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ON THE RHETORIC OF THE PLACE BETWEEN

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Leon Allen Raikes

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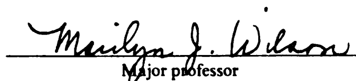

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# ABSTRACT

## SUFISM, TAOISM, AND RALPH WALDO EMERSON: A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE RHETORIC OF THE PLACE BETWEEN

By

Leon Allen Raikes

Conceiving of the tensions between the rhetorics of the east and west metaphorically helps us to confront both the felt gulf between language and learning and the conventionality of our theory. The gulf between language and life is related to institutions, cultural diversity, creativity, and search for the truth. The place between is between active, logical categories of intelligence and receptive, sensual categories of feeling; it has a prophetic intelligence which becomes real only in finding a language for it.

The rhetoric and pedagogies of Sufism, Taoism, and Ralph Waldo Emerson reveal a theory of the place between capable both of conforming and challenging modern western theories of language and learning. The experience of the place between arrests time, instills a special kind of Zen stupidity, disdains discursiveness, and animates all religion. The language of the place between involves the speaker/writer more than the audience in a purposive disturbance of conventional thinking. Tentative and questioning, the rhetoric of the place between celebrates constant unsettling.

The rhetoric of Sufism explores beyond reasoning the home of the active imagination, a real place between. The language of this place is indirect, impersonal, dependent on surprise and symbol. An initiate brought beyond words

through words transcends the self, understands received culture as dead culture, is creatively stimulated to doubt. The Sufi practices prayer as a reshaping of reality. Sufism creates for modern westerners key practical pedagogical imperatives.

Similarly, language in Zen practice enables transcendence of conditioning, favors spontaneity over discursiveness, aims at clarity by avoiding direct affirmation, and cures scholastics of dependence on explanations.

A key guide into eastern rhetorical insights for westerners is Ralph Waldo Emerson. Favoring not instruction but provocation, his rhetorical strategy gives clear answers only to take them away. His assimilation of eastern influences helps him to focus less on either logic or self expression and more on taking himself out of time into the metaphorical place between.

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1995

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and family without whose patience and support this work would never have been completed.

## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the help and support of my dissertation committee: Dr. Marilyn Wilson, chairperson and Drs. Kitty Geissler, Mike Lopez, and Jay Ludwig. I also acknowledge the help and encouragement of my employer, Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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## Introduction: Journeying To the Metaphorical East

Picture my fear and confusion.

It was my first day of teaching. I had never taken an education course in my life. I had figured that if ever I found myself teaching, I'd just tell students what I knew. Now it didn't seem so simple.

As I stood facing twenty-two Arabic-speaking teenagers in a small Lebanese village, they stood facing me. Quickly I understood that, at least in every outward way, teachers are far more venerated in other societies; students quickly rise when the teacher enters and sit only when invited to do so.

Now what? I stood facing them. They stood facing me. I had received a cordial introduction from the immense and affable Principal, who had admonished my students to show me all due respect--I who had travelled several thousand miles to the Military Zone just to help them learn English. But he was gone now. What next?

For a few instants those words "Military Zone" made me a bit uncomfortable. I glanced briefly out the classroom window, beyond the balcony, up to Mount Hermon and beyond. I could see into three countries (Lebanon, Syria, and Israel); I was very much a foreigner in at least four, this great quiet classroom seeming the biggest country of all.

I will never forget noting how many thoughts, all eloquently embodied in key words, can go through a person's mind in just the ten seconds before the inception

of actual speech. And how memorable is that silence before the speech of a lifetime, the constellating and breathing of words in a calculated rhetorical act.

Exactly what should I be saying to precisely these Lebanese teenagers--and about the great tradition of English literature that I loved? Could these students really read Milton or "The Rape of the Lock"?

Vividly I remember that silence between, the flashback I saw so clearly in a few seconds that involved a whole segment of my life.

Just two years earlier, as an undergraduate junior at Kalamazoo College, I had been studying, as one of a handful of white students, at Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone. How I had loved my friends and our journeys to their homes in the "bush"; but it was the classrooms I remembered now--one in particular: The Political History of West Africa, or some such thing.

Let me picture the scene on a typical stifling hot morning. Having wandered down the gorgeous paths, lined with oleander and dotted with whole bushes of hybiscus, I entered the lecture hall--100 or more students in a lecture-style room waiting for the professor to enter. By unfortunate custom, the white students sat together near the front; others were from all over Africa--many countries and many tribal groups--but all here to learn about their own political history.

Of course it was a history they knew about. They were living in it; during the Biafran Civil War as it was, for example, Ibo and Yoruba ("enemies") sat in the same room to learn about themselves.

The professor came in. She was a young white woman. She was an expert, educated at a major British university. She lectured for ninety minutes while

everyone in the room took copious notes. Then we all went into the real world again.

I asked my Ibo friend and neighbor in the dorm what he thought of all this. He said the woman knew much. But did she teach him anything new? Well, the woman knew much--and she had a degree from a great university. She had come all the way to Africa to teach us.

She had come all the way....The Principal in Marjoyoun had said I had come all the way....Was I going to become, had I already become, like that white woman?

And I quickly remembered two other lessons at Fourah Bay College, though I have forgotten almost everything I learned about political history. My favorite course--and the one I had really come to take--was a class on "primitive religion." It was taught by a leader at the college, a respected scholar on Mende religion particularly. He had written books. He knew about tribal customs. He was a wise man.

He <u>lectured</u> the six or eight of us in his class, speaking to us from long pages of manuscript notes. The men had to wear ties; the women had to wear dresses. He permitted no questions, expected no discussion, spoke as the authority.

He was a wise man.

Several weeks later, travelling with a friend a hundred miles into the jungle to his village, I got to know my friend's father, a famous Chief. The Chief had twenty-three wives, almost a hundred children, a huge cocoa plantation, and a marvelous little station wagon with a motor like a Singer sewing machine. He

spoke beautiful English.

He gave me, for a few weeks, my own house. And he said, "If you want to know about our religion, come out on the night of the full moon and dance with us. Then, if you have questions, come to me and ask."

I danced all one night, along with the whole village, to the beat of giant drums played with their entire forearms by huge men. People joked about me: "Now, if he only learns the Mende language, he will be one of us." And I understood the centrality of language in the cohesion and belongingness of groups that night in a wholly new way.

And I asked the Chief many questions. He too was a very wise man.

The other lesson was shorter. Back in Freetown, I came out to watch a parade on a festival day. Riding in the back seats of shining Mercedes were the Justices of the Supreme Court--all large Black men. Each wore a very British powdered wig.

To be truthful, I struggled not to laugh at their absurd appearance, realizing only a moment later the real import here: power, including the authority to decree laws and judge issues affecting a whole country, <u>and</u> including the <u>written</u> aspects of the law--all this power here was borrowed from a colonial system foreign to the Sierra Leoneans I knew and loved.

But these too were wise men.

In any case, all this went through my mind quickly as I stood in front of my young Lebanese students--as they stood before me.

Somehow I remembered to ask them to be seated, and then, casting my voice into an absolutely still well of stunned silence, I talked. I thanked them and the

village for inviting me to Lebanon. I talked about where I had been and what I cared about. I talked about my love for literature which I hoped to share with them. I talked about how I hoped to learn more and more about them and their families, their aspirations for the future, their dreams.

Fortunately, no cross-border shelling went on that day. The silence was too perfect between us by now, between the American teacher "who had come so far" and the Lebanese scholars who were engaged in a fascinating ballet of furtive glances and raised eyebrows among them.

They had not expected **this**. The wanted me to <u>teach</u>. My job, as they saw it, was to tell them what they needed to know. Then they could study, memorize, and pass the government exams. Those British exams--you know, the very ones given to British teenagers twenty years before--those exams were looming.

Later, for many afternoons to come, I would watch pairs or small bands of students marching up and down the courtyard of the small college memorizing lessons, remembering <u>verbatim</u> my oftentimes casual words (!).

At that moment I was not a wise man. They called me the "chatty professor."

Well, in the following years my behaviors became less overt but no less <u>subversive</u>. I wanted my students to do well on the exams, of course; but I also wanted them to **think for themselves**--really to have fresh ideas, say, about Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much With Us." I knew that such a text could be meaningful to these students personally. Who could know more about the tension between materialism and ancient spiritual values? Who could say more about the differences between spending time making money or eating lunch for

three hours with a friend?

What I learned most in those years has not to do so much with pedagogy--though I certainly had (and have) a lot to learn about techniques. Nor does what I learned have chiefly to do with teaching English as a second language: I just kept searching for ideas that work. It is true that my students taught me many things about Shakespeare and Pope and Yeats and Dickinson, just as I hope they learned from me not only about literature but also about global issues--but even all this is not chief among what I feel I have learned over the years of adjusting to new societies and finally to various school cultures within America.

Whether in America or abroad there is for each student and each classroom a key tension between two cultures. Before I try to define what these cultures are or what they have to do with various rhetorical behaviors (not to mention pedagogical endeavors)--let me just **visualize** them first.

You can use simple labels to begin with if you want--I've even created a chart to which we can refer, understanding that eventually we may have to qualify or perfect these labels:

| **West** | **East** |
|---|---|
| **new** | **old** |
| **intellectual/social** | **intuitional/personal** |
| **mechanical** | **spiritual** |
| **academic** | **experiential** |
| **scholarly** | **prayerful** |
| **a rhetoric of** | **a rhetoric of** |
| **research (review)** | **insearch, here & now** |
| **adulthood** | **childhood &/or** |
| | **amiable old age** |

But let me share a memory first--again from the Lebanese border with Israel.

Thinking of this border, a no-man's land between two worlds, always helps me to visualize the gulf of which I will be speaking.

Picture a tall fence between two warring countries. There are harsh electric lights at night. In the daytime vigilant patrols go up and down on both sides. No one must cross this border going in either direction.

I remember standing at this place one spring day. First I looked into Israel where "the desert bloomed." New olive trees were flourishing in beautifully-tended groves on the greening hillsides. Straight and well-maintained roads organized the landscape. Here there was every sign of careful planning, scientific inquiry and discourse about planning and inquiry, and plenty of organization.

On "my" side, still in Lebanon, was a totally different scene, inspiring in a different way. Ancient roadways meandered around hills, part of the timeless road that once carried goods from Byblos or Tyre to Jerusalem or around Mount Hermon to Damascus. Olive trees grew here as well, but mostly older ones planted at random, never in rows. There was little planning or organizing here, except for the organic patterning of nature left to her own designs.

The point, you are asking? Well, it's not so simple as a "point," but so far these assertions might be made, tentative and subject to much more discussion:

**(a) The worlds on the two sides of the fence are both real.**
**(b) Both real worlds struggle to be realized in each specific man and woman, whether coming at first from the east or from the west.**
**(c) The tensions between or interplay between these two world are thoroughly rhetorical.**
**(d) A global understanding of rhetoric and complete picture of literacy education require a full**

**awareness of the real worlds on <u>both</u> sides of the fence.**

**(e) The seeds of the understanding of each world are scattered along the other side of the fence.**

**(f) For those of us in the West, where mostly we prefer the straight rows and the new plants scientifically irrigated, <u>intuitions</u> we may have about a fuller or more global picture of discourse and literacy education can be crystallized by study of eastern rhetorics--even as most of us will remain thoroughly western rhetoricians and researchers in the end.**

For the purpose of further discussion--though of course warping the truth somewhat while still working at a very general level--why not characterize western vs. eastern rhetorical traditions a little more concretely?

We can begin by agreeing what is to be meant by **rhetoric.** Robert T. Oliver, in his groundbreaking <u>Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China</u> (1971), prefers to quote Donald C. Bryant ("Rhetoric: Its Function and Its Scope," <u>Quarterly Journal of Speech</u>, December 1953): Rhetoric is "the function of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas." The usefulness of such a definition is its dynamism: rhetoric <u>does</u> something, creating or redefining a relationship among individuals. Rhetoric in this context defines or manipulates <u>reality</u> within certain situations. **But** its definition of reality is never absolute. Oliver, significantly, adds to his working definition of rhetoric: rhetoric is the function of adjusting ideas to people or people to ideas <u>and</u> rhetoric is the function of adjusting <u>people to people</u> (6-7).

In the study and the use of rhetoric, reality is <u>relative</u>; it is **culturally** relative, in fact. Certainty is not the province of rhetoric; or, looked at another way, Truth itself is relative. Again referring to Robert T. Oliver (6):

> The function of rhetoric is not, like dialectic, to examine a given subject in order adequately to depict its nature. Nor is rhetoric, like logic, designed to discover and demonstrate inevitable conclusions about a subject. The province of rhetoric, as Aristotle pointed out, is the realm of prob-abilities. We do not argue about that which is certain or attainable; we try to persuade concerning propositions which have alternative acceptable conclusions.

"Alternative acceptable conclusions"--but how many alternatives are acceptable and in what range may be a cultural variable. If the province of rhetoric is neither to define absolutely nor to absolutely define, it follows that rhetoric has to do with areas of choice within human experience and how people may be influenced in making these choices. What rhetoricians may do to influence choices, however, is again relative: "The kinds of ideas that interest or move people and the reasons why they accept or reject them are not universals; they are specific attributes of specific cultures" (7).

Of course some of these culture-specific attributes may be specific indeed. But for the sake of discussion only, here a rough distinction is being made between the very general categories "east" and "west." Understand at the outset that these designations are not meant to be geographical. That is, eastern aspects of rhetoric may be alive and well in the geographical west (among those for whom the east is a particular study or among those, like Ralph Waldo Emerson, for whom the east has acted as a kind of influence or filter for spontaneous intellectual or spiritual ideas). Likewise, increasingly, western predispositions in rhetoric are likely to be more and more influential in the east, especially among expanding market economies. I speak of dichotomies tentatively and personally, all in an effort to help us western thinkers rise beyond our own already-achieved categories.

The east and the west are metaphors. Both are alive in each of us.

Yet it is the metaphorical west that rules us pedagogically; it has defined the limits of how we see literacy and the very rhetorical stance of literacy education.

Robert T. Oliver, like almost everyone else describing the origins of what is western in western rhetoric, calls us back to Plato in the famous passage from Phaedrus, where he has Socrates say the following on how we may define rhetoric:

> The conditions to be filled are these. First, you must know the truth about the subject you speak or write about; that is to say, you must be able to isolate it in definition, and having so defined it, you must understand how to divide it into kinds, until you reach the limit of division; secondly, you must have a corresponding discernment of the nature of the soul, discover the type of speech appropriate to each nature, and order and arrange your discourse accordingly, addressing a variegated soul in a variegated style that ranges over the whole gamut of tones, and a simple soul in a simple style. All this must be done if you are to become competent, within human limits, as a scientific practitioner of speech, whether you propose to expound or persuade. (Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds. The Collected Dialogues of Plato. New York, 1961, 522-523)

Embedded in this famous passage is almost everything western about the western traditions of rhetoric. (a) You must "know the truth about your subject" before you write or speak about it; only relatively recently have western rhetorics allowed that one may write, in that very process, to first learn about the subject. (b) You must "divide [your subject] into kinds," classifying and categorizing, dissecting and analyzing--all very useful (but also, as we shall see, distorting or restricting as well). (c) Order and arrange your discourse in certain patterns which can be learned, practiced, and ingrained.

In the west, rhetoric has been a study to help people to get a job done.

To show how all the above distinguishes western rhetorical theory and practice

from eastern theory and practice, Robert T. Oliver is once again the best source--also in his seminal work Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China, focused on **attitudes** to rhetoric. For sure, several centuries of rhetorical study in the west have produced a vast and varied literature on the study of rhetoric; "the west has been intoxicated with eloquence and the means of attaining it" (9-10). In ancient India and China, on the other hand, Oliver asserts that the bibliography is very slim indeed on the subject of rhetoric. But it is Oliver's explanation of these facts which is so important here:

> To state the matter most simply, in the West rhetoric has been considered to be so important that it has had to be explored and delineated separately, as a special field of knowledge about human relations. In the East, rhetoric has been considered so important that it could not be separated from the remainder of human knowledge (10).

Let's look at the above facts and perspectives in a little more concrete way. I am reminded by Oliver of the lovely distinction Antoine de Saint-Exupery makes in the early pages of his The Little Prince. First he shows that he takes rhetorical acts very seriously:

> For I do not want anyone to read my book carelessly. I have suffered too much grief in setting down these memories. Six years have already passed since my friend went away from me, with his sheep. If I try to describe him here, it is to make sure that I shall not forget him. To forget a friend is sad. Not everyone has had a friend. And if I forget him, I may become like the grown-ups who are no longer interested in anything but figures (18-19).

De Saint-Exupery must write his memories down in order not to lose them--but also in order not to be **changed** into a merely reasoning and logical adult person "no longer interested in anything but figures." At the same time, in his rhetorical

sophistication, he knows that he has to reach those adults (those westerners) too; if his audience were only children, that would change the way he tells the story, meaning that there are two distinct rhetorics involved. To only children he could say, "The proof that the Little Prince existed is that he was charming, that he laughed, and that he was looking for a sheep. If anybody wants a sheep, that is proof that he exists." But grown-ups and western rhetoricians who grew up cheek to jowl with the Greeks will want another treatment before being satisfied: "The planet he came from is Asteroid B-612." Oh well, then: they would be convinced.

Here is how the author would have liked to begin his story--but this would only work for readers who are comfortable with the idea that fairy tales are **true**:

> Once upon a time there was a little prince who lived on a planet that was scarcely bigger than himself, and who had need of a sheep....

You see the problem.

The issue here is **the** basic issue about what is real and how a person can talk about it. Robert T. Oliver and others explain that in the east, universally, writers and thinkers are devoted to the "related concepts of unity and harmony":

> In this view all things properly belong together and coexist. Consequently, the ancient East has not been much interested in logic, which necessarily correlates unlike elements, nor has it favored either definition or classification as aids to clear thought (10).

Plato's way of first knowing the truth about a subject and then dividing it "into kinds" is a foreign way of thinking. In fact, as Oliver too implies, **clear thought** itself (as the west defines it) is not of particular value in the east:

> Whereas the West has favored analysis and division of subject matter into identifiable and separate entities, the East has believed

> that to see truth steadily one must see it whole. (Oliver 10)

If, in the process, "outlines are dimmed" (10), such a "loss" is more than compensated by the varied gains of "viewing the subject in its interrelated entirety" (10).

If your effort is to define a certain aspect of what you call real, a certain rhetoric will provide you the tools. You will classify, characterize, clarify. You will make distinctions and *prove* your definitions true if your readers or listeners accept your categories. On the other hand, if your purpose is to unify, describe, exemplify, you will need other rhetorical tools. You will see intellectual categories, no matter how carefully logical, as comfortable abstractions or damaging delusions. Your philosophy of rhetoric, if you choose to develop one, will focus not so much on clarity, proof, and consistency for the sake of an audience--rather it will focus more on discovery, tentativeness, expressiveness, and inconsistency *for your own sake*.

You need to choose between a rhetoric of ideas which is persuasive and rather definite *or* a rhetoric of insights which is necessarily continuous and *fluctual*.

Such approaches to rhetoric, then, seem at first almost mutually exclusive. One wonders if it is possible to speak about one world from the perspective of another. Yet we must remember that there is just this one world, and even in western-dominated research westerners have developed various ways of talking about its unity.

Especially westerners--fond, you see, of classifying and dividing and defining things in formal outline--especially westerners need to be reminded *constantly* that

there is but one world. Think of Carlos Castaneda in the first of the books about Don Juan (1968), The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge; Carlos is a chatty degree candidate who is obsessed with taking notes. The only discourse he knows is academic: he is in the process of inventing a dissertation, sifting through and constantly reorganizing pages of notes. Under Don Juan's tutelage and especially under the influence of the hallucinogens associated with Don Juan's instruction about becoming a "man [sic] of knowledge," Carlos enters and retreats--enters a "separate reality" and then returns to "this world." He begins to think that he experiences two worlds, and he is torn between them. Here are Don Juan's words, his rhetorical effort to teach:

> You think there are two worlds for you--two paths. But there is only one....The only world available to you is the world of men, and that world you cannot choose to leave. You are a man! The protector [Mescalito] showed you the world of happiness where there is no difference between things because there is no one there to ask about the difference. But that is not the world of men. The protector shook you out of it and showed you how a man thinks and fights. That is the world of man. And to be a man is to be condemned to that world. You have the vanity to believe you live in two worlds, but that is only your vanity. There is but one single world for us. We are men and must follow the world of men contentedly (152-153).

The way of knowledge, the "path with heart," while not a road down which one can **talk oneself**, is a road on which descriptions and simple instructions and even metaphorical explanations can help a "man of knowledge" discipline and clarify himself. His rhetoric borrows from both east and west: from "east" the ritual repetition, the subtle suggestion, the unitary vision, the assertion of the oneness of all things; from the "west", the ability to offer at least partial explanations, if only so that apprentices of the future may follow. Note that

Castaneda appends, to this very first volume, a different treatment of all the same material, but this time labelled "Structural Analysis." His western desire to explain and categorize is over-riding.

Teachers of some variety of spiritual knowledge in various cultural traditions, while relying on language to instruct apprentices in a knowledge that essentially goes beyond explanations, bring students of rhetoric face to face with the mystery and the key paradox of language. While we can be inspired by Don Juan's words--

> For me there is only the travelling on the paths that have a heart, or any path that may have a heart. There I travel, and the only worthwhile challenge for me is to travel its full length. And there I travel--looking, looking breathlessly (185).

--the question remains, how do we talk about or define or demonstrate or describe this walking on the path? What indeed is the path? How can I express my experiences of it to even one other person? Could I hope to do so definitively? The question is how to talk about insightful experiences without at the same time **killing them.**

Stimulating a great deal of thought on these questions, Toby Fulwiler, in his Teaching With Writing, refers to Georges Gusdorf in the section on "Thought and Language." In 1977 Gusdorf analyzed the "double and often contradictory role" of our language in personal development. We communicate ideas and facts to other people--often we get very good at this in schools; and we use language to express ourselves, to discover ourselves to ourselves, to reveal ourselves spiritually. As Fulwiler puts it, the two roles--"communicative" and "expressive"--may often seem

to oppose each other. Quoting Gusdorf directly now, "The more I communicate, the less I express myself; the more I express myself, the less I communicate" (in Fulwiler 3).

The writer's dilemma, then, and the cross-cultural challenge in the study of rhetoric through the ages, is it not both to express oneself and define concepts at the same time? How can I help you to understand without losing my own identity in the categories of discourse I must use in order to be understood? How can I discover and use a rhetoric of personal reflection without sounding, in my speech, either simply crazed and incoherent or, even in my careful speech, nonetheless anti-intellectual?

And please note how the imagery of this particular discourse is beginning to hinge decisively on dualities, opposites, dichotomies--or their real or invented or eventual unity. Is this imagery, once again, not the core of the larger image throughout of the "east" and the "west"?

Yet another general way of "defining," from a western perspective, the metaphorical distinction between east and west is to note the differing social contexts in which rhetoric happens. Whereas the west, formed in its rhetorical ideas by Plato, Aristotle, and Periclean speech-making, focuses on persuasion, such is much less the case in the east. Throughout the east there is very little lecture tradition, no long tradition of political debate, no love of eloquence for its own manipulative sake (Oliver 1-2), no eternal worry about sophism. Rather, the eastern traditions focus on declamation, recitation, prayer, inner search, and subtle innuendo. Yet in daily life, as at all times in all places, the rhetorical issues may

not be as overtly philosophical as I make them seem.

> The key to understanding the Asian mind and Asian civilization is their manner of talk: how they addressed one another and why, under what circumstances, on what topics, in what varied styles, with what intent, and with what effects? (Oliver 2-3)

It should be clear by now that "east" and "west," "the rhetoric of the east" and the "rhetoric of the west"--all are terms that absolutely do not exist absolutely. We can use these terms only metaphorically, loosely, carefully in relationship to each other. Referring back to the chart (above) of "east" vs. "west," surely you can see that no single person--nor a whole culture--is likely to be isolated on one side. Rather we could begin to regard these as competing sets of energies. Real people, as well as whole populations, are no doubt drawn in two directions at once.

So?

It is the felt gulf between, the silence as it were between the beating of the angels' wings, that I want to ask about. How could we learn a new or clearer vision for our study of rhetoric or for the pedagogies of literacy by standing in the silence between? How can insights acquired in this study help us to define a rhetoric of spiritual, personal discovery in an age not characterized by prophecy or revelation? How could a person's own words help a new future unfold?

New future, you say? Redundant? I mean a future which is not a reconstruction of somebody else's time shaped even by identical forces. I'm talking about our ability (or not) to intervene in history. I'm talking about bridging the gulf.

But most of us, western academics or those under the influence of western

intellectual-rhetorical tradition especially, remain imprisoned in a strict duality. We suffer from this duality on several layers because we know intuitively a gulf between parts of ourselves.

Let me explain what I mean by such a duality.

First, teachers and students both will easily understand the felt dimensions of this duality. It is experienced as a gulf between two lives. We enjoy an intellectual life and, outside the academy, a personal life. If we are artists, we are always struggling with the perceived dissonance between the art and the life. Often there is so little time for the art, and entirely too much routine personal lived experience. Or we wish we had a greater share of time for writing poems, novels, articles, or plays and a lesser share of time for grading students' essays or cooking the evening meal or driving Emily to swimming practice.

Don't students experience this duality too?

In fact, it may torture them more deeply than it does us. They ask, "What do these lectures and studying for these tests and doing the research (whatever that is) have to do with me?"

Of course many students don't ask these questions. They remind me of an article by David Batholomae ("Inventing the University" in Mike Rose, ed., When A Writer Can't Write). Batholomae claims that in writing for us students seek to join our discourse community--they "reinvent the University." Yet writing will be required before the intellectual skills are learned. Hence the student voice mimicking authority, the hollow bluffs. The problem of audience awareness becomes, for our students, enormously complicated when they are subject to a

language they can neither command nor control. If "learning," at least as it is defined in the liberal arts curriculum, becomes more a matter of imitation and parody than a matter of "invention and discovery" (143), this is another way of saying that large groups of students are denied access to literacy in the very setting in which we say they are gaining access to literate traditions. The environments in which we may place our students (like the land of "administered thought" in Richard Ohmann's picture of Comp 101) may actually prevent development in literacy.

Many of us are so used to duality, to the sensation of leading more than one life, that we stop noticing such dissonance. And it is far more convenient to ignore it (that related duality) in our students.

What can we do to regain an experience of the whole life again? How can we give a greater gift to students--especially those of us who teach in English and writing and humanities departments--the gift of wholism, a meaning for the academic dimensions of life, a reason for colleges and universities as institutions?

We will not find as many clues as we expect to the answers for these questions in our own research only. To let "the academy" examine itself academically to reform the academy could go on inconclusively for generations. It would be rather like a sick patient trying to talk himself or herself out of being sick in purely medical terms. A new conceptual universe would be required, and a new vocabulary. Perhaps even a miracle.

Fortunately, we do not have to wait for miracles. In our own research on language and literacy in the last few decades are the seeds of our salvation--the

seeds scattered on the other side of the fence.

I often feel that I have to see something a new way. Intuitively I see that I will not understand better an issue, a problem, a hem in the fabric of reality, by using the vocabulary or the conceptual categories already in my possession. I will have to step outside myself. Then I remember Fritjof Capra in his Tao of Physics and how, quoting the early twentieth century physicist Werner Heisenberg, he justified his will to compare unlike things:

> It is probably quite true generally that in the history of human thinking the most fruitful developments frequently take place at the points where two different lines of thought meet. These lines may have their roots in quite different parts of human culture, in different times or different environments or different religious traditions: hence if they actually meet, that is if they are at least so much related to each other that a real interaction can take place, then one may hope that new and interesting developments may follow.

Bringing apparently dissimilar conceptual or experiential universes into the neighborhood of each other develops light and heat: illumination and imaginative energy.

**That is what I'm going to try to do here.**

Doing so makes the topics I organize and the language I use in this discourse quite personal. If I create metaphors centering on the Sufi tradition of the rhetoric of enlightenment, or the associated Zen tradition, or the example of Ralph Waldo Emerson, I do so in a personal way. You could only expect me to draw from what I know--if by know we mean both intellectual conviction and experiential certainty. I offer **one way** of thinking about the questions listed below; each reader will also

have to draw from personal experience--no matter what continent, metaphorically, or what historical epoch is most personal to him or to her.

In planning a journey of just this type, it must be understood that there are no definite maps. Maps delineate a linear journey precisely in terms of the map. Arriving at a destination happens in terms of the map. Here the awkwardness is in using a map but then changing the language and the strategy of the map before arriving when, in terms of where we wish to go, the language of the map no longer identifies where we are reaching. To arrive at an understanding of the metaphorical east in western rhetoric will mean looking at the blurred but vital landscape just under the one we already know about on our western map. It will mean subverting and resisting all along the way.

Similarities we may find among divergent "traditions"--Sufism, Zen, the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson--will not make sense if looked at reasonably in terms of influences. It is unlikely that medieval Sufis, for example, were influenced by knowledge of contemporary developments in far-away Zen. Nor would it be easy--nor even useful except in terms of a merely intellectual history--to prove how or how much Emerson was influenced by either Sufism or Zen-like (mostly earlier Hindu) writings. What we have to find is more general, more universal features of a rhetorical landscape--a landscape we can associate with the metaphorical east. This may be a landscape that we already know, though not distinctly--one which we can ignore--just under the features of our western map. It is a real language, nonetheless, and one the exploration of which potentially restores to us the non-dual and a richness of discourse which liberates the spirit. It will also resist and

subvert the assumptions about rhetoric which we already feel more comfortable to have made.

All this is therefore not so much about Sufism, Zen, or Emerson as it is, right now, about **us**.

What calls me is a certain spirit of journeying--you know, the kind of journeying when you wake up on a clear, cool day knowing that you want to wander now, perhaps for many days. You eat a good meal, put on your most comfortable old shoes, pitch a few snacks into a bag, and away you go. If someone asks where you are going, you say "wherever my feet might be taking me." And you mean it. Not knowing too clearly exactly what to expect or how your trek will end up is part of the adventure.

But if you're taking readers along, you have necessarily an added weight of responsibility. Being in this circumstance myself, there follow certain defining lists or classifications. While such lists or classifications might--from the standpoint of an adventurer--**keep** us from exploring many interesting sideroads and deep gullies branching down to the river, at least we know we will get home for Christmas. And, as searching leads to searching, we can always come back for other journeys for many years to come.

(l) Assumptions in this discourse include: (a) the definition of literacy is necessarily cultural, whether you like to define literacy that way or not; (b) western research on literacy and western rhetorical predispositions which shape that research are extremely likely to be ethno-centric (just as is the eastern

perspective on western life and letters); (c) multiple perspectives on language and learning, imaginatively created, can act on us as missile-like lectures of the roshi, with equally unsettling-of-the-world-as-we-view-it results; (d) having become unsettled, we can come face to face creatively with the conventionality of our own thinking--we will see ourselves revealingly; (e) engaging in this long-term journey-into-other-people's-ways-of-making-meaning actively can help us, in practical terms, to understand what to do about practical pedagogical problems; (f) having some fresh ideas about what to do, we can try that doing before starting the whole process all over again. We will find that there is really no end to the journeying.

Why follow exactly this path up the mountain? The Sufi insight is an insight of personal discovery, endless prayer, recitation; the rhetoric of personal revelation is complete submission to God. The words are a way beyond the language, beyond the self, straight to God. The Zen insight I take to be related to the Way of the Sufi, but even more personal, even more remarkable in its involvement with words. Its enlightenment is said to be an enlightenment beyond language using language to point the way. And Ralph Waldo Emerson's insight was a way of drawing intuitively from extra-Christian mystical traditions even without completely entering those traditions. His search to balance the Intellect and the Spirit, Jesus and the Buddha, the society and the self convictingly prefigures the search for balance which calls many twentieth century researchers in several fields, in many countries, to look both east and west within. All that follows, as I recreate my own path up the mountain, is meant to be an extended answer to the question: what

does attention to the rhetorical subtleties of these traditions add or confirm in an already prevalent quest in western research to address these issues?

Certain issues--there are scores of these, but I mean here to focus on the following:

(l) How can an attempt to see more global issues in the study of rhetoric help us to face the conventionality of our own thoughts about language?

(2) More specifically, what might a study of Sufi traditions teach us (or confirm in us) about pedagogy or about the language of personal reflection?

(3) What unique insights might a study of rhetoric in the Zen tradition also contribute to the same study?

(4) How can a perspective on the unique achievements of Ralph Waldo Emerson that focuses on his intuitive crossing of cultures teach us about modern approaches to global diversity?

(5) In all the above cases, how does a rhetoric of explanations and clarifications transform itself into a rhetoric of revelation by shocking, surprising, or irritating people into greater awareness?

(6) How might learning all the above constructively and meaningfully affect practical pedagogical methods?

Tentative answerings to these questions will involve the following methods:

(a) <u>Both</u> a general survey of Sufism, Zen or Taoism, and the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson <u>and</u> a study of restricted texts;

(b) Purposive looks at differing ideas or perspectives in order to clarify what, in isolation, might be more obscure;

(c) Always a focus and a concentration on how newly global perspectives on English education could enhance learning;

(d) Simultaneous research, in a western sense, and insearch, in an eastern sense;

(e) An equal respect for both sides of the fence.

What do I think it will come down to if you travel with me? We will go together, with this one over-arching question in mind, though not expecting a final answer, nonetheless realizing in an extended way the usefulness of asking impossible questions:

> **What is, finally, the role of rhetoric in seeking the Truth?**

If, especially as westerners, we begin to define the Truth as unfinished, incomplete, and therefore inexpressible as definition, what is the useful and ultimate role of intellect alone in relation to achieved intuition? Can there, in our own times, be a rhetoric of spiritual insearch which is not only a talking about but also a talking within perceived truth? How can an understanding of such a potential rhetorical reality contribute to sound and successful teaching practices? How can a study of the rhetoric of personal revelation in ancient-and-also-living, non-western traditions (even among western writers) help us to conceptualize and to meaningfully practice a rhetoric of personal insearch in a modern secular age?

There follow three related extended essays--on Sufism, on Zen or Taoism, and on Ralph Waldo Emerson--centering in general on a rhetoric of personal transformation and prayerful or poetic speech. None of these essays is meant to be definitive or final; they are more like goadings toward further thought and practice. Each essay is a personal exploration, the writing of which has shaken and challenged my own ideas about rhetoric, literacy, and pedagogy to the extent of personal crisis.

**Ancient Sufism and Modern English Education:**
**A Vision at the Connection of Divergent Cultures**

Introduction

The Watermelon Hunter

> Once upon a time there was a man who strayed, from his own country, into the world known as the Land of Fools. He soon saw a number of people flying in terror from a field where they had been trying to reap wheat. 'There is a monster in that field,' they told him. He looked, and he saw that it was a watermelon. He offered to kill the 'monster' for them. When he had cut the melon from its stalk, he took a slice and began to eat it. The people became even more terrified of him than they had been of the melon. They drove him away with a pitchforks crying, 'He will kill us next, unless we get rid of him.' It so happened that another time another man also strayed into the land of fools, and the same thing started to happen to him. But, instead of offering to help them with the 'monster,' he agreed with them that it must be dangerous, and by tiptoeing away from it with them he gained their confidence. He spent a long time with them in their houses until he could teach them, little by little, the basic facts which would enable them not only to lose their fear of melons, but even to cultivate them themselves. (Shah 207-08)

Sufism, an uncodified body of practices of teaching and learning in a broader tradition of Islamic mysticism--seems far removed in time and place from the modern English classroom. Yet Sufi attitudes and practices have helped maintain, for "literate" and "non-literate" Muslims alike, a theory of knowledge that serves well even to the present day. Sufism has no single satisfactory definition; no single theory of teaching and learning has ever been codified. Its "truth without form" (Shah 202) is reborn and modified in each successive generation of learners and teachers who seek together "attainment."

But that is the point. The process of repeating the search for ultimate

definitions in a system recognizing cultural and historical relativity will make possible the activities through which we may reach our goals in spite of ourselves.

What could the Islamic mystics of all ages teach us, from their rich heritage of research on language and learning, about the directions in which our best thoughts on English education are moving? What could they have to do with us? Travelling into their realm may help us to achieve an objective distance from our own cultural assumptions regarding teaching and learning. Sufi meditations on teaching and learning can help us to define tentative answers to key issues:

****What is Sufism?**

****What is the place between in Sufi theory of knowing and what could this have to do with us?**

****From the Sufi perspective, what assessments might be made concerning knowledge, literacy, the role of language in learning, and cultural relativity?**

****What can we learn from the Sufi vision of learners?**

****What can we learn from the Sufi vision of teachers?**

****What can we learn from the Sufi vision of institutions?**

****What aspects of Sufi teaching and learning could help us redefine, for modern westerners, a rhetoric of creative personal discovery?**

Only quite lately, perhaps, have we begun to teach the way the second man

does in "The Watermelon Hunter," guided as we have been by a great body of research on English education spanning several decades. That is, we begin from the student and go from there, not always pretending to preconceive the eventual outcomes yet maintaining fidelity to our theories about literacy, literature, and education. We respect the various cultures in which we are called upon to operate.

As we shall see, this is very much in keeping with the ancient Sufi ideas about learners: learners are at different stages of "attainment," they come to learn for vastly different reasons out of different cultural and social contexts, and they have very particular needs which teachers can gradually address in a community of "initiates" or learners.

The community in flux is the central metaphor of Sufi teaching: "Teachers in one circle become pupils in another" ("Themes for Solitary Contemplation" in Shah 232). Learning is always under way for all. The real subject of education is how we know. And in this process we need each other. Within this mystic tradition, then, there is less ascetisicm or scholasticism than we might expect. There is only the ever-renewed opportunity for learning in ordered, rigorously contemplated communities.

Sufi themes of contemplation are foreshadowed in the following passage from a Sufi notebook (Shah 231-32):

> Sufism is a study which is not scholastic. Its materials are taken from almost every form of human experience. Its books and pens are in the environment and resemble nothing that the scholastic or enthusiast ever dreams about. It is because recitations, effort and books are included in this kind of study, and because Sufi teacher

are called 'Teacher,' that the fact of specialized communication has become confused with academic or imitative study.

As in an enlightened vision of English education in our own era, the key questions have to do with a definition of literacy, the role of print in knowledge-making, the relationship of teachers and learners, and knowing as related to the wider world. The central questions revolve around what seekers of knowledge **do.** As Paulo Friere said in a conversation with Ira Shor, "While education is not the lever for social transformation, nevertheless transformation is an educational event" (Shor and Friere 134). It is therefore not too romantic or unrealistic to imagine that we might be shocked into recognition of a vision for the twenty-first century by looking deeply into the past within a tradition of personal and social transformation. At the very least, doing so can create a sort of Sufi metaphor for English education in the modern era.

By looking from outside in, from afar, we may see the whole picture. I have taken another contemplation theme as my own guide (Abu Said in Shah 219): **"Being a Sufi is to put away what is in your head--imagined truth, preconceptions, conditioning--and to face what may happen to you."**

What Is Sufism?

While it has been singularly difficult to define Sufism throughout the ages--for reasons which will become more and more clear--there has been no dearth of attempts, even among Sufis themselves. Some of these definitions, while useful, seem almost too general to be clear. For example, Arberry refers to Sufism as "the

mystical movement of an uncompromising monotheism" (12). Victor Danner, in the introduction to his translation of Ibn 'Atta'Illah's The Book of Wisdom, provides his own simple definition: "a body of teachings and methods having the love and knowledge of God as their goal" (9). Or a modern-day Sufi--Salma Al-Faqih Hassen in Sufism--insists that what distinguishes a Sufi from those for whom love and gnosis are separate paths is the belief that "knowledge is an outcome of love and visa versa" (6).

Yet none of these attempts to define the Sufis as Islamic mystics comes even close to distinguishing the special flavor of Sufi belief and practice from other mystical traditions--or even from the doctrine of Islam generally. And such distinctions must be made in order to show how Sufism, and Sufism in particular, can help modern westerners gain insights about the development of their own rhetoric of personal insight.

Furthermore, the Sufis must be rescued from the popular stereotype of "whirling" dervishes, the so called "intoxicated" Sufis. As John Renard, S.J., is quick to point out in his introduction to Ibn 'Abbad's Letters on the Sufi Path, the "sober" trends are the important ones in the study of Sufism, not the dancing dervishes or the "weird feats like piercing limbs with knives" in occasional degenerate communities throughout the Islamic world; the "sober" schools still exist today (x-xi).

Nor must we take the easy way out, as others have preferred to do. To quote the Sufi tradition generally and Ibn el-Jalili in particular, "Sufism is truth without form" (in Shah 222). Of course it is Truth, or at least a search for Truth; all

gnosticism is that. But the "without form" part is Sufic indeed--the suggestion being that, far from being Absolute, the truth is relative, adaptive, evolving, perhaps even whatever you make it.

Most westerners will want to know more, arguing that merely to define Sufism as "truth without form" is really no definition at all. They will not be pleased for sure with some suggestions which identify Sufism not just with Islam but even with a kind of trans-historical, cross-cultural universalism; Selma al-Faqih Hassen referred to Sufism (in 1971) as "the truth in all religions" (3). Thinking also of Sufism as "truth without [fixed] form," she wrote of a kind of Sufism adjusted to various times and places; she asserted that Sufis existed long before the birth of Muhammed and that in the Time of Jesus they were the Essenes, including John the Baptist (4).

It is also Salma al-Faqih Hassen who quotes Hujwari on her very next page: "To the Sufi the meaning of Sufism is clearer than the Sun and does not need an explanation or indication" (5).

Hujwari's meaning in this context, though, is very important; knowledge (of God) requires only direct apprehension. The meaning of Sufism is "clearer than the sun," no veils between. This is so even if the mass of men and women do not understand; in seeking for explanations they fail to find anything. The Sufis are the few--as Hassen reminds us, "the foremost." And, like almost every other commentator on Sufism, she quotes the Qoran (2:182): "When my servants inquire of thee concerning me tell them I am near" (16).

Therefore, another traditional way to define who the Sufis are is to say simply

that they are "Those who are Near" (Lings, Twentieth Century 38). In another place Lings quotes Junayd (the "shaikh of shaikhs" himself) this way: "Sufism is that God should make thee die away from thyself and live in Him" (What Is Sufism? 108).

**That's Near.**

A tradition of the Sufis themselves refers to the need to define Sufism, showing that in their view such a need developed only as times changed, as people lived at a distance in time and place from the Revelations of Muhammad himself, and as a kind of worldliness came between people and God--completely disrupting the nearness for which the Sufis are famous. Martin Lings, like many others, quotes Abu 'l-Hassan Fushanji (10th century): "Today Sufism is a name without a reality. It was once a reality without a name." Hujwari, about a century later, commented this way (and has been quoted ever since): "In the time of the Companions of the Prophet and their immediate successors this name [Sufism] did not exist, but its reality was in everyone. Now the name exists without the reality" (What Is Sufism? 45).

The point is: if you need to ask what Sufism is, you will not be able to know. It is like Louis Armstrong's famous comment in our own century; when asked after his concerts "What is Jazz?" he replied, "Man, if you gotta ask, you'll never know" (In Kennedy iii).

Such a tradition of unwillingness consciously to define terms or to develop commentaries or to codify teachings accounts for the slow growth of Sufi expression in literature--especially since, according to Austin in his introduction to

Ibn 'Arabi's The Sufis of Andalusia, "emphasis was on personal contact between disciples and master" (51). Certain key issues that need further discussion follow from these facts: (a) the relationship between teachers and learners was very much thought out among Sufi practitioners; (b) spoken language gained far more respect than written discourse, at least at first; and (c) the need for lots of talking and especially reading and writing is a sure sign that people of the way have lost their nearness to God--books fill in where direct knowledge has failed. Lings (in his introduction to A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century) quotes an A.J. Arberry translation of a famous saying from the tenth century Sufi of Bukhara, a woman named Kalabadhi: "Then [after the second generation of Islam] desire diminished and purpose flagged; and with this came the spate of questions and answers, books and treatises" (43).

Those of us in the bookish West may wonder at such reticence, such concern about the relatively low regard the Sufis seem to have for personal expression even though their personal expressions are in many cases so numerous and impressive. Why do the Sufis seem to prefer not to regard writing, especially careful analysis and commentary, as a desirable part of the path to Knowledge?

