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AN ARTLESS ART:

FICTION AND REALITY IN THE WORK OF SHIGA NAOYA

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a critical analysis of the work of Shiga Naoya, one of the major creative writers of modern Japan. Shiga is presented primarily as the author of shi-shōsetsu ("I-novels"), a distinctively Japanese genre that combines elements of fiction and autobiography. This "blurring" of the lines between fiction and non-fiction is shown to have been particularly disturbing to certain Western critics, and the present thesis attempts to answer these critics, first, by showing the solid basis of the shi-shōsetsu in the Japanese literary tradition; second, by showing how the mixture of fiction and reality is an integral part of Shiga's art on both a technical and a thematic level; and, third, by pointing out the parallels to Shiga's practise in some recent literary trends of the West itself.

In Chapter 1, Shiga's first published story, "Aru Asa" ("One Morning"), is used as an example of the shi-shōsetsu in its simplest and barest form, and thus as an example of everything that certain Western critics dislike about this genre. Some of them, for instance, have accused the story of "triviality". In answer to this charge, I have shown how Shiga, by virtue of his masterful style and his depth of psychological insight, manages to turn even seemingly insignificant material into significant literature. "Aru Asa", in fact, already contains in microcosm the central problem



to be explored throughout Shiga's most important later works: namely, the conflict between the protagonist's desire for individual freedom and self-expression on the one hand and, on the other, his longing for peace of mind and communion with others.

The solution which Shiga eventually offered to this "problem of the ego" is first adumbrated in the story I consider in Chapter 2, "Kinosaki ni te" (At Kinosaki). Here the protagonist receives a profound shock to his sense of self--a near fatal accident--but also is given some intimation of the way to ultimate psychic health: through self-surrender and union with nature. On the principle that the best way to define something is often by contrast with its opposite, I have also compared this work with a Tolstoy story, "Three Deaths", in order to bring out more clearly the special qualities of the shi-shōsetsu.

In the story I deal with in Chapter 3, "Takibi" ("Bonfire") the Shiga protagonist is seen to have already attained some degree of union with nature. The narrative progression of the story, in fact, consists simply of a steady deepening of this lyrical, idyllic mood. To show that there are some analogies to Shiga's "naturally plotted" stories in the recent West, I compare "Takibi" with a Hemingway story, "Big Two-Hearted River". I also point out that the affinity between the two authors' use of imagery as "objective correlative"



is by no means coincidental, in view of the influence of Japanese poetry on Hemingway through Ezra Pound and the Imagists.

In the fourth and final chapter I deal with An'ya Kōro (A Dark Night's Passing), which I regard as the culmination of Shiga's art on both a thematic and a technical level. In this work Shiga himself comes to grips with the essential nature of the shi-shōsetsu, including the fiction/reality dialectic that is the crucial problem at its core, and it is here also that he relates this technical issue with the thematic issue I see as central to his work: the protagonist's longing for spiritual liberation. In An'ya Kōro, in other words, the problem of the man and the problem of the writer some to be seen as ultimately the same problem, and in a way that could obtain only when the man is a writer of shi-shōsetsu. I conclude my discussion with what, in my view, Shiga has to offer to the Western reader, as well as an appraisal of what I consider to be the improved climate for the reception of his work in the West.

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Introduction

No modern Japanese writer of comparable stature has been as sorely neglected in the West as Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉 (1883-1971). Although most of his major stories were written in the Taishō period (1912-1926), and his single great novel appeared in 1937, it was not until the 1970's that any substantial translation and criticism of his work was undertaken in English. There is, as yet, no book-length collection of his short stories (though there is in French<sup>1</sup>); a mere handful of them are scattered throughout various anthologies--this in spite of the fact that Shiga has long been recognized as one of the great masters of the form in Japan. His one novel-length work, An'ya Kōro 暗夜行路 (1937) was finally translated by Edwin McClellan as A Dark Night's Passing in 1976. As for critical studies, the first to be published in book form was Francis Mathy's Shiga Naoya (1975). As I intend to show, this is a rather narrow and unsympathetic treatment. William Sibley's The Shiga Hero, a revision of his 1971 doctoral dissertation, appeared in 1979; though more sympathetic to his subject than Mathy, Sibley nevertheless takes a markedly Freudian approach that, in my view, results in an equally distorted image of Shiga's art. Perhaps the most helpful and perceptive study to date, presenting the author more in the context of his own culture, has been the chapter Ueda Makoto devoted to Shiga in his



Modern Japanese Writers and the Nature of Literature (1976), which I shall have occasion to return to later.

Why has Shiga's work suffered this long neglect by a Western readership that has given an enthusiastic reception to such writers as Kawabata, Tanizaki, Mishima and Abe? The basic reason seems to be that, in the eyes of Western readers, Shiga's works lack the usual attributes of "fiction": since most of the events described are taken directly and in a seemingly random fashion from the author's own life, there is little in the way of conventional "well-built" plot-structure; and, since the author himself, or his fictional persona, is almost invariably the protagonist of these self-absorbed works, there is no development of a wide range of "rounded" characters. Edward Seidensticker perhaps expresses the traditional Western view of the kind of shi-shōsetsu

私小説 ("I-novels") that Shiga wrote when he refers to them as "unformed reminiscence" and as "a form of autobiographical jotting that may scarcely seem to deserve the name fiction at all."<sup>2</sup> In the same essay, however, Seidensticker admits the significance of this genre, albeit reluctantly, in the overall context of modern Japanese fiction when he says that "if there is any one characteristic distinguishing the modern Japanese novel from the modern novel elsewhere, it is the importance of undisguised and unshaped autobiography."<sup>3</sup> Mishima Yukio also recognized the central place



of this genre in the contemporary literature of his country, but he saw it in a more cosmopolitan and less belittling light:

The "I-novel" of modern Japanese literature is a complex creation of mixed ancestry, bred from the French naturalist novel, from the Japanese occasional essay style of the Middle Ages (called, revealingly, "following one's thoughts") and from the self-worship of European romanticism. And, because of the peculiar characteristics of Japanese poetry which I have mentioned before, the "I-novel" form was also made to serve the function of<sup>4</sup> fulfilling poetic needs through the vehicle of prose.

The issue, in fact, is even larger than that of the shi-shōsetsu per se, though this is a very widely practised genre. That the problematic relation between fiction and reality has preoccupied many of Japan's greatest modern novelists has been well demonstrated by Ueda Makoto in his Modern Japanese Writers. In his analysis of the literary theories of eight novelists, the first question that Ueda considers in each case is the writer's view of the relation between life and literature, and he shows that it is a question that has especially exercised writers in modern Japan.

As I shall point out in Chapter 1, it seems to me, then, that Francis Mathy attempts to evade this central issue which must arise in any consideration of Shiga by over-emphasizing the few more conventional works of fiction the author wrote. To do so, I would claim, is to present a distorted image both of Shiga's actual accomplishment as a writer and of his abiding influence on the literature of his country.



Shiga Naoya must stand or fall as a writer of shi-shōsetsu; to try to "dress him up" in more acceptably conventional or Western garb is a futile exercise that only belies the true nature of the subject. In this present analysis, then, I concentrate exclusively on Shiga as a shi-shōsetsu writer, and attempt to trace the development of the theme I regard as central to these "autobiographical" works: that of a man seeking to free himself from his own egotism by achieving total union with nature. At the same time, I try to address the central critical problem which arises in connection with the shi-shōsetsu, a problem that Shiga himself, as I shall show, came ultimately to deal with in his great novel: the on-going dialectic between fiction and reality.

In Chapter 1 I use Shiga's first published story, "Aru Asa" 或る朝 (One Morning, 1908), as an example of the shi-shōsetsu in its simplest and barest form and, consequently, as an example of everything that most offends Western critics in particular about this genre. My intention is to show that the views of these critics are heavily prejudiced by the values of their own culture; when Shiga's works are viewed through the eyes of a sympathetic native critic such as Kobayashi Hideo, for instance, they seem a culmination of all that is finest in the Japanese literary tradition. On the level of theme, I point out that we can already discern in Shiga's earliest story the outlines of a



problem that will recur throughout his shi-shōsetsu written over the next thirty years: how is the protagonist to resolve the tension between the demands of his own fiercely independent ego and his longing for peace of mind and communion with others? The definitive solution to this problem finally comes, as we shall see, with the climactic scene of his magnum opus, published almost thirty years after "Aru Asa".

In Chapter 2 I deal with a more mature example of Shiga's art, a work that is, in fact, one of the most celebrated of his short stories: "Kinosaki ni te" 城崎にて (At Kinosaki, 1917). Here the Shiga protagonist receives a far more profound shock to his sense of self than in the earlier story--a near-fatal accident--but also he already senses the direction he must travel to achieve his ultimate liberation: towards self-surrender and union with nature. In order to define more clearly the distinctive nature of the shi-shōsetsu in the context of the world literature, I also compare this Shiga story with a short story by a great master of the genre as it has been practised traditionally in the West, Leo Tolstoy. It is a fortunate coincidence that the Tolstoy story, "Three Deaths", has a similar overall concept and structure to "Kinosaki ni te", though, as we shall see, it also presents some interesting points of contrast.

Chapter 3 deals with another of Shiga's best-known stories, "Takibi" 焚火 (Bonfire, 1920). In contrast to the two earlier stories, the mood of this work is close to idyllic as



the protagonist is shown leading a quiet life in the mountains, enjoying a pleasant communion with both man and nature. Whereas in Chapter 2 I use a Tolstoy story to show how the traditional Western form of this genre differed from Shiga's shi-shōsetsu, in the present chapter I use a Hemingway story, "Big Two-Hearted River", to show that there are some close parallels to Shiga's practise in the more recent West. I also point out that this apparent affinity is by no means entirely coincidental, in view of the considerable Japanese influence on the Western "Imagist" poets, who in turn influenced such fiction writers as Hemingway.

In Chapter 4 the two levels of my discussion may be seen to be brought together in the analysis of An'ya Kōro, a work I regard as the culmination of Shiga's art on both a thematic and a technical level. It is in this work, as I hope to show, that Shiga himself comes to grips with the essential nature of the shi-shōsetsu, including the fiction/reality dialectic that is the crucial problem at its core, and it is here also that he relates this "technical" issue with the thematic issue I have seen as central to his work up to this point: the protagonist's longing for spiritual liberation. In An'ya Kōro, in other words, the problem of the man and the problem of the writer come to be seen as ultimately the same problem, and in a way that could obtain only when the man is a writer of shi-shōsetsu. I conclude my discussion with a summation of what, in my view, Shiga has to offer to the Western reader, as well as an appraisal of what I consider to be the improved



climate for the reception of his work in the West.

Shiga Naoya was born in 1883 at the village of Ishimaki in Miyagi Prefecture on the northeast coast of Japan, where his father was posted as an employee of the Dai-ichi Bank. The father, however, was an ambitious and successful businessman, a graduate of the new Keiō University, and before long he returned to Tokyo, quit his job at the bank and set out to make a name for himself in the world of high finance. Eventually he became the director of both a railway and an insurance company. Since it was also the case that the Shigas had been for generations leading samurai retainers of the Sōma clan, it may well be said that Naoya was born into a "good" family, both in terms of wealth and of social status. This is, indeed, the most crucial fact about his early biography, since it enabled him to attend the Gakushūin or "peers' School", where he first came into contact with other writers of the Shirakaba group, and, more importantly, since it enabled him, throughout the rest of his life, to concentrate exclusively on his writing, turning out works at a leisurely pace without the necessity of making a living.

Although Shiga attended one of the best schools and, later, the best university in the country, he was not a particularly good student. In fact, he had to repeat two years at Gakushūin and he dropped out of Tokyo Imperial University before completing his course of studies (in English



literature). This is significant in view of his later reputation as a "primitive", a man who valued instinct and emotion above intellect. Nevertheless, it was at school, as I have mentioned, that Shiga came into contact with several other young men who had literary ambitions, most importantly Mushanokōji Saneatsu, who would be Shiga's closest friend and supporter for the rest of his life. When this group of young men had advanced together to Tokyo University, they published a literary magazine called Shirakaba 白樺 (White Birch). The magazine, which remained in circulation from 1910 to 1923, not only published works by members of the group itself but also attempted to introduce contemporary Western literature and art to Japanese readers. By serving both of these functions it became a cultural influence of considerable importance in Taishō Japan. At any rate, this was the vehicle through which Shiga's stories first became widely known. Still, one must be wary of any facile categorizations of him as a member of the "Shirakaba group". The importance of the group to Shiga lay far more in the friendship and support it provided than in any direct influence of its literary theories on his work. As I hope to show, Shiga the writer was very much his own man.

There is one other fact which must be mentioned about Shiga's early biography: his stormy relationship with his father. Needless to say, as a hard-headed businessman the



father was none too pleased with his son's choice of vocation, particularly since it meant that he would remain financially dependent on his father for much of his life. There were other sources of irritation: Naoya's protests over the pollution caused by a copper mine his family was associated with; his affair with one of the family maids and his determination to marry her; and, finally, his marriage in 1914 without his father's consent to a cousin of Mushanokōji. During the years 1913 to 1915, however, Shiga's state of mind underwent a significant change, a change reflected, as we shall see, in his stories "Kinosaki ni te" and "Takibi". His close brush with death on the one hand (he was hit by a streetcar in Tokyo in the summer of 1913) and his increasing sense of union with nature on the other (in 1915 he went with his new bride to live amid the beautiful mountain scenery of Akagi in Central Japan) changed his attitude of confrontation and self-assertion into one of longing for harmony and peace of mind. With this new attitude he was soon able to effect a reconciliation with his father, an event which is movingly described in one of his most celebrated shi-shōsetsu Wakai 和解 (Reconciliation, 1917). With this reconciliation the principal drama of Shiga's life came to an end, and he was able to spend the rest of his days (until his death at the age of eighty-eight in 1971) in the quiet enjoyment of his family, of the world of nature and of the traditional Far Eastern arts.



With time, in fact, Shiga became an almost archetypal figure on the Japanese cultural scene, seeming more and more like the reincarnation of some enlightened sage of old.

But, as a writer, one final great struggle awaited him after his reconciliation with his father: he had still to finish his magnum opus, An'ya Kōro. This was a long and tortuous process: the first part of the novel was published in 1921, and it was not until 1937 that the last instalment appeared, a full twenty-five years after the work was begun. After the publication of this one great novel Shiga wrote little of any consequence, though he lived another thirty-four years. This fact alone seems to tell us much about the special relationship between a writer of shi-shōsetsu and his work. Having poured all of the agony and the hard-earned wisdom of his life into this one work, it seems that Shiga now felt he had best maintain a dignified silence.



## Chapter I

Shiga Naoya may be regarded as first and foremost a shortstory writer. This is not to deny the importance of his one novel, An'ya Kōro (A Dark Night's Passing), upon which much of his high reputation in Japan rests. Nor is it to deny the wide appeal of his most famous novella, Wakai (Reconciliation), that watakushishōsetsu par excellence which has moved critics to such effusive heights (or depths) in describing its emotional impact. But the fact remains that Shiga was far more prolific as a short-story writer than as a novelist and, more significantly, that short stories such as "Takibi" ("Bonfire") and "Kinosaki nite!" ("At Kinosaki") seem to embody, to a greater extent than any of his other works, those qualities that most critics, I think, would regard as "quintessentially Shiga". Furthermore, even his great novel is rather episodic in character, so that despite its considerable length, it has been regarded by more than one critic, as we shall see, as more a series of loosely related short stories than a tightly structured novel (and, indeed, it was originally planned as such<sup>I</sup>). One might add that Shiga took the major part of his working life (about twenty-five years) to write his one novel. Needless to say, this seems to imply that novel-writing did not come easy to him.



Although Shiga wrote some sixty odd short stories, the problem of which to single out as representative is not a particularly vexing one. What Shiga is renowned for, above all, is his style (and, as we shall see, he himself considered style to be the quintessence of the writer's art) but, unlike his most famous contemporaries, Tanizake and Akutagawa, he did not possess a facile command of a variety of styles. This already tells us much about the kind of writer he was. In his case in particular, the "style is the man". Shiga's own view, which we shall explore in more depth later, was that a writer's style arose spontaneously from the depths of his being; it was the man's own basic "rhythm" that, in the case of a great writer, communicated itself forcefully to the reader through the written word. Because style, then, was such a deeply personal thing, it could not be changed at will like a suit of clothes. In keeping with this view, Shiga left his characteristic stamp on everything he wrote. This is not to say that all his works are masterpieces, but they do all manifest, to some extent, the unmistakable "Shiga style". As a result, almost any of them would serve to represent this primary aspect of his art.

As for content, the stories may be divided into two broad categories: those that are more or less "autobiographical" (the shi-shōsetsu), comprising by far the majority, and those that are more invented or "fictional". With this classification, there already appears the fiction/non-fiction or fiction/reality dialectic which will be a recur-



ring theme in my study of Shiga. But I wish to say immediately that there is no value-judgment implied here. It seems to me that Francis Mathy, for instance, only betrays his Western preconceptions about what constitutes "good literature" by his ranking of the "fictional" stories above the "autobiographical"<sup>2</sup>. In his book, the first full-length study of Shiga in English, Mathy gives "star coverage" to the fictional stories in a chapter called "A Golden Ten" and laments that Shiga was unable to write more because he was "hampered by an impossible theory of prose fiction",<sup>3</sup> i.e., he generally preferred to write in "such a defective genre as the autobiographical novel".<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it seems to me that by over-emphasizing the fictional stories at the expense of the autobiographical, Mathy distorts our view of Shiga's achievement as a writer, since the great majority of his stories are shi-shōsetsu and since he is known in Japan mainly as the master of this genre (and it is as such that he has exercised his enormous influence on modern Japanese literature). At any rate, in the present study I have tried to attain a more appropriate balance by dealing at greater length with the autobiographical than with the fictional stories.

As I have said, there is a remarkable unity to Shiga's entire opus. Even in his first published story, "Aru Asa" ("One Morning" - 1908), there already appear many of the characteristic features of his style and content. In fact,



it would be only a slight exaggeration to say that this five page product of Shiga's early manhood already contains the greater portion of his later work in microcosm.

"Aru Asa" is the simple story of a young man, Shintarō, who has trouble getting out of bed one morning. The night before he had persisted in reading a novel until very late, despite the protestations of his grandmother, who is sharing the same bedroom. She had warned him that a Buddhist priest would be coming early the next morning to celebrate a memorial service for his dead grandfather, and that they would have to rise long before the priest arrived to get everything ready. But Shintarō had continued reading until the early hours of the morning. Now, whenever his grandmother comes to get him up, he falls back to sleep again. She grows increasingly irritated, until finally she is not politely requesting but sternly commanding him to get up, and to be quick about it. This in turn brings out the rebel in Shintarō, who defiantly tells her that all her pestering has only made it more difficult for him to get up. Calling him a "devil", his grandmother stalks angrily out of the room. Even though he is no longer really sleepy, Shintarō's stubborn pride now prevents him from getting up.

When his grandmother returns once more, she tries a bit of "psychology" on him: she begins folding up her own heavy mattress and quilts, even though, at seventy-three, she



should not be putting herself to such a strain. But the clever Shintarō sees through her strategy and still refuses to budge. Finally, his grandmother becomes angry and accuses him of having no sense of "filial duty". "If filial duty means being at the beck and call of an old lady", Shintarō answers rather spitefully, "then I want no part of it."<sup>5</sup> His grandmother rushes out in tears.

Now that he has enjoyed this cathartic release of animosity, Shintarō finally feels in the mood to get up. But he still has not exhausted all his resentment. While getting dressed, he entertains another spiteful thought: perhaps he will go skating the next day on a lake where three students drowned recently -- surely this will make his grandmother worry about him.

His grandmother now enters the room again. Relieved that Shintarō is now up, she tries to make peace with him by asking his advice about which writing brushes to offer to the priest when he comes. She meekly obeys when he orders her to put two brushes back as not suitable. With this further salve to his ego, Shintarō is thoroughly appeased. Left alone again, he suddenly feels like laughing. He cancels the idea of the skating trip and begins to fold up his bedding neatly and put it away. Now completely "reconciled", he even folds up his grandmother's bedding. While doing so, though, he is suddenly overcome, "in the midst of laughter", by an



uncontrollable urge to cry. The tears stream down his cheeks, so many that "he could no longer see anything". But when finally the tears stop, he feels "refreshed, purified".<sup>6</sup>

In the final scene of the story, Shintarō goes to his younger brother and sisters in the next room, where he joins in their playful joking. The story thus ends on an appropriately light note, signifying Shintarō's euphoria not just at having been purged of some negative emotions but, more importantly, at being able to rejoin the comfortable family circle, the all-important Japanese realm of amae.<sup>7</sup>

Although the style in which "Aru Asa" is written is not quite yet the mature "Shiga style", we already can discern here some of its major features. Generally, there is a kind of strong, authoritative tone to the writing which comes, no doubt, from the almost staccato rhythm: short, clipped sentences in which no words are wasted and facts are stated simply and clearly. One is given the sense that the words have been chosen with extreme care, and these words are generally of a simple, basic kind. There is a very sparse use of adjectives; the language is not in any way "decorative" but rather economical, efficient. It is, as Tanizaki Junichirō has pointed out,<sup>8</sup> an essentially "masculine" style (and Tanizaki contrasts it with the "feminine" style that descends from Lady Murasaki and finds its principal modern expression in his own works). If we were to look for its



equivalent in English, perhaps the closest would be the equally celebrated "Hemingway style" -- and there are, in fact, some remarkable similarities between the styles of these two writers, even in such details as their choice of words.<sup>9</sup>

Shiga is renowned above all for his style (it is used, for instance, as a model of ideal Japanese prose in schools across the country) and style, as I have said, occupies an all-important position in his own view of literature. In a significant essay he wrote on the subject, which might be considered a personal manifesto of his "way" as a writer (I mean "way" in the Japanese sense of dō or michi, for it becomes apparent that writing was as much a spiritual discipline to him as an art), Shiga uses the English word "rhythm" to describe that quality which he considers to be the quintessence of good writing. This is not merely a matter of the skillful arrangement of words -- it is, one might say, something communicated almost "between the words", a kind of "reverberation" from the author's "mind and spirit" -- somewhat akin, it seems, to the Shavian concept of "life-force". Of necessity, then, the author must be not just a talented artist but also a highly developed human being. (Perhaps this view does much to explain the "biographical fixation" of many Japanese Shiga critics -- he was himself, by all accounts, an impressive, almost charismatic person). According to Shiga: "One can always tell from one's own reaction



on reading a story how strongly (or feebly) the author's sensibility has pulsed with this rhythm while he wrote."<sup>10</sup> And the medium used is almost irrelevant, since the rhythm is always basically the same: "All encounters with the works of superior men, whether their deeds, their pronouncements or their writings, gives us real pleasure...Good words, good paintings, good books -- all good works have this effect upon us."<sup>11</sup> The true pleasure of reading, then, is the pleasure of a kind of spiritual communion with great men: "Our eyes are opened to whatever qualities hidden within ourselves we might share with them. Our mind and spirit grow taut..."<sup>12</sup> This "quasi-mystical" view of the function of literature is also highly relevant to what is probably the most recurrent theme of Shiga's works and a theme which, as we have seen, is already adumbrated in "Aru Asa": the hero's struggle to overcome all sense of alienation by achieving total communion with his fellow man, particularly with other members of his family, and with nature at large. With his concrete sense of "rhythm" as a kind of natural force that could be transmitted from man to man, Shiga obviously saw literature itself as a very practical means for achieving this communion.

Furthermore, according to Shiga "rhythm" transcends both form and content in a work of literature. He makes this clear in his discussion of Ihara Saikaku, the writer he admired more than any other of the Japanese tradition: "Saikaku's Ogeba



and Oridome are written with a cool, clean detachment and a strong rhythm. Their subjects are various trivial occurrences in the 'floating world'; and yet they have that effect upon the reader which I mentioned before: a tightening up of one's mind and spirit."<sup>13</sup> Thus a writer is able to make great art even out of "trivial" subject matter, providing he commands a masterful style.

Apparently, Francis Mathy does not see eye-to-eye with Shiga on this point. He finds the style of "Aru Asa" to be "splendid" but does not feel that this sufficiently compensates for the "triviality" of its contents.<sup>14</sup> In particular, he is irritated by the "Immature self-centeredness" of the hero, who is "not a little boy, as his actions and words would seem to indicate, but a grown man of twenty-five".<sup>15</sup> Surely this is too much like arguing "ad hominem" -- one does not necessarily have to morally approve of the hero's behaviour to appreciate the story as a story. If this were not so, it would be impossible for the "cosmopolitan" reader to freely enjoy the literature of cultures with values very different to his own -- and there would be no such discipline as "comparative literature". In the present case, for instance, it may seem implausible or even reprehensible to the contemporary Western reader that a twenty-five year-old man should act so "childishly" towards his grandmother but, in the context of Meiji Japan, where family relations were oppressively close and where young men lived at home until married, Shintarō's behaviour is not to be wondered at.



But there is a larger issue at stake here. It seems to me, in fact, that Mathy misses the very essence of Shiga's achievement. Here is a writer who has taken the small, seemingly insignificant events of everyday life and turned them into literary art of a high order. Triviality, after all, is, like beauty, very much in the eye of the beholder. Ever since Van Gogh did a splendid painting of a pair of old shoes, modern art has taught us this if nothing else. The point is that once Shiga has turned a "trivial" incident into a short story, it no longer seems trivial. Like the fabled King Midas, Shiga has the golden touch. But one must not be misled by authorial pronouncements -- he accomplishes his miracles of alchemy not only by the force of his style or "rhythm". He also possessed considerable powers of insight into the human psyche, and this enables him to show us the disturbing forces at work beneath the calm, seemingly uneventful surface of everyday life.

