

## A Short Introduction to R.H. Blyth:

A Lecture at Japan Foundation, London, on 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 2013,

co-sponsored by Japan Society

### R.H. ブライズの生涯とことば (抄)

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**Abstract:** これは2013年10月10日、ロンドン Russell Square House の国際交流基金で行った講演記録である。日英協会・国際交流基金共催。R.H. ブライズは1898年12月3日、英国エセックス州生まれ。第一次大戦中は「人殺しはできない」として徴兵を忌避しロンドンの刑務所で肉体労働に服し、戦後ロンドン大学で英文学専攻、翌年教員資格を取得、日本支配下の朝鮮は京城大学予科に英語教師として赴任。そこで鈴木大拙著 *Essays in Zen Buddhism* (『禅論』)に出会い、以後日本文化、特に禅と俳句研究に傾倒。妙心寺別院、華山大義老師のもとに参禅。1940年大拙の故郷金沢の四高に転じたが、翌年太平洋戦争勃発。神戸の外国民間人収容所で終戦まで日本文化研究・執筆に没頭。戦時中の42年、英文著作 *Zen in English Literature* (『英文学の中の禅』)を北星堂から出版。戦後、*Haiku* (『俳句』4巻)と共にアメリカ西海岸およびパリを中心に「禅ブーム・haiku ブーム」を巻き起こし、やがて世界各国で国際俳句を生んだ。一方46年には学習院大学教授に迎えられ、46年元旦の昭和天皇「人間宣言」の英文草稿を執筆、同年から64年亡くなるまで皇太子(今上天皇)の家庭教師を務めた。また *Senryu* (『川柳』)ほか日本文化についての多くの英文著作を表し、さらに外務省研修所や東京の多くの大学その他でシェイクスピアやソローなどユニークな英米文学を講じ、多数の英米文学教科書や英会話テキストを出版。54年東京大学から文学博士号授与。59年勲四等瑞宝章授与。さらに *A History of Haiku* (『俳句の歴史』2巻)を出版。また *Zen Series* (『禅シリーズ』)を執筆中、64年10月28日死去、享年65歳。学習院旧図書館での告別式で安倍能成院長の弔辞に「ブライズ君、オメデトウ」と。大拙師の指示で、北鎌倉東慶寺、「鈴木大拙夫妻之墓」の後ろに埋葬された。講演で配布された「R.H. ブライズのことば(抄)」(英文)を付した。また、講演後のアンケートおよび聴衆のコメントの一部を収録した。

**Key words:** R.H. Blyth, conscientious objector, Zen, poetry, Haiku, Senryu, humour, Thoreau, Daisetz T. Suzuki, Emperor's Private tutor R.H. ブライズ、良心的徴兵忌避者、禅、詩、俳句、川柳、ユーモア、H.D. ソロー、鈴木大拙、皇太子(現天皇)の家庭教師

### Lecture: A Short Introduction to R.H. Blyth

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen:

It has just occurred to me that I may have met some of you about thirty years ago at Sadler's Wells Theatre, as I gave lectures there several nights before the performances of Noh in 1983 and 84.

It is my special honour to be able to talk tonight on my British mentor, Professor R.H. Blyth, in his home country. He left his home country in 1924 at the age of 25, and never returned except once; it was while he was still young and he stayed in England about one year and never more.

I think I should talk about his life first chronologically, then discuss his ideas and way of life, referring to the quotations from his writings.

Reginald Horace Blyth was born at Layton (now Leytonstone), Essex, on 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, 1898, and soon moved to Ilford, Essex and attended Cleveland Road Primary School and then the County High School for Boys. During the first world war he served time as a conscientious objector at Wormwood Scrubs in London. I wonder whether it is still there. (Response from the audience, "Yes".) It seems he was influenced by his grandfather as well as Bertrand Russell and other writers.

