From "Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu" to "Triumph of the Sparrow: Zen Poems of Shinkichi Takahashi": The Japanese Sources of Lucien Stryk's Early Poems

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Lucien Stryk's arrival for his first visiting lectureship in Japan, at Niigata University in the summer of 1956, coincided with the publication of a second successful collection of poems, *The Trespasser*. Poems in this collection, like those in the earlier *Taproot* (1953), were respectable and well-wrought, reliant upon accentual meters and predetermined forms, but striking enough in theme and diction to avoid easy placement in what Delmore Schwartz was to call by the end of the decade the "peaceful public park" of contemporary American poetry. Of poems from these collections reprinted in Stryk's *Collected Poems*[1] perhaps the best is "The Stack Among the Ruins" (p. 4). In the second stanza the "stack" of the title is described, a chimney of a building destroyed in war:

> No smoke lifts from the broken chimney's lip
> Where winds hurl down to jar the blistered fields:
> It stands alone, a maniac that yields
> No breath or word, but raddled by the dip
> And twist of day, turns inward to a grief
> That's like an arm shaped through an empty sleeve.

The closing simile is more daring than most of the period, and anticipates in

several ways things to come, but in other matters, the strictly iambic five-stress lines, regular end rhyme, and elevated theme, the stanza is faithful to mainstream mid-fifties poetics. For the most part Stryk is in control of his formalism, but in some ways we see as well the formalism in control of Stryk. The *maniac* of line three is an unhappy collocation with *chimney*, but is in the poem because it meets the dictates of meter; and that the "I" so much derided by the New Critics is absent is not noteworthy in one stanza, but its complete avoidance in every poem of *Taproot* and *The Trespasser* is remarkable. Neither Stryk nor a persona which might be mistaken for him is anywhere to be found. *Someone* feels the grief in the quoted stanza, but we do not know who. The voice is disembodied and distant, the speaker as absent as the arm in the empty sleeve.

Much was stirring in American poetry in 1956, though. In retrospect we know that "movements" were being born, projectivism, deep imagery, beat, Black Mountain, New York, confessional. Stryk was not directly associated with any of these, but a sea change was in the making. By the publication of Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry* in 1960, poems like those that filled Stryk's first two books were looking a little stale, and Stryk himself acknowledges as much. The 1984 *Collected Poems* contains generous selection from four original collections and a book of translation, along with a range of "New Poems," but only seven poems from *Taproot* and *The Trespasser* combined, and earlier he had written of an early draft of a poem begun in 1962 that it was "conventionally structured . . . , the sort of piece with which I'd already filled two 'well-received' but unsatisfactory books," *Taproot* and *The Trespasser*. He felt the need in revising the poem to "break down" the "rigidly regular stanzas" and "welter of words," which were too much like the poems in the early books. Elsewhere he makes the same point more succinctly: the revision of the 1962 draft was "a leap into a truer poetry."[2]

Some of what happened to lead Stryk to feel that his early poems were less than satisfactory is well known to anyone acquainted with his work. His commitment to Zen Buddhism is well documented, and its effects upon his poetry have not gone unnoticed, but the larger question of the role of Japan in the development of the work has received little attention, having been subsumed in the former category. Like many in the West in the twentieth century, though, Stryk has come to Zen almost exclusively through Japanese sources, and while the traceable effects of Japan upon his poems may rightly be said to begin in Zen, they do not end there. Japanese materials and sources, some related to Zen and some not, are traceable in the poems from the third book forward, and a study of their use will reveal a shaping and

deepening of the poems in a way that an investigation of Zen Buddhist elements alone will not.

The visiting lectureship in Niigata was Stryk's second trip to Japan. He had been a combat soldier on Saipan and Okinawa in the closing months of the Pacific War, and immediately following was stationed briefly with the occupation forces in Aizu-Wakamatsu, near Niigata, but traceable effects of these experiences in his poems are minimal.[3] Stryk himself marks the occasion of his first profound encounter with Japan by giving one experience preference of place in two books. Both in the foreword to the 1977 *Zen Poetry* and in "Beginnings, Ends," the first essay of the 1981 *Encounter with Zen*, he describes a meeting with a Zen priest in a remote mountain temple south of Niigata in the autumn of 1957. The meeting was to have singular effects. So moved was Stryk by the priest's manner that he set about learning everything he could about Buddhism, and so serious was his work to this end that eight years of study and practice pass before he publishes another book, this a collection of translations from Zen literature. Then four other books follow in five years, a third and fourth collection of poems, a major anthology of Buddhism, translations of the modern poet Shinkichi Takahashi (1901–1987); three years later two more books appear, a fifth collection of poems, another collection of translations from medieval China and Japan. The work continues from there, all of it, Stryk would agree, set in motion in the mountains of Niigata Prefecture in the autumn of 1957. Considered separately the various collections confirm Stryk as a gifted poet, translator, and interpreter of Buddhism. Together, and by any standard, they represent an extraordinary accomplishment.

One poem in particular is central to understanding Stryk's early incorporation of Japanese materials, and again he himself points to the place from which investigation may depart, another encounter with a Zen priest, again in Japan, again with remarkable effects. He had remained at Niigata until the summer of 1958, then returned to America, but in 1962 and 1963 was back in Japan for a second visiting lectureship, this time at Yamaguchi University, in the mountains of Western Honshu. Yamaguchi had been a castle town, and during the Muromachi period,[4] a powerful local family, the Ouchi, had endeavored to turn it into a cultural center rivaling the splendor of the capital in Kyoto. To this end they sponsored the building of several Zen temples, some of which remain among the most beautiful in the country. Stryk visited these often, sometimes in the company of Ikemoto Takashi, a professor of English literature at the university, whose interest in Zen paralleled his own. Together they had begun translation of the poems from Zen tradition and interviews with Zen priests which would appear in the first of seven collaborations. The crucial exchange with Yasuda Tenzan

Roshi, of Joeiji, the most famous of the Muromachi temples in Yamaguchi, came during one of these interviews. The significant facts of the meeting and its aftermath are that a "reprimand" from the Roshi led Stryk to question his own role as an artist, and a complex of events, the reprimand, the translation of the poems, the visits to the temples, a growing appreciation of Japanese ink painting, an earlier exchange with another Rinzai priest, came together in a powerful experience. Working without break from early afternoon through the night and into morning light Stryk recast early drafts of a poem set in the rock garden at Joeiji, radically changing both form and concept. This was his "leap into a truer poetry."[5]

The garden, attributed to Sesshu Toyo (1420–1506), the greatest of Japanese ink painters, and a devotee of Zen,[6] is among the most famous in Japan. It is enclosed by hills on three sides, and the central pond and low-lying greenery are unusual in Zen *kansho* or contemplation gardens, but arrangements of stones within the greenery and a "dry waterfall" in the right background give it elements of the *kare-sansui* or dry landscape style commonly associated with Zen and uniquely Japanese. Such gardens were not primarily intended to provide aesthetic pleasure, but instead were "expedient means" of "devices" *(hoben)*, like the koan.

"Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu" (CP 44–47) is a meditation in eight sections upon the garden and its lessons. Metaphor is more prevalent and more skillfully employed than in Stryk's earlier work, images more cryptic, the voice more personal, but the feature of the poem which departs most absolutely from previous work is its division into short lines and irregular three-line stanzas. In early drafts, and in earlier poems, as we have seen, Stryk's lines and stanzas had been conventionally measured and formally determined. Here a major change has occurred. The opening four-stanza section provides a good example, though any of seven others would do.

What do they think of
    Where they lean
Like ponderous heads, the rocks?—

In prankish spring, ducks
    Joggling here
And there, brushing tails,

Like silly thoughts shared,
    Passed from head
To head? When, gong quavering

About a ripened sky, we
    Up and go,
Do they waken from a dream of flesh?

