RESEARCH REPORT

Masaoka Shiki's Last Days and His Creations: Notes on a Poet Who Suffered from Tuberculosis and Spinal Caries

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Abstract

Once, tuberculosis was said to be a disease that made us acknowledge death, as cancer might today. Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), a pseudonym for Masaoka Tsunenori, died of tuberculosis at 35, with complications from spinal caries. One of the most famous and important poets in modern Japanese literature, Shiki expressed, through his last poems and thoughts, the poignancy and challenges of his debilitated state, offering us a rare glimpse into a highly active and poetic mind at the edge of death, still able to find beauty, even within severe restrictions of illness. The continual and thoughtful care he received from family and friends offers us insight and chances for reflection on how best to support a dying person.

As literary historian Reginald Horace Blyth wrote of Shiki, "By the end of his short life, he had found some humanity, but no religion, no pantheism, or mysticism, or Zen." This article asserts that Shiki's self-discovery of a sense of 'humanity' is deeply related to the poet's epiphanies of objective self-awareness, *satori* [enlightenment], and *kaigyaku* [humor], all of which represent fundamental qualities of his writing, especially his later writing. This article focuses on the philosophical concepts of Shiki's thinking, but also serves as a brief introduction to the life and literary work of the artist, who is not so well known outside of Japan.

Keywords: thanatology, Masaoka Shiki, *haiku, tanka, satori, kaigyaku*, objective self-awareness, pulmonary tuberculosis, spinal caries, end-of-life care

Preface

Once, tuberculosis was said to be a disease that made us realize and acknowledge death, as cancer might today. In her ground-breaking book, *Illness as Metaphor*, philosopher Susan Sontag wrote the following about tuberculosis as metaphor:

> Two diseases have been spectacularly, and similarly, encumbered by the trappings of metaphor: tuberculosis and cancer. (Sontag 1983: 7)

> TB [tuberculosis] is thought to be relatively painless. …. TB is thought to provide an easy death, while cancer is the spectacularly wretched one. For over a hundred years TB remained the preferred way of giving death a meaning - an edifying, refined disease. (Sontag 1983: 20)

> The Romantics moralized death in a new way: with the TB death, which dissolved the gross body, etherealized the personality, expanded consciousness. It was equally possible, through fantasies about TB, to aestheticize death. (Sontag 1983: 24) (Omission by research author)

Sontag's literary characterizations of

tuberculosis differ starkly from those expressed by Shiki, who suffered both from tuberculosis (TB) and, near the end of his life, spinal caries. In fact, Shiki found the experiences of his illnesses much less romantic, refined, and ethereal. Ironically, writer and philosopher Tokutomi Roka (1868-1927) published a novel titled *Hototogisu* [*The Cuckoo*] which has the same meaning as Shiki's pen name. *The Cuckoo* was released in serial form, from 1898-1899, as Shiki began suffering more acutely from TB, shortly after, around 1900 [Meiji 33], and was hugely popular throughout Japan and abroad, later published in multiple translations. The novel depicts the death of its heroine, Namiko, by TB, in a romanticized way consistent with Sontag's description. In his last poems and other expressions, Shiki presents a prosaic and unromantic experience with TB, one that shows how he suffered, but was able to come to terms with his illness, while at the same time use the experience as a catalyst for some of his finest writing.

Despite his serious condition, which left him largely bedridden during the last six years of his life, Shiki was still a prolific writer who managed to leave a tremendous amount of quality work over a short lifetime. Shiki is one of the most famous and important Japanese poets in modern times. In his book *A History of Haiku*, Reginald Horace Blyth, a specialist in Zen and haiku, describes Shiki in the following manner:

> Shiki, 1867-1902, is considered to be the restorer of haiku, which had been falling off since the time of Buson. Basho walked his Way of Haiku; Buson his Way of Art; Issa, though he did not speak of it, his Way of Humanity. What had Shiki? He had no Way of any kind, unless perhaps a Way of Beauty, like Keats, but ill-health and beauty do not go well together, and by the end of his short life he had got some humanity, but no religion, no pantheism, or mysticism, or Zen. (Blyth 1964: 21)

Shiki's "humanity", which Blyth mentions, is related to objective self-awareness, '*satori*' [enlightenment] (or at least his own form of it), and '*kaigyaku*' [humor]. Japanese historian Donald Keene also describes Shiki's sense of humanity, in relation to the poet's cultural background (see, Keene 1998: 36, or Chapter 2 of this article).

This article considers the concepts of objective self-awareness, *satori*, and *kaigyaku*, concluding with reflections about whether Shiki benefited or was comforted by any of his personal epiphanies, as expressed in his writing. Providing some biographical context will help us place these concepts. First, he was a reformer of *tanka* and *haiku*. Shiki succeeded in composing literary works in modern colloquial Japanese, rather than using highly formalized Japanese. Shiki also lived a life that expresses an additional bioethical meaning. That is, Shiki was a real-life example of end-of-life care, where no alternative was possible. He became infected with pulmonary tuberculosis at the age of 21, and later contracted spinal caries at the age of 28. He became largely bedridden for the final six years of his life, requiring the continual care of doctors, his younger sister Ritsu, and friends.