Martin Lings, in his chapter on the "Origins of Sufism" answers that question in the clearest possible way. He makes a distinction between inspiration and revelation in Qoranic, and especially Sufi, tradition. Inspiration is "like a spark struck from a flint"--the flint being man and the striker God. But revelation means a **"spark struck by God from Himself"**. The Qoran is revealed by God, not in any way as an expression of ideas or feelings by the Prophet himself (34-35). It is

important in these cases to be reminded, once again, in fact, that Muhammed is not a son of God In Islamic theology: he is (only) the messenger.

It is clear, then, in many ways that, however we may wish to try to define Sufism, the Sufis themselves reject utterly the categories of western rational philosophy. Most understanding commentators on Sufi masters find themselves, likewise, arguing against judging the Sufis by these same categories. R.W.J. Austin, S.J., in introducing Ibn 'Arabi's Bezels of Wisdom, asserts:

> Western scholars have too often tried, rather unsuccessfully, to judge him [Ibn 'Arabi'] by the criteria of rational philosophy and to understand his concepts within that framework, ignoring in the process his own frequent criticism of rational approaches to reality and forgetting that most non-western religious traditions have very different perspectives than our own. (24)

Some may argue, on the other hand, that any writer who created in his productive lifetime 251 titles, as Ibn 'Arabi did (Austin 12), must have valued the power of organized, written discourse. However, it must be remembered that Ibn 'Arabi thought of himself first as a mystic and only secondarily as a philosopher (24); he sought expression of direct spiritual revelation (13), often writing quickly--most of his works remain uncollected and unpublished even in Arabic (12).

Well, then, if it is not going to be easy to define Sufism as a philosophy in western terms using western names and categories, what about the word itself? Etymology is often a useful and revealing tool in western scholarship. Well, mysteries and confusions about the word abound (are you surprised?), making even this line of inquiry typically frustrating.

There is a traditional answer to the question about the origin of the word sufi.

Selma al-Faqih Hassen asserts that the word is from the Arabic root for "wool," alluding to the woolen robes of destitute Sufis worn in the early days of Islam (Sufism 4). Idries Shah, in his introduction to the anthology The Way of the Sufi, cites and then disparages as pure fabrication this very same tradition (15-16). Other theories, as Shah summarizes them, include the idea that the word sufi is "linked...to the Greek word divine wisdom (sophia) and also with the Hebrew cabbalistic term Ain Sof (the 'absolutely infinite')," especially since "Hebrew experts" almost universally connect early Jewish mystics to the Sufi tradition (14-15). More interesting still is the theory that the Sufis themselves, having no etymological history for the word and not worrying for a minute how to define the term, simply reassert the value of the key letters themselves: S,U,F--the sound of the letters in that order is significant, according to Shah, for their "effect on human mentation" (16). It is just mere accident that the same letters are found in the Arabic word for wool, "soof."

It does not make things any easier to note, as Shah does, that Sufis "claim that their knowledge has existed for thousands of years"; yet they "deny that it is derivative, affirming that it is an equivalent of the Hermetic, Pythagorean, and Platonic streams" (15). Sufism, apparently we must believe, simply is what it is. We cannot ignore, for example, the assertion of Hujwari (in his eleventh century Revelation, the "earliest available Persian treatment of Sufism") that the word Sufi has no etymology (Shah 15).

Nor can we lightly skip over Shah's satiric statement about Nicholson, himself the translator of Hujwari's text:

> Nicholson shows no curiosity about this claim [that Sufi has no etymology], but thinking about it could have led him to an important idea on Sufism. For him, quite clearly, a word must have an etymology. Unconsciously assuming that 'no etymology' must be absurd, he looks no further in that direction but, all undismayed, continues to seek an etymological derivation, like...many others, such a mind will prefer the word 'wool' to the seeming paradox of 'no etymology.' (15)

Here is a clear example of how and why, if we are really to understand Sufism, its theories of knowledge and language, we will have to be less bound by our usual conceptual categories than usual. To put it another way, we won't be able to discover a definitive etymology, we won't be able to settle on a single clear definition, we won't be able to make the diversity of Sufism itself into a monolithic philosophy or religion.

We will have to concentrate instead on the experience of being a Sufi. As Austin so rightly demonstrates in his introduction to Ibn 'Arabi, the "greatest obstacle" to our understanding of Sufism is that "we need to actually experience his [Ibn 'Arabi's] insights"; this is exactly the dilemma, Austin believes, faced by any "non-participant" student of mysticism "in whatever tradition" (24). Austin translates a passage from Ibn 'Arabi's The Meccan Revelations this way:

> Knowledge of mystical states can only be had by actual experience, nor can reason of man define it, nor arrive at any cognizance of it by deduction, as is also the case with knowledge of the taste of honey, the bitterness of patience, the bliss of sexual union, love, passion, or desire, all of which cannot possibly be known unless one be properly qualified or experience them directly. (24)

To really be able to define Sufi, one would have to become one. And then, of course, no definition would matter.

In the absence of a pure and simple definition of Sufism, then, we will have to

settle for second-best; that is, we can still try to **describe the Sufis themselves.** How would we know a Sufi if we met one? What distinguishes a true Person of the Way from anyone else?

Martin Lings' small book What Is Sufism? is the best answer I know of in English. Lings begins not by trying to define Sufism in purely western terms but by **describing how you would know a Sufi.** He invents a parable:

> ....Let us liken this world to a garden--or more precisely to a nursery garden, for there is nothing in it which has not been planted there with a view to its being eventually transplanted elsewhere. The central part of the garden is allotted to trees of a particularly noble kind, though relatively small and growing in earthenware pots; but as we look at them all our attention is caught by one that is arrestingly finer than any of the others, which it far excels in luxuriance and vigor of growth. The cause is not naked to the eye, but we know at once what has happened, without the need for any investigation: the tree has somehow been able to strike root deep into the earth through the base of its receptacle. (13)

The Sufi is recognized as one who has struck roots deep into the living soul. We know this **"without the need for any investigation."** We recognize that person's depth by the vibrant aliveness of branches and fruits; the Sufi stands out in a crowd. Note that the Sufi still lives among all the other trees, imprisoned as it were within the garden, but

> [t]he full-grown Sufi is thus conscious of being, like other men, a prisoner in the world of forms, but unlike them he is also conscious of being free, with a freedom which immeasurably outweighs his imprisonment. He may therefore be said to have two centres of consciousness, one human and one Divine, and he may speak now from one and now from the other, which accounts for certain apparent contradictions. (14)

Sufis are, then, people who are in this world and very much involved in this world--but also their attention is directed to God. As the Qoran says, regarding all

Muslims, "We have made you a middle people" (II: 143); as Lings and others point out, in another way that could mean that Sufis are the ones who could bridge the east and the west.

The <u>middle</u> position, looked at in a certain way, also places the Sufi consciousness <u>between</u> sensation and intellection--neither permitting the Sufi a mere abandonment of mental purpose on the one hand nor a mere circumscription of intellectual territory on the other. In fact, Lings' best short definition of who a Sufi is, even as distinct from other Muslims, refers in a way to the life of "middle people": "The choice they [the Sufis] have deliberately and irrevocably made of the Eternal in preference to the ephemeral is not merely theoretic or mental but so totally sincere that it has shaken them to the depth of their being and set them in motion on the path" (30).

Sufis are those who are singularly undistracted on their Way to God. How is a person qualified to enter a Sufi order and set himself/herself in a community of people on the Way? Again quoting Lings in his <u>What Is Sufism?</u>, "If it be asked what qualification is necessary for entry into a Sufi order, or what it is that impels anyone to seek initiation, the answer will be that the clouds in the night of the soul must be thin enough to allow at least some glimmer of Heart-light to penetrate the gloom" (52). The heart is the seat of revealed knowledge, and it needs to reflect, as clearly and purely as possible, the "light of the Spirit to the darkness of the Soul" (51).

Sufism might be thought of as a pathway between the Heart and God, an opening through the darkness of mere sensation and mentation to (at least an

imperfect) vision of God. As we shall see, the Sufis, very sensitive to the fallenness of "Man" nonetheless powerfully focus on the "as if thou" (Lings 58). That is, whatever can set up a pure vibration of awareness from the Heart to God is what the Sufi seeks. Sufis are fond of quoting the Qoran on this: The Prophet said, "There is a polish for everything that taketh away rust; and the polish of the Heart is the invocation of Allah" (59). Reciting, speaking, in some cases also the vibrations of music--certainly prayer--"a thing counts for him [the Sufi] as positive according to the measure in which it is capable of setting up a vibration towards the Heart and clearing access to it" (58).

Yet the Sufi cannot live in isolation, alone with God. Not yet. Sufism does not exclude the outward (The Outward is even one of God's 99 Names). Rather, the Sufi seeks oneness, the unity of God, in which the outward is "Conjoined with the Inward," making the Sufi world a "world of symbols" (Lings 93). Sufism excludes only the independent outward and strives to live in harmony with a **certain place between.**

It is no accident that the first of Ibn 'Abbad of Rhonda's Letters on the Sufi Path criticizes the "jurists," the intellectuals of his day, for their use of reason and "inflexible opinions." One path Ibn 'Abbad defines as "the intellect's search for evidence and its inability to understand except by a kind of analogical reasoning and comparison. This is as far as empirical study will lead one" (62). This is the world of exoterism, typical of Islamic scholarship through the ages. It leads to a very limited view of the universe. The other path, the Sufi Path, Ibn 'Abbad describes as resting "on the light of certitude, by which only the clear truth is

manifest [in an esoteric system]. That is the most sublime thing that can descend from the heavens into the hearts of chosen believers, who comprehend thereby the Mystic Truth of the Attributes and Names" (62).

Such a lived, experienced condition of Heart-knowledge, existing in the now and escaping firm rational categories, that is Sufism. It is so hard to define and talk about precisely because it eludes western categories of thought and permissible rhetorical facts. It carries us to what we must define next as the **place between.**

Between what and what? The sought-after Heart-knowledge is first of all "to the left of" sensation, though sense-knowledge and Heart-knowledge are both typically "direct." However, as Martin Lings asserts in his own definitions of Sufism, "sense knowledge, being the lowest mode of perception, is the most deeply submerged in space and time and other earthly conditions and is therefore narrower and more fleeting than "mind-knowledge" (55). At the same time, Heart-knowledge is "to the right of" rational knowledge, the categories of purely logical discourse developed so successfully in the western traditions of rhetoric.

The place between is what the Sufis themselves describe as the inner "Taste," which escapes from these conditions [mere sensation to the left and mere mentation to the right] "in virtue of its exaltation and is thus of all experiences the vastest and mose enduring" (Lings, What Is Sufism? 55).

The problem is that we need to redefine for western rhetoric the ways of discourse for this world between. Otherwise, having no way to "talk about" this creative and imaginative world, we will not identify it as Real.

So many others have noted the extent to which Sufi gnosis consistently refers back to almost every Sufi's favorite Qoranic verse, the famous Verse of Light (XXIV: 35, quoted here from Lings' Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century):

> God is the light of the Heavens and of the earth. His light (on earth) is like a niche, wherein is a lamp. The lamp is of glass; the glass is like a shining planet. It is lit from a sacred olive tree that is neither of the East nor of the West, the oil whereof well nigh blazeth though the fire have not touched it--Light upon Light! God leadeth to His Light whom He will, and God citeth symbols for men, and God is the knower of all things. (43)

Through symbols we may make our path to Light. We may be brought to God--but neither from the right nor from the left, the East nor the West. Lings' note to the Qoranic verse: "Inasmuch as it is neither of the East nor of the West, the sacred olive is the tree of wheresoever ye turn..., that is, the tree of Gnosis" (43).

## The Place Between

> He made an inspiration
> come upon you
> so as to take you out of the prison of your
> existence
> into the unlimited space of your contemplation.
> (Ibn 'Atta'Illah, #54, p. 61)

Shaikh Ahmad al-Alawi, to whom Martin Lings and others refer as the Sufi Saint of the twentieth century, wrote that "there is only one World, and this is it. What we look on as a sensible world, the fine world of time and space, is nothing but a conglomeration of veils which hide the Real world. Those veils are our own senses: our eyes are the veils over true sight. Our ears are the veil over true

hearing...[etc]" (Lings 136).

The Real World is this place between.

On the other side, in the world of the jurists, the intellectuals, the logicians, al-Alawi insists there is no gnosis (140). Similarly, Ibn 'Ata'Illah, in his The Book of Wisdom, attempted to reveal that God does not have to be argued toward. His statement #29 beautifully summarizes this insight:

> What a difference between one who proceeds from God
> in his argumentation
> and one who proceeds inferentially to Him!
> He who has Him as his starting-point knows the Real
> as It is,
> and proves any matter by reference to the Being of its
> origin.
> But inferential argumentation
> comes from the absence of union with Him.
> Otherwise, when was it that He became absent
> that one has to proceed inferentially to Him?
> Or when was it that He became distant
> that created things themselves will unite us to Him? (53)

The basic question is one of direction. Do we start from the world of duality, from mind and sensation, and then evolve toward God, or do we start with God, the God who is already within us? Sufism, as we know, is that path between, the path of direct apprehension. Victor Danner's note to Ibn 'Ata'Illah's #29 above is a good working summary from which to begin:

> Gnosis takes its point of departure from the Real (al-Haqq, which also means "the truth" and "God" and is one of the 99 Names of Allah), not with the Creation (al-Khalq), which is, from the usual point of view, other-than-God; it thus works downward to the world to God, not upward from the world to God. It is theologians, philosophers, and others who argue syllogistically from the imperfection of things to the perfection of God, from multiplicity to the Divine Unity, and from the relativity of everything to the Absolute. But their argumentation is defective, for God is not

> 'absent' at any given moment that one has to 'prove' Him inferentially, nor is he so distant that is via created things or multiplicity that one must 'reach' Him. On the contrary, He is present and Near--he is 'here' and 'now.' We should start with Him, not with the World. Ibn Ajibah, in commentary on this Hikmah, mentions two groups as being, on the other hand, the people of love, who have gnosis, sanctity, and direct vision, and, on the other hand, the people of service, who stop at the external shells and have no light of knowledge and understanding. (135)

Working toward the Middle way, with the people who are Near, would help us also to steer the middle course, which in turn may help us escape our western love of dualities. Can we too, in our language, express direct vision? In English? For direction, we can contemplate one of Kwaja 'Abdallah's prayers in Intimate Conversations:

O God,
When I look at you, I am proud;
When I look at me I am lost;
When I look at myself I melt.
Look upon us that we may discard the baggage of duality, (213)

Just to be briefly reminded about why we should care about discarding "the baggage of duality," let us remember that the felt experience of that duality, especially as it has obsessed us in the western world, is dissociation, alienation, the despair of disintegration--the sort of spiritual aridity many have said characterizes the twentieth century, in all the multiplicity of its existential interpretations and expressions. But to think of a spiritually arid present in contrast to a spiritually rich past is merely another facet of our dualistic thinking. Haven't men and women of the past experienced spiritual aridity? Hasn't it always been a struggle to find the Middle Way, really to be the "middle people" which the Qoran discusses?

Of course the experience of spiritual aridity is not new to the twentieth century. Ibn 'Abbad of Rhonda (1332-1390), for example, felt that he lived in a spiritual wasteland, especially during his youth in Spain, and that the original spirit and gnosis of the Sufi Way had been so debased (especially because of the juridical hair-splitting of the Islamic intellectuals) that he felt called, in being one of the Near, to show others the closer way to God. He felt that "the good is ancestral" but that people have to be trained back to it (Renard 10-11).

Renard, in assessing Ibn 'Abbad of Rhonda's relationship to his own time, also insists in his introduction that, had the Sufi master lived today, he would have written as Hans von Balthasar wrote (in his 1961 book called Prayer):

> We live in a period spiritually arid; the images of the world that spoke of God have become obscure signs and enigmas, the words of Scripture are marred by skeptics and rationalists; men's hearts, in this robot age, are crushed and over-ridden, and they no longer believe in contemplation. When people turn to prayer, they start from a feeling of hopelessness and futility; they drag along the ground and despair of ever rising. The temptation to negation and despair is so great, it presses so heavily on those who remain sensitive to the question of the meaning of life that they need to use all their strength to go against the stream. (20)

When the lived experience of life thirsts for a kind of knowledge, a gnosis, that can be satisfied neither in sensation (the materialistic world) nor in mentation (the literate world of the skeptics, critics, and reactionists), the only other choice is not despair.

Sufism opens up the place between.

The Moses of the Qoran explored this place--and of course in direct access to God:

> When Moses asked to see God distinctly, apart from the world, He answered him: 'Thou shalt not see Me, 'for I am not outside the world nor am I in it; I am separate from it, nor joined unto it. Gaze upon the mountain: if it stand firm in its place, then shalt thou see Me. And when the Lord manifested himself unto the mountain, and the shadow gave place to the substance, and separation attained unto union, and the mountain and all other places were levelled out of sight, Moses fell down senseless, for 'between' had become obliterated and 'where' had vanished, and the eye had been refreshed with the Eye. (In Lings 166)

Several aspects of this verse have made it dear to Sufis through the ages. For one, God tells Moses that He cannot be approached through dualistic categories alone--he cannot be considered to be either in or out of the world. Similarly, really to be in the between place is to be in union with God, though the word 'between' itself would disappear since it too generates dualistic categories. All of this is where the "shadow gave place to the substance," where Reality emerged from the merely real. Moses fell down senseless because, as a single living man still attached to the dualities of this world, wholly to see God, to go to God, would annihilate all the categories of his experience, the 'where,' the 'between,' the 'this,' or the 'that.' The real between place for the Sufis to explore and talk about is the path from here to God; to see God directly would be beyond human endurance, but to see God ahead--to know that you're headed in the right direction, to be Near--that is the Sufi Way.

Ibn 'Abbad of Rhonda was among several Sufis, according to Renard, who conceptualized Sufism as a "third place," a "between way." Renard's summary of what Ibn 'Abbad meant by Mystic Truth could have been written as a commentary on the very same Qoranic verse regarding Moses:

> The substance of the Mystic Truth comes into being when a human being regards himself as nothing, both in himself and his knowledge, awareness and all his qualities. Now only the Laws revealed by the Prophets and the Messengers are able to conform to such a Reality. Their revelations contain certain truths that the intellect can arrive at unaided and others that are beyond the power of reasoning. All these truths are, nevertheless, professed by the faithful as one simple entity, and it is their unity that nullifies all [merely human] reasoning and opinion. For the unity of that which is intelligible and that which surpasses reason gives rise to a third reality which is neither intelligible nor beyond reason, and is thus outside either of those categories; and if is neither of these, then the human being, with his knowledge and awareness, is reduced to nothing in the face of it. He thus becomes like a blind person to whom the way is shown and who lets himself be guided. Now the Mystic Truth is just that. (28)

The "third reality," because it is <u>beyond two</u>, is, in western terms, beyond dualistic categories. It is the only image that works, it seems, in the literature itself as a correlative to the state of the Sufi which is reached through guided contemplation.

Now it is the <u>rhetoric</u>, the power of linguistic choice available in any language, that may permit individuals to explore this <u>third reality</u>. Do we, in fact, retain in English any vestige of a rhetoric that permits exploring the place beyond dualities which Ibn 'Abbad of Rhonda described in such detail?

It is unlikely, but not hopeless. And the way to find out requires us to return, as for the Sufis themselves, to the "greater shaikh" the "Son of Plato," Ibn 'Abbad's great predecessor: <u>Ibn 'Arabi</u>. In this regard we are indeed fortunate to have Henry Corbin's pioneering work (translated from the French by Ralph Mannheim), <u>Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi</u>. I doubt that any other western writer could have created a clearer understanding for us of the <u>third reality</u> or the "place between."

Having become one of the modern world's few really great experts on Ibn

'Arabi in particular and medieval Sufi traditions in general, Henry Corbin came to two key conclusions after years of study and contemplation.

First of all, Corbin concluded that for all "spiritualists," cross-culturally, the world is "Three-fold":

> Between the universe that can be apprehended by pure intellectual perception (the Universe of Cherubic Intelligences) and the universe perceptible to the senses, there is an intermediate world, the world of Idea-images, of archetypal figures, of subtle substances, of 'immaterial matter.' (3-4)

This world is the one I am calling the "place between." Corbin talks about it as the Active Imagination, a real place that Ibn 'Arabi "penetrated with ease from his earliest years" (11), the world of symbols or symbolic knowledge.

Please understand right away that by Active Imagination, Ibn 'Arabi (as interpreted by Corbin), does not mean fiction or fantasy. The **active** imagination permits a direct apprehension of a sort of reality; those without the capacity and desire to exercise this capacity--**to explore the place between**--will not credit it with actual existence at all. What does this active imagination do? It transforms scenery into symbols:

> The active imagination guides, anticipates, molds sense perception; that is why it transmutes sensory data into symbols. The Burning Bush [back to the Moses story again] is only a brushwood fire if it is merely perceived by the sensory organs. In order that Moses may perceive the Burning Bush and hear the voice calling him **'from the right side of the valley'**--in short, in order that there may be a theophany, an organ of trans-sensory perception is needed. (Corbin 80)

Now the question becomes, what is the role of language, if any, in the operation of this creative "pagan of trans-sensory perception"? What could we say about the

rhetoric of revelation which such a literacy would entail?

The western rhetorical traditions of logical categories--all the systems of either/or--will be inoperative here. All the Sufis, it could be said, whether ancient or modern, agree that gnosis "must not be reduced to theology and philosophy" (Danner 38)--which means that, to get a full picture, rhetoric must not be thought of as a branch of philosophy; it is the other way around.

Knowledge of "a place between," a use of what Corbin calls the Active Imagination--whatever language we may use to describe this creative, potential capacity--Ibn 'Arabi regarded as the "Triumph" itself, the escape from merely human dualistic categories. We could call this achievement transcendence, for what of a better term, as Corbin does. Summarizing Ibn 'Arabi's life, he writes:

> Ibn 'Arabi knew that this triumph [transcendence] is obtained neither by the effort of rational philosophy, nor by conversion to what he was later to term a 'God created in dogmas.' It depends on a certain decisive encounter, which is entirely personal, irreplaceable, barely communicable to the most fraternal soul, still less translatable in terms of any change of external allegiance or social quality. It is the fruit of a long quest, the work of an entire lifetime; Ibn 'Arabi's life was that long Quest....(44)

Personal, irreplaceable, barely communicable--a lifetime quest. Surely we have categories of discourse for such an experience in the west; don't we have western traditions of mysticism as well?

This leads us to the second of Corbin's key insights. He focuses squarely on the division of east and west during the Middle Ages, meaning by this several literal and symbolic aspects simultaneously.

The key issue for Corbin is the role of Aristotle's influence, during the

Middle Ages, on the directions in which the east and west would literally or symbolically develop. In the west, in Spain (the birthplace of Ibn 'Arabi) the Aristotelian Averroes became the main influence (8). Further east, especially in Iran (to which Ibn 'Arabi migrated in order to escape the juridical aspects of scholasticism), the main influence was the esoteric doctrine of Ibn 'Arabi himself (9), called by everyone through the ages the Son of Plato.

The tension that would define the experimental and intellectual future of the east and the west was the tension between Plato and Aristotle, Avincenna and Averroes. The drama of this tension is still being played out nearly a thousand years later.

It was particularly the neoplatonic angelology of Avincenna, according to Corbin, which "caused alarm among medieval scholastics" (10). In this angelology there is a place for an entire world between, an "intermediate world of Active Imagination"; this is the place, the home, of "prophetic inspiration and theophanic visions" (10-11). It is a place of intelligence--please understand this as a key point--that is, in the totality of the universe as it can be learned by awake and contemplative individuals, there are not only two continents, as it were, one of the (rational) intellect and one not of the intellect. There is a whole universe between to which our language does not often refer; it too is a place of real intelligence, clear imagination. This imagination, like the "other" intelligence, is also true, or neither of them is true, or truth is not a question; but their "fate" is bound together in any real picture, any comprehensive vision, of human operations.

Another way to establish the reality of the world between--while also showing

how little the western rhetorical traditions think or write about it--is to focus on Ibn 'Arabi's way of defining this place. He centers on what people do in this place: **they imagine**; it is the home of Active Imagination.

Remember again, we are not talking about fantasy or dream. The home of Ibn 'Arabi's active imagination is just as real as anywhere else.

About the only way we deal with this "world between" in the west is to discuss the imagination generally. But there is precious little writing or research in the academic west on creativity; this is because, of course, our categories of thought and the languages we use do not teach us how to deal with this subject. As Rollo May shows in his unique book The Courage To Create, "When we examine the psychological studies and writings on creativity over the past fifty years, the first thing that strikes us is the general paucity of material and the inadequacy of the work"; May thinks this is because the subject has been "avoided as unscientific, mysterious, disturbing, and too corruptive of the scientific training of graduate students." What writing there has been--like Adler's compensatory theory of creativity to make up for perceived inadequacies--simply does not reflect the reality of the true experience of creative people (33-35). Could it be that the relative absence of serious and true talk about creativity in the west has to do with the inadequacies of our rhetorical categories, the absence once again of the same "place between"?

Now, again to emphasize the essential aspects of Avincennan angelology, understand that this world view, this picture or map of the human psyche in relation to the perceived and knowable universe, retained a **separate but equal**

**place between**--what Corbin called, of course in referring to Ibn 'Arabi's ideas, the "intermediate world of pure imagination." This "intermediate world," included in the system, actively created the possibility of an entire "prophetic psychology" which is by now almost utterly unavailable to the west except by travelling back to the Sufis and others. It is, after all, this "prophetic psychology," Corbin reminds us, on which rested the spirit of symbolic exegesis, the spiritual understanding of Revelations, "in short the ta'wil which was equally fundamental to Sufism and to Shi'ism (etymologically, the 'carrying back' of a thing to its principle, of a symbol to what it symbolizes" (12). To deny the intermediate realm of Active Imagination is to deny people access to their own creative potential, their own language with God, the ability to directly perceive and hence talk to God.

Corbin defines ta'wil even more clearly, showing how by definition it exceeds or transcends everyday facts. Interpreting what he has learned from years of work on the difficult texts of Ibn 'Arabi still in manuscript, Corbin defines the ta'wil as "essential symbolic understanding, the transmutation of everything visible into symbols, the intuition of the essence or person in an image which partakes neither of universal logic nor of sense perception, and which is the only means of signifying what is to be signified" (13). Note: **the only means**; to deny a person the use of the Active Imagination of Idea-Images, of "immaterial matter" (4) is to cut off that person from a path of creative talk with God, the prophetic language of spiritual discovery.

This is why Corbin, in translating and interpreting Ibn 'Arabi, includes the word active in "Active Imagination." Only in the Avincennan angelology, the non-

dualistic map of experience, can there be provided a "radical autonomy of the individual"--the freedom of a person to participate in the creative energies of God. The Avincennan angelology provides a foundation for this radical autonomy, however, "not in what we should simply call a philosophy of the spirit but in a theosophy of the Holy Spirit" (12).

The focus, in other words, of the active imagination which quickens the world between, is that it makes things real; it creates something from nothing, as in imitation of God's creation, and it is permitted to do so--as we shall see--partly in the use of language, especially prayer. To live in the sacred requires that we make things real, participate in God. This is exactly what I think a western scholastic like Mircea Eliade means, in his own way, when he interprets the sacred through his academic vehicle of comparative religion. For example, note Eliade's summary to his own The Sacred and Profane: The Nature of Religion--The Significance of Religious Myth, Symbolism, and Ritual Within Life and Culture:

> Homo Religiosus always believes that there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real. He further believes that life has a sacred origin and that human existence realizes all of its potentialities in proportion as it is religious--that is, participates in reality....By reactualizing sacred history, by imitating the divine behavior, man puts and keeps himself close to the gods--that is, in the real and the significant. (202)

Looked at in these western academic terms, the Sufis mean only to reactualize history by imitating the divine **creative** behavior. Only this is real.

Considering all the above, as Corbin along with almost everyone else who has written about the medieval Sufis points out, it should be no surprise that Sufic

theory and practice so alarmed the orthodox. Averroes, for example, in restoring "authentic Aristoteleanism," severely criticized the neoplatonic Avincenna (Corbin 12). For Corbin, or anyone else sympathetic to the neoplatonic bent of Ibn 'Arabi and the whole Sufi tradition which he clarified, Averronism cut off people forever from the source of their own divine and prophetic intelligence--all in an effort to neatly and logically deal with the question of the relationship between the intelligence of people and the Divine Intelligence (once again an insistence on dualistic categories). Quoting Corbin:

> Averroeism denies the human individual as such any possibility of becoming eternal. In his radical answer to the problem of the intellects, St. Thomas grants the individual an 'active intellect,' but not a separate intellect; the intellect of the individual is no longer of transcendent or celestial Intelligence. This seemingly technical solution implies a fundamental decision, the decision to do away with the transcendent dimension of the individual as such, that is, his immediate and personal relationship with the Angel of Knowledge and of Revelation. (19)

If this change was inevitable, Corbin suggests, it was because the medieval Christian theologian-philosophers so much emphasized the value of the Church as Institution, the hierarchy of the human church as intermediary between person and God. All this left precious little space for the creative intelligence between, so much cherished by Avincenna and other neoplatonists.

The line from Avincenna has become, in the modern age, what westerners might be willing to call, in the tradition of mysticism within Islam, a kind of "oriental wisdom," a wisdom in which, as summarized by Corbin, "philosophy and mystical experience are inseparable." Sufism, you remember, is a theory of the Real, neither only valuing the world of the senses which tie us to this world nor

only the world of the rational intellect which ties us to argumentation and bookish exoterism. In Ibn 'Arabi and others, "a philosophy that does not culminate in a metaphysics of ecstasy is vain speculation; a mystical experience that is not grounded in sound philosophical education is in danger of degenerating and going astray" (Corbin 20). Sufis will feel real feelings, reason clearly in long books, live everyday lives, pray and sleep; but they will also seek to keep real, in its personal and powerful mediation, the third world between, the world of active angelic imaging.

By now you see that it is exactly this last which separates the Sufi tradition both from the merely juridical exoteric tradition of Islam and certainly from western Christian theology. And the contrast is once again a useful metaphor in defining, as has been the case throughout this essay, the symbolic nature of tension between the "east" and the "west."

Victor Danner, in his introduction to Ibn 'Ata'Illah's The Book of Wisdom, confirms this basic contrast as well as Corbin's essential vision of it. In his analysis of Sufi gnosis, he asserts again the importance of the third place, the realm which requires paradox for its expression if we are working from western categories: "Gnosis is not possible in Sufism without that mixture of love and knowledge which characterizes the saintly sage, or the wise saint" (12). If, in the Middle Ages, the west "abandoned the neoplatonic tradition in favor of Aristoteleanism, "that happened during the time of Ibn 'Atta'Illah, St. Thomas Aquinas and other "scholastic partisans" being his contemporaries--and Meister Eckhard, another contemporary, being condemned as heretical because of his "sapiential positions"

(16).

In his view of Danner and many others, these are the moments in history which separated, symbolically and forever, unless we do something about it, the life of the east from the life of the west:

> Just as Sufism, which reflects Islamic neoplatonism, laid the groundwork for the future development of the spiritual life in Islam of the 13th century, so, similarly, Christian Aristotelianism led eventually, step by step, to the negotiation of the gnostic message embedded in the Christian religion and to the rise of rationalism and the disintegration of the Christian world. (16-17)

Universally these changes within the west are regarded as a loss by the Sufis, even by Ibn 'Arabi himself. And it is in these terms that most modern commentators in the west regard the differences between Sufism and all forms of exoterism. It is all a question of the success or failure of Avincennism and what that loss meant to generations. In the west, according to Corbin for example, we have "the defeat of Latin Avincennism, overwhelmed first by the attacks of the pious Guillaume d'Auvergne, bishop of Paris, then by the rising tide of Averroeism." In the east, especially in Iran, we have Avincennism gaining new vigor after the time of Ibn 'Arabi, acquiring a new life "that has endured down to our own time" (21).

It is only this eastern, more Avincennan tradition which has preserved the middle world, the place of the Active Imagination. It is in this world that Sufic dramaturgy emerged, recitals of initiation into Sufi orders (as in the works of Suhrawardi, in which, according to Corbin, "the theme is always the Quest of the encounter with the Angel who is the Holy Spirit and the Active Intelligence, the Angel of Knowledge and Revelation" (21-22).

Corbin emphasizes again and again the symbolic significance, in terms of east and west, of the triumph of Averroeism in the west (even in Muslim Spain)--and hence Ibn 'Arabi's own migration to the orient (9, 29). After all, in his systems, Averroes completely omitted the entire second category of angels, the bery home of the Active Intelligence/Imagination. Corbin refers to Averroes' omission as nothing short of a "tragedy," a loss to the entire western world "in the disappearance of the world of celestial souls, the world of correspondences and substantive images, whose specific organ of knowledge was the Active Imagination" (13).

I too lament the magnitude of this loss. The huge implications of this loss, as both Corbin and Danner remind us, are apparent when we remember that the "intermediate world" to which Corbin in his analysis of Ibn 'Arabi constantly refers, "is the realm where the conflict between theology and philosophy, between faith and knowledge, between symbol and history, is revealed." The "inherent ambiguity" of swelling Averroeism greatly intensified such conflicts--and "this ambiguity extends to our own time" (33).

Yet it is nourishing to note that the loss referred to here may not be irremediable. The Sufi tradition, its "truth without form" as developed from the neoplatonism of Ibn 'Arabi, the Son of Plato (and others), may yet be able to teach westerners to understand the role of language in restorating the place between. We will need to come to understand Ibn 'Arabi's notion that: "God describes Himself to us through ourselves" (Corbin 115); "creation is an act of the Divine intention" (193).

And we will need to be reminded, again and again, of the difference between searching for meaning, looking for God, reasoning toward God--all of this on the one hand--and just being united with Him from the start through the mediation of the "place between." This is the paradox we will seek to overcome: while rational methods of logic and clear reasoning, worked out in treatises, actually *keep* us from God (or from expression of our imaginative unity with God), there *is* a creative role for language in surprising us or tricking us or mesmerizing us or focusing us into direct knowledge of God--the God within. We will be propelled along by meditating on the thirty-first saying in 'Ata'Illah's *The Book of Wisdom* (53):

> Those who are voyaging to Him
> are guided by the lights of their orientation,
> whereas those who are united to Him
> have the lights of face to face confrontation.
> The former belongs to their lights,
> whereas those who are united to Him
> have the lights of face to face confrontation.
> The former belongs to their lights,
> whereas the lights belong to the latter,
> for they belong to God and nothing apart from Him:
> "Say Allah. Then leave them prattling in their talk."
> (Qoran 6:42)

## Knowledge, Literacy, and Cultural Relativity

What Is Virtue?

> Look around you at people who have virtues. You will find that many people have not been ennobled by their practices, though they have that repute. The practice of virtues is itself next to nothing. A thread is not made into a jewel because it passes through the holes on a series of pearls. I was unable to learn, let alone teach, until I had realized that a desolate place is not made fertile merely by the presence of a treasure beneath the ground. (Hamid Qalindoz in

Shah 253)

Sufis take a dim view of books and the people who make the books out of mere veneration for facts. Adopting the words and reproducing information are not virtues, though there may be rewards.

This reminds me of Janet Emig's notions on "magical thinking," the unenlightened idea that what is taught is necessarily learned (in Goswami 62). The Sufis, too, believe in "unmagical" thinking. Emig emphasizes that knowledge is something in the process of getting made. Especially she notes that (a) "the rhythms of writing are uneven" and (b) "the processes of writing can be enhanced by working in, and with a group of writers, perhaps especially a teacher, who give vital response, including advice" (in Goswami 64). To quote the Sufis again, "A donkey stabled in a library does not become literate" (Abdel Ali Haidar in Shah 273). Making knowledge will take time, perhaps even a lifetime, and it cannot be made and issued into a void. Making knowledge is a group effort led by a teacher/guide; uses of language will be recursive and developmental tools--not ends in themselves, but means toward the end of fuller enlightenment.

Gnosis, the knowledge that matters, is a moving target among all Sufi-like thinkers. Should a person feel that she or he has arrived at ultimate understanding--and, worse yet, pretend to explain it merely in words--that person is clearly deluded. Victor Danner, in introducing Ibn 'Atta'Illah's Book of Wisdom, is just one of many who assert that Sufis agree: "Gnosis must not be reduced to theology or philosophy" (38). Lings, in his Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century, simply states that logic (in the western sense of a branch of philosophy) and

gnosticism are mutually exclusive terms. In gnosticism there is certainly no need, in the key experience itself, for logical argument at all (139-40).

Yet reverence for the word--as clearly shown by Applebee (1984) and by England/Tchudi (1978)--is engrained in our educational culture--and almost always with the intention of social control. Hence the Great Books syndrome, the conservative movement for English-only in our schools, the seemingly repetitive curricula in many schools. Especially in the teaching of literature, Applebee shows historically the gradual clarification in the minds of many of the dichotomy--the "progressive goals of improving individuals" versus the "goals of a body politic concerned with stability" (249). As early as 1918 in an English Journal editorial, Applebee found the irony: "Training in a little autocracy is a poor preparation for citizenship in a democracy" (64). And even more important to contemporary culture, "Preparation for college does not equal preparation for life" (65).

The real life that should matter, for the Sufi within us, is the experience of the Middle Way, the mystic's path. We are guided on that path by a teacher, of course, but also--in both western and eastern social groups--by doctrine. And Doctrine is, by definition, expressed in words. But for the mystic these must be **living** words.

An example will help. Perhaps for the Sufi the simplest doctrine relates to the one word above all words, the repetition of the Divine Name. **Allah**--or the divinely revealed testification: la illaha illa Allah, **there is no God but God.**

Now the saying of the name or the revealed testification could easily become mere repetition--no preparation for life there. Or the use of these words

contemplatively, creatively, **actively**, may help a person to make at that time a connection to God. Martin Lings, in his What Is Sufism?, explains it this way:

> No God but God: for the mind it is a formulation of truth; for the will it is an injunction with regard to the truth; but for the Heart [the middle place, the himma] and its intuitive prolongations certainly it is a simple synthesis, a Name of Truth, belonging as such to the highest category of Divine Names. (63)

It is a living word, along the vibrations of which a person is opened up to the Truth.

Or there are other Names--99 Names for God. Each echoes in all the others. One is Omnipresence. Omnipresence is a name for "Absolute Oneness." And in this "Absolute Oneness" there is no separate polarity between subject and object, between knower and known, **no duality again**. "To be known by God is thus mysteriously to be God" (Lings What Is Sufism? 65). For the Sufi, that is the most that one would want to learn about life.

There is nothing as useless as dead doctrine, the mere recitation of words, the use of logical arguments or the writing of treatises for their own sakes. But there is nothing as useful as the living word. Lings' summary is best: "All doctrine is related to the mind; but mystical doctrine, which corresponds to the love of Certainty, is a summons of the mind to transcend itself" (What Is Sufism? 63).

The "summons of the mind to transcend itself" is one way to define active knowledge, Ibn 'Arabi's "active imagination," or education generally.

But the central question is, of course, whose knowledge is to be given to whom--often with the underlying assumption (by groups in power) that the Absolute Truth exists externally and that the persons in power shall disseminate

that Truth.

It is very Sufic of Jan Cooper when she denies the monolithic purity of a First Language and argues for the discontinuity of discourse: "The reality of discourse is characterized by its discontinuity, which is to say that it is not grounded in any 'original,' 'true' language....It is not grounded in some prediscursive reality" (1986, 207). Reality must be rediscovered in language over and over again--which is exactly why the Sufis have refused to set down a sacred text or even a final set of guidelines for behavior. Praying and writing, like the writing Cooper talks about in her "Ecology of Writing," "changes social reality" (7). The key idea for Sufis as for modern ideas on social discourse is that truth changes; it is forever undergoing revision in words. Again to quote Cooper, "What we mean by social writing is that writing is located in the social world and, thus, is fundamentally structured by the shape of that environment" (x). As social environments adapt and change through time, language and what we theorize language should be doing within groups changes too.

The key implications for teachers' relationship with students is this: teachers, usually from a different generation than students, may be isolated from those they teach in world view, in their language. Teachers must therefore keep revising their own linguistic world in order to reach students.

Another Sufi lesson, "The Fool and the Donkey," summarizes this point (Saadi of Shiraz in Shah 93): "A foolish man was raving at a donkey. It took no notice. A wiser man who was watching said: 'Idiot!' The donkey will never learn your language--better that you should observe silence and instead master the

tongue of the donkey.'"

This does not of course mean that teachers must merely reverse the tables and unreservedly accept the world view and linguistic setting of students. But we must learn to speak their language as a prerequisite for establishing a real community of learners. We must go to them before we can bring them to us.

Even in Dixon's early and seminal Growth Through English, Dixon began to see how social dialects, all single ways of speaking including academic discourse, in fact restrict expression. He wrote early in the book of the "paradox of language." Language is both public--as especially in the classroom or workplace (or mosque)--and private--as "each individual takes what he can from the shared store of experience and builds it into a world of his own" (6-7). This is the same paradox referred to before, the paradox Fulwiler emphasized in his Teaching With Writing when quoting Georges Gusdorf (1977): "The more I communicate, the less I express myself; the more I express myself, the less I communicate" (in Fulwiler 3). Prescribing an entire language and curriculum would mean, therefore, an assault on the person. Hence the low incidence of expressive writing reported by Britton in his famous study and replicated by Nancy Martin and others (see Martin and others 20-27).

We speak of these distinctions sometimes, with our students, as telling versus showing, personal writing versus exposition, or inner dialogue versus public performance. In speaking these ways, our talk is once again typically dualistic.

Also typical, on the contrary, is Ibn 'Arabi's tripartite analogy of stages in the way--that is, the way to understanding and to an expression of that understanding.

The first stage is, of course, literal, the merely outward practice of the shari'a, the formulaic repetitions. According to Corbin, Ibn 'Arabi symbolizes this stage by the stars "whose brilliance darkens as soon as the full moon of the other two stages rises." The two following stages are those in which the Sufi is "initiated" into the ta'wil, "the symbolic exegesis which 'carries back' the literal statements to that which they symbolize"--connecting the inner and the outer, the figurative and the literal--and of which they are the 'cipher'--taught, in other words, "how to interpret the rites in their mystic, esoteric sense" (Corbin 49-50). The initiates are brought beyond mere words through the words, to self realization through tradition.

What is called for, then, is no less than a redefinition of culture--and then a redefinition of literacy since, as Friere often insists, "Literacy and education in general are cultural expressions. You cannot conduct literacy work outside the world of culture because education in itself is a dimension of culture" (Friere and Macedo 51-52).

In this huge effort of cultural redefinition--ultimately transformation--the Sufis can help us again. Sheikh Abu Nasr Sarraj spoke of three cultures (in Shah 240):

> Worldly culture, which is merely acquiring information, opinions, and learning of a conventionalized kind; Religious culture, which is repetitions, following rules and discipline, behaving in an ethically acceptable way. Sufi culture, which is self-development, realizing what is relevant, concentration and contemplation, cultivation and inner experience.

"Worldly culture" is the realm of Hirschean lists, English-only movements, standardized evaluations--all of which codify and ossify the prevailing culture as a weapon against free speech and true personal discovery. It is demonstrated in a

famous Sufi parable ("When Death Is Not Death" in Shah 120) in which a man, thought to be dead, revived. No one believed him when he insisted that he was alive because (a) he had been certified dead by competent experts and (b) all the mourners agreed with the experts.

Part of the transformation, the redefinition of culture, will need to be a profound change among (and especially within) the powerful intellectuals who shape or help us to define our culture. The experts have to be made a bit less sure of their expertise, to begin to participate themselves in the rediscovery of the third reality, or what we have called the "place between."

