

Table of Contents

- [About this Volume](#)
- "Enlightenment East and West: An Introduction to Romanticism and Buddhism"
- Mark Lussier, Arizona State University
- [Essay](#)
- "Shelley's Golden Wind: Zen Harmonics in *A Defence of Poetry* and 'Ode to the West Wind'"
- John G. Rudy, Indiana University Kokomo
- [Essay](#)
- "Blake, Heidegger, Buddhism, and Deep Ecology: A Fourfold Perspective on Humanity's Relationship to Nature"
- Louise Economides, University of Montana
- [Essay](#)
- "Kafka and the Coincidence of Opposites"
- Dennis McCort, Syracuse University
- [Essay](#)
- "Hegel on Buddhism"
- Timothy Morton, University of California, Davis
- [Essay](#)
- "The Tantric Master, Lord Marpa, Twice Dreamt of the Prophet, William Blake"
- Norman Dubie, Arizona State University
- [Poem](#)

Romanticism and Buddhism

[About this Volume](#) | [About the Praxis Series](#) | [About the Contributors](#)

About This Volume

This volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* includes an editor's introduction by Mark Lussier, essays by Louise Economides, Timothy Morton, John Rudy, Dennis McCort, and a poem by Norman Dubie.

The genesis of this collection began with seemingly simple questions the editor asked of himself (and occasionally others), and the works appearing in this volume represent answers offered by insightful and engaged colleagues: "What's going on with Buddhism during the Romantic period? Can and should academic and spiritual practices be unified and interrelated, thereby helping heal an artificially conditioned alienation common within the increasingly corporate academy?" Each one of the essays in this volume argues in different yet interrelated ways for a shared view in Buddhism and Romanticism of forms of suffering created by the self and of the freedom from suffering found in self-annihilation. Emptiness resides in plenitude and solitude, the problematic path for Buddhists and Romanticists alike.

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About the Romantic Circles Praxis Series

The **Romantic Circles Praxis Series** is devoted to using computer technologies for the contemporary critical investigation of the languages, cultures, histories, and theories of Romanticism. Tracking the circulation of Romanticism within these interrelated domains of knowledge, **RCPS** recognizes as its conceptual terrain a world where Romanticism has, on the one hand, dissolved as a period and an idea into a plurality of discourses and, on the other, retained a vigorous, recognizable hold on the intellectual and theoretical discussions of today. **RCPS** is committed to mapping out this terrain with the best and most exciting critical writing of contemporary Romanticist scholarship.

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Romanticism and Buddhism

Enlightenment East and West: An Introduction to Romanticism and Buddhism

Mark Lussier, Arizona State University

Rather than summarizing the essays appearing in this special issue of *Romantic Circles Praxis*, this introductory essay provides a historical context for the emergence of what is now termed 'Buddhism' into European consciousness during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This essay appears in *Romanticism and Buddhism*, a volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for *Romantic Circles* (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University of Maryland.

"Like some recent philosophers of the West, I needed to turn myself toward the East in order to find guides and basic principles of method. . . . I followed the teaching of masters for whom a daily practice—in fact, yoga—was what could help awaken or reawaken and discover words and gestures carrying another meaning, another light, another rationality."

Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West*

"The true artist, monk, and scientist are not searching to grasp knowledge as object, but rather as event."

Arthur Zajonc, *Catching the Light*

1. The topic of the following volume, *Romanticism and Buddhism*, has a relatively short history worth brief consideration relative to the intellectual and spiritual energies expressed in the epigrams by Luce Irigaray and Arthur Zajonc. Like Irigaray, my open and broad inquiry emerged from a coincidence of particular practices and theoretical interests where the fissures cut into consciousness by culture re-fuse division to "reawaken and discover words and gestures carrying another meaning." Like Zajonc, my experience of "knowledge" as dynamic "event" (where "Events in Time" issue forth from the space between "a Pulsation of the Artery" [Blake, *M* 29.2; E 127]), fleeting though it might be, united the personal and professional in ethical commitments (the "pleasure" of knowledge Wordsworth evokes in the 1802 "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* and in language quite compatible with Zajonc [606]). The experience evoked by Irigaray and Zajonc occurs at the spacetime coordinates termed self and represents the continuum where "knowledge [is an] event" through which consciousness "reawakens" to "another meaning, another light, another rationality." This sounds to me as good a description of "enlightenment" as any other, and what Irigaray and Zajonc voice fits well with the definitions of enlightenment current at the beginning of the Romantic period and conveniently codified by Dr. Johnson in 1756: "To quicken in the faculty of vision," "to furnish with encrease [sic] of knowledge," and "to illuminate with divine knowledge" (239). At the beginning of the last intensive phase of encounter between Buddhism and the west during the Romantic era (afterward those relations shift from encounter to mutual interaction), sufficient refinement of western enlightenment epistemology had occurred to provide western philosophy with a glimpse of eastern views of enlightenment. For example, Shantideva in his famous treatise *The Way of the Bodhisattva* describes enlightenment (in terms rather close to Irigaray and Zajonc and easily conversant with Johnson's *Dictionary*) as the state where "beings like myself discern and grasp/That all things have the character of space," the spacetime where "the truth of voidness" resides within and issues forth from "the chasms and abysses of existence" (159).

2. The transference (or perhaps sublimation) of energies generated through the glimpse of these far shores was easily accomplished, since Romantic descriptions of enlightenment offered by, for example, Blake (in *The Four Zoas*) and Shelley (in *Prometheus Unbound*) converge with those found in Buddhist texts emerging in European languages for the first time across the nineteenth century. This coincidence of forms of enlightenment as self-annihilation ripples through all the works in this volume. The genesis of this collection, then, began with seemingly simple questions asked of myself (and occasionally others), and the works appearing in this volume represent answers offered by insightful and engaged colleagues: "What's going on with Buddhism during the Romantic period? Can and should academic and spiritual practices be unified and interrelated, thereby helping heal an artificially conditioned alienation common within the increasingly corporate academy?" My answer began through merging meditative and devotional practices with pedagogical and service commitments, where William Blake's "proverb of hell" served as the ethical foundation for them all: "The most sublime act is to place another before you" (36.17).
3. Around the same time I first asked the question, admitted the motive, and sought to move theory into practice, I met Timothy Morton at the 1995 North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR), and across the next two years and several conferences, whether in Baltimore or Bloomington, our conversations often swirled around coincident personal histories and shared academic affinities within the broad area of "Buddhism and Romanticism." When I was asked to review John Rudy's *Wordsworth and the Zen Mind: The Poetry of Self-Emptying* (SUNY, 1996) for *Romantic Circles*, my sense of growing community and commitment created broadened possibilities, and in a preliminary attempt to put academic flesh on the intuitive bones, I proposed a special session at the 2001 NASSR conference in Seattle, where Tim Morton and John Rudy were joined by Louise Economides in the initial articulation of the issues and authors grappled with through this volume. When I began to receive the essays for this volume, I had two other significant encounters that pushed the work toward its present ripeness. At the moment when the following essays began to arrive, Norman Dubie kindly offered me an autographed copy of his most recent collection of poems (*Ordinary Mornings of a Coliseum*, which includes the stunning "Shambhala" [48-53]), and I asked whether he might want to submit a poem for the volume, given his long-term practice of Tibetan Buddhism and its rippling presence in past poetry. After explaining his exhaustion from his poetic past labor, he said he would consider it but that I should not be overly hopeful. However, within forty-eight hours, he stunned me when he read the first iteration of the opening poem for this volume on my answering machine. As I moved into the editing for the volume, I re-encountered Dennis McCort's *Going Beyond the Pairs: The Coincidence of Opposites in German Romanticism, Zen Buddhism, and Deconstruction* and immediately wrote him to request an essay. Initially, he indicated that, with the exception of an essay on Kafka, he had no work prepared for such an undertaking, and with a sense of loss, I wrote to say that Kafka might fall too far outside the temporal range of the volume. But within forty-eight hours, having been haunted by the intersections such an essay promised, I wrote him again and asked for the essay, and I am thrilled he agreed to join this "visionary company." Rather than rehearse the elements easily discerned from the essays themselves, the remainder of this introduction will provide a context within which readers can explore the resonances at work in the essays themselves as they connect to broader historical and cultural developments mapped in subsequent sections of this introduction. At the outset, readers of this introduction should know that I have cast an intentionally broad textual net (of Indra perhaps), drawing upon works from the two primary vehicles of the dharma—the Hinayana and Mahayana—as well as the three major languages—Pali, Sanskrit, and Tibetan—by which the major sutras were disseminated across southeast, central, and northern Asia and through which the teachings of the Buddha returned to India and subsequently flowed into western consciousness.

II. The Emergence of Buddhism into Romantic Europe

4. Although I have traced elsewhere the punctuated phases of encounter leading to the emergence of Buddhism into western consciousness during the Romantic Age, I will nonetheless provide a brief historical map to provide a better context within which to read the essays that follow (Lussier 1-27). The temporal range Raymond Williams adopted for European Romanticism, approximately from the birth of Blake to the death of Wordsworth (30-2), actually coincides rather well with the textual emergence of Buddhism into western consciousness. Across this period, the religion originating with the enlightenment of the historical being named Siddhartha Gautama evolved from initial western views of a philosophy operating "under the imputation of atheism" (Fields 47) practiced by "Idolaters" (Polo I.219) through the publication of travel narratives recording specific encounters, of summative histories of eastern religions that, for the first time, clearly distinguished Buddhism from Hinduism, and finally of the most important canonical works, beginning with the *Lotus Sutra*. These developments flowed from the related activities of colonialism and empiricism now extended to the world through the application of categorical imperatives energizing its own form of enlightenment in its second, Romantic stage (Brown 38-46). The outward movement of Europeans across the trans-Himalayan and southeast Asian regions generated an influx of manuscripts and books, creating a counterflow of textual materials collected and catalogued on site and subsequently transmitted to European centers of oriental learning, where they were translated, collated, and edited. This dimension of the orientalist project led directly to the flowering of the dharma in Europe during the nineteenth century.
5. Both within the application of practices now termed "Orientalism" during the period and within the academic analysis of those practices in the influential work of Edward Said and his progeny, Buddhism has remained somewhat hidden from scholarly view, and several historical confluences help account for this relative absence. First, as scholarship has long established, long before the moment of heightened contact with Europeans at the end of the eighteenth century, the religion of the Buddha "had ceased to exist on the subcontinent" (Batchelor 232), being virtually eradicated as a practice within India "by the fourteenth century" (Lopez 53) and quite difficult to discern through the sparse architectural remains in northern India and Nepal. This same problem was equally true for the widely diverse sculptural presences of the Buddha and other deities dispersed across the continent in Bhutan, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, China, Japan, Nepal, Siam, Tibet, and elsewhere, since revered figures often "morphed" through cultural contact and appropriation (the best example would be the transformation of the Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion, Avalokiteśvara, into Kuan-yin in Chinese and Chenrezig in Tibetan forms). Second, following "the close of the first stage of encounter, one defined primarily by spiritual colonialism, Japan and China closed their borders to the disruptive Europeans and its Jesuit shock troops" (Lussier 6), and the arena of encounter shifted to the subcontinent and also involved different European nationals, with the England, France, and Russia replacing Italy, Portugal and Spain at the vanguard of contact. Third, as the preceding list of countries confirms, the two major Buddhist traditions—the vehicles of Theravāda (Pāli for "the way of the elders") and Mahāyāna (Sanskrit for "the great vehicle")—were "split" across national colonial lines among England, France, and Russia, again rendering attempts at a summative view extremely difficult (Keown 300, 167). Fourth, the textual body of the dharma was equally scattered across vast geophysical spaces and spread across numerous languages, although those primary to the emergence in Romantic Europe of the major sutras and commentaries defining the canonical literature were Pāli, Sanskrit, and Tibetan. Ironically, then, the textual body of Buddhism was itself a type of counterflow as well, since the dharma returned to northern India through the agency and agents of British authority in Calcutta and often returned along the same paths (e.g. through Darjeeling to Calcutta) through which it was dispersed from its homeland. The process of emergence was quite slow, unfolding with deliberation shaped by complexities, yet by the end of the nineteenth century, Buddhism had not only achieved status as a world religion within the west's sociology of knowledge but had even begun to exert a strange attraction on its occidental other.
6. The contradictions inherent in England's relations with India and its northern neighbors can clearly be

discerned in the complicated history of Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal, who expressed his admiration for the "great originality. . . [and] sublimity of conception, reasoning and diction" of Indian mythology and culture in his preface to Charles Wilkins's 1785 translation of *The Bhagavad-Gita* (Allen and Trivedi 171) yet who was later put on trial for the supposed exploitation and abuse of "his power over the Indian people in Bengal" (Allen and Trivedi 37). Ultimately, in spite of scathing attacks mounted by Edmund Burke and Richard Brinsley Sheridan in the House of Lords, Hastings was acquitted of all charges after a decade-long impeachment trial, but his influence directly impacted policies subsequently pursued by the East India Company. However, even before his impeachment trial, Hastings initiated contact with the high lamas in Tibet through the diplomatic mission undertaken by the Scotsman George Bogle to the Teshoo Lama (Panchen Lama in current parlance), and as Kate Teltscher suggests, the effort "was as much textual as commercial or diplomatic" and was motivated by Hastings's hope to "imprint on the hearts of our own countrymen the sense and obligation of benevolence" such texts might engender (Teltscher 94, 95). However, the hope of establishing long-term relations between Calcutta and Lhasa ended somewhat abruptly when the Panchen Lama and Bogle died "at nearly the same time," which, in the words of Captain Samuel Turner, created "almost insuperable difficulties in the way of re-establishing our intercourse with Tibet, at least for some considerable time to come" (Turner xvi).

7. As most critics of Oriental scholarship acknowledge, the prime mover of the eventual resolution of Buddhism from Hinduism in the European mind was certainly the towering presence behind the Oriental Renaissance, Sir William Jones, although his immediate interests upon arrival in Calcutta in 1783 were the Indian legal system and Hindu mythology (Cannon 194-6; Franklin 84-120). Jones shared Hastings's "respectful and sympathetic response to Hindu culture," for example beginning the study of Sanskrit almost immediately after his arrival, and through these studies Jones generated considerable "cultural empathy" for Indian literature and culture (Franklin 118, 120). In his first year of residency, Jones founded the two most conspicuous vehicles, the Asiatick Society of Bengal and its influential journal, through which Buddhism emerged into European knowledge, a point easily on display in the first issue of the journal, which included materials on Buddhist practices in Ceylon and Tibet. As a result of Jones's efforts, "the nascent field of Oriental philology" began to discover "certain linguistic, historical, cultural, and social continuities between the Orient and Europe" (Makdisi 110), yet the influx of materials also created, as Nigel Leask has documented, "anxieties about the Other" (2) that emerge in a broad range of writing across the Romantic period itself.
8. In spite of his Sanskrit studies, Jones never clearly differentiated Buddhism from Hinduism, since he continued to see the "Sage of the Shakyas" as "the ninth incarnation of Vishnu" (Fields 47), and Buddhism remained somewhat submerged in the literature and mythology of India until the second decade of the nineteenth century, when two individuals with radically different agendas, Brian Houghton Hodgson and Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, codified the canonical literature embedded in Sanskrit and Tibetan and transmitted manuscripts and texts to centers of oriental scholarship in Calcutta, London, and Paris. Known respectively as the "fathers" of Himalayan and Tibetan Studies, Hodgson and de Kőrös provided the linguistic and textual materials necessary for the translation and interpretation of major Buddhist works.
9. The motives of Hodgson were clearly colonial; he obtained a "special license" to enter Haileybury, which "had been founded in 1806 as a college to educate future civilian employees of the East India Company," through the intervention of James Pattinson, then director of the Company itself (Waterhouse 1-2), and during his residency he was befriended and mentored by Thomas Robert Malthus and completed studies by earning "honours in Bengali, Persian, Hindi, Political Economy and Classics—though failing in Mathematics" (Waterhouse 3). Although initially selecting Calcutta for his residency, Hodgson was promoted to Assistant Resident for Nepal shortly after his arrival and transferred to Katmandu, where he remained for almost twenty years, where the study of Buddhism

became "his first interest," and where he encountered "the scholar Amritanada" (Waterhouse 4, 5). Hodgson began to collect Sanskrit manuscripts during this period, leading to the publication of his most influential "Sketch of Buddhism" (a work that cast long yet problematic shadows across the nineteenth century), yet his motivation was not any religious interest in the religion of the Buddha (he often expressed ambivalence in his own published works); rather he sought "to gather materials that would make it possible for others, specifically the members of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, to conduct such an investigation" (Lopez 52). Across his lengthy and distinguished, although somewhat controversial, career, Hodgson accumulated 423 works, and as Donald S. Lopez, Jr. indicates, this textual cache contained "the most important sūtras and tantras of Sanskrit Buddhism, works that in India, and in translations into Chinese and Tibetan, were among the most important in the history of Buddhism" (55). In Stephen Batchelor's assessment, "Hodgson's contribution to Buddhist studies was not his scholarship; his importance lies in having provided the scholarly community with hitherto unknown Buddhist texts" (238). These works were transmitted to a variety of entities and individuals, including the Library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Royal Asiatic Society, but most importantly, Hodgson sent 59 works to Eugene Burnouf, who succeeded his teacher (Léonard de Chézy) to the first academic chair of Sanskrit in Europe at the Collège de France in Paris (Batchelor 239).

10. While Hodgson's motives were clearly colonial, the efforts of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös were decidedly "Romantic," since his was a search for linguistic and cultural origins, rather than colonial gain: "I cheerfully engaged in the study of it [Tibetan], hoping it might serve me as a vehicle to my immediate purpose, namely, my researches in respect to the origins and language of the Hungarians" (Csoma, "Preface" vi). Born in the small Transylvanian village of Kőrös and trained in philology and enlightenment epistemology by Eichhorn and Blumenbach at the University of Gottingen (where he joined two friends in an oath to seek the origins of the Hungarian peoples), Csoma undertook his "epic journey" in February 1819, one of the most arduous ever pursued outside of "official" sponsorship (Lussier 16-9). As his biographer Hirendra Nath Mukerjee relates, he left his small village "before the snows [melted and] only lightly clad as if he intended merely taking a walk," with only "a stick in his hand and a small bundle" of food and paper under his arm (15, 16). After almost two years of travel, primarily on foot, Csoma arrived at the Kashmir border with his meager financial resources exhausted and was offered letters of introduction and supplemental funds by William Moorcroft, a murky, mysterious "agent of the East India Company intent on securing influence in central Asia as a means of thwarting the southward advance of imperial Russia" (Batchelor 235) in the opening phase of what later became known, in Rudyard Kipling's apt phrase, as "The Great Game" (Hopkirk 20-3).
11. Csoma arrived at the Zangla Monastery in June 1823, where he entered Tibetan Studies with the head lama, Sangye Puntsog, who identified Skander Beg (the name Csoma used upon entering the subcontinent) as "a European. The first one, the very first one[,] to reach that place" (Terjék vii). More importantly for the emergence of Buddhism, the source used to teach Csoma Tibetan was nothing less than "the great compilation of the Tibetan Sacred Books, in one hundred volumes . . . styled Ka-gyur" (Csoma *Tibetan Studies* 175), placing him in contact with the entire Buddhist canon preserved in Tibetan. After seventeen months of intensive study, Csoma headed for Calcutta to seek the publication of an astonishing group of completed works, including the first *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, a *Tibetan Grammar in English*, and the massive *Mahavyutpatti* (which offered nothing less than a discursive map of the entire "psychological, logical, and metaphysical terminology of the Buddhists" [Csoma *Tibetan Studies* 20.397]). This last compilation included discussions of the most important works in the history of Buddhism, including "The Four Noble Truths" (Buddha), "The Middle Way" (Nagarjuna), "The Way of the Bodhisattva" (Shantideva), and the "Lamp for the Path of Enlightenment" (Atisha), and although the publication of this work was long delayed, Csoma drew upon his summation in numerous articles published in the major periodicals of oriental studies. Across the next nine years, Csoma often returned to Tibet to continue his studies and finally died on March 24, 1842 in Darjeeling while seeking to enter

Lhasa for the first time. Unlike Hodgson's involvement in colonial machinations, Csoma remained aloof from such activities (for example, he never sealed a single letter in his long residency in the Indian subcontinent), earning the respect of those indigenous to the region, and "On 22 February 1933, Csoma was officially canonized as a bodhisattva in the grant hall of Taisho Buddhist University in Tokyo" (Batchelor 237). As Murkejee notes, this was "the highest praise a man can get in Buddhist terms" (74), since the term *bodhisattva* (Sanskrit for "enlightenment being") designates one who strives for enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, rather than one working toward individual release from the wheel of reincarnation (and this difference defines the chief doctrinal departure between, respectively, the Mahayana and Hinayana vehicles in Buddhist practice).

12. Once the work of Csoma was joined to the work of Hodgson, the majority of elements necessary for the full flowering of the dharma in European thought were in place, since Eugene Burnouf, the recipient of some of Hodgson's manuscripts and aware of Csoma's research publications, was simply the "man best equipped to make sense of them" (Batchelor 239). Burnouf had completed a major study of the other linguistic thread within which the Buddhist canon was preserved (Pāli) and published a dictionary of the language in the 1824. Once his work was supplemented by that of George Turnour, who published a summation of "the Buddhist literature of Ceylon, and who composed in the sacred language of that island, the ancient Pali" (Lopez 54) in 1834, the linguistic pieces were in place. As a preliminary move to publishing major translations of the sūtras, Burnouf published a definitive history of Buddhism in India in 1844 (a work exerting massive influence across the second half of the nineteenth century), and although Burnouf died before it could appear, his translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, published in 1852, became "the first full-length translation of a Buddhist sūtra from Sakskrit into a European language" (Batchelor 241).
13. Burnouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme Indien* offered "the prototype of the European concept of Buddhism" (Batchelor 239) and quickly became "the most influential scholarly work on Buddhism in the nineteenth century" (Lopez quoting Max Müller), first influencing Arthur Schopenhauer and through post-1844 editions of his masterwork *The World as Will and Representation* subsequently influencing Friedrich Nietzsche and Richard Wagner among others. As Schopenhauer admits, his knowledge of Buddhism was incomplete, and his emphasis on "will" and "representation" underwrote his "misreading or misprision" (Bloom 3), thereby skewing his understanding of Buddhist concepts like "empty nothingness" and "nirvana." Yet, through his specific misunderstanding of these concepts, he found them provocative and important, since both concepts were compatible with a mindset where "subject and object no longer exist" (Schopenhauer I.412).
14. Of course, this eradication of dualism lurks at the core of most European Romanticism's refinement of enlightenment epistemology. For this reason, the shift in ethical thought one finds in Nietzsche, where the major problem for philosophy and society alike was not the battle against "sin" (a resistant element from the eclipsed theological episteme that preceded the emergence of enlightenment epistemology) but against "suffering," finds its roots in Schopenhauer's reception of Buddhism:

Buddhism is a hundred times more realistic than Christianity—it has the heritage of a cool and objective posing of problems in its composition, it arrives *after* a philosophical movement lasting hundreds of years; the concept "God" is already abolished by the time it arrives. Buddhism is the only really *positivistic* religion history has to show us . . . it no longer speaks of "the struggle against sin," but quite in accordance with actuality, "the struggle against *suffering*." It has already . . . the self-deception of moral concepts behind it—it stands, in my language, *beyond* good and evil. (Nietzsche 129)

The language Nietzsche draws upon—"cool and objective" and "positivistic"—shows its enlightenment epistemic roots, yet the hammering philosopher's view that all suffering results from "the self-

deception of moral concepts" intersects both Buddhist and Romantic theories of self and society.

III. The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism and Romanticism

15. The issue of suffering and its causes, the focus of Nietzsche's salutary comments about Buddhist thought, functions as "the very foundation" (Gyatso 1) of both Hinayana and Mahayana forms of Buddhist practice yet equally operates in foundational ways within a broad range of Romantic thought as well. As Ken Jones suggests, the tradition of "inconceivable liberation" embedded in most Buddhist traditions (a term borrowed from the *Vimalakirti Sutra*) and "modernity's humanistic project of social emancipation are complementary" (xvi), and numerous Romantic thinkers across both its periodic term and national traditions were motivated to develop an engaged form of philosophic *praxis* that strove to transform both physical and metaphysical reality. Perhaps confirmed through my admittedly all-too-brief historical survey of Buddhism's direct emergence into European awareness during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, anyone seeking direct "influence" between Buddhist thought and practices and those developed within the full range of Romantic thought will quite likely only experience historical disappointment, since the canon of the sutras was simply not available until the second half of the nineteenth century. (Indeed, I have considered this aspect of the topic in two other works, one appearing in the electronic journal *Literature Compass* and the other included in the collection *Interrogating Orientalism[s]*.) After all, even Sir William Jones (who was primarily responsible for launching what Raymond Schwab termed the "Oriental Renaissance") had still not clearly differentiated Buddhism from Hinduism by his death, and such discernment awaited the work published in Jones's influential journal (e.g. by Csoma, Hodgson, and H. H. Wilson among others) and the translation of texts arriving into centers of European orientalism via a strong colonial counterflow of materials. And so, this last section will only gesture at the deeper resonances between the broad terms of "Buddhism" and "Romanticism" by focusing on the nature of suffering and the degree to which the pursuit of enlightenment, either in its eastern or western forms, delivers freedom from that suffering.
16. Buddha's elaboration of the role of suffering was offered seven weeks after his enlightenment, although it took the pleas of "the two highest gods in the realm of samsara [illusion], Indra and Brahma" (K. Rinpoche 13) to overcome the Buddha's initial reticence regarding his ability to teach those "who live in lust and hate" (Bodhi 48, 70). The Buddha's "first formal teaching [took place] at a place known as the Deer Park, in Sarnath near Varanasi, India" (K. Rinpoche 13), and this opening sutra stands at the foundation of all Buddhist vehicles and canons:

Just as one who stands on a mountain peak
Can see below the people all around,
So, O wise one, all-seeing sage,
Ascend the palace of the Dhamma.
Let the sorrowless one survey this human breed,
Engulfed in sorrow, overcome by birth and old age.
(Bodhi 71)

Prompted by Brahmā Sahampati, the enlightened Buddha turned the first wheel of the dharma in order to expound the four noble truths to only "five of his former ascetic companions" (Keown 71), and these truths are based on the recognition that all sentient beings aspire to achieve happiness by overcoming suffering:

1. The truth of suffering ("birth," "decay," and "death")
2. The truth of the origins of suffering ("craving")
3. The truth of cessation of suffering ("fading away," "extinction of craving")

4. The truth of the path beyond suffering ("The Noble Eightfold Path": "right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration")
(Kornfield 28-31)

Commentaries on these concepts literally fill monastic libraries (east and west), but a condensed discussion should provide transition to analogous insights resonating with Romantic literature.

17. Buddhist literature proposes a tripartite structure to the suffering associated with *samsāra* (Sanskrit: Pāli, "flowing on"), "the cycle of repeated birth and death that individuals undergo" (Keown 248). At a fundamental level, all sentient beings share the painful experiences of birth, sickness, old age, and death, and it was precisely Siddhartha Gautama's early encounter with these four universal "ties of life" (Carus 13) that propelled him from his luxurious existence and onto the path of the dharma (Carus 13-25). At a secondary level, the suffering of change emerges through recognition that the temporary relief provided by short-term pleasures eventually undergoes change as well, giving rise to subsequent suffering through the form of grasping at such pleasures. Finally, the third level of suffering of conditioning "refers to the bare fact of our unenlightened existence . . . under the influence" of ignorance of these noble truths (Gyatso 54). This last, broadest view of suffering is directly connected to the tendency of individuals to grasp as fixed and immutable "the impermanent nature of reality" (Gyatso 54-5), an existential misperception that relentlessly generates on-going suffering through the ego's willed ignorance of and resistance to dependent origination (interdependent versus independent existence). Once the first three "truths" are recognized and embraced, then meditative practice would work to re/cognize mind's relationships with itself and all others, therein leading consciousness into nirvana, the state of freedom beyond all suffering inscribed within cyclic existence.
18. Once suffering as boundary condition is perceived and once the role ignorance plays in maintaining suffering is unveiled, the crucial question shifts to the possibility of cessation and the "nirvana" experienced in that cessation. Can one achieve liberation from suffering and what method best assures such cessation? Within Buddhist practice, cessation emerges with the recognition of the impermanent nature of all things, all thoughts, all selves, hence the tendency to focus on *śūnyatā* (Sanskrit: Pāli, *sūññatā*), "emptiness or nothingness" (Keown 282) in some forms of analytic meditative practice. The robust literature surrounding the *Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtras* (*The Diamond Sutra* and *The Heart Sutra*) pursues precisely this "perfection of insight/wisdom" (Keown 218) and "consists of thirty-eight different books, composed in India between 100 B.C. and A.D. 600" (Conze xxviii). Both works are associated with teachings undertaken by Shakyamuni Buddha on Vulture Peak in the sixth century B.C.E., and both aim at nothing "less than the total extinction of the self" (Conze xxix).
19. As well as being one of the first works directly translated into a European language from Sanskrit, *The Diamond Sutra*, which literally translates as "diamond-cutter," also "has the distinction of being the oldest printed book [and] was completed by Wang Chieh on May 11, 868 [CE]" (Conze 75). This work traces the shift of emphasis from individual cessation to the bodhisattva dedication to relieve universal suffering at all levels of existence (from a Hinayana to a Mahayana interpretation), a view apparent in the following response Buddha offers to a query by Subhuti: "As many beings as there are in the universe of beings, comprehended under the term "beings"—egg-born, born from a womb, moisture-born, or miraculously born; with or without form; with perception, without perception, and with neither perception nor nonperception—as far as any conceivable form of beings is conceived: all these I must lead to Nirvana, into that Realm of Nirvana which leaves nothing behind" (Conze 16). This refinement of the four noble truths establishes an "ethos of otherness" wherein "the most sublime act is to place another before you" and also provides insight into the divergent paths taken by Hinayana and Mahayana forms of practice.