On closer view, then, "Aru Asa" does not seem so "trivial" after all. As I have already indicated, one of Shiga's major themes is prefigured in this short work: seen from a "social" perspective, it is the conflict between a man's needs as an individual and his needs as part of a social group. The whole issue of "individualism" was very much in the air in the late Meiji period. In discussing Natsume Sōseki's famous talk, Watakushi no Kojinshugi (My Individualism), Jay Rubin notes "the remarkable upsurge in individualism that followed the



Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905."<sup>16</sup> In the realm of literature, "naturalist fiction, with its emphasis on the liberation of the individual, was gaining in popularity."<sup>17</sup> And Sōseki too, both in his public talk and in his novels, was concerned with the "tension between a proud commitment to modern, rationalistic individualism and the longing for emotional submergence in the group."<sup>18</sup> In his talk, for instance, he contrasts his own independent stance with the "feudalistic" cliquishness of Japanese literary groups. But he also admits to suffering the "loneliness of individualism".<sup>19</sup> Such Meiji writers as Sōseki and Mori Ōgai.<sup>20</sup> No doubt saw "individualism" as an essential ingredient of the Western culture they were so busily trying to import to Japan.

In his insistence on his own rights as an individual, Shiga too was certainly a product of his time. But, unlike the older writers, he does not approach individualism as an intellectual problem -- he is not concerned, for instance, with how it conflicts with traditional Japanese cultural values in the abstract; rather it is for him a personal problem to be worked out in his day-to-day relations with his family. It is a matter of his will to act according to his own deepest instincts and feelings, as opposed to his family's will that he conform to their standards of behaviour. (In the same way he rejected the teachings of the Christian leader Uchimura Kanzō not so much on ideological as on personal grounds -- when they threatened to interfere with what he



considered to be the "natural" free expression of his sexual instincts.<sup>21</sup>). Thus Shiga did not suffer from any vague, quasi-metaphysical sense of alienation such as his more intellectual contemporary, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, gave as his reason for committing suicide;<sup>22</sup> and, since he was not concerned with any "larger" political or philosophical issue, once he was completely "reconciled" with his family, he was able to spend the rest of his long life in a relatively tranquil state of mind (and, ironically, writing very little).

To those who would accuse Shiga of having too "narrow" a scope as a writer, one might quote some eloquent words of his greatest apologist, the "dean of Japanese critics", Kobayashi Hideo; "Empty thought can go anywhere, my own feet can tread only a small bit of ground. We think of eternal life, I must shortly die. I cannot have many friends, I cannot have many lovers. The things to which I can give assent from my very entrails add up to but a tiny sum, the people I can love and hate can number no more than the few immediately beside me. This is the state of life for me, and it is for everyone...The fact that the writer does not depart from his own life means that he gives it his assent, and it alone."<sup>23</sup> The distinguished scholar Nakamura Hajime has devoted a good part of a lengthy volume to demonstrating the essential "down-to-earthness" of the Japanese world-view,<sup>24</sup> but it is doubtful whether anyone has expressed it better than Kobayashi in this brief passage. Shiga himself has put



what we may regard as his "writer's credo" even more succinctly: "A superficial experience of rare and sensational events is of little value to the writer. It is more important for him to experience even small things deeply."<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, it seems that for Western readers it is difficult to accept Shiga's "small things" for what they are. Even those more sympathetic to his work than Mathy are forever trying to make something out of it that it clearly is not. Edward Seidensticker for instance, would have us see the typical Shiga story as a kind of modern-day version of the "utamonogatari" of the Heian period, "poem-tales" such as the Ise Monogatari in which "a fictional or non-fictional ground was provided for a succession of lyrics. The ground itself was usually formless and of slight literary value. It but served to set off the lyrics...So it is with Shiga. The triviality of the autobiographical background is to be forgiven to the extent that it offers a setting for the moments of lyrical awareness. The whole is to be judged as a unified work of fiction no more than is an 'utamonogatari'."<sup>26</sup> While this may be regarded as a valiant attempt on the part of a sympathetic Western critic to rescue Shiga from the charge of "triviality", it is doubtful whether, at least in the eyes of his Japanese admirers, Shiga is in need of being rescued. Triviality, as I have said, is in the eye of the beholder. And, in dismissing Shiga's "trivial and annoying reminiscence" as merely the "prosy setting" for a few "moments of poetry",



it seems that Seidensticker would throw out the baby with the bathwater -- the "autobiographical background" is, after all, the substance of the works. It is an absurd notion anyway that any author would write long stretches of prose merely to set off a few "moments of poetry" -- many of Shiga's stories, in fact, including "Arus Asa" have no such distinguishable "poetic moments". If Shiga's intentions had been so single-mindedly lyrical, surely he would have written poetry.

Taking quite an opposite tack is William Sibley, who calls on the "big ideas" of Freudian psychoanalysis to try to make Shiga's "small things" seem larger than they are. To Sibley, for instance, "Aru Asa" is not simply the story of a willful young man who is reluctant to get out of bed one morning (surely not an unheard-of case!); the hero's irrationality towards his grandmother has deeply Oedipal origins that can be understood only in the total context of Shiga's life and work (and, of course, the life and work of Dr. Freud). Sibley concedes that, on its own, "Aru Asa" is a "slight story" that "represents Japanese personal fiction (shishōsetsu) at its most limited."<sup>27</sup> In his view, we can begin to make sense of the "seemingly pointless detail"<sup>28</sup> of this story only after we have subjected the "Shiga Hero" as he appears throughout the author's entire opus to thorough psychoanalysis. Sibley is not too clear on what we shall discover



then, but it seems to have something to do with the hero's crying spell. It appears to me that he gives inordinate emphasis to Shintaro's tears: "Is it, we wonder, a sudden grief for his dead grandfather that has elicited his tears? Remorse for his treatment of his grandmother? Or perhaps he has been upset by a brief reference to his father which she makes at one point, provoking at first a particularly ill-tempered outbursts on the hero's part. Most of those who read "Aru Asa" when it was first published in Shirakaba did not, presumably, make much sense of it. Indeed, they could not, without some 'inside' knowledge of the author's life and personality on which they might draw to complete the story. And so they may well have felt justified in not, finally, caring too much what it is that makes the hero cry."<sup>29</sup> To me this is a prime example of the kind of reductio ad absurdum that follows inevitably from the "reductive" approach to literature: first Sibley assumes that Shiga has hidden some tidbits of psychoanalytical insight "between the lines" and then he rebukes the author for having hid them too successfully. He would reduce "Aru Asa" to a kind of psychoanalytical detective story in which the main clue, the hero's tears, can be understood only in the total context of the hero's "case history" (and this, of course, is playing an unfair trick on the reader). As a matter of fact, if there was any one principle that Shiga adhered to as a writer, it was that he never withheld information from the reader -- in one famous instance, he reprimanded



Akutagawa for "tricking the reader" in just this way in his story "The Martyr", wherein the "surprise fact" that the "hero" is actually a girl is not revealed until the very end (a la O. Henry).<sup>30</sup>

It seems to me that, in the present case too, there is no mystery at all about "what it is that makes the hero cry". In fact, it is perfectly transparent to anyone who is not too preoccupied with unearthing psychological profundities to notice what is actually happening in the story. If we look at the passage in which Shintarō's "crying spell" is described, we see that Shiga does, in fact, give us a strong hint as to the cause of the young man's outburst: it comes over him "spontaneously" while he is folding up his grandmother's bedding. Here, in Shiga's first story, we already have a characteristic example of the kind of concreteness of tactility for which he is famous -- and which derives, ultimately, from his "poetic" or even "mystical" sense of the intimate communion of "subjective" man with "objective" world. Shintarō does not begin to cry until he actually touches something belonging to his grandmother -- which, in Shiga's "animistic" world, is filled with her "presence". It is this immediate physical contact with his "grandmother" which awakens his intense though dormant love for her, thus obliterating all traces of the animosity he had felt towards her just a few moments before. What causes his tears is not so much remorse (the "Shiga hero", as we shall see, does not waste time feeling



guilty about "doing what comes naturally") but a simple feeling of relief that an unpleasant negative emotion has been replaced by a powerful positive emotion -- in other words, a simple release of tension. One does not need to be a trained psychoanalyst to see that the real "message" of the hero's tears is simply that he loves his grandmother very much.

Shiga's stories may well be described, as they have been by Japanese literary historians, as shinkyō shōsetsu (literally, "state of mind" stories) but it is important to emphasize that the "shinkyō" is all in the "shōsetsu". Nothing extraneous to the stories is necessary for our understanding of them. No doubt it is interesting to observe how later Shiga heroes are prefigured by the hero of his first story, but this should not prevent us from accepting "Aru Asa" as a story in its own right, however "simple" or however much of a "small thing" it is.

Long before it came into vogue in the West, the Japanese understood the beauty of "minimal art". The power of this beauty has been hauntingly evoked by Kobayashi Hideo in his lyrical essay on the Nō play, Taema: "Music and dance and song are reduced to the barest essentials. The Music is like a cry, the dance is little more than a walk, and the song is like ordinary prayer. It is enough. What else is needed?"<sup>31</sup> Similarly Shiga's is an art of "barest essentials". His "small things" are to be appreciated in all their simple, immediate



reality, in their "suchness" (sono mama) to use a Buddhist term, like the frog in Bashō's haiku, like the rocks in a Zen temple garden or, to take a more contemporary example, like the simple images of family life in the films of Ozu Yasujiro. As soon as the reader begins to analyze, to intellectualize, to look for deep symbolic or psychological meanings, he has immediately "lost it", as the Zen masters say. Obviously this puts the critic (and the graduate student) in a rather difficult position. Kobayashi Hideo, as I have said, has undoubtedly been Shiga's most successful apologist, and it is significant that he himself is more of an intuitive poet or philosopher than an "orthodox" analytical critic in the Western sense -- his impressionistic, oracular pronouncements, though highly suggestive, are often far more difficult to fathom than the writings they are meant to elucidate. Nevertheless, it is Kobayashi's understanding of the traditional Japanese aesthetic sensibility, as revealed in the essay just quoted, that enables him to appreciate Shiga's work so deeply.

"Aru Asa", then, is the simple story of a young man's altercation and eventual reconciliation with his grandmother. But it is interesting to note that it anticipates in this, as we shall see, the basic pattern of the "action" in many of Shiga's later stories, including his two major works (both in length and in quality): Wakai (Reconciliation) and An'ya Kōro (A Dark Night's Passing). The cause of the rift between the



Shiga hero and his family is not always so clear or straightforward as in "Aru Asa", though it generally has to do with his being more willful and "self-oriented" than Japanese society permits; but, in all these stories, what Shiga emphasizes more than anything is that the hero must allow his feelings to run their "natural" course before a "reconciliation" is possible. In the present story, we observe that, once he has been angered by his grandmother's pestering, Shintarō's mood becomes conciliatory only after he has thrown a few insults her way and she has humbled herself by asking his advice. We may agree with Francis Mathy that this is "childish" behaviour but, nevertheless, it is convincingly human and, therefore, "natural". As Ueda Makoto has pointed out in an excellent essay on Shiga's aesthetics, "natural beauty" is a primary quality in Shiga's concept of the "ideal novel".<sup>32</sup> But this does not belong only to mountains and trees -- it is, above all, a human beauty: "An impression of natural beauty comes from observing a man who conducts himself honestly, in accordance with his inmost feelings. Such a man would not repress his true feelings in the interest of social convention...He would follow the dictates of his innermost self even if that would lead to an explosive clash with his father or even to the death of his wife. A man fighting for his survival was beautiful, because he was, if nothing else, pure in his motives."<sup>33</sup> It is not necessary, as I have said, for the reader to morally approve of a hero in order to derive



aesthetic satisfaction from his portrayal. And here, in "Aru Asa", we have our first taste of Shiga's "amorality": the "natural"-- raw gut feelings, intuitions, instincts -- counts far more than the "moral" -- a mere intellectual abstraction.

But now, in seeming to come perilously close to confusing Shiga himself with the Shiga here, we approach what is perhaps, at least from a Western viewpoint, the central critical problem of his work: its status as "fiction". In the case of "Aru Asa", the author himself, at first, seemed to have his doubts. In his diary entry of January 14, 1908, he notes that, having written during the morning about a quarrel he had had with his grandmother the previous day, he called the piece: "A Non-Story, Grandmother" ("Hi-Shōsetsu, Sobo").<sup>34</sup> Significantly, though, Shiga later changed his mind about the status of this work as "non-fiction". In a commentary on it written in 1928, he describes it as his first "short story".<sup>35</sup> One may speculate that, in the meantime, his view of what constitutes a work of fiction or a shōsetsu had broadened or, perhaps, had become more traditionally Japanese.<sup>36</sup> The young Shiga was, after all, an avid reader of Chekhov, Tolstoy and Flaubert and was likely to be influenced by Western concepts of fiction. As he matured in his art he naturally developed the confidence to set his own aesthetic standards.

"Aru Asa" is the first in a long line of Shiga's shi-shōsetsu ("I-novels" or "personal fictions"), stories closely



based on the events of his own life and featuring a hero more or less identifiable as himself. Certain Western critics are hesitant or even refuse to accept such works as "legitimate" fiction. Edward Seidensticker describes the shi-shōsetsu as "unformed reminiscence" and as a "form of autobiographical jotting that may scarcely seem to deserve the name fiction at all."<sup>37</sup> Francis Mathy makes the same point in regard to "Aru Asa": "The piece is hardly more than a sketch..."<sup>38</sup> and he laments that the author was "hampered by an impossible theory of prose fiction",<sup>39</sup> although occasionally "Shiga was able to transcend the autobiographical mode and find objective fictional symbols to express his inner states."<sup>40</sup> Even a Japanese critic, Nakamura Mitsuo, has said that he was "tempted" to describe Shiga's novel, An'ya Kōro as "non-literature".<sup>41</sup>

What these critics object to is not, of course, the presence in fiction of autobiography per se. Many of the most celebrated Western novels of this century are very largely autobiographical -- Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Proust's A la Recherche du Temps Perdu, Lawrence's Sons and Lovers -- one could go on almost indefinitely. But it seems that, to the Western eye at least, these works appear more consciously structured for aesthetic effect, more finely shaped into "works of fiction" than the Japanese shi-shōsetsu -- which Seidensticker, for instance, calls "the unshapen ones".<sup>42</sup>



But this sense of "formal structure", it seems to me, is exactly what Shiga wished to avoid. His love of the "natural" made him eschew anything that smacked of fabrication

(koshiraemono, to use the word by which the father of the shi-shōsetsu, Tayama Katai, denounced a certain Western novel<sup>43a</sup>)

--including the formal plot-structure of conventional fiction.

(We have already mentioned his aversion to some of Akutagawa's well-plotted stories.) Nor is he alone in this predilection

for the "storyless novel", (hanashi no nai shōsetsu) to use the term Akutagawa himself applied to Shiga's work.<sup>43b</sup> In

fact, he has a very substantial part of the Japanese literary tradition behind him. The contempt for "popular" fiction

that merely "tells a story" in the conventional sense has a venerable lineage in both China and Japan -- it is, in fact,

embodied in the very word shōsetsu. As Herbert Franke points out in his introduction to a collection of Chinese stories:

"The Chinese term for novellas, Hsiao-shuo (shōsetsu in Japanese), 'little tales', contains a certain undertone of disparagement. Narrative prose, and indeed every sort of light fiction, was not generally regarded as a branch of serious literature, and, unlike poetry or the formal essay, it was not a field in which literary ambition could lead on to fame and social prestige."<sup>44</sup> The stern strictures of

Confucius no doubt had much to do with this. Like Plato in a famous passage of the Republic<sup>45</sup> the Chinese philosopher

took a dim view of the fictive imagination, abjuring any talk



of "miracles, acts of violence, troubles, and ghosts."<sup>46</sup>

This strict Confucian attitude seems to have been imported, along with much else, into Japan. The great works of fiction of the Heian period, as we all know, were written by women, while the men were occupied with the more "serious" business of writing Chinese-style poems and essays. Lady Murasaki is obviously responding to the charge of "falsity" often leveled against the novel in her day when she puts her famous "defense of fiction" into the mouth of Prince Genji: "The Chronicles of Japan and the rest are a mere fragment of the whole truth. It is your romances that fill in the details... There are differences in the degree of seriousness. But to dismiss them as lies is itself to depart from the truth... He now seemed bent on establishing the uses of fiction."<sup>47</sup> Murasaki's arguments failed to convince the literary establishment, though. Until the arrival of the great critic Motoori Norinaga in the eighteenth century, even her own masterpiece was rendered acceptable to Buddhists and Confucians, if at all, only by being contorted to fit various allegorical interpretations. Meanwhile, the "mainstream" tradition of Japanese literature continued to consist of diaries, zuihitsu (fandom essays), haibun (poems mixed with prose) and so on. (A literature, in other words, of the "personal" or lyric rather than of the epic or dramatic mode.)

Fiction may seem to have enjoyed something of a renaissance with the arrival of Ihara Saikaku in the late seventeenth



century. As Donald Keene remarks, "it is not much of an exaggeration to say that he re-established prose fiction as an art after over four hundred years of anonymous writings."<sup>48</sup>

But, as Keene also points out, Saikaku is admired not so much for the content of his stories, which are, for the most part, light, comic tales of the pleasure quarters, the "floating world"; what sets him apart from countless other writers of ukiyo zōshi is his masterful style. In the words of Howard Hibbitt, Saikaku, like the great woodblock print artists, achieves his "finest effects by sheery stylistic verve."<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, as we have already seen, Shiga himself, who admired Saikaku more than any other Japanese writer, said of his works: "Their subjects are various trivial occurrences in the 'floating world'; and yet they have that effect upon the reader which I mentioned before: a tightening up of one's mind and spirit."<sup>50</sup> This was because of the "strong rhythm" of the author's style.

In other words, the great popularity of Saikaku did nothing to change the traditional view that well-plotted fiction per se was not an appropriate medium for "serious" literary expression. And certainly no cause for a change in this view was provided by any of Saikaku's successors, writers of ukiyo-zōchi that, as Keene says, were "devoted to trivial incidents of the licensed quarters or to the implausible doings of paper-thin heroes,"<sup>51</sup> and that resemble Saikaku's works in style, if at all, only because they were directly plagiarized



from him.<sup>51</sup> There were, of course, a few important exceptions over the centuries -- in particular, Ueda Akinari and Takizawa Bakin. But Akinari himself considered his fictional works to be of "small consequence" in comparison with his non-fiction,<sup>52</sup> and Bakin's novels, though heavily didactic, were lumped together with the gesaku fiction of his era (literally, the "low works") -- in Keene's terms, the "playful compositions", a term that was "originally intended to indicate that the author disclaimed responsibility for a frivolous work".<sup>53</sup> The general trend of Japanese critical opinion is bluntly summarized by Ivan Morris: "During the Tokugawa period, and indeed ever since the days of The Tale of Genji, scholars have looked down on prose fiction, which was widely regarded as being fit only for women, children, and the lesser breeds."<sup>54</sup>

With this long tradition behind them of fiction having such an ambiguous status, it is little wonder that the "men of Meiji" were somewhat startled to find that the novel was regarded as such a high art form in the nineteenth century West. As Ivan Morris says: "One result of the introduction of Western literature was to enhance the position of prose fiction in Japan."<sup>55</sup> Tsubouchi Shōyō's Shōsetsu Shinzui (The Essence of the Novel), written in 1885, was the first Japanese work of theoretical criticism to take the novel seriously as an art form. Shōyō laments the low state of fiction in his country, and then expresses the pious hope that "by dint of steady planning from now on for the improvement of our novels



we may finally be able to surpass in quality the European novels, and permit our novels to take a glorious place along with painting, music, and poetry on the altar of the arts."<sup>56</sup>

At first Meiji writers tried to imitate their Western models as dutifully as they could, writing political novels a la Disraeli and novels of social concern a la Zola. But it did not take long for the native tradition to reassert itself, though under the guise of the very modern-sounding "naturalism". From the outset, as Ivan Morris points out, "Japanese naturalism began to diverge from the movement in Europe that had inspired it. The publication in 1908 of Futon (The Quilt), a novel by Tayama Katai, one of the leading naturalists, served to establish the autobiographical approach as the standard as the standard for Japanese writers of the naturalist school."<sup>57</sup> Where the French naturalists, aiming to give the portrait of a whole society, created highly structured novels featuring a broad range of characters, their Japanese counterparts focused exclusively on the everyday events of their rather uneventful lives, writing in a discursive, diary-like fashion. Thus began the tradition of the modern Japanese shi-shōsetsu. "The main legacy of naturalism in Japan has been the belief of many writers that the only worthwhile and 'sincere' form of literature is that which takes its material directly from the facts of the author's physical and spiritual life. This trend affected several writers who were in other respects strongly opposed to the naturalists. Among them was Shiga Naoya."<sup>58</sup>



The foremost practitioner of the day of a more "Western" form of novel-writing, Natsume Sōseki, was regarded by the naturalists as a rather superficial panderer to popular taste. According to Itō Sei, they "criticized Sōseki, saying that his works were all 'fictions' with no descriptions of harsh realities, and that the writer should fully expose himself in his works."<sup>59</sup> When Sōseki finally did write an autobiographical novel, Michikusa (Grass by the Wayside), it was "generally appreciated as the best of Sōseki's entire works, and as the only one worthy of the name of novel...Sōseki too may have written an 'I' novel because he realized the persuasive power that that mode of writing had. As I have mentioned before, there exist in Japanese society solid grounds for a personal novel to win readers."<sup>60</sup>

The fact that the traditional "anti-fiction" bias was still very much alive in Shiga's day is clearly shown in an essay written in 1925 by Kume Masao, perhaps the best-known apologist of the shi-shōsetsu. Kume regards the I-novel as "the essence of prose writing" and seems close to dismissing such Western classics as War and Peace, Crime and Punishment and Madame Bovary as "great popular novels, and fabricated stories just for entertainment."<sup>61</sup> Taking up the familiar Japanese theme of the "artificiality" of conventional fiction, Kume resorts to a rather trite metaphor: "I think that no matter how beautifully produced, an artificial flower falls



too far short of one in wile nature."<sup>62</sup>

Edward Seidensticker has shown that at the basis of this "anti-fiction" view is the peculiarly Japanese concept of "pure literature" (jun bungaku), which has played an important part in indigenous theories of the novel since the Meiji period.<sup>63</sup> It may seem paradoxical or even contradictory to Western readers, but in this context the "pure" novel is not the one which is entirely a product of the writer's imagination (i.e. completely "fictional") but the one which is intimately personal and self-revelatory (i.e. autobiographical) -- in other words, works which some Western critics, as we have seen, would not even regard as "literature" at all. What is seen by Japanese critics as standing at the opposite pole to the literarily "pure" is the sūzōku, popular fiction. (And, as Seidensticker has pointed out elsewhere, Japanese popular writers "often have a slick patness in their plotting that would be worthy of the most skillful science-fiction writer."<sup>64</sup> Thus the tendency of critics to regard the "well-plotted novel" as a "popular" novel.) Kume Masao, in his 1935 essay, Jun Bungaku Yogisetsu (Pure Literature as Avocation), recommends to the financially straightened literatus "writing pot-boilers for a living and producing 'pure literature' in one's spare time".<sup>65a</sup> He offers Shiga's work as the "highest peak" of the pure.

Kume's strictures setting up the autobiographical novel as "pure literature" are, of course, every bit as narrow as



those of Western critics that regard it as "non-literature". Needless to say, Shiga cannot be held accountable for the excesses of his apologists. As we have seen, he did attack one of Akutagawa's stories for its artificial "surprise ending", but, on the other hand, he himself wrote some highly successful "fictional" works when he chose to do so. In other words, his views on "fiction" versus "non-fiction" were not as exclusive or doctrinaire as those of some of his apologists. His preference for the autobiographical mode was more an aesthetic than an ideological one.

Indeed, it is questionable whether Shiga was influenced by literary trends at all -- by the naturalists, as Ivan Morris implies, by his fellow members of the Shirakaba-ha, or by anyone else. Shiga himself claimed to have read little Western literature and even less Japanese. But the important thing is that Japanese readers were well prepared by the long tradition we have just reviewed to accept his "plotless" autobiographical stories as quite legitimate shōsetsu. And what of Western readers? Seidensticker makes the interesting claim that all would be well if only the shi-shōsetsu would change the genre designation of their works: "Perhaps in the end one's chief complaint against Shiga and his colleagues and followers is that they chose to give their lyrics-with-setting the name shōsetsu, and so to arouse false expectations in the breasts of those accustomed to rendering shōsetsu as 'short story' or



'novel'." <sup>66</sup> We may overlook, for a moment, the strange suggestion that Shiga et al must be held responsible for the "false expectations" of Western readers (for, as we have pointed out, Japanese readers would not have such expectations aroused by the word shōsetsu). But does the whole problem really boil down to a simple matter of the confusion of genres? Would not, to paraphrase the Bard, a shi-shōsetsu smell as bad (or as good) by any other name? Would a Western reader suddenly cease to find Shiga's stories "wearisome", to use Seidensticker's word, <sup>67</sup> if he were told they were not "short stories" by "lyrics-with-setting" or utamonogatari? It seems a rather doubtful proposition. One can change one's glasses easily enough but not one's eyes -- and it is the culturally conditioned eyes that we are really talking about here.

