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The Concept of Death in *Kusamakura* and *Kōfu* by Natsume Sōseki

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla veškeré použité prameny a literaturu.

V Olomouci dne…………………… Podpis………………………..

Anotace

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Tato práce si dává za cíl porovnat smrt jakožto koncept ve dvou vybraných dílech Nacume Sósekiho, kde jsou smrt a smrtelnost jedněmi z hlavních témat. K analýze těchto děl jsou využita díla z oblasti naratologie zasazená do kontextu Japonského uchopení smrti v období autorova života. Po podrobné analýze tato práce zjišťuje, že v díle *Kusamakura* se hraje smrt převážně estetickou roli. Protagonista-umělec je smrtí fascinován a touží uchopit estetickou podstatu v tváři umírající dívky, aniž by bylo jeho pojetí zastřeno emocemi. Oproti tomu protagonista v Kófu je sžírán vlastními emocemi natolik, že pasivně vyhledává smrt. Napříč oběma díly lze vycítit vlivy Evropské literatury a Buddhistického pojetí smrti.

Na tomto místě bych chtěla poděkovat vedoucí své diplomové práce za trpělivost a cenné rady. Velice si cením vstřícného přístupu, podnětných rozhovorů a času, který mi věnovala. Dále děkuji svým blízkým, kteří mi poskytovali psychickou podporu.

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Editorial Note

For the purpose of this thesis, the Japanese is transcribed using the modified Hepburn transcription.

The standard for personal names is as follows: Transcribed name, name in Japanese (year of birth–year of death).

The standard for literary works in text is as follows: Transcribed title in cursive or in quotation marks, title in Japanese (translation of the title, year of publication).

Unless quoted in a direct citation, the standard for terminology in Japanese is as follows: *transcribed term in cursive*, term in Japanese (translation or short explanation unless explained in the text).

1. Introduction

Death is an all-encompassing topic that touches every single one of us. It is connected to various branches of science, it has ideological significance and it affects us psychologically and socially. It remains a mystery that we as a species have been trying to explore using various tools. In literary context, death represents a topic of both the oldest and contemporary literary works. For example, the mythical king Gilgamesh strives to overcome death into immortality and Orpheus follows his lover to the underworld to save her from death. Even though one's end of life is certain, there are various ways of understanding it. While death can become a literary device for expressing other meanings in literature, it can in turn also be expressed or alluded to by various literary devices. This thesis explores death as the main focus in the analysis of two literary works by Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916) – *Kusamakura* 草枕 (The Three-Cornered World or The Grass Pillow, 1906) and *Kōfu* 坑夫 (The Miner, 1908).

Before this thesis jumps to analysis and interpretation, the first chapter introduces Natsume Sōseki. We learn about his complicated childhood, about his friends and family, his ambitions and failures, but also about his psychological state of mind. This section introduces influences on Sōseki's works in connection to *death*. Death is certainly not a companion Sōseki wanted in his life, but it kept visiting him in both his personal life and his literary works.

To create a theoretical framework that we could form the basis for further analysis and interpretation, this text explains terminology on a cross-section of academic sciences. Interconnectedness is today a key point for assessing meaning in literature, therefore before a perspective is decided, it is necessary to establish grounds for analysis using terms such as *thanology*, *death*, *death representations*, or even a *concept*. In the "Death as a Concept" chapter, we delve into possible approaches to analysing *death representations* and determine a more specific approach using these terms. The text here also discusses the concept of writing a literary work as a means to surpass *death*.

The "Philosophical and Socio-Cultural Aspects of Death in Japan" section introduces religious, mythological and socio-cultural understanding of death in Japan, with focus on the period when the two literary works were written. Burial practices, funeral ceremonies, beliefs and mythology surrounding death not only vary across the world, but also across religious traditions within one country. There are also similarities in, i.e., Greco-Roman mythology and Japanese Shintō

mythology. The text is particularly preoccupied with the significance of death in Buddhism and how it might be projected into a literary work, which proves useful as background information for further narrative analysis.

A literary text uses literary devices to convey meaning, therefore the text in "Narrative Devices as Tools for Interpreting Meaning" investigates the role literary theory plays in the use of such devices. This is where we specifically establish theoretical scope for textual analysis in the two following chapters. For basic narratological analysis of a plot, the text presents Christopher Booker's *The Seven Basic Plots* (2004). Drawing on some literary theory by Sōseki in combination with Michihiro Ama's *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction* (2021) and Karatani Kojin's *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (1993), we interconnect theoretical concepts for further narratological analysis.

In the chapter focusing on *Kusamakura*, the text studies *death representations* in this literary work closely using the literature mentioned above. We learn that *death* predominantly serves an aesthetic function in *Kusamakura*, although there are some underlying influences of Buddhism. The text inspects how *death* manifests in the work narratologically through various plot points and how the characters shape them. We also explore how historical context of the time period seeps into understanding of *death* here.

The chapter studying *Kōfu* offers insight into how Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* (ca 1308–1320) influenced its overall narratological scheme and motifs. The text inspects how Buddhism shapes the understanding of *death* in such context. Closeness to *death* proves to be an incentive for the main character, a call for action. As a concept, death-like life becomes a centre for *Kōfu*'s narration.

This thesis then concludes the main points of the analysis in "Conclusion and Summary," with focus on the last two chapters.

2. About the Author

Natsume Sōseki (born as Natsume Kin'nosuke 夏目金之助) is often called *sensei* 先生 (honorific name for master or teacher) by Japanese scholars. This respectful title is based on his extensive literary and theoretical works, which he managed to write within a rather short span of 10 years, but also the fact that his personal beliefs and philosophies shaped the Japanese literary world in a unique way. He was born in the Japanese capital in times of turbulent changes. Japan had just entered the Meiji era (1968–1912) and abandoned its closed-door policy of the Tokugawa shogunate[1] in favour of a more open state regime under a modern governmental system. In the years following Emperor Meiji's enthronement, the restoration of the imperial power went hand in hand with a more democratic government compared to Japan's past regime. Political representatives were elected through public balloting, indicating that its citizens were seen as more equal and freer in their pursuits,[2] while knowledge became a driving force of the industrialisation and modernization of Japan as a country.[3] However, the *kokutai* ideology[4] that grew stronger with the Emperor's empowerment alongside the economic and political insecurity on the international stage also brought about the rise of militarism.

Natsume Sōseki was a person of intellect in the midst of a cultural and industrial revolution struggling with his own personal demons. Among those, one should count his upbringing and his family, his education and those who played a part in it, his friends and losses of those close to him, as well as his travels, his mental and physical problems, and the context of the time. All these factors influenced Sōseki in forming his ideas and his understanding of literature and consequently his literary works. Marvin Marcus describes Sōseki's writing style in descriptions of sceneries drawing inspiration from his early past as either brief or "borrowed"[5] from others, when analysing his *shōhin*.[6] In fact, the way Marcus analyses his literary texts, he cannot help but assume the male protagonists of *Sanshirō* 三四郎 (1908), *Sorekara* それから (And Then,

[1] *Shogunate* is a term for a style of Japanese government dominated by feudal military dictatorship. Tokugawa shogunate is associated with the Edo period (1603–1868) when Japan isolated itself from most of the world.
[2] *Daimyōs* were now rid of their authority, and they handed it over to the Emperor and his government. The system of four social classes along with the discriminated minority *burakumin* was abolished by law. Compulsory education was established through educational reforms and the government established a standardized national language. Foreign books were no longer prohibited.
[3] Japanese government funded numerous educational and political missions abroad. The issue of unfair international treaties was hindering Japan's sovereignty internationally and there were efforts to abolish them.
[4] *Kokutai ideology* meant sovereignty of the country under the Emperor's rule.
[5] Marvin Marcus, *Reflections In A Glass Door*, (Honolulu: Universitiy of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 80.
[6] Marcus defines *shōhin* as "small works," i.e., short stories, diaries and letters.

1909), and *Mon* 門 (Gate, 1910), etc. to be Sōseki's alter-egos sharing close similarities with the man in both personality and life.[7] In *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction*, Michihiro Ama also ascribes the category "personal fiction"[8] to Sōseki novels based on these similarities between the author and the protagonists. Personally, I would say that this perspective appears to fit most of Sōseki's works, but the inspiration in his past resembles sketches developed into separate unrelated storyboards.

2.1. Childhood as Inspiration

As any publication on Sōseki proves, the affairs of his early years that formed him well into adulthood were complicated. Sōseki was adopted young into Shihobara Shonosuke's family as an heir.[9] The Natsume family was struggling with having a child at an old age (they already had eight other children) and was affected by the *shogunate*'s fall. Sōseki's father, Naokatsu, was a community leader, who occupied a hereditary position of *nanushi*[10] before the birth of his youngest son[11] and later he was appointed *kuchō*.[12] Nevertheless, they later adopted Sōseki back, because Shiobara divorced his wife over his love affair and left her with the child to fend for herself. This left the two families at odds. Sōseki's childhood is seldom described in his works, and presumably, he avoids describing the childhood of his protagonists with much detail because of potential unhappy memories.

Still, there are cases where unhappy memories make great inspiration. For example, K's character in *Kokoro* 心 (1914, in English under the same title), who was similarly adopted, also had a somewhat complicated relationship with his adoptive family. The conflict in *Kokoro* stems from K's secretive change of study programme, therefore one could say he is to blame for his situation. On the other hand, Sōseki felt pressure because of the dispute between Shiobara and Natsume over him, which was not solved by the time he was twenty-one years old. Additionally, there was still pressure to live up to his family's expectations. When he was questioning the course of his future studies, having dropped out of middle school after being

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[7] Marvin Marcus, *Reflections In A Glass Door*, 3.
[8] She uses this term instead of commonly used *watakusi shōsetsu* or *shisōsetsu*.
Michiro, Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York, 2021), 3.
[9] Adoption and complicated family relationships become a recurrent motif in Sōseki's novels possibly based on this experience.
[10] Neighborhood magistrate.
[11] John Nathan, *Soseki: Modern Japan's Greatest Novelist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), chap. 1. E-book.
[12] Mayor of a ward.

classically trained in Chinese literature and *kanbun*,[13] he returned to studying at a university. His brother tried to persuade Sōseki to study architecture. Despite this, Sōseki decided to follow his heart and study literature upon a friend's advice, which made him even more of an outsider in his own family.[14] His experience as both a student of English literature and later a teacher then served as an inspiration for the setting in e.g., *Sanshirō* or *Botchan* 坊ちゃん (1906).

As far as encounters with death in the family are concerned, in retrospect, Sōseki reflects upon his own mental state in connection to his brothers' deaths in his memoirs *Omoidasu koto nado* 思い出す事など (My Memories, 1910). There, he describes their beards on their diminishing bodies in contrast with his own mortality (at the time he himself struggled with illness):

> *"For my part, I'd spent many days, following the near-fatal episode, in that strange liminal state hovering somewhere between life and death. Once the crisis had passed, one of the first things I did, out of a desire to confirm that I was in fact still alive, was to look at myself in the mirror. And there, reflected in the unforgiving glass, was the very image of my brother, dead these many years—bones protruding, skeleton-like, from sunken cheeks; the sallow complexion, deathly pale and cold; the lifeless eyes, unmoving in their sockets; the hair and beard in wild profusion."*[15]

Sōseki can clearly feel his own death approaching. Possibly, he senses that he will soon be reunited with his deceased brothers. Such manner of psychological depth is also present in his fiction, as is demonstrated in the analysis of the two literary works that are the focus of this thesis.

