

Memoirs of the Phoenix

Shatterings

REECE HARRIS

*The cover is a collage by James Harrill of Lincolnton, N. C. called **The Phoenix**, a gift to this author in 1971. This was his last work in this medium and announced a profound change in him that was expressed as well in his future work. Shatterings create space sometimes even for new life. An unexpected turn.*

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DEDICATION

To my wife Julie with whom I shared becoming ashes but then rising once again from the ashes and so continuing through the many turns of a life together.



Figure 1: *Death Gives an Audience*—Giambattista Tiepolo
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Gallery

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Preface
A WORK LOST IN
TRANSLATION

The music of the small band of musicians rises from the valley below me. Their dance moves them up into the vicinity of my house, my house that rests in the foothills of these mountains, mountains which also rise from the valley below yet have rested here for a very long time. But these mountains do not rest as my home rests; on the contrary the mountains are restive; yes, as if in anticipation of the arrival of the dancers. The music and rhythms do arouse old memories, but in ways so new that the memories are just now arising from today's dawn. Yes. The moment now is magical. Why is the moment before the festival more mysterious than any moment in the festival itself? Would it not be astounding if a god were leading this small band to this the house that I built myself, overlooking the greening of the valley below? Why is the moment before the arrival of the god so special? Nietzsche said

it has been two-thousand years and no new gods!

I know at least our friends will come. They will sing. And they will dance. I too will dance, but not in the usual way I dance, wildly everywhere, but in no place. I ask the sky of these matters and the Measure of my Life replies: "Be precise! Then an ecstasy will take you where no mathematical exactitude can ever take you." So the organizing principles of a text such as this will be one of resonance and gesture rather than topic and logic? Yes, I think I know this that should I resist any technocratic power, then an unfolding might happen according to its own inner force rather than any that I might press upon it from without.

Anxiety sinks me. I cry out "Will my tread raise the words from just the marks of the rhythm? And after my feet stop, will I forget?"



Figure 2: Hopi Dancer, Property of the Author

1 *Dead or alive?*

If you realize your own nature, you certainly are free from life and death. When your eyes are finally closed, how can you be free of life and death?

Mumonkan, Koan 47,
Tosotsu's Three Barriers[Shi74]

1.1 **An elderly gentleman speaks of his mother**

A visitor on county tax business sat in the garden of the owner of one of those old and very large mansions in North Carolina. The owner's no longer luminous eyes bespoke age and exhaustion. The corneas were outer rimmed by white bands encircling fields of yellow and faded green. Lace adorned his white shirt and suited in black he seemed from another century. He sat before his visitor leaning on the arms of a long garden swing, slowly and only slightly swinging to and

fro. The attic windows towering above us were sightless due to their cataracts of abandoned bric a brac. A Mansard roof, rising into the morning mists, capped the attic.

The visitor asked him something of the history of his large and well enjunkted house. He told me his family had lived and cultivated that land for many generations. Then he spoke of their recent troubles with new neighbors “not from these parts.” However, his references to an active mother who, it seemed and even at this very moment was bustling about the house preparing lunch perturbed the mind of our visitor. Contemplating the age of the mother of the already very old man sitting before him, he naturally surmised his mother must be very old indeed. The visitor therefore said,

Your mother must be a remarkable woman to be so active at her age. The Old Man quickly caught both the visitor and the visitor’s skepticism for the gold in his eyes flashed as if seeing his visitor for the first time; he leaned forward closing the distance. Blue veins rose from the back of hands separated from the rest of his body by the yellow stained lace cuffs of his shirt. His sharp thin voice sliced abruptly the air as blue hands rested quietly upon black trousers.

Son, my mother died 30 years ago, but I want you to know that she is more real to me than you are!

On the retelling of this tale as if I were now a visitor

from afar and after hearing these words once again, I am once again astonished at the upsurge of silence. Such a suspension of the usual course of thinking could have been dismissed by the mere thought that the old man was surely doddering; and thinking this would have left me with the unmemorable. But this time, for no reason at all, I did not blink.

I held this door open just long enough for a cascade of questions which with their very persistent questing would chip away at the sense and aim of who I thought I was and how thinking and remembering thread us through. The struggle to unravel the threads of these questions seems only to create another fabric that conceals it. But perhaps But this song in its many diverse forms seeks as ever the best life to live, and this search seems to demand of us that we give up much that we have held dear. From these losses, a dark night of the soul or at least something like a journey through the night is fated for some of us. So in surprising and unexpected ways, what appears personal is already part of a community before we even speak! But this community seems small, leading us to think of it as esoteric. However, there is nothing special and nothing undisclosed. It is only the hearer that makes it so. At least so I believe.

