



CARMEN BLACKER

# Carmen Elizabeth Blacker

## 1924–2009

### I

CARMEN BLACKER was a distinctive figure in Japanese Studies in the second half of the twentieth century and a leading scholar of Japanese religion and folklore.<sup>1</sup> She will be remembered chiefly for her magnum opus on Japanese shamanism, *The Catalpa Bow*.<sup>2</sup> She also published a considerable body of work in the form of papers, lectures, contributions to edited volumes and reviews. This supporting work frequently reveals her methods and assumptions more clearly than the longer book. Nor was her research confined to religion; she also produced notable early work in intellectual history, and more broadly in a series of biographical accounts of men and women connected to Japan. She was a member of what she herself recognised proudly as ‘our notable generation’,<sup>3</sup> that included a cohort of scholars of Japan who encountered the language during the war such as, in this country, William Beasley, Geoffrey Bownas, Eric Ceadel, Ronald Dore, Charles Dunn, Douglas Mills, Ian Nish and Patrick O’Neill. The group included also scholars who later turned to the study of China, such

<sup>1</sup> A detailed account of her life is given by Peter Kornicki in his ‘Carmen Blacker (1924–2009) and the study of Japanese religion’, in Hugh Cortazzi (ed.) *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits*, vol. 7 (Folkstone, 2010), pp. 216–29.

<sup>2</sup> *The Catalpa Bow: a Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* (London, 1975 and subsequent editions; Japanese translation, 1979). In the references that follow, works are by Carmen Blacker unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Introduction’ to *The Collected Writings of Carmen Blacker*, reprint of Japan Library and Edition Synapse edition of 2000 (Routledge, 2004), p. 2 (henceforward CWCB).

as Michael Loewe, whom she was to marry, and Denis Twitchett. Her own life seemed to inherit several British cultural, intellectual and scholarly traditions: the intrepid Victorian traveller in the manner of Isabella Bird; the writer of felicitous prose and cultivated lady of letters, in the general style of her own grandfather, but reinforced perhaps by her long friendship with Arthur Waley; the gifted Oxbridge woman scholar in a world still overwhelmingly dominated by men; and the participant in old-established, London-based learned societies.

Carmen was born on 13 July 1924, the eldest of three talented children. Her background was international, privileged and colourful. Her paternal great-grandfather, John Blacker, married a woman from a prominent Peruvian political family, and a cousin of Carmen, Pedro Beltran, was to become prime minister of Peru (1959–61). John Blacker was a bibliophile; his collection of Renaissance book bindings was rumoured, quite unreliably it transpired, to be worth £70,000. His son, Carmen's paternal grandfather, Carlos Blacker (1859–1928), though at one time bankrupt, seems to have recovered to live, mainly abroad, on private means. He numbered Oscar Wilde, Bernard Shaw and Anatole France among his friends. Wilde, indeed, called him 'the best dressed man in London'.<sup>4</sup> Carlos married Miss Caroline Frost, a descendant of a Confederate general in the American Civil War. They had two sons: the younger was killed in the First World War; the elder, Carmen's father, Carlos Paton 'Pip' Blacker (1895–1975), was a hero of both World Wars, wounded twice and awarded the Military Cross in the First World War and the George Medal in the Second World War. He was an influential psychiatrist much influenced by the Jungian tradition, and credited with the basic design of the psychiatric branch of the National Health Service. His influence on Carmen was inestimable. Not least, his bearing suggests something of Carmen's own presence; he was 'tall, spare and determined, [and] remained every inch an old Etonian and ex-Coldstream Guards officer'.<sup>5</sup> He was also a man of great physical vigour: 'Even in his late fifties he thought nothing of running miles and miles along a beach in sunshine in sheer exuberance.'<sup>6</sup> Carmen inherited these traits: she possessed great energy and was tall and slim; she dressed strikingly, often in red, in a style that projected readiness for action but at the same time elegance and authority. Carmen's mother, Helen Maude, was a daughter of Major A. J. Pilkington, from a family associated in an

<sup>4</sup>Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (Harmondsworth, 1988), p. 527.

<sup>5</sup>Richard A. Soloway, 'Blacker, Carlos Paton (1895–1975)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47726>>.

<sup>6</sup>G. C. L. Bertram, Obituary notice, in the *Bulletin of the Eugenics Society*, vol. 7 (3) (1975), p. 19.

earlier generation with the shipping business and the White Star Line in Liverpool. A maternal uncle, Canon Ronald Pilkington (1892–1975), turned from Anglicanism to become a Roman Catholic priest with a special interest in Eastern Christianity; he was in due course to supply Carmen with information on signs of demoniacal possession identified in the Catholic church.<sup>7</sup>

Carmen's early life was spent happily in the family home, 'Pasturewood', a spacious house with extensive grounds in the rural village of Shamley Green, near Guildford. Yet some influence from her father's profession was unavoidable. Carmen was to be high spirited, but also highly strung, all her life. In her early twenties, she was perceived as 'nervous', a trait exacerbated by her wartime experience. Not until 1947 did Eve Edwards, Professor of Chinese at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, feel able to claim on her behalf that 'perhaps one might say that a rather "over-psychologised" childhood appears now to have been surmounted—or justified!<sup>8</sup> During her Surrey childhood, there were already indications of the direction of her future life. Carmen recollected that her enthusiasm for Japan was probably aroused by her father, who 'used to read aloud to us the myths and stories of various countries, and . . . when he came to the stories from the *Kojiki* [the earliest extant history of Japan] he remarked that the names of the gods were very long'.<sup>9</sup>

A turning point bringing the desire to learn the language was the gift from her mother to the child of twelve, at Carmen's own request, of *An Elementary Grammar of the Japanese Language, with Easy Progressive Exercises*, by Baba Tatsui (1850–88),<sup>10</sup> the Japanese democratic politician. This book was to 'unlock the door to a strange land which lay, radiant and shining, far over the horizon of the sea'. At boarding school at Benenden from 1938, she studied this grammar '[o]ccasionally, when bored with the school curriculum'. At boarding school, she also became friends with Juliet Piggott, daughter of Major General Piggott, a second-generation Japan hand, educated in Japan and a fluent speaker of the language, not long returned from attachment to the British embassy in Tokyo. General Piggott

<sup>7</sup> *The Catalpa Bow*, p. 349.

<sup>8</sup> Professor E. D. Edwards, 'Letter of Reference', Nov. 1947. Somerville archive. I am grateful to the Principal and Fellows of Somerville College and to Dr Michael Loewe for permission to quote this and other material from the Somerville College Archive.

<sup>9</sup> This and the other quotations in this paragraph are from 'Recollections of Baba Tatsui's Elementary Grammar', an essay published as a supplement to Baba's collected works in 1988; CWCB, pp. 201–3.

<sup>10</sup> The names of Japanese are given here in the Japanese order, with the surname first.

gave Carmen weekly lessons in Japanese during school holidays until the Second World War.

For Carmen's father, able to rejoin his old battalion, the war brought 'one of the happiest periods in my life'.<sup>11</sup> For his elder daughter, it meant entry into the adult world through work in intelligence and a career commitment to the study of Japan. But the war also brought lasting resentment at what she perceived as undervaluation by unimaginative and obstinate men. In 1942, she joined the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), and was soon transferred to a special accelerated course in Japanese with a 'highly secret' but undisclosed job in view.<sup>12</sup> She was then seconded to Bletchley, the government intelligence institution. Her pay was a paltry £2 a week, explained to her as 'partly due to my age, 18, and partly due to my being a woman'. Her task was to compile a card index of vocabulary of 'any words likely to turn up in a decoded message' from Japanese captured documents and other sources. She remained convinced that she served no useful purpose in the war effort. This 'uncongenial employment', it was observed at SOAS, imposed much stress on her.<sup>13</sup> By the beginning of 1945, she had become 'utterly bored with the work . . . and my morale began to weaken'. In February, she 'contracted an old-fashioned red-flanellist complaint known as a quinsy' [*sc.* tonsillitis] and was allowed to go home to recover. Meanwhile, confidential but successful efforts were made to transfer her back to SOAS as Special Lecturer to teach intensive Japanese courses to servicemen. She gave up her Bletchley pass with 'relief and jubilation'.

