

Yamamura Bocho — *through a crystal prism*

A Galaxy of Talents

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SUMMARY

*From the Editor of
the English Edition*

This is the second volume of Professor Alexander Dolin's work on modern Japanese poetry to be translated into English. The first, *The Silver Age of Japanese Poetry*, was published by Akita International University Press in 2010. That volume focused on the beginnings of the movement for new poetry (i.e. poetry in non-traditional forms or *shi*) in Japan at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, and on the first coherent modern poetic movements, Romanticism and Symbolism. The material was drawn from the first volume of Professor Dolin's *Istoriya novoy yaponskoy poezii (History of New Japanese Poetry)*, published in 2007 by Hyperion Press of St. Petersburg. The present translation, which covers the period of socially engaged poetry and modernist experimentation during the late Meiji (1868–1912), Taisho (1912–1926), and early Showa (1926–1989) periods, is based on material from volumes 2 and 3 of Professor Dolin's four-volume Russian original.

With the publication of this second translated volume, English-language readers now have for the first time a comprehensive study of modern Japanese poetry of the first half of the twentieth century. Despite the interest in the West in traditional Japanese poetic forms (*tanka, haiku*), there has been little scholarly study outside of Japan on modern Japanese poetry. Professor Dolin's publications in Russian, which include many anthologies of poetry in translation in addition to several research monographs, have been the major exception.

There are several possible explanations for this dearth of interest among Western scholars in modern Japanese poetry. One suspects that it is in part the result of a preference for the exoticism or "otherness" of Japan's traditional poetic forms. Related to this, perhaps, is the tendency to see the poets of *kindaishi* (modern poetry) and *gendaishi* (contemporary poetry), virtually all of whom were serious students of Western poetry, as imitators, and thus to view their work as essentially derivative. Yet there has been much attention paid to the modern Japanese novel, a genre which is

every bit as much a product of Japan's encounter with West as the modern *shi*. Ultimately, the lack of interest in the subject may be a reflection of the decline of poetry in our own age. While many of us still read novels (even if it is in digital format on some "device"), few of us today tend to read or write poetry.

But as Professor Dolin's portraits of the prewar poets and their circles convincingly show, there was a time in Japan when modern poetry did matter. The number of poets, poetic associations, magazines, and published collections covered in this book is truly astonishing and is a testament both to the author's thorough research and to the seriousness with which Japan's literati and readers viewed the business of poetry in the prewar period. This engagement with poetry and poetics, moreover, did not simply take the form of imitating the latest Western poetic fashions. Japanese poets soon saw themselves not simply as followers of but as participants in a global debate on poetics and the role of poetry in society. By the Taisho period they were also responding to an already established tradition of *kindaishi* and its reigning manifestation, Symbolism. Finally, these dialectical processes were taking place in a period of rapid modernization that was transforming the very social and political context of any poetic production. Japanese poetry could not help but be distinctive for the simple reason that it was written in Japan and addressed a specific Japan reality.

The story that Professor Dolin tells in this book is of the emergence of Modernism in Japanese poetry. On the technical side, this development required the further freeing up of poetic form. This was achieved, in part, by the short-lived Naturalist movement in poetry, which helped push through the use of the colloquial language (*kogo*) and the normalization of free verse (*jiyushi*). Also important for technical advancement was the influence of the various avant-garde schools (Dada, Cubism, Futurism, Surrealism), which gave to poets the license to experiment with sound, image, and even meaning (or denial of meaning!).

However, technical developments alone do not make this poetry "modernist." Modernism is also defined by its response or relationship to the very process of modernization that gives it its name. In the wake of the October Revolution in Russian in 1917

and the founding of the Japanese Communist Party in 1922, many writers became convinced of the need to use their craft to fight for democracy, social justice, and the rights of the working class. This led to the rise of the proletarian literature movement, which for a few years, from the late 1920s to the early 1930s, was a major force in the poetic world. Yet the movement was short-lived. As Japan embarked on its aggressive campaign of expansion, the authorities began to crackdown on dissenters, and poets and other writers who had sided with the proletarians of the world were forced to recant or face an even worse fate.

While some of the proletarian poets may be counted among the modernists, there were others who, precisely because of their attempts to remain aloof from social or political concerns, should perhaps be seen as the true founders of modernist poetry. Arguably the first fully modernist literary text in Japan was the poetry collection *Tsuki ni hoeru* (Howling at the Moon, 1917) by Hagiwara Sakutarō, an intellectual poet who spent much of his career living a comfortable life in a provincial town. Another of the seminal figures of modernist poetics was Nishiwaki Junzaburo, the Western-educated surrealist who was the intellectual leader of the group behind the influential journal *Shi to shiron* (Poetry and Poetics). The journal ran for five years during the very heyday of the proletarian literature movement and offered a very different view of the role of poetry. For the poets of *Shi to shiron*, poetry was an aesthetic pursuit that was both supranational — the poets saw themselves as cosmopolitans — and intensely subjective. Like all Modernisms, in other words, the Japanese version is characterized by an ironic stance towards modern social reality and by the attempt to achieve a position of transcendence in the intellectual-aesthetic realm.

Yet it is one of the cruel ironies of Japanese Modernism that this transcendence was put to the test almost as soon as it was achieved. As the war fever grew, it became increasingly difficult to publish without being drawn into the government's propaganda programs. Some poets chose to withdraw to the country and spend the war years in quiet anonymity, but many more, in some way or another and in some cases quite willingly, offered their services to the state and went on to sing the praises of Japan's brave soldiers and of the empire's grand mission in East Asia. The complete and

utter failure of that mission not only caused much bitter remorse and shame, it also ensured that the poetics of the postwar period would be one that continued the ironic, subjective, and aestheticist approach of prewar Modernism.

Yet as Professor Dolin's portraits of individual poets reveal, there is another side to Japanese modernist poetry that sets it apart from others. While most of the actors were conversant with Western theory and employed many of the same devices as their European and American counterparts, many of them had started as poets of *haiku* or *tanka*, and later in their lives many returned to these genres or gave to their *shi* certain *haiku*-like qualities. Whether they were conscious of it or not, in other words, the Japanese modernists were always involved in a dialogue with the native tradition. Two obvious products of this dialogue were the "short poem" (*tanshi*) and the "prose poem" (*sanbunshi*).

Finally, maturity, reflection or evacuation to the countryside during the war or the early postwar, motivated many poets to reconsider not only native poetic forms but also other aspects of traditional culture. The cases of the Dadaist Takahashi Shinkichi and the great "people's poet" Miyazawa Kenji are exceptional only in that these two almost from the start had one foot firmly planted in the Buddhist worldview. For other poets it took longer, but as Professor Dolin shows, even the most devout modernists were prone later in their careers to discover an appreciation for traditional life and a renewed reverence for nature, while at the same time making peace with the world and coming to an acceptance of the Buddhist notion of *mujo* (impermanence).

I have my doubts as to whether this brief sketch has really done justice to Professor Dolin's important achievement in this work. It has in any case been a great pleasure to have been a part of this project. As the editor of the English translation, I must take responsibility for any awkwardness in the text. I appeal to the reader to be indulgent and not let any imperfections that remain detract from this thorough and stimulating account of the rise of modernist poetry in Japan.

William Lee

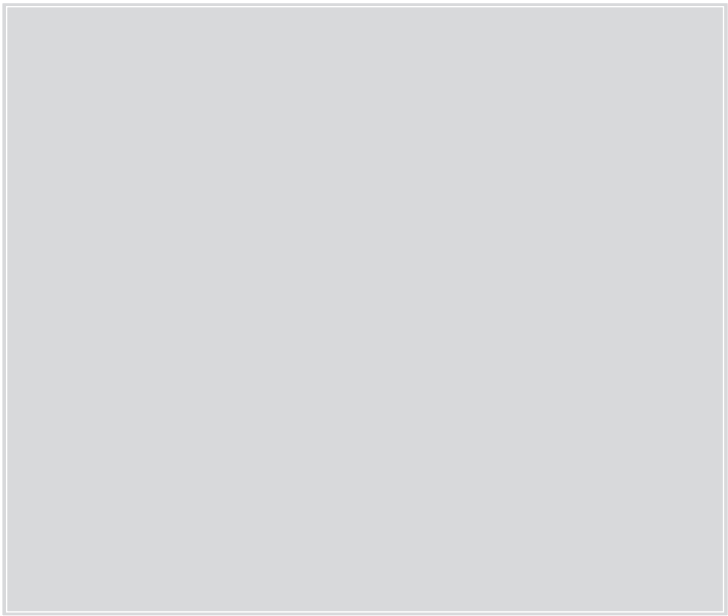
Winnipeg, Canada, December, 2012

THE BRONZE AGE
OF
JAPANESE POETRY

THE SURGE OF MODERN VERSE
IN THE MEIJI—TAISHO—EARLY SHOWA PERIOD



POETRY OF A NEW AGE



The decline of Romanticism and Symbolism marked the beginning of a new period in Japanese poetry, a period dominated by modern verse comparable to that of the Western masters of the similar schools and trends. This was a verse fully capable of meeting the challenge of the twentieth century. The artist's attitude had radically changed and he acquired a new vision of his relations with reality. If the Romantics and Symbolists had preferred the realm of dreams, refined emotions, and vague but potent images in an effort to escape the troubles and sorrows of mundane life, the truly modern poets, whatever schools they belonged to, always maintained a close connection with the everyday events of the world and sharply felt the dramatic character of life, being engaged in it not only personally but socially as well. The confrontation with bourgeois society inevitably gave rise to various art forms and methods, beginning with the shocking works of the Naturalists, but in its best achievements this new poetry was always deeply historical, reflecting urgent political and social issues, as well as the aspirations of the new generation for universal cultural values and metaphysical truth.

In 1918 Guillaume Apollinaire wrote:

The new spirit which is making itself heard strives above all to inherit from the classics a sound good sense, a sure critical spirit, perspectives on the universe and on the soul of man, and the sense of duty which lays bare our feelings and limits or rather contains their manifestations.

It strives further to inherit from the romantics a curiosity which will incite it to explore all the domains suitable for

furnishing literary subject matter which will permit life to be exalted in whatever form it occurs.

To explore truth, to search for it, as much in the ethnic domain, for example, as in that of the imagination — those are the principal characteristics of the new spirit [354, p. 227].

To be sure, some elements of this new mind had already been planted in Japan much earlier, beginning in the period of “spiritual revolution” during the last decade of the nineteenth century, when the stream of western culture flowing into the country caused rapid and irreversible changes in the worldview of writers, poets, and artists of modern orientation, forcing them to break away completely from the medieval canon. The poetry of the Romanticist school that had emerged from foundations in the journal *Bungakukai* (World of Literature) was already essentially innovative and in that sense anti-traditional. The poetry of Japanese Symbolism, riding on the wave of interest in the poetry of Baudelaire, Verlaine, and Rimbaud, and on an infatuation with the exotic and erotic masterpieces of literature and painting of the Edo period, had been a no less enriching experience. In their poems, translations, and critiques and reviews of western aesthetic theory, the Romanticists and Symbolists had taught the Japanese reading public how to appreciate the new art.

A dramatic gap between the ideals of goodness, justice, and beauty, on the one hand, and the ugly reality of bourgeois society on the other, had by the beginning of the twentieth century already manifested itself in Japan. The empire’s accelerated growth in terms of economic, technological, and military power had been accompanied by an increase in exploitation and by vestiges of feudal morals, supported by a nationalist state ideology penetrating all levels of society, where any demonstration of dangerous free-thinking, any sign of dissidence, was punishable by law. The outward appearance of parliamentary democracy did not just fail

to protect the people, the intellectuals in particular, from continuous oppression by the authorities; on the contrary, it only strengthened the punitive functions of the state. This was demonstrated most clearly in the cruel treatment of the group of socialists headed by Kotoku Shusui in 1911, which ended in their trial and execution.

Strikes and “rice revolts” shaking the country revealed the true scale of the social discontent and had an acute impact on the intellectuals. The leftist wing that emerged in poetry put the issues of social justice in the forefront. The poet-humanists of the “Shirakaba” (“White Birch”) group were the first to reflect the growing discontent of the people and the demand for change. Following in their steps, the poets of the democratic populist school of “people’s poetry” (*minshu shi ha*) began speaking out in the interests of the oppressed. The poets of the school, by adapting the ideas of Tolstoy and Russian populism, as well as some concepts of western liberal democracy, in many ways paved the way for the emergence of the proletarian literature movement in the 1920s.

At the same time, leftist anarchist poetic journals declared war on the establishment, persistently preaching the concept of the “transformation of the revolution in art into social revolution.” The emerging Japanese avant-garde, like its analogues in Europe and America, would reflect a deep crisis of morals, a collapse of the philistine system of values. Casting away the traditional standards of beauty and harmony, the avant-garde leaders proclaimed:

Our mind can express neither the turmoil of the saturation of everyday life, nor the stupidity and blindness of modern culture. Is it surprising that at such a moment an immediate feeling is being born! That immediate feeling constitutes our morals, our actions, and our art [30, v. 2, p. 86].

Whereas the democratic trend in the aesthetics of the new age can be considered a positive pole, a negative pole was also necessary for the “spark” of modern art. Such a negative

pole can be located in the destructive tendency of the artistic mind—a tendency towards alienation, which designated a vector in the evolution of Modernism in the twentieth century. A revolution in science followed by the crisis of technological civilization, along with the growth of social contradictions and a gloomy premonition of world cataclysms, all brought to life the hypertrophy of individualism, resulting in the birth of an anarchical culture of avant-garde protest and a boom of aestheticist tendencies in literature and the arts. The self-value of art and its self-sufficient harmony were opposed to the accruing chaos and disharmony of the world around and the horrors of wars and revolutions.

Doubts about social progress, combined with aspirations to overcome the imperfections of the world with the help of artistic ingenuity, resulted in the masterpieces by the founders of western Modernism like Joyce, Proust, Eliot, Pound, Cummings, Valéry, Breton, and Eluard. Their discoveries were delightfully picked up and developed by the Japanese poets of the twentieth century, from the Futurist Kambara Tai and the Dadaist Takahashi Shinkichi, to the Sensualist Hagiwara Sakutarō and the Surrealist Nishiwaki Junzaburo. However, the crisis of the individual mind torn by the disparity between social reality and the ideal, so typical of western literature at the beginning of the twentieth century, was gradually being transformed in Japan into an absolutely different artistic outlook.

The majority of the poets of Japanese modernism, having passed the stage of stormy infatuation with French Cubism, German Expressionism or Russian Futurism, several years later would come back to their native roots, going into the depths of medieval classical literature and Buddhist philosophy. This dual self-identification can be said to define the nature of Japanese Modernism: the artist conceives himself not only the apostle of the avant-garde, challenging the hateful reality, but also the “keeper of the fire,” carefully preserving the legacy of a tradition in which he has included himself and of which he

is destined to be a part. The consciousness of being a part of this centuries-long tradition, of being connected to one’s native soil, distinguishes the Japanese modernists from their western counterparts.

Though the *kindaishi* masterpieces, which have now acquired the status of classics, draw the attention of many literary historians in Japan, in Russia and in the West, new Japanese poetry of the first half of the twentieth century is presented by a rather limited number of translations and even fewer critical studies.

In the Soviet period, only the works by some proletarian poets were issued in the anthology *Japanese poetry*, translated by V. Markova and A. Gluskina [419]. A collection of poems by Oguma Hideo, the leader of proletarian poetry of the later period, was translated by A. Mamonov. An anthology compiled by the author of this book, *From Modern Japanese Poetry* [393], includes, in particular, pre-war poems by Miyoshi Tatsuji, Kusano Shinpei, and Kaneko Mitsuharu. Later *kindaishi* and early *gendaishi*, also translated by the present author, were published in the anthologies *Moon Shade* [445] and *Japanese Poetry of the Silver Age* [420].

In the West at various periods of time small collections of the poetry of Takamura Kotaro, Miyazawa Kenji, Kusano Shinpei (but not by the leaders of avant-garde poetry), and some anthologies of modern poetry introducing a large number of names represented by one or two poems have been published. Occasionally poems by some of the authors discussed here have appeared in the pages of casual collections, but a comprehensive anthology of poetry of the first decades of the twentieth century seems to be yet missing in the West.

An attempt at a methodical review of the works by several leading poets of *kindaishi* in the Taisho-early Showa period has been made by Donald Keene in the chapter on modern poetry in his *Dawn to the West* [319]. However, the work of Western European and American scholars actually begins and ends with this review. Rather detailed analysis of *shintaiishi*,

kindaishi and *gendaishi* poetry from the Meiji—Taisho and early Showa periods is included the present author's *Sketches on Modern Japanese Poetry* [382], *New Japanese Poetry* [380], and the comprehensive *History of New Japanese Poetry* [377].

Works on the poetry of the Meiji (1868–1912), Taisho (1912–1926), and early Showa (1926–1989) periods by Japanese scholars are numerous and informative. First of all, we should mention the publications of poetic texts with commentaries by the leading historians of literature and poetry in such prominent series as: *Complete Works of Modern Japanese Poets (Gendai nihon shijin zenshu, 15 volumes)*, published in the mid-1960s [28]; *Modern Japanese Poetry (Nihon gendaishi taikai, 14 volumes)*, published in the mid-1970s [169]; *Japanese Poetry (Nihon no shika, 31 volumes)*, published from the late 1960s to the early 1970s [176]; *Complete Works by the Japanese Poets (Nihon no shijin zenshu, 34 volumes)*, published at the end of the 1970s [175], *Works by Modern Poets (Gendai no shijin, 12 volumes)*, published in the middle of the 1980s [30]; and also a series of publications on literary criticism and poetic theory. An extensive review of modern poetry is presented in the multi-volume collection of lectures entitled *History of Modern Japanese Poetry (Nihon gendaishi shi)* [168]. Poetry also occupies an important place in the fundamental works on literature written by Kato Shuichi [92], Odagiri Hideo [186], Yoshida Seiichi [269], and Ueda Hiroshi [246].

Among serious monographic studies of the last decades, worthy of mention are the books by Yoshimoto Takaaki on Takamura Kotaro [272], Serizawa Shunsuke on Miyazawa Kenji [214], Tamura Keiji on Hagiwara Sakutarō [236], Hirano Ken on Takahashi Shinkichi [46], and Nakamura Minoru on Nakahara Chuya [153]. However, this list can be easily extended as the stream of Japanese works on new poetry continues to increase every year. Interest in the poetry of the Japanese Silver Age among both experts and readers is certainly no casual affair, and can be compared to the growing interest in the works of writers of the Silver Age in Russia.

In the present study the focus will be on several representative schools and some of the leading figures who paved the way for the poetry of Japanese modernism in the twentieth century.

**МОЖЕТ - В ПОРЯДКЕ БРЕДА -
ПАРУ-ТРОЙКУ СТРОК ДОБАВИТЬ?
ИЛИ КАРТИНКУ ПОСТАВИМ НА
ПОЛОСУ**

THE RISING TIDE

NATURALISM—A REVOLT AGAINST AESTHETICISM

The poetry of Naturalism, or, more precisely, the naturalistic poetry of early twentieth-century Japan, became a significant landmark in the history of modern Japanese literature, putting an end to the monopoly of “pure poetry” and establishing a revolutionary poetics that influenced the Japanese literary world at large. Its impact on the poetry of the time can be appreciated even more if we consider the fact that the “school” represented in fact a miniscule group, one which enjoyed only a very limited period of existence.

Strictly speaking, naturalistic poetry (*shizenshugi shi ha*) has been ranked among the other offsprings of the powerful school of Naturalism mostly due to the influence aroused by the “experimental novel” of Emile Zola, which had given birth in Japan to such masterpieces as *The Family (Ie)* by Shimazaki Toson, *The Futon (Futon)* by Tayama Katai, and *Earth (Tsuchi)* by Nagatsuka Takashi.

In the limited number of poems related to the naturalistic schools we do not find the characteristic features of Naturalism as we know it: there is no intent to emphasize the biological laws of life, to portray the psychological motivation of behavior and human actions, or to depict the influence of everyday life and the social environment on the individual. Instead we find only disagreeable, even revolting, images designed, presumably, to arouse repulsion or fear. In short, we encounter nothing but naked nature suffocating under mountains of verbally articulated filth. It is a kind of poetry which can be regarded as a purulent appendix of Naturalist prose. It is not easy to find

a parallel to this phenomenon in any other national literature, but its influence can be easily traced in the modern Japanese novel and cinema. The strange “physiological naturalism” of modern authors is rooted in the same, from the perspective of the Western reader, perverted, approach to nature that was so typical of the poetry of Kawaji Ryuko, Soma Gyofu, and Hitomi Tomei.

