



# Suicidal Honor: General Nogi And the Writings of Mori Ogai And Natsume Soseki

*Doris G. Bargaen*

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On September 13, 1912, the day of Emperor Meiji's funeral, General Nogi Maresuke committed ritual suicide by seppuku (disembowelment). The revered military hero's wife joined in his act of junshi ("following one's lord into death"). The violence of their double suicide shocked the nation. Doris Bargaen, in the first half of her book, demonstrates that the deeper significance of Nogi's action must be sought in his personal history, enmeshed as it was in the tumultuous politics of the Meiji period. In the second half of "Suicidal Honor", Bargaen turns to the extraordinary influence of the Nogis' deaths on two of Japan's greatest writers, Mori Ogai and Natsume Soseki. Ogai's historical fiction is a profound meditation on the significance of ritual suicide in a time of historical transition. The protagonist of *Kokoro*, Soseki's masterpiece, refers to the general's junshi before taking his own life. Scholars routinely mention this reference, but Bargaen demonstrates the ways in which Soseki's agonized response to Nogi's suicide structures the entire novel. By exploring the historical and literary legacies of Nogi, Ogai, and Soseki from an interdisciplinary perspective, "Suicidal Honor" illuminates Japan's prolonged and painful transition from the idealized heroic world of samurai culture to the mundane anxieties of modernity.

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