When approaching modern Japanese literature, it is of no surprise for a reader to come across many instances of death vividly depicted. Modern Japanese writers frequently recall and represent emotion-charged memories linked to losses suffered during childhood and adolescence that shaped the formation of selfhood. This paper examines two modern Japanese writers’ attitudes toward death and responses to funerals. Tayama Katai (1871-1930) and Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916) both dealt with the inevitability of death and depicted rites of passage in their works. On the one hand, such narrative treatments facilitate engagement with and working through of issues related to separation, absence and displacement and help stabilize the difficult transition period by making loss “comprehensible, socially acceptable, and necessary.”2 This understanding of funerals and their fictional treatments, “taming death” as it were, is particularly useful for examining autobiographical novels such as Tayama’s Life (Sei, 1908) and Sōseki’s To The Spring Equinox and Beyond (Higan sugimade, 1912). On the other hand, funerals can be sources of great anxiety. The intersection of life and death marked by the funeral service can alter the relationship of bereaved and other and leave him/her in a tenuous liminal state. Sōseki’s The Miner (Kōfu, 1908) and Sanshirō (Sanshirō, 1908) depict such crises. This paper examines personal and collective dimensions of loss and recovery in modern Japanese literary representations of death and funerals.

Losing a Father

Tayama Katai is best known as the author of The Quilt (Futon, 1907), a
representative work of Japanese Naturalism, and as a shishōsetsu (confessional I-novel) writer. Literary critics have perceived love and sexuality as an overriding theme of Katai’s works, but ignored Katai’s concerns with death and how he responded to it in his novels.

Katai lost his father in the Seinan Civil War. In *Hometown* (Furusato, 1899), an autobiographical novel of his childhood, the narrator recalls instances of death and his first love. His father died in 1877 when he was five years old. The narrator and his mother moved back to her parent’s house, where one day he saw his mother and grandfather crying. Not knowing why, he concluded they were weak individuals. Soon after, he befriended two girls, one of whom drowned while trying to catch a bouquet that the other girl threw into the upper stream. He was with them but could not help her. In the evening that day, he was told that she had passed away. The narrator came to think of death for the first time. Several years later, the other girl, Sodeko—his first love—moved to a big new house when her father became principal of a local elementary school. The narrator became jealous of Sodeko’s family and asked his mother why he had to live in a small house. He lamented when his mother told him that he would have been better off if his father had lived. When he became a teenager and saw his classmate prepare for study in Tokyo, he once again grieved at the early death of his father and not having enough money for his higher education in Tokyo.³

In 1905, Katai published *The Diary of the Second Army Corps at War* (Dai nigun junsho Nikki). This work is based on his experience of the Russo-Japanese War as a member of a photography team between March and September of 1904. Katai wrote about the advancing Second Army Corps through the Battles of Nanshan, Te-li-Ssu, and Tashihchiao. He was unable to report on the Battle of Liaoyang, which was the goal of his crew, because of his illness. In *The Diary*, Katai included conditions of the various battles,
the Japanese army’s formations against enemy troops, scenes of atrocities, the geography of China, the food he ate, appearances of local houses and towns as well as the lives of Chinese, while weaving into them his poems and the observation of beautiful natural landscape. He also recorded his interaction and conversation with military officers and with Mori Ogai, a prominent literati figure of the day and a physician who served as an army surgeon. Katai included in *The Diary* the correspondences he had produced during his service and the descriptions of a pocket notebook he had carried. In essence, there is a fictional dimension to *The Diary*.

Katai dedicates *The Diary* to his father at the beginning and states a sense of fulfillment in the preface. He proudly writes: “I was extremely fortunate to go to the front during the Russo-Japanese War, which was unprecedented. Experiences of cannon shells and rains of bullets, without doubt, impacted my limited thinking. I wanted to witness the largest and most tragic event that human beings could imagine.” Although he never participated in combat, Katai considered his life being placed on an “eternal battlefield” and expressed a strong sense of mission.

*The Diary* starts with his departure from Hiroshima. On the way to the Asian continent by ship, the narrator thinks of his father. He remembers how his mother and her three children, including himself, endured much hardship after losing the breadwinner of the family. He also imagines bitterly what would happen to his wife and child if he, himself, were to die. For the narrator, dying in battle seems unnatural because the surviving family must suffer as a consequence. He states: “After a while, I came to think that death on the battlefield is a grave problem that we must study.”

Before advancing to the battlefield, the narrator witnesses the funeral of the first victim from the Second Army Corp. The service for Lieutenant Katsura is held during a
quiet and even peaceful time in Manchuria, where the narrator has enjoyed the sight of a magnificent night sky and countless stars. On the afternoon of May 13, he attends the ceremony:

Referring to the pages of my pocket diary, I noticed that my visit to Shukakō is recorded. It was the unforgettable last rite for Lieutenant Katsura. Since the Commander and various officers were going to attend, we had left our station after finishing lunch. Shukakō is about one li [four kilometers] north of the Daiyōka station. On the highland to the right of Shukakō, three companies of soldiers stood in a row. Beyond them, there was an altar nicely made up of willow branches and corn shells. A large amount of food, including a pig, hen, and pots of sake, were offered in memory of Lt. Katsura. By the time I arrived, the Commander and the Division Commander had already been seated, and sutra chanting was about to begin. The first loss of the Corp caused all to sorrow. I especially recognized the great sadness of those who were going to fire blank shots. Three unshaved Buddhist priests were in attendance. It was, however, strange to see them wearing western shoes with their robes. I found it even comical when hearing their chant, loud and often interrupted. This amusement, however, made me much sadder. I imagined how the lieutenant had died, covered with blood and in agony.

The sky with a wisp of grey cloud appeared to be sending condolences. When the service concluded and condolences were expressed, the Commander and the Division Commander returned to the station on horseback, followed by the infantrymen. The altar and burial marker are now abandoned and will decay in a few years because of the wind and rain.9

Despite the solemn outlook of the funeral, the narrator finds an avenue from which the pent-up energy of the servicemen can be released, such as through the strange appearance of Buddhist priests. After they leave, a strong sense of impermanence fills his heart. Three days after the service, he hears the first sound of cannon fire and begins to witness the tragedy of war. The description of the funeral is significant as an overture to the main body of the text. Concerning the correlation between the narrative and funeral, Alan Friedman
states:

…Beginning where experience ends, both narrative and funeral concern absence, separation, displacement [sic]; both seek to shape and regularize transitional processes, to “tame” death, which always threatens to become anarchic, by making it comprehensible, socially acceptable, and necessary.¹⁰

Katai’s narrative works as a catharsis, in as much as Buddhist funerals “tame” violent death. The funerary narration, situated before the description of the front line, indicates the availability of Buddhist services throughout the course of the war. They were the means by which Japanese servicemen, as well as Katai, could mourn and relieve them of their feelings concerning a loss of their comrades.

The narrator was, however, unable to come to terms with unnatural death. He was overwhelmed by the tragedy of war by witnessing the agony of dying soldiers; a pile of dead bodies being deformed and torn up; blood spilled on the roadside and blood stains left on bandages and handkerchiefs; and the enemy formation full of trenches with overhead cover, loopholes, pitfalls, and barbed wire spreading all around.¹¹ When the narrator discovers a bag belonging to a dead officer, he cannot stop imagining how it would be delivered to the officer’s wife. He arises a question of unnatural death:

…For some people, death is life itself. Man obviously must accept death. However, [those soldiers] died without any spiritual shock or struggle. They were shot and stabbed to death instantly. It is worth crying over!¹²

War not only causes people to die inhumanly but also makes death mechanical. It is beyond the narrator’s comprehension. Further, the death of Major Tachibana—a brave man who had taken good care of Katai’s photography team—disturbs the narrator. Tachibana died in the Battle of Liaoyang, one of the fiercest battles that Katai was informed of. Although
Tachibana once succeeded to occupy the hill where the Russian army had held a position, he was shot several times during the counterattack. The narrator looks up the hill where Tachibana lost his life and thinks of his last moment:

….The sorrow he must have felt—not looking back at the happiness he gave up for the sake of the nation—while laying and bleeding in a field of cannon smoke, is it still part of life? Is it still a kind of sorrow we experience in this world? I am unable to discuss it now.\textsuperscript{13}

Katai, perplexed at the demise of an officer whom he had become acquainted with, avoids glorifying Tachibana’s death, though listening to the heroic accounts of his last moment. Instead, he tries to understand Tachibana’s inner feelings concealed by the deification of his spirit.