The idea of creating a counterweight to the Symbolist movement, which by the beginning of the twentieth century had already flooded Japanese literature, was gradually gaining momentum. The literary critic Iwano Homei turned to this issue in his articles. Similarly, the prominent scholar of literature Shimamura Hogetsu, in his theoretical essay “Conversations on Literature One Evening” (“Ichi yu shiwa”), tried to predict the outlook of the coming poetic world. He also discussed the topic in the chapter of that work entitled “The Movement for the Unification of the Literary and Colloquial Language and the Poetry of the Future.”

In 1906, the journal *Shinsei* (New Life) published a poem by Kato Kaishun entitled “A Dead Man” (“Shinin”), which can be seen as a model naturalistic verse, were it not for the elaborate *bungo* (classical literary language) grammatical style.

The mission of putting an end to the domination of archaic poetic diction, particularly the petrified classical *bungo* style, had to be carried out by people who had never known any other kind of Japanese poetry because such poetry did not yet exist. This mission was nonetheless accomplished in an incredibly brief period of time.

In 1907 Japanese Naturalism established its position in the world of poetry through the work of two poetic groups, the “Waseda Poetic Society” (“Waseda Shisha”) and the “The Society for Poetic Writing” (“Shishosha”). Their influence was quickly registered in three journals: *Shinsei* (New Voices), *Shincho* (The New Current), and *Bunko* (Serial Editions). Neither group lived beyond the spring of the next year, but their heritage in poetry and literary criticism was considerable.

The Waseda group brought together five young poets, at least two of whom, Soma Gyofu and Miki Rofu, later gained significant recognition. However, Miki Rofu joined the Naturalists for such a short period of time that his membership in this group can hardly be seen as a factor in his future reputation as the leading poet of Symbolism. Noguchi Ujo, Hitomi Tomei, and Kato Kaishun, as well as Fukuda Yusaku, who joined the club late, were less fortunate in terms of recognition.

Kaishun, after having shocked the audience with his “Dead man,” continued experimenting in the same vein, creating a range of disgusting images of the sick and demented and of victims of violence. His poems paint life only in black, piling up one repulsive physiological detail after another. Some of his poems build a bridge to the forthcoming dark fantasies of surrealism:

*An iron hammer crashes the forehead with a crunching sound.
Look, the bull falls to the ground,
Its moaning body convulsing in agony.
Now the corpse shudders for the last time.
A vague glow of an old man's eye.
A frightening smile on the face.
Oh, what is it? In that ditch
That goes around the slaughter house,
Where the blood of the animals flows,
A snow-white parsley flower in bloom.*

“The Parsley Flower” (“Seri no hana”)

Hitomi Tomei also created a colorful gallery of characters, including dead men, cripples, and repulsive lunatics in such poems as “An Old Timer” (“Roji”) and “Crematorium” (“Yakiba”). The latter masterpiece gives a qualified account of the process of burning corpses.

Ujo and Rofu were less persistent in making their poems frightening, and Soma Gyofu tended mostly to promote the concepts of naturalism in his works of literary criticism

The “Society for Poetic Writing,” headed by the minor poets Kawai Suimei and Yokose Yau, launched the small journal *Poet* (*Shijin*). It was in that journal that the most notorious masterpiece of Japanese Naturalism in colloquial language was published by a young and ambitious poet, Kawaji Ryuko (1888–1959). He called his opus “The Garbage Heap” (“*Hakidame*”), and it was indeed the climax of the movement.

The triumph of Ryuko’s “The Garbage Heap,” which has been cited by critics as the starting point of modern poetry in colloquial Japanese (see [2, p. 8; 242, p. 41; 418, p. 143]), was in a certain sense accidental. This can be partly explained by the fact that the verse stood out from other poems published about the same time. But this garbage-biased style never had any imitators. Nor can we find similar samples in Ryuko’s own poetic collections. In fact, soon after he published the poem he switched to composing poetry in the Symbolist vein. Nonetheless, “The Garbage Heap” remains one of the noteworthy historic landmarks of the late Meiji period and a kind of epitaph to the school of Naturalism:

<i>tonari no ie no komegura no urate ni</i>	7-5-4
<i>kusai hakidame ga musareta nioi</i>	3-5-7
<i>hakidame no uchi no wana wana</i>	5-7
<i>iroiro no gomoku no kusai</i>	5-7

*In the backyard behind the rice granary of the house next door
The heavy stench of a stinking, rotten garbage heap.
Odorous vapors of the garbage and all kinds of litter
Buried in the pile, here and there...*

*The buzzing of insects shakes the stale air
With a fierce accord and then dies down again,
Sinking into the depths of the evening darkness.
Oh this pitiful destiny of the mosquitoes,
Coming here day after day, night after night
To rush ferociously to the heap,
Where they swarm and cry,
Lamenting the sad fate of the garbage heap...*

Although the poem in question might be regarded as a kind of self-parody, literary critics of the time tended to take it seriously. The journal *Shijin* appreciated the poem as an example of the “unification of literary and colloquial language” (*gembun itchi*). However, another journal, *Sekai* (World), commented that the piece resembles a poem only in rhythmic form and contains no poetry.

Actually, the poem was only an attempt to introduce a new, unconventional, lexicon into Japanese poetry and to break out of the restrictions of *bungo* grammar. In terms of metrics, the poem is still a typical *kindaishi* based on traditional rhythmic patterns with some slight modifications.

After his first “masterpiece,” Ryuko published some more naturalistic poems in the same vein, including “Fish Bones” (“*Zatsugyo no hone*”) and “Sewer Water in a Ditch” (“*Mizo no mizu*”). Hereafter, his inspiration seems to have waned for several years. But in 1910 Ryuko published a collection of poems entitled *Flowers on the Roadside* (*Robo no hana*) — a book of lyrical poetry in an original style. His rhythmic experiments, going ahead of his time, were close to pure *vers libre*. Maybe for this reason Ryuko’s poems were underestimated by the biased critics; this was, after all, the heyday of Symbolism. When the age of Modernism came ten years later, Ryuko was unable to make the adjustment. Although he made a decent literary career both as a poet and as a scholar of literature and lived for another half century, his place in the history of new Japanese poetry was determined primarily by his manifesto-poem, “The Garbage Heap”.

The publication of the poem by Ryuko puzzled both the readers and the critics, who had to reevaluate existing views on the boundaries of the profane in art and the boundaries of art when it was engaged in such profane matters. The majority was inclined to accept any liberties for the sake of the total emancipation of poetry. In this respect, the reaction was not basically different from the tendencies of European poetry of the period.

The critic Katagami Tengen wrote in his article “Major Doubts Concerning Poetry” (“*Shika no kompongi*”):

The so called poetic response, unlimited in its manifestations, is always contained in a specific form, but it is only the poets of the future who can decide whether the worldview of the bard is conveyed in an irreproachable classic imagery [168, v. 2, p. 54].

The idea of the necessity and usefulness of “mundane” subject matter in poetry was put forth in the article “The Symbolism of Naturalism” (“Shizenshugi hyosho shiron”) by Iwano Homei (see [81, p. 94]). In the discussions that took place in the pages of the poetry journals in 1907-1908, the most active participants, including former poets of Romanticism, pointed an indignant finger at their predecessors and called for the final and resolute removal of the antinomy between art and reality. As Shimamura Hogetsu put it in his article “Modern Poetry” (“Gendai no shi”),

When I read Japanese *shintaiishi* poems today — and I assume that other people have the same experience — I feel first of all that they lack immediacy, subtlety, and clearness of expression. It should be noted that they also almost never touch on the issues of real life [168, v. 2, p. 54].

In his aspiration to destroy completely the canons of poetic diction, Hogetsu fiercely defended the concept of the unity of the literary and spoken language, which had already been successfully applied to the Naturalist novel in Japan. His concept of a coherent usage of the living language in poetry Hogetsu developed in another crucial article, “The Problem of Poetry in Colloquial Language” (“Kogoshi mondai”, 1908), which illustrated the two trends in the world of poetry with examples drawn from Wordsworth and Whitman, giving absolute priority at this historical juncture to the unbounded and versatile verse of Walt Whitman.

The term *kogoshi* (poetry in the colloquial language) was crystallized precisely in this debate. According to the Japanese historian of literature Hitomi Maruyoshi, the concept of *kogoshi* was first introduced in 1907. In addition to *kogo-jiyushi* (free

verse in the vernacular) there was also the *bungo jiyushi* tradition, which became the basis for the development of Symbolism in the Taisho period. It can be found occasionally even among the works of poets who are modern in every other sense, like Miyoshi Tatsuji. Putting aside for the moment theoretical arguments about the nature of *jiyushi*, we may assume that free verse (real *vers libre*), born in the bosom of the Naturalist school, was part of a larger process of change in the poetic language in the direction of *kogoshi*.

While young, aggressive poets were bravely promoting new poetry without bounds, the elder generation (Susukida Kyukin, Kambara Ariake, Yokose Yau) pretended to be indifferent to the new vogue. However, in 1908 Kambara Ariake’s *Ariake Collection* (*Ariake Shu*) appeared and was universally acknowledged as one of the jewels of the Symbolist school. It was immediately subjected to the indiscriminate criticism of the Naturalists. Five dissenters led by Kato Kaishun and Hitomi Tomei attacked Ariake and the whole school of Symbolism in their “Collective Criticism of the *Ariake Collection*” (“Ariake shu gohyo,” 1908). In this article we can witness the attempt to evaluate one specific poetics from the standpoint of another and to replace objective principles of evaluation of literature with subjective ones.

Kato Kaishun wrote:

In general I do not like elaborate harmony in poetry, and, as I have noted already, I don’t care much for the structure of poetic diction [*goku*] in the works of our Symbolists. Consequently, I dislike Symbolism at large. In other words, they apply very unnaturally the concept of “art without art” (“artless art”). Extending this thesis, we may say that everything in this poetry seems unnatural and artificial, with the exception of two or three pieces [168, v. 2, p. 56].

The most grounded criticism was represented in a review by Soma Gyofu entitled “Reading the *Ariake Collection*” (“Ariake Shu wo yomu”). Pointing out that in this new collection

sentiments and intellect simply coexist in the poems, Gyofu criticized the bard of Symbolism for his intellectual rationalism and for his lack of individuality and pathos, which were held to be so vital for the modern age.

Probably he still cannot leave the realm of poetry for entertainment. Instead of singing suffering and grief as such, he seems to enjoy writing about them. In the works of this poet there are neither tormenting sentiments nor grief, nor anxiety and unrest, so typical of our contemporaries. He just pours out his feelings in song. Eventually, however, he proves to be unable to express what he intended to express, yet is content with the engravings of a beautiful ornament on the stone plate of his intellect. Hasn't the time come yet to leave the ramparts of poetry for entertainment? [168, v. 2, p. 51-52]

Asserting the advent of an age of new poetry, Gyofu incorrectly calls Ariake "the last defender of *shintaiishi*." In fact, by this time the classical poetic form of *shintaiishi* was already extinct and all the remaining forms of metric verse had become categorized as "modern poetry" (*kindaishi*).

Hitomi Tomei joined Gyofu in his propaganda efforts, proclaiming that the poetic element should be recognized not only in beauty but also in ugliness, not only in the pleasant, but also in the disgusting, not only in harmonious old-fashioned stanzas, but also in the depths of everyday colloquial speech.

Ariake had to retreat and repent. In his article "The Poetry of the United Literary and Spoken Language" ("Genbun itchi no shika"), he regretfully admits that, perhaps, in poetry, as in prose, an era of naturalism had come and that the rapid advancement of *kogoshi* had undermined the foundations of the refined poetry of *bungo*.

It would be fair to say that the poets of the Japanese *shizenshugi shi ha* did not promote Naturalism in its European version. They set themselves the task of a formal rather than

of an ideological or moral nature, and preferred in general not to touch the social aspects of reality. Judging by the absence in their writings of any mention of the names of Auguste Comte and Hippolyte Taine (already by this time translated into Japanese), the philosophical basis of European Naturalism was alien to them. Zola's novels were probably familiar to them only by hearsay and did not play a special role in shaping the positions of the school.

In their efforts to put an end to the domination of anachronistic "eloquent writing," members of the *shizenshugi shi ha* preached primitive realism with the hope of returning poetry from the heavenly heights to the truth of life, to the harsh realities of human existence. In this respect, their position matches not the movement of Naturalism, which was taken over from Europe by the Japanese novelists of the time, but with the program of a group of poets who called themselves Naturists, formed in France in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Saint-Georges de Bouhélier, Anna de Noailles, and other adherents of Naturism, exploiting the achievements of Hugo (and also to some extent Zola) to oppose the Symbolist school, condemned any kind of artificial imagery and at the same time opposed themselves to Naturalism. Japanese participants of the *shizenshugi shi ha* did something similar. True, they did not repudiate the writers of naturalist novels, but they completely ignored them in their theoretical work. In parentheses, we note that the similarity here was apparently purely typological, since the Japanese poets, not being experts in French literature, could hardly know about the existence of the small Naturist circle in Paris.

Thus, the basic requirements of Japanese Naturalism were the depiction of the phenomena of life by means inspired by life proper and self-expression in the most natural form. Soma Gyofu (1873-1950) formulated the program of the Naturalist school in 1908 in an article under the intriguing title of "The World of Poetry Which Lacks a Self" ("Mizukara kakeru shikai"). This article by Gyofu, which sounded like a literary manifesto, deserves to be quoted:

Emancipating content — this is, actually, the main result we can achieve. But what is to be done with the conventionally acknowledged constant forms of poetry? That's where the root of all doubts and controversies is hidden. Just liberalizing the form will not resolve the problem... Modern novelists who already abandoned thinking exclusively in refined categories put forward a concept of depicting sheer nature, nature as it is. Poets also should abandon the notorious thinking in categories of refined art and try to hear the voice of their ego, so that this natural voice will sound in their songs [168, v. 2, p. 60].

Calling for a breaking away from the forms and imagery of Symbolism, Gyofu is willing to indulge only “poetry that contains new life” (*atarashiki seimei aru shi*). He then proceeds to the “practical” part of his criticism, which is confined for most part to the domain of wishful thinking.

In the service of the slogan “Introduce Naturalism into poetry,” I would like to make some concrete demands: The first issue is the problem of poetic lexicon. Colloquial words (*kogo*) should be used in poetry. We insist on using absolutely the same words that we, modern people, use in daily life. The second demand is to destroy completely the old melodic structure of poetry, its harmony. And the third demand is to break the concordance of the lines and the stanzas in the poem [168, v. 2, p. 61].

This unrestrained apology of *kogo jiyushi* by Gyofu provoked fierce debate in the pages of the poetic journals. Unexpectedly, however, it did not meet strong opposition from the camp of the Symbolists, who were still basking in their success and growing recognition (the heyday of Symbolism came in the years 1909-1912). In his article “My Prospective on the Literary World” (“Bunkai shigi”) published in the pages of the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, one of the country's major newspapers, Iwano Homei gently reprimanded the author of the notorious manifesto for his extremism. Many poets were ready to introduce into their verse some colloquialisms, but not exactly the language

patterns of everyday life. For such poets, in other words, there was the assumption that not all base subjects are worthy of being depicted in poetry.

In response, Gyofu published another daring article, “Suicide, Reduction or Nonsense?” (“Jissatsu ka, tanshuku ka, muimi ka”), in which he scornfully declared that, if there are people who want to compose senseless eloquent stanzas, nobody is going to stop them. However, genuine poetry should follow a different path. In another article, “A Radical Reformation of the Poetic World” (“Shikai no komponteki kakushin”), Gyofu gave a thorough analyses of the conventional poetic system, trying to show the advantages of *kogo jiyushi*. His article concludes with a reiteration of his main point:

Finally I would like to get back again to the necessity of abandoning *shintai*, which is now nothing but history. In other words, I want to go back to my demand to break all the external and internal restrictions that bind our poetic world, and, using the inner drive as the starting point, take the first step on the way to the birth of new poetry — to create its form. [226, v. 1, p. 145].

It was impossible, however, to argue on the theoretical issues without supporting this ambitious program with practical examples of real ingenuity. But to prove one's advantages in this field was much more difficult. Soma Gyofu wrote in fact only one noteworthy poem corresponding to the desired characteristics of the Naturalist school — “A Skinny Dog” (“Yase inu”).

*The scorching sun shines bright,
The yellow dust rising high, the air dry and suffocating.
In front of a shell fish shop stands a skinny, mangy dog.
Its red tongue hanging outside its mouth, it licks its lips
from time to time.*

*What a disgusting sight!
Now it stares at my face, and then it runs after me.*

*I turn left – and it turns left; I turn right – and it turns right.
 I quicken my pace but the bitch trots faster and faster.
 Oh you dirty weird bitch!
 Why are you following me?!
 Get lost, you filthy beast! I've got nothing for you!
 Get lost!*

Formally, the poem met the demands of *kogo jiyushi* diction, being bound neither by the conventional poetic lexicon nor by metric regulations. The poetic expression flows, unrestrained by any traditional rules:

*yakutsuku yo ni hi ga teru
 kiiro no hokori ga tatte kuki ga museru yo ni kawaite iru
 mukimiya no mae ni ke wo nuketa yaseinu ga iru*

Critics appreciated the poem as a probable prototype of the future poetry in colloquial language, but rightly marked the lack of poetic thought against the background of impressive imagery. But this poem, like many others of the kind, was not “thought-oriented.” The author sets himself only one task: to create the foulest mood that can be evoked by close contact with “reality.” Although his poem is much more modest in comparison with Ryuko’s “Garbage Heap,” the common ground of the two poems is beyond any doubt.

The roots of this specific “physiological” naturalism can be traced back to the popular culture of the Edo or Tokugawa period (1600–1867), which combined eloquence and intellectual wit with elements of open obscenity and fecal humor. However in the Edo period, such poetry and painting remained in the shadows, not daring to claim its right as the mainstream of the arts.

No wonder, then, that the attempt by the Naturalists to reform Japanese poetry “from the bottom,” while not a complete failure, was never a real success. Contrary to the assertions of the bold young challengers, their provocative poetry was deeply anti-humanist, and for this reason could never gain the

sympathy and support of other young poets. Their works were short-lived, but their role in the evolution of new poetry should not be underestimated.

Few novice poets managed to overcome the barrier between the poetry of “stars and violets” (as the lyrics of Kyukin and Ariake were called) and the poetry of the “garbage heap.” The 1908 poem by Miki Rofu “The Dark Door” (“Kurai tobira”), written shortly before his final break with Naturalism, was seen by contemporaries as an allegory of this “impasse” in the new poetry:

*The closed dark door.
 In front of it
 A crowd of the blind men weeping in distress.
 A dark room.*

*Now one timidly knocks on the door,
 And then another.
 Now they are all banging on the door
 So hard that it should have been broken down.
 “What a strange door!”
 The blind men shout,
 “The dark door!!”
 “Open the door!” —
*

This poem, which was in a way closer to the imagery of Symbolism than of Naturalism, marked the end of the “Sturm und Drang” age for the Naturalist school in Japan. During the years 1908–1910 the school was in trouble, as can be seen in the crisis of creative identity affecting several leading poets of the group: Kawaji Ryuko temporarily stopped writing poetry; Iwano Homei abandoned poetry, switching to professional literary criticism; and Miki Rofu defected to the camp of the Symbolists. Soma Gyofu kept silence for over two years after his *Collection of Poetry by Gyofu (Gyofu shishu, 1908)* was

ignored by readers. His further poetic experiments were even less successful, although Gyofu kept on lecturing on poetic theory and publishing essays for years before he finally left Tokyo for his native Niigata. There the apostle of Naturalism lived in peace writing research works on Japanese classics and composing some *tanka* till his death in 1950 — a career trajectory not unlike that of many other Japanese modernist poets of the early twentieth century.

In 1909, when a group of poets — Tomei, Kaishun, Yusaku, and others — founded the “Society of Free Verse” (“Jiyushi sha”), Naturalism was no longer on the agenda. In the group’s small poetry magazine, *Shizen to insho* (Nature and Impression), which incidentally existed for less than a year, the principle of “poetry of sentiment” (*kibun shi*) was proclaimed. This kind of poetry, partly influenced by the ferments of Naturalism, embraces a wide range of poets of the emerging modernism in the Taisho period.