Nevertheless, Shiki continued to create art until the day he died at age 35. His body of work, overwhelming, both in quantity and quality, offers many entry points for explication and discussion, to learn about his life and art. We can frame some of these entry points as questions with brief references to their relevance to medical ethics:

1. *What did Shiki think about his own death and that of others?* Considering this question teaches us about coming to terms with death.
2. *How did he resist the urge to commit suicide, which had haunted him many times?* Considering this question leads us to think about related topics, such as euthanasia, dignity in death, assisted suicide, and end-of-life care.
3. *How did his younger sister Ritsu support him through his difficulties?* This question teaches us about terminal home care and pain control in Tokyo, over 115 years ago (see, *Document*: Morphine Administration Record).

Shiki was the patriarch and the sole earner of the house. It was both his pride and responsibility, and he always suffered from his inability, or lack of power (social pain) to do more. Ritsu had to turn her heart into a demon's, in order to replace his bandages, as he

experienced continual and severe pain, as well as regularly clean his bedding and bedpan. The value of Ritsu's efforts to comfort Shiki through his ailments as well as his mental anguish and loneliness cannot be overstated. At the same time, we are invited to consider how such palliative care and pain care can be solved in contemporary society.

1. Shiki and his impending death.

1.1 Objective self-awareness and transcendent sensitivity

In early May of 1902, four months before his death, Shiki began writing his final essay series, *Byosho Rokushaku* [*Six-Foot Sickbed*], which was serialized in the newspaper *Nippon*, for which he was a staff writer. The title of the series is described in such a memorable form that it has become, for many contemporary Japanese, a familiar image of sickness and impending death:

> A six-foot sickbed - this is my world. And this sickbed six feet long is too big for me. Sometimes I have only to stretch my arm a bit to touch the *tatami*, but at other times I can't even relax by pushing my legs outside the covers. In extreme cases, I am relaxed but am tormented by such terrible pain that I'm unable to move my body so much as an inch or even half an inch. Racked by pain, anguish, shrieks, morphine, I search for a way out, helplessly craving a little peace on a road that leads to death. All the same, as long as I stay alive, I intend to say whatever I feel like saying. Day in and day out, all I ever see are newspapers and magazines, but often I am in such pain I cannot read them. When I can, they make me angry or irritated; but once in a while something makes me so happy, I forget my pain. Feeling like someone who has been sleeping for six whole years and knows nothing of the outside world, I write this preface by way of introducing myself.
>
> (*Byosho* R*okushaku*, no. 1, June 5th, 1902 (Not the date of writing, but the newspaper date. Same as below). Translated by Keene, Keene 2013: 171-172)

The idea of his bed being 'six-feet'[6尺] has a philosophical meaning of its own. In Japan, both *fusuma* [sliding screen] and *tatami*-mats (also *futon*-mattresses) are made to be approximately six feet in length. There is an old proverb that says, "Standing takes half a tatami, and sleeping takes but one," which means that human beings do not require any more space than a *tatami* (about 180cm by 90 cm; 6 by 3 feet) to live.

Nevertheless, even this size was too wide for Shiki, just four months before his death. Here, Shiki claims that certainly the size of a *tatami* is too wide for his sick body, but his *spirit* can spread out from there. This spirit can be restated as imagination. For example, Shiki imagines himself leaving his body and objectively looking at himself on the six-foot sickbed. This is not necessarily astral projection (out-of-body experience), but rather the sign of an untethered imagination.

The description of his sickbed informs us about Shiki's objectivism. Objectivism once had just been Shiki's technique to write poetry, but later, especially as his illness worsened to the point of being incurable, it became part of his lifestyle. To describe this technique, he called it '*shasei*.' Beichman translates this word as "to sketch from life" (Beichman 1982: 54). Shiki used the term *shasei*, which was influenced by Nakamura Fusetsu (1). Certainly, this way of thinking was part of the realism already expressed in modern Japanese literature, in accord with other profound changes, such as the felt national need for rapid industrialization (*Bunmei-Kaika*). However, it is worth noting that Shiki tried to tackle 'everything' objectively, through his ailments. Naturalism (rather natural scientism) in Western literature in the 19th century also promoted realism in modern Japanese literature. Shiki's *shasei* is one such expression.

1.2 Shiki and Chomin

Much of Shiki's commentary on his literary contemporary Nakae Chomin (1847-1901) may best be understood as a literary rivalry of sorts, near the end of their lives. Chomin died on the 13th of December, while Shiki died less than a year later, September 19th, 1902; both of them were gravely ill. In characteristically stark and

realist language and image, Shiki thought that 'everything' is included in the body itself. Shiki criticized Chomin, a pseudonym for Nakae Tokusuke, a journalist and statesman of the Meiji era, a famous Enlightenment thinker whose last work *Ichinen Yu-han* [*One Year and a Half*], chronicling his physical decline from esophageal cancer, brought him unexpected acclaim and some material success as well, while Shiki's writings about his last days experienced little material success.

