ON THE WAY OF POETRY AND NATURE

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ABSTRACT

Within a traditional culture everything is potentially a religious discipline, and in few places has this been made clearer than in Japan prior to modernity, for there the way of the sword, the way of tea, the way of flower arranging, all were, and to a most limited degree now are still, modes of religious expression, and indeed are in general well known outside Japan even today. To be a tea master for instance is, still, a matter of great prestige, but more than this, is a manifestation of religious discipline–it is a demonstration of active *samadhi,* of total absorption in the moment, in one's activity, and this it is which infills the ceremony with so much dignity and power.[2] Time seems suspended; everything is condensed into a single fluid movement. This dignity and power is common to all the initiatory disciplines– for that is what these all are, and indeed what all the traditional arts are– but there is one discipline which is traditionally not limited to one or another class, nor is it indeed even limited to any single initiatory transmission, as are the various other arts. We speak of course of poetry, of the *ars poetica,* and it upon this we shall centre.

At one time virtually everyone in Japan participated in this discipline, and indeed there were even night–long 'capping' parties, in which *renga* formed the center of the evening. And even though this discipline is, now, very nearly forgotten by most in that country, save by those familiar with the

[2] We were privileged, in this regard, to have witnessed a tea ceremony of the highest order as part of an anniversary celebration for Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji; by highest order we mean that the master was, in the context of this particular ceremony, freed to act spontaneously within the ritual moves of tea making. This highest combination of spontaneity and ritual is rarely seen, even by long–time students of the tea master; and the witnessing of it gives proof once again that the only true freedom is that of absolute mastery–for were a neophyte to attempt the same 'spontaneous' ceremony it should become a mere mockery. The traditional arts possess a dignity which in the modern world, with its factories and its focus upon quantity, can scarcely imagine. The reader is, in this regard, advised to read Marco Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas,* (London:1948).

ancient traditions, nonetheless it remains today, as always, open to everyone, and indeed forms a religious discipline itself, a means toward religious manifestation and understanding. To see how this is so, we shall turn back to examine the origins, cognates and function of poetry as– religious discipline, focusing upon Japanese tradition.

We have chosen to focus upon the Japanese *ars poetica* because the most traces remain of it; the same things which we shall observe of it are true also of Taoist Chinese poetry, as for that matter of Amerindian songs and poetry– all retain that primal simplicity and closeness to nature which characterises the primordial cultures. But the Japanese poetical disciplines became the most refined of these, and the most traces of its poetical creations exist–and hence we will in the main concentrated upon Japanese *waka, haiku* and *renga* while drawing upon other traditions, and while keeping in mind that this is by no means a phenomenon confined to Japan, by any means, but rather is, each according to its own way, universal amongst traditional cultures.

Probably, though, to focus upon the Japanese way of poetry, it would be best to begin with mention of Shinto, for Shinto, like Taoism and like the Amerindian traditions, represents a connexion with an earlier epoch, one closer to the primordial world itself, and far closer to the natural world than later times.

Shinto is certainly one of the purest natural religious traditions, insofar as it represents precisely this connexion with primordiality, entailing worship of the spirits which are to be found everywhere in the natural world, amongst groves, waterfalls, animals, rocks, mountains, and concentrated in certain shrines which are most simply indicated by means of flags and ropes.[3]

This recognition of the divinity incarnate in the natural world, and the profound rituals it engendered– clapping, bowing to the ancestors and to the spirit beings, offering incense and water– is absolutely pure and simple, indeed primal purification. Attachment to the past, in the form of guilt, and to the future, in the expectation of a future life, are absent here. Rather, there

[3] See the essay 'On Ropes and Flags' in our *Entering the Gate: Essays in Traditional Studies,* (London: 1989).

is simply the sound of the clap, the silent bending of the ritual bow, the recognition of the inherent beauty and incarnate Divinity of that place, and the ceremony is through.

