

Article

The Rhythm of Breath in Natsume Sōseki's *Recollecting and Such*

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Abstract: This article examines Japanese novelist Natsume Sōseki's (1867–1916) memoir *Recollecting and Such* (*Omoidasu koto nado*; 1910). I argue that Sōseki invites the reader to imagine breath through his literary representation of both physiological and metaphysical experience and the rhythm of the narrative's experimental poetic form. In concert with the theme of this special issue, I show how *Recollecting and Such* self-reflexively restores and evokes the corporeal experience of sensation beyond just visual perception: the narrative reveals itself as a poetic form of measurement and its first-person narrator a “rhythmanalyst”, someone who listens to the internal rhythms of his own body and then to that of the external world (Henri Lefebvre). The narrator's awareness of the duration, frequency, and intensity of sensation as well as his regular compositions of metered verse—haiku and *kanshi* (traditional Chinese poetry as practiced in Japan; Sinitic verse)—are ways that the narrative measures the limits of life, memory, and sensory experience. The oscillation between prose and poetry in the narrative generates an organic rhythm, simulating the long and short breaths of a convalescing body, which invites the reader to breathe together—“to conspire” in the literal sense—with the text as a form of sympathy.

Keywords: Natsume Sōseki; breath; lyric; form; rhythm; memory; sympathy



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1. Introduction

Breath may not always catch one's eye, but we know it when we feel it. Natsume Sōseki's (1867–1916) memoir *Recollecting and Such* (*Omoidasu koto nado*; Natsume [1910] 2018e) contains scenes representing sensory perception, including those that invite the reader to imagine the feeling of breath:

Back when I was living in England, I hated it with all my heart. Much like how Heine hated England, I hated England with a passion. But when it was time for me to leave, I looked out onto the sea that was London, at the eddying flows of unknown human faces, and I began to feel as if the depths of the reddish-brown air that enveloped them contained a kind of gas that was fit for me to breathe. Standing still at the city center, I looked up at the sky.¹

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 449)

At the end of the memoir, Sōseki's narrator is about to return home from the hospital whereupon he recalls a similar moment of imminent departure: he remembers the miserable years he spent in London and compares himself to German lyric poet Heinrich Heine (1797–1856), who had also written of his disgust for London.² Unlike Heine, the narrator has not abandoned himself to nostalgia for the homeland: as his vision takes in London's vast and bustling urban landscape, ironically, he finds some fellow feeling with its people, noting that he and they all share what he describes as “a kind of gas” (*issu no gasu*). Claiming that this gas is “fit for me to breathe” (*yo no kokyū ni tekisuru*), he stands in stillness—as if in reverence—and gazes at the sky.

This nondescript gas forms a bond between the narrator and other human beings through the act of breathing. Once the gas has joined his own breath, and he is breathing

together with everyone else, the narrator is reminded of breath's connection to the natural world—once it is exhaled, breath becomes air and the sky.

We might chuckle—or cringe in disgust—at the irony that what binds the narrator with other people is gas. In the Meiji period (1867–1912), the word “gas” (*gasu*) likely referred to something with a foul smell, such as hydrogen sulfide, gasoline, or flatulence.³ And if we are to let the reference to Heine's *English Fragments* (*Englische Fragmente*; Heine [1828] 1887)—an essay that comments on the shock and wonder of diverse smells and sights of early nineteenth-century London, from coal smoke and raw fish to beggars and prostitutes—inform our reading of the narrator's own recollection of London, then we might imagine the gas mentioned here is just as unpleasant.

I read this selected passage as metacommentary on *Recollecting and Such*, namely the way the narrative invites the reader to imagine oneself inhaling substances—some stinking like gas—mediated by the narrator's breath in literary form. Although breath is more often than not invisible, I propose it is made palpable to the reader through the process of reading. I examine how Sōseki's work achieves this in two ways: through its representation of both physiological and metaphysical breath and through the rhythm of its experimental poetic form.

Physiological breath refers to the narrator's breathing, or respiration, during his convalescence. *Recollecting and Such* is a retrospective narrative about, among other things, memory loss and restoration. Sōseki scholar Ishizaki Hitoshi (Ishizaki 2017, pp. 587–589) has described the work as a “contemplative essay” (*shisakuteki na zuihitsu*), and, like many Sōseki scholars, has read it as autobiography or memoir that recounts the events of Sōseki's “Catastrophe at Shuzenji” (*Shuzenji no taikan*). Not long after completing his novel *The Gate* (*Mon*; Natsume [1910] 2017c), Sōseki came down with severe abdominal pain, admitted himself to the hospital and was diagnosed with a serious case of stomach ulcers. After receiving treatment, in August of that year, Sōseki vacationed at Shuzenji—a hot spring resort—on the Izu Peninsula. He suffered a relapse of the ulcer, which hemorrhaged, resulting in blood loss and a coma. He survived it and convalesced at Shuzenji until he was well enough to return to the hospital in October. It was at the hospital where he began writing *Recollecting and Such*, which was serialized in installments in both the Tokyo and Osaka *Asahi* newspapers.⁴

As a narrative about a human being's near-death experience, *Recollecting and Such* also represents what I call metaphysical breath, or pneuma. Sōseki—who was also a scholar of English literature—referenced multiple literary and philosophical traditions in his writings. *Recollecting and Such* references the Greek, Anglo-European, Russian, and East Asian traditions.⁵ I use the word pneuma as a catch-all term for Sōseki's representation of metaphysical breath, referring simultaneously to the “soul; spirit” in Christian theology as well as to the “invisible liquid or vapor” that was vital to bodily function in ancient Greco-Roman medicine (Merriam-Webster 2022). I also use it to refer to the “air” or “vital force” (*J. ki*; Ch. *qi*) that humanity shares with nature in traditional East Asian thought. These different kinds of metaphysical breath also speak to the ideas of psychologist and philosopher William James (1842–1910), who compared breath to consciousness.⁶ Sōseki makes explicit reference to *A Pluralistic Universe* (James 1909) in installment 3, where the narrator laments James's death, who coincidentally died on August 26, 1910, a month before Sōseki began writing. The presence of these multiple meanings of breath in *Recollecting and Such* is also evidence that ideas from scientific and religious discourses all converged in Japanese literary writing at the turn of twentieth century.⁷ Thought of in terms of pneuma, breath moves where the body cannot, places of the imagination including the sky, the clouds, and the universe.

These representations of breath afford the narrative its rhythm. To explain what I mean by rhythm, I lean on the conceptual work of Henri Lefebvre (Lefebvre [1992] 2013, pp. 29–30), showing how Sōseki's narrative reveals itself as a poetic form of measurement and its first-person narrator—Sōseki's lyric “I”—a “rhythmanalyst”, or someone who listens to the internal rhythms of his own body and then to that of the external world.⁸ The

narrator's heightened awareness of the duration, frequency, and intensity of sensation as well as his regular compositions of metered verse—haiku and *kanshi* (traditional Chinese poetry as practiced in Japan; Sinitic verse)—are ways, I propose, that the narrative measures the limits of life, memory, and sensory experience, exploring what it means to be human and to breathe again after a close encounter with death. The oscillation between prose and poetry in the narrative generates an organic rhythm, simulating a breathing body, which invites the reader to breathe together—“to conspire” in the literal sense—with the text as a form of sympathy.

