

Dynamite Against the *Bundan* Fantasies of Empowerment and Violence in the Writings of Yamamura Bochō

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Abstract This study investigates the strategies of empowerment within the literary field that were adopted by Yamamura Bochō (1884-1924), an author of *shi* (poetry in non-traditional forms) who ephemerally came to the fore of the Japanese literary scene (*bundan*) with the collection *Seisanryōhari* (The Holy Prism), published in 1915. It is focused on Bochō's articulation of a fantasy of empowerment by destruction and regeneration: such tropes are similar to the rhetorical strategies adopted by the European avant-garde movements, and, in evoking such categories as 'terrorism' or 'anarchism', they border the domains of early 20th century political discourse. These tropes are analyzed focusing on a genealogical perspective that involves both intertextual and historical research. It is argued that the rhetoric of antagonism and destruction can be a relevant focus in order to appreciate the modalities of construction of a modernist discourse from both a Japanese and comparative perspective.

Summary 1. Introduction. — 2. Yamamura Bochō. — 3. The Rhetoric of Antagonism in Bochō's Writings. — 4. *Pereat mundus...* Dynamite as a Means to Artistic Self-assertion. — 5. Adding a Reactionary Flavour: Against the Blind Populace. — 6. Conclusion. — 7. Appendix. *Arguments, et clairon, et coups de poing*: A Dubious Futurist Genealogy.

Petroleum and dynamite do not belong exclusively to politics; someday they will liberate us from the tyranny of the glories of our artistic past. (Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 1912)¹

1 Introduction

The Japanese poet Yamamura Bochō (1884-1924) is mainly known as the author of *Seisanryōhari* (The Holy Prism, December 1915), a collection of *shi* (poetry in non-traditional forms) that is considered to have been a solitary forerunner of the avant-garde and modernist movements of the Shōwa period (1926-1989) due to its defiant formal experiments.² Slated

1 Quoted in E.-J.B. 1912. Unless otherwise specified, all translations from French and Japanese are my own.

2 No monographic studies on Bochō are available in English. Translations of his poetry are quite dispersed; among them, three poems are presented in Rimer, Gessel 2005, pp. 298-299. General presentations of his life and work can be found in Wilson, Atsumi 1972; Keene 1999, pp. 281-283.

by some contemporary critics, such as Kawaji Ryūkō (1888-1959), and only half-heartedly defended even by the members of Bochō's literary coterie, such as Murō Saisei (1889-1962), *Seisanryōhari* went generally ignored by the majority of the *bundan* (Japanese literary establishment), marking the failure of Bochō's self-styled «prismist» (*purizumisuto*) period of formal and linguistic experiments in *shi*.

A belated endorsement of *Seisanryōhari* came from Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886-1942), one of the most important Japanese poets of his generation. In an article titled «Nihon ni okeru miraiha no shi to sono kaisetsu» (Poetry of the Japanese Futurist School and Its Explanation), published in the magazine *Kanjō* (Sentiment) in November 1916 (now in KSGS-SZ, vol. 2, pp. 24-29), Sakutarō introduced «futurism» (*miraiha*) as a critical category viable in the analysis of Bochō's poetry. In Sakutarō's words, *Seisanryōhari* was an instance of the «art of the most extreme Symbolism», which he defined as «futurism». Even though Sakutarō defined *Seisanryōhari* as a piece of Japanese futurism, his idea of futurism probably did not correspond to what 'futurism' meant in Italy or France (Omuka 2000, pp. 253-254). However, he was probably right in establishing a link of some sort between Bochō's experiments and the works of the European avant-gardes, which were profusely presented in Japan at the time Bochō was writing the poems that were included in *Seisanryōhari*.

Such connections with the discourses on/of European avant-garde have been routinely discussed or even just mentioned by Japanese scholars, meaning Bochō's 'avant-garde' production has been studied more than the later humanistic poetry to which he devoted himself after the failure of his prismist project. However, despite the evocative label of «futurist» poet, it must be remembered that, like the anarchist shooters and bombers who had pursued in Europe the so-called 'propaganda by the deed' in the preceding decades, Bochō fundamentally 'acted alone'. As noted by commentators, the very impression that his «prismism» (*purizumizumu*)³ was an actual school or avant-garde group with a well-defined and coherent aesthetic was part of the largely fictional narrative of empowerment that he elaborated during his 'prismist period' (1913-1916).⁴

3 In some of his writings around 1915, Bochō defines himself as a «prismist» (*purizumisuto*) or a «saint-prismist» (*seipurizumisuto*). Both words seem to derive from an *a posteriori* rationalization of the poetic method implemented in *Seisanryōhari*. They also contain suggestions from the discourse of artistic avant-garde, such as the circulation of similar European labels in '-ism' (e.g., *kyūbizumu*, *fyūchurizumu*, etc.). Murō Saisei also attached the prismist label to Bochō in his preface to *Seisanryōhari*. However, behind it, there was no organized school. Bochō did have some disciples, but none of those who gathered around his *dōjin zasshi* (coterie magazines) showed any specific interest in following him in his formal experiments. I have discussed these aspects in Zanotti 2011.

4 Following a general consensus among Japanese scholars, I define the 'prismist period' (or *Seisanryōhari jidai*) as the period between May 1913 - release of *Sannin no otome* (Three

In building up this narrative, Bochō's writings did have a series of elements in common with the discourses on/of the European avant-garde groups. In this paper, leaving aside Bochō's poetry, I will try to locate these elements in his prose writings, where his self-representation as an 'avant-garde' writer is more clearly articulated. I will focus in particular on Bochō's usage of expressions of violence and aggression against the literary establishment. In their articulation of a fantasy of empowerment by destruction and regeneration, such tropes are in many ways similar to the rhetorical strategies adopted by Italian Futurists in their fight against «passéist» institutions, and, in evoking such categories as 'terrorism' or 'anarchism', they border the domains of early 20th century political discourse, in which these categories were recurrent tropes. Since images of arson and bombing appear coupled in Bochō's writings, as in the representative sentence by Marinetti that opens this paper, I will specifically analyze them, particularly focusing on a genealogical perspective that involves both intertextual and historical research. One of my assumptions is that the rhetoric of antagonism and destruction can be considered to be a relevant focus in order to appreciate the modalities of construction of a modernist discourse from both a Japanese and comparative perspective.

I also intend to contribute some suggestions on the issue of Bochō's 'futurism', a critical topic that was inaugurated by Sakutarō's idiosyncratic labelling in the aforementioned 1916 article.⁵ Notwithstanding his knowledge of some aspects and works of the European avant-garde movements and many common grounds, this paper will show that the intertextual elements that support the definition of Bochō as a follower of or adherent of the doctrines of Italian Futurism appear to be scarce and critically dubious.

2 Yamamura Bochō

Yamamura Bochō (real name Kogure Hakkujū)⁶ was born to a peasant family in Gunma Prefecture and had to struggle to obtain an education. His fam-

Maidens), Bochō's previous collection of mainly Symbolist poetry - and the beginning of 1917 when his move towards the camp of humanitarian and populist literature became apparent. As for their previous publication in a magazine, the thirty-six pieces in *Seisanryōhari* date from May 1914 to June 1915.

5 Much of the debate, which also involves the reception of Cubism and other avant-garde movements, is reconstructed in Tanaka 1988, pp. 170-193. Other relevant opinions are expressed in Itō 1979, p. 14; Inoue 1988; Ichimura 1989, pp. 163-170; Nakamura 1995, pp. 194-198.

6 Kogure was the family name of his biological father. However, at his birth, Bochō was originally registered as the second son of his maternal grandfather, whose family name was Shimura. He changed his family name in 1913 when he became an adopted son-in-law of his wife's family, the Tsuchidas. This explains why his name appears as Shimura or Tsuchida in many sources. 'Hakuju' is another recurring reading of his first name.

ily's economic instability prevented him from completing elementary school; however, he continued to study, read, and educate himself independently. When he was fifteen, he had sufficiently advanced his education to obtain a teaching position in his former school. He later devoted himself to the study of English and in 1902, converted to Anglicanism. Due to his connections with the Church, he was admitted to Tsukiji Seisan Isshin Gakkō (Holy Trinity School), the institute that trained Japanese Anglican ministers (it later merged with Rikkyō University), and graduated in 1908. In Tokyo, he began to cultivate his literary vocation as well. After graduating, he moved from one appointment to another as a missionary in a half-dozen north-eastern parishes. He finally settled down in Taira from 1912 to 1918, a town in Fukushima Prefecture that is part of the Iwaki municipality today.

As a peripheral intellectual with a well-established position in the local regional *bundan*, Bochō made every effort to remain in touch with the Tokyo *bundan* as well. This may explain the eccentricity of his literary trajectory – it reflects a spasmodic search for recognition and empowerment.