The connection here with the absolute simplicity of *haiku* is, as R. H. Blyth pointed out in his study of the subject[4] is clear– in both one sees the absolute beauty and simplicity of the natural world, shining forth in clarity, as in the poem of Bashitsu:

The bright autumn moon:

The shadows of trees and grass– And those of men!.[5]

The first line refers to transcendent truth, of which the moon is symbolic; the next line refers to the shadowy phenomenal realm, and the third line refer– to the human realm, which stands between these two, perceives the former, but like the latter is still immersed in the shadow– realm, the *saha–world* of temporality. The human, the trees and the grass are here correlated with one another, distinguished only by the human cognizance of the moon. The natural world is indivisible from the Divine, and this theophanic capacity is precisely what makes traditional poetry so powerful religiously, for truly the natural and the Divine are not separable. None of this is to say that *haiku* is a 'product' of Shinto, but rather to point out the deep affinities between the two, as deep as that between Taoism and the ancient Chinese poetry, particularly of the 'recluse' kind. And with that aside, we will consider the nature of poetry as religious discipline itself, using *haiku, waka* and *renga* as our focus, beginning in more general terms, and moving toward the specific.

Poetry functions particularly well as a religious discipline because its centrum is the word, which is to say the *mantra* or *dharani,* in sacred terms. Now a *mantra* or a *dharani* is a sacred chant, untranslatable, really, and its 'function' is the invocation or manifestation of the Divine power with which it is resonant.

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[4] See R.H. Blyth, *Haiku,* (Hokkuseido: 1949) Vol. I, 160, 'Eastern Culture.' 4).
[5] Ibid, I.I 96.

Even though ultimately there is only the Divine Unity, nonetheless there are various aspects or functions as it were of the Divine resonant within certain ancient syllables, words and tones which embody the harmonic vibration most consonant with certain deities or Divine powers. By repetition of those phrases, which have been transmitted from antiquity, or revealed in conjunction with a certain era, one is able to place oneself in consonance with the power which is a deity, a transcendent being or force.[6] In the former case, we refer to the traditional religious *mantra* or *dharani,* which though strictly speaking are atemporal, transcendent, nonetheless due to the nature of our world appear to us as having been 'passed down' from primordiality– hut in the latter case one finds the definition of sacred chant expanded so that indeed it may even include poetry of a certain kind, referring here to 'revelation' in a more or less individual sense.

But let us first consider what the *mantra* or *dharani* 'does,' that we can see how poetry may also become mantraic. The *mantras* and *dharanis* are traditionally seen to have emanated from the sacred letter A, which is the primal sound, the primordial vibration as it were, to which all words return, and from which they emanate; A is the principal Origin itself. The Word is the emanation of this Origin; all words emanate from and reflect it, and if followed to their source, are one with it. This last is traditionally expanded in esoteric Buddhism to say that 'Everything spoken by the tongue is a mystic formula (*dharani*).[7]'

This is in essence a Tantric saying–it is cognate with the realization that everything in phenomenality is one's teacher, a recognition which poetry

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[6] It is because such phrases or syllables are themselves indivisible from the force which is the deity or Divine itself, that traditionally there has been such emphasis upon the retention of the primordial language in its most perfect form. This is, naturally enough, particularly emphasized in Western tradition as in Iamblichus' *De Mysteriis,* in the *Corpus Hermeticum,* and in Plato's *Phaedrus,* towards its end–for the Western tradition has most nearly lost its connections to primordiality; similar strictures enjoining the retention of language in its ancient perfection obtain in the East, but there the continuity has been maintained. The loss of a sacred language– as the loss of Latin in the Roman Catholic Church– is a major step toward the destruction of the tradition as a whole, for language, the means of communication, is the tie that binds man to man, and man to the Divine.

[7] Quotation taken from the 'Commentary on the Great Wisdom Sutra,' quoted by Muji in his *Shasekishu,* translated as *Sand and Pebbles,* R. Morrell, trs. (New York: 1985), 5A:12.

certainly is eminently suited to express, and indeed one may say that this is the fundamental understanding 'behind' *haiku* and traditional poetry in general, for in it evil is given its place in the sacred order of the cosmos.