This rhythm makes the presence of a person felt in the reader's imagination, distinguishing *Recollecting and Such* as an experimental poetic form—a modern prose poem. Works that have been categorized as *zuihitsu* (essay) traditionally contain the personal musings of the author. When reading *Recollecting and Such*, the reader imagines a personal self via a lyric mode. This mode is initially suggested—furtively—in the work's title: “Omoidasu koto nado.” In English, the title has been translated as *Recollections* (Flutsch 1997; Marcus 2009) and *Remembrances* (Flutsch 2003). A more literal interpretation retains the title's ambiguity: in *omoidasu koto*, the verb *omoidasu*, “to recollect”, is nominalized, giving us “recollecting”; and the *nado* is a suffix attached to nouns, meaning “and the like.” John Nathan retains these elements in his rendering: *Recollecting and Other Matters* (Nathan 2018). Similarly, my rendering “Recollecting and Such” suggests that it is a work about the act of recollecting and something else—the function of poetry, “what poetry can do.” As poets across time and traditions have shown, poetry is breath.⁹ Through the idiom of breathing, I propose that we read *Recollecting and Such* as a prose poem whose rhythm is formed by long and short breaths.

Shorter breaths take form in the sheer number of lyric poems in the narrative. Despite the severity of his illness and memory loss, the narrator is *compos mentis* throughout; this suggests that what on the surface may look like the discursive recollections of an invalid, upon closer examination, be a calculated and virtuosic poetic performance, especially to the ear of the reader. The narrator restores his memory, or at least tries to, through the composition of thirty-five poems—haiku and *kanshi*—across thirty-two installments:

| | | | | | |
|-----|------------------------------|----|-------------------|----|-------------------|
| 1 | Haiku (2) | 11 | Haiku (1) | 22 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) |
| 2 | Haiku (2) | 12 | Haiku (1) | 23 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) |
| 3 | Haiku (2) | 13 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) | 24 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) |
| 4 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) | 14 | Haiku (1) | 25 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) |
| 5 | Haiku (4), <i>Kanshi</i> (1) | 15 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) | 26 | Haiku (1) |
| 6 | | 16 | Haiku (1) | 27 | |
| 7.1 | | 17 | Haiku (1) | 28 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) |
| 7.2 | Haiku (1) | 18 | Haiku (1) | 29 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) |
| 8 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) | 19 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) | 30 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) |
| 9 | | 20 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) | 31 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) |
| 10 | Haiku (1) | 21 | | 32 | <i>Kanshi</i> (1) |

While convalescing and questioning the limits of his own form (his body), the narrator finds solace in composing in these poetic forms through which he engages in a lyrical process of self-healing and sensory restoration. The reader imagines these poems—considering their brevity in comparison to the prose—as short, lyric bursts of breath.

The poetic form of *Recollecting and Such* challenges the linear movement and teleology of modern progress. We might even describe its form as anti-modern, proto-modernist, or, as one scholar has put it, “a new genre.”¹⁰ In Meiji literary history, *Recollecting and Such* might be described as a work of *shaseibun*, or “life-sketch writing”, a new genre of prose writing inspired by the haiku reforms of poet Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), calling for realism and immediacy in poetry.¹¹ Other short, poetic, and episodic works by Sōseki that

might fit the description of “a new genre” include *Ten Nights of Dream* (*Yume jūya*; Natsume [1908] 2018f), *Spring Miscellany* (*Eijitsu shōhin*; Natsume [1909] 2018a), and *Inside My Glass Doors* (*Garasudo no uchi*; Natsume [1915] 2018b); these works traditionally have been collected with *Recollecting and Such*, among other short pieces, in a volume titled *Shōhin*, or “Smaller Gems”.¹²

Any attempt, however, to place *Recollecting and Such* in a literary genre—historical (e.g., *shaseibun*), ad hoc (e.g., *shōhin*), or otherwise (e.g., memoir)—effaces the singularity of the work in Sōseki’s oeuvre and in Meiji literature, a position afforded by its form and sheer number of poems. It could be argued that Sōseki was following the literary innovations of his close friend Shiki, whose deathbed narratives, including *Six-foot Sickbed* (*Byōshō rokushaku*; Masaoka [1902] 1975b), were also works of *versiprosa*, or works that place prose and poetry side by side.¹³ To be sure, *versiprosa* was not new to the tradition and was common in *zuihitsu* and similar genres, including *haibun* (*haikai* prose) from the Edo period (1603–1867); it was also a part of the Late Edo literati (*bunjin*) repertoire, an artisan culture devoted to pursuits in multiple genres across poetry, painting, and calligraphy (Mewhinney 2022). Distinguishing his practice from Late Edo literature, however, Sōseki—and Shiki, to a lesser extent—placed traditional forms (e.g., haiku, *kanshi*) alongside modern vernacular prose, affording his work a more dynamic rhythm and temporality that was also modern.¹⁴

We might also think of its poetic form as an expansion of scientific empiricism in Meiji, informed by the thought of William James and others. In his examination of Sōseki’s literary criticism, most notably *Theory of Literature* (*Bungakuron*; Natsume [1907] 2017a), Thomas Lamarre (Lamarre 2008, p. 74) has argued that Sōseki, following the writings of James, “expands the field of empirical analysis to include the emotional accompaniments to perception as well as the event that generated them.” *Recollecting and Such* can be read as a work of empirical analysis that narrates events in prose while supplying their “emotional accompaniment” in poetry.

The oscillation between prose and poetry represents the temporal shifts in the process of recollecting, manifesting in the way the narrative moves back and forth between the past and the present. As shown in the table above, nearly all installments in *Recollecting and Such* contain, or conclude with, a haiku or *kanshi*. These poems anchor the narrator temporarily in past thoughts and sensations as well as in the lyric present; meanwhile, the surrounding prose narrative represents past and present events in non-chronological order. Speaking to its meandering temporality, Sōseki scholar Takemori Tenyū has called the narrative “circuitous” (*ukaiteki*) (Takemori 1986, p. 181).

As a work about a personal catastrophe that emerged during the height of Japanese imperialism, *Recollecting and Such* has been discussed in terms of national allegory.¹⁵ My contribution to these earlier studies is to examine the work in the context of modern print culture, exploring the specific question of what it means to *read* the work. In the following pages, I go on to suggest that Sōseki’s representation of breath in an experimental poetic form demanded a kind of attunement from the reader—a poetic attention—that challenged the teleological progress of modernity as well as Walter Benjamin’s (Benjamin [1936] 1968) claim that the work of art had lost its aura of authenticity in the age of mechanical reproducibility. The tyranny of the image after the proliferation of film and photography was something with which Japanese writers had to contend in the early twentieth century; Sōseki looked to poetry for ways to represent non-visual sensations, giving form to sound, smell, and touch. In this way, my article answers the call of this special issue by offering close and distant readings of literary representations of breath and showing how *Recollecting and Such* self-reflexively restores and evokes the corporeal experience of sensation in 1910.

The following section examines the narrator of *Recollecting and Such* through Lefebvres’s notion of a “rhythmanalyst”, showing how his process of recollection—and finding his breath again—involves paying close attention to the rhythms of past sensory experiences via compositions of lyric poetry.