Surprising though it may be, this brief offensive of Naturalism in poetry was keenly appreciated and supported by Ishikawa Takuboku, who referred to his own poetry as “The Life School” (“Seikatsu ha”). Takuboku tended to associate Naturalism with realism in the broad sense of the term. Although it might be a contamination of terminology, his vision of Naturalism was very flattering:

Whatever you say, the poetry of the fifth decade of the Meiji period should be written in the words of the fifth decade of the Meiji period. Consequently the problem is not whether certain words are appropriate or not as elements of poetic lexicon, and not whether such language is suitable for poetic techniques or not; the real issue is the new poetic spirit, or, more precisely, the necessity of conveying the spirit of the age. I assume that the Naturalism movement of recent years is the first spirit of the philosophy elaborated by the Japanese during the first forty years of their life in the Meiji period. That is why we should pay great attention to the real application (*jikko*) of the language. There is no other

reason in our being but the implementation of philosophical categories. And the fact that poetry is using the language of its age is also, in my opinion, a part of this process of following reality, and that should be highly appreciated [66, p. 157–158].

Leaving alone Takuboku’s reference to philosophy, we can see that his interest is focused on the domain of poetic lexicon and form at large. The living colloquial language applied to the realm of poetry became the crucial contribution of Japanese Naturalists to the development of modern verse. Having broken the monopoly of “pure poetry” in the shell of metric verse, the poets of *shizenshugi shi ha* paved the way for the impressive achievements of both the poetry of early modernism and the poetry of humanist realism, the two major trends during the following three decades.

THE LITERARY GROUP *SHIRAKABA*

ENLIGHTENMENT FROM THE WEST

If we can date the start of the “Shirakaba” (“White Birch”) group to the founding of the journal of the same name in April 1910, then it is clear that this group managed to maintain its reputation as one of the leading circles in the world of Japanese literature for over fourteen years, breaking many records for longevity in the process. During this period such significant schools as Naturalism, Symbolism, Sensualism, Democratic Poetry, Futurism, and Dadaism would come and go. If we ask ourselves the reason for this amazing survival, the answer will no doubt include the following: political neutrality, humanist drive, and an ego-centric self-sufficiency among the group’s members.

The ideology of the group was primarily formulated by Mushakoji Saneatsu (1885–1976) in a number of rather vague and chaotic theoretical articles and essays. Mushakoji, promoting the concept of the creative elite as the motive force of social evolution, asserted the great advantage of the talented Artist in comparison with ordinary people. He identified art as the only instrument of creation: “For an ordinary man it is a natural necessity to adjust to society, whereas a Talent raises society to his own level” [418, p. 200].

Having inherited from his predecessors, the Romanticists from the *Bungakukai* and *Myojo* groups, a bias for the great names, especially of Western culture, which can be defined now as aesthetic relativism, Mushakoji would switch in his journal from Nietzsche to Dostoevsky, from Tolstoy to Romaine Rolland, from Verhaeren to Maeterlinck. His friends and colleagues would eagerly support each new candidate,

Mushakoji
Saneatsu



武者小路實篤

proclaiming him “the champion of world humanism.” From such roots Mushakoji hoped to grow “a birch grove” around a utopian settlement, which he called a “New Village” (“Atarashiki mura”). His attempt to establish an ideal “enlightened community” in the “New Village” failed, but his literary endeavor lived on and inspired many talented young poets. Many of those who later became known as the pillars of modern Japanese verse started their careers in the pages of the *Shirakaba* journal. Among them there was the best poet of the twentieth century, Takamura Kotaro, who had already paid tribute to Symbolism in his early years.

Takamura Kotaro considered the pretentious aestheticism of the “Pan no kai” (“Pan Society”), with its aura of decadent French Symbolism and a lust for pleasures à la Edo *ukiyo* culture, to be too artificial and imposing.

In such poems as “The Spring of Humankind” (“Jinrui no Izumi”) or “Dancing with Nature” (“Banbutsu to tomo ni odoru”), he speaks of the powerful transformative force granted to man by Nature:

*All of the so-called human contradictions
Contain no contradictions for him.
He pours salt into sugar,*

*Producing water from the flames.
For him all antinomies are dissolved in Oneness,
All differences shine as one light...*

“Dancing with Nature”

Whitman’s motives, quite obvious in this poem, dominated the poetry of Takamura Kotaro during his infatuation with the Shirakaba group. The pathos of the eternal search for truth, combined with an intense introspective analysis, all of it aimed at the awakening of the human soul, permeates his lyrics and nourishes their humanistic content. Takamura’s faith in the power of the human mind and might of the human spirit is rooted in his understanding of the unity of world civilizations, where the culture of one country is able to awake from slumber and show a new path for the culture of another country — meaning primarily Western culture and Japan. His respect for Western culture, increased even more after his “pilgrimage” to America and Europe, where he studied art, gave the Japanese poet hope for the revival of the world, which he eagerly shared with other members of the Shirakaba group.

SENKE MOTOMARO—IN PRAISE
OF THE CREATIVE SPIRIT

Alongside the ingenious Takamura Kotaro, among the poets of the Shirakaba group comes the name of another talented but less famous poet, Senke Motomaro (1888–1948). Senke considered poetry the most expressive form of literature, but he also wrote short stories and dramas. The scope of his interests was determined in large measure by the work of such Western artists as Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Whitman, Van Gogh, and Beethoven. His first and most famous collection of poems by Senke, *I saw it Myself (Jibun wa mita)*, was released only in 1918, but some lyrical poems which were later included in this collection appeared in the pages of *Shirakaba* and other major journals regularly over a period of six years.

Muroo Saisei, in his *Biographies of my Favorite Poets*, points out that indifference to life, typical of some early works by Senke, “disappears in his best poems, which are marked by mental clarity and an unerring ear” [145, p. 201].

Labor and men of labor constitute the main theme of Motomaro’s contemplations in verse. He always remained estranged from the progressive social movements of the time and was reluctant to notice a change in the consciousness of the workers, peasants and intellectuals, which revealed itself so clearly in the infamous “Incident of the Offence to the Throne” (1910–1911), which resulted in the death sentence for a group of socialist activists. Nevertheless he perceived by intuition the pristine creative power hidden in the people. His impressive poem “Sound of the Carts” (“Kuruma no oto”) sounds like a hymn to the peasants, the eternal laborers (especially if we consider the fact that the caravan of peasants’ carts is removing nightsoil from the city to the fields, where it will be used as fertilizer). The sympathy of Senke Motomaro for “les misérables,” his naive admiration for the “harsh but joyful life” of working people, is closely related to the utopian experiments of Mushakoji Saneatsu, who tried to establish his ideal rural community “New village” in 1918. It is hard to believe that the writers and poets of the Shirakaba group could still admire ideas in the vein of Robert Owen after the victory of the socialist October Revolution in Russia, which echoed around the world, and after a mighty wave of strikes in Japan often referred to as “rice riots.”

Meanwhile, in the early lyrical poetry of Senke Motomaro there is no trace of social cataclysms shattering the globe. On the contrary, it is calm and serene, full of goodness and quiet compassion. Even seemingly typical landscape poems like “Wild Geese” (“Kari”) radiate faith in the holiness of ancient patriarchal mores, and in the inviolability of perennial peasant virtues. In two books, *Glow over a Meadow* (*Yaten no hikari*) and *The Joy of New Life* (*Shinsei no yorokobi*), the poet switches to the discourse on the place of Man in the universe and his duty towards all living creatures (“Snake” — “Hebi. These collections

are also abundant in small landscape sketches written in melodious free verse:

*A cloud is floating
like a stretched wing of an angel.
Where will it land?
Going down and down it flies far away...*
“Cloud” (“Kumo”)

Singing the fresh beauty of the spring blossoms and the sad charm of the autumn maples, Senke is seeking inspiration in the simple truth of human sentiments (“A Boy and a Girl” — Shonen to shojo) and in the pleasant realization of the supreme joy of routine everyday life (“The Morning Street” — Asa no machi). The poet sees his ideal in Whitman’s Man-creator, the master of nature living in accordance with the rhythms of nature — wild, robust, amorous, drinking, eating, and giving birth to new generations. In the panegyric to his idol (“Whitman” — Hoittoman), Senke worships the American bard who could contain the whole universe in his heart. However, along with numerous poems that display the mature skill of the author and philosophic depth of his thought, we can find in his collections of the early 1920s the resonance of candid didactic verse in the vein of Shirakaba (“Seriousness” — “Honki,” “Hatred” — “Urami,” etc.). The end of the Shirakaba period was marked for Senke by the drastic expansion of his techniques. Always driven by the aspiration “to sing better,” he tries to apply the best achievements of Western poetry to his own verse. In poems like “A Garden in the Beginning of Autumn” (“Shoshu no niwa”) we find a brilliant example of landscape lyrics. Very often we can see in the context of *vers libre* such typical techniques as emphasis, framing refrains, epiphores, and grammatical and semantic parallelisms. The scope of the tropes is significantly enhanced and new genres are introduced. Probably influenced by the movement for the “short poem” (*tanshi*), so popular in the 1920s, and also inspired by the old and new *haiku* masterpieces, Senke composes some charming miniature verses:

As if playing, the river flows — it is spring.
 “River” (“Kawa”)

Colourful reminiscences’ from his childhood, scenes from village festivals and rites, and descriptions of the lovely nature of his native land are combined in Senke’s poems with contemplations on moral duty, on the destiny of humanity, and on the creativity of the human mind and the vital force of art:

A refined beauty of language and an exquisite elaboration of the poetic diction are needed. So, too, is an abundance of content and lexical forms. One should aspire for the sensual depth of the art, which can be achieved only in this way. And then poetry will thrive on earth until the stars fade in the sky [253, p. 222].

The poet often applies for support to the great shadows of the past, coming both from the heritage of East and West. Thus in his poem “A Mountain” (“Yama”) the discourse on the role and meaning of art in this world is supported by the examples of Hokusai and Cézanne, in “Self-portrait” (“Jigazo”) by the names of Verlaine and other French poets.

However, from the perspective of the readers, elevated poetry of this kind was getting old-fashioned and boring. By the end of the 1920s Senke Motomaro was already regarded by many in the world of modern poetry as a relic. Like some other *kindaishi* poets he switched to prose and literary criticism, and did not compose any noteworthy poetic works during the last two decades of his life.

OZAKI KIHACHI—*SINGING*
THE GLORY OF LABOR

Another poet of the *Shirakaba* group, Ozaki Kihachi (1892–1974), was a typical man of letters of the Silver Age of Japanese culture. He was a tireless student, studying

Ozaki
 Kihachi



尾形龜之助

English, French, and German in order to read Western poetry in the original. He enjoyed Western painting and the music of Mozart, Wagner, and Berlioz. Having read Thoreau’s *Walden*, he retired from his position at a major bank and moved to a quiet village. There he lived for many decades enjoying nature and his favorite books.

Ozaki entered the realm of literature in 1910 when he published in *Shirakaba* the translation of Romaine Rolland’s work “Berlioz.” The young Japanese poet was enchanted with the personality and writings of Rolland. He started correspondence with the prominent French writer and even sent to him his first collection of poems (in Japanese), asking for a review.

Older fellow poets like Takamura Kotaro, Senke Motomaro, and, to some extent, Sato Sonosuke, influenced greatly the formation of Ozaki’s individual manner. One can find in his works many parallels with the poetry of Senke Motomaro. The similarity of subjects chosen as topics is especially striking when it comes to the theme of “joyful labor,” the everyday toil of the workers full of profound spirituality. These romantic descriptions of the agile and vivacious workers are even more distant from the gloomy Japanese reality of the time than the ideal portraits of the virtuous peasants in the poems by Senke.

*I am praising them,
 Those young carpenters and apprentices
 Who are working tonight.
 I am singing glory to their labor, their perseverance!..
 “Night in the Suburb” (“Yofuke kogai nite”)*

Actually, Ozaki was continuing—after a delay of two decades—the tradition, established in the late nineteenth century by Shimazaki Toson in his “Songs of Labor” (“Rodo zatsuei”) and developed later by the poets of the democratic populist school (*minshu shi ha*). Still, whereas the latter school cultivated a kind of idealistic realism, becoming the foundation of the emerging proletarian literature, the poets of *Shirakaba*, raised on the principles of abstract humanism, complied with composing romantic odes to labor with a touch of Whitman’s “cosmic optimism.”

As Yamamuro Sei, an expert on Ozaki’s works, notes, the emancipation of the poets from the innate short-sighted “islander’s conscience” (*shimaguni konjo*), a traditional Asian mentality, marked the shift in *kindaishi* poetry to global literary standards and values. That was certainly the case with Ozaki, who would measure his verse by the European conventions. A few poems by Ozaki, including the one quoted above, were translated and published in the journal *Europe*, which was founded in 1923 by Romaine Rolland.

Many poems from Ozaki’s collection *Under the High Clouds* (*Kosoun no moto*, 1924), addressed “to the unknown friends in the city and in the countryside,” are characterized by idealistic rhetoric and abstract imagery full of common patterns and symbols like light and darkness, good and evil, humanism and oppression, and democracy and tyranny. It was probably welcomed by a substantial part of the readership who were already too overwhelmed with the sophisticated eloquence of the long-lived Symbolism and by the arrogant experiments of the emerging avant-garde. The majority of the poems glorify again the romantic beauty of the hard but joyful toil exercised by the rice-planters, fishermen, masons, and dock workers (see

in *Under the High Clouds*; “Ships in the Mouth of the River” — Kawaguchi no senchaku). Alongside these social declarations one may find some elaborate lyrical sketches, conveying, for instance, the author’s impressions of Bach’s music (“Music” — “Ongaku”) or giving a panoramic perspective of a mountain valley decorated with autumn foliage (“The Autumn Wind” — “Akikaze”).

The third collection by Ozaki, *The Lights in the Field* (*Koya no hi*), according to the assertion of the author, was just a reflection of the harmony of nature and the soul of the poet in the happy period during his honeymoon. The landscapes, carefully described by Ozaki, bear an obvious imprint of Hermann Hesse’s poetics. Hesse’s poems became the favorite reading of the Japanese poet in his voluntary hermit’s retreat. In a transparent metaphor, he addresses his idol:

*I am drinking from your source,
 Oh revitalizing spring, dashing from a dark crevice...
 “A Spring in the Evening” (“Yube no izumi”)*

Maybe this infatuation with Hesse was motivated by the artistic credo of the Swiss writer, who always aspired for self-perfection by means of introspection. Ozaki, overwhelmed with the imposing culture of the bourgeois world and reluctant to accept the modernist rules of the game, needed it for self-purification. Staying away from the formalist quest of modern poetry and lamenting the forced demise of proletarian literature, Ozaki tried to cultivate internal life and abandon mundane vanity. He kept reading the works by Hesse, which explained the bipolar principle of life and the harmony of nature and the human spirit. He also studied R. M. Rilke’s poetics promoting universal love and humanism, as well as the perception of the world by means of symbolic philosophical imagery.

*In my embrace the forest is appeased.
 I am myself its trembling and its rustle...
 Rilke “Island”*

One can find, for example, the direct influence of the “poetics of things” in Senke’s poem “Autumn” (“Aki”), prompted by Rilke’s “A Day in Autumn.”

During the war years, Ozaki ignored the military hysteria of the big cities, having gained a reputation as “a poet of the mountains.” Indeed, many lovely poetic sketches of the mountain landscapes in the vein of realistic humanist art are included in his collection *Highlands* (*Kogen shi shu*, 1942). The theme of war, which Ozaki does not avoid, is also treated in his verse quite differently from the “war poems” (*sensu shi*) vogue of the time. Revealing the tragic essence of the enormous carnage, he calls on his compatriots “to live like humans, beautifully, in justice” (“The New Battlefield” — “Shinsenjo”).

In the foreword to his debut collection, Ozaki Kihachi articulated his goals as a poet:

The reason for my human existence is singing while living a more and more proactive, a more and more meaningful life; to live composing more and more bright, more and more perfect songs. I need nothing more but the implementation of this simple desire [54, p. 384].

SATO SONOSUKE —
A VOICE FOR JUSTICE

In the constellation of the poets that constituted the core of humanist literature in the Taisho period, Sato Sonosuke presents a most distinctive individuality, not only due to his sparkling talent and adventurous nature, but also due to his incredible prolificacy, which can perhaps be compared only to the abundant writings of Miyazawa Kenji. To borrow the definition of Ito Shinkichi, “his body and soul would also radiate bright light, like the city illumination during a festival” [78, p. 410].

The first collection of *The Helmet of Justice* (“*Seigi no kabuto*”) by Sato Sonosuke, permeated with the humanist dreams of the

Shirakaba group under various romantic spices, saw light in 1916. In the lengthy poems constructed on the basis of metric stanzas, the author gives a vague outline of the realm of Justice on earth, which will be a reward to all those who suffer and perish in the struggle against evil in the world. A messiah wearing the Helmet of Justice on his head brings deliverance to oppressed mankind.

The impact of Christian thought in the verse by Sato Sonosuke is even more evident than in the works of Senke Motomaro, Ozaki Kihachi, and the poets of the democratic populist school. Imagery painting apocalyptic calamities and the Final Judgment are typical of his early poetry. It is interesting that Sato, unlike his fellow-poets from *Shirakaba*, does not pursue the vision of universal harmony, peace and consensus. On the contrary, he speaks of the purifying Apocalypse, of the mighty storm that will sweep away all the filthy desires and base passions of humanity, bringing a paradise on earth to those “raptured.”

In his city sketches, Sato Sonosuke watches the street scenes from a distance — like the characters of Claude Monet’s “Boulevard des Capucines.” His rural poems are more animated, full of fresh feeling and elaborate imagery.

Like Senke Motomaro and Ozaki Kihachi, Sato often turns to the theme of Labor, seeking in it a source of optimistic vitality. He depicts with colourful strokes a laundry woman who washes linen in the river, her children running and playing around, then eating and waiting for their father to come back from work (“A Laundry Woman” — *Sentakujō*). All these idyllic resemble belated remakes of Wordsworth’s poems on peasant life (“Michael,” “We are Seven”). Over time, from the idealist quest for liberty and democracy, so typical of his early works, Sato shifts to the position of “non-interference,” following the principle promoted by Mushakoji Saneatsu: everyone is good in his appropriate place. In his perspective, the man of Labor sowing and reaping his crop is feeling perfectly well in his place. He did not want to hear about “the rice revolts” of the impoverished workers and peasants that had shaken the country in 1918.

Defining the correlation between poetry and reality, Sato emphasizes the importance of creativity in life:

I consider it necessary that human life be filled with happiness. However, even if there is no happiness, for us, who comply with this humble existence, only that kind of existence can be called life which is permeated with the pathos of animosity, with inspiration, and with glorification of this pathos. Art, with the blessing of Providence, can display the spirit of elevated animosity even in the abyss of the hardest illness, grief, despair, and death [253, p. 338].

Sato's poetry of the early 1920s bears the imprint of the influence of Emile Verhaeren, whose books revealed so distinctly the antithesis of "The giant Squid-city against the purifying and healing farmers' countryside." In many of Sato's poems one can find references and even indirect quotations from the *Les Flamandes (Poems of Flanders)*, *Les flambeaux noirs (Black Torches)*, *Les rythmes souverains (The Sovereign Rhythms)*, and other books by Verhaeren. For example, his "A girl from the Crossing" ("Tsuji shikako ni") is an adaptation of Verhaeren's "A Woman in Black." A number of impressive poems by Sato give a sharp criticism of merciless urban life ("The City Dwellers" — "Tokai jinshu," "The Man who Hanged Himself" — "Kubitsuri," etc.)

Following the suit of Verhaeren, the Japanese poet depicts the scenes of "crazy" urban life in picturesque elaborate metaphors, tossing together real and fantastic images, giving a panoramic picture of a horrific melting pot of tormented human bodies and souls. However, among numerous poems of horror and despair, one can find also simple and truthful stories showing the life of workers in all their repulsive misery ("At the Matches Factory" — Matchi seizo kaisha nite). Sympathizing with the oppressed poor who "get fire with their own hands," the poet regards them as the captives of the dark forces of evil, the victims of terrible injustice. Still, sticking to his position of non-engagement, Sato would never even mention such options as open protest, let alone speak of revolt. Although a contemporary to the writers of the proletarian literature

movement, Sato remains uninterested in such things as class conscience and social dissidence. In principle he does not accept any kind of concrete social action, staying quite content with abstract humanist declarations.

In the poetry of Sato Sonosuke, the unpretentious life of the farmers is presented as an ideal alternative to the "monster city" of the evolving industrial civilization. Unlike Verhaeren, who would depict in his works rather gloomy pictures of the peasant's everyday existence (in the vein of the renowned masterpiece by Van Gogh "The Potato Eaters"), the Japanese poet creates mostly idyllic images of the "good peasants":

*He is like a bird that cannot take off from the ground,
Struggling with the force of gravity,
Granted with the source of life by the heavens,
Washing his crimson hands in the blue sky...*

"A Peasant" ("Hyakusho")

Like many other poets of the time, after having passed the period of worshipping all things Western, a few years later Sato Sonosuke returned to his "turf," seeking sources of inspiration in indigenous rites and rituals, dances and songs, folklore and classical literature.

