

Article

Real Animals and Where to Find Them: in the Works of Shimazaki Tōson and Shiga Naoya

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ABSTRACT: Nature in general and animals in particular are part of our lives: we might love to be near them and take solace in interacting with them; or we might be disgusted or afraid of them. Nevertheless, in the end we are still largely dependent on them for air, food, labour, protection, or companionship. Nature and animals have also always featured widely and in various forms in visual arts and literature. Fables and folktales impart moral teachings by personifying animals, or by temporarily making their world come into contact with the human world; since the beginning of time, humans have projected their loneliness, longing, or anger on quiet forests, the starry sky, or a raging bull, through what David H. Thoreau, the pioneer of nature writing, called “correspondences”—a trope that often ends up making nature itself invisible.

This paper discusses four early 20th century works by novelists Shimazaki Tōson of the Naturalist movement, and Shiga Naoya of the Shirakaba movement, in search for “real animals,” i.e., animals that do not quite “correspond” to the narrators’ or characters’ feelings, do not impart any kind of moral teachings, but instead look back at us, “without moving, just to see,” like Derrida’s cat in “The Animal That Therefore I Am.” Focusing on the “Otherness” these animals—wild as well as domesticated—display, I analyse their interactions with the humans around them, in order to shed light on issues such as death, destiny, guilt and responsibility.

KEYWORDS: animals, realism, ecopoetics, Shimazaki Tōson, Shiga Naoya

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1. Introduction: Looking for Real Animals

I am a cat. I don't have a name yet.

I have no idea where I was born—I only remember that it was a dark, damp place, and I was crying. That's where I saw a human being for the first time. I heard afterwards that human was a student, the worst type of all. Rumour even has it that students sometimes catch us, to boil and eat. At that time, though, I knew nothing about anything, so I wasn't particularly afraid...¹ (p. 1)

Thus begins Natsume Sōseki's famous novel, *Wagahai ha neko de aru* (*I Am a Cat*, 1905–06), in which a nameless house cat observes the humans around him and whimsically reports on their foibles. The encounter between the newborn kitten and the human race is recounted through a combination of innocent first impressions (the surprisingly hairless face of the human; his big hands; the smoke coming out of his mouth and nose, etc) and subsequent knowledge (the human is a student, who might on occasion kill cats—or perhaps animals in general, as the language is ambiguous; the smoke coming out of his face is tobacco, etc). This recollection is prefaced by two short sentences: the first one, in which the narrator announces he is a cat, using the (slightly pompous) pronoun *wagahai* to refer to himself, imitating perhaps his master; and the second one, in which he subtly complains about not having a name “yet.” The lack of a name comes up again several times throughout the novel and is one of the features that define Sōseki's cat, who, it must be said, is not an actual, real cat. While he might nap on the veranda, steal fish from the dinner table, and scratch the tatami mats with his claws, he can also read and understand human language, and, most importantly, wants a name—in other words, a place in the human logocentric order. This is definitely different from the cat Derrida talks about in “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)” :²

I have trouble repressing a reflex dictated by immodesty. Trouble keeping silent within me a protest against the indecency. Against the impropriety that comes of finding oneself naked, one's sex exposed, stark naked before a cat that looks at you without moving, just to see. (...) It is generally thought, although none of the philosophers I am about to examine actually mention it, that the property unique to animals and what in the final analysis distinguishes them from

¹ My translation. A full translation by Aiko Ito and Graeme Wilson appeared from Tuttle Publishing in 1972, but for this paper I used my own, more literal, rendition.

² “L'Animal que donc je suis (à suivre),” address given by Jaques Derrida at the 1997 Cerisy Conference on the “autobiographical animal.” The quotations above are from David Wills's English translation, which appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28 (2), Winter, 2002, pp. 369–418.

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man, is their being naked without knowing it. Not being naked therefore, not having knowledge of their nudity, in short without consciousness of good and evil. (...) I must make it clear from the start, the cat I am talking about is a real cat, truly, believe me, a *little* cat. It isn't the figure of a cat. It doesn't silently enter the room as an allegory for all the cats on the earth, the felines that traverse myths and religions, literature and fables. (p. 372–374. Emphasis mine, I.H.; same applies to all subsequent quotes.)

When Sōseki's cat observes human beings, it does not look at them “without moving, just to see,” but instead freely offers judgements that stem from his all too human “consciousness of good and evil.” The cat does not have a name and is painfully aware of this form of “nakedness.” In a nutshell, what we encounter in this novel is not a “real cat,” but the “figure of a cat:” one of the many symbolic animals that “traverse myths and religions, literature and fables.”

We all grew up with such animals; in modern times, at least, they have probably played a more important role than their living counterparts in shaping our mental and moral spaces. In literature and the arts in general, animals and nature have often stood for something else, something inherently human—after all, such works of representation can only come from the minds and hands of humans and are thus contaminated with human self-reflection. A father's anguish over his son's departure for battle is projected upon a dark, stormy forest, and star-crossed lovers appear to find respite when looking at the same night sky; the fox is cunning, the pig dirty, the cat lazy, and the way such qualities are played out against more desirable ones—the wisdom of tortoises, or the loyalty of dogs—is meant to teach human children life lessons on good and bad, right and wrong.