Yet this period of her life was not altogether barren. Towards the end of the war through the diplomat John Pilcher (later British ambassador in Tokyo), she met Arthur Waley, already a famous but also notoriously difficult man, of whom it has been commented that '[h]is public *persona* was of extreme shyness that became abrupt rudeness'.<sup>14</sup> Carmen, by her own account,<sup>15</sup> was a girl herself 'still paralyzed with shyness' and 'tongue tied',

<sup>11</sup> C. P. Blacker, *Have You Forgotten Yet?*, ed. John Blacker (Barnsley, 2000), p. 287. His battalion was now commanded 'by my old friend Colonel Lionel Bootle-Wilbraham, D.S.O., M.C. (later Lord Skelmersdale)'.

<sup>12</sup> This and the following autobiographical quotations regarding Bletchley are from 'Recollections of *temps perdu* at Bletchley Park', in F. H. Hinsley and Alan Stripp (eds.), *Code Breakers: the Inside Story of Bletchley Park* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 300–5.

<sup>13</sup> E. D. Edwards, 'Letter of Reference'; Somerville College Archive.

<sup>14</sup> David Holloway, 'Waley and his women' [review of Alison Waley, *A Half of Two Lives*], *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 Sept. 1982, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Quotations from 'Intent of courtesy: a recollection of Arthur Waley', first published in Ivan Morris (ed.), *Madly Singing in the Mountains: an Appreciation and Anthology* (London, 1970); CWCB, pp. 204–9;

when she first met him at his office in the Ministry of Information. Nonetheless, they formed a friendship. Waley encouraged her to learn Chinese. This she did, with texts supplied by Waley, surreptitiously while on duty at Bletchley. Carmen was to seek his advice and help on her future studies, counting for instance on his support for her application to study in America.<sup>16</sup> They were to remain in contact for the rest of Waley's life. She came to find in him 'a scholar of almost magical insight and . . . a master of language' and she developed an intense veneration of 'a nobility of character, a tenderness, a courage in grief and adversity' that she had not at first appreciated. Waley's combination of aestheticism and cultural curiosity must be accounted an important influence on Carmen's scholarship.

Leaving Bletchley liberated Carmen; she was soon reported to have 'gained greatly in poise'.<sup>17</sup> Concurrently with her Special Lecturer post at SOAS, she enrolled for the BA in Japanese. She graduated with First Class Honours in 1947. Waley was an examiner. With what Carmen called his 'lofty disregard for conventions' and, it has to be said, a typical bluntness, he called her to his room and informed her of 'rather silly mistakes' in her history papers.<sup>18</sup> But Carmen felt that her degree in Japanese left her still under-educated. Turning down an offer of a post in Japanese at Cambridge, she wrote to Dr Janet Vaughan, Principal of Somerville College, Oxford, who had been known to her father, that 'I feel that I should read some non-linguistic subject—preferably history or sociology—before I could do anything useful.'<sup>19</sup> In November 1947, she successfully sat an entrance examination to Somerville, but was persuaded to change subject to Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Her wartime service entitled her to exemption from the First Public Examination, and in January 1948 she embarked on a Shortened Final Honours School, taking six, rather than the usual eight, papers in just two years. One of her tutors was R. B. McCallum (1898–1973), Professor of Modern History, later Master of Pembroke. At Somerville, entered when she was 23, a fellow student recalled that 'she subscribed to Buddhist thought and she kept a harpsichord in the Penrose Room . . . She was always turned out in a distinctive fashion.' She was noted for her 'readiness to praise and encourage others (combined with active and acute criticism if occasion

<sup>16</sup> Carmen to Dr Janet Vaughan, 10 Sept. 1949. Somerville College Archive.

<sup>17</sup> E. D. Edwards, 'Letter of Reference'; Somerville College Archive.

<sup>18</sup> 'Carmen Blacker', in P. F. Kornicki and I. J. McMullen (eds.), *Religion in Japan: Arrows to Heaven and Earth* (Cambridge, 1996), p. xviii. This information is closely based on Carmen's own recollections.

<sup>19</sup> Carmen to Janet Vaughan, 10 Sept. 1947; Somerville College Archive.

demanded)'.<sup>20</sup> She sat finals in late 1949 and was awarded Second Class Honours, a result deemed 'most creditable' by Janet Vaughan, given that she had done 'no previous work in this field'; 'her work on Political Theory had alpha quality'.<sup>21</sup> By the time of her graduation, she had won respect from all quarters in Oxford. Janet Vaughan wrote of her that she was 'an extremely well balanced hard-headed, young woman'. Some traces of her earlier nervousness, however, evidently remained. Janet Vaughan cautioned on a nervous tic: her 'eye lashes which work full time are most misleading'.<sup>22</sup> Later, after Carmen had taken a post at Cambridge, Vaughan was to describe her as 'a young woman of real distinction of mind and person. If I saw a chance of making her a Fellow this College, I should take it at once.'<sup>23</sup>

After Oxford, Carmen studied at Harvard during 1950–1 under the Henry Fellowship scheme. At Oxford, she had enjoyed studying eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European political and moral thought. Curious as to how these ideas had been received in Japan, she began research on this topic at Harvard. Her mentors were the university's best-known Japan scholars, professors S. Elisseeff and E. O. Reischauer, though neither specialised in her field of research. Finally, in 1952, she succeeded in paying her first visit to Japan. A condition of the scholarship that she received from the Treasury Committee for Studentships in Oriental Languages and Cultures was that she write a thesis. She identified Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) as a pivotal figure in the adoption of Western thought in Japan, and it seemed natural to continue this study. She enrolled in Keiô University, the institution founded by Fukuzawa himself; and her supervisor was none other than one of Fukuzawa's grandsons, Kiyooka Eiichi. Like other Western foreign students in Japan in the early post-war period, she found herself privileged by the special interest and support of staff and students alike. Much of her time was spent in the 'Big Reading Room' of the gothic-style university library. But Carmen was ever a person of irrepressible energy. She 'spent as much time as I could each spring and autumn in Kyoto and most of the summer in Kamakura'.<sup>24</sup> In Kamakura, she stayed in the tea house of the novelist Osaragi Jirô for six weeks, which

<sup>20</sup> Anne Warburton 'Carmen Elizabeth Blacker, 1948, Hon. Fellow 1991', *Somerville College Report, 2008–2009*, pp. 84–5.

<sup>21</sup> Janet Vaughan to W. L. Atkinson, 31 Dec. 1949; Somerville College Archive.

<sup>22</sup> Janet Vaughan to Miss Fone, 3 Nov. 1949; Somerville College Archive.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> 'Impressions of a Japanese University', first published in the *Bulletin of the Japan Society of London* (13), June, 1954; CWCB, p. 289.

she described as ‘among the happiest in my life’.<sup>25</sup> She went everywhere by bicycle, exploring Buddhist temples and talking with people ‘from all walks of life’. She recalled of this time that ‘[s]mall, simple actions and scenes had a wonderful intensity and reality, a kind of magic which is now more difficult to find’.