In 1904 he made his debut as a writer of post-Romantic *tanka*. Then he converted to *shi* and became fascinated with Kanbara Ariake's obscure Symbolism. At the same time, he flirted with Naturalism and *kōgo jiyūshi* (poetry in spoken language and free verse). However, he rapidly changed sides when the movement's fortunes declined and the *bundan* faced a resurgence of anti-Naturalist trends. By 1914, after the publication of his mainly Symbolist, Verlainesque collection entitled *Sannin no otome* (Three Maidens, May 1913), Bochō came to be associated with the disciples of Kitahara Hakushū (1885-1942). At the summit of this repositioning, he established a tactical alliance with two emerging poets of the same coterie: Murō Saisei from Kanazawa and Hagiwara Sakutarō from Maebashi.

Around June 1914, the three young men founded Ningyo Shisha (Mermaid Poetry Society). In March 1915, they launched their own magazine, *Takujō funsui* (Tabletop Fountain), to a meagre audience, resulting in the magazine's premature cancellation after only three issues. Around the same time Bochō edited two short-lived *dōjin zasshi* (coterie magazines) in Taira: *Fūkei* (Landscape, May-November 1914) and *Le Prisme* (April-August 1916), where many of his 'prismist' works were originally published.

The shaky Ningyo Shisha came to an end after the controversies raised by the publication of *Seisanryōhari* (December 1915). Though the collection was largely unnoticed by the dominant sectors of the literary world, Bochō fell prey to attacks mainly orchestrated by Miki Rofū (1889-1964) and his disciples, who wrote for the magazine *Mirai* (Future).⁷ Poems

7 The *Mirai* group included Kawaji Ryūkō and Yanagisawa Ken (1889-1953), among others. Sakutarō's later depiction, in the commemorative article «Yamamura Bochō no koto» (On Yamamura Bochō, *Nihon shijin* [The Japanese Poet], February 1926), on the vicious attacks

such as «Fūkei» (Landscape) or the infamous «Geigo» (Delirium) were interpreted by his contemporaries as little more than bad jokes.

Landscape
 Rape-flowers everywhere
 Rape-flowers everywhere
 Rape-flowers everywhere
 Rape-flowers everywhere
 Rape-flowers everywhere
 Rape-flowers everywhere
 Rape-flowers everywhere
 Faint fluting with a wheat-blade
 Rape-flowers everywhere⁸

DELIRIUM
 THEFT GOLDSH
 ROBBERY TRUMPET
 BLACKMAIL VIOLIN
 GAMBLING CAT
 FRAUD SARAÇA
 BRIBERY VELUDO
 ADULTERY APPLE
 ASSAULT SKYLARK
 MURDER TULIP
 ABORTION SHADOW
 SEDITION SNOW

As for his peers, Saisei adopted an ambiguous stance in support of his colleague, while Sakutarō, an enthusiastic reader of some of Bochō's poems, was one of the few who publicly defended Bochō's experimentalism. However, Sakutarō began to perceive a growing discrepancy between Bochō's poetry and his own at the time, which would soon find acclaim through his *Tsuki ni hoeru* (Howling at the Moon, 1917) collection.

Ningyo Shisha *de facto* disbanded in June 1916, when Sakutarō and Saisei founded another magazine, *Kanjō* (Sentiment), without inviting Bochō to

on *Seisanryōhari* from an angered *bundan*, is generally judged by modern scholars as being too emphatic. See Tanaka 1988, pp. 236-237; Kitagawa 1995, p. 35. In this article, Sakutarō eulogized his recently deceased colleague by depicting him as a «martyr» of the ignorance of the times. He went on to say that «perhaps there has been no writer [in the Meiji and Taishō eras] that experienced the derision and the insults of the poetry world as much as Yamamura Bochō»; in the same piece, Sakutarō defined Bochō as the «father of the Japanese school of Cubist poetry» (quoted in Inamura 1987, pp. 119-132).

⁸ «Fūkei», lines 1-9, as translated in Wilson, Atsumi 1972, p. 466.

contribute. From around 1917, Bochō began to abandon his «prismist» poetry and converted to the humanitarian, Whitmanesque, «democratic» style of poetry that was in vogue at the time. This change was made official in his following collection, *Kaze wa kusaki ni sasayaita* (The Wind Has Whispered to the Plants, 1918), which also marked Bochō's disappearance from the Tokyo literary scene. Bochō never again gained the same kind of attention that he had with *Seisanryōhari*, a collection that had profited from his temporary connections to the Tokyo poetry scene and his attempted appropriation of the avant-garde discourse.

He was already nearly forgotten when, in 1924, he died from complications of tuberculosis. As a sort of poetic testament, he left a collection, *Kumo* (Clouds), which was posthumously published in 1925. This publication contributed to obscuring his pioneering role in avant-garde literature, and established, in the prewar critical discourse of *shi*, his reputation as a bucolic poet of «clouds and children».⁹

3 The Rhetoric of Antagonism in Bochō's Writings

The empirical starting point of this research is the fact that in Bochō's letters and writings (short essays, articles, editorial columns) from around 1914 to 1916 one can detect attitudes of aversion towards the literary and cultural status quo. In some of their articulations, these feelings reach a violence that makes a reader accustomed with early 20th century artistic discourse think of the antagonistic polemics of the European avant-garde movements, particularly those systematically carried out by the Italian Futurists.

From a biographical standpoint, the emergence of such tones seems to be chronologically related to three factors in Bochō's life.

The first factor is the failure of *Fūkei*, a *dōjin zasshi* that Bochō edited and published in Taira. After many hardships, lack of financial support, and only six monthly issues, *Fūkei* folded in November 1914 without having a significant impact on the literary scene. Bochō had great personal expectations of this magazine, which he had conceived as a vehicle for his poetry and tangible proof of his leadership in the local literary scene.

The second factor seems to be – right between the end of 1914 and the beginning of 1915 – that Bochō acquired some familiarity with an array of sources related to the European avant-garde movements. These comprised art history books like Kimura Shōhachi's *Geijutsu no kakumei* (Revolution in Art, May 1914) and *Miraiha oyobi rittaiha no geijutsu* (The Art of Futurism and Cubism, March 1915), the anthology of translations of French

9 Section 2 of this paper is an improved version of Zanotti 2011, pp. 287-290.

poetry *Rira no hana* (Lilac Flowers, November 1914) edited by Yosano Hiroshi (1873-1935, better known today by the pen name of 'Tekkan', which he regularly used until 1905),¹⁰ and many articles presenting the European avant-garde movements, which were being released at that time in the Japanese press.¹¹ Textual evidences of Bochō's cognizance of Arthur Jerome Eddy's *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (1914), a book on the new trends in European art characterized by a sympathetic view of Cubism, Futurism, and «Compositionalism» (i.e., Kandinsky's painting) appear a little later, around January 1916.

The third factor is the completion of *Seisanryōhari*. This collection must have looked like a breakthrough work to Bochō, and its upcoming epiphany in the literary world as something to be awaited and prepared for as a revolutionary event. This can be noted in the nearly messianic tones in which Bochō describes his own literary activity around this period. Combative metaphors appear repeatedly in his editorials, reflecting an antagonistic stance towards the poetry scene (*shidan*): «I am ready to fight. Until I fall down» («Shōsoku» [News], *Fūkei*, May 1914) (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 545),¹² and «As a man with a life, I am already in arms, I raise my weapons up in the

10 Kimura's *Geijutsu no kakumei* featured a translation of Frank Rutter's *Revolution in Art: An Introduction to the Study of Cézanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Other Modern Painters* (1910) that dealt for the most part with post-Impressionist masters. Kimura too, a post-Impressionist painter and critic in his own right, devoted the long original essay that makes up the core of the book to these masters. The most interesting section of the book is the final one because it contains a complete translation of Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger's *Du Cubisme* (from its English translation of 1913), partial translations of the manifestos included in the catalogue of the *Exhibition of Works by the Italian Futurist Painters* held at the Sackville Gallery in London in March 1912, and a translation of Camille Mauclair's article «Le Futurisme et la jeune Italie» (Futurism and Young Italy), which was originally published in the *Dépêche de Toulouse* on 30 October 1911. This article was routinely sent as a leaflet by Marinetti to all his new contacts. *Miraiha oyobi rittaiha no geijutsu* reworked the materials presented in *Geijutsu no kakumei* and Kimura added longer commentaries in the form of personal considerations and fictive dialogues; however, his opinion on the new movements remained fundamentally negative. *Lilac Flowers* (a more precise translation could be *The Flowers of the [Closierie des] Lilas* from the name of the bistrot in Paris frequented at that time by Yosano and many French poets) presented in translation one poem each by Marinetti («A l'automobile de course»), Aldo Palazzeschi («La fontana malata»), Valentine de Saint-Point («Les pavots de sang»), and Blaise Cendrars (an early version of «Ma danse» that was later reprinted as one of the *19 poèmes élastiques*). All these authors were introduced to the reader as «futurist poets». Substantial excerpts from Kimura's books can be read today in KSGS-K (vol. 1, pp. 3-148, 225-454). *Rira no hana* is available in vol. 13 of *Tekkan Akiko zenshū*.

11 For a rich but still incomplete collection of such articles, see KSGS-SZ (vols. 1-2). The critical literature on the introduction of European avant-gardes in Japan is constantly growing. See, on Futurism and in European languages: Omuka 2000; Hackner 2001; Nishino 2009.