We might say, for instance, that Shiga's autobiographical stories should be read in the same spirit as one reads, say, a literary diary or an autobiography in the West. But Western diaries and autobiographies, like Western novels, tend to be highly structured works bearing a strong imprint of the "ordering intellect". (One thinks, for instance, of the autobiography of Rousseau or the journals of Andre Gide.) It seems, in fact, that we have come across a truly fundamental cultural difference here, not just in aesthetic values but in the whole way of perceiving and approaching the world (which is in turn reflected, of course, in the aesthetics). In commenting on the distinctive "Japanese concept of structural unity", Ueda



Makoto remarks: "Japanese arts generally shun logic as the principle of unity and try to minimize the role of intellect in the structure of a work; this is true even of those arts that could admit into themselves a large measure of discursive reason if they wanted to...When talking about the work of prose, which is supposedly more logical than poetic language, Japanese aestheticians never emphasize the importance of tight, logically coherent structure. Lady Murasaki speaks only of natural smoothness, the rhythm of life, which is never logical; The Tale of Genji in fact, is almost a series of short stories loosely strung together. A tragedy could certainly make use of a logically constructed plot but Chikamatsu seldom does so; his plays, especially his historical plays, present a series of incidents that are in themselves dramatic but loosely connected to one another...Perhaps beneath all this lies a view of life that Norinaga says is traditionally Japanese: human life is essentially irrational and the universe is not logically constructed. The work of art, if it aims to copy life and nature faithfully, cannot have a logical structure."<sup>68</sup>  
(underlining my own)

This last sentence, it seems to me, is especially pertinent to Shiga's works. The only logic they possess is, as Kobayashi Hideo has said, the "logic of everyday life".<sup>69</sup> In other words, Shiga's narratives do not progress in the linear, syllogistic fashion of the classic Aristotelean plot-line,<sup>70</sup> with a "logical" cause-and-effect relation between a clearly



identifiable beginning, middle and end. Rather, the events in his stories are linked in a lossely associative manner reminiscent of Japanese linked verse (renga<sup>71</sup>) -- or, indeed, of the "randomness" of life itself. The total aesthetic effect of this technique is one of a quiet, relaxed naturalness. As Kobayashi has said of Shiga: "His spirit does not know drama. His trials are those of a growing tree."<sup>72</sup>

Already in "Aru Asa" we can see the results of this method of writing in which "the logic of everyday life itself becomes the logic of literary creation."<sup>73</sup> There is a delicate art involved here -- it is certainly not, as one might expect, merely a matter of reporting "things as they happen". The writer must exercise great sensitivity in selecting details and in following the "natural" course of events. As we have already seen, Shintarō must go through a rather complex series of mood-changes before he is finally able to feel "reconciled" with his grandmother -- and to get out of bed. Shiga conveys all this with admirable economy, in just a few short narrative sentences and a few snatches of dialogue. To quote again from Kobayashi: "Since Tayama Katai learned from Maupassant the literary value of daily life as it is, no writer has succeeded as well as Shiga Naoya has in boldly, even violently, wresting from his own life a work of art."<sup>74</sup> (Underlining my own.)

But to see Shiga's art of what Ueda calls the "natural plot"<sup>75</sup> in full flower, we must go on to some of his more mature works.



## Chapter 2

"Kinosaki ni te" 城崎にて (At Kinosaki) was written in 1917, almost a decade after "Aru Asa". It soon becomes evident, on reading this story, that Shiga had by now achieved full maturity as a writer. "Kinosaki ni te" is, in fact, one of the most widely praised and widely anthologized stories of modern Japan.<sup>1</sup>

The story is structured around three encounters which the narrator has with death as manifested in the world of nature. A near-fatal accident that he has recently suffered has made him sensitive to the omnipresence of death, so that he notices things he would normally overlook and notices them with an abnormal clarity and intensity. The relationship between the three incidents described is thus not casual as in conventional narrative but associative as in poetry.

The story opens with a typically vigorous first sentence, no words wasted, which takes us into the heart of the matter immediately: "Yamanote-sen no densha ni hanetobasarete kega o shita, sono ato yōsei ni, hitori de Tajima no Kinosaki onsen e dekaketa." (After being hit by a train on the Yamanote line, I went alone to Kinosaki hot spring in Tajima to convalesce.) This is a fine example of what Tanizaki calls the "practicality" (jitsuyō 実用) of Shiga's style<sup>2</sup> -- perhaps not so rare a quality in English as in Japanese prose, which generally tends to be more circumlocutory.



In the first paragraph we are also told that the narrator has not yet completely escaped from the shadow of death: according to his doctor, there is still a chance that he might develop tuberculosis of the spine, which could prove fatal. Thus he takes an understandable interest in even the smallest manifestations of death in the world around him.

The narrator's first "encounter" is with a dead bee. He sees it one morning on the roof of the genkan, the entrance-way to his hotel. The impact which this sight has on the narrator's death-oriented consciousness is made real to us in two ways: by a graphic description of the pathetic figure of the dead bee, its legs "doubled tight under it" and "its feelers dropped untidily over its head"<sup>3</sup>, and by a contrast of the dead bee with the many living bees swarming busily around it: "The industrious living bees gave so completely a sense of life. The other beside them, rolled over with its legs under it, still in the same spot whenever I looked at it, morning, noon, night -- how completely it gave a sense of death."<sup>4</sup> We are then told explicitly of the narrator's emotional response: "It gave me a feeling of utter quietness. Of loneliness. It was lonely to see the dead body left there on the cold tile in the evening when the rest had gone inside. And at the same time it was tranquil, soothing."<sup>5</sup> This is a familiar pattern in Shiga's shi-shōsetsu: a graphic evocation of the natural world of human relations, followed by an extended analysis



of the narrator's usually rather complex responses -- in other words, a continual reciprocation between outer and inner worlds.

As is evident from the above quote, the narrator's response to his first encounter with death is generally a rather positive one. He is attracted to the peaceful quietude of death. After the dead bee has been washed away by the rains, he imagines it lying somewhere completely motionless: "how quiet it must be -- before only working and working, no longer moving now. I felt a certain nearness to that quiet."<sup>6</sup> He mentions that he has recently written a story called "Han's Crime" (Han no Hanzai 范の犯罪, one of Shiga's "fictional" stories), in which a Chinese juggler, Han, had murdered his wife. In his present mood he would like to rewrite the story from the wife's point of view, "to describe her murdered and quiet in her grave".<sup>7</sup> Without being overly facetious, one might remark here that Shiga (or his narrative alter ego) comes uncomfortably close to a writer usually considered his opposite in "healthy-mindedness", Kawabata Yasunari, the "necrophilic" author of The House of Sleeping Beauties (Nemureru Bijō 眠り美女). But perhaps fortunately Shiga assures us that he never did write The Murdered Wife of Han, although "the urge was there".<sup>8</sup> He tells us further: "I was much disturbed that my way of thinking had become so different from that of the hero of a long novel I was writing."<sup>9</sup> The reference



is, of course, to An'ya Kōro ( 暗夜行路 A Dark Night's Passing), in which the hero, Kensaku, is almost desperately life-affirming and "positivist"; the present narrator's mood of feeling "friendly to death"<sup>10</sup> would no doubt seem abhorrent to Kensaku. This is true, at least, for those early portions of the novel that Shiga was writing at the same time as "Kinosaki ni te" -- though, as we shall see, it becomes less and less true as Kensaku moves towards his final, climactic experience of "self-dissolution" and union with nature on Mount Daisen in the penultimate chapter of the novel.

The narrator's second encounter with death is a rather more violent and unpleasant one. Walking through the town one day, he notices a noisy crowd of people gathered along the bank of a small stream. When he investigates, he finds that: "A large rat had been thrown in and was swimming desperately to get away. A skewer some eight to ten inches long was thrust through the skin of its neck, so that it projected about three or four inches above the head and three or four below the throat."<sup>11</sup> Some of the bystanders are making sport of the unfortunate creature by throwing stones at it. It struggles to climb up the bank and into a hole, but the skewer catches on some rocks and it falls back into the stream, "trying still to save itself somehow. One could tell nothing from its face, but from its actions one could see how desperate it was."<sup>12</sup> The narrator turns away from the scene: "I did not want to see the end."<sup>13</sup>



Whereas his first experience gave him an inviting sense of the ultimate peace of death, then, the sight of the tormented rat is far more disturbing: "It was terrible to think that this suffering lay before the quiet I was after. Even if I did feel a certain nearness to that quiet after death, still the struggle on the way was terrible."<sup>14</sup> And indeed he is reminded that, after his recent accident, his own instinct to survive had welled up as powerfully and irresistibly as the rat's: "I wanted to do what could be done. I decided on a hospital for myself. I told how I was to be taken there. I asked someone to telephone in advance because I was afraid the doctor might be out and they would not be ready to operate immediately. Even when I was but half-conscious my mind worked so well on what was most important that I was surprised at it afterward myself."<sup>15</sup> Strangely, though, he remembers that, at the same time, "I was surprised afterward too at how little I was troubled by fear of death."<sup>16</sup>

The narrator's final encounter with death is even more disturbing, as he himself is the agent who brings it about. While out for an evening stroll, he comes across a water lizard sitting on a rock beside a stream. Wishing merely "to startle the lizard into the water",<sup>17</sup> he absent-mindedly tosses a stone in its direction. By what seems to him like some perverse twist of fate, the stone scores a direct hit and the lizard is killed. Again, Shiga's descriptive powers



are admirably evocative: "The stone slapped against the rock and fell into the water. As it hit, the lizard seemed to jump five inches or so to the side. Its tail curled high in the air...The curved tail began quietly to fall back down of its own weight. The toes of the projecting front feet, braced against the slope with knee joints cut, turned under and the lizard fell forward, its strength gone. Its tail lay flat against the rock. It did not move. It was dead."<sup>18</sup>

There is no trace left now of the narrator's previous attraction to death. What especially troubles him is the way the lizard's death seems such a product of arbitrary chance. Indeed, long before Camus and Ionesco, Shiga here presents us with an acute sense of the "existential absurdity" of the fate of all living creatures: "I often enough kill lizards and such, but the thought that I had killed one without intending to filled me with a strange revulsion. I had done it, but from the beginning entirely by chance."<sup>19</sup>

Contemplating thus the lizard's death, the narrator is filled with a sense of the loneliness of the living creature"<sup>20</sup> This is further intensified when he thinks now of what might have become of the two other dead creatures, the bee "carried underground by that rain",<sup>21</sup> and the rat, swept "off to sea, probably, and its body, bloated from the water, would be washing up now with the rubbish on a beach."<sup>22</sup> Hishthoughts then turned to himself: "And I who had not died was walking here.



I knew I should be grateful. But the proper feeling of happiness refused to come. To be alive and to be dead were not two opposite extremes. There did not seem to be much difference between them."<sup>23</sup> In this mood of somber pessimism and extreme detachment, he stumbles back to his inn in the growing darkness: "the feel of my feet against the ground, cut off from my sight, seemed uncertain in the extreme."<sup>24</sup> We are thus left with the feeling that the narrator has been somewhat devastated, albeit enlightened, by his final encounter with death. The work ends, though, with a kind of "footnote" that is rather more positive in tone: "It is more than three years now. I did not get spinal tuberculosis -- that much I escaped."<sup>25</sup> Thus the story is set in a sort of "frame" by the opening and closing paragraphs, in which the narrator reminisces about the events "at Kinosaki" from a distance of three years.

According to Tanikawa Tetsuzō, Japanese writers, "from Akutagawa Ryūnosuke on, have lavished praise on this story."<sup>26</sup> What the critics have found to praise in it, above all, is the excellence of its style. To illustrate what he considers to be the source of this excellence, Tanikawa quotes from Shiga's commentary on the story: "This too is a story based on the events as they actually happened. The deaths of the rat, the bee and the water lizard all were really witnessed by me over a period of several days. And I intended to write directly and sincerely about the feelings that arose in me at



the time."<sup>27</sup> The very fact, then, that the writer is so close to the events of which he writes gives his style an immediacy, a "directness" and "sincerity" that it could not otherwise attain. This idea is by no means peculiar to the apologists of the shi-shōsetsu, despite Francis Mathy's claim that the term "sincerity" has "but a low place in the Western critical vocabulary."<sup>28</sup> As a matter of fact, it has a high place in the vocabulary of no less a writer than Tolstoy, who maintained that art is "infectious" (i.e. persuasive) "in consequence of the sincerity of the artist, that is, of the greater or lesser force with which the artist himself experiences the sensation which he is conveying..."<sup>29</sup> This sounds very close indeed to Shiga's concept of jikkan (実感 "felt realizations") which, as Mathy himself points out, is central to his espousal of an "autobiographical" art.<sup>30</sup> To take but one other example the distinguished English critic, F.R. Leavis, in an essay entitled "Reality and Sincerity", maintains that "sincerity" is a term "to which a critic must try and give some useful force by appropriate and careful use..."<sup>31</sup> And he goes on to compare a poem by Emily Brontë unfavorably with one by Thomas Hardy because Brontë is "dramatizing herself in a situation such as she has clearly not known in actual experience: what she offers is betryingly less real."<sup>32</sup> And "to say that Hardy's poem has an advantage in reality is to say (it will turn out) that it represents a profounder and completer sincerity."<sup>33</sup>



Of course, this does not mean that there is unanimity on this point in the West. Leavis himself notes Coleridge's belief that one of the "promises of genius" is "the choice of subjects very remote from the private interests and circumstances of the writer himself. At least I have found that, where the subject is taken immediately from the author's personal sensations and experiences, the excellence of a particular poem is but an equivocal mark, and often a fallacious pledge, of genuine poetic power."<sup>34</sup> And we might add to this Flaubert's dictum: "toute oeuvre est condamnable ou l'auteur se laisse deviner."<sup>35</sup> Flaubert, says William Barry, "warned us against every work of art in which the author's face seems to be reflected...Such egotism, he thinks is unworthy of a supreme artist, and bears its condemnation it itself."<sup>36</sup> In other words, the debate between the apologists of the "fictional" and those of the "autobiographical" is an eternal one and has been conducted as vigorously in Europe as in Japan.

Nevertheless, it seems that, in the Japan of Shiga's day at least, it was the "sincerity" of the shi-shōsetsu which won the most admirers (although the "other side" was well represented by that consummate story-teller, Tanizaki Junichirō.) Again it is Kobayashi Hideo who, with a few memorable similes, best expresses the sense of immediacy and spontaneity in Shiga's style that Japanese readers find so appealing: "His perceptions are direct indeed, like the cobra swaying to the sound of the flute, or the wings of the ptarmigan turning white



with the advent of winter. The immediacy of the awareness does not permit of hesitation in the choice of words. They are found before the ripples have reached the edge of the pond."<sup>37</sup> It is doubtful whether Shiga -- or any other writer -- could attain this miraculous degree of immediacy if he did not write directly out of his own experience.

Yoshida Sei-ichi also emphasizes Shiga's spontaneity, even going so far as to say that the selection of pertinent details, a process that most writers agonize over, comes to him simply and naturally. "Shiga's sentences are alive", says Yoshida, "because they do not describe too much, they select only the necessary details. Shiga himself once observed: "When one looks at a particular thing and tries to think about using it as the material for one's writing, one's attention is all the more distracted to other, superfluous things -- and this serves no purpose. When I do something I do it almost unconsciously, and usually I write down only whatever remains in my mind about it afterwards'. But these are the words of a man blessed with the true writer's temperament! To see the essential things naturally, without even trying to see them -- this is indeed a born writer. The process of selection operates in him unconsciously."<sup>38</sup>

Yoshida goes on to say, though, that from the point of view of the "science of rhetoric" Shiga's writing, looked at sentence by sentence, does not necessarily qualify as "fine prose" (meibun 美文). He notes, for instance, the many



repetitions of words and phrases, quoting as an example the following passage from "Kinosaki ni te":

"Su no deiri ni isogashiku sono waki o haimawaru ga mattaku kōdei suru yōsu wa nakatta. Isogashiku tachihataraitte iru hachi wa ika ni mo ikite iru mono to iu kanji o ataeta. Sono waki ni ippiki, asa mo hiru mo yū mo, miru tabi ni hitotsu tokoro mattaku ugokazu ni utsumuki ni korogatte iru no o miru to, sore ga mata ika ni mo shinda mono to iu kanji o ataeru no da. ~~xxxxxxx~~ Sore wa mikka hodo sono mama ni natte ita. ~~xxxxxxx~~ Sore wa mite ite, ika ni mo shizuka na kanji o ataeta. Samishikatta. Hoka ..... no hachi ga mina sue e haitte shimatta higure, tsumetai kawara ni hitotsu nokotta shigai o miru koto wa samishikatta. Shikashi, ..... ~~sore wa~~ ika ni mo shizuka datta."<sup>39</sup>

The following is a rather literal translation but it still cannot, of course, reproduce the exact effect of all the repetitions in Japanese. "They crawled busily around the entrance to their hive but they gave no sign whatever that they had any relation to the dead bee. These busily working bees certainly gave me the feeling that they were living things. And, again, whenever I saw the dead one beside them, morning noon or night, lying face down always in exactly the same place, it certainly gave me the feeling that it was a dead thing. ~~It~~ lay there for more than three days. When I looked at ~~it~~, it certainly gave me a feeling of quietness. And of loneliness. .... It was lonely to see the one dead bee left on the cold roof- .....



tile when the others had all gone into their hive after night-fall. But also it<sub>xx</sub> was certainly tranquil.")

"In this brief passage alone," Yoshida remarks, "there is one sentence in which there are four repetitions of the same word or phrase, two sentences in which there are three and two in which there are two. That there should be so many repetitions even after the writer has omitted and deleted as much as possible is probably a fault from the point of view of rhetoric. But it is all a necessary and unavoidable part of Shiga's mode of expression. The repetitions are a part of his poetic sense of rhythm, and give forceful expression to those impressions which have made the deepest impact on his mind."<sup>40</sup>

The repetitions may serve a thematic as well as a stylistic purpose. Yoshida illustrates this with the following passage, also from "Kinosaki ni te":

"Ima jibun ni ano nezumi no yō na koto ga okottara jibun wa dō suru darō. Jibun wa yahari nezumi to onaji yō sore ni chikai jibun ni natta koto o omowanai de wa irarenakatta. Jibun wa dekiru dake no koto o shiyō to shita. Jibun wa jishin de byōin o kimeta."<sup>41</sup>

("What would I do if I were now in the same situation as the rat was in? Would I not, after all, struggle for survival in the same way as the rat was doing? I could not help recalling how I had behaved much like that when I had my accident. I tried to do whatever could possibly be done. I de-



cided on a hospital for myself.")

"What about these eight repetitions of the word 'jibun'?" asks Yoshida. "If we were to isolate this passage and examine it as an example of bad style, it would probably be possible to delete many of the repetitions. But if we look at it as embedded in its original context, and try to discern how this 'jibun' works, then this mode of expression which emphasizes the self assumes a necessary role as part of the honest self-absorption of the passage."<sup>42</sup> (We shall return to this subject of the thematic use of repetitions later when we examine Shiga's repeated use of the word "sabishi" (lonely) in "Kinosaki ni te".)

Yoshida's analysis, then, seems to support Shiga's contention that there is more to good style than mere skill or technique, whether this involves following textbook rules of rhetoric or any other "artificial" standards. Shiga himself, as we have seen, used the word "rhythm" to try to define the quintessence of what he regarded to be good style. But, as we may see from the above example, this involves more than just patterns of sound -- it is also, we might say, the very pattern of a writer's feelings and thoughts.

Although he did not see eye-to-eye with Shiga's apologists on the innate superiority of the shi-shōsetsu genre per se,<sup>43</sup> Tanizaki Junichirō, who was certainly no mean stylist himself, was as unreserved as anyone else in his praise



of Shiga's style. Of "Kinosaki ni te" in particular, he said that it had the finest style he had ever encountered.<sup>44</sup> He quotes from it extensively to illustrate the virtues of Shiga's style in his Bunshō Tokuhon ( 文章読本 Stylistic Reader). What he seems to admire above all is the economy or "practicality" (jitsuyō 実用) of Shiga's writing. As an example, he quotes the partial sentence: "Ta no hachi ga mina su ni haitte shimatta higure tsumetai kawara no ue ni hitotsu nokotta shigai o miru koto wa..."<sup>45</sup> (...to see the one dead body left on the cold tile in the evening after the other bees had all entered the hive.") Any ordinary writer, says Tanizaki, would have written this in a far more roundabout way: "Hi ga kureru to ta no hachi wa mina su ni haitte shimatte sono shigai dake ga tsumetai kawara no ue ni hitotsu nokotte ita ga, sore o miru to..."<sup>46</sup> ("After it had grown dark and the other bees had all gone into the hive, only the dead body would be left behind, all alone, on the cold tile; when I saw it..."). Tanizaki describes Shiga's sentence as having been "tightened up" (hikishimeta 引締め) and says that "this very 'tightening up' enables the sentence to convey its impressions with all the more clarity."<sup>47</sup> As a further illustration of this point he quotes Shiga's graphic description of the activity of the bees: "Hachi wa hame no awai kara surinukete deru to hitomazu genkan no yane ni orita. Soko de hane ya shokkaku o maeashi ya ushiroashi de teinei ni totonoeru to sukoshi arukimawaru yatsu mo aru ga sugu hosonagai hane o ryōhō e shik-



kari to hatte buuun to tobitatsu. Tobitatsu to kyū ni hayaku natte tonde yuku."<sup>48</sup> ("Pushing their way out from between the boards they would pause on the roof of the entranceway. Some would walk around for a moment after they had arranged their wings and feelers with their front and hind legs, and immediately they too would spread their slender wings taut and take off with a heavy droning. Once in the air they moved quickly away."<sup>49</sup>) "Here the bees' movements", says Tanizaki, "are described precisely as one would see them through close observation. The reader feels that he is actually seeing each motion because all waste has been eliminated in the description; any word that is not absolutely necessary has been left out."<sup>50</sup>

Responding to Tanizaki's analysis, Tanikawa Tetsuzō, perhaps more in consonance with Shiga's own way of thinking, emphasizes that the power of Shiga's writing derives not merely from his talent for "close observation" but also from his deep sensitivity towards the natural world and even from his personal strength of character:

I feel a special interest in the passage which describes the rat's death. What is shown here is Shiga's power as a realist -- I mean not merely his powers of description but the power of his heart to gaze unflinchingly and without regret at any scene whatsoever. Furthermore, Shiga has the sort of temperament that is more than usually responsive to such scenes. In this case also he says finally: 'I felt lonely and unhappy.' But having said this, he does not turn his eyes away from the scene. One can find this kind of example everywhere in Shiga. He is the same in regard to the human heart. He sees what he must see, he feels what he must feel; he does not, like the faint-hearted, turn his eyes away or try to cover things up."<sup>51</sup>



From the comments of these major Japanese critics, then, we may take it that "Kinosaki ni te" is regarded, on grounds of style alone, as a masterpiece of the shi-shōsetsu genre, and thus may fairly stand to represent this genre in any comparative study of it with, say, the modern Western short story. It is fortunate, then, that there happens to be a highly "representative" Western story built around largely the same idea as Shiga's but written very much in the European manner: Tolstoy's "Three Deaths" (and who could represent the Western fictional tradition better than Tolstoy?) It will tell us much, I think, about the distinctive nature and special merits of the shi-shōsetsu genre to compare the way in which these two different writers handle a basically similar story concept.

The question of "influence" should be quickly disposed of. Although Shiga was a great admirer of Tolstoy,<sup>52</sup> it is unlikely that this is a case of "direct influence". As I have already quoted him as saying, Shiga based the story on events he had actually experienced. It is one of the obvious virtues of "autobiographical" writers in general that they are fairly immune to any kind of direct influence. Whether Shiga was "indirectly" influenced to make a story out of the events he witnessed because he had read the Tolstoy story is a rather esoteric question, and one that is anyway more of biographical than of critical interest.



Tolstoy's story, as its title implies, is structured, like "Kinosaki ni te", around three separate deaths: that of a wealthy lady, that of an old peasant and that of a young tree. The story is divided into four numbered parts. In the first part, we are introduced to the lady, travelling from Russia to Italy by stagecoach with her husband, her doctor and her maidservant. The group has stopped at a post-station and here the doctor advises the husband not to continue with the journey, as his wife will surely die along the way. The husband tries to prevail upon his wife to turn back, but she, acting like a rather petulant, spoiled child, insists that, if only she can reach the warm climate of the south, her tuberculosis will vanish.

In the second part we are taken inside the drivers' room at the post-station and here introduced to Uncle Theodore, an old driver who is also, like the lady, dying of tuberculosis. In sharp contrast to the lady, however, he accepts his coming death with calm stoicism, even apologizing to the woman of the house for the inconvenience his illness has caused her. When a young driver asks for his boots, since he will no longer be needing them, the old man accedes without complaint, asking only that the youth buy a gravestone for him when he is dead.

In the third part it is about half a year later and the scene is the wealthy lady's house in Russia. She did not go



on to Italy after all and now we witness the solemn scene of her grieving family gathered around her deathbed. The solemnity of the occasion, though, is somewhat marred by the lady's continuing insistence that, if only her husband had allowed her to proceed to Italy, she would be fully recovered by now. Up to her last moment she refuses to accept the inevitable; she rejects the very idea of death with an instinctive ferocity which recalls the futile struggle of Shiga's rat. Only when death finally comes does she achieve a dignified calm. Now we are reminded of the quietude of Shiga's dead bee: "The dead woman's face looked stern and majestic. Neither in the clear cold brow nor in the firmly closed lips was there any movement."<sup>53</sup>

In the story's fourth and final chapter we are taken back to the post-station. Uncle Theodore has been dead now many months but he still has no gravestone. The young driver who promised him one is prodded by the woman of the house until finally he agrees to go out and cut down a tree, so that the old man might have at least a wooden cross over him. In the final scene of the story Tolstoy "draws back" and describes the tree's death not through the young driver's eyes but as if from the point of view of Nature itself -- the way the axe-blows, for instance, disturb the silence of the forest. And when the young ash has fallen, the other trees around it are described as having "flaunted the beauty of their motionless



branches still more joyously in the newly cleared space."<sup>54</sup>

As this last quote immediately suggests, the two stories have more in common than merely their overall conception. In this case, it is the use of the device of contrast in a quite specific way: to give a profound sense of the difference between life and death. We have already seen how Shiga's contrast of the motionless dead bee with the busily active ones succeeded in giving this sense. The final sentence of Tolstoy's story achieves the same effect in much the same way: "the sappy leaves whispered gladly and peacefully on the treetops, and the branches of those that were living began to rustle slowly and majestically over the dead and prostrate tree."<sup>55</sup> Tolstoy, in fact, uses this device more extensively than Shiga. For example, he contrasts the feeble, irritable dying lady with her energetic, cheerful maidservant who possesses a "full bosom" and "quick black eyes"<sup>56</sup>, and likewise he contrasts the gentle old Theodore with the young driver, insolent but full of life, who demands his boots.

Both authors also, of course, contrast the three deaths described in their respective stories, but now to quite different effect. In Tolstoy the contrast serves largely a moral and satiric purpose: as his English translator remarks, he contrasts "the querulous invalid lady with the dying peasant and the useful tree which made no demands on anyone."<sup>57</sup> In other words, even in this early story of Tolstoy's we find his perennial theme of the decadence of the upper classes as



opposed to the peasantry and to the world of nature in general (to which, in Tolstoy's view, the peasantry also belong) -- a world represented here by the tree. As we would expect, Shiga is far less moral and cerebral. What he contrasts mainly are his different emotional responses to the three deaths, ranging, as we have seen, from the positive to the negative.