Japan was a challenge to the spirit as well as to the mind. In Kamakura, she was able to pursue her now established interest in Buddhism. She joined a *zazen* (meditation) class as an external student. Two years later she gave an account to a London audience of her experiences both of student campus activity in Tokyo and of Buddhism in Kamakura. For her, both Keiō, the modern Western style academic institution, and Engakuji, ‘where the monks are seeking enlightenment by the same methods as they have followed for hundreds of years’, were ‘Japan as she exists now. They both exist side by side, and even interfuse.’<sup>26</sup> The relationship of the ancient and spiritual with the more modern was in due course to constitute a major theme in her life’s work.

## II

But Carmen’s first commitment was to the field of intellectual history. Returning to England in 1953, she spent the next two years at SOAS, shaping her research on Fukuzawa Yukichi into a doctoral thesis. Meanwhile, in 1955 she had been appointed to an Assistant Lectureship at Cambridge, and it was Cambridge University Press that published her dissertation as *The Japanese Enlightenment: a Study of the Writings of Fukuzawa Yukichi* in 1964. This book was dedicated to her father. Its theme was ambitious: the revolution in thought that took place in Japan during the collapse of the late feudal regime and the inauguration of Japan’s modern political order. Its scope is concomitantly broad; it surveys the thought not only of Fukuzawa himself, but also of other leading intellectuals of the time, most of whom wrote voluminously. Required also were knowledge of the Japanese intellectual tradition; the internal political history of Japan during a period of precipitate change; the Western intellectual tradition, including nineteenth-century positivist thinkers such as Herbert Spencer and reformers such as Samuel Smiles. The book successfully conveys the

<sup>25</sup>This and the following quotations in this paragraph are from ‘A room with a gourd: recollections of Osaragi Jirō’, first published in the *Cambridge Review*, 1985; CWCB, pp. 210–13.

<sup>26</sup>‘Impressions of a Japanese University’; CWCB, p. 294.



profound nature of the change in Japan: the reversal of the understanding of history as from decline from a past golden age to progress towards a future utopia; the reconstruction of the understanding of the role of the individual and of human agency in history; the position of women; the role of government and the nature and limitation of political authority. Carmen drew on new work on neo-Confucianism by A. C. Graham of SOAS, and on contemporary Japanese scholarship on Meiji-period intellectual history. She was among the first to reflect the work of Maruyama Masao, the leading Japanese intellectual historian and political scientist of the twentieth century. Carmen conveys this panorama lucidly, accessibly and elegantly, mostly through well-selected quotation and paraphrase. She is also realistic: Fukuzawa was driven partly by a spirit of rebellion against the humiliating restrictions of feudal society, and partly by a desire to use Western democracy instrumentally to arm Japan against Western expansionism. The final chapter confronts Fukuzawa's lurch to advocacy of a form of Japanese imperialism in order to resist Western expansionism.

*The Japanese Enlightenment* was one of the earliest British scholarly books on Japan to be published after the war. It addressed the intellectual modernisation of Japan in a generally positive spirit. Since then, much progress has been made in understanding Fukuzawa's thought. A finer-grained reading of Fukuzawa's views than Carmen could reasonably have achieved is now possible. He is recognised as a creative thinker who developed Western ideas in original ways. But Fukuzawa remains a hero, much as Carmen claimed. Her book, like the classic work of her friend and contemporary at the University of London, Ronald Dore's great *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (1965), is recognised as a pioneer work and a gesture of imaginative generosity to a defeated nation. It has been appreciated as such in Japan itself. For these reasons, *The Japanese Enlightenment* is a historically significant book. It might have inaugurated a research career in intellectual history. In fact, Carmen produced little more in that field: an article on the reactionary thinker Ôhashi Totsuan (1816–62), containing an account of Japanese neo-Confucianism that can still be recommended for its clear and accurate summary of traditional Japanese neo-Confucian thought; and a brief account of the historiography of the nationalist and pro-imperial historian Rai San'yô (1781–1832), for an edited book on East Asian historiography.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> For a bibliography of these and other articles, see 'The principal publications of Carmen Blacker', in Kornicki and McMullen (eds.), *Religion in Japan*, pp. xxii–xxiii.

## III

Even as she did the research at Keio for the book on Fukuzawa, Carmen had been drawn in a different direction. She now committed herself to the study of Japanese religion, both historical and contemporary, and the related fields of myth and folklore. Her interest in Japanese religion seems likely to have been coloured by her father's Jungian psychology and his work as a psychiatrist. Carmen may have inherited a sensitivity to the numinous from him. In his war memoirs C. P. Blacker records a powerful hierophany during an interlude in fighting near Amiens in the spring of 1917, at a place called Corbie. He was taking a walk by moonlight along a canal towpath. As he walked, the canal 'acquired a numen'. He experienced a brief vision of 'luminous bodies—meteors or stars—emitting both light and music'. He remained uncertain of its significance, but later used the metaphor of 'seeds', writing that: 'The remarkable thing, as I now see, about such seeds—stored as bare memories of past experiences which, in the past, have fallen on unreceptive ground—is their capacity to remain dormant for long periods, perhaps waiting inertly for an auspicious change in the soil which contains them.'<sup>28</sup>

Carmen was to share and develop her father's concern with hierophanies and their capacity to survive unconsciously in the mind. Perhaps the psychiatrist's daughter is also reflected in Carmen's focus on religion primarily as an individual, rather than social or political, experience. Throughout her life, she retained an intense sense of the power of psychic phenomena and of the mind as a volatile, but also creative, substratum of human psychology, a repository of ancient knowledge. She was to write of the 'mysterious and terrifying power'<sup>29</sup> associated with certain kinds of myth; of the 'magnetic force' with which the mind tends to elaborate the perception of apparitions; the 'terrifying malignity' or 'peculiar power' of 'resentful spirits'.<sup>30</sup> She also believed that 'altered states of consciousness', along with 'states of trance, of possession, of ecstatic flight', should, in the study of Japanese religion, be the object of 'sympathetic comprehension'.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Blacker, *Have You Forgotten Yet?*, pp. 159–62.

<sup>29</sup> 'Two Shinto myths: the Golden Age and the Chosen People', first published in Sue Henny and Jean-Pierre Lehmann (eds.), *Themes and Theories in Modern Japanese History* (London, 1988); CWCB, p. 28.

<sup>30</sup> 'The angry ghost in Japan', first published in H. R. E. Davidson and W. M. S. Russell (eds.), *The Folklore of Ghosts* (Cambridge, 1980); CWCB, pp. 51–9.

<sup>31</sup> 'Rethinking the study of religion in Japan', in Adriana Boscaro, Franco Gatti and Massimo Raveri (eds.), *Rethinking Japan: Volume II: Social Sciences, Ideology and Thought* (Folkstone, 1990), p. 238.