After the war, he entered London University, specializing in English Literature and studied under Professor W.P. Ker, an authority of Medieval Literature, and he studied many subjects. Blyth received a B.A. with First Class Honours in English in 1923. Then he obtained his teaching certificate from the London Day Training College in 1924. He married one of his classmates, Annie Berkovitch, and moved to Japanese occupied Korea to teach at Keijo (Seoul) University.

One day Professor Blyth told us in a class at Tokyo University of Education that he had loved "the grass in the green field" and got interested in Buddhism. As he got interested in Buddhism, he wanted to go to India. He wanted to go to India, but he could not enter there; "therefore, here I am."

His early adherence to animistic philosophy and a commitment to vegetarianism led him to become interested in Buddhism, and he wanted to go to India. But he could not approve of the way some of his countrymen were treating Indian subjects, and he accepted an invitation to move to Seoul.

While teaching in Korea, he wrote some poems: two were printed in *The London Mercury* (August 1927) and two others in the Korean school magazine *Kaikon-Jidai*. He became enthusiastic about Japanese culture, especially *haiku* and its Zen Buddhist origins and philosophy.

His marriage was not successful. His wife returned to England in 1934 with a Korean boy whom they adopted, and the two divorced. This is the only time in his life Blyth returned to his home country. The divorce was a bitter experience for him. He eagerly read D.T. Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism*, and he practiced *zazen* (Zen-sitting, or Zen meditation) at the Myoshinji-Betsuin Zen temple in Seoul under Kayama Taigi Roshi.

In 1937 Blyth married a Japanese woman, Tomiko Kijima, and wishing to understand her people and culture, he moved with her to Japan in 1940. They settled in Kanazawa, Suzuki's home town, and Blyth taught English at the Fourth High School, now Kanazawa University.

With the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, he was interned as an enemy national. In the internment camp in Kobe, in the west of Kyoto, he devoted himself to study and writing, finishing his first book, *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics*. This was published in 1942 in the midst of the

war, with the Hokuseido Press in Tokyo, abiding by their prewar publication agreement. When I asked the President of the Hokuseido Press after Blyth's death how they could publish a book written by an enemy national in the enemy's language, which was prohibited to use in Japan, President Nakatsuchi answered plainly, "We just kept our promise."

After the war, in 1945, Blyth was invited to Tokyo's Gakushuin University, the former Peers' School, as a professor of English. The following year, he took up a farther position as the private tutor of English to Crown Prince Akihito, who is now the Emperor of Japan. Also, Blyth facilitated Emperor Hirohito's historical declaration of 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1946, that he was a human being rather than a god.

Blyth was invited to teach English at several other universities and organizations. He was a unique teacher, with a profound commitment: "to give (and receive) something more than sentence patterns", he writes, "to achieve the object of life, the communication of souls."

In the early 1950s, *Zen in English Literature* and *Haiku* (4 Vols.) were widely circulated among enthusiastic readers in areas of America and Europe, especially California and Paris. Aldous Huxley writes, "There is a very curious book by a man called R.H. Blyth, called *Zen in English Literature*. Blyth is a professor at some Japanese University and has lived in that country for many years. The book deals with the relation between moment-by-moment experience of Things-as-they-Are [and] Poetry. It is a bit perverse sometimes, but very illuminating at others." In the *Sunday Times* in 1958, Huxley mentioned Blyth's book as his favourite.

In 1954, Blyth obtained a Doctor of Letters by the formal submission of his works on Haiku to Tokyo University. He wrote assiduously: *Senryu*, *Survey of English Literature*, *Japanese Humour*, *Oriental Humour*, *Zen and ZenClassic*, *History of Haiku*, as well as many English textbooks for students. Hokuseido Press was the publisher of all but a few of his works. In 1959, Blyth was decorated with "KunYontou Zuihoushou" by the Emperor.