In any event, *mantra* and *dharani,* by means of repetition, offer entry into a station of consciousness termed 'word *samadhi;'* it is the same station no doubt briefly entered by Tennyson when he, as a youth, would wander about repeating his own name to himself until its significance vanished and, later, he was filled with a sense of great, inexplicable bliss. 'Word *samadhi'* is the 'internal' reflexion of the 'external' realization that all beings are one's teachers– both are the manifestation of a deep inward fusion, the *conjunctionis oppositorum;* the realisation of primal unity. Poetry, if it is composed in a certain fused state of mind, may also allow one to partake in these understandings, but it must emanate from, allowing entry into a station of invocational unity, and offering insight into the Divine nature of a given situation, place, event, or being, insight into 'instantaneity.' This is the power of *dharani–mysterious* beyond all human understanding, they bring into play'forces beyond, far beyond the human realm; and the power of poetry is a reflexion of these powers, a reflex ion of the dharanic power.

But poetry is not so concentrated, so pure as *dharan{or mantran* for these are transmitted precisely because of their efficacy, their mysterious power to invoke given beneficent forces; whereas poetry, while arising from a correlate realisation of unity, is more individual, and this 'individualised' aspect of poetry gives it that fleeting, ethereal, sad quality, for there is always in poetry a cognisance of human transience which in *mantras* or *dharani* is non–existent, the human realm *per se* being in truth of no consequence whatever to the Divine; the Divine functions within it without reference to this or that individual or situation–it is impersonal, absolute.

This is not to say, though, that poetry is not also a kind of Divine revelation–its sheer beauty, its manifestation of human transience, of insubstantiality, of the suffering which is existence, not to mention its transmission of religious truths all attest to its revelatory nature, its power, though of course on a lower level than that of the revealed *dharani,* being more limited and 'individualistic.'

Yet at times, when from the pen or lips of a truly religious being, poetry may indeed verge upon the dharanic–which is to say a series of words which act to relieve suffering, as for instance the poem of Kiyomizu Kanzeon, the bodhisattva particularly affiliated to the sufferings of our own tormented era:

Although your pain be as the burning moxa on Shimeji's fields

Still trust in me while yet I remain in this world.[8]

The power of *waka,* of this kind of religious poetry, is that its few words are able to bestow serenity, able to still the mind, and offer an insight into the very nature of existence, as does the following poem by a page overheard by Eshin, a priest:

To what shall I Compare this human life?

To the white wake

Of a boat rowing away

At the break of dawn.[9]

Images like this are so beautiful that one's mind is naturally calmed, in a different way than that by which it is calmed in the poem of Kanzeon Bosatsu, to be sure, the former being truly a *dharani,* transcendent, the latter being a poetical insight into the nature of existence.

Then, too, poetry is able to set forth the way by which man ought live, as in the case of Goethe's poem:

Life I never can divide/ Inner and outer together you see.

Whole to all I must abide;/ Else I cannot be.

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[8] *Shinkokinshu* XX: 1917; see *Sand and Pebbles,* op. cit, 5A: 12.
[9] *Ibid*, 5A: II.

Always I have written/ What I feel and mean to say

And thus my friends although I split/ Yet still I remain one.

Hence we can see here what we might well call a triple order: the poem of Kyomizu Kanzeon is wholly transcendent, being indeed an irruption of the Divine into the phenomenal realm so to speak; the poem of Eshin belongs to a slightly lesser order, being aesthetically powerful, but not transcendent; and the poem of Goethe belongs to the discursive or prosaic variety, useful for moral exhortation. This is not to say that these three poems are not all engaged in the same revelation, only that they present different aspects of what may well be called theophany (using the term without specific monotheist connotations).

The poem of Eshin, above, is a *waka,* the thirty–one syllable poetic form characteristic of Japanese poetry, the *waka* traditionally having been said to have been initiated by Susanno, the storm and oceanic God, brother of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. The first poem of this type was said to be on the occasion of Susanno's marriage to Kushinada Hime, the full poem being

A many– layered fence

At Izumo, where clouds billow–

I build a fence

To live therein with my wife.

