

Beyond Naturalism: Sōma Gyofū, Italian Futurism, and the Search for a New “Art of Force”

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According to the main narratives on the history of Japanese literature, the heyday of Japanese naturalism (*shizenshugi*) came to an end around the commencement of the Taishō period (1912–26).¹ A reaction against (to quote Ishikawa Takuboku’s words) the “scientific, fatalistic, static, and self-negating”² tendencies associated with the local brands of naturalism was stimulated by the introduction in the *bundan* (literary world) of fresher discursive resources coming from European intellectual fields, where a similar trend change had already taken place. As had happened to their European counterparts, the authors who opposed *shizenshugi* began to appropriate and re-elaborate such discourses and their related practices.

These discourses and practices, often generically described as the “anti-naturalist movement” (*anchi-nachurarizumu*, *hanshizenshugi undō*), were extremely heterogeneous and comprised a wide range of tendencies, some of which were also latent in, or later appropriated by, naturalism itself. Some of them may be variously described, on the basis of their tone and philosophical background, as anti-rationalist, spiritualistic, or anti-materialist. They included a revival of religious and mystical themes in art and literature (epitomized by the works of Maeterlinck, Tagore, Ibsen, Tolstoy, etc.), new currents of anti-positivist and anti-idealist thought (represented by Nietzsche, Eucken, Bergson, etc.), the appropriation in the aesthetic discourse of the most recent discoveries in the fields of science (including electromagnetism, quantum mechanics, and non-Euclidean geometries), the post-Impressionist debates on art (especially focused, in Japan, on the works of Rodin, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Cézanne, Matisse, and Kandinsky), and, later, the symbolic and technical revolts led by the historical avant-gardes (beginning with Futurism, which debuted in 1909) against established conventions in art. The impact of these and other tendencies and tropes (all concurring with the heterogeneous genealogy of Japanese “anti-naturalism”) on the *bundan* in its totality, or on specific authors, has been widely investigated by the existing scholarship on the subject.³

¹ See, for instance, Kenneth G. Henshall, *In Search of Nature: The Japanese Writer Tayama Katai (1872–1930)*, 175–76, and Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*, 90–91.

² Quoted in Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, 90.

³ The varied canon of “anti-naturalist” authors includes writers such as Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Nagai Kafū, Takamura Kōtarō, Kinoshita Mokutarō, and Arishima Takeo. General studies

In this paper, I will attempt to shed light on a minor part of this process: the implementation of Futurist discourse in the *bundan*, and its contribution to the articulation of the anti-naturalist movement in Japan. In particular, I will focus on the impact that Futurism had on the trajectory of Sōma Gyofū (1883–1950), a literary critic and author who initially supported naturalism and later, in the early Taishō period, developed post-naturalist positions often described as being marked by “self-centrism” (*jikoshugi*), “vitalism,” or “life-centrism” (*seimeishugi*).⁴ His ideas during this period reveal traces of a fascination with the Futurist rhetoric and agenda, which he partially incorporated in his theoretical effort to articulate the transition to a new phase in his personal history and in the collective evolution of the Japanese intellectual field.⁵

A STORY OF REORIENTED TRAJECTORIES

The naturalist movement in Japan or *shizenshugi* (generally divided into its two phases of “early” and “later” naturalism) emerged in literature at the beginning of the twentieth century and remained a dominant feature in the world of letters for nearly a decade.⁶ A complex and at times even contradictory mixture of elements taken from French and German naturalism, European *fin-de-siècle* currents of thought, and local discourses on modern individual, society, and language, Japanese naturalism was a strong trend in the novel and an important (although less successful) school among poets in non-traditional forms (*shijin*), being instrumental in the birth of the influential “movement for poetry in contemporary vernacular language and free verse” (*kōgo jiyūshi undō*). Liberal-oriented Waseda University in Tokyo was one of the headquarters of both schools, so it comes as

on these trends comprise Noda Utarō, *Nihon tanbiha bungaku no tanjō*; Sakagami Hiroichi, *Hanshizenshugi no shisō to bungaku*; Itō Sei, *Nihon bundanishi*, vol. 14, *Hanshizenshugi no hitotachi*; and Ikuho Amano, *Decadent Literature in Twentieth-Century Japan: Spectacles of Idle Labor*. It should be noted that the eclectic incorporation of heterogeneous components of diverse origins is an element that the anti-naturalist movements in Japan shared with *shizenshugi*, as recently pointed out by Henshall’s renewed emphasis on the influence exerted by diverse regional versions of European “naturalism” on *shizenshugi*. Henshall, *In Search of Nature*, xii.

⁴ Suzuki Sadami has devoted a number of influential studies to the analysis of the tendencies that he labelled “Taishō life-centrism” (*Taishō seimeishugi*). As an introduction to this topic in English, see Suzuki Sadami, “Rewriting the Literary History of Japanese Modernism,” 45–48.

⁵ The concepts of “intellectual field,” “trajectory,” “symbolic profits,” and “position” that I use as descriptive tools in this paper are based on the works of Pierre Bourdieu. See, in particular, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*.

⁶ Henshall, *In Search of Nature*, 175–77.

no surprise that the penetration of naturalism among Japanese academia mainly extended from there. Sōma Gyofū was one of the main theorists and supporters of naturalism in Japan, as well as being a lecturer at this institution.

The reaction movement against naturalism criticised its aesthetic tenets, as well as its allegedly deterministic and self-negating vision of human and social life, by contrasting them with a rediscovery of the freedom and creativity of the “self” (*jiko, jiga*) and “life” (*jinsei, seimei, inochi, raifu, seikatsu*). These discourses are usually seen as reverberating in a number of cultural enterprises of the 1910s, including the authors connected to the art and literary journal *Shirakaba* (White birch, 1910–23), post-Impressionist writers and artists such as Takamura Kōtarō (1883–1956), and even early proponents of avant-garde poetry, such as Kanbara Tai (1898–1997) and Hirato Renkichi (1893–1922). These discourses peaked in the first half of the Taishō era and resulted in a new distribution of positions within the Japanese intellectual field. Many authors who had taken advantage of the propulsive force of naturalist trends distanced themselves from them, seeking to acquire their portion of the symbolic profits derived from the appropriation of the newer discursive resources.