But personification and anthropomorphism, or the correspondence between the human and the non-human, as seen for instance in the works of American nature writer Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) or philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), essentially make nature invisible, or barely visible, using it as a mirror for human interiority, or as a means to reflect the transcendental. On the other hand, as Yamada³ notes, 20th century environmentalist writers such as Edward Abbey (1927–1989; author of *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness*, 1968) et al show a keen awareness of the anthropocentrism inherent in correspondences, and attempt to approach nature as existence, not as representation. Acknowledging the difficulty of this approach, they also recognise that correspondences are a means of coming in contact with nature, an absolute Other that could not otherwise be incorporated in the framework of human experience. According to Sasaki, Jonathan Bate (b.1958; author of *The Song of the Earth*, 2000) furthers this discus-

³ 山田悠介「交換」(小谷一明・巴山岳人・結城正美・豊里真弓・喜納育江編『文学から環境を考える—エコクリティシズムガイドブック』勉誠出版, 2014).

sion, referring to the representation of nature without symbolism, i.e., giving voice to the “silence of nature,” as an act of “ecopoetics,” and arguing that the actions of writing and reading in themselves can, and should be, ecological.⁴

The same tendencies to strip nature of its veil of symbolism can be seen in the way modern reformers of Japanese *tanka* and *haiku* Masaoka Shiki and Takahama Kyoshi approach literary sketching after nature, *shaseibun*, debating whether descriptions should include or not “the historical fascination,” in other words the weight of literary tradition that connects the moonflower (*yugao* in Japanese), for example, with the character Yugao of *Genji Monogatari* fame; Shiki is leaning towards writing about the flower only as it appears before one’s eyes, and maintains that this would allow for the discovery of new things, invisible to the ancients,⁵ while Kyoshi proposes that the beauty of nature is half cultural, and cautions that doing away with any and all references to older representations would mean killing off half of this beauty.⁶ Shiki’s skepticism towards what he calls “symbolic” or “weak description,” and his focus on the “true description” that can represent nature as is (*ari no mama*) will be further complicated in the theoretical discourse on description as painting (*byōsha*) put forth by Tayama Katai (1872–1930) and illustrated in the work of Japanese Naturalist/realist writers of the 20th century (such as the two discussed in this paper).

In her criticism of anthropocentrism, while recognising humans as agents of meaning-making, Donna Haraway advocates for a reevaluation of the ethical and cultural practices that shape our relationships with the non-human world. Her *Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*⁷ puts forth the following definition of “companion species:”

“Companion species” (...) must include such organic beings as rice, bees, tulips, and intestinal flora, all of whom make life for humans what it is—and vice-versa. (p. 15)

Thus, human-landscape couplings fit snugly within the category of companion species, evoking all the questions about the histories and relations that weld the souls of dogs and their humans. (...) I want to tell stories about relating in significant otherness, through which the partners come to be who we are in flesh and sign. (p. 22)

In her book, Haraway focuses on dogs as companion species, but the argument expands

⁴ 佐々木郁子「環境詩学」(小谷一明・巴山岳人・結城正美・豊里真弓・喜納育江編『文学から環境を考える—エコクリティシズムガイドブック』勉誠出版, 2014).

⁵ 「叙事文」(『日本』1900).

⁶ 「俳話 二」(『ホトトギス』1904).

⁷ Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003.

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beyond pets to cattle and experimental animals, the discussion about “significant otherness” and partnerships “in flesh and sign” applicable to all possible human-landscape and human-nonhuman couplings. We can say, in Haraway’s own words, that all animals are “other worlds,” and the experience of “sharing life with a different being” is essential to all; this sharing is always to be done in the spirit of “unconditional love,” inhabiting “an inter-subjective world that is about meeting the other in all fleshly detail of a mortal relationship.”

Haraway’s “fleshly detail of a mortal relationship” brings to mind—perhaps somewhat forcedly—Derrida’s focus on the animal as “a mortal existence” that “refuses to be conceptualized” or use the vehicle of mythology and literature to traverse the ages—instead standing before us, staring us down. Of course, one must keep in mind that Derrida uses the cat as the premise for launching into an abstract discussion on animal ontology and stops short of truly engaging with the “real cat” that looks at him. The “otherness” that Haraway and Derrida perceive in animals is also of a different caliber: Haraway’s implies companionship, as the expression “significant other” clearly shows, while Derrida’s does not, as indicated by the fact that he refers to the cat’s point of view as that of an “absolute/wholly other.”

On the other hand, it is indeed true that both Derrida and Haraway focus on the potential of a de-anthropomorphising gaze that would allow us to take in the fleshly reality of the non-human animal; nevertheless, it should also be mentioned here that they both develop their critiques of anthropocentrism starting from animals that are closest to us: pets. With their ideas in mind, my paper will go on to discuss four early 20th century works by novelists Shimazaki Tōson of the Naturalist movement, and Shiga Naoya of the Shirakaba group, looking at the “real animals” they describe, which run the gamut from pets to pests, from wild to domesticated. By analysing the way in which they are represented, i.e., without necessarily corresponding to the narrators’ or characters’ feelings, and without imparting any kind of moral teachings, I will attempt to shed some light on issues such as death, destiny, guilt, and responsibility in the human-nonhuman world.