Blyth's whole life may be epitomized in his following passage, from the Preface to *Humour in English Literature*, written five years before his death:

I also once thought, rightly enough, that poetry is the only important thing in the world. I now think, at last quite rightly, that humour, in its broadest meaning, and as including or rather suffusing poetry, is the real thing. (1959)

If, as D.T. Suzuki writes in his memorial article, "he was first and foremost a poet with a wonderfully keen and sensitive perception," Blyth was also a perfect humorist. He looked a mixture of Charlie Chaplin and Laurence Olivier, (when I wrote so in my letter to him, he was pleased, according to his secretary), and could make any person laugh, including the Empress, at any time he liked. Blyth wrote to me in 1963 from Oiso, where he lived during his last years. The letter is full of humour and is an indication of the spirit in which he threw himself wholeheartedly into life and work.

“....After teaching at the Gaimusho three hours in the morning, I have to teach at the Girls dept. of the Gakushuin 1-2:30; at Waseda 2-4:00; at the Jiyu Gakuen 3.30-4.30; and at Kyoiku Dai 4.30-5.30. As you see, these times overlap in the most interesting way, leaving me a minus quantity in which to pass from one place to another. It reminds me of the title of a book: “What men will do for money.” I am building a house, two-storied, all by myself, and when I am too exhausted to lift even the lightest hammer I am translating from 禅門公案大成 [Collection of Zen Koans] for the next Zen Book....”

When I visited his home, I felt it was very Blyth-like that he had built his house with a big living tree growing in the middle of a room, up through the floor and out through the roof into the sky.

In one corner of the room, I found a fascinating organ, which I learnt Blyth had constructed by himself, by combining two different organs. Blyth loved to play various musical instruments: organ, piano, violin, viola, cello, flute, recorder, oboe, clarinet, and others. He especially loved the music of Bach as much as he loved the haiku of Basho.

After Blyth's death, his secretary, Akiko Kobayashi, contributed a bulk of Bach scores to the Tokyo Bach Society in Ginza. His annotations and scribbles on the scores moved some people to compare his interpretation to that of Albert Schweitzer's, and the president whispered, “Deeper”.

Blyth composed excellent haiku in Japanese. This is one from his Korean days:

葉がくれに青い夢見るかたつむり

Hagakure ni aoi yume miru katatsumuri.

Behind a leaf,

Dreaming a blue dream,

A snail. (my translation)

And this one during the last days of his life:

山茶花に心残して旅出かな

Sazanaka ni kokoro nokoshite tabide kana.

With Sazanqua camellias

Leaving my heart behind,

I start on a journey (do)

Blyth died on 28 October, 1964, at the age of sixty-five. Some papers reported he died of some diseases, but *the Mainich-Shinbun* as “natural death”. In the farewell ceremony at the former Library of the Gakushuin University, President Yoshishige Abe of the Gakushuin, said, “Buraizu-kun, Omedetou” in Japanese, meaning, “Congratulations, Mr. Blyth.”

His grave is located behind that of “Dr. and Mrs. Daisetz Suzuki” at what we call “Philosophers’

Corner” in the cemetery of Tokeiji Zen Temple at Kita-Kamakura. According to Blyth’s secretary, Suzuki suggested Blyth rest in this location. Suzuki’s grave had been built when his wife Beatrice died in 1939. Suzuki himself died two years after Blyth, in 1966, at the age of ninety-five.

Now, let me read select short passages from Blyth’s works, mostly chronological.

1. **Zen** is the most precious possession of Asia. With its beginnings in India, development in China, and final practical application in Japan, it is today the strongest power in the world. It is a world-power, for in so far as men *live* at all, they live by Zen. (*Zen in English Literature*, 1942)

2. **When we have the eye of God, we are released from cause and effect**, (“He that loseth his life shall find it”); **from space**, (If ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done”); **and from time**, (“A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past”); **and “Doing anything at all in any conceivable circumstances,” is the freedom of Zen.** (Do)

3. **Thoreau** is great in combining Western independence and self-respect, the deep sense of differences in things, with the spirit of the East, its weak sense of the ego, its mystical feeling for nature and the sameness of things. (*Selections from Thoreau’s Journals*, 1949)

