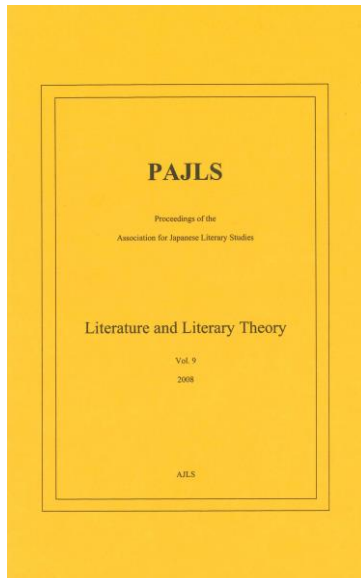


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The Novel and the End of Homosocial Literature

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Takahashi Hideo has argued that male friendship played a vital role among the first generation of Meiji male intellectuals. Born on the cusp of a new age, these men were unable to look to their elders for guidance, which led to an unprecedented emphasis on lateral ties of friendship. Takahashi mentions Tsubouchi Shōyō, Mori Ōgai, Kōda Rohan, Tokutomi Sohō, Miyake Setsurei, Futabatei Shimei and others (all born in the years immediately surrounding the Meiji Restoration), but the primary focus of his essay is on the friendship between Masaoka Shiki and Natsume Sōseki, which he sees as most representative of this “generation which valued friendship.”¹ Intriguingly, Takahashi also notes that the emphasis on male friendship one finds in these authors does *not* characterize the work of members of the naturalist school such as Kunikida Doppo, Tayama Katai, and Tokuda Shūsei, all of whom were born just a few years later in 1873.

If the rise of naturalism in Japan can be considered as synonymous not only with the rise of the novel genre but also the rise of heteronormative ideology, this generational shift might also be read as a shift from one form of male homosociality to another: from a sort of “boys club” whose members wrote primarily with a male audience in mind and with relatively little interest in, much less anxiety over, women, to the late Meiji naturalists whose novels tirelessly represent the impotent male intellectual in his frustrated pursuit of women. Thus while male homosocial relations and friendships occupy an important place in the work of Ōgai (think of “Maihime,” “Fumizukai,” and *Gan*), Rohan (“Hige Otoko,” “Gojūnotō”) or the early Sōseki (*Botchan*, *Wagahai wa neko de aru*), it is almost entirely absent from a work like Katai’s “Futon” or “Shōjōbyō,” in which the self-absorbed narrators have no interest in other men whatsoever except to the extent that they interfere with or ridicule their machinations towards the female objects of their lust.

In this essay I will look to the work of Sōseki and his friend Masaoka Shiki to ask what happens to literature when women suddenly emerge to be reckoned with as autonomous subjects. I will argue that for Sōseki the death of Shiki in 1902 symbolized the demise of a male homosocial literary culture characterized both by great generic and stylistic diversity and a fundamental indifference to women. In the place of this culture (on Shiki’s grave as it were) rose the modern Japanese novel, a genre that forced male authors to confront women as autonomous subjects for the first time. Sōseki took up this challenge to produce some of the greatest novels ever written in Japanese. But he did so, I will argue, without ever overcoming his melancholic attachment to Shiki and the homosocial world he embodied.

The friendship between Shiki and Sōseki has taken on mythic proportions in the history of modern Japanese literature. Fiercely competitive but at the same time immensely supportive of one another, the two men carried on an extensive dialogue over more than a decade in which they hashed out ideas about the newly emergent field of “literature” (*bungaku*). In his columns for the journal *Nihon* and later for the haiku magazine *Hototogisu*, Shiki was busy throughout the 1890s until his death in 1902 articulating a comprehensive vision of literature that included for the first time beneath a single rubric the formerly discrete genres of haiku, tanka, poetry in

¹ Takahashi Hideo, “Herumesu teki yūjō: Sōseki to Shiki no aida,” *Sōseki kenkyū*, no. 7 (1996), 39.

