

REVIEW ARTICLE

robin d. gill. *Octopussy, Dry Kidney & Blue Spots: Dirty Themes from 18-19c Japanese Poems*, Key Biscayne, FL: paraverse press, 2007, and *Mad in Translation: A Thousand Years of Kyōka, Comic Japanese Poetry in the Classic Waka Mode*, Key Biscayne, FL: paraverse press, 2009.

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Emblazoned onto the front cover of his translation volume of mostly randy comic verse, the first of two works by robin d. gill under review here, is the iconographic masthead *THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW*, intimating recognition by that venerable institution. Upon closer inspection, however, the masthead turns out to be sandwiched by the fine print: “Yet Another Good Book...Will Probably Ignore” (Figure 1).

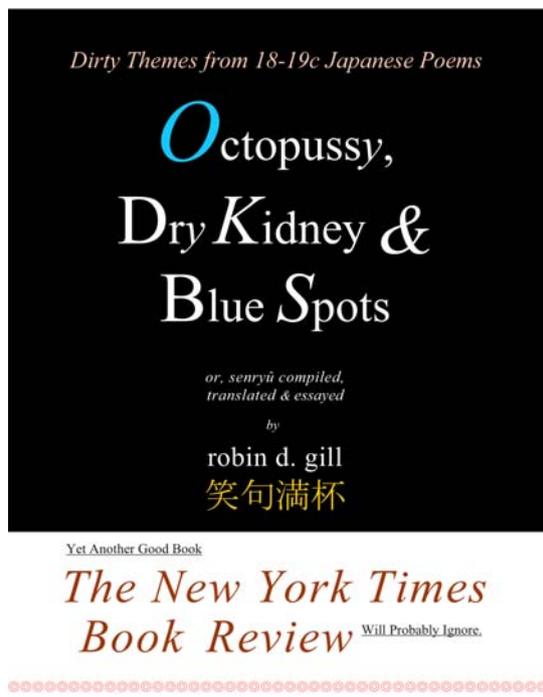


Figure 1. *Octopussy, Dry Kidney* Cover.

This tongue-in-cheek hoax offers a whiff of the wonderful eccentricity running throughout maverick author gill’s ever-expanding corpus of

writings on Edo-period poetry, particularly comic poetry. The eccentricity resides less in the momentary leg-pulling than in the ironically wishful “probably”; for as gill must know, only works in large print-runs draw such notice, not those in small runs issued by “vanity presses”—which is surely how the Gray Lady would pigeonhole paraverse press, the self-publishing enterprise of none other than gill himself.

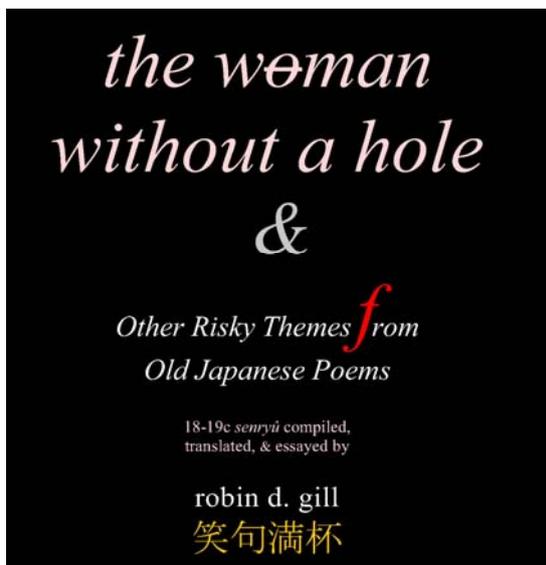
Another whiff of whimsical unconventional-ity wafts up from the main title, *Octopussy*. gill claims to have discovered only recently that this was never really *his* neologism, but that of Ian Fleming.¹ Yet it is Henry Fielding, with his alternative titles to chapters and sections, who perhaps rather comes to mind, as well as the wood-block-printed publications of the Edo period, with their array of external and internal designations (*gedai* and *naidai*); for *Octopussy* bears just such a second title, *The Woman Without a Hole & Other Risky Themes From Old Japanese Poems* (Figure 2).² The typography here amounts to another jest, referencing the legend (informing several of the comic poems) that the great poet and beauty Ono no Komachi was able to resist amorous advances because she lacked a vagina—the crossed-out “o” supposedly barring the one hole in the eponymous “woman” (in fact, there is another anatomical opening, tempting to some, in the letter “a”...).

More drastically, the title page to the closely related *Mad in Translation* presents a veritable laundry list of alternative titles: *The Unbearable Lightness of Kyōka*; *In Search of Wild Waka*; *Fun Poems from the Land of the Surprising Sun*; *Welcome to the Crazy Verse*; *Wacky Waka*; *Mad-cap Poems for the Man Who Wore a Carapace on his Head*; *Kyōka & other Kooky Japanese Poems*; *The Paraverse of Japanese Mad Poetry*; and

¹ Personal correspondence with the author. Full disclosure: gill and I have corresponded about his work and he has sent me copies of his books for this review. Page numbers to *Mad in Translation* are to the reading copy he sent and may vary slightly from the “final” version of that book. Full publishing information for gill’s other books appears at the end of this review.

² This image is from the front cover of an alternative version of the book.

(gill's favorite) *Please, No Songs to Move Heaven and Earth!* Matters are further complicated by the fact that gill has recently issued an abridged version of this book (running a mere 300 pages, as opposed to the 740 of the complete version), titled *Kyōka, Japan's Comic Verse: A Mad in Translation Reader*. Even the titles to gill's works on *haiku*, though less multitudinous, often turn out to be jokey: *Rise Ye, Sea Slugs! 1000 Holothurian Haiku* ("holothurian" being the English adjectival form, it turns out, of the Japanese *namako*, or sea cucumber); *Cherry Blossom Epiphany: The Poetry and Philosophy of a Flowering Tree* ("Forget the fruit! This book is about the flower"); *Fly-ku!* (devoted to *haiku* on—well, you guessed it); and so on and so forth.



Yet Another Good Book

The New York Times
Book Review Will Probably Ignore.