Between 1912 and 1913, Sōma Gyofū also started moving away from naturalism to a form of post-naturalism where the “life-centric” elements were particularly strong. The Gyofū essays that are commonly associated with this process include “Geijutsu no seikatsuka” (The transformation of art into everyday life) and “Seimeiryoku no chokkan” (The intuition of life-force), which were originally published in *Waseda bungaku* (Waseda literature) in September 1912 and August 1913 respectively, as well as “Sei no kōshinkyoku” (The march of life) in *Bunshō sekai* (The world of texts) in November 1913.⁷ During this phase, Gyofū met Futurism, and in at least one of his essays of this period he tried to appropriate some of the discursive features of the Italian movement.

In this paper, I will focus on “Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei” (The central life in contemporary art),⁸ a short but particularly meaningful essay that appeared in the March 1913 issue of *Waseda bungaku*.

“Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei” is the most conspicuous evidence of Gyofū’s interest in Futurism. I will try to illustrate a series of intertextual correspondence

⁷ See Sugiura Shizuka, “Yamamura Bochō ron: *Seisanryōhari* no seimei, ningen,” 121–22. In this period, Gyofū was also influenced by the social anarchism of Ōsugi Sakae (1885–1923) and the individualist anarchism of Max Stirner, to the extent that some scholars believe that their influence had a role in his retirement in 1916. See Ishizuka Masahide, “Sōma Gyofū to Shutirunā jigaron.”

⁸ In “Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei,” the term *gendai* oscillates between the meanings of “modern” and “contemporary.” Its quasi-synonym *kindai* (modern age) appears only four times in this essay.

items between Futurist materials and Gyofū's article. In addition, I will highlight the fact that Gyofū's interpretations of Futurist ideas tended in some cases to assimilate them not only to his post-naturalist ideology, but also to his persisting naturalist background. In conclusion, this paper will hopefully help to illuminate the case of Gyofū's appropriation of Futurist discursive resources in the wider perspective of the reorientation of the *bundan* after the conclusion of the heyday of *shizenshugi*.

SŌMA GYOFŪ: A BRIEF PROFILE

Although he was one of the most influential literary theorists and critics of his generation, Sōma Gyofū is little known outside Japan. This is mainly because his career, while brilliant, was short. In 1916, at the height of his academic prestige and influence, he suddenly withdrew from the literary world in order to retire to his hometown in Niigata Prefecture. This event shocked many of his colleagues, as can be seen in a 1916 essay by his one-time friend, the poet Yamamura Bochō (1884–1924).⁹ Back in his rural hometown, Gyofū continued publishing extensively, but, as noted by Bochō himself, his influence on the younger generations fell dramatically. Among his most accomplished works of this period, his studies on the *tanka* poet Ryōkan (1758–1831), who was a native of the same province, are often mentioned.

Sōma Gyofū hailed from one of the most pre-eminent families in present day Itoigawa – a family that specialized in the craft of traditional religious architecture. In 1902, he entered Waseda, graduating from the department of English literature in 1906.¹⁰ A practitioner of *tanka*, he founded, along with Maeda Ringai (1864–1946) and Iwano Hōmei (1873–1920) (who were to become associated with naturalism in their own right), the magazine *Shirayuri* (White lily, 1903–7), which timidly opposed the “romantic” taste of Yosano Tekkan's Shinshisha (Society of New Poetry) that was in vogue at that time (Gyofū himself was a member of this Society from 1901 to 1903). After graduating, he joined the editorial board of the recently revived *Waseda bungaku*, which he helped to develop into the most influential journal of the naturalist camp. In 1907, he was one of the founders of Waseda Shisha (Waseda Poetry Society), a group of

⁹ Yamamura Bochō, “Hisō-naru genmetsusha: Sōma Gyofū-shi to jibun to” (The tragic disillusioned: Sōma Gyofū and me). Now in *Yamamura Bochō zenshū*, 4:359–66. Originally published in *Shinrisōshugi* (New idealism) in February and March 1916.

¹⁰ The biographical information on Gyofū is mainly taken from Katsuyama Kō, “Sōma Gyofū,” and Nakamura Kan, “Nenpū: Sōma Gyofū.” “Gyofū” was a nom de plume. His real name (昌治) is alternatively read as Shōji or Masaharu in the sources.

poets specialising in non-traditional forms (*shi*), who embraced free verse and contemporary vernacular spoken language. In so doing, they became one of the leading groups focusing on naturalist and impressionist poetry in Japan. Gyofū himself authored many poems, some of which are now considered among the most remarkable experiments in the new style.¹¹

A prolific literary columnist and cultural journalist, Gyofū had many connections within the literary world, especially with Waseda alumni and *Waseda bungaku* contributors. He was already a fully-fledged representative of the *bundan* when he crowned his promising career by entering Waseda as a lecturer (*kōshi*) in modern European literature in 1911. He authored several volumes of literary criticism (often collections of previously published essays), and some of his most influential books announced the new era of Taishō post-naturalism (their titles are quite self-explanatory): *Reimeiki no bungaku* (Literature of the daybreak era, 1912), *Shin bungaku shoho* (First steps of the new literature, 1913), *Jiga seikatsu to bungaku* (The life of the self and literature, 1914). He was also an accomplished translator of such authors as Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Gorky.

When it seemed that Gyofū’s position was to be crystallized in the realms of institutional consecration, he published *Kangenroku* (A record of coming back) in February 1916. It was a confessional essay, in which he announced his retreat to his hometown, to a “life as an ordinary person” (*bonpu no seikatsu*).¹² After that, he severed most of his contacts with the *bundan* and returned to Tokyo only once, for the funeral of his friend and mentor, Shimamura Hōgetsu (1871–1918).¹³

AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO MODERN LIFE’S ANGUISH

“Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei” was published in the March 1913 issue of *Waseda bungaku*, bearing the date 16 February.¹⁴ This article can be seen as a meditation on the anguished condition of modern human beings, as well as a

¹¹ In particular, the poem “Yaseinu” (Skinny dog, 1908) is considered to be one of the most important early examples of *kōgo jiyūshi*. Gyofū also gained fame as a lyricist for university and school anthems, including that of his own alma mater.