The most famous example of such a conversion in Sufi tradition involves no less a person than Muhammed al-Ghazali (b. 451/1059), who was in his time, according to all accounts, a leading Sunni scholar/lawyer who had been appointed professor of divinity at the influential Nizamiya Madrasa (university) in Baghdad (484/1091). But, so the story goes, al-Ghazali "yearned for a more personal experience with God," so much so that he entered a ten-year period of retirement. His famous Sufi text al-Munquidh min al-dalal is his autobiography in which he reveals in very honest detail his **conversion to Sufism**--from exoterism to exoterism. He became known quickly as Hujjat al-Islam, "proof of Islam" (Arberry 79-81). Arberry translates part of this autobiography this way:

> Now, the doctrine was easier to me than the practice, so I began by learning their doctrine from the books and sayings of their Shaikhs, until I acquired as much of their Way as it is possible to acquire by learning and hearing, and saw plainly that what is most peculiar to them cannot be learned, but can only be reached by immediate experience and ecstasy and inward transformation. I became convinced that I had now acquired all the knowledge of Sufism that

> could possibly be obtained by means of study; as for the rest there was no way of coming to it except by leading the mystical life. I looked upon myself as I was then. Worldly interests encompassed me on every side. Even my work as a teacher--the best thing I was engaged in--seemed unimportant and useless in view of the life hereafter. When I considered the intention of my teaching, I perceived that instead of doing it for God's sake alone I had no motive but the desire for glory and reputation. I realizes that I stood on the edge of a precipice and would fall into hell-fire unless I set about to mend my ways...Conscious of my helplessness and having surrendered my will entirely, I took refuge with God as a man in sore trouble who has no resource left. God answered my prayer and made it easy for me to turn my back on reputation and wealth and wife and children and friends. (80)

The conversion itself, and the autobiographical account of it, have often been compared to those of St. Augustine. Each had a profound influence on his religion. Al-Ghazali in particular, because his first fame was as an intellectual and jurist, helped to make the position of Sufism secure with in the traditions of Islam. He proved to his own generation and ours that the same person can possess both "profound learning," remarkable intellectual gifts, <u>and</u> "a theoretical knowledge and personal experience of Sufi life" (Arberry 82-83).

Still thinking of key differences between "religious culture" and real "Sufi culture," one more story will serve--a story which also will act as a perfect prelude to essential ideas of Pattison and Friere:

> Sadik Hamzawi was asked:
> "How did you come to succeed, by his own wish, the sage of Samarkand, when you were only a servant in the house?"
> He said: "He taught me what he wanted to teach me, and I learned it. He said once: 'I cannot teach the others, the disciples, to the same degree because they want to ask questions, they demand the meetings, they impose the framework, they therefore only teach themselves what they already know.'

> "I said to him: 'Teach me what you can, and tell me how to learn.' This is how I became his successor. People have cherished notions about how teaching and learning should take place. They cannot have the notions and also the learning." (The Naqshbandi Order in Shah 148)

If students can learn to ask to learn more than they already know--and if teachers can overcome their own "cherished notions"--only then can they have the real learning. Only then can they begin to overcome the predispositions of their culture.

In the modern world, the relationships among culture, power, and literacy are perhaps best understood by examining the theories of Pattison and Friere. Pattison's vision of early Christianity is especially relevant here since it was at that point in history that Sufi and early Christian (western) ideas on culture and literacy diverged. (Note that we have already emphasized the dichotomy between Averroes and Avincenna).

Literacy became a battleground then and now, Pattison believes, precisely because people can use literacy to further their own interests (83). This is why Pattison, in his 1982 On Literacy, sees the early church as a scene of tension between Book and Word, the Christians in revolt against established order. Then the irony: when the church itself assumed authority, literacy was restricted in order to maintain authority. Literacy was for the elite in one of the earliest "Great Books" ascendencies. Whoever controls how literacy is defined and who has access to it necessarily restricts access for others (Pattison 72-86). In the modern world that split led--perhaps through the powerful agency of Matthew Arnold--to the

apparent isolation of education from popular culture, the alienation contemporary students of all ages are likely to feel from the language and modes of thinking of our schools. As Applebee paints the picture, Americans embraced the view in Culture and Anarchy (1867) that education should become an agent for "social control"--"to stem the 'erosion' of cultural values" (23).

To bridge this gap in the twenty-first century is not going to be easy. As Henry A. Giroux shows in his introduction to Friere and Macedo's Literacy: Reading the Word and the World, we will fall far short merely to revise the curriculum to include readings from minorities or third world writers. We and our students must instead work together **to revise culture itself.** Only to get to know our students and to give them culturally particularized reading matter is no basic revision of the power structure at all: "It [such a plan] fails to understand that literacy is not just related to the poor or the inability of subordinate groups to read and write adequately; it is also fundamentally related to forms of political and ideological ignorance that functions as a refusal to know the limits and political consequences of one's view of the world" (in Friere and Macedo 5).

Our view of literacy must **mean** cultural literacy--"critical literacy has to explicate the validity of different types of music, poetry, language, and world view" (Friere and Macedo 53). An "emancipatory literacy" (54) allowing for a multiplicity of discourses, while requiring political and social transformation first (55), can permit a critical reinvention of culture. Differences among people and the bases of power which distinguish them can become a discussion in which subjectivity is not suppressed but facilitated. Since all language is packed with

ideology (Friere 128), we can make that ideology the very subject of our dialogic discourse. We must read and write the world first (50) before we can hope to really talk about it. Friere himself offers the best summary:

> Schools do not really create subjectivity. Subjectivity functions within schools. Schools can and do repress the development of subjectivity, as in the case of creativity, for example. A critical pedagogy must not repress students' creativity....Creativity needs to be stimulated, not only at the levels of students' individuality, but also at the level of their individuality in a social context. Instead of suffocating this curious impulse, educators should stimulate risk-taking, without which there is no creativity. Instead of reinforcing the purely mechanical repetitions of phrases and lists, educators should stimulate students to doubt. (57)

Friere's view of literacy echoes, though in his own language, the wisdom of the Islamic mystics. As Idries Shah demonstrates in his The Way of the Sufi, "All Sufi teachings are held basically to belong to their own time. The Sufi message in written form is regarded as being of limited effectiveness" (259).

To summarize, knowledge is neither something given nor something received. It is always made. And when, in just that form, it no longer communicates or it becomes obsolete, it is remade. English education, like Sufism, is in the process of reinventing culture.

Yet the danger of misjudging the Truth in others, or of enforcing conformism in the name of freedom, remains high within the institutions in which we operate. It is possible that our institutional conformism now could be just as intolerant as in the days of the early (medieval) "intoxicated" Sufis. Martin Lings reminds us how Hallaj was put to death for saying "I am the Truth"; Lings sees this as an example of how "spiritual drunkenness" can be "misunderstood by the exoteric community"

(What Is Sufism? 104). Similarly, Arberry celebrates Abu Yazid of Bistam, the very first of the so-called "intoxicated Sufis," who "scandalized the orthodox" by exclaiming, "Glory to me! How great is my majesty!" (54). And even in our own time, Meher Baba (in his The Everything and Nothing published in Sydney in 1963) is quoted as having written: "There is only one question. And once you know the answer to that question there are no more to ask....Out of the depths of unbroken Infinity arose the question, Who am I? And to that there is only one answer--I am God!" (In Sufism 18).

Having "stimulated students to doubt" (Friere, above), educators must be willing to accept and respect the creative uniqueness in each individual student--even if that student's expressions seem "intoxicated" or extreme in some way. In the thought of Attar (the Persian Mystic), the soul must be led back to its native home [in God] (Smith 23); but then those "in the neighborhood" need to be willing to let that soul occupy its home.

It is, in fact, Attar, in his famous Mantiq al-Tayr ("Discourse of the Birds") who tells quite perfectly of the Sufi path to knowledge--the stripping of the veils (Smith 20) on the way to God. This "allegory of the Sufi's slow and arduous journey to God" (28) brings the searcher through seven valleys--the valleys of search, love, knowledge, detachment, unification, bewilderment, and annihilation (29). In the Valley of Love, love is stronger than reason: "The reason is naught but smoke" (46), for love cannot be understood by the mind alone.

Reaching as far as the Valley of Gnosis, each of the travelling "birds" must find his or her own way. No one can experience or define the way for anyone else;

each makes progress according to only his or her capacity: "Though the great were to fly with all its might, could it ever equal the perfection of the wind? Since, then, there are different ways of making the journey, no two birds will fly alike" (50). Having now been given some understanding of the Valley of Gnosis, the person who enters there will never wish to leave, accepting instead the beauty of this revelation (even though there are more valleys to travel ahead) as approaching perfection. Again quoting Attar in the Smith translation, "When the sun shines upon him, the dust-bin of this world is changed for him into a rose garden: the kernel is seen beneath the rind....A hundred thousand mysteries are revealed to him from under the Veil" (50).

Having been blessed in such a way, why shouldn't the traveller be content to stay in the valley forever? Why the longing for a yet more complete union with God? Why is there speech at all, poetry, the telling of the journey--all when it is really only the journey that counts? The birds in Attar's great allegory learn the answers from the parable of the Phoenix:

> The Phoenix is a wonderful bird, which is found in Hindustan. It has no mate but dwells alone in solitude. Its beak is wonderfully hard and long, like a flute, containing holes to the number of nearly a hundred. Each of these holes gives forth a different tone, and each tone reveals a different mystery. The art of music was taught to this bird by a philosopher who became its friend, and when the Phoenix utters these sounds, bird and fish are agitated thereby: all the wild beasts are reduced to silence, and by that entrancing music are bereft of their senses.
>
> The Phoenix lives about a thousand years; it knows quite clearly the time of its death, and when this knowledge is tearing at its heart, it gathers fuel, a hundred trees or more, and heaps them up in one place. It hastens to place itself in the midst of this pyre, and utters a hundred laments over itself. Then through each of those holes in its

> beak, out of the depth of its spotless soul, it gives forth plaintive cries of woe, and as it utters its dying lament, it trembles like a leaf. At the sound of its music, all the birds of the air gather together, and the wild beasts come, attracted by the sound, and all assemble to be present at the death of the Phoenix, knowing that they must die like it. When the moment has come to draw its last breath, the Phoenix spreads out its tail and its feathers, and thereby fire is kindled, and the flames spread swiftly to the heaped-up wood, and it blazes up with vigour. Soon both pyre and bird become a glowing red-hot mass. When the glowing charcoal is reduced to ashes, and but one spark remains, then, from the ashes, a new Phoenix arises into life. (51-52)

Not having yet reached absolute oneness with God, the love and the longing are so intense--the apprehension of glory so near--that the birds are inspired to song, in the flutes of which each hole "gives forth a different tone, and each tone reveals a different mystery."

It is only in the very last valleys, on the journey to God, especially in the "Valley of Poverty and Annihilation," that the seeker enters a state beyond the power of the mind to grasp or word to express. "When the Ocean of Infinity begins to stir its waves, how can the reflections upon its surface remain where they are? The world present and the world to come are as pictures reflected on its waters..." (55).

## Books, Recitation, and Prayer in Sufi Theory and Practice

### Books

Sufi attitudes and practices, both ancient and modern, regarding the writing and publishing of books should be no surprise to anyone with an awareness of mystical traditions generally. These attitudes and practices bring those interested

in what the ancient Sufis have to reveal to modern researchers face to face with the exact irony which is usual among mystics: while the Sufis express a great distrust of books and a great sensitivity to the limitations of public discourse, they have produced, nonetheless, a rich literature over the ages. Many Sufis have themselves been prolific writers.

At the forefront in Sufis' suspicion of printed knowledge is that much greater faith in direct communication of awareness from teacher to initiate, from the one nearest to God to the one just next to him. Martin Lings, in discussing the role of modern prophecy in A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century, quotes an old Sufi maxim: "Take knowledge from the breasts of men, not from their words." Lings also expresses the usual conclusion among commentators on Sufism regarding the diminution of prophetic power as Muslims get more and more separated in time from Muhammed and his Divine Revelation. Lings quotes a famous woman of the tenth century, a Sufi of Bukhara named Kalabadhi (in a translation from Arberry's The Doctrine of the Sufis): "Then [after the second generation of Islam] desire diminished and purpose flagged: and with this came the spate of questions and answers, books and treatises" (43). Books became necessary, in other words, only when a more living relationship to knowledge faded. We have books for when we need to accept second best.

Yet a person must not get the impression that books should be taken too seriously. Why should Sufis write so many books? Lings quotes Sheikh as-Alawi (the "twentieth century saint") on this subject too. Al-Alawi insists that when certain thoughts plague and preoccupy a person, that person should know what to

do: "Take them out of your brain and put them in a book, and then they will let you rest" [even if you don't publish the book] (58-9). In other words, books are for the thoughts and insights from which we seek to free ourselves so that we can focus on what really counts.

What always most counts is the knowledge learned directly from a teacher; again, books are only second best. While, by the fourteenth century, Ibn 'Abbad of Rhonda could assert that books could then be "guides," he also took great pains to show that it is up to God to send appropriate guides at appropriate times. These guides are usually and preferably people, but books are possible substitutions.

Yet Ibn 'Abbad, also typically, cautioned those around him to see that very few books are great enough to serve the role of spiritual guides in the absence of a teacher. In the twelfth of his Letters on the Sufi Path, he recommended a certain book to his reader (Ibn 'Ata's The Book of Light) with the added admonition that, if an active participation in "God's unity" is the goal, once you [the reader of The Book of Light] really grasp the book, "you will have no need of other renowned writings" (175). No Sufi recommends reading just whatever is at hand; reading for pleasure is a modern idea. Ibn 'Abbad concludes: "Take hold of what is before your eyes and leave aside that which you have only heard of: when the sun has risen, what need will you have of Saturn?" (175).

Likewise, when looked at from the perspective of life and death and what endures of us after our passing, what good are books? What good is the name "Islam" and all the arguments in treatises about its meaning and its categories? Hasan of Basra is quoted by Shah: "When he asked, 'What is Islam, and who are

the Muslims?' he answered: 'Islam is in the books, and Muslims are in the tomb'"
(162).

I remind you again: "The aim of a book may be to instruct, yet you can also use it as a pillow...." (Jalaludin Rumi in Shah 110).

Sufi books gain importance, in the realm of Sufi endeavor, then, primarily as guides. They must be kept in perspective as means to an end, never as ends in themselves. They help guide us to knowledge, but they are not in themselves that knowledge. In the following Sufi parable, they are "a vehicle":

Travel--With and Without a Vehicle

> If you cast yourself into the sea, without any guidance, this is full of danger, because man mistakes things which arise within himself for things arising from elsewhere. If, on the other hand, you travel on the sea in a ship, this is perilous because there is danger of attachment to the vehicle. In the one case, the end is not known, and there is no guidance. In the other case, the means becomes an end, and there is no arriving. (Niffari in Shah 187)

At minimum, a person would have to be guided in reading the books to grasp their importance. Otherwise, one can either be lost at sea or stuck on the ship.

And all agree that only a few books are worth reading. Titus Burkhardt, in his preface to Austin's translation of The Bezels of Wisdom, writes that the Sufis tell us "the only books worth our attention are those which spring from the heart [not the mind] and in turn speak to the heart" (xi). But what the Sufis mean by the heart is far different from our western concept of emotion or feeling: the heart is the organ of the place between, the "active imagination." Burkhardt puts it his own way: the heart is "the meeting place of the soul or mind or, more precisely, is the focal point where the mind, which is in itself all knowledge or light, is reflected in

the mirror of the Soul" (xi).

Ibn 'Arabi's own publication history and approach to writing might help to clarify these points. He wrote 251 titles, according to his translator R.W.J. Austin, linking east and west, unifying many traditions, drawing from whatever aspects of spiritual tradition he could find (12-14). In the Bezels of Wisdom, his best known work and one of the few translated and analyzed thoroughly in western languages, the title itself gives away method and purpose. Bezel means "setting in which the gem, engraved with a name, will be set to make a seal ring." Al-'Arabi means that "each prophet, after whom each chapter is entitled, is the human setting in which the gemstone of each kind of wisdom is set, thus making of each prophet the signet or sign, by selection, of a particular aspect of God's wisdom" (16). Contemplating the unity in this diversity, the unique beauty of each of the prophet's revelations, and seeking to synthesize them in the vision--these are laudable goals for a book. As Burkhardt says in his Preface, "Water derives its color from the vessel that holds it" (xii).

Yet The Bezels of Wisdom, like all of Ibn 'Arabi's books, is not logically arranged. It is digressive and unbalanced, treating some prophets summarily and others in great detail. Even modern commentators are sometimes hard-pressed to grasp connections between the quoted Qoranic passages and the lessons Ibn 'Arabi seems to wish to draw from these passages. And why do all this work for others anyway? Ibn 'Arabi himself claimed to write from direct inspiration, directly from spiritual revelation (Austin 12-13).

Speaking of spiritual revelation, what about the Qoran itself, really the one

book? In Ansari's Intimate Conversations, he asks: "O God!/ Your glorious book is a keepsake from you./ Since you are present therein,/ What need is there of a momento?" (94). Why should any other sign or book be required?

The answer may be that the Book does not quite reveal Itself only because it is read a few times through. It **reveals** AND veils. In interpreting Ibn 'Arabi's ideas on text, Austin summarizes the issue this way: "Each verse [of the Qoran] has many more meanings than the one that might be obvious to the ordinary believer, who sees merely the surface of things" (18). Inspired words need interpretation, it is true--but not in treatises: personal guides are required.

It is no wonder that most commentators, in clarifying Sufi attitudes to the Qoran, are reduced to quotation from the Qoran itself. The Qoran does, in fact, have a great deal to say about its own verses. For example:

> It [the reading of the verses] causes the skins of those that fear their Lord to thrill. Then their skins and their hearts grow pliant unto the remembrance of God. (39:23 in Lings, What Is Sufism? 60)

This is similar to the usual Sufi distinction between the intellect and the soul, conviction and Certainty. The Qoran offers the hope of Certainty that comes from between. Likewise, the Sufis often recite 45:3-5, as quoted, for example, in the introduction to Ibn 'Abbad's Letters on the Sufi Path:

> Behold, in the heavens and the earth are signs for those who believe. And in your creation, and all the wild creatures He has scattered over the earth as signs for the people of firm faith. And the alteration of night and day, and the sustenance that God sends down from the sky, quickening thereby the earth after her death, and the ordering of winds--these are signs for a people who understand. (8)

"Signs for a people who understand": such understanding can be found in very few

books.

Perhaps it is best to conclude that the Sufis' ambivalence about books is never resolved. Great books have been created by great Sufi masters, but in most situations and for most people, these very same books are, in themselves, of little worth. Titus Burkhardt, again in his "Preface" to Ibn 'Arabi's Bezels of Wisdom, re-tells the culminating story (in this case about Muhammed ben Makhluf):

> "What are you going to do with that?" he asked me [a Master referring to an initiate with a book]. "It is much too advanced for you. What you need is a primer" [for the spiritual life]. "In that case, the book shall remain on my shelf until I am wise enough to study it." "When you are wise, you will no longer need the book." "Whom was it written for then?" "For men who can see through walls but do not do so, nor even wish to."

Words and Text

The Sufis have always had a rather modern approach to ideas about reading, the making of meaning out of printed text. For them, perhaps surprisingly, there is no one meaning to interpret, even in a qoranic text. There are only levels of understanding the self, the text reflecting back to readers only what they are prepared--by instinct, training, or experience--to understand.

A summary of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas in the Bezels of Wisdom is a good example of the Sufi concept of **text as mirror**:

> Beneath the surface...lies an ocean of meaning, both subtle and spiritual, that is accessible only to those whose inner eye is open, whether by divine grace or proper training. In this way...the text acts, so to speak, as a mirror to the reader, in that the latter will perceive in it only that which his own spiritual state permits him to see." (Austin 19)

"Those whose inner eye is open" only will see beneath the surface of an "ocean of meaning." This will take training, the preparation of spiritual states available on the Sufi way.

It is not surprising, then, that modern commentators have detected, in The Bezels of Wisdom, the cabbalistic tradition of the Jews, the gnostic tradition of Christianity, and the infiltration of Buddhist and Hindu ideas (Austin 23). One sees what one is prepared, by disposition or training, to see.

Such an expectation for a text, please remember, is partly engendered by the way in which a text gets written, under what circumstances. For example, Henry Corbin refers to Ibn 'Arabi's The Book of the Revelations Received in Mecca Concerning the Knowledge of the King and the Kingdom, an **enormous** work of at least 3,000 pages, the "Bible of esoterism in Islam" (73), but also unavailable in English. Then Corbin quotes Ibn 'Arabi this way: "An author who writes under the dictates of divine inspiration often registers things that are without [apparent] relation to the substance of the chapter he is engaged in writing" (74). Such writing, resisting "the conceptual development of a dialectic carried on according to the laws of Aristotelian logic" (Corbin 74), will require each reader to create connections of his or her own. People will be expected to reconstruct the text differently--in the Sufi view, according to their position on the way, their time and their place, and their receptivity to the message.

Words and texts are not therefore gifts from which to create dogma. Characteristically, each person must create his or her own experience as a "middle person," not desiring at the outset to conform to any expectation from the outside.

Corbin interprets the words of Ibn 'Arabi this way: the form in which each of us receives the Master's thought conforms to an "inner heaven": this, according to Corbin, is the "very principle of the theophanism of Ibn 'Arabi,"

> who for that reason can only guide each man individually to what he alone is capable of seeing, and not bring him to any collective pre-established dogma: Talem eum vidi qualem capere potui. The truth of the individual's vision is proportional to his fidelity to himself, his fidelity to the one man who is able to bear witness to his individual vision and do homage to the guide who leads him to it. (75-76)

Two people reading the same words are likely to have different experiences of the text. Each is true.

If the Sufi thought of Ibn 'Arabi and others like him has been rejected over the ages, Corbin believes that is no surprise; people have preferred to sidestep "the self-knowledge and self-judgement that this spirituality entails" (76). They have preferred to speak in terms of nominalism or realism or other categorical terms, avoiding the "decisive contemplation" to which a Sufi text points (Corbin 76).

The best Sufi texts would therefore be ones of hints and allusions, full not of dogma but of signs. Whereas the treatises created by a "scholastic theology"..."will only serve to increase your doubts and pile up illusion upon illusion" (Lings 54), texts made up of words used in a different way can not only conceal but also reveal. As Lings points out, a person can accept words "as a manner of speaking, allowing them to pass over his head," or these words might open again **that middle way which is a direct Way to God.** Words can awaken "a vertical consciousness," which Lings says is what Sufis mean by dhauq, "literally 'taste'";

"this word is used in view of the directness of perception, to show that it transcends indirect mental knowledge, being no less than some degree of 'heart knowledge'" (39).

If texts do not help open up this vertical consciousness or help train people to open up this vertical consciousness, they are probably not worth reading (for you, right now). The trick is to read just a few books extremely well.

Even in the case of modern prophecy, according to Martin Lings in Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century, aphorisms are used to startle the mind into apprehension of unity. While the mind knows only fragments, words have the power of the unexpected to shock us into awareness in spite of ourselves.

This is the cunning of words in Sufi tradition, best found, of course, in the Qoran itself. If the object of the Revealed Book Itself is to bring the Sufi to God, how do the words of the text do that? Lings, this time in his What is Sufism?, best expresses the answers by quoting Frithjof Schuon's Understanding Islam (p. 50); I can only do the same:

> "The Quran is, like the world, at the same time one and multiple. The world is a multiplicity which disperses and divides; the Quran is a multiplicity which draws together and leads to unity. The multiplicity of the holy Book--the diversity of its words, sentences, pictures, and stories--fills the soul and then absorbs it and imperceptibly transposes it into the climate of serenity and immutability by a sort of divine 'cunning.' The soul, which is accustomed to a flux of phenomena, yields to the flux without resistance; it lives in phenomena and is by them divided and dispersed--even more than that, it actually becomes what it thinks and does. The revealed Discourse has the virtue that it accepts this tendency while at the same time reversing the movement thanks to the celestial nature of the content and the language, so that the fishes of the soul swim without distrust and with their habitual rhythm into the divine net." (In Lings 79-80)

## Recitation

It is said that Ibn 'Abbad of Rhonda knew the Qoran by heart by the age of seven. Nor is such an early accomplishment rare even today. According to the video program "Islam" from Eyre's BBC series The Long Search (#5 in the sequence), many youngsters learn the entire Qoran--about the size of the New Testament--by heart even in our time, certainly in the villages of Egypt.

The repetition, the personal knowledge, the recitation itself, are experiences which many Muslims and most Sufis over the ages have treasured. Memorizing and reciting verses can open up the soul to God--and again, I remind you, through the agency of the active imagination we have spoken of as the "place between." According to Martin Lings in his introduction to al-Alawi, whole verses--the experience of whole verses--are limited only by the intelligence and imagination of those who recite them; "they can be, if interpreted in their highest sense, as openings through which the immortal in man may pour itself out in escape from the mortal limitations of the soul" (36). The words themselves do not achieve these aims, of course, but Sufis can ride the words into a higher plane of existence.

The recitation of the Qoran is in this sense its own language, having nothing to do with mere Arabic. In R.W.J. Austin's introduction to his translation of Ibn 'Arabi's The Sufis of Andalusia, Austin summarizes the role of the Qoran itself and Qoranic recitation in a simple way: the words of the Qoran are a call; for "men whom neither trading nor selling diverts from the remembrance of God" (quoting the Qoran), the call "summons the Sufi away from ego over the long

distance and deep gulf to God" (52). And Austin, like almost every other western writer on Sufism, strategically quotes from the Qoran itself (VI: 92): "Say God and leave them floundering in confusion" (52).

"Saying God" is itself a language. It is not Arabic. It is not grammar. It is the language of the Sufi Way in action, the way between, for those who are Near.

The personal quality of recitation together with its simplicity (a person needs no special paraphernalia or ritualistic knowledge) make it a sort of **escape from the mind**. Whereas, in a sense, westerners may want to use words logically and precisely in order to argue theological issues or even to pray persuasively, the Qoranic words of recitation are meant to put the mind to rest. As Martin Lings so potently asserts (in What Is Sufism?), "For the mind alone and unaided it is impossible to resolve into Oneness the duality of Creator and Creation" (66). Sufis, like everyone else, need help to transcend duality. Yet, just as in the Frithjof Schuon passage quoted above, the Qoranic words and their prayerful recitation can prepare "the fishes of the soul [to] swim without distrust and with their habitual rhythm into the divine net."

Quoting Shaikh 'Ali al-Jamal, "Relax the mind and learn to swim" (in What Is Sufism? 67). Mental perplexity may be a necessary part of anyone's personal development--even an essential aspect of mental and spiritual growth. Sufis would agree with this; but for them the issue is how the mind should respond to perplexity--not, as likely in the west, by analyzing, classifying, arranging, and synthesizing--no: rather (as Lings would summarize it), "Let go of your mind so that your soul, now out of its depth, may experience the spontaneous stirrings of

intuition, just as a body out of its depth in water may experience the spontaneous stirrings of its limbs in the movement of swimming" (67). (Here Lings, in a footnote of his own, connects these aspects of spontaneous mental-intuitive action with the use of the koan in the Zen tradition to meet mental perplexity with creative and personal action. I will develop this connection in the next chapter).

For many Muslims, then, and most Sufis too, recitation of the Qoran is the means of concentrating on God, of setting off from shore. "The Sufis speak of 'seeking to be drowned' (istighraq) in the verses of the Qoran" (Lings What Is Sufism? 25). They express in this way their will to transcend selfhood and duality in the "uncreated word of God" (25).

It is also Lings (though this time in Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century) who reminds us that the first word of the Qoran itself, the first word of the Revelation of Muhammed, was "the imperative iqra', 'recite'; and qur'an itself means 'recitation'" (35). What Muslims everywhere are to do is recite the verses of the Qoran.

There is no analagous tradition that I am aware of in the west, no believing so utterly in revealed words as the vehicle of participating in the creative work of God. This is because "the revealing of a text to be recited necessarily amounts, at the summit of the community which receives it, to the inauguration of a form of mysticism" (Lings 35). I think this means, in other words, that recitation (unlike, say, the reading of verses in the Christian traditions just before sermons or homilies) helps

Muslims to **participate** right then in the Divine Revelation which it was

Muhammed's work only to receive.

While, for us, sermons and homilies may help to explain the verses, **Sufic recitation explains itself.** The recitation of revealed text participates in the inauguration of a form of mysticism which I think only Lings has adequately explained in western words:

> ....to recite such a text is to undergo a divine "interference," a mysterious penetration of the soul by the Spirit, of this world by the next, and the practice of taking advantage of this possibility becomes, after a certain point, no less than following a mystic path. (35)

It is this mystic path which is open to the Muslim who recites the verses of the Qoran the way the Sufis have learned to do so, in expectation of personal extinction within the greater reality of the Revelation itself. In this regard Lings once again remembers to refer to the Sufi tradition of "drowning": "The Sufis have always sought to take full advantage of the Presence of the Infinite in the finite by 'drowning' themselves in the verses (ayat, literally 'mysterious signs') of the Revelation" (35).

To quote Shaikh Ahmad al-'Alawi, the "twentieth century saint," when speaking of the Qoran: "It hath taken up its dwelling in our hearts and on our tongues and is mingled with our blood and our flesh and our bones and all that is in us" (Diwan 64 in Lings 35).

Prayer in Sufi Thought and Practice: "Ardent Talk"

Do not abandon the Invocation
because you do not feel the presence of God therein.
For your forgetfulness of the Invocation of Him

is worse than your forgetfulness in the Invocation of Him.
Perhaps He will take you from an Invocation with
forgetfulness
to one with vigilance, and from one with vigilance
to one with the Presence of God,
and from one with the Presence of God
to one wherein everything but the Invoked is absent.
"And that is not difficult with God."
(Ibn 'Ata'Illah, The Book of Wisdom #47)

"And that is not difficult with God" (Qoran 14:20)--what is not difficult for God is to lift the Sufi from his or her prayerfulness into a place "wherein everything but the Invoked is absent." Yet this cannot and will not happen if the Sufi neglects to pray: "Your forgetfulness of the Invocation of Him/ is worse than your forgetfulness in the Invocation of Him." If praying but not mindfully (or, in Sufi terms heartfully), that is at least the beginning of prayerfulness. How could one expect to experience His presence in prayer without praying?

In this regard A.J. Arberry beautifully quotes an "authentic description of intimacy with God" (by Isa al-Kharraz, d. 286/899): "Then his soul is joyfully busied with secret converse with God, and passionate study, and ardent talk" (56).

It is in this "ardent talk," often more private than public recitation, in which Sufis reveal themselves the most. Or they conceal themselves. It is like the old problem of the empty space and the silence around words when the question becomes whether the words or the silence engender the most meaning.

Prayer is for sure "secret talk"--the kind of "permanent prayer of the heart" (Ibn 'Atta'Illah #55) which solves the problem presented in the passage from The Book of Wisdom above. For at some point abandoning invocation, stopping prayer, is no more possible than to will a cessation of breathing. Thinking about it,

studying the "grammar of prayer," is as useless as trying to define one's own breathing.

This reminds me of the "celebrated Ibrahim b. Adham, Prince of Balkh (d. 160/777), the legend of whose conversion to austerity became a favorite there among Sufis" (Arberry 36); when a disciple asked him to define service, he replied, "The beginning of service is meditation and silence, save for the recollection (dhikr) of God." Even more to the point, when this same Sufi was informed "that a certain man was studying grammar, he commented, 'He is in greater need of studying silence'" (in Arberry 37).

However, once again it is in the writings of Ibn 'Arabi, for the most part hidden from western readers because of the absence of translations and commentaries in western languages, that the uniqueness of Sufi understanding of prayer reveals itself. I do not think one could derive the same understanding of prayer, and especially the role of language and imagination in prayer, anywhere else--not in Christian mysticism, not in all the manifestations of nineteenth century idealism, not (very likely) in the recesses of one's own heart.

The Sufis, and especially Ibn 'Arabi, clarify for westerners the real meaning of the gnostic tradition in the very way they define and use prayer. Let me summarize and interpret Henry Corbin's commentary on Ibn 'Arabi in order to establish this point.

Let's begin this way: most westerners--especially in modern times, let us assume--regard prayer as a kind of supplication. The idea, the logic, of prayer, especially in the Christian tradition, is to intercede, to intervene, to interfere with

God in such a way that God's attitudes or actions with respect to us might be changed: make my friend well, give me composure or knowledge, and so on. God's is the greater reality; his is the only really Active Imagination.

As we shall see, Ibn 'Arabi's ideas about prayer (as Corbin reveals them) are quite opposite, attributing as they do to the prayer itself, and to those who make it, an **active** role in affecting or even re-creating the world--and not the unreal world, no--the actual world outside of us. To quote Corbin at length:

> For prayer is not a request for something: it is the expression of a mode of being, a means of existing and of causing to exist, that is, a means of causing the God who reveals Himself to appear, of "seeing" Him, not to be sure in His essence, but in a form which precisely He reveals by revealing Himself by and to that form. This view of prayer takes the ground from under the feet of those who, utterly ignorant of the nature of the Theophanic Imagination as Creation, argue that a God who is the "creation" of our Imagination can only be "unreal" and that there can be no purpose in praying to such a God. For it is precisely because he is a creation of the imagination that we pray to Him, and that He exists. Prayer is the highest form, the supreme act of the Creative Imagination. By virtue of the sharing of roles, the divine Compassion, as theophany and existentiation of the universe of beings, is the Prayer of God aspiring to issue forth from His unknownness and to be known, whereas the Prayer of Man accomplishes this theophany because in it and through it the "Form of God" (surat al-Haqq) becomes visible to the heart, to the Active Imagination which projects before it, in its Qibla, the image, whose receptacle, (epiphanic form, mazhar) is the worshipper's being in the measure of its capacity. God prays for us, which means that He epiphanizes Himself insofar as He is the God whom and for whom we pray (that is, the God who epiphanizes Himself for us and by us). We do not pray to the Divine Essence in its hiddenness; each faithful ('abd) prays to his Lord (Rabb), the Lord who is in the form of his faith. (248)

We will see in what ways Corbin builds to this particular summary-exposition of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas about prayer, but emphasize for now in your mind the key assertion: "Prayer is the highest form the supreme act of the Creative

Imagination." In praying, **the words of our prayers actually affect and change the world outside of ourselves.** It is in prayer that the creative energy of God is revealed to us, not concealed from us. Our prayers are the words of our participation in the ongoing creation of God's world.

Just first to review what has already been shown about Corbin's interpretation of Ibn 'Arabi, remember first of all the way itself, the middle world, the ta'wil ("etymologically the 'carrying back' of a thing to its principle, of a symbol to what it symbolizes"). According to Corbin, it was (is) the "intermediate world of the pure Imagination" which made possible "the prophetic psychology on which rested the spirit of symbolic exegesis" (12). Corbin adds that, by definition, the ta'wil "cannot belong to the world of everyday fact" (16). **Transcendence** means precisely that--to be carried into direct communication with God above the planes of everyday reality. We know that Ibn 'Arabi, as a representative Sufi, was perfectly sure that words alone--the "effort of rational philosophy" or a "God created in dogmas"--are insufficient. Only the rhetoric of the middle way, the home of the Active Imagination, could help--the key to which is really experience; to quote again from a passage in Corbin's book already cited, "It [transcendence] depends on a certain decisive encounter, which is entirely personal, irreplaceable, barely communicable to the most fraternal soul...." (44).

While Ibn 'Arabi, again as a representative Sufi, read many books (4), it was his real work of a lifetime to transform his every word and deed into prayer. And such is the true meaning of the Sufi quest.

Beyond these familiar aspects of Sufi thought on prayer, Corbin's analysis

carries us as close as analysis ever could to a real understanding of Ibn 'Arabi and others on four key points.

**(l) One's concept of the language of prayer depends on one's concept of God.** The Sufis believe in a "suffering and passionate God"--an approach which separates them from the "rational theology" of all three monotheistic religions (including, of course, Islam itself) (108). The Sufi thinkers (like Ibn 'Arabi), seeing God as "affected by human events" (109), will also see him as affected or changed by prayers. God, as a suffering God, longing toward his people, leans toward those who speak to Him compassionately. According to Ibn 'Arabi (as interpreted by Corbin), in fact, the Arabic word for God, Al-lah, can be derived from the root wlh, **to be sad** (109).

If this vision of God seems strange to us, it is only because we have not paid enough attention to the hadith, the "sayings of the Prophet," which are second only to the Qoran itself in the estimation of devout Muslims. Especially relevant, as of course Corbin is quick to point out, is the favorite among Sufis regarding the divine pathos, his secret passion for the people of his creation: "I was a hidden Treasure and I yearned to be known. Then I created creatures in order to be known by them." Corbin suggests, "with still greater fidelity to Ibn 'Arabi's thought, let us translate: 'in order to become in them the object of my knowledge'" (114). Put another way, "God describes Himself to us through ourselves" (115). God is a God who reveals Himself in beings (whom he had created) "through being known by them" (114).

The divine reciprocity--which is also in us, as we in prayer help to reveal and

create God who in turn created us in the field between, the field of Active Imagination--I believe is the kernel of Sufi gnosis. Much later in his "analysis," Corbin comes to a similar conclusion in a very revealing way:

> What Jalaudin Rumi [together with Ibn 'Arabi, the progenitors for Sufi esoterism for the future] taught is almost word for word what Meister Eckhardt was to teach in the West little more than a century later: '**The Father speaks the word into the soul, and when the Son is born, each soul becomes a Mary.**' And this motif of the Spiritual Child, of the mystic soul giving birth to itself, or in the words of Jalaudin Rumi mediating the sublime symbol, 'engendering himself to his Angel'--this motif is so much a spiritual dominant that we also find it in the mystic theologians and philosophers of the Sufi tradition. (172)

The mystic soul giving birth to itself: this is an **imaginative** act which requires the divine reciprocity of God searching for us while we search for him. Otherwise there is mere supplication, words are only words, and no real gnosis occurs.

**(2) Gnostic prayer actualizes God.** These prayers do not merely supplicate God, do not provoke a "change in a being outside him who would subsequently take pity on him" (Corbin 117). Whatever change occurs because of the active nature of the prayer itself. It is through us that God will do His work. Or, to stick to Corbin's way of summarizing things, "his [the gnostic's] prayer tends to actualize this divine being as he aspires to be through and for him who is praying and who 'in his very prayer' is the organ of his passion" (117). This is the sense in which God said, "I was a hidden Treasure and I yearned to be known. Then I created creatures in order to be known by them." Prayer is the language of this knowing. We make God real even as we pray to Him.

**(3) Prayer is Imagination; Imagination is Prayer.** Ibn 'Arabi believed that "by imagining the Universe God created it." Creation is theophany; "creation is an act of the divine imaginative power" (182). It is easy to conclude, then, how the Sufis are seeing "ardent talk"; if our own active imagination is activated, we can participate (with God) in the imaginative creation: this is surely what Ibn 'Arabi means by his idea of "recurrent creation"; having "untied the knots" of "dogmatic faiths," (205) the aspirant can--partly through his own imaginative power and partly through the power of God who is "yearning to be known"--participate for life in a "continuous ascension" (205).

Our own active imagination, this clearly means--the imagination which permits us to speak in words and to create new worlds--is, in Ibn 'Arabi's view, consistently a theophanic imagination:

> The beings it 'creates' subsist with an independent existence sui generis in the intermediate world which pertains to this mode of existence. The God whom it 'creates,' far from being an unreal product of our fantasy, is also a theophany, for man's Active Imagination is merely the organ of the absolute Theophanic Imagination. (183)

Not to permit the "intermediate world" to be recognized, not to exercise the Active Imagination of the world between two worlds, would be nothing less than the tragedy discussed earlier: when Averroes omitted the whole second category of angels (Corbin 13), when the conflict began which "split the occident"--"the conflict[s] between theology and philosophy, between faith and knowledge, between symbol and history" (13).

We can only conclude with Ibn 'Arabi (via Corbin): "prayer is a theophany par

excellence; as such, it is 'creative'" (183); by this, however, is not meant merely creative expression. Personal expression, except in the sense of generalized longing or sadness for God, is not the point. The God to whom prayer is spoken "because it creates Him is precisely the God who reveals Himself to Prayer in Creation, and this Creation, at this moment, is one among the theophanies whose real subject is the Godhead revealing Himself to Himself" (183). Of course, in all this is the real meaning of the words oneness with God, the mystic unity in diversity.

For it is in the gift of the Active Imagination, the place between, that God and His people reach out and touch each other, merging (if you are a Sufi) into One. Corbin finds in this another instance of the coincidentia oppositorum. For, he says (summarizing Ibn 'Arabi's views), "It is our Active Imagination...that does this imagining, and then again it is not; our Active Imagination is a moment, an instant, of the Divine Imagination that is the universe, which is itself total theophany" (214). And at this point Corbin can only quote one of Ibn 'Arabi's own "most illustrious disciples," 'Abd al-Karim Jili:

> Know that when the Active Imagination configures a form in thought, this configuration and this imagination are created. But the Creator exists in every creation. This imagination and this figure exist in you, and you are the creator (al-Haqq) in respect of their existence in you. Thus the imaginative operation concerning God must be yours, but simultaneously God exists in it. On this point I awaken you to a sublime secret, from which a number of divine secrets are to be learned, for example, the secret of destiny and the secret of divine knowledge, and the fact that these are one and the same science by which the Creator and Creature are known. (214-215).

In a sense it is not we who create our own prayers. Is it God seeking Himself to be revealed? As Corbin succinctly summarizes, "The Creator is one with the

imagining Creature because each Creative Imagination is a theophany, a recurrence of the Creation" (215).

**(4) The Prayer as Active Imagination which actualizes God requires a special organ, which in many modern men and women is atrophied but not dead.** The power of this organ, called by Ibn 'Arabi himma, when concentrated, **creates** objects; it actually changes the outside world in certain ways. In Corbin's words, "Thanks to the Active Imagination, the gnostic's heart [seat of himma] projects what is reflected in it (that which it mirrors); and the object on which he thus concentrates his creative power, the imaginative mediation, becomes the apparition of the outward, extra-psychic reality" (223). Put more simply, perhaps, the gnostic's prayer can help to create the reality for which it prays.

The heart as home for gnosis is of course not the physical heart. Rather the Sufis refer to a sort of "mystic physiology," a creative and metaphoric connection between the vibrations of certain physical centers and certain psychic realities, not unlike the "chakras, or 'lotus blossoms'" in other traditions (221).

The heart as home of gnosis is, in fact, what distinguished Sufis from other people. According to Ibn 'Arabi himself, there are three classes of people. There are simple believers. Above them are the disciples of rational intellect, the theologians. And above them are the "disciples of the science of the heart," the Sufis themselves. Note that a "simple believer can develop into a mystic through spiritual training; but between mystics and rational theologians there is an unbridgeable gulf" (230). Neither the mind nor mere sensation suffice alone, but the path of sensation is at least in the right direction. The Sufis, as we have seen,

follow the way between. Their prayers are the discourse of this place.

Our western rhetoric of explanations and definitions does not permit us into this between place, where it can experience only an engendering silence instead. But Ibn 'Arabi and Sufis like him spent a lifetime inhabiting and describing that place as much as possible: the mystic "experiences himself as the microcosm of the Divine Being," open to "recurrent creation" (234), willing to engage in ardent talk. According to Corbin's vision of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas:

> This presupposes, of course, a basic visionary imagination, a 'presence of the heart' in the intermediate world where immaterial beings take on their 'apparitional bodies' and where material things are dematerialized to become 'subtle bodies,' an intermediate world which is the encounter (the 'conspiration') of the spiritual and the physical and which consequently dominates the outward world of 'real' objects fixated in their material states. (234)

Himma, the power of the energy of the heart, functions to "perceive the intermediate world" (236) in such a way that mere appearances can gain the status of Truth. Looked at another way, the activity of himma is creative in that it transmutes things into symbols (243) through its very action, permitting those things to exist on a higher plane of being. As Corbin summarizes it, not to exercise the himma (to let this organ of the heart atrophy along with the entire intermediate world) is the tragedy (the loss) which has separated east from west, the west from itself: "To ignore this typology is to destroy the meaning of vision as such and purely and simply to accept data as they present themselves in the raw" (243).