2.2. Formative Influences and Education

In his speech "Watashi no Kojin Shugi" 私の個人主義 (My Individualism, 1914), Sōseki reflects on what drove him to pursue English literature. English was a useful language to pursue as Japan was entering the world scene and becoming more "Western."[16] Sōseki's early

[13] *Kanbun* is a form of Japanese writing based on Classical Chinese.
[14] John Nathan, *Soseki: Modern Japan's Greatest Novelist*, chap. 1.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Western in a sense that Japan would adopt or appropriate laws, technologies and ideologies of European and American imperialistic powers in order to level with them on the international playfield. The previous inward attitude of Japan as a state was replaced by more outward efforts in almost every field, aimed inwardly in terms of development and profit. Japan was bounded by unfair international treaties after it opened its doors, hence by proving its sovereignty as a world citizen, it hoped to eradicate them and advance internationally without such hurdles.

education is based in Chinese classics and *kambun* (another major influence in his writing), mostly because of his parents' wishes. After learning English in a cram school, he enrolled to the First Special Higher School under Tokyo Imperial University in 1984. There, he astounded his classmates with his ability to read and write in both Chinese and English, but he had troubles fulfilling formal requirements due to a stomach disease (stomach problems seem to follow him throughout his life).[17] He would admit to not understanding works like *Hamlet* at first, he was mainly interested in Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Addison and Pope as well as (at that time less known) Walt Whitman. English Romanticism combined with Japanese writing tradition especially flows through *Kusamakura*, as is discussed further. Romantic poets not only became a focus in his university assignments but also in magazines, resulting in Sōseki gaining the reputation of "a superior critic of Western letters."[18] Despite his undeniable passion for literature, Sōseki admits in "Watashi No Kojin Shugi" that the meaning of the term *literature* remained a puzzle for him after he graduated from Tokyo Imperial University in 1893.

Exactly the same age, Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規 (1967–1902) studied at the same school in Tokyo and was a major influence on Sōseki's writing style. Sōseki's deep friendship with him started shortly before the poet showed any signs of his fatal illness, tuberculosis. Their relationship was mostly based on mutual critical exchange on poems and texts. Modernized haikus were Shiki's main endeavour while they were a means of expressing feelings for Sōseki. Shiki's critiques of Sōseki's writings were mostly kind, while Sōseki often came across as slightly harsh. When Shiki fell ill, Sōseki would encourage him to not give up hope and continue reading and writing. It was Sōseki that named Shiki "cuckoo," in various ways of writing, alluding to the redness of the bird's throat – so similar to Shiki's bloody one. A similar name Hototogisu ホトトギス was also used for the literary magazine, where they both published texts. Shiki also used the name Sōseki for a while before his friend adopted it as his own. [19] By all accounts, their relationship was truly special. Shiki's death in 1902 during Sōseki's stay in London was a great blow.

[17] John Nathan, *Soseki: Modern Japan's Greatest Novelist*, chap. 1.
[18] John Nathan, *Soseki: Modern Japan's Greatest Novelist*, chap. 1.
[19] John Nathan, *Soseki: Modern Japan's Greatest Novelist*, chap. 3.

2.3. Mental Health and Writing

Arrangements for Sōseki's marriage started when he was a well-respected teacher in Matsuyama, Shiki's hometown, where he settled as a teacher.[20]. The marriage was handled long distance by his family. When he finally met Kyoko, whose family was from Kamakura, neither of them was entirely pleased with the other's looks. This conflicted nature of their relationship continued into their marriage and served as an inspiration for the relationship between Kushami and his wife in *Wagahai wa Neko de Aru* 吾輩は猫である (I Am a Cat, 1905). Kyoko later struggled with poor mental health, which was possibly caused by a miscarriage, but also by Sōseki's comments on her appearance and sleeping habits.[21] Presumably, Sōseki's obstinate temper could not only be seen not only as one of the causes for his unhappy marriage, but also for his later mental and physiological problems.

As part of the Japanese government's support to bright minds in pursuit of knowledge abroad, Sōseki was supposed to study linguistics in the United Kingdom. Instead, he proceeded to attend lectures of Professor William Paton Ker, an expert on medieval literature, and he took private lessons at James Craig's house, an expert on Shakespeare.[22] Later, he concluded a different approach was necessary in order to further his literary studies. During his stay in London from 1901 to 1903, he accumulated over four hundred book volumes and visited historical sites in the area questioning the locals. While abroad, he came to be disillusioned with the English-speaking world and was forced to return to Japan earlier than planned.

The experience in Great Britain negatively affected Sōseki's mental health. Not only did he leave shortly after his second child was on the way, but he was also mistreated by British society. Victorian Brits[23] were not always kind to Sōseki as colonial and racial prejudice was still very common. Sōseki experienced his own sense of racial inferiority in encounters with Europeans – he compares their physique to his own in his diaries and the London inspired work *Rondon Tō* ロンドン塔 (London Tower, 1905).[24] On another instance, he concludes that those, whom he thought to be educated and respectable, were in fact less knowledgeable of their own culture

[20] The period of his stay there served as inspiration for *Botchan* as far as setting and role of a teacher itself is considered.

[21] Kyoko apparently did not wake up before Sōseki did to prepare him breakfast, which seemed to him lazy. John Nathan, *Soseki: Modern Japan's Greatest Novelist*, chap. 4.

[22] John Nathan, *Soseki: Modern Japan's Greatest Novelist*, chap. 5.

[23] Queen Victoria died in 1901 during Sōseki's stay and was succeed by king Edward VII.

[24] "[…] [If] looked at impartially, one would have to say that it was they, not I, who look splendid. In any case, I feel small. "
Marvin Marcus, *Reflections In A Glass Door*, 19.

than a foreigner such as him. His account states that despite this he remained in their eyes lesser.[25] By the end of his stay, Sōseki secluded himself into his room to read.[26] He would have probably sunken into a much darker place, if not for the fact that no news of Shiki's death reached him until prior to his departure for Japan (not earlier). He was prompted to return because the Japanese ministry did not receive any reports on his research and when another Japanese poet visited him he informed them via a telegram that Sōseki had "gone mad."[27] Upon their instructions, he then left Britain disillusioned and discouraged.

In 1903, Sōseki found employment at the Tokyo Imperial University as a lecturer, replacing Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904), rousing displeasure in his students (this incident served as inspiration for *Sanshirō*). Some of his lectures were published as part of his literature criticism collection *Bungakuron* 文学論 (Theory of Literature, 1907) and *Bungaku hyōron* 文学評論 (Literary Criticism, 1909). He did become more popular the longer he stayed at the university, yet he felt that "his views would have never been taken seriously in England."[28] His mental health grew weaker as his wife moved to live with her parents for a while and Sōseki suffered paranoia of being spied on.[29] Writing *Wagahai wa Neko de Aru* brought him solace. The novel is a parody on his own life and intellectuals of that period from perspective of a cat. Simultaneously with this novel (that he started in January 1905 and finished in 1906), Sōseki was also writing other short stories, *Botchan* and *Kusamakura*. Just a year after Sōseki's return from Europe, in 1904–1905, the Japanese Empire was at war with the Russian Empire (only a decade after the First Sino-Japanese War) that resulted in Japanese victory. The Treaty of Portsmouth then legitimised the Japanese influence sphere over Korea (resulting in annexation in 1910) and consequently incited a wave of patriotism in Japan that meant stronger militarist tendencies toward Manchuria. Sōseki uses contemporary world affairs as a background in *Kusamakura*, where the main protagonist uses art and poetry in an escapist way. In such a short period of time, Sōseki began his writing career using different writing methods and continued to write many more.

[25] He illustrates this in a quote about a British woman he met: *"When I use a difficult word, she pretends to know it even if she doesn't, and it's clear from her expression that she wouldn't compromise her dignity as a British gentlewoman by asking a Japanese—a pathetic creature."* Ibid.
[26] That was for him the only way to work on the ten-year project of literature that he set for himself.
[27] Marvin Marcus, *Reflections In A Glass Door*, 19.
[28] Donald Keene, "Natsume Sōseki," in *Dawn To The West: Fiction* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1984), 312.
[29] Marvin Marcus, *Reflections In A Glass Door*, 31.

In 1906, Sōseki finally changed his career path to be a full-time writer when he joined *Asahi Shinbun* 朝日新聞. He could then write novels solely for them, starting off with *Gubijinsō* 虞美人草 (The Poppy, 1907) and *Kōfu*, which are closer to the European naturalist tradition in writing. *Kōfu* was written based on a story by a worker from the Ashio copper mine.[30] Along with *Kusamakura* and *Yume Jūya* 夢十夜 (Ten Nights of Dreams, 1908), it belongs among the more experimental works by the author. The intended trilogy of *Sanshirō*, *Sorekara*, and *Mon* resulted in three different novels, whose protagonists are "unrelated, but their social milieu and problems show little resemblance."[31] Upon finishing this series of novels, Sōseki's health worsened. He was hospitalised with a stomach ulcer and later he retreated to Shuzenji to recover. Because the resulting complications proved to almost be life threatening, Sōseki turned to painting and composing haiku in order to heal and his writing style also changed.[32] Moreover, Sōseki was furhter crushed by death of one of his daughters. He alludes to this tragedy in *Higan Sugi Made* 彼岸杉迄 (Until After Equinox, 1912).[33] This marks a shift in Sōseki's fiction toward a less cheerful tone, culminating in *Kokoro*, *Mon* and *Meian* 明暗 (Light and Dark, 1916). Sōseki's ulcers were progressively worsening as he continued writing and lecturing on literature and philosophical topics like individualism. He died whilst working on *Meian* in 1916 due to his long illness.

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[30] Ashio copper mine was a site of a possibly first major Japanese polution disaster. The miners rioted in 1907 due to working conditions.
[31] Donald Keene, "Natsume Sōseki," 328.
[32] John Nathan, *Soseki: Modern Japan's Greatest Novelist,* chap. 13.
[33] Donald Keene, "Natsume Sōseki," 334.

3. Death as a Concept

3.1. Grounds for Analysis

There is a growing body of literature dealing with *death* as a topic that offers insight into the (mostly European and American) understanding of the term. *Thanology*, or *death studies*, is a field of academic studies that offers an ever-developing discourse on how *death* seeps into various academic disciplines. *Death* can be investigated through the eyes of a cultural anthropologist, a medic, a philosopher, a biologist, a film critic or a linguist, to name a few, therefore understanding of the term may fundamentally differ for each of them. In order to include variables in understanding *death*, this thesis works with it as a *concept*, a term broad enough to allow for more space in analysis than a semiotic definition of *death* would. Such approach facilitates discussion on *death representations* in a literary text. According to cultural and literary theorist Mieke Bal, working with concepts instead of single method-based research should be encouraged because it "*helps rather than hinders*"[34] an interdisciplinary discussion. Similarly, in *Textual Strategies* (1979), Josué V. Harari speaks against a limited framework for literary criticism when he proposes that "*the idea of a method whose procedures, like a cooking recipe, can be repeated mechanically and* [that it is something] *no work can 'resist,' is a dangerous proposition*."[35] Therefore, interdisciplinarity is at the heart of understanding how abstract concepts such as *death*, which are linked to various fields of academic research, are represented in a literary text.

The main challenge in establishing a conceptual framework is assessing relevant points of interest for textual analysis. Scope of interest could not only include the moment of death, but also following/preceding bodily decay and sense of mortality, aesthetics of *death*, death ideations and death denial, funerary practices, beliefs in afterlife and consequent philosophies on life in relation to its inevitable end. Further investigation into conceptual understanding of *death* allows us to observe how such ideas manifest in a literary work. Hence, this thesis examines relevant works of literary theory in relation to Japanese Buddhist and Shintō tradition. This text inspects employed narrative strategies and literary devices that form meaning in text in combination with cultural context.

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[34] Mieke Bal, "Working with Concepts," *European Journal of English Studies*, 13:1 (2009): 21, https://doi.org/10.1080/13825570802708121.

[35] Josué V. Harari, "Preface" in *Textual Strategies*, ed. Josué V. Harari (New York: Cornel University, 1979), 11.

As an additional point to discussion of *death* as a concept, one could also question what a literary work itself represents in relation to one's mortality in general. Adriana Teodorescu discusses the idea of an author defeating death simply by producing a written work in the collection *Death Representations in Literature Forms and Theories* (2015). There, Teodorescu refuses the notion that literature is a so called *slap in the face of death*,[36] because when analysing literary pieces dealing with *death "we must never take for granted the idea [...] according to which the authenticity of the being, encountered or regained in the acceptance of one's own death/mortal nature (of the characters, of the reader through characters) leads automatically to the defeat of death."*[37] Teodorescu warns against interpreting *death representations* in an over-aestheticised manner and points to language as a possible tool in observing features of *death*. When doing so, she discourages from understanding simply language as a death-revealing or a death-opposing principle:

> *"Either we choose to consider that language [...] reveals a principle of death, extracting the object from the environmental reality, depriving it from its substantiality. Or, on the contrary, we consider language a force opposed to death, which, through its linguistic baptism over the world, gets rid of its specific degradation and has the chance of another body."*[38]

She sees "*the power of literature per se to annihilate death*"[39] as a cliché. In other words, the reality whether an author writes whilst striving to "survive" (at least metaphorically) on paper or not, may be up for discussion. As a topic, it belongs more to an existential sphere of philosophy (e. g. Michel Foucault writes on this)[40] but we could say that it does not bring much valuable or new information to the sphere of literary studies.