2. Recollecting as Rhythmanalysis

The reader is first made aware of the notion of breath in the opening installment when the narrator comments on his process of recollection, which involves composing metered forms of poetry: haiku and *kanshi*. The narrator remembers the day that he leaves Shuzenji—the hot-spring town where he vacations before falling ill again—and returns to the hospital in Tokyo. Lying on a stretcher, he displays a heightened awareness of his senses:

They covered the stretcher with tung-oil paper to keep off the rainfall at dusk. I felt like I had been put to sleep in a pit, and from time to time opened my eyes to darkness. My nose could smell the tung-oil paper. My ears could hear sounds in fragments, raindrops falling on the tung-oil paper, and the faint voices of people who seemed to be escorting me on the stretcher. But my eyes saw nothing. It seems that the chrysanthemum stem that Dr. Morinari inserted in the cloth purse by my pillow broke off in the confusion when we alighted the train.

On the stretcher,
No chrysanthemum in sight,
Just tung-oil paper.

tsuridai ni /nogiku mo mienu / tōyu kana
釣台に野菊も見えぬ桐油哉

I later condensed the scene from that moment into these seventeen syllables.

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 358)

His supine position and the image of his own burial point to *Recollecting and Such* as a memento mori. The suggestion of impending death triggers something in the narrator, sharpening his senses. Although he cannot see anything, he can smell and hear. His attention to the sound is especially acute, as he can make out the fall of raindrops and the faint voices of people. In this way, the narrator speaks to Henri Lefebvre's notion of a "rhythmanalyst":

The rhythmanalyst calls on all his senses: He draws on his breathing, the circulation of his blood, the beatings of his heart and the delivery of his speech as landmarks. Without privileging any one of these sensations, raised by him in the perception of rhythms, to the detriment of any other. He thinks with his body, not in the abstract, but in the lived temporality.

(Lefebvre [1992] 2013, p. 31)

Later in the narrative, there are more "landmarks" where the narrator comments on his breathing and other vital functions. Here, one landmark is clear—his composition of a haiku to record bodily sensations at a specific moment in time, what Lefebvre calls "lived temporality." The idea that the narrator "condensed" (*chijimeta*) a lived experience in a moment of time into lyric form—thereby refiguring the past as the lyric present—also speaks to Roland Barthes's (Barthes 2010, p. 48) description of haiku as a poetry of the instant, as the act of writing "time at once, as-it-happens; Time is salvaged at once = concomitance of the note (of the writing) and what incites it: immediate *fruition* of the sensible and of writing."

Although a Japanese reader would know that a haiku is composed of seventeen syllables, Sōseki made it a point to explain its metered form, the number of syllables. This is one of several instances in *Recollecting and Such* where the narrator—a rhythmanalyst—is concerned with forms of counting and measurement, including poetry. The installment concludes by again associating the act of counting and numbers with speech overheard and poetic sound:

In my hospital room the tatami was still green. The sliding doors had new paper, and the walls a fresh coat of paint. Everything was comfortable and clean—so clean that I immediately recalled the words that assistant director Dr. Sugimoto

had left, reassuring my wife the second time he came to Shuzenji to examine my condition: “We’ll change the tatami and we’ll be waiting for you.” Counting them on my fingers, it has been already sixteen or seventeen days since he made that promise. Indeed, the green tatami have been waiting a long time for me.

I wonder—
How many nights already
Of katydid song?

omoikeri / sude ni ikuyo no / kirigirisu
思いけり既に幾夜の蟋蟀

From that night forward and for a long while this hospital became my second home.

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 359)

The narrator finds himself back in the same—but newly furnished—hospital room. Admiring the green color of the new tatami, he counts the number of days since Dr. Morimoto’s promise to change the tatami; wanting to measure the passage of time again, he composes a haiku, using the trope of katydid song. In haiku poetics, the katydid (*kirigirisu*) is a season word (*kigo*) for early autumn and is known for its monotonous—even hypnotic—drone.

In his study of Sōseki’s poetry, literary critic Kamiyama Mutsumi (Kamiyama 2011, pp. 34–35) has remarked on the striking resonance between the first measure—*omoikeri*—and the third measure—*kirigirisu*—of the haiku: each measure produces a long silence, giving the whole poem a “modulated rhythm” (*merihari no kita rizumu*). In grammatical terms, both measures denote a pause or “sentence stop”: *keri* is a “cutting-word” (*kireji*) in haiku poetics, and *kirigirisu* is a nominal ending (*taigen-dome*). These measures allow for the poem as a whole to simulate the modulated—song-silence-song-silence—rhythm of katydid song.

The visual resonance between the green color of the katydid and the green color of the tatami suggests that the insect could be a poetic figure for the narrator himself. In the installment, there is no mention of anyone else in the hospital room; thus, we assume that the narrator is alone. By choosing a figure whose appearance is small, insignificant, and almost invisible, but whose song is faintly audible, the narrator speaks to the way the sound of poetry and the representation of breath in the narrative will enlist the reader’s attention in the installments to come. In nature, katydids (generally males) produce their sound via stridulation—the rubbing together of its forewings—to attract a mate. As if listening to katydid song, the reader is coaxed into listening to the narrator’s bodily vibrations—breathing—through the rhythm of poetic form.

To be sure, the katydid song, although peaceful, is associated with pathos, distress, and death in the haiku tradition.¹⁶ The irony of the narrator’s attachment to it suggests that the song could be metacommentary on the poems within *Recollecting and Such* as well as on the work as a whole. Anglophone poetry scholar Jeremy Noel-Tod writes on the nature of prose poems: “Prose poems love to hint that they are themselves metaphorical unveilings of their own elusive nature” (Noel-Tod 2018, pp. xxv–xxxvi). As metacommentary, the katydid song is elusive. Other parts of the narrative do not hint so much as offer explicit self-reflexive and self-referential comments about the function of poetry. In installment 5—in which he composes as many as four haiku and one *kanshi*—the narrator addresses the reader, explaining the purpose of including poems in *Recollecting and Such*:

I insert *kanshi* and haiku into *Omoidasu koto nado* not with the mere intention of presenting myself as a haiku or *kanshi* poet. To tell the truth, whether the poems are good or bad is of no concern to me. I would be content should I be able to impart to the hearts of my readers, at the speed of a glance, the message that I was living under the sway of such moods while ill.

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 371)

The narrator stresses that he is not a professional poet, but an amateur, which we might interpret as an attempt to deflect the reader's expectation that his poems adhere strictly to literary convention, as the two genres would suggest. Both haiku and *kanshi* had been practiced for hundreds of years, making them genres of traditional Japanese poetry. *Kanshi* had come to be considered outmoded by the turn of the twentieth century, while haiku had come to be recognized as its own modern lyric genre. Despite their different afterlives in the modern period, both genres still belonged to the category of poetic convention.

The narrator wishes for the reader to evaluate his poems not by tradition or poetic convention but by whether they communicate his "moods" (*jōchō* 情調) while ill. The word *jōchō*—meaning "mood" or "affective state"—first appeared in the Japanese language in the early twentieth century ([Nihon kokugo daijiten 2022](#)); *Recollecting and Such* was one of the earliest works to feature it. By claiming that the goal of composing poems is to impart *jōchō* onto the hearts of readers, the narrator is suggesting that the representation of personal feelings in haiku and *kanshi* is something new.¹⁷

The following *kanshi*—a pentasyllabic quatrain (*gogon zekku*)—from the same installment perhaps will give us a glance of his mood:

The literary man has yet to die;
In illness he appropriates pure leisure.
What does he do in the mountains day by day,
But look at emerald mountains morning after morning?

