

BOOK REVIEWS

SENGAI, THE ZEN MASTER. By Daisetz T. Suzuki. Faber & Faber: London, 1971, 191 pp., 128 pl.

To be asked—especially by the journal he founded—to review the last book Suzuki Daisetz prepared for publication, I feel as a rare privilege, for he is one of the three men—each one creative and vigorous in spirit till his last day, each one over eighty when I met him—whom I revere as the decisive influences of my life.

The others are Albert Schweitzer with whom I worked in his Lambaréné Hospital and Pope John XXIII, whose Vatican Council I witnessed in hundreds of drawings. I discovered Suzuki Daisetz's works thirty years ago and he has been my daily companion ever since.

For Albert Schweitzer I have the deepest respect. He was a great man, who developed each one of his potentialities to its utmost limit. Both D.T. Suzuki and Pope John went a little further... They were, I am convinced, true Bodhisattvas, whose enlightened lives bore extraordinary fruit.

Pope John smiled away the phantasm of a frozen, monolithic establishment as the embodiment, the absolute monopoly of all wisdom and grace. Like Hyaku-jō he opened his arms wide and thereby gave the wordless sermon which all men understood instantly. Pointing at a certain throne he said: "If I sit on that chair I am infallible. That is why I shall never sit on it!" Ever since his death concerted efforts have been being made to restore "law and order."

Sengai, sticking his head out of the window to announce: "I am not home," reminds one of Pope John, saying to an audience of chattering women: "If you are not quiet, I'll bless you right away and go back to my room." Pope John's innumerable anecdotes are the first *mondō* to come out of Rome. D.T. Suzuki is the voice of Buddhism, of Zen, crying in the Western wilderness, when all its ideologies, all values, had failed. It is his undying merit to have dispelled almost singlehandedly the persistent misinterpretations of Buddhism as a nega-

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

tivistic, pessimistic, nihilistic attitude towards life and the world. After Suzuki it has become more difficult for Christian apologists to present Buddhism as no more than an antipasto for the Last Supper. He planted a seed for which the Western soil was ready and where it may well come to its own, unexpected fruition. If there has ever been a moment when it appeared as if "Zen-Snobbi-mus" (Ernst Benz) might be all that Suzuki's efforts had reached in the West, which I disbelieve, it has passed long ago. What has remained is a leavening which has deeply and positively affected the lives of innumerable men and women, for whom D.T. Suzuki continues to be a "pocket guru," a portable roshi.

If to the superficial reader he seems to repeat himself in his many books, it is because in his desire to transmit the unsayable by means of words, Suzuki expressed his message in innumerable ways, approached both his subject and the reader with infinite patience from every possible angle in order to establish contact on a great variety of levels of awareness. His complete works might well be re-issued under the collective title of "Introduction to Zen Buddhism," for in each one of his books he starts afresh as it were, attempting to introduce his readers to their most intimate Self, to the Original Face.

As Pope John disclaimed being a theologian, Suzuki denied being a scholar. Both were transparent beings, sages, who showed in their words and deeds the deepest concern for concrete human beings, manifesting Prajna-Karuna. Pope John left as his Last Will that most human of encyclicals, "Pacem in Terris" ("Peace on Earth"). Suzuki left as his, the marvellous posthumous article written at age ninety, "Self the Unattainable" (*E.B.* Vol. III, no. 2), and this delightful book on Sengai, a "transcendental humorist," an uncanonized artist.

The text of *Sengai, the Zen Master* seems at first deceptively simple and familiar to the experienced reader of D.T. Suzuki, as if it were just another set of variations on the themes which return in the "Essays," in *Essence of Buddhism*, the *Doctrine of No-Mind*, and in his other books. Then, slowly it dawns on one that in this last serious game with his enlightened insights, gently avoiding all didactic devices, he has concealed a real summing up, a final elucidation of, for instance, the advaitistic nature of Zen, of the ego as identical with Absolute Emptiness, of the doctrine of identity and difference, of "aspiration is realization." He even keeps his old promise, to elaborate on his indispensable Kegon lecture of 1947!

