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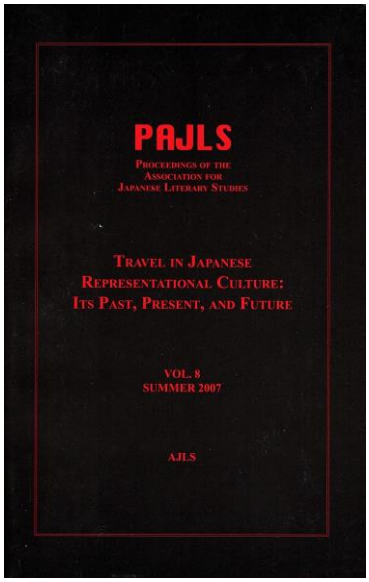

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SINGULAR WOMEN: HIRABAYASHI AND ENCHI IN 1958 AMERICA

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The essay I'll be discussing today is "Ryokō wa yūjō no hakaba ka: futari tabi no wazurawashisa" (Is travel the death of friendship? The complications of traveling as a twosome).[1] This is an article Hirabayashi Taiko wrote for *Bungei shunjū* about her two-month trip with Enchi Fumiko to the United States in late spring 1958, where they visited New York, Washington D.C., Boston, and San Francisco for professional and recreational interests. I'm not sure Hirabayashi offers an answer about whether the article lives up to its provocative title, but she does provide insight into the nature of difference and encounters with the other while traveling. I believe that when she talks about difference, she is not referring to a straightforward scenario of a Japanese feeling like a foreigner in America, but a difference in "behaving like Japanese" between herself and her longtime friend. Hirabayashi feels criticism from Enchi that surprises and offends her, so that her friend becomes "other" with the alienating effect of their conflicts.

Currently I am working on a study of the friendship between these two women and their reception by the public and the literary establishment, and about how they were so close despite—or perhaps because of— how different they were in almost every aspect.

Hirabayashi and Enchi first met in the late 1920s at a *Nyonin geijutsu* meeting, and became close friends around 1935. Their friendship was over 20 years old when they traveled to the U.S. together, and in some ways Hirabayashi's discussion of their petty conflicts is not surprising, given how dissimilar they are. Their youthful ideals, the ways they expressed them, their way of moving about in the world, their relationships with men, their political expression, and their writing styles differ in multiple ways. At age 17, Enchi's family hired a private tutor for her to study literature and language, while Hirabayashi struck out on her own for Tokyo from her rural hometown in Nagano-ken the day after graduating high school. She sought out socialist and anarchist groups, married a disreputable anarchist at 19, gave birth to his child and lost the

[1] First published in *Bungei shunjū* on Oct. 1, 1958. Citations in the present article are from *Hirabayashi Taiko zenshū*, vol. 12 (Tokyo: Ushio Shuppansha, 1979), and will be noted parenthetically in the text.

baby, left her husband, and wandered through various relationships and living situations until she married Kobori Jinji in 1927. Enchi married a journalist and had a daughter in 1932.

In her *kaisetsu* to volume 3 of the *Hirabayashi Taiko zenshū*, Enchi writes that she considered Hirabayashi her *senpai* in prose writing, though they had both been noticed by the bundan in the late 1920s—Enchi for her plays produced at the Tsukiji Little Theater.[2] The two of them had entirely different literary influences: while Enchi was inspired by writers who explored the fantastical, imaginative, and macabre such as Tanizaki, Edgar Allen Poe, and Kafū, Hirabayashi was drawn to the stark realism of Shiga Naoya, Tokuda Shūsei, Shimazaki Tōson, and Tolstoy. Enchi reveals that she learned much about literature and writing from Hirabayashi, and that the two of them grew close at a time when they lived near each other in Nakano-ku and talked about their problems in marriage and love.[3]

