

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

Too Easy a Simplicity: Watson's *Ryōkan*

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THE REPUTATION of Burton Watson as a translator of Chinese poetry is so solidly established that we students of Japanese literature, having heard that Watson had now turned to doing translations from the Japanese, expected to have nothing other than words of admiration and gratitude for the results. It is evident now, however, that our hopes and expectations were somewhat too high. A careful examination of Watson's *Ryōkan: Zen Monk-Poet of Japan*¹ leaves no choice but for a mixed reaction, muted praise, some hypotheses concerning what may have gone wrong, and brief intellectual sprints into the forest of wider issues at stake.

First, there must be praise where praise is due. And this is appropriate, as we might have expected, for what Watson has done with those poems which the Japanese monk Ryōkan wrote in Chinese. Without exception these are literate, polished, and a pleasure to read. Watson's deep familiarity with the form results once again in poems which seem to have just the right diction, use of parallel constructions, rhythms in English, and overall control. Comparison with the originals shows that Watson gives us verses that have nearly the same mental, emotional, and musical wealth that is in the originals. It is, for instance, not only the self-portrait but also the verbal cadences and word-choice that make the following an exquisite poem in English:²

Breath of spring bit by bit milder; rattling the rings on my staff, I
head for the east town.

¹ Burton Watson, trans., *Ryōkan: Zen Monk-Poet of Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); hereafter abbreviated as *Ryōkan*. Some of Watson's translations of Ryōkan's poems appeared earlier in his *Japanese Literature in Chinese*, vol. 2 (New York, 1976), pp. 87-117.

² *Ryōkan*, p. 76.

TOO EASY A SIMPLICITY

Green green, willows in the gardens; bobbing bobbing, duckweed on the pond.

Alms bowl smelling sweet with rice from a thousand houses; heart indifferent to ten-thousand chariot glory.

Following in tracks of old time Buddhas, begging for food, I go my way.

In reading a poem such as this, one can be pleased that the translator of the T'ang poet Han-shan³ saw fit to deal with Ryōkan (1758–1831), a Japanese monk who lived much later but wished to emulate the great recluse poet of the T'ang. It seems right that Watson should do Ryōkan, and his translations of Ryōkan poems in Chinese prove this; they are satisfying and rewarding.

By contrast Watson's rendering of many of Ryōkan's poems in Japanese is flat and prosaic. From what is presented it is difficult to know, for instance, what about the following translation qualifies it as a poem:⁴

Hito towaba

Otogo no mori no

ko no shita ni

ochiba hiroite

iru to kotaeyo

If anyone asks

say I'm in the grove

of Otogo Shrine

picking up fallen leaves

under the trees

Since the central reference to Otogo Shrine will be without significance to the average reader of the English version, the reasons for its selection will remain obscure. Moreover, since the translator has not bothered to play with the synecdoche according to which Shinto shrines are often referred to merely as groves (*mori*), the whole poem comes across as banal at best. The real problem is that this is not an isolated case. The specificity and poignancy of a number of poems are lost here because the translator did nothing to facilitate the understanding of his Western readers; place-names thus become mere ciphers and the poems in which they appear then go flat.

Perhaps this has happened in part because Watson, like all translators, wanted to prevent his poems from having to hobble across the page on footnote stilts. But I suspect that it is also connected with something to be discussed in more detail below, namely, Watson's decision to interpret Ryōkan primarily in and through the category of "simplicity" and his emphasis upon the poet-monk's avoidance of "literary artifice and intellectualization."⁵ But in order to isolate the issues here it is necessary first to demonstrate in more detail why Watson's translations of *tanka* are frequently unsatisfying. The intention here

³ Burton Watson, trans., *Cold Mountain: 100 Poems by the T'ang Poet Han-shan* (New York, 1970).

⁴ *Ryōkan*, p. 39.

⁵ *Ryōkan*, p. 8.

LA FLEUR

is not to be picayune or to squirt what William Carlos Williams called “little hoses of objection” on the work of a great translator. It is, rather, to present materials as the basis for exploring some larger, possibly more interesting issues.

The following is, for instance, a severely truncated translation:⁶

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| <p><i>Tarachina no</i> <i>haha ga katami to</i> <i>asa yū ni</i> <i>Sado no shimabe wo</i> <i>uchimitsuru ka mo</i></p> | <p>Memories of my mother: morning and evening I look far off at those island shores of Sado</p> |
|---|---|

We are given a footnote that informs us that Sado Island was the birthplace of Ryōkan's mother, yet even with this information, the poem in English is simple to the point of being simplistic. The original, however, is rich and subtle—so much so that a more detailed comparison of the two may be instructive.