Chinese (*kanshi*), “new style poetry” (*shintaiishi*), novels, drama, and literary criticism. Shiki’s all-embracing notion of literature was to have a profound impact on Sōseki, not only when he came to write his monumental *Theory of Literature* upon his return to Japan in 1902, but also in the early phase of his career as a novelist. A work like Sōseki’s *Kusamakura* (1906), for example, is a compendium of virtually every style of writing being practiced at the time. In addition to numerous haiku, it includes classical Japanese waka, Chinese poetry, poetry in English, and lengthy examples of present-tense descriptive prose known as *shaseibun*. Compared to the increasingly monologic style of novelistic prose that was coming into ascendancy at the time among practitioners of naturalism, the sheer linguistic diversity of *Kusamakura* is a wonder to behold. It is also another way in which Sōseki seems to have been attempting to make up for the debt he felt he owed to Shiki. As Inoue Hisashi has commented, “For some reason Sōseki always felt that he owed something to Shiki. He felt bad for outliving him and felt it was incumbent on him to finish the work that Shiki had started. You can think of Sōseki’s entire life as a struggle to repay the literary debt he owed to Shiki.”²

What Inoue called Sōseki’s “literary debt” toward Shiki can be understood as a commitment to generic diversity and a struggle against the encroaching monopoly of the naturalist novel. But framed as it was in the context of their friendship, we cannot overlook the fact that this commitment and struggle were also fundamentally homosocial in nature. Writing in multiple genres including haiku, Chinese poetry, and novelistic prose was largely the prerogative of men in the Meiji period. The ability to switch freely from one genre to another made possible a kind of verbal cross-dressing that allowed for great latitude in the way one performed one’s gender identity. I do not have space here to elaborate this argument very thoroughly, but one example should serve to illustrate what I mean. In a letter to Shiki written on 27 September 1889 Sōseki relates in a mock chivalric tone his valiant attempts to lobby their professor so that Shiki would not fail his classes. Sōseki finds his otherwise questionable courage and masculinity spurred into action by the imperative to rescue Shiki, whom he jokingly portrays as a damsel in distress. Describing his fighting on “her” behalf in an extended martial metaphor Sōseki tells Shiki:

I did not waver in the slightest, but drummed up heretofore untapped reservoirs of courage, and after just two or three sallies I emerged victorious, as if I had been guided all along by the hand of Mars himself! Now the Young Lady may freely conduct her person into the second-year classroom, Home Room Number Three, in whatever manner she chooses, whether it be up, down, or sideways. No doubt she will exclaim, “How very gallant indeed! I declare there is more to this clown-faced Kin-san than meets the eye!” and set about publishing my meritorious deeds in letters large and luminous for all to read.³

Sōseki refers to Shiki in this letter as his “lady” or “mistress” (*mekake*) and to himself as Shiki’s “man” (*rōkun*). This kind of mock male romance is possible, it seems, thanks to the fact that the letter is written in an exaggerated rakugo-like style liberally sprinkled with Chinese expressions and classical grammar. The one instance of *genbun’itchi* in the letter is when Sōseki ventriloquizes Shiki’s response to his heroic efforts to secure his grades for him. And the effect

² A round-table discussion by Inoue Hisashi, Komori Yōichi, and Ishihara Chiaki, “Sōseki to Shiki: Kishitsu to buntai,” *Sōseki kenkyū*, no. 7 (1996), 20.

³ Natsume Sōseki, *Sōseki zenshū*, vol. 22 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), 10.

is to make Shiki sound like a woman: "How very gallant indeed! I declare there is more to this clown-faced Kin-san than meets the eye!" If in this context gender is something that men can perform as they please, it is the result of their greater freedom to manipulate a variety of literary styles. If it had been written entirely in *genbun'itchi* (as in a naturalist novel, for example) this letter would come uncomfortably close (for some people) to a love letter between two men. As it is, however, far from compromising the gender role of the letter's writer or its recipient, Sōseki's language playfully performs a classically binary gender distinction: the hapless woman is saved by a knight in shining armor. The fact that both parties are biological men only adds to the humor and light-hearted (homo)sociality of the exchange. Gender is here clearly an effect of linguistic performance by two linguistically privileged men.

