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The Beginnings of Japanese Free-Verse Poetry and the Dynamics of Cultural Change[1]

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In his essays on the dynamics of cultural change, the semiotician Yuri Lotman proposes a model to explain the fact that when an area of culture—poetry, for example—develops a set of self-descriptions—such as poetry criticism, histories of poetry, and so on—that area of culture (or semiotic system, to use Lotman's term) is in a position to become rigidly self-repeating: once it draws up rules for itself, then there is the possibility that it will follow those rules. The semiotic system is described as having become rigidified, under such circumstances. Lotman posits another alternative: the semiotic system might instead choose to break or alter its own rules, renovating and transforming itself by incorporating elements from other semiotic systems.
In this essay I argue that the appearance of modern Japanese free-verse poetry can be explained using a modified version of Lotman's model. It is common for historians of modern Japanese poetry to say that the poet Kawaji Ryūkō was the first to publish free-verse poetry in Japanese (in 1907). This essay places Ryūkō's work in context, characterizing it as a synthesis of a number of elements from the contemporary criticism—the principal among these being the current of negative criticism of Japanese poetry, on the one hand, and the current of positive response to Western free-verse poetry, on the other. By synthesizing elements from various strands of poetry and poetry criticism, Ryūkō created a poetic form that is now prevalent in the Japanese poetry establishment today.

Keywords: *jiyūshi*, free-verse poetry, Kawaji Ryūkō, Yuri Lotman, *genbun itchi*, *shintaishi*, poetic meter, *vers libre*, Hattori Yoshika, Kanbara Ariake

"I must doff my cap to Kawaji Ryūkō 川路柳虹," writes Nomura Kiyoshi 能村潔 at the end of his essay on a transitional period (roughly 1897–1907) in modern Japanese poetry.[2] In Nomura's account, Ryūkō's work is epochal insofar as it forged a new variety of Japanese poetry, the vernacular-style free-verse poem (*kōgo jiyūshi* 口語自由詩). Ryūkō's status as the

1 The author would like to thank John Breen for his helpful direction; the two anonymous readers for their recommendations; and Nicholas Albertson for reading a draft of this article.
2 Nomura 1954, p. 109.

pioneer of this new kind of poetry is supported by a stable critical consensus that formed soon after he published his "Shinshi yonshō" 新詩四章 (Four New Poems) in the September 1907 issue of the journal *Shijin* 詩人. A month later, the critic Hattori Yoshika 服部嘉香 hailed Ryūkō's "Shinshi yonshō" as a striking departure from the status quo in Japanese poetry;[3] Hattori's assessment remains in circulation today, as Ryūkō continues to be identified as the pioneer of free-verse poetry in Japanese.[4] A few scholars and critics have taken issue with the consensus view of Ryūkō's place in the history of modern Japanese poetry, but it would appear they are swimming against the tide.[5]

The undated portrait of Kawaji Ryūkō. From *Gendai Nihon shijin zenshū*, vol. 3 (Kawaji Ryūkō, Murō Saisei, Senke Motomaro, Noguchi Yonejirō). Sōgensha, 1955.

For the purposes of this essay, however, Ryūkō's contribution to Japanese literary history will be accorded relatively minor importance, while more attention will be given to the literary-critical context within which Ryūkō was writing. As this essay will argue, the significant factor in the creation of a free-verse Japanese poetry was not the work of Ryūkō or any other single poet, but was rather the existence of a literary-critical environment within which the adaptation of a new verse form, based on a foreign poetics of free verse, was construed as both possible and desirable.

3 See Hattori 1907. Hattori's review is analyzed in greater detail below.

4 Postwar poets and critics who have recognized Ryūkō as the author of the first free-verse poetry in Japanese include Miki R. 1950, p. 1; Yano 1950, p. 450; Hattori 1963, pp. 125–30; Murano 1968, p. 6; Ōoka 1969, p. 17; Okkotsu 1972, p. 729; Miki S. 1986, p. 316; Okkotsu 1991, pp. 18 and 333; Suga 1995, p. 244; Fukushima 1997, pp. 15 and 56; Ikegawa 1998, p. 62; Satō N. 2011, p. 37; and Takizawa 2011, p. 533. Many of these statements, especially the later ones, include hedge phrases. Instead of saying Ryūkō "*was* the first," they claim he "is *said/reputed/recognized* to be the first," or some analogous revision to the basic claim. This does not change the picture very much.

5 There are at least two writers who have minimized Ryūkō's place in the history of modern Japanese poetry. First, Hitomi Enkichi 人見円吉 analyzes the poem that is reputed to be Ryūkō's first free-verse poem ("Hakidame" 塵溜) and claims that, since most of the lines can be scanned as 5- and 7-syllable clauses, the poem is therefore not a good example of free verse at all (Hitomi 1975, p. 608). This objection does not refer to Ryūkō's other early free-verse poems, just the first one. Second, in his 1994 dissertation on modern Japanese poetry, Wakui Takashi acknowledges Ryūkō's status as a pioneer, but claims that the trail Ryūkō blazed was all too easy. Wakui concedes that "*kōgo jiyūshi* is no doubt one of the major stages in the development of modern Japanese poetry. Otherwise books such as Hatt[o]ri Yoshika's *Kōgoshi shōshi* (1963) or Hitomi Enkichi (Tōmei)'s more voluminous *Kōgoshi no shiteki kenkyū* (1975) arguing for an 'origin' of *kōgoshi* would not have been written. But," Wakui continues, "either as *kōgoshi* or as *jiyūshi*, the birth of *kōgo jiyūshi* was not as shocking and innovative an event as Dante, Wordsworth, Whitman or the Imagist movement must have been in their respective traditions. At each point in the compressed history of modern Japanese literature, the future was already laid out by the West, and thus every step of evolution was more or less anticipated. Taken as a whole, the pace of change during the century[-]long evolution of *shi* seems nothing less than frenzied. Yet each stage of change was incremental and not something that introduced a total discontinuity" (Wakui 1994, p. 98). I disagree with Wakui's claim that "the future [of Japanese poetry] was already laid out by the West," but Wakui's observations on free-verse poetry are stimulating (e.g., pp. 89–90, 95–99). His reflections on the Japanese pronunciation of *kanshi* as a precursor of free-verse poetry, while in need of an evidentiary basis, offer a significant counterweight to the arguments that Japanese free-verse poetry owes everything to Western models (Wakui 1994, pp. 44–46). Incidentally, other writers have claimed that Japanese free verse can be compared with Japanese readings of *kanshi*. (For example, Suga 1995, p. 231, and Takahashi 2011, pp. 302–303.) In general, Wakui stresses that "[t]he shift to free verse [in Japanese] was probably rather painless" (Wakui 1994, p. 44; cf. p. 89: "Free verse came into being without much pain"). As a later section of this essay will show, it is not entirely true that the creation of free verse in Japanese was altogether "painless."

This context-centric approach is intended to supplement the style of literary history that grants agency primarily to individual authors. (See the first footnote for examples, which are more numerous than one might expect.) It is easy to give a poet like Kawaji Ryūkō most of the credit for being the first to write in a variety of Japanese poetry that now, a century later, seems to be a permanent constellation in the firmament of Japanese poetic forms. But my view is that in literary history any formal innovation, in addition to being ascribable to a (usually) single work by a (usually) single author, is also and more importantly a social phenomenon—by which I mean that it requires multiple agents and multiple kinds of agency.[6] A network of relations—among nations (e.g., the treaties between Japan and various European and North American countries that allowed for unrestricted travel among the signatory nations), among institutions (e.g., between universities in Japan and elsewhere that allowed student exchanges and research programs abroad), among individuals (e.g., among poets in Japan and elsewhere; among poets dead and living), among objects in the world (e.g., the circulation of books in European languages outside of Europe; the circulation of books in Japanese outside of Japan)—had to be in place in order for Ryūkō (or any poet) to write in free verse. But the intricacies of this network are material enough for an entire monograph. The ambition of this essay is more modest: to show the close connection between poetry criticism and poetic practice—i.e., the writing *about* poetry and the writing *of* poetry—around the time of the appearance of the first free-verse poems in Japan.

Many theorists of the past century have concentrated on the supra-individual aspects of literary creativity, and in this essay the primary theoretical model is adapted from the work of Yuri Lotman.[7] Lotman's work seeks to explain how cultural traditions, invested in continuity as they must be in order to be traditions at all, nevertheless inevitably transform over time. Lotman persuasively argues that, in many cases, traditions change when they attain self-consciousness, and when they thus become aware of the fact that they have certain elements that are relatively more static than others. To say that a tradition "attains self-consciousness" (my phrasing, not Lotman's) is, of course, to anthropomorphize it; what is meant by self-consciousness here is critical self-description. A "semiotic system" (Lotman's term) that has arrived at the point of describing itself, codifying its rules, writing its history, and so on, is engaged in what Lotman calls self-description.

Before saying more about poetry, I should clarify Lotman's term *semiotic system*. For analytic purposes, researchers tend to isolate their object of study from the sum total of cultural phenomena, treating it as self-enclosed and relatively autonomous. For Lotman, this procedure, while little more than an artificial expedient, is also a practical necessity, which is admissible only so long as the researcher grants that the object under examination is a simplification or a reduction. In Lotman's words, "such simplification is a common feature of science."[8] As he puts it, "This approach is entirely warranted as a heuristic," although the danger is that sometimes "it leads us to perceive logical convention as

6 My approach in this essay owes the greatest of its many debts to two scholarly works on modern poetry: Karimi-Hakkak 1995 and Steele 1990.

7 The inspiration for applying Lotman to the appearance of free-verse poetry in Japanese came from Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak's work on similar developments in the history of modern Persian poetry. See Karimi-Hakkak 1995, pp. 7–22.

