There are many types of *flâneur*, and as many definitions. The *Universal Dictionary of the English Language* describes the *flâneur* as "a gentle, dreamy loafer, esp. one who idles about the streets". To describe the *flâneur*, as a "loafer" is surely harsh, and "gentle" at best is only partly true. On the other hand, the adjective "dreamy" and the phrase "idling about the streets" hit on several characteristics of the *flâneur*. He (the *flâneur* is always a man) is a figure of the city, and *flânerie* implies aimless, pleasurable wanderings, in which the city in all its fascination becomes a projection of the *flâneur*’s imagination. In a city crowd the *flâneur* is both participant and observer; his meanderings have a sort of purposeless purpose.

The recognition of the *flâneur* as a particular kind of city figure has its origins in France in the mid-nineteenth century as Paris began its rapid growth, and *flânerie* as a theme in literature emerged in the writings of Balzac and Baudelaire. Equally, corresponding to the accelerated transformation which took place in Tokyo in the first decades of the twentieth century, the *flâneur* and his perceptions of city life can be found in the poetry of Hagiwara Sakutarô and the essays of Nagai Kafû. These two artists had in common the chief characteristic of the *flâneur*—that is, each remained solitary within the vastness of the city—but in their observations and reactions each displayed strong differences. Sakutarô celebrated city crowds and the street scenes of Tokyo. Emotionally, he identified with the people and their situations. Kafû, on the other hand, adopted a critical attitude towards modernism and its price: the dissolution of the past and the loss of cultural values. Always in his wanderings about Tokyo he looked for signs where the past had been preserved. In the literature of Japan at that time Sakutarô and Kafû are quite distinct in projecting onto the city states of mind typical of the *flâneur*. It is also worth mentioning that it is only in the arts that we are able to find any record of the *flâneur* and his impressions. Doubtless, in the population of any city *flâneurs* true to type exist, but have left no record of their solitary adventures.
HAGIWARA SAKUTARÔ (1886-1942)

Hagiwara Sakutarô was born in 1886, the son of a well-to-do doctor. In his schooldays Sakutarô was anything but a successful student and as an adult was never able to find employment, to his continual despair. Even in small tasks he was often impractical. After his death his daughter wrote that “whenever my father sent books or a parcel, by the time they arrived at their destination they were generally in a state of collapse with half of the contents out, or in the worst case nothing at all.” Yet Sakutarô had a profound knowledge and passion for music and his poems are famous for their inspiring rhythms achieved through phonetic effects. He is one of the great lyric poets of Japan, a modernist and pioneer, one of the first to break free from the constriction of traditional forms and to write poems in free verse (shi) as well as prose (sanbunshi), in both cases using contemporary language. “The purpose of poetry,” he wrote, “is to gaze deeply into the feelings that are quivering in one’s inner soul, and which flow out irrepressibly. Poetry is words beyond words.” Because of his great sense of rhythm, Sakutarô is known as ‘the poet of music’. Even his prose poetry is built around inner rhythms.

Sakutarô modestly described himself as being “if nothing else, a man with a strong sense of curiosity”. Curious he certainly was. “Whenever anything new or unusual had been invented,” he wrote, “I could not rest until I had seen or heard it. So whenever something came along, like talking motion pictures, or three-dimensional cinema, I would be the first to go and see it. I think I must have also been the first person in literary circles to take to jazz bands.” He was the first poet who consciously took the city as a poetic theme. In the following passage from his poem “City and Country” he brings Tokyo alive as it was in 1917 in brilliantly vivid imagery and with all the delight of the flâneur:

In the great incandescent city of Tokyo
The people who live in that wonderful city
Form a lively, vigorous crowd
Forever jostling one another on the great polished thoroughfares
Slipping in between the houses in the crowded tangle of buildings
There one finds a lonely back alley
Where the twisted eaves of bars intertwine
Along a dirty languidly flowing canal
In the sad atmosphere of that soot-grimed quarter
The cramped streets
Are always congested with crowds of drunken labourers
MODERNISM IN THE CITY: YASUKO CLAREMONT