The measure of lines is bound to syllables, not accents. In the quoted stanzas, the first and third lines are either five or seven or, in the case of the last line, nine syllables, and the middle line is always three. The poem continues in this manner, with slight variation in syllabic length in first and third lines, the middle line remaining constant at three syllables throughout. In "Making Poems" Stryk notes the similarity of the stanza form to *haiku*, and compares its compactness with the classical Zen poems he was translating at the time with Ikemoto Takashi, but suggests in both cases that the resemblance was not intentional. Intentional or not, though, the similarity is striking, especially when we remember the iambs and end rhymes of the earlier work. Japanese prosody has been bound to syllable counts of fives and sevens since the emergence of *waka* in the sixth century, and though the concept of *haiku* as a discrete poem derives, like the term itself, from the late nineteenth century, Japanese poetry from the earliest times relied upon basic compositional units of three syllabic lines. By 1962 when the meeting with Yasuda Roshi led to the crisis which brought about the restructuring of early sections of the poem, Stryk had been working on one level or another with translation of classical Japanese poetry for at least five years[7] and surely had read much more. In his casting about for a new form he had a model ready at hand, and evidence in the poem is strong that consciously or not he accepted important parts of it.

Much of the content as well as the form of "Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu" is traceable to Japanese sources, as is clear from the title and setting. Concepts related to Zen are connected to recurrent images of birds and flying and lightness and darkness, themselves not uncommon metaphors in Mahayana tradition, and the poem directly addresses, sometimes even names, major Zen themes—impermanence, emptiness, mind conscious of itself, no mind, attachment. These, however, like Zen itself, have roots in Indian and Chinese, not Japanese, sources. Occasionally, though, such larger Mahayana themes are related to subjects which *are* distinctly Japanese, as in section II, where "impermanence" is related to a woodblock print by Hokusai (1760–1849):

In the Three Whites of
    Hokusai—
Fuji, the snow, the crane—

What startles is the black: in
    The outline
Of the mountain, the branch-tips

Piercing the snow, the quills of
    The crane's wing:
Meaning impermanence.

Here, in stainless air, the
    Artist's name
Blazes like a crow.

The connections are unlikely. First, Hokusai was a follower of Nichiren, not Zen, Buddhism, and though the former, like all Japanese Buddhism, is a Mahayana school and therefore accepts the premise of impermanence, it does not, like Zen, place it anywhere near the center of the tradition. Hokusai certainly would not have tried to "mean" impermanence. Further, of the eight sections of the poem, II alone does not refer explicitly to the garden, unless the reference is in the "Here" of the last stanza, which is ambiguous, so even the connection of these lines to what comes before and after is not immediately apparent. Perhaps of some help, then, is a fact which does not appear in the poem. Since at least the latter half of the nineteenth century and possibly long before, the garden has been thought of as a representation of the whole of the world. Because of this, each rock formation has been given a geographical name representative of the part of the world which it symbolizes. One of the rocks, centrally located, thought to symbolize Japan itself, is shaped remarkably like Fuji, even, like the Fuji in Hokusai's print, turns from grey to white near the top, in approximation of the snowcap of the "real" Fuji. In a country where even tea cups become famous and acquire names, it is not particularly remarkable that this rock has come to be called "Fuji." One of the comments for which Stryk was reprimanded by the Roshi, though, concerned the "aesthetic sin" of supplying "obvious comparisons" for visitors to the garden, and one example he cited was this "Fuji" (*Encounter* 120). The transposition of the Fuji in the garden to the Fuji in the print was probably not intended, and the leap from the one to the other covers considerable unconscious territory, but the connection exists, logically drawn or not, and helps provide the section with a link to the garden which the Mahayana concept of impermanence solidifies.

The rocks seem unchanging while everything around them is in flux. In section I, the ducks, like the "silly thoughts" they represent, come and go; shadows move across the garden in III, and in IV a butterfly flits past, and a

tourist aims a camera; weeds have appeared in the garden in V, and pigeons circle and "peck at crumbs" and circle again in VI and VII; in VIII the garden is "pierced through by birdsong" and gathers the morning light. The sun rises and sets, seasons pass, but the rocks appear the same. We see them as our grandfathers saw them, and their grandfathers, as Sesshu would have seen them in the fifteenth century. In the aesthetics of the *kare-sansui* garden, though, rock, because of its illusion of permanence, is understood to be a particularly forceful symbol of impermanence. Finding an attribute in what appears its negation, the essence of the ink painting in its empty space, the energy of the music in its silence, the strength of the "Whites of Hokusai" in their black antitheses, is an aesthetic principle born in T'ang China, but the *kare-sansui* garden in this regard is a Japanese manifestation. Because we cannot see the rocks change we know more deeply that they change. If the garden has a lesson that can be stated, it is that everything, even rock, even Fuji, is impermanent. The perception connects the section to the garden and to larger themes in the poem, the "emptiness" of the third section, the "firmness" of the seventh, and most importantly, the climatic final line, where a figure sits in *zazen* before the garden as darkness lifts and "waits for the rocks to split."

This closing image is a final instance of direct linkage to Japanese sources, and as clear an instance as can be found in Stryk's poems of an echo from work he has translated. Among his translations are numerous examples of two unusual types of occasional poems which have developed in East Asia, *toki-no-ge*, enlightenment poems, with their roots in T'ang China, and *jisei*, death poems, which have Chinese manifestations but were more widespread in Japan even in centuries before the importation of Zen. Both have been practiced in Zen temples and monasteries in Japan since the Kamakura period, and in the hands of medieval Zen priests, images employed to characterize enlightenment and death became all but indistinguishable. Often in both cases a grammatical object, commonly an abstract metaphor for some perceived duality, or a natural element with metaphorical overtones, a mountain or the light of a star, is collocated with a verb denoting a sudden and absolute breaking apart. Stryk's translations with Takashi Ikemoto of the *toki-no-ge* of Muso Soseki (1275–1351) and Daito Kokushi (1282–1338), both done at about the time of revising "Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu," and the *jisei* of Dogen Kigen (1200–1253), published after Stryk's poem but surely known to him as he was revising the drafts, are examples of this sort of imagery, and antecedents to the "splitting of the rocks." In their translations, Muso in his moment of enlightenment "crushed the skeletal void" and Daito exclaims that he has "broken Unmon's barrier"; Dogen compares his moment of passing to a "shattering" of the stars and sky. The "splitting of the rocks" is linked imagistically to their impermanence, but it informs

the end of the poem in this other way: the figure sitting, "blown round like Buddha on the lotus," is waiting for nothing less than enlightenment.[8]

"Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu" does not appear in Stryk's third book of poems, but its lessons are pervasive. He writes in "Making Poems" (p. 26) that after the initial breakthrough he turned attention to other poems, and found, in a "bulky manuscript" in progress, much to be rid of, much else to be rewritten. He calls the result his "first real book," *Notes for a Guidebook*, published in 1965. We might expect the collection to be heavily indebted to Japan: Stryk had lived in the country for parts of five of the previous nine years; he had practiced Zen Buddhism learned there for eight; the first of the collaborations with Takashi Ikemoto, mainly translations from Japanese Zen tradition, had appeared earlier in the spring; the reading for *World of the Buddha* was under way; he had met Shinkichi Takahashi. But on the surface the book is curiously lacking in Japanese materials. Variations on the syllabic line and stanza form born of the recasting of "Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu" are apparent, and most poems which do not employ that line and that stanza remain free, seeking a form and measure suited to meaning and sound, what Pound called the musical phrase and contrasted to the metronome. Certainly the voice too is transformed, personal, introspective here, familiar there, always humane. In these things it is tempting to find Japanese models, but too many other sources are possible. All we can say with certainty is what has been said: the freer forms are indebted at least in part to Japanese poetry, in particular to the basic unit of three syllabic lines; and these poems are rooted, on Stryk's own evidence, in the revision of one poem, set in Japan, making seminal use of Zen Buddhist aesthetics and particular works of Japanese art, Kamakura enlightenment poems, a Muromachi landscape garden, an Edo woodblock print. Beyond this, at this stage, we must turn to particular instances of Japanese subjects in particular poems. Four from *Notes for a Guidebook* rely on Japan for setting or theme.

