gap between horse-tram and wagon, when a bicycle suddenly slips

in from the other side. At such instants preserving one's life is the main thing and, without contemplating whether to retreat or fall off, my body has already let out an "eek!" and fallen. My manner of falling is a little clumsy, and I only avoid the indignity of landing on all fours by giving the horse's thigh a nasty knock with my left hand. Yet hardly have I time to think, That was close!, before the horse-tram starts moving forward. The horse is startled and kicks away my bicycle. The other bicycle whizzes past as if nothing has happened. The cycle of events does not stop there. A gentleman riding in a flashy gig gallops up from behind and regards me, whip in hand, and, quietly shocked by my suicide attempt, says, "It's all right! Don't worry! I won't kill you!" (Natsume, 1918a, p. 62; Natsume, 2004, pp. 87-88)

Though Sōseki's narrator-protagonist does not cite a rule that he inadvertently violated on this second occasion (unlike the last), there was a protocol for cyclists encountering live animals such as horses. As Peter Kratzke explains, quoting Pratt's aforementioned cycling guidebook *The American Bicyclist*, «Bicyclers [...] when meeting horses on the road 'It is a courtesy of the road to turn out more than the law requires, to dismount rather than force out a loaded team, to avoid riding at and through a herd of live animals driven out on the road'» (Kratzke, 2016, p. 45). This scene in Sōseki's "Bicycle Diary" precisely illustrates what could happen when the protocol was not observed, in the challenging circumstances of congestion and confusion.

Enter Hagiwara Sakutarō, whose essay "Bicycle Diary" is set in an unnamed town which we may presume to be the author's hometown of Maebashi, the capital of Gumma Prefecture in mid-1930s Japan. His narrator-cyclist's panic upon spotting pedestrians in his way produces a comparable yet distinct exchange with others who share public space with him and his bicycle. The point of contention is which party should move to avoid a predicted crash: «I saw several pedestrians ahead of me, and from the top of the saddle I called out to them, "Have an eye! Have an eye! Dodge me! Duck me!" Those pedestrians turned back and laughed, saying to me, "You should dodge us yourself." Trying to evade them, I erred and crashed into a cliff.» (Hagiwara, 1975, p. 656). In this case, the cyclist takes on more responsibility than he can manage, and while avoiding a crash with the pedestrians he hits a cliff, damaging his bicycle as well as slightly injuring himself. The intentionality of the modern subject thus fails to determine his action here, because his body and mind do not coordinate well enough to successfully manifest his intention.

Also noteworthy, in Hagiwara's narratives, the first-person narrator's account is taken over by speech of various characters – including his own as the protagonist of the story – that is not mediated by the narrator as indirect speech but presented as direct speech (within quotation marks). Thus the present tense and "I"-agency of the narrative discourse of both pieces explicitly demonstrates dialogism. The participation of other voices makes the narrative multivalent, dissolving the narrative authority and neutrality that might otherwise have been delivered. The immediacy and dynamism of the characters' quoted words not only transcribe what the charac-

ters say to each other but suggest the elusiveness of the ultimate truth in narration. Amid the physical crisis and mental confusion of learning to ride, the narrator-cyclist relinquishes control not only over the act of cycling but also over that of narration. His insufficient riding skills and consequent inability to make a move proactively reflect and are reflected in such heteroglossia, which complicates and compromises any attempt at truth-making by way of narration.

An extreme case is brought to the fore at the end of Hagiwara's "Bicycle Diary." The unavoidability of a crash arises from and results in the impossibility of communication, where dialogism renounces not only the first-person narrator's authority but also the potential of dialogic negotiation:

March 1 I cycled in the city. I found an old woman in front of me. I rang the bell yet she couldn't hear. The road was so narrow that I could not dodge her. I ended up colliding with her and knocking her down. Startled, I helped her up and asked her if she had been hurt. Fortunately she wasn't even scratched. [Still] I bowed and apologized profusely to her for the impudence. Yet the old woman obstinately wouldn't listen. She raised her voice and abused me, saying: "What grudge do you hold against me to knock me down?" Her manners and looks were quite base. Assuming that she must be demanding compensation, I produced some money and pushed it into her hand. She then threw the money to the ground, grew even more vexed, and yelled at me. I was horrified and didn't know what to do, other than repeating my apologies without any way out. Some voices had reached my ear. I looked and saw a crowd had gathered noisily all around me. I was even more embarrassed and in a bind. Luckily I recognized an acquaintance in the crowd. He approached and coaxed the old woman, finally succeeding in assuaging her anger. I am writing this down for a record in the diary. (Hagiwara, 1975, p. 657)

In both Hagiwara's "Bicycle Diary" and in Natsume Sōseki's "Bicycle Diary," a crash is caused by lack of communication: in Sōseki's case, due to the protagonist's ignorance of cycling protocols, and in Hagiwara's case, due to the old woman's apparent hearing impairment. In both cases the victim of the narrator-cyclist blames him in personal terms (racial, or inter-personal/emotional) rather than attributing the accident to technical or communicative errors. A third party has to disentangle the knot, to restore the civil order in social relations.

8. Conclusion

Cyclists are touching handlebars with their hands, pedals with the soles of their feet, and the saddle of the bicycle with their buttocks. The cyclist's physical presence is as immediate as the textual presence of a first-person narrator who is also a character and is not detached or omniscient but grappling with events and situations as their narration unfolds. Unlike public transportation passengers, cyclists must negotiate with both their bicycles and their environment to manage their own speed, direction, and pace, in much the same way that intradiegetic narrators may try to control the

narrative with limited capabilities and various degrees of success. And just as cyclists are more vulnerable to the effects of natural elements and urban traffic conditions than are automobile drivers and train or bus passengers, who are shielded from them by the vehicles, so intradiegetic narrators' power is ineluctably shaped by the events and situations they are relating which affect them directly.

Such parallels between the cyclist and the intradiegetic narrator are effectively demonstrated in the narratives examined here of cycling lessons by inept beginners. More skilled and experienced riders, whose movements occur naturally and subconsciously, may not realize their being with things and being in the world, and thus fail to make the relation between their mind and body palpable in their narratives. In contrast, the clumsy cyclists in Sōseki, Hagiwara, and Ishikawa's narratives not only present themselves as spectacles but make the reader vicariously experience their fear, pain, embarrassment, and exhilaration while simultaneously staying in the saddle of their respective narrative journeys. Painfully aware of their limited control over the situation, they try to tell their stories not from an advantageous, privileged position of authority, but from within the chaos and confusion they are themselves creating and being victimized by. In the process, we recognize the inseparably entangled cooperation of the mind and the body, the interior and exterior, and the human and the material – binaries that are not clearly demarcated into two camps yet that haunt the involved parties' constant negotiations with each other. Bicycles are both modern and anti-modern, both man-made and beyond human; they offer a mode of being in the world other than as a commander of nature and matter, and enable representation not by the mind detached from the world but from within and around the body.

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