Memory experts say that when we recall old memories, we see ourselves as there before us in the third person, participating in the remembered scene, but

when we recall very recent memories, we are in the presence of ourselves as the first person. My experience at least seems to confirm this. I think of it as if a memory becomes completed or perfected as it ages in the cauldron of experience, so we then shift our speech from present, to past and then finally to the perfect. We have the progression: seeing, saw, and knowing.

Remembering the living and the dead, the Russian philosopher Michael Berdyaev once said something inscrutable. We might say these days it was like a Koan. I would find myself thinking about it at odd moments for many years after having read it. Perhaps I am fortunate that the things I understand least seem to hang on, until, after a long time, as if my brain suddenly becomes rewired, and then I see it! At least the delusion that I see it is very strong! Berdyaev claimed that what we ordinarily call the living are actually dead, but in fact the dead are the actually living! Strange thing to say, no? It cuts across conventional usages of language where life and death are simple opposites. But even on first hearing this I thought it not unrelated to something Herakleitos said: *The gods, immortal mortals, men, mortal immortals.*

But Berdyaev was not speaking of ghosts. A life as works in progress is unfinished like a Navajo blanket half finished still hanging on the loom. But when the weaver lays down the comb for the last time and steps

back, the blanket in the fullness of itself now stands free of the loom which now only frames it. The loom is no longer the frame of the work but now works as the frame. Abiding fully in its completion, it gathers together the wool, the design, and the skill of the weaver. Such an interweaving of wool, design, and skill brings forth something with standing—for now it is free and so set apart. We say "It is finished."

1.2 A Dream from Afar

A memory of a dream. My retelling of the visitor's recollection of the Old Man and the presence of his mother bears some resemblance to the recounting of a dream. But with a difference. The tale of the Old Man does not seem in itself either to invite or demand interpretation. It's just a story, no? Just the matter of fact happenstance in life as usual. So, I have tried to frame this story in such a way that its meaning might be in doubt as if it were a dream. If we were writing a memoir, part of such a memoir should display something of the stamp of our world of the night since at least a third of our life is spent in that world? It may be the case that everything we do, say, and enact in the so-called waking world not only bears the stamp but owes it's arising to the world of the night.

I wonder if it matters that the dream was dreamt forty-three years ago by perhaps someone who might

no longer be known to this the writer now writing? It takes a special act of imaginative force to make a memory part of who we think we are or were. The were that we were should more properly be addressed at least as "you" or maybe the more impersonal form of the 2nd person singular, "thou." In the course of weaving our life, sometimes we unweave what was woven and weave it anew in the retelling. So, to the recounting. We say "we" here to remind ourselves of that many within that makes a life. We would not want some to feel left out of this little account. The dream:

Therein and far down in the depths of a lake illumined by the full moon in the zenith of some night's passage, the dreamer's Eye saw above an immense frog floating on the surface of a turquoise colored lake. Oh it was very still! No ripples! We might say an Eye below saw an Apart of Itself floating above but only as a shadow thrown down upon the Eye below by the eclipsed light of the moon—an unearthly moon it was—or maybe a dying sun gasping out its last squibs to penetrate through the waters down to that single Eye below. The frog was headless. Four swimmers positioned along its four legs guided this immense beast along its way towards some distant shore. Its body with its four legs was shaped as a squared-off circle. Perhaps its missing head was an absent me reflected upside down in the depths of the pupil of the Eye below. Granting that it is possible to have a reflection of

an absence. I have suggested how this might be possible with the Old Man and his mother, but we have been heard to speak of God as only known through the Presence of his Absence. There are many living beings here encountering and countering each other.

I am now recalling this dream as it once more rewrites its meaning while I am writing this sentence. Rereading and rethinking the Difficult or the Enigmatic does something interesting to the whole of ourselves, as the rethinking not only deepens but also spreads afar within us like water aflame flowing anew and freshly emblazoning the memories of events from afar but yet now being reborn. Such an act of emptying that makes way for something new is also called *kenosis*. It is not something that you can do for yourself. It comes upon you in the ways it always has, quite unexpectedly.

Do we remember what we see? Or *au verso*: do we see what we remember? To know is to have seen, so speaks the roots of our language. But do the roots speak as clearly as the burgeoning leaves springing up in spring and soon falling down in fall? No, for the roots are hidden deep within the earth, the mother of all that is. Our dreams do not speak. But dreams inspire words as do roots nurture leaves. It may be that the retelling and the recalling of anything is an act of transformation. Let us continue with a small aside on the life within. The Interior Life I read Jung's auto-

biography *Memories, Dreams, and Reflections*[Jun61] just as it was published posthumously around 1962. He said his autobiography was a memoir of his interior life, not a chronicle of events of his external life, which life was not very important to him. At that time, I easily embraced that distinction as if Jung and I were brothers of the same spirit. With enough momentum from that embrace I read everything Jung wrote, and was a diligent transcriber and interpreter of my dreams. This was surely one of the most exciting periods of my life unfolding as it did a world of intricately weaving threads which reweave themselves into new and startling resonances. But I discovered that there was always an unbridgeable distance between the dream and its transcription or interpretation. In fact, the transcription was already an interpretation. There was never enough I could say that would capture it.