Still, Sōseki was persuaded to study literature and not science, because he could one day *"create a masterpiece that will survive* [him] *as a legacy for hundreds of years or even thousands of years."*[41] He saw that literature was a way for him to "serve the world."[42] In this way, we may say he acquired a tool for Teodorescu's *slap in the face of death*. Presumably, most authors (as

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[36] Adriana Teodorescu, "Introduction" in *Death Representations In Literature Forms And Theories*, ed. Adriana Teodorescu (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 5.
[37] Adriana Teodorescu, "Introduction," 5.
[38] Adriana Teodorescu, "Death Representation in Literature: Cultural and Theoretical Principles" in *Death Representations In Literature Forms And Theories*, ed. Adriana Teodorescu (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 56.
[39] Adriana Teodorescu, "Introduction," 1.
[40] In Harari's *Textual Strategies,* Foucault says that "*our* [European] *culture has metaporhosed this idea of narrative, or writing, as something designed to ward off death."*
Harari, Josué V. (ed.), *Textual Strategies* (New York: Cornel University. 1979), 142.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

any other person) ponder the meaning of their work in the grand scheme of things at least once in their lifetime, but it is the text itself that should be of concern in analysing thoughts in connection to a sense of mortality. Nevertheless, in most cases, it is difficult to discern whether an author is simply expressing a character's thoughts and fears or is using a character to speak the author's own ideas. Additionally, Teodorescu warns against an over-aesthecised manner of analysis in her essay when she describes it to be *"a propensity to consider death in literature to be significant only for literary studies."*[43] As the whole collection of essays suggests, literary studies can *"provide* [a] *fresh and accurate way of interrogating death as a steady and unavoidable human reality and as an ever-continuing socio-cultural construction."*[44]

However, as previously mentioned, Teodorescu's view belongs more to a European outlook on literary analysis. *Death representations* can still serve an aesthetic function and the idea of defeating mortality through writing is applicable in Buddhist context (the text further explores this idea in the following sections). This thesis pays attention to different approaches to *death representations* within selected Sōseki's works: socio-literary context, cultural patterns and, briefly, also connection between literary portrayal and the author's theoretical works. The main aim of this thesis is to inspect strategies employed in establishing the analysed *death representations* that serve a possible interpretation.

[43] Adriana Teodorescu, "Introduction," 1.
[44] Adriana Teodorescu, "Introduction," 1.

3.2. Philosophical and Socio-Cultural Aspects of *Death* in Japan

Within a Japanese context, the conceptual understanding of *death* has been predominantly shaped by Buddhism, although we can also observe influences of Shintō and shamanism, and later even Christianity.[45] Historically, the earliest concepts of *death* are linked to the notion of afterlife, ancestry worship[46] and funerary practices. Understandably, both Shintō and Buddhism contain theological or philosophical practices not necessarily connected to the concept of mortality, they also seep into rituals, customs and beliefs that reflect social hierarchy, morality, medicinal practices, superstitions about good and bad fortune, etc. The concept of afterlife before the introduction of Buddhism in Japan (6th century) remains a topic of discussion in academic circles as we only have scarce information about the time preceding the establishment of Buddhism into the government system in the Nara period (710–794). As a result, the Japanese Buddhist concept of mortality, rebirth and afterlife incorporated related concepts from other East Asian traditions and specifically local Shintō tradition of *kami*[47] worship, which leans more toward seeing *death* as a pollutant and part of a social taboo. *Kami* as a general term could also be understood to be unable "to conceive of a moral right and wrong," which is how the Edo writer Ueda Akinari 上田秋成 (1734–1809) portrays them.[48]The polluting aspect of *death* is illustrated in a story about the gods Izanami and Izanagi in *Kojiki*.[49] *Yomi*, the underworld in *Kojiki*, is essentially a world of impurity, disease, rot and decay, full of demons. Because of this taboo nature of *death*, funerary practices, or the practical side of *death*, remain with Buddhist temples.[50]

[45] After a state persecution period under the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868) came to an end and freedom of religion was introduced in 1871, various Christian denominations started operating in Japan. Nowadays, the number of self-identified Christians makes up about 1,1% of Japanese population according to the 2021 Religious Yearbook of the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan.

[46] Even today, there usually is a family altar *butsudan* in a Japanese household that is used to pay family ancestors respects.

[47] *Kami* 神 are gods or spirits in Shintō that inhabit this world.

[48] Susanna Fessler, "The Nature of the Kami. Ueda Akinari and Tandai Shōshin Roku," *Monumenta Nipponica* 51, no. 1 (1996): 1. Accessed March 12, 2021. doi:10.2307/2385314.

[49]A chronicle of myths, oral traditions and tales known as *Kojiki* (古事記) was collected in approximately 712 and written using Chinese characters and Japanese prosody. Shortly after, a similar collection *Nihon Shoki* (日本書紀, ca 720) was put together. It is a chronicle of oral tradition, more detailed and elaborate than *Kojiki*, written in Chinese.

[50] Nowadays, there are more options available in choice of funeral services outside Buddhist association since the funerary market has been undergoing a revolution to a certain degree. One can choose to scatter the deceased's ashes, and graves may not be tied to a family but to an organization for example.

When it comes to what follows after dying, concepts of afterlife and an underworld not only differ throughout various belief systems but also throughout various Buddhist schools.[51] The most popular branch,[52] the Pure Land Buddhism, promises reincarnation in Amida Buddha's Pure Land.[53] Apart from a promise of afterlife, followers of many religious traditions are generally also motivated to worship because of a threat of what would happen if required morals were disregarded. While in Judeo-Christian concepts of afterlife, one is judged upon death and either sent to Heaven or Hell, Buddhism teaches that one is stuck in a reincarnation cycle (based on one's *karma*) that needs to be broken. In general, Buddhist ideology is centred on life lived in suffering that one can escape through following the Buddhist teachings of self-sacrifice. In order to ensure reaching the promised heavenly realm (like the Pure Land), one also must devote their dying thoughts to the karmic process. If one cannot transcend to a heavenly realm, it is believed that one enters a realm of hell, or one could be reincarnated as a living creature (an animal or a human) based on one's past karma. Folk tales and popular myths offer another perspective on afterlife in stories about those who did not pass on and haunt this world as ghosts.[54] Summer becomes a season of ghost tales and ancestor worships, as it is believed to be the time when spirits can visit our worldly realm and they are celebrated and remembered during *obon matsuri*, or the Obon Festival.

Japanese culture has a history of regarding self-sacrifice as a highly moral act, especially in the context of samurai culture. In Buddhism, self-sacrifice not only exists in a form of material offerings but also bodily sacrifice of various kinds. In some cases, this could even mean suicide, such as the one committed by the Boddhisattva Medicine King in the Lotus Sūtra, the basis of the Pure Land Buddhism, who "*wrapped himself in jewels and burned his body in offering to*

[51] Mariko Namba Walter identifies differences in approaches to death between the Tendai sect, the Shingon sect, Nichiren sect, Shin Buddhism, Zen Buddhism, etc.
Mariko Namba Walter, *Death and Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism,* 252-261.
[52] The 2021 Religious Yearbook (or Shūkyō Nenkan: Reiwa Sannenban) of the Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan explains how the Buddhist temples (and other religious institutions) and their Japanese followers have changed in numbers in the preface to collected data on year 2021.
The Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan, "Shūkyō Nenkan: Reiwa Sannenban," December 28, 2021, 15-17, https://www.bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/hakusho_nenjihokokusho/shukyo_nenkan/pdf/r03nenkan.pdf.
[53] *Jōdō bukkyō* (浄土仏教) in Japanese, is a branch of Buddhism spread across South East Asia that belongs to Mahāyāna cosmology. In Japan, it developed into various sects, mostly represented by Shin Buddhism or *Jōdō shinshū* (浄土真宗) founded on the teachings of the Tendai school (天台宗) and influenced by the Lotus sūtra and Mahāyāna Nirvana sūtra.
[54] One of the most famous ghosts would be a scholar and politician Sugawara no Michizane (菅原 道真/菅原 道眞, 845-903) who was turned into a deity out of fear of his anger. His wrath was blamed for plague, drought and floods. To calm his spirit, he was made a deity of sky and storms under the name Tenjin (天神). Today he is more commonly worshipped as a deity of scholarship.

the Buddha Pure and Bright Excellence of Sun and Moon."[55] According to Christmas's *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism* (2005), suicide is a way of escaping suffering in life, however "*destruction of the physical body merely transfers the entity [committing suicide] to other spheres of existence, and rebirth into the physical follows.*"[56] Before Buddhism was institutionalised in Japan, servants followed their masters into death as part of an ancient Japanese sacrificial custom *junsō* (殉葬, lit. follow into the grave). This custom later shifted into *junshi*[57] (usually done by *seppuku*[58]) and is loosely connected to the act of *shinjū*[59] (in that it could also be regarded as a moral act associated with honour). Views on suicide by *junshi* differed. On the one hand, *junshi* became outlawed in order to secure servants for descendants of the deceased aristocrats and permission (*mokkei*, 黙契) was needed, otherwise it was referred to as a *dog's death* (*inujini*, 犬死). On the other hand, in *Suicidal Honor: General Nogi And The Writings Of Mori Ôgai And Natsume Sôseki* (2006) Doris Bargen explains that "junshi *committed without permission was sometimes considered the most glorious form of death*,"[60] or a "*proof of an uncanny inner identity of spirit,*"[61] which was a highly esteemed goal in samurai culture associated with loyalty, servitude and honour. Historically, there are cases of *junshi* being committed en mass by a whole family, but also on a battlefield when one's lord died in the battle. However, *junshi* was already a thing of the past by the Meiji era.[62]

As far as funerals are concerned, funerary practices in Japan differ from Buddhist school to Buddhist school in details such as the *sūtras* employed in the funerary service, beliefs about the soul's processing towards the Pure Land, or even the tools used in the funerary ceremonies. In

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[55] Brian O. Rupert, "Beyond Death and Afterlife," in *Death and Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism,* eds. Stone, Jacqueline I., and Mariko Namba Walter (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 104.

[56] Christmas, *A Popular Dictionary of Buddhism*, 220.

[57] *Junshi* (殉死) is "*in its prototypical Japanese form* […] [a] *voluntary human sacrifice upon the death of a secular lord who is venerated like a deity.* Junshi *is performed by* seppuku*, an elaborate ritual usually requiring a second or a witness."* Doris G. Bargen, *Suicidal Honor: General Nogi And The Writings Of Mori Ôgai And Natsume Sôseki*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 20.

[58] *Seppuku* (切腹) is a form of ritual suicide by disembowelment. Bargen, *Suicidal Honor: General Nogi And The Writings Of Mori Ôgai And Natsume Sôseki*, 1.

[59] *Shinjū* (心中) is a suicide committed by lovers. For example, popular dramatic Chikamatsu Monzaemon 近松門左衛門 (1653–1725) writes on this topic in *Shinjūten no Amijima* 心中天網島 (1731, The Love Suicides at Amijima).

[60] Bargen, *Suicidal Honor: General Nogi And The Writings Of Mori Ôgai And Natsume Sôseki*, 20.

[61] Ibid.

[62] When General Nogi Maresuke 乃木 希典 committed suicide in honour of the Emperor Meiji's passing in 1912, it is seen as an end of an era. Sōseki reflects on this in *Kokoro.*
Bargen, *Suicidal Honor: General Nogi And The Writings Of Mori Ôgai And Natsume Sôseki*, 80-81.

