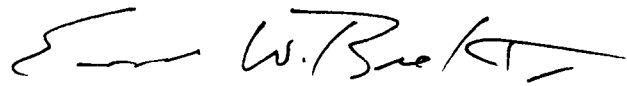


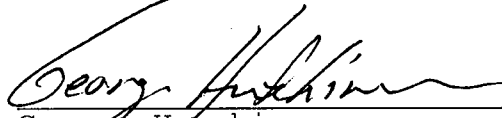
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Claudia Milstead entitled "The Zen of Modern Poetry: Reading Eliot, Stevens, and Williams in a Zen Context." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.


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THE ZEN OF MODERN POETRY:
READING ELIOT, STEVENS, AND WILLIAMS
IN A ZEN CONTEXT

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Claudia Milstead
December 1998

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to

Arnold Sprague,

who is the sound of two hands clapping.

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I wish to thank the Huntington Library for permission to quote from documents in the Wallace Stevens Archive.

I am grateful to several scholars who corresponded with me by e-mail: Dr. Alan Filreis, Dr. Zhaoming Qian, Dr. Joan Harrigan, Dr. James Fitzgerald, and Robert Aitken Roshi.

My committee members were a graduate student's dream come true. I thank them for their expertise, encouragement, and efficiency. Dr. Miriam Levering was called upon to do more than any outside reader should expect, but she cheerfully and carefully read the poems of Eliot, Stevens, and Williams. Dr. George Hutchinson and Dr. Edward Bratton, both careful readers and good editors, provided excellent commentary in a timely manner. Dr. B.J. Leggett, my director, provided incisive, supportive feedback. His guidance in the early days of the project was especially helpful, when he and I both feared that the project might be "a dissertation about nothing."

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ABSTRACT

The Zen of Modern Poetry: Reading Eliot, Stevens, and Williams in a Zen Context traces the three poets' exposure to and knowledge of Hindu and Buddhist texts and philosophy, then discusses some of their poems that exhibit Zen concepts.

The introduction, "Eastern Thought and Western Texts," summarizes the effect of Hindu and Buddhist texts on Western literature.

Chapter one, "Zen Buddhism: Providing a Context," provides an overview of Zen Buddhism and explains the concepts of non-attachment, nondualism, Emptiness, the non-illusory self, and Enlightenment.

Chapter two, "T.S. Eliot: From Suffering to Enlightenment," discusses Eliot's major poems. It argues that Eliot depicts suffering as a result of dualism in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* and that he depicts peace through Enlightenment in *Four Quartets*. The discussion of "Little Gidding" suggests that Krishna is an element of the familiar compound ghost.

Chapter three, "Wallace Stevens: The Unmaking of the Mind," maintains that Stevens demonstrates the Zen concepts of nonduality, non-attachment, and Zen reality, with the

latter especially evident in his later poems. The discussion of "Montrachet-le-Jardin" claims, in agreement with Alan Filreis, that the poem is based on a pamphlet by a Buddhist monk. The chapter also raises the possibility that the poem sequence "Lettres d'un Soldat" was modeled on the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Chapter four, "William Carlos Williams: A Reality of Non-Attachment," maintains that some of Williams' shorter poems are attempts to portray objects in their suchness while others illustrate the concepts of non-attachment, Emptiness, and Zen spontaneity. It argues that Williams recognizes the inadequacy of language to convey the experience of reality. The discussion of Book I of *Paterson* claims that Williams' concept of reality is similar to the Zen notion of reality.

The afterword suggests that as Zen becomes more prevalent in the West, it will be used to interpret more literary texts. It also raises the possibility that Sokei-an Sasaki, a follower of Zen who associated with literary figures in New York, may have influenced Williams and other American poets.

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Introduction

Eastern Thought and Western Texts

When Ezra Pound turned to classical Chinese verse as a model for his new ideas of poetry, he was following a well-established tradition of Western writers looking to the East for inspiration. The philosophies of the East, as well as its literature, have informed the literature of the West for centuries. The East-West connection is particularly evident in Western literature written after 1784, when Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic Society and made ancient Eastern texts available not only to the people of India but also to the West. Jones published articles about the contemporary cultures of India, Tibet, Ceylon, and other Asian countries in the Society's periodical *Asiatick Researches*, which found its way into the libraries of many literate Westerners, including Thomas Jefferson and William Emerson, father of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Of particular interest was the 1785 translation by Charles Wilkins of the *Bhagvat-Geeta* [sic], which Thoreau took with him to Walden Pond (B. Miller 155).

Fueled by Jones' work and that of other English "Orientalists" who worked as civil servants in the East, the Romantics found the East fascinating subject matter. In the nineteenth century, as trade and travel increased between East and West, more publications appeared to make the cultures and philosophies of the East familiar to England and America. FitzGerald's 1859 translation of the *Rubaiyat*

of Omar Khayyam influenced not only the Pre-Raphaelites and the Victorians, but later writers as well. In 1878, English journalist and poet Edwin Arnold published *The Light of Asia, or The Great Renunciation, Being the Life and Teachings of Gautama, Prince of India and Founder of Buddhism*. Its American edition, published at the behest of Bronson Alcott, went to eighty editions and sold between half a million and a million copies (Fields 67-68).

In 1910-11 Harriet Monroe visited China, where she studied Chinese art. She returned home and established *Poetry*, which became the leading journal for modern poets. Her appreciation for Chinese aesthetics had already been established by 1913, when she published Pound's haiku "In a Station of the Metro" (Willis 9-10). About the same time, Pound read the late Ernest Fenollosa's notes on the Chinese written character and was drawn to the idea that written Chinese, as Fenollosa had understood it, conveyed a picture of the idea being expressed, making it an excellent medium for poetry. As a result, Pound incorporated Chinese forms and ideas into his notion of what a new poetry should do. The 1915 publication of Pound's *Cathay*, his translations of classical Chinese poems based on the Fenollosa notebooks, sparked a wave of interest in Eastern literature. Such literary magazines as *The Little Review* and *Poetry* published

Chinese poems and poems modeled on the Chinese and Japanese (Qian 4).

It is not surprising that similarities to Eastern philosophies have been pointed out in the work of the Romantics, the Transcendentalists, the Victorians, and the Modernists. No doubt one could point to specific Eastern texts as direct sources for Western texts, but the effect of Eastern thought on Western literature has been more far-reaching and significant than as source material.

At the same time that the West was learning about the East through texts, trade, and travel, Western scientific discoveries, especially those in archaeology and psychology, were casting doubt on traditional Western beliefs. The great doubt of the nineteenth century was only exacerbated as the twentieth century arrived, with world war on its heels. Although probably no era is considered static by its contemporaries, the period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century must have seemed particularly full of uncertainty, with science and religion locked in a death struggle for supremacy. Could an intelligent, thinking person believe in religion? Must those who embraced science give up all spirituality? If science could disprove religion, was anything left upon which to base ethical behavior? The great doubt spread beyond religious matters to a questioning of the basic assumptions of existence, truth, and perception, leaving even the nature of the self

open to question, and in the process affecting art and literature. This doubting age required new forms of art, ones that responded to the challenges and concerns of the present. The Impressionists, for instance, worked not to present life as it is, but rather as it seems to be, recognizing the importance of perception over a hard, absolute truth, and later the Cubists would offer a multiplicity of views as the truest reality. A new literature for the age would not present a hard, absolute truth, but would instead question the old assumptions and offer only fragments as wisdom.

Modern poetry began developing at the same time that Western cultural traditions were being challenged and reconstructed. If art is a reflection of the concerns of its era, consciously or not, then modern poetry is a reflection of the state of Western civilization in the early part of the twentieth century. In the struggle to understand a world in flux, the concepts of Eastern thought provided, if not answers, then at least another way of questioning and understanding that world. For many, traditional Christianity could not answer the challenges to reality, the self, and the meaning of existence that were brought on by scientific advances. Alternatives to that traditional view, whether Western or Eastern, now seemed attractive. For those who wanted some kind of replacement for the now-dead Christian God and the god of Plato, Eastern

thought offered the advantage of retaining a sense of spirituality. Further, being at least 500 years older than Christianity, Eastern thought carried the credential of longevity that implied legitimacy. Finally, and perhaps most important, Eastern thought provided a spiritual belief that did not contradict science. Many thinkers of the time were attracted to Eastern thought, including the three modern poets of this study, T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams.

The term "Eastern thought" is an ambiguous term for the philosophies of the East, and by "the East" I mean principally India, China, and Japan. "Eastern thought" encompasses such belief systems as Hinduism, Taoism, Confucianism, and several varieties of Buddhism. Evidence of any of those systems might be found in twentieth-century literature, including poems by Eliot, Stevens, and Williams. Understanding relevant concepts of those belief systems would undoubtedly lead to a better understanding of the poems. However, the poets in question, as well as other Western writers, read texts from a number of Eastern belief systems and related Western philosophies as well. Identifying the specific source systems would be difficult.

This study argues that using Zen Buddhism as a framework for understanding the poems will illuminate much of the Eastern thought imbedded in them. Zen has as its basic assumption a world of wholeness that is obscured with

illusion as a result of dualistic thinking. It teaches that reality is the ineffable, and that people can approach the ineffable through meditation. In those beliefs, it has much in common with Hinduism, Taoism, and other forms of Buddhism. In some cases, of course, a poem makes direct reference to a text from a specific system. For instance, *The Waste Land* relates the thunder fable from one of the Upanishads, a Vedantic text. In such cases, it is helpful to know what the passage means within that belief system. However, in many other instances understanding the concepts of non-dualism, non-attachment, the illusory ego-self, and the realization of Emptiness as taught in Zen Buddhism will help open the poems to the reader.

This study does not attempt to present a comprehensive view of Zen. Its purpose is to use Zen to elucidate poems of Eliot, Stevens, and Williams, not to instruct students of Zen. Those who are interested in the study of Zen will want to consult other texts or teachers.

Chapter One

Zen Buddhism: Providing a Context

A number of Eastern philosophies are evident in Western literature, including modern poetry and in particular the poems of T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams. P.S. Sri, in *T.S. Eliot, Vedanta and Buddhism*, finds both Hinduism and Buddhism in the work of Eliot. William W. Bevis, in *Mind of Winter*, does a phenomenological reading of Stevens, but acknowledges that others recognize Zen elements in Stevens. Zen master and writer Robert Aitkin, in fact, hails Stevens as "one of the very few great poets who will be an endless source of inspiration for future generations of Western Zen teachers" (72). Zhaoming Qian, in *Orientalism and Modernism*, argues that Williams uses elements of Taoism in his poems. All three poets of this study make use of certain concepts that are central to the practice of Zen: non-attachment, non-dualism, and the realization of Emptiness. In addition, all three posit a transitory, non-permanent self that is in keeping with the teachings of Zen. Regardless of what elements they may also use from other belief systems, Eliot, Stevens, and Williams use so many Zen concepts that Zen can be used as a framework for understanding the Eastern elements of their poems.

Although this study uses Zen as a framework for reading modern poetry, it makes forays into Hindu texts during the

discussions of Eliot and Stevens. Eliot, who learned Sanskrit and Eastern philosophy at Harvard, makes allusions to the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita* that I did not want to ignore in this study even though they are not Zen texts. In chapter two, I discuss briefly the ways in which *The Waste Land* resembles an Upanishad. In the discussion of *Four Quartets* I suggest that an element of the familiar compound ghost in "Little Gidding" might be Krishna and that in the same passage, the narrator would represent Arjuna. Stevens' connection to the *Bhagavad Gita* is a little more tenuous. In his minor poem sequence "Lettres d'un Soldat," Stevens used for its epigraph a French passage referring to Arjuna's dilemma in the *Bhagavad Gita*. I suggest that Stevens might have modeled the entire poem sequence on the *Bhagavad Gita*. Although the *Gita* is not a Zen text, it does have as its central point an element that is essential to Zen, the concept of non-attachment. Eliot would have learned about non-attachment from a number of Eastern texts in addition to the *Gita*, but Stevens' reading was more limited. If Stevens was familiar with the *Gita*, it would help explain how he became knowledgeable about non-attachment, which he displays in later poems.

Using Zen to interpret poetry seems paradoxical, given Zen's resistance to abstraction and interpretation.

However, the concepts are there in the poems, and to leave them unidentified leaves the meaning obscured. Zen is strongly connected to Hinduism, Taoism, and, of course, other forms of Buddhism, and as a result it shares with those philosophies some basic assumptions about the world. D.T. Suzuki, the first major writer on Zen for Western readers, says that "we find in Zen all the philosophy of the East crystallized" (*Introduction* 38). Thus, illuminating the Zen in the poems also sheds light on other Eastern philosophies that might be present. Additionally, although Zen eschews abstractions, it recognizes an integration of philosophy, everyday life, and art that makes it well suited as a means of understanding poetry, particularly since Zen masters have used poetry in their teaching for centuries.

By reading the poems of Eliot, Stevens, and Williams in a Zen context, I do not argue that these poets were Zen Buddhists, nor that they used Zen Buddhist texts as source material. I argue that as they engaged philosophical and artistic questions, especially of reality and the self, they used Zen concepts to make their points. This use of Zen may be conscious. Eliot's interest in Buddhism is well documented and is evident not only in his allusions to the Buddha's Fire Sermon in *The Waste Land* but in other poems and in his poetic theory of impersonality as well. Cleo McNelly Kearns says that Eliot allowed his Buddhist perspective to "flow into and modify his essentially Western

sensibility and work," making him "the supreme expositor of Buddhist wisdom in our poetic tradition" ("T.S. Eliot" 135). Stevens was introduced to Zen Buddhism through Witter Bynner, a college classmate, and had access to other Eastern texts as well. Stevens' references to vacancy, emptiness, the never-resting mind, and the effect of perception on reality seem blatantly Zen-like. Recent scholarship by Zhaoming Qian reveals that Williams read, studied, and imitated the work of eighth century Chinese poets. Williams' Chinese connection is significant to this study because in imitating the work of those poets, particularly Po Chu-i, Williams incorporated concepts of Taoism, which is similar to Zen. Although a case could be made that Eliot, Stevens, and Williams consciously used Zen or other Eastern concepts in their poems, the main focus of this study is not the use of Eastern texts as source material.

This study uses Zen as a framework for understanding Eastern concepts that are present in the poems. This chapter provides background material about Zen and explains relevant Zen concepts, quoting Zen commentators and referring to poems that will be discussed in later chapters. The three chapters that follow discuss separately the poets of the study, including their individual propensities toward a Zen-like point of view as revealed through their essays, correspondence, or other prose. After documenting each poet's exposure to and knowledge of Eastern philosophy, art,

and literature, those chapters discuss poems that can be better understood when read in a Zen context.

The second chapter traces T.S. Eliot's move from dualistic thinking in his early poems to Enlightenment and creativity in the later ones. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is read as a demonstration of an ego-self locked in fear and suffering brought on by dualistic thinking. Prufrock himself is compared to neurotic patients who are helped by the Zen-influenced Morita therapy. The chapter argues that the people of *The Waste Land* are also locked in dualism and that the end of the poem shows hope for Enlightenment after meditation. *Four Quartets* is read as Enlightenment attained, with a mature Eliot exhibiting creativity and non-attachment as he embraces the flux of a transient world. The discussion of "Little Gidding" suggests that Krishna may be an element of the familiar compound ghost, with the narrator representing Arjuna in that passage.

The third chapter of this study discusses Wallace Stevens, demonstrating that a Zen-like perspective, especially of the self, informs his poems. An early minor poem sequence, "Lettres d'un Soldat," is discussed in light of the possibility that it is modeled on the *Bhagavad Gita*, which teaches non-attachment as a central point. Stevens' later comprehension of non-attachment is demonstrated in a

discussion of "Polo Ponies Practicing." "Montrachet-le-Jardin," which Alan Filreis argues is based on a pamphlet by a Buddhist monk from Germany being held prisoner in Ceylon, is discussed as an illustration of Buddhist concepts. A discussion of "The Snow Man" negotiates two Zen readings of the poem, considering whether Stevens' Snow Man is attached to Emptiness. The later poems, including "Landscape with Boat," "The Rock," and "Of Mere Being," are discussed as evidence that Stevens' concept of reality is similar to that of Zen reality.

The fourth chapter reveals that William Carlos Williams may have been acquainted with a student of Zen about the same time he became interested in Chinese poetry. It discusses Zhaoming Qian's argument that "To the Shade of Po Chu-i" is Williams' response to poems by classical Chinese poet Po Chu-i. A number of Williams' shorter poems are discussed as attempts to portray objects in their suchness while others are considered as illustrations of the concepts of non-attachment, Emptiness, and Zen spontaneity. The chapter argues that because Williams recognizes the inadequacy of language to convey the experience of reality, he resorts to the technique of not-naming, which enriches the poems. Several short poems and Book I of *Paterson* demonstrate Williams' concept of reality, which is similar to the Zen notion of reality.

To read poetry from a Zen perspective, one must

comprehend the Zen state of consciousness, which according to one commentary is "characterized by the absence of dualistic thinking" (Radcliff and Radcliff 33). This state has implications not only for reading poetry, but also for the act of creating poetry. The poets of this study seem to have recognized the creative potential of this state and fostered its attainment, even though they did not identify it as Zen. This impulse is expressed most forcefully by Williams, a physician, who said that when working with patients he felt that, for the moment, he "actually became them" (*Autobiography* 356). Experiencing such moments in which he saw "that secret world of perfection" would bring him a phrase which he quickly wrote down on a scrap of paper (289).

In addition to experiencing a Zen state of consciousness at least occasionally, all three poets also wrote poems that reflect a recognition and appreciation of nondualism. Eliot's moments of nondualism are found in *Four Quartets*. Stevens' most vivid examples are in "The Snow Man," "Landscape with Boat," and "Of Mere Being." Williams' most surprising example of nondualism is probably "Death the Barber."

The idea of a Zen concept seems to be a paradox because Zen is a way to experience the world directly as it is, free of concepts and other ideas. However, Zen itself is a

concept, and followers of Zen, like other people, must express their ideas in concepts. The difference is that Zen Buddhists are acutely aware of concepts and their limitations, accepting them for what they are. Regardless of any seeming paradox, if one is to understand Zen, one must understand Zen concepts. Some Zen Buddhists disagree, saying that Zen should be experienced, not understood, because any understanding of Zen will fall short of the experience. However, this same argument could be made about any experience such as driving a car or swimming. Understanding how to drive or swim is not the same as the experience of driving or swimming. Nevertheless, instructional pamphlets and books successfully prepare the novice who may or may not eventually take the wheel or the plunge. Therefore, it seems reasonable that one should be able to understand Zen without experiencing it, and in fact hundreds of books attempt to help readers do just that.

Zen Buddhists do have a point, though, in that Zen is different. Unlike driving or swimming, the practice of Zen challenges conventional modes of thinking and conventional language. It is said to be "outside the scriptures," with "no dependence upon words and letters" (Ogata 13), rendering language inadequate as an instructional medium. Zen is an approach to the world that requires a perspective that is totally foreign to conventional thinking because it is beyond all dualisms. Zen takes the position that only

concrete things are real; all ideas are abstractions. To Zen Buddhists, even the notion of subject-object opposition is an abstraction. In the absence of the subject-object assumption, one struggles to say what Zen is "for" or "against" because Zen does not recognize such distinctions. To further complicate the issue, Zen, being "outside the scriptures," has no dogma and no authorized standard of belief. In conventional thinking, however, Zen is certainly something that can be differentiated from everything else, and the study of Zen requires rigorous discipline. Thus, a discussion of Zen is bound to be contradictory and to misrepresent Zen to some extent. At best, any discussion of Zen will point to what Zen is like, ironically dealing with ideas about the thing, and not the thing itself. According to an often-quoted Zen saying, "Zen is a finger pointing to the moon, but it is not the finger" (Suzuki, *Essays* 19).

Before seeing how Zen distinguishes itself from other schools of Buddhism, we first must look at Buddhism in general. Buddhists believe that all things are impermanent; nothing is permanent and unchanging. In spite of that, or maybe because of it, human beings long for the permanent and infinite. Stevens alluded to this longing when he wrote "Our prime instinct is to go on indefinitely like the wax flowers on the mantelpiece" (*Opus* 234). Buddhists say that this longing, which is also called clutching or craving, brings about what Buddhism calls *dukkha*, or suffering (Abe,

Comparative 130). The goal of all Buddhists is to alleviate suffering (Kasulis 150n). According to Buddhists, suffering can be eliminated only by eradicating its cause, which is ignorance of the true nature of the world. Buddhists say that when human beings accept the true nature of the world, that it is impermanent, they are no longer ignorant and they no longer suffer (Abe, *Comparative* 130).

When Buddhists say that the world is characterized by suffering, they do not mean they believe that life is devoid of pleasure. They recognize that pleasure and suffering cannot exist without each other and that the human inclination is to seek pleasure while trying to avoid suffering. This futile attempt to separate suffering from pleasure so that only pleasure can be experienced constitutes suffering (Abe, *Western* 205-206). Another way to explain it is to say that "life as we usually live it is suffering" because we are continually frustrated by attempting the impossible (Watts, *Way* 46). *Dukkha*, a Sanskrit word, is usually defined as suffering, pain or unsatisfactoriness (Fields 7), but it also means "inadequacy" (Kasulis 55) or "frustration" (Watts, *Way* 46). Benjamin Radcliff and Amy Radcliff define *dukkha* as "unhappiness of any kind, but particularly that which comes from our discontent with life," including a "distaste for bad weather or warm beer" and "fear of death and the passage

of time" (92). According to Buddhists, the foolish attempt to hold on to life and avoid death keeps humankind "irrevocably bound to samsara, the cycle of birth and death" (Abe, *Western* 206). The solution is to realize and embrace the fundamental impermanence of the world, in the process accepting both life and death, happiness and suffering.

The story of Siddhartha Gautama, founder of Buddhism, says that Siddhartha first learned about suffering when he went outside his palace walls for the first time and encountered old age, disease, and death. Profoundly affected by his discovery and motivated by compassion, Siddhartha left his wife and child and all his riches to devote his life to the alleviation of suffering. Siddhartha tried one religious discipline after another for six years, unsuccessfully seeking a way to end suffering. Having failed to find an external solution, Siddhartha resolved to look inward. He sat silently beneath a tree, resolving to remain there until he found the answer. After a period of several weeks, the answer came to him, and he saw the world in an entirely new way. From then on, Siddhartha was known as the Buddha, which means Enlightened One (Fields 4-9; Snelling 17-33). Although Siddhartha's experience has been interpreted in different ways by various schools of Buddhism, all Buddhists agree that full Enlightenment is not unique to the Buddha but is "the very nature, the birthright of every human being" (Fields 6).

Significantly, the Buddha did not retreat to a monastery after his Enlightenment, but re-entered conventional life, spending his remaining 45 years wandering through the villages and towns of India, teaching. While the Buddha was teaching, he never wrote down any of his discourses, or *sutras*; all were transmitted orally (Fields 8). After his death, 500 elders are said to have gathered to hear his close disciples recite the Buddha's teachings. Those teachings were not recorded until several centuries later, when they were first written on palm leaves (9).

Although all schools of Buddhism claim to be based on the Buddha's teachings, the schools vary widely in their interpretations of those teachings and the meaning of the Buddha's life, at least partly because some of the Buddha's followers began to idealize his life and personality soon after his death (Abe, *Comparative* 13). This idealization of the Buddha is evident in the stories from what are known as the Pali scriptures, translated into English in 1896 by Henry Clarke Warren and published by the Harvard University Press. The birth of the Buddha, for instance, is presented as a miraculous event in which the child was born "unsmeared by any impurity from his mother's womb" (Warren 46), and he announced as he was being born that he wanted to give alms (47).

Each school of Buddhism claims as its scriptural authority one or more of the Buddha's *sutras*, with the

exception of Zen Buddhism, which claims no authoritative scripture (Abe, *Comparative* 19). Zen Buddhists have traditionally claimed as their authority their own direct experience of Enlightenment (Suzuki, *Essays* 168). This is not to say, however, that no primary Zen texts exist. Some Zen Buddhists use the Buddha's Diamond Sutra or Heart Sutra for guidance. The collected teachings of such masters as Dogen, Hui-neng, and Hakuin are also read by Zen Buddhists, as are collections of Zen koans, the seemingly paradoxical questions used in meditation, and their accompanying commentary. In addition, numerous scholars over the centuries have written interpretations of the primary Buddhist texts, and they have written essays on subjects of interest to Zen Buddhists as well. Twentieth-century scholars who write about Zen specifically for the West include Masao Abe, Robert Aitken, D. T. Suzuki, and Alan Watts.

Bodhidharma, the earliest Zen patriarch, is said to have come to China from India in A.D. 520, bringing a message that distinguished Zen from other schools of Buddhism in China (Suzuki, *Essays* 176). A text

traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma defines Zen as

not relying on words or letters;

an independent transmission apart from the

scriptural doctrine or any teaching;

directly pointing to the human Mind; and
awakening to one's Original Nature, thereby
actualizing one's own Buddhahood.

(Abe, *Comparative* 3)

This four-line text sets out the essentials of Zen, but it does not establish a direct connection between the Buddha and Zen.

A connection between the Buddha and Zen is established in a legend that, according to Suzuki, is generally accepted by orthodox Zen followers to be the origin of their doctrine (*Essays* 167-168). However, it is not supported by Indian texts (Tanahashi 22). According to this legend, the Buddha was preaching to a congregation of his disciples at the Mount of the Holy Vulture when, instead of resorting to a lengthy discourse, he silently lifted a bouquet of flowers that had been given him by a disciple. The Buddha's unspoken teaching was understood only by Mahakasyapa, who responded by smiling. In recognition of Mahakasyapa's understanding, the Buddha announced, "I have the most precious treasure, spiritual and transcendental, which this moment I hand over to you, O venerable Mahakasyapa!" (Suzuki, *Essays* 167). With that, the Buddha certified the Enlightenment of Mahakasyapa, establishing a tradition of unbroken face-to-face transmission of the Buddha's teaching, or *dharma*, for Zen. In its role as "an independent

transmission...not relying on words or letters," Zen attempts to return not to the *sutras*, but to the source of the *sutras*, the self-awakening Mind of Buddha, which Zen Buddhists believe is the true nature of all humankind. Zen attempts to transmit this self-awakening Mind "from person to person, from generation to generation" (Abe, *Comparative* 19).

Given its independence from scripture and dogma, the beliefs of Zen Buddhists are probably the simplest in all Buddhism, yet the most difficult to characterize. The other chief distinguishing feature of Zen besides its attitude about texts is its reliance on meditation. All schools of Buddhism use meditation, but meditation, especially seated meditation known as *zazen*, is central to Zen. The practice that became known as Zen began in India as "dhyana," the Sanskrit word for "meditation." From India, it was taken to China, where attempts to pronounce the Sanskrit word became "ch'an." The practice of ch'an then went to Japan, where the word was mispronounced as "zen" (Thien-An 2). Zen meditation is traditionally performed in a seated position, a practice followed in China by Bodhidharma, who is said to have sat so long in meditation that his legs fell off (Watts, *Way* 86). Dogen, the thirteenth-century Zen master credited for having established the Soto school of Zen in Japan, is known for his emphasis on *zazen* (Abe, *Western* 25).

Dogen's teaching on *zazen*, delivered in 1243, instructs students to sit on a cushion placed on a mat, with legs crossed and the body erect. The ears should be in line with the shoulders, the nose in line with the navel. The tongue should rest against the roof of the mouth, lips and teeth closed, the eyes open. The mind should be at rest, not consciously thinking, remembering, or trying to do anything. Once mind and body are settled, the student is to breathe deeply and exhale fully. For Dogen, *zazen* is the practice of Zen (Tanahashi 29-30).

Zazen is practiced today essentially the same way Dogen taught it in the thirteenth century, and though on a practical level one may be said to practice *zazen* in order to attain Enlightenment, the Zen view is that "one sits solely for the sake of doing so; sitting has no other purpose" (Radcliff and Radcliff 108). As Alan Watts says, "to practice with an end in view is to have one eye on the practice and the other on the end, which is lack of concentration, lack of sincerity" (Way 154). In the act of *zazen*, the meditator sits quietly in the manner described by Dogen, releases all thought, and simply experiences the world as it is.

The point at which the mind experiences the world as it is, according to Zen Buddhism, is the point at which the Zen state of consciousness differs so dramatically from the

conventional state of mind. This awakened state is called by a number of terms, including Awakening, *bodhi*, Enlightenment, Realization, *satori*, the realization of Emptiness, the realization of the Buddha-nature, and the realization of the true self. Although Zen teaches that every sentient creature has this awakened Buddha-nature and anyone who releases attachment to illusion will realize it, Enlightenment typically comes about only after years of meditation and study. When this state of consciousness is achieved, the meditator is unable to characterize it adequately in words, just as, according to Zen Buddhists, the Buddha could not. Zen Buddhists claim that the Buddha's real message was unspoken, regardless of how many scriptures were attributed to the Buddha, and when words are used in an attempt to express it, the experience is trivialized (Watts, *Way* 45). A well known Zen story demonstrates the surface banality of such an attempt. A Zen master writes:

Before I had studied Zen for thirty years, I saw mountains as mountains, and waters as waters. When I arrived at a more intimate knowledge, I came to the point where I saw that mountains are not mountains, and waters are not waters. But now that I have got its very substance I am at rest. For it's just that I see mountains once again as mountains, and waters once again as waters. (qtd.

in Watts, *Way* 126)

What the Zen master attempts to describe is the change in his perception that occurred after he had learned to see the world as it is, but to the uninformed reader, his statement is utter nonsense.

Before this master began his Zen practice, he perceived the world in the conventional manner, and things seemed ordinary to him. As he began to calm his mind, mountains and waters did not seem the same because for the first time he began to perceive them free of ideas. Finally, when he realized Emptiness, the Zen master perceived mountains and waters just as they are, in their suchness. To the uninformed reader, the final state seems identical to the beginning state, but the mind that experiences the world in its suchness is aware of a profound difference, and the informed reader can comprehend it. Similarly, the reader who has knowledge of Zen can better comprehend poetry or other art that incorporates Zen concepts.

The Zen idea of how the world really is differs widely from traditional Western notions, and that difference has implications for poetry and art in general. The Buddhist idea of what the world is like is similar to that of the Vedantic or Hindu tradition. The Vedantic story of creation says that the world began when Brahman, the only existing entity, divided itself into the things of the earth — people, animals, trees, rivers. Although the things of the

earth appear to be separate, they are all Brahman, and the spiritual goal is to recognize the oneness that has always existed. (See Prabhavananda and Manchester; Watts, *The Way of Zen* 31-44; Radcliff and Radcliff 88-91.) In contrast, the Judeo-Christian story of creation says that God created the things of the world as separate entities, and the spiritual goal is to bridge that gap of separation to become one with God. Buddhists begin with an assumption of a world characterized by wholeness rather than separateness.