After a few years of this wandering the ways and byways of my interior life, it abruptly ended, leaving me a little bereft. Jung himself warned of this. Suddenly, my dream world became prosaic and uninteresting, no longer filled with rather grand images, but much more like the life I was actually living. This raised the question about the existence of a distinction between a so-called "interior life" and "exterior life" which both I and Jung somehow seemed to accept. This distinction was fully developed by Jung in his theory of

types and we still promulgate that distinction when we speak of "introvert" or "extrovert." As I said, doubts have erased the lines of that distinction. I have found others speak with alarming clarity about this indistinction without listening to the maundering of the anthropologists on the dream worlds of aborigines. Are we not thinking of this memorial as a kind of mandetertale? Mallarmé in his little piece called *An Interrupted Performance* [Mal94, page 99] writes:

... is astonishing that there exists no association of dreamers in every large town to support a journal that takes notice of events in the light peculiar to dreams. Reality is but an artifice, good only for stabilizing the average intellect amid the mirages of a fact . . . I want, for my own satisfaction, to write down a certain Anecdote, as it struck the gaze of a poet, before it is divulged by the reporters set up by the crowd to assign each thing a common character.

Yes, we must get there before the reporters come and usurp the powers of our seeing. The vision of merchants of information is occluded by the fog of a persistent *they*; a *they* we know well each time we say *you know, they say*. . . and in this way we lose the power to see things anew. But do all of us have such powers of freedom to lose? And is it possible for

others to open the doors of such seeing for just anyone? Probably not. *They* seems to have the attention of most everyone.

Mallarmé writes down this anecdote *for his own satisfaction*; he says nothing about trying to communicate or transmit important information. Nor is expressing or trying to communicate an idea. Sounds a bit solipsistic, no? Sitting there, by himself like that. I wonder what we think an idea might be? But I am already leaping ahead. First close your eyes and recall from the depths of our racial memory that the Indo European root from whence words like technique and text emerge—and are still emerging—is *teks*: to weave. Such ‘texts’ can come as works of a community, as the Navajo rug is the work of the Navajo community where the songs sung by weavers as they work are those provided by the Singers. The Navajo weavers do not weave on horizontal looms with moving beaters simply because the Singers have refused to create songs for such looms. They are clear and adamant about their refusal. There will be no songs for such looms. The Singers do not give reasons, so I can only surmise that there are deep reservations of, shall we say a spiritual kind, against all the folderol that might make more efficient our productions. But a production is rarely a Work. The Singer’s refusal is done in the face of the economic felicities that would surely accrue from increased rug production. Surely.

There is another possibility, and maybe very strange to anyone who thinks themselves solely as some kind of being we call *an individual* who speaks out views for the sake of others. This text of Mallarmé's may already belong in advance to a certain community not yet present. I say this because the text does not communicate but rather works up a certain resonant ringing which rings us all into its circle. But probably not. Sometimes I think of it as a summons to give up having answers and start asking questions. This stance is rare, perhaps even esoteric, yes, but never *ipso facto* exclusive, since serious questioning seem to reach out to others. Nevertheless, there are plenty who might say straightaway they have not the foggiest idea of what I am talking about. For them, I say consider this little piece as a bit of anthropology where we are studying the strange practices and beliefs of some community very distant from the one in which we live. And their task is to prepare a little lexicon so that they can communicate with the members of this strange community. Building such a lexicon is not easy since it carries with it so much of what we already are. We cannot leap over our own shadow.

Jung and the Gnostics

Jung passionately read and studied the now heretical Gnostics during a period of his own very passionate search for the truth. Jung was convinced the Gnostics

had the crucial insight into our actual state; in particular, they saw the role of Evil which was not simply an absence of the Good as Christian Orthodoxy would have it. Gnostic texts tell us there are three kinds of people: the pneumatic—those who already fully live in the spirit or breath, the hylic—those who are pure matter and have no trace of pneuma, and finally those in between with a mere seed of a soul. We might say: there are those that have a soul already, there are those that have none and both of these are very happy and live blessed lives, but there are those in the midst of the labor of making a soul from the undeveloped pneumatic seed, a special *spermatikos* they were given at birth and they, oh yes, they greatly suffer from their extreme being neither here nor there.