Further, Katai faced the possibility of death himself. Once, he was in a combat zone, where bombshells were flying past, and he later contracted typhoid. Catching a disease was the most miserable thing in war, but because of Mori’s help, Katai received a better treatment at a hospital for officers. He could have been placed in a ward where regular soldiers were treated and its sanitary conditions and accommodation were beyond one’s imagination. Later, Katai reproduced those scenes in \textit{One Soldier} (Ippeisotsu, 1908). After all these experiences, Katai could no longer explain the case of unnatural death in the same way as the narrator of \textit{The End of Jūemon} (Jūemon no saigo, 1902) saw the demise of Jūemon through a reconciliation between man’s instinct and social regulation.\textsuperscript{14} Death became one of Katai’s literary inquiries.

\textit{Futon as a Buddhist Symbol}

After recovering from the Russo-Japanese War, Katai wrote \textit{The Quilt} (Futon) and began establishing himself as a writer of Naturalism. In \textit{In the Future of Naturalism}
(Shizen shugi no zento, 1908), while defining a naturalist’s novel as having neither objectives nor ideals, he expressed a wish to explore the meaning of death—how we prepare for it and how we feel about it when a desire to live persists—because all goals that man has fulfilled and all the ideals that man has held are meaningless upon death. When *The Quilt* is read in this light, the implication of death cannot be ignored, although it is usually seen as a story of unfulfilled love, caused by “the clash between the freedom of individual[s] and the obligations of life as a member of society.”

*The Quilt* depicts the anguish of a middle-aged writer, Takenaka Tokio. He is caught by his obligation to two women, his wife and Yoshiko—a young female whom he takes into his home as a student when she admires his work and expresses to him her desire to become a writer. Tokio soon discovers that Yoshiko is in love with a young man. Driven by jealousy and a feeling of supervisory failure, Tokio reports their relationship to Yoshiko’s father, who becomes uneasy about it and orders Yoshiko back home. *The Quilt* ends with Tokio’s reaction to the letter she wrote to him when leaving his place.

Tokio thought about those thirty miles of mountain road deep in snow, and about that country town there in the hills, also buried in snow. He went upstarts to Yoshiko’s room, which was still as she had left it the day of her departure. Overcome with nostalgia and longing, he wanted to recall something of her from those of her things that were left behind….Presently he stood up and opened the sliding partition. Three large wicker traveling-cases, tied with cord, were waiting to be sent off, and beyond them in a pile lay the bedding that Yoshiko normally used—a mattress of light green arabesque design, and a quilt of the same pattern, with thick cotton padding. Tokio drew them out. The familiar smell of a woman’s oil and sweat excited him beyond words. The velvet edging of the quilt was noticeably dirty, and Tokio pressed his face to it, immersing himself in that familiar female smell.

All at once he was stricken with desire, with sadness, with despair. He spread out the mattress, lay the quilt out on it, and wept as he buried his face against the cold, stained, velvet edging.
The room was gloomy, and outside the wind was raging. The futon that Yoshiko has used stimulates Tokio’s sexual desire and becomes a symbol of eroticism. It, however, signifies change, impermanence, and even death as well. According to Alan Friedman’s study conducted on portraits of the nineteenth-century Victorian deathbed scenes, the bed implies a connection between eros and thanatos, where birth, intercourse, sickness, and death all come to be related. Whereas a bed is fixed bedding, a futon is transportable—folded, unfolded, placed in a closet, or carried to other places. Such mobility highlights its ever-changing quality, connecting to the Buddhist principle of impermanence. A futon, in fact, was developed from a cushion that Buddhist monks employed for meditation, according to one etymological source.

The impermanent outlook that the futon implies accentuates Tokio’s loneliness. After learning about Yoshiko’s romance, Tokio gets drunk and begins singing to distract himself from the sadness.

Halfway through the verse he suddenly stood up, still wearing the quilt [futon] with which his wife had covered him, and, looking just like a little mountain, moved towards the parlor. His wife, very worried, followed and asked where he was going. He paid no attention and tried to enter the toilet, still clad in the quilt. His wife was flustered:

“What are you doing? You shouldn’t get drunk like this! It’s horrible! That’s the toilet!”

Suddenly she pulled at the quilt from behind, and was left holding it there in the entrance to the toilet.

The bedding, a natural environment for copulation, is almost dragged into a place for excretion. Its use as a part of a condition for intercourse changes to a means of keeping a man warm. Further, when Tokio compares himself to Yoshiko’s young lover and laments over his old age, he happens to be reading Guy de Maupassant’s As Strong As Death, which
deals with the second love of an old painter—echoing the French naturalists’ influence on Katai, such as de Maupassant and Zola.\textsuperscript{22} There is thus a thanatos dimension in The Quilt.

**Responses to Unnatural Death**

Death remains as a predictable theme in Katai’s work. It is an important part of the plot of, for instance, more than half of the stories included in the first volume of *The Collected Works of Katai (Teihon Katai zenshū)*, which contains The Quilt.\textsuperscript{23}

In both *One Soldier* (Ippeisotsu, 1908) and *The Sound of Wheels* (Kuruma no oto, 1908), Katai demonstrates the fictional treatment of the death of a young soldier. They are short stories, whose settings take place in Manchuria during the Russo-Japanese War. In *One Solider*, a private who could not stand the unsanitary conditions of a temporary hospital, where he was put, left without recovering from beriberi. Not knowing where to go, he wonders one place to another, but suffers from a tremendous physical pain, which makes him not even think of his family or hometown in Japan. He eventually dies alone without any help. *The Sound of Wheels* depicts the death of a Japanese sergeant major at a makeshift hospital. He was shut in the chest by enemy gunfire and was abandoned by an army surgeon who saw no hope in saving his life. The sergeant major died while groaning and calling out his wife’s name. In both stories, the narrator faithfully portrays death, which reflects Katai’s style of writing known as the “plane depiction” (*heimen byōsha*), and produces a narrative without involving strong emotions.\textsuperscript{24} Katai acquired a position of an onlooker who objectified what he has seen during his service in the Russo-Japanese War. It was also a moment of sadness and loneliness since he could not express his strong feelings.\textsuperscript{25}

In *Country Teacher* (Inaka kyōshi, 1909), the narrator treats the life and death of an ordinary young man called Hayashi Seizō. After reading the diary of Kobayashi Shūzō
(1884-1904), who died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-one without serving in the Russo-Japanese War, Katai decided to fictionalize his life to describe the feelings of those who could not bear the burden of war but died in the Japanese countryside without becoming heroes. Hayashi ends his life when the Japanese army captures Lioyang and newspapers report many cases of heroic deaths, although Kobayashi did not die on that day. The Japanese literary critic, Kobayashi Ichirō, points out that Katai saw the frustration of his own adolescence in Kobayashi Shūzō’s unfulfilled life and expressed his regret for not being able to witness the Battle of Lioyang by representing the premature death of the main character, while making the life of Hayashi dramatic, by illuminating Japan’s victory over Russia, and more eventful by having him frequently visit a red-light district.26

To understand Katai’s artistic imagination of unnatural and untimely death, it is first necessary to consider the study of traumatic memory. Although not taking up arms during the Russo-Japanese war, Katai, as a member of a photograph crew, still witnessed many instances of death in action and horrendous scenes. As Judith Herman points out, intense trauma, including what Robert J. Lifton calls “indelible image” or “death imprint” for survivors of war and natural disaster, not only prevents them from rationalizing death but also destroys the foundation of selfhood in connection with others. For the recuperation of the self, the survivor, therefore, must seek the restoration of relationships. Herman states, “Sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world.”27 Katai was unable to account for the causes of unnatural death, such as the killing of Major Tachibana, and even wrote “the aftermath of the battle scenes made my unhealthy brain driven to madness” in The Diary of the Second Army Corps at War.28 Healing for Katai meant sharing his trauma by fictionalizing what he had witnessed in war.
In what way then, did Katai seek to reconnect himself with others? For this inquiry, the notion of “conscious death” highlighted by Albert Camus is useful. According to Lawrence Langer,

Just as art imposes form on reality, the mind can set limits to the possible in experience. It does this first by acknowledging the ultimate limit that experience sets on life—mortality. Camus’s idea of conscious death establishes the chance for a life that truly reflects the human condition, while permitting that condition to approach the desirable features of art. Defying history, conscious death transforms random events, through the experience of certain individuals, into the semblance of “lived works of art.” And language is the catalyst.\(^{29}\)

Camus correlates art to life by defining its limits. Man can recognize the dignity of life by understanding the decisiveness of dying and express a desire for transcending death through creative writing in the absence of God.\(^{30}\) Meursault’s death in *The Stranger* represents such an artistic effort. Langer argues:

Meursault’s desire to be greeted with cries of hatred by the spectators at his execution may signify his need to make his death part of someone else’s life, to impinge on another’s memory as those in his past have not impinged on his. It is a negative expression of fraternal feeling (*pour que je me sente moins seul*), an unusual but understandable assertion of the principle that in death any acknowledgment from other human beings is better than none.\(^{31}\)

Because of the death sentence, Meursault is finally able to connect himself with his mother, whose death he did not mourn, and to others. During World War II, Camus found the notion of conscious death insufficient for explaining the atrocity of war and re-examined his attitude toward a massacre.\(^{32}\)

When Katai’s works of unnatural death are read in the light of conscious death, he seems to make ordinary soldiers part of “someone else’s life” and connect them to their
family and comrades. For instance, in *The Sound of Wheels*, the dying sergeant major repeatedly requests his subordinates to visit his wife when they return to Japan and tell her how he ended his life in their care.\(^3^3\) In *One Soldier*, an insignificant soldier wanders alone, suffers from beriberi, and walks into a building, which seems to be unoccupied. His agonies while dying, however, wake up Japanese soldiers sleeping in the building.\(^3^4\) Through such powerful images, Katai made death part of his life as well, which was deprived of the memory of his father. In the case of *Country Teacher*, Hayashi represents the lives of many young Japanese, who could not join the Japanese Imperial army and fight in the Russo-Japanese War but died forlornly of tuberculosis because of physical defects.\(^3^5\) Katai turned his traumatic war experiences into novels and produced a “testimony,” which contains both private and public aspects. As Herman points out, the former reflects confession and spirituality, where as the latter makes political and judicial implications.\(^3^6\) The aforementioned Katai’s works somewhat problematize war and atrocity, if not entirely.

*A Shinto Funeral*

In the autobiographical novel *Life* (Sei, 1908), Katai reenacted his mother’s death, which also represented an institutional practice of the nation state of Japan. This novel centers on Ryō’s family, the elder brother of Tetsunosuke—Katai’s alter ego—and his dying mother. She grew up in an era when patriarchal authority was the norm; hence, she constantly collides with her children, who hold a different attitude toward life, and with Okei, Ryō’s third wife. After the premature death of her husband, Ryō’s mother raised four children by herself, but was frustrated because the children did not succeed in society and because Okei did not live up to her expectations. Tetsunosuke is both critical of his mother’s feudal ways of thinking but also sympathetic to her going against the current of the times. For him, her death signifies the transition of time and change in the family
The arrival of the new era is noticeable even in the funeral arrangement. The mother’s service is not conducted in the traditional Buddhist style, but in the contemporary Shinto fashion. At the beginning of the Meiji era, the movement to separate Buddhism and Shinto escalated, leading to the invention of a new Shinto practice. According to Nam-lin Hur,

In a show of trying to divest imperial rites and ceremonies of any Buddhist character, Emperor Meiji conducted Shinto-style memorial services for his father, Emperor Kōmei (r. 1847-66), who had previously been buried with a Buddhist service. After this, imperial house no longer conducted Buddhist funerary rites for its members. In the fourth intercalary month, the Meiji government moved to order all Shinto priests to conduct Shinto funerals for their family members, effectively freeing them from the bondage of the *danka* [“the enduring relationship between a Buddhist temple and its funerary patron household, cemented from generation to generation through recurring rites and services related to death and ancestral veneration”] system. At the same time, it encouraged the populace to leave their *danna* temples [temples to which “the funerary patron household or individual” is affiliated with] voluntarily and to switch to Shinto funerals.37

The introduction of Shinto funerary liturgy was part of the Meiji government’s effort to suppress Buddhism and to promote Shinto closely connected to imperial ideology. The Shinto funeral was, however, not without its problems. They included the question of defilement in death, the lack of a standard format, and inefficient support for the construction of State Shinto, which “should stand above all religions and maintain the highest spiritual standard.” Shinto death rituals were, therefore, unpopular and Buddhist funeral and memorial services continued to prevail.38

In *Life*, a Shinto priest officiates Ryō’s mother’s funeral because her husband is enshrined at Yasukuni Shrine, but Buddhist elements persist throughout the funerary
service. When the mother is about to die, Okoma, her niece, recites namu-amida-butsu and moistens her lips with a brush. After jerking her chin up, the mother takes her last breath.

The head of the family [Ryō], who is checking her pulse, also knows that this is it. The last moment! Death! Sorrow fills everyone’s hearts. Death makes people forget everything and purifies all unhealthy thoughts [about that person]. There is nobody who is not touched by the sadness and sympathy of the occasion.

Okoma continues to recite namu-amida-butsu and says to Tetsunosuke and Hideo [Tetsunosuke’s younger brother], “Why don’t you moisten her lips with the last water. This is the end of the karmic relationship to your mother.”

Tetsunosuke cries, as does everyone else. Their attitude toward the mother changes drastically. The curiosity of her death is now taken over by sadness mixed with a sense of purity and beauty. Although now released from filial duty, they have ambiguous feelings of independence and loneliness.

With the arrival of their relatives, the family contacts a high-ranking Shinto priest from Hibiya Great Shrine (Hibiya daijingū). Before his arrival however, the family makes a Buddhist arrangement based on the female members’ suggestion that the mother is a buddha until a Shinto priest conducts the ceremony. During the all-night vigil, the Shinto priest delivers words of blessings and bestows on the deceased a Shinto posthumous name, which ends with “Mikoto.” The family offers three kinds of mountain vegetables and seafood at the altar. After the service, people express their thoughts on the deceased, speak of their own interests, and chat pleasantly with each other. Then a good-looking modern coffin arrives. It is spacious enough to accommodate the entire body without breaking her legs or crooking her neck. Before encoffing, while reciting namu-amida-butsu, the people wash her body with hot water. Tetsunosuke finds it difficult to bear but decides to wash his mother’s feet and only learns how cold a dead body is. When dressing the body, the women
hang a Buddhist sack around her chest and put coins into it. Although the Shinto procedure does not allow it, they place a cane and a pair of sandals in the coffin.41

The next day, Ryō and Tetsunosuke attend the funeral wearing Shinto robes. Before the procession to the cemetery, the Shinto priest delivers a long prayer. Then those in attendance offer incense and gather around the coffin. After the last viewing, undertakers nail down the coffin lid and take it out of the house. The attendees form a line and move to Aoyama Cemetery, where many of Tetsunosuke’s family members and relatives are buried. He recalls the days he visited there with his mother. At the Aoyama funeral hall, the Shinto priest offers another prayer, which includes the reading of the mother’s biography, and the attendees are deeply moved by it. After the service, undertakers carry the coffin to the graveyard and place it in a hole in the ground. The attendants fill the hole with sand, set up a burial marker, and offer water. The funeral is over.42

For Tetsunosuke—and Katai—death is a solemn event in life. It not only ends the problematic relationship with his mother but also purifies his attitude toward her and sublimates his negative emotions. The funeral service provides Tetsunosuke with time to reflect on the deceased, as well as on the relationship with his wife, brothers and sisters, and relatives. Katai wrote Life about nine years after his mother’s passing and immediately after the sensational debut of The Quilt. By writing Life, he aimed to not only come to terms with her loss but to also firmly establish himself as a Naturalist novelist. In other words, Sei completed the process of departing from his old self: He confessed his family problems and critically examined each one.43

In sum, Katai’s literary responses to the death of his parents reflected the state apparatus of modern Japan. Given the fact that the enshrinement of loyalist spirits at Yasukuni Shrine and the notion of an honorable death for the country had not yet appealed
to the general public.\textsuperscript{44} Tayama family’s observance of a Shinto funeral was remarkable.\textsuperscript{45}

\textbf{Natsume Sōseki}

Like Katai, Natsume Sōseki made many literary responses to funerals. On one level, it was a process of healing. Sōseki dedicated a part of \textit{To the Spring Equinox and Beyond} to his fifth daughter, who died suddenly on November 29, 1911, and included a description of her funeral.\textsuperscript{46} Unlike Katai however, funerals in Sōseki’s works agitate some of the narrators and characters. Before discussing it further, a consideration of Sōseki’s attitude toward death is necessary.