"The Structure of Japanese Buddhist Funerals" Mariko Namba Walter explains how Zen Buddhism believes in an instant transgression of the deceased into Amida's land, while other Buddhist schools claim a forty-nine day long transgression period during which the deceased's family along with a Buddhist priest perform prayer for the deceased in order to aid them in reaching Buddhahood.[63] She identifies similarities and differences in the structures of funerals performed by popular Japanese Pure Land schools.

According to Namba Walter's research, we can establish basic stages common to most funerals but varying in details according to Buddhist schools. The first stage is the "*initiatory stage*," which usually consists of inviting Amida to the deathbed through *sūtra* recitation, a "*wake"* held the following night and "*funeral proper*." The second stage is the "*ordination of the dead*" stage i.e., the ritual posthumous ordaining of the deceased as a Buddhist monk or nun (there the deceased also receives a posthumous name), followed by a third stage named "*leading the deceased to the other world*," where the officiating priest poses a question in Zen-style format to the deceased (that is answered with silence) and performs a roar that leads the deceased to the original realm of Buddha. After a short prayer the family of the deceased separates bones from the ashes. Finally, after going through the previous stages, funerary processes end with a "*transfer of merit*," where the deceased's spirit wanders in an in-between state for forty-nine days. Various post-cremation ceremonial services are performed to aid the spirit reach Buddhahood, the most important ceremony being the one on the forty-ninth day, but some schools see the thirty-three year anniversary of passing as an important milestone as well. [64]

As far as the religious and philosophical development during Sōseki's lifetime is concerned, the modern period was a time of turbulent changes. According to the *2021 Religious Yearbook*, the Meiji era was a time when

> "*temples were affected by efforts to separate Buddhism and Shintō as well as by anti-Buddhist movements. In 1872* […]*, being a Buddhist priest was no longer seen as a social status but a job occupation* […]. *Religious organisations were being restructured* […]. *And modern Buddhist studies were developing from the traditional study of religious doctrine up until the Edo period [(also referred to as the Tokugawa shogunate)] under the influence of the priests*

[63] Mariko Namba Walter, "The Structure of Japanese Buddhist Funerals," in *Death and Afterlife in Japanese Buddhism,* eds. Stone, Jacqueline I., and Mariko Namba Walter (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 270.

[64] Mariko Namba Walter, "The Structure of Japanese Buddhist Funerals," 261-269.

that studied abroad. Another interesting point of this time period would be that it was the time when the Buddhist Enlightenment movement and Zaike Buddhism [zaike bukkyō] *began.'*[65]

Many Buddhist scholars came to prominence in the public's consciousness and present day academia sees the Meiji period as the time when modern and present day Japanese philosophical thought started to form. Japanese intelligentsia under the influence of Western thought incorporated Western concepts into already established Japanese religious and philosophical thought, which resulted into efforts to re-define them. The sense of nationality, religion and social hierarchy were being questioned and reshaped after more than a two-hundred-year period of relative stability. The literary scene mirrored such progress with its own experimentation.

[65] The Agency for Cultural Affairs of Japan, "Shūkyō Nenkan: Reiwa Sannenban," December 28, 2021, 15, https://www.bunka.go.jp/tokei_hakusho_shuppan/hakusho_nenjihokokusho/shukyo_nenkan/pdf/r03nenkan.pdf.

3.3. Narrative Devices as Tools for Interpreting Meaning

Another equally important step in establishing grounds for further conceptual analysis lies in the text itself. There are various methodological approaches that literary theory as a discipline offers when examining a text in order to identify underlying textual strategies. Prevalently, these approaches originate in the question "What is literature?" and focus on how form and content are connected. One of the first to formulate a theory on what is poetry (or literature) was the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who gave structure to the genres of Comedy and Tragedy in *Poetics* (ca 350 BC). Most prolific literary theories are much younger in origin. Formalism, for example, centres on a text's form and studies how it manifests in modes and genres through grammar and syntax, but also literary devices. On a basic level, it is similar to Structuralism, a methodological approach brought to existence by Ferdinand de Saussure's Course in General Linguistics. Both methodologies rose to prominence in the early 20th century. Structuralism branched out into schools such as the Prague Linguistic Circle, the Russian Structuralism, French Structuralism, etc., and its focus was primarily on the linguistic aspect of a text. Structuralism aims to search for a structure in a text with stress on seeing form and meaning as part of a social interaction, i.e., a communication between an author and an audience, where a text acts as a medium. According to Jonathan Culler, *"the attempt to theorize the distinctiveness of literary language or the distinctiveness of literature was central to theory in those early years* [of Structuralist theory]*, but it hasn't been the focus of theoretical activity for some time.*"[66]

Narratology and Archetypal Criticism specifically deal with literary language and structure in a literary text. Narratology, as its name would suggest, studies narrative and narrative structure. Modern roots of this discipline are primarily preoccupied with folktales and Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) of the Russian Formalist tradition is particularly often used as a reference. Archetypal Criticism is a literary theory focused on narrative with stress on recurring archetypes and myths. It grew on popularity in the 1940s and 1950s under the influence of Northrop Frye's work. It combines Jungian literary theory with cultural anthropology rooting in Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915). In order to establish an intertextual basis for textual interpretation, this thesis draws on these schools of literary theory.

As a starting point for broadly identifying narrative schemes, we shall turn to a more contemporary narratologist, Christopher Booker and his *The Seven Basic Plots* (2004). In this

[66] Nathan, Culler, *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 26-27.

book, Booker presents a universal set of seven narrative plots that one can find in classic and contemporary literature across the world. He bases the theory on Frye's and Joseph Campbell's works, as well as other literary theory traditions. There is "Overcoming the Monster," where a great evil poses a threat and the hero eventually destroys it. In "Rags to Riches," the hero overcomes adversity through virtue and ultimately gains wealth, power and love as a result. "The Quest" is similar to "Rags to Riches" but there is a goal, or a grail per se, which the hero seeks on a journey of discovery, alone or with companions. The "Voyage and Return" plot is about a hero setting off on a journey, with emphasis on the process of discovering the world or oneself. Once a certain objective is reached, he returns home. This plot stresses events prior to the objective, as they serve as a tool for developing the hero's character – that is what distinguishes it from "The Quest."

Another two plots, "Comedy" and "Tragedy," are based on those in *Poetics*, however, Booker develops them by more contemporary literary narratives. In "Comedy," *"a shadow of confusion"*[67] hangs over the characters until it develops into a *"nightmarish tangle"*[68] (such as two characters not being able to be together) before a revelation of previously unrecognised facts dramatically changes the state of things (e.g., a previously hated character proves to be misunderstood) and clears the shadows for a joyful union of characters to come together. *"What was dark is now light."*[69] A dark figure in "Comedy" may or may not be present, it can even be the hero of the narrative, but the happy ending is the key point in narrative that distinguishes "Comedy" from "Tragedy." In contrast to "Comedy," "Tragedy" sees the protagonist striving for an object of desire to be the villain spiralling into darkness. After initial success, the hero is met with failure and seeks darkness in frustration, which brings forces of opposition against the hero (ostracisation by society, fate, etc.) and eventually the hero is destroyed. The balance between darkness and light may be of varied distribution, where the hero progressively turns towards darker and darker paths or is seeking redemption after committing a dark act, however, the hero's destruction and prevalence of darkness at the end of a narrative is what denotes a "Tragedy." The final plot called "Rebirth" is close to "Tragedy" in its narrative – the hero falls to dark forces or to inevitable fate, however, usually after a long time of such misfortune a "miraculous act of redemption"[70] saves them from darkness and brings them to "glorious

[67] Christopher, Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 150.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Christopher, Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots*, 194.

light."[71] Additionally to his analysis of plot types, Booker also offers types of characters such plots might contain.

Booker's publication is an example of literary theory and literary criticism claiming universality while predominantly focusing on Western literary tradition and seldom granting space to literature from the rest of the world. Therefore, while Booker's theory of seven basic plots may prove useful for general narratological analysis, it is necessary that this thesis also pays attention to specifics of Japanese literature in interpretation. When zooming in on a text, one may observe that literary devices such as symbolism, analogies and metaphors (which serve as tools for possible interpretations of tone, style and overt or covert meanings) may carry different value in Western context than in the Japanese context. Applying Western narrative structures to Japanese literary canon may prove to be a difficult task to achieve.

In *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, where Karatani Kojin presents new literary concepts that emerged during the Meiji period, Karatani states that Sōseki doubted *"the universal character of English literature"* as its *"universality was not a priori, but historical."*[72] As an author, he drew inspiration from both Western literature and Japanese Edo literature, which was for rooted in Chinese literature. The Meiji period allowed for experimentation with genres and themes, which additionally went hand in hand with new understandings of already established literary movements. The genre of Novel was in the process of further development, where Japanese literary scholars attempted new definitions.[73] While not separate from contemporary Romantic and Naturalist tendencies in Japanese literature, Sōseki distanced himself from association with a specific movement and focused on developing his own path in discussion with his literary contemporaries. Sōseki wrote *Wagahai Wa Neko De Aru* and *Gubijinsō* in a period *"when naturalism had already been established as the dominant trend in Japanese literature, however, his work can in no way be regarded as a replication of Edo fiction pure and Simple."*[74]At the same time, when writing about English literature, *"he gave the highest evaluation to the writings of Swift and Stem. Late-nineteenth-century British scholars saw these works as representing a stage of immaturity and germination of the novel."*[75] Having practiced

[71] Christopher, Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots*, 194.
[72] Kojin, Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, trans.Brett de Bary (Duke University Press, 1993), 12.
[73] For example, in Shōsetsu Shinzui 小説神髄 (Essence of the Novel, 1885), Tsubouchi Shōyo 坪内逍遥 (1859–1935) established his own theory of genre that put emphasis on human feelings over description in literature.
[74] Kojin, Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, 178
[75] Kojin, Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, 177.

haiku composition with Shiki, Sōseki was drawn to write his novels using a technique based on Shiki's sketching or *shaseibun*.

Karatani mentions that *shaseibun* is what provided Sōseki with literary freedom and allowed him to mix genres. As an example, he explains how Sōseki uses present narrative tense instead of past narrative tense (with suffix *ta*) in his works:

> *"If the suffix ta may be defined as marking a point from which one reconstructs the past. Soseki's rejection of ta was a refusal of this kind of synthesizing, totalizing viewpoint. It was also a rejection of the apparent actuality of the 'self' (watakushi). Soseki felt similarly about plot: 'What is plot? Life has no plots. Is it not pointless to construct a plot from what has none?' Soseki also wrote that, 'If this position of the writer of shaseibun is taken to the extreme, it is completely incompatible with the views of novelists. Plot is the foremost necessity for the novel.'"*[76]

Identifying plot in Japanese novels, or whether there even is any, is a discussion of even later writers such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介 (1892–1927) or Tanizaki Djun'ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965). Although absence of a main plot does not necessarily imply absence of a narrative structure that would employ minor subplots.

Another interesting reading of Japanese narrative structures would include Buddhism. Michihiro Ama's *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction* inspects a possible interpretation of Japanese literary narrative as a path toward Buddhahood.[77] She bases this on various approaches to literary theory of other academics who discuss whether a literary text could be regarded as a religious exercise. Opposing views suggest that such perspective ignores Buddhist efforts to discourage self-centeredness.[78] Ama specifically pays attention to *shishōsetsu* (or I-novels, i.e., novels in first or third person narration, often based on the author's lived experience) under the term "personal fiction," developing on the theory by Tomi Suzuki that *"the connection between Buddhism and I-novels was made as part of the Japanese literary establishment's later justification to make I-novels uniquely Japanese."*[79] It is the characters' path in *shishōsetsu* that brings them opportunities for spirituality, which is often

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[76] Ibid, 179.
[77] Consequently, Teodorescu's view that literary endeavour should not be regarded as "a slap in the face of death" falls apart in this context, because a Buddhist writing could be understood as an act of writing aimed towards reincarnation in the Pure Land.
[78] Michihiro Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction*, (Albany: State University of New York, 2021), 27-31.
[79] Michihiro Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction*, 27.