Hirabayashi begins her article by saying she's heard several instances of "discord" (*fuha*) among groups of travelers whose dynamic changes completely while they are abroad. As she describes it, she's heard about writers and editors who leave for a trip together on equal footing but return as "masters and followers," and interpreters who end up as trip leaders because of their knowledge of the local language (238). In Enchi and Hirabayashi's case, one question to consider is whether their travel in the U.S. exaggerates aspects of their personalities, or provokes unprecedented reactions from them: Hirabayashi first notes hers and Enchi's "innate" nature or personality when she tells her readers that on the way to the airport, Enchi's husband Yoshimatsu confides to Hirabayashi that he hopes the two friends will avoid any major quarrels, since both she and Enchi tend toward willfulness (*wagamama*). Hirabayashi adds that this is in part because Enchi grew up in a privileged household and never had to humble herself before anyone. Yet Hirabayashi implies also that the trip brought out unusual behavior in both of them: as she concludes, "with travel, one has a certain tense state of mind." (243).

Hirabayashi's account of how the friendship fares under the strain of foreign travel reminds me of Paul Fussell's description of travel writing (as quoted by Joshua Fogel): "travel books are a sub-species of memoir in which the autobiographical narrative arises from the speaker's encounter with distant or unfamiliar data, and in which the narrative—

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[2] *Hirabayashi Taiko zenshū*, vol. 3, 463.
[3] *Hirabayashi Taiko zenshū*, vol. 3, 464.

unlike that in a novel or romance—claims literal validity by constant reference to actuality."[4]

Hirabayashi finds this "distant or unfamiliar data" not in American customs or geography, but in her close friend's behavior. She tells us she was forewarned by the examples of previous writers' travels and Enchi's husband, that the two women's proximity might bring out strange or unpleasant personality traits (238). These warnings give Hirabayashi's observations the "validity" Fussell mentions: that the strange and incomprehensible are not the figments of imagination found in fiction, but in the real yet unfamiliar environment of America that provokes surprising behavior from her longtime friend.

Hirabayashi prepares her readers with these warnings and also with her own knowledge of Enchi and herself, then shows how despite this preparation, foreign travel brings unexpected, unpleasant discoveries. As she tells it,

> "[Enchi's privileged background] was one of her interesting features to me. Yoshimatsu's conclusion that I was also willful was of course true, but the limits to which we maintained our willfulness were entirely different. Things that meant nothing to me were extremely important to her, and things that made no difference to her were extremely important to me. In reality, we haven't had very many instances where our selfishness clashed up to now. However, on a trip we would be together from morning to night: I wasn't sure whether even women would do very well in those kinds of arguments" (239).

When I read Hirabayashi's discussion of "wagamama" I think about how these two women most likely succeeded in their careers because of a tenacity to pursue what they desire and believe in, despite social pressure toward feminine diffidence. What do Hirabayashi's examples of Enchi's "wagamama" during their trip say about this term as it might apply to women's "willfulness" or "selfishness?"

I wonder also about how Enchi's instances of asserting herself seem ineffectual. She definitely succeeds in making an impression on Hirabayashi, since Hirabayashi writes about these episodes, but otherwise Enchi's vocal opinions or complaints don't change anything. One example of this is when she criticizes Hirabayashi for putting an

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[4] Joshua Fogel, *The Literature of Travel in the Japanese Rediscovery of China, 1862–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 8.

extra cent of postage on her letters because the stamps the machine dispenses don't add up to the exact amount of postage she needs. Twice Enchi tells other Japanese she has only just met about how surprised she is by Hirabayashi's paying extra postage, even though everyone does it in Japan, Hirabayashi says. "I absolutely could not agree with her way of thinking." When Enchi complains about the extra postage in broken English to the hotel store clerk, Hirabayashi reports that the middle-aged female clerk turned on her with a harsh-sounding reply that neither of them understood. Hirabayashi concludes about Enchi's reaction that "Whether it was a scrupulousness or an inflexibility that I discovered in her character, I enjoyed reflecting on it" (240). Hirabayashi writes with perhaps an aim toward understanding herself and Enchi, but also with a somewhat self-justifying air. She defends herself against Enchi's criticism while not necessarily condemning Enchi for her complaints.