Zen teaches that the world appears to be made of separate things because the discriminating mind continually acts to distinguish and objectify the things of the world. This action creates an illusion of separateness that exists only in the mind. For instance, Zen Buddhists say that to see a tree as separate from the ground in which it grows is to create an arbitrary separation that is not real. The tree and the ground exist as particulars, but they are dependent on each other. Like everything else in the world, tree and ground are interdependent, interlocking parts of a whole. A Zen Buddhist would think of a tree in its context as part of the ground it grows from, the air surrounding it, the birds that nest in it, and the people who sit beneath it. The tree and the things that constitute its context — which ultimately comprise the entire world — are in constant flux because everything in the world is impermanent and changing. According to Zen, concrete objects exist and

change. Abstract distinctions between them are useful in the everyday world, but ultimately unimportant. (See discussion in Radcliff and Radcliff 17-33.)

The concept of Emptiness, or *Mu*, is particularly important to Zen Buddhists. Although Emptiness is sometimes called "nothingness," Zen Emptiness is not the same as the Western concept of "nothingness." "Nothingness" or "nothing" in the Western dualistic manner of thinking is the opposite of "something" and is therefore something itself. Zen does not recognize dualistic oppositions because such relational attitudes are merely ideas, products of the discriminating mind. Zen Emptiness is just emptiness; it is not the opposite of anything. Further, when Zen teaches that an object is "empty," it does not mean that the object does not exist, nor does it mean that the object is some kind of apparition. Zen Emptiness is sometimes misunderstood as nihilistic, but Emptiness is openness, not negation. An object is Empty in that it has no self-identity beyond the sensory and phenomenal dimension. As Masao Abe explains, a desk is a desk because it has the form of a desk, but its identity as a desk ends there. If we see its identity as a desk in terms of its nature, we do not see it as empty (*Comparative* 99). An "empty" object is only what it is in the present moment, not what it could be or what it could do under different circumstances. In Zen, Emptiness is what remains in the absence of all abstractions. To perceive the

world in its Emptiness is to experience Enlightenment.

Zen Buddhists experience Enlightenment by meditating. Zazen is the traditional meditation, but Zen teaches that meditation can also be performed through the mindful performance of ordinary activities. Forgetting the self and concentrating only on the task at hand, whether it be walking down the street or painting woodwork, the meditator can clear his or her mind of abstractions. One way to clear the mind of abstractions is to work with a koan. A koan is a seemingly illogical question or dialogue used to help the student become free of dualistic thinking. A well known example is Hakuin's "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" While people who are not Zen students may enjoy the challenge of trying to answer such puzzles, teachers of Zen stress that koans are not games. Miura and Sasaki, among the earliest and most thorough commentators on the koan for Western readers, caution that the koan "is not a conundrum to be solved by a nimble wit" (xi). The koan is more accurately compared to the familiar inkblot test used by psychologists because both are used to assess the state of mind. The point of the koan is not the answer, but the change in thinking that takes place while the student searches for the answer. Typically, a student will work with a koan for years, puzzling over it as he or she goes about daily activities. When the student has achieved the necessary change in perception that makes the koan clear, he

or she goes to the master with the answer. The master then asks the student to provide a poem or "capping phrase" as evidence that the student truly has attained the necessary shift in consciousness (x-xiii). The student may create a phrase or select a verse from a traditional Zen text. Sokei-an Sasaki, teaching Zen in the United States, encouraged his students to select a capping verse from *Alice in Wonderland* (Watts, Way 167). With or without a koan, however, meditation can be performed in a number of ways.

Regardless of how meditation is performed, during the process a Zen student empties the mind by neither holding on to thoughts nor trying to banish them. Trying to have an empty mind only causes the mind to be filled with thoughts of having an empty mind. In a move that is characteristically Zen-like, the meditator clears the mind by not trying to clear the mind. Thoughts are left free to appear and disappear as they will, and finally the mind empties. Beginners at meditation sometimes have difficulty letting thoughts go because the mind wants to attach to them. To keep the discriminating mind busy, beginning meditators either chant or count their breaths, providing something to occupy the mind until it is bored enough to release thought. Working with a koan can also occupy the mind until it is calmed. When the mind is free of all thought, including the thought of no-thought, it is in what one commentator describes as "a boundless state of unity

through time and space in which the concept of objectivity and subjectivity are abandoned" (Tworkov 7). (For a discussion of meditation techniques, see Radcliff and Radcliff, 119-135; 139-142.)

When Emptiness is realized, the Zen concept of suchness is also uncovered. To perceive an object as empty is to see it in its suchness. An empty tree is just a particular tree, free of all ideas, including ideas of "treeness," purpose, or quality, but at the same time it is also seen in an interdependent relationship with its immediate surroundings. Any tree that is not present at this particular moment is not a tree, but an idea of a tree. An empty tree is not taller or shorter than another, nor is it straighter or considered more or less suitable for firewood or lumber than another tree. It is merely this particular tree at this particular moment. This concept is demonstrated by Williams in "The Great Figure," where he presents the figure 5 in its suchness. He does not explain or interpret the figure; he presents it purely as it is in the moment, a part of its immediate surroundings. The suchness of an object is its pure existence. Suchness may also be described as "as-it-isness." The as-it-isness of the world is Zen reality. (See Abe, *Zen and Western Thought*, 223-227.)

In the realization of suchness or Emptiness, the self disappears. A traditional Buddhist scripture teaches that,

just as a chariot is the composite of its parts, with no one part alone constituting the chariot, the self exists only as an aggregate of parts, and the self as an entity does not exist (Warren 129-148). Zen reveals the self as illusion through the attainment of Emptiness. When the mind releases all abstractions, it no longer thinks dualistically, and there is no longer any separation between subject and object. If dualistic thinking is absent, so is the "I" that represents the ego-self, the "I" that defines the world as Other than the self.

This ego-self is not, according to Zen Buddhism, the true self, but merely an idea about the self. Zen Buddhists believe that the true self is pure consciousness (Radcliff and Radcliff 44). Traditional Western thought says that the self is an entity that has certain experiences. In Zen thinking, there is no entity to "have" experience; the self *is* experience. Therefore, in Zen terms the self is not something that perceives light; the self *is* light. This true self is also called the Buddha-nature, and Zen Buddhists believe that it is part of every sentient being. Further, Zen Buddhists who follow the tradition established by Dogen do not say that every sentient being *has* the Buddha-nature, but that every sentient being *is* the Buddha-nature. Similarly, one does not develop the Buddha-nature or gain the Buddha-nature; one realizes the Buddha-nature

that has always been present. The experience of realizing the Buddha-nature enables the enlightened to know the Emptiness and connectedness of all living things and therefore to feel compassion for them. The experience also reveals the clutching, ever-hungry ego-self for what it is, an illusion.

In contrast to the true self, whose realization brings about compassion and alleviation of suffering, the ego perpetuates suffering. The ego, looking at the self from the outside, experiences literal self-consciousness, an awareness of the self. To ask "Who am I?" is to reveal both an inquiring self and a self as object of the question. This ability to consider the self as object means that human beings always feel a sense of separation and alienation. While most people accept some degree of this feeling as natural, it can be a source of deep anxiety. In fact, noted Zen writer Masao Abe argues in *Zen and Western Thought* that self-estrangement and anxiety are inherent to the structure of the ego-self. As he says, "to be human is to be a problem to oneself, regardless of one's culture, class, sex, nationality, or the era in which one lives" (6). This anxiety-ridden state is a reflection of the ego's desires and fears, and it is vividly demonstrated in T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." All of Prufrock's anxieties stem from his preoccupation with his ego-self. The characters of *The Waste Land* are also consumed with the

concerns of the illusory self. Near the end of *The Waste Land*, however, the narrating consciousness appears to gain some peace through a glimpse of Enlightenment. William Carlos Williams also portrays a character locked in dualistic thinking. His "farmer in deep thought" from *Spring and All* sets himself as an antagonist against his fields. The poem, however, ends with the portrayal and remains silent on the consequences of the duality.

Paramount among the ego-self's fears is the fear of death, which means total annihilation of the ego. Zen Buddhists believe that when the mind is calmed through meditation and the ego is released, there is no longer any fear of death because there is no entity to "have" fear. Zen belief holds that the true self does not "know" such concepts as death and life. The true self is pure consciousness, and as such it experiences all of the interlocking wholeness of the world. To the true self, death is, if anything, merely a cessation of awareness. Further, because the true self is the Buddha-nature, which is all-encompassing and empty, it is not diminished by the cessation of part of it. In contrast, the ego is caught up in dualities. It does not embrace both life and death as experience. In its abhorrence of death, it clutches at life just as it clutches at other ideas. In the epigraph to *The Waste Land*, Eliot shows that the Sybil of Cumae is miserable

because she clutches first at life and then at death. Her suffering cannot end because she cannot stop clutching and embrace both life and death. Zen teaches that if the ego is released, there is no entity to "have" a fear of death or life. In effect, Zen Buddhism puts an end to the fear of death by killing the illusion of the ego (Radcliff and Radcliff 54).

While it is active, however, the ego acts upon its fears and desires. In defense against its fears and in pursuit of its pleasures, the ego constructs a complex network of abstractions that constitute human culture and include politics, science, and religion. In short, it constructs the conventional world that people depend upon in their everyday lives. Zen Buddhists, like everyone else, live in this conventional world. However, Zen Buddhists understand that it is a world of socially agreed-upon conventions that ultimately are unimportant. Zen Buddhists live in this world but are not attached to it. Others, however, are often so attached to this conventional world of abstractions and impermanence that they are miserable. Construction of this network of abstractions is possible because human beings can think of the self as an object situated in ideas of time and space that are also abstractions of the mind. Ironically, the consciousness of self that makes abstract thinking possible also perpetuates abstract thinking, keeping unenlightened human beings locked

in a spiral of attachment and suffering.

Regardless of the suffering caused by the ego, Zen does not consider the ego to be evil or even undesirable. Such designations as "good" and "evil" are abstractions rooted in dualism, and Zen does not recognize abstractions as reality. According to Zen, things are what they are in their Emptiness, no more and no less. Further, all things are "mutually dependent and co-arising and co-ceasing" (Abe *Comparative* 94), meaning that everything in the world depends upon something else for its existence. All things are interlocking and interdependent parts of the whole, and in reality it is all empty. To judge things as good or evil, useful or irrelevant shows attachment to ideas, an attachment that perpetuates suffering by causing one to desire things that are not real and that one cannot attain.

Zen Buddhists believe that to seek good creates its opposite, and to spend one's life seeking one idea and avoiding another is to lock oneself into dualism (Radcliff and Radcliff 157-158). The Zen life therefore seeks nothing, not even Enlightenment. It is a life of no purpose, for to have a purpose is to be attached, and to be attached is to be locked into dualistic thinking and suffering. In seeking nothing, the life of no purpose paradoxically "misses nothing," and the "senses are fully open to receive the world" (Watt *Way* 176). In "At the Ball Game," Williams demonstrates both non-attachment and

attachment, suggesting that attachment brings harm to society.

Ordinary life, however, requires some degree of attachment, even for those who practice Zen. To make budgets, keep appointment calendars, work toward degrees, and even travel to Japan for Zen study requires attachment to ideas and some commitment to purpose. The seeming inconsistency between living in non-attachment and living in the conventional world reflects the balance required of the Zen life. Zen teaches the principle of two truths in which both conventional truth and ultimate truth are embraced. Knowing that a truth of the conventional world (for instance, that the sun appears to rise in the east) is contrary to ultimate truth (it doesn't really), Zen avoids attachment to either and, at the same time, avoids attachment to the difference between the two. Zen teaches "the dynamic structure and interrelationship of the two truths" (Abe *Comparative* 51-52). Thus, the way of Zen requires one to be ever in balance, almost dancing, to avoid attachment and avoidance of attachment, which is in itself attachment.

The concept of attaining by not seeking or doing by not doing is called *wu-wei*, which is known in Taoism as well as Zen Buddhism. Although it is translated as "non-doing" (Kasulis 36) or "non-action" (Abe 284), *wu-wei* should not be

misinterpreted as the passive act of doing nothing, or the anxiety-ridden stasis of J. Alfred Prufrock. *Wu-wei* is action, but it is action that is free, uncontrived, and spontaneous (Watts, *Way* 52), as found, for example, in Stevens' "Polo Ponies Practicing," as I will argue in chapter three. Thus, *wu-wei* can be understood as "non-conscious action" or "an unwillingness to let the conscious mind run rampant" (Radcliff and Radcliff 85). Applying the principle of *wu-wei* to life in general, the Zen life is a purposeless life, one that allows the ego-self to disappear and the true self to be realized.

The concept of *wu-wei* is of particular importance in art. Because in Zen there is no duality, there is no conflict in Zen art between "the natural element of chance and the human element of control" (Watts, *Way* 174). Veering either way, toward chance or toward control, is to attach to one or the other. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot remarks that writing poetry is, or should be, both a conscious and unconscious act (43), suggesting that the poet must strike that balance between chance and control that is essential to Zen art and to the concept of *wu-wei*. Creating art in the spirit of *wu-wei* allows the artistic expression to spring forth from the true self, freely and without attachment to abstractions.

Zen ideas about art are, naturally, compatible with Zen ideas about life. The Zen artist and the medium are one, in that the art emerges spontaneously, with the artist giving no thought to form or purpose. Technique is, of course, practiced in a mindful way, almost as a meditation, but the artist must not let the "rules" limit his or her response. The Zen way is to learn the rules and practice them, but then respond without attachment to the rules (Kasulis 140). The result is a balance that Watts characterizes as "discipline in spontaneity and spontaneity in discipline" (Way 174). The spare nature of Zen art is related to the Zen concept of considering Emptiness as relational to form. In Chinese landscape paintings, for instance, which Stevens admired, the blank space is considered "part of the painting and not just unpainted background" (179). This approach to art, the idea of not having to fill in everything with "things" echoes the Zen idea of emptying the mind of abstractions and perceiving the world in its suchness. Thus, to Zen, unlike traditional Western approaches, life and art are part of an interdependent and interlocking whole. Art is not something that one "does"; art and life are one.

Although all three poets of this study earned a living through jobs they held in addition to writing poetry, they all espoused an integration of life and art. That integration in itself is a Zen idea, though of course it is

not exclusively Zen. Such are the Zen concepts found in the poems of this study. Non-attachment, non-dualism, the illusory ego-self, and the realization of Emptiness may not belong exclusively to Zen, but they are a part of Zen, and the poems that contain these concepts can be understood when read in a Zen context.

Chapter Two

T.S. Eliot: From Suffering to Enlightenment

Much has been written about T.S. Eliot's interest in Eastern philosophies. Jeffrey Perl and Andrew Tuck have documented Eliot's interest in Buddhism and Hinduism while at Harvard, including his study of Sanskrit. Eliot's remark to Chilean poet Gabriele Mistral, overheard by Stephen Spender, that he "almost became a Buddhist" while writing *The Waste Land* has been repeated often (Spender 20). Peter Ackroyd's biography, *T.S. Eliot*, and the two by Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* and *Eliot's Early Years*, mention Eliot's interest in the East. Several works have discussed Eliot's use of Buddhist and Hindu texts and philosophy, especially in *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. They include *T.S. Eliot, Vedanta and Buddhism* by P.S. Sri, *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot* by Hugh Kenner, and *T.S. Eliot and Indic Traditions: A Study in Poetry and Belief* by Cleo McNelly Kearns. Kearns also discusses the subject in two articles, "T.S. Eliot, Buddhism, and the Point of No Return" and "Religion, Literature, and Society in the Work of T.S. Eliot."

Eliot's 1927 conversion to Anglicanism might be considered to mark the end of a young man's flirtation with exotic Eastern philosophies, but evidence indicates that Eliot's interest in Hinduism and Buddhism was more than

superficial and that it lasted beyond his conversion. In *After Strange Gods*, Eliot said that studying Sanskrit for two years and Indic philosophy for one year left him "in a state of enlightened mystification" (43). He came to the conclusion that if he were to truly understand Brahmin and Buddhist thought, or as he put it, "really [penetrate] to the heart of that mystery" (44), he would have to forget "how to think and feel as an American or a European" (44), and he was unwilling to do that. But we must not underestimate Eliot's commitment to studying Hinduism and Buddhism. He does not explain what he means by "a state of enlightened mystification," but the fact that he modified the word "mystification" with "enlightened" marks him as more than a casual reader, and the fact that he made those remarks in 1933, referring to his studies of some twenty years earlier, indicates the great depth of his interest. Masao Hirai, a Japanese scholar, says that he went to England to interview Eliot some years after World War II but was unable to ask many questions because Eliot kept asking him about Zen Buddhism (qtd. in Johnston vi), showing that Eliot's interest lasted long beyond the Page-Barbour lectures of 1933.

Regardless of how intense or long-lasting Eliot's interest in Buddhism might have been, however, what is significant is the way that interest is manifested in his work. Kearns notes that Buddhism, at least as Eliot

understood it, "demands, or seems to demand...little of its adherents in terms of dogmatic assent" but at the same time demands "a deliberate and quite clinical transformation of consciousness" ("T.S. Eliot" 130). She argues that "the most 'Buddhist' moments in Eliot's work [are] not always or only the ones where Buddhism is most explicit" (132), but "in his ever more refined sense of how the mind might actually be modified, in the very categories of its perception, by close, directed attention to experience" (133). Hugh Kenner made a similar observation some forty years earlier in *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot*. Kenner wrote that Eliot exhibited in both his poetry and essays several Bradleyan notions, among them the idea that subject and object are one, that all things are interlocking and interdependent, and that the self is a construction in space and time. Kenner points out, however, that Eliot had already worked those ideas into his poetry before he encountered the philosophy of F.H. Bradley (63). According to Kenner, Eliot developed those ideas through reading Laforgue, who "no doubt drew his attention to Schopenhauer, who was interested in Buddhism and wished men to recognize their true condition, each one alone in an illusory world" (57). Whether Eliot encountered a particular way of approaching the world through Buddhism, Bradley, Laforgue, or some other source, it is a perspective that stayed with him and that he

expressed in his work even after his conversion to Anglicanism.

Eliot's conversion to Anglicanism in 1927 marks a change in his poetry, even for the critic looking at his work in a Zen context. The two pre-conversion poems of this study, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*, are both marked by a discomfort that is not present in the poems written after 1927. This discomfort is at odds with the Zen "mentality which feels completely at home in this universe, and which sees man as an integral part of his environment" (Watts, *Way* 175). From a Zen view, the early poems are a struggle for Enlightenment; the later poems are a realization of Enlightenment. Such a progression is not incompatible with a sincere commitment to Anglicanism or any other Western religion. For Zen Buddhists, the realization of Emptiness can happen within any cultural setting, and the abstractions of established religions, codes of law, or other cultural artifacts are merely ways of dealing with the practical world. Zen thought recognizes that "abstractions fuel the engine of reason" but warns that "we must not confuse them with reality" (Radcliff and Radcliff 27). From a Zen perspective, cultural artifacts are convenient, but not ultimately important, and Eliot's commitment to the religion and culture of England over those of his home country is unimportant in itself. The trappings of English

culture reflect the abstractions he chose for his environment as he moved toward Enlightenment. One could argue that Eliot's willingness to exchange his American culture for English culture indicates his belief in culture as abstraction and his desire to fit in with his immediate cultural environment.

Eliot's perspective on literature and the world reflects the Buddhist idea of dependent co-origination, which says that "everything in the universe is co-arising and co-ceasing and is interdependent with each other, that nothing exists independently; nothing has its own enduring fixed being" (Abe *Comparative* 174). Eliot exhibits that sense of interdependency in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," where he says that "[n]o poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" (38). He says that each artist must be seen in the context of all other art, and that the appearance of a new work calls for an adjustment of the old to accommodate the new (38-39). In another Zen-like move, Eliot says "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates" (41). At first glance, this separation of the sufferer from the creator appears to be a violation of the Zen sense of interdependency, but Eliot calls for the separation of "the man who suffers" from "the mind which creates" (41), echoing

the Zen belief that "the person who has experiences does not exist;...there are only experiences as they occur" (Radcliff and Radcliff 43). Eliot calls for detachment from the abstraction of "man" or "artist" as an entity that "suffers" in favor of allowing "the mind" to create. If we think of Eliot's "mind which creates" as Zen's true self or Buddha-nature, then, to Eliot, the creative act is not purposely performed by the ego-self but instead arises from within, in keeping with the Zen idea that "the person does not perform action; rather, action performs the person" (Kasulis 139). Eliot's artist releases his attachment to the ego and, like the Zen Buddhist, in an act of "egoless responsiveness... achieves freedom, creativity, compassion, and wisdom" (Kasulis 141).

In refining Wordsworth's claim that poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquillity," Eliot says that poetry is "a concentration...of a great number of experiences" that would not seem to be experiences to the average person (43). He adds that the concentration of experiences "does not happen consciously" or deliberately, and "they finally unite in an atmosphere which is 'tranquil' only in that it is a passive attending upon the event" (43). He adds, paradoxically, that much of poetry writing "must be conscious and deliberate" (43), and he urges the poet to surrender himself "wholly to the work to be done" (44). What he suggests is reminiscent of the Zen practice of mindfulness, in which

"[c]oncentration is focused on an activity, on the experience itself, rather than on the person performing the activity and having the experience" (Radcliff and Radcliff 49). The action is simultaneously conscious and unconscious.

Eliot is similarly paradoxical in his approach to the past and the present. Although he urges the poet to be aware of the past, he advocates living in "the present moment of the past," being "conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living" (44). These paradoxes are characteristic of Zen, particularly as Zen applies to the arts. It is commonly accepted that a student of the arts "must first learn technique in order to transcend technique" (Kasulis 140). In Zen art training, the transcending of technique occurs when the student overcomes attachment to technique and responds "to the presence of the moment," allowing the "determinateness of past conditions" to "vibrate in unison with the openness of the present" (140), avoiding attachment to either the present or the past. What Eliot advocates in poetry is a Zen-like embracing of paradox, in which a kind of balance is achieved with deliberate concentration and unconscious creativity, and with poets of the past and those of the present moment. Eliot's position is not far from Alan Watts' description of Zen artistic technique as "discipline in spontaneity and spontaneity in discipline" (174).

Concerning poetry of the past, Eliot follows his own admonition, at least in the early poems discussed here, through his heavy use of literary allusion. Both "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* seamlessly incorporate literature of the past as part of their present moment, beginning with each poem's epigraph. This affects not only the Eliot poems, but also the way readers respond to the older literature that is incorporated into them. In demonstrating the ideas he set forth in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot fashions a Zen reality of interlocking and interdependent literature. "Prufrock" can no more stand alone, separated from the works that came before it, than can *The Waste Land*. Both incorporate works from the past in making their own statements about the present.

The statement that "Prufrock" makes about the present is that it is unbearable. It is unbearable to Prufrock because he does not know himself and does not want to know himself. This theme is clear even in the epigraph, from Canto XXVII of Dante's *Inferno*. Dante, being guided through hell by Virgil, encounters a soul who, speaking through a flame, wants to know what has been going on in Italy since he left. Dante answers, then says, "And now I beg you tell us who you are" (Musa 1: 259). The soul that speaks through the flame is that of Guido da Montefeltro, a friar who was damned to hell because he gave false counsel and did not

repent of that sin (Musa 2: 356). He answers:

If I thought I were speaking to a soul
who someday might return to see the world,
most certainly this flame would cease to flicker;

But since no one, if I have heard the truth,
ever returns alive from this deep pit,
with no fear of dishonor I respond (Musa 1: 261)

The poem then begins "Let us go then, you and I." Use of the word "then" implies the resumption of a conversation, and its use in the opening line of the poem makes a link with the epigraph. Kenner remarks that "Prufrock" "begins somewhere in its own epigraph," noting that Eliot's use of epigraphs serves to "blur the beginnings of the poems" (50). In light of Eliot's ideas about the inter-relatedness of all art, this blurring of the poem's beginning makes an overt link between "Prufrock" and Dante's *Inferno*, and it points to a Zen-like interlocking of past and present poetry.

Further, if a connection exists between this particular passage of Dante and "Prufrock," the "overwhelming question" is one of identity. The "overwhelming question" is not one that Prufrock is trying to ask; it is a question that has been asked of him: Who are you? In lines 8-10, the streets "lead you to an overwhelming question"; in line 30 a question is lifted and dropped on his plate. He

contemplates answering the question when he asks himself how he should begin to "spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways" (59-60) and again in lines 90-95 by saying he has returned from the dead. The question is overwhelming to Prufrock because the only self he knows is full of fear.

Guido reveals himself only because he believes his listeners will not return to earth and tell what they know about him, thus bringing disgrace upon his name. Prufrock, however, is among those who are living, even if he is in his own private hell, and he spends the entire poem hesitating to reveal himself. His listeners—who may be "you," the women in the room, and/or the reader—are not trapped safely in hell, and he fears that they will talk about him to others. In his hesitation to reveal himself, Prufrock reveals instead his fears and fantasies. Ironically, according to traditional Western thinking, this is the same as revealing himself. According to Zen, however, Prufrock has revealed only his ego, which is "the mind's idea of itself" (Radcliff and Radcliff 43).

The Zen idea of self is markedly different from the self of the traditional Western view. The nondualism of Zen extends to the idea of the self in that the abstracted, or conceptualized, self, which in Western terms is the ego, is seen as illusion. The "I" that can be thought of, or objectified, is not the true self (Abe, *Western* 198). Zen

says that the separation of things is the work of the discriminating mind, and the resulting abstractions are illusion (Radcliff and Radcliff 21-22). This includes the most basic distinction, which is the division of "self" from "not-self." This distinction is similarly an illusion (46), and to realize the true self is "to remove the barriers between one's self and others" (Yokoi 39). Alan Watts says that Zen is "a joining of 'self' and 'life' into so close a unity and rhythm that the distinction between the two is forgotten" (*Spirit* 121), an idea that is certainly foreign to Prufrock.

The true self, because it is not an abstraction, exists as Emptiness. Another term for the true self is "Buddha-nature." Just as Enlightenment cannot be achieved by seeking it, the true self or Buddha-nature cannot be found by seeking it. As soon as we think of it, it is objectified and is not the true self. When the Zen Master Po-chang was asked about seeking the Buddha-nature, he answered, "It's much like riding an ox in search of the ox" (qtd. in Watts, *Way* 99). Prufrock cannot find his true self because he is searching for it.

In advocating non-dualistic thinking and non-attachment, Zen values being "completely at home in this universe" (Watts, *Way* 175). J. Alfred Prufrock is the antithesis of that Zen model. Prufrock's dis-ease with the

world is particularly evident in his discomfort with women, but at the core of his discontent is his inability to face the world as it is in the present moment. He usually thinks about the future or the past instead of the present, and when he does face the world in the present, the experience is mediated in some way. In Zen terms, Prufrock's inability to face the world as it is indicates that he does not realize his Buddha-nature. He is so caught up in abstractions, the concerns of his ego, that he cannot realize his true self. While a certain measure of self-consciousness is a normal part of human life, being trapped in self-reflection, as Prufrock certainly is trapped, prevents the true self from being realized and also brings on an inability to act (Kasulis 149). The solution is "to forget the self and return to what is" (149).

Prufrock's malady sounds remarkably like a condition that in Japan is called *shinkeishitsu* and that is "characterized by interpersonally oriented symptoms such as obsessive shyness, oversensitivity, and feelings of inferiority" (Reynolds, Morita 4). Symptoms can include "fear of looking other people in the eye, fear of being unable to perform perfectly, fear of omens, fear of blushing, fear of people, fear of disease, fear of dirt, persistent doubting, and persistently wandering thoughts" (12). Those who suffer from *shinkeishitsu* are unable to use

retrospection and prospection as a healthy way to reflect upon their own activity; like Prufrock, they get so caught up in intellectualizing that they neurotically postpone action. For them, "[a]nalysis, whether of the self or of the world, can never end; a new distinction is always possible" (Kasulis 149). In Western medicine, such a condition is called neurosis and is treated with psychotherapy. In Japan (and recently in the United States), *shinkeishitsu* is successfully treated with the Zen-influenced Morita therapy, which was developed in the early part of the twentieth century by Dr. Shoma Morita. Dr. Morita believed that "neurotic suffering" was not a medical condition, but arose from a "misunderstanding" about life (Reynolds, *Playing* 13). Treatment consists of helping the patient gain a new understanding of life. The Morita therapist seeks "to have the patient accept the given without concern for what should be" (148). Prufrock is so concerned for what should be, or what might be, that he cannot act.

Prufrock's inability to act is not to be confused with the Taoist and Zen concept of *wu-wei*, which is non-action. Prufrock's failure to act is the opposite of what he wants to do, which is to act. He is locked in the dualism of acting/not-acting. If he wanted to avoid his present position of stasis, he might purposely act. For instance,

he might blurt out his life story to one of the women. In Zen terms, this would be action that is performed for the purpose of not being inactive and would still be part of that dualism of acting/not-acting. Zen offers another alternative, which is neither acting nor purposely not-acting, called *wu-wei*. *Wu-wei* is not the act of standing still, nor is it the act of not standing still. It is "unselfconscious responsiveness" (Kasulis 36). Watts compares *wu-wei* to the act of seeing with peripheral vision, not trying to see, but trusting the eyes "to do the work by themselves" (Way 19). In Zen, appropriate action is performed without attachment. The doer performs without thought of self or purpose. The action arises from the true self or Buddha-nature. To act in the without-thinking mode of *wu-wei* is to be fully aware of the world as it is and to participate "in the presence of things as they are" (Kasulis 95).

The Zen idea of appropriate action is "ultimately free, uncontrived, or spontaneous action, in exactly the same sense as the Taoist *wu-wei*" (Watts, Way 52). Prufrock is incapable of such action. He can walk down the street, but when faced with the possibility of "an overwhelming question," he cannot act. Instead, he postpones the action, saying there will be time "for a hundred indecisions...a

hundred visions and revisions" (32-33). His *shinkeishitsu* has him as immobilized as the "patient etherised upon a table" in line three.

Prufrock himself is not etherised, but he is surrounded by a literal and symbolic fog that filters the world as it is, and that ultimately keeps him from acting. The yellow fog and the yellow smoke around him (15-25) comprise one kind of filter between Prufrock and the world. Another filter consists of Prufrock's daydreams about being "a pair of ragged claws" (73) on "the floors of silent seas" (74) and lingering "in the chambers of the sea" (129) with mermaids. This is a twofold avoidance of reality. First, when Prufrock is busy daydreaming, he cannot confront the world at hand. Second, besides distancing himself from the real world, Prufrock also distances himself from his fantasy world by imagining it submerged in the sea, with the water acting as a barrier. When "human voices wake us" (131), he is jolted out of his daydream, and instead of making a smooth transition to waking life, he is overcome by conventional reality, and he figuratively drowns.