4. **Haiku** is a kind of *satori*, or enlightenment, in which  
We see into the life of things. (*Haiku*, Vol.1, 1949)

5. **Senryû** are expressions of moments of vision into, not the nature of things, but the nature of man. **Senryû** is mild satire; there is no cynicism in it, no callousness; things are taken as they are. We may compare a man whose life and writings were full of humour, an American, the greatest man that America has produced—I refer to **Thoreau**. (*Senryu: Japanese Satirical Verses*, 1949)

6. **Thoreau’s** *Walden, A Week* and the *Journals* are perhaps the purest expression of what I am calling “culture”.... It is a past that is always present. The best, the most serene, is the present which is always present. (*Thoughts on Culture*, 1949)

7. **Thoreau** is always “mindful that the earth is beneath and the heavens are above him.” Everything in him begins in nature. When the final account is made and God closes the books, it may be found that Thoreau was the one real man America produced.

(*A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* by H.D. Thoreau, 1951)

8. There is, after all, no **truth** in the world unless *we* are true, no **beauty** unless *we* are beautiful, no **love** unless *we* are loving. (*A Chronological Anthology of Religion in English Literature*, 1951)

9. **Bashô** gives us the same feeling of depth as **Bach**,...by a certain serenity and “expressiveness” which never aims at beauty but often achieves it as it were by accident. (*Haiku*, Vol. Four, 1952)
10. **Haiku**, together with the music of **Bach** and **Chinese paintings**, have given me the greatest, purest, and most constant pleasure of my life. (Do)
11. “Ripeness is all,” is a word of **Zen**: one can hardly get one’s intellectual teeth into it. There is a similar passage in *Hamlet* “The readiness is all.” But “Ripeness is all” goes deeper.
12. We do **zazen**, not to get anything, but to throw away all we have and to throw away even the idea that we are throwing something away.
13. We are to share with **Him** in the task of sweeping rooms and breaking bread, doing for **Him** what could not be done without us, for in us **He** moves and lives and has **His** being. (*Buddhist Sermons on Christian Texts*, 1952)
14. **Dorothy Wordsworth** is like **Bashô** in her attitude to nature. In some ways she is even closer to **Issa**, in the profundity of her simplicity. To give an example from the Japanese poet, almost her contemporary; ただ居れば居るとて雪のふりにけり “Just being here, / I am here, / And the snow falls.” (*Dorothy Wordsworth’s Journals with Notes*, 1953)
15. **Poetry**, whether in verse or prose, in thoughts or deeds, is the only thing that makes life worth living....Poetry is indispensable to life. **Poetical life** is life. Unpoetical life is mere existence, is nothing. (*A Survey of English Literature*, 1956)
16. If a poem cannot be read well (aloud) it is not worth reading (silently). The entrance examination to Heaven is a **reading aloud of poetry**. (*How to Read English Poetry*, 1958)
17. **Error** is as necessary for life as truth, and there must be something in iambic verse which appeals to people, which makes them happy, just like the thought of Heaven, or marital bliss, or any other of the carrots that have moved forward the human donkey. (Do)
18. Some poems indeed are difficult because of their very simplicity. So with one of the most poetical lines of Wordsworth, in the second verse of *To My Sister*: “**And grass in the green field.**” (*Easy Poems*, Book One, 1959)
19. The Chinese and Japanese **poets** wrote for themselves alone, or for nature; they just wrote, and in so

far as they did this they were the profounder. The English, the European poets wrote for one another, for the world of men, and this sociality makes them less deep, but warmer, more human. (Do)

20. The **poetry lesson** is the most important lesson in school. If it is neglected, if it is a failure, all is lost, and God created the world in vain. (Do)

21. “Without a knowledge of the **language** it is absurd to try to deal with the speakers or their writings.” (*Oriental Humour*, 1959)

22. The **Japanese laugh** (ideally speaking) has some sadness in it. It is more laughing (together) with than (down) at. (Do)

23. **Love without humour** is not real love, healthy love, and should end in tragedy, as it really does in drama. (*Humour in English Literature*, 1959)