Her first direct encounter with Japanese religion, however, seems likely to have been with Zen. Yet the ultimate Buddhist salvation, release from the world, was for her not the main interest of the tradition. Aside from her early experience of *zazen*, Carmen appears little concerned with Buddhist soteriology itself, or in exploring the rigorous ontology, epistemology or logic that form the metaphysical basis of Zen Buddhism. The human and cultural context of the quest aroused a deeper fascination. Despite a life-long interest, she never became a Buddhist. In her Charles Strong Memorial Lecture of 1968,<sup>32</sup> she described two ways in which ‘yoga’ was used to achieve Buddhist enlightenment, a state that she described as ‘a discipline, of mind or body or both, . . . [directed] towards the end of yoking, unifying oneself with God, the divine ground’. These two methods were found in the Zen and Shingon sects respectively. Both the *kôan* and meditation of Zen and the lesser known, esoteric, Shingon methods were ‘viable’. But in Shingon esoteric practice, Carmen found a model of the religious quest based on recovery of an innate characteristic more rewarding than the fierce abstraction and renunciation of intellect of Zen. Zen’s use of *kôan* had ‘no aura of numinousness’; wrongly understood, it was also more vulnerable to trivialisation, witness ‘most of the rubbish talked about by Beat enthusiasts of Zen’. By contrast, Shingon’s luxuriant techniques of *mudra*, *mantra* and meditative visualisations employed ‘symbolic imitation’, and constituted a ‘ritual drama’. They ‘rous[ed] by means of an exterior reflection an image which already exists inside our minds’. Here was a view of the mind that resonated with Jungian psychology of archetypes and the collective unconscious. In a later address, she expanded this view of the mind explicitly to include folklore and myth as repositories of ‘patterns by which [the human mind] can understand and remember historical reality’. She became interested in cultural transmission or ‘how the component motifs of the legend interlock and interfuse, and how the images and symbols, with their ambivalent faces, melt into one another’.<sup>33</sup>

Even before the publication of *The Japanese Enlightenment* she had already begun to publish on esoteric Buddhism. Her first essay in this field, ‘The divine boy in Japanese Buddhism’, had drawn on early medieval Japanese texts of the *setsuwa* genre, mainly Buddhist homilies, to

<sup>32</sup> Charles Strong Memorial Lecture of 1968, ‘Methods of Yoga in Japanese Buddhism’, *Milla wa-Milla*, no. 8, 3–19.

<sup>33</sup> ‘The Exiled Warrior and the Hidden Village’ [Presidential Address to the Folklore Society, 17 March 1984], *Folklore*, 95 (2) (1984), 149. She did not find myths, folklore or religious belief incompatible with science. See her discussion in ‘The seer as a healer in Japan’, in H. R. E. Davidson (ed.), *The Seer in Celtic and Other Traditions* (Edinburgh, 1989); CWCB, pp. 65–6.

describe the historical phenomenon of the *gohô dôji*, boy protectors of the Law, 'a saviour, servant and wayshower of holy men'.<sup>34</sup> Here, the Jungian theme was particularly strong. Expressing her argument in the conceptual language of psychiatry, she concluded of this figure in words that paraphrase those of Jung himself, that the '*puer aeternus*, in his fusion of weakness and strength, seems to represent the wholeness which comes from the union of opposites, the complete man who has transcended the limitations of ordinary consciousness'.<sup>35</sup>

This belief in an early stratum of Japanese experience was no doubt reinforced by her reading in the works of the founding fathers of Japanese folklore, Yanagida Kunio (1875–1962) and Orikuchi Shinobu (1887–1953). For both, folklore embodied a quest for the origins of national culture but also a teleology that related these origins to the present and the prospect of revival in some form. This approach was problematic for some more left-wing scholars, but Carmen was interested in the purely religious rather than any political aspect of their work. In the same general direction another, no less strong, influence on Carmen's interest in mythology and folklore was the writing of the eminent Romanian scholar of religion Mircea Eliade whose work Carmen professed that she 'always found inspiring';<sup>36</sup> Eliade's belief in a primordial state and his concept of the 'paradise syndrome' was particularly attractive to her.<sup>37</sup> But his influence appeared to extend further, to her basic methodological assumptions. Carmen seemed to accept his view that human nature was innately religious, reflected in Eliade's concept of '*homo religiosus*'. Experience of the sacred, she seems to assume, is itself irreducible, rather than to be explained through reductive analysis by other disciplines such as the social sciences or psychology. Though she might not have admitted to the description, Carmen is in this sense probably best viewed as a phenomenologist, largely concerned with a perceived world. She remained, at any rate, little attracted by theoretical issues or alternative theories of religious behaviour or myth. She did not explore myth from a Marxist, structuralist, let alone Freudian standpoint. She was concerned to document the religious experience of

<sup>34</sup>'The divine boy in Japanese Buddhism', first published in *Asian Folklore*, 22 (1963); CWCB, p. 107.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. For Jung's very similar wording, see C. G. Jung and C. Kerényi, *Introduction to a Science of Mythology: the Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series XXII (Princeton, NJ, 1993), p. 83.

<sup>36</sup>'The language of birds', Lecture on the occasion of the opening of the Faculty of International Studies, Ueno Gakuen University, 30 June 1996; CWCB, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

Japanese, both historical and contemporary, empathetically from the practitioner's standpoint. Among contemporary Japanese scholars, Hori Ichirō and Gorai Shigeru, leading students of Shamanism and of the ascetic cult known as Shugendo, are particularly frequently quoted in her writing for their empirical information.

Carmen professed a strong dislike of jargon. Her writing is clear and accessible, her style disciplined but compellingly readable, her prose often exhilarating. The approach is seldom theoretical. On the old rivalry between the 'diffusionist' and 'separate origin' theories of the origins of folklore, for instance, like one of her heroes, the Japanese antiquarian, polymath and folklorist, Minakata Kumugusu, she forbore to express an explicit opinion. In one of her last articles, 'The disguised wandering saint: an example of the stranger in folklore' (1990), she noted common features between the motif of hospitality offered to or withheld from strangers, but also crucial differences across cultures. In the case of withheld hospitality, for instance, in Europe and the West, the agent is transformed into a bird; in Japan, the food withheld becomes inedible and the whole community is affected. This led her to the conclusion that, at least in this case, here is a 'strong probability ... of a source different from the analogous European tales'.<sup>38</sup> Detachment from theory did not, however, mean that she avoided complexity. In another late article on divination, 'Divination and oracles in Japan', Carmen described, with illustrative diagrams, the intricate but 'cumbersome yes-no method' required in the use of turtle shells for divination, 'still employed', as she writes, 'in the course of the important and mysterious rite ... by which the Japanese emperor is consecrated and enthroned'.<sup>39</sup>

Later lectures and articles on historical folklore continued to view Japanese religious practice in terms of recovering or acting out an innate, pristine inheritance from primordial time. In an interview with *Japan Digest* in 1991, Carmen expressed a belief not inconsistent with Jungian teleology. She spoke of the existence of 'older levels [in the Japanese mind], which we may call mythical, ... which send up symbols which appear in dreams and folklore. These symbols will often solve a problem in a manner that rational, quantitative thinking cannot.'<sup>40</sup> Carmen's interest in this

<sup>38</sup>'The disguised wandering saint: an example of the stranger in folklore', *Folklore*, 101 (2) (1990); CWCB, p. 183.

<sup>39</sup>'Divination and oracles in Japan', in Michael Loewe and Carmen Blacker (eds.), *Divination and Oracles* (London, 1981); CWCB, p. 72.