P.S. Sri argues that Prufrock finds his dreamworld reassuring because its images are all "concrete and exact," in contrast to "the flowing concourse of his day-to-day-world," in which people and incidents are so indistinct that he cannot relate to them meaningfully (20). While it is

true that Prufrock's everyday world is surrounded by smoke and fog, its images are concrete: "sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells" (7), the women with "arms that are braceleted and white and bare/...downed with light brown hair" (63-64). Prufrock's remembrance, whether a true memory or a daydream, of walking at dusk "through narrow streets" and watching "smoke that rises from the pipes/ Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows" (70-73) is also concrete, as are the images of people talking about his bald spot (40-41) and his thinness (44), and the image of Prufrock's head being brought in on a platter (82). Both Prufrock's waking world and his fantasy world are filled with concrete images. The concreteness of the images is, in fact, evidence of Prufrock's unrestrained, discriminating mind at work. While he shields himself from experiencing direct reality through the symbolic filter of smoke, fog, dusk, or evening, he simultaneously fills his mind with the minute distinctions that are typical of the patient with *shinkeishitsu*.

The closest Prufrock comes to experiencing full daylight, i.e., direct experience, is in the reference to afternoon in line 75, but even that is mediated. Prufrock presumably would be open to the experience, but the afternoon is, unfortunately, asleep. In describing the event, Prufrock cannot restrain himself enough to say simply that the afternoon sleeps. His malady compels him to

qualify and distinguish further, almost ad nauseam. He doubles the afternoon by adding "the evening" as an appositive (75); it does not merely "sleep," or even sleep "peacefully" (75); it "sleeps so peacefully" (75). Two lines later, "asleep" is qualified by the possibility that the afternoon is "tired...or it malingers" (77). It is not merely smoothed by "fingers," but by "long fingers" (76). Further, the afternoon's sleeping position and location are pinpointed: "Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me" (78). Such attention to ideas about things is what, according to Zen, makes it impossible for Prufrock to experience the things themselves and to realize his true self.

For Zen, reality is "here and now" (Abe, *Western* 284), but Prufrock avoids experiencing that reality by perceiving what is before him through a filter. He avoids the present by occupying his mind with thoughts of some time or place other than when and where he is at the moment. He longs for another time and place because, it appears, he is uncomfortable with the present time and place. In the opening lines where Prufrock proposes going on a visit, the images are evocative of discomfort. The retreats are "muttering" (5), suggesting dissatisfaction, and "retreats" themselves represent a withdrawal from life. Streets are "half-deserted" (4) and they "follow like a tedious argument/

Of insidious intent" (8-9). The nights in cheap hotels are "restless" (6). All of these images evoke a sense of wanting to get away from a place, but Prufrock also wants to get away from the present time. According to Zen thinking, only the present moment exists, and "the past and the future are abstractions without any concrete reality" (Watts, *Way* 199). Yet Prufrock says "there will be time" (23 and elsewhere), ignoring the fact that time is here in the present. That he repeats the line several times emphasizes the fact that he dismisses the present, in which he chooses to do nothing, in favor of a future in which all things seem possible. Dwelling on this future keeps Prufrock immobile in the present, which for Zen is the only time that is real. Prufrock's allusions to the past, too, serve to keep him from taking action in the present. The three stanzas beginning at line 49, "For I have known them all already, known them all," demonstrate a world-weary attitude. If he claims to have "known them all" (49), "known the eyes" (55), and "known the arms" (62), he can justify not interacting with the women in the present. This keeps Prufrock wrapped up in his *shinkeishitsu*, away from interpersonal relationships, and out of touch with his true self.

When Prufrock wonders "Do I dare?" (37), "Do I dare/ Disturb the universe?" (45-46), and "So how should I presume?" (54), he is considering the consequences of

revealing himself. From a practical point of view, the idea that such a revelation would "disturb the universe" is ludicrous. However, if by "disturb" one means "affect," then Prufrock will "disturb" the universe because according to Buddhism's idea of dependent co-origination, nothing is self-existing, and everything is interdependent (Abe, *Comparative* 100). The actions of one thing will affect another. In this model, Prufrock does affect the universe by revealing himself, even if what he reveals is the abstracted ego-self. However, he also affects the universe by declining to reveal himself. Prufrock, as he is in all his fears and insecurities in the present moment, is part of the dynamic whole, and his existence is in relation to the whole. His actions, or lack of them, affect the whole in the same way that the arrival of a great work of poetry affects the array of literary works of the past. There is an adjustment.

The root cause of Prufrock's suffering is his discomfort with himself, and he is uncomfortable with himself because the only self he knows is the clutching, fictional ego whose job it is to separate itself from Other. He is, to paraphrase Masao Abe, "a problem to himself" because he is human and therefore an ego-self (*Western* 6). Peace with the world will not be possible for Prufrock until he is at peace with himself, accepting reality in the

present moment.

Buddhism teaches that all suffering comes from longing for permanence in an impermanent world. Thus, the suffering depicted in "Prufrock" and that depicted in *The Waste Land* arise from the same source, even though the manifestation of the suffering seems different. Prufrock's suffering seems more acute and personal because the ego-self is so prominent in the poem, and Prufrock seems to be the only character who is suffering. In contrast, the suffering of *The Waste Land* is depicted by a number of characters in different facets of Western culture. Still, both poems depict suffering that arises from attachment to the impermanent.

As Kenner said of "Prufrock," *The Waste Land* begins "somewhere in its own epigraph" (50), blurring the poem's beginning and linking an ancient work of literature with one of the present moment. In the epigraph, a passage from *Satyricon*, the Sybil of Cumae is old and weak, hanging in a cage. Through the granting of a wish by Apollo some years earlier, she has been "spared" death and will live forever. However, because she did not also ask for immortality along with eternal life, she continues to age. When the Sybil is asked by the narrator of the epigraph what she wants, she replies, "I want to die" (Sri 22).

Buddhists would say that the Sybil suffers for the same reason that all humankind suffers, because she clutches at

impermanence. The only cure for suffering is to learn the true nature of the world, which is realized through Enlightenment (Abe, *Comparative* 130). The true nature of the world is that it is impermanent; life and death are the reality of human life. Moreover, Zen's non-dualistic thinking teaches that life and death are not in opposition to each other; they are inextricably interconnected. Although the Sybil chose first one and then the other, in the Zen view such a choice is impossible because life and death are "as inseparable as two sides of a sheet of paper" (Abe, *Comparative* 35). The Sybil's present wish for death objectifies the death experience just as her wish for eternal life made an object of that experience. In objectifying experience and seeking either life or death, she traps herself in dualistic thinking. The Zen way is to grasp "life subjectively...and realize that life and death are not two separate things" (35). The Sybil, however, remains trapped in dualism. She literally and figuratively hangs suspended in a life of suffering. As epigraph, the Sybil sets the tone for an account of modern life that is meaningless to those who are trapped in attachment, dualism, and suffering.

In "Burial of the Dead," the narrating consciousness says that April is cruel because it brings life from death, "breeding/ Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/ Memory and

desire, stirring/ Dull roots with spring rain" (1-4). What he finds disquieting is the inevitable connection between life and death, which the narrator cannot embrace. Because he cannot accept both life and death as events, he sees "fear in a handful of dust" (30). This handful of dust is symbolic of death, but through its tie to the epigraph, it also symbolizes life. When the Sybil asked to live forever, Apollo granted her one year of life for every grain of dust she could hold in her hand (Sri 23). Thus, the handful of dust, in being evocative of both life and death, demonstrates that the fearsome element is neither death nor eternal life, but attachment to one or the other.

Throughout "The Burial of the Dead," fleeting vignettes appear in the mind of the narrating consciousness, suggesting that he is meditating. He recalls memories of drinking coffee at the Hofgarten (10-11) and sledding at "the arch-duke's/ My cousin's" (13-14). Later, he remembers the incident in the Hyacinth garden (35-41). This memory is significant because the narrator says he was "neither/ Living nor dead" (39-40), a state which removes him from dualism. In this state, he "knew nothing,/ Looking into the heart of light, the silence" (40-41). This is the without-thinking, "unselfconscious responsiveness" (Kasulis 36) of Zen in which the narrator knows "nothing," including fear, and momentarily escapes from dualism into a realization of Emptiness. His next memory is of his encounter with Madame

Sosostris, "the wisest woman in Europe,/ With a wicked pack of cards" (45-46). There again he meets the prospect of death, which is inescapable for all humankind, and in particular he is shown his own death in the card of the "drowned Phoenician Sailor" (47). In the final stanza of the section he again encounters death, but here he sees the universal nature of death: "I had not thought death had undone so many" (63). Further, he himself now connects life with death as he asks whether the "corpse you planted last year in your garden" has "begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?" (71-72).

In the beginning of "The Burial of the Dead" the narrator finds the mixing of life and death "cruel," but at the end he worries that "the sudden frost" or the digging dog will keep the corpse from blooming. What accounts for the change in attitude is that his meditation on death brings him a brief spontaneous Enlightenment, a glimpse at his own death, and the knowledge that death has "undone so many" (63). Hui Li, who reads *The Waste Land* as "a meditation on death from the Buddhist perspective centering around Phlebas' dying moment" (100), calls meditation "a visionary experience with the potential to unveil the vision of the truth of reality and its realization" (103). That definition holds true for Zen meditation, *zazen*. During *zazen* the meditator "observes thoughts and emotions as they

occur, as if from a distance" (Radcliff and Radcliff 120), without trying to hold on to thoughts and emotions or trying to chase them away. Thoughts, including memories and speculations, flit through the mind at will, without purpose. *Zazen* is performed, like all Zen actions, without purpose because to act with a purpose is to have attachment to impermanence, which brings about suffering. However, in a practical sense *zazen* is practiced for the purpose of experiencing the world as it is, or as Li says, "to unveil the vision of the truth of reality and its realization" (103). At the end of "The Burial of the Dead," the narrating consciousness has begun to see the truth of death: that it is inevitable, universal, and inseparably linked with life.

Intermixed in the thoughts of the narrating consciousness are allusions to Western literature and culture. For instance, the invocation of April in the opening lines is reminiscent of Chaucer's Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*. The phrases "Son of man" (20) and "shadow under this red rock" (25) are from the Bible. The German quotation (31-34) is from Wagner, the reference to "crowds of people" is from Dante, and the "Unreal City" (60) is from Baudelaire. The other sections of *The Waste Land* are similarly allusive. These literary and cultural references show that the narrating consciousness is well read, and the

fact that he brings them forth as he meditates shows that he integrates the experience of reading literature with the experience of living. He demonstrates what Eliot said about the poet's mind, that it is "a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together" ("Tradition" 41). The narrating consciousness is, by Eliot's definition, the mind of a poet. Further, it is the mind of a poet who has released the barriers between himself and poetic works of the past through meditation.

The meditation continues in "A Game of Chess." Here, in the first stanza the narrator seems as attached to details as Prufrock is. A crucial difference, however, is that an ego-self is not present. Attention is directed not at how the items in the room relate to the ego-self, but how they relate to the whole. "The Chair she sat in" (77) is linked to "the marble" (78), "the glass" (78), "a golden Cupidon" (80), "sevenbranched candelabra" (82) "her jewels" (84), "her strange synthetic perfumes" (87), and other items in the room, ending with "her hair/ Spread out in fiery points" (108-109).

The woman whose "nerves are bad to-night" (111) stands in sharp contrast to the egoless passage that precedes her. Like Prufrock, she is attached to her ego-self. Her question about her husband's thoughts, "What are you

thinking of?" (113), becomes centered upon herself: "I never know what you are thinking" (114). She, like Prufrock, worries so much about what she *should* do—"What shall I do now? What shall I do?" (131)—that she is incapable of acting.

The narrating consciousness, apparently the woman's husband, continues his meditation as he remembers this vignette. His answers, only marginally relevant to the woman's questions, are not spoken aloud, as we can see from the lack of quotation marks. He continues letting thoughts come and go at will, but again death is on his mind as he recalls "dead men" (116) and "pearls that were his eyes" (125). In response to the woman's question "What shall we do tomorrow?/ What shall we ever do?" (133-34), he gives a specific answer of mundane activities followed by "waiting for a knock upon the door" (138), which suggests death. When the woman hears a noise, she wants to know what it is (117). When she believes that she detects a change she asks, "What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?" (119). Instead of experiencing what is happening, she wants to objectify and classify it. The woman is consumed with ideas of things, and the man is focused on death. As a result, neither can experience reality in the present moment.

Significantly, the narrating consciousness does not

analyze or make conclusions about any of the vignettes called forth. He "observes thoughts and emotions as they occur, as if from a distance" (Radcliff and Radcliff 120) without attachment. The pub scene that follows is treated the same way, but it is held at even more distance. The story about Lil's abortion is told by Lil's friend at the pub, where it is overheard, and later called forth by the narrating consciousness, making the events of Lil's life an abstraction instead of an experience. In the moment of her experience, though, Lil denies reality by deceiving Albert about what she does with the money. For his part, Albert fails to recognize the responsibilities of indulging his passions with Lil. Both of them are living in delusion instead of reality. That their lives are illusion is made doubly clear when their story is abstracted into a twice-told tale that becomes an object of curiosity to others. Close on the heels of such illusion comes the ominous, insistent reality of death: "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME" (152, 165, 168, 169). Again, the narrating consciousness allows these thoughts to pass through his mind without comment.

Thoughts of death continue in "The Fire Sermon" with "a cold blast" (185) in which the narrator hears the "rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear" (186), followed by mention of the death of two kings (191-192).

More prominent in this section, however, is the theme

of unsatisfactory sex, which was introduced in "A Game of Chess" not only with Lil and Albert, but also the reference to the rape of Philomel, "by the barbarous king/ So rudely forced" (99-100). Philomel returns in "The Fire Sermon" in the phrase "So rudely forc'd" (205). Paradoxically, the phrase occurs after the account of the nymphs and "their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors" (180), a vignette in which the sexual activities are only implied, but nonetheless consensual. The allusion to Philomel occurs almost immediately after the reference to Sweeney visiting Mrs. Porter (196-201), in which again sexual activities are implied and presumably consensual. Why are two episodes of consensual sex linked with an episode of rape from Greek mythology? One answer is that all three events are connected with the "fires" of passion, which is a direct connection to the section's title, "The Fire Sermon," an allusion to the Buddha's Fire Sermon. In that sermon, the Buddha advises aversion for the senses so that humankind can be "divested of passion" and become free (Warren 353).

Zen Buddhism does not teach aversion to the senses. It does not try to "silence the feelings and cultivate bland indifference" (Watts, *Way* 115). It advocates full experience of what is at the moment, without avoidance and without attachment. The nymphs and the young men are an episode from the recent past (177-181). Sweeney will visit

Mrs. Porter "in the spring" (198). These are episodes from the past and the future, abstractions of experience in abstractions of time. The story of Philomel is from Greek myth, an even more distant abstraction. According to Zen beliefs, all three episodes are abstractions, harmless and unimportant in themselves. They would become a problem to the narrator only if he were to become attached to the ideas and use that attachment to keep himself from living fully in the present.

The central vignette of this section takes place between the typist and the young man carbuncular and is viewed by Tiresias (215-256). Unlike the narrating consciousness, Tiresias comments on the scene. He describes the young man carbuncular as "One of the low on whom assurance sits/ As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire" (233-234), one whose "vanity requires no response" to his sexual advances (241). The woman, he says, has "[stooped] to folly" (253). At the beginning of the scene, Tiresias "foretold the rest" (229), suggesting a tired, repetitious enactment. Although this scene is sexual, it is devoid of passion and would, on the surface, seem to follow the Buddha's admonition to be "divested of passion" (Warren 353). Yet, it is counter to the Zen notion of fully experiencing the present. While the typist is "bored and tired" (236), the young man carbuncular "assaults at once" (239), with neither of them honoring the kind of dependent

co-originating harmony required of a Zen response.

The "Death by Water" section serves as a reminder of the impermanence of life. In Buddhist imagery, the wheel is the wheel of life. Those "who turn the wheel" are those who remain attached to the world. They are asked to think about Phlebas, now dead, who "was once handsome and tall as you" (321). This is a reminder that clutching to the impermanent brings about suffering.

The central vignette of "What the Thunder Said" reenacts the thunder fable from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, a sacred scripture from Vedantic belief. Eliot was familiar with the Upanishads from his Harvard studies in Sanskrit and Indic philosophy. Although more than 100 Upanishads exist and all are considered revealed literature, only ten, including the Brihadaranyaka, are considered principal (Prabhavananda and Manchester ix-x). The thunder fable, which is only part of the Brihadaranyaka, is about the god Prajapati, who is said to have a "thundering" voice. From that description, Eliot drew the image of the thunder (Srivastava 50). In the story, three classes of men—gods, men, and asuras—have been studying with their father, the god Prajapati. The sons who are unruly are called gods; the especially greedy ones are called men; the cruel ones are called asuras (demons). At the end of their term of study, each group in turn asks Prajapati to instruct them. He replies to each group with the single syllable "Da." The

unruly gods understand the syllable to mean "damayata," which means "be self-controlled." The selfish men take it for "datta," which means "be charitable." The cruel asuras believe it means "dayadhwam," which means "be compassionate." Although the same syllable is spoken to each group, each understands it to have a different meaning, and Prajapati assures each group that its understanding of the syllable is correct (*Brhadaranyaka* [sic] 814-816; Madhavananda 814-818; Prabhavananda and Manchester 112). The Hindu commentator Sankaracarya notes that the gods, men, and asuras knew they lacked certain qualities and were apprehensive of what Prajapati would say to them, "and as soon as they heard the syllable 'Da,' their own fears led them to understand its meaning" (*Brhadaranyaka* 817).

What part does the thunder fable play in the overall scheme of *The Waste Land*? Reading the poem from a Zen perspective, it represents the thoughts of a mind in meditation. The thoughts that occupy that mind depict people who are locked in dualism and abstractions, and clutching at impermanence. The characters in the poem suffer because, like all unenlightened people, they have failed to release their attachment to illusion. The fifth section, which contains the thunder fable, offers hope of enlightenment.

In the first stanza, the recognition that "He who was

living is now dead/ We who were living are now dying/ With a little patience" (328-330) indicates a realization that life and death are interconnected, "as inseparable as two sides of a sheet of paper" (Abe, *Comparative* 35). In the next stanza, the narrator longs for water: "If there were only water amongst the rock" (338). In Zen, water can represent "thusness" (Tanahashi 348), which is "the unchanging nature of things" (Abe, *Western* 103) or Emptiness (107). The narrator wants to realize Emptiness, but "there is no water" (359). According to Zen beliefs, the narrator will not find "water" as long as he is looking for it because to objectify Emptiness is to be unable to realize it—like Po-chang's fabled ox that one cannot find while riding it (Watts, *Way* 99).

Significantly, the next passage contains a question that Cleo Kearns says "might be said to function precisely as a koan does, to pose a conundrum apparently unanswerable, from which we get relief only by a sharper insight than any provided by its initial terms of reference" ("T.S. Eliot" 134). The question is "Who is the third who walks always beside you?" (360). It is a conundrum that contains two ambiguities. First, are there two people or three? Second, is the person identified as "you" standing next to the narrator, or is he walking ahead? The narrator says, "When I count, there are only you and I together/ But when I look

ahead up the white road/ There is always another one walking beside you" (361-363). The unknown figure is "wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded" (364), and the narrator can't tell "whether a man or a woman" (365). What Kearns calls the "initial terms of reference" for the koan passage are the assumptions that objects occupy time and space, that they cannot be in two places at once, and that they do not disappear. To solve the koan, the narrator must develop a perspective that allows him to walk with only one person, just the two of them together, and yet look ahead and see that person walking along with someone else. He must experience the koan from a point of view that is completely different from the conventional way of thinking.

No solution to the koan is provided in "What the Thunder Said," but images from the koan are repeated in the next passage, suggesting that the koan is still on the narrator's mind. The image of the hooded figure appears in the next stanza as "those hooded hordes, swarming/ Over endless plains" (369-370), and a woman, evocative of "I do not know whether a man or a woman" (366), appears as the woman who "drew her long black hair out tight/ And fiddled whisper music on those strings" (378-379).

A Zen student may work with a koan for several years before attaining the state of mind necessary for solving it. The point of the koan exercise is not to solve the koan but to transform the student's manner of thinking. The koan

serves as an examination to determine whether the student's thinking has been transformed (Miura and Sasaki 11). In "What the Thunder Said," about thirty lines after the koan, we have some indication that the koan has worked. A "flash of lightning" (394), symbolizing insight into reality, is followed by "a damp gust/ Bringing rain" (394-395), which, as water, symbolizes Emptiness.

After this realization of Emptiness, the narrator calls forth the thunder fable, which contains a "great ethical teaching" that "every meditator is asked to read in the dental rumblings of the three da's...of a thunder-clap" (Sastri xv). Narsingh Srivastava calls the message of the thunder fable a note of redemption that "is related to the implicit central motif of right action which is introduced as an antithesis to the panorama of inaction and wrong action of which the wastelanders are incurable victims" (49-50). In his use of the thunder fable, Eliot transposed the order of the groups that asked for a teaching and used his own translation of the Sanskrit, but the message is clear as a plan of action. It is: "Give, sympathise, control" (Eliot CPP 53).

That the poem ends with what Eliot calls "The Peace which passeth understanding" (CPP 55) is significant in that it indicates the narrator has realized Emptiness. He has experienced the interlocking interdependency of the things

of the world, realized the illusion of the self and other abstractions such as time, and attained peace.

The poems ends with "Shantih shantih shantih" (434), which Eliot explains as "a formal ending to an Upanishad" (CPP 55). In his comments on the original manuscript of *The Waste Land*, Ezra Pound suggested that Eliot leave out the final line, saying that nothing "wd. be lacking if the last three were omitted" (Letters 497). Eliot kept the line in, however, indicating that he thought the triple shantih essential. Thus, the poem has the same ending as an Upanishad.

The Waste Land also resembles an Upanishad in several other respects. The vignettes of *The Waste Land* (the hyacinth girl, Madame Sostres, Stetson's corpse, the neurotic woman, Albert and Lil, the typist and the young man carbuncular) are set down in a cinematic style, without comment by the narrator. Similarly, the Upanishads are said to be ancient accounts of mystical revelations written down by seers whose aim was not to explain, but merely to report (Prabhavananda and Manchester x). Conrad Aiken called *The Waste Land* "a brilliant and kaleidoscopic confusion" (35) and said it succeeds "by virtue of its incoherence, not of its plan: by virtue of its ambiguities, not of its explanations" (36). Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick

Manchester, noted commentators on Hinduism to the West, say this about the Upanishads: "Never were ideas set down--an expositor might suspect--with less regard for his convenience. Nowhere is there a logical beginning, nowhere a logical end" (x-xi). In its presentation of vignettes without commentary, its ambiguity, and its apparent lack of organization, as well as its triple-shantih ending, *The Waste Land* resembles an Upanishad.

While *The Waste Land* ends with a hope of spiritual peace, the poems of *Four Quartets* deliver peace through release from attachment and through a realization of the interlocking interdependency of the things of the world. Both "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* depict characters locked in attachment to transient things and suspended in dualistic thinking. *Four Quartets* offers peace because it points to a path that is free of attachment and beyond dualistic thinking.

The release from attachment in *Four Quartets* that is most noticeable in comparison to the earlier poems is the release of the ego-self. In "Prufrock," the narrating ego-self is overbearingly present, and in *The Waste Land* it seems purposely obscured. Both modes represent attachment, either to presence or absence. In *Four Quartets*, the narrating "I" seems neither forcefully present nor

purposefully absent, but rather unobtrusive and yet appropriately authoritative. Kenner remarks that the narrating persona of "Burnt Norton" is so subordinated that when the "I" appears in line 17, it "prompts no curiosity" (294). In *Four Quartets* as a whole, the impression is that of an ego-self that is seen for what it is — a convenient device.

Another aspect of release that is absent in the early poems but present in *Four Quartets* is that of action without attachment, or *wu-wei*. It is particularly evident in "Dry Salvages," where although it is achieved only temporarily, it is attainable. The attainability of release and spiritual fulfillment is a dominant theme in *Four Quartets* and is what distinguishes it from the early poems.

The spiritual fulfillment offered in *Four Quartets* is conventionally read in Christian terms. P.S. Sri, while acknowledging the Christian element in *Four Quartets*, detects a strongly Vedantic note. By reading *Four Quartets* in a Zen context I do not wish to negate any Christian or Vedantic imagery or beliefs in the poems because they are certainly present, along with Zen concepts. Zen involves a particular approach to the world that is compatible with several belief systems, and I think it fair to say that Eliot uses images and ideas from a number of sources. Any

of those sources may be used as a key to understanding *Four Quartets*. Zen teaches that any belief system, including Zen, is only a vehicle to the truth, not the truth itself.

The poems of *Four Quartets* are richly endowed with Zen concepts, but the first two sections of "Burnt Norton" are particularly so. They depict the state of Enlightenment, particularly as it relates to the Zen idea of time. Christian time is said to be linear, and Hindu time cyclical. Although Buddhist time is sometimes said to be cyclical, it is more accurate to say that it is neither linear nor cyclical (Abe, *Comparative* 163). In Buddhism, which teaches dependent co-origination, time and being "are inseparably connected with one another" (164). Dogen, a thirteenth-century Zen Master, uses the term "being-time" to convey that point (Kasulis 79).

Eliot is particularly Zen-like in the way he depicts time in "Burnt Norton." Zen teaches that "there is no other time than this instant" because "the past and the future are abstractions without any concrete reality" (Watts, *Way* 199), but Zen does not negate the past or the future. Like Eliot, Zen considers the past, present, and future as interlocking components of being-time. Being-time can be experienced either as "total involvement in the nowness of temporal events" or as a ranging or flowing in multiple directions (Kasulis 80). The present, then, is "not merely the

isolated right-now; it is also the convergence of past and future" (80).

When Eliot says in "Burnt Norton" that "Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future,/ and time future contained in time past" (1-3) he is depicting the Zen notion of time. In lines 6-7 and again in lines 45-46, the narrator says "What might have been and what has been/ Point to one end, which is always present," meaning that the abstractions of past and future point to one site, which is always there. The abstractions of past and future "point" to one site because they emanate from it. That site is the mind, which creates abstractions to understand the world (Radcliff and Radcliff 42). Through meditation, the mind releases abstractions, like those of the past and the present, until it realizes, or becomes, Emptiness, which is always "present."

Perhaps the most memorable image of Emptiness in "Burnt Norton" is the passage where the narrator moves down "the empty alley" (32) and looks "down into the drained pool" to see a pool "filled with water out of sunlight" (35). Cleo McNelly Kearns calls this passage "the most remarkable exercise in Buddhist syntax, double entendre, and *différance* in the whole of Eliot's work" and adds that it is "the best rendering we have in English of the experience of *shunyata*, or divine emptiness" ("T.S. Eliot" 134). Sri argues that the

pattern described by the narrator going through "the first gate" (20), "into the box circle" (32), to "the drained pool" (33), reaching the "lotos" (36) when drawn as a diagram makes a picture of a tantric mandala. A mandala, he explains, is a pattern of images "often used as an aid to meditation" (103). The pool depicted in the lines that describe Sri's mandala has the paradoxical full-emptiness of Emptiness. The drained pool "filled with water out of sunlight" (35) has a surface that "glittered out of heart of light" (37).

What the narrator may see is the sun shining into a pool that has no water in it. He has been meditating, and at first glance, the pool appears to be full of water, with what appears to be the surface of the water glittering. He suddenly realizes the pool is filled with sunlight, not water, and because his mind has been opened through meditation, he suddenly senses the interconnectedness of pool, sunlight, and water. This is a moment of Enlightenment. After "a cloud passed" (39), the moment of Enlightenment ended and "the pool was empty" (39), meaning that it seemed to have nothing in it. On a conventional level, the passing cloud changed the light conditions, destroying the optical illusion. On another level, the experience came to an end because the narrator was unable to sustain the moment of Enlightenment. The moment of Enlightenment is brief because, as the bird says, "human

kind/ Cannot bear very much reality" (42-43).

Section II of "Burnt Norton" opens with a catalog of disparate things in relationship to each other constituting the interdependent world:

Garlic and sapphires in the mud
 Clot the bedded axle-tree.
 The trilling wire in the blood
 Sings below inveterate scars
 Appeasing long forgotten wars
 The dance along the artery
 The circulation of the lymph
 Are figured in the drift of stars (47-54)

In the notion of dependent co-origination that is central to Buddhism, the things of the world are enjoined in a dynamic oneness in which they are relational to each other (Abe, *Comparative* 174). However, the narrator's list of widely disparate objects challenges the notion that they are interrelated and suggests that the narrator finds it difficult to accept a co-dependent universe. "Burnt Norton"'s "still point" of that "turning world" (62) is the non-dualistic realization of Emptiness. As the narrator says, the point is "neither arrest nor movement" (64), "neither movement from nor towards" (65), or "neither ascent nor decline" (66). Yet, the site of Enlightenment cannot be fixed in time or place because, as the narrator says, "that

is to place it in time" (69), and Enlightenment is beyond time, just as it is beyond things (Miura and Sasaki 3).

The still point paradoxically continues to move as it avoids both attachment and avoidance, and in that sense it is like the dance mentioned in line 67. The still point of Zen, the realization of Enlightenment, is similar to a dance in that in transcending dualism it moves neither in avoidance nor attachment, but freely. The release from "practical desire" (70), "action and suffering" (71), and "compulsion" (72) describes the state of Enlightenment. The "enchainment of past and future" (79) that "protects mankind from heaven and damnation" (81) is the nondualistic position of Zen which sees the converging of past and future (Kasulis 80) and releases humankind from every dualism, including that of heaven and hell.

Eliot ends section II on a Western note by saying that "time is conquered" (89). Zen Buddhists do not say that time is conquered. For Zen Buddhists, time is being. Further, they do not set up dualities in which anything would be conquered or triumphant.

In section III, "Burnt Norton" moves to a depiction of the "place of disaffection" (90), which is ordinary existence without Enlightenment. It is neither the "daylight" that turns "shadow into transient beauty" (94) nor the "darkness" that will "purify the soul" (96). In being "neither plenitude nor vacancy" (99), this place knows

neither the richness of perception that comes as a result of Enlightenment nor the Emptiness that is Enlightenment. The "flicker" (99) is the Buddha-nature that exists within the people here but is hidden from the "strained time-ridden faces" (100) that are "distracted" (101) and "filled with fancies and empty of meaning" (102). The darkness that will "purify the soul" (96) is "not here...in this twittering world" (113) because that world is filled with abstract thought.