8 Lotman 1977, p. 195.

empirical reality."[9] Elsewhere, Lotman explains that "writing an isolated history of a given language—the language of poetry, for example—outside of its surrounding context, is the same as removing a single instrument group from an orchestra and analyzing it as a whole composition."[10] Now, when Lotman warns against the dangers of simplification in semiotic research, he is addressing himself to researchers in the present; but in fact he sees a similar process of simplification at work in the *self-descriptions* that are created by semiotic systems. As will be explained below, it is these self-descriptions that can play an important role in bringing about cultural change.

In place of the term self-description, Lotman sometimes uses the term metalanguage; and Lotman's insight is to draw a connection between the history of any given semiotic system, on the one hand, and the formation of metalanguages that describe that system, on the other. "A description will always be more organized than its object," Lotman claims;[11] and from this it would seem to follow that when a semiotic system begins to describe itself, to codify its own characteristics, that system then has the potential to rigidify, that is, to begin following its own rules intentionally. "Since a description involves, as we have already mentioned, a higher degree of organization," Lotman writes, "the self-description of a semiotic system […] is a powerful means for the self-organization of the system."[12] But one of the effects of a semiotic system's self-description is the creation of a boundary between what belongs to the system and what does not belong; a rule of inclusion is also a rule of exclusion: "The description of the systematic…is at the same time an indication of the nature of the extrasystematic."[13] What Lotman goes on to suggest is that once a semiotic system has achieved this state of self-description, it is then in a position to undertake a program of intentional self-alteration, precisely by incorporating extrasystematic elements and/or rejecting other elements that have hitherto been regarded as systematic: "One of the chief sources of the dynamism of semiotic structures is the constant process of drawing extrasystematic elements into the realm of the system and of expelling systematic elements into the area of non-system."[14] Rephrasing this hypothesis: when a semiotic system changes, often the change is brought about because the system is in contact with another system that is "outside" it (where "outside" is relative to the system's self-description of what it includes "inside" itself). To repeat, Lotman grants that such constructions are wholly artificial; yet they have an explanatory capability that is far-reaching.

The important point is that the metalanguage about a semiotic system, as Lotman shows, may in some cases effect a *change* in that system. For example, when a semiotic system is described as having traits that a sufficiently high or influential number of its users deem undesirable, then one possible result is that the users of that semiotic system can construct arguments in favor of *changing* the system; their aim, one imagines, is to alter the semiotic system in such a way that it may subsequently be described as having desirable traits that it had previously lacked.

9 Lotman 2013, p. 355.
10 Lotman 2013, p. 367.
11 Lotman 1977, p. 196.
12 Lotman 1977, p. 197.
13 Lotman 1977, p. 198.
14 Lotman 1977, p. 196. Cf. Lotman 2013, p. 367: "Only in a heuristic can one isolate the history of literature, painting, or some other type of semiotics from its surroundings. In reality, movement is realized as a continuous exchange—the perception of alien systems, accompanied by their translation into a familiar language."

Some readers may object that Lotman's argument is actually rather simple. It might seem he is saying nothing more than that (limiting ourselves to the case of literature for the moment) literary criticism sometimes works: i.e., literary criticism sometimes alters the literary landscape. To such an objection, the rebuttal might be made that Lotman's work on cultural change actually has a wider scope, and arrives at subtler conclusions: one of Lotman's insights is that cultural change can have highly counterintuitive origins. For example, the very simplification that is brought by a system's self-description has the potential, surprisingly, to contribute to that system's transformation. This model helps to explain how systems, by arriving at self-descriptions, have the potential to become something else altogether, thereby rendering their (earlier) self-descriptions obsolete.

The summary of Lotman's theory sketched above is itself a necessarily reductive piece of metalanguage, but it supports the contention that in the study of the semiotic system of poetry, it is difficult to account for change without considering one of poetry's primary metalanguages: poetry criticism. This essay will argue that the appearance of Japanese free-verse poetry is inseparable from a confluence of trends in Japanese poetry criticism in the first decade of the twentieth century.[15] The relevant critical trends are contrary in their tendency. On the one hand, there is the critics' tendency to disparage the *shintaishi*, a metrically regular modern form of Japanese lyric; on the other hand, there is the critics' tendency to praise free-verse poetries in Western languages. In terms of Lotman's model, the first tendency represents the Japanese critics' negative assessment of the poetry being written in Japan in the first decade of the twentieth century; the second tendency represents the critics' turn toward (what Lotman would call) extrasystematic elements in the hope of finding poetic techniques (in this case, those of the Western free-verse poetries) that might palliate the alleged drawbacks of the *shintaishi*. The confluence of these two tendencies creates a situation in which a particular kind of change is, according to Lotman's model, highly likely, a change of the sort brought about by "drawing extrasystematic elements into the realm of the system and of expelling systematic elements into the area of non-system" (as quoted above). Kawaji Ryūkō's free-verse poetry represents such a change.

Accordingly, the structure of this essay is as follows. The first section recounts the critics' invectives against the Japanese poetry of their time; the second section gathers several Japanese critical appreciations of nineteenth-century European poetry, especially free verse; and the final section then very briefly examines Kawaji Ryūkō's own statements about free verse. Ryūkō's descriptions of free verse, as we will see, are a pastiche of the critical writings that are treated in the first two sections of this essay.

15 To give due credit to another scholar, it is fitting here to mention again Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, whose work on modern Persian poetry is an application of Lotman's theories. Karimi-Hakkak describes the main outline of the history of modern Persian poetry, in very compressed form, as follows:

> […] [A] succession of Iranian intellectuals…began to define and describe the classical system of poetic signification and communication in the Persian-speaking cultures in such a way as to make the drive to change it an imperative. To achieve that, they constructed the idea of a 'European poetry' which, they argued, had contributed to palpable advances in European societies. That paradigm, I contend, had little to do with any particular esthetic movement or poetic trend in Europe. It was rather part of a new cultural imaginary, a construct necessary if the age-old [Persian] poetic culture was to be challenged and changed (Karimi-Hakkak 1995, pp. 6–7).

Karimi-Hakkak's study substantiates this history with far-ranging evidence.

Japanese Poets' and Critics' Cases against the Japanese Language in Modern Poetry

In a brief 1934 reminiscence on his activity as a young poet, Katō Kaishun 加藤介春 recounts how the poetry group with which he was affiliated in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Waseda Shisha 早稲田詩社 (Waseda Poetry Group), was looking for a means to extricate the Japanese *shintaishi* 新体詩 (new-style poem) from an impasse by updating and modernizing it through and through. The *shintaishi* had been invented and disseminated in an 1882 anthology called the *Shintaishi shō* 新体詩抄 (more on this below), but this new lyric form was proving objectionable because of its allegedly antiquated diction and its allegedly monotonous prosody.

The unofficial doyen of the Waseda group, the editor and translator Shimamura Hōgetsu 島村抱月, had called for Japanese poetry to be renovated along lines that had already been sketched in the prose fiction of (Japanese) Naturalism. Hōgetsu had written that the Japanese poetry being published even in the first decade of the twentieth century was still burdened with antiquated elements that seemed anachronistic: an elevated diction of the sort that seldom appeared in conversation, and metrical constraints that forced a poet's language into artificial syntax and rhythms. In a June 1906 essay in the journal *Bunshō sekai* 文章世界 titled "Isseki bunwa" 一夕文話, Hōgetsu distinguishes between two kinds of written language: one is *gabun* 雅文 (elegant diction); the other is *genbun itchi* 言文一致 (unified speech-and-print), a term that represented, for Hōgetsu as for others, a modern literary language such as had been used in Japanese literary prose since the 1880s.[16] (The distinction between *gabun* and *genbun itchi*, as Hōgetsu is using it here, finds an analogue in the distinction between *bungo* 文語 or "written language" and *kōgo* 口語 or "spoken [vernacular] language." The *kōgo* or vernacular has already been mentioned in the first paragraph of this essay, but I bring up the terms again here because they will reappear below.) In Hōgetsu's view, Japanese poetry was being hampered by its too heavy reliance on *gabun,* and needed to start incorporating a more modern *genbun itchi* diction to survive.

Hōgetsu explains that he is using the term *genbun itchi* in a somewhat idiosyncratic way. Some writers, he claims, think that the difference between the elegant language of *gabun* and the (putatively more modern) *genbun itchi* style can be reduced to differences among verb endings and adjective endings;[17] but he maintains that the distinction between an older verb ending like *-nari* なり and a more recently popularized ending like *-de aru* である "is a difference at the level of rhetoric only."[18] For Hōgetsu, the more important characteristic of *genbun itchi* is what he thinks of as its expressive immediacy: "With *genbun itchi*, the content [of an utterance] eschews the gaudiness of outward form and expresses the feelings nakedly and unreflectively, in a romantic [English in original] and spirited flow."[19] The *genbun itchi* style has come to be used in personal letters and even in obituaries, so there should be nothing to prevent its use in poetry.[20] In the same essay, Hōgetsu invokes the example of William Wordsworth, a British Romantic poet whose oeuvre represented a successful program of renovation in poetry:

16 Shimamura 1906. On the use of the vernacular in literature, see Twine 1991, Tomasi 2004, and Jacobowitz 2006.
17 Examples of this view can be found in Hattori 1907, pp. 327–28, Kanbara 1908, p. 334, and Hitomi 1954, p. 23.
18 Shimamura 1906, p. 67.
19 Shimamura 1906, p. 68.
20 Shimamura 1906, pp. 68–70.

