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This creative writing thesis consists of four groups of poems, which function as “commentaries” on a significant Zen Buddhist literary work, or koan. Although these relate to each other as chapters of a single work, each may also stand as a separate chapbook. The four larger works, or chapters, are framed by two single-page poems, which comment on single short, more traditional, koans.

I have chosen three larger koans as well as one short scripture because, as a group, they exemplify each other, forming a cohesive artistic artifact. Also they are the most “literary” of the works to be found in the Zen literary tradition, clearly suggesting the appropriateness of a contemporary western poetic response. The four works commented on which form the basis of the four chapters are the following.

Genjokoan (Jap.) roughly “Enlightenment Appears in Everyday Life,” or “Everyday Life is Enlightenment” was written by Dogen Zenji (1200-1253), the founder of the Japanese Soto sect of Zen Buddhism. This piece is the first chapter of Dogen’s *Shobo-genzo*, which is considered “the most profound work in all of Zen literature and the most outstanding work of religious literature of Japan.”*

* Stephan Schuhmacher, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston: Shambhala 1989) 118.

Sei-ji-Koan. Early Chinese Ch'an (Zen) Buddhists appropriated this folk tale about a woman who splits into two people becoming whole at the end of the story as part of its wisdom literature. The interpretation of this story invites the use of contemporary western psychology and physics among other influences.

Hyakujo and the Fox. This koan deals with causality and ethics from the standpoint of paradox. Although it is the product of the Zen tradition it bears a resemblance to folk tradition. Because of this, like the Sei-ji koan, it is atypical in Zen tradition and lends itself to a western artistic interpretive approach.

Heart Sutra. This is the most important scripture for Zen Buddhists and is revered by all East Asian (Mahayana) Buddhists.

AND YET... AND YET...

A thesis submitted
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by

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General Introduction

Zen Buddhism, the non-theistic psycho-spiritual system which developed in sixth century China, has much to say about the value of silence and the inefficiency of words, concepts, and images to convey reality. It is surprising, then, to learn that of all the Buddhist sects of Asia, Zen has the largest collection of literature produced by its own rank and file. Even today, in the west, there seems no end to the proliferation of works, both scholarly and creative, from Buddhists in general and Zenists in particular. But of all the literary genres the one for which Zen Buddhism is best known is poetry.

On second thought, this is not really so surprising. Zen, like many a mystical tradition, loves paradox and, perhaps, this is just one of them. When the deepest attention is given to what is said or written by Zenists, it tends to put one's words, concepts, and images, on hold in a radical way. Then, after spending quality time in that rare silence, there is much one might be compelled to say about the experience.

The literature that tries to convey the “indefinable, incommunicable root, free from all names, descriptions, and concepts, that can only be experienced by each individual” (Schuhmacher 443), is that of the *koan*. Nishijima writes that the Japanese word *koan* is derived from *kofu-no-antoku* (Jp). This refers to “a notice board on which a new law was announced to the public in ancient China” (33). Zen Buddhists have appropriated the word for their own purpose to mean “stories and sayings [which] contain

patterns, like blue prints, for various inner exercises in attention, mental posture, and higher perception...” (Cleary xv).

But I prefer an even more prosaic description. Here’s one:

Koans are the folk stories of Zen Buddhism, metaphorical narratives that particularize essential nature. Each koan is a window that shows the whole truth but just from a single vantage. It is limited in perspective. ... When they are enriched with insightful comments and poems, then you have ten thousand vantages. There is no end to this process of enrichment. (Aitken ix)

Did he say *poems*?

I have always felt that the act of writing poetry, like the practice of Zen is, in essence, a contemplative act. That there are differences between poetry, religion, and philosophy, per se, is obvious. Yet, that they can be seen to overlap in essential ways should be noted as well. In fact, they often compliment each other. As Gary Snyder puts it,

[M]editation looks inward, poetry holds forth. One is private, te other is out in the world. One enters the moment, the other shares it. But in practice it is never entirely clear which is doing which. In any case, we do not know tht in spite of the conterporary public perception of meditation and poetry as special, exotic, and difficult, they are both as old and as common as grass. (2)

Poetry, as a contemplative act, is motivated by contemplative states that occur in the writer who, if successful, produces artifacts which initiate contemplative states in the reader. The highest aim of contemplation is to arrive at a deep insight into the nature of oneself and others. Once again, because this insight by nature transcends words, concepts, and images, that is, those elements which comprise language, the modes of linguistic expression which the writer employs are often of necessity ambiguous and paradoxical. In one sense, one must learn to use language against itself.

It seems to me the more deeply one looks in to the workings of language, the more one finds that language desires this conflict. It wants to be wooed like a lover who encourages one moment, only to pull away at another. She disappoints and infuriates but one cannot help loving and needing her. Then, after prolonged objective descriptions, instructions, inquiries, theorizing, and all the rest, language finally matures into poetry.

I like to think that this is what Wittgenstein had in mind when he describes his motivation in writing. In one of his works, which I understood much better when I began to read it as a series of poems, he writes that his intention is to teach the reader “to pass from one piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense” (1958 #464). His intention is to orchestrate the failure of language to explain itself in such a way as to cause the reader to “see the world aright” (1961, 74).

Wittgenstein seeks to undermine language’s stranglehold on the reader. He does this by uncovering “one or another piece of plain nonsense and of bumps that the understanding has got by running its head against the limits of language” (119). Then, once the “houses of cards” have been swept away, “the grounds of language on which

they stand” appear (113). The reader, if all goes well, comes to the place where the problem of language “completely disappears” (113) and “everything lies open to view and there is nothing to explain” (126).

And I am not the only person to perceive a poetic quality in Wittgenstein as well as a parallel between him, the western philosophical schools he has inspired, and Asian ways of manipulating language for the sake of spiritual insight. After a study of Zen Buddhism, Charles S. Hardwick wrote that,

Now, it is possible to see the significance of some of the queer statements we meet in [Wittgenstein’s] work. “Do we think with our feet?” “What is the color of the number three?” These statements are devised to produce a “bump.” We quickly sense the queerness of these statements. But they are calculated to bring us to see that such statements as “What is the meaning of a word?” are equally queer. Our failure to see this in the first place is simply because we assume that a statement such as “What is the meaning of a word?” does make sense. Herein lies the real nonsense. We have been bewitched by our language, and we need a bump to bring us around to seeing our error. (232-3)

As a serious Zen person I have had the best of luck pursuing these academic, as well as creative and spiritual, interests as a single endeavor. After several years practicing Zen under teachers who preferred specialization in Zen practice as a sign of dedication to that practice, I became the student of the late Kobun Chino Otokawa, Roshi in 1979. Not only did Kobun not discourage my perennial pursuits, as had other teachers, he insisted

that I pour myself into such studies and even joined me with no small amount of enthusiasm.

As his Jisha, or personal attendant, a kind of teacher in training position at Zen temples, I had a gratifying amount of access to him. Kobun and I spent many sleepless nights going over the underlying insights of spirituality, philosophy, and the arts of the east and west. It was during those times that I came to envision projects like the one at hand: using Zen Buddhist classic literary works as a springboard for the creation of poems. These poems would also incorporate wisdom literature from the various religious and philosophical cultures which parallel the insights expressed in those Zen classics. I once told Kobun of this idea, expressing disbelief that I could do such a project justice. With a great show of energy, he said, “You *have* to do it!”

After long consideration I have chosen four classics of prime importance in Zen Buddhism which have been of enormous personal value in my own intellectual and spiritual life. Perhaps the most important characteristic of these four works is that, unlike the typical Zen koan, they are not short intense aphorisms which simply back one’s intellect up against the wall. These challenge the intellect but give the mind some breathing room. These are the works which I feel best lend themselves to a western style of poetic commentary.

With the sections marked *Initiation* and *Coda*, I do, however, begin and end the entire collection with examples of the more usual style of koan. Unlike the koans which comprise the four chapters, these sections contain only single poems. Together they

symbolize the beginning and end of one's study of koans. The koan in *Invitation* is a good example of a first koan of a major collection, and *Coda* of a last koan.

The two middle works are unique in Zen Buddhism in that they relate to folk tales which have nothing at all to do with Buddhism. One, the *Sei-ji koan*, is the only instance of a koan in a major collection of koans that originates entirely from a non-Buddhist source. In this koan a Zen teacher recalls a Chinese ghost story in which a woman splits into two individuals who later rejoin. The teacher makes the story into a koan simply by asking which of the two manifestations of the woman was the real one. The other chapter, *Hyakujo and the Fox*, borrows heavily from indigenous Chinese fox spirit lore but, unlike the *Sei-ji koan*, was composed by a Zen Buddhist source. The first and last chapters might seem philosophical and discursive. Yet, both can easily be considered prose poems. As a whole I have tried to create a cohesive artistic artifact, while giving each chapter an internal integrity that would allow each to be read as a separate chapbook.

Although I have spent a tiny fraction of my life working on these series' of poems, they were inspired by a lifelong study of what I am persuaded are some of humankind's greatest cultural gifts. These, in turn, were produced, preserved, taught, and eventually extended to the world by persons who should be remembered and their goodwill emulated. The vast majority of these are not represented here but have provided the context for what follows. It is my hope that the reader will feel at least some of the resulting love and gratitude manifest in my effort.

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An Invitation

One day the World Honored One ascended the seat.
Manjusuri struck the gavel and said
“Clearly observe the Dharma of the King of Dharma;
The Dharma of the King of Dharma is thus.”
The World Honored One then got down from the seat. *

In The Beginning Let There Be

Light finds its face
when you turn yours
upward to meet it.
But which of you
is looking?
Light, after all,
is for eyes
and eyes are
what faces have.
Therefore,
one must ascend
the face to be
seen as one.
So be a saint
won't you?
Suggest light
to the assembly.
Then watch with me
as everyone's hands
grope upward
to discern their features.

*Cleary, Thomas, trans. *Book of Serenity*. Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Press, 1990. Case #1: 3-5.