"triggered by the protagonist's sense of loneliness, displacement, loss, frustration, and other types of suffering. These activities develop further, as main characters seek self-detachment, the state of oneness, and a spiritual strength; make efforts to understand, overcome, and move away from the causes of suffering; and accept their past, engage with their present conditions, and come to terms with self and others. Despite these differences, realization and acceptance of suffering is the beginning of a path that leads them to self-realization, self-transformation, and Buddhist awakening."[80]

However, reaching a goal and attaining Buddhahood themselves are not necessary for a Buddhist narrative. Ideology expressed within a work or *"the main characters' external activities, such as travelling (moving to or away from a city), wandering from one place to another, and observing Buddhist funerals and processions"* [81] may also very much contribute to such narrative. Ama applies these findings to examples from Modern Japanese fiction, including several Sōseki's works. She explains that Sōseki was interested in Buddhism from a philosophical perspective, before he survived a life-threatening moment.[82] He spent some time in Zen temples in Koishikawa and Kamakura in 1893 and searched for answers in there.[83] However, as is evident in the analysis, he merely used Buddhist concepts for inspiration for the selected works.

As previously mentioned, literary theory often centres on the question "What is literature?" and this is also what drove Sōseki towards his own literary pursuit. This might be also connected to his (for Japanese standards) almost radical individualism, a topic he explained in his speech "Watashi no Kojin Shugi" as well as in his other writings. Sōseki gave the speech at Gakushuin University in 1914 and its text is included in the *"ten-year project Sōseki had set for himself during his 1900–1902 stay in London: to theorize literature in all of its psychological and sociological ramifications."*[84] This project unfortunately did not reach complete fulfilment due to Sōseki dying rather young, nevertheless what he managed to write down represents a body of literary theory well-ahead of its time, almost a *"foreshadowing of later developments in literary theory, such as formalism, structuralism, reader-response theory, cognitive science, and postcolonialism."*[85] In *Bungakuron*, Sōseki puts emphasis on personal narrative from a

[80] Michihiro Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction*, 31.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid, 73.
[83] Marvin Marcus, *Reflections In A Glass Door*, 110.
[84] Soseki, Natsume, "My Individualism," in *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*, ed. By Michael K. Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda, and Joseph A. Murphy, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), E-book.
[85] Soseki, Natsume, "Introduction," in *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*, ed. Michael K. Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda, and Joseph A. Murphy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). E-book.

psychological and sociological perspective (as is also evident in his novels) when he invents a formula for literary substance. According to this formula, F (concepts and impressions, not necessarily based on science) accompanied by f (affect and emotions) constitutes the substance of literature. Literary (or artistic) truth is different from scientific truth, therefore *"as long as one has attained an artistic truth, the person viewing the piece* [of literature] *has no need to be troubled by whether or not it demonstrates a scientific truth."*[86] A writer employs hyperbole to exaggerate facts, selectively omits or abbreviates information and synthesises *"material actually existing in the world* [to] *draw out something that does not exist in this world."* [87] When explaining the difference, Sōseki writes on the concept of *death* that

> *"for the sake of continued living we incessantly labor; to prolong our life we fret and fuss. For this reason the large F 'death' typically attaches uneasiness and fear as its small f. It is the nature of our sentiment to share this universally. However, with the state of the world at the point it is today, it is no surprise that people appear who rather prize and seek death, that is, assign to death a pleasurable affect. That is to say, depending on time and context, the exact opposite f can attach to the same fact of death."* [88]

As we shall see further on, this notion can be applied to some of Sōseki's works. The following chapters explore how death is represented in *Kusamakura* and *Kōfu*. The text inspects how the formula, which can be considered quite universal, manifests within them in combination with narratological approaches by Booker and Ama.

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[86] Soseki, Natsume, in *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*, ed. Michael K. Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda, and Joseph A. Murphy, book 4, chap. 2.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Soseki, Natsume, in *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*, ed. Michael K. Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda, and Joseph A. Murphy, book2, chap. 2.

4. Studying *Death* in *Kusamakura*: Aesthetics and the Impermanence of Life

Sōseki wrote *Kusamakura* at the beginning of his writing career and placed its story in Nakoi, a small village based on a similar place at a foot of a mountain path with several hot springs near Kumamoto. A thirty-year old painter and poet from Tokyo (because he does not have a name, he is referred to as the artist protagonist in this text) travels through the place and settles in Shioda's hostel, where he meets Shioda's daughter Nami. The artist protagonist vows to produce art rid of human emotions (this principle is called 非人情 *hininjō*), a process that he sees as the most objective way of describing the world. In *Kusamakura*, everything serves as a means of inspiration to the artist protagonist and principles of art are the main topic. Nami entertains his artistic aspirations and playfully aids in realising some of his ideas so that he can transform them into art. Although the novel mostly focuses on processes of creating art and aestheticism, its second half is more emotionally expressive as the shadow of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) looms over life in even such a remote place.

The process of depersonalisation through *hininjō* 非人情 is established in the first chapter when the artist protagonist describes his thoughts on life as he ascends a mountain. He explains his decision as follows: *"Since I've come here to devote myself to the unhuman* [(hininjō)]*, this is the perspective on humans that I will take, and it is bound to be different from the view I would have from the midst of a life lived deep in the cramped little streets of the crowded world."*[89] However, as Nami herself doubts that this approach is rid of emotions, when he translates a novel to her in chapter nine, she asks whether that means that "*an artist is someone who falls in love unemotionally* [(不人情, funinjō)]."[90] As he explains the difference is that his way of reading and loving is not *un-emotional* (*funinjō*) but *non-emotional* (*hininjō*), which means that the story itself does not matter.[91] While this is also partially true about *Kusamakura* itself, as the story progresses and undertones of a distant war seep into the narrative, it is clear that this impersonal attitude to the world serves as an escapist tactic.

[89] Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), Chapter 1. E-book.
The English translation uses "*unhuman*" for translating *hininjō,* but in English, this word also has a meaning of "cruel" or "superhuman," which is far from what Sōseki intended by using *hininjō.* He uses the term to express an approach rid of human emotions, a depersonalized objective approach to description.
[90] Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 1.
[91] Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 1.

The aesthetics of *Kusamakura* not only draw from Sōseki's own ideas but also from Japanese, Chinese and European (mainly Romantic and Naturalist) aesthetic tradition. When inspecting Japanese influences, *hininjō* may be linked to the principle of *mono no aware* and Zen Buddhism.

Since life and death are omnipresent in one's life, Japanese culture searched for a way to appreciate the beauty of life that is soon to wither, or had even already suffered under the passage of time. The feeling associated with this is called *mono no aware* and has been present in Japanese literature since the time of *Genji Monogatari* 源氏物語 (The Tale of Genji, Murasaki Shikibu, early 11th century). Keene explains this term when referring to *"the phrase in the original [of The Tale of Genji] that has been translated as 'the sorrow of human existence' is* mono no aware. *It might better be translated as 'a sensitivity to things,' but this sensitivity usually takes the form of realizing the perishability of beauty and human happiness."*[92] Meanwhile Davies and Ikeno offer examples such as when *"people are aware of the beauty of full blossoms, of course, but are more touched and deeply moved when these blossoms are falling or beginning to wilt. Similarly, they think that a moon partially covered by clouds is more appealing than one that is full."*[93] Similarly to *hininjō*, *mono no aware* is also not linked to the story *per se*, it is linked to the place of things (both living and material) in this world and to appreciating their beauty.[94] The artist protagonist aspires to see people as figures from Nō theatre[95] whom he observes "*from a lofty and transcendent perspective, and [he does his] best to prevent any spark of human feeling* [(人情 ninjō)] *from springing up between [him and them].*"[96] It is not that the subjects of his art would be without emotions. He cannot be swayed by them as an artist in order to create objective art.

The difference between *hininjō* and *ninjō* is clarified in the way the artist protagonist describes Millais' Ophelia. A drowning woman at peace becomes a repetitive theme in the novel. In the second chapter, the artist protagonist imagines Nami on a horse in her wedding dress but substitutes her face with Ophelia's, since they have not met yet. An old woman in a teahouse

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[92] Donald Keene, "Japanese Fiction," in *The Pleasures Of Japanese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 86.
[93] Roger, Davies and Osamu Ikeno, "Bigaku: The Japanese Sense of Beauty," in *The Japanese Mind: Understanding Contemporary Culture* (Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 2002). E-book.
[94] The artist protagonist relates to this in the following text: "*With no other thought in mind, I will be in a fine position to pass lofty judgment on the presence or absence of beauty in all I view..."*
Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 1.
[95] "*How would it be if I chose to view as actions in a Noh drama the events and people I meet with in the course of this journey?"* Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 1.
[96] Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 1.

tells a story of a woman from Nagara that drowned herself instead of deciding whom to marry and likens her to Nami,[97] only Nami does not drown herself and lives a life full of energy after leaving her husband. In chapter seven, the artist protagonist reminiscences on the idea of aesthetics of a drowning person again:

> *"Looked at thus, Millais's painting of Ophelia, which has always somehow disturbed me, is in fact a work of considerable beauty. I have long wondered why he chose such an unpleasant scene, but now I see just why it works as a picture. There is undoubtedly something inherently aesthetic* [(美的 biteki)] *about a figure drifting or sunk, or half afloat and half sunk, lying at ease upon the flow.* […] *Of course, if she were depicted writhing in a spasm of agony, it would quite destroy the spirit of the work, but on the other hand an utterly unalluring and indifferent expression would convey no trace of human feeling."*[98]

It is this absence of a visible feeling that establishes *hininjō* and allows one to appreciate beauty of the deceased without life's agony being reflected onto the observer. Ophelia's story is no longer about suffering but about being at peace in death. A body rid of emotions through death becomes a part of aesthetic scenery. Still, the artist protagonist sets his mind on painting Nami with a facial expression she is yet to show.

If such a work were to be painted within the Buddhist context, perhaps it would be painted with lotus flowers as a sign of Ophelia ascending into the Pure Land. However, the artist protagonist does not seem to be interested in conveying a religious feeling with his possible painting, he does not appear to follow any specific religion. Ama connects his ideas to Zen Buddhism, as she understands *hininjō* to be a kind of "Buddhist detachment."[99] Narratively, Ama describes *Kusamakura* as story of "ground, path, and goal,"[100] which is close to Booker's Quest. "Ground," according to Ama, is the fact that the artist protagonist sees living in the worlds itself as a problem. His whole journey including the interactions with people represents "path" and fulfilment of his artistic pursuits before returning to Tokyo is the "goal." She stresses that the artist protagonist is knowledgeable in both classical and modern poetry to such a degree that he could be considered leading a path resembling Buddhist enlightenment.[101] As such, the aesthetics of *death* in *Kusamakura* could also be understood from a Buddhist point of view.

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[97] In chapter four, Nami admits to teaching the story to the old woman, perhaps knowingly that she would spread rumours about her anyway.
[98] Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 7, E-book.
[99] Michiro, Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction,* 151.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Michiro, Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction,* 153.

As far as European influence is concerned, the artist protagonist paints his surroundings and encounters with Nami in such a light that a European reader might almost feel as if they are reading a novel with Gothic[102] and Romantic[103] undertones. Perhaps the most relevant to this would be the scene in chapter three, where Nami roams halls of the hostel in her wedding dress almost as a ghost. The artist protagonist feels an eerie presence about the hostel the first night there and the intricate layout of the building in a remote area surrounded by natural landscape seems to be an almost satirical[104] hint on Gothic literature.

As such, it is easy to see why Kin'ya Tsuruta in "Sôseki's *Kusamakura*: A Journey To 'The Other Side,'" (1988) sets *Kusamakura* in the realm of so called *mukōgawa* literature,[105] a term he uses for a narrative scheme similar to the narrative theory of *monomyth*.[106] This would also correspond with Booker's Quest, where the artist protagonist's grail is represented by his artistic aims to paint Nami. According to Tsuruta's analysis, the artist protagonist crosses the mountain to a place on the "other side" (possibly even a realm of the supernatural or realm of the dead), a location *"which form[s] an effective contrast to life in the metropolis"*[107] where he becomes lost. Water surfaces play a role of a border between this and another world. There is Kagami Pond, where Nami threatens to drown herself, and there is the sea, which the military crosses to Manchuria. The artist protagonist recognizes the pond as a place for crossing to the Pure Land, when he says *namu amida butsu* to the supposedly drowned women.[108] Nami becomes a companion to the artist protagonist that tests him and leads him astray from his ambitions and

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[102] Gothic literature is said to have "*a prevailing atmosphere of mystery and terror."* Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Gothic novel," Encyclopedia Britannica, May 12, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/art/Gothic-novel.