> The difference between the *gabun* we have seen hitherto and *genbun itchi* is, in a word, the difference between the Classical [*kurashikaru* クラシカル] and the Romantic [*romantikku* ロマンティック]. That is, *gabun* is Classical and *genbun itchi* is Romantic. With time, the Romantic *genbun itchi* will come to be [viewed as] a Classical *gabun*. This [transformation] can be seen in other countries, too—for example, in England, albeit only in English poetry, not prose. By eliminating what he dubbed 'poetic diction' [*poetikku dikushon* ポエティック、ディクション], Wordsworth called for the expression of the flow of the natural feelings as they well up.[21] In Japan, this phenomenon has taken place, albeit [only] in prose.[22]

Hōgetsu maintains further that, while some Japanese poets have attempted to write *genbun itchi* poetry, their attempts have failed, because they are not sufficiently spontaneous and natural-sounding.[23]

Hōgetsu's essay, as Katō Kaishun's reminiscence indicates, was seen as a challenge for Japanese poets to devise a new kind of poetry. But Katō notes that putting such a modernizing program into practice was not a simple matter: "[T]he poetry establishment was so deeply under the sway of the old forms," Katō writes in his reminiscence almost twenty years later, "that it was not at all easy to be rid of them. It was like being in a swamp into which one kept sinking deeper and deeper the harder one struggled to get out."[24] This view was shared by Hōgetsu himself in a later essay published in 1907: "[I]t is not easy to show precisely how to write [Japanese] poetry in *genbun itchi*."[25]

By 1907 there was already in place a modern tradition of invective against Japanese poetry. The first complaints were directed against the brevity of traditional Japanese forms, such as the waka and the haiku. After the longer *shintaishi* took hold, complaints were subsequently directed against the perceived monotony and unmusicality of this longer but still metrically regular form. Each of these complaints will be described in turn.

It is frequently said that modern Japanese poetry begins with 1882's *Shintaishi shō*, an anthology of nineteen poems—fourteen translations of English-language verse and five original works—by three compilers, Toyama Shōichi 外山正一, Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎, and Yatabe Ryōkichi 矢田部良吉, all of whom had studied at universities in the United States. The compilers' prefaces, along with the prose comments that they appended to many of the poems in the anthology, function as a multi-part manifesto for poetic change. The prefaces are sales pitches for a new Japanese poetry: hence the term *shintaishi*, "*new*-style poem." In his preface, however, Toyama Shōichi adds a negative note, disparaging the traditional forms of Japanese poetry:

> The methods of expression we use when we have been moved by something are the thirty-one syllables [i.e., waka], *senryū*, and simple T'ang-style poetry. We use them simply because they are not demanding modes of expression. But in the long run, when

21 "The expression of the flow of the natural feelings as they well up" is Hōgetsu's paraphrase of Wordsworth's famous dictum that poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." I have more to say on this below.
22 Shimamura 1906, p. 67.
23 Shimamura 1906, pp. 70–71.
24 Katō 1934, p. 311.
25 Shimamura 1907, p. 332.

> we view things through such simple modes of expression as this, without a doubt the ideas they encompass will also be simple. This may be a very rude objection to raise, but it seems to me that the ideas which we can exhaustive[ly] convey through such modes of expression as the thirty-one syllables, or satirical verse, are those of a duration no longer than fireworks or shooting stars. When we get ideas in our head with the slightest continuity and try to enunciate them, such modes of expression are basically inadequate.[26]

In a sense, the *shintaishi* was a good solution to the problem Toyama describes: the *shintaishi* could have any number of lines or stanzas; each line had two hemistichs, the first being five syllables long and the second seven syllables long. (As will be discussed below, later forms of *shintaishi* had lines of other lengths.) The principal advantage of the *shintaishi* from the perspective of its inventors was that the form allowed for a sustained meditation upon a theme.[27] It also facilitated translation of longer poems in Western languages into Japanese; to my knowledge, no attempt was made to translate Western lyrics into haiku or tanka.[28]

But a drawback of the *shintaishi*, in the eyes of some Japanese poets and critics, was that it was monotonous. The discussion of the *shintaishi*'s monotony received a significant impetus from the psychologist Motora Yūjirō 元良勇次郎 (1858–1912), who had earned his doctorate at Johns Hopkins in 1888 and played a role in founding experimental psychology as an academic discipline in Japan. In the journal *Tetsugaku zasshi* 哲学雑誌 in 1890 Motora published "'Rizumu' no koto: Seishin butsurigaku dai kyū-kai"「リズム」ノ事: 精神物理学第九回 (Rhythm: Essays on Psychophysics, #9), a two-part article on Japanese prosody in which he used a statistical analysis to show that traditional Japanese prosody was repetitive.[29]

Motora was aware of the *shintaishi* and held a low opinion of it. His articles were motivated, it appears, by a desire for a poetic form that improved on the *shintaishi* and (what he saw as) its monotonous meter. He concludes:

> I derive no pleasure whatsoever when I peruse the recent new-style verse [*shintai no inbun* 新体の韻文] or the translations of Western verse. Why, I know not. It might be just my amateur taste; yet I think it might also be that a layman like myself cannot derive pleasure when our country's poets, in their pursuit of beautiful language, do not choose a *rhythm* that serves for such auditory delights as are suited to the *rhythmical* nature of the mind. (p. 458)

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26 Toyama et al. 1882, 3rd *jo*, p. 1 verso, and Morrell 1975, p. 23.

27 On the significance of *renzoku shitaru shisō* 連続したる思想 or "sustained [or continuous] thought" in the *Shintaishi shō*, see Brink 2003. On extended thought in late-Meiji Japanese lyric, see also Suga 1995, pp. 231–47 on *imi shikōsei* 意味志向性 or "an orientation toward [extended] meaning"; and Satō N. 2011, p. 27 on *imiteki na jizokusei, renzokusei* 意味的な持続性、連続性 or "persistence/continuity of meaning" in free-verse poetry.

28 For a thorough listing of translations into Japanese, see Chiba 1998, pp. 276–318.

29 Motora 1890. The phrase *seishin butsurigaku* 精神物理学 (psychological physics) was a translation of a term used by Gustav Fechner (1801–1887), a German psychologist whose *Elemente der Psychophysik* theorized, on an experimental basis, the relation between the intensity of a given external stimulus and the intensity of a subject's corresponding perception. On Motora Yūjirō as a psychologist, see Satō T. 2002. In-text parenthetical references are keyed to Motora 1890. "Traditional" here is shorthand for prosody derived from the *Kokinshū* 古今集, an anthology that, Motora alleges, had an inflexible prosodic profile, and therefore a less healthy one, from his perspective as a psychologist.

With several pages of charts for his proof, Motora—the details of his methodology need not concern us here—compares the poems of the *Kokinshū* 古今集 (a tenth-century poetry anthology) with the poems in the *Kojiki* 古事記 (an eighth-century account of the legendary origins of the Yamato imperial line) and finds that the *Kokinshū* poetry is much more repetitive in its 5's and 7's; the meter of the *Kojiki* poems, by contrast, is observably more variable. Motora adds that the *Kokinshū* has been the historically more influential collection, governing (by either positive or negative example) the composition of waka for nearly a thousand years. Motora's study, in its condemnation of the typical prosody of the *Kokinshū*, is implicitly calling for nothing less than a revolution in Japanese metrics:

> When we analyze the *Kokinshū* it appears already to have been more narrowly bound to the rule of a 5-7 meter. Thus the effect of the *Kokinshū* poems becomes not that of sufficiently giving voice to thought but rather one of linguistic elaboration and ornamental diction. Conversely in the *Kojiki* it was possible to express thought freely, so that, although in point of regularity, the [poetry in the] *Kojiki* appears highly erratic, one is not infrequently struck by the level of conception. (p. 453)

While Motora, as we have seen above, is critical of the poetry of the *Shintaishi shō*, nevertheless he shares with the compilers of the *Shintaishi shō* a belief that the aim of poetry is to express thoughts, as shown in the quotation just given. Motora differs from the compilers of the *Shintaishi shō*, however, in believing that the *shintaishi* is ineffective as a vehicle for expression precisely because it is "narrowly bound to the rule of a 5-7 meter."

It is hard to defend the *Shintaishi shō* poems from the charge of monotony. For instance, one of the first *shintaishi*, a translation of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy begins:

死ぬるが増か生くるが増か
つたなき運の情なく
堪へ忍ぶが男児ぞよ
一そのことに二つなき
死んで眠りてそれぎりと
さらりと去つて消え行くも

思案をするハこゝぞかし
うきめからきめ重なるも
又もおもへバさハあらで
露の玉の緒うちきりて
からきくるしき世の中を
卑怯の業にあらぬかや… (後略) [30]

Shinuru ga mashi ka / ikuru ga mashi ka[31]
tsutanaki un no / nasake naku
koraeshinobu ga / otoko zo yo
itsu sono koto ni / futatsu naki
shinde nemurite / soregiri to
sarari to satte / kieyuku mo

shian o suru wa / koko zo ka shi
ukime karakime / kasanaru mo
mata mo omoeba / sa wa arade
tsuyu no tama no o / uchikirite
karaki kurushiki / yo no naka o
hikyō no waza ni / aranu ka ya…

> Is it better to die? Is it better to live? Here indeed is cause for thought [*shian*]. The sadness, the bitterness, the gravity of a pitiless and poor fortune—

30 Toyama et al. 1882, p. 40 verso. Note that there are two versions of the soliloquy in the anthology.
31 Slashes have been added to mark the caesuras.

> I should be a man and endure them. Or, upon reconsideration, I should not.
> In this matter there is only one [way], not two. Were I to cut the dewdrop necklace
> and die and only sleep, and thereby depart and summarily leave
> this bitter, painful world, would it not be a coward's deed?...