¹² Sōma Gyofū, “Kangenroku,” 346.

¹³ An interpretation of his retreat based on Erik Erikson’s social psychology is provided in Katō Jun, “Kindai Nihon ni okeru hanmon seinen no keifu: Sōma Gyofū no *Kangenroku* wo megutte.” A summary of the scholarly hypotheses on Gyofū’s retreat can be read, *ibid.*, 83–84.

¹⁴ It was later reprinted in *Jiga seikatsu to bungaku* (1914) and in *Gyofū ronshū* (Collected essays of Gyofū, 1915). A presentation of this article, together with the translation of some passages, is provided in Omuka Toshiharu, “Futurism in Japan, 1909–1920,” 254, and Thomas Hackner, *Dada und Futurismus in Japan: Die Rezeption der Historischen Avantgarden*, 42–44.

recognition of Italian Futurism as a well-directed attempt to provide an effective response to such a condition.

The article opens in tones that remind us of F. T. Marinetti's manifestos:

Science (*kagaku*) has changed the world radically. The ancient poets, by spurring their extraordinary imaginative force and borrowing the so-called mystical forces of the soul, used to dream a world outside of the world. The modern scientist has staged in the real world miracles even more mystical, even more amazing than these. He has disclosed a world inside of the world. He has brought the mysteries inside reality.¹⁵

The short and incisive sentence placed at the very beginning of the article describes the state of things in an apodictic way: the fact that science "has changed the world" is presented as an obvious matter of fact. In this passage, the material means of scientists are opposed to the "imaginative force" (*kūsōryoku*) of poets. Extolling the "miracles" (*kiseki*) of science (often contrasting them to a pre-scientific world) is a common trait in positivist discourses (to which naturalism was, to a certain degree, indebted) as well as of Futurist propaganda. A clearer "futurist" nuance is found in a following passage:

Even those sick people that could not be healed if not by waiting for the mystical force of Christ, now can be healed to some extent by the force of men like them. The voice of people is transmitted inside wires, and man can fly through the sky without wings. Look at the trains! Look at the steamships! Look at the streetcars! Look at the automobiles! All these things, what are they, if not miracles? What are they, if not mystical creations? Miracles! Miracles! This is an era where miracles by men that are not gods take place all over the world. Even more firmly, even more effectively than God, men themselves have opened up a new world.¹⁶

These lines somehow contain an anticipation of Hirato Renkichi's Futurist manifesto of 1921.

The gods' possessions have been conquered by the arms of humans, and what was once the gods' power generator has today become the city's motor, participating in the functioning of the humanity of millions.¹⁷

¹⁵ Sōma Gyofū, "Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei," 2. Unless otherwise specified, all English translations are mine.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ As translated in Miryam Sas, "Scent from the Future: The First English Translation of the 1921 Japanese Futurist Manifesto," 118.

Here, both Gyofū and Hirato articulate a mythology of man that is constructed as an analogy to that of God: if God is the one who used to deliver miracles, now it is man’s turn to perform them; if in the past it was Christ who had to be worshipped in order for humans to be saved, now it is the mundane power of human science. The logical consequence is that humankind, having acquired the traditional attributes of God, can now get rid of him and take his place.

In this passage from Gyofū’s essay, two points are of particular interest. First, the mention of Christ, an image coming from a religion that, despite its concurrent local development, was not native to Japan or East Asia. Without having any specific theological connotation, this mention of Christ appears as one of the tropes (naturalized via European literature and philosophy) available to a Japanese intellectual raised in a westernized school system and specialized in European literature, who, in this text, is posing as if he were writing for all humanity, not just for his own country or “culture.” As a “modern man” (*gendaijin*), Gyofū seems to perceive himself within a transnational and transcultural modernity, produced by the pervasive action of science and technology.

The second point is the mention of the telephone (“the voice of people is transmitted inside wires”) as an example of the triumphs of modern technology. The telephone was a relatively well-established feature in 1913.¹⁸ Gyofū’s essay does not reflect the intense debate that was taking place in Europe about the new possibilities offered by the invention of wireless telegraphy (and Futurism had an important part to play in it).¹⁹

Gyofū’s depiction of the modern world is characterized along the parameters of industrialization and urbanization; accordingly, the “metropolis” (*daitokai*), as a trope, plays a crucial role in it. Gyofū, who had never travelled abroad, undoubtedly had in mind the tumultuous development of Tokyo as a model. The “well-ordered city of old has been destroyed and has become the place for the hustle of modern scientific life”; “the countryside, which used to be the realm of the tranquil primitive life, has been destroyed” too, and now it lives in an “organic relationship with the city.” Humans and machines have now become one and are moving together.²⁰

¹⁸ As reported by Gregory Golley, the telephone was introduced in Japan in 1877. Gregory Golley, *When Our Eyes no Longer See: Realism, Science, and Ecology in Japanese Literary Modernism*, 45.

¹⁹ On this point, see John J. White, *Literary Futurism: Aspects of the First Avant Garde*, 143–214, and Timothy C. Campbell, *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi*.

²⁰ Sōma, “Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei,” 3.

Wars, revolutions, social upheavals of various meanings, soot, trains, streetcars, automobiles, gatherings, railway noises, telephones, airplanes, sirens, competition among adverts, parliaments, schools, newspapers, restaurants, theatres – the whole world has begun to throb (*yakudō shidashita*) having the metropolis as its centre. Thus, numberless modern and liberated subjects (*jiga*) rush around this ebullient world. These are the modern times (*gendai*).²¹

In these lines, characterized by the rhetorical device of *accumulatio* (a figure common not only to the impressionist poetry that Gyofū himself had practised, but also – to a more radical degree – to the Futurist words-in-freedom), Gyofū provides a poignant depiction of the material and psychological impact that the new urban and industrial life was having on the condition of modern subjectivities. Gyofū's depiction shares many traits with influential representations of modernity, such as those investigated by Marshall Berman in his classic *All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (1982): the centrality of the urban environment, the pervasiveness of technology, feelings of interconnectedness, acceleration and speed, sentiments of existential uncertainty or elation, and the overwhelming complexity of new sensorial perceptions.