Ah, that many–layered fence![10]

It is interesting that the *waka–form* continues a triplicity throughout, this first poem repeating the word 'fence' three times, in conformity with the three worlds or realms (physical, subtle, sidereal) of the cosmos, this being the symbolism of thirty as well, which consists in three sets of ten, ten being

[10] That is, in Japanese: Yakumo tatsu / Izumo yaegaki / Tsumagome ni / Yaegaki tsukuru / Sonoyaegaki (w)e.

the number of perfection, the *waka* having an extra' one attached to signify the transcendence of the triplicity.

Now there are different degrees of transcendence, of course, and these degrees manifest in poetry as well; in the *Jodo Wason,* the Pure Land Hymn Collection, we find references to 'birth in the Palace,' to the 'Transformed Land' (*Kedo*), also called the 'Border Land,' (*Henji*), and the 'Castle of Doubt,' (Gijo).[11] That is: for those beings who doubt the Inconceivable Vow, but who nonetheless recite the Name, enter into a 'trajectory' toward the Pure Land by virtue of the invocation, but because of their lack of faith, enter info a 'palace,' or 'heavenly state' in which they see the *Hoben keshin,* the expedient transformed body of the Buddha, but not the true Transcendent Body *(dharmakaya),* nor do they enter into the transcendence which is the Pure Land itself a transmuted but not utterly transcendent state.[12] It is said that those born into the 'Transformed Land' stay in the imaginal Palace for Five Hundred years, a stay which though perhaps from a human perspective would be a delight, nonetheless from a more transcendent view would be clearly a delimitation as it were.

Now this same is to be seen in the poetical 'hierarchy' which we mentioned above: Goethe's poem is primarily discursive, intellectual; Eshin's poem is aesthetical, beautiful; and the poem of Kanzeon is indeed transcendent, leading beyond the world of suffering. Poetry, in brief, is capable of expressing a wide range of truth–all these are true, to be sure, but the latter is more transcendent than the former nonetheless.

Poetry is also able to express the highest truth–though at this point, like the dharani of Kanzeon, it is very nearly no longer poetry at all, but something utterly beyond the phenomenal world. Yet even so, it employs the imagery of this world, conformably with the indivisibility of *samsara* and *nirvana,* and with the fact that one; as Dionysius the Areopagite said, must necessarily speak of the Divine in phenomenal terms, else the human mind cannot comprehend it.

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[11] See the *Jodo Wasan,* (Kyoto: 1965) 1.2, p. 27.

[12] *Ibid*, 35, p. 63. One may say that the Pure Land is the principial Reality of which the phenomenal. is a reflection; hence as Hakuin Zenji said, 'the Pure Land is near to hand.'

Said Sillman, in a song:

The attainment of Equal Mind

Is called the One–Child Stage;

The One–Child Stage is Buddha–nature;

One realises it in the Land of Serene Sustenance.[13]

The poem is based upon a passage from the *Nehan Gyo,* which reads as follows:

'Buddha-nature is *Tathagata.* Buddha nature is called the One–Child stage. Why? Because in the nature of the One– Child stage, Bodhisattvas attain the mind of equality toward all beings. All beings will eventually attain this station; hence it is said all beings possess Buddha-nature. The One–Child stage is Buddha-nature; Buddha-nature is *Tathagata.*[14]'

The attainment of Equal Mind, or Equanimity, is the regarding of all beings equally, not being prejudiced against one or another, but seeing all with the Eye of Insight; it is primordial vision, seing each being anew in each instant–it is pure openness. Consequently it is called the one–child station, for one views every being as one's own child, with compassionate regard, being the manifestation of Avalokitesvara. This regarding is indeed the Buddha-nature itself, indivisible from all beings, though they know it not.