The most interesting use of Japanese materials in these is in "The Beachcomber" (CP 8), a poem unusual in the collection in that it employs accentual meter and end rhyme. The formal structure and a setting near Niigata suggest that Stryk drafted the poem during his first visiting lectureship, which would make it among his earliest uses of a Japanese subject, though presumably it was revised after the recasting of "Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu." The setting is established in line two in a reference to Sado, the largest island in the Sea of Japan, about twenty miles off the coast of Niigata Prefecture. A "plum-black Sado vase" appears twenty-four years later in a poem in Stryk's most recent collection.[9] On the surface, the use of Japanese materials is limited to the setting and a few scattered details, the gnarled pine trees common to Northern coastal Japan, ten lacquered bowls imagined by a central character, a simile of a sunset "like a vulgar fan," but Stryk

is working with more than these. The poem relies on historical allusion which for most readers in the West will be opaque, but when the references are understood they reveal a tonal richness lacking in earlier work, including "Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu."

Sado has a long history, a period as an independent province, a period of gold and silver mining, and a present-day population of 90,000, but is known primarily as the place to which the military governments of the middle ages exiled criminals and others considered dangerous to official order. Even today when most Japanese hear the name Sado they think of exile, and many recall particular names and stories of the exiled. These included, among common outlaws and misfits, major figures in the literature, religion, and politics of the times who in the constant intrigues and changing fortunes of the imperial and shogunal courts found themselves on the wrong side of the power. From the point of view of Kamakura or Kyoto in the middle ages, Sado was the end of the earth, distant, uncivilized, and bleak. The stories of those sent there, some legendary and others factual, some remembered in folk songs and others in court poetry, are consistent in eliciting from their hearers empathy for the grief and loneliness of the exiled. The most famous of these was the emperor Juntoku (1197–1242), a scholar and poet exiled in 1221 for his role in an attempt to reassert imperial power over the military government. The plan was foiled, his followers executed, and his infant son banished to a separate Northern province, where he died at the age of thirteen. Juntoku himself died on Sado, powerless and grief stricken, after twenty-one years of exile. Zeami (1363–1443), the brilliant actor, writer, and critic who established the Noh as a classical art form, was another exiled to Sado, in 1434, at the age of seventy-one, four years after his banishment from court and two years after the death of his eldest son, and in a work from Sado, *Kintosho, Writings from the Island of Gold*, he tells a story of another exile, Kyogoku Tamekane (1254–1332), perhaps the greatest poet of his day, in exile on Sado from 1298 to 1303. Zeami asked the attendant of Yahata Shrine why the mountain cuckoo did not sing there, and was told that long ago when Tamekane had visited and heard the cuckoo's song, its beauty, reminding him of his life in the capital and all he had lost, caused such grief that he composed a poem asking the birds to leave the place. The surrounding woods, the attendant reported to Zeami, had been silent from that time.[10]

Sabi is a noun which denotes the mixture of beauty and loneliness that the Japanese from early times have found irresistible. It has often been related to the literature of exile, and has been a positively valued characteristic in poetry since Fujiwara Shunzei (1114–1204) propounded it along with other ideals in the twelfth century. Tamekane hears the cuckoo's song at Yahata Shrine and precisely because of its beauty is overcome with grief; the

cuckoo's song, and the scene itself, precisely because of Tamekane's grief, is more beautiful. *Sabi* exists in the song and in the grief, and in the intuition of their mixing. As Shunzei developed the concept into a critical principle, it had to do with a tone and an imagery of "somber, muted beauty" capable of capturing this intuition. The writing which developed as a result has been called a "poetry of descriptive symbolism," and is recognizable even in translation as distinctly Japanese:

Loneliness—
The essential color of a beauty
Not to be defined:
Over the dark evergreens, the dusk
That gathers on far autumn hills.[11]

At the time of writing "The Beachcomber," Stryk would have been aware of the story of Juntoku and of Zeami, perhaps of Tamekane as well, along with various similar tales, which are known throughout Japan but make up part of the shared cultural knowledge of Niigata Prefecture. Whether he would have known specifically of *sabi* as an aesthetic ideal is less clear, though the stories themselves inspire a sort of introspective melancholy which is related, but in the same way that we recognize the poem about loneliness as being somehow "Japanese" whether we know or not that it "has *sabi*," Stryk would have been aware of the tone and its effects, if not the name itself, and by 1973 at the latest he knew enough about *sabi* and related principles to publish a well-crafted explanation of them, in an introduction to translations of poems reliant upon them, which includes reference to Zeami's writing about them.[12]

It is from this complex of history, geography, and aesthetic sensibility that the two stanzas of "The Beachcomber" depart. The setting is not Sado itself but a beach on Honshû, in Niigata Prefecture, with "the nineteen peaks of Sado" visible in the distance, rising from violet mist across the water. The poem shows its cognizance of history in references to the "Exiles' Route" in the first stanza and the "exiled peaks" in the second, and the severe climate is emphasized in the "iced Siberian wind" which has swept across the sea and "bent and shriveled to their salty core" the pine trees that "hold the beaten shore." A solitary female figure, the beachcomber of the title, has been "wasted by a cold/Necessity" to wander the beach searching the surf. The peaks of Sado are the grammatical subject of the first sentence and form a backdrop to everything that follows, but it is the "patchwork bobbing" of the woman's back in the opening subordinate clause, as she bends for something, stands, bends, and stands again, that is the central im-

age of the first line and the first stanza. The opening lines of the second stanza, though like others in referring to the woman in the third person, describe an imagined scene, set within the larger frame, which could only be known from her point of view:

> She dreams a raft of treasure to her reach:
> A silky foam will wash ten lacquered bowls
> Like frozen blossoms to the beach,
> And she will pluck them with a girlish hand.

But when she "scoops and hurls a pebble at the waves," as if the action will summon the raft of treasure, "nothing happens": from the "crystal founts/ The frail and scattered richness never breaks."

Without knowledge of setting and history, references to Sado and exile in each stanza notwithstanding, the poem is on the whole understandable, the writing admirable, the tone somber and beautiful, but the subject appears to be a rather ordinary daydream, and does not make claims upon attention beyond that. The dreamed-of treasure in the "ten lacquered bowls" is evocative, but in the absence of other suggestion seems to refer to material wealth, "the frail and scattered richness" of the final line. In one way knowledge of Sado supports the reading—gold deposits were once so plentiful around the island that surface waters were suffused with their dust—but it adds other layers as well. The connection of the scene to Japanese history and cultural tradition, both its splendors and its sorrows, represents in the poem a kind of *sabi*, the cultivated brilliance of the medieval imperial court and the riches of Noh and *waka* existing alongside their loss in the desolation of exile and the bleak setting of the beach, one feeding off the other, like the cuckoo's song and Tamekane's grief, in a particularly Japanese circle of associations. The language of the poem in large part supports these overtones. Description of the scene is in no way based upon Japanese models, but is restrained and more solemnly evocative of natural landscape than any of Stryk's earlier work. The bleak wintry setting, the solitary figure wandering the beach, and the distant peaks rising from violet mist across water are reminiscent of the "descriptive symbolism" which grew from Shunzei's principles, and each could be found in a classical Japanese evocation of *sabi*.

More than calling attention to natural description, though, the presence of the peaks of Sado deepens the connotative power of imagery and figurative language. The ambiguous "raft of treasure" implies both abundance and conveyance across water, and in the latter reading would have had Sado as a point of departure, since around the island is open sea, the North Asian mainland five hundred miles beyond, and in the sentence following, as if in

reminder, the sunset "spreads slowly on the exiled peaks." Further, the lacquered bowls, with their suggestions of artistic accomplishment and aesthetic sensibility and their aristocratic overtones, are fitting objects to have come from Sado. The first written legal code of Japan required every household to have a lacquer tree and to pay a tax in lacquer to the imperial house, and by the Kamakura period decorations on lacquerware were most often scenes from imperial poetry collections and court diaries, often inlaid in swirling backgrounds of powdered gold and silver. Lacquerware cannot be particularly connected to the imperial line, but until the Edo period was affordable only to the aristocracy, and its appearance here in the silky foam of waves with the peaks of Sado in the distance would call to the mind of any Japanese familiar with the story the fate of Juntoku, as if his grief had been made palpable and was abandoned to the waves.