It also strongly emphasises the dynamic nature of modern life. For Gyofū, the whole world has become a “whirlwind” (*uzu*), which is also an image that punctuates Berman's study. In particular, the term *yakudō*, which appears no less than twenty-three times in this article,²² was used at that time as a buzzword to translate the Bergsonian concept of *élan*.²³ Futurism too had some Bergsonian roots,²⁴ and stressed the dynamism of modern society accelerated by mechanical speed, deriving from it a number of epistemological conclusions that were neatly articulated in their manifestos.

In fact, Gyofū's phantasmagoria of modern life shares many points with the introductory parts of the “Destruction of Syntax – Untrammelled Imagination – Words-in-Freedom” manifesto, which Marinetti was to sign a few months later, on 11 May 1913:

²¹ Ibid., 3–4.

²² In one case, Gyofū uses the expression *seimei yakudō* (*élan vital*). In addition, *hiyaku*, a near-equivalent to *yakudō*, appears eight times in the text.

²³ On the reception of Bergson in Meiji-Taishō Japan, see Gunji Yoshio, ed., *Berukuson shoshi: Nihon ni okeru kenkyū no tenkai*, 13–32. It may also be useful to compare the modalities in which Bergson's thought was received and adapted by three different authors of the post-naturalist generation: Kanbara Tai (Omuka Toshiharu, *Taishōki shinkōbijutsu undō no kenkyū*, 330–44), Yamamura Bochō (Sugiura, “Yamamura Bochō ron,” 120–32), and Inagaki Taruho (Takahashi Yasuo, “Taruho to miraiha no butai to shite no *Shinseinen*,” 376–82).

Futurism is based on that complete renewal of human sensibility which has taken place since the great scientific discoveries. Those who to-day use telegraphs, telephones, gramophones, cycles, motor-cycles, motor-cars, transatlantics, dirigibles, aeroplanes, kinematographs, big daily papers (synthesis of the world’s day) do not realise that these different means of communication, of transit, and of information exercise a very decisive influence on their *psyche*.²⁵

This idea of a “renewal of human sensibility” had already been introduced in the “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters” (11 April 1910), whose subscribers proclaimed themselves to be “the primitives of a new sensitiveness, multiplied hundredfold.”²⁶ Gyofū shares with Futurism, and with many other authors reflecting on modernity, an awareness of the irreversible anthropological transformation that separates the modern technological *gendaijin* from pre-modern humanity (*kako no ningen, mukashi no hito*). In Gyofū’s case too, modernity seems to be located in a combination of material transformations (triggered, in Gyofū’s essay, by technology, science, and their unacknowledged motor, capitalism) as well as the psychological and physiological reactions of human subjects, who are seen as entities that pre-exist modern environments and are caught within them in spite of themselves.

In fact, Gyofū is less optimistic than his Italian counterparts regarding the cognitive and psychological toll that this hyperkinetic modern world imposes on its human inhabitants, and expresses the need to find a philosophical salvation from all the existential uncertainty it causes:

Anxiety, chaos, confusion, turmoil, disturbance, unrest (*fuan, konton, zattō, sōjō, kakuran, dōyō*) – this is the modern world (*gendai no sekai*). There is neither rest nor comfort. Everything moves with no rest. Everything is in turmoil. Anxiety and unrest are the two most evident characteristics of modern life (*gendai seikatsu*). From this anxiety, from this unrest, by what, and in what way will we save ourselves? Again, where will we go in order to escape from this condition?²⁷

²⁴ See, on this point: Giovanni Lista, “Le Futurisme marinettien,” 28–32; Günter Berghaus, *Futurism and Politics: Between Anarchist Rebellion and Fascist Reaction, 1909–1944*, 25, and Mark Antliff, “The Fourth Dimension and Futurism: A Politicized Space.”

²⁵ F. T. Marinetti, “Wireless Imagination and Words at Liberty.” Italics in the original.

²⁶ Umberto Boccioni et al., “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters,” 33. Text featured in the catalogue of the “Exhibition of Works by the Italian Futurist Painters,” held at the Sackville Gallery in London from 1 to 31 March 1912. This manifesto is commonly known in Italian as “La pittura futurista: Manifesto tecnico.” A partial Japanese translation of this manifesto (including this sentence) had been published in *Bijutsu shinpō* (Art journal) in May 1912 (now available in *Kaigai shinkō geijutsuron sōsho: Shinbun zasshi hen*, 1:12–15).

²⁷ Sōma, “Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei,” 6.

Capitalizing on his knowledge of world literature, Gyofū provides a brief survey of the solutions and models proposed by writers and philosophers of the recent past; many of them were part of the Japanese post-naturalist canon. Gyofū himself was a long-time reader of a number of these writers, and even a translator.²⁸ Thus, he goes on to briefly illustrate the considerations on modernity (and/or its antidotes) that appear in the works of Ivan Turgenev, Maxim Gorky, Edward Carpenter, Henry David Thoreau, Friedrich Nietzsche, Leo Tolstoy, Leonid Andreyev, and Henrik Ibsen.²⁹ In the end, however, he judges that all of them are incapable of providing a suitable answer to the condition of modern subjectivities. In particular, he finds those doctrines that curse modern civilization and urge a return to a “primitive” (that is, “natural” and pre-industrial) condition absolutely unsatisfying. Escaping from this world like the author of *Walden* “is not something that we can do. Nor is it something we desire to do.”³⁰

In Gyofū’s view, going back to a mystified primitiveness is not allowed; the solution must be found in this very world. “If we desert this modern world of today, where on earth are we supposed to live?” he asks.³¹ According to him, the only solution is in accepting and enjoying modern life in all its reality, plenitude, and creative force, and in so doing, refusing inactivity, passivity, and contemplation. In this, Gyofū exalts activism, embraces a vitalist attitude, and rejects any romanticizing of tradition and past eras: a trait that can be dubbed, by borrowing an expression from the Futurists, as an anti-*passéist* stance.

