

## THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

it is the systematic completeness of his answer that is original. His second answer, though, will surprise some readers. Evil is, of course, a practical problem, one that everyone must face and respond to constructively; but the theoretical problem of evil is illusory. It arises from premises that have not been rightly positioned. As the Buddha himself would say, the question is not well put.

A book that settles the problem of evil justifies its existence by that accomplishment alone, but in this book that achievement shares honors with many. Reading its pages, I sensed more than once that they may be those of a "non-returner." The spirit that infuses them seems bound for the Himalayas he loved and brought so many of us to love. The Himalayas and *śūnyata* beyond.

HUSTON SMITH

*A ZEN WAVE: Bashō's Haiku and Zen.* By Robert Aitken, with a foreword by W. S. Merwin. New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1978. 192 pp. with illustrations; glossary, list of Japanese equivalents of Chinese names, notes.

The haiku is not an easy form to discuss. It sets up the kind of resistance to interpretation which makes most of the usual critical approaches to the text seem redundant. In this sense the form seems 'beyond interpretation', persistently deflecting the critic, pushing him towards more peripheral exegetic activities, towards easier options, such as writing its history (its origins and development), or its poetics (the grammar of its forms), or its 'psycho-genetics' (the background 'experience' which went to produce it). Each of these approaches may at least have the merit of presenting fresh information.

An engagement with its 'content' sets up the greatest resistance. The haiku exemplifies that form which eludes fixed significations, the easy extrapolation of 'themes'; it arrests the mind in its movement from image to concept; it represents the miniature form whose 'content' is forever deferred. Thus it offers minimal rewards in the way of representation (it says nothing *about* Mount Fuji or about Suma in summer or Kiso in autumn, thus tempting commentators to fill in the gaps which the haiku itself opens up); it has little metaphorical density (meanings are not projected on an axis of similarities); and it is plainly misguided to read it as symbolism.

How then can a critic engage with such an elusive form? How pin-point effects produced by verbal gestures or *tracks* which seem to vanish when scrutinized? How discourse on a text which refuses to yield up its 'truth'? How be 'serious' about a form whose name means 'play verse'?

In *A Zen Wave* Robert Aitken has found a way into the haiku which is at

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once ingenious and fruitful. He selects twenty-six of Bashō's mature haiku (those written mainly on pilgrimages during the last decade of his life) and locates them in the context of Zen teaching and 'realisation' (Aitken Rōshi occasionally resorts to the kind of historical and biographical exegesis outlined above but in a way which is never unwieldy or cumbersome). Thus for a moment (the space of a short talk) he illuminates the 'site' of each haiku, lets it briefly shine out, and then extinguish itself without trace. Appropriately he concludes each talk with a haiku (generally one of his own), a splendid inter-textual gesture re-enacting the traditional response, 'interpreting' one haiku by producing another.

In presenting these talks Aitken eschews any hint of a developing sequence, of a serial argument upon which the reader can settle. Instead each talk is its own spatial 'moment'; it rotates around a centre-less centre, and like the haiku upon which it comments it *detonates* in contingent 'flashes' of insight. His approach owes much to Daisetz Suzuki and to the improvisational style of the 1960's, weaving together, informally, exposition with anecdote, Zen 'doctrine' with its mondos and fables, personal with literary allusion (if the approach can be faulted it is for those simplisms parading as insights which were endemic to the 60's cultural scene, and for its designating as 'shallow' concepts what are really dead metaphors).

Each of the talks is prefaced by a word-for-word translation (from the Romanized Japanese), a literal configuration out of which the haiku, as unmediated gesture or *showing*, explodes—a shock-effect absorbed by those spatial and temporal 'buffers' and by the fixed point of view which constitutes the English translation. Take, for example, 'The Shepherd's Purse' (upon which Aitken bases his meditation on 'suchness'):

Carefully looking-when  
*nazuna* flower blooms  
hedge!

When I look carefully—  
*Nazuna* is blooming  
Beneath the hedge.

[p. 74]

The free-wheeling commentary which follows first places the *nazuna* weed in the context of *seeing* (detached, that is, from the competitive value-systems associated with more conventionally exquisite flowers). Then Suzuki's name is invoked, and through it the 'doctrinal' dimension is subtly intruded. *Seeing* involves the interpenetration of noetic, affective and conative activities, the three-in-one of prajñā-intuition, through which Aitken actualizes the day-to-day activity of *seeing* the flower, of 'seeing, appreciating, and sharing' it. This in turn leads to reflections on how people actually *see*, on how 'compassion' discloses the flower in contrast to that 'self-centred arrogance' (man's inveterate ethnocentricity) which conceals it from view (Aitken Rōshi's special irritation is reserved for those who refuse compassion on the grounds of its 'dishonesty',

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its untruth to their feelings. 'To what are you being honest. . . . You do not belong here', he comments). Finally the talk is dissolved, transformed into a further mini-text on *seeing*, Ta-lung's rejoinder to a question about the fixed Dharma body, 'The mountain flowers bloom like brocade;/The river between the hills is blue as indigo.'