20. While *The Diamond Sutra* offers an elaborate and extended refinement on the first turning of the wheel of dharma, *The Heart Sutra* presents the negative dialectics associated with the Buddhist view of "emptiness" in a condensed (and hence dense) formulation, rendering the conception (*śūnyatā*) perhaps the most difficult concept for the initial reception of Buddhist thought in Romantic Europe, due to its seemingly paradoxical path to knowledge. Early in the work, the bodhisattva Avolokitesvara volunteers to explain "the bodhisattva's Heart of Perfect Wisdom which is the Universal Womb of Wisdom" (Kornfield 135) and offers the following phrase: "form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness" (Conze 86). This complex view of the emptiness of forms and forms of emptiness leads to articulate the mantra that stands at the "heart" or "core" of the wisdom leading to enlightenment precisely because it points "beyond": "Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi, Svaha!" ("Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, O what an awakening, all hail!" [Conze 113]). As Paul Williams suggests, the terms of this mantra point to "the Abhidharma [Sanskrit, "higher doctrine"]" wherein is critiqued "the claim to have found some things which really, ultimately exist," and for those who strive "to practice these teachings in meditation and life the requirement of completing letting go [going beyond altogether] . . . is an extremely difficult one [and] very frightening" (48).
21. Not surprisingly, the German revolution in Romantic philosophy at the beginning of the Romantic period, inaugurated with Goethe and Kant and extending through the Schlegels and Novalis to Hegel, elaborated a similar view of required complementarity capable of moving beyond polar opposition. The realization of freedom within the Kantian configuration of consciousness as the experience of "unity in the *existence* of appearances" (Kant 393) arguably provides within late eighteenth century European philosophy the strongest analogue to diverse Buddhist descriptions of enlightenment and certainly requires the necessity of thinking of the self "both a 'phenomenon' and as 'noumenon'" where perceived complementarity requires "a kind of *negative* consciousness" (36-7). Romantic literature is replete with aesthetic examples of this philosophical tenet, whether in Coleridge's recognition of "the one life within us and abroad" ("The Eolian Harp" [28.26]) or Shelley's insistence that subjectivity itself is defined by the "unremitting interchange" ("Mont Blanc" [98.39]) between mind and matter. In its rethinking of European enlightenment epistemology, Romantic thought began to grapple with both metaphysical complementarities and cultural relativities, where the "vital nothingness" discovered at the foundation of both consciousness and cosmos necessarily requires a process of self-emptying to confront the reality of subject as "egoless participant" (Rudy [2004] 20). As Dennis McCort has rigorously argued (see as well [his essay included here](#)), the German Romantic tradition offered "the brilliant if brief climax of the long spiritual development of a world view that was heterodox, though in no way opposed, to the predominantly rationalist outlook of the preceding and following eras" and strove to make, in August Schlegel's phrase, a "commitment to everything" (21, 23) that would lead to "self-realization" through negative dialectics and self-annihilation. Of course, dialectical thought in all its varied vehicles can only lead to G. W. F. Hegel, and as [Timothy Morton's](#) thoughtful and energetic analysis of Hegel's somewhat conflicted reception of Buddhism attests (see below), the very element of emptiness resisted so strongly by Hegel subsequently becomes the very ground of analytic critique for the philosophical inheritors of European Romantic philosophies and practices, from Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to Bohr, Derrida, Foucault, Heisenberg, and beyond (Plotnitsky 7-13, 249-60).
22. Hegel provides an appropriate transition back to Romanticism's version of enlightenment, which is described briefly above and by which the age modifies prior forms of epistemological enlightenment prevalent during the eighteenth century. Certainly, as this brief discussion indicates, great accord can be found between emergent forms of Romantic thought and practice and the four noble truths and the perfection of wisdom derived from *The Diamond Sutra* and *The Heart Sutra*. As the essays in this volume attest, the elements within the German expression of Romanticism provide strong resonance with emergent Buddhism, where writers like Friedrich Schlegel and the Jena group "are seen as 'enlightening the Enlightenment about itself and saving it thus'" (Chaouli 44). This saving of the

Enlightenment involved the eradication of crippling dualism within western thought, a philosophical move conversant with the similar strategy, deployed against binary structuration, pursued much later by deconstruction in general and Derrida in particular (McCort 167-8). Such refashioning of enlightenment epistemology lead Friedrich Schlegel to insist, in 1800, that "in the Orient we must seek the highest Romanticism," and, in 1803, to coin the phrase "Oriental Renaissance" to characterize the reception accorded the explosion of materials arriving in Europe from Asia (quoted in Batchelor 252).

23. One can see the German version of this "highest Romanticism" in the writing of numerous authors. For example, in August Wilhelm Schlegel's 1808 Vienna lectures, he argues for a "commitment to everything" later summed up in Novalis's arresting image of "being": "All being, being *per se*, is nothing but a being-free—a hovering between extremes" (McCort 23, 24). As Dennis McCort forcefully argues, Novalis "holds the self, conceived as an autonomous entity, to be relatively unreal," with the self functioning as "dialectical oscillation rather than discrete entity" (McCort 167), where the poet's view of self exists in relational rather than essential terms: "The seat of the soul is to be found there where inner world and outer world touch. Where they interpenetrate, it is in each point of the interpenetration" (quot. by McCort 31). German Romantic thought sought to overcome the "human drive for fixity . . . that must, finally be relinquished if man is to realize what Nietzsche, in a moment of neo-Romantic illumination, called 'the transvaluation of values,' that is, the equal and absolute value of everything" (McCort 23).
24. In both [Norman Dubie's poem](#) and [Louise Economides's essay](#), Blake is seen as a crucial mediating figure for the volume's concerns, and Blake has often, through his robust and extended critique of enlightenment epistemology, offered direct connections to Buddhist thought, as Allen Ginsberg makes clear in poems and essays (Ginsberg 282-4). To make his connections apparent, Ginsberg points directly to Blake's analysis of "the changes of Urizen" in *The Book of Urizen*, where each age offers "torment," "harrowing fear," "craving," "terror" and leads to states of "dismal woe" (74-76). Blake's *Urizen* offers a severe critique of "the 'rational' pursuit of a self" (McCort 31) through Urizen's illusory vision of "solitary" existence (a sovereign self) and his desire for a reality "without fluctuations" (Blake 71). Blake's antidote to this severe diagnosis occurs rather late in the canon and involves "self-annihilation," with the poet proposing in *Milton* that "the Laws of Eternity [require] that each shall mutually/Annihilate himself for others good" (139.36). Blake's view here clearly intersects the position articulated by the Buddha, where "the annihilation of self is the condition of enlightenment" (Carus 4) yet equally connects with his articulation of an ethos of otherness expressed as early as *The Book of Thel*: "everything that lives,/Lives not alone, nor for itself" (5.26-7).
25. As John Rudy has previously argued, initially through Wordsworth and more recently through other English Romantics (e.g. Blake, Coleridge and Keats), the cultivation of meditative quiescence in the indwelling of Romantic poetry led directly to the implosion of "all potential dualism between self and other" and yielded as its by-product an experience of "the soul's greatness" through "its ability to eliminate itself" (*Romanticism* 40, 78-9), and [here he traces](#) a similar process through Percy Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind." In similar ways, the poet John Keats offers an analogous form of the "no self" state (Sanskrit: "anātman") within Buddhist thought. For Keats, as argued in the oft quoted letter to Richard Woodhouse (27 October 1818)—wherein he stands against the "Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime"—the poet argues that "poetical Character itself . . . has no self," since "it is everything and nothing," and he then argues further that the poet "is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no identity . . . he has no self" (501). Thus, both Keats and Novalis as Romantic authors "inaugurated a certain sense of authorship and, at the same time, in the very same breath, announced the author's imminent demise" (Bennett 55), a view clearly intersecting several strands of argument pursued in all the essays in the volume.
26. Certainly, when exploring the varied types of suffering evoked by Romantic writers, the movement

from "sin" to "suffering" is manifest repeatedly. The period's most overt evocation of an eternal state of suffering, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, precisely positions the origin of that suffering in a willed act of an "independent" self who has forgotten the "reality" of dependent origination. In one of the text's endlessly fascinating nuances, the residual of this knowledge lurks in the crew's "superstitious" belief that albatross and weather are connected (I forgo further commentary here, since I have treated it in more extensively elsewhere). The Byronic mode of Romanticism, as represented by works like *Childe Harold*, *The Giaour*, or *Manfred*, maintains relentless focus on suffering and its subsequent re-inscription through relentless and remorseless self-consciousness (the "self-anatomizing gaze" shared by the Cenci family in Shelley's drama) when the temporary satisfaction of transient pleasures collapses. The "fullness of Satiety" that occurs through running "Sin's long labyrinth" simply leaves Harold "sore sick at heart" (26). The moment that the Giaour realizes that his actions have caused the death of his beloved Leila, he becomes enclosed in "a life of pain" (90), leading to "the grief of years," as he compulsively replays the event (even on his death bed), while for Manfred, his existential state is defined by "Grief" and "Sorrow" that accompanies his inability to achieve "forgetfulness" and "self-oblivion" (125, 128, 129). What Byron's major characters seek yet achieve not is a form of self-forgetting affiliated with "self-annihilation" termed by Geoffrey Hartman "anti-self-consciousness," since "it is consciousness, ultimately, which alienates them [Romantic artists] from life and imposes the burden of a self which religion or death or a return to the state of nature might dissolve" (51). Like Blake, Percy Shelley finds a middle path beyond these ultimately restrictive possibilities, the "perfect symmetry" of seamless interconnectivity between Promethean mind and alterity itself.

27. The type of self-overcoming suggested by Hartman is most prominently displayed in Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, a work that intersects the concerns offered in Blake's *The Four Zoas* but which pursues its aims in a Hellenic rather than Hebraic mythic framework. Yet the work of Shelley that most presages suffering as vehicle of self-realization is "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills," which offers an extended poetic analysis of "the deep wide sea of Misery" we share but which culminates with the realization that shared "love . . . heals all strife" (118.365). For both Byron and Shelley, the Promethean mode provides a vehicle for exploring "suffering," "pain," and "agony" (Byron 15.6; 16.9-10) founded in an ethos of otherness, where the attempt to assuage "the sum of human wretchedness" leads to relentless "torture" (Byron 16.18, 37). In Shelley's more compelling and extended treatment, the bound Titan offers, following the recollection of his curse against Jupiter (where he wishes for infinite suffering for the usurping god), a stunning renunciation that enacts a form of self-annihilation grounded in his own version of an ethos of otherness: "words are quick and vain;/Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine./I wish no living thing to suffer pain" (Shelley 218.303-5). Here Shelley opposes hate with love, a position seen in Blake's earlier argument from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and elsewhere that "everything that lives is Holy" (45).
28. In both Romantic and Buddhist forms, self-annihilation functions as antidote to the cultural reification of an illusory spectre of identity, an essential and sovereign self, that continually creates all the suffering experienced in the world. Of course, this is precisely the truth of suffering resident in the inaugural teaching of the fourth noble truths at the foundation of all Buddhist systems. What the "highest Romanticism" discovers beyond the self is, simply put, everything and nothing. With some shared affinities established, although by no means exhausted, I invite readers to plunge into the works that follow, since each work in the volume argues in different yet interrelated ways for a shared view in Buddhism and Romanticism of forms of suffering created by the self and of the freedom from suffering found in self-annihilation. Emptiness resides in plenitude and solitude, the problematic path for Buddhists and Romanticists alike.

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Romanticism and Buddhism

Shelley's Golden Wind: Zen Harmonics in *A Defence of Poetry* and "Ode to the West Wind"

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Art for Shelley entails a self-emptying exposure to a prior Buddhistic oneness with all beings, an 'origin' dislocated in time and space yet forever emergent in the moment and accessible through poetry as a mode of spiritual practice. This article explores the theoretical features, the practical functions, and the critical implications of this 'origin' through a Zen Buddhist reading of Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* and 'Ode to the West Wind.' This essay appears in *Romanticism and Buddhism*, a volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for Romantic Circles (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University of Maryland.

1. Early in his *Defence of Poetry*, Shelley undertakes to define art in relation to a "principle" of "harmony" that "acts otherwise than in the lyre," the Aeolian image he deploys to explicate his thesis that poetry is "the expression of the Imagination" and that it is "connate with the origin of man" (480). This principle of harmony undermines all notions of perspective in art, all presumptions of there being anything like a separate poetic self or a separate cosmic force creative in itself and inaugural of human productivity. The aesthetic base of this harmony, if it can be said to have a base at all, is meditative unfolding rather than hermeneutic perception. Art for Shelley is a journey from selfhood (a relational mode of subject-object dissociation) to full personhood (an opening process aligned with interdependent origination). The method of this journey is not self-affirmation or self-projection, as the term "expression of the Imagination" may imply, but self-emptying exposure to a prior Buddhistic oneness with all beings, an "origin" dislocated in time and space yet forever emergent in the moment and accessible through poetry as a mode of spiritual practice.
2. We get a glimpse of this journey, as I wish to call it, in the two sentence groupings comprising the four-sentence discourse on poetry at the head of the second paragraph of the *Defence*. The first two sentences offer what for all practical purposes we may call a conventional dualistic framework for understanding poetry, Shelley's term for all art or creative achievement:

Poetry, in a general sense, may be defined to be "the expression of the Imagination": and poetry is connate with the origin of man. Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody. (480)

The compound construction of the first sentence, augmented by the second sentence's image of humanity as instrumental to a variety of inspiriting forces, suggests that art is one thing, humankind something else. Despite the implications of the term "connate" (inborn, congenital), the sentences, taken together, convey a basal dualism reflected in and extended by the effort to define. Shelley, possibly in keeping with the *Defence* as a discourse about rather than a demonstration of poetic theory, employs the language of dyadic construction to explore what must here be perceived as a relationship between creativity and human origin. The wind, as the preferred item in this dual construction, plays upon the awaiting harp, quickening it to "melody." Shelley thus objectifies his subject, creating a perspective necessarily outside that which is to be examined.

3. The second grouping of sentences, however, offers a different strategy for understanding human creativity, one that moves well beyond the relational notion of humankind as an instrument of forces

sympathetic to yet other than itself:

But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody, alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them. It is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined proportion of sound; even as the musician can accommodate his voice to the sound of the lyre. (480)

Shelley's syntax here is noticeably convoluted, confounding cause and effect through reference to a "principle" that "produces" harmony "by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them." The internality of the process is displaced. The "sounds or motions" discerned as functions of the harp are depicted as adjusting paradoxically to the very "impressions which excite them." The two dimensions of Aeolian activity—functional adjustment and inaugural impulse—arise integrally, as if from within each other. Additionally, as the "impressions" which strike the chords are themselves conceived as both "external and internal" to the lyre, to recall the earlier grouping, the locus of adjustment is itself displaced into an indeterminate rhythmic activity. There is, as it were, adjusting, but no separable object that is doing the adjusting. One cannot find here a projective subject to range against an object or, conversely, an inspiring object to range against a passive subject. The "proportion of sound" itself may be "determined," as Shelley puts it, but its "origin," to use his earlier term, is mysteriously hidden in the activity it appears to excite. The principle of harmonic accommodation adumbrated in these sentences offers an image of humankind, not as a separate instrument over which inspiring forces play, but as a displaced process of interactive creativity inclusive of yet beyond the dyadic configurations of wind and harp, external and internal, self and other, and, most importantly, beyond the dual notion of poetry and humanity as related forms rather than as mutually pervasive events.

4. The problem here is that the principle of harmony specified in this passage as a condition of unity beyond the melodic constructions of the harp is an enacted process: it "acts," to recall the third sentence, and "produces." It does not, however, remain stable enough for either the poet or the reader to apprehend it existentially in a discursive context, a point Shelley seems to be making when he says, later in the *Defence*, "Every original language near to its source is in itself the chaos of a cyclic poem: the copiousness of lexicography and the distinctions of grammar are the works of a later age, and are merely the catalogue and the form of the creations of Poetry" (482). Discourse can talk about the interactive process of accommodation suggested earlier in the *Defence*, but the closer it comes to the "source" of the process, the closer it also comes to what Shelley calls "the chaos of a cyclic poem." To the mind seeking a definition of what at its origin is a process of mutual disappearance of one thing, say wind, in another, say "lyre," the preoccupation with form, the melody indicated in the first grouping of sentences, must give way to participation in the "chaos" of the creative process itself, enacting through reading what the poet does in writing. And what the poet does is to enact a displaced spirituality. "A Poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one," says Shelley later in the *Defence*; "as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not" (483). Like the displaced internality affirmed earlier in the mutual adjustment of wind and harp, the poet is himself displaced in time and space. Without "time," "place," and "number," he is without perspective, literally beyond the proverbial fulcrum by which he would move the lever of his understanding.
5. What Shelley offers in place of such understanding is a holistic mode of life itself enacted through image. "A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth," he writes elsewhere in the *Defence* (485). Such life, however, is not available to us through a stable perspective outside the interactive dynamics of a unitary, ongoing creativity. A "poem," he says in explication of the theme of eternity expressed above, "is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human

nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds" (485). Shelley's image of the mind of the creator as reflected in "all other minds" finds an illuminating analogue in Hua-yen Buddhism—Fa Tsang's Hall of Mirrors. (Hua-yen is "one of the five traditionally recognized schools of Zen" [Ferguson 317].) Affirming one day that "One cannot really understand Totality in an immediate sense before reaching Enlightenment," the Tang Empress Wu asks the Buddhist master Fa Tsang (A. D. 643-712):

With your genius, however, I wonder whether you can give me a demonstration that will reveal the mystery of the Dharmadhatu ["the Infinity and Totality of the Buddha's Domain"]—including such wonders as the "all in one" and the "one in all," the simultaneous arising of all realms, the interpenetration and containment of all dharmas, the Non-Obstruction of space and time, and the like? (Chang 23)

Fa Tsang responds by building a room lined with mirrors on the ceiling, the floor, all four walls, and in the corners. He then places in the center of the room an image of Buddha "with a burning torch beside it" so that in "each and every mirror" one finds "reflections of all the other mirrors." Asserting that "The principle of interpenetration and containment is clearly shown by this demonstration," Fa Tsang explains that "These infinite reflections of different realms now simultaneously arise without the slightest effort; they just naturally do so in a perfectly harmonious way. . ." (Chang 24). The harmony that Fa Tsang remarks expresses the Zen Buddhist understanding that mind as the condition of "Enlightenment" Empress Wu seeks is not limited to individual skulls. Explaining that "the mind is timeless and permeates all" and that "Its function is not merely that of perception and cognition," the nineteenth-century Japanese Soto Sect priest Tanzen asserts that "It [mind] is limitless, containing all phenomena—mountains, rivers, the whole universe. A fan can soar skyward, a toad fly, yet never outside the mind" (Stryk and Ikemoto 91). In Fa Tsang's demonstration, mind and form, like hall and mirror, implode upon each other. The individual mind both contains and reflects all things as any given form both contains and reflects all other forms.

6. Shelley's perception of a poem as the "the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth," together with his notion of "the mind of the creator" as imaged in "all other minds" during the act of creation, qualifies, in the manner of Fa Tsang's demonstration, mind and form as a creative interactive process both reflective and productive of a dynamic unity at the base of life. While the forms remain stable, the endless reflection of form in every other form keeps the perceiving eye in a state of endless motion. It is not motion, however, that impels us to look always to the future. Nor is it motion that impels us toward the past in quest of the elusive origin "connate" with poetry. Rather, it is motion in which origin, as well as past and future, is always here in the present through the mutual reflection and interaction of each form, or poem, as creative process itself. As the mind of the creator is a moving composite of actions reflective of and implicate in the minds of all others, therefore without beginning and end, there is no beginning and no end to creativity. Creativity subverts linearity through what Fa Tsang calls the "principle of interpenetration and containment" (24)—what Shelley, I believe, is affirming in the cyclical claim that a poem "is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the creator, which is itself the image of all other minds" (485). For Shelley, form and function, or form and action, to use his vocabulary, are mutually embedded through an originative process of interpenetration as a mode of mutual containment. Each form reflects all other forms, and each form contains all other forms as the mind of the creator both reflects and contains all other minds. The Japanese Zen philosopher Nishida Kitaro sees this process in terms of interactive consciousness itself: "The act of consciousness consists in this dynamic interpenetration of subjectivity and objectivity" (84). The journey from melodic constructiveness to harmonic oneness accrues through a process of opening upon origin, or "source," as itself the endlessly shifting, endlessly emergent containment of one thing in and as all other things. One journeys to such an origin only in the sense that one encounters it as already existing at the base of one's being

—"perhaps within all sentient beings," as Shelley puts it—and as available through the process, decidedly paradoxical, of engaging in oneself the very forms, the very melodic constructions, one must necessarily get beyond.

7. With few exceptions, however, Western critical thought has difficulty understanding this principle of mutual penetration and containment in creativity as the actions of a vital, though centerless, unity. Jerrold E. Hogle, for example, in a study significantly entitled *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of his Major Works*, articulates the importance of action in Shelley. But, as the subtitle of his study indicates, he comprehends the process in the dualistic terms of transference and development rather than of mutual containment. "There is no 'undifferentiated unity' from which Shelleyan thinking or writing develops," writes Hogle. There is, rather, what Hogle calls a "motion between at least two 'externalities.'" Closer in understanding to the dyadic fluctuations implicit in melodic constructiveness than to the multidirectional accommodations of codependent harmony, Hogle's concept of "motion" views Shelleyan process as "a drive toward a counterpart rising ahead of it and a harking back to a different one receding in its wake." The "harking back" that Hogle affirms, however, does not result in a mode of absolute containment of mutually creative minds in the present. It contributes, rather, a unidirectional "drive" toward an ever-receding future: "It seeks a future relationship that may carry forward a portion of a previous one now outside it and already dissolved" (10).
8. While Hogle's notion of a decentering process at work in Shelley's practice goes a long way towards explaining the poet's railings against what Hogle calls "a self-contained Immanence" (6), it does not appreciably alter our sense of Shelleyan "harmony" as a bridged togetherness of self and other, inner and outer, past and present. There is yet for Hogle's Shelley a power, "an 'invisible influence,'" causing all these "fadings and changings." This power, according to Hogle, "is the permanent, though self-concealing, self-mover causing all these transpositions, and it is the actual movement from state to state that turns one coloration into another without revealing any self-contained point of departure (any 'seed' leading to the 'flower' and its changes)" (11). The poet in this state of continual transition toward the future is forever divorced from the present, even from himself, moving like a latter-day deconstructor from one interpretive perching point to another in a process of endless deferral.
9. Subsequent commentaries seem for the most part to confirm and extend this fundamentally binaristic vision of Shelley's life and poetry as a mode of endless perceptual quest rather than of existential fulfillment in the eternally unfolding originative moment. Kathleen M. Wheeler, for example, attempts to substitute the term matrix for center in dealing with Shelley's philosophy. But in so doing, she comes dangerously close to denying the poet's preoccupation with origin: "In Shelley's matrix or field theory of consciousness, there is no centre, no origin. . ." (14). There are instead for Wheeler various "centres" that work in relationship with equally various "circumferences." This paradigm frees us from the notion of a "self-contained Immanence," to recall Hogle's terminology. But it does not free us entirely from the dualism, admittedly subtle, of the centering process itself and the attendant notion of a projective subject located in time and space. Concomitantly, the process of circumferencing, however shifting and variable it appears, does not elude the notion of containment as boundary. Origin as a process of endless unfolding gives way in critical discourse to variable demarcation, the process of a perceptually based constructivism preoccupied with definition rather than with existence.
10. Given the force of these binaristic wrasslings, as we might call them, it is not surprising to find a recent commentator, Tim Milnes, arguing that Shelley maintained a kind of "duplicity" regarding the entire question of epistemic centers: "like many modern 'ordinary-language' philosophers he maintained a patient indifference or double-mindedness concerning the relation between the fixed 'centre' of knowledge and an impermanent 'circumference' of experience" (5). Despite Shelley's claim in his letter to Medwin that his "mind is at peace concerning nothing so much as the constitution & mysteries of the

great system of things—my curiosity on this point never amounts to solicitude" (qtd. in Milnes 5), Milnes insists that "At the same time, his curiosity never waned into insouciance, but mediated between an inherited Cartesian epistemic imperative to seek a (perhaps unattainable) ground for a knowing relationship with the world, and an emergent view of our relationship with the world as one which was not solely or primarily predicated on *knowing*" (5; italics Milnes's). The "peace" that Shelley remarks in his letter to Medwin, a condition arguably resonant with the Aeolian "harmony" mentioned in the *Defence*, is explicated in terms of mediation and doubleness, idiomatic initiatives that rely on a presumed distinction between "knowledge" and "experience" and that by their very nature subvert the implicit oneness Shelley affirms at the base of his practice when he avers that "poetry is connate with the origin of man."

11. If we are to appreciate fully the "harmony" of his poetic theory, we must, I think, read Shelley in two directions at the same time. Having moved, for example, from the first two sentences of paragraph two of the *Defence* forward to the second two, we are invited to move backward to and through the first grouping to live, rather than simply understand, Shelley's notion of origin. If poetry is indeed "connate with the origin of man," it is of the nature, not only of human life, but of life itself. And life itself, as Mark Lussier reveals in a recent study of Romantic dynamics, is for Shelley not a linear progression from one point to another but a process of "rhythmic oscillations" depicted in the emerging science of Shelley's day as wave theory. "This rhythmic presence, shared by cosmos and consciousness alike," writes Lussier, "allows Shelley to argue that: [Poetry] 'is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge . . .'" (163). Like centering and circumferencing, harmony may act "otherwise," as Shelley puts it, than melody. But it nevertheless embraces and folds into melody as melody, rightly encountered, opens onto a prior and enabling harmony. It is the aesthetic counterpart to the cause-effect process in Fa Tsang's Hall of Mirrors. "Fa Tsang held that earlier and later events mutually require each other," writes Charles Hartshorne. "Effects are as necessary to their causes as vice versa" (64). A truly oscillatory process is one in which both dimensions of aesthetic experience—melodic constructiveness and harmonic priority—die into each other as the creative mind—a mind continuous, as Lussier affirms, with the universe—experiences its own creativity as a mode of eternal fading or dying. "A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry,'" writes Shelley later in the *Defence*. "The greatest poet even cannot say it: for the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness" (503-4). Neither the wind nor the "transitory brightness" it appears to inspire can be separated from the mind, the "coal," that is simultaneously producing and undergoing the experience. As Shelley writes in yet further explication of the process, "this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure" (504). As the very coloring of a flower is itself the functioning of the flower's emergence, so fading, transitoriness, is the function of its creativity. But creativity, the ambient field of a mind continuous with the universe, is eternal. We die in creativity not to be reborn in another form but to manifest as none other than the universe itself. Fading is the function of creativity, which is in turn the eternally unfolding collyrium, the necessarily "transitory brightness," of our inherent oneness, or original harmony, not with but as the oscillatory cosmos. Consciousness located in a separate self must of necessity remain "unprophetic either of its approach or its departure." The creativity Shelley is describing occurs in the realm of no-self, or non-self, a place, if you will, where death is neither loss of one state nor transport to another.
12. Nowhere in the Shelley canon do we see this process of creative death enacted more forcibly and succinctly than in the famous "Ode to the West Wind." Comprising both a perceptual and an experiential context for understanding the poetic principles set forth in the *Defence* (the "Ode" was composed approximately a year and a half before the *Defence*), the first two tercets of the last stanza of the "Ode" reveal the poet as both a suppliant and an intendant of the West Wind. The mode of this interactive dynamic is a displaced voice whose movement from preoccupation with lyric expression to concern with harmonic oneness forms around a generative meditative self-emptying that illuminates

the spiritual features of the journey implicit in the second paragraph of the *Defence*. Addressing the wind, Shelley says:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one! (57-62)

We cannot find in this passage a still point, a center, from which to launch an expedition into understanding. Like a hall of mirrors, Shelley's poetry teases the observing eye into endless motion. But the motion is not linear, moving from one point to another. Nor is it eschatological, moving from a presumed beginning to an expected end. Rather, the motion here is all interanimate. The death implicit in the falling leaves is at the same time the voiced life of the forest upon which the wind plays. Harmony is tumult. Sadness converges into "Sweet," and the plaintive note of longing in the voice of the suppliant is inseparable from the persistent imperative in the reiterated "Be thou." To be the lyre is to be the wind itself. To be the wind is to be empty of all abiding form while at the same time inclusive of, indeed productive of, the very forms that reveal it. Caused by the rotation of the earth, which is itself caused by the universe, invisible, unheard, unfelt, literally unperceived except through the motions, the tonal variations, and the sensations produced by the objects upon which it plays, the wind is at once all things and no-thing in particular, a "cyclic" event without beginning and end. To be the wind itself rather than to become one with it, as a dualistic frame of reference might impel us to infer, is to be, in the moment of creativity, nothing less than the universe itself. It is to move beyond the melodic configurations of metaphor and transcendence to the harmonic empty field of generative oneness as all things. One emerges, or opens oneself, as creativity in the mode of each thing's dying into all other things and of all other things' eternal dying into each thing. Or, as the famous *Ocean Seal* of Hua-yen Buddhism expresses it, "In One is All, / In many is One." Beyond all notions of inaugural force, "One is identical to All, / Many is identical to One" (qtd. in Odin xix).