A similar difference may be remarked in the role that nature plays in the two stories. In the context of Shiga's total opus, "Kinosaki ni te" is important in that it records the "Shiga hero's" first really significant contact with the world of nature. "Aru Asa:", as we have seen, was concerned exclusively with the narrow world of human relations within a family setting that seemed "claustrophobic" for a young man yearning to express his individuality. "Kinosaki ni te" provides the first indication of how the Shiga hero will seek escape from these oppressive confines: by turning more and more towards the wider world of nature. We can discern the growth of this tendency throughout Shiga's later works until, as we shall see, it reaches a kind of climax in his novel, An'ya Kōro. In his final years Shiga turned away from the human world even more, saying that "the troublesome complications of human affairs have gradually come to be most distasteful to me."<sup>58</sup> His very last stories are concerned almost entirely with plants and animals. As Francis Mathy says: "Now that Shiga had established an almost perfect rapport with



nature he no longer felt the urge to write about the complications of human affairs, but was content to live immersed in nature, quietly enjoying the beauty that surrounded him."<sup>59</sup>

In "Kinosaki ni te", then, there is already some hint of what we might call Shiga's growing "distaste" for human nature.

The only human beings to appear in the story, besides the narrator himself, are the onlookers who cruelly torment the dying rat. And even the narrator himself is not presented in an entirely favourable light: through carelessness, albeit unintentionally, he is the agent of the unfortunate lizard's death.

In Tolstoy's story too there is a strong sense of the purity of the natural world as opposed, at least, to the world of the Russian aristocracy; but still the story is centred far more on human life. For one thing, the stoical peasants are seen as every bit a part of nature as the trees in the forests. And Tolstoy is, after all, a nineteenth-century Western writer -- what he is interested in above all is the portrayal of human character. Even in this story of only about fifteen pages (almost three times the length of Shiga's story but very short indeed for Tolstoy!) a whole gallery of characters is presented, and even the minor ones seem to spring into life with just a few strokes of the master's pen. In Shiga's story there are no "characters" in this sense -- only the "disembodied consciousness of the narrator. But I shall return to this point in more detail later.



Because Tolstoy employs "nature", including the peasantry largely for the moral purpose of satirizing the aristocracy, his view of nature, as we might expect, tends to be idealistic, even sentimental. We all know how persistently he idealized the Russian peasant, but in the present story we can see how he also tends to idealize inanimate nature, by a kind of anthropomorphism that is rather unconvincing to the modern mind. We see this, for instance, in the sentence already quoted: "The trees flaunted the beauty of their motionless branches still more joyously in the newly cleared space."<sup>60</sup> Tolstoy's picture of the tree's death, in fact, seems an altogether too pretty one if we compare it with Shiga's uncompromisingly realistic portrayal of the rat's desperate struggle for survival and the lizard's absurd death by mischance. Although Shiga, like Tolstoy, turns to nature as a welcome alternative to the humal world, he describes what he sees there with a clear, unflinching eye, perhaps because he has no "vested interest" in making a moral point. There is, as I have mentioned, some hint here of his growing "distaste" (I use the word advisedly, to connote more an emotional than a moral response) for human beings -- but this is by no means the main point of the story.

In setting himself up as the judge instead of as merely, like Shiga's narrator, the experiencer of the world, Tolstoy naturally assumes the God-like, "omniscient" point of view. A judge, after all, must appear to be "objective", and this



pretence to objectivity would be far less convincing if a first-person narrative viewpoint were used. Here lies, it seems to me, the very crux of the difference between Shiga's story and Tolstoy's -- and indeed between the shi-shōsetsu and the mainstream tradition of Western fiction in general. It is not merely a technical difference but a difference in the way of apprehending the world. On these specific grounds, Shiga and the shi-shōsetsu seem to offer certain distinct advantages, especially to the modern reader who is wary of a writer who makes absolute judgments.

The feeling that the third-person "omniscient" narrative viewpoint is in some way "artificial" is certainly not confined to Japanese critics. In his seminal study, The Rhetoric of Fiction, Wayne Booth remarks: "One of the most obviously artificial devices of the storyteller is the trick of going beneath the surface of the action to obtain a reliable view of a character's mind and heart. Whatever our ideas may be about the natural way to tell a story, artifice is unmistakably present whenever the author tells us what no one in so-called real life could possibly know. In life we never know anyone but ourselves by thoroughly reliable internal signs..."<sup>61</sup> Unintentionally, I am sure, this distinguished American critic has here written a convincing defense of the shi-shōsetsu aesthetic.

I have already used Ueda Makoto's term, the "Natural plot" to describe an "associative" rather than a casual narrative



line, but now we can see that this "naturalness" is also related to the narrative viewpoint. As Booth points out, there is something undeniably artificial about an author telling us the inner thoughts and feelings of a variety of characters -- and this artificiality becomes particularly apparent in Tolstoy's case, as we have seen, when he goes so far as to tell us the "inner feelings" of natural objects such as trees. But I would go further than Booth and say that this artificiality extends even to the narrative structure of a story written from an "omniscient" point of view. The "three deaths" of Tolstoy's story, for instance, are not integrated into a natural, seamless whole as successfully as those of "Kinosaki ni te". This is made immediately apparent by the fact that Tolstoy is obliged to divide his story into four distinct numbered parts, whereas Shiga's story is all "of a piece". In "Three Deaths", the relation of the lady's death to that of the old peasant is, on the surface level of the action, purely coincidental: it just so happens that the lady's carriage has stopped at the post-house where the peasant lies dying. On a deeper, thematic level, the reader is aware that the author has brought these two deaths together to contrast them and so to make a moral point. The tree's death is causally related to the peasant's death in the usual "syllogistic" manner of Western narrative: because A, therefore B. But again, it is related to the lady's death thematically only to make a moral



point; indeed, if the reader were unaware of these thematic relationships which have been "artificially" imposed upon the three deaths by the author's moral will, then the story would seem pointless.

What enables "Kinosaki ni te" to have such a "natural" structure is its complete and undisguised subjectivity. In the first paragraph of the story, as we have seen, the narrator informs us of his near escape from death just before his trip to Kinosaki. It therefore seems perfectly natural, in the first place, that he is especially observant of death in the world about him, even in small forms that a "normal" person might fail to notice, and, in the second place, that he should respond to even these "small" deaths with exceptionally deep feeling. In other words, the first paragraph defines the nature of the consciousness through which all the events of the story will be filtered; there is no pretence at all, as in Tolstoy's story, that we are to be presented with an "objective" God's eye view of reality. As a result, the reader is prepared to accept the events described as a natural, indeed inevitable, expression of the narrator's state of mind (thus it is a shinkyō shōsetsu in the fullest sense of the term).

"Kinosaki ni te", then, is an excellent example of the total subjectivity of the shi-shōsetsu genre. This is not merely a matter of the story being written in the first-person singular or being faithfully autobiographical. If, for instance, we find that the narrator's "state of mind" permeates the whole



story even in the smallest details. The entire story is pervaded by the psychological atmosphere of a traumatized mind, the mind of a man still in a mild state of shock after having suffered a serious accident. The narrator tells us himself in the second paragraph of the story: "My head was still not clear."<sup>62</sup> And indeed he seems to wander about Kinosaki, itself a rather "unreal" resort town, as in a waking dream. There is a dream-like quality, for instance, to the intensity and minute detail of his observation of the bees. But the final scene of the story in particular verges on the surrealistic. The narrator is out for a walk one evening on a mountain road above the town. He feels strongly compelled to go on and on as in a dream: "I kept thinking I would go back, but each time I went on to see what was around the next corner."<sup>63</sup> And the nature surrounding him takes on a mysterious dream-like ambience:

The quiet made me strangely restless. There was a large mulberry tree beside the road. A leaf on one branch that protruded out over the road from the far side fluttered rhythmically back and forth. There was no wind, everything except the stream was sunk in silence, only that one leaf fluttered on. I thought it odd. I was a little afraid even, but I was curious. I went down and looked at it for a time. A breeze came up. The leaf stopped moving. <sup>64</sup>

This seemingly irrational behaviour of the single leaf creates the proper air of mystery for what is about to happen: The narrator spots a water lizard sitting on a rock beside a stream. It just so happens that lizards have a kind of personal symbolic significance for him:



Some years before, when I was staying in the mountains not far from Tokyo, I had seen water lizards gathered around a drain from the inn, and I had thought how I would hate to be a water lizard, what it would be like to be reborn one. I did not like to come on water lizards because they always brought on the same thought. 65

It is therefore as if this present lizard has sprung from some deep "obsessive" region of his own unconscious mind, again as in a dream. Thus when he casually throws a stone and "accidentally" kills the lizard, one need not call on the good doctor of Vienna to see the obvious symbolic meaning that this "dream-like" action has.

With this last example, though, we are moving from the formal to the thematic level, and indeed it is an indication of how well-integrated these two levels are in Shiga that it is difficult to talk of them separately. Not only is the narrator's consciousness the "filter" of all external events but this consciousness itself is also the actual subject of the story. This too is characteristic of the shi-shōsetsu: the central interest of the story lies in the series of changes which the narrator's consciousness undergoes as it witnesses or experiences the events the story describes. The genre thus may claim a unique reciprocal interaction between form and content: the subject of the narration is the changes in the narrator's consciousness, which are in turn reflected in the narrative style and structure -- and so on, one might say, ad infinitum.



Lest this all begin to sound overly abstract, what it means in more concrete terms is an extraordinary depth of insight into the human psyche. As we have seen, Shiga's story cannot begin to compare with Tolstoy's in terms of "breadth" -- that is, in the range of "characters" it presents. In fact, one might well say that Shiga offers us no full-blooded, "rounded" characters of the type E.M. Forster has delineated in his celebrated study of the novel.<sup>66</sup> Even the narrator in Shiga's story is little more than a "disembodied" consciousness. Shiga employs none of the tricks of which Tolstoy was such a master, those little details of physical appearance, personal mannerism or idiosyncratic behaviour which can make even a minor character spring to life. We know nothing "personal" about Shiga's narrator except that he is a writer; he is, in fact, hardly identifiable as an individual. This is perhaps the central paradox that emerges from a comparison of the two stories: the shi-shōsetsu is deeply subjective but, at the same time, almost completely impersonal; the Western story, on the other hand, despite its pose of objectivity, is far more "personal" in the sense that it presents individual human personalities and, as we have seen, even tends to "personify" natural objects such as trees. Of course, we would expect an "objective" writer such as Tolstoy to present a wider range of characters, but then we would also expect that Shiga's narrator, at least, since the whole story is focused on him, would be more highly "individ-



uated" than any of Tolstoy's characters. But this is certainly not the case. If, however, we examine more closely the nature of human personality -- at least as it usually appears in fiction -- what seemed to be a paradox may no longer seem so. What gives Tolstoy's characters personality, as I have already pointed out, is his use of such largely surface details as the character's appearance, mannerisms, opinions and so on. Shiga's narrator, on the other hand, is presented at such a deep level of his psychic being that he appears to be almost a non-individuated "everyman". It seems that the deeper a writer goes into the human psyche the less distinguishing features he finds there -- at the deepest level, perhaps it is quite literally true that "all men are one". And this sense of universality is added to by the fact that the problem that the narrator confronts in this story is, after all, the most universal problem of all: death itself.

This aspect of "impersonality" also explains why the reader is not offended by the self-absorption of the shishōsetsu genre, at least as practised by Shiga. I quoted earlier Flaubert's condemnation of the "egotism: of any work "in which the author's face is reflected."<sup>67</sup> But in Shiga's work, one might counter, it is not the author's "face" that is reflected but his "soul", and one might add, the impersonality of the human psyche at its deepest level is attested to by Western psychology as much as by Eastern philosophy (e.g., Jung's "collective unconscious").



The point emerges more clearly if we contrast the way in which Shiga and Tolstoy approach death, which may be regarded as the central theme of both stories. There is a difference in their approaches here parallel to that we found before in the way they dealt with nature. Tolstoy is mainly interested in using his "three deaths" to make a moral and satiric point, Shiga, on the otherhand, attempts to confront the very nature of death itself, with its sense of peace but also with its cruelty and arbitrariness. He is thus working on a far more universal level: a basic human consciousness, stripped of almost all "personality", confronting a fundamental human problem. Thus there is no question of the author's "egotism" preventing the reader's identification with the narrator -- because the only part of himself that he "exhibits" to us is the deepest part, the part that we share with him. In this sense the "I" of a Shiga story is the same as the "I" behind say, a Bashō haiku or a Western lyrical poem -- it is human consciousness at its most basic and universal level. I think we are justified, then, in saying that what Shiga -- and the shi-shōsetsu at its best -- sacrifices in "breadth" he gains in "depth".

I have already remarked on the "reciprocity" of form and content in Shiga's story, but the ultimate example of it is this: not only is the narrative voice largely impersonal, but impersonality itself is the narrator's final "goal" -- that is the series of changes which the narrator's conscious-



ness undergoes, and which are the story's true focal point, are all in the direction of impersonality.

The critic Yoshida Sei-ichi, as I have already shown at some length, <sup>68</sup> has demonstrated how Shiga often makes use of the repetition of a word or phrase to establish the "psychological atmosphere" of his stories. In "Kinosaki ni te" the most important of these words is sabishii, usually translated as "lonely". In its adjectival or nominal form, the word is used to describe the narrator's emotional response to each of the three deaths he witnesses. Seeing the dead bee "gave me a feeling of utter quietness. Of loneliness. It was lonely to see the dead body left there on the cold tile in the evening when the rest had gone inside."<sup>69</sup> Watching the doomed rat: "I felt lonely and unhappy."<sup>70</sup> And, having killed the lizard: "I was filled with a sadness for the lizard, with a sense of the loneliness of the living creature. Quite by accident I had lived. Quite by accident the lizard had died. I was lonely, and presently I started back toward the inn down the road still visible at my feet."<sup>71</sup>

Obviously if a writer such as Shiga, famous for not wasting words, repeats one word so often, then we might expect that word to carry more than its normal weight of meaning. Unfortunately, the English word "lonely" is not able to bear that weight -- it has, of course, none of the rich cultural associations of the Japanese word sabishii. As William Siple



points out, sabishii in the context of Shiga's story describes a "quite positive, if largely passive, esthetic-emotional experience..."<sup>72</sup>

The key word sabi, derived from sabishii, is, of course, a key term of Japanese aesthetics, and is used particularly in the poetics of Bashō's school of haiku. Bashō himself, as Ueda Makoto points out, often used the word sabishii. But he conceived of loneliness, says Ueda, "as an impersonal atmosphere, in contrast with grief or sorrow, which is a personal emotion. The contrast cannot be over-emphasized, because loneliness thus conceived lay at the bottom of Bashō's view of life, pointing toward a way in which his plea 'return to nature' can be fulfilled."<sup>73</sup> Sorrow, in other words, belongs to the human world, whereas "loneliness" belongs to the world of nature. Thus, if it were possible for men to escape from sorrow, "it would be only through a denial of humanity, through men's dehumanizing themselves. They can escape from sorrow only when they transform it into an impersonal atmosphere, loneliness."<sup>74</sup> This transformation is brought about by a deep communion with nature, as in the following haiku of Bashō:

My sorrowful soul --  
Make it feel onesome,  
You, a cuckoo. 75

The poet, says Ueda, "as he set out to compose the poem, was still in the world of humanity, with a personal feeling like sorrow. The cuckoo, on the other hand, seemed to have



already transcended sorrow, as it was closer to the heart of nature. Thereupon the poet wished that the bird's cry might enlighten his soul and eventually lead him into the realm of impersonal loneliness, where he would no longer feel sorrow... Such a dissolution of personal emotion into an impersonal atmosphere constitutes the core of Bashō's attitude toward life".<sup>76</sup>

If we review the way in which Shiga uses the word sabishii, we find that more and more throughout the story it comes to take on Bashō's sense of an "impersonal atmosphere" pervading nature. And the effect which the absorption of this "atmosphere" has on the narrator's consciousness is to produce a greater and greater sense of detachment. His contemplation of the dead bee gives him a sense of "loneliness" but "at the same time it was tranquil, soothing."<sup>77</sup> Already, then, in Bashō's terms this is not a "personal sorrow" but a liberating, impersonal feeling derived directly from nature. His response to the sight of the doomed rat struggling for survival at first seems more "sorrowful" and therefore "personal" -- in fact, it reminds him of his own struggle to survive after his accident. But further contemplation leads him on to the kind of "transformation" Bashō demands from the cuckoo in his haiku: by identifying with the rat, he comes to see that to struggle to survive is a universal instinct, present in the rat as much as in himself, and that therefore it would be absurd for him to take it "personally", i.e., for him to feel bad that he had



acted "like an animal" after his accident, that he too had been driven by an irresistible force. This realization gives him the necessary sense of detachment:

I would have behaved but little differently indeed from the rat. Even now, I decided, it would be much the same -- let it be. My mood at the moment, it was clear could have little immediate effect. And the truth lay on both sides. It was very good if there was such an effect, and it was very good if there was none. That was all. 78

The narrator's profound sense of detachment is even further intensified by his accidental killing of the lizard. He is filled with "a sense of the loneliness of the living creature. Quite by accident I had lived. Quite by accident the lizard had died. I was lonely..."<sup>79</sup> In other words, by identifying with the lizard as he had with the rat, he receives a further insight: that death strikes arbitrarily. He feels that he himself might just as easily be dead now -- if he had been as unlucky as the lizard at the time of his accident. The thought is enough to make him lose his attachment to life: "And I who had not died was walking here. I knew I should be grateful. But the proper feeling of happiness refused to come. To be alive and to be dead were not two opposite extremes. There did not seem to be much difference between them."<sup>80</sup> Thus, it seems, the narrator has reached an ultimate level of "impersonality" and detachment since, though he knows he will instinctively struggle for survival if the need arises, he no longer really cares, intellectually at least, whether he lives or dies.



But what is the purpose, the reader may well ask, of achieving such an "unhuman" detachment? What is its wider significance? We have already seen that Bashō advocated the development of an impersonal state of consciousness as a way of "returning to nature".<sup>81</sup> According to Francis Mathy, it is exactly this sense of closeness to nature that Shiga is expressing in "Kinosaki ni te"! after his encounter with death, he "found himself entering a new world of union and harmony with nature."<sup>82</sup> William Sibley emphasizes the "Shiga hero's" mature acceptance of death that has been brought about by his deep communion with nature. And Sibley relates this to the "more fully delineated experience of Kensaku"<sup>83</sup>, the hero of Shiga's novel, An'ya Koro ( 暗夜行路 A Dark Night's Passing). In the penultimate chapter of this long novel, Kensaku retreats like a traditional hermit to Mount Daisen and there undergoes a "mystical" experience of self-dissolution and union with nature. Shortly before he has this experience, we are told that "he was irresistably attracted to the realm the Buddhists call 'nirvana' or 'jakumetsu iraku' (the bliss of annihilation)."<sup>84</sup>

Undoubtedly there is some relation between Kensaku's experience of "self-annihilation: and union with nature and the experience of detachment and "impersonality" of the narrator of "Kinosaki ni te", but I doubt that it is as straightforward as Mathy and Sibley would have us believe. If we look again at the final part of the story, we find that the



narrator's experience has by no means left him in an unalloyed state of bliss. He feels none of the euphoria that Kensaku experiences on Mount Daisen. In fact, he feels rather miserable and confused. The final scene of the story makes it quite clear that his "dark night" has not yet passed: "My sense of sight took in only the distant lights, and the feel of my feet against the ground, cut off from my sight, seemed uncertain in the extreme. Only my head worked on as it would. It lead me deeper and deeper into these fancies."<sup>85</sup>

These last two sentences in particular, it seems to me, tell us why the narrator has not yet achieved the psychic breakthrough -- the "satori" -- he is after: he continues to intellectualize, to fantasize, and therefore to stand apart from nature. He has not yet surrendered his whole mind and soul to nature as Kensaku does on Mount Daisen. There is, in fact, something suspiciously "intellectual" even about his sense of detachment. When he says: "To be alive and to be dead were not two opposite extremes", he is stating an idea rather than describing an experience -- and it is doubtful whether any Zen master (or for that matter, any reader) would accept this as real proof of spiritual transformation.

When Kensaku experiences complete union with nature on Mount Daisen, he remembers that he has had similar experiences before, but that he had "always tried instinctively to resist it, and on finding such resistance difficult, he had felt a distinct uneasiness. But this time, he had not the slightest



will to resist; and contentedly, without a trade of the old uneasiness, he accepted nature's embrace."<sup>86</sup> If, like Kobayashi Hideo and William Sibley among others, we see the "Shiga hero" as one consistent character throughout, at least, Shiga's "autobiographical" works, then we might say that "Kinosaki ni te" describes one of those earlier experiences when he "tried instinctively" to resist "nature's embrace". Without dwelling on the problematical relation of nirvana to death in orthodox Buddhist philosophy, we might certainly claim that the "Kinosaki ni te" narrator's early attraction to the quietude of death may be related to Kensaku's attraction to the "bliss of annihilation". What seems to be yearned for in both cases is the death of the troublesome individual human self so that it may be replaced by an "impersonal" state of consciousness that is totally at one with the natural world. This would explain why the narrator is troubled by his own "instinct to survive" after he is reminded of it by the struggling rat -- this instinct to resist death is, after all, an expression of that same instinct that Kensaku speaks of, to resist complete mergence with nature. The narrator of "Kinosaki ni te" is obviously not yet ready for such a complete surrender of self, though he is moving hesitantly in that direction. Before he is capable of so unreservedly "letting go", the grip of his ego must be loosened by a whole series of traumatic shocks. But we shall see this more clearly when we come to An'ya Kōro.



### Chapter 3

"Takibi" 焚火 ("Bonfire", 1920) shares a place with "Kinosaki ni te" as one of Shiga's two or three most celebrated short stories. Just as "Kinosaki ni te" was offered as a paragon of the Shiga style by Tanizaki Junichirō, "Takibi" was selected by another great contemporary, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, to serve as a model of what he considered to be the finest qualities of Shiga's art of fiction, which was a "kind of fiction approaching poetry".<sup>1</sup> What was quintessential to this art, according to Akutagawa, was its traditional Japanese lyricism, its intensely "sincere", exalted mood that transformed the rather ordinary, everyday events the story described into pure poetry. Although he saw Shiga as a "realist who does not depend on fancy or fantasy"<sup>2</sup> (i.e., as an "autobiographical" writer), he was also convinced that "what makes Shiga's realism unique is his poetic spirit which is deeply entrenched in Oriental tradition";<sup>3</sup> this, "coupled with his technical mastery, endows his most prosaic work with a singular beauty".<sup>4</sup> Thus it was possible for a "pure story" (jun shōsetsu) such as "Takibi" to be a "plotless story" (hanashi no nai shōsetsu),<sup>5</sup> because the pervasive lyrical mood, and not a highly structured plot-line, was the unifying principle of the work.

As I shall make clear later, it seems to me that Akutagawa, perhaps a little too eager to make a point, presented here an over-simplified analysis of Shiga's art, since he



tried to reduce it to merely one of its major ingredients. Nevertheless, if we compare "Takibi" with "Kinosaki ni te" for a moment, we may see why it was a highly appropriate choice to illustrate Shiga's "lyricism". The world of nature plays a dominant role in both stories but in "Kinosaki ni te", as we have seen, the narrator's response to this world is an ambiguous one. He is at first attracted to the absolute stillness at its core -- whether this be called "death" or "nirvana" -- but then he recoils back into the shell of his own ego when he sees the violence and suffering that necessarily precedes that stillness. "Takibi", written about three years later, is the product of a far different frame of mind; without troubling himself about "life versus death" as an intellectual problem, the Shiga hero is now able to immerse himself without restraint in the natural world and, as a somewhat paradoxical result, he is also able to commune more comfortably with his fellow man. In contrast to the rather dark, somber mood of "Kinosaki ni te", then, the overall mood of "Takibi" is one of profound tranquility and joy.

The "narrative progression" of the story may be seen as a steady deepening of this mood -- rather than, as in conventional fiction, the building up of casually-related events towards a "climax". At first, the mood is anything but lyrical, as the opening paragraph of the story makes clear:

It rained that day from morning on. All through the afternoon I played cards in my room upstairs with my wife, the painter S., and K., the innkeeper. The



smoke-filled room made everyone feel drowsy. By three o'clock we were sick of card-playing and had over-stuffed ourselves with cakes. 6

Significantly, then, the narrator and his friends are first presented to us indoors, and they are in a bored and restless mood. In other words, they are confined within the same narrow, claustrophobic world as the narrator of "Aru Asa", and the stuffy, smoke-filled room seems to aptly represent this world. But relief is soon at hand:

One of us stood up and slid open the paper-screen window. At some point the rain had stopped. Chill mountain air charged with the scent of fresh green streamed into the room, driving the tobacco smoke into swirls. We all exchanged glances, as if suddenly-coming to life. 7

In the second paragraph of the story, then, there is already a turn away from the human world and towards nature. The windows are literally thrown open to let in some of nature's fresh air, which clears out the tobacco smoke and makes the people inside feel as if they have been brought back to life.

At this point, it might be appropriate to make a few remarks on Shiga's use of imagery. In the hands of a more cerebral writer than he, the use of imagery such as the above could well seem like a form of simplistic, over-obvious "symbolism". But this is another important advantage of the casual, diary-like style of the shi-shōsetsu: even if the author does insert some imaginary details to suit his thematic purpose, the reader still has the sense that he is simply describing things "as they happened", and is not straining to



create meaningful but artificial "symbols." As Shiga himself said of another story: "In a relaxed frame of mine I wrote down the day's happenings as they actually occurred."<sup>8</sup> The important point is that he maintains this "relaxed" style even in his more "fictional" and more "symbolic" works, as we shall see when we come to An'ya Kōro. Thus the reader would usually fail even to notice that there is any form of symbolism present -- although, of course, it might all the while be having its cumulative effect on his mind, subtly and unnoticed. In this as in other areas, we may see the success of Shiga's aesthetic "program" to abolish all traces of artificiality.