12 In his *Fūkei* editorial columns, Bochō tended to adopt a more flamboyant language than that used by him in other magazines. See for instance his editorial in the second issue of the magazine (June 1914), in YBZ (vol. 4, pp. 546-548).

sky. I won't back off, not even by a single step» («Shiran senpyō» [Selection and Comment for the Poetry Column], *Shūsai bundan*, December 1914) (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 560).¹³

This attitude became particularly marked after he established Ningyo Shisha, around June 1914, together with Murō Saisei and Hagiwara Sakutarō.¹⁴ In April 1915, the magazine *Sōzō* (Creation) published a survey on «the recent poetry scene» («Saikin no shidan») conducted among their regular contributors. Responding on behalf of Ningyo Shisha, Bochō sent the following statement: «Today's poetry scene is all about common sense poetry and obsolete people. The members of Ningyo Shisha have been assigned by Heaven (*ten*) a duty to sanitize the poetic scene and the world of men in general. So they have been given a gun each» (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 563).

This short piece sounds like a communiqué from an action group and contains an extremely violent attack, something that was quite new in the literary world of that time. Even if Bochō stayed on a metaphorical level, he would evoke the possibility of a physical elimination of what was wrong in the poetic scene of his days. By that he means the «common sense poetry» (*konmon sensu no shi*) and the «obsolete people» (*kyūjin*), the poets with an established position, as implicitly opposed to the *shinjin*, the newcomers.¹⁵ The word *eiseigakari* ('duty of sanitization') conjures up the idea of a hygienic sterilization, and Ningyo Shisha members are depicted as entrusted of a heavenly mission to disinfect the world of letters with «a gun each». Ningyo Shisha's mandate is not limited to the poetry scene but can be virtually extended to «the world of men in general».

Among the regular contributors to *Sōzō* who replied to the survey, there were members of Miki Rofū's rival coterie. Perhaps Bochō deliberately used such provocative tones because he knew that his declaration was to be published next to those sent by the authors to whom his accusations were more or less explicitly addressed (in fact, Hattori Yoshika [1886-1975]

13 A similar image appears in a letter to Mogi Shōzō (24 March 1915; YBZ, vol. 4, p. 663). *Shūsai bundan* (The Literary World of the Talented Ones) was a well-established literary magazine to which Bochō had contributed since the beginning of his career. In this, as in other magazines, Bochō was involved in the administration of a «poetry column» (*shiran*) in which he commented on poems sent by the readers.

14 The involvement of Bochō with Ningyo Shisha has been widely studied by Japanese scholars: see Itō 1979; Tanaka 1988, pp. 275-342; Kitagawa 1995, pp. 265-277. After the release of *Seisanryōhari*, Ningyo Shisha went on an indefinite hiatus. Sakutarō and Saisei founded another magazine, *Kanjō* (Sentiment), in June 1916, without inviting Bochō to collaborate. He joined them only in October, but distanced himself from the pair again in November 1917, apparently because of growing divergences with Saisei. With this rupture, Bochō practically estranged himself from the central *shidan* of Tokyo. See also Ichimura 1995.

15 A similar but far less violent attack can be found in «Sensha mōgo» (The Lies of a Selector, *Shinhyōron* [New Criticism], May 1915), where Bochō claims that, unlike many poets of today «who value the common sense», he, as an «enemy of mediocre poem-makers», is not prone to any compromise (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 564).

and Shirotori Seigo [1890-1973] took the occasion of this survey to bitterly criticize Kitahara Hakushū and his Ningyo Shisha protégés (Tanaka 1988, pp. 331-332).¹⁶ Placed almost at the end of the rubric, after a series of generally urbane declarations on their own poetic tastes offered by the other contributors, Bochō's short communiqué appears as a blunt and confrontational statement. Despite such circumstantial usage of words for shock value, his tone and expressions imply a fantasy of violent purification and cleansing that, as we will see, is not isolated in his writings of this period.

A few months later, similar tones can be found in «Awabi tori wa» (Ear Shell Fishers), an essay that appeared in *Ginkei* in September 1915:

I think that there is nothing as idiotic as today's poetry scene (the same could be probably said of the entire literary scene). I'm so upset I won't say any more. They still have to open their eyes. They build their power through groups and circles, this is their policy; they are all busy at saving the appearances of this awful state of things; don't they even surpass those stupid politicians in that? Behind the curtains, it is a laughable mechanism. In such a situation, works of distinction are not going to appear. In times like these, true things cannot but stay silent. Otherwise, one should stand up with a gun in hand. It's about knocking down or being knocked down. But if you even knocked him down, there wouldn't be too much honour with such an opponent. (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 352)¹⁷

In this piece, Bochō keenly criticizes the organization and distribution of power within the contemporary literary scene. In his words, the *shidan* (here conceived as part of the *bundan*), with all its intrigues and hypocrisy that suffocate the appearance of true talents, falls to a lower level than that of professional politicians. Here, too, in articulating his critique to the «state of impasse of today's literary scene»,¹⁸ Bochō resorts to the image of a physical elimination of one's opponent in the world of cultural production.

In these writings, the object of Bochō's aversion is posited in the terms of a non-metaphorical and non-euphemized representation of authority within the literary field. In other words, here Bochō explicitly resents and targets his actual competitors for the material and symbolic profits connected to poetic activity, as well as the holders of such profits (consecrated poets).

16 Following this and other episodes, Ningyo Shisha stopped considering *Sōzō* a neutral place for their activities.

17 *Ginkei* (the name of an ancient instrument) was a Kyoto *dōjin zasshi*.

18 «Kono geijutsu de aru» (This Art of Mine), *Gunshū e* (To the Masses), January 1916 (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 358). *Gunshū e* was a short-lived *dōjin zasshi* edited in Taira by Bochō's friend and disciple, Hanaoka Kenji (1887-1968).

Other two aspects of Bochō's polemic language will be analyzed in the following sections: the images of bombing and arson as a hyperbolic way of violent empowerment in the literary field and the rhetorical configuration of the «masses» as an obstacle to this empowerment. I will argue that these two aspects configure Bochō's fantasies of empowerment as a fictional narrative where reactionary and modernist tropes coalesce.

4 *Pereat mundus...* Dynamite as a Means to Artistic Self-assertion

When he announced the forthcoming publication of *Seisanryōhari*, Bochō produced what Itō Shinkichi (2001, p. 2) has defined as some of the earliest manifesto-like pages of the Japanese literary avant-garde. In fact, in a letter to Mogi Shōzō of 24 March 1915, Bochō declared that «In order to burn down this world of letters that sides with the ignorant people of common sense (*konmon sensu no gunmō mikata no bungeikai*), I must be an arsonist (*hōka hansha*)» (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 663). Thus, he coupled his aversion towards the status quo to an image of active destruction by fire. A few months later, on 15 September, he committed to a letter addressed to his former student Koyama Moichi (1892-1974)¹⁹ one of his most well-known statements:

I am manufacturing a *bomb* (*bakuretsudan*) for the literary scene and the intellectual world of today [...]

This collection of poetry makes its appearance too early in this century, it is a rare book that is a thousand, ten thousand years in advance. This collection of mine is something that is not mine, it is the fountain of man's life. Behold how it's holy, and strong! (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 663, emphasis by Bochō)

As scholars like Itō have pointed out, Bochō's intention to bomb the literary world was nearly ten years in advance of the anarchist poets of the *Aka to kuro* (Red and Black) *dōjin zasshi*,²⁰ who, in the first number of their magazine (January 1923) famously stated: «What is poetry? What is a poet? Abandoning all the concepts from the past, we boldly proclaim! 'Poetry is a bomb! A poet is a dark criminal who throws a bomb against the fortified walls and doors of a prison!'» (trans. in Hirata 1993, p. 136).²¹

19 Older sources give the reading 'Shigeichi' for Koyama's first name.

20 Writing about Bochō's letter, Itō (2001, p. 2) ominously evokes the 1910-1911 Taigyaku Jiken ('High Treason Incident'), an alleged plot to assassinate the Meiji Emperor that led to the imprisonment of many leftist leaders and to the execution of twelve of them.

21 In a similar vein, writing in the June 1923 issue of *Nihon shijin*, Tsuboi Shigeji (1897-1975),

However, unlike the poets of *Aka to kuro* (Okamoto Jun, Tsuboi Shigeji, Hagiwara Kyōjirō, etc.), who belonged to a younger generation,²² Bochō had no deep understanding of or direct commitment to the most recent developments in the international or local anarcho-communist movements except through the journalistic accounts of the deeds they inspired and the cultural debate that accompanied them.