While it is true, as Buell et al point out, that artistic and literary creations, as well as scholarly and philosophical debates about the borders or interrelations between the human and the animal “remain fundamentally human,” it is through such discourses that “the literary imagination can go far toward envisioning how the world presents itself” to other beings, thus helping us “relativize the human perspective as one among many.”⁸ Without the rhetoric of correspondence, the “real animals” described in the works of the two authors discussed in this paper have the potential to give voice to the silence of

⁸ Lawrence Buell, Ursula K. Heise, and Karen Thornber “Literature and Environment,” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 2011 (36).

nature and allow us to discover post-human/post-modern connections, heretofore invisible to “the ancients.”

2. Shimazaki Tōson: The Slaughterhouse Scene in *Chikuma River Sketches* and *The Broken Commandment*

Shimazaki Tōson (1872–1943) is known as one of the most prominent Naturalist writers. As Japanese Naturalism (*shizen shugi*) gained momentum around the turn of the 20th century, its proponents advocated for the description of people and events exactly as they are (*ari no mama*), often obtaining inspiration from their own environment and experiences. Tōson was first a Romantic poet in his twenties and later became (in)famous as the author of numerous novels and short stories based on his own life and the life of his family and friends. He also published numerous collections of travel writing and children’s stories; as is to be expected, in the former, descriptions of nature and the landscapes the narrator moves through play a central role, while in the latter animals are often present, sometimes in the personified form characteristic to fairy tales, and sometimes in their “real” form, as the object of (almost) scientific observation. Animals and nature also make their appearance in Tōson’s novels, where they are often only part of the background, and only sometimes play a more important (but usually supporting) role.

One such novel is *The Broken Commandment* (*Hakai*), published in 1906 and focusing on the identity struggles of a schoolteacher (Segawa Ushimatsu) belonging to the former pariah class of the *burakumin*. The class system had been abolished after the Meiji Restoration, but the *burakumin* continued to be discriminated against, a fact that often forced them to conceal their origin—as Ushimatsu too does in the novel. When the protagonist’s father is accidentally killed by a bull, he travels back to his village to participate in the funeral and the slaughtering of the bull. He takes in both the scenery of his native land and the slaughterhouse scene, in which several *burakumin* are directly involved, while pondering on the implications of his father’s death and the “commandment” (not to reveal his status) that he has promised him to keep. The *burakumin* workers are described as “brutish” in this episode, and the protagonist struggles with his ambivalent feelings towards his origin.⁹

The Broken Commandment (from here on referred to as *The Commandment*) is not an autobiographical novel, like most of Tōson’s later work, but it is directly based on

⁹ For a discussion of Tōson’s novel as a reflection on *burakumin* as a “disease” affecting the body of the nation, see Michael Bourdagh’s “The Disease of Nationalism, the Empire of Hygiene: *The Broken Commandment* as Hygiene Manual,” *The Dawn That Never Comes: Shimazaki Tōson and Japanese Nationalism*, Columbia University Press, 2003.

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his experience in and around Komoro (present day Nagano prefecture), where he taught between 1899 and 1905. While in Komoro, Tōson wrote a series of literary sketches about the nature, people, and climate (*fūdo*) of the area, which were published as a collection called *Chikuma River Sketches* (*Chikumagawa no sukecchi*; from here on referred to as *The Sketches*) in 1913, after serialisation in the magazine *Chūgaku Sekai* from June to September 1911. Even though the collection came out after *The Commandment*, the sketches were actually written prior to the novel. Here, I would like to compare the way in which humans and animals are described in the episodes titled “Slaughterhouse” (I, II, III, and IV) in *The Sketches*, with Chapter 10 of *The Commandment*, which focuses on the slaughtering of the bull that had killed Ushimatsu’s father. Let me begin by looking side by side at the landscape described in the two works: the first quote is from *The Sketches*, the second from *The Commandment*.

It may be the beginning of a new year, but it is a cold, yellowish morning sun that shines through the glass of the train windows. The stands of leafless trees outside are melancholy and there is not a soul out in the countryside. I see silent snow-covered valleys, mulberry fields enclosed by their stone fences, and the clinging brown leaves of the mountain beech. (...) The cold climate and poor soil have naturally created a hard-working people. Here the fields of Shinshū do not produce as rich a yield of vegetables as those in Jōshū.¹⁰ (p. 80)

They had started out early. The road was still muddy from the dew, and cocks were crowing as they made their way through thick mist. But the day was mild, like early spring, even the dead grasses by the roadside seeming to revive in its gentle warmth. (...) Tiny green shots, reminders of man’s longing for spring, carpeted the wheat fields lining the road. Each of the four men saw the landscape about him with different eyes. (...) For these three, talk of the country was always talk of men’s labor and livelihood, while for Ushimatsu, so much younger, the landscape had so many other associations than those of work.¹¹ (p. 105)

The first-person narrator in *The Sketches* gives a direct and objective account of the winter landscape he sees as he heads to Ueda to visit a slaughterhouse. The scene is almost devoid of human presence, and there is little feeling or conjecture in the description. The narrator concludes this descriptive passage with a general comment on the link between climate, geography, and people’s character. The second quote, from *The Commandment*,

¹⁰ For the quotations from *Chikuma River Sketches* I am using William E. Naff’s translation (University of Hawaii Press, 1991).

¹¹ For the quotations from *The Broken Commandment*, I am using Kenneth Strong’s translation (University of Tokyo Press, 1974).