It is the sense of fulfilment (*jūjitsukan*) of our life as a whole. It is the vital force (*seimeiryoku*) that must guide as a whole our life of anxiety and agitation. It is the full global conscience to enjoy our life assertively. It is the sense of stability of our life as a whole and the sense of a creative effort eternally new.³²

These very anxieties, these perplexities, these sufferings are the labour that will bring before long the dawn of a new life. There is no need to borrow any new force beside these. In these very perplexities, in this very confusion, the great force of

²⁸ A selection of the translations that Gyofū published in book format before his retirement comprises Turgenev’s *On the Eve* (as *Sono zen’ya*, 1908), *Fathers and Sons* (as *Chichi to ko*, 1909), *Home of the Gentry* (as *Kizoku no ie*, 1910), and *Virgin Soil* (as *Shojochi*, 1914); Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* (1913) and *Resurrection* (as *Fukkatsu*, with Sōma Taizō, 1915); Andreyev’s *The Seven Who Were Hanged* (as *Shichi shikeishū monogatari*, 1913); and a selection of Gorky’s works (*Gōrikishū*, 1909).

²⁹ In his discussion, he quotes passages from *Home of the Gentry*, Gorky’s *Chelkash*, and mentions the Nietzschean doctrine of the *Übermensch*.

³⁰ Sōma, “Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei,” 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

³² *Ibid.*, 8.

the new life pulsates (*shin seikatsuryoku ga yakudō shite iru*). There is no need to resort to divine or demonic supernatural forces.³³ Modernity (*gendai*) is a world that must be really built by man. Nay, a world that must be built only by man.³⁴

In Gyofū’s thought, one can find a peculiar coexistence of anti-metaphysical and anti-idealistic positivism, a “religion of man,” and newer “philosophies of life” deriving from Bergsonism and from Rudolph Eucken’s practical activism (in this article, Gyofū honours the German Nobel laureate in 1908 with the epithet “academic prophet of the modern times”). Speaking of the latter, the period between 1912 and 1916 witnessed a surge of translations and essays on Eucken in Japan.³⁵ The very concept of “central life” (*chūshin seimei*), which appears in the title of Gyofū’s article, can be found for instance in the similar title of the first chapter, “Gendai shichō no chūshin seimei” (Central life in contemporary thought), of Inage Sofū’s³⁶ book *Oiken no tetsugaku* (The philosophy of Eucken, October 1913). In this chapter, the expression *chūshinteki seimei* is used as a synonym of *zentaiteki seimei* (total life) and as an antonym of *bubunteki seimei* (partial life) and *hisōteki seimei* (superficial life), and stands for an attitude of full acceptance and development of human life in all its manifestations.³⁷

³³ Here Gyofū rephrases a four-character idiom (*yojijukugo*), *shinkōkifu* (uncanny workmanship), literally meaning “a god’s craft, a demon’s axe.”

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁵ Among the translations, not necessarily from the German original: *Daishisōka no jinseikan* (*Die Lebensanschauungen der grossen Denker*), trans. Abe Yoshishige (1912); *Gojin wa nao Kirisutokyōto tariuru ka* (*Können wir noch Christen sein?*), trans. Nukaga Kanosuke (1912); *Shinrisōshugi no tetsugaku* (*Der Kampf um einen geistigen Lebensinhalt*), trans. Hatano Sei’ichi and Miyamoto Wakichi (1913); *Gendai shūkyō tetsugaku no shuyō mondai* (from the English edition, *Christianity and the New Idealism*), trans. Katō Naoshi (1913); *Shizenshugi ka risōshugi ka* (*Naturalismus oder Idealismus?* [1909 Nobel lecture]), trans. Kanokogi Kazunobu (1914); *Shūkyō noshintai* (*Der Wahrheitsgehalt der Religion*), trans. Minami Hajime (1914); *Gendai shisō to rinri mondai* (from the English, *Ethics and Modern Thought*), trans. Imaoka Shin’ichirō (1914); *Jinsei no igi to kachi* (*Der Sinn und Wert des Lebens*), trans. Minami Hajime (1914). Among the book-length studies: Minami Hajime, *Oiken no tetsugaku* (The philosophy of Eucken, 1914); Date Gen’ichirō, ed., *Oiken* (1914); Furuya Ei’ichi, *Oiken tetsugaku no hinan* (Criticism of Eucken’s philosophy, 1914); Satō Tadashi, *Oiken no shūkyō shisō* (Eucken’s religious thought, 1914); Nakajima Manjirō, *Oiken no tetsugaku* (1914); Inage Sofū, *Oiken to gendai shichō* (Eucken and the contemporary currents of thought, 1915); Abe Yoshishige, *Oiken* (1915); Minami Hajime, *Oiken to jidai shisō* (Eucken and the thought of the day, 1916). Even one of the essays in Natsume Sōseki’s *Kongōsō* (1915) carries the title *Oiken no seishin seikatsu* (Spiritual life in Eucken). Many of these books were reprinted several times.

³⁶ Inage (1887–1946) graduated from Waseda, studied abroad in Germany and specialized in education studies. He also served as a professor of this discipline at his alma mater. He was a prolific author of essays on the latest trends of European and North American thought.

³⁷ Inage Sofū, *Oiken no tetsugaku*, 26. See also Sugiura, “Yamamura Bochō ron,” 121–22.

Both Gyofū and Inage were locally articulating, in their respective sub-fields of literary discourse and philosophical writing, the transnational discourses of vitalism and life-centrism.

THE “CENTRAL LIFE” IN ART

As a conclusion to his analysis of modern life, Gyofū theorizes and praises the search for a “religion of force” (*chikara no shūkyō*) able to manifest itself through human activity. Meditation and contemplation of art and nature, as conceived in the traditional way, cannot but give us just a momentary release from the anguishes of modern life. Contemporary art, being too idealistic and static, is not able to express a true “religion of force” and adapt itself to the ever-changing world of modern man and science. We need, he concludes, a new art.