Chapter One

Wetter When Wet

A Commentary on Dogen's *Genjo Koan* in Poems

Introduction

The Genjo Koan was written by Dogen Zenji (1200-1253) in the autumn of 1233. Dogen, besides being the founder of the Soto sect of Zen Buddhism in Japan, is without any question the most important Zen master of Japan. He is also considered Japan's greatest religious personality and is venerated there by all Buddhist schools as a saint or bodhisattva [as well as by philosophers in the east and west as a] most profound and original thinker. (Schuhmacher 93)

Dogen wanted the Genjo Koan to be the first chapter of his magnum opus, *Shobogenzo*, or *The Eye and Treasury of the True Law*, which has been recognized as "the most profound work in all of Zen literature and the most outstanding work of religious literature of Japan" (Schuhmacher 118). As a practicing Zen person, Dogen and the Soto way of doing things have been major influences in my own spiritual growth. But beyond this, over the several years during which I have studied Dogen and the Soto sect's bible, the *Shobogenzo*, I have been moved by the Genjo Koan's aesthetic qualities. I don't believe that the reader need to understand the popular medieval Japanese form and style the work represents, nor be able to decipher the use of Chinese poetic syntax, or be

familiar with all of the Buddhist technicalities, to find value in it. Rather one can best read the Genjo Koan less as a philosophical or religious discourse to be “understood,” than as a prose poem to be enjoyed.

As mentioned in the general introduction, I have also been fascinated that these aesthetic qualities seem to parallel those of certain contemporary western philosophical works. Reference to some of these are imbedded in this collection of poems. The reader may, for example, recognize reference to Heidegger and Wittgenstein in the poem *Stolen Answers to a Test of the Institute’s No Mystical Realist Left Behind Program*.

These perceptions have also taught me that, one’s religious or philosophical views notwithstanding, contemporary poetic processes are themselves a spiritual practice. If all else fails in trying to access the “meanings” of many important works in these genres, I have found it of value to simply relax and bask in the warmth of their sheer poetry.

Genjo Koan, comprised of the two words *genjo* and *koan*, has been variously translated. A few examples are “Spontaneous realization” (Heine 258), “The actualization of enlightenment” (Nishiyama 1), “The Realized Universe” (Nishijima 33), “Enlightenment Appears in Everyday Life,” as well as “Everyday Life is Enlightenment” (Schuhmacher 118). The subtlety of just these two words accentuated by their coupling in one sentence and used as a title has been a significant challenge to my own poetic sensibilities. The poems which follow those of *On the Title*, continually return to the task of seeking a more proper realization of the meaning of Genjo Koan.

The controlling theme of the Genjo Koan is the doctrine of “original”, or inherent, enlightenment (Hongaku Jp., pen-chuch Chin.). In *Wetter When Wet*, I often refer to this as “alreadyness.” The doctrine is often expressed in Soto Zen Buddhist circles with the cliché that we are all already enlightened although most people simply don’t know this. In order to find out you need to get enlightened.

This doctrine, which originated with a text called *The Awakening of Faith* (Hakeda, trans.) compiled in China, permeates all of Japanese Buddhism, and Dogen is its greatest proponent. The first definition of original enlightenment states that,

“original enlightenment” indicates [the essence of Mind (a priori) in contradistinction to [the essence of Mind in] the process of actualization of enlightenment; the process of actualization of enlightenment is none other than [the process of integrating] the identity with the original enlightenment. (Hakeda 37)

I have always thought of original enlightenment as similar to the Judeo-Christian notion that we are created in the image of God. It is a teaching that we share identity with absolute reality on a certain level. This creates a paradox in both Zen and Judeo-Christian thought. If we already have this connection with the absolute, or God, why is it that religion teaches we must strive to establish a correct relationship with the divine? But in religion and philosophy, as in poetry, paradox is not always a problem. It is often an opportunity.

As I began to write *Wetter When Wet*, a political issue insinuated itself into my writing. I had intended this piece to comment on the Genjo Koan’s beauty and on my

love for the tradition that extended from it and of which I am a part. Because of this issue some cynicism organically found its way into the piece. Someday, when this situation is resolved, I may write another such piece, returning to my original intention. But for the present project this critical slant seems entirely appropriate.

Those of us who have been a part of the American Zen Buddhist spiritual endeavor that comes from Dogen have had a precarious relationship with the Soto-shu, or the institution of the Soto sect in Japan which Dogen founded. The Soto-shu is a huge tightly knit organization which has asked Americans who have been ordained as monks, nuns, or teachers of Zen, to go to Japan to be “verified.” Much of this verification process seems, among numerous other things, to entail indoctrination in some Japanese nationalistic practices. I, and others who have found themselves in this situation, have resisted this, refusing to recognize the Soto-shu as an institutional authority to which we should submit. Instead, it is felt that Americans are developing their own way of implementing Dogen’s teaching apart from unnecessary, and even inappropriate, cultural manifestations.

Recently, however, a group of American Zen teachers who have, in fact, submitted to the Soto-shu in Japan over the years, have been asked by that institution to initiate an American Soto Zen Buddhist Association, effectively to organize an American office for the Soto-shu. A stated purpose for this organization is to “standardize” Soto practice. This could mean that ordinations will be revoked and teachers not being recognized as “authentic.” The persons thus affected would be required to learn a series of rituals and practices the organization would teach as standard for such persons. For

this purpose, the association has also been asked to form a Soto Zen Buddhism Training Institute.

Of course, there is a wisdom to the notion of standardizing religious training and practices. There are practical considerations such as recognition by the government for non-profit status. However, the thought of replacing the simple loving spirituality of meditation and the study of Dogen's teaching with the Vatican like superstructure of another Soto-shu is heartbreaking.

I would not feel so strongly about this issue if not for the training I received from my own teacher, Kobun Chino Otokawa, who was a high ranking monk in the Soto-shu and whose brother is the second in line to head the organization. Kobun was extremely critical of the Soto-shu and taught his students in a unique organization-subverting manner. His goal was not to teach Japanese or any other type of religion, per se, but to improve the quality of his student's spiritual lives. If the organizations as that under discussion were to have their way, it is possible that traditions such as Kobun's would disappear unnoticed, their value negated.

Angie Boissevain, one of Kobun's successors, wrote an open letter to those involved in the project of the institute's creation. This is a more diplomatic way of stating what I have tried to express.

I know I'm not the only one to see that the Institute Proposal is focussed on training priests for an institutional career... However, for those of us whose training was in small groups outside of Zen institutions, and who are continuing to teach in that tradition, this emphasis is not so useful.

Though I know the institute proposals are not intended to suggest that they be requirements for “authentic” Soto Zen training, the truth is, as way leads on to way, our human tendency is to solidify and commodify our intentions into requirements and leave out what doesn't fit current criteria. My hope is that great care will be taken to allow as much flexibility as possible to inform this new effort to create “appropriate” Soto Zen training in America, and that institutional training be only one of the several possible avenues that we offer to the many beings.

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On the Title

Desert Tells the Prophet's Foot What Feet Tell Sand (*Genjo...*)

Not all nails pierce Christ's palms.

Thirst,
 that bible of Being,
precedes them.

 Existence,
hunger's authentic scripture,
pierces palms at the end
of Mind only now
 even now.

The Grammar of Law is Law (...*Koan*)

Yes,
 If the State is a Desert. (Sophocles 215)

(When all things are the Buddha Dharma, there is illusion and enlightenment, practice, birth, death, Buddhas, and sentient beings. When all things are without self, there is no illusion or enlightenment, no birth or death, no Buddhas or sentient beings. The Buddha Way is originally beyond any fullness and lack, and for that reason, there is birth and death, illusion and enlightenment, sentient beings and Buddhas. Yet for all that, flowers fall amid our regret and yearning, and hated weeds grow apace.)

1) Birth and Death Sleepwalk into the Wild

Bare heart feet enter the forest.

Beneath them pulse-paths
hang like cypress. Cool shade
vibrates with each step
greeting next ground.

Above, antler arteries
crown a stately stag. He sips
foliage shadow shimmering
beneath subcutaneous sky.

Bare heart feet track pulse

through thicket bone and
stream-strewn organ fields
to where wild cats crouch
behind capillary bushes.

Throbbing sinew tracks, bow
under arm, head and back
bent to observe ground
where trace betrays prey.

Trodden beneath heart feet
farmed there dangerous
in the denial of use
blood footprints
cell-sand.

2) Farming Difference

Here is a heart full of forests
held with the wisdom
of cupped hands
carrying splintered glass. Above
and below pulse paths
in which fowl and fish
respond to sky and stream

as she hopes he will
respond her invitation
to an evening meal.

(He too is child of waves
unfurled from the tide that
left us here. He too
must eat.)

Perhaps, in her request
he will see footprints of bass
floating through streams
beneath finch-pierced light.

Perhaps fish, feet of water,
will walk rivers into that light
to footprint salt blood
overstepping the pulses
that propel them within
stone throw ripples.

And perhaps, in reverence
that night a Fall flower will
remove the hat from its heart
and watch a tide of multi colored
leaves quit anginic branches
like shards of glass falling
show front and back,
touch earth's palm,
count *one*.

3) Kinds of When

Someone has forsaken
the outside and outside
a blossom takes notice.

Why, it wonders
as she closes the door
to its garden habitat, is that
called *home* instead of *bud*?

Inside she illumines
the bud nature of creation
whose destiny is to seed
and sprout devoid
of soil and sun,
inner or outer.

There, a forest of naked hearts
writes anticipating a firmament
fraught with fictitious fish
churning sky milk into
galaxy cheese.

4) Varieties of Alreadiness

Sky-clad forests emerge
 from the envelope whose contents
 ask for yes.

They sneeze foul into clear
 and cumulus toward earth
 enveloping sun-sky. They hold,
 as if in cupped hands,
 cool fish-feet rivers. There,
 wild lives affirm water
 and air as they do fins,
 feathers, and fir,

as he does her invitation
 to coconut soup and more.

(Perhaps as he kneels in reverence
 he will remove the mind from his heart.)

Throughout paths pulse
 in the knowledge that love
 is the care with which
 glass splinter brethren
 are held in cupped hands,
 and as never is a species
 of always.

Splinters touch with love
 the cupped hands in which
 they are held and when bare
 heart feet enter such forests
 they enter
 each other,
 penetrate
 themselves.

(Practice that confirms things by taking the self to them is illusion: for things to come forward and practice and confirm the self is enlightenment. Those who greatly enlighten illusion are Buddhas. Those who are greatly deluded amid enlightenment are sentient beings. Some people continue to realize enlightenment beyond enlightenment. Some proceed amid illusion deeper into further illusion.)

Two Memos Circulating in the American Prescribed Iconoclasm Training Institute

1) A Proposal to Democratize Non-Duality

“Part of the beauty of compassion is that there is no way to standardize it. ...there is no way to subject it to strict administrative control ...” (Lewin 43).

(Note: The Institute has not approved this statement.)

“Is it true that one enters
the forest of a naked heart
with heart unclothed? “

(...and that nakedness is the forest...)

[“Find out!” (Loori 29, 39)

“Could it be that one enters
the heart with bare feet?”

(...yet even possible answers
do not solve inquiry...)