While this letter is quite typical for Sōseki's early career, it is well known that Sōseki's writing gradually shifted into a more uniformly novelistic mode after he resigned from his post as professor of English literature at Tokyo University in 1907 to begin a career as a newspaper novelist in the employ of the *Asahi shinbun*. In the string of novels that he published at the rate of about one a year until his death in 1916, Sōseki focused increasingly on the torment of alienated men and women in the modern world. The stylistic exuberance of Sōseki's earlier works like *Wagahai wa neko de aru* and *Kusamakura* gave way to ever more "serious," psychologically complex narratives focusing on the daily struggles of characters for whom language had become less of an arena for the display of poetic virtuosity, comic gender-bending, and light-hearted (homo)sociality and more of a battleground of subterranean rivalries and inarticulate anxieties. As an eminent scholar of English literature, Sōseki himself might well have characterized his transformation as something no less dramatic than if Laurence Sterne, the eighteenth-century author of *Tristram Shandy*, had ended his career writing like Henry James. In Sōseki's later works the chatty narrators, poetic language, present-tense narrative, and sprawling digressions of his earlier works disappear, and in many instances in these later works, language itself loses the battle to an indifferent silence. "He was on the verge of saying something kind," we read of the protagonist Daisuke in *Sore kara* (1909) ". . . but decided it was too much trouble, and stopped."⁴

I have always found this to be one of the saddest lines in all of Sōseki's work. And it is only made more sad when we remember just a few years earlier Sōseki was to be found brilliantly satirizing just this sort of alienation in *Wagahai wa neko de aru*. It was the character Meitei's (known in the brilliant English translation of Aiko Itō and Graeme Wilson as "Waverhouse") crackpot theory in that novel that the day would come when individualism would progress to the point where neither marriage nor art would be possible. In the near future, just as no one would want to be tied down to another person in marriage, Waverhouse expostulated, no one would want to read anything written by anyone but himself. This vision of complete alienation from the social is already to be glimpsed, Waverhouse argues, in the work of novelists like George Meredith and Henry James:

This stage of the literary future is already evidenced in England where two of their leading novelists, Henry James and George Meredith, have personalities so strong and so strongly reflected in their novels that very few people care to read them. And no wonder. Only readers with personalities of matching force could find such works of any interest. That trend will accelerate and, by the time that

⁴ Natsume Sōseki, *And Then*, Norma Moore Field trans. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 139. Natsume Sōseki, *Sorekara*, in *Sōseki zenshū*, vol. 6 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), 186-87.

marriage is finally recognized as immoral, all art will have disappeared. Surely you can see that, when anything that either of us might write has become quite meaningless to the other, then there will be nothing, let alone art, which we can share. We shall all be excommunicated from each other.⁵

Just as Waverhouse predicted, as the modern novel came to dominate the literary scene in Japan and Sōseki's writing in particular, the optimistic vision of a literature that was both sociable and socially engaged that Sōseki shared with Shiki gradually began to fade. The novel theorist Mikhail Bakhtin argued that the rise of the novel in Europe resulted in what he called the "novelization" of all other genres. The novel was not simply one genre among many but a sort of genre to end all genres, in the face of which all other literary forms would appear hopelessly stylized and outdated. While Bakhtin celebrated this work of the novel as a modernizing "liberation [of genres] from all that serves as a brake on their unique development,"⁶ Karatani Kōjin has taken a less sunny view of the situation in the Japanese context. In his essay "The Extinction of Genres" Karatani argued that the novel either killed off or incorporated everything that challenged its dominance. For Karatani and other critics of literary modernization, the novel was not just the most effective form for representing modern life, it actually *created* modern life itself in its own exclusive image. It is not surprising then, that Sōseki, particularly the *early* Sōseki who was still under the sway of Shiki's influence, emerges as Karatani's champion, as the defender of literary diversity against the encroaching monopoly of the novel.⁷