In the next stanza, the narrator must "descend" (114) into "the world of perpetual solitude,/ World not world, but that which is not world" (115-116), meaning that he must release all abstractions, all thoughts. He meditates while the conventional world continues with its attachments, or "appetency" (125), in "its metalled ways/ Of time past and time future" (125-126), which represents the conventional modes of dualistic thinking.

Section IV continues with the thoughts of the unenlightened. The opening lines "Time and the bell have buried the day,/ The black cloud carries the sun away" (127-128) signify death. The narrator, who speaks as an unenlightened ego-self, wants to know if after his death he will still be the center of the world: "Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis/ Stray down, bend to us..../ Chill/ Fingers of yew be curled/ Down on us?" (129-134). The answer is provided in the image of the kingfisher, a

songless bird, whose wing reflects the light. The light symbolizes the Buddha-nature, which is within every sentient being. In answering "light to light" (135), or reflecting the light with its wing, the kingfisher reveals its Buddha-nature. That it remains "silent" (135) means that it continues acting as it always has. In other words, the kingfisher is not changed by the death of the narrator. What is more, "the light is still/ At the still point of the turning world" (135-136); the world continues in flux, with reality or Enlightenment as its still point.

In section V, the narrator says "that which is only living/ Can only die" (138-139), indicating his acceptance of impermanence. Words and music, according to the narrator, can reach into the stillness, which is Enlightenment, "only by the form, the pattern" (139-142). Within the experience of Enlightenment, symbols are meaningless because in that state things are perceived as the things themselves, not what they mean. Thus, a word would be only a pattern of sounds or the form of lines on a paper, just as music would be only a pattern of sound.

The "co-existence" of stillness and movement, beginning and end, and always and now (142-149) is the Buddhist principle of dependent co-origination in which "there is nothing independent or self-existing whatsoever apart from other things" (Abe, *Comparative* 94). The "chimera" (158),

used in the sense of a monster made of disparate parts, echoes the idea of everything in the world being interdependent. That "words strain,/ Crack and sometimes break, under the burden" (149-150) points to the inadequacy of words to convey the direct experience of reality. The "Word" (155), however, is different. While it can mean Christ, especially since it is "in the desert" (155) and "attacked by voices of temptation" (156), which alludes to the experience of Christ tempted in the desert by Satan, it can also be read as Enlightenment. Enlightenment is in the "desert" (155) of Emptiness. The "voices of temptation" represent the ordinary mind that wants to perceive a dualistic world, especially in the face of death, represented by the "crying shadow in the funeral dance" (157). Here, the ordinary mind perceives the chimera as "disconsolate" (158) because it wants the things of the world to be separate and dualistic.

In its first two sections, "East Coker" discusses humankind as an element of dependent co-origination, challenges the adequacy of language to convey knowledge and experience, and questions the basis for scientific knowledge. The solution offered in section III is a Zen purposelessness that results in release from attachment.

The first stanza in section I of "East Coker" depicts the continuous cycle of generation and decay. The second stanza brings the history of humankind into the cycle,

describing timeless ritual in archaic language: "daunsinge, signifying matrimonie" (29). The repetition of "In my beginning is my end" (1,14) and its echo "In my beginning" (50) bring the narrator into the cycle, suggesting an entire world of dependent co-origination. Section II continues that theme, bringing in seasons (52), temperature (53), the constellations (58-64), and the end of the world through "destructive fire" (66) and ice (67).

The second stanza begins with an abrupt self-reflexive remark: "That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory:/ A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion" (68-69). With that, the narrator complains of "the intolerable wrestle/ With words and meanings" (70-71), a difficulty also noted by Zen commentator T. P. Kasulis, who says that words must be "mistrusted as a medium for fully understanding the nature of experience (or of reality)" (12). The narrator expected, with "the wisdom of age" (75), to gain "autumnal serenity" (74). Because he does not have that serenity, he questions the value of "knowledge derived from experience" (83). The operative word here is "derived." The narrator questions the value of knowledge obtained some way other than direct experience. That kind of knowledge, derived from other sources, "imposes a pattern, and falsifies" (84). Zen teaches that scientific knowledge is "a product of our minds, rather than a product of the universe" (Radcliff and Radcliff 64). In constructing

scientific theories so that we can understand the world, we unwittingly construct a world that is of our own making. Thus, what we customarily think of as knowledge may be at odds with what we know through direct experience. The narrator recognizes that direct experience of reality is the most reliable way to gain knowledge because "the pattern is new in every moment" (85), and knowledge derived from the experience of others would not contain the new pattern of each moment.

He says that we are "undeceived" (87) of only the kind of knowledge that can "no longer harm" us (88), suggesting that we continue to be deceived by things that can harm us. As we go through life "in a dark wood, in a bramble,/ On the edge of a grimpen" (90-91), we have nothing upon which to rely, nothing upon which to base knowledge. The narrator wants to know that "old men" (94), the wise ones, also experienced "folly/ ...fear of fear and frenzy, ...fear of possession/ Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God" (94-96). He wants to know that his experience is not unique. Finally, he recognizes that humility is the "only wisdom we can hope to acquire" (97) in an impermanent world.

Section III recognizes that everyone—"captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,/The generous patrons of art, the statesmen and the rulers" (103-104), etc.—goes "into the dark" (102), i.e., dies. As the narrator imagines waiting for what happens after death, like

being in a theater and waiting "for the scene to be changed" (114), he cautions his soul to "wait without hope/ For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love/ For love would be love of the wrong thing" (123-125). This suggests a Zen-like purposelessness, and that impression is strengthened by the phrase "Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought" (127), in that being without thought is a prerequisite for Zen Enlightenment. The reference to "the agony/ Of death and birth" (132-133) is reminiscent of the Buddhist belief that unenlightened human beings are tied to an endless cycle of death and birth. In the final lines of section III, the narrator posits a solution in a series of seemingly paradoxical statements:

...In order to arrive there,

To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,

You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.

In order to arrive at what you do not know

You must go by a way which is the way of
ignorance.

In order to possess what you do not possess

You must go by the way of dispossession.

In order to arrive at what you are not

You must go through the way in which you are not.

And what you do not know is the only thing you know

And what you own is what you do not own

And where you are is where you are not. (135-146)

The solution he offers is to release attachment to the dualistic point of view and see the world in its reality.

The poem that is most overtly "Eastern" in thought is "Dry Salvages," with its reference to Krishna and Arjuna from the *Bhagavad Gita*. Indeed, the poem exudes Eastern influence from its first line. The river that is a "strong brown god—sullen, untamed and intractable" (2) is reminiscent of the unruly men who are called gods in the Upanishadic thunder fable that Eliot uses in *The Waste Land*. In keeping with the Vedantic and Zen idea that meaning is derived from context, the river's meaning changes as its relationship with humankind changes. It is variously "a frontier" (3), "a conveyor of commerce" (4), and "only a problem confronting the builder of bridges" (5). The river, like the all-present *Brahman* of Vedanta or the Buddha-nature of Zen, "is within us" (15). The sea, composed of many rivers, has "Many gods and many voices" (30-31), and it is part of the world in flux depicted in the first two sections of "Dry Salvages."

The Hindu connotations continue in Section III, where Eliot mentions the Hindu deity Krishna: "I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant" (124). The teachings of Krishna are found in the *Bhagavad Gita*, a philosophical poem that explains Vedantic beliefs (B. Miller, *BG* 1). The eighteen chapters of the *Gita* are a dialogue between Krishna

and Arjuna on the plain where a great battle is to be fought. Arjuna, who has kinsmen and friends on both sides, is in despair over the carnage that will ensue. He tells Krishna, his charioteer, he does not want to fight. In the remaining seventeen chapters of the *Gita*, Krishna explains that because he is a warrior he must fight without thinking of the consequences of his actions. As the *Gita* ends, Arjuna stands with his "doubt dispelled,/ ready to act" (B. Miller, *BG* 153).

The reference to Krishna at first seems inappropriate. Helen Gardner explains, incorrectly I think, that in the *Gita* "Arjuna is concerned with the problem of the innate sinfulness of human action, and Krishna replies to his doubts by insisting on the necessity of disinterestedness" (173). She concludes in a footnote that "to introduce Krishna at this point is an error and destroys the imaginative harmony of the poem" (173). In contrast, P. S. Sri says that Krishna teaches Arjuna that the universal reality (*Brahman*) and the reality within ourselves (*Atman*) are "indissolubly united to constitute an indivisible reality" (99), and Krishna urges Arjuna "to surrender to the indwelling Godhead and act without brooding over the fruits of action—to be an instrument, in other words, of the timeless reality" (99). Both Gardner and Sri understand that Arjuna is being urged to act without concern for the

consequences of his action, but there is a significant difference. Gardner implies that Arjuna is being urged by Krishna to do something he believes to be wrong; Sri says that Arjuna is being advised to trust the spirit within himself, which is inherently good. An understanding of what Krishna meant is crucial to a satisfactory reading of "Dry Salvages."

Although Vedanta, like Zen, has as its basis a particular view of the world that must be confronted with every ethical or philosophical point that is raised, Krishna addresses a variety of issues in his advice to Arjuna. In addition, Krishna's teaching is "intentionally multifaceted" (B. Miller, *BG* 2). Which specific issue was Eliot's narrator concerned with when he wondered what Krishna meant?

The narrator begins by saying that time is relative: "the future is a faded song.../ Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret" (126-127). He says that people living within time are "not escaping from the past/ Into different lives, or into any future" (137-138). Further, they "are not the same people who left that station/ Or who will arrive at any terminus" (139-140). He says that the world is in flux, with people and time as part of that flux.

A voice is heard above that world in flux, one that we are to read as the voice of ultimate truth because it is

directed "not to the ear" (147) and it is "not in any language" (148). It is, we learn at the end of the passage, the voice of Krishna "as when he admonished Arjuna/ On the field of battle" (166-167). Krishna urges the voyagers to continue going as they are, even though they are deluded if they believe they are actually going anywhere: "Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging" (149). He restates the narrator's point that "you are not those who saw the harbour/ Receding, or those who will disembark" (150-151), confirming the impermanence of the self. He establishes a point "between the hither and the farther shore" (152) where "time is withdrawn" (153) where the voyagers can "consider the future/ And the past with an equal mind" (153-154), at a moment of *wu-wei*, "the moment which is not of action or inaction" (155). At that point Krishna believes the voyager is ready to hear the following message:

... "on whatever sphere of being
 The mind of a man may be intent
 At the time of death" — that is the one action
 (And the time of death is every moment)
 Which shall fructify in the lives of others:

And do not think of the fruit of action. (156-161)

The message says that only one action will be meaningful, and that is the action a man is concentrating on at the time

of his death. He adds that "the time of death is every moment" (159) because in Vedanta, as in Zen, life and death are inseparable. In a sense, then, every action is meaningful if the performer is "intent" on it because every moment is the moment of death. Further, Krishna admonishes the voyagers not to "think of the fruit of action" (161), and in doing so he urges the voyagers to adopt the state of purposeless non-action that Zen calls *wu-wei*. The final part of Krishna's message to the voyagers is

O voyagers, O seamen,
 You who come to port, and you whose bodies
 Will suffer the trial and judgement of the sea
 Or whatever event, this is your real destination.
 (162-165)

Because the antecedent of "this" (165) is ambiguous, the "real destination" may be the voyage itself, the state of *wu-wei*, or the port for those who make it to port and the "judgement of the sea/ Or whatever event" (164-165) for the rest. The conventional assumption is that the port is the destination of a voyager, so Krishna's emphasis on the "real" destination would suggest that he means some point other than the port is the "real destination." Krishna includes those who are lost at sea with those who make it to port, implying that the voyagers in neither group have found their "real" destination. The real destination may be the

voyage, but only if the voyager realizes that life and death are inseparable and that every action is meaningful if it is done selflessly. To reach that state, the voyager must release all attachments and, in Zen terms, allow the action to arise from the true self, or, as Sri says, "be an instrument...of the timeless reality" (99).

The issue that concerns Eliot's narrator, then, is that of action performed without attachment, which in Zen terms is *wu-wei*. In his analogy of the train trip, Eliot's narrator says essentially the same thing that Krishna says. The passengers leave the station without "those who saw them off" (134) and settle into their own routines, relaxing themselves "from grief into relief" (135). They grieve, but they "fare forward" in a world of change, "not escaping from the past/ ...or into any future" (137-138), and their grief is released. They journey without attachment, just as Krishna advises Arjuna to move forward without thought of the fruits of his action.

The concept of right action arises again in section V, where it is defined as "freedom/ From past and future also" (224-225) and acknowledged as "For most of us/...the aim/ Never here to be realized" (226-227). In contrast, the kind of movement "which is only moved/ And has in it no source of movement" (221-222) is action that is performed for a purpose. It has "no source of movement" because it is

initiated by the ego-self, which is an illusion, or as the narrator says, it is "Driven by daemonic, chthonic/ Powers" (223-224).

This advocacy of right action comes after a catalog of what might be termed "wrong actions" of trying to tell the future through seances, horoscopes, graphology, palm-reading, reading tea leaves, or psychoanalysis (184-194). People are led to these practices, the narrator suggests, when "there is distress of nations and perplexity" (197) and people look to the past and future, clinging "to that dimension" (200) instead of living in the seemingly chaotic present. To live fully in the present, confronting what is, or "to apprehend/ The point of intersection of the timeless/ With time" (200-202) requires "a lifetime's death in love,/ Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender" (202-203), something most of us are incapable of. Most of us, according to the narrator, have "only the unattended/ Moment" in which we release all barriers between the self and Other and experience "music heard so deeply/ That it is not heard at all, but you are the music/ While the music lasts" (210-212).

The narrator says that most of us do not attain Enlightenment, but we are "undefeated/ Because we have gone on trying" (228-229). Acknowledging our mortality, we are "content" if we "nourish/...The life of significant soil" (231, 233). The soil is "significant" because of its role

in an interlocking, interdependent universe. We are "content" to die because we accept the inseparability of life and death.

"Little Gidding" recalls the theme of "Little Coker" and "Burnt Norton" in its approach to time and beginnings and endings. It echoes the cycle of generation and rebirth of a world in flux as stated in the other three poems, and it offers a still point at "the intersection of the timeless moment" (52), much as the other three poems do. From a Zen standpoint, what distinguishes "Little Gidding" is its forceful argument for action without attachment.

The argument is prompted by the appearance of the mysterious stranger who has "the sudden look of some dead master" (92). After assuring the narrator that he is not here "to rehearse/ My thought and theory which you have forgotten" (111-112) the stranger says he has come to "disclose the gifts reserved for age/ To set a crown upon your lifetime's effort" (129-130). The three "gifts reserved for age" (129) are crowning achievements only in an ironic sense. First is "the cold friction of expiring sense/ Without enchantment" (131-132), a loss of the senses as the body grows old. Second is "the conscious impotence of rage/ At human folly, and the laceration/ Of laughter at what ceases to amuse" (135-136), or the ability to recognize "human folly" while knowing that he can do nothing about it. Third is "the rending pain of re-enactment/ Of all that you

have done, and been.../...the awareness/ Of things ill done and done to others' harm/ Which once you took for exercise of virtue" (138-142), the suffering that comes from the knowledge that he has hurt others, sometimes in the name of good. Significantly, the stranger does not bestow the gifts on the narrator; he merely "discloses" them, or points them out.

The real gift the stranger brings is to tell the narrator what to do about those "gifts" of old age. He says that "the exasperated spirit" (144) will focus on those faults "unless restored by that refining fire/ Where you must move in measure, like a dancer" (145-146). To be healed, the narrator must achieve that still point beyond dualism, where he acts without attachment, dancing freely in neither avoidance nor attachment. After delivering that message, the stranger leaves at daybreak "with a kind of valediction" (148) at "the blowing of the horn" (149).

Because Eliot calls the figure "a familiar compound ghost" (95), it is possible that the stranger represents more than one person. Among the speculations about what figures might comprise the stranger are Dante, Mallarme, Milton, Yeats, Irving Babbitt, Eliot himself, and Nicholas Ferrar, the master of Little Gidding (Nevin 90). F.O. Matthiessen suggests that the stranger resembles "Brunetto Latini, whose meeting with Dante in hell is one of the passages which has impressed Eliot most" (100). Ronald

Schuchard says the stranger is "the compound ghost of masterful writers—the central figure of whom we know to be Yeats" (70). While I do not rule out any of these possibilities, I propose that there is ample reason to believe that Krishna is an element of the compound ghost.

The stranger leaves at "the blowing of the horn" (149); in the *Gita*, Krishna blows a horn made from the bone of a demon (Hill 76). Further evidence is that he has "the sudden look of some dead master" and is described as having "brown baked features" (94) appropriate to the human manifestation of a Vedantic deity. Krishna is said to appear on earth "to accomplish the restoration of order in times of chaos". (B. Miller, *BG* 7), and the stranger appears in "Little Gidding" just after a World War II bombing raid. The narrator says the stranger is someone he had known and forgotten and now "half recalled" (93), implying they have met before. The stranger says he is "not eager to rehearse/ My thought and theory which you have forgotten" (111-112), suggesting the stranger has advised the narrator before. These statements lead us to understand that the stranger and the narrator may be a reincarnation of Krishna and Arjuna or that they symbolize the two. The "chaos" that brought Krishna to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* was twofold. A battle was impending, and Arjuna was experiencing a moral crisis. In "Little Gidding," World War II is wreaking

destruction on England, and the narrator questions the meaning of his life, in that what he thought he "came for/ Is only a shell, a husk of meaning" (30-31).

The stranger's words are enough to remind the narrator of what he already knew, that attachment to impermanence brings about suffering. That even "love of a country" comes from "attachment to our own field of action" (160-161), and the only solution is to recognize the abstractions of dualism for what they are, illusion. As the narrator notes, "All manner of thing shall be well/ By the purification of the motive" (197-198).

From a Zen standpoint, the stranger, whether he is Krishna, Yeats, a character from Dante, or some combination thereof, is a manifestation of Emptiness, or the Buddha-nature. In essence, by seeing the stranger, the narrator sees a symbol of his own true self or Buddha-nature. And his revelation of truth, that the "condition of complete simplicity" (253) is one in which "the fire and the rose are one" (259), is a state of Enlightenment.

In *Four Quartets* Eliot shows the ease and freedom that come from living a life in balance, embracing everything, with attachment to nothing. To some extent the message of *Four Quartets* is in direct contrast to what is shown in "Prufrock" and *The Waste Land*, but it is also a completion. If we can judge Eliot's state of mind from his work, we see

from his early poems that he is aware of the Buddhist world view but does not show its successful implementation. *Four Quartets* shows a mature Eliot in the dance of creativity, embracing the flux of a transient world. As Eliot matures in his spiritual development, he shows a more hopeful view of the world. At the end, he no longer seems to believe that life is meaningless or hopeless. By releasing such concepts from his mind, he is able to portray a world that simply *is*.

Chapter Three

Wallace Stevens: The Unmaking of the Mind

In his Enlightenment, the Buddha recognized that life consists of suffering, and that suffering comes from our inclination to try to hold on to permanence in a world that is impermanent and constantly changing. Wallace Stevens, in his 1937 essay "Insurance and Social Change," appears to recognize a similar truth:

The objective of all of us is to live in a world in which nothing unpleasant can happen. Our prime instinct is to go on indefinitely like the wax flowers on the mantelpiece. (*Opus* 234)

The Buddha taught that the cure for suffering is non-attachment. Stevens said the cure is insurance. In the essay, which Stevens said was written "lightly" and "intended to touch the imagination" (234), he goes on to discuss insurance, not Buddhism. However, it is striking how succinctly and imaginatively Stevens, the insurance company executive and poet, states the basic human problem as it is defined by Buddhists.

In an essay written the following year, "Surety and Fidelity Claims," Stevens makes another observation that has Buddhist and Hindu overtones:

A man in the home office tends to conduct his business on the basis of the papers that come before him. After twenty-five years or more of that sort of

thing, he finds it difficult sometimes to distinguish himself from the papers he handles and comes almost to believe that he and his papers constitute a single creature, consisting principally of hands and eyes: lots of hands and lots of eyes. (*Opus* 239)

In describing his relationship to the paperwork required of him, Stevens unwittingly describes a multi-eyed and multi-handed Hindu deity and at the same time illustrates the concept of non-duality. In saying that "he and his papers constitute a single creature" (239), he erases the separation between subject and object, making them, in Zen terms, part of an interdependent, interlocking whole that is beyond Western dualism.

Stevens had no formal connection to Buddhism, but a number of his poems and essays reveal a Zen-like world view in which reality is Emptiness and impermanence is recognized as the nature of the world. In fact, the remarkable affinity between Stevens' work and the teachings of Zen has moved Robert Aitken, the "unofficial American dean of Zen" (Tworkov 25), to call Stevens "one of the very few great poets who will be a source of endless inspiration for future generations of Western Zen teachers" (Aitken, "Wallace" 72).

Aitken's remark is a surprising observation about an upper-middle class white American who was born in Reading, Pennsylvania in 1879, earned a law degree, and spent most of his adult life in Hartford, Connecticut, working for the

Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company. Stevens' background does not appear to have been a likely preparation for him to play a key role in Zen although, like other well-read Americans of his era and economic station, Stevens was exposed to texts, art, and ideas of the East. While he was at Harvard, from fall 1897 through spring 1900 (Bates 47), Stevens was introduced to Zen Buddhist texts by his classmate Witter Bynner, "a self-professed enthusiast of Eastern culture and philosophy" (Willis 13). During the Harvard years, Stevens also read Edward FitzGerald's translation of *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (Bates 51; H. Stevens 34), FitzGerald's letters (*Letters* 20), and the works of Max Muller, "the conspicuous Orientalist of the day" (381), who edited the Oxford *Sacred Books of the East* series. In 1906, Stevens read philosopher Paul Elmer More on Christianity, Plato, and the Orient (Bevis 206). Stevens initially said that More lacked "vigor, life, originality," but noted in his journal three years later that he no longer held that position (*Letters* 90). In 1909, the year he changed his opinion of More, Stevens was reading a book by Kakuzo Okakura, probably *Ideals of the East* (*Letters* 137; H. Stevens 221). His journal entries and letters from that period contain comments, apparently from his reading, on Chinese landscape gardening, the art of flower arranging, and Japanese color prints (H. Stevens 221-222). One of the

journal entries is a sentence that Stevens apparently believed to be a tenet of Buddhism, though it is a misstatement: "Sakyamuni — all evil resides in the individual will to live" (221). Another entry is a Chinese saying about poetry: "The sound stops short. The sense runs on" (222).

Stevens' interest in the East is also reflected in some of his correspondence (*Letters* 256). Stevens liked to write people in other parts of the world and ask them to send him local delicacies and high quality curios and art. He initiated several such relationships with people in the East, including Lucy Monroe Calhoun, wife of the American ambassador (Willis 9), who lived in Peking and was the sister of Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry*. In 1922, Calhoun sent Stevens, at his request, jasmine tea, a carved wooden figure of a "benevolent old god," a jade screen, two black crystal lions, and a small jade figure, all of which delighted him (*Letters* 229-230). In 1935 his Eastern correspondents included Benjamin Kwock, a student in Canton, China (301), and Rosamund Bates Cary, the wife of a missionary living in Japan (280-281). In late 1937, Stevens began corresponding with Leonard C. van Geyzel, a poet and translator of poetry from the Singhalese, who lived in Ceylon (323). In 1951, he was writing to Peter H. Lee, a Korean poet who was for a time a student at Yale (741).

The van Geyzel relationship is one of several that lasted a number of years. During the seventeen years they corresponded (Filreis 160-161), van Geyzel sent Stevens tea, art, and jewelry from Ceylon, and the two routinely sent books to each other (*Letters* 323-324, 327-328, 331-333, 337, 355-356, 380-381). In October 1941 van Geyzel sent Stevens a pamphlet, "Essence of the Buddha's Teaching," which was the transcript of a radio address by Nyanatiloka, a German Buddhist scholar and monk in Ceylon who was being held in a British internment camp (Filreis 164). Stevens incorporated elements of the pamphlet into his poem "Montrachet-le-Jardin," which was published in the January-February 1942 *Partisan Review* (164-165). In the unpublished letter accompanying the pamphlet, van Geyzel alluded to another, unspecified, book on Buddhism that he didn't send Stevens because it was "more difficult." Of Nyanatiloka's pamphlet, he said, "I can't think of a better short statement of the subject" (Van Geyzel). These comments suggest that Stevens had expressed to van Geyzel an interest in learning about Buddhism.

Earlier, in 1940, van Geyzel had sent Stevens a Ceylon-published English translation of the *Gita Govinda* (*Letters* 380), a twelfth-century Sanskrit poem about Krishna's passionate love affair with the cowherdess Radha as a rite of spring (B. Miller, *Love* ix). It is not clear from the

published correspondence whether Stevens asked for the book or whether van Geyzel initiated the transaction. After the book arrived, Stevens set it aside and first read Arthur Berriedale Keith's *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, a book he had owned for some time but never used. Stevens said he did this preparatory reading so he could "place" the *Gita Govinda* since he was not familiar with it (*Letters* 380).

Two years after he received the *Gita Govinda*, however, Stevens was asked about Hindu poetry and replied, "I don't like that Indian stuff." Pressed for more information, he said, "I was given a book recently about Indian philosophy and civilization, and I read the sections on their theories of poetry, very carefully. They're a nuisance" (*Brazeau, Parts* 127).

Regardless of Stevens' opinion about Hindu poetry specifically, *Letters of Wallace Stevens* contains ample evidence that the poet had a fondness for the art and literature of the East in general. In late 1941, a gift of ripe persimmons from a business associate in Georgia prompted Stevens to think of "the antique Japanese prints in black and white, in which monkeys are eating persimmons in bare trees" (394). When publisher Ronald Lane Latimer suggested in 1935 that Stevens had been influenced by Chinese and Japanese poetry, Stevens agreed and added that it was "quite possible" he had deliberately tried to "attain

certain qualities" of that poetry (291). In a 1950 letter to another correspondent, however, Stevens said that he had "perhaps a half dozen volumes of Chinese and Japanese poetry somewhere in the house" and added that "all this is purely casual" (291n). One of these volumes was a book of Chinese poetry, bound in white leather, that Stevens had bought for Christmas in 1933 for \$200 (Brazeau, *Parts* 37). In a 1952 letter, he thanked Peter H. Lee for sending him a Chinese scroll and said it "made the same impression on me when I first looked at it that a collection of Chinese poems makes: an impression of something venerable, true and quiet" (*Letters* 742). When Stevens learned in 1941 that Latimer had "turned Buddhist, and is a monk or priest in one of the temples at Tokio" [sic], he remarked to another correspondent that "Latimer is an extraordinary person who lives in an extraordinary world" (391). In a 1944 letter, Stevens mentioned that a correspondent in France had sent him a copy of *Chinese Mysticism and Modern Poetry* (478), and in 1953 he lamented having missed seeing some Japanese pictures at the Boston Museum (804).

Numerous overt references to the East appear in Stevens' poems and plays, especially the early work. The most obvious, perhaps, is his 1916 verse play *Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise*. Although the scene is "a hilltop in eastern Pennsylvania" (*Opus* 149), the main characters are

three Chinese men, and the dialog consists of enigmatic koan-like statements. Works in *Collected Poems* that contain overt Eastern references include "Six Significant Landscapes," "Jasmine's Beautiful Thoughts Underneath the Willow," "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," and "Tea," all of which were published in *Harmonium*, Stevens' first collection. Those from *Opus Posthumous* include "Carnet de Voyage," "From a Junk," "Eight Significant Landscapes," and "Bowl," all of which were written in 1914 and 1916. Still others, to be discussed later, are less overtly connected to the East and yet embody Zen or other Eastern teachings. "Lettres d'un Soldat," written in 1917, deserves special consideration and will be discussed shortly. It contains overt references to the East, and in fact embodies Hindu philosophy, but its derivation from the 1916 French book of the same name and its French epigraphs obscure that connection.

Although Stevens' nearly lifelong interest in the East is documented through his journals and correspondence, and overt references to the East appear in his work, this does not explain how he became an inspiration to Western teachers of Zen. The fact is that Stevens, like Eliot, somehow acquired a particular way of looking at the world that happens to be compatible with Zen, and that perspective is reflected in Stevens' poetry and essays. Both Eliot and Stevens were exposed to a wide variety of texts in

literature and philosophy, and some of the ideas they encountered are epistemologically similar to Zen. This epistemological ground is one of indeterminacy and flux, with no fixed meaning or purpose. For Stevens, a major source of that epistemology was no doubt Nietzsche, as demonstrated in his correspondence (*Letters* 461-462 and elsewhere) and as argued by B.J. Leggett in *Early Stevens: The Nietzschean Intertext*. The question of whether Stevens adopted that epistemology as a result of being exposed to such ideas in various texts, or whether he sought out those texts because of a predisposition to accept such ideas remains unresolved and is, I think, a moot point. In either case, Stevens embraced a Zen-like perspective of the world, a perspective that informs his poems.

Aitken finds "a profound relationship between Stevens' work and the teachings of Zen Buddhism" (Aitken, "Wallace" 69) in that Stevens, like the Zen masters dating from Bodhidharma in the sixth century, presents "the potent emptiness" (72). Although he considers Stevens "an endless inspiration" for Western teachers of Zen, Aitken maintains that Stevens is not a Zen poet. Further, he adds that other poets whom Zen teachers have quoted in their discourses, such as Tu Fu and Basho, had "little or no formal connection with Zen," either (72). According to Aitken, what makes Stevens' work interesting to those who know something about

Zen is Stevens' propensity for writing poems that have "no intellectual overlay to obscure things as they are" (69).

This absence of intellectual overlay is essential to the Zen concept of Emptiness, which in Buddhism is the ultimate reality (Abe, *Comparative* 42). To Zen Buddhists, the world is a network of particulars, and reality resides in the relationship among particulars (Stryk 29). No thing exists on its own; in that sense, it is said to be Empty. To realize Emptiness is to allow the mind to release all abstractions or ideas and recognize the interlocking interdependence, or dependent co-origination, of all things (Abe, *Comparative* 43). In Zen practice, this release is accomplished during meditation, which can take the form of traditional sitting meditation, walking meditation, or the mindful performance of ordinary actions like household chores. In releasing abstractions, the meditator is freed from dualism and achieves the state of consciousness that defines Zen (Radcliff and Radcliff 33). In this state, things are only and truly what they are in their Emptiness, unobscured, as Aitken says of Stevens' poetry, by any intellectual overlay.

