

# Changing Appreciations of Japanese Literature :

## Basil Hall Chamberlain versus Arthur Waley

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I should like to talk to you today about the changing position Japanese literature has occupied in the European mind for the last one hundred and thirty years. I suppose that the generations of your great-grandfathers knew very little of Japanese literature throughout the nineteenth century. They knew nothing because there was practically no translation of artistic value at that time. Though Sweden had a great Japan scholar Thunberg (1743-1828), the existence of Japan itself impinged on the European consciousness after Japan's victory over Russia in 1905. The existence of Japanese literature gradually became known from the 1910s and the 1920s. It was largely thanks to Arthur Waley's English translation of the *Tale of Genji* (1925-1933). It was mostly through the pen of this great orientalist that for the first time a work of Japanese literature came to be as highly appreciated as any masterpiece of European literature.

Why was there then such a drastic change in the evaluation of Japanese literature? Had Japanese literature all of sudden changed in quality? Or had there been a change on the part of Western Japan specialists' perception of things Japanese? Or had it something to do with exceptional individuals, at a time when the number of Japan specialists was very limited? Anyway, the problem seems to have lain not on the side of Japanese literature itself, but rather on the side of Western interpreters of Japan of the time. Japanese literature had not changed. Japanese classical literature, at least, had remained the same in the Japanese language. It was, therefore, the European perception of Japanese literature or Japanese culture that had changed. That is the reason why I wish to discuss with you European scholars, who will lead Japanese studies in the twenty-first century,

not about Japanese literature itself, but about your Western response to and recognition of Japanese literature. My topic is entitled "Changing appreciations of Japanese literature," and I'll deal mainly with two towering figures in Japanese studies : one is Basil Hall Chamberlain (1850-1935) and the other is Arthur Waley (1889-1966). In the past what did the low or high appreciations of Japanese literature mean? And my question is : had it something to do with your Western perception of Japan or of Japanese civilization in world history ?

In former times, for most Europeans, European civilization was the only civilization. The word "civilization" was used for a long time in the singular. It was unthinkable for many Westerners that there could be civilizations other than their own. Besides, in the nineteenth century the Japanese Westernizer Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) himself thought that way : Europeans had reached a far higher level of civilization. Geographically speaking, there were parts other than Western Europe. However, other parts were to be commercially, culturally and even religiously connected with Europe on Europe's own initiative, not vice versa. In the mind of the Westerners of the time, it should be Westerners that initiate any great enterprise on a global scale. We may call worldwide movements of the past a kind of globalization before the term existed. It is true that there have been various kinds of globalization movements since the time of the great navigations and discoveries. After the discovery of America by Columbus during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), Sir Francis Drake succeeded in the circumnavigation of the world (1580). Puck, a mischievous fairy in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, written toward the end of the sixteenth century, answers Oberon, the king of fairies, "I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." It means that the fairy will make a flying tour of the globe in forty minutes. Shakespeare, a contemporary of Drake, was in fact conscious that the earth is round, and the theatre, where his plays were performed, was called the Globe Theatre. That was the time when in China the Ming Emperor still believed that he was at the center of the universe which was supposed to be flat and square.

The globalization movements so far have been led mainly by hegemonic powers of the West : global enterprises were sometimes called colonization, Christianization, westernization, civilization, modernization etc. The Spanish Conquistadors were the first Europeans who tried militarily a global conquest. Jesuits tried spiritually a worldwide conquest by sending missionaries to five continents of the world,

following closely in the footsteps of conquistadors, their compatriots. Colonization in America, Africa and Asia was first justified in the name of Christian evangelization. In course of time, with the separation of state and religion, Europeans began to insist more on the civilizing aspects of European overseas activities. The French called the colonizing efforts *oeuvre de chérntié*: they called it later *mission civilisatrice*. Kipling proposed the idea of *White man's burden* at the turn of the century when the United States took over the administration of the Philippines. It was in fact the beginning of American imperialism. The westernization of non-western parts of the globe, however, was considered a step toward civilization.

What I have sketched so far is a very rough overview of modern history of the world. In former times white European Christians asserted and behaved as if they alone were civilized people. And I should add that there were many reasons for them to believe in their highly privileged cultural position.