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also describes the protagonist going to a slaughterhouse in Ueda, together with his uncle, his friend Inoko Rentarō, and a lawyer. The description presents the world “as is” for the most part, but some natural elements are also made symbolic of human feelings. The omniscient narrator warns the reader of the difference in gaze among the four men—for three of them, the scenery (fields, cattle) is simply linked to livelihood and work, while for Ushimatsu, it is imbued with memories and nostalgia. We can read here a first sign of the difference between those who inhabit the land, and those who visit it as landscape; such signs will continue to appear in the slaughterhouse episode in various forms and with various nuances.

The descriptions of the cattle brought to slaughter and their interaction with the butchers are also quite different in the two pieces. The scene in *The Sketches* is quoted below:

A black bull of the Nanbu breed is now led into the central courtyard. The tip of the nose looks white. The two other animals still tied up in the holding pen begin to struggle. One of the butchers goes up beside the red cow, pushes down on its nose, and calms it, saying “Dō, dō!” The black mongrel bull tied beside it shakes its head from side to side and then runs around the post to which it is tied, struggling to escape. It looks as though they are putting up a final battle almost by instinct. In contrast, the bull that has been led forward is relatively calm. A purplish film has settled over its eyes. (p. 82)

The three animals and their movements are described in simple, straightforward prose; the quote above is the full extent to which the narrator focuses on the bulls while they are alive, while the rest of the sketch focuses on what happens to them after they are killed. On the other hand, in *The Commandment*, considerably more space is allotted to describing the animals, especially the bull involved in the accident, but also its owner’s and Ushimatsu’s feelings before, during, and after the slaughter.

Ushimatsu stood with his uncle and the owner of the bull outside the stockade. He could feel no bitterness—it was an animal that was to blame (...)—but painful memories rose of his father’s sad end, of his blood spilt over the grass of the pasture. The other two, Sado bulls both of them, (...) were poor creatures, too thin to serve any purpose now but the satisfaction of human appetite: a pitiful contrast with the well-filled frame and gleaming black hide of the splendid crossbreed from Nishinoiri. From outside the fence the owner stroked the bull’s muzzle and throat. “A terrible thing you did, wasn’t it? I didn’t want to bring you down here—it was your own doing. Remember that, and take your punishment calmly.” He was like a parent admonishing his child to bow to his fate as he bids him a sad farewell. (p. 110)

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Time for the condemned bull to be led out of the pen. The Sado bulls (...) grew restless, jerking their heads from side to side. Pressing his hand on the muzzle of the brown one, a slaughterman spoke to them, alternatively scolding and soothing. Animals though they were, some instinct warned them what was about to happen, urging them to escape if they could. (...) seeming to glare at the bystanders, he [the Nishinoiri bull] marched with ponderous dignity to where the vet was waiting. This was the vicious beast that had savagely gored a man, yet the sight of it going to its death drew men's pity, too. (p. 111)

The Nishinoiri bull is stroked and directly addressed by its owner; this does not necessarily humanise the bull, but instead shows the special relationship between breeder and cattle: they are important presences in each other's lives, they depend on each other, and the breeder has to both protect his cattle and assume responsibility for its actions. The slaughterers too talk to the bulls and stroke their muzzles; their gestures are practical, meant to calm the animals down so that the slaying can go smoothly. While those directly involved do not necessarily treat the bulls as having human features, the narrator does exactly that, comparing the bulls with "condemned criminals in a prison cell" and likening the owner to "a parent admonishing his child," or describing the Nishinoiri bull as "march[ing] with ponderous dignity." *The Commandment* thus brings before the reader two worlds: one, that of Ushimatsu and the narrator, modern and urbanised subjects who project human interiority and features onto the animals and the landscape, and the other, of the farmers, cattle breeders, and slaughterers, who are more matter of fact and practical, yet not devoid of empathy: they live with the animals every day, in a mutual dependence shaped by the "fleshy detail of a mortal relationship."

As for the bulls' turning into beef, the narrator in *The Sketches* describes the scene in quite some detail. Below I have quoted the excerpts referring only to the Nanbu bull, but the description also covers the killing and cutting up of a black mongrel, a red cow, and a pig.

Another man takes up the killing axe and delivers a smashing blow to the animal's forehead. It rolls its eyes, its legs quiver, its breath leaves in a jet of white vapor. It lets out a faint groan and stops breathing. (...) The Nanbu bull that was killed first has now been completely skinned by the three men working on it. As I stand watching a short distance from the others I can see the steam rising from the still-warm hide. (...) A cold sun shines in past the eaves that have been decorated with straw ropes for the season, lighting the heavy beams, the bodies of the fallen animals on the floor, the shoulders of the white-uniformed butchers. (...) "Eighty-four pounds...sixty-nine pounds twelve ounces..." (...) The killing room is filled with the stench of meat and grease and fresh blood. (p. 83–86)

In *The Sketches*, the moment of the bull's death and the actions of the butchers are carefully observed and rendered into words as objectively as possible, avoiding both direct emotion and the establishing of any kind of correspondence to the narrator's interiority. On the other hand, a novel requires a different type of approach, one that structures the plot and gives the reader insight into the protagonists' inner life and struggles through the events they witness or participate in. To this end, both the reactions of the owner and of Ushimatsu are recorded in *The Commandment*, as follows:

A single blow, and with a faint groan the huge bull breathed its last. (...) The foreman slit its throat, one man cut off its tail, another untied the rope; (...) The smell of blood and fat filled the shed. (...) Slowly, in the centre of the shed, the great bulk of the carcass rose off the floor. Another man began to saw through the backbone. The owner's eyes stayed riveted, as if in prayer, on what was left of his bull. (...) Once again, for Ushimatsu, memory ousted thought. Do not forget! The dying man's last feverish breath, on which those words had been spoken, seared the very core of his living being... (...) "Twelve *kan* five hundred!... Eleven *kan* seven hundred!" One by one, great chunks of meat from the dead bull were lifted onto enormous scales. One of the slaughtermen called out the reading; licking his pencil, the butcher recorded it in a notebook. (...) Sunlight caught the thigh and foreleg swinging from the roof, picking out the gleaming white fat and yellowish suet around the groin—for Ushimatsu it was no longer the relic of a hideous tragedy: only a huge lump of meat. (p. 112–113)

The descriptive language used in the novel is straightforward and plain, too, for the most part. Nevertheless, as the first quote shows, in the owner, the demise of the bull triggers an attitude similar to prayer, perhaps resembling a folk ritual for the soul of the dead animal; in Ushimatsu, it brings forth the weight of the commandment he has to keep, the bull's last breath overlapping with his father's.

The second quote describes the scene after the slaughter, when the bulls have become carcasses, broken down in parts and pieces, sights and smells, and expressed in numbers. Ushimatsu sees the bull as "a huge lump of meat," but he also reflects on the meat and fat catching the sunlight, which points to potentially turning the events into something beyond "a hideous tragedy," i.e., finding in them a kind of beauty. As in the case of landscape, this aestheticising attitude towards the bull's carcass is what sets him (and the narrator) apart from his uncle and the owner of the bull, who both live *inside* the landscape and *with* the animals, mutually dependent in life and death, and thus see them only as they "really" are.

3. Shiga Naoya: Small Animals in “At Kinosaki” and “The House by the Moat”

Shiga Naoya (1883–1971) was one of the members of the *Shirakaba* (White Birch) group, founded by young intellectuals attending the Peers’ School (*Gakushūin*). Together, they published the magazine *Shirakaba*, which introduced new ideas and forms of artistic expression from Europe, with a focus on humanism, individualism, and idealism. While they took a critical stance towards the Naturalist literature of the previous generation, many of their works were autobiographical, like their predecessors’. Shiga is sometimes referred to as “the God of the novel,” after the title of his short story “The Shopboy’s God” (*Kozō no kamisama*, 1920), and in recognition of his polished style. While “The Shopboy’s God” is not strictly autobiographical, even though a Shiga-like “writer” makes his appearance at the end of the piece, many of Shiga’s other works are. Some can be even considered essayistic, non-fictional writing, with a narrator-protagonist whose persona very closely resembles the author himself.

Throughout his life, Shiga wrote and published numerous pieces—some novels, some sketches, some essays—that feature animals, usually small ones. From the missing dog, found poisoned in one of his earliest works, *Otsu Junkichi* (1912), to the butterfly fluttering inside the train involved in a near-fatal accident in *Dekigoto* (“The Incident,” 1913); and from the dragonfly, the gecko, and the hermit crab appearing in pieces such as *Tonbo*, *Yamori*, or *Yadokari no shi* (included in the collection *Shōhin itsutsu/Five Pieces*, 1917) to the chickens, dogs, cats, horses, bats, copper pheasants, swallows, and many other beings appearing in his late pieces collected under the telling title *Dōbutsu shōhin* (*Animal Sketches*, 1966), Shiga’s writing is populated by all imaginable animals, running the gamut from small to big, domesticated to wild, pets to pests.¹²

¹² On animals in Shiga’s works, refer also to 呉保華「志賀文学における小動物の死の心象風景について」(『岡大國文論稿 30』2002.03) and 富澤成實「子母澤寛と志賀直哉—動物作品をめぐる—」(『大学史紀要 26』2020.03). Go discusses the undercurrent of religious feeling that imbues Shiga’s earlier works (up to *Ki no saki ni te*), focusing on the way in which animals mediate the narrator’s understanding of death, while Tomizawa looks at Shiga’s later pieces (from *Dōbutsu shōhin*), analysing the differences in the narrator’s attitudes towards wild animals versus pets. Finally, 石田英作「志賀直哉『濠端の住まい』に見る〈自然〉—松江がもたらしたもの—」(『島根県立大学短期大学部松江キャンパス研究紀要55』2016) focuses on nature in general in “The House by the Moat,” contrasting Shiga’s approach to those of Satomi Ton (who visited him in Matsue) or Koizumi Yakumo/Lafcadio Hearn (who had lived there between 1890–1891). He also points out that, by interacting with nature and writing about the experience, Shiga came close to Miyazawa Kenji’s position, who saw himself as one who listens to nature and translates its voice into human words. Whether Shiga was able to completely shed his individualism is debatable, but we can agree with Ishida that the narrator does attempt to observe and understand nature in its own terms in “The

The two short pieces I will discuss in this paper, “At Kinosaki” (*Ki no saki ni te*, 1917) and “The House by the Moat” (*Horibata no sumai*, 1925)¹³ are based on events from Shiga’s own life (a near death experience following a train accident, and spending one summer in a house located near the Matsue town castle’s moat), and directly describe the thoughts and feelings of the first person narrator, a very credible alter ego of the author, while also providing the reader with detailed observations about the life and death of several animals the narrator happens to encounter.