It is not my intention here to render judgment on the novel or to settle the debate as to whether it represented a liberation of genres or literary genocide. The fact is that the novel did become the preeminent literary genre in modern Japan. While the loss of Shiki and the younger Sōseki's more capacious notion of literature is certainly much to be regretted, there can be no doubt that the rise of the novel did provide a vital means for modern men and women to understand and cope with the complexities of modern life. The focus here is on the way in which the rise of the novel spelled the end not only of the generic diversity of Meiji "literature" but also of a particular and perhaps uniquely Meiji form of male homosociality. It is in this context that we need to understand the significance of the literary friendship shared by Shiki and Sōseki. Between 1895 and 1899 Sōseki wrote 2000 haiku in letters to his friend Shiki, who duly commented upon them as he did with so many other aspiring male poets throughout his short career. As Komori Yōichi has written, "haiku was the verbal link that bound Sōseki and Shiki together."⁸ Theirs was a bond mediated by a form of writing that was virtually monopolized by men. But unlike the homosocial triangles that would crop up in so many of Sōseki's later novels—triangles in which bonds between two men were mediated by competition over a single woman—the homosociality of haiku was an exclusively male affair. Shiki and his "haiku friends" (*haiyū*) gathered on a regular basis for haiku meetings during which they would read and critique each other's works in a convivial atmosphere—while Shiki's mother and sister brought food and drinks and otherwise kept out of sight. Unlike the classical *waka*, with its

⁵ Natsume Sōseki, *I Am a Cat*, Aiko Ito and Graeme Wilson trans. (Boston: Tuttle Publishing: 2002), 620. Natsume Sōseki, *Wagahai wa neko de aru*, in *Sōseki zenshū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), 550.

⁶ M. M. Bakhtin, "Epic and the Novel: Toward a Methodology for the Study of the Novel," in Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 39.

⁷ See Karatani Kōjin, "The Extinction of Genres," *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, translation edited by Brett de Bary, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

⁸ Inoue, Komori, and Ishihara, "Sōseki to Shiki: Kishitsu to buntai," 53.

flowing diction and predilection for romance, the haiku favored by Shiki's circle stressed the representation of everyday affairs and the objective observation of nature, and shied away from overt sentimentality. Shiki himself famously wrote virtually no haiku or even *tanka* about male-female love. But male friendship had a prominent place not only in the extra-literary context of the haiku world but also among the themes chosen for haiku itself. One particularly beautiful example, written by Shiki to Sōseki on the occasion of the latter's departure for Tokyo in 1895, reads:

I who go
and you who stay behind
two Autumns.⁹

The exclusion of women from the world of Meiji haiku seems to have made possible a degree of intimacy among male haiku poets that can strike a modern reader as verging on the homoerotic. Indeed, in a round-table discussion about Shiki and Sōseki held in 1996, Komori went so far as to claim that Sōseki was "always in love with Shiki" and pointed to several exchanges of letters between the two that read like love letters, including the one I cited earlier.¹⁰ Shiki's jealousy of the wife of his favorite disciple Kyoshi has often been remarked upon. Shiki never married nor did he have much of a heterosexual love life, even before he was stricken with tuberculosis. According to Kawahigashi Hekigodō, another of his disciples, "Shiki felt he could not touch a woman's lingerie (*yumaki*) with the same hands he used to prepare the art that was so sacred to him."¹¹