Throughout his life, Sōseki both feared and idealized death. As Marvin Marcus points out, “the memento mori episode…would be a mainstay of Sōseki’s literary reminiscence.”\textsuperscript{47} While a teenager, Sōseki lost his beloved natural mother and eldest sister. At the age of twenty-one, two elder brothers passed away—he held his eldest brother, Daisuke, in particular high esteem. As early as 1889, Sōseki expressed a “weariness of life” to his friend, Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), showing “a deep-rooted dislike of life and a sympathy for death.” In 1891, about a year after he started studying at Tokyo Imperial University, Toyo, a sister-in-law of his, whom Sōseki had also respected, died. As a result of attending their funerals and memorial services, he became familiar with Shin Buddhist rituals because of his family temple’s Buddhist affiliation.\textsuperscript{48}

Between October 1900 and January 1903, the Japanese government sent Sōseki to London. This experience not only affected his personality but also shaped characteristics of his persona, which felt alienated from modern society. Marcus summarizes Sōseki’s experience in London:

The young man came to see himself as a stranger in a strange land. He lived
alone in a succession of London boardinghouses, reading book after book and
making elaborate notes in a crabbed scrawl. There was only sporadic
communication with his wife. Rather than take university courses, he settled for a
weekly tutorial with a somewhat eccentric Shakespearean scholar. He obsessed
over money and how to stretch the little that was available—much of it spent in
the local bookstores. As he refined his understanding of English literature,
Kinnosuke [Sōseki] cultivated a profound distaste for its society and people.49

After bitter experiences of racial discrimination, poverty, and alienation, Sōseki was on the
point of madness. This was also when he pondered on life and death. In 1901, at the age of
thirty-five, Sōseki wrote in “A Fragment” (Danpen): “Were we born, we must die—whence
we come, whither we tend? Answer!”50 In The Tower of London (Londontō, 1905), one of
his earliest fictions, the narrator expresses concern for the inevitable aspect of life—death.

Again I try to imagine it. Once having been born, one must live. One must be
bold enough not to speak of one’s fear of death and just live. Saying that one must
live was true before Christ and Confucius and is true after Christ and Confucius.
It needs no argument, only that since one wishes to be alive, therefore one must
live. All people must live. The people bound in this hell were also in accordance
with this great truth and had to live. At the same time they were confronted with a
doomed fate….51

In this short story, the narrator meditates upon the destiny of prisoners confined in a tower
and re-imagines the death of Lady Jane Grey.52 Thus, since the inception of his literary
career, Sōseki grappled with mortality.

Ten Nights of Dream (Yume Jūya, 1908) includes many short stories related to
death. Death is a blessing for those who cannot fulfill themselves in this world. It is fear for
those seeking love because courtship increases attachment to life. It is a dilemma for those
who can neither trace consciousness back to the past nor progress to the future, and it is an
escape for those who cannot believe in God.53
Sōseki eventually came to face his own “death.” After finishing *The Gate* (Mon, March-June, 1910), his health deteriorated rapidly. He was diagnosed as developing a gastric ulcer and was hospitalized. He got out of the hospital at the end of July and moved to Shuzenji on Izu peninsula to recuperate. His condition, however, worsened on August 24 and he vomited a large amount of blood. The subsequent attack, caused by cerebral anemia, almost killed him. According to his wife, he was “dead for thirty minutes.”

During the eight months of further hospitalization, Sōseki wrote a collection of short episodes, entitled “Recollections” (Omoidasu koto nado, 1911). It includes his observations of hospital life, records his recovery, reflections on his survival, discussions of the inconceivability of life, fate and human kindness, as well as his analysis of problematic modern civilization. Among them, the narrator’s mediation on the transition from life to death is worth for quoting:

…At hearing my wife’s explanation, I felt how trivial death was. Then, I felt how sudden the transition from life to death was. There was no negotiation between life and death. I could not understand why I was dominated by these two phenomena, which are very distant. I was speechless when I considered having crossed over these two realms, even though there might have been some sort of relationship between life and death—which I do not know—and because of that [connection between life and death], I think I died and resurrected.

“Life and death” is a set phrase, used in daily life. It expresses contrast, like slow and fast, small and large, and hot and cold. Contemporary psychologists say that life and death belongs to such a category of contrast association. But if “life” and “death,” as two completely different phases, capture me interchangeably, how can I compare life and death on the same level?54

After experiencing sudden transitions between life and death, Sōseki could not comprehend the relationship between the two in either logical or mysterious terms. It was just inconceivable. Earlier in *The Poppy* (Gubijinsō, 1907), Sōseki wrote: “Fate (*unmei*) is great
because it not only announces the end of life but also suddenly transforms life into death.”

Now, the same fate, which had placed Sōseki into near death, brought him back to life. In this context, fate suggests “life by accident” (gūzen no inochi), even though Sōseki understood that death was an organic process.55

*The Poppy* delivers a significant message concerning life and death. The story develops on the negotiations among six young people over their nuptial arrangements and ends with the diary of Mr. Kōno, who is “a pensive and learned young man prone to philosophical rumination.” Two days after the funeral of Fujio—“a rich, glamorous, and self-centered young woman”56—who died suddenly, Kōno writes:

Finally, tragedy occurred. This was expected. Not lending a helping hand despite expecting a tragedy means to have understood the futility of a helping hand in the presence of unwholesome karma. It is to have understood the magnitude of tragedy. It is to have let the power of tragedy be known and wash away the karma of the three worlds. It is not driven by the act of unkindness…. It is politely to accept the judgment of nature that is greater than man and let him understand the original appearance (honrai no menmoku) in a moment of lightening.

Tragedy is greater than comedy. Someone explains this by saying that death overcomes all problems…. Fate (unmei) is great because it not only announces the end of life but also transforms life suddenly into death. Fate is powerful because death comes when one is unprepared for it. It is compelling because those who have not been serious about living become sincere in an urgent need to understand the righteousness of the path (dōgi). It is superb because man comes to understand the righteousness of the path as the most important matter in life. It is significant because the righteousness of the path never changes in the occurrence of a tragic event. Although it is ideal to put the righteousness of the path into practice, it is the most difficult thing to do. Tragedy is compelling because it makes man put the righteousness of the path into practice, which is convenient for others but the most inconvenient for himself…..

“Questions are plentiful: is it millet or rice, this is a comedy. Is it artisan or
merchant, this too is a comedy. Is it this woman or that woman, this too is a comedy. Is it silk or satin, this too, is a comedy. Is it English or German, this too is a comedy. Everything is a comedy. In the end there is one question left—is it life or death? This is a tragedy….”

Everyone is left standing with the serious problem of life and death. By solving this problem, man is said to reject death and choose life. At this point, everyone moves toward life. In exchange for denying death, man comes to observe the righteousness of the path. But as man continues to progress—further distancing himself from death—he no longer needs the righteousness of the path because he is overconfident with living….

When the righteousness of the path degenerates and it is hard to maintain society adequately, where everyone wishes to live, tragedy suddenly comes upon us. At this time, man looks at the beginning of selfhood and learns for the first time that death stands next to life….

Sōseki purposely added these passages to the ending of The Poppy, which he called a “theory” or “philosophy.” He wrote The Poppy “for the sake of explaining this theory” and in order to do so he had to kill Fujio. According to Karatani Kōjin, the righteousness of the path suggests the law of nature, which is connected to the Confucian moral standard, and that those who violate it will be punished by it. The righteousness of the path, however, goes beyond the implication of restoring a moral order. Kōno clearly sees that the dichotomy of life and death is the fundamental problem for modern human beings. Without first coming to terms with life and death, Kōno considers all human activities unreliable.

**The Buddhist Perspectives on Death**

Instead of distancing himself from death, the narrator of The Poppy idealizes death. At the beginning of the novel, Kōno and his friend, Munechika, are climbing Mt. Hiei, where Saichō established the Tendai school of Buddhism during the medieval period of Japanese history. The following narration appears between their dialogues:
It is quiet. In a state of tranquility, one recognizes one’s life as being entrusted to quietude. My blood, which is related to both heaven and earth, gains subtle energy, circulating quietly and not bothering the body as if it were “non-deluded” (jakujōri). Being aware of life, but not troubled by it, is like a sky without clouds, changing in the morning and evening. It is the spirit that transcends all kinds of attachment (kōdei). If I cannot put one foot into a universe that goes beyond all worlds, spanning from east to west, and emptying the three worlds of the past, present, and future, I would rather be a fossil, a black fossil, which absorbs the colors of red, blue, yellow, and purple, and never reproducing them. If not, I want to die. Death is the end of everything, yet it is the beginning of all things…..Why don’t you have a noble mind (harukanaru kokoro) and long for the land of eternity (harukanaru kuni)?

This passage brings to mind the Buddhist notion of “aversion to the impure world and aspiration for the Pure Land” (onriedo gongujōdo). As a related analysis to this concept, Mizukawa Takao writes concerning the ending of I Am a Cat (Wagahai wa neko de aru, 1905-1906):

Sōseki scorned the mediocrity and timidity of his other self [Kushami, Dr. Sneeze]. The conclusion of Wagahai wa neko de aru is:

“I die. I die and receive peace. Peace cannot be had without dying. Save us, merciful Buddha! Save us, merciful Buddha! Gracious blessing, Gracious blessing.”