<sup>40</sup>*Japan Digest*, 1 (3) (1991), p. 24.

primordial world extended to language. In 'The language of birds' (1996), she spoke with sympathy, indeed excitement, of the belief of the French philosopher René Guénon that folk belief in a pure ancient language was a 'safe repository for spiritual truth', a 'code', through which messages could be transmitted in times of crisis or degeneration. One aspect of this was the widespread folk belief in the 'secret language' of birds that existed before language became corrupted, accessible only to those gifted with special knowledge.<sup>41</sup> Here again, Carmen did not engage with the contemporary debate among scholars of Japanese history over language, domination and empowerment. She remained detached from postmodernism, structuralism or neo-Marxism in its various forms. Like Eliade himself, she saw communication and friendship with animals as a 'means of partially recovering the paradisaical situation of primordial human beings'.<sup>42</sup>

This ancient substratum of Japanese experience had historically been overlaid or suppressed not just by modernisation, but earlier by Buddhism and by Chinese culture. It had been further damaged by the Meiji government's ruthless suppression of syncretic sects such as the Shugendō. Yet it was preserved to some extent in folklore. Thus of 'folk traditions' concerning the emperor's reputedly bizarre life style, she concludes: 'folklore . . . uniquely preserves the memory of ancient practices forgotten elsewhere but once observed by the sacral forbears of the Japanese emperors'. And this, she makes clear, referred to 'some period before history', when the 'sacred nature of the emperor was then more pronounced than in later times'.<sup>43</sup> This view would not now pass unchallenged; more recent scholarship would see the ritual purity of the emperor as a construct built up in the early historical period of state building in the seventh and eighth centuries under the influence of continental Daoism and of Buddhism. Uncomfortably for many historians of early modern and modern Japan, belief in a primordial ethical paradise suggests the essentialist belief in a pristine Japan propagated by the nativist school, the Kokugakusha, and their later followers, a major influence on modern Japanese nationalism.

Carmen was, of course, aware of the danger. In 'Two Shinto myths: the golden age and the chosen people', she distinguished two types of

<sup>41</sup>'The language of birds', p. 10.

<sup>42</sup>Mircea Eliade, quoted in Douglas Allen, *Myth and Religion in Mircea Eliade* (New York, 2002), p. 15. Through recovery of this language, in Carmen's own words, 'we find ourselves looking once more at our Original Face' ('The language of birds', p. 14).

<sup>43</sup>'Forgotten practices of the past: Kaempfer's description of the Japanese Emperor', in B. Bodart-Bailey and D. Massarella (eds.), *The Furthest Goal: Engelbert Kaempfer's Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (Folkestone, 1995); CWCB, p. 161.

myth: first, explanatory, narrative myths, which ‘account for the workings of the universe around us’ and impose ‘on the visible world an ordered scheme’. The second type consisted of implicitly irrational myths which ‘possess a peculiar power over human rationality’. The latter type, perhaps more akin to ideology, ‘can bind groups and whole nations together into a common purpose’. She described the chauvinistic linguistic theories of the early modern nativist scholars Kamo no Mabuchi (1697–1769), Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801) and Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843). Their beliefs, she contended, belong to the category of myth that ‘possess [a] mysterious and terrifying power over the human mind’.<sup>44</sup> The assumption of the superiority of the Japanese language culminated in the theory that the Japanese race, too, was created superior, a belief which Carmen characterised as ‘less common than might be supposed’. Such irrational views had been discredited with Japan’s defeat in the Pacific War, but she added darkly that there were signs that ‘their grip on the Japanese mind may not entirely have relaxed’.<sup>45</sup> If this hints at some of the problematic aspects the school of Japanese folklore associated with Yanagida and Origuchi alluded to above, she did not develop the theme. But her final lecture at Oxford in 2001, delivered without notes when she was already experiencing symptoms of the Parkinson’s that was to disable her, fiercely exposed the fabrication of the Nationalist Shinto ideology derived from mythical traditions in the Meiji period.

#### IV

Carmen’s early accounts of religious phenomena were based on printed published sources, many from the medieval period. Increasingly, however, her work included field study, direct observation of the present state of the phenomena whose earlier history she had researched. Already by 1963 she was visiting the Nichiren temple of Barakisan Myôgyôji in Chiba prefecture, where she observed the Abbott, ‘a dignified and awe-inspiring person who had accomplished a strenuous programme of austerities’,<sup>46</sup> implementing a detailed catechism to subjects believed possessed by vengeful spirits. This was to provide material for her later (1981) paper

<sup>44</sup> ‘Two Shinto Myths’, p. 28.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> ‘The angry ghost in Japan’, in Davidson and Russell (eds.), *The Folklore of Ghosts*; CWCB, p. 56.

'The angry ghost in Japan'. An early paper, 'Initiation in the Shugendô' (1965), again drew on participant observation, here in the *akimine* [Autumn peak] ritual on Dewa Sanzan in the north of Japan. Here, library research felicitously combined with direct observation to provide a sense of how the rite had changed over its long history, leaving its typical latter-day initiate 'a faintly debased figure'.<sup>47</sup> Much later, her article, 'The Goddess emerges from her Cave: Fujita Himiko and her Dragon Palace family' (1994), is based entirely on Carmen's personal knowledge of Fujita, the founder of one of Japan's smaller, but most attractive, new religions, the Ryûgû Kazoku (Dragon Palace Family). Here, as elsewhere when describing apparently exotic beliefs, Carmen wrote in a nuanced style which presented her subject's sometimes bizarre views with sympathy but which delicately suspended or withheld authorial belief. Fujita claimed to be a reincarnation of the Sun Goddess, and to represent the gentle, female side of deity, to right a traditional distortion towards 'hard, war-like, masculine divinities'.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout her career and well into her retirement, Carmen was an annual visitor to Japan. The Cambridge summer Long Vacation could be used for the trips, first on the ten-day journey partly across Russia, latterly entirely by plane. Once there, she pursued her investigations into religious history and contemporary practice. She constantly took photos, and these and her diaries, bequeathed to the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures in Norwich, should be a valuable resource for future students of twentieth-century Japan. She took pleasure in sharing her field trips with students and friends. In Kyoto, she bicycled everywhere, as had been her wont since childhood. To accompany her was exhilarating, for she had infectious enthusiasm and a sense of fun. In 1964, visiting the Ittôen, a small religious community outside the city, she was delighted with what seemed an epiphany: suddenly, the stooped figure of the nonagenarian founder, Nishida Tenkô (1872–1968), appeared with his wife on a stone bridge over the pond in their garden, 'like Chinese immortals'. Later, touring the community farm, she delighted in the pigs poking their snouts in greeting through the bars of their cages. She took a small party to the top of Mt Hiei, the sacred mountain to the north-east of Kyoto.

<sup>47</sup>'Initiation in the Shugendô: the passage through the Ten States of Existence', in C. J. Bleeker (ed.), *Initiation, Studies in the History of Religions* (Supplement to *Numen*, 10) (Leiden, 1963); CWCB, p. 193.

<sup>48</sup>'The goddess emerges from her cave: Fujita Himiko and her Dragon Palace Family', in Peter Clarke and Jeffrey Somers (eds.), *Japanese New Religions in the West* (Folkestone, 1994); CWCB, p. 146.



Night came on and transport back to the city had ended for the day. The group trespassed in pitch darkness down the cable car track, fearful that at any moment a car might descend. But Carmen loudly repeated the esoteric Buddhist mantra of invulnerability, effectively, for level ground was reached without mishap. Her physical energy remained remarkable. In 1986, the historian of Victorian views of Japan, Professor Yokoyama Toshio, himself a mountaineer, accompanied her on a climb of Mt Tsurugi on Shikoku. Citing the ‘nimble surefootedness of a gazelle’, that William Gladstone had marvelled at in Isabella Bird, Yokoyama described Carmen’s ascent. His wife left far behind, he ‘had to try my very best to follow the fluttering lower ends of Carmen’s trousers that were occasionally visible ever further off through gaps in the increasingly dense clouds’.<sup>49</sup>

## V

The several qualities identified above are best exemplified in Carmen’s magnum opus, *The Catalpa Bow: a Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* (1975). The book is named after the catalpa tree (Japanese *azusa* [*betula grossa* var. *ulmifolia*])<sup>50</sup>, the hard wood of which was traditionally used to make bows. Shamans used such bows from early times to summon spirits. *The Catalpa Bow* rapidly became established as a classic, winning a readership beyond the world of Japanese Studies. The book is based on Carmen’s strengths: extensive reading in the Japanese historical and ethnographic literature combined with fieldwork in sacred places, mountains, lakes, temples, and shrines, and interviews with monks, priests, shamans, pilgrims and members of the Japanese public. Carmen performed the *kai-hōgyō*, a strenuous ritual circumambulation of Mt Hiei, failure at which was purported to require suicide; twice she participated in the week-long *akinomine* austerity on Mt Haguro in Yamagata Prefecture; three times she ascended Ontake, the sacred volcano that straddles the boundary between Nagano and Gifu Prefectures.

