



Title	The Problem of Defining Japanese Critical Terminology : Motoori Norinaga's Explanation Of 'Aya'
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Citation	詞林. 1998, 24, p. 41-59
Version Type	VoR
URL	<a href="https://doi.org/10.18910/67422">https://doi.org/10.18910/67422</a>
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# The Problem of Defining Japanese Critical Terminology:

## Motoori Norinaga's Explanation Of 'Aya'

(和歌論用語を定義すること—本居宣長の「<sup>あや</sup>文」をめぐる—)

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### 要 旨

本稿は、本居宣長の和歌論である『石上私淑言』における「<sup>あや</sup>文」という語を厳密に定義せんとする試みである。それにより、歌学用語を定義する過程を考察することになる。ソクラテスの時期以来、言葉の明確な定義を追求し、それに執着さえ持つ西洋哲学の伝統に対して、日本の伝統的な歌学・歌論においては、厳密な定義は要求されたものではないと言ってもよからう。本稿では、「<sup>あや</sup>文」の定義を出発点として、ソクラテスがもったような定義意識を、和歌論の研究に適応させるならば、どのような結果が生じようか、という検討を行う。

In this essay, I shall approach the field of Japanese poetics through an exploration of the nature and limits of definition. Grasping the thought and the poetic art of a culture depends to no small extent on understanding that culture's language and how it is used both to create and to describe that thought and that art. The tradition of Japanese *waka* theory is one that processes a rich critical and descriptive vocabulary. To understand that tradition, and thus the way Japanese poets and theorists have thought about the *waka* that they create and judge, it goes without saying that it is necessary to have a secure grasp of the meaning and significance of this vocabulary.

Perhaps the above claim says nothing outstanding. To understand any theoretical exercise, it is obvious that one must have a good grasp of the language used to express the thought at hand. To my mind, however, the discussion of Japanese poetic, or for that matter aesthetic, terminology presents certain special difficulties to the non-Japanese researcher, especially to those who have been trained in European philosophy. The difficulty is rooted in the fact that what European philosophers have traditionally taken to be a good definition is something rarely if ever seen in the Japanese tradition; indeed, the most visible tendency in Japanese art and aesthetic theory is quite the reverse. In line with the Japanese proverb "*iwanu ga hana*," or "The flower lies within the unspoken," Japanese writers have often shown an aversion towards rigorous

definition and explanation. While this aversion may leave non-Japanese with a sense of frustration directed towards Japanese “ambiguity,” such frustration and lack of comprehension have led not a few Japanese, emphasizing often the fact that theirs is an island nation, to claim that the aesthetic aspects of their culture simply cannot be understood by foreigners, that there is a certain quality connected with being Japanese, a certain shared understanding, that is simply unavailable to outsiders. Rejecting any such theory of “uniqueness,” I wish here to approach this problem, by looking first at the nature and extent of definition in the European philosophical and aesthetic traditions, and then comparing that with 18th century theorist Motoori Norinaga’s manner of explaining and defining the special term he adapted as a criterion of all poetry. I hope not only to make clear the differences in thinking regarding definition and explanation that exist between these two essentially disparate traditions, but also to begin developing a method of explaining such problematic terminology in a manner which will be satisfactory to a trained European aesthete while yet avoiding the common pitfall of forcing what has been constructed with a fundamentally Japanese logic into a framework that simply cannot cope with it.<sup>1</sup>

## **I. Definition for Socrates and in European Aesthetics**

The attitude which regards the careful and detailed definition of terms as a necessary and fundamental task of philosophical inquiry can be seen clearly in the vision given by Plato of his teacher Socrates. This attitude is a basis of the dialectical method by which truth was sought and thought to be attainable. Such attention to words and what they signify has been paid not only by the ancients. In fact the analysis of the words we use to do philosophy is the major project in what might be called the two major trends in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy as well, Anglo-American analytical philosophy and Continental European hermeneutic philosophy.

Even a cursory look at any Socratic dialogue will reveal the extent to which the Socratic/ Platonic project was concerned with definition. Indeed, most of the dialogues left by Plato focus on the proper definition or explanation of a single important term: Piety in the *Euthyphro*, Virtue in the *Meno*, Justice in the *Republic*, Beauty in the *Hippias Major*, Love in the *Symposium*. The sophistic enemies of Socrates are portrayed either as careless users or devious

twisters of words, employing rhetoric to their own advantage, covering up the inadequacies in their understanding with flowery speech. They are seen profiting from vague and muddy use of language. Socrates, on the other hand, wants not profit but truth.