“Find out ...” (Loori 208)

“Might those feet burn in bushes
emblematic of cognizance
too mature for *what if*
or *so that's it !--?*”

“Well, find out!” (Loori 242)]

No,

(“...as well as not
something else...”)

it dawns.

2) What the Receding Tide of a Shared Ocean Leaves

Setting sun does not leave the sky.

Yet neither this nor rusting
of West's last light worn
by the rising moon
as her robe of mourning
is its intention.

Below, there are enough leaf
emblems of autumn unfurled
for wind-mind to move
and mind's wind
to scrub clean
the grass bowl yard.

Where wind-feet
--the *what*
of a wondering mind-- run,
trees grasp ground
as ripened roots rest
in the knowledge that this
swirling of sandals, old
and worn as they are,
is pilgrimage enough.

The moon undresses
to minister to other
sides of the curve,
from
those some
to
some those.

Yet

the sky does not abandon her
as both become night.

(When Buddhas are truly Buddhas, there is no need for them to perceive they are Buddhas. Yet they are realized, fully confirmed Buddhas--and they go on realizing Buddhahood continuously. Seeing forms and hearing sounds with body and mind as one, they make them intimately their own and fully know them. But it is not like a reflection in a mirror, it is not like the moon on the waves. When they realize one side, the other side is in darkness.)

**As Soon As (That is to say *When*)
When Does Not Appear**

Outside, in the garden, a walk is taken
and someone has clothed her feet
with clogs. These just miss the snail
during her --no, their-- morning stroll
with thoughts of future dinner
that will confirm him as guest,
her as host.

That is, if the snail
is solid enough ground
for this day's next step.

She passes snail, variegated shoots,
blossoms strangled with sleep being reborn,
tossed weeds dying on garden's indefinite
edges.

She doesn't see the sun lean
on the snail's vague immediacy--wave
of virtual motionlessness--
as a crutch. Instead

she wonders,

will dinner be like this:
carefully chosen varied ingredients
prepared with the love of morning light,
splinters held in the cupped skull
soup bowl of between star darkness?

(To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one's self. To learn one's self is to forget one's self. To forget one's self is to be confirmed by all dharmas. To be confirmed by all dharmas is to cast off one's body and mind and the bodies and minds of others as well. All trace of enlightenment disappears, and this traceless enlightenment continues on without end. The moment you begin seeking the Dharma, you move far from its environs. The moment the Dharma has been rightly transmitted to you, you become the Person of your original part.)

**Unhatchability of Eye's Eggs
(The contents of her invitation)**

Come eat.

Watch eye eggs awaken,
hatch into sight, lids discarded
like ivory shells revealing
those who fail to grasp
how trace betrays

Eat to stop all evil...

prey are doomed to betray
not only repetition but also

to practice good...

those who fail to betray
what they see (as well).

to see Sight see.

Lift the voice of your lids. Watch
egg's eyes shut. Taste
an egg in hatching
of realization
that learned eyes
can never be heard.

(When a man is in a boat at sea and looks back at the shoreline, it may seem to him as though the shore is moving. In like manner, when a person tries to discern and affirm things with a confused notion of his body and mind, he makes the mistake of thinking his own mind, his own nature, is permanent and unchanging. If he turns back within himself, making all his daily deeds immediately and directly his own, the reason all things have no selfhood becomes clear to him.)

Sides of When

Miscellaneous soup recipes
 tell her suchness
 of the you and I things
 is the us-ness
 of non-being

as she remembers him telling her
 that coconut soup was his favorite.

Non-being?

Look,
 here is a recipe for that very appetizer.

Us-ness?

Watch the cult of dawnist-wind leaves
 perform their ritual on temple autumn ground
 she hears the window say.

Perhaps
 she will answer the liquid of ocean
 --how much more so soup?--
 is the potential dewiness of a leaf.

(Which leaf? It's gone.
 Buried in the soup stirred
 in her peripheral vision.)

She extends the page to light,
 and deciphers ingredients blurred
 to her vision. She knows future wetness,
 cupped as it will be in a bowl's defining
 emptiness, can only be a beginning
 in a context of beginnings.

Slanting it

toward window light she is drenched
by its touch.

Outside,
no one notices the snail's
unattempted announcement
of garden soup discovery.

(Once firewood turns to ash, the ash cannot revert to being firewood. But you should not take the view that it is ash afterward and firewood before. You should realize that although firewood is at the dharma-stage of firewood, and that this is possessed of before and after, the firewood is at the same time independent, completely cut off from before, completely cut off from after. Ashes are in the dharma-stage of ashes, which also has before and after. Just as firewood does not revert to wood once it has turned to ashes, human beings do not return to life after they have died. Buddhas do not speak of life becoming death. They speak of being “unborn.” Since it is a confirmed Buddhist teaching that death does not become life, Buddhists speak of being “undying.” Life is a stage of time, and death is a stage of time. It is like winter and spring. Buddhists do not suppose that winter passes into spring or speak of spring passing into summer.)

Stolen Answers to a Test of the Institute’s No Mystical Realist Left Behind Program

Existence, That Soup of Experience

In the beginning voice

Let there be everything that is the case
heard the echo

Why is there everything
(that is, “the case”)
rather than nothing?

It knew it had bitten off
more than it could chew.

Quick! Hide in here!
creation offered.

But from then on
it was everywhere challenged with

Who goes there?

The answer of silence is

You know what it is
but the answer to the question
what is it

is
I don’t know.

(The attainment of enlightenment is like the moon reflected on the water. The moon does not get wet, and the surface of the water is not broken. For all the breadth and vastness of its light, the moon comes to rest in a small patch of water. The whole □□□émoon and the sky in its entirety come to rest in a single dewdrop on a grass tip--a mere pinpoint of water. Enlightenment does not destroy man any more than the moon makes a hole on the surface of the water. Man does not obstruct enlightenment any more than the drop of dew obstructs the moon or the heavens. The depth of the one will be the measure of the other's height. As for time--the quickness or slowness--of enlightenment's coming, you must carefully scrutinize the quantity of the water, survey the extent of the moon and the sky.)

Everything in Which Nothing is Seen

(Note: In a recent communication the Institute asked the snail if it practiced as a layman or as a professional monastic. The snail replied that it did not engage in "az-uh" practice.)

At the end of Christ's palm,
emblem of unpierced reality,
mind unfurled recalls

not all feet imprint sand,
not all sand is footprint

and...

(...not all nails...not all nails...).

Yet

every footprint vanishes traceless

as hunger and soup fade
one into the other
(...to practice good...
to stop all evil...).

Thus,

mind unfurled recoils

from Mind,
unlike the snail, that nail,
who would, if it could, look up,
see the improbable stars,
extend a tongue of awe
and intone "we." Instead,

the un-I snail, full of *us*, unseen
proceeds piecing palm mind,
ignorantly greeting next ground.

When you have still not fully realized the Dharma in body and mind you think it sufficient. When the Dharma fills body and mind, you feel some lack. It is like boarding a boat and sailing into a broad and shoreless sea. You see nothing as you gaze about you but a wide circle of sea. Yet the great ocean is not circular. It is not square. It has other, inexhaustible virtues. It is like a glittering palace. It is like a necklace of precious jewels. Yet it appears for the moment to the range of your eyes simply as an encircling sea. It is the same with all things. The dusty world and the Buddha Way beyond may assume many different aspects, but we can see and understand them only to the extent that our eye is cultivated through practice. If we are to grasp the true and particular natures of all things, we must know that in addition to apparent circularity or angularity, there are inexhaustibly great virtues in the mountains and seas. We must realize that this inexhaustible store is present not only all around us, it is present right beneath our feet and within a single drop of water.)

**Initial Grammar of Iconoclastic Clichés:
“Experience is my Favorite Soup”**

“Yes...” (Sophocles 215)

My favorite flesh is the earth,

that frame outside the frame
that frames itself.

My own skin

during its defining moments,
is the earth
as it makes itself known.

With it

I sleepwalk into birth and death,
and dream I remove my sandals
in awe of their presence.

With it

I wake up,
birth and death my skin frame
(everything, in fact, that is the case).

As such, favorite tides are flesh, a nail
that secures announcements to church
doors and Town Hall bulletin boards
to greet next ground.

(The cosmos is nail.
What is Christ’s palm?)

Thus do nails gain favor
paper burns in the bush of air,
footprints vanish, become sand

(The world is footprint.
What is your self?)

and

banner sky tracks
foot filled ground.

(Fish swim the water and however much they swim, there is no end to the water. Birds fly the skies, and however much they fly, there is no end to the skies. Yet fish never once leave the water, birds never forsake the sky. When their need is great, there is great activity. When their need is small, there is small activity. In this way, none ever fails to exert itself to the full, and nowhere does any fail to move and turn freely. If a bird leaves the sky, it will soon die. If a fish leaves the water, it at once perishes. We should grasp that water means life [for the fish], and the sky means life [for the bird]. It must be that the bird means life [for the sky], and the fish means life [for the water]; that life is the bird, life is the fish. We could continue in this way even further, because practice and realization, and for all that is possessed of life, it is the same. Even were a bird or fish that desired to proceed further on after coming to the end of the sky or the water, it could make no way, could find no place, in either element. When that place is attained, when that way is achieved, all of one's everyday activities are immediately manifesting reality. Inasmuch as this way, this place, is neither large nor small, self nor other, does not exist from before, does not come into being now for the first time, it is just as it is)

But! (Yasutani 40)

(Because it is as it is, if a person practices and realizes the Buddha Way, when he attains one dharma he penetrates completely that one dharma; when he encounters one practice, he practices that one practice. Since here is where the place exists, and since the Way opens out in all directions, the reason we are unable to know its total knowable limits is simply because our knowing lives together and practices together with the full penetration of the Buddha Dharma.)

The Entry for “Snail” in the Complete Concordance of Therefore

(Note: The Institute does not recognize this concordance as authoritative for use in the exegesis of important texts. Nor does it recognize the snail as a legitimate member of its profession.)

When all snail is non-us snail
there is snail trace leaving practice.
When every snail is unseen snail
there is everything but practice.

Instead,

in dream, birth and death
enter the wild where
difference is farmed in full
view of alreadiness-es,
to say nothing
of whens.

[Pause] (Sophocles 215)

Yet, neither
is this snail’s trail of slime, this snail
for whom there can be no *when*
from which a *there is* can follow.