It should be noted that poetry singing the beauties of the native land (in the narrow sense of the word, i.e., the poet's native village or town — *furusato*) has been always a characteristic feature of traditional Japanese lyricism. "Songs of the native land," rooted in the medieval *tanka* anthologies, constituted a special topic widely explored by the poets of Japanese Romanticism. We can easily remember such masterpieces as "Freedom Lives in the Mountains and Woods" by Kunikida Doppo, "A Song on a Journey to Chikuma River" by Shimazaki Tosen, and "Oh, If I could be in the Land of Yamato now!" by Susukida Kyukin.

In the poetry of the Taisho period this trend is even more distinct. Senke Motomaro, Ozaki Kihachi, and Fukushi Kojiro, in their quest for national identity, "the soul of Japan," go into

the depths of life of the ordinary people. In such poems as “My Home” (“Watakushi no ie”), “The Midwifery” (“Samba”), “Three Festivals” (“Mitsu no matsuri”) the author does not comply with rhetoric praises to the Peasant but tries instead to conceive the eternal wisdom of the peasant’s labor, his simple and at the mean time complex philosophy of life. No doubt some radical changes in his worldview were influenced by Sato’s drift from Christianity back to Buddhism and his reassessment of Christian ethics:

For the adherents of Christ everything ends with paradise, from which there is no return, but in the East this point is regarded as just the beginning of the journey awaiting the deceased person... [253, p. 356]

The later poems by Sato Sonosuke were more and more didactic, more and more out of date. He remains in the pages of the anthologies as a typical poet of the Taisho period, representing the idealistic aspirations and humanist endeavour of his age.

FUKUSHI KOJIRO—
A TORCH IN THE DARKNESS

Fukushi Kojiro, another renowned poet of the *Shirakaba* group, was the first to express in colloquial language elevated thoughts and civic values, which formerly had been conveyed exclusively in the classic *bungo* forms. However, the idealistic didacticism of his poems predestined their short life span and indicates a major drawback that had a heavy impact both on the poetry of liberal-minded intellectuals and on the bards of the proletarian literature movement. Such rhetoric could be impressive only in the beginning, when it was still novel and fresh. Rather soon it would inevitably become too imposing — and boring. Singing glory to Labor and to all those “constructors of the world,” the poet would often prefer abstract slogans to concrete imagery. Fukushi mostly remains the captive

of the humanist ideals introduced by the philosophers of ages long bygone, and depicts Japanese workers and peasants of the twentieth century in the manner of the European utopian socialists of the nineteenth century.

*Only you are marked
by this beautiful destiny –
to build a city of great music, of great Sound.
That’s what I am dreaming about,
And I presume, tens of thousands of people dream of it too...
“To the Workers” (“Rodosha ni atau”),*

Fukushi applies to all the “men of labor” his favourite metaphor “the child of the sun” or “the sun-child” (*taiyo no ko*), addressing to them his poetry. His picture of the world, revealed by these poetic works, is rather simple, not to say primitive. There are the people — good diligent men who do not know their way and stay in darkness. There is the bright future, a utopian realm of justice, paradise on earth. There is also the poet, who allegedly knows the way to the bright future and is willing to guide the people there. From his poetry one cannot understand what dark forces oppress the poor people, what forces might drive them to the bright future, and what the future “realm of the sun” looks like.

The extreme idealism of the collection can be easily traced in the imagery and poetic techniques. The poems are rife with emphatic patterns: exclamations, condemnations, slogans. Very often grammatical parallelisms, anaphora, and epiphora are used to reinforce rhythmic structure. As a rule, the composition of the poems is determined by the antithesis “light — darkness,” “joy — grief,” “strength — weakness,” “victory — defeat,” etc. Numerous hyperboles refer to the eruption of a volcano, to a mighty hurricane, to thunder and lightning. The background landscape — if any — is limited to the conventional mentioning of a storm.

Albeit permeated with decorative and unconvincing rhetoric, Fukushi’s collection *The Sun Child* in a way became

a revelation for many men of letters who had not found their way in the tumultuous high seas of Taisho culture. In a country where Symbolists kept on basking in their sweet dreams, Naturalists kept on pouring on the readers buckets of waste, *tanka* and *haiku* poets kept on singing the beauty of the flowers and butterflies, there suddenly sounded the loud voice of a bard with odes to the Human and to the Sun.

In the poem called “A Song Addressed to the Japanese Literati” (“Nihon bungakusha ni ataru uta”), Fukushi took the liberty of publishing his credo:

*I reject your writings
Because you like groundless darkness...*

*I will bring to light everything hidden in the darkness.
I am the child of the sun who can bring the concealed element
to light,*

*Make it beautiful and strong.
I have to break away from you.
Having destroyed the house made of sand,
I'll build another house of stone.
I don't know yet what kind of house it will be
But for sure it will be located far from you.*

In the foreword to the third and the last edition of his collection *Perspective* (Tembo, 1920), Fukushi summarizes his achievements:

If we divide all my previous works into two periods, the first one should be characterized by the lyricism of the book *The Sun Child*, marked by emotional abundance, and the second by the realism of the *Uneasy Happiness*, a collection full of fierce passion. And now that I have conceived the classical melodic order, I experienced a change for the third time and entered the third stage of creative activity that can be called “the classicist period” [254, p. 400].

Like many of his contemporaries who witnessed the fast modernization, industrialization, and militarization of

the country, Fukushi tends to see in the City a symbol of the new vicious world — the world of the triumphant Mammon. However, the bonds connecting the poet to that City are too strong to seek an escape in virgin nature — as the Romanticists would do. That is why Fukushi does not reject industrial civilization, although he laments its emerging ugly image.

The great Kanto earthquake of 1923 that devastated Tokyo made Fukushi leave the capital for three years and go back to his native Hirosaki in the North-Eastern part of Honshu. There he directed his efforts to the collecting of folk songs, tales, ballads, and legends. This period in general was marked by the dramatic growth of interest in the history and ethnography of the local communities among Japanese intellectuals of the time, which was transformed soon into a national movement. The most renowned leaders of the movement were two outstanding scholars — Yanagita Kunio and Origuchi Shinobu. The latter one also gained wide recognition in the world of *tanka* poetry under the pen name Shaku Choku. Highly appreciating the goals and major concepts of the “local culture revival doctrine” (*chihoshugi*), Fukushi even published “A Local Culture Revival Action Manifesto” (“Chihoshugi no kodo sengensho”) and tried to compose poetry in his native Tohoku dialect. In his mature works one can find an amazing love of the “small native land,” which nobody would have expected from the cosmopolitan author of *The Sun Child* and other emancipated collections. It was in fact a drastic shift of values in favour of indigenous Japanese culture.

Over time Fukushi focused his interests in the field of historical, archaeological, and ethnographic research. This infatuation gave him a relative security during the tumultuous years of the so-called period of darkness, when the militarist censorship tried to eradicate any signs of liberal thought and pro-western ideology among the literati. The authorities were quite content with his studies of the glorious Japanese cultural heritage. At least Fukushi was spared from the “civil duty” of composing odes to the Imperial army and navy. Before and during the war he travelled widely throughout Japan making

records of the customs and mores of the most remote peasant communities. In 1942 he published his voluminous research volume called *Contemplations on the Original Japan (Gen Nippon ko)*, which was welcomed by his fellow scholars.

In the late 1930s, Hagiwara Sakutarō wrote the following about Fukushi: “In many of his poems I discovered a strange mysterious element. It is hidden somewhere deep under the outer brilliance, and you cannot touch it with your hands. A strange, gloomy, painful, enigmatic touch — in the vein of the Russians...” [253, p. 402].

However, essentially, all the later writings of Fukushi Kojiro bear a distinct imprint of the humanist thought he cultivated with such zeal in the early *Shirakaba* years.

THE DEMOCRATIC POPULIST SCHOOL

THOUGHTS OF THE PEOPLE

Whereas the *Shirakaba* poets promoted the abstract humanist ideas of Western thinkers and writers in the shell of vague and pompous larger-than-life imagery, there was in the Taisho era a moderate, more well-balanced alternative to that elevated kind of verse. It was more concrete, close to the earth, and mass-oriented — qualities that could provide to that new lyricism a wide audience across class divisions. Many prominent poets who felt their responsibility for the country and nation in the period of growing social unrest, turned to a civic poetry marked by a socialist world outlook. Naturally, the main reason for the emergence of the democratic populist school of “people’s poetry” (*minshu shi ha*) was the deepening of the class contradictions in Japan as a result of rapid modernization, and the impact of Western socialist theories, which were getting more and more recognition both among the intellectuals and among the workers. Still, the poetry of the democratic populists was nothing like a revolutionary manifesto yet. On the contrary, it was mostly an attempt to find a way to class reconciliation, peace, and social harmony.

Ishikawa Takuboku, the great *tanka* poet and an author of numerous controversial *kindaishi*, and who considered his work to represent the “Life School” (“Seikatsu ha”), was the direct forerunner of the democratic populist school in the late Meiji period. He died young, but if he had been blessed with several more years of life, the destiny of realistic poetry in Japan might have been different. However, his achievements are enough to consider him the pioneer of the class-conscious democratic trend in the poetic world.

Along with *tanka*, which brought him the reputation of a National poet, Takuboku kept on writing poetry in new forms, which were more appropriate for the civic lyricism he had nourished. He debuted with the *shintaiishi* collection *Aspiration* (*Akogare*, 1905). It was mostly raw material, a bleak imitation of the Romanticist opuses by Kyukin and Ariake. But among the early poems by Takuboku there were some pearls, too — like his famous pacifist poem in memory of the Russian admiral Makarov, who perished at the beginning of the Russo-Japanese war when his flagship exploded on a mine. Although Takuboku himself later criticized his ode to Makarov, it was definitely a very special example of civic lyricism standing apart from the long series of nationalist militant propaganda poems of the time.

The socialist consciousness of Takuboku reaches its climax in the sequence of poems called “After the Endless Disputes” (“Hateshinaki giron no ato”) from his last collection, *Whistle and a Pipe* (*Yobiko to kuchibue*, 1911). In this sequence the poet evokes the shadows of the Russian populists of the nineteenth century, who had sacrificed their careers and lives for the emancipation of the oppressed peasants.

*We have gatherings full of heated arguments.
And our eyes glare not less
Than the eyes of Russian youngsters half a century ago!
We keep on endlessly disputing “What is to be done?”
But not one of us would bang with a fist on the table
And exclaim: “Go to the people!”*

*We all know what we want.
We all know what the people want.
We all know what is to be done –
Oh, much better than they could know!
And still not one of us would bang with a fist on the table
And exclaim: “Go to the people!”*

*Only the young congregate here.
It is youth that always starts building something new.
The old world will perish soon and we shall win!*

*The fierce arguments, the glaring eyes –
But not one of us would bang with a fist on the table
And exclaim: “Go to the people!”*

.....

“After the Endless Disputes”

Takuboku died in 1912 of tuberculosis, having seen neither the victory of the socialist October Revolution in his beloved Russia, nor the mighty wave of the proletarian literature movement in Japan. Of course, he could never imagine that the Russian revolution would turn into an Apocalyptic calamity for a large part of the world.

The death of Takuboku was followed by the strengthening of the nationalist forces in Japan that tried to launch a militant campaign in literature and culture. In search of a quiet haven many poets preferred to escape from the aggravating political reaction into the enchanted realm of Symbolism. Other poets, who would not comply with the gloomy reality, decided “to take arms against the sea of troubles and by opposing end them.” They formed a democracy-oriented group, which later became known as the “democratic populist school” (*minshu shi ha*). Momota Soji, Shiratori Shogo, Fukuda Masao, Kato Ichio, and Tomita Saika put forth the slogan “Poetry — to the people!” Their works reflected a quest for the new socialist values and for radical democratic reforms.

The Russian revolutions of 1917 — first the bourgeois February Revolution and then the October Socialist Revolution — made a great impact on the progress of democratic trends in Japanese society. All the modernist groups — the Anarchists, the Futurists, the Dadaists — which had proclaimed a Revolution in the Arts, would give their support to the Russians and even stepped in with a new slogan: “The transformation of the revolution in Art into social revolution!” The concepts of so-called “scientific socialism” (mostly later interpretations of Marxism) were especially influential. However, democratic populists shared neither the aesthetic concepts of the modernists nor their extreme socialist political views. They were inspired

mostly by the humanist Western philosophy recently promoted on a large scale by the *Shirakaba* journal. The teachings of Tolstoy, conceived as an alternative to the three major tendencies in the philosophy of the time in Japan — bourgeois pragmatism, classical idealism, and Marxism in various interpretations — became a source of eternal truth for the democratic populists.

The concept of transforming the world into the realm of Goodness and Justice by the creative force of Art, coined by the *Shirakaba* authors, also had a great appeal to the democratic populists. That concept also defined the list of their “icons,” the literary beacons picked up from the various literatures. The credo of the school was articulated in the slogan “Art belongs to people” (perhaps coincidentally, it was also one of Lenin’s “sacred formulas”). Tomita Saika wrote in his article “Poetry as a Popular Art” (“Minshu geijutsu toshite no shika”, 1917):

I would like to emphasize once more that poetry along with the so-called fine arts in this new age and in this new world should belong to the people: it is vital that the people seize their rights as the owners of art [239, p. 163].

The number of the Western poets who were chosen as the beacons by the Japanese populists is quite limited, and their real roles in the history of world literature vary greatly. Here we can mention the names of the American bard Walt Whitman and the famous Belgian poet Emile Verhaeren. Ironically, there were on the list two other democratic poets, Edward Carpenter and Horace Traubel, who were worshipped even more. Both are now completely shrouded in oblivion and are almost unknown in the West.

The poets of the Japanese Naturalist school can be regarded as the predecessors of the democratic populists in terms of diction, as they were the first to introduce the colloquial language in poetry and to break the monopoly of eloquent Symbolist lyricism. Their concept of individual and social emancipation through the means of language, rhythm, and imagery was acknowledged both by the apostles of the avant-garde and by the enthusiasts of realistic populist verse.

We can hardly agree with the assertion of the Japanese critic Kudo Nobuhiro who stated that the democratic populist poetry movement emerged “spontaneously and unconsciously” (see [168, v. 3, p. 190]). It is quite obvious that *minshu shi ha* shaped up as a group with a certain ideological program under certain specific circumstances of literary and social life in Japan. Its democratic credo was revealed quite explicitly in the course of polemics on the pages of the leading literary journals. The material for the disputes was provided by the recent collections of the *Shirakaba* poets and those of the democratic populists: *The Sun Child (Taiyo no ko, 1914)* by Fukushi Kojiro, *One of this World (Sekai no hitori, 1914)* by Shiratori Shogo, *The First Man (Saisho no hitori, 1915)* and *One and All (Hitori to zentai, 1916)* by Momota Soji, *The Words of the Peasants (Nomin no kotoba, 1916)* by Fukuda Masao, and *The Call of the Earth, the Whisper of the Earth (Tsuchi no sakebi, tsuchi no sasayaki, 1917)* by Kato Ichio.

The authors unanimously agreed on the necessity of democratization, which presumes bringing poetry to the service of the working people. The manifesto-article by Tomita Saika, “Poetry as a Popular Art,” explained the social function of *minshu shi ha*: “I am sure that the movement for free verse and for poetry in colloquial language are components of the quest for a poetics and imagery appropriate for the time and closely related to the popular movements of our age” [239, p. 167].

The leaders of the school gave various definitions to the notion of “populism” or “democratic populism” and the role of a populist art: some followed the legacy of Tolstoy, some preferred the way of Russian populists of the nineteenth century, and some the humanism of Romain Rolland. There were several more trends in which one can trace three major doctrines. Homma Hisao put forth his theory of the “common people” (*heimin ron*) led by the working class. Osugi Sakae suggested his theory of the “creative ordinary working man” (*sozoteki heimin rodosha*). Kato Ichio promoted the idealistic “popular idea” (*minshu ide*) in the arts and literature.

Above all, the democratic poets insisted on their difference from “the poets of the past,” including the authors of the

Symbolist school: “They would sing only with their lips, and we are singing with our guts, with all our nature” [221, p. 94].

Shiratori Shogo expands this thought: “We put naked Individuality into the magnetic will of the Whole, and therefore the Whole lives in the Individual. And then somewhere in the depths an inner knowledge emerges, the name of which is Conception” [221, p. 93].

Shiratori outlines three substantial characteristic features of the new poetry: deep and passionate interest in the present and a drive to the future; a new attitude to the surrounding world — an ability to point out people, events, and facts that would mean nothing for the poets of the past; and freedom from any language restrictions and the need for imagery to be totally accessible for ordinary readers.

Fukuda Masao makes another crucial remark: “Close correlation with real life is the pillar of our democratic poetry — the ability to grasp individuality in men and then render everything in a generalization” [221, p. 93].

The concepts of humanism and of the civic duty of the poet give a clue to the doctrine of Japanese democratic populism. Still, the paragraphs of the manifestos often look more convincing than the poetic works produced. Such notions as “populism,” “democracy,” and “humanism” are merged and contaminated in their writings into a vague universal ideal, which “reveals in a single grass leaf the life of the world, the hidden treasures of the world soul” [221, p. 94]. The acute realization of the Artist’s responsibility and obligations to mankind makes the poet sing every particle of this life, “gaining from the earth, from the trees, from the work of the spirit of universal love, which is the main thing in poetry...” [221, p. 94]

The democratic poetry movement reached its peak in 1918, having occupied for a few months the dominant position in Japanese poetry. Quite a few poets who shared basic views on democracy and peace joined *minshu shi ha*. The number of collections published by that time are evidence of the fact that the mainstream of Taisho poetry was ready to take the route designated by the democratic populists in their collective

brochure *The New Method of Composing Poetry* (*Atarasii shi no tsukurikata*). Among the best books of the kind published by that time one should mention *I Saw it Myself* (*Jibun wa mita*) by Senke Motomaro, *The Wind Rustled in the Grass and the Trees* (*Kaze ga kusaki ni sasayaita*) by Yamamura Bocho, *On Love* (*Ai ni tsuite*) by Muroo Saisei, *The Road Ahead* (*Dotei*) by Takamura Kotaro, all of which are marked by a profound understanding of nature and a broad humanist world outlook.

The foundation of the influential magazine *People* (*Minshu*) in 1918 contributed to the consolidation of the democratic forces in literature. Poet Fukuda Masao became its editor-in-chief, being in the meantime the head of the “Society for Poetic Disputes” (“*Shiwa kai*”), which emerged at approximately the same time. The first issue of the magazine featured a challenging manifesto by Fukuda Masao on its first page:

We are given life by our native land (*kyodo*). But also we are given life by this great land (*taichi*). We are flesh of the flesh of the people. We are citizens of the world. We are citizens of Japan. We are what we are. We create freely. Criticize freely. We truly fight. We are young people unknown to the world yet. And we are rising in the name of the whole great world, in the name of Japan, in the name of art. Here comes the sound of the bell. We are those who ring the bell at dawn, standing among the sakura trees in bloom! [168, v. 2, p. 206]

The last phrase evokes an allusion to the famous classic Kabuki play *Shibaraku* (Just a moment) and many related poetic lines, where the image symbolizes an inevitable disturbance and confusion in the process of change — as the tolling bell makes the beautiful delicate cherry flowers fall to the ground.

On the other hand, the popular magazine *Bell* (*Kolokol*) issued by the émigré democratic writer Alexander Herzen in the late nineteenth century, which had been for many years the voice of the liberal wing in Russia, would inevitably come to the mind of a Russian scholar of literature. However, the name of Herzen was most likely not known to the Japanese democratic populist school, and the parallel might be just a coincidence.

The title page of the magazine also included a quotation from Traubel:

*People are the masters of life!
People, people!*

Defining the notion of “the popular essence of literature” remained the major problem for the *minshu shi ha* poets, and their discussions were systematically published in the magazine. The majority of the populist poets, breaking away from the socialists, anarchists and right wing radicals, preached the utopian ideals of global liberty, equality, and fraternity. They resolutely denied any forms of class struggle, preferring instead pathetic odes and hymns to the honest, diligent working people of the earth.

In an age of political struggle the democratic populist poets deliberately tried to avoid any political bias, staying away from the parties and social movements. As Kudo Nobuhiro points out, “speaking of the struggle, they would not specify against whom they fight, speaking of oppression they would not indicate who the oppressor was” [114, p. 211]. Both in their articles and in their poems the images of the “adversaries” are very vague, blurred by passionate rhetoric. In the age of fierce ideological debates, they never cared about articulating any ideological program. Only the Symbolists were identified by the democratic populists as a real and imminent danger, and they continued to pour on the Symbolists currents of sharp criticism for their blatant aestheticism, formalism, and total disrespect for the needs of the ordinary people.