13. In Zen terms, Shelley's "Be thou me, impetuous one!" expresses the central principle of Buddhist metaphysics:

Here, O Sariputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness is no other than form, form is no other than emptiness; whatever is form that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness that is form. The same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness. Thus, O Sariputra, all dharmas [teachings] are empty of own-being, are without marks; they are neither produced nor stopped, neither defiled nor immaculate, neither deficient nor complete. (Conze 140)

Known as the *Heart Sutra*, this passage, recited daily in Zen temples throughout the world, incorporates the Buddhist principle of impermanence—of all things being in a state of eternal change—to advance the notion that all things are empty of abiding form yet implicate in all other things. Emptiness, therefore, is not absence, the nihilistic surmise by which a dualistic frame of reference might understand it, but, in the words of Masao Abe, present patriarch of the Kyoto School of Zen Buddhism, "true Fullness" (Abe 10). The *dharma*, the teaching by which this principle would be understood, is at one and the same time the practice of emptiness embodied in the forms themselves (Robinson, Johnson, and Thanissaro 324). To understand emptiness, one must practice emptiness. To practice emptiness, one must allow oneself to be all things. "Emptiness empties itself," writes Abe, "becoming non-emptiness, that is, true Fullness" (10).

14. Given the force of these interactive dynamics, the central question for Buddhists and for readers of Shelley alike must of necessity be one of methodology. How does one be the emptiness, be the wind, in a context that moves beyond all modes and forms of dualistic understanding? Shelleyan criticism tends to answer this question in terms of transcendence. "The man rises from his state of prostrate surrender to join himself to the force of the wind," writes Irene H. Chayes, "master it—fulfilling his [Shelley's] boyhood ambition to 'outstrip' it (ll. 50-51)—and turn it into an instrument of his own." The process, for Chayes, is one of simple inversion: "Passive becomes active and active, passive; agent and medium, performer and performed upon, change places" (Shelley 623-24). The result of this inversion is for Chayes a new transcendentalism, one in which "the man raises himself to a level above both the human and the mundane natural" (Shelley 624). A similar dualism informs Richard Cronin's thesis that the poem expresses "a contrast within itself between rigid order and uncontrollable energy" (232). Reinhard H. Friedrich, writing a few years later, avers that "The last two stanzas of the 'Ode' intensify the dual states of despair and hope that are characteristic for the prophetic and visionary experience, but their passionate urgency applies most strongly to the prophet-poet himself who yearns for release and transcendence" (167). Another critic, Simon Haines, views the final section of the "Ode" as exhibiting "something of the odour of megalomania, the sheer desire for power without the limiting sense of moral fallibility" (161). Recent studies of the Asian influence on Shelley continue a line of dualistic commentary inseparable, perhaps, from Western epistemic traditions.^[1] "Shelley's prayer 'make me thy lyre' presents the wind as a singer," writes Asha Viswas. "The poet wants to be a passive instrument of this singer." Comparing Shelley to the "poet seers" of Vedic lore, figures who "pray to the Maruts [phenomena of nature] to spread their hymns far away," Viswas affirms for the poet a condition of eternal "desire" as a transcendental base for his relationship with the world. "Thus the structure of a poet's desire never changes. It transcends time and space" (92). Such transcendence, however, serves only to leave the participant in yet another relational field—a new and higher condition, perhaps, but one that begs endlessly for further resolution.
15. For Buddhists, there are no limits to the process of identification, of opening upon interdependent origination as the grounds of one's being, and no authoritative dialectic by which the act may be systematized. Unlike other spiritual traditions, including Gnosticism, Pantheism, and forms of Christian apophasis and *via negativa*, the Buddhist understanding of oneness does not rely on the monotheistic perception of a centrally located source or an indwelling force or principle that acts to create coherency. "Monotheistic oneness does not include the element of self-negation and is substantial," writes Masao Abe, "whereas nondualistic oneness includes self-negation and is nonsubstantial" (24-25). As such, Buddhism offers a generative alternative context for helping readers explore and understand the full theoretical implications of mind and form as the moving, integrative basis of creative enterprise.
16. Zen Buddhism, which emphasizes meditative self-emptying as a harmonizing end sufficient unto itself, offers an equally generative alternative context for helping readers understand the practical dynamics of the interanimate oneness at work in voidist documents and acts. The oneness of "One is identical to All, / Many is identical to One," to recall the *Ocean Seal*, inheres in a monadic experience beyond representational logic. "Truth simply can't be re-presented," writes the modern Zen priest Steve Hagan (5). As a Soto Sect practitioner, Hagan is affirming the principle of oneness iterated succinctly in the School's leading Japanese philosopher, Dogen Zenji (1200-1253): "We have to accept that in this world there are millions and millions of objects and each one respectively is the entire world" (Cleary, *Timeless Spring* 12). Acceptance inheres in identification rather than in accession to a principle of oneness or in an individual's mystic joining with a perceived force or power. Zen meditative practice is particularly useful here in helping us understand that Shelley was already the wind prior to his appeal. The answer to the question "How does one be the wind?" lies not in perception—that is, in the dual frame of reference by which one seeks that which is susceptible of definition, therefore separate from the seeker herself—but in the continual practice of self-emptying as an end in itself. The lesson

surfaces with remarkable clarity and precision in the twenty-seventh case of *The Blue Cliff Record*, a major training manual for the Rinzaï (Chinese, Lin-chi) tradition in Zen Buddhism. The case revolves around a conversation between the tenth-century Zen master Yun Men and one of his disciples: "A monk asked Yun Men, 'How is it when the tree withers and the leaves fall?' Yun Men said, 'Body exposed in the golden wind'" (Cleary and Cleary 176). Variant translations depict the master as responding with "That's wholly manifest: golden Autumn wind" (App 131) or simply with "Golden Wind!" (Shimano 23). The disciple's question to his master is, in the words of his latter-day translator, "What will happen when thoughts, ideas, opinions, emotional reactions, psychological problems, attachments, expectations, life, death, sickness, and old age all fall away and our minds become bare?" (Shimano 24). The master's response, *tairo gimpo* in Japanese, may be rendered loosely in English as "become the living body of the golden wind" or "manifest golden wind as yourself" (Shimano 24). The term *tairo* is both indicative and imperative. One must be literally the golden wind of absolute emptiness (freedom from such attachments as those listed above) in order to be consentaneously the absolute fullness of life in all its forms—the "Totality" of "Enlightenment" Empress Wu asks Fa Tsang to demonstrate. Eido Shimano Roshi, aware of the complexity of the term *tairo*, does not attempt to translate it directly. Instead, he translates the master as saying simply, "Golden Wind." The wind embodies for Shimano both the ontological and the epistemological at once: it is what one is seeking to be, and it is simultaneously the process of knowing by which one will become it. "Golden Wind blows away the monk's streams of delusions," writes Shimano, while at the same time "perfectly revealing" the master's "own state of mind" (25), the state of perfect selflessness and oneness with all things. Put another way, we may say that it is what Shelley means when, to recall the *Defence*, he says that "A Poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not" (483).

17. To be empty of thought and yet to be in a state of "conceptions," as Shelley calls it, a state in which "time and place and number are not," is to be free of thought as representation. Thought as we know it must die in the very act of its being deployed in order that our original nature, what Empress Wu refers to as "Enlightenment," may manifest. The modern Zen Master Bernie Glassman states the case as follows:

Intrinsically, we are enlightened, we are the Buddha. Not just us, but everything—sticks, flowers, trees, stars. But experientially, we are not enlightened because we have yet to experience this fact. Without such experience, without such a realization, the intrinsic, though real, is just words to us. (16)

Getting to this state of "realization," of literally making real our "origin," to use Shelley's vocabulary, requires that we give up our ideas about reality. "Whatever notion we may have about emptiness is not emptiness," writes Glassman, "but merely an idea of emptiness." In giving up our ideas about reality, we do not come to see another reality. Rather, as Glassman puts it, combining the indicative and the imperative, we "Just see everything as it is instead of the concept we have of it." If we can see that "The concept is not the thing itself," we will, in Glassman's terms, see "This world as it is, and that's what emptiness means" (18-19). Thoughts, to put it another way, must die in the very act of their emerging so that the thinker may see that which he already is.

18. Shelley affirms the same principle, I believe, when in the final lines of the "Ode" he says to the wind:

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

Be through my lips to unawakened Earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? (63-70)

What is perhaps so difficult for Western readers to understand is that the act itself of dying is the act of awakening. William Keach, for example, offers a reading of these lines that accepts "death and change," but he sees the process in the dual terms of triumph and loss, "the fierce triumph of temporal life to which imagination and desire and will themselves belong; that is what Shelley's style works persistently and brilliantly to realize" (40). Death in creative awakening, however, or death as a giving up or a letting pass the very thoughts our minds are forever conjuring, is not a matter of triumph and loss. It is, rather, the actual manifest oneness of the universe itself. This manifest oneness is for Shelley a matter not of belief but of awakening practice, a being "through my lips" the awakening of "Earth" itself, not just "mankind."

19. From the Zen perspective, the lesson on practice as itself the awakening of the earth surfaces with remarkable poignancy in yet another Zen anecdote involving wind:

As Zen master Pao-ch'e [n.d.] of Mount Ma-ku was fanning himself, a monk came and said, "The nature of wind is permanently abiding and there is no place it does not reach. Why, master, do you still use a fan?" The master said, "You only know that the nature of wind is permanently abiding, but you do not yet know the true meaning of 'there is no place it does not reach.'" The monk said, "What is the true meaning of 'there is no place it does not reach'?" The master just fanned himself. The monk bowed deeply. (Yasutani 106-7)

Commenting on the monk's first question, Hakuun Yasutani says that "the spirit of the question is, 'since sentient beings are originally buddhas, why are practice and realization necessary?'" (Yasutani 97). The monk understands, as all students of Buddhism would, the lesson iterated so bluntly in the important *Nirvana Sutra*: "All beings have the Buddha-nature." What he does not understand is the more existential affirmation, as conveyed in Zen master Dogen's revisionist translation, that "*entire being* [Japanese, *shitsu*] is the Buddha-nature" (61). Popularly rendered as "All beings *are* the Buddha-nature," the revision cuts to the understanding that Buddha-nature, rendered frequently as "original nature" or "original face," must be lived beyond its representations and its meanings as conveyed in texts and teachings. Addressing the second question, in which the monk asks Yun-men the "meaning of 'there is no place it does not reach,'" Yasutani explains that "his real question" is "'What is this buddha-nature with which we are originally endowed?'" (Yasutani 97). The monk is obviously having difficulty getting beyond the dual frame of reflective thinking with its tendencies to definition rather than lived experience. In remaining silent and continuing simply to use his fan, however, the master, again according to Yasutani, "exposes his buddha-nature and thrusts it forth. He thrusts forth *muji* [nothingness, emptiness]; he unsparingly reveals his original face" (Yasutani 97). He abandons definition, together with the entire framework of representational thought, for the simple "act," to recall Shelley's term, of harmonic oneness. Practice is the evocation of oneness.

20. Shelley's insistence on "incantation" rather than on interpretation as the means of approaching his poem, together with his concluding question about winter and spring, is a variant of Pao-ch'e's fanning. Shelley is enacting rather than simply representing the "origin" he will affirm later in the *Defence* as "connate" with poetry. He is asking the same of his readers. Denied the reassurance of a definitive response, we are invited to go back through the poem to engage the practice of self-emptying implicit in its incantatory dynamics. That dynamics can, from a Zen perspective, be viewed in terms of the threefold process Dogen offers as the base of all Buddhist meditative practice:

To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one's self. To learn one's self is to forget one's self. To forget one's self is to be confirmed by all dharmas [teachings as things themselves]. To be confirmed by all dharmas is to cast off one's body and mind and the bodies and minds of others as well. All trace of enlightenment disappears, and this traceless enlightenment continues on without end. (41)

The effect of this procedure, what Dogen describes as being "confirmed by all dharmas" (41), is expressed poignantly in the widely popular claim by Shitou that "A sage has no self, yet there is nothing that is not himself" (Cleary 391). Intrinsically (to recall Glassman's term), there never really was a separate self to empty. Empress Wu was already in a state of "Enlightenment," of oneness with all things, though she was not awake to it. The meditative enactment described by Dogen, which appears like a movement from self to non-self, is in essence an opening upon an original interanimate oneness that is always here and that, again in Dogen's words, "continues on without end" (41).

21. A cursory glance at the overall movement of thought and image in the "Ode" provides a glimpse of this meditative process as Shelley intuited it. The first three stanzas correspond roughly to the first fold of Dogen's claim that, popularly rendered, to study Buddhism is to study the self. Addressing the wind first as a "breath" (stanza 1), then as a "Dirge" (stanza 2), and finally as "Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams / The blue Mediterranean . . ." (stanza 3), Shelley affirms that the wind is an awakening process aligned with death. The wind in these early stanzas, however, is yet other than the poet himself. It is a force to be apprehended, pursued, and appealed to by a self that is yet other than what it discerns. In stanza 4, however, Shelley commences the process of self-forgetting, longing first to be a "leaf," then a "cloud," and finally a "wave," anything that can be taken up by the wind. This longing—together with the declaration, "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" (54)—implies his understanding, perhaps intuitive, that the separate self is nothing but an inhibiting illusion that must give way to one's initial identity with all things. The stanza's concluding couplet, however, with its assertion that "A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed / One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud" (55-56), signals that the process of self-forgetting is not complete. Shelley is yet attempting to define something in relation to a perceived self and so is caught yet in the dualistic frame of seeking to know what can never be apprehended through ideas. It is not until stanza 5, with the death of thought itself as definitive process—"Drive my dead thoughts over the universe / Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!" (64-65)—that the poet as a separate self disappears into his practice ("my lips"), into prophecy itself as that which is beyond affirmation and denial.
22. Beyond definition, one with the earth upon which it plays, Shelley's "Wind" (69), no longer identified as autumnal, is also one with the poet as the practice itself of poetry—a practice that extends beyond writer and reader to effect the awakening of earth itself. Caught up in the interfluent dynamics of this creative breeze, the reader encounters concomitantly a state of spiritual unknowing or non-knowing that opens upon ever-new possibilities for awakening to the full sufficiency of the lived moment. As the monk simply bows and the master simply continues fanning, leaving students of the *koan* in the state of what Zen calls "no-mind" (Suzuki, esp. 28-29), so Shelley simply withdraws, leaving us in a state of questioning that should, if we take literally his reference to incantation, drive us back into the processes of the poem as a self-emptying enterprise sufficient in itself to the evocation of human "origin" as the act of harmonic oneness with all things. The process is, for all practical purposes, a poetic variant of what Zen calls *zazen* (Japanese, meditative sitting). "Zazen reveals the total reality of interdependent origination," writes the modern Zen master Shohaku Okumura. "When we let go of thought, we put our whole being in the reality of interpenetrating reality. This is how we are verified by all beings" (114-15). In a variant of Shelley's question to the wind, we may well ask: Are we equal to the task?

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Notes

¹ See my *Romanticism and Zen Buddhism*, 47-69.

[Back](#)

² Also Shiton, 700-790.

Romanticism and Buddhism

Blake, Heidegger, Buddhism, and Deep Ecology: A Fourfold Perspective on Humanity's Relationship to Nature

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This study examines the controversy surrounding Deep Ecology and argues that this branch of ecological theory usefully interrogates anthropocentric humanism. Parallels between Deep Ecology and Buddhist thought are explored as a means of countering the charge that Deep Ecology is narrowly 'romantic,' while its indebtedness to Romanticism, particularly that evident in William Blake and Martin Heidegger's phenomenology, is also acknowledged. This essay appears in *Romanticism and Buddhism*, a volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for Romantic Circles (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University of Maryland.

1. Deep ecology, that branch of environmental philosophy that most radically challenges the assumptions of anthropocentric humanism, has recently become something of a *bête-noir* within mainstream ecological thought. Following Luc Ferry's influential linking of deep ecology with fascism in *The New Ecological Order*, many environmental thinkers have published work criticizing the movement's anti-modernism and potentially totalitarian holism. For example, in "Ecofascism: An Enduring Temptation," Michael Zimmerman identifies instances of such holism in the politics of noted European environmentalist Dr. Walter Schoenichen and in American environmentalist J. Baird Collicott's early approval of deep ecology's "biocentric" philosophy. Citing Aldus Leopold's collectivist land ethic as a major influence upon American biocentrists, Zimmerman sums up the threat of organic holism at work in certain branches of deep ecological thought:

According to Leopold, 'the land' refers to the internally related complex of organic and inorganic elements . . . that constitute a particular biome or bioregion. Leopold sometimes described these elements as being analogous to the organs of an organism. To survive, an organism's organs must cooperatively limit their behavior in ways that serve the higher good of the whole organism. Individual organisms lack ethical importance, for they are temporary instantiations of enduring species whose interlocking relationships constitute 'the land.' (400)

If taken as a biological foundation for political policy, it is not difficult to see how Leopold's land ethic can lead to a form of holistic totalitarianism wherein the rights of individuals are automatically subordinated to the collective good. Similarly, in *Imagining Nature: Blake's Environmental Poetics*, literary critic Kevin Hutchings analyzes the Polypus in Blake's *Jerusalem* as a "travesty or parody of the holistic relationality which is a definitive yet ultimately irreducible or undefinable trait of Blakean 'Life'" (194). Hutchings analyzes the Polypus as a figure whereby Blake explores the horrific implications of a human society that has been "overwhelmed by the 'Outside' or objective universe" (196) to such an extent that it behaves like an assimilating "organism" in which "the individual human loses all autonomous identity." He goes on to link such a totalitarian vision with Arne Naess's philosophy:

One of the founders of the 'deep ecology' movement, Naess advocates an ethic of human 'identification' with all life, a mode of relationship entailing [according to critic Ralph Pite] 'an extension of sympathy that reaches so far and becomes so constant that the self loses any desire to differentiate between itself and the world.' (quoted in Hutchings 197)

Far from offering a desirable alternative to modernity's dualistic alienation of human beings from nature as a domain to be dominated in the name of civilization, Hutchings's deep ecological Polypus embodies an inverse, pathological form of identification which "entails a holistic totalitarianism that actually forecloses ethical possibilities" (197).

2. Such critiques are important insofar as they identify regressive elements within the deep ecology movement that, in the name of holism, seek to efface difference and to deny political contingency via recourse to specious biological determinism. The historical consequences of such ideology in Nazi "blood and soil" totalitarianism should serve as a powerful reminder of the risks entailed in reactionary dismissals of modernity and of humanism's ethical legacy for our species. However, as Cary Wolfe and other scholars have pointed out, traditional liberal humanism is—in and of itself—theoretically "impoverished" when it comes to providing non-anthropocentric models for how to conceive the rights of *non-human* species. Indeed, changes currently underway in global ecology and in technology indicate that non-human nature is rapidly being altered by human culture to such an extent that any distinguishable difference between what is "natural" and what is artificial may soon be rendered meaningless. Although the cultural dimension of nature's meaning has always been a product of human artifice, the scope of physical changes underway in today's global weather systems, increasingly ubiquitous genetically modified organisms, and in continually shrinking habitat for endangered species all suggest that nature's material "difference" is being effaced by humanity on an unprecedented scale. Indeed, it is the latter erasure that has led contemporary ecologists such as Bill McKibben to conclude that our era marks the "end of nature" and philosophers such as Michel Serres to argue that global culture has itself become a force of nature, the human equivalent of plate tectonics (16). In other words, if we continue to apply powerful technology under the influence of a traditionally humanist mindset that remains blind to the pitfalls of anthropocentrism, nature as an "outside" will cease to function as a useful counterbalance to human activity or as a domain which provides a window onto other modes of being. In essence, the risk of humanity being reduced to a subset of biological nature feared by opponents of totalitarian holism seems far less likely today than an opposite (equally problematic) monism wherein nature is completely subsumed by the category of the human.
3. Insofar as it attempts to inaugurate a means of thinking alternatives to the latter dilemma, deep ecology remains a significant facet of environmental philosophy. Of all the major schools of ecological thinking currently available, deep ecology addresses most directly the problem of anthropocentrism and the need to re-consider the status of non-human entities as co-inhabitants of planet earth. It does so primarily via the Deep Ecology Platform (DEP)'s recognition of "intrinsic value" in all life forms and its assertion that human beings have no essential "right" to reduce the richness of biodiversity "except to satisfy vital needs" (Naess and Sessions quoted in *Deep Ecology* 70). Although the concepts of "inherent worth" and humanity's "vital needs" are subject to deconstruction, the platform nonetheless raises the question of why non-human life has traditionally been excluded from "subject" status in western thought, and (therefore) from inclusion within the sphere of "intrinsic value" and/or unalienable rights. Indeed, the notion of intrinsic value, I will argue, necessarily compliments the principle of "wide identification" that also underwrites deep ecological thought as an "ultimate premise" (Glasser 219). As is illustrated in Zimmerman's and Hutchings's analysis, the charge that deep ecology promotes totalitarian holism hinges largely upon exclusive attention to the "identification" principle without an acknowledgement of the tension that is produced by deep ecology's concurrent inclusion of the "intrinsic value" principle. At a fundamental level, the latter represents an attempt to acknowledge the value of both "human and nonhuman" diversity, as reflected in the platform's second basic principle: "richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of [intrinsic] values" (Naess and Sessions quoted in *Deep Ecology* 70). It is difficult to see how a commitment to human diversity as a "value in [itself]" gels with the charge of totalitarian holism leveled by critics of deep ecology. Moreover, diverse traditions have informed the philosophical premises of the DEP (including Spinozan Christianity, feminism, pre-industrial or "primal" cultures, ecological science, contemporary

physics and—particularly significant for the present study—Romanticism and Eastern religion).

4. The humanist tradition in Western thought enables us to contemplate human life's "intrinsic value," arguably one of the most important ethical achievements of this philosophy. Although subject to the charge of logical fallacy (it might be argued that nothing has inherent value but that all value derives from human attribution), the principle nonetheless possesses a certain wisdom insofar as it guards against the reduction of value to utility. This is why Kant's "categorical imperative" asserts that it is wrong to see a human being as a "means" to some end rather than as an "end in his/herself"—i.e. to see subjects in terms of their functional utility rather than as entities with a value that transcends all notions of use. Following in this tradition, Naess attempts to extend the concept of what constitutes an "end in itself" to non-human entities. Thus, following Tom Regan, he defines "intrinsic value" as "the presence of inherent value in a natural object . . . independent of any awareness, interest, or appreciation of it by any conscious being" (Regan quoted in Naess 197). The humanist tradition, however, maintains that differences in kind which exist between humans and animals (language use, rationality, capacity for ethical behavior) justifies their exclusion from the domain of "intrinsic rights." For example, Kant maintained that because animals lacked consciousness, they could not be ends in themselves but were mere means to human ends. Given recent discoveries regarding animal consciousness in the field of cognitive ethology and regarding humanity's close genetic kinship with other animals, many of the discriminatory markers invoked by earlier humanist thinkers have proven to be problematic and/or not nearly as clearly defined as was once believed. Deep ecology challenges us to reconsider why we continue to deny that non-human life can also be perceived as possessing inherent worth and why, for purposes of expediency, human beings should automatically have the right to determine a natural entity's value, or, conversely, to deny it. In order to consider the possibility that non-human life forms might possess intrinsic value, deep ecologists have had to seek philosophical models beyond those afforded in humanism, insights derived from non-dominant traditions within Western thought and in Eastern traditions such as Buddhism.
5. Humanity's ability to identify with certain non-human life forms may at first seem to be a sufficient basis for attributing intrinsic value to an entity, yet in actuality identification alone in no way ensures that an organism's right to life will be acknowledged. For example, human beings might identify with a tiger's strength and beauty or a wolf's intelligence, yet this very identification contributes to the slaughter of tigers for aphrodisiac products in the Far East and has contributed to our competitive drive to exterminate the wolf in the West. Likewise, the popularity of bird feathers and furs as objects of aesthetic admiration (human identification with the beauty of these things) has contributed to extinction and/or drastic reduction in the populations of other animals. This is why "wide identification" alone is an insufficient principle upon which to ground an ecological philosophy that goes beyond the limitations of traditional humanism. Conversely, if we cannot identify with non-human life at all (seeing human interests as being entirely distinct from the interests of other organisms and denying the latter a capacity for thought or feeling) then we also run the risk of objectifying and exploiting natural entities as wholly alien "others." In an effort to avoid either scenario, deep ecology attempts to counterbalance "wide identification" with an acknowledgement of all life's "intrinsic value." The great risk of this strategy is that, from a conventionally rational perspective, it may appear to be incoherent. Operating from within such a perspective, one might critique the logic of asking human beings to identify with natural entities while simultaneously asserting that life's value is ultimately "independent" of any human "awareness, interest, or appreciation" of it. From such a standpoint, a philosophy must choose whether it bases its ethical claims upon principles of sameness (identification) or difference (attribution of value to things because they resist the homogenizing effects of identification).
6. This paper will make a case for the necessity of deep ecology's inclusion of these apparently contradictory (but actually complementary) principles within its philosophical framework. Three key sources of deep ecological thought—Romanticism, Martin Heidegger's philosophy, and Buddhism—

collectively illustrate the importance of combining both "wide identification" and "intrinsic value" in one's environmental ethos. William Blake's monistic art demonstrates the vital importance of human identification with nature; Martin Heidegger's late philosophy outlines the limitations of identification and the need to acknowledge "intrinsic value" in non-human entities; and Buddhist thought parallels both approaches, providing a means for recognizing their complementarity. Conceptually, this essay will revolve around the insight suggested in Zen master Ch'ing-Yüan's famous sermon on mountains and waters (Sheng-yu Lai 358-359). Ch'ing-Yüan states that when he first began to study Zen, mountains were mountains and waters were waters, when he thought he understood Zen, mountains were *not* mountains and waters were *not* waters, and when he actually experienced Zen awakening mountains were again mountains and waters were again waters. One way to interpret this sermon is to note that we in the West are inheritors of a dominant mode of dualistic thinking wherein mountains and waters appear to be objects existing "outside" the human subject, which could be likened to the first phases of understanding in Ch'ing-Yüan's sermon. However, we also inherit a less dominant tradition (Romanticism) that seeks to foster a mode of consciousness that transforms mountains and waters into phenomena the subject identifies with on a deeper level. In this second phase of awareness, mountains no longer appear to be the objects they once were, but take on an altered phenomenological status within the mind of the perceiver. Yet, such identification must go a step further in order for the human subject to achieve a truly enlightened relationship with mountains and waters. A third phase must be achieved wherein mountains and waters again are acknowledged as being separable from humanity, although this insight is now accompanied by a greater sense of compassion than was available at the outset. Inspired by Ch'ing-Yüan's sermon, this paper will consider whether deep identification is a necessary prerequisite to "letting things be," by acknowledging that such identification does not require a one way projection of human identity onto nature, nor an insistence that nature be absolutely revealed to us. True identification humbly acknowledges the limits of human understanding and values the mystery of nature's "suchness"—its irreducible otherness—by creating a space for acknowledging its "intrinsic value."

7. In "Blake's Deep Ecology, or the Ethos of Otherness," critic Mark Lussier usefully revises the traditional characterization of Blake as an archetypal champion of art and reviler of nature as something hostile to the imagination. As he convincingly illustrates, what Blake objected to was the Cartesian construct of nature as an object domain separable from human consciousness, a world of dead matter that could be exploited ad infinitum to benefit humanity's estate. In such a view, nature's unpredictability is effaced within a mechanistic framework that characterizes it as a machine-like system composed of discreet parts, whose power can be harnessed by human beings. Nature remains a material other, but one that can be controlled by humanity. Blake's texts—perhaps more than those of any other Romantic poet—consistently subvert this construction of nature and the anthropocentric subjectivity that underwrites it. This is because of his conviction (expressed in a 1799 letter to Rev. Dr. Trusler) that "to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself" (*Complete Poetry* 702). For Blake, nature and humanity are in fact one, originally unified in Albion, the Eternal Man. Albion's fragmentation gave rise to the dualistic illusion that humanity is separate from nature, but imaginative perception—particularly that enacted in poetic reflection—reveals the true interconnection of all things. In order to experience what a deep ecologist might term "wide identification" with nature, however, Blake asserted that we must revise our atomistic understanding of subjectivity in order to comprehend all existence as reflecting the Human Form Divine. Within this monistic schema, all entities share humanity's capacity for intellect, feeling, and "speech" because, on a deep level, they are synonymous with the human mind or imagination.
8. Blake realized that human identification with nature requires an acknowledgment of how non-human entities "signify" even though they don't literally possess human language. This is why, in poems such as "The Book of Thel" natural entities "speak" to Thel in the sense that they are capable of educating her if she is receptive to their lessons. As Lussier points out, this poem anticipates what we would

today describe as an ecological awareness that "every thing that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself" (II: 26-27)—that although lilies, clouds, worms and human beings are (as individuals) impermanent, they sustain wider networks of life that do not pass away. This is why the Lilly (Blake's spelling) of the field explains she doesn't lament death because her life nourishes other animals like the lamb and the bee. Likewise, a little cloud explains that when it appears to vanish, it in fact remains part of the water cycle that gives "tenfold life" (II: 11) to other beings. Thel's existential dilemma (a uniquely human dilemma) is that she cannot accept either her mortality or her integration within the web of life. This is why Thel fears that she "live[s] only to be at death the food of worms," to which the cloud replies "Then if thou art the food of worms. O virgin of the skies, / How great thy use, how great thy blessing" (II: 23-26). Here, the text playfully subverts Thel's speciesist revulsion at the prospect of becoming worm food by reversing the anthropocentric assumption that human beings use nature (but not vice versa) to celebrate Thel's inescapable "purposiveness" within ongoing natural cycles. Yet, due to a dualistic philosophy that locates subjectivity exclusively in the individual's disembodied mind, Thel is incapable of consciously accepting her own impermanence, an understanding that would provide insight into what Lussier terms "the splendors of a complementary, undifferentiated existence" (55). As many commentators have pointed out, an acceptance of impermanence as an existential condition common to all things is also a major facet of Buddhist thought, one that implies a need for the individual ego to free itself from a grasping mentality that would seek to escape or avoid such a realization. D. T. Suzuki sums up this stance succinctly: "we are all finite, we cannot live out of time and space . . . salvation must be sought in the finite itself . . . if you seek the transcendental, that will cut you off from this world of relativity, which is the same thing as annihilation of yourself" (14).