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>fūryū hito imada shisezu</i> | 風流人未死 |
| <i>byōri seikan o ryōsu</i> | 病裡領清閑 |
| <i>nichinichi sanchū no koto</i> | 日日山中事 |
| <i>chōchō hekizan o miru</i> | 朝朝見碧山 ¹⁸ |

([Natsume \[1910\] 2018e](#), p. 372)

The poem opens with irony: to be literary is to be sick.¹⁹ The ill speaker's self-identification as a man with "literary sensibility" (*fūryū*) references the notion of illness as a pretext for writing, especially among women authors, in late imperial China ([Fong 2010](#)). Despite his declining condition, the speaker declares he "has yet to die". He postpones death by making the silence and immobility precipitated by illness an opportunity for poetry. Lines 3 and 4 throw this poetry into relief, conjuring images of traditional Chinese landscape painting. But the overt repetition—"mountains day by day", "mountains morning after morning"—highlights the cyclicity and monotony of "pure leisure" (*seikan*) and the poem as a whole. The resonance between this repetition and the katydid song in the earlier haiku suggests that sound—and by extension breath—in *Recollecting and Such* is ironic.

Should this *kanshi* communicate his mood or affective state, the narrator hopes that it happens "at the speed of a glance" (*ichibetsu no tokiuchi ni*), a wish that we might also read ironically. On the one hand, his wish acknowledges the affordances of modern print media, that information be transmitted quickly via the visual image. Literary historian Maeda Ai ([Maeda 2004](#)) has argued that the nineteenth century, with the advent of photography and the rise of the image, marked a turning point in the practice of reading, that readers were no longer composing poems to recite them out loud, but to read alone in silence.

While the premodern practice of recitation had waned, it was not gone; poets still gathered to compose in traditional poetic genres—*kanshi*, haiku, and waka (or tanka)—and later published their poems in literary journals and in the newspaper.²⁰ As Robert Tuck ([Tuck 2018](#)) has shown, the social aspect of poetic production, or "poetic sociality", that characterizes much of the premodern tradition, in fact, endured in the modern space of mass print media and went on to form a modern national literary community during Meiji.

As a newspaper serial, *Recollecting and Such* participated in this community, announcing to thousands of readers through its poetry that the narrator is still breathing and that his heart is still beating. Scholar of Anglophone poetry Jonathan Culler (Culler 2019, p. 36) has observed: “lyric is in touch with fundamental bodily rhythms: the timing of heartbeats, of breathing, of walking, of marching, of dancing.” When we consider the grammatical object of the glance—*shōsoku* 消息, translated above as “message”—we are reminded that the narrator is composing lyric poetry, making this “glance” more than meets the eye. *Shōsoku* means “news” or “tidings”, referring to a written correspondence (e.g., a letter) conveying the message of whether a person is “dead” (*shō*) or “alive” (*soku*); the primary meaning of *soku* is “breath”. In this way, the word *shōsoku* serves as metacommentary on the premise of the entire narrative—to recollect and recover from a near-death experience. The narrator communicates his return to life and his senses by composing lyric forms—haiku and *kan-shi*—that require the reader to slow down and sound out the syllables. We might interpret this “glance”, then, ironically, as a metaphor for how lyric makes breath almost visible or heartbeats almost audible.

Although the narrator survived his near-death experience, his recollection of the events surrounding his illness suggests that he might be breathing his last breaths. In the next section, I examine Sōseki’s representation of physiological breath, showing how the narrator’s vivid descriptions allow for the reader to imagine the look and smell of vital fluids.

3. Breath and Blood

In literary history, *Recollecting and Such* is known as the record of Sōseki’s “Catastrophe at Shuzenji”, the time when he fell unconscious for thirty-minutes after coughing up blood. Sōseki represents this event in installment 15: the narrator is intrigued by the fact that he was not aware of the lapse in consciousness and attempts to understand this gap by composing a poem.²¹ Falling into a coma and not knowing it becomes the epistemological crisis in *Recollecting and Such*, as the whole narrative is about restoring lost memories, including those that the narrator does not have any recollection of having. The narrator describes his recollection of seeing his own blood many times in the narrative, including the passage below from installment 14:

Even now I can remember vividly how the shape and color of the vomited blood looked in the shiny metal spittoon. And for that period of time, the image of that raw-smelling mass, congealed like agar, constantly flickered before my eyes.

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 404)

The passage gives us a sense of the smell and texture of his blood, using the adjective “raw-smelling” (*namagusai*) and comparing its firmness to that of agar (*kanten*). Claiming that the image of blood “constantly flickered before my eyes” (*tsune ni mesaki ni chiratsuite ita*) suggests that the image is haunting.

The representation of blood in *Recollecting in Such* was likely a welcome attraction to readers of the *Asahi* newspaper in 1910. Readers might have recognized in Sōseki’s narrator symptoms of what Pau Pitarch Fernández (Fernández 2015) has called “morbid genius”, referring to the way Japanese writers through the 1910s and 1920s deployed tropes of mental abnormality in the name of creative genius. Coughing blood, although not a psychological symptom, was possibly another act of this pathological performance.

Sōseki was not the first Meiji writer to give readers a literary representation of effluvia. Shiki’s deathbed narratives (Masaoka [1901] 1975a, Masaoka [1902] 1975b) were serialized in the *Nippon* newspaper, representing his pulmonary tuberculosis as a public poetic performance. Shiki and Sōseki, among other Meiji writers, were readers of Anglo-European Romantic poetry. English literature scholar Clark Lawlor has shown that the literary representation of breath was part of a literary genre in British Romanticism (Lawlor 2021). Examining the works of Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Samuel Richardson, Lawlor has argued that consumptive breath was fashionable in the Romantic period, as dying from consumption was thought to be a beautiful and divine death: “the shedding of the flesh and lack of scarring or marks on the skin symbolized the notion that one was also

shedding one's sins and rising to the afterlife with divine approval" (Lawlor 2021, p. 292). Although Sōseki nor his narrator suffered from consumption, by saturating *Recollecting and Such* with vivid descriptions of the look and odor of blood, he might have been presenting himself to his Japanese readers as a morbid genius and Romantic celebrity with fashionable—and stinky—breath for all to see, smell, and admire.²²

Elsewhere in the narrative, the narrator remarks that the “raw-smelling” odor of the blood “strikes the nose”, and whenever he moves his body, a “raw-smelling burb blows through my nostrils” (Natsume [1910] 2018e, pp. 382–83). Sōseki's representation of the olfactory senses speaks to the way Lefebvre has argued that smells—for the rhythm analyst—reveal quotidian rhythms:

He does not neglect therefore (though would this not be an issue in excess of the individual, stemming from social circles and the environment?), in particular he does not neglect smells, scents, the impressions that are so strong in the child and other living beings, which society atrophies, neutralises in order to arrive at the colourless, the odourless and the insensible. Yet smells are part of rhythms, reveal them: odours of the morning and evening, of hours of sunlight or darkness, of rain or fine weather. The rhythm analyst observes and retains smells as traces that mark out rhythms. He garbs himself in the tissue of the lived, of the everyday. But the difficulties never cease for him.