Figure 2. *The Wōman Without a Hole* Cover

Regrettably for gill, the usual cast of scholarly journals in East Asian Studies and Japanology have (like the *New York Times*) passed over his work, no doubt because his books telegraph their unconventionality so flamboyantly. gill projects himself less as translator or poet or amateur-scholar, or some combination thereof, than

as entertainer or *agent provocateur* or playful self-promoter: "If anyone with a major publisher is reading," gill slips in at one point, referencing *Octopussy* and yet another work, "I would be happy to do an illustrated half-length *pure wasabi* version of this book and my earlier *Topsy-turvy 1585*, so long as you give me a decent five-figure advance and promise a large run for each."³

Alas, one imagines that should some beleaguered editor at just such a publishing house actually be reading, s/he might sniff an elaborate Nabokovian practical joke: the constant intrusion of parenthetical remarks into otherwise learned discourse may smack of Charles Kinbote, the neurotic, almost certainly paranoid schizophrenic narrator of *Pale Fire*, who punctuates his quasi-scholarly annotations of poetry with asides about such things as the loud amusement park in front of his present lodgings where he resides in exile from the distant northern kingdom of Zembla. Or perhaps our only slightly less imaginary editor might fear that gill—who leads a reclusive, mysterious rural existence outside of Gainesville, Florida, usania (this neologism seemingly his)—could turn out to be another William Chester Minor, whose singular contributions to the compilation of *The Oxford English Dictionary* (as per Simon Winchester's *Professor and the Madman*) were proffered far from Oxford, in the relative comfort of an insane asylum. After all, paraverse press—named for gill's portmanteau word describing his method of translating poems into parallel verses—may also inadvertently suggest that its mastermind has slipped into some sort of parallel universe.

Succumbing to such ruminations would be as lamentable as ignoring gill's corpus. This is because gill has given us two lively, extraordinarily knowledgeable, if decidedly non-academic, works on Edo-period comic poetry: *Octopussy*, on comic *haiku* (*senryū* 川柳), including what he calls "dirty" ones (*bareku* ばれ句); and *Mad in Translation*, on "mad" verse (*kyōka* 狂歌). Bombilating with verve, these works stand out from the huggermugger of scholarly discourse on similar topics, which more often than not disap-

³ gill, *Octopussy*, p. 465.

points as eminent but dull. To the extent that Edo-period poetry is too often misleadingly reduced to haiku by Bashō and friends, gill's works on less established modes of *haikai* poetry and subjects—like the one devoted wholly to sea cucumbers—represent a refreshingly unencumbered contribution to the field. Even if these works cannot be described as punctiliously scholarly, gill's status as poet-translator and amateur-scholar allows him the freedom to innovate. Some of his innovations set him apart from much scholarly publishing in Japanese studies and may even put him ahead of the curve. Indeed, gill's unorthodox views on, and practice of, translation inform his treatment of print media itself, as we will see, in new and exciting ways.

Fish Out of Water

But first: who is robin d. gill? No newcomer to Japanese literature, gill, during his many years residing in Japan before his self-imposed exile to usania, published prodigiously in Japanese on poetry and related subjects under the penname Keigu 敬愚, "Yours Foolishly," a pun on *keigu* 敬具, "Yours truly."⁴ This penchant for witty self-effacement makes one speculate if his English name isn't itself some kind of prank, a pseudonym suggesting comic incongruity (underscored by the cummingsesque lack of capitalization), like horns on a hare. The presumption that silliness can be a form of seriousness jibes with the spirit of Edo-period comic literature, particularly so-called "frivolous prose" (*gesaku*), but also *senryū* and *kyōka* themselves, which are not unrelated to *gesaku* (though gill never explores this probable connection). *All* first-rate poets, gill observes, "are wise enough to eventually indulge their foolish side, not simply to entertain others but to keep themselves in stitches."⁵

Many of gill's contentions are equally provocative, if not insightful, as with his argument, which runs throughout his writings, that the individual 17-syllable poem now known as haiku begins not with Bashō (1644-1694), as conventional thinking has long maintained, but two centuries earlier, with Sōgi (1421-1502). It is not so

much that the first collection of opening stanzas (*hokku*) published in isolation from the rest of their linked-verse sequences, as though they were what would later become haiku, dates to Sōgi's posthumous *Jinensai hokku* (1506), but that Sōgi, in gill's opinion, "wrote hundreds if not thousands [of poems] that clearly qualify as haiku" by virtue of their conception and subject matter.⁶ While not all specialists would concur, ignoring the conventional wisdom allows gill to open up the field of *haikai* studies to a closer examination of haiku before and apart from the Bashō School.

gill also breaks ranks by rejecting the old-school dictum that Japanese haiku and *senryū* should be translated into English in a 5-7-5 syllable line pattern. This is a shrewd move. Like dollars and yen, English syllables and Japanese *onji*—more a *mora* than a "syllable"—are different animals. Syllables are by no means of uniform weight themselves (compare "no" and "rough"), of course, but *onji*—what gill, throughout his writings, incisively terms *syllabets*—fall on the lighter end of the scale. gill thus settles on a line pattern of 2-3-2 accented beats for *senryū* and *bareku*. Accordingly, for his translations of the 5-7-5-7-7 syllabet *kyōka*, gill aims for 2-3-2-3-3 accented beats, mostly arranging these into 5 lines, every now and then 4 lines, but also often only 2 lines, which he maintains feels even closer to the originals.⁷

More daringly, gill runs against the grain of so much academic translation by frequently employing end rhyme in his renditions of comic verse. He does as much with a minority of the *senryū* in *Octopussy* and a majority of the *kyōka* in *Mad in Translation*. This is not to imply that the original poems relied on end rhyme; rather, gill believes that rhyme can compensate for the loss of Japanese puns and wordplay when transposing into English. Rhyme, gill insists, provides the sense of comic closure that is otherwise unavailable in translation. His strategy rests on the keen observation that rhyme is actually an unsung form of wordplay.⁸ Thus, gill mobilizes

⁴ Or, more literally, "Your respectful fool" and "Your respectful tool," respectively.

⁵ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 53.

⁶ gill, *The Fifth Season*, p. 19, n. 3.

⁷ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 27.

⁸ See *Mad in Translation*, pp. 24, 28, and *passim*.

rhyme in place of the untranslatable pun, to pound home the punch line, ratify it, and make it seem intended if not natural. “So why the rhyme? I think the answer is that, without it, English short poems just do not have the snap to be funny.”⁹ gill has a point.

In recent decades, end-rhyme partisans among translators of haiku (like Harold Henderson) and of *waka* have all but ceased and desisted. But gill is dealing with overtly comic poetry, so he may be justified in revisiting the issue. One should therefore grant some leeway here, even if the effect is not always droll, since more often than not gill captures something of the whimsicality.

For instance, consider gill’s rendering of Yadoya Meshimori’s (1753-1830) well-known *kyōka* alluding to a line from Ki no Tsurayuki’s “*Kana Preface*”:

uta-yomi wa / heta koso yokere / ametsuchi
no / ugoki-idashite / tamaru mono ka wa

To my mind, bad poets are the ones to be preferred:

Who wants to see Heaven and the Earth disturbed?¹⁰

The rhyme undoubtedly helps convey the humor, especially in comparison to a more orthodox rendering by Burton Watson that relies on allusion:

when it comes to poets,
the clumsier the better—
what a mess
if heaven and earth
really started to move¹¹

In most instances, gill exploits rhyme this way to marvelous effect. In a few cases, he is so successful that it almost seems as though the poem was originally composed in English:

To smoke however high the cost is simply wacko:

⁹ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 57.