9. Blake consistently presents "self-annihilation" an ethical imperative that permits a fundamental re-visioning of nature. However, as Kevin Hutchings points out, such "annihilation" is *not* synonymous with the human subject's complete loss of identity due to its absorption into nature as an "outside," as may be erroneously inferred from Lussier's notion of "undifferentiated existence." On the contrary, in Blake's schema, the atomistic Cartesian subject is "annihilated" not by being absorbed into nature, but instead is transformed via a radical expansion outward so that it comes to be perceived as encompassing both humanity and nature within a higher "Human" identity. I would argue that what could be termed Blake's monistic "higher humanism" is something that distinguishes his art from both Zen Buddhist thought and from deep ecology. However, Blake's emphasis on phenomenological experience as a gateway to realizing this higher state of unity is something that also connects his thought with these approaches, as scholars such as John G. Rudy have noted. In poems such as *Milton*, self-annihilation is not merely arrived at via abstract contemplation, but is experienced as an ecstatic, embodied expansion of the self outward in moments of intense inspiration. What critic Michel Haar says of Rilke's attempt to explore the "'unheard of center' or 'pure space' of the heart of the world that is no longer subject or object" (130) seems equally descriptive of Blake's project. Haar asserts that when Rilke says "The birds fly through us" he "does not mean our consciousness represents the flight of the birds; not only do we experience their very flight in our body, but it happens through our body in a sense that is not simply a matter of perception but a fit of passion, of an ecstatic outburst, of 'sympathy,' of a fluttering of wings that quivers through and beyond us in a space that gathers and envelops us" (Haar 126). Such ecstatic "sympathy" enables Blake to experience (via his imagination) the being of other animals and to assert that they have the ability to "signify" through and beyond the scope of language. A vivid instance of this occurs in *Milton's* famous lark song passage:

The Lark sitting upon his earthly bed: just as the morn
Appears; listens silent; then springing from the waving Corn-field! loud
He leads the Choir of Day! trill, trill, trill, trill,
Mounting upon the wings of light into the Great Expanse:
Reechoing against the lovely blue & shining heavenly Shell.
His little throat labours with inspiration; everyfeather

On throat & breast & wings vibrates with the effluence Divine
All Nature listens silent to him & the awful Sun
Stands still upon the Mountain looking on this little Bird
With eyes of soft humility, & wonder love & awe (II, 31:29-38)

Inspired, the lark's song moves its whole being, makes it quake with "Divine effluence"; its whole body "vibrates" with inspiration, just as the poem resonates with a sound but half its own. The poet, like the bird, "labours" to give voice to this "ecstatic outburst" whereby the reader may experience something of the bird's vibrant trace: "the bird flies through us" when our bodies resonate with the text, or when we experience the lark's song first hand. The lark signifies as an emergent phenomenon at the juncture of bird, text, song and consciousness, so that its voice becomes indistinguishable from the poet's. Such identification, whereby the bird is no longer just a bird, nor the text just a vehicle for representation, would be quite impossible from a dualistic perspective. Similarly, Rudy interprets the lines "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way./ Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five" in Blake's "Marriage of Heaven and Hell" as "draw[ing] the reader meditatively into the prior oneness of text and bird, of text and world, as the emergent base of all reading" (102). Rudy notes that the question "*How do you arrive at the knowledge of immensity suggested in the phrase 'immense world of delight'*" meditatively leads the reader towards the insight that "the bird is not simply a representation of delight. It *is* the realm of delight itself, requiring not simply knowledge *about* but knowledge *as* that which is under the pen" (104). What we see in Blake's poetics that is common to both Zen and deep ecology is, therefore, an emphasis on action as a form of knowledge that compliments discourse, "a shift from saying to doing" (100).

10. And yet, is Blake's romantic identification enough to provide us with a blueprint for subjectivity that moves beyond anthropocentrism to cultivate an ethos of alterity? Given Blake's monistic position, his belief that all things are part of a higher Human (with a capital H) identity, one might question in what sense his poetry permits the thinking nature's alterity as true "otherness." It seems to me that Blake's thought is incompatible with deep ecology's desire to recognize nature's "inherent value" if by this we mean the ability to acknowledge nature's worth beyond any human "awareness, interest or appreciation" of it. Indeed, Blake's thinking does not break with humanism's tendency to see in man "the measure of all things" — why else would his figure of ultimate unification (Albion) bear a human form? From an ecological perspective, Blake's monistic equation of nature with Human imagination poses potential difficulties. For example, what about the need to protect species or landscapes with which we humans have difficulty identifying (perhaps why there aren't more "save the leech or swamp" campaigns)? Likewise, as aforementioned, too much human identification with a species can also lead to destructive ecological practices. Still more problematic is the potential to justify continuing radical alteration of the environment based on the principle of identity. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx explores how the pastoral ideal guiding western cultivation of so-called "barren" wilderness is underwritten by the notion that all human arts (including technology) are a product of nature, that nature evolved our tool wielding species to permit its own transformation. In the humanities, the equivalent of this thinking is reflected in assertions that without art, nature would not signify—in Heideggerian terms, that nature requires the "clearings" of human language so that the "truth" of its being may shine forth. The common theme here is, to quote Blake, "where man is not, nature is barren." Yet deep ecology seeks to balance "wide identification" with an ability to recognize that nature (even without humans) constitutes a richly diverse panorama of life, much of which evolved long before humans arrived on the scene. Is there a way to balance identification with an acknowledgment that this domain has inherent value, a right to exist apart from us?
11. In order to create room for thinking the truth of inherent value, deep ecology draws upon both post-Romantic Western thought and insights from Eastern philosophy, most notably from the late work of philosopher Martin Heidegger and from Zen Buddhism. As Bill Devall and George Sessions note in

Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered, Heidegger "made three contributions to the deep, long-range ecology literature," namely: his critique of Western philosophy's development after Plato (which "paved the way for the technocratic mentality that espouses domination over Nature"), his characterization of Thinking as something "closer to the Taoist process of contemplation than to Western analytical thinking," and finally, an ethos that urges modern culture to develop ways of "dwell[ing] authentically on this Earth" via increased alertness to one's bioregion and to natural processes (98). Despite these potentially useful ideas, however, it must be acknowledged that Heidegger not only remains a controversial figure due to his allegiances with Nazi politics, but also a problematic thinker even from an ecological perspective. For example, in *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, Jacques Derrida notes that Heidegger's characterization of animals as "world poor" in comparison to human beings constitutes a "discourse on privation [that] cannot avoid a certain anthropocentric or even humanist teleology" (55). In "Eating Well," Derrida even claims that Heidegger's theory of animal privation belies a "sacrificial structure" (113) that underwrites western culture's putting to death (in a non-criminal manner) of not only animals but also groups of de-humanized people. While I do not endorse Derrida's conclusion that Heidegger's desire to deny humanity's kinship with animals implies that human beings do not "have a responsibility to the living in general" (112), it is important to acknowledge potentially destructive components in Heidegger's thinking which tend to essentialize both human and animal identity alike. Philosophers sympathetic to deep ecology would do well to interrogate such flaws in Heidegger's critique of humanism, as Michael Zimmerman has in recent years.

12. Nevertheless, in spite of the many shortcomings in Heidegger's work (and life), his thought does inaugurate, in a unique manner, a way towards thinking the underlying complementarity of "wide identification" and "inherent value" which is critical to the deep ecological platform. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on the evolving relationship of "poiesis" to physis in Heidegger's work as an indication that nature's "presence" or truth may not ultimately require human artifice to be revealed. I will focus on "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935) and "The Thing" (1950) as texts that reflect, in Zimmerman's words, a turning away from an earlier anthropocentrism in Heidegger's thought when the philosopher concluded that "he could no longer conceive of being in terms of human understanding, but instead had to conceive of human understanding as an aspect of being itself" ("Heidegger" 247). That is, Heidegger's late philosophy regarding the mutually "appropriating mirror-play" ("The Thing" 179) of the fourfold (earth, sky, mortals and the divine) suggests that the "physis" (self-revealing event) of natural entities constitutes a form of value ("intrinsic value") that cannot be reduced to the clearings afforded by western poiesis (human facilitated modes of revealing), such as art and technology. Heidegger's eventual turn away from formal philosophy is sometimes attributed to his interest in poets writing in the Romantic tradition, such as Hölderlin and Rilke. Certainly in essays like "As When On a Holiday..." (1939) we can see the influence of romantic identification with nature at work. Here, Heidegger develops his hermeneutics of resonance, whereby the poet responds to the "call" of nature by creating linguistic "clearings" through which the truth of its "holy chaos" (82) can be simultaneously revealed and concealed, or perhaps more to the point, *revealed in its concealment*. But beyond the identification that permits the poet to respond to nature's sublimity, there is also a play in this essay between nature's presence and absence, a revealing and concealing flux that is not evident (or possible) in Blake's monistic ethos. Is there another tradition that Heidegger brings into play that enables insight into an irreducible nothingness that is ever at work in nature's revealing? Many scholars have pointed to the influence of Eastern thought—and particularly Buddhism and Taoism—on the development of Heidegger's late work. The philosopher was already referencing Eastern thought in his lectures during the 1930's, worked with a Chinese scholar to translate Lao-tzu in 1946, and, upon reading D.T. Suzuki's *Zen Buddhism* in the 1950's, remarked "[i]f I understand this man correctly, this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings" (quoted in Suzuki xi). As Zimmerman asserts in "Heidegger, Buddhism and deep ecology," there is much to suggest that Zen thinking enabled Heidegger's late philosophy of dwelling to go beyond anthropocentric identification in order to explore how all things

(man-made and natural entities) are at once absent and present, gathering the world into presence by virtue of their emptiness.

13. This shift is perhaps most evident in the different treatment of the relationship between art and nature in "The Origin of the Work of Art"(1935) and in "The Thing"(1950). In the "Origin" essay, Heidegger discusses the way a Greek temple "accomplishes" (175) the strife between earth and world necessary for the revealing of truth, and in doing so "acquire[s] the shape of destiny for human being" (167). That is, the temple both embodies occidental culture's pitting of human history (world) against an earth that is conceived of as being "ahistorical," and brings these domains into an antagonistic "belonging to one another"(174). Natural entities require the temple's work for their "truth" to come into presence, and historical world requires the earth as a foundation that grounds its unfolding destiny. Through a series of violent cuts, the temple's *différance* permits an otherwise invisible earth to become visible:

Standing there, the building holds its ground against the storm raging above it and so first makes the storm itself manifest in its violence . . .
The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air . . .
Tree, grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus appear as what they are. The Greeks early called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things *physis*. (167-68)

What is curious about the description of the temple's poiesis—its bringing into presence of nature—is the way in which the temple's "world" has usurped the original meaning of *physis*, which is an "emerging and rising *in itself*" [my emphasis]. That is, natural phenomena only become "visible" via the temple's enframing; by implication, earthly things cannot manifest themselves as what they truly are without the presence of human poiesis (which originally included both art and technology as forms of *technē*). The earth's reliance upon human enframing for its truth to appear is even more pronounced in the world of modern (as opposed to ancient) art. In his famous discussion of Van Gogh's painting of peasant shoes, Heidegger analyzes the way in which the painting reveals the truth of the shoes as equipment, which in turn reflects the truth of the peasant's "world" and, only indirectly, the earth's truth as part of the peasant's world. Indeed, the earth's status in the world revealed through this relatively modern, representational work of art is arguably even more removed than what we see in the Greek temple. This is because "earth" in the painting is subject to many layers of mediation: its traces are only indirectly apparent by considering signs of wear upon the shoes, the earth's significance for the (hypothetical) peasant woman who owns the shoes, the artist Van Gogh's interpretation of the peasant's world, the viewer's interpretation of Van Gogh's interpretations. On the one hand, Heidegger tells us that "in the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth, its quiet gift of the ripening grain and its unexplained self-refusal in the fallow desolation of the wintry field" (159). On the other hand, we are told that the shoes are a completely de-contextualized aesthetic object: "there is nothing surrounding this pair of peasant shoes in or to which they might belong—only an undefined space. There are not even clods of soil from the field or the field-path sticking to them, which would at least hint at their use." The question therefore arises as to how the earth can be at once present *and* absent in modern representational art; a paradox that can only be resolved by seeing the earth's "presence" as being entirely contingent upon the viewer's apprehension of its role in the peasant's experience of world: "on the leather lie the dampness and richness of the soil. Under the soles stretches the loneliness of the field-path as evening falls." The earth's *physis* as a mode of self-revealing is, therefore, particularly inaccessible within the *alethias* (clearings) afforded by Van Gogh's painting. Although a trace of the earth's materiality is evident in the ancient temple's marble and in the natural environment which surrounds it, nature's *physis* is completely subsumed in the painting by the shoes' utility, the peasant woman's world, and the decontextualized nature of the art object itself.

14. By 1954, however, *physis* makes a remarkable comeback in "The Question Concerning Technology."

There, Heidegger claims that not only art, but physis itself is a form of poiesis ("bringing forth"): "physis is indeed poiēsis in the highest sense," as evident in the "bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself"(10). Rather than pitting technology's poiesis against earth's physis in an effort to alter the latter, Heidegger suggests that technology should ideally allow the earth's own presence to "be" instead of transforming nature into a gigantic "standing reserve"(17) of energy. What can account for the dramatic shift in physis's status in this late work? I believe a careful study of "The Thing," a text written four years before "The Question Concerning Technology," suggests that concepts derived from Eastern traditions may well have influenced this change in Heidegger's thought. In this text, there is an attempt to re-think the value of physis, of learning to respect what is inherent in nature—what Zen philosophy might refer to as nature's "suchness." Such thinking would see humanity's identification with nature as a first (not final) step towards granting natural entities the right to "just be" (inherent value). Paradoxically, deep identification entails granting non-human things a certain *distance* from humanity's modes of being, while also acknowledging that all things are "appropriated" within the fourfold "thinging" of earth, sky, mortals, and the divine. The former creates a space for thinking how the physis of natural entities constitutes a mode of poiesis, while the latter (in a suggestive parallel with Buddhist thought) implies that all things have "presence" by virtue of an underlying absence (emptiness).

15. As in "The Question Concerning Technology" essay, "The Thing" begins with a discussion of the many ways in which contemporary technology appears to have virtually eliminated "distances in time and space" (165). That is, circa 1950, air travel, telecommunications, film, and other technologies seem to have "abolish[ed] every possibility" of temporal or spatial "remoteness" as great distances can be overcome with a speed that is historically unprecedented (an abolition that is even more pronounced in the 21st Century internet era). Yet, Heidegger argues that in spite of this "conquest of distances" there is a "terrifying" sense in which we remain remote from the nature of things: "the nearness of things remains absent" (166). In the course of the essay, it becomes clear that "things" include both man-made and natural entities, the phenomena that constitute "being" as a whole. Heidegger suggests that the "thingness of things" (167) remains remote from us as long as we conceive of things as *objects*: "the thingly character of the thing does not consist in its being a represented object, nor can it be defined in any way in terms of objectness, the over-againstness, of the object." That is, the essence of thing-ness does not appear in "objective" scientific accounts of an entity's physical composition, or in modes of enframing which equate things merely with their utility as man-made products. Nor do we gain insight into the nature of things by dividing the world between "objects" represented within the subject's consciousness versus things-in-themselves (Kant's account): "'Thing-in-itself,' thought in a rigorously Kantian way, means an object that is no object for us, because it is supposed to stand, stay put, without a possible before: for the human representational act that encounters it" (177). Instead of seeing things as static objects that are "represented" within human consciousness, Heidegger proposes that we contemplate all things as instances of "gathering"—as clearings that enable a bringing together of four modes of being—earth, sky, mortals (human beings), and the divine—that mutually appropriate (179) each other. A thing's thing-ness therefore consists in its "bringing near" (178) the fourfold in a way that "sets each of the four free into its own, [yet] binds these free ones into the simplicity of their essential being toward one another" (179). For example, a jug "things" insofar as it holds the "gift" of wine, and thereby gathers the sky's water, the earth's grape, humanity's production of wine, and the presence of gods when wine is used in religious ceremonies (libation). Such gatherings constitute the thingness of things, something not only true of the products of human poiesis, but also of the physis of natural entities:

Inconspicuously compliant is the thing: the jug and the bench, the footbridge and the plow. But tree and pond, too, brook and hill, are things, each in its own way. Things, each thinging from time to time in its own way, are heron and roe, deer horse and bull. Things, each thinging and each staying in its own way, are mirror and clasp, book and picture,

Two things are striking regarding this penultimate passage in "The Thing." First, there is an acknowledgement here that poiesis is not the only means whereby things come into "presence"; rather, all things do this insofar as they gather the fourfold, "each in [their] own way." A tree, for example, can also be said to "gather" the fourfold insofar as it is nourished by the earth's soil, and the sky's light can be affected by human care and perceived as a symbol of divine creation. Unlike what we see in the "Origin of Art" essay, Heidegger insists here that things do not appear as things "by means of human making," but neither, he insists, do they appear "without the vigilance of mortals" (181). From a human perspective, things do not appear in their thing-ness unless we reconsider what it means to "dwell" more responsively in a world where we are always already part of a larger "dance of appropriat[ion]" (180) over which we cannot exert ultimate control. In acknowledging that all things gather the world, "each in [their] own way," Heidegger's thought inaugurates a way towards understanding natural entities' "inherent value" and challenges human beings to find ways to honor this value in their own poiesis (technological or artistic clearings).

16. How did Heidegger arrive at such a different perspective on the relationship between physis and poiesis in his later work? Scholars such as Reinhard May and Michael Zimmerman have suggested that Heidegger's encounters with Eastern thought—particularly his interest in Buddhism and Taoism—may well have influenced this shift. A crucial step toward acknowledging humanity's appropriation within the fourfold lies in recognizing a deeper relationship between emptiness and form than has traditionally been available in post-Platonic Western philosophy—a relationship convincingly elaborated within Eastern traditions. As Zimmerman argues, both Heidegger and Mahayana Buddhism acknowledge "humans can learn to 'let things be' only by gaining insight into the nothingness that pervades all things" ("Heidegger" 240). In Mahayana Buddhism, nothingness connotes the "emptiness" and impermanence of all things, yet is not synonymous with formless, chaotic negativity. Rather, the Sanskrit word for nothingness, "sunyata," is derived from a term meaning "to swell" (quoted in "Heidegger" 252), suggesting that emptiness can be conceived of as a "clearing" or openness that constitutes a generative space in which things appear. It is no accident that Heidegger chooses a jug as the focus of his discussion in "The Thing." A jug is an ideal focus for critiquing of our understanding of things as solid, discreet objects, rather than "clearings" which gather the world. The jug's "thing-ness" is not to be understood as synonymous with its material composition, but is instead suggested by its "holding" (or gathering) nature:

When we fill the jug, the pouring that fills it flows into the empty jug. The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel's holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel . . . [t]he vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds. (169)

In contrast to the Greek temple in the "Origin" essay, whose columns make the air visible, it is the *emptiness* of the jug, not its form, that constitutes its thingness. In Taoist fashion, the jug is a clearing through which the fourfold comes to presence, as it gathers together the earth's soil and the sky's rain in wine that mortals pour in libation to the gods. Indeed, as Reinhard May illustrates in *Heidegger's Hidden Sources*, "The Thing's" discussion of the jug remarkably parallels Chapt. 11 of Lao Tzu's exploration of how "[t]he work of pitchers consists in their nothingness" (30). Similarly, Zimmerman discusses suggestive parallels between Heidegger's characterization of the fourfold's mutually appropriating "mirror-play" and insight regarding the universe's luminosity in Mahayana Buddhism. In the most famous expression of this insight, the universe is conceived as the jewel net of the god Indra. All things are analogous to "perfect gems" within this net (or network), and their reflective light is simultaneously produced by all the gems collectively, "no one of which stands in a 'superior' or 'causal' relation to the others" ("Heidegger" 253). Zimmerman argues that "Heidegger's account of the dance of

earth and sky, gods and mortals, the dance in which things manifest themselves in the event of mutual appropriation, bears remarkable similarities to the Buddhist account of the moment-by-moment coproduction of self-luminous phenomena" (257).

17. Critics steeped within a Western tradition that posits the human individual's dignity and "inherent value" might find the suggestion that all things (human and otherwise) are "empty" has troubling implications if applied to political subjectivity, fearing that an emptying of selves is often a prerequisite of totalitarian political regimes or can lead to too intense an identification with the "objective" domain. For example, Brian Victoria's *Zen War Stories* makes a compelling case for a link between the Zen concept of "selflessness" and Japanese militarism during World War II, and Karla Poewe's *New Religions and the Nazis* similarly links the German Faith movement, militarism and Indo-Aryan religious doctrine, particularly Jakob Hauer's interpretation of Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*. Poewe claims that Hauer's efforts to forge a new Indo-Aryan religion with a fatalistic warrior code "anticipated justification of the deeds committed by the Nazi regime" (79). Such work, as with critiques of radical elements within the deep ecology movement, usefully analyzes potential effects of state-sanctioned religious ideology, instead of maintaining that religious discourse necessarily "transcends" politics. As convincing as such studies are as explorations of how Eastern thought has been appropriated by totalitarian regimes, it is problematic to conclude that Buddhist and/or Hindu thought is *essentially* nationalistic and/or totalitarian. To draw such a conclusion is to not only distort what Hirata Seikō describes as "the absolute rejection of war in ancient Indian Buddhism" (4), but also to deny that any set of ideas is subject to variable interpretation or, more rigorously, (re-) construction over time. As is well known, when Chinese scholars translated Indian Hinayanan and Mahayanan texts, they interpreted Buddhism within the framework of existing Taoist thought, resulting in "Cha'an" Buddhism; likewise, Japanese monks reinterpreted these texts to form Zen Buddhism. Any western interpreter of Buddhism brings to the table certain cultural and/or ideological lenses through which he or she constructs interpretations of this thought. Concepts such as "emptiness" are therefore not only subject to ideological appropriation (in both a positive and negative sense), but also to unintended distortion. As John Rudy and other interpreters of Zen Buddhism have pointed out, a western, dualistic tradition that divides the world between subjects and objects can contribute to misinterpretation of the concept of emptiness. In *Romanticism and Zen Buddhism*, Rudy points out that:

For Zen Buddhists, engaging [a] spiritual ground [inclusive yet prior to subject-object dualities] follows patterns of meditative emptying by which individuals relinquish the compulsion either to assert independence through radical emphases on difference or to establish unity through variant modes of bridged togetherness. The result is neither subjective nor objective. It is, rather, an opening process that reveals how each thing in nature is both an autonomous unit of codependent activity and a holistic manifestation of ultimate reality. (xiii)

Rather than underwriting identification with "objective" or state-sanctioned structures (totalitarian or otherwise), emptiness as Rudy interprets it suggests an alternative to both subjective individualism and objective obedience to collectives. Indeed, it is such alternatives to dualistic accounts of human subjectivity vis-à-vis the rest of the living world that appealed not only to Heidegger in the later stages of his philosophy, but also continues to appeal to deep ecologists. As "The Thing" makes clear, insight into the self's "appropriation" within the world's mirror play does *not* entail a collapsing of any one dimension of the fourfold into the others. Human beings still retain a unique manner of "gathering" the world in relation to other beings: "men alone, as mortals, by dwelling attain to the world as world" (182)—that is, human beings alone can self-consciously choose the mode of their dwelling and experience the world as one of many possible worlds. Nonetheless, other non-human beings also participate in the fourfold, "each in its own way," and this diversity implies the inherent value of each unique mode of gathering. The metaphor of "mirror-play" enables Heidegger to suggest a deep

identification between human and non-human actors in the "dance" of creation, yet this mirroring never stabilizes into a form of monistic holism. I would suggest that this is because, unlike his Romantic predecessors such as William Blake, Heidegger ultimately resists equating "nature" with a higher Human identity, such as the Imagination. Instead, the philosopher, like deep ecologists influenced by his thought, challenges us to think of identification and inherent worth as a productive "coincidence of opposites" (in Dennis McCort's parlance), the kind of paradoxical truth embraced by Buddhist and Taoist traditions. If we re-conceive the identity of all things as at once unique (having inherent value) and empty (inescapably appropriated by other beings), a truly non-anthropocentric understanding of nature becomes possible. Paradoxically, only by learning to "identify" with the emptiness of all things while retaining a sense of our distinctive perspective may we eventually find it in ourselves to allow mountains to be mountains and waters to be waters.

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Romanticism and Buddhism

Kafka and the Coincidence of Opposites

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This study traces the mystical idea of the coincidence of opposites through Kafka's short fiction as well as through his letters and diaries. It constitutes a kind of cautionary argument against current cultural-constructivist interpretations that mean to undermine the view of Kafka as primarily a spiritual writer. This essay appears in *Romanticism and Buddhism*, a volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for Romantic Circles (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University of Maryland.

Bei der nächsten Zusammenkunft zeigte ich dann Doktor Kafka meine gebundene Auswahl der [tabloid] Titelblätter. . . . Ich sagte: "Es ist ein Bildersalat—bunt und widerspruchsvoll wie das Leben." Doch Kafka entgegnete kopfschüttelnd: "Nein, das stimmt nicht. Die Bilder verdecken mehr als sie enthüllen. Sie gehen nicht in die Tiefe, wo alle Widersprüche mit einander korrespondieren."

[At our next meeting I proceeded to show Doctor Kafka my bound selection of (tabloid) title pages. . . . I said, "It's an image salad—colorful and contradictory like life itself." Shaking his head Kafka disagreed: "No, that's not it. The pictures conceal more than they reveal. They don't penetrate the depths, where all contradictions correspond with one another."]

—Gustav Janouch, *Gespräche mit Kafka*

Introduction

1. The epigraph cited above has Kafka commenting to his friend Janouch on the trivial matter of tabloid sensationalism. What is not trivial is his implicit allusion to his own deepest mystical experience when he observes that front-page stories, skimming the surface of events as they inevitably do, fail to go "in die Tiefe, wo alle widersprüche mit einander korrespondieren" ["into the depths where all contradictions correspond with one another"] (Janouch 136). Kafka knew these inner "depths" directly as rarefied and blissful states of consciousness, mystical states, in which even something so fundamental to human experience as the principle of contradiction, the very bedrock of logic, was left far behind. I am going to argue here that this subtle sense of a *coincidentia oppositorum*, as an inner sanctum beyond all taint of resistance or friction, lay at the heart of Kafka's religious sensibility, and that the latter, in turn, lay at the heart of his literary sensibility.
2. More specifically, my aim in the following pages is to identify and examine the particular dynamics of Kafka's mysticism through an analysis of this principle of the coincidence of opposites, first as a recurrent motif in his intellectual life, and then as a thematic and structural force in several key works of short fiction. Since the *coincidentia*, as the "abstract essence" of dialectical logic, may be said to subsume all experiential content, it becomes intrinsically more interesting as form than as content, and we will thus be examining a variety of Kafka's *coincidentia*-generated binaries (e.g., conscious/unconscious, freedom/bondage, wisdom/ignorance), first in a series of short parables and finally in two of the longer short fictions, "Die Verwandlung" ["The Metamorphosis"] and "Vor dem Gesetz" ["Before the Law"]. Moreover, since the *coincidentia*, understood in the German and other mystical traditions familiar to Kafka as the original Oneness of the pairs of opposites, is precisely what the human mind obscures as it conceptually bifurcates things in order to "get at them," we will be

focusing especially on those relatively rare instances in Kafka's fiction in which the mind of the character or persona goes beyond its own intrinsic limits. This is in support of the case for Kafka's mystical insight as a mainspring of his literary creativity and, more generally, for Kafka as essentially a spiritual writer, convinced in the end of the human being's capacity to transcend, however remote the possibility, the suffering of separation built into his or her own dualistic consciousness.

