

Unveiling Open Secrets of Hometown, War, and Mass Culture in Twentieth-Century  
Japanese Poetry

By

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Abstract

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My dissertation, *Unveiling Open Secrets of Hometown, War, and Mass Culture in Twentieth Century Japanese Lyric Poetry*, explores the potential of lyric poetry, when used in conjunction with strategies of translation and rewriting, to unveil politically charged open secrets. Translation theorist André Lefèvre has said that translation can function as a kind of “alibi” that allows the translator to evade or redirect the pressures of censorship, to publish subversive material that might excite a more repressive reaction were it under the author’s name as original work. The poets treated in my dissertation all use various modes of translation, rewriting, or adaptation to create an alibi for themselves, a quietly resistant lyric voice forged from the fragments of other languages, other writers, and other media. Although modern lyric has often been portrayed as an elite art form removed from popular art forms, all the poets and artists discussed in my project adapt visual imagery and motifs from mass culture into lyric poetry in order to show the pervasiveness of these open secrets in a way that permeates the cultural environments of the elite and ordinary people alike.

The first chapter explores Kitahara Hakushû’s (1885-1942) defamiliarizing portrayal of the nostalgic ideal of the hometown in his 1912 poetry collection *Memories* and other works. Hakushû uses visual devices drawn from Meiji cinema to reveal the projected, artificial quality of the notion of hometown. The second chapter investigates Ueda Bin’s (1874-1916) translations of Charles Baudelaire, which portray indirect ripples of the distant Russo-Japanese War in the latent violence of urban life in Tokyo. Chapter three discusses several 1930s lyric poets’ use of formal motifs drawn from mass media in their works of propagandistic nationalism during the Pacific War, and argues that these writers endued their works of nationalistic poetry with oblique criticism of wartime militarism. The last chapter of the dissertation investigates the legacy of these prewar and wartime strategies of the open secret in 1960s poetry and film of the Minamata environmentalist activist movement.

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## Introduction: Framing Open Secrets As a Space of Possibility in Modern Japanese Poetry

How can lyric poetry, often viewed as a hermetically personal and apolitical literary form, serve as a political form of expression under conditions of political repression and censorship that prevent straightforward modes of dissent? Writing under varying degrees and kinds of state pressure and censorship in the period from 1900-1940, the poets in this study availed themselves of the inward, personal mode of lyric poetry in part because more straightforward modes of political speech carried risks of suppression or marginalization. These poets treated the political realities of their time as a kind of “open secret,” a revelation that remains unspoken, rather than unveiled or exposed, and indeed carries a political and aesthetic charge that is all the more potent for remaining unspoken. This argument first locates prewar Japanese lyric poets’ critical capacity in their ability to register the unspeakable quality of the open secrets that underlay Japanese society in the early years of the twentieth century, during times of war, nationalism, totalitarianism, and imperialism. It then traces the legacy of these prewar poets into the lyric poets and filmmakers responding to environmentalist disaster (in Minamata) in the 1960s. Throughout, I explore notions of the open secret found in critical theory, and the liminal space between knowing and not knowing, acting and not acting that the term implies. This line of inquiry overlaps with recent debates in lyric studies about whether and how lyric can be political. Using the notion of open secrets, I will suggest that the lyric is political precisely for what it does not say, rather than for what it does.

I draw the idea of the open secret from Anne Lise François’s work on open secrets as a form of politically significant non-action, what she calls “recessive action” that “makes nothing happen,” where nothing is not the default result of apathy and inaction but a strategically constructed void that contains the potential for radical transformation.<sup>1</sup> The reticent, often demure Victorian texts in François’s study eschew the realm of worldly experience, not as an act of protest, but rather as one of sheer exhaustion, so that they lose interest in the things of this earth and resign themselves to their fate. François has noted how important the concept of open secrets has become in critical theory, in Slavoj Žižek and other critical theorists’ Marxian analysis of ideology as people’s willed, knowing misrecognition of the oppressive social reality in which they are embedded,<sup>2</sup> as well as in queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s work on the closet as an open secret that allows its practitioners, hiding in plain sight, to survive and sometimes to explore potentially radical possibilities for gender trouble and subversion.<sup>3</sup> The poets in this study combine François’s act of receding from the worldly realm with various subversive strategies.

For Žižek, ideology, the fundamental worldview through which the capitalistic ruling order exerts its dominance over society, operates as an open secret, one that people understand but pretend not to. “Totalitarian ideology... is no longer meant, even by its

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<sup>1</sup> Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008) 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

authors, to be taken seriously,”<sup>4</sup> but rather it is meant to be obeyed at a cynical, ironic distance. Subjugated but not duped, “they know very well how things really are, but still they keep doing it as if they did not know.”<sup>5</sup>

In Sedgwick’s work, the closet operates as a kind of open secret, where various kinds of open-endedness and possibility exist because sexual orientation is still not publicly known, still not articulated. The act of unveiling, of coming out, has perhaps more radical potential here than in the cynical totalitarian mode of Žizek: “In dealing with an open-secret structure, it’s only by being shameless about risking the obvious that we happen into the vicinity of the transformative.”<sup>6</sup> Sedgwick points out that coming out is usually not a single, discrete act with a clear before and after, but an ongoing process that reiterates itself a little differently each time it happens. Even after coming out, there are ways that the unknowability and liminality of the open secret still inhere in sexuality: “That’s one of the things that ‘queer’ can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.”<sup>7</sup>

Theoretical debates about the political relevance of lyric poetry echo the concerns of theorists like Žizek and Sedgwick working with notions of the open secret. The political content of lyric poetry often operates in the elusive realm of the unsaid, in Sedgwick’s “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning.” Walter Benjamin, for example, has used the work of Marx, Proust, and Freud to read the work of lyric poet Charles Baudelaire as a traumatic expression of a repressed past—not the personal past of the individual poet or speaker (Proust’s voluntary memory), but a collective, discursive past (Proust’s involuntary memory) that coalesces around the poem’s place in history. In Baudelaire, the nostalgia and longing of lyric poetry become a space where “voluntary and involuntary recollection lose their mutual exclusiveness,”<sup>8</sup> and the personal voice of lyric echoes with society’s repressed historical realities. For Benjamin, Baudelaire’s traumatic flashbacks work, not by explicitly revealing the historical realities they point to, but by refracting them indirectly as allegory. Adorno’s work on lyric extends Benjamin’s insight, arguing that “the lyric work is always the expression of a social antagonism,” an expression that disintegrates or unsays itself.<sup>9</sup> In Adorno’s analysis of Paul Celan as well as of the Romantics, the lyric voice seems to extinguish itself, to go out into a kind of darkness, slumber, silence, or death.

In industrial society, the lyric idea of a self-restoring immediacy becomes—where

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<sup>4</sup> Slavoj Žizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, UK: Verso Books, 1989) 27.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

<sup>6</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of The Closet* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 1990) 22.

<sup>7</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993) 8.

<sup>8</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Harry Zohn, trans. (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 159-160

<sup>9</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” in Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature Vol. 1*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University, 1991) 45.

it does not impotently evoke a romantic past—more and more something that flashes out abruptly, something in which what is impossible transcends its own impossibility.<sup>10</sup>

It is in lyric poetry's performance of its own impossibility that Adorno sees the potential for "social antagonism." Both Adorno and Benjamin see lyric's political value in its ability to work with certain kinds of indirectness or silence, in allegorical representations of traumatically repressed historical pasts for Benjamin, and in the silence and death that are inherent to the utterance of lyric speakers in the modern age for Adorno. Both thinkers think of lyric as a certain kind of not-speaking that reveals by not revealing.

These strands of critical theory suggest that lyric is the performance of a non-utterance, a speech act that undoes itself in the speaking. Even once a lyric has been uttered, it still has an inarticulate quality, so much so that it might as well have not been said out loud at all. In other words, lyric unveils its secrets, but in a fragmented way full of lapses and lacunae, unveiling its open secrets only to reveal more veils.

The poets treated in this study have diverse relationships to their respective open secrets. Some leave the open secret entirely unspoken, as Ueda Bin (1874-1916) does in Chapter 2 in his portrayals of urban life that scarcely mention war. Others, like Chapter 1's lyric poet Kitahara Hakushū (1885-1942), in his defamiliarizing portrayal of the nostalgic ideal of the hometown, are willing, to a degree, to unveil the open secret and speak it aloud, even as they continue to participate in the ideological structures that keep it in place. In Chapter 3, poetry collections by Kitahara Hakushū and Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886-1942), written in the 1930s during the Pacific War, draw on the obliqueness and indirectness of the open secret in order to express ambivalence toward the war's overpowering presence in daily life. In Chapter 4, the open secret offers contemporary Japanese environmentalist poets and filmmakers protesting a mercury spill a way to approach the notion of hometown with a kind of double vision, aware of its connection to state and commercial interests, yet keenly attuned to its aesthetic and emotional power, which they seek to deploy on behalf of the victims.

In Chapter One, "Sensing Open Secrets of a Constructed Hometown in Kitahara Hakushū's *Memories*," I argue that Japanese poet Kitahara Hakushū's 1912 book of poems, *Memories*, which concern his childhood in the small southern town of Yanagawa, explores the constructed, artificial nature of the nostalgic ideal of the hometown by linking it to emerging visual media of film and photography. The poems in *Memories* present the hometown as a mediated, constructed entity: for example, by viewing it through the fragmented, scattered lens of a kaleidoscope in the poem "Sun," or by using a flickering film projector as a metaphor for the speaker's fragmented memory in "Fragments." The book's illustrations, a mixture of hand-drawn ink drawings by the poet himself, reprints of Edo-period (1603-1868) lithography, and photographs tinged by late Meiji (1868-1912) visual entertainments of panoramas and magic lanterns, create a hybrid visual portrait of the poet's hometown: as a personal memory in the hand-drawn pictures, an Edo-esque popular sideshow in the lithographs, and as a proto-cinematic spectacle in the photographs.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 50.



Hakushū reveals the hometown to be a constructed figment, as artificial and ephemeral as the products of cinema and mass culture, and lyric's nostalgia for such figments to be a mere performative spectacle. Like those who know ideology to be false consciousness in Žižek's formulation of ideology's ability to work on those who know it to be mere false consciousness, the people in Hakushū's poems "know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know."<sup>11</sup> Rather than naïvely believe in the hometown as an object of longing, Hakushū's poems reveal a longing for hometown as mediated by the visual technologies of his time.

Chapter 2, "War as an Open Secret in Tokyo Urban Life in Ueda Bin's *Sounds Of The Tide*," argues that experimental translator Ueda Bin engaged with his contemporary moment, the Russo-Japanese War, in the 1905 collection *Sounds of the Tide*. In this collection, Ueda uses Baudelaire's portrayal of the traumatic quality of everyday urban life in nineteenth-century Paris, which for Baudelaire entails a continual forgetting of hidden violence and oppression, to comment on the amnesia of everyday life in Tokyo during the far-off Russo-Japanese War occurring on the far-off Asian mainland. While Ueda never suffered outright censorship, he did face criticism from the nationalistic journal *Taiyō* for mentioning the war in an insufficiently orthodox register of Japanese—namely, for using an unusual Chinese character to refer to Manchuria, rather than the more common orthography associated with imperial expansion. In response to such pressures to talk about war only in a prescribed way, Ueda availed himself of the indirectness of the open secret in order to talk about the war without talking about it.

Ueda's particular inflection of the open secret portrays war as a pervasive feeling of dislocation, confusion, and uncertainty underlying everyday urban life in Tokyo: what Mary Favret calls the affective experience of "war at a distance" as experienced by civilians on the home front. Drawing on recent theories of affect and of the everyday, Favret argues that for European Romantics of the nineteenth century, "wartime is not just a period of time that can be got over or settled, but rather a persistent mode of daily living and a habit of mind"<sup>12</sup> woven into the very fabric of everyday life. Ueda Bin lived in a time where distant, overseas warfare was a frequent, almost normal occurrence for city dwellers going about their lives. When *Sounds of the Tide* appeared in 1905, during the Russo-Japanese War, the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War was still in recent memory, and Japan was escalating its militarized colonial presence on the Chinese mainland and in Korea. Media coverage, including prints, photographs, and motion pictures brought home the conflict in mediated, often sensationalized form. For many civilians in urban Tokyo during the distant Russo-Japanese War, the war was no more than a kind of background or undercurrent of everyday life, and it deeply, although indirectly, colored ordinary people's perceptions of themselves and their social lives with others. *Sounds of the Tide* captures the subtle ripples of war on the edges of people's daily lives, as a "habit of mind" so pervasive it escapes their awareness.

Chapter 3, "Poets on the Radio, The Poet As Benshi: Mechanized Lyric in a Time of Total War" argues that Kitahara Hakushū (1885-1942), Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886-1942), and other lyric poets obliquely express their ambivalence towards 1930s and

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<sup>11</sup> Žižek, 30

<sup>12</sup> Mary Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2009)14.

1940s militarization. They accomplish this oblique political expression using their increased access to mass media, which was made possible by the act of collaborating with the imperialist enterprise, often by producing nationalistically themed poetry. Their work, often marginalized and ignored by critics because of their nationalistic poetry, reveals the complex attitudes they had towards their role as poets of the mass media, with more opportunities than ever to appear in major newspapers, magazines, records, and radio programs. Both poets attempted to locate a place for lyric poetry within the structures of mass culture, in the process negotiating the severe censorship and scrutiny at work in the 1930s and 1940s. They embraced the opportunity to reach mass audience with their work, which in previous decades appeared more frequently in coterie journals, while finding ways to subtly critique the ongoing war effort, especially its mass media front in which they were enlisted.

Because of the highly nationalized state of the mass media in late 1930s Japan, these poets' critical portrayals of mass media take on a distinctly subversive undertone. For poets engaged in the production of nationalistic poetry for mass media outlets, a critique of cinema, radio, or photography at that time was in a sense also a critique of the domestic front of the war effort, a front in which they participated. Their poems on mass media provide critical views of the emergence of sound film and the associated tightening of censorship, of the highly nationalized climate of radio and recordings, and of the detachment from human suffering found in photography. In their poems on cinema, Hakushū and Hagiwara likened their position as poets addressing a mass audience under intense censorship to that of silent film narrators, or *benshi*, who were responsible for carrying out censors' edits to film scripts. Like these embattled *benshi*, they found ways of subtly pushing back against the censorship rules under which they operated. In their oral performances on records and radio, they used vocal inflections in order to indirectly imply their ambivalence about appearing on these highly militarized media, which were more tightly controlled than any other. Hagiwara and Hakushū's critical portrayals of the mass media in which their nationalistic war poetry appeared illuminates the critical potential of lyric poetry when it operates in the register of the open secret, allowing 1930s poets to express their ambivalence towards their own acts of collaboration.

Chapter 4, "Revisiting the Homeland as an Open Secret in the Poems of Ishimure Michiko and the Films of Tsuchimoto Noriaki," explores the legacy of the prewar poets discussed in the preceding chapters into the present day Minamata environmentalist movement, which developed in response to a prolonged episode of industrial mercury contamination in the fishing town of Minamata in southern Japan. The Chisso Corporation, a chemical and plastics manufacturing company, released large quantities of mercury into the Shiranui Sea near Minamata starting in the early 1930s until at least 1968, when the company agreed to stop dumping. Official figures list a total of 2,955 cases of mercury poisoning, though government and corporate pressure on victims not to report their illness means the figure is probably much higher.<sup>13</sup> Like Kitahara Hakushū, activist poet Ishimure Michiko and film director Tsuchimoto Noriaki memorialized the trauma's impact on Minamata via the nostalgic ideal of hometown, advocating for the victims and imaginatively constructing a radical, utopian alternative hometown.

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<sup>13</sup> Ministry of The Environment, Government of Japan, "Minamata Disease: The History And Measures," <http://www.env.go.jp/en/chemi/hs/minamata2002/ch2.html>

Using the logic of the open secret, according to which unveiling an ideological construct is not enough to defuse its emotional and aesthetic power, these environmentalist activists use the longing, nostalgia, and sense of phantasmagoric unreality evoked by the trope of hometown to memorialize the disaster, as well as to express their protest and resistance. For these artists, the hometown trope operates as a kind of ideological open secret: an idealized, nostalgic façade that conceals a reality of tainted-ness, disaster, and suffering. Unveiling this open secret means not just pointing to the reality beneath the façade, but doing so while operating within the affective and aesthetic structures of longing, nostalgia, and phantasmagoric unreality associated with the hometown.

These two artists portray Minamata as what Ishimure calls a “looked-for hometown” (*mezasu kokyō*)<sup>14</sup> capable of eliciting intense feelings of belonging and yearning. Using deliberately archaic diction drawn from the classical poetry form of *waka* Ishimure seeks to reclaim a premodern past for Minamata without resorting to nationalist notions of essential Japaneseness. Her “homeland” is emphatically not the nostalgic place imagined by Japanese nationalists, where the voices of Minamata victims are forcibly marginalized. Ishimure’s homeland may not exist in reality, but serves as a reminder of a kind of unrealized dream thrumming throughout her work and investing it with its almost defiant aesthetic intensity, using the dream of hometown despite its appropriation by state and corporate interests she intends to resist.

For both artists, Minamata exercises a pull of emotional longing: a sense of belonging, of aesthetic beauty, of longing for something unattainable because it was lost or damaged by the ravages of disaster. They speak the language of homeland back to its nationalistic forbears, albeit in a fractured, altered form, whereby the open secrets that society does not acknowledge appear tentatively legible, but in a warped and unfamiliar way. For them, the open secret is an effective tool in this environment of indifference and cynicism precisely because it thrives on being unspoken and ignored, in transfiguring a collective response of silence from one of callous indifference into one that resounds with unvoiced notes of resistance.

The poets of the open secret bring to light human beings’ embedded-ness in secret structures just beyond their comprehension, and the brief moments when those structures flash into partially sensed legibility. They act as models of oblique political engagement. Together, these poets and filmmakers indicate a mode of lyricism as a mass idiom, one which proposes, not only the solitary concerns of an individual poet, but a politically engaged imaginary for the collective. At the very least, the lyric poet acts as a model of oblique political engagement for the crowd, occupying a privileged place with whom the collective can identify. What are the poetic and political possibilities of receding from the worldly realm? These are the ethical and aesthetic questions that ground this study.

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<sup>14</sup> Ishimure Michiko, *Hanikami no Kuni* (Fukuoka, Japan: Sekifūsha, 2002) 21.

## Chapter 1

### Unveiling Open Secrets of a Constructed Hometown in Kitahara Hakushû's *Memories*

In 1910, a poetry circle called the Pan Society (*Pan no Kai*) discovered that the *kempeitai*, the Japanese police in charge of political crimes, had been regularly attending their meetings. What interest could the police have possibly had in a decadent organization dedicated to drinking, poetry, and song whose meetings took place at Tokyo drinking establishments? Indeed, most contemporary critics—much as critics today—saw lyric poetry as a hermetically personal, apolitical form. But, as Pan Society poet Yoshî Isamu (1886-1960) explained it, the police had misunderstood the name of the organization. Lacking familiarity with Western classics, they had not understood that the Society was named after Pan, the Greek god of song. Instead, they assumed the poetry circle had named itself after the Japanese word for “bread,” also pronounced *pan*, and suspected the group of Communist or proletarian sympathies due to the associations between bread and socialism found in works such as Peter Kropotkin’s *The Conquest of Bread* (1892).<sup>1516</sup> Even if the police were wrong about the meaning of the word *pan*, they were not wrong to suspect these lyric poets of harboring seditious thoughts about Japanese society. Pan Society poets did in fact embed their work with obliquely subversive aspects, making them of interest to the state for more than their writings about and real-life practice of decadence and pleasure. This essay seeks to excavate some of the latent political valences of modern Japanese lyric poetry that the state intuited were there. Perhaps the police were not so far off in their suspicions of the radical possibilities of lyric song after all.

Pan Society founder and experimental poet Kitahara Hakushû (1885-1942), like other Society members, employed the genre to imaginatively engage with his political moment. By exploring the political and social valences in Hakushû’s 1912 poetry collection *Memories*, this essay seeks to contribute to a politically inflected reading of modern Japanese poetry. In this respect I will build on the work of scholars such as Kevin Doak, who has written on the nationalist inflections of the Japanese Romantic poet Hagiwara Sakutarô (1886-1942).<sup>17</sup> I will bring out the political undertones of Hakushû’s poetry by using Anne-Lise François’s work on the open secret, in which she suggests texts can be politically meaningful by renouncing their own capacity to make any external impact upon the world, by “making nothing happen,”<sup>18</sup> where nothing is not the default result of apathy and inaction but a strategically constructed void that contains

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<sup>15</sup> Yoshî Isamu, “*Ôkawa Hashi*,” in *Tôkyô Hanjôki* (Tokyo Hibi Shimbunsha, 1928) 194

<sup>16</sup> Takagai Hiroya, *Hakushû* (Tokyo: Shoshi Yamada, 2008) 169

<sup>17</sup> Kevin Doak, *Dreams Of Difference: The Japan Romantic School And The Crisis Of Modernity* (University of California Press, 1994)

<sup>18</sup> Anne-Lise Francois, “Preface,” in *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford University, 2008) xv

potential for radical transformation. She suggests that the political value of modern lyric is the performance of a non-utterance, a speech act that undoes itself in the speaking.

The constructed, fictitious quality of the past, the supposedly authentic site of the speaker's memories, is the open secret that animates the collection. The speakers of the poems undermine and question their own authenticity, creating a sense of unveiling that never reaches completion. "Is this a memory, or our own autumn legend?," asks the speaker in the poem "Prelude," which opens the collection.<sup>19</sup> This unanswered question creates a space where François's "nothing" can happen, a space between memory and legend, authenticity and artifice, where lyric utterance can productively undermine its own capacity to make meaning.

In addition to the poems, the collection contains a series of illustrations depicting the small town where Hakushû grew up, in which the poet questions the authenticity of his own memories using a different medium, visual art. Where is the true essence of the poet's past: in poem, in photograph, in hand-made drawing, or in lithograph? In the poems as well as the illustrations in *Memories*, Hakushû reveals that lyric's connection to the past it portrays is not a natural, unmediated one, but historically implicated and contingent on its moment in time.

The open secret in Hakushû's poetry works at the margins of awareness, at what Marina Tsvetaeva calls "the periphery of the visible,"<sup>20</sup> between what is sayable and what is not. The open secret allows Hakushû to capture the dark side of history indirectly, in fragments and glimpses that draw on what is already common knowledge, and call on the reader to fill in the blanks. In the book's illustrations, as well as in the poems' metavisual figurative devices, Hakushû uses the visual technology of the day, including cinema, photography, drawing, and lithography to reveal the open secret's place on the periphery of the visible. The constructed, artificial quality of the poet's childhood memories emerges in indirect, fragmentary glimpses mediated through these visual modes.

Whether the open secret is the hometown as an artificial nostalgic trope in the poem "Sun," upper-class detachment from rural poverty and hardship "Night," the pervasiveness of spectacle and performance in daily life in "Break in the Rainy Season," the distorted effect visual technology has upon reality in the book's illustrations, or the ambivalent relationship between the individual person and the urban crowd in a series of poems called "Fragments," each poem in *Memories* participates in the unveiling of contradictions and fissures at the heart of Japanese modernity. Hakushû's poems provide a dimension of commentary on their social and political situation in their moments of rupture, in which the text undoes its own capacity to signify. These moments of rupture manifest as flashes of memory, wherein the past suddenly resurfaces into the present. These flashes partake of the logic of an open secret: they reveal what is already common, if unspoken or perhaps even unspeakable, knowledge.

### **Yanagawa as Machine, Projection, and Nightmare in *Memories***

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<sup>19</sup> Kitahara Hakushû, *Omoide: Jojōshōkyoku-shū* (Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Centâ, 1999), i

<sup>20</sup> Marina Tsvetaeva, *Art in the Light of Conscience: Eight Essays on Poetry*, Angela Livingstone, trans. (London, UK: Bloodaxe Books 2010) 141

Hakushū's descriptions of his childhood home, the riverside city of Yanagawa on the southern island of Kyūshū, use motifs drawn from Meiji-period cinema and other visual media to underline what he saw as the city's artificial, constructed quality.<sup>21</sup> He once compared his rapid-fire, imagistic writing style to the speed of cinema: "The film that has been granted me is cut extremely short. My speed is fairly rapid: it is light, it is shadow, it is color, it is pure sound [*oto nomi de arimasu*]. Watch the film as it goes *cut cut cut* [*patsu patsu patsu*]." <sup>22</sup> His evocations of Yanagawa, are written in a mechanized style, saturated in the visual cultures of the late Meiji Period, perhaps in part due to his having lived in Tokyo since 1904 when he moved there to pursue his literary career.

Already in the preface to *Memories*, he describes the town's famous canals, often evoked in nostalgic terms as a connection to an Edo-period economy before train services and modern roads, as glowing with artificial light: "near and far, emitting silver light, many man-made waterways come into view." As has been said of Hakushū's portrayal of Tokyo, this description of Yanagawa's canals seems as if "he is not writing about a city at all but about a machine," <sup>23</sup> a machine that, like a film projector or other Meiji-period mechanized visual entertainments, emits metallic light and directs the speaker's field of vision through space, "near and far." For Hakushū, Yanagawa is a nostalgic figment as artificial as the canals often cited as its quaintest tourist attraction. Hakushū emphasizes the town's loss of economic prosperity, including Hakushū's family whose once-thriving sake brewery, which had recently failed at the time of *Memories*' publication, leaving Hakushū, already a successful poet, as the family's primary breadwinner. For Hakushū, Yanagawa is a "dead city" (*taishi*), an "ash-colored coffin" (*hai-iro no hitsugi*), <sup>24</sup> an inorganic machine that shines but does not produce anything but light. Although the lushness of his language suggests a kind of pleasure in the city's mechanization, Hakushū's machine-like portrayal of Yanagawa suggests his "critical stance towards the government's policy of modernization" in urban spaces such as both Yanagawa and Tokyo, <sup>25</sup> a stance that he unfolds over the course of the collection as a series of open secrets.

Then, in the poem "Sun" (Taiyō), Hakushū reveals that his hometown is a constructed "projection of a town" that is mediated through emerging visual technologies. Like Hakushū's mechanized evocations of urban space in his writings on Tokyo,

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<sup>21</sup> Yanagawa was a former castle town with a network of canals built by its feudal landowning family during the Tokugawa Period. See Margaret Benton Fukasawa, *Kitahara Hakushū: His Life and Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) 2. The city's artificial quality that Hakushū describes in his writings comes, not only from the man-made waterways that crisscrossed the town, but also from its phantasmical character as a ghost town living in the shadow of its former prosperity.

<sup>22</sup> Kitahara Hakushū "Ōkawa Fūkei," in *Tōkyō Hanjōki*, 139

<sup>23</sup> Evelyn Schulz, "Narratives of Counter-Modernity: Urban Spaces and Mnemonic Sites in the "Tōkyō Hanjōki," in *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 2 no. 1 (2003), 149.

<sup>24</sup> "Ash-colored coffin" is Margaret Benton Fukasawa's translation, *Kitahara Hakushū: His Life and Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993) 7

<sup>25</sup> Schulz, "Narratives," 148

Yanagawa here appears as a figment in a “kaleidoscope” held by the speaker of the poem: it is a trick of perception like the play of light found in the device:

Sun

The sun is like trumpets on a festival day,  
like a magician’s released doves,  
or like particles of a glittering medicinal infusion,  
like antipyrin powder from long ago.  
The sun, red then green, shines inside  
a kaleidoscope I turn with childhood hands of childhood, choked  
with grain blossoms, gaping through  
a thin lens into the depth of my uncanny box, refracts  
again, like faint magic lantern dreams, projections of a town.

The sun sends silk trees to sleep,  
scatters gentle dandelions,  
on a silver harmonica, on the smell of autumn’s harvest,  
on toads’ skins, it casts an almost intangible pain.

The sun, with the glow of withered grass, with the flavor of corn,  
wakes my gentle older sister, comforts her, and yet  
the sun, the sun  
on a new young man’s terror, a secret that shifts between body and soul,  
with the intensely glaring gaze of a judge—  
ah, ah, the sun looks on and on, and threatens.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Kitahara, “*Taiyō*,” in *Omoide*, 253

太陽

太陽は祭日の喇叭のごとく、  
放たれし手品つかいの鳩のごとく、  
或は閃く薬湯のフラフのごとく、  
なつかしきアンチピリンの粉のごとし。  
太陽は紅く、また、みどりに、  
幼年の手に回す万華鏡のなかに光り、  
穀物の花にむせび、  
薄きレンズを透かしてわが怪しき函のそこに、  
微かなる幻燈の夢のごとく、また街の射影をうつす。

太陽はまた合歡の木をねむらせ、  
やさしきたんぽぽをふきおくり、  
銀のハーモニカに、秋の収穫のにおいに、  
或は青き蟾蜍の肌に触れがたき痛みをちらす。

Influenced by Symbolist poetry’s use of synesthesia and sensory disorientation, the first stanza portrays the sun as a chaotic entity whose light manifests as sound (trumpets), flight (the released doves), and intoxicating substance (the medicinal antipyrin), causing a feeling of synesthetic confusion in the speaker. Like the “silver light” emitted by the artificial waterways of Yanagawa in the preface, the light emitted by the sun has an unnatural quality: though it comes from a natural object, it feels artificial and constructed. It has a drug-like power to resemble “antipyrin,” or to cause sleep, as it does to the “silk trees” in the second stanza.

The sun’s ability to morph from one sensorial register to another is echoed in the poem’s use of language from different registers, including transliterated foreign loan words (“antipyrin” and “fluff,” written in the script for foreign words, katakana), Sinified neologisms for foreign words written in Chinese characters (the word for trumpet, *rappa*, of Dutch-origin and *hyaku megane* for “kaleidoscope”), and many words of domestic Japanese vocabulary. The multilingual nature of this poem’s vocabulary reflects Yanagawa’s history of proximity to Dutch and Portuguese trading outposts in Nagasaki and Hakushū’s interest in *namban shumi*, or southern exoticism, a self-consciously exotic style found in his previous poetry collection *Jashūmon* (*Heretic Gate*, 1909), which drew inspiration from Edo-period hidden Christianity in Kyūshū.<sup>27</sup> Just as the sun disorients the speaker’s senses, it also disorients language itself, bringing to light its chaotic hybridity and its ability to morph between different national and temporal idioms.

Under the sun’s intoxicating influence, the speaker holds a kaleidoscope, a proto-cinematic device often used in Meiji-period *misemono*, or popular entertainments, a frequent appearance among the booths and attractions that would feature in the “festival day” setting of the poem. The speaker expresses a sense of personal connection to the kaleidoscope, calling it “my uncanny box” (*waga ayashiki hako*), emphasizing his sense of identification with it via the possessive pronoun *waga* or “my,” suggesting that his deepest secrets lie concealed within. The box does not only conceal; it also leaves its contents vulnerable to exposure, by virtue of the fragility of its “thin lens” (*usuki renzu*), which admits the disorienting sunlight that pervades the scene. Within the box lies the faint “magic lantern dreams” (*gentō no yume*), another common Meiji-period proto-cinematic attraction.<sup>28</sup> The proto-cinematic dreams concealed in the speaker’s secret box portray “projections of a town” (*machi no sha’ei*), suggesting Yanagawa’s artificiality

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太陽は枯草のほめきに、玉蜀黍の風味に、  
 優しき姉のさまして労れども、  
 太陽は太陽は  
 新しき少年の恐怖にぞ——身と霊との変りゆく秘密にぞ、  
 あまりにも眩き判官のまなざしをもて  
 ああ、ああ、太陽はかにかくに凝視めつつ脅かす。

<sup>27</sup> Miki Taku discusses “*namban shumi*” in Hakushū’s early work in *Kitahara Hakushū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 2005) 66-67.

<sup>28</sup> Aaron Gerow discusses the protocinematic qualities of *gentō* and other visual entertainments (*misemono*) in *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Articulations of Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship, 1895-1925* (University of California Press, 2010) 41.



and mechanized quality. The speaker's inner box conceals the secret knowledge that his hometown is a mere "projection" constructed by the light of the sun.

The exposure of the contents of the speaker's secret box causes a reaction of viscerally felt corporeal anxiety, a moment of intense feeling in his "body and soul" (*mi to tamashii*) that fills him with a "young man's terror" (*shōnen no osore*). The speaker's terror and discomfort around his physical body are triggered by the moment of exposure of his "secret," the hidden contents of his uncanny box. Is the boy himself a mere "projection," like the town concealed in his kaleidoscope? The "hands of childhood" with which the speaker holds the device suggest the moment's setting in the distant past, lending it a further quality of remove and distance. The sun's light, in the first stanza an intoxicating sensory experience, now takes on a threatening, dominating quality, like the "glaring gaze of a judge" (*mabayuki hankan no manazashi*), and seems to subject the speaker to the threat of surveillance, judgment, or punishment.

The speaker finds himself transfixed by the secret, by the terrible knowledge that what lies inside him is a mere "projection" or figment. The language of the poem itself starts to break down under the pressure of the open secret's intense affective, emotional power over the speaker. The final line splinters, containing a hyphen and the nonsignifying exclamation "ah, ah!"

with the intensely glaring gaze of a judge—  
ah, ah, the sun looks on and on, and threatens.

The fake quality of the hometown is an open secret that operates on the margins of explicit language and conscious awareness, in the blank spaces and silences opened up by the fragmented final line of "Sun." The open secret allows Kitahara to capture the dark side of history indirectly, in fragments and glimpses that draw on what is already common knowledge, and call upon the reader to fill in the blanks. The poem unveils the constructed, false quality of the speaker's hometown, but the reader is left with the resulting void.

In the poem "Night" (Yoru), Hakushū uses silence and blank spaces to register the rural poverty, hardship, and the cholera epidemics that afflicted the area surrounding Yanagawa during his childhood, while, as in "Sun," mediating these events and undermining their authenticity with imagery redolent of Meiji-period visual cultures. The poem describes a series of disconnected visual images in a black-and-white color scale, suggesting the disorienting experience of visual overload associated with the new medium of cinema. Some of the poem's images recall kabuki theater, the source material for many Meiji-period films, such as the *villainous* character Ono Sadakurō from the kabuki play *Chūshingura*, or the tooth-blackening dye used by the female characters in these Edo-period dramas.

Night is black...black of the other side of silver foil.  
Smooth black of the sand by the sea,  
And then the black of the play's curtain as it falls,  
The black of a ghost's hair.

Night is black...slimy light of a snake's eyes,  
Disgusting smell of tooth-blackening dye,  
Wandering bag of medicinal remedies

Black cat walking softly.....night is black.

Night is black...black of a thief's frightening stealth.  
Sadakurô's snake-eye umbrella,  
Like a touch at the back of the neck,  
Like the lifeless wings of a dead firefly,

Night is black ... black of the clock numbers.  
Night of dripping blood,  
of raw white scissors in hand  
when the Live Liver Taker<sup>29</sup> looks in on me.  
Night is black....I try and try to close  
my eyes, but night is when blue, red, numberless  
spirits fall. Night that rings in my ears, depths unknown  
Dark night.  
Alone night.

night ... night ... night ...<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The Live Liver Taker [*Ikigimo-Dori*], a creature that cuts out people's livers in their sleep, appears in folklore. Miki Taku suggests stories of the Live Liver Taker arose in response to cholera epidemics in the Meiji Period. See Miki Taku, *Kitahara Hakushū* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 2005) 11.

<sup>30</sup> Kitahara Hakushū, "Yoru," in Kitahara Hakushū, *Omoide: Jojōshōkyokushū* (Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Sentā, 2005) 255-256.