This is poetry at its most transcendent, but even so it is phrased in part in natural terms; the love of a mother for child is expanded to include all beings in this 'Land of Serene Sustenance.' Traditional poetry has as its forte the conjunction of natural and transcendent truth, if we may so speak– indeed, it is most powerful when these are indisseverable, and it is significant that the waka takes its origin mythologically from the marriage of the storm God and the celestial maiden, for so it is also in every poem, that it contains at once a

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[13] *Ibid*, 92, based on a passage from the *Nehan Gyo.*
[14] *Ibid.*

nature and a sidereal, transcendent aspect. Let us consider in this regard some poems of Soen Nakagawa Roshi, for this contemporary Zen Buddhist teacher was also a recognised poet in the traditional sense. He wrote:

\kite kono	Alive!
Aoba wakaba no	The light of the Sun
Hi no hikari [15]	In new green leaves

Now this poem, like so many of Nakagawa Soen's poems, is directly related to *zazen,* or Zen Buddhist meditation– it in fact narrates as it were the miraculous experience of one coming out of deep *Samadhi like* 'crawling out of the dead sea'[16] in which one realises first the primal fact, that one is 'alive!', then the phenomenal mark of this is the light of the sun which denotes existence in the cosmos–and then the new green leaves of the trees. Hence in this single poem we have as it were the birth of the being, the 'entry' into the phenomenal world, the realm of multiplicity. Generally speaking, a *haiku* poem has within it a line referring to the Transcendent, and a line referring to the 'puncture' of that image by movement in the immanent; and in any case the poem typically manifests the union, the syzygy of the Divine and the mortal. And so it is in this case: the light of the sun is simultaneous with the Divine light, which is 'in the new green leaves' of life, the connections of samsaric existence, indivisible from the nirvanic Divine. The light is in the new green leaves and indeed they could not even be seen without it. The light remains the Transcendent, the leaves ever-changing, and yet the two are indisseverable.

Something of the same is true in the following poem as well:

Nanatsu boshi	In winter
Juhyo no ueo	The seven stars
Ariku na ru	Walk upon a crystal forest.[17]

[15] See *The Soen Roku,* (New York: 1986), p. 68.
[16] *Ibid*, p. 71.
[17] *Ibid.*

This poem begins with a general state: winter, a state of privation, the world white, pure, a state externally barren, but internally alive, a state of withdrawal in internalisation; 'winter' is in the poem followed by the 'seven stars,' which refers of course to the Pleiedes, that hazy circle of seven sidereal sisters which marks the coming rains; like the sunlight in the previous poem, though, the seven stars are 'eternal,' 'nirvanic' so to speak, and the 'crystal forest' of the last line suggests again the multiplicity of existence, 'walking' here come late to the light implicitly penetrating the new green leaves in the other poem– there is movement, interpenetration. Yet the reference is to a crystalline, frozen world, to the shimmering beauty of the winter forest which denotes also an inward state–the stellar, distanced objectivity of the wintry mind, everything seen in absolute clarity. The seven stars, incidentally, also may be seen to refer to the six previous Buddhas, prior to Sakyamuni, who is the seventh of this present world–cycle. In any even, we can see that metaphysical truth is indivisible from the natural–the imagery and the meaning are conjunct in these *haiku,* which with their brevity and simplicity is nonetheless by no means devoid of religious meaning, though in a form so condensed that the undiscerning reader may never catch it at all. This 'condensation' is precisely what makes *haiku*–o amenable to Zen Buddhist praxis, for Zen itself is the condensation of the religious path into its very crystalline essence–not for nothing is Zen Buddhism called the 'short path.' But that 'shortness' carries with it a correlate steepness, and consequently is not for all, though it is open to all.

And in fact one finds *haiku* and *waka,* whilst primordially connected to Shinto and, throughout conjunct with the natural world, very much intertwined with the Buddhist tradition as well, in which intertwining we can see also the primal relation between poetry and religious praxis, the former providing a kind of vehicle for the expression of the latter. In truth, poetry is fundamentally not 'secular' at all, the very word having came into existence only in the present era, but rather is inherently religious, or spiritual in origin, thereby being indivisible from the natural world, the source of which it reflects.

Nowhere is the Buddhist recognition of the unitariness of *samsara* and *nirvana* more evident than in poetry, for poetry is and must be reflective of the phenomenal realm, yet at the same time reflects the transcendent verities,

Transcendent Reality, by means of phenomenal images. That 'below' is indivisible from that 'above,' to employ the Hermetic formulation, though geometrical symbolism is quite out of place here, since we are indeed speaking of unities. It is in this very world that we can see the Divine; the Pure Land is nowhere else than here, in this very moment, and poetry's power consists in the revelation of this truth in beautiful, intoxicating words.