[103] European Romantic literature "*emphasized the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental."* The artist protagonist's detached approach to feeling would go against this tendency, however, as the text progresses, he does express his emotions in the novel.
Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Romanticism," Encyclopedia Britannica, February 2, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/art/Romanticism.

[104] In reality, Nami pretends to be a ghost-like presence to please the artist protagonist and serve as a source of inspiration to him. Still, while she helps him in his search for inspiration (in vain, as he does not pain a single painting throughout the novel), she teases him about the way he sees the world at the same time, which makes this a satirical approach.

[105] According to Tsuruta, "*mukōgawa is a by-product of Japan's rapid modernization, for among other things, modernization forced on the Japanese the complex problem of individuation, one of the components of modernity by which the people of Japan have been simultaneously attracted and repelled."*
Kin'ya Tsuruta, "Sôseki's Kusamakura: A Journey To 'The Other Side,'" *The Journal Of The Association Of Teachers Of Japanese,* vol. 22, no. 2 (1988): 170, https://doi.org/10.2307/488940.

[106] Also known as "Hero's journey," a narrative template popularized by Joseph Campbell (1904-1987). It structures narrative into several sections on a journey of a hero.

[107] Kin'ya Tsuruta, "Sôseki's Kusamakura: A Journey To 'The Other Side,'" 171.

[108] Michiro, Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction,* 155.

his ego, which he is supposed to transcend in order to fulfil his Quest. Ama explains that this makes her "a spiritual guide for men."[109]

As a character, Nami embodies a *"nurturer/mother who exerts an overpowering sexual attraction."*[110] The later part is realised when she strips naked in front of the artist protagonist and then flees laughing.[111] But she is also an enchantress,[112] who has family ties to the woman from Nagara (possibly a seductress), and whose family is rumoured to be cursed by madness in one person each generation. In chapter six, the artist protagonist observes red camellia flowers blooming around the Kagami Pond, reminding him of blood. Tsuruta explains this passage as a moment where *"the camellia blossoms represent not only an enchantress but also the spilled blood of her victim."*[113] While the artist protagonist's feelings about Nami are not clearly verbalised, Tsuruta claims that it illustrates that *"having no need to apply his detachment theory to objects in nature, he can freely reveal his true feelings about women through his reactions to the camellia blossoms."*[114] The artist protagonist changes his opinion on Nami, as he sees her gentler side when she meets with her ex-husband and hands him money instead of an expected blow with a dagger. With that, the theme of *death* with mysterious undertones is merely used to create tension, which is released once the theme is pushed aside in favour of a more emotional worldview.[115]

Other instances of the artist protagonist straying from his *hininjō* ideals are often accompanied by attempts of being objective. *"At every turn he drops the name of an artist or a poet. Whenever he loses control or is threatened by a person or an event, he quotes passages from well-known poems."*[116] In those moments, the artist protagonist strains himself to remain detached from emotions through this tactic. These hints to Sōseki's background knowledge as an avid reader of English literature and are meant to put emotional control back into the artist

[109] Ibid.
[110] Kin'ya Tsuruta, "Sôseki's Kusamakura: A Journey To 'The Other Side,'" 171.
[111] Tsuruta claims that by relaxing in the bath, the artist protagonist gives space in his heart to *ninjō*, revealing that his relationship with Nami is not only on a surface level. "*Like his dreams, the bath scene reveals various sides of the protagonist that he does not show when he is on his guard as a detached artist."*
Kin'ya Tsuruta, "Sôseki's Kusamakura: A Journey To 'The Other Side,'" 178.
[112] The woman from the teahouse and Genbei are the ones spreading rumours about Nami. An abbot then disperses any doubts about Nami's ill intents, explaining that she helped a young man through a "*great crisis in life.*"
Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 11, E-book.
[113] Kin'ya Tsuruta, "Sôseki's Kusamakura: A Journey To 'The Other Side,'" 180.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Tsuruta explains that Nami hides her true nature and only reveals it at the train station *"when caught off guard, reveals her true inner gentleness."* This expression becomes inspiration for the painting the artist protagonist plans to paint.
Ibid, 186.
[116] Ibid, 185.

protagonist's hands. Sōseki also draws inspiration in Gothic and Romantic literature or in Japanese ghost tales that were popularised by Lafcadio Hearn[117] at that time. In *Interpretations of Literature* (1915),[118] Hearn states that *"if we do not believe in old-fashioned stories and theories about ghosts, we are nevertheless obliged to recognize today that we are ghosts of ourselves."*[119] He suggests a writer should look for inspiration in dreams, if they do not believe in ghosts, as *"all artistic elements of ghostly literature exist in your dreams."*[120] That is not to say that Sōseki drew inspiration from his dreams, but that the quotes illustrate how the artist protagonist enters a dreamlike state in sections where he enters Tsuruta's *"other side."* This romanticising of reality (Nami pretending to be a ghost, visiting him in a bath, and appearing to be jumping into a pond) is largely removed from the ideals of detachment the artist protagonist seeks to follow. Tsuruta rightly interprets this as the artist protagonist's *"effort on his part to dilute the immediacy of reality with his hininjō world of art and to regain his control."*[121]

Control is one of reasons why the artist protagonist comes to Nakoi when he leaves a metropolitan Tokyo shadowed by war. He admits that he had to deal with troubles from detectives 探偵 (*tantei*),[122] although it is difficult to discern why the detectives investigate him.[123] One could see a reason to leave the city when it is filled with an uneasy atmosphere of debating military tactics and young men leaving their families to serve the country. Observing his surroundings without emotions would not be possible in such an environment.

The escapist nature of the artist protagonist's detachment efforts is connected to the way interconnectedness between life and death is depicted in the novel. In chapter six, the artist protagonist explains the connection between the universe and an artist since *"only thanks to the existence of the poet and the painter are we able to imbibe the essence of this dualistic world […]. The artist feasts on mists, he sips the dew, appraising this hue and assessing that, and he*

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[117] Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904), known in Japan as Yakumo Koizumi 小泉 八雲, was a writer of Greek-Irish descent, who rewrote many Japanese traditional folk tales for the international readership and also taught English literature in Japan.
[118] The University of Tōhoku lists this book as part of Sōseki's collection in their catalogue of books that he used to own. Published in 1915, almost a decade after *Kusamakura*'s publishing, it touches on various topics in literature in general. The collection can be accessed at http://www.library.tohoku.ac.jp/en/collections/soseki/index.html
[119] Lafcadio Hearn, "The Supernatural in Fiction" in *Interpretations of Literature* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1965), 91, http://books.google.com/books?id=YUMLAAAAIAAJ&oe=UTF-8.
[120] Lafcadio Hearn, "The Supernatural in Fiction" in *Interpretations of Literature* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1965), 94, http://books.google.com/books?id=YUMLAAAAIAAJ&oe=UTF-8.
[121] Kin'ya Tsuruta, "Sôseki's Kusamakura: A Journey To 'The Other Side,'" 185.
[122] Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 11, E-book.
[123] One could imagine they asked him questions in case of drafting but the novel is not clear about this.

does not lament the moment of death."[124] An artist serves as a medium between a commoner and the beauty of the world. As he himself claims to be such an artist, he explains aging and death:

> *"Our years may pass unheeded until we find ourselves in groaning decrepitude, but when we turn to recollect our life and enumerate the vicissitudes of our history and experience, then surely we will be able to call up with delight some moment when we have forgotten our sullied selves, a moment that lingers still, just as even a rotting corpse will yet emit a faint glow. Anyone who cannot do so cannot call his life worth living* [(生甲斐のない ikigai no nai)]. *"*[125]

As he explains it, death gives meaning to life. If one approaches mentions of death in the novel from this perspective, the aesthetics of the deceased Ophelia and the eerie atmosphere of the "ghost" fall short of detachment from their story. Since rage, nor hatred, or bitterness[126] is something he does not wish to see in the drowning body of Ophelia, it appears as if by wishing to draw Nami-Ophelia with an expression of pity in her dying face, he aims to link this expression to the life that passed. Her pity would then be over her untimely death or over her unfulfilled romance.

Untimely death is again connected to the war efforts to Manchuria and sets a tragic tone to the ending. Nami's cousin, young Kyuichi, is to be sent to Manchuria to join the Japanese military. It is made clear that Kyuichi might not return home alive. Nami reminds him so on the way to Nihonbashi in chapter thirteen, while in chapter eight her father optimistically asks him to bring some China when he returns. When the artist protagonist hears about Kyuichi's leave, he is shocked that war found its way to this remote village. He likens Kyuichi to a follower of steps of *"defeated warriors from the great clan wars of the twelfth century."*[127] He paints a picture of his faith with words and comments that "*this young man sits, beside an artist for whom the sole value of human life lies in dreaming,*"[128] almost as if hiding his sadness behind this statement. In a broad sense, joining the military with a certain death could be considered an act of indirect suicide, therefore the previously mentioned "*following one's lord into death."*[129] Nami urges Kyuichi to die in a cynical tone, suggesting that she too would join the military to

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[124] Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 6, E-book.
[125] Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 6, E-book.
[126] "Bitterness? No, too vulgar, unless it had a poetic air of romance to it."
Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 10, E-book.
[127] Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 8, E-book.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Doris G. Bargen, *Suicidal Honor: General Nogi And The Writings Of Mori Ôgai And Natsume Sôseki*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006), 14.

die if she could.[130] There is no nationalistic motivation in her words. In contrast to her, old man Shioda stresses that Kyuichi will return in victory, yet their wishes to see Kyuichi alive again are stronger than any militaristic pride. It is the artist protagonist who gives Kyuichi's story a melancholic turn in his narration, describing events that are yet to come in imagined details[131] as inevitable. Red dots of flowers in the sea appear as a reminder that blood will be spilled. Kyuichi is the reason for the family to come to Tokyo, a visit as natural as death drawing toward him. When he boards a train and leaves, another head appears from a train window. Nami's ex-husband is on the same train, on the same path to untimely death, shedding light back onto his life.

If we take this concept of death giving meaning to life, Kyuichi's death and Nami's ex-husband's death not only give meaning to their lives (in Nami's ex-husband's case, his demise might even be a sort of retribution or atonement for their marriage), but they also enable Nami to show an expression of pity. Through expressing this emotion, Nami can finally be immortalised as a painting. However, it could be argued that such an approach would reduce the character's life to a one-dimensional representation of her personality. The artist protagonist's *hininjō* is in essence a reductive process that only shows the beauty the artist protagonist desires to show. Considering this alongside the characters joining the military (some of the have been alienated by the other), *Kusamakura* could also be considered a Tragedy.

Among Sōseki's works, *Kusamakura* is a novel where characters die outside of the narrative and in a way that affects other characters. Death is not directly described, as it would go against the intended detached aestheticism if the characters would actually die as part of the narrative were to be described realistically in their dying pains. It would also disrupt the idea of a romanticised death giving meaning to life. Nami's mother dies a year before the artist protagonist's visit, making Nami the mother/nurturer figure in her family but also presumably affecting her emotionally. The "Death" of Nami's marriage and presumed death of her ex-husband then again influence Nami's life. The rumoured suicide of a woman dying because of indecisiveness hangs over Nami as an ill omen. Her threats to kill herself if given a chance with both her words and actions signal how the actions of others are reflected upon her. Perhaps if the artist protagonist were to paint her dying, she would be released from this. When we focus on Nami as a character inside *Kusamakura*'s narrative from this perspective, Tsuruta's Nami

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[130] Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 13.
[131] The artist protagonist describes Kyuichi as a "young man with the brutal mark of bloodshed upon his brow." Natsume Sōseki, *Kusamakura*, Chapter 13.

as an enchantress is dissolved into a damsel-in-distress, which is a completely opposing character type.