In *Hamlet* the soliloquy is some thirty lines long, and the versions in the *Shintaishi shō* have slightly fewer lines. In number of syllables, however, the *Shintaishi shō* versions are more than twice as long as the original, at twenty four syllables per line in the *Shintaishi shō* versus ten syllables per line of iambic pentameter. The number of syllables is not the best metric for comparison, but it is undeniable that the Japanese translation includes several redundancies. Shakespeare's content is being expanded to fill a much larger, looser container, as it were. The Japanese version of the soliloquy includes many hemistichs composed of words in the same part of speech, often near-synonyms. *Karaki kurushiki* is two adjectives: "bitter, painful." *Ukime karakime* ("sadness, bitterness") is two nearly synonymous nouns, and repeats the word *karaki*; s*hinde nemurite*, two verbs: "dying, sleeping." More examples could be given. The style of the translation seems to be founded on a principle of syntactic iteration and semantic redundancy; and redundancy is, I would argue, the keynote of the style of the *Shintaishi shō* as a whole, probably motivated by the translators' desire to be especially clear when offering difficult texts to readers unfamiliar with Western literature.[32]

The meter of the *shintaishi* was repeatedly criticized. While for some observers (like the compilers of the *Shintaishi shō*) the problem with the haiku and the waka and the other fixed forms was that they were too short, for others the problem with the *shintaishi* was that it seemed too long. The poet and critic Ōmachi Keigetsu 大町桂月 (1869–1925), writing in the journal *Teikoku bungaku* 帝国文学 in 1898, comments that "Japanese poets are doomed to be holed up in a fortress made of chains of five-syllable and seven-syllable lines."[33] Long Japanese poems written in meter were derided. An unsigned 1899 article, "Shintaishi kai" 新体詩界 (The [Current] *Shintaishi* World), states that it was becoming clearer and clearer with each passing year that "the 7-5 [poetic] form is unsuited to long poems," and gives as an example the longest poem in Shimazaki Tōson's 島崎藤村 1898 collection *Natsukusa* 夏草, "Nōfu" 農夫 (The Farmer), an 883-line poem in a 7-5 meter. [34] Another writer makes a similar complaint about Doi Bansui's 土井晩翠 347-line poem "Seiraku shūfū gojōgen" 星落秋風五丈原; this author complains that in general the *shintaishi* "misses the mark" with its endless repetition of 5- and 7-syllable clauses, as though nothing had been learned from the mistakes of poets in earlier centuries.[35]

32 One could defend this translation of Hamlet's soliloquy by claiming that the redundancies are a result of fidelity to the source text. Frank Kermode has persuasively argued that the style of *Hamlet* relies heavily on doublings (e.g., "slings and arrows," "to die—to sleep," "the trappings and the suits," and so on). See the chapter on *Hamlet* in Kermode 2000, pp. 96–125. But it is easy to find examples of such doublings in the other poems in the *Shintaishi shō*.

33 Akatsuka 1991, pp. 248–49. Ōmachi voices many complaints about Japanese as a language for poetry: for example, since all positive verbs end in an *u* sound (excepting *nari* and *ari*), all (positive) verb-stopped sentences, in effect, rhyme with one another; and with only five vowels, it is virtually impossible to rhyme beautifully in Japanese; and not only is there no easy way to rhyme, but there is no tonal variation (*hyōsoku* 平仄) as there is in Chinese.

34 Akatsuka 1991, p. 261. The number 883 is taken from Morita 1970, p. 350.

35 Akatsuka 1991, p. 262.

The phrase *senpen ichiritsu* 千篇一律, "a thousand verses, [but only] one meter," sums up the position of those who were dissatisfied with the *shintaishi* on metrical grounds.[36] It must be admitted, however, that even in the years before free verse, Japanese poetic meter was not all 5's and 7's. Kawai Suimei's 河井酔茗 *Shintaishi sahō* 新体詩作法 (How to Write *Shintaishi*), for example, notes that the *shintaishi* has been written in "7-6, 7-7, 7-5-7, 8-5, 8-6, 8-7, and 8-8"; but Suimei concedes that the other meters are "rarer than [the poems written in] 7-5."[37] Indeed, Suimei names the years 1897–1905 "the age of the 7-5 meter."[38] Hoping for variety, critics advocated a fundamental change in how the *shintaishi* was composed.

Compounding the attacks on the meter of the *shintaishi* were complaints about what was deemed the intrinsically unmusical nature of the Japanese language. For instance, Hattori Yoshika, a young critic who campaigned tirelessly for the adoption of Western methods in Japanese poetry, preferred Western poetries over Japanese verse precisely because "the linguistic variability of the Western poetries brings with it the ability to be freely musical, with their intonational meters, rhyming meters [*ōinritsu* 押韻律], and syllabic meters—an ability not to be found in Japanese poetry."[39]

Some Japanese poets voiced similar complaints about their artistic medium, claiming that the Japanese language limited the effects they were able to achieve in their poetry. The case of the poet-turned-novelist Shimazaki Tōson is illustrative. Tōson's career as a poet had the most auspicious of beginnings. His debut 1897 collection *Wakanashū* 若菜集 has been credited with delaying the appearance of free-verse *genbun itchi* poetry.[40] But within a matter of years, Tōson gave his *congé* to poetry, deciding to write novels for the rest of his active life. In 1901 Tōson published his fourth and final poetry collection, *Rakubaishū* 落梅集, at the end of which there appears a long essay on Japanese poetics, "Gagen to shiika" 雅言と詩歌 (Elegant Diction and Poetry), in which Tōson outlines the "drawbacks" (*furi* 不利) of composing poetry in Japanese.[41] The very first of these, Tōson claims, is the paucity of vowels in Japanese, a disadvantage exacerbated by the fact that the few attested vowels are all of a similar length and stress—with detrimental consequences for the musicality of poetry. In comparison with poetry in English and Chinese, he adds, Japanese poetry does not fare well. To demonstrate the poverty of the Japanese language in comparison with English and Chinese, Tōson resorts to a simplified musical notation. He gives a short sample of English poetry: four lines of George Gordon, Lord Byron's poem *Childe Harold*, in which the unstressed syllables are marked as quarter-notes, the stressed syllables as half-notes, in pleasing iambic alternation. Tōson's second example is a poem by Li Bai: four lines of seven syllables each, in which high-toned syllables are marked as quarter-notes and low-toned syllables are marked as half-

36 The phrase *senpen ichiritsu* was used by various commentators, although not always to belittle the *shintaishi*. For example, a 1904 article signed by one pseudonymous Hinagiku 雛菊 disparages the metrical monotony of the recent popular collections of *shintaishi*: see Hinagiku 1904, p. 150. Conversely, Sasagawa Rinpū 笹川臨風 questions whether the *shintaishi* is actually as monotonous as its detractors would have us believe. See Sasagawa 1907, p. 197.

37 Kawai 1908, p. 219.

38 Kawai 1908, pp. 18–19. Suimei chooses 1897 for the publication of Shimazaki Tōson's *Wakanashū*; with the publication of Ueda Bin's translation anthology *Kaichōon* in 1905, there is a surge in the influence of Symbolism. Both poets will be mentioned below.

39 Hattori 1908, p. 365.

40 Keene 1984, p. 204.

41 Shimazaki 1901, p. 240.

notes.[42] Tōson's musical rendering makes clear that consecutive lines in Li Bai's poem are tonally non-repeating, in keeping with one of the rules of poetry composition in the T'ang era. The third example is a waka from the fifteenth book of the *Kokinshū*, and every syllable is marked as a quarter-note—a graphic representation of what Tōson sees as the monotony of Japanese phonetics. Having concluded his rapid survey of the musical possibilities of English, Chinese, and Japanese, Tōson exclaims, "Look how unsatisfactory are the vowels of our elegant language [*gagen* 雅言], and how difficult it is [in Japanese] to arrive at an effective meter [*inritsu* 韻律]!"[43]

With so many reasons to inveigh against Japanese poetry, Japanese poets and critics sought temporary relief, perhaps not surprisingly, in the poetry of the Western languages, to which we will turn in the next section.

Japanese Descriptions of Poetry in European Languages, Especially *Vers Libre*

In the first section of this essay, Shimamura Hōgetsu was already cited as an advocate of adopting a more modern poetic vocabulary and discarding the allegedly antiquated poetic diction of Japanese poetry. To cite him again, he criticized the *shintaishi* for its lack of "directness and straightness" (*direkutonesu* ディレクトネス, *sutoreitonesu* ストレイトネス) and its failure to use words from "actual life" (Hōgetsu's gloss on the phrase *jissai seikatsu* 実際生活).[44] For Hōgetsu, the diction of the *shintaishi* is incompatible with "directness." As has already been suggested, he is borrowing his ideals from Wordsworth, and from Walt Whitman as well:

> … [W]henever I read English[-language] poetry, in all points the modernity of the language is recognizable; with Whitman and Wordsworth especially I feel that such is the case. In Japan the [poetic] language is not at all the modern language, and Japanese poets must make remarkable efforts to express modern thoughts and feelings; one immediately senses how much effort our poets expend; and the misshapen and distorted result is inevitable. That said, it is not easy to show precisely how to write *genbun itchi* poetry.[45]

As Hōgetsu argues here, the language of Japanese poetry was somehow out of sync with the demands of contemporary poetic expression. A few privileged Western poets had solved the problem of suiting their diction to their expressive goals; but the *shintaishi* still suffered from a mismatch.

There is an irony in this invective against the diction of the *shintaishi*: the compilers of the *Shintaishi shō* had actually believed they were *solving* the problem of poetic diction. And their solution was in part inspired by their admiration of Western poetry. As Yatabe Ryōkichi puts it in the prose comment to his poem "Kamakura no daibutsu ni mōdete kan

42 More specifically, syllables in (what English-language learners of Chinese are taught as) the first and second tones are marked with half-notes; syllables in the third and fourth tones, with quarter-notes.