¹⁰ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 32.

¹¹ Quoted in gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 33.

which only goes to prove, no relief beats tobacco!¹²

And in a rare few cases, gill manages to work a pun into the end rhyme:

ima made wa
heta ga shinu zo to
omoishi ni
jōzu mo shineba
kuso jōzu kana

’Til now I thought
for sure, dying was something
for nincompoops
When talents die, though fewer,
I’ll bet we make better manure!¹³

Sometimes, when he can swing the pun, gill dispenses with end rhyme completely:

shibaraku mo
yotoko ni shiri o
suezaru wa
waga tsuma naranu
inazuma zokashi

Ne’er in my bed
long enuf to sleep, the girl
called Lightning;
Here I am for a screw,
And all she does is bolt!¹⁴

At other times, however, gill’s translations are more whimsical than warranted by the original. Compare two versions of a verse (composed in 1716) by Raizan. First, Yoel Hoffman’s:

raizan wa
umareta toga de
shinurunari
sore de urami mo
nanimo ka mo nashi

¹² gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 305. The original runs: jūson no / ari to wa shirite / nomu kara wa / tabako ni masaru / nagusami wa nashi.

¹³ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 383.

¹⁴ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 262.

Raizan has died
to pay for the mistake
of being born:
for this he blames no one,
and bears no grudge.

And gill's version:

I Raizan die;
call it my punishment
for being born.
The fault is mine, I leave
in peace. Don't mourn!¹⁵

Needless to say, treating this ostensibly somber poem as a mad verse runs the risk of trivialization. But when the original is a light *waka* to begin with, the mad-verse idiom feels more apropos. Consider, for instance, two renditions of Ariwara Motokata's infamous poem opening the first imperial anthology of *waka*, *Japanese Verse Old and New* (*Kokin wakashū*, ca. 920). The following rendition, by scholar-translator Helen Craig McCullough, while slavishly close to the original in meaning if not in syllable count, feels rather plodding:

toshi no uchi ni
haru wa kinikeri
hitotose o
koso to ya iwamu
kotoshi to ya iwamu

Springtime has arrived
While the old year lingers on.
What then of the year?
Are we to talk of "last year"?
Or are we to say "this year"?¹⁶

Gill, by contrast, throws convention to the wind, offering this rather breezy interpretation:

Spring is in the air today,
So tell me if we may,

Call this year last year
Before New Year's day!

By treating this light *waka* as a madcap poem, gill may be truer to the original than McCullough, though he is also provocatively rewriting the history of both poetic forms. As he himself puts it: "The original, which I consider mad, is neither the oldest *kyōka* nor, for that matter, ever called a *kyōka*. Nor was it an AABA verse; but I submit that my reading of Ariwara no Motokata's *waka* is, nonetheless, closer to the *spirit* of the original than the usual boring translation."¹⁷ gill has a point here, too. When it comes to rendering poetry, particularly comic poetry, literal is not necessarily better. For the translator, eliciting an eye roll trumps blank stares.

But eyebrows will be raised when it comes to gill's chronology, which pushes the advent of the *kyōka* back a half millennium earlier than the generally accepted opinion that the first extant *kyōka* collection, that by Kyōgetsu (1265-1328), marks the beginning of the form. Indeed, one of gill's most radical and interesting contentions in *Mad in Translation* is that by dwelling on the so-called *kyōka* boom of Tenmei-era (1781-1789) Edo, scholars have wrongfully obfuscated the genre's venerable history and origins, which he asserts stretch back past Kyōgetsu and even the *Kokinshū* to the earliest extant writings in Japan, *Record of Ancient Matters* (*Kojiki*, 712), *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon shoki*, 720), and *Myriad Leaves Collection* (*Man'yōshū*, compiled ca. 759). It is not that the *kyōka* grew out of the comic *waka* in these works, but rather that there was no distinction between the two in the first place.¹⁸

Gill admits, however, that what he considers to be *kyōka* was not recognized as such until none other than the great Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241) coined the term. And during a period of increased seriousness in *waka* epitomized by the *Shinkokin wakashū* (ca. 1439), the *kyōka*

¹⁵ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 387.

¹⁶ McCullough, trans. and annot. *Kokin Wakashū: The First Imperial Anthology of Japanese Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), p. 14.

¹⁷ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 34.

¹⁸ For more on this, see *Mad in Translation*, pp. 595-634 and passim.

was forced underground, as it were, seeking refuge in the lighthearted form of linked poetry (*haikai no renga*). According to gill's revised history, the *kyōka* emerged as its own true genre and became popular a century or two earlier than the Tenmei *kyōka* boom, with works by Yūchōrō (1547-1602), Kōfū (fl. ca. 1660s-70s), and the first bona-fide *kyōka* master, Teiryū (d. 1735). As gill puts it: "Despite the fact that the 100-odd books reproduced in *Kyōka Taikan*, or *Broadview* clearly revealed the literary importance of 16-17c *kyōka*, in the absence of a corresponding analytical rethinking of the history—or none energetic enough to blast through the shuttered windows of the Ivory Tower—almost everything written about *kyōka* continues to parrot the scholarship of the 1950's and 60's which, failing to appreciate older *kyōka*, treated 18-19c Edo *kyōka* as what amounts to the only real thing...I can understand both the appeal of Tenmei *kyōka* and of Edo but still, *why, after a quarter of a century are 16-17c kyōka still largely unknown?*"¹⁹

This is a good question on top of a provocative thesis. gill is absolutely right to interrogate the Edo-centric narrative of the *kyōka*. One of gill's major contributions is his challenge to the conventional wisdom that *kyōka* became popular *only* in Edo during the Tenmei era, with its leading practitioner, Ōta Nanpo (1749-1823).²⁰ Sorry to say, however, gill's revised timeline did not entirely convince this reviewer. For one thing, his thesis unfolds in a chapter called "A Short & Inadequate yet Extraordinarily Broad History of the Japanese 'Mad Poems' called *Kyōka* or *not* called *Kyōka* but *like* them," a title that is considerably less convoluted than its content. For another, it is not clear how *kyōka* migrated from *waka* to *haikai no renga* to *kyōka* and yet remained a single, clearly definable entity. Simply put, this is implausible. If gill has demonstrated anything, it is that what has persisted from the age of antiquity is not the *kyōka* form so much as the comic imagination in Japanese poetry. As he himself admits: "If, like me, you see the comic at the heart of literature rather than a derivative or mere parody of the serious, you might also agree

that *kyōka* by whatever name could have survived without formal *waka*, but not the vice-versa."²¹

There are a few other noteworthy quirks in gill's works, such as his practice, in *Mad in Translation*, of making his translation chapters occupy two facing pages at all costs. When the main poem(s) and discussion conclude before the end of the second page, which is not infrequently the case, the remaining space is filled with fluff—personal comments and digressions that bear upon the original only tangentially, if that. gill justifies this practice on aesthetic grounds, and some of his comments are genuinely fascinating, even illuminating. At worst, though, this practice feels distracting if not so rigid that one suspects some kind of superstition is at play, like not stepping on the crevice between slabs of cement sidewalk.