In “At Kinosaki,” the narrator (*jibun*), after having had an almost fatal accident—and a very modern one at that, i.e., a trolley car accident—goes to recuperate in the onsen-town of Kinosaki. He is “still not quite clear in [his] head,” and often has “lonely thoughts.” He spends a lot of time walking and observing nature, especially small life forms: crab fish, wasps, rats, lizards, which eventually helps him come to terms with his own mortality: “Death would come sooner or later. (...) Something like an affection for death arose within me.” A few days into his stay, he becomes focused on the comings and goings of busy wasps near the entryway of his inn, and then one morning notices a dead one:

Every day, as long as the weather held, the corpulent tiger-striped wasps were out hard at work from morning until almost nightfall. (...) When I was bored, I would often watch the comings and goings of the wasps from the veranda railing. One morning I spotted a wasp that had died on the roof of the entryway. (...) The other wasps were perfectly indifferent to it. (...) It stayed that way for about three days. Looking at it gave me such a feeling of quietness. (...) During the night, there was a heavy rainfall. (...) The wasp’s body was no longer in its place. (...) It was quiet because a wasp that has been nothing but busy, busy, had become absolutely still. I felt an intimacy in that stillness. (p. 58–59)

The narrator first contrasts the wasps’ continuous movement in life with the peaceful stillness in death, then comments on the indifference of the living wasps, who do not seem to care about the dead one. This detail indicates the existence, on the side of the narrator, of a certain expectation for death to cause grief, or at least some sort of reaction. Nevertheless, he is pushed beyond this expectation via observing the “real” behaviour of the wasps, without anthropomorphising them. At the same time, feeling intimacy with the wasp’s stillness, he is able to appreciate his own chance at reprieve in Kinosaki.

House by the Moat,” even if Ishida’s interpretation of this process as a “purification of one’s interiority through the power of ‘Nature’” might seem to shift the focus back on the human/individual.

¹³ For the quotations from these two short stories, I am using Jane Dunlop’s translations, from *The Paper Door and Other Stories by Shiga Naoya*, San Francisco: North Point, 1987.

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During one of his walks, the narrator encounters another scene that makes him ponder on death and the struggle to stay alive: a rat, drowning while village children are throwing rocks at it:

Desperately swimming, the rat was trying to get away. The rat's neck had been pierced with a skewer about eight inches in length. (...) Two or three children and a rickshaw-man of about forty were chucking stones at it. (...) The appearance of the rat, as it fled for its life with all its strength, laboring under a fate that would end in death, remained strangely in my mind. I had a lonely, unpleasant feeling. (...) If I were in a situation similar to the rat's, what would I do? Wouldn't I struggle, as the rat had done? (p. 60–61)

Witnessing the rat's final moments, the narrator is left with an "lonely, unpleasant feeling (*sabishii iyana kimochi*)," as the animal's struggle and ultimate death enable him to play out his own brush with death and the loneliness of the experience. The attitude of the narrator, a city-dweller, is contrasted with that of the villagers, who are having cruel fun torturing the already wounded animal: for them, the rat is simply a pest, his death inconsequential, if not desired.

The last animal featured in the short story is a lizard, whom the narrator accidentally kills on his way back to the inn:

It was a water lizard. Still wet, it had a beautiful color (...) I squatted down at ease and watched it (...) I thought I'd startle the water lizard and make him go into the water. I remembered the way they walked, clumsily swinging their bodies. Still squatting, I picked up a stone the size of a small ball that was by me and threw it. (...) [T]he lizard, the toes of his forefeet braced in front of it curling inward, weakly tumbled forward. Its tail clung to the rock. It was motionless. The water lizard was dead. (...) The fact that I had killed the lizard without at all meaning to pierced me with a strange unpleasantness. (p. 63)

Ironically, the narrator, who has escaped death himself, ends up taking the life of another being. The lizard's final moments are carefully described, the narrator sparing no detail about the unfortunate transition from a beautifully coloured small animal to a motionless one, the tensed-up body separated from its tail. Towards this accidental killing the narrator also feels "unpleasantness," a "strange" one (*myōna iyana ki*), arguably different from the "unpleasant feeling" coupled with loneliness that he had experienced when witnessing the rat's struggle.

Shiga's restrained prose generally stops short of giving more details about the events described and the reactions they produce in the narrator. This flat style is nevertheless all the more effective, as it presents the reader with a glimpse of "real animals," devoid of

symbolism and seemingly unaffected by human projections, even while the narrator feels intimacy towards the dead wasp's quietness, shares into the rat's struggle for survival, and experiences guilt towards the killing of the lizard. The entire text functions as an allegory of, or as a meditation on human death, but it does so without depriving the animals of the reality of their own death.

Next let us look at "The House by the Moat." After living in the big city, "drained dry by [his] relationships with people, people, people," here too the narrator retires temporarily to a small provincial community, where he leads "a simple life," interacting mainly with Nature:

When I came out here [to Matsue] from my life in the city, drained dry by my relationships with people, people, people, it set my heart very much at ease. My life here was a relationship with insects, birds, fish, water plants, the sky, and, after them, lastly, with human beings. (...) My house being the only one on this road with an eaves-light, it was a natural gathering place for the lizards in the neighborhood. Always with an uneasy sensation at the back of my neck, I hastily passed beneath them. Even with Nature, there were some relationships that were unwelcome. (...) Startled by my tread, they [the bullfrogs on the tatami] would flee in the direction of the moat. (...) Actually, no doubt, I was an intruder, who had caused a panic in the house of frogs, lizards, and insects. (p. 113–114)

Not all interactions are welcome and, as the narrator observes, his house is actually taking over the natural habitat of various small animals and insects, who, in their turn, come to reclaim their territory when the human inhabitant is away. Interestingly, while the narrator refers to his house as a "natural gathering place" for these critters, it should be noted that the house's eaves-light is the one that attracts moths and beetles, which then attract the lizards and bullfrogs that the narrator has to chase away—the human dwelling has in fact created a new type of habitat for the various beings of the moat.