(Lefebvre [1992] 2013, p. 31)

Recollecting and Such is garbed in the tissue of the narrator's recollection of his lived experience. The smells mark out the rhythms—the ebbs and flows—of his illness. The narrative in this way works against what Lefebvre describes as the modern “atrophy” of sensory experience by providing the reader with opportunities to imagine colors, odors, and textures.

Installment 13 narrates a dramatic scene of events that the narrator does not remember having experienced, including spewing blood on his wife's yukata. The installment concludes with a *kanshi*—a heptasyllabic quatrain (*shichigon zekku*)—representing blood as a beautiful work of literary tapestry, raising the Romantic conceit of consumptive breath to full volume:

Dripping blood crimson, lettering from my bosom;
Coughed glinting in the twilight, a pool of twilled silk.
Night falls and I idly wonder, is this body bone?
Abed like stone, I dream of wintry clouds.

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| <i>rinri taru kōketsu fukuchū no bun</i> | 淋漓絳血腹中文 |
| <i>haite kōkon o terashite kimon o tadayowasu</i> | 嘔照黃昏漾綺紋 |
| <i>yoru ni irite munashiku utagau mi wa kore hone ka to</i> | 入夜空疑身是骨 |
| <i>gashō ishi no gotoku kan'un o yumemu</i> | 臥牀如石夢寒雲 ²³ |

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 397)

If the descriptions throughout the prose narrative were not enough, lines 1 and 2 of this poem likely imparted to the hearts of Japanese readers that vomited blood was a beautiful thing. Chinese literature scholar Yoshikawa Kōjirō (Natsume 2018c, p. 251) commented that the blood is “none other than the feeling of literature within one's own bosom”, highlighting the allusion to the traditional phrase “brocaded heart, embroidered bowels” (Ch. *jīn xīn xiū chāng* 錦心繡腸), a trope for a great literary artist.²⁴

The images of blood “dripping” (*rinri*) and “lettering from my bosom” (*fukuchū no bun*) suggest a non-linear and dynamic flow, inviting us to imagine the presence of a human being—referenced by way of synecdoche—who is just as alive, beautiful, and full of agency. In her study of the epistemology of rhythm in late eighteenth-century German natural science, Janina Wellman has discussed the work of physician Ignaz Döllinger (1770–1841), making the observation that blood has a rhythm of its own: “The flow of the blood is thus

a rhythmical movement in the sense, first, that it is a single flowing motion composed of discrete states (thickening and thinning, flowing together and apart), and second, that the movement has its very own metronome—it can, so to speak, conduct itself and define its own specific rhythm” (Wellman [2010] 2017, p. 151).

Following this aestheticization of effluvium, the speaker comments on the heaviness of his body, wondering whether his entire body is just bone. Comparing his bedridden state to that of stone, he dreams of “wintry clouds” (*kan’un*), suggesting that even the mutable and formless clouds are frozen in still form just like him. Chinese literature scholar Kuroda Mamiko (Kuroda 2018b, p. 25) has noted the range of sensations in these lines—the hardness of bone, the softness of cloud, the haziness of dream, and the material reality of the cold—and claims that the striking contrast between these images affords “a lingering feeling of wonder” (*fushigi na yoin*). Part of this wonder comes from cloud imagery, which, especially in *kanshi*, can reference the Buddhist afterlife. In his examination of the literary representation of Buddhism in modern Japanese fiction, Michihiro Ama has argued that Sōseki, along with other Meiji writers, embraced a Buddhist worldview after their near-death experiences, writing: “for Sōseki, the Shuzenji crisis was a simulation of dying” (Ama 2021, p. 40). In this way, we might interpret the “wintry clouds” in line 4 as a metaphor for Sōseki’s representation of death as a simulation of death in suspension.

While Buddhist and Daoist tropes appear the most frequently in his poetry, Sōseki was familiar with Christianity, mysticism, and other traditions of spiritual thought. Joshua Rogers has shown how Japanese literature after Meiji was “enchanted” by a confluence of spiritual thought across texts and traditions (Rogers 2021). When the poem’s speaker dreams of wintry clouds—or when the narrator looks up at the sky—we might think of these acts as referencing spirituality on a less local and more global, human scale. In the next section, I turn to how the narrator’s lapse in consciousness and consequent fragility make him wonder about metaphysical experience—forms of consciousness beyond the waking and beyond the living. In this process, I show how his breath—as soul, spirit, and consciousness—roams in spaces where the body cannot go.

4. Breath and Beyond

I opened this article with a passage where the narrator recalls the moment he felt a kind of gas join with his breath, then stands still, looking up at the sky. Once his breath melts into the air, he feels reverence for nature. This is one of many scenes in *Recollecting and Such* of looking up at the sky. Although the narrator’s material circumstances—his supine position—make this perspective natural, his imagination widens this perspective in poems that represent the speaker’s mind—his soul, spirit, or consciousness—moving beyond the sky and into the cosmos. In installment 5, the narrator composes a haiku representing a dream flowing into outer space:

Parting—
A dream, one stream
The Milky Way.

wakaruru ya / yume hitosuji no / ama no gawa

別るるや夢一筋の天の川

I had no idea what it meant then and I still don’t understand it now, but I wonder if the poem could be associations from the time I parted with Tōyōjō indistinctly circling my mind as if in a dream, and then suddenly taking form in a trance.

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 372)

The meaning of the haiku is opaque to the narrator himself. He speculates that the poem could be the amalgam of “associations” (*rensō*)—a new word imported from nineteenth-century psychology—from the time he parted with haiku poet Matsune Tōyōjō (1878–1964), a Sōseki student. These feelings and ideas circle in his consciousness, “suddenly taking form in a trance” (*kōkotsu to dekiagatta*). This state suggests that his mental faculties

were not in control, and that poetic inspiration had come from elsewhere. We might think of the narrator's trance in terms of James's notion of "fringe", the indistinct edge of consciousness, "a sense of the direction from which an impression is about to come, although no positive impression is yet there" (James 1892). In this sense, the poem represents how thoughts and feelings can appear out of nowhere without leaving a positive impression or scientific explanation of the source.

We can read the first measure of the haiku as the representation of leaving one's waking consciousness behind and entering the world of dream. If we take the poem to be representing what happens when one falls unconscious—a kind of "death" when the mind is dreaming—then we might interpret the grammatical subject here to be the speaker's soul. Once the soul has parted from the body, and is floating in space, a dream melts into a single stream of light (*yume hitosuji*) flowing into the vast "river of heaven" (*ama no gawa*)—the Milky Way.

By representing dream as a glowing stream flowing into the Milky Way, Sōseki alludes to James's notion of "stream of consciousness." In his illuminating examination on the influence of James on Sōseki, Iwashita Hiroshi has argued that the idea of "stream" (from James) plays a central role in Sōseki's representation of subjectivity; Iwashita has shown how Sōseki places fictional characters in states of "floating" (*fuwafuwa*), a subjectivity that involves leaving the individual self behind and returning to a space of universal, communal consciousness (Iwashita 2021). This connection between an individual and universal consciousness can be seen in the grammar of Sōseki's poem: the possessive particle *no* connects, as a form of enjambment, the second and third measures—*yume hitosuji no / ama no gawa*—fusing dream with cosmos.