Talking negatively about contemporary artists, Gyofū defines in these terms what they are searching for:

The stillness of meditation, the ecstasy (*ekusutashī*) of contemplation that they glorify (*shōbi suru*)...³⁸

This sentence is quite similar to a passage from Marinetti’s first manifesto of Futurism (1909) and from its Japanese translation, with which Gyofū was most likely acquainted, by Hasegawa Tenkei:

3. Literature has hitherto glorified thoughtful immobility, ecstasy and sleep;³⁹

エクスタシー

三、従来、文学は沈思の無動、享悦、睡眠を賞美した。⁴⁰

³⁸ Sōma, “Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei,” 12.

³⁹ Marinetti, “Initial Manifesto,” 3.

⁴⁰ Hasegawa Tenkei, “Shōraiha no kaiga tenrankai” (The exhibition of Futurist painting), *Bunshō sekai* (June 1912). Reprinted in *Kaigai shinkō geijutsuron sōsho: Shinbun zasshi hen*, 1:17–23. In this paper, *kanji* are given in their modern form, while I keep the historical orthography for the *kana* syllabary. *Furigana* is not reproduced unless it is particularly meaningful. Hasegawa (1876–1940) was one of the most influential naturalist critics of that time. In this article, Hasegawa, who had visited the Futurist exhibition held in London in March 1912, provided a translation of the eleven articles of the text of Marinetti’s initial manifesto that was printed in the catalogue. It was the second Japanese translation of this manifesto, coming after the one from German provided by Mori Ōgai in 1909. For a short presentation of Hasegawa’s article, see Ōtani Shōgo, “Itaria miraiha no shōkai to Nihon kindai yōga,” 109–10, and Omuka, “Futurism in Japan,” 249.

The lexical and topical correspondence between these passages does not seem to be coincidental. Two terms are identical: *ekusutashī* (ecstasy) and *shōbi suru* (to glorify). In addition, the two expressions *meisō no seijaku* (stillness of meditation) in Gyofū’s text and *chinshi no mudō* (immobility of deep thought) in Hasegawa’s translation appear to mirror one another.

Other similarities to Futurist statements can be found in two passages in which Gyofū affirms that the new art he wishes for must be an art for life, not “for libraries and museums”:

Ideas and art made for libraries and museums (*raiburarī ya myūjiyamu no tame*) are of no use to us busy people of today.⁴¹

We want an art that is not for libraries and museums (*toshokan ya bijutsukan no tame*), but that must be the force of the dynamic modern life itself.⁴²

These passages strongly echo, albeit in a far less radical way, the tenth article of Marinetti’s initial manifesto:

We wish to destroy the museums, the libraries...⁴³

Interestingly, in the first excerpt, Gyofū oddly spells the two words for “library” and “museum” in the *katakana* syllabary used for foreign loanwords: *raiburarī* and *myūjiyamu*. This may suggest that he adopted the opposition to this couple directly from some English material on Futurism, or, at least, that the two concepts were shaped in his narrative with reference to a “western” and exotic imaginary. Hasegawa’s translation of Marinetti’s manifesto presents instead the two corresponding Japanese words *toshokan* (library) and *hakubutsukan* (museum), which partly return in Gyofū’s second passage. This one is particularly marked by the fusion of Futurist and Bergsonian motifs, as signalled by the image of “dynamic modern life” (*yakudō-seru gendai seikatsu*).

Given these appeals to activist and iconoclast attitudes, it is almost logical for Gyofū to arrive at, by the end of his article, a direct homage to the Italian Futurists. He recognizes that, when it comes to the world of fine arts, Italian Futurism is the sole movement that comes close to the creation of an “art of force” (*chikara no geijutsu*) able to cope with the dynamic nature of the modern world, an art that

⁴¹ Sōma, “Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei,” 12–13.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴³ Marinetti, “Initial Manifesto,” 4.

must be the “musical accompaniment” for the never-ending dance of the world: “the waltz, the polka of our dancing life.”⁴⁴

Out of such a feeling, we (*watashitachi*) would like to praise that violent Futurist movement (*Fyūchurizumu no undō*) of the young Italians. We do not care about things such as the so-called artistic value of their works. Don’t they actually clamour for the destruction of museums and libraries? They are not workers who consider producing their works as the most important thing in their lives. They are revolutionaries of sensibility (*kibun no kakumeisha*). They are the active supporters of the new life. The élan of modern life (*gendai seikatsu no yakudō*) waves with them. The breath of modern life is their own breath.

They have dismissed all the old feelings (*ninjō*), all the old social obligations (*giri*). They strive to proceed further, until the point when, with this new world created by science, we will be able to live a god’s life. It is said that someone criticized them by saying that “we can’t conceal the fact that this school, having close relations with political and social ideas, sooner or later will transform itself into a political party.” But this won’t harm in the least their authoritativeness as artists. On the contrary, in this very attitude we find the germs of the new “art of force” (*chikara no geijutsu*) that we are really asking for.⁴⁵

Overcoming the system of values based on the traditional opposition between *ninjō* (human feelings) and *giri* (social obligations) is usually characterized as one of the main ideological tenets of the Japanese naturalist movement.⁴⁶ In this passage from Gyofū’s essay, one can notice an unconscious fusion of the ideas of the Italian movement with the social stance adopted by Japanese naturalists. Another interesting point is the pluralization of the authorial voice (*watashitachi*, “we”), a mystifying manifesto-like trait that this passage shares with Marinetti’s self-representation of his movement (Marinetti’s “Nous” or “Noi,” especially in his first manifesto, was a rhetorical strategy not fully substantiated by the existence of real companions).

⁴⁴ Sōma, “Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei,” 13. The emphasis on such images of dance probably comes from a Bergsonian background too. On the role of dance and performing arts in the imaginary of the Japanese avant-garde scene, see Mizusawa Tsutomu, “The Artists Start to Dance: The Changing Image of the Body in Art of the Taishō Period,” 15–24.

⁴⁵ Sōma, “Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei,” 14, my underlining.

⁴⁶ An example taken from Gyofū’s *Jiga seikatsu to bungaku* (1914): speaking of *Tanisoko* (The bottom of the valley, 1913), a “popular novel” (*tsūzoku shōsetsu*) by Satō Kōroku (1874–1949), Gyofū says that the only “original point” in that novel is the “opposition to the old conventional morals (*kyū dōtoku*). Moreover, such opposition has been thoroughly depicted as an opposition with no compromise.” Quoted in Tanizawa Ei’ichi, “Honzuki hitozuki (168): Atarashii tsūzoku shōsetsu,” 168.