Similar associations may be drawn from the "frozen blossoms." Cherry blossoms are the single most enduring image in Japanese cultural tradition, so much a part of literary history that in poetry from the fifteenth century forward reference to a flower or blossom without a specifying adjective was by convention understood to be cherry, and called to mind the intermingling associations of the loveliness of life and its brevity, the beauty of the world, but also the *mono no aware*, sadness of things, inherent in it, a feeling closely associated with *sabi* and a constant theme in the literature of exile. The fact that these blossoms are not named as cherry is not important. In the context all Japanese would understand them as such, and by not naming them Stryk follows five hundred years of poetic tradition. Here, remarkably, in the woman's dream the blossoms are frozen, reinforcing earlier suggestions of the frigidity of the scene and the delicacy of the treasure, but also denying conventional associations of short-lived beauty and the essential sadness of life. Here the beauty is preserved in ice, and offers at least the suggestion that the dreamed-of treasure transcends both time and death. These blossoms could be from a springtime in the middle ages and would not have lost their beauty, and in the dream of them the woman herself is frozen in time. Elsewhere she is "wasted" and compared to the bent and shriveled pines holding the shore, but in her dream of lacquered bowls like frozen blossoms it is with a "girlish hand" that she plucks them from the surf.

The power of "The Beachcomber" comes in its associations and suggestions, and these in large part derive from the circle of associations set in motion by the peaks of Sado rising in the distance. We cannot say with certainty that the lacquered bowls or frozen blossoms "mean" this or "stand for" that, or that the woman's "cold necessity" is, for example, the attempt to find something in the waves which allows her to recapture the beauty of a personal or a cultural past, or to salve her own spiritual or emotional exile,

but these and related readings are possible. In any case, the treasure the woman dreams to her reach is surely more than gold or silver, and her "cold necessity" surely grows from a longing or a loss, neither named nor directly nameable, but without doubt connected both to the splendor and the grief of those from the past exiled to Sado, and to the beauty and ambiguity of "the frail and scattered richness [which] never breaks."

A second poem from *Notes for a Guidebook* which is indebted to Japan is "Hearn in Matsue" (CP, 8–10), which relies on a variation of the stanza of three syllabic lines developed in "Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu," and takes as its subject the fifteen months, August 1890 to November 1891, that Lafcadio Hearn lived in Matsue, near the coast of the Sea of Japan in what is now Shimane Prefecture. In twelve books written in Japan and published between 1893 and his death in Tokyo in 1904, Hearn established the popular image of the country in the West and, in no small part, in Japan itself. His subjects were the legends and tales of traditional Japan, which were disappearing in the rush toward modernization even as he wrote, and in fourteen years in the country, after a life particularly marked by turmoil and dislocation, it was this time in Matsue, a small castle town far removed from changes taking place in more cosmopolitan centers, that he was happiest. Hearn's reputation in the West diminished markedly after the Second World War, and his writings from Japan were for a time regarded as little more than exotica, but Stryk's poem is a sensitive portrayal, sympathetic to Hearn's odd genius and beautiful style in tales "which drew/The expert's/Touch like lacquered puzzle-boxes," and in this sense the poem is prescient, similar to recent reevaluations which recognize again Hearn's humanity and talent. The "Lady, Ellen Freeman" mentioned in stanza one was a physician's wife in Cincinnati who had courted Hearn while he was a young reporter there; the "bed and name" of stanza four alludes to his marriage in Matsue to Koizumi Setsu, the daughter of an impoverished local *samurai*, and his adoption of the family name, by which to this day he is known in Japan; the "house//Which brushed the river a crane's cry from the/Daimyo's Tower" in stanzas four and five refers to Kitabori, the rented *bukeyashiki*, *samurai* house, where Hearn and Setsu lived from June to November 1891, from which was visible the donjon of Matsue Castle. The house still stands, beside another *bukeyashiki*, which is now the Koizumi Yakumo Memorial Museum, in honor of Matsue's most famous resident, regarded still in Japan, perhaps rightly, as having understood something of an essence of the country which the Japanese themselves have lost, or forgotten, or bartered away.[13]

Two other poems in *Notes for a Guidebook* make use of Japanese material, but in less essential ways. "Return to Hiroshima" (CP, 10–13) addresses the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, but does not rely upon Japanese historical or cultural detail beyond the well-known facts of the bombing it-

self; and "The Mine: Yamaguchi" (CP, 13) evokes a troubled scene in and around a coal mine in Yamaguchi Prefecture, but only the title specifically marks the setting as Japan. Likewise, poems in *The Pit and Other Poems*, published in 1969, offer little to the study of Stryk's incorporation of Japanese material. "Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu" finally appears in the collection, and variations on the syllabic measure developed in that poem continue, sometimes in imagistic triplets reminiscent of *haiku*. Beyond this, Stryk notes in "Making Poems" (p. 26) that the collection was mainly written while he was at work on *World of the Buddha* and, with Takashi Ikemoto, *Afterimages: Zen Poems of Shinkichi Takahashi*, but echoes from those works, if any, are indistinct, and poems which make use of Japanese subjects or themes, "To a Japanese Poet" (CP, 43), "The Quake" (CP, 48), "H. S. With Noh Mask" (CP, 48–49), "Cormorant" (CP, 59–60), and "And They Call This Living!" (CP, 64–65), do so in incidental ways.[14]

It is in the title poem of the next collection, the 1973 *Awakening*, that the next major step in the journey begun in Niigata in 1957 may be traced. "Awakening: Homage to Hakuin, Zen Master, 1685–1768" (CP, 106–8) departs dramatically from previous work, and again Japanese sources play a determinative role. The title alludes to a common translation of the Japanese *kensho*, also rendered "enlightenment," or, more literally, "seeing into [one's own true] nature."[15] Zen (Ch., *Ch'an*) is a school of Buddhism which, like all others, traces its roots to India in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., in the life and teaching of Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha, but according to its own self-understanding it differs from others schools in that it is "a special transmission outside the sciptures, / not founded upon words and letters, / [which] by pointing directly to mind / lets [one] see into [one's own true] nature and [thus] attain Buddhahood."[16] In the closing line of this most famous of Zen self-definitions, *kensho jobutsu* in Japanese, is the "awakening" of Stryk's title, and in the opening line, *kyoge betsuden*, "special transmission outside the scriptures," is an insight into the nature of the tradition which leads from T'ang China to Hakuin's Zen, and from there to Stryk's poem.