In fact, one hesitates even to apply the term "symbolism" which usually carries such a weight of metaphysical connotation in the West, to Shiga's simple -- indeed, almost primitive -- use of imagery. An object in Shiga rarely stands for something other than it is in itself: the stream of fresh mountain air does not really "symbolize" nature -- it is nature; likewise the stuffy, smoke-filled room does not merely "represent" the claustrophobic human world -- it is that world. In other words, Shiga's "symbolism" does not usually amount to anything more than the most elementary form of synecdoche, perhaps the oldest and most natural of all symbolic uses of language, since it is embodied in such everyday expressions as "thirty head of cattle". In "Takibi" there is one important exception to this which we shall note later, an exception which stands out conspicuously because it is a more complex



kind of symbol. For the most part, though, Shiga's imagery is concrete and "this-worldly".

To return to our story, the net effect of the in-rushing stream of "chill mountain air" is to entice the group of bored, restless humans out into the world of nature, where they know their spirits will be further refreshed. Eventually they all climb to a place some way up the mountain where together they are building a small hut for the narrator and his wife to live in. This working together outdoors gives them a very real sense of satisfaction:

Twilight on the mountain always puts one in a mellow mood, especially after a rainfall. And when, as now, we had been working and paused to observe our day's work while having a smoke, a fleeting kind of joy arose between us. 9

Already we see, then, an important difference between "Takibi" and "Kinosaki ni te": now there is none of the sense of "loneliness" which, as we saw, was the dominant mood of the earlier story. The narrator no longer confronts nature alone. On the contrary, there is now a strong sense of "communal spirit" that is manifested not only in the group's working together but also, throughout the story, in their sharing the joys of communing with nature. This sense of "joyful sharing" is further intensified in the following paragraph when the narrator recalls the good time they had had together on the previous day:

On the day before it had also cleared up in the afternoon and the twilight had been beautiful. It was made all the more beautiful by a great rainbow that extended all the way from Torii Pass to Black Cypress Mountain.



We had lingered near the hut for a long time. It was placed among a grove of oaks and we couldn't resist climbing them. Even my wife had wanted to climb up to have a good look at the rainbow, so K. and I helped her climb to a height of more than six metres. "It's as comfortable as an armchair", K. had shouted down to us. He lay face up in a fork of high branches that were conveniently wide-spread and, puffing on a cigarette, he set the branches swaying like great waves. 10

This happy memory leads the narrator to suggest that they should all go boating on the lake that night. Thus begins, in this highly casual manner, the story's main event: the group's expedition on a mountain lake one quiet evening in spring.

Significantly, on their way to the lake the group passes through "the dark precincts of a Shintō shrine that was hidden among tall fir trees."<sup>11</sup> As we shall see, the group's coming encounter with the natural world will give them a "primitive" animistic sense of the awesome, mysterious power of nature -- the story, in fact, takes on an ever-deepening atmosphere of "nature-worship" that is strongly reminiscent of Shintō. Thus the shrine forms a highly appropriate "gateway" for the group's entrance into the natural world.

At first, though, the group's high spirits set them apart from the nature that surrounds them. They act like excited children out for a night's adventure. When they see a bracken-gatherer's bonfire burning on the opposite shore of the lake, they row over out of curiosity to take a look. There is a subtle contrast set up between the group's light-hearted chatter and the quiet, solemn mood of the natural world as darkness descends. Vivid images of nature are interposed with



snatches of conversation. On the one hand: "It was a tranquil evening. Some faint after-glow of the sunset still remained in the western sky. But the mountains on all sides were black, and I thought they resembled the backs of crouching water lizards."<sup>12</sup> And: "From Bird Island to the mainland the water was especially calm. Looking over the sides of the boat, we could see below us a perfect mirror-image of the star-filled sky."<sup>13</sup> And, on the other hand: "'It seemed a little cold', I said, dipping my hand into the water. 'But when I spent a few days viewing the autumn leaves around Ashino Lake a while ago, I went swimming there early one morning and it wasn't as cold as I thought it would be. I have even gone swimming around there in early April.' 'My, you were really something in the old days', said my wife teasingly, knowing full well how I am usually so sensitive to cold."<sup>14</sup>

But gradually this playful, light-hearted mood of the four people diminishes as they are drawn deeper and deeper into the quieter, more solemn mood of nature itself. What seems to make for a "turning point" in this regard is the lighting of the bonfire which, as indicated by the title, stands as the central image of the story. Now they are no longer merely passive observers of the natural scene; by the "ritualistic" act of lighting a fire, they themselves become active "celebrants" of nature's mysterious beauty and power. In fact, before they can even attempt to light the fire, they must begin to relate to their environment in a more intimate



way that naturally heightens their awareness of it:

To collect materials for the bonfire, we all entered the dark forest. There was everywhere a luxuriant growth of ferns, wild plants, yellow-flowered shrubs and so on. We all went our separate ways but, whenever K. or S. puffed on a cigarette, we could see where they were by the small red glow. Where the old bark of the white birches was already peeling, its rough edges turned out, it was easy to tear off. Every now and then, the sound of K. snapping off a branch broke the deep silence of the forest. When we had gathered as much as we could handle, we carried it back to the beach. 15

And when finally they light the fire, it is as if the whole world around them is transformed by this act:

The area around us suddenly grew bright. The firelight was reflected across the water and even onto the trees opposite us on Bird Island. 16

As we shall see, Shiga uses the image of fire to great effect again in his novel, An'ya Kōro, but now connected more explicitly with a Shintō ritual, the "fire festival" of Kurama.<sup>17</sup> Fire plays an important role in Shintō purification rites,<sup>18</sup> along, of course, with water -- which, significantly, is the other dominant image of "Takibi". When we remember that the group has first crossed over a body of water (according to Norman Friedman, a "universally understood" symbol of "some sort of spiritual transition"<sup>19</sup>) and then lit a bonfire, it becomes evident that Shiga is using these elemental images to suggest the deeper nature of the group's experience. But why do these people stand in need of "purification" and what manner of "spiritual transition" do they undergo? If we recall the first scene of the story -- the tired, bored, restless group that has overstuffed itself on cakes -- I think the answer



becomes clear. Lighting the bonfire completes the process of psychic "purification", of spiritual as well as physical refreshment, that the inrush of fresh mountain air first began; and by crossing over the lake the group has literally removed itself far from the stuffy, smoke-filled room -- the human world -- and so is now able to immerse itself ever deeper into the world of nature. As the four people experience this immersion, their mood or state of mind changes perceptibly.

What gives expression to this change of mood primarily are the stories told as the group sits around the bonfire by K., the innkeeper. K. is the only long-time resident of the mountain in the group and his closeness to this particular spot on earth is emphasized by the stories he tells. Thus he is the appropriate person to lead the others to a greater sense of harmony with the surrounding nature -- his voice, in fact, comes to seem, if not the voice of nature itself, at least of the genius loci.

K.'s first story "deepens" the group's mood by reminding them, in a way reminiscent of "Kinosaki ni te", that not beauty alone but also terror and death are present in nature:

"were there any wild dogs about in the old days?" asked S. "As a boy I often heard them," answered K. "Sometimes in the middle of the night I heard them howling in the distance and I remember it gave me a terrible feeling of loneliness."

He then told us a story about his father, now dead, who had liked to go night-fishing. One night the wild dogs had surrounded him and, to escape them, he had had to make his way home through the water along the shoreline. And the year when they had first put their horses out to graze on the mountain, he had seen one of them that had been attacked and half-devoured by the dogs. 20



K.'s second story is a kind of ironic prelude to his final and most important one:

The story was that K., as a child, was coming home from Maebashi one night when he saw this thing in a large pine grove about eight kilometres past Kogure. An area about three hundred metres in front of him glowed with a vague light and a black figure over two metres high moved within it. But when he walked further on he came across a man with a large pack on his back resting by the roadside, and he realized that it had been this man, occasionally striking a match to light a cigarette as he walked along, whom he had taken for the giant within the halo of light. 21

This experience of K.'s with the pseudo-giant leads the group to a discussion of "mysteries" in general.

"Mysteries usually turn out that way, don't they?" said S. "But I think there are some real mysteries," said my wife. "I don't know about giants and such but I believe, for instance, that things are sometimes revealed to us in dreams." "Well, that's something else again now, isn't it?" said S. And then, as if suddenly remembering something: "Say, K.-san, that story about when you were trapped in the snow last year, that's pretty mysterious, isn't it?" And, turning around to me: "Have you heard about that yet?"

"No, I haven't."

"Yes, that was really quite strange," said K. And he proceeded to tell the story. 22

Thus the second story of a "false mystery" leads to K.'s extended account of a genuine mystery he has experienced, and this last story-within-a-story really forms a kind of "climax" (or high-point, at least) to the whole development of "Takibi" as we have been tracing it.

The incident had occurred during the previous winter. Returning to the mountain from a trip to Tokyo, K. had arrived at the nearby town of Mizumuma at about three o'clock in the afternoon. Since it was still early and home was so near, he



did not feel like waiting until the next day to ascent the mountain.

Thinking that he would go as far as the foot of the mountain anyway and then decide whether to climb or not, he left Mizunuma. Dusk had just settled as he approached the second of the series of Shintō archways at the foot of the mountain. There was ample moonlight and he felt to tiredness in either body or mind. He decided to climb. 23

One notes again that K. must pass through a torii (a Shintō "archway") before he enters more deeply into the world of nature -- as the group itself had done earlier in the story before they crossed the lake.

K. soon finds himself, in fact, in danger of being "immersed" in nature not just spiritually but in a literal, physical sense. The snow grows deeper the higher he climbs, so that even he, who has grown up on the mountain, loses the trail. All he can do is head upwards, higher and higher.

He continued climbing, urging himself on step by step. He didn't feel especially afraid or uneasy. But he felt a certain vagueness encroaching upon his mind. "Thinking about it now, I know I was in real danger," said K. "People who die in the snow usually get that way and then they fall asleep. They end up dying in their sleep." Strangely enough, even though he had known all this, K. had not felt the slightest uneasiness at the time. 24

The theme of the attraction of death, of the "bliss of annihilation", appears at this point in "Takibi" too, then, and just as in "Kinosaki ni te" and An'ya Kōro, it is associated with Shiga's major theme of the achievement of total union with nature.



But K. manages to resist the "siren-song" of death and finally reaches the top of the mountain-pass. As he begins his descent, he notices two lanterns coming towards him in the distance. He is surprised that anyone should be out at this late hour. He is even more surprised, though, when he meets up with the lantern-bearers and finds that it is his brother-in-law with three guests of their inn. Even though no-one could have known that he was coming back at this time, they tell him that his mother had got them up and sent them out to meet him. She had assured them that K. had just called out to her. She had spoke so clearly and firmly that they had not thought to question what she said.

"When I asked about it later," says K., "it turned out that this was exactly the time when I was most weak and had that slight feeling of vagueness. On the mountain we go to bed early, at seven or eight, so it was just around that time when everyone had fallen into the deepest sleep. Even so, my mother woke up four men and sent them out into the night -- so I think she must have heard that call very clearly."

"And did you in fact call out to her?" asked my wife.

"No, I certainly didn't. Because no matter how hard I had called from the other side of the pass, no-one would have heard me."

"Of course," said my wife. Obviously she had been very moved by the story. There were tears in her eyes. 25

K.'s tale of real-life mystery reduces the group to an awestruck silence that is in telling contrast to their earlier light-hearted chatter. Whereas up to this point in the evening they have enjoyed communing with nature and with each other on a rather superficial level, K.'s story reminds them of the much deeper level of communion possible between human beings -- in



this case, the love between mother and son. The narrator gives further emphasis to the point with some comments of his own:

If one knew about the relationship between K. and his mother, one was even more deeply moved by this story. I didn't know him very well but K.'s dead father, who was nicknamed "Ibsen" because of his resemblance to the playwright, didn't seem a particularly bad man but, to say the least, he didn't amount to much as a husband. They say that he lived most of the time around Maebashi with his young mistress and, come summer, he would bring her with him to the mountain, pick up his earnings from the inn and then leave. K. was deeply upset by his father's behaviour and often clashed with him. And this made K. all the more deeply attached to his mother and his mother all the more deeply attached to him. 26

But it is important to note that this moving insight into the depths of a human relationship does not distract the group from the world of nature that surrounds them. On the contrary, what they come to feel is that this mother's love, which is able even to transcend the bounds of time and space, is as awesome, mysterious and elemental a power of nature as the fire they have lit on the beach this evening. In other words, at this deepest level man and nature are one, since both are an expression of that same elemental, ineffable force that Shiga has elsewhere called "rhythm".. Earlier we saw that it was the sharing of this elemental force that made possible a deep communion between writer and reader; now, on a much wider scale, we can see that it is likewise this all-pervasive "rhythm" which enables man to achieve union both with his fellow man and with nature.



Thus, in the closing passages of the story, when the group turn their eyes back to the world around them, it is with a vastly deepened sense of oneness. This is brilliantly symbolized by their final "communal" (in more senses than one) action:

K. picked a well-charred branch out of the fire and hurled it with all his might far out over the lake. Red sparks scattered from the branch as it went flying through the air. In simultaneous reflection, a branch scattering red sparks went flying through the water. The upper and lower branches described the same arc, one through air, the other through water, until, the instant they came together at the water's surface, they sizzled out and the surrounding area fell back into darkness. The effect was fascinating. The rest of us also began to pick up smoldering branches and hurl them out over the lake. 27

There is a sense of exhilaration, almost of ecstasy, in the self-abandonment of these four people as they fling firey branches out over the lake, There is also a sense of ritual-like participation in the creating of an awesome and beautiful natural phenomenon, as there was when they first lit the bonfire -- but now with this sense of joyful abandon. We may also note how Shiga, in this final brilliant scene, brings together the three elemental images he has used so effectively throughout the story: air, water and fire. And now we can see clearly the full symbolical meaning of "fire", the story's central image. It is both the agent and the symbol of that "mystical union" which is the main theme of "Takibi" and indeed, one might say, of Shiga's entire opus. Just as the ritual of lighting the bonfire precipitated the



group's feeling of oneness with nature, so now it is fire, in the form of burning branches, that brings together the mountain air (which streamed into the smoke-filled room in the story's first scene) and the water (the lake the group has earlier crossed) in a symbol of perfect union and, it is even suggested, of final death or nirvana: "The upper and lower branches described the same arc, one through air, the other through water, until, the instant they came together at the water's surface, they sizzled out and the surrounding area fell back into darkness."<sup>28</sup> (My own emphasis.)

As the story closes the group is silent, thoroughly immersed in the peace and beauty of the world around them -- in fact, as much an integral part of the landscape themselves as the tiny figures in a traditional Far Eastern sansui ink painting (an art which Shiga greatly admired and even tried to emulate in his writing<sup>29</sup>). As in "Kinosaki ni te" we are left with the "impersonal" atmosphere of the natural world, But whereas in the earlier story the sense was of "man alone with nature", now it is just simply of "nature alone with nature":

We boarded the boat. The bracken-gatherer's bonfire across the lake had now also died out. Our boat rounded Bird Island and glided quietly towards the woods around the Shinto shrine.  
The calls of the owl grew more and more distant. 30

The narrative line of "Takibi" thus may perhaps better be seen as "oscillating" rather than as straight: that is, it swings like a pendulum back and forth between the human and



the natural worlds until finally these two worlds are brought together and the pendulum stops. Or, to use a "sonic" figure that is perhaps more appropriate, it is as if a bell were struck in the wilderness and we listen to its gently dying reverbrations -- the narrative movement between the two worlds may be seen to form the "wave-length" of this sound, the peaks of which gradually diminish until finally they come together and there is silence -- i.e., the end of the story. At any rate, it is the movement between the two worlds that forms the essential dynamic of the story, its basic narrative "rhythm", rather than the movement from conflict to resolution of conventional fiction.

In "Takibi", then, we have another form of Shiga's "Natural plot". Whereas in "Kinosaki ni te" the incidents arose by virtue of the associative working of the narrator's death-obsessed consciousness, in the present story they arise from the yearning of a group of people, confined too long in a stuffy room, to refresh their spirits by communion with nature. (And perhaps in the end, they get more "communion" than they bargained for.) Both stories arise naturally from the state of mind of the narrator (and, in the latter case, of his friends). In this sense they are ultimately "subjective". And, though the dynamic principle of their narrative structures is somewhat different, in both cases the "plot" is structured in an unconventional way that may even make the stories seem "plotless", as Akutagawa claims they are. It is doubtful,



though, whether there can exist any such rara avis as a "plotless story" -- one might as well speak of "soundless music" or "invisible painting". A truly plotless story would have no discernible narrative structure whatsoever -- and then, of course, it would no longer be a story. Certainly Shiga's stories, as I hope to have shown, have an integral structure, an almost rigorous internal logic of their own, and even a definable movement towards a kind of climax and denouement (albeit very different in nature to those of conventional fiction), so that to call them "plotless" is, in the end, an absurd misrepresentation. One suspects either that Akutagawa and like-minded critics had failed to look closely enough at the works themselves or, what is more likely, were over-influenced by nineteenth-century Western paradigms of the short story. Plot, after all, as the Oxford English dictionary reminds us,<sup>31</sup> has to do with the way events in a story are connected to each other. As I have already pointed out, in traditional Western fiction this connection is usually casual. In Shiga it usually takes other forms -- but still a connecting principle is very much there if a critic takes the trouble to look for it.

Shiga's real problem in regard to narrative structure, it seems to me, is quite an opposite one. Given the elemental, almost epic-like nature of the underlying action of his stories -- as shown by his use of certain universal, archetypal symbols: crossing the lake and lighting the fire in "Takibi", the



"journey through dark night" and the final ascent of the mountain in An'ya Kōro -- there is actually a danger that his stories might become too schematic, too formalized in structure for modern taste. It is here that the diary-like informality of the shi-shōsetsu genre has come to his rescue, disguising the epic-like or parable-like formality of the Shiga story's thematic conception so successfully that, as we have seen, some near-sighted critics have accused it of "formlessness". But I shall pursue this point at greater length when I come to deal with An'ya Kōro.

In the previous chapter we found some fundamental differences between the Shiga shi-shōsetsu as represented by "Kinosaki ni te" and the traditional Western short story as represented by Tolstoy's "Three Deaths". If we look among more contemporary Western writers, however, it is possible to find, if not exact parallels, at least much closer analogies to Shiga's "naturally plotted" stories. I am thinking, in particular, of the early short stories of a writer who made his debut just over a decade after Shiga, Ernest Hemingway.

I have already mentioned the remarkable similarity between Shiga's style and Hemingway's<sup>32</sup> -- that is, of course, after we have taken into account the gulf that separates their two respective languages. There is in both writers a desire to eschew all forms of "artificiality", including the kind of "big words" and abstract rhetoric that characterize "intel-



lectual discourse" in any language. Their preference is for a simple, down-to-earth mode of expression. As a result, they both tend to write short declarative sentences free of subordinate clauses and this gives their prose a strong, almost staccato rhythm. They also both use a simple colloquial diction which includes only a few of the most commonplace of those adjectives which express emotional or intellectual judgments (i.e., words such as "good" or "nice"). A wider use of such adjectives, they both seem to feel, would make their writing overly intellectual and abstract. Concomitantly, they fill their writing with simple, concrete nouns that name actual physical objects. This "anti-intellectualism" is also expressed by the preference of both writers for the "non-logical" use of language -- most notably, the way in which both will repeat a key word or phrase constantly rather than resort to explicit argument to make their point.<sup>33</sup> Above all, the styles of both writers are characterized by such a disciplined economy -- packing the greatest possible meaning into the fewest possible words -- and by such a vivid immediacy -- capturing the exact feeling of the experience -- that critics of both have often claimed that their prose approaches the quality of poetry. At the same time, however, these critics insist on its extreme "naturalness!", and they often use images taken from the natural world to illustrate this point. I have already quoted the beautiful series of metaphors that Kobayashi Hideo used to describe the "immediacy" of Shiga's style, saying that it was like



"the wings of the ptarmigan turning white with the advent of winter" and so on.<sup>34</sup> The following passage that Ford Madox Ford wrote on Hemingway's style is much in the same vein:

Hemingway's words strike you, each one, as if they were pebbles fetched fresh from a brook. They live and shine, each in its place. So one of his pages has the effect of a brook-bottom into which you look down through the flowing water. 35

But since "le style est l'homme meme",<sup>36</sup> it is hardly surprising that, on closer observation, there are some deeper affinities between these two writers whose styles have so much in common. Their ultimate affinity, it seems to me, is that both belong to that seemingly paradoxical category of man, the modern "primitivist". As M.H. Abrams points out, there is a strong tradition of "cultural primitivism" in the West which may be traced back to Rousseau and the Romantics -- i.e., to about the time the Industrial Revolution was beginning to make its impact felt.

Cultural primitivism is the preference of "nature" over "art" in any field of human culture and values. For example in ethics a primitivist lauds the "natural", or "innate" instincts and passions over the dictates of reason and prudential forethought; in social philosophy, the ideal is the simple and "natural" forms of social and political order in place of the anxieties and frustrations engendered by a complex and highly developed social organization; in milieu, a primitivist prefers outdoor "nature", unmodified by human intervention, to cities or artful gardens; and in literature and the other arts, he puts his reliance on spontaneity, the free expression of emotion, and the intuitive products of "natural genius", as against the reasoned adaptation of artistic means to forseen ends and the reliance on "artificial" forms, rules and conventions.

To this obviously apposite summation, I might add something that also seems quite germane to our present discussion:



namely, that the literary "primitivist", because of the great value he places in "spontaneity, the free expression of emotion, and the intuitive products of 'natural genius'" -- in other words, on immediacy -- has usually tended to take himself as his first and foremost subject, because, as Hemingway once asked: "Does a writer know anyone better?"<sup>38</sup> Rousseau himself, of course, began this tradition with his great Confessions, and the figure of the self-absorbed Byronic "egotist" became a familiar one in Romantic literature.

The career of Ernest Hemingway is an interesting case in point. Generally speaking, it seems that the further he drew away from his own immediate experience, the more his writing lost its original power. Critics are generally agreed that his early stories and his first two novels are his most successful works,<sup>39</sup> and these are also his most closely autobiographical. The change reflected in the noticeable deterioration of the famous "Hemingway style" in his later works. As Scott Donaldson points out, his style changed "from an early economy of language and objectivity of presentation to a much longer, more discursive, and, for almost all observers, less successful later style. It was the first style that became famous and imitated."<sup>40</sup>

It is also pertinent to our discussion of Shiga's shishōsetsu to note that such later, non-autobiographical Hemingway novels as For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940) are more conventionally structured than his earlier works. The closely autobiographical "Nick Adams stories", on the other hand, may well



be regarded as being "naturally plotted" in a way similar to Shiga's shi-shōsetsu. To early readers, in fact, they appeared not as "well-made" stories but as formless "slices of life". Reminiscing about the difficulties of his early career, when publishers refused to accept his radically new versions of the short-story form, Hemingway once wrote of "all of the stories back in the mail...with notes of rejection that would never call them stories, but always anecdotes, sketches, contes, etc."<sup>41</sup> As we have already seen, Shiga still has the same problem with certain Western critics -- perhaps because they have not yet caught up with the remarkable developments in the Western short story between Tolstoy and Hemingway.

Although, of course, there can be no question of any direct influence either way between Shiga and Hemingway (since the latter read no Japanese and the former had written the bulk of his work before Hemingway was published), there is, nevertheless, an interesting and important "Japanese connection" in Hemingway's case which may account, to some extent, for the affinities between them. During the years of his "apprenticeship" in the early 1920's in Paris, Hemingway came under the direct influence of the so-called "Imagists", and especially of the mentor of them all, Ezra Pound. Pound, in fact, exercised his "blue pencil" on Hemingway's early stories in the same way as he did on the early poetry of T.S. Eliot. The Japanese influence on Pound and the other Imagists has been well-documented,<sup>42</sup> and this influence, in turn, may be seen to



have reached Hemingway mainly through Pound. What it amounts to in Hemingway's case, above all, is a very precise and concrete use of imagery to create an emotion or a psychological atmosphere. It is the technique made famous under Eliot's term of the "objective correlative", although, as Jackson Benson points out,<sup>43</sup> James Joyce's "epiphany" expresses a very similar concept. In fact, this central doctrine of Imagism may be seen to lie at the core of the aesthetic theory of the whole "Pound-Lewis-Ford-Joyce-Stein-Eliot group"<sup>44</sup> so that, if we add, as we must, the name of W.B. Yeats to this list, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the Japanese influence on early twentieth-century literature in English was a crucial one.

Characteristically, Hemingway himself expressed his imagist credo in rather more concrete terms than "epiphany" or "objective correlative". What he tried to capture in his work, he once wrote, was "the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion."<sup>45</sup> Hemingway's concept here of the "real thing" seems remarkably close to Shiga's "real feeling" (jikkan) which, as we have already seen, was central to his aesthetic program. Both writers, then, might be called "lyrical realists", and it is this combination of the precise image with the true emotion in their work that links it to the Japanese poetic tradition. As Jackson Benson points out in regard to some of Hemingway's "Haiku-like" sentences, "there is a sense of timelessness: the vision of an instant and all its internal stresses, isolated and captured, yet speaking for



itself. The matter-of-factness is journalistic, but it is also poetic. These sentences are very much like Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro' which he called a 'hokku-like sentence'.<sup>46</sup> What Benson says here of Hemingway's style is very similar to what Akutagawa says of Shiga's style in the passage I have already quoted.<sup>47</sup> Needless to say, one need not look for a Pound in Shiga's background -- he comes by this tradition quite "naturally".

In Hemingway's case, as in Shiga's the emphasis on emotional veracity leads the writer perforce to a heavy reliance on the data of his own life -- for, as Hemingway pointed out, he knows his own feelings best. Carlos Baker has described the way in which the young Hemingway arrived at this "autobiographical" preference:

"All you have to do is write one true sentence," he told himself. "Write the truest sentence that you know." It must be above all a "true simple declarative sentence without scrollwork or ornamental language of any sort. It must deal with something he knew from personal experience. Stories like "The passing of Pickles McCarty" or "Wolves and Doughnuts" had been largely invented. They grazed his own experience in Italy and Illinois without keeping the central facts in focus. Now he wanted to place his faith in the direct transcription of what he saw. That and no more. Somehow the emotion that he wanted to convey would filter through the reported facts. 48

It was inevitable that, with his primary emphasis on personal emotion, Hemingway, like Shiga, would write a new kind of fiction. Being so self-centred, he would obviously not write the traditional English "social novel", nor, with his



distrust of abstract ideas, would he write the more French style "thesis-novel". Especially in his earlier (and best) works, Hemingway, like Shiga, was a practitioner of that fictional form that has risen to prominence only in this century, which Ralph Freedman has called the "lyrical novel".<sup>49</sup> As a result, the "Hemingway hero", like the "Shiga hero", is a fairly consistent character who appears as the protagonist of all Hemingway's major works, from the "Nick Adams" of his first stories to the "Thomas Hudson" of his final, posthumous novel, Islands in the Stream (1970), and this character is an identifiable persona of the author himself.