Again it is important to repeat: attempts in western terms to describe such insights regarding the rhetoric of prayer are doomed to failure. "Transcendental

unity of being"--or worse yet "Monism" or "pantheism"--(as such words are used in the context of western intellectual history) make it hard to imagine any role for prayer at all (246). Only by permitting the intermediate world to exist once again in our perception--only to revive the himma, the "psychospiritual organ" (Corbin 249)--can we meditate successfully on Ibn 'Arabi's maxim:

> **If He has given us life and existence by His Being, I also give Him life by knowing Him in my heart.**

Prayer becomes, in itself, the "recurrence of creation" (247) in which, even in a public place, the prayerful person goes alone with God--in Corbin's words again "releasing the spiritual person from collective norms and ready-made evidences and enabling him to live as a unique individual for and with his unique God" (268). To become one with this unique God is also to share in His ultimate creative capacity: **the word makes real what it says.**

## Empowering the Angels Within: Pedagogical Implications

Sufism **is** a pedagogy; it has to do with a continuous creation of insights and spiritual knowledge which is neither detached and scholastic nor personal and expressive. Its central issue through the ages has been how to express a truth in the process of being discovered without at the same time killing or institutionalizing that truth. Its central vehicle is a rhetoric of the place between.

Furthermore, the stated or unstated assumption of the language of spiritual disciplines continues to be that **expressing discoveries about life creatively** is the reason for language. If, at the same time, teachers acknowledge in the context of

modern institutions that as truth changes, language changes, the central pedagogical issue becomes one of tolerance for ambiguity. Descriptions and not prescriptions will predominate. The experience of teaching, far from routine, will create a continuous dialogic enterprise which will also assure the imaginative integrity of teachers and the institutions in which they necessarily operate.

Before going on to explore the special tone and insights of Zen rhetoric and the rhetoric of Ralph Waldo Emerson, it is necessary to summarize the practical pedagogical imperatives of an emerging picture of the place between. The following seven practical objectives both summarize what can be concluded from a study of Sufism and prefigure the similar pedagogical imperatives of the ensuing studies of "The Zen of English Education" and "Emerson, Rhetoric, and the Centripetence of East and West."

(1) **In both writing and literature classes, the key objective will be to teach the relationship between language and culture.** The role of language itself in this relationship will be to mediate between the past and present in the creation of an ever-renewing Sufi-like sesnse of the truth, the re-making of culture, the discovery of the future.

(a) In informal journal writing or in spontaneous in-class writing episodes, the focus will be on the process of knowledge-making rather than on personal expression. This focus will happen because of the nature of assigned topics (not only "how do you feel"? but also "how did you come to create just this expression of your ideas/conclusions?"); and this focus will happen because of the nature of teacher responses (not only "that is interesting, but..." but also "how would you

have expressed a different conclusion if...?" or "what specific words or structures in the written or spoken discourse created in you exactly this way of responding?"). In-class dialogue with students or person-to-person conferences with individuals will center on the following key questions: "Why are students'/teachers' responses to events or readings different from each other?" "How are they alike and why?" "What portion of similarities may be accounted for in terms of cultural conditioning?" "What is the role of personality in language/expression?" "What does it contribute to your understanding of the world or to your own experience in that world to write about events or readings?"

(b) In writings for public presentation, focus of students will be turned to the fluidity of rhetorical situations. Key questions for discussion will include: "How much can a writer control reader response?" "What aspects of audience must be taken into account--personality, cultural conditioning, bias, extent of education about established rhetorical forms?" Once a piece of writing has been drafted and revised, students will be asked to re-do that piece for a surprisingly different audience: all children under the age of ten, all Japanese readers of English who have never travelled from their own country, all novitiates under the age of twenty-five living in an isolated monastery, etc. This revision of a piece after the writing has already been done will not be amnnounced to students beforehand; nor will the new audience be revealed. Rather, the element of surprise and creative encounter will be maintained in order to prevent the dread consistency of routine.

(c) In written responses to literature, once again students will be directed

to focus on the relationship between language and culture. Questions suddenly presented to students might include: "How much of what students experience in the process of reading comes from the work of art and how much from the self?" "How much of the cultural context of the writer is it essential to know?" "How do students themselves account for varying interpretations of the same text?" "What proposals can they themselves create to guide responses closer to a consensus?" "Why would such a consensus be desired?" "Why are some American authors popular abroad and not others?" "How do differences in responses to the same works written in English from one country or region to the next reveal the relationship between language and culture?"

(d) In the assigned creation of literature (non-fiction, fiction, drama, poetry), make the creative process a study in itself. In and out of class, in reflecting on student-generated literature, questions will focus less on the texts themselves and more on the process of creating texts: "How much of what gets written is personal expression?" "How much is imitation?" "How much is original or real?" "What is meant by real, and what is the relationship between art and reality?" After writing experiences and discussion of the writing experiences, students will be asked to write reflections on the process of what they have written. Several accounts of the creative process recorded by published writers will be read and discussed. Students will be asked to create their own (temporary and non-dogmatic) statements defining elements of the creative process.

(e) Give students a choice (and respect their conclusions). Students can accept simplicity (writing is cultural record, writing is personal expression, or

writing is perfected imitation of received forms). Or students can accept complexity and ambiguity (language is the ever-just-now-being-created production of culture). Help students first to see what the Sufis meant when showing that a received culture is a dead culture. Then let them choose between the world we already know and the world to which language can help us to go as we re-make that world.

(f) Discuss complicated implications with students and permit them to come to their own temporary conclusions about these. Sufic implications of the remaking of culture include that the job will never be finished; we have an immense responsibility as we address language to each other; teachers in one circle may become students in another, but to be in this circle means to accept the guidance of a teacher and to be willing to keep searching for truth even as that very truth remains necessarily elusive.

**(2) Expected roles of both teachers and students will need to be redefined.** If the role of the teacher, as within a Sufi context, is to stimulate students to doubt, teachers will need to understand, tolerate, and at least temporarily accept somewhat "intoxicated" responses from students. What students say or write may not be so much imperfect or wrong as provisional and not-yet. The clearly defined agent role of the teacher will be to prod students beyond what they already know even if that knowledge is not the same as what is already known to the teacher; his or her comments on papers or during class discussion might be "I see where you're coming from, but..." or "why therefore does so-and-so (either another author or another student) say..." or "how would you change your way of

expressing this if...?" Teacher may in fact be the wrong word if that word implies the wise one from whom emanates the knowledge to be learned; coach is also not quite right if it implies mostly inspiring on to winning--since cempetition here is really not at all the point. Words like questioner, goader, or inspirer may be more accurate as long as they do not preconceive an actual defined epistemological goal which it is the trick of the "goader" to make unsuspecting students/initiates reach. Kurt Spellmeyer, in his Common Ground (1993), suggests words like "motivator" or "agitator" (232).

The role of students will also need to be given more latitude of definition, Students, as they feel obliged to "create their own relevance" (Spellmeyer 232), practically speaking will need to be given the freedom, eventually, to make or at least to revise the nature of their own assignments, to choose at least some of their own readings, to make their own conclusions, ultimately to discover their own language.

**(3) Students and teachers will need to redefine the meaning and value of texts/books**, including the ones they themselves make. If, in eastern cultural contexts, the focus of rhetorical acts is on the producer of discourse more than on the effects of that discourse on an audience, the texts/books themselves must remain in everyone's mind a means to an end, never an end in themselves. This may be real news to our students and needs to be thoroughly explored in our dialogue with them. Such discussions may help students to see books not as sacred repositories of knowledge to be unlocked by careful study, not as final explanations designed to arrest doubt, not as expressions of personal feeling

merely--but rather as vehicles to stimulate readers to their own expressions of discovery. In a fully Sufi context, this would mean not to assign the same books year after year as a protection of a fixed canon but rather to provoke students to read books which, in the judgement of attentive teachers, are most what individual students need to unsettle their conditioned responses to language and their ideas about rhetoric in a creative way. In a nineteenth century American literature class, that may still mean Moby Dick for some students--but for others it may mean The Oregon Trail or even a string of "sentimental novels."

**(4) A curricular objective will be to experiment, in a number of shorter assignments rather than fewer longer ones, with a variety of legitimate responses to doubt and ambiguity.** Some questions/proposals for student writing may clarify the "western" way of responding to doubt and ambiguity: analyzing, classifying, arranging, researching, synthesizing. Other questions/proposals for student writing may stimulate a more "eastern" way of letting go of the mind and discovering different ways of organizing. Yet a third group of questions/proposals for student writing may encourage a totally oblique and creative response to the same events or readings.

An ideal assignment would request more than one of these kinds of responses as part of the same assignment. To take an example, this time from a poetry class, the following four kinds/ examples of topics could appear as part of the same mid to late term assignment: (a) "Thoroughly explicate two poems while comparing or contrasting their thematic focus; choose poems from among the following pairs of poets: Gwendolyn Brooks/Marge Piercy, Langston Hughes/Lucille Clifton, Robert

Bly/James Wright." (b) "Writers often worry about being ORIGINAL. They wish either to modify tradition or to reject old ways altogether. Yet the identity of each individual person is in some way defined by his/her cultural and intellectual past. What poems by what favorite poet we have studied most successfully meet the challenge of creative innovation? Has this poet succeeded by worrying much or by worrying little about this very issue?" (c) "Either write a poem of your own in response to one of our readings or, selecting a favorite poem which nonetheless you feel has some flaws, re-write the poem in your own way. Explain your revisions in a few brief paragraphs." (d) "Looking back over your last three responses (a-c), write a page about what you have learned about language; which of these three topics did you most benefit from? What questions would you next like to ask yourself? What three questions would you most like to ask other members of this class?"

**(5) Students and teachers will need to work together, through a long dialogue about language in language, to begin to free themselves from the felt duality of learning and life.** Far from insisting on the life of the classroom as separate from "real" life, students and teachers will need to ask each other what it would mean to conceive of language education as belonging to life itself; nor should we be satisfied to think of language and literature as a study about life--a detached discipline in its own right. To accept a detachment of our study from life is to accept the felt duality against which our willingness to react sends us to the study of rhetoric in the first place.

To make the goal of temporary triumph over duality or detachment a

pedagogical reality, it will not be possible for the teacher to operate conceptually separate from the students. The detachment or felt duality must, on the contrary, become the very subject of our language and literature classes. It must be embedded in our dialogic methods.

In turn, to make such dialogue possible, practically speaking, students and teachers will need to discuss/write about/revise their understanding of institutions and the academy in general. I believe that students are eager to understand, personally, the Sufi sense in which language is not a manipulative end in itself but rather a poedagogical tool: to speak and to read and to write is to engage in pedagogical activities which change our definition of our world, If planned, predictive discourse cannot in itself help us beyond what we already know, it follows that (in the Sufi sense) it cannot help us to transcend ourselves or be among the Near. A clear belief in all the above prepares us to understand why Kurt Spellmeyer, as an example of a modern researcher and teacher, asserts so strongly that our pedagogies must carry us beyond our academic culture of interpretations of interpretations directly into the power of making our own meaning. A clear belief in all the above energizes our understanding of Ralph Waldo Emerson's rejection of the kind of scholarship that defines antiquity at the expense of the here and now.

Such a position of the language-making person in the world was already, for the Sufis, a key insight. We have learned that they were the middle people; they not only believed in the third reality between: they lived in that place. With the help of Henry Corbin, we have seen the meaning of the Sufis saying that they wish

to refine all their thoughts and actions into prayer. It is in prayer that the Sufi believes he or she most actively participates in the reshaping and actual creating of our world. What we decide to say or write makes a difference in the shape our world will take. Sufis actually believe, as we might, that the real and possible world (what Zen practitioners will call the non-dual) has its reality not if it is copied or borrowed or merely referred to and interpreted--but only as it is created by ourselves.

You may still want to ask--working toward the goal of students and teachers living together in such a place of creation, the place between--what will we be doing? What will we talk about?

What we will talk about is the simplest part. I will give you an example by telling a story.

Once I had a very silent student. Let's call her Jamila--in Arabic, the quietly beautiful. She worked hard as a student and earned above average grades, but she was very unhappy at college: she felt not at home, as though she had come into the academy from a very far place. Once I received from her a very clear and brief paper in which she told me exactly the reasons why she had decided to quit school. She was running out of money, she was very tired, and there was this young man.

I thought at first that she had fallen in love, that she was gong to quit school to marry. But she explained the very different truth.

The young man in question was also in my class; he was brilliant, he studied hardly at all, he got perfect grades, and he didn't seem to have to worry about

money or the future or anything else. But he represented to Jamila all that was wrong with a college or a university.

One night, while the two had been studying together for my class, he had tried to rape her.

Now I remembered this young man's papers for my class, a seminar called "the Sacred and the Profane," a cross-cultural survey of comparative religion focusing on how men and women of all ages tend to make meaning in their lives. In his papers he had shown his intellectual clarity and had revealed also, to my own satisfaction, a sincere attachment to humane and empathetic and sensitive values. I thought of him then--I almost said I think of him now--as a model student.

Now Jamila's question to me was why she should stay in an institutional environment in which a young man will be an immense success, will write and talk in an apparently detached and convincing way about values and meaning in the classroom world while, outside the classroom, she felt, these thoughts and ideas had had little effect. Were there the two worlds, one of language and ideas and one of daily experience? Had I thought of how detached my own concepts were from the experience of real people outside of books and papers?

I am sorry to say that at that time I had very inadequate answers for Jamila. But I did learn from her, convincingly, the extent to which a felt duality is possible for students and teachers if vital questions do not become central to our dialogue: "What is the relationship between learning and life?" "How can we make what we talk and write more centrally personal to us?" "Is language the vehicle of creating

personae or persons?"

**(6) Contributing to a triumph over felt duality will be revivified techniques created to combat routine.** But of course these techniques can therefore not always involve planned teaching units or measureable skills. Just as the Sufi master encourages neither self-indulgent expressiveness nor patterns of dogmatic explanation, we can manage the tone of classroom experiences by encouraging in ourselves the gifts of spontaneity and surprise. Classroom time will need to focus not on what has already been discovered but on what is every minute being newly found out. Surprise draws out joy and humor as opposed to predictiveness and routine.

There follow two key implications. First, students will need to learn about the rhetorical techniques which Sufism, it turns out, has in common with Taoism and with the practice of western writers interested in the East (such as Ralph Waldo Emerson). These techniques include an emphasis away from explanation and analysis (telling) in favor of showing: metaphor, repetition with variation, paradox, sudden bursts of strange associations, or even new words. Classroom texts can exemplify these techniques; vocal teacher admiration for them will encourage their practice among students.

Secondly, teachers can pose problems to students spontaneously in both writing and literature classes in order to encourage a range of responses over time. If, in a poetry class, one day students practice organized explications, the next day they can be encouraged to draw responses or to role-play one-act plays. If one day ten Wallace Stevens poems are assigned, the next day an eleventh can

be given (which students have never seen) to encourage a sudden journal response. Whatever uses of classtime are invented by teachers, these uses can involve a creative range of ways to encourage students, when it is thought they are ready, to find new ways in language to respond to language and ideas. If our students know, on any given day, exactly what to expect in class, their boredom will teach them more about detachment than about engagement. In contrast, spontaneity and surprise can result in feeling the energy of constant discovery. As Attar of Nishapur is often quoted, "The true lover finds the light only if, like the candle, he is his own fuel, consuming himself" (in Shah 71).

**(7) Also contributing to a triumph over felt duality will be our own enhanced ability to rise above the artificial categories of cherished conceptual models.** For example, we greatly trouble ourselves about how to get students beyond autobiographical expressiveness toward analysis, research, logical reasoning, intelligent manipulation of abstract ideas, scholarly presentation. We may argue about how many stages are in between or what to call these stages. Yet all this may be a problem only in our dualistic terms, our attachment to artificial categories. The simpler may be as usual the more effective: to teach writing, reading literature, the creative process, the presentation of reasoned abstractions as real and immediate responses to lived situations would help students just to do the kind of work their situations immediately require.

As an analogy, we have learned that teaching language skills as graded exercises has only modest results--from sentence combining to paragraph skills to the five-paragraph theme; from description/narration to exposition to

argumentation. All have proved to be artificial departments of a whole human skill and activity imposed from the outside. Similarly, what would happen if we were to stop focusing on autobiographical expression versus public presentation? What if we were to emphasize instead the problem-solving, world-making possibilities of reading and writing in each situation, in the here and now?

**In conclusion,** our challenge questions to students when they have written anything might include the following: "Who would really want to read this?" "Why would anyone want to read this?" "Why shouldn't your writing just be floated down the river (or, in modern terms, just be deleted)?" "How much of what you have written is an avoidance of decisive contemplation and how much expresses a willingness to question and to doubt?"

To accept a Sufi metaphor for English education is to center not on texts and on writing texts alone but on the creative process itself. The prophetic intelligence can be disovered through searching for the language for it. We can seek the truth not through others' categories but with our whole intelligence in the **place between,** the Sufi pathway between the heart and God.

## The Zen of English Education

You may want to ask what the ancient traditions and practices of Taoism or Zen may have to do with the short history of English education--especially the history of modern research on English education. You are right to be skeptical.

Furthermore, you will ask, what are the connections with Sufism?

One response is brief: there is no real connection between Taoism and Sufism, for example, and certainly no real connection between either of these and modern scholarship on English education. Research on literacy education and philosophical speculation about the history of ideas on rhetoric can go on for decades quite successfully without reference to either Sufism or Taoism or Zen. And certainly Zen, especially, does not need western commentary: Zennists are particularly suspicious of the value of language use generally.

Nor is this chapter quite literally about eastern contemplative traditions at all. If you want to learn about, say, Zen, you should seriously practice za-zen ("meditation") under the guidance of a great Teacher. And if my own purpose had been to seek Enlightenment (in the Zen sense of that term), I would not have written this essay; it wouldn't matter if I had written this essay or not.

In fact, any practicing Zennist would argue, the writing of this paper has probably impeded my progress toward illumination in every way.

But you are still left with the same questions. And of course a short answer

will not serve. The <u>long</u> answer to your simple question--what do the ancient traditions and practices of Taoism and Zen have to do with the short history of English education?--is what this chapter **is**.

Please think of this chapter as an experiment. It seeks to set the philosophical tone for a re-envisioning or a revising of a vision of English education by looking from the outside in--by attempting to define the <u>place between</u> in Corbin's analysis of Ibn 'Arabi, yet in a different vocabulary. My hope is that a radically altered perspective may help us freshly to see the strengths and weaknesses of our western theories about language and the pedagogies by which these theories have been tested.

In seeking a "third place" from which to see <u>in</u> from the outside, I alter and add to an important question Ellspeth Stuckey asks in her <u>The Violence of Literacy</u>? (while also changing from her despairing tone): "Why do studies in language always result in solutions that are linguistic rather than social or economic?" (41). I add "spiritual" (elemental, holistic, not only academic) to this list: Why do studies in language always result in solutions that are linguistic rather than social or economic or "spiritual"?

Much recent research on English education and literacy in our academies--much talk about the philosophy of rhetoric--has been culturally monochromatic. Redressing such a limitation paves the way for creative thinking about our own most precious concepts of literacy and literature. And the seeds of a more global or universal grasp of our own traditions are already germinating within us.

Let's try being on the outside looking in. Stuckey complains that there is "no

place in western literacy to castigate the forms of western literacy" (The Violence of Literacy 51). I'd like to try some castigating.

In the process I ask and discuss the following questions:

***Can I defend my methods?**

***Can I define the undefinable? What is Zen?**

***What is "the now" in Zen thought and action?**

***More Theory? How can we do scholarship on that which rejects scholarship?**

***East meets West? A Historical Evolution?**

***What are the theoretical aspects of Zen language?**

***What are the practical aspects of Zen language?**

***Towards a Zen rhetoric for the western world?**

***Tentative conclusions?**

A Note on Methods

I am not the first to see Sufism and Taoism as the keys to a global philosophical vision. In his Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts, Toshihiko Izutsu, though he makes comparisons sketchily, shares my enthusiasm for Henry Corbin's work on Ibn 'Arabi. In that work, as Izutsu himself notes, Corbin passionately argues for "un dialogue dans la metahistoire" (Izutsu 469). What Corbin hoped to legitimize was a holistic and intuitive vision of the commonalities among divergent traditions. Looking at Sufism and Taoism together is an especially valuable test case since there can have been

few if any overt patterns of one's profound influence on the other. Commonalities can be systematically identified only from a third place, a third cultural or historical perspective.

Yet if looked at merely in terms of traditional textual scholarship, assertions of similarities might be regarded as pure myth-making. Such a view would certainly emerge if one were to look at individual cultural and rhetorical traditions as discrete entities operating only in a particular place and time.

Corbin's method of "metahistoire" would regard individual cultural and rhetorical traditions, rather, somewhat as metaphors. Each defines, isolates, and exercises a certain important aspect of human experience. None expresses the whole. In this sense, in other words, the same person can be a western scholar, a Sufi, and a practicing Zennist at the same time--almost in the same way that the same person can be a teacher, father, and poet simultaneously. Culturally-flavored rhetorical traditions, each successful and essential in its own time, can be alive severally in the same person as competing images of the same universality. This may be why the thorny philosophical issue of unity in diversity is so interestingly a feature for Sufis, Zennists, and modern Americans--though each in a particular way.

Just to take an example, Izutsu, after a thorough and very individual treatment of both Sufism and Taoism, briefly in the last few chapters defends key comparisons. According to him, Tao--a vital word discussed in detail later--"is primarily an exact counterpart of the Islamic haqq, the Truth or Reality" (470). Now some would argue that such an exact equivalency is quite impossible; no

doubt an individual Sufi and individual Zennist, when presented with this idea, would themselves discuss at great length the positive and negative aspects of this equivalency. That is not the point.

The point is that, for Izutsu's understanding and our own of what is universal enough about Sufism or Taoism to clarify each for the modern person who speaks mostly English, the statement of this equivalency--if not merely off the cuff but carefully worked out-- clarifies and reveals much more than it conceals. And all such terms, from the point of view of Sufism and Taoism themselves, are at best pale metaphors for the reality in the first place.

Even further to the point, more than one's own rhetorical tradition might be necessary to reveal itself to itself. Otherwise we may have scholarship for its own sake without the life force that gave the intellectual life the reason to do its work in the first place.

Naturally, Izutsu himself offers the best example. He joins Sufism and Taoism on the one side together while showing how they are so utterly distinct from the Aristotelian tradition of the West on the other. Assuming that "existence" is itself a central philosophical issue--"which has always and everywhere been the central theme for innumerable philosophers"--Izutsu concludes that Aristotle ("an Aristotle") means by existence phenomenal things. "An Aristotle" begins his philosophizing "from the ordinary experience of Existence shared by all men [sic] on the level of common sense." According to Izutsu, the eastern traditions begin the other way around: for them ("an Ibn 'Arabi or a Chuang-tzu"), ordinary physical things are but a dream. They exist, certainly, but they do not in

themselves capably reveal "the real metaphysical depth of Existence." For that to happen, humans need "spiritual eyesight" (Ibn 'Arabi) or "illuminating light" (Chuang-tzu)--only gained through "spiritual rebirth" (Izutsu 474).

It is for the rhetoric of that spiritual rebirth that this chapter is seeking. Call it "metahistoire," metaphor, or myth. We will have to understand how and why our common sense western rhetoric, or Aristotelian tradition, is inadequate for the job--or how it along with us might be ready for a "spiritual rebirth."

O.K., But Why Zen? Can We Define the Undefinable?

In the "Preface" to Philip Kapleau's The Three Pillars of Zen: Teaching, Practice, Enlightenment, Zen is defined as "a religion with a unique method of body-mind training whose aim is satori, that is, Self-realization." Because Zen was brought from India to China, and then to Japan where it was elaborated, it is the "consummation of the spiritual experiences of three great Asian civilizations" (xv).

Very well, then: Zen is a certain kind of pedagogy which has an identifiable history and tradition. Yet this much will hardly satisfy a western thinker used to simple tags easy to memorize. Perhaps the best short definition designed for western consumption is William Barrett's in his preface to Suzuki's Zen Buddhism: "If the westerner wants a handle by which to lay hold of it," Zen is "Radical Intuitionism" (xv). Yet Barrett swiftly emphasizes that Zen is not a philosophy of intuition. (Most commentators insist, in fact, that Zen is neither a philosophy nor a religion of any kind). Rather, Barrett insists, Zen is "radical intuition in the act itself....We see with the two eyes only insofar as we are also seeing (though we

may not know it) with the third eye--the eye of intuition." And in this process of active intuition, the role of language is not to describe or explain: it is only to point beyond language, beyond concepts, straight into things themselves (xv).

Izutsu would probably assert that this is not unlike Ibn 'Arabi's intuitions about the active imagination.

Suzuki himself insists that Zen "does not explain but indicate"; it focuses only on the concrete and tangible, abhorring abstractions (10). It is in this sense that Suzuki means (like so many other commentators) that Zen concentrates on a higher faculty than the intellect (7). In helping us to avoid being crippled or crazy, Zen shows us how to "drink right from the fountain of life" (3).

Another approach would be to define Zen as the path toward freedom from "any ideational representation"--especially any representation that makes us believe in a split in our own being. It is an illusion to believe that we are living life as though there were a gulf between parts of ourselves--between the finite and the infinite. "The peace we have been so eagerly seeking after has been there all the time" (Suzuki 13). Suzuki goes on to quote a poem:

> Misty rain on Mount Lu,
> And waves surging in Che-chiang;
> When you have not yet been there,
> Many a regret surely you have;
>
> But once there and homeward you wend,
> How matter-of-fact things look!
> Misty rain on Mount Lu,
> And waves surging in Che-chiang. (13-14)

Not unlike the Sufis who believe that Sufism permeates all things and lives, though in different guises, at all places and at all times, D.T. Suzuki also believes

in the centrality and universality of Zen. To him, it is the life that precedes and then continues to animate all religions--including the three great monotheistic traditions of the West:

> What makes all these religions and philosophies vital and inspiring, keeping up their usefulness and efficiency, is due to the presence in them of what I may designate as the Zen element. Mere scholasticism or mere sacerdotalism will never create a living faith. Religion requires something inwardly propelling, energizing, and capable of doing work. The intellect is useful in its place, but when it tries to cover the whole field of religion it dries up the source of life....Zen is what makes the religious feeling run through its legitimate channel and what gives life to the intellect.
>
> Zen does this by giving one a new point of view on things, a new way of appreciating the truth and beauty of life and the world, by discovering a new source of energy in the inmost recesses of consciousness, and by bestowing on one a feeling of completeness and sufficiency. (111)

Why might we have become separated from this vital source of energy? How can we, while avoiding "mere scholasticism or mere sacerdotalism," re-define a rhetoric of spiritual wholeness or talk each other back into "completeness and sufficiency"?

This, I remind you, is the role of the place between--or the perspective from the outside in. Alan Watts himself, the other great interpreter of Zen to the West besides Suzuki, speaks about just this matter in the early pages of his The Way of Zen. Watts writes openly of the strange place he finds himself. He is not primarily or only a western scholar; everyone agrees that western scholarship prevents understanding of the "real" Zen--this even though he is writing a remarkably western-looking book. Nor is he himself a Zen master, wholly alive within the tradition of Zen; in such a case he is unlikely to have written this kind of book at

all. Just as he almost begins to apologize for not being a Zen master, Watts writes: "When one speaks from within a tradition, and especially from within its institutional hierarchy, there is always apt to be a certain lack of perspective and grasp of an outsider's viewpoint" (12).

How then are we to learn about Zen? If talked about from the angle of scholarship, Watts suggests, we would "miss the point and eat the menu instead of the dinner." If talked about from the angle of expert Zen practice, we would, within that particular institutional hierarchy as well, "not know what dinner is being eaten" (13). But of course! Watts knows the answer to his own problem--he too chooses the third place, the place between: "For the relationship between two positions becomes far more clear when there is a third from which to compare them" (14).

Yet you may doubt that it would be a real Zen that we would be seeing from the third place. But that depends on what you mean. It depends on whether you believe it is possible to escape cultural conditioning. It depends on whether you "believe in" Zen. As Watts concludes, "If there is anything in this world which transcends the relativities of cultural conditioning, it is Zen" (14).

Zen is therefore, among other things, a practice and a tradition that shuns institutions. So many of its practitioners, again according to Watts, "never sought the acknowledgement of any formal authority" (14). In this sense Zen is closely connected to Sufism, a practice in which it is also believed that wisdom cannot be transferred within institutions or within books. How otherwise to escape the powers of cultural conditioning?

In all of this--and still attempting to define the undefinable--note the almost impossible role, therefore, of language itself: the very vehicle of cultural conditioning! It is in this sense that Zen leaves us in a world in which expression of Zen experience in words is itself a contradiction of terms. Watts quotes an ancient Upanishad: "Where knowledge is without duality, without action, cause, or effect, unspeakable, incomparable, beyond description, what is that? It is impossible to say!" (54).

Abstractions or "conventional signs" will always be inadequate for Zen expression since they are "like the cup; they reduce experience to units simple enough to be comprehended one at a time" (Watts 27). Watts also calls this kind of experience "central vision," the vision of the spotlight, up close and detailed. Zen teaches instead a kind of relatively unconscious or "peripheral" vision: this kind of vision permits synthesis and global perception of things not even consciously realized. Of course even westerners have some peripheral vision. "But it is not academically and philosophically respectable" (Watts 29).

Oliver too would describe (though of course not define) the eastern, Taoist practitioner as a "Way-follower": Taoism is an effort to answer basic human questions in a way differently than Confucius would (234-35). Oliver means, of course, in unconventional ways, since the Confucian tradition focuses on guidelines and rules. Watts as well sees freedom from convention as the goal--not to "spurn" convention but also not to be "deceived" by it (31):

> The West has no recognized institution corresponding to Taoism because our Hebrew-Christian spiritual tradition identifies the Absolute--God--with the moral and logical order of convention. This

> might almost be called a major cultural catastrophe, because it weights the social order with excessive authority, inviting just those revolutions against religion and tradition which have been so characteristic of Western history. (31)

You can see from this why the Way world is shaped beyond intelligence. If in conscious intellectual activity alone we attempt to "clutch the world in its net of abstractions, and to insist that life be bound and fitted to its rigid categories, the mood of Taoism will remain incomprehensible; and the intellect will wear itself out" (Watts 38-39). Or looked at another way, to really understand The Tao or Zennist practice, one would have to become, "in a rather special sense, stupid" (38).

It is with an openness to this special kind of stupidity, then, that western readers and students can begin to deal with the strange language of Taoist or Zen texts. To show what I mean, let me go straight to "the source," a passage from the Tao Te Ching of Lao-tzu. I refer to this book as "the source," the horse's mouth, since universally this text is regarded as the primary sourcebook of Taoist thought. A "compilation" which is "attributed to the prototypical Lao-tzu" and usually dated around 500 B.C., it is the one book read by "virtually all literate peoples in China" over the ages (Cleary 2). Cleary also points out that "when the Taoist canon was put to the torch by order of the Mongol ruler of China in 1280, this Tao Te Ching alone was spared destruction" (3).

Here is Cleary's recent translation of section eight called "Higher Good Is like Water":

> Higher good is like water:
> the good in water benefits all,

and does so without contention.
It rests where people dislike to be,
so it is close to the Way.
Where it dwells becomes good ground;
profound is the good in its heart,
benevolent the good it bestows.
Goodness in words is trustworthiness,
goodness in government is order;
goodness in work is ability,
goodness in action is timeliness.
But only by noncontention
is there nothing extreme. (12)

In this section, Cleary asserts in his notes, commentators throughout the ages generally agree that water symbolizes "having an open heart" (137), being able to adapt to the time. As with Sufism, the suggestion is that perception of the true way changes with time and place and situation. It cannot be defined once and for all. In the latter part of this eighth "chapter," goodness in its many applications emphasizes that Taoism is not to be "quietistic, introverted, or amoral" (137). It is quiet and active at the same time--already something of a paradox for western thinkers. The language itself suggests also that Taoism is not abstract: it is seen in the actions of real people as they live their lives.

Izutsu emphasizes the same stillness in action when discussing the stages of the spiritual life, insisting that stillness or peacefulness does not mean dead: "The vital energy hidden in the darkness of the root is actually motionless, but the root is by no means dead" (413).

Similarly, the western mind objects when told, repeatedly, in commentary on the Tao or on Zen instruction, that The Way is eternally nameless or that the best definition of The Way is "Nothing." Yet the Tao Te Ching is quite clear on this

point in its opening "chapter":

> A way can be a guide, but not a fixed path,
> names can be given, but not permanent labels.
> Nonbeing is called the beginning of heaven and earth;
> being is called the mother of all things.
> Always passionless, thereby observe the subtle;
> ever intent, thereby observe the apparent.
> These two come from the same source but differ in name;
> both are considered mysteries.
> The mystery of mysteries
> is the gateway of marvels. (Cleary 9)

Here as elsewhere, the <u>named</u> stands for "discursive intellectual activity" (or being); Nonbeing, the <u>nameless</u>, "stands for passionless, uncontrived, formless awareness" (131). Discursive intellectual activity has its place and its usefulness--much commentary has been produced within the traditions themselves; another translation for line 4 reads: "the named is the mother of all things" (131). But **awareness**, exactly like "awareness" in the works of Ibn 'Arabi and other Sufis, requires a different discourse if it is talked about at all, the special kind of rhetoric discussed at length later in this chapter. To get to "the mystery of mysteries" requires a different way--as in this opening chapter of the <u>Tao Te Ching</u>, a "gateway of marvels," a path between, a pass between two prominence in the third way of which there is a different map.

For these reasons Lao-tzu and so many of his followers can speak of the <u>fullness</u> of nonbeing. Such is the only language we will have to **point to**, but not explain or to describe, the vibrant life-unity of the Tao. Cognition and The Way are both real, but they are not the same journey. As Izutsu explains, The Way is considered Nothing only in that it is beyond human cognition: "Just as light far too

brilliant for human eyes is the same as darkness or lack of light, The Way is 'Nothing' or 'Non-being' precisely because of its plenitude of Being" (408).

Or Isutsu summarizes the reality of The Way in western conceptual language in this paradoxical manner: Lao-tzu depicts The Way as "something shadowy and dark, prior to the existence of Heaven and Earth, unknown and unknowable, impenetrable and intangible to the degree of only properly being described as Non-Being, and yet pregnant with forms, images and things, which lie latent in the midst of its primordial obscurity" (303).

It is no wonder that Chuang-tzu, Lao-tzu's immediate follower and elucidator, focused so carefully on the very ancient myth of the featureless face of the Emperor Hun Tun. His two guests, emperors of the south and the north (of opposites, that is--emperors from the world of named being), were well treated by Hun Tun; these two were very happy to have stepped "into the domain of the supra-sensible world of 'undifferentiation,' the Absolute," in their brief intuitive felicity. But the two guests decided that, since all men "are possessed of seven orifices for seeing, hearing, eating, and breathing," and since they had been so well-treated by Hun Tun, they would bore holes in Hun Tun to repay him. The moment the holes were bored into Hun Tun, Hun Tun (the Absolute) died.

As Izutsu, referring to a large body of ancient commentary, interprets this myth, when Reason, the "human intellect," tries to bore holes in the Absolute, that is to say "tries to mark distinctions and bring out to actuality all the forms that have remained latent in all the original undifferentiation," "the result of 'boring' is nothing but the philosophy of Names as represented by Confucius and his school."

But the fact that Hun Tun dies "means that the Absolute can be brought in to the grasp of Reason by 'essential' distinctions being made in the reality of the Absolute, and becomes thereby something understandable; but the moment it becomes understandable to Reason, the Absolute dies" (304-5).

You see therefore why we want to be careful not to bore too many holes.

The myth of Hun Tun also explains why--even though this may drive western readers to distraction--the best discussion of Zen does not mention Zen at all. There is such a notable book--and one written by a westerner at that: Herrigal's Zen in the Art of Archery, which is ostensibly only about archery. As Fritjof Capra says in his chapter on Zen in The Tao of Physics, "Herrigal's description of archery is one of the purest accounts of Zen because it does not talk about Zen at all" (113).

Yet Herrigal himself does offer a kind of definition of Zen based on his own years of instruction in archery by a Zen master. His "definition" focuses on the supremacy of experience as compared to commentary. So, even for this commentary, I adopt his words as the best working definition by which continued discussion will be guided: Zen is

> not speculation at all but immediate experience of what, as the bottomless ground of Being, cannot be apprehended by intellectual means, and cannot be conceived or interpreted even after the most unequivocal and incontestable experiences: one knows it by not knowing it. (21)

Put another way, we should learn to be satisfied if there is no simple and clear way to define the term or terms which will nonetheless shape our discussion. Such a fact will keep us in the concrete, save us from complacency. As Alan Watts

frames this idea, "To serve their purpose, names and terms must of necessity be fixed and definite like all units of measurement. But their use is--up to a point--so satisfactory that man is always in danger of confusing his measures with the world so measured" (61).

There is a final caution here for western thinkers. In the absence of a clear definition, we like to seek approximate equivalents. This would be a big mistake here. Many before us, again according to Watts, have made the error of associating Zen or Tao with various "idealist" philosophies of the west--for the understandable sake of making us more comfortable with ensuing discourse. The Zen experience of life, for example, according to Watts, is not monist. It "does not think that all things are in reality One because, concretely speaking, there never were any 'things' to be considered 'One.' To join is as much...as to separate." We must therefore learn to speak of the reality as "non-dual" rather than "one," "since the concept of one must always be in relation to that of many" (60).

We must therefore learn to speak about the "feel" or the experience of Zen rather than the definition or meaning of Zen. This is possible for us because we all live in the same world; we only describe it or point to it differently. Again quoting Watts, he [any Buddhist generally] "sees the world that we see; but he does not mark it off, measure it, divide it in the same way. He does not look upon it as really or concretely broken down into separate things or events. He sees that the skin may just as well be regarded as what joins us to our environment as what separates us from it" (60).

D.T. Suzuki quotes the very western mystic Eckhart: "Simple people conceive

that we are to see God as if He stood on that side and we on this. It is not so; God and I are one in the act of my perceiving him" (113).

The NOW: A Unity of Thought and Action

The unity of thought and action coupled with the relative irrelevance of discourse about that unity are key features of Zen practice. I envision the purpose of the Zen approach to life this way: its discipline and hard work result in a very-present spontaneity; its spiritual and linguistic training seek to restore the unity of thought and action.

Toshihiko Izutsu attributes to Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu the "Great Doubt" (312), the question about whether an artificial order imposed on reality, most usually in words, can ever be superior in value to the virtual chaos (undifferentiation) of actual experience in time. To the Chinese masters, the reality of being is chaos, while the "malady" of Reason is to insist on an artificial order (310). Such an order may have the benefit of comfort or conventional guidance, but it is not real. Worse yet, conventional wisdom likely leads to a confusion of cleverness with understanding.

A simple way to describe this confusion is to refer to Benjamin Hoff's The Tao of Pooh, a particularly clear introduction for western readers to the relevant issues here:

> "Rabbit's clever," said Pooh thoughtfully.
> "Yes," said Piglet, "Rabbit's clever."
> "And he has Brain."
> "Yes," said Piglet, "Rabbit has Brain."
> There was a long silence.

> "I suppose," said Pooh, "that that's why he never understands anything." (15)

Understanding happens not in the cleverness of discussion--certainly not in the objective distance of planned analysis. Understanding, as the real gift of an experienced life, happens NOW.

Once more to refer to Benjamin Hoff, in his sequel to The Tao of Pooh called The Te of Piglet, not without reason he quotes frequently from Henry David Thoreau, surely among the most Zen of western writers. Here's an example:

> By closing the eyes and slumbering, and consenting to be deceived by shows, men establish and confirm their daily life of routine and habit everywhere, which still is built on purely illusory foundations. Children, who play life, discern its true law and relations more clearly than men, who fail to live it worthily, but who think they are wiser by experience, that is, by failure....Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are able to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us. (144-145)

This is surely a passage pregnant with Zen messages. (l) A conventional life of "routine and habit" is the mere shadow of the life that is possible. (2) Children, like the Pooh Bear in the previous passage, know more than we give them credit for since they live life now without reference to lots of discourse about the past or present. (3) Truth, far from remote, is everywhere around and in us. (4) To live in that Truth requires only the fragile power of escaping from conventions, especially from what everybody else has said, into the unity of the present, "**the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us.**"

I know for myself that to restore the unity of thought and action is an energy badly needed among those who research modern English education and among those who practice and revise its pedagogies. I think, for example, of my disappointment in the closing pages of Ellspeth Stuckey's The Violence of Literacy. After ruthlessly analyzing and conceptualizing the violence of literacy in our time, she repeats despairingly "What to do? What to do?" In other words, now that we unveil our own ideas and rationally develop elaborate ideas about our ideas, what do we do? Lived Zen experience may be able to teach us to overcome this debilitating duality.

To clarify what I mean, let me just remind you of Ohmann's much earlier analysis of literacy as social control. I refer to what he calls "the problem of problems" (88). By this he means that as we define problems only historically and intellectually, we can remain "above our [own] circumstances," at home in our intellectual circumstances--researchers answering to researchers--while remaining wholly removed from the present. We don't have to do anything. In writing this paper I am only slightly avoiding my western penchant for technical and peripheral issues--always at the expense of simple and basic ones.

Only now do I begin to see more wholly what Robert Scholes really meant in his Textual Power. Scholes analyzes a hierarchy, a step by step cognitive and linguistic progression, from reading to interpretation to criticism. Few get to the level of criticism, he asserts (39), because teachers--in their veneration for texts and for textual interpretations (and Zennists would say, delusion)--shy away from "the rendering of accounts that are themselves abstractions from the cultural text,

versions of social reality for our consideration. **The point is whether or not we are willing to openly discuss more than one version of cultural reality.** To do so is to risk subversion" (39-40).

In this sense Zen masters are forever subversive. Through their approach to reality and language they seek to bring their "students" into timeless awareness of reality (ironically, with the help of language) in an experience which is completely personal: no text exists to predict its outcome or to measure its results. What happens is not interpretive or intellectual; it is not anti-intellectual either. It just is.

It is also in this sense that Zen focuses on non-action. Non-action does not mean doing nothing; but it does also not mean asking, as Stuckey does so despairingly, "What to do?" It means doing what we do.

It has been noted in many places that the nineteenth century approach to language, of which we are still in many ways the inheritors in western education, suggests that knowledge precedes experience; knowledge precedes writing. One follows the rules, the forms (let's say for a comparison and contrast essay). And this means that **students do not have to think for themselves** since the invention stage of the rhetorical process is already taken care of. The Zen approach to English education could solve this problem instantly. For the Zen approach to language and experience is all invention.

The concept of living in the present completely enough so that life becomes all invention doesn't sound so hard. But to do so requires, I'm sure, years of practice and experience. Our concepts, our thoughts, our interpretations keep cropping up and getting in the way. As Lao-tzu says in the seventeenth chapter of his Tao Te

Ching, "When faith is insufficient/ and there is disbelief,/ it is from the high value placed on words" (Cleary 18). Discussion, discursiveness, arrests spontaneity.

What the Tao Te Ching recommends instead is "open awareness" (Commentary on the sixth chapter, Cleary 136)--a sort of natural breathing and poise of the mind. On the subject of the "valley spirit" (a metaphor for this "open awareness"), the sixth chapter concludes: "Continuous, on the brink of existence,/ to put it into practice, don't try to force it" (11). This is because it "eludes the contrivances of formal intellect" (Commentary in Cleary 137).

In D.T. Suzuki's introduction to Herrigal's book on archery, he remarks that--for any art, not just archery--technical knowledge is never enough (10). Zen is too simple for that--a working of the "everyday mind" (11), freed from any effort to conceptualize. As long as Herrigal thought about what he was doing--wondering what the teacher would think, adding up the steps he needed to take to shoot the arrow cleanly and decisively, comparing himself to other students--he failed. Many years of discipline went on before he stopped being paralyzed by his own separate thoughts. His success came only when "the hitter and the hit" were no longer separate objects but were a part of the same reality (10); Herrigal was returned to his own "childlikeness" (13), a self-forgetfulness.

In the introduction to Herrigal's book, Suzuki summarizes this way:

> Zen is the "everyday mind" as was proclaimed by Baso (died 788); this "everyday mind" is no more than "sleeping when tired, eating when hungry." As soon as we reflect, deliberate, and conceptualize, the original unconsciousness is lost and a thought interferes. We no longer eat while eating, we no longer sleep while sleeping. (11)

But remember that this state being described is not really one of quiescent non-

action. We are not talking about oblivion or passivity. We are talking about doing what we already do, but completely. Nor is this abolishing "the habit of the veneration of Mind" (Izutsu 342) some kind of negative anti-intellectualism. It is not a "negative state of non-movement" but rather "a dynamic non-movement full of inner ontological tensions, and concealing within itself infinite possibilities of movement and action" (Izutsu 349).