In the Japanese original, the part translated above as “Save us, merciful Buddha! Save us, merciful Buddha” is “Namu Amida Butsu” with indications to repeat this six more times. The unnamed cat, therefore, appears to desire birth in the Pure Land by reciting the Nembutsu. This may seem like a light and froth-like conclusion, but a careful reader should realize that a passage such as “Through death I’m drifting slowly into peace” [peace and tranquility cannot be attained without dying], contains Sōseki’s vivid sense of rejecting the world.

By rejecting this world, Sōseki implied longing for the other world, the world of the Pure Land. He continued to romanticize death in his personal essays and letters, even after the
Shuzenji crisis. *Kokoro* (Kokoro, 1914) is an extreme novel in the sense that such a death wish is fulfilled as suicide.

*Kokoro* consists of three parts: “Sensei and I,” “My Parents and I,” and “Sensei and His Testament.” In Chapter One, “I,” the narrator who is a university student in Tokyo, befriends an elderly educated man whom he calls “Sensei”—a married but lonely person who dutifully visits someone’s grave every month alone. In Chapter Two, upon graduation, “I” returns to his hometown to look after his dying father, who expects him to develop a promising career with the help of Sensei. While sympathizing with his father’s remaining days, “I” finds him old-fashioned and his family narrow-minded. Just when his father falls into a critical condition, “I” receives a long letter from Sensei. While leafing through the letter, Sensei’s last words cause the narrator to leave his dying father and return to Tokyo hoping he can still see Sensei. In Chapter Three, the letter discloses Sensei’s past and expresses his decision to take his own life after the death of Emperor Meiji and the immolation of General Nogi. James Fujii summarizes Sensei’s past:

…It reveals how, left in the care of his uncle after the death of his parents, the school-age Sensei is subsequently tricked out of his inheritance. With what is left from his inheritance, he comes to study presumably at what was then Tokyo Imperial University. Sensei falls in love with the daughter of a widow in whose house he takes room and board. In the meantime, Sensei is worried about a classmate whom he identifies solely by the initial “K.” Concerned about his friend, whose religious concern with an ascetic spirituality makes daily living somewhat hazardous, Sensei persuades K to move in with him. Despite K’s puritanical insistence on living a spiritual life, he too falls in love with the widow’s daughter, Ojōsan. Upon hearing K confess his feelings for her, Sensei is seized with panic for having missed the opportunity to declare his own feelings….Fueled by the jealousy he feels during those occasional moments when he perceives Ojōsan to be favoring K, Sensei plays on K’s sincerity and ridicules him for straying from his path of the mind and spirit. Whether moved by his own heart, goaded by jealousy toward K, or influenced from other direction (the text is ambiguous),
Sensei quickly asks for Ojōsan’s hand in marriage but is unable to tell K about it. When K discovers what has happened, he takes his own life. There is no accusation in his short suicide note, which simply ends with “why did I wait so long to die?” Sensei later marries Ojōsan, but he never confesses his part in the drama of K’s death, out of fear, he writes in his last letter, that telling her would “taint her whole life with the memory of something that was ugly.” As a result, Ojōsan must suffer through living with a man who has renounced any intention of living, never certain how she herself might be the cause of his unexplained misery.

Six individuals die in Kokoro, both naturally and unnaturally. Three are non-fictional—the death of Emperor Meiji caused by illness and the double suicide of the Nogi couple, while the other three are fictional—the natural death of the narrator’s father and two cases of suicide, Sensei’s and K’s. As Doris Bargen points out, K’s death is the beginning of a “lethal chain reaction…followed by that of Emperor Meiji and then by Nogi’s.” Sensei sympathizes with General Nogi, who suffered for more than thirty years after losing the Imperial Banners during the Seinan Civil War. Sensei’s choice of suicide is, however, different from Nogi’s since his relationship to K is not hierarchical. It is rather a “fatal combination of obligation [“to the memory of K”], indebtedness, and guilt.”

Many scholars have discussed the implication of these cases of death. Just to name a few, Fujii suggests Japan’s modern experience which contributed to Sensei’s death: “the disintegration of the family unit, the ascendance of self-oriented conceptions of society, and the pernicious effects of an industrialized, increasingly materialistic nation,” as well as the “frustration of speechlessness, the loss of voice and the erosion of familiar avenues by which the sense of subject could be affirmed, all of which must have assailed many of Sensei’s generation.” Sharalyn Orbaugh points out that Ojōsan’s silence implies intimacy between Sensei and K and leads them to take their own lives when the “male terror of women’s reproductive faculties” intensifies. Bargen supports Orbaugh’s position by saying,
“For them [Sensei and K], writing [Sensei’s testament to the narrator and K’s suicide note] becomes a substitute for physical reproduction.”

Mizukawa Takao draws attention to a possible Shin Buddhist influence in the plot of Kokoro. For example, K was born into a Shin Buddhist temple in Niigata prefecture but abandons the “teachings of his family temple” and attempts to develop his spirituality using “self-power.” That perseverance, however, led him to destroy himself.

The acts of taking one’s life—both in historical and imaginary cases of suicide—were by all means real to Sōseki himself. A few months after the completion of Kokoro, Sōseki wrote a letter to Hayashiha Kōzō, dated November 14, 1914.

I did not intend to state twice in a row that I selected life over death but unintentionally did so because of my mood then. But that’s neither a lie nor making light of the matter. I really hope that after I die, everyone will gather before my coffin and send me off with a “Banzai!” I believe consciousness is all there is to life, and yet I cannot believe that the same consciousness is all of me. I believe something of me will remain even after I die, and further, that I will return to my original self when I die. I do not look fondly on suicide at present, and very likely will try living to the fullest. And while living, like most people, I believe I will exhibit the weak points I was born with. That’s because I believe that’s what life is. What I dislike most of all, however, is while disliking life, to forcibly move from life to the exceedingly agonizing death. That’s why I have no desire to commit suicide. Besides, selecting death means an aversion to this world (enseikan) that is not the same as a pessimistic view of life (hikan). You understand the difference between them, don’t you?

Sōseki was showing “the suffering and agony of life that was whirling around deep in his mind and heart from the time he had been a youth.” While re-emphasizing the notion of aversion to this world, he was simultaneously professing his determination to live and not take his own life. In other words, by having K and Sensei commit suicide and destroying the troubled character of Sensei, which somewhat represents his alter ego, Sōseki
decisively put to end a suicidal desire that he must have held for a long time.

By rejecting suicide, yet idealizing death, Sōseki saw death as a way to return to what he called his “original self,” where “something” of him would continue. He later redefined death as the “absolute realm.” In Inside My Glass Doors (Garasudo no uchi, January to February, 1915)—a series of autobiographical essays—he wrote: “I feel that what is called death is sweeter than life, and the thought strikes me that it is the highest state to which a man aspires.” He also addressed a letter to Kuroyanagi Kunitarō, dated February 15, 1915: “….I don’t think individuality or what is called individual would continue after death, as Spiritualists or Maeterlinck say. All I would like to state is that only after death do we enter the absolute realm, and when comparing the absolute world with the relative world, I sense something sacred.” Sōseki further modified his position.

Sometime in 1915 he wrote (in an undated portion of the “A Fragment”):

Death over life…but that implies disliking life and does not seem to integrate life and death. In order to be consistent about life and death (or transcend the two), one must accept phenomena is existence and relative is absolute.

“That may be so logically.”

“Perhaps.”

“But, can you reach [such a state] by merely thinking about it?”

“I just want to get there.”

As Mizukawa suggests at that point, Sōseki considered “life and death to be one body” by applying the notion of “oneness of life and death,” and attempted to liberate himself from his attachment to both life and death.

The teaching of Zen Buddhism played a significant role in Sōseki coming to this realization. As early as 1894, about a year after graduating from Tokyo Imperial University, Sōseki stayed in Kigen-in in the Engaku-ji compound, Kamakura. He practiced
Zen meditation for about two weeks under the guidance of Shaku Sōen (1859-1919) (Sōen represented Japanese Buddhism along with other Buddhist leaders at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.) Sōseki was unable to solve a kōan or Zen riddle at that time (“what was your original state before your parents were born?”) and described that experience in Ten Nights of Dream and the novel, Mon (The Gate, 1911).