One of the reasons that, for them, justify their civilizing mission was that others were perceived as uncivilized. Westerners believed that as a sign of their civilization there is great literature in Europe and America, while there is not in other parts of the world. This notion is even today still very deeply rooted. From time to time we hear some American professors frankly complain about the nuisance for them of being obliged to teach "third world literature in translation," of which the literary quality is dubious. Conversely stated, it is true that in general the Great Books series, Everyman's Library or Modern Library and the like published by reputable publishing companies of London, New York or Boston contain almost exclusively works of the Western world. In France the *Pléiade* series contain very few writers other than writers of the West. If it is so even today, then how about the Western evaluation of literatures of other parts of the world a century ago? Let us check what the most authoritative Western Japan specialist wrote about Japanese literature in 1902. Is Japanese literature really worthwhile for you to study? What was the general appreciation of Japanese literature before Arthur Waley? In *Things Japanese* (fourth edition, 1902), Basil Hall Chamberlain concludes his article on "Literature" as follows :

Sum total : what Japanese literature most lacks is genius. It lacks thought, logical grasp, depth, breadth, and many-sidedness. It is too timorous, too narrow to compass great things. Perhaps the Court atmosphere and predomi-

nantly feminine influence in which it was nursed for the first few centuries of its existence stifled it, or else the fault may have lain with the Chinese formalism in which it grew up. But we suspect that there was some original sin of weakness as well. Otherwise the clash of India and China with old mythological Japan, of Buddhism with Shinto, of imperialism with feudalism, and of all with Catholicism in the sixteenth century and with Dutch ideas a little later, would have produced more important results. If Japan has given us no music, so also has she given us no immortal verse, neither do her authors atone for lack of substance by any special beauties of form. But Japanese literature has occasional graces, and is full of incidental scientific interest. The intrepid searcher for facts and "curios" will, therefore, be rewarded if he has the courage to devote to it the study of many years. A certain writer has said that "it should be left to a few missionaries to plod their way through the wilderness of the Chinese language to the deserts of Chinese literature." Such a sweeping condemnation is unjust in the case of Chinese. It would be unjust in that of Japanese also, even with all deductions made.

If you accept this low opinion of Japanese literature as it is written in this small encyclopedia *Japonica*, I am afraid you will be discouraged from continuing your study of Japanese literature. Many of you feel that Chamberlain's view is badly jaundiced but some of you find that it is not wholly negative. As to the "Language" the same author writes as follows :

Japanese — with its peculiar grammar, its uncertain affinities, its ancient literature — is a language worthy of more attention than it has yet received. We say "language ;" but "languages" would be more strictly correct, the modern colloquial speech having diverged from the old classical tongue almost to the same extent as Italian has diverged from Latin. The Japanese still employ in their books, and even in correspondence and advertisements, a style which is partly classical and partly artificial. This is what is termed the "Written Language." The student therefore finds himself confronted with a double task. Add to this the necessity of committing to memory two syllabaries, one of which has many variant forms, and at least two or three thousand Chinese ideographs in forms standard and cursive, — ideographs, too, most of

which are susceptible of three or four different readings according to circumstances, — add further that all these categories of written symbols are apt to be encountered pell-mell on the same page, and the task of mastering Japanese becomes almost Herculean.

It is these facts that discourage most learners, but the best continue. Basil Hall Chamberlain, by insisting on the difficulty of mastering Japanese, tells us consciously or unconsciously that he himself is a Herculean hero in the field of Japanese studies, as he has mastered the language. When *Things Japanese* was published for the first time in 1890, the author was, according to the frontispiece, “Professor of Japanese and Philology in the Imperial University of Japan.” This is something unprecedented for a foreigner to achieve. In the second edition (1891) he was “Emeritus Professor of Japanese and Philology in the Imperial University of Japan.” That means Chamberlain had already given up the post of professorship of the only university that existed in Japan at the age of forty.<sup>i</sup>

What sort of a man was Basil Hall Chamberlain? He wrote as follows in his “Quelques souvenirs personnels en manière de préface” to the French translation (1927) of his *Things Japanese* :

Né de parents anglais, je fus élevé en France et, sans parler de brefs séjours en Italie, en Grèce, en Allemagne, je passai toute ma dix-huitième année en Espagne, vivant exclusivement dans la société d’Espagnols. Ainsi mon adolescence m’avait fourni un arrière-plan d’expériences cosmopolites, et, lorsqu’en mai 1873, alors dans ma vingt-troisième année, j’abordai au Japon, j’étais assez bien préparé à étudier en toute liberté d’esprit un nouveau pays étranger. Je me mis aussitôt à l’œuvre, profitant de tous mes loisirs et des longs mois de vacances que donne la carrière universitaire qui était devenue la mienne, pour parcourir le Japon dans tous les sens. . . .