Izutsu's own translation from Chuang-tzu offers the best summary for further contemplation; here Chuang-tzu is describing the spiritual stage which makes understanding (not cleverness) possible:

> After he had put Life outside his mind (his inner eye was opened just as) the first light of dawn breaks through (the darkness of night). (349)

Even After All the Above--More Theory?

> Detach from learning and you have no worries.
> How far apart are yes and yeah?
> How far apart are good and bad?
> The things people fear cannot but be feared.
> Wild indeed the uncentered!
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> Mine is indeed the mind of an ignoramus
> in its unadulterated simplicity.
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> (Exerpts from Chapter 20 of the Tao Te Ching,
> Cleary 20)
>
> For learning you gain daily;
> for the Way you lose daily.
> Losing and losing,
> thus you reach noncontrivance;
> be uncontrived and nothing is not done....
> (From Chapter 48 of the Tao Te Ching,
> Cleary 38)

By "learning" here is meant "habituation to convention" (Cleary 144). Zen is the unlearning--a process which may be long and arduous. It is a lot of work to become, in a special sense, stupid again.

To become in this sense stupid again means shedding psychological barriers or, in even more western terms, "overcoming conditioning" (Cleary 153). To reach noncontrivance is to have become free from habituation to particular conceptual categories.

It is not hard to see the irony. I am not the first to write somewhat academically about a world view that scorns criticism. While gaining daily, I pay the price: for awhile at least, I have to lose as much as or more than I gain.

No doubt western observers are put off at first by hostility to rational discourse. Quite rightly we know of the richness of our own tradition of commentary and even commentary on commentary. We are trained to be good at it. It may even give us pleasure. Yet the very activity by which we most want to know Zen acts as a repellent: the more we gain, the more we lose.

How is it, then, that we can excuse scholarship or even speculation about a field of endeavor so allergic to analysis?

Kutz and Roskelly describe exactly what a Zen master seeks to do when they define what they call the teacher's task: "to inquire into the relationship between what students know and what they can express" (33). False: If you can't say it, you don't know it. True: We know more than we can say. Kutz and Roskelly, as western researchers, assert: "Language is an inherent part of the process of conceptualization" (35). My exposure to Zen leads me to conclude that Zennists

would think (though not assert): **Language is not an embodiment of concept or reality but a necessary aspect of the process of knowing.**

How else could we explain the richness of Zen literature--including, as we shall see, poems, lectures, and even lengthy commentaries? These literary pieces, often themselves guarded as self-sufficient treasures, may be useful to those who are capable of using them (but dangerous, as in the Sufi tradition as well) to those who are unprepared to read them. In the process of knowing, Zen writings are likely to have two key purposes, as we shall see: (a) to **startle** novices out of their conditioned complacency; (b) to **settle** those who have once achieved awareness into comfort with their abnormality. It may even be suggested that the job of Zen writings is to ensure abnormality.

Where, you may ask, does this leave me? Is this ethnography I'm doing, if you want a western term? Kutz and Roskelly note, "An ethnographer can never eliminate personal perspective entirely, but he can learn to use that perspective to make him more aware of others" (29). So this is not Zen, but Zen as a metaphor, a differently colored filter through which I am looking. Looking that way could help us become aware of others' perspectives; but also I may be writing myself into awareness of my own cultural determinism.

Exploring a place between, I am still aware of the central problem. A famous quote from Chuang-tzu defines this problem best: "A well frog cannot imagine the ocean, nor can a summer insect conceive of ice. How then can a scholar understand the Tao? He is restricted by his own learning" (In Hoff 24). Similarly, "A dog is not reckoned good because he barks well, and a man is not reckoned

wise because he speaks skillfully" (Chuang-tzu in Capra 101).

A scholar cannot understand the Tao. So I will have to be careful not quite to be one.

Herrigal, in his Zen in the Art of Archery, wrote about how he had tried for many months much too hard: he had tried too hard to understand what he was doing, to observe too intensely what he was not doing, to talk it all out to himself in words. Only when he had learned not to think too hard did he achieve perfection in his art (40). He needed not to understand but to experience the unity of the hitter and the hit.

Partly it is a question of deciding what is important and what it is not important to know. And it is not a question of proving. This is the part, directly related to western ideas of rhetoric, which it is so hard for scholarship to deal with.

In Communication and Culture in Ancient China and India, Robert T. Oliver carefully distinguishes, for the sake of western research, the rhetoric of the ancient East from the rhetoric of the ancient West--a parting of the ways which he and others see as the origin of our western inability to really grasp the distinctiveness of our own western rhetorical tradition. In his chapter on "The Rhetorical Influence of Gautama Buddha," for example, Oliver focuses on the Buddha's admonition: "Depart from the insignificant," an admonition central to the flavor and activity of Buddhism as it influenced all the East and finally crystalize in the Japanese Zen tradition.

What does this one admonition mean for the rhetorical influence of

Buddhism? At the outset it focuses rhetoric wholly upon consequentials." By "consequentials," of course, Buddha would have meant the essentials of spiritual evolution. The rhetoric of this evolution would almost totally concentrate on the **speaker** much more than the hearer. According to Oliver, "In the view of the Buddha, there is not an ethic for rhetoric but an ethic of rhetoric. Whatever may be said has direct consequences not alone (or even especially) for the hearer, but more explicitly and inevitably for the speaker himself" (75-77). In Oliver's opinion this is much different from the historical tradition of western rhetoric in which persuasion is central (77).

Looking at the job of language this way within the setting of a community of speakers/learners/teachers would draw people away from externals (not into their clarification and classification as in the West). Or, put by Oliver in a different way, rhetoric would "adjust people to circumstances, rather than to try to adjust circumstances to people" (78).

The second major effect of the Buddha's admonitions on the historical development of rhetoric in the East was to discourage persuasion while emphasizing "expository discourse"; the felt or experienced constant contradiction "between essential truth and its apparent contradictions demanded constant and exhaustive efforts of elucidation" (Oliver 78). Repeated explanations or categorizations simply did not match up with actual experience. Disputation based on logical analysis only served, in this rhetorical tradition, to widen the gap between knowledge and experience. As Benjamin Hoff writes in The Tao of Pooh, "Isn't the knowledge that comes from experience more valuable than knowledge

that doesn't? It seems fairly obvious to some of us that a lot of scholars need to go outside and sniff around--walk through the grass, talk to the animals. That sort of thing.

> 'Lots of people talk to the animals,' said Pooh.
> 'Maybe, but...'
> 'Not very many listen, though,' he said.
> 'That's the problem,' he added.

In other words, you might say that there is more to Knowing than just being correct" (29). If truth "is an understanding that apparent differences are illusory"--even differences between human speech and the talk of the animals, as it were--such a concept renounces rhetoric [itself] in favor of dialectic" (Oliver 76). This is the sense in which the famous opening words of the fifty-sixth chapter of the Tao Te Ching might be understood: "Those who know do not say;/ those who say do not know" (Cleary 43).

Ultimately, rhetoric for Gautama involves a redefinition or redirection of our understanding of the nature of personhood. His conclusions and his practice focus on the key distinctions between himself and the traditions of both Aristotle and the Christian church. In Aristotle's view, people are subject to all manner of unclarity and "emotionalism," but they can be brought "to perceive objective truth when it is logically expounded"; persons are outside of the world capable of "evaluating it objectively and separately from personal involvement." In Judeo-Christian theology, the distinction between persons and all the rest of creation is emphasized in order to focus on redemption--almost an escape from our own nature. Gautama Buddha, on the other hand, viewed persons as a part of a

certain totality--"unable eventually to perceive either the world or [themselves] logically"; in this reality a person "cannot separate himself as observer from what it is that he seeks to observe" (Oliver 78).

Why did Aristotle, therefore, posit the need for persuasion? It must have been to lead others from nonsense to sense (Oliver 77-79). But such attention to particulars may blind us to the truth which is staring us in the face.

Thus, in the rhetorical stance of The Buddha, the acceptable method of inquiry is not logical--"not even mental--but intuitive. The individual cannot think his way to understanding; he must feel his way toward it" (Oliver 79). Objective clarification is an end forever out of grasp and, in a real sense, useless. A better goal is subjective understanding.

Herrigal, in his book on archery, goes so far as to say that to explain is a betrayal of Zen (26). To really understand, he found, is to steer clear of logical explanations, his method involving only himself, the essentials (27-28). His became the rhetoric of the speaker rather than the hearer. But Herrigal shows how difficult a task he had set for himself. When his master would achieve something that Herrigal could not understand or explain, rather than just accepting what had happened and living with it, what did Herrigal do, typical westerner that he was? He started writing notes to himself about how the master's achievements could have been explained: what was the master's "trick"? (37).

Herrigal too had to deal with the apparent contradiction of Zen texts existing in a tradition without definitions. Slowly he learned that the texts had been prepared to awake only those who were prepared to learn (24), only those to

whom learning the texts, at the same time, didn't really matter:

> To know unconsciously is best.
> To presume to know what you don't
> is sick.
> Only by recognizing the sickness
> of sickness
> is it possible not to be sick....
> (Tao Te Ching #71, Cleary 55)

> Not exalting cleverness
> causes the people not to contend.
> (Tao Te Ching #3, Cleary 10)

## East Meets West: A Historical Evolution?

In so many ways and so many places, evidence accumulates that insights which could be gained from the East guide change and growth in the West's ways of dealing with its own great traditions--and the recently perceived limitations of those traditions: in physics, in Christian theology, in pedagogy, in rhetoric. So much evidence from such a variety of sources leads to the conclusion that the West--whether always aware of this or not--is moving to an accommodation of its theories and practices with the ancient wisdom of the East. Such evidence occurs both within a body of literature (scholarship) and within the reported experience of individuals we might know and respect. This is especially true if we accept the evolution from West to East more as a major cultural metaphor than as a logical proposition.

Writes Heinrich Dumoulin in Christianity Meets Buddhism, "The Dialogue between East and West counts as one of the decisive events of our era" (7). For Dumoulin this dialogue is less political than psychological. In his discussion he

begins by referring to Jung and his notions of the east and the west within us (10)--that is, the metaphorical poles to which, in turn, we may be drawn individually; neither alone expresses the totality of spirit we may intuitively "know."

Speaking from a spiritual perspective, Dumoulin sees that the East has far more to give right now, the gift that westerners need: the insight not of dualities (as, for example, the subject and the verb, as we shall see) but of balance--the "balance of stillness and motion" (13). We are already experts in dualities. What we may seek without knowing it, "the balance of stillness and motion," is the very **non-action** so central to an understanding of Zen, the meeting place of action and contemplation in which wholeness matures. In the West we refer to body and soul, inner and outer--for Emerson, the Me and the Not Me. In the inexpressible moment of Zen these are one--even if a dialogue with words were the vehicle which got us there.

The meeting-ground of East and West, according to Dumoulin, happens to be critical to students of literacy and language. It emphasizes concrete reality versus abstract thinking (17-18); "the reality of being exists beyond all concepts and words" (18).

That's Zen. But that's also Christianity, according to Dumoulin, in its respect for mystery and for the transcendent reality of God. The mystery of God in Christian theology "which constitutes the central core of divine revelation also cannot be expressed adequately by human words and concepts" (19). Note then the following summary, according to Dumoulin, of significant values needed by westerners for which westerners are preparing themselves by openness to the

East--and also consider the implications for our concepts about literacy and language:

> Stillness and meditation, oneness of spirit and body, intuitive awareness of the truth touching the mystery of reality--all these lie deeply within man [sic], at the very root of his existence. They are by no means the exclusive possession of Far Eastern spirituality, but are imbedded (if forgotten) in Western tradition. We here touch common ground. (2021)

A major case study in "the awareness of the truth touching the mystery of reality" within the life and work of a western man is Thomas Merton, a priest who travelled to the East both metaphorically and actually, in order to find the deepest truth of his own western theology. In his study of Merton, Thomas Merton: Monk and Poet, George Woodcock asserts that "if mankind were to be made whole again," Merton believed, the people of the East and West would have to come to some sort of "rapprochement"--especially among religious adherents from both major traditions. As a major part of the process, the Church itself would have to "open itself to learning from the eastern religions as in its early days it had been exposed to the influences of Platonism and Gnosticism..."(151). To quote Merton himself, "If the West continues to underestimate and to neglect the spiritual heritage of the East, it may hasten the tragedy that threatens man and his civilizations" (Mystics and Zen Masters in Woodcock 155).

One can see everywhere in Merton's writings clear evidence of a western theologian coming to terms with his own theological tradition because of having taken the east seriously. Thinking, for example, of the dark night of the soul and his own early monastic life, Merton wrote of Zen training this way:

> One might almost say that one of the purposes of Zen training is to push the monk by force into a kind of dark night, and to bring him as quickly and efficaciously as possible into a quandary where, forced to face and reject his most cherished illusions, driven almost to despair, he abandons all false hopes and makes a breakthrough into a complete humility, detachment, and spiritual poverty. (Mystics and Zen Masters in Woodcock 166)

"Forced to face and to reject his most cherished illusions," such a person is freed from conditioning, the bonds of preconceptions, and sees clearly, for himself or for herself for the first time, the transcendent meaning of the Tao.

It is also everywhere evident in Merton's work that he had to leave the West in order to come to terms with it; that, in a sense, is what the East is for. Many have remarked that, just as Gandhi came to terms with his own East by contact with the West (the writings of Henry David Thoreau, for example), Thomas Merton's own development shows a person really discovering his West only through the East (149).

This latter is the direction of the evolution which we are talking about here.

William Barrett, in his introduction to D.T. Suzuki's classic Zen Buddhism, defines the evolutionary shift among westerners toward the East in more philosophical terms. Barrett assumes, which I think is fair, that westerners--both in ways we understand the world and in the rhetorical conventions by which we discuss that world--are inheritors of the Greeks and the Hebrews, both profoundly dualistic traditions. In the Hebrew world, God stands apart from humans and all the rest of Creation--in a world of dualism based on "religious and moral grounds." In the Greek world, dualisms are "along intellectual lines." The Greek

achievement was to "define the ideal of rationality for man; but in doing so, Plato and Aristotle not only made reason the highest and most valued function, they also went so far as to make it the center of our personal identity."

Barrett affirms, on the other hand, that "the Orientals never succumbed to this latter error." We have already seen how they favored intuition over reason, seeking a center between the dualities of "reason and unreason, intellect and senses, morality and nature."

What we all inherit, then, in Barrett's terms, are "an irrationally nagging conscience from the Hebrews, an excessively dividing rational mind from the Greeks" (ix). Our experience in the modern world, however, tells us, when we are at least open to the counterbalancing intuitionism of the East, that our ways of seeing and discussing the world are outdated and incomplete.

As we shall see later in Fritjof Capra's The Tao of Physics, in other words, even in our sciences themselves (the prized training grounds of western rationalism), "modern developments have combined to make our inherited rationalism more shaky" (Barrett x). When we observe apparently parallel shifts among modern men and women in several areas of endeavor toward eastern world-views and toward eastern rhetorical traits, "these instances make up a body of 'coincidence' so formidable that they must give us pause" (Barrett xiii): Merton and others in theology, Capra and others in physics and in other modern sciences, and (according to Barrett) D.H. Lawrence and James Joyce in English literature (xii-xiii).

One effect of Fritjof Capra's The Tao of Physics is to clarify the inadequacy of

traditional western rationality and rhetoric to deal with modern scientific developments. In Capra's "Preface to the Second Edition" (1982), he affirms that the "profound harmony between the world view of modern physics and the views of Eastern mysticism now appears as an integral part of a much larger cultural transformation" (xvii)--a widespread attempt to redress the imbalance in the West, the favoring of the yang. Capra believes that we are everywhere witnessing a "tremendous evolutionary movement" that illustrates the ancient Chinese saying: "'The yang, having reached its climax, retreats in favor of the yin'" (xvi).

To show what sorts of parallels he sees between modern physics and Zen, for example, Capra only needs to quote from both sources. Here is just one such paired instance (32):

> The contradiction so puzzling to the ordinary way of thinking comes from the fact that we have to use language to communicate our inner experience which in its very nature transcends linguistics. (D.T. Suzuki)
>
> The problems of language here are really serious. We wish to speak in some way about the structure of the atoms....But we cannot speak about atoms in ordinary language. (W. Heisenberg)

In defining the "new physics" for readers who are not physicists, Capra can only describe how the physicists themselves came to feel. Systematically, experiments called into question the most cherished notions of academic rational principles. And "every time the physicists asked nature a question in an atomic experiment, nature answered with a paradox" (55). The scientists themselves felt like the Zen monk described by Merton: brought "into a quandary where, forced to face and to reject his most cherished illusions, driven almost to despair, he abandons all false

hopes and makes a breakthrough"...(Woodcock 166).

When physicists had to describe the results of their experiments, they faced a linguistic crisis too. What words to use? How to deal with a single phenomenon which is sometimes more like a wave and sometimes more like a particle? They could only invent clusters of words like Zen riddles: "energy packets," "probability waves" (56).

We are talking here of a situation in which the rhetorical conventions and patterns of the West are no longer deemed adequate to scientific inquiry and scholarship. This is just as a western theologian may no longer find the rhetorical conventions and patterns of the west, inherited from the Hebrews and the Greeks, adequate to theology or prayer. And this is just as a writer of essays or poems (as we will see in the next chapter) may no longer find the rhetorical conventions and patterns of the west adequate to poetry or criticism.

In all these cases logical abstractions may be found only palely to approximate reality (see Capra 15). In science, theology, and literature we may continue to favor logical abstractions--but only because "our representation of reality is so much easier to grasp than reality itself" (Capra 15).

One reason Capra's book is so unusual and necessary for western readers--along with other books designed for a large audience such as the two by Benjamin Hoff, The Tao of Pooh and The Te of Piglet--is that it clarifies for middle culture the evolutionary issues which are so important to it. As Barrett argues, the transformations in culture over recent years which demonstrate an openness of the West to the East have happened essentially in the "deep and high parts of our

culture" (introduction to Suzuki xiii)--that is, among the specialized physicists introduced by Capra and men and women like them or among very simple people. The vast middle part of culture remains unaffected.

That this is so places an immediate burden and mission on those who educate masses of young men and women--perhaps particularly in writing and literature classes.

If the "common ground" which Dumoulin defined is accessible to all, if others besides Thomas Merton have access to their own west most perfectly through the east, if we are to find a rhetoric for the modern world which makes science available in words even to scientists, this way through the middle to the middle is an insight not absent from western thinking about language and pedagogy. Kutz and Roskelly, for example, enter the picture again. They assert that language mediates between the learner and the world, shaping and extending thought. A student "actively constructs a world, and language helps shape the construction" (39). In arguing for this they contrast Piaget and Bruner almost the way I have been contrasting the West and the East. They first describe the basic cultural chauvinism of Piaget and his emphasis on logical reasoning: "The kind of abstract, logical reasoning that Piaget valued in the actions of the children he observed and in his assumptions about their development has long been valued in western society and in our schools" (40). Bruner, on the other hand, "balances the logical, analytic, and 'paradigmatic' mode of reasoning with another, equally important mode of knowing--one that's intuitive rather than rational, and that represents its meaning in stories rather than logical syllogisms and formulae" (from Actual

Minds, Possible Worlds 13 in Kutz and Roskelly 45). Real people may benefit from both insights, the developmental aspects of logical western thinking and the "narrative knowing" which Bruner describes.

Whereas, as Kutz and Roskelly imagine, in the dominant model some part of everyone is silenced (53), it does not have to be so. Dumoulin looked at Christian spirituality as evolving from west to east; Kutz and Roskelly ask "What makes good writing?" and note a broad historical sweep: "Form is appeal" in classical rhetoric, "form is all" in eighteenth and nineteenth century rhetoric, and "form is function" in the new rhetoric (162-165). The evolution of these rhetorics is likewise an evolution from West to East.

What are the pedagogical implications of this evolution? Of course there are many (see last section of this chapter). But for one example, in Modern Japan: An Idea Book for K-12 Teachers, Anita Matson describes a unit on haiku in which she has students go outdoors and describe their perceptions before saying anything herself about the form and tradition of Japanese poetry. Student talk can precede teacher talk.

In The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation Thich Nhat Hanh, himself a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, contrasts "machine thinking" (12) and mindfulness--thinking in compartments (48) versus direct awareness. Both can be expressed, though differently, in writing--though the first kind predominates in schools. Which of the two choices most promotes creativity, an activity we say we prize in the west? On the kind of thinking and language most prized in western schools, Hanh says, "The raft is used to cross the river. It isn't to be carried

around on your shoulders. The finger which points at the moon isn't the moon itself" (56). Or, as Benjamin Hoff writes, "A clever mind is not a heart" (The Tao of Pooh 128).

## Theoretical Aspects of Zen Language

To me the best philosophic treatment of language in the Zen tradition can be found in T.P. Kasulis' Zen Action/Zen Person. Even though Kasulis is without doubt a card-carrying western academic, his initial theoretical metaphor is consistent with what we have so far learned about Zen practice. Contrasting philosophy with religion, academic discourse with primary experience, Kasulis writes, "Studying about Zen should never be confused with practicing Zen, just as studying aesthetics should not be confused with being an artist" (x).

Nonetheless, Kasulis uses his academic/linguistic mastery of both English and Japanese to get to the heart of the differences between West and East as embodied in the languages themselves; he concentrates on the word **person** as a vehicle for revealing the distinctiveness of Zen relationships to language generally.

The Japanese use of three distinct words for person reveals that contextual meaning is absolutely primary. That is, in English I speak to you can map both of us as transmitters, language bridging the gap:

a R b.

In Japanese, however, The **R** (between) is primary. It is only from **R** (the bridge,

the situation, the context) that **a** and **b** (you and I) take any shape at all (7). As Kasulis emphasizes, the western metaphor we-are-actors-on-a-stage has no meaning at all (9).

How then does the Zen Buddhist operate with language? As we shall see more distinctly later, the **koan** (westerners would probably say "riddle") as a teaching tool provides a basic example. Kasulis quotes the most famous of these koans:

> A monk once asked Master Joshu, "Has a dog the Buddha nature or not?" Joshu said, "Mu!"

Then Kasulis' important commentary runs like this:

> The monk is challenging Joshu by posing a question with no apparent solution: if Joshu responds in the affirmative, he is open to censure for being overly dependent on traditional [conventional] teachings instead of his own insight; if he responds negatively, he can be criticized for egotism and arrogance, for placing himself above the teachings of his Buddhist predecessors [since in Buddhist doctrine every sentient being has Buddha nature]. (10)

How then does a koan work, since often this same one is given to aspirants even today? Kasulis thinks, and surely he is right, that "the Zen position is that all intellectual attempts to grasp the significance of this utterance will fail" (11).

A person must become one with the Mu itself, the yes-no, in order to achieve liberation from the bonds of mere intellect. In the use of language this way, the koan is meant to **point** the "student" to a religious experience beyond dualities (12). Two key Zen themes emerge: words (concepts) are in themselves empty; students must turn to the source of their own experience (12).

What all this means is simple to express but difficult to grasp. Conceptual

distinctions, usually expressed in language, are not connected with outside reality; that is, "since language can never leave its own constructs and internal rules, it cannot serve as a vehicle for philosophic truth" (Kasulis 22). Words are essentially empty of independent reality, therefore only capable at best of highlighting some aspect while also concealing. This is why Kasulis refers to Heidegger, who said that every assertion both conceals and reveals (24). Or, put in different terms by Toshihiko Izutsu in reflecting on a specific text by Chuang-tzu, what happens when a great lutist like Chao Wen does actualize the perfection of a single song in music and words? Then "the infinite number of other pieces which are left behind become darkened and nullified." That is, even the perfect expression (if possible) is "defective" at the same time; only silence would serve to embody all the pieces of music with Chao Wen would be capable of "actualizing" (365). Revealing conceals more than it reveals.

Kasulis' conclusions stimulate the western imagination--or, in a sense, point to a different way of understanding of the rhetoric of spiritual searching. What is meant in Zen by attachment to conceptualizations? He defines this attachment as "when one begins to understand oneself or others as equivalent to categories" (28). How can those who practice Zen survive all the contradictions, even contradicting themselves from one day to the next in what they say or do? Well, the inconsistency of maintaining contrary views "seems less objectionable than the absurdity of maintaining either view exclusively" (27).

How can those who practice Zen live with the incompleteness of their personal or conceptual models? "Completeness and consistency are not as critical

as in the intended use and appropriateness of the model" (28). It is thus that "without-thinking" can be the source of thought (140) and even that language can grow out of "without-thinking" (140). The blessing is the spontaneity, the "artless art" for which Zen poets, for example, are deservedly famous (141).

It is partly a question of the reservation or dispersal of vital energy. We have already seen this point in the famous third chapter of the Tao Te Ching: "Not exalting cleverness/ causes the people not to contend" (Cleary 10). People will not argue with you and cause you to lose all of your energy if you don't make too much of your cleverness (133-134). You will be able to stay on the middle course, the between place again, through which you can journey spontaneously toward peace and illumination.

Taking this course will also permit you, as Chuang-tzu was quick to point out, to avoid the absurdity of your own language when clearly that language leads only to further absurdity--and dispersal of energy. In the second of Chaung-tzu's own so called "Inner Chapters," he asserts that the "aim of sages is for diffused brilliance"--by which he means that the sages will avoid direct affirmations or explanations in order to aim at clarity (Cleary 74). Otherwise the sages would not be sages; they would engage in fruitless argumentations to dispel their energy.

In order to suggest, by way of concrete example, his point (and at the risk of a momentary lapse from sageness), Chuang-tzu says that he will try to say what he means:

> There is a beginning, there is never a beginning to have a beginning, there is never beginning to never begin to have a beginning. There is existence, there is nonexistence. There is never the beginning the

> existence of nonexistence, there is never beginning never beginning the existence of nonexistence. Suddenly there are existence and nonexistence, but we don't know if existence or nonexistence actually exist or not. (75)

Nor should we spend very much of our time trying to figure that out. Once having tried to figure all this out, Chuang-tzu concludes, language itself would prevent us from knowing if and when we had done something: "Now I have said something, but I don't know if what I have said actually says something or not" (Cleary 75).

Yet the question continues to nag at us: what are we to say to someone who is asking us for explanations? How can we use our experience and our language to help others understand on their own?

Once again the modern aspirant Herrigal, in his study of Zen archery, reports on just this dilemma. He was always asking questions. And his Master was always saying, "You are under an illusion if you imagine that these dark connections [as between the real inner goal and the "target" or disk of paper at which the archers had been shooting] would help you. These are processes which are beyond the reach of understanding" (82-83). The two spent a great deal of time conversing with each other, and Herrigal kept an extensive journal full of lame attempts to explain to himself what had so far been happening. But there remained no effective explanations. There could be only analogies, riddles, and metaphors--aspects of language to **point toward** but never to fully express. Quoting Herrigal's Master directly:

> Do not forget that even in Nature there are correspondences which cannot be understood, and yet are so real that we have grown accustomed to them, just as if they could not be any different. I will give you an example which I have often puzzled over. The spider

> dances her web without knowing that there are flies that will get caught in it. The fly, dancing nonchalantly on a sunbeam, gets caught in the net without knowing what lies in store. But through both of them 'It' dances, and inside and outside are united in this dance. So, too, the archer hits the target without having aimed--more I cannot say. (83)

The 'It' is there even when not noticed. We know many things which we cannot say. Hitting the target directly, when not just a very occasional fortuitous accident, is untimed and unplanned and unexplained.

But of course even this did not satisfy the inquiring mind of Herrigal, even after years of practice. He still let his Master know that there must be some sort of unconscious skill involved which could be explained if only it could be discovered, perfected only if it could be analyzed and isolated. Frustrated, as a Master would be with a western aspirant stuck on the conventions of his own thinking, Herrigal's master proved his lesson lastly without words. He shot at and perfectly hit the target in the absolute dark (84-85)! The Master proved to have direct methods of communicating after all--but only when the conversation and the stories and the poetry had **pointed** the way.

Similarly, Izutsu, in his chapter "Beyond This and That," affirms that, "from the point of view of the Way, there can be no distinction between 'true' and 'false'" (328). In such a situation, language itself cannot help people cope with a reality which is, in Chuang-tzu's own estimation "Chaotic" (324)--that is, beyond the power of disputation to satisfy and clarify.

In the last analysis, human language is inadequate. And one must conclude that rhetoric itself does not equal reality. In a sense, rhetoric has nothing to do

with reality. The role of language, as Izutsu insists in referring to both Ibn 'Arabi and Chuang tzu, is merely to crystallize the world into the **things** which we can talk about (360-365). Or, summarized in a different manner, "If brought down to the level of language, the Way will immediately and inevitably turn into a concept" (377).

So we are inevitably led down to the same conclusion in discussing the theoretical aspects of Zen language which we reached in discussing how we could have any theory at all about Zen. We are left with the one word **Nothing**. But this word **Nothing** is what we are led to precisely because of our point of view. Remember that, from the Zen perspective, this **Nothing** is really the fullest existence (Izutsu 387), not a passive nothing.

If we must once again have definitions, the Zen, or the Way, is really the **Something**: "This 'nameless' Something, in its positive aspect, i.e. in its eternal and everlasting creativeness, may be 'named' provisionally the 'Way'" (Izutsu 388).

> **To speak rarely is natural.**
> **That is why a gusty wind doesn't last the morning,**
> **a downpour of rain doesn't last all day.**
> **Who does this? Heaven and earth.**
> **If even heaven and earth cannot go on forever,**
> **how much less can human beings?**
> (From Chapter 23 of the Tao Te Ching, Cleary 23)

Language in Zen Practice

Any look at language in Zen practice begins, not surprisingly, with a contradiction. Takeshi Ikemoto, in his introduction to Zen: Poems, Prayers, Sermons, Anecdotes, Interviews, quotes Muso, a great Zen Master (1275-1351):

"A monk who is given to reading non-Buddhist books and engages in writing is a wordling with a shaven head. He is less than nobody" (xv-xvi); yet Muso himself was a prolific writer of commentaries and poems!

One way out of this contradiction common to Zen masters, according to Ikemoto, is to assert that book knowledge is harmful to beginners, but after training it can prove "of great service to him" (xvi). It is for sure true that writing about Zen and all manner of intellectualizing about Zen literature appears to be an impediment to the progress of initiates. In Kapleau's The Three Pillars of Zen, the author includes several interviews with both Japanese and American initiates who achieved satori (enlightenment); it is obvious in these that those aspirants who had preconceptions about Zen, who had read books about Zen experience, struggled harder and took longer to cleanse their minds of "delusion," the obsession with intellectual distinctions. But it is also true that there is a great body of Zen literature.

We must therefore conclude, as Ikemoto does, that there is a role for literature "in the cultivation of Zen" (xvi), though perhaps **this role is more vital for the writer than in the critical approach of earnest readers**. Ikemoto quotes an interesting Zen postulate: "Poetry and Zen are of a savor" (xvi).

One way to summarize all this in western language is that "Zen literature is the expression of the inexpressible" (Ikemoto xvii), but we are not to understand from this that Zen is a kind of mysticism. Whereas Christian mysticism, for example, makes possible a union with God, such an experience, in Christian theology, can only happen if God wills; as Ikemoto points out, in Zen there is no

intermediary: "To a Zen poet, a thing of beauty or anything in nature is the Absolute. Hence his freedom from rationality and his recourse to uncommon symbols. Yet ultimately what he portrays is concrete, not a dreamy fancy or vision" (xviii).

All the above begins to add up if one uses a nice western word like process; language is in the process, a necessary though imperfect vehicle which may permit liberating moments of knowing--though language in itself cannot express knowledge. Ikemoto summarizes this way:

> The Zen view is that Truth is beyond verbalization. Yet this fact can best be proclaimed by language; hence the master's readiness to make use of it. They use language not just for proclamation of the via negative, but for a positive expression intended to direct their disciples' minds' eye to the Inexpressible. It is not a rare occurrence to gain satori as one reads or listens to a sermon. (xx)

Language in Zen practice is then clearly a pedagogical tool, a mediation between master and student, a way beyond language in language.

The language process in practice is extremely dynamic and energetic while being supremely disciplined at the same time. Total attention to a koan given by a Zen master, for example, articulated in a few simple words, does not in itself bestow Buddhahood; "It uncovers a Buddha nature" (Kapleau 22). The koan is not to be figured out in the western sense. Remember that, "while most people place a high value on abstract thought," it is the opposite with Zen, which "has clearly demonstrated that discriminative thinking lies at the root of delusion" (Kapleau 29).

D.T. Suzuki, in Chapter 6 of his Zen Buddhism, "The Reason of Unreason:

The Koan Exercise," concisely focuses on the pedagogical process of traditional koan inquiry (though "inquiry" is no doubt too western a word here). A pedagogical process should, first of all, have a purpose, we always like to say. I notice that Suzuki is perfectly clear about the purpose of the koan: "to destroy the root of life," "to make the calculating mind die," "to root out the entire mind that has been at work since eternity" (138). This does sound rather violent, especially in western spheres where value-free education gets seriously talked about. But the end here is to nurture (that sounds gentler) the student/aspirant beyond "the limits of intellection" (Suzuki 138). To go beyond the limits of intellection can happen only by a process of exhausting endeavor--to adjust the whole world view will require an event very nearly cataclysmic.

At first--and again and again, perhaps even for years--the student/aspirant will fail. As in any good pedagogical process, there must be room for failure. The "measurement" (again too western a word) of this failure will mean diagnosis. And, according to Suzuki, this too is indeed an integral part of the koan exercise. When carefully the master listens to a student/aspirant's struggles with a particular koan--say, for example, "A monk asked Tung-shan, 'Who is the Buddha?' 'Three chin of flax'" (134)--the master can thereby gauge "the mental state of the questioner" (135) and know how to respond, what further questions to ask or how long to maintain a threatening silence.

Also a good pedagogical process will have a graded series of exercises designed to develop defined skills. The koan exercise has this too. The students/aspirants, repeatedly dissatisfied with the words of centuries of

commentators (in the West, the critics), will experience their own lack of illuminating success as "no crack in it to insert their intellectual teeth" (137). They will have to develop, gradually, other skills that they didn't even know existed.

Furthermore, I conclude from my somewhat metaphorical reading of Suzuki's chapter, a good pedagogical process resists oversimplification. If it is a process worth doing, it will take much work. As Suzuki says, the koan "refuses to be solved under any easier conditions" (139). The process will require nothing less than the complete attention of both the master/teacher and the student/aspirant.

How will the process end? How will master and aspirant agree that there has been success? That moment will come surprisingly, spontaneously, and mutually when--as all commentators on Zen instruction seem to agree--the intuitively "right" answer will be given and, amid shouts of joy and laughter, master/teacher and student/aspirant alike will recognize that the job is done (for now)--"instead of the intellect, which taken by itself forms only a part of our being, the entire personality, mind and body, is thrown out into the solution of the koan" (Suzuki 136).

Finally, what will happen to the koan itself, the words themselves, the lessons, the pages of historical commentary, the lectures and sermons? All will be quickly thrown out:

> But once solved the koan is compared to a piece of brick used to knock at a gate; when the gate is opened the brick is thrown away. The koan is useful as long as the mental doors are closed, but when they are opened it may be forgotten. What one sees after the opening will be something quite unexpected, something that has never before entered even into one's imagination. But when the koan is re-examined from this newly acquired point of view, how

> marvelously suggestive, how fittingly constructed, although there is nothing artificial here! (Suzuki 139)

Or there are other ways to "explain" how language works in Zen practice, what long sutras or poems are for. Phillip Kapleau, for example, asks us to picture a typical Japanese scroll painting with lots of empty space; in sutras "just as in the picture our minds are brought to a heightened awareness of the white space because of a tree, so through the reciting of the sutras we can be led to sense the reality lying beyond them, the Emptiness to which they point" (17).

Or we could more simply just assert that the role of Zen language in Zen practice is mostly to upset the conventional expectations that we bring to even casual conversation. We can be startled into "awareness" even when we didn't know we were looking. A traditional example which Suzuki celebrates shows how such a "revolution" may be stirred in our minds: "Hokoji (P'ang-yun), formerly a Confucian, asked Baso (Ma-tsu, --788), 'What kind of man is he who does not keep company with anything?' Replied the Master, 'I will tell you when you have swallowed up in one draught all the waters in the West River'" (18).

The purposive disturbance of conventional thinking or conditioning, the emptiness around language--these are not only experiences of Zen monks in the mountains of Japan. In his The Tao of Physics Fritjof Capra uses similar language to describe the experience of twentieth century western physicists for whom "the bottom is dropping out" (40), that is for whom verbal models and even normal sense experience are no longer adequate to describe properties of, say, subatomic particles. In this same vein Capra quotes Einstein when that genius first grasped

the reality of atomic physics: "All my attempts to adapt the theoretical foundation of physics to [this new type of] knowledge failed completely. It was as though the ground had pulled out from under one, with no firm foundation to be seen anywhere, upon which one could have built" (in Capra 42).

In observing this gulf between experience or knowledge on the one hand and the expression permitted by language on the other, westerners--teachers of literacy too--can grasp the Zen master's purpose in using the koans. These koans are mostly the outgrowth of the Zen master's will to point directly to the truth in a very few words. Sudden and spontaneous words, according to Capra among many others, are meant to "expose the paradoxes of conceptual thinking" and to **stop** "the thought process" (108). Language once again is thus used to **point** the student/aspirant beyond the limitations of language--not unlike the process which we sometimes claim, even in the West, is to be achieved through the concise and surprising language of our poems.

The principles of Zen teaching, inadequately referred to perhaps as Truth, are meant to be learned not just in the mind but in the whole person. That is why the koans must defy the regular rules of daily discourse. As Kapleau indicates, "By wheedling the intellect into attempting solutions impossible for it, koans reveal to us the inherent limitations of the logical mind as an instrument for realizing ultimate Truth"; they rid us of western duality in order to liberate us to the world in which we actually live--not our ideas about things but the things themselves (65). The merit of language used in a certain way is that it compels us, "in ingenious and dramatic fashion, to learn these doctrines not simply with our head

but with our whole being, refusing to permit us to sit back and endlessly theorize about them in the abstract" (Kapleau 64-65).

But the roshi, or master, does far more than merely assign a puzzle and wait for the result. He must use his language to **surprise** his hearers into comprehension (awareness), often in daily sermons at the monastery which everyone attends--but even more importantly in daily individual meetings. We'd call this conferencing.

The roshi "strikes against" the koan; "keenly aware of the different levels of comprehension of his hearers, he pitches his commentary so that each receives according to his capacity to understand, even as he relates the spirit of the koan to his hearers' common life experience" (Kapleau 67). A roshi might say, as Yasutani-roshi does, for example, in Kapleau's transcripts, "You must look into the source of your thoughts, thereby annihilating them" (71).

Language in Zen practice therefore exists in several dynamic contexts, all of them by definition unfixed and changing. There are the koans, the long contemplation of which is meant to free a person from conceptualizations and to experience satori directly. Attendance at daily lectures may help aspirants to shape their relationship to meditation and to the koans in such a way that enlightenment may occur more quickly. Daily "conferences" with the roshi may be charged with just the felt energy which gives the aspirant the motivation to work harder (though often the roshi just issues a reprimand or may even hit the aspirant in an attempt to surprise him or her further into awareness). And there is a great body of Zen literature which may or may not be useful in encouraging enlightenment or in

providing the material for ongoing meditation once enlightenment has been achieved.

However, there is yet another genre of Zen literature--the so called satori poem. Such a poem is written to express/depict/memorialize/record for further meditation the exact moment of enlightenment. Such a poem is another attempt, necessarily imperfect and not meant to replace the moment itself, to use language to point beyond language into the Way itself. D.T. Suzuki celebrates this particular example:

> One stroke has made me forget all my previous knowledge,
> No artificial discipline is at all needed;
> In every movement I uphold the ancient way,
> And never fall into the rut of mere quietism;
> Wherever I walk no traces are left,
> And my senses are not fettered by rules of conduct;
> Everywhere those who have attained to the truth,
> All declare this to be of the highest order. (95)

In this particular satori poem are found the very themes emphasized above: all intellectual categories are swept away in a moment; the new level of Zen life is not separate from the world but very much alive in it; conventional language and actions are suddenly superseded; this is the ultimate human experience; and such a personal achievement of awareness can be pointed at in words, but words are no substitute for it.

Closing with a satori poem, however, offers not only a summary. Doing so leads to a key final point related to language in Zen practice: language in Zen practice resists western romanticizing--or should for those who are paying attention. That is, the satori poem has nothing to do with personal expression.

Personal expression would have to do with supremely individual inflections; enlightenment has to do with supremely universal truth.

As usual, it is Toshihiko Izutsu who has the clearest way of clarifying this last key point. In the chapter "Against Essentialism," Izutsu refers us to a celebrated passage in Chuang-tzu's writings in which there is the allegory of the Wind. Here the Wind is not merely a beauty in itself or an expression in itself; rather the wind becomes a "philosophical symbol" for defining "verbally what is verbally inexpressible." According to Izutsu, the passage can best be understood if it is remembered that the Wind symbolizes existence, "or the Absolute in its all-pervading actus" (368), its forever-changing and forever-moving sufficiency; the hollow openings of the trees symbolize "essences" (368), individuals or individual things.

Here is the passage as translated by Izutsu himself:

> The great earth eructates; and the eructation is called Wind. As long as the eructation does not actually occur, all the hollows of the trees raise singing shouts.
>
> Listen! Do you not hear the trailing sound of the wind as it comes blowing from afar? The trees in the mountain forests begin to rustle, stir, and sway, and then all the hollows and holes of huge trees measuring a hundred arms' lengths around begin to give forth different sounds.
>
> There are holes like noses, like mouths, like ears; some are [square] like crosspieces upon pillars; some are [round] as cups, some are like mortars. Some are like deep ponds; some are like shallow basins. [The sounds they emit are accordingly various]; some roar like torrents dashing across the rocks; some hiss like flying arrows; some growl, some gasp, some shout, some moan. Some sounds are deep and muffled, some sounds are sad and mournful.
>
> As the first wind goes away with the light trailing sound, there comes

> the following one with a deep rumbling sound. To a gentle wind the hollows answer with faint sounds. To a stormy wind they answer with loud sounds.
>
> However, once the raging gale has passed on, all these hollows and holes are empty and soundless. You see only the boughs swaying, and the tender twigs gently moving. (368-69)

This opening passage of the allegory of wind is expressive and beautiful in itself, but it was not meant as a literary achievement. Rather, it is meant to say in language, through philosophical symbols, what could not be said in any other way. As Izutsu insists:

> The philosophical intention of Chuang-tzu may be formulated in the following way. The 'hollows' and 'holes' of the trees imagine that they are independently existent, that they emit these sounds. They fail to notice that they emit these sounds only by the active working of the Wind upon them. It is, in reality, the Wind that makes the 'hollows' resound. (369)

The "Cosmic Wind" in this passage corresponds exactly, according to Izutsu, with Ibn 'Arabi's sarayan al-wujud or "spreading of existence." For both Ibn 'Arabi and Chuang-tzu, existence is something on the move--"blowing," "flowing," or "spreading" (369), never at exactly the same place twice.

Chuang-tzu's passage continues:

> [One and the same Wind] blows on ten thousand things in different ways, and makes each hollow produce its own peculiar sound, so that each imagines that its own self produces that particular sound. But who, in reality, is the one who makes [the hollows] produce various sounds? (369)

That is indeed the question! Remember that wind has no sound of its own; the Absolute is, in its absoluteness, itself absolutely silent. We hear "the ten thousand sounds" produced by the hollows of the trees; these are the "sound of earth," often

emanating from within us since we live on the level of the ten thousand things. We may, paradoxically, hear the sound of heaven only behind the sounds of the earth (See Izutsu 369).

The point for language in Zen practice is that we must not confuse the hollows with the Wind. If we notice any sounds emerging from within, we must remember that we are not expressing ourselves but rather the Cosmic Wind is spreading around us. And we must learn to listen, behind the sounds, for the Cosmic Silence.