Sōseki never gave up his interest in Zen. In his later years, he continued practicing Zen meditation and corresponding with young Zen priests. In fact, he asked them to chant sutras when he died. According to Ama Toshimaro, sitting meditation was effective for Sōseki to neutralize his consciousness. Sōseki practiced Zen meditation “not because he aimed to establish a settled mind (anjin ryūmei), but rather because he wished to question how the self, as a modern entity, should be defined in the Meiji era and how the modern ego, which was capable of sustaining a reality in that period, could be created. Once he had discovered the possibility of establishing a Japanese subjectivity, he began to re-evaluate traditional Zen.” While engaging in Zen, Sōseki began to examine the changeable and the unchangeable, and perceived them to be identical. Such a perception allowed him to realize the unity of life and death, if not through a meditative experience, at least on an intellectual level. (The dialogue in Sōseki’s “Fragment” given above, resonates with Ichirō’s anguish in The Wayfarer [Kōjin, 1912-1913]: “But how can I change from a speculative to a practical man? Please tell me that.”)

Funerals as a Liminal Experience

Sōseki’s interstitial position between life and death with respect to a Zen-like perspective illustrates the degree to which his fictional characters display “liminal” personalities when witnessing funerals. Here, Victor Turner’s application of the liminal phase to a religious narrative is useful. Susan Ackerman summarizes it as:
According to Turner, the most defining characteristics of the liminal state or the liminal persona is ambiguity; in Turner’s classic formulation, to be liminal is to be betwixt and between, separated from an earlier social structure or set of social conditions but not yet reaggregated or reincorporated into a new structure or set of conditions. “Liminal entities,” Turner writes in *The Ritual Process*, “are neither here nor there, they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.” As such, they are often described using symbols and images that themselves stand outside normative experiences and customary configurations and that emphasize “paradox, disorder, anomaly, opposition, and the like.” Turner even describes how some symbols of liminality depict paradox particularly vividly by representing both “birth and death, womb and tomb”…

A second important quality of liminal persons, Turner goes on to state, is that they are often represented “as possessing nothing.” The reason for this is “to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system.” Indeed, so absent are marks of rank or distinction that Turner labels liminal persons, and more particularly groups comprised of liminal persons, as egalitarian. Turner moreover argues, liminal groups experience what he calls communitas, a time of “intense social togetherness” and of “union with one’s fellow human beings” during which the distinctions and boundaries that usually keep people apart (for example, economic distinctions, status distinctions, kinship boundaries) dissolve.76

Liminal personas can emerge during rites of passage including funerals, seen as symbols that go beyond normal daily life experiences, and exhibit conflicts and contradictions within themselves. The narrator of *The Miner* (Kōfu, 1908) and Sanshirō, as in Sōseki’s *Sanshirō* (1908), are such individuals.

*The Miner* is based on a story that Sōseki had heard from a young man. The plot is straightforward. An educated young man, troubled with his family and two women, leaves home and wanders around intending to kill himself. He is accidentally recruited by a trickster into joining a group of mine laborers and taken to Ashio (a copper mine in Tochigi
prefecture). Because he is fresh off the boat, rough uneducated miners harass him, and the poor living conditions torment him. But after meeting Yasu, an educated elder miner, the young man determines not to run away and stays there to work. Yasu ended up in Ashio because he had committed a crime in the city. Because of him, the young man decides to live strongly and eventually returns to Tokyo.

The young man’s attitude toward death changes frequently and so do his understanding of religion and the miners. At first, he identifies the cause of his problems to be his desire to change others but not himself—his other self which betrays him (“person incubating within oneself” [senpukusha])—and the intangibility of the mind. He tells himself: “…if I really want to forget my anguish, I’m really going to have to die. No doubt, though, the minute the anguish disappears, I’ll want to come to life again. The ideal thing for me, to be quite honest, would be to live and die over and over.” At the mine however, the young man comes to realize the broader implications of death when a funeral procession passes by his boarding house. A group of miners drag a very sick miner, Kin, who has been lying on the floor, to the window and force him watch the procession.

The jangle continued indifferently to appear around the corner of the stone wall. Was it never going to end, I wondered, stretching to look down at the road, which brought me another rush of horror. Between the bearers of the wash basins, dangling in space as it made its way down the mountain road, was a square coffin. The top had been covered in a white sheet, a bare cedar pole passed through the wooden loops at either end, and there was a man shouldering each end of the pole with all the mater-of-factness he might have evidenced if entrusted with a load of water. From here it looked as if they, too, were cheerfully singing the chant. It was then that I realized the meaning of “jangle.” The moment of understanding came with a piercing clarity I shall never forget for the rest of my life, whatever else is left in store for me. A “jangle” was a funeral, a kind of funeral that can only be performed—indeed, must be performed—for miners of the four classes—miner, digger, setter, and shopper. It was a funeral in which phrases
from the sutras are sung in the emotional Naniwa-bushi style, the music of shattering wash basins is played, the coffin is carried past the barracks, dangling like a barrel of water on a pole, and, finally, a half-dead miner is dragged from his bed and, despite his protests, forced to look on. It was the height of innocence, the height of cruelty.

“How about it, Kin? Get a good look? Pretty good, huh?”

“Year, year, I saw it. Now, take me back and let me lie down, for heaven’s sake,” Kin pleaded.

The two who had brought him over now took Kin between them and, with small, quick steps, led him to where the quilt lay on the floor.

Then, as if the entire overcast sky had suddenly turned to powder and come filtering down, it began to rain. Smashing its way through this rain, the jangle continued on down toward town.

“More rain,” the men grumbled, shutting the window, each of them finding his way back to the hearth. At some point in the commotion, almost before I knew it, I had been admitted to the ranks of the savages and was now able to approach the fire. This occurred through both chance and design….

Taking a seat at random, I felt what little warmth there was to be had at the sunken hearth bathing over my face. Much to my surprise, the others were ignoring me now and I escaped without further ridicule. Perhaps because I had taken the initiative to enter their ranks, the others had decided to tolerate me as just another savage. Possibly the sudden appearance of the jangle had distracted them enough to make them forget about me for a while. Or maybe they had simply run out of jibes or had their fill of cursing. Whatever the reason, once I found this new seat I felt somewhat more relaxed. Of course, the many voices around the hearth now concentrated on the jangle.

“I wonder where it came from?”

“What’s the difference? A jangle’s a jangle.”

“Maybe from Kuroichi’s. Somewhere up there.”

“I wonder where you go after a jangle.”

“To the temple, stupid. Everybody knows that.”

“Who you callin’ stupid? I’m talkin’ about after the temple.”

“He’s right. It sure as hell doesn’t end at the temple. You gotta go somewhere.”

“That’s what I mean. The last place. I wonder what it’s like there. Think it’s the same as here?”

“Sure, Human souls go there. It must be pretty much the same.”

“I think so, too. If you go somewhere, it’s gotta be there.”
They talk about ‘heaven’ and ‘hell,’ but ya hafta eat there, too, I guess.”
“I wonder if they’ve got women.”
“Of course they’ve got women. There’s no place in the world without women.”
This more or less sums up the kind of nonsensical talk that followed the jangle. At first, I thought I must be hearing a joke. Figuring it was probably all right to laugh, I took a quick survey, the corner of my mouth twitching, but obviously I was the only one who wanted to laugh. The other faces around the hearth were as hard as if carved in stone. These men were discussing the question of the afterlife in deadly earnest. There was an intensity to be seen on each furrowed brow that could only be described as unbelievable. One glance was enough to expunge my initial urge to laugh. It took me completely by surprise that such bold, reckless men—men who knew when they went down into the mine with their oil lamps that they might never again see the light of the day, savages who were more machine than human, more animal than machine—should be so deeply concerned about what lay in store for them. No wonder men needed religion to guarantee an afterlife. I was not actually aware, of course, when I raised my eyes and surveyed the men sitting cross-legged around the hearth, that a combination of restraint and awe had wiped the nearly formed smile from my face. I merely felt a need to observe decorum, as if I had opened my eyes expecting to see a comedy, and found there instead a throng of fierce guardian deities in full armor. In other words, what happened, surely, was that I witnessed for the first time in my life the germ of all true religious feeling and, in the presence of these half-animal—half-humans, felt a genuine sense of awe. (Nevertheless, I myself still possess no religious feeling.”)

The “jangle” instantly alters the relationship between the narrator and the miners. It removes the barriers of educational and cultural differences, the hierarchy within the mining industry, and generational gaps. It also helps the narrator raise a “genuine sense of awe.” In other words, at the intersection of life and death—marked by the funeral procession—the liminal group experience takes place. Because the narrator and miners are alike confused over the matter of death, albeit in a different degree, it brings their relationship to a more or less equal level. They also represent individuals who do not “possess” anything.