It is perhaps in the *Euthyphro* that Socrates is best depicted in his quest for clarity. There, having been notified that he will be brought to trial for impiety, Socrates meets up with old Euthyphro, diviner and teacher of religious matters, who is himself charging his own father with manslaughter. While Socrates is being thought impious on account of “not believing in the gods of the state and creating new gods,” Euthyphro is likewise thought impious in that he has the gall to bring charges against his very father. A debate ensues between the dialectician and the soothsayer on the nature of piety and impiety.<sup>2</sup> Of course, the consciousness at the time is not one in which the two are seeking to define a word—they are seeking to understand a principle—but what ensues can in fact be characterized as the laborious attempt to define what ‘piety’ means.

Whenever Euthyphro, respected teacher, sets up a definition, Socrates is there to check it, and indeed, nothing the old teacher can devise will endure the relentless pursuit of clarity of the master. Euthyphro at first answers Socrates by giving an example of what the word ‘piety’ denotes, namely, his very actions. Socrates, however, is not satisfied with simple denotations; he wants to know the essence of piety: “I was not inviting you to name one or two of many pious actions, but to tell me the essential characteristic whereby *all* pious acts are pious.”<sup>3</sup> Euthyphro then replies with a general definition, that “What is dear to the gods is pious, and what is not dear to them is impious.”<sup>4</sup> Socrates of course continues to pursue a more detailed and grounded definition: “Come then, let us examine our statement.”<sup>5</sup> Euthyphro responds, continually adding conditions to his definition, continually being examined by Socrates, in the end giving up in frustration, beleaguered by the gadfly who would seek to tear down all imperfect explanations.

It is in this will to examine that Socrates’s character is most truly manifest. No statement may stand that is not sound; none that relies upon accepted but unproven or unspoken notions should be trusted. We know the nature of a thing such as piety only after dialectically wringing it out, seeing all of its implications, testing all we believe about it. In this case Euthyphro gives what might best be characterized as a common-sense definition of ‘piety.’ For

Socrates, however, common sense has but a tenuous place in philosophical inquiry. This is made clear in his response to the next version of the definition: "Then shall we test the truth of this statement also, or shall we let it go and simply accept it on the authority of ourselves and others, recognizing it as true on the basis of mere assertion?"<sup>6</sup>

It is this attitude, in which no statement uttered by authority is thus allowed to pass, which eventually led Socrates to his execution. With him as a kind of role model, most aestheticians in the European tradition have similarly sought clear and rigorous definitions of the terms which they use. Plato himself sought the definition of beauty. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, gives the first recorded definition of tragedy, one with which all theorists of the genre to this day have grappled. The history of modern aesthetics, at its heart, reflects a struggle with the definition of aesthetic terms such as 'beautiful,' 'sublime,' 'art,' 'poetry,' and 'picturesque,' the theories of Kant and Burke perhaps providing the best examples. In Japan as well, Ohnishi Yoshinori, perhaps the foremost Japanese aesthician of this century, influenced by the systematic and analytical nature of European (particularly German) aesthetics, sought to explain the ideals of Japan in a similar fashion, in his works *Yugen to Aware*, and *Fuga Ron: Sabi no Kenkyu*.<sup>7</sup> A quick perusal of the traditional works in poetics or other types of aesthetic theory in Japan is all that is necessary to see that no such level of concern with definition was possessed generally by the Japanese before their contact with the West in the Meiji period. The question I wish to address here, though, is whether or not such a concern might help to clarify some of the vague points of that tradition.

By the way, this attitude which seeks specific and detailed definition of terms is not limited to the philosophical tradition, but can be seen across various disciplines in Europe, poetics proper not excluded. We see it, for instance, in the published *Lectures on Shakespeare* of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, where the great Romantic poet seeks a definition of 'poetry.' There he places the term into a context by discussing its relation to other things like prose and science, and then moves dialectically through various stages of definition, inquiring into poetry's object, its effects, and its conditions before arriving at the definition that,

[P]oetry, or rather a poem, is a species of composition, opposed

to science, as having intellectual pleasure for its object, and attaining its end by the use of language natural to us in a state of excitement,—but distinguished from other species of composition, not excluded by the former criterion, by permitting a pleasure from the whole consistent with a consciousness of pleasure from the component parts.<sup>8</sup>

Taking this as an example of the degree to which exactness in the explanation and definition of poetic terms might be taken, I wish to proceed to look at the explanation given by Norinaga of the term '*aya*,' which he uses to denote that something which makes poetry different from regular speech. From there, I hope to reflect upon the problem of defining Japanese poetic terms: to what extent might a consciousness similar to that of Socrates, or Coleridge for that matter, clarify, or possibly further muddy, our now less than satisfactory understanding of such terms?