This can be seen in the *koan* cases not only of the *Mumonkan* and of the *llekiganroku,* which are traditionally accompanied by the verses of Setcho, but in the *Zenrin kushu* as well, the latter being in fact a collection of traditional and popular poetic lines and phrases which are employed in Rinzai Zen practise during *sanzen–one,* when given a *koan,* and having attained realisation of that station which it represents, then needs to find the proper 'capping verse' for the *koan, koan* literally meaning a kind of government record, appropriate in this case especially because the Zen Buddhist student is on a path toward that transcendent state which is 'master of heaven and of earth,' the regal state, the state of kingship. In any case, the verses which enter into the canon of the *Zenrin kushu* are thereby transmuted, their meaning become permeated with subtle spiritual implications, whatever the verse's origin.[18]

The same is true in fact of the *koan* cases themselves, which are hardly unpoetic: take this case from the *Hekiganroku,* without introduction, accompanying verses, or commentary: 'A monk asked Haryo: "What is the sword against which a hair is blown?" Haryo said: "Each branch of the coral embraces the bright moon." The original text reads *sui mo ken,* or 'blow hair sword,' meaning the sword of Zen practise which cuts through even a hair blown against it, through even the subtlest of delusions. And as to the corresponding line: 'Each branch of the coral embraces the bright moon,'– the branches refer to the ten thousand things of the cosmos; which is to say, *samsara,* and the bright moon refers to the fullness of nirvanic wisdom–every being is one's teacher puts this same understanding another way. But the sheer beauty of the line is, as Katsuki Sekida points out, intended to foster a 'language *samadhi'–one* repeats it again and again until the line transcends itself, or rather one transcends the line. And listen to Engo's introduction for case ninety–nine, Chu Kokushi and the Tenbodied Herdsman:

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[18] See *The Book of the Zen Grove,* Zenrin Robert Lewis, trs., (New York: 1984).

'When the dragon calls, mists and clouds arise; when the tiger roars, gales begin to blow. The supreme teachings of the Buddha ring out with a silvery voice. The actions of Zen masters are like those of absolutely expert archers, whose arrows, shot from opposite directions, collide in midair. The truth is revealed for all ages and places. Tell me, who has ever been like this? [19]

The dragon calling forth the clouds and rain refers here to the traditional Buddhist use of clouds and rain as symbolic of *upaya,* the skillful means of the Buddha for the liberation of beings, means as omnipresent as rain. Then too the dragon, like the *naga,* is affiliated with the waters, with coldness and wet, symbolic of ignorance; and hence it is a poetic reversal to use this as an image of the ultimate truth, a typical Buddhist reversal The roaring of the tiger which has the force of gales refers to the instantaneous, absolute power available to the Zen student, to one who is in control of himself, who can draw upon the absolute resources of his tempering in the dragon's cave of deep *samadhi.* Dragon and tiger are images which have their origin in Taoism, the dragon referring to the cold, watry yin–quality, the tiger having a dry, yang quality[20]. These of course are related to certain directions, and to various properties; but at this point we pass outside the scope of the present enquiry.

To continue the commentary then: the silvery voice of the Buddha refers to the moon, the full moon being symbolic of nirvanic Buddhahood; and the two archers whose arrows collide in mid air has several symbolic implications.

First, we may note that it is traditionally said in Buddhism that it is extraordinarily unique to attain human form, much less to be able, in that form, to hear the Dharmic truth; and the difficulty of two arrows striking in midair corresponds to this difficulty, to the rarity of this good fortune. But second, we might point out another, more esoteric aspect to this simile, that being, the two arrows collide in midair and all force ceases. They no longer are carried on their courses, but rather their arc ceases and they fall away. Likewise, the *dharma* manifests as the falling away of the karmic obstructions,

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[19] See Setcho's verses and the traditionally appended commentary to case ninety–nine, *Hekiganroku,* translated by Katsuki Sekida, (New York: 1977), as *Two Zen Classics.*
[20] See *Taoist Yoga,* Lu K'uan Yu, (New York: 1970), Ch. 7.

of the forces which impell the being in samsaric delusion, in order that Reality may manifest.