A maturation of thought demanding greater simplicity brought the sense that, as exciting as these words once were to me, they are too burdened by complex ideas and so are not helpful. Over the years, I have preferred the simplicity of Socrates' statement to Meno in the dialogue called *Meno: The unexamined life is not worth living*. Socrates said that the dog was the most philosophical of all animals because it knows the difference between its friends and its enemies. The dog's sense of smell is powerful. It can drive the dog in an unflagging dig for a promising but deeply buried bone. Yes. Smell. Intelligence may have much of its source in the sense of smell. It was actu-

ally Aristotle who said this, not me. But in the days of the oral traditions, Homer uses *nous* or mind, for the special sense of the warrior who can *smell out a situation* as we even now say. There are those then who have smelled out something important and carry with them throughout their lives questions which even in the act of the quest so proposed reshapes the living of their lives. And there are those who do not persistently ask the questions that might pare their lives down into the sparser deep heart's core. Have we not seen ourselves in the circles of constantly reaffirming what we think we know? There we affirm only what we expect. Nothing new happens to us.

Dream Work

The period of my "dream work," if we can call it that, gave me an uncanny ability to see at the same time many layers of meaning. I knew what Dante meant when he wrote in his letter to Con Grande of the seven layers of meaning woven into the text of the *Divine Comedy*. That some local Jungians attended my community seminars on the *Divine Comedy* did not surprise me, but I was no longer interested in any kind of special interpretations already prefitted for text at hand. I did not querulously remind them of Jung's advice to himself when he saw a new patient, that he refrain from too quickly applying familiar rubrics but rather start anew as if he knew nothing. Would we

wish our life to be always only encountering the expected? Herakleitos' advice about suspending expectations is hard to take to heart when we are so much moved to assure our safety with habitual moves that we think work: *We must expect the unexpected, for the truth is hard to obtain.* So, should not every memory be also dis-membered? A truthful memoir is just that!

The opening line of the *Inferno* abruptly and fully discloses for us his experience of our belonging together yet within the profound embrace of the inconscussable difference of our individuality,

In the middle of our life I came to myself in a
dark wood

The singular plays here its counterpoint against and along with the plural: He returned *mi ritrovai* to HIMSELF, as if awakening, in the middle of OUR life, *nostra vita*. The *Community of Souls*, as it has been called, is a community in communion. We will now take this communion as just sharing a common aim: to seek out the best life to live. We therefore celebrate the on-going activity of this community as did Dante and others by recalling and sharing with you the reader or listener what a few of our or his friends have said. True, they are all dead, but they may be more alive than any of us! It was certainly so for Dante, for his guides do make an interesting list. Imagine! Virgil, Beatrice, and even Apollo! There are not only

intrinsic difficulties for the matter at hand, but even danger; 'they' are always on the look out for eccentric thoughts that might challenge the social fabric. Socrates was sentenced to death on the grounds that he had his own private (divinities and did not worship the gods of the state. And Dante warns the reader at the beginning of Canto II, *Paradiso*:

Oh you, in your boat too small, but desiring
to hear, and have followed my singing
keel on its way,
Go back to your own shores;
do not commit yourself to the open sea; for
should you lose me, you may lose your-
self.

The four swimmers at each of the four corners of a giant headless frog lent soft guidance to the blind crossing moving across the fully lunar illumined waters. And even now it still makes that crossing. Like Hermes who guides souls from the world of living to the dead, these swimmers are guides from some unknown Elsewhere. The name given to the so-called science to interpret divine texts is *hermeneutics* after the god Hermes. An interpreter of divine scripture must have this hermeneutic power in order to traverse the abyss between human and divine so as to deliver that sermon which breaths the breath of the absent god. But Hermes is also the god of luck; so,

hermeneutics is no science after all. It is hermetic. There is no method. There are no results to be expected in advance. We must expect the unexpected. And so it happens. We are on occasion assumed unto an unexpected interpretation. We recall the Hermes of the Hermetic or Alchemical Arts to which Jung devoted much of his powers was also Jung's special guide wherewith he saw those alchemical arts as symbols in transformation and through the intense concentration of performing the Work itself could also transform the soul of the officiant.

This means that the act in itself of interpreting my dream also transforms the who that I think I am into the who-that-I-am. So the use of the phrase "my dream" is an error. It is not my dream at all. Dreaming and the dream had suddenly become unimportant, for they had lost that noumenous quality of an Other beyond this phenomenal world. We sometimes called such things transcendental. There I was, once again kicked out of paradise! But this also reveals something of the perversity of being too interested in one's dream world. Nevertheless, this distinction between phenomena and noumena lives splits the space of our lives into an incoherent sensible and supersensible world. We talk about our Cartesian split into mind and body. The numinous world is more magical than a world ruled by the inevitability of cause and effect, so it has its own seduction. And many seemed

shocked to realize how much of their lives are filled with the passive ramblings, hardly ever remembered, of associative thinking and random feelings. The great ox of the mind is indeed an unruly beast! Questions addressed to a dream invites disclosure as conversation. At first what is to be disclosed seems to be working as if backstage moving the dream figures hither and thither. What is disclosed is not only the dream but the disclosure itself! However, this was not like seeing the magicians at work in Plato's cave moving figures behind a fire casting shadows that create the drama for the watchers below. Rather, an undercurrent washed upwards the power by which something from Elsewhere created the drama for the shadows on the wall! "Here a little talk there was of me and thee, and then no more of me and thee!"¹