It is interesting also to note that, because of his primary reliance on the "facts" of his own experience, Hemingway, like Shiga, did not make the rigid distinctions between "fiction" and "non-fiction" that have been customary in the West. As Sheridan Baker points out, Hemingway "consistently shows a kind of wilfulness in reporting fact with journalistic accuracy and then insisting that it is all fiction, that 'there are no real people in this volume'."<sup>50</sup> Indeed, some of the works included in his short story collections were first written and published as newspaper reports, just as a Shiga story such as "Aru Asa" was first written as a diary entry. Green Hills of Africa (1935) is a very literal account of one of Hemingway's African safaris, but it is presented in the form of a novel, complete with extensive dialogue. As Hemingway



says in the foreword: "The writer has attempted to write an absolutely true book to see whether the shape of a country and the pattern of a month's action can, if truly presented, compete with the imagination."<sup>51</sup> Similarly, his Paris memoir, A Movable Feast (1964) is presented in a novelistic form and Hemingway writes in the preface: "If the reader prefers, this book may be regarded as fiction."<sup>52</sup> In his "Memoir as Fiction" Fraser Sutherland defends this practise of Hemingway's by arguing that "since the writer's mind is always at work, everything he writes is fiction. And whether the writer pretends to write 'pure' fiction or pure non-fiction, he produces a new image."<sup>53</sup>

Jackson Benson, however, tells us that there is really nothing new about this mixing of "journalistic" fact with fiction -- the very word "novel", after all, is related to "news". Hemingway's use of journalistic style and content "was really a new application of an old approach that goes back to the 'true accounts' of Defoe and the early novelists. Fiction, the history of fiction tells us, must never be fiction, never 'made up', but always presented as something that really happened -- either history, a discovered 'document' or biography, a discovered 'diary'. But the modern temper demands more immediacy, more authenticity, more impersonality."<sup>54</sup> Another way of putting this, as we have seen in Shiga's case, is that the story must seem "natural" (i.e., taken directly



from nature) as opposed to "artificial". In this sense Hemingway, like Shiga, wanted to write an "anti-literary literature".<sup>55</sup> As Robert Weeks has testified, Hemingway's "consummate art" is an "art so unobtrusive as to elicit the charge of not being art at all"<sup>56</sup> in other words, the best art of all to Hemingway, as to Shiga, is one that appears to be "artless".

At this point a sceptical reader might well ask: exactly wherein, then, does the seemingly invisible art of such writers lie? The answer, of course, is: first and foremost, in the very process of selection. This was summed up by Ezra Pound in his famous bilingual motto, obtained by chance from a German-Italian dictionary: "Dichten=condensare."<sup>57</sup> According to Jackson Benson, it was Hemingway's "reportorial skills" that enabled him to put this motto into practise and, by doing so, "writing prose in the manner of modern poetry. His effort involved looking carefully, getting at the essential facts of the situation he observed, putting these facts down in a straight-forward, economical fashion, and then letting this 'condensed essence' speak the emotion for itself."<sup>58</sup>

But the famous "economy" of Hemingway's style, as of Shiga's is not merely a matter of packing the greatest possible meaning into the fewest possible words; the writer is also "economical" in his selection of his material, so that what is left out is often as important as what is included.<sup>59</sup> "I always try to write," Hemingway once remarked, "on the prin-



ciple of the iceberg. There is seven eighths of it under water for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg."<sup>60</sup>

This "iceberg principle" is brilliantly illustrated by the major story of Hemingway's first collection, In our Time (1925). The story, "Big Two-Hearted River", is, as it happens admirably suited for comparison and contrast with "Takibi". As in Shiga's story, very little seems to happen on the surface: we are shown Nick Adams, the protagonist of a whole series of early Hemingway stories, returning alone to fish a river in northern Michigan where he often fished when younger. He hikes a few miles, sets up camp, cooks himself a meal, beds down for the night, gets up the next morning and catches a few trout -- this is the extent of the story's action and it is all described with almost microscopic realism. Nevertheless, there are hints throughout the story that this is no ordinary "fishing trip" -- that is, in fact, a rather desperate attempt on the part of the protagonist to administer therapy to his own deeply wounded psyche. And the source of this wound? "The story," Hemingway himself said years after he wrote it, "was about coming back from the war but there was no mention of the war in it."<sup>61</sup> Once we have realized this fact, the story's imagery and action become comprehensible on a much deeper level.

The "burned-over" country which is the opening image of the story, for instance, (and which is so reminiscent of



T.S. Eliot's "Waste Land", written just a couple of years before) now seems to symbolize both the physical ruin of the war Nick has just returned from, and the psychic scars it has caused in him. Hemingway's "burned-over" country, in fact, performs much the same function in the structure of this story as Shiga's "stuffy, smoke-filled room" does in "Takibi"! it serves as a very concrete imagistic embodiment of all that the protagonist is about to escape from -- which, in both cases, may be described as the "ills of civilization". Shiga's group take a boat out over the lake, Hemingway's protagonist hikes up to the "good country" not yet devastated by man; the principal action of both stories, in other words -- as we would only expect from two "primitivist" writers -- is an escape from civilization into the world of nature.

But the similarity between these two stories does not end there. Just as the Shiga group engaged in certain "primitive" rituals to bring themselves into deeper harmony with nature -- lighting the bonfire, throwing the firey branches out over the lake -- to an even greater extent the Hemingway protagonist is shown engaged continuously in ritualistic actions: making camp, cooking meals, preparing his fishing equipment, fishing itself -- indeed, these activities occupy almost the entire story, and they are described in such minute, almost monotonous detail that the reader can have no doubt about their "ritualistic" nature.



In the Hemingway story, these rituals seem to have a double purpose: as in the Shiga story, they help to bring the protagonist into closer touch with nature, but they also have a more urgent function -- they help him to exercise control over his own disordered, traumatized mind. The war-scarred Nick, as Elizabeth Wells points out, "does not want to think. He wants to act. He is, in fact, consciously putting himself through a ritual that will keep him from thinking."<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a strain of "nature mysticism" in Hemingway, as in Shiga, and Nick's rituals do bring him at least a momentary "unitive" experience with nature. This comes through the story's central ritual (and, as Jackson Benson points out,<sup>63</sup> the central ritual of all the Nick Adams stories): fishing. When he catches his first trout, Nick achieves a momentary oneness with the fish which releases him briefly from the oppressive confines of his own troubled self. As Philip Young points out, this momentary release is reflected even in the language of the story: "When there is the extreme excitement of a big strike from a trout the style changes abruptly. The pressure is off the man, he is nowhere but right there playing the fish, and then the sentences lengthen greatly and become appropriately graceful."<sup>64</sup> Hemingway describes an identical kind of experience more explicitly in an earlier story of In our Time called "Cross-Country Snow", but this time Nick is skiing: "The rush and the sudden swoop as he dropped



down a steep undulation in the mountainside plucked Nick's mind out and left him only the wonderful flying, dropping sensation in his body."<sup>65</sup> As Sheridan Baker says: "The peace for which Nick is searching, in our time, is not unlike -- in a tough, earthbound sort of way -- that which passes all understanding."<sup>66</sup>

In some ways, "Bit Two-Hearted River" may seem to remind us more of "Kinosaki ni te" than of "Takibi". In the earlier Shiga story, as we may recall, the protagonist also retired alone to nature to try to recover from the recent trauma of a near-fatal accident. Like Nick too he had trouble exercising control over his traumatized mind. In the final scene of the story he is fairly overwhelmed by thoughts of death: "Only my head worked on as it would. It led me deeper and deeper into these fancies."<sup>67</sup>

While the mood of "Big Two-Hearted River" is not as light and tranquil as that of "Takibi", however, neither is it as dark and tortured as that of "Kinosaki ni te". Through the studied practise of his "rituals", Nick does manage to keep his thoughts in check: "His mind was starting to work. He knew he could choke it because he was tired enough."<sup>68</sup> And, as we have seen, he does achieve a few moments of self-oblivion and union with nature. Now he knows, at least, the direction his recovery must take. There is hope here for the future. The story, in fact, ends on this emphatically optimistic note: "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp."<sup>69</sup>



On the other hand, the mood of "Takibi" is not as unreservedly "light-hearted" as might first appear. Here too there are shadows in the background and, again, they are not made too explicit because Shiga, like Hemingway, believes in the power of "the thing left out". On closer view of the story, in fact, we find that, just as Nick's war experience is an "unspoken presence" in "Big Two-Hearted River", so the Shiga narrator's near-fatal accident still looms in the background of "Takibi". Francis Mathy perceptively notices this when, in speaking of Shiga's life on Mount Akagi, the site of "Takibi", he remarks: "The quiet melancholy that Shiga had begun to experience after his brush with death was further deepened here on this mountain. It is the feeling of quiet melancholy that informs the story 'Bonfire'..."<sup>70</sup> In the same way as Hemingway refers symbolically to the war with his image of the "burnt-over" country at the opening of his story, early in "Takibi" Shiga makes use of a striking image that immediately puts us in mind of "Kinosaki ni te" and the near-fatal accident: "But the mountains on all sides were black, and I thought they resembled the backs of crouching water lizards."<sup>71</sup> When we recall the final episode of "Kinosaki ni te", in which the narrator kills a water lizard, as well as the deep symbolic significance which he tells us these creatures have for him, then it is difficult to believe that this is just a casually-dropped simile (and, of course, it is also made conspicuous by the fact that Shiga rarely uses such similes).



As the story progresses, too, this darker note emerges more explicitly when K. tells his story of the wild dogs who had once killed a horse on the mountain and who had even, one night, threatened to kill his father; and the narrator himself then tells of the skull of "a small wild animal" he had found in "Hell Valley" just a few days before. Death being perhaps the major theme of Shiga's work, as it is of Hemingway's,<sup>72</sup> it is hardly surprising that it is not entirely absent even from "Takibi", one of Shiga's most "light-hearted" stories. Nevertheless, amidst the beauty of the mountain and the lake on a tranquil evening in spring, death seems but a distant shadow -- albeit a necessary "foil" to set off the joyful sense of life that occupies the foreground. Thoughts of death no longer overwhelm the Shiga narrator, as in "Kinosaki ni te", disturbing the quietness of mind necessary for him to achieve harmony both with nature and with his fellow man. As the final scene of "Takibi" shows, he is, in fact, well on the way to the "enlightenment" that is, as we shall see, the culminating experience of An'ya Kōro and, indeed, of Shiga's entire opus.



## Chapter 4

With writers more prolific than Shiga Naoya, there may be some dispute as to which of their works may be regarded as the most important or the most representative; in Shiga's case, however, there is only one work which can be singled out unreservedly as his magnum opus: An'ya Kōro (暗夜行路 A Dark Night's Passing, 1937). At about four hundred pages, it is his only really substantial, novel-length work -- all his other fictional writings are either short stories or novellas. Furthermore An'ya Kōro contains the clearest, most forceful expression of Shiga's major themes and the finest passages of his celebrated prose style. Indeed, he seemed to have put all that he had into this one novel, as evidenced, first, by the fact that it took him about twenty-five years of intermittent effort to write it (from 1912 to 1937) and, second, by the fact that after it was finally done with, he wrote very little else, though he lived another thirty-four years. Regarding this novel Agawa Hiroyuki has written: "Here is to be found everything Shiga possesses, everything that he aspired to in his life and work."<sup>1</sup> And, as Francis Mathy points out: "Some Japanese critics go so far as to call it the highest peak of modern Japanese literature."<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, An'ya Kōro is not so "pure" an example of the quintessential Shiga Naoya shi-shōsetsu as the short stories we have examined up to this point. It is that seemingly adulterated form, the "fictional autobiography", in two distinct



senses. On the one hand, if we regard the novel as the author's autobiography, we discover that, though the protagonist, Tokitō Kensaku, is obviously a persona of Shiga himself, many of the events the novel describes are fictitious. As Shiga once wrote: "Kensaku's actions and feelings represent what I myself would do if placed in similar circumstances, or what I would want to do, or what I have actually done."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the novel is also a "fictional autobiography" in the sense that it is presented as the actual autobiography of the fictional character, Tokitō Kensaku. On this level, An'ya Kōrō, as we shall see, may be regarded as a novel about a man trying to write An'ya Kōrō. In my discussion of the work, I shall be more interested in its being an autobiography in this second sense -- that is, qua the autobiography of the character, Tokitō Kensaku rather than of the man, Shiga Naoya. To the best of my knowledge, previous critics of the work have failed to emphasize this distinction, though it seems to me crucial to a full understanding of the aesthetic achievement and thematic significance of the novel.

With their largely "biographical" approach, Japanese critics seem to content themselves with ferreting out those correspondences which do exist between the author's life and this particular work. One rather hostile critic, Nakamura Mitsuo, even goes so far as to say that readers contemporary with Shiga accepted An'ya Kōrō as a great novel, even though the main



character is "never more than a kind of abstract existence" only because they "saw behind the abstract hero the figure of the writer himself. It was because the readers accepted the novel unconditionally as an autobiographical novel presenting the idealized self of the writer."<sup>4</sup> A Western critic such as Francis Mathy, on the other hand, seems to regard it as a kind of "admission of defeat" on Shiga's part that he would write a fictional autobiography rather than a pure shishōsetsu. The way Mathy sees it, Shiga did not have enough material in his own life to fill a lengthy novel, and so had to resort to some of the very "fabrications" he had always frowned upon.<sup>5</sup> He also wished to avoid the pain of introspection:

To salvage the parts he had already written and go on to complete the novel, he had recourse to fiction: he designed the structure of the two "sins", the "sin" of the hero's mother and that of his wife, and into this structure were fitted the individual parts. Since it was never more than a convenient technical device, it is no wonder that it has so little organic function in the novel. Shiga's inability to continue the work without recourse to fictional elements is eloquent testimony of the degree to which the desire to "mine what is in me" had begun to yield to the desire for harmony and peace. 6

In making these various points, however, Mathy like the Japanese critics, is still regarding An'ya Kōro as a fictional autobiography only in the first and, it seems to me, lesser sense -- qua the autobiography of Shiga the man. I hope to show that, once we regard the novel in its proper light -- as a fictional autobiography in both senses -- we discover that the complex mixture of fiction and reality it contains, far from



being "inorganic", is an integral part of the novel's form and theme from the very beginning. With this novel, in fact, Shiga consciously confronts the nature of the shi-shōsetsu and the problems, both personal and aesthetic, that the writing of it involves. Furthermore, the tension between the "real" and the "fictional" is a part of that larger tension which Shiga, as a "primitivist", inevitably felt, and which forms the basic dynamic of An'ya Kōro: the tension between man/art/civilization on the one hand and nature on the other. This is the tension that is ultimately resolved in the union of man and nature in the climactic scene on Mount Daisen, and I hope to show that, once we regard An'ya Kōro as the autobiography of Tokitō Kensaku, we find that it is because of this ultimate resolution that Kensaku is able to go on to write this very work. Not to regard the work as Kensaku's autobiography is, then, to miss a good part of its meaning.

An'ya Kōro opens with a short prologue entitled, "The Hero's Reminiscences", in which Kensaku recalls five major episodes from his childhood. All five deal with his difficult, involved relations with his family. In the first it is his "grandfather": the boy Kensaku's impressions of the old man are unfavorable from the beginning -- he is "seedy" and disreputable-looking -- so that when Kensaku is sent to live with him he is baffled and resentful that of all his family he has been singled out for this special treatment, although "since



my infancy I had come to expect injustice."<sup>7</sup>

The second episode concerns Kensaku's relations with his mother. Once, when he was four or five years old, his mother found him perched dangerously high on a roof. She held him there by riveting force of her eyes until he could be rescued by two manservants. Kensaku still cherishes this memory as a proof that he was loved by at least one member of his family. "For years after, my eyes would fill with tears whenever I remembered it. And I have thought to myself: whatever else, my mother at least loved me very much."<sup>8</sup>

The third episode also concerns Kensaku's relations with his mother. When she refuses to give him some cake that his father has bought, he persistently and aggressively continues to demand some. As the narrator remarks in retrospect, he did not really want the cake, he only wanted "to cry my heart out, or to be shouted at, or to be beaten -- it didn't matter which, so long as something was done to soothe my nerves, to get rid of the terrible feeling of oppression."<sup>9</sup> Thus he paints a picture of himself as a rather gloomy, high-strung boy who feels sorely neglected -- characteristics that, as we are to see, stay with him into adulthood.

The fourth episode concerns the young Kensaku's life at his grandfather's house where "everything was slovenly."<sup>10</sup> The house was a gathering-place for all sorts of disreputable characters, who dropped in at night to play cards. Kensaku's



only consolation was his grandfather's young mistress, Oei, who acted as a kind of substitute mother for him (since his own mother was dead by then). When she had had a few drinks and was in a good mood, "she would pick me up and put me on her knees and hold me tight in her strong, thick arms, I would feel such ecstasy then, I hardly cared that I could not breathe."<sup>11</sup>

In the fifth and final episode Kensaku is shown relating with his father. On this particular day his father is in a good mood, so he invites the boy to wrestle with him. What starts as a harmless play-fight between the two suddenly becomes a fight in earnest when they both allow their true feelings towards each other to surface. Kensaku is roughly pushed away by his father and, when he still persists, he is finally bound hand and foot. As he lies helpless on the floor, he is filled with rage and hatred towards his father.

The first question that must arise, it seems to me, in any consideration of An'ya Kōro, is: why does Shiga use this unusual device of opening a long third-person novel with a short prologue written by the hero in the first person? We might begin to answer by saying, of course, that it forms a splendid introduction to the novel's themes and motifs, since in Kensaku's case particularly "the child is father of the man". There is even an element of suspenseful mystery in the way the prologue poses questions for which the novel proper provides the answer. Why is Kensaku's grandfather presented



as such an unsavory character? Why is Kensaku himself continually singled out for "unjust" treatment by his family, including being shipped off to live with his grandfather? And why is there a certain tension in his relations with his mother and outright animosity in his relations with his father? To all of these questions the answer comes in Part II of the novel, when we discover, along with Kensaku, that his mother was seduced by his supposed "grandfather" when his "father" was away from home and that he himself is the product of this "sinful" union. Thus Kensaku's "dark night" begins at the very moment of his birth and, as the prologue shows, continues through his childhood.

One may see, then, how skillfully Shiga introduces his major theme -- Kensaku's struggle to overcome his "dark fate" -- in the few pages of the prologue, without, at the same time, giving too much away. (We are reminded here again of Hemingway's "principle of the iceberg" and the strategic "thing left out".) Nevertheless, it seems to me that the prologue serves another function that is at least as important: it establishes Kensaku as a writer of shi-shōsetsu and so, at least potentially, as the author of An'ya Kōro itself. The prologue, after all, might have been written, like the rest of the novel, in the third person and in this form might have presented its "introductory" material just as well. By casting it as a shi-shōsetsu written by Kensaku, Shiga actually accomplishes three things: he introduces the concept of a fictional character being the author



of a work that we know, of course, was actually written by Shiga himself (thus preparing us to accept the idea that the whole novel is also meant to have been written by this character); and finally, he introduces the shi-shōsetsu genre itself, and the complex problem of "fiction versus reality" that it involves, since the prologue is a "pure" example of the shi-shōsetsu only qua authored by Kensaku (if we regard Shiga as the author then it contains several fictitious elements, most notably the character of the grandfather, who is purposely made to be diametrically opposite to Shiga's own greatly revered paternal grandfather -- a samurai of the old school).

The question then arises: why did not Shiga go on to write the rest of the novel in the first person, presenting it outright, like the prologue, as the shi-shōsetsu of Tokitō Kensaku? Generally, one might answer that to have done so would have been to have upset the delicate balance of fiction and reality which forms the novel's underlying aesthetic tension. But since the novel operates in two different senses as a "fictional autobiography", the question must be answered on two different levels. Firstly, although there is a "spiritual" identity between the author and his protagonist, there are also large elements of fiction in the novel, so that it was necessary for Shiga to establish some distance between himself and Kensaku. In a lengthy shi-shōsetsu such as Wakai ( 和解                      Reconciliation, 1917), for instance, Shiga does write in the first person while calling himself by a fictitious name, but this



work is a direct transcription of events from his own life. By writing An'ya Kōro in the third person, he serves notice that it is not so straight-forwardly autobiographical as his earlier works. Furthermore, in this work, as I hope to show, he wished to write not merely a shi-shōsetsu ("fictional" or otherwise) but an extended commentary on the shi-shōsetsu genre, and for this purpose also he needed some distance from the form itself.

Secondly, An'ya Kōro's being written in the third person does not prevent us from regarding it as Kensaku's shi-shōsetsu. On the contrary, it seems to me more to point in this direction. Although, as we have seen, Shiga usually wrote his own "pure" shi-shōsetsu in the first person, this practise was by no means universal among other writers of the genre -- including the "founder", Tayama Katai -- despite its designation ("I" novel"). After all, it is easy enough for a writer to change "I" to "he" if he wants to maintain some semblance of fictionality. But the important point, in the case of An'ya Kōro, is that the whole novel, with one brief but important exception that I shall discuss later, is told from Kensaku's point of view. Just as, in the prologue, we do not know the root cause of the boy Kensaku's "dark fate" because he himself does not know it, so, throughout the rest of the novel, we perceive the world entirely through his eyes.

But there is, it seems to me, a deeper reason, related to the novel's central theme, why Kensaku should be made to



write his spiritual autobiography in the third person, a reason which I shall briefly outline here but return to in more detail later. Throughout the novel we are presented again and again with Kensaku as a frustrated writer unable to bring any of his shi-shōsetsu to a successful conclusion. By the novel's end we know why: he has been insufficiently detached from the complications of his life and, above all, from his own tyrannically egotistical self; without this detachment, quite naturally, it has been impossible for him to write, as an author of shi-shōsetsu must do, about either his life or himself. Only when he has achieved the supreme detachment that comes with his final union with nature on Mount Daisen is he free to write -- and, I would argue, what he goes on to write is this novel called An'ya Kōro. That he has written the novel in the third person, then, signifies his new-found detachment from his formerly oppressive self.

Shiga continues the shi-shōsetsu motif in the first chapter of the novel proper, but now in a lighter, even satirical vein. The chapter opens with a scene reminiscent of "Aru Asa": the protagonist, unable to sleep, reading in bed until the early hours of the morning. What Kensaku is reading here, though, is also significant: it is a shi-shōsetsu written by an acquaintance, Sakaguchi. And it does not please Kensaku; in fact, it leaves "a nasty taste in his mouth" and confirms the "mounting dislike for Sakaguchi" that he has felt for some time.<sup>12</sup> He throws the story aside and, interestingly enough,



seeks refuge in a "harmless little book", a "historical romance"<sup>13</sup> called Tsukahara Bokuden (the adventure of a master swordsman of the Muromachi period). Thus the fiction/reality dialectic is introduced in a rather humorous fashion at the very beginning of the novel.

But there is more. When Kensaku awakes the following afternoon, he finds that Sakaguchi himself has come to call on him, together with another acquaintance, Tatsuoka. Kensaku at first refuses to see Sakaguchi, but quickly relents. We are then told:

The story by Sakaguchi that Kensaku had found so unpleasant was about a man who has an affair with his fifteen-year-old housemaid; the housemaid becomes pregnant and is sent to an abortionist. Kensaku thought it most likely that it was based on the author's own experience. The facts described were in themselves unpleasant enough; but what he really disliked was the obvious flippancy of the author. He could have forgiven the facts if he had been allowed to feel some sympathy for the protagonist; but the flippancy, the superciliousness of the protagonist (and of Sakaguchi) left no room for such sympathy. He was angered, too, by the way the protagonist's friend, who he was certain had been modeled on himself, was described. 14

Because Sakaguchi portrays him in the story as "an unknowing observer, harboring what amounted to a secret longing for the girl",<sup>15</sup> the irate Kensaku is surprised that Sakaguchi would have the nerve to come call on him.

Had he expected to get an angry letter from Kensaku and when it didn't come, become uneasy and begun to feel threatened by the uncanny silence? Or had he come to play the stage villain, gloating over his own nastiness? He had better be careful, Kensaku thought, or I'll give him a piece of my mind. Thus his fancies



about Sakaguchi became less and less restrained; and by the time he had finished washing his face, he was in a state of considerable agitation. 16

When Kensaku joins his guests, however, he finds that Tatsuoka is equally convinced that he is the model for Sakaguchi's unintelligent character. "He says most of the story is imagined", he tells Kensaku, "but I doubt it. He's just the sort of fellow who'll write about his friends behind their backs."<sup>17</sup> Sakaguchi himself maintains a haughty silence in the face of these accusations:

One thing at least was clear -- he was enjoying himself, Why else would he have that smirk on his face? In his characteristic fashion, he was flaunting his superiority. 18

When he finally tries to silence Tatsuoka, though, the two men come close to blows. But Sakaguchi must beat a hasty retreat, because he is "no match for Tatsuoka physically, who was not only twice as large but a third-grade black belt in judo."<sup>19</sup> Kensaku finds himself thrust into the unexpected role of mediator between the two. But he is still not convinced that the firend in the story is Tatsuoka. To protest about it, though, would be to admit that he sees some similarity between this "unadmirable" character and himself, so that Sakaguchi, who is such a "slippery customer", might easily ask: "'Do you really have such a low opinion of your own character that you should see yourself in him!'"<sup>20</sup> Kensaku even suspects that Tatsuoka is only pretending to think that he is the model for the character, hoping that, by doing so, he will prevent Kensaku, the real model, from breaking off his friendship with Sakaguchi.