Elsewhere in the splendour of the great city avenues
The gleaming door handles of the business houses
Gentlemen's canes, polished shoes, stone paving, tree-lined footpaths
Windows, windows, windows—the windows of the Central Station Hotel
And in yet another lively street
Like clumps of flowers, groups of beautiful ladies hurrying along
Carriages, automobiles, rickshaws, countless trams
Kaminari gate at Asakusa Park, cafes, theatres, music, barbers, whores,
Landlords, students, adults and children
Ah, what a happy merry-go-round
Tokyo fantasy on revolving wooden horses
All these happy things, moving things, drinking places, dirty places,
lonely places, crowded places, the serious, the complicated, the curious,
things in the sunlight, things in the shade, the bright and happy, the dark
and unbearably sad
All sensual pleasure and anguish, all modern thought and emotion
Perhaps even everything that is 'human' is to be found within this city.7

The Tokyo described here by Sakutarō had grown to become one of the
great cities of the world, due to Japan's new-found economic power from
the sale of armaments in World War I and an unstoppable rise in consumerism.

After the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923, the centuries-old city
was reconstructed into a modern city. Labourers poured into facto-
ries from all over the countryside, students came to study, the media
flourished and business people wanted to make a fortune. Foreign ideas
were taken up and adapted; Western technology underpinned industrial
progress. The residents of Tokyo were not necessarily born in Tokyo;
often they came to live there to work, so that Tokyo in a community
sense became increasingly less distinct, and cultural diversity emerged
at the cost of losing the authentic traditions which the city once had.
Tokyo had become, in effect, a large-scale centre of modernism, of
"crisis and change" as described by Terry Eagleton, "where the present
moment is somehow of the future".8 In this city Hagiwara Sakutarō
was, for a time, both a participant and an observer—essential qualities
of the flâneur.

Apart from Baudelaire, the name most associated with the flâneur
is that of Walter Benjamin, who was himself a flâneur. Baudelaire
described the flâneur as "one who botanizes on the asphalt".9 Benjamin
is just as memorable in describing the isolation of the flâneur and
how the city, with its buildings, commodities, and people ceaselessly
streaming by, can affect him with all the power of an opiate.
The crowd is not only the newest asylum of outlaws; it is also the latest narcotic for those abandoned. The flâneur is someone abandoned in the crowd. In this he shares the situation of the commodity. He is not aware of this special situation, but this does not diminish its effect on him and it permeates him blissfully like a narcotic that can compensate him for many humiliations. The intoxication to which he surrenders is the intoxication of the commodity around which he surges.... Empathy is the nature of the intoxication to which the flâneur surrenders himself in the crowd.\textsuperscript{10}

In Sakutarō's city poems published throughout his career since \textit{Tsuki ni haeru} (\textit{Honeymoon at the Moon}, 1917) we find the dual feelings of intoxication and abandonment about which Benjamin is speaking, although not precisely as Benjamin intended. Sakutarō's poetry is highly personal. He described himself as "a poet of feelings", so that he was always intensely aware of the fleeting character of city life which he combined with the "crisis and change" forever taking place in his own life. He found in the city release from feelings of despair which so often beset him:

The pleasure of city life lies in a space of forgetfulness that can be found anywhere. Not only in theatres and cinema halls, but also simply walking among the crowd, or seeing beautiful women in the streets, or browsing in the department stores or observing the hustle and bustle of the city through train windows and seeing various passengers, there is a space of forgetfulness where you can case your mind from the suffering of life.\textsuperscript{11}

Alone in a city crowd, Sakutarō enjoys his anonymity as he engages in the pleasure of 'Walking in Search through the Crowd' ('Gunshū no naka o motomete aruku', 1923):

I always yearn for the city
I long to be in the midst of the bustling city crowd
The crowd is like a great wave of emotion
A group that flows out everywhere with its abundant will and lust
In the sadness of a spring twilight, oh how I enjoy seeking out the shadows between the tangle of city buildings and being pummeled in the middle of a large crowd\textsuperscript{12}

On the other hand, in another poem, 'Gunshū no naka ni ite' ('Being in the Crowd', 1939), a prose poem which he wrote towards the end of his career, he describes with almost harrowing sensitivity the plight of all who have become lost in the indifference of the city:

City life is life as a crowd, where completely different people thinking quite separate thoughts sit together on the same public bench, looking at the same sky, without the least communication between them. The
same city sky spreads above the park bench in Asakusa, where the homeless tramp, the unemployed and the lost soul with nowhere to go, sit blankly side by side, each thinking his own thoughts. It reveals with infinite sadness the mood of the city as the gas lamps are lit.\textsuperscript{13}

Towards the end of the poem the poet’s tone changes into a certain nostalgia, a desire to lose his identity forever in the surge of the crowd:

The city is my lover. The crowd is my home. I will be roaming under the city sky and walking together with them forever. The horizon beyond the waves disappears. I will flow away in the midst of the crowd.\textsuperscript{14}

The people of the city or classes of people appear continually in his poems: clerks busily stamping documents, “the face of the detective deep in thought”, or factory workers pouring out into the street at dusk. In ‘Yūbinkyoku’ (‘Post Office’, 1939) he observes “poor female factory workers” with “their postal saving passes of daily wages in their hands” making a queue at the window, and a “rustic old country woman earnestly begs a person nearby to write a letter for her”. He recognized in himself the despair of the underclass:

We are the same, wearing worn-out shoes of despair as we wander the ports of daily life. A post office, as with a wharf or station, has the sadness and nostalgia of a place that evokes the ennui of life’s long journey and the nostalgia of the eternal soul.\textsuperscript{15}

It is around 1925, when he and his family started living in Tokyo, that both in his poetry and in his life Sakutarō’s attachment to the city radically alters. As we have seen, his poems revolve around people as representing the vitality of a modern city, with the cityscape and commodification as background, and it is through this deep emotional engagement that Sakutarō expresses the spirit of the flâneur. But always close at hand is a tone of melancholy. Discussing his poetry, Sakutarō had written:

What I want from my readers is that they appreciate not just the ideas and events on the surface of the poem, but my feelings which are the core of my inner self. I express inexplicable, complex, particular feelings, such as sadness, happiness, loneliness and fear by means of rhythms in my poetry.\textsuperscript{16}

In ‘Rikkyō o wataru’ (‘Crossing the footbridge’, 1939) we find that the city has receded to form only a loci or metaphor for the expression of his emotions. The poem contains a multiplicity of emotions that are fused together, with the image of the bridge acting as a connecting symbol:
I am lonely, crossing the footbridge all alone. Where can I go? I have never compromised, taking the easy way. The sun is low on the horizon; everything around me burns with anger. I am lonely, crossing the footbridge all alone, overwhelmed by my own shadow, in my long coat hating everybody, smashing, rebelling, ridiculing, ensnaring, inflaming hostility. Crossing this high imaginary bridge towards the city silhouetted against the sky.¹⁷

And in our final quotation from Sakutarō’s poetry—the opening passage of a long prose poem, ‘Kyomu bi ur’ (‘The Song of Nothingness’, 1939)—an empty city beer hall symbolises Sakutarō’s state of mind as he sits despondently, a glass of beer in his hand, reflecting on his “empty days”:

Three o’clock in the afternoon. In the middle of a vast hall I am drinking beer alone. There are no other customers, nor any sign of anything moving. The stove burns bright, and through the thick glass doors the sad light of late afternoon comes piercing in. White concrete floor, tables which seem to have no place there, numerous thin legs of chairs.¹⁸

Sakutarō’s inability to be conventionally successful in life weighed heavily upon him. In 1925 he published a highly personal note added to the preface of his fourth collection of poems, ‘Junjō shōkyokushū’ (‘Poems of a Pure Heart’) in which he expresses both anger and remorse at his own incapacity. The first paragraph reads:

My homeland! What feelings come to my heart when I see my homeland in the distance. My sad homeland. The people there are heartless. They always look at me cold-heartedly, saying that I have no job and am eccentric. They laugh at the pitiable poet and spit on me behind my back. They ridicule me, saying ‘here is a fool walking’.¹⁹

In his home city of Maebashi a cultural centre is now dedicated to Sakutarō.