On another level, the haiku speaks to the way James compared his experience under nitrous oxide to religious experience, which he claims is one of many forms of consciousness: "It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different . . . No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded" (James 1902b). Sōseki's haiku might be attempting to represent one or more of these other forms of consciousness, showing, through its poetic form, how the "filmliest of screens" lies between them.

Sōseki continued to use poetry to represent metaphysical breath as another form of consciousness. In installment 10, the narrator remembers heavy rainfall at Shuzenji. He hears from the maid that Tokyo had flooded, making it impossible for his family to come visit him. He receives a telegram from his wife indicating that she and his children are fine. The falling rain soon becomes a metaphor for his declining health: as it pours, his condition worsens. At midnight, he receives a long-distance phone call. He puts the receiver to his ears, but he cannot make out the voice (which is his wife's), describing the conversation "as if one is talking to the wind" (*kaze to hanashi o suru gotoku*) (Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 389). After a letter from his wife arrives later, he is relieved: "I was so overcome after seeing the letter that I forgot about my own illness" (Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 389). Despite this relief, Sōseki concludes the installment with a haiku that represents catastrophe on a cosmic scale:

Sick, I dream—
Streaming from the Milky Way
Surges of water.

yande yumemu / ama no gawa yori / demizu kana
病んで夢む天の川より出水かな

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 389)

The way the poem represents images from the preceding prose speaks to Marvin Marcus's description of the poems in *Recollecting and Such* as a "lyrical synopsis of the respective

episode while pointing to the author's deep and abiding poetic sensibilities" (Marcus 2009, p. 12). In the previous haiku, images of dream and the Milky Way had a figural resonance with the narrator's trance state and the opacity of meaning detailed in the prose. This poem, however, ironizes the narrator's feeling of relief in the preceding prose: by representing the ill speaker's dream inundated by water surging down from outer space, the poem drowns the imagination in a cosmic flood.

The narrator revisits similar imagery that precipitates sensory distress in installment 29 when he becomes fixated on—and haunted by—the rhythmic boom of a *taiko* drum from a Buddhist temple in the Shuzenji town. The whole installment can be read as a metaphor for how *Recollecting and Such* demands the reader pay attention to rhythm and to how the sounds that make up this rhythm are haunting—like breath as a constant reminder of death.

The narrator's haunting by the booming *taiko* drum is associated with poetry. He remembers convalescing in his room at Shuzenji, repeatedly reading a war poem scrawled on a scroll that hung in the alcove. As he listens attentively to the temple drum—which is imagined—he remembers the war poem and imagines himself as an ambushed soldier waiting anxiously for the next boom of the battle drum. The imagination of this sound—the boom of the drum—seems to evoke the terror of approaching death and the arrival of the ineffable:

Each time the sound of the imagined *taiko* drum echoed in my eardrums . . . boom . . . boom . . . I started to recall all these memories. Reflecting on that time I was lying on my back, trying to forget the pain from my bottom, and desperately waiting for night to dawn, the sound of the *taiko* drum at Shuzenji suddenly and ceaselessly boomed in depths of my ears, stirring indescribable associations.

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 441)

The narrator describes the sound of the imagined drum echoing in his "eardrums" (*komaku*) and the "depths of my ears" (*mimi no soko*), giving us a corporeal sense of sound as it resonates deeply in his skull and throughout his body. On the level of language, the echo between the two types of drums mentioned in the passage—eardrum and temple drum—makes Sōseki's literary representation of reverberation all the more resonant.

The narrator studies the boom, describing its occurrence in the darkness of night, detailing its frequency and rhythm. He concludes the installment with the idea that the drum assails his waking consciousness like a "hallucination" (*sakkaku*) and composes a *kanshi*—a heptasyllabic quatrain (*shichigon zekku*)—that refigures this sonic assault in poetic form:

I doubt among those who have been to Shuzenji anyone has studied the temple's *taiko* drum as closely as I have. Consequently, even now from time to time the sound of a boom—sharp and echoless—haunts my eardrums like a hallucination. Whenever that happens, a kind of indescribable feeling recurs.

I dream of circling the galaxy, dew drips in the depths;
Night severs shapes and shadows, the dim lantern glooms.
I was close when falling ill at the inn by the Shuzenji;
Beyond the curtain the slow bell booms, already it is autumn.

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| <i>yume wa seikō o megurite genro yū ni</i> | 夢繞星潢沄露幽 |
| <i>yoru wa keiei o wakachite antō ureu</i> | 夜分形影暗燈愁 |
| <i>kitei yande chikashi shuzenji</i> | 旗亭病近修禪寺 |
| <i>ikkō no soshō sude ni kyūshū</i> | 一梶疎鐘已九秋 ²⁵ |

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 443)

Kuroda has noted the innovation of Sōseki's *kanshi* in *Recollecting and Such*; she claims that while the view of life and death as represented in his poems can be sourced to the tradition, "within the frame of 'dream' emerges a world unto itself" (Kuroda 2019b, p. 16). The poem

opens with the word “dream” (*yume*), framing it; as the images unfold, we imagine the speaker’s mind on the edge of consciousness. In this way, the poem evokes James’s notion of fringe, linking the dream world to the waking world, like in the previous two haiku. In line 1, the speaker dreams of circling the “galaxy” (*seikō*), referring to the Milky Way. The latter half of the line refigures the narrator’s recollection of the haunting temple drum into the image of dew dripping into dark depths. The poem becomes a ghostly and fantastic representation of the imagination swirling in the glow of stars yet also dripping in deep, dark recesses of outer space.

The rest of the poem returns to the material world, suggesting that while the dream is short-lived, the nightmare continues. Line 2 echoes the feelings of terror that nighttime stirs in the narrator, representing night as the agent that “severs shapes and shadows” (*keiei o wakachite*), allowing for the speaker’s shadow to be separated from his body. With shadows and immaterial forms free to their own devices, the speaker feels anxiety and doom, represented by the gloom of a dim lantern.

Lines 3 and 4 give us a sense of how terror strikes the speaker’s ear, representing him at Shuzenji and hearing a boom. The form of line 3 reproduces the echo: the “inn” (*kitei*) is synecdoche for the hot-spring resort, and “Shuzenji” is the name of the Buddhist temple, the source of the sound that haunts the narrator’s recollection. The words “Shuzenji” 修善寺 and “Shuzenji” 修禅寺, although written with slightly different orthography, are homonymous. In line 4, the boom of the *taiko* drum detailed in the prose is refigured as the boom of a “slow bell” (*soshō*), signaling that autumn—the season of decay and melancholy—has already (*sude ni*) arrived. If we interpret the “curtain” (*ikkō*) as a poetic figure for James’s notion of the “filmiest of screens” that lies between forms of consciousness, then the slow boom of the bell becomes the knell in the speaker’s imagination announcing that death, having already arrived, awaits him.

As the poem holds our attention in suspense, we imagine that the speaker might be taking his last breaths. In the next section, I conclude this study by considering why we might think of Sōseki’s representation of breath in *Recollecting and Such* as an invitation to breathe together with the narrator, sympathizing with him.