24. I also once thought, rightly enough, that **poetry** is the only important thing in the world. I now think, at last quite rightly, that **humour**, in its broadest meaning, and as including or rather suffusing poetry, is the real thing. (Do)

25. The **object of life** is to understand one another; in particular, for men to understand women (rather easy) and for women to understand (mysterious) men; in general for one nation (if such an illusion has any real existence) to understand another. (Do)

26. If I am asked, “Are you for, or against Zen?” the answer is, both, not neither. The great fault of **Christians** is that they never criticize (fundamentally) Christianity.... **Zen** is the essence of Christianity, of Buddhism, of all that is good in the daily life of ordinary people... (*Zen and Zen Classics*, Vol. One, 1960)

27. **Zen** is not something that changes and grows, it is the changing and growing itself. (Do)

28. We can find very little **humour** in the Bible, but a great deal of satire, especially in the Old Testament.... Swift saw **war** as Goya and other caricaturists have seen it, without glory, disgust only remaining. (*Zen and Zen Classics*, Vol.7, 1962)

29. We must **create ZEN**, and perish in the attempt. (Do)

30. **Bashō's soul** was like Christ's heaven, it had many mansions; he could embrace many people, and could write many kinds of haiku. Issa had no master, no real disciples. (*A History of Haiku*, Vol. One, 1963)

31. The world, of which Japan is a part and a microcosm, has set for itself goals totally different from those of **Bashô**. **His Way of Haiku** can hardly be said to exist now, for almost nobody walks on it. As a Way, it was in many respects better than that of Taoism, Christianity, Confucianism, Buddhism, and so on. Its desuetude is a monument to the stupidity, vulgarity, sentimentality, and unpoeticity of human beings. It makes us view their possible total destruction with equanimity. (*A History of Haiku*, Vol. Two, 1964)

32. What is lacking is the mediaeval idea of **magnanimity**, “great-souledness,” the ideal man towards whom we must consciously strive and from whom a good society is unconsciously created. As in the old mystery religions, every man is to **die and be born again**, but he must die in his own special way, and live in his own special way, for imitation, conformity, conventionality, is annihilation absolute. (*Zen and Zen Classics*, Vol. Two, 1964)

33. **Human life** has a meaning only if the struggle is hopeless. (1964)

----Posthumous Publications----

34. We must **imitate Christ** in his imitation of nobody. (*Zen and Zen Classics*, Vol. Four, 1966)

35. The way to **stop war** is to make it ridiculous.

36. Why God created the **world** becomes more mysterious every day.

37. It must be remembered that **Life** and **life-death** are one thing, not two.

With the death of Dr. **Reginald Horace Blyth** on October 28, 1964, the world lost one of the most eminent exponents of Japanese culture of recent years. His studies on *haiku* and the Japanese sense of humor as well as Zen were unique contributions towards East-West understanding. **D.T. Suzuki** (*The Eastern Buddhist*, Sept. 1965)

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## Comments:

•It was a real pleasure to welcome you to the Japan Foundation on the 10<sup>th</sup>. We felt the whole event was a great success. There was a very good attendance and the audience seemed genuinely interested in Blyth and your relationship with him. I should tell you that the comments we received in our feedback questionnaires were all extremely positive indeed. Please do keep us updated on any future plans you might have to come to the UK. With best wishes from a rainy and gloomy London. **Hal Parker, Japan Foundation London**

### From the Questionnaire by the Japan Foundation:

**Question** : What part of the event was most interesting to you?

- That Blyth connected Bach with Basho, Haiku and other aspects of Japanese culture
- All
- Discovering lots of new things and wondering why I hadn't heard about them before. Would like to know more about R.H. Blyth
- Q&A
- The links of the speaker to R.H. Blyth
- Lecture
- Seeing Ueda-san in person
- Prof Ueda
- Personal reflection
- Personal experience
- The hand out had some fantastic quotes. Very personal account of his life, which I liked
- All of it

