

PUBLIC SELECTION BASED ON QUALIFICATIONS AND INTERVIEW FOR THE AWARDING OF NO. 1 GRANT LASTING 12 MONTHS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN ACCORDANCE WITH ART. 22 OF LAW OF 30.12.2010 NO. 240 AT THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, LITERATURES AND CULTURES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BERGAMO (ACADEMIC RECRUITMENT FIELD 10/N3 - CENTRAL AND EAST ASIAN CULTURES – ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE L-OR/22 - JAPANESE AND KOREAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES

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### **RESEARCH PROJECT**

**"Java Sparrow" (Bunchō, 1908) a compendium of Natsume Sōseki's literary production. Contents analysis, translation and critical edition"**

#### **1) Objective:**

Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) published episodes called *shōhin* (small works), both individually and in series, as literary intermezzi in between the serialization of his major novels. The experimental writing and the variety of topics are the most relevant features of his *shōhin* production. However, at least one recurrent motif can be found in these literary works. That is, the first-person writer-narrator who depicts a literary portrait of himself in his solitary study while reflecting on his daily life and his past. The introspective voice and personal reminiscence are essential components of those *shōhin* written in this vein, such as "Java Sparrow" (*Bunchō*, 1908), "Spring Miscellany" (*Eijitsu shōhin*, 1909), "Inside My Glass Doors" (*Garasudo no uchi*, 1915). Even though these collections are woven together by the introspective voice of their authorial narrator as he traverses the landscape of memory, only "Inside My Glass Doors" has been relatively taken into consideration by the international critics who dedicated more attention to Sōseki's long novels. Considering these premises, the research project aims to:

- study "Java Sparrow" in order to point out the most significative features both on the literary and stylistic level.
- study "Java Sparrow" in the wider context of Sōseki's oeuvre.
- translate "Java Sparrow" and provide a complete set of notes for a planned critical edition.

#### **2) Theoretical framework:**

This research project takes into consideration some topics already discussed in critical studies concerning Natsume Sōseki's long fictions, but will use them as a tool for studying his *shōhin* production, particularly "Java Sparrow". Criticism and commentary on Sōseki's use of colours and their symbolism (Orsi 1999 e Okuma 1995), on his theory of literature (Bourdagh 2009), and on the narrative motif of the "studio" (Marcus 2009, Ishizaki 1981), are the starting point of a project that aims to investigate his personal writings and possibly suggest new interpretations.

#### **3) Research project description:**

Natsume Sōseki is one of the most representative authors of the Meiji's era (1868-1912), renowned for his criticism of the westernization of Japanese culture, his unconventionality and independency from literary movements in Meiji Japan. He had a deep knowledge of Chinese and Japanese literature, but was also the leading scholar of English literature in Japan.

Although the long fiction comprises the bulk of his oeuvre, this was but one of his literary accomplishments. He also wrote *shōhin* episodes, short stories or literary vignettes, whose genre is not clearly definable. This mode of narrative sketching was a congenial vehicle of literary self-expression for Sōseki, who applied it to personal reminiscence and self-representation.

The first noteworthy work in this vein, *Bunchō* (Java Sparrow, 1908), concerns the sad fate of a pet bird taken into the Natsume home. The story marks the appearance of the first-person writer-narrator who would be a mainstay of subsequent *shōhin*, where fictional elements are added to a realistic portrayal of the writer in his domestic milieu. In *Bunchō* we also find a considerable use of colours for their symbolic meaning and the presence of the study as a workplace and as a private enclave within the domicile. More in general *Bunchō* addresses the themes of loneliness, abandonment, unexpressed love, betrayal, and regret found in almost all Sōseki's major novels. Thus, it can be considered a compendium of his subsequent production.

**Key-words:** Sōseki, *shōhin*, Japanese literature

#### 4) Time:

Preliminary Phase (4 months): Bibliographic study, theoretical and methodological setting of research

Phase 1 (5 months): Translation of the text, writing of the commentary on the text

Phase 2 (3 months): Writing of a paper based on the research results.

#### 5) Expected results:

Through the analysis of the “Java Sparrow” the proposed research project seeks to make a significant contribution to the study of Sōseki’s personal writings known as *shōhin*. In addition, the translation of “Java Sparrow” would represent its first Italian version. At the same time, this research could be the premise for a critical edition of all the *shōhin* related to the *shosai monogatari* subgenre (tales told from one's study).

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