As a youth, Stevens developed the habit of taking long walks, a practice he continued most of his life. William Bevis argues that these walks were a kind of meditation, during which Stevens adopted "a meditative consciousness that was itself selfless" (5). Bevis contends that this

state was more a result of Stevens' disposition and his walks than his reading (217). Simply reading about Eastern philosophies does not make one a practitioner of meditation. In contrast, those who clear the mind through physical activity or working mindfully on a routine task enter a state of meditation whether they realize that fact or not, and regardless of whether they have ever read Eastern texts. As long-distance runners are aware, such a state results not in a hypnotic, zombie-like trance, but rather in a condition of heightened awareness. Paradoxically, this state of full awareness brings on a loss of the self. Zen teaches that this state is the center of creative energy. That Stevens tended to compose poetry during his walks, or at least get ideas for poems that he would work on later, is reported by his coworkers at the insurance company in interviews with Peter Brazeau in *Parts of a World*. (See especially the interview with Richard Sunbury, pages 34-39.) Zen teaches that creativity is enhanced by meditation, and it seems clear that Stevens' habit of walking gave him a space in which he could free his mind, allowing the creative force to work spontaneously.

I do not wish to dismiss, however, the importance of the Eastern texts that Stevens read. As this study reveals, Stevens was very much aware of concepts such as Emptiness, nonduality, and action without attachment, and these concepts are illustrated in his poems. Regardless of

whether he spontaneously entered a meditative state of selflessness as Bevis suggests, Stevens knew the vocabulary of that state. He learned that vocabulary by reading Eastern texts, and he applied it in the poems he wrote.

Ordinarily, it is difficult to connect a specific Eastern text to a Stevens poem, but Alan Filreis argues that "Montrachet-le-Jardin" incorporates some elements of a pamphlet called "Essence of the Buddha's Teaching" that is the transcript of a radio address given by Nyanatiloka, a Buddhist monk. He also points out that Stevens published the poem shortly after receiving the pamphlet (164-165). Stevens received the pamphlet from Leonard van Geyzel, his correspondent in Ceylon, who enclosed it in a letter dated October 14, 1941. In the letter, van Geyzel explained that "Nyanatiloka is a German and has the reputation of being one of the greatest Buddhist scholars alive today....At this moment of course, he is in an internment camp, rather unnecessarily, I can't help thinking" (Van Geyzel). The pamphlet, subtitled "A Radio-lecture delivered at Colombo," sets forth "the essence of the original teaching of the Buddha...as handed down to us in the sacred scriptures written in the Pali language" (Nyanatiloka 1). Noting that many of his listeners were Westerners who thought of Buddhism as "some sort of idolatry or mysticism" (Nyanatiloka 1), Nyanatiloka opened his talk by quoting Friedrich Nietzsche, who said that Buddhism is "a hundred

times more realistic than Christianity" (qtd. in Nyanatiloka 2). Incidentally, just a few months after receiving this pamphlet, Stevens began discussing Nietzsche in his correspondence with Henry Church, but the discussion appears to have been initiated by Church (Leggett, *Early* 32). After letting Nietzsche explain for him that Buddhism does not teach the existence of a god, does not require prayer, does not use coercion, and does not challenge other religions, Nyanatiloka tells the life of the Buddha and explains the basic beliefs of Buddhism (Nyanatiloka 2-8).

I agree with Filreis that Stevens seems to combine a Buddha figure with Nyanatiloka in "Montrachet-le-Jardin" (164-165), but my reading of the poem is different from Filreis'. It may be, as Filreis suggests, that the "prisoner" of lines 23 and 28 refers to Nyanatiloka, since the monk was being held prisoner by the British, but it may also refer to Nyanatiloka's listeners. Nyanatiloka describes Buddhism as a liberation from religious rite and ritual (8), dogmatism (9), and selfish craving (18). Thus, he offers freedom to his listeners who may be, in a sense, prisoners to religion or to selfish craving. In fact, Nyanatiloka says that "belief in mere externals" makes man "a smug mental slave" (8). For this reason, I believe that the "prisoner" in lines 23 and 28 of Stevens' poem refers to people listening to Nyanatiloka's radio address.

The "undeciphered murmuring" (22) that "[c]omes close to

the prisoner's ear" (23) is a continuation of the "sounds resembling sounds" (11) from the earlier stanzas which are the teachings of Buddhism. "Tonight" this "undeciphered murmuring" (22) comes through the voice of Nyanatiloka over the radio and "becomes a throat/ The hand can touch" (23-24) because now the teaching comes from a real person and it is about a real person, the Buddha, not a "green bronze nor marble" (24) religious statue of a god-like figure. That throat is the "hero's throat in which the words are spoken" (25), and Nyanatiloka is a hero in two senses. First, although war is raging and he is imprisoned, he continues to teach the way of peace. Second, as a Buddhist, he believes in no god and follows the Buddha's admonition, "Be your own light, be your own refuge" (qtd. in Nyanatiloka 7-8). If he is his "own light," he might be said to be, in Stevens' words, "the hero of his world" (33).

Stevens mentions "our singular skeleton" (19), "the skeleton in the moonlight" (29), and the "salty skeleton" (34). Filreis associates the skeleton with Nyanatiloka's story of the Buddha, in which, while searching for peace, the future Buddha became an ascetic who fasted until "at last he looked like a mere skeleton" (Filreis 164; Nyanatiloka 3). If Stevens' poem is read so that Nyanatiloka is the prisoner, then the voice of Buddhism comes to him through the Buddha, and the skeleton can represent the Buddha. The problem, however, is that the man

who became the Buddha gave up "fasting and bodily mortification" (Nyanatiloka 3), and by the time he received Enlightenment, the Buddha did not look like a skeleton. Because this pamphlet was not Stevens' first contact with the story of the Buddha, he should have been aware of this distinction. The possibility remains, however, that Stevens didn't know the Buddha had abandoned asceticism, or that he wanted to use the skeleton image anyway.

For my reading, the skeleton represents human mortality. Line 19 says "our singular skeleton" (emphasis added), suggesting more than one person, and the "singular" suggests that the human skeleton is distinctive. The skeleton is said to be "salty" in line 34, echoing the phrase "Salt-flicker" in line 20, a reference to Nyanatiloka's use of the ocean as example. In explaining that the self is not a permanent entity, he talks about "numberless processes, countless life-waves, in this vast ever-surging ocean of bodily states" (14). He mentions the ocean again when explaining why Buddhists do not believe in reincarnation. What appears to be a wave in the ocean, he says, is merely "a continued rising and falling of continued but ever new masses of water" (17), and similarly what appears to be a continuing ego-entity is "in reality merely a life-wave" (17). Thus, a human being could be considered a "salty skeleton." The "skeleton in the moonlight" (29) may refer to enlightenment. After hearing the words of the

hero, the "skeleton in the moonlight sings" (29), suggesting that it has been enlivened by what the hero teaches. In Dogen's teaching and other texts, moonlight often refers to Enlightenment (Tanahashi 308). Stevens, of course, might not have been aware of that reference, but the idea of light representing knowledge is well established.

When the "skeleton in the moonlight" (29) "[s]ings of an heroic world beyond the cell" (30), it is practicing Buddhism. It tells about the liberating world of peace that lies beyond the narrow world of "hearsay or tradition...handed down from olden time, by rumours, by mean reasoning and logical deductions, by outward appearances, by cherished opinions and speculations, by mere possibilities" that the Buddha warns against (qtd. in Nyanatiloka 10). This world is "heroic" in that humankind, not a god, determines what is true or good.

When the salty skeleton "hears the earliest poems of the world/ In which man is the hero" (40-41), he is listening to Buddhist scriptures. He can hear "the words,/ Before the speaker's youngest breath is taken" (41-42) because the Buddha's words are timeless. He is going to "the hero-land" (46), where the "poison in the blood will have been purged" (49) and an "inner miracle" will take place (50). This corresponds to Nyanatiloka's depiction of the extinction of suffering, which is "the highest state of selflessness, wisdom and holiness" (18), and which he says

is available to everyone. Stevens says that this "inner miracle" (50) will happen the way "apples fall, without astronomy" (52), or naturally. As the skeleton points out, "it is a question of/ The naked man" (55-56), meaning that human beings alone, without the aid of a god, can achieve peace.

Stevens' narrator then recalls that "the speechless, invisible gods/ Ruled us before" (58-59), referring to the gods of Hinduism. Now that we are free of those gods, he says, there now "must be mercy in Asia" (61), with "scholars bent upon their books" (62) and "lean sacristans/ Of the good, speaking of good in the voice of men" (63-64). Here he means that scholars like Nyanatiloka must be free to do their work. Although all men can speak of the good (65), to "equate the root-man and the super-man" (67) is "like to love" (66). The "root-man" is the ascetic, whose ways the Buddha abandoned, and "the super-man" is probably a reference to Nietzsche's Superman, an example of another extreme. As Nyanatiloka says, the Buddha advocated rejection of extremes in favor of the Middle Path, "which leads to peace, to penetration, enlightenment and liberation" (9).

After meditating for several stanzas, Stevens' narrator questions the value of "yesterday's devotions" (97). "I affirm" he says, "and then at midnight the great cat/ Leaps quickly from the fireside and is gone" (98-99). Here, the

"great cat" may represent the realization of Emptiness because both must be won over every day — the cat through kindness, the realization of Emptiness through meditation. In questioning the value of "yesterday's devotions" (97), Stevens' narrator emphasizes the fact that, in contrast to religions that require only adherence to external rules, the practice of Buddhism is a daily experience that transforms everyday life. This point directly addresses the underlying message transmitted by Nyanatiloka, that practice of the teachings of the Buddha offers peace of mind and peace in the world.

It seems probable that Stevens based "Montrachet-le-Jardin" on Nyanatiloka's "Essence of the Buddha's Teaching." Stevens' use of another Eastern text, the *Bhagavad Gita*, is less certain but still a possibility. In 1917, when Stevens wrote "Lettres d'un Soldat," a minor poem sequence, he may have modeled it after the *Bhagavad Gita*, an ancient Hindu poem and scripture.

Although I have found no evidence among published documents that Stevens read the *Gita*, as it is popularly known, it is inconceivable that he would have read the variety of Eastern texts mentioned in his published journal entries and correspondence without also reading the *Gita*. First translated into English in 1785 by Charles Wilkins, the *Gita* had been published in more than 100 English

editions by the time Stevens entered Harvard. In 1897, Stevens' first year at Harvard, *The Sacred Books of the East*, the series edited by Max Muller, issued the volume that contains the *Gita* (Kapoor 3-15). Further, in an unpublished letter, Leonard van Geyzel suggested to Stevens that T.S. Eliot should write a new translation of the *Mahabharata* to replace the one done by Edwin Arnold (Filreis 172) in the nineteenth century. The *Mahabharata* is the eighteen-book Hindu epic that contains the *Gita*. Although nothing came of van Geyzel's idea for Eliot's translation (Filreis 327), the correspondence suggests that both Stevens and van Geyzel were familiar with the *Gita*. It is unlikely, however, that either had a scholarly knowledge of the text.

"Lettres d'un Soldat" has not received a great deal of attention from critics and none suggests that it was modeled on the *Gita*. Stevens' letters and A. Walton Litz's *Introspective Voyager* provide most of the information about how Stevens came to write the sequence. "Lettres d'un Soldat" is based on the book by the same name, which is a collection of the letters sent by a French soldier to his mother between August 1914 and April 1915. The soldier was Eugene Emmanuel Lemerrier, a painter, who disappeared and presumably died in combat on the day his last letter was sent (*Soldier* vii). The letters were originally published

in *Revue de Paris* in August 1915 and were published as a book in 1916 (Litz 72). The following year, the book was translated into English by Theodore Stanton and published by A.C. McClurg in Chicago. Working from the French edition, Stevens wrote a sequence of poems using passages from the letters as epigraphs and sent them to Harriet Monroe on September 1, 1917. Along with the poems, he sent a copy of the French edition of the book, adding that an English language translation had also been published (*Letters* 202). Setting aside for a moment the possibility that the *Gita* may have played a part, "Lettres d'un Soldat," being modeled on the French book, is the only work Stevens ever produced that relies "so heavily on a literary source" (Macleod 46). In March 1918, Stevens met with Monroe at her office to discuss the poems, and they "weeded out the bad ones" (*Letters* 203). Stevens' published correspondence does not say how many poems were originally in the sequence, but nine of them appeared in *Poetry* in May 1918. Only three of those nine ("The Surprises of the Superhuman," "Negation," and "The Death of a Soldier") plus one other poem from the sequence ("Lunar Paraphrase") appeared in the second edition of *Harmonium* (Litz 156).

The thirteen poems known to have been in the original sequence that was sent to Monroe, including their French epigraphs, were published in *Opus Posthumous* after Stevens'

death (*Opus* 29-36). They also appear in Appendix B of Litz's *Introspective Voyager*. It might be reasonable to assume that those thirteen poems constitute the entire sequence originally sent to Monroe, except that an additional poem, published by Litz in his notes to Appendix B, is designated as "XVI" in manuscript (Litz 316). Further, the poem identified as XIII in *Opus Posthumous* is designated "XVII" in manuscript (Litz 309). This suggests that the original sequence contained at least seventeen poems. I suspect that the sequence contained eighteen poems, to match the eighteen chapters of the *Gita*.

Stevens chose as his epigraph to the entire sequence an excerpt from the preface to the original French edition of the book, which was written by Andre Chevrillon. In the excerpt, Chevrillon compares Lemer cier's experience to the dilemma faced by Arjuna, "who had doubted whether he were right in turning from the absolute to take part in the human nightmare of war" (Litz 73). Arjuna is the warrior whose dialogue with the god Krishna, his charioteer, on the battlefield of Kurukshetra constitutes the eighteen teachings, or chapters, of the *Gita*. The fact that Stevens chose part of the *Bhagavad Gita* section of Chevrillon's preface as the epigraph to his sequence suggests that Stevens, like Chevrillon, saw some correlation between Lemer cier and Arjuna. In contrast, the American edition of

the book paraphrases Chevrillon's preface, leaving out material the translator considered "less interesting" to "our American public" (*Soldier* vii), including the three pages referring to the *Bhagavad Gita* and Arjuna (*Lettres* xii-xv). In addition to Arjuna, Chevrillon also compares Lemerrier to Marcus Aurelius (*Soldier* x, xvii; *Lettres* xi, xxxiii) and Shelley (*Soldier* xv; *Lettres* xiv, xvii). Stevens used Chevrillon's comparison of Lemerrier to Arjuna in his epigraph, but not the references to Marcus Aurelius or Shelley. That, plus the probability that Stevens' sequence originally contained at least seventeen poems, suggests that Stevens modeled the sequence after the *Bhagavad Gita* and further suggests that the sequence actually contained eighteen poems, to match the *Gita*'s eighteen chapters.

If this hypothesis is valid, several poems are missing. No poems have been identified as XIV, XV, or XVIII in manuscript, so at least those three poems are missing. Poems XII and XIII as published in *Opus Posthumous* are numbered XVI and XVII, respectively, in the manuscripts (Litz 309-310), indicating that the original poems numbered XII and XIII are also missing, making a total of possibly five missing poems.

Another element to consider is the epigraph that would have accompanied an eighteenth poem. Stevens' poems follow Lemerrier's letters in chronological order. The epigraph to

the poem designated as XVII in the manuscript is from Lemer cier's letter dated March 26, 1915. In Lemer cier's book, ten more letters follow that one, the last dated April 6. If Stevens wrote an eighteenth poem for the sequence, he could easily have chosen an epigraph from Lemer cier's ten letters written after March 26.

Complicating the matter of the missing poems, a second poem bearing the designation "XVI" in manuscript also exists. Unpublished except in Litz's notes to Appendix B (310) and in *Opus Posthumous* as a note to "Lettres d'un Soldat" (319), the poem is about the return of cranes. Stevens' narrator speaks of "the fire/ That touches" the cranes (5-6) and says he "knows that he must not know/ Nor burden his endurance with desire" (6-7). Although Stevens' crane poem mentions desire, Lemer cier's epigraph does not. An overt reference to desire is found, however, in the sixteenth chapter of the *Gita*, where Krishna speaks disapprovingly of people who have "insatiable desires" and think of nothing but "sensual enjoyment" (Mascaro 74). The connection between cranes and desire in Stevens' poem is not clear, and it is further muddled in the attempt to link it to the sixteenth chapter of the *Gita*. The connection becomes clear when *les grues* is translated not as *cranes*, but in its usage as French slang for *prostitutes*. If Stevens' narrator hears the cries of prostitutes, it is

understandable that he would not want to "know" them or "burden his endurance with desire." Stevens knew French well and would have been capable of such word play. A similar ploy may be at work in the first stanza, where "jades" may refer to prostitutes. When read with the sixteenth chapter of the *Gita*, allowing some word play on the part of Stevens, the poem becomes a statement about relinquishing attachment to desire. The fact that the poem was discarded probably indicates that Stevens realized it did not work.

In choosing the excerpts from Lemercier's letters to be used as epigraphs for his individual poems, Stevens molds the meaning of the letters to his own design, emphasizing, I think, the similarities between his poem sequence and the *Gita*. Stevens' Lemercier emerges as a man concerned with fate, renunciation, hope, eternal justice, conscience, life, and death. No doubt Chevrillon, too, noticed those concerns, prompting his comparison of Lemercier with Arjuna, who also ponders these issues. Yet, Lemercier also wrote to his mother about other subjects, such as Spinoza, Beethoven, Dante, poetry, art, friends back home, and the weather. The excerpts Stevens chose to use as epigraphs preserve the similarity between Lemercier and Arjuna that Chevrillon noted.

Although the *Gita* is not a Zen text, it expounds

principles that are central to the practice of Zen.

Stevens' familiarity with the *Gita* so early in his career is relevant to this study because it further demonstrates his knowledge of Eastern texts and concepts. The apparent ease with which Stevens incorporated certain Zen-like concepts in his later poetry indicates that he must have thought about and worked with the concepts over a period of years.

The connection between certain poems and chapters of the *Gita* sometimes seems tenuous. Further, the first four chapters of the *Gita* seem to correspond to the first four poems, but I don't find a companion poem for the fifth chapter of the *Gita*. After that point, the chapters and the poems line up with an offset of one. For instance, chapter six goes with poem V, and chapter nine goes with poem VIII. Despite these problems, however, enough correlations exist to suggest that more study might show a stronger connection. A close reading of all the poems and epigraphs in the sequence along with corresponding chapters of the *Gita* is not appropriate for this study, but I will demonstrate some of the connections by discussing two of the poems that were eventually published in *Collected Poems*.

Poem VI, "The Surprises of the Superhuman" (CP 98), compares the human idea of justice to that of the superhuman. Similarly, the seventh chapter of the *Gita*

establishes Krishna as distinctly greater than humankind, i.e., superhuman, and presents his view of good and evil. Looking at Stevens' poem from an Eastern perspective, the "palais de justice of chambermaids" (1) "[makes] more awry our faulty human things" (6) because "the brave dicta of its kings" (5) come from the human concept of justice, which is based on the dualism of right and wrong. Were that justice "lost in *Urbarmenschlichkeit*" (3) or the superhuman, things "would soon come right" (4) because such a system would be free of dualism. In the seventh chapter of the *Gita*, Krishna says, "In this whole vast universe there is nothing higher than I" (Mascaro 36), establishing himself as superhuman, well above human concerns. Krishna says that those who worship him are good and those who do not are evil (37). However, he teaches that those "whose sins have come to an end" are those who are "free from the delusion of division" (38), suggesting that a higher ideal of justice is beyond the dualism of good and evil. Therefore, the human idea of justice is dualistic while Krishna's is beyond that. In the epigraph to Stevens' poem, Lemercier says, "I have a firm hope and a real confidence in eternal justice, whatever may be the surprise that this eternal justice sometimes causes in us because of our preconceived human idea of what it should be" (*Soldier* 68-69). Here, Lemercier, Stevens, and the *Gita* all say that the human notion of justice is at

odds with the idea of a transcendent, eternal justice, suggesting that eternal justice often "surprises" human beings because they do not understand it. My reading of "The Surprises of the Superhuman" is based on the difference between a dualistic and a nondualistic view of the world. In that sense, the poem reflects the Zen teaching that attachment to the abstraction of dualism perpetuates suffering. Although Zen does not teach a concept of eternal justice, and in fact dismisses justice itself as an illusion, it does teach the idea of an "eternal now" that, being Zen reality, is beyond judgments of good and evil. This poem demonstrates that Stevens understood the difference between a system based on dualism and one that is not, and, further, that he understood that dualism is an imposed order.

Poem IX, "Negation," was also published in *Collected Poems* without its epigraph (97-98). It can be linked to the tenth chapter of the *Gita*, in which Krishna teaches that he is everything, "the beginning, the middle, and the end of all that lives" (Mascaro 49), and "the One source of all" (47). Krishna adds that this catalog is only a small part of his infinity (51), indicating that human beings cannot comprehend his totality. The creator in "Negation" "[struggles] toward his harmonious whole" (2), evoking the image of the all-inclusive Krishna. Although Krishna says

repeatedly that he is everything, he also says that he is the best of every kind of thing. For instance, among the senses, he is the mind and among bodies of water, he is "the vast ocean" (49). Thus, he is similar to Stevens' creator, who rejects "intermediate parts,/ Horrors and falsities and wrongs" (3-4), incorporating only the best.

Both Krishna and Stevens' blind creator are beyond the understanding of human beings. The human concept of infinity does not encompass the totality of Krishna (Mascaro 51); and Stevens' creator seems, to human beings, to be an "Incapable master of all force,/ Too vague idealist" (5-6). We perceive the creator as "incapable" and "vague" because of the limitations of our understanding. That the creator is "overwhelmed/ By an afflatus that persists" (6-7) means that our limited minds are so caught up in the imparting of divine knowledge (such as scriptures) that they cannot comprehend the reality of the absolute. Thus, direct experience of the absolute is "overwhelmed" by a mediated experience of the absolute.

Lemercier says in the epigraph to "Negation" that we must believe in "an impersonal justice which is independent of all human influence, and have faith in useful and harmonious destiny notwithstanding the horrible form which it seems to assume at the present moment" (*Soldier* 109). Because the totality of the absolute is beyond our understanding, the world seems "horrible" and unjust, and

our perception of the creator or Krishna is incomplete. The "this" for which "we endure brief lives" (8) is the "harmonious whole" (2), that divine knowledge and impersonal justice of which we perceive only a portion. As mortals, our "brief lives" are "evanescent symmetries" (9) because they are impermanent and bound by birth and death. The potter's thumb is "meticulous" in that the creator has purposely made us impermanent. This poem shows Stevens' comprehension of transience within a harmonious, interlocking whole, a concept he demonstrates in later poems, notably "Landscape with Boat" (CP 241).

If Stevens modeled "Lettres d'un Soldat" on the *Bhagavad Gita*, why is there no record of that pattern in his published correspondence, essays, and interviews? He submitted the poems to Monroe in September 1917 but did not meet with her to discuss them until the following March (*Letters* 202, 205). By then, according to Morse, both Stevens and Monroe had lost enthusiasm for the series (Morse 49). Monroe published nine of the poems in *Poetry*; Stevens did not include any of the poems in the first edition of *Harmonium*, and published only four in the revised edition (Litz 72). Litz suggests that "the general design of the series depended too much on the content of the citations and the interaction between the citations and the individual poems" (77). If dependence on the Lemercier text was a bar

to the poem's success, an added dependence upon the *Gita* would only have further exacerbated that problem. If Stevens modeled "Lettres d'un Soldat" on the *Gita*, I suspect that he abandoned the structure as a failed experiment when he and Monroe agreed that the series did not work. I further suspect that the missing poems of the sequence are to be found in Stevens' body of work.

When *Harmonium* was published in 1923, James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* had both already demonstrated that an ancient text could successfully underpin a modern one. Perhaps Stevens had no desire to display his own earlier and (to him) feeblar attempt at the same technique and consequently chose not to use any of the "Lettres" poems in the volume. By 1931, when *Harmonium* was revised and published again, Stevens could look at the poems objectively enough to include four of them in the revised edition, but without their epigraphs.

Whether Stevens based "Lettres d'un Soldat" on the *Gita* or not, he presented in the poems some concepts associated with Hinduism and Buddhism. A concept central to the *Gita* is that of action without attachment. Krishna teaches Arjuna that he must do his duty as a warrior without thought for the consequences of his actions because his duty comes from a higher power. In Zen, there is no god or higher power, but the demands of the ego are to be ignored in favor

of the actions of the true self. The action of the true self seems to spring forth effortlessly, without direction and without attachment to the concerns of the ego. This concept, known by the term *wu-wei*, is defined by a Zen commentator as "unselfconscious responsiveness" (Kasulis 36). Stevens' poem "Polo Ponies Practicing" (*Opus* 70), written in 1934, illustrates this sort of action that arises from the true self, free of dualism.

The poem's narrator first establishes the fact that a "constant cry" against "an old order" (1) is not sufficient. Such rebellion is "itself old and stale" (3). According to Zen thinking, the mind should be disciplined yet free, moving with the flow of change like a ball in a mountain stream (Watts, *Way* 42), not following in opposition to something else. To act in rebellion against an old order would be as stultifying as to be part of the old order. Further, the narrator emphasizes that the order is not just old, but "constantly old" (2), suggesting that its stasis is confirmed again and again, keeping it permanently in place. In contrast, the freedom of Zen is so complete that it "becomes a kind of ecstasy" (Watts, *Way* 42).

In place of rebellion against the old order, the narrator posits "the world of a moment" (4) that is "Beyond any order,/ Beyond any rebellion" (10-11). What he describes is the Zen position, which is beyond dualism and

in which activity "functions creatively according to things confronted in the given situation" (Abe, *Western* 117). Such a moment, the narrator suggests, contains "the world" (4). According to Zen teachings, time exists only in the present. Yesterday, like tomorrow, is only an idea about time, not time itself, because it cannot be experienced. Yet, because we remember the past as past in the present moment and anticipate the future as the future in the present moment, the present moment carries all of time. In that respect, "now" is eternal (Tanahashi 13). Dogen, the thirteenth-century Zen master, taught that time is being, not a separate entity or a framework in which to fit existence. It follows, then, that what is experienced in time-being is what is real; anything else is an idea. Therefore, according to Dogen, each moment is the entire world (Tanahashi 76-77). When Stevens says, "Here is the world of a moment" (4), he expresses Dogen's concept of time-being.

The Zen sense of ecstasy is attested to by the moment's being "Fitted by men and horses/ For hymns" (5-6). Significantly, both men and horses together make the moment one deserving the joyful praise of hymns. Thus, men and horses work in concert, effacing the duality of rider and mount. The "brilliant air" (12) should be understood to mean both the air we breathe and "air" in the sense of a song, evoking both the "thudding air" (9) and the "hymns" (6). It touches without favor or attachment the "flanks of

horses" (13), "clear grass" (14), and "the shapes of the mind" (15).

The phrase "the shapes of the mind" refers to the condition of the untrained mind. The Zen-trained mind at rest is said to be formless, but the untrained mind is full of thoughts, which are believed to have shape (Farkas 46). "The shapes of the mind," then, are thoughts. The phrase "A brilliant air" (12) is an appositive to "the world of a moment" (4). Thus, the world of a moment is the brilliant air, or song, that alights on the shapes of the mind, or thoughts. What Stevens describes is the realization of Emptiness upon the ordinary mind. That "the world of a moment" also is on the "flanks of horses" and on "clear grass" (13-14) implies that those objects, too, are seen as Empty. In this experience, the "shapes" that fill the ordinary mind disappear, disclosing Buddha-mind, which is "inseparable from the great activity of the universe" (Tanahashi 266). At the end of the poem, polo ponies, riders, and the field are perceived as interlocking parts of a whole.

Finally, the image of polo ponies practicing for a match brings to mind the combination of "discipline in spontaneity and spontaneity in discipline" required of Zen art (Watts, *Way* 174). Men and ponies, like the Zen artist, must practice technique so thoroughly that the exercise of it becomes effortless. The fact that the ponies are

practicing, not playing a match, is particularly appropriate to Zen. The act of playing a polo match would suggest intention and a goal, while practicing suggests the Zen idea of moving freely, without purpose and without reflection (Kasulis 62).

Stevens' engagement with Zen-like concepts continued throughout his career and is evident, as just demonstrated, even in poems that do not overtly mention the East. The point, however, is not that Stevens often seems to agree with Zen thinking, but rather that Stevens engages issues central to Zen, opening them for discussion. For instance, Stevens is concerned with the imagination and reality. Zen would consider the products of the imagination to be abstractions, and to perceive reality (or realize Emptiness), one releases all abstractions. Stevens often presents characters, for instance in "The Snow Man" (CP 9) and "The Plain Sense of Things" (CP 502), who try to strip away all abstractions so they can apprehend reality, only to fail in the attempt. These failures seem to suggest that it is impossible to do away with the imaginative impulse. Further, Stevens sometimes seems to suggest, for instance in "Study of Two Pears" (CP 196) and "Landscape with Boat" (CP 241), that the imagination is a necessary element in the perception of reality.

Incidentally, Stevens may have read about a Zen

attitude regarding the imagination and perfection around 1909, when he was reading Kakuzo Okakura. According to *Letters*, the only title by Okakura mentioned in Stevens' journal is *Ideals of the East* (152). However, Okakura also wrote *The Book of Tea*, published in 1906, in which he discusses the meaning of the unsymmetrical in the Japanese tea-room. As Okakura explains it, some things in the tea-room are purposely left incomplete so that each guest can, in his imagination, complete the total effect in relation to himself. True beauty can be discovered, he explains, only through this completing act of the imagination (qtd. in Abe, *Comparative* 242-243; Okakura 76). Masao Abe considers the explanation an erroneous depiction of Zen thought because Zen does not take perfection, reality, or any other concept as an ideal end to arrive at (*Comparative* 243). One can see, however, that it might have appealed to Stevens as he considered the dynamic of imagination and reality.

Stevens' suggestion that imagination is a necessary component of the perception of reality seems to be in direct contrast to Zen teaching (insofar as anything can be said to be in direct contrast to Zen), and certainly Abe disagrees with that position. However, Stevens' stance serves to illuminate one of many seeming contradictions in Zen and provides an opening for discussion. Zen teaches that abstractions are not reality, but it also teaches that the

ability to engage in abstract reasoning makes us human (Radcliff and Radcliff 27). Thus, Zen agrees with Stevens that we will never be able to totally release ourselves from abstractions. Further, Zen teaches that realizing Emptiness means to see the interlocking interdependence of all things (Abe, *Western* 92-93). Where does one draw the line between having ideas about things and seeing the interdependence among things? The answer, or an answer, is that we cannot avoid abstractions, but if we want to minimize suffering, we can recognize abstractions as what they are, merely ideas. We can use them and enjoy them without becoming attached to them. Poetry, perhaps the biggest abstraction of all, becomes an aid to our attainment of reality if we accept it for what it is, and I think Stevens says exactly that in "The Rock" (*CP* 525).