All of this is not at all to suggest that Shiki was "gay" (although he might well have been). And of course misogyny, one hopes, is hardly a predictor of homosexuality. Shiki's misogyny was quite unremarkable in Meiji Japan, particularly among members of the former samurai class like Shiki. According to the still lingering Edo aesthetic known as *iki*, a man who lost his head over a woman was beneath contempt, and male friendship was valued much more highly than any relationship with a woman. This aesthetic is very much in evidence in texts by Sōseki such as *Wagahai wa neko de aru* or *Botchan* which are populated by what Mizumura Minae calls "slightly ridiculous, yet valiant men [who are] . . . held together by ties of friendship . . . ready to wage war against the evils of society—one of these evils being, of course, a man's involvement with a woman."¹²

⁹ Masaoka Shiki and Burton Watson, *Masaoka Shiki: Selected Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 44. The original reads: "Yuku ware ni / todomaru nare ni / aki futatsu."

¹⁰ The following anecdote gives a sense of the almost erotic intensity of Sōseki and Shiki's haiku exchanges. In 1891, when Sōseki wrote to Shiki telling him he wanted to start practicing haiku Shiki fired back with a letter more than three meters long explaining the basics of haiku composition. While this letter has unfortunately been lost (Sōseki was notoriously bad about keeping his correspondence) we do have Sōseki's reply from August 3 of that year. After thanking his friend profusely Sōseki writes, "Your thoughtful tutorial, coming so promptly in response to my new enthusiasm for haiku, made me happier than a love letter (*jōnin no tamazusa*) and I read it feverishly." Cited in Tsubouchi Toshinori, *Haijin Sōseki* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2003), 18.

¹¹ Kawahigashi Hekigodō, *Shiki no kaisō* (Tokyo: Shōnan shobō, 1944), 461.

¹² Minae Mizumura, "Resisting Woman: Reading Soseki's *Gubinjinso*," Dennis Washburn and Alan Tansman, eds., *Studies in Modern Japanese Literature: Essays and Translations in Honor of Edwin McClellan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 32.

It was this male homosocial realm that Sōseki was eventually to leave behind as his career as a novelist progressed. But like his lingering sense of guilt for having outlived Shiki, his nostalgia for this world would stay with him throughout his life. While the content of his novels shifted more and more toward the world of men and women, it was a world in which he was never entirely comfortable. As Angela Liu has shown, while writing his last great novel *Light and Darkness* in 1916, Sōseki would spend his afternoons composing poetry in Chinese. As Yiu writes, Chinese poetry, with its “blockish appearance on the printed page” provided a “comforting shelter for a tired spirit that ha[d] spoken out again and again about the injustice, hypocrisy, and preposterousness of a society undergoing rapid change.”¹³ But the shelter Sōseki sought in Chinese poetry had a gendered dimension as well. As a member of the last generation of Japanese males who grew up learning Chinese, for Sōseki writing in Chinese was associated with a lost homosocial world. The novel, by contrast, was associated with the modernity he saw all around him. The world of the novel was the world in which men and women faced each other—if not as equals at least as co-inhabitants of that world.

In what remains of this essay, I would like to focus on two examples from Sōseki’s writing that should help to illustrate what I mean. The first is from *Kusamakura*, and the second is from Sōseki’s last, unfinished novel *Meian*. Given that Sōseki himself called *Kusamakura* his “haiku novel” it is perhaps unfair to classify it as a novel at all. While it does have a coherent narrative, it can also be read as a series of exercises in composition. As I pointed out earlier, it is a virtual smorgasbord of writing styles, including haiku, *waka*, Chinese poetry and prose, English poetry, *shaseibun*, and everything in between. It is told from the perspective of an unnamed “painter” who has escaped the hustle and bustle of the big city to take refuge in an obscure mountain village. Like a leisured Chinese literatus, his goal is to maintain a purely aesthetic relation to the world, to look at it as if it were a picture he were painting and above all, to remain unmoved. He writes haiku and beautifully descriptive prose of the various picturesque mountain scenes and townspeople he comes across, always taking care not to become involved in the scene as anything more than an observer. The narrator has no past that we know of, nor really even much of a personality. He is little more than a narrative device to allow Sōseki to indulge in various types of writing.