He was undoubtedly better acquainted with earlier representations of the connections between anarchism and literature, such as those documented in such works as Vance Thompson's *French Portraits* (1900), a survey on the literary scene of contemporary France whose second edition of 1913 was among Bochō's favourite readings.²³ In the chapter «Men of Letters and Anarchy», he could have found a brief and largely unsympathetic presentation of the ideas of those French intellectuals who had praised the anarchist attacks and bombings that had deeply impressed the country's public opinion at the turn of the century: «The young literature has acclaimed the bomb-throwers and justified the stabbers» (Thompson 1913, p. 205).²⁴ Thompson mentioned such authors as Laurent Tailhade, Stuart Merrill, Gabriel Randon (who penned the *Litanies of Dynamite*), André Ibels, Zo d'Axa, Octave Mirbeau, Henri Mazel, and Paul Adam. He put them side by side because of their use of a «purely literary, purely decorative, artistic, sentimental» version of the «propaganda by deeds - the blunt argument of dynamite, the polemics of knives and picric acid - » (p. 209)²⁵ that appears to be not too different from Bochō's own.

Bochō translated a short excerpt from this book with the title of «Neo Poetori» (New Poetry, dated to April 1915; YBZ, vol. 4, p. 857)²⁶ in which a number of allusions to the «rebellious» (*hangyakuteki*) nature of the new poets can be found. In Thompson's passage, French *vers-libristes* are paired to «the anarchists» (a word that Bochō translates here as «kyomutōin», 'nihilists'); however, in this part of his book there is no overt mention of the latter's terrorist activities: «In its broader sense the theory might be stated in Retté's words - *tu feras ce que tu voudras*. It

a member of the *Aka to kuro* group, later defined the poetry of Dadaist Takahashi Shinkichi (1901-1987) as «a pistol, a bomb (*bakudan*)» (quoted in Chiba 1978, p. 81).

22 An idea of the participation of Hagiwara Kyōjirō and other members of the *Aka to kuro* group in the local discourses on anarchism and terrorism is provided in Gardner 2006, chapters 3 and 6.

23 In the January 1915 issue of *Shūsai bundan*, Bochō published a translation of the selection from Jules Renard's *Histoires naturelles* presented by Thompson (see Kubo 1970).

24 A survey of the trope of the anarchist bomber in England is conducted in Cole 2009. See also Melchiori 1985; Ó Donghaile 2011.

25 I ignored a minor typographical mistake.

26 It corresponds to the paragraph «Free Verse» in the chapter «The New Poetry» (Thompson 1913, pp. 100-104).

is the oriflamme of the anarchist and the poet» (Thompson 1913, p. 104; YBZ, vol. 4, p. 463).

Another earlier precedent, this time a local one, seems helpful in order to assess the historical significance of Bochō's 'bombing' imagery. It is an appeal written almost fifteen years before by the poet Yosano Hiroshi (Tekkan) as a defence of Yosano Akiko's (1878-1942) epoch-making *tankas*.

Akiko, let's publish your collection of poems [*Midaregami* (Tangled Hair, 1901)]. Let's stop worrying about the falseness of *giri* [social obligations], worldly considerations, and other silly things – let's encourage ordinary people to use their heads. There has never been a poet who has written such beautiful poems as you do. I am certain that your poems will be loved by the people 100 or even 1000 years hence. Your poems are a bombshell [*bakudan*], a beautiful and magnificent bombshell with the power to destroy the social conventions that have lasted for so many years (trans. in Okada 2003, pp. 48-49).

It is remarkable that, despite their different purposes and contexts, Yosano's appeal and Bochō's letter share the image of the bomb and a reference to a remote future when the work of poetry they are talking about will be held in the esteem it deserves. Yosano's text is an interesting precedent for the inscription of the trope of the bomb in a discourse with a libertarian agenda, whether it confines itself to the literary world or expands to the whole of social life. However, the attitude expressed in these two texts seems quite different. Bochō's letter is marked by a more explicit antagonistic stance: his bomb is not «beautiful», and its effects do not resonate with Yosano's progressive posture, which is perhaps more in tune with the remnants of the ideology of Meiji enlightenment. As we will see later, this difference is linked to a sense of alienation felt by Bochō that seems to be lacking from Yosano's optimistic liberalism.

Some of the most radical statements by Bochō were committed to private writings, such as the above-mentioned letters; however, magazines, as versatile repositories of his public meditations and appeals on literature, also played a relevant role in the articulation and dissemination of his fantasies of empowerment within the literary field. After the closing of *Fūkei* and *Takujō funsui* (Tabletop Fountain), the official magazine of Ningyo Shisha,²⁷ he came to nurture great expectations towards a new magazine that he planned to launch in 1916 as a collaboration with Murō Saisei. The new periodical was to be called *Runesansu* (Renaissance). Anticipating its appearance in his column on *Shūsai bundan* in December 1915 («Chōshi

27 *Takujō funsui* ran from March to May 1915 (three issues). Now available in *Takujō funsui: Kindai bungei fukkoku sōkan*.

senpyō» [Selection and Comment of Long Poems]), Bochō announced that «its doors will be freely open to those comrades (*dōshi*) who want to throw some dynamite (*dainamaito*) against the musty art scene of today, and get intoxicated with their own purity». He concluded that «the world ought to be for the young» (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 578). In this latter passage one can detect a common motif in modernist youth mythologies, including those expounded by Futurism and Fascism. The claim for empowerment by the self-styled «young people» (*wakaki hitobito*) goes with a fetishization of their own supposed «purity» (*junshin*). *Runesansu* was to carry on the ‘bombing’ action initiated by *Seisanryōhari* and maybe even widen its range – with a noteworthy interdisciplinary extension – not only to the literary world, but also to the entire «art scene» (*geijutsudan*).

Eventually, despite Bochō’s enthusiasm, *Runesansu* remained a mere project. The bad reception *Seisanryōhari* received isolated Bochō and irreversibly damaged the unity between the three Ningyo Shisha members. This did not stop Bochō’s articulation of fantasies of empowerment in the literary field. After a period of dormancy in the first months of 1916, his writings again showed antagonistic tones during the publication of *Le Prisme* (April to August 1916), a magazine that he ran in the town of Taira for just four issues. Its premature folding heralded the end of the prismist period. To Bochō, this magazine represented the last opportunity for his poetry to meet the success he thought it deserved. Introducing *Le Prisme* to his readers in April 1916 («Chōshi senpyō», *Shūsai bundan*), Bochō resorted once again to the image of the arsonist: «From next April, I am going to put out *Le Prisme*, as a revival of *Fūkei*, the magazine of pure literature that I used to publish some time ago. We will set fire to this stagnant art world. I wish that people who want to be arsonists (*hōka hannin*) will join us» (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 584). The mention of the «stagnant art world» (*chintai-seru geijutsukai*) parallels that of the «musty art scene of today», which had appeared about four months before in the announcement of the release of *Runesansu*.

Among the tropes used by Bochō to articulate his antagonistic stance, the image of the arsonist is one of the richest in layers and nuances, where Romantic, Symbolist, and Christian motifs, all coming from different phases and experiences of his previous trajectory, melt and intertwine. An outcast, Bochō’s arsonist gleams gloomily of self-destructive nuances that can be traced back to autobiographical narratives and to implicit analogies with Christological tropes. To quote the psychological and phenomenological phrasing of the avant-garde scholar Renato Poggioli, Bochō’s incendiary is prone to become a victim of his own destructive actions in an act of «agonistic sacrifice for the future» and of «self-immolation» (1968, pp. 65-68). He thus finds his place in a gallery of liminal characters (halfway between Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* and Rimbaud’s clairvoyant

ant destitute)²⁸ that, according to Bochō, are the «true appraisers» of his poetry: «The true appraisers of my poetry are among the dancers of genius. Then, among musicians and sculptors. Besides, they are among detectives, murderers, arsonists (*hōka hannin*), orphans, idiots, saints, scientists, in other words, among those who live at the top of misery or jubilation. Among poets and men of letters, it is rare to find one of them in a thousand» («Tangin shigo» [Poetic Words in D#], *Shiika*, March 1916) (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 859).²⁹

Bochō dives here into a bio-literary paradigm of clearly Symbolist origin, a paradigm that had been largely popularized in Japan in the previous years by essays and translations by Iwano Hōmei, Arthur Symons, Kuriyagawa Hakuson, and others. Bochō had cherished this paradigm at least since he had been forced to hastily leave Sendai in disgrace in 1910 after he clashed with a superior at the local Anglican church where he was working as a missionary. It was probably then that he began to fantasize about his identification with the model of the *poète maudit* embodied by Baudelaire, of whom he was an avid reader at that time.³⁰ As the passage from «Tangin shigo» shows, this implied the acceptance and even the aestheticization of his own supposed condition of marginality.

This point gives a first hint towards interpreting Bochō's terrorist postures as a reenactment of post-Romantic and Symbolist discourses of the 'religion of art' (and of the artist), of the «Christlike mystique of the 'artiste maudit', sacrificed in this world and consecrated in the one beyond» (Bourdieu 1996, p. 83). Bochō's dynamite neither has the same function as Yosano's bomb that was aimed at the destruction of premodern social constraints, nor the bombs of the *Aka to kuro* poets. The latter's terrorism was conceived as a means of social uprising, and its final goal was the liberation of the masses who were spiritually and materially oppressed by capitalism. Poetry (art) was an instrument to attain what they saw as a more important and eminently political goal. On the other hand, Bochō aimed at the full accomplishment of his own art: what hinders or negates this accomplishment (critics, the *bundan*, the ignorant audience) must be destroyed. Bochō's discourse can be termed in this respect as marked by

28 See: «[The Poet] becomes among all men the great invalid, the great criminal, the great accursed – and the Supreme Scientist! For he attains the *unknown!*» («Letter of the Seer», emphasis in the original) (Rimbaud [1871] 2008, p. 116). See also Poggioli 1968, pp. 109-112.