NAGAI KAFU (1879-1959)

Kafū was born in 1879 in Koishikawa, Tokyo, the eldest son of a wealthy family with a samurai class background. He spent his youth indulging himself in the old pleasure quarter of Yoshiwara with its particular culture of aesthetics based on the Edo period in Japan (1600-1868). He also studied English and French. The old culture of the East and the modern culture of the West look incompatible, yet combined they gave him a particular vision of aesthetics and defined his contrarian narrative style. With his father’s financial support Kafū went to America and France (1903-1908). In 1913 he published Sango-shō (Coral Anthology), translations of French poems by Verlaine and Baudelaire, for example,
which had a strong influence on contemporary Japanese poets. Even in Japanese the book is a classic of poetic diction.

Kafū is an eccentric prose writer with a distinct taste for the Edo gesaku culture, which is commonly translated into English as light literature of the Edo period, its main purpose being entertainment for the public. Kafū’s artistry is structured on his pose as a flâneur whose outsider gaze penetrates what constitutes Japan’s modernism at the cost of losing its cultural identity. His moral standing and his artistic expression go hand in hand to form a contrarian perspective. His moral attitude is explicitly stated in ‘Hanabi’ (1919, ‘Fireworks’):

While I was going to Keiō University, I often saw on my way a line of five or six horse-drawn police wagons heading along the street through Ichigaya in the direction of the law court in Hibiya. Of all the worldly incidents I have ever seen or heard about, none had ever inspired such unspeakable disgust as this one. As a writer, I should not have kept silent about this question of ideology. Was not the novelist Zola forced to become an exile because he had cried out for justice in the Dreyfus case? But I, like the other writers of the day, did not say one word. I was assailed by unbearable pangs of conscience.

I felt extremely ashamed to be a writer. I reasoned with myself that from then on the best thing for me to do would be to lower the level of my art to that of the Edo gesaku writers. From that time on I wore a tobacco pouch, collected ukiyo-e prints, and began to play the samisen.90

Kafū refers here to the ‘Great Treason Incident’ in 1911, in which the execution of socialist Kōtoku Shūsui and eleven other so-called anarchists took place. In the late feudal Tokugawa Japan, the gesaku writers deliberately presented themselves as being not very serious and ambitious writers, so that they could remain working under the repression. While Kafū was pursuing his career as a writer, he too experienced censorship by the authoritarian Meiji government, for example publication bans on his books. Kafū was an exponent of Zola’s naturalism, yet with the great Meiji writer Mori Ōgai (1862–1922) he opposed the main literary trend of the time, the shishōsetsu (‘1-novel’) that had its origins in Japan’s naturalist movement. His critical eye pointed out the opacity prevalent in the shishōsetsu genre, where lucidity was intended to be its hallmark.

Kafū’s commitment to being a latter-day gesaku writer prompted him to re-investigate the topography of Edo culture, as so little of it was left in Tokyo. Kafū’s standing as a flâneur is clearly articulated in his collection of essays entitled Hiyorigeta (1915), which also shows Tokyo in the pre-Great Kantō Earthquake period. In the first sentence of the
first essay he describes his appearance when he goes out for a walk: "I am exceptionally tall and always wear footgear—*hiyorigeta*—and an umbrella." The contrast between the umbrella and *hiyorigeta* (which is a pair of clogs with low heels to be worn on a sunny day) makes the reader smile at once. All his life Kafū was an individualist, with no interest in materialism. He was attracted by the fleeting beauty of the cityscape. Here we shall look at Kafū as a *flâneur* with the capacity to appreciate Eastern aesthetics while practising Western-style criticism.