夜は黒. . . . . 銀箔の裏面の黒。  
滑らかな渦海の黒、  
さうして芝居の下幕の黒、  
幽霊の髪黒。

夜は黒. . . . . ぬるぶると蛇の目が光り、  
おはぐろの臭のいやらしく、  
千金丹の鞆がうろつき、  
黒猫がふわりとあるく. . . . . 夜は黒。

夜は黒. . . . . おそろしい、忍びやかな盗人の黒、  
定九郎の蛇目傘、  
誰だか頸すぢに触るやうな、  
力のない死蝋の翅のやうな。

夜は黒. . . . . 時計の数字の不思議な黒。  
血潮のしたたる  
生じろい鋏を持って  
生胆取のさしのぞく夜。

In cinematically infused terms, the poem portrays the night terrors of a little boy visited by the Live Liver Taker (*Ikigimo Tori*), a folkloric monster dating to cholera epidemics of the Meiji period. Cholera patients who died in forced hospitalization, never to return to their families, were said to have fallen victim to this creature, who removed their organs while they were still living. Tales of this creature emerged from popular fear and suspicion of modern medical treatment, often coercively imposed by the state on poor rural communities. In one case in Chiba prefecture in 1877, local fishermen beat a doctor to death because of rumors that he had taken the livers of his cholera patients, like the feared “Live Liver Taker.”<sup>31</sup>

The moniker “Live Liver Taker” was also applied to a serial killer called Baba Katsutarô (circa 1875-1908), who, over a period from 1905 to 1906, cut out the internal organs of four women, believing that they were medical remedies for consumption.<sup>32</sup> The media coverage of Baba and fascination with his outrageous medical beliefs reflected popular anxiety over the state’s imposition of medical advances and public health. Popular images of the Live Liver Taker, both of the folkloric creature and of the criminal, were not just an outgrowth of superstitious fear of scientific medical advances; they were also a powerful symbol of the “popular contestation that emerged in response to the Meiji state’s efforts to bring health—and its lack—under governmental control... a series of confrontations between the government and the people over the question ‘whose body is it?’”<sup>33</sup> The Live Liver Taker’s appearance in the poem brings such ideological clashes between the Meiji state and the people to bear on the child’s hermetic little world. Whose dreams, whose body, and whose room is it, the boy seems to ask himself, as his world is cast into doubt. Is his private world as safe and innocent as he thought, or are the ideological clashes taking place outside seeping in? The Live-Liver Taker, with his roots in folklore as well as in mass media accounts of the murder case, joins with Sadakurô and the imagery of cinematic historical dramas to create a sense of the boy’s media-saturated inner life, populated by demons drawn from popular forms.

In “Night,” the Live Liver Taker contrasts with the safety and coziness of the boy’s room. The ticking of the clock suggests a relatively well-to-do middle-class Meiji home able to afford such a household comfort, since clocks were associated with cleanliness,

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夜は黒. . . . . 瞑っても瞑っても、  
青い赤い無数の霊の落ちかかる夜。  
耳鳴の底知れぬ夜。  
暗い夜。  
ひとりぼっちの夜。

夜. . . 夜. . . 夜. . .

<sup>31</sup> Miki, *Kitahara Hakushū*, 11.

<sup>32</sup> “Ikigimo Tori Jiken de Yonin Satsugai no Shikeishū,” *Yomiuri Shimbun* (June 19, 1908)

<sup>33</sup> Susan L. Burns, “Constructing The Body: Health and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Japan,” in *Nation Work: Asian Elites and National Identities* edited by Timothy Brook and others (University of Michigan, 2000), p. 27.

efficiency, and an up-to-date, modern home,<sup>34</sup> as well with the “uniformity and regularity” of the Meiji-period ideal of a modern capitalistic routine.<sup>35</sup> Fukasawa points out that Hakushū’s well-to-do family owned a wall clock during his childhood in Yanagawa.<sup>36</sup> The boy seems to be sleeping alone, another sign of relative affluence, as it was rare for children to have their own rooms at the time. The little boy’s family (like Hakushū’s own) is presumably of a social class that could afford some protection from the very worst of the suffering associated with the late Meiji cholera epidemics.

The sound of the clock, a sign of middle-class comfort, takes on a horrifying cast when juxtaposed with the boy’s nightmares of cinematic monsters. Hakushū’s preface to the collection mentions that Hakushū had a childhood fear of the family clock and associated it with the tales of the Live Liver Taker’s deadly visits to cholera wards: “And the sound of the clock in the middle of the night marks the stealthy footsteps, dripping blood, of the Live Liver Taker on Tonka John’s<sup>37</sup> little brain, numb with fevered imaginings, as if pulling him into the dark depths of time, when it strikes the hour.”<sup>38</sup> The clock’s sound pulls him down “into the dark depths of time,” where he encounters the “ghosts” and “numberless spirits” in the poem, perhaps belonging to those who have fallen victim to the Live Liver Taker.

It is as though this sign of prosperity echoes with the voices of those who suffer beyond the safety of the little boy’s fortunate home. The little boy closes his eyes and sees “numberless spirits / fall,” as if the dead are all around him. Meanwhile, the Live Liver Taker “looks in on” him, with a luminous flash from his “raw white scissors.” The flash of light calls out to the little boy and draws him in: he knows the Live Liver Taker is there to “look in on [him,]” (*sashi-nozoku*). The Live Liver Taker is here for him and him alone, but the monster has not come to collect the boy’s internal organs. Instead, the Live Liver Taker has come to confront him with the reality of others’ suffering he does not share. Unlike the “numberless spirits” drifting through “depths unknown,” the boy lies safe in his futon. The Live Liver Taker cannot kill him, but it can confront him with the open secret of others’ suffering, echoing through the “dark night. / Alone Night.” The damaged, fragmented form of the poem, ultimately trailing off into a series of ellipses (“night...night...night...”), reveals how the suffering of others and the social reality that isolates the little boy from it are unspeakable; they escape language’s capacity to express them.

Like the speaker in “Sun,” the boy in “Night” is confronted with dark secrets about himself, moments of self-discovery that overwhelm language’s capacity to signify. These

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<sup>34</sup> See Jordan Sand, “The Housewife’s Laboratory,” in *House And Home In Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space, And Bourgeois Culture*, (Harvard University Asia Center, 2003) 55-95

<sup>35</sup> Stefan Tanaka, *New Times in Modern Japan* (Princeton University Press, 2006) 12

<sup>36</sup> Fukasawa, *Kitahara Hakushū*, 7

<sup>37</sup> Tonka John is a nickname Hakushū uses for his childhood self in *Memories*.

Explanations of its origins differ. It is a Romanization of Kyūshū dialect for the oldest son of a good family. Itō Sei, ed. *Nihon Kindai Bungaku Taikei*, volume 59 (Kadokawa, 1969) 125.

<sup>38</sup> Hakushū, *Omoide*, 19

moments of unveiling are mediated by imagery drawn from visual cultures: the boy's proto-cinematic kaleidoscope in "Sun" and frightening black-and-white images suggestive of cinematic kabuki theater adaptations in "Night." These moments are at once beyond language and at the "periphery of the visible," where the boy's cinematically-infused fantasies break down and impinge on his reality.

In details from "Night" like the "black of the clock numbers" or the gleam of the "raw white scissors," Hakushû transfigures commonplace details of everyday life into unsettling, frightening apparitions. The open secret pervades the details of everyday life, charging them with a kind of power to call out to the speaker with "almost intangible pain:"

sends silk trees to sleep,  
scatters gentle dandelions,  
on a silver harmonica, on the smell of autumn's harvest,  
on toads' skins, it casts an almost intangible pain.

The open secret makes itself felt with an "intangible pain," which the speaker describes as if he experiences it himself even though it is directed on the "toads' skins" rather than his own, in charged details of everyday life such as the ticking clock in "Night." This "intangible pain" touches the speaker of the poem on a visceral level, as well as hinting at the reader's reception of the poem. The reader also feels the "intangible pain" (*furegataki itami*) of the mysterious open secret, a sensation that cannot be put into words or explicitly described. The open secret viscerally interpellates those who are implicated in these moments of commonplace, ordinary experience that become charged with a certain intensity.

The list is a key formal element for the open secret to speak or call out to its interlocutors through these charged everyday details. Hakushû often writes lists of images in the manner of the passage quoted above, lists or litanies of unrelated sensory details drawn from the everyday of small-town life that end in a kind of puzzlement or confusion, an "almost intangible pain." The elements in the list accumulate one after another, familiar yet juxtaposed in new combinations, and these images then call out to the reader to interpret them. What is the link between "silk trees," "dandelions," the sound of the "harmonica," the "smell of autumn's harvest," and "toads' skins?" The list demands that the reader leap from unexpected image to unexpected image, making or forgoing interpretive links between each one. Between the peaceful slumber of silk trees, and the smell of autumn's harvest, there lies a gap that calls out to readers as those who know the reason behind this list yet cannot speak it aloud. The call of the open secret is a gentle one: it may be painful, but that pain is "almost intangible." It grazes the skin with the gentleness of the wind through the silk trees, or the sound of the silver harmonica.

Hakushû locates the historical context of his poems in these moments of what Anne-Lise François calls "uncounted experience," the ephemeral stuff of sense memory and beauty. In this reading of *Memories* as a historically inflected work of lyric expression, the word history is used to mean a complex web of multiple pasts interwoven by poetic memory that registers in moments of sensed experience. *Memories* imagines history as a fragmentary lyric structure in which each poem suddenly remembers its own embeddedness. These moments of remembering are what make Hakushû's poems historically and politically aware of their moment.

### An “Inner Emigration” and the Reaction against Late Meiji Lyric Poets

Kitahara Hakushū was one of many poets following the late Meiji generation who sought to open up lyric to its social and political context without abandoning the personal, inward realm. *Memories*, published in the last year of the Meiji period, though many of its poems first appeared in magazines several years previously, was a turning point between the earlier form of *shintai shi* (new style poetry) written in classical Japanese, and *jiyū shi* (free verse), written in modern day colloquial Japanese (*kōgo*), which would become the dominant idiom of poetry written in Japanese in the Taishō period. *Memories*’ language, as we have seen in the hybrid, chaotic vocabulary appearing in “Sun” and Night,” mixes grammatical patterns from classical Japanese with modern and Westernized neologisms, regional words from the southern Kyūshū dialect spoken in Yanagawa, and terms from modern scientific vocabulary. Hakushū’s contemporary, Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886-1942), would publish *Howling at the Moon* (*Tsuki ni Hoeru*), the first work of colloquial *jiyū-shi*, in 1917, five years after the publication of *Memories*, citing Hakushū’s work, and *Memories* in particular, as an important source of inspiration in his creation of a new poetic language.<sup>39</sup>

Hakushū’s politically aware poems in *Memories* came at a time of a growing focus on personal, private expression in Japanese literature and intellectual life, and lively debate about the political possibilities of such an inward turn. Harry Harootunian has described this introspective turn as an “inner emigration” that favored “unpolitical” matters of the self over collective political action.<sup>40</sup> Harootunian suggests that this disenchantment with political action stemmed from the onset of nationalism and imperialism in Japanese public life beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, especially the series of Peace Preservation Laws first passed in 1900 that regulated labor activism and freedom of speech.<sup>41</sup> Many disaffected Japanese intellectuals chose to take a critical stance in art or literary work rather than in political action and looked to “literature and art as a new mediation between individual and state.”<sup>42</sup> Harootunian suggests that the unpolitical turn of many Japanese literary and intellectual figures had a kind of critical overtone: “[f]ailure to change the world led to criticism of it.”<sup>43</sup> The widespread disillusionment among writers and artists intensified during the “winter period” (*fuyu no jidai*) that followed the 1911 Great Treason Trial and the government’s ensuing crackdown on leftist speech and organizing.<sup>44</sup> The inner emigration brought with it a newly inward-facing mode of socially and politically engaged writing.

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<sup>39</sup> Katsuhara Haruki, “Sakutarō to Hakushū,” in Ueda Hiroshi and Nakajima Kunihiko, *Ishikawa Takuboku to Kitahara Hakushū* (Yūseidō Shuppan, 1989) 205

<sup>40</sup> Harootunian, H.D., “Between Politics and Culture: Authority and the Ambiguities of Intellectual Choice in Imperial Japan,” in eds. H.D Harootunian and Bernard Silverman. *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taishō Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974) 123.

<sup>41</sup> Harootunian, “Between,” 145

<sup>42</sup> Harootunian, “Between,” 128

<sup>43</sup> Harootunian, “Between,” 128

<sup>44</sup> Vera Mackie and Yamaizumi Susumu, “Introduction,” *Japan and the High Treason Incident* (Routledge, 2013) 4.

In keeping with the turn-of-the-century “inner emigration” Harootunian describes, lyric poetry by late nineteenth-century writers like Tayama Katai (1871-1930), Yanagita Kunio (1875-1965), and Miyazaki Koshoshi (1864-1922) featured an often hermetic sense of a closed, personal realm removed from the social world yet still embedded within it. In an essay included in the 1897 volume *Lyric Poetry [Jojōshi]*, an anthology by Miyazaki, Tayama, Yanagita, and others, the poets display a sense of their personally expressive enterprise as “our very own song” separate from “the law of the world:”

In our opinion, the future success of this thing we call free verse [*shintaiishi*] depends on a willingness to allow almost any of the various means relied upon by our hearts, to forget the self in words and rhythm, to utter thought and feeling as they truly are; thus, these shall be our very own songs, and indeed this form and this use of language, though there is much to mark their difference from the law of the world, are all the more our own, expressions of our thought and feeling, our very own song.<sup>45</sup>

The poets in the *Lyric Poetry* anthology seek in lyric a mode of closed, personal expression, yet they also seek “to forget the self in words and rhythm.” Even for those who saw in lyric a unified mode of personal expression, the volatile formal components of “words and rhythm” undermine that position.

The emotional urgency in the above quotation from *Lyric Poetry* suggests that the poets were not unaware of their impending loss: they knew the “future success” of lyric as a mode of personal expression was already in doubt, and they were already aware that lyric’s propensity to “forget the self” might not be compatible with its capacity to serve as a unified mode of personal expression. This sense of lyric as a form in crisis was intensified by the pervasive inward turn in Japanese intellectual life in response to increases in state surveillance and regulation of expression, such as the attempts to monitor the Pan Society. The cracks and fissures already apparent in lyric form for the turn-of-the-century poets in the *Lyric Poetry* anthology become an opportunity for Hakushū’s experiments in *Memories*.

### “The Tanka Inside Modern Poetry” and Hakushū’s Inward Turn

Poets emerging after the *Lyric Poetry* generation sought an alternative to a closed, personal understanding of lyric poetry, and instead intended to open lyric up to its historical moment. In the case of *Memories*, the “inner emigration” Harootunian describes represents not a turn away from the social and political world, but rather a way to engage with it by employing the inward-looking, self-interrogatory tools and strategies of lyric poetry. Hakushū’s lyrics engage their social setting from their inside out, by reconfiguring their relationship to time and the past. Hakushū’s poems claim a kind of imaginatively reopened tanka as a prerequisite for their own existence, a secret at their core that they slowly open up.

For example, the epigraph at the beginning of *Memories* plays on a longstanding poetic trope, of a ship disappearing into the distance. The past uses of this image accumulate into a hidden undertone of past-ness:

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<sup>45</sup> Miyazaki Kokoshi, Tayama Katai, et al., *Jojōshi* (Tokyo: Tōji Shobō, 1964) 35.

Time passes, at an unknown moment, it passes tenderly; leaving a wake,  
time passes, like the hull of a red steam ship passing away.

(Passed Days Number 20)<sup>46</sup>

Although they do not make an explicit reference to a particular text, Hakushû's lines recall a famous tanka from the imperial poetry anthology *Kokinshû* (ca. 905). The *Kokinshû* poem describes the disappearance of a ship behind a distant island. In its *Kokinshû* setting, the image of the disappearing ship is intended to reinforce the melancholy, elegant poetic essence of its presumed topic, Travel:

<i>Honobono to</i>	dimly through morning
<i>Akashi no ura no</i>	mists over Akashi Bay my
<i>Asagiri ni</i>	longings trace the ship
<i>Shimaga kureyuku</i>	vanishing from sight floating
<i>Fune o shi zo omou</i>	silently behind the isle <sup>47</sup>

Hakushû's poem features a red (*akai*) steamship (perhaps playing on the first two syllables of Akashi) an image redolent of the commercial and military enterprises that employed such ships in the late Meiji time period of this poem. The red steamship, readers may assume, is probably employed on some errand to support the modernizing enterprise of the Meiji Japanese state. It also conjures up the seaside views of Yanagawa, which includes a port on the Ariake Sea called Okinohata within its limits. The refrain of Hakushû's poem, "time passes" (*toki wa yuku*), draws on the inevitability of the passage of time and the transience of all things, a common trope in all ages of Japanese poetry, especially as the word for "passes" (*yuku*) often carries overtones of death or passing away. Yet, unlike the *Kokinshû* tanka, which has a seasonal autumn setting suggested by the use of the seasonal word "morning mist" (*asagiri*), Hakushû's poem has no season. It is set in "time," pure and simple, abstracted from the seasonal rhythms that marked premodern poetry. The passage of time for Hakushû is embedded in the homogenous, abstract time of capitalistic national expansion rather than in the codified, seasonal framework of classical poetics.

Hakushû's poem describes the time of capitalistic modernity as "an unknown moment" (*itsu shirazu*) that resembles an instant of "uncounted experience:" a moment so light and gentle it is all but missed as it occurs.<sup>48</sup> Hakushû's "unknown moment" calls out "tenderly" (*yasashiku*), with all the gentleness of the open secret's "intangible pain," so gently that it scarcely registers, like the ephemeral wake of the passing steamship. The "unknown moment" is not past, not present, but a kind of liminal time where one temporal mode blurs into the next. The ship's trajectory across the sea recalls the linear progression of time towards the future, but it also "tenderly" (*yasashiku*) leaves behind a

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<sup>46</sup> Kitahara, *Omoide*, 150

時は逝く、何時しらず柔らかに影してぞゆく、  
時は逝く、赤き蒸汽の船腹の過ぎゆくごとく。

<sup>47</sup> Laurel C. Rodd, Mary Henkenius, *Kokinshû: A Collection of Poems Ancient And Modern* (Cheng And Tsui, 1996) 165

<sup>48</sup> Francois 13



wake, an ephemeral trace of the past. The poem expresses a kind of gentle ambivalence towards the capitalistic progression of linear time, and of ships across the sea. Yet this ambivalence itself is so gentle and ephemeral that it barely registers, erasing itself even as it comes into existence, like the wake of the ship whose progress the poem laments. For Hakushū, modernity seems to be a missed event that can scarcely be said to have occurred at all: an uncounted moment that calls out in a flash of gentle, lyric beauty and vanishes as it occurs.

As suggested by the “red steamship” of the epigraph quoted above, Hakushū’s *Memories* uses a turn towards a literary past as a way of engaging their embeddedness in the social world of their present. Theodor Adorno (1903-1969) suggests that lyric poetry’s imaginative reinvention of its own past offers a way to engage with the social and political structures of the real world. According to Adorno, the traces of lyric poetry’s own history embedded in its language enable lyric to serve as a critically enabling medium that stretches beyond the limits of individual subjectivity towards a collective mode of expression. In so doing, lyric reacquires a precarious connection to its own lost history.

Poetic language charged with its own history enables moments when the supposedly lost traces of antiquity become visible in a newly vivid way. For Adorno, these flashes of lyric possibility illuminate not only the past, but also the social reality of the present: “the lyric work is always the expression of a social antagonism.”<sup>49</sup> For Hakushū, too, lyric’s relationship to the past offers possibilities for imagining the present and even the future. In the poem “Night” quoted earlier, when the songlike cadences of classical Japanese break into the stuttering, elliptical fragment “Night...night...night...,” Hakushū presents the reader with one such flash of lyric impossibility, in which the poem gives voice to its own fragmentation.

The historical and social openness in the personal lyrics of Kitahara Hakushū’s *Memories* rests on a re-imagined relationship to antiquity, a relationship that appears in the kind of sudden, often shocking flashes of awareness Adorno describes. In a 1913 essay called “Paulownia Flowers and Castella,” Hakushū describes the past of Japanese literary history, especially the classically inflected poetic form *tanka*, as a kind of open secret embedded in the fabric of modern lyric, one whose momentary flashes of visibility threaten to undo the very same poetic enterprise they underlie.

The language of this essay imagines *tanka* as a half hidden secret, one that “ought to be” hidden away in a closed-off treasure box, yet exists precariously on the verge of exposure to the outside world:

An antique, tiny emerald that ought to be placed in a crystalline box and cherished secretly behind bottles of intensely transporting liquor and hashish. ... That is the way I think of *tanka*. And so I truly love it.<sup>50</sup>

The emerald’s treasure box contains bottles that in turn conceal their own cherished contents, illicit or intoxicating substances like liquor and hashish, rendering the treasure box a nesting doll of secrets within secrets. The jewel box is also noted for its transparent

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<sup>49</sup> Adorno, “On Lyric Poetry and Society,” 45

<sup>50</sup> Kitahara Hakushū, “Kiri no hana to kasutera,” in *Kitahara Hakushū Zenkashū*, volume 1, (Iwanami Shoten, 1990) 9

and fragile quality (“crystalline”), leaving its contents vulnerable to what lies outside in the world around it. Like the kaleidoscope of “Sun,” the speaker’s “uncanny box” that conceals his innermost secrets even as it exposes them to the sun’s light, the jewel box is a device at once of concealment and of exposure. The conditional verb suffix “ought to be,” (-*beki*) suggests that despite the speaker’s best efforts, the crystalline box in which he seeks to hide his secret historical past is never quite a safely closed-off container. Like the disintegrating child speaker at the end of “Night,” whose eyes “try and try to close” but ultimately cannot help but open up to the night that surrounds them, tanka in “Paulownia Flowers” remains caught between closedness and openness. The “crystalline box” and the secret-filled vessels inside it construct a figure for the open lyrics in *Memories*: each poem serves as a transparent container whose every stanza in turn contains something else, with their innermost kernel the “tiny, antique” artifact of an interiorized historical past. With momentary flashes of intensity, the open lyrics of *Memories* render this inward past visible through the crystalline layers that serve at once to reveal and obfuscate their contents.

Hakushû’s image of hashish and liquor evokes the work of French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), whom he mentions in the same essay: “The hearts of the young yearn for a music far more complicated and incomplete. They go to the sensation and form of. . . Baudelaire. . .”<sup>51</sup> Like Baudelaire, as well as thinkers like Adorno and Benjamin who study him, Hakushû looks to lyric as a way to engage the present by reimagining the past. Hakushû’s Baudelaire-inflected treatment of tanka in this essay allows him to voice concerns about lyric as a response to his own present-day context, in which “...the nerves of a modern person are always trembling so intensely it becomes painful.”<sup>52</sup> Hakushû echoes this concern for the sensory overload of modern life in his imagistic, hybridized style, which features frequent lists of disjointed images, often related in terms that conjure the visual media and cultures of the time, as well as frequent juxtapositions between archaic literary vocabulary drawn from tanka and modern, exotic words drawn from Baudelaire and other Western poets. The “complicated and incomplete” music of the open lyrics in *Memories* exposes Hakushû’s sense that “[t]he time for an uncomplicated poetry of pure feeling has passed,”<sup>53</sup> and his response to that sense of lyric’s having somehow missed its own time, a moment which has always already passed.

### **“Break in the Rainy Season” and the Spectacle of Urban Modernity**

Hakushû’s essay sometimes seems aware of the risk of over-romanticizing, or idealizing the lost past for which it mourns. In the poem “Break in the Rainy Season,” which describes a springtime kabuki performance in a small rural theater, Hakushû playfully undermines the melancholy of his Baudelairean nostalgic persona by revealing the performative artifice at the heart of the lyric mode and forgoing one of the most important defining features of lyric, its reliance upon an individual, personal speaker.

The performance, which takes place in the leek patch of a working farm, is accompanied by the sound of a turning waterwheel, which forms the central image of the

<sup>51</sup> Kitahara, “Kiri no hana,” 8

<sup>52</sup> Kitahara, “Kiri no hana,” 6

<sup>53</sup> Kitahara, “Kiri no Hana,” 10

poem. In addition to suggesting the submersion of the poem's speaker in a mechanized, nonhuman entity, the waterwheel evokes the viewing conditions of Meiji cinema. The circular motion of the waterwheel underlying the action of the play recalls the rotation of a film projector as a film displays in a theater. As in "Night," which used cinematic imagery of kabuki productions to frame the speaker's childhood memories, "Break in the Rainy Season" juxtaposes the speaker's memories with an indirect comment on the experience of early Japanese cinema-going. The poem's speaker, at once wryly aware of the spectacle's artificiality, and naively caught up in the magical show before him, manages to hold onto some form of critical agency even as he surrenders himself to the spectacle.

Break in the Rainy Season

Turn, turn, waterwheel,  
Today from noon Tadanobu  
Has worn full red makeup  
Footsteps light, hands light  
Under the *hanamichi*<sup>54</sup> where the fox tries to make his entrance, waterwheel . . .

Turn, turn, waterwheel,  
Old straw mats wet with rain, from the round ceiling of that little theater  
Blue sky shows through, sunlight,  
Radiant like the seven treasures  
Smiles on the makeup room too.

Turn, turn, waterwheel,  
Enjoy at least this one day clear interval of spring rain, let it float away  
The revolving stage too slides along,  
Draw out the water, the puddle of water from the onion patch under the stage.

Turn, turn, waterwheel,  
Red and black of the patterned curtain, stays up a little longer, as longingly  
The traveling *oyama*  
Also looks on  
Draw out the water, from the leek patch that serves as the earthen floor for this little  
country theater.

Turn, turn, waterwheel,  
From early noon, Tadanobu has painted scarlet makeup on his face  
Footsteps lightly, hands lightly  
Under the *hanamichi* where the fox tries to make his entrance, waterwheel . . .<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *Hanamichi* is a raised platform connected to the main stage in a kabuki performance, often where the performers enter and exit.

<sup>55</sup> Kitahara, *Omoide*, 325  
梅雨の晴れ間

The poem has a persistent drive to expose what mundane, hidden realities underlie the magical spectacle of the theater. Just as the theater is revealed to be nothing but a dressed-up onion patch, lyric itself is exposed as a mechanically produced spectacle, rather than a natural fount of emotion. The sound of the waterwheel, which goes on as a constant undercurrent, provides a reminder that the space is not a real theater, only an ordinary working farm. Yet the spectacle still goes on, and it still beguiles, despite the poem's knowing, slightly wry gestures to the telltale signs that this is only repurposed farmland, such as the "puddle of water under the stage." Lyric might be an artificial spectacle engendered by an impersonal machine, but its power to feel, to elicit feeling in others, and to beguile remains undeniable.

The poem's central aesthetic and emotional presence is not that of a privileged first-person speaker, but the rhythmic sound of the waterwheel pumping water out of the onion patch to preserve the dry space for the theater, a machine that exists to perpetuate the illusion. The poem's refrain, "turn, turn, waterwheel" (*mawase, mawase, mizu guruma*), with its alliterative repetition of *m*-sounds in Japanese, mimetically suggests the repetitive movement of the waterwheel as it turns in an almost mechanical manner. This repetitive, mechanical sound, detached from the action of the kabuki play, underlies the

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廻せ、廻せ、水ぐるま、  
けふの午から忠信が隈どり紅いしやつ面に  
足どりかろく、手もかろく  
狐六法踏みゆかむ花道の下、水ぐるま. . . . .

廻せ、廻せ、水ぐるま、  
雨に濡れたる古むしろ、円天井のその屋根に、  
青い空透き、日の光  
七宝のごとききらきらと、化粧部屋にも笑ふなり。

廻せ、廻せ、水ぐるま、  
梅雨の晴れ間の一日を、せめて楽しく浮かれよと  
廻り舞台も滑るなり、  
水を汲み出せ、そのしたの葱の畑のたまり水。

廻せ、廻せ、水ぐるま、  
だんだら葱の黒と赤、すこしかかげてなつかしく  
旅の女形もさし覗く、  
水を汲み出せ、平土間の、田舎芝居の葦畑。

廻せ、廻せ、水ぐるま、  
はやも午から忠信が紅隈にとつたしやつ面に  
足どりかろく、手もかろく、  
狐六法踏みゆかむ花道の下、水ぐるま. . . . .

poem without offering any kind of subjective or emotional undercurrent. The waterwheel is merely there in the background, turning and turning, not part of the theater troupe and not offering any comment on it. Subjective experience in this poem becomes unstable and elusive, residing only provisionally in the rhythm of the poem itself rather than in the privileged realm of first-person perspective.

Even in a poem lacking a unified site for personal, subjective experience, Hakushû manages to construct a moment of nostalgic longing. It is through the eyes of one of the actors, rather than a first-person speaker, that the poem seems to recognize the precarious beauty of the lyric moment it inhabits. The *oyama* (or *onnagata*) actor (a male actor performing a female role) looks on “longingly” (“*natsukashiku*,” a word that often means “nostalgically”), as he holds the curtain in place. Both the cross-gender-performing *oyama* actor, as well as the character Tadanobu, who transforms from his disguise as warlord Yoshitsune’s retainer into his true form as a fox spirit, introduce layers of transformation, performance, and instability to fixed notions of identity and selfhood, further destabilizing the poem’s grounding in consistent subjective experience. The rhythm of the waterwheel soon submerges the actor’s moment of nostalgic longing, and the poem returns to its state of mechanized lyric experience untethered to a subjective point of view. Although the poem’s setting and subject matter remain in the rural arena of a folk song, the tension between the lyric speaker and the larger mechanized body that submerges him provides a dimension of commentary on the era of urban modernity in which the piece was written.

Unlike some of Hakushû other poems discussed earlier, this poem does not look at urban modernity in a dark or unsettling light. This poem takes the open secret of the little boy’s night terrors in “Night,” in which the revenants of history confront him with the suffering of others, into a lighter register. There is no terror here, only the “lightness” of the actor’s gestures as he gracefully performs his role:

Today from noon Tadanobu  
Has worn full red makeup  
Footsteps lightly, hands lightly

The speaker is drawn to the “full red makeup” of the actor, because of its power to transform him into the character of Tadanobu, a figure of metamorphosis and transformation. The actor transforms so fully into his role that the speaker refers to him by the character’s name, blurring the line between reality and fantasy in the magical space of the theater. The speaker enters into a world of magical transformations, where fixed identities are thrown into playful flux. The open secret is not always about suffering; it is also about transformation, play, and possibility. The secrets and silences that underlie the surface of everyday life offer possibility for this kind of play. Unlike other poems in the collection, such as “Night,” where modernity is a terrifying, dark experience, “Break in the Rainy Season” highlights the possibilities modernity contains for performance and play.

The poem’s refrain, “turn, turn, waterwheel” (*mawase, mawase, mizu guruma*) suggests the speaker’s investment in the spectacle before him, as he urges the waterwheel on in the imperative mode. Interestingly, the speaker calls out not to the actors or characters, who are central to the action of the play, but to the incidental entity of the waterwheel. The speaker’s interest in the mechanical object underlying the spectacle recalls the practice in some Meiji-period cinema showings of placing the projector in

view of the audience.<sup>56</sup> For Meiji spectators, the projector's circular, mechanical motion was an entertaining part of the show, not, as it is today, a distraction from the spectacle that has to be concealed from view.<sup>57</sup>

By calling out to the waterwheel, the poem's speaker exemplifies Meiji spectators' ability to integrate the mechanics of cinema into the affective experience of viewing a film. Hakushū's speaker adopts a stance at "the periphery of the visual," where the incidental details surrounding the play, including the mechanical motions of the waterwheel/film projector, matter as much as the spectacle itself. The speaker's emotional investment in the spectacle comes, not in spite of its really being an ordinary farm dressed up to look like a kabuki play, but because of this very artifice. It is the waterwheel, which provides a reminder that the spectacle before him is not real, that brings the speaker the most pleasure, and the most keenly felt possibility for critical awareness as a sophisticated consumer of modern spectacular entertainment.

### **Beyond the Written Word: Visual Art in *Memories***

In a series of visual images, Hakushū pursues the logic of the open secret out of the written word altogether and into the realm of the visual. The pictures tease us with the knowledge that visual technologies such as photography are just as subjective and prone to distortion as the words they supposedly supplement. Hakushū presents one series of self-portraits and another of townscapes depicting Yanagawa. Both these series serve to illuminate and obscure the objects they depict: the poet and his hometown. The poet and his hometown are revealed to be figments, artificial projections of the visual technologies employed by the collection. Yet, despite their artificiality, both poet and hometown have a visceral, emotional affective presence in the text. The two self-portraits (see Figures 1 and 2) gesture at the poet as a kind of photographer, a controlling hand who presents reality as it really is. Yet this figure is never fully revealed to us; instead he remains made up of glimpses and fragments.

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<sup>56</sup> Donald Richie and Joseph Anderson, *The Japanese Film: Art And Industry* (Princeton, 1983), p. 23.

<sup>57</sup> Richie, 24.



Figure 1, Frontispiece, Kitahara, *Omoide*

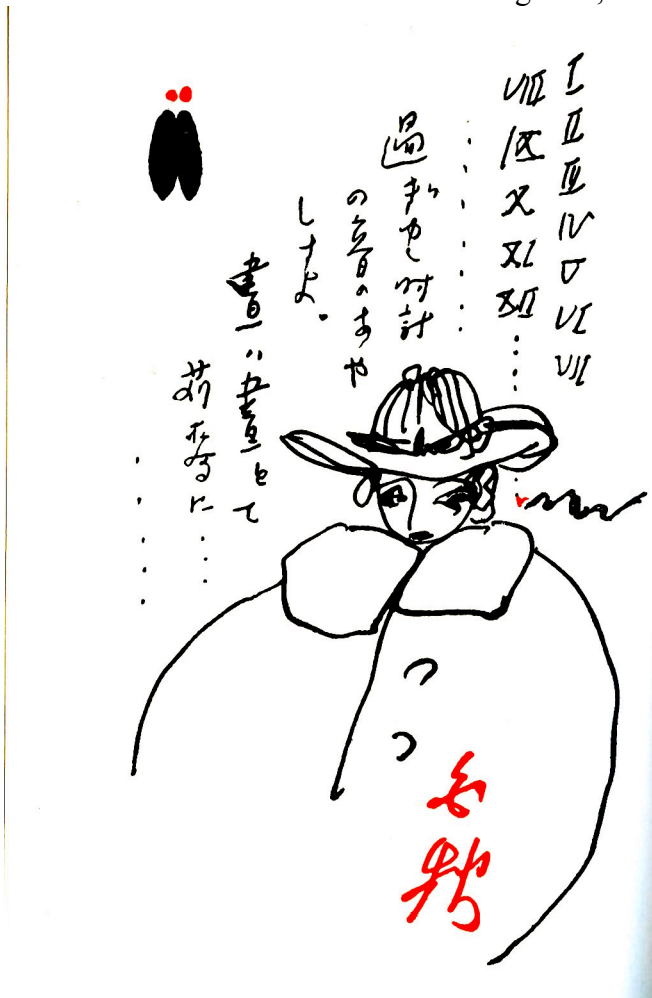


Figure 2, "Yonen no Hi," illustration,

Kitahara, *Omoide*, 139

The two self-portraits present a playfully emptied-out shell of the poet's emotive persona. The poet is revealed as a ghost of a person, with no body or authentic substance, a mere figment haunting the collection. Yet, as is often the case with the open secret logic of *Memories*, there is still an affecting, emotional aspect to the illustrations. In the book's frontispiece, Figure 1, the poet portrays a Pierrot-like figure wearing a ruffled collar, a fixed expression of melancholy on his face. Hovering over the Pierrot's head is his remembered fragment of a riverside landscape labeled with the romanized title of the collection, "OMOIDÉ," like a thought bubble in a comic strip. A subsequent Pierrot-style self-portrait, Figure 2 above, shows a tiny figure wrapped in puffy, voluminous clothing. This whimsical cartoon of the poet invests his attempts to construct a persona with at once a certain puffed-up pretentiousness and a kind of vulnerability. Hakushū's sad clown persona draws on the character of Pierrot, an early Meiji-period import via Italian and French performing traditions, often associated with themes of transformation and metamorphosis, for example in the Symbolist poetry of Jules Laforgue (1860-1887).<sup>58</sup> With its emphasis on performance and artifice, recalling the figure of Tadanobu the fox spirit in "Break in the Rainy Season," the whimsical portrait suggests that the poet-as-clown is just a constructed, mask-like face, but somehow also vulnerable beneath the artifice.