Or consider Aitken's treatment of the haiku called 'Dreams' (upon which he bases his meditation on 'play'):

You butterfly	You are the butterfly	
I Chuang-tzu of	And I the dreaming heart	
dream mind	Of Chuang-tzu.	[p. 125]

The context, of course, is Chuang-tzu's celebrated dream of the butterfly dreaming he was Chuang-tzu, and (by extension) of the world itself as 'great dream', the proliferation of fictional forms. The talk's key-word is 'dream' through which the commentary is opened up to the dimensions of 'world-play'; of language as free-play, the *present*-ing of the world through the dissemination of signs which elude definitive meanings; of friendship as the play of intimate presentation; of sangha play and even the solemn tea-ceremony which is 'play, nonetheless'; and of that ultimate play which collapses dichotomies and in which 'all points reflect all other points'. At this point the talk is dissolved, transformed into yet another dream-poem (a surprisingly one-dimensional text, however, packed with dead tropes, whose opening line is 'All action is like a dream').

This is a rather solemn and truncated account of Aitken's lively and play-ful achievement. At only one level was I made persistently aware of a lack, an absence of any real consideration of *readerly* activity (given the emphasis of the talks this might well have had genuine relevance). Aitken keeps mainly to Bashō's 'side' of the haiku, to his background, his development, his experience, thus locating the reader *in front of* the text. He might also have made the experiment of placing the reader *within* it. I can best illustrate what I mean by taking that vertiginous haiku, 'The Goi':

Lightning!	A flash of lightning;	
darkness of side goes	Through the darkness goes	
night heron of cry	The scream of a night heron.	[p. 101]

The commentary centres on the implications of these light and darkness metaphors, and on Bashō's own play on the double-sense of the word 'goi' (it can mean both 'heron' and the five degrees of 'interfusion of the universal and the particular'). It concludes that the haiku articulates 'our deepest experience' in which 'the scream and the lightning are one with the darkness, and the sighs of the poet and reader alike'. However illuminating this is as commentary it

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seems an inadequate response to the dynamics of reading the haiku (paradoxically Aitken is occasionally trapped by a critical vocabulary which reinscribes the 'subject' of experience at precisely that level of 'subjectivity' which the haiku dissolves). An alternative reading might displace the metaphor of the reader as 'fixed subject' (one with heights and depths of experience) with that of an open 'site' or expanding 'field' of awareness.

Such a transformational reading might engage with the 'Goi' haiku as a system of vanishing signs in which language enacts its own evanescence. It might posit a fracture, a vertiginous 'site' at which lightning and the darkness collide. It might point to a 'void' (the void-core of language whose 'form is emptiness') simultaneously reconstituted as vanishing sound, the eerie scream of the heron which materializes the darkness ('emptiness is form'). Thus the reader becomes the 'site' of a vanishing, a *dissolve* ('emptiness emptying itself'), the de-creation which each reading enacts.

This mere sketch (much compressed) of an alternative approach in no sense 'contradicts' that of Aitken Rōshi. On the contrary both may be viewed as variants on the single production which is the haiku itself.

GERALD DOHERTY

*A ZEN FOREST: SAYINGS OF THE MASTERS.* Translated by Sōiku Shigematsu, with a foreword by Gary Snyder. Tokyo and New York: Weatherhill, 1981. xiv + 178 pp.; appendix with Chinese originals and romanized Japanese readings, glossary, bibliography.

As we in the West may sense from the *Wu Men Kuan*, the *Pi Yen Lu*, the *Denkōroku*, and other collections of classic Zen Buddhist dialogues and stories, poetry plays an important role in Zen teaching. Such commentators as Hsüeh-tou and Keizan use poetry as well as prose in explicating their cases, and in the *Pi Yen Lu* we even find Hsüeh-tou making a poetical comment, and then Yüan-wu adding a capping verse to Hsüeh-tou's poem.

Perhaps deriving from this use of verses in the *Pi Yen Lu*, koan practice in Japan often involves a capping-verse exercise called *jakugo*. After resolving a koan to the teacher's satisfaction, the student may be asked to find a verse that will be appropriate to the point just made. Finding exactly the suitable verse helps the student to clarify the koan and to personalize its significance.

Sōkei-an Sasaki summarized the use of *jakugo* briefly in *Cat's Yawn*, and translated some examples. Isshū Miura and Ruth Fuller Sasaki gave a more complete account of the practice in *Zen Dust*, and translated many more. Other translations of the verses are scattered in the writings of D. T. Suzuki and