Après dix-huit années consécutives de cette vie, je publiai, en 1891, en même temps que le *Guide Murray du Japon*, l’édition anglaise des *Things Japanese* (Choses japonaises), petite encyclopédie ou mieux, recueil d’essais toujours brefs traduits ici sous le titre de *Mœurs et Coutumes du Japon*. Plusieurs éditions suivirent, chacune d’elles comportant de nombreuses modifications afin de tenir le livre à jour, la transformation du Japon ayant été, comme on le sait

kaléïdoscopique, — pourtant beaucoup demeurait du passé. . . .

George Sansom (1883–1965), who had begun the career of Japan specialist first as a student interpreter in the English legation in Tokyo, then diplomat and later the authoritative historian of Japan, probably being an Englishman of humbler origin without university education, was very much impressed with Chamberlain's background, his authoritative attitude, his erudition, and his Britishness. However, is his educational background, as is referred to in the preface, really so formidable?

Basil Hall Chamberlain was born at Southsea on 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1850. His father was an admiral in the British Navy and his grandfather, Sir Henry Orlando Chamberlain, represented England at Rio de Janeiro. On his mother's side he was descended from a lowland Scottish family, the Halls of Dunglass. Her father, Captain Basil Hall, R. N., was one of the first Europeans to visit the Luchu Islands and the coast of Korea, of which he published an account. On the death of his mother, Basil Hall Chamberlain with his two brothers went to live with his grandmother, Lady Chamberlain, at Versailles. He was educated there by English tutors and a German governess and at Lycée de Versailles. Thus early in life he became expert in two foreign languages, and his knowledge was further widened when he went at the age of seventeen to reside for a year in Spain. He came to Japan in 1873 at the age of twenty-three. Chamberlain's prestige as the leading authority on things Japanese lasted for almost half a century after his publication in 1882 of the translation of the *Kojiki*, the oldest Japanese book compiled in 712, even though he retired to Geneva in 1911. By the way, the young Chamberlain was rejected by Oxford University on account of his poor health; that explains why he later put so much importance on his title of Emeritus Professor in the Imperial University of Tokyo. It was a kind of psychological recompense of a frustrated youth. In fact he taught there only for four years, and the exceptional honor was accorded to the dean of Western Japan specialists residing in Japan. He firmly believed in the superiority of the British. As a descendent of glorious nation builders, Chamberlain attached great importance to the British Empire. In his last book written in French *Encore est vive la Souris* (1933), Chamberlain made an anachronistic comment saying that if the British are as foolish as to throw away India, the Russians or, better, the Japanese should take care of that colony instead.

One of the first Westerners who had doubts about Chamberlain's statements

concerning Japanese literature<sup>ii</sup> and Japanese language was Arthur Waley.

Waley, who was thirty-nine years younger than Chamberlain, began to study Chinese and Japanese when he entered the British Museum in 1913. Laurence Binyon, his sympathetic chief at the Department of Prints and Drawings, encouraged him to study the languages of East Asia. At that time as there was no school to learn these languages in London Waley learnt them by himself, exchanging lessons with Japanese residing in London. Among them were the future radar specialist Yagi Hidetsugu and the painter Makino Yoshio. As Waley was able to use books of the British Museum's Department of Printed Books, he must have read through many of Chamberlain's Japanese studies. Among them were *The Classical Poetry of the Japanese* (1880), *A Translation of the "Ko-ji-ki," "Records of Ancient Matters"* (1882).

Chamberlain's attitude was summarized as follows by Richard Bowring (1991)<sup>iii</sup> :

...Not that he was afraid to have strong opinions. Indeed, one of the attractions of his writing is that, although reticent in some respects, he is often willing to be open and candid. In common with most Englishmen in Japan, he considered that his role as educator was justified and self-evident. By and large it was obvious that Europeans had reached a far higher level of civilization and that in most things they 'knew better' than the Japanese.

Chamberlain's evaluation of *Kojiki* (712) as a work of art is that "there is no beauty of style, to preserve some trace of which he (the translator) may be tempted to sacrifice a certain amount of accuracy. The *Records* sound queer and bald in Japanese, as will be noticed further on ; and it is therefore right, even from a stylistic point of view, that they should sound bald and queer in English."<sup>iv</sup> And he adds a typically Victorian comment : "The only portions of the text which, from obvious reasons, refuse to lend themselves to translation into English after this fashion (of a rigid and literal conformity with the Japanese text) are the indecent portions."