(Do not think that in attaining this place it will ever become your own perception, and be knowable by means of interception. Although we say the breakthrough into realization is directly and immediately manifested, one's inherent being is not necessarily totally manifested. Doesn't its manifestation have to be so? As Zen master Poach of Mount May was fanning himself, a monk came up and said, "The nature of the wind is constancy. There is no place that it does not reach. Why use a fan?" Poach answered, "You only know the nature of the wind is constancy. You haven't yet grasped the meaning of its reaching every place." "What is the meaning of its reaching every place?" asked the monk. The master only fanned himself. The monk bowed deeply.)

Therefore Feet Ask Sand the Whereabouts of a Prophet's Footprints

Milky as the way
of bare heart feet
who wonder where they are

 cupped as they are
 in the hands of here.

Bare heart feet wander
 where they are
as
 they are
the forests of milk they enter.

As milky as snails' ways are
dangerously farmed heart feet
trodden beneath garden galaxies
present face to sky, drink
eye meat.

(Verification of the Buddha Dharma, the authentic transmission of the vital Way, is like this. To say that one should not use a fan because the wind is constant, that there will be a wind even when one does not use a fan, fails to understand both constancy and the nature of the wind. It is because the nature of the wind is constancy that the wind of the house of Buddhism reveals the great earth's golden presence and ripens the sweet milk of the long rivers.)

Traces of Father Snail Cosmos

Cupped in Milky Way hands
 a single shard snail innocent
 of galaxy churns ground
 into earth cheese gold
 ignorant as well that it too
 is cream of rivers
 it will never see
 cheese born
 of garden-udders
 milked by unborn stars
 of a yet to be past.

This is the tide that left you here
 frightened and breathless,
 wondering what has happened,
 wondering what to do.

The coming waves
 no longer reach but remind.

They curl
 backward in strong wind
 like *come hither* fingers.

Someday they will grasp
 and take back.

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Chapter Two

Future's New Skin

A Commentary on Hyakujo (Jp.) (Pai-chang; Chin.) and the Fox in Poems

Future's New Skin

In bed alone
your hand opens
as if to receive the sky.
The night is a well
fed by sleep and need,
mud and unseen fish.
Before the sunrises
you must ask darkness
for clear water. But,
instead, closed eyes
will place another's hand
in yours, like a cup filled
with light that spills
into new time.

The Case

Once when Pai-chang gave a series of talks, a certain old man was always there listening together with the monks. When they left, he would leave too. One day, however, he remained behind. Pai-chang asked him, "Who are you, standing here before me?"

The old man replied, "I am not a human being. In the far distant past, in the time of Kasyapa Buddha, I was head priest at this mountain. One day a monk asked me, 'Does an enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect or not?' I replied, 'Such a person does not fall under the law of cause and effect.' With this I was reborn five hundred times as a fox. Please say a turning word for me and release me from the body of a fox."

He then asked Pai-chang, "Does an enlightened person fall under the law of cause and effect or not?"

Pai-chang said, "Such a person does not evade (that is ignore) the law of cause and effect."

Hearing this, the old man immediately was enlightened. Making his bows he said, "I am released from the body of a fox. The body is on the other side of this mountain. I wish to make a request of you. Please, Abbot, perform my funeral as for a priest."

Pai-chang had a head monk strike the signal and inform the assembly that after the noon meal there would be a funeral service for a priest. The monks talked about this in wonder. "All of us are well. There is no one in the morgue. What does the teacher mean?"

After the meal, Pai-chang led the monks to the foot of a rock on the far side of the mountain. And there, with his staff, he poked out the body of a dead fox. He then performed the ceremony of cremation. That evening he took the high seat before his assembly and told the monks the whole story.

Huang-po stepped forward and said, "As you say, the old man missed the turning word and was reborn as a fox five hundred times. What if he had given the right answer each time he was asked a question--what would have happened then?"

Pai-chang said, "Just step up here closer, and I'll tell you." Huang-po went up to Pai-chang and slapped him in the face.

Pai-chang clapped his hands and laughed, saying, "I thought the Barbarian had a red beard, but here is a red-headed Barbarian."

Aitken, Robert, trans. *The Gateless Barrier. The Wu-Men Kuan (Mumonkan)*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1991. 19-21.

The Fox Counts its Tail For Courage

... *your prophets are like the foxes in the deserts.* (Ezekiel 13: 4)

Yes, if the desert is a farm. (Parodied from Sophocles 215)

Before the sun rises fleeing
 chickens sound the alarm
 littering the coop with quote-
 -mark feathers. Now,
 cornered in a fresh bath
 of light and gun's glare,
 foul dangling from its jaws,
 the fox thief freezes, caught.

Evil too, a farmer's word,
 is frozen, dead, so this,
 says the fox, is my chicken.
 As evidence of agreement
 fox and farmer share
 the firmament that lifts the early
 morning winter moon high
 over a distant peak.

Breakfast and after he wondered
 did he shoot the fox -that fox
 who disappeared
 with the smell of coffee-

as he reviewed that morning's sermon,
 and thoughts that one can dream
 a scent periodically interrupted?

Poised seductively in pre-dawn light,
 before its own hoped for breakfast,
 the tail counting fox, nocturnal,
 infernal, and undomesticated,
 in fox, and dreamer's pre-REM-sleep,
 had repeated *one*
 until convinced. Yet,

it remembered before coffee brews,
dream farmers pursue predators
who seek to steal
their livelihood.

We, it thought,
who seek to honor our contract
with God.

The Pastor's Sunday Reading From the Scriptures

*While they were talking and discussing together,
the fox himself drew near and went with them.
But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*

And he said to them,

*“What is this conversation which you
are holding with each other as you trot?”*

*And they stood still, looking sad,
tails low enough to be mistaken
for fifth legs. Then one of them
named Brer Reynard
answered him,*

*”Are you the only visitor to the mountain
who does not know the things
that have happened in the dreams
of the person reading this passage
of scripture to his congregation?”*

And he said to them,

“What things?”

And they said to him,

*“Concerning the chicken stealing fox,
who was a prophet mighty in deed
and word before all of earth's life forms,
and how the farmer caught, cornered,
and him shot, he, who kept
his fox covenant with God.*

*But we had hoped that he was the one
to resolve the paradoxes inherent
in the ethics of God's agreements
with us and all other living creatures.
Yes, and besides all this, it is now
the third day since this happened.*

*Moreover, some vixens of our company
amazed us. They were at the dumpster
before humans awake and did not find his body;
and they came back saying that they had even
seen a vision of wildlife officers, who said
that he was alive. Some of those
who were with us went to the dumpster,
and found it just as the vixens had said;
but him they did not see. “*

And he said to them, “O foolish foxes,

*and slow of heart to believe all
that the prophets have spoken!
Was it not necessary that the fox
should suffer these things
and enter into his glory?”*

*And beginning with Uncle Remus
and all the prophets, he interpreted to them
in all the folk tales of shape shifting
the things concerning himself.*

*So they drew near to a hole
in the field to which they were going.
He appeared to be going further,
but they constrained him saying,
“Stay with us for it is toward daybreak
and it is time to hide from the humans.”*

So he went down to stay with them.

*When he settled in to eat with them,
he took the garbage, blessed, divided,
and gave it to them. And their eyes
were opened and they recognized him;*

and he vanished from their sight.

*Looking up before delivering the last sentence,
the pastor's eyes met those of a dirty, ragged,
disheveled, young woman sitting in the last pew.*

*Who was this new person whose sad yet wild
eyes seemed to draw that last passage
from his mouth?*

*Did not our hearts burn within us
while he talked to us on the road,
while he opened to us the scriptures?*

Betrayed Seadrift

I am a woman upon the land,
 I am a silkie on the sea. Guest
 of the alien airy radiance of outer
 water-space, in which non-current
 misleads, unnaturally re-created.

I had believed Eternal Presence
 could be earned by the we-created souls.
 One need only submit to current, tugged
 by sea pulse compasses of to and fro,
 the full power of violent ocean as defense
 in the deep dwellings where insubstantial light
 and shadow-shine crash into their variegated
 vanishings of entrusted wisdoms unknown.

For this God has withheld true skin,
 pelt and sea, denying me self-form
 and home. Kidnapped from the tides,
 stubborn shores of rock and gravel rose
 and, braking upon them, loud foam spilt
 into sun and left me here.

Standing before the wall of books
 in the church's study she extended
 her hand to touch Paul Tillich's
 Systematic Theology, counting
 the number of volumes:

one, two, three.

True skin withheld,

she whispered.

And why was that a false view the pastor asked
 from behind his large wooden desk as he tried to recall
 names of church going mental health care professionals
 as well as his own relevant seminary training.

Nothing done, not done, or un-done, of evil
 or good, can stay a created being's
 obliteration before the absolute.

Only divine grace born of faith
 can one be justified and saved.
 Thus, by such error my skin
 took leave. Your dreams,
 perchance my skin will retrieve.

Basic Pauline theology, he began to say, until he saw
 her hand stop to take out a book on Gnosticism.

Look,

she said finding a passage in the text,

true skin. A commentary on the scripture
 you read today.

The pastor took it and read where she pointed
 as she looked out the window counting the cars
 as they left.

*Jesus and faithlessness
 disappear into each other.
 Jesus authored the cosmos.
 With what do you identify?*

Before he could remark
 on the text's heretical nature,
 she took and replaced the volume.
 Then, she grasped his hand with hers
 and, looking up into his eyes,

[The Pastor's Mind Drifts Recalling Another Heretical Shape Shifting Dream Testament

*While I was thus in the act of contemplating the deeper implications of causality
 and ethics, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to
 increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a
 personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch
 the floor.*

*He said there was a realized person's last fox body laying under a bush on the
 other side of the mountain. He also said that the fullness of moral knowledge as
 related to cause and effect was fully manifest therein.*

Also, that there was kindling, logs, and all manner of devices necessary for the performance of the fox's funeral cremation.

The five hundred in one fox body of error was thus brought forth from a bush as a voice of a people speaking out from the dust.]

she said,

foxes in dream will come
with seal's sheath retrieved.
I will ware their precepts,
they will be my salvation.
I shall return, a silkie,
to the sea.

The Dream that Fed a Fox

Eating his lunch in an open field, the farmer noticed a young boy dancing in the distance. He picked up his lunch box and moved toward the boy to get a closer look. The farmer noticed the boy repeatedly danced first to the right and then, after a pause, to the left. As he danced, his limbs bounced against his sides lifelessly like a puppet's. And while he seemed not to be in control of his movements, he danced in childish delight as if unconcerned as to who might be controlling his actions.

Then, the farmer saw a fox close by behind a patch of bushes. The farmer sat under a tree far enough not to be noticed by the pair, placing his lunch box on the ground beside him. In time he realized that whenever the fox's tail moved to the right, the boy automatically danced to the right. Likewise, when the fox twisted his tail to the left, the boy danced in that direction.