On the literary attack, Shiki criticized Chomin's lack of objective observation of his own illness, even though Chomin was also a teacher of Shiki's uncle, Kato Takusen, one of the largest benefactors of Shiki. In a somewhat reckless manner (See, Fukumoto 2017: 107), Shiki criticized Chomin and his final days which were described in Chomin's best seller essay *Ichinen Yu-han*. Shiki criticized Chomin as "not beautiful" in his unpublished essay *Gyoga Manroku* [*Stray Notes While Lying On My Back*, including *Morphine Diaries*] and three series published essays titled "*Rest of Life*" (1901). Both Shiki and Chomin are examples of terminally ill patients who painfully chronicled their condition and decline in their writing. In the following illustration, in a soft but direct rebuke of Chomin's view of dying and death, Shiki, who had always used 居士 'koji,' the Japanese traditional honorific title in referencing 'Chomin', omits all honorifics;

> [Written in the old style of Japanese] He [Chomin] still doesn't know anything about *beauty* [美], and in this point, his view is inferior to mine. If he understands *reason* [理], he will give up, but if he understands beauty, he can enjoy the rest of his life. He must enjoy it when he buys apricots and eats them with his wife [as Chomin says in *Ichinen Yu-han*], but there is some reason behind it. The scorching daytime heat is gone, and the white flowers of calabash [夕顔] sway in the evening breeze; what kind of *reason* is there? (*Gyoga Manroku*, Oct. 15th, 1901)

Shiki's chiding of Chomin, might derive from Chomin's unexpected literary fame, something that apparently surprised Chomin himself.

However, this critique by Shiki was still unpublished at the time; only the three series essays, titled "*Rest of Life*", were published before Shiki's death. Therefore, no one at the time knew of Shiki's critique and reflections in *Gyoga Manroku.*

Though the second essay of *Rest of Life* describes Shiki's writing philosophy, the first essay of the series gives us a better sense of his thoughts on how the dying Chomin failed to go far enough, in coming to terms with the ending of his life. Shiki states his opinion, which he also stated in *Gyoga Manroku:*

> However, in the point that Chomin can't understand the pleasure beyond *Gidayu* [Japanese traditional play performed by dolls], it is inevitable that Chomin is a secular person. …… He was able to give up on death from his theoretical reasoning because he had an education [culture]. …… If Chomin was able to live a little more, he may have been able to reach more than "giving up." ("*Rest of Life*," in: *Shiki Zenshu* [*Shiki Complete Works*], XII: 534-539, especially 536. Omission by research author)

In other words, Shiki criticized Chomin for never surpassing the stage of "giving up". Chomin is unaware of beauty, and on this point, his view is inferior to Shiki's epiphanies about dying and death. Shiki thinks that if Chomin understands reason, he will give up; but if he understands beauty, he would be able to enjoy his life, even if he is on his deathbed. Surely, apricots and time spent with his wife can bring joy, but there is reason behind them (thus no true joy, thought Shiki). Shiki asks if reason is really necessary to feel the wind in the evening after the whiteness of the sun. Shiki, as he faced death, was able to find joy, without or beyond reason, in experiencing *nature*, even in his debilitated state.

Shiki's dissatisfaction lies in the fact that Chomin went to see Gidayu and ate apricots with his wife. Shiki, who was bedridden could not go out, and he gave up on ever having a wife and children. As the heir of the Masaoka family name, this lack of both wife and children apparently led to his feeling of disaffection. He could eat apricots only with his disciples,

mother, and sister. Concerning Shiki's critique of Chomin, writer Masamune Hakucho thinks that "there might have been an envy" (Hakucho 1983: 7; Chomin 2016: 321), but Tsurugaya also notes that Shiki had long before accepted and come to terms with not having a wife and children and money as well. If we accept Tsurugaya's description, Shiki had already conceded the impossibility of marriage, children, fame, and money. However, in contrast to Chomin, who, in Shiki's mind, still clung to rationality and worldly considerations, Shiki broke through to a higher, non-rational level, shown in his *Byosho Rokushaku* and other last writings.

This higher level of being can be characterized as objective self-awareness. By being able to take a more objective view of his painful life, Shiki was able to reach a level, beyond rationality, where even a miserable life could not inhibit laughter. Shiki reached the point where he could simply love nature and sketch in words and paintings, what seems mundane and unnoticed and bring the humble images of life into high relief and visible in a new light.

Shiki's deepest feeling as a terminal patient (2) is starkly depicted in his last essay, "The Morning of September 14th", and the poet's literary epiphany (3) occurs in the *Jisei* "*Hechima Saite*" (Both will be addressed further on in this article).

1.3 Shiki's viewpoint

Despite being bedridden and unable to move without great pain and much discomfort, faced with the fact of terminal illness, Shiki was able to move to a new level of consciousness, beyond reason and the worries of life. At this level, Shiki sees, smells, feels, thinks, and writes (at times with the help of a scribe or interpreter), transcending his situation, although at the same time acutely aware that he feels himself as a physical body. Consider the following *tanka*, written a year before his death;

kame ni sasu
fuji no hanabusa
mijikakereba
tatami no ue ni
todokazarikeri
[the sprays of wisteria
arranged in the vase
are so short
they don't reach
to the tatami]
瓶にさす藤の花ぶさみじかければたたみの上にとどかざりけり
(*Bokuju Itteki* [*A Drop of Ink*], April 28th, 1901. Translated by Brower, Brower 1971: 403)

This is one of the most famous of his tanka, widely known in Japan and part of the literary canon taught at school. This tanka is also widely considered to be one of the most difficult works to understand and interpret. Generally, works created with Shiki's motto of "*shasei* objectivism" are likely to raise questions. Most Japanese junior high school students would probably think, 'Of course, the short sprays of flowers do not reach the tatami. So what?' However, we must remember Shiki's words;

Even if I was lying on the sick-bed year-round, day and night and always enjoy looking up even at a *bonsai* tree that is three-shaku high [about 3 ft.], when I was a little distressed by morphine, I want to laugh at myself who was bothered a while ago.
(*Byosho* R*okushaku*, no. 42, June 23rd, 1902. Research author's emphasis is added)

In other words, the true meaning of this work cannot be understood unless it is seen from Shiki's point of view. Many of Shiki's important works cannot be understood without sharing the viewpoint of Shiki, the bedridden patient.