The scenes of our life, whether the life in dreams or the dreams in life, play and often replay in the mind's eye. Should we try to put this in words we discover we cannot encounter the dream other than as interpretation which is not the dream itself. When we awaken the dream that is recalled is already a presentation of something very different that happened in the night of sleep and to which we are only barely privy. Abruptly, we see that the fruit of our labor arrives most authentically by a throw of dice from no other hand than that of Hermes, that god of diceman

¹From the *Rubiyat*, the Fitzgerald translation.

as well as psychopomp. Surely no accident being a diceman as well as a guide for souls. Suddenly, as if by accident, Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés* —*A throw of the dice*. —casts its throw into my mind. The poem is typeset in changing fonts, broken lines and other typesetter's incunabula falling from left to right. The pauses and the descent down the page, like the turning of a falling leaf, encapsulate and suspend thought as they fall through the page from the left to the right. As tempting as it is to pause here on our walk under the shade of this poem and speak further on it, we will just quote as provocation the last line of this poem [Mal94, page 145]:

*Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés, All
Thought emits a throw of the dice.*

The throw sends us along a way never before traversed. Dante, in the line following his warning to the reader not to be lost in an open sea in a ship too small, says *The water, on which I now traverse, was never coursed before*. But Apollo is his guide! Many who have read this passage found it strange indeed that a pagan god should be Dante's guide in a Christian Paradise. But this is not a text that goes about business as usual! And yes, so may each of us with some risk along a new way go, perhaps with a guide or perhaps not. But pray not lost into some greatly perturbed hyperbolic orbit that sweeps us out and away

from earth, sun, and all that is homely from whence all recollection comes.

Those same demiurges who craft our dreams also craft what we call the more ordinary and saner world of our life as usual. Chuang Tzu's little story of the uncertainty of whether or not an Emperor is dreaming he is a Butterfly or a Butterfly dreaming he is an Emperor, or, yes, and best of all, a Butterfly dreaming he is an Emperor dreaming he is a Butterfly. The specter of indistinction between real and imaginary is raised to consciousness, as does the story of the Old Man who knows his dead mother is more real than the person sitting before him. But we have also said that our dream world is more real than often long drab days in the office, lecturing sleeping students, and publishing scholarly papers. The usual flit and flutter of our thinking cannot be dignified as any kind of work. Apparently free, but only unfettered. Work gathers. But sometimes a dream or the diagnosis of a fatal illness admirably focuses our minds. We now taste Work. And right in the middle of our life-as-usual erupts this semaphore from Elsewhere. We stop and listen. Paradoxically Elsewhere is very near. We do not see it, but we hear its breathing. Listen while you read aloud the following and so hear the rhythms breathe the breath from the caverns below:

Oh the mind, mind has mountains;
cliffs of fall Frightful, sheer, no-man-
fathomed.
Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there.
—Gerard Manley Hopkins

Jung called the work on a dream the dream work. Perhaps by this phrase we become Initiates into some Hermetic Order. This work is hermetic because it seeks an interpretation, and as we suggested above, there does not appear to be any certainty dealing with Hermes the Diceman. *Hermeneutics* is the name religious scholars give to that which is needed for interpreting the Bible. All interpretation and this will include translation as well is an intense struggle between image and language. Always without a winner, but we can have lucky hits! Perhaps the practice of geometry is like this. The word *geometry* bespeaks giving measure to the Mother of all Mothers, Gaia. We speak of figures and we draw figures to illustrate our speech. Drawing and speaking belong together. To paraphrase Kant, figureless talk is meaningless, and speechless figures are empty. In any case, *eidos* and *logos* dance a wild tango. Not easily are they unentangled despite fierce efforts of the officious masters of the learned cha-cha-cha that brings us universal grammars and pure logic! Nevertheless, it is exactly

this tension that makes this dance so much like a bent bow or the tension in a lyre or the tension in our own mind.