Rejecting the concepts of class struggle and of the revolutionary transformation of society, Japanese Populists put forward the doctrine of a national entity on the platform of democracy and humanism. Not only the common people but also the aristocratic elite were granted the right to be called “people.” Fukuda Masao would insist that a lonely old aristocrat and an old peasant both belong to the same “people.”

MOMOTA SOJI—A ROAD
ACROSS THE SWAMP

Momota Soji (1893–1955) was probably the most original poet of the democratic populist school and one who left a visible trace in modern Japanese literature. His debut collection, *The First Man* (*Saisho no hitori*, 1915), shows not only the profound influence of Western democratic poetry but also the influence of classical Hinduist concepts. Momota seriously studied traditional Indian philosophy, introduced to the West by Vivekananda and Ramakrishna, in search of the ideal harmonious religion.

His next book, *One and All* (*Hitori to zentai*, 1916), reveals a clear understanding of the *minshu shi ha* mission, its ideas, and principles. The quest for truth and justice leads him alternatively from Buddhism to Hinduism, from Hinduism to Christianity, from Tolstoy’s epic sagas and treatises on ethics to the psychological novels of Dostoevsky, to Nietzsche’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, to Maeterlinck’s dramas, Van Gogh’s paintings, and Traubel’s verse. That search for identity was full of hardships and controversies. Momota articulated his vision of the poet’s sacred duty in the impressive poem “Me Alone” (“Jibun hitori”).

Over time, feeling more and more engaged in the democratic populist movement, Momota dropped his individualist quest marked by painful introspection and switched to more commonly acknowledged values. The themes of the working people, liberty, and fraternity dominate his mature poetry. These sweet dreams of Japanese Populism are explicitly expressed in such poems as “Gazing at the Skies” (“Koten o megakete”), “The Tower of Babel” (“Baberu no to”), “Practical People and Me” (“Jikkosha to jibun”), and “The Spirit of Labor” (“Rodo no seishin”). His poem “To those who Dig the Earth” (“Tsuchi o horu hitotachi ni”) is a solemn hymn to Work.

Momota Soji promptly responded to the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia, publishing in his new collection, *A Road across the Swamp* (*Nukarumi no gairo*, 1918), a monumental

ode to the country, which was viewed by many as a socialist dream incarnate — “Oh, Russia, you are flying!” (“Roshia yo nare wa tobu!”). In this poem the author refers to the famous symbolic image of the country created by the Russian novelist Nikolay Gogol in his classic novel *The Dead Souls* — the image of a Russian troika, a carriage or sledge pulled by three horses that rushes through the world as if flying. Depicting the revolutionary Russia as a flying *troika*, the author sees the destiny of the giant neighboring Northern country as the forthcoming destiny of humanity:

*Oh Russia!
You are flying
And in your journey
You are free.
You are flying over all the countries,
Over countless clashes and disturbances.*

*Oh, you troika-carriage bird.
You are flying!
You are rushing through the air over the world...*

In the heyday of the *minshu shi ha* Momota reaches the climax of his creative activity, getting closer and closer to the class-conscious poetry of the time but never crossing the line. Many of his passionate poems gained wide recognition: “I Send you the New Spirit of the People” (“Kimitachi ni okuru atarashii minshu no seishin”) was published in *Minshu* magazine, and “Mayday Morning” (“Gogatsu matsuri no asa”) was welcomed by the leading democratic journal *Tanemaku hito* (Sower). Soon his poetry became a kind of publicist discourse in verse opposing “the old world” of capitalism.

Of course, Momota, like all his contemporaries, could never guess about the tragic outcome of the Russian socialist experiment. This point brings to the optimistic militant poetry of the democratic populists — as viewed from the twenty-first century — a touch of irony and sadness. In fact, it was the poetry of the misguided, of those deceived by the revolutionary

mantras and poster-icons, composed precisely in the period when the Red Terror policy was exterminating millions in Russia.

The inflammatory poems by Momota Soji were popular also among the Anarchist Leftists and Futurists in Japan. However, his own infatuation with revolutionary ideas was short-lived.

Already in 1922, when the democratic populist movement entered the stage of decline, Momota withdrew from the ideological struggle. Maybe he was just tired of the endless arguments or afraid of the possible repercussions from the government in a time when the political situation in the country was heated. In the next few years, marked by the foundation of the Communist Party of Japan, the great Kanto earthquake, an intimidation campaign against trade union activists, and a growing class struggle, Momota Soji broke away from the democratic camp and turned his attention mostly to landscape poetry. He lived long and published many collections of poetry, none of which are ever mentioned as a serious achievement of modern verse: *The Wind-roller (Fusha)*, *The Time of Quietude (Shizuka naru toki)*, *A Garden of Nothing (Nani mo nai niwa)*, and *The Winter Flowers Notebook (Fuyubana cho)*. For over thirty years he kept the reputation as a controversial “Taisho era poet”.

A similar evolution was typical of almost all the democratic populist poets: Fukuda Masao (1893–1952), the author of numerous collections, of which only one, *The Words of the Peasants*, remained in the memory of the following generations; Shiratori Shogo (1890–1973), who gained recognition as a young translator of the poetry of Whitman and Traubel in the Taisho years; Tomita Saika (1890–1987) who enjoyed success only once, in 1919, with his collection *Child of the Earth* (“Tsuchi no ko”).

The democratic populist poetry that burned like a torch showing the road to an elusive bright future in the Taisho era, vanished into darkness by the early 1920s. It was succeeded by the powerfully class-conscious proletarian literature movement. The new age demanded new songs, but the slogan of the populists, “People are the masters of life,” designated the way of all the democratic schools and groupings in the Japanese poetry of the twentieth century.

POETRY ON THE BARRICADES

PROLETARIAN BARDS—*IDEOLOGY* *REVEALED IN VERSE*

The proletarian literature movement was a unique cultural phenomenon on an unprecedented scale and had a profound impact on Japanese society of the twentieth century. Scores of writers and poets addressed their works not to the traditional audience of intellectual readers but to the hundreds of thousands, if not to millions. It should not be regarded as just another school or trend in the evolving literary process of the time. Proletarian literature was blood of the blood and flesh of the flesh of the proletarian revolutionary movement in Japan, deeply influenced by Marxism and Leninism. We may assume that in Japan proletarian literature was even more ideologically pure, consistent, and coherent as a movement than it was in Russia proper — perhaps because it was always driven by the elevated ideals of freedom and never was stained with the blood of crimes against humanity, as would happen in Russia and other socialist countries where Communist ideas prevailed. Writers and poets would join the Communist party in good faith and struggle hand in hand with the workers for their bright future. Many were persecuted and some were killed by the police. Some lacked proficiency or real poetic skills. All remained the captives of the ideological patterns emerging from the political illusions. However, their words would call working people to the barricades, and their lives became examples of self-sacrifice. Their sacrifices, moreover, were not entirely in vain, as due to their heroic struggle Japan over time would adapt the most efficient and practical Marxist concepts.

Later, in the period of the postwar democratic reforms, Marxist theory played an important role in the creation of the “mutual social harmony” doctrine in Japan. Whereas Marxism in its perverted extremist forms brought suffering and endless misery to the Soviet Union, China, and other Socialist countries, Japan became probably the only nation that benefitted from the reasonable application of Marxism, permanently improving the working conditions, environment, and social security. Eventually it almost totally succeeded in the eradication of class confrontation in the country.

It is not easy to say when exactly proletarian poetry emerged in Japan. Probably socialist-oriented class consciousness first affected Japanese literati during and after the infamous “offence of Royalty” incident, when the renowned socialist leader Kotoku Shusui was arrested with his comrades, put to trial, and executed in 1911. In the poetry of Ishikawa Takuboku from his collection *Whistle and a Pipe* one can find some lines directly meeting the demands of proletarian art.

The achievements of the Japanese democratic populist poets as the forerunners of the proletarian literature movement also should not be underestimated. However, the *minshu shi ha* poets as well as the *Shirakaba* group poets conceived of the “people” as subjects of exploitation, as the suffering victims of injustice, who were certainly worthy of a better destiny but were not able to mount a resolute social protest. Like the Russian populists of the nineteenth century, they tended to see the people from the perspective of compassionate and sympathetic intellectuals, always keeping a distance between their own comfortable world of wealth and the world of misery, pain, and hard labor.

To overcome the stereotypes established by the democratic popular literature of the Taisho period, some anarchist extremes could be very helpful. Indeed, Anarchism, which was already widespread in Japan, was the most appropriate channel for dissident ideas containing a challenge to the feudal legacy, to militant nationalism, and to the rampant bourgeois exploitation in the growing Asian empire. No wonder that Anarchism was embraced as an ideological credo by the poets and painters of

various schools. Despite this great diversity we can point to two major trends in these anarchist groupings.

One trend, rooted in the creative experiments of the Futurists, Cubists, and Surrealists, later merged with the politically neutral modernist schools of the 1920s and early 1930s. The other one, which included the literati of socialist orientation, was slowly drifting in the direction of class-conscious art and eventually fused with the proletarian literature movement.

The triumph of the socialist October Revolution in Russia was the greatest milestone for liberal-minded democratic literature in Japan, which was gradually creating a place for real proletarian writers. The wave of strikes and demonstrations, followed by the powerful “rice revolts” of 1918, marked the end of the so called “winter period” (*fuyu no jidai*). Opposition parties and factions were awakening from a long period of hibernation. Socialists, who had had to go underground after the execution of Kotoku and his friends, were back on track again.

In December 1920, thanks to the joint efforts of the workers’ movement leaders and liberal intellectuals represented mostly by writers and critics, the Japanese Socialist League (*Nihon shakaishugi domei*) was founded. It included almost all the existing Socialist parties and organizations of the time. The Union was dissolved a few months later, in May 1921, but it left a legacy in the form of an influential magazine, *Tanemaku hito* (The Sower), headed by Komaki Omi. The magazine, the motto of which was “criticism and action” (*hihan to kodo*), was mostly a socio-political periodical, but it became also the voice of the proletarian literature movement. *The Sower* published numerous articles in support of the Russian revolution and world revolution, appeals to the workers and intellectuals, various anti-war manifestos and pamphlets, as well as caricatures and poems.

The journal became the basis for a core socialist grouping which tended to gather under its colors all the leftist forces that were not bound by the orthodox Marxist orientation. However,

Sower had its rivals in the form of anarchist literary (mostly poetic) journals like *Aka to kuro* (Red and Black), *Kusari* (Chain), and *Kamba* (Restless Horse). Those journals emerged in 1923, soon after the foundation of the Communist Party of Japan in 1922. All of them opposed the program demands of CPJ aimed at the mobilization of the proletariat under the strong leadership of the party. As the manifesto of *Aka to kuro* stated: "Poems are bombs! A poet is a black madman, throwing bombs at the solid walls and gates of a prison... Revolt is conscience. What poetry can emerge without revolt!?" [168, v. 3, p. 31].

The revolutionary concept of Anarchism assumed the need for the total destruction of the existing political system, with all its social, ethical, and aesthetic values, in the name of a bright future. Japanese anarchists in their demands would follow the path of their Russian forerunners, who had already started demolishing the heritage of the old world.

Among the Japanese anarchists of the time one can include the names of Okamoto Jun, Matsumoto Junzo, Ono Tozaburo, Dada Kansuke, Tsuboi Shigeji, and even Hagiwara Sakutarō, a renowned lyricist and the leader of Japanese Sensualism (*kanjo-ha*).

In 1924 *Tanemaku hito* was replaced by the journal *Bungei sensen* (Literary Front). It became the basis for the establishment of the "Japanese Proletarian Literature Federation" ("Nihon puroretaria bungei renmei" or "Puroren"). By that time the Communist party, founded in 1922 under the control of the Comintern, was gaining wide popularity in Japan. Having entered a new stage of evolution, proletarian poetry kept its amazing diversity. The "League" became a refuge for liberal-minded intellectuals, avant-garde poets, militant anarchists, orthodox Marxists, natural born leaders of popular revolts, and some poets of the primitive naturalist "realism" that was called by the contemporary critics "shit-realism" (*kuso rearizumu*).

Deliberate naivete was a distinctive feature of such poems as "Poor Katyusha" ("Itoshino Katyusya") by Hayashi Fumiko, inspired by the novel *Resurrection* by L. Tolstoy. However, in the

pages of *Bungei sensen* one could find also works by avant-garde Anarchist poets openly gravitating to the Revolution. Tsuboi Shigeji (1897–1975), a future leader of proletarian literature, who at that time was trying on anarchist attire, published in 1926 a surrealist poem with complex political implications "A Soldier in the Head" ("Atama no naka no heishi"):

*Every day a gendarme comes to my place, rattling his saber
and stomping boots.
In his right hand the policeman firmly squeezes a loaded pistol.
Meanwhile in my head a deserter is hiding
and that soldier in my head is constantly laughing.
"What, again you came to look for attic rats?"
"Yes, sir, I'm sorry for troubling you, but, with your permission,
the police will make one more search."*

This is followed by a search and, in the dialogue between the author and the gendarme, the intervention of the invisible soldier, who mercilessly curses the authorities and mocks them. Fleeing from the nightmares, the main character (the author) leaves home and wanders off. He finds a well.

*A pit covered with a heavy lid. When the lid is pushed aside,
pitch darkness opens below.
And deep at the bottom of the well, something vaguely stirs –
Countless hands, hands appealing for help.
From the dark bottom of the well comes a cry for help.*

Unable to help the prisoners, the author wanders farther and comes to a place where a demonstration or rally is taking place. There he is apprehended by the gendarmes. The author is struck by horror:

*"What will happen to the soldier in my head?"
"With this rascal we know what to do!" –
With these words, the policeman pressed the pistol barrel to
my head and fired.*

*Red blood gushed out. With the flow of blood
out of my head the the soldier, covered with blood, ran out.
And he was not alone.
Behind him more soldiers were rushing out...*

The soldiers coming to life in such a bizarre way, according to the author's design, will accomplish the revolution. Behing the hazy modernist imagery one can see some allusions to the grim reality. Tsuboi, who gave the same title "A Soldier in my Head" to one of his books in honor of the poem, thirty years later, in the theoretical paper "A Clue to Writing Poetry" ("Shisaku no tegakari"), wrote:

It certainly is not the result of my real life experience, but only a fictional history, created entirely by the force of my imagination. In terms of conventional "realism," it is absolutely not "true," but as part of my individual experience, it reflects a certain truth.

The main theme of the poem is a protest against the political authorities in power and the police regime imposed by them. It aimed at the destruction of this regime and this order; that is the spiritual opportunity I tried to embody in the world of fiction...

Actions that would seem impossible in the circumstances, are made possible in the poem through the creation of an imaginative world, and it is this kind of reality that becomes the leading, guiding force in the structure of my work (a structure based on fiction) [100, p. 177-178].

Tsuboi Shigeji, a potent and extravagant poet, later became one of the leaders of the proletarian literature movement. He studied for a while at Waseda University in Tokyo, but quit. Under the growing pressure of Marxism, he soon abandoned his anarchist views and proclaimed himself a champion of the proletarian struggle for freedom. He wrote short political prose pieces and was an active organizer. He was arrested twice. The second time he was imprisoned with other left-wing writers during the campaign of terror launched by the police on March 15, 1932, and tortured until he renounced his right to publish any dissident works. A broken man, he went home

to the island of Shodo to recuperate from his ill treatment in prison. Later Tsuboi returned from the country to the capital, still in deep frustration, feeling like a traitor. He described his sentiments in such poems as "Self-portrait" ("Jigazo"), "Mask" ("Kamen"), and "Criminal" ("Hansha"). During the war time in Tokyo, refraining from collaboration with the authorities, he wrote short humorous prose pieces with anti-war allusions. Many years later, after the war, Tsuboi wrote one of his most significant collections of poetry, *Air-balloon (Fusen, 1957)*.

The leftist Anarchists attached great importance to the revolutionary symbols, and therefore would never save on comparisons, metaphors, and allegories. In their poetry class consciousness is usually replaced by a vague premonition of a great social upheaval. A colorful illustration of the "Anarcho-Symbolist" trend in the Japanese proletarian poetry of the early period can be found in the poem "Burial" ("Bojo") by Okamoto Jun from his book *From Night to Morning (Yoru kara asa e)*:

*The high top of a cedar tree
clasps the blueish-white three-day-old crescent moon.
It looks like a guillotine blade.
Danton! Danton! Danton!
I suddenly remember the face of Danton
And shudder, as if from the cold.
But I am probably not Robespierre.
"I can hear neither the cries of women nor pistol shots,
But in an evening like that something definitely will happen..." –
With these thoughts I walk over the black soil of the fresh graves...*

Meanwhile, as the poets of *Red and Black* fanned the smoldering sparks of rebellion among the people, some qualitative changes were brewing in the proletarian literature movement. In September 1926 Aono Suekichi published in the pages of *Literary Front* his theoretical article "Natural Development and Motivation" ("Shizenseichosei to mokuteki ishiki"), in which he gave the Bolshevik interpretation of Lenin's provisions on spontaneity and consciousness in the

treatise *What is to be Done?* Based on this and subsequent articles by Aono, the universal interpretation of proletarian literature as a “movement conducting a purposeful consciousness” took shape.

Nakano Shigeharu, the acknowledged leader of proletarian poetry, showed his support to Aono and to the collective manifesto of the *Bungaku sensen* journal, inspired by those articles. In December 1926 and January 1927, in the journal *Roba* (Donkey—the name of the magazine was offered by the poet Horii Tatsuo, who borrowed the image from a poem by Francis Jammes), Nakano published the article “Notes on Poetry” (“Shi ni kansuru dampen”), where from the Marxist standpoint he gave a sharp criticism of the “supra-class” poetry of progressive, democratic nature, which still cannot be called real proletarian poetry. Sparing no strong expressions, Nakano castigated the members of the anarchist group *Red and Black*—Hagiwara, Tsuboi, and Okamoto. Their pretentious Europeanized poems he called “ghost poetry,” the books of the Symbolists, shrouded in the veil of eastern exoticism, “poetry of memories of the past,” and all the Anarchist groupings in poetry were named “the school of yelling and hubbub.” But, calling the anarchists and other modernists “completely non-proletarian poets,” Nakano did not deny their objective merits. He was sympathetic to their “irrepressible yearning to move the cart.” At the same time, he pointed to the inadmissibility of destruction for the sake of destruction, art for art’s sake, and other abstract slogans alien to the consistent struggle of the proletarians for their rights.

The further evolution of Marxist-Leninist ideas in literary theory, and particularly in the criticism of poetry, can be traced in another work by Nakano, “Pathos of Poems on Viewing the Native Scenery” (“Kyodo bokei shi ni arawareta fundo”), which advocated “single-minded aim-oriented consciousness.” Of course, now, in historical retrospect, we see that the article by Nakano, as of many other ideologists of proletarian literature, is somewhat biased and prone to naive sociology, but his criticism of anarchism was certainly damning:

Nakano
Shigeharu



中野重治

I often come across the works of the authors who can be called the school yelling, or if you wish, the school of hubbub. There are usually in them certain streets, cars, some heads, blood, prostitutes, bombs, revolution, despair, bang, bang, boom-bam, uh, uh, etc. In short, there is nothing in this mode to be proud of, it is just an outlet for black nihilism [159, p. 61].

The article pointed out the distinction between poetic agitation and true poetry full of humanistic pathos:

We must be sensitive to detail. Our poetry, which is backed by a proletarian consciousness based on the understanding of the historical mission of the working class, is played mainly in a major key, while the freshness and vividness of emotion seem to be especially suited to giving attention to minor things [159, p. 62–63].

Not only in articles and manifestos, but also in Nakano’s mature lyrical poetry, we see the realization of his thesis about the combination of universal social motives with the ability to convey the mood of the verse in concrete and easily perceptible images that appeal to the heart of the reader. The new self-realization of Nakano as a truly national poet can be felt in

his poem “Farewell at Dawn” (“Yoake mae no sayonara”), published in January 1927. The poem opens with a typical night scene from the life of the working quarters. In a little house on the outskirts of Tokyo the inhabitants are sleeping, all of them simple and good people: the poor owners — a husband and wife with an infant — and six workers who rent a room in the attic. It is for them that the soul of the poet is in pain, it is for their bright future that he prepares himself for the mighty storms, it is for their sake that he is leaving home for the unknown world of fierce class struggle:

*The dawn is close.
Oh, this tiny room of four and a half tatami!
Baby's diapers hanging on the line.
A sooty bulb without shade,
Celluloid toys
The rented mattresses.
Fleas!
I tell you: “Good-bye!”
I'm leaving to make flowers bloom,
Our flowers,
Flowers, that belong to the couple from the ground floor,
Belong to their child.
I'll make it so that one day all these flowers bloom wildly!*

In the history of proletarian literature, Nakano Shigeharu occupies a special place. He was unquestionably the greatest name among the proletarian poets of the time, but his path to the heights of glory was covered with thorns. The son of petty landowners, Nakano spent his childhood in a remote village in Fukui Prefecture. Later, the gifted young man was lucky to meet one of the greatest masters of *gendaishi* verse, Muroo Saisei, and his destiny was largely determined by the beneficial influence of this outstanding poet. The closest friend of Nakano during his childhood years was Kubokawa Tsurujiro, later also a renowned poet and novelist. Nakano described his hopes and aspirations of the early years in the novel *A Farewell to the Song* (*Uta no wakare*, 1939).