And yet, as usually happens in a novel, the painter soon meets a mysterious and beautiful woman who threatens to disturb his equipoise. Her name is O-Nami and she is the daughter of the proprietor of the inn where the painter is staying. Their meeting seems ripped from the pages of a classical Japanese tale: he writes two haiku in his notebook, and while he is out she comes into his room to clean and replies with two poems of her own. Startled to find these verses written in a hand that was “too firm to be a woman’s and too graceful to be a man’s,” the painter becomes captivated by their author. But he is very careful not to let himself be carried away, telling himself that his interest in her is a purely aesthetic one.

O-Nami is one of the most beautifully rendered characters in modern Japanese literature. She is a woman with a mind of her own whom the painter is unable to capture in a single image, whether verbal or visual. It is the frustration and fascination that this engenders that cause the narrator to question his own ability to remain unmoved by and detached from the world around him. Like her androgynous handwriting, O-Nami herself cannot be pigeonholed as a “woman.” And it is precisely this quality that endows her with a *sexual difference* that makes the narrator uneasy and uncertain of himself *as a man*. While there is no shortage of novels from this period

¹³ Angela Liu, *Chaos and Order in the Works of Natsume Sōseki* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1998), 184.

in which women are represented as mysterious and unfathomable creatures, *Kusamakura* is special insofar as it does so in an extremely self-conscious fashion. This is nowhere more evident than in a scene in which the narrator and O-Nami are discussing the best way to read a novel. O-Nami has walked in on the narrator while he is reading a novel (written, it is important to add, in English). When she apologizes for disturbing him he says he doesn't mind in the least, because he never reads a novel from beginning to end anyway. Then he expounds the following curious theory of the novel in relation to love:

"Because I am a painter I don't find it necessary to read a novel from beginning to end. I can enjoy reading a novel in any order. Talking to you is enjoyable too. In fact I'd like to talk with you every day while I'm staying here. I wouldn't even mind falling for you. That would be very enjoyable indeed. But no matter how far in love with you I fell that would not make it necessary for us to become man and wife. As long as you have to get married just because you've fallen in love you have to read novels all the way through from beginning to end."

"What an inhuman way of falling in love you artists have."

"Not inhuman; non-human. It is because we read novels with this same non-human, objective approach that we don't care about the plot. For us it is interesting to flip open the book as if we were drawing a fortune and read aimlessly wherever it happens to fall open."¹⁴

To read a novel at random wherever its pages fall open is to read it like a collection of haiku. If the haiku is what Sōseki called, in his *Theory of Literature*, literature of the "slice" or "cut" (*dannmenteki bungaku*), the novel is a literature of continuity, of time. It is in this sense that Sōseki called *The Three-Cornered World* itself a "haiku novel." As long as one can read it in this fashion, one need not be swept up in the vortex of romance that lies at the heart of the novel genre. As this passage makes clear, the painter in Sōseki's narrator has an aversion to plot, to time, to everything, it would seem, that distinguishes the novel from the haiku. And he makes a connection between a certain way of reading novels and what has more recently been called compulsory heterosexuality and used simply to be called the "marriage plot."

When O-Nami asks why he is not interested in the story, he says to himself condescendingly, "Yes, she's a woman all right," and decides to "test her a little."¹⁵ As a woman, the narrator assumes, O-Nami is a typical novel reader, whereas he sees his relation to the written word in painterly, spatial terms. As long as this simple binary holds, as long as gender and genre cleave neatly together, the narrator is still on safe ground. Gender difference remains uncontested and provokes no anxiety. But in typical Sōseki fashion, the narrator's smug self-complacency is soon disturbed by the androgynous O-Nami. When he says (somewhat disingenuously) that he doesn't see what is so strange about his way of reading novels, O-Nami replies:

¹⁴ I have slightly adapted Alan Turney's translation of this passage. See Natsume Sōseki, *The Three-Cornered World*, Alan Turney trans. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965), 124. For the Japanese see Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, in *Sōseki zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), 109.