## II. *Aya* and the *Waka*

Motoori Norinaga was one thinker who seemed to have had a special talent for digging up old words that were rich in significance, adding new nuances to them, and using them to express in a novel way some particularly difficult aspect of this thought. The first such term to come to mind when reflecting upon Norinaga's theories of poetry and fiction is perhaps '*mono no aware*.' This term, as well as its component '*aware*' alone, was used variously in poetry and prose, as well as poetic and other literary theory long before Norinaga used it as his keyword to describe the nature of poetry and *monogatari* fiction, but it was Norinaga who first attempted to give to the word a clear and specific significance. And it was his use which colored the manner in which the word would thereafter be understood—it is the significance which he gave to the term that has become the common one. Consequently, more than any other part of his vast scholarship, it is his "*mono no aware* theory," especially the last and most advanced version of it in his *Genji Monogatari Tama no Ogushi*, that has become his best-known accomplishment.

Though '*mono no aware*' might be the most well-known keyword created by Norinaga, it is by no means the only term so adapted by him for such a purpose. '*Aya*' is one other such term, one which plays an important role in

Norinaga's poetic theory. Despite this fact it has not been given near as much attention by later scholars as '*mono no aware*' has. One contemporary scholar who does, however, seem to have felt its importance is the aesthete Amagasaki Akira. "The *Aya* of *Waka*," which is the preface-like first chapter of his work on poetic theory, *Kacho no Tsukai*, begins as follows,

Up until the early modern period, almost all that existed as Japanese literary theory was *waka* theory. Research into classical Japanese literature and nativism may have advanced enormously in the Edo era, but even then the '*aya*' of words was still, as always, seen as a problem tied to *waka*.<sup>9</sup>

In this work Amagasaki takes as his object Japanese *waka* poetry, for the reason that it is in such poetry that *aya*, that thing which he principally seeks, is to be found. It might be thought that in the above quote '*aya*' is used vaguely, with no explanation of the term's signification being afforded in the least. Any Japanese educated in the national literature would of course be at least marginally familiar with the term, and indeed "the *aya* of words" (*kotoba no aya*) is a somewhat common expression in the colloquial language as well, but Amagasaki shows that he has no confidence in the agreement of individual understandings in that he goes on to explain it in more detail, and in that explanation, he references Motoori Norinaga:

For example, Norinaga thought in the following manner. 'Normal words' have the power to signify and theorize concerning the 'reason' of things, but cannot relate *aware*, as it is 'such a thing as cannot be spoken.' What can express this *aware* is words possessing '*aya*,' i.e., poetry.<sup>10</sup>

In explaining what he means to signify by his use of the term, Amagasaki borrows Norinaga's signification, beginning, however, not with any substantial definition of what the word connotes, but with a functional definition that relies upon the role the term has played in previous theory. This may leave us, in fact, with a sense of confusion regarding just what this mysterious thing is that has the power to change 'normal words' into 'poetry.' Amagasaki proceeds, however, to explain the word in more concrete terms.

Taken broadly, 'aya' refers to the alternation of 5 and 7 syllable lines into which *waka* are patterned, and thus in this respect all *waka* possess *aya*. However, if we take its narrow meaning, even within a *waka* there exist both elements that contain *aya* and those that do not...(Norinaga) favored the plain (*heitan*) in a *waka*'s shape (*sugata*) and despised obtrusive *aya*.<sup>11</sup>

What we see here is that in Amagasaki's interpretation, not only are there differences in breadth, but there are two different qualitative levels to the meaning of *aya* in Norinaga. All poems contain *aya* in as much as they are poems. Thus in the case of the Japanese *tanka*, in so far as the words are arranged in the 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic verse structure, they contain *aya*, and thus can be called a poem. However, he also finds in Norinaga a more subtle use of the term, indeed a normative one--good poems contain the right kind of *aya*, while obtrusive-sounding and poorly-written poems lack it. Hence Amagasaki identifies *aya* in the narrow sense with good poetic style. In the case of Norinaga, who expressed clearly his preference for the style of the *Shin Kokinshu*, true *aya* was to be found in the style of the poems contained in that collection. Amagasaki, himself seeking something like a history of *aya*, goes on to discuss several different theories of what good *waka* are, in order to discover what good *aya* in fact has been thought by the past masters to be.

Based upon this discussion, the only concrete thing that we can point to as that which *aya* denotes is the syllabic structure shared by most Japanese poetry. Sometimes this structure is well-created, and sometimes not. Understood in such a manner, though, this term comes to serve little to no function. To make a parallel with English poetry, this is similar to saying that poetry is that which simply consists in rhyme or meter, and that good rhyme or good meter makes for good poetry. But it is obvious that, just as 'poetry' means more than "words possessing rhyme and/or meter," a discussion of the difference between *waka* and normal words which simply explained that the first follow a decided syllabic structure would be less than informative. In fact, within the Japanese tradition, wherein all pre-modern poetry (except some of the very earliest) consisted of some pattern of alternating 5 and 7 syllable verses, such a statement approaches truism. Amagasaki's second point regarding the nature of *aya* adds no concrete information whatsoever to our understanding. Were someone to speak of some 'X,' and go on to tell that of this 'X' there were both good



(plain and subtle) as well as poor (obtrusive) examples, such an explanation would afford no idea of what 'X' in fact was. We can conclude from this that Amagasaki expects a certain level of understanding from his audience in regard to what this "*aya*" is, and that this is in fact a higher level of understanding than can be obtained from a simple dictionary. Looking at such a definition will enable us to get a preliminary understanding of the term.