43 Shimazaki 1901, pp. 240–45.

44 Shimamura 1907, p. 332. For an extended treatment of Hōgetsu's part in the debate over poetic meter, see Tomasi 2007.

45 Shimamura 1907, p. 332.

ari" 鎌倉の大仏に詣でゝ感あり (Impressions on Visiting the Daibutsu at Kamakura) in the *Shintaishi shō*:

> In Western lands people usually compose poetry using the ordinary vocabulary of the people, and everyone directly expresses what is on his mind. In ancient times we did the same thing in Japan, but when today's scholars compose poetry (*shi*) they use Chinese words; and when they write Japanese verse (*uta*) they choose an archaic vocabulary. Ordinary language, treated as inferior and vulgar, is not employed. This cannot but be an error in judgment.[46]

The other *Shintaishi shō* prefacers shared Yatabe's optimism. Toyama Shōichi writes that he and the other compilers "hav[e] our noses complacently high with self-satisfaction" at the success of their translations;[47] Inoue Tetsujirō "sighs with relief" on discovering that the *shintaishi* written by his two fellow compilers had "mixed together literary and colloquial expressions, [and] the result was plain and straightforward, easy to read and easy to understand."[48] The *Shintaishi shō* compilers seemed to anticipate a favorable reception, but the next generation of poets found the *shintaishi* to be wanting.

The example of Wordsworth seems to have contributed much to the late-Meiji Japanese poets' dissatisfaction with the perceived mismatch between their so-called antiquated poetic diction and the "modern" matter that they felt compelled to express.[49] As Hattori Yoshika put it, in an October 1907 essay titled "Genbun itchi no shi" 言文一致の詩 (Poetry in *genbun itchi*), Wordsworth was an ideal precursor, someone who had achieved in English precisely what Japanese poets wanted to achieve in Japanese.[50] To the 1798 collection *Lyrical Ballads*, which Wordsworth coauthored with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, critics have traced the beginnings of (what was at the time seen as) a new kind of poetry in English, a poetry that eschewed the rhyming couplets and the elevated diction of the previous generation of poets, which included Alexander Pope.[51] When *Lyrical Ballads* was reprinted in 1800, Wordsworth appended a preface in which he explained his reasons for favoring what he called a "language really used by men" over an ostensibly "poetic diction."

Phrases from Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* reverberate throughout the Japanese poetry criticism of the first decade of the twentieth century. One example is the article by Hattori Yoshika mentioned in the previous paragraph, which includes a long block quote that is taken, he says, from the Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Hattori's quote is actually a pastiche of phrases taken from various sections of Wordsworth's Preface. I reproduce them here:

> (1) So-called elegant poetic language is "the common inheritance of poets."
> (2) "The principal object, then, proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and

46 Toyama et al. 1882, p. 25 recto, and Morrell 1975, p. 19.
47 Toyama et al. 1882, 3rd *jo* p. 2 recto, and Morrell 1975, p. 24.
48 Toyama et al. 1882, 1st *jo* p. 1 verso, and Morrell 1975, p. 14 (modified).
49 On the reception of Wordsworth in Japan, see Ogawa 1982, pp. 7–66, and Mori 1988, pp. 4–57.
50 Hattori 1907, pp. 328–29.
51 I will not here unravel the reception history of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*; suffice it to note that, in the words of Stephen Gill, Wordsworth's "achievement of 1797–8 [in *Lyrical Ballads*] […] [is] great and, when all the scholarly footnotes have been written, still a new beginning in English poetry" (Wordsworth 1984, p. xvii).

> situations [Hattori gives "incidents" and "situations" both in English] from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect."
> (3) "There will also be found in these volumes little of what is usually called poetic diction [Hattori gives "poetic diction" in English]; as much pains has [*sic*] been taken to avoid it as is ordinarily taken to produce it. . . "
> (4) "[S]uch a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language than that which is frequently substituted for it…"
> (5) "[S]ome of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written."[52]

With Wordsworth's authority underwriting his claims, Hattori argues that the Japanese poetry of his time is too reliant on "poetic diction" and therefore should alter its language. As another example of Wordsworth-idolatry, consider the following sentence from an unsigned article in the May 1908 issue of *Hibashira* 火柱: "ōru guddo poetori izu za suponten'asu ōbāfurowa [*sic*] ovu pawafuru hīringu [*sic*]" オールグッド、ポエトリ、イズ、ザ スポンテンアス、オーバーフロワ、オヴ、パワフル ヒーリング, a gloss on the phrase "All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," from Wordsworth's Preface.[53]

Frequently associated with Wordsworth was the name of the American poet Walt Whitman. To cite Shimamura Hōgetsu again, in a 1908 article he pairs Whitman and Wordsworth together as poets who demonize "poetic diction":

> The topic of *kōgoshi* in the West has for quite some time entailed two controversial areas [*mondai to naru ten* 問題となる点] […] First is the *poetic diction* used by poets such as Wordsworth and Whitman, by which is meant a theory of lineation [*shikuhō no ron* 詩句法の論]; second, *meter*, by which is meant a theory of rhythm [*rikkaku* 律格]. The former of these [i.e., poetic diction] entails the belief that it's mistaken to claim that poetry must have a vocabulary different from that of ordinary speech (i.e., "choice of words" [English gloss in original]) and a syntax [different from that of ordinary language] (i.e., "order of words" [English gloss in original]).[54]

For "poetic diction" Hōgetsu writes *poechikku dikushon* ポエチック・ヂクション, trusting that his readers will be familiar with Wordsworth's statements *in English*. The phrases "choice of words" and "order of words" are also given in English pronunciation glosses, although these are explained periphrastically. Wordsworth and Whitman have not only solved the problems faced by Japanese poets in 1908, Hōgetsu suggests, but they (the Wordsworths and the Whitmans) have devised a vocabulary (in English, of course) for describing their solutions.[55]

52 (1) = pp. 600–601; (2) = pp. 596–97; (3) = p. 600; (4) = p. 597; (5) = p. 601, in Wordsworth 1984.
53 Hitomi 1954, p. 32.
54 Shimamura 1908, p. 369.
55 For a thorough account of Whitman's reception in Japan, see for example Sadoya 1969, pp. 1–32.

The above paragraphs are not intended to provide an exhaustive account of the early Japanese reception of Wordsworth or Whitman; the citations given above rather serve to show how Wordsworth and Whitman were reduced to a few salient traits, and described as poets who had faced *and overcome* the same poetic quandaries that Japanese poets faced in the first decade of the twentieth century.[56] But for the purposes of this essay, the early reception of the French *vers libre* is especially relevant.

In early twentieth-century Japanese descriptions of modern (i.e., nineteenth-century) French poetry, one of the important figures was the poet and translator Ueda Bin 上田敏. Two years before Ryūkō published his first free-verse poems (in September of 1907), Ueda Bin had published *Kaichōon* 海潮音 (The Sound of the Tide) in 1905, an anthology of poems translated from European languages: Italian, German, French, Provençal, and English. The translations from the French, though, were the main attraction; of the twenty-nine poets presented in the anthology, fourteen are French or Belgian, and most of these were associated with the movements known as Parnassianism or Symbolism.[57] Bin himself claimed to be partial to the more classically-slanted Parnassians, but critics have acknowledged that his translations of the French and Belgian Symbolists made the greatest impression on the Japanese poetry establishment.[58] The different French poetry movements are worth mentioning because, in the capsule history of French poetry that Bin provides in the Preface to *Kaichōon*, the transition from Parnassianism to Symbolism is what gave rise to the French *vers libre*:

> Modern French poetry reached a height in Parnassianism, the resplendent beauty of which was the result of ultimate refining and polishing. But then, at the very apogee of Parnassianism, a 'change of state' was necessitated, and the necessity was realized by Mallarmé and Verlaine. The moment was decisive; they provided the impetus. They began to propagandize for 'Symbolisme'; they encouraged and elucidated the phenomenon of the *vers libre* form [*jiyūshi kei* 自由詩形].[59]

In the very next sentence, however, Bin explains that Japanese poets might not find the *vers libre* amenable:

> The translator of this volume is scarcely the one to say that Japanese poetry should imitate them exactly; my particular bent is more in sympathy with the Parnassians….[60]

And the Parnassians' poetry was metrically regular. In effect, Bin is suggesting that his Japanese audience, and the Japanese poets among them, are not ready for *vers libre* yet. It is worth noting that the poems in *Kaichōon* are all prosodically regular translations of prosodically regular originals: although the stanza structure of Bin's translations is flexible, their

56 For a contrasting approach to Wordsworth, consider Sōma Gyofū, who questions the meaning of the famous dictum about the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling." Gyofū suggests that not just any feeling will meet Wordsworth's standards, and that what Wordsworth really calls for is "a *complex* thought or the kind of feeling that would accompany it" (my emphasis). See Sōma 1908, p. 41.

57 Ueda 1952, p. 5, and Kamiyama et al. 1975, p. 111.

58 Keene 1984, p. 228.

59 Ueda 1952, p. 5, and Kamiyama et al. 1975, p. 111.

60 Ueda 1952, pp. 5–6, and Kamiyama et al. 1975, p. 111.

meter adheres to a prosody in 7's and 5's.[61] So while Bin introduces the *term* "*vers libre*," he does not introduce the *practice* of it.[62] This fact almost certainly contributes to the relatively low circulation of the term *jiyūshi*, "free poetry" (Bin's calque on *vers libre*), in the years between 1905, when *Kaichōon* was published, and 1907, when Ryūkō published his first free-verse poems.[63] During those two years, no free verse was being written in Japanese; or more importantly, no poetry was being *recognized* as free verse in Japanese.