## Towards A More Eastern Rhetoric for the Western World

Although eastern writers have written very sparingly about rhetoric itself, that does not mean a dearth of rhetorical ideas. One needs only to make one's own conclusions about implications for rhetoric of major eastern texts. From these implications one may be able to draw conclusions about positive effects knowledge of eastern language theory and practice might have on theory and practice in the West--especially in those instances in which western theorists and/or teachers might intuitively grasp inadequacies in their own traditions.

Robert T. Oliver, in his Communication and Culture in Ancient India and China, provides a rare instance of a discussion of major eastern texts as rhetoric. He asserts, for example, in his chapter on "Rhetorical Implications of Taoism," that, although Taoism "discouraged bookishness" (234), the Tao Te Ching itself could be considered a book about rhetoric (235). Let me begin this discussion by summarizing his key points.

(1) The main "rhetorical contribution" of the writings derived from Lao-tzu "is their insight concerning the futility of argument and contention" (235). The winner of an argument may actually lose more than he or she gains. A more successful strategy than western principles of patterned persuasion would be to "surmount opposition" by encompassing all viewpoints within higher goals (236). Consensus, never in itself a necessary goal, might nonetheless actually be reached by intuitive search for unity behind multiplicity. Or, looked at differently, the rhetorician may surmount futile argumentation or self-defensive opposition best by calmly seeking expression--first of all in one's own example--of the intuitive oneness behind all contraries.

(2) People do not _think_ their way into harmony as much as they _feel_ their way into harmony (238). This would mean that effective communication would center on symbolic, discursive, expository presentation. As Oliver reminds us, so consistent with Taoist views, "The brain is no more truly an organism of man than is stomach or skin; why then emphasize its importance?" (238).

(3) To the West all the above might seem completely anti-rhetorical--but that is because of our point of view. Passages in the _Tao Te Ching_ itself may denounce rhetoric, as we have seen; but the very purpose of the writings derived from Lao-tzu is rhetorical, Oliver insists, because they teach people how to adjust themselves to circumstances in order "to attain the ultimate goal of both the individual and society" (239). In the west we may tend to work the other way around--to adjust circumstances to people (to force changes around us), often with an emphasis on the self at the expense of society. In a culture which emphasizes eloquence and

persuasion, it may be hard for us to recognize that "when problems abound, glib cleverness is as futile as inarticulate awkwardness" (239).

(4) Whereas, in the West, our rhetorical behaviors may emphasize the aggressive and rebellion against "the fundamental laws of the universe" (240), the opposite is not the non-active serenity which many see in Taoist theory and practice. Rather, the opposite is a strange sort of passivity which is hard for us to really imagine--the "flowing into and becoming one with nature" (240). If, as Oliver defines them, the cardinal "concepts" of Lao-tzu are "passive non-action," "mindlessness," and "spontaneous righteousness" (240), all three have rhetorical implications. The central idea here is that people must learn to think, feel, and act in accordance with their own basic natures--in harmony with them, without overt or patterned deceptions. In such a way of life, Oliver concludes, "since natural forces are genuinely inscrutable and nonreasonable, it is futile to try to 'understand' them or to foster understanding by others." It is better to avoid "purposive action" and to seek to live effortlessly (240).

(5) Truth, if capable of being suggested in words at all, will be understood intuitively, never through patterned analysis. This means that "the insight needed to understand truth and to communicate with one another consists of spontaneous identification." Yet such spontaneity cannot be achieved until "aggressive patterns" [of typically western thought and language], "etched by society" [convention] into your nature can be erased (241). Flagrant individualism for its own conceptual or persuasive sake would be the wrong way to go.

(6) Lecturing or discursive presentation of facts or concepts as though they

were completely true is a pedagogical disaster. On the contrary, Oliver would summarize Lao-tzu's advice, his pedagogical-rhetorical stance this way:

> Do not attempt the impossible task of trying to conform to the vast network of often conflicting and never adequate social beliefs and customs. Moreover, do not try to understand nature, either; for such an effort at understanding would require analysis, and this would fix upon the object your own mode of interpreting it. The recipe that Lao-tzu recommended is simple to state, though perhaps impossible fully to attain: empty your mind and be passively receptive to spontaneous insight. (241)

While Lao-tzu's goals may be almost unattainable, the rhetorical implication for westerners and easterners alike is clear, useful, and immediate: attempt to reach a "degree of sophisticated understanding" that would uncover the ossified conventions of social and intellectual life in your culture--whatever that culture may be--as the "artificial constructs" that they are. Only then in our life and in our language can we find freedom, the spontaneous non-action which the Taoists writers recommend but refuse fully to define. Oliver's summary is perfect: "To Lao-tzu the disfigurement of human nature by diversion from natural tendencies through acceptance of culturally established forms of thinking and behaving is the pathway to pretense, frustration, and futility" (243).

(7) The purpose of communication, in the Taoist tradition, is neither self expression nor detached analysis. Rather, according to Oliver, "the purpose of communication is communication" (243). Talk justifies itself when its sort of undesigned design assists individuals "to pierce through the camouflage maintained by society" (243). Otherwise rhetoric will do more harm than good.

(8) Rhetoric cannot be taught, not in the western sense of "taught" as, for

example, a graded series of analyzed skills. Rather, Oliver shows, "the skills required for effective speaking...are not 'learned' but are 'recovered'--by relaxing into one's own essential nature" (244). This view alone accounts for the special flavor of Taoist writings or Zen poems. Style, organization and delivery are "nonassertive and nonargumentative" (244). In sum, "The message that is unqualifiedly true and that is identified with the listener's own feelings will be accepted by him most readily as he hears it set forth with utter and categorical simplicity--with no qualifications and no argumentative supports" (244). At the same time, one must not want too much for others to agree: that is a matter for them; rhetorical presentation may be designed more for the presenter than for the hearer or reader. "To think purposively, Lao Tzu would warn, is to court the danger of imposing one's own conclusions upon the matter under consideration" (Oliver 245).

(9) One cannot pretend to present the truth in words. As Chuang-tzu would have said (as Lao-tzu's primary follower, according to Oliver), "Knowledge is far too uncertain to justify its persuasive presentation" (249). For what then do we have language at all? Speech is, according to Chaung-tzu, as interpreted by Oliver, "the prism through which one's identity with nature should be revealed. Anything less than this or anything that seeks to go beyond this aim can only be artificial or contrived" (257).

Now, then, considering these nine points from the western point of view, any rhetorician would probably conclude that Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu asked for too

much. The conventions of western rhetoric, indeed the norms of civilized life in the 1990's, would make living up to these ideas a fruitless impossibility.

I agree. No one would be so senseless to recommend that, having observed the virtues of Lao-tzu's rhetorical ideas, we should now simply adopt them. Doing so would be directly at variance with these rhetorical ideas themselves.

Yet we also begin to observe, both in theory and practice, perceived weaknesses in the received wisdom of the western rhetorical traditions in which we daily operate. Let's therefore go back to each of the nine aspects of eastern rhetoric above to see what they could mean--in more practical terms--for the West. What could we learn? How could these ideas help us to work on some of our own theoretical or pedagogical dilemmas?

(1) To openly admit that there is more to rhetoric than persuasion would free us in several ways: we would no longer have to try to convince our students, hopelessly, that all we can know could be analyzed and presented in critical patterns. The patterns themselves, if taught merely as patterns, have not helped us or them to understand why so much of what we know cannot be satisfactorily presented. What should any writer do when what is perceived does not quite fit one of the patterns?

How can we continue to defend the idea to our students that the world can be logically explained when their own experience and the complex discoveries of our own western science point to the contrary?

(2) In the teaching of literature, the non-predominance of brain, if openly discussed in class, might help us to clarify the real and felt distinctions between art

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and criticism. Why is there so little work in our classrooms and in our academic discourse about the sources and operation of creativity itself?

(3) What if we admit that "glib cleverness" is just as inadequate as stumbling inarticulateness? A public admission of this in the classroom could lead to a critical discussion of rhetoric itself. What would it mean to students to see rhetoric as both adjustment of people to circumstances and of circumstances to people?

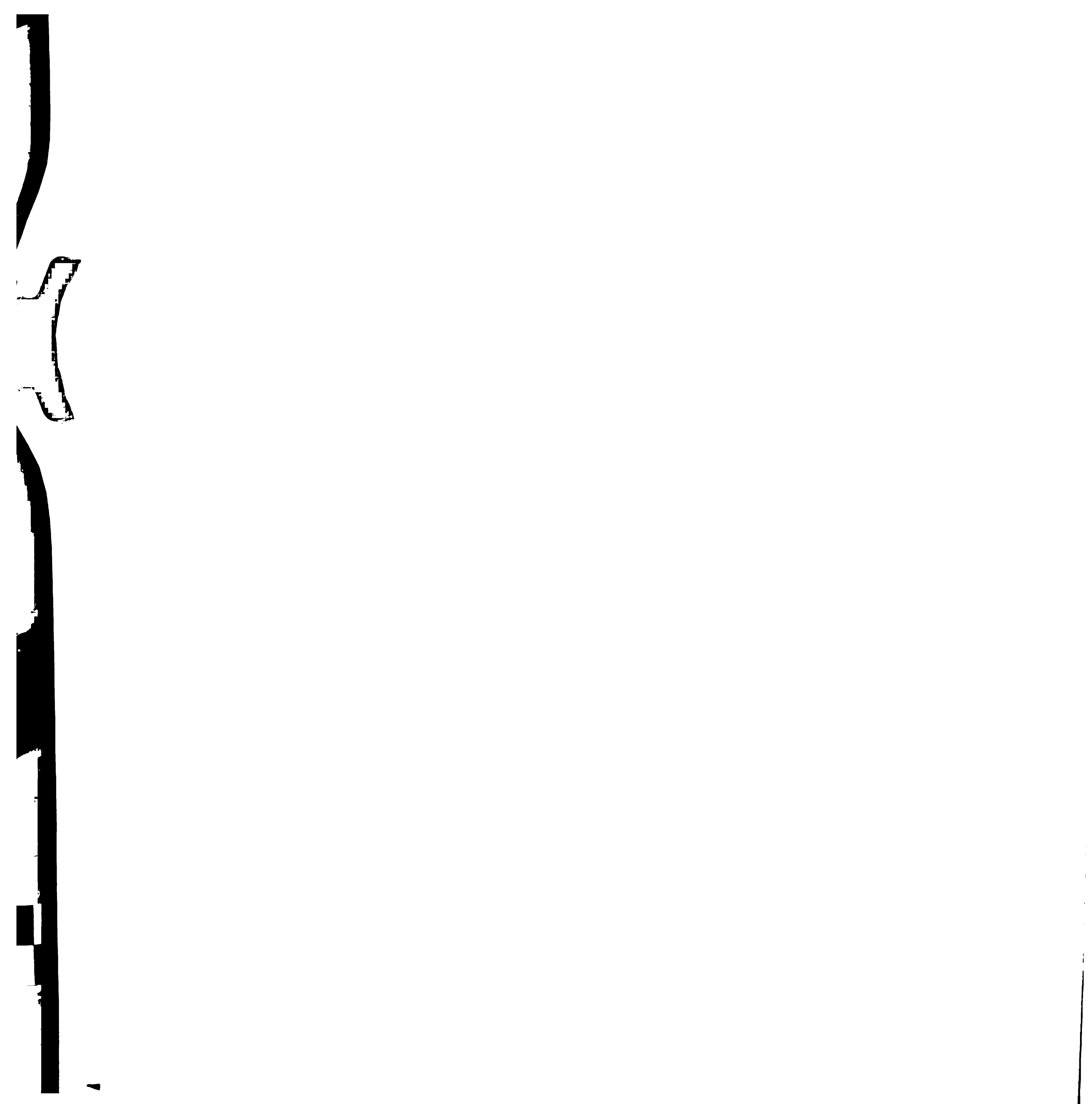
(4) Rather than pretending to understand, define, or worse yet teach about inscrutable natural forces within us, what would happen if we taught writing and literature as though mostly (to use a nicely western, Aristotelian category) invention? What would it mean for teachers and students alike to see language as spontaneous non-action rather than purposive argumentation?

(5) In a group setting, how might an atmosphere of "spontaneous identification" rather than rigorous inquiry promote motivation and discovery?

(6) Openness to what in the West we call "critical thinking" or "interpretations of interpretations," if actually encouraged and practiced as such, might help students to observe, each for himself or herself for the first time, the extent to which we are culturally conditioned. Are schools ready for this?

(7) How much tolerance do we really have in schools for a kind of talk/writing in which the "purpose of communication is communication"? Could we learn to evaluate this talk or writing in some sensible way? How do we read and talk about a piece which has few of the trappings of western rhetorical planning?

(8) How do we learn to run a classroom in which rhetorical skills are not taught as graded exercises but as instincts to be recovered? Is there a place in our



curricula for "spontaneous non-action"?

(9) How do we define for ourselves and for our students a theory of knowledge if such knowledge is "far too uncertain to justify its persuasive presentation"? What is it that we really propose to teach?

We may not have satisfactory and quick answers in too many of these categories. Yet these are necessary questions if we are to be willing to treat the world, our knowledge of that world, and our ways of knowing about that world in language in the state of flux in which they are. Not looking for the answers dooms us along with our students to the feelings of disassociation which are very critical among us--the gulf again between life and school, life and work, school and work, feelings and acceptable rhetorical standards.

I too, you may have guessed, do not have all the answers. Yet there needs to be a place to begin. Here is one simple example, again demonstrating how knowledge of the rhetoric of the east may at least begin to help us to address some of our own problems.

We could begin with a chapter from Suzuki's Zen Buddhism in which he analyzes, in ways respectable to western students of language, the verbal methods in Zen practice. These include paradox, going beyond opposites, contradiction, affirmation, repetition, and exclamation--all, according to Suzuki, "tools" of the Zen master's trade.

(1) Zen practice could teach us about the value of accepting paradox. We are used to paradoxes in western literature and theology, of course; Suzuki cites the

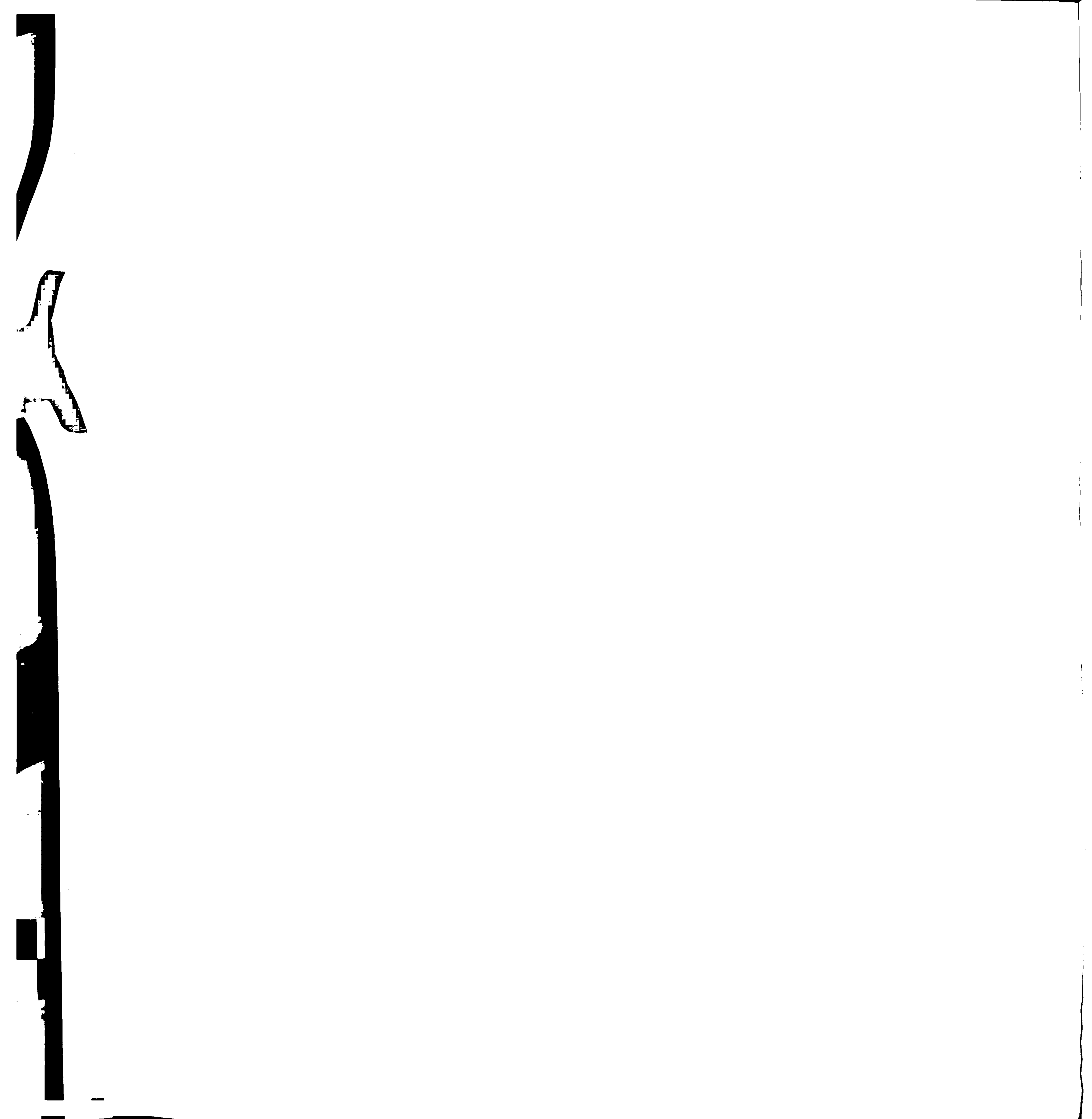
example from Meister Eckhart of the "immovable mover" (115). But in Zen our daily experience is all paradox: "When I pass over the bridge,/ Lo, the water floweth not, but the bridge doth flow" (115). Such a paradox, remember, is not something to figure out; rather, it expresses the truth of our real knowledge and experience. In the west we need this kind of tolerance for paradox, as we have seen, to deal even with the culminating achievements of our western science. Fritjof Capra, for example, writes about the essential paradox of matter itself at the atomic level--it is both particle and wave (136).

(2) Going beyond the opposites in the Zen way would free us from endless disputations about differences, including the gulf between self and others. Are we willing to give up our fascination with distinctions?--like the man in the famous Zen story, hanging over a precipice, holding on by his teeth to a weed, are we willing to open our mouths to speak?

(3) What would it mean, rhetorically, in a felt and expressed awareness of contradictions, to answer yes one day and no the next? Is a right answer right forever? Does it matter?

(4) Affirmations might be just as regular. Zen or Zen-flavored rhetoric is not always apparently negative. Sometimes things are true simply because we have said them and others intuitively agree.

(5) Repetition is itself a respectable rhetorical device. If I say something frequently enough, does it become true? Suzuki quotes Meister Eckhart again: "It is as if one stood before a high mountain and cried, 'Art thou there?' The echo comes back, 'Art thou there?'" (124-25). Or Suzuki writes, "When the mind is so



tuned as to be all ready to break into a certain note, the master turns the key and it sings out its own melody, not learned from anybody else but discovered within itself" (125).

(6) Exclamations serve as well to answer questions as "intelligible answers" (Suzuki 127). Language itself, in Zen practice, is in a way all exclamation--when it comes directly "out of [one's] inner experience" (125).

For now we could conclude with two passages for further thought. First, according to Izutsu in defining the "Perfect Man" in Chuang-tzu's terms, the mind of a Perfect Man is like a "polished mirror"--it reflects every object faithfully but does not "get perturbed" when objects go away (437).

The second is a story celebrated by Suzuki in concluding his own discussion of "verbal method":

> A monk...asked, "Please play me a tune on a stringless harp." The master was quiet for some little while and said, "Did you hear it?" "No, I do not hear it." "Why," said the master, "did you not ask louder?" (128)

## Further Tentative Conclusions

In a nicely eastern way, for now, we could end where we began:

> My eyes eavesdrop on their lashes!
> I'm finished with the ordinary!
> What use has halter, bridle
> To one who's shaken off contrivance?
> (Satori poem by Eichu, 1340-1416,
> in Stryk and Ikemoto 10)

To be finished with the ordinary, however, a person had better be ready to deal

with the consequences. To have shaken off contrivance (conventionality, conditioning), a person had better be ready to face the self.

If we, as western rhetoricians, are ready to throw away the halter and the bridle, we need to be open to the results. Keeping the halter and the bridle just in case won't do.

Referring to William Barrett once again, in his introduction to Suzuki's book, I notice that he too does not recommend importation of Zen to the west: it would come along with too many "cultural institutions" which for us in themselves would be contrivances. But, he says, there are "things which we could learn or unlearn from it [Zen] and apply in our own way." It may offer possibilities of communication which have been, for us, so far unexplored (10).

For us too the language of Zen, its rhetorical practices and its only-seemingly anti-rhetorical stance, may startle us out of our "existing errors" (Oliver 131). This can happen if we are willing to contemplate its apparently bizarre or self-contradictory messages.

We will be in the position of learners, as Herrigal was when he went from Germany to Japan to study archery. He learned about Zen by studying archery. We might learn about Zen by studying and teaching rhetoric. Herrigal is clear about the teaching and learning practice itself: the student must be ready for the lifebelt before being saved (41-42). The accomplishment will take the archer, or the metaphorical archer, "by surprise" (48). And key factors in the accomplishment will be the centrality of the teacher, the openness to ceremonial behaviors (as also in the classroom), and the value of routine--lots and lots of practice! (66).

Using eastern traditions as metaphors for our own intuitive longings makes sense when we want to understand why wholly western perspectives have not quite satisfied us. This is especially true since complete pursuit of our own rational methods reveals so many of our limitations--along with the essentially non-western aspects of the troubling discoveries our own rationality reveals to us.

Even Fritjof Capra, a physicist, in pursuing research on eastern metaphysics has come to look at Taoism as an analogue for his own scientific discoveries. The parallels are amazing: the rational and detached observer of scientific experiments becomes a participator, influencing just by virtue of his or her own presence the very nature of the results (127). Scientific questioning is forced to explore the unity of all things (116-129). The universe is discovered to be dynamic, forever in the process of changing (175-192). In an interplay of emptiness and form, "material objects are not distinct entities" (195). Quark symmetries become a kind of western koan (235-245). And ours is a universe in which even the detached observer--the one attempting to be detached--discovers an inner experience of the interpenetration of all things (275-292).

Capra's conclusion? The East need not take over the West, nor the West the East: "Science does not need mysticism and mysticism does not need science, but men and women need both. Mystical experience is necessary to understand the deepest nature of things, and science is necessary for modern life. What we need, therefore, is not a synthesis but a dynamic interplay between mystical intuition and scientific analysis" (297). Likewise in our own field of English education, we do not need a synthesis of western research and eastern in-search. We need instead a

dynamic interplay of western and eastern insights on language and literacy. Men and women need both.

Men and women need more than clever analysis, more than beautiful words. Men and women need the truth which unifies the ten thousand things--and a rhetoric that will support their discoveries. In all this as usual Lao-tzu is a solid inspiration, this time in the final chapter (#81) of the Tao Te Ching--a chapter in which "beautiful" could perhaps better be translated as "beautified" (Cleary 160); knowers are not contenders, sages do not hoard or become prideful, men and women everywhere seek the harmony with the world which is already theirs. In such a place words are not to deceive or to decorate, not just for the sake of experience, never weapons but always having violent energy:

> True words are not beautiful,
> beautiful words are not true.
> The good are not argumentative,
> the argumentative are not good.
> Knowers do not generalize,
> generalists do not know.
> Sages do not accumulate anything
> but give everything to others,
> having more the more they give.
> The Way of heaven
> helps and does not harm.
> The Way for humans
> is to act without contention. (60)

**Emerson, Rhetoric,**
**and the Centripetence of East and West**

## Introduction

> There are no fixtures in nature. The universe is fluid and volatile. Permanence is but a word in degrees. Our globe seen by God, is a transparent law, not a mass of facts. The law dissolves the facts and holds it fluid. Our culture is the predominance of an idea which draws after it this train of cities and institutions. (From the third paragraph of Emerson's "Circles")

For Ralph Waldo Emerson, human imagination is forever a work in progress. If there is to be a metaphor for the creative potential, it is all around us. It is the evolutionary principle by which, as for the Sufis and Zennists, God (or the God within us) perpetually creates itself through our personal agency. It is everywhere around us, and we are clothed in it. Its energy and power beat within our breasts.

If we are to accept a role for language itself in the unfolding evolutionary creative process around and within us, Emerson is tentative in his conclusions about that role. This is necessarily so--because if we are to regard rhetoric as a science or as a branch of logic and philosophy in the western sense, that rhetoric will in itself dam the flow. Rules, models, conventions, conformist expectations--all create for Emerson the same dangers feared by the Sufi masters or by the practicing Zen roshis: they divide our world into false categories and skeletal patterns; they blind us to our own lived experience--not of classifications or of persuasive certainties, but of inspired probabilities. **Awareness** requires its own discourse.

Emerson's own personal quest for just such a discourse did not unfold logically or smoothly. Almost certainly he doubted the way. Yet it is just as certain that Emerson was guided by his increasing knowledge of and respect for inspired scriptures of the East. While much scholarship on American Transcendentalism generally or on Ralph Waldo Emerson specifically either ignores or devalues the role of eastern religions in Emerson's development as philosopher or rhetor (see Versluis 12-13), I agree with Arthur Versluis in his 1993 American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions: "At the center of the entire American Transcendentalist movement was the encounter with world religions" (13).

Likewise, in Lawrence Buell's comprehensive bibliographic essay "The Transcendentalist Movement" in The Transcendentalists: A Review of Research and Criticism (edited by Joel Myerson, 1984), Buell assesses a central split among the community of critics over the last one hundred years or more--between those on the one hand who see oriental influences as having little central importance to the development of Transcendentalism and those on the other hand who argue that Transcendentalism could not even have happened without orientalism (35).

In agreeing more with the latter view, I recognize myself among a distinct minority. Lawrence Buell concludes, after an exhaustive study of research on Emerson up to 1984, that "Transcendentalist interest in the orient has not been studied exhaustively" (35).

Even a quick look at the entire Joel Myerson volume (The Transcendentalists: A Review of the Research and Criticism) certainly supports Buell's conclusion. In the entire thirty-page essay "Ralph Waldo Emerson" by Robert E. Burkholder and

Joel Myerson--a comprehensive bibliographic study of recurrent issues in criticism--fewer than ten items are listed regarding oriental sources (see page 148); among those critical works that evaluate Emerson's writing abilities or rhetorical habits, few emphasize the importance of anything other than western traditions (see pages 160-161).

In fact, Lawrence Buell lists only three major works involving "oriental influences and analogues" and the entire body of Transcendentalist writings. The "pioneering work" by Arthur Christy (The Orient in American Transcendentalism) and Frederic I. Carpenter's Emerson and Asia both appeared in the 1930's. Carl T. Jackson's 1987 The Oriental Religions and American Thought, containing only one section on Emerson, at least asserts the key thought: "Unquestionably the first Americans to approach Asian thought sympathetically and to assimilate Oriental ideas into their world view" were the Transcendentalists (in Myerson 34). Quoting Lawrence Buell again in the Myerson volume, the Jackson survey "is likely to stand for some time as the standard reference work despite its relative brevity...by virtue of its essential soundness and the dearth of scholarly interest in the subject" (35).

This "dearth of scholarly interest" has been perpetuated, I think, by two likely causes--causes which Emerson himself had to overcome in order to grow more eastern in rhetorical practice himself: (a) simple ignorance, in the same way that Emerson (like Thoreau) had to be exposed to the eastern texts themselves more sympathetically before overcoming the prejudices of his intellectual culture; as Arthur Versluis insists, by 1836, after more reading, Emerson began to "put aside

the popular prejudices against 'Indian superstition' that he had read since college" (54). (b) Intellectual chauvinism, in that critics--almost inevitably intellectuals trained in the logic and rhetoric of western categories--naturally feel more at home discussing aspects of Emerson's life and work that are more comfortable to them and demonstrable by them in normal methods: western influences, say, or the relative discursive cohesion of a single work. It is eminently possible for trained western critics to ignore the "new voice" that developed in Emerson after the 1830's, after his further reflection on eastern texts--especially since this is the very voice addressed to the intellectual class, urging them on beyond their books (Versluis 57).

It is fortunate indeed that Arthur Versluis (1993) has so ably helped to rectify what Buell called earlier the "dearth of scholarly interest." But before I show more clearly why I celebrate what Versluis has done, there are two more matters to be dealt with: how to define Transcendentalism and how to defend comparative methods which may seem to traditional textual scholars less than scientific and therefore incomplete.

Lawrence Buell has reminded us that those we call the "Transcendentalists" share with each other more differences than similarities; they themselves boasted that no two were alike (in Myerson 2). To find an encompassing similarity necessitates generality and abstraction: one could say the Transcendentalists shared a "faith in the boundless possibilities of human nature" (Buell in Myerson 2); but we say the very same thing about the English Romantics. To avoid the confusion of all the best critics over the years about how to define

Transcendentalism, then, I will do what Arthur Versluis did in his 1993 volume; I will adopt Lawrence Buell's definition in his Literary Transcendentalism, but as expressed by Versluis:

> Transcendentalism is fundamentally an intuitionism, a belief that Truth can be intuitively perceived by higher Reason that this intuition precedes and invigorates all religious awareness, and that it can penetrate the various forms of world religions, extracting from them their essence. (Versluis 12)

Note in this focus on Transcendentalism as intuitionism a key timelessness. It is true that intuition precedes Reason, but there is no sense in analyzing stages of development, causes and effects, or influences; it unifies various forms, it reveals and illuminates, it assimilates. It relates to the Sufi's truth without form and to the Zennist-Emersonian "transparent eyeball." It vivifies Carl T. Jackson's 1987 assertion that the transcendentalists sympathetically assimilated "oriental ideas into their world view" (in Myerson 34). To be influenced by something and to assimilate something are opposite energies.

Well, isn't it almost always the case that the way a person defines terms determines the investigative method? Even Versluis somewhat apologizes about his method in ways in which I hope not to have to; in a footnote, he writes:

> Throughout I follow a practice of close reading bolstered by intellectual history, and I note correspondences between transcendentalist texts and their Asian referents. Occasionally--in the section on Emerson and Thoreau--I note parallels between the works of Transcendentalists and the Asian traditions, of which they probably had little knowledge. But in doing this I am careful to note that these are only parallels and am following a practice common in contemporary scholarship on this topic. (Note 36, p. 15)

I agree that it will be much more important and enriching to look for parallels

than for influences. But, instead of saying "in doing this I am careful to note that these are only parallels," I would say, "in doing this I am careful to note that these are especially parallels. Why? In characterizing the meaning for Ralph Waldo Emerson of the expressions of the East with which he came into contact, I seek not so much to explain as to imitate his own assimilation.

For awhile, at least, revelation needs to gain precedence over what we traditionally call scholarship--and for the same reasons it did for Emerson himself. As Arthur Versluis asserts, Emerson was not often especially concerned about scholarship as such--whether a work he was reading was Islamic or not or which of two literary works preceded the other; he just wished to determine whether a passage he was studying or thinking of incorporating into his own writing might excite appropriate insights (Versluis 7). For Emerson, it was not a question of finding antiquity in eastern scriptures (Versluis 63); rather, he meant to make them here and now. Once again it is all assimilation: for Emerson, "The significance of Asian religions--of all human history--consists of assimilation into the present, into the individual here and now" (Versluis 63).

In fact, it is just such insights that make Versluis the best guide to anyone who would look into the subject of Emerson and the East. For, even while doing evident and well-informed scholarship, Versluis also begins with a grasp of the Emersonian going beyond "contingent distinctions"; others may argue, in looking at an Emersonian passage, whether the allusions are more Neoplatonic or Vedantic, but I'm sure Emerson himself would remind us as Versluis does: "But finally, Emerson was using the Neoplatonic tradition to transcend it--the gods in question

are, ultimately, neither Neoplatonic nor Indian but just the gods, beyond such contingent distinctions" (64).

Yet going beyond/beneath "contingent distinctions" did not come to Ralph Waldo Emerson, as to a Zen or Sufi aspirant, in a single flash of insight. Most of his work involved a thoroughly agonizing massaging of opposites. In Versluis' words, "Emerson sought to resolve the tensions between tradition and inspiration, between ritual and rapture" (51), and, I would add, between language and expressionless resolution/revelation. To find a way to do so, Emerson must have intuitively guessed, would take a lifetime of dedication, it would involve if successful the "renascence" of religion (Versluis 51) within his whole society, and it would be achieved with tools not solely intellectual. This was and remains true even as we struggle with overtly intellectual expression or symbols, drawn from our look at intellectual history (as, in fact, I attempt to do here).

For Emerson, unity was the highest aspiration--to join in one person and one perception a **reality between** which joins the " 'men of talent,' in whom the 'perception of difference is predominant,' with those who 'abide by the perception of Identity,' who are the 'Orientals, the philosophers, the men of faith and divinity, the men of genius'" ("Plato" in Versluis 51). In this journey Emerson would draw more and more freely from Asian religions in order to more and more perfectly experience the one goal, the "self transcendence" (Versluis 51).

Yet there is one more key action and power which is essential to this picture in all the details that follow throughout this essay. Not only is there the urgency of assimilation, the realization of what Versluis and others call the Transcendentalist

"literary religion" (51); even more vital is the simultaneous transmutation, the power of putting into action that literary religion.

This last is the hardest and the most troublesome part of all, the power in which Emerson so often felt he had failed--**the power of action in speech**.

For Emerson--and for me in writing this essay--two key questions must with great force come together: in assimilating and in transmuting and in the accompanying rhetorical acts, the issue is not only the intellectual one of how to achieve unity/revelation/awareness, but also beyond that these two key questions:

(1) in this very process, what becomes of the SELF?

(2) how is it that we talk about it?

To begin, we could find what Emerson wrote in his Journal (May 1837) in a passage which, according to Versluis, joins "Vedantic ideas with Germanic mysticism" (55):

> Who shall define to me an individual? I behold with awe and delight many illustrations of the One Universal Mind. I see my being embedded in it. I am only a form of him. He is the Soul of Me. I can even with a mountainous aspiring say, I am God. (JMN V: 336)

I remind you again, as I have in the beginning: **awareness requires its own discourse.**

## Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Rhetoric of the Place Between

All this is precisely why Emerson must assert (in "Circles") that "there are no fixtures in nature." Not a single aspect is finished. All is the not yet. Just as for the Sufis or Zennists--or for Christian mystics looking at the world from God's

perspective, or the Jesus within us--Emerson discredits any mere "mass of facts."

And again, just as for Sufis or Zennists, the core achievement of the individual, in spiritual discipline, is to overcome cultural conditioning, Emerson decries the crippling power of fixed ideas; he regrets the power over us of mere facts: "An expense of ends to meet is fate;--organization tyrannizing over character. The menagerie, or forms and powers of the spine, is a book of fate; the bill of the bird, the skull of the snake, determines tyrannically its limits. So is the scale of races, of temperaments" ("Fate" in Miller, ed. 982). All facts whose force imprisons or limits us, including those which have to do with speech, naturally block or blur the creative energy. For creation means change. And it is thus that a whole society, if locked into its own picture of itself and only its own narrow range of ways to express itself, can be imprisoned by a single idea. As above, "Our culture is the predominance of an idea which draws after it this train of cities and institutions." Or elsewhere, in "The American Scholar," Emerson asserts, "I had better never see a book than to be warped by its attention clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system" (in Miller, ed. 901).

"This train of cities and institutions"--these are the inevitable outcomes of our willingness to accept a "mass of facts" as certainties. We may have become trapped within the limits of our own discourse.

Intuitively understanding all the above but not necessarily knowing how to teach thoroughly his listeners or readers what always to do about limitations, Ralph Waldo Emerson did what his Sufi and Zen predecessors had done. He taught a rhetoric of probabilities, a rhetoric of insight and of alternative

acceptable conclusions. He used and taught language as no more than a means to an end.

I do not mean that Emerson learned from his Sufi and Zen predecessors--not in the sense that you would think I meant if I said so. I will seek to show the vitality of these traditions as assimilated by Emerson--and there is plenty of evidence--but to suggest that Emerson adopted Sufi or Zen ideas or practices would be to contradict the whole point. Attentive readers may even have to conclude that Emerson only partially understood his predecessors; but that would not be a really significant point either. What will matter is to establish the validity of a whole aspect of rhetoric short-changed by modern academic western traditions, especially evolving into the modernism after the New Critics. This potential for creative process within the study of rhetoric itself is shared by Zen, by Sufism, and by Ralph Waldo Emerson.

I keep referring to this potential (and avoiding to call it a tradition) as the place between--the "third eye" referred to in Zen, a place in which there is discovered to be no split in our being after all; the "creative imagination" as explored by Corbin in the works of Ibn 'Arabi; "poetry," "veracity," "truth," or "action" in the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson:

> ....Drudgery, calamity, exasperation, want are instructors in eloquence and wisdom. The true scholar grudges every opportunity of action passed by, as a loss of power. It is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products. A strange process too, this, by which experience is converted into thought, as a mulberry leaf is converted into satin. ("The American Scholar" in Miller, ed. 903)

It is critical to repeat that this place of experience and expression which I call

the "place between" must be allowed a rhetorical possibility of its own. However inadequate language might be, to the satisfaction of some, to define it and locate it, without any rhetoric at all for this place few will think of it as real at all.

Before going on, then, let's stop long enough just to review the place between from the perspective of traditional academic rhetoric. Personal expression at the one pole it is not. Only to express sensation or feeling creates the veils for the Sufis, the delusions for the Zennists, the prison of personality for Emerson; in "The American Scholar" Emerson says, "The world is his who can see through its pretension" (in Miller, ed. 905). Mentation at the other pole it is also not. Logic, reasoning, and persuasion create only false categories: Sufism, Zen, and Emerson all agree about that--hence for all three the suspicion of the end value of words and books (even as all three again and again create texts).

The intermediate realm, the rhetoric of probabilities, the place of sustained and continuous flowing creativity, has to do wholly with neither logic nor perception but with the transmutation of everything visible into symbols or aphorisms. It is Sufism; it is the Tao; it is for Emerson the oversoul.

Two key Emerson passages further vivify, from his perspective, the place between. First from "Poetry and Imagination":

> Mountains and oceans we think we understand;--
> yes, so long as they are contented to be such,
> and are safe with the geologist,--but when they
> are melted in the Promethean alembics and come
> out men, and then, melted again, come out words,
> without any abatement, but with an exaltation of
> power! (Complete Writings 731)

Awareness, if you prefer to call it that, or primary creative power, requires not a

rhetoric of facts or categories or conventions of intellectual discourse, nor at the other extreme mere depth of feeling: if awareness is to have any real rhetoric at all, it will have to be one contemporaneous with the gods. In this sort of speech there is no trope to fall back on unless you are yourself one: "For the value of the trope is that the hearer is one: and indeed Nature itself is a vast trope, and all particular natures are tropes" ("Poetry and Imagination" 731).

Note that a consequence of just such a "definition" of tropes is to nullify the primacy of logic and persuasion. For the rhetoric we are discussing here is not ultimately one for audiences at all; the purpose is not to affect listeners or hearers but to validate the power of speakers or writers themselves.

A second defining Emersonian passage therefore comes from "The Oversoul":

> Persons are supplementary to the primary teaching of the soul....Persons themselves acquaint us with the impersonal. In all conversation between two persons, tacit reference is made to a third party, to a common nature. That third party or common nature is not social; it is impersonal; it is God. And so in groups where debate is earnest, and especially on high questions, the company become aware that the thought rises to an equal level in all bosoms, that all have a spiritual property in what was said, as well as the sayer. They all become wiser than they were. It arches over them like a temple, this unity of thought, in which every heart beats with nobler sense of power and duty, and thinks and acts with unusual solemnity....The learned and studious of thought have no monopoly on wisdom. Their violence of direction in some degree disqualifies them to think truly. (In Miller, ed. 938-39)

Wholly planned and organized discourse--along with more discourse on planning and organizing--"disqualifies [us] to think truly." Wholly unplanned and personal discourse--mere self expression--cannot permit us to evolve beyond what we already know, which is why Emerson asserts that "Persons are supplementary to

the primary teaching of the soul." It is once again a matter of the "third party," a separate place between. But in this passage, "It [a greater place to which thought arises <u>among</u> persons] arches over them like a temple." And it is, at least at first, a temple made of words.

All of this helps to explain the apparent contradiction (contradiction from our logical western point of view) between the deep suspicion of Zen, Sufism, and Emerson for the value of language and books on the one hand and the necessary engagement of all in rhetorical acts on the other. "It arches over them": among the Sufis, recitation and prayer may be a <u>group</u> activity; we know that Sufis read and write many books and that they are elevated in their wisdom through controlled linguistic interaction with periodically changing masters. Among those who practice Zen, meditation happens on <u>common ground</u> in a shared silence, initiates present themselves daily to their masters for brief discussions, Masters gauge initiates' progress partly on the basis of verbal responses, and, once having attained "enlightenment," even then <u>shared</u> reading and writing may be continuous.

Likewise, for Ralph Waldo Emerson, books must be tools and discussion must be transitory and evolutionary, but he too wrote prolifically. He must have sincerely believed in the "third party," a metaphor for the place in language in continuous creative remaking <u>among others</u>, a place "in which every heart beats with nobler sense of power and duty." He wrote in "The American Scholar" that books could make a man into a "mere thinker" (in Miller, ed, 899). Even more importantly, just a few pages later, we read:

> Undoubtedly there is a right way of reading,--so it be sternly

> subordinated. Man Thinking must not be subdued by his instruments. Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings. But when the intervals of darkness come, as come they must,--when the soul seeth not, when the sun is his, and the stars withdraw their shining,--we repair to the lamps which were kindled by their ray to guide our steps to the East again, where the dawn is. We hear that we may speak. The Arabian proverb says, "A fig tree looking on a fig tree, becometh fruitful." (901)

Of ultimate value are the moments of seeing God directly, of participating in the Creation at this moment, of Zen awareness, spontaneous. But between times right reading and writing can serve--if made contemporary, personal, actual, and immediate--to guide us back to the Dawn again: "There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind's own sense of good and fair" ("The American Scholar" in Miller, ed. 901). Other people's books and bibles might adjust us to the making of our own original ones only very simply and serenely, only by virtue of the naked sky "which arches over them like a temple," above the simple actions of the fig trees in the Arabic proverb: "A fig tree looking on a fig tree, becometh fruitful."

Emerson also wrote in "Poetry and Imagination"--and in other places, necessarily--of the role of the rhetoric of probability in transmuting mere common sense into the evolutionary and creative imagination. Common sense, he asserted, looks at Nature and sees "real and final facts"; but the Imagination sees through these facts and uses "them as tropes or words for thought which they signify." For Emerson, the potential power of poetry meets people in their "pains, anxieties,

and superstitions" and, with words, "lifts the veil on universal laws" (in Complete Writings 732, 738).

What becomes apparent, in all the above, are the following more than mere facts:

(a) The writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson establish links, for western readers, with the insights of the rhetoric of the East. This remains true whether Emerson knew or intended to explore these links or not.

(b) The constellation of Emerson's notions about rhetoric stands at variance with some assumptions about rhetoric in modernist western traditions.

(c) Re-establishing our connection to this same constellation of notions for us, in the West, would help us to deal with perceived deficits in our own intellectual traditions.

(d) Clarifying the value of Emerson's constellation of notions about rhetoric for us and for our students would best serve us to understand Emerson himself as well as those who have been influenced by him.

(e) Keeping alive the Emersonian road of inquiry about rhetoric would help modern researchers and teachers to accommodate our tradition with the wisdom of the east while also rejuvenating our own inquiry and practice.

To illustrate these points, the following steps will have to be taken: The Emersonian road of inquiry about rhetoric will have to be more clearly defined as distinct from established modernist traditions; in this the work of Richard Poirier can be our guide. This same road will have to be investigated for connections to

Sufi and Zen practices. Emerson's rhetorical practice itself will have to be described. And finally the teaching of Emerson in particular and rhetoric in general will have to be redefined in the light of all we have learned. The overarching metaphor remains the place between.