His low opinion of Japanese literature continues. In *Things Japanese* in the article "Literature" Chamberlain writes this way in the first edition of 1890 as well as in the sixth edition of 1939.<sup>v</sup> The *Collection of a Myriad Leaves* referred to is of course the first anthology of *uta*-poems, *Manyōshū* (circa 760) :

And now it may be asked : What is the value of this Japanese literature — so ancient, so voluminous, locked up in so recondite a written character? We repeat what we have already said of the Collection of a Myriad Leaves, — that it is invaluable to the philologist, the archaeologist, the historian, the student of curious manners which have disappeared or are fast disappearing. We may add that there are some clever and many pretty things in it.

At the early stage of his Japanese studies, Waley had the good luck to read the manuscripts of Japanese Nō plays translated by Fenollosa and Hirata. Ezra Pound who edited the manuscripts asked Waley to peruse them. Interested by the world of Nō theatre, Waley himself began his own translation of *Nō Plays of Japan* together with a very detailed introduction, which was the result of his analytical study of Zeami's dramaturgy. To conclude his introduction Waley adds two remarks, first :

And if I have failed to make these translations in some sense works of art — if they are merely philology, not literature — then I have indeed fallen short of what I hoped and intended.<sup>vi</sup>

This credo of the scholar-translator Waley is apparently different from the philologist Chamberlain. The second remark is in a sense more impressive :

The *libretti* of Greek tragedy have won for themselves a separate existence simply as poetic literature. Yet even of them it has been said that “the words are only part of the poem.” Still less did the words of Nō constitute the whole “poem,” yet if some cataclysm were to sweep away the Nō theatre, I think the plays (as literature) would live.<sup>vii</sup>

These are general remarks, in which Chamberlain's name is not directly mentioned. However, it is already clear that Waley from the very beginning did not have a low opinion of Japanese literature.

Waley, while studying Japanese *uta*-poems, got an impression quite different from Chamberlain's.<sup>viii</sup> First against the so-called difficulty of mastering the classical Japanese, Waley writes as follows :



The translations in this book are chiefly intended to facilitate the study of the Japanese text; for Japanese poetry can only be rightly enjoyed in the original. And since the classical language has an easy grammar and limited vocabulary, a few months should suffice for the mastering of it. The reader who wishes to pursue this study further should learn the Japanese syllabary and some (perhaps about 600) of the commoner Chinese characters. He will then be able to use the native texts.

People say that this is true for a genius like Waley but not for scholars in general, even above average. However, what Waley writes toward the end of his introduction to *Japanese Poetry, The 'Uta'* (1919) is, in fact, a very common sense view of the classical Japanese as used in the *uta*. As for the limited vocabulary and the number of Chinese characters, statistics show the truth of Waley's comments.<sup>ix</sup> If other students do not accept what Waley says here, it is because there has been said so much about the difficulty of mastering the Japanese language. Many people take what Waley says here only as a sign of his exceptional linguistic genius. I think, however, that Waley's comment was a sort of antidote to what Chamberlain and the like had exaggerated. Just think of the simple fact: it was not necessary for a young Japanese girl of the Meiji period like Yosano Akiko with her limited education (she had never got a university education) to make any Herculean efforts to appreciate the *uta* or the *Genji monogatari*. Seidensticker, who re-translated the *Tale of Genji* in 1976, stated six years later that to decipher is not the same as to read, and he insisted on the meaning of pace in narrative literature. The precocious Akiko caught that pace as early as in her teens, and so did the authoress of the *Sarashina nikki* at the age of thirteen.

Waley's second point of disagreement with Chamberlain concerns the manner of Chamberlain's translation. In *Japanese Poetry : The 'Uta'* Waley lists chronologically nine European books to be consulted. The ninth is B. H. Chamberlain, *Japanese Poetry*, 1911. Here Waley adds the following comment :

Very free verse translations from the *Manyō* and *Kokin*, in this style :

I muse on the old-world story,  
As the boats glide to and fro,  
Of the fisher-boy Urashima,

Who a-fishing lov'd to go.

Waley was not satisfied with the manner of translating, like a Victorian jingle, regular, stressed metres, onomatopoeic noises.<sup>x</sup> In 1929 Waley translated the poem in question in his article “The Originality of Japanese Civilization.” This monograph was written for the British group attending the Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations at Kyoto in October 1929. Probably someone of the group had asked Waley to give them a different view of Japan from the one widespread by Chamberlain that Japanese civilization is purely derivative.<sup>xi</sup> According to Chamberlain apart from bathtubs, “almost all other Japanese institutions have their root in China.” I don't know if Waley's more balanced view of various civilizations of the world had something to do with his non-Christian origin. Although of Jewish descent, Waley himself was an agnostic. His view concerning religions and superstitions is also very interesting. When Ivan Morris makes a valiant attempt to define the difference between religion and superstition, Waley says : “I would prefer simply to say that ‘superstition’ is any belief that the speaker thinks silly.”<sup>xii</sup>

Let us turn back to the *Manyōshū* poem, and let us quote just the beginning of the eighth-century ballad for the sake of comparison :

One day in spring  
Watching upon a tall cliff all alone  
I saw the fishing boats rocking and rocking  
Down in the misty bay, and to my mind there came  
This tale of long ago.