The liminal experience brought about the funeral is also observed by Sanshirō.
The novel is about a naïve country student, Sanshirō, who goes to study in Tokyo and experiences many new things while discovering what he considers the three worlds: the first realm as being distant with “the fragrance of the past”—represented by his mother; the second state as containing those who know “nothing of the real world”—such as scholars, like Nonomiya and Hirota; and the third domain as being “radiant and fluid as spring”—symbolized by women.79

Sanshirō is an indecisive man, which is proved by several events. On his way to Tokyo, he becomes acquainted with a woman who lost contact with her husband after the Russo-Japanese War. He spends a night with her but does not know what to do in that situation. The next day, before they separate, she smiles and says to him: “You’re quite a coward, aren’t you?”80 Another time, he sees a person run over by a train and becomes terrified. He immediately leaves the scene of the accident without trying to help. His feeling there is “the roots of life…work loose…and float off into the dark void.”81

Soon after, Sanshirō falls in love with Mineko, a progressive non-traditional woman. His love, however, is never fulfilled, partly because he does not know whether she loves him or makes a fool of him. Mineko sees a part of herself in him and calls Sanshirō a “stray sheep” suggesting his hesitation and bewilderment. Sanshirō thinks his fate is in the hands of a playful friend, Yojirō, to whom he lends money. Unable to repay the loan, Yojirō arranges for Mineko to lend money to Sanshirō. After Sanshirō receives some money from his parents, he visits Mineko, who is posing as a model at Haratuchi’s art studio, and returns her money.

…He [Sanshirō] had never thought keenly about death; his youthful blood was still too warm for that. A fire leapt before his eyes so gigantic that it could singe his brows, and this feeling was his true self. Now he was headed for Akebono-cho and Haraguchi’s.
A child’s funeral passed him going the other way. Two men in formal coats were the only mourners. The little coffin was wrapped in a spotless, white cloth. A pretty pinwheel was attached to its side. The wheel turned steadily. Each of its five blades was painted a different color. They blurred into one as the wheel turned. The white coffin moved past him, the pinwheel spinning constantly. He thought it a lovely funeral.

Sanshiro looked at other people’s writing and other people’s funerals from the outside. If someone were to come along and suggest that, while he was about it, he look at Mineko from the outside, he would have been shocked, for his eyes were no longer capable of doing that. Indeed, he had never been conscious of a distinction between inside and outside. He knew only that, while he sensed a tranquil beauty in the death of another, there was a kind of anguish beneath the beautiful pleasure he felt from the living Mineko. He would move straight ahead, trying to sweep away this anguish. If he went forward, it seemed, the anguish would leave him. He never dreamed of stepping aside to get rid of it. Incapable of such a thought, Sanshiro viewed death [the gathering of nirvana—“jakumetsu no e”] from afar, as a word on the printed page, and he felt the pathos of early death from a place apart. What should have brought him sadness he viewed with pleasure and felt to be beautiful.82

Watching the funeral procession, Sanshirō—who is unable to differentiate between inside and outside—sees a child’s innocence and the beauty of death. Simultaneously arouses in him a sense of calm and agitation. Ultimately, Sanshirō perceives death, nirvana, and emptiness to be materialized as a printed word. Although in this passage Mineko represents the force of life, according to Norma Field, she also stands for “the dying of youth.” To put it differently, love and death are inseparable in Sanshirō (as well as in Sōseki’s other novels).83 Mineko eventually marries a friend of her brother. Just before doing so, she whispers to Sanshirō: “For I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me.”84 When seen through the point of a liminal person such as Sanshirō, Mineko also emerges as an uncertain individual who represents liminality.

**Conclusion**
This paper has examined the depiction of death in modern Japanese fiction, focusing on the works of Tayama Katai and Natsume Sōseki and reflecting their experiences. They were not the only writers who made literary responses to death during this period. Others were also meditating on death through the act of writing. Ito Sei argues that modern Japanese writers, while recognizing their selfhood, responded to death in two opposite ways, which he categorizes as descending and ascending types. The former suggests experiencing life by going against the social norm, escaping from traditional communal life, and even choosing to destroy their life. On the other hand, the latter type implies transforming one’s perspectives, or seeking religion, and appreciating life by living positively and enjoying nature. Both models were built on the notion of “nothingness” (mu) in Eastern tradition; however, nihilism prevails over the descending type, whereas awareness of mother nature helps the writer in the ascending model realize the self as a trifle yet seek a meaningful way of living despite the hardships of life.\textsuperscript{85} Ito’s typology is helpful to understand the modern Japanese writer’s attitude toward death, but Katai’s and Sōseki’s works suggest that the notion of death itself had changed by this time in modern Japan. In \textit{Western Attitudes toward Death}, Philippe Ariès states:

\ldots In a world of change the traditional attitude toward death appears inert and static. The old attitude in which death was both familiar and near, evoking no great fear or awe, offers too marked a contrast to ours, where death is so frightful that we dare not utter its name.\textsuperscript{86} Ariès also writes:

Thus far we have illustrated two attitudes toward death. The first, the oldest, the longest held, and the most common one, is the familiar resignation to the collective destiny of the species and can be summarized by the phrase, \textit{Et morioe-mur}, and we shall all die. The second, which appeared in the twelfth century, reveals the importance given throughout the entire modern period to the self, to one’s own existence, and can be expressed by another phrase, \textit{la mort de soi}, one’s own death.
Beginning with the eighteenth century, man in western societies tended to give death a new meaning. He exalted it, dramatized it, and thought of it as disquieting and greedy. But he already was less concerned with his own death than *la mort de toi*, the death of the other person, whose loss and memory inspired in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the new cult of tombs and cemeteries and the romantic, rhetorical treatment of death.\textsuperscript{87}

Ariès’s analysis of death in the modern West cannot be simply applied to modern Japanese experience of death; however, it serves as a reference point. Traditionally in Japan, the world of the dead was not clearly separated from that of the living, and this vision still persists today to some degree. The rise of individualism in late nineteenth-century Japan however, produced an awareness of selfhood stronger than ever before and transformed the traditional perspective on the end of life, which had been seen as part of communal and organic processes. Katai’s and Soseki’s literary responses to death stands at a junction where they were concerned about both their own death and others’.

\textsuperscript{1} Author thanks to David Stahl for editing the abstract  
\textsuperscript{3} “Furusato,” *Teihon Katai Zenshu*, vol. 14, 13, 15-8, 33, 56-7. Katai felt he was doomed for a long time between 1893 and 1908, until establishing himself as a novelist with *Futon* and *Sei*. He felt that he had not received sufficient opportunities to fully explore his talents but instead met with strong criticism every month from a journal to which he contributed (Miyauchi, 81, 100).  
\textsuperscript{4} However as a photographer crew member, Katai was not in a position to obtain information related to military strategy and army positions in a timely manner. Tomoko Aoyama. “Japanese Literary Responses to the Russo-Japanese War” *The Russo-Japanese War in Cultural Perspective, 1904-5*, eds. David Wells and Sandra Wilson (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1999), 66-7.  
\textsuperscript{5} Munakata Kazushige, “kaisetsu,” “Dai nigun junsho nikki,” *Teihon Katai zenshū*, vol. 15, 794. In *The Diary of the Second Army Corps at War*, Katai writes, “When I look at the pocket diary…” (91) and “Don’t forget that this is the diary of an individual” (153).  
\textsuperscript{6} “Dai nigun junsho nikki,” *Teihon Katai zenshū*, vol. 15, 4-5.
Tomoko Aoyama compares Mori Ogai’s *Verse Diary* and Tayama Katai’s *Diary of the Second Army Corps at War* as representative examples of Japanese novelists’ responses to the Russo-Japanese War. She states, “Unlike Ōgai, who served in the war for its whole length, Katai’s experience was confined to several months in 1904. While Ōgai’s diary represents the completed work of art, Katai’s represents the process or even the impossibility of creating art. Scenery and incidents are often exclamatorily recorded as wonderful potential material for poetry, painting or some other form of art. For him, ‘life is an eternal battlefield’ and ‘war is the most spectacular thing among all human affairs.’ He is thrilled and honoured to be able to witness this ‘spectacle’ or ‘panorama’, but is often only tantalised in his search for words to describe it. The result is a somewhat overexcited and often hackneyed manner.” Concerning the naturalist writer’s attitude to war, Aoyama further states, “The notion of the writer as ‘life’s war correspondent’ plays a key role in naturalist writings; it sums up the naturalist writer’s interest in the lives of ordinary people and his self-appointed, heroic mission to depict those lives without embellishment” (Aoyama, 66).