First I shall discuss Eastern aesthetics found in *Hiyorigeta*. Kafū describes topographical details of Tokyo, not shops or restaurants. In his walks he observes the light and shade of the natural environment around him but not the appearances of people passing by. Hilly slopes, bridges, Mt. Fuji in the distance, rivers, trees, the sunset and flowering grass on the vacant spots are his interests in which he finds beauty in transition. For him, the beauty of Tokyo lies in views of trees and water as depicted in *ukiyo-e* prints by Hokusai and Hiroshige in the Edo period. Compared to Kyoto and Nara, Tokyo offers no great temples and shrines, but has the natural beauty of the seasons. Kafū notices the indispensable relationship between the aesthetic view of Tokyo and the sunset. He can illustrate in detail exactly which streets and intersections show different views of the sunset. Similarly he argues that what gives Tokyo its distinctive character is the visibility of Mt. Fuji in the distance, just as Milan has the Alps behind and Naples the smoke of Mt. Vesuvius. As a citizen of Tokyo Kafū realized that soon there would be no site in Tokyo left for the survival of Edo culture. *Hiyorigeta* is his attempt that at least in writing he would be able to keep the beauty of the past intact:

The reason why I record the dates when I started writing these essays is that by the time this book is published I believe that some of the places that have been described here as excellent scenery will have been destroyed and gone completely. The wooden bridge, Imadobashi has been replaced by an iron bridge and the bank of the Edo River has been cemented over with no expectation of seeing the flowers of dew grass again. Aren't the vacant land outside the Sakurada Gate and that on the opposite side of Shiba Akabanebashi ready to be developed very shortly? I wish my humble book could become a source of talk one day conveying a memento of life in what is now a dream and where yesterday's deep pool becomes today's shallows.

As a *flâneur*, Kafū is a self-imposed recorder of inevitable change.

*Hiyorigeta* also contains some *kyōka* (comic and satiric Japanese poems popular in the 18th century Edo) giving a flavour of Edo culture
that has almost died out. His eyes find beauty in insignificant grass and banal items, such as a drying platform on a roof, revealing the fact that his aestheticism belongs to a particular type of tradition of aestheticism—that is, of low culture and the reversal of the way of the official world, so clearly shown in *ukiyo-e* prints.

Next, I should like to discuss Kažū’s criticism of contemporary society and his artistic projection. A *flâneur* must be a critical observer of the world, with his views reflecting his personality.

The areas where Kažū wanders about are back lanes and narrow streets with open gutters. There you find such shrines dedicated to a malicious god or a stone statue of Jizō (a guardian deity of children) or of foxes of Inari (a messenger of the gods). They are insignificant and unauthorized but are worshipped by the locals. Kažū felt almost at home when he saw a bib around the neck of a stone Jizō or some odd offerings, such as dumplings and fried *tōfu*. In the same vein he likes wandering around in the slum quarters with his eyes and ears open to listen to girls’ practising singing and playing the *samisen*. Kažū is not simply nostalgic but critical of the inhabitants: "... there is a life of the people in the shade—a pitiable and subservient life of silly people who are also lazy and irresponsible".

He saw happiness in poverty, too. When it rained the rainwater ran from the hilly area to the lower area, where poor dwellings and slums existed. After the heavy rain the dirty cloths and rags were exhibited like flags and banners on the roofs and at window sites. He noticed:

The dark naked men, dirty looking wives wearing underskirts only, and girls with little children at their backs in the dirty current of water try hard with buckets, baskets and tubs in their hands to catch fish overflowing from the ponds of wealthy family mansions. When I saw them from the bridge on my way I was impressed with such a grand sight under the sunny clear sky after the rain. It is like that of army soldiers standing in a row or feudal lords sitting in a row on stage. Each one of them can be extremely common but when they are all together as a group they form an unexpected beauty and dignity. The sight of the poor families I happened to see on the Furukawa Bridge after the storm was one of those examples.

There is no element of nostalgia here, just the energy of everyday life.