The same can be said for the next unpublished haiku, created at the same time as *Byosho Rokushaku*, in the summer of 1902, probably one of his final works.

ikita me wo
tsutsuki ni kuru ka
hae no koe
[will it come to peck,
at living my eyes
voice of fly]
活きた目をつつきに来るか蝿の声
(*Shiki Zenshu*, vol. III: 460)

At that time, Shiki is thinking of himself as

if he were a soldier dying on the battlefield. He expects that crows would come to peck the body, especially the eyes, even though he is not dead! However, it is not the crow but the fly that comes. Further, it is its sound, not its figure. Even so, how sensitive he is to hear the fly's voice! No, of course, Shiki does not hear the fly's voice. No one can hear the voice of an insect that cannot speak. Shiki feels the change in the air in the room and feels that change has reached his open eyes.

1.4 Awareness of death and the pen name 'Shiki'

Shiki wrote the following tanka one year before his death (dated May 4th, 1901):

ichihatsu no
hana saki-idete
wagame ni wa
kotoshi bakari no
haru yukan to su
[the wall iris
opens its buds:
before my eyes
the last spring
begins to fade]
(Translated by Beichman, Beichmann 1982: 138)

Shiki despised May because his physical condition worsened every year, in the midst of spring. Also, in this verse above, we can see that he is terribly irritated and pained. But, in fact, he was able to see the spring of the following year. In this way, in his later years, Shiki always understood that death was coming for him. However, he struggled most when he reread the oldest *kanshi* [Chinese poetry] he wrote, when he was in his twenties:

聞子規　　子規を聞く
一声弧月下　一声、弧月の下
啼血不堪聞　血に啼きて聞くに堪えず
半夜空欹枕　半夜空しく枕を欹つ
古郷万里雲　古郷、万里の雲
[*Listen to The Cry of Shiki* [*Little Cuckoo*]
One cry under the lonely moon;
It coughs blood, I cannot bear to listen.
Halfway through the night, I strain my ears in vain, Ten thousand *ri* of clouds over my old home]
(Translated by Keene, Keene 2013: 24. Originally, *Shiki Zenshu* VII: 16)

Long before Shiki became ill, as an adolescent, he wrote of the cry of the little cuckoo or 'shiki.' It seems that the poet unwittingly intuited his future as a tuberculosis patient. In poems of east Asia (China, Japan) *shiki* (*hototogisu*) is a symbol of a dying poet. The pronunciation of this 'shiki' also leads to another word '*shiki* [死期],' which means "time of death" in Japanese.

Historian Donald Keene explains the significance of the bird metaphor:

> This early mention of the *hototogisu*, a bird whose cries suggest it is coughing blood, has an ominous ring as the work of an eleven-year-old, seeming to foretell Shiki's death twenty-four years later. "Shiki" was the Sino-Japanese name for the *hototogisu*. The image of the *hototogisu* would run through Shiki's writings. (Keene 2013: 206, note 36).

In contrast, Keene quotes a haiku written by *Hozumi Eiki* (1823-1904), who is almost forgotten by contemporary Japanese.

chi wo nagasu
ame ya orihushi
hototogisu
[Rain washes away
The blood: just at that moment
A nightingale sings.]
(Translated by Keene, Keene 1984)

The poem is based on Ueno, the battlefield of the Meiji Restoration. In this haiku, the *hototogisu* (Keene translated it 'nightingale' here) is just a bird which spits blood, without philosophical import.

However, the connection between one of Shiki's earliest works and his pen name is still a matter of theory. The decisive change in his philosophical and literary outlook occurred as his condition worsened from pulmonary tuberculosis and, later, spinal caries. Shiki later recalls that immediately after hearing the diagnosis, he felt that time had stopped for about five seconds (See,

a letter to *Kyoshi*, March 17th, 1896; *Shiki Zenshu*, XIX: 16-19).

2. Preparedness to die

2.1 Shiki's ambitions and despair

As early as 1895, Shiki wrote the following in the same letter to Kyoshi, one of his most gifted disciples in haiku, as well as a fraternal figure:

> Many people in this world have great ambitions, but none so great as I. Most people are buried in the earth still embracing their dreams, but no one will ever go beneath holding fast to as many as I. …. No matter how great my achievement in haiku, it will be as zero compared to the infinity of my dreams.
> (Translated by Beichman, Beichman 1982: 60. Originally *Shiki Zenshu* XIX: 18)

Shiki was a very ambitious man. He was a student at the Imperial University (*Teikoku Daigaku*) in the 1890s. This was the first and only university in Japan at that time, so the classes had only a few dozen students, including Shiki. They were expected to become senior government officials or to serve as teachers at educational institutions that were established one after another on behalf of foreigners who were hired at very high salaries.

Tsubouchi Shoyo, an upperclassman of Shiki's at the university and from whom Shiki had learned English, was exceptionally well-established in literature, and as a result, Tsubouchi felt himself, along with other graduates at the time, as someone who would be responsible for the establishment of the Faculty of Literature at Waseda University, as well as becoming a leader in spreading Western theater to an increasingly modern and urban Japan.