To sum up this analysis, *Kusamakura*'s approach to life as an aesthetic device for art makes death as a theme a device that can change the atmosphere of the novel into a mysterious one. As a reminder of time that is to pass, it gives meaning to life and influences characters within narration. As far as Sōseki's formula for a literary substance is concerned, there is a historical background (F) of the Sino-Japanese war affecting ordinary Japanese citizens (scientific truth) as observed by an individual who strives to become detached from the world emotionally (f, affect). It is his struggle with this effort that make up the literary version of the events (artistic truth). Narrative scheme in Kusamakura has strong Buddhist connotations to achieving enlightenment and afterlife. Water surfaces and mountains represent realms closer to the "other side," which characters cross or are threatened to cross. However, as death itself occurs outside the narrative, its role remains aesthetic.

5. Studying Death in *Kōfu*: Punishment and Hell Imagery

Kōfu is often forgotten by literary scholars,[132] as this novel is so unlike the rest of Sōseki's works.[133] Sōseki was under pressure to publish a novel periodically for *Asahi Shinbun* in 1908, therefore he decided to loosely base it on a life story of a young man, who wanted to persuade him to write about conditions at the copper mine in Ashio. Naturally, Sōseki put his own spin on the story when he decided to format the novel in a style nearing a stream-of-consciousness, full of inner monologues and abundance of detail. The first-person novel is written from a retrospective perspective. The novel focuses on an unnamed protagonist, a nineteen-year-old man fleeing Tokyo because of societal shame. Despite already having been engaged to a girl from a family of an equal status, he found himself enamoured by another. When his romantic pursuits were exposed, he decided to run. He confesses to his past later in the novel,[134] hence the reader is left wondering what could possibly lead a young promising man to seek death and self-destruction.

At the beginning of the novel, we find the protagonist already outside Tokyo, lost in dark thoughts and not knowing where he is going. As such, he starts out similarly as the *Kusamakura*'s artist, who also left Tokyo (possibly chased by detectives) and is now lost in thoughts, searching for a certain feeling. Only the artist protagonist's thoughts are not driven by fear, anger or shame. *Kōfu*'s protagonist is running from the society because he brought disgrace to the families involved, he is very emotional and subjective in his view of the situation, self-centred even. There is no effort for detachment.

While the novel's text is emotionally charged when it comes to hardships in the mines, it is far from an objective commentary on social conditions of the working class the young miner from Ashio would have wanted Sōseki to write. To put it simply, the scientific truth of the social class is different from the literary truth, especially when seen from a perspective of a higher-class citizen looking down on his companions. The method of composition itself was not based on "any rigid theory of the novel."[135] Donald Keene states that *Kōfu* is "a monologue in which the author does not intrude, and no listener is specified,"[136] proclaiming it "a kind of anti-

[132] John Nathan mentions it in Sōseki's biography in chapter nine by its title in a matter of a way without expanding on it.
[133] *"Calling it Sōseki's ugly duckling might be an oversimplification, but it is clearly different from all the others in size and shape and color."*
Murakami Haruki, "Introduction," in *The Miner*, trans. Jay Rubin. (London: Gallic Books, 2015), 8, Kindle.
[134] Natsume, Sōseki, *The Miner*, 43-45.
[135] Donald, Keene, "Natsume Sōseki," 323.
[136] Ibid.

novel."[137] The protagonist is shocked by the conditions in the mines, but it does not immediately make him sympathize with the miners as he describes them as "monkeys."[138] There are exceptions, but in many moments he would assume the worst of them. He starts to relate the miners once he learns that he is ill.

Keene defends Sōseki's narrative choice, when he says that he

> *"undoubtedly also wished to call attention to the inhuman conditions under which the miners worked. […] The impression of formlessness […], the use of the language suitable to the speaker tather than the more refined style of the author, the omission of details necessary for a full comprehension of the background, the seemingly random choice of objects described were all typical of the European psychological novel."*[139]

The reality of the mines, within the limits of the writer's imagination, might not be "scientific" but it is conveyed so that the reader cannot take an escapist approach to it and hopefully rejects the protagonist's high-horse attitude combined with radical individualism, which is so on brand for Sōseki's characters. It is clear that the novel is a changing point for Sōseki's fiction and Jay Rubin agrees with this notion when he writes in the Translator's Afterword that

> *"The Miner gives us hardly more than a glimpse of the life of the miners, for Sōseki has done everything he can to make the excursion of his protagonist a psychological one. He is clearly speaking of himself when he has his narrator say, 'Thank goodness, I do have this great gift … the ability to dissect my experience with an open mind and to evaluate each little piece of it.' This is the foundation of all Sōseki's mature fiction, and it is the direction in which he decisively turned, beginning with The Miner."*[140]

Narratively speaking, we could recognize *Kōfu* to be a Quest. The protagonist sets out with a goal in mind, he is running as if someone is after him *"with only one thought in mind:* Go into the dark, you've got to go into the dark.*"*[141] He contemplates death as an option for escape, or as a release from suffering and shame, but he is not brave enough to take such a definitive step. Instead, he seeks death indirectly as a form of punishment that would find him if he were worthy of it.[142] There is no real return to Tokyo as part of the main narration that would make this novel

[137] Ibid, 324.
[138] Natsume, Sōseki, *The Miner*, 170.
[139] Donald, Keene, "Natsume Sōseki," 324.
[140] Jay Rubin, "Translator's Afterword," in *The Miner*, trans. Jay Rubin. (London: Gallic Books, 2015), 226, Kindle.
[141] Natsume, Sōseki, *The Miner*, 26.
[142] Natsume, Sōseki, *The Miner*, 27.

a Voyage and Return story. However, since the protagonist eventually returns to his higher-class standing in Tokyo (the narration is presented as a retrospective) and the events prior to him leaving are not described in detail, it would be possible to identify *Kōfu* as a Rags to Riches story as well. Ama identifies the story to be about overcoming challenges in order to become an adult, with a narrative pattern of "ground, path, and goal" without any reference to Buddhism.[143]

As Keene notices, *Kōfu* was influenced by Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*,[144] which is a narrative poem that Christopher Booker identifies as a Quest. However, *Kōfu* is a darker version of the *Divine Comedy*, since the protagonist is not in search of a paradise but of a suitable form of punishment. For the heroes of the Quest, *"the journey they now face is indeed long and arduous, and that it is hard enough simply to get near enough* [their goal] *to see the nature of this mysterious ego-transcending goal, the Self."*[145] If the protagonist is transcending the Self by getting near to death, he transcends the Self by fitting in the hierarchy of the mines. He is no longer oppressed by the city's social structure, his family has no authority over him there, and he reaches independence. He is no longer haunted by his past enough to wish for death. As such, the initial grail of death or punishment is replaced by a kind of freedom.

That explained, the following paragraphs offer a closer insight into *death* in the novel. The start of the novel presents a convincing depiction of the protagonist's state of mind where suicide hangs over him as a solution to his problems. He is upset, lost and driven by a sense of shame. "I'm walking because I can't stay still,"[146] he says to explain that he feels as if he is chased by guilt or people. He is an outcast now, exiled from his homeland: "As long as I am in this world, I can never reach out and touch it."[147] Suicidal thoughts cross his mind: *"I want to go somewhere without people and live by myself, and if I can't do that, I might as well…"*[148] This "might as well" is an ultimate one, a yet unspoken wish to solve everything with death, but anxiety prevents him from acting on it, it "was not about to happen at any moment."[149] There is nothing heroic or loyal that would make such an act resemble previously discussed *junsō*. It would be a selfish act performed to save his own face. The first-person narrator assures the reader that he did not actually wish to die by his own hand, as this is a retrospective narration:

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[143] Michiro, Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction*, 197.
[144] Donald, Keene, "Natsume Sōseki," 324.
[145] Christopher, Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots*, 566.
[146] Natsume, Sōseki, *The Miner*, 25.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid, 26.
[149] Ibid.

"Now it seems ridiculous, but there are times in life when we come to feel that the only comfort left us is to move ahead toward death."[150] On death, the protagonist expresses his opinion when he says that "[w]hen it's too close, it can never be a comfort. That's just how death works."[151] He regains a clearer state of mind when he is asked whether he would like a job by a passer-by.

The passer-by is at first a nameless character. The protagonist refers to him as *dotera*[152] until he finds his name is Chōzo. We could liken him to Dante's Virgil. Only, he is not a wise old man. He also becomes the protagonist's guide for some part of the narration. He promises the protagonist wealth in the mines and guides him and other men (even a little boy) down to the mining town. Afterwards, the protagonist is led by another miner down into the darkness and eventually left on his own to crawl back up to the light. The men represent the characters of wise men, however, they are wiser only in experience and cunning,[153] distrusting the protagonist to be able to survive in the mines yet complying with his wish to continue the path. There is no Beatrice, the only young woman is in the protagonist's past, she is the *seductress* from Tsuruta's take on *monomyth* as well as the reason for the protagonist's fall. The contrast between the dark land (or Hell) and light Tokyo is stronger by association with the socially dignified life the protagonist was meant to live in the Emperor's city, i.e., the city of the living god, only to fall to the bottom of the society.

The protagonist enters the afterlife of his city life, an underworld of Japanese society. His unstable mind brough him to a boundary, a liminal space in between two worlds. In the beginning of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante finds himself lost in the dark similarly to the protagonist who leaves the Tokyo *"where the sun shines"*[154] and walks through trees to a *"Kagura stage in the dark for a nap,* [the stage belonged to a] *Hachiman shrine, probably."*[155] Applying Tsuruta's *mukōgawa* literature method to this, the protagonist crosses the boundary over to the other side or he starts his journey to the underworld at this moment. When he eats food from the lower-class world[156] or when he lets Chōzo pay for him,[157] he becomes part of that world.

Structure-wise, Dante's Divine Comedy is divided into three parts: Inferno, Purgatory and Paradise, written in verse. Possibly, structure of a narrative poem evokes poetic connotations

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[150] Ibid, 27-28.
[151] Ibid, 27.
[152] That is what a piece of clothing he wears is called.
[153] Ama identifies Chōzo as a "trickster." Michiro, Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction*, 197.
[154] Natsume, Sōseki, *The Miner*, 25.
[155] Ibid, 23.
[156] Ibid, 33.
[157] Ibid, 50.

similar to a stream-of-consciousness narration. However, there is no clear division in *Kōfu*'s narration that would mark individual sections, because it was published as novel without chapters (we could only look to the form in which it was being published in the newspaper in 1907). Since the protagonist does not leave the mines, we could say there is no Purgatory or Paradise to be identified. If taken from a Buddhist perspective, the mines could hardly be considered Amida's Pure Land, but they do provide enough suffering for a path towards reaching it outside of the narration.

In the beginning of *Kōfu,* Chōzō leads the protagonist to an area that could be likened to Limbo in Inferno. It is a small town where they board a train and cross a boundary between the world of ordinary people and the world of miners. While a train does not cross a river (Dante crosses the river Acheron)[158] that would symbolize a crossing to the world of the dead, he is required to pay for the ride, as if he was entering underworld from the Greek mythology. The train station town resembles a smaller Tokyo, the people there are not completely outside the society, they live on the edge of the mining hell, not deserving of living in the god's city but not bound for the hellish sites of the mining town, much like the 'virtuous pagans'[159] of the *Divine Comedy*.

As for the other circles of Inferno, it is difficult to discern any intentional hints. The novel is more focused on the descend into darkness than any layers of morality. Greed might have led some of the miners there, yet it is not what is keeping them since they do not make enough money to leave the mines.[160] The protagonist succumbed to Lust when he was in Tokyo, his involvement with two women brought him suffering, therefore, we can see basic Buddhist doctrine crossing paths with Christian influences here. It is implied that many of the miners there are fleeing something, for example the law (Dante's circle of Violence) or debts (the circle of Greed in some cases). The last circles in Inferno are the circle of Fraud and Treachery. The protagonist tries to fool himself into believing that he can become a miner or that he can live as if dead. The miners laugh at the protagonist, because he has not experienced hard labour, he has not tasted cheap rice, and he has not slept on a hard bed with bedbugs.

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[158] Dante, Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy,* trans. John Ciardi (Michigan: Modern Library, 1996), 65. Kindle.
[159] Ibid, 72.
[160] Chōzo and other proprietors promised wealth to the poor men in mines. Once they are in the mines, however, their debts tend to only grow bigger.