*Aya*: N. 1. The pattern created by vertical, horizontal, and diagonal, etc. lines. Especially the pattern of crisscrossing diagonal lines. 2. Lineage, fold; thread (of a discussion), reason, logic. (As in '*aya nashi*' and '*ayame*.) 3. Decorative elements in a text. Rhetoric. 4. That which is purposely added or attached. The adding of color.<sup>12</sup>

We will see that Norinaga uses the term in ways resembling three of the four definitions given here. Amagasaki, in giving the brief definition quoted above, used the word in distinction to "normal words," those which signify the "reason of things." Ironically, however, that very thing which he sets up as the opposite of *aya* is actually one possible meaning of the term (No. 2 above)! In fact the roots of such a usage are ancient, the terms '*aya nashi*' and '*ayame*' appearing numerous in poetry as well as prose at least as far back as the *Man'yōshū*. Whatever ambiguity that might be found in Amagasaki's use of '*aya*' may perhaps be traced back to Norinaga's own use of the term. While the role given it by Norinaga in *Isonokami Sasamegoto*, his most advanced book on *waka* theory, is no small one, the explanation he gives of the term is less than perspicuous. Of course, such might be expected from a man like Norinaga, who continually lashed out against the over-rationalization of the Confucians, calling it unnatural and arrogant, stifling and ignorant of the wonder of human and divine existence, blasting its tendency to read poetry not as it should be read, i.e. as the expression of human experience and emotion, but finding everywhere a political or moral lesson.

In order to define '*aya*' we must look both into what Norinaga explicitly says about the word and how he otherwise uses it, picking up pieces here and there throughout *Isonokami Sasamegoto* and fitting them together to form the coherent whole that he never presents. In response to the question, "The word '*uta*' signifies just what kind of thing?" the first question of a book written in a question and answer format, Norinaga reveals the importance of

the role that *aya* will play in his poetics by giving it as one of three criteria concerning what makes an '*uta*':<sup>13</sup>

Speaking broadly, starting with the 31-syllable *tanka* and including the *Kagura uta*, the *saibara*, the *renga*, the *imayo*, the *fuzoku uta*, the *Tale of the Heike*, the songs of the *Noh*, modern comic songs, *haikai*, short songs, puppet theatre and even popular children's and laborers' songs, any thing that is sung out, containing *aya* and in which the words are well arranged is an *uta*.<sup>14</sup>

Here the three criteria given are that for some thing to be an *uta*, 1. It must be "sung." 2. It must contain '*aya*.' 3. Its words must be "well arranged." Here we see something that Amagasaki also noticed, namely that the notion of '*aya*' is central to Norinaga's understanding of what an *uta* is. But this too amounts to a mere functional definition. What exactly does Norinaga mean by the word? That is the next question asked by his examiner. His reply,

"Having *aya*" signifies that the words are properly arranged and situated and show no disorder. In general, from old times until the present, and in both noble and common poetry, that proper arrangement has meant lines of five and seven syllables. Thus the *tanka* of old as well as the popular songs of today are all arranged in fives and sevens.<sup>15</sup>

In this, the closest Norinaga comes to giving an actual definition of '*aya*,' we see that first and foremost in his usage, '*aya*' does indeed indicate the decided syllabic structure standard to pre-modern Japanese poetry, the meter given to words when they are put into verse form. This is just as Amagasaki has stated in the quotes above. This is not, however, a complete definition. There are numerous other places throughout the text where Norinaga both adds to and qualifies what he says here—he has other definite things in mind when he speaks of "the *aya* of words." We know, for instance, that *aya* is not identical with meter through statements made by Norinaga just before he gives this 'definition,' when he attributes *aya* to the voices of animals as well as to certain sounds emanating from inanimate objects. In accordance with statements made by Ki no Tsurayuki in the Japanese preface to the *Kokinshu*, he claims that animals such as birds and frogs can indeed create *uta*, though not all of their sounds are *uta*--only those that contain *aya*. Furthermore, he states of the sounds of inani-

mate objects,

We do not even call the wondrous sounds produced by various musical instruments ‘*uta*,’ Why? because such sounds are not voices produced spontaneously out of the heart. How, then, might we call the sound of the wind or the echo of the waters ‘*uta*?’ Even if such sounds contain *aya*, the voice of an inanimate object is no *uta*.<sup>16</sup>

Thus though these sounds cannot be considered poems, still they might contain *aya*. Viewed in light of these two points, it is clear that in the usage of Norinaga, ‘*aya*’ refers to something broader than the 5-7 syllabic structure. Obviously, animals and inanimate objects do not produce sounds in groups of 5, 7, 5, 7, and 7 syllables, yet still the sounds which they make sometimes contain *aya*. Thus, this syllabic structure is not a necessary condition of *aya* being present. From this we know that there is something else that the term must also signify. Indeed Norinaga does elaborate in regard to this, not at this point in the work, but later, in relating his theory of how poems come to be. His statements there point less to a distinction between the good and bad in poetry or between plain and obtrusive *aya*, as discussed by Amagasaki, but rather to further concrete elements of expression that are part of what *aya* is, and which function to make poems special, different in form and function from “normal words.”