What were the sources of Gyofū’s knowledge of Futurism? According to the scholarship on this subject, secondary sources on Futurism available in Japanese were not numerous at the beginning of 1913.⁴⁷ The underlined part in the passage quoted above is clearly indebted to Camille Mauclair’s article “Le Futurisme et la jeune Italie” (Futurism and young Italy). Marinetti used to disseminate it as a propaganda leaflet, in which it was presented as an article originally published in the French newspaper *La Dépêche de Toulouse* on 30 October 1911. The art critic and painter Kimura Shōhachi (1893–1958) published a complete Japanese translation of Mauclair’s article, entitled “Miraiha to wakaki Itari” (Futurism and young Italy), in the October 1912 issue of the magazine *Gendai no yōga* (Contemporary western-style painting).⁴⁸ Kimura again presented some excerpts of this translation in the article “Miraiha no koto” (On Futurism), published in the *Yomiuri shinbun* newspaper on February 15, 16, and 18, 1913.

Of the underlined part presented above, the sentence between quotation marks is taken *verbatim* from Kimura’s translation,⁴⁹ while the rest is a rephrasing of another passage from the same translation. Let us compare Gyofū’s text to this passage.

Gyofū:

They have dismissed all the old feelings (*ninjō*), all the old social obligations (*giri*). They strive to proceed further, until the point when, with this new world created by science, we will be able to live a god’s life.

⁴⁷ On the reception of Futurism in Japan in the 1910s, see Ōtani, “Itaria miraiha no shōkai”; Omuka, “Futurism in Japan”; Hackner, *Dada und Futurismus in Japan*, 38–50; and Nishino Yoshiaki, “F. T. Marinetti and Japan the Futurist.” Apart from the translation of the first manifesto published by Mori Ōgai in 1909, the presentation of Futurism in Japan began in 1912, as a result of the exhibitions held by the movement in Paris and London. Accordingly, the first articles on Futurism mainly appeared in art magazines, or emphasized the pictorial aspects of the movement. The “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters,” cited above, was partially translated and quoted (alternatively from its French or English versions) in a number of such articles.

⁴⁸ Now in *Kaigai shinkō geijutsuron sōsho: Shinbun zasshi hen*, 1:34–38. Kimura and his friends of the Fusain painterly coterie (1912–13) reportedly received the original article from Marinetti himself. For more details about this episode, see Tanaka Atsushi, *Taiyō to “Jintan”: 1912-nen no jigazōgun, soshite Ajia no naka no “Jintan,”* 176–88; and Nishino Yoshiaki, “Avangyarudo shi shi kō (10): Kimura Shōhachi no miraiha” = “A/Z on Avant-garde magazines (10): Futurism of Shohachi Kimura.”

⁴⁹ The French original, reproduced in Giovanni Lista, ed., *Futurisme: manifestes, proclamations, documents*, 413–15, reads: “Il n’en est pas moins vrai que le futurisme est en passe de constituer, en se transformant, un parti, car il s’annexe des idées politiques et sociales...” [It is not less true that Futurism is going to constitute, by transforming itself, a party, since it incorporates some political and social ideas].

Kimura's "Miraiha no koto," with the passage directly translated from Mauclair between quotation marks:

By breaking the old morals (*kyū dōtoku*), they wish to arrive at their so-called ideal society, where "people, who do not concern themselves with such things as social obligations (*giri*) and human feelings (*ninjō*), thanks to the method and the tools of science, will live a god's life."⁵⁰

"Miraiha no koto" was published in three parts. It is worth noting that the first part, from which the passage above is taken, was published the day before Gyofū signed "Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei." I suggest that he took direct inspiration from reading Kimura's article.⁵¹

Immediately after his praises for Italian Futurism, Gyofū quotes in his essay some excerpts (articles 7, 8, and 11) of the "Initial Manifesto of Futurism." Gyofū provides them in the Japanese rendition published by Hasegawa Tenkei in June 1912.⁵²

7. There is no more beauty except in strife. No masterpiece without aggressiveness. Poetry must be a violent onslaught upon the unknown forces, to command them to bow before man.

⁵⁰ Reprinted in *Kaigai shinkō geijutsuron sōsho: Shinbun zasshi hen*, 1:108. The French original reads: "l'homme, libre de passions et de devoirs, fort des moyens et des outillages de la mécanique future, mènera une existence de dieu" [man, freed from passions and duties, thanks to the means and the tools of future mechanics, will live a god's existence] in Lista, ed., *Futurisme*, 414. This characterization somehow stuck in the Japanese representation of Futurism. In a passage from *Shingejutsu* (The new art), a book edited by Yoshino Sakuzō published in 1916 in a popular series devoted to the latest foreign trends in art, one can still read: "And so their ideal state is a country with a particular social system organized on the basis of science. Among the people living in this society, there will no longer be such things as the so-called social obligations (*giri*) and human feelings (*ninjō*), and people, by using the scientific method and scientific tools, will just work at manifesting everyone their own vital instinct (*seikatsu honnō*) and expanding their life-will (*seikatsu ishi*)." Reprinted in *Kaigai shinkō geijutsuron sōsho: Kanpon hen*, 2:380.

⁵¹ It is unlikely that Gyofū had read its earlier version in the less visible *Gendai no yōga*, a magazine that had a limited circulation.

⁵² Besides the aforementioned article by Hasegawa, another source on Futurism for Gyofū could have been Takamura Kōtarō's "Miraiha no zekkyō" (The scream of the Futurists), an article published in the *Yomiuri shinbun* on 5 March 1912, which was also mentioned in Hasegawa's report. This can be suggested by the repetition of the verb *sakebu* (to scream, written with the same Chinese character for *kyō* in *zekkyō*) to introduce, in Gyofū's essay, direct quotations from the Futurist manifesto. These lexical choices seem to suggest to the Japanese contemporary reader that the "scream" was the quintessential means of expression adopted by the Futurists.