This caricature of the poet as a clown accompanies a parodic rehashing of the poetry of *Memories*. The Pierrot's overhead thought bubble contains handwritten roman numerals, which point to the frequent use of numbered units throughout the book, in such sequences as the numbered sections of the prose preface, or the numbered sequence of poems called "Fragments." However, there is more to the numbers than just their playful, self-aware comment upon the structure of the book. The written caption beside the sequence of numerals reads, "Oh, the frightfulness of the sound of the moving clock." The numbers recall the recurring image of a ticking clock, which is a source of fear as well as fascination for the childlike speakers of the poems in *Memories*. For example, in the poem "Night," discussed earlier, the numbers of the clock are the catalyst for the child's encounter with the horrors of the past: "Night is black ... black of the clock numbers." In the drawing, once again, the sound of time passing somehow renders the fabric of time permeable, and revenants from history appear with all the intensity of a nightmare. In the drawing, Hakushū plays on the poetic intensity of this image, undercutting it by calling attention to its constructedness. The puffy, odd little figure suggests a lighter, gently ironic perspective on the darkness of "Night."

In both these drawings, the poet insists upon the artificiality of his persona and the playfully arbitrary quality of his own formal procedures. In the playing card illustrations, however, Hakushū undercuts his own poetic procedures by exposing their calculated artificiality. In the preface, Hakushū comments self-deprecatingly upon his drawings' awkward, unskilled quality:

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<sup>58</sup> For more on the trajectory of the Pierrot motif in Japan, including its 1960s avant-garde iterations, see Miwako Tezuka, "Experimentation and Tradition: The Avant-Garde Play *Pierrot Lunaire* by Jikken Kōbō and Takechi Tetsuji," *Art Journal* 70, no. 3 (Fall 2011) 64-86.



Thus, in order to offer this collection of small lyric songs as my one and only gift to my flesh and blood, on the cover do I use the Queen of Hearts, rich with memory, and, though completely inexperienced with art, I even include my drawings of red-throated fireflies, the Live Liver Taker, John, and Gonsan. And so, as far as my heart goes, I long to nostalgify my own thoughts and feelings, decorating according to my own design, however clumsy it may be, thus finally it is being published this May.

Hakushû here emphasizes the “inexperienced,” naïve quality of his drawings, while still arguing for their ability to convey genuine emotion and serve as his “one and only gift” to people he loves in his hometown. The heartfelt, sentimental quality of the naïve drawings remains, despite their calculated performative quality. There is a wry sadness to the drawings, in their handmade roughness. The comically oversize eyes of the figure in the frontispiece, or the sad, floppy hat of the second Pierrot figure suggest a kind of gentle vulnerability. The drawings’ ambivalence to their own ability to elicit feeling in the viewer yields a problem that hangs over the rest of the book: can lyric be heartfelt if it is artificial? Where does the feeling come from, if the elaborate series of poetic experiments in *Memories* are all just a card game based on chance and randomness? Does lyric memory irreparably distort the past it represents, leaving only a parodic shell?

In a series of photographs of his hometown, Hakushû suggests that photographic representations of reality are as unstable and given to slippage as his series of playful, inauthentic self-portraits. Like the self-portraits, these images call into question the book’s authenticity and playfully hint at its constructed-ness. (See Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 3, “*Shiba Kôkan Dôbanga*,” illustration, Kitahara, *Omoide*, 69



Figure 4 Kitahara Hakushû, *Omoide*, 36-37

The two portrayals of the town hint that, like the poet's Pierrot persona, it is constructed, artificial, and given to metamorphosis and change. The lithograph of a riverside scene Hakushû chooses features a line of wooden buildings and people busily milling around on one side of the river, and a line of trees on the other, with a small bridge connecting the two banks. Edo-period artist Shiba Kôkan (1747-1818), an early adopter of linear perspective who spent much of his career in and around the nearby international port of Nagasaki, uses the three-dimensional technique in this engraving: buildings, river, and trees all stretch into the distance in three curved but parallel lines, apparently reaching into infinity.

Following this engraving, there is a photograph of the poet's hometown Yanagawa, featuring a riverside scene that recalls the one in Kôkan's engraving. In the late Meiji period, such townscape views, either engravings in Western-style linear perspective or photographs, were often sold as postcards to foreigners visiting Japan. The images Hakushû includes thus offer a glimpse of how visual technology was used to appeal to a commodity market. Hakushû offers a reminder that vision itself is historically contingent, rather than purely objective and realistic.

The engraving by Shiba Kôkan and the photograph of Yanagawa both visually rhyme with the sketched-in riverbank—labeled “MEMORIES”—floating over the Pierrot figure in the book's frontispiece (see Figure 1). The hand-drawn river, however, is not portrayed in linear perspective. Instead, it is oddly miniaturized, small enough that the Pierrot figure looms over it. The drawing shows the river the way a child might see it, or the way it might appear in an adult's memory of childhood. Meanwhile, the same river flows through the engraving and the photograph, though in the linear perspective afforded by these technologies. The childlike drawing of the river is not vulnerable to commodification in the same way that the engraving and the photograph are. It would not make sense to see such an image on a postcard or touristic souvenir in the late Meiji period, in the way that images like the engraving or the photograph often were. The Pierrot's memory of the river escapes the capacity of these visual technologies—they cannot grasp it. Yet the playful lightness of the drawing suggests that it does not pretend to be a transcendent, truthful version of the river, and that it is no more authentic than

photography or lithography, more commodified modes of visual technology.

Instead, the Shiba Kōkan view of the river, the photographic one, and the little sketch of a river floating in the Pierrot's thought bubble are all snapshots taken in particular historical conditions. None of them, whatever technological developments they use, has access to a transcendent, objective view of the river that flows through the poet's memory. The river itself is visible only through these historically contingent modes of visual representation. The river is embedded inextricably in its historical moment, visible differently depending on what kind of visual technology is used to approach it.

Like the poem "Sun," in which the speaker's introspective gaze into his own childhood toy reveals a miniature, projected version of the town outside, the illustrations reveal a reinvented version of the poet's hometown. In the preface, when Hakushū describes his encounter with the Kōkan engraving in a secondhand shop, the poet suggests that behind the playful Pierrot persona of his playing card self-portraits lurks a rag-picker or *flâneur*, illicitly savoring the storefront detritus of history and playfully assembling it into newly reconfigured forms.

...[T]he engraving by Shiba Kōkan is something I furtively acquired when it was abandoned in the trash at the time of its preliminary sale at a secondhand shop, a work of curious coloring and a deeply impressive exotic quality, though the loss of the original picture's elegance due to the indistinctness of the photograph is to be regretted above all else.<sup>59</sup>

Hakushū emphasizes the "exotic" quality of Kōkan's ordinary, everyday townscape, rendered uncanny by the passage of time and the ravages of photographic reproduction. Hakushū offers the drawings and reproductions in *Memories* as random fragments thrown together, salvaged from the lost past. The whimsically haphazard assemblage of visual art in *Memories*, like a little boy's box of cherished scraps and treasures, serves as a repository for the poet's childhood memories that has an almost magically transformative effect on the very past it seeks to preserve or revive.

Yet it is precisely this effect of transformation enacted upon the past that *Memories* cannot quite come to terms with. Hakushū laments the distortion of the "original picture" in photographic reproduction, suggesting that memory recalls the past only at the cost of distorting it. Interestingly, Hakushū phrases his lament for the original picture in the passive construction, so that the implied agent could be either the first person, the poet, or the second person, the reader: the loss of the original photograph is "to be regretted above all else" (*kono ue mo naku zannen ni omowareru*). The polite, almost distant quality of Hakushū's lament implicates the reader by virtue of its gentleness, so that as readers, we too, regret the loss of an original picture we have never seen. Perhaps the preservation of the original picture's purity is less important in the end than this moment of togetherness between reader and poet, a moment that gentles the reader into playing an active part in the poet's attempt to reconstruct the past.

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<sup>59</sup> Naruse Fujio, "Shiba Kōkan," in *Encyclopedia Nipponica* (Tokyo, Shogakukan) Accessed 8 Oct. 2010, [www.japanknowledge.com](http://www.japanknowledge.com)

The reader is thus invited to share the poet's discovery of lyric's place implicated in its history, and in the resulting ambivalence to this discovery. Does the past's newly altered form represent a loss "to be regretted above all else," as the preface says of the faded photograph, or does lyric's transformation of the past contain the possibility for social change in the present?

### **The "Fragments" Sequence: Fragmentary Structures of Temporal Embeddedness**

The sequence called "Fragments" (translated below) encapsulates what the poetry collection *Memories* as a whole seeks to accomplish: critically viewing its historical conditions from the slightly skewed position of "the periphery of the visible," where the open secret of the artificial, constructed quality of modern ideological tenets becomes legible. This time, the poem adopts the point of view of a child lost in a crowd at a small town festival. The boy wanders into a movie theater, where he feels frightened by the strange people in the audience and the images onscreen. "Fragments" portrays the dilemma of the poet seeking to take a critical position towards Japanese modernity: a lost child who wanders through a world that he finds alienating and foreign, yet also compelling and attractive. Hakushû's poems hover on the periphery of the historical phenomena they document, the way the child speaker of "Fragments" peeps into the world of adulthood and spectacle hidden behind the curtain.

Hakushû reveals the speaker's ambivalence towards the experience of existing in an urban crowd: the crowd is overwhelming and threatening to the speaker's sense of self, but it also offers thrilling new affective and aesthetic experiences. Like the spectator in "Break in the Rainy Season," who remains aware of the spectacle's artificiality even as he surrenders to its escapist charms, the speaker in "Fragments" strikes a fine balance between holding onto some sense of individual self while losing himself in the crowd. The boy is learning new perceptual and critical skills in order to participate in the spectacle of urban modernity, on the streets as well as in the cinema.

Many Taishô-period writers and thinkers, such as Gonda Yasunosuke (1887-1951) or Kon Wajirô (1888-1973), sought to understand modern Japan by analyzing urban Tokyo crowds, describing how crowds provided opportunities to perform new subjectivities, such as the "moga," or modern girl for example.<sup>60</sup> Hakushû does not document the Tokyo streets the way Gonda and Kon did. Instead, he captures what Tsvetaeva might call the "afterimage" of the urban crowd, by depicting the traces it leaves on his retrospective memories of childhood. The speaker's memory, of getting lost as a child at a festival in his hometown, contains an oblique meditation on the experience of living in a crowded urban setting:

35

A show on festival day, of projected faces even in the smelly fog,  
from a gap in the scary curtain a flash of a motion picture looks through,  
but this is the cheap makeup of the crowd's inside, or else  
this must be why, this must be why, this helplessness of a young body, this flow of tears.

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<sup>60</sup> Harry Harootunian, *History's Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, And The Question Of Everyday Life* (Columbia University Press, 2000) 118.

36

A keen, rustic whistle, and oh, a flow of tears.  
A chaotic motion picture projected on a sooty cloth,  
when gaslight sinks and disappears in a temporary tent on the outskirts of town,  
A keen, rustic whistle, and oh, a flow of tears.

37

Sorrow, sorrow,  
watching a blue tinted magic lantern, when  
forlorn somehow, this child's tears flowed  
and so I go to a club, call on a friend,  
order deep red tomato slices and whiskey,  
for proud young days.<sup>61</sup>

In the “Fragments” sequence, the retrospective, personal character of lyric poetry becomes a vehicle for a continual cycle of memory and shock. The past of the speaker's memory and the present of his urban Tokyo experience blur one into the other. As so often occurs in Hakushū's writing style, the poem reflects this chaotic blurring between

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<sup>61</sup> Kitahara, “*Danshō* 36, 37, 38,” in *Omoide*, 108-110  
三十五

縁日の見世物の、臭き瓦斯にも面うつし、  
怪しげの幕のひまより活動写真の色は透かせど、  
かくもまた廉白粉の、人込のなかもありけど、  
さはいえど、さはいえど、わかき身のすべもなさ、涙ながるる。

三十六

鄙びたる鋭き呼子そをきけば涙ながるる。  
いそがしき活動写真煤びたる布に映すと、  
かりそめの場末の小屋に瓦斯の火の消え落つるとき、  
鄙びたる鋭き呼子そをきけば涙ながるる。

三十七

あはれ、あはれ、  
色青き幻燈をみてありしとき、  
なになればたづきなく、かのこども涙ながれし  
いざやわれ、倶楽部にゆき、友をたずね、  
紅のトマト切り、ウイスキーの酒や呼ばむ、  
ほこりあるわかき日のために。

temporalities in its mixture of words from different registers: the classical literary term “*aware*” (sorrow) alongside the Meiji-era coinage “motion picture” (*katsudō shashin*), as well as the words “tomato” and “whiskey” of English origin.

In three fragments from the sequence, the speaker’s immersion in a childhood memory of getting lost at a fair catalyzes a series of Proustian memory shocks with all the sensory intensity of a cinematic flashback. The impact of this memory shock connects the young boy to the “crowd’s inside” that surrounds him, dissolving the boundaries between himself and others. The boy finds himself immersed in an urban, collective setting, rather than the intense solitude of other poems, such as “Night.”

The speaker of the poem has an unstable sense of self, one that is ready to dissolve its borders and merge with others in the crowd around him. The speaker’s continual oscillation between these two registers of memory renders the “Fragments” series a disorienting sequence of conflicting shocks: the authenticity of the child speaker’s immersive sense impressions is repeatedly thrown into question by the appearance of the adult speaker at a temporal remove from his child self, while the adult speaker’s safe grounding in his own present is repeatedly obliterated by the overwhelming vividness of the childhood flashbacks. Who is the weeping child of the first two poems, so viscerally aware of the “helplessness” of his “young body?” Why has a fleeting glimpse of a movie playing behind a curtain catalyzed such a terrified, panicked reaction in the little boy? Why does the child of 35 and 36 feel so oddly dissociated from the first-person pronoun in Fragment 37? Most mysteriously of all, why does the adult speaker of Fragment 37 first relive the little boy’s tearful panic, only to then retrospectively invest his own terrifying experience with a nostalgic glow, reminiscing drunkenly about his “proud young days”?

The “proud young days” of the childhood memory to which the adult speaker continually flashes back are themselves a moment in which the speaker’s childhood self realizes his own place in “the crowd’s inside,” and becomes part of a collective entity. What frightens the child the most is the “projected” (*utsushi*) quality of what he sees inside the movie theater: not only the images on screen, but also the faces of the spectators take on a flickering appearance of unreality. The boy’s forbidden gaze through the curtain returns to him with frightening intensity, as the film itself “looks through” the curtain back at the speaker. The boy experiences himself as one of a crowd of projections, “the inside of a crowd” that projects itself internally within the speaker, provoking a reaction of shock and fear so visceral that he bursts into tears. The child’s glimpse of the film through the curtain in Fragment 35 is all the more “scary” because of its forbidden, eavesdropped quality, a kind of vision he may not understand, yet knows he should not have access to. The child’s glimpse of the projected world beyond the curtain becomes a realization of his own place in the crowd. The crowd, and the little boy as he dissolves in it, are no more than “projected” figments, as artificial as the images onscreen.

What happens once the boy finds himself enveloped by the “crowd’s inside,” one of its artificial “projected faces”? The experience of the crowd is “scary” and horrifying, yet it also has the potential for the speaker to envision himself in new ways. Looking back as an adult, the speaker remembers his “proud young days” with a kind of longing. The speaker goes to a “club” with a friend and enjoys, in the urban atmosphere of a Tokyo bar, the flashback to the anonymity of the crowd, at once terrifying and thrilling,

that he experienced as a child. The “Fragments” series envisions urban modernity as terrifying, like a crowd to a small lost child, but it also explores the new experiences and modes of feeling that urban modernity has to offer. The speaker is thrust outside of himself and into a new mode of modern, collective experience, and the resulting feelings are at once thrilling and frightening. The boy finds himself in a world of fantasy and illusion, where the film’s “projected faces” merge with those of the crowd of spectators. Has the boy escaped into the anonymity of an urban crowd, or into the fantasy world of a film, or both? The speaker finds himself wandering between present and past, reality and fantasy, the solitude of a lost child and the collectivity of a crowd. The crowd offers a horrifying loss of selfhood and humanity for the speaker, as well as the potential for new modes of experience among the fantastic collective of “projected faces.” Hakushû’s poems hover on the periphery of the historical phenomena they document, the way the child speaker of “Fragments” peeps into the world of adulthood and spectacle hidden behind the curtain. It is with the charged ambivalence of an outsider who does not pretend fully to understand the phenomena he witnesses that Hakushû gives voice to his historical moment.

Hakushû’s work allows us to ask, What kind of poem counts as political or social critique? Is it possible to imagine a form of critically enabling poetic expression that does not explicitly position itself as such, and instead reveals its politics by its own connection to what Raymond Williams would call historically contingent structures of feeling? The little boy in “Night” makes no attempt to break free of the hermetic safety of his upper-class bedroom. The speaker of “Sun” cannot help feeling intense nostalgia for his hometown, even though he knows it is only a figment. The spectacle of daily life in “Break in the Rainy Season” continues to beguile the audience despite having been revealed to be a purely mechanical, artificial phenomenon. The little boy in “Fragments” is ineluctably drawn to immerse himself in the crowd despite its “scary,” threatening quality. All the poems in *Memories* partake in the same pattern: they briefly unveil some aspect of Japanese modernity, only to pull close the veil again and accept their own implication in the phenomena they have just exposed as constructed and unreal. In Žižek’s words, “They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know.”<sup>62</sup>

At times, such as in “Fragments,” when the speaker takes his place in the midst of the urban crowd, there is a note of inevitability and acceptance to the “forlorn” speaker’s laments in “Fragments”: “Sorrow, sorrow” (*Aware, aware*), he exclaims. He does not actively resist his situation, or attempt to imagine any alternative. Such an active gesture would be out of place in this poem, which is too immersed in the experience it depicts to adopt the critical distance necessary to take a political stance.

The poems seem aware of their own refusal to take up the critical work they obliquely indicate. At times, such as in the fragmented ending of the poem “Night:” (“Night...night...night...”), Hakushû’s poems extinguish themselves out of self-abnegation, as if they are exhausted by the dilemma engendered by their open secrets, which they know but cannot utter. Open secrets remain unuttered at the cost of undermining the poems’ ability to utter anything at all. Yet it is by their very silence that they bear witness to the “intangible pain” (“Sun”), left behind as the afterimage of

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<sup>62</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York, Verso: 1989) 30

history. Perhaps the Japanese secret police were oddly right to put Hakushû under surveillance in the years leading up to the publication of this work, as it is the silence of the open secret that offers potential for new kinds of politically aware imagination.

The open secrets at work in Hakushû's Meiji-period early work shifted and transformed with changes in social context, from the poet's later involvement with the Taishô-period children's poetry magazine *Red Bird* (*Akai tori*), which contained critiques of what Hakushû viewed as "Western-style" (*seiyô-shiki*) children's songs that, Sawada Mayumi notes, clash with the frequent use of Western words and techniques in his own poetry,<sup>63</sup> to his eventual rightward turn in the late 1930s during the Pacific War. Hakushû's ability to write about childhood in *Memories* eventually made him an ideal person to transmit the "ideology of the Japanese state" to child readers in books of explicitly pro-war children's poetry and songs.<sup>64</sup> The politics of lyric for Hakushû, an agent for decadence as well as subversive social critique in the era of the Pan Society, shifted towards the more nationalistically tinged critique of Westernization in his *Akai tori* days, before ultimately embracing the rightward nationalism of the 1930s, notably producing a song in honor of the Hitler Youth in 1938.<sup>65</sup> Although the nationalistic overtones of Hakushû's later works have often rendered them of marginal interest to critics, recently there have been readings by critics seeking to excavate notes of ambivalence in these later works, such as Sawada Mayumi's exploration of the irony that underlies Hakushû's critiques of Westernization in *Red Bird*, or Kanno Akimasa's discussion of the dynamic interplay between vision and the unseen in Hakushû's final nationalistic *tanka* collections.<sup>66</sup> The open secrets and half-hidden meanings of *Memories* remain, but they become unstable and dynamic, continuing what Hakushû once called his rapid-fire, cinematic "cut-cut-cut," in which hidden meanings destabilize, transform, and evade their own unveiling.

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<sup>63</sup> Sawada Mayumi, "Kitahara Hakushû ni Yoru 'Seiyô-shiki' Dôyô no Hihan ni Tsuite," Nijjima Junior College 27 (2007)

<sup>64</sup> Miki, *Kitahara Hakushû*, 378

<sup>65</sup> Miki, *Kitahara Hakushû*, 392

<sup>66</sup> Kanno Akimasa, "Mitsutsu Mizariki," in *Ishikawa Takuboku to Kitahara Hakushû*, Ueda Hiroshi and Nakajima Kunihiko (Yûseidô Shuppan, 1989)



## Chapter 2

### War as an Open Secret In Ueda Bin's *Sounds of the Tide*

As we have seen in the previous chapter, which discussed Kitahara Hakushū's unveiling of the artificiality of the trope of hometown, lyric poetry, because of its supposed hermetic remove from the world of politics and social engagement, offers a useful tool for poets attempting to explore political issues obliquely and under the radar. One such issue was the Russo-Japanese War occurring on the Asian mainland. A translation anthology of Charles Baudelaire and other European poets may not seem like the most responsive, effective way to talk about war, but for poet and translator Ueda Bin (1874-1916), it was the words of others that offered a language to discuss the unsayable open secrets that he saw pervading daily life in wartime.

Why translate Baudelaire at this particular time? The Russo-Japanese War is often thought of as the first modern war, in part because of its saturated media presence on the home front. It had a pervasive effect on everyday civilian life, mediated through literary and journalistic writing, lithographs, photography, and film. For Ueda Bin, Baudelaire's portrayals of the latent violence in urban life—its chaotic crowd scenes, its cycles of traumatic flashback followed by amnesia—offered a way to understand the oblique effects of the war on the civilian experience in Tokyo. Using Baudelaire's urban idiom, Bin translates the distant violence of the war on the mainland into the urban everyday.

*Sound of The Tide's* dedication places the work in the context of the distant conflict: "This work is dedicated to Mori Ogai, in distant Manchuria," *Haruka na manshū naru Mori Ogai nite kono sho wo kenzu*.<sup>67</sup> Mori Ogai (1862-1922), a Meiji writer and translator, was the editor and major translator of a recent prominent work of Western poetry translations, the 1889 collection *Vestiges (Omokage)*. At the time of Ueda Bin's *Sounds Of The Tide*, Ogai was serving as a military medical officer in Manchuria. Ueda dedicates his work to the distant reality of military action in China during the Russo-Japanese War, mediated by Ogai, an earlier poetry translator. The dedication links together Ueda's writing poetry with the ongoing war "in distant Manchuria."

In the dedication, Ueda highlights the distance that separates him from the soldier he addresses, by using the adjective "distant" to modify Manchuria, a distance that has to be navigated by an act of domesticating translation. As we shall see later in this analysis, Ueda Bin's domesticating translation approach was very different from Mori Ogai's, which was more foreignizing. Bin's relationship to Ogai's translations gives the dedication's distance a kind of ironic quality: he is dedicating the collection to someone whose approach was very different from his own, making the dedication read a little like a challenge, or perhaps an apology, to its dedicatee. The distance also appears to be a sort of exotic distance, exciting longing and unattainability. The domesticating approach does not seek to close this distance altogether, but to bridge it, while leaving its ironic, exotic valences intact.

While Ueda Bin never experienced outright censorship, or the kind of police surveillance experienced by the poets of Pan Circle discussed in the previous chapter, Bin's dedication faced criticism from the nationalistic critic Omachi Keigetsu for

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<sup>67</sup> Ueda Bin, *Ueda Bin Zenyaku Shishū*, edited by Yamanouchi Yoshio and Yano Hōjin (Iwanami Shoten, 1963) 12.

mentioning the war in an insufficiently orthodox register of Japanese—namely, for using an unusual Chinese character to refer to Manchuria, rather than the more common orthography associated with imperial efforts to expand. In addition, Omachi criticized his dedication of the volume to Mori Ogai serving in Manchuria as a military medical officer: “These are the manners of a junior towards his senior. *Look at this, how far away and distant, I have gone out of my way to send this all the way to Manchuria,*” said Omachi, deploring what he saw as the ostentatious quality of Bin’s dedication.<sup>68</sup> In his critique, Omachi emphasizes the hierarchical difference between *kôshin* (junior) and *senpai* (senior), and the rudeness of Bin’s attempt to navigate this distance. While these terms are not particularly associated with the military and appear in civilian bureaucratic, academic, and other contexts, Omachi’s attempt to enforce the gap between *kôshin* and *senpai*, one of whom is on the battlefield, evokes a kind of militaristic undertone, an implication that men should stick to their ranks and respect their superiors. The criticism of Bin’s dedication might not have taken this particular form were it not for the wartime context. In response to pressures to talk about war in a prescribed way, Bin avails himself of the indirectness of the open secret in order to talk about the war without talking about it.

In *Sounds of the Tide*, the open secret of war echoes in the timeless ring of temple bells, it surges through the crowds of the public city streets, and it lurks in the darkened corridors of the private home. War appears in *Sounds Of The Tide* as a pervasive feeling of dislocation, confusion, and uncertainty, what Mary Favret calls the affective experience of “war at a distance” as experienced by civilians on the home front. Drawing on recent theories of affect and of the everyday, Favret argues that, for European Romantics of the nineteenth century, “wartime is not just a period of time that can be got over or settled, but rather a persistent mode of daily living and a habit of mind”<sup>69</sup> woven into the very fabric of daily life. Favret’s nineteenth-century Romantic poets, including Wordsworth, Shelley, and others, lived in a time of nearly non-stop warfare, including a decades-long conflict between Britain and France, as well as numerous overseas conflicts in Africa, India, and elsewhere as European powers sought to expand their colonial empires. Like these Western poets, Ueda Bin lived in a time where distant, overseas warfare was a frequent occurrence. When *Sounds Of The Tide* appeared in 1905, during the Russo-Japanese War, the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese War was still in recent memory, and Japan was escalating its militarized colonial presence on the Chinese mainland and in Korea. Media coverage, including prints and photographs, brought home the conflict in mediated, often sensationalized form. For many civilians in urban Tokyo during the distant Russo-Japanese War, the war manifested as a kind of background or undercurrent of everyday life, coloring ordinary people’s perceptions of themselves and their social lives with others. Like the *kempeitai* misreading of the Pan Society’s name as the word for “bread” rather than the Greek god, which mistakenly linked the group to Socialist politics while overlooking the subtly subversive aspects of what they were actually doing,

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<sup>68</sup>*Taiyō* 20, no. 2 (January 1906) p. 159.

<sup>69</sup> Favret 14

*Taiyô* may have been overly fixated on nitpicking the perceived impropriety of Ueda Bin's word choices. In so doing, perhaps they missed the subtle implications of Ueda's project as a whole.

In recent scholarship, many have overlooked these aspects of *Sounds of the Tide*, instead labeling Ueda Bin (1874-1916) as a domesticating translator, one who makes Western poetry easily consumable for Japanese readers by using familiar poetic forms and turns of phrase. For instance, Jean Toyama argues that Ueda's translations use intertextual allusions and set phrases in order to make Western poetry accessible to Japanese readers. She points to the frequency with which Ueda uses pre-existing words and phrases that appear conventionally in classical poetry, a twist, she says, on the linked verse practice of *honkadôri*, which allusively embeds previously composed phrases in each new verse in a sequence.<sup>70</sup> This domesticating reading of Ueda does not, however, account for the sense of fragmentation that pervades *Sounds Of The Tide*: the use of white space, elliptical, unfinished syntax, and strange or difficult turns of phrase. What is it really that Ueda is domesticating, in these dissonant, often fragmented translations? What distant, remote reality is it that Ueda seeks to render disconcertingly familiar? I am suggesting that Ueda is in fact a domesticating translator of war, and that his translations seek to reveal to his readers the open secret of their own indirect implication in the distant, unimaginable reality of war. Ueda's translations expose the quiet, nearly indecipherable ripple effects that the far-off Russo-Japanese War has on everyday urban life in Tokyo.

Like Toyama, who contrasts Ueda Bin's translations with avant-garde poet Nishiwaki Junzaburô's foreignizing ones, recent theorists of translation have valorized foreignizing translations, which preserve the foreign quality of the original text, over domesticating ones like Ueda Bin's, which use devices from the target language to make the source text less alienating. Translation scholar Lawrence Venuti advocates foreignizing translations over domesticating ones because, he argues, domestication forces the source text to assimilate to the cultural practices of the target language.<sup>71</sup> I want to investigate the ethical possibilities of domesticating translation in Bin, a mode of translation peculiarly suited to navigating the disjunctions of what Favret calls "war at a distance." For Ueda Bin, domesticating translation operates at the level of an open secret, concealing something strange and unknowable with something ordinary and familiar. The act of domesticating a foreign text mirrors the process of mediating a war fought overseas, making it palatable and comprehensible for domestic audiences, rather than emphasizing its strange, unknowable qualities.

Domesticating translations can have an alienating effect of their own, though in a different way from foreignizing translations. As we shall see in the close readings that

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<sup>70</sup> Jean Toyama, "Intertextuality And The Problem of Translation: A Study Of Two Translations Of Verlaine's 'Chanson D'Automne,'" in *Comparative Literature East And West: Traditions And Trends, Selected Conference Papers, Volume 1* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989) 66.

<sup>71</sup> See for example Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*. Because Venuti's work focuses on translations into English, the power dynamics are very different from this case, where Ueda Bin is domesticating a text from a hegemonic Western language into a comparatively marginal one.

follow, when Bin uses conventional phrases like “days past” [*sugishi hi*], or “the voice of the Buddha” [*bonnon myô* ], phrases Toyama compares to the classical allusive practice *honkadôri*, in context with the scenes of Parisian city dwellers in his source texts, these familiar phrases certainly have a familiar, domesticating effect on the exotic scenes they depict. In the process, however, these conventional devices take on an estranged quality because of their juxtaposition with a foreign setting. The “voice of the Buddha” has an incongruous quality when transposed to a Baudelaire text. Bin’s domesticating translations have an alienating effect, uprooting conventional Japanese literary phrases and devices and placing them in an unfamiliar context.

### Ueda’s Counter-Translations As A Response To Previous Translations

Many Meiji translators, including Mori Ogai and the translators of *Shintaishi*, sought in Western poetry a transparent medium for the lyrical expression of inner feelings, a foreign endeavor in the context of classical Japanese poetry, which emphasized intertextual allusiveness over transparent personal expression. Previous translations of Western poetry to which Ueda Bin was reacting had a foreignizing effect, emphasizing the unfamiliar aspects of Western poetry, especially its personal expressiveness. As Toyama suggests in her emphasis on *honkadori* in his work, Ueda Bin’s translations mark a step back from the personal, expressive mode of translation favored by Meiji translators, and a turn to a more allusive, intertextual mode.

Ueda’s translation approach in *Sounds Of The Tide* differs significantly from Mori Ogai’s in *Vestiges*. Many critics have remarked upon the “ambiguous distance (*bimyô na kyori*)” between the two translators’ approaches.<sup>72</sup> Where Ogai’s translations seek to clarify and explicate, Ueda’s use fragmentation and ambiguity. Mori Ogai was already a major literary figure, known for his experiments in fiction that sought to adapt Western literary techniques, as well as his resistance to the then-dominant literary school of Naturalism. His translations in *Vestiges* form a part of his larger literary endeavor in the novella *Maihime (Dancing Girl, 1890)* and other famous works, that of creating a new, modern Japanese literary idiom by adapting Western literary techniques. In his translations, Ogai took a didactic, authoritative approach, one that sought to introduce Japanese readers to Western poetry and teach them how to read it, rather than one that made foreign texts familiar. For example, in Ogai’s famous translation of Ophelia’s mad song from William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, he clarifies and glosses what remains ambiguous and fragmented in the original. In the following stanza, Ogai adds an indicator to clarify which speaker is speaking in the dialogic poem, where no such clarification exists in the original:

*kare wa shinikeri waga hime yo*  
*mizo wa yomiji he tachinikeri*  
*kashira no hô no koke wo miyo*  
*ashi no hô ni ishi tateri*

He is dead and gone, lady,  
 He is dead and gone,

<sup>72</sup> Miyoshi Yukio, *Kindai no Jojô* (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobo, 1990) 30

At his head a grass-green turf,  
At his heels a stone.<sup>73</sup>

In the original Shakespeare text, the first two lines of the stanza are addressed to the mad lady by some unknown interlocutor, one who exists only in her mind. This third-party interlocutor addresses the mad woman using the appellation “lady.” Ogai renders this using the appellation “*waga hime yo*,” “my lady.” In the next two lines of Shakespeare, however, the sense of an unknown interlocutor addressing the mad woman becomes ambiguous: “At his head a grass-green turf,/At his heels a stone.” For Shakespeare, there is simply the overwhelming fact of the turf and the stone, left to stand on their own. Is it the unknown interlocutor who cries out at these markers of the beloved’s grave? Is it the mad woman herself? Is it neither one nor the other, a kind of third-person narrative voice removed from the action of the scene? The turf and stone seem to overwhelm the dialogic frame of the poem and blur these voices together in a single utterance of mourning.

In Ogai’s rendering, however, he adds the phrase “*mi yo*,” or “let us look” to the line about the turf overgrowing the beloved’s grave. Translated into English, Ogai’s Japanese version of these lines reads: “Let us look at the turf at his head.” The scholar Matsumura Tomomi points out that this insertion allows Ogai to heighten the scene’s resemblance to Noh drama, in which an interlocutor, the *waki*, draws out the sad tale of an often mad protagonist, the *shite*.<sup>74</sup> While Ogai captures the dialogic, dramatic quality of the scene, he sacrifices the ambiguity and fragmentation found in the original. The resulting translation reads like a civilizing act, a dutiful translator’s attempt to bring cohesion and legibility to what would otherwise be madness and confusion.

Ogai uses a domesticating device, the conventional Noh signifiers of madness, but it is in the service of a foreignizing endeavor, of creating a new Japanese poetic idiom of personal expressivity. The dichotomy between domestication and foreignization is not rigid and absolute: foreignizing translators like Mori Ogai employ domesticating devices, while Ueda Bin’s domesticating translations have foreign, alienating qualities. Ogai’s translations are teaching his readers a new mode of reading poetry: as direct expressions of emotion, like Ophelia’s spontaneous mad song, rather than as conventional exercises in intertextual poetics, as is so much of traditional Japanese poetry. The allusions to Noh and other classical texts in *Vestiges* help train readers in this new mode of reading by providing readers with recognizable Japanese signifiers of madness. For Ogai, however, the mad song of Ophelia was expressive and unique to her character. It was not a variation on a conventional motif of madness, as are mad songs in Noh drama, although these conventional signifiers help render her madness translatable.

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<sup>73</sup> かれは死にけり我ひめよ  
渠はよみぢへ立ちにけり  
かしらの方の苔を見よ  
あしの方には石たてり

Sato Isao, *Eishi to Nihon Shijin* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1982) 4-5.

<sup>74</sup> Matsumura Tomomi, “Ophelia no Uta,” in *Mori Ogai Omokage Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Keio University) 166.

For many young Meiji writers, Ogai's translation of Ophelia's mad song became a kind of anthem for Romantic, personal subjectivity, expressed in their own unique words, rather than the conventional ones of the tradition. For example, Shimazaki Tōson's 1912 novel *Spring* features a scene in which a group of young Meiji youths recite this poem together, in Ogai's translation, as a celebration of their devotion to art, poetry, and romantic love.<sup>75</sup> For Tōson and many other writers of his generation, Ogai's translation of Ophelia's mad song became a symbol of the new, modern, Meiji way of reading and appreciating poetry, as an internal, personal expression of intense emotion.<sup>76</sup>

The expository clarity of Ogai's translation is a foreign act in relation to Japanese poetry, which conventionally favors indirectness and ambiguity. Just as Ueda Bin's domesticating translations have an estranging effect, Ogai's foreignizing ones have a familiar, comprehensible quality. Ogai foreignizes Shakespeare for Japanese readers, creating a new language of transparency and personal expressivity. Ueda Bin does the converse with Baudelaire, domesticating him, rendering him familiar by using Japanese conventions of indirectness and ambiguity.