Having entered the Department of German Literature of Tokyo Imperial University, Nakano revealed himself to be a man of tireless energy and inexhaustable creative imagination. He participated in various literary societies, wrote and published poetry, and organized, together with Kaji Wataru and Hisaita Eijiro, the “Society for the Research of Socialist Literature” (“Shakaishugi bungaku kenkyukai,” which was later renamed “Scientific Society for the Study of Marxist Art”). Early poems by Nakano, born under the direct influence of the humanist poetry of the Taisho era, gravitate towards the problematic symbolic imagery (“People from the High Road” — Oomichi no hitobito) and to elaborate lyrical landscapes in the elegiac manner. Nakano probably owes his skill in landscape poetry to his youthful fascination with the *tanka* collections of Saito Mokichi, one of the best Japanese poets of the twentieth century. Nakano also tried *tanka*, but soon switched entirely to *gendaishi*. Through carefully designed poetic landscapes he seeks to convey the innermost feelings (“*oku no oku naru mono*”). Outpourings of love, which occupy an important place in the early lyrical works of Nakano, bear the touch of Symbolism and generally have very little to do with Nakano’s verse of the second half of the 1920s.

Participation in the the popular poetic journal *Roba* (1926), which published one after another of his theoretical articles and manifesto-poems, became a turning point in the literary career of Nakano Shigeharu. His most famous poems saw the light at that time: “Song” (“Uta”), “Locomotive” (“Kikai”), “Farewell at Dawn.” Muroo Saisei, although not positioning himself as a proletarian poet, remained the spiritual leader and mentor of the young poets from the *Roba* group. The journal published the poetry of democratic authors of all types and styles, regardless of the schools and groups they officially belonged to: Kubokawa Tsurujiro and Hori Tatsuo, Hagiwara Sakutaro and Fukushi Kojiro, Takamura Kotaro and Sato Haruo. “In short, this journal, embodying the principles of petty-bourgeois humanism, demanded mostly originality of art based on the close relationship of art to life,” recalls Nakano [159, p. 41].

Among all the writers involved in the *Roba* group, Nakano Shigeharu no doubt adhered to the extreme leftist wing. At the second congress of the All-Japan League of Proletarian Literature he was elected to the central committee. However, the league disintegrated soon after as a result of the disruptive activities of the left-sectarian faction led by Fukumoto Katsuo and including Kurahara Korehito, Kubokawa Tsurujiro, Hayashi Fusao, Hayami Yoshiki, and Aono Suekichi, who all quit the league. Nakano, inspired by the catchy slogan, "Art should be the trumpet of the revolution," took the side of Fukumoto and played a leading role in the journal *Puroretaria geijutsu* ("Proletarian Art"). However, having realized his error, Nakano and his old friends soon put forth a call for a united front in the face of the advancing reaction. When, in response to the repression of March 15, 1928, the Japan Federation of Proletarian Art (NAPF) was founded, Nakano was among its leaders.

In 1931 Nakano joined the ranks of the Communist Party, contributing greatly to the establishment of various proletarian literary associations. In 1934, subjected to cruel persecution, he signed a renunciation declaration, but found enough strength to continue fighting. In the stories, novels, and poems of the prewar and war years, Nakano shows the true face of Japanese militarism, revealing the drama of ordinary people doomed to wanton destruction and untold suffering. In the summer of 1945 gendarmes sent the unbroken poet to the army as a private, but in the autumn of the same year, after Japan's surrender, he returned to Tokyo and resumed his membership in the JCP. Becoming one of the leaders of the "Society of New Japanese Literature" ("Shin nihon bungakukai"), Nakano again raised the banner of proletarian art.

The pre-war *Book of Poems of Nakano Shigeharu* (*Nakano Shigeharu shi shu*, 1935), covering the decade of his most intense artistic and ideological quest, reflects the significant evolution of his outlook. From "pure poetry" ("White Waves" — "Shiranani," "Pretty Girls" — "Akarui musumera," etc.), and from the discourse on the national ideal of a hero ("Hero" —

"Goketsu"), Nakano shifts to class-conscious poetry carrying a charge of revolutionary energy.

*Stop singing them!
Stop singing of scarlet flowers and wings of a dragonfly,
Of whispers of the breeze and the scent of women's hair!*
"Song"

The author encourages his fellow-poets to compose marches calling for revolutionary battles. He urges them to comprehend the soul of the people and pour it into the song, abandoning the aesthetic ideals of the past. The locomotive from the poem of the same name is a symbol of the power of its creators, of the entire working class. Its beauty captivates the imagination by the coherence and harmony of the parts of the mechanism. Such imagery can be compared to the paintings of Fernand Leger, which present a poetic hymn to the constructors of the future life. Subsequently, Nakano developed his ideas about a novel proletarian art in numerous articles and essays.

While discussions on various political, social, and literary issues went on, political unrest in Japan was increasing. A wave of strikes rolled over the country in 1926. In March 1927 the "Workers and Peasants Party" was founded, and in November its right wing broke away to form the Social-Democratic Party. In the same period the Communist Party of Japan was reorganized by the initiative of the Comintern. Against the background of growing revolutionary trends, young Marxist intellectuals were enjoying substantial popularity in Japan.

The publication of *An Anthology of Japanese Proletarian Poems* (*Nihon puroretaria shi shu*), undertaken by members of the Puro-Gei federation in November 1927, on the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution, became an important event in the poetic world. The anthology included many of the poems that are now considered paradigmatic: "Proletariat" ("Puroretaria") by Kobayashi Sonoo, "Overthrow him!" ("Kare wo taose")

by Hasegawa Senshin, and many other poems embodying the loud and sometimes harsh voice of the working people, a united and organized proletariat:

*Let's bravely attack the villains,
Retaining presence of mind!
Let's unite with other comrades —
Victory will be ours!*
Kobayashi Sonoo, "Proletariat"

Many authors came to the proletarian poetry, not only from the Marxist circles, which attracted so many young intellectuals, but also directly from the factories and fields. The fundamental basis of their work was the concept of proletarian solidarity and class hatred of the bourgeoisie. This was the main topic of such works as "Proletarian Poetry" ("Puroretaria shi") by Kobayashi Sonoo, "Song of the Proletariat" ("Puroretaria no uta") by Ueno Masao, and "The Soul of the Proletarian" ("Puroretaria no tama") by Oomori Honro.

Faithful to the notion of proletarian internationalism, the authors of the *Anthology* expressed a strong condemnation of the Japanese government's aggressive policy in China.

In 1927, the "Society for the Research of Socialist Literature" ("Shakaishugi bungaku kenkyukai") was transformed into the "Scientific Society for the Study of Marxist Art" ("Marukusu-shugi geijutsu kenkyukai" or "Marugei" in abridged form). It was led by Nakano Shigeharu, Hayashi Fusao, Kamei Katsuichiro, and Yamada Seizaburo.

"Marugei" played an important role in the activities of the *Literary Front* magazine. Having pushed away the anarchists, it also gained a leading position in the "Proletarian Art League" ("Purogei"), although the majority of the cofounders left the group.

Along with the leftist-oriented high browed intellectuals ordinary workers and peasants also belonged to the core of proletarian poetry. They saw the basis of their activities in the concept of proletarian solidarity and in the sacred hatred

towards the world bourgeoisie. These were the themes of the poems "Proletarian Poetry" ("Puroretaria no shi") by Kobayashi Sonoo, "Song of the Proletariat song" ("Puroretaria no uta") by Ueno Masao, and "The Soul of the Proletarian" ("Puroretaria no tama") by Oomori Honro.

In 1928, reactionary forces encouraged by the government launched a campaign against the Proletarian literature movement. Facing the extreme circumstances, proletarian writers realized the necessity to close their ranks. On March 25 they proclaimed the foundation of NAPF (Japan Federation of Proletarian Art — an abbreviation in Esperanto). *Senki* (The Battle Flag) became the official organ of the new association, which united all the leading proletarian poets, novelists, and critics. The poets of *Senki* came from different social backgrounds. Along with Nakano Shigeharu, Kubokawa Tsurujiro, Moriyama Kei, Taki Shigeru, and other Marxist intellectuals, there were Ueno Masao and Miyoshi Jiro, who emerged from the anarchist groupings, and quite a few authors of proletarian and peasant origin, such as Kobayashi Sonoo, Matsuda Kaiko, Hasegawa Susumu, and Hidejima Takeshi. The journal paid much attention to the problems of the aesthetics and theory of proletarian literature.

Many of the verses by proletarian poets reflected their professional experience and therefore were focused on some specific trade. This can be regarded as the direct implementation of the demand put forth by the renowned critic Kurahara Korehito and formulated in his article "The Way to Proletarian Realism" ("Puroretaria rearizumu e no michi," 1928): to look at the world through the eyes of the proletarian vanguard and to depict life from the standpoint of unforgiving realism.

Together with realistic episodes of hard toil at the plants and factories we can find among the works of proletarian authors numerous "poems of protest" aimed at the rampant violence of the police, the blatant military campaigns, and the pogroms perpetrated by rightist extremists. The majority of these "poems of protest" saw light after the tragic events of the Great Kanto earthquake in 1923, which was followed

by the massacre of the Korean minority and mass arrests of Communist and Socialist activists. The grim reality of the time was meticulously described by Kobayashi Takiji in his novel *March 15 (Sangatsu jugonichi)*. A few years later the writer himself died under torture at the police department. “Poems of protest” encouraged the fighters after bitter defeats, inspiring them with hope and faith.

In his article “The Study of the Poetic Work” (“Shi no shigoto no kenkyu”), Nakano Shigeharu summarized his ideas on the proletarian poetry, placing it in the framework of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics. He sharply criticized the leftist extremism, which promoted primitive class-conscious art, thereby denouncing the ideals of a new culture. He wrote in condemnation of “mechanical” poetry:

To conceive engagement in revolutionary activities and revolutionary enlightenment in a sheer mechanical way would mean just transplanting social slogans to poetry, which leads to the shrinking of the broad scope of the emotional life of a working man and eventually, as its logical expansion, to the total elimination of emotional life and of the life-oriented basis of poetry at large. The result of that process can be seen in the poems which appear as such only in form — the stillborn babies whose voices were never heard [159, p. 71-72].

The article by Nakano, which seemingly contained also an element of self-criticism, became an important milestone on the way of proletarian poetry. It voiced the opinion of the majority of proletarian poets who were strongly opposed to extreme leftism. In October 193, they formed an association called “Congress of Poets” (“Shijin kaigi”) and started in January 1931 issuing a journal called *Puroretaria shi* (Proletarian Poetry). The core of the group was constituted by Nakano Shigeharu, Ito Shinkichi, Murata Tatsuo, Hashimoto Seiichi, and Kimura Yoshiki.

Whereas the Communist Organization of Proletarian Writers (KOPF), which had inherited from NAPF numerous

local poetic circles and clubs at the factories and in the villages, was openly calling for the merging of poetic activities with the economic and social forms of class struggle, the members of “Congress of Poets” would pursue a more moderate policy, focusing mostly on the formation of the proletarian class consciousness by means of poetry. Naturally, the theme of Soviet Russia and the October Revolution played a very special role in the poetry of those authors. Their activity was encouraged by the directions of the Comintern published in 1932, which defined the mission of the Japanese proletariat as building opposition to the reactionary forces and the active struggle against the threat of war.

By that time war already became an imminent menace. The “Manchurian incident” of September 1931 turned out to be the prelude to the global catastrophe. January of the next year was marked by the “Shanghai incident.” In March, the puppet state of Manchukuo was established by the Japanese. Clouds were darkening over East Asia.

Across the whole proletarian poetry of the late 1920s — early 1930s we find the consistently repeating theme of protest against the increasingly arbitrary and ruthless cruelty of the authorities, the domination of militarism, and the rampant Black Hundred reaction. A strong impetus to the development of “protest songs” was given by the bloody events that are also reflected in the famous novel by Kobayashi Takiji, *March 15*. Poetry taught resilience and perseverance, encouraged the fallen spirit, and inspired confidence in victory:

*What is thicker — the skin on your hands or on our cheeks?
 What is harder — your pencils or the bones of our fingers?
 What will submit easier — your fingertips
 or our trachea under them?
 What's tougher — your bamboo swords or the muscles of our hands?
 What is stronger — your savvy iron boots
 or our buttocks?
 We will give you a clear understanding of that.*

.....

*We will give you a clear understanding:
Under your pencils, inserted between our fingers,
Under your whips,
Bamboo swords,
Ramrods,
Under the blows,
Slaps,
Kicks,
We silently lose consciousness,
And silently come to life again.
We — the proletarians, we are — machines, we are steel,
we are immortal!*

Taki Shigeru, “Song of the Resistance under Torture”
 (“Gomon ni taeru uta”)

Incidentally, a poem of the same name — “Song of Resistance under Torture” — a few years later appeared in Nazi-occupied France. Its author was Louis Aragon, poet of the French Resistance.

“Song” by Taki Shigeru was echoed in the poem “Dedicated to the Events of March 15” (“Sangatsu jujo nichi ni okuru”) by Matsuzaki Keiji, “In the Prison Cell” (“Ori no naka ni”) by Hada Hajime, and in the works of many other proletarian poets, party functionaries, and supporters.

In 1929 Nakano Shigeharu was one of the most energetic leaders of the NAPF and was working hard for the party. He published articles, essays, short stories, and poems. The poem “Memories of an evening harvest” (“Egari no omoide”) is dedicated to the struggle of the destitute peasants. His popular poem “Shinagawa Station in the Rain” (“Ame no furu Shinagawa eki”) is a hymn to proletarian internationalism. Seeing home Korean friends, the poet addresses to them these parting words:

*Go there and crack that hard, thick, slippery ice.
Let the water gush that has so long been constrained by ice cover!*

*Goodbye,
You soldiers of the Japanese proletariat,
I shall see you on the day of vengeance and victory,
when we are together
We will laugh then laugh and cry with happiness...*

Meanwhile, blinded by the radiant revolutionary spirit of their ideas, the leftists were ready to subject to merciless criticism almost any manifestation of the creative mind going beyond direct ideological declarations and primitive propaganda. Under the fire of this bizarre criticism was, in particular, a beautiful poem by Moriyama Kei (1904–1991), “Early Spring” (“Soshun”):

*Is it real that so early
I see swollen buds on the trees?
Birds build their nests and flit over the meadows!
These birds cross the Arakawa stream,
Disappearing into the haze over the meadow,
Flying straight across the river!
Oh the wind, driving clouds of smoke
In the sky of Kamedo!
Wind, tirelessly moving the stormy sea!
Oh our dear land,
That gave forever the heavy burden to countless lives,
Showing off the many hungry and destitute!
It's time to raise the feeble voice of the flute...*

Moriyama’s place in the proletarian literature is in the galaxy of Marxist intellectuals who brought their knowledge and their talent to the service of the revolution. Many of his poems combine the clarity of class consciousness with a deep psychological insight, contained in the shell of a polished and bright style. For example, his low-key poem “Song of the Deceased Daughter” (“Shinda musume no uta”) is imbued with inner pathos and deep emotion. But the best creation of Moriyama was undoubtedly “Early Spring,” which critics from

the *Sankei* newspaper accused of triviality and the absence of party slogans needed in such a tense political situation.

Nakano raised his voice in defense of Moriyama. Using the debate over “Early Spring,” he pointed out the fallacies of the leftist extremists. In the article “A Study of the Work of Poetry” (“Shi no shigoto kenkyu”), he formulated his ideas of proletarian poetry in the light of Marxist-Leninist aesthetics:

I believe that the poem by Moriyama Kei is a good poem. This song is for those living in the Nankatsu area, closely connected with the revolutionary traditions of the Japanese proletariat, those who are hungry and naked, who day and night do not stop fighting. The song truly conveys the character of the working class, which by reason of its natural position is waging an unceasing victorious struggle. There are no heroes subscribing to “Party slogans,” but there are people who lead a tireless struggle. The very lives of these people are directly connected with party slogans. Yet the presence in verse of the slogans and claims of strikes is not yet an appropriate condition for creating a good poem.

Makimura Ko is one of the most eminent poets of the final period of the proletarian literature movement. Since his school years he had been fascinated with the writings of Kropotkin, Marx, and Lenin. He organized a campaign of protest against mandatory military education at school. At the age of twenty, he became the head of the Kochi prefectural branch of NAPF and also the chairman of the local Union of Communist Youth. Makimura wrote passionate romantic poems on the struggle of Japanese workers and on the brave Korean patriots leading a guerilla war against the Japanese occupiers. In 1932 he was arrested and died in jail after a long imprisonment. He was only twenty-six years old.

International solidarity was one of the crucial topics for the proletarian poets. In 1932 Hashimoto Masao published in the *Anthology of Proletarian Poetry* (*Puroretaria shi shu*) a manifesto-poem, “Stretching a Hand to our Chinese Comrades” (“Chugoku

no doshi e te wo sashinoboru”). Nakano Shigeharu wrote about the duty of proletarian honor in his impressive poem “About a Soldier” (“Heitai ni tsuite”).

But proletarian literature was already doomed, and the desperate endeavors of the poets could only prolong for a while its agony.

THE LAST STAND—FACING
THE REALM OF DARKNESS

On March 24, 1932, the police began a full-scale offensive crack-down on the “dissidents.” On that very day they arrested scores of CPJ leaders, over four hundred members of the Proletarian Culture Activists Federation and the Union of Proletarian Writers, including Kurahara Korehito, Nakano Shigeharu, Tsuboi Shigeji, Kubokawa Tsurujiro, and Makimura Ko. Miyamoto Kenji and Kobayashi Takiji went underground and continued the unequal struggle, but a few months later Kobayashi was tracked down and caught by police. On February 20, 1933, he died of torture while under interrogation. It was a terrible blow to the proletarian literature movement, after which there was no hope for recovery. A period of recession followed, marked by the gradual fading of the revolutionary struggle in the country. The military government was taking control, bringing the whole nation to submission. Proletarian leaders and proletarian writers tried to detain the wave of reaction sweeping over Japan, but their cause was lost.

In July 1933 two prominent members of the CPJ leadership, Sano Manabu and Nabeyama Sadachika, became the first renegades, having signed an official “repentance” document. They had made “the turn” (*tenko*). That event marked the beginning of the so called “conversion culture” (*tenko bunka*) and “conversion literature” (*tenko bungaku*)—a deplorable and shameful phenomenon of Japanese history in 1930s and 1940s. To make the dissident public figures acknowledge officially their repentance was a part of the policy of the militarist authorities,

which aimed at the extermination of opposition and the forging of a homogenous society of loyal subjects indoctrinated into the ideology of a racist and aggressive nationalism.

Occasional sympathizers recoiled from the proletarian literature movement. In February 1934 the Union of Proletarian Writers of Japan was disbanded. Proletarian literature as a single powerful ideological and political movement no longer existed. Japan was facing the “period of darkness.”

Nakano Shigeharu signed the renunciation declaration, after which he was permitted to publish in 1935 his first collection of poetry (some poems were cut by the censors). Nakano was perhaps the only one of the writers who made “the turn” who dared to ignore his renunciation and went on to write almost the same way as before. Seeing this, the Press Department of the police bureau at the Ministry of the Interior in 1937 finally put a ban on the publication of the works of Nakano, Miyamoto Yuriko, and Tosaka Jun.

Collection of Poems by Nakano Shigeharu (Nakano Shigeharu shi shu, 1935), which included all the best works created by the poet over the previous ten years, became a sun ray in the realm of darkness and was warmly received by readers. In the preface Nakano wrote: “I will be satisfied and consider the experience a success, if this book shows that for a writer and an artist, who came from the non-proletarian strata, opening the way for unity with the proletariat, albeit being extremely difficult, is not impossible” [159, p. 86]. Apparently, the publication of the collection partly redeemed in the eyes of friends and allies the “turn” made by Nakano. Later, in the preface to the postwar edition of his poems, he wrote: “Apart from my closest friends, who welcomed the publication of this book, I remember that it met with a warm and kind response from the part of Kaneko Mitsuharu, Ono Tozaburo, and others” [159, p. 91].