Further, the narrator focuses on the domesticated animals of his neighbours, observing their behaviour carefully:

When you attentively observed the life of the chickens, it was rather interesting. The very maternal demeanour of the mother hen, the innocent, childlike behavior of the chicks, the dignified mien, befitting the head of the family, of the rooster—all of them, each in character, each nicely suited to his or her place, made one life together. It was a pleasure to watch them. (...) It made you feel as if you were watching cheerful, energetic young girls. Rather than beautiful, it was charming, lovable. (...) I'd nicknamed him [the ugly rooster] Kumasaka Chohan, after the famous bandit of ancient times. Reaching out his head, with a sort of speculation in the one eye that faced me, Kumasaka would glare in my direction. When I tossed him a bit of bread,

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although somewhat flustered, he would urgently call his hens and allow them to eat it. Quite cool and collected now, he would gobble down a crumb himself. (p. 115–116)

The narrator endows the chicken he sees everyday with human qualities and behaviours: the hen has “maternal demeanour;” the chicks are “childlike” and resemble “cheerful, energetic young girls;” finally, the rooster shows a “dignified mien, befitting the head of the family,” and glares at him “with a sort of speculation.” All the while, the narrator seems to be vaguely aware of the fact that he is merely assigning the chicken roles similar to those of the members of a human family, mentioning that they are “all in character,” “nicely suited to his or her place.”

One night, the hen is killed by a stray cat; while the narrator vaguely pities the motherless chicks, the neighbour’s response shows more practical concerns: with the hen dead, the chicks will have a hard time surviving, which means less food/profit for him and his family. His wife cuts their losses by cooking the hen, and throws its head out into the courtyard:

The flesh of the killed chicken became that day’s side dish for the carpenter and his wife. Only the head, its red wattles ripped to threads and tatters, was thrown out into the garden. (...) Trembling with fear, the chicks gathered around it, but they did not seem to think it was the head of their mother. (...) It’d be good if the cat gets caught nice and proper in the trap tonight, I thought. (p. 118)

The narrator does not conceal his surprise at seeing that the chicks do not “recognise” their dead mother’s head; this scene resembles the indifference of nature described in “At Kinosaki,” when the living wasps are similarly described as not caring about the dead one. The “pitiful” sight of the chicks “trembling with fear” makes the narrator wish that the cat who caused the “tragedy” be caught “nice and proper,” and punished for its deed. Soon, the cat is caught in the trap set up by the neighbour and is to be drowned in punishment. The narrator listens to the trapped cat well into the night, overcome by a feeling of loneliness (*sabishii kimochi*) at the thought that “one of [the] two lives will be snuffed out at dawn.” He briefly considers freeing the cat, but decides against it in the end:

Wasn’t killing the chicken something that the cat had had to do? It was very much in the natural order of things that a cat on his own should try to do that. (...) If, now and then, in a heavy rain, someone left the door open and the coop was raided, rather than regarding the cat as an evil pest it was truer to see it as the fault of the forgetful person. (...) At a time like this, I did not know what I should do. The chicks were to be pitied, and so was the mother hen. And now that the cat, who had caused their unhappy fate, had been caught, he too was unbearably pitiable.

(...) I could only look on silently. I did not think that this was because of my heartlessness. If it was heartlessness, then the heartlessness of God was like this, I thought. (p. 119–120)

Here, the narrator ponders on the implications of the fact that the cat is killed by his neighbours simply for acting like a cat—when the hen’s death was actually their fault, derived from having failed their responsibility to protect their domesticated animals. In the end, though, he admits that “it was a matter of course that my neighbors could not allow the cat to live,” and defends his choice not to lift a finger by claiming that his non-action parallels God’s heartlessness, relegating “the course of events” to “an irresistible destiny.” While initially projecting ever-so-human feelings on the chicks (who do not recognise the dead hen’s head, and do not know how helpless they are) and on the cat spending his “last night on earth” in a cage (who is not aware of this imminent end, and struggles to free himself instinctively), the narrator in the end implies that respect for another human’s property is what prevails over pity for another living creature. After agonising (even if only briefly) over whether to let the cat go “by a special act of grace,” he actually sleeps through his drowning, reporting the aftermath as follows:

The next day, when I woke up, the cat had already been drowned. His dead body had been buried. The box that had been used as a trap, set out in a sunny place, was already more than half dry. (p. 120)

In these dry final lines, one could read something akin to the lack of reaction (*reitan*) of the living wasps to the dead one in “At Kinosaki,” or to the chicks not recognising the discarded hen’s head as belonging to their mother. The Shiga narrator has come to terms with the “irresistible destiny” of death, allowing some of the “indifference” he observed in the animals to rub in on him, too. The animals’ struggle to survive is contrasted with death’s stillness again, and the peacefulness of its aftermath makes grief inconsequential.