Despite Stevens' engagement with Zen issues and despite Aitken's assessment of Stevens as an inspiration to Western teachers of Zen, few literary critics have written on Stevens' poetry in relation to Zen. Robert Tompkins, who concentrates on Stevens' later poems, notes a progression as Stevens struggled over the course of his career to attain "a true relationship to language" (26). He argues that Stevens developed "the possibilities of self-awareness" and finally managed to "dissolve the illusory self" (26). In his final years, Tompkins argues, Stevens achieved "the final unmaking of the mind" (36) in which his poems "move into a boundless

reality of the imagination" (39), especially in the poems in the *The Rock* section of *Collected Poems*. Jerome Griswold does not posit a progression in Stevens' poetry, choosing instead to justify Aitken's interest in Stevens' poems over, for instance, the haiku-like poetry of William Carlos Williams. In accounting for Aitken's interest in Stevens, Griswold argues that "Stevens' poetry is a poetry of epistemological failures" (9). Assuming the validity of Griswold's statement, Stevens' poetry has that failure in common with Zen, which is said to be beyond words, doctrine, or any teaching (Abe, *Comparative* 3).

Griswold agrees with Aitken's assessment of Stevens' significant contribution to Western teachers of Zen (Aitken, "Wallace" 72; Griswold 9), but the two differ slightly in their readings of "The Snow Man," a poem that both use to demonstrate Stevens' engagement with Zen. Aitken believes that the realization of Emptiness is incomplete in "The Snow Man" because the Snow Man takes only the first step, that of uncovering "all things just as they are, with no associations" (71). He argues that Stevens completes the process in another poem, "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" (CP 65), where Hoon "emerges from Emptiness, like the Buddha rising from his profound experience under the Bodhi tree" (72). Griswold agrees with Aitken that mature realization in Zen requires the two steps, the "discovery of primordial

emptiness" followed by "reemerging in the world of phenomena" (12). However, he argues that both steps are met in "The Snow Man" through epistemological failure (12).

Before looking at the issue of epistemological failure and trying to negotiate the area where Aitken and Griswold disagree, I first want to discuss the rest of "The Snow Man" in a Zen context, incorporating ideas that both Aitken and Griswold agree upon. That the poem is about reality is undeniable. Stevens himself, in a 1944 letter, explained "The Snow Man" as "an example of the necessity of identifying oneself with reality in order to understand it and enjoy it" (*Letters* 464). This experience of "identifying oneself with reality" is what happens in the Zen practice of releasing all abstractions, including the abstraction of the self, to move beyond dualism and realize Emptiness. In that state, no separation exists between the perceiver and the perceived, and that is precisely the state depicted in "The Snow Man."

In attaining the "mind of winter" (1), the perceiver beholds "the frost and the bough/ Of the pine-trees" (2-3) and "the junipers shagged with ice" (5), but does not "think/ Of any misery in the sound of the wind" (7-8). To the narrator, anyone seeing such a scene would naturally think of "misery in the sound of the wind" (8) because as human beings we tend to interpret the world according to how it affects us, and such cold means misery. To see the scene

without thinking of misery is to see it in its Emptiness and to realize at the same time one's own Emptiness, or as Stevens puts it, for the perceiver to be "nothing himself" (14). In beholding "[n]othing that is not there" (15), the perceiver is looking only at the thing itself without bringing in abstractions, or ideas. The last words of the last line, "the nothing that is," are at the core of the disagreement between Aitken and Griswold.

Griswold summarizes Aitken's reading as follows:

...the Snow Man aims to avoid projecting or smearing his own feelings on the world and wishes instead for a true perception of the bare place as just phenomena without the intrusions of self. In doing this, Aitken proposes, the Snow Man makes a Zen-like discovery of the primordial emptiness of the universe which is at the same time full of phenomena[.] (12)

As Griswold points out, Zen teaches that realizing "primordial emptiness," as the Snow Man has done, is just one part of realizing Enlightenment (12).

Zen training is sometimes described as having several stages, but those stages are not fully defined by Zen masters because to do so would serve to objectify and consequently work against the process of realizing Emptiness (Yeh 25). However, Zen teachers do look to Siddhartha Gautama's experience of Enlightenment as an example, and

they note that after Siddhartha realized Emptiness he stood up and walked away to rejoin society. They take this action as an indication that realizing Emptiness is neither the literal nor the figurative end (in either meaning of the word) of human life. In Zen practice, one realizes the things of the world in their Emptiness, and then one resumes one's ordinary life, but with a changed perspective.

The aftermath of Hoon's experience of Enlightenment, not the Enlightenment itself, is depicted in "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" (CP 65), and his enlightened state probably goes unnoticed by most readers. Aitken notes that Hoon's descent in purple, signifying royalty, "is the king-like nature of one who emerges from emptiness, like the Buddha rising from his profound experience under the Bodhi tree" (72). Hoon proclaims upon descending that he was "not less" than himself (3), which speaks to the paradoxical Zen experience of finding one's true self by finding the no-self in Enlightenment (Abe, *Western* 165). Because the illusion of separation between himself and the rest of the world has been dispelled, Hoon perceives himself, in a sense, as transparent; he is what he experiences. Thus, he realizes that he "was the world in which [he] walked" (10), signifying that he no longer perceives a dualistic world. That he walks in the world demonstrates that Hoon rejoins the world after his Enlightenment.

The idea of rejoining the world after Enlightenment is

advocated in what is known as the Mountains and Waters Sutra, the teaching in which a Zen master describes the three stages he experienced in attaining Enlightenment. He says that before he began to study Zen thirty years ago, he thought that mountains are mountains and waters are waters. When he achieved realization, he understood that mountains are not mountains and waters are not waters. Now he sees that mountains are just mountains, and waters are just waters (qtd. in Tanahashi 309). Although the first and third stages appear the same to outsiders, they are different because in the third stage, the master perceives mountains and waters in their suchness. (See Chapter One for further discussion.) After realizing Emptiness and perceiving things as they really are in their suchness, the Zen master, like Siddhartha, re-enters the world. This resumption is necessary, as Griswold points out, to keep the student who has realized Emptiness from "getting stuck there in a quietistic bliss" (12). To Griswold and Aitken, a failure to depict the Snow Man taking that step back into the world with his changed perspective would constitute the depiction of an incomplete Enlightenment. Aitken says the poem does not depict that second step back into the world. Griswold says it does.

Griswold argues that if the poem is read as an "epistemological failure" and "a kind of elaborate joke" (12), it is clear that the Snow Man does become "unstuck"

from Emptiness. The Snow Man's "elaborate preparation" to "behold the winter as it is" is a clue, according to Griswold, that the poem is to be read as a joke (13). After going through what Griswold calls all the "complex ceremonials" (13) to see the world as it is, without projecting any ideas on it at all, the Snow Man still projects something upon the world, and it is himself, in his nothingness. To Griswold, the last words of the last line make this projection clear. The Snow Man perceives not only "Nothing that is not there," which means the world without any ideas, but he also perceives "the nothing that is" (emphasis added). For Griswold, Stevens' use of the article "the" before "nothing" makes it the specific, constructed nothing that is the Snow Man, and it is "not emptiness discovered but imposed" (13). According to Griswold's argument, because Stevens recognizes that the Snow Man has projected his own nothingness onto the world, the poem clearly demonstrates that the Snow Man is attached to Emptiness, and in that attachment he is doing what Zen teachers call "guarding the corpse" (14). Therefore, according to Griswold, the poem demonstrates the necessity of detachment from Emptiness. I agree that the poem can be read in that way, but demonstrating "the necessity of detachment from Emptiness" (emphasis added) is not the same as demonstrating the step that actually accomplishes that detachment. Perhaps during the poem the Snow Man recognizes

his attachment to Emptiness, but he does not become free of it in the poem.

Aitken does not break the last line into parts. He considers the entire last line, "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is," as a whole and says that it is evocative of the Heart Sutra (Aitken, "Wallace" 71), a widely used Zen teaching that focuses on the essence of Emptiness (Zen x). Aitken quotes the line from the Heart Sutra that he finds similar to the last line of "The Snow Man": "form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form" (Aitken, "Wallace" 71; Zen 91). In Zen, form is one of the five skandas, or aggregates, of phenomena. The other skandas are feeling, perception, impulses, and consciousness (Tanahashi 284). The Heart Sutra goes on to say that the other four skandas are also empty, and in fact "all things are empty appearances" (Zen 91). This means simply that nothing in the world has a self-sustaining existence. Everything in the world depends upon something else for its existence, and is therefore empty, according to Zen. Regardless of what the Snow Man sees, it is all empty, and if he sees "Nothing that is not there," he is adding no abstractions to the scene, and all that he perceives is the reality of empty phenomena.

In looking at the last line as a whole unit and not addressing Stevens' use of the article "the" before

"nothing," Aitken does not acknowledge what Griswold takes to be an objectification of "nothing." Griswold argues that the use of the article makes "nothing" a specific, objectified thing. I agree that such is the usual case, but here I think the use of the article cannot be avoided. Without it, the line would say that the Snow Man beholds "Nothing that is not there and nothing that is," which is misleading because the last part of the line now says that the Snow Man does not see anything that is there. The Snow Man does see the phenomena before him. We know he sees them because the pine boughs, junipers, and spruces are mentioned in the earlier lines. Further, the first part of the line, in saying that the Snow Man sees "Nothing that is not there," implies that he *does* see things that are there. And what is there? Whatever is meant by "the nothing." One answer is that "the nothing" means the Snow Man himself, which does not work because the Snow Man cannot behold himself. Another answer is Griswold's reading, which says that "the nothing" is Emptiness, which the Snow Man has realized, objectified, and recognized as an attachment. Yet another possible answer is that "the nothing" means the phenomena in their Emptiness, and the article "the" is necessary to prevent misunderstanding. That the article "the" seems to objectify an unobjectifiable entity merely points to the failure of language to convey adequately the reality of experience in the present moment. Any attempt to

capture an experience in words is necessarily a retrospective reconstruction of reality rather than the experience of reality itself (Kasulis 60). The attempt fails, and will always fail, because communication requires an object, and Zen Emptiness, as experience, cannot be an object.

The Snow Man beholds "the nothing that is" there, meaning the present phenomena in their Emptiness. That describes an experience of Enlightenment. Whether Enlightenment comes suddenly and completely, as the Rinzai school teaches, or in the form of a gradual growth of clear awareness, as the Soto school teaches (Tworkov 258-259), it must be followed by the return to "mountains are mountains." The necessity of this detachment from Emptiness does not mean, however, that a poem attempting to characterize Enlightenment must also depict the detachment that must follow. The nature of communication is that it fails to convey adequately direct experience. If the instrument is known to be inadequate, why fault it for being what it is? Scores of Zen texts have already failed, and will continue to fail, at depicting the experience of Enlightenment for the simple reason that direct experience cannot be conveyed in words. Aitken predicted that Stevens would be a source of inspiration for Western teachers of Zen, not that he would teach Zen himself. In "The Snow Man," teachers of Zen find an opportunity to discuss the realization of Emptiness.

In beholding "Nothing that is not there," the Snow Man would now regard the previous scene, "the frost and the boughs/ Of the pine-trees crusted with snow" (2-3), "the junipers shagged with ice,/ The spruces rough in the distant glitter/ Of the January sun" (5-7), differently. Although the scene appears to be spare, the description is rife with abstractions. Both "frost" and "boughs" are concepts, as are the varieties of trees (pine, junipers, and spruces), and the words "shagged," "rough," "distant," "glitter," and "January." All of these words depend upon a differentiation that requires a particular perspective, a point that B.J. Leggett discusses in terms of perspectivism for his Nietzschean reading of the poem (*Early* 187-95).

According to Zen, these differentiations are both possible and necessary within the duality that is imposed by the discriminating, ordinary mind. The object of Zen is to move beyond duality in recognizing and accepting the interlocking interdependency of all things; in other words, to experience phenomena not as ideas, and not as self-existing entities, but as things that are dependent on everything else for their existence. The Snow Man experiences Emptiness, but he does not experience it until the end of the poem, when the phenomena mentioned in the earlier lines are realized as Empty in themselves.

The fact that Stevens said the poem is about reality suggests that his notion of reality is similar to that of

Zen teachings on the subject. Zen Buddhism teaches that reality is the absence of abstractions (Radcliff and Radcliff 27) and that Zen itself is "the direct experience of reality" (32). D.T. Suzuki, the first to write on Zen for the West, defines reality as "that which remains behind...when all the outer skin or casing falls off" (*Living* 30). Another Zen commentator says that "reality is what is now happening—it is not outside our experience, but the construct being worked out in our experience" (Kasulis 61). To Stevens, reality "is not that external scene but the life that is lived in it. Reality is things as they are" (*Necessary* 25). For Stevens and for Zen, reality is experience.

Stevens exhibits, or attempts to exhibit, this same sense of reality in other poems. In "The Plain Sense of Things" (*CP* 502), as Griswold notes (13), the narrator attempts to see the world free of the imagination. When he reaches what seems like "an end of the imagination" (3), however, he realizes that even "the absence of the imagination had/ Itself to be imagined" (14-15). A Zen approach would be to experience the moment, not imagine an absence. In the phrase "After the leaves have fallen" (1), leaves are a metaphor for thoughts. This suggests that after all thoughts have left the mind, as in meditation, "we return/ To a plain sense of things" (1-2), free of

abstractions. In this state, when attempting to perceive the world without abstractions, it is "difficult," as Stevens says, "even to choose the adjective" (5) to describe such a state. Adjectives depend upon a dualistic differentiation that is overcome in meditation. This points out once again the failure of words to describe direct experience, especially that of Emptiness or the meditative state.

Griswold reads "A Quiet Normal Life" (CP 523) as similar to "The Snow Man" because it says that "those who attempt to see the world as it is and free of projections are not aware how much they are still projecting" (13). In negating his self-constructed place, the character notes that he is not, for instance, "an inhabitant, obedient/ To gallant notions on the part of the cold" (5-6). However, in ascribing "gallant notions" to "cold" (6) and "night" (11) he piles abstraction upon abstraction. As the last line indicates, his "actual candle blazed with artifice," meaning that his mind was still creating abstractions.

The "anti-master-man" in "Landscape with Boat" (CP 241) attempts to find the truth by brushing away everything. He imagines the truth to be "single-colored, colorless, primitive" (13), lying "in an uncreated night" (15), or perhaps in a place that had to be imagined, a place he could reach only "by rejecting what he saw/ And denying what he heard" (22-23). In short, to find the truth he "had only

not to live" (23). In a play on "The Snow Man," the anti-master-man expects to become a void that will be projected into another (24-25). The truth presented in the final section of the poem is Stevens' own idea of reality, which is experience. What has not occurred to anti-master-man is that he, in his experience of life, is part of truth, and that indeed, "the world itself was the truth" (40). Stevens says that had the anti-master-man "been better able to suppose" he might have experienced the reality of the world and said "The thing I hum appears to be/ The rhythm of this celestial pantomime" (47-48). Zen teaches that all things in the world are interlocking and interdependent, including human beings, so the final image of the anti-master-man humming in tune with the world is compatible with Zen teaching. Stevens probably puts more stock in imagination than Zen does, however, because he says the anti-master-man could see the truth if he were "better able to suppose," suggesting that imagination is a necessary part of perceiving reality.

"Study of Two Pears" (CP 196) demonstrates another attempt to perceive reality, being an attempt to see an object as it really is. Although the "object" is two pears, not one, the narrator does not call attention to the separateness of the pears. He does not indicate that there are two, except in the title, although he does use plural nouns and pronouns when referring to the pears. This

treatment suggests an attempt to avoid the conventional mind's compulsive separation and categorization. After all, the conventional mind would immediately want to call attention to the fact of two pears and to begin comparing them to each other. Stevens' observer refrains from that act. However, he does employ other abstractions in describing shape ("tapering") and color ("citrons"), so his avoidance of the number of pears may point to a kind of blindness on the part of the observer. Although it is likely that both pears have stems, the "hard dry leaf" (15) is said to hang from "the stem" (16), not "a stem" or "one of the stems," implying that the two pears have only one stem. The narrator treats the two pears as a single object, and in doing so, he ignores the most obvious element of the pears as they exist, the fact that there are two of them.

In stanza I, the narrator refuses to see the pears as a resemblance of anything else. He wants to see them as they are. He does not say what they are or how many he sees, but he knows what they are not and what they do not resemble. In stanzas II and III, he describes their shapes: "forms/ Composed of curves/ Bulging toward the base" (6-8); "Having curved outlines./ They are round/ Tapering toward the top" (10-12). In stanza IV, he finds "bits of blue" (14) on them and notices the "hard dry leaf" (16). In stanza V, he describes the tones of yellow in the skin. Finally in stanza VI, he describes the "shadows of the pears" (21)

instead of the pears themselves. He concludes that "The pears are not seen/ As the observer wills" (23-24). Similar to the Snow Man as critiqued by Griswold, the observer of the two pears goes through complex preparations to "study" two pears. He describes disparate elements of the pears, but he fails to convey to the reader what the pears are really like.

The pears are not seen "as the observer wills" because the observer is "willing" himself to see the pears instead of just looking at them. He is trying too hard. However, he is also trying to convey with language, without the use of metaphor, the experience of the pears, a futile exercise. According to a famous story, the master Po-chang was asked to define Zen. He replied, "When hungry, eat; when tired, sleep" (Watts, *Way* 99). Po-chang might have offered some advice to Stevens' observer on how to study pears: "Just look at them." A less verbose Zen master might have picked up a pear and taken a bite out of it.

From a Zen perspective, part of the problem in perceiving reality is the bifurcated self, composed of the true self and the illusion of the ego. The ego compulsively creates abstractions in an effort to understand the world, paradoxically obscuring reality and creating anxiety. Masao Abe says that self-estrangement and anxiety are inherent in the structure of human identity and cannot be overcome "unless we first overcome the ego-self and awaken to our

true Self" (*Western* 6-7). If the ego-self is overcome, according to Zen, the mind is calmed and no longer suffers. Stevens seems to disagree that overcoming the ego-self would be sufficient. In "The Poems of Our Climate" (*CP* 193) he says that even if viewing the simplicity of carnations in a bowl of water were to conceal the "evilily compounded, vital I" (13), "[s]till one would want more, one would need more, / More than a world of white and snowy scents" (16-17). He says "the never-resting mind" would still remain (18). Here he is at odds with Zen teaching, which claims that overcoming the ego-self quenches desire and ends suffering. Yet even Zen teachers readily admit that few people sustain the rested mind for any appreciable length of time. Thus, daily meditation is recommended. In addition, Zen does not advocate "concealment" of the "evilily compounded, vital I" because such an attempt would only make the ego more active. In Zen, the ego is overcome through the boredom brought on by meditation (Radcliff and Radcliff 125).

The poem that is perhaps Stevens' most forceful treatment of reality is "The Rock" (*CP* 525-528), which Robert Tompkins reads as a tension between being, which "is imagined as a barren, lifeless emptiness," and the illusion of consciousness, which seeks to transform that barrenness (Tompkins 35). As Tompkins notes, the consciousness that narrates the poem assumes that time is a being separate from

itself, and that assumption, which is false by Zen thinking, preserves a dualism that both prevents the poem from being transparent and keeps its consciousness in a state of suffering (35). Stated more simply, in "The Rock" Stevens presents the continual impulse of the conventional mind to categorize, interpret, and adorn reality. Zen reality is the present moment in the absence of abstractions, and in Stevens' poem, that reality is symbolized by the rock. As he does in "The Plain Sense of Things," Stevens here uses leaves as a metaphor for thoughts. All the adornments of the rock, such as the leaves, symbolize the mind's propensity to "clarify" reality by covering it over with ideas. Zen does not characterize reality as "barren." In fact, Zen does not characterize reality at all because to do so would be to objectify it. However, from the perspective of the conventional mind, reality would seem "barren," and it is from this perspective that Stevens writes. The conventional mind wants to "cure" the barren rock by transforming it with ideas. If the barren rock were transformed, however, and were to become something other than what it is, the conventional mind would no longer exist because reality would not exist.

The first section, "Seventy Years Later," illustrates the Zen idea that the past is only an idea about reality, not reality itself, because it is not present experience. The narrator recalls the past and remarks that it "is an

illusion that we were ever alive" (1), meaning that the past is an illusion, not reality. From a Zen standpoint, the sun in this poem is a symbol of the conventional mind because, like the conventional mind, it creates "its own happiness" (18). Stevens' sun creates a meeting of two people "at noon at the edge of the field" (12) when, significantly, the sun is at its strongest point. The metaphor suggests that the conventional mind is at the height of its imaginative powers when two people meet. The "green leaves" that cover the rock of reality (22) and the "lilacs" that bloom (23) satisfy the sun because they adorn reality. This action of adorning reality symbolizes the conventional mind's imposing abstractions upon reality in an effort to understand the world (Radcliff and Radcliff 41).

The final lines of the section say that the "blooming" of the lilacs and the "musk/ Were being alive, an incessant being alive" (25-26). The word "being" here should be interpreted as "the state of being," so that the lines mean that the act of blooming and the then-present fragrance of musk were, seventy years ago, the life-filled experience of the state of being. These two sensory experiences function as particulars within the general concept of being, or existence. The "being" in the last line of the section is said to be "that gross universe" in that it is the undifferentiated everything that exists prior to the conventional, discriminating mind.

Part II, "The Poem as Icon," is a celebration of the imaginative powers of the conventional mind. Having shown in the previous section that the mind continually seeks to adorn reality, Stevens now uses the poem itself as an icon or symbol of how fanciful the mind can be in performing its task. In this section, the mind is not content just to "cover the rock with leaves" (28) but wants to "be cured of it by a cure of the ground/ Or a cure of ourselves, that is equal to a cure/ Of the ground" (29-31). That "a cure of ourselves" is "equal to a cure/ Of the ground" is consistent with Zen teaching, which says that nothing happens in isolation. How does one "cure" reality of its barrenness? In *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Robert Pirsig explains the concept this way: "You want to know how to paint a perfect painting? It's easy. Make yourself perfect and then just paint naturally" (293). Similarly, the way to cure reality of its barrenness is to adjust the mind so that it no longer perceives reality as barren and no longer feels compelled to adorn reality. The narrator asks for a cure that is "beyond forgetfulness" (31), meaning that we cannot merely forget that we like to adorn reality. We must be aware of that impulse and yet lose the desire for it. This releasing of the conventional mind from its impulse to form abstractions is the Zen realization of Emptiness.

The conventional mind that narrates the poem then suggests another alternative: If the leaves "broke into

bud," bloomed, and bore fruit; and if we ate the fruit, that might be "a cure of the ground" (32-35). In other words, if we follow the impulse to adorn reality, nurture that impulse, and consume the product of it, we may be cured. What the narrator suggests is the creation of poetry. This "fiction of the leaves" (35), he says, "is the icon/ Of the poem".../ And the icon is the man" (36-38). The leaves' blooming and bearing fruit to be eaten is a metaphor for the creation of poetry. In trying to adorn reality, we create poetry, and creating poetry is a human act; thus fiction is poem is human being, especially according to Zen, which teaches that the person is the act.

In "bear[ing] their fruit so that the year is known" poetry becomes a particular thing from a particular time that can be understood as though it were fruit that could be eaten. A poem exists as a thing that can be consumed in an eternal present even though it is an artifact from an abstraction of time. This suggests, as Tompkins indicates, that the narrating consciousness of the poem considers time as a being separate from himself (35). Although Tompkins says that such a dualistic view perpetuates suffering (35), it does not necessarily have that effect. Zen does not teach that all abstractions must be eliminated. It teaches that abstractions must be recognized for what they are (Radcliff and Radcliff 20-21). Poetry is a representative of the abstractions of the imagination. If it is seen as

such and not mistaken for reality, it does not perpetuate suffering in the Buddhist sense. The poem, according to Stevens, "makes meanings of the rock" (55) so that "its barrenness becomes a thousand things/ And so exists no more" (57). These lines do not say that reality no longer exists, only that "its barrenness" exists no more. The creation of poetry allows the conventional mind to perceive meanings in reality so that reality no longer seems barren. This is similar to the function of scriptures or teachings in the practice of Zen. The teaching is said to be a finger pointing to the moon. The moon is reality, and the finger is used as a guide in the direction of the moon. Once the moon is seen, the finger is no longer needed (Thien-An 22). The creation of poetry allows the mind to find meaning in the otherwise barren reality. At some point, the mind can face reality without the poetry.

In part III, "Forms of the Rock in a Night-Hymn," reality is "the gray particular of man's life" (61) from which he rises and descends. In other words, it is the absolute on which everything of his life is based. The sun, a symbol for the conventional mind, is a prominent image in the first section. Night, a prominent image in the third section, represents, according to Dogen, the realm of nonduality (Tanahashi 313). The "cure" having been effected in section II through poetry, the mind can now accept the rock of reality as the "the habitation of the whole" (70)

and the "starting point of the human and the end" (76).

"The Rock" begins as a complaint about the past, which can be read as suffering that comes about from trying to hold on to the illusion of the past. It ends with a calm acceptance of reality. What brings about the transformation is the creation of poetry.

Although the sun seems to symbolize the conventional mind in "The Rock," in "Questions Are Remarks" (CP 462) it seems to stand for reality. The poem begins in "the weed of summer" when "this green sprout why" appears (1). This alludes to the inevitability of abstractions popping up, even in the midst of a site known for its connection with reality, which summer would suggest. The sun tries to shine through "adult enfantillages" (3), which Aitken takes for "the ascription of human qualities to non-human things, beginning with 'why,' the conceptual weed which takes us furthest from realization of things as they are" (71). In contrast to the adults, described as "drowsy, infant, old men" (18), Stevens presents his grandson "Peter the voyant" (7) who clearly asks the "complete" (9) question: "Mother, what is that" (7). The image is that of a child squarely facing reality. Instead of asking "this green sprout why," Peter asks simply what it is. To Stevens, the question cuts through "antique acceptances" (5) and "so much rhetoric" (8), the stale ideas we associate with the sun/reality. It is the fresh, Zen-like approach of a child who is not burdened

with knowledge. While other poems in *The Rock* show, as Tompkins says, the "unmaking of the mind" (36) "Questions Are Remarks" shows the mind before it needs unmaking.

In "The Irish Cliffs of Moher" (CP 501) Stevens' narrator unmakes the mind by asking who his father is — not the traditional idea of father, but "my father in this world, in this house,/ At the spirit's base" (1-2). The question goes to the heart of identity "before thought, before speech" (5). This is reminiscent of a Zen koan: "Not thinking of good, not thinking of evil, just this moment, what is your original face before your mother and father were born?" (Kasulis 52). For Zen, that "original face" is the self in the absence of "all conceptualizations and learned responses" (51-52). In seeking the father that is "before thought, before speech" (5), the Stevens poem also gets to the core of identity, and I think it and the koan reach the same point. Stevens' narrator says his ancestors go back to "the cliffs of Moher" (7), which rise "out of present time and place" (9). He looks at the landscape, then negates it, saying it is his father. Then he negates that statement and says the landscape is a "likeness, one of the race of fathers" (15). This suggests that the original "father" is ineffable, like the true self of Zen. This poem represents an "unmaking" of the mind because it resists the separation and categorization of dualism that the mind tends to perform.

In a final unmaking of the mind, Stevens wrote in the last year of his life "Of Mere Being" (*Opus* 141), a poem that Tompkins says is "not about anything at all" (38). It is not "about" anything because it is a depiction of an image in a mind "[b]eyond the last thought" (2). The "gold-feathered bird" (4) is said to sing "without human meaning" (5) because a human mind is not interpreting it. The human mind that depicts the image is at rest, in meditation. In Zen meditation, the resting mind is not considered a void, but more like space, where "thoughts and perceptions come and go, like planets moving through the heavens" (Radcliff and Radcliff 106). Thus, during meditation the image of a palm tree may appear, it may have a gold-feathered bird in it, and that bird may even sing, but the resting mind will neither seek nor avoid the image. The resting mind merely allows the thoughts and perceptions to come and go without comment.

Significantly, even the mind at rest does not totally refrain from categorizing. The tree at the end of the mind is identified as a palm, and the place where it rises is described as "the bronze decor" (3). The bird is "gold-feathered" (4), which is yet another categorization, and the sounds it makes are described as a song, though without "human meaning" (5). However, as Tompkins says, within this original mind "a new self, a new style and a new awareness arise within language that moves utterly beyond any after-

image or isolated preoccupation with one's fate or the world's" (39). Meditation, the return to original mind, is practiced for no purpose, just as the bird in the palm merely "sings" (9), without reason, in either sense of the word. Stevens captures that moment of no-mind which is "the source of our experience of the universe" and from which, like the Buddha arising from his Enlightenment, we "become truly spontaneous and responsive to the flow of events" (Kasulis 37). It is from this state that action without attachment is possible.

Stevens demonstrated an interest in the art and poetry of the East virtually his entire life, and key concepts identified with Eastern thought inform his poems. Like Eliot, Stevens developed a way of looking at the world that is profoundly compatible with the teachings of Zen Buddhism. It is difficult to say what factors moved Stevens to write about reality, Emptiness, action without attachment, and the true self. Aitken declines to question the reasons for "the connection between a certain kind of poet and a certain kind of religion," saying that "if we let it, Stevens' 'green sprout why' would take over our civilization" (72). Like Aitken, we can release the "green sprout why" and consider Stevens' poems in a Zen context without having to explain to ourselves how they came to be what they are.

Chapter Four

William Carlos Williams: A Reality of Non-Attachment

The Eastern influence on the poems of William Carlos Williams seems to manifest itself most clearly in his short, haiku-like poems such as "The Red Wheelbarrow," which was published in *Spring and All* in 1923. However, other poems that have no overt connection with the East more clearly demonstrate elements of Eastern thought, and "The Red Wheelbarrow" itself yields to an Eastern reading beyond its formal aspects. Many of Williams' poems, in fact, embody the Zen concept of nondualism. They have as their underlying assumption a world view that is remarkably Zen-like, consisting of an interdependent and interlocking network of particulars that are free of abstractions.