¹⁵ Turney, *The Three-Cornered World*, 123. Natsume, *Kusamakura*, 107.

"But you and I are different."

"How so?" I said, looking straight into the woman's eyes. This, I thought, was my chance to test her. Her gaze, however, did not waver for an instant, which made me feel that I was the one being examined.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha. You mean you don't know?"¹⁶

This question goes unanswered in the novel although, or perhaps *because*, it is the subtext of the whole work—it is the question the narrator tries so studiously to avoid by maintaining a strict detachment from the world. It is the question he manages to avoid by writing haiku and Chinese poetry, by drawing and painting: What is the difference between men and women? By 1906 this question was not as easily answered (for men) as it once was. And for Sōseki the novel was the only genre in which one could ask it, however much one hated doing so. In this scene, we see the power relation reversing itself as the examiner becomes the examined. While the narrator was once confident in his ability to distinguish men from women based on how they read a novel, O-Nami's unflinching gaze and haunting question destroys the comfortable binary. As long as the narrator could assume that women were interested solely in the "story" and not in the more "sophisticated" aesthetic aspects of literature, he could remain unshaken in his own gender identity. But O-Nami refuses to take the bait. She insists only that she is "different." And it is clear that she is. But he cannot say exactly how. This is why, painter that he is, he remains unable to paint her.

But however much the narrator of *Kusamakura* is discomfited by O-Nami's gender-bending performances and her unfathomable difference, he is never seriously challenged in his ability to remain detached and unmoved by the world around him. The same cannot be said of Sōseki's last, unfinished, and most "novelistic" novel *Light and Darkness* from 1916. Tsuda, the novel's hapless male protagonist, spends approximately 350 of its 500 pages sitting in the hospital recovering from an operation on an anal fistula as his wife, sister, and boss's wife swoop in and out of his room, each seeking to manipulate him according to her own desires. The following passage is a bit long but I think it's worth quoting in full. It is from a scene in which Tsuda's wife O-Nobu has rather too cavalierly taken him up on his suggestion that she leave him alone in the hospital to spend a day at the theater with her friends.

He had been ashamed to treat her like a caged bird and had thought it was not manly of him to tie her to him forever. Thus he had finally released her to fly forth into the free and open air. But no sooner had she thanked him for his kindness and left his sick bed than he began to regret that he had been left behind alone. He had strained his ears, hungry for some human sound. When she had opened the entrance door to go out, the ringing of the bell had sounded much too rude to him. The strange feeling in the muscles near the incision had begun again at precisely that time. . . . From his own motives he had constructed a relationship between the two events. He also began to want to tell her about the relationship later. He wanted to do this simply to make her feel sorry that this had been the unfortunate result of her leaving him, lying sick in bed, and of running off for a day's enjoyment at the theatre; but he wanted also to make her repent. Yet he did not know the appropriate words for expressing these desires. For even if he did tell her, he was certain she would not understand. And even if she did, it would

¹⁶ Turney, *The Three-Cornered World*, 123. Natsume, *Kusamakura*, 108.

be difficult to make her feel precisely as he wished her to feel. Thus he could do nothing but remain silent and feel displeased about the entire episode.¹⁷

This is the kind of scene that can only be represented in a “modern novel.” Sōseki’s persistent use of the third person pronouns *kare* and *kanojo* (a relatively recent invention in Japanese prose at the time) emphasizes the vast gulf that separates Tsuda and his wife. [I should say that this is something you lose in the translation, since we are used to “he” and “she.” For contrast you might note that the passage in Sōseki’s letter to Shiki above used only two pronominal words for “I,” one time each, with all other grammatical subjects left to be inferred by the reader according to context and politeness level.] We are given access to the content of Tsuda’s thoughts, but not, as would typically have been the case in premodern prose, as either direct internal monologue or through overt narratorial intervention, but rather in the form of a free-indirect discourse that transforms the comically straightforward effect of direct interior monologue into a devastatingly ironic commentary that somehow manages to be sympathetic and mocking at once.