By contrast, Shiki had quit university, though almost everyone had encouraged him to change his mind. Shiki was greatly ashamed of having betrayed his family and hometown expectations. As a scholar from Matsuyama City, formerly Matsuyama *Han*, a local area of the Edo period, he defamed his family name, *Masaoka* (former *samurai*). This failure to complete his degree is an early example Shiki facing and confronting limits.

However, it was his incurable disease that became the fatal limit for him, as evidenced by his last two published essays both named after his literary and physical limitations, *Bokuju Itteki* [A Drop *of Ink*] and *Byosho Rokushaku* [Six-foot *Sickbed*].

So, as Beichman states (Beichman 1982: 60), "[By] this time Shiki made his statement, he seems to have adjusted to the limits of his world. The title of the diary itself, with its implication that his world was contained within the boundaries of a six-foot sickbed, would indicate as much, as does the title of the diary he had written the previous year, *A Drop of Ink*. Both suggested that he had scaled down his expectations to the point where they no longer created needless frustrations."

So, in his despair, it is likely that he would have considered suicide. However, no matter how hard he looked at his younger cousin, Fujino Kohaku, who had committed suicide, or some acquaintances - the first one of which was Shimizu Noritoo, who died at the age of seventeen, Shiki's university roommate for whom he had served as a chief mourner on behalf of Shimizu's father in distant Matsuyama - who died without being able to commit suicide, Shiki could not kill himself.

2.2 Suicidal impulse and acceptance of suffering

However, Shiki must have had no desire to commit suicide, though he had thought of it. In a famous description dated October 13th, 1901, in *Gyoga Manroku*, he writes with tears that he had nearly succumbed to a suicidal urge, but he could not die because of the suspected pain before his own death; it wasn't that he decided not to die, but rather felt he was unable to die. This description is memorable:

> The house had become silent. Now I was alone. Lying on my left side, I stared at the writing set before me. Four or five worn-out brushes and a thermometer and on top of them, lying quite exposed, a blunt little knife a couple of inches long and a two-inch eyeleteer. The suicidal feeling that sometimes sweeps over me even when I

am not in such a state suddenly surged up. The thought had already flashed through my head while I was writing the telegram message ….

But I could hardly kill myself with that blunt little knife or the eyeleteer. I knew a razor was in the next room if I could only get there. Once I had a razor, cutting my throat would be no problem, but sad to say, I can't even crawl now. If no other way existed, cutting my windpipe with the little knife would not be impossible. Or I could pierce a hole in my heart with the eyeleteer. I could certainly kill myself in that way, but I wondered if I would die immediately if I drilled three or four holes.

I thought over every possibility, but to tell the truth, fear won out, and in the end, I couldn't bring myself to do it. I wasn't afraid of death, but of the pain. I thought that if I found the pain of my sickness unbearable, how much more horrible the pain would be if I botched my suicide. But that was not all. When I looked at the knife, I felt something like a current of fear flowing from it and welling up inside me. (Translated by Keene, Keene 1998: 370-371. Omission, paragraphing and emphasis by research author)

At the end of his diary, Shiki drew pictures of the knife and the eyeleteer, and wrote four Chinese letters 古白曰来 [*Kohaku* iwaku 'kitare,' *Kohaku* calls to come]. The Voice of Kohaku from hell tormented Shiki. Kohaku tried to kill himself with a pistol seven years ago, but he could not die for days in a hopeless situation. Also, in the next year, the last months of his life, he often expressed his desire to die. Unable to commit suicide, because he lacked the ability to do so, Shiki, it seems, wanted some form of assisted suicide. From June 19th to 22nd (newspaper dates), 1902, Shiki wrote these consecutive essays (*Byosho Rokushaku*):

No. 38 (June 19th)
[Written in the old style of Japanese (4)] Here is a patient. He is in so much pain and weak to the point that he can hardly move. His mind is confused and can't read books or newspapers because his eyes are crumbling. Even worse, writing a sentence with a brush can never be done. So, there are neither nurses nor visitors to talk to. How can he spend his day? How can he spend his day?

No. 39 (June 20th)
When I took to my sickbed, as long as I could still move, I didn't find my sickness too hard to endure, and I lay there quite serenely. But when, as of late, I have become unable even to stir, I am prey to mental anguish, and almost every day, I feel pain enough to drive me out of my mind.

I have tried my utmost to bear it, but I have reached the point where I can endure no more, and my patience is at last exhausted. A person who gets into such a state is no use for anything. Screams. Howls. More screams, more howling. I have no way to describe the pain, the agony. I think it would be easier if I turned into a real lunatic, but I can't even do that. If I could only die, that would be more welcome than anything else. But I cannot die and no one will kill me.

The suffering of the day is finally reduced at night, and when I am slightly drowsy, the pain of the day ends and the pain of the next day wakes up already. There is no time when it hurts as much as when waking up. Isn't there anyone to save me from this pain? Isn't there anyone to save me from this pain? (Paragraphing and emphasis by research author. See, Keene 1998: 368)

So, who can help Shiki? How about religious grace? Apparently not, as the following diary entry describes:

No. 40 (June 21st)
"How can I spend my day?" "Isn't there anyone to save me from this pain?" To get here, religious people will say that I have arrived at a religious issue. But for me who does not believe in religion, religion is useless. God's helping hand cannot reach those who do not believe in Christianity. For those who don't believe in Buddhism, it is impossible to spend the day repeating Buddhist prayers. ….