The first line, 'Tell me, who has ever been like this?' is ironic, and also possesses a dual meaning. On the one hand, one may say that no one has ever been like this–for who is it that one could say 'is like this?' From the Buddhist perspective, the personality consists in a concatenation of parts or elements, and there is ultimately no single individual, no permanent being. Then, too, on the other hand one may indeed say that some really are 'like this,' for it is without question possible to attain to the truth, to realise liberation, though who it is that realises, that is another matter.

And so we can see that the original poetry of this *koan,* like that which is found throughout Zen Buddhtst writings, is conjunct with metaphysical implications so profound that one can scarcely fathom them; with all its beauty, the koan is also simultaneously wholly manifesting its transcendent meanings and origin. And because it employs so much natural imagery, to transcendent ends, we can say that the traditional poetic form indeed 'marks' the centre of Zen Buddhist transmission, being the means of 'regulating' or of 'examining' the student, testing him to see if he has attained the subtleties of transcendent understanding marked by the poetic mode of discourse.

In fact, one can think of no other religious tradition which entails such a reliance on poetry as means of religious practise; this is true in the Chinese transmission, but becomes truly pivotal within the Japanese, in conjunction with the Japanese *haiku* and *waka* tradition as part of the cultural .inheritance from Shinto. But poetry has been inherent ill Zen Buddhism since its beginning; it is true that the Buddha enjoined the avoidance of poetry as an activity in itself, but we are not here talking about poetry as entertainment merely nor in any modem sense. In Zen Buddhism, poetry is in truth a Way, like the various Mystery disciplines in the West: it is a democratic means of entry and of manifestation in some respects–anyone may enter–but at the same time it is truly aristocratic, for only a few are really brilliant. Brilliance is not a matter of words, though, of fluency in expression; it is rather a matter of transcendent realisation which shines through it so to speak, and of the ways in which that realisation manifests. Certainly there are certain qualities which 'condition' that realisation in its permeation into the phenomenal

realm, as it were; it may possess a quality of rigour, or of mercy, of absolute clarity or of natural, hence indirect references. But in any case it is symbolical, for the symbolic is the means of 'communication' in our world with the 'archetypal,' the transcendent.[21]

It is in fact precisely for this reason that modem poetry is, in many different ways, so profoundly anti–symbolic: it must be so, for, emerging out of a mind divorced from religious practise which is originally the heart of poetry, one can only expect that many inferior possibilities might be realised in the name of poetry, among them being infatuation with words themselves, various forays into the realms of greed, anger, ignorance, self-infatuated displays and even dare one say it?– demonic outbursts. But all of this has nothing to do with the way of poetry as a means of initiatory discipline, and since this is our focus in this essay, we will skip modem incongruities in the name of poetry, and return to our central consideration, concluding our discussion with the words of National teacher Daio on Kanzeon Bodhisattva, an initiatory poem *par excellence* the sphere of perfect communion is clear everywhere the pitcher water is alive, the willow eyes arc green there are also cold crags and early green bamboo why are people these days in such a great hurry? the cliffs are high and deep, the waters rush and tumble the realm of perfect communion is new in each place face to face, the people who meet her don't recognise her when will they ever be free from the harbour of illusion? lotus blossoms always in her hands, she stands alone, magnificent a boy comes to call wordless, eyes resemble eyebrows know that outside of joining the palms and bowing the head how could this thing be explained to him? the sound of the rushing spring is cool and subtle the colours of the mount– in crags are deep but distinct in every field the realm of perfect communion how can Sudhana know? the dense crags jut forth precipitous the waterfalls spew an azure loom in each land the sphere of perfect communion those who go right in are rare the clouds are thin, the river endless the universal door appears without deception questioning the boy, he doesn't 'yet know it exists he went uselessly searching in the cold of mists and waves in a hundred cities

[21] We speak here in figural terms, *of* course, but it is necessary to do so when referring to the contingent human perspective. Our use of the word 'archetypal' has nothing whatever to do with modem psychologising implications lent it.