3. In addition, along the way and especially in my "Conclusion," I will suggest how Kafka's mysticism is best to be regarded in the context of the current cultural-constructivist approach to his works, an approach, like poststructuralism generally from which it derives, tending to cast doubt on Kafka's serious literary interest in spiritual transcendence. Essentially, I will argue that there is no need to impugn the spiritual dimension of the fiction in order to view it as a conduit of currents (variously religious, political, materialistic) coursing through its own culture. In Kafka the spiritual and the cultural are perfectly compatible—indeed, as I aim to show, it is part of his literary (and spiritual) genius to reveal them as such.
4. In summary, then, my aim in the pages that follow is threefold: 1) to clarify the dynamics of Kafka's literary mysticism by tracing its core principle, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, in a series of works; 2) this, in order to support the view of Kafka as primarily a spiritual writer, vis-à-vis current interpretive trends such as cultural constructivism which tend to ignore, if not expressly deny, the transcendental dimension in his work; and 3) to view the subtle relationship between these two interpretive approaches in terms of a spiritual paradox that Kafka himself well appreciated.
5. To be sure, the awareness of an expansive inner sphere where "the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles" (James 298), could touch and even freely mingle, was hardly unique to Kafka. The idea of the *coincidentia oppositorum* is well ensconced in the history of German mysticism. As the great figures of that history tell us, the *coincidentia* is that abyssal point in deepest consciousness whence originate and whither return all the categorical pairs that presume to organize experience by bifurcating it (good/evil, true/false, subject/object, etc.). Eckhart calls it the single Eye through which God and man view each other and, elsewhere, "the identity out of the One into the One and with the One" (qtd. in Ross 270).^[1] In a sermon he waxes ecstatic over his vision of the purified soul for which "[t]he whole scattered world of lower things is gathered up to oneness when the soul climbs up to that life in which there are no opposites" (Eckhart 173). A century and a half later we have from Nicholas of Cusa the coining of the Latin phrase *coincidentia oppositorum* as a designation for the trinitarian God in his meditation manual for monks, *De visione Dei*. One of the exercises Nicholas urged on his charges as a way of experiencing the *coincidentia* was to stand in a semicircle facing a wall in whose center hung a picture of Jesus whose eyes beamed out to meet those of all the viewing monks simultaneously (Miller 133). Thus the identity of the one and the many.
6. One can easily trace the ubiquitousness of the idea among post-Eckhartian mystical and even not so mystical thinkers from Böhme and Silesius to Herder, Friedrich Schlegel, and, of course, Hegel.^[2] Nor is the idea uniquely German or even predominantly Western. One need only consider the ancient Indian tradition of *advaita* Vedanta, which views ultimate reality as "not-two" and suffuses various permutations of both Hinduism and Buddhism. One of those permutations would be Zen, which affirms the fundamental identity of samsara and nirvana, or form and emptiness, in its revered "Heart Sutra." Indeed, Zen Buddhism's unique fusion of humor and mystical paradox is, in its way, "Kafkaesque," and I will not hesitate in the pages that follow to draw on Zen's looking-glass logic as I attempt to shed light on some of the more baffling paradoxes in Kafka's parables.
7. As one of many names for the *unio mystica*, the mystical insight *par excellence*, the *coincidentia* seems to be ontologically prior to any particulars of religious culture. If we view it as the hub of the wheel to

which so many religious-cultural spokes point, then it seems sound to argue, with respect to Kafka, that the *coincidentia* came first and foremost out of his own mystical experience and that it therefore conceptually supersedes (which is *not* to say "invalidates") the many frustrating and often confusing attempts by scholars to identify his mysticism with particular religions, from Hasidism/Kabbalism (Jofen, Grözinger) and various admixtures of Judaism and Gnosticism (Walther, Sokel) to theosophy (Ryan, Sokel) and, most recently, the Eastern wisdom traditions (Lee, Whitlark, Ryan). This is a confusion Grözinger himself acknowledges when he says, for example, in trying to pin down "a Jewish background to Kafka's thoughts," "Nor is his [Kafka's] use of biblical topoi in the aphorisms any more indicative on their own [of such a background], for they could just as easily have found their way to Kafka via Christian mystics such as Meister Eckhardt" (165).

Background

8. Let us begin near the end with Kafka's "Eckermann," Gustav Janouch. If the young friend is to be trusted as a reliable witness to Kafka's thinking-out-loud in his last years, the idea of the *coincidentia* was never far from the latter's thoughts. To wit, Janouch recreates no fewer than three conversations in which Kafka portrays life and death as most intimate antagonists. In one, the older, wiser man attempts to console the younger, upset over his parents' impending divorce, with the promise of the new life that is sure to spring from the ashes of familial strife: "Man muß hinter dem abgestorbenen Laub, das uns umraschelt, schon das junge, frische Frühlingsgrün sehen, sich gedulden und warten" ["Beneath the dead leaves rustling around us one must be able to sense already the young, fresh green of spring, and then be patient and wait"] (252). The seed of the one is already germinating in the other. The opposites are always mingling in subtle ways that escape our notice. Indeed, such dialectical transformation demands of us nothing less than a mindful, stoic patience ("Man muß geduldig alles in sich aufnehmen und wachsen" ["One must patiently take everything into oneself and let it grow"]), for it entails the daunting challenge of bursting "[d]ie Grenzen des ängstlichen Ich" ["the boundaries of the fearful ego"] (252). Such patience issues, then, from a deeper self, a self beyond the defensive ego that keeps the opposites apart. Janouch proceeds to call this patience

Doktor Kafkas Lebensgrundgesetz, den er mir mit beharrlicher Nachsicht einzupflanzen versuchte, ein Grundsatz, von dessen Richtigkeit er mich mit jedem Wort, jeder Handbewegung, jedem Lächeln und Blinzeln seiner großen Augen und dem ganzen langjährigen Dienstaufenthalt in der Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt überzeugte.

[Doctor Kafka's life principle, with which he attempted to inoculate me with persistent care, a principle of whose validity he convinced me with every word, every hand gesture, every smile and squint of his large eyes and with the whole long-suffering term of service in the Workers' Accident Insurance Company.] (252)

9. The other two conversations show Kafka in even more impressive attitudes of spiritual heroism and accentuate the tendency of the *Gespräche*, at the hands of the uncritical devotee, towards hagiography. In one, Kafka becomes something of a Nietzschean *Übermensch* in the sense of one who has embraced the impossible commandment of *amor fati*: "Ich habe zu allem ja gesagt. So wird das Leid zum Zauber und der Tod—der ist nur ein Bestandteil des süßen Lebens" ["I have said yes to everything. Thereby does suffering become enchantment, and death—that is merely a component of sweet life"] (237). In the other, he is endorsing the mystical pronouncements of the Taoist sage, Chuang Tsi: "Durch das Leben wird nicht der Tod lebendig; durch das Sterben wird nicht das Leben getötet. Leben und Tod sind bedingt; sie sind umschlossen von einem großen Zusammenhang" ["Through life death is not quickened; through death life is not destroyed. Life and death condition each other; they are comprehended by a great connection"]. To which Kafka appends: "Das ist—glaube ich—das Grund—

und Hauptproblem aller Religion und Lebensweisheit" ["That is, I believe, the fundamental and foremost problem of all religion and worldly wisdom"] (208).

10. Such late-life aperçus, including the epigraph to this essay, show the continuing prominence in Kafka's worldview of an essentially mystical idea probably familiar to him since childhood. To be sure, particular notions of the *coincidentia* from many different cultural quarters did converge over the years in Kafka's receptive and fecund imagination. There were, from early on, the miraculous tales of the old Hasidic holy men whose powers enabled them to traverse the boundary between life and death with ease, tales known to Kafka through the Baal Shem collections of Buber and Peretz and forming part of his religious-cultural background as a member of the Prague Jewish community (Jofen 30-31, 42). Then there was the dialectical thought of German Romanticism and Idealist philosophy in which Kafka was steeped in his latter days at the German Gymnasium and again more intensively at the University of Prague. As Heidsieck so ably documents, "from late 1902 until the end of 1905 Kafka attended [as an extra-curricular activity] meetings of the philosophers' club or *Louvre-circle*," learning a great deal from the core group of the club made up of "three academic lecturers and several students from the university's philosophy department" (5). Kafka's favorite Romantic author was the kindred troubled soul, Heinrich von Kleist, whose brilliant essay, "Über das Marionettentheater" ["On the Marionette Theater"], had cast the *coincidentia* in lapsarian-mythic terms of Paradise Regained: "Mithin . . . müßten wir wieder von dem Baum der Erkenntnis essen, um in den Stand der Unschuld zurückzufallen" ["And so . . . we would have to eat once again from the tree of knowledge in order to fall back into the condition of innocence"] (Kleist 127). We can't become innocent again by "undoing" our self-awareness but we can transcend the limits of either condition by fusing both into a higher third. Kafka's twist on this, in the parable, "Das Kommen des Messias" ["The Coming of the Messiah"], is the obscure pronouncement, "Der Messias wird . . . erst einen Tag nach seiner Ankunft kommen" ["The Messiah will . . . not come until one day after his arrival"] (*Hochzeitsvorbereitungen* 67; hereafter H), a dazzling paradox asserting, in effect, that what is already here cannot "arrive." Time and eternity, or experience and innocence, coincide!
11. A further academic influence was the course in philosophical psychology that Kafka took in his senior year at the *Gymnasium*. Here he was introduced to some of the new cognitive research of the Leipzig experimental psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (Heidsieck 4-5), which led in turn to his preoccupation with the thought of Wundt's colleague, Gustav Theodor Fechner. A fascinating blend of mystic and scientist, Fechner had obsessed for years over the age-old mind-body conundrum, being driven by it to invent the discipline of psychophysics which became a milestone in the measurement of mental processes (Chaplin and Krawiec 36). Fechner's text, *Elemente der Psychophysik* (1860), already a classic by the turn of the century, may well have been used in Kafka's course and would, at the very least, have been cited by Kafka's professor in that course, Emil Gschwind, who had studied at Leipzig under Wundt (Heidsieck 5). The book's importance here lies in its outlining of a careful series of experiments applying Ernst Weber's law of the "just noticeable difference" in physical stimuli (body) to the measurement of sensory thresholds (mind), leading to Fechner's final pronouncement that mind and body are identical (Chaplin and Krawiec 36). We don't know whether, or how well, Kafka may have appreciated the scientific underpinnings of Fechner's identity hypothesis, but it seems safe to assume the mere assertion by science of the identity of these hoary philosophical antipodes, along with their broader extension, *Natur* and *Geist*, stirred his imagination profoundly.
12. It certainly influenced his close friend, the Prague jurist and moral philosopher, Felix Weltsch, who took the same psychology course at the *Gymnasium*, and whose entire scholarly career, it may fairly be said, was a relentless pursuit—often with Kafka—of the question, as Schillemeit puts it, "wie kommt es überhaupt zu 'Wirkungen' des Geistes in der Welt der Erscheinungen" ["how it is at all possible for spirit to have 'effects' on the world of phenomena"] (168). In several books well known to Kafka—one of which, *Gnade und Freiheit* [*Grace and Freedom*] (1920), Kafka even critiqued in galley proofs—

Weltsch framed the *coincidentia* in terms of a kind of creative *via media*, a "Weg der Gnade" ["way of grace"] or "Weg der Freiheit" ["way of freedom"] (depending on whether God or man was viewed as the agent of transformation), as part of his search for a moral solution to the "Vitalität"-versus-"Geist" or instinct-versus-free will dichotomy (Schillemeit 169-70). Without exaggeration the influence of Fechner's identity hypothesis may be said to have spanned the long years of the Kafka-Weltsch friendship and beyond, ending with the appearance in 1936 of Weltsch's socio-political commentary, *Wagnis der Mitte* [*Risking the Middle Way*], and beginning with Kafka's curt report to Oskar Pollak in a letter of November, 1903, "Ich lese Fechner, Eckehart" [I'm reading Fechner and Eckhart"] (*Briefe* 20). Thus, around the time Kafka and Weltsch were introduced by Max Brod, Kafka was reading, in tandem, a modern scientific champion of mind-body identity and medieval mysticism's most profound exponent of the *coincidentia*.^[3]

13. No doubt the fullest flowering of this principle in Kafka's mystical sensibility occurred during 1917-18 when, in the flush of his emancipation from the insurance agency, he was able to bring an intense intellectual focus to the task of recording his paradoxical spiritual insights in aphoristic form in some eight octavo notebooks. Many of the most intriguing of these play with the cosmology of Messianism and the Second Coming, themes rooted in Kafka's deep familiarity with various popularized strains of medieval Kabbalism and its contemporary phase, Hasidism (Grözinger 13-14, 165-78; Jofen; Walther 38, 113-14). Freethinker that he was, Kafka traversed Jewish, Christian and Eastern wisdom traditions, noting parallels, with ease and delight. As for specific mystical expressions of the *coincidentia oppositorum* coming from his own religion of Judaism, two are especially worthy of mention. First there was the sixteenth-century kabbalist Isaac Luria's notion of "tzimtzum," that is, the primordial kenotic space of Divine contraction out of which the pairs of opposites constituting the universe were said to arise. (The visionary thought of Luria, the Baal Shem Tov of Martin Buber's collection of Hasidic tales, is often cited by kabbalistic scholars as a precursor of the Hegelian dialectic.) Even more important for Kafka's eclectic cosmology, according to Grözinger, was the mystical theology of the eighteenth-century Hasidic Maggid (preacher), Dov Ber, who used the image of the two trees in the Garden of Eden, an image prominent in Kafka's aphorisms, to represent the hope of man's ultimate redemption from the pairs of opposites that dog the human mind. Thus Grözinger: "Only after man leaves the material world—or, in the words of the Maggid . . . [o]nce man comprehends the truth of the Tree of Life, this other truth [of the Tree of Knowledge] fades away in the light of the truth of Oneness, of the elimination of opposites. This is the truth of the Tree of Life, the eternal truth which is present in the unity of all being" (171). Grözinger connects Kafka to these and other kabbalistic traditions through the latter's associations with Buber and Georg Langer (also an avid collector of Hasidic tales), and through "his own studies, through conversations with friends, and through family life as well as through observations of Jewish life in Prague, especially in the synagogue" (4).
14. Many of the aphorisms having to do with the Fall, suffering and redemption show a progressivist chiliastic or even quasi-Hegelian structure culminating in some aspect of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the final freedom promised by man's release from the prison of the principle of contradiction. Thus, for example, the above-cited prophecy, quoted here in full,

Der Messias wird erst kommen, wenn er nicht mehr nötig sein wird, er wird erst einen Tag nach seiner Ankunft kommen, er wird nicht am letzten Tag kommen, sondern am allerletzten

[The Messiah will not come until he is no longer necessary; he will not come until one day after his arrival; he will not come on the last day but on the very last] (H 67)

in which not one but two pairs of opposites, time/eternity and desire/fulfillment, are brilliantly conflated, thereby revealing that our very longings and expectations actually create our illusory sense

of temporal sequence and separation. He will "come" when he is no longer needed, that is, when our grinding spiritual hunger ceases to blind us to His eternal presence. The moment of this cessation, a moment out of time, is the identity of need and fulfillment. And since the one versus the many is an antinomy like any other, when these particular opposites reunite, so do they all in Messianic epiphany. (In Rinzai Zen, which takes a spiritual perspective very similar to Kafka's, it is said that to solve the mu koan, the one typically assigned as a first meditation exercise to novices, is to solve all koans.^[4])

15. The other Second-Coming prophecy, dated November 30 (1917) in the third notebook, shows, or at least implies, a similar synthesis of double antinomies (a coincidence of coincidences) as it looks forward to the revelation of the identity of God and man and the oneness of inner and outer worlds "in der symbolischen Aufzeigung der Auferstehung des Mittlers im einzelnen Menschen" ["in the symbolic demonstration of the resurrection of the mediator in the individual"] (H 66). (I understand Kafka's sense of symbolisch here to be similar to Goethe's [a means by which one being not only represents but also participates in another] or Jung's [a bridge through which opposite shores connect].) Just as striking are key thematic variations scattered throughout the aphorisms, such as the identification of Paradise with this earthly vale of tears ("[Es ist] möglich, daß wir nicht nur dauernd im Paradiese bleiben könnten, sondern tatsächlich dort dauernd sind" ["(It is) not only possible that we could remain permanently in paradise but that we actually already are there permanently"] [H 69]) or its subjective correlative, the insistence, beyond imagining, of the inseparability of suffering and bliss:

Nur hier ist Leiden Leiden. Nicht so, als ob die, welche hier leiden, anderswo wegen dieses Leidens erhöht werden sollen, sondern so, daß das, was in dieser Welt leiden heißt, in einer andern Welt, unverändert und nur befreit von seinem Gegensatz, Seligkeit ist.

[Only here is suffering suffering. Not in the sense that those who suffer here will, because of this suffering, be exalted in some other place, but in the sense that what in this world is called suffering is, in another world, unchanged and merely liberated from its opposite, bliss.] (H 80)

This is no different than Novalis's ecstatic anticipation in the supremely mystical *Hymnen an die Nacht* [*Hymns to the Night*]:

Und jede Pein Wird einst ein Stachel Der Wollust sein. [And every pain Will be a spur To blissful gain.] (20)

16. Scholars have, of course, noted this or that aspect of the picture I am endeavoring to present here more globally and with a heightened sense of its significance as a context for Kafka's creativity. Although he does not specifically locate Kafka within the German mystical tradition of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, Hartmut Binder, for example, does note the strong tendency in the aphorisms towards the fusion of contraries: "Die Gegensätze, die, auf Held und Gegenspieler verteilt, in den Erzählungen und Romanen die Handlung in Gang bringen, werden in den Parabeln und Aphorismen zum Paradox zusammengefaßt. . . . Dieses Zusammenzwingen des Gegensätzlichen zur Identität ist charakteristisch für Kafkas Paradoxe" ["The contraries, as allotted to hero and counterpart, which in the tales and novels set the plot moving, become in the parables and aphorisms condensed into paradox. . . . This fusion of oppositions into identity is characteristic for Kafka's paradoxes"] (235). Hans Walther grounds Kafka's Messianic vision "[i]n der kabbalistischen Literatur des Mittelalters" ["in the kabbalistic literature of the Middle Ages"] which conceives the Fall in dialectical terms as the chaotic proliferation of alienated pairs destined to come together again: ". . . die Spaltung in Gutes und Böses, Lebendiges und Totes, Reines und Unreines, Heiliges und Profanes. . . . In der messianischen Erlösung werden jedoch mit der gefallen Welt auch alle jene Scheidungen, die ihr Wesen ausmachen, verschwinden" [". . . the split into good and evil, life and death, pure and impure, sacred and profane. . .

. But in the Messianic redemption the fallen world, along with all those separations that make up its being, will disappear"] (113). More pessimistically, Walter Sokel, in noting the prominence in Kafka's worldview of the double bind for man (in particular Jewish humanity) created by the pairs of opposites, sees him as tending strongly towards a separatistic Gnostic cosmology, affinities to Kabbalism notwithstanding. In other words, for Sokel, Kafka is too strongly attached to the transcendent God of light to affirm an ultimate reconciliation with Jehovah, "who is a God of life and its promise on earth" ("Between Gnosticism and Jehovah" 71). Sokel's signature image for this view is from the well-known aphorism in notebook 3 that has man bound by two chains around the neck which alternately pull him upward toward heaven and downward toward earth, always against the direction in which he seeks to move. One wonders what Sokel makes of the numerous aphorisms that prophesy redemption.

The Fiction

17. Yet, as fascinating as the foregoing sketch of mingled influences is, these surely were for Kafka no more than gratifying corroborations of what he already knew first-hand from his own deepest inner experience; and it could only have been from such experience, from the post-spatial pointal abyss of the *coincidentia*, that he was writing when he baited Weltsch in a letter with the indirect question "ob die Welt aus einem Punkt zu kurieren ist" ["whether the world can be cured from a single point"] (*Briefe* 187).^[5] On at least one occasion, and probably more than that, this centering or healing effect of the *coincidentia* took the form for Kafka of the experienced identity of the writer with the process of writing.^[6] This occurred during the night in which he jotted down the entire text of "Das Urteil" ["The Judgment"] in a single trance-like sitting. For once he felt he had fully experienced the elusive condition of pure writing, "as though the tale had written itself through him using him only as its medium" (Sokel, "Frozen Sea" 75). Sokel emphasizes Kafka's sense, recorded in his diary, of the "forward movement of the tale which carried him along as though in water" (75). This effect of flow or swimming, analogous to orgasm, is a common metaphor in mystical literature East and West for the bliss of the *coincidentia*.
18. For Kafka writing was from the beginning an almost instinctive kind of spiritual practice, a way of breaking through what he called "the frozen sea" of incessant self-absorption to a "total opening of body and soul" (qtd. in Sokel, "Frozen Sea" 71, 75).^[7] It was Kafka's "royal road" to the creative unconscious and the deeper states of being. In its best moments it meant a perfect congruence between his personal will as writer and the autonomous thrust of the process. It was in this sense of surrendering the neurotic need to control the moment to the effortless flow of the *coincidentia* that Kafka could describe the songs in his head in "Die Sirenen" ["The Sirens"] as so many "verführerische Nachtstimmen" ["seductive voices of the night"] beckoning him in the evening to his desk after another dreary day of adjusting claims (*Parables and Paradoxes* 92). To the extent that those voices could on a given evening write themselves through Kafka, Kafka could experience even the ghastliest of them, even the sirens with their hideous claws and sterile wombs, even Gregor Samsa, as beauty itself: "[S]ie konnten nicht dafür, dass die Klage so schön klang" ["They couldn't help it that their lament sounded so beautiful"] (*Parables* 92). All images expressive of Kafka's alienation from the body ("eine fremde Schweinerei" ["an alien obscenity"] [*Briefe* 131]), whether his own (Gregor, "Der grüne Drache" ["The Green Dragon"]) or the woman's (the sirens, K.'s rolling around with Frieda in beer puddles in the inn of the castle village), would be redeemed through the mysterious alchemy of the *coincidentia*. When the song could sing itself, all would be transformed by that Beauty that is in no way opposed to ugliness. Only the mystical notion of such a Beauty reconciles us to Kafka's otherwise shocking offence to ordinary sensibility in the conversations with Janouch in which he twice conflates love with filth: "Die Liebe schlägt immer Wunden, die eigentlich nie richtig heilen, da die Liebe immer in Begleitung von Schmutz erscheint" ["Love always inflicts wounds that never properly heal, since love always appears in the company of filth"], and shortly thereafter, "Der Weg zur Liebe führt immer durch

Schmutz und Elend" ["The way to love always leads through filth and misery"] (239, 242).

19. But not only did the *coincidentia* "write" Kafka, he also wrote (about) *It*—one is almost tempted to say *only* (about) *It*—as an analysis of much of the short fiction and the immortal "Verwandlung" makes clear. "Die Zelle ["The Cell"]," for example, can certainly be read as Kafka's mystical vision of the identity of conscious and unconscious mind,^[8] or mind and body:

"Wie bin ich hierhergekommen?" rief ich. Es war ein mäßig großer, von mildem elektrischem Licht beleuchteter Saal, dessen Wände ich abschnitt. Es waren zwar einige Türen vorhanden, öffnete man sie aber, dann stand man vor einer dunklen glatten Felswand, die kaum eine Handbreit von der Türschwelle entfernt war und geradlinig aufwärts und nach beiden Seiten in unabsehbare Ferne verlief. Hier war kein Ausweg. Nur eine Tür führte in ein Nebenzimmer, die Aussicht dort war hoffnungsreicher, aber nicht weniger befremdend als bei den andern Türen. Man sah in ein Fürstenzimmer, Rot und Gold herrschte dort vor, es gab dort mehrere wandhohe Spiegel und einen großen Glaslüster. Aber das war noch nicht alles.

Ich muß nicht mehr zurück, die Zelle ist gesprengt, ich bewege mich, ich fühle meinen Körper.

["How did I get here?" I exclaimed. It was a moderately large hall, lit by soft electric light, and I was walking along close to the walls. Although there were several doors, if one opened them one only found oneself standing in front of a dark, smooth rock-face, scarcely a handbreadth beyond the threshold and extending vertically upwards and horizontally on both sides, seemingly without any end. Here was no way out. Only one door led to an adjoining room, the prospect there was more hopeful, but no less startling than that behind the other doors. One looked into a royal apartment, the prevailing colors were red and gold, there were several mirrors as high as the ceiling, and a large glass chandelier. But that was not all.

I do not have to go back again, the cell is burst open, I move, I feel my body.] (*Parables* 116-17)

I see this parable as the artistic apotheosis of Fechner's identity hypothesis. It enacts the lightning-flash realization by the first-person narrator of the coincidence of opposites: at first we have the cell with its two rooms, one lit by a bland electric light, the other more colorful and lit by a great glass chandelier. These rooms are, as often in self-reflective dreams, the conscious and unconscious minds respectively, the narrator identifying with the safe but monotonous light of reason or conscious awareness, for here is where he stands, not daring to do more than sheepishly peer into the more colorful, more promising ("hoffnungsreicher") adjacent room. But he senses that the conscious mind alone will not get him out of the prison of dualism ("Hier war kein Ausweg" ["Here was no way out"]), for it is that mind, with its subject-object structure, that *constitutes* the prison. He also senses, wisely, that a caution-to-the-winds plunge into the more mysterious, more promising "Fürstenzimmer" ["royal apartment"], though its walls be decked with great mirrors of self-revelation that are themselves illuminated and integrated by a Jungian mandala-like chandelier, will avail him little since there will be no conscious ego to appreciate all this self-knowledge. Neither the dualism of consciousness nor the monism of unconsciousness will free him. There being nothing he can do, no move he can make, he gives up. And it is precisely in this giving-up, this total letting-go of the intent to be free, that freedom happens—suddenly, effortlessly, mysteriously: "Ich muß nicht mehr zurück, die Zelle ist gesprengt, ich bewege mich, ich fühle meinen Körper" ["I do not have to go back again, the cell is burst open, I move, I feel my body"]. He is no longer a consciousness that *has* an unconscious, or a mind that *has* a body; now he

is the body, and, *being* the body, now *knows* it in a way far superior to before. Liberation is trumpeted in a separate concluding paragraph as a *fait accompli*, implying that the event itself takes place in the silence *between* paragraphs, in other words that, as the *coincidentia* of conscious and unconscious, or mind and body, or "before" and "after," it defies narration which can properly function only by keeping all these pairs separate. Perhaps that which cannot be told occurs on the unmentioned threshold between the rooms, a spatial analog to the temporal silence between paragraphs.^[9]

20. Kafka's familiarity since *Gymnasium* days with the psychology of Gustav Fechner bore other fruit as well. Fechner's careful probing of the gray area between mind and body in the performance of the earliest stimulus-response experiments helped Kafka to crystallize his own independently acquired mystical understanding of the mind as a dialectical field generated from the matrix of the *coincidentia*. Fechnerian influence is quite apparent in "Der Wächter" ["The Watchman"] in Kafka's ironic play with the idea of thresholds of sudden awareness:

Ich überließ den ersten Wächter. Nachträglich erschrak ich, lief wieder zurück und sagte dem Wächter: "Ich bin hier durchgelaufen, während du abgewendet warst." Der Wächter sah vor sich hin und schwieg. "Ich hätte es wohl nicht tun sollen", sagte ich. Der Wächter schwieg noch immer. "Bedeutet dein Schweigen die Erlaubnis zu passieren?" . . .

[I ran past the first watchman. Then I was horrified, ran back again and said to the watchman: "I ran through here while you were looking the other way." The watchman gazed ahead of him and said nothing. "I suppose I really oughtn't to have done it," I said. The watchman still said nothing. "Does your silence indicate permission to pass?" . . .
(*Parables* 80-81)

Here Kafka dramatizes the inverse dialectical relationship between simple and self-consciousness, the two ordinary human levels. Spontaneous action, the proverbial Zen sword stroke, happens when one forgets the "watcher." But the instant he is remembered, self-doubt and awkwardness come storming back. Subtly implied in this Zen "koan" (perhaps through the *Ich-Erzähler* [first-person narrator] who recalls the event) is a matrix from which both states spring and on which they remain existentially dependent. (A traditional Zen mondo asks: "When the two disappear into the one, where does the one go?") Also implied is a tiny seed of irritation nascent to the spontaneous state, a seed which, at a certain point in its growth, will cause the narrated I-persona suddenly to recall the watcher who abruptly ends the free flow of action: thus the passage from innocence to experience, or childhood to adulthood, termed by Lacan "the mirror phase," a lapsarian image also favored by Kleist in his masterful "Über das Marionettentheater." It is from Fechner that Kafka came to understand the term *Schwelle* [threshold] in a psychological sense. As Heidsieck tells us, "Fechner empirically demonstrated that sensory impressions and their concomitant feelings require a minimal (noticeable) intensity to enter into consciousness. He applied this concept to aesthetics and introduced the term *aesthetic threshold*, which Kafka is using here as well [i.e., in an incidental text discovered by Max Brod]" (28). Fechner's concept of *Schwelle* helped Kafka to grasp intellectually what he knew well from inner experience, that states of consciousness, mystical no less than other kinds, are related to one another in both a "gradual" and "sudden" sense. There is psychospiritual evolution, perhaps largely unconscious, towards illumination, climaxed by a sudden burst of insight; or, as in "Der Wächter," there is a kind of reverse event: blissful child's play aborted by the sudden appearance of the Other.

21. We can also infer, through the mini-drama enacted in "Der Wächter," Kafka's sense that the mystical state, insofar as it comprehends these discrete lesser states of mind, is the only escape from the "Zelle" (two rooms) of dualism. It is not really to be viewed as the "third" phase of the Romantic-triadic myth of the Fall, a linear view, but as an apotheosis of the first two phases, a blending of the best of each: the seamless joy of spontaneity and the discriminative power of "difference," a true *coincidentia*

oppositorum.

22. "Robinson Crusoe" presents another trope for the putatively split human mind as its own trap, only here the trap is agoraphobic rather than claustrophobic as in "Die Zelle":

Hätte Robinson den höchsten oder richtiger den sichtbarsten Punkt der Insel niemals verlassen, aus Trost oder Demut oder Furcht oder Unkenntnis oder Sehnsucht, so wäre er bald zugrunde gegangen; da er aber ohne Rücksicht auf die Schiffe und ihre schwachen Fernrohre seine ganze Insel zu erforschen und ihrer sich zu freuen begann, erhielt er sich am Leben und wurde in einer allerdings dem Verstand notwendigen Konsequenz schliesslich doch gefunden.