Also, gill unwittingly adds oil to the bonfire of any would-be critics by his unremitting reliance on emphasis. One is reminded of Mark Twain's alleged remark (according to John Grogan's *Marley & Me*) that using an exclamation point in one's writing is like laughing at one's own joke. All of the italics, underlining, exclamation points, and non-standard characters in the quoted material in this review, in fact, reflect emphasis in the original. This emphasis is so rampant that one feels it would have been easier for gill to emphasize the points he wished not to emphasize.

Finally, carried away by his own exuberance perhaps, gill sometimes plays it fast and loose, passing off speculation as fact. One example is his statement that the mad verse was the most widespread form of comic poetry *ever*: "Hence, I think it truly extraordinary that the 'mad poem,' the *kyōka*, was able to achieve in its heyday greater popularity than that achieved by any similar genre of poem, if there is a similar genre, anywhere in the world."²²

Dirty *Senryū*

These quirks are negligible compared to gill's great accomplishment, which resides in his unflinching treatment and cheerily filthy transla-

¹⁹ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 596.

²⁰ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 698.

²¹ gill, *Mad in Translation*, pp. 608-9.

²² gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 20.

tions, in *Octopussy*, of a completely overlooked class of *senryū*. This is the *bareku* 破礼句, literally “etiquette-violating verse,” which gill renders “dirty *senryū*” (though, for a general audience, it might better be rendered as “dirty sexy haiku”). It has long been standard operating procedure among scholars of Edo literary studies either to ignore the *bareku* or, perhaps more egregiously, to acknowledge its existence begrudgingly without actually dirtying one’s hands by translating it, particularly in suitably crude language. The main exception to this rule is John Solt, who not long after issuing a seminal article on the subject left academia.²³ Here it might be queried why it is that the two major translators of *bareku* now work outside the academy. More to the point, one may wonder how it is that Edo studies outside Japan tends to be so priggish when Edo literature itself is so rich in scatological and sexual material.

The prudishness goes back at least to Reginald Horace Blyth, whose work on *senryū* largely set the tone for others to follow. Writing on the prevalence of *bareku*—though he never dignified them with that word—within one collection of *senryū*, Blyth blushed:

On the whole the verses [in *Suetsumuhana*] are so poor, poetically, that the ingeniousness of many of them hardly makes up for their dealing with low people at their lowest. I do not mean that sex is low; far from it. But lowness is low whether it is in music or art or religion, and when these or sex are deficient in humour they are poor and equally poor. Only a few verses are given here, not the best, but the best printable ones.²⁴

But how is one to understand another culture by looking at it through the standards of one’s own culture?

²³ Solt, “Willow Leaftips,” in Sumie Jones, ed., *Reading / Imaging Eros* (Bloomington: The East Asian Studies Center, Indiana University, 1996), pp. 129-34.

²⁴ R. H. Blyth, *Edo Satirical Verse Anthologies* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1961), p. 277.

Likewise, it was with “regrettable decorum” (as William Sibley so eloquently put it) that Donald Keene, in *World Within Walls*, dismissed such randy *senryū* out of hand.²⁵ Similarly, Faubion Bowers seems to have had *bareku* in mind when stating, scornfully: “*Haikai* spoke in everyday language and sometimes, in its exuberance, became little more than a display of wit and scatology.”²⁶ Even Makoto Ueda, in his otherwise first-rate *Light Verse from the Floating World*, which surpasses all other English-language works on *senryū* in the quality of its translations as well as its scholarship, looks down on *bareku*: “[T]here is a multitude of *senryū* [sic] peppered with slang words for male and female genitals as well as for various bedroom practices used by courtesans. There were so many such *senryū* that someone collected them in an anthology; entitled *Suetsumuhana* (The Saffron Flower), it appeared in four volumes between 1776 and 1801. Many of these *senryū* violate our sense of decency.”²⁷

Among the readers for whom Ueda presumes to speak, it would be out of the question to include robin d. gill. “I confess there was a time in my life when I read many books of obscene *senryū*,” gill writes, “but I cannot imagine a respectable scholar of Japanese with the time or inclination to do that. Indeed, Ueda’s explanation for ‘*the beautiful wife / boiling his herb medicine / that doesn’t work*,’ namely, that it is ‘very likely the medicine is an aphrodisiac,’ shows that he did not recognize one of the top dozen or two stereotypes of dirty *senryū*, *empty-kidney*, where the husband is bed-ridden yet literally *semper paratus* so to speak...so, [Ueda] probably did lack something but it was less a matter of skill (the ability to translate well), than of comprehen-

²⁵ Sibley, p. 487 of “A World Surveyed,” in *Monumenta Nipponica*, vol. 32, no. 4 (Winter 1977), pp. 485-94.

²⁶ Faubion Bowers, ed., *The Classic Tradition of Haiku: An Anthology* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), p. vii.

²⁷ Makoto Ueda, *Light Verse from the Floating World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 26. Ueda (like gill after him) drops the macron, ostensibly to usher the word into the English lexicon.

sion or a lack thereof.²⁸

Still, the larger issue with Ueda's starchy refusal to give *bareku* its due is that by making the standard perfunctory nod to *bareku* only to ignore it, Ueda slips a few into his book unwittingly. For instance, there is the perfectly indecent *bareku* employing a *double entendre* that is presented as a chaste little *senryū*: the word *ogamu*, meaning to place one's hands together fervently in prayer, is rendered merely as "worships" without capturing its vernacular use referring to the act of male auto-eroticism.²⁹

In contrast to Ueda's improperly proper renderings of *bareku*, gill's renderings are properly improper. In fact, as suggested by his *Apologia*, titled frankly "to be blunt—a word about cunt," gill shrinks not from matching the Japanese originals in earthy language.³⁰ This openness informs the organization of *Octopussy* as a whole, for his chapters (and not just individual verses from those chapters) are arranged by topics like: masturbation (*lying face up / self-pleasure turns a navel / into a puddle*, p. 77); syphilis (*cured and clean / as a pipe, then, cough! and / 'is nose blows off*, p. 95); anal sex (*butt-fucked / 'it's just like a turd / coming in'*, p. 199); farts (*wintering in / delighted with the farts / of her husband*, p. 370); vaginas (*all pussies / stink says the maid / unashamed*, p. 293); and sexual politics (*mr married-in / a fool with quim in his face / praises its taste*, p. 238), to cite but a few.