The sense of a "special transmission outside the scriptures" is at the heart of the so-called "Zen of the Patriarchs" (*soshizen*) which underlies all Japanese manifestations of the tradition. According to the teaching, the "special transmission" began when Sakyamuni himself passed on the enlightened Buddha mind to his disciple Kâsyapa, and the "passing on of the lamp," as the common metaphor has it, continued through the centuries, in a lineage of twenty-seven Indian patriarchs, to Bodhidharma (Jpn., Daruma, d. 532), the twenty-eighth, who brought the teaching to China, becoming the first patriarch of Chinese Zen. What we think of today as Zen has its first full flowering in this movement to China, especially in the figure of the

sixth Chinese partriarch, Hui-neng (Jpn., E'no, 638–713), around whose teaching variant interpretations of the tradition unified, as well as, in the following century, a line of four great masters who stood in direct relationship to each other, Ma-tsu (709–788), Pai-chang (749–814), Huang-po (d. 850), and Lin-chi (d. 866), Baso, Hyakujô, Obaku, and Rinzai in Japanese, whose brilliance solidified the teaching of the "transmission outside the scriptures," an epithet, in essence, for sudden awakening to the Buddha mind brought about by meditation. Before the Sixth Patriarch and the line which lead to Lin-chi, the teaching, even about "awakening," was sutra-based. After, in the words of the foremost Western historian of Zen, "while the main themes of the Mahâyâna sûtras were preserved, the method of meditation, no longer determined by the sûtras nor dependent on texts and the printed word, was concerned solely with passing on the Buddha mind. . . . Wherever 'no thought' broke through negation and paradox into enlightenment, there was the Zen of the Patriarchs."[17]

The line of Chinese Zen which derived from Ma-tsu and reached its apogee with Lin-chi was the line most directly concerned with "transmission outside the scriptures," and it became in time the preeminent line not only of Chinese Zen but of the whole of Chinese Buddhism, and after the ninth century bore the name of Lin-chi, to reflect the innovations brought to the tradition by that great master. Lin-chi himself, and Japanese interpretation of his work, will have significant effect on later Stryk's poems, but the point here is that it is this line and this teaching, still bearing Lin-chi's name but with the Japanese pronunciation of the characters, *Rinzai*, which is brought to Japan by the monk Eisai (1141–1215) and others in the early years of the Kamakura period,[18] and which reaches a zenith in Japan in the figure of Hakuin Ekaku, to whom Stryk's poem is an "homage," and whose spirit and teaching inform the poem in important ways.

Hakuin from childhood exhibited a tendency toward extremes of spiritual insecurity and doubt, but also, to keep these in balance, considerable intellectual and artistic ability. His mother was a follower of the teaching of Nichiren, but when, at the age of fifteen, he entered monastic life, it was at Shoinji, a Zen temple in Hara, his native village, that he was granted the tonsure. He soon moved to another monastery in a nearby town, but there, after reading the story of the violent death of a T'ang dynasty master, fell into despair. Doubting his ability to gain awakening, he left the monastery and turned for consolation to poetry and painting, though his later writing on the period makes clear that in these activities he continued to seek resolution to spiritual questions. A pivotal moment came two years later while he was staying at Zuiunji in what is now Gifu Prefecture. On a warm summer day the abbot put his volumes of Taoist, Confucian, and Buddhist texts out in the sun to air, and Hakuin, plagued still by doubts about his proper di-

rection, resolved to choose one of the books at random and let it be a guide. The chosen text was a collection of anecdotes about the Chinese Zen masters, and in it he read of Shih-shuang (Jpn., Sekiso, 986–1039), who meditated day and night without interruption and pierced his own flesh with an awl whenever he became drowsy so that the pain would refocus his mind, until finally and after great effort, he achieved *kensho*, the awakening to the Budda mind.

Forty years later Hakuin remembered this as the day he dedicated himself to Zen. In the collection of writings called the *Orategame, The Embossed Tea Kettle*,[19] he describes the single-minded practice which followed. He travelled north, to Eiganji, in what is now Niigata Prefecture, and there, for days on end, sat in *zazen*, often forgetting both to eat and sleep. Eventually he experienced a "great doubt" (*daigijo*) which left him feeling at once paralyzed and as if he were "floating through the air," sensations which continued for days, until early one morning, after a night of meditation, he had his first glimpse of *kensho*, in the spring of his twenty-fourth year. The "great doubt" was to recur many times, but was always followed by an even greater *kensho*, until finally Hakuin came to see the one as a prerequisite for the other. The *kensho*, experiences themselves in time reached ecstatic heights, and more even than his predecessors he stressed their singular importance: "If you wish to seek Buddha, you must first have an awakening to your own true nature. Without this, what benefit will you derive from reciting prayers or chanting sûtras? The word 'Budda' means 'Awakened.' When you awaken, your own mind is Buddha. If you seek Buddha in tangible form other than in your own mind you are a fool."[20]

By thirty-two Hakuin had been offered a position of influence at the most prestigious Rinzai monastery in Kyoto, where he would have found not only recognition and power but also the intellectual stimulation of the old capital, then still the most cultured city in the country. He declined, though, and returned instead to Shoinji, the rural temple in Hara where he had begun his apprenticeship. There he worked with local farmers and shunned attention, but word spread of his brilliance as a teacher and disciples gathered around him from near and far. For fifty-one years he taught at Shoinji, stressing always the importance of *zazen*, *koan* study, and above all the experience of awakening. Throughout his life he continued painting and composing poetry, and produced masterpieces in both. His *kensho* experiences continued as well, and were captured in the formidable prose of his later years with an imagistic power rare even among the luminaries of T'ang and perhaps without equal in Japanese Zen. By the time of his death at Shoinji, in his sleep at the age of eighty-three, the small temple was the most important Zen training center in Japan, and he the most revered master of many generations. He is counted today among important figures in Japanese

literature and art, and his significance to Rinzai Zen cannot be overstated. His interpretation of the teaching in terms understandable to common people is responsible for its dissemination throughout the rural population of Japan, and his reforms of monastic life and practice and his systematization of *koan* study affect the daily life of every Rinzai monk. Virtually all Rinzai masters today belong to his line, follow his teaching, and accept his continued insistence upon the primacy of "awakening."

Stryk's poem begins with lines which establish immediately a relationship with Japanese aesthetic and spiritual tradition, but it is in the second of seven sections that Hakuin is directly invoked, and in these lines may be found the essential point around which the poem revolves:

> A freeze last night, the window's
> laced ice flowers, a meadow drifting
> from the glacier's side. I think of Hakuin:
>
> "Freezing in an icefield, stretched
> thousands of miles in all directions,
> I was alone, transparent, and could not move."
>
> Legs cramped, mind pointing
> like a torch, I cannot see beyond
> the frost, out nor in. And do not move.

The quotation is from Hakuin's *Orategama*. Stryk verifies in a letter that it is his own translation broken into lines.[21] In Hakuin's text, the image of the "icefield" occurs directly before description of his first *kensho* experience, and refers to the "great doubt" which preceded it. After randomly selecting the book of anecdotes about the Chinese Zen masters, Hakuin had travelled to Eiganji, and following his description of days of *zazen* and *koan* study at that temple come the lines assimilated in "Awakening." In the best complete English translation of the *Orategama*, and in the context of preceding and following sentences, the passage reads as follows:

> Suddenly a great doubt manifested itself before me. *It was as though I were frozen solid in the midst of an ice sheet extending tens of thousands of miles. A purity filled my breast and I could neither go forward nor retreat.* To all intents and pur-

> poses I was out of my mind and the *[koan] mu* alone remained. [Italics added.][12]

This is the state which lasted for several days in which Hakuin felt as if he were "floating through the air," and in lines directly following, he describes the *kensho* which followed:

> I chanced to hear the sound of the temple bell and I was suddenly transformed. It was as if a sheet of ice had been smashed. . . . Suddenly I returned to my senses. . . . All my former doubts vanished as though ice had melted away.

In Hakuin's text, then, ice is a powerful image of spiritual doubt, and it functions in three ways. First, as an ice field or sheet stretching "thousands of miles in all directions," it represents the paralyzing "great doubt" which had precedents in earlier Zen writing but which Hakuin brought to the fore of the Japanese tradition, and claimed finally was a prerequisite for awakening; second, the smashing of the ice sheet, an image related to *toki-no-ge* such as those Stryk echoed in the closing line of "Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu," represents awakening itself, the doubt suddenly and absolutely broken apart; finally, after the awakening, the doubt which has been overcome is like "ice . . . melted away." The effect upon Hakuin was remarkable. He realized that his previous understanding had been incomplete, and called out in a loud voice: "Wonderful, wonderful. There is no cycle of birth and death through which one must pass. There is no enlightenment one must seek." He rushed to the master of Eiganji to have his awakening confirmed.