From a Zen standpoint, Williams' poems are most interesting when they depict the nondualistic world in a timeless moment. This nondualistic world, which is actually the conventional world seen in an unconventional way, is Zen reality. The objects in this world are "real" in the sense that they exist, but they are "empty" in the Zen sense, which means that they are realized as entities that are not self-sustaining. They do not stand as separate from and in opposition to other things. Their existence depends upon the existence of something else; they are part of an interlocking and interdependent network. Further, they appear just as they are, free of ideas about their purpose,

quality, usefulness, or virtue. Thus, the objects appear in their "suchness." Zen teaches that the experience of the world in its suchness cannot be expressed in words, but even Zen poets repeatedly try, knowing their words will fall short. They work without attachment to the concepts of "success" or "failure," finding peace in the attempt itself.

Williams' poems appear to be repeated attempts to portray objects in their suchness, sometimes using the technique of not-naming in an effort to avoid objectification. Whether Williams was consciously making this effort or was even aware of the concept of "suchness" is difficult to know. However, in the opening pages of *Spring and All*, he demonstrated that he knew something about the concept:

The reader knows himself as he was twenty years ago and he has also in mind a vision of what he would be, some day. Oh, some day! But the thing he never knows and never dares to know is what he is at the exact moment that he is. And this moment is the only thing in which I am at all interested. (CP1 177-178)

In that passage, Williams indicates that the present moment, free of all ideas about the past and future, reveals us as we really are. Zen teaches that this state reveals us in our suchness.

In the poems of *Sour Grapes* and *Spring and All*,

Williams demonstrates a firm knowledge of Zen reality. He depicts objects in their suchness, a nondualistic reality of interlocking interdependency, and the concept of action without attachment. In "The farmer in deep thought" (CP1 186) he shows how easily we fall into dualistic thinking, and in "The crowd at the ball game" (CP1 233) he shows the dangers of it. In *Paterson*, Williams demonstrates that the search for "beauty" requires that we release all thought of separation, especially those separations that are so common as to be thought ordained. In this long poem, Williams reveals that his reality is Zen reality.

There are indications that in addition to expressing Zen concepts in his poems, Williams also recognized them in his daily life, although his grasp of them seems incomplete. The experience he called "immediacy" that occurred while working with his patients sounds remarkably like a brief experience of Enlightenment, as does his reaction to suddenly being confronted with a fire engine, its sirens roaring and bells clanging. As he stated in *Spring and All*, Williams was drawn to the immediacy of the present moment. This is a concept commonly associated with Zen but often misinterpreted. The discussion of "This Is Just to Say" (CP1 372) clarifies the difference between a pure, selfless moment and fulfillment of desire. Whether Williams thought the poem expressed a pure moment of immediacy or something

else is a moot point, but the poem invites discussion of ethical issues, as does "The crowd at the ball game" (CP1 233). Equally difficult to answer and perhaps equally as moot is the question of how Williams came to embrace Zen reality.

Williams' poems took on Zen-like characteristics after 1915, the year he read *Cathay*, a newly published book of poems translated from the Chinese by his old college friend Ezra Pound. In a letter to Harriet Monroe the same year, Williams said that *Cathay* contained "perhaps a few of the greatest poems ever written" (qtd. in Mariani 122).

By 1915, Williams had earned his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania (1906), served internships at the French Hospital and Child's Hospital in New York City (1906-1909), self-published his first book of poetry (1909), studied pediatrics at the University of Leipzig (1909-1910), married Florence Herman (1912), published in London his second collection of poems, *The Tempers* (1913), and was writing and practicing medicine from his home at Nine Ridge Road in Rutherford, New Jersey (Mazzaro 1; Mariani xiii). Also about this time, Williams began associating with a group of New York poets, artists, and critics including Alfred Kreyborg, Malcolm Cowley, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, and Maxwell Bodenheim (Mariani 123).

Like other poets of that time, Williams began to

explore Chinese literature and culture shortly after reading *Cathay* (Qian 141). Williams is known to have read H.A. Giles' *A History of Chinese Literature* (120) and two books of translations by Arthur Waley, *One Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems* and *More Translations from the Chinese* (Qian 129). Williams' interest in the East continued beyond the immediate excitement generated by *Cathay*. When Flossie Williams dispersed the contents of her husband's personal library after his 1963 death, about two dozen works relating to the East remained in the collection. They included the volumes by Waley and Giles, Lofcadio Hearn's 1915 *Japanese Lyrics*, two copies of *Quaint Stories of Samurais* by Saikaku Ibara published in 1928, a 1904 handbook called *Chinese Made Easy* (Qian 179-180), the Edward FitzGerald translation of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* ("Descriptive...Fairleigh" 33), and a 1956 edition of *The Setting Sun* by Osamu Dazai (36). The range of dates demonstrates that Williams' interest in the East was long-lasting, if less wide-ranging than Stevens' or Eliot's. In addition, Williams began working in 1958 with David Rafael Wang on a translation of Chinese poems. It was published after Williams' death as "The Cassia Tree" (CP2 359, 501).

Williams' interest in the East is also evident in his autobiography, where he expressed an appreciation for

Chinese art and the Orient in general. At a museum of Oriental art in Seattle in 1950, he saw "the finest examples of Chinese carving" he had ever seen and a painting of crows in flight that "might open our minds...to many worlds" (371). On the same trip while at a museum in Eugene, Oregon, he admired the Oriental collection brought from China during the Boxer Rebellion, saying that looking at a magnificent marble statue of a Chinese ruler "seemed to make the whole campus outside us an absurdity" (383). Williams remarked that the West Coast cities "faced the Orient" and "Europe had no more than a legendary hold on them" (382). He bemoaned the fact that college students looked to Europe for "culture" when the "Orient, which they fear, is their opportunity...to *embrace that new*" (383). Years earlier, during the period when Williams was reading the Chinese translations of Waley and Giles, his father died of cancer on Christmas Day 1918. That morning, the older man's presents to everyone were laid out. The gift for Williams was a bronze bell, which his father had had fitted with the ivory figure of a Chinese philosopher as a handle (166). For the elder Williams to have taken such care seems to indicate that the Chinese philosopher, whom Williams does not identify in the autobiography, held some significance for the poet.

In 1916, when Williams was beginning to visit New York frequently to hobnob with his circle of artistic friends, a

thirty-four-year-old Zen student and artist from Japan, Sokei-an Shigetsu Sasaki, settled in New York after living on the West Coast for ten years. Sasaki was well educated in English, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Japanese, and he was familiar with the social customs of the United States. Although he moved back and forth between Japan and the United States several times after 1919, by 1930 Sasaki settled permanently in New York and began giving Zen lectures in Manhattan (Farkas ix). He later married Ruth Fuller, a member of a wealthy Chicago family, who had studied Zen in Japan (xix). At the time he opened his zendo in New York, Sasaki said that his mission was to be "the first [Zen teacher] to bury his bones in this land and to mark this land with the seal of the Buddha's teaching" (xvii).

When he first arrived in New York in 1916, however, Sasaki was not certified to teach Zen. He found a job carving ivory and wood, painting boxes, and repairing art (Fields 178). In addition to being an artist, Sasaki was also a talented actor and writer (Farkas xviii). When he was not working, he was in Greenwich Village associating with other writers and artists (Farkas xvi; Fields 178). I have found no published evidence that he and Williams ever met. However, Sasaki did work with Maxwell Bodenheim, an acquaintance of Williams', on a translation of poems by Li Po (Farkas xvi; Fields 178). The five poems were published

in the November 1917 issue of *The Little Review* (Fields 402; Bodenheim 3-4). Sasaki also became friendly with "a woman from a Southern family who wrote pulp fiction" (Farkas xvi). The fiction writer reported that Sasaki gave her koans to work on, becoming angry when she easily passed ones that he had struggled with (xvi). Although Sasaki was not an ordained teacher of Zen at that time, he practiced Zen, meditating in parks and other public spaces throughout the city (xvi), and he was capable of explaining the Taoist and Zen elements of Li Po's poems as well as translating them.

Even if Williams and Sasaki never met, it is clear that they associated with people in the same circle, and it is equally clear that Sasaki talked about Chinese poetry and Zen to people whom Williams knew. The three years when Sasaki first lived in New York and frequented Greenwich Village, 1916-1919, coincide with the period when Williams and other poets were exploring Eastern literature and culture in the wake of Pound's *Cathay*. Sasaki's presence in that circle at that time means that those writers had access to someone who could talk knowledgeably about Chinese and Japanese literature and philosophy.

The work that Williams produced about that time contains several overt references to the East. Notably, the Prologue to *Kora in Hell*, written in 1918, mentions classical poet Li Po (*SE* 25-26) and Yang Kue-fei, a figure

from Chinese history and literature (SE 17). "Portrait of the Author," published in 1921, also mentions Yang Kuei-fei. Poem V from the 1923 *Spring and All* (CP1 190-191) refers to Chinese poems and also to "the bowmen of Shu" (191). More significant, however, is "To the Shade of Po Chu-i," which was written no later than 1920 but remained lost for many years in the files of *The Little Review* (Read 422).

Dennis Read discovered six previously lost poems among the editorial files of *The Little Review* in the Special Collections of the Golda Meir Library at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Read 422). "To the Shade of Po Chu-i" was sent to *The Little Review* along with five other poems, probably in 1920, but none of them were published by the magazine (422-423). Of those six poems, Williams included "Winter Trees," "Complaint," and "The Cold Night" in his *Sour Grapes* collection published at the end of 1921. "Winter Trees" had appeared in the January 1921 issue of *Dial* (423). The other three poems, "To the Shade of Po Chu-i," "Cats' Month," and "Daybreak," were either rejected by Williams himself for *Sour Grapes* or, as Read thinks more likely, remained unnoticed in the files of *The Little Review* (424, 422).

The Po Chu-i of Williams' title was a Chinese Taoist poet who lived 772-846. The Taoism of Po Chu-i is relevant

to this study because of the close similarities between Taoism and Zen Buddhism. Taoism, like Zen, is a way of liberation from conventional thought (Watts, *Way* 3-4).

Taoism originated in China in the fourth to third century B.C. Tradition says that Bodhidharma brought Zen to China in the sixth century, but another form of Buddhism is said to have been introduced to China in the first century. To the Chinese of that time, Buddhism seemed similar to Taoism, and at first, Chinese Buddhists used Taoist terms to explain Buddhist doctrine. By the time Zen achieved a separate identity in the eighth century, most Chinese knew clearly that Taoism and Buddhism, including Zen, were two different things. Although Taoism and Zen for the most part use different terms, some of the concepts they teach are virtually identical. Both Zen and Taoism teach nonduality, action without attachment (*wu-wei*), and the inadequacy of language. The underlying world view in the poems of Po Chu-i, then, can be discussed in terms used by Zen.

Po Chu-i's masterpiece is his 120-line poem *Chang hen ge*, composed in 806, which is translated in Giles' *A History of Chinese Literature* as "The Everlasting Wrong" (Qian 120; Giles 168-175). It is based on the true story of Yang Kuei-fei¹, the favorite concubine of emperor Ming Huang, who

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The Wade-Giles system for the transliteration of Chinese was in use during Williams' time. In *Orientalism and*

reigned 712-756 (Qian 115). According to the account provided by Giles, after Yang Kuei-fei came to the palace, Ming Huang neglected his official duties in favor of "revelry and dissipation" (Giles 168). A rebellion broke out, and the court fled to another city. Ming Huang returned only after abdicating in favor of his son (168). As members of the court were fleeing the capital city, however, the imperial soldiers refused to go any further until Yang Kuei-fei, "she of the moth-eyebrows," was dead (171).

As Zhaoming Qian notes, Williams alluded to Yang Kuei-fei in both the Prologue to *Kora in Hell* and "Portrait of the Author" (122). I believe that "To the Shade of Po Chu-i" also contains an allusion to Yang Kuei-fei, in the image of the girl in the red tam. While I read Williams' poem as somber, Qian reads it as lighthearted, pointing out that it was probably inspired by several of Po Chu-i's lighter poems on aging that were translated by Waley. Among those are "At the End of Spring (To Yuan Chen)" (Qian 133), "On Being Sixty" (Waley 124; Qian 132), "On His Baldness" (Qian 132-133), and "Going to the Mountains with a Little Dancing Girl, Aged Fifteen, Written when the poet was about sixty-five" (Waley 126; Qian 133).

Modernism, Qian uses the Pinyin system in which Po Chu-i is called Bo Juyi and Yang Kuei-fei is called Yang Guifei. For consistency, I use the Wade-Giles system throughout the study.

Because Williams' narrator addresses the shade of Po Chu-i and says "I try to comfort myself/ with thought of your old age" (3-4), the poem undeniably refers to Po Chu-i's poems about aging. Po Chu-i's poems depict an old age that is comforting. At sixty years of age, the Chinese poet says he is "still short of illness and decay and far from decrepit old age" and when drunk he can "recall old poems and sing a whole volume" (Waley 125). At sixty-five years of age, Po Chu-i goes to the mountains with a fifteen-year-old dancing girl where they "splash and play" in the spring fountains (Waley 126). Further, Po Chu-i writes that he does not mind being bald because his "tiresome comb for ever is laid aside" (qtd. in Qian 132), and finally in "At the End of Spring (To Yuan Chen)," he writes "It does not matter whether one is young or old" (qtd. in Qian 133). It is significant, however, that the narrator says he *tries* to comfort himself with thoughts of Po Chu-i's old age. He does not say that he actually finds that comfort.

Discomfort is present from the opening line, where the narrator says "The work is heavy." That note is sounded again in the second line, where the "bare branches" are "laden with snow" (emphasis added). Next, the narrator attempts to comfort himself with thoughts of Po Chu-i's old age. Qian argues that the poem begins by equating "a somber feeling (human suffering) with a somber landscape (nature's suffering)" and then changes abruptly by juxtaposing that

scene with "the image of the flamboyant girl" (135), the girl in a red tam. He further proposes that the girl is "a visionary projection of what is craved after," an example of Williams' "seeing and imagining at the same moment" (135).

I don't agree that the appearance of the girl in the red tam constitutes an abrupt change because I do not see her as flamboyant, nor do I think she should be considered a vision. Nothing in the poem indicates that the girl is any less real than the "bare branches." Only her red tam might possibly be considered "flamboyant," but that same "flamboyant" red is also the color of blood. When she appears, her coat is "snow smeared from running and falling" (7), sounding a note more somber than flamboyant. The tone is further confirmed by the final lines, "Of what shall I think now/ save of death the bright dancer?" (8-9). Once the narrator sees the girl, he can think of nothing but death, evoking the image of Yang Kuei-fei, her death imminent.

The girl in the red tam, with her "quick ankles" (6), can be equated with Po Chu-i's teenaged companion who "quickness her sleeve-dancing" (Waley 126), and both are linked to the image of "death the bright dancer" (9). This image of "death the bright dancer" also relates to Yang Kuei-fei. In Giles' version of the story of Yang Kuei-fei, she is dancing to a song called "Rainbow Skirt and Feather Jacket" when the revolution erupts (Giles 170). She dances

again to that tune in the spirit world when Ming Huang sends a Taoist priest to see about her (174). Thus, Yang Kuei-fei is also a "bright dancer."

Because the death of Yang Kuei-fei, the bright dancer, is central to her story, she has a stronger claim than Po Chu-i's teenager does for reminding Williams' narrator of "death the bright dancer." When Williams' narrator sees the girl in the red tam, he can think of nothing but death the bright dancer. This calls for a strong association between the girl and death, an association that Yang Kuei-fei has but Po Chu-i's teenager does not. Further, the girl in the red tam has been "running and falling" (7). Po Chu-i's teenager is said to "splash and play" and "climb and sport" (Waley 126), but she is not said to run and fall. Yang Kuei-fei, on the other hand, has to flee for her life, an action easily associated with "running and falling" (7). The words "heavy" (1), "laden" (2), "try to comfort" (3), and "running and falling" (7) all contribute to the poem's somber tone. That tone is further enhanced by the narrator's lack of choice in the final two lines when he can think of nothing but death.

Williams' poem is set in winter, probably as a way to signify that the narrator's life is drawing to an end, correlating his mood to the season. Po Chu-i's poems on aging, however, are not set in winter. "Going to the Mountains," for instance, speaks of "spring fountains" (Waley

126). Williams may have set the poem in winter to contrast with Po Chu-i's spring. Incidentally, however, Yang Kuei-fei's death took place in the winter of the year 755 (Qian 116). This detail is not mentioned in Giles' account of Yang Kuei-fei, but the story is a familiar one in China (117). If Williams knew that detail, then the setting of the poem would further link the girl in the red tam with Yang Kuei-fei. The fact that Sokei-an Sasaki had been working on translations of Chinese poems with at least one poet in Williams' circle just before Williams wrote the poem increases the likelihood that Williams knew more about Yang Kuei-fei's story than what is told in Giles' version. However, even without that link, the girl in the red tam can represent both Yang Kuei-fei and Po Chu-i's teenaged companion.

While "To the Shade of Po Chu-i" has easily discernible connections to the East, other poems by Williams are just as strongly connected although the link is not so visible. One example is "The Great Figure" (CP1 174), which from a Zen standpoint is as important for the circumstances under which it was written as it is for what it says.

Williams recalls in his autobiography that "coming back exhausted from the Post Graduate Clinic," he was approaching a friend's apartment when he heard "a great clatter of bells and the roar of a fire engine passing the end of the street" (172). Turning, he saw "a golden figure 5 on a red

background flash by" (172). "The impression was so sudden and forceful," he said, "that I took a piece of paper out of my pocket and wrote a short poem about it" (172). From a Zen standpoint, Williams' state of exhaustion disarmed his active, discriminating mind, allowing his true mind to accept sensory input without a filter. Such an experience is common to Zen students working on a koan in meditation. Koan study is used to bring the Zen student "to direct, intuitive realization of Reality without recourse to the mediation of words or concepts" (Miura x). The koan, designed to defeat dualistic thinking, exhausts the everyday mind. Once the student gives up, the answer can emerge, and it typically does so suddenly. In Williams' case, the figure appeared so suddenly that the discriminating mind was not able to reassert itself and categorize the image. Williams saw the figure 5 as it really is, without any abstractions, intellectual understanding, or interpretation. He saw the figure 5 in its suchness.

Some mediation did take place, however, between the initial appearance of the image and the image as it appears in the published poem. Williams reported that the event took place "on a hot July day" (172), but the poem takes place "Among the rain/ and lights" (1-2) in the "dark city" (13). Some sort of mediation between an event and the recording of it is inevitable because words are inadequate to convey experience. In the face of that inadequacy, the

poet creates an arrangement of words that will convey the spirit of the experience. The spirit of this particular experience is conveyed through the use of stark contrasts that constitute a dynamic whole. The "lights" of the second line contrast with "the dark city" in the last line; the gold figure 5 contrasts with the red firetruck. These contrasting particulars, however, move in concert with each other. The moving firetruck, complete with its gold figure 5, moves not "against" its background, but "Among the rain/ and lights" (1-2), and it moves "to gong clangs/ siren howls and wheels" (10-12), instead of in opposition to them (emphasis added in both cases).

What the narrator seems to see "moving/ tense/ unheeded" (7-9) is the figure 5, not the firetruck. Significantly, Williams does not explain the meaning of the figure 5. It is a discrete particular in its suchness, naturally but loosely connected to the firetruck, the moving, and the clangs and howls. That the entire assembly can move in concert, "unheeded" (9), suggests that its dynamic nature is ordinary.

The event of the poem itself is simple: A man notices the figure 5 on a firetruck as it passes by with its bells clanging. Yet this simple incident had a profound effect on Williams. The event is reminiscent of the experience of Hakuin (1685-1768), the Zen patriarch who gained "his first glimmer of enlightenment" at the sound of a temple bell

(Kasulis 115). The crucial element was not the sound of the temple bell, or in Williams' case the clanging of the firetruck bells, but the condition of the mind. Hakuin was so intent on his spiritual quest that as he meditated, he forgot to eat and rest. He became consumed with doubt, and for several days, he felt disconnected from his surroundings. Then at the sound of the temple bell, he was "suddenly transformed" (115). Williams' exhaustion served a similar purpose in that it prepared his mind to receive sensory data in a forceful manner. I do not suggest that Williams attained a "glimmer of enlightenment," but rather that his exhaustion made his mind especially receptive to sensory input, which the poet then used for his art.

There are other instances, however, that seem to indicate that Williams had some affinity to a Zen perspective. During the practice of medicine, Williams experienced what he called immediacy, the thing he "wanted to tell openly" (*Autobiography* 288). Being a physician gained him "entrance to these secret gardens of the self," he said, in which he saw "that secret world of perfection" (288). Williams describes such a moment as "an identifiable thing," with "its chief characteristic" being that it is "sure, all of a piece and, as I have said, instant and perfect: it comes, it is there, and it vanishes" (289). For Williams, such a moment would bring him a phrase which, he said, "fluttered before me for a moment, a phrase which I

quickly write down on anything at hand, any piece of paper I can grab" (289).

Although Williams did not characterize such moments as anything but artistic inspiration, they are, from a Zen perspective, moments in which separation between subject and object are dissolved. This notion is particularly clear in his description of what it was like to call on his patients:

I lost myself in the very properties of their minds: for the moment at least I actually became them, whoever they should be, so that when I detached myself from them at the end of a half-hour of intense concentration over some illness which was affecting them, it was as though I were reawakening from a sleep. For the moment I myself did not exist, nothing of myself affected me. As a consequence I came back to myself, as from any other sleep, rested. (356)

Williams again articulates that idea of dissolving the separation between self and Other when he says that his goal in writing *In the American Grain* was to "get inside the heads of some of the American founders or Heroes....I wanted nothing to get between me and what they themselves had recorded" (*Autobiography* 178).

Just as Williams sought to erase the separation between subject and object in the practice of medicine, he also sought in poetry to erase the observing "I," preferring a

dadaist succession of images without an encompassing narrative (Mariani 196). Yet he said later on that the poem should be considered as a "field rather than an assembly of more or less ankylosed lines" (*Autobiography* 329). His notion that a poem should be a succession of images and also part of a field brings to mind the Zen idea of the world being "a network of particulars, each reflecting the universal and taking reality from its relationship to all others" (Stryk 29).

"The Great Figure," which reflects that notion of reality, was published in *Sour Grapes*, Williams' 1921 collection. Dennis Read notes that many of the poems in *Sour Grapes* contain the "striking combination of sorrow and happiness, of regret and joy" common to Po Chu-i's poems, suggesting Waley's translations as a source (425). Qian, too, notes the similarities between the poems of *Sour Grapes* and Po Chu-i's poems, suggesting that the collection "to a certain extent embodies Williams' effort to see life as a whole, as Po Chu-i did in his time" (140). Some examples of Williams' efforts to present contrasting moods and images include "Berket and the Stars" (CP1 141), which depicts high spirits in contrast to "student poverty"; "Blizzard" (CP1 152), which shows the sun shining after a blizzard; "Winter Trees" (CP1 153), which contrasts the activity of spring and fall with the serenity of winter; "Complaint" (CP1 153),

which begins with complaining and ends with compassion; and "Thursday" (CP 157), which compares dreaming with practicality.

In addition to presenting contrasts and attempting to show life as a whole, some of the poems of *Sour Grapes* also attempt to present common objects and events in such a way that they escape stultification. This attempt to make things new was a lifelong goal for Williams. In a radio interview many years after the 1921 publication of *Sour Grapes*, Williams spoke of the need for continued experimentation in poetry to break the traditions. If the stultifying icons were broken, he said, the spirit inhabiting that icon would be free to "take again a form which will be more contemporary" (Mariani 609). Zen takes a similar approach in its distrust of the written or spoken word. Zen teaches that to name a concept or object forces it into a predetermined and intellectualized category. To refrain from naming the thing, and to present it just as it appears, leads the mind to reconsider the object. Williams' presentation of the figure 5 without an explanation of its meaning is an example.

In "The Lonely Street" (CP1 174), Williams continually refrains from naming. His only indication of who is walking is in the first line: "School is over." Although it becomes clear that the people who are walking are school children,

school girls, in fact, Williams does not identify them. He identifies them as girls only by the reference to "frocks" in line three and the use of the pronoun "her" in the next-to-last line.

He also avoids naming as he tells what the children are doing. In the sixth line, he says the children hold "pink flames," saying not what the objects are, but what they look like. In line 12, the pink flames are "pink sugar on a stick" and in the next line are said to be "like a carnation" (emphasis added). Williams refuses to say what object each child holds, except to give an answer that the reader knows is false: "pink flames." He resists using words to categorize and define the object, using them instead to disrupt conventional thought.

Williams' treatment of cotton candy is not the poem's only instance of the disruption of conventional thought. Although it is "too hot/ to walk at ease" (1-2), Williams immediately contradicts himself by saying that the children "At ease/ ...walk the streets" (2-3). He contradicts himself again in describing what the children wear. They are dressed in "white from head to foot" (7), and yet they are also "in yellow, floating stuff,/ black sash and stockings" (9-10). From a Zen viewpoint, however, these are not contradictions. The idea of "too hot" is relative, just as to walk "at ease" is relative. The categories "too hot" and "at ease" have been established by the narrator, and the

contradiction exists only in his mind. Similarly, the children are said to be dressed all in white and at the same time in yellow and black. The simplest answer is that one child is dressed all in white, another is dressed "in yellow, floating stuff" (9), and still another is wearing a "black sash and stockings" (10). Because the children have not been differentiated in the first six lines, the reader wants to continue thinking of the children as a group rather than separate entities. Thus, the reader's mind wants to stay with the kind of thinking that has already been established and assume they are all dressed alike. But the poem jolts the reader into a new kind of thought with the seemingly contradictory statement that they are dressed all in white but also in different colors.

Again in this poem, as he does in "The Great Figure," Williams presents a reality of particulars within a network. The children walking along eating cotton candy are differentiated by their clothing, yet allied with each other by walking together as they eat cotton candy. In the last line, Williams says the children "mount the lonely street." The word "mount," with its sexual connotations as well as its conventional usage of a rider climbing astride a horse, implies a closer bond between the children and the street than would have been the case had he used the phrase "walk the lonely street." Thus, the reality of the particular children and their cotton candy encompasses the particular

of the street.

In calling the street "lonely" and at the same time presenting it as a particular within a larger reality, Williams creates a world of wholeness that embraces the congeniality of a group of children as well as the solitude of a street. Reading this poem in a Zen context illuminates it in a way that remains closed, I think, to other readings. On its surface, "The Lonely Street" displays no connections to the East. Yet, Zen/Taoist concepts are embedded in it.

A similar move is at work in "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives" (CP1 146) where Williams avoids naming the thing, thereby leaving it free from stultification. The setting is a train station, but Williams does not mention the phrase "train station," describing instead the particulars within a dynamic reality.

The voices that announce incoming and outgoing trains are subtly compared to singers in a choir as Williams calls them "[m]en with picked voices" (1) who "chant the names/ of cities in a huge gallery" (1-2). Depicting what these men do while leaving them unnamed leads the reader to think of them in new ways instead of confining them to a stultified category. Similarly, instead of using the stale word "passengers," he speaks of "those coming to be carried" (6). Williams names the "great clock," but he exposes conventional ideas of time as illusion when he says that if the hands were to "move quickly and at once the whole/

secret would be out and the shuffling/ of all ants be done forever" (13-15). The "secret" is that timepieces do not mark a God-ordained something called "time," but are merely instruments of social consensus. If people knew that, he suggests, they would no longer allow their lives to be ruled by the clock.

A few lines later, Williams reads the time on the clock in the same way he reads the figure 5 in "The Great Figure." He reads the figures that the hands are pointing to just as they are, without interpretation: "two—twofour—twoeight!" (21). To read them conventionally, he would say "2:10—2:20—2:40!" At 2:10, only one hand is visible because both hands point to the figure 2. Thus, he says "two." At the other times, the hands point to two figures, and he calls out both figures. Williams resists the usual reading of time, and in the process he leads the reader to rethink conventions of time and timekeeping. This move also presents the numbers as particulars within the context of the clock as well as within the context of a larger reality, all of it empty of any meaning except that which is applied to it by the observer.

The train's leaving the station is represented by the one word "Taillights—" (36), which economically and vividly conveys the idea. But that departure is not the final end, as is indicated by the next two lines: "In time: twofour!/ In time: twoeight!" (37-38). In time, other trains will

leave. They will also return, as indicated in the lines "rails forever parallel/ return on themselves infinitely" (42-43). In the never-ending, never-beginning universe represented by the train station, something is always leaving, something always arriving. Yet this motion, like the motion of the "wheels repeating/ the same gesture" (40-41), is an illusion because the objects "remain relatively/ stationary" (41-42), their apparent motion depending upon their relationship with other objects.

Because the poem is titled "Overture to a Dance of Locomotives," the implication is that we are to read the actions in the train station as a prelude, not a part of the dance. However, this overture, like the parallel tracks, has no beginning and no end. In fact, the dance can be "sure" (44) only because the overture is continuous. Thus, Williams' overture is part of the dynamic whole.

As unmistakable as the Eastern notes are in *Sour Grapes*, they are even more pronounced in *Spring and All*. In poem V, Williams compares boxing matches to Chinese poems, finding them "the same" (CP1 190), and refers to the "grief of the bowmen of Shu" (191). These overt references are not, however, the principal way in which the collection is linked to the East. *Spring and All*, published in 1923, both "signified the coming of age of Modernist poetry in English" and "marked Williams' completion of modernization in the

early 1920s" (Qian 144). The same qualities that mark its modernity also mark its connection to the East. Noting that the fusions of verse with prose, verbal art with visual art, and spontaneous writing with studied work are markers of Modernist poetry present in *Spring and All*, Qian argues that all three of these fusions "have origins in the Chinese poetic heritage" (144). As a result, Qian calls *Spring and All* "a success not only in Modernism, but also in the marriage of Eastern and Western poetic concepts and forms" (145).

Qian considers the "most striking" of Chinese notions presented in *Spring and All* to be "nondiscrimination" (145), or nonduality. As examples of particular interest in this regard, he points to poem XV, "Light Becomes Darkness" (CP1 213); poem I, "Spring and All" (CP1 183); and poem XIV, "Death the Barber" (CP1 212). To demonstrate the slight difference between the way Qian explains "nondiscrimination" in the poems and the way I explain "nonduality" in them, I will discuss here in detail poem XIV.

In poem XIV, sometimes printed under the title "Death the Barber" (CP1 212), Qian notes that Williams unites "life with death" and "old age with vitality," revealing an attitude "strongly reminiscent of Po Chu-i" (146). While I agree that these contrasts can be identified in the poem, I want to make clear the point that Zen (and Taoist) reality

is not so much a fusion of opposites, but more a network of particulars within nondualism. A system of opposites depends upon a consciousness that discriminates and separates. Zen teaches that such a system is illusion, that in reality everything in the world is interlocking and interdependent, not in opposition. My reading of the poem demonstrates a network of particulars within an interlocking and dynamic nondualistic whole.