In a boarding house, a chilly scene reminds the protagonist of the reality of a miner's life. He happens to witness a funeral procession for a miner, which is called a "jangle" or *jambō* ジャンボー.[161]

> *"A 'jangle' was a funeral, a kind of funeral that can only be performed—indeed, must be performed—for miners of the four classes—miner, digger, setter, and shopper. It was a funeral in which phrases from the sutras are sung in the emotional Naniwa-bushi style, the music of shattering wash basins is played, the coffin is carried past the barracks, dangling like a barrel of water on a pole."*[162]

The sutras are sung in style that sounds like "battle cries," as if the procession wanted the deceased to be honoured like a warrior or to carry on to the afterlife as one. The miners in the boarding house drag an old dying miner Kin to watch the scene. The protagonist sees this act as "the height of innocence, the height of cruelty."[163] We could assume that there is some innocence in proving to the man that he would be treated to a funeral when he passes,[164] however it also reminds him that such fate is close. The proximity to death is omnipresent in there. The protagonist is brough closer to the miners by such realization, although there is some bewilderment on his side that he "has joined men of the lowest rank in society who use a wooden bucket as a coffin and whose families do not attend their funerals."[165] He is still an outsider to them, but he no longer feels as alienated. He himself is not religious but he understands that they need religiousness to survive in the mines. The miners strike a conversation about what comes after the funeral:

> *"'He's right. It sure doesn't end at the temple. You gotta go somewhere.'*
>
> *'That's what I mean. The last place. I wonder what it's like there. Think it's the same as here?'*
>
> *'Sure. Human souls go there. It must be pretty much the same.'*
>
> *'I think so, too. If you go somewhere, it's gotta be there.'*
>
> *'They talk about "Heaven" and "Hell," but ya hafta eat there, too, I guess.'*
>
> *'I wonder if they've got women.'*

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[161] Natsume, Sōseki, *Kōfu*, (Tokyo: Aozora Bunkō, 2012), 99. Kindle.
[162] Natsume, Sōseki, *The Miner*, 132-133.
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ama states that in such funeral processions "it was no uncommon for a dead body to be scrunched to fit into a tight wooden bucket." The coffin is carried as one. Michiro, Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction,* 198.
[165] Ibid.

'Of course they've got women. There's no place in the world without women.'"[166]

In that moment, the protagonist sees them as "half-beast," "half-humans" but for a moment also as "fierce guardian deities in full armor."[167] Ama identifies this as a moment, where "[t]hey dissolve hierarchies and boundaries, which previously defined their places in society"[168] as they are all met with notion of mortality and afterlife in a religious sense.

The next day, the protagonist is faced with his own mortality when he "hovers between the reals of life and death"[169] both physically and mentally. Another miner, Hatsu, becomes his guide to the depths of the mine. The entrance to the mines, which resembles a train tunnel, is called "the door to Hell"[170] followed by the "Main Street of Hell."[171] Hatsu warns the protagonist against becoming a miner as a last warning before they descend: "If you're plannin' to come out alive, you're better off not goin' into the hole to begin with."[172] As a bad omen, the message hangs over the protagonist, who was determined to join the miners "because of the work's similarity to death."[173] The way down is dark, cold, wet and slippery. Soon, they are forced to walk on all fours, or squeeze themselves through narrow holes. At one instance, he hears dynamite go off in the distance. There is an omnipresent threat of death. Exhaustion catches up with the protagonist after climbing ladders. He is dizzy, as if he entered a "dream state."[174]

Slowly, they proceed to an abandoned Tunnel 8 flooded with water, the bottom of the mine and after they turn back, the protagonist begins to feel unwell. Coincidentally, the eight circle in Dante's Inferno is Fraud. As Hatsu leaves him in there seemingly to bring help, the protagonist is left in the dark alone, long enough to reach a point of despair. He is convinced that he will die in there and the thought scares him. "I had never dreamed that human beings were so worried about death,"[175] he thinks. He feels that something has warned him about the danger of dying, an instinct, a god or a spirit. The moment of despair brings him to a moment close to religiousness. At this point, the protagonist clearly is not fit to be a miner and he knows that a life that could bring him death is not something he desires.

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[166] Natsume, Sōseki, *The Miner*, 134.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Michiro, Ama, *The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction*, 199.
[169] Ibid.
[170] Natsume, Sōseki, *The Miner*, 149.
[171] Ibid, 151.
[172] Ibid, 150.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid, 172.
[175] Ibid, 182.

When Hatsu returns to lead them back outside the mines, the protagonist is driven to continue only by anger and fear of death. He describes the experience as "having approached the nearer shore of the Three-Channeled River,"[176] a Buddhist River Styx that deceased souls cross on the way to Hell. Therefore, he calls this experience "the Experience of Turning from Death and Returning to Life." Furthermore, he presents his opinion about accepting one's death: "Those who die in a burst of passion go cleanly to their deaths, but those who cower in the face of death never seem to accept it fully."[177] As a result, it seems that he betrays his initial conviction to die completely, yet he again almost succumbs to the urge to let go of the ladder and die. When Hatsu mentions that he might not be able to work the next day in his condition, the protagonist rushes ahead of Hatsu into the darkness out of anger. He betrays his guide, completing the circles of Inferno with the ninth circle of Treachery.

On the way through the darkness, he finds a solitary miner Yasu who reminds him of an older version of himself. Similarly to the protagonist, he was involved with a woman and was forced to abandon higher society as a result. However, his sin appears to be graver, because he is fleeing the "hand of justice."[178] He has spent six years in the mines repenting but he has no plan to leave. Despite that, he urges the protagonist not to seek life in the mines, because it is "a place for human trash. It's a cemetery. A place where human beings are buried alive. A trap."[179] He encourages the protagonist to find a decent job that would suit him better. Touched by this, the protagonist is determined to become a miner in honour of men such as Yasu. Unfortunately, he learns that due to his health, he cannot become one even if he desires it. He is diagnosed with bronchitis the next day, almost as if destiny granted him his wish of a near-death life. With his wish granted, he suddenly starts to see beauty in the place. Finally, he realizes that he is equal to the people in the mines and he starts "his training to be a degenerate"[180] like them as a boiler bookkeeper. In a true Quest manner, he transcends his Self and reaches a new mental state, possibly even enlightenment.

Eventually, the protagonist returns to Tokyo. As a narrator, he concludes the novel mysteriously: "That's all there is to my experience as a miner. And every bit of it is true, which you can tell from the fact that this book never did turn into a novel."[181] Having written this, Sōseki puts emphasis on the unreliability of the narrator. *Kōfu* may not be a novel in a traditional

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[176] Ibid, 184.
[177] Ibid, 185.
[178] Ibid, 195.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Ibid, 220.
[181] Ibid, 219.

sense, but it illustrates Sōseki's formula for a literary substance. There is a concept (F) of hardships in the Ashio mine (scientific truth) transformed into Sōseki's own literary version (artistic truth). The first-person narrator provides affect (f) as his emotions warp his perspective into an over-dramatic version of events. As a narrator, the protagonist admits that

> *"whenever the thought of suicide popped into my head, it was always as a kind of spectacle to be staged for others. I would use a pistol or dagger and die magnificently, in a manner that would elicit praise. I often thought of taking the famous suicide leap at Kegon Falls. But quietly hanging myself in a toilet or storage shed? No, this I rejected as beneath me."*[182]

Death as a theme in *Kōfu* sets a tone of desperation for the novel. The protagonist is desperate because of his guilt, shame and pride. The miners are also in a desperate situation, which they cannot escape. Narratively, it provides a drive for the protagonist to seek out or avoid danger in order to evolve past its morally fallen state. Motif of afterlife creates a prison-like/Hell-like landscape where characters live in an intense death-near state. There is no release for them, unless they have the privileges of a higher class. Similarly to *Kusamakura*, actual dying is outside of narrative. The dead body carried by the funeral procession is anonymous and used as narrative device to instil religious fear of *death* into characters.

[182] Ibid, 186.

6. Conclusion and Summary

The topic of this thesis introduces how *death* as a concept manifests in *Kusamakura* and *Kōfu*. The text covers how Sōseki' adoption becomes a recurrent motif in some of his works and how his studies of English, Chinese and Japanese classics also influenced his literary endeavours. His mental health was gravely affected by deaths of family members and friends, but also by his ambitions and his individualistic nature. He uses his memories as fuel for creation of literary characters that often resemble him. Sōseki offers his own theory on how literary substance is achieved, which both works fulfil. His formula of scientific truth portrayed through artistic truth build on affect conveys the theme of *death*. In both works, we can observe that historical context of his time period is not irrelevant. In *Kusamakura*, the Sino-Japanese war echoes on the background of the narration as a death-aesthetic inducing reminder. In *Kōfu*, the living conditions in the mines reflect on the hellish resemblance of the place, where the workers rioted in 1907. 0

Using the theoretical framework established in the "Death as a Concept" chapter, this thesis inspects that both literary works show signs of Booker's Quest, although other interpretations of the narratological structures are also possible. Ama's research aids in establishing Buddhist connotations to narrative and Tsuruta's article serves as a tool for establishing signs of the "other side." According to Ama, both works share the narratological structure of "ground, path, goal," which is a key element for identifying Buddhist references. Although both the artist protagonist and *Kōfu*'s protagonist are drawn to *death*, they are not necessary religious in their hearts. Still, the previously discussed religious context in Japan manifests in how they understand *death*. The artist protagonist strives for a detached view on the matter, while *Kōfu*'s protagonist cannot think straight and seeks out closeness to death in a self-destructive manner.

In both works, the protagonists are guided towards their goals by someone. In *Kusamakura*, Nami is a character of a young woman, who leads the artist protagonist astray from his detachment as a seductress. At the same time, it is her efforts that enable him to see beauty in death and makes her a nurturer of his artistic goals. Her facial expression when her cousin leaves for the war is a genuine emotion, which he observes as a painting. The novel ends with a sense of melancholy. In *Kōfu*, there are several guides. Chōzo binds the protagonist to the mines, when he leads him there and pays for his food and a ticket. Hatsu shows him the depth of the mines, revealing that in his core, the protagonist does not wish to die. Yasu reveals to the protagonist moral value of staying in the mines, which enables him to finally see the miners as

equal. When their goals are achieved, both protagonists eventually return to Tokyo outside of narration. It is through suffering (of others or of their own) that they reach their goals.

Death and life are essentially interconnected. In *Kusamakura*, the concept of death gives meaning to life. Kyuichi is on his path to die for the Japanese Empire alongside Nami's ex-husband. Young Kyuichi is yet to make anything out of his life, therefore his sacrifice would grant his existence metaphorical meaning. Nami's ex-husband's deployment is painted to be a retributing fact. *Kōfu*'s protagonist seeks life in death, i.e., to live as if he was dead or at least close to death. Suicidal ideations present themselves as a solution to his problems, whenever he is in an emotional crisis. When he reaches a point of mental and physical exhaustion, which is close to death, he can finally start his journey back towards life. As such, proximity to *death* gives his life meaning too.

Aesthetically, both concepts of death are also close to European literary tradition. *Kusamakura* offers Romantic or Gothic undertones to the portrayal of Nami, whether she threatens to drown herself or haunts Shioda's hostel. Death in *Kōfu* is Naturalistic when connected to the hardships of the miners. Ultimately, both present different approaches to death, even though they share any similarities. As both are quite experimental, we can sense a shift in Sōseki's fiction within the short period between their publications. This marks a turn in his works for a darker, more pessimistic perspective. As far as the concept of *death* is concerned, we may encounter it in both his earlier and later works. *Kusamakura* and *Kōfu* are mere two examples from this category.

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Resumé

This thesis aims to compare *death* as a concept in two selected works by Natsume Sōseki., where *death* and mortality are among the main topics. For the purpose of literary analysis, the text uses theoretical works from the field of Narratology in the context of the Japanese understanding of *death* during the author's lifetime. After a detailed analysis, this thesis determines that *death* predominantly plays an aesthetic role in *Kusamakura*. The artist protagonist is fascinated by *death* and hopes to grasp its aesthetic essence as depicted in a face of a dying girl. He hopes to do so detached from emotions. Compared to that, *Kōfu*'s protagonist is being consumed by his own emotion to such a degree that he passively seeks out *death*. Both works show influences of European literature and Buddhist understanding of *death*.