Section II of Stryk's poem is read differently with knowledge of the context of Hakuin's unforgettable image. As the history of Sado deepens "The Beachcomber," this most important section of "Awakening" is deepened by the metaphorical link between Hakuin's ice and spiritual doubt, though the poem, with a reliance upon suggestion itself reminiscent of Japanese aesthetics, expresses only half of the metaphor. "A freeze last night, the window's / laced ice flowers, a meadow drifting / from the glacier's side." Hakuin's connotations are transferred intact. The ice, and therefore the doubt, suffuses the speaker's world as well as Hakuin's, and he knows that it must be broken through or melted away or there will be no awakening. The closing tercet addresses the need and extends the metaphor. The speaker sits in *zazen*, "legs cramped, mind pointing / like a torch," but the ice grows more formidable yet, and he "cannot see beyond [it], out nor in."

In a later essay about "Awakening" Stryk calls these lines a "profound identification" with Hakuin.[23] With the central metaphor in context we see that this includes recognition of and confrontation with the spiritual doubt which according to Hakuin obscures, but is nonetheless a prerequisite for, awakening.

Section II is central to understanding "Awakening" as a poem about the onset and overcoming of spiritual doubt, but once this is established images from beginning to end cohere around the reading, many of them drawn from Japanese sources. Section I is an evocation of the meditation which precedes the doubt, the "dawn" of a process traced through following sections:

> Shoichi brushed the black
> on thick.
> His circle held a poem
> like buds
> above a flowering bowl.
>
> Since the moment of my
> pointing,
> this bowl, an "earth device,"
> holds
> nothing but the dawn.

Shoichi is a common Japanese name, but here probably refers to the Japanese Rinzai master Enni Ben'en (1201–1280), given the posthumous name Shoichi Kokushi by the Emperor Hanazono, and referred to as Shoichi by Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto in a relevant translation from his work published eight years before "Awakening":

> The all-meaning circle:
> No in, no out;
> No light, no shade.
> Here all saints are born.[24]

The connotations of Enni's poem are in keeping with those of the section, and if "Shoichi" is indeed Enni, then probably this is the poem brushed above his circle in the opening stanza, in Chinese vertical script so that it reminds the speaker of "buds / above a flowering bowl." The circle itself has been a symbol for enlightenment in Zen tradition from the sixth century

forward, and here introduces the theme of awakening. Elsewhere Stryk calls it "Zen's mandala,"[25] and suggests that it is used by the speaker of these lines to focus the mind, an act expressed in the metaphor of "pointing," which anticipates the "mind pointing / like a torch" of section II. That the circle becomes a bowl and the bowl, in the "moment of . . . pointing," an "earth device" emphasizes its use as an object of meditation. The Japanese *hoben* in Buddhist texts refers to "expedient means" or "devices," *koan*, a *kansho* garden, a brushed-ink circle or earthenware bowl used for meditation, which might aid in the attainment of *kensho*. *Hoben* have roots in the Mahayana sutras, and figure prominently in Chinese Zen, but in Japanese tradition Hakuin more than others stressed their importance, in part because of this concern for common people who could not sit daily under the guidance of a master. The lines are a fitting prelude, then, to those which introduce Hakuin's ice: the theme of awakening is introduced, and the speaker employs a *hoben* to focus concentration, as Hakuin himself employed the *koan mu* in the practice which led to the "great doubt" and the *kensho* which lay beyond it.

Both the circle and the doubt recur in III, the former in a "round stone" the speaker holds in his palm and "[turns] full circle, / slowly, in the late sun," the latter, in part, in the odd effect this produces:

> Severe compression,
>
> like a troubled head,
> stings my hand.
> [The stone] falls. A small dust rises.

On the surface the lines suggest doubt or something closely related, but they resonate more deeply as well. In the context of the diverse echoes of the circle—the round stone, the turning of it "full circle" in the palm, the late sun, even the "troubled head"—Hakuin's resurrection of a related T'ang Dynasty metaphor is relevant. In a series of talks on Zen published in 1743 Hakuin defines spiritual doubt as one of "three essential requirements" for the attainment of *kensho*, but refers to it not as *daigijo*, "great doubt," the term he uses in the *Orategama*, but as *gidan*, "ball of doubt,"[26] a metaphor with referents in eighth-century Chinese *toki-no-ge*, where it occurs along with other imagery suggestive of the circle of awakening. In the *toki-no-ge* of Lo-han Kuei-ch'en (Jpn., Rakan Keichin, 867–928), for example, the "ball of doubt" in the moment of awakening "falls to the ground with a crash," to the effect that Lo-han realizes that "the sun from the first

had been round."[27] The metaphor is common in T'ang and Sung writing, and Stryk surely would have been aware of it by the time he wrote "Awakening."[28] Whether he had it consciously in mind in section III cannot be established, but its echo is there in any case, bringing the lines fully into sympathy with the earlier-established theme of doubt, to which the "small dust" which rises when the stone falls is likewise connected. From the Sanskrit sutras forward, throughout Chinese and Japanese Zen, dust (Jpn., *jin*) has been a metaphor for those things which defile the pure mind, and is used by Japanese masters precisely in this way in at least three poems Stryk translated before he wrote "Awakening."[29] The effect of its use here is obvious. When Lo-han's ball of doubt fell it was with the crash of enlightenment; here, when the stone falls, only the "small dust" rises. The mind is not yet clear, the doubt not yet broken through.

In IV the speaker is again at a window, his sight no longer obscured by ice, but the lines remain troubled and their connection to Hakuin's doubt remains strong. In distant "dark air," clouds and smoke moving westward across the sky, the speaker perceives "something / wanting a name," and with "gathered breath," traces across the window "a simple word." In his essay about "Awakening" Stryk mentions the word "doubt" only in connection with these lines. The "something wanting a name," he writes, is in effect a self-imposed *koan*, the sort of "device" which can lead to "great doubt," a reexamination of "manners with which, hitherto, we explained reality to ourselves," to the effect that something "original . . . within us" may "break free." *Koan* originate in Sung China, as does the suggestion that their study may provoke the "great doubt," but Hakuin above all others in the tradition stressed and shaped their use; he wrote many himself, systematized the order in which they are approached, and in the *Orategama* and elsewhere specifically equated their efficacy with the onset of the "great doubt." Stryk's analysis is pure "Hakuin Zen," but the speaker in section IV has not yet broken through. The "simple word" he supplies in response to the self-imposed question leaves him "uneasy," Stryk writes; it may prove "as limiting as . . . others have been" and "his doubts [are] far from resolved."[30]

Sections V and VI are marked by an easing of tone and a speaker less self-conscious, more involved in activity and impression than in *thinking about* activity and impression, and represent in this sense a movement toward resolution of doubt fully in accord with Zen teaching. The circle recurs in V in the image of "planets whirling in the sand," a reference to a "universe" the speaker has constructed of shells at his daughter's "command" while they are at a beach, and in the cryptic and impressionistic section VI slight echoes from the translations of Takahashi are discernible, the

interest in time in "Rat on Mount Ishizuchi" and "The Position of the Sparrow" (CP, 86, 99), for example, and the "flesh and bone" of "The Peach" (CP, 93). Beyond these, though, the sections are neither directly related to Japan nor to earlier-established themes derived from Japanese sources.

Section VII, however, develops from and further extends those themes:

> I write in the dark again,
> rather by dusk-light,
> and what I love about
>
> this hour is the way the trees
> are taken, one by one,
> into the great wash of darkness.
>
> At this hour I am always happy,
> ready to be taken myself,
> fully aware.