Eventually, the farmer became so engrossed in the boy's performance that he didn't notice when his lunch box disappeared.

The fox had a good meal that day.

Samson Gives His Testimony to the Wildlife Management Officer Investigating a Reported Abuse of Three Hundred Foxes (Judges 15)

I was just trying to visit my wife,
 but her father refused to even let
 me by, even though I brought
 a baby goat as a present.
 Her Dad said “I was sure
 that you had taken a dislike to her,
 so I gave her
 to your wedding companion.
 But think about it.
 Her younger sister is more
 beautiful than she; let her
 become your wife instead.”
 So, hell, I figured the farmers
 could have no claim against me
 for any harm I would do to them,
 for it is written,

they shall be a portion for foxes. (Psalms 63:10)

So I caught three hundred foxes
 for is it written,

*Catch us the foxes,
 The little foxes
 That ruin the vineyards--
 For our vineyard is in blossom. (Song of Songs, 2:15).*

I took torches and,
 turning the foxes tail to tail,
 placed a torch between each
 pair of tails. I lit the torches
 and turned them loose
 among the standing grain
 of the farms, setting fire
 to stacked grain, standing grain,
 vineyards, and olive trees.
 This I did to bring to fulfillment
 the scripture in which it is written

*Because of the chicken coop, which lies desolate;
 the foxes walk upon it. (Lamentations 5:18).*

The Pastor's Stream of Dream Scripture #1

The same day there came certain of the wild life
from the neighboring fields, saying unto the fox,
Get thee out, and depart hence:
for the farmer will kill thee.

And he said to them, Go ye, and tell that human, Behold,
I add depth to your moral reasoning, and cause
you to dream today and tomorrow,
and the third day I shall be perfected.

Nevertheless I must walk today,
and tomorrow, and the day following:
for it cannot be that a fox,
whose contract with God he honors,
perish away from the chicken coop.

#2 Farmer Oppenheimer's Dream of The Cosmic Fox Who Becomes

*terror transcending sanity
without beginning, middle,*

*end. Gaze. Despair. In awe fall
to your knees, head gripped
in your hands.*

*I am Death which eternally seizes
and obliterates. I am the world*

*shattering and all annihilating
totality
of time.*

*Cause. Effect. I have come
to annihilate them. They,*

*in my boundless form,
have never been.*

[The Pastor's Stream of Scripture Consciousness #1

*By the blast of God they perish,
and by the breath of his nostrils
are they consumed (Job 4:9)]*

*Yet you
begrudge me this chicken.*

Fox and Silkie Woman Meet

The wooden fence seemed to extend
 forever in both directions. All around it
 were fields, forests, and streams.
 Above, the unlidged eye of day
 painted a summer without blemish.
 On neither side could civilization be seen;
 nothing in need of separation.

Walking along its length, she happened
 on a slight creature of fur hovering
 over a prized catch.
 Sensing another presence,
 it lifted its head to reveal the face of a fox.
 Startled, the fox backed away, the fence
 and its stolen lunch box between them.
 For a while, it seemed it might turn and run.
 Instead, it stopped and extended its snout.
 Its nostrils shimmered with interest.

*Why, you're not one of them!
 But you have one of their bodies!
 Who are you?
 How did you get that way?*

She told him of her race; of the silkies,
 and of some who, like her, are condemned
 to human form without their seal skin.

*Fascinating!
 Are you hungry?
 There's enough here for both of us.*

Incidentally, why are you in the pastor's dream?

The fox jumped through a hole in the fence,
 lunch box in its jaws, and sat next to her.
 It sat upright and reached into the box
 with its right paw the way a human would
 to pull out half a sandwich.
 She accepted the offering.

What is this stuff they eat?
 I haven't eaten since I changed
 because I don't know how to do
 human eating.

Before she got an answer
 she remembered the fox's last question.

Wait. This is the pastor's dream?
 I thought it was mine. In fact, I used to have
 these repeating dreams when I sea-slept.
 I was hoping I was home, drifting, dreaming
 of being human and coming across
 as many as one or two hundred foxes--

More like three hundred, the fox interjected.

--lanterns in hand,
 on their way to a wedding.

*An auspicious dream for a shape-shifter like you.
 For humans, it is dangerous to disturb fox kin
 at any point in a wedding, even in dreams.*

I'm glad to hear that. But I don't know why I'm here. All I know is that, after hearing the pastor's sermons over the past few months, I'm convinced he can help me get my skin back so I can go home to my family. In fact, I'm certain the solution to my problem has something to do with his dreams about you. But the pastor doesn't believe me. He thinks I'm nuts.

*He thinks you're nuts!? I think he's going nuts.
 I really disturb him. He kills me
 for doing what God created me to do.
 Does this mean he is disagreeing with God?
 ... hey, wait ...*

*Maybe you are the pastor.
 Maybe you're his past, or something,
 working out some kind of personal theology.
 That would explain how you can be here.*

That's it exactly. He thinks that living things
cannot be good of their own effort;
that they can by-pass punishment for evil
by having some kind of faith.

Faith? What's that?

Thinking something. I'm not sure.
But when he figures it out,
I can go home.

Sounds strange. Not simple like having a contract with God.

Yes. Animals are simple. Humans are complex.
And that means while animals are each singular,
humans are full of animals.

Fox nodded in appreciation of the statement
as the sun nudged the moon out of its firmament,
a distant peak allowing for its revelation of light.

In the distance, the animals
saw the pastor approaching, walking
along the length of the fence.

*Here he comes.
Let's go to work.*

Power Answers Truth

The spirit, helplessly hopeless,
 behind its furred face melted
 in the glare of the farmer's weapon
 of dream, silent at sunrise
 with the roar,

evil.

It let fall the half-chewed chicken in its jaws,
 and slinked backwards against the fence,
 trapped, defenseless in guilt, slobber trail
 between face and fowl.

[The Pastor's Stream of Scripture Consciousness # 2

For what is your life?
 It is even a vapour,
 that appeareth for a little time,
 and then vanisheth away
 (James 4:14)]

The farmer's aim froze momentarily
 at the sight of fox eyes' fear-fire,
 which said,

Humans have their farms,
 and birds have nests, but we you
 condemn, who honor our contract
 with God. We, who cannot appeal
 in the speech of zero tails:

*Please, for the love of God
 don't shut me! Sweet Jesus,
 I don't want to die!*

Skin's Past Pasts

Making her way home
from the pastor's house,
the silkie woman imagined
she was on a walk in Japan
and that I was following her.

She fancied me thinking,

Perhaps, on her way home
she will visit an *Inari* temple
where the fox spirit is honored.
I'd like that.
And perhaps there,
she will gain some insight. Still,

I doubt she will ever come to know if eggs
are unhatched chicken babies,

or if a chicken's unhatched babies
are eggs.

Epilogue

Faith in Roots

Years after Jesus talked to the tree,
Eisai returned from China with tea seeds.
He banished them to the eastern soil
and forgave them their deaths when,
in repentance, they blossomed
into Japan's first tea leaves.
He could see bits of his face when
he leaned down to look closely at
the morning dew on the green sprouts.
At night he dreamt the legends of tea
were the methods of awakening
and in fear of further sleep
harvested his eyelids.
In shame he would tell his monks
that their task was to remain awake
while still in possession of their eyelids.
But his own sleeping continued
and the dreams grew worse.
Eisai watched in silent panic
as Jesus approached.
He was a fig tree and bore no fruit.
He knew he would be miraculously
withered for his crime. He struggled
to awaken but could not,
and as he lay there, dreaming,
his mouth could just barely
form the words
forgive me.

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Chapter Three

The Manynesses

A Commentary on the Sei-ji Koan in Prose and Poems

Goso asked a monk, “Sei-ji and her soul are separated; which is the true Sei-ji?”

Introduction

This is the only koan that comes from a folk tale and which has no connection to Zen or Buddhism. The narrative comes from the Tang dynasty’s collection of ghost stories. A Zen teacher by the name of Goso appropriated the tale for his own purposes simply by asking a question about the story. And what is that story? Listen.

Once upon a time in a small village in ancient China, there lived an old man by the name of Chokan. He had a beautiful daughter, named Sei, whom he loved very much. She and her cousin, a handsome young man named Ochu, grew up together in the same village. Eventually they fell in love. But Chokan choose another man to wed her and when this was announced Ochu, completely heartbroken by the news, decided to leave his village forever. He took a small boat to the river and began rowing away, absolutely devastated, wondering what a future without his wonderful Sei would be like.

Before he got far enough to lose sight of the shore, Ochu saw someone running along the bank waving and shouting. Rowing a little further, he was overjoyed to see that

it was Sei. She ask to go with him and together they traveled to a land far from the village in which they had grown up.

Years later, Ochu and Sei had two children and, as parents themselves, began to feel sorry for leaving their own families. They decided to return and ask forgiveness. On the other side of the river it was decided that Ochu go to Chokan alone at first. Sei and the children remained by the boat.

Ochu found Chokan at the market place and was surprised that Chokan was excited to see him again. But as Ochu began to explain Chokan became confused. Chokan stopped Ochu before he could finish and asked “Who are you talking about?” Ochu answered, “Your daughter Sei, of course! Who else would I be talking about?” Chokan was even more confused by this. “Sei is still here!” he said. “But after you disappeared from the village, She fell very ill. In fact, she is bedridden and refuses to even speak.”

Neither would give an inch in their descriptions of where Sei was and what condition she was in. So Ochu suggested that they meet at Chokan’s house where Chokan claimed Sei was still living. Ochu would bring Sei with him for Chokan to see for himself.

As Ochu and Sei began their walk to Chokan’s house, Chokan told his bedridden Sei what had just happened. Chokan’s Sei immediately got up for the first time in years and walked toward the entrance of the house. On the other side Ochu and the other Sei saw the door open. Out came Sei, and the two Sei-s rushed into each other merging into one person.

Chokan and Ochu stood amazed and stammering. Finally, they asked the one Sei how she was, and if she knew what had happened. “I remember following Ochu’s boat as if in a dream. I didn’t know that I was in bed.”

Manynesses

*What kind of city lies
behind these walls?*

People with upturned faces,
hopeful of recognition,
bathe in the light
of dream citizenship.

*Of what
are the bricks comprised?*

Uncertainty shines from
multiple wheel smiles
which, like skin, attach
to bodies nominally.

*About what
do they dream?*

Remove footprints
of distant people
from the earth.

What kind of city lies?

Dreaming makes them strong,
but sleepers are easy victims.

1) A Woman Called We

What kind of city lies
behind these walls?