But the content of this passage is just as “novelistic” as its form. Sōseki could hardly have chosen a more overdetermined metaphor for masculinity in crisis than a palpitating, painful sphincter at the mercy of a woman’s whims. At the same time, the passage can be read as a kind of history of the emergence of the modern novel as a genre in which men and women face each other in all their mutual mystification and difference. Recognizing that he cannot expect O-Nobu to sacrifice her own pleasures for his sake, Tsuda bravely sets her free. A manly act, he tells himself, but its effect is to make him all the more aware of his dependence on her. Tsuda could not be more different from the breezily confident narrator of *Kusamakura* who imagined he could pick and choose when and for how long he would like to fall in love like he would dip in and out of a novel. Tsuda is trapped in this novelistic world, at the mercy of the women who surround him. He is also, like all of the other characters in it, utterly alone. His desire to hear “some human sound” is so strong that he has lost the ability, crucial for a haiku poet, to look at the world with a cool and disinterested objectivity.

But perhaps most significantly, Tsuda is at a loss for words. He wants, however petulantly, to make O-Nobu see how she has hurt him. “But it would be difficult to make her feel precisely as he wished her to feel. Thus he could do nothing but *remain silent* and feel displeased about the entire episode” [emphasis added]. This kind of wordy description of silence is, as I mentioned earlier, a hallmark of the modern novel. It is one reason why the novel cannot be counted as just another genre of literature. If the various genres that constituted the “literature” that Shiki knew could be considered just so many different ways of saying the same old things, the modern novel, at least as Sōseki practiced it, was a working through of the failure of language itself.

No wonder Sōseki liked to write Chinese poetry in the afternoons while he was writing *Light and Darkness*. Here is an example of one of them:

Tired of the noise of the carriage and horses in the capital,
I return to my old mountain and close the wooden door.

¹⁷ Natsume Sōseki, *Light and Darkness: An Unfinished Novel*, Unesco Collection of Representative Works: Japanese Series (London: Owen, 1971), 169-170. Natsume Sōseki, *Meian*, in *Sōseki zenshū*, vol. 11 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), 313-314.

Red peach blossoms, green water, spring clouds in the temple,
Warm days, mild breeze, hazy rustic village.¹⁸

And here is a haiku he wrote on the occasion of his own operation for an anal fistula in 1914.

Led off to slaughter
In the autumn wind
The bull's behind.¹⁹

I hope that the juxtaposition of these two very different texts with the scene from *Light and Darkness* will give you a clearer sense of the difference genre makes. The Chinese poem conjures by its very language a restful, utopian refuge from the world—one in which being alone does not mean being lonely. In fact one could argue that the poet is in very good company indeed, given the long and distinguished history of the poetic recluse in East Asian literature. And the haiku, with its humorously self-deprecating comparison of the poet with a doomed bull, creates a sort of bemused alter ego able to look down on his own fate and laugh.

But in the novel psychological depth robs us of all distance. We can laugh at Tsuda, but it is an uncomfortable laugh. For Sōseki, the novel could be neither a refuge from reality, a form of sociality, nor a contribution to the nation. Those possibilities might still have inhered in other genres, like haiku, that survived from the Meiji period. But Sōseki knew they were well on their way to ossifying into “tradition.” For him, the sunny homosociality of the haiku, and indeed, of literature itself, had died with friend Shiki, while Sōseki was away in London, immersed alone in the study of the novel.

¹⁸ This is Angela Liu's translation. Liu, *Chaos and Order*, 185.

¹⁹ “Matsukaze ya / hōrare ni iku / ushi no shiri.” In Natsume Soseki, *Sōseki zenshū*, vol. 24 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1996), 97.