5. Final Breaths

Much like the recurring boom of the *taiko* drum that haunts the narrator’s eardrums and imagination, Sōseki’s narrative produces a series of booms on its own from the oscillation between prose and poetry, generating an organic rhythm that enlists our attention. By calling this rhythm “organic”, I am referencing the idea of “organic form”, a morphological metaphor for a poetic form that, in the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), “shapes as it develops from within”, (Abrams 1971, p. 213) and that thereby seemed to represent the poet’s inner world “naturally.” I propose that through this organic rhythm, Sōseki solicits sympathy from the reader, inviting him to breathe together—“to conspire” in the literal sense—with the narrator.

Sōseki shows us how to sympathize through the example of his narrator. In installment 21, the narrator compares his own encounter with death with that of Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881), who, in 1849, was sentenced to death by firing squad and at the very last minute received a reprieve:

Within the space of one hour his mind had moved from life to death and then from death back to life, three times in sharp zigzags. And each of these three points were connected to each other firmly at the angle. These changes in themselves must have been a shocking experience. When a man with the conviction that he is to go on living is suddenly told that in the next five minutes he is to die, he comes to terms with death and holds on to his remaining five minutes of life. He waits for death’s imminent arrival, all the while conscious of the minutes counting down, four, three, two, and just when he thought it would take him, death is immediately sent back whence it came—that moment is called a new life. For someone as neurotic as I am even one of those three phases would be

unbearable. A fellow prisoner who actually shared the same fate as Dostoevsky did indeed go insane.²⁶

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 418)

The passage speaks to the representation of death in *Recollecting and Such*. The image of the “zigzag” (*kyokusetsu*) pattern in Dostoevsky’s mind evokes the narrator’s own “death” and “coming back to life” as well as the temporality of his recollection, moving event after event in non-chronological order. The claim that these critical moments are “connected to each other firmly at the angle” suggests that this geometric form is whole and not fragmentary, indicating that life and death are part of the same path.

The way the narrator inhabits Dostoevsky’s mind and imagines him counting down the few minutes he has left to live before being shot speaks to the way that the reader of *Recollecting and Such* inhabits the mind of the narrator and imagines with him forms of measurement, the passage of time, the intensity of sensation, and the liminal space between life and death. While the circumstances are different—in that the narrator is not waiting to be executed before a firing squad—the heightened awareness of sensation is similar. By imagining Dostoevsky at this critical moment, the narrator establishes a form of identification with him, and the reader, in turn, learns to feel sympathy for the narrator.

Moments such as this one, along with the many poems and vivid descriptions in the prose, evoke what William James has called the “warmth and intimacy” characteristic of experiences that the mind can appropriate as its own—as felt memories: “Remembrance is like direct feeling; its object is suffused with warmth and intimacy to which no object of mere conception ever attains” (James 1892). Remembrances are special in this way because we have a warm and intimate attachment to them; memories afford a sense of a “personal self”, which James argues is essential to the subject’s awareness of his own consciousness.

While many of the memories in *Recollecting and Such* are disturbing, the narrator’s attachment to them brings the reader closer to knowing another human being. The narrative concludes with a final attempt to solicit the reader’s sympathy, through a *kanishi*—a heptasyllabic regulated verse (*shichigon risshi*)—that brings the narrative full circle:

Now that it is done, I can catch my breath;
How can I live the rest of my life, left over like cinders?
Wind passes over the ancient gorge, autumn sounds stir the air,
The sun sinks into secluded bamboo, stygian colors fall.
Thoughtlessly I said I would stay three months in the mountains,
Little did I know another sky stretched beyond the gate.
Let my return not be late for the season of yellow blossoms,
Chances are a roving spirit dreams of the old moss at home.

| | |
|--|-----------------------|
| <i>banji kyū seshi toki issoku kaeru</i> | 萬事休時一息回 |
| <i>yosei ani shinobin ya zankai ni hisuru ni</i> | 餘生豈忍比殘灰 |
| <i>kaze wa kokan o sugite shūsei okori</i> | 風過古澗秋聲起 |
| <i>hi wa yūkō ni ochite meishoku kitaru</i> | 日落幽篁暝色來 |
| <i>midari ni iu sanchū ni sangetsu todomaru to</i> | 漫道山中三月滯 |
| <i>nanzo shiran mongai ni itten hiraku o</i> | 詎知門外一天開 |
| <i>kiki okururu nakare kōka no setsu</i> | 歸期勿後黃花節 |
| <i>osoraku wa kikon no kyūtai o yumemuru aran</i> | 恐有羈魂夢舊苔 ²⁷ |

(Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 451)

The poem opens with the affirmation that the speaker has survived the worst of it, referring to his miraculous return from the dead—an echo of the opening of *Recollecting and Such* when the narrator is lying down, waiting to be transported back to his home in Tokyo. The poem ends with the same feeling of waiting and indeterminacy: although the speaker

wishes that he will be back in time to see the yellow blossoms, he suggests that all that is possible at this point is for his “roving spirit” (*kikon*) to be dreaming of home.

We can think of this “roving spirit” as a metonym for his breath, consciousness, and soul, making the poem an allegory for the representation of breath in *Recollecting and Such*. In the opening line—“Now that it is done, I can catch my breath”—the speaker figures his recovery through the image of “breath.” The “return” (*kaeru*) or cyclicity of breath speaks to the rhythm generated by the recursive oscillation between prose and poetry, simulating cycles of breath. Although these cycles of breath are hard to imagine visually, the reader can feel the narrator and the work as a whole “breathe” through the process of reading. As Jeremy Noel-Tod writes: “Without the visual architecture of verse, the prose poem is not immediately identifiable on the page. When read aloud, however, it is often characterized by the kind of echoic patterning that we associate with verse, arriving at its conclusion with a resonant neatness” (Noel-Tod 2018, p. xxviii).

In this way, I have tried to show how Sōseki’s modern prose poem challenged the dominance of the visual image in the age of mechanical reproduction through its representation of breath—which can be heard, smelled, and felt as rhythm. This rhythm, although varying throughout the narrative, is a sign of life, speaking to Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s pronouncement: “The poet is he who, in the word, produces life” (Agamben [1996] 1999, p. 93). *Recollecting and Such* demonstrates how life and poetry come together in breath.

Considering the history of 1910, we might think of Sōseki’s choice to represent breath in literary form as a humanistic gesture, offering relief to the imagination from the entrapment of ideology and giving readers—wherever they might be, in the metropole or in the colonies—a means to cope with life, especially during dark times. English literature scholar Alexander Freer (Freer 2015, p. 549, p. 563) has proposed rhythm-making as “an activity of sense-making and coping”; he argues that we should “view language as a vehicle of human coping, rather than the storehouse of lost human value. Form cannot ‘hide’ extra content, only prop up our desire to believe that something is hidden.” In this light, Sōseki’s invitation to breathe together with his narrator could be considered a generative way of getting us to rediscover human value in the very hidden form of breath. Although sometimes it feels as if we are inhaling breath that smells like gas or vomit, affording us this ironic form of intimacy is perhaps what Sōseki felt was most honest and most human.