Thus, although Ueda's translations of the cleaner *senryū* are indeed top drawer, gill throws open the lower drawers to discover hidden therein all sorts of smutty books, sex toys, birth control devices, abortifacients, and so on, not to mention scatological matter. Wonderful stuff, in other words. Certainly for anyone interested in the popular sexual imagination of Edo-period Japan. Yet it is in breaking the wrongheaded if entrenched pattern of dismissive lip service to randy verse—that is, of barely acknowledging *bareku* in order to try to repress it—that gill's *Octopussy* is to be singled out for especial praise. And while Timon Screech and others have drawn

on *bareku* in their writings, they cast it in a minor, supporting role. gill brings the *bareku* up front and center as a bad-boy player worthy of his own spotlight.³¹ This represents a significant contribution to Edo studies.

A *Bareku* By Any Other Name

Having said that, one difficulty with gill's treatment of *bareku* in *Octopussy*, though not amounting to an Achilles heel, concerns language. This has nothing to do with the saltiness, which is entirely justifiable and, indeed, indispensable. Rather, it is the fact that gill adamantly refuses to deploy the term *bareku*. gill argues that no such term existed during the Edo period and, further, that by using it as though it had existed, one inevitably draws a line between clean and dirty *senryū* in a way that inadvertently gives rise to the misapplication of modern conceptions of sex and obscenity.

Fair enough. Nobody should force his or her own postmodern conceptions onto the early modern Japanese. However, abstaining from the term *bareku* does not necessarily preclude cultural colonialism. And anyway, abstention gives rise to a different set of problems. Clumping *senryū* and *bareku* together this way will no doubt mislead some readers into believing that all *senryū* are *bareku*—or all *bareku*, *senryū*. Neither is the case, really, for strictly speaking, *bareku* can refer to any kind of lewd verse, not just *senryū*.³² gill attempts to make this distinction in a way: "it needs to be said that just as not all *senryū* are *bareku*, not all *bareku* are *senryū*, so it might be wiser for scholars to call them in English what I do, simply...*dirty senryū*."³³ Nevertheless, in differentiating between *senryū* and dirty *senryū*—which is to say verses not to be called *bareku* on historical grounds but still dirty nonetheless—gill ends up deferring and thereby reifying, in less direct, more convoluted terms, the selfsame distinction between *senryū* and *bareku*

³¹ See Timon Screech, *Sex and the Floating World: Exotic Images in Japan 1700-1820* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999).

³² As gill puts it, *bareku* were "Lewd haiku, *kyōku*, *senryū* or *zappai*." In gill, *Octopussy*, p. 472.

³³ gill, *Octopussy*, p. 451.

²⁸ gill, *Octopussy*, p. 450.

²⁹ Ueda, *Light Verse from the Floating World*, p. 81.

³⁰ gill, *Octopussy*, p. 463.

that he is trying to avoid in the first place.

The term *senryū* itself is a retrospective term, referring to a type of verse that in its own day was typically termed *tsukeai* 付合 (the riposte in the verse-capping game *maekuzuke* 前句付け), *kyōku* 狂句 (madcap haiku), and so forth. Thus, since gill insists on eschewing the term *bareku* on the grounds of historical accuracy, he should eschew *senryū* as well. (One suspects gill may actually be willing to do so, for he has hinted that he finds the dichotomy between *senryū* as humorous and haiku as *serious* to be false: “As readers of my books already know, there is far more humor in *haikai* than generally realized...”³⁴)

What needs to be emphasized, though, is that the *concept* of dirty sexy *senryū* clearly existed during the Edo period. Like pornography itself, people recognized *bareku* when they saw it, even if they did not have a single unambiguous word for it. Indeed, even though it was not until the mid-twentieth century that the scholar Okada Hajime would coin the word *bareku* and apply it retroactively, Edo-period authors, publishers, and readers clearly recognized that there were certain verses that occupied a special category.³⁵ There was no consensus on what to call these verses—contemporary terms included *aiku* 愛句 (love verse), *renku* 恋句 (“coupled verse,” burlesquing *renku* 連句 or “linked verse”), and particularly *iroku* 色句 (erotic verse)—and yet many anthologies included them nevertheless.

One such work was *The Ten-Thousand-Verses Match Evaluated by Senryū* (*Senryū hyō manku awase* 川柳評万句合, a.k.a. *Manku awase*), a series of printed announcements of the winning ripostes in verse-capping contests (*maekuzuke*) that Karai Senryū 柄井川柳 (1718-1790) held from 1757 to 1789. Inasmuch as many of these ripostes would today be labeled *bareku*, *Manku awase* is widely considered to be one of the early major repositories of these dirty sexy verses.

What is more, there were also *bareku*-only collections. This is proof that the category ex-

isted even in the absence of an agreed-upon label for it. The first such collection was most likely *The Haikai-Style Safflower Princess* (*Haifū suetsumuhana* 誹風末摘花, a.k.a. *Suetsumuhana*), issued in four installments from 1776 to 1801. Japanese scholars have long regarded *Safflower Princess* as the most “literary” of these *bareku*-only collections, and since its illustrations are hardly x-rated, it remains the least unprintable. Widely read and highly evaluated in its day, *Safflower Princess* was banned as obscene throughout the early part of the twentieth century, and was brought to light in modern print only after the U.S. occupation.³⁶

More notably, *Safflower Princess* casts some light on another contemporary term for *bareku* and its relationship to *senryū*. The title can be thought of as advertising humor just as much as licentiousness, implying that the dirty sexy verses within, by whatever name, were indeed a kind of *senryū*; for the word *suetsumuhana* denotes a type of safflower, the tip of which was pinched off (just as Senryū himself cherry-picked the most colorful verses, an act that later would give rise to the term *senryū*) for his *Manku awase*—to create rouge (*beni*), a color (like pink) with sexual connotations. In fact, *suetsumuhana* is also echoic of the term *sueban* 末番, another contemporary term for *bareku*, meaning those verses at the “bottom of the barrel.” This is where these verses presumably ended up due to their subject matter, which dealt with the “extremities” of the lower part of the body, that is to say sex and excretion (as per Bakhtin’s carnivalesque). Of course, *suetsumuhana* also refers to the derisive nickname in *The Tale of Genji* for the lady with the comically long red-tipped nose. Thus, the word further connotes an exaggerated humor as well as this vague sexuality.

There were also *bareku*-only collections whose verses were composed expressly for that collection. The *most* unprintable one, perhaps, was *Willow Leaf-tips* (*Yanagi no hazue* 柳の葉末, 1835), whose verses were composed at various parties hosted by the likes of Ryūsha and Akako under the guidance of Senryū IV (a.k.a. Hitomi

³⁴ gill, *Octopussy*, p. 453.

³⁵ Okada Hajime, *Yanagi no hazue zenshaku* (Yūkō shobō, 1956).

³⁶ Solt, “Willow Leaf-tips,” p. 129.