29 This passage was later excised when the text was included in the collection of essays *Chiisana kokusō yori* (From the Little Granary, 1918). *Shiika* (Poems and *Tanka*) was a magazine run by Bochō's long-time acquaintance Maeda Yūgure (1883-1951), a tankaist of some renown.

30 For a detailed account of the Sendai episode, see Nakamura 1995, pp. 48-53. According to the autobiographical piece «Hanmen jiden» (A One-Sided Autobiography, 1916), Bochō had to leave Sendai in a hurry, carrying with him only a «little red book» (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 153), that is, F.P. Sturm's English translations from Baudelaire.

«aestheticcentrism».³¹ To him, art is still the supreme value in a world otherwise marked by modern anomie: *fiat ars, pereat mundus*³² (by bombings or arsons, or anything that serves the purpose).

5 Adding a Reactionary Flavour: Against the Blind Populace

Bochō's antagonistic stance was not only aimed at the literary establishment, but also tackled the 'popular' audience, the 'masses', which are the object of occasional feelings of aversion from him and other Ningyo Shisha members. Within the microphysical dimension of a marginal denomination (Ningyo Shisha or «prismism») in a marginal field (the so-called *shidan*, or *shi* scene) of literary production, Bochō's fantasy of empowerment therefore articulated a twofold battle against the established literary power and against the popular «taste of the day» (see Poggioli 1968, pp. 123-124).

As a rhetorical configuration, this latter trope required the existence of a linguistic object corresponding to the 'popular' and 'mass' audience. Against its ignorance, blindness, or dumbness, the scandal of the misunderstood revolutionary poet could take place.

The idea of a spiritual aristocracy, even if only implicitly, had been incorporated in the Japanese discourse of Symbolist and *décadent* poetry almost from its inception, and it was well represented, in the embodiment with which Bochō was better acquainted, by Kitahara Hakushū's magazines, such as *Okujō teien* (Roof Garden), *Zanboa* (Shaddock), *Chijō junrei* (Pilgrimage on Earth), and *Ars*.³³ In this discursive tradition, the aesthetic experience was conceived as something restricted to individuals of not ordinary sensibility.

Within Ningyo Shisha, Sakutarō absorbed such suggestions in the most notable way. This is shown by the general tone he attempted to give to *Takujō funsui*, starting from the well-known column in the second issue where, while explaining the name of the magazine (allusive in itself to the elitist cénacle-like nature of the group), he compared his coterie to the patricians of Rome: «We are noblemen (*kizoku*) in every moment. We study the refined customs of Roman nobles, who place a fountain of perfume on the table even when they dine. We are *luxurious*. Our hands are white

31 See, on this term and on the topic of «fascist aesthetics»: Cornyetz 2007, pp. 23-33.

32 Benjamin 1968, p. 242.

33 *Okujō teien* closed after only two issues (October 1909 and February 1910) mainly because of censorship issues. *Zanboa* enjoyed a longer life, from November 1911 to May 1913. In its last issue, Sakutarō had his first poem published. *Chijō junrei* (September 1914-March 1915) and *Ars* (April-October 1915) were launched at Hakushū's comeback after a temporary retreat. Bochō contributed significantly to both of them: his most controversial poem *Geigo* (Delirium, later included in *Seisanryōhari*) appeared for the first time in the June 1915 issue of *Ars*.

and smooth. We have never laboured in our life. And of this we are proud» (Hagiwara 1915, p. 16).³⁴

Probably, Bochō, with his history of being a peasant and low-rank missionary, was not at ease with such exhibits of provincial dandyism (a trait to which Sakutarō was particularly prone). In fact, according to Bochō scholar Wada Yoshiaki (1968, p. 141), they accelerated his estrangement from the society. However, Bochō himself was not immune to such attitudes. Although, in his writings, the passages where he, as a missionary and a minister, expresses affection and solidarity towards the popular classes are overwhelmingly more frequent, in some of his texts of this period, it is possible to detect the insurgence of antidemocratic feelings. These can be partly attributed to the frustration he experienced after the failure of his prismist poetry but they are not devoid of the same elitist self-congratulation that can be found in many texts produced by European avant-garde artists (think of Marinetti's «pleasure of being booed» or the «slap in the face of public taste» of the Russian Futurists) or the persecutory fantasies that can be traced back to the Symbolist/*décadent* trope of the *poète maudit*.

An article by Suzuki Suezō, an obscure *Fūkei* contributor and one of the few who publicly praised *Seisanryōhari*, is quite revealing, because it probably shows some degree of ideological proximity with Bochō's own opinions in this respect. In his apologetic review of Bochō's collection, «Yamamura Bochō-shi to *Seisanryōhari*» (Mr. Yamamura Bochō and *The Holy Prism, Shiika*, July 1916), Suzuki gives its being «too aristocratic» as the reason for its bad reception.

So, at this time, *Seisanryōhari* is too aristocratic (*arisutokuratekku*) to be judged by today's poetry scene. It does not have a hint of vulgar taste, and yet it is not something narrow-minded and antidemocracy (*demokurashī o mitomenai mono*): it is sacred aristocracy (*seikureddo arisutokurashī*). It is nobility (*kizoku*) at the top of simplicity and devotion. It goes forward as a guiding light. The devotion of the people (*minshū*) will necessarily attain Bochō's footsteps. And when he steps forward again, the distance from the others will grow more and more and comprehension will become even more remote; the charges against him will gain even more strength (Quoted in Wada 1968, pp. 194-195).

Suzuki defines Bochō's poetry by resorting to the *quasi*-oxymoronic category of a «sacred aristocracy» that, despite being aristocratic, simultaneously avoids an antidemocratic attitude: in other words, a spiritual and

34 Emphasis in the original. Also quoted in Wada 1968, p. 141. It is not clear if Sakutarō confused ancient Rome with India in this passage, as some suggest (see Itō 1979, p. 6).

ideal aristocracy that is not socially aristocratic. This is as contradictory a characterization («simultaneously A and not A») as that of the «fascist dream» (as defined in the wake of Slavoj Žižek) of having «capitalism without capitalism» (see Ivy 2009, p. viii; Tansman 2009, p. 29).

With his «guiding light» metaphor, Suzuki assigns to Bochō a leading position vis-à-vis the «people», who are necessarily destined to attain in the future what he has already achieved in the present. In other words, even if he does not seem to be fully aware of it, Suzuki puts Bochō in an *avant-garde position* in a way that the elitist and Romantic attributes connected to such condition are strongly emphasized.

However, Bochō did not share Suzuki's confidence that his poetry was destined to enjoy a following – at least, not in the following thousand or ten thousand years – as we have seen in his 'bomb letter'. The bad reception to his literary efforts prevented him from cherishing the ambition to present himself as a leader for the masses. If, in his discourse, he implemented a dichotomy between the «men of genius» and the «masses» that resembled that of Suzuki, it was more than anything in negative and conflicting terms.

For instance, a revealing word that appears frequently in his writings of this period is *gunmō* 群盲, which literally means 'a crowd of blind people', which can be associated with the idea of the 'illiterate/ignorant populace'.³⁵ Bochō often uses this word in attributive forms (*gunmō no* or *gunmōteki*), seemingly without pointing to any specific social class. It stands, transversally, for the absolute idiocy and blindness of those who do not understand (his) art. A revealing instance of the usage of this word among his Ningyo Shisha peers is found in a letter that Sakutarō sent to him in September 1914. The poet from Maebashi states that grasping the «metallic rhythm» of Bochō's poetry is an extremely difficult task for the «blind populace (*gunmō*) of this country» (*Hagiwara Sakutarō zenshū*, vol. 13, p. 58).

Before proceeding further, I would like to stress that Bochō tended to absolutize the perspective of a limited circuit of practitioners (in this case, the so-called *shidan*), something very similar to what Pierre Bourdieu called a

35 In «Shun'ya tsūshin» (Correspondence on a Spring Night, *Shiika*, April 1913; YBZ, vol. 4, p. 301), Bochō associates this word with its synonym *shūgu* ('the vulgar masses', which is attested in dictionaries in compounds such as *shūgu seiji*, 'ochlocracy'). Another interesting example of the usage of the word *gunmō* is in the diary of Tanaka Kyōkichi (1892-1915), a young artist of the group gathered around the magazine *Tsukuhae* (Moonglow), who later illustrated Sakutarō's *Tsuki ni hoeru* (1917). Commenting upon the sixth conservative State-sponsored Bunten art exhibition, Tanaka stated that he found «unbearable the spectacle of ignorant people (*gunmō*) praising works of no value» (16 October 1912; quoted in Tanaka 1990, p. 74). An artist of the same avant-garde group, Onchi Kōshirō (1891-1955), expressed in his diary (30 July 1915) the same resentment against the «crowd of fools» (*gujin no mure*) that oppress the individual (quoted in Tanaka 1990, pp. 201-202). For the record, *Gunmō* was also the title of a Japanese translation of Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blind* (*Les aveugles*), published in 1914.