Emerson, Rhetoric, and the Modernist Antithesis

Studying Emerson's work from our post-modernist perspective as a path to understanding the "place between" (the rhetoric of the creative and spiritual imagination) produces two key side effects. (1) Doing so helps us to know how we can teach Emerson within the canon without making him seem like a transcendental aberration to the "real" tradition of American writing. (2) Doing so helps us to define the constellation of notions about rhetoric which places him near the mainstream of an independent cross-cultural and trans-historical tradition; in this tradition, of course, are Sufi and Zen rhetorics among others from the east, as well as an atrophied-but-still-living branch of knowledge about rhetoric in the west: a knowledge of the "place between," an intuition about what the west in us needs to re-learn about the east in us all.

No work by a western critic more clarifies the atrophied-but-still-living branch of knowledge about rhetoric than Richard Poirier's The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections (1987). Poirier rightly sees Emerson as pivotal in our rediscovery of a kind of rhetoric which at least admits a place for the "third eye," or for Emerson's "third party."

From our modernist perspective, influenced by the New Critical attention to

the text itself, there are clear reasons, according to Poirier, why the trans-historical aspects of Emerson's rhetoric have been ignored or denied. Like Sufi or Zen ideas and practices, the Emersonian tradition is "antagonistic to any kind of institutionalized discourse about literature or about ideas generally; it is antagonistic to 'thinking' as a profession...." Yet it is in academic institutions that Emerson might get talked about, and talked about by people to whom Emerson might seem anti-intellectual. He might seem anti-intellectual since the "Emersonian idealization of action implicitly disparages the power of words" (50). To focus on the limits of language in organized discourse is to talk those of us in schools, it is thought, out of a profession.

And again all this brings us to the familiar irony--which now we must grasp from the Emersonian perspective: how is it that Emerson (and James after him) will talk to an audience even while attacking the value of talking? (50) If we are to understand from Emerson that his emphasis on action (or being) presupposes "that there are no verbal solutions" (48), is there any serious purpose for rhetoric at all?

Emerson's own answers to these questions, as Poirier interprets them, would be greatly at variance with key assumptions about text held as holy by the New Critics or by T.S. Eliot, whom Poirier deems as the single-handed creator of the rhetorical tradition we have inherited from the recent past (96-113). This is because for Emerson, as for the Sufis or Zennists, it is not the text itself which matters at all. In Poirier's words, "The product of art is not the work you read or look at" (84). The product is much more in the mediation between the maker of

words and the words themselves, the maker of the words and his or her own active resistance to them. This is a far cry from T.S. Eliot, for whom, according to Poirier, writing was "more or less indistinguishable from a critical reading that was all but crippling" (109).

Emerson worked in the other direction, toward a rhetorical stance in which, far from being crippling, writing could temporarily free him to a power over words.

Let's see further how Poirier helps to explain this. It is, firstly, not at all the case that Emerson felt no antagonism to literature or to the painful necessity of language. As for all of us, it must have irritated Emerson greatly that he could not prevent words from squirming out of his very grasp. The text itself is always on the move. As Poirier puts it, "Language represents both an entitlement to say certain things and the evidence that we are never done trying to say other things" (138). The text simultaneously moves with and against us; it cannot say what we mean; what we mean is forever becoming unsettled.

Poirier quotes Emerson in "Prudence": "We write from aspiration and antagonism, as well as experience." He takes Emerson to mean that

> while we aspire to say something new, the materials at hand indicate that whatever we say can be understood only if it is relatively familiar. We therefore become antagonistic to conventions even though we are in need of them. Indeed, the social and literary forms that ask for our compliance were themselves produced in resistance to conventions of an earlier time. (138)

Not to use language at all would in a sense mean submitting to the power of language over us. To develop a rhetoric of insight and creative resistance, on the

other hand, while never an act of victory, would at least keep us vibrantly alive--alive in a rhetorical stance within the place between (a) mere submission to conventional categories (on the one hand) and (b) mere personal expression, the unfamiliar to others (on the other hand).

Poirier may be right, in his concluding section of The Renewal of Literature, that Emerson's dream of genius was to "know a world without knowing it as text"--an ambition "utterly at odds with a poet's calling" (210). But in lived experience, for Emerson and for us, we must say yes to life, a life in which language is simultaneously the expression of and the obscuring of truth.

We must figure out what our actions will be in this context.

You can see from this the sense in which for Emerson rhetoric was a rhetoric of between. We are caught in the middle of everything by our own language--if we see that language, trans-culturally and trans-historically, as far more than text. Our rhetorical stance within the universe is itself, I think, a sort of beautiful necessity. As Poirier indicates, Emerson "implies that language is both the gift of consciousness and its exacting price, and because of it we live not in a natural but in a conventional, and therefore artificial, relation to the world and to ourselves" (96). A certain aspect of language both gets in our way and frees us from the past into the creative future at the same time. Our resistance to convention is a heroic resistance out of which can be created--temporarily--our very own selves.

All of this also helps to explain in another way why Sufis, Zennists, and Emerson disciples alike distrust language, especially published language. The text itself does not matter. It is the process, of which the text is only the by-product,

that matters.

All of this additionally helps to explain why Poirier sees modernism, post Eliot, as such a direct and successful challenge to the Emersonian "tradition," not dead but latent. Poirier emphasizes, for modernists, the virtue of difficulty. And reading, to be good and productive, must be difficult too. This very difficulty, according to Poirier, has two results: it encourages a whole body of interpretive discourse (which may be neither useful nor creative in itself); it "perpetuates the power of literature as a privileged and exclusive form of discourse" (which turns writing into a class issue, criticism into a "snob's game") (98). Yet these facts may go on unnoticed within the very institutions which perpetuate the primacy of modernism.

Such a modernism is text-choked; if looked at from the Emersonian perspective, it is confusing the means with the ends; books themselves take the place of nature. If looked at from the Zen perspective, it is the worst kind of delusion, the focus on the public at the expense of the private, artificial categories in place of the non-dual; the virtue of difficulty is precisely the opposite of Zen spontaneity and simplicity. If looked at from the Sufi perspective, it is once again the emphasis on the juridical aspect of the Word rather than the creative imagination.

Poirier summarizes his definition of modernism by saying that "modernist writers lend themselves to and encourage a programmed and widespread misreading of a kind that calls attention mostly to structured complications and designs of allusiveness" (104). Such misreading calls us, through the force of its rhetorical assumptions, powerfully away from spontaneity, insight, creativity; it kills

effectively the place between.

If modernism is, in Poirier's terms, a giant misreading of texts and rhetorical acts, that same modernism is in direct contrast to the insights of eastern rhetoric surveyed earlier. It is a modernism which expressly denies access to either Sufism or Taoism or to any of their derivatives. And that very same modernism is at the root of the perceived dualism in schools with which I introduced this series of essays.

The deep divisions between modernist and Emersonian perceptions of rhetorical acts explains, according to Poirier, why "Emersonians like to be at odds with those whom William James calls 'intellectualists,' people who prefer to think of truth as something already waiting to be discovered, something with a capital letter, not followed, as in Frost, by a question mark" (175). "Intellectualists" may think of a text, appropriately difficult and patterned with allusions, as containing the signs of its own elucidation--almost as though analysis and persuasion are the real and final categories of human experience. Emersonians counter, Poirier would say, that "language is a way of making things clear but also of insisting that things are not and should not be so clear as to seriously restrain us" (29). This is because the job of a fluctual rhetoric of personal insight--one that permits literature to "change shape every twenty years or so" (Poirier 4)--is to make possible our <u>temporary</u> triumph over convention, our triumph over language itself.

Or at least we can pretend--we can delude ourselves and others into believing--that originality in language is possible. It is very Zen of Emerson to first recognize, as Poirier insists he does, the "conventions, usage, grammar, structure,

rhetoric" of the received past, and then still insist on the true job of originality: "to make the above seem artificial" (36) even if we are dependent upon them.

As in Sufism and Zen, the job of a rhetorician exploring personal awareness is neither to copy the past nor to break with it utterly (since that would not be possible anyway); the job, rather, is to create a temporary victory over what Emerson named, please recall, "mere facts." The job of the Zen or Sufi in Emersonian rhetoric is not to be useful at all.

The utilitarianism of western academic discourse assumes that literature is good for people. Indeed Poirier begins his "Prologue" by reminding readers about the "long history of demanding [or assigning] reading for cultural renovation" (4). We hear that the West is in trouble in the "centers of the culture" (as in the teaching of its literature or in the training in its rhetorics); but Poirier believes that this is "merely one more journalistic-political maneuver designed to obscure the failure in our political-economic-social arrangements" (8). We cannot solve these problems by teaching texts.

But we can teach a more Emersonian rhetoric in which resistance (something more like Friere's "critical literacy") can teach us to see texts, if shrines of past rhetorical solutions, as no more than they are. Shrines live only if we make them so. We go to them before they come to us.

It is no wonder that the key danger that would concern Emersonian rhetoricians would be to be entrapped by their own language. Fully in the Eastern tradition, Poirier insists that "Emersonians want to prevent words from coming to rest and want to dissuade us from hoping that they ever might" (16). Words are

not reality.

At this point Poirier quotes from "Circles": "Nothing is secure but life, transition, and energizing spirit" (16). I would add, also from "Circles," several aphoristic summaries: "New arts destroy the old" (Miller, ed. 946); "Good as is discourse, silence is better" (948); "The field cannot be well seen from within the field. The astronomer must have his diameter of the earth's orbit as a base to find the parallax of any star" (949). And "I unsettle all things" (951).

Much like a Zen or Sufi Master, Emerson is all energy, all impatience. He defines genius as "impatience with the codifications of life" (Poirier 65). No wonder he felt "on edge" (Poirier 9) about his own rhetorical stance.

No wonder as well that Emerson would have preferred to discuss rhetorical acts rather than the expectations of rhetorical practices. No wonder one of Emerson's favorite words was power.

Poirier best explains the Emersonian tendency toward "active" rather than "reflective" responses by quoting from Emerson's inheritor, William James in James' Pragmatism, Lecture II:

> A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once and for all upon a lot of inveterate habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstractions and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad a priori reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns toward concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards actions and towards power. (17)

James learned the elements of this manifesto from Emerson, but elements of this manifesto in its rhetorical applications pre-date Emerson by centuries. It is as

though the Emersonian "tradition" which Prorier defines as distinct from modernism, is a stream of insight into rhetorical acts that returns us to earliest civilizations. A merely scholarly analysis might obscure such facts, but Emerson too was aware of the trans-historical aspects of key human insights; Poirier reminds us of an 1847 passage in Emerson's Journal: "A good scholar will find Aristophanes and Hafiz and Rabelais full of American history" (44). Similarly, according to Poirier, the New World "offers an opportunity less to discover the old than to rediscover its true origins otherwise obscured within the encrustations of acquired culture" (45).

Yet taking such a global and trans-historical approach to cultural themes--including the study of rhetoric--may be "disruptive of the critical-interpretive enterprise as most people practice it" (Poirier 26).

To cast off the "encrustations of acquired culture" relates to the special kind of stupidity recommended in Zen meditation and practice. It is, even within the study of rhetoric itself, to be willing to see the independence of art from life, to see that art is not necessary. Emerson wrote in his journal on May 18, 1840: "Criticism must be transcendental, that is must consider literature ephemeral and easily entertain the supposition of its entire disappearance" (in Poirier 27). We could begin to understand in this way the legendary Zen poets who floated their parchment poems down the rivers into the sea. They acted on the supposition that the text in itself is truly unnecessary.

Poirier asks the challenging question: why not just erase each sentence as we go? The answer, Poirier thinks, is in the metaphor of transition. If, as in "Self

Reliance," "power ceases in the instant of repose" (in Poirier 47), this only suggests our fear, if we are not in transition, of being insulated in our own minds (60). Words, no matter what the rhetorical stance, are inadequate to convey how genius works (or the Tao or Ibn 'Arabi's creative imagination).

In this way there is great sense in Emerson's famous admiration for contradiction. To have seen Truth, to have achieved authority even for a moment over language, is to have killed it--just as, in the Taoist legend the King died the minute his guests had bored into his face the defining holes.

To be constantly tentative and questioning, at least in this life, is the only Way. Yet we will do so in words. Rhetoric is for Emerson both his most resisted fate and his most revered freedom.

Emersonian language is an Emersonian fate because it is the most powerful element of inherited culture: it binds us to the past and to convention. Emerson "was ready to teach us," Poirier says, "long before Foucault, that if we intend ever to resist our social and cultural fate, then we must first see it for what it is, and that its form, ultimately, is the language we use in learning to know ourselves" (72). Yet rhetorical stance is also the most potent place, for these very same reasons, to resist our fate, to redefine traditions, to escape (if only partly) from conditioning, to create who we are. As Poirier puts it, "Language is the only way to get around the construction of language, and in his management of this paradox Emerson shows why he is now and always essential (72).

All of this should help to define Emerson as our teacher of the place between. He learned how to be neither this nor that--like Wordsworth, according to Poirier,

"beside himself" (75)--unlike many of us, at home in a sort of suspended, noble perplexity. In assenting to while also resisting rhetorical tradition and past writing, Emerson developed the sort of detached self recommended by mystics of the East--what Poirier calls a "loose-fitting" self: "indifferent to social identification, and capable of that 'doubleness' which makes it possible to be inside and outside society at once, inside and outside the self" (77).

Yet Emerson was no Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, not a double personality. In a contradictory sense, he was the one man in between. Note the words of Emerson himself in "Experience":

> We live amid surfaces, and the true art of life is to skate well over them. Under the oldest, mouldiest conventions, a man of native force prospers just as well as the newest in the world, and that by skill of handling and treatment. He can take hold anywhere. Life itself is a mixture of power and form, and will not bear the least excess of either.

The metaphor of skating emphasizes both action and transition as a source of true power. For Emerson language is wholly, at its most real, utterly transitory and vehicular.

What's more, once you have skated across a pond, you can discard your skates. Or at least you could consider erasing as you go: "The great poet makes us feel our own wealth, and then we think the less of his compositions. His best communication to our mind is to despise all he has done" ("Oversoul" in Poirier 68). Or, I would add, to despise all we ourselves have done.

Here we have come to the real core of the issue, and to the purpose of caring whether we can have a rhetoric of inception at all. Here we need to see in what

sense Emerson's rhetorical stance can be called a rhetorical stance.

What does it mean to discard the skates? Where will you be going? And what do you have to say?

At the exact moment when the skates are thrown away, we have only weak names. We call this non-dual timeless inception many things in the cross-cultural, transhistorical stream of experience I have called between: enlightenment, awareness, the Way of the Near; Emerson, in "The Oversoul," can only use the name revelation.

Revelation is an appropriate word for Emerson to use since it is borrowed from his Christian tradition and its association with mysteries. It is a word his audience would partly understand. But, as a word choice (naturally), it is potentially misleading, inexact, too weak for its job. Revelation cannot be defined by Emerson himself except as "the announcements of the soul, its manifestations of its own nature" ("Oversoul" in Miller, ed. 939).

But it can be described. "Announcements" and "manifestations" "are attended by the emotion of the sublime" (939); they are "an influx of the Divine mind into our mind" (939)--what Mircea Eliade would call, in his The Sacred and the Profane, hierophanies (195).

Emerson is very careful to insist that such revelations are not thought about. They merely occur. And they require a special language even to talk about them.

Not being thought about, revelations of course cannot be defined--only described in such words as "thrill," "awe," "delight" ("The Oversoul" 940). As for the Sufis or the Zennists, they are not perceptions: that would be too dualistic,

connoting a giver of light versus a receiver of light. Nor are they perceptions--that is, known or studied beforehand, related to what is already known, scheduled or prepared for. They are better called inceptions, indicating that they are sudden, unexplained, unexpected, impossible to analyze, and wholly difficult to talk about.

Emerson is also careful to insist that such "inceptions" are non-dual or, if western rhetoric insists, unitary: "In these communications [that is, between person and God or between person and the Tao], the power to see, is not separated from the will to do, but the insight proceeds from obedience, and the obedience proceeds from a joyful perception" (940); dualistic categories of beingness or cause and effect have no role.

Whereas western talk about cause and effect, the useful analysis of origins and influences and consequences, creates a logic which is everywhere embedded in language--and which requires reasoned discourse--inception refuses to link even questions (a kind of causes) with answers (a kind of consequences). Emerson asserts later in "The Oversoul":

> These questions which we lust to ask about the future, are a confession of sin. God has no answer for them. No answer in words can reply to a question of things. It is not in an arbitrary "decree of God," but in the nature of man that a veil shuts down on the facts of tomorrow: for the soul will not have us read any other cipher than that of cause and effect. By this veil, which curtains events, it instructs the children of men to live in today. The only mode of obtaining an answer to these questions of the senses, is, to forego all low curiosity, and, accepting the tide of being which floats us into the secrets of nature, work and live, work and live, and all unawares the advancing soul has built and forged for itself a new condition, and the question and answer are one. (In Miller, ed. 941)

Clearly a place or time in which "the question and answer are one" is not amicable

to a rhetoric of classification and analysis. For our best questions, "God has no answer."

Yet for Emerson this does not mean there are no answers. Rhetoric will play a role between persons and God if (a) you allow that there is "no answer in words"; and (b) at the same time, resisting both the absoluteness of "wise silence" (936) and the volubility of too much artificially structured talk, you allow for there to be language: "The only mode of obtaining an answer to these questions of the senses, is,...work and live, work and live...." And, adding to that list, trust in the slow building of a "new condition."

For that "new condition" there are temporary names: "a certain tendency to insanity," "ravishment," "enthusiasm" (940)--what the Sufis called intoxication. Emerson, like any good writer trained in tradition, gives a few examples: being "basted with excess of light" (Thomas Gray), "the trances of Socrates, the 'union' of Plotinus, the vision of Porphyry, the conversion of Paul, the aurora of Behmen, the conversions of George Fox and his Quakers, the illumination of Swedenborg,...the rapture of the Moravian and Quietist" (940), and so on. Emerson defines what all of these have in common even while he knows they resist definition: "Revelation is the discourse of the soul" (940).

How typical of Emerson to hazard a clear-seeming definition--and then to contradict its very adequacy; he would like to go beyond words, but words are what he has. First, after "defining" revelation as "the discourse of the soul," he shows that most will understand by that prophecy, a kind of fortune-telling. People still want specific and measurable answers about the future in specific and

manageable words.

But such specificity would be immediately untrue. It would let people rest: they would "know" and then fail to search. That is just why Emerson first gives his readers or listeners what they want--a definition, an answer--and then takes them away.

To those who would wish for measurable and specific answers to important questions, Emerson says:

> We must pick no locks. We must check this low curiosity. An answer in words is delusive; it is really no answer to the questions you ask. Do not require a description of the countries to which you sail. The description does not describe them to you, and tomorrow you arrive there, and know them by inhabiting them. ("The Oversoul" in Miller, ed. 940)

"Do not require a description of the countries to which you sail," Emerson advises us. Yet we keep demanding descriptions all the while. And Emerson himself keeps giving them just as he continues to take them away.

## Emerson, Rhetoric, and the Eastern Antecedents

Before summarizing the rhetorical facts of Emerson'sdiscourse as western critics have chosen to analyze them, it is important to see how Emerson relates to the East--especially to the Sufis and to the Hindu/Buddhist/Zen way of the Orient. Then we can observe if what Emerson has in common with the east is similar to what puts him at variance with the west (especially if by "west" we mean the common sense tradition of rationalists such as Hugh Blair, leading to what Poirier

has called the "modernism" of our own century). Then finally such a study will reveal what a study of "eastern" aspects of Emerson's work still has to teach us as we define or intuit our rhetorical and pedagogical strategies for our own time.

As early as 1953, in the Emerson Handbook edited by Frederic Ives Carpenter, Emerson's apparent lack of formal logic, "his failure to follow the rules of formal logic" (109), is placed in the context of Emersonian action. The key to understanding Emersonian rhetoric is to focus on the distinction between "the logic of human understanding" and transcendental "Reason" (110). For modern scholarship, the institutions of the academy in particular, Carpenter and others believed that writers would have to distinguish between "the discursive language of science and logic" and the "presentational language of art, religion, and myth" (110).

And I would add: writers would have to stop confusing the two or sanctifying the one at the expense of the other.

In order to explore how a rhetoric in the western world, of use to actual audiences, could be developed and perfected, Emerson turned to the East. But he did so a bit at a time, not always knowing why. He is likely to have misinterpreted the actual East in the process in order to suit his own needs, and he may have made conclusions (about Sufis and Hindus in particular) that were based on insufficient knowledge. We may even have to conclude that he insufficiently understood the relationship of the East to him, in and of himself; he may have failed in his own enterprise. However that may be,

In Emerson's mind a "meeting" of East and West took place which

> was of historic importance. Although he never succeeded in uniting these opposites, he helped introduce the western mind to eastern thought, he introduced and naturalized eastern thought for western readers, and he partially assimilated it in his own writing and thinking. Perhaps because Emerson attempted so immense a task, his partial failure has seemed to outweigh the minor successes of lesser men. (Carpenter 110-11)

Let us at least try to understand what drew Emerson to eastern texts, and what aspects of eastern rhetoric he "assimilated."

That Emerson knew about Islamic and particularly Sufic texts is certain. Yet it is at first somewhat troubling how negatively he wrote of the Muslim faith. On the last page of his essay "Natural Religion," he refers to the character of the Prophet Muhammad as being very bad, even though, he says, there are many fine Koranic passages (in Gohdes, ed. 60). Or, early in his process of learning about Islamic writings, as he had been encouraged by his aunt (Mary Moody Emerson) to read them, he was attracted to Islam only as a sort of "fairy land" of exoticism: "Every man has a fairy land just beyond the compass of his horizon....and it is very natural that literature at large should look for some fanciful stories of mind which surpassed example and probability" (Letters of RWE I 116-17, ed. Ralph L. Rusk in Obeidat 113).

A simple way to establish influence is to see references in Emerson's own works. The poem "Days" begins:

> Daughters of Time, the hyacinth days,
> Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes...
> (In Miller, ed. 1018)

Yet the image of the Sufi dervishes here, only a passing image, conforms to the western stereotype of whirling ecstasies, insensate states of misguided spiritual

intoxication, "muffled and dumb." Emerson means only to amplify and decorate a poem about the quick passing of time, mortality, with a reference to a world which fascinates him, but also a world of which he cannot or would not really avail himself.

More subtle and interesting, the Sufi influence in the poem "Bacchus" centers on the Sufi metaphor of intoxication in a much more developed way. While allusions in the poem are comprehensively Greek, there can be little question that the idea of spiritual drunkenness has been derived from Sufi poets he has read, especially Sa'adi of Shiraz (b. 1194) and Hafiz (b. 1320):

> Bring me wine, but wine which never grew
> In the belly of the grape. (ll. 1-2)
>
> . . . . . . . .
>
> Give me the true,--
> Whose ample leaves and tendrils curled
> Among the silver hills of heaven
> Draw everlasting dew;
> Wine of wine,
> Blood of the world,
> Form of form, and mold of statues,
> That I intoxicated,
> And by the draught assimilated,
> May float at pleasure through all natures;
> The bird-language rightly spell,
> And that which roses say as well....(ll. 14-26)
>
> (In Miller, ed. 1011-12)

As for Sufis, drinking "the true" will aid in piercing the mysteries and, significantly, in grasping the natural language locked in real things. Yet even so, the aspect of this piercing of mysteries remains quite amorphous and idealized in the poem; the poem reflects little actual understanding of the Sufi mystical Way. "Bacchus,"

though written in Emerson's maturity (1846), reflects more what Murwan Obeidat calls his "early phase" of orientalism, an "awareness of the Orient" which manifests itself mostly as "fragments of fantasy that reflect Emerson's preoccupation with exoticism" (133-34).

Yet Obeidat shows conclusively in his 1988 article in The Muslim World how Emerson's interest in and knowledge of the Muslim east began to grow. Certainly "not an orientalist himself," Emerson nevertheless began to read all the Muslim books he could find during the 1830's and 1840's (see Obeidat 134).

As Obeidat emphasizes, by 1850, when Emerson published his Representative Men, he referred frequently, often in passing, to Islamic materials even when discussing matters unrelated. Especially telling, according to Obeidat, is the first sentence in the essay on "Plato":

> Among secular books, Plato only is entitled to Omar's fanatical compliment to the Koran, when he said, "Burn the libraries; for their value is in this book." (Complete Works IV 39 in Obeidat 134)

Why does Emerson reserve this unique place for Plato only? It is because, according to Emerson, Plato synthesized "the unity of Asia, and the detail of Europe" (Works IV 53), the soul of the east and the rational science of the west.

Yet throughout "Plato," there is no doubt that Plato subserves the east to the west. Like Whitman after him, he imagines human culture moving from the east to the west, from the fatality and immense soul of the east to the active, intellectual, manipulative science of the west. While the two poles are unequal, as Emerson sees them, neither can be fully understood without the other. As Obeidat so aptly says, "East and West are intellectually defined here. The difference

between them is neither geographical, nor racial. It is a difference in the cultures that distinguish the two worlds" (135). And for Emerson other names for east versus west are "the one and the many," or "being and intellect" (135). This is the very split which Emerson knew intuitively he would seek, through language, to overcome.

It is as though, I too am suggesting, if the historical sweep of civilization has been from east to west, continuing westward it would arrive at the east again.

As Emerson matured, Obeidat suggests in his article, his attraction to Sufic texts intensified as he saw in them potential solutions for some of his own problems. While Emerson still saw "America's preeminence in world history" (Obeidat 136), he also felt less and less negative bias toward the Muslim world, especially in terms of the poems of Sa'adi and Hafiz: witness Emerson's essay "Persian Poetry" (136). In spite of all the praise of Plato as unifier of west and east, Emerson still saw something lacking in Plato, something still missing, he may have thought, in western letters: "It is almost the whole deduction in merit from Plato, that his writings have not,--what is no doubt incident to the regnancy of intellect in his work,--the vital authority which the screams of prophets and the sermons of unlettered Arabs and Jesus possess" (Works IV 76 in Obeidat 136).

Obeidat goes on to convince that it is just this element of vital authority Emerson sought and found in the Sufi poems of the Persian poets. Emerson may have felt that "being occidental is being better" (Obeidat 136): "Orientalism is Fatalism, resignation: Accidentalism is Freedom and Will" (JMN X 90). But he also thought that being occidental is being incomplete.

Of course it is worth noting that generalizing about orientalism as fatalism is a skewed misreading or misunderstanding of true facts; but remember we are not speaking here of a real East or certainly of a real orientalism or even a deep understanding of Islam. As Obeidat too remarks, "Emerson imbued his writing with Islamic quotations, or brief, incidentally confused, references to Islamic metaphysics and made these subservient to his views" (137).

There is nothing wrong with having done so. Some will argue that is what I have done. There is something wrong with "making these subservient to his [our] views only if we are making greater claims for them: that they embody the real east or an organized scholarly treatment of the east. In the sense that Emerson was working, there is no real east at all except what he makes it represent <u>in him</u>.

<u>In him</u> it can come to represent partly a tentative resolution to his questions about <u>Fate</u> and partly a way to deal with his instincts about <u>vital authority</u>.

If Fate is a characteristic of (Emerson's concepts of) orientalism, his essay on "Power," according to Obeidat, enhances his grasp of what such fatalism must mean to him. "Power" "develops the idea of freedom overagainst surrender to fate" (Obeidat 138). I think myself this is best understood in the essay on "Fate" itself (1851). Here Emerson seems to <u>dignify</u> the "fatalists" of the east when he quotes from a Persian poem in the opening pages. It is not a question of whether or not people are subject to limiting powers; in this essay Emerson is forced too to say that they are. It is rather a question of with what bravery and fortitude people respond to the facts and exercise their freedom within boundaries: "Great men, great nations, have not been boasters and buffoons, but perceivers of the terror of

life, and have manned themselves to face it" (in Miller, ed. 980-981).

Furthermore, to deal with his instincts about vital authority, Emerson did what the Sufi poets did. He crafted words. He asserted his instincts in images. He created, even out of his own limitations and the limitations of language, new metaphors or aphorisms. For example, Emerson wrote aphoristically, "'Tis the best use of Fate to teach a fatal courage" ("Fate" in Miller, ed. 987). And later in the same essay Emerson recreated once again his image of the skater skimming freely between: "the cold is inconsiderate of persons, tingles your blood, freezes a man like a dewdrop. But learn to skate and the ice will give you a graceful, sweet, and poetic motion" (Miller, ed. 990).

How can we know if Emerson speaks here truly? We would have to try this skating ourselves. Or at least we need to accept the truth of these words because Emerson says so.

The power of the language, if even temporary, to suspend all disbelief is what I think Obeidat thinks Emerson means by vital authority. What Emerson most admired in the Sufi poets he knew, according to Obeidat, was their intellectual freedom, their playful and necessarily inconsistent attitudes about life, the "mental force" they acquired from freedom which exists in spite of limitations (139).

I believe that it is a similar joyful recklessness about language, even while aware of its serious limitations, that Emerson let the Sufi poets rub off on him. Writing of Hafiz, Emerson says, "Hafiz praises wine, maidens, boys, birds, mornings, and music, to give vent to his immense hilarity and sympathy with every form of beauty and joy....Those are the natural topics and language of his wit and

perception" (in Obeidat 140).

Please note in this passage how topics and language come together in the same breath. For the perceptions and ideas cannot float off lonely by themselves; organized words are a hollow fate in themselves if they have no wit to animate them, no reckless freedom of spirit. As Obeidat puts it, Emerson, like Hafiz, "believed that the force of men's thoughts lies in the way of uttering them" (140). No wonder Emerson quoted Hafiz this way: "Loose the knots of the heart" (Works VIII 246 in Obeidat 140). That is the core of the Sufi message.

The Sufi poets reinforced for Emerson many of his chief instincts. In living freely a dignified life within the constraints of recognized fate, the Sufi poets embodied what Emerson called self-reliance (Obeidat 141). Likewise, knowledge is of much less use than energy or "vent"; as Obeidat summarizes it, "Self expression...is an utterance of every self reliant man who could use nature as his language" (141). Writing on Hafiz in his journals, Emerson asserts about expression (which gives "vital authority") that it

> is all we want: not knowledge, but vent: we know enough; but have not leaves and lungs enough for a healthy perspiration and growth. (JMN in Obeidat 141)

Finally, what the Sufi poets taught Emerson was the essential aspect of being, in Obeidat's words, "inspired men of their people" (142). I take this to be, for Emerson, the ultimate source of their vital authority: they "spoke" for their people to focus all on the beautiful and the divine. This echoed in them, the audience, which gave to their poems the ring of truth--if not the Truth itself. To find the rhetorical principles of such an echo or ring brought Emerson to the East in the

first place, I believe--not to adopt the East as his home, but (in Obeidat's words) "to find a vocabulary for his [own, western] ideas" (145).

Emerson leaves no doubt about what is to him the centrality of rhetoric or the ultimate power of speech; I cannot help but add, also from "Persian Poetry," the following:

> Hafiz was the Prince of Persian poets. His was the fluent mind in which every thought and feeling came readily to his lips. The difference is not so much the quality of men's thoughts as in the power of uttering them. (Complete Writings 799)

Utterance most matters. It is the source of a true but unclear-to-the-mind sort of vital authority.

To confirm in him such instincts about vital authority, such free and reckless utterance, Emerson (or anyone else) would have to turn further to the east. That is, into silence.

Why this is so has already been clarified somewhat in the previous chapter. Language is forever inadequate to express the Truth, Oneness (the non-dual), The Tao, or God. Yet language is what we have as a tool to explore this nothingness--the very same nothingness which the Zen masters would insist on calling All.

While Emerson did refer to the Orient often and while he read what he could, I doubt that he ever really conceptualized aspects of the Tao exactly as we have discussed them. Nor do I have any reason to believe that he had ever learned of Toism. But he did admire the Hindus.

For example, his poem "Hamatreya," concerning the impermanence of land ownership or pride in all possessions, has an obvious Hindu source. Emerson

copied a passage from a sacred Hindu text into his journal in 1845 related theoretically to this poem (See footnotes to the poem in Miller, ed. 1006). "Brahma," a better known poem, at least represents a basic knowledge of Hindu mythology, including the seven highest saints of Hinduism (See "Brahma" in Miller, ed. 1019).

Yet I never feel quite the same vital necessity when Emerson refers to Hinduism as I feel when he expresses his passion for Sa'adi of Shiraz. What then is the role of the Far East in Emerson's development, especially in terms of his rhetorical ideas and practices?

First it could be said that Emerson may have in part acquired a certain timeless or spaceless perspective from the Hindu influence, though ideas about sublimity in the western tradition of, say, Edmund Burke, might have done the same. But secondly, and far more important, Emerson was remarkably Zen in both thought and practice--even if, or largely because, he did not know it.

To see how the "long view" of Hinduism affected Emerson--its allowance for the vastness of time and space--there are many places to look. One of the most telling, to me, is in "Poetry and Imagination":

> The belief that the higher use of the material world is to furnish us types or pictures to express the thoughts of the mind, is carried to its logical extreme by the Hindoos, who, following Buddha, have made it the central doctrine of their religion that what we call Nature, the external world, has no real existence,--is only phenomenal. Youth, age, property, condition, events, persons,--self, even,--are successive maias (deceptions), through which Vishnu mocks or instructs the soul. I think Hindoo books the best gymnastics for the mind....All European libraries might almost be read without the swing of this gigantic arm being suspended. (Complete Writings 730-31)

Several important features of this passage call attention to themselves. (a) Emerson is impressed by the phenomenal aspect of Hindu religion and may have been challenged in his own way, as we shall see, to deal with the philosophically troubling aspects of the inner versus the outer life. (b) It is through appearances, deceptions, that Vishnu instructs the soul. If there were no tensions between inner and outer, the unspeakable and the spoken, the implication is that there could be no instruction. (c) The scope of Hindu precepts of time and space are so vast that only one swing of the "gigantic arm" would more than account for a whole western library (or more). (d) Most important, Emerson includes in his list of deceptions the self--"self, even"--a central clue to the meaning of the distant east to his own meta-philosophical development.

To me it seems that Emerson has incredibly Zen moments. Yet there is very little western literature which directly connects Emerson to the East beyond the Sufis or the Hindus. That in itself isn't so bad; it merely tends to disprove the likelihood of a pattern of influence in the western sense. Yet if Emerson's constellation of notions about the east relates to a timeless and cross-cultural aspect of human intelligence about spirit and language, as I believe, a pattern of cause and effect would be immaterial anyway.

At least there is one article to go on, and it is so complete that it negates the need for others. Soiku Shigematsu, in "Ralph Waldo Emerson's Zen Universalism," clarifies exactly what is most Zen about the western transcendentalist.

Central, of course, are Emerson's questions about the self ("self, even"). It is

utterly Zen of Emerson to doubt that intellect and self have even an important relationship.

Shigematsu begins his analysis by restating, in his own way, the usual Zen concept, derived as we have seen from Lao-tzu himself, of the centripetal versus centrifugal minds. The centripetal mind turns inward, and its central question is "Who am I?" The centrifugal mind, well-developed in the west, turns outward, and its central question is "What is the universe?" (95).

Conceptualized this way, in western language, the issues remain hopelessly dualistic.

This is why Emerson says, according to Shigematsu, that "science must be studied humanly" (JMN V 169 in Shigematsu 95). Our centrifugal force must be "not only intellectual but egoless," in which case the question "What is the universe?" will become "'What is the relationship between the universe and ourselves?'" (95).

In this place, the place between, is the nexus of the Emersonian self, I think. If the two questions become one question (not in a dualistic but in an eastern non-dual way), that question becomes a question about the self. That is why, I think, Shigematsu quotes Emerson's early journals: "The great business of life is to learn ourselves" (JMN III 144 in Shigematsu 95). Quoting again from Emerson, Shigematsu reminds us that "wherever we go, whatever we do, self is the sole subject we study and learn" (JMN IV 67-68 in Shigematsu 96). Shigematsu knows that this is the essence of Zen as he quotes Eihei Dogen (1200-53): "To learn the Buddhist way is to learn oneself" (96).

To continue to read Shigematsu's reading of Emerson is to read about Zen. Having come to know the lives of all kinds of "religious enthusiasts" (96) in his reading, Emerson makes perfectly clear in his diaries what unifies all these studies:

> Each owes all to the discovery that God must be sought within, not without. This is the discovery of Jesus. Each perceives the worthlessness of all instruction, and the infinity of wisdom that issues from meditation. Each perceives the nullity of all conditions but one, innocence; and the absolute submission which attends it. (JMN V 5 in Shigematsu 96)

No doubt Shigematsu is right to see in this very insight the meaning of the famous transparent eyeball passage in Nature: "I am nothing, I see all" (96) could be in itself a Zen poem. Further, I would add, this very focus on self explains anyone's attitudes, if they are tentative, to organized instruction--especially in books. This very focus puts into perspective our attitudes about books and therefore the utility or uselessness of language. And this very focus explains to Christians everywhere both the root of their own gnostic tradition and the root of Islam's meaning as submission; especially the Sufis or the Sufi in us concentrates on "the absolute submission which attends [the nullity of all conditions but one]" (96).

This very "Zen Universalism" relates to Emerson's instinctive attraction to the long view which we have seen he knew mostly from ancient Hindu texts. From the long view, distinctions disappear. Logical clarifications completely lose their significance, Shigematsu insists (97), and this would have made Emerson less bemoan "his own lack of logical ability"; in fact, if Emerson had only been able to learn of Zen thought and practice, "he could have constructed and expressed his thought much more consistently" (96-97). From the long view all differences

vanish, as it were when viewed from outer space. Shigematsu perfectly quotes Emerson himself:

> Every violation, every suicide, every miracle, every willfulness however large it may show near to us, melts quickly into the All, and at a distance is not seen. The outline is as smooth as the curve of the moon. (In JMN V 164)

Most remarkable to me in this passage is Emerson's use of the term The All. It could equally be called The Tao.

The All is equally the Nothing, which defies western logic. Shigematsu's own metaphor is precise:

> This nothing, containing everything limitlessly, is in a perfect state of stillness just before everything appears. It is, as it were, a top spinning at full speed, which seems as if motionless. (99)

Emerson himself sought ways to express just such an effort to empty himself of conventions, preconceptions, and cultural conditioning--using rhetorical techniques, as we shall see, far more at home in the East than in the West. Shigematsi cites one excellent example:

> In the instant [I] leave behind all human relations,...I become a moist cold element....I have died out of the human world and come to feel a strange cold, aqueous, terraqueous, aerial, etherial sympathy and existence. (In JMN V 496-97)

In an effort to express such insights, Emerson was more Zen than he ever knew, understanding not from reading or research but from his own insearching how self-negation is in fact the "perfect" self affirmation (Shigematsu 100). An awakened one once said, "That morning star is myself! I am shining!" (100). This is exactly what Emerson learned from his transparent eyeball experience, I think, or when, as Shigematsu insists, he wrote "I feel the centipede in me--cayman, carp,

eagle, and fox. I am moved by strange sympathies" (in JMN IV 199-200).

The who when the centripetal and centrifugal forces meet is the self; the where when these forces meet is, of course, the place between:

> Science was false in being unpoetical. It assumed to explain a reptile or a mollusk, and isolated it,--which is hunting for life in graveyards. Reptile or mollusk or man or angel only exists in system, in relation. ("Poetry and Imagination" in Complete Writings 729)

Or Emerson would say that most people have second-hand thoughts. But others "will prefer the grandeur of that law which he finds in himself" ("Natural Religion" in Gohdes, ed. 55).

## Emerson and the East from the Perspective of Western Criticism

What it means for the theory of rhetoric among western researchers for a person to "prefer the grandeur of that law which he finds in himself" has produced a rich literature. In the context of this study, parallels with perceptions of rhetoric in the metaphorical east are striking. A summary of these parallels will reveal what is most eastern about Emerson's rhetorical practices.

In Emerson's early development, according to Sheldon W. Lieberman, Emerson needed to find his own way to react against the neoclassical traditions he had inherited from his own education. There having been no real revolt in America against literary neoclassicism, Emerson remained basically unaffected by European romanticism until the 1820's. His main literary influence was still Hugh Blair (Lieberman 22-25). Blair and the others associated with Scottish Common Sense Realism believed that the best arbiter of literary works is public taste; critics

must defend that taste. The central tenet of Scottish criticism--"The careful balance between passion and restraint, the emphasis on 'pleasing' as the means and on moral instruction as the objective of literature" (31)--are the ideas against which Emerson had to react in his development as a philosopher and rhetorician.

In a later article the same Lieberman shows clearly the shape Emerson's reactions against his own neoclassical education would take. According to Lieberman, the years 1821-1836 mark dramatic changes in Emerson's philosophy and his rhetorical theory--a group of changes which separated him from the influence of the Scottish philosophers of the eighteenth century.

Emerson encountered Blair's lectures, according to Lieberman, as early as 1818 at Harvard. One early influence was Blair's emphasis on models, distinctly different from Emerson's later work on invention. By 1828 things had changed, as testified in his journal: "An alehouse is a better school for eloquence than a college" (193). Emerson began to consider more and more the strength and value of common speech. Also Emerson developed strong ideas on spontaneity (195).

For years to come, Lieberman shows, Emerson would try to bring into agreeable relationship his increasing respect for economy, his belief in indirection or surprising an audience into apprehension of a truth, and unity of discourse. He wished to reflect in his own writing the organic integrity he saw in the universe without, he felt, exactly knowing how to do so. The problem of form remained central for Emerson (200-06).

Here the conclusions reached by Emerson which are most related to the East are vital. Among these is the primacy of language itself over form. Believing in

that caused Emerson to shape individual sentences that would startle and amaze readers/listeners into their own action--almost like koans. Similarly, Lieberman believes, Emerson never solved his own perceived problems regarding form (204-06). That is because to have done so would have meant the end to Emerson's transition and power in the here and now, the place between satisfaction with form and concept and resistance to language itself.

Seeing Emerson this way explains much about his own key decisions in life: his attraction to Unitarianism and his life as a minister and then his rejection of that role as a minister. L.L. Buell, for example, places Emerson's ideas of the poet-priest (unifying art and religion) and Emerson's ideas on expression or eloquence in their Unitarian tradition. As Buell asserts, "A practical eloquence was what the Unitarians sought in their preaching, not doctrinal logic chopping" (7). Buell reminds us that Emerson called Locke and Hume "reasoning machines" (6). While Emerson went further than Unitarian pulpit eloquence would allow, it remains a fact that Unitarian distrust of creeds "made it more important for the Unitarian minister to arouse the spirit than to instruct" (9).

Buell reminds us that Emersonian self-reliance demands creativity (15), not imitation--making the ministers of established religion rank lower than artists to an exceptional degree. Art provided Emerson, as a rhetorician, more freedom than the ministry. Emerson's literary objective, according to Buell, was to unite "seer" and "sayer," "spiritual substance and beautiful expression....The ambivalence is reflected in the image of the poet-priest in 'The Divinity School Address' and pervades all of Emerson's literary criticism. Like the ideal preacher, Emerson's

'Poet,' the 'Man of Beauty,' must be the 'reconciler,' perfect in both inspiration and utterance" (19).

This role of reconciler helps to define Emerson's relationship to <u>the place between</u> as found, independently, in Sufism and Zen. This is because Emerson's whole power and energy as rhetor proved to become one of active and perpetual <u>mediation</u> between extremes.

For example, James A. Berlin, in his <u>Writing Instruction in Nineteenth Century American Colleges</u>, shows how those who inveigh against the lack of logic in the essays of Emerson overlook the writer's rhetorical intention. Rather than studying his essays for the writer's incapacities, taking account of Emerson's own reasons for writing his essays the way he did and focusing on the <u>capacities</u> of the writer's decisions will permit a new vision of the writer. To that end Berlin argues for a view of romantic rhetoric as more than mere self-expression. Emerson <u>did</u> have a purpose with respect to his audience and, as we shall see, a strategy with respect to them; <u>but</u> his purpose was not to teach in the normal sense of making demonstrable assertions. He wanted his listeners/readers not to learn but to seek and to find.