This is the English translation of the long poem “Haru no hi no kasumeru sora ni, Sumi-no-e no . . .” which Lafcadio Hearn recited to himself so often in the Japanese original. Waley writes : “Perhaps the most completely unique and original poems which it (*Manyōshū*) contains are the narrative poems which Europeans, for want of a better term, have usually called ballads, though in their smooth grace they are far indeed removed from the poetry that the West has called by this name. Of these the most celebrated is *The Fisher-Boy of Urashima*, which I here give in a new version, since the rhymed one by Professor Chamberlain seems to me unsatisfactory. It is, however, impossible in English to do justice to the delicate, undulating movement

which pervades the original from the first line to the last.” Waley, however, put the name of Beryl de Zoete as the translator of the ballad in the article. As his lady companion never learnt Japanese, it was impossible for her to translate it. Had she polished the rough translation prepared by Waley? Or, did Waley ask Beryl to lend her name to avoid a direct confrontation with the aged Chamberlain, whose scholarly pride had already been wounded?

Yes, Chamberlain had lost face : no one had shattered so completely the credibility of Chamberlain's scholarship as Waley, the English translator of the *Tale of Genji*. Let us check, first, what Chamberlain had to say about the *Genji Monogatari* in various editions of his *Things Japanese*, and let us check, secondly, what was said about the *Tale of Genji* when Waley's translation was published in six volumes from 1925 on.

In the first edition (1890) of *Things Japanese* the *Genji Monogatari* is referred to, in the article “Literature,” as “the most celebrated of all, chiefly on account of its ornate style,” (p. 209) and after praising Jippensha Ikku, “the Rabelais of Japan,” Chamberlain continues :

On the other hand, much of that which the Japanese themselves prize most highly in their literature seems intolerably flat and insipid to the European taste. The romances — most of them — are every bit as dull as the histories, though in another way. The histories are too brief, the romances too long-winded. If the authoress of the *Genji Monogatari*, though lauded to the skies by her compatriots, has been branded by Georges Bousquet as *cette ennuyeuse Scudéry japonaise*, she surely richly deserves it.

The French novelist Mademoiselle Scudéry (1607?-1701) had one of the chief literary salons of Paris in the time of Louis XIV. She wrote two long pseudo-historical novels, full of fashionable sentiment and preciosity : *Artamène* and *Clélie*. Although once translated into English, they had long been forgotten. Chamberlain, in insinuating that Lady Murasaki is a bore, adroitly avoids his own responsibility as a literary critic, by quoting the French jurist Georges Bousquet's low opinion of the authoress of the *Genji monogatari*. Bousquet was a French jurist who came to Japan as early as 1872 at the age of twenty-six, as a legal adviser to the new Meiji government. He later wrote a book, *Le Japon de nos Jours*. I am wondering if

Bousquet had really read *Genji monogatari* in the Japanese original. I doubt it. In 1882 *Genji Monogatari*, of which the first seventeen chapters were translated by Suematsu Kenchō, was published by Trübner, London. It is a kind of Victorian paraphrase of the Japanese classic in which all sexual matters are carefully expurgated. You may call that adaptation really *ennuyeuse*. Anyway the problem with some of Chamberlain's judgments is : — in righting the Europeans, he seems to us to continually wrong Japanese literature.

Chamberlain, indeed, was persistent in his low opinion of *Genji monogatari*. From the fourth edition (1902) of *Things Japanese* he adds the following footnote in small letters, always relying on opinions of British diplomatists :

Sir Ernest Satow's judgment of the *Genji Mono-gatari* agrees with ours. "The plot," writes he, "is devoid of interest, and it is only of value as marking a stage in the development of the language." Fairness, however, requires that the very different estimate of this work formed by Mr. Aston, the accomplished historian of Japanese literature, should be here cited. He writes as follows : —