Bin's implicit prediction—that his Japanese readers were not ready for free verse—could be either corroborated or negated, depending on one's view of the critical reaction to Japanese free verse. Some Japanese writers viewed the French *vers libre* with enthusiasm. The poet Iwano Hōmei 岩野泡鳴, for instance, excitedly explains that the "*vers libre*" (in Roman letters in the original) has proclaimed "a new law [*rihō* 理法]" which entails "the rule [*kisoku* 規則] of breaking all the rules."[64] And for some Japanese writers, enthusiasm for the free-verse form translated into a disparagement of those Japanese poets who still wrote *shintaishi*. Writing in May 1909, not even two years after Ryūkō's free-verse poems, Hattori Yoshika surveys the scene of Japanese poetry and concludes that the free-verse poetry is not gaining popularity quickly enough: "In our poetry establishment, in which there is need of a modern, free, lyric poetry [*jiyūteki jojōshi* 自由的抒情詩], it is lamentable that there are those [poets] who still dabble in the old methods."[65]

The Japanese free-verse poem also had its early detractors. The critic Oritake Ryōhō 折竹蓼峰, on encountering Ryūkō's free-verse poems, reacted harshly: "At the beginning [of the recent issue of the journal *Shijin*] there are four works by a poet who goes by Ryūkō or some such name. The titles make them sound consequential—'Trash Heap,' 'Cactus Flower,' 'Love's Return,' 'Lovebird'—but in fact they aren't even bad poetry, they're just poetry-like."[66] In an article written a year later, Oritake lumps the *vers libre* together with the vernacular poem (*kōgoshi*) as a variety of poetry that leaves him more puzzled than indifferent.[67] Oritake's repeated criticisms of Ryūkō's work "went beyond textual critique and became insulting attacks on Ryūkō's character," in the opinion of the scholar Okkotsu Akio, who notes that the writers Morikawa Kison 森川葵村 and Hattori Yoshika felt compelled to visit Oritake's home to try to persuade him to desist in his "irresponsible

61 For the philosophical background of Ueda Bin's translations, see Amano 2011. As Amano explains, Bin's strategy of "paradoxically employ[ing] the traditional [syllable schemes] in his translation of Symbolist poems in order to make their foreign sensibility accessible to Japanese readers" (p. 58) was grounded in Bin's interpretations of thinkers such as Heraclitus and Walter Pater. Summarizing a 1915 essay by Bin, Amano claims that "the Japanese Naturalist poets who were eager to employ free-verse poems…seem ludicrous to Ueda because, in his view, … [t]hey have tried to replace rhythm with colloquial form (*kōgo*), but such an effort immediately destroys the musical dynamics" (p. 65). I thank one of the anonymous readers for referring me to Amano's work.

62 One poem in *Kaichōon* avoids a discernible regular meter, the translation of a six-line poem by Heinrich Heine. The Japanese title is "Hana no otome" 花のをとめ, and its meter can be scanned as: 7-6 / 7-6 / 7-5 / 5-9 / 5-9 / 5-9. While not exactly free verse, this poem is different from other *shintaishi* in that it does not have a recurring meter throughout. Ueda 1952, p. 81.

63 This may explain why some scholars have overlooked Ueda Bin's 1905 use of *jiyūshi* in their historical treatments of the term. For example, Hitomi Enkichi contends, in my view incorrectly, that the earliest use of the term *jiyūshi* is in October 1908 (Hitomi 1954, p. 45). Okkotsu Akio later repeats Hitomi's date and cites him as a source (Okkotsu 1991, p. 3).

64 Hōmei adds that the term *jiyūshi* is a translation of *vers libre*. See Iwano 1908, p. 373.

65 Hattori 1909, p. 386.

66 Fukushima 1997, p. 57.

67 Oritake 1908, p. 350.

criticisms."[68] Another reviewer writes that the free-verse poetry makes him "want to vomit," and he castigates the free-verse poets as "criminals who, by writing such poems…make our citizens' language [*kokumin no gengo* 国民の言語] ugly."[69] Perhaps Ueda Bin was right to hesitate before offering examples of free verse to the Japanese reading public.

An important Japanese Symbolist poet, Kanbara Ariake 蒲原有明, writing in 1914, looks back with bemusement on the first appearance of Japanese free verse. In a review of Iwano Hōmei's translation of Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, Ariake surveys the impact of foreign literatures on Japanese poetry and concludes with the following:

> …and then the so-called 'free-verse' movement arose in our country. It has a rhythm such as you find in 'The bell is ringing, a pitch-black funeral procession is passing by, ding dong.' Japanese poetry has had to go back and start everything over again from the first page of the elementary school textbook, a fact that has implications both good and bad.
> And here I've reached a point where I may end this description and put down my brush.[70]

Ariake's ending flourish has an overtone of despair, and indeed by 1914 Ariake's career as a poet was effectively finished. His poetic output had ceased with the publication of a poetry collection, the *Ariake shū* 有明集 in 1908, the year after the publication of Ryūkō's first free-verse poems. Ariake's Symbolist *shintaishi* in the *Ariake shū* were received with a storm of criticism, much of it negative, and from this time onward the once-"new" style of poetry would be seen as the old.[71]

Kawaji Ryūkō's Free Verse

Given that many Japanese poets and critics took a jaundiced view of contemporary Japanese poetry and a sanguine view of the possibilities of poetry in European languages, one might expect that the best resolution would be to write poetry in European languages. A few Japanese poets did precisely that. Yoné Noguchi (English penname of Noguchi Yonejirō 野口米次郎), for example, wrote poetry in English, most of it free verse, as in the following lines from his 1903 collection *From the Eastern Sea*:

> Fuji Yama,
> Touched by thy divine breath,
> We return to the shape of God.
> Thy silence is Song […][72]

68 Okkotsu 1991, pp. 337–38.
69 Hitomi 1954, p. 49.
70 Kanbara 1914, p. 291. In a later reminiscence, his *Hiunshō* 飛雲抄 (1938), Ariake recycles his parody of the free-verse poem, concluding that "the free-verse movement begins not from the liberation of poetry but its opposite" (Kanbara 1980, p. 278).
71 For contemporary reception of Ariake, see Matsubara et al. 1908. For an analysis of Ariake's attempts at writing free verse, see Satō N. 2011, pp. 17–28.
72 Noguchi 1903, p. 7.

Most of Noguchi's poetry in English is unrhymed free verse in the manner of the lines just quoted.[73] The novelist Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石, too, wrote verse in English, but did not publish it; his English poetry remained in his notebooks at his death.[74] Sōseki's first English-language poem was written in 1901; it is written in a loose trimeter with rhymes on alternating lines.[75] In 1903–1904, having just returned from England, Sōseki writes a handful of short English lyrics in free verse, as in the following lines from the beginning of his poem "Dawn of Creation":

> Heaven in her first grief said: 'Wilt thou kiss me once more ere we part?'
> 'Yes dear,' replied Earth. 'A thousand kisses, if they cure thee of thy grief.'
> They slept a while, souls united in each other's embrace. […][76]

Sōseki's English poems remained uncirculated until the publication of an edition of his collected works in 1918.[77]

For most Japanese poets at the time—indeed, for most poets anywhere—writing in a language not their own was not an option. It was a young poet on the verge of his nineteenth birthday, Kawaji Ryūkō, who published the first Japanese poems to be recognized as free verse. In September 1907, as has already been noted, Ryūkō published his "Shinshi yonshō" (Four New Poems); in the following month, Hattori Yoshika (mentioned above) published his article "Genbun itchi no shi" (Poetry in *Genbun itchi*). Hattori's essay on Ryūkō is vital: it signals to other poets that here is a kind of Japanese poetry that avoids the faults of monotony and unmusicality, while approximating the traits of Western poetries that critics deem desirable. Hattori's essay hails Ryūkō's work as "marking an epoch in the history of Japanese poetry" because it is "pure *genbun itchi* poetry" (*junzentaru genbun itchi shi* 純然たる言文一致詩), unlike other Japanese poems written in a "folk-song meter" (*zokuyōtai* 俗謡体), by which Hattori probably means a 7-5 meter.[78] Hattori did not yet use the term free verse, but by singling out metrical constraint (*mītā no yakusoku* ミーターの約束) as a matter of primary importance, he reorients the critical discourse, emphasizing the aspect of Ryūkō's poetry that was most distinctive.[79]

The point about critical reception is crucial. The English-language free-verse poetry of Yoné Noguchi, as far as I have been able to determine, was not recognized as such in Japan; and Sōseki's English free verse was unknown. Even in Japanese, though, an important precursor had already written poetry that must be described as free verse: Kitamura Tōkoku 北村透谷. In a classical poetic register, and in a "poetic diction" that Japanese advocates of Wordsworth's ideals would have found unacceptable, Tōkoku had written free-verse poems as early as April 1889, with the publication of his *Soshū no shi* 楚囚の詩 (Poems of a Prisoner). As Tōkoku writes in the brief Preface to this collection, "[The verses in] this

73 Writing in December 1908, Iwano Hōmei comments that Yoné Noguchi's English poems—which Hōmei characterizes as *eigo sanbunshi* 英語散文詩 or "English free-verse [literally: prose] poems"—"are based on Whitman," adding that of all Noguchi's poems "only one or two are metrically regular" (Iwano 1908, p. 373).
74 Natsume 1995, pp. 708–709.
75 Natsume 1995, pp. 163–68. The poem: "Life's Dialogue."
76 Natsume 1995, p. 172.
77 Natsume 1995, p. 709.
78 Hattori 1907, p. 327.
79 Hattori 1907, p. 329.

