

Nicole Saldaña

January 8, 2014

Japanese Literature

How Japanese Authors Really Feel

Between all the novels we have read to this point, and beginning The Woman in the Dunes by Kobo Abe, I have been able to conclude many similar themes to these novels. Just between No Longer Human and Confessions of a Mask, a strong similarity of going through a similar process trying to discover who they really are. No Longer Human started with a boy trying to discover how to connect with other humans as he felt disconnected by the abuse he faced as a child. Confessions of a Mask was about a man trying to discover himself and later coming out as homosexual. The Cat in the Coffin, A young lady finds out the grim truth of a story of new discoveries through each chapter that she experiences in this family's life. However, the book that has stood out to me more to portray this theme of discovery has been Kokoro.

I would like to begin how all of these authors seemed to do a pretty good job of writing out of the normality of what other countries think of them. The Japanese are usually known to being quiet, revere, and being ok with the culture norm. However, these authors do a great job portraying how different Japanese people can really think. These books all had very powerful messages to help other people who could possibly be feeling the same way. Even though some were not as an enjoyable read as others, they were still well written and had great ways to truly express how these authors felt.

In my opinion, I feel that Kokoro seems to portray this theme of self-discovery well, but shows this form of discovery through another person's perspective instead of just their own. It seemed to me that the narrator was not the one struggling to say who he really was, but that he helped the person he named as "Sensei" discover where he was in life. It also helped the narrator discover himself what kind of person he is. The narrator is just a young university student trying to figure out where to go in life, and this man Sensei helped him. However, it is also shown in this book that Sensei also discovered how to trust someone, even just before he committed suicide.

Focusing on the narrator part of discovery, he found it by trusting this one person, Sensei, with all of the problems he had been facing. The biggest problem was the narrator dealing with the issue of going home to spend time with his father before he passed away. After being connect to Sensei for not even a long time, the narrator completely listened to Sensei's advice. To go back home and be there for his father. The narrator says so himself in one passage of not planning to spend his summer back at home idly. Adding to this, the narrator also confirms the fact that he acknowledges how his mother would be alone, accepting that his father would indeed pass away. He recalls, however, the conversation between Sensei and Sensei's wife of who would die first. This makes the narrator realize the importance of this topic and that he should see his father anyway, regardless of knowing the outcome.

Having gone home, the narrator has found out more about his family than he would ever think about discovering. One thing that he learns about is how his parents view his father's illness. Even though in the letter she had sent her son, the narrator's mother tells the son of how her father seems to be doing fine. She supports her husband who says he will live another 10 to 20 years yet doctors saying he will not live that long. Having heard a similar situation with Sensei, the narrator knows how critical it is to be with this illness. However, the narrator learns how from his mother that how it should worry him more that his father doesn't talk when he is in pain, making it even more difficult to find out when his last day would really be. The father is trying to live life to the fullest, showing the son that nothing should be in the way to stop him.

Not even a page later, this family learns even more things together. Since the narrator just recently graduated and finished going to his university, the family wants to throw him a party. Although the narrator declines politely, knowing in his mind parties are just ways people gather to drink with whom you barely socialize with other than these gatherings, he learns an interesting fact. Although it is a nice intention of throwing a party, the other side of it is the obligation of throwing one. Being in the countryside, it is easier for bad talk to go around. Neighbors, the narrator discovers, play an important role in the social life of his parents, which can change easily by knowing quickly what is happening and knowing what should happen. The only way

the narrator is saved from not having a party and not being the fault of hurting his family's social life was the death of the general. Soon after it was emperor that fell ill just like the narrator's father.

Through this ill turn of events, the narrator then receives the letter from Sensei as his own father is in his deathbed, that Sensei was also to be deceased once the narrator received the letter. Although the narrator flees back to Tokyo to where Sensei is located, he begins to see why Sensei was the way he was through the long written letter the narrator received. The third part of this book helps tie together what Sensei had discovered in his life. After finding out his uncle had cheated most of his fortune out of him, Sensei did not want to be the same type of person. However, in writing the letter he explains how his friend, K, and he had fallen in love with the same woman. Sensei goes into asking for her hand in marriage while knowing his friend was in fact in love with her and knowing his friend K was not the type to be able to handle this kind of betrayal lightly. Sensei has then discovered his own cruel heart was the same as his uncle's, feeling very guilty about K's suicide. After the death of K and the mother of the girl, Sensei does marry the woman who was still Sensei's wife today. This helped the narrator realize Sensei's visits to the grave of his friend monthly and why his wife was not allowed to accompany him.

Throughout this tale, sad news is shared very frequently. Although many of this happened during a critical stage in the narrator's life, (just graduated, not knowing where to go) I feel that the narrator was able to see how frail life can be. It might have motivated himself to get going on his life not knowing how it could possibly end. This book was really well written, and grabbed my attention immediately on the third part to pull the whole story together. It made me realize how great of an idea this study abroad trip was, living life to the fullest is better than thinking how close death is.