In the extreme, even my breath was dominated by the breaths of others and it became very painful. It has become much more difficult to harmonize with myself and my surroundings. When morphine is working well, this harmony is a little easier, but these days it no longer works. I fall into this kind of boundary. ….

If a compassionate soul comes to my bed and tells me something interesting, I will be grateful that it will save me some pain. ....

The only thing I want to refuse is a person who sits face to face and says nothing. (Omission, paragraphing by research author)

Because Shiki is "educated according to rationalist, Confucian principles" (Keene 1998: 368), religion could not bring comfort to him. Finally, he was also kept from speaking, as if being unable to write was bad enough.

No. 41 (June 22nd)
Today the suffering was severe. ….
I was administered morphine twice.
(Omission by research author. But in fact, it seems to be that, in the day like this, Shiki can hardly think of anything)

In these consecutive entries, it is apparent that Shiki was barely able to write no. 38 by himself. After that, he had to rely on dictation. And the pain was especially severe the day he wrote no. 41.

2.3 A letter from a religious person with lung disease

At that time, a letter was delivered to Shiki who suffered such a disease. He wrote in the same essay:

No. 42 (June 23rd)
When I got up this morning, I received a letter. It is from an anonymous sender in *Hongo* [Tokyo] and he is a stranger to me. This letter is roughly as follows:

Sincerely, I read your Byosho Rokushaku and felt something, so I'll give you some advice.

First, rest assured that the Heaven King or Nyorai are always with you.

Second, if you can't believe in the former, just be patient with your current situation, progress of the situation, leave it to pain, leave everything as it goes, leave Heaven and Earth and let everything appear and disappear to you because of the limit of human power.

Third, if you can do neither, cry in confusion, only to die.

Once I was on the verge of death, and inevitably bothered and confused about my body, I could get a mental rest by that second way. This was my saving grace, so I can't say that it will help relieve your pain or not. I beg you to try to think if your pain is a bit softer.

This kind, clear, and plain letter has caught my heart and my thoughts are almost completely covered. ….

However, in me, the mental illness is physiologically generated, and when I am in pain, I can't do anything. Even if it is physiologically worrying, there is no other way than to leave it to "the current progress." There is no other way than crying, feeling annoyed, and dying at last. ….

But as long as it is a physical pain, when it is mild, I can't give up but say that there is no means of comfort. When it comes to advanced pain, I can't just be comfortable, but I feel like I can't give up. Probably, I can still not give up. ….

Even if I was lying on the sick-bed year round, day and night and always enjoy looking up even at a *bonsai* tree that is three-shaku [3 ft.] high, when I was a little distressed by morphine, I want to laugh at myself who was bothered a while ago.

If I knew that I was the same person when I laughed, those who laugh at my annoyance would all be laughed at by me if each changed their position and could not escape. Having a hearty laugh. (Written on June 21st (5) (Omission, paragraphing and emphasis by research author)

The sender of this letter is probably Kiyozawa Manshi, a reformer of *Jodo-Shinshu*

[Buddhism] during the Meiji era. Kiyozawa's disciple Akegarasu Haya studied and composed haiku and tanka under Shiki at the same time. In addition, Kiyozawa had shown his respect for Shiki's works for several years. Kiyozawa noted Shiki's huge appetite, which was mentioned in Shiki's later essays. Shiki's gluttony was one way to cope with his lung disease. One medical scientist Fujimoto Shigefumi, President of Sendai Aoba Gakuin Junior College, speculates that Shiki ate more than 3000 or 4000 kilo calories a day (cf. Fujimura 2011: 56). The anonymous letter was supposed to be sent to Shiki, to encourage him. Of the three ways to be saved from suffering, Kiyozawa recommends the second. However, Shiki is most sympathetic with the third suggestion, "Cry in confusion, only to die," It seems that Shiki could live only this way, as Shiki's own *satori* [enlightenment, epiphany].

2.4 *Satori* for Shiki himself

Before this letter, Kiyozawa was asked by another disciple, Ando Shuichi, "What do you think about the *satori* of Masaoka Shiki's thinking?" (cf. Ando 1904) Kiyozawa praised Shiki's view of *satori*. This actual conversation between a master and a pupil was triggered by a famous essay of Shiki, an excerpt of which follows:

> Up to now, I have always misunderstood the *satori* of Zen. I mistakenly supposed that *satori* was a way of dying in a tranquil state, regardless of the circumstances, but *satori* is actually how to live in a tranquil manner, regardless of the circumstances.
> (*Byosho Rokushaku*, no. 21, June 2nd in 1902. Translated by Keene, Keene 2013: 232, note 27. Originally *Shiki Zenshu* XI: 261)

Although Shiki had little good to say about religion per se, he did express a kind of affinity for *satori* in Zen. However, this *satori*, in the sense Shiki describes it, is, as Blyth says (Blyth 1964: 21, and in the Preface of this article), different from religion, pantheism, mysticism, and Zen; instead, it is related to '*kaigyaku*.'

2.5 *Jisei* [farewell/resignation haiku]

Shiki wrote three *haiku* as his *jisei* on the day before his death. The first of them is the most relevant for this article.