The book filled a lacuna in the Western literature on shamanism. Carmen’s work forms a pendant to Mircea Eliade’s seminal study of Asian Shamanism, which had largely omitted Japan. She saw Japanese shamanism as an outgrowth of its Siberian counterpart, though with a Polynesian

<sup>49</sup>Yokoyama Toshio, ‘Memories of Dr Carmen Blacker OBE, FBA (1924–2009)’, Address to memorial meeting at Clare Hall, November, 2009; published in *Sansai* (5) (April 2011), p. 132.

<sup>50</sup>A species of birch, less elegantly known as *yoguso minebari* or nightsoil mountain birch.

input and with the World Tree replaced by a Mountain. In this book, the 'paradisaal' theme of the primordial stratum of Japanese religiosity is less obtrusive than in her articles and addresses. Lived, observed, experience interested her and she reported it with empathy and felicity. Nonetheless, she confidently identified her modern shamanism as perpetuating a pre-Buddhist 'archaic mysticism'. This tradition, overlaid in early historical times by Buddhist influences, survived 'like mycelium under the ground'.<sup>51</sup> The book anatomises the two realms of the shamanic world view, sacred and profane, and the figure of the shaman, who mediates between them. It describes the supernatural beings and the changing location of the other world that they inhabit as, through Japanese protohistory, it shifted from the sea to the mountains. Carmen describes the acquisition of shamanic power through asceticism, involving mastery over both water and fire. A particularly vivid chapter conjures up the prehistoric or protohistoric shaman, the 'majestic sacral woman', based on recovered ancient *haniwa* (grave clay cylinder) images and also provides a critical summary of modern reconstructions of the cult, role and initiation of ancient shamans, based partly also on modern ethnography. The book includes Carmen's own typology of shamanic practice, broadly divided into the two types of ascetic healer and exorciser on the one hand and more passive medium on the other. She identified persistent shamanic elements in certain of the 'new religions'; and, from her own compelling and vivid observation, described surviving shamanic practices, including oracles and exorcisms in village and mountain contexts. All too often, these traditional practices were found to be faltering, weakened, or abandoned. In such cases, Carmen relied on the relatively recent, extensive Japanese ethnographic literature, of which she had a thorough knowledge. Part of this book's enduring value lies in its eloquent record of practices that were fading from history.

## VI

Carmen's approach to the study of Japanese religion won a degree of respect from the leading Japanese scholars of her field rarely accorded to foreign researchers. Professor Miyake Hitoshi, the *eminence grise* in the field of Japanese shamanism, wrote of how foreign scholars tended to apply their own preconceived methodologies to the study of Japanese

<sup>51</sup> Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow*, p. 32.

religion and to accommodate empirical evidence to these assumptions; their findings, in turn, fed back to the Japanese academic world, distorting understanding of Japanese religious experience. Carmen's approach was different:

Even when she came to Japan, she met first not with [Japanese] researchers, but with shamanic mediums and ascetics, personally participated in their practice, and shared their experiences. Then, later, she would discuss their recollections with evident pleasure and seek their opinions. The fruits of this participatory investigation over many years are presented [in *The Catalpa Bow*].

Carmen, he claimed, had provided the basic material for an understanding of shamanism, an intercultural phenomenon.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, in the eyes of Japanese, Carmen was the object of fascinated admiration, even awe. She spoke Japanese fluently, perhaps with a tinge of bookishness, in a distinctive feminine form, with honorific verb terminations and a lexicon appropriate for a woman of status. Female researchers of her generation still faced obstacles, particularly in the field of religious history, where taboos still operated. The rumour among students that in the interest of pursuing research she impersonated a man apparently has substance, at least in one instance.<sup>53</sup> But she largely overcame the difficulty by a combination of patent seriousness of purpose, energy, thorough preparation, personal charm and a sense of humour. At least once, at the Hayama *takusen* [oracular utterance] rite at Ôkua, near Sôma, Fukushima Prefecture, the taboo was waived for her personally.<sup>54</sup> Yet hindrances remained. In 1961, researching the initiatory rites of the Shugendô, she had been able as a woman only to proceed into the Yoshino hills as far as 'a spot where there stands a statue of Aizen Myôdô and a stone pillar inscribed with the words, "*korekara nyonin kinsei*"—No women allowed beyond here.' By 1972, the situation was somewhat relaxed and she made the journey again. Her patience was abundantly rewarded. She was among four women 'privileged to see for the first time the deep ravines, the paths winding deeper and deeper into the hills, now through forests of pine and cryptomeria, now emerging onto open hillsides of bamboo shrub and long grass, from which could be seen layer upon layer of blue hills rising from a lake of mist as though to the edge of the world.' However, the

<sup>52</sup> Miyake Hitoshi, 'Kaisetsu' [Introduction], in *Azusa yumi—Nihon ni okeru shâmanteki kôï*, tr. Akiyama Satoko (Tokyo, 1995), pp. 231–8.

<sup>53</sup> Personal communication from Dr Loewe.

<sup>54</sup> *The Catalpa Bow*, p. 263.

women were inevitably soon stopped. For the rest, Carmen had to rely on the reports of male observers.<sup>55</sup>

Sympathy with women is abundant in her published scholarship, especially *The Catalpa Bow*. Her most conspicuous gesture in this mode was her joint editorship, with Edward Shils, of *Cambridge Women: Twelve Portraits*,<sup>56</sup> for which, according to Shils, she did 'most of the work'.<sup>57</sup> Carmen wrote the preface, which is informed by a controlled anger at the social and institutional disabilities under which women suffered in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Cambridge, together with admiration for 'their passion for knowledge, their intellectual distinction and their powers of original and creative thinking'. She was never, however, an aggressive modern-style feminist. She had no use for what she referred to as 'gendered types, female figurations and androcentric premises'.<sup>58</sup>

## VII

Carmen also produced article-length essays and addresses on various contemporaries or near contemporaries. This category of work was important to her, for she gave it second place after 'Religion, myth and folklore' in her collected works.<sup>59</sup> These lively pieces are the most literary of her writings. They have something of the panache of Lytton Strachey, but wholly lack his sardonic intent. Many were contributions to the timely and praise-worthy effort led by the former ambassador to Japan Sir Hugh Cortazzi, Professors Ian Nish, Gordon Daniels and others, to record, while personal memories still survived, the activities of men and women whose lives had involved them with Japan since the Restoration of 1868. An air of vulnerability, of failed expectation, colourful eccentricity or under-appreciation, links many of Carmen's contributions in this genre. Many of her vignettes concerned personal acquaintances and had an autobiographical aspect. But some also concerned men who lived too early for Carmen to have met. First, in chronological order, was Laurence Oliphant, the brilliant and well-connected diplomat and latterly fundamentalist Christian, with his

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 215–16.

<sup>56</sup> Edward Shils and Carmen Blacker (eds.), *Cambridge Women: Twelve Portraits* (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, Edward Shils, 'Introduction', p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 'Preface', p. xix.

<sup>59</sup> CWCB, pp. 201–309.