Barbers are historically connected with death because they originally were surgeons and blood-letters. In using the metaphor of the barber as death, Williams evokes that connotation. Further, the barber of Williams' poem is concerned with endings. His profession requires him to deal with the ends of hair, and he talks about death, conventionally considered the end of life. Lines two and three, which repeat the phrase "the barber," signal that repetition will be a theme of the poem, and the kind of death the barber talks about is no more permanent than the haircuts he gives. He trims off the ends of hair only to repeat the action two weeks later. Similarly, the death he speaks of is momentary and repetitious: "It's just/ a moment/ he said, we die/ every night" (9-12). And even when the barber talks about "the newest/ ways to grow/ hair" (14-16), he speaks of growing hair "on/ bald death" (16-17), again repeating the theme of death. While the barber wants to talk about repeated endings, the narrator wants to talk

about beginnings. He tells the barber about a new invention, "the quartz/ lamp" (19-20), and "old men" (21) who have grown "third/ sets of teeth" (22-23).

The old man who comes to the door and says "Sunshine today!" (28) suggests another kind of repetition, a daily report of the weather, "for which/ death shaves/ him twice/ a week" (29-32). The suggestion here is that because the old man comes in and reports whether the day promises sunshine, death shaves off a bit of the old man's life twice a week, another repetition. In other words, because the old man shows evidence of being alive and noticing his surroundings, death shortens his life. The fact that he is alive means that he is dying, a principle of Zen that Williams also uses later in the preface to *Paterson*.

This image of death as a barber in the last stanza echoes the opening lines, "Of death/ the barber/ the barber/ talked to me" (1-4), which mean "Of Death the Barber the barber talked to me." The barber's direct comment about death occurs outside the poem, but it seems clear that he has explained to the narrator that death trims away bits of our lives just as a barber trims our hair. This happens, the barber explains, each night when we die for "just/ a moment" (9-10).

The second stanza finds the barber "cutting" the narrator's "life with/ sleep to trim" his hair. The narrator's life is cut with sleep because he dozes off while

the barber is cutting his hair and talking to him. He wakes up, however, at the mention of death and staves off the barber's talk of endings with his own talk of beginnings.

Rather than a reconciliation of opposites, the poem depicts an interdependency. Endings, such as the cutting of hair, depend upon beginnings, such as the growing of hair, just as the barber and the narrator depend upon each other. Death and life are not in opposition to each other, but rather interdependent. The old man who announces "Sunshine today!" is himself a fusion of age ("old man") and vitality ("Sunshine"), and he interacts with the barber, the narrator, and death, setting askew any simplistic equation of dualistic oppositions. The old man performs a repetitive action that will be returned with a twice-weekly shave, and his appearance is a cue for the narrator to tell a story. He is part of the dynamic, nondualistic whole.

Another depiction of a nondualistic, interdependent whole is found in Williams' poem XII (CP1 210), which begins "The red paper box." Here he shows that meaning is not fixed and permanent, but determined by context. Williams' poem XII demonstrates some of the meanings of an object, taking the same approach mentioned in the discussion of "The Lonely Street." As he identifies the object, he describes what it looks like and what it does, avoiding language that would confine the object in conventional patterns of thought.

The first six lines describe the object, which is a "red paper box/ hinged with cloth" (1-2). The box "is lined/ inside and out/ with imitation/ leather" (3-6). Here, no attempt is made to place the box in a context. The next lines, however, say that the object is both "the sun" (7) and "the table/ with dinner/ on it" (8-10), adding that "these are the same" (11). They are "the same" in a conventional sense in that both are centers, the sun being the center of our solar system, and a table with dinner on it being the center of a family. From a Zen viewpoint, they are "the same" in the sense that both are "empty," meaning that they are non-self-sustaining entities that depend upon the existence of other things for their identity.

The next three stanzas suggest other contexts for the red paper box, among them a place for "old ladies" (16) to keep "paper clips/ and red elastics" (18-19) and a food supply for "insects/ that suck gummed labels" (21-11). The use suggested in the fourth stanza says that "Its twoinch trays/ have engineers/ that convey glue/ to airplanes" (12-15). A pot of glue might have been kept in each tray, ready for an imaginary "engineer" to transport supplies to toy airplanes in need of repair.

Having established in the third stanza that the box is "the sun" and consequently the center of the solar system, Williams declares in the seventh stanza that "this is eternity" (24), which is true in a nondualistic world.

Through the "dial" (26) of eternity, or time, "we discover/
transparent tissue/ on a spool" (26-28), the impermanence of
life.

Within this solar system, the "stars/ are round/
cardboard/ with a tin edge" (30-32). The final stanza says
that the "stars" have "a ring/ to fasten them/ to a trunk/
for the vacation—" (33-36), which means that these stars are
identification tags to be fastened to a trunk. The box,
then, contains glue, paper clips, red rubber bands, gummed
labels, and paper identification tags. The poem defines the
box by describing what it does: It holds supplies for the
family and is, therefore, as much a center as "the table/
with dinner/ on it" (8-10).

In the opening pages of *Spring and All*, Williams said
he wanted to show humankind what we are in the present
moment. Three poems are particularly apt demonstrations of
that attempt: poem III, "The farmer in deep thought" (CP1
186), poem XI "In passing with my mind" (CP1 205), and poem
XXVI "The crowd at the ball game" (CP1 233).

Poem III, which begins "The farmer in deep thought"
(CP1 186), depicts Williams' farmer oblivious to the rest of
the world. As he walks "through the rain/ among his blank
fields" (2-3), the rest of the world "rolls coldly away"
(10), "leaving room for thought" (13). Williams portrays
him as an "artist figure" (17), and he is, in that he is

planting his fields in his mind, making him in effect a composer. The farmer's preoccupation with thoughts of a future action, "in his head/ the harvest already planted" (5-6), shows that he is objectifying his fields. In the final line, Williams calls the farmer "antagonist," as he must be, having separated himself from his fields by objectifying them. While from a conventional view it can be said that Williams depicts the farmer as he is in the particular moment, the farmer stands as a person locked into dualism, pitting himself against his own field. Thus, the farmer does not represent a person as he truly is from a Zen standpoint.

In poem VI, which begins with "'In passing with my mind" (CP1 205), the narrator drives along, thinking of "nothing in the world" (2) and sees three strangers, people he knows nothing about. He observes these people just as they are, without judgment, without preconceived notions of who they are or what they are doing. This unencumbered observation places these people squarely in the present, which is the exact moment that interests Williams. "The supreme importance/ of this nameless spectacle/" he says, "sped me by them/ without a word--" (19-22), leaving the reader to wonder whether he is serious or jesting. Can this mundane moment be of "supreme importance"? If so, then why would he speed by "without a word"? It is of "supreme importance" because it is a pure moment, free of past and future,

judgment and expectation. "Nameless," it is free, too, of categories that would define and confine it. Williams speeds by "without a word" to honor the moment with silence.

Poem XXVI, "The crowd at the ball game" (CP1 233), depicts in its opening lines the *wu-wei*, or action without attachment, of a crowd at a ball game. Moving "uniformly/ by a spirit of uselessness/ which delights them" (2-4), the people in the crowd move freely and in concert. The impression here is of hundreds or thousands of people in synch with each other because all are moving from the true self, without attachment. Williams then brings in an ominous note, saying that the crowd is "alive, venomous" (16), that it is "the Inquisition, the/ Revolution" (23-24), and telling what it would do to others. He then returns to his previous position, saying it "is beauty itself/ that lives/ day by day in them/ idly" (25-28), and in the last few lines the crowd is laughing and "permanently, seriously/ without thought" (35-36). This suggests that the people in the crowd are indifferent to what they do, that they can just as easily persecute others or laugh mindlessly. The potential for violence, he says, is "the power of their faces" (30) and is what makes the crowd so beautiful.

From a Zen standpoint, the key to the poem lies in the words "for this/ to be warned against/ saluted and defied—/ It is alive, venomous" (15-16). The syntax is difficult to follow, but the meaning is clear that once the crowd becomes

solidified in thought and can be "saluted and defied," it becomes a menace to society. When the people are solidified in thought, they are no longer moving freely but are instead attached to an idea and acting on their desires. Buddhists believe that attachment to any impermanent entity, for instance an idea, is the cause of suffering. For Buddhists, the solution is to release all attachments.

This point brings up an ethical dilemma that concerns many Buddhists, including Zen Buddhists. How do people with a nondualistic perspective live ethically in the conventional world? Advocating non-attachment for oneself may be acceptable, but what is one to do when a portion of the world is attached to an idea like Inquisition or Revolution? If enough people, for instance the crowd at Williams' ball game, remain non-attached and act spontaneously and appropriately within the situation, the crowd does not turn into persecutors. Zen teaches that previous to the introduction of any distinctions, we have a natural urge to be compassionate. According to Zen thinking, it is dualistic thinking that interferes with that natural compassion. Zen, unlike traditional Western systems, teaches that one eliminates selfishness "by modeling oneself after oneself and, therefore, forgetting oneself" (Kasulis 98). Yet, historical experience shows that crowds—or nations—do attach themselves to ideas, often seemingly noble ones, and that attachment leads to, in

Williams' words, "the Inquisition, the/ Revolution." In response to the dilemma of how to live in the conventional world, Buddhists cite the words of the Buddha:

Not by hatred is hatred appeased:

Hatred is appeased by the renouncing of hatred.

It is so conquered only by love

This is a law eternal. (qtd. in Abe, *Comparative*

217)

By this, they mean that even in cases where attachment, or fighting back, would seem to be the solution, it is not.

Robert Aitken says that we can save the world by saving "little pieces of it," and we do that by first "changing our self-centered attitudes as individuals" (*Mind* 144). The spontaneity that Zen is known for is sometimes misinterpreted to mean a selfish concern with only the present moment, regardless of the consequences. While Zen does teach a purposeless spontaneity, it is a spontaneity that arises out of a forgetting of the self and which has at its base a compassion for all beings. Williams' crowd at the ball game is spontaneous in the Zen sense when each person forgets the ego-self and remembers that everything depends upon everything else. When the people in the crowd become centered on the ego-self, they act out of fear, selfishness, and hatred, and their actions are not compassionate.

One of Williams' most famous poems is often taught as

an example of a spontaneous act. It is spontaneous in the conventional sense, but it is not a Zen spontaneity, which must arise out of selflessness. In "This Is Just to Say" (CP1 372), the narrator has "eaten/ the plums" (1-2). He does not say why he ate them, but he reports that "they were delicious/ so sweet/ and so cold" (10-12). An argument can be made that the taking of the plums was a spontaneous act that occurred in a non-thinking moment. The first bite of the first plum might well have been a truly spontaneous act, assuming that the narrator opened the refrigerator door for some other reason, not on a search for plums. Once the narrator went beyond the first bite, however, he was acting out of selfish desire, especially since he knew the plums were planned for breakfast. An act performed to fulfill desire is not a spontaneous act in the Zen sense.

"This Is Just to Say" depicts an action that is centered on the ego-self, and it is compounded by the quasi-apology in line nine. In the imperative "Forgive me" (9), the narrator shows that again he wants something. This time, however, the thing he wants, forgiveness, cannot simply be taken, as the plums were. Because he cannot take forgiveness, he demands that it be given him, again focusing on his own desires.

While the ego-self is overpoweringly present in "This Is Just to Say," it is absent in Williams' best known work, poem XXII of "Spring and All," often published as "The Red

Wheelbarrow" (CP1 224). It is a set of images, except for the opening phrase of promise: "so much depends/ upon" (1-2). Without the phrase, the "red wheel/ barrow" (3-4) and the "white/ chickens" (7-8) are unrelated particulars. With the phrase, they are parts of a network, because "so much depends/ upon" them, leading the reader to puzzle out what it is that depends so much upon this wheelbarrow and these chickens. And why does it matter that the wheelbarrow is "glazed with rain/ water" (5-6)?

The poem constitutes an illogical grammatical construction because the words "so much" create the expectation of a clause to complete the thought. The completion does not come, leaving the discriminating mind scrambling for an answer it will not find. In the sense that the poem sets up a situation that has no logical resolution according to conventional thought, it functions like a Zen koan. Koans are given to Zen students so they will experience the limits of dualistic thinking. From there, they experience the freedom of Zen. In Williams' poem, the reader experiences the limits of the poem, finding it incomplete. With nowhere else to go, the reader focuses his or her attention upon the ordinary objects, just as they are: a wheelbarrow glazed with rain water and some white chickens. In the absence of an ego-self, the objects appear in their suchness, free of abstractions, yet at the same time connected with each other.

The wheelbarrow and the chickens in their suchness are reminiscent of the mountains and waters in the third phase of the Mountains and Waters Sutra. In that teaching, the objects are the same, but they seem to be different to the perceiver, who has just undergone Enlightenment. Allen Dunn argues that Williams' theory of imaginative power as set forth in *Spring and All* says that after the imagination destroys humanity, "the world is recreated in exactly the same form as the world which was destroyed" (54). Now, "the world is new, and this newness is apparent only to the imagination" (54). Dunn argues that "The Red Wheelbarrow" represents objects in that new world that are transformed, not by physical change, but by a change in the way they are perceived. This is the same move taught by the Mountains and Waters Sutra. Further, Dunn argues that in the discussion of imagination preceding "The Red Wheelbarrow," Williams says that the power that transforms prose into poetry "can also transform an entire range of human activities by rescuing habitual or mundane activity to poetic immediacy" (56). Dunn does not use a Zen framework, but he recognizes in Williams the impulse toward Zen presence in the eternal moment.

Although Williams is best known for his compact, economical poems, for many years he wanted to write a long poem. The first section of that long poem, *Paterson*, was published in 1946. The remaining four books of *Paterson*

were published in 1948, 1949, 1951, and 1958 (*Paterson* ix).

In the last few years of his life, in spite of being virtually disabled by a series of strokes, Williams managed to type out four pages of what would have been *Paterson* VI.

In 1951, when the first four books of *Paterson* had been published, Williams said that the poem was about "the resemblance between the mind of modern man and a city" (*Paterson* xiii). Rejecting his own city of Rutherford as "not distinguished or varied enough" for his purpose (xiii), Williams used the nearby city of Paterson, with its Passaic Falls, as his model. Tellingly, he said "I deliberately selected Paterson as my reality" (xiii), suggesting that for Williams, the mind is reality.

Zen teaches that the ultimate reality is the unobtainable. As the unobtainable, ultimate reality is not located anywhere. Yet, the only way we can apprehend what Zen calls ultimate reality is through the mind. In the attainment of ultimate reality, separation between self and not-self is released, so in effect one can say that Zen's ultimate reality is the mind. Thus, when Williams said his poem is about the mind of modern man and a city, and when he said he chose the city of Paterson as his reality, he equated the mind of modern man with reality, following in the footsteps of Zen. Because Williams' idea of reality is similar to that of Zen, his poem about reality yields itself

to a Zen reading. I will not attempt to read the entire poem but will discuss the preface and the three chapters of Book I, where Williams repeatedly demonstrates the difficulties brought on by dualistic thinking and depicts the peace of mind found in Zen reality.

In the Preface to Book I, Williams presents a world of flux in which death is an essential element of life. Man will never "live well in his body," he says, except by dying and knowing that he is dying. While this statement could be interpreted in a pessimistic light to mean that man will never "live well in his body" until the last moment of his life, I think a different reading is more accurate. The point of the statement is to establish what prevents man from "liv[ing] well in his body," and the assumption is that it would be possible for man to live well in his body if only he knew how. Paradoxically, Williams says that man can live well in his body if he dies and knows that he is dying. Again, this statement seems to suggest that man will live well only for a few moments at the end of his life. Zen takes a different view, however, by saying that death is not an event that comes at the end of life, but rather a part of life. From a Zen standpoint, to see life and death as separate events is to objectify them by viewing them from the "outside." In Zen, there is no "outside." Real life, as it is experienced, is both living and dying because there is no rigid separation of the two. Thus, every moment of life

is also death (Abe, *Comparative* 34-35), and Williams suggests that if man recognizes this fact of life-in-death he can "live well in his body." The implication from a Zen standpoint is that experiencing life as it really is enables a person to live fully in the moment, i.e. "live well in his body," instead of standing outside his life and filtering his life through abstractions. The person who wants to live well, then, must be beyond any separations, attaching himself to neither life nor death, and consider himself as part of the interlocking and interdependent whole.

The purpose of the poem, as stated in the opening lines of the preface, is to find beauty. The question, though, is how to find beauty "when/ it is locked in the mind past all remonstrance" (1-2). If "beauty" is the ineffable, or in Zen terms, Emptiness, it is locked in the mind if it is obscured by abstractions such as the objectification of life and death. The stanza following the opening two lines of prose suggests how one goes about getting to the truth, or realizing Emptiness: One "make[s] a start/ out of particulars" (3-4) by perceiving the things of the world without associations. One then "make[s] them general, rolling/ up the sum" (5-6) by seeing those particulars as interdependent and interlocking. One does it "by defective means—/Sniffing the trees" (4-5) like a dog in that we experience the world through our imperfect senses. And yet, "defective" as they are, our senses are the only means we

have of experiencing the world, unless we "run out—/ after the rabbits" (11-12), or approach the world through reason, pursuing the metaphorical rabbits of abstraction. The preface speaks against that approach and in favor of knowledge gained through direct experience.

Williams writes that a man must "[renew] himself/...in addition and subtraction/ walking up and down" (45-47), constantly reconsidering what he thinks he knows, "walking up and down" to gain more knowledge through direct experience. He must avoid having a mind like a bed, "always made up" (52), because that would cause "the writing of stale poems" (51). The image is one of constant renewal, summarized in the final section with the particulars being gathered up and then "rained down/ and regathered into a river that flows/ and encircles" (61-63). From a Zen standpoint, the preface presents a world of flux in which Williams' man can realize Emptiness (or find beauty) by experiencing the interconnectedness and interdependence of life and death.

Robert Lowell calls the "quest for beauty" in Book I "a search for the whole man," noting that the poem is really about "the divorce of modern life" (Mazzaro 74), and, allowing for different terminology, his view is consistent with a Zen view of the poem. Lowell reads the river as a symbol for thought, adding that it is "the elemental thought that lacks a language, the source of life and motion" (73).

This kind of thought is similar to Emptiness, which for Zen is ultimate reality and is beyond language (Abe, *Comparative* 49). Such thought would be "the source of life and motion" only in the conventional sense, however. In a nondualistic world, there can be no source because there is no beginning or end.

After establishing in the preface that the poem is a search for "beauty," which we take as a search for ultimate reality, the first chapter of Book I depicts the character of Paterson, who is both city and man. The immortal Patterson is presented as a god-like source of everything, and it is his thoughts that "animate a thousand automaton" (*Paterson*, I 6). These automaton, people who do not realize that he is their source, "walk outside their bodies aimlessly/ for the most part,/ locked and forgot in their desires—unroused" (6). That the people of the city are the thoughts of the character Paterson becomes clear in the passage where "Mr./ Paterson has gone away/ to rest and write" (9). Mr. Paterson's thoughts are inside the bus, "sitting and standing" (9). The narrating "I" wonders who these people are, then says "that they may live/ his thought is listed in the Telephone/ Directory" (10), equating "his thought" with the people.

From a Zen perspective, both the character Paterson and the river symbolize ultimate reality. One point must be clarified, however. In Zen, ultimate reality is not

considered the "source" if source means "creator" because a nondualistic world has no beginning and no end. Ultimate reality might be considered the "source" in conventional terms in that, after people experience it for a fleeting moment, it gives them peace. In their incomplete understanding of the experience, they might think of ultimate reality—and the character Paterson or the river in the poem—as the "source" of their peace. The people who do not attain even an incomplete sense of ultimate reality, however, "walk outside their bodies," meaning that they are trapped in the illusion of the objectified ego-self. Because these people have not awakened to the true self, they remain estranged from themselves (Abe, *Western* 7) and, in Williams' term, they "walk outside their bodies."

So that these people "may live," they are "listed in the Telephone/ Directory" (10). This listing, to them, proves their existence. Yet this "proof" is so far removed from the experience of reality and the true self that it only compounds their estrangement from themselves. According to Zen, the true self is unobtainable. The more we try to reach it, the further it is from us. The conventional concept of the self is the ego, which is an illusion because it is not the true self, but just an idea about the true self. A person's name, though helpful in everyday life, is an idea (a name) attached to another idea (the ego-self), so it is one more step removed from the true self. Looking

into a telephone directory to see one's name written on the page merely proves that a symbol of the illusory self has been compiled in a book of symbols. Thus, seeking confirmation of their existence in a telephone directory listing does not help these dualistic-minded people find the truth. It only exacerbates their estrangement from the self.

As the chapter continues, more evidence of self-estrangement is revealed. A prose section describing a "monster in human form," in itself a symbol of estrangement, ends with George Washington asking the "monster" which side of political dualism he falls on, "Whig or Tory" (*Paterson*, I 10). Other evidence of duality in the chapter is found in the depiction of the sharp division between the masculine and feminine.

He suggests in two passages that separation of people according to any kind of classification leads to their objectification. The first passage seems innocent enough, the report of the population of Paterson in 1870, according to "native born" and "foreign" (10). Two pages later, however, a long prose passage tells mildly of "the traitors' hangings" (12) and other violent events. In its report of massacres, hangings, desertions, slavery, and enforced prostitution, the passage identifies people by their categories: "the Tuscaroras," "albinos," "Hessian deserters," "negro slaves," "women and their brats," and "Irish women and

children" (12-13). The same impulse that separates and categorizes people also restrains and imprisons them. By the end of that passage, the focus is on the objectification of women who have been enslaved.

It is directly followed by a passage about "9 women/ of some African chief semi-naked/ astraddle a log, an official log to/ be presumed" (13) pictured in *National Geographic*. The chief's wives are lined up on the log according to age and seniority, "in a descending scale of freshness" like so many products. Williams suggests that the forces that objectify the wives also harm the man, "no matter/ how much a chief he may be," and "destroy him at home" (14). This statement reinforces the chapter's opposition to separation as it seeks beauty in wholeness.

As he continues in the first chapter to depict the division between the men and women, Williams seems to make a point of the difference in language use between men and women. The passage about the flower spreading "its colored petals" as it sinks "back into the loam" says that the cry the flower gives out is more of "a shiver/ as they [the petals] wilt and disappear" (11). Marriage, which has "a shuddering implication," we are told, is responsible for the silencing of the flower. Thus, the flower clearly symbolizes women, who "do not know the words/ or have not/ the courage to use them" (11).

In the two accounts of death at Passaic Falls, Williams

points explicitly to the difference in use of language between men and women. Mrs. Sarah Cummings uttered one small cry of distress, then disappeared, falling to her death in the water, evoking the image of the flower falling back into the loam. Her body was found the next morning "in a depth of 42 feet" (14). In contrast, Sam Patch had established himself as a daredevil jumper and toured the West jumping into various bodies of water. On the day of his death, he stood on a platform at the edge of the Passaic Falls and made a short speech before jumping. This time, however, "his body wavered in the air—Speech had failed him. He was confused. The word had been drained of its meaning" (16). His body was found the following spring, "frozen in an ice-cake" (16). Williams, having already made the statement about women and language in the metaphor of the flower, seems to use these two accounts of death to confirm that women cannot or will not use language effectively. He also seems to say that men use it inappropriately, too, at least when it comes to their approach to reality. In both deaths, language fails to negotiate the force of elemental thought, or ultimate reality, symbolized by the falls. Thus, Williams says that using language to approach reality is futile.

Looking at Williams' metaphor of language and reality, both deaths can be explained from a Zen perspective. According to Williams' scheme, Mrs. Cummings, being a woman,

was afraid of language. We can intuit that she was also afraid of the falls, i.e., reality, in that she saw herself as separate from it and cried out as she fell into it. Her body was found submerged in 42 feet of water/reality, but she was not an active part of it. Thus, her approach to reality, an approach ridden with fear, was not successful. Mr. Patch, on the other hand, could be said to be merging himself with reality as he jumped into the water, but because the story presents him as a daredevil jumper, I think it is more accurate to see him as pitting himself against the water in competition. His speech before the jump, then, was a challenge that further separated him from the falls, a challenge that failed. Mr. Patch's body being found frozen in the falls signifies his utter separation from reality. Even when he was totally submerged in reality, Mr. Patch was separated from it. Neither Mrs. Cummings' approach nor Mr. Patch's approach to reality works, however. A happy medium would be symbolized by a silent swimmer, which Williams introduces at the end of Book IV, in the person of an Odysseus figure swimming to shore.

The theme of separation and nondualism continues in the second chapter of Book I, which opens with a statement of nondualistic perspective: "There is no direction" (17). This can also be taken in the conventional dualistic sense, in that one does not know where to go. Ironically, one does not know where to go because, although knowledge abounds,

"Divorce is the sign of knowledge in our time" (17). This "divorce," or increasingly complex separation and categorization, is the nature of scientific knowledge (or was at the time when Williams was writing Book I), making it difficult to find the way through such a labyrinth. The object of the search is, as mentioned in the preface, "beauty," or ultimate reality.

Alluding to the deaths of Mrs. Cummings and Mr. Patch in the first chapter and his own search for ultimate truth, the narrator wonders why he has not put himself "deliberately in the way of death" (19-20). This echoes the idea in the preface that a man does not live well until he knows that he is dying. He reminisces about the wives of the African chief depicted in the *National Geographic*, reflecting now upon their interrelatedness, sitting together on a ceremonial log (21). He comments that ultimate reality is "certainly NOT" found in the university (21), that monument to reason and abstraction. These comments indicate that he is approaching a reality that contains interrelated particulars and is beyond dualistic thought.

Thinking of the first wife of the African chief, he brings up again the flower as symbol of women, this time a closed bud "whose history...laughs at the names by which they think to trap it" (22). This implies that women have escaped the "naming" that would imprison them, but such an idea is in conflict with the images of the socially

restricted women in the first chapter: the women procured "for the soldiers in America" (12), the Irish women and children sent by Cromwell to be sold as slaves in Barbadoes (13), and the nine women married to one African chief (13). The key, however, is in the next statement, "Escapes!/ Never by running but by lying still" (22), which suggests that women "escape" by not attaching themselves to the conflict. They "escape" by remaining whole and free within themselves. In this move, Williams advocates non-attachment, which he also advocates in "The crowd at the ball game" (CP1 233) and through negative examples in "The farmer in deep thought" (CP1 186) and "This Is Just to Say" (CP1 372).

Realizing that women are a part of ultimate reality in their wholeness, the narrator seeks to become a part of "the stream/ that has no language, coursing/ beneath the quiet heaven of your eyes" (23). Now it becomes clear that women's inability or unwillingness to use language links them to ultimate reality, which is the ineffable, unspoken, and unnameable. In saying that he wants to become part of "the stream," the narrator shows that he is approaching reality in the way of non-attachment, which will make it possible for him to experience it. The narrator becomes part of that reality, then emerges from it. As he re-emerges into the conventional world, he is acutely aware of "the rumors of separate worlds, the birds as against the fish, the grape to the green weed" (25). This sequence

depicts the narrator's fleeting glimpse of ultimate reality and his re-entering the world of dualism. Because he has experienced non-dualism, he is now acutely aware of the separations of the conventional world, separations which are detailed in the account of the Williams family leaving Haiti during a revolution (25-26), discord within a family (26), and the separation of the artist from his work (28).

In his attempt to find "beauty" within a nondualistic whole, Williams repeatedly points to the major oppositions of the conventional world: men/women, natives/foreigners, ruling class/revolutionaries. After his glimpse of nonduality, he is able to see even more subtle divisions in the conventional world, suggesting that even those divisions interfere with the attainment of "beauty" in wholeness. One of the subtle agents of division is language. Language, because its function is to identify, tends to be a disruptive factor in the search for wholeness. It names, consequently separating and at the same time bestowing the power of domination on the naming entity. The opening stanza of chapter three, Book I, challenges this proposition, asking "So you think because the rose/ is red that you shall have the mastery?" (29). The question for the artist, then, becomes how to find beauty in wholeness while using the disruptive, divisive element of language.

Another divisive power of language is its role in creating and preserving knowledge, which in turn becomes "an

impossible moat between the high and the low" (33). The moat image suggests that pure thought, symbolized by water, can be misused by the creators and keepers of knowledge, "the knowledgeable idiots, the university" (34), as a separating rather than uniting force. Williams again brings in the image of Mr. Patch's body "frozen in an ice cake" (35), followed by images of water fouled by a man's body (35), factory waste (36), and a dead horse (37). Finally, thought is cleansed and redeemed "by the pouring torrent" and an earthquake (39). The chapter ends with a note on Greek poetry explaining how Hipponax, attempting to make meter sound more like "prose and common speech," wounded it, "doing thus the utmost violence to the rhythmical structure" (40). This seems to suggest that poetry cannot be modified to sound like common speech without destroying it.

At the end of Book I, Williams has set out the difficulties of finding "beauty," but he has not offered a solution to the artist who must use language. Beauty, or reality, is to be found only in nonduality, and it can be found only through non-attachment. Pure thought is a part of that nonduality, but it cannot be expressed through the inherently divisive force of language. Thus, *Paterson* demonstrates the inadequacy of language to express reality.

This message, fully expressed in *Paterson*, is also present in Williams' earlier, shorter poems, though not so clearly. In those, he attempts to depict the suchness of

seemingly disparate objects in an interlocking and interdependent network, trying at the same time to portray the immediacy of the moment. Yet, to portray the moment is to objectify it and destroy its immediacy. Further, to convey the idea of an object is also to imprison it. The poet is left with the device of not-naming, which, taken to its extreme, obliterates poetry itself. The challenge becomes a dance that requires the soft touch of conveying without imprisoning, defining without stultifying. It is the poet's engaging, yet hopeless task.

Williams was interested in portraying humankind as it exists in the present moment, devoid of the abstractions of future and past, free of confining names and concepts. He was doomed to failure because what he wanted to express was beyond words, and a poet's only tools are words. Teachers of Zen face this same dilemma as they lead students to the experience of Emptiness. They know that words fail, but they continue to use them. The result is not anger and frustration, but enigmatic stories that point toward the meaning they wish to convey. Like the poet, whose words also fail, the teacher of Zen risks being misunderstood, his suggestion being taken for fact. A favorite saying of Zen is

to point at the moon a finger is needed, but woe
to those who take the finger for the moon; a
basket is welcome to carry our fish home, but when

the fish are safely on the table why should we
eternally bother ourselves with the basket?

(Suzuki, *Essays* 19)

The solution, both for poets and teachers of Zen, is non-attachment. The failure of words can be marked a "failure" only by those who are