«subfield of restricted production, where producers have only other producers for clients (who are also their direct competitors)» (1996, p. 217). A few hundred copies of *Seisanryōhari* were printed.³⁶ We cannot realistically think that the «blind populace» (*gunmō*) that Bochō criticized for not understanding his work was anything larger than the tiny coteries (formed either by professionals or amateurs) who cared about *shi*; a genre that in Japan, at that time, was possibly the most marginal in terms of number of practitioners, size of its publishing market, and resonance of its critical discourse.³⁷

A semantic shift is then at work in Bochō's usage of the *gunmō* image. In the process of articulating his protest, Bochō does not represent his antagonists as actual critics or *shidan* members, but as a generic throng that is linguistically determined as a discursive subject by its own obtuseness and inability to understand Bochō's poetry. The *gunmō* image works as a rhetorical figure that hyperbolically subsumes the opponents Bochō actually had within the *shidan*.

In December 1913, an «ignorant audience» (*gunmōteki kōshū*) (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 313) were those who supported the ideas of Kimura Shōhachi and his post-Impressionist colleagues, with whom Bochō was engaged in a literary debate.³⁸ In 1916, Bochō considered that it was against «compliance with the blind populace (*gunmō raidō*) and empty formality of customs» (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 361) that critic Sōma Gyofū (1883-1950), the «tragic disillusioned», had lost his battle for a new culture.³⁹ Antidemocratic feelings

36 Maybe even less, as information about the exact number of printed copies is scarce. Ningyo Shisha launched a subscription to print fifty copies of the special edition (*tokusei*), but it is not known if they were all printed. We do not have any figure regarding the standard edition (*namisei*). See Tanaka 1988, p. 338. In 2001, scholar and bibliophile Kawashima Kōki reported an evaluation of two million yens for a copy (with the original case) of the special edition (p. 9); this shows how rare the book is today.

37 *Tsuki ni hoeru*, which today is considered Sakutarō's masterpiece and one of the most important collections of *shi* of the 20th century, had a first run of just five hundred copies (Tanaka 1990, p. 256). According to a memoir by Saisei (quoted in Ichimura 1995, p. 41), two hundred copies per month of *Kanjō*, the literary magazine run by Sakutarō and Saisei, were printed from June 1916 to November 1919. The same figure was reported for *Tsukuhae*, the seminal art *dōjin zasshi* edited by Onchi Kōshirō and Tanaka Kyōkichi, which went largely unsold (Tanaka 1990, pp. 113, 145, 150). Bochō's *dōjin zasshi* were probably printed in even lower numbers.

38 «Senpaku-naru genjitsu kōtei o warau» (I Laugh at Your Shallow Affirmation of Reality), *Shiika*, December 1913. In this article, Bochō replied to the attacks orchestrated by the poet and journalist Hitomi Tōmei (1883-1974) against his collection *Sannin no otome*. Tōmei resented Bochō for having left Naturalism in order to move into the anti-Naturalist camp. The attacks comprised articles by Tōmei himself, Kawaji Ryūkō, Shirotori Seigo, Fukushi Kōjirō (1889-1946) and the young Kimura Shōhachi. «I Laugh at Your...» is generally regarded by Japanese scholars as an important stage in the formation of *Seisanryōhari*'s new poetics (Sugiura 1979).

39 «Hisō-naru genmetsusha» (The Tragic Disillusioned), *Shinrisōshugi* (New Idealism),

also resurfaced in the passages where Bochō anticipated the publication of *Le Prisme*. In his words, the new magazine was meant to express the true nature of the self «without falling ill with the *pride* of the masses (*gunshū*)» («Chōshi senpyō», *Shūsai bundan*, March 1916) (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 583, emphasis by Bochō).

The elitist overtones of Bochō's narrative reached their climax in «Shihin» (Poetical Genius), an essay originally published in *Le Prisme* in May 1916 and later included in the collection of prose writings *Chiisana kokusō yori* (From the Little Granary, 1918). In this essay, Bochō extols the ideal figure of the misunderstood man of genius who is rejected by the populace, declaring: «In our times, there are just egoists who are too small and mediocre to acknowledge genius and listen to its voice, and the ignorant populace (*gunmō*) who defend their idiocy by wielding their number in vain. This is the most despicable attribute brought by ideas of liberty and equality» (YBZ, vol. 4, pp. 168, 855).⁴⁰

Writing to his disciple Hanaoka Kenji on 2 November 1916, in a moment when he could acutely perceive that all his ambitions linked to the prismist project were crushed, Bochō described himself as «surrounded by enemies on all sides as a poet», and, using the third person, he addressed a bitter retort to his country: «Ah, Japan, so rich in many high-spirited young men! O Japan, where things are decided by the blind majority (*gunmō no tasūketsu*)! But Bochō, he will never forsake his poetry» (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 671).

In elaborating such an unrealistic and nearly paranoid narrative, Bochō must have been attracted by the Symbolist and anti-Naturalist paradigm of the individual of genius. This required the inclusion in his discourse of the trope of the poet's alienation not only from the literary scene, but also from human society as a whole. In compliance with this paradigm, Bochō depicted his own alienation by a full display of tropes, such as the blind crowd (an outnumbering enemy, portrayed as the ally and supporter of a mediocre world of letters, or as overlapping with it), and, as a modernist means of reacting to that, the destructive violence of bombs and arsons.

Such images of destruction, however akin they are to the thematic stock of anarchist or avant-garde propaganda, still configure as their sole agent the post-Romantic individual of genius. This is portrayed in a solipsistic act of rebellion *for art's sake*, which is almost certainly doomed to have no choice but to «take submissively the blind (*gunmō no*) derision of people»

February and March 1916. «Genmetsusha» was written by Bochō in homage to Sōma Gyofū, the Naturalist critic whose sudden decision to leave the literary and academic world and retire in the countryside had provoked a deep emotion in the *bundan*. In this essay, Bochō claims that he had a strong bond with Gyofū during their university days (around 1904-1906), when both contributed to the *tanka* magazine *Shirayuri* (White Lily).

40 The text in *Chiisana kokusō yori* reads: «The ignorant populace that take as their point of reference a number of too mediocre and petty egoisms to acknowledge...».

(«Shōsoku», *Fūkei*, October 1914) (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 554). Therefore, these images only border what is generally considered as one of the characteristic tropes of modernist discourses, that of a palingenetic «creative destruction» as a means to attain a «total social regeneration».⁴¹ Despite Bochō's effort to anchor these images of violent reaction against the literary establishment and the ignorance of the 'masses' to a (no less fictional) movement (prismism), they still appear neatly individualistic and «aestheticentric».

Bochō's egalitarian and pacifist education as a Christian tottered under the weight of a literary and personal failure, but it was not only that. The antidemocratic implications of the '*gunmō* discourse' also expose an ambiguous dialectic between the cultural producer and the 'masses' that is both Romantic (in its emphasis on the isolation of the individual who is bound to be misunderstood and persecuted for his art) and modernist (in the redemptive role played by technology-enhanced violence as a means to overcome it).

6 Conclusion

In socio-literary terms, in his position as an emerging *bungaku seinen* (young writer)⁴² with a scarce endowment of starting capital, Bochō envisioned propelling his trajectory within the *bundan* by resorting to many different resources, both traditional and 'avant-garde'. Among the latter, aggressive propaganda that bordered symbolic terrorism. According to Pierre Bourdieu, terrorism can be considered a highly risky «strategy of despair» (2000, p. 228), as indeed, given the inertial configuration of the structures of power and the fact that those who tend to resort to this sort of terrorism are constitutionally deprived of symbolic capital, such attempts are often bound to fail or backfire (1996, pp. 261-263). This may well be the case with Bochō who was around thirty when he conceived *Seisanryōhari* and was ominously aware that his career, far from attaining consecration, was progressively spiralling down (as, in fact, it did).

Since they parallel the tactics of empowerment of a struggling writer, Bochō's narratives of violence and destruction reflect his initial ambitions (around 1914-1915) to vehemently impact the literary scene of Japan as an avant-garde author. From 1916, as his literary and editorial efforts met with failure, such images of destruction came to be increasingly tinged with frustration, resentment, or even despair. In other words, they evolved from

41 According to many commentators, the genealogy of this trope (and of the aesthetic overtones that connect it to a Symbolist background) comprises Friedrich Nietzsche's «active nihilism» and resonates in Georges Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* and F.T. Marinetti's «war, the sole cleanser of the world» (see Griffin 2007, pp. 152-153, 182). Griffin also notices the tropological association of modernism and anarchist terrorism (pp. 125-126).