As Hirabayashi warns us at the beginning of her essay, their conflicts originate in money and class upbringing: Enchi is astounded at Hirabayashi's overspending on extra postage, to the extent that Hirabayashi feels judged and somewhat humiliated: "Enchi began saying 'You don't use money very carefully, do you?' That was what she said, and I knew very well there was dissatisfaction in those words" (239). The sense of justice by which Hirabayashi distinguished herself in her political activism and realist fiction reveals itself through the insecurity Hirabayashi carries regarding her class background (in contrast to Enchi's privileged one). This sense of justice also appears in the extent to which Japanese hierarchical customs play a part in her portrayal of their interactions while outside of Japan. In her essay as in her fiction writing, Hirabayashi characteristically places her friendship with Enchi and Enchi's behavior under the microscope for readers to judge, and adds a bit of humor and self-deprecation. "Whenever I get hired help, the first thing I tell them is that I am stingy (*kechi*)…. I'm the type of person who makes a hobby out of being stingy…Of course I did some considerable shopping on my trip, but the goods were always cheap, to the point where it was even unpleasant for me" (239).

The usual outcome of travel and travel accounts is to learn something about oneself, one's relationships, and / or one's home, whether that home is defined by so-called national character or by the specific region of one's hometown. "Home" could also mean the customs a person considers most "natural" or comfortable: Hirabayashi and Enchi are both from Japan, for example, but early on in her essay Hirabayashi is careful to point out the differences in their personalities and background. She expresses constraint at being confronted with certain Japanese

customs through Enchi, particularly hierarchical customs. One way in which Hirabayashi's article departs from Fussell's description of travel accounts is in Fussell's following idea: "the speaker in a travel book exhibits himself as physically more free than the reader, and thus every such book… is an implicit celebration of freedom."[5] Hirabayashi hints at the possibility of freedom from hierarchical practices in a country whose reputation is that of less class consciousness than in Japanese society, but that traveling with a fellow Japanese prevents such freedom. At a large Japan Society banquet for example, they found themselves scrambling for a table when they arrived to find it crowded with people who had already seated themselves. Afterward, Enchi argued with their interpreter that the seating arrangement at the Japan Society banquet was rude because Enchi's seat was in a lowly position far from the decorative scroll (*kakejiku*) while Hirabayashi sat closest to it. The interpreter said they were all seated at the table of their host according to Western custom, but Enchi countered that the room was Japanese style (242).

Is there a subtext in Hirabayashi's article that is suggesting what makes a good traveler? What is this "good traveler"—is it someone who leaves the customs of her native land at home when she is in a foreign country? Hirabayashi has written a self-examination along the lines of autobiography that is also an examination of Japanese class customs. Her motive in writing about how foreign travel posed a challenge to her long-term friendship could be a method of showing what individual idiosyncrasies hidden by social custom emerge in a changed setting. In this way, she places these social customs under the microscope to show how they might threaten human connection. On the other hand, these social customs are ways of being that Enchi takes for granted in Japan as essential to comfortable, ordered surroundings. That they go missing while in America means she might be missing the sense of order she needs while already coping with a foreign experience. Perhaps she herself thinks Hirabayashi acts in unfamiliar ways, ignoring or forgetting what Enchi might believe is expected behavior, so that Enchi's sense of order is even more disturbed. Someone she has known for decades as a close friend is doing things she has never seen in her before and furthermore disagrees with—what is it about these surroundings that makes her act so strangely?

Hirabayashi is frank about her disagreements with Enchi in this work, but there is still room for reading a subtext of cultural comparison and interrogation in her essay. She can write honestly about Enchi in

[5] Fogel, *The Literature of Travel in the Japanese Rediscovery of China*, 8.

Bungei shunjū because she knows their friendship can withstand criticism of her friend. She includes self-criticism also, in the way she talks about her thoughtless spending. The essay ends on a note of humor and self-examination when she tells the reader that the souvenirs she bought in the U.S. were all oddities (*hen na mono bakari*). Why had she chosen these things? she asks herself, and concludes with a laugh that she was in an odd state state of mind at the time she was traveling abroad—the "tense state of mind" or "nervous mental state" I mentioned earlier (243). With this she suggests the possibility of her being an unreliable narrator, and also hints at the possibility that sometimes her longtime friend knows her better than she knows herself.

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