I therefore arose from my bed of the familiar and traveled to Japan. To learn a language overflowing with an unfamiliar power of nuance, true, but also distancing myself from well-worn runnels of my own language battered into a thoughtless compliance. Not so much was it the language, but rather their literature incarnating a certain kind of regard for the world; this regard brings forth the remarkable even uncanny *Noh* plays, *Haiku*, or Lady Murasaki's *The Tales of Genji*. A Plunge into the Utterly Different is ecstatic; we are liberated from our self-imposed slavery. I would almost say learning a grammatical schemata not resembling any Indo-European language seems to rewire our brains! Yes, Chomsky's *Universal Grammar* can make it fit. But rewiring my brain to speak Japanese brought a new way of seeing things and hearing sounds. I can hardly recover the way things once presented themselves to me. But not simply because of learning Japanese. My stay in Japan was the fruit of an earlier encounter, earlier at least by the reckoning of our ordinary clock time, but only arriving much later.

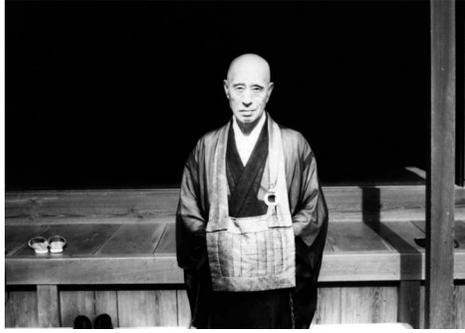


Figure 1.1: Roshi Shibayama at Nanzenji, Kyoto

1.3 Roshi Zenkei Shibayama, Abbot of Nanzenzei

Miss Kudo, his translator, did tell us he had a nasty disposition. Maybe he was just straightforward. A broadly smiling faculty member of *Duke University* asked him to tell of his pleasures while he visited Duke's multi-million dollar endowed gardens. He replied:

It was like I was walking through a beautiful forest, and abruptly leaving the forest there before me in a large clearing was a beautiful woman stretched out on the forest floor having a horrible operation done on her face.

And when I was first introduced to Miss Kudo, Master Shibayama carefully informed me that she had been

his student for nearly thirty years but sadly *she has made very little spiritual progress*. Miss Kudo blushed.

I appropriated them as my guests and took them to our home situated on thirty acres deep in the North Carolina countryside not far from Chapel Hill. Master Shibayama walked around and about our hill-top house with its magnificent view and ancient walnut trees. Suddenly he exploded in a grin and paroxysm of unbridled ecstasy as he cried:

What a beautiful place to be naked!

Yes. Naked. Would that we could so easily become naked. This unabashed breaking out was full and so complete.

I had at that time ink stone, brushes, and some very fine Japanese paper. The unarranged bumptiousness of our home with vast open clearings and sudden clustering of dense vegetation contrasted sharply with the forcefully arranged Duke Gardens, whose concentric circles did not encourage the ungoverning silence between poppies and peonies; whereas life enhanced brings the two apples, once lifeless in their separateness, to the nearness of their mutual presence, a presence already bespoken by the blank emptiness of the rice paper; the amphiboly of their sameness produces a ringing that is the oneing of these things thinging their difference. Nakedness means barely seen,

translucent, since our shame comes only from a knotted thought that we are special, set aside, and even chosen. But this nakedness can be heard. I claim this is not some aesthetic sense unique to the Japanese; the phrase *aesthetic sense*, is here set to the question extraordinary. Do we say the Japanese have found better ways to say these things, at least for themselves? I doubt it, after all, this kind of language usage is the language that would have languages as mere means expression. But I have suggested such language that makes language speak in this way does not speak.

I watched him as he intently prepared the ink, wet the brushes, and with quick deft motions brushed two very special ink-apples into existence with this text on the left of and above the apples: *He and I are not two but one*. It is on the wall to my left as I write this and I supplied a copy for you here:

Many times I have found myself pondering this (perhaps because it is so close), and the notes on Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* in the last chapter of this book is something of the fruit of this pondering. Something that seems far is in fact near is an abridgment of the reality of the Real. So it is only natural that the unity here is not the usual one we too easily appropriate. *These two apples are the center of the circle that this little volume draws through the compass of our thought.*

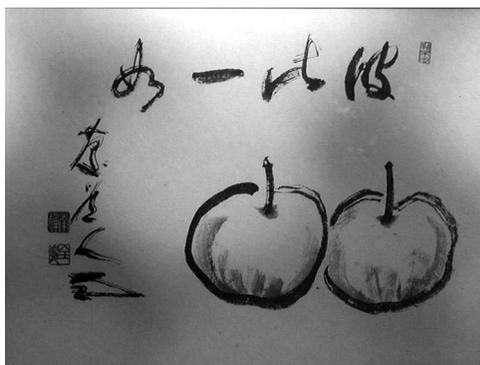


Figure 1.2: He and I are not two but one

Consider then these apples neither as one nor as two, but rather in a dynamic disequilibrium—an oscillation that could be called *neither noring*. These apples and the text are alive in their ambiguity just as is the simple mathematical expression like $1+1=2$. Imagine, if you can, locked in a world with sharply defined boxes, very left brained, filled with the march of little symbols such as you find in Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* where after hundreds of pages, the number 1 is finally defined. Will you finally be convinced? I do not wish to suggest this exercise is meaningless, but it needs another portion of ourselves which may or may not be still alive and well for a confrontation with something quite new.