Shūsuke). Its title plays both on the *yanagi* (willow) of Karai Senryū's *Willow Barrel* (*Yanagi-daru* 柳多留, 1765-1838), thereby suggesting Senryū IV's role in editing *Yanagi no hazue*, and on the *sue* of *Suetsumuhana*, confirming the popularity of the term *sueban* for *bareku*. Whereas the *sue* or "tip" usually refers to the top of a tree, however, in the case of a willow the uppermost leaves trail in the muck—which, as Senryū IV is quick to observe in his Preface, is precisely where most of these verses amusingly settle.

This quibble about nomenclature and the resultant conflation of *bareku* with *senryū* notwithstanding, gill should be applauded for rolling up his sleeves and diving into the muck so enthusiastically.

The paraverse Method

The chief innovation running throughout gill's works, not just those under review, is his paraverse method. It is also the most conspicuous aspect of his works, since it departs visually from the layout of standard translation volumes. None of his books sport the usual pared-down haiku-in-translation look. gill arranges his multiple translations spatially on the page less as parallel verses per se than in clusters (perhaps "clusterversing" would be more apropos?). About this unusual layout, gill remarks:

...I came to feel that multiple translations, conceptually justified or not, *looked* bad. Presented in serial, strung-out down a page, or even spanning pages, a multiple-translation fails to convince; *many* poems are not *a* poem. Moreover, as haiku lines are very short, the waste of space/paper/trees represented by the broad margins was troubling. So, I started to experiment with mixes of single, double and even triple columns. It was not easy, for Microsoft Word columns have many quirks which are exaggerated when one mixes Japanese and English. But the torture was worth it, for the effect was stunning. Presented in side-by-side pairs or more complex clusters such as 1-2-1, 2-1-2, 2-3-2, 1-2-3-2-1, the multiple readings are experienced as a singular translation, a composite, *i.e.*, one multi-faceted *crystalline*(?) object of

word art, a poem! Unless someone else has done this before, I would seem to have come up with a *major literary invention*, albeit one with limited use, for clusters only work with tiny poems, such as Japanese *haiku*, *senryū* or short Chinese rhymes that can be written in squares as small as 4 x 4 characters.³⁷

It is impossible to replicate these clusters as they appear in his books in the format of the present journal, but a glance at a page will suffice (Figure 3).

170 Holeless

ことわりや穴さえ有らばせもせめ
kotowari ya ana sae araba sase mo semu 洞4
(protest/qualification!/: hole even have-if let do-not)

i beg your pardon
even if she had a hole
she wouldn't have

見た事も無くして小町の穴を云い 新編
mita koto mo nakute komachi no ana o ii 三
(seen-thing even not komachi's hole[acc.] saying)

without seeing it
making pronouncements
re. komachi's hole

all this talk of
something never seen
komachi's hole

Sometime in the 80's or the 90's, I recall seeing a photograph of a mummy on a hanging advertisement for a weekly magazine which stuck in my mind because of the headline about this Silkroad find. Not only was she a *blond* in the Far East but a *virgin*! The next day, Sato Sanpei, lead cartoonist for the prestigious *Asahi Shinbun* (who was kind enough to treat me to sushi when I got some of his work into the *Japan Times*), had her with blushing cheeks – how he did it in *b&w* I cannot recall – a quote of the "virgin" claim and some words to the effect that she was horribly embarrassed that they were so rude as to look.

おしい事開かず'に散る花の色
oshii koto hirakazu ni chiru hana no iro
(regrettable thing open-not falling blossom's color/beauty)

what beauty lost
when a flower blows without
having bloomed!

what a waste!
the beauty of the blossom
that never blooms

a thing to regret
the bloom that drops
un-opened

a crying shame
this bud never knew
the birds & bees

The phrase "flower's color/cross/beauty" (*hana no iro*) is commonly found in *Komachi ku* not actually naming her. Another: "The beauty of / a flower that remains / virgin for life" (生娘で一生くら花の色 73-7 *ki-musume de isshō kurau hana no iro*). They play upon her own *waka* ("hana no iro . . .") regretting beauty lost as she wasted her life on idle concerns. Until I read her poems in Carter's *Traditional Japanese Poetry*, I might have agreed with her self-evaluation. But, when you read "In my idleness / I turn to look at the sky – / though it's not as if / the man I am waiting for / will descend from the heavens," or another *waka* expressing her desire to share with someone the bush clover bloom and chime of the clear-toned cicada* in the evening glow, you *know* her life was well spent.

Figure 3. Example of gill's Page Formatting.

Now, regardless of whether one agrees with gill's sense of aesthetics, two principle concerns with the paraverse method stand out. For one thing, offering multiple translations of the same poem does not always augment our understanding of the original, and sometimes may actually detract from it, if not undercut gill's authority as a translator. For another thing, gill paraverses

³⁷ gill, *A Dolphin in the Woods*, p. 18.

more than verses. That is, he gives us multiple versions of his interpretations—and even his books themselves (not to mention his titles). At best, this may provide a model for a brave new form of scholarly publishing in a digital age. At worst, however, this ends up devolving into a real muddle.

Before exploring these issues, a word on the paraverse method itself. Gill provides on average two or three translations of each poem (not counting his helpful word-for-word literal translations), sometimes more, fewer times less. It would seem that, as with the alternative titles, Gill resists allowing himself to be pinned down to a single version of anything. Since no single English translation could ever quite capture the true essence of the Japanese original (Gill somewhere observes that Korean comes much closer), offering several versions of the same verse can, he maintains, help readers to better triangulate the play of meanings in the original.

Gill makes this claim throughout his writings whenever he discusses his paraverse method. He does so most succinctly, perhaps, in the introduction to his most recent work, *A Dolphin in the Woods*, where he explains that he took his inspiration from the likes of Alan Watts, “who noted the skeletal nature of Chinese not only permits but asks for multiple readings” as well as from Sato Hiroaki’s book *One Hundred Frogs* (1983), in which Sato provides a slew of translations of Bashō’s famous frog poem:

Then, in 2003, as I worked on my first book of translated haiku for publication (900+ *ku* about sea cucumber), I realized [that paraversing] was not just a game. For many *ku*, more than one translation was needed to cover ambiguity, express manifold meaning, or supply enough cultural background for it to be fully understood without the wit destroyed by explanation and extra beats.³⁸

Now, whether providing multiple verses (*ku*) fully explains the meaning of the original without the extra information that Gill provides, however, is a matter of debate. Sometimes he is more successful than others. Let us take a test case,

selected at random:

nanuka baka nan-no kotta to nyobo ii
(‘seven-days only what things[!#?],’ wife says)

get a life!
seven days are nothing
says his wife

what’s seven days
out of your life! stop bitching
says his wife

just seven days
what’s the big fuckin’ deal!
says the wife

seven whole days
a big ado about nothing
laughs his wife

Here we see some rhyme, though it is not as prodigious as his *kyōka* renderings. One wonders, though, if the semantic differences among these paraverses really justify their inclusion?