> *hechima saite*
> *tan no tsumarishi*
> *hotoke kana*
> [The sponge gourd has bloomed;
> See the Buddha
> Stuffed with phlegm]
> (Translated by Keene, Keene 2013: 188)
> 糸瓜咲て痰のつまりし佛かな

During this time, near the end of life, Ritsu and disciple Hekigoto both supported Shiki in his writing. In later years, Hekigoto recalled that Shiki was out of breath as he wrote three verses, including this first one with his brush. The final state of Shiki, which Hekigoto describes in his *Shiki no Kaiso* [*Reminiscence of Shiki*], is very touching. As many critics have explained, it is strange that Shiki compares the dying self here to a Buddha (in old Japanese grammar, 'shi' of 'tsumarishi' is an auxiliary verb of the past tense in the first person). The Japanese word '*hotoke*' can also stand for 'corpse,' but his intended meaning is not necessarily religious because religious figures or divinities such as the Buddha or God do not struggle, suffer or die.

Here, Shiki is about to die. In Japanese custom, it is said that water of the *hechima* soothes the throat of a sick person, but it actually does not work. It is too late. Like the old proverb '*yamai koumou* [*koukou*] *ni iru'* [When the disease spreads too far, it is no longer curable]. However, even as he was dying, Shiki looked at himself objectively, even portraying himself humorously. His sense of humor, *kaigyaku*, is what Shiki had consistently, as he could not help but laugh at his tormented self (See, No. 42 of *Byosho Rokushaku*, and above, 2.2 of this article). Shiki eventually died, but he did so by retaining his essential character.

Conclusion: Pain, Care, and Thanks

As he was the patriarch and sole earner of his own house, Shiki was also the patriarch of the literary association with his name *Hototogisu*. As well, he was surrounded by many disciples and shared a fraternal bond with many of them.

However, during the years leading up to

his death, Natsume Soseki, the most famous writer in modern Japanese literature, and Shiki's lifelong friend, was in London, so Shiki could not meet with him. Shiki wrote several letters and confessed his deep sadness and despair, which he could tell only to his friend. Shiki himself was aware of his impending death, and the surroundings he starkly describes express this awareness. His last days and last creations, including three *jisei haiku*, were composed when he was no longer able to speak well enough, so people who cared for him could not know his last words. However, he gave them a lot, and they returned the favor; Shiki must have been grateful for all the things that he was given.

Swiss-American psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross mentions a poem as an example of the last stage in her five-stage model of encountering dying: 'acceptance' (cf. Kübler-Ross 1969). The poem, translated from Bengali to English by the poet himself, was written by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1913, and the first such winner who hailed from Asia:

> I have got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers! I bow to you all and take my departure.
>
> Here I give back the keys of my door - and I give up all claims to my house. I only ask for last kind words from you.
>
> We were neighbours for long, but I received more than I could give. Now the day has dawned and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out. A summons has come and I am ready for my journey. (*Gitanjali*, 93)

Tagore's poem aptly expresses how Shiki must have felt: acceptance of his impending death.

Let us conclude this article with Shiki's own words. The *jisei* [farewell] haiku has already been mentioned, and the following are some lines from his last essay, "The Morning of September 14th." It was written five days before his death and published in "*Hototogisu*" magazine, dated September 20th, 1902, a day after his death, with a note stating that "Shiki died; he made a distant trip at 1 am." In prose, Shiki adds his own description:

> My condition suddenly worsened from 4, 5 days ago; although from before my legs that had been hardly able to move, suddenly swollen like water, I can't move at all. ….
>
> Until now, I have suffered from various pains, but this is the first time I have experienced such pains. Therefore, for the past few days, my hospital room has become a kind of disturbing atmosphere due to my suffering, the hustle and bustle of my house and my friends coming to visit.
>
> …. When I woke up this morning, my feet remained the same as the previous day, but my mind was very calm, probably because I had a good night's sleep only last night different from usual. Although my face was slightly southward, I was unable to move it at all, but I looked quietly outside the glass *shoji* [window]. [Looking to cloudy silent sky, *yoshizu* [reed screen], about 10 fruits and a few flowers of *hechima*, *ominaeshi* [golden lace], *keitou* [cockscomb], *shukaidou* [begonia] .....] Since I got sick, I have never seen this garden as quietly with a peaceful heart as this morning. [Talking with Kyoshi, hearing a voice of an about 6-year old child living in a house opposite south, reading a textbook, and a *natto* seller comes to Shiki's house in the back of the alley, so asked to buy because of contributing sales; actually he didn't want it much....].
>
> .... When I talk with Kyoshi about the morning at Suma [where Kyoshi went to visit when Shiki's condition worsened enough to die, in 1895], the hechima leaves fluctuate one by one as if they had fallen, even by dew. Every time, the coolness of autumn seemed to permeate my skin, and it was a good feeling. It seemed strange that I felt so painful that I didn't feel sick for a while, so I wanted to write it in a sentence and spell it with my mouth. I asked Kyoshi to write it down. (Cf. *Shiki Zenshu* XII: 570-572. Omission, paragraphing and emphasis by research author)

It may not have been romantic, but this saved moment before his final moments was characterized by a tranquility after his long journey of suffering from tuberculosis and spinal

caries. We know that Shiki's death was possible only with his essential character, and with care of those around him.

Document

Morphine Administration Record (by Shiki himself, in *Gyoga Manroku,* II, cf. *Shiki Zenshu* XXI: 489-493).
Period: 1. From March 10th to 12th, 1902.
Period: 2.-3. From June 20th to July 29th, 1902.