The lines do not rely upon apocalyptic images associated with *kensho*, Hakuin's "smashing," Lo-han's "crashing," or the others, but they do represent the "awakening" of the title. All traces of doubt are gone; the tone is consistent with a "carrying of the meditative spirit . . . into life" that Stryk associates with Hakuin;[31] and the "great wash of darkness" into which "the trees / are taken, one by one" suggests the Buddha nature (*bussho*), the original non-duality into which singularities return in the moment of *kensho*, and into which the speaker himself is "ready to be taken," the closing "fully aware" related in both English and Japanese to spiritual awakening.[32] More than representing the *moment* of awakening, then, when doubt is "crushed" or "shattered" or "smashed," the lines represent its consequences. Hakuin's "return to the senses" and Lohan's recognition that "the sun from the first had been round" are followed by joy, the "love" and "happiness" of the "hour," the readiness to be "taken," the sense of peace that emanates from these lines. The section is rich with connotation and suggests among other things a reconciliation with death, but in the end dusk light is dusk light, darkness, darkness, and the speaker's composed recognition of both, balanced against the dawn of section I, is evidence that the process set in motion by Enni's circle and propelled by Hakuin's ice has reached, at least in these moments, a culmination in awakening.

The Zen understanding of awakening, the theme of the "great doubt,"

and imagery related to both, the circle, the ball, and the "small dust," have origins in Chinese tradition, but their derivation here from Japanese sources makes them part of this study and underlines the degree to which Stryk's encounter with Zen has been filtered through Japan, and as in earlier poems this conceptual debt is matched by a reliance upon technique traceable to Japanese sources. Stryk and Ikemoto Takashi's translations of Shinkichi Takahashi, collected in *Triumph of the Sparrow: Zen Poems of Shinkichi Takahashi*,[33] had appeared three years earlier, and traces are apparent here. Takahashi dabbled with *haiku*, wrote three hundred *waka*, and often employed lines of five or seven syllables, but ultimately rejected predetermined forms as too limiting, and in his four-volume 1982 *Collected Works*,[34] the last published in his lifetime, he included no traditionally-structured poems. In translating Takahashi, Stryk adopts various techniques to approximate the effect of his free-verse Japanese, and in several poems, "A Wood in Sound," "Time," "The Pipe," "The Peach," "Collapse," "Sun," "Words," and "Rain" among others (CP, 82–97), he employs an irregular stanza of three lines ranging from three to nine syllables, broken at grammatically or rhetorically logical points, with no syntactical ellipses. Stryk does not employ such a stanza in his own work prior to "Awakening," but four of seven sections there rely upon it wholly, and two others deviate only in minor ways. Only section VI varies significantly, and these lines, as we have seen, echo Takahashi in a different way. In a recent interview Stryk remarks that Takahashi's influence upon his poetry has been "profound," and cites "Awakening" as a movement toward his "compactness and rigor."[35] The stanza pattern developed in translations from his work is a tangible example of the point.

Two other poems in *Awakening* draw upon Takahashi in different ways. In the first, "Away" (CP, 108–9), the temple in Yamaguchi with "Takayama-roshi" shouting "Down, down, and breathe!" are references to Tôshunji, in the northern hills of Yamaguchi, and its master at the time Stryk lived in the city, Takayama Taigan Rôshi, Stryk and Ikemoto Takashi's collaborator on *Zen Poems of China and Japan*, to whom Stryk's later poem "Willows" (CP, 197–98) is dedicated.[36] The echo from Takahashi is brief but striking: the image of the speaker's feet "suddenly [flying] off" is a surrealist touch unprecedented in Stryk's earlier work but remarkably like leaps common in Takahashi, the feet becoming horse hoofs and "dropping off" in "Fish" (CP, 102–3), the disappearance of the sailor's toes in "Deck" (CP, 100), and recurrent images elsewhere of things which suddenly "fly off" or "take off." And in "Making Poems" (p. 29) Stryk writes that his translation of Takahashi's "Burning Oneself to Death (CP, 87) "lay behind the making" of "Letter to Jean-Paul Baudot, at Christmas" (CP, 141),

though the connection here is more in a tone and a stance toward violent subject matter than in a single image or technique. The debt to Takahashi is perhaps deeper than is evident in these poems alone, but aside from the free-verse-stanza pattern employed in "Awakening" and elsewhere only in these may an influence be definitively traced.

Even though *Awakening* does not rely further upon Japanese subject, the collection nonetheless marks a turning point in Stryk's appropriation of Japanese sources, traces of which are apparent in every poem. Two-thirds employ variations upon either the free-verse triplets of the Takahashi translations or the syllabic triplets of "Zen: The Rocks of Sesshu," and most others rely upon lines with regular syllable counts. A reflective "I" developed in *Notes for a Guidebook* and common in *The Pit and Other Poems* evolves here into a persona standing behind individual poems, and this too has its connection to Japan. "Awakening" opens the collection, and the voice developed there, calm, thoughtful, and strengthened by Buddhist sensibilities learned and developed in Japan, is the voice of the collection. That poem for the first time brings together Stryk's interest in Zen and the more commonplace concerns of a secular life, the father at a beach with his daughter, the writer watching darkness fall outside a window. Following poems address themes not related to Buddhism or to Japan, the death of a student, the love of a husband for his wife, a father for his son; the voice describes landscapes both external and internal, welcomes home a neighbor, consoles a friend and deplores a war, but in all these the reactions are shaped by the tradition from which the opening poem arises, and nothing in the collection exists fully outside that context. Stryk's later work continues this movement, and further draws upon Japanese themes, styles, and settings, but it is in *Awakening* that Stryk's Buddhism and his poetry fully come together, and in this collection that the profound degree to which his life and work have been influenced by Japan becomes fully apparent.

Notes

[1]Athens, Ohio: Swallow/Ohio University Press, 1984.

[2]"Making Poems" (1976), rpt. in *Encounter With Zen: Writings on Poetry and Zen* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow/Ohio University Press, 1981): 22–23; *Zen Poetry* (1977; rpt. New York: Penguin, 1981): 10.

[3]Of work he has chosen to keep in print only three poems address experiences specifically related to Japan and the war, "Return to Hiroshima" (*CP*, 10–13), "Watching War Movies" (*CP*, 183–84), and "Rooms: II" (*Bells of Lombardy* [DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986]: 15); "The Pit" (*CP*, 78–79) is Stryk's most powerful recollection of war, but, pointedly, nothing in it indicates a specific setting.

[4]Names of Japanese historical periods and their precise dates are not always agreed upon.

Those used here, with alternate names in parentheses, are Kamakura, 1186–1336; Muromachi (Ashikaga), 1392–1573; and Edo (Tokugawa), 1603–1868; the Chinese dynastic periods referred to later are the T'ang, 618–907, and the Sung, 960–1279.

[5]For the exchange with Yasuda Roshi see *Encounter*, pp. 118–25; for details of its effects see "Making Poems," pp. 22–27; *Zen Poetry*, p. 10; and "Lucien Stryk: An Interview by Kent Johnson," *American Poetry Review* (March/April 1990): 47–48; my account is indebted as well to letters from Stryk, of 16 August, 9 September, and 12 October 1991, which have been helpful in this and many other matters.

[6]Sesshu is believed by some to be the greatest of Japanese painters, perhaps even the greatest Japanese artist. The fullest discussion of his life and work in English is in Ichimatsu Tanaka, *Japanese Ink Painting: Shubun to Sesshu*, trans. Bruce Darling (New York: Weatherhill, 1972); photographs and discussion of the garden at Joeiji may be found in Masao Hayakawa, *The Garden Art of Japan*, trans. Richard L. Gage (New York: Weatherhill, 1973), figs. 37, 63, pp. 76, 85–86.

[7]Stryk writes in "Beginnings, Ends" (p. 10) that after the meeting with the priest at the mountain temple in Niigata in 1957, he began "making very tentative translations of [Zen] literature, particularly poetry." Much of this poetry, even though written by Japanese monks and priests, was composed in Chinese, but some of Stryk's early translations were from Japanese as well, and surely by 1962 he was well aware of the syllabic prosody and three- and two-line units which characterize virtually the whole of Japanese poetic tradition.