Remaining in service, proletarian poets, lacking a single platform, leadership, and action programs, grouped around the magazine *Shi seishin* (Poetic Spirit), founded in March 1934. Communists and non-Communists, who kept on publishing poems in the magazine, cherished a common desire to maintain

the fading flames of proletarian literature. Along with the poetry of Oguma Hideo, Enchi Terutake, Kimura Yoshiki, and Taki Shigeru, in *Shi seishin* were published numerous works by Ono Tozaburo, Oe Mitsuo, and Tsuboi Shigeji.

Three centuries earlier the Tokugawa regime had resorted to the same method in its campaign against the Christian faith. Like the Christian martyrs, opponents of the state’s aggressive policies were made to repent in public, to confess to “criminal activities” and make a solemn oath to the emperor. After such a “turn” the person was totally denounced in the eyes of his former comrades and had no alternative but to collaborate with the regime.

The forced repentance and renunciation campaign was a striking success in the country, which had been home to numerous Communist, Socialist, and Anarchist revolutionary parties and organizations for more than fifteen years. Some renegades were persuaded in prison, but for many a conversation with a member of the police would be quite enough.

As writers in Japan would almost inevitably become public figures, as in the former Soviet Union, a ban on publications (virtually a ban on their profession) meant for them in fact death in poverty and oblivion. Nobody could avoid strict censorship in Japan, and the military government only continued to tighten its grip on the throat of culture.

Whereas for the democratic intellectuals in Germany during the same period there was at least such an option as emigration, for the Japanese men of culture, deeply rooted in their indigenous national traditions, the way of emigration was unacceptable, and the emigration rate was close to zero. Police and officials in charge of various ideological institutions skillfully played on the patriotic feelings of the writers, tempting them with popular concepts such as the “civic duty of the loyal subject,” the supremacy of the “Yamato race,” the need to repel British and American expansion, and Japan’s great mission to create a “co-prosperity sphere” in East Asia.

The corporative mind, so typical of the Japanese, could not resist for long the new corporative values imposed so intensely by the media. Rather soon the situation in the country changed dramatically. All the hesitating democrats left the camp of proletarian literature. Many workers also were blindfolded by the overwhelming nationalist military propaganda. Thus came “the age of darkness” (*yami no jidai*).

However, some activists of the perishing proletarian literature movement kept up a last line of resistance. Oguma Hideo (1901–1940) became the most daring proletarian poet of the “age of darkness.” His biography was typical of a working man. He changed professions several times — from blacksmith, to fisherman, to journalist. His debut in poetry dates back to the late 1920s, but real fame came to Oguma only in the mid- 1930s.

Ito Shinkichi called him “a new type of poet who emerged from proletarian culture” [100, p. 198].

In the gloomy years when the police and the military government almost managed to shut down the voices of protest, Oguma fearlessly encouraged people “to talk freely” (*shaberimakureru*). Endless optimism permeates his best poems. Facing a bleak reality, he nevertheless asserts:

*The songs of sadness gone —
There is place only for the songs of joy!*

“The Songs of a Nightingale” (“Uguisu no uta”)

It is hard to overestimate Oguma’s contribution to the proletarian poetry and literature at large. While his former comrades in arms were either dying in prisons or signing their repentance declarations, he kept on writing poetry full of revolutionary pathos and uncompromised faith.

The Russian revolutionary bard Mayakovsky, popular enough among the proletarian writers of the twenties, was Oguma’s favorite poet, whom he praised in the impressive ode “Speaking the Language of Mayakovsky” (“Mayakowusuki no shita ni kawatte”). The theme of revolutionary Russia appears in the beautiful poems “Oh Volga-river!” (“Worugagawa yo”) and

Oguma
Hideo



小
熊
秀
雄

“The Song of the Departing Carriage” (“Basha no shuppatsu no uta”). His best works sound like hymns to the struggle and to the creative potential of humankind: “The Song of a Smith” (“Kaji no uta”), “The Song of Fellow-Travelers — myself and the Wind” (“Watakushi to kaze no michizure no uta”). A fusion of civic responsibility and lyrical sentiments—a quality so characteristic of Mayakovsky—becomes also a distinctive feature of Oguma’s poetic world. He cannot separate himself from politics, but politics for him is just a part of normal daily life, one of the important current problems that should be taken care of. The powerful, full-blooded imagery of Oguma Hideo has not lost its magnetism and freshness, even for the readers of the twenty-first century.

The contribution of Oguma Hideo to proletarian poetry can hardly be overestimated. In the years of severe hardships, when, one after the other, his former comrades were dying in prison or signing renunciations, he managed to create poems full of courage and revolutionary fervor:

*So fight;
Fight, my friends!
Loot the treasures
Robbed by the rich.*

As robbers —
 Boldly, fearlessly —
 Loot them!
 Here are the formations
 of our Red cavalry on the march!
 “Poem on Horseback”

Songs of protest containing condemnations of the war were included in the poetic collections *Over the Old World* (*Furuki sekai no ue ni*, 1934) and *Osaka* (*Osaka*, 1935) by Ono Tozaburo, as well as in the book by Kaneko Mitsuharu, *The Sharks* (*Same*, 1937). The latter poet was in fact never a member of the proletarian literature movement, but he made a last stand together with a few remaining unbroken literati.

The poem “Military Road” (“Gunyo doro”) by Ono Tozaburo reflects a grim presentiment of the impending catastrophe, for which the path has been cleared:

*Crossing the fields in the dark suburbs,
 up to the foot of the distant mountains
 goes straight the road.
 In the moonlit night from the hill
 as far as the eye can see
 lined up along the road telegraph poles, and piles of matting.
 Work is finished.
 On the pavement, bathed in moonlight,
 The long shadow of a grader, covered with a casing.
 In the middle of the road an abandoned mixer shows
 to the night sky its ugly, dry white mouth.
 Silence of the night —
 even a dog would not run on this road.
 Absolute silence.*

The calm before the storm did not last long. Japan was ready to go to war, and bitterness permeates the poet's heart.

Defeated but not crushed completely, proletarian poetry was silenced during the war. A few years later it was reborn

in the new avatar of mass democratic poetry. However, before that Japan had to pass through the hell of the war years. The renegade democrats who were calling the people to fight under the flag of the Rising Sun could hardly foresee the calamities that were to come. As a Japanese critic put it, “the characteristic feature of the time was a clear division of literature into two camps: the literature that was covered with blood in its struggle against the dark forces that had imposed the war on the nation, disturbing its peaceful life and breaking its spirit; and the literature that had sold itself to the aggressors, supporting their criminal activities” [418, p. 274].

This severe judgment is not quite fair. There was one more category of literati who tended to stay away from the class struggle and any other political problems of the time, finding solace in the realm of pure art. Having left the big cities, they went into “domestic emigration,” seeking refuge far from the world of violence and destruction in remote mountain villages. There were also some heroes who did not betray their ideals, writing songs of resistance in their dungeons. Over time, militant slogans were forgotten, but lyrical masterpieces and songs of protest remained, and poets from different camps entered the history of Japanese literature as the great talents of the early Showa period.

AVANT-GARDE ON THE MARCH

GOING ACROSS THE BORDERS

The sources of the avant-garde movement, like most trends in Japanese culture of the modern period, can be traced primarily to western art and literature. The fascination with the West was so great at the beginning of the twentieth century that Japanese poets and artists not only enthusiastically supported all the achievements of their European idols, but also blindly repeated their mistakes. It would take many years for the chaos of manifestos of Futurism, Dadaism, Cubism, and Surrealism to be shaped into a system of original aesthetic values, and for the poets to realize the goal of their creative activities, which was articulated best in the form of the militant slogan supported by almost all the different avant-garde groupings: “transformation of the revolution in art into social revolution.”

The young poets and artists, driven by the “new spirit” (*esprit nouveau*) of French, Russian and Italian Modernism, had no doubts that the era of Symbolism, which had started in 1904 and enriched Japanese literature with many magnificent examples of poetry, was close to its end and would soon be replaced by an epoch of revolutionary art that would challenge the canon and break all the conventions along the way. Hagiwara Sakutarō, one of the leaders of the upcoming modernist school of Sensualism, wrote in 1913 the essay “Futurist Poetry in Japan and its Interpretation” (“Nihon ni okeru mirai ha no shi to sono kaisetsu”), addressing mainly his friend and adherent Yamamura Bocho:

I suppose the Futurist movement initiated by Kandinsky and Marinetti surely suggests various forms of new life and

new morality in its requirements towards art. Nevertheless, the spiritual core of Futurism is essentially nothing other than an extension of the post-impressionists' endeavour [168, v. 2, p. 324].

Interpreting Futurism as a generic name for all emerging Western avant-garde schools and trends, Hagiwara justly emphasizes the distinctiveness of the modernist poetry by Bocho, which was essentially rather close to the work of the Italian and French pioneers of new verse in being an attempt to shock the public.

Beginning in 1917, in the wake of the Bolshevik October Revolution in Russia, the avant-garde-oriented Japanese intellectuals turned to their northern neighbor in search of new Futurist directions. They were attracted most of all by the fusion of social and artistic revolution that was apparently taking place in Russia. Indeed, for a time the Russian avant-gardists were on the whole given a free hand and even managed to push aside the "out-of-date" classical aesthetics. It was a unique historical episode during which avant-gardist revelry prevailed over tradition and common sense. This feast during the plague of the terrible civil war in Russia lasted for approximately three years, after which the revolutionary artists were strictly disciplined by their Communist masters.

The Japanese modernists tended to see the Russian experiment as the implementation of their most far-fetched projects and dreams rather than a merely utopian venture. They conceived rather accurately the specific feature of Russian Futurism, which was characterized by its anarchist-nihilist spiritual revolt against bourgeois morals and bourgeois aesthetics, in contrast to the concept of the "technological civilization" cherished by the Italian Futurists.

It was the activity of the extremist group of Russian Futurists, the "Budetlyane," a group within the "Gilea" association, that attracted most of the attention of the Japanese avant-garde. N. Aseyev and B. Pasternak, who for a time joined the Futurists, interested them to a lesser degree; even less were they attracted

to I. Severyanin, who had declared himself an "ego-futurist," deliberately emphasizing his social non-engagement. Just as in 1909, when the first Futurist manifesto by Filippo Marinetti was enthusiastically welcomed in Japan, ten years later the declaration "Slap in the Face of Public Taste" by the Russian extremists was repeated by many literati in Tokyo:

To those reading us, the New, First, and Unexpected. Only we are the face of our time. A trumpet heralding the new epoch blows in our verse. The past is too crowded and cramped. The Academy and Pushkin are less comprehensible than Hieroglyphics. We must throw overboard Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and all the rest from the Ship of Modernity (quot. in [450, p. 244]).

The pathetic and nihilistic call to anarchy implied in the poetry and manifestos of the Russian Futurists, amplified by the scandalous ways of their artistic life, and finally enhanced by the turmoil of the Russian revolution, undoubtedly had a great influence on the Japanese avant-garde movement. This was quite natural if we consider the tremendous impact Russian classics by writers like Turgenev, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Gorky had had on the Japanese literary world in the Meiji — early Taisho era. For a long time these names had been for Japanese readers the embodiment of Western humanist thought and symbols of literary perfection. Now the young Japanese poets rising against their cultural establishment heard from their Russian brothers-in-faith the call to throw all these world-renowned geniuses overboard.

David Burliuk, who had been one of the leading poets of the "Gilea" grouping before he emigrated from Russia soon after the revolution, played an important role in the development of the Japanese Futurist movement. Burliuk, an outstanding modernist painter in his own right, had had a long time correspondence with Japanese artists of the Society of Futurist Art. In the fall of 1920, together with Victor Palmov and several other adherents, he arrived in Japan and spent almost two years there preaching the Futurist faith.

Hirado Renkichi, a young poet who had read Italian Futurist manifestos and listened to Burliuk's lectures, published in December 1921 his own poetic credo, which, according to some literary critics, started a new era in poetry. The document was called "The Movement for Japanese Futurist Manifestos" ("Nihon mirai ha sengen undo") and was supplemented with several illustrative poems by the author. Hirado enthusiastically quoted Marinetti, presenting meanwhile his original interpretation of Futurism in picturesque images:

We live in mighty light and heat. We are the children of mighty light and heat. We ourselves are mighty light and heat.

Direct feeling is a perception that should come instead of knowledge,¹ common knowledge is a foe of the Futurist anti-art. Time and space are already dead, we live in the absolute movement. We must create charging boldly...

We do not need these many graveyards any more. Libraries, museums, academies are not worthy of the roar of the engine of an automobile that glides along the highway. You just sniff the rotten smell of those library deposits that have to be thrown away with garbage. — Isn't the fresh smell of gasoline much better?!

We are those who love the velocity of flying moments, all those who, following Marinetti, are charmed by the flashing pictures of cinematography. We shall use acoustic effects, symbols of mathematics, all the mechanical means to procure our participation in the free and self-regulating act of Creation. To the complete exhaustion of our strengths

¹ Compare with Marinetti's call for the "freedom to listen through objects and the capricious breathing of engines, the sensitivity and instincts of metals, stones, wood, etc. Replace human psychology, now exhausted, with the acquisition of material lyricism" [442, p. 39].

² Compare with the approval of Marinetti: "a roaring car rushing along the highway is more beautiful than Nike of Samothrace" [442, p. 7].

shall we fight the conventions of stylistics and poetics, sweeping out first of all the dead bodies of the adjectives and pronouns, using the indefinite nature of the verbs to penetrate into unknown areas where nobody has been before.

Nothing will make Futurism give its body for sale. Only the freedom of the mechanisms — energy — movement — absolute authority — absolute values [47, p. 190-191].

The significance of the leaflet by Hirado Renkichi was in his insistent call to turn from theory to practice, to "destructive-creative activity." He further elaborated his ideas in the essay "My Futurism and Practical Activity" ("Watakushi no miraishugi to jikko"), published shortly before the poet's unexpected early death in 1922. Hirado's experimental poems, although a bit naive in their youthful pathetic aspiration, are full of bright lyricism and vigor:

*Oh, this happiness of movement!
This happiness of a beating heart,
Of the moving engine!*

*Oh, this happiness of the rolling wheel,
Of the waving wings!
This happiness of the hand
Stretched from the iron machines
To the cities and villages,
To Infinity!*

"Comprehension of the Essence" ("Dosatsu")

However, alongside the purely declarative poems that resemble lines from his own manifesto, we also find in Hirado's work complicated formalistic experiments that can be compared to the achievements of French Cubism and German Expressionism. An example is the poem "Flying Birds" ("Hicho"), called by the author "a Space-Cubist work":

The birds fly
 Their bodies and souls
 Grow dark
 Black birds
 Skinny and weak
 They fly
 Drawn into the whirlpool
 Of the Universal wind
 Above the abyss of magnetism
 Drawn into the whirlpool
 They soar
 Soar
 The wings of a mill
 Wing by wing
 Wing
 Wing
 Wing
 Wing

In the original, the visual effect of the poem is amplified by the ideographic peculiarity of the characters “bird” and “wing,” which allowed Kawaji Ryuko, Hirado Renkichi’s friend and colleague, to compare this poem to the “calligrammes” of Apollinaire.

Propagating “the futurism of impulsive passion” (*chokujo-shugi mirai ha*), Hirado nevertheless tried to scrutinize all the trends of Western avant-garde poetry and apply the best of them in his verse. Here is another poem by Hirado in the Expressionist manner, with this time the accent on both visual and acoustic imagery:

On the cheek of a girl the waves of blood stream down like pink hock-cup — a huge moth sitting by the bed of a sick friend waves his wings like a fan and anticipates sweet pollen — Sapa-Sapa-Sapa — SSSSS — a white moth folds his wings — heads heads heads heads — the lead cabins of meeting heads lines dipping the envy of looks — among the streaming rays covering her the girl smiles sometimes.

“IMPRESSIONS OF K. HOSPITAL”
 (“K BYOIN NO INSHO”)

Hirado’s scrupulousness is clearly seen in his analytical essay “Formation and Development of Four Versions of Our Movement For New Poetry in 1921” (“Sen kyu hyaku ju ichi nen ni okeru waga shinshi undo no yon shu no tenkai”), which contains a meticulous analysis of Futurism, Cubism, Dadaism, and Expressionism in Japan in comparison with their Western counterparts.

It is well known that the cult of the autonomous or “self-sufficient” word was the cornerstone of Futurist poetics, especially in Russia. A word taken without its direct substantial and ideological meaning allegedly had the right to an absolutely independent existence. As the authors of the Russian Futurist anthology *A Judges’ Warren* declared, “For the sake of freedom, we have abolished spelling... we have destroyed punctuation marks — and therefore for the first time the role of the word matter is put forward and realized” (quot. in [450, p. 247]).

At the same time, pushing to the point of absurdity “the magic of sounds” suggested by the Symbolists and illustrated so vividly by the “color vowels” of Rimbaud, the Futurists tried to create Harmony out of virtually nothing, developing ad absurdum the concept of “colored vowels”:

Yeuyu
 iayu
 oayeyeyeya...

V. Krutchonyh, “The Universal Language”

Such formalistic experiments were destined to occupy an honorable place in the history of the poetry of European modernism and American neo-avant-garde, as well as in the history of modern Japanese verse.

Thus, in Hirado’s poem “A Theme for Orchestra” (“Gasō”) we see an attempt to produce a “syncretic” work of art using audio and visual effects for the purpose of creating the final

“musical” image from the dispersed associations in the current of consciousness.

THE VOICE OF THE DAWN BRUU-UNBB voice
N voice N voice
UU voice U dawn++voice+light light light
U. voice RNR voice voice of the dawn
U. voice of the things OBBBBB voice voice voice voice voice
R. voice V -- voice plane....

This technique, obviously very close to the spirit of the art of Cubist and Futurist painting, found no small number of followers among Japanese avant-garde poets and artists of the 1920s, including Togo Seiji, later a popular painter and creator of salon-style “pin-up” beauty pictures.

Togo was an ardent admirer of Marinetti, whom he had met in person during his travels in Europe. He accepted without any reservations the manifestos by Italian Futurists and in every possible way welcomed the scandalous manner in which the Futurists produced propaganda for their artistic concepts. He was attracted by the pathos of Marinetti’s verse and by his talent as a speaker. In his own compositions he tried to convey the dynamism of the time by varying complex design techniques, interchanging alphabets and characters, and introducing into the poems musical notes, symbols, and numerals in an obvious effort to achieve purely abstract images.

an endless spiral of the winding staircase
shapeless endless sky blue blue light blue light blue
a sudden lazy sway of a falling parachute
Br Br Br BRRR RRRRRRRrrr
no time even to inhale the air
casting down a mysterious black shadow
suddenly crossing the sky Wish
silences the shriek
of the giant mass
aaaaaaaaaaaaah!
8765432
stretching to infinity an endless eye

The sudden death of Hirado Renkichi in August 1922 was a heavy blow for the poetic avant-garde movement, but the activity of various modernist groups and schools was gaining momentum.

TAKAHASI SHINKICHI—
 DADAISM AND ZEN

At the end of 1922, a group of young poets united around the magazine *Dadaizomu* (Dadaism), which followed the path of a new school of Absurdists founded in Switzerland by Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Jean Arp, Marcel Janco, Richard Huelsenbeck, Sophie Täuber, and Hans Richter. The young poets’ magazine, at first ignored by the critics, in 1924 changed its name to *Dokuchi shubun* (Disgusting Reading — Rubbish Scribes). The Dadaists cherished bold plans. They were going to publish a collection of their works (not written yet) in 24 volumes and open an artistic “Café Dada” — a Japanese analogue of the “Cabaret Voltaire” in Zurich. German Dadaism was also not unknown to them, although it did not influence directly the Japanese grouping.

Takahashi Shinkichi (1901–1987), who came to Tokyo from the island of Shikoku, became the soul of the group after dropping his studies at the School of Commerce. He formulated the platform of Dadaism in his extensive manifesto, “Credo: Dadaist” (“Dengen wa dadaisto”), published first in the magazine, and then as a foreword to the author’s collection *Poems by the Dadaist Shinkichi* (*Dadaisuto Shinkichi no shi*). The manifesto presents an eclectic mixture of ideas deriving from Swiss Dadaism, French Absurdism, Italian and Russian Futurism, and the philosophical tradition of Zen Buddhism. In connection with this last source, it is important to take note of the fact that Takahashi, who would expound the ideas of Zen in his mature poetry, when he was twenty years old spent about seven months in a Buddhist

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monastery as a novice trying to acquire the wisdom of Zen. The style of the manifesto reminds one of the writings of Kambara Tai and Hirado Renkichi:

DADA proclaims all the things and denies all things. "Infinity" and "nothingness" are just words formed by sounds and are no different than the words for "tobacco" or "underwear."