Norinaga describes the poetic impulse in general as something that naturally springs up in the human heart when that heart is moved through contact with the outside world. The heart thus moved is filled with *mono no aware* to the extent that it can no longer keep silent, wherefrom it speaks forth its feelings in verse form, in words imbued with *aya*. On the most basic level, poetry is unintentional and unplanned, the result of a catharsis, an expression welling up from the sensitive heart. There are times, however, when poetry is planned and our expressions carefully chosen, when we consciously create poems to say the things we cannot fully express in normal speech or with unconsciously invested *aya*. At such times, poets turn to rhetorical technique. In *Isonokami Sasamegoto* Norinaga doesn’t go so far as to give a clear enumeration of such techniques in showing what he means by the term. He does, however, describe several of them as part of the process of making a poem, of “giving *aya* to words.” There are seven such techniques, all commonly used in the *waka* tradition, which he either explicitly mentions or presents through the

poems he quotes. Below I shall show these, using the poems that Norinaga quotes in order to display them, and also showing how he relates these techniques to 'aya.'

After stating that, fundamentally, poems are born forth of themselves at times when humans are overcome with *mono no aware*, he further qualifies this point:

There are also times, though, when the fullness of the unbearable *aware* we feel is particularly difficult to put into verse, when our feelings are particularly hard to express. At such times, we can entrust our feelings to the sounds of the wind or the insects that touch our ears, and compose poems based upon them. Or we might compare our thoughts to the site or scent of the blossoms or the color of the snow, and use these as vehicles for our expression. This is what it means in the preface to the *Kokinshu* when it says 'We attach the thoughts in our hearts to the things we see and hear and speak out upon them.' Even when *mono no aware* is hard to express were we to speak out spontaneously, if we do so in terms of the things we hear and see in this way, even our deepest emotions are easy to express.<sup>17</sup>

Here Norinaga is of course referring to the use of metaphor, particularly the type which entered Japan with Chinese verse and became so prevalent in the *waka* of the *Man'yōshū* and afterwards, that being the technique of "approaching the object to state your thoughts" (*kibutsu chinshi*). There are of course various manners in which metaphor might be applied, and Norinaga touches upon two. There can be direct metaphor, an example of which he gives in a poem from the *Nihon Shoki*:

A. みづみづし久米の子らが垣下に植へしはじかみ口ひびく  
我は忘れずうちてしやまむ

Just as the ginger, planted at the foot of the fence,  
by the children of Kume, great in vigor,  
leaves a lasting burning in my mouth,  
so shall I not forget him  
who was shot and met his end.

Norinaga gives a second example, a poem by Priest Sosei that was included in the *Kokinshū*, that contains a later and more elegant use of direct metaphor:

- B. 音にのみきくのしら露よるはおきて昼はおもひにあへず消ぬべし<sup>18</sup>  
 Hearing only rumors, never have I seen you.  
 Like the dew on a chrysanthemum,  
     awakening at night and vanishing in the daylight,  
 in my love I spend sleepless nights, and feel  
     I shall fade to nothing when daylight comes.

Separate in his mind is another kind of metaphorical technique, which we might call “hidden,” as it is used when outright expression is impossible. He states:

There is yet another kind of situation that occurs when the *aware* of things is unbearable. Such cases occur when we cannot clearly and directly express our feelings in words, as there is something hindering such expression. Then, too, we speak in terms of external things.<sup>19</sup>

He then gives the following example from the *Kojiki*, from the time when Emperor Jimmu perished and his son Prince Tagishimimi schemed to kill his younger brothers. Hearing of this, the mother of the younger princes wrote two poems, relying upon metaphorical images of the wind and clouds to inform them secretly of this scheme. The first poem reads:

- C. うねび山ひるは雲とみ夕されば風ふかむとぞ木の葉さやげる  
 At noon the clouds hang over Mount Unebi,  
 but when evening comes  
 the wind will rise, the leaves on the trees will rustle.

The rising wind, of course, being a metaphor for the older prince.