"I do not profess to have read more than a small part of this portentously long romance, but judging from a study of a few books of it, the above condemnations appear to me undeserved. The ornate style to which these adverse critics object consists chiefly in the honorific terminations of the verbs, as natural to a courtly dialect as the gorgeous but cumbrous costumes and the elaborate ceremonial of the palace. There is no superabundance of descriptive adjectives or anything to correspond to our word-painting. The want of interest complained of seems to me to proceed from a misunderstanding of the writer's object. She was not bent on producing a highly wrought plot or sensational story. Her object was to interest and amuse her readers by picture of real life, and of the sentiments and doings of actual men and women. There is no exaggeration in the *Genji*, no superfine morality, and none of the fine writing that abounds in modern Japanese fiction. What Murasaki-no-Shikibu did for Japanese literature was to add to it a new kind of composition, viz. the novel, or epic, of real life as it has been called. She was the Richardson of Japan, and her genius resembled his in many ways. She delighted specially in delineating types of womanhood. Indeed, the whole work may be regarded as a series of pictures of this kind, drawn with minute care, and from a full knowledge of her

subject-matter. She does not deal in broad strokes of the pen. Her method is to produce graphic and realistic effects by numerous touches of detail. This is, however, incompatible with simplicity of style. Her sentences are long and somewhat complicated, and this with the antique language and the differences of manners and customs constitutes a very serious difficulty to the student. The *Genji* is not an easy book either to us or to the author's modern fellow-countrymen. The labour of mastering its meaning is probably one reason why it is not more appreciated. As a picture of a long past state of society, there is nothing in the contemporary European literature which can for a moment be compared with it. It contains a host of personages from Mikados down to the lowest court attendants to elucidate whose genealogy the standard *Kogetsushō* edition has devoted a whole volume. Its scene is laid sometimes in Kyoto, but also changes to Hiyeizan, Suma, and other places in the neighbourhood. A whole calendar of court ceremonies might be compiled from it. If we remember that it was written long before Chaucer, Dante, and Boccaccio shone on the horizon of European literature, it will appear a truly remarkable performance."

Chamberlain's treatment seems fair on the surface level, as he refers to two Japan specialists of different opinions apart from Bousquet. But his "fairness" has its limits: this self-styled cosmopolitan does not listen to non-European opinions. He believes himself to be alien to patriotism. However, is it possible for a European like him who believes a priori in the supremacy of European civilization not to be a culturally patriotic European? One should know that there is latently a dangerous cultural nationalism: that nationalism is called Euro-centrism which threatens non-European.

Moreover, as is generally the rule, Europeans who reside abroad for long years tend to idealize Europe: the so-called complex of superiority peculiar to those who live in a foreign settlement. That condescending tendency must have been exacerbated in the case of Chamberlain, as Japanese adulators lionized him. *Things Japanese* is an interesting book, as it reflects many topics talked about among the Western residents in open ports such as Yokohama and Kobe. The September 29, 1927 issue of the *Japan Weekly Chronicle* announces "New Edition of a Famous Book":

*Things Japanese* remains as good reading as when it was first issued. The fund of learning and research that go to the making of the book is pleasantly concealed under a lightness of touch and a picturesqueness of presentation which make it not only a storehouse of information on all that concerns Japan but also a piece of literature. . . .

The wealth of information contained in the book makes it indispensable to all interested in Japan. He who reads the book through, from the first page to the last, and has a memory retentive enough to enable him to remember the contents, will receive a liberal education, not only in things Japanese but also in what may be called comparative sociology.

However, because of his too great confidence in his ability to produce balanced judgments, Chamberlain ends up by being fatally flawed.

When Waley's translation of the first volume appeared in 1925, the *Times Literary Supplement* wholeheartedly welcomed the *Tale of Genji* :

A Japanese masterpiece. . . . The wonderful beauty of this first fragment. . . . In it a forgotten civilization comes to life with a completeness which is surpassed only by the greatest of our novelists, and with a beauty of arrangement which it would be very hard to find surpassed anywhere.

With the publication of the *Tale of Genji* in six volumes by George Allen & Unwin Ltd., Japanese literature made its debut on the centre court of world literature. When Part II, *The Sacred Tree*, appeared the next year, the *Observer* said :

We surrender ourselves to equal sensations of astonishment and captivity. . . . Lady Murasaki practically fashioned the instrument she uses with such unfaltering art. This fact alone is enough to make the book a wonder.

*The Times* said :

Clearly one of the great pieces of fiction. The skill and grace of Mr. Waley's translation are evident enough. The prose of this second volume is a constant delight.

Praises are showered upon both the author and the translator. The *Saturday Review* admired :

The omnipresent sense of beauty is the great delight of Murasaki's novel. . . . As a novelist she is remarkably well equipped. Her sympathy rarely fails her, nor does the delicacy and sureness of her touch. . . . Mr. Waley's translation is marvelous for the subtlety, precision and beauty of its language.