42 This label was used by Bochō himself in «Hanmen jiden» (YBZ, vol. 4, p. 153).

being instrumental in the articulation of a *futural* narrative of empowerment to being instrumental in the articulation of a *retrospective* narrative of defeat. This narrative of defeat was both etiological, in that it tried to provide an explanation for past failures, and antidemocratic, in that it posited the blindness of people and the isolation of creative geniuses as among the main causes of such failures. Being chronologically and socially backward looking, this narrative may be characterized as reactionary.

Bochō resorted to hyperbolic referents («art world», «society», «the blind populace», etc.) and apocalyptic tropes («dynamite», «bombs», etc.) to depict his trajectory within what was in fact only a marginal sector of the literary field. This reveals the fantastic and fictional nature of these narratives as well as the attraction of contemporary discursive models coming from the European avant-garde movements.

Still, such tropes strike the reader for their intriguing likeness with those of the Italian Futurist writings. They call for reflection on the means by which literary protest was linguistically articulated at a time when literary discourse as a whole had become able to incorporate some by-products of local and transnational 'modernities'. These included technological (bombs, dynamite) and criminological devices (the arsonist as a felon and as a maniac, the terrorist, and the bomber, especially if an anarchist) that can be found as common elements to the Japanese and Western European contexts of those years.⁴³

A minor or a premature avant-garde writer in his literary practice, Bochō was in the same way the bearer of a small-scale fantasy of destruction/regeneration that, in its aestheticized solipsism, was largely unable to create a long-lasting alternative to the sense of anomie he must have experienced regarding his position in the literary field.

Such position proved untenable in the end. By 1917, with the poems later included in the collection *Kaze wa kusaki ni sasayaita* (The Wind Has Whispered to the Plants), which expounded his own version of the then-thriving humanitarian and ruralistic 'popular poetry' (*minshūshi*), Bochō found himself a new niche in the Taishō literary market, and he abandoned any commitment to an avant-garde agenda.

43 In the French and Italian contexts, one is obviously reminded of the immense emotion provoked by the attacks by Ravachol (1892), Auguste Vaillant (1893), Émile Henry (1892 and 1894), Sante Caserio (1894), Luigi Lucheni (1898), Gaetano Bresci (1900) and of the (more or less explicit) apologies of such actions expounded by intellectuals, such as those cited in Vance Thompson's *French Portraits*. See also Melchiori 1985, chapters 1-2. In Japan, there had been attacks against high-profile politicians, even if they were not always inspired by anarchist ideals. Among the more recent ones were those against Mori Arinori (1889) and Itō Hirobumi (1909). The picture comprises also the miners' revolt in Ashio (Ashio Bōdō Jiken, 1907) and, obviously, the 'High Treason Incident' of 1910-1911.

7 Appendix

Arguments, et clairon, et coups de poing: A Dubious Futurist Genealogy

Among the eristic options available for his symbolic struggle, Bochō chose the themes of violence and destruction. In this, he made a nearly unprecedented choice for the Japanese literary field, a choice that appears as one of the most 'avant-garde' elements in his writings. It can be said that this aspect resonates with a particular attitude of antagonism and rebellion that had been spread by books like Kimura Shōhachi's, which, together with Futurist and Cubist proclamations and programs, had popularized in Japan the 'esprit nouveau' of a sector of the European intellectual field. Therefore, one may think that the presence of these elements in Bochō's work could be traced back to a reception of a series of tropes that can be found in the manifestos of Italian Futurism. These tropes can be defined as variations on the image of the «destructive arm of the Anarchist» (1912, p. 4)⁴⁴ that was praised by Marinetti in article 9 of his famous first manifesto of 1909. As noted by Roy Starrs (2011, pp. 112-131), recent scholarship has discussed the fallacies of a too mono-directional search for 'influences' from 'Western' cultural production to Japan in order to account for the characteristics of Japanese modernism. However, the imbalance of material and symbolic power between the Japanese intellectual fields and those in Europe and North America is largely undeniable. While Japanese cultural journalism was eager to record and debate even the least new perturbations that were taking place in the cultural scenes of France, Germany, United States, Great Britain, or Russia (and in their peripheries, such as Italy), the same was not obviously happening in reverse. Accordingly, in the following section, I will try to illuminate, from an intertextual perspective and deliberately eschewing any heuristically unproductive commentary on the supposed originality or derivativeness of Bochō's works, the intertextual connections between Bochō's writings and Italian Futurist materials, as far as the tropes presented in the first part of this paper are concerned.

In an often-cited interview that he placed at the end of *Le Futurisme* (1911), a collection of essays and manifestos on Futurism, Marinetti himself reassured his readers about the provocative nature of his plans to «destroy the museums, the libraries» (1912, p. 4), as notoriously proclaimed in the first manifesto of the movement:

[Marinetti]: If we had resorted to diplomatic language, if we had been very sensible, very gentle, we would not have provoked any echo. So-

⁴⁴ When available, I will quote from the official English versions of Futurist manifestos because they were the best known in Japan. It is worth noting that the word 'anarchist' corresponds in the Italian version of this manifesto to *libertari* (libertarians) and in the French version to *anarchistes*.

me people are spineless and they need to be awakened by being hit. It is because we want to succeed that we swagger our way straight to the goal, that we violently place ourselves in opposition to ordinary taste and moderation. In fact, we invented nothing, and all we do is aggressively synthesize a range of feelings, of ideas that strived to be expressed. Futurism is nothing but the praise or, if you prefer, the exaltation of originality and personality.

[Interviewer]: The rest is nothing but arguments, isn't it?...

M: Arguments, and bugle, and punches! (*Arguments, et clairon, et coups de poing!*)

I: You aren't going to set fire to a library, are you?

M: To none!

I: You aren't going to flood a museum?

M: None!⁴⁵

Taken at face value or not, this interview is remarkable for the fact that Marinetti emphasizes the tactical function of the images of destruction, violence, arsons, and bombings that were disseminated in the Futurist propaganda at this early stage. In his words, they are mostly «arguments», that is, a set of linguistic and rhetorical devices. Such a definition rings even truer for the images of destruction employed by Bochō, who, unlike Marinetti, never associated himself with social or political action. I will attempt now to illustrate the dispersion of such «arguments» in the Japanese press in the years around the publication of *Seisanryōhari*.

Art critic Morita Kamenosuke (1883-1966) (KSGS-SZ, vol. 1, p. 289) touched on a topic similar to that of Marinetti's interview in the last instalment (September 1915) of his article «Taisei gakai shin undō no keika oyobi kyubizumu» (Trends of the New Movements in the Western Art World, and Cubism) featured in the prominent art magazine *Bijutsu shinpō* (Art Journal). Morita heavily borrowed from Arthur Jerome Eddy's influential *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* (1914), a book that, as we have already seen, had a significant circulation in Japan at that time, spearheading a mildly sympathetic reception of the latest avant-garde movements of Europe. In his article, Morita translated the following passage from Eddy's book:

In an address recently delivered in London, the leader of Futurism warned his hearers not to accept too literally the startling extravagances of some of the Futurist manifestoes and literature. He stated frankly that many of the most violent propositions were uttered for the

45 «Marinetti interviewé par le 'Temps'» [14 March 1911], in Marinetti [1911] 1979, pp. 206-207. In the article «Miraiha no zekkyō» (The Cry of Futurism, *Yomiuri shinbun*, 5 March 1912), Takamura Kōtarō translated the *clairon* sentence, but he did not clarify its context (see *Takamura Kōtarō zenshū*, vol. 8, p. 4).

purpose of arousing public attention to what they considered very real evils in our modern life. For instance, when the Futurists cry, «Down with all museums», «Destroy all remains of antiquity», they do not mean that if they were given the power they would do these things, but what they desire is to arouse Italy and the ancient world to the fact that Italy has a position as a *modern* nation (Eddy 1914, p. 188, emphasis in the original).⁴⁶

Marinetti had to make such clarifications because part of the press, especially in the English-speaking world, was interpreting his destructive claims literally, and they went as far as to explicitly associate the Futurist movement with anarchist terrorism.⁴⁷ Among the several articles on this topic, «The New Crazy ‘Exploding’ Pictures by ‘Art Anarchists’», published in the *Illustrated London News* in February 1912 and later reprinted in the *New York American* on 31 March 1912, elaborated on the motif of the bomb beside a colossal reproduction (covering nearly half of the page) of Gino Severini’s *The ‘Pan Pan’ Dance at the Monico*:

What do you think of the picture at the top of the page? It looks, you will say, like an «explosion»: like, in fact, an artistic bomb. Who throw bombs? Why, anarchists, of course. But the idea of anarchy is too tame for the painters of the school to which this painting belongs. They call themselves «The Post-Anarchists of Art», meaning that they are everything any anarchist is and then some more.⁴⁸

The pairing of Futurism with political anarchism reverberated in Japan through these and other English-language materials. It began with the «Initial Manifesto of Futurism», which, as we have already seen, extolled «the destructive arm of the Anarchist», and with paintings, such as *Rebellion* (by Luigi Russolo) and *The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli* (by Carlo

46 It is unlikely that Bochō read Morita’s article, but he knew Eddy’s book. He translated a passage from the chapter «Esoragoto» in the aforementioned article «Kono geijutsu de aru» (January 1916). Moreover, cultural columnist Nakada Katsunosuke (1886-1945) quoted passages from *Cubists and Post-Impressionism* in two articles in the January and February 1915 issues of *Sōzō*. As we have already seen, Bochō was a regular contributor to this magazine. Nakada also presented a translation of the very first pages of the book in the *Yomiuri shinbun* (7 August 1915: «Shingejutsu ni kanshite» [On the New Art]; KSGS-SZ, vol. 1, p. 324). In all these cases, however, the name of the American critic and the title of his book went uncredited. A partial translation of the book by Kume Masao was released in September 1916 as *Rittaiha to kōki inshōha* (Cubism and Post-Impressionism).