The Japanese original begins with the phrase “*tarachine no*,” a conventional opening or “pillow word” with a history that goes back to the *Man'yō-shū* of the eighth century. Watson, however, makes no attempt to render this into English—probably because, as he notes elsewhere, such “pillow-words” are often “a bane to the translator.”⁷ He is right in recognizing “pillow-words” as troublesome but completely wrong, I think, in rushing to the conclusion that they can be arbitrarily dropped out without seriously impoverishing the poem. It is highly likely that “*tarachine no*” (足乳根の) means something such as “satisfying source of milk” and is, therefore, scarcely an element that can be simply deleted from a verse about the poet's deceased mother. The poem, after all, is one that is charged with a powerful emotion of longing, one that becomes literally incarnate in physical and bodily forms. The poet's recollection of his mother's breasts is juxtaposed in the structure of the verse with his present sight of the shores of Sado Island. The phrase that is located centrally in the poem, *asa yū ni* or “morning and evening,” functions as a fulcrum which both separates and joins the two times of life, namely, childhood when the mother was always present and maturity when she is gone.

But the thing I find most unsatisfying is what Watson has done with the word *katami* 形見 in this verse. His rendering of it as “memories” tends to internalize and mentalize something that was both very physical and intensely emotional. Even our words “keepsake” and “memento” do not completely convey the degree to which a *katami* serves as a tangible and concrete portion of the life and person of someone now either dead or otherwise departed. (Although this is

⁶ *Ryōkan*, p. 41.

⁷ *Ryōkan*, p. 8, note 6.

TOO EASY A SIMPLICITY

not the place for such an inquiry, I suspect that a close investigation of the uses of the word *katami* in Japanese literature would serve as a convenient entry into rather unique processes of "symbolization" there, processes that are quite unlike those of the West and quite likely influenced considerably by Buddhist thought.⁸) My point here is simply that Ryōkan in this poem tells us that his memories of the past have a physical form in the world presently before his eyes; Sado's coastline is almost a precious relic of his mother's presence. The syntax of the verse permits the subtle implication that the mother who gave every morning and evening of the milk of her body to the poet in his infancy, the morning of his life, now has also left the island of her birth as a keepsake for his later use. Now he looks at it both in the morning and evening. The verbal wit is keen and the range of nuance is sophisticated; they retain the intensity of the poem's emotion and prevent it from collapsing into mere sentimentality.

In commenting on the translations of the *Genji Monogatari*, Masao Miyoshi has cautioned against trying to cleanse away all ambiguities and noted that "at every turn the stream of narrative opens up an unexpected perspective which also revises what has come before."⁹ In its own fashion the language of classical *tanka* is no different; its wealth lies in its richness, its capacity for multiple nuance, and its ability to turn twists into revelations. My attempt, far from adequate, to express something of the wealth and brilliance of the Ryōkan poem here analyzed would be:

*Tarachine no
haha ga katami to
asa yū ni
Sado no shimabe wo
uchimitsuru ka mo*

Milksource mother
gave me herself to keep,
morning and evening—
a memento out there I gaze at:
the shores of Sado Island

I do not wish to deny that there are times when Watson's rendition has just the right economy. I think that the following, for instance, works very well:¹⁰

*Hachi no ko wo
waga wasururedomo
toru hito wa nashi
toru hito wa nashi
hachi no ko aware*

I've forgotten
my begging bowl
but no one would steal it
no one would steal it—
how sad for my begging bowl

⁸ A phonetic link with the word *katami* 片身 would only reinforce this point.

⁹ Masao Miyoshi, "Translation as Interpretation: A Review Article," *Journal of Asian Studies* 38: 2 (February 1979), pp. 299-302. Quote p. 301.

¹⁰ *Ryōkan*, p. 29.

LA FLEUR

The following, likewise, seems to me to be just right:¹¹

*Ware dani mo
mada kuitaranu
shiragayu no
soko ni mo miyuru
kagebōshi kana*

When even *I* haven't had
enough to eat,
at the bottom of my bowl
of rice gruel
my shadow hogging in!

These and some others neither waste words nor fall into verbal parsimony.