At any rate, one thing these rather convoluted agonies of suspicion seem to illustrate, with more than a touch of humour, are the occupational hazards of a writer of shi-shōsetsu, the perils of mixing fiction with reality. Although the scene approaches farce when the engineer and the writer almost come to blows, there is, nevertheless, an undercurrent of serious comment here. To begin with, Sakaguchi's story, as an account of the author's affair with his young maid, is highly reminiscent of Tayama Katai's Futon ( 蒲団 The Quilt, 1980), the first "naturalist" shi-shōsetsu of modern Jpaaan, and the work which first popularized this genre. Shiga, then, seems to be serving notice here that his shō-shōsetsu is to be in some important way different to those of Tayama and the "naturalists". How he perceives this difference becomes clear if we look again at Kensaku's criticism of Sakagushi's story. It is not the "unpleasant" facts that disurb him (and the "naturalists" were well known for wallowing in the mud), it is the unsympathetic attitude of the author and of the protagonist, his alter ego. "He could have forgiven the facts if he had been allowed to feel some sympathy for the protagonist; but the flippancy, the superciliousness of the protagonist (and of Sakaguchi) left no room for such sympathy."<sup>21</sup> The cynical protagonist is shown cruelly mistreating the young maid for his own amusement, although the real girl was, as Kensaku knows, "innocent and good-hearted".<sup>22</sup> In other words, Sakaguchi lacks the one quality that is absolutely essential in a writer of shi-shōsetsu: sincerity. If the author lacks



this quality then so, inevitably, will his fictional persona, and his work, no matter how brilliant intellectually, will fall flat because, as Kensaku tells us, it will fail to arouse our sympathy, i.e., it will not bring about that all-important communion of spirit between reader and writer which, as we have seen, Shiga called "rhythm".

By establishing this close relation between personal character and aesthetic value in the writing of shi-shōsetsu (a relation that has always been emphasized in traditional Japanese aesthetics), Shiga also prepares us for the theme that I have already suggested is central to the novel: Kensaku must solve his fundamental "problem of the self" before he can succeed as a writer -- and go on to write this very novel. Already in this first scene, despite its almost comic tone, we are given some hints of the depths of this problem: his anger and mental agitation, which seem out of all proportion to their rather trivial cause; his suspicion, amounting to almost paranoia, not only of Sakaguchi but even of the harmless Tatsuoka; and, finally, his self-doubts revealed, as he himself admits, by the very fact that he identifies with the disagreeable character portrayed by Sakaguchi, not on the basis of any external evidence but entirely because of what he perceives as a "similarity of character".<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, this opening scene also gives us just as clear indications that there is much to be hoped for from Kensaku. In telling contrast to the smug, self-satisfied



Sakaguchi, Kensaku is at least aware -- painfully aware -- that something within him is seriously awry. He admits to himself that he is being "far too suspicious of Sakaguchi" and that, "ever since his experience with Aiko", he has found it increasingly difficult to trust people".<sup>24</sup> (As is consistent with this being Kensaku's shi-shōsetsu, his own "stream of consciousness", we do not understand this reference to "Aiko" until later in the novel). He also admits that he does not "like this tendency in himself, but there was not much he could do about it."<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, by this very act of painful self-awareness, he has taken the first step on the road that will lead him ultimately out of his "dark night". What this first scene shows us, in Shiga's admirably economical fashion, is that Kensaku, unlike his fellow-writer, Sakaguchi, possesses at least the sincerity necessary to make progress as a human being -- and so as a writer of shi-shōsetsu.

Throughout the remainder of Part I of the novel, however, Kensaku's development seems more in the nature of a "rake's progress". He begins to frequent the teahouses and, eventually, the brothels of Yoshiwara, conducting liaisons with several different geisha, but without being really satisfied with any of them. Ultimately he must admit to himself his inability to control his sexual desires, as he admitted earlier that he could not control his suspicions; and this too is a symptom of some deeper malaise:



The truth was that he was drawn to almost every woman he saw...And before he could stop himself, he was asking himself the unwelcome question: "What is it that I want?" He knew the answer; but it was so unpleasant, he wanted to hide from it. 26

Finally, Kensaku's sexual desire becomes fixed on Oei, his "grandfather's" ex-mistress who is now living with him as a kind of housekeeper. He recognizes instinctively, though that his increasing "self-indulgence" might lead him now to violate some deep taboo, which could prove disastrous:

With every passing day, his self-indulgence became more intense.

As his life grew more anarchic, so did his mind, and his lewd fantasies about Oei became more and more uncontrolled. He wondered fearfully what would happen to them if his present condition were to persist. This woman, who had been his grandfather's mistress, was almost twenty years older than he. He imagined their future together. What he saw -- and he shrank before the prospect -- was his own destruction. 27

As Part I ends, Kensaku decides that he must get away from Tokyo for six months or a year, to try to come to grips with himself on his own, away from Oei and from the distractions of his perpetually carousing friends. As he tells Oei, he also hopes that in solitude he will "get a lot of work done".<sup>28</sup> This is the first important statement in the novel of the link between Kensaku's spiritual well-being and his capacity to write. Also, by going away to face himself alone, he acknowledges, at least unconsciously, that his fundamental problem does not lie in his external circumstances but in his inner condition -- which he alone can change. This is the beginning of a process of progressive "internalization" in



Kensaku's perception of his own problem which, as we shall see, culminates in the final part of the novel when he openly confronts his own "tyranical" egotism. His going into hermetical retreat to seek peace of mind in the traditional Oriental fashion at the end of Part I also foreshadows his final "retreat" on Mount Daisen at the end of Part IV.

As Part II opens, Kensaku is on his way by ship to Onomichi, a small provincial town beautifully situated on the Inland Sea, which he has chosen as the site of his retreat. Standing alone on the ship's deck, he has an experience that is an important prelude to the experience he will have on Mount Daisen several years later:

Above and below, to his right and left, the darkness stretched without limit. And here he was, standing in the very middle of this enormous thing...He alone stood face to face with nature, as mankind's chosen representative. But together with this exaggerated sense of self-importance came the hopeless feeling that he was about to be swallowed up by the great darkness around him. It was not altogether unpleasant. He fought against it nevertheless. As if to prove to himself his own presence, he tightened the muscles in his lower abdomen and breathed deeply. As soon as he stopped doing so, however, he again felt in danger of being swallowed up. 29

It is obvious from this that Kensaku is not yet ready to "let go" and completely lose himself in nature, even though he already recognizes that the experience is "not altogether unpleasant". And it is also obvious what is stopping him: his "exaggerated sense of self-importance" -- i.e., his ego -- the other side of which is fear, the fear of losing himself,



of being "swallowed up". To counteract this fear of what in Zen is called "nothingness" (mu ~~無~~ ), Kensaku tightens his abdominal muscles and breathes deeply, "as if to prove to himself his own presence". The Zen way, of course, and the way Kensaku himself will come to eventually, is to embrace this nothingness; but, for the moment, his excessive egotism prevents the kind of self-surrender that this requires.

At first Kensaku responds well to his peaceful life on the mountainside above Onomichi. "At least he felt relaxed enough to start on a long-range project he had been planning. This was to be a work based on his life from childhood to the present."<sup>30</sup> In other words, he has begun to write Än'ya Kōro -- specifically, we may speculate, the part that later becomes the prologue, the "hero's reminiscences" of his childhood. This would account for the prologue's being written in the first person: it was written before Kensaku had attained the "post-Daisen" detachment I spoke of earlier.

The fact that he lacks such detachment is shown by his inability to continue writing at Onomichi. A writer of shi-shōsetsu, as Shiga once said, must "mine" what is in him,<sup>31</sup> but this often involves painful introspection and self-analysis. Kensaku, for instance, is troubled by a memory of having touched his mother's genitals while sleeping with her as a four-year-old, and having been reprimanded by her for doing so.

He felt shame still as he remembered the incident. He was also puzzled by the memory. What had made him do such a thing? Was it curiosity or was it some kind of



urge?...Perhaps, he thought wretchedly, he had inherited such an inclination; perhaps even with such things, one may be cursed by the sins of one's forefathers. It was with childhood reminiscences like these, then, that he began his writing. 32

But, after about a month of reawakening such painful memories, the presence of the past becomes a bit too much for Kensaku: "For about a month his work progressed at a steady pace, and both his daily life and his health seemed satisfactory. Then gradually everything began to deteriorate."<sup>33</sup> And: "As his work faltered he began to suffer from the monotony of his life. Every day was the same."<sup>34</sup> Here we have, then, a somewhat more serious example of the hazards of writing shi-shōsetsu than was presented in the novel's opening scene, and one that demands from the writer a good deal of self-detachment, since the "self" is his principle subject.

Finding, then, that the internal pressure that builds up during solitude is, as yet, too much for him to bear, Kensaku turns to an external source for relief: he writes to his brother, Nobuyuki, asking him to convey his proposal of marriage to Oei. Nobuyuki's answer brings a double shock; not only does Oei adamantly refuse his proposal, but Nobuyuki reveals the reason why she must: the "shoddy, common, worthless old man" to whom she was mistress is Kensaku's real father. This unwelcome piece of information is the deepest blow yet to Kensaku's sense of self; it shakes him to the very core.

It was all like a dream to him. The being that was himself, the person he had known until now as himself, seemed to be going farther and farther into the distance like a thinking mist. 35



Again, then, Kensaku feels threatened by a sense of "nothingness". Significantly, what saves him at this point is the sudden surge of sympathy he feels for his dead mother:

His mother and that shoddy, common, worthless old man -- the mere thought of the association was ugly and unclean. He was then suddenly filled with overwhelming pity for his mother, his mother who had been defiled by that man. "Mama!" he cried out, like a boy about to throw himself into his mother's arms. 36

By this spontaneous cry from the depths of his soul Kensaku turns all his attention away from himself and towards another, thus freeing himself, at least momentarily, from his own personal pain. Although this is an entirely instinctive action here, it is, nevertheless, an important indication of the way that, ultimately, Kensaku must consciously embrace: the way of self-transcendence, of "freeing the self from the self".

In the letter that he sends back to his brother, Kensaku makes it clear that he is determined to make positive use of his new "self-knowledge", however painful, both as a man and as a writer of shi-shōsetsu:

Through my new knowledge about myself I shall be able to do my work with greater determination than before. And in that new determination I shall seek my salvation. There is no other way for me. By that means, I shall be able to accomplish two things at once: do the work I want to do and find myself. 37

Here, then, we have the most explicit statement yet of the intimate relation between Kensaku's "finding himself" and his capacity to write.



There is also some ironic, almost comic comment here on a subject familiar by now: the perils of writing shi-shōsetsu. Nobuyuki has expressed his concern that the "family scandal" will make its way into Kensaku's writings, so that Kensaku must try to reassure him:

I can sympathize with your fear lest the affairs of our family should appear in my writings. I cannot promise that they will not appear in some form or other. But I shall try to be careful not to cause discomfort. 38

Left alone with his thoughts at Onomichi, Kensaku naturally is tempted to brood at times about his being born a "child of sin". But, already, long before his experience on Mount Daisen, he knows intuitively that relief can be found only if he is able to "dissolve" his troubled self in the vast world of nature that surrounds him:

He made himself think of the vastness of the world around him...in the midst of this vastness there was this minute particle that was himself, busily weaving a web of misery in the little world of his mind. Such was his customary way of combatting his own fits of depression... 39

Nevertheless, Kensaku does not yet feel strong enough to heal his own wounded spirit all by himself. He decides to return to Tokyo, although with misgivings that he might relapse again into his old life of dissipation.

The thought of living once more the way he had done those last three months in Tokyo was almost enough to detain him. There was his work too, nowhere near completion. How could he live like that again, he wondered, rushing about frantically yet always with that oppressive feeling of guilt? 40

Back in Tokyo, Kensaku finds that his brother has decided to resign from his company and take up the study of Zen. The



startled Kensaku "could hardly share Nobuyuki's confidence in the efficacy of Zen. Zen was becoming awfully fashionable, and Kensaku naturally felt animosity toward it."<sup>41</sup> He also disapproves of the Zen master Nobuyuki has chosen to study with: "He was the sort that spoke to large audiences at such places as the Mitsui Assembly Hall. For men like him, who went about scattering seed indiscriminately on barren ground, Kensaku had no respect."<sup>42</sup>

This is the first significant mention of Zen Buddhism in An'ya Kōre. There is an interesting dialectical relation between this novel and the "meditation" sect that has exercised such an overwhelming influence on Japanese culture. As some of my comments have already suggested, Kensaku's "journey through dark night" -- his struggle to free himself from his own egotism and his eventual achievement of this by total union with nature -- fall perfectly within the Zen view of life and of the basic human predicament. Later in the novel, in fact, Kensaku is shown to be reading and admiring the Zen classics: the "enlightenment stories", in particular, "appealed deeply to his susceptible mind. And each time he heard the words, 'Thus in an instant there was enlightenment', he would feel like crying."<sup>43</sup> And, just before his Daisen experience, we are told: "Though he knew nothing about Buddhism, such realms believed in by Buddhists as 'nirvana' and 'the realm of bliss' seemed irresistibly attractive to him."<sup>44</sup> While living on



Mount Daisen, in fact, he even comes close to attending a Zen sesshin (extended period of lectures and meditation).

Nevertheless, An'ya Kōro is not a religious tract but a novel, so that Shiga, whatever his personal views on the matter, is wise to balance Kensaku's positive feelings about Zen in its "pure" form with some rather negative feelings about Zen as a modern organized religion (an example of which we saw in his contemptuous opinion of the "indiscriminate" Zen master quoted above). The important point, though, is that Kensaku, although undoubtedly somewhat under the sway of Zen ideas, does not, in contrast to his brother, take up the actual practise of Zen. If his Mount Daisen experience is a genuine Zen satori, it has been achieved "naturally" and not by zazen (meditation) or kōan practise. Kensaku is definitely the type of man who must go his own way -- if only because of the enormity of his ego. As we are told: "it distressed him to imagine himself sitting humbly at the feet of some smug Zen priest".<sup>45</sup>

On one level, then, An'ya Kōro may be regarded as part of that series of major modern Japanese novels and stories that try to come to terms with this fundamental aspect of Japanese culture, the ineffable wisdom of Zen. The list includes Mori Ōgai's "Kanzan Jittoku" (1916), Natsume Sōseki's Mon (The Gate, 1910), and, more recently, Mishima Yukio's Kinkakuji (The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, 1956). Of all these works, though, it seems to me that Shiga's despite its apparent rejection of "orthodox" Zen, comes closest to presenting the authentic Zen experience of a great spiritual liberation achieved



after years of painful effort. Perhaps this accounts for the very palpable spiritual power of the novel, which gave it something of a "cult following" among several generations of Japanese readers.

To return to the story itself, though: as Part II draws to a close, Kensaku despite all his good resolutions, does return to his former life-style of frequenting the teahouses and brothels of Yoshiwara. He "once more began to decline, both in spirit and in body...His way of life again became disorderly".<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, however, he dreams of escaping entirely from the world of men, much like a traditional hermit:

He would find a world where the very air he breathed was different. He would live at the foot of some great mountain, among peasants who knew nothing. And if he could live apart even from them, all the better... How good it would be to live and eventually die in that condition -- forgotten, unknown, untouched by the outer world! 47

Walking through the Ginza one night, he tries to evoke within himself the spirit of a Zen man of old like Han-Shan:

He must look straight ahead with the eyes of a calm and controlled man and not look about him nervously as he was wont to do. He wanted to be like a man striding alone through the wilderness in the twilight, unmindful of the crying pines and the whispering grass. (Had Nobuyuki said the image was to be found in a poem by Han-Shan?) He wanted to capture the spirit of such a man -- even here on Ginza. And he did not altogether fail to do so. In his present frame of mind he needed desperately to cling to some such ideal. 48

As we would expect from his present mental condition, Kensaku also fails to make any progress in his writing. "There was the long piece that he had worked on in Onomichi and was



still unfinished, but he did not want to touch that for the time being."<sup>49</sup> (Kensaku is referring here, of course, to An'ya Kōro itself.) Since he is in no mood to engage in the kind of painful introspection that the writing of his lengthy shi-shōsetsu would require, he feels that he might try writing a work of conventional fiction, drawing on his experiences in the "gay quarter". While visiting a teahouse one night he had heard from two geisha the story of Eihana, "the most wicked geisha in town",<sup>50</sup> whom Kensaku had seen perform when she was a girl. She had trained when young to become a ballad-singer but had run away before her training was finished to live with the son of a local bookseller. But the boy was soon taken back by his parents and she was disowned by hers. She was pregnant by then and rumor had it that she had destroyed her own child and taken up with the first man who happened along, who turned out to be a pimp. She had disappeared from Tokyo for a few years but now she was back and working as a geisha in Yanagibashi, one of the pleasure quarters frequented by Kensaku.

This tale of Eihana is the first of a series of "stories within the story" that appear in An'ya Kōro (other examples are the samurai tale told by Naoko's uncle, Oei's misadventures in China, the story of the Korean nobleman mistreated by Japanese colonial authorities and the gossip that Kensaku hears on Mount Daisen about the melodramatic goings-on that surround



the "sluttish" wife of the woodcutter Take). As we saw in "Takibi", this is a favorite device of Shiga's. Just as the "supernatural" material in "Takibi" is made more acceptable by being presented in this kind of framework (since the author seems "detached" from the material -- he is merely "reporting" something he has heard), so is the rather melodramatic material here made more palatable by being presented merely as gossip Kensaku has heard. Nevertheless, these "conventional-style" stories do have an important function in An'ya Kōro. Quite apart from their intrinsic interest as stories per se, they serve to represent traditional, conventional fiction within the novel (the story of Eihana, for instance, sounds like something out of the gesaku literature of the Tokugawa period, with its highly coloured tales of the "floating world"); and thus they function, within the fiction/reality dialectic, as the opposite end of the pole to the shi-shōsetsu. In other words, Shiga makes good use of the principle, here as elsewhere, that the best way to define something is by contrast with its opposite. When, for instance, Kensaku's friend Ishimoto suggests that "all that background stuff about Eihana" would make a good story, Kensaku's reaction is significant:

"Quite so," said Kensaku with an obvious lack of enthusiasm. "At least, it's good conversation material." This last remark was ungracious, but he had to make it; for he resented Ishimoto's assumption that the stuff of gossip could immediately be translated into writing. 51

In other words, the mere fact that something has actually happened does not qualify it as material for a writer of shi-



shōsetsu. Life itself is often as full of melodrama as the most vulgar soap opera, but the writer, as an artist, must select as his material only what seems most appropriate and "natural" to him.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, Kensaku has a momentary change of heart about the Eihana story as material for his writing, and this tells us much about what motivates him as a writer. When he and his brother return home from the teahouse:

Nobuyuki recounted for Oei's benefit the story of Eihana. It was a tale told with little pity and in a spirit of censure about a woman steeped in evil...Kensaku was filled with anger. He thought of that little pale-faced girl on the stage, so helpless yet proud, and wanted to tell them, "It's not Eihana that's bad!" But they had never seen the girl, and they would not know what he meant; and as he sat there trying to contain his anger, it suddenly occurred to him that there was something he could write about. 53

It is clear, then, that Kensaku must have a strong personal feeling about something before he is able to write about it. In the case of Eihana, there is, in fact, an even deeper personal reason than the one indicated in the above quote: as a "fallen woman", she reminds him of his mother.<sup>54</sup> Still, there is one crucial stumbling-block: as an author of shi-shōsetsu how is he to write about someone other than himself?

He tried writing about Eihana from his own point of view; quickly it became evident that the story would be too bare told that way, and he decided to tell it from her point of view, giving his imagination free rein. He toyed with the idea of having her meet Omasa the Viper...He liked the story less and less as it developed. It seemed to him to become particularly contrived after the heroine's journey to Hokkaido. Besides, he found telling a story from a woman's point of view, which he had never attempted before, far more difficult than he had imagined. 55 (My emphasis.)



Here we have one of the most explicit statements of Shiga's "credo" as a writer of shi-shōsetsu: that, at least for himself, to try to tell a story from any point of view other than his own would be to risk the kind of artificial, "contrived" writing he associated with conventional fiction. And, indeed, if we look at even his own "fictional" stories, we find that, in almost every case, the protagonists are identifiable projections of himself: the "Han" of "Han no Hanzai" (Han's Crime), the "Kakita" of "Akanishi Kakita", the "Claudius" of "Kurādiasu no Nikki" ("The Diary of Claudius") and so on.

As Part III of the novel opens, Kensaku's spirits have revived somewhat from the doldrums we last saw him in. He has moved to Kyoto, the old capital of Japan, whose "ancient temples and works of art led him gently back to ancient times, inviting a response from him that he had not thought possible."<sup>56</sup> He spends most of his time just walking around the old city, admiring its temples, gardens and art works and soaking in its peaceful atmosphere. On one such outing he happens to catch sight of a young woman in a nearby house, who presents an inviting picture of domesticity to the lonely Kensaku as she goes about her household chores. "She was a pleasing and wholesome sight, and he was immediately drawn to her."<sup>57</sup> So drawn is he, in fact, that the impulsive Kensaku resolves to marry her, more or less on the spot. In doing so, he identifies himself, interestingly enough, with perhaps the most famous of all fictional characters, Don Quixote, and hopes that his new-found



love might raise him above himself as did the "blind" love of Quixote for Dulcinea. These hopes seem to be realized, at first, when the girl and her family accept his proposal and Kensaku settles down with his new bride, Naoko, to a life of comfortable domestic bliss in the beautiful suburbs of northern Kyoto. But there is some suggestion that, for a writer of shi-shōsetsu his life is now a little too comfortable: "He would often sit at his desk and simply stare at the view, not writing a word."<sup>58</sup>

Marriage, though, soon brings its own great trials. About a month after the newly wed couple's first child is born, it dies a slow, agonizing death from erysipelas. Kensaku, who had felt great delight at becoming a father, is plunged back into the depths of despair. He feels great bitterness towards what he perceives to be his evil fate, which has destroyed his new-found happiness just at its inception: "why must he be betrayed now, when after years of journeying down the dark road, he had thought that the waiting and seeking had not been in vain, that the dawn had at last come?...he could not in the end escape the conviction that he was the victim of some evil force bent on hurting him."<sup>59</sup> Significantly, then, Kensaku is still inclined to place the blame for his misery on some power exterior to himself. He turns to his writing for therapy, but that too fails him: "Kensaku sought to immerse himself in his work, which had lain discarded too long. But he felt so weighed down by a sense of fatigue -- it was like a heavy



chain wrapped around him -- that he was incapable of such immersion."<sup>60</sup> Part III ends, then, with Kensaku at the nadir of his despair.

One final great trial awaits him, though, and this is recounted in the opening chapters of Part IV. He is obliged to take a ten-day trip to Korea to rescue Oei, who has been stranded there after failing to set up a "geisha" business. When he returns to Kyoto, the intuitive Kensaku immediately senses, from his wife's behavior, that something is seriously wrong. He presses Naoko to reveal what is troubling her and finally she breaks down and tells him. During his absence she was visited by her cousin, Kaname. When they were children, he and Naoko had once played a game together that had distinctly erotic overtones, so that she still felt uncomfortable in his presence. Nevertheless, she had allowed him to stay with her and, one night after they had played cards until late, she had offered to massage his back. Taking advantage of the situation, Kaname had forced himself upon her. Naoko resisted for some time, but eventually she "felt herself drained of all power to resist. Indeed, she soon lost even the capacity to think."<sup>61</sup> The incident is thus ambiguous, half seduction and half rape, but this does nothing to lessen Kensaku's shock.

He struggles bravely, however, to overcome his emotional turmoil and do the best thing for both his wife and himself. "'I do not want to condemn her', he said to himself, repeating



what he had said to Naoko the night before. 'I want to forgive her.'"<sup>62</sup> But, with his large ego so badly bruised, this is easier said than done: "A moment later, however, he could not avoid adding, 'And so I shall be the only fool in the entire affair, the only loser.'"<sup>63</sup>

An important hint as to the only way out of this emotional labyrinth is provided by Kensaku's friend, Suematsu. Though still unaware of the real cause of Kensaku's present "Touchiness", Suematsu berates him for the quick, "irrational" way in which he judges people.

In matters involving your feelings, you really are a tyrant. You're a terrible egoist, you know. True, you're not a calculating person, and I suppose that's a good thing. But you can be very thoughtless... Let me put it another way. Perhaps you yourself aren't tyrannical; rather, it's as though a little tyrant is living inside you somewhere. I suppose it's possible that the real victim is therefore you." 64

Because of his basic "sincerity", Kensaku is forced to admit to himself the truth of his friend's words.

Kensaku had always allowed his emotions to tyrannize over him; but he had not before thought to describe his own condition quite in these words. Now, as he remembered the various incidents in his life, he had again to grant that more often than not he had been wrestling with himself, that his enemy had been a creature residing within him. 65

This is the culmination of the process of "interiorization" I mentioned before. Kensaku now no longer perceives his fundamental problem as caused by some exterior "evil fate" -- he knows now that the problem lies within. With this realization he has taken a major step towards his spiritual freedom.



Although there are a few more struggles to come, he is sure now, at least, of the direction he must travel to emerge from his "dark night". And a prophetic promise of what lies at the end is also given by Suematsu. When Kensaku asks: "'If I am going to spend the rest of my life fighting with this thing that's inside me, what was the point of my having been born?", Suematsu tells him, with a "consoling look": "'Perhaps it isn't so bad, if at the end of it all there's peace of mind waiting.'"66

Suematsu's point about the "tyrant" ego is further driven home to Kensaku by an incident that occurs a few months later. By this time Kensaku has been blessed with another child, and one would expect to find him in a better frame of mind. On the surface all does seem to be calm but the fact that Kensaku is still subject to unpredictable rages shows that he has by no means resolved his inner tensions.

One day he takes Naoko with some others on an outing to a nearby resort. At the train station she goes to use the toilet and Kensaku is infuriated by her slowness. The train has already begun to pull out when Naoko tries to board it. Kensaku orders her to return home. When she persists in trying to get aboard, Kensaku, "as in a reflex action",<sup>67</sup> pushes her off. She falls onto the station platform, injuring herself slightly. Thinking that he must have had "some sort of fit"<sup>68</sup> Kensaku is naturally very shocked by his own behavior: "He could still see the strange look in Naoko's eyes as she fell off the train. It was unbearable. Oh God, he thought, I've



done something irreparable."<sup>69</sup> And "he dared not contemplate what his action had done to their future relationship."<sup>70</sup> It is indeed as if some uncontrollable "tyrant" within him had acted, rather than his true self..