We visited him a second time at Nanzenji some six years later when we were returning from India. He showed us his gardens and his head monk whipped up a frothy green tea in a bright red bowl. He sat above us on a dais and we spoke of things so serious I cannot remember any of them. Sadly, I was too young and too full of myself. Much later near the end of his life he published *Zen Comments on the Mumonkan*[Shi74] being the collected comments of Zen Masters over the centuries on some forty-eight Koans with, of course, his own comments. The forty-seventh Koan called *Tosotsu's Barriers* are difficult barriers indeed. Roughly, it concerns the Living of the Dead and the Dead of the Living. It tells a tale of an older and younger monk who perform funeral services for a family in the village after which ceremony the younger monk pounds the top of the coffin and asks: *Alive or dead!?* The older monk replies emphatically: *I am not saying!* This leads to a physical brawl between the two, with the final result that the younger monk departs from the monastery. Only after many years does he return after having finally penetrated that barrier.

In training at the monastery, the Master may suddenly ask you, *Where do you go when you are dead?* He will not tolerate even a moment of hesitation in your reply. [Shi74, page 322]

I visited him a third time ten years later when I went to Japan to learn Japanese and play Go. I walked across the small clearing before Nanjenzi's gate. The monks were out that day raking up autumn leaves. I asked one of them where I could find Master Shibayama. They told me he had died some years ago. I then asked for directions to his *haka*. It was just down a side road not far from the monastery. I recall the quiet walk down a small street and then into the gate of the cemetery. As I stood before the resting place of his ashes, I asked those mute stones: *Are you dead or alive?* And I had to ask myself as well: *Am I dead or alive?*

A word for language: *Kotoba*.

Koto I will here tentatively translate as *gathering*. But, oh yes, it has meanings that meander everywhere, making many turns leaving me dizzy as to where I stand. We could consider *logos* a rather clever, insightful, yes, even learned translation, but I suggest we resist smashing these two words together in such a thoughtless fashion. And *ba* we will tentatively translate as *petal*. In this way, I follow the invitation to think language as that which gathers petals or flowers. And an especially beautiful such gathering as might flow from the magic of poets you might call *Ikebana*, an especially graceful arrangement of petals, for *Ike* calls us into the vicinity what we ordinarily call *graceful*. The

Kanji for *bana* could be translated as *flowers*. Thinking of language in this way celebrates the uniquely human act of gathering the petals of the world into a single volume and celebrate the paradox of impermanence. No, not impermanence of the world. Just impermanence. When we walk amongst the falling cherry blossoms in the spring we may be moved to write a short poem with that resonance of what the Japanese have named *aware no mono*, the inherent sadness in the deep heart of things. In truth, we are writing as we cut and arrange the flowers from our garden: for its own sake's sake. And so these words too flowing forth here and gathering as they do blossoms, leaves, and things of this world will soon fade away along the balustrade of memory.

Reading Japanese makes visible its syllabic nature, each character in its own space. Each character is a kind of petal. It is not so *abcdarian*[Joy76, page 198] as Joyce expressed his contempt for the average reader of English who mostly sees words composed of letters. English too has its march of syllables with their own magic rhythms and repetitions; new meanings arrive in this way, and are not easily found in dictionaries! Without that sense of the magic of rhythm of the syllables the world itself will be lost to us!

Transporting, yes, even ecstatic this encounter with Japanese. True, I was similarly transported when I learned and read the few great works we have writ-

ten in Greek. In any case. A curtain had been lifted. Crowds clustered at the portal of consciousness shorn from the obfuscations of super civilized no-think. All had unfamiliar faces I even imagined I began to see a tree as Aristotle might have seen it which would be a thing without objectivity. This does not mean, however, it is purely subjective. My Tewa Indian friends near Santa Fe helped me. They have no adjectives that might describe an object. Indeed, they had no idea what I meant by *object*. They saw the tree as *greening* not green. So then I saw van Gogh's sunflower as no longer a sunflower, but sunflowering. But again I was not without help from an experience some thirty years later. For then I too saw fields of sunflowers in Hungary near where we lived. Everywhere along all those country roads fields of sunflowers surged up into the exploding Summer light and now were wafting to and fro in the light breezes each one with only eye cast forcefully into the face of the sun yet centered in their very own sunbright; I saw it and it became me fully! Yes, they were dancing the Great Cantata of the World Aflame. In the morning, they faced the road and in the evening they turned their faces away from the road, for as always, they faced the sun. Surely a strange miracle! And it was as if I saw it for the first time, but had understood it thirty years earlier. Ah, the difference between seeing and understanding! The world of dreams, in which we live, has