'lilac gloves'.<sup>60</sup> Three English pioneers of Japanese studies, Ernest Satow, W. G. Aston and B. H. Chamberlain, are the subjects of an admiring lecture.<sup>61</sup> Another vivid account describes the folklorist Minakata Kumagusu, the subject of her first address when President of the Folklore Society. This must have electrified her audience: here was an individual of a kind dear to her heart, whose 'entire career was so eccentric, so flouting of every accepted convention, that for many years he was scarcely remembered, let alone honoured, in his own country'.<sup>62</sup> She spoke of his 'head-long erudition', and the 'demonic drive' and 'careless ferocity' of his scholarship: 'In summer he could not be bothered to wear any clothes, and would sit writing in his study stark naked. Stark naked likewise he would wander over to the other parts of the house when he needed food or company, though he was always careful to put on a loincloth or pants for meals.'<sup>63</sup>

Another Japanese expatriate was Yoshio Markino [Makino Yoshio],<sup>64</sup> the impressionist artist and writer, whose misty watercolours and prints of London and elsewhere are now eagerly collected and whose picaresque Japanese-English autobiographical writings still cause the reader to smile. Markino was repatriated to Japan early in the war and Carmen found him, living in penury, in Kamakura on her first visit to Japan. Only one of her portraits was of a woman, Marie Stopes, a friend of her father, the advocate of birth control, early enthusiast for Nô drama, and exchanger of passionate love letters with Japanese men. Carmen met her living in lonely grandeur in old age. She endorsed the view that Stopes was 'one of the most remarkable women of the twentieth century'.<sup>65</sup> Her tribute to Arthur Waley has already been quoted. She wrote an affectionate memoir of her friend Christmas Humphreys, the populariser of Buddhism, though she did not confront the banality of which Humphreys, a believer in Madame Blavatsky till his death, was capable.<sup>66</sup> Carmen's own early

<sup>60</sup>'Laurance Oliphant and Japan, 1858-1888', in Ian Nish (ed.), *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits*, vol. 2 (London, 1997); CWCB, pp. 632-73.

<sup>61</sup>Carmen Blacker, 'Three great Japanologists: Chamberlain, Aston and Satow'. Lecture given at the Ueno Gakuen to mark the British Festival, 1998; CWCB, pp. 295-309.

<sup>62</sup>The following quotations concerning Minakata are from 'Minakata Kumagusu: a neglected Japanese genius', *Folklore*, 94 (2) (1983), 139-52.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>64</sup>'Yoshio Markino, 1869-1956', in Ian Nish (ed.), *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits*, vol. 1 (Folkestone, 1994); CWCB, pp. 248-61.

<sup>65</sup>'Marie Stopes and Japan', in Sir Hugh Cortazzi and Gordon Daniels (eds.), *Britain and Japan: Themes and Personalities* (London, 1991); CWCB, p. 222.

<sup>66</sup>'Christmas Humphreys and Japan', in Nish, *Britain and Japan*; CWCB, pp. 274-81

instructor in Japanese, Major General F. S. G. Piggott and his father, Sir Francis Taylor Piggott, were both commemorated. Both were ardent Japanophiles; both could have stepped from the pages of an Anthony Powell novel. The father had been an adviser to the Meiji government on constitutional law, and Carmen vividly evokes the social life of expatriates in the early phase of Westernisation in Tokyo. The son, fluent in Japanese and a calligrapher ‘of skill and elegance’, became military attaché to the British Embassy in Tokyo during the period leading up to the Second World War. It was he who, on return to England, had given the schoolgirl Carmen her first lessons in Japanese. He appears to have suffered from a military man’s necessarily selective myopia, bolstered by his innocent love of the country. Amazingly, as Carmen observed ‘[H]e was apparently completely unaware of the ominous signs of the rise of ultranationalism, of totalitarian military rule, of the aberrant Shinto cult of the emperor’. For him, Pearl Harbor ‘came as an incomprehensible shock’.<sup>67</sup> She venerated him, as she put it elsewhere, as ‘a type of human being who was very soon to become extinct’.<sup>68</sup>

These vignettes will be read for their period feel and delight in human quirkiness. Carmen vividly brings to life her subjects’ often remarkable talents, their colourful eccentricities and their adversities. If this category of her work tends to lionise, the same generous spirit also informs her reviews.<sup>69</sup> These are often descriptive as much as critical. Occasionally, there is a flash of anger, as against Edmund Blunden’s ongoing exploitation of his Japanese mistress<sup>70</sup> and Jean Herbert’s falsification of Shinto in *Shinto. At the Fountainhead of Japan* (London, 1967). This book, on grounds carefully documented in her review, Carmen declared ‘deserve[s] to be ... forgotten’.<sup>71</sup>

## VIII

Carmen’s academic home for most of her life was Cambridge. She was lecturer in Japanese for nearly four decades, until her retirement in 1991.

<sup>67</sup> ‘The two Piggotts: Sir Francis Taylor Piggott and Major General F. S. G. Piggott’, in Cortazzi and Daniels, *Britain and Japan*; CWCB, pp. 231–2

<sup>68</sup> ‘Introduction’, CWCB, p. 2.

<sup>69</sup> A selection of her reviews is found in CWCB, pp. 313–45.

<sup>70</sup> ‘Review of Sumie Okada, *Edmund Blunden and Japan—the History of a Relationship*’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 Dec. 1988; CWCB, pp. 324–5.

<sup>71</sup> ‘Introduction’, CWCB, p. 4.

At first attached to Newnham, she became a founding fellow of the new graduate college, Clare Hall, in 1965. Within her own Faculty of Oriental Studies at Cambridge, Carmen would have admitted to frustrations. Yet her dedication to Japanese Studies and to learning was unquestionable. Loftily, she regarded scholarship as a vocation rather than a profession or occupation and was scornful of the unionisation of university teachers. In part, she must have seen scholarship as a humanist challenge to preserve values threatened in the modern world. As a teacher, she could be fierce, but many former students remember her with gratitude. Her erudition and the intensity of her own commitment to her field inspired, her eloquence and aura of flamboyance dazzled. Carmen gave a course of lectures on Tokugawa intellectual history for Part II of the Japanese Studies tripos, but much of her teaching consisted of reading premodern texts with undergraduates. In these translation supervisions, she insisted on good English style; arrows, for instance, were always 'loosed' or 'shot', never 'fired'. Among her students not a few pursued academic careers, several in fields related to Carmen's own: D. B. Waterhouse (matriculated 1959), distinguished scholar of woodblock prints; James McMullen (1959), researcher in Japanese Confucianism; Richard Bowring (1965), literary scholar and historian of Japanese religion; Peter Nosco (1971), intellectual historian; and John Breen (1975), specialist in Tokugawa Shinto. Others took a different path: Rupert Faulkner (1973) and Clare Pollard (1985) became art historians and museum curators primarily interested in Japanese ceramics. None of these quite followed in her particular path into folklore and mythology. In that respect, her closest heir is the French anthropologist Dr Anne-Marie Bouchy, whom Carmen never formally taught, but whom she greatly admired.

Though conscientious over her academic duties, Carmen balked at the bureaucracy of academic administration. She was detached from the technological progress in language pedagogy that made such great strides during her time. Her own experience of learning Japanese in the 1940s had been of a different sort, ascetic, almost religious in intensity. It was 'best described as a *shugyō*, a discipline of mind, body and spirit. It required dedication, concentration, willingness to sacrifice frivolities.'<sup>72</sup> Her early colleagues in Japanese Studies at Cambridge, Eric Ceadal, later appointed University Librarian, J. R. McEwan, intellectual historian, Douglas Mills, the historian of medieval literature, and the very reserved American historian, Charles Sheldon, had been wartime contemporaries and friends.