From the first day of class I suspected Sei-ji was a deeply disturbed individual. She looked like a Barbie doll. Her face was pale and her hair stiff. She sat upright and motionless in her desk with her eyes lowered and barely blinking. They seemed not to be fixed on anything. It was as if she were made of plastic.

This was a class on Religious Philosophy I taught regularly at the local State university. It was spring semester of 1985. She entered each class alone and did not speak to anyone. I felt that she consciously shied away from people, especially if they made expressive physical gestures. Vocal expressions of the slightest emotion--any emotion--seemed to frighten her. Her own actions were mechanical and seemed calculated not to draw attention.

Yet, despite her strange appearance and stilted behavior, her academic work was clearly above average. In fact, her comments in class, rare as they were, demonstrated a brilliant intellect. She knew a great deal about history, world culture, the arts, and current social issues. She was able to analyze and synthesize facts and formulate significant conclusions. In that respect, she was what college instructors hope for in their students.

At the end of virtually every class Sei-ji would stay behind along with other students who had questions or comments. Except for Sei-ji, these students would congregate in front of my desk, each waiting their turn to speak with me. After speaking each would leave and I would turn to another student and address their concerns.

Sei-ji stayed to one side and at a distance. She held her clasped hands in front of her and stood quietly, looking slightly away from the rest of us. It seemed as if Sei-ji were preparing to initiate some conversation. But it was evident that she was frightened to do so.

As the number of students declined, Sei-ji would increase her distance from the desk and me. When all but one person had finished speaking to me Sei-ji would leave without having said a word. Each time there was a disappointed look on her face. Once I made a point of asking her if she wanted to talk to me before this could happen. She said no and scurried out.

All of this concerned me. But as long as she did well with her course work her idiosyncrasies and personal problems were not my business. I suspected she was in some kind of emotional trouble. But I could help only if an opportunity to do so presented itself.

Before the beginning of a class toward the end of the semester Sei-ji entered the classroom before anyone else as I was arranging material on the desk. She asked me to sign a form allowing her to withdraw from the class. I was taken aback as this was the first time she spoke to me privately. But I was much more surprised at the request itself.

I told her that there was no reason for her to withdraw from my class. She was doing quite well. She explained that she was flunking all of her other classes and that the university would allow her to withdraw from those classes only if she withdrew altogether from the university that semester.

I was shocked. I couldn't imagine Sei-ji not doing well in any college class let alone failing a full semester's worth of them. Perhaps her other teachers required students not to look like mannequins, to speak frequently, and to be emotionally demonstrative.

Although she seemed ill at ease with prolonged discussions in the past, especially if those involved personal matters. I couldn't let this go. I didn't sign the form right away. I placed it on the desk, sat down, and asked her to tell me what had been the problem with her other classes.

A fundamental change came over her at that point. Color entered her face as she took off her coat and sat down. Her demeanor became relaxed and fluid. She breathed slower and deeper. Her physical and vocal gestures were those of a confident woman. Even the tone of her voice changed slightly yet significantly. Where did Barbie go? I thought. Sei-ji told me that she was having trouble concentrating in her classes. But that was true only if she was able to actually enter the room where the class was being held. The closer she came to the classroom the heavier her feet seemed to become. Often, when she got to within several yards of the door of the classroom she found herself unable to move. She could only move in the direction of home. Many times she could not even get out of bed when she thought about the need to attend class that day. In any case, her mind went blank during tests and she could not bring herself to finish assignments. Worse, when teachers tried to speak with her about these matters she could not bring herself to speak.

I suddenly don't remember where I am, or what I'm doing. I even forget who I am and get really scared.

Apparently, Sei-ji responded positively to the informal atmosphere of our class.

Classic clinical depression, I thought, as if I were any kind of expert on the subject. But there was something else; something I consciously expelled from my mind at the time. Perhaps I felt a need to dismiss it because I could not understand it.

I had the distinct sensation that Sei-ji was not talking to me at all. Instead, someone else was borrowing Sei-ji's "I." Someone else was telling things *about* Sei-ji. This made no sense to me. I decided that it was an insubstantial impression; nothing to pay attention to.

I didn't think it was my place to push the issue more than I already had. I took the form and signed it, thanking her for her openness.

What will you do now?

She told me she would move back in with her parents for the summer and think about her life. I wished her well.

By the way, if you need someone to talk to feel free to write or call me, ok?

At this she brightened. Barbie was nowhere in sight. She said that she planned to write me in any case.

I had no idea what I had gotten myself into. My education about a particularly strange and severe mental illness was about to begin.

That summer the letters arrived.

Letters came with frightening descriptions of dreams, torturous dreams, dreams of dismembered body parts floating in the air around her, toward her, cornering her, trapping her.

Arms, legs, torsos, heads, swirl around spewing blood as she screams. The blood soaks her and doesn't stop.

Then, eyes appear. Mouths appear. Eyes and mouths sprout on stomachs and hands, feet and chests; eyes and mouths where they don't belong. She knew that like these eyes and mouths she was somehow horribly out of place. She felt that she too did not belong, not just in the dream, but anywhere in the world. She never had and never could.

The eyes glare and the mouths open. Was it hard for her to write the obscenities the voices screamed out to her?

You're a useless fucking slut! Just die you stupid cunt!

It was the end of Barbie.

I tried to convince Sei-ji to go into counseling when she returned to the university that fall.

Actually, it didn't take much convincing. Sei-ji was horrified over her dreams. But there was much more to be concerned about. She could not account for large blocks of time during most days. People she could not remember claimed to know her. She repeatedly found herself in places without knowing how she got there. There were items

in her apartment that she didn't recall purchasing. She periodically panicked for no reason.

The local mental health care agency gave Sei-ji several tests and paired her with Laura, a therapist who specialized in Sei-ji's diagnosis. Thing was, she wasn't told her diagnosis. To do so might jeopardize her treatment because it would cause her to look for, and perhaps even create symptoms. But this was not a problem. Sei-ji did not want to know anyway.

As her therapy progressed, Sei-ji reiterated to me what she told her counselor each week. She was beginning to reconstruct what she could remember of her personal history. As I listened to these stories of her past, I thought I was listening to a bad B horror movie script.

When she was seven years old her mother died. Shortly afterward her father began to rape and beat her. Often while molesting her, her father would tell her to pretend he was something other than who he was. *Daddy isn't here, honey. I'm an alien from outer space.* It was as if he could not admit to himself that he was molesting his daughter even in the midst of the act.

When she wasn't being abused, she was neglected. Both her father and brother left her at home alone for long periods of time. At least she wasn't lonely when her father was using her for a surrogate wife on the pretext of being an alien.

A year after her mother's death her father remarried. This lessened the episodes of incest by her father. But one of her stepbrothers started to pick up the slack. Worse, he found a delight in mentally abusing her.

Sei-ji recounted an example of psychic torture she suspected her stepbrother of perpetrating. Her family had found a litter of puppies in a nearby ditch and had been able to find homes for all but one of them. One night her family had once again left her alone. She thought the house was empty. In fact, she had witnessed each family member at some point leaving her until she was all alone.

But she wasn't alone. There was a knock on the door of her bedroom. She opened it to find the puppy placed on the floor in front of her, dead. Its head had been severed and was placed by its body. Sei-ji slammed the door, locked it, and ran into her closet.

None of her family members claimed responsibility for the act. No one called the police to report that someone had entered the house while they were away. Like, if that is what you can call it, continued as before.

I often wonder what kind of dreams I would have under these circumstances.

Sei-ji began to have a new kind of dream. In these she found herself immersed in darkness. There was nothing to see, but she could hear a multitude of voices. Often, the voices in these new dreams taunted her as in the earlier ones. But more often than not they included what she thought to be announcements of some future event.

Over the next few months these announcements took precedence over the other vocal sounds in her dreams. As they did Sei-ji thought she could decipher them. There was to be a visit. Someone was coming.

Two of the voices began to be heard over the others. Sei-ji understood that these were the voices of the visitors she was to expect.

One night, during one of her frequent visits. Sei-ji told me that she suspected she was suffering from Multiple Personality Disorder and that her alters, or other identities, were preparing to make themselves known to her. Two of them, those represented by the two prominent voices in her dreams, had volunteered to be the first.

Sei-ji's therapist had been careful not to suggest this condition to her. But Sei-ji suspected that Laura was waiting for her to come to just such a conclusion on her own.

I tended to doubt the existence of MPD. I reasoned that, even if it did exist, it must be too rare for me to ever meet a person who had it. I assigned it to the realm of TV. It was *Three Faces of Eve* and *Sybil*.

I listened politely to her as always. But this time I was thinking *Bull shit*.

I was mistaken.

Over the next few years, Sei-ji and Laura gave me a crash course in Dissociative Identity Disorder. My experiences with Sei-ji during this time convinced me of the reality of this mental condition once called Multiple Personality Disorder. In fact, I became well acquainted with many of Sei-ji's alters. Sei-ji was careful to refer to her alters as her aspects. Giving them a personal name and separate history would impart a sense of separateness from the central personality. This would make the disorder worse.

Sei-ji called the two aspects being announced in her dreams *Red* and *Yellow*. Red tended to be a fiery young woman while Yellow had a soft and demure personality. We would speak often. I would be sure to call whoever I was speaking to Sei-ji, as Laura had instructed me, and both alters would answer to that name.

Once a year, for several years after their appearance, Red would accuse me of being like Sei-ji's father in some way and beat me. This would occur around Christmas when Sei-ji agonized over the thought of spending time with her family. Half the time I would have to call the police and Sei-ji would spend a couple of weeks in the psych ward. Yellow did the honors of explaining and apologizing. We would all meet at Laura's office for a debriefing.

Sei-ji eventually realized that she had been attacking me out of a disbelief that I, or anyone, would remain her friend. Every major figure in her life had betrayed her in some form or another during her formative years of her life. At some point I would naturally betray and leave her. It would hurt less if she were to initiate what she knew would happen. If she drove me away she was in control. If I simply left her to her own devices she would once again be a helpless victim.

I held on in each case. I assured her that I didn't want her abusers to win. Even so, I would hold her accountable for her acts of violence. Eventually the attacks stopped. Beside Red and Yellow, the alter with whom I was the most familiar was a group of people. Dissociatives can do that.

The Children, as Sei-ji called this alter, represented a group of young girls. They came out only at night and only when Sei-ji felt very safe. Often, this occurred when Sei-ji came for a pizza visit. These happened about once a week. She would snuggle in a blanket on the couch as we watched TV. One or another of my several cats would come to snuggle with her.

We feel like a queen! she would say.