Ueda, in part because the didactic work undertaken by Ogai has already been accomplished, is free to experiment more freely in his translations, to use formal fragmentation and open-endedness rather than clarity and explication. Rather than tame the madness of his difficult, fragmented texts, as Ogai does to Ophelia, Ueda intensifies their ambiguity using white space, ellipses, or interrogative sentence endings. It is possible, then, to view *Sounds of the Tide* as a kind of counter-translation in relation to Ogai's *Vestiges*. Where Ogai was didactic, Ueda is ambiguous and fragmented; where Ogai is personal and introspective, Ueda questions the hermetically sealed notion of the self on which much Meiji lyric poetry was based. Ueda's dedication to Ogai in distant Manchuria, therefore, must be viewed in this light, as not only an act of reverence to Ueda's distinguished predecessor, but also a kind of opening salvo in the effort to move towards a new poetics different from the one Ogai established in *Vestiges*.

### **Ueda's "Ochiba" and Ogai's "Mono no Oto:" Traumatic Flashback and The Wartime Urban Everyday**

The gap between Ogai's and Bin's translation approaches corresponds to the gap in how they approach war. Mori Ogai's writing on the Russo-Japanese War in the poetry collection *Uta Nikki* [*Song Diary*] echoes his didactic, foreignizing work in the translation collection *Vestiges*. In other words, Mori Ogai foreignizes war, portraying it as an alien, unfamiliar experience removed from ordinary life on the home front, and stretches Japanese poetic language to provide a clear, transparent portrayal of war. Ueda Bin, on the other hand, domesticates the war in his translations, which focus on the oblique effects of the war on urban everyday life.

Ueda's translation of Paul Verlaine's *Chanson D'Automne*, called "Falling Leaf" (*Ochiba*), portrays the experience of distant warfare in urban Tokyo using the device of a traumatic flashback whose content is never revealed. In the poem, the sound of a bell

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<sup>75</sup> Shimazaki Tōson, *Haru*, in *Shimazaki Tōson Shū*, Chikuma Bungaku Gendai Taikei 9 (Tokyo: Chikuma, 1970) 10-11.

<sup>76</sup> Matsumura 170

brings back a “memory” (*omoide*) that affects the speaker in a visceral, bodily manner. The speaker’s chest tightens, face pales, and eyes tear up:

*Kane no oto ni  
mune fusagi  
iro kaete  
namida gumu  
sugishi hi no  
omoide ya*

Tout suffocant  
Et blême, quand  
Sonne l'heure,  
Je me souviens  
Des jours anciens  
Et je pleure

In this stanza, Bin's alterations to the French original emphasize the passivity of the speaker and his viscerally experienced loss of a sense of self after the sudden memory shock. In French, the speaker's act of memory is described using a verb: "je me souviens" [I remember], creating the sense of a speaker actively recalling the past. In Bin's translation, the act of recollection is described using the exclamation of a noun: *omoide ya*, "ah, memory," suggesting the emergence of the memory on its own, rather than a subject recalling it. The French describes the speaker's physical reaction with an adjectival phrase, as "[t]out suffocant/ [e]t blême" [suffocating and pale], whereas Bin uses noun clauses to heighten the visceral effect of the memory on the speaker's body: "mune fusagi/ iro kaete/namida gumu" ["chest is blocked, color changes, tears flow"]. Bin's use of fragmented noun clauses, rather than adjectival and verb phrases with a first-person subject as in the original, gives the speaker's body a wounded, broken quality, as well as a passive one. The speaker becomes a suffering and sobbing object like the bell that rings, or the violin that sighs in an earlier stanza, rather than a cohesive, narrating entity. There is no clarifying gesture on the translator's part as in Mori Ogai's Ophelia, no attempt to create a cohesive lyric speaker experiencing a personal recollection. Indeed, where such a clarifying gesture, the first-person pronoun, exists in the original text, Bin removes it. The speaker of this stanza is a collection of fragmented and disembodied body parts, blown apart by the force of an unidentified memory, echoing emerging discourses of trauma.

It is not that the speaker is a former soldier experiencing a flashback to a scene of war he has experienced. The speaker's lack of identifying features gives him an anonymous, paradigmatic quality, a kind of typical urban dweller or flaneur, prone to memory shocks from a past that is not accessible to him.<sup>77</sup> For Ueda Bin writing in 1905, dedicating his work to "distant Manchuria," this urban experience is colored by the occurrence of war overseas. The traumatic flashback experienced by the speaker of *Ochiba* suggests the cycle of traumatic memory and amnesia that characterized urban life at this time of war, where violence happening elsewhere is sublimated and experienced indirectly by urban denizens going about their daily lives. The speaker of "*Ochiba*" is a typical wartime urban dweller, one caught in Favret's experience of "war at a distance."

Bin counters the disorienting quality of the speaker's traumatic flashback with domesticating gestures, rendering it familiar and poetically legible. In addition to suggesting the disembodying effects of trauma, his fragmented, noun-heavy syntax has a domesticating effect for Japanese readers of poetry because of these devices' common appearance in *waka* poetry starting in the period of the thirteenth-century imperial anthology *Shin Kokinshū*. Ending the stanza with an emphatic noun, *omoide ya* ["oh memory"] recalls the common literary convention of *taigen dome*, ending a sentence with a noun for dramatic effect or emphasis. Like Mori Ogai seeking to make Ophelia's madness comprehensible to Japanese readers using the conventions of Noh drama, Bin uses noun-dominated sentence structure to make the experience of an urban dweller's traumatic memory shocks legible in conventionally poetic Japanese.

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<sup>77</sup> Walter Benjamin describes the *flaneur* as prone to traumatic memory flashbacks brought about by the latent, sublimated violence of urban life, for example in "On Some Motifs In Baudelaire."



Another domesticating device Bin uses is a five-syllable rhythm for every line, a rhythm which comes from Edo period *kayô*, popular songs written for shamisen and voice. In addition to suggesting the original French poem's rhythm of four syllables per line, the gesture domesticates Verlaine's memory-shocked city dweller, conjuring the Edo urban milieu of the merchant-class society that consumed and produced *kayô*.

This domesticating gesture has an alienating effect, one Bin produces by including a single line that deviates from the five-syllable pattern, the six-syllable line "*Kane no oto ni*" [the sound of the bell]. It is the ringing of a bell that interrupts the five-syllable rhythm, creating a single line that sticks out prominently in a poem of otherwise regular five-syllable lines. This interruptive gesture contrasts with the French, which contains a regular 4-syllable rhythm for every line, and has no irregular syllabic interruption the way Bin's translation does.

By rupturing the familiar rhythm of *kayô*, Bin highlights the disruptive quality of the traumatic memory that resurfaces in the speaker. The bell's ringing interrupts the speaker's present, as well as the rhythm of the poem and its connection to its Edo-period antecedents, reminding readers that it is not in fact a pre-Meiji Restoration popular song, but a translation of Parisian scenes of urban life. The rhythmic irregularity brings out the alienating effect of the translator's domesticating efforts, the contrast between the domestic literary conventions from classical and popular Japanese poetics and the Western setting of the poem. As a domesticating translator, Bin undermines the familiarity of his translations, creating a kind of alienating domestication.

"Ochiba" portrays urban daily life using the rhythm of a smooth, familiar song, then interrupting it with a single unfamiliar, jarring note. The single false note creates a subtle sense of unease beneath the surface of this lyrical, songlike poem that hearkens back to the poem's wartime context..

Bin's "Ochiba" contains indirect undertones of the traumatic effects of war on urban everyday life, thereby blurring the line between home front and battlefield. By contrast, the speaker in Ogai's war poem "Mono no Oto" expresses a hierarchical difference between the chaos of life on the battlefield, and an idealized homeland for which he longs. He lies awake at night, listening to the sounds of ordinary life at his inn in China, and is reminded of the sound of bells at home in Japan.

物のおとこそ	をかしけれ
窓の外ちかき	鶏のこえ
屋のうへたかき	砲のおと

...

節おもしろく	数よみて
おく算盤の	球のおと
飼ひを促す	馬のこえ
窓の紙うつ	雪のおと
かり寝の夢に	かよひ来る
我古里の	鐘のこえ

(175-78)

The different sounds	were interesting
Outside the window nearby	chicken's voices
High above the roof	the sound of guns

...

Counting cheerfully	the bamboo notches
On an abacus	the sound of the beads moving
Encouraging his owner	the voice of a horse
Striking the paper of the window	the sound of snow
In my light sleep	coming and going
From my homeland	the sound of a bell

Like Ueda Bin, Ogai uses a regular syllabic rhythm. Ogai writes in alternating sequences of seven and five syllable, or *shichi-go-chô*, a rhythm associated with court poetry and haikai, rather than the five syllable rhythm associated with popular songs (*kayo*) that Ueda uses. There is a clear and dramatic difference in register between the bulk of the poem, which describes in detail the chaotic, vulgar atmosphere of an inn near the battlefield, and the final two lines, which describe, in elegant, high literary terms, the speaker's sensation of longing for home. Ogai's poem describes the sounds of ordinary life busily continuing at an inn near the frontlines of the Russo-Japanese War on the Chinese mainland—chickens, gunfire, counting on an abacus. In the final line, the sound of a bell summons up the memory of the speaker's homeland (*furusato*). Ogai's use of the words "dream" and "*kayoi*" suggest a common word from waka court poetry, *yume no kayoji*, a "road in dreams" where lovers separated in reality can meet. Using this high literary diction and the *shichi-go-chô* syllabic rhythm, Ogai elevates the common, ordinary details of life on the battlefield to the realm of courtly, elegant love poetry. The soldier longing for home becomes an elegant, aristocratic figure sighing for his lover left at home. The thought of the homeland, or *furusato*, elevates the speaker above the chaotic, messy world of the Chinese mainland.

Like Ogai's "Mono no Oto," Bin's "Ochiba" uses the sound of a bell to blur the boundaries between the speaker's present moment and a disparate reality happening elsewhere. The speaker of "Ochi-ba" is overwhelmed by "memories" of "days passed" (*sugishi hi no omoide ya*), yielding a sense of simultaneity. The poem never reveals the content of the memory that so intensely affects the speaker. The poem deliberately creates a sense of ambiguity and opacity around its content. We do not know if the poem is set in present or past, if the speaker is a man or a woman, or anything concrete beyond the sense of sudden, almost traumatic recollection. Whose memory is this, and of what? The ambiguity of "Ochiba," when read against the clear hierarchical mapping of homeland and battlefield in Ogai's poem, suggests a wartime affect of drifting, dislocation, and uncertainty: as the poem's final lines describe, "here and there/unsettled/drifting (*koko kashiko/sadamenaku/tobichirau*)" (201). While Ogai seeks to rationally comprehend the reality of war and hierarchically distance it from the

idealized “homeland (furusato),” Ueda embraces the chaos and uncertainty between the two realms.

While war does not explicitly appear in the poem “Ochiba,” the poem’s proximity to another piece containing a bell explicitly linked to warfare suggests that the dislocation and uncertainty of “Ochiba” is in fact a result of its wartime setting. This second bell appears in the poem “Ware-Gane,” a translation of “La Cloche Fêlée (The Broken Bell)” by Charles Baudelaire:

Sad and melancholy, at the winter night’s hearth,  
Listening to purple flames burn up, burn out  
Bell of the dark night sky filled with mist, listening,  
Vague memories of days past [*sugishi hi*] float to the surface.

Listening to the deep-throated bell, the body fills with longing  
Regardless of his advanced years, his voice is bold and faithful<sup>78</sup>

...

The last cry of an abandoned wounded soldier?

Unlike the gentle tone of the Verlaine bell, the sound of Baudelaire’s cracked, broken bell is “deep throated,” “bold,” and “faithful.” The bell is no gentle reminder of days past; instead it tolls with a hoarse, almost frightening strength. Eventually, the loud cry of the bell becomes the cry of a wounded soldier: “the last cry of an abandoned wounded soldier?” (*suterareshi kizu-ôi no heishi no iki tayuru tsui no umeki ka*)

Like the poem “Ochiba,” which depicted the resurfacing of a traumatic flashback in an anonymous urban dweller, “Ware-Gane” depicts a memory re-emerging at a moment of shock, catalyzed by the ringing of a bell. The “vague memories” of “days passed” resurface in the hoarse, broken voice of the bell. The past is referred to by *sugishi hi*, the same phrase that appears when the bell rings in “Ochiba” cited earlier, takes on an indeterminate, timeless quality. The bell in both “Ochiba” and “Ware-Gane” summons memories of this vague “days passed,” sometimes associated with war, and sometimes not. Is this past appearing nostalgically in the speaker’s mind the time of the Sino-Japanese War a decade earlier, during which Ueda was a boy? Is it the past of Baudelaire’s 1857 wartime setting, coeval with the Crimean War and other conflicts, domestic and foreign in which France was involved? Is it the 1866 date in which Verlaine’s “*sugishi hi* (days passed)” appears, when France was involved in overseas conflicts in Mexico and Korea? The present moment of 1905 begins to bleed into other wartime moments, as the *sugishi hi*, or “past days” of the poem take on a hazy, indeterminate quality: *sokohaka to naki*.

The bell is compared to “the figure [*sugata*] of an old soldier standing as a sentry to the camp,” a sentry standing guard over the past whose memory the bell’s ringing resurrects. Ueda emphasizes the soldier’s protective, watchful quality—in the Baudelaire poem, he is merely “un vieux soldat qui veille” [“an old soldier who watches”], not necessarily “a sentry.” The bell fuses with the figure of this old soldier to form an entity at once inhuman and strangely organic. The bell rings with a human-sounding “voice” [*koe*], rather than a sound or tone. Its voice is “faithful” [*mame-naru*], like that of a

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<sup>78</sup> Ueda, 42

dutiful translator. It is tempting to hear an echo of a remark Ueda makes in the preface to the collection, that “so-called literal translations are not faithful translations” [*“iwayuru tsuigo yaku wa chūjitsu yaku ni arazu”*].<sup>79</sup> The bell’s “faithful voice” rings true to the past it guards like a sentry only because of the cracks that warp and distort the memory it enunciates. The bell is a faithful translator, but its faithfulness produces a cracked, fragmented rendering of the soldier’s wartime past.

Ueda ends the poem with *ka*, a particle that usually marks questions and at the very least introduces an intense level of doubt and ambiguity into the rhetoric of a sentence. This rhetorical move does not exist in the Baudelaire poem, which ends with a declarative sentence marked with a period. In Ueda’s rendering, the bell’s dying groan feels far from final. Instead, it echoes with the indeterminate possibility of an unanswered question.

In another departure from the original Baudelaire, perhaps Ueda’s most blatantly unfaithful move in the entire collection, the translator inserts the phrase “the Buddha’s voice” [*bonnon myō*]. In the original Baudelaire poem, the bell rings simply with a “pious note,” but in Ueda’s version it rings with “the voice of the Buddha.” While Bin’s insertion of so patently Japanese a term in the midst of the Baudelaire poem certainly has a domesticating effect for Japanese readers, it is also disorienting because of its incongruous appearance in a French poem. Unlike Ogai’s domesticating of Ophelia, which draws on a clear set of Noh theatrical conventions in order to create a certain kind of accessibility for Japanese readers, Bin’s Buddha does not have a recognizable generic framework. It feels unexpected and rootless, a literary reference that does not actually refer to anything, a domesticating translation move that feels strange and incongruous because of its very familiarity.

Bin’s use of the *ka* interrogative particle to heighten the ambiguity of the original Baudelaire poem underlines how different his approach is from Mori Ogai, the previous translator to whom the book is dedicated. Ogai would have sought to didactically explicate the ambiguity of the soldier’s cry echoing in the sound of the bell. He would have attempted to render this moment accessible for readers unused to experimental Western poetry. Ueda, however, is content to leave the silence in Baudelaire’s poem intact, and let his readers struggle with it.

Bin’s effort at counter-translation in Ogai’s wake is tied to his wartime moment. Unlike Ogai, who presents war as a foreign phenomenon whose chaos and vulgarity is removed from the idealized homeland, Bin views “distant Manchuria” as a repressed reality that comes resurfacing into everyday life in Tokyo. Bin’s treatment of war as an open secret means that he must move beyond the didactic, clarifying mode of Ogai’s translations. The open secret depends on silence, blank space, and fragmentation in order to make itself recognizable, and therefore Bin’s translation must make room for these elements that Ogai sought to clarify and explain away.

### **The Sea As Crowd And Reflections of War**

The sense of drifting—“sokohaka to naki,” (Waregane) “sadamenuku” (Ochiba)—that we have seen in Bin’s translations so far gives rise to a peculiarly unstable and ambiguous relationship between individuals and crowds, one that mirrors

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<sup>79</sup> Ueda, 16

the fractured presence of distant warfare in daily life. Bin's "Hito To Umi," ["Man And The Sea"], a translation of Baudelaire's "L'Homme Et La Mer," where a man looks into the ocean and sees his own darkest secrets reflected back at him, portrays the oblique effects of distant warfare on the urban crowd. Using a man looking into the sea as a metaphor for the individual's relationship to the urban mass, Baudelaire's poem highlights the antagonistic, conflict-filled relationship between individual and crowd. Bin's translation softens the antagonism between individual and crowd, and instead gives them a sense of conspiratorial intimacy.

Like the crowd, the sea in Baudelaire's poem is a powerful, homogenous mass that has the ability to engulf the individual and strip him of his individuality. The individual, gazing at his own reflection in the surface of the sea, imagines throwing himself in, and he contemplates this immersive loss of self with fear as well as a kind of longing or fascination: "You please yourself to plunge into the breast of your own image/You embrace it with your eyes, and your heart/ distracts itself sometimes from its own murmur/with that indomitable and savage sound."<sup>80</sup> The poem's speaker addresses man and the sea as "lutteurs éternels" ["eternal wrestlers"] who for centuries have "fought each other without pity or regret" ["vous vous combattez sans pitié ni remords"]. Yet, Baudelaire points out, these eternal enemies are bound together by a kind of intimacy and even a passionate love: "free man, you shall cherish the sea!" ["homme libre, tu chériras la mer!"] It is a condition of man's state as liberated and free, namely, the democratic impulse then sweeping post-Revolutionary France, that this troubled relationship between crowd and self must persist. Does the sea-as-crowd overwhelm the individual self with no possibility of individual humanity? "[Y]our heart/ distracts itself sometimes from its own murmur/with that indomitable and savage sound," says Baudelaire, suggesting that, though the roar of the sea may drown out the murmur of the human heart, it does not overwhelm it completely.

In Bin's translation of this poem, it is the intimacy between man and the sea, the almost conspiratorial link between the two destructive entities that emerges most forcefully, rather than the antagonism between them. Man and sea are joined together by a shared love of secrets. Bin writes, "does each of you have such secrets to keep jealously, man and sea?" ["*kaku mo netage ni himegoto no sawa ni mo aru ka, hito to umi,*"]<sup>81</sup> There is a gentleness to Bin's moment of address, created by the softening influence of the interrogative marker "ka", which differs from the more strident tone of the original by Baudelaire: "O sea, none know your inner riches/So jealous are you to keep your secrets!"<sup>82</sup> Just as in the final stanza of "Ware-gane," Ueda inserts a question marker where there is none in the original, lending it a tone of open-ended-ness and

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<sup>80</sup> All quotations from this poem are from the bilingual edition of Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil And Paris Spleen*, translated by William H. Crosby (Brockport, NY: BOA Editions, 1991) 136. The translations are mine, not Crosby's.

Tu te plais à te plonger au sein de ton image;/Tu l'embrasses des yeuz et des bras, et ton Coeur/Se distrait quelque fois de sa proper rumeur/Au bruit de cette plainte indomptable et sauvage.

<sup>81</sup> Ueda 43

<sup>82</sup> "O mer, nul ne connaît tes richesses intimes,/Tant vous êtes jaloux de garder vos secrets!"

indeterminacy. Man and the sea are joined by a shared secret, a secret the speaker queries but leaves unspoken. Bin domesticates the foreign entity of the sea, depicting it as familiar and intimate despite its alien qualities.

In contrast, a translation of George Gordon Lord Byron (1788-1824) by Kanbara Ariake (1876-1952) portrays the sea as an entity that is wholly foreign and other, one that seeks to engulf man, with no room for the kind of uneasy recognition found in Bin's rendering of Baudelaire, which emphasizes their intimacy:

*Ningen no bōgyaku wa kage mo naku, so ga mi sae,  
Taba no ma ni kieteyuku ame no ato ni hitoshizuku*<sup>83</sup>

No shadow of human beings' destruction, even their own  
Disappears like a single drop of rain in the waves

In Ariake's version of Byron, the ocean overwhelms the individual self like the water overwhelms a single drop of rain. Here the sea is wholly other. It is possessed of no secret inner life, no uncountable abyss that mirrors the internal human one. Ariake's translation portrays a Romantic notion of self, closed and self-sufficient, seeking to bravely master the unknown, resistant seas.

The danger the sea offers man in Ariake's Byron is engulfment; by contrast, the danger the sea offers man in Bin's translation of Baudelaire is recognition, the sight of his own reflection fragmented and broken by the choppy waves: "The trembling of water and sky, reflected shadows of the heart" [*mizu ya sora naru yura yura wa, utsushi-gokoro no sugata nite.*] Here, Bin adds the descriptor "yura yura," an onomatopoeic word for trembling, whereas Baudelaire lets the reflection go unmodified: "The sea remains your mirror; you contemplate your soul/In the infinite progress of its waves."<sup>84</sup> Bin thus emphasizes the trembling, precarious quality of the reflection, a fragmented, unfaithful version of the self who gazes at it.

Bin's portrayal of the sea as a familiar mirror of mankind, rather than an alien entity that engulfs him, draws on certain historical developments at the time, 1905. At that time, the sea provided the avenue for Japanese national expansion abroad. The sea is associated with war, imperialism, trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange. These associations appear in journalistic images of the Russo-Japanese War portraying the spectacle of naval battles for mass audiences in Japan. Bin's description of the sea as a mirror that reflects back the urban dweller's secrets reflects its appearance in mass media, where audiences gaze on its own reflection in mediated form.

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<sup>83</sup>人間の暴虐は影もなく、そが身さえ、  
束の間に消えてゆく雨の跡のひとしづく

The original Byron reads:

The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain/a shadow of man's ravage, save his own/  
when for a moment, like a drop of rain, /He sinks into thy depths.

Sato Isao, 455

<sup>84</sup> "La mer reste ton miroir; tu contemples ton âme/Dans le déroulement infini de sa lame..."

At the time, the sea was a common device in both Western and Japanese poetry used to describe the chaos of urban crowds. For example, in his novel *Haru*, Shimazaki Tôson describes the urban crowds of Tokyo during the Russo-Japanese War in the following terms:

When he [Kishimoto, the novel's protagonist] reached the streets of Fujimi-chô, he saw a crowd of men and women gathered in front of a print shop, struggling among each other to view the bloodthirsty war prints.

“To Beijing. To Beijing, ”

the eyes of people coming and going seemed to scream as they passed. Their raging backs asked when would come the day that street bonfires would be lit in celebration. With the kind of silence water returns to after someone has disturbed it, a troop of foot soldiers, their eyes serious, their footsteps in unison, passed before the maddened spectators. Once those footsteps began to sound distant, yet more footsteps approached. Kishimoto drifted through.<sup>85</sup>

For Tôson, the crowd during wartime is caught in a kind of collective madness: he calls them “the maddened spectators,” *nekkyô shita bôgansha*. Tôson describes the wartime crowds' madness using imagery redolent of water and the sea. The passing soldiers turn the atmosphere from riotous excitement to grave seriousness, with “the kind of silence water returns to after someone has disturbed it,” *mizu wo utta yô ni, shizumari-kaetta*. The water-like imagery also appears in Tôson's description of the crowd's movement as it jostles to view the war prints in the shop window. The narrative lens shows a homogenous mass of “people coming and going, *ôrai suru hito-bito*, then focuses in close up on their faces, then their backs. This motion of the crowd, an endless succession of “screaming eyes” and “raging backs,” recalls the angry waves of the sea in the Ariake translation, in which a raging mass of water threatens to engulf the speaker. Tôson's protagonist, Kishimoto, remains an outsider, participating neither in the fury of the civilian crowd, nor the deathly seriousness of the soldiers, merely drifting through it all, in the crowd but never part of it. The sea remains alien and foreign to him, just as it does in the Ariake translation of Byron.

Bin's translation of Baudelaire's sea does not allow for the kind of outsider's stance adopted by Tôson's protagonist Kishimoto, or by the speaker in Ariake's Byron translation. The relationship between sea and man, crowd and individual, is not purely an antagonistic one. There is also a kind of recognition, a moment of conspiratorial understanding between man and the sea that “each of [them] has [their] secrets,” *kaku mo netage ni himegoto no sawa ni mo aru ka*. Bin's translation suggests that the crowd expresses the “secret” inner life of the individual. This less antagonistic view of the relationship between individual and crowd has an affinity with the vision of the crowd found in Taishô-era Japanese chroniclers and critics of everyday life, such as Gonda Yasunosuke (1887-1951) and Kon Wajirô (1888-1973). Harry Harootunian has described how these writers believed that urban crowds had the ability to discover and perform new forms of modern subjectivity and experience:

Life on the streets constantly externalized the power of desire and the way people acted out their innermost fantasies, as if they were crowded on a theater

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<sup>85</sup> Tôson, 122

stage... Terms like *gaito* (street), (*minshū*) (people), and *taishū* (masses) entered the lexicon of common buzzwords that were used everywhere in speech and writing and came to be associated with people moving on the streets, consuming new products and forms of entertainment.<sup>86</sup>

Harootunian describes how crowds provided opportunities to perform new subjectivities, such as the “moga” modern girl for example. Interestingly, the crowd in Harootunian’s formulation, far from overwhelming individual subjectivity, seems to provide more room for subjectivity, more selves, more spirit, more feeling, more possibility for personal expression, rather than less. The crowd is a space of performance, expression, and feeling, not homogeneity, conformity, and loss of self. The crowd is where individuals can live out “their innermost fantasies,” and express secret desires that otherwise remain buried. It is as if the anonymity and freedom of being lost in a crowd allows people to be more fully themselves than when they are in private.

Like the crowd in Yasunosuke and Kon, the sea in Ueda is a space of possibility and imagination, where secret desires find an expressive outlet. For Bin, the sea is the mirror of the “free-hearted human being,” [*kokoro mama* (written with the characters for freedom, *jiyū*) *naru ningen*,] where the individual first encounters new possibilities for social existence. The crowd in wartime has a conspiratorial relationship to the open secret of war: they keep each other’s secrets jealously, like man and the sea. The sea does not drown the individual self for Bin; instead, it holds up a “mirror” that reveals unspeakable secrets, secrets that implicate both the individual and the crowd through which he moves.

The “eternal strugglers,” sea and man, crowd and individual, are not locked in antagonistic combat, one against the other. Rather, the *eien no sumōdo* are implicated in a pervasive structure of remote wartime violence, a structure that becomes visible only in the “secrets,” *himegoto*, reflected at the depths of the crowd’s human heart. The secret combat in which the crowd remains locked goes on as a kind of undercurrent beneath the surface of everyday life. The crowd in wartime is a sea that holds the secrets of the self and reflect these secrets back in moments of conspiratorial recognition.

### **The War Inside The Urban Home In “Clocks”**

If people are freest to be themselves, to experiment and perform, on the Tokyo streets, then what is left for them in the domestic sphere? The spectacle of the urban crowd and its expansive, oceanic quality contrasts with the claustrophobic quality of domestic life in Bin’s translations. In “Tokei” [“Clocks”], Bin’s translation of Belgian poet Emile Verhaeren’s poem “Horloges,” Bin shows the indirect effects of war on the life of the Meiji period urban household.

“Tokei” destabilizes the notion of home as a private space removed from public society, by revealing the small, almost invisible disruptions in domestic life wrought by the distant reality of war. The home as a private sphere was a modern development that came along with the Meiji Restoration. Jordan Sand describes the Meiji-era development of home as a domestic, private space in the following terms as “the public construction of

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<sup>86</sup> Harry Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, And The Question Of Everyday Life* (Columbia University Press, 2000) 118.



a private sphere<sup>87</sup>” in which the home claimed to “operate on different principles from public society.”<sup>88</sup> This new conception of the home, while it appeared as a natural and eternal part of human life, was in fact a modern ideological development, a sign of Japan’s modernity and its status as a nation state with a prospering middle class. Bin’s “Tokei” is in on the open secret of the home’s ideological underpinnings. The poem is aware that home is no hermetically sealed refuge from society’s troubles, nor is it an eternal, natural part of human life. Yet the poem barely expresses its knowledge that these notions of home are ideological fictions, preferring to leave its revelation as an uneasy, semi-acknowledged open secret.

Sand explains that clocks were a way in which Meiji homes organized themselves to maximize their efficiency. He argues that kitchens during this period were perceived as places of efficiency and productivity, where housewives accomplished the work of cooking for their households.<sup>89</sup> In particular, clocks were often found in Meiji kitchens, where they allowed housewives to use their time efficiently.<sup>90</sup> Clocks allow the capitalistic ideology of efficiency and success to interpellate the housewife. Clocks bring the time of the outside world, which is organized to be efficient and productive, into the home, a supposedly private and natural refuge from society. The ticking of the clock in “Tokei” is the sound of the outside world penetrating what is nominally a refuge from it. Clocks are a kind of interloper, bringing the time of efficiency, capitalist production, and perhaps even war into the home. The open secret of war insinuates itself even into the inner domestic sanctum.

Ueda’s translation brings out this quality of the clocks, as interlopers who violate domestic privacy. The clock walks with the stealthy gait of an intruder or a thief: “the stealthy gait of a clock,” “*tokei no shinobi ashi*.” With each passing moment, time, in other words, brings with it a stranger breaking into the home, softly stealing through the corridors and ready to make away with whatever secrets lie concealed therein. In the first stanza, the poem establishes its setting in the dark corridors of a prosperous house, *yakata no yami*. The clock first makes itself known with the sound of the its ticking hands, which become human footsteps climbing the staircase of time.

The poem endows the image of clocks, an ordinary presence in typical well-to-do Meiji homes, with almost human limbs, faces, and voices. The clocks become uncanny strangers, interlopers in the domestic setting of the poem, bringing with them a subtle interruption into the fabric of daily life. Like the ticking of the clock, the rupture this interloper effects is almost a background noise, so closely integrated with ordinary life it is practically inaudible. The rupture in the poem seeks, not only to expose the dark side of Meiji domesticity, but also to open lyric poetry up to its historical context, shifting lyric from a private, inward mode of expression, to a public, historically conscious one.

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<sup>87</sup> Jordan Sand, *House And Home In Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space, And Bourgeois Culture* (Harvard University Asia Center: 2003)9

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<sup>89</sup> Jordan Sand, “The Housewife’s Laboratory,” in *House And Home In Modern Japan: Architecture, Domestic Space, And Bourgeois Culture*, 55-95 (Harvard University Asia Center: 2003)

<sup>90</sup> Sand 87

In the second stanza, the intrusive stranger in the supposedly hermetically closed domestic setting of the home exposes the secret anxieties that lie concealed within. The clock reveals the home's anxiety about waste and decay, the onset of which brings unwanted vulnerability and exposure:

Behind the glass lid, white eyes without ornament,  
The colors of the floral pattern fade, time's numbers too are wasted.  
Oh hazy moon of dimly shadowed empty halls,  
This is the light of a clock's eyes.<sup>91</sup>

The clock's face reflects back the mortality of its human owners. The face of the clock is ravaged by time, its colors faded: *hana moyô iro samete*. Time has left the clock face bare. Its stark whiteness has no decoration to soften it: *shirome no omote-kazari naku*. The numbers on its face have withered to stark, thin lines: *toki no sôji mo saraboinu*. The poem's fear of decay and age accompanies a kind of uneasiness about exposure and vulnerability. It is time's ability to expose the bareness, the emptiness of the clock's face that unsettles the reader, its ability to reveal what lies behind the glittering glass façade that covers the clock face: *garasu no futa no ushiro ni*. What lies behind the transparent glass of everyday life, and when will the mysterious motion of time unveil it?

The inhuman quality of the clock adds to its character as a reckoner, a summer-up of everyday life who will pass a verdict on its emptiness. The clock's eyes feel robotic and empty of human emotion, like an empty corridor: *hito no ke taeshi watadono no kage honokuraki rôgetsu yo*. The clock becomes a human-like body with no spirit to animate it, an empty body whose emptiness is displayed for all to see. The home is supposed to be alive with all the cozy warmth and moral rectitude of Meiji family ideology, but the clock's withered features betray the inner emptiness that underlies this ideological façade.

The clock's hidden notes of unease thrum beneath the household's daily routine, in the unspoken register of one of the open secrets that underlie normal domestic life. Would the clock's voice echo with so many contrasting, fragmented tones without the added charge of criticism in the press aimed at Bin for his dedication to his friend "in distant Manchuria" (*haruka na Manshû ni te*)? Perhaps one of the house's inhabitants, like Ueda's dedicatee, is serving abroad in the war, and it is longing for his absence and uncertainty about his fate that the clock expresses in its empty, devastated face, or its uneasy ticking sounds. These fears and longings are not vocalized, but left to echo in the silence that pervades the house. The breach of the private home by the alien sounds of the clock suggests the unspoken anxieties about distant warfare that pervaded supposedly tranquil domestic life in 1905.

## Conclusion

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<sup>91</sup>硝子の蓋の後には、白目の面飾なく、  
花形模様色褪めて、時の数字もさらぼひぬ。  
人の気絶えし渡殿の影ほのぐらき朧月よ、  
これや時鐘の眼の光。

As we have seen in these preceding examples from *Sounds of The Tide*, the open secret of warfare manifests in a sense of unease and latent trauma pervading everyday urban life in Tokyo. Bin traces this open secret in the traumatic memory shocks experienced by a typical urban dweller in “Ochiba,” in the conspiratorial intimacy linking individual and crowd in “Hito to Umi,” and in the claustrophobic anxiety of domestic life in “Tokei.” Together, these poems create a portrait of urban life as a kind of fractured mirror image of the battlefield, where traumatized citizens meet their fellows in the crowd, and return home to a realm of deathly silence. Where other writers like Mori Ogai, as we have seen, created a sense of war as something foreign and alien, removed from ordinary life on the urban home front, Bin portrays the war as intimately connected to the everyday, its presence felt in the urbanite’s memory, on the crowded streets, and inside the home.

Bin’s domesticating translations offer a twist on the translator’s task of making the foreign and the distant into something familiar. The sense of strangeness, dislocation, and foreignness in these poems comes, not from the foreignness of Baudelaire himself, but from the dislocation of the reality that these poems seek to describe: the home front civilian experience of distant war. Bin makes the familiar strange, and the strange familiar, so that a Meiji interior appears alien, where Baudelaire appears familiar. Like war itself, Baudelaire and his contemporaries are distant and unknowable, yet endowed with a surprisingly familiar, recognizable quality, a familiarity that makes itself known in gaps and silences that interpellate the reader and implicate him in his own darkest secrets. The logic of the open secret, in which familiar elements of everyday life conceal a hidden reality that language cannot wholly give voice to, becomes the logic of Bin’s translation endeavor. Like a man catching sight of himself in that radically other entity, the ocean, Bin captures a fragmentary glimpse of something recognizable reflected in a medium that should be strange and foreign.

Bin’s translations, which, as we have seen, the critical consensus characterizes as domesticating, succeed in domesticating their foreign texts, but in the process they foreignize the domestic context into which they import their source texts. They blur the line between foreign and domestic, creating a sense of dislocation throughout the book. In so doing, Bin stretches Japanese poetic language to create an idiom capable of describing the experience of modern warfare at a distance, its strangeness as well as its familiarity.

## Chapter 3

### The Poet as *Benshi*, Poets on the Radio: Lyric Poetry and Mass Media in a Time of Total War

#### Introduction: The Conservative Retreat (*Taikyaku*) in Modern Japanese Poetry and the Turn to Mass Media

The previous chapter explored the indirect effects of distant war on daily life in Tokyo during the Russo-Japanese War in the obliquely violent portraits of urban life found in Ueda Bin's translations of lyric poetry by Charles Baudelaire. A purportedly personal, hermetic mode of lyric poetry offered Bin a way to portray the presence of war as an open secret that exists in the interstices of the unspoken. This chapter explores lyric poetry's capacity to respond to war when it no longer operates in the oblique, interstitial manner described by Ueda Bin, but instead becomes an overpowering presence in daily life, as it did in late 1930s and early 1940s Tokyo.