All that exists in our imagination exists indeed. The fragments of the past live on the soy-crumbs of the future. In a stone or in a herring's head there is more imagination than we can find in a man's head; even a ladle or a cat also possesses some imagination... [159, p. 196-197]

From this Dadaist position, the author then proceeds to touch upon various social, political, ethical, and aesthetic problems, denying any necessity for class struggle, and calling for an anarchist rebellion against the establishment.

Political ideas, the focal point of everybody's attention at the beginning of the 1920s, in Takahashi's interpretation become an absurdist parody, a grotesque revealing both the author's sympathy towards the fashionable trends but at the same time his contempt for everything lying beyond the realm of Dadaist art. Though we cannot find any social implications

in *Poems by the Dadaist Shinkichi*, his manifesto operates with many political and social notions, at least as a tribute to the modern times.

After all, Takahashi was aware that the Berlin Dadaists (Raul Osman and others) in April 1919 formed in support of the proletariat a Central Revolutionary Dadaist Committee, which would publish articles and manifestos and speak at meetings against the government of the Weimar republic. The rebellious essence of the avant-garde art movement, which would pave the way for modern "counter-culture," was often revealed in the slogans of the class struggle put forth by such masters of modernist verse as Breton, Soupault, and Gaul. Let us also not forget that one of the first leaders of the Surrealism movement, Louis Aragon, later even joined the French Communist Party and participated in the Resistance movement during the Second World War. Temporary flirting with communism and other kinds of political and social activity were rather typical of all the European avant-garde poets [159, p. 198-199].

Mocking quasi-revolutionary appeals in the vein of Marinetti (who later became a bard of Italian Fascism), Takahashi does not deny the ideals of social progress, but he is also wont occasionally to oppose them with a healthy Dadaist concept of existence, the absolutism of the Ego in a world of dispersed and alienated things:

Dada gives birth to the Absolute, analyses and synthesizes. The Absolute follows in the steps of DADA. Nobody can find an ally in DADA. At the belt of DADA hangs a furious heart striving for battle. Not stopping even for a moment, DADA goes on exploding and crashing. The Absolute is a foe of DADA. Killing the Absolute by sacrilege, swallowing it, DADA mockingly shows its tongue as an eternal proletarian. [168, v. 2, p. 200].

The works included in *Poems by the Dadaist Shinkichi* are akin to European avant-garde works of the period, dominated by random images torn from a stream of consciousness, incomprehensible allusions, and abstract metaphors. Sometimes

it is possible to detect certain pieces of reality in this mosaic, sometimes not:

*the snow
is black
the turnip is dark
filthy hands burdocks bearing obscenity
dead poems that are not good even for the sashimi sauce
licked out dust sleeping man
rusty nails in the surf-driven log thick buttocks of a woman
colliding lust of both*

“A Blind Man” (“Mekura”)

Young people tended to hear in this gibberish a revolutionary call for anarchy, a reckless challenge to the conventions of bourgeois morality. Takahashi’s absurdist “graphic” poem “Plates” (“Sara”) is regarded as the acme of the Dadaist nonsense verse. It consists of 28 repetitions of the character *sara* with a strange small piece of text attached:

*Plate
plate
plate
.....
apathy
pathos of the worms crawling over the forehead
with your apron the color of white rice
don't you wipe the plates
oh you woman with the black nostrils*

The poetics of the *Poems by the Dadaist Shinkichi*, in many ways forshadowing the later discoveries of the Japanese Surrealists, includes the application of such poetic inventions as André Breton’s “automatic writing,” absurd puns based on a homonymic metaphors, and figurative graphic compositions of characters. All these devices were used to satisfy the “natural” requirements of a Modernist artist for self-expression. Although

some desperate attempts to write in the Dadaist manner had been made by Yoshiyuki Eisuke, Tsuji Jun, Enchi Terutake, and other young writers, in the early 1920s it was only Takahashi Shinkichi who successfully expressed the ideas of aesthetic nihilism.

Later the creative credo of the poet changed dramatically. Partly through empirical search, partly through logical inference, he perceived a remote, latent connection between Dadaist nonsense and the paradoxical logic of Zen Buddhism, drawing a conclusion about the benefits of Zen practice. In 1927 — by this time Takahashi was not only the author of a famous collection of poems but also of a novel in the same vein, *Dada* (1924) — he wrote: “I assume that Dada is just a nasty trend in the initial phase of understanding Zen wisdom” [159, p. 208].

This was the beginning of the amazing transformation of an aggressive Dadaist into a devout Zen Buddhist. This transformation was even more surprising given the fact that it preceded by almost thirty years the complicated multilateral ties between Western modernism, the counter culture of youth, and Zen Buddhism.

Beginning in 1928, Takahashi was persistently engaged in Zen meditation, studying the classics, and writing in the Zen tradition under the guidance of experienced monks. In two collections of poems of the same year, *Daily Food* (*Jisshoku*) and *Jokes* (*Gegen-shu*), we feel a striking change of style in comparison to his earlier Dadaist works. Some scholars compare Takahashi’s early poetry with the painful, agonizing search for novelty typical of the aesthetics of Antonin Artaud. From the initial rejection of realism and the “material” world, the poet eventually comes to the acceptance of reality, seeking, as a true Zen follower, “nirvana inside samsara.”

Whereas the early Dadaist experiments by Takahashi, reflecting the general “revolution of form” taking place in the evolution of Japanese Modernism, present the idea of the absolute emancipation of the Artist, the poems written in the late 1920s are marked by the poet’s attempt to escape from his own ego, to connect his existence with nature and with society,

and to conceive himself as a particle of the great universe. Following the precepts of the Zen patriarchs, Takahashi tried to feel himself in the universe and feel the universe in himself. However, he did not accept the traditional artistic principle of passive reflection, which is the basis of medieval Zen poetry. He could not accept an impersonal image of the object, something Zen masters of the past would aspire to.

By the middle of the 1930s the poet's spiritual quest had acquired relative stability, suggesting he had reached a kind of enlightenment as a result of a long and arduous process of introspection.

Trying to define further Takahashi's evolution in the field of modernist Zen poetry, his friend and fellow-poet Nakahara Chuya shows how, from a painful, hysterical rejection of society in his early Dadaist works, the poet gradually turned to the search for universal harmony. According to Chuya, he still failed to reach the desired peaceful state of mind and remained in the captivity of extreme subjectivism. The same failure befell his quest for the ideals of humanism, which Takahashi sought in vain by delving into the maze of Buddhist concepts of goodness, justice, and common well being:

It is absolutely obvious that he proceeds from humanism (*yumanite*); but such remarkable humanism, apparently, implies theory. Takahashi indeed has the habit of pondering everything very seriously. However, people who, like Takahashi, always and everywhere resort to deduction, risk losing the very essence of humanism [159, p. 217].

After having adapted the doctrines of non-action and overcoming the duality of existence, Takahashi Shimkichi became too zealous in transferring the dogma of the Zen patriarchs to poetry. Some of his poems structurally resemble the paradoxical *koans*, asserting this or that aspect of the cardinal concept. Such, for example, is the famous poem "Irrationality" ("Muimi"), declaring a typical Zen rejection of the "manifested way," a verbal expression of the meaning of phenomena:

*Words are the first thing I do not accept.
I want us to live having destroyed words.
It's impossible to find the words that can reveal the essence
of the Initial word.*

In the book of poems *Father and Mother (Fubo, 1943)*, Zen metaphysical speculations are replaced by true realism, spontaneously arising from Takahashi's new, tragic worldview. The horrors of war do not leave him indifferent. With a growing bewilderment and fear, the poet watches his utopian dreams of a "brotherhood of the peoples of East Asia" collapse, violence and injustice prevailing everywhere. "Definitely, until the earth breaks apart and oceans dry up, there will be no end to this war," he wrote bitterly in one of the poems of those years. Equally realistic and full of deep empathy are many poems referring to the early postwar years, gathered in the *Collection of Poems by Takahashi Shinkichi (1949)*.

However, in all the collections that continued to appear up to the late 1960s, Takahashi again and again returns to Zen symbols, showing the way to the next generation of avant-garde poets:

*Say that I am not home.
Say that there is no one here.
I will be back in five hundred thousand years.
"Away from home" ("Rusu")*

A new wave of infatuation with Zen, which coincided with the Zen boom in the West, forced Takahashi to compare his youthful Dadaist experiments to the similar experiments of the neo-avant-garde. The Japanese critics, on the other hand, compare Takahashi's cosmic vision with the free space and time images of Jules Supervielle [159, p. 240]. However, in our opinion, at this point we can talk only about some typological parallels, but in no way about a direct influence. Takahashi's poetry, unlike the works by most of his contemporaries, is very little exposed to Western influence, while Buddhist motifs

can be traced at every step in the philosophical lyrical poems of his later collections.

Some of Takahashi's poems have certain flaws due to the abundance of didactic ideas and scholastic contemplation. In his other works that might seem, at first glance, whimsical abstractions, it is the Buddhist allusions that give a profound meaning to the imagery. Though Takahashi rejects the trivial nonsense of Dada poetry, he nevertheless widely uses the device of "debasement" (displacement) invented by Breton and which later took root in the poetry and painting of Surrealism. The poet extracts ordinary objects from their familiar context, imposes alien features on them, and compares them with the incomparable in order to achieve the effects of destroying "typical" reality and creating a surreal atmosphere on the basis of a playful metaphor, just as in the line from the poem "The Sun" ("Taiyo"): "A snake, sticking his head out from under the stone, wants to eat my thoughts." However, Takahashi Shinkichi, unlike the devoted Surrealists, never indulges in a game for the sake of a game. In his poetics, a "displacement" is only an auxiliary means to convey the complex concepts of Buddhist metaphysics, to assert the Zen idea of existence, the doctrine of reincarnation, or the imaginative nature of all things.

The dreamlike images bring the reader into a misty area of subconscious, full of strange and false associations, elusive shadows; but behind all this we can infer something real, tangible, and earthly.

Not surprisingly, the young post-war poets accepted the poetry of "displacement," though hardly any of them could call Takahashi Shinkichi his teacher. "His thought," writes Miyoshi Toyochiro, "embraces everything from amoeba to space, reality and nothingness, life and death. It overcomes the antinomy of life and death, not logically but poetically" [168, v. 3, p. 210].

However, most critics, true to the stereotype established in the anthologies, appreciate Takahashi Shinkichi primarily as the apostle of a "revolutionary form," the first and the only true Japanese Dadaist.

DEATH VERDICT TO THE ESTABLISHMENT

Meanwhile, the avant-garde in the 1920s continued to attack the Olympus of the bourgeois establishment, putting forth one manifesto after another. The militant slogans by Kambara Tai, Hirado Renkichi, and Takahashi Shinkichi appeared in the pages of the anarchist literary journal *Aka to kuro* (Red and Black), founded in January 1923. The editors of the journal were the poets Kubokawa Tsurujiro and Okamoto Jun, future active members of the proletarian literature movement, together with the Anarchist-Nihilists Hagiwara Kyojiro and Tanizaki Chotaro. The supporters of *Red and Black* tried to reconcile and unite uncoordinated avant-garde groupings to fight for free art under the banner of "poetic revolution" (*shi no kakumei*). As one of these manifestos put it, "Poems are bombs! A poet is a black madman, throwing bombs at the solid walls and gates of a prison!" [168, v. 2, p. 347]

The growth of the class struggle in the country under the direct influence of the events in Russia and in Western Europe could not fail to have a revolutionary impact on the Japanese literati. The ideas of Marx, Engels, and the leaders of the Communist International were spreading worldwide. At the same time, the influence of the anarcho-syndicalist wing of the trade union movement was also increasing, and this led to a split in the ranks of the Communist Party of Japan shortly after it had been founded in July 1922. The echo of the political struggle, though in an indirect and vague way, was reflected in the publication of *Aka to kuro* and other similar literary journals. In fact, *Red and Black* became a link between the class struggle of the proletarians and the bohemians, putting forward specific economic and political demands, on the one hand, and encouraging the struggle of the restless literary youth for "revolution through art," on the other.

The left-anarchist sentiments of the poets, who for several years were content with provocative but harmless declarations, were aggravated after the tragic events of September 1, 1923,

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Kyojiro.



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when the bloody repression by the authorities following the Great Kanto earthquake ended with a crackdown on the Communists, the trade union activists, and the Korean ethnic minority. This outburst of reaction confirmed that the intellectuals could not remain outside politics dwelling in the realm of formalistic experiments. Politics with all its ugliness and power had invaded their enchanted kingdom.

After the Kanto earthquake, several avant-garde magazines emerged almost simultaneously: *Kamba* (Restless Horse), *Kusari* (Chains), *Damu-Damu*, and *Ge. Gimigam. Prrr. Gimgem*. However, the participants in all these magazine ventures were soon to split up and go their separate ways.

In 1923 appeared the book by David Burliuk and Kinoshita Shuichiro, *What is Futurism? An Answer*, which proclaimed the sacred mission of avant-garde art on a global scale. In its wake many new articles and studies followed, including: "Dada Psychology" ("Dada no shinri") by Tsuji Jun, "The Modern City as Art" ("Geijutsu ni arawaretaru kindai toshi") by Chiba Kameo, "Art of the Flood Period" ("Hanran-ki-no geijutsu") by Okamoto Jun, "The Nihilist Ropshin" ("Nihirisuto Ropushin") by Ono Tozaburo, "To the Poets Seeking Awards" ("Kunsho o hoshigaru shijindomo ni") by Kubokawa Tsurujiro, and "The Psychology of Machines and of the People Operating Machines"

("Kikai oyobi kikai ni chokumen suru mono no shinri") by Hagiwara Kyojiro.

In addition to the numerous poems by Futurists and Dadaists appearing by the mid-1920s, various experimental works in other genres were also published, including the novel *Dada* by Takahashi Shinkichi, and a farce in the Expressionist style by Hayashi Tadao, *A Broken Man* (*Yabureta hito*).

Among the works of early Japanese Modernism, most of which are today only of biographical interest, the poetic collection *Death Verdict* (*Shikei sengoku*) by Hagiwara Kyojiro (1899–1938) obviously stands out as a live demonstration of protest. This book, which begins with a passionate manifesto as its foreword, represents the last chord in the dramatic history of early Japanese avant-garde and marked a transition to the mature poetry of Modernism, which was soon to conquer the world.

It is hardly possible to assert that *Death Verdict*, released in October 1925, was very much different in form and content from the work of other Japanese Futurists and Expressionists. It would perhaps be better to see it as a generalized result of the whole movement, carrying within itself an indomitable pathos of protest. According to the author, the title of the collection implies "a death sentence to modern bourgeois civilization."

In the foreword to his collection, Hagiwara criticizes philistine morality, proclaiming freedom of conscience through the freedom of creative activity: "In response to all the tricks of modern civilization, trying at all costs to drive us into the snare of decadence, I put forward my powerful will" [35, p. 192].

Raising his voice against the disgusting establishment, the poet regards his book as "a mortal blow to the tamed and impotent academy," a challenge to public morals, and to the conventional art that has made blind its creators.

Touching further on the issue of the new art, Hagiwara accentuates the necessity to reconcile poetry with life. In the

case of the large industrial city in particular, the task is to modernize it, to fill it with new content:

A poem is not just some music I hear inside myself, but the rattling of a train mixed with the noise of the streets. It is also the sound of a printing press and the squeak of a pen on a sheet of paper, the buzz of a swarm of midges.... Let our spirit, smoking like a grenade before the explosion, fly forever in a turbulent whirlpool.... Always new facts, always struggles! Permanent change — that's the process that leads to ecstasy, to the intoxication that verges on insanity! [35, p. 194].

According to Hagiwara, the modern artist needs neither the perfection of ancient canons nor the order of religious rites, nor even the mechanical beauty of urban sights. "Where do we see the Beauty, the object of our aspiration?" he asks himself and immediately answers the question: "It is a huge steam-roller that rolls in its rush forward over appeasement, over famine, over the shells of multiple personalities." Then Hagiwara makes his appeal to the reader:

Comprehend! The thunderous roar of our poems! Their nervousness! Their cubistic complexity! The great rumble of their forward movement. The anti-art (which is the real art)! The Human! [35, p. 195]

The passionate manifesto ends with revolutionary slogans: "Freedom! Freedom! Down with all kinds of slavery!"

Hagiwara Kyojiro has remained in the history of Japanese literature as the author of the manifesto and the poetry collection *Death Verdict*. The aesthetic value of Hagiwara's early poetry is disputed today, but its importance for that transitional period can hardly be overestimated, as it comprises the thoughts and feelings of the entire Japanese avant-garde generation. Many of the poems in *Death Verdict* demonstrate various technical devices of Futurism and Expressionism. Colorful images that seem to be put on the canvas by uneven nervous strokes of the brush form a gloomy urban "mood landscape":

A mighty rectangle

chains and tempered iron and schemes

the military and precious metals and honors

erected high high high high

THE MELTING POINT OF THE CAPITAL — HIBIYA

twisted space

endless traps and graves

a cemetery of the clerks endowed with modern knowledge

high high high high still higher and higher

black abysses between the high buildings

slaughter house exploitation grinding teeth

high high high high high high

move move move move move move move

HIBIYA

it goes

it goes

everything is still ahead

it holds in the hand the key to itself

an empty laughter

the crazy dance of money...

"Hibiya" ("Hibiya")

Hagiwara considers himself primarily a poet of urban social and psychological conflict, bringing to light the passionate but deeply hidden protest of the artistic mind. His love lyrics and pastoral poetry appear mostly as a background for the great urban show. In the poetics of *Death Sentence* we can trace a specific structure. It is difficult to locate it in one or even several poems; such poems should be read and evaluated in large cycles. Ito Shinkichi concludes: "They suggest a transition from the *revolution in art* to the *art of revolution*" [100, p. 160]. Actually, most of the poems in the collection are dominated by an anarchist rejection of bourgeois civilization, which is deemed hostile to man and nature.

The years after the Great Kanto earthquake were marked by increasing contradictions between the various groups of avant-garde poets. Some, like Tsuboi Shigeji and Nakano Shigeharu,

gradually outgrew the anarchist ideas and would eventually join the proletarian literature movement. Others continued to support the Modernist magazines, openly declaring their non-engagement in politics and their commitment to the principles of pure art.

Thus, in June 1924 a magazine under the striking name *Ge. Gimigam. Prrr. Gimgem* appeared. It was the project of Kitazono Katsue, Nakahara Makoto, Takagi Haruo, and Ishino Shigemichi, four poets who tried to create a world of refined intellectual poetry in imitation of the famous group “Bauhaus,” which had emerged at the same time in Weimar. The most talented member of the group was Kitazono, who later became one of the greatest poets of Surrealism.

The members of the “MAVO” group proclaimed the principles of rationalist constructivism and, to some extent, Dadaism. The manifesto of the MAVO journal declared: “We make revolution. We move forward. We always affirm and negate. We live in the various meanings of words” [168, v. 2, p. 351].

Founded in August 1925, MAVO became the last stronghold of the Futurist avant-garde. Its editor, Murayama Tomoyoshi, who had lived for a time in Germany, brought to Japanese soil the aesthetic concepts of European Modernism. He translated poems by V. Kandinsky and Ernst Toller, as well as articles by German authors on architecture and painting. The magazine organized exhibitions of “Rationalist Constructivism,” which were marked by the participation of Russian émigré artists. Murayama called his friends and associates “Mavoists” and the movement itself “Mavoism.” With a self-critical zeal the participants wrote about themselves: “MAVO is a gang of blue lunatics who put black goggles on their red mugs” [168, v. 2, p. 352]. Together with the poets of the *Aka to kuro* and *Damu-Damu* groups, the Mavoists were trying to secure their position at any price, often putting together radical formalist experiments with the most non-conformist political slogans and combining appeals for revolution in art with revolutionary proclamations. In an effort to keep in touch with the latest

modern trends of literary life in the West, the Mavoists maintained regular correspondence with such European modernist journals as *L'Effort moderne* in Paris, *Das Werk* in Zurich, and *Blok* in Warsaw.

The Mavoists, like the other avant-garde groups mentioned above, were replaced in 1928 by the mighty association of poets of mature Modernism centered around the journal *Shi to shiron* (Poetry and Poetics), which became a milestone in the history of modern Japanese verse. However, it is clear that the major literary experiments of *Poetry and Poetics* would have been impossible without the bold challenge to philistine bourgeois morals by the minor avant-garde groupings. The creative activity of the Futurists, Dadaists, and Expressionists of the Taisho era opened up new frontiers for *gendaishi* poetry, endowing it with a rebellious spirit and an inexhaustible lust for innovation.