[Had Robinson Crusoe never left the highest, or more correctly the most visible point of his island, from desire for comfort, or timidity, or fear, or ignorance, or longing, he would soon have perished; but since without paying any attention to passing ships and their feeble telescopes he started to explore the whole island and take pleasure in it, he managed to keep himself alive and finally was found after all, by a chain of causality that was, of course, logically inevitable.] (*Parables* 184-85)

Robinson is exposed to the dangers lurking behind every tree of the uncharted island. So at first he stays visibly perched at its peak, believing, like the prisoner in "Die Zelle," that remaining within the relatively safe, overt space of consciousness (here the upper strata of the mysterious island of self) offers the best hope of rescue. But he soon begins to suspect that hope for deliverance from "up here" and "out there" (compare the blocked exit doors of the blandly lit room of conscious reason in "Die Zelle") is delusive and that his best bet is to explore "seine ganze Insel" ["his entire island"]. And so, no longer clinging to the safe conscious nor avoiding the threatening unconscious sphere, Robinson places himself at the optimal vantage point of any experiential moment, at the *coincidentia oppositorum* that is Self, and begins to enjoy the bracing freedom of the dialectical swim of the pairs (say, conscious and unconscious, abandonment and rescue) into and out of each other. That Kafka is thinking here in terms of the higher dialectical logic of the *coincidentia* that liberates rather than the either-or Aristotelian sort that binds, is made clear in his closing characterization of Robinson's rescue as occurring "in einer allerdings dem Verstand notwendigen Konsequenz" ["by a chain of causality that was, of course, logically inevitable"]. Since rescue here would seem anything but "logically inevitable," we take Kafka's words as a cue to probe beyond the confines of two-dimensional to the spaciousness of three-dimensional logic. At that indeterminate moment when Robinson surrenders utterly to his isolation, he is rescued—by his True Self, the *coincidentia oppositorum*, which by virtue of Its absolute non-discrimination between abandonment and rescue, constitutes the only true rescue.

23. Dialectical logic is the logic of the mystic. Its insight is that the members of any polarity are existentially interdependent (no abandonment without rescue, no up without down, etc.). The mystic experiences this law as applying, not just to interior linguistic reality (the categories by which the mind organizes the world), but to exterior physical reality as well, hence to all phenomena without exception. This being the case, it dawns on him or her that no particular thing is ever "real" in and of itself, in the sense of being an independently existing substance, but merely acquires a kind of illusory reality by virtue of its negative attachment to its own counterpart. (Some such insight, it seems to me, lies behind the binary emphasis of Saussurean linguistics as well as the poststructuralist claim that language cannot refer to anything outside itself.) This realization brings freedom from "the pairs of opposites that dog the human mind," as the tradition of Advaita Vedanta has it. Thus Robinson's "rescue."
24. The mystic in Kafka knew that dialectics promises emancipation from the separative prison of dualism. Recall his paradoxical assertion, quoted above, of the identity of happiness and suffering, the latter

somehow, mysteriously, "unverändert und nur befreit von seinem Gegensatz" ["unchanged and merely liberated from its opposite"]. In "Der Kaiser" ["The Emperor"] Kafka lends depth and nuance to this vision of an inner dialectical law governing the universe by claiming that faith in the workings of that law must not be allowed to preclude doubt, that indeed faith and doubt are as inextricable as any other pair of opposites and are themselves a manifestation of the law. A drop of doubt in a sea of faith is no problem (and for reasons having nothing to do with quantitative difference): "Viel Aufsehen machte das natürlich nicht; wenn die Brandung einen Wassertropfen ans Land wirft, stört das nicht den ewigen Wellengang des Meeres, es ist vielmehr von ihm bedingt" ["This, naturally, did not cause much of a stir; when the surf flings a drop of water on to the land, that does not interfere with the eternal rolling of the sea, on the contrary, it is caused by it"] (*Parables* 108-09). Faith and doubt define each other. If one can allow room for both in consciousness, without phobically trying to get rid of the negative, if one can, like Robinson, keep faith in the unknown depths of the mysterious island of self even as fear and doubt rumble in the belly, one invites rescue by the Source of all the pairs. That rescue is neither more nor less than the joyful recognition of that Source as, in the words of ancient Zen master Hui-neng, one's own "True Nature."

25. In "Die Wahrheit über Sancho Pansa" ["The Truth about Sancho Panza"] the dualism that is transcended in *coincidentia* is personified in the characters of Sancho and the Don, and their particular relationship casts the issue of self-awareness less in Freudian (cf. "Die Zelle") than in Jungian pan-mystical terms of lower ego versus higher Self, or ignorance versus Wisdom.

Sancho Pansa, der sich übrigen dessen nie gerühmt hat, gelang es im Laufe der Jahre, durch Beistellung einer Menge Ritter- und Räuberromane in den Abend- und Nachtstunden seinen Teufel, dem er später den Namen Don Quichotte gab, derart von sich abzulenken, dass dieser dann haltlos die verrücktesten Taten ausführte, die aber mangels eines vorbestimmten Gegenstandes, der eben Sancho Pansa hätte sein sollen, niemandem schaden. Sancho Pansa, ein freier Mann, folgte gleichmütig, vielleicht aus einem gewissen Verantwortlichkeitsgefühl, dem Don Quichotte auf seinen Zügen und hatte davon eine grosse und nützliche Unterhaltung bis an sein Ende.

[Without making any boast of it Sancho Panza succeeded in the course of years, by devouring a great number of romances of chivalry and adventure in the evening and night hours, in so diverting from him his demon, whom he later called Don Quixote, that his demon thereupon set out in perfect freedom on the maddest exploits, which, however, for the lack of a preordained object, which should have been Sancho Panza himself, harmed nobody. A free man, Sancho Panza philosophically followed Don Quixote on his crusades, perhaps out of a sense of responsibility, and had of them a great and edifying entertainment to the end of his days.] (*Parables* 178-79)

We are told that, over time, Sancho has managed to free himself from his demon, the proud but deluded adventurer Quixote, through the practice of reading romances of chivalry and adventure. In other words, by studying literary projections of his own egoic craving for honor, a kind of meditation, Sancho eventually "catches on" to the conative impulses driving his own consciousness and, in so doing, transcends them, that is, awakens to his true Self or higher nature. In paradoxical terms, that higher nature is a Don who completely sees through his own posturing and is therefore able to enjoy it to the hilt: "Sancho Pansa, ein freier Mann, folgte gleichmütig . . . dem Don Quichotte auf seinen Zügen und hatte davon eine grosse und nützliche Unterhaltung bis an sein Ende" ["A free man, Sancho Panza philosophically followed Don Quixote on his crusades, . . . and had of them a great and edifying entertainment to the end of his days"]. So Kafka is intimating that, once this "catching on to" oneself occurs, wisdom/Self/Sancho can finally relax into its own identity with ignorance/ego/the Don. Since both terms are essentially empty, mere "signifiers" in current critical parlance, not a hair's breadth

separates them. Zen describes this emancipated condition as moving freely within one's own karma and likens it to a dreamer's sudden realization that he is dreaming. Since he's making it all up anyway, he may as well enjoy himself (McCort, "Kafka Koans" 66-67). (In "Die Quelle," ["The Spring"] by contrast, we have an allegory of the failure of the persona to awaken to his True Nature: "Da er aber nichts merkt, kann er nicht trinken" ["But as he notices nothing he cannot drink"] [*Parables* 184-85]. Through his depiction of both rare deliverance and frequent failure in the short fiction, Kafka may be suggesting that spiritual awakening is a gratuitous event that occurs independently of the will of the individual.)

26. Deliverance, it seems to me, is precisely what comes to Gregor Samsa at the moment of death, not biological death but that mystical "death before death" or ego death of which Angelus Silesius speaks in his renowned epigram (164).[\[10\]](#) In keeping with our casual allusions to Zen as a frame of mystical reference, one could describe "Die Verwandlung" as the narration of the archetypal struggle with a koan, the koan of identity: "What am I?" is the question. As with any good koan, the issue is anything but airy philosophical speculation. For Gregor it becomes, in the course of his season in hell, quite literally a matter of life and death. Dreading the insect and longing for the human, he eventually finds himself stuck between the two, paralyzed, or in Kafka's term, "festgenagelt" ["nailed fast" or "crucified"] (*Sämtliche Erzählungen* 84) between positive and negative energies, not unlike the mighty *Alexander der Grosse* riveted by his own "Erdenschwere" (*Parables* 94; Kafka's intranslatable neologism meaning literally "earth heaviness"): "Er [Gregor] machte bald die Entdeckung, daß er sich nun überhaupt nicht mehr rühren konnte" ["He (Gregor) soon made the discovery that he could no longer move at all"] (*Sämtliche Erzählungen* 96). When Gregor, in his pathetic apology to the chief clerk in part one, squeaks, "Ich bin in der Klemme" ["I'm in a fix"] (*SE* 66), he is of course saying far more than he knows at that point in the narrative and might well have substituted the Japanese *koan* for the German *Klemme*.
27. This psychospiritual impasse between opposites is precisely where a good koan grips one, for only when it becomes crystal clear that all further struggle to resolve the koanic issue of what one "is" is absurd, does the issue suddenly resolve itself: Gregor isn't really anything in particular (or more precisely, anything more than an arena of struggle between delusive self-images) because he's everything in general. He's the whole story! This sudden leap from part (character in struggle) to whole (narrator/narration), which is a leap to their identity resolving the koan of "identity," seems in retrospect almost predictable from the intimate proximity to Gregor of the only nominally omniscient narrator from the beginning.[\[11\]](#) Once Gregor sees He's behind it all—indeed, that He *is* it all—then the compassion for others heretofore blocked by frantic self-concern can flow out in unalloyed profusion: "An seine Familie dachte er mit Rührung und Liebe zurück" ["He thought back on his family with affection and love"] (*SE* 96).
28. Gregor succeeds in awakening to his True Nature, the *coincidentia oppositorum* of character and narrator, or part and whole. He learns that each of us is both the author and the protagonist of his own life-drama, each of us both contending with and identical to the universe of his own experience. This amounts to a paradoxical identity of bondage and freedom, implying a higher Freedom that is not in any way opposed to bondage, indeed that flourishes right in the midst of bondage. One's True Nature is this Freedom itself. Gregor's realization of the Freedom that he *is* (not "has," a dualistic notion) uncorks the heretofore bottled-up love of family. (The phrase "Rührung und Liebe" ["affection and love"] marks the only occurrence of the word *Liebe* in the tale.) He has cracked wide open the very koan whose solution eludes the parched persona in "Die Quelle." This wretched Every "Er" ["He"] fails to make Gregor's leap from part ("ein zweiter Teil aber merkt nichts" ["another part notices nothing"]) to whole ("ein Teil übersieht das Ganze" ["one part overlooks the whole"]), unable to crystallize a vague intuition of their identity: "Ein zweiter Teil . . . hat höchstens eine Ahnung dessen, daß der erste Teil alles sieht" ["another part . . . has at most a divination that the first part sees all"] (*Parables* 184-85). As

long as he is limited to the "tunnel vision" of an involved character, he must remain oblivious to the proximity of the flowing water: "Er hat Durst und ist von der Quelle nur durch ein Gebüsch getrennt" ["He is thirsty, and is cut off from a spring by a mere clump of bushes"] (*Parables* 184-85). Only a higher perspective, revealing to him that he is fundamentally a "One" that has somehow become two ("zweigeteilt" ["divided against himself"]) [*Parables* 184-85]), a perspective enjoyed by Gregor through his "death before death," can restore him to the integrity that alone would slake his thirst. The waters of the "Quelle" are, needless to say, those of spirit, or, in modern parlance, self-realization.

Conclusion

29. Kafka's sure mystical instincts taught him that nothing is overcome by resistance and, conversely, that anything, even contradiction, is overcome by assimilation. He also knew that this assimilation was subtle, for it meant dying to one's own sense of separate selfhood. Even *waiting* for fulfillment was merely a form of passive aggression that reinforced the ego. That's why, in "Vor dem Gesetz," a hundred, or a thousand, or a million gatekeepers seem to stand between the man from the country and the Law whose majesty he seeks. As long as (the) man continues to see the ultimate authority dualistically as the Other to which he is subject rather than monistically as something he *is*, there will always be the next gatekeeper.
30. But perhaps we can take his death as merely allegorical, that is, as the death of a limited, hence essentially deluded, point of view (like Gregor's "death before death"), which, by virtue of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, marks it as the commencement of his life in freedom. That would make the gatekeeper's shutting of the gate both an end and a beginning, itself a coincidence. From the expansive vision gained by dying to his sense of separate selfhood, the man from the country suddenly beholds the blocked gate to the Law as what in truth it has always been, a non-barrier, or what Zen calls a *mumon-kan* or gateless gate. (The *Mumonkan* [literally "no-gate barrier"] is a renowned collection of Chinese koans dating from the thirteenth century. Even today it remains the "Bible" of Rinzai Zen spiritual practice. Its koans, like all effective koans, are designed to bring the student to the profound realization that all imagined barriers to Oneness [*coincidentia*] are just that: *imagined*, "gateless gates," projections of the intrinsically dualistic, and hence delusive, structure of human consciousness.)[\[12\]](#)
31. Kafka knew the *coincidentia oppositorum* as that ineffable, exquisite moment in which what has long been felt as the confining bane of one's existence—insect, gatekeeper, cell—is suddenly known, through the experience of identity with it, to be freedom itself.[\[13\]](#) When the man *becomes* the cell, there *is* no cell. When he *becomes* the Law's guardian, which amounts ironically to becoming (realizing) the projected discriminating function of his own mind, he becomes the Law itself, for, in the looking-glass logic of mysticism, to become a single thing experienced as other is to overcome *all* otherness.
32. Perhaps the ultimate paradox of this freedom to which Kafka points is that it bridges even that most unbridgeable of gaps, that between opposed interpretations of his works. In light of the *coincidentia*, even the cultural constructivism of, say, a Rolf Goebel and my own mystical or "transcendent" approach to Kafka become seamlessly compatible. The *coincidentia*, as Kafka knew and expressed it, supersedes all boundaries, not excluding that between transcendence and immanence, or *Geist* and *Kultur*. Kafka was well aware (even if some of his current constructivist critics are not) that spiritual transcendence had nothing to do with any remote ideal sphere of pure being, or what Goebel, with reference to "Vor dem Gesetz," erroneously calls a "künstlerischen Autonomie- und Reinheitsideal" ["ideal of artistic autonomy and purity"] ("Verborgener" 42). Rather, it was to be realized right within the miasma of cultural constraint, indeed there or nowhere, like the Zen lotus sprouting up unblemished from the mud. The death of the man from the country is, *mirabile dictu*, the allegorical death of the

mind of ignorance, the gate-erecting mind, which would keep the cultural and the spiritual, the human and the Divine, apart.

33. It dawns on the man, in allegorical death, that it is neither possible nor necessary to cast off the trappings of culture that comprise his conditioned life, nor need he cross any putative hallowed threshold to gain the freedom embodied by the Law (a law being the one thing that is not subject to itself), because he realizes that freedom is always already the case on either side of the gate. It is then that gate and gatekeeper [14] go "poof!", exposed as the empty phantasms they have always been. [15] They are demons of merely apparent separation, one might say, conjured by the binarizing human mind (operating at times, such as here and now, in its literary-critical mode), demons forever subject to exorcism by the *coincidentia oppositorum*.

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Notes

¹ "Das Auge darin ich Gott sehe, ist dasselbe Auge, darin Gott mich sieht. Mein Auge und Gottes Auge ist ein Auge und ein Gesicht und ein Erkennen und eine Liebe" (qtd. in Suzuki 126). Except for Brod and Grözinger, German sources are quoted here in the notes in the original. In the text, however, they are quoted both in the original and in English translations made by me, the only exceptions to the latter being Grözinger and Kafka's parables. Translations of the parables are taken from the dual-language edition, *Parables and Paradoxes*.

[Back](#)

² Among the "not so mystical" thinkers would be Herder, who, according to Michael Morton, is grounded in the tradition of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, a tradition stretching back to Cusanus and, so the author argues, long before him to the pre-Socratic Ionian philosopher Heraclitus. Morton calls Herder "the direct ancestor of such thinkers as Hegel and Nietzsche" (51), this by reason of his 1764 essay, "On Diligence in Several Learned Languages," the exposition of which occurs in three stages, "corresponding broadly to the pattern of

thesis-antithesis-synthesis that, a generation later, becomes the characteristic framework, not merely of the Hegelian system, nor even solely of German Idealism, but of Romantic thought and sensibility generally" (28). In the third chapter of his book, Morton offers a reading of Herder's essay that shows how its subtle and paradoxical method of composition clearly prefigures the Romantic poets' playful deconstruction of the presumably irreducible identity/difference antinomy. As Beate Allert puts it, summarizing Morton on Herder: "Unity seems to restore itself by means of its own disruption. The return to unity, lost in the process of historically necessary differentiation, can be achieved only by sustaining differentiation" (248).

[Back](#)

³ According to Margarita Pazi, Brod was himself committed to the pursuit of a "schöpferische Mitte" in his thought and imaginative writing so that it may be appropriate to speak of the "Prager Kreis" as a "triumvirate of the *coincidentia*": "Bei Kafka ist es die detaillierte, realistische Wiedergabe irrealer Vorgänge; die Realität eines Traumes. Bei Brod läßt es sich als die Suche nach dem Weg bezeichnen, der eine Vermengung dieser Gegensätze ermöglicht. . . . Das wahre Ziel kann stets nur in der Verbindung der Polaritäten erreicht werden, durch das 'und', wie er es mit sprachlicher Emphasis in 'Stefan Rott' darstellte" (51-52).

[Back](#)

⁴ The koan is the principal form of meditation practiced by the Rinzai sect. Kapleau defines it as "a formulation, in baffling language, pointing to ultimate truth. Koans cannot be solved by recourse to logical reasoning but only by awakening a deeper level of the mind beyond the discursive intellect" (369). The *mu* koan recalls an exchange between Master Joshu (ninth century) and a monk wherein the monk asks Joshu, "Does a dog have the Buddha nature," and the latter answers "Mu!" (no) (Kapleau 76). The novice meditates upon this "Mu" until the Zen master is satisfied that he has sufficiently discerned its spiritual significance.

[Back](#)

⁵ The letter was written in October of 1917. See *Briefe* 186-88. It will have become apparent by now that my approach to Kafka, like my approach to mystical experience in general, is one that allows for the possibility of a "pure" event, i.e., a moment of awareness that transcends cultural constraint or conditioning of any kind. Thus my position amounts, tentatively at least, to a kind of rear-guard action against what might be termed the neo-Kantian "constructivist" view of consciousness, currently predominant in religious philosophy and the social sciences, which views our experience, religious or otherwise, as invariably shaped by a psychologically and socially predetermined "set" (nexus of beliefs, values, attitudes, etc.). In other words, we rather "construct" than encounter internal and external events. My position, then, again tentatively, would be opposite that of Rolf Goebel's in *Constructing China* or in "Kafka and the East: The Case for Cultural Construction," or in "Verborgener Orientalismus," each of which argues for a Kafka who viewed Eastern spirituality primarily as a foil for satire of Western orientalism. On this view, Kafka became disillusioned, some time in the Fall of 1914 after writing "Vor dem Gesetz" (presumably his "swan song" to transcendence), with the quest for a "künstlerische Autonomie- und Reinheitsideal" ("Verborgener" 42), once he understood that ideal to be no more than an empty metaphysical construct (Kafka as reluctant constructivist). This essay reads Kafka as far too spiritually savvy to confuse the spiritual with such phantasms as lofty ideals, universal essences, or remote pristine spheres. What Kafka actually knew the spiritual to "be" (for lack of a better term) —i.e., the experience (not idea) of the *coincidentia oppositorum*—is what I am attempting to demonstrate here. The reason I hedge in declaring my opposition to Goebel, and cultural constructivism generally, is that the *coincidentia* paradoxically allows, indeed requires, a compatibility between the spiritual and any other view of interpersonal or cultural relations. This is because they are, from the mystical perspective, *advaita* or not-two. For further elaboration, see the "Conclusion" at the end of the essay. For able representatives of both sides of the current philosophical debate over mystical experience as pure versus constructed, the reader is referred to Katz and Faure (constructivists, though the latter hedges a bit) and to Forman (purist).

[Back](#)

⁶ This particular form of the *coincidentia oppositorum* is also what Friedrich Schlegel is alluding to, in terms of irony, in his famous *Athenäum* fragment 116 where he describes romantic poetry as a hovering ("schweben") "zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden" (93). It also seems to be what poststructuralists are getting at when they rant about the death of the author: what they mean is the total absorption of the writer's ego into the act of writing from which vantage point the whole sense of individual identity can be seen to be an illusion (of language).

[Back](#)

⁷ Werner Hoffmann (102) paraphrases Kafka's own words in the *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen* to the effect that "Schreiben blieb für ihn eine Form, seine Form des Gebetes." Grözinger stresses Kafka's Kabbalistic sense of language as a creative power, available to God and man alike, that expresses the mystery of the essential continuity, in being, of signifier and signified, word and thing: "This may explain why life and language are identical for Kafka and why he attributes a religious weight to writing as a form of prayer" (140). We might also mention in this context that Kafka was not unfamiliar with either the idea or practice of meditation as a means of achieving a quasi-mystical one-pointed state of consciousness. In a letter of mid November 1917 to Felix Weltsch, there is a curious passage in which he speaks hypothetically of a succession of ever deeper phases of concentrated awareness culminating in a "Denkzipfel" that would amount to a temporary banishing of the ego ("So wärest Du also glücklich ganz beseitigt" [199]).

[Back](#)

⁸ Kafka's intellectual understanding of the unconscious seems to have come from two different, though parallel, trends in turn-of-the-century academic psychology: from psychoanalysis, which both fascinated and repelled him with its "threat" of an "'Eindrängung' des 'Gegenwillens'", i.e., a potential return or breakthrough of the repressed, as he puts it in a letter of October 1917 to Weltsch paraphrasing the latter ("Was Du mit der 'Eindrängung' des 'Gegenwillens' meinst, glaube ich zu verstehen, es gehört zu dem verdammt psychologischen Theorienkreis [i.e., Freud's inner circle in Vienna], den Du nicht liebst, aber von dem Du besessen bist [und ich wohl auch]" [*Briefe* 187]); and from the cognitive psychology of Fechner with its more mundane but also more experimentally supported measurement of thresholds of perception or awareness (Heidsieck 28).

According to Blank (28 and 49), whose recent catalog of books in Kafka's personal library, *In Kafkas Bibliothek*, supersedes Jürgen Borns *Kafkas Bibliothek* of 1990, Kafka had in his possession at least two psychoanalytic studies, Theodor Reik's *Flaubert und sein Versuchung des Heiligen Antonius* of 1912 and Hans Blüher's *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft*, 2 vols., 1917 and 1920. Blank (49) also cites Binder's informative history of Kafka's highly ambivalent attitude towards psychoanalysis presumably dating from at least as early as the Fall of 1911.

[Back](#)

⁹ The notion of an inscrutable threshold between opposed spheres that, by virtue of its very inscrutability, illuminates (and thereby harmonizes) all, is mentioned by Kafka in an off-hand conversation of October 1920 with Gustav Janouch, here too in the context of the "two souls," conscious and unconscious, that dwell in the human heart. As he reflects to his young friend on the paradox of psychological freedom as a value that, à la Faust, must constantly be maintained by vigilant effort, Kafka says: "Der Funke, der unser bewußtes Leben ausmacht, muß die Kluft der Gegensätze überbrücken und von einem Pol zum anderen springen, damit wir die Welt für einen Augenblick im Blitzlicht erblicken" (60). Sparks and lightning are, of course, perennial mystical images of spiritual insight and suggest Kafka's vision of a "sudden cure" for the divided human self that goes qualitatively beyond the plodding effort of, say, psychoanalysis. (It would seem that the *coincidentia* was especially resonant in Kafka's mind at this time since he also alludes to it in the very conversation preceding this one in Janouch's record. In this instance the context is less individual-psychological and more transpersonally mystical as Kafka instructs his interlocutor on the permeability of the

boundary between self and world: "Der Griff nach der Welt ist deshalb immer ein Griff nach innen. Darum ist jede Betonwand nur ein Schein, der früher oder später zerfällt. Denn Innen und Außen gehören zusammen. Voneinander losgelöst sind es zwei verwirrende Ansichten eines Geheimnisses, das wir nur erleiden, aber nicht enträtseln können" [57]. If we consider the span of years between the 1903 letter to Oskar Pollak mentioned earlier ["Ich lese Fechner, Eckehart"] and this conversation with Janouch in 1920, it becomes clear that the *coincidentia oppositorum*, this deepest of paradoxes, continued to occupy a lofty position in Kafka's mystical consciousness.)

[Back](#)

¹⁰ "Stirb ehe du noch stirbst / damit du nicht darffst sterben / Wann du nu sterben solst: sonst möchtestu verderben."

[Back](#)

¹¹ Cf. the short parable, "Die Quelle," for another—in this case very pointed and precise—elaboration of the coincidence of part and Whole (or ego and Self). As with Gregor before his Enlightenment, so too here does the "part" (the "er"-persona who is thirsty) have a dim "Ahnung" of its true identity as the Whole.

[Back](#)

¹² On Kafka's conversance with the nearly universal mystical archetype of the series of gates leading to ever more rarefied levels of spiritual perception, see Grözinger (46-54) for the Kabbalah and Lee (256-72) for Taoism and Buddhism. In "Vor dem Gesetz" Kafka, as usual, gives a traditional image his own Zen-like paradoxical twist: Enlightenment is not a gradual thing, not a matter of getting through so many doors of perception, but a sudden, liberating intuition (grounded though it be in long suffering and frustration) of one's intrinsic identity with everything (Zen's *kensho*), occurring at the moment of ego-death (the allegorical death of the man from the country). Individual identity surrenders to cosmic: the quest for the Law had been but a quest for one's own True Self.

[Back](#)

¹³ For another reading of "Vor dem Gesetz" as a parable of the coincidence of opposites—the perspective in this case Taoist-mystical—see Lee 9-10, 242-72. Lee likens Kafka's Law to the Tao, viewing both as a matrix for such interdependent opposites as transcendence and immanence, and interior (human) and exterior nature (hence also morality and nature). The identification of the Law with the Tao ("the right and perfect life" [174]) has also been made by Max Brod in his biography of Kafka.

[Back](#)

¹⁴ The growing disparity in size between man and gatekeeper ("[D]er Grössenunterschied hat sich sehr zuungunsten des Mannes verändert" [*Parables* 62]) is analogous to the deepest stages of koan meditation in which the meditator may struggle with the anxious sense that he is disappearing and only the koan itself remains, looming like an invincible mountain. The paradox, of course, is that the moment the koan exists by itself, it ceases to exist since, as the German proverb has it, "Einer ist keiner."

[Back](#)

¹⁵ Zen, in a typical affront to logic, might call this "casting off one's conditioning without casting it off." The paradox I adumbrate in my reading of "Vor dem Gesetz" allows me to insist on a mystical-transcendent perspective on Kafka as a *sine qua non* for appreciating the subtlety of his art while still endorsing, without fear of contradiction, the richly nuanced materialist approach of cultural constructivism as practiced by Goebel et al (e.g. Sander Gilman's intriguing view of Kafka's life and work as embodying "the world of disease that formed Kafka's [Jewish] experience" [230]; or Mark Anderson's brilliant examination of Kafka's complex relations to the important cultural trends of his own time and place, such as Hapsburg decadence, dandyism and changing social attitudes towards the body; or Karen Piper's convincing reading of the penal

colony as an allegory of the beginning of the end of empire). My only caution is that the reader beware of any assertion by a constructivist commentator that these two approaches are mutually exclusive. Anderson [14], by contrast, implies their possible congruence in his subtle discussion of the "richly ambiguous" sense in which Kafka often uses the term *Verkehr* in his writing: to indicate "the movement of the modern [urban] world" [*diesseits*] as well as the [mystical?] ecstasy that he occasionally experienced in the throes of "intercourse" with writing [*jenseits*]. This surprising openness of Anderson to transcendence comes a mere nine pages after his firm assertion that "Kafka's status as a modern *depends* on the failure of his effort to reach *das Allerheiligste*" [5].

[Back](#)

Romanticism and Buddhism

Hegel on Buddhism

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Hegel derived his understanding of Buddhism from a particular sect of Tibetan Buddhism which emphasizes the notion of emptiness. This essay demonstrates the significance of Hegel's gendered misprision of Buddhism for his thought and for Western philosophy in general, and in particular provides a major reading of the idea of 'nothingness' which Western thought takes to be the content of Buddhist 'emptiness.' This essay appears in *Romanticism and Buddhism*, a volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for *Romantic Circles* (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University of Maryland.