But in the majority of cases Watson skimps on Ryōkan. He seems to have misapplied Ryōkan's citation of the *Analects*' dictum that "to go too far is as bad as not going far enough,"¹² forgetting that the converse, though perhaps more common, is *equally* true. He underestimated what was necessary to make the journey from the original to Ryōkan's new home in another language. The largesse and verbal play of the beloved monk-poet is belied by renderings that make conciseness the chief, sometimes almost the sole, concern.

I am not absolutely certain that I can trace the etiology of this error. Nevertheless, I will hazard two hypotheses. The first of these has to do with the history of the West's reception of Japanese poetry; the second has to do with our understanding or, perhaps, our *mis*understanding of what is meant by "simplicity" in Buddhism generally and in Zen particularly. The two points, although related on many levels, deserve separate and sequential treatment.

There is a certain irony in the fact that the West's appreciation of Japanese verse has developed along a course that is almost completely the reverse of the evolution of poetry in Japan itself. We began with haiku, something which in Japan was a relatively late development, and have only gradually worked back in time to begin to appreciate the longer, more traditional, forms of verse. One result of this ironic inversion of history is that the haiku form has somehow gotten lodged in *our* consciousness as the "standard" form of Japanese verse. Along with this, the criterion of conciseness or brevity has for us become so identified with Japanese poetry that, strange as this may seem to a Japanese, the thirty-one syllable form of the *tanka* strikes many Westerners as almost too lengthy to be Japanese. The even longer, earlier form of the *chōka* would strike many here as almost beyond the pale.

This is due in part, of course, because the haiku had such a great impact upon twentieth-century Western verse forms. It fit, for instance, the quest and purposes of the Imagist movement precisely. Ezra Pound tells us that while in Paris in 1911 he experienced something at the Metro at La Concorde but could

¹¹ *Ryōkan*, p. 55.

¹² *Ryōkan*, p. 121; *Analects* xi, 15.

TOO EASY A SIMPLICITY

not put it into verse. For more than a year he tried to encapsulate that experience in various forms of longer verse but he was unsuccessful. But then it happened. With, as he said, "the Japanese *hokku* in mind," Pound wrote an enormously influential poem in twenty words:¹³

In a Station of the Metro
The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Some critics may doubt that this was really a haiku, but literary historians will admit that the *influence* both of this poem and of the haiku tradition in which it claimed an ancestry have been very great in our century, one which Hugh Kenner has called "the Pound Era."

Perhaps we are now gradually coming to realize that our century's celebration of Japanese verse was not necessarily due to intrinsic interest in it; rather, it seems that haiku served Imagism and other movements as a model for their "reaction against the flabby, abstract language and structure into which the poetry of the nineteenth century had degenerated."¹⁴ It was part of a much more general quest in twentieth-century modernism for economy, simplicity, and the absence of symbols. In a perceptive essay which puts this whole development into perspective and explores its philosophical assumptions, Michel Beaujour notes that the orthodoxy of this movement has been the belief that "less is more."¹⁵ Beaujour sees a continuous thread from Pound's misguided fascination with the Chinese written character to Roland Barthes's much more recent praise for both Zen and the haiku as places where "le symbole comme opération sémantique . . . est attaqué"¹⁶ (the symbol as a semantic operation is under attack). According to Beaujour these borrowings served occidentals interested in what they took to be the "non-metaphysical, nonsymbolic Orient" because there they thought they found what they had been looking for, namely, "muted signifiers that keep meaning in abeyance."¹⁷

The interesting thing is that Watson's rendition of Ryōkan fits all these criteria very well; they have economy, leanness, and the absence of anything resembling symbolism. It is, therefore, quite natural for us to *feel* that they are

¹³ As quoted in Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971), p. 184.

¹⁴ Alex Preminger et al., eds., *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, enlarged edition (Princeton, 1974), p. 377 ("Imagism").

¹⁵ Michel Beaujour, "Is Less More?" *New York Literary Forum: Intertextuality*, vol. 2 (New York, 1978), pp. 237-243.

¹⁶ Roland Barthes, *L'empire des signes* (Geneva: Albert Skira, 1970), p. 100.

¹⁷ Beaujour, p. 240.

in the modern mode, a type of poetic language to which in our century we have become accustomed and one which we vaguely connect with haiku and with Zen.