Or consider the following (not selected at random):

(senzuri o kaki-ofuseta no [sic] ga shihainin)

delayed gratification

the clerk who beat
his rivals by beating off
alone?—the boss

the masturbator
is the one who became
the master later

he who made do
with jacking off now
the company boss³⁹

Sometimes not all of the translations are by Gill. Take his discussion of *ateire*, which he de-

³⁸ Gill, *A Dolphin in the Woods*, pp. 17-18.

³⁹ Gill, *Octopussy*, p. 67.

finer as the “targeted insertion” of a dildo, as opposed to *ategaki*, either the “aimed stroking” of men or clitoral masturbation:

nigaoe de ateire o suru nagatsubone
(resemble-face-with aim-insert-do chamber-
maid)

staring at an actor print
the harem chambermaid
inserts her dildo [trans. solt]

an actor’s likeness
for the chamber-maid’s
targeted insertion [gill]

gill goes on to compare notes, adding yet a third version:

Solt’s translation captures the action perfectly, and Screech’s “*Using a ‘likeness picture’ / She sticks it in / The serving woman*” serves to bring out the fact that pictures were *used*—a well-made point in his book *Sex and the Floating World*, is that hard *or soft* (clothed) pictures could be *used* for masturbation—but neither of these previous translations caught the wit, which in *senryu*, is to say the poet’s intent. It is, of course, the invention of that *new term*. As there is no TM to indicate it is new, one must waste a lot of time on *senryu* to catch it (Syunroan explains, but because of my familiarity with *ategaki*, I had cracked it on my own!) Screech also opines that a dildo *or* fingers could be stuck in. *The words by themselves could allow it*, but I have yet to find a single *nagatsubone* who used her fingers. For *that* you need an ordinary maidservant, a *gejo*, not one who wears fine clothing in a palace!⁴⁰

It might be countered that Screech’s “*She sticks it in*” somehow captures more of the wit than gill’s own “targeted insertion.” To be fair, though, gill does not always treat his versions as superior. Sometimes he doffs his hat to others. Either way, though, and even when the paraverses are all his, gill may run the risk of under-

mining his own authority.

This is the reason that translators have traditionally considered multiple translations of a single poem anathema. Any translator worth his or her salt should be able to render a single poem into a single translation, the logic runs. Furthermore, gill admits that many of his paraverses deliberately pursue readings of the original that may not be warranted: “Readers who fancy themselves to be traditionalists and are unfamiliar with my work, may be wary of a translator who confesses from the start that he will be literally unfaithful to the originals in order to be spiritually true. If you know my work, however, you know there is nothing to fear, for I always provide the original Japanese, a romanization, a word-by-word gloss and ample explanation (of which the numerous composite translations play a role) of what cannot be translated. This permits me to play without compunction and you, the reader, to see what is what and make your own judgment.”⁴¹

This approach may actually be canny. After all, limiting oneself to a single translation of each poem implies that there is—or at least *should be*—a one-to-one correspondence between a translation and its original, an implication that might well be questioned even without the benefit of so much recent translation theory. Anyway, since gill publishes on his own dime, he need not limit himself this way if he chooses not to. Moreover, the open-endedness of the paraverse method matches the open-endedness of the poems themselves, which often have more than one possible interpretation. Or rather, could it be that the original poem has one multifaceted range of meanings and the paraverse method is really just rendering the same interpretation into English in multiple ways? Either way, for every reader turned off by the seemingly radical indeterminacy of paraversing, gill may well earn another reader who doesn’t mind—or even enjoys—the semantic juggling act.

~~Gills Gone Wild!~~ Perverse paraversing

The more intractable problem, though, is that gill applies his paraverse method promiscuously to more than his rendering of verses. I am not

⁴⁰ gill, *Octopussy*, p. 85.

⁴¹ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 25.

referring here to his penchant for multiple titles to his books, or even for the recipes on his website < www.paraverse.org > for cooking up different versions of his printed books. Once there, readers can not only find “*Errata & Lacuna*” to his various works, but also write in with their own comments and corrigenda, so that the stability of any of gill’s printed texts is constantly in flux. In this sense, it might be said that gill’s true medium is a mixed-media palimpsest. His printed books aspire to the interactivity and hypertextuality of the web. This means that gill’s work is ahead of the curve, and thus, his wonderful eccentricities aside, it can provide a model, of sorts, for scholarly presentation in the age of digital reproduction. gill’s books represent the closest, perhaps, that printed text can come to mimicking the open-endedness of the internet, though print must perforce always remain the net’s pale shadow.

The problem is rather that gill’s writing itself more often than not feels inchoate. Even “just” in the printed versions of his texts, strikeouts—~~included to be read as rejected~~—are not uncommon. This is presumably to share every last movement of his mind with the reader, even his banana-peel missteps, as though to imply that those who would do less are somehow less than candid: “Because, [sic] I provide glosses, readers can see what I do, but academics generally do not share that information => I am not the only one adding and subtracting words; I am just open about it.”⁴² And elsewhere: “your author believes in sharing failure as well as triumph.”⁴³

No doubt such statements will strike some readers as scrupulously honest. Others, though, may find these statements honest to a fault. I can see how they would antagonize many “academics” (and others) as presumptuous (for assuming that readers are interested in over-explaining) as well as sanctimonious. But it is the persistent destabilization of his prose that can be exasperating. Why should space—and the reader’s time—be freighted by material otherwise meant for the editorial scrapheap? Is this really meaningful? Addressing the not unrelated issue of the organi-

⁴² gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 59.

⁴³ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 25.

zation of his work, gill confesses “the arrangement is pretty haphazard, even sloppy. A friend and critic who is *always* dismayed by my lack of editing, may find it absolutely appalling, yet another example, and *the worst*, of a book published before it was, properly speaking, a book.”⁴⁴

Regrettably, I would have to agree with the friend. Why not edit out the strikeouts? Do they really add anything vital, for instance, to our knowledge of the poems in gill’s section “*Devil’s Tongue for a Merkin?*”:

konnyaku o memekko ni suru hana no yoi
32-8

~~making a cunt
from the devil’s tongue
blossom drunk~~

choosing konjak
that looks like nookie
on blossom eve

~~a blossom drunk
turns his konjak into
a piece of tail~~

Konnyaku, or *konjak* as it is sometimes written in English[,] is also *devil’s tongue* according to my Japanese-English dictionary, though the definition found in my English-English dictionary “a foul-smelling fleshy herb, *Hydrosme rivieri*, of the Old World tropics” suggests otherwise (for it is found in temperate Japan). The starch is cooked and formed into springy—close to whale blubber—rectangular or round blocks which have a somewhat off-color, sexy smell (whether foul or not depends on your taste). ~~I suppose it would be possible to take a round block and fashion it to look like a vulva just for the hell of it, but, this is, after all a senryu, and it is more likely a lonely drunk is preparing to jack off with a piece of konjak while sitting in the bloomshade under the falling petals. ☐ So, I thought, but~~ Okada notes *there is a bona-fide way konjak is prepared where it*

⁴⁴ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 13.

looks that way (probably to hold the sauce=flavor)!⁴⁵

While all of this may be fascinating, it would have been more to the point simply to state that *konnyaku* 蕪蕪 was a key ingredient, along with such things as rawhide, velvet (*birōdo* 天鷲絨), and fur, in the *azumagata* 東形, the infamous Edo-style artificial vagina.⁴⁶ It might be countered that since the poem is all about getting plastered in the “bloomshade” (gill’s poetic creation for “beneath the cherry blossoms” that one wishes he had not cancelled out), the false starts and double takes communicate the poet’s inebriated state, in a way. Unfortunately, though, this kind of performative act is the exception that proves the rule.