The spell is diminished only where the subject, in Hegel's language, is "involved"

—Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

1. When Adorno castigates the materialistic consumption of an easily available form of Zen as a "corny exoticism," the decoration of a vacuously uncritical form of modern subjectivity (*Negative Dialectics* 68), he may not be aware of the extent to which traditional (non-Western) Buddhists may already agree with him. And when he describes genuine self-reflection, the subject meditating upon "its real captivity," he does not note that this is indeed a more genuine form of Buddhist meditation. Moreover, when Adorno approvingly cites the notion of Hegelian "involvement," he appears not to be aware of the irony that such an idea has links to Hegel's encounters with Buddhism (68). Buddhism, then, seems to be on both sides of the equation. How might one begin to account for such a state of affairs? Adorno has Heidegger in his sights, with his (for Adorno) paradoxically reifying view of Being and his concomitant later interest in Zen. Adorno tacks closely to the passage in Hegel's *Logic* where Buddhism is discussed (119-20). Adorno's argument—that Heidegger reifies modern subjectivity much as a quiescent Zen produces a fascist modern subject—would have been even more effective had he been aware of some of the historical and philosophical determinants of reified nothingness. Moreover, this would have enabled an intensification of Adorno's already intensely dialectical account of nothingness and nihilism towards the end of *Negative Dialectics*, which he associates explicitly with the thought of Schopenhauer (376-81). In a book committed to thought's encounter with what it is not, myopic Western eyes might at least have caught a glimpse of Mahayana Buddhism in the Romantic period. Adorno needed only to have read Hegel on Buddhism more closely. And far from finding models for fascist subjectivity, Adorno would have discovered in Hegel himself a weak, sickly, feminine being, the castoff of a relentless dialectic, the very type of Adorno's own remorseless assault on modern positivity. For in Hegel, Buddhism is the abject body that must be expelled for true subject-object relations to commence. And ironically enough, Buddhism itself would probably agree.
2. In Adorno, what for Hegel was consciousness without content has become "nonconceptual vagary" (68). Hegel's notion of pure consciousness without content aptly theorizes some Romantic-period aesthetic phenomena (Simpson 10). But to what extent does this notion, under scrutiny, undermine the idea of a stable, solid self upon which some of the popular ideas of Romantic art depend (such as the idea of the "egotistical sublime")? Hegel discovered a form of modern consciousness reflected in the Buddhist idea of emptiness, or as he puts it, "nothingness."^[1] For Hegel, nothingness is a state of pure negation, devoid of positive determinations. It is, therefore, a dialectical dead end, or rather, a horrifyingly stillborn, stunted false start. Staying with this nothingness would not be the same as the

"tarrying with the negative" to which he exhorts philosophy in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*, but a premature retirement of Spirit in a pasture in which, to use his striking image, all cows are black (Hegel para. 16). Nothingness as void is a basic element of Judeo-Christian theology. The concept of nothing or zero is significant in the history of the West: borrowed from Arabic mathematics, zero enables negative numbers, which facilitates double-entry bookkeeping, a cornerstone of capitalism—zero enables debt, the creation of speculative capital.^[2] Nothingness was also destined to become a significant aspect of Romantic and post-Romantic European philosophy. There is no doubt that a careful, slow reading of Hegel's (mis)recognition of nothingness in Buddhism would be of great value.

3. This essay explores something that Hegel tries to hide in plain view, something that he disavows that rests uncannily close to his own philosophical scheme in what Hegel construes as an almost maddening contentment and self-enclosure. Hegel dismisses Buddhism, and in particular, Buddhist meditation, without keeping it utterly out of reach. Indeed, he is unable to jettison Buddhism, even while he is criticizing it, for it provides some key elements of his models for thinking. Despite the way in which it shadows his thought, discussions of Hegel's view of Buddhism have so far tended to be oblique or limited to simple reference.^[3] There is still rather little on the topic in general, and very little detailed work on Hegel's complex engagement with Buddhist ideas and practices. Here I combine textual, historicist and philosophical analysis to demonstrate that whether Hegel already had what Heidegger calls a "pre-understanding" for Buddhism in his thinking; whether the fragmentary Chinese and Tibetan whispers that reached him from his sources on Buddhism influenced his view; whether he was always already disposed to view emptiness as "nothingness" and Buddhist soteriological practice as *Insichsein* or "being-within-self" (that is, ultimately without concrete determinants); or whether Buddhism did influence him indirectly; my thesis stands: that there is a remarkable and historically probable collusion between Hegel's view of the nothingness of the in-itself—or, as first stated in the *Logic*, Fichte's phrase $I = I$,^[4]—and the dominant form of Tibetan Buddhism of which he was aware. And that residing within Hegel's concept of Buddhism, like a toe half-absorbed into a sucking mouth (an image to which we will return), is a gentle lovingness (Sanskrit: *maitri*) whose objective and sexual status is rigorously, and, for Hegel, threateningly indeterminate.
4. Three sections follow. The first establishes Hegel's view of Buddhism, exploring in particular a key set of texts that explore ideas of nothingness, or emptiness. The second investigates more thoroughly those notions of Buddhist emptiness with which Hegel was familiar. This digression into Buddhist thinking is crucial for my argument, since it demonstrates that Hegel's idea of nothingness drastically reduces emptiness to what Buddhism itself ironically considers a rather substantial *thing* in which one has to *believe*. The final section outlines the ways in which Hegel's view of emptiness insufficiently accounts for the different kinds of Buddhist view contemporary with Hegel. The main Buddhist text on emptiness, the Prajnaparamita Sutra (the Sutra of the Heart of Transcendent Knowledge), is reproduced in an Appendix in its abbreviated twenty-five-line form.

Hegel's Buddhism or, philosophy puts its foot in its mouth

5. Buddhism had existed in Western writing for a long time before Hegel examined it. Strabo, Marco Polo and Peter Bayle had discussed it; John Toland talked about "the religion of Fo" (Buddha); the travel writer Richard Hakluyt published pictures of yogis (certain kinds of practitioner), though whether they were Hindu or Buddhist is not specified. The Annual Bibliography of English literature lists about forty citations about Buddhism, Tibet and the Dalai Lama in Romantic-period poetry. Thomas Moore, for example, wrote about mantra, Buddha, and Tibetan Lamas.^[5] Hegel's direct sources for his view of Buddhism are, primarily, the work of Samuel Turner (1749—1802), an English researcher who had gained access to the court of the Dalai Lama and his associate the Panchen Lama (the findings were published around 1800); and the sixth and seventh volumes of the encyclopedic *Allgemeine Historie* on

Buddhism (1750).^[6] From the former, Hegel gleaned information about the idea that Lamas were reincarnations of previous Lamas (or high teachers). From the latter, he obtained the concept of "the empty" or "nothing," which is the main focus of this paper.

6. Here is the passage from the *Allgemeine Historie*:

Sie sagen, dass das leere oder Nichts, dere Ursprung aller Dinge sey; dass aus diesem Nichts und aus der Vermischung [Vermischung] der Elemente, alle Dinge hervorgebracht sind, und dahin wieder zuruck sehren müssen; dass alle Wesen, sowohl belebte als unbelebte, nur in der Gestalt und in den Eigenschaften von einander unterscheiden sind: in Betrachtung des Ubwesens oder Grundstoffs aber, einerley bleiben. (6.368)

They say that mere Nothingness is the basis of all things; that all things are brought out of this Nothing and out of the mingling of the elements, and must tend back there again; that all phenomena, both living and non-living, are only different from one another in form and in superficial properties: upon examination/contemplation of phenomena or basic elements, however, nothing besides remains.

Note that this is "mere" nothingness. Note also that nothingness is claimed to be "the basis of all things" (not necessarily a universal view, even in Tibet, whence the *Allgemeine Historie* obtained its information). And note the subtle ambiguity that there is "nothing besides" the phenomena one might analyze. Does this mean that nothingness actually exists "besides" these phenomena? Or does it suggest that all we can possibly experience are these phenomena themselves? We shall return to this. In brief, despite protesting that what he dislikes about Buddhism is the first idea, that nothingness is the basis of all things, what Hegel actually produces, along with many others, is a sense of a positive nothingness that exists alongside phenomena. In strictly Buddhist terms, he becomes guilty of the very nihilism he is berating in what he beholds.

7. In the *Logic* Hegel makes one explicit remark about Buddhism, and some others that pertain to his understanding of Buddhism in his later lectures on religion. Buddhism plays a consistent role in this body of work. It is a placeholder for a view that must be acknowledged but ultimately surpassed on the onward march towards the full realization of the Notion in Christianity. We could easily blame Hegel for a form of imperialism and stop there, but it will be more revealing to find out what he says, and not only for its parallels with the view to which he was indirectly exposed.
8. In all historical probability, the very people who started the Tibetan whispers, the Gelugpa sect that had been dominant since the mid-eighteenth century, had developed their own form of xenophobia, which manifested both as an intolerance towards outsiders (still evident in some Tibetan teachers' attitudes towards "Westerners" and even those from other Tibetan sects), and as a strict doctrinal discipline. This specific discipline is most legible in the incongruities in Hegel's perception of Buddhism. There is a general understanding of what the Mahayana (of which more later) calls the absolute truth ("nothingness"), fused with a perception of strict Hinayana self-denial, and tinged with the Vajrayana culture of "Lamaism," as Hegel calls it, which would have been highly visible to Samuel Turner. Hegel's Buddhism is a mixture of asceticism, a limited philosophical view of the absolute, and superstition. Hegel does not so much hear as overhear the Gelugpa whispers about emptiness.
9. The Gelugpas (who were and are headed by the Dalai Lama), with their very thorough and gradual path of study, scholarship and debate, would have been loath to dish out anything beyond the strict Hinayana teachings which must be held by all monastic practitioners of whatever level (unlike some of the yogic practitioners associated with other sects in Tibet)—hence asceticism. Emptiness (nothingness) would have been a general cultural understanding, as the Mahayana view was pervasive

in Tibet. Merely being born meant taking refuge vows (taking refuge in the Buddha, the dharma and the sangha or community of practitioners), just as young children in Christian cultures are baptized. Entering a monastery, as every aspiring young man or woman would tend to do, would entail taking the bodhisattva vows of entry into the Mahayana, in which one promises to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. So most Tibetans would be familiar with what Hegel calls "nothingness" as part of the cultural background. And the Vajrayana, remaining secret even to most of the monks with whom Turner would have come into contact, would be perceived as trappings by a visitor—the supernatural elements, the idea of incarnate Lamas, the rituals.

10. Paragraph 87 of the *Logic* describes "Pure" being as "mere abstraction" and "therefore the absolutely negative: which, in a similarly immediate aspect, is just Nothing" (125, 127). Hegel continues:

Hence was derived the second definition of the Absolute: the Absolute is the Nought. In fact this definition is implied in saying that the thing-in-itself is the indeterminate, utterly without form and so without content—or in saying that God is only the supreme Being and nothing more; for this is really declaring him to be the same negativity as above. The Nothing which the Buddhists make the universal principal, as well as the final aim and goal of everything, is the same abstraction. (127)

The talk of nothingness as "the final aim and goal of everything" is evidently derived from the *Allgemeine Historie*. Hegel here compares what he knows of Buddhism from the *Allgemeine Historie* with Spinozist and Enlightenment attitudes towards God, that he is a "supreme Being and nothing more." (One should qualify this, however, by recalling Hegel's spirited defense of this view, which he calls a true pantheism, in the section on Buddhism in *Religion*.) The notes that follow are revealing:

It is natural too for us to represent Being as absolute riches, and Nothing as absolute poverty. But if when we view the whole world we can only say that everything is, and nothing more, we are neglecting all speciality and, instead of absolute plenitude, we have absolute emptiness. The same stricture is applicable to those who define God to be mere Being; a definition not a whit better than that of the Buddhists, who make God to be Nought, and who from that principle draw the further conclusion that self-annihilation is the means by which man becomes God. (128)

(Hegel may misinterpret Spinoza's idea of nothingness: Hegel subscribes to a non-Parmenidean, relativistic or *meontic* form of "nothing," while Spinoza could be said to opt for a more radical *oukotic* nothing) (Regan 147). If we study the lectures on the philosophy of religion, we will be able to read back into a later passage in the *Logic*, the beginnings of the section on essence (a dialectical progression from the idea of being), Hegel's understanding of what he means by *Insichsein* or being-within-self, which is his view of Buddhist practice:

Unfortunately when the Absolute is taken only to be the Essence, the negativity which this implies is often taken only to mean the withdrawal of all determinate predicates. This negative action of withdrawal or abstraction thus falls outside of the Essence—which is thus left as a mere result apart from its premisses—the *caput mortuum* of abstraction. But as this negativity, instead of being external to Being, is its own dialectic, the truth of the latter, viz. Essence, will be Being as retired within itself—immanent Being. (162)

Because it lacks predicates, this apophatic essentiality seems too abstract for Hegel. And yet the way in which he describes inwardness bears the trace of an all too physical materiality. In the *Logic*, it is a death's head. To imagine Buddhism as a skull would effectively kill it off. But elsewhere Hegel produces a far more uncanny image. Ironically, the image that he chooses to describe Buddhism in

Religion is a Hindu one: "The image of Buddha in the thinking posture, with feet and arms intertwined so that a toe extends into the mouth—this [is] the withdrawal into self, this absorption in oneself" (252). This astonishing image is alarming more in the eyes of the narrator than in itself: babies gleefully suck their toes all the time. But in Hegel's description, it is as if the toe has taken on a horrifying life of its own, wiggling away from the life of totalizing spirit. The toe "extends," it wants to thrust itself down the throat, like one of Francis Bacon's figures disappearing into a keyhole or a washbasin.[7] Would it have been marginally less disturbing if the mouth had (actively) tried to swallow the toe? The translation captures something of the Cartesian view of matter as sheer extension, so that we cannot tell whether there is a willing subject "behind" the toe's descent into the mouth's wet cavity. The extension of the toe (willed or not? by the mind, or by the toe itself?) is precisely self-annihilating, and pleurably so. The mixture of sexuality and death could not be harder to miss. Or is it asexual pleasure? Or presexual? This is a precise indeterminacy to which we shall return.

11. The toe sucker is practicing literal, physical introversion. The body turns round on itself and disposes of itself down one of its own holes. To be "retired within itself," Being loses its spiritual or ideal aspect and actually *becomes* this very image, as in Hegel's telling syntax: "The image of Buddha . . . this [is] the withdrawal into self." Hegel repetitively adds "this absorption in oneself," as if he himself cannot get away from the fascinating, sucking maw. There is a little eddy of enjoyment in Hegel's own text, a sucking backwash that is not simply dialectics at a standstill, but rather an entirely different order of being. This Buddhist being is only recognizable in Hegel's universe as an inconsistent distortion, at once too insubstantial and too solid. Buddhism stands both for an absolute nothingness, a blank zero that itself becomes heavy and dense, unable to shift itself into dialectical gear, and for a substantiality that is not even graced with an idea of nothingness. Contemplation, meditation, is tantamount to reducing the body to a horrifying inertia, a body without organs in the Deleuzian-Guattarian terminology (Deleuze and Guattari 149-66). The nearest approximation is a black hole, a physicality so intense that nothing escapes from it. On the other hand, the image is made of organs rather than a single, independent body. If he is terrified of the static body without organs of the meditating ascetic, in which the inside of the body threatens to swallow all trace of working limbs, perhaps Hegel's description also evokes an even greater panic concerning the possibility of *organs without bodies*. As one starts to examine the image, nothingness proliferates into a veritable sea of holes. The zero of the open mouth, stuffed full of the body of which it forms a part, while the body curls around in a giant, fleshy zero, like a doughnut: this is the inconsistent, compelling image, the *sinthome* of Hegel's ideological fixation.[8] It is ironic, then, that for Buddhist meditators, physical posture is indeed not only a support for meditation, but also embodies it, quite literally, as in the notions of yoga and mudra (gesture), where certain postures enact forms of being awake. These are indeed "thinking postures," to use Hegel's phrase, the textual ambiguity brilliantly (accidentally?) betraying his anxiety about the idea that a *posture* could *think*. There must be an infinite distance between *posing* a philosophical proposition, conceptually *positing*, and this *posturing* thought, this thinking that postures and postures that perform thinking. As any Buddhist meditator could have told Hegel, meditation is a highly physical process.
12. As well as being disturbingly feminine (I am reminded of Φ , Lacan's formula for castration, Phi—a Greek letter that is like a crossed-out zero, something that is "not even nothing"), Hegel's version of Buddhism is disturbingly infantile: it needs to pull its toe out and start doing dialectics. The image of self-swallowing "stands above the wildness of desire and is the cessation of desire" (252), and also the cessation of predication:

[Buddhists] say that everything emerges from nothing, everything returns to nothing. That is the absolute foundation, the indeterminate, the negated being of everything particular, so that all particular existences or actualities are only forms, and only the nothing has genuine independence, while in contrast all other actuality has none; it counts only as something

accidental, an indifferent form. For a human being, this state of negation is the highest state: one must immerse oneself in this nothing, in the eternal tranquillity of the nothing generally, in the substantial in which all determinations cease, where there is no virtue or intelligence, where all movement annuls itself. All characteristics of both natural life and spiritual life have vanished. To be blissful, human beings themselves must strive, through ceaseless internal mindfulness, to will nothing, to want [nothing], and to do nothing. (253—4)

Again, note the way in which Hegel adopts the *Allgemeine Historie's der Nichts* in "the eternal tranquillity of the nothing." For Hegel, the Buddhist constantly equates form with mere accidentality, which in itself is "indifferent" nothing. "When one attains this," declares Hegel, putting Buddhism in its place, "there is no longer any question of something higher, of virtue and immortality." Instead, "Human holiness consists in uniting oneself, by this negation, with nothingness, and so with God, with the absolute" (254). Union with God is embodied in extending one's toe into one's mouth in an impossible, fantastic act of self-swallowing, a precise figuration of the paradoxical impossibility of "will[ing] nothing—want[ing] [nothing], and do[ing] nothing" (the sneer in the tricolon is almost audible). Again, the image of willing nothing is at once vacuously negative and disturbingly positive. Nothingness is threatening because of its inertia as well as its blankness, its "indifferent" refusal to lift the body into the spirit world.

13. At this point in his career, Hegel views Buddhism as even lower in the hierarchy of religions than Hinduism, which proliferates dream-like images of the absolute in all the varied figures of the Hindu pantheon. Later, in revising *Religion* and in *The Philosophy of History*, he was to reverse their respective positions.^[9] Buddhism, more than the Taoism that in his scheme precedes it in its understanding of the absolute, at least grasps that there is something determinate to be recognized and sought, unlike more animistic religions. It is just that what is recognized is still, for Hegel, on a very abstract level, as abstract as the statement "I = I" (*Logic* 125). Buddhism remains in the position ascribed in the *Logic* to the doctrine of "Becoming," whose "maxim" is that "Being is the passage into Nought, and Nought the passage into Being" (131). The way Buddhism floats about between more and less primitive stages of religious history is symptomatic of the tremendous anxiety with which Hegel simultaneously teases out and wards off this I = I, this self-enclosing, self-regarding nothingness that barely conceals a positive pleasure, a self-liberating or self-annihilating suction. This pleasurable self-reference might later find a name in narcissism. Without alluding directly to toes extending into mouths, Jacques Derrida opposed the implication that narcissism is a contemptible state. He insisted upon the existence of many differently "extended" forms of narcissism, forms that may or may not be the disturbing self-regard of Hegel's Buddha (Derrida 199). Indeed, in Buddhism, self-regard might be a form of kindness (*maitri*) rather than selfishness.
14. Hegel is well aware that self-swallowing is paradoxical. After the swallow, there would be no swallower, and no swallowee. That is his point. (Curiously, it is rather close to the Buddhist idea of transcendent generosity, that in truth there is no gift, no giver, and no recipient.) This paradox hides another, deeper one: that of self-pleasuring. This self-pleasuring is the very form of the meditating Buddha, a form Hegel hides out in the open of his text. Is the toe-sucking sexual, or not? Is it an objectal relationship, resembling a relationship of a subject to Melanie Klein's "partial objects"? Are swallower and swallowee the same? Are they different? This indeterminacy is structural, not epiphenomenal. Subject, object and abject are smeared across one another unrecognizably. It looks like the one thing that Hegel finds more frightening than nothingness is this unrecognizable intimacy, this intimacy with the extimate, with what protrudes, such as a toe, and the red, wet, all too human O of the mouth that takes it in. The disavowal of nothingness hides another disavowed, even more denegated and foreclosed thing, the inertia of the self-pleasurer, who after all appears in the form of an inert statue, a self-consuming artifact, the static image of a meditator disappearing into nothing, and/or

dissolving into enjoyment. After all, who is to say that there is a person, a sucker, behind all this? The image organizes zones of pleasure rather than a single solid self. In the conclusion, I will re-examine the idea that Hegel's Buddhism has something to say about the objects that we think of as art, objects whose status was becoming highly contested and politicized in his era, as the notion of the aesthetic sought, rather like Buddhism, to reconcile subject and object in a world in which they had been ripped apart.

15. Hegel's thinking about nothing, and about nothing as Buddhism, is of the utmost significance in the history of philosophy: for example, all too briefly, Schopenhauer's view of Buddhism as annihilation of desire; Nietzsche's critique of Buddhism as a consumption of the soul; Heidegger's interest in Zen; the nuancing and critique of "I = I" in Sartre. Aside from their potential political implications for hearing the plight of the exiled Tibetans, the drastically distorted remarks of Slavoj Žižek on "Western Buddhism" in *Critical Inquiry* and elsewhere continue the equation of emptiness with nothingness, and nirvana with the realization of this nothingness. Notwithstanding the irony that Lacanian (and therefore Sartrean, and therefore Hegelian) notions of nothingness inform his view of why the Christian legacy is worth fighting for, for Žižek Western Buddhism is only a hippy form of laziness, lacking the commitment to moral absolutes that he praises in the proclamations of Pope John Paul II.^[10] Using the zeugma "dust to dust," from the Book of Common Prayer, which resembles Hegel's "I = I" in its circular brevity, Žižek rubbishes nirvana as "primordial Void" (Žižek 54). Far from being an originally Buddhist concept, this void is Judaeo-Christian through and through. It is as if, in translation, Buddhism is thought to stop at the mysterious void that pre-exists God's act of creation. Translation yanks emptiness towards the void, then blames it for being nothingness. Though, as I will argue, certain Buddhist views do tend towards nihilism, they by no means justify any action based on the misinterpretation that since everything is empty anyway, one might as well steal or kill. The notion of emptiness is inseparable from compassion. Since reality goes beyond any conceptualization, we can afford to lose a little of our precious territory, our ego-clinging, our sense of a self to which we are holding on for dear life.
16. It is the Prajnaparamita Sutra that Schopenhauer explicitly quotes at the end of the first volume of *The World as Will and Representation* in declaring that "the point where subject and object no longer exist" is "nothing," a nothing that oscillates between an aestheticized asceticism, an "ocean-like calmness of the spirit," and a more existentially horrific "empty nothingness" (Schopenhauer 411-2). Despite the fact that towards the beginning of paragraph 71, from which these statements are taken, he indicates that nothing can only be a relative entity, not a positive one, Schopenhauer cannot resist imbuing it with a certain charm or horror; despite, one might add, his Kantian insistence on the ways in which aestheticized asceticism transcends desire. Such a paradoxical, ambiguous nothingness is the place at which the Western notion of the aesthetic, itself a reconciler of subject and object, mistakenly meets the Buddhist notion of emptiness. The image of the toe-swallowing meditator is remarkably similar to what De Quincey says about Kant, that in his "aesthetic" self-absorption he was a stomach devouring itself (De Quincey 2.156).^[11] Schopenhauer's cold nirvana forgets about the pleasure Hegel tries to ward off. According to Buddhism, the universe in which we exist is the *desire realm*, and thus, since all beings are caught in a dialectic of desire, passion (and com-*passion*) is a lifeline to enlightenment, because by extending friendliness to oneself and others, one begins to understand that things are not as solid as our habitual tendencies would take them to be.
17. In *The Philosophy of History* Hegel draws upon more material from Turner's account of the court of the Dalai Lama. Hegel exhibits a horrified fascination concerning the "feminine" education of the young incarnate Lama (Tibetan: *tulku*) "in a kind of prison" of "quiet and solitude," living "chiefly on vegetables" and "revolt[ing] from killing any animal, even a louse" (171). This vignette is as arresting as the toe-swallowing statue. For a start, here is evidence that Hegel robustly joined the contemporary debate on vegetarianism. For him, vegetarianism is unmanly, as is refraining from killing animals. I am

reminded of the portrayal of the Jacobins in the English press as at once both cannibals and vegetarians: the word "revolt" was well chosen by the translator.[\[12\]](#) For Hegel, Buddhists eat themselves (toe-sucking) and yet they abstain from carnivorousness, and from virility. As David Clark has shown, masculinity and meat-eating are inextricably intertwined in Hegel.[\[13\]](#)

18. For Hegel, the capacity to act, to will, has been imprisoned. Hegel goes further here than a simple picture of monastic calm. Aside from walls and doors, quietness and solitude themselves constitute the prison. If we combine this image with that of the toe-sucker, we discover inwardness upon inwardness, self-withdrawal enclosed within self-withdrawal. The Lama's being is locked within another (being-within-self), or even willingly inserted into it, like a toe. The prison of quiet and solitude is practically the external form of the view of nothingness, embodied in the oroboros, the self-swallowing man. Shut away in the monastery, the Lama's very body is his or her prison, a hole inside a hole. And yet the Lama is on display, like a statue. The Lama "does not hold the Spiritual Essence as his peculiar property, but is regarded as partaking in it only in order to exhibit it to others," in a spirit not unlike that of French or American republicanism (171). Hegel must have been disturbed by the extent to which the culture of the Lama uncannily echoed the Europe of absolute freedom and terror, while simultaneously retaining a monarchical structure, an unsynthesized parody of the very state for which he himself argued. Furthermore, his recoil from nothingness is a curious symptom of his unconscious reification of it: if it were really just nothing at all, then why be repulsed? There is evidence here of a denegation, a strong disavowal of the body in its inert, contemplative and "passive," "feminine" mode. *Insichsein*, then, is a sick form of inwardness. Indeed, Hegel goes so far as to posit inwardness itself as sickness. The horror of the toe-sucker is that he or she has already achieved the union (or dissolution?) of subject and object, before the dialectic has even begun. It is a frighteningly abject version of Hegel's own system, oblivious to the march of History, an astonishingly resilient and resistant form of physical being that preexists the dialectic, standing outside and yet inside at the same time, a state of exception that uncannily resembles Hegel's own devouring and self-devouring dialectic. This has to do with Hegel himself, of course, but it also has to do with the cultural logics of patriarchy and imperialism, in which those who do not have History must have it imposed on them. It has not a little to do with the image of the inscrutable, self-regarding, lazy Oriental. For the British, this role was played by the Chinese, who for De Quincey needed some Western Historical stimulation to wake them up.[\[14\]](#)
19. To which a Buddhist might reply: yes, indeed, better never to have started the march of History, better never to have become involved in samsara, better to have stayed inert, with one's toe in one's mouth, partaking in nothingness. Žižek's harsh words about peaceful states of mind as forms of laziness contain generous helpings of the abject image that Hegelian History had to exempt. Žižek moves too quickly to cast aside the moment at which Western philosophy got a glimpse of emptiness. It is significant from within the perspective of Marxism itself that at the very start of industrial capitalism and imperialism, an image of absolute tranquility was thrown up out of Orientalist studies of Tibet and China. Writing in *Minima Moralia* a century and a half later, Adorno corrects a reflex towards seeing production as (painful) labor. Adorno evokes nirvana:

A mankind which no longer knows want will begin to have an inkling of the delusory, futile nature of all the arrangements hitherto made in order to escape want, which used wealth to reproduce want on a larger scale. Enjoyment would be affected, just as its present framework is inseparable from operating, planning, having one's way, subjugating. *Rien faire comme une bête*, lying on water and looking peacefully at the sky, "being, nothing else, without any further definition and fulfilment," might take the place of process, act, satisfaction. . . . None of the abstract concepts comes closer to fulfilled utopia than that of eternal peace. (Adorno 157)

"Being, nothing else, without any further definition and fulfillment": in Adorno's use of the words of

Maupassant we re-encounter Hegel's notion of nothingness. The collapsed, non-grasping surrender which Hegel spurns is raised to the highest power in Adorno. Despite his own proclamations against Buddhism, Adorno remains one of the few philosophers working within Western traditions whose thinking has a flavor that a Buddhist would recognize as sympathetic.

"There is no spoon": sources for Hegel's nothingness

20. For Hegel, Buddhist nothingness is a false, reified concreteness, a concreteness with, as we have seen, a soft, feminine, abject underbelly. Apparently, there is not enough mediation in meditation. Hegel's sources would have proved no help: the contemporary Gelugpas (and still nowadays, in some cases) could be hostile towards meditation practice, and many have reserved it for a notional point after the completion of one's intellectual studies. Their view of what Hegel is calling nothingness is more popular with Buddhist scholars than with meditators. Ironically, meditators (yogis) were more likely to prefer approaches (such as Cittamatra, discussed below) that could be used as provisional stepping stones (mediations) on the way towards perfect understanding, under the assumption that the owl of enlightenment flies only at dusk. Hegel might even have preferred such views and compared them more favorably with Christianity.
21. I now turn to Tibetan Buddhism's account of so-called "nothingness," a concept (or non-concept?) only visible to Hegel in paradoxical and oxymoronic terms. One very significant aspect of the soteriological practice of Buddhism is the progressive realization of ever more profound views of reality. Understanding what reality is will help to lessen the suffering caused by the grasping and fixation that turns the wheel of samsara or migratory existence (Tibetan: *khorwa*) round and round. According to Tibetan tradition, the historical Buddha supposedly "turned the Wheel of Dharma" or teaching three times during his life. The teachings comprise two different "vehicles" (Sanskrit: *yanas*) for taking the practitioner from confusion and suffering to enlightenment: the Hinayana and Mahayana, the latter of which was taught in two different ways. The "first turning of the Wheel of Dharma" is often called the Hinayana, or Shravakayana (Sanskrit) to denote the "hearers" or ordinary practitioners who heard these teachings. The idea is that in his compassion the Buddha expounded the same teaching in three different ways to three different capacities of audience. Still others assert that different types of audience heard the same words in different ways. I use the notion of the "three turnings of the Wheel of Dharma" as a heuristic term that is intrinsic to the schools of thought I investigate here.
22. "Hinayana" (Sanskrit: "narrow vehicle") is the name that Mahayana (Sanskrit: "broad vehicle") Buddhism gave to early traditions of Buddhist doctrine, as practiced for instance by the Theravadins of Southern Asia. I use the term "Hinayana" here in line with the Tibetan Mahayana and Vajrayana (Sanskrit: "indestructible vehicle") traditions of which Hegel was aware. To think of Hinayana as somehow "lesser" is significantly to misunderstand Tibetan views, in which so-called Hinayana discipline is thoroughly incorporated into Mahayana and Vajrayana practices. The Hinayana, or narrow vehicle, is not all that narrow in its view: the narrowness is the immediacy of focus on the individual practitioner himself or herself, the goal being *soso tharpa* (Tibetan: individual liberation from suffering in samsara). The view of the Hinayana is egolessness. This can be construed first as egolessness of self, in which the self is analyzed into a congeries of phenomenological atoms. Secondly, at least in some forms of Hinayana, one realizes *partial* egolessness of dharmas (Sanskrit: dharmas here in a second sense, that of elements of reality), consisting of the chain of cause and effect known in Tibetan as *tendrel* (Tibetan: dependently originated arising; Sanskrit: *pratityasamutpada*). (This is considered partial egolessness of dharmas from the point of view of the second vehicle, the Mahayana or "broad" vehicle.) In other words, things do not really exist: this glass of water is only made out of bits and pieces of other things, and so are those other things; and the same goes for our actions and thoughts.

23. In the teachings of the "first turning," Buddha's laying out of the Hinayana view, then, there is already some degree of emptiness compared with the habitual notions one has of having a single solid self. Notice that in this view, reality is already not split into subject and object. We are dealing with pieces of phenomenological experience, phenomenological atoms that according to Hinayana scripture occur every sixtieth of a second. These dharmas, or phenomenological atoms, are comprised of a perceiver and a perceived, sense organs and perceptual fields, including the "sense consciousnesses" construed *as* aspects of consciousness: a rainbow, for instance, depends upon water, sunlight, and a certain point of view. So there is some emptiness here. The view of an Arhat or realized being who has followed the path of the Hinayana, is, according to the Mahayanists, equal to that of a bodhisattva on the sixth bhumi (Sanskrit: level of enlightenment; there are eleven in the Mahayana). For the realized practitioner of Hinayana, grasping ceases, though there is still some subtle fixation on what reality is.
24. The "second turning of the Wheel of Dharma" comprised the Mahayana teachings. Mahayana means "great" vehicle, because its view is proclaimed to be vast and profound: profound because it delves down to the bottomlessness of reality; and vast because it expands to care for all sentient beings throughout all space(s) and time(s). In the Mahayana one takes a vow called the bodhisattva vow, in which one promises to help all other sentient beings to enlightenment before attaining enlightenment oneself, or to attain enlightenment for their sake. Of course, paradoxically, the wish to open up one's resources to other sentient beings is itself very enlightening and one finds oneself enlightened more rapidly than on the Hinayana path of individual liberation. The Mahayana path is based on understanding and realizing the view of emptiness, and of extending one's warmth and compassion towards other sentient beings: giving birth, in other words, to *bodhichitta* (Sanskrit: "mind of enlightenment"). Even if he had been correct about nothingness, Hegel would still have overlooked the compassion side of this coin.
25. Tibetan Buddhists use the terms *trangdon* and *ngedon* to differentiate among the teachings. According to all Mahayanists, the Hinayana view of egolessness is *trangdon*, that is, a partial view. Now according to some Mahayanists, notably the ones with whom Hegel's sources came into contact (in particular the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism, which had assumed political control throughout the eighteenth century), the second turning of the wheel of dharma is fully *ngedon* or definitive, while the teachings of the third turning are partially *ngedon*, designed to aid those who had difficulty with the view of emptiness (Tibetan: *tongpa-nyi*; Sanskrit: *shunyata*) expounded in the second turning. According to other lineages, for example, the Kagyü and Nyingma sects of Tibetan Buddhism (the Kagyü are headed by the Karmapa, who is their equivalent of the Gelugpas' Dalai Lama)^[15] the third turning teachings are *ngedon*, and the second turning partially *ngedon*. The third turning teachings are often called "luminosity" to distinguish them from the second turning teachings on emptiness, though they are said not to contradict this view, but to complement it. (And from a Kagyü or Nyingma point of view, they complete it.)
26. In *The Matrix*, that popular classroom teaching aid, the protagonist Neo observes a young boy dressed like a *tulku* (Tibetan: incarnate Lama). The boy is playing with a metal spoon, supposedly causing it to bend by realizing the truth that in reality "there is no spoon." The boy's words have become an incredibly popular *ersatz* Buddhist catchphrase. Indeed, it does encapsulate the second turning doctrine of emptiness rather well. It is actually easy to explain the second turning view to readers of literary theory: all they have to do is imagine Derrida's view of language and writing to apply to the whole of reality. Nagarjuna (first to second century AD) was the Indian exponent of the Madhyamaka or "middle way" on which the view of emptiness is based. Nagarjuna did not provide a philosophical view so much as a deconstructive method of reducing to absurdity any argument that asserted something single, lasting or independent about reality (in Buddhism, these three together comprise a view based on "self" or ego). In the manner of Derrida insisting that *différance* is not a concept, Nagarjuna insisted that anyone who accepted his philosophy as a belief was incurably insane. (Incidentally, it seems strange,

from a Buddhist point of view, that scholars are at pains to declare in the titles of their books on deconstruction and religion, notably Buddhism, that they are "healing" or "mending" deconstruction. From a Buddhist point of view, it would have been more apt to say that they are sharpening it or making it tougher—or just doing it.)[\[16\]](#)

27. In Tibet the second turning is associated most strongly with Chandrakirti, a student of Nagarjuna, and is known as *rangtong*, or emptiness of self, self-emptiness. How is *rangtong* different from the egolessness of the Hinayana? In this view, the very tools with which we analyzed egolessness of self have no single lasting independent existence. There is a panoply of Hinayana terms for understanding reality, such as the five skandhas (Sanskrit: "heaps"). These five "heaps" make up a sense of self, in the absence of a real one. They are what the Prajnaparamita Sutra refers to in the phrase "no form, no feeling, no perception, no formation, no consciousness"; then there are the sense organs, the sense consciousness and sense fields.
28. An easy way of understanding the Prajnaparamita Sutra would be to put all the terms in the middle section of the Sutra into quotation marks. "In reality, there is no 'form', no 'feeling', no 'perception'" and so forth. The meaning of the Sutra is summed up in the first declaration of Avalokiteshvara, when he says "Form is emptiness; emptiness also is form [that is, substance and shape—determination in Hegelese]; emptiness is no other than form; form is no other than emptiness." If we were to delve into the vertiginous levels of emptiness progressively proclaimed in this chiasmus, this essay would be many times its current length. In brief, the Sutra declares that the very conceptual tools with which the Hinayanists broke down reality are themselves subject to deconstruction: they do not in themselves give rise to a metaphysics of presence. There is no spoon. "Spoon" is just a designation we give to something whose spooniness is a coming together of various causes and conditions, which are themselves empty of inherent existence for the same reason: and the ways in which we break *those* down, talking about cause and effect, for example, or sense fields, is also subject to deconstruction.
29. Among a great variety of methods, Nagarjuna's student Chandrakirti developed the deconstructive form of argument known as the "tiny vajra" (diamond, lightning bolt, scepter), a mini-Madhyamaka exercise, to show that phenomena cannot be said to arise—and that therefore they cannot be said to dwell or cease either. Madhyamaka is much more rigorous than atomism. If we said the spoon arose from something else, a non-spoon, then the essence of the spoon would still be caught up in the pre-spoon, and there would be no (single, independent, lasting) spoon. If the spoon came from itself, then it must always have existed, otherwise it would have come from a non-spoon. This is not the case, so there is no spoon. If the spoon came both from itself and from other entities (non-spoons), it would exist and not exist simultaneously, and since this cannot be true, we cannot establish the existence of the spoon on this basis either. If the spoon came neither from itself nor from a non-spoon, then we assert that something can come from nothing, and we have not determined why the spoon is a spoon and not anything else, say a fork. There is no way of establishing that the spoon is single, independent, and lasting. Since for a Berkeley or a Hume ideas could be said simply to be congeries of sensation and designation, one can see how Hegel would have associated Buddhist thought with certain aspects of Enlightenment philosophy; though there are more resemblances between the Madhyamakan view of emptiness and skepticism than there are to Spinozan pantheism.
30. Why did Nagarjuna call his (non)view the middle way, anyway? It is designed to steer a course between asserting that things exist—in this view, that would be theism, or what Derrida and others call ontotheology—and asserting that they do not—that would be nihilism, which for Nagarjuna still implies holding on to a concept, in which case there is a separation of knower and known, and the return of dualism. Nihilism is *believing in nothing* (in some senses, actually quite impossible). As Adorno puts it, in a devastatingly brief attack on modern chic: "Faith in nothingness would be as insipid as would faith in Being. It would be the palliative of a mind proudly content to see through the

whole swindle" (*Negative Dialectics* 379). One can already see that Hegel's choice of "nothingness" to designate what he understands of emptiness is at least somewhat prey to an accusation that it is truly existent, in the sense of being single, independent and lasting. Hence his view that Buddhism involves the stripping away of all determinants from the self by a rigorous asceticism and (for him) a paradoxical identification with the nothingness. Ironically, the nothingness that Hegel calls the truth of I = I has at least a dash of somethingness.

31. Hegel construes reincarnation as mitigating the potential idolatry of the ways in which Tibetans appeared (and still appear according to current Western media) to "worship a living god" in the form of the Dalai Lama. He is not really a person pretending to be a god, declares Hegel, just a spokesperson (or somewhere between an incarnation and a spokesperson) for nothingness. For all the kinds of cultural superiority such a statement could project, and despite the imperial uses to which such a patronizing generosity could be put, Hegel was not far from the truth. (Incidentally, the inverse misapprehension prevented the Tibetans from converting to Christianity when the first missionaries arrived. In order to describe the risen Christ, they inadvertently used the Tibetan for "zombie" — literally a body activated by an abstract force — and failed to impress.) One can tell that Hegel was inspired by the *rangtong* view in his use of "highest" to describe emptiness: "For a human being, this state of negation is the highest state" (Religion 254). According to the *rangtong* view, reality in its highest absolute nature is empty: if you saw reality properly the perceptual field would at first dissolve, as it does for Neo at the end of *The Matrix*; the first bhumi (level) of Mahayana realization is said to be an experience of everything disappearing.^[17] But in the next view under discussion, emptiness is not the ultimate point of reality, but rather its basis.

There is a spoon: emptiness as basic reality

32. The reason why things exist at all is *because* they are empty, but that does not somehow get rid of them. As the 1970s advertisement for shredded wheat put it, this view has nothing added or taken away. In the *shentong* or third turning view, reality is indeed beyond conceptualization—including the subtle conceptualization that holds on to *that* idea, in whatever form, as a thing to be known. This is what preserves the *shentong* view from nihilism, and from a certain smugness bred of holding the ultimate philosophical joker up your sleeve. "Shentong" means emptiness of other. In the *shentong* view emptiness is only the basis of phenomenal appearance. It is associated in Tibet with the Indian teacher Asanga (third to fourth century AD), and with Yogachara, which means basically a school of thought that is helpful to meditators.
33. One might at this point almost declare, "there *is* a spoon, because it is empty." According to Tsoknyi Rinpoche, a teacher in the Kagyü and Nyingma lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, the reason we can tell this glass of water is empty is *because* it exists.^[18] In other words its emptiness is not in spite of its existence. Emptiness is not the ultimate state of the glass; it is the basis for the glass's existence. To extend the analogy with deconstruction, *différance* by no means abolishes the distinctions between signs; *pace* one of my literary theory undergraduates who wrote about deconstruction being a "communistic" theory that reduced distinction to absolute lack of determination—just a huge vague soup of non-meaning, in which everything means nothing to an equal extent.
34. To the uneducated ear the *shentong* view almost sounds like a version of idealism, or perhaps even solipsism, especially as it is full of phrases such as "the clear light nature of mind," which could also easily be read as a form of theism. This is indeed how it sounds to certain Tibetans, notably those with whom Hegel's sources came into contact. Another contemporary Tibetan teacher, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso of the Kagyü lineage, writes that "Because *Shentong* makes the same distinction between the three natures as the Cittamatrins do, and because it stresses the true existence of the luminous knowing

aspect of mind, many Rangtong masters have confused it with the thought of Cittamatra" or "mind-only" (Tibetan: *semtsam*) (Gyamtso 76). This is another way in which Hegel, following the *rangtong* view and being himself an idealist, could have become confused about the *shentong* view; indeed, one of Hegel's indirect sources, Alexander Csoma de Koros, was puzzled on this very point. One must here recall that the Cittamatra view itself goes beyond the pantheism of the Coleridgean and Wordsworthian "one life within us and abroad": the kind of pantheism that Hegel benignly defends in his closing remarks in the section on Buddhism in *Religion* (260—3). Cittamatra certainly has no tendencies towards either pantheism or solipsism—why? Because we have already overcome a sense of self in the Hinayana, whose view is egolessness; it does not somehow get to come back. The mind-only view is very helpful in resolving our concepts about the dualism of inside and outside: "All our concepts are based on accepting outer objects as separate from the inner perceiving mind and taking them to be real." Mind-only, in which all phenomena are perceived as more or less real existents of mind, answers the question of "How does the interface of mind and matter actually work?" (Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso 50).

35. "However," continues Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso, "there are very important differences between Cittamatra and *Shentong*. Firstly, *Shentong* does not accept the Cittamatra view that consciousness is truly existent. [It] hold[s] the Madhyamaka view that it is non-arising and without self-nature. They consider themselves to be the Great Madhyamikas because their system involves not only recognizing freedom from all conceptual contrivance, but also the realization of the Wisdom Mind (Jnana) that is free from all contrivance" (96). From this standpoint, knowing reality as something to be known is still a form of objectification, howsoever subtle. The Buddhist path first emphasizes clearing away gross obstacles to the proper view: the *kleshas* or afflictive mental states (anger, jealousy, pride and so forth). This helps to eliminate the "grasping" that is one aspect of the Third Noble Truth (the Noble Truths are common to all schools of Buddhism). Then the practitioner must deal with "fixation," the mind's compulsion to hold on to things, informed by more subtle misconceptions. Thus the Hinayana is oriented towards working on the self; the Mahayana towards working with the other (and with otherness).
36. From the *shentong* point of view the *rangtong* tends towards nihilism—a paradoxical (and ultimately untenable) *belief* in *nothing*; the idea of emptiness in the *rangtong* is still somewhat conceptual—it is precisely the idea that no concept can be applied to the notion of emptiness; in other words it is paradoxically not fully nonconceptual. Reality is empty, but not of the qualities of a Buddha, transcendent intelligence, wisdom and compassion: luminosity. Remember that the subject/object dualism has long been surpassed. So what we are dealing with here is a self-luminous reality, beyond conceptualization, endowed with all the qualities of a Buddha. After which point, in Buddhism, there is only poetry, the direct proclamation of enlightened mind otherwise known as Vajrayana.
37. The *shentong* view of luminosity and Buddha-nature strikingly resembles David Clark's observation on Schelling's view of the Behmenist *Ungrund* in his essay on Jean-Luc Marion's *God without Being*: "the *Ungrund* is contaminated *from the start* by the universe it subtends, making the impulse to misrecognize the groundless as the primal ground, and thereby firmly reappropriate it to ontotheology, quite irresistible"; "the *Ungrund's* non-being is neither the void of nothingness nor the nonsense of non-entity," so that the question then becomes how to avoid speaking of it, or as Derrida, quoted in Clark, observes: "how, in speaking, not to say this or that, in this or that manner? . . . How to avoid . . . even predication itself?" (Clark 161-2).
38. Buddhism is less tongue-tied than this: reality has all the qualities of a Buddha, wakefulness, intelligence, compassion—attributes which are often called "luminosity" to distinguish it from sheer lack of existence. What we are constantly forgetting in our fascination with emptiness, especially as intellectuals—a fascination reminiscent of Sartre's formulation, in which, as a matter of fact, it is we

who are the nothingness and the in-itself that is the being— "like a gigantic object in a desert world" (as Sartre puts it)(246)—what we are forgetting here, in our fixation, is precisely the original nonseparation of subject and object—what Buddha nature is seeing is precisely Buddha nature. There is nothing to be seen because the difference between seer and seen has been transcended. In fact, any slight introduction of such a difference would entail a legitimate attack from the *rangtong* or prasangika Madhyamaka view, and rightly so too. To read Hegel from the standpoint of Buddhism, this difference stems from the fascination with which Hegel regards the big fat zero of the toe-sucking meditator. It is a nothing that is not even nothing, that hides a something, an irrepressible gentleness perhaps, which Hegel would call feminine and which Buddhism would call bodhichitta, the mind of enlightenment, the genuine heart of sadness.

39. In their apophatic anxiety to speak nothing and nothing more, many writers on the topic of emptiness fall into the mode of Jeremy in *Yellow Submarine*—a poor creature whose scholarship leaves him a nowhere man who "hasn't got a point of view" (The Beatles). This is not quite enough to inspire the practitioner, according to the Kagyü and Nyingma sects of Tibetan Buddhism. There is surely something of this in Adorno's marshalling of the medieval apophatic tradition with the Buddhist view of nirvana (however distorted) against Nietzschean nihilism, which supplies fascism with "slogans": "The medieval *nihil privativum* in which the concept of nothingness was recognized as the negation of something rather than as autosemantic, is as superior to the diligent 'overcomings' as the image of Nirvana, of nothingness as something" (380). The *rangtong* is traditionally said to be good for academics, who like tying themselves in knots—or think that they can untie them and will worry at them incessantly until they themselves disappear (Magliola 102). It is a shame that Buddhism has been construed in the West to imply a view that ultimate reality is nothingness or absence of determination. Buddhist intellectuals still have work to do to correct the distorted picture of Buddhism that has become a complacently unexamined commonplace in some postmodernist intellectual circles, which have simply received without question the (pessimist and nihilist) assessments of Buddhism transmitted by such thinkers as Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.
40. The point of all three turnings is to help sentient beings become more compassionate and kind to themselves and others, in part by realizing that there was never much in the first place to hold on to in the way of the territory of selfhood. The "self" that *Insichsein* is "within" never had that much existence anyway; there was not much A for A to equal itself, a point taken up in Wittgenstein, and in Derrida on the copula.[\[19\]](#) For a Buddhist, to say that emptiness is absence of determination is a determination. Hegel's view of emptiness as nothingness is, from the Buddhist point of view, an error that had profound consequences not only for the reception of Buddhism in the West, but for the history of continental philosophy to come, and it was also useful in constructing a historical narrative that promotes Christianity at Buddhism's expense.
41. To study Hegel's Buddhism is to call for a re-examination of issues in Hegel's aesthetics that would take his fascinating, abject image of the Buddha into account. On the one hand, "the primitive artistic pantheism of the East" appears to jam together the two halves of art, nature and idea, as "unsuitable" and opaque to one another. Thus are produced forms that cannot adequately bear their content, either becoming "bizarre, grotesque and tasteless" (rather like Hegel's view of the proliferating dreams of Hinduism), or turning "the infinite but abstract freedom of the substantive Idea disdainfully against all phenomenal being as null and evanescent," rather like his view of Buddhism (Hegel 83). In the *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel was keen to criticize the idea of God as merely "One, the supreme Being as such": in this formula "we have only enunciated a lifeless abstraction of the irrational understanding" (77). On the other hand, the inwardness of the Romantic art form is analogous to a pure "consciousness of God . . . in which the distinction of objectivity and subjectivity is done away" (90). Could the inwardness with which Hegel characterizes Buddhism have anything to do with this, or is it merely to be construed as marginal to Hegel's thought? Hegel appears disturbed by the notion of irony:

a sense of "the nothingness of all that is objective" which gives rise to a "sickly" form of "quiescence and feebleness—which does not like to act or to touch anything for fear of surrendering its inward harmony." Hegel here offers what could later be used as a critique of his student Schopenhauer, whose fusion of Buddhism and the aesthetic presents just such a "morbid saintliness and yearning," based on an "abstract inwardness (of mind)," a "retirement into itself" (73). Surely there is an echo of this in the Buddhism of *Insichsein*? And could what Hegel says about irony, that most Romantic of tropes, be isometric with his view of Buddhism and in particular, Buddhist meditation practice?

42. Despite his wish to eject it from the path of the dialectic, to leave it sucking its toe at the doorstep of History, the big, fat zero, the feminine body of the meditator, contemplation embodied, the body whose image is its concept, the *thinking posture*, an abject version of artistic harmony, reappears in the moment of irony, the quintessence of contemporary art. A Hegelian reading of Romantic art, then, would necessarily consist of reflections on Buddhadharma, however obliquely, and moreover, Romantic art itself embodies a certain Buddhism. There is a secret passage between the vertigo of irony, and the oceanic pleasure of lovingness, *maitri*, imagined in the form of a statue whose toe extends into its mouth. Never fully digested into Hegel's scheme, finding itself at the start, or is it outside, or is it just inside, the dialectical process, Buddha nature, the I = I, which is also zero, which is also a body ingesting itself, haunts Hegel's text like the melancholy echo of a fully embodied emptiness suffused with longing and compassion, which is, in fact, what it actually is.

Appendix

The Prajnaparamita Sutra in twenty-five lines. (There are various versions, both larger than this and much smaller.) My insertions in square brackets. Translated into Tibetan by Lotsawa bhikshu [monk] Rinchen De with the Indian pandita [scholar] Vimalamitra. Translated into English by the Nalanda Translation Committee, with reference to several Sanskrit editions.

The Sutra of the Heart of Transcendent Knowledge.

Thus have I heard. Once the Blessed One was dwelling in Rajagriha at Vulture Peak mountain, together with a great gathering of the sangha of monks and a great gathering of the sangha of bodhisattvas. At that time the Blessed One entered the samadhi [meditation state] that expresses the dharma called "profound illumination," and at the same time noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva [great bodhisattva], while practicing the profound prajnaparamita, saw in this way: he saw the five skandhas to be empty of nature.

Then, through the power of the Buddha, venerable Shariputra said to noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, "How should a son or daughter of noble family train, who wishes to practice the profound prajnaparamita?"

Addressed in this way, noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, said to venerable Shariputra, "O Shariputra, a son or daughter of noble family who wishes to practice the profound prajnaparamita should see in this way: seeing the five skandhas to be empty of nature. Form is emptiness; emptiness also is form. Emptiness is no other than form; form is no other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling, perception, formation, and consciousness are emptiness. Thus, Shariputra, all dharmas are emptiness. There are no characteristics. There is no birth and no cessation. There is no impurity and no purity. There is no decrease and no increase. Therefore, Shariputra, in emptiness, there is no form, no feeling, no perception, no formation, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind; no appearance, no sound, no smell, no touch, no taste, no dharmas; no eye dhatu ["space," capacity] up to no mind dhatu, no dhatu of dharmas, no mind consciousness dhatu; no

ignorance, no end of ignorance up to no old age and death, no end of old age and death; no suffering, no origin of suffering, no cessation of suffering, no path, no wisdom, no attainment, and no nonattainment. Therefore, Shariputra, since the bodhisattvas have no attainment, they abide by means of prajnaparamita. Since there is no obscuration of mind, there is no fear. They transcend falsity and attain complete nirvana. All the Buddhas of the three times, by means of prajnaparamita, fully awaken to unsurpassable, true, complete enlightenment. Therefore, the great mantra of prajnaparamita, the mantra of great insight, the unsurpassed mantra, the unequalled mantra, the mantra that calms all suffering, should be known as truth, since there is no deception. The prajnaparamita mantra is said in this way:

OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA

[oh beyond, beyond, completely beyond, beyond all concept of beyond, awake, so be it]

Thus, Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva should train in the profound prajnaparamita."

Then the Blessed One arose from that samadhi and praised noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, saying, "Good, good, O son of noble family; thus it is, O son of noble family, thus it is. One should practice the profound prajnaparamita just as you have taught and all the tathagatas will rejoice."

When the Blessed One had said this, venerable Shariputra and noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, that whole assembly and the world with its gods, humans, asuras [jealous gods], and gandharvas [musicians of the gods] rejoiced and praised the words of the Blessed One.

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Notes

¹ For recent work on Hegel and Buddhism, see Kenneth Liberman, "Negative Dialectics in 'Madhyamika' and the Continental Tradition," pp. 185-202, and Heinrich Dumoulin, "Buddhism and Nineteenth-Century German Philosophy," pp. 457-70.

[Back](#)

² See Robert Kaplan, *The Nothing That Is: A Natural History of Zero*.

[Back](#)

³ See for example Louis Dupré, "Transitions and Tensions in Hegel's Treatment of Determinate Religion," pp. 81-92, esp. 84, 92; John Burbridge, "Is Hegel a Christian?", 93-107, esp. 104.

[Back](#)

⁴ Attributed to Fichte in *Vorselungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*; see Daniel P. Jamros, *The Human Shape of God: Religion in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, 126.

[Back](#)

⁵ In *The Fall of Hebe, Fum and Hum*, and *Tout Pour la Tripe*.

[Back](#)

⁶ Hegel was also somewhat familiar with the following indirect sources: Jean Pierre Abel-Rémusat; de Koros; *Allgemeine Historie der Reisen zu Wasser und zu Lande; oder, Sammlung aller Reisebeschreibungen* (Leipzig, 1750), vols. 6, 7; Samuel Turner, "Copy of an Account Given by Mr. Turner, of His Interview with the Teshoo Lama at the Monastery of Terpaling, Enclosed in Mr. Turner's Letter to the Honourable the Governor General, Dated Patna, 2d March, 1784," in *Asiatic Researches* 1:197-205; "An Account of a Journey in Tibet," in *Asiatic Researches* 1:207-220; *An Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama, in Tibet: Containing a Narrative of a Journey through Bootan, and Part of Tibet* (London, 1800), which Turner dedicated to the East India Company. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 265 n. 183, 185, 266 n. 188, 504-5.

[Back](#)

⁷ See Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*.

[Back](#)

⁸ The term is a pun on the Apostle Thomas, who had to insert his fingers into the gaping wound in the side of the risen Christ, who had returned to convince Thomas of His reality. For Lacan, the sinthome is neither symptom nor fantasy but "the point marking the dimension of 'what is in the subject more than himself' and what he therefore 'loves more than himself'" (Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, 132).

[Back](#)

⁹ See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*.

[Back](#)

¹⁰ See Slavoj Žižek, "Melancholy and the Act," 657-81, esp. 674-7; see also *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?*, esp. 23, 27-40, 128, 166-7.

[Back](#)

¹¹ See David Clark, "We Other Prussians: Bodies and Pleasures in De Quincey and Late Kant," 261-87.

[Back](#)

¹² See Timothy Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: The Body and the Natural World*, 13-56.

[Back](#)

¹³ See David Clark, "Hegel, Eating: Schelling and the Carnivorous Virility of Philosophy," 115-40.

[Back](#)

¹⁴ See Nigel Leask, "Murdering One's Double: Thomas de Quincey and S.T. Coleridge," 170-228.

[Back](#)

¹⁵ For political reasons the Dalai Lama has assumed greater control over the Tibetan nation as the oppression of the Chinese has continued. Also to be factored into this discussion should be an understanding of the Rime or unbiased lineage, started by Jigme Lingpa (1730-1798), which had roots earlier but started to come into prominence in the nineteenth century. This nonsectarian approach has stressed the wisdom inhering in all schools of Buddhism.

[Back](#)

¹⁶ See David Loy, ed., *Healing Deconstruction: Postmodern Thought in Buddhism and Christianity*: a title whose double meaning is still singular. See also Robert Magliola, *Derrida on the Mend*.

[Back](#)

¹⁷ Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, Sutrayana Seminary, 1999.

[Back](#)

¹⁸ Tsoknyi Rinpoche, Boulder Shambhala Center, August 1998.

[Back](#)

¹⁹ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (5.5303), and Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

[Back](#)

Romanticism and Buddhism

The Tantric Master, Lord Marpa, Twice Dreamt of the Prophet, William Blake

Norman Dubie, Arizona State University

Art for Shelley entails a self-emptying exposure to a prior Buddhistic oneness with all beings, an 'origin' dislocated in time and space yet forever emergent in the moment and accessible through poetry as a mode of spiritual practice. This article explores the theoretical features, the practical functions, and the critical implications of this 'origin' through a Zen Buddhist reading of Shelley's *'A Defence of Poetry'* and *'Ode to the West Wind.'* This essay appears in *'Romanticism and Buddhism'*, a volume of *'Romantic Circles Praxis Series'*, prepared exclusively for Romantic Circles (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University of Maryland.

The great translator thought
he had suffered the sleep of a cloudless day
in a boat of skins
on a cold and black inland sea.

Elohim, the eye of minor periphery,
broke bread with him on the moonlit water.
He washed his beard and hair
and said your daughters are now stepping from furnaces.
But if we wake
by their drying looms
with a mountain of salt between me and them,
then the diarist wife
has taken these margins of yellowing shoreline
from us.

London sleeps with its cousins and sisters all winter
while naked surgeons cross through the city
bearing torches . . . well, citizens

this is the cult of worms
who by physical inches of devotion are measuring a churchyard.
The owls forming a morbidly obese quotation
from Ovid.

The Word is always out weeping in the evening
refusing the hot custards, stealing
from sick and defenseless travelers.
The last Republic is out too, burning on the horizon.

Phoenician men sitting on the purple rocks
mending their nets, chewing
on roots, laugh
and then walk out across the water.

They've been doing it for centuries,
that is— mending their nets with laughter.