But the problem is that the Japanese poems translated by Watson are not haiku at all. They are tanka and ought to have been translated as such. Moreover, the difference between a poem of seventeen syllables and one of thirty-one is more than a difference of fourteen syllables. It is the difference between haiku, a kind of poetry in which verbal play is not necessarily important and tanka, a poetry which when deprived of the verbal play on which it thrives, turns dull. It either does this or turns into the semantic equivalent of a haiku—interesting but not as semantically rich as the original. In my judgment Watson has too often translated Ryōkan's tanka as if they were haiku. Therefore they often appear as a single image which is swiftly presented but they lack the more relaxed and playful ambiance that is constitutive of the older Japanese form of verse. They lack, in addition, the "music"—usually achieved through the assonance and alliteration that become noticeable and valuable when a verse goes beyond seventeen syllables—that is characteristic of tanka.

For example, it is interesting to note what Watson does with the following:¹⁸

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Yama kage no</i> | In the mountain's shadow |
| <i>kusa no ihori wa</i> | my grass hut's |
| <i>ito samushi</i> | so cold |
| <i>shiba wo takitsutsu</i> | I'll be up burning firewood |
| <i>yo wo akashitemu</i> | all night long |

The translation is a poem the Imagists would have admired. But in order to make it so swift and uncomplicated Watson has had to eliminate what in the original is some delightful play with the final verb, *akasu* 明かす. This word, which in its most literal sense means "to cause to be lit," functions as synecdoche for "passing the whole night" when in a phrase with *yo* 夜 as its object. In classical verse it often denotes the dawn that removes the darkness and signals that the whole night has been passed. Here Ryōkan takes advantage of these multiple significations in order to portray the severity of his plight. The range of the original includes all the elements of what follows as my attempt to translate the poem:

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>Yama kage no</i> | My grass hut, shadowed |
| <i>kusa no ihori wa</i> | by the mountain it's on, is |
| <i>ito samushi</i> | terribly cold: |
| <i>shiba wo takitsutsu</i> | up kindling firewood all night, |
| <i>yo wo akashitemu</i> | I'll make light till daybreak. |

¹⁸ Ryōkan, p. 18.

TOO EASY A SIMPLICITY

Without the irony of the last phrases the special poignance of this poem is lost.

My point is that we should not be misled by our own acquired, twentieth-century Western, taste for haiku. We should, at least, not let it beguile us into a misrepresentation of the other forms of Japanese verse, especially that of the *tanka*. Most especially we should not let the canons of economy and terseness loom so large that the older, more complex, and more leisurely forms of Japanese verse seem to us as no more than "precursors" to what we take to be a level of perfection achieved only in the haiku form.

This would be, I think, especially unfortunate in the case of Ryōkan since he, in fact, lived later than both Bashō (1644–1694) and Buson (1715–1783) and, therefore, in a period when the haiku form had already been developed and perfected. Therefore, the fascinating thing about Ryōkan is that, although he wrote haiku as well, his genius as a Buddhist poet is best expressed in his use of the *tanka* form he *deliberately* chose to use. To capture, therefore, the specificity of this Buddhist poet it is necessary to ask why he really excelled in the older form instead of throwing it away in favor of the directness, alacrity, and vigor of the haiku mode. This question may seem irrelevant and unnecessarily academic to Japanese students of their own verse but I wish to suggest it is a valuable question for many of us in the West who have grown accustomed to assuming that the link between Zen and haiku is both natural and necessary—that is, that any thing of more than seventeen syllables would be not only unnecessarily prolix but almost an impediment to sudden enlightenment. It is, I think, a question worth asking, probably a question which Ryōkan's poetry *forces* us to ask.

It would be pretentious to attempt to give a definitive answer to this question and such is not my intention at all. I merely wish here to suggest that we have some interesting evidence that contradicts our all too common assumption that there is a necessary, natural, and intrinsic relationship between what is Buddhist and what is brief. It is, moreover, to propose that we in the West may have developed some bad habits in our thinking about the "simplicity" of Buddhism and of Zen. The relationship between Buddhism and the literary aesthetics of Japan is, I would argue, considerably more complex and interesting than our habitual, sometimes casual, celebrations of "simplicity" often suggest. It seems like a poor joke to suggest that simplicity may, in fact, be more complex than we have assumed for a long while; nevertheless, Buddhist simplicity is something which we ought to examine rather than merely assume we understand.