47 See Burke 1986, pp. 67-70, for a survey centred on the US press.

48 This article can be retrieved in the Marinetti’s *Libroni* online database, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Also quoted in Burke 1986, p. 68.

Carrà), which were both reproduced in the catalogues of the Bernheim-Jeune and Sackville exhibitions of 1912.⁴⁹

The label of «anarchists of the art world» is echoed in articles by Hasegawa Tenkei (1876-1940) and Yosano Hiroshi, which, around the same period, presented the Futurist movement to the Japanese readers.⁵⁰ In other cases, the Futurists were more generically connected to «syndicalism», often with an implicit reference to its anarchist and revolutionary version.

Therefore, we must stress that the connection of the anarchist doctrines with Futurism, however incorrectly or superficially emphasized in the press of the period, was relatively well known in the Japanese intellectual field.⁵¹

It is possible that, independently of his knowledge of Futurist propaganda, Bochō might have somehow nurtured an awareness of the political (and, in some cases, the terroristic) practices connected to the international anarchist movement; he may have found in them a source for a series of discursive objects (the terrorist attack, dynamite, arson, sabotage, etc.) that punctuated his polemic discourse. I will try, however, to examine if and how the more specific discursive configurations of *futurism as an instance of anarchism* and of *anarchism as an instance of futurism* can be connected to Bochō's statements about bombings and arson.

As a critical exercise, I will try now to verify the textual genealogy of a single specific image, that of the arsonist (*hōka hansha*). It seems that Bochō had no reading skills of any foreign language except English (and that was not impeccable) (Wada 1976, p. 77; Nakamura 1995, pp. 87-88). Therefore, if he came to know about Futurist materials, it must have been through Japanese or English texts or through the mediation of someone who could understand Italian or French. According to the state of the research on this point, he might have known the following materials.

It is not known if Bochō knew the original text of the aforementioned «Initial Manifesto of Futurism», which in the Sackville catalogue urges the «good incendiaries with their charred fingers» to «set fire to the shelves of the libraries» (Marinetti 1912, pp. 5-6). Kimura Shōhachi provided a translation of this version of the manifesto in his *Miraiha oyobi rittaiha no*

49 The first was held in Paris from 5 to 24 February 1912, the second in London from 1 to 31 March 1912. On the circulation of these two catalogues in Japan, see Ōtani 1992; Tanaka 2002.

50 Hasegawa Tenkei, «Shōraiha no kaiga tenrankai» (The Exhibition of Paintings of the Futurist School), *Bunshō sekai* (The World of Letters), June 1912 (now in KSGS-SZ, vol. 1, pp. 17-23). Yosano Hiroshi, «Fyuchurisuto no geijutsu» (Futurist Art), from the collection *Pari yori* (From Paris, May 1914), now in *Tekkan Akiko zenshū*, vol. 10, pp. 207-211.

51 Post-Impressionist artists like Takamura Kōtarō (1883-1956) and Hiroshima Kōho (1889-1951) had already claimed the label of anarchists in some of their 1910s writings. However, they did not resort to images of violence; to them, who were imbued with post-Impressionist and anti-Naturalist mythologies of the self, 'anarchism' was more than anything synonymous with absolute creative freedom (see Tanaka 1997, p. 168).

geijutsu (The Art of Futurism and Cubism, March 1915), a book that Bochō personally owned (Inoue 1988, p. 33; Tanaka 1988, p. 191):

Soko de, nanraka koto o suru te o motte yoki sendōsha wa kita no dearu... kita no dearu... Toshokan no noki ni hi o tsukeru ga ii! (KSGS-K, vol. 1, p. 278)⁵²

There have arrived the good agitators with their hands that can do anything... there have arrived... What a good thing it is to set fire to the eaves of the libraries!

This is an inaccurate rendition where, albeit the idea of setting fire to libraries is conveyed, the original word for «incendiaries» was translated with its metaphorical meaning of «agitators» (*sendōsha*). In the same way, when Kimura translates a previous passage where Marinetti defines his manifesto as a «manifesto of violence, destructive and incendiary», he renders «incendiary» as «sendōteki-naru» (literally, ‘agitatory’, ‘seditious’) (KSGS-K, vol. 1, pp. 84, 276). Such choices sensibly weaken the possibility of a direct lexical influence of this translation on Bochō’s *hōka hansha* image.

In this book, Kimura also gives a summary of the Futurists’ political ideas. They are depicted as «from time to time ardent nationalists, anarchists, nihilists, or socialists», whose «ideal of life is a succession of destructions» (KSGS-K, vol. 1, pp. 285-286).

According to Futurism scholars (Gioè 1987; Cammarota 2002), another Futurist manifesto that features the trope of the arsonist, «Uccidiamo il chiaro di luna!» / «Tuons le clair de lune!» (Let’s Kill Off the Moonlight!, 1909) was not available in Japanese or English before 1917. Moreover, there is no mention of it in the Japanese periodicals about Futurism collected in KSGS-SZ (vols. 1-2). Despite the inclusion of this manifesto in *Le Futurisme* (a book that, as can be inferred from Kimura Shōhachi’s and Takamura Kōtarō’s writings of this period,⁵³ circulated among the post-Impressionist coterie in Tokyo), it seems that Bochō didn’t know about it, as he did not about *Le Futurisme*.

52 This translation is also included in *Geijutsu no kakumei* (KSGS-K, vol. 1, p. 86). As far as I know, this is the first Japanese translation of this part of the manifesto. Previous translations were limited to its eleven articles. Another translation of this passage, where «incendiaries» is rendered as «sendōsha», appeared in the article «Miraiha banzai» (Hurray for Futurism!), *Yomiuri shinbun*, 25 December 1914 (KSGS-SZ, vol. 1, p. 246).

53 It is reported that Kōtarō had directly written to Marinetti in 1909, during or shortly after a study trip to Europe. Parts of *Le Futurisme* are rephrased in his article «Miraiha no zekkyō» (see above). As for Kimura and his younger colleague, Uryū Yōjirō, I know no explicit account of their contacts with this book, but since Marinetti regularly sent materials to them for some time after they wrote to him in 1912 (see Tanaka 2002, for more details), it is highly probable that they got a courtesy copy of it directly from the Futurist leader.

Other passing references to the arsonist trope in the Futurist discourse are probably too watered down and oblique to have impressed Japanese readers. This is the case of Sakuma Kanae's «Mirai shugi undō» (The Futurist Movement, *Teikoku bungaku* [Literature of the Imperial University], January 1914),⁵⁴ where the Futurists' attitude is said to reveal «the restlessness of an arsonist (*hōkasha*) who is starting a fire by using petroleum» (p. 83).

Finally, Bochō's inflammatory tropes may recall Futurist poet Aldo Palazzeschi's verses on similar themes, such as those that can be found in the poem «L'incendiario» (The Arsonist) from his collection that bears the same name (1910). However, as far as is known, no translation of this poem in English or Japanese was available before 1917, nor was the original covered in the Japanese cultural press. Despite Yosano Hiroshi's knowledge of some of Palazzeschi's verse (as shown by *Rira no hana*), it is therefore quite unlikely that Bochō knew about the works of this Italian poet.

Thus, despite their rhetorical similarities, I was not able to find conclusive evidence to posit a *direct* textual influence of the specific Futurist image of the arsonist on Bochō's writings. This study does not explore this issue in its entirety, but, as a provisional conclusion, it may be said that Bochō came to conceive some of the images of destruction and violence found in his writings of the so-called 'prismist period' independently from the *direct and punctual* influence of Futurist texts known at that time in Japan and to him personally.

Abbreviations

KSGS-K = Hidaka, Shōji; Omuka, Toshiharu (eds.) (2003). *Kaigai shinkō geijutsuron sōsho: Kanpon hen.* 12 vols. Tōkyō: Yumani Shobō.

KSGS-SZ = Hidaka, Shōji; Omuka, Toshiharu (eds.) (2005). *Kaigai shinkō geijutsuron sōsho: Shinbun zasshi hen.* 10 vols. Tōkyō: Yumani Shobō.

YBZ = *Yamamura Bochō zenshū* (1989-1990). 4 vols. Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō.

54 A translation of Massimo Dell'Isola, «Poche parole intorno al Futurismo» (A Few Words on Futurism), *Rivista d'Italia*, February 1913.

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