After quoting these poems, Norinaga stresses that the objects spoken of in them are merely used to express deeper emotions, emotions which do not necessarily bear any natural relation to the objects themselves. Such natural objects as are suitable to be used in creating such metaphors are usually themselves rich in *aware*, he admits, but the point is that these poems are not *about* such objects. The objects are mere vehicles used metaphorically in order to express human emotion. In this discussion Norinaga never explicitly uses the word *aya*. He merely speaks of times when neither mere speech nor spontaneous poetic expression is sufficient to fully express poetic emotion. The implica-

tion clearly is that in such cases, the accomplished poet will move beyond simple meter and supplement the metrical *aya* which he has given to his words with metaphor. Thus indeed such techniques are also part of what is signified by the term.

Following this, Norinaga goes into a more explicit discussion of the connection between rhetoric and *aya*. He mentions the pillow word (*makura kotoba*) as one specific rhetorical device used in order lend *aya* to a poem:

[E]ven poems in the age of the gods did not consist merely of an exclamation of heartfelt feelings simplicitor. *Aya* must be given to words, and one's voice must sing charmingly in *aware*. When we use pillow words like 'young grass' to speak of a wife, or 'blackberry lily' to speak of the night, aren't we merely giving *aya* to words and adjusting meter?<sup>20</sup>

He follows this by quoting three poems, all rich in rhetoric, to give a concrete example of what *aya* denotes. Two of the three poems contain pillow words, and most of the other representative rhetorical techniques of Japanese poetry are visible as well.

- D. 敷島のやまとはあらぬからごろもころもへずしてあふよしもがな<sup>21</sup>  
The Chinese dress we see so much these days  
is not of Yamato, *these islands spread across the sea*.  
If I could but see you nearly as often. . .
- E. みかのはらわきて流るるいづみ川いつ見きとてかこひしかるらむ<sup>22</sup>  
Like the river Izumi,  
gushing out, flowing through Mika plain,  
when did I see her, that so pours forth my love?
- F. よそにのみみてややみなむかづらぎやたかまの山のみねのしら雲<sup>23</sup>  
Might I gaze from afar and stopped at that?  
Just like the White clouds at the peak  
of *Kazuragi's Mount Takama*.

The pillow words used in the above poems are '*shikishima no*' in (D), translated "These islands spread across the sea," and in F, '*kazuragi ya*,' which is a place name, and yet also functions as a pillow word. There are also, however,

four other types of traditional rhetorical devices displayed in these three poems. One is the *jo kotoba* or preface, which appears in (D) and (E). In (D), taking up the first three lines of the original and the first two of the translation, the preface works in conjunction with the pillow word ‘*shikishima no,*’ to form an imagistic and metaphorical introduction to the main idea of the poem, namely that the poet wants to meet his beloved. The preface in (E) functions in similar fashion. There, however, the connection between the preface and the body of the poem is secured not by pillow word, but through the use of a pivot word (*kakekotoba*), another type of rhetorical device, relying upon the repetition of sounds. Here, the sound ‘izumi’ appears twice consecutively, the first time signifying the river’s name, the second ‘when did I see.’<sup>24</sup>

In each of these poems, all of which happen to be love poems, the words which form the preface have no direct connection to be emotions being expressed. Rather, they work as a certain type of non-direct metaphor, enriching poetic imagery and adding elegance and beauty, helping to convey in a poetic manner the feelings expressed by enriching the *aya* given to words. In regards to this, Norinaga states:

In these, the thoughts of the poets’ hearts are expressed in only two of the five verses of each poem, with the remaining three verses being dedicated solely to *aya*. There are some people who therefore think of these as useless words, but it is through the *aya* of such “useless” words that the *aware* of the other two phrases is truly deepened. All of this illustrates the difference between everyday speech and poetry.<sup>25</sup>

This is the most explicit statement that Norinaga makes concerning the relationship between *aya* and concrete rhetorical practice. From it we can know unequivocally that for Norinaga ‘*aya*’ signifies not only meter, but also the rhetorical devices which work to enhance poet style. Incidentally, two other rhetorical devices, both forms of association of images, can be seen in these three poems. These are the *uta makura*, or use of a place name that carries certain associated images, and word association (*engo*). “Mika Plain” in poem E and “Mount Takama” in (F) are of course place names. In their use here as *uta makura*, however, they signify less the physical characteristics of an actual place and more a certain set of images which had culturally and poetically come to be