4. Conclusion: Death Makes Us Real

Just like in the case of villagers throwing rocks at the drowning rat in “At Kinosaki,” for the carpenter and his wife in “A House by the Moat” the cat is a pest that needs to be prevented from causing more damage to their property; it is not punished for committing a bad deed, because it is in effect “without consciousness of good and evil,” as Derrida tells us. Similarly, there can be no consciousness of good and evil in the bull killing Ushimatsu’s father in *The Broken Commandment*, either—even though the owner tells the animal to “take [his] punishment calmly” and Ushimatsu thinks that his father’s demise is the animal’s “fault.” In reality, in these pieces of prose animals are killed because people have

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failed to take full responsibility, to protect as well as control the animals that they own.

Ownership over domesticated animals is, of course, an anthropocentric way of defining the relationship between humans and non-humans, and the behaviour of the latter will often reveal this one-sidedness. Like the small critters taking over the house by the moat at the beginning of Shiga's second piece, domesticated or semi-domesticated animals will converge toward humans and their habitat, making the best of the survival advantages they offer, but will fall back on their instincts, following "the natural order of things" whenever necessary: running away, being violent, and generally ignoring the human "matter of course."

Proximity with animals gives humans an excuse to draw comparisons with their own behaviour, to expect similarities rather than differences, in essence if not in degree. In both Tōson's and Shiga's works, this tendency appears to be stronger in the city-dwellers, who only occasionally have to interact with animals, and whose interactions occur outside the everyday realm of the practical. Both authors embed in the pieces discussed (and in their other works) descriptions that mark the difference between urban and rural sensibilities. Thus, they show how nature and animals can be, on the one hand, objectively observed, or admired and sublimated; they might also constitute something to project one's own interiority upon, without actual responsibility. On the other hand, animals are something that is controlled—domesticated, owned, killed; something one's livelihood depends on, but also something that needs care and protection from pests. In the latter type of relationship, specific to the rural sensibility, there is no "correspondence," but instead a special kind of mutual dependence, in which the non-human is not anthropomorphised, but rather understood in its own terms, as an absolute but necessary Other.

Here, we might agree with Yano Satoji¹⁴ when he says that "anthropocentrism is incomplete in itself and needs the animal as other. (...) Animals do not need humans, but humans cannot be without animals." It is indeed true that some animals only need humans because they have been domesticated by them; as Furukawa Hideo¹⁵ puts it, they now have a "contract" with humans, which makes them subject to artificial selection instead of natural selection. On the other hand, humans need animals not only for food, labour, and more recently companionship, but also for making sense of their own world.

While human-nonhuman relations, as well as many of the animal reactions (or lack thereof) are often framed by an anthropocentric perspective (be it urban-aestheticising, or rural-practical), the "real" animal's gaze is also present in Tōson's and Shiga's works, usually "as is," without being humanised: the bull looks at the bystanders right before

¹⁴ 矢野智司「越境する動物がもたらす贈物〈ギフト〉」(『環境人文学II—他者としての自然』勉誠出版, 2017).

¹⁵ 古川日出男『馬たちよ、それでも光は無垢で』新潮社, 2011.

being slaughtered, with “not so much as a mournful bellow,” which makes the humans question themselves; the frogs whose habitat is invaded stare at the narrator unmoved and unfazed; the rooster “glares,” giving him pause, etc. This silent, inscrutable gaze, “only looking, just to see,” (Derrida) exposes humans to their own nakedness, and allows them to perceive, albeit ever so briefly, an alternative approach to life and death. In other words, in the pieces analysed above, we may say that animals also function as a bridge connecting to the “Other” in the “Other World,” their death mediating the human understanding of mortality and of the supernatural/god(s). As Imamura Hitoshi¹⁶ argues, nature, like the gods, does not have a voice, and humans have to interact with it “imaginatively,” within its silence; as such, dying and dead animals quietly connect humans with the reality of death, through the “fleshly detail of a mortal relationship” (Haraway).

Finally, it is worth reiterating here that Tōson and Shiga are known for their realistic, heavily autobiographical writing. The works analysed in this paper display a clear tendency towards sketching after nature, towards the non-fictional and essayistic. This fact is not unconnected with the following argument about nature writing that Noda Ken’ichi¹⁷ makes:

The emphasis that this genre [nature writing] places on non-fiction points towards its intention to open itself completely to the otherness and heterogeneity of nature, through oscillating between presentation and re-presentation. Or perhaps experiential reality offers an opportunity to question once again the framework of representability, and language itself. It concomitantly brings to the fore several complex and essential problems including the way the encounter with otherness is narrated, from the issue of defining wilderness, to the rhetorical implications of personification, and to the critique of anthropocentrism. (translation mine, I.H.)

We can definitely recognise in Tōson’s and Shiga’s works discussed above a—perhaps unconscious—skepticism directed at the “framework of representability and language itself.” Their focus on “real animals” does indeed raise the questions Noda mentions: is the encounter with Otherness narratable? Is personification/correspondence unavoidable? As if to address these questions, their writing tends to oscillate “between presentation and re-presentation,” and the way they approach nature and animals, without/with little symbolism, as an Other whose experiences are often different and incomprehensible to humans, can be read in an ecopoetic key—as I have tried to do in this paper.

¹⁶ 今村仁司『交易する人間（ホモ・コムニカンス）—贈与と交換の人間学』講談社, 2000.

¹⁷ 野田研一「自然という他者—声と主体のゆくえ—」（『環境という視座—日本文学とエコクリティシズム』勉誠出版, 2011）.