collection are neither our country's so-called waka [*uta* 歌] nor poetry [*shi* 詩]; rather, they resemble narrative [prose] [*shōsetsu ni nite oru* 小説に似てをる]. Yet even so they are poetry..."[80] It appears that Tōkoku's poetry puzzled contemporary readers. According to the editor of Tōkoku's collected works, one early reviewer for the *Jogaku zasshi* 女学雑誌 pronounced an uncertain evaluation of *Soshū no shi*: "Unfortunately I cannot admire this as metrical poetry [*risshi* 律詩] …. If I had to say, I would describe this as prose laden with poetic sentiment [*shijō aru no sanbun nari* 詩情あるの散文なり]."[81] Citing another puzzled reaction by the man of letters Yamaji Aizan 山路愛山, the editor of Tōkoku's collected works concludes: "The critics [at the time] did not realize there was such a thing as free-verse poetry [*jiyūritsu no shi* 自由律の詩]."[82] Tōkoku's example, so far as I have been able to determine, was not recognized as a forerunner by the Japanese poets who were experimenting with free verse in 1907–1908.[83] To the contrary, Tōkoku was already being forgotten. In a January 1907 article, Kanbara Ariake laments the fact that even *shintaishi* poets seemed to have ignored the works of the major poets of the previous decade: he names Yamada Bimyō 山田美妙, Miyazaki Koshoshi 宮崎湖処子, and Kitamura Tōkoku as the principal of the forgotten precursors. Ariake goes so far as to provide a pronunciation gloss for the second ideograph in Tōkoku's given name, suggesting that he (or his editor) thought his readers might find the name unfamiliar.[84] Tōkoku had committed suicide in 1894 at age 25, so the posthumous reception of his works, written over the course of a truncated career, depended entirely on critics and historians.

Following the publication of his free-verse poems, Ryūkō himself wrote a number of occasional articles on poetics; he shaped the reception of his poetry and gave a positive vector to the critical discourse about the free-verse form. One of Ryūkō's early essays, "Jiyūshi kei: Kyōretsu naru inshō" 自由詩形: 強烈なる印象 (The Free-Verse Form: Forceful Impressions), seeks to assuage the critical establishment's doubts by claiming (to put it here schematically) that the free-verse poem *avoided* all the alleged faults of Japanese poetic language and *had* all the contrasting favorable traits of Western free-verse poetries. For an example of how Ryūkō distances the new Japanese free-verse poetry from prior poetic forms, take his statements on the rhythm of free verse. Critics who had disparaged the metrically regular *shintaishi*, as has been shown above, tended to object to its repetitive rhythm. Ryūkō harps on this very string, and he does so by invoking a distinction between the form of a poem and its content. For Ryūkō, form and content should contribute in equal measures to the overall musicality of a poem; or, as he puts it, the "tone" of the form and the "tone" of the content should harmonize:

80 Kitamura 1950, p. 4.
81 Kitamura 1950, p. 415.
82 Kitamura 1950, p. 415.
83 Amō Hisayoshi 阿毛久芳 had written of another kind of poetry that was well known in the 1880s and 1890s: the *jiyūka* 自由歌 (freedom verse). The *jiyūka* was a type of *shintaishi* distinguished by its theme: freedom, especially in the political sense (Amō 2001, pp. 561–62). For example, in Komuro Kutsuzan's 小室屈山 poem "Jiyū no uta" 自由の歌 (Song of Freedom), there are lines such as *Hito no jiyū to* / *iu mono wa*. // *Tenchi shizen no* / *michi naru zo* 人の自由といふものは. 天地自然の道なるぞ (Personal freedom is Nature's way) (NGST 1950, p. 54); and, near the end of a *shintaishi* version of "Rippu Ban Unkuru" リップ・バン・ウンクル [*sic*] (Rip Van Winkle), there is the line *Jiyū yo jiyū*. / *kate jiyū* 自由よ自由. 勝て自由 (Freedom, O Freedom! To you the victory, Freedom!) (NGST 1950, p. 102). I thank one of the anonymous readers for referring me to Amō's essay.
84 Kanbara 1907, p. 12.

> In the earlier poetry, a 7-5 verse is a 7-5 verse no matter how many you read; a 5-7 verse is a 5-7 verse no matter how many you read. [In the earlier poetry] there were works, of course, that achieved a *unité* [so glossed in the original] between the *tone* of content and the *tone* of that [particular] form [i.e., the *shintaishi*]. But the content was always being dictated by the form and was sung accordingly, creating a clear distinction between content and form. In the new free-verse poetry, [however,] the form *is* the content.[85]

Form and content in harmony: and thus, Ryūkō concludes, free-verse poetry extricates Japanese poets from the morass of the *shintaishi*. The tenability of the distinctions Ryūkō is drawing, between form and content, between tonal unity and disunity, is not at issue here; what most catches my attention is how Ryūkō has adapted the complaints that earlier critics made against the *shintaishi* and used them to shed favorable light on the free-verse poem.

In the same essay, Ryūkō claims that Japanese free-verse poetry resembles poetry written by certain prominent Western poets. At a crucial argumentative turn, Ryūkō invokes the name of Walt Whitman to parry an objection that the critic Ikuta Chōkō 生田長江, a translator of German literature, had raised against the new Japanese poetry. Ikuta's 1908 article "Kōgoshi o warau" 口語詩を嗤ふ (Laughing at the Vernacular Poem) had faulted the newer kind of poetry on the grounds that it seemed to erode the difference between prose and poetry:

> It's not that I'm claiming there are no poems that should be written in the vernacular [*kōgo*]. It's that I must believe that there are *some* poems that should *not* be written in the vernacular. I'm not opposed to the existence of vernacular poems, but in the end it's difficult for me to understand the reasoning behind the claims that all poems must be in the vernacular. And even if a poem is in the vernacular, it must have some kind of rhythmical constraint [*ritsubunteki yakusoku* 律文的約束]. If it does not, then the boundary between prose and poetry vanishes. The vernacular poetry of today has forgotten the fundamental difference between prose and poetry.[86]

Ryūkō replies, in effect, that a poem is made rhythmical by being divided into *lines*; moreover, lineation distinguishes poetry from prose. Ryūkō's supporting evidence is the example of Whitman:

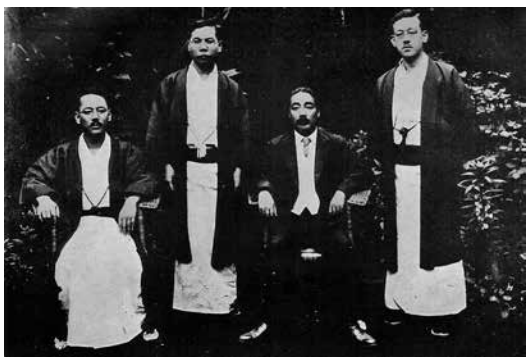
> In prose poetry [*sanbunshi*] there are two varieties: prose poems based on prose, and prose poems based on poetry. I prefer to see the vernacular poem [*kōgoshi*] as the latter. For convenience's sake, to give examples of prose-based prose poetry—or to put it differently, poetry written in prose ([in English:] "prose poem," or "poem in prose")—there are the [prose] poems of Turgenev or Baudelaire, which are poems in terms of their content even though they have borrowed prose for their form. They are prose. But in my view, the prose-style poems [*sanbuntai shi* 散文体詩] of someone like Whitman are utterly different from [the prose poems of Turgenev and Baudelaire] in several

85 Kawaji 1909, pp. 379–80.
86 Hitomi 1954, p. 48.

> points (a matter which I cannot argue in detail because I'm researching it at present). In Whitman, there are *lines* [English gloss in original]. These [lines] have the style [or form: *katachi* 形] of prose, but it is evident that in places they lose the quality of being mere prose. And what, after all, is the significance of dividing [the text] into lines and shaping them as stanzas? The point, it goes without saying, is the poem's rhythm.[87]

In this essay, Ryūkō stakes everything on what he calls rhythm as a means to distinguish a poem from a piece of prose; but rhythm is, he argues, determined primarily by lineation.[88]

Other poets eventually joined Ryūkō in publishing free verse. After publishing his "Shinshi yonshō" in September 1907, Ryūkō continued publishing free-verse poems: five poems in October 1907, three more in December 1907, and another in March 1908, all in the journal *Shijin*. In May 1908 two other poets published free-verse poems in the journal *Waseda bungaku*: Sōma Gyofū 相馬御風 and Miki Rofū 三木露風. In the same month Ryūkō published another free-verse poem in *Shijin*. In the remaining months of 1908 several other poets would begin publishing poems in the new form: Hitomi Tōmei 人見東明 (later Enkichi 円吉), Fukuda Yūsaku 福田夕咲, Iwano Hōmei, Katō Kaishun, and Kawai Suimei among them.[89] Ryūkō's first poetry collection, *Robō no hana* 路傍の花 (Flowers by the Wayside), was published in September 1910; the first half of the collection was in free verse, while the second half was in various prosodically regular forms. Four months earlier, Kawai Suimei's collection *Kiri* 霧 (Mists) had been published (May 1910), and it too contained free-verse poems. Within a few years, the well-known poets Takamura Kōtarō 高村光太郎 and Hagiwara Sakutarō 萩原朔太郎 would begin publishing their free-verse poems: Takamura's first poetry collection, *Dōtei* 道程 (The Road Ahead), was published in 1914; Hagiwara's first collection, *Tsuki ni hoeru* 月に吠える (Howling at the Moon), in 1917.



The group portrait includes, from left to right, Maeda Yūgure 前田夕暮, Miki Rofū, Kitahara Hakushū 北原白秋, and Hattori Yoshika, dated July 1925 (Taishō 14). From Hattori Yoshika. *Kōgoshi shōshi: Nihon jiyūshi zenshi*. Shōrinsha, 1963.