associated with the names of numerous famous places in Japan. Most poets used such *uta makura* though never even having seen the actual place, in order simply to amplify the imagery of their poems and add a certain kind of nostalgic elegance. These place names are not meant to relate the physical setting of the poems in which they were employed. They are meant instead to transmit a poetic or cultural setting and image, and thus should also be thought of as one form through which *aya* is given to words; as Norinaga says, “deepening” the expression of the more literally meaningful verses. Word association works in a similar manner. It is seen in poems (B) and (E), wherein various words that hold a certain semantic relationship (*en*) are used, working not so much to change or add to the meaning of the poem as to give it a deeper texture, with certain words and images being called up or anticipated through the use of words which were thought to have a natural relationship to other words. A list of the associative words themselves will itself make this point clear: In (B), ‘dew’ calls up ‘vanish;’ in (E), ‘gushing’ is associated with the name of the river Izumi, which also signifies a spring. Poems made with a strong consciousness of word association might include as many as five or more such words. While neither of these poems presents us with a paradigmatic use of *engo*, it is still important to point out their existence here as one form of standard poetic rhetoric. It is obvious that Norinaga was explicitly and consciously pointing to at least the pillow word and the preface as forms of *aya*. Whether or not he had the *uta makura* and *engo* in mind as well is not made apparent in this text, but the fact that he found at least word association to be an important stylistic device is demonstrated in other of his writings.<sup>26</sup> It is certain, however, that all of these rhetorical devices do enrich the language of the poem, and move it further away from the realm of ordinary language. Thus all can be said to work in “giving *aya* to words.”

### III. Defining the Poetic

We are now in a position to attempt a more complete definition of ‘*aya*’ as used in Norinaga’s theory:

*Aya* is the style or form that is contained in poetry and which sets poetic language apart from ordinary speech and writing. Whereas ordinary words can



convey logic or reason, *aya* conveys human emotion and impression, or, to borrow Norinaga's term, it conveys *mono no aware*. Concretely speaking, 'aya' denotes first and foremost the metrical form of poetic verse, and thus in the Japanese tradition, it signifies the 5/7 syllable meter. It also, however, signifies other rhetorical and stylistic elements which help to convey *mono no aware*, and thus help to make poetic language special. Norinaga refers, either explicitly or implicitly, to seven such elements in his work: direct and hidden metaphor, pillow words (*makura kotoba*), poetic prefaces (*jo kotoba*), pivot words (*kakekotoba*), word association (*engo*), and place-name association (*uta makura*).

Looking over what is said, it seems that it would be a mistake to charge that Norinaga failed in his attempt to define this term. It would perhaps be more correct to allege that his style of definition differs greatly from that of Socrates, Plato, and what we in the Western tradition have generally become accustomed to. Norinaga's consciousness towards definition is more like that of the sophist than that of Socrates. Indeed, his process is similar to that of Euthyphro seen above. Each starts out with a basic and simplistic definition that then is amended greatly, some elements being added and others being qualified, until what stands at the last actually looks little like what was so proudly put forth at the first. Norinaga's interrogator is no Socrates, however. Indeed in his works Norinaga himself is the hero, fashioning the questions he is asked merely to call up the answers that he wishes to give. The difference is that Norinaga explains things as he feels the need to do so, and is unconcerned with the task of forming clear and distinct definitions. He is more content to give examples as he goes along, in a kind of winding and poetic dialectic which displays in concrete form the basic notions which he wishes to express, namely that reason and precise logic cannot express those things that are most important to human beings. In doing so, it might be said that his own prose itself displays a kind of *aya*, though one closer in nuance to the Chinese *wen*, written with the same character ( 文 ) that Norinaga uses to write 'aya,' and which is referred to explicitly in the third dictionary definition above.<sup>27</sup>

It should perhaps be concluded that Norinaga himself both expected and relied upon a general understanding of the meaning of the term when he wrote. Perhaps he felt that in light of such an understanding he had no need to give a precise definition. Certainly he knew that the Confucians of his day

would associate 'aya' written '文' with the Chinese literary concept that bore a significant relationship to his own use of its Japanese counterpart. It is also likely that Norinaga meant to make some association between 'aya' written '文' and 'aya' written '綾,' which is closest in meaning to the first dictionary definition above. This character is used exclusively to signify the design or pattern of fabric. It is quite probable, though, that Norinaga was fully conscious of this in using the term, and felt some distinct relationship between the pattern or design woven into a cloth and the pattern of words written out in graceful script or sung out in lengthened and metered voice to make a poem. Indeed the etymology of the two words is the same, both having acquired their respective characters well after their formation in spoken Japanese.

While not being quite as eager to break down common sense usage as was Socrates, Norinaga did not simply bow to authority or custom in his use of the word. Quite the contrary. Norinaga explicitly gives a (albeit insufficient) definition of 'aya' in order to give the hint that he will use the term in a new and special manner, and that he has not merely adapted the Chinese 'wen.'<sup>28</sup> From that point, Norinaga shows us what 'aya' is not through the use of complicated reasoning and definition, but by fitting it into his theory of how poems are created and pointing it out in certain example verses. He subordinates explanation of the term to his primary project, showing where poems come from and what role they serve in life. In the end, Norinaga does in fact give a fairly detailed account of what he means by the word *aya*. The problem is not that he did not give us enough information to understand the term as he was using it, it is that he did not present that information in any way similar to the way those of us trained in the European tradition are used to receiving it. Thus developing a sound understanding of these terms necessitates a serious project, it necessitates digging down deep into the words and into the tradition, in reviewing all the little close relationships between the various statements he did make.