When the Children showed up I felt at ease. There was never any trouble when they were around. Beside that, they were always pleasant and appreciative. I could let my guard down and relax.

But there were to be more dreams, more announcements, more arrivals.

Sei-ji began having dreams in which she saw just the back of a hunchbacked figure surrounded by a thick darkness. The voices were frightened. Sei-ji heard them saying *oh no, that's the mean one!* The voices called the hunchbacked figure *Troll*.

After about a year of these dreams, Red and Yellow told me that they had to go away for a while. They had to take a journey.

Where are you going?

We have to go deep into Sei-ji and liberate Troll. She won't come out by herself.

Red and Yellow disappeared for several months.

One night Sei-ji was sitting on my bed in my room. I was in a rocking chair facing her. We were having one of our therapeutic visits. Sei-ji had been experiencing time lapses again. She asked me to describe events that had recently occurred between us-- memories we held in common--to help her retrieve her function of memory. We did this on a regular basis.

Suddenly, Sei-ji stiffened her legs. Her hands clenched into fists and she began to make angry comments that I could not understand. I could hear her teeth grinding.

I was familiar with these emotional emergencies called *abreactions*. They came out of the blue and once started had to run their course. Sei-ji spent about an hour and a half tensing her muscles and yelling things I could not make out. Then, something I was not familiar with happened.

Sei-ji stopped yelling and relaxed.

For an instant her eyes showed no emotion. Then they filled with expression. It was a frightening, ineffable, expression. It was full of ill will; a superhuman kind of hate.

I swear something happened to the air around me. A strange ugly energy seemed to fill the room. I felt poisoned, dying. I have rarely been so afraid.

Sei-ji seemed to savor my reaction to whatever this event was. She scrutinized me at length and then leapt up, performing a strange dance.

I'm not going to take any shit from anybody!

She danced out of the room and around the house.

It was the first and only time I had witnessed the emergence of an alter. Troll had been liberated and was now an outward part of the family called Sei-ji.

The dreams finally ended.

Over the next few years there were other emergencies. But these were minor characters. All the important people were out. And Troll presided over them. Troll, like the voices warned, was the mean one. In fact, she was far more violent than Red.

Thanks to Laura's efforts, Troll agreed to a position of responsibility. She was to stay inside watching out for the welfare of the other alters. Troll took great pride in this. She refrained from taking charge of Sei-ji's outer life.

Sei-ji once told me that Troll thought of herself as the leader of a parade. I recalled the dance I had seen her perform at her emergence. So that's what that was about, I thought. She was being a Drum Majorette. She even twirled an invisible Baton.

In High School I played trumpet. During football season, I was a member of a marching band. Like Sei-ji's alters, I was sometimes part of a parade. I had to follow a Drum Major. We all did.

I hated marching band. I hated being led. But sometimes one has no choice.

Parades frighten me. Even the most innocuous of them conjure in me images of Nuremberg and the Nazis. They are celebrations of the anti-individual, the group in need of discipline determined by uncaring authority. They are symbols of what can happen to people who are not allowed to think and feel for themselves.

I have watched Sei-ji's parade now for over twenty years. It often makes me dizzy with fear and despair.

But perhaps I am being unfair to parade lovers. There are times when we become lost and need direction. Sometimes people will not go in a healthy direction unless they are enticed. They need the pretext of a celebration; a parade. And when the parade arrives at its destination uniforms come off and people continue with their lives as individuals.

In any case, this parade started long ago. There is no stopping it now. All I can do is watch and wonder *where are all these people going?*

2) Particle

*Of what
are the bricks comprised?*

Three hundred foxes were huddled
around a fire the night a place
became sacred for the first time.
From the back it was hard to see,
but those closer to the front
spread the word.

The fire
came from a bush. It was aflame
but the fire did not consume
the plant from which the fire emanated.
Light flicked against amazed fox faces
while those too far from the source
gained warmth from fur against fur.

*Is it still burning? Some in back asked.
Is the bush still giving off heat and light?*

There is a story all foxes know.
Their tails had been used to spread
a destructive fire in a human war.
More proof they need us,
many a fox thought.
But more explanation than this
was needed.

Perhaps, some thought,
the bush was the heart
of the human they filled.
Fox fire had swept the land.
Now only this bush remained.

Amidst the flickering and crackle of flame,
each tried to determine the best way
in which to count fox tail flames in the fire
of a burning human heart.

3) Wave

*About what
do they dream?*

Sei-ji crossed the river to separate herself
from that shore to which we must all return.

Waves pushed with their open palms,
while those ahead curled before collapsing.
She noted their crests pointed forward
and this encouraged her and her lover.

Jacob might have seen her on his way over.
They must have followed different currents,
gone by other ends of the river. Unlike her,
he left alone. Both left much behind.

And for each, there was the water,
to separate and to take back.

They would meet before they returned,
first to sit down and weep by the waters
of the great Yangtze, inventing excuses
for the oppression which prompted their tears,
and then to fight, to wrestle
until the break of dawn.

They fought as the river struggled with itself,
fish and plants tossed in their conflicted home,
unified in its multiple divergence's. They fought
as if struggling for air, to befriend the tides,
or just to get back home.

Finally Sei-ji said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking."
But Jacob answered, "I will not let you go
unless you bless me."

What was that all about?
she would later wonder,

as he would wonder if she were an angel
or merely himself being pulled under.

4) The Tendency to Exist

What kind of city lies?

At birth her vibrations were too subtle
for those uninitiated in feline pediatrics.
Yet, somehow, the delicate rhythms
of her emergence joined the leisurely
march toward maturation.

Months later,
she crawled out of a bush in front
of an abandoned student house,
alone, half starved, crying.

Now, she
was the fire of the bush that begot her;
a tiny black flame sanctifying the ground
which upheld those destined to testify
to this second genesis.

A woman found and took her, loved her
back to life with fluids and steroid shots.
She nurtured the kitten as she would
her own mind;

a soul separated from itself
by a life of incest and brutality.

Sei-ji, I suggested, when she asked
for a name; but more, a name
that might symbolize her own
eventual recovery. *Sei-ji*,

another of Christ's palms.

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Chapter Four

Be Still and Follow

A Commentary on the Heart Sutra in Poems

Introduction

It always comes back to the Heart Sutra. Every day, in any place Zen practice occurs, be it a bedroom zendo or a major monastery, one constantly returns to the Heart Sutra; that shortest of all Buddhist scriptures so loved by Zen people. They value the scripture “since it formulates in a particularly clear and concise way the teaching of shunyata, emptiness, the immediate experience of which is sought by Zen practitioners.” (128). I often recall the few years I spent at Jiko-ji, Kobun’s mountain retreat center, as one continuous chanting of the scripture. Several years later after meditation I chant the Heart Sutra on my futon alone in my bedroom. Nothing has changed.

I will let the following collection of poems speak for itself without further introduction. However, it might be useful to explain the words of the title. The Sanskrit *Maha* means “great” in a spiritual sense. *Prajna* is that which cuts through delusion arriving at “an immediately experienced intuitive wisdom that cannot be conveyed by concepts or in intellectual terms” (Schuhmacher 274). *Paramita* is translated as “perfection,” and has the connotation of crossing an ocean “...lit. ‘that which has reached

the other shore,' the transcendental" (267). *Hridaya* means heart, or some vital center. *Sutra* "...lit. 'thread.'" refers to a scripture. Buddhist sutras always begin with the words "Thus have I heard." These are thought to be the words of Buddha's cousin Ananda who committed Buddha's discourses to memory (342).

On The Scripture's Title

Thorn Poem, Thicket Poem

(Maha)

Inside there is soup to be made
and someone has cut a lotus root.
She stops for a moment
to appreciate the severed surfaces
from which viscous substance
exude fine string like filaments.
These cut the kitchen from awareness
so that like a fleck of foam on the sea
the cook becomes blind with wisdom.
When it is time to eat such insight,
the eye of a blind heart,
will lift like a fog.

Outside a snail with ox horns
loses itself to the field it plows.
It too must eat and searches,
a speck of its own ocean.
Its peace sign head sways
in the slowest of motions
as its trail of slime glistens
in the glare of the above
eye of evening that opens
and closes with the leisurely
lid of months.

Tonight the air simmers in light
as under the unlidded eye of day.
Yet it is not strange that human eyes,
housed and unconcerned as they are,
misplace the ooze trail
to the ground below.

Inside someone is looking out
imprisoned by a protecting window
as well as what has been taken in
to savor the way in which
evening mist forms
like comprehension
in the face of once
hungry beings.

Seed Poem

(... *prajna*)

Even the earth cannot judge
the snail small.

Its meager shimmering trail
produced with imperceptible speed
seeks to alert the universe
of this world's two sides.

Yet, if it could, the moon
would simmer ingredients
of experience
in its bowl of all-at-onceness.

It might be, of course,
that the snail seeks to penetrate
into creation as it forges to forget
the breadth and depth
of its environment.

Even the snail cannot judge
the sky vast.

The world-shared umbrella
loses itself to midnight.
The moonlight knife
reaches everywhere
but cuts nothing
not even the evening mist
which climbs the blade
that illuminates it
and through which
the light passes
without disruption.

All fingers grasp the edge
of this cliff.

All other moments
are absent.

Forest Poem

(... ... *paramita*)

In order to cross
you must make the river,
in whose arms your lungs
will tighten, holier than the heart,
even though, lacking flesh
with its sin of honesty,
the tidal abyss may mislead
and betray.

When you add your body to it,
quitting the shore,
you will hear your destination
voiced in the diurnal pulses
and the scream
of rock scrubbing foam
as that moon driven creature
competes with the stubborn
cliffs, gravel, and sand,
to end your dream
of standing on the other side
where others see you
reach out your hand
in the direction from which
you have come.

A Snail's Drink of Dew

(... .. *hrydaya* ...)

1) Neptune, 1989

Since consciousness thinks
that light is meaningless
unless an eye is present,
it sent one millions of miles
from the brains that conceived it
speeding through blind nothingness
toward a beautiful blue gas ball
the way a frog's tongue
targets a fly far from its mouth.

It shot past
satisfied with just a taste
of the dark rings and moons
and a blue comparable only
to that of earth where minds
had stood stock still for an instant
with the realization that this
was the illumination
in which they too
were contained.

2) I Have Been Examined As Well.

I have always known
you were there only inches
away from things I can see,
verify, and so love
without difficulty.
You tugged like a fish
on the sonic pulses cast
by the microphone-like instrument
cold on my chest.
Here I am, you said
as you blew me kisses
again and again from the screen
as I stared enraptured
and held you closer
with the arms of my ribs.