<sup>72</sup>'Introduction', CWCB, p. 3.

After their departure by the early 1980s, she felt isolated. If a brittleness, even fractiousness, could lead to personal antipathies, there was also playfulness or mischief from her side. Visitors to her third-floor office in the Faculty of Oriental Studies were offered Japanese tea. She would open the window and, averting her face, empty the dregs onto the path below: 'I always hope that this will land on the head of Professor [x]', she once confessed. More seriously, she could be sharp tongued or impatient; old friendships could sour. Such contradictions seemed incongruous in one otherwise so conspicuously courteous, so given to imaginative generosity and gestures of sympathy. In a different direction, she could sound anti-American, yet she prided herself on being able to recite the names of all the states of the Union. She enjoyed visiting the United States and Canada, and had many North American friends.

Whatever the case, obscurely to the outside world, she was never awarded an *ad hominem* chair or readership within her faculty. But if her experience there was sometimes difficult, there was a momentous success. Staff retirements in the 1980s had left Carmen as the only senior full-time teacher of Japanese, and there was a real danger that the subject might be closed. There was talk of amalgamating the teaching of Japanese with Oxford. Appalled, Carmen appealed to the then British Ambassador in Tokyo, Sir Hugh Cortazzi, an old friend from her SOAS days, for help. His intervention led to a substantial benefaction from the Japanese Keidanren and Tokyo Electric Power Company. This founded a chair in Japanese Studies. Carmen herself made an eloquent speech of gratitude in the University Senate, but ruled herself out as a candidate for the chair, which was first held by her pupil Richard Bowring. Cambridge Japanese Studies had been saved. Carmen retired six years later.

In due course, Carmen's distinctive contribution to Japanese Studies was to be honoured. In addition to her Presidency of the Folklore Society 1982–4, she was elected Honorary Member in 1988; she was awarded the Order of the Precious Crown by the Government of Japan in 1988; was elected to Fellowship of the British Academy in 1989 and an Honorary Fellow of Somerville College, Oxford in 1991; received the Minakata Kumagusu Prize in 1997; a Japan Festival Award in 2001; and was appointed OBE in 2004. She received visiting academic appointments. As early as 1968, she toured Australia giving the Charles Strong Memorial Lectures. She was Visiting Professor at several North American universities: Columbia (1965–6); Princeton (1979); and Toronto (1992). In Japan, she was Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Humanistic Sciences, University of Kyoto in 1986. From 1986 annually until illness prevented her from



making the journey, she was Visiting Professor also at Ueno Gakuen University, whose President, the poet and scholar of Irish literature Ishibashi Hiro, had been a friend since their student days at Keio.

In 1975, she and her partner and later husband, the notable scholar of Han Dynasty China, Michael Loewe, had settled in Willow House in Grantchester. There, they jointly brought out two edited volumes on fields of mutual interest: *Ancient Cosmologies* (London, 1975) and *Divination and Oracles* (New York, 1981). Their numerous friends and acquaintances resembled the figures whom Carmen commemorated in print and lectures. They included royalty: the present Empress of Japan and her daughter, with whom she discussed folklore; Prince Charles, whom she advised on the *Dajôsai* [Japanese coronation ceremony] and at whose invitation she spent a weekend at Sandringham; the Dalai Lama; Sir Laurens van der Post; David Wilson (Lord Wilson), formerly Governor of Hong Kong; Sir Hugh Cortazzi, sometime ambassador to Japan and biographer of Japan hands; Owen Chadwick, eminent ecclesiastical historian and vice-chancellor; Edward Shils, the Anglophile American sociologist; Laurence Picken, the eminent historian of East Asian music; Donald Keene, leading American translator of Japanese literature; and Hugh Trevor-Roper (Lord Dacre), with whom Carmen had in common wartime work in intelligence, and with whose preoccupation with the literary aspect of scholarly writing she surely sympathised. As is also reported of Trevor-Roper, Carmen was a gracious correspondent. Perhaps it was true of her as has been written of Trevor-Roper, she ‘was more at ease in ... letter-writing where ... human contact [could] be essayed within protective limits’.<sup>73</sup> Carmen was also active in old-established London learned societies. In addition to the Folklore Society, she was at various times a member of the Japan Society; the Asiatic Society of Japan; the Buddhist Society; the Royal Asiatic Society; the Sherlock Holmes Society, for whom she composed a special test of knowledge; and the Victorian Association. She also acted as president of the British Association of Japanese Studies, the professional organisation for university teachers and scholars in the Japan field, in 1981–2.

<sup>73</sup> Blair Worden, ‘Hugh Redwald Trevor-Roper 1914–2003’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 150, *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows*, VI (2008), 259.

## IX

All committed students of premodern Japan, possibly of any premodern society, are faced at some level with a sense of loss: the depletion of the distinctively traditional and particular in the face of material progress and the cultural convergence of globalisation. Carmen would surely have conceded that modern Japanese live healthier and freer lives than their predecessors, but she wrote of ‘living in what René Guenon called the impoverished reality of the modern world’.<sup>74</sup> She reacted against the erosion of tradition with intensity.

There is much to be said ... for being old enough to have seen Japan before tower blocks, computers, television screens and mobile phones so drastically changed the scene ... B. H. Chamberlain wrote that old Japan was like an oyster; force it open and many things beautiful and precious die. He might have said the same of the changes that have taken place since those of my generation first saw Japan.<sup>75</sup>

Carmen’s life and work are testimony to her passionate attempt to understand and record the world whose imminent loss she deplored. She could not stop history, but, half a century after receiving Baba Tatsui’s *Elementary Grammar* as her mother’s gift, she expressed gratitude for ‘the joys, the treasures and the enrichment of my life, which [have come] to me through the study of Japanese’.<sup>76</sup> Posterity, in turn, owes her no small gratitude for the eloquence and sympathy with which she has shared her exploration and documentation of a vanishing world.

In 1994, cycling into Cambridge from Grantchester, Carmen fell and broke a hip. She never fully recovered but developed disquieting symptoms, including vertigo. Eventually, she was diagnosed with the Parkinson’s Disease that came to restrict her mobility, preventing her from travelling to Japan. Nonetheless, she lived to complete her English translation of the nineteenth-century Japanese novel *Mukashi-gatari inazuma byôshi* under the title *The Straw Sandal* (Folkestone, 2008). This was a farrago of magic and violence, a project begun fifty years earlier at the suggestion of Arthur Waley. But this most energetic of scholars entered a slow decline, her suffering mitigated only by the devoted care of Michael Loewe. Enigmatically, until she became too ill, she had appeared on Sunday mornings in the

<sup>74</sup>‘The *Shinza* or God-seat in the *Daijôsai*: throne, bed or incubation couch?’, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, 17 (2–3) (1990); CWCB, p. 97.

<sup>75</sup>‘Introduction’; CWCB, p. 2.

<sup>76</sup>‘Recollections of Baba Tatsui’s *Elementary Grammar*’; CWCB, p. 203.

back of her parish church in Grantchester, to ‘observe the liturgy’. She died on her eighty-fifth birthday, 13 July 2009, at the Hope Nursing Home, Cambridge. Her funeral, part Buddhist, part Christian, was held in the parish church. She would have appreciated the violent thunderstorm which broke out that morning but had cleared when the cortege left the church for her cremation.

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*Note.* In compiling this memoir, I have received suggestions and advice from many friends and colleagues. I should acknowledge special information from Professor Peter Kornicki, FBA, Dr Michael Loewe, Professor David McMullen, FBA, Professor Matsuzawa Hiroaki, Professor Noel Pinnington, and Professor Yokoyama Toshio.