[8]The translations from Muso and Daito appeared in *Zen: Poems, Prayers, Sermons, Anecdotes, Interviews* (1965; rpt. Athens, Ohio: Swallow/Ohio University Press, 1981) and are reprinted in *Zen Poetry*, p. 64; the Dogen translation, from *Zen Poems of China and Japan: The Crane's Bill* (1973; rpt. New York: Grove, 1981), is reprinted in *Encounter*, p. 55; Muso is a major figure in Japanese religious, cultural, and literary history; his gardens at Saihoji and Tenryuji in Kyoto are prototypes of the *kare-sansui* style; Daito, also known as Shuho Myocho, was founder of Daitokuji; "Unmon's barrier" alludes to Case 8 in the *Hekiganroku* (Ch., *Pi-yen lu*; see Katsuki Sekida, trans., *Two Zen Classics: Mumonkan and Hekiganroku* [New York: Weatherhill, 1977]: 168–71); Dogen was founder of Japanese Soto Zen.

[9]"Translating Zen Poems," in *Of Pen and Ink and Paper Scraps* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow/Ohio University Press, 1989): 24–25.

[10]Rpt. in Robert N. Huey, *Kyogoku Tamekane: Poetry and Politics in Late Kamakura Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1989): 36; Huey points out that since the poem is not found among Tamekane's works, Zeami's story about it was probably a local legend.

[11]*Sabi* had existed as an aesthetic principle before Shunzei, and is ultimately traceable, as is so much of "Japanese" aesthetic and religious theory, to T'ang China, but Shunzei gave it the interpretation and emphasis that made it an enduring ideal in Japanese poetry; *haikai* poets of the seventeenth century, especially Basho, develop the concept further, and change the meaning slightly, but acknowledge Shunzei's influence; the most thorough explanation in English of *sabi* as a Japanese poetic ideal is in Robert H. Brower and Earl Miner, *Japanese Court Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961): 260–62, from which the quotations and the poem, by the priest Jakurin (1139?–1202), are taken.

[12]See "Poetry and Zen," in *Encounter*, pp. 57–63; it should be noted, however, that in Japan *sabi* and the other terms discussed were used as critical terms before Zen arrived in the country and have never been exclusively associated with Zen.

[13]Elizabeth Stevenson's *Lafcadio Hearn* (New York: Macmillan, 1961) remains the most satisfying biography of Hearn, though Jonathan Cott's biography and anthology *Wandering Ghost: The Odyssey of Lafcadio Hearn* (New York: Knopf, 1991) may also be recommended;

Hearn's letters to Ellen Freeman, one of which is quoted in Stryk's poem, are collected in Milton Bronner, ed., *Letters from the Raven* (New York: Brentano, 1907).

[14]Nothing in "And They Call This Living!" marks the setting as Japan, but Stryk writes in the letter of 12 October 1991 that the beach described was near his house in Niigata, and that the poem was written there during his first visiting lectureship.

[15]Strictly speaking, *kensho* (Ch., *chien-hsing*) means "seeing into one's own nature" and *satori* (Ch., *wu*) means "spiritual awakening" or "enlightenment," though in practice they are used as synonyms in both Chinese and Japanese tradition.

[16]The traditional ascription of this quatrain to Bodhidharma is erroneous; individual lines appear in various early Zen texts, but the lines first appear together in a work compiled in 1108; see Isshu Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki, *Zen Dust* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966): 229–30.

[17]Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History*, vol. 1, trans. James W. Heisig and Paul Knitter (New York: Macmillan, 1988): 158–59.

[18]Eisai is credited with having founded Zen in Japan, and not without reason, but the process was more complex than the ascription to one founder suggests, and others played important roles; see Dumoulin, vol. 2 (1990): 5–21.

[19]The best English translation is by Philip Yampolsky in his *Zen Master Hakuin: Selected Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971): 29–157.

[20]*Sokko roku kaien fusetsu* (1743), in *Hakuin Osho Zenshu*, vol. 2, ed. Goto Koson (Tokyo: Ryuginsha, 1935): 411; most of the work has not been translated, but passages appear in *Zen Dust*, pp. 41–43, 46–47, and 58.

[21]16 August 1991.

[22]Yampolsky p. 118; *mu* means "nothingness" and refers to Case 1 in the *Mumonkan* (Ch., *Wu-men kuan*), compiled by Wu-men Hui-k'ai (Jpn., Mumon Ekai, 1183–1260): "A monk asked Joshu, 'Has the dog Buddha Nature?' Joshu answered, 'Mu' " (Sekida, p. 27).

[23]"What? Why This. This Only," in *Singular Voices*, ed. Stephen Berg (New York: Avon, 1985): 260.

[24]The translation appeared in *Poems, Prayers*, but my source is *Zen Poetry*, p. 63; Enni is among the most important of early Rinzai masters in Japan; he established one of four main Rinzai lines of the Kamakura Period and was founding abbot of Tofukuji in Kyoto.

[25]"What? Why This," p. 259.

[26]*Sokko roku kaien fusetsu*, p. 413; *gidan* has also been translated "spirit of doubt," "gathering of doubt," and simply "doubt," but originally was a metaphor with connotations including *roundness*, along with *gathering* or *cohering*; a translation strictly attentive to nuance and mindless of style would be something like "cohesion of doubt into a roundish mass."

[27]Ruth Sasaki, trans., *Zen Dust*, p. 247.

[28]In fact, Stryk's tacit awareness of the metaphor is demonstrable. His translation of a late poem by Hakuin includes the lines "Priceless is one's incantation, / Turning a red-hot iron ball to butter oil" (1965; rpt. in *Zen Poetry* 78). The referent of the "red-hot iron ball" (*netsu tetsugan*) is Wu-men's commentary upon Case 1 of the *Mumonkan*, the source of the *mu* Hakuin was meditating upon when the "great doubt" overtook him (see note 22). In Sekida's translation (p. 28) Wu-men writes that one should "summon up a spirit of great doubt" to concentrate on the *mu*, and the result will be like "swallowing a red-hot iron ball, which you cannot spit out even if you try"; the two characters that Sekida translates "spirit of great doubt," though, are *gidan*, the "ball of doubt" under discussion here. Stryk's work is further connected to Case 1 of the *Mumonkan*, and thereby to the "ball of doubt," by his translation of "On Joshu's Nothingness," by "Saisho (?–1506)," a poem explicitly about the case (1965; rpt. in *Zen Poetry*, 74).

[29]The translations, of poems by Muso Soseki, "Kodo (1370–1433)," and Kogaku Soen (1859–1919), appeared in *Poems, Prayers*, and are reprinted in *Zen Poetry*, pp. 64, 71, and 82; Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto later translated poems by Chinese masters "Shofu" and "Kuchu" which also make use of the metaphor (*Zen Poetry*, 46 and 50); a prototype for all these is the seventh-century quatrain attributed to Hui-neng, the Sixth Chinese Patriarch: "Originally there is no tree of enlightenment, / Nor is there a stand with a clear mirror. / From the beginning not one thing exists; / Where, then, is a grain of dust to cling?" (Dumoulin, vol. 1, p. 133, but see also note 53, 151–52); Stryk had included a different translation of this poem in a passage in *World of the Buddha* (1968; rev. ed. New York: Grove, 1982): 336.

[30]"What? Why This," pp. 262–63.

[31]"What? Why This," p. 264.

[32]The Japanese *kizuku*, which in daily usage means "to become aware of," is also a synonym for *satoru*, "to become spiritually awakened."

[33]The collection includes an interview with Takahashi and reprints all translations of his work which appeared in *Afterimages: Zen Poems of Shinkichi Takahashi* (1970) and *Zen Poetry* (133–60), along with an introduction which appeared earlier as "Shinkichi Takahashi: Contempoary Zen Poet," in *Encounter*, pp. 37–49; the latter, and Makoto Ueda's "Takahashi Shinkichi," in his *Modern Japanese Poets and the Nature of Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983): 335–79, are the most knowledgeable accounts of Takahashi in English.

[34]*Takahashi Shinkichi Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seidosha).

[35]*APR interview*, p. 47.

[36]An interview with Takayama Roshi appeared in *Poems, Prayers* and is reprinted in *Encounter*, pp. 109–16.