Like William Wordsworth, whose poetry "successfully created the taste by which it is now judged," Ryūkō helped bring about a transformation in how Japanese poetry was conceived.[90] He played a crucial role in establishing the major form of modern Japanese poetry that is being written today. But it is hard to argue that Ryūkō's

87 Kawaji 1909, p. 379.

88 Cf. Marjorie Perloff, writing as late as 1998: "What *is* free verse anyway? However varied its definitions, there is general agreement [that] the *sine qua non* of free verse is *lineation*. When the lines run all the way to the right margin, the result is prose, however 'poetic.' The basic unit of free verse is thus the line…" (Perloff 1998, p. 87).

89 This summary is a compression of Okkotsu 1991, pp. 337–40.

90 Mellor and Matlak 1996, p. 563. Note this comment that Wordsworth made in a letter to Lady Beaumont (21 May 1807): "[N]ever forget what I believe was observed to you by [Samuel Taylor] Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great or original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen" (Wordsworth 1969, p. 150).

reputation in Japanese poetry is as high as Wordsworth's in English. The work of the poets who began publishing poetry a few years later than Ryūkō—Takamura and Hagiwara among them—eclipsed his contributions and those of the other early experimenters. Ryūkō continued to publish poetry collections, but with decreasing frequency;[91] he had a career as a prolific art critic throughout the 1920s and 1930s.[92] In a brief autobiographical sketch written for an anthology of his poetry, he notes with evident pride that he shared credit for the first anthology of modern Japanese poetry translated into a European language, the *Anthologie des poètes japonais contemporains*.[93]

Looking back on his first poetry collection forty years later (1950), Ryūkō continued to shape and burnish his legacy, letting it be known which foreign texts had influenced his early poetry:

> My first published vernacular-style new poems [*kōgotai no shinshi* 口語体の新詩] were in the September 1907 number of Kawai [Suimei] sensei's [journal] *Shijin*. I should make a minor clarification here. In Hinatsu 日夏 [Kōnosuke]'s history of Japanese poetry, he conjectures that [my poems] were influenced by Katayama Koson's 片山孤村 prose translation of a translated poem in "Shinkeishitsu no bungaku" 神経質の文学 (The Literature of Nerves) in [the journal] *Teikoku bungaku*.[94]

Before continuing with Ryūkō's account, it is fitting to mention here what Hinatsu Kōnosuke had written to elicit Ryūkō's rebuttal. In *Meiji Taishō shishi* 明治大正詩史 (1948), Hinatsu writes that "Ryūkō's experiment [*shisaku* 試作; he refers to the poem "Hakidame"] is clearly modeled on a translation that [Katayama] Koson had published; and thus it should be realized how historically important this text of Koson's is for the history of Japanese poetry, even though Koson hated modernity [*kindai girai* 近代ぎらひ]."[95] The translation by Katayama Koson to which Hinatsu alludes is a version of a poem by the German poet Richard Dehmel. (Hinatsu reprints the first lines of Koson's translation.) In Koson's 1905 "Shinkeishitsu no bungaku," Dehmel's poem "Der tote Ton" ("The Dead Sound") is printed first in German and then in a following translation, titled "Shiseru hibiki" 死せる響. Dehmel's poem is written in metrically regular rhyming couplets; but Koson's translation, a line-for-line rendering of the original, follows no discernible metrical pattern. The first line of Dehmel's poem is rich in inner rhymes that suggest the repetitive gonging of a bell: "Ton von Glocken. Drohn von Glocken. Wo nur? Weh, ich falle!" The first line of Koson's translation: "Kane ga naru gōn, gōn, doko darō, yaa taihen watakushi wa taoreru yo" 鐘が鳴るゴーン、ゴーン、何処だらう、やあ大変私は仆れるよ. (It is surely this line that Ariake has in mind in his 1914 retrospective, mentioned above.) Koson's brief comment on this poem begins: "It may seem foolish of me to introduce a poem such as this one, but any inspection of the egregious faults of the *décadents* must go to these lengths." His further explanation

91 He published collections in 1914 = *Kanata no sora ni* かなたの空に; 1918 = *Shōri* 勝利; 1921 = *Akebono no koe* 曙の声; 1922 = *Ayumu hito* 歩む人; 1935 = *Akarui kaze* 明るい風; 1947 = *Mui no sekkei* 無為の設計; and 1957 = *Nami* 波. Cf. GNSZ 1955, pp. 6–11.

92 Takizawa 2011, pp. 571–86.

93 GNSZ 1955, p. 6. The *Anthologie des poètes japonais contemporains* (1939) was edited by Matsuo Kuni and E. Steinilber Oberlin; Ryūkō is credited with the Preface to that volume.

94 Kawaji 1950, p. 5.

95 Hinatsu 1948, p. 225.

of Dehmel's rhyme-heavy "Klangmalerei" (sound-painting) is not written in laudatory terms.[96] Perhaps predictably, Ryūkō denies that he modeled his poetry on Koson's version of Dehmel, alleging that he did not see it in print until later:

> But this is just [Hinatsu's] conjecture. At the time, I was still living as a student in Kyoto and in fact I'd not read or even heard about that [issue of] *Teikoku bungaku*. Therefore his [i.e., Koson's] experiment with the vernacular style [*kōgotai* 口語体] had no bearing whatsoever. It wasn't until half a year *after* I had published my poems that I came to Tokyo, which is when Hattori Yoshika showed me [Koson's translation]. And even then, I only thought it was just a bit of translated prose [*sanbun yaku* 散文訳].[97]

Having cleared up Hinatsu's misunderstanding, Ryūkō is quick to assert that his poetry *did have models*, just not the ones that Hinatsu surmised. The relevant intertext, in Ryūkō's retrospective account, is the French *vers libre*. Ryūkō also names Hattori Yoshika as an important interlocutor during the crucial early period of his career:

> The name *kōgoshi* 口語詩 was taken from common parlance; my [preferred] term [at the time] was *kōgotai no shi* 口語体の詩 (since any *min'yō* 民謡 [folk song] would be a *kōgoshi*)—because the idea was that it had done away with the old rhythms, breaking the old forms and creating a new one; in any case it was not a term that I liked. Then the poetry critic Hattori Yoshika told me about the French *vers libre*, which he had found in Vance Thompson's *French Portraits*, a book that I too was reading at the time. We took that as our term and translated it just as we found it, coining the term *jiyūshi*.[98] I later learned more about the *jiyūshi* form from the works of Verhaeren and [Viélé-] Griffin in *Poètes d'aujourd'hui*, an anthology of modern French poetry.[99]

In a manner that should remind us of Ryūkō's earlier critical essays, here he stresses the affinities between his work and that of European poets. But the *shintaishi* against which Ryūkō's early free-verse poetry had reacted was no longer worth so much as a mention. From this, one should not conclude that the *shintaishi* had completely faded from view. But one may surmise that, in 1950, Japanese poets no longer felt it necessary to distinguish their verses from the *shintaishi*: the distinction had come to be taken for granted.

Conclusion

It may seem that, after the initial mention of Yuri Lotman's model of cultural change, this essay has allowed that model to fade from view. In fact, however, it has been implicit in the essay's organization at every step. Following Lotman's model, which is (as Lotman grants) a simplification for heuristic purposes, this essay has treated the appearance of Japanese free verse as a process that unfolds in several phases.

96 Katayama 1905, pp. 175–76.

97 It seems unlikely that Ryūkō could have mistaken either Koson's translation or Dehmel's original German for prose.

98 If Ryūkō believed that he and Hattori coined the term *jiyūshi*, then this suggests they had overlooked or forgotten Ueda Bin's use of the term in his 1905 Preface to *Kaichōon*.

99 Kawaji 1950, p. 5.

This essay's first long section delineates how Japanese poetry critics cast certain features of Japanese *shintaishi* poetry in a negative light, focusing their criticism on the monotony of the *shintaishi* meter and the unmusicality of the Japanese language. As Lotman would have it, the critics' description of Japanese poetry is a purposive simplification: they exclude the full range of poetic phenomena from their account so that their negative criticisms loom larger. The second section then shows Japanese poetry critics looking abroad (outside the semiotic system of Japanese poetry, as Lotman would put it) to poetries in Western languages, to see whether Western poets might have found techniques that would ameliorate the perceived drawbacks of Japanese poetry. Here again, the critics' description of Western poetries is selective, and intentionally so: their primary aim is to highlight the (alleged) successes of the *vers libre* in particular. The third section then shows how a poet, Kawaji Ryūkō, writes a form of Japanese poetry designed to avoid the drawbacks that critics had located in *shintaishi* poetry and to approximate the more desirable features of the Western poetries that critics had singled out for praise. Ryūkō's own poetry criticism tends to corroborate this model.

It should be granted here, though, that as a piece of selective criticism in its own right, this essay falls far short of the full complexity of the material it takes as evidence. The choice of free verse as a topical focus has entailed, in this essay at least, the consideration primarily of the *shintaishi* and free-verse poetry, to the exclusion of the contemporary haiku and tanka. It need not have done so, as is shown by Leith Morton's meticulous account of the revolution in modern Japanese tanka.[100] Furthermore, there is a limitation in Lotman's model of cultural change: Lotman proposes that a semiotic system that formulates its own rules will then *rigidify* under some circumstances or *change* under other circumstances, but it remains difficult to know what circumstances contribute to the one result or the other. Take the difference between the creation of the *shintaishi* and the later creation of Japanese free verse. Both events can be described using Lotman's model; but they had very different sequels. The *shintaishi*, like the later free verse, was created in response to certain criticisms; but the *shintaishi* gave rise to other criticisms in turn, and another major change—the creation of free verse—followed soon thereafter. But the creation of the free verse, one could argue, has *not* been followed (yet) by an analogously major change. The free-verse poem continues to be written on a wide scale, while the *shintaishi* has been relegated to a comparatively minor status in Japanese poetry. This difference remains to be explained.

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