In a much-discussed conservative turn, starting in 1931 following the Manchurian Incident, many Japanese poets shifted away from the experimental qualities of their early work and toward collaboration with an increasingly repressive state apparatus. Ironically, it was their lyricism, with its focus on the personal, allowed them to continue to publish in these straitened circumstances, and even to find a newly receptive space for themselves in mass culture, including radio, recordings, photography, and the lost art of silent film narration, which all found propagandistic uses for poetry as the war continued. Poets took refuge in the personal, romantic realm of lyric poetry and wrote with ambivalent self-consciousness about the genre's mechanization and incorporation into popular culture in a time of war.

By broadcasting their ambivalent poetic texts in the highly policed idiom of popular culture, these poets reveal the form's ability to work in the oblique register of the "alibi" that André Lefèvre suggests translation (in this case, not between languages, but between media) can provide.<sup>92</sup> How does lyric poetry operate in the popular sphere in a time of war, especially if we accept Adorno's famous assertion that lyric is "always the expression of a social antagonism" that works by undoing or unsaying itself, enacting its own extinguishment into deathly silence?<sup>93</sup> With what echoes of oblique resistance does this voice of self-silencing resound when it utters itself in the public sphere? Anne-Lise François suggests that it is in this act of unsaying that the political potential of lyric poetry lies, in its ability to speak in the idiom of open secrets, which, in unveiling, unsay themselves.<sup>94</sup> While Hakushū and Hagiwara both produced poems that were explicitly

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<sup>92</sup> André Lefèvre, "Slauerhoff and 'Po Tsju I': Three Paradigms for the Study of Influence," *Tamkang Review* 10 no. 1 (1979): 75.

<sup>93</sup> Theodor Adorno, "On Lyric Poetry and Society," in *Notes to Literature Vol. 1*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 45.

<sup>94</sup> Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2008), 135-36.

about war, many with a nationalistic bent, it is often in their poems about other things, especially through war-saturated media, that they register their ambivalence towards their place as lyric poets enlisted in an imperialistic enterprise.

This chapter will explore the late works of two different poets responding to the unveiling of what was once an open secret in earlier decades before the onset of total war following the Manchurian Incident: war as a fact of daily life in late 1930s Tokyo. The experimental pioneer of free verse Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886-1942), who in 1914 was the first person to publish an entire poetry collection in vernacular Japanese, responded to the war with a kind of retreat from poetry. He wrote very little in the 1930s, and what he did write has often been criticized as not being poetic enough, “poorly written” and “sentimental,” in the words of Modernist poet Miyoshi Tatsuji (1900-1964),<sup>95</sup> suggesting a decline from experimentalism to the hackneyed sentimentality of lyricism. Lyric poet Kitahara Hakushū (1885-1942), whose early work and its brushes with the Meiji- and Taishō-period censors were discussed extensively in Chapter 1, on the other hand, did not cut down on writing the way Hagiwara did, but rather experienced a productive flourishing during the war, writing more than ever and enjoying a high degree of popular success in newspapers, records, and radio. While highly successful at the time, Hakushū’s wartime output has often been ignored by subsequent postwar scholars who see it as nationalist and propagandistic.

War poems by both poets combine nationalistic overtones with complexity and ambivalence. Despite these poems’ often ambiguous attitude toward warfare, they are often treated as a kind of black mark on the poets’ careers, left out of poetry anthologies and under-discussed by critics, if not outright condemned as jingoistic propaganda. Engagement with the texts themselves reveals the complicated nature of collaborative poetry: it is not the wholly enthusiastic embrace of militarism as which it is so often dismissed, but neither does that make it critical of war in the usual anti-war sense. Instead, Hagiwara and Hakushū’s war poetry reveals the arbitrariness of the distinction often drawn between jingoistic, collaborative poets who embraced the war effort out of genuine enthusiasm, and virtuous poets who gave in to pressures to print pro-war poetry only because of coercive pressure from the state.

Crucial to undoing this binary distinction between enthusiastically jingoistic collaborators and virtuous poets yielding reluctantly to state pressure is understanding these poets’ place in the mass media in the 1930s. The war brought them many opportunities to appear in major newspapers, on the radio, and on records, all media that were progressively nationalizing as the war continued. Opportunities for this kind of mass exposure were less common in the prewar period, and poets like Hagiwara and Hakushū produced many thoughtful, ambivalent texts on these media, to which they had been granted greater access than before. Though they had certainly appeared in mass media outlets from time to time in earlier years, these opportunities would not have existed to the same extent without the war and its mass media front. These poets’ often fraught attitudes towards radio, film, and other media reveal the difficulty they had navigating their new roles as nationalized poets of the masses enlisted, willingly or not, in a wartime media campaign, either as producers of nationalistic war poetry, or of

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<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Iijima Kōichi, *Hagiwara Sakutarō* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1980) 375.

supposedly innocuous works of lyricism that might offer distraction or consolation to audiences.

The intentions behind these poets' wartime texts are very difficult to gauge: a 1937 letter from Hagiwara to his colleague, the poet Maruyama Kaoru (1899-1974), claims that he wrote a poem titled "On the Day of the Fall of Nanjing" in a single night after being "coercively requested" (*kyōsei-teki ni tanomare*) by a columnist for the *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* newspaper.<sup>96</sup> Whatever the truth of such an assertion (and it is certainly worth taking seriously, as fear ran rampant in Japanese literary circles after Proletarian writer Kobayashi Takiji [1903-1933] was tortured to death by the police), a reading of Hagiwara's poem suggests that it is a thoughtful, ambivalent text (likely composed with some care and thought, rather than in the single night of panic that Hagiwara describes), and that it is not a jingoistic piece that deserves to be disavowed by its author and struck from his canonical works. Whatever 1930s poets' private feelings were on the matter, the act of writing war poetry brought them an opportunity to engage with a mass audience, presenting ordinary readers with texts marked by ambiguities, gaps, and also possibilities for interpretation from an array of political perspectives.

The poem in question, "On the Day of the Fall of Nanjing" (*Nankin kanraku no hi ni*, 1937), was published in the *Asahi Shinbun* to celebrate the Japanese conquest of Nanjing in 1937, an atrocity often referred to as the Rape of Nanjing or the Nanjing Massacre, in which the Japanese military killed over 300,000 civilians, according to many estimates. The poem is undoubtedly nationalistic in its sympathetic portrayal of Japanese soldiers and especially in its total silence concerning their victims; however it also expresses ambivalence towards the misery of warfare, and describes it in far from glamorous terms. The poem's critical valences towards warfare are often overlooked, and it is almost always omitted from anthologies of Hagiwara's work. It is widely considered a work of collaboration by literary critics and ordinary readers alike.<sup>97</sup>

Hagiwara's poem describes a scene of Japanese soldiers in transit, emphasizing their experiences of hardship:

On our day of marching without rest,  
men and horses race one another onwards,  
the Transportation Corps continues on the road of mud.<sup>98</sup>

While the soldiers' hard work and determination is portrayed in laudatory terms ("marching without rest," *kōgun ni ikowazu*), they also appear dehumanized and animal-like, covered in mud and marching in formation with non-human horses. They appear to have given up their humanity for a life of subhuman, muddy labor and misery. The soldiers are not particularly warrior-like or brave; they participate in no scenes of combat, instead playing the role of beasts of burden hauling their load. The pitiful misery of the soldiers obscures their participation in the massacre; it is hard to imagine these figures of drudgery committing acts of extreme violence against Chinese civilians, who are not

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<sup>96</sup> Quoted in Shiraishi Akihiko, "Mado-san arata-na sensō-shi, 1942 no sakuhin, Nakajima Toshi-kyōju ga hakken," *Asahi Shinbun*, November 6, 2011, [http://www.asahi.com/culture/news\\_culture/TKY201011060180\\_02.html](http://www.asahi.com/culture/news_culture/TKY201011060180_02.html)

<sup>97</sup> Kondō Yōta, "Sensō-shi no jōken," *Gendai Shi Techō* 5 (2001) 45

<sup>98</sup> Hagiwara Sakutarō, *Hagiwara Sakutarō Zenshū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1959) 561

alluded to at all. The poem's attention to the sufferings of the soldiers thus serves to camouflage the brutality of the event it commemorates.

The smokescreen of the soldiers' suffering also has another function: it allows the poem to implicate its readers as fellow laborers in the wartime work force. The poem's description of the soldiers as grimy, dull working men, "wearing a helmet and burnt by the sun" (*tetsu kabuto o kabutte hi ni yaketari*),<sup>99</sup> has a normalizing effect, rendering the extreme event in mundane, unexciting terms reminiscent of a long, hard commute to a factory or a construction site. By viewing the Nanjing Massacre through the lens of the Transportation Corps, Hagiwara highlights its connection to ordinary civilian life, its roots in the everyday routine of capitalistic labor. It is not only the Transportation Corps who experience a grueling work routine, after all, it is also the civilian labor force back in Tokyo who manufacture the goods the soldiers haul to the battlefield.

Further muddying the waters, the poem ends with a jingoistic cheer: "We must celebrate and cheer hooray! / We must celebrate and cheer hooray!"<sup>100</sup> But there are overtones of coercion to the cheer that undermine its sincerity ("must celebrate," *iwau beshi*), so that the poem ends on a note of jingoism fraught with ambivalence. Perhaps Hagiwara's disavowal of the poem, his claim to have dashed it off under duress, forms part of the provocation posed by the final lines' forced cry of *banzai*: the border between coerced participation in the war effort and genuine enthusiasm becomes illegible, leaving its audience of newspaper readers with plenty to puzzle over with regards to their own participation in the mass media home front. Are they, like the tired soldiers of the poem, slogging mechanically through their routine of participation in the war effort as mass media consumers; or, do they experience moments of jingoistic pleasure in their work?

Hakushū, too, produced many works of nationalistically tinged war poetry, ones that share the tonal ambivalence of Hagiwara's "On the Day of the Fall of Nanjing." For example in a tanka from his 1940 collection *Black Cypress*, he portrays the warlike manful spectacle of a Japanese military parade, but does so while fracturing the canonical syllable count of the tanka form, giving rise to a moment of disjunction.

*tsuwamono wa  
aegu ima wa mo  
o-takebite  
koe age ni kemu  
tennō heika  
banzai*<sup>101</sup>

Warriors  
gasp. Now  
how manfully  
they raised their voice  
*For the Emperor,  
Hooray!*

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 562

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 562

<sup>101</sup> Kitahara Hakushū, *Kitahara Hakushū Zenkashū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1990) 326

Hakushū's tanka describes the soldiers in heroic, idealistic terms, calling them "warriors" (*tsuwamono*), rather than the more neutral "soldiers" (*heitai*). The language of idealized, warlike masculinity, including the word "manfully," *o-takebite*, conjures associations of the war poetry found in the eighth-century Imperial anthology *Manyōshū*, then undergoing a renaissance as wartime poets revisited its ideals of "manly heroism" (*masurao*).<sup>102</sup> The poem describes the spectacle of militarism, reveling in the display of manly heroism it brings to viewers, whose pleasure is gestured to using the classical past tense suffix "*kemu*," which implies the presence of a speaker recollecting the past.

The poem's overt pleasure in the display of warlike masculinity is complicated, however, by Hakushū's departure from the standard metrics of the tanka, which are usually composed in sequences of five and seven syllables, a pattern of 5-7-5-7-7. This poem contains the usual thirty-one-syllable pattern, but then adds an extra four-syllable unit at the end, the word "hooray" (*banzai*, which counts as four syllables in Japanese). While the addition of a single syllable to the standard tanka pattern is a common technique known as "extra character" (*ji-amari*), the addition of four syllables, almost an entire five-syllable unit, is highly unusual. It is as though the soldiers' cry ruptures the form of the tanka itself, exceeding the bounds of canonical poetic expression.

This moment of rupture certainly serves to enhance the manly pleasures of the scene: the soldiers' orgiastic passion is such that it cannot be contained by conventional literary forms. However, it also suggests that there exists a kind of tension between the tanka form and modern war poetry, that the two cannot coexist without creating moments of disjunction. The end of the poem departs so drastically from conventional *shichi-gochō*, or 7-5 syllabic rhythm, that it would complicate efforts to chant or perform it orally. The word "hooray" is meant to be uttered aloud, an oral cry by definition, but its place in the poem makes it a barrier to oral performance. Were this poem performed in a sequence of tanka, it would be confusing for a casual listener trying to decipher where one poem ended and the next began, leaving the word *banzai* to hover in a kind of static-filled gap between poems.

Hakushū's nationalistic poem defamiliarizes the orality of the tanka form, and raises the question of whether classical poetic forms can survive intact their encounter with the overwhelming pleasures of wartime spectacle. As we shall see, the fact that Hakushū disrupts the poem's ability to be smoothly read aloud is highly suggestive in light of his own frequent participation in 1930s oral culture on records or radio. His insertion of the word *banzai* outside the traditional syllabic bounds of the tanka suggests that these mass media broadcasts of his work have a disjunctive effect, giving rise to moments of static that disorient listeners. It is notable that both Hakushū's tanka and Hagiwara's poem on Nanjing end with a cry of *banzai*, a triumphant note that they allow to echo with undertones of ambivalence and uncertainty.

Despite the ambivalent quality of their war poetry, as seen in the two preceding examples, it has caused postwar critics to either ignore or dismiss both poets' late work. So powerful is the stigma of the war poems that critics marginalize Hagiwara and Hakushū's late works in general, not just the poems specifically written in support of the

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<sup>102</sup> Donald Keene, *World Within Walls: A History of Japanese Literature*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 507.



war. Both poets have faced criticism or lack of interest in their late works because of their turn away from their earlier poetics, often referred to as a “retreat” or *taikyaku*.<sup>103</sup> Margaret Benton Fukasawa refers to the war poems in Kitahara Hakushū’s 1940 poetry collection *Black Cyprus* as “patriotic” and suggests that they “have lost their relevance for modern readers.”<sup>104</sup> Ueda Makoto characterizes Hagiwara’s last collection *Ice Land* (*Hyōtō*, 1934) as “sentimentalist” and a retreat from the “transcendental sphere” of his earlier work.<sup>105</sup> In the last ten years, however, such scholars as Kevin Doak, Tsuboi Hideto, and Toshiko Ellis have begun to revisit these poets’ late works, undeterred by the stigma often placed on their 1930s output. This chapter seeks to contribute to this relatively recent development.

In this framework, contextualized with the war poems discussed above, Hagiwara and Hakushū’s late works offer a meditation on the role of mass media in a time of war, the chance it offers poets to hide in plain sight. This chapter will address these poets’ appearances in mass media, as well as their poems and prose that discuss them. The omnipresence of imagery drawn from the cinematic *benshi*, from radio and recordings, and from photography invites readers to engage with poetry not just as textual, but as a performative, visual, and audio art. These poets treat mechanized media “not only as theme and content, but also in . . . poetry’s structure and relative chronology,”<sup>106</sup> so that lyric poetry as a mode of writing is transformed by its encounters with these other media.

In this chapter, first, I will discuss how these poets framed their retreat, or *taikyaku*, into mass media collusion in terms of a response to censorship, comparing themselves to *benshi*, silent film narrators who functioned as the often slyly subversive point person between censors and film audiences. Second, I will explore Hagiwara’s and Hakushū’s critical attitudes to 1930s radio and records, the medium most closely aligned with the state and its imperial war efforts. Third, I will analyze the two poets’ attitude to photography in wartime Japan, with Hagiwara emphasizing the medium’s distancing, detached qualities, and Hakushū its potential to create moments of emotion and empathy. Through cinema, oral culture, and photography, these two poets’ late works explore the ambivalent position of lyric poetry, sometimes thought of as elite and hermetic, within mass culture, especially the prevalence of militarist nationalism, of which they are critical but in which they are deeply embedded, aesthetically and emotionally.

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<sup>103</sup> These poets’ retreat, or *taikyaku*, overlaps with the phenomenon of apostasy found in *tenkō* literature, wherein formerly committed leftist writers produced nationalistic literature during the 1930s. Unlike the *tenkō* writers, who were originally Marxists, anarchists, and other leftists, the poets in this chapter were not ideologically affiliated prior to their 1930s nationalistic turn. For more on the *tenkō* phenomenon amongst leftist Japanese poets, see Miriam Silverberg, *Changing Song: The Marxist Manifestos of Nakano Shigeharu* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>104</sup> Margaret Benton Fukasawa, *Kitahara Hakushū: His Life and Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 162.

<sup>105</sup> Ueda Makoto, *Modern Japanese Poets and the Nature of Literature* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983), 148-49.

<sup>106</sup> Margaret Helen Persin, *Getting the Picture: The Ekphrastic Principle in Twentieth-Century Spanish Poetry* (London: Associated University Presses, 1997), 187.

## The Poet as Benshi: The Conservative Turn and the Transition to Sound

Both Kitahara Hakushū and Hagiwara Sakutarō attempted to create a lyric voice under the strictures of wartime censorship using idioms and formal devices borrowed from mass culture, which was under severe censorship and scrutiny in the 1930s. In particular, they aligned their straitened position with the trajectory of the Japanese film industry, which was undergoing an immense shift in the 1930s as silent films accompanied by live oral narration were replaced by talkies with prerecorded sound, first on records and then as part of the projected film. Many, particularly those in the Pure Film movement (*Jun eiga geki undō*), advocated for Japanese cinema to shed its Meiji-era theatrical, oral qualities and instead progress toward what they saw as a more modern, purely visual experience of cinema. However, these poets' elegiac evocations of their youthful movie-going memories expressed ambivalence about the move away from the orality and performativity of Meiji cinema. Most of all, they expressed nostalgia for benshi, silent film narrators, who, while responsible for carrying out the censors' edits to their scripts, which were often handed to the narrator directly from a censor attending the screening, also managed to push against the pressures of censorship in small but significant ways.<sup>107</sup>

The replacement of benshi with recorded sound, as well as the increasing repression that came with 1930s militarization, meant that there was far less room for such ingenious responses to the censors' commands. By looking back to the Meiji period, when benshi were considered the first film stars, with loyal followings of fans who came to the theater expressly to see their favorite performers, Hagiwara and Hakushū imply a sense of identification with benshi of times past, who were at once censorship's enforcers and its oblique critics.

In the predicament of silent film narrators, who once were able to get away with subverting the censorship rules they were tasked with enforcing, Hagiwara and Hakushū saw an echo of their own difficulties of maintaining lyric expressivity in a time when the ability to express one's individual subjectivity was under pressure from censorship. Beginning in the 1920s, benshi were required to support the censors' versions of the films they narrated, rather than obliquely subverting them as sometimes happened in the Meiji and Taishō periods. Film reformers, including the advocates of Pure Film, pressured benshi to bring less expressiveness and individuality to their performances and instead to function as explicators of the film, thereby "rendering themselves invisible and

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<sup>107</sup>For example, in 1908, when the Yokota Film Studio was forbidden to screen a French film about the trial and execution of Louis XVI during the French Revolution, the benshi at a theater in the Kanda area of Tokyo adjusted their scripts so that King Louis XVI was now an American bandit king, and the populist mob calling for his death were enthusiastic citizens helping the state to capture him. Of course, while many audience members were probably happy to go along with the edited story line, it is highly likely that at least a few were in on the joke, and that audiences managed to catch the revolutionary thrust of the film's scenes of populist mobilization. Satō Tadao, *Nihon Eiga Shi*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995) 101.

supporting the illusion that the text spoke itself.”<sup>108</sup> These invisible benshi managed to prolong the era of silent film into the 1930s in Japan, by promoting the illusion that their narration was a transparent, unbiased presentation of the film, rather than a performative interpretation of it bolstered by pressure from film reformers and state censorship.

Even then, later benshi found ways of asserting their artistic subjectivity, pushing back against pressure to function as transparent explicators of their censor-approved texts.<sup>109</sup> In their wartime works, Hakushū and Hagiwara found ways of “rendering themselves invisible,” as Gerow says of the benshi in later years, taking refuge in the oblique and supposedly hermetically personal realm of lyric poetry, evading the censors’ commands even as they fulfilled them.

Like the benshi, whose role was declining more and more as they were expected to merge with the cinematic text and give up their distinctive voices, the poets in these works attempts to preserve some trace of agency while they lend their voices to the advance of audiovisual technologies and their increasing militarization. In 1942, shortly before his death, Hagiwara remarked on the similarities between free-verse (*jiyū shi*) poets seeking to reach mass audiences during wartime and the now passé craft of the benshi:

Once long ago, when silent film was ubiquitous, there were explainers called “benshi.” They were in fact a kind of oral poet, adding a high level of intonation and rhythm to their words, making all their explanations into a kind of free-verse-like beautiful style, and how ardently, how sonorously, they delivered their explanations. The explanations of Somei Saburō, Tokugawa Musei, and other such famous benshi truly were a kind of beautiful style, and they were once a mode of free verse with its own rhythm.

Therefore, it hardly needs saying that their explanation, among young people searching for poetry, had great charms and was welcomed. Even the youth of the masses, with no understanding of poetry at all, were highly compelled by the oral poetry of these motion picture benshi, and at one time, imitations of them were fashionable among the youth of the masses.<sup>110</sup>

It is important to note that the essay containing these comments was printed in a state-supported anthology of nationalistic war poetry, *A Poetry Collection of Great Japan: To Sing of Holy War (Dai Nippon Shishū: Sei Sen Ni Utau, 1942)*. Therefore, Hagiwara’s nostalgia for the “beautiful archaic style” of benshi narrators, and its potential to serve as poetry of the masses, was proffered in service to the Japanese war effort. In

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<sup>108</sup> Aaron Gerow, *Visions of Japanese Modernity: Cinema, Nation, and Spectatorship 1995-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 152.

<sup>109</sup>For example, the popular late-1920s Tokyo benshi Ōkura Mitsugu (1899-1978) was famed for his ability to bring eroticism and sexuality to his narration of even the most innocuous films approved by the censors, so that, in the words of one disapproving letter to the editor in 1928, “Any film, no matter the film, whether a tale of patriotism and loyalty, or a tale of maternal love, becomes a work of obscenity.” Satō, *Nihon Eiga Shi*, vol. 1, 316-17

<sup>110</sup> Hagiwara Sakutarō, “Taishū to Shi Bungaku,” in *Dai Nippon Shishū: Sei Sen ni Utau*, edited by Kawaji Ryūkō (Tokyo: Ōbunsha, 1942), 226-27.

this passage's nostalgia for the Meiji-period benshi, who so cleverly responded to their role as mouthpieces of film censorship, Hagiwara implies an ambivalence towards his own role as a public face of national poetry, including his appearance in the nationalistic collection carrying these remarks.<sup>111</sup> He makes a subtly critical comparison between poets cheering the masses on with their nationalistic poetry (works such as his own "On the Day of the Fall of Nanjing" published five years previously, or Hakushū's 1940 military tanka) and benshi evading the same morality laws they were tasked with enforcing. Hagiwara and his fellow nationalized poets, his glowing recollection of the benshi suggests, could afford to learn a thing or two from their lost art.

This passage on benshi narration presents the lost art as a potential first step toward re-envisioning poetry as a popular mode of expression. With nostalgia for the Meiji-period world of cinema-viewing, Hagiwara's comments frame benshi narration as a retrospective art whose time has passed, repeatedly using such temporal phrases as "once long ago" (*katsute mukashi*) and "once was" (*katsu...de atta*). He describes their linguistic style as "beautiful archaic style," or *bibun*, suggesting its self-consciously archaicizing nature. Like the free-verse poets who Hagiwara says they inspired, benshi were translators who created a new idiom in modern Japanese, drawing on classical literary and performance forms and on the dialogue of Hollywood and other foreign films. The benshi "rhythm" (what Hagiwara refers to as *sessō*, *setsuritsu*) drew on the 7-5 syllabic rhythms of classical Japanese poetic forms, as well as on modern colloquial Japanese, including both central Tokyo standard and local, especially Osaka, variants.<sup>112</sup> Their textured, rich use of language enabled them to provide unique and sometimes subversive interpretations of the films they narrated, enabling the kind of oblique evasions of censorship that we have seen. For Hagiwara and other poets seeking to make the most of their new popularity on the airwaves and in newsprint, the benshi offered a kind of model for hiding in plain sight.

"How ardently, how sonorously, they delivered their explanations," he exclaims,<sup>113</sup> with a kind of lament that the expressivity and lyricism of the benshi's "beautiful archaic style" are no longer current. Hagiwara's comments about the lost art of the benshi indicate the qualities which he attempts to ironically resurrect in his own late poems about cinema. For example, in a series of prose poems called "Three Actors" (*San-nin no Haiyū*, 1928), which addresses in turn three major Hollywood silent film stars, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, and Harold Lloyd, Hagiwara portrays his own *taikyaku*, his late works' descent into silence, reclusiveness, and reduced artistic expressivity, by aligning this transition in his work with the advent of talkies and the end of silent film and the benshi. All three stars had careers that were negatively affected by sound, a transition that was well under way in 1928 when Hagiwara published the poem. Though the poem contains no explicit mention of the benshi, as novelist Haniya Yutaka (1909-97) points out, many of the early Hollywood films were first mediated for Japanese

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<sup>111</sup> Tsuboi Hideto makes the point that Hagiwara was the most famous poet to appear in this particular collection, making his essay a point of prestige, a way to make the propagandistic book look more like serious literature (Tsuboi, 177).

<sup>112</sup> An analysis of the language used by *benshi* appears in Satō Tadao, *Nihon Eiga Shi*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1995), 103-4.

<sup>113</sup> Hagiwara, "Taishū to Shi Bungaku," 227.

audiences by benshi,<sup>114</sup> so the encounter with these actors that Hagiwara describes implies the presence of a benshi in the poem.

In addition, the pleasurable intimacy the poem's speaker expresses towards his beloved stars has a subtle homoerotic undertone, thereby obliquely subverting morality laws against depictions of homosexuality. Hagiwara had already experienced brushes with morality censorship for depictions of non-normative masculine sexuality earlier in his career, for example in 1914 when the poem "The One who Loves Love" (*Koi o koi suru hito*), which describes a masculine speaker wearing female clothing and make-up while making love to a tree, was banned from publication in his poetry collection *Howling at the Moon* (*Tsuki ni hoeru*). Hagiwara's fraught negotiations with censorship extended from the political realm (as we have seen in "On the Day of the Fall of Nanjing") to that of morality, and both were intertwined in his poetry on cinema. Iijima Kōichi points out that, due to the sparsity of Hagiwara's late output, the 1928 poem "Buster Keaton" comes directly before the 1937 "On the Day of the Fall of Nanjing" in the Hagiwara Sakutarō *zenshū*, or complete works.<sup>115</sup> Their proximity is suggestive, as both seek to negotiate a poet's place with regards to mass media and censorship, colluding in some ways, and resisting in others.

The poem's speaker resembles a benshi in his ability to adopt different personas and points of view, and in his ability to serve as a model for the sometimes illicit pleasures of the average movie viewer. Sometimes he addresses the actor in the second person as *kimi*, you, with effusive exclamations like, "Buster Keaton! You are a nineteenth-century man of passion [*jōnetsuka*]!"<sup>116</sup> These moments of lyrical address position the poet as a kind of audience surrogate, carried away with fannish enthusiasm for his favorite star as he projects his fantasies about the kind of passionate man he imagines Buster Keaton to be, and addressing him in the second person, an act of intimacy in the Japanese language, where pronouns are often omitted unless inserted for particular emphasis, to the point where second-person pronouns are sometimes translated into English as "dear" or "darling." Sometimes the speaker provides lines of dialogue, not for Buster Keaton himself, who remains a silent screen on which to project the fantasies of others, but for other characters, such as Buster Keaton's parents, who cheerfully bid him goodbye at the train station as he goes to Chicago, encouraging him to pursue his dream in the big city: "Bye Keaton! This is called civilization [*bunmeikaika*]."<sup>117</sup> Speaking dialogue for the characters positions the speaker as a kind of dutiful, neutral benshi who overdubs the dialogue for viewers without comment or interpretation of his own, as befits the role of impartial explicator or *setsumeisha* that the benshi was expected to play in the late 1920s. The speaker oscillates from infatuated, "passionate" spectator to dutifully relaying the parents' dialogue. However, the overly didactic line "This is called civilization" (*kore ga bunmei kaika to iu mono da*) suggests that the benshi takes the parents' dutiful farewell less than seriously.

Iijima Kōichi has pointed out that the 1928 poem is concurrent with the start of Hagiwara's retreat or *taikyaku* away from the experimental modernism of his earlier work,

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<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Satō, *Nihon Eiga Shi*, vol. 1, 315.

<sup>115</sup> Iijima Kōichi, *Hagiwara Sakutarō* (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1975) 39

<sup>116</sup> Hagiwara Sakutarō, *Hagiwara Sakutarō Zenshū*, vol. 1, 558.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 558.

ultimately culminating in the reclusive silence of his final collection *Ice Land* (*Hyōtō*, 1934), the object of much criticism and critical lack of attention due to the stigma of Hagiwara's war poem.<sup>118</sup> The speaker as benshi uses Keaton and Chaplin to express his lament for the passing of the silent era and a concurrent side of his own poetic enterprise. He depicts Keaton with a tone of nostalgia for what the speaker sees as his optimistic interest in and excitement about science and modernity. The object of the speaker's nostalgia is not the nationalistic premodern past at stake in nationalist poems such as Hakushū's 1940 militarist tanka, but rather the potential and excitement of an earlier phase of modernization. As the 1920s drew to a close, Hagiwara's portrayal of Buster Keaton as an optimistic Meiji-era man of sensual pleasures and scientific knowledge implicitly posits this earlier period as a time when the possibilities offered by modernity for new experiences—sexual, aesthetic, and political—was not yet foreclosed.

The portrayal of Buster Keaton as an elegy for the optimism of an earlier era of modernization combines language of progress and advancement with that of nostalgia and remembrance. The poet portrays Keaton as an early adopter of the latest developments in science and technology, who as a child sits under “the first lamp” ever generated by “European progress and civilization” (*Yoroppa no bunmei kaika*) and reads a book titled *Guide to Science* (*Rigaku no Shirabe*).<sup>119</sup> Keaton embarks on a “steam train” from “lithographs of long ago” (*mukashi no dōhanga*),<sup>120</sup> an image that takes the train, a symbol often associated with modernity, newness, and progress, and views it through the nostalgic lens of the “long ago” (*mukashi*) print medium of lithography.

The speaker narrates Buster Keaton's visit to a “wondrous planetarium” (*fushigi na tenbunkan*) and a “kineorama of celestial travel” (*tenkai ryokō no kineorama*),<sup>121</sup> evoking images of proto-cinematic forms of visual entertainment. Keaton's “wondrous” (*fushigi*, wondrous, mysterious, uncanny) proto-cinematic visual spectacle contrasts with the dulled, melancholy portrayals of movie theaters and entertainments in his 1934 poetry collection *Ice Land*, where Asakusa's famous Luna Park is described as an alienating place where spectators sit in silence and “side by side in contemplation, people are alone” (*soba e ni shi'i suru mono wa sabishiki nari*).<sup>122</sup> Keaton's portrait is infused with the speaker's nostalgia for when these new technologies were exciting and full of possibility, before the disillusionment of *Ice Land* has set in.

At the end of the poem, Keaton retreats from the thrills of modernization and finds refuge in a pastoral scene, where he lives “alone in the woods and forests of nature” (*shizen no shinrin ni hitori de sumi*).<sup>123</sup> This retreat seems a place not of refuge and rest, but of loneliness and alienation. The speaker says Keaton “longs for far-off modern civilization” (*tōku bunmei ni akogare*),<sup>124</sup> implying that his remove from these things has left him with some sense of discontent and yearning (*akogare*) for the world of urban modernity that he left behind. Like the reclusive, disillusioned speaker of Hagiwara's

<sup>118</sup> Iijima, *Hagiwara Sakutarō*, 39

<sup>119</sup> Hagiwara, *Hagiwara Sakutarō Zenshū* 1, 558

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 559

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 559

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 362

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 559

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 559

wartime collection *Ice Land*, Keaton has lost his taste for the modern sensory pleasures of the city, but he does not seem to take much comfort in his pastoral refuge, either. “You too are one of the naturally lonely ones” (*kimi mo mata seirai no “sabishiki hito” no hitori de aru*), the speaker tells Keaton in the poem’s final line.<sup>125</sup> The speaker’s use of the phrase “you too” (*kimi mo mata*) seems to offer the lonely recluse some form of hope and undercut the bleak loneliness of the ending. Even if he is alone, the speaker shares his experience of alienation, and some form of communication and bonding between them is possible.

Hagiwara’s poem on Buster Keaton foreshadows the reclusive world of his 1930s poems, where the formal experimentalism of his earlier work recedes in favor of performing its own silence. Read alongside Hagiwara’s elegiac view of the end of silent cinema, *katsudō shashin*, in “Three Actors,” Kitahara Hakushū’s cinematic tanka from the 1930s present the transition to sound in nostalgic, ambivalent terms that parallel his own late wartime “retreat” from experimentalism into the world of nationalistic propaganda.

The poem revisits the image of a waterwheel, which figures in the poem “Spring Rain Clear Interval” (*Tsuyu no Harema*) from the poet’s 1912 collection *Memories*, where, as discussed in Chapter 1, the wheel’s revolving motion and musical, rhythmic sound served as a figure for what the poet saw as the lyricism of early Japanese cinema in the Meiji period. Turning in circles as it drained a farm field that was serving as a theater for a kabuki troupe, Hakushū’s waterwheel evoked a revolving cinema projector showing a *kyūgeki* or historical drama, highlighting the emerging art form’s connection to Edo period *misemono*, spectacles or entertainments. As it projects the new, modern spectacle of Meiji film, the projector has a lyrical, songlike presence that captivates the speaker, who addresses it in the alliterative, rhythmic refrain: *mawase, mawase, mizu guruma* (“turn, turn, waterwheel”). For Meiji-period Hakushū, an optimistic adopter of new viewing practices with all the excitement of Hagiwara’s Keaton, the turning of the waterwheel-as-projector has the power to inspire lyric song, as it fuels the cinematic *kyūgeki* spectacle in front of him.

Hakushū’s 1940 revisiting of the waterwheel shifts the lyricism of the film projector away from the Edo-inflected, folk-song orality of his late Meiji poem and toward a more Shōwa-era understanding of lyricism, namely, the standardized rhythms of modern tanka. In addition to the shift from the textured, variegated rhythms of popular song to the smooth, regular flow of the high art tanka, the waterwheel displays an ambivalent relationship to sound and vision that echoes the development of cinema at the time, which was shifting from the orality of benshi narration to a more visual register with the onset of sound and the reforms spearheaded by the Pure Film movement.

Unlike “Spring Rain Clear Interval,” with its variations of five- and six-syllable rhythms drawn from Edo period *kayō* and *min’yō* popular songs, this 1940 tanka has a complete, regular pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables, with no extra or missing syllables or other attempts to fragment this rhythm. The rhythm of the waterwheel-as-projector has shifted from the popular tones of Edo folk songs to the orthodox, high literary sound of tanka.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 559

*mizu guruma / haru meku kikeba / ippō ni / noru se no oto mo / kagayaku gotoshi*

waterwheel  
sounds like spring  
the current as it climbs  
one side makes a sound  
like it shines

The speaker finds himself caught between the orality of early cinema and the visuality of current forms of the medium. There is no human voice to mediate the film, as there was once in the days of the benshi. Instead, he listens to the mechanical sounds of the waterwheel (*mizu guruma haru meku kikeba*). The sound of the water current (*se no oto*) as it climbs up the device sounds “like it is shining” (*kagayaku gotoshi*). Instead of producing a folk-song-like, oral refrain, the waterwheel’s revolving motion produces a synesthetic visual effect of shining light. The speaker’s act of listening yields a kind of echo of liquid light. Perhaps because of his blindness, which causes him to draw visual images from sounds, the sound conjures a sense memory of light flashing off the water, one that he cannot directly access in reality but constructs in his imagination. The sound of the revolving projector evokes a visual experience, the sound of light, in the speaker. He has no songlike refrain, like the narration of a benshi, to mediate the experience of the projector. Instead, he has the sound of light itself, the mechanical sounds of the waterwheel as it turns and projects its shining light. There is an inhuman, impersonal quality to the speaker’s encounter with the waterwheel. It is a moment made up of sound and light, with no oral embedding to give it narrative or lyric form.