About Part III, the *Daily Express* joined other papers in praise of the translator, although the reviewer had no knowledge of Japanese :

To anyone who has not had the luck to read the previous two volumes, the beauty of this book will come as rather staggering. Mr. Waley has translated it into English that is classic in its beauty. . . . One of the few translations in our language that have all the stamp of original genius.

About the "modern voice" of the work, the *Evening Standard* said as follows after the publication of Part IV in 1928 :

It is simply marvelous in beauty and truth, and so modern, both in feeling and in technique, that it might have been written yesterday.

Four years had passed when in 1932 Part V, *Lady of the Boat*, appeared. In the *Daily Telegraph* the novelist and critic Rebecca West compares the Japanese author-ess with European authors :

Knowledge of this book adds the same pleasure to life as knowledge of, say, the works of Shakespeare or Jane Austen or Proust.<sup>xiii</sup>

When finally the last volume appeared in 1933, Waley himself commented :

It certainly contains the finest 150 pages<sup>xiv</sup> in the whole book, and it has been very exciting to get to grips with this part at last. But the greater emotional intensity of this part makes it far harder to do, and it often takes three or four

hours to do a single page.

Chamberlain lived in Geneva for almost twenty-three years after his return from Japan in 1912 until his death at the age of eighty-four in 1935. Long forgotten in London, he was twice called before his death “the late professor Chamberlain” in newspapers ; that news was the reason why Chamberlain gave the ironic title to his last book *Encore est vive la Souris* in 1933, quoting a verse from Charles d’Orléans.

The octogenarian knew, however, that an exceptional reception was being given to the Waley translation of *Genji* in the London world of letters. Chamberlain was now obliged to say something to save face. In the last edition of *Things Japanese* he therefore says : “Very various have been the judgments passed on this celebrated work by competent European critics,” and adds the following footnote :

Mr. Arthur Waley’s beautiful English version in six volumes will henceforth enable the cultivated European reader to form his own opinion on the matter, — so far, that is, as any literary opinion can be founded on a translation.<sup>xv</sup> We ourselves formerly accepted Satow’s view. But of late years we have come to doubt whether we thoroughly understood the exceptionally difficult text. A Japanese student of European literature might do wisely by abstaining from any judgment on the merits of Browning, Mallarmé, or Jean Paul.

Is *Genji monogatari* or is Browning’s *Men and Women* that difficult ? As I am a Japanese student of Robert Browning, I cannot help smiling, hearing the proud scholar-imperialist Chamberlain’s last *makeoshimi*, his sour-grapes comment. Although there are many scholars everywhere whose false pride prevents them from acknowledging themselves to be in the wrong, there are also those who recognize more objectively what were the drawbacks of Japanese studies in Chamberlain’s generation and what were the eye-opening contributions of Arthur Waley. When the great scholar poet passed away on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1966, the *Times* wrote as follows :

Arthur Waley did more by the elegance, the vitality and lucidity of his translations from the Chinese and Japanese to introduce the English-speaking world to the literature and civilization of the Far East than anyone of his generation. He freed oriental studies from the charge of pedantry and distor-



tion of patronage which afflicted them in the later nineteenth century, and brought them into the main stream of intelligent reading.

Yes, more than anyone else it was the single individual Arthur Waley who changed the Western appreciation of Japanese literature by his masterpiece in English, the *Tale of Genji*.<sup>xvi</sup>