Too Much Information

At its worst, gill’s paraverse-style writing can be deliberately and distractingly digressive. For instance, gill’s *Foreword* on x-rated *senryū*—which begins on page XXX (another gag, of course; the surrounding pages are 10 and 12), runs 3 pages, picks up again on p. 435, and zig-zags on and on through various notes, notes to notes, *apologia*, sidebars that gill terms “eddies,” and so on and so forth—is a coralline labyrinth. All of this makes *Octopussy* a tangle of texts that a university professor may want to think long and hard about before assigning to undergraduate beginners, though some fun-loving souls among them might not be irreconcilably put off.

For gill, the advantage of paraversing is that it provides the latitude to explore his subjects in the manner of Blyth’s freewheeling ruminations on *haiku* and *senryū*, only more so. For the reader, the benefit comes from allowing oneself to be taken on an idiosyncratic and at times extremely personal journey of discovery by a guide who knows the terrain better than most. If you like gill’s personality, this can be immense fun. gill also justifies his paraversing as educational, providing students of Japanese poetry with a

⁴⁵ gill, *Octopussy*, pp. 77-78.

⁴⁶ For more on this, see Tanobe Tomizō, *Ishamitate Edo no kōshoku* (Kawade shobō, 1989), pp. 177-79.

sense of the translation process as well as the polysemic density of these verses. Paraversing helps with the paranomasia.

It must be said that while paraversing may convey something of the process of translating these verses from the Japanese, it is doubtful that most students of Japanese poetry would really have the time or the desire to retrace all of gill’s mental acrobatics. With all of the dizzying contortions, gill sometimes loses track of his pedagogical aims and veers into the incessantly personal—or even the private. There is a difference, after all, between being open about the process of translation and opening up about one’s innermost psyche. Speculating on one of Nanpo’s pseudonyms, Yomo no Akara, gill reveals parenthetically: “I read an explanation once, but it must not have been very interesting. I forgot it.”⁴⁷ How is this admission beneficial to the student of Japanese poetry? How is it not self-indulgent?

More vexingly, gill’s woeful circumstances are a not infrequent subject of asides: “by removing trace elements, tears *do* have calming properties, according to research in a blue paperback in a cardboard box in a warehouse in Japan, waiting a decade for its owner, a pauper, to sell enough books of his own to be able to afford to settle down and be reunited with his library.”⁴⁸ Departing from the mistranslation of *kabocha*: “Well, maybe that is less frightening than the all too real specter of poverty that keeps millions of men—such as your author—single.”⁴⁹ His fulmination against those who poke fun at thinness (as per a poem from the *Man’yōshū*) runs in this vein, too: “An involuntarily thin man myself, I resent kidding about something that cannot be helped. Fat people have a choice. No one has to eat.”⁵⁰ Why does one attempt to translate comic poetry in the first place? “Because translating wit helped him forget his tinnitus and country exile.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 592.

⁴⁸ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 58.

⁴⁹ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 593.

⁵⁰ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 56. gill renders the headnote to the poem in question, *MYS* #3853, as *Kidding a Thin Man*.

⁵¹ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 13.

Only a heartless person would not feel sorry for gill, whose plight sounds miserable indeed. But what does his personal plight have to do with comic poetry—unless he is trying to say that the ethos of *senryū* and *kyōka* compels him to disclose his own secrets, or that in order to translate Japanese poetry well one must suffer badly? One's sympathy is sometimes undercut when his statements smack of self pity: "Circumstances do not allow me to move to a city or drive to a university library. I am stuck on a country property burdened with animals—tax-cows, old dogs and other merciless time-eaters—...without money to move or hire help for I am the help, or even for auto-insurance, without which I dare not borrow [my sister's] old clunker."

gill veers off road even further here, which is the right of any self-published author, perhaps. He continues: "Moreover, *we should not have to drive for access*. Library policies requiring *physical presence* for data-base use are anti-social and anti-ecological. Why waste fossil fuel for what can be moved on-line at infinitely less cost?"⁵² It turns out that true to his convictions gill has made his books available on-line at Google: "With books 100% viewable, they should also be reviewable without the loss of paper=trees. But if anyone who reads this does such a review, please see the continually updated Errata, as mentioned in my last message!"⁵³

Still, just because gill provides multiple versions of more than his translations need not condemn the paraverse method itself. In fact, it might be said that paraversing informs gill's understanding of parody, a crucial element of *senryū* and *kyōka*, and qualifies him uniquely to handle this poetry. Perhaps gill is able to handle comic verse so well because of paraversing. In one of his forewords to *Mad in Translation*, gill observes:

To appreciate parody, you must know the parodied, which must also be translated. That

⁵² gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 595.

⁵³ <http://www.japannavigator.com/2009/05/05/the-paraverse-of-robin-d-gill-countless-haiku-and-some-intercultural-musings/> Accessed January 5, 2010.

would only be inconvenient—more explanation—were not *the linguistic gap between our languages so large the parody and the parodied may lose much if not most of their similarity in translation...* while I say 'parody' for lack of a broader term, in most cases, the play upon the original, which may change as little as one letter, might better be called a *mutation*, and if that sounds too random, too natural, the only suitable word I can think of would be a term I invented to describe poems that changed so much in translation that I was forced to admit I was creating something new, alternative to or taking off on the original *paraverses*.⁵⁴

The insight here is that there is a synergy between paraverse translation and parody, by which I assume gill means the narrow sense of imitation to ridicule, instead of a more expansive parody (of the sort Linda Hutcheon and others have proposed).⁵⁵ This may well be the reason that gill excels in the translation of parodic verse in the broad sense he seems *not* to mean. In the final analysis, this is probably why *Octopussy* and *Mad in Translation* are preferable to gill's more serious works—and, for that matter, why they may also be preferable, even with all their quirks, to the preponderance of academic translations of Edo-period comic poetry.

Other Works by gill Mentioned Herein

Cherry Blossom Epiphany: The Poetry and Philosophy of a Flowering Tree. Key Biscayne, FL: paraverse press, 2007.

⁵⁴ gill, *Mad in Translation*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985). However, Hutcheon herself has since acknowledged major problems with her own approach. See her *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994).

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