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Notes

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

² Sōseki alludes to the water metaphor in the opening of Heine’s essay: “I have seen the greatest wonder which the world can show to the astonished spirit; I have seen it, and am more astonished than ever—and still there remains fixed in my memory that stone forest of houses, and amid them the rushing stream of faces, of living human faces, with all their motley passions, all their terrible impulses of love, of hunger, and of hate—I am speaking of London” (Heine [1828] 1887).

³ Mori Ōgai (1862–1922) used the word *gasu* to refer to hydrogen sulfide in *Vita Sexualis* (*Wita sekusuarisu*; Mori [1909] 1972). In the same year, the word *gasu* appeared in Sōseki’s travelogue *Travels in Manchuria and Korea* (*Mankan tokorodokoro*; Natsume [1909] 2018d), referring to flatulence. On the shores of Hokkaidō, the word can also be used to refer to thick fog or smoke from the ocean. (Nihon kokugo daijiten 2022)

⁴ This article examines the work serialized as *Omoidasu koto nado* in the Tokyo *Asahi* newspaper from October 29, 1910 to February 20, 1911, and in the Osaka *Asahi* newspaper from October 29, 1910 to March 5, 1911. The day of the first installment was the same for both the Tokyo and Osaka newspapers, but from the second installment, the publications differed by days or even

weeks. Installment 7 was published in two parts. Although the serial concluded after thirty-two installments, Sōseki published a postscript entitled “Byōin no haru” (Spring in the hospital) in the Tokyo *Asahi* on April 13, 1911 (April 9 in Osaka). When the serial installments were published in book form in *Kirinukichō yori* (From the Scrapbook) on August 18, 1911, the postscript appeared as chapter 33 of *Omoidasu koto nado*.

5 *Recollecting and such* is replete with references to scientists, philosophers, poets, and other intellectual luminaries of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries: William James, Henri Bergson, Ivan Turgenev, Herbert Spencer, Henrik Ibsen, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Thomas De Quincey, and Friedrich Nietzsche, as well as Hakuin, Ogyū Sorai, and also Chinese poets from the Qing dynasty (1644–1912).

6 James: “the stream of thinking . . . is itself to consist chiefly of the steam of my breathing . . . breath, which was ever the original of ‘spirit,’ breath moving outwards, between the glottis and the nostrils, is, I am persuaded, the essence out of which philosophers have constructed the entity known to them as consciousness. *That entity is fictitious, while thoughts in the concrete are fully real. But thoughts in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are.*” (James 1902a)

7 Joshua Rogers (Rogers 2021) has examined how ideas from science and religion converged in literary theory and production in early twentieth-century Japan.

8 Lefebvre compares the rhythm analyst to a poet: “Does the rhythm analyst thus come close to the poet? Yes, to a large extent, more so than he does to the psychoanalyst, and still more so than he does to the statistician, who counts *things* and, quite reasonably, describes them in their immobility. Like the poet, the rhythm analyst performs a verbal action, which has an *aesthetic* import. The poet concerns himself above all with words, the verbal. Whereas the rhythm analyst concerns himself with temporalities and their relations within wholes.” (Lefebvre [1992] 2013, p. 33)

9 William Wordsworth: “Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge.” (Wordsworth [1800] 2014, p. 88)

10 Maria Flutsch has called it a new literary genre: “In its form, unique among Sōseki’s works, *Recollections* could be said to present a microcosm of his whole oeuvre. This is because it contains miniature versions of every literary form Sōseki ever used, moulded together into a new genre.” (Flutsch 1997, p. 6)

11 Daniel Poch has examined Sōseki’s lyrical novel *Pillow of Grass* (Kusamakura; Natsume [1906] 2017b) as a work of *shaseibun*. (Poch 2013; Poch 2020, pp. 179–208)

12 *Shōhin* is the title of vol. 12 of *Teihon Sōseki zenshū*. “Smaller Gems” is the title of chapter eight in Nathan’s biography of Sōseki. In the chapter, Nathan examines Sōseki’s shorter fiction, works that are not regarded as *shōhin*, but could be, as Nathan’s title suggests. (Nathan 2018, pp. 107–16)

13 Janine Beichman (Beichman 1986, pp. 116–45) and Donald Keene (Keene 2013, pp. 171–86) have examined Shiki’s deathbed narratives.

14 This dissonance in register (classical versus modern vernacular) is what distinguishes *Recollecting and Such* from *zuihitsu* (essay), *nikki* (diary), and other genres of *versiprosa* from the premodern tradition. As H. Mack Horton observes, prose and poetry are part and parcel to the structure of premodern Japanese diaries: “The juxtaposition of genres within the diary format is itself a classical tradition. Most notable, of course, is the mix of poetry and prose, ‘versiprosa,’ which is a characteristic of most if not all diaries in the Japanese language since Tsurayuki’s *Tosa Nikki*.” (Horton 2002, p. 95)

15 For example, Ishizaki (Ishizaki 2017, p. 589) has read *Omoidasu koto nado* as a veiled critique of the political events of 1910, including the failed assassination plot against the Meiji Emperor, known as the “High Treason Incident” (*taigyaku jiken*). Maria Flutsch (Flutsch 2003, p. 239) has argued that the text is a critique of Japanese imperialism: “Sōseki uses the tropes of illness and the deaths of numerous friends to focus on the place of individual human experience, memory and the past in relation to concepts of nature, time and death, in a powerful critique of the dominant political discourses of his day.”

16 Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) on seeing the helmet of a fallen warrior in *Narrow Road to the Deep North* (*Oku no hosomichi*; Matsuo [1689] 1959, p. 94): “What pathos! / Under the helmet / A katydid sings” (*muzan ya / kabuto no shita no / kirigirisu*).

17 In installment 4, the narrator reiterates the idea that he is offering the reader something new in a *kanshi* that refers to itself and other compositions as “new poems” (*shinshi* 新詩). (Natsume [1910] 2018e, p. 367)

18 See annotations to this poem. (Natsume 2018c, pp. 244–45)

19 In her reading of another Sōseki *kanshi*, Kuroda Mamiko has pointed out that Sōseki used the word *fūryū* to refer to Shiki’s illness (Kuroda 2018a, pp. 16–17).

20 This practice survives on a much smaller scale today.

21 Kuroda Mamiko (Kuroda 2019b) has performed a detailed examination of this poem.

22 It appears that the glamor of being tubercular did not last in literary history. William Johnston (Johnston 1995) has shown how, in later literature, tuberculosis came to be represented as stigmatized.

23 See annotations to this poem. (Natsume 2018c, pp. 251–52).

24 Kuroda Mamiko (Kuroda 2018a, pp. 16–26) has read the images of blood and bone in Sōseki’s poem as allusions to the Late Tang poetic genius Li He (791–816 CE).

25 See annotations to this poem. (Natsume 2018c, pp. 248–50).

- ²⁶ Modified from Flutsch's translation. (Flutsch 1997, pp. 69–70).
- ²⁷ See annotations to this poem. (Natsume 2018c, pp. 252–254). Kuroda Mamiko (Kuroda 2019a, pp. 12–21) has added more context to these annotations by Ikkai Tomoyoshi, showing how this poem features a recurring image—what she calls “the polyphony of water”—in Sōseki's *kanshi* and prose fiction.

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