BOOK REVIEWS

But what about this Sengai, in whom I somehow recognize a colleague?

He was not considered as a professional artist, but this is unimportant. Edouard Manet said: "In art there are no professionals or amateurs, there are only good or bad painters." Like Sengai's, my preferred medium is drawing, that simplest and most direct of media which does not allow of correction, which shows up all subterfuge.

Basil Gray, in his comment, refers to Sengai's drawings as "illustrations," but Sengai is no illustrator! One might as well assert that he illustrated his drawings with haiku as the other way around. He draws as spontaneously as Bashō's frog goes plop in the pond.

Not as a critic but as a fellow artist of Sengai's, let me try to say something about the experience of drawing: The process, the discipline of drawing is the refinement, the sensitization of a reflex-arc which runs from the eye through the existential whole of the artist to the hand, which, like a seismograph, precipitates a line, a sign, on the paper. Any interference by the critical, conceptualizing ego spoils the process of drawing and adds devices, shortcuts, stylistic tricks which may be attractive or interesting, but which are a falsification of the authentic act of drawing, which thereby may well become "illustration."

Authentic drawing is simply and purely precipitated perception, in which all objects become equivalent appearances on the retina, affirmed by the hand that merely notes down in obedience. It is at the same time a process of identification. I become what I draw, yet remain myself. I become cabbage, saint or turtle while I draw them; without this identification I cannot draw a straight line. Hence too, turtle, cabbage and saint become equivalent to one another and to me. They become non-objects. The signs on the paper, however, are reconstituted by the beholder as objects, and may therefore easily be interpreted as humorous, as caricature, even as subversive. True drawing questions all establishments including the art establishment. This pure, authentic drawing is what strikes me in Sengai. Appearances come to his eye out of Emptiness, are precipitated as signs, before—split seconds later—they return into Nothingness, so that the eye-to-hand reflex hardly has time to catch them. "Even before I can say it is like a flash of lightning or a dew drop, it is no more," Sengai says. Yet, it has been caught on the wing by the unself-conscious brush, which has become a mere extension of the artist's hand, which in turn is the instrument of the perceiving eye (1).

THE EASTERN BUDDHIST

I had better put "artist" in quotes, because Sengai almost certainly would disdain the title. He obviously did not create as a self-consciously "artistic" organism. Hence he is not rewarded with inclusion in the anthologies and official collections and remains eternally a discovery, like the sculptor Enkū.

I am a little doubtful about the authorship of a few of these drawings. Not being an art historian I may well be mistaken, but in works like "Buddha and his attendants" (p. 40) I do not see the striking, authentic handwriting (sometimes curiously akin to the work of members of the contemporary Cobra Group, Alechinsky, Appel, Lucebert), which is so unmistakable for instance in the Monju Bosatsu (p. 51), who has not come to bring a quick, smooth peace, but the Sword of Vajraraja, or in the Hotei (p. 55), who finds no place to set down his burden or rest his head. For Sengai, the authentic, enlightened draughtsman and Zen Master, things are Such as they are. His hand, his brush, caresses, traces Suchness. There is no fancy symbolism to be found here—"Zen," says R.H. Blyth, "is the un-symbolisation of the world." Sengai's Maitreya is as concrete as his magnificent "Woman offering Pickles" (p. 136), as concrete as the clear water running through the reeds (p. 114) and the Maillol-like Kanzan and Jittoku (p. 93).

With Sengai, with Bashō, with D.T. Suzuki, we jump forever, playfully, youthfully and profoundly:

An old pond
Bashō jumps in
Sound of water! (p. 177)

Sengai, the Zen Master is a beautiful way for Suzuki Daisetz to take leave of life, to go on living.

FREDERICK FRANCE

ART IN JAPANESE ESOTERIC BUDDHISM. By Sawa Takaaki, translated by Richard L. Gage. Weatherhill/Heibonsha: New York, 1971, 151 pp., 180 pl.

This book is one of the first published volumes of the projected collection "Heibonsha Survey of Japanese Art" which will consist of English translations of the "Nihon no Bijutsu" Series recently published by Heibonsha.