



One Robe, One Bowl: The Zen Poetry of Ryokan

John Stevens

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The

hermit-monk Ryokan, long beloved in Japan both for his poetry and for his character, belongs in the tradition of the great Zen eccentrics of China and Japan. His reclusive life and celebration of nature and the natural life also bring to mind his younger American contemporary, Thoreau. Ryokan's poetry is that of the mature Zen master, its deceptive simplicity revealing an art that surpasses artifice. Although Ryokan was born in eighteenth-century Japan, his extraordinary poems, capturing in a few luminous phrases both the beauty and the pathos of human life, reach far beyond time and place to touch the springs of humanity.

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