Naoko's reaction is one of deep but knowing sadness. She accuses Kensaku of having not really forgiven her in his heart of hearts: "I was terribly pleased when you said you weren't going to hate me, you weren't going to brood about it, since hating and brooding did no one any good. But you can't expect me to go on believing what you said when you do something like what you did the other day. I can't help thinking that deep inside, you do resent me."<sup>71</sup> Although Kensaku is angered by her suggestion that even his forgiveness is tinged with egotism, still he must admit that: "As you say, my feelings aren't as magnanimous as my ideas."<sup>72</sup> He sees this, though, as a problem which he must solve alone. "A doctor may say I'm suffering from a nervous breakdown. But even if I am, I don't want to go to a doctor for help."<sup>73</sup> As a result: "I want merely to go away to some mountain for half a year, and live quietly by myself."<sup>74</sup>

As his place of retreat this time Kensaku chooses Mount Daisen, "a holy place of the Tendai sect",<sup>75</sup> where he can stay in a Buddhist temple. Before leaving he tells Naoko jokingly that he will "concentrate on attaining Buddhahood" and "shall return as Buddha".<sup>76</sup> But there is a serious undertone to this jesting: "He was indeed leaving in a frame of mind akin to



that of a man about to take holy orders, but he could hardly tell Naoko so."<sup>77</sup> When Oei objects that the similar retreat he had made to Onomichi a few years before did him little good, he explains to her that his motives now are quite different: "I went to Onomichi to force myself to get some work done; I found that it was too difficult, and I failed. But this time, work is not my primary concern. I'm going in order to find spiritual well-being, you might say, and to recover my physical strength."<sup>78</sup> This difference makes clear how serious -- and how desperate -- Kensaku has become about his spiritual quest, now that he has seen the terrible depths of his own egotism. And, although his "spiritual well-being" and not his writing is now his "primary concern", because he is an author of shi-shōsetsu the two are really inseparable. A spiritual break-through will also enable him to break through the writer's block he has suffered all through the novel.

As soon as Kensaku arrives in the vicinity of Mount Daisen, his spirits begin to revive. He is immediately struck by the great contrast between people who live in the city and those who live close to nature. "As though for the first time, he was made aware that such a world as this existed. There are people, he thought, that live like wild cats in a cave, forever snarling at each other; and then there is this life."<sup>79</sup> When he ascends the mountain itself, he comes across a "serene old man" at a teashop who seems an ideal example of a man who lives close to nature; "He must have gazed at the same scene countless times before; yet here he was, still gazing at it without



apparent boredom...he was like an ancient tree in the mountains, he was like a moss-covered rock that had been placed there in front of the view. If he was thinking at all, he was thinking as an old tree or a rock would think. He seemed so tranquil, Kensaku envied him."<sup>80</sup> Here, then, is a perfect image of what it means to be "dissolved" in nature, "mindless" in the Zen sense, untroubled by any of the petty concerns of the human world -- free even of one's own memories, one's own "identity". Here is an image, in fact, of everything that Kensaku hopes to become.

There is another "natural" man whom Kensaku meets later on the mountain: Take, the Christ-like carpenter who fixes the temple buildings without pay. His wife is a notorious "slut" with several lovers but Take, in telling contrast to Kensaku, "could not bring himself to hate her".<sup>81</sup> Kensaku marvels at Take's forbearance which, he speculates, probably comes from "his total understanding of what his wife was...Of course Take must have suffered, he must be suffering now. Yet he had somehow managed to rise above his misfortune."<sup>82</sup> This simple carpenter, then, has attained the state of egolessness that Kensaku aspires to.

In his new conciliatory mood, Kensaku writes a letter home to Naoko. He explains to her the changes that have already occurred in his state of mind: "Since coming to this mountain I've spent a lot of time looking at the little birds, the insects, the trees, the water, the rocks. As I observe



closely all these things by myself, I find that they give rise to all kinds of feelings and thoughts that I never had before. That a world which had never existed for me before has opened itself up to me has given me a sense of joy."<sup>83</sup> Significantly, with his psychic condition improved he has also begun to write again, and he encloses an example of his work in his letter to Naoko -- as we would expect, a "nature sketch".

We now approach what may be regarded as the climactic scene not only of An'ya Kōro but of Shiga's entire opus. Kensaku decides to hike up to the top of Mount Daisen one night, so as to watch the sunrise from there the following morning. He is accompanied by a group of company employees from Osaka, whose boisterous holiday spirits contrast sharply with Kensaku's own quiet, subdued mood. Indeed, they share little of his growing sensitivity to nature. When he tells them he has already been on the mountain a fortnight, they ask: "How can you stand it? We'd go mad after two days here."<sup>84</sup> We are thus given a distinct sense of irony when they all break into a traditional pilgrim's chant as they begin to ascent the "holy mountain": "Begone all the senses, let the spirits guide us to the clear sky above."<sup>85</sup> Regarded from Kensaku's present state of mind, however, these words have an entirely appropriate tenor, and may even be regarded as prophetic of his coming experience.

That there are still, though, for the moment, some traces of worldly egotism left in him is made clear by the "competi-



tive" feeling he has, as the only Tokyo man in the group, towards the other young men, who are all from the rival city of Osaka. This makes him push on up the mountain at the same pace as theirs, in spite of the fact that he is still suffering the after effects of a "severe attack of diarrhea" he had earlier that day.<sup>86</sup> When the group pauses to rest after about an hour's hike, though, Kensaku feels that he has no more strength to continue. He tells the others that he will rest there until dawn, and then return home by himself. Reluctantly, the group continues on up the mountain without him.

Left alone on the mountain in the quiet of the night, Kensaku is now able to commune with nature as never before. He sits down on the grass and begins "breathing deeply through his nose, his eyes closed"<sup>87</sup> (interestingly, the traditional way a Zen adept quiets his mind before meditation). Then comes perhaps the most celebrated passage in all of Shiga:

He felt his exhaustion turn into a strange state of rapture. He could feel his mind and his body both gradually merging into this great nature that surrounded him. It was not nature that was visible to the eyes; rather, it was like a limitless body of air that wrapped itself around him, this tiny creature no larger than a poppy seed. To be gently drawn into it, and there be restored, was a pleasure beyond the power of words to describe...He had experienced this feeling of being absorbed by nature before; but this was the first time that it was accompanied by such rapture. In previous instances, the feeling perhaps had been more that of being sucked in by nature than that of merging into it; and though there had been some pleasure attached to it, he had at the same time always tried instinctively to resist it, and on finding such resistance difficult, he had felt a distinct uneasiness. But this time, he had not the slightest will to resist; and contentedly, without a trace of the old uneasiness; he accepted nature's embrace. 88



It is important, first, to note Kensaku's condition immediately preceding this experience: he was thoroughly worn out by his illness and by the effort of competing with the boisterous Osaka men. Beyond this, of course, we must recall all the great trials he has undergone throughout the course of the novel, which have taxed his spirit close to breaking-point. As the familiar Christian phrase has it: "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." And this truth has also been made an integral part of Zen training, as we know from the innumerable "enlightenment stories" recounted in the works of D.T. Suzuki,<sup>89</sup> in which the adept frequently attains satori only when pushed to the very end of his tether. It is claimed that the vise-like grip of egotism on human consciousness can be loosened only in this exacting way, and certainly in Kensaku's case this seems to be borne out. As he himself recalls in the above passage, when he had experienced a similar feeling of being "dissolved" in nature before (as I have noted earlier, on the boat to Onomichi), he had "instinctively" resisted it, fearing loss of his identity (as he says, of being "sucked in"). The great difference now is that his sense of individual self has since received a good many shocks, which have greatly reduced its hold on him and, more importantly, Kensaku himself, as we have seen, has admitted his own egotism to be his fundamental problem and has consciously taken measures to overcome it (for one thing, coming to this mountain). And so, "this time, he had not the slightest will to resist; and contentedly, without



a trace of the old uneasiness, he accepted nature's embrace."<sup>90</sup>

Here, then, is the culmination of that process of increasing union with nature which I have traced through four of Shiga's major works. In his earliest story, "Aru Asa", the bare outline of the problem was presented: how was a hypersensitive young man to cope with the frictions that inevitably resulted from his relations with others, especially within the narrow, rather oppressive confines of the traditional Japanese family. By "Kinosaki ni te" he has received a more severe shock to his delicate sense of self -- a near-fatal accident -- but he also is given some inkling of a way out: by turning away from the human world and towards nature. Nevertheless, he is not yet ready for the degree of self-surrender that a total mergence with nature would require, as is evidenced by his intellectual doubts towards the story's end, which arise from his equating such a state of union with death. (Interestingly, these doubts are answered by Kensaku in the paragraph following the passage quoted above: "He felt as if he had just taken a step on the road to eternity. Death held no threat for him. If this means dying, he thought, I can die without regret. But to him then, this journey to eternity did not seem the same as death."<sup>91</sup>) In "Takibi" the Shiga protagonist has already attained some degree of union with nature but, shared as it is among a group of convivial friends, this seems more like a passing mood -- like the momentary calm of the lake's surface in the story -- rather than the profound experience of self-surrender that the solitary Kensaku undergoes,



an experience one feels will have lasting and radical effects on the man's whole being and character. An'ya Kōro, in fact, contains all the stages we have observed in the previous stories, but in much larger dimensions: that is, the wounds that Kensaku receives to his sense of self are far more critical and prolonged than those of the earlier protagonists, just as his ultimate experience of liberation is far more profound.

But the cycle is not quite yet complete: since it began in the human world, not in the world of nature, it must also end there. As we have seen, the Shiga protagonist's first perception that something was basically awry -- both in "Aru Asa" and in An'ya Kōro -- arose from his difficulties in relating with other people. Now that, supposedly, he has eliminated the root cause -- his own egotism -- it is only natural that he be shown descending from his mountain retreat and relating with others in a new and freer way. This would correspond to the traditional final stage of the "enlightened" man's life known as "re-entering the marketplace" and invariably illustrated in the last of the Zen ox-herding pictures one finds in monasteries all over East Asia.

Such, in fact, is the import of An'ya Kōro's final scene. Perhaps so as not to be overly obvious about it, Shiga keeps the scene short and, rather than employ the symbolism of Kensaku actually descending from the mountain, he has the human world below -- in the form of Naoko -- come to Kensaku instead. But the true significance of the scene is nevertheless quite



apparent. When Naoko arrives, Kensaku is lying prostrate in bed, thoroughly exhausted, and his worn appearance initially shocks her. But when she draws near to him, she soon forgets her anxiety and falls under the spell of his new presence:

His gaze was like a caress. She thought she had never seen such gentleness, such love, in anyone's eyes before. She was about to say, "Everything is all right now," but she refrained, for in the presence of such contentment and quiet, the words seemed hollow. 92

That one word describing the quality of Kensaku's gaze -- "caress" -- tells us volumes about his new-found capacity for communion with others. As was revealed in "Takibi", an increased capacity for union with nature brings an equally increased capacity for union with one's fellow man since, at the deepest level, man and nature are one. As we recall, Shiga used the term "rhythm" to express that fundamental power that is shared by all natural phenomena, including man, and it is this "rhythm", more a spiritual than a physical quality, that he seems to be referring to by the word "nature" in the passage quoted above: "It was not nature that was visible to the eyes..."<sup>93</sup> Thus, when Kensaku becomes identified with this universal "rhythm", he also becomes identified with the innermost nature of man. On the level of human relations the word for this "unitive" capacity is, of course, "love", and so Naoko "thought she had never seen such gentleness, such love, in anyone's eyes before."<sup>94</sup>

The final few paragraphs of the novel contain an unusual device: the narrative viewpoint, having been that of Kensaku



throughout the entire novel, suddenly changed to that of Naoko. This has disturbed some critics who, perhaps, have got the idea from Percy Lubbock that a novel must have a rigidly consistent point of view,<sup>95</sup> but, regarded with the above explication in mind, it seems a perfectly appropriate "objective correlative" on a formal level for what is, on a thematic level, the profound depth of union achieved between Naoko and Kensaku. Despite her initial wifely anxiety, Naoko has been so drawn into Kensaku's "tranquility" that she is now prepared to accept even the idea that he might die:

She had never seen him look so tranquil. Perhaps, she thought, he is not going to live through this. But the thought somehow did not sadden her very much. As she sat there looking at him, she felt herself becoming an inseparable part of him; and she kept on thinking, "Whether he lives or not, I shall never leave him, I shall go wherever he goes." 96

But there is another significance to this change of viewpoint which has been missed by a critic like Francis Mathy, who fails to take Kensaku as the "fictional" author of the novel.<sup>97</sup> Naoko does not only achieve union with Kensaku -- above all, Kensaku achieves union with Naoko (it is he, after all, who has just been "enlightened" on the mountain). With his new-found capacity for union with others, Kensaku, the erstwhile writer of shi-shōsetsu, who had been so totally absorbed in himself that, as we saw when he tried to write the story of Eihana, he could never write from any viewpoint but his own, is now able to commune with others to such an extent that he can even write down their innermost thoughts. The fact that the novel ends with a thought of Naoko's rather than of Kensaku's signi-



fies the depth of selflessness that he has attained, and the new dimensions that have opened for him both as a writer and a man.

Many readers of An'ya Kōro engage in rather bootless arguments as to whether Kensaku goes on to live or to die at the end.<sup>98</sup> As I read the novel there is no doubt about the answer. Regarding Shiga as the author, if he had meant Kensaku to be presumed dead the novel would lose much of its meaning as an analysis of the shi-shōsetsu and the problems involved in its creation: principally, the fact that, because of the intimate link between an "autobiographical" writer's life and work, Kensaku's "writer's block" can only be overcome by a breakthrough on the personal, psychic level, a breakthrough that will enable him to go on to write An'ya Kōro itself. Regarding Kensaku as the author, if he had died the novel, of course, would not have existed at all.

Having devoted so much of my discussion to An'ya Kōro qua the shi-shōsetsu of Tokitō Kensaku (because other critics have failed to regard the novel in this light and, most importantly, because, for the sake of critical analysis, the novel is best viewed from this perspective), I should perhaps devote a few concluding remarks to the work qua the shi-shōsetsu of Shiga Naoya himself.

As we have seen, Shiga once admitted that Kensaku was a direct projection of himself<sup>99</sup> and, even though there is much



invented material in the novel -- for instance, the "illicit" birth of the hero and his wife's "semi-rape" -- we also know that many details of Shiga's own life went into the work. Most important of these is undoubtedly his own experience of deep union with nature while on Mount Daisen in the summer of 1914.<sup>100</sup> How significant the experience was for him may be judged by the fact that he used it, almost a quarter of a century later, as the basis for the "climax" of his magnum opus. But, of course, the experience did not occupy quite the same position in Shiga's life as in Kensaku's: it did not mark the climactic high-point of his growth as man and artist, nor did it enable him to live the rest of his days as an all-compassionate, enlightened Buddha. In other words, through the process of fictionalization the Daisen experience and the character of Shiga himself have been made "larger than life" -- they have assumed, in fact, almost mythic proportions. This may be seen as an inevitable process, regardless of how much an author draws his material from his own "everyday" life. Just as an objet trouve -- say, an old shoe -- takes on a formal, symbolic aspect if placed on a pedestal in a museum, so too an author's own experience regardless how "trivial" or private, takes on a symbolic, universal aspect when placed within the framework of a novel. All the more so is this true, then, when the "experience" in question is such a fundamental one as a man's "journey through dark night" towards spiritual liberation. And this mythic, archetypal aspect of An'ya Kōro accounts, of course, for much



of its underlying power. It is not simply the story of one man's spiritual struggle but a kind of "pilgrim's progress" of a modern Everyman (and, in consonance with this, Kensaku is a rather "impersonal" character in the sense I noted in Chapter 2<sup>101</sup>). Nevertheless, because it is a modern novel (and, above all, a Japanese novel), this thematic tendency towards formality and abstraction is balanced by the very informal structure and particular content of the shi-shōsetsu genre itself, which is, in this respect, a worthy descendant of the medieval nikki (diary) and zuihitsu (random essay). In this sense, the fiction/reality dialectic which Shiga establishes in An'ya Kōro is one of a delicate and masterful balance, both terms of which may be seen as absolutely essential to the total aesthetic effect.

It is, however, this very mixing of "fiction" and "non-fiction", and the supposed "formlessness" that results from it, which has disturbed some Western critics of the novel. In an article on the shi-shōsetsu, Edward Seidensticker, in fact, expands this complaint to a criticism of Far Eastern Literature in general:

In the Orient, the notion of genre has been at once too elaborate and not elaborate enough, if these fundamental Western distinctions between fiction and non-fiction, lyric and drama, are accepted...Some Japanese categories, such as shōsetsu and monogatari, seem so broad as to be meaningless. They include virtually everything, and cut across what in the Western tradition seem like the most fundamental distinctions. Others like sharebon and Kibyōshi, seem so narrow as to be meaningless. They cover tiny realms, and within their tiny realms seem capable, in a most perverse fashion,



of mixing fiction and non-fiction, quite as in the monogatari empire. 102

As a matter of fact, though, even the "fundamental Western distinctions" are not what they used to be. The rambling autobiographical journals of Jack Kerouac, for instance, works such as On the Road (1957) and The Dharma Bums (1958), were among the more celebrated "novels" of the 'fifties "Best generation". Writing in a more "documentary" vein, Truman Capote claimed to have invented a new genre, the "non-fiction novel", with his In Cold Blood (1965). Norman Mailer also has followed this trend with his "reportorial novels" such as The Armies of the Night (1968), subtitled "History as a Novel, the Novel as History", and his more recent The Executioner's Song (1979), subtitled "A True Life Novel". Time magazine has even invented an ugly neologism for such works: "faction".

Whatever we may think of the literary value of these recent American novels, it is likely that, because of their widespread acceptance, the younger generation of Western readers will be less disturbed than their elders by the "blurred lines" between fiction and non-fiction in the works of Shiga Naoya. Perhaps, then, it is no coincidence that An'ya Kōro finally appeared in English translation in 1976, about forty years after its first publication in Japan, even though it has long been recognized in its own country as a modern Classic. Shiga, in fact, seems at the same time both peculiarly modern and very much within the Japanese tradition. This seeming paradox is by no means unprecedented: traditional Japanese architecture, for instance, with its simple lines and uncluttered decor, seems



very modern to the Western eye -- nor is this entirely fortuitous, in view of its seminal influence on such architects as Frank Lloyd Wright. In the same way, as we shall in Chapter III, the haiku has a way of seeming ultra-modern because of its affinity with and influence on Imagism and the many offshoots of that early modernist movement. Whether the recent breakdown in the Western novel of the formerly strict divisions between fiction and non-fiction is due in part to Japanese influence is more difficult to determine. Certainly there was a strong Japanese (especially a "Zen") influence on the "Beat" writers which led them to emphasize "spontaneity", an emphasis that resulted, for instance, in the "automatic" diary-like writing of a Jack Kerouac. But there seems, anyway, something in the modern temper -- shaped so much by newspapers and television -- that demands at least a greater illusion of "reality". (As any book publisher knows, non-fiction generally sells far better than fiction).

At any rate, Shiga's works too may be seen, on one level, to appeal to the reader's appetite for "the facts". Just as early English novelists such as Defoe and Richardson used the letter and the diary form to impart a sense of "reality" to their fictional works, in An'ya Kōro Shiga uses the shi-shōsetsu for the same purpose. Aesthetically, this results in an impression of "artlessness" (since the writer seems merely to be "transcribing" reality) which enables Shiga to avoid what he considered to be "artificiality" of conventional fiction. But there is another side to the "artless art" equation:



the writer's art itself. This lies not merely in his invention of certain fictional details but in the essential vision which orders the selection of all his material -- "fiction" and "non-fiction" alike -- and which unifies the entire work. In Shiga's case, as I hope to have shown, this central vision is redolent of the mainstream spiritual culture of the Orient. In its conception of the human predicament and of the way to wisdom and liberation, it is a restatement of an ancient tradition in modern terms. It is primarily as such, I would suggest, that the works of Shiga Naoya will eventually find their way into the hearts of Western readers.



## Introduction

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## Chapter I

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2. Francis Mathy, Shiga Naoya (New York: Twayne, 1974).
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4. *ibid.*, p. 42
5. Shiga Naoya, "Aru Asa", in Seibei to Hyōtan (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1968) p. 17. My translation.
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7. As, for instance, analyzed by Dr. Takeo Doi, The Anatomy of Dependence, trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1973).
8. Tanizaki Junichirō, "Bunshō Tokuhon", Tanizaki Junichirō Zenshū (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1958) xxi. pp. 84-90.
9. Both writers, for instance, generally restrict themselves to only the most simple adjectives descriptive of subjective judgments: "good", "nice", "pleasant", "bad", etc.



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12. *ibid.*
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14. Mathy, Shiga, p. 45
15. *ibid.*
16. Jay Rubin, "Sōseki on Individualism", in Monumenta Nipponica, vol. xxxiv, no. 1 (1979) p. 21
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21. For an account of this incident, see Mathy, p. 23
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23. Kobayashi Hideo Zenshū (Shinchōsha, 1955-57), vol. vi, pp. 34-35. This translation by Edward Seidensticker in his essay, "Kobayashi Hideo" in Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture, ed. Donald Shively (Princeton Univ. Press, 1971) p. 433
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26. Seidensticker, "Strangely Shaped Novels" in Studies in Japanese Culture, p. 219
27. Sibley, Shiga Hero, p. 126
28. *ibid.*
29. *ibid.*
30. see Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, p. 104
31. Kobayashi, vol. vi, pp. 117-19, Quoted in Seidensticker, "Kobayashi Hideo" in This Country, Japan (Kodansha, 1979) p. 181
32. Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, p. 99
33. *ibid.*
34. see Stephen Kohl, Shiga Naoya: a Critical Biography (Univ. of Washington Ph.D. dissertation, 1974) p. 21
35. *ibid.*, p. 20
36. The word "shōsetsu" encompasses a far broader range of works than the word "novel".
37. Seidensticker, Studies in Japanese Culture, p. 217
38. Mathy, Shiga, p. 44
39. *ibid.*, p. 41
40. *ibid.*
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- 43a Seidensticker, This Country, Japan, p. 100
- 43b see Ueda, p. 131



44. Herbert Franke, Introduction, The Golden Casket: Chinese Novellas of Two Millenia, trans. Christopher Levenson (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964) p. 3
45. Plato, Republic, Book X
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71. On the principles of renga, see Earl Miner's recent Japanese Linked Poetry (Princeton Univ. Press, 1979)
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73. Quoted in Sibley, Shiga Hero, p. 1
74. *ibid.*
75. Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, p. 106

## Chapter 2

1. See, for instance, Tanikawa Tetsuzō's fulsome praise in his Shiga Naoya no Sakuhin (vol. 2), (Tokyo: Mikasa Shobō, 1942) p. 92



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xxi p. 90
3. Shiga Naoya, "At Kinosaki", trans, Edward Seidensticker  
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p. 273
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6. *ibid.*, p. 274
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17. *ibid.*, p. 276
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19. *ibid.*
20. *ibid.*
21. *ibid.*
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23. *ibid.*
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41. *ibid.*
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44. Yoshida, Bunshō to Buntai, p. 48
45. Tanizaki, Zenshū, xxi, 18
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55. ibid., p. 308
56. ibid., p. 291
57. ibid., p. viii
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62. Keene, Modern Japanese Literature, p. 272
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70. ibid. p. 275
71. ibid., p. 277
72. Sibley, Shiga Hero, p. 227
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80. ibid.
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(Tokyo: Kodansha, 1976) p. 375
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88.

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12.   ibid.
13.   ibid., p. 179
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18.   See, for example, D.C. Holtom's account of the role of fire in Shintō ritual in his The National Faith of Japan (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1965) p. 29
19.   Norman Friedman, "Symbol", in Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton Univ. Press, 1974) p. 834
20.   Shiga, Kozō no Kamisama, p. 182.
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22.   ibid., pp. 183-4
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25.   ibid., p. 187
26.   ibid.



27. *ibid.*, p. 188
28. *ibid.*
29. See Mathy, Shiga, p. 161
30. Shiga, Kozō no Kamisama, p. 188
31. Oxford English Dictionary, (Oxford Univ. Press, 1971)  
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sidered to be the language of those incapable of cause-  
and-effect reasoning..."
34. See above, p. 36
35. Quoted in Edmund Wilson, Eight Essays, (New York: Doubleday,  
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36. Comte de Buffon, Discours sur le Style (1753)
37. M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York:  
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38. Quoted in A.E. Hotchner, Papa Hemingway (New York: Random  
House, 1966) p. 199
39. See Benson, Hemingway, p. xi
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41. Hemingway, Green Hills of Africa (New York: Scribner's, 1935) p. 70
  42. See Earl Miner, The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature (Princeton Univ. Press, 1958)  
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  43. Benson, Hemingway, p. 307
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  57. Benson, Hemingway, p. 309
  58. *ibid.*



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60. Donaldson, Will, p. 245
61. Benson, Hemingway, p. 39
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63. *ibid.*, p. 297
64. Weeks, Hemingway, p. 106
65. Hemingway, "Cross-Country Snow" in In Our Time (New York: Scribner's, 1925) p. 107
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67. Keene, Modern Japanese Literature, p. 277
68. Hemingway, "Big Two-Hearted River" in In Our Time, p. 142
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71. Shiga, Kozō no Kamisama, p. 176
72. On Hemingway's obsession with death, see Donaldson, Will p. 282.

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3. *ibid.*, p. 92
4. *ibid.*, p. 101
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33. *ibid.*
34. *ibid.*



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39. *ibid.*, p. 150
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42. *ibid.*
43. *ibid.*, p. 186
44. *ibid.*, p. 375
45. *ibid.*, p. 186-87
46. *ibid.*, p. 184
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49. *ibid.*, p. 181
50. *ibid.*, p. 174
51. *ibid.*, p. 178
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56. *ibid.*, p. 201
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58. *ibid.*, p. 271
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