Kažū compares the people living in slums in Tokyo to those in New York and London. To Kažū, Japanese slum areas can be characterised as areas of ‘quietness’ whereas Western slum areas are characterized by activity. In that ‘quietness’ he finds almost the virtue of life in contentment with what you spiritually have. So strong were his convictions
that he believed it was almost dangerous for the Japanese poor to be educated and enlightened, leading them to adopt the spirit of protest of the new age:

They would then begin to realize how abject is the poverty endured by the lower class.\(^{25}\)

Having seen the ruins of the grand mansions of the Edo period and their gardens, Kafū saw in them the cost of Japan’s advancement into a modern state:

I have imagined the scenes of a number of famous gardens in the Edo period which I read about in books and saw in pictures. I acknowledge that the Meiji civilization in which we were born came into being as a result of the drastic measures that took place, when the art of the garden was destroyed so that military compounds and factories manufacturing weaponry could be built on their sites.\(^{26}\)

In *Hiyorigeta*, Kafū describes a visit to ‘Kanchōrō’, the house of his mentor, Mori Ōgai, whose ascetic study was in a tower—“the tide viewing tower”—from which Tokyo Bay could be seen. Kafū, the *flâneur*, vividly depicts the sparseness of Ōgai’s study and how the view of the city changed into a smoky mist as a temple bell began ringing, reminding him of the colour of grey in a painting of Chavannes.

Perhaps Kafū was an elitist, even a dilettante. Because he grew up in a well-off family, the only way that he could find to rebel against the values they represented was to identify with the losing side. He liked the untainted dignity of the lower class people and their culture, such as *ukiyo-e*, *kyōka* and *gesaku* literature, in which you could find common grass and insects characterized in the form of art. He rejected the falsity of the shops in the Ginza. Behind the pose of eccentricity lay his moral convictions. In his works, such as *Hiyorigeta*, he celebrated an aesthetic past, remnants of which he continued to find as he went about Tokyo. Stephen Snyder in his book *Fictions of Desire*\(^{27}\) quoted Walter Benjamin’s words, “The delight of the urban poet is love—not at first sight, but at last sight”, which is certainly appropriate to Kafū’s exclusive taste for fleeting beauty. As a *flâneur* he saw clearly what Tokyo had lost and what it had once been. He was an uncompromising critic of modernity. He died alone, a solitary and eccentric figure throughout his life.

In their perceptions of Tokyo, Kafū and Sakutarō complemented each other. In Kafū’s aesthetic vision of the past there was no place for the bustling crowds and individuals of a modern city that so attracted Sakutarō. Kafū’s focus is confined, Sakutarō’s comprehensive. “The great city avenues” described by Sakutarō are dismissed by Kafū
with disdain. Kafū’s prose is evaluative, Sakutarō’s poetry emotionally charged. Each projected a particular state of mind in his perceptions of the city. Kafū never wavered in his concern for the aesthetic past of Japan being obliterated by modernism. For Sakutarō, on the other hand, city life was deeply intertwined with his personal emotions. Kafū was a citizen, an insider, whereas Sakutarō, born in the country, resided in Tokyo only for a time, and toward the end of his life he reversed his early adulation of the city entirely in favour of a nostalgic return to the country and its traditional values.

NOTES

1 Honoré de Balzac, Physiologie du flâneur (1841), Charles Baudelaire, Les Fleurs du mal (1857).
2 Hagiwara Yōko (1929–2005), essayist, novelist, the eldest daughter of Sakutarō, born in Tokyo. Her works generally centred around her memories of her father and her associations with literary people. She won the Japan Essayist Prize with Father, Hagiwara Sakutarō in 1960.
3 Sakutarō’s last collection of poems, Hyōō (The Iceland, 1954), which was deliberately written in the old style of Japanese, is one exception. The critic, Fukumaga Takehiko nevertheless argues that the classical diction used in The Iceland still demonstrates Sakutarō’s ability to create his own poetic language even when using the old form.
11 Hagiwara, in ‘Shukumei’ (‘Fate’, 1939), Nihon no Shiika, p. 361. Unless otherwise stated all translations are mine.
16 Hagiwara, Tsuki ni hoeru (Hotelizing at the Moon, 1917), in Nihon no Shiika, p. 6.
17 ‘Fate’, Nihon no Shiika, p. 342.
18 ‘Fate’, Nihon no Shiika, p. 362.
19 Hagiwara, Junjū shōkyakushū (Poems of a Pure Heart, 1925), in Nihon no Shiika, p. 275.


23 *Hyorigeta* (1915), in *Zenshū*, p. 214.

24 *Hyorigeta*, pp. 235–236.


26 *Hyorigeta*, p. 254.