#### notes

- i) From the third edition (1898) through the sixth edition (1939) Basil Hall Chamberlain was “Emeritus Professor of Japanese and Philology in the Imperial University of Tokyo,” as other imperial universities were being created in the meantime.
- ii) With Chamberlain’s statements concerning Japanese music and religion, Lafcadio Hearn (1850-1904) could not agree. Their disagreements are worth more serious study. About Chamberlain’s highhanded attitude, Fenollosa was extremely critical. He compared Hearn’s attitude toward the Japanese and Chamberlain’s as “sympathy versus ridicule.” See Yamaguchi Seiichi, *Fenollosa*, (Tokyo, Sanseidō) vol. 2, p. 145.
- iii) Richard Bowring, “Basil Hall Chamberlain” in Hugh Cortazzi and Gordon Daniels ed., *Britain and Japan 1859-1991*, (London, Routledge, 1991), p. 133.
- iv) *The Kojiki, Records of Ancient Matters*, tr., by B. H. Chamberlain, (Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1981), Translator’s Introduction, p. iv.
- v) Chamberlain’s manuscript for the sixth posthumous edition (1939) had been written by 1934. He died on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1935.
- vi) Arthur Waley, *The Nō Plays of Japan*, (George Allen & Unwin, 1921), p. 55.
- vii) Ibid. p. 52.
- viii) I really don’t know why Waley categorically denies poetical value of pieces included in *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*. Waley says in his introduction to *Japanese Poetry The ‘Uta’* (Clarendon Press, 1919) : “Of the two hundred and thirty-five poems contained in these two chronicles, not one is of any value as literature.” I personally am of quite a different opinion. The poem of the cup pledge by the Empress Suserihime (Vol. I, Sect. XXV) is reminiscent of the *coplas* of Southern Spain which Waley quotes in his article on “The Originality of Japanese Civilization” : “Tu querer es como el toro, / Donde lo llaman, va ; / Y el mio como la piedra, / Donde la ponen, s’esta.”
- ix) As for the numbers of nouns, verbs and adjectives used in *uta* anthologies such as *Manyō-shū*, *Kokin-shū* and *Gosen-wakashū*, see Miyajima Tatsuo ed., *Koten taishō goi hyō*, (Tokyo, Kasama-shoin, 1972). Waley’s view is valid for *uta*-anthologies like *Kokin-shū* and *Gosen-wakashū*, while it is not so for *Manyō-shū* that has a vocabulary three times richer than that of *Kokin* and *Gosen*. The latter two *uta*-anthologies have about 1000 nouns and less than 700 verbs each. A limited vocabulary, indeed. As for words of Chinese origin, they are less than 0.3 % of the vocabularies used in the three *uta*-anthologies.
- x) The remarks concerning poetical devices used by the older generation of Japanologists are made by Carmen Blacker in her “Introduction to the new edition”

- of Arthur Waley, *Japanese Poetry, the 'Uta'*, (rpt., An East-West Center Book, the University Press of Hawaii, 1976), p. vii.
- xi) Basil Hall Chamberlain insists on the view that the Japanese are “a nation of imitators” at the beginning of *The Classical Poetry of the Japanese* (London, 1880).
- xii) Arthur Waley, “Review of Ivan Morris’s *The World of the Shining Prince*” in I. Morris ed., *Madly Singing in the Mountains, an appreciation and anthology of Arthur Waley*, (George Allen & Unwin, 1970), p. 375.
- xiii) I have partially reproduced here the reviews that were printed on the covers of the six volumes of the *Tale of Genji* (first edition, George Allen & Unwin). As for a little more detailed information concerning the reviews, see Ruth Perlmutter’s doctoral dissertation, *Arthur Waley and His Place in the Modern Movement between the Two Wars*, (UMI, 1971).
- xiv) For the translation of the last ten chapters Waley used mainly Kaneko Motoomi’s edition (Meiji shoin) as is mentioned by Waley himself in Volumes V (preface) and VI (introduction) of the first edition of the *Tale of Genji*. Waley relies also on Yoshizawa Yoshinori’s modern Japanese translation, (Vols. VIII and IX of *Zenyaku Ōchō bungaku sōsho*, 1927), which are now in the Durham University library. From Waley’s marginal notes on many pages it is apparent that Waley used also the modern Japanese version, while translating “the finest 150 pages” in question.
- xv) About the question of Waley’s translation it should be quoted here the remark of George Sansom. The British diplomat writes in his *Japan, A Short Cultural History* (London, Cresset Press, 1931, p. 235 n.) that Waley’s modern English is “incomparably richer, stronger, more various and supple than Heian Japanese.” The remark shows how Sansom was surprised reading Waley’s English translation, that reversed the general low opinion of Lady Murasaki’s *Tale of Genji*. The low esteem had been held until then by leading British Japan specialists, as we have already seen. There is, however, a part of truth in what Sansom says about the richness of modern English used by Waley. Our question is: is Waley’s translation totally different from the Japanese original? Is not every reading of a work of literature a kind of new translation? There are as many possible readings of a work of literature as there are as many interpretive readers. As each reader selects different things for attention, a good translator will be someone who knows how to draw the best of the original into his or her own tongue. Sansom later adds another note to his *Japan, A Short Cultural History* (New York, D. Appleton, 1943, p. 240 n.), praising Waley’s translation as “masterly, and itself comes very near to being a work of creative genius. Is it ungrateful to add that perhaps it does more than justice to the original?”
- xvi) It should be added here that Waley radically changed the Western view of the British colonialism by his book *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes* (George Allen & Unwin, 1958).