In these two poems, Hagiwara and Hakushū both use the transition of early Shōwa cinema to metaphorically highlight the transition occurring in their own poetic trajectories, away from the excitement and optimism of Meiji- and Taishō-era experimentalism, and toward a retreat, *taikyaku*, into the world of lyricism. Hagiwara’s earlier effort, from 1928, compensates for the decline of the *benshi* by allowing the speaker to give voice to different personas and characters. Hakushū, on the other hand, presents a cinematic world without the live orality of the benshi, in which the mechanical sounds of the projector have no human voice to mediate them. While Hagiwara’s “Buster Keaton” performs a return to Meiji-period oral practices of cinema, Hakushū’s poem merely presents a world without them, in which benshi have been replaced by machines. Both of them use the obsolescence of the benshi to represent their own conservative turn, to point to their use of the alibi of mass culture in the face of intensifying censorship.

### **Poets on the Radio: Oral Culture and Wartime Poetry Readings**

We have seen how the benshi offered Hagiwara and Hakushū a way to meditate on their new relationship to mass media, what Hagiwara, in the essay where he compares poets to benshi, calls a “national poet” (*kokmuinteki na shijin*). Hagiwara, in his homage to Buster Keaton, performs the benshi’s delicate tightrope act with regards to the censors, offering himself as a transparent narrator, while lightly commenting on his subject matter in a humorous, sometimes subversive manner. Hakushū, on the other hand, offers a glimpse of the world of film-going in the benshi’s absence, where machines give rise to



lyric song with no human voice to mediate them, a mechanized glow of liquid light. In their poems featured on the radio and on records, the very innovations that had rendered benshi obsolete, Hagiwara and Hakushū extend their self-conscious critique of themselves as mass poets to the aural media most closely tied to the national war effort, due to the state's close involvement in their day-to-day operations. Japanese radio was heavily nationalized from its inception in the mid-1920s, with the state funding the majority of broadcasting stations and maintaining strict control over their programming.<sup>126</sup> Record companies, while operated by private commerce, were often produced with radio broadcast in mind and were therefore also subject to state controls. Even newsreaders' tone of voice was monitored, and anything departing from careful neutrality could be censored from future broadcasts.<sup>127</sup>

Like the benshi who tried to assert their artistic subjectivity with even the smallest of vocal gestures, Hakushū and Hagiwara's performances use seemingly insignificant oral features in order to express their ambivalence towards their place as nationalized poets in the 1930s and their nostalgia for an earlier era of modern poetic expression before the codes of censorship became so rigid. An extra syllable orally added to the printed text, a certain monotonous tone of voice: these subtle cues become, like the benshis' performance under the very nose of the censors, a way for these poets to assert their subjectivity even as they are instrumentalized by nationalized oral media.

As with their poetry on cinema, Hagiwara and Hakushū's oral performances for records and radio posit a nostalgic return to the Meiji period as an implicit expression of ambivalence towards their role as nationalized poets participating in the war effort. They characterize the oral culture of the 1930s as mechanized and un-poetic, and offer the Meiji-era practice of chanting poetry as an alternative to the usual poetry readings found on national airwaves. To return to Hagiwara's 1942 comments on the benshi-as-poet, what he most laments about the passing away of the benshi's "beautiful archaic style" is its oral features: its "expressive" (*jōkanteki*) quality and its "rhythm" (*sessō*). At the same time, Hagiwara also implicitly posits the benshi as at once a precursor and a lost alternative to the "oral poetry" (*rōdoku shi*) then pervading the Japanese radio airways and records.

What were the stakes of the popularity of *rōdoku shi*, and how did the form come to exert so pervasive and dominant role in the wartime Japanese poetic world? The media context to which Hagiwara was responding was one in which there was a significant emphasis on orality, and in this environment, the oral qualities of *rōdoku shi* flourished. The practice of poetry readings originated in the 1920s with the People's Poetry Group (*Minshū Shi-ha*), who used it as a way to propagate the burgeoning form of *jiyū kōgo shi*, or colloquial free verse, which was written in contemporary vernacular Japanese rather than classical.<sup>128</sup>

Building on the use of poetry readings by the People's Poetry Group, 1930s poets expanded the practice of oral performance of poetry. Tsuboi Hideto has described the

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<sup>126</sup> Gregory J. Karsza, *The State and the Mass Media in Japan 1918-1945* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1988) 76.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>128</sup> Tsuboi Hideto, *Koe no Shukusai: Nihon Kindaishi to Sensō* (Nagoya, Japan: Nagoya University Press, 1997) 35.

post-1931 era in Japanese poetry as a “return to the voice” (*koe e no kaiki*), a play on Hagiwara Sakutarō’s famous nationalistic 1938 essay “Return to Japan” (*Nihon e no kaiki*).<sup>129</sup> The return to orality among Japanese poets in the 1930s represented a reaction against the emphasis on visuality found in the high Modernism that dominated poetic production during the 1920s, including the use of the materiality of typography as a poetic device by Surrealists such as Kitasono Katsue, or the use of visual art in conjunction with text by anarchists such as Hagiwara Kyōjirō (1899-1938) in the Mavo Group.

When viewed in context with the highly nationalized and censored medium of 1930s radio, Tsuboi’s formulation of a “return to the voice” that parallels the nationalistic “return to Japan” suggests that the new emphasis on orality was closely intertwined with the rightward turn of many Japanese poets during the war. The popularity of broadcasted and recorded *rōdoku* performances of poems, as well as the adaptation of many poems into popular songs, facilitated the participation of modern Japanese poetry in the war effort, since so many of these broadcasts and recordings were nationalistically themed, like the war poems discussed above.<sup>130</sup>

As with their use of the *benshi*, which posited Meiji-era cinema as an alternative to the heavily censored present state of the medium, Hagiwara and Hakushū express nostalgia for Meiji-era orality as a way of obliquely commenting on censorship in oral culture. Both expressed ambivalence about the popularity of the *rōdoku* style of poetry reading, instead using the more archaic term *rōgin*, which was coined in the Meiji era, when poetry reading was performed in a more musical manner, almost resembling chanting. Their use of the term *rōgin* for the performance of free verse suggests a kind of nostalgia “for the perceived poetic energy of the innovators of the early Meiji,”<sup>131</sup> who tried to incorporate Edo-period poetic rhythms and musicality into their reading style, rather than support for the more modern, conversational style of reading favored by *rōdoku* performances usually broadcast on nationalized radio.

While both Hakushū and Hagiwara referred to their poems when read aloud as *rōgin*, interestingly their performance styles when actually reading them aloud are very different. In a series of recordings made for Columbia Records from 1937 to 1940, Hakushū, when reading either his tanka or his free verse, performs them in a musical, chant-like manner that emphasizes their use of 7-5 syllabic rhythm (*shichi-go chō*). Hagiwara, on the other hand, reads his free-verse poems, which also contain occasional echoes of *shichi-go chō*, in a repetitive monotone. In the 1930s, most poetry recordings and broadcasts featured professional vocal performers, rather than the poems’ author, so these recordings represent an unusual chance to examine these two poets’ vocal interpretations of their own works at a time when the issue of orality in poetry was particularly charged.

In Hakushū’s 1937 oral reading of a series of free-verse poems called “Fragments” (*Danshō*) about his childhood memories of listening to music from his 1912 collection *Omoide*, his musical, *rōgin*-like delivery suggests nostalgia for the earlier era of *Shintai*-

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 162

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 238

<sup>131</sup> Sugimoto, “Nation as Artwork,” 182.

*shi* experimentation, and enacts the retreat, or *taikyaku*, of the 1930s poetry scene.<sup>132</sup> Hakushū's image of the piano and its connection to Meiji-era media color his Shōwa-style oral performance with regret and ambivalence. It suggests that, as the benshi once did in their negotiations with the censors, Hakushū self-consciously seeks a compromise between collusion with and resistance to the constraints of a regulated mass media.

Although the poems he performs are free verse, not tanka, he reads them in the rhythmic, musical fashion of tanka *rōgin*, rather than the more colloquial, spoken-word style that characterized most *rōdoku*-style poetry readings. With slight pauses between each five- or seven-syllable unit, Hakushū's rhythmic reading style emphasizes the poems' resemblance to Meiji-era New Style Poetry (*Shintai-shi*), which used *shichi-go chō* in free verse in the attempt to create a hybrid modern form of rhythmic poetry. The poem's use of Meiji-era coinages such as *piano* and *hari-do* (glass door) further support this turn to the Meiji era.

The Meiji-era nostalgia is disrupted when, at one point, Hakushū departs from the written text and inserts an extra syllable in order to make a line fit the 7-5 syllable rhythm: *waga tomo [wa] izuko ni ariya* (my friend, where is he?).<sup>133</sup> The insertion, the grammatical particle *wa*, marks "my friend" as the topic of the sentence. While the particle *wa* was added to fit the 7-5 rhythm and enhance the poem's musicality, it also has the effect of making the sentence more grammatically correct and closer to the rules of vernacular modern Japanese prose. "My friend" is now introduced as the topic of the sentence, rather than suddenly interjected by the speaker in a moment of feeling so intense that the rules of grammar can be bent. Rather than the experimental rhythms of the *Shintaishi* poets, the line starts to resemble the vernacular poets of the 1930s radio waves, who seek to reproduce the patterns of standardized modern Japanese. The original 1912 printed version allowed the line to stand with a broken *shich-go chō* rhythm as well as with nonstandardized syntax, while the 1937 oral reading smoothed over these irregularities.

Hakushū reads with a quality of melancholy and sadness that suggests a dimension of self-awareness or ambivalence about his own act of standardizing or smoothing over the irregularities in the Meiji-era text with the vocal mannerisms of Shōwa mass orality. His vocal performance is quiet and soft, almost fragile, creating a sense of regret and melancholy. The speaker smoothing out his own once-experimental and recalcitrant poems does so while looking back at his youth with longing and regret.

The vocal softness of the performance suggests the lassitude of an aging speaker looking back on childhood and highlights the temporal return at work in Hakushū's oral rendition of his twenty-year-old poem. The piece first appeared in his 1912 collection *Omoide* (Memories), which was about the poet's childhood in the town of Yanagawa in southern Japan. The text's original place in a sequence of childhood reminiscences

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<sup>132</sup> National Diet Library, *Kitahara Hakushū Jisaku Rōdoku*, perf. Kitahara Hakushū (Columbia Records, 1939), from Rekishiteki Ongen Sound Archive, streaming sound file, 3:33, [http://rekion.dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/3571476?itemId=info%3Andljp%2Fpid%2F3571476&\\_\\_lang=en](http://rekion.dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/3571476?itemId=info%3Andljp%2Fpid%2F3571476&__lang=en)

<sup>133</sup> The original text of the poem appears in Kitahara Hakushū, *Omoide: Jojōshōkyoku* (Tokyo: Nihon Toshō Sentā, 1999), 106-10.

suggested that the scene it describes is one of the speaker's loneliness as a child, a "lonely" (*samishira*) boy standing by the window and "looking out alone" (*hitori nagamete*), wishing for friends to play with (*waga tomo, izuko ni ariya*). Hakushū's 1937 performance of the poem, shortly after the publication of a series of *tanka* in the journal *Tama* describing his diagnosis of diabetes, which would soon lead to the loss of his vision, recontextualizes the speaker's loneliness. Now, instead of a young child looking out the window and wishing for playmates, the speaker is an old man losing his vision and contemplating his mortality.

For 1937 Hakushū, the piano underlines the ambivalence with which he vocally edits his early work to make it fit the landscape of Shōwa mass orality, with its emphasis on vernacular Japanese and 7-5 syllabic rhythm. The piano, which was often featured as accompaniment in the kineorama shows that Hakushū attended as a youth, suggests associations with the Meiji-era media landscape. Its music, along with the benshi's narration, would have provided the live soundscape for the proto-cinematic entertainments that the childhood speaker might have enjoyed.

Elsewhere in the original 1912 collection Hakushū is reading from, in the poem "Shadows" (*In'ei*), which he does not perform in his 1937 poetry reading, the piano appears as an accompaniment, not only for the kineorama entertainment, but for memory itself: "Oh kineorama of my truly young days, / Piano accompanying from the shadow of my memory."<sup>134</sup>

This passage from Hakushū's 1912 work casts his 1937 recorded performance in a different light: the piano to which the child speaker listens is part of a Meiji-era live media soundscape. The piano's music summons "memory" (*omoidae*) in the "shadow" (*kage*) of the kineorama's images, providing a kind of shadow-memory where the speaker's childhood memories blur with the images cast by the projecting device. In light of the piano's association with the kineorama, the child speaker of "Fragments" becomes a consumer of media, as he "touches the keys" and listens to the "unreal high notes" (*utsutsu naki takane*), unreal perhaps because of the fantastic cinematic images they recall, and looks out the window, which resembles a screen because of its large, flat quality and its visual function. As the child wishes for a friend to play with (*waga tomo [wa] izuko ni ari ya*), the piano summons memories of his cinematic shadow self. The longing and ambivalence with which the child grown old summons memories of his Meiji-era cinematic life implicitly critiques the heavily censored media environment in which his oral performance appears.

While Hakushū's oral performance expresses ambivalence toward the mass production of oral poetry by hearkening back to Meiji-period forms of orality, Hagiwara's monotonous, dry reading style emphasizes the mechanical, inhuman quality of 1930s oral culture. In contrast to what Hagiwara once called the "expressive, sonorous" reading style of the benshi, or to Hakushū's musical reading, Hagiwara's vocal performance is repetitive and drone-like. Indeed, the mechanical quality of Hagiwara's reading style suggests a kind of refusal of Hakushū's nostalgia for Meiji orality, or perhaps an awareness of the impossibility of such a return. It is easy to imagine Hagiwara performing the scenes of monotonous drudgery from his war poem "On the Day of the

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<sup>134</sup> Kitahara Hakushū, *Kitahara Hakushū Zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1985)

Fall of Nanjing” in a similar inexpressive, uninflected voice. Hagiwara’s performance highlights the laborious routine of work as a nationalized poet, as mechanized and unenthused as the Transportation Corps trudging towards Nanjing.

Hagiwara’s reading aloud of “Nogizaka Club” (*Nogizaka kurabu*), from his 1934 collection *Ice Land*, was recorded in 1940.<sup>135</sup> In the recording, Hagiwara reads each line in the same rhythm and tone, with a downward drop at the end of each line as though at the end of a sentence. While Hakushū read with musicality and smoothness, sometimes without making a pause at the line break, in order to indicate the flowing enjambment of a sentence across two poetic lines, Hagiwara ends each line of the poem with the same downward drop in pitch and a brief pause, even if the line break comes in the middle of a sentence enjambed to the next line. This choppy vocal performance creates a sense of constant interruption rather than smooth, flowing syntax, almost as if the recording is punctuated by static.

Hagiwara’s interruptive reading style performatively highlights themes of rupture and disjunction in the poem, and it suggests that these themes are in fact aimed at critiquing the Shōwa oral culture in which the recording appears. For example, Hagiwara inserts his usual downward drop in pitch followed by a pause between the following two lines: “Through the busy streets of the end of the year, depressed and wandering / at night once again on a chair at the bar trying to get drunk” (*seigo no isogashiki machi o urei mayoite / yoru mo nao sake ba no isu ni yowamu to suru zo*). Hagiwara’s voice comes to a stop at the end of the word *mayoite* (wandering), so that the act of wandering becomes a gap or aporia in the poem, a barrier to the continued act of utterance. Wandering represents a gap in the poem’s transition to oral text, a gap that opens up the possibility for the poet to express his ambivalence about that transition.

In the prose preface to *Hyōtō*, the collection that contains the poem “Nogizaka Club” from his recorded performance, Hagiwara states that he sees these works as primarily oral texts, written in the melodious *rōgin* style of Meiji orality, rather than the colloquial, spoken style of Shōwa *rōdoku*:

...[a]ll these poems are “*rōgin*,” to be sung with the emotiveness of *rōgin*. The reader should read them aloud, and should by no means read them silently. This is “poetry to be sung” [*utau tame no shi* (the character *shi* annotated with the *furigana* “*uta*”)].<sup>136</sup>

In light of Hagiwara’s emphasis on song (*uta*) and musical, chant-like oral reading (*rōgin*), we would expect that his performance on Columbia Records would resemble the musical, flowing style of Hakushū. His language suggests that he shares Hakushū’s nostalgia for Meiji-period orality, which infuses the other poet’s rhythmic, musical vocal performance with melancholy and ambivalence. However, the droning, repetitive manner in which Hagiwara reads his poetry suggests that this is far from the case. Rather than performing Hakushū’s melancholic return to Meiji orality, Hagiwara’s reading highlights the impossibility of such a return by deliberately avoiding expressivity and musicality

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<sup>135</sup> National Diet Library, *Shi Rōdoku: Nogizaka Kurabu, Hi, Numazu Chihō*, perf. Hagiwara Sakutarō (Columbia Records, 1940), from Rekishiteki Ongen Sound Archive, streaming sound file, 2:59, <http://rekion.dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/3571577>

<sup>136</sup> Hagiwara, *Hagiwara Sakutarō Zenshū* 1, 358

alike. Hagiwara's songs are difficult, recalcitrant ones that stick in the throat and cannot be sung--and yet, he says in the preface, they must not be read silently either (*kesshite andoku subeki de wa nai*).<sup>137</sup>

Perhaps Hagiwara's expressionless reading style represents an attempt to give voice to a kind of silence, a song that sings of its own impossibility, the impossibility of producing lyric song in an era where it is broadcast en masse. Like the speaker in "Nogizaka Club," who, "like a bear" (*kuma no gotoku*), hibernates the day away "inside the white-walled, desolate Western-style room" (*haku 'a no kōbaku taru yōshitsu no uchi*), it seems that Hagiwara has chosen reclusiveness and silence, rendering himself incapable of human speech like the bear, and sealing his poetic voice inside the homogenous, white-walled confines of the Western-style radio broadcast of free verse.

### **From Detachment to Empathy: Poetry on Photography**

Each in his own way, Hakushū and Hagiwara valorize the silences and gaps that emerge in vocal performance, whether these appear in the elegiac gestures at a lost mode of Meiji orality in Hakushū's case, or in Hagiwara's unemotive performance of the rote quality of the 1930s mechanization of poetry reading. A similar dynamic emerges in their treatment of photography, where the blank spaces and the unseen become a vehicle for the expression of the two poets' complex attitudes toward 1930s militarization of the nationalized media as a domestic wartime resource. While Hakushū's poems suggest that photography can be a vehicle for moments of empathy between viewers and the subjects depicted, Hagiwara's emphasize the distant, detached quality of photography. Both Hakushū poetry of photographic empathy and Hagiwara's of chilly emotional distance bring to the fore the question of the ethics of photography in wartime, asking readers to consider whether it can be a vehicle for compassion, or for indifference, and what the stakes of those affective responses are.

Hagiwara's comments on his own experiments with photography suggest he saw a complex relationship between photography, emotion, and distance. Starting in the 1910s until the 1930s, he was an amateur practitioner of stereoscopic photography, a mode of photography inspired by three-dimensional nineteenth-century panorama entertainments in which two identical photographs are superimposed in order to create a three-dimensional image. In a 1939 essay for the photography magazine *Asahi Camera* he described three-dimensional photography in the following terms:

Thus, the autumn grass, or the umbrella, or whatever is in the foreground, strongly presses forward, while the background retires one layer further back, and inside a dream of long duration, it feels silent and motionless.<sup>138</sup>

Inspired by the Meiji-era panoramic entertainments that appear in his poem "Buster Keaton," Hagiwara's three-dimensional photographs were meant to play with the dimensions of space, to use proximity and distance in order to create an emotional response in the viewer. By contrast, Hagiwara suggests that the two-dimensional

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 358

<sup>138</sup> Hagiwara Sakutarō, *Hagiwara Sakutarō Shashin Sakuhin: Nosutarujia Shijin ga Totta Mō Hitotsu no Fūkei* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1999) 85

photography which pervaded wartime print media was flat and emotionless, without the power to elicit such a “dream of long duration.”

Hagiwara’s poem “Fire” represents what Hagiwara saw as the flat, emotionless quality of Shōwa print photography. The poem is about a catastrophic fire in an unidentified urban setting, described as a “silent city at evening” (*yūbe no shizuka naru tokai*),<sup>139</sup> a description that suggests the city is rendered silent by the act of photography, and that it is in its declining evening moments as it nears night and extinction. The line “in an instant all was totally destroyed” (*shunji ni issai o horoboshi tsukuseri*)<sup>140</sup> suggests the temporality of photography in times of war or disaster, which exists to distill a catastrophic event into a single moment (*shunji*) of total destruction.

Despite the fact that the scene it describes of a major urban fire would surely be loud and cacophonous, the poem emphasizes its total silence, describing the city repeatedly as “silent” (*shizuka*).<sup>141</sup> The poem does not mention photography; however, the unreality of the fire, which makes no sound, generates no heat, and produces no human victims, suggests that it is a photographic representation rather than a real fire, perhaps printed in an illustrated magazine, or *gahō*, which would have been unlikely to print representations of the human damage of the fire.

The city’s silence is mirrored by the poem’s speaker and his unspecified addressee: “Watching the fire burn red / like a beast / thou art silent and say nothing” (*akaku moeru hi o mitari / kemono no gotoku / nanji wa chinmoku shite iwazaru kana*).<sup>142</sup> The speaker and his addressee “are silent” (*chinmoku shite*) as they gaze upon the disaster, and in keeping their silence, they seem to have lost an essential aspect of their humanity and become “like beasts” (*kemono no gotoku*).<sup>143</sup> The use of archaic, flowery poetic language like *nanji* (thou) and the cutting word *kana*, which often appears as a conventional emphatic word in classical *haikai*, emphasize the speaker’s aesthetic detachment from the scene before him, which he writes about in self-consciously artificial terms. Far from creating empathy, the photographic gaze creates detachment, leading the speaker and his addressee to judge the flames “beautiful” (*utsukushiku*)<sup>144</sup> and describe them in flowery language, regardless of the suffering they create.

The speaker notes the fire’s destruction of the city’s capitalistic infrastructure, which consumes “everything all at once” (*subete issai*), once again evoking the singular moment captured by photography and its destructive power:

Capital, and factories, and large-scale buildings  
Hope, and prosperity, and riches, and ambition  
All in an instant burnt up<sup>145</sup>

Ultimately, not only the city’s capitalistic resources, but human feelings of “hope” and “ambition” are consumed by the flames, the affective underpinnings of capitalistic

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<sup>139</sup> Hagiwara, *Hagiwara Sakutarō Zenshū* 1, 372

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 373

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 372

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

growth. Ultimately the flames destroy the speaker and his addressee's ability to feel and emotionally connect with one another: "in this silent twilight sky / thou rememberest ardor,"<sup>146</sup> says the speaker, suggesting he and his addressee are remembering an intensity of feeling they can no longer experience. They are reduced to silent beasts as they act as spectators of a photographically captured fire.

By contrast, Hakushū's poems about photography emphasize its ability to elicit empathic connections across time and space. For example, in one poem the speaker experiences a moment of connection with a soldier in a photograph in a magazine. The poem is labeled with a note "Looking at a certain illustrated magazine" (*aru gahō o mite*).<sup>147</sup>

*moro no me wo / shiroku ōeru / hei hitori / miyaru hō da ni / omoenakuni*<sup>148</sup>

both eyes / whitely covered / a lone soldier / the direction he is looking / is surprising

With its opening phrase "both eyes" (*moro no me*), as well as the verb "looking" (*miyaru*), the poem foregrounds the act of vision and the way it is mediated by print and photography. The speaker does not reveal what the soldier is looking at, or why he finds it surprising. Is the soldier looking at something offscreen, outside the frame of the photo, meaning that the object of his gaze is unknowable and unseen to the viewer? Or is he looking at the camera, returning the viewer's gaze? The soldier's eyes are "whitely covered" (*shiroku ōeru*), perhaps by his hand or by a glare, rendering his gaze yet more inaccessible, as well as referring to the monochromatic black-and-white color scale of much printed photography. Can the speaker even tell with any certainty what direction the soldier is looking if he cannot see his eyes? The soldier is left to have his own subjectivity, his own inner life, and the poet does not try to ventriloquize or interpret it. The speaker's reticence to speculate about what has attracted the soldier's gaze suggests that he too is averting his eyes in a sense, turning away from whatever draws the soldier's attention. Drawn together by the medium of printed journalistic photography, the soldier and the speaker turn their eyes away from one another, connecting with one another by not looking, not seeing. The speaker turns away from the reality of war and prefers a world of not-seeing and not-looking.

Hakushū's poems on photography and the act of looking away draw the attention of the reader to what is unseen, what lies in the blank spaces of the photographs with which wartime consumers of media were inundated. In doing so, they create a space in photography for an empathetic connection between seer and seen, a possibility that Hagiwara treats with skepticism in his poem "Fire." These two divergent interpretations of photography in a time of war suggest how the medium itself, and its intermedia translations into and as lyric poetry, can function as a tool either of detachment or of empathetic connection, either highlighting viewers' humanity or revealing their loss of it.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid. 373

<sup>147</sup> Kitahara, *Kitahara Hakushū Zenkashū*, vol. 3, 210.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 210



## **Conclusion: Lyric and Mass Media in Wartime and Re-envisioning the Narrative of 1930s Failure**

The preceding chapter has shown how, through their poetry on the transition from silent film, on oral culture, and on photography, Japanese poets unveiled the ambivalent position of poetry in a time of war, highlighting the pleasures and possibilities afforded by their new access to mass culture, as well as the self-aware critical distance with which they approached these forms. It is one of the interesting ironies of the 1930s period that, because of the state's appetite for poets willing to lend their voices to the imperial enterprise, modern poetry in Japan achieved a height of popularity that it has seldom enjoyed before or since. Poets whose main readership in the 1910s and 1920s consisted of Modernist avant-gardes and leftist coteries found themselves with new access to mass media publications and radio broadcasts. As we have seen in Hakushū's melancholy, lamenting radio performances, and in Hagiwara's mechanized, emphatically unemotional ones, many poets brought a degree of self-conscious critique to their encounters with mass media, offering a dimension of commentary on their own acts of collaboration in wartime mass media.

It is difficult to ascertain the reception of these complex, ambivalent poems. It is most certainly true that their popularity at the time was due in large part to their ability to lend their support to Japanese nationalism, but what if their popularity comes in part from their ambivalence about this very support? It is certainly possible that, as much as readers and listeners enjoyed the nationalistic overtones of the works discussed here, they also gleaned the overtones of critical distance with which these poets approached their own collaboration. The 1930s and 1940s are often posited as a time of failure and retreat for Japanese poetry, but what if modern poetry's newfound popularity actually points, not to a failure, but to a shift in register, a shift from the experimentalism of high Modernism, not to conservatism, but to the oblique strategies of lyric poetry? What if, in other words, these poems found their mass audience, not only for their collaborative position, but also for their subtextual overtones of ambivalence and even resistance? Such questions point us readers in the direction of recovering the multivalent possibilities of these wartime poems, so often marginalized as relics of patriotic collaboration, a collaboration they critiqued even as they supported it.

## Chapter 4

### Unveiling the Tainted Hometown in the Work of Tsuchimoto Noriaki and Ishimure Michiko

#### Introduction: Re-appropriating Hometown (*Kokyō*)

The Eco Park in the southern Japanese town of Minamata appears to be an ordinary community park. It features an extensive seaside complex of leisure and sporting facilities, as well as informational plaques about the town's famously strict environmental policies, such as its over forty categories for sorting household waste. On a weekend afternoon, local fishing aficionados come to the pleasant waterside location to catch fish. However, the park stands on the site of what some estimate to be 1,510,000 cubic meters of toxic mercury.<sup>149</sup> Critics suggest that even a modest earthquake could easily dislodge the underground mercury and release it into the surrounding area.<sup>150</sup>

The park is supposedly built in memory of a prolonged episode of industrial mercury contamination in Minamata, though of course in reality it acts to conceal what it is meant to memorialize. The Chisso Corporation, a chemical and plastics manufacturing company, released large quantities of mercury into the Shiranui Sea near Minamata starting in the early 1930s until at least 1968, when the company agreed to stop dumping. Official figures list a total of 2,955 cases of mercury poisoning,<sup>151</sup> though government standards for what level of mercury poisoning counts for these statistics, as well as widespread pressure on victims not to report their illness, mean the figure is certainly higher.

The promotional materials found in and around the park tout Minamata as a site for old-fashioned, nostalgic tourism (see figure 1).

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<sup>149</sup> Yasuma Takeshi, "Minamata Osen Saito Kenbunroku," Kagakubutsu Shitsumon Shimin Kenkyūkai, July 2011, [http://www.ne.jp/asahi/kagaku/pico/mercury/minamata/110626\\_contaminated\\_site.html](http://www.ne.jp/asahi/kagaku/pico/mercury/minamata/110626_contaminated_site.html)

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ministry of The Environment, Government of Japan, "Minamata Disease: The History And Measures," <http://www.env.go.jp/en/chemi/hs/minamata2002/ch2.html>



Fig. 1 *Minamata Shi Kankô Gaidobukku*, Minamata Shi Shôkô Kankô Shinkô Kai and Minamata Kankô Bussan Kyokai (2013), cover image

In this image, drawn by Minamata born manga artist Eguchi Hisashi (b. 1956), two young women wearing kimono enjoy the quaint streets of the town, perhaps after a dip in a hot spring. The image draws on a certain kind of small town nostalgia: the winding streets, the old-fashioned *noren* curtain gateways, and the girls' kimono all evoke quaint, retro charm. This poster presents travel to Minamata as a *sato gaeri* of sorts, a “homecoming” where travelers can get away from the humdrum of ordinary life and get to know an older, quainter version of Japan.

This quaint, nostalgic version of Japan exists in a dreamlike, unreal register. The two figures' free-floating position relative to the little boxes of townscape against which they are foregrounded creates a sense of unreality. They are not walking through Minamata's streets, so much as floating through and above visual representations of them. This dreamlike visual framing suggests that the girls' journey could be taking place in their imagination or their memory. The version of Minamata as a quaint hometown sold by Minamata tourist associations appears to be a phantasm or a dream, through which tourists are invited to wander at their leisure.

It is against this backdrop of commercialized hometown imagery that poetry by Minamata activist Ishimure Michiko (b. 1927) and film produced by documentarian Tsuchimoto Noriaki (1928-2008) use the notion of hometown to memorialize the Minamata disaster, to advocate for the victims, and to imagine a utopian future. This activist take on the trope of hometown in the Minamata context first appears in the poetry and prose of Ishimure, a native of Amagusa in the Minamata area. Ishimure's writing, beginning with the publication of *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow* (*Kûkai Jôdo*, 1969), an award-winning essayistic account of the mercury spill, brought nationwide attention to

the event. Tokyo-based documentary filmmaker Tsuchimoto Noriaki, a veteran of the 1960s Tokyo student movements, was among those who were drawn to the Minamata disaster by Ishimure's work (118-19). He directed a multi-film series of documentary films, beginning in 1975 with *Minamata: The Victims And Their World*, and continuing throughout his life. In Tsuchimoto's 1981 film *Minamata Mural (Minamata no zu)*, the two artists collaborated, in a scene in which Ishimure recites one of her poems for the camera.

Using the logic of the open secret, according to which unveiling an ideological construct is not enough to defuse its emotional and aesthetic power, these environmentalist activists use the longing, nostalgia, and sense of phantasmagoric unreality evoked by the trope of hometown to memorialize the disaster, as well as to express their protest and resistance. For these artists, the hometown trope operates as a kind of ideological open secret: an idealized, nostalgic façade that, like Minamata's Eco Park on its foundation of toxic waste, conceals a reality of tainted-ness, disaster, and suffering. Unveiling this open secret means not just pointing to the reality beneath the façade, but doing so while operating within the affective and aesthetic structures of longing, nostalgia, and phantasmagoric unreality associated with the hometown. Working within this hometown structure, so eagerly adopted by commercial interests, brings Ishimure and Tsuchimoto into proximity with Chisso and other corporate and state entities seeking to conceal and minimize the disaster.

Open secrets are not only a device for the activists, they are also deployed by the corporate perpetrators of the disaster. Ishimure and Tsuchimoto's relationship to the corporate perpetrators of the disaster is often ambivalent, mixing resistance and anger with intimacy and closeness. "I have feelings of love, you know, for the Chisso factory [*Aijô ga arun desu yo, Chisso kôjô ni*]. It's one-sided [*katte na omoi ire de*]," Ishimure has commented.<sup>152</sup> This love that she feels for the Chisso factory manifests in her memory of the Chisso company song, which even after decades of advocating against them, she still knows by heart: "When light shines on Mt. Yajiro/Reflects on the Shiranui Sea/The factory roof flashes out/Against the town's sky clouding with smoke."<sup>153</sup>

The Chisso company song and the work of Minamata activists both operate around the same open secret: the factory's central place in Minamata and its polluting effects on its natural landscape and its people. The company's song describes an act of pollution, the factory's emission of chemicals into the air through the smoke from its smokestacks. The song's use of light and smoke suggests a dynamic of revelation and concealment: the factory "flashes out" in the sunshine and reveals itself, and then obscures itself by clouding the town's sky with smoke, blurring the sudden clarity emitted by the light from the mountain. Both the smoke and the factory it obfuscates are rendered visible at the very moment of concealment. The Chisso song simultaneously draws attention to and seeks to obscure or diminish the factory's effect on the town's landscape, a self-effacing epiphany reminiscent of the open secret, which remains obscure even after it has been unveiled.

In the company song, Chisso seems as constitutive of the town's landscape as the

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<sup>152</sup> Fujiwara Shinya and Ishimure Michiko, *Namida Furu Hana* (Kawade Shobo, 2012) p. 91.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, p. 91.

mountains, the sea, or the air people breathe. The song places the factory alongside the natural features of Minamata: Mount Yashiro, the Shiranui Sea, and the Chisso factory together dominate the landscape. The central place of the factory in the town's landscape echoes Chisso's central place in the economic life of Minamata. For Ishimure Michiko's generation, Chisso provided a majority of local jobs, owned the majority of the town's land and water, and sustained the local economy<sup>154</sup> (it continues to play a significant economic role in Minamata today, though not to the degree it once did). The factory's place in the song alongside the mountains, the sea, and the air suggests how crucial it was to the townspeople's survival. The factory has the ubiquity and invisibility of the open secret, the ability to hide in plain sight because of its very prominence in the life of Minamata.

As suggested by her love of the Chisso factory and its company song, the language Ishimure uses in her writing to understand the disaster, particularly her expressions of love and belonging for her corporately sustained hometown, is affected, or tainted, by the ideological structures the perpetrator uses to conceal the disaster. It is as if she is operating within the limits proscribed by the Eco Park, with its twofold, seemingly contradictory, purpose of memorial and concealment, and her work is going to have to exist within the limits of that space. In such an environment, the act of unveiling is going to be fraught and fragmented, filled with something like Eve Sedgwick's "gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning."<sup>155</sup> Sedgwick uses these words to describe the re-appropriation of the word queer from its use as a slur to a term of self-identification used in the first person, and the fissures and slippages the word develops in the process of this transformation. Like the queer activists Sedgwick describes, Ishimure is using the language of those in power to articulate a place for herself, to self-identify.

In a sense, Ishimure is trying to "queer" the hometown, to shift it from a corporate construct imposed from without, into something she herself can identify with. The open secret offers a kind of double vision where the façade and the reality it conceals are not really separate from one another, but rather interlocked. Ishimure uses the language and emotion of hometown in resonance with its connections to Chisso and state interests. She uses their language to articulate her own feelings, the push and pull of belonging and uncertainty she feels with regard to the notion of hometown.