**3) The Eye With Which We See
 Is The Eye With Which We Are Seen**

Galaxies hatch to become
the inside of eggs.
Consciousness thinks otherwise
 so eyes
scatter wildly everywhere
to see what is invisibly intimate
or unreachably distant.

And there is no real fault in this.
Yet, awareness of the heart
is knowledge that one contains
the light in which one lives.

Oars; Tat tvam asi*(... .. sutra)*

A wet oar
 can be placed in water
 as easily as a dry one.

Both feel the pull
 of an arm.

A right eye can open
 as easily as a left one
 can close.

Both confirm the fear
 of being current-borne,
 wave-flung.

Say:
 In the Beginning was Form.
 Form was *with* Emptiness.
 Form was Emptiness.

To go on this journey
 nothing need budge.

Thus have I heard. *

* “Faugh!” (Hakuin 11)

On the Sutra

*(Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva
When practicing deeply the Prajna Paramita...)*

*(...Perceived that all five skandhas are empty
And was saved from all suffering and distress.)*

“Bah!” (Hakuin 18)

A Snail's Persistence

A spider's web just inches away
and to the side of the snail's path
cowers from the fog floating
above. It savors the world
of snails and nourishment.

Should the snail stop and look
deeply there it would see a nest
of sleeping waves blossoming
with dew-drop moons.
The miniscule pearls would form
a sea of nests tossed in the ocean
of eyes to which the moons would fly.
And with these the snail
might uphold the sky.

The snail will pass the web
and the waves will sleep,
even if those who might study
the snail's dried trail in the future,
and noticing the web so close by,
might fantasize a night burgeoning
with shining satellites too small
to enter the cognition of any
but the tiniest of creatures.

As no such possibility exists,
the snail can only dip its oars
into the rocky ground of galaxy
and continue.

(O Sariputra...

“Phuh!” (Hakuin 29)

(..form does not differ from emptiness;

Emptiness does not differ from form.

That which is form is emptiness;

“Rubbish!” (Hakuin 31)

That which is emptiness, form.

The same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses, consciousness.)

Snail’s Face, Human Heart

Inside the host says goodbye
to her guest, who having enjoyed
the meal and company, plans
gatherings of his own,
as both enact the ritual
of putting the evening
to bed.

Standing by the open door
she watches him enter
and recede into the fog
until he seems a gray
Japanese bell hanging
on some unseen tree
far off in the distance.
A bell, she thinks,
is an open mouth
in empty space.

She imagines continued reverberation
even though her guest has vanished,
as does everything in such a fog,
lit, as it is, by the fullness
of a warm Fall moon.

*(O Sariputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness;
They do not appear nor disappear,
Are not tainted nor pure,
Do not increase nor decrease.)*

Spirit Filled Brain, Body Filled Mind

At meal's end he watched the fog
through a window, admiring
its Monet-mind.

She saw this and misinterpreted
her guest's appreciation of the scene
as a sign he had lost interest,
and he in turn mistook her polite
promptings, giving him an easy out
as her wish for him to leave.

After such meals the ground seethes
in darkness, as do nests that reach
toward sky so moonless
that high and low are equal
to an eye's wing.

Because of such nights
she believes there are times
when one need not strike metal
for a bell to sound.

Because of what neither of them see
gusts of wind come
from unknown directions
and the bell speaks
to all evenings
in which fog
obscures fog.

*(Therefore in Emptiness, no form
 No feelings, no perceptions, no impulses, no consciousness;
 No eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind;
 No color, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind;
 No realm of eyes and so forth until no realm of mind-consciousness;
 No ignorance and also no extinction of it, and so forth until
 no-old-age-and-death and also no extinction of them;
 No suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path;
 No cognition, also no attainment.)*

1) Inter-Nothings

Snail and man greet each other
 through mutual invisibility
 as the fog releases them
 in its embrace. Man and snail
 swim in fog clarity always
 arriving at the shore
 of where they are.
 And as the moon blossoms
 in and through the moist air
 a language forms for their use
 and that of the listening future.
 The knife of moon's light
 penetrates the fog's thick fullness
 cutting nothing.

Thus the illumination of fog
 makes clear that nothing
 is seen, neither snail
 nor man.

That neither sees the other
 is this alphabet's first letter,
 the first god
 of a new city
 of gods.

2) The Song of a Snail's God

Now may one hear a snail sing
of ancient wheels rolling,
the neighing of horses,
conchs that blare
to the trumpeting of elephants,
deafening cacophony of battle drums,
and the shouts of warring troops
as they hold high their arrows,
swords, shields, and spears.

Now, granted snail sight, he sees
galactic mouths into which rush,
rushed, and will rush, helplessly spinning
as from or to war, myriad armies
and hosts of kings,
whose heads with crowns bespeckled
with the eyes of countless jewels
flashing in every direction, to illuminate
armored limbs and painted bodies,
the subjects of kingdoms, fortified cities,
and the very light in which they
and the worlds are enthroned,
crushed and ground to cosmic dust,
coughed into the black expanse of infinity,
the everywhere-eye laughing at their screams
while countless Super Novas,
competing for the attention of a single sky,
perfume terror-stricken worlds
with the blinding precision
of their assured destruction.

Thus did Oppenheimer hear:

4) **The I With Which I See
Is The I With Which I is Seen**

Inside there are dishes to be washed
and someone has been kissed
with recent memory.

Outside there is fog to digest;
a fog which clouds her recent visitor
from view as he slowly negotiates
a difficult way back home. Yet
each step covers the ground
on which he walks.

She knows she too will be a guest,
but that sightlessness
cannot blind her,
even when blindness
takes away her sight.

It is past time to eat
yet fog says,
as would and will
any clear sky,

*Eye has always known
I am there
eyeing my own
blindness
in its own
I.*

Fog watches her
through the kitchen window
as a towel hides from view
the spoon she is drying.

Beneath tightly woven fibers
the spoon is manipulated
like a kitten searching
for mother's teats;
back and forth,
up and down.

*(With nothing to attain
 The Bodhisattva depends on Prajna Paramita
 And the mind is no hindrance.
 Without any hindrance no fears exist;
 Far apart from every perverted view the Bodhisattva dwells in Nirvana.)*

**I Babies in the Sea of a Blindly Fertile Womb
 ('ehyeh 'aser 'ehyer: I am that I am)**

You have heard that someone
 had cut a lotus root.

God, she said over soup,
 cannot add or subtract
 from who He is.

You believe in God then?

He doesn't want me to,
 knowing, as He does,
 that God does not exist.

Host and guest stop for a moment
 to appreciate severed surfaces
 from which viscous substance
 exude fine string like filaments.

All fingers grasp the edge
 of this cliff. All other moments
 are absent.

But I say unto you:
 In the midst of these roots
 -- the taste of coconut milk.

*(In the three worlds of past, present, and future, all Buddhas depend on Prajna Paramita
And attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect enlightenment.)*

Clear Confusion of a Fog Filled Snail

...be warned!

*The making of many books is without limit
and much study is a wearing of the flesh.*

The sum of the matter, when all is said and done:

To experience
is to smother.

You cannot breathe
with or within me.

You cannot breathe
without or out of me.

And there is
only breath.

*(Therefore know the Prajna Paramita
Is the great transcendent mantra,
Is the great bright mantra,
Is the utmost mantra,
Is the supreme mantra,)*

“Gabble-gabble.” (Hakuin 70)

*(Which is able to relieve all suffering
And is true, not false.
So proclaim the Prajna Paramita mantra,
Proclaim the mantra that says:
Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate! Bodhi! Svaha!)*

“I don’t know. That’s Indian stuff!”
(Kobun Chino Otokawa, Roshi. Summer sesshin,
Rocky Mountain Dharma Center, Colorado, 1979.)

Love at Rest

At home alone
the evening permeates his mind.
He questions if the meal was perfect
simply because of who prepared it
and remembers how she touched him
to say good-bye. He wonders
did she sense his heart,
--as he did hers--
perishable as fog and as faulty,
in what warmth she found there
soon to dissipate into cool gardens
eaten by snails and galaxies
finally loving all
being not
a thing.

Epilogue

“Know it well, love was his meaning.

Who reveals it to you?

Love.

What did he reveal to you?

Love.

Why does he reveal it to you?

For love.

Remain in this, and you will know more of the same.

But you will never know different, without end.”

(Julian of Norwich 142)

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The Heart Sutra in Sino-Sanskrit
(for chanting)

Ma Ka Han Nya Ha Ra Mit Ta Shin Gyo

KAN JI ZAI BO SATSU GYO JIN HAN NYA HA RA MIT TA JI
 SHO KEN GO ON KAI KU DO IS SAI KU YAKU SHA RI SHI
 SHIKI FU I KU KU FU I SHIKI SHIKI SOKU ZE KU KU SOKU
 ZE SHIKI JU SO GYO SHIKI YAKU BU NYO ZE SHA RI SHI
 ZE SHO HO KU SO FU SHO FU METSU FU KU FU JO FU ZO
 FU GEN ZE KO KU CHU MU SHIKI MU JU SO GYO SHIKI MU
 GEN NI BI ZES SHIN NI MU SHIKI SHO KO MI SOKU HO MU
 GEN KAI NAI SHI MU I SHIKI KAI MU MU MYO YAKU MU MU
 MYO JIN NAI SHI MU RO SHI YAKU MU RO SHI JIN MU KU SHU
 METSU DO MU CHI YAKU MU TOKU I MU SHO TOK KO BO DAI
 SAT TA E HAN NYA HA RA MI TA KO SHIN MU KE GE MU
 KE GE KO MU U KU FU ON RI IS SAI TEN DO MU SO KU
 GYO NE HAN SAN ZE SHO BUTSU E HAN NYA HA RA MI
 TA KO TOKU A NOKU TA RA SAM MYAKU SAM BO DAI KO CHI
 HAN NYA HA RA MI TA ZE DAI JIN SHU ZE DAI MYO SHU
 ZE MU JO SHU ZE MU TO DO SHU NO JO IS SAI KU SHIN
 JITSU FU KO KO SETSU HAN NYA HA RA MI TA SHU SOKU
 SETSU SHU WATSU GYA TE GYA TE HA RA GYA TE HARA SO
 GYA TE BO JI SOWA KA HAN NYA SHIN GYO

Coda

*A monk asked Haryo,
“What is the razor-sharp sword?”
Haryo said,
“Each branch of coral supports the moon.”**

Each Branch of Coral Supports the Moon

Yes,
 and yet...
 and yet...

* Cleary, Thomas trans. *Secrets of the Blue Cliff Record*. Boston: Shambhala, 2000. Case #100: 350.