8 “Dai nigun junsho Nikki,” 31-3.
11 “Dai nigun junsho Nikki,” 149.
12 “Dai nigun junsho Nikki,” 281.
14 *The End of Jūemon*, which is somewhat similar to Sudermann’s *Der Katzensteg* (known as *Regina*, 1890) and is based on Katai’s witness of an actual event, comes to a conclusion with the murder of *Jūemon*—a rough and wild young man who clashes with his village people because he values his instinct. After *Jūemon*’s death, his lover burns almost the entire village down in revenge and burns herself to death. When the narrator discovers that the villagers built graves for the couple and made offerings to them, he exclaims: “Well, everyone nature [Jūemon’s instinct] finally went back to nature [the order of a society].” For a brief analysis of this novel, see Henshall, 15.
18 *The Quilt and Other Stories by Tayama Katai*, trans. Kenneth G. Henshall (Tokyo: Tokyo
On a zoom-in picture of Walton's *The Last Moments of HRH The Prince Consort*, Alan W. Friedman comments: “showing only the loving family, the children of owing their existence to erotic acts performed in the depicted bed by the dying Albert and his grieving wife.” Alan Warren Friedman. *Fictional Death and the Modernist Enterprise* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 76.


Henshall, *The Quilt*, 49.

Plot-wise, *Futon* is directly related to Gerhart Hauptmann’s *Lonely Lives* (Miyauchi Shunsuke, *Tayama Katai ronkō*. Tokyo: Sō bunsha, 2003), 38. For a discussion of the similarities and differences between *Futon* and *Lonely Lives*, see Fowler, 118. Referring to a Japanese scholar, Fowler also mentions that *Futon*’s conclusions might have been modeled on Zola’s *Therese Raquin*.

In addition to *One Soldier* and *The Sound of Wheels*, the first volume includes *Brother* (Ani, 1907?), a short autobiographical story, begins with “I thought about the dead brother,” leading to the narrator’s discussion of life and death. This story also includes an incident in which the brother’s wife accidentally suffocates her baby during breast-feeding. *A Bundle of Scallions* (Negi hitotaba, 1908) deals with a woman, who steals a bundle of scallions to prevent starvation and ends up killing her infant, while *Anxiety* (Fuan, 1910) copes with the protagonist’s obsession with death and dead bodies. *The Girl Watcher* (Shōjobyō, 1907) ends with the death of the protagonist who falls off a crowded train while obsessively watching a girl. Based on Katai’s memoirs, Henshall writes: “…the story was an attempt by the author to ‘kill off’ his old self and to clear the way for a fresh start in life, when he could openly be his real and unashamedly frank self” (Henshall, *The Quilt*, 19).


“Dai nigun junsho Nikki,” 152.

Lawrence L. Langer. *Death in Modern Literature; The Age of Atrocity* (Boston: Beacon
press, 1978), 125. Concerning Camus’s conscious death, Langer writes: “Perhaps we are to conclude that conscious death, like the absurd, leads nowhere but is a necessary preliminary step in developing an attitude toward the world that excludes nothing. As the iniquities that had to be ‘embraced’—imaginatively consented to—multiplied and intensified in horror, Camus turned to a stage beyond negation of banality and affirmation of life—dying and killing” (p. 130); and “Socrates’ ancient aphorism about the unexamined life gives substance to its modern version that the unexamined death is not worth dying. The unexamined death sanctions the unexamined life; only through confronting death, as for Meursault, may one encounter ‘the secret image of his own life’” (p. 132).

31 Langer, 148.
32 Langer states: “Camus’s prewar works are constructed on the principle that one may and must live so as to prevent death from taking one by surprise. It is an attitude born of crisis, but inconsonant with atrocity” (Langer, 127). *The Plague* reflects Camus’s concern about the atrocity of war.
33 “The Sound of Wheels” in *The Quilt and Other Stories by Tayama Katai*, 196.
34 “One Soldier,” in *The Quilt and Other Stories by Tayama Katai*, 162-3.
36 Herman, 181. Herman refers to Inger Agger’s and Soren Jensen’s work.
38 Nam-lin Hur, 344.
39 “Sei,” *Teihon Katai Zenshū*, vol.1, 181. In Katai’s *Rinshitsu* (*Next Room*, 1907), the narrator makes a similar observation of death: It deeply moves him and nullifies all of his complaints. Thus, he criticizes a physician, who is indifferent to such feelings, and an old woman, who understands death as a matter of course and simply prays to the Buddha (Miyauchi, 176).
40 “Sei,” 188.
41 “Sei,” 192-5.
43 Katai writes: “I started writing ‘Life’ from the 1st March [sic] 1908. Four or five days earlier Shimazaki’s ‘Spring’ had started appearing in the ‘Asahi’, so I realized I had to try all the harder. I knew that my literary position was at a critical point, in the sense that it was at an important yet dangerous stage. ‘The Quilt’ had created something of a literary sensation, and in the New Year I had put out ‘One Soldier’ and ‘The House on the Bank’, which had both received good reviews. If I did not now put everything I could into my
writing, who knows when such an opportunity might come my way again? Such were my thoughts at the time….The material for ‘Life’ was something I had had in mind for several years. It was about people around me, so I didn’t need to use any imagination, but on the other hand it was, for that very reason, difficult to write. I found it particularly difficult to write about my mother. But what else could I do? I resolved to write openly about everything.” Tayama Katai. *Literary Life in Tokyô 1885-1915*, trans. Kenneth G Henshall. Leiden, Brill, 1987, 206-7. “Tokyo no sanjūnen,” *Teihon Katai Zenshū*, vol.15, 625.


Literary representation of contemporary Shinto funeral rites is found in Etō Jun’s *Tsuma to Watashi*.

His diary shows how much he regretted her loss: “While she was alive, I didn’t think she was more important than other children. But now, when she is dead, I think she was the most adorable child.” “My stomach has cracked. My mind, too, it seems, for I feel an incurable sorrow each time I recall [the loss of my child.]” (“Nikki, 1911,” *SZ* vol. 13, 673-4. The second quote comes from Kingo Ochiai and Sanford Goldstein trans. *To The Spring Equinox and Beyond* [Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1985], 324.) For Sōseki, who was recuperating from the Shuzenji crisis, Hinako’s death caused significant damage. He incorporated the incident of her death into a chapter of *To The Spring Equinox and Beyond*, titled “A Rainy Day.” After that, he wrote to his friend: “I began writing ‘A Rainy Day’ on Hinako’s birthday [March 2] and finished it on her hundredth memorial day [March 7]. I’m glad I did it, because it has become a tribute to her” (Miyazawa, “Natsume Sōseki to bukkyō, part 1,” 59).

Marcus, 71.


Marcus, 18.


Karatani Kōjin, 72-81, 87-8. Scholars have made various psychoanalytic analyses as well as directed criticism concerning the psychoanalytic reading of *Ten Nights of Dream*. See,
for instance, Marcus, 10, 210.

54 Omoidasu koto nado, SZ vol. 8, 313-4.

55 Omoidasu koto nado, 292.

56 Yiu, 27.


58 Sōseki’s letter to Komiya Toyotaka, dated July 19, 1907. “I have been writing Gubijinsō every day. You should not be so sympathetic to Fujio. She is an odious woman. Though she might be poetic, she is untamed. She lacks a sense of morality. To kill her in the end is the main idea of this work. If I cannot kill her skillfully, then I will save her. But, even if I save her, someone like Fujio is essentially useless as a human being. At the end, I am going to add some philosophy. This philosophy will consist of a theory. It is for the sake of explaining this theory that I have been writing this entire work. So you must not think that she is any good” (translated by Yiu, 35-6).

59 Karatani, Sōseki ron shūsei, 16. Angela Yiu also translates dōgi as “morality” or “obligation.” By dōgi, however, Sōseki seems to go beyond the differentiation between right and wrong and suggest logicalness or fairness.

60 Gubijinsō, SZ vol. 3, 17.


64 Fujii, 144.

65 Quotes in Bargen, 180-1.

66 Mizukawa, 165-6.


68 Mizukawa, 169.

69 Sōseki Zenshū vol. 1, 440. Quoted and translated in Mizukawa, 169-70.


73 Ama Toshimaro. “The Eye of Pure Objectiveness: Natsume Sōseki’s Search for the
Sōseki began interacting with a Zen priest in 1914 and wrote to him on November 15, 1916—about one month before his death: “…This may seem strange to say but I am an ‘ignorant thing’ who, only after reaching the age of fifty, has become aware of aspiring to follow the Way. Considering when I will be able to devote myself to it, I am surprised at how great the distance is…” (translated in Ama Toshimaro, 136).


The Miner, 91-4.


Sanshirō, 9.

Sanshirō, 43.


Sanshirō, 209.


Ariès, 55-6.