But such an examination is probably best done not in the abstract but through something as concrete and vital as the verse of Ryōkan, for his is a poetry appreciated by many for the simplicity it expresses, one usually linked to this poet's pursuit of Zen ideals. It is the quality expressed in those poems in which he celebrates the joys of playing games with village children—perhaps the

dimension of his life that has done the most to endear him to subsequent generations of Japanese readers. But this popular portrait of Ryōkan may be more than merely charming; it may, in fact, nicely depict the way in which "play" can be quite useful for looking at how Ryōkan combined the practice of poetry with that of Buddhism. I believe it is this which Ueda Miyoji has rightly detected as the element of *yuga-zammai* 遊戯三昧 in the verse of Ryōkan—that is, the freedom and playfulness of someone in samādhi.¹⁹

This is the nub of my dissatisfaction with Watson's Ryōkan: the simplicity of this great monk-poet—and it is a simplicity that is both religious and literary—is too easily dealt with in terms of the economy of language to which we have become accustomed in modern verse in the West. By giving us poems in which the *number* of semantic elements is reduced as far as possible—even fewer than in the original—Watson has denied us the chance of seeing that Ryōkan's simplicity really lies not there but, rather, in the *way* in which complex things are handled by him. D. T. Suzuki, whose admiration for Ryōkan was great and whose public praise for this poet has much to do with our eagerness to see him adequately represented in English, put the matter more exactly, I think, by writing of Ryōkan's "purposelessness" and emancipation from the "concept of teleology." This was the key point Suzuki raised in his discussion of Ryōkan.²⁰

"When purpose is too much in evidence in a work of art, so called, art is no longer there; it becomes a machine or an advertisement. Beauty runs away, ugly human hands become altogether too visible. Suchness in art consists in its artlessness, this is, purposelessness."

We might, with profit, pursue the question of the exact implication of this for our understanding of Ryōkan.

What attracts us to poets such as Ryōkan is not that they returned once again to being children but that they have learned how to live with a child's playfulness while in the world of adult complexity. In fact, we might even say that this kind of simplicity is *only* possible in contexts of complexity. It is a playfulness that consists not in the elimination of elements—fellow humans, rules, literary traditions, or whatever—but in the capacity to handle all of these without abrasiveness or obstruction (*muge* 無碍). While it is true, for instance, that Ryōkan admired and emulated the poetry of the *Man'yō-shū*, the eighth-century collection of Japan's earliest verse, he himself lived in a poetic world that was much more inclusive and, for that reason, more complex than that of the early poets he admired. Unlike the world of the *Man'yō-shū* Ryōkan's world included

¹⁹ Ueda Miyoji, *Saigyō, Sanatomo, Ryōkan* (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1974), p. 163.

²⁰ Daisetz T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton, 1959), p. 376.

TOO EASY A SIMPLICITY

not only a long tradition and proliferation of Japanese verse-forms but centuries of the development of Buddhist thought in Japan. What is remarkable, then, is the ease and felicity with which he handles all of these things: pillow-words, alliteration, allusiveness, words with multiple significations all are dealt with with such skill that his poems become clear and purposeless visions of the play of the universe. It seems to me that Ryōkan never assumed that these were incompatible with the simplicity, playfulness, and artlessness that were so important both for his life and his art.

The striking thing about Ryōkan is that his poetry often demonstrates the immediacy of certain aspects of Buddhism—an immediacy that was and remains accessible to children. In order to test and explore this hypothesis I tried a small experiment. I showed the following translation by Watson to my two children—along with Watson's footnote which states that "The Three Thousand Worlds" means "the universe":²¹

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|--|--|
| <p><i>Awayuki no</i> <i>naka ni tachitaru</i> <i>michiōchi</i> <i>mata sono naka ni</i> <i>awayuki zo furu</i></p> | <p>The Three Thousand Worlds that step forth with the light snow, and the light snow that falls in those Three Thousand Worlds</p> |
|--|--|

Separately each child expressed consternation and, eventually, an inability to understand the poem. This was, I thought, unfortunate because in this verse Ryōkan has mediated the Buddhist notion of the free, untrammelled interpenetration of worlds through the very sense of wonder with which a child views a shower of snowflakes before his or her own eyes. It seemed to me that much of what Ryōkan expresses here concerning the harmony of the immensity of the universe with the most minute things becomes intelligible to twentieth-century children at least in part through what they already know about the universe. Use of a word such as "galaxy" would, therefore, not be an intrusion into this poem; it actually seems to have been part of Ryōkan's vision. I, therefore, offered the following as a translation to my children, a version that strictly follows the progression of the original and uses no more words than Watson:

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Awayuki no</i> <i>naka ni tachitaru</i> <i>michiōchi</i> <i>mata sono naka ni</i> <i>awayuki zo furu</i></p> | <p>Fine snow falling before my eyes: a galaxy of three thousand worlds, in each of which as well fine snow is falling</p> |
|--|---|

While this version too is certainly less than perfect, I at least gathered from

²¹ Ryōkan, p. 51.

the comments of my children that this poem pleased rather than perplexed them. In addition I suspect that the Buddhist vision it embraces is, as Ryōkan knew, accessible to the experience of children. The original is a superb verse, subtle and playful even while it is simple and concrete.

I have argued here that tanka, in contrast to haiku, has more room and more time for play with the multiple meanings of words and that this is no less Buddhist than the swift, sharp images of the seventeen-syllable form. But this might raise a question whether or not this place for polysemy in tanka means that it is a form of verse given to *symbolic* expression. Although this is not the place to explore this question at length,²² I think it must be given a negative answer. And the reason for this is simply that the word-play that goes on in tanka—through “associated meanings” (*engo*), “pivot words” (*kakekotoba*) and the like—does not involve an implicit tension between the surface meaning and the “real” meaning of words. This is to say that the verse of Japan did not develop, like that of the West, in an intellectual context in which a Platonic or Neo-Platonic version of value and meaning held sway.²³ Although this point has not often been grasped by Westerners working with Japanese verse, it is very important. It means that in classical Buddhist epistemology and aesthetics what we might call “depth” does not involve a rejection of what is outside and superficial in order to find value in what is inside and deep but is, rather, the establishment of a *free interplay* between levels without any suggestion that one is subordinate to another. It is a point which Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, I think, expressed by stating that “the true inside of the inside is not having inside or outside.”²⁴ Likewise, Konishi Jin’ichi depicted it as “. . . the conclusion that imagery in Zen is tantamount to tenorless symbolism.”²⁵ The difference between this and an aesthetic derived from Platonism is significant. And this, I would suggest, is the reason why there is much less intellectual and literary distance between tanka and haiku than there is between the old Platonizing, symbolizing traditions of Western poetry and the West’s new, twentieth-century

²² For a fuller treatment of this problem see “The Matrix of *Yūgen*: Fujiwara Shunzei and Tendai Buddhism,” in my *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (forthcoming).

²³ See the entry on “Platonism and Poetry,” in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, pp. 619–621.

²⁴ Hisamatsu Shin’ichi, *Zen and the Fine Arts*, trans. by Tokiwa Gishin (Tokyo and New York, 1974), p. 49; see also Hisamatsu’s discussion of “simplicity” in *Zen*, pp. 30–31 and 55 ff.

²⁵ Konishi Jin’ichi, “Image and Ambiguity: The Impact of Zen Buddhism on Japanese Literature,” unpublished paper, Tokyo, 1973, p. 15; see also Konishi’s “Shunzei no *Yūgen-fū* to Shikan,” *Bungaku* 20: 2 (February 1952), pp. 108–116.

TOO EASY A SIMPLICITY

tradition—one which Beaujour calls “anti-symbolism”²⁶ and identifies as having its beginnings in Pound and the Imagist movement. And this is the reason why there can be a wealth of verbal play in tanka without turning it into what would be viewed as “symbolic” verse in the West. The difference in the philosophical and religious traditions also makes for a difference in literary expectations and possibilities.

In spite of all these misgivings about his ways of presenting Ryōkan, Watson’s reputation as one of our era’s great translators is deserved. My questions are really no more than a reminder to all of us that there is a richness in Ryōkan which still needs to be further mined. Lest it seem that I have focussed on flaws and problems at the cost of missing places where Watson’s versions work very well indeed, I cite the following as two examples among those which I find not only satisfying but very successful:²⁷

*Satobe ni wa
fue ya tsuzumi no
oto su nari
miyama wa sawa ni
matsu no oto shite*

Down in the village
the din of
flute and drum,
here deep in the mountain
everywhere the sound of the pines

*Ashihiki no
iwama wo tsutau
koke mizu no
kasuka ni ware wa
sumiwatara ka mo*

Faint trickle of
mossy water from
a crevice in the mountain rock:
the clear still way
I pass through the world

²⁶ Beaujour, p. 240.

²⁷ *Ryōkan*, pp. 33 and 20 respectively.