In adapting such a foreign attitude towards clarity in definition, we might also lend some needed assistance to a Japanese tradition which has long felt such clarity unnecessary. If Norinaga's methods of definition and explanation are less precise, rigorous, and "logocentric" than what has been expected in the European philosophical tradition starting as far back as Socrates' assault on the sophists, he is not alone. In fact, within the Japanese tradition he actually can claim a place among the most rigorous theorists. If the history of *waka*

theory shows a large quantity of critical terminology, it also shows a less than synchronized use of that terminology from writer to writer and age to age, it often being unclear in just what way a certain writer means to use a particular term. Two other terms which display a particularly vague usage are, for example, 'sugata' "shape," and 'fushi,' "knot, joint." The first might be said to take its most prominent role in the theory of Fujiwara Shunzei, whereas the second figures most importantly in that of Minamoto Toshiyori, though both words are used by several other writers as well, including Norinaga. I mention these two terms because each, like 'aya' in Norinaga, points to certain aspects of poetic style, and it is far from clear to me what relationships obtain between the three words. The delineation of the similarities and differences in what these three (as well as other) stylistic terms signify is indeed a project calling for future attention.

Footnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Numerous European-trained Japanese theoreticians can also be accused of this. 20th Century Aestheticians such as Kuki Shuzo, Okazaki Yoshie, and Ohnishi Yoshinori, for example, each in his own way attempted to explain certain Japanese aesthetic terminology according to Western aesthetic logic and terms.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, translated John Warrington, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1969, p. 8. In the following quotes, I have rendered 'pious' and 'impious' what the translator has chosen to render 'holy' and 'unholy.'

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15. The examination of this point would take us into tangential territory, so I will omit it here, but the adherence to an unspoken level of agreement and understanding is rather common in Japan, and some Japanese even refer to a mutual understanding that exists among all Japanese this the term 'ishin denshin,' literally "by the heart, the heart transmitted." This usage is of course a perversion of the original Zen Buddhist meaning, referring to the transmission of the Dharma "from mind to mind."

<sup>7</sup> *Yugen to Aware*, Tokyo: Iwanami, 1939. *Fuga Ron*, Tokyo: Iwanami, 1940.

<sup>8</sup> From *Lectures on Shakespeare*, New York: Everyman's Library, E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc. (First Published: 1810-1818).

<sup>9</sup> Amagasaki Akira, *Kacho no Tsukai*, Tokyo: Keiso Shobo, 1987, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Kadokawa Classical Japanese Dictionary*, 1982.

<sup>13</sup> In Japanese the word 'uta' has two primary and related meanings. It is used both to signify what we express with the English 'poem' as well as what we express with 'song.' In fact the broad nature of the word's use can be gathered in the following quote, where it is used to denote everything from *tanka* to epic to puppet theatre and children's songs.

<sup>14</sup> Hino Tatsuo, ed., *Motoori Norinaga Shu*, Shincho Collection of Classical Japanese Literature,

Tokyo: Shincho, 1983, p. 251.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>18</sup> *Kokinshu*, book 11, no. 470.

<sup>19</sup> *Motoori Norinaga Shu*, p. 310.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 314. The pillow words are, in Japanese, “*waka kusa no*” and “*nuba tama no*,” respectively.

<sup>21</sup> *Kokinshu*, book 14, no. 697.

<sup>22</sup> *Shin Kokinshu*, book 11, no. 996.

<sup>23</sup> *Shin Kokinshu*, book 11, no. 990.

<sup>24</sup> Incidentally, another preface relying upon a pivot word was used in B above, but in that case the pivot word functioned not through repetition of sounds, but in the more typical manner, wherein sounds which represent homophonic words are placed between two independent phrases, read with one meaning in connection to the first phrase and another in connection to the second.

<sup>25</sup> *Motoori Norinaga Shu*, p. 315.

<sup>26</sup> Norinaga gives a discussion of the meaning and traditional significance of word association in his *Shogaku Hitoba*. See also Takahashi Toshikazu, *Motoori Norinaga no Kagaku*, Osaka: Izumi Shoten, 1996, p.91-93.

<sup>27</sup> A full account of the significance of the term would of necessity contain a more thorough discussion of the relationship between ‘*wen*’ in Chinese literary thought and Norinaga’s ‘*aya*.’ It should also include a more thorough discussion of the traditional significance of related Japanese words, such as ‘*ayame*’ and ‘*aya nashi*.’ Such a treatment must be postponed for the time being, however.

<sup>28</sup> Whereas ‘*wen*’ was used mainly to refer to prose style, Norinaga tells us from the start that he is dealing with Japanese poetry.

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