Echoing Ishimure's conflicting feelings of ambivalence and belonging towards her corporately sustained hometown, filmmaker Tsuchimoto writes how, despite his status as an outsider recording events in Minamata, he has come to feel as if it is his hometown. In particular, it is the Shiranui Sea, the sea where most of the chemicals dumped by Chisso ended up, that provides the locus for his feelings of love and belonging:

Shiranui Sea is a place that has captured me. It is the sea of my fate, so wherever I go, whatever I do, I turn back, wanting to return. Of course, this is tied to the circumstances of Minamata Disease, but the beauty and gentleness of this sea are an ancestral land to me, a pretend hometown [*"kokyō"*] I long for. As a human being who creates things, there is nothing so happy as to possess a soil that constantly

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<sup>154</sup> Ishimure Michiko, *Kūkai Jōdo* (Kodansha, 2004) p. 119

<sup>155</sup> Sedgwick *Tendencies*, p. 8

awakens that something, the seething, boiling feeling of document and image.<sup>156</sup>

Tsuchimoto imagines Minamata as a “pretend hometown” that acts as a creative origin or wellspring for him. His inspiration is inextricably connected to the source of Minamata’s tainted-ness, the Shiranui Sea. Tsuchimoto’s adoption of Minamata as a “pretend hometown” involves being “captured,” placed in a passive, vulnerable position by the site of the disaster. Like Ishimure’s ability to remember the company song (or her inability to forget it), Tsuchimoto’s identification with the tainted sea seems to place him in a close, intimate relationship with Chisso, “captured” and beguiled by the effects of the disaster. Like the company workers and fishermen of Minamata, Tsuchimoto’s labor as a filmmaker is sustained by the sea, the source of the pollution. He needs it to survive as an artist, but he knows it is deadly.

Tsuchimoto and Ishimure are both working from a position of ambivalence and uncertainty, inspired and sustained by the sea, but also aware of its taintedness. As we have seen in previous chapters, lyric as the unveiling of an ideological open secret offers a way to navigate such a fraught position. Francois suggests that the lyric voice silences itself even as it is speaking, performing a kind of non-revelation that is peculiarly suited to the act of unveiling an open secret. For these artists, lyric points to the obvious, but it does so in a fragmented, indeterminate way, such that even after the open secret of the hometown’s tainted-ness has been unveiled, it still resists articulation. Tsuchimoto’s idealized, aesthetically pleasing townscape shots portraying Minamata as a hometown always contain a subtle hint of something tainted and uneasy, whether the smoke of the Chisso factory smokestacks in the distance, or the unsettling jerkiness of a handheld camera. Ishimure’s lyrical, songlike evocations of Minamata as a cosmic “origin” (*hajime*) of creativity and life force, meanwhile, have a fragmented quality that undermines their own musicality, casting doubt on Minamata’s ability to give birth to pure lyric song. These moments work by unveiling: they reveal the taintedness that lurks beneath Minamata’s beauty. But, they also leave the façade intact in some sense. Tsuchimoto’s townscapes would not work without their beauty, and neither would Ishimure’s poems without their songlike musicality, however broken it might be. Both artists are aware that what has “captured” them, their hometown’s ability to beguile and captivate, owes its existence in part to the corporate interests that control the town and its natural resources, including its beauty.

In using lyric’s capacity to unveil open secrets while working within the emotional and aesthetic facades that conceal them, Ishimure and Tsuchimoto demonstrate a connection to the legacy of the prewar poets discussed earlier in this dissertation, who used a politicized mode of lyric poetry to unveil and critique open secrets of Japanese society. Ishimure and Tsuchimoto’s phantasmagoric portrayals of Minamata, featuring ghosts and spirits, as well as lush, exaggerated natural imagery, draw upon Kitahara Hakushu’s (1885-1942) portrayal of his hometown as a deliberately projected figment of performativity and artifice, as discussed in Chapter 1. They also draw on the indirect, esoteric writing strategies of poets like Ueda Bin (1874-1916), who, as discussed in Chapter 2, revealed the indirect effects of distant wartime violence in supposedly

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<sup>156</sup> Tsuchimoto Noriaki, *Waga Eiga Hakken no Tabi* (Tokyo: Nihon Tosho Sentā, 2000) 267

peaceful everyday life in Tokyo using his fragmented translations of urban poetry by Charles Baudelaire. Ishimure and Tsuchimoto draw on the tools of mass culture, including commercial photography and film, to make their esoteric political messages legible by ordinary people. Ishimure and Tsuchimoto draw on the poetry of the open secret in order to unveil the hometown's connection to commercial imagery deployed by Chisso, while attempting to use it in a transformative way where the marginalized voices of Minamata victims can emerge. Their imagined hometown exists not beyond or outside the realm of the commodified, but adjacent to it.

### **“*Furusato wa tôki ni arite omou mono:*” Drawing on and De-stabilizing Previous Visions of Hometown**

“Hometown is a far-away thing to be remembered/yearned for” (*furusato wa tôki ni arite omou mono*), goes the refrain of a 1916 poem by lyric poet Murô Saisei (1889-1962), a friend and coterie colleague of Kitahara Hakushû. This popular poem, often included in text books and anthologies, provides a working definition of hometown that holds true for much of modern Japanese lyric poetry, in which hometown is nearly always absent or lost, and therefore has to be re-constructed imaginatively. Stephen Dodd has described the modern “*furusato*” or hometown in the case of Japanese fiction as an “ideological process” (9) related to the formation of modern national identity, one that corresponds “less to an external locality that may (or may not) exist in reality” (3) than to “an object of desire that is always already lost; its meaning emerges precisely through experience of this loss and the desire to reclaim it” (14). This section will extend the ideological process of loss and imaginative reclaiming that Dodd locates in fictional evocations of hometown to the case of modern Japanese poetry, and show how Minamata artists and activists Ishimure and Tsuchimoto drew on these previous iterations of modern hometown in their work.

In a context of increased migration from the countryside to cities, the hometown was portrayed as a melancholy object of nostalgia and yearning for city dwellers separated from their birthplaces in poetry of the Meiji period, as expressed by the poets of the 1897 poetry anthology *Lyric Poetry (Jojôshi)*. In the Taishô period, however, hometown nostalgia was a playfully artificial, constructed pose employed by poets like Kitahara Hakushû. Chapter 1 of this dissertation has shown how Hakushû used visual media's portrayals of his hometown Yanagawa, including magic lanterns, photographs, and lithographs, to reveal how it was constructed as a “hometown.” Both Hakushû's and Murô Saisei's melancholy evocation of hometown as a “far-away thing to be remembered” have a performative, self-aware quality that sets it apart from their more earnest Meiji predecessors.

For Kitahara Hakushû and these other Taishô writers, the hometown lacked the earnest nostalgia of Meiji poets, or the sense of loss eventually experienced by poets writing about their hometowns in the 1930s. Kevin Doak shows how poet Hagiwara Sakutarô (1886-1942) used an imaginary, constructed version of his hometown Maebashi, articulated with self-conscious irony, to construct a nationalist identity for an increasingly militarized Japan in the 1930s.<sup>157</sup> Hagiwara's ironic, self-aware evocations of hometown suggest that the ideology of hometown operates under a kind of cynical

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<sup>157</sup> Kevin Doak, *Dreams of Difference* (University of California, 1994).

distance, in that people know it is a false construct, but believe in it despite this knowledge. Hagiwara Sakutarô approaches the hometown with something approximating the cynical ironic distance that Zizek says characterizes totalitarian ideology: “they know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know.”<sup>158</sup>

The 1960s and 1970s saw a resurgence of hometown imagery in the avant garde works of Terayama Shûji (1935-1983), whose tanka collection *Den'en ni Shisu (To Die in the Country)*, 1964), later adapted by the poet into a 1975 film of the same name, portrays the poet's Aomori hometown in a grotesque, orgiastic register that offers the chance to experiment with the body, sexuality, and performance. Terayama and other 1960s poets, such as rural leftist Tanikawa Gan (1923-1995), whose coterie magazine *Circle Village [Saakuru Mura]* published work by Ishimure Michiko, posit the hometown as something like Dodd's “always already lost” object of desire, an imaginative encounter with which will bring liberation and utopian possibilities for social transformation and revolution.

These radical notions of hometown emerged in dialogue with commercial uses of hometown in this time period, in 1970s tourist campaigns. Marilyn Ivy has shown how Japan Railways' “Discover Japan” ad campaign in the 1970s sought to promote travel by portraying the Japanese countryside as an authentic site of essential Japaneseness, where travelers alienated by the homogeneous globalization of the big cities could recover a sense of their lost “deferred origin.”<sup>159</sup> Like the Minamata Eco Park brochure discussed earlier, such ads draw on the nostalgia and yearning elicited by the notion of a lost “hometown” or *furusato*.

In their work on the Minamata disaster, Ishimure and Tsuchimoto are participating in this longstanding discourse of hometown, seeking to recoup it for the particular context of Minamata. Ishimure and Tsuchimoto draw on the agrarian nostalgia and yearning found in Meiji poetry; the performative, constructed, and cinematic qualities of the hometown in Taisho poetry; the self-aware irony with which Sakutarô and others approached the hometown in the 1930s; and the radical politics of their 1960s contemporaries. Using these elements, they seek to construct a vision of hometown capable of memorializing the Minamata disaster, of giving voice to the trauma and suffering of its victims, and of advocating for political redress and transformation.

While they are very much invested in Minamata as a real, particular locale, they employ the tropes of hometown as an absent, lost object of desire that has to be imaginatively recuperated. As we have seen, Minamata's status as a company town, dependent on the Chisso corporation for its survival, means that its identity as a hometown is particularly closely intertwined with commercial language and imagery. Poets seeking to sing the beauties of its natural landscape find it dominated by the physical presence of the factory. When Tsuchimoto looks at the polluted sea and calls it his “pretend hometown,” or Ishimure looks at the factory with her “feelings of love,” their feelings of identification with their hometown bring them into proximity with the corporate interests that have caused the disaster. The trope of a lost, absent hometown provides Ishimure and Tsuchimoto with a language with which to unveil the open secret of Chisso's wrongdoing, and its inextricable connection to the town's identity and sense

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<sup>158</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object Of Ideology* (Verso, 1989) p. 30

<sup>159</sup> Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses Of The Vanishing* 34



of self. For Tsuchimoto and Ishimure, Minamata is in a sense lost or absent, rendered so by the damage of the disaster. Like the idealized, utopian hometown of Terayama and Tanikawa's 1960s poetry, Minamata exists for Ishimure and Tsuchimoto in an imaginative realm beyond the reach of Chisso, where there exist possibilities for healing, community, and social transformation in the lives of the victims.

### **Hometown, Lyric, and Cinema: A Victim's Voice**

In Tsuchimoto's 1981 film *Minamata Mural* [*Minamata no Zu*] about the creation of *The Minamata Panels* (Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, 1980), a mural depicting the Minamata disaster, the director collaborates with Ishimure and the two mural artists to create a cinematic aesthetic with which to construct a radical vision of hometown, one in which the voices of Minamata victims are acknowledged rather than silenced. In the film, Tsuchimoto depicts the mural artists' journey to Minamata, their interactions with the locals as they work on their project, and its exhibition in Tokyo once it is finished. In the sequence depicting the mural's exhibition in Tokyo, Tsuchimoto films the mural in close-up, revealing one detail at a time, while Ishimure recites one of her poems, "Unknown Words From The Origin" (*Hajime Yori Shirazariki Kotoba*). This section will analyze the sequence depicting Ishimure viewing the mural for the first time in the gallery. In the cinematic devices employed by Tsuchimoto, and the cinematic formal elements of Ishimure's poem, the homeland appears both strange and familiar, eliciting belonging/allegiance, as well as alienation and resistance. This push and pull of belonging and alienation comes from the collaborators' differing positions relative to Minamata. How can their shared vision of hometown make room for the voices of the victims? In what sense is Minamata really their hometown to construct?

Prior to their involvement with Tsuchimoto and Ishimure, mural artists Maruki Iri (1901-1995) and Maruki Toshi (1912-2000), a married couple, produced *The Hiroshima Panels* [*Hiroshima no Zu*], a collaborative series of murals lasting over several decades from 1950-1982 depicting the atomic bombing of Hiroshima (Maruki Iri was born there and had family members who were survivors of the bombing). Their interest in Minamata grew out of their work on the atomic bombings and their desire to connect their existing work on atrocity and trauma to the ongoing disaster in Minamata.

The sequence depicting the mural's exhibition in Tokyo explores the problem of outsiders' relationship to Minamata and their ability to speak for victims. Tsuchimoto, an outsider from Tokyo, had at the time of filming already worked in Minamata and spent extended periods of time there for over a decade. The Marukis are newcomers to the town, outsiders with no direct connection to the disaster, but whose personal ties to the Hiroshima bombing allow them some degree of empathy with the trauma experienced by the Minamata victims they portray in the mural. Ishimure, meanwhile, is a native of the Minamata area who has lived there her whole life, an insider. Even as an insider, she has a fraught position relative to the Minamata victims she writes about and advocates for. While there is some speculation that her battle with Parkinson's Disease may be connected to mercury poisoning, she has never identified herself as a Minamata Disease victim, and describes herself as a third-person observer of the incident. Though she was born into relative poverty, the oldest daughter in a stone artisan's family, by the 1981 filming of *Minamata Mural*, she was a relatively privileged figure compared to many in

Minamata, a successful writer with an international platform. Her willingness to interrogate her own relative power and privilege provides a kind of way in for outsiders like Tsuchimoto and the Marukis, who are aware of their status as outsiders.

Ishimure's self-awareness of her relative power and privilege compared to the Minamata disease victims she writes about runs throughout her work, and is quite possibly one of the reasons outsiders are often drawn to the disaster through her writing. She makes way for projects like the Marukis' and Tsuchimoto's by drawing attention to the limitations of her own. One such self-critical moment comes in *Paradise of the Sea of Sorrow*, when Ishimure states that the asymmetrical power dynamic between herself as a writer and observer and the victims she interviews can sometimes feel like a "one-sided encounter" [*ippô-teki na de'ai*], especially when so many of the victims have cognitive impairments that prevent them from being fully aware of their surroundings.<sup>160</sup> This one-sidedness is the central concern of Tsuchimoto, Ishimure, and the Marukis' collaboration in *Minamata Mural*, which explores the unequal power dynamics of artistically representing the suffering of others, especially when the sufferers are not capable of participating in the project, or even of being fully aware that it is going on. In Ishimure's writing, the gaze provides a way to navigate these power dynamics, an empathetic gaze that does not transcend the unequal power dynamics of the "one-sided encounter," but works across them.

For example, in one scene in *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow*, she is unsettled by the "hostility" [*teki-i*] in the gaze of Kamatsuru Matsu, a Minamata patient she glimpses through an open door who has fallen to the floor from his hospital bed. She feels "overtaken," vulnerable and exposed by his gaze, as if her "existence...was worthy of disdain." She describes how Kamatsuru's gaze penetrates her body and comes to possess her: "Kamatsuru Matsu's sad gaze of a goat or fish, his physical form like driftwood, his soul that could not die: from that day they all came to live inside me [*kono hi kara zenbu watakushi no naka ni utsuri sunda*]." Ishimure's empathetic gaze in this scene is not so much a meeting between equals, as a volatile, shifting power dynamic in which each party seems to take the upper hand in turn: first Ishimure's gaze intrudes on Kamatsuru's weakened state, exposing and humiliating him; then his gaze unsettles her with its "hostility," so much so that she feels it become part of her very being, and his gaze comes "to live inside [her]," like a spirit possessing a medium. In this encounter, the gaze provides a way for the writer to speak for someone else, someone who cannot speak for himself except with the nonverbal resentment and hostility contained in his gaze. The act of speaking for someone else is made possible by opening oneself up to another's gaze, by becoming its object. Like Tsuchimoto when he described himself as "captivated" by the Shiranui Sea, the site of the pollution from the disaster, Ishimure is rendered passive and vulnerable by the power in Kamatsuru's gaze.

It is with Ishimure's empathetic gaze, with its constantly shifting power dynamics between observer and observed, that *Minamata Mural* approaches its subjects, the Minamata Disease victims whose portraits make up the bulk of the Marukis' mural. The mural sequence's equivalent of what Ishimure calls a "one-sided encounter" takes place with the Marukis' portrait of a young girl in a kimono with visible traces of physical and mental impairment from Minamata disease, including convulsing hands and drool at her

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<sup>160</sup> Ishimure 1969 p. 141

lips. The following close reading will show how Tsuchimoto’s camera work, Ishimure’s poem, and the Marukis’ painting seek to represent, not only the artists’ own discomfort as outsiders gazing on another’s pain, but also some trace of the girl’s subjectivity, letting it emerge in the power of the gaze. The film acknowledges the “one-sided-ness” that according to Ishimure characterizes the encounter between observer and observed, but it also works to compensate for that one-sided-ness, by giving the girl in the mural a kind of agency of her own, by allowing her to return the camera’s gaze in her own way. The girl has lost her vision due to mercury poison, and the Marukis leave her eyes unpainted as white, blank space.



**Fig. 1** The complete *The Minamata Panels*, Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, 1980, <http://www.aya.or.jp/~marukimnsn/kyosei/minamata-s.JPG>. The girl is in the center panel, surrounded by a patch of negative space.

Despite the girl’s prominent place in the mural’s center, such that she is one of the first things most gallery-goers notice when looking at the mural, she is one of the last images viewers see in the film sequence, which reveals the mural in long, slow close-up shots of various details, while Ishimure reads her poem. The film displays a certain reticence to reach the point of visual contact with the girl’s portrait. There is an oblique quality to the film’s gaze, which does not seek contact with her, or any of the human subjects in the mural right away. Instead, it lingers over natural imagery, water and animals, and even on incidental splashes of paint and close-ups of the paper. In its reticence to show the human subjects of the mural, who, with their blank, white eyes, are not painted so as to appear to return our gaze, the film seems to doubt the power of the gaze to provide the kind of empathetic encounter that Ishimure describes with Kamatasuru Matsu. The camera’s gaze goes unreturned, unanswered by the human subjects of the mural.

The film’s encounter with the girl is first framed and mediated by a meditation on the materiality of the artistic work that contains her image. Ishimure recites the poem, beginning with an extended metaphor of light and photographic developing fluid to suggest an encounter with a cosmic “origin” (*hajime*).

From rift in stone      fall    drops of water  
 They fill                both palms  
 Water is light  
 Drips of light  
 Fill    hands’ hollows

...You have entered the world's womb for the first time<sup>161</sup>

The poem's speaker holds a handful of water whose luminous quality suggests the marbled ink washes covering the paper surface of the mural. In the line "Water is light" (*mizu wa hikari*), Ishimure suggests the emerging images in photographic or cinematic developing fluid. Tsuchimoto's extreme closeups of the texture of the mural abstract it into a filmic image composed of what Ishimure might describe as liquid light, making it look like a natural object, like a shell or rock that has washed ashore (see figure 2).



Fig. 2 *Minamata no Zu*, directed by Tsuchimoto Noriaki, Siglo Films, 1981

The poem's speaker's encounter with luminous water gestures at the act of a photographer or filmmaker working with developing fluid as he brings his art to life. Ishimure, Tsuchimoto, and the Marukis become collaborators encountering an unknown origin, which neither words nor images can capture in full.

The small-scale intimacy of the poem's speaker's handful of water then expands to

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<sup>161</sup>岩の裂けめより したたり落ちる 水の雫が  
両の掌に満ちてくる  
水は光  
ひかりの雫が  
手の窪みいっぱい満ちてくる

...汝ははじめて 世界の胎に 入った

Ishimure Michiko, "Hajime Yori Shirazariki Kotoba," in *Watashi de wa Naku, Shiranui Kai Ga*, by Tsuchimoto Noriaki and others, (Kitagawa Forum, 1981) pp. 364-65

a sweeping, cosmic view of the sea itself. The speaker's handheld encounter with an uncanny other world leads her to a primal realm of unconscious experience, a sensory return to "the world's womb." The poem identifies with the sea, the source of taintedness, but also the source of inspiration, of art, of activism. The water is tainted with chemicals, but it is also the luminous liquid of Tsuchimoto's film developing fluid, of the Marukis' paints. The gaze, as mediated as it might be, has a connection with something authentic and primal, the "world's womb." The materiality of the artists' media all depend on water, on chemicals, on some trace of the disaster.

What do viewers find in this cosmic origin, this primal moment of encounter, and how are they to successfully perceive it? The poem enjoins its readers to "listen:" "You should try to listen/You must try to catch the sound" (*kiite miru ga yoi/kikitoraneba naranai*). The poem suggests that the act of listening comes only with difficulty: "You should *try* to listen [*kiitemiru*]" (the verb ending *-temiru* means to try or attempt). The act of listening, the poem implies, comes with difficulty.

The speaker's injunction to listen ushers in the story of a young girl who died from Minamata disease, told in the voice of her mother. The mother uses language and imagery from the classical chanting style *joruri* associated with *bunraku* puppet theater; she precedes her tale with the statement that she is "speaking *joruri*" (*joruri o katatteiru*). Meanwhile, Tsuchimoto's camera moves through fragmented images of the collective portrait, including snatches of hands and feet, to accompany the girl's story (see figure 3). The puppet theater references and Tsuchimoto's images of disembodied body parts create a troubling sense that the girl has been turned into a passive, doll-like figure, who has lost her ability to be active due to Minamata disease.



Fig. 3 Image of hands from *Minamata no Zu*, directed by Tsuchimoto Noriaki.

As the girl's illness worsens, impairing her mobility and ability to speak, the speaker describes her daughter's loss of humanity and transformation into a "thing:"

Now the girl can no longer speak or eat, the cherry blossoms have opened.

[...] Her body has at last twisted. She has become nothing but bones. Is this really my daughter's back? She has become like a figure of a thing that is not human [*ningen ja naka yô na mon no sugata*]...she is dying...<sup>162</sup>

The language of the poem focuses on the girl's body, describing her as a "thing" (*mon*) made of "bones." The poem, and Tsuchimoto's cinematic embedding of it in images of disembodied body parts, confronts us with this problem, the victims' loss of some central part of their humanity, and the grief and anguish this loss engenders in those who love them. Does the girl have a voice, even after she has transformed into a thing? Is this voice ever accessible to Ishimure's act of listening ("*kiitemiru*")?

This problem is compounded by the presence in the poem of what is very likely a real person's story. The poem bears a resemblance to a passage in Ishimure's transcription of the story of Yamanaka Chiyo, the mother of Minamata disease victim Yamanaka Satsuki who passed away as a teenager:

I felt like this was no longer the daughter I had given birth to. It was like the death of a dog or a cat. ... Her eyes couldn't see, her ears couldn't hear, she couldn't speak, she couldn't eat. She was crying out in a voice that did not sound human, repeating it.<sup>163</sup>

In rewriting Yamanaka's testimony as poetry, Ishimure seems to suggest that the poem is brought to a stop in some sense by the girl's loss of their humanity, especially their loss of language. It has to fall back on a document, on someone else's words. The mothers' testimony suggests a longing for some connection to the children these girls were before they lost the ability to speak.

In this moment, which describes a Minamata victim's loss of her humanity and her inability to communicate with other people, the poem enacts the dilemma of Tsuchimoto, Ishimure, and the Marukis, who, like the mother longing for some form of connection with her daughter, seek some form of connection with the Minamata victims they portray, some way to allow them to express themselves as human beings. The girl has lost, not only her voice, but also the communicative power of the gaze ("her eyes could not see," Satsuki's mother says). Unlike Kamatsuru Matsu in *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow*, who makes his hostility felt by returning the observer's gaze, the young girl in the mural does not seem to have the power to look back, to express herself in that way. Her eyes in the mural have a blank, unseeing quality, such that viewers can see the white paper beneath the paint. (insert image) She does not look back at viewers; she does not return their gaze. Instead, viewers find themselves gazing at the paper, the material basis for the mural, and its tainted chemical composition of water and ink, captivated by the materiality of the work itself and its connection to the polluted natural environment.

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<sup>162</sup> あの娘がもう ものもいわん 食べもせんごとなつてからも桜の咲きよりましたですもん。[...] やっぱりあれが地獄でございますなあ。身体のととう曲がりました。骨ばっかりになつてもああた 娘の腰でございますばい。人間じゃなかようなもの姿になつて 死んで。 . . .

Ibid. 365

<sup>163</sup> Ishimure Michiko, *Kūkai Jōdo: Waga Minamata Byō* (Kōdansha, 1972) p.47.

The girl's blank eyes undermine the communicative, empathetic function of the gaze to speak for those who cannot express themselves verbally. All that seems left to the girl in the mural is touch, which is often the sense that compensates for the loss of sight in visually impaired individuals. For her, the gaze is tactile, rather than visual. The poem's speaker relates how, towards the end of her daughter's illness, she would go out in the garden and try to gather cherry blossoms in her hands:

She could no longer speak, but this is what she did...she slid into the garden—  
*what's she trying to do I wonder?*—and sat on the petals scattered and spread out.  
The petals            one            by            one, she gathered them.

The young girl's hand, its grasping motions enacted by the fragmented line “Gather, spill Gather, spill” (*hiroï koboshi hiroï koboshi*) embodies a fragile moment of tactile connection with the world. She sees the beauty of the cherry petals by touching them, unable to process them visually. Even her ability to touch is compromised by the illness, since she cannot keep the petals in her hands due to nerve damage. Like Ishimure's tactile gesture initiating the mural sequence, the girl's attempt to grasp the petals never quite makes contact (see figure 5).



Fig. 5 The hand of one of the Minamata disease patients depicted in the mural (above); Ishimure Michiko almost touching the mural (below); Ibid.

The parallel between her hands and Ishimure's suggests that she has a kind of creative agency. Ishimure's encounter with the mural, like the girl's attempt to gather cherry blossoms, seems incomplete and even unsuccessful in a sense. Both women fail to grasp or gather the aesthetically pleasing objects they desire. But it is this very failure that seems to leave some space open for the cherry blossoms, or the mural, to exist independently from the gaze of those who wish to consume or enjoy them. The distance between these two figures' hands and the objects they reach out for diminishes but never completely vanishes, leaving a small but charged space for reflection on the part of viewers. Our gaze, like the girl's and Ishimure's acts of touch, is rendered oblique by Tsuchimoto's camera work, which is reticent to portray her visually. Viewers see the ink on the paper, then the sea and the animals, before they see her, and even when they see her, it is in glimpses of her hands and eyes before her whole image appears. Like the girl spilling the cherry blossoms, only catching a brief tactile glimpse of them, the viewers' gaze remains fragmented and incomplete. The film's fragmented, oblique cinematic gaze allows the viewer to empathize with the girl's grasping, tactile attempts to reach out to the world despite her impaired gaze. The camera's act of looking away allows the girl to return its gaze in a sense, though she can only do so with her hands, not her eyes.

The gaze acts here as a site of empathetic connection that operates by undoing itself, by looking away, or, in the girl's case, by dropping the petals that are the object of her tactile gaze. The mural's encounter with her has the quality of a missed encounter: it holds her tactile gaze, then drops or evades it. The mural sequence ends with a utopian gesture, a suggestion that transformative possibilities for the future emerge in the periphery of the viewers' averted gaze. The end of Ishimure's poem describes a phantasmagoric "looked-for hometown" [*mezasu kokyô*] that exists thousands of feet under the sea:

Beyond swirling        marine algae  
A looked-for hometown        blue rugged mountains

渦巻く                マリン・スノーの彼方  
目ざす故郷は        青峨山脈

The "looked for hometown" is submerged by the sea, which is tainted with the chemicals emitted by Chisso. Its location under the water suggests that it is a drowned city like Atlantis whose inhabitants might have died. It is described as existing somewhere spatially or temporally "beyond" [*achira*] relative to the speaker, giving it an otherworldly quality, beyond the here and now. The "looked for hometown" exists in the next world, in life after death, perhaps offering a home for the spirits of those who have died from Minamata Disease.

The speaker's otherworldly hometown, a hometown that exists beyond death and beyond pollution, emerges in a fragmented, oblique visual register. It is obscured by the "swirling" marine algae, it is "looked for" [*mezasu*], rather than seen. It emerges in the oblique, averted gaze of the camera as it looks away from the girl. Ishimure's "looked-for hometown" seems to have a utopian quality: it may not exist in the tainted, contaminated reality depicted by Tsuchimoto's camera lens, but it has a fragile connection to the real world. Its reality emerges in the peripheral vision, in the not-quite unseen, but hardly visible register of open secrets. The young girl's attempts to reach out and connect with



her impaired hand suggest the fragility of the speaker's imagined "looked-for hometown," a world where Minamata victims are empowered rather than marginalized. What Ishimure calls the "looked-for hometown" seems to rest in a utopic space of impossibility, in another or in the next world. It emerges in a glimpse, in the peripheral, barely visible register of the viewer's averted gaze.

Why does the viewer look away? Out of respect? Out of shame or guilt? Different viewers will find different ways to interpret the camera's reticence. For the Marukis or for Tsuchimoto, outsiders who have come to Minamata to pursue their artistic work, looking away seems like an act of respect, a choice to respect victims' privacy and dignity, an admission that their art can only go so far in representing the suffering of others. For Ishimure, an insider but one with relative power and privilege compared to people like the girl portrayed in the mural, looking away has different stakes. Ishimure's "looked-for hometown," even for those who live there, is only visible to the averted gaze, like a traumatic missed event that emerges only in flashes and glimpses.

The utopic space of the "looked-for hometown" does not transcend or escape the disaster, or the reach of the corporate perpetrators. The natural landscape of Ishimure's "looked-for hometown," a setting of mountains and sea, resembles the natural features described in the Chisso company song. Like the Chisso factory, which the song says "flashes out" in a sudden glimpse, but is then clouded by smoke from the factory smokestacks, Ishimure's otherworldly hometown is seen and then unseen, obscured by "swirling marine algae." Even as an imagined utopia beyond the here and now, Minamata is still a company town, its landscape mirroring the one put forth by the Chisso company song. What emerges in Ishimure's averted gaze is the natural landscape as represented by the perpetrators, a corporately owned landscape that resonates with the one she is attempting to imagine.

### **Landscape and the Gaze in "Flickering:" Revealing the Stain on the Picture Postcard**

Ishimure's work portrays the taintedness as well as the beauty of Minamata's landscape, so much of which was legally owned by Chisso. The previous section has explored the reticence of the gaze when directed at victims of Minamata disease. The following section will extend this analysis to the landscape of Minamata. Even its beauty is claimed as a kind of intangible natural resource by the company, as we have seen in the company song's treatment of landscape, and its resonance with Ishimure's poem "Words From Unknown Origin." The following section will explore the Minamata landscape in Ishimure's poetry and its relationship to the gaze. How is Minamata's landscape seeable? With averted eyes, in flashes and glimpses? When is it the corporate vision of landscape, and when is it something else, something utopian? Is it ever possible to separate the two?

In the poem "Flickering" (*Tenmetsu*), Ishimure depicts the landscape of Minamata with the reticent, empathetic gaze directed at Minamata victims in the previous sequence. In this poem, Ishimure defamiliarizes established, traditional lyric tropes using cinematically inflected visual techniques. The poem takes place in a romantic register, describing a speaker mourning for a lost childhood lover (*osanai koibito*), as she wanders through a small village on a winter night. From the speaker's footsteps a "*banka*" arises

in the snow kicked up by her feet, a classical genre of elegy dating back to the early imperial poetry anthology *Manyōshū*: “excavating the earth’s surface, kicking up an elegy [*banka*].”<sup>164</sup> The speaker thereby situates her mourning in a long line of conventional literary devices of elegy and memorial, often associated with the act of traveling or walking through landscape.

In addition to the eighth-century register of the *banka*, the poem contains a reference that evokes later periods of court poetry, or *waka*. In one line, the speaker declares, “tonight too as sane as fireflies” (*konya mo hotaru hodo no shōki desu*).<sup>165</sup> The image of fireflies was often associated in classical poetry with longing for an absent lover, for example in *waka* by the Heian period court poet Izumi Shikibu. Fireflies also often appear in Edo period *haiku* as a *kigo*, or seasonal key word, to mark summer or early fall. Ishimure defamiliarizes this common image by having fireflies appear in the middle of the snow. What does it mean to be as sane as fireflies on a snowy night? The madness of the image could perhaps refer to the mental effects of Minamata disease, which can impair cognition and perception, perhaps producing the kind of abnormal mental state described here. There is also something hopeful about Ishimure’s insanely out-of-season fireflies: they light up the darkness even when they should have died. They have survived, outlived the seasonal change that should have killed them.

The peripatetic, ambulatory quality of the poem, in which the speaker wanders through a snowy townscape, hoping to “lose [her]self” (*mizukara o mayowasu*) among the “homes where people live” (*ningen no sumu ie*), leaving behind her “footsteps,” recalls the walking, handheld camera shots of Minamata streets and alleyways that appear in Tsuchimoto’s films. The speaker’s elegy for her lost love arises from her footsteps: it is a bodily act, of walking or ambulating through the space of Minamata, that produces this elegy.

Like Ishimure’s walking elegy, Tsuchimoto’s ambulatory camerawork seeks to portray an ethical encounter with the Minamata disaster through the act of walking. In one such shot, the shaky camera lingers on an industrial building, glimpsed through the cracks in a wooden structure (see figure 6).

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<sup>164</sup> Ishimure Michiko, *Hanikami No Kuni* (Fukuoka, Japan: Sekifūsha, 2002) 25.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* 25



Fig. 6 *Minamata Kanja-san To Sono Sekai*, directed by Tsuchimoto Noriaki (Siglo Films, 1971)

This shot has a “flickering” quality that recalls Ishimure’s poem, produced by the camera’s shaky movement and the glimpsed, fleeting quality of the image. Like the touristic promotional image mentioned earlier, this shot hints at the old-fashioned charms of walking through the winding alleyways of Minamata, enjoying the traditional wooden construction of the buildings. This moment has a “point of view” quality, a sense that the camera presents the point of view of an actual individual person as he walks the streets. However, the gap in the fence, through which appears some sort of industrial structure, reveals the open secret of the damage and suffering beneath the town’s charming, old-fashioned façade. Peeping through the cracks in the old-fashioned wooden building is a glimpse of the economic powerhouse of the Chisso Corporation, which is responsible for the mercury poisoning that afflicts the town.

The quaintness of this townscape scene, therefore, takes on an unsettling quality, an undertone of poison, corrosiveness, and death reminiscent of what film scholar Pascal Bonitzer calls “the stain on the picture postcard” in the films of Alfred Hitchcock.<sup>166</sup> Bonitzer describes how the idealized, touristic settings of Hitchcock’s films are often rendered unsettling and frightening by the presence of an unfamiliar, slightly perverse deviation from the way things should be: for example, a tiny black speck in the blue sky above a peaceful cornfield turns out to be an airplane trying to kill the protagonist in *North by Northwest*; or, in *Foreign Correspondent*, a perfect European townscape is

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<sup>166</sup> Pascal Bonitzer, “Hitchcockian Suspense,” in *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan But Were Afraid to Ask*, Slavoj Žižek, ed. (London: Verso, 1992) 22.

disrupted by the image of a windmill turning the wrong way.<sup>167</sup>

Ishimure's winter fireflies, too, with their unfamiliar, disruptive take on a conventional image, perform a function similar to that of the Hitchcockian stain. The tiny flashing lights of the fireflies against the white snow sound the alarm that something is wrong with this natural scene, despite its beauty. The fireflies are tainted: they are estranged from their place in nature. The presence of fireflies in winter suggests a natural world whose rhythms are thrown off by some unseen contaminant or poison.

The glimpse of something hidden through a small, incomplete gap suggests the opening line of Ishimure's "Flickering," which offers a glimpse of what the speaker calls the "space between" (*aima*) falling snowflakes. Tsuchimoto's camera shot illuminates a "space between," an *aima*, where a hidden reality underneath the façade of daily life becomes visible. The *aima* space gives rise to a sense of uncertainty in the viewer trying to navigate through the city, and through his or her own complicity or ignorance of the disaster. Where does the viewer or reader fit in relation to the *aima* Ishimure reveals? This liminal space provides a self-aware glimpse of readers' capacity to oscillate between empathy and indifference; guilt and complicity; uncertainty and knowledge.

It is within this sense of drift and uncertainty that Ishimure suggests something she calls "nothing time" (*mu no jikoku*) exists. It is in an instant of this "nothing time" in which appears the elegy written by a body moving through space, a body perhaps prevented from walking normally by the effects of Minamata disease. The ephemerality of the speaker's footprints in the snow, which will presumably either melt away when the temperatures rise, or find themselves buried by the next snowfall, suggests that "nothing time" does not last long, and neither does the elegy which it engenders.

It is a mark of Ishimure's wandering speaker in "Tenmetsu," as well as Tsuchimoto's drifting peripatetic camera shots in *Kanja-san*, that they do not present a picture of Minamata as a particularly productive place. The smoking factories and gushing pipes in Tsuchimoto's film are remarkable for their ominous, contaminating quality, not for their manufacturing productivity. Indeed, the voiceover does not comment on the function of these manufacturing objects, leaving them as silent presences onscreen to be interpreted by the viewer. Ishimure's town, too, contains "people's houses" with "flickering lights," no factories, workplaces, or other institutions in sight. The speaker wanders aimlessly through the wintry town, seemingly with no financial, economic, or familial obligations to dictate her movements. The "nothing time" appears to exist just outside of, or perhaps parallel to, the economically productive time of capitalism.