1. March, 1902

10th 8:40 am	11th 1:30 pm, past 11 pm	12th Noon

2. June, 1902

20th Noon, 9 pm	21st 5:45 pm	22nd 9:05 am
23rd 2:15 am	24th 9 am, 6:20 pm	25th 8:35 pm
26th 8 am	27th 6 am, 10 pm, 37.8 C (body temperature)	28th 10:20 am, 8:25 pm
29th 9 am	30th 9 am, 37.2 C	

3. July, 1902

1st 8:30 am, 5:25 pm	2nd 8:30 am, 7:15 pm	3rd 7 am, 3:30 pm
4th past 4 am, 4 pm	5th past 7 am, 7 pm	6th around 8 am, ar. 7 pm
7th 8:30 am, pm (lack of time)	8th 7:30 am, 5:30 pm	9th 9:15 am
10th not drunk	11th twice (lack of times)	12th 8 am, 4:40 pm
13th 4 am, past 3 pm	14th 2 am, 3 pm	15th 2 am, 1:30 pm, 9:30 pm*
16th 0:35 pm	17th 1 am, 0:30 pm, 8:30 pm*	18th 9:30 am, 5:30 pm
19th 9 am	20th not drunk	21st 10 am
22nd 9:30 am	23rd 10 pm	29th 10:35 am

(From 24th to 28th, no record)

* He drank three times despite the doctor's limit of twice a day. Perhaps he and others were guilty of it, but judging from current standards, we can appreciate that he increased the medication rather than to suffer from unbearable pain.

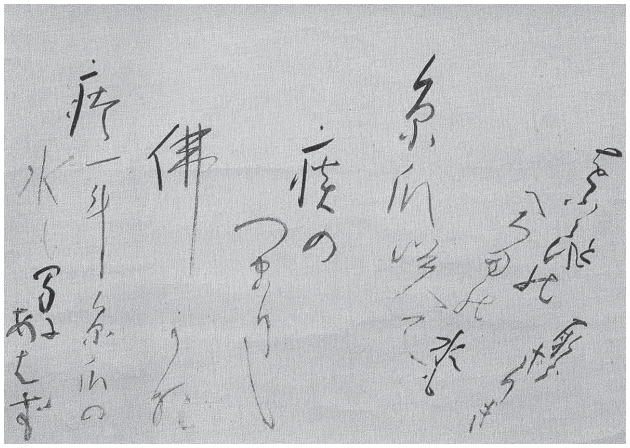

figure 1

Shiki's autograph of three haiku as his *jisei*, written on 18th September, 1902, just a half day before his death (from right to left, 4th-7th lines: 糸瓜咲て [*hechima saite*] 痰の [*tan no*] つまりし [*tsumarishi*] 佛可奈 [*hotoke kana*])

Endnotes

1 Fusetsu was Shiki's very important friend, who had learned from *Asai Chu*, one of the leading Western-style painters of the Meiji era at the government-run *Kobu Bijutsu Gakko* (Technical School of Art, established in 1876). Also, a famous writer and doctor Mori Ogai praised Fusetsu, and it is known that Mori requested Fusetsu write the calligraphy inscribed on his own (Ogai's) grave.

2 Even Tsurugaya, an excellent researcher and translator of Chomin, admits that "Certainly, the depth of the shadow of death in Shiki's final essays *Gyoga Manroku, Bokuju Itteki* and *Byosho Rokushaku* elevate them above Chomin's *Ichinen Yu-han*..." (Tsurugaya's explanation; see, Chomin 1995: 317-323, especially 322-323). In addition, Tsurugaya praises Shiki's final essay "The Morning of September 14th" as it evokes feelings of "clear tranquility and peace" (his explanation; Chomin 1995: 322-323).

3 In describing these three *haiku* of the *jisei*, a famous haiku poet *Yamamoto Kenkichi* (see, Yamamoto 1962: 36) praised them, stating that "[they are] complete final words and also singing," "It can be said that his life as haiku poet is to get these three phrases." These are generally highly acclaimed as Shiki's masterpieces. I agree with these opinions. Ironically, the one exception was Shiki's gifted disciple, Kyoshi, who gave the last works of Shiki a low rating. Kyoshi wrote, "I don't think these *haiku* of the *jisei* are as good

as Shiki's [other] works, and I think that they are not particularly good enough to represent Shiki's objective attitude towards life" (Naito et al. 1916: 42. Emphasis by research author).

4 Like many other languages, Japanese has two styles of writing: the old style or written language was used mainly until about 1900s (Meiji 30s), some years after the death of Shiki. Shiki is the person who introduced a new style of Japanese writing which expresses spoken language. Because Shiki, in his last years, could not use the pen (Japanese brush) well enough, he had others (mostly his sister Ritsu, or disciples (Kyoshi, Hekigoto, and others) write down his spoken words. With his rich knowledge of Chinese and old Japanese, Shiki became one of the best writers of his era. His supervising manager, Kuga Katsunan, President of the Newspaper Nippon; his uncle Kato Takusen; his elder friend, Mori Ogai, are also such people, deserving of the title of experts.

5 Noted by Shiki himself. This date of writing is different from the newspaper date and is a message to the sender of that letter, Kiyozawa, although Shiki pretends not to know in the text.

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