•I was at your talk on the 10<sup>th</sup> Oct on the life of R.H. Blyth and would like to tell you how Great it was to be there and listen to your readings from Blyth. I must say you brought Professor Blyth with you. I try to write Haiku and knowing you like to laugh a lots So here goes: Sat With Friendly Owl / Looking At Moon Together / Then Fell Out The Tree. I do hope you liked it. •Would it be possible to get a copy of your notes that you spoke from about Blyth, only I would like to show them my students? •Please may I make a longer comment which hopefully may be of interest to you and your magazine. **I recently attended your talk on 10th October 2013 about the life of R H Blyth and would like to express my comments on what an extremely good lecture it was. We all sat with anticipation for the lecture to commence and felt the room light up when a slight Japanese man entered into the room. Professor Kuniyoshi Munakata**

**sprung into life and with immense skill and dexterity, began to tell us about the life of R H Blyth. With such feeling, the Professor brought Blyth to life and it was almost as if the man himself was in the room. The whole evening simply flew by and with every twist and turn of the story, new events and facts unfolded in front of us. Thank you Professor from the bottom of my heart for a marvellous lecture and a truly memorable evening.** ·I was most impressed with your lecture on the life and times of R.H. Blyth in London. I also very much liked the passages about Haiku, it is so true that Haiku is a kind of satori or enlightenment, in which we see into the life of things. I try to write Haiku and have found that it has been an enlightenment for me and to hear you say Haiku is a kind of satori that allows us to see into. This is what I try to do in my poetry. Then to let us know that Blyth put the music of Bach and Chinese Paintings with Haiku as his greatest, purest and most constant pleasure of his life. Further to this Blyth said that poetry, whether in verse or prose, in thoughts or deeds, is the thing that makes life worth living. Having lost my wife I found great comfort in writing Haiku. It allowed me to express my feelings of great sorrow and loss, indeed, sometimes the paper would be wet with my tears of sorrow. The passage about love is so true as love without humour is not real love and usually ends in tragedy. I found this to be so true for me. Listening to the lecture on R.H. Blyth by Professor Kuniyoshi Ueda left me with a feeling of joy and sadness that the lecture was now at its end. So if I may I would like to leave you with some Haiku of mine Dedicated to R.H. Blyth and Professor Kuniyoshi Ueda.

His Hand Held No Gun / Conscientious Objector / In His Hand a Pen.

Rooster Kept Crowing / No More Had Him For Dinner / Now Nights Are Quite.

How Mysterious / Fell Asleep With You. / When Standing At Your Graveside

Thank You So Much My Sincere Regards **Brian Tott.**

·It was very nice to meet you at the R.H. Blyth lecture, which I found very interesting. On attachment, as promised are the photos taken on the day. I hope that you like them. Frank Williams ·I'm delighted to hear that you like the photos. Please feel free to use the photos as you see fit. The gentleman speaking to you in the photos is David Cobb, the co-founder of the British Haiku Society. · My main hobby since (early) retiring has been writing haiku. In total I have been writing haiku for about 18 years and have had many haiku published in various journals. I'm also an active member of the British Haiku Society. Also I have a haiku blog; maybe you'd like to visit it. The URL

is: <http://fwilliams-haikuhaigaetc.blogspot.co.uk/> **Frank Williams**

· I greatly enjoyed your talk. I think that the world needs more people like Professor Blyth! I am writing a doctoral thesis about the transmission of Zen to the West in the latter half of the twentieth century, and plan to include Blyth within the study. So I would be very happy if I could have a chance to talk to you more about him – and indeed about world culture in general – when I am next in Japan. I'm sorry that I couldn't make it to your performance in Chester, but I hope that you will visit Oxford and give a performance here next time you come to England. · There are enthusiasts for both Shakespeare and Noh in Oxford, so I'm sure that something could be arranged which would attract both. I would be very happy to assist with coordinating and organising. I enjoyed the Noh Hamlet on-line very much, and very much look forward to seeing it live! **Alice Freeman**