Both Tsuchimoto and Ishimure aspire to portray this "nothing time" outside of capitalistic productivity, where the stain of Minamata's tainted-ness becomes visible, rather than remain concealed by the forces of profit. "Nothing time" has a utopian quality; it conjures a "nowhere" land removed from the demands of capitalistic productivity. This remove from the world of capitalism, however, produces a sense of loneliness and isolation in the speaker of "Flickering": there are no other human beings in the poem, and she seems alone in the empty, wintry setting. The speaker's sadness as she watches her childhood lover vanish in the snow suggests that her lack of family and economic ties to the outside world, flawed and capitalistic though it might be, leaves her

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid. 21

without a community or a sense of belonging.

The speaker's lack of interpersonal connection raises unsettling questions about readers'/viewers' own complicity in the disaster: she is alone, and no amount of well-intentioned readerly empathy or compassion can change that. Like the uneasy spectators of a Hitchcockian thriller or horror film, who oscillate between victim and perpetrator, viewers/readers are asked to "lose themselves" (*mizukara wo mayowasu*). The wanderers of Ishimure's snowy night occupy an ambiguous position, neither perpetrator nor victim, but passersby with unclear allegiances, moving through a space of uncertainty.

### **Seas, Screens, and Crowds: Losing the Self And Finding a Crowd**

The dilemma of the speaker in "Flickering," and of the viewers of Tsuchimoto's Hitchcockian cinematic sequences, invites speculation about the role of bystanders in the Minamata crisis, their oscillation between empathy and indifference, complicity and action. How much knowledge do bystanders have of the open secret of Minamata's stain, and what effect does this knowledge produce, especially when conveyed in the aesthetically and ideologically charged language of hometown that Tsuchimoto and Ishimure employ?

Tsuchimoto hints at this problem in his many portrayals of crowd scenes in his Minamata documentaries, which often focus on the role of bystanders, peripheral figures without a clear sense of what is happening or what they are doing there. In the beginning of a sequence depicting a mural of Minamata installed in a Tokyo museum, Tsuchimoto films often oblivious museumgoers as they react to the images on display. One woman points out a cat to a small child: "Look, it's a cat!" (*Hora, neko da!*) (see figure 7).



Fig. 7 “Hora! Neko da!” (*Minamata no Zu*)

The cat recalls some of the earliest images of Minamata disease, footage of local cats with the symptoms of mercury poisoning. The woman and child do not discuss this association carried by the image of the cat in the mural, but it hovers over the seemingly innocent exchange. The two of them are not indifferent to or ignorant of the details of the Minamata disaster, but the event’s reality remains on the periphery of their awareness. There is a sense of uncertainty to the relationship between these two viewers and Minamata: How much do they know, and how do they express this knowledge? What are the possible valences of the two viewers’ innocent appreciation of the cat?

In another of Tsuchimoto’s documentaries, *Minamata: The Victims And Their World*, a group of protesters from Minamata stand on a busy street chanting with visible emotion, while passers-by either ignore them or toss a few coins into their donation container. The open secret is an effective tool in this environment of indifference precisely because it thrives on being unspoken and ignored, in transfiguring a street scene of callous indifference into something capable of eliciting a sense of self-aware complicity in the viewer. The indifferent crowd in the protest scene does not stand only for cynicism and inaction: instead, Tsuchimoto makes sure that their presence is almost as remarkable as that of the protesters, lingering on incidental details like a passing schoolgirl’s blouse, or a small child wandering apart from the crowd (see figure 8).



Fig. 8 *Minamata: Kanja-san to Sono Sekai*  
***Minamata Kanja-san To Sono Sekai***

In the protest scene in figure 8, in the big city of Kagoshima near Minamata, the camera moves in a circular motion behind the protester’s head as he speaks through his megaphone to reveal the little girl wandering into his field of vision. This camera motion

suggests the protester's own point of view, his focus on the reactions of bystanders, including the unaccompanied little girl. This circular, wandering camera motion recurs in Ishimure Michiko's appearance in *Minamata Mural*, in which the camera circles behind her head to reveal the crowds depicted in the mural (see figure 9).



Fig. 9 *Minamata no Zu*

Like the Kagoshima protester, Ishimure's rear silhouette is framed by a crowd scene she is viewing. The shot hints at her point of view, her point of contact with the painted crowd scene before her. Meanwhile, the camera picks up the background noise of the crowd scene that surrounds her, people like the woman and child admiring the cat. Ishimure stands wavering between two crowds, one projected as image, and one enveloping her as background noise, uncertain where she stands between the two.

These images create a sense of drift and uncertainty: Where does the protest end and ordinary daily life begin? What is the connection between the protesters and the passers-by, witnessing the protest on the margins of their awareness as they go about their daily routine? Ishimure Michiko's portrayals of the sea as a fragmented, overwhelming entity with the capacity to overwhelm, or to embrace, an individual person contain an oblique meditation upon the issue of crowds and bystanders that complements Tsuchimoto's. For Ishimure, the crowd and the sea contain possibilities for transformation and uncertainty, for the kind of wandering, lost sensation found in the moment where the little girl in *Kanja-san* wanders at the periphery of the protest, unsure what is going on (*"mizukara o mayowasu,"* "Flickering"). The crowd for Ishimure is made up of such wandering lost individuals, pursuing their fragmented but perhaps collective ends, inscribing the space they move through with the "rising elegy" kicked up by their errant footsteps, with the "pretend homeland" that will be erased when they move on.

Ishimure's link between the sea and the crowd draws on a common convention in modern lyric poetry, dating back to the nineteenth century, when Baudelaire used the sea as a figure for the waves of people in the Parisian crowd.<sup>168</sup> We have seen this association before in Ueda Bin's Baudelaire translations, discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, where the image of a man looking at his reflection in the surface of the sea reveals how crowd and individual are bound together by knowledge of the open secret of war happening far away on the Asian mainland. For Ishimure, too, the sea-as-crowd offers the possibility of collective political awareness, and perhaps even transformation. In Ishimure's prose poem *Nyûkon* (Spirit Entry, 1981), she portrays the sea as a mirror or reflective screen that reflects the crowd's fragmented uncertainty, but also its potential power.

Like Ueda Bin's sea, which stood for the urban crowd going about their daily lives while bound together by an unspoken awareness of the distant war occurring on the Asian mainland, Ishimure's sea serves as a "mirror" that reflects the open secrets that usually remain invisible at the periphery of the crowd's awareness. The poem starts with a speaker going to the sea in the evening and experiencing a sense of estrangement, as the evening light has transformed the sea into an unfamiliar-looking entity, so that "it looks almost like a different sea" (*maru de chigau umi ni mieru*). The sea has an uneasy stillness: "the sea's surface goes completely still [*mattaku seishi shite*], and in order to receive all of heaven's light, it turns into a single mirror [*ichimai no kagami o kasu*]." Like the winter fireflies in "Flickering," the unfamiliar glow of the sea has a quality reminiscent of the Hitchcockian stain, an unsettling beauty that points to its own deceptive nature, that hints at the dark reality beneath the calm surface.

The speaker associates the sea with the past, with a premodern original essence that can be revived at this moment of encounter: "this sea, in a single day, restores all the designs of antiquity" (*taiko no takurami o subete fukugen shi*). The notion of "restoration" in particular resonates with post-disaster revival efforts undertaken by state and private touristic enterprises in Minamata, which seek to rebuild and restore what has been lost to the disaster, or even with similar revival efforts going on in Fukushima today. The crowd attempts to revive a lost antiquity using its primal, oceanic collective power to access an imagined origin, and its efforts to do so resonate with the images of hometown found in mass culture.

For Ishimure, the sea is not a perfect mirror of the hometown ideology it projects, for it warps and fragments what it reflects:

Of course it is not completely level, because of the ceaselessly breaking light, the sea expands into its own interior [*uchigawa e to hirogari*], and it looks as if it is crying out with the whispers of numberless shards of a mirror [*musû no kagami no saihen no yôna nami no sazameki de naritatteiru yôni mieru*].

The sea, like the crowd, may look like a flat (*taimen*), homogenous mass, but the unfamiliar evening light reveals the fragmented, plural, conflicting energies beneath the mass of unitary uniformity. The sea in this poem gives a sense of a crowd that, rather than using its power in a confrontational manner, "expands into its own interior," and

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<sup>168</sup> See Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs In Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, Harry Zohn, trans (Houghton Mifflin: 1968).



takes political action in an inward, recessive realm: a crowd that thinks, feels, and cries out in “whispers” not in unison, but in the fragmented “numberless shards” of its disjointed individual participants. Like the drifting, uncertain mode of Tsuchimoto’s crowd shots, which focus as much on the chaotic, fragmented motions of the crowd as on their supposed ideological unity, this line portrays the crowd’s political power as fragmented, uncertain, and ephemeral. If the solitary speaker of “Flashing” were to join some form of a collective, one that would still allow her to “lose herself” in the utopic realm of “nothing time,” it might look something like this fragmented, broken mirror.

The crowd produces a contradictory sense of belonging and estrangement in the speaker, who ends the poem with a question: “my place where I belong [*ibasho*] must be there, but when will I go to it?” The speaker’s sense of belonging, *ibasho*, carries an undertone of estrangement, in the realization that she may not ever get to this *ibasho*. She feels her place is with the crowd, but there exists a kind of drift and uncertainty that prevents her feeling wholly at home there. The turn to the future, an indeterminate time when her sense of belonging to the crowd will come to fruition, gives the poem a quietly utopian tone, suggesting that the crowd’s potential to act, and the speaker’s ability to participate in such collective action, lie unrealized in the future.

Like the prewar poets who posit return to the hometown as ultimately impossible, a forever unattainable object of desire, the speaker sees the sea as an origin to which her return is infinitely deferred, as suggested by the open-ended question with which the poem closes. The poem leaves the attainability of the speaker’s *ibasho* indeterminate. Is she a part of the crowd and its efforts to “restore” (*fukugen*) a lost “antiquity” (*taiko*)? Or does her awareness that such efforts are impossible keep her at a peripheral position, forever gazing at the surface of the sea, without ever achieving immersion in it?

Ishimure’s meditation on the sea-as-reflective screen-as crowd suggests that the crowd is actually a kind of projection, an ephemeral phenomenon that depends upon a particular way of looking. When is a crowd just a group of people, and when is a crowd a protest? When is a crowd just a mass of light particles bouncing off a screen? The crowd as sea, like the hometown, has an absent or unreal quality that requires a certain kind of reticent, fragmentary gaze to be seen. It is in looking away, at the cracks and fragments of the screen, that the crowd’s collective power becomes visible.

As we have seen, these questions make themselves felt in Tsuchimoto’s fragmented, wavering crowd scenes, which make a point of emphasizing the presence of liminal figures, lingering on such details as a lost girl wandering on the edges of a protest. Tsuchimoto suggests the fragility and ephemerality of a crowd’s collective bond, which, like the light of Ishimure’s fireflies, flickers in and out of existence, including some, excluding others, and leaving yet others in a kind of liminal state. Tsuchimoto’s interest in the fringes of the crowd, those who occupy this liminal state between bystander and participant, echoes the uncertainty of Ishimure’s speaker in *Nyûkon*, looking for her “place she belongs” (*ibasho*). Like the mother and child at the exhibit in *Minamata No Zu*, pointing to the cat in the mural, half aware of what the cat means and half not, these marginal figures create a sense of drift and uncertainty. Where is their *ibasho* with respect to the mural, to the sea, or to the crowd of other spectators? What happens when that *ibasho* starts to slip and change?

The visual experience of sea, crowd, and screen elicits a complex response of belonging, unity, as well as complicity. The poem “Spirit Entry” longs for union and

belonging with the sea-as-crowd, but it also contains an awareness that the sea is tainted. The speaker's connection to the crowd contains a recognition of that taintedness in herself: the sea's "inward spread" (*uchigawa he no hirogari*) reaches into her own interior, or *uchigawa*, where it finds a reflection of its own taintedness. Much as the out-of-season fireflies in "Flashing" elicit a sense of taintedness in the speaker of that poem, in "Spirit Entry" too, the act of gazing at the sea produces a sense of shared implication in its taintedness.

## Conclusion

So far, we have seen how, using the open secret of the hometown's embeddedness in commercial imagery, Ishimure and Tsuchimoto shift the kind of silence around Minamata, from the denial of the corporate perpetrators, to one where the voices of the victims are able to make themselves heard, albeit in an indirect, fragmented manner. They do so by constructing an imagined, utopian "looked-for hometown" using a hybrid of poetry and cinema, as shown in their collaboration for the mural sequence in *Minamata no Zu*. This "looked-for hometown" evokes emotional responses of yearning and belonging. However, Ishimure and Tsuchimoto undermine these emotional responses by revealing the "stain on the picture postcard" of commercial hometown imagery, the dark side of their imagined hometown, which renders it too defamiliarized and uncomfortable for viewers and readers to readily identify with it. Is the "looked-for hometown" a utopian ideal, or an unsettling symbol for audiences' complicity in the suffering of others? Ishimure and Tsuchimoto explore this question in their portrayal of crowd scenes, which, through their drifting, fragmented visual quality and emphasis on the presence of bystanders, suggest the fragmented, uncertain quality of collective political action. For both artists, it is the reticent, indirect gaze of the open secret, which looks away from its object, that reveals the utopian "looked-for hometown," the taintedness of Minamata's landscape, and creates the bonds and disjunctures in the fragmented crowd scenes. The complex, shifting *ibasho* of the speaker in Ishimure's *Nyūkon*, and the wandering, ambulatory camerawork of Tsuchimoto's Minamata footage, seek by turns to create and then to destabilize an imaginative "looked-for hometown." Ishimure and Tsuchimoto's work offers a way to approach the notion of hometown with a kind of double vision, aware of its connection to Chisso, yet keenly attuned to its aesthetic and emotional power, which they seek to deploy on behalf of the victims.

"I felt as if my heart was being completely read" (*kochira no kokoro ga yomitorareteshimau yō na kanji wo oboeta*),<sup>169</sup> Ishimure writes in a brief prose essay about a photograph of a young Fukushima refugee driven from his home in the evacuation zone after the 3/11 earthquake and nuclear disaster.<sup>170</sup> For her, the question is not what she sees when she looks at such photographs, but rather what they see when they look back at her. The passive verb "being completely read" (*yomitorareteshimau*) suggests that, like the girl gathering cherry blossoms in Tsuchimoto's mural sequence, the young man in the photograph is imbued with a degree of agency (he is the active

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<sup>169</sup> Ishimure Michiko and others, *3/11 To Watashi: Higashi Nihon Dai Shinzai de Kangaeta Koto* (Fujiwara Shoten, 2012) pp. 17-19.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 18

agent of the sentence, rather than the speaker). He reaches out to the viewer, who feels “read,” seen through, and understood (punctum?). The act of looking, the “looked-for hometown,” is where such intersubjective connections become possible.

There is a quality of drift, uncertainty, and yet of revelation to Ishimure’s encounter with the photograph. His gaze is penetrating, perhaps accusatory in its intensity, leaving her ability to return his gaze in doubt. Does she look away, averting her gaze from the intensity of his own? What is her *ibasho* with relation to it? The forcefulness of his gaze exerts a kind of power and dominance over the speaker, countering his marginalized, powerless position as a refugee. The accusatory force of his gaze suggests how, as consumers of this image, viewers are wired into the capitalist media economy that provides such images in newspapers and other publications. The speaker is an outsider removed from the experiences of this photograph’s subject, but at the same time, she empathizes with him, rendered vulnerable by the power in his gaze.

Like the speaker of “Spirit Entry” searching for her place (*ibasho*) in the reflective, screen-like sea, or the bystanders wandering through the periphery of the cinematically constructed crowds in Tsuchimoto Noriaki’s protest scenes, post-3/11 Ishimure seems to link the possibility of collective action with a certain way of gazing or looking at images, one that draws on the open secret’s halfway point between knowing and not knowing, acting and not acting, belonging and not belonging. For Ishimure and Tsuchimoto, the gaze operates by turning away from its object, instead turning inward back at the viewer. In the utopian “looked-for homeland” of Ishimure’s poem, the speaker’s averted gaze turns away from marginalized Minamata disease victims to the unseen, to the next world. For Ishimure’s wandering, solitary lyric speakers, or the fragmented, isolated figures at the edges of Tsuchimoto’s crowd scenes, the possibility of being seen with this averted, oblique gaze offers some form of healing or consolation, as well as maybe even some potentially powerful collective connections. Perhaps “to be read” by a photograph or other work offers a chance to collectivize the intimacy of this connection, to reach out to a form of potentially transformative community, one in which the viewer might also become a member, one where the power contained in the photograph’s gaze turned back at the spectator can act upon the political structures of the real world.

## Conclusion: The Elephant in the Room Emerges Onto the Streets

In closing, I will briefly frame the open secret as a space where political critique wrestles with its own limits with a discussion of 1960s experimental Japanese novelist Abe Kōbō's (1924-1993) absurdist fable "Open Secret" (*kōzen no himitsu*, 1975). This short story has recently found a new readership in response to the March 11, 2011 nuclear disaster at Fukushima Daiichi reactor. In its treatment of the open secret as a mode of disclosure that also acts to conceal, Abe's story illuminates the possibilities and pitfalls of collective protest in response to disaster, issues of great concern to the recent artists who have sought to reclaim this text as an allegory for the event.

Abe's tale, written in a disillusioned post-sixties climate of what many in Japan perceived as the decline of radical art and politics, illuminates the open secret's possibilities for political, aesthetic, and interpretive transformations of society, as well as the foreclosure of those possibilities. In the following analysis, I will show how Abe's story portrays the unveiling of an open secret, (namely the existence of a mysterious creature hidden at the bottom of a ditch in a small town), the brief window of possibility for radical transformation that the secret's unveiling provides, and finally, the closing of that window. Despite the story's ending note of disillusionment, I want to explore the open secret as a space of possibility, a space that survives even after the secret's unveiling.

The open secret, an elephant who lives unnoticed in a ditch until one fateful day when the town notices its existence for the first time, offers a space of possibility to the townspeople, who coalesce into a collective unit with political power in the aftermath of their discovery, as well as to the state, which implicitly offers the townspeople security and protection during their response of violent hysteria and fear. The open secret in Abe's tale is therefore a contested site, an elephant in the room to which both the state and the people stake a claim.

In the unnamed town of Abe's story, a creature lives at the bottom of a muddy ditch. For many years, "[t]here was not a single person who noticed. Even if someone did, they pretended not to."<sup>171</sup> There are a few rare townspeople, mostly children, who "perceive the truth" (*shinsō o minuiteru*), but for the most part, the ditch and its unseen inhabitant are "already an open secret" (*sude ni kōzen no himitsu da*). One day, an elephant, starved to skin and bones and rotting away from years of submersion, emerges out of the muddy water.

Abe's narrator lingers on the moment of the open secret's unveiling, describing in detail the trembling of the ditch water as the elephant surfaces and the confusing, fragmented first glimpses of its body in the sludge. The moment of unveiling carries an overtone of futurity, transformation, and possibility.

It was moving. It was definitely moving. A rip appeared in the sludge's dry, white membrane. A form emerged in the black, wet surface.

The parts that looked like a tree trunk were vertebrae. The parts that looked like branches growing out from each side were ribs. Between each bone, oil-paper-like skin.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Abe Kōbō, *Warau Tsuki* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1975) 138

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 139

This moment has a strange aesthetic power, even beauty, in its proliferation of primal imagery--of water, mud, and plant and animal life. It is as if the unveiling of this particular open secret is also the birth of some cosmic originary life form, a creature that may give rise to its own new, unknown lineage that will proceed along some alternative evolutionary timeline.

The revelatory power and beauty of the open secret seem to be at their most intense at the very moment of unveiling, when it is still all but illegible and may yet prove to be the source of new, undiscovered worlds. The moment has an immediately electrifying effect on the townspeople, who, at first, do not understand exactly what they are witnessing or what is happening to them as they do so.

Was it just our imagination? It seemed imagined [*ki no sei no yô de mo aru shi*], it seemed real [*jijitsu no yô de mo aru*]...Already, on the bridge, a crowd had come into being [*hito dakari ga dekiteita*]. The number of people was unclear. It seemed like three [*sannin no yô de mo aru shi*], it seemed like ten [*jûnin no yô de mo aru*].<sup>173</sup>

Abe's parallel syntax, the repeated phrase "it seemed like" (*no yô de mo aru*), suggests that, not only are the townspeople uncertain about the reality of what they are witnessing, they also experience a strange sense of uncertainty about who they are themselves, and who they are in relationship to one another. When are three, or ten, people on a bridge simply random, unconnected passersby, and when do they become a "crowd" (*hito dakari*), drawn together by their shared knowledge of the unknowable? The exact moment that the crowd's formation happens is elusive, and its fluidity persists throughout the story, as people slip in and out of its collective bonds. The crowd's fluidity, its uncertain, fragmented character is an important part of the open secret's ability to retain latent unrealized possibilities for collective transformation.

The crowd's fragmented, fluid collectivity gropes for words it does not yet quite have, to articulate what its members already know, but have never said. A large portion of the story is made up of unattributed, overheard dialogue: disembodied words that could come from any one of the passersby on the bridge as they calcify into a collective. This is the first time that they have ever spoken of the creature, ever acknowledged their private suspicions as something shared.

Some are surprised: "This is shocking!"

Some are not: "Don't play dumb!"<sup>174</sup>

Some remain silent, like a shopkeeper who takes one look at the elephant, "goes rigid, shakes his head back and forth, averts his gaze [*shisen o sorase*], and quickly shuts himself away inside [*sassa to oku ni hikikondeshimau*]."<sup>175</sup> The shopkeeper refuses to join the embryonic crowd as it comes into being, or to accept its new shared knowledge of the creature its members had always privately suspected was there. Instead, he chooses to continue thinking of the elephant as an open secret, something to be looked at with

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 138

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 140

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 142

averted eyes, to be thought of only in the privacy of his own home and not discussed on the streets with others. The shopkeeper recuses himself from the open secret's unveiling, and from the collective action that ensues.

The shopkeeper is not the only one looking for a way to avoid unveiling the town's open secret. Another bystander tries to cast doubt on the reality of events, suggesting, "That thing, what's wrong with just believing that it is an illusion [*anna mono, gensô da to omotte naze warui*]? There's no way it could ever exist in Japan in the first place."<sup>176</sup> This bystander, unable even to name the "thing" (*mono*) that has appeared before him, struggles to navigate the layers of belief and disbelief, truth and illusion in which his perception of the elephant is embedded. Perhaps the crowd in which he has found himself is merely caught in a mass delusion (*gensô*). Perhaps if, like the shopkeeper, they were all to disperse to their individual homes or workplaces, the elephant would dissolve into unreality as quickly as the crowd that, the bystander suggests, has dreamed it into existence.

Neither the shopkeeper with averted eyes, nor the anonymous elephant denier, seems prepared to accept the unveiling of the open secret. Instead, they persist in living in the register of open secrets, in the unsaid and unsayable space between willed delusion and conscious acceptance of reality. It is these two figures who resonate most with the poets discussed in this dissertation, poets who, confronted with the exigency of historical developments (nationalistic hometown nostalgia, war, environmental disaster), either turn their gaze away and recuse themselves, or swathe the events in front of them in layers of illusion, doubt, and fantasy. "Is this a memory, or our own autumn legend?" as Kitahara Hakushû wonders of his hometown, which he portrays in the fantastical idiom of cinema and mass culture, in the 1912 poem "Preface."<sup>177</sup>

The shopkeeper, meanwhile, with his averted eyes and charged silence, recalls Ueda Bin's 1910 translation anthology *Sounds of the Tide*, seldom acknowledged as war poetry although it was written during the Russo-Japanese War and dedicated to the translator's close friend and mentor then serving on the battlefield. Ueda's collection hardly mentions the war, but even with its gaze resolutely turned away, it captures war's oblique ripple effects in the fragmented, often quietly violent scenes of urban life found in translations of Charles Baudelaire and other poets.

The elephant-denier's injunction to "think of that thing as an illusion," and the shopkeeper's decision to turn his gaze away, both entail looking away from the elephant, and looking at the crowd instead, a crowd which both speakers recuse themselves from. The crowd's response eventually turns violent, making these two characters' refusal to participate a potentially provocative act. In refusing to make the elephant the object of their gaze, these two characters instead see the crowd in which they are almost enlisted for what it is: a violent mob acting not entirely in its own best interests.

The collective response turns violent when the elephant turns its starved, suffering face to look at the crowd, who are immediately moved to pity it. "Poor thing, I can't look at it..." says one person. Someone throws a book of matches down from the bridge. "I had nothing else to feed it," this bystander says apologetically. The crowd murmurs approvingly, glad that someone has finally taken action. Oddly pedantic scientific

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 142

<sup>177</sup> Kitahara, *Kitahara Hakushû Zenshû*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1985) 37

rationalizations issue forth. “Elephants are vegetarians after all.” “That’s a good idea. The sulfur will help stop the rotting.”<sup>178</sup>

Before long, the crowd is tossing matchbook after matchbook down to the elephant, which bursts into flames and burns away “like old newsprint,” suggesting that the nonstop mass media attention its exposure has given it has proven inflammatory. The narrator comments that, “in love for the weak [*jakusha*, the vulnerable, the disadvantaged], there always lurks a desire to kill [*satsui*].”<sup>179</sup> It is the crowd’s pity that precipitates its act of destruction. Perhaps this is because to pity the elephant, they first had to accept its reality. Once the bystander looked into the elephant’s eyes and exclaimed at what he or she found there, the voices of denial and fantasy stopped. The crowd’s pity forced some form of action, and brought an end to the uncertainty and open-endedness that existed while its members had yet to fully accept the unveiling of their open secret. The crowd’s collective turn to pity cements the power dynamic between them on the one hand, and the elephant on the other. The elephant is no longer the indeterminate creature who emerged dripping from the ditch, unknowable and hard to pin down, carrying possibilities for transformation. Instead, it has become an object of pity, a *jakusha*, one of the weak or the vulnerable.

“In love for the weak [*jakusha*, the vulnerable, the disadvantaged], there always lurks a desire to kill [*satsui*].” Why does Abe use the word *ai*, love, instead of words like pity, empathy, or sympathy (*nasake*, *kyōkan*, or *dōjō*) that imply a degree of asymmetry between the person who feels it and the object of that feeling, when the power dynamic between the crowd and the elephant is so far from equal? In *pity* for the weak, certainly, it is understandable that there is some latent urge to kill. But love seems different. Love implies the existence of an intense bond, perhaps a romantic or familial one. The elephant after all has been part of the town’s life for many years (one bystander suggests it is a holdover from prehistoric times). It has existed as a kind of unsaid substratum of everyday life for as long as anyone can remember. According to Abe’s aphorism, it was the intimacy and closeness that the townspeople felt toward the elephant that occasioned its death. The crowd’s destruction of the animal was an act of love, a love with the unspoken structure of an open secret, an unacknowledged but often silently thought-of presence in the town’s life, a kind of “love that dare not speak its name.”

Does this love survive the speaking of its name, and the ensuing death of its object? Is there some possibility that the townspeople could redirect their love, from violent annihilation, to ethical engagement? It is notable that the people commit their deadly act of love from their own free will: the state does not appear in the story, and there is no police presence in the town. Nevertheless, Abe’s story, especially the two characters who refuse to participate in the mob’s actions, points readers to consider the way that people police themselves, so that even in the absence of any representative of the state, the townspeople act as their own violent enforcers.

Despite the story’s pessimistic ending, the apparent finality of the elephant’s death does not entirely foreclose the vectors of indeterminacy and possibility that the creature’s appearance evoked in the townspeople. The completeness and cleanness with which the elephant vanishes, leaving behind no corpse or even smell, suggest that maybe

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<sup>178</sup> Abe, 144

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 145

there was some truth to the elephant denier's claim that the elephant was illusory. It vanishes, like the ephemeral headlines on the newspapers the crowd reads every day, into the ether of time as it passes. Perhaps the crowd's destruction of the elephant will become the next open secret, giving rise to its own uneasy silences, its own opportunities for various kinds of denial and fantasy. Perhaps the elephant still exists somewhere in the imaginations of the townspeople. If it survived hundreds of years at the bottom of a ditch, then maybe it could survive even this conflagration. Now that the townspeople believe they are rid of it forever, perhaps the elephant can wander freely through the streets, the town's denial enabling its survival, foraging for food and hiding in the periphery of others' deliberately restricted vision. The story points to an ethical way of engaging with the suffering of others, one that does so by looking away, rather than confronting it head on. The shopkeeper looks away, but the townspeople who destroy the elephant look directly at it. The oblique, averted gaze of the shopkeeper offers the elephant the possibility of survival, while the direct gaze of the other townspeople offers it pity and then destruction.

It is this act of looking away in an ethically charged manner that resonates with the poetry of Ishimure Michiko, whose highly aestheticized, fantastic portrayals of the small town of Minamata, the site of a major episode of industrial mercury poisoning, treat the disaster with such beauty and artfulness that it takes on a dreamlike quality, hovering at the periphery of readers' awareness. Her work, which aestheticizes the suffering of others, certainly resonates with Abe's insight about "love for the weak" and its latent "urge to kill." Her poetry seeks to counter this power dynamic by empowering the objects of her beautifying gaze, allowing them to survive at the margins of others' awareness.

Unrealized possibilities for survival and transformation hover in the background of Abe's story, subtly undermining the ending's tragic overtone, suggesting that the failure and foreclosure awaiting radical aesthetic and political movements may not be the whole story. Abe's tale about the dangers, and radical possibilities, of unveiling, of the volatile moment when an open secret is spoken aloud and detonates its unspoken charge, has recently found a second life as an allegory for the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. In his 2012 exhibition "Open Secret," performance artist Takeuchi Kōta stocked his Tokyo gallery with paperback copies of the collection in which the story appears for attendees to leaf through. The exhibit featured documentation of Takeuchi's experience as a low-level temporary worker at the Fukushima No.1 nuclear reactor plant, especially his relationship to the mysterious "finger-pointing worker" (*yubi-sashi sagyōin*), an anonymous nuclear plant worker who, on August 28, 2011, pointed his finger at a live web camera installed at the plant for twenty minutes. Takeuchi, who has refused to say whether or not he is the worker, emphasizes the man's anonymity, his unknowability: "...[T]his worker does not express his subjectivity, but, especially in this time of crisis, what the eye cannot see becomes visible [*arawa ni natta me ni mienai*]: our doubt about, as well as compulsion towards, societal collective consciousness."<sup>180</sup>

Like Abe Kōbō's elephant as its unrecognizable body emerges in fragmented glimpses from the sludge, the finger-pointing worker poses a challenge to collective efforts to understand or categorize him. For many, the image of the pointing worker

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<sup>180</sup> Snow Contemporary, *Takeuchi Kōta Kotei "Kōzen no Himitsu"* (February 17, 2012), p. 3, <http://officekubota.com/snowcontemporary>



carries an accusatory tone, a jab at the terrible working conditions at Fukushima No. 1. The figure's pointing pose, which could be said to resemble wartime American "Uncle Sam Wants You" propaganda imagery, echoes state efforts to recruit volunteers and short-term laborers to help rebuild Fukushima (Takeuchi, who applied through Hello Work, a state-run recruitment agency, was one such laborer). For some viewers, the video is not primarily about Fukushima at all, but about the public's perceptual response to it, the volatile mixture of denial, delusion, and doubt that characterizes public life in times of crisis. Takeuchi's refusal to confirm what everyone suspects, that he himself is the finger-pointing man, recalls the obscure and contradictory responses of Japanese government and corporate interests in the wake of the disaster, their refusal to confirm public anxieties that their denials only serve to inflame. Like Abe's elephant denier, Takeuchi casts doubt on what should be unambiguous, thereby calling attention to the public's mass delusion (*gensō*), its uncertainty with respect to reality and truth.

Despite the fascinating dynamics at work in Takeuchi's use of the Abe Kōbō text, the artist's problematic project ends up fulfilling the tale's cautionary portents on the perils of "love for the weak." Like the poets as *benshi* of the 1930s, who expressed their ambivalence towards censorship even as they cooperated with its strictures, writers and artists like Takeuchi who incorporate the exclusion zone into their work serve as the vanguard of an effort they may not personally support. With the 2020 Tokyo Olympics on the horizon, it may not be long before Fukushima becomes a site for eco-tourism along the same lines as Minamata. Journalistic accounts by major domestic and international news outlets, literary works by the contemporary poet Wagō Ryōichi and others, commercial tours operated by former residents, and even a well-publicized international art exhibit called *Don't Follow the Wind* located inside the exclusion zone (often touted in terms emphasizing the site's exclusivity as "the most inaccessible art exhibition in the world"<sup>181</sup>) all offer the general public imaginative access to the heavily restricted, but highly visible, exclusion zone, and make the area seem mysterious, unknowable, and exclusive.

In such a context, it is possible to view Takeuchi, Wagō, and their cohort, not only as oppositional artists seeking to shed light on injustice, but also as ambivalent collaborators in ongoing commercial and state efforts to commercialize and eventually resettle the exclusion zone. Many of the works in the exhibition *Don't Follow the Wind*, such as Ai Weiwei's *Ray of Hope*, a light installation that illuminates an abandoned house during the hours its absent occupants would likely be home each day, express sympathy with those of Fukushima's evacuees who wish to return, implicitly positing the repopulation of the exclusion zone as the object of hope for the future, despite lingering concerns about the safety of the site.

Perhaps Takeuchi's finger-pointing gesture can be taken most productively, not as an act of accusation or a plea for awareness, but an injunction to, like the unworldly speakers of Anne-Lise François's study, avert the gaze. Open secrets create opportunities for slippage, for people like Abe's shopkeeper to weave in and out of the crowd, to dilute or evade its collective bonds. Takeuchi has said that what he really wants to discuss in his

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<sup>181</sup> Justin McCurry, "Fukushima's radioactive wasteland turns into art gallery," *The Guardian*, November 15, 2015,

work is what it means “to see and to be seen” (*miru/mirareru*),<sup>182</sup> but perhaps this perceptual process occurs most productively for his work when undertaken in the oblique, averted manner of the open secret. What new possibilities emerge in the blurring of vision, the proliferation of gaps and lacunae, that occur when the eyes are turned away? The sheer volume of images and information after 3.11 and in other times of crisis creates an impulse to look away, to avert the gaze from the overload of material and instead look at the gaps and fissures in this overload, look at what they do not reveal. The act of looking away reveals the critical possibilities that inhere in the unseen. Rather than break society’s collective silence about uncomfortable truths, these poets of the open secret shift it incrementally, perceiving in it unvoiced notes of complicity, uncertainty, resistance, doubt.

Like Abe’s shopkeeper and elephant-denier, who opt out of the violent collective in order to gaze critically upon the crowd around them, the poets discussed in this study represent the political and empathetic possibilities inherent in the act of looking away. This act of looking away can lead to ethically productive slippage between viewer and viewed, self and other. We have seen how Hakushū uses the averted gaze in order to create a moment of interpersonal empathy between viewer and object in a 1940 poem about a photograph of a soldier with covered eyes, of whom the speaker remarks “the direction he is looking / is surprising” (*miyaru hō da ni / omoenaku ni*). Elsewhere, we have seen how Minamata activist Ishimure Michiko’s speaker avoids the eyes of a Minamata disease patient, thereby subtly indicating the power difference between her, a writer with an international platform, and the object of her averted gaze, a man who is losing his voice twice over, due to his political marginalization and to the effects of his illness. Rather than joining in the mass discourse around Fukushima and other events of crisis, in which the state and other commercial interests seek to exploit people’s potentially explosive responses to the elephants in the room, the poets discussed here offer ways of looking away. In looking elsewhere, readers see that the elephant is no longer a threat to be contained by an escalating culture of security and militarism, but a fellow member of the crowd, a crowd of individuals whose searching gazes are turned upon each other, rich with power as well as possibility.

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<sup>182</sup> Snow Contemporary, 2

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