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Sanskrit original. Whenever the meaning of the text is not unequivocally clear it is necessary to consult the Sanskrit texts in order to see whether this can help us to understand Kumārajīva's translation. However, one must be careful not to force its meaning into strict correspondence with the Sanskrit text when the construction of the Chinese text does not allow such interpretation. It would be highly desirable to study the text with the help of a Sinologist who has a good knowledge of Chinese literature of the period between the Han and Sui dynasties.

A careful study of Kumārajīva's translation of the Lotus Sūtra and of other texts is required for a better knowledge of his translation methods. Only through a much more exact knowledge of Kumārajīva's vocabulary and style is it possible to arrive at a correct appreciation of the value of his translations in those cases in which no Sanskrit original has survived. Kumārajīva's translation of the Lotus Sūtra has been studied mainly from the religious and philosophical points of view. However, just as any other text, it has to be studied in the first place as a *text* with the help of sound philological methods. This does not mean that the traditional exegesis has to be completely discarded. The history of the Lotus Sūtra in China and Japan cannot be understood without knowledge of the commentaries. The primary meaning of Kumārajīva's translation of the Lotus Sūtra and the traditional exegesis are two different things which have to be clearly distinguished. The translations by Katō and Murano contain only very few notes and give in this respect much less than, for instance, Sakamoto in the annotation to his translation. It is to be hoped that a future translator will point out in notes the interpretations given by Chih-i and other Buddhist scholars. This would be of great benefit, especially for the English reader who is unfamiliar with the traditional exegesis of the Lotus Sūtra in China and Japan.

J. W. DE JONG.

ZEN AND THE COMIC SPIRIT. By Conrad Hyers. Rider & Co. Ltd.: London and The Westminster Press, 192 pp.

To the Western mind, religion is anything but a laughing matter and therefore Conrad Hyers's "Zen and the Comic Spirit" will, I hope, provide many people with a much needed and enjoyable initiation into a mode of spirituality which dispenses with solemnity and churchy frown.

"Humor means freedom," says Dr. Hyers, as he sets out to corroborate Bergson's and Freud's views of laughter as an expression of liberation, or perhaps

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more precisely: as release from the existential tensions of living within the confines of Avidya. He does this with such admirable thoroughness, that one wonders if he has skipped even a single *mondo*, *waka*, *haiku*, remotely imbued with the comic spirit. The book, although meticulously documented and indexed, is nevertheless remarkably free from academic pedantry and tedium, which would be incompatible with this treasury of chuckles, guffaws and double entendres from the very pinnacles of human awareness. Dr. Hyers has a knack for retelling, arranging and weaving these specimens into a whole without ever giving the impression of "swallowing the saliva of other people . . . accumulating heaps of *curiosa* and antiquities." (Ummon)

The joke of Zen, after all, is on "the World" (the World being the spurious, delusional value system of Avidya that makes up our precariously explosive fabric of antagonistic coexistences). Zen views this "World" with a radical realism that is the precise opposite of the naive realism of the Realpolitiker, as the tragicomic joke it is, a jest of cosmic proportions in which the supposedly solid Form we are—and have the illusion of manipulating—is perceived as sheer Emptiness, and vice versa, the prototypical joke of existence that is non-existence, but a non-existence which nevertheless is very much the only existence we have.

Dr. Hyers in one of his many happy turns of phrase says of the philosophy of Descartes: . . . when all is in doubt, we retreat to the seemingly impregnable refuge of the reflective self: *cogito ego sum*. . . . There is no small irony in the fact that what is the fundamental illusion for Buddhist experience is taken as the fundamental axiom of Cartesian thought," and he speaks of Zen's repugnance against "moralizing in the abstract."

He demonstrates eloquently how Zen's total iconoclasm, its thoroughgoing demythologization, its de-idolization of words and concepts has the paradoxical effect of re-sacralizing life, so that "the whole range of earthly life is opened up as a sacred mystery"—meanwhile never losing sight of Bodhidharma's "a vast Emptiness, Sire, and nothing holy in it."

And yet, when Hyers poses the rhetorical questions: "Is reality serious as we habitually suppose and not humorous?" he makes me feel uncomfortable. In our time the limitless continuum of cruelty and violence, the cumulative folly of "the world" has become so monstrous that my unenlightened mind is all too often assaulted beyond laughter or even tears.

It is not that Dr. Hyers lacks sensitivity to suffering. On the contrary, there are many places in the book where he alludes to the affinity between humor and

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compassion (I do not remember who said that humor is a sense of the tragic wittingly expressed). At most one would have liked an even fuller emphasis on the character of Zen's laughter being the very opposite of any mirth that issues from anywhere but from Prajna, the inseparable concomitant of Karuna. Within the non-existence of existence, the unspeakable suffering of beings is so real that I wonder if the Bodhisattva's smile wouldn't fade in contemplating the contemporary torture camps of Chile, Brazil, the gas-ovens of Auschwitz, etc. etc. and whether even a Sengai would discover there "a way of life in the midst of death, and burst out in hearty laughter." The eye of Zen is indeed focused beyond both the serious and the comic.

Perhaps these remarks reflect more on the idiosyncrasies of the reviewer than on any deficiency in Dr. Hyers's admirable compendium of Zen humor. With all the high appreciation I have for Nansen I could probably not have helped to berate the master for his didactic vivisection on the cat, telling him that a religious attitude to life which in its twenty-five hundred years of tradition has not produced a single auto-da-fé, nor personalities à la Torquemada, Savonarola or Calvin, should be able to dispense with the killing of a single kitten for teaching purposes. I wonder what Nansen's rejoinder would have been. . . .

"Zen and the Comic Spirit" is an appropriately goodhumored, beautifully written, often witty and always learned, summing up of a most lovable and admirable aspect of Zen. It is a triumphant demonstration that not—as we have been told so often—is it only one single step from the sublime to the ridiculous, but that from the ridiculous to the sublime there is not even a step to be taken.

FREDERICK FRANCK

AN OUTLINE OF PRINCIPAL METHODS OF MEDITATION. Translated from the Chinese by Sujitkumar Mukhopadhyaya. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press: Pondicherry, 1972, 53 pp.

The present work is a translation of the *Ssu-wei-lüeb-yao-fa* 思惟略要法, a Buddhist meditation text which gives a concise account of ten kinds of meditation chosen from among those prevalent in early Mahayana Buddhism in India and presumably in Central Asia. The ten are: 1] meditation on the Four Immeasurable Minds, 2] meditation on impurities, 3] meditation on white bone, 4] meditation on the image of Buddha, 5] meditation on the real Buddha, 6] meditation on the dharmakaya of Buddha, 7] meditation on Buddhas of the ten directions, 8] meditation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life, 9] meditation on the