Indeed the key to the theory of romantic rhetoric is in the theory of knowing. Again it is Berlin who points out that romantic rhetoric "places the composing process, the act of writing and speaking, at the center of knowing" (10). Yet this means something very different to Emerson than it might seem; <u>his</u> conclusion is that one cannot use just the language itself to tell another what one has learned--the learning is in making the language. As Emerson says in the 1867 essay on

"Eloquence." "The eloquent man is he who is no beautiful speaker, but one who is inwardly drunk with a certain belief."

Berlin also shows that if learning/knowing consists of an action between perceiver and world, this epistemology goes beyond the prevailing empiricism of the nineteenth century's focus on the inductive method. While knowledge was to the Common Sense Realists "extralinguistic" (21), and rhetoric "an elaboration of how the mind of an auditor can be affected so as to produce the immediate experience of the interlocutor (21), knowledge became to the romantic rhetor a way beyond the merely physical world and beyond the realm of demonstrable proofs; knowledge is possible insofar as language permits us to transcend language (11), and "the meaning is the metaphor" (ll) in a method which is thoroughly analogical. As Emerson himself said in Nature, the world is emblematic.

Berlin puts Emerson in perspective when he summarizes: "Emerson departs from (both Platonic idealism and Common Sense Realism) when he locates the real in the fusion of the sensual and the ideal. Reality is a human construction, joining the world of ideas to the material object in an act of creative perception. The sensory realm by itself is lifeless matter. The ideal by itself is meaningless abstraction. Knowledge is possible only in the interaction of the two" (46). In this epistemology, any demonstrable proofs too easily become dogma--and dogma, above all else, impedes personal knowing. In Emerson's world, you simply cannot tell anyone else what is real or demonstrate the absolute truth of anything. All is analogy, emblem, and action.

In the absence of adaptive forms and dependable tropes, then, just what are

the rhetorical tools that make writing an acceptable or meaningful choice to Emerson, or to the Sufis or Zennists? The answer to be found in Emerson's attraction to eastern universalism is an emphasis--some would say, an exaggeration--of invention and literary effects: metaphors, proverbs, aphorisms.

This is in a sense what R.A. Yoder concluded some years ago in an article on "Emerson's Dialectic." According to Yoder, a key Emersonian method, as exemplified in "The Oversoul," is "wave after wave of assertion" with "great cumulative force" (316). Similarly, I would add, Emerson's essay on Nature accumulates power through focus on memorable aphorisms: "A man is a god in ruins"; "Man is the dwarf of himself"; "Man applies to nature but half his force"; "Deep calls unto deep."

R.C. La Rosa best formulates the significance of this perpetual invention of aphorisms and proverbs in regarding them, in themselves, in important ways: (a) as the powerful energy to forestall, if even temporarily, our tendency to be satisfied with received forms, with mere imitation; and (b) as form in themselves: aphorisms can have a purpose of their own in suggesting the shape of an entire essay or lecture (20-30). Emerson called imitation "the vice of overcivilized communities" (15) and emphasized again, especially for the maker of discourse, the absolutely key role of invention and discovery.

Increasingly Emerson realized that a purposive technique of avoiding consistency means, in language, a focus on metaphor, analogy, proverbs, and affirmation. The fact is, as Roland Lee points out (among others), Emerson felt that belief is far more than adherence to doctrine and that faith is a kind of

knowing in its own right; perception of truth (or the desire for perception of truth) can be aroused in others only indirectly; "proofs are impossible, unnecessary, and, even worse, irrelevant" (235). As for indirection, two techniques were deliberate, according to Lee: avoidance of a constant terminology (a series of terms best suggests an "unsayable reality"), and consistent affirmation (the better to train the spirit). Emerson unified his essays not by idea but by attitude (242-44).

B. Packer similarly asserts that Emerson praised the "merit of not explaining," reflecting his skepticism about "the possibility of 'accurate' expression" (322). This is more than an assertion of a "necessary obliquity," as relevant journal passages show": "The aim of the author is not to tell truth--that he cannot do--but to suggest it" (323).

One test case is the famous image of the "transparent eyeball," usually considered bathetic, but Packer believes that even this was a calculated risk, a "deliberate anti-sublime" (328). Here and elsewhere, she says, "Emerson deliberately invites us to consider him a fool" (328). Emerson's rhetorical purpose is not to gain admirers but to shock readers or listeners into finding their own truth. Packer's summary is that "Emerson never apologizes and never explains. Challenge him and he simply withdraws, like Uriel, into his cloud, leaving it to his readers to decide whether his apparent 'lapses' are a result of his incapacities or ours" (342).

But it is perhaps an article by Wayne C. Anderson which best puts Emerson's rhetorical decisions into focus and into historical context--and into relationship with the independent practices of Sufi or Zen aspirants. Anderson centers his

work on what he calls Emerson's rhetoric of reiteration. By rhetoric of reiteration Anderson means the declaring of important beliefs followed not by proofs but by repetition in other forms of similar declarations. While this strategy is not well accepted in our own age of logical demonstrations and clear development of ideas, there is a long tradition of declaration as a rhetorical strategy (37-38).

Emerson relies on the rhetoric of reiteration because his ideas are based on "indemonstrable premises of faith." While Emerson is capable of clear reasoning (and Anderson shows examples), he cannot employ these methods at "the most important junctures in his prose" (39). At those junctures he must declaim and reiterate to excite his readers or listeners to understanding.

By way of example, in Nature, Emerson asserts that "Nothing divine dies," while making no effort to validate the assertion. He can only repeat in other ways: "All good is eternally reproductive" (39). Anderson argues for the effectiveness of such a rhetorical method by referring to Perelman ("The very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience" implies "their importance and pertinency to the discussion") and to Piaget's demonstration of presence (one feature emphasized at a time in perception) (40-41).

Furthermore, Anderson shows the connection of the techniques of declaration and reiteration to the idea of "refining" in the Rhetorica Ad Herrennium in which no opportunity is given to the hearer "to remove his attention from the topic":

> Refining consists in dwelling on the same topic and yet seeming to say something very new. It is accomplished in two ways: by merely repeating the same idea, or by descanting upon it. We shall not repeat the same thing precisely--for that, to be sure, would weary the reader and not refine the idea--but with changes. (41)

Anderson further traces the tradition of repetition through Cicero and Quintillion to the Renaissance and finally Blair. Repetition gets attention and attention prepares for belief (42). Of course the problem of belief remains, as Emerson well knew. But conversion itself "takes place beyond the realm that language can control" (48).

The rhetorical tradition argues that repetition itself can be persuasive. And at stake is the relationship between rhetoric and logic. Insofar as Emerson's essays are persuasive, they establish "the peculiar power of rhetoric that does not depend on argument" (49). The power of rhetoric may not depend on argument at all.

A key insight for readers of Emerson must then be that Emerson was not trying to convey results and certainly did not intend to create a philosophical system. To look for such as system is to totally miss what Emerson is all about (Lee 239). As Roland Lee puts it, interpreting here, Emerson followed the principle that "one can never stir a reader into movement by inviting him to stand still" (239-40). As Emerson said in his 1835 Journal, "To think is to act."

Yet this leaves us where we already were, wondering about the rhetor's relationship to audience. Many, including John Sloan, have argued that Emerson's own rhetorical principles lead to the conclusion that adaptation to an audience is unnecessary. Conciliating an audience means, after all, that you may fail to "edify them" (11). Indeed proofs are unnecessary for one who is able to take "sovereign possession of an audience" ("Eloquence," 1847).

Emerson even sometimes asserted that one should ignore audience response since responding to criticism, either positive or negative, "spoils later efforts"

(Sloan 11). The only proper position to take in regards to an audience is that the audience must adapt to the speaker (12).

In this insight, as we have seen, Emerson agrees with the Sufi and Zen rhetoricians who preceded him. Presented speech, either in oratory or in writing, is best seen as having only one public purpose. While its key purpose is for the benefit of the presenter, its public purpose is **to provoke**. The work of rhetoric is not to prove but to discover and perceive.

Emerson may not always have been comfortable with such a conclusion himself. Nor did he come to this conclusion easily or quickly. Yet, as in all learning which he recommended to others, he gained insight into the relationship between the personal and public roles of discourse through experience.

As Roberta Ray reminds her own readers, Emerson was one of the first Americans to make a career of lecturing. He is said to have wanted to become a professor of rhetoric. According to Ray, his concept of the orator in society was not to "convert men to one's own faith, but rather, to persuade men of their own innate worth" (216).

Emerson's unique theory of rhetorical invention relates, once again, according to Ray, to his distinction between reason and understanding--quoting an Emerson letter to his brother:

> Reason is the highest faculty of soul--what we mean often by the soul itself; it never reasons, never proves, it simply perceives; it is vision. The understanding toils all the time, compares, contrives, adds, argues, near sighted but strong sighted....(219)

Whereas most theories of invention have to do with Emerson's category of

understanding, he is most concerned with "reason" (219); hence life is a "quest for inspiration" (220). To Emerson, the orator is an artist who can "express the correspondence of the material and spiritual worlds" (221). Oratory can create of the audience new artists (222).

The orator is a poet in his ability to represent spiritual facts by natural symbols, an analogist in his awareness of the divinity within him, a provocator in his awakening of the sluggish multitude (222-23). In Emerson's rhetorical theory man is a god to be freed (225). The function of the orator is to "provoke men to see, feel, and live by that truth which comes from the oversoul" (224).

Even earlier (1960), Herbert Wichelns best summarized both Emerson's theory and the resultant rhetorical tools in relation to that theory. Wichelns believes that, through a period of time, Emerson "found his true calling and his right relation to his hearers by making himself thoroughly independent of them" (502). His education occurred in working on more than 170 half-hour sermons (506), leading him more and more away from convention and toward the starting of a "positive doctrine that would have meaning for others" (507-11) and combat the "endless doing" of men whose energy "narrowed their minds" (514).

The method he developed for presenting his ideas Wichelns summarizes as follows: "He had a command of incandescent phrase--now direct exhortation, now homely image, now sparkling metaphor, now concrete fact in condensed and forcible statement" (516).

Emerson, Rhetoric, and the Future of Theory and Practice

By now you may be wondering what has become of the Emersonians, the Sufis, the Zennists in the modern academy. Is the metaphorical east in western rhetoric fading or sharpening its focus? What are the prophecies for the twenty-first century?

Some may argue that Sufic ideas and practices of rhetoric served their time and place: but can their insights be adapted to the postmodern world of large universities, mass media, and the worldwide web? If Sufi ideas and practices enliven individuals' capacities for creative imagination, they may be more relevant than ever. If the Sufi notion of the adaptivity of the truth is itself true, that adaptation should be going on around us constantly whether we know it or not.

Some may also argue that the extreme doubts in the Zen tradition regarding the usefulness of language itself by definition prevent Zen from being relevant to a modern western world producing far more writing than any previous civilization. Yet the Zen search for awareness, however it may be thought about or defined, continues strong in countless westerners, whether they have ever heard of Zen or not. Even western critics may delight in discussing Zen moments in the poetry of, say, Wordsworth or Wallace Steven or Robert Bly. Academic curricula include units on Asiatic poetry, often including satori poems. Western readers make, through their purchasing power, books illuminating eastern insight very popular-- The Tao of Physics and The Tao of Pooh among them.

Likewise, Richard Poirier and others argue for a profound Emersonian

influence on American writers like William James, Robert Frost, or Wallace Stevens--even if that which is most Emersonian about them has made these same writers troublesome to modernist critics.

And, I would argue, in postmodern research on rhetoric the Emersonian tradition is alive and well, even among those who don't claim their ancestry. The best example, I believe, is Kurt Spellmeyer in his Common Ground: Dialogue, Understanding, and the Teaching of Composition. His crystallizing work can offer a test case by which to establish the need for more Sufi-Zen-Emersonian approaches to rhetoric and pedagogy as well as encouraging willingness to pay attention to them.

Spellmeyer began his own transformation as a teacher where I did: his felt experience of the gulf between theory and practice, between school-life and other life, between the metaphorical west and the metaphorical east. In Spellmeyer's "Prologue" he begins by describing the "two cultures" of his experience as related to the perceived crisis of literacy in our society (vii). If we live in a society which exaggerates the "culture of interpretation"--that is, of analysis and persuasion--our society unwittingly fails to focus on the "power to make meaning" (viii) on our own. This longing to have the "power to make meaning," if allowed to express itself, relates to the Sufi's will to walk in the space between himself and God in the home of the angels' creative imagination; it relates to the Zen aspirant's will to clear her mind of all borrowed illusions in order to discover her authentic self in a moment of pure awareness; and it relates to the Emersonian thirst for power that comes from resisting conventions, including rhetorical ones: most people may

prefer second-hand thoughts, I repeat, but another "will prefer the grandeur of that law which he finds in himself."

It is just that the vocabulary of Sufism, Zen, or Ralph Waldo Emerson seem so foreign to us. We wonder how to make such a diction authentically our own.

Spellmeyer makes it clear that help in this regard will not come from Hirschean lists. Facts in themselves are useless things:

> Students are often unable to read actively and write perceptively, not because they have yet to learn the codes of our culture, but because these codes are so familiar--familiar rather than meaningful--that students cannot make the cultural text less commonplace and cliched, in ways that would facilitate the enlargement of understanding. (125)

These students must learn to resist the cultural text, just as Emerson did, not become yet more satisfied with the text. Background knowledge, Spellmeyer shows, is in itself useless in making the two cultures become "mutually problematic" (125). Or, in sum, the "educational decline Hirsch blames on cultural illiteracy" Spellmeyer attributes to an academic pedagogy "that discourages students from transposing 'our' knowledge into their lived worlds" (126).

In the education-based world we have created, one created with good democratic intentions, we have insured for our students and often for ourselves a greater and greater tension between the two cultures. We have forced a choice. Spellmeyer has good names for the choice: "either to do or to understand, either to practice or reflect on practice" (13). We have continued to insist too much on understanding and reflection at the expense of Emersonian action.

The Sufis would call this action prayer, the Zennists meditation, Emerson

power. In all three cases, the unabashed focus would be on self and seldom on culture or society. This is just why, in Nature, Emerson so subversively insisted that society never advances.

No wonder Sufi-Zen-Emersonian texts so self-consciously resist the texts. It is not a question of anti-social or anti-intellectual bias. It is a celebration of the creative self.

Spellmeyer would say "metamorphosis"; literacy is not to teach codes and forms, and rhetoric is not a tool of social manipulation. To use language is to actively resist the very reality of language.

Just as Ibn 'Arabi said he wrote books in order to rid himself of what was in his mind, in order to go on from there, Spellmeyer remembers to ask why people write books at all. Is it to "re-instate" order or also to "challenge and transform" it? (32). Looked at this way, the Sufi-Zen-Emersonian resistance to language is necessary because the experience of language is so thoroughly epistemological:

> A program of education that represents knowledge as true in itself, good in itself, may preserve the authority of the past--and with it the authority of the school and state--but it does so by ignoring the present, or those aspects of the present which distinguish today from events that have gone on before. (Spellmeyer 97)

This is why we and our students may feel so trapped between two cultures. It is as though we have really nothing to do if we are only asked to imitate and learn. We wish to create. As Spellmeyer says, the failure of the scholastic tradition is not seeing knowledge as "something that has to be produced" (70).

If success in school and society means what it meant to Richard Rodriguez in his 1982 Hunger of Memory--that is, the ideal of disinterested knowledge for the

sake of conformity and acceptance--the self must be sacrificed. Quoting Rodriguez, "Once I learned public language, it would never again be easy for me to hear intimate family voices" (in Spellmeyer 29). If our society and its ideas about literacy are to mean an admonition to "suppress feelings and beliefs for the sake of public approval," that will foster an attitude of "calculating alienation" (Spellmeyer 108). But this is the very gulf from which Sufi-Zen-Emersonian action permits an escape.

If only we could learn to facilitate this escape in schools. By now we have learned for sure that certain pedagogical ideas, though well-meaning, are counter-productive. We have learned that we can't first teach the skills in isolation before asking students to practice and apply these same skills. In composition, we have learned that we can't first teach models and then expect innovation. If knowledge is, as according to Spellmeyer, "dialogical from the ground up, then [the demand for imitation before innovation] may ensure the very failure that teachers intend to prevent" (45).

We are learning that the focus needs to be between, in the nexus of the Emersonian "loose fitting" self. We do want to teach creativity, but we have not known how to do so within the context of the classroom. For long we have known that real knowledge is not given, but made--but we have not always acted like it.

The pedagogy of the "place between" is thoroughly spiritual, thoroughly related to the mystic way. We need not apologize for that or try to seem ashamed, within our own academic communities, if our dedication to such a place makes us seem anti-intellectual (which we are not). It is all right for us not to claim to know

answers.

But we will know what to do. What to do, in Spellmeyer's terms, is to learn with our students new and contemporary strategies of resistance (16). We need to work with them to identify a different sort of rhetorical goal, one not talked about in many rhetorics. This goal will not be imitation of some "public language" (Spellmeyer 19); nor, as Poirier has shown, will this goal be to reinforce the modernist focus on definitive and difficult texts. Rather, our goal will be, in resistance to language, the creation of our very own selves.

For decades some teachers have taken all too seriously their perceived duties as, in Spellmeyer's words, "guardians of the public truth" (88), those who have revered the rhetorical models and the cultural ideas which they have treated as holy. But, "If we reject the idea of education as a dialogue between students and teachers," one which allows both groups to affirm "local" and personal knowledge, then we perpetuate the devaluing of lived experience in order to preserve a truth "that belongs to no one, except possibly those authorities who have purchased their speech at a price of a far more pervasive silence" (Spellmeyer 145). As teachers ourselves, we will really mean what we say, when we agree with Spellmeyer, if we are willing to accept uncomfortable pedagogical categories--or few categories at all.

Spellmeyer recognizes as I do that new kinds of writing and reading will be required if we are to overcome our inherited "logophobic" fear of "polyvalence" (56). If, in spite of what we say about the primacy of creativity and the need to empower our students, we remain new critical types, we will be perpetuating in

ourselves the very gulf in experience we had hoped to bridge.

We will remain like those described by Spellmeyer who, "if there is a discrepancy between reasoned scrutiny and decorum, opt for decorum every time" (56). I believe that, if we are to have any real dialogue with students at all, the best subject for that dialogue will be discrepancy itself.

Spellmeyer summarizes all of this beautifully in what I take to be his manifesto early in his Common Ground:

> I will argue for a dialogical pedagogy that recognizes individuals as real players in the social game, conscious agents who are never altogether powerless, unaware, or passive in their relations to others; never just creations, always reflective creators of both their own identities, and the social worlds they inhabit. I hope to suggest that we ourselves have become successful, have gained some measure of control over our life process, by circumventing the ascetic regimen normally imposed upon our students, and that by continuing to impose a regimen of this kind, we do not in fact prepare them for the tasks we have undertaken, but obscure the real sources of our creativity and power. (32)

If we "continue to impose a regimen" of western rhetoric which may emphasize imitation of models or patterns of persuasion--and if we "continue to impose a regimen" of cultural facts embodied in Hirschean lists--we arrive back where we began in Chapter One. You stand with me before my Lebanese students staring into the gulf between; you go down with me, disconsolate, to the border fence between the metaphorical east and the metaphorical west.

Spellmeyer's "manifesto" has two key implications within the context of the Sufi-Zen-Emersonian notions of the place between.

The first has to do with the teacher-person. This person, in Spellmeyer's terms, is not unlike the Sufi master who cannot tell the aspirant what is true for

him or her--only a daily dialogue can occur, the subject of which is the discrepancy between two kinds of knowledge and the creative potential between in meditation, recitation, and prayer. Nor can the Zen roshi lead a single person to enlightenment in the Nothingness of Tao. The roshi can ask and answer questions, write lectures and poems, shock and scare others into illumination. His is the place between Truth and delusion, the Now and linear time. Similarly, the teacher, if considering Spellmeyer in earnest, is much like the Emersonian orator. Such a person is a motivator, agitator, a creator of aphoristic flashes, in modern terms almost a charismatic leader.

That Emerson thought of himself in these terms is best revealed in his two essays called "Eloquence" (1847 and 1867). In the 1847 essay, Emerson argues that an orator must have a kind of physical health or animal heat. He is willing to accept that large numbers of hearers will be influenced first by his character and only secondarily by ideas. Yet Emerson does not in this way emphasize the moral weakness of beautiful speaking or rhetorical effectiveness; rather he emphasizes the grave responsibility of one who has a great theme. Great people or great speakers, he says, do not take but make their themes: "Eloquence is the appropriate organ of the highest personal energy". In the later (1867) essay, Emerson is even more clear about implications for pedagogy. He insists that there can be no real school of eloquence, nor a series of lessons universally effective. Learners must learn eloquence the way they learn to swim--by plunging in.

The second key implication of Spellmeyer's manifesto focuses on students. Students must be free to discover a way to say what they mean (for now)--to read

and write authentically. We will need to learn how to permit students to create their own relevance (of course, again, by learning to occupy the place between). As Spellmeyer concludes in his own book, specialized knowledge can become useful to students only when "our" questions help them to "resolve theirs" (218). This will mean for us a radical redefining of what to do.

Specifically what to do will mean violating many of our cherished inherited pedagogical practices. We will have to call the attention for students, to students of their "situatedness" (Spellmeyer 111); we must encourage their resistance. This will mean permitting what we regard as misreadings of literature. In referring to the opposite "filter, absorb, and digest" model of literacy education, Spellmeyer agrees with Friere--and both are thoroughly Emersonian: that is, students trained in the factory model can never learn to see "inquiry as conversation" (113). We must allow and celebrate in our students any tentativeness or indirection in their ways of writing about their world. And we must let students bring extratextual knowledge to bear on their readings. Students will do so anyway. We must be willing to begin our conversation from there.

In all the above, rather than devoting ourselves to preserving the sameness in the continuity of culture, we need to believe without apology in Emersonian self-reliance and in the creative potential of Ibn 'Arabi's place between. It is not by accident that, in agitating for the power of each person's resistance in language to language itself and to the culture it preserves, Emerson wrote in Nature, aphoristically, that society never advances.

Are we willing to let our students and ourselves really believe this?

Spellmeyer concludes his book not only by expressing such willingness, but also by extending this inclusive good will to the critics. He does so by saying that both Peter Elbow and David Batholomae are right (274). This conclusion reminds me immediately of Mark Wiley's 1990 article called "Writing in the American Grain: Peter Elbow and David Batholomae's Emersonian Pedagogies of Empowerment."

Wiley identifies "writing in the American grain" the way I have defined it, though I see the grain as far more than American: "writing in the American grain is an attempt to see the world with fresh eyes, 'to form an original relation to the universe,' as Emerson insisted (CW 1:7). It relies on the individual experience as the route to achieve authority as a writer, and even though the expression of that experience must be translated into cultural codes, the duty of each writer is to resist the external authority of those codes in order to make language one's own again" (57). Furthermore, Wiley sees the common ground between Elbow and Bartholomae as concern with empowerment in resistance to language.

But Wiley is troubled about ways in which, under the influence either of Elbow or Bartholomae, students will gain authority over their own texts. Rightly, Wiley asserts that authority for Elbow is achievement in voice, a quality which is "describable but not definable" (58); Wiley ascribes to Elbow's work a sort of Emersonian immaturity, as in Emerson's own famous words: it is the wise man's duty to "pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things" (CW 1 20 in Wiley 59). Wiley is also right to see authority in Bartholomae's work as being achieved "both within and against one's community" (Wiley 62) as we struggle to become members of a discourse community. And Wiley is right to see

the common ground between Elbow and Bartholomae as the recognition of the value of "individual experience" (63).

Even so, on the question of how students will learn to achieve and value their own voice or their own texts, Wiley is troubled about issues which only a fuller understanding of Emerson can address--or relating to the cross-cultural and trans-historical aspects of the place between. He is concerned that the struggle for form will never end. **Sufis, Zennists, and Emerson would celebrate this.** Wiley is worried that writing in these American pedegogies, while helping writers to move away from the past and toward the future, take the writer away from the present. Yet this is just what the rhetoric of the place between is designed to prevent. Wiley's concern that students' achieved power can only be temporary (65) is an inevitability that only further resistance can forestall.

Even more troubling to Wiley is that we have found no way to "tell [students] why this authority is valuable" (65). But I think they already know: it is to achieve a triumph over the self, even if only temporarily, the Emersonian "loose-fitting" self again--a rhetoric of personal and spiritual insight in the place between that ameliorates our felt alienation in the gulf between two cultures.

This very issue is absolutely central to all being argued in these related essays. It is essential in answering the rhetor's perpetual searching for what to do. And the path is readily available in Emerson's theory of the **creative imagination.**

The problem here is familiar to anyone teaching literature or writing in the late twentieth century who is aware if the research on literacy over the past few decades. As Wiley too has shown, even apparently contradictory "camps"--in his

article represented by Elbow and Bartholomae--agree that the first hurdle in a holistic language arts class is to help students overcome their borrowed or bureaucratic language: first to recognize the problem and then to have some dialogue about it. The second step, in almost all research going back to Britten's groundbreaking studies, is to make room in our theory and practice for expressive language. Writers need to begin with their personal experience and work from there. Hence Elbow's optimistic work on voice and Bartholomae and Petosky's work on moving from personal language toward membership in a discourse community.

It is beyond that our pedegogies begin to break down. In a writing course that begins with description, journal writing, and personal narrative and intends to move toward more and more public presentation (exposition, argument, even the research paper), for most students the developmental process breaks down somewhere. We don't know just how to give students the power we want them to have over public presentation. We believe students need to include in their own developing philosophies of rhetoric both discursive and presentational abilities. And our teaching from models or patterns of argument produces, for most, less and less voice and more and more imitation.

Our frustration is something Emerson understood too well. Merely to assert that students will find their own way in an open and dialogical environment may not promote success. As Merton Sealts, Jr. reminds us in his "Mulberry Leaves and Satin: Emerson's Theory of the Creative Process," Emerson too "regarded philosophical idealism as unsatisfactory" (81). Quoting from Emerson's Nature,

Sealts reminds us that idealism "leaves me in the splendid labyrinth of my own perceptions, to wander without end," and, worse yet, "leaves God out of me" (CW 1 37-38 in Sealts 81).

In the Emersonian action of the creative imagination, there is an energy or force between person and God exactly like Zen satori and exactly like Ibn 'Arabi's middle world of angels. This is a force which simultaneously streams out of me and into me when God is, in the Now, creating through me and I am coming to God to create Him. This is what Emerson calls utterance; Sealts calls it "outward expression of inward energy" (84); I would add the simultaneous energy of inward expression of outward energy. The rhetoric of the place between must act in this mediation.

Emerson's best expression of this mediation, an expression which draws him closest to the Sufis and to Zen, is in his essay "Art." Emerson uses the term disindividuation. I would argue that the individuation, not argument or analysis or culturally encoded public presentation, is the appropriate end (following, as in the writing class) an understanding of resistance and a freeing up of personal expression.

So much in keeping with the Sufi and Zen "traditions," Emerson everywhere asserts that what any writer or artist produces "is the least part of his work." What matters is, in Emerson's words, "the universal soul" expressing itself through the artist as agent. What the artist must do is (quoting Emerson) "disindividualize himself, and be a man...through whom the soul of all men circulates...and an organ through which the universal mind acts" (EL 2 42-54 in Sealts 84).

The goal of rhetoric when looked at these ways is thoroughly spiritual and to a much lesser extent practical. It is neither to be logical and objective and disinterested in the intellectual sense nor to be expressive and affective in the poetical sense. It is something between, depersonalized and free of illusions--just as it is for the Sufis and the Zennists.

Here is the true meaning, apart from all intellectual discourse about them, of the natural or the transcendental aspects of what we have preferred to call Emerson's romantic rhetoric. He really means it when he says that art is, at the moment of its creation, both an expression of the Divine mind and an achievement of the individual spirit. He really means it (in "Art") when he says that expressions of the "true artist" are "discovered and executed" rather than "arbitrarily composed" (on the basis of imitative models or recognized rhetorical patterns). As long as we insist only on two places, writing as modelled public presentation or writing as spontaneous personal expression, our dialogic discourse with students will not find an energy for the place between where, for Emerson, "every genuine work of art" is rooted in "the constitution of things" and has "as much reason for being as the earth and the sun" (in Sealts 84).

In this regard we are also exactly wrong when we argue that our role as coaches of writers is to help them place themselves fully within the culture and language of their own time and place. They will not themselves feel at home there. If we are to help ourselves and others to make real the place between of the actual angels, we must believe as Emerson did, as a practicing mystic, "that a man never rises so high as when he takes himself out of historical time" (Bevis

49). In the non-dual moments of illumination of the Zennists or the Sufis, or in the moments of illumination which Emerson experienced, only there can one abandon oneself to true spontaneity (Bevis 49), escaping the past and the future in the eternal now.

The rhetoric for this experience is necessarily non western and related, from our western side of the fence, to the metaphorical east. In the words of Bevis, "The Emersonian ecstasy is not induced by linear progressions, may not be comprehended by progressive mental acts, and may not be reflected by progressive models" (50).

If writing has any key purpose for readers, it will be to shock and amaze and maneuver them into ecstasies of their own. It will not be reasonable. And it will not be personally expressive. But it will have active power. This means that the "discontinuous form" (Bevis 53) of Emerson's essays and lectures, Sufi texts, or Zen poems/"lectures" will be a purpose in itself.

Meaning will have no primacy (Bevis 52), but only tone. Purposive discontinuous speech will not arise from "frenzied, irrational...promptings" but from a detached will to hold the mirror to the self. It is to do no less that we are called into the place between. It is to do no less that we are called to act with our students.

Conclusion

Only now are we in a position fully to see how misunderstanding Ralph Waldo Emerson or under-valuing the rhetoric of the East or failing to help students to realize the potential of their own creative power--all are part of the same negative energy. All are part of the same failure to grasp the relationship between rhetoric and the self. All are ways to ignore the reality of the place between.

To see how these failures are related is to be forced to define between what: in rhetorical terms, between the categories of western intellectual analysis on the one hand, and, on the other hand, self-expressiveness as a value in itself.

While it is our obligation thoroughly to teach our students the usefulness of argumentation and logical analysis in the Aristotelian tradition, we must also be willing to explore with them the sense in which these categories are a convenient fabrication. To see the limitations of tropic answers to rhetorical problems would mean to teach resistance to them. Just as Ibn 'Arabi developed a way of writing to resist "the conceptual development of a dialectic carried on according to the laws of Aristotelian logic" (Corbin 74), we can teach ourselves and our students how to judge when such logic meets or does not meet our rhetorical needs. Just as Zennists argue against faith in merely linguistic solutions to problems--demonstrating how representations of reality are easier to accept than reality itself--we can question with our students the discrepancy between real experience and the available ways to talk about it. Just as Emerson may be said to have made his discourse unclear on purpose (when measured against standards of logical

arrangement and amplification), we can encourage the creative power of aphorism, surprise, and revelation.

Not to do so means to accept mere data and the ways people have agreed to talk about that data not only as convention but also, mistakenly, as truth.

Assuming that logical proof is an end in itself, the standard by which all rhetoric is to be judged, ignores Lao-tzu's insights on the futility of contention (see Oliver 235) and forestalls questioning of the artificial and conventionalized aspects of life within one's own intellectual culture. I remind you again of Spellmeyer's view of students:

> Students are often unable to read actively and write perceptively, not because they have to learn the codes of our culture, but because these codes are so familiar--familiar rather than meaningful--that students cannot make the cultural text less commonplace and cliched, in ways that would facilitate the enlargement of understanding. (125)

We must help our students to grasp not only how graded skills and established forms are to be learned but also how to enhance their instincts and intuitions. We can learn to celebrate with them that the struggle for form will never end.

Similarly, we can resist in our lives as teachers and writers the western cultural emphasis on self and self-expression. Correctly and necessarily our process pedagogy begins with self-exploration: we encourage free-writing, journal-writing, autobiographical essay writing, personal exploration, and voice. Correctly we emphasize the importance of personal ownership of writing to prevent mere imitation of models. Yet we may be failing to help these same students to see self-exploration as far more than an end in itself.

Such a failure relates directly to frequent misunderstanding of Emerson himself. Despite Emerson's exhaustive personal energies to inspire and to steer his audiences away from both selfish individualism and greedy mercantilism, he failed to impact the general direction of the American democracy because he was misunderstood. He is himself often accused to this day of fostering both selfishness and commercialism (see Versluis).

Self-knowledge or the celebration of the self's own voice are antithetical to the energies of Sufism, Taoism, and Emersonian Transcendentalism--all three. What Sufis call the Knowledge of the Real is a quality of awareness above all states, whether real or metaphorical drunkenness, which a single self may experience. The entire purpose of Zen meditation is to dissolve the boundaries between self and world in a moment of illumination; even the satori poem itself, the poem which records the supreme moment of awareness, has nothing to do with personal expressiveness.

Likewise, what the rhetoric of Emerson has to teach us has nothing to do with either modernism or romanticism--rather with a way of knowing that precedes or can exist independent from all the -isms which western criticism has invented. Emerson's understanding of the self is the key to how all this is so.

The work of Richard Poirier has already been summarized in ways which show Emerson as antithetical to modernism. In questioning even the possibility of verbal solutions, Emerson denies the modernist veneration for difficult texts. In denying the need to spend one's energy on building up a self from fragments and ruins, Emerson obliterates the sense of modernist technique. And, in Poirier's own

summary, as in Sufi or Zen ideas and practices, Emerson was "antagonistic to any kind of institutionalized discourse about literature or about ideas generally; [he] was antagonistic to 'thinking' as a profession" (50).

Recently, in his American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions, Arthur Versluis' key insight is that Emerson escaped the limitations of romanticism as well. Versluis sees selfhood, the trap of romanticist solipsism, as the distinctive Romantic trait; he notes that by 1850, by which time Emerson had read widely in eastern religions and had begun to transcribe long sections of oriental texts into his journal (66), Emerson would write in Representative Men:

> In all nations, there are minds which incline to dwell in the conception of the fundamental Unity. The raptures of prayer and ecstasy of devotion lose all beings in one Being. This tendency finds its highest expression in the religious writings of the East, and chiefly in the Indian scriptures....Those writings contain little else than this idea, and they rise to pure and sublime strains in celebrating it. (CW IV: 28)

In writing this, Emerson resisted, according to Versluis, the "particularizing thrust" (65) of the Romantic era, that era which explored and celebrated chiefly the self.

If you think it curious for Emerson to write Representative Men as a whole book about individuals if he believed the self is an illusion, do not despair. For, as Versluis reminds us, the first essay is called "The Uses of Great Men"; he quotes Emerson aptly: "There needs but one wise man in a company, and all are wise,--so rapid is the contagion. Great men are thus a collyrium to clear our eyes from egotism, and enable us to see other people and their works" (CW IV: 15). Great men and women do not become great so that they can build up or celebrate the self; rather, they are great in their detachment from self and in the clarity of their

actions.

Chiefly the East taught Emerson the universality of illusion. He learned by this to include the illusion of the self. Versluis' summary is perfect: "Insufficient attention has been paid to Emerson's focus on transcending the self, for it is here, on the poet's illumination or inspiration, that Emerson's works are often actually centered. Pivitol here are [both] Platonism and the Vedanta" (67).

Could this mean anything to us when we go into class on Monday? Indeed. It means that we will start in our pedagogy with autobiography, personal expression, narrative, opening the pores to direct observation. It means that we will also concentrate on work toward analysis and logic and academic research when purpose and audience require those very things. Yet we will continue to struggle to get students from personal expression to analysis; we will ask, with our students, what is between or beyond.

We need to make as our ultimate goal not mere efficiency or competence--not even only the personal voice that Peter Elbow and others celebrate. Instead the goal might be the Emersonian effacement of the self--exploration, ultimately, of language as a tool for Truth, not just a skill but also an inspiration. Emerson in his works is still prepared to show us not how to embrace the self--to explore the psychological depths, to self-help our way into individual wholeness, to live locked into our own mental image of the universe--but rather to rise above the self.

Such is Emerson's Transcendentalism, which cannot properly be called Romanticism at all:

> It is a secret which every intellectual man quickly learns, that beyond

> the energy of his possessed and conscious intellect he is capable of a new energy (as of an intellect doubled on itself), by abandonment to the nature of things; that beside his privacy of power as an individual man, there is a great public power on which he can draw, by unlocking at all risks, his human doors, and suffering the ethereal tides to roll and circulate through him; then he is caught up into the life of the Universe, his speech is thunder, his thought is law, and his words are universally intelligible as the plants and animals. (From "The Poet" CW I:78)

The path to such a rhetoric for ourselves and for our students may be thought to be backwards--through Emerson and into the East. Or it may be thought to be forward--into the future which even now we are engaged in the process of making. Or you may think of it once again as a place between; since really it has nothing to do with time at all--only with assimilation and transmutation--it can be thought to be all three.

It is thus that if we understand Emerson as a man, struggling against the tide of both traditional intellectual structures and the impulse toward self-expression, for whom assimilation of the East clarified an intuition to self-transcendence--only then can we appreciate how vital was his energy even in its partial failure. If, in Versluis' words, he "plundered the world's religious texts for insights, but he seldom did them an injustice in his presentation of them" (78), then we too may be justified in plundering his works as well as those to which his were referents. We would tend only to demonstrate our own misunderstanding of Emerson's works if, either only analyzing them or only expressing our personal reactions to them, we did any less than he did: "He did not simply read the Upanishads [for example], he assimilated and reproduced them" (Versluis 78).

One name for all this is mysticism. But most teachers would have a hard time

allowing it in any discussion of modern pedagogy. Even so, looking at all writing which emerges in the process of self-transcendence, it will not be out of place to speak, as the Sufis did, of "ardent talk." Martin Lings, you may recall, defined the real mystical doctrine as "the summons of the Mind to transcend itself" (63); or: "To be known by God is thus mysteriously to be God" (65). How is this different from Emerson in his journal, writing--again, I remind you: "Who shall define to me an Individual? I behold with awe & delight many illustrations of the One Universal Mind. I see my being embedded in it. I am only a form of him. He is the soul of Me. I can even with a mountainous aspiring say, I am God" (Journals MN V:336).

Emerson knew in both a deeply personal and in a deeply detached way the sense in which the self-transcendent imagination alone can make things real. That reality is denied to any of us only by cutting us off from the language of prophetic and creative power. Emerson would have keenly understood Corbin writing about Ibn 'Arabi: "God describes Himself to us through ourselves" (115). He would have understood Zen resistance to language, if he had known about it, because he has already assimilated it through Hindu scriptures (at the root common between himself and Zen). And this is the very sense in which the ancient texts were not interesting to Emerson for their antiquity: all must be gathered into the here and now.

It turns out, then, that Emerson's enduring problem is exactly our own. If we too, as teachers and students and writers, are to escape accusation as intellectual "colonizers" (Versluis 5), we must deal in practical and concrete terms with the

Emersonian "literary religion" (Versluis 51)--his assimilation and transmutation at the nexus of the disindividualized self, but in language. How are we to turn this literary religion into **actual power** for the here and now? How can we, in our own time and place, transform the good name of intuition into practical deeds?

As for the Sufis, the Zennists, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the transformation of intuition into practical power will center on the role of teachers in learning. Teachers of this type must be spontaneous and, though intelligent and aware of pedagogical concepts, free from conventions, repetitions, and consistencies. While insisting that students read and write, teachers of this type will remember that texts are only tools, forms are necessarily impermanent, and the real subject of education is, as for Emerson and his predecessors, assimilation and transmutation, selflessness and self-transcendence. Teachers of this type will forever struggle to reconcile two facts: (l) tradition is an "encysting of truth" (Versluis 51), whereas the root of real spiritual truth appears at times as a kind of incoherence, or rapture, or even insanity; and (2) in the midst of this apparent chaos of creative power is the reality--forever in the process of being made--of the engendering place between, a place demanding its own language, a place being surely referred to by Emerson in Representative Men: "All philosophy of east and west has the same **centripetence**" (CW IV: 28).

I give to Ralph Waldo Emerson the final words:

> **That which we are, we shall teach, not voluntarily, but involuntarily.** ("The Over-Soul" in Miller, ed. 941)

> **No answer in words can reply to a question in things. It is not in an arbitrary "decree of God," but in the nature of man that a veil shuts**

**down on the facts of tomorrow: for the soul will not have us read any other cipher than that of cause and effect. By this veil, which curtains events, it instructs the children of men to live in today. The only mode of obtaining an answer to these questions of the senses, is, to forego all low curiosity, and, accepting the tide of being which floats us into the secret of nature, work and live, work and live, and all unawares, the advancing soul has built and forged for itself a new condition, and the question and answer are one.** ("The Over-Soul" in Miller, ed. 941)

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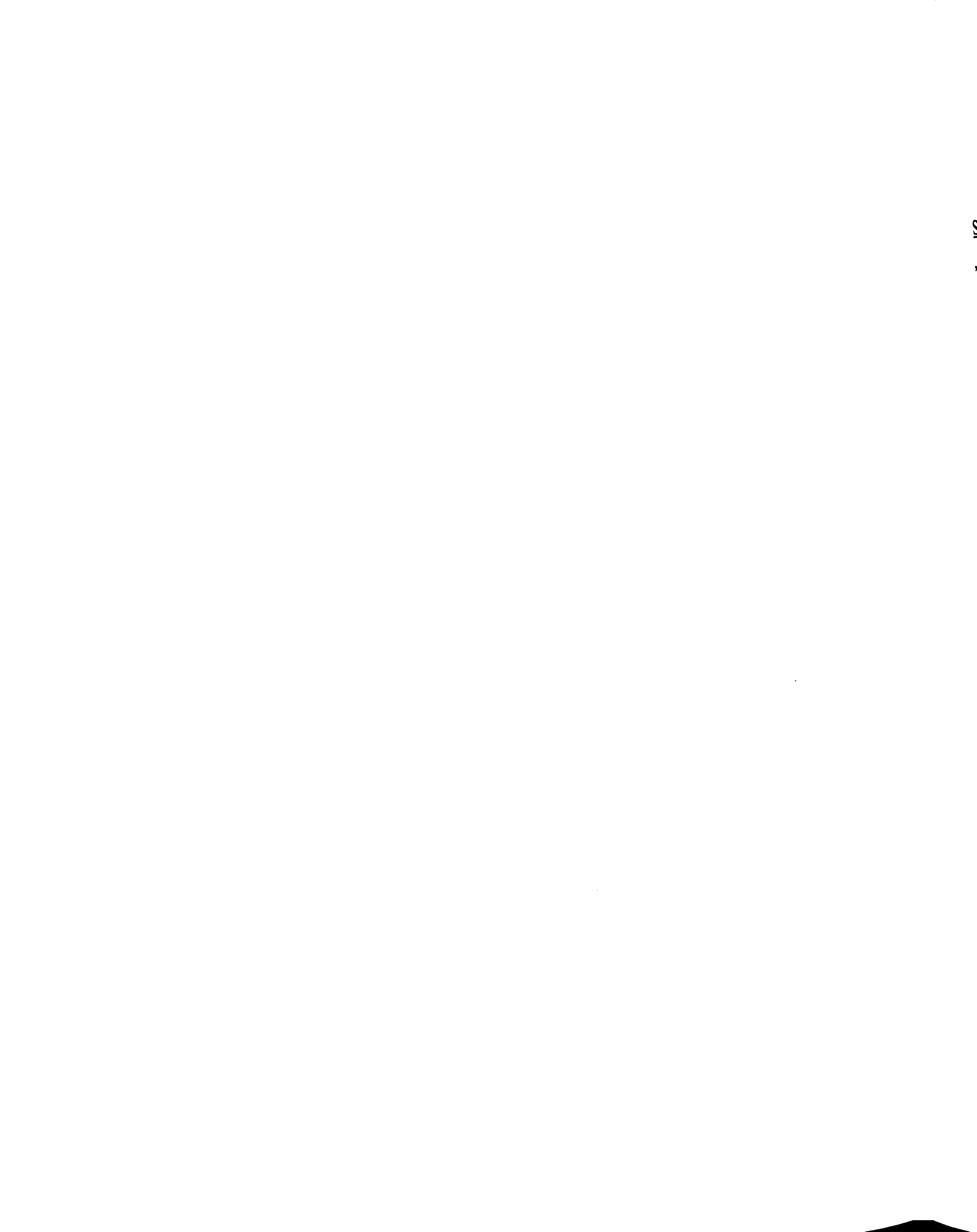

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