8. We stand upon the extreme promontory of the centuries!... Why should we look behind us, when we have to break in the mysterious portals of the Impossible?... Already we live in the absolute, since we have already created speed, eternal and ever-present.

...

11. We shall sing of the great crowds in the excitement of labour, pleasure or rebellion; of the multi-coloured and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capital cities; of the nocturnal vibration of arsenals and workshops beneath their violent electric moons; of the greedy stations swallowing smoking snakes; of factories suspended from the clouds by their strings of smoke; of bridges leaping like gymnasts over the diabolical cutlery of sunbathed rivers; of adventurous liners scenting the horizon; of broad-chested locomotives prancing on the rails ... and of the gliding flight of aeroplanes, the sound of whose screw is like the flapping of flags and the applause of an enthusiastic crowd.⁵³

Article 11 shares many themes and the rhetorical device of accumulation with Gyofū’s depiction of modern urban life. This is another example of the convergence between Gyofū’s post-naturalism and Futurist discourse.

CONCLUSION

The textual evidence presented in this paper directly and indirectly suggests that Gyofū had a relatively good knowledge of Japanese secondary literature on some prominent Futurist texts. It seems that Gyofū did not conduct original research on the Italian movement, nor did he introduce new information or sources to the Japanese reader. The originality of his contribution to the Japanese debate on Futurism resides in the insertion of Futurist motifs into the wider discourse on post-naturalism and its ability to address the modern condition. In this way, Futurism ceased to be seen as just a distant and bizarre European phenomenon, and began to be interpreted as something also applicable to Japan.

Gyofū offers a representation of the Italian Futurists that is at the same time tamed and slightly distorted in order to provide a better match with his naturalist background and with his recently espoused vitalist credo. The Futurists are seen as worshippers of science, enemies of social conservatism and prophets of the creative force of the individual: all these traits are surely detectable in their own self-representation, as articulated in their main manifestos, but are

⁵³ Marinetti, “Initial Manifesto,” 3–4.

particularly emphasized in Gyofū's scarcely nuanced depiction. At the same time, he completely obliterates those aspects of the Italian movement that, if not adequately glossed, could appear far from palatable to his liberal and progressive background: the exaltation of war as the "only health giver of the world," the "contempt for woman,"⁵⁴ the strong nationalism, the exaggerated rhetoric of violence and destruction.

What is even more ambiguous in Gyofū's endorsement of Futurism is the fact that he deliberately puts aside the question of the aesthetic value of their works, be it their paintings or the Futurist poems and novels that were mostly unknown in Japan in 1913 ("We do not care about things such as the so-called artistic value of their works," he declares). His refusal to express an aesthetic judgment does not necessarily mean that he abdicated from his role as a literary *critic*: on the contrary, it seems that Gyofū had grasped the meta-aesthetic dimension of the Futurist agenda, and thus he concentrated his evaluation of the movement on its discursive attitude. In conformity with its post-*l'art pour l'art* platform, Futurism contended that modern life itself was more important than art, and that human actions and activities – especially if brave, provocative, and even violent and unjust – had their own aesthetic value. The product of art was not more important than the act of producing it, and one of the aims of Futurism was, as for Gyofū, the "transformation of art into life" (*geijutsu no seikatsuka*). In its emphasis on life and on its manifold creative power, Futurism could appeal to Japanese post-naturalists like Gyofū, who had recently proclaimed the reinstatement of the individual and of life after an era of (to use Ishikawa Takuboku's famous definition) generational "blockade" (*heisoku*). Therefore, more than the Futurists' works (their subjects, their techniques) it was their procedural paratexts (manifestos, declarations of intents, attitudes, demonstrative actions, etc.) that most strikingly impressed those members of the Japanese cultural world who were involved in overcoming naturalist poetics.⁵⁵

In fact, in Gyofū's case, what matters most to him is the Futurists' "attitude" (*taido*), or, to be more precise, the way he represents their attitude through the mediation of his own philosophical convictions. Therefore, at the end of his essay, he explicitly declares that his sympathy towards the Italian movement is more

⁵⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁵ In the case of painting in the "Western style" (*yōga*), we must remember that in the early 1910s, a large part of the Japanese scene was still engrossed in the debate on the post-Impressionist reaction to Realism and Impressionism, and that only a relatively small number of artists and critics were *au courant* with, let alone interested in, the wider implications of Cubism and Futurism. See, on this point, Asano Tōru, "Rittaiha, miraiha to Taishōki no kaiga," and Iseki Masaaki, *Miraiha: Itaria, Roshia, Nihon*, 387–439.

on the grounds of “mood” (*kibun*) than of a critical evaluation of their artistic achievements: “what I praise is just their ... ardent revolutionary mood ... their active and virile attitude towards modern life.”⁵⁶

Even if partially marked by an exploitative use for argument’s sake, Gyofū’s sympathy towards the Italian movement was nevertheless an endorsement of great prestige, and somehow it can be seen, to adopt Marinetti’s militaristic analogies, as one of the first “victories” scored by Futurism in “Japan, the country of *bushidō*.”⁵⁷

It seems to me that it would be worthwhile to reread Gyofū’s writings from this period in order to detect other Futurist borrowings in his rhetorical strategies. On a larger scale, it is important to verify to what extent such acts of discursive appropriation were common among the Japanese intellectuals who articulated the transition from naturalism to post-naturalism, and how these borrowings coexisted, as Gyofū’s case seems to suggest, with the (at times even involuntary or unconscious) survival of naturalist motifs in their works.

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⁵⁶ Sōma, “Gendai geijutsu no chūshin seimei,” 15.

⁵⁷ Marinetti’s enthusiastic words from a 1912 letter to Uryū Yōjirō, allegedly quoted or paraphrased in Japanese in an article by Kimura Shōhachi in *Gendai no yōga* (October 1912). Uryū was a younger member of Fusain who had contacted Marinetti in order to acquire more information on the Futurist exhibitions held in Paris and London. See Tanaka, *Taiyō to “Jintan,”* 176–77. Their original correspondence, if it has survived, is yet to be located.

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