no sense of time as do clocks. Our clock within is the clock governed by the jumps and clicks of a disproportionate anxiety which unwinds as much as it winds. It is disproportionate because there is nothing really there that would make us anxious. True anxiety is an empty winter field. Nothingness. But this Nothingness negates everything, yes, even itself! Nothingness makes the way for our past to arrive from the future. That there should be no misunderstanding; I did not say an *empty winter field* is a metaphor for *true anxiety*. We have forgotten that things can have a standing that can stand alone for it and for none other than itself. We have forgotten that every true new beginning must stand alone and escape gnarly procrustean machinations that in-bed our thinking. Remembering is everything although we might remember only nothing. So it was now at this moment driving along those country roads in southern Hungary, a field has become a field of sunflowers. For a brief moment, van Gogh sat beside me on a bench and he and I spoke a few words. Oddly, I cannot recall what we said to each other, but only the sound of syllables wrung forth in unfamiliar rhythms cast against an uncanny stillness. We will be friends forever, perhaps a forever not unlike the forever that binds a tired Old Man resting lastingly in his swing, his mother dusting, cleaning, and as always sharing her life with her son.

1.4 A sacrifice on the shores of the Ganges

As the summer sun rose over the Ganges wending through *Varanasi*, India, we made our way, following the large swinging rear of a cow, down through a narrow winding stair opening out onto a path to the ghats. As we turned round and down the spiral stair our leader dropped a large paddy with a concussive but nevertheless sacred “plop; ” and within the span of two steps a breathless and beaming young girl burst from her house, scooped up this beautiful paddy cradling it inside her forearms never losing a drop. She lovingly carried back to be plastered on the outside wall of the house where once dried it would fuel the hearth fire within which fire will bestow a very special taste to the chapattis. As suddenly as she came, she vanished; only the sound and glint of the jingling of her wrist bracelets lancing through the swishing of her blue sari lingered. Yes, she vanished. But the joy of it!

The path to the ghat was girded with white draped figures each lap holding a begging bowl. One was not sitting. He lay there on his left side as if asleep but a socket of a sightless eye was alive with an ecstatic dance of flies. His begging bowl rested a few inches from his fingertips. No one noticed or moved to remove him elsewhere. Tomorrow his place will be taken by another. *Varanasi* is the best possible place

to die.

We arrived just above the steps of the ghat and paused before the expanse of that river. Each ghat with their long wide steps dropped gingerly down into the Ganges. The wide shallow steps were fitting for the steady and thoughtful steps of those who here tended their sacrifices and ablutions. Behind us a convent of widows chanted songs in honor of Lord Shiva. And on our far left along the shore, the fires of the Burning Ghat were just then liberating the atman within from the dross of corpse flesh and sending it up along the path of the rising smoke to find for itself a new life. The Ganges itself was burning with the reflection of those fires. Dogs hung about, carrying off a bone or two. While out on a boat in the river, pondering these things, I washed my face in those waters. Astonishing that the water was sweet and mildly perfumed! Did I smell lavender? Corpses of lepers are purified by these waters. Not far away they floated. Their distended blue stubs rocked by the slowly moving water waved supplications. They were on their way to Calcutta where finally they would be delivered into the embrace of the open sea.

Before us a tall thin figure of a man standing ankle deep in the water reached down and lifted a water filled palm into the light of the rising sun. Abruptly, he cried out: *OM!* And not far away a few others jointed this choir: *OM!* Yes! Their unwavering attention for



Figure 1.3: At the Ghats, on banks of the Ganges

every detail has this time born fruit– the Sacrifice has been successful. No, not always is there such success as this was, but when it does, it happens exactly in this way! Each time the dice are thrown freely! And in the freedom of the throw, *Time* begins again to recur as it always does, exactly in this way. The gods, abandoned to the eternal cold of forgetfulness, begin their approach to warm themselves by this sacrificial fire blazing within the heart of the hand holding forth this special water into the light of the rising sun. But not only were the gods coming. Oh my! All of the scattered leaves of the universe were ingathering. Yes! These running syllables now make their last roundelay clothing all that is and ringing round nearer and nearer to the fire that burns within the each of us.

1.5 Bibliographical Notes for Chapter 1

1. The quotes from Dante are from the pre-1900 translations by P. H. Wickstead.
2. The poems quoted by Gerard Manley Hopkins are from the first edition of 1918.
3. The quotes from Herakleitos are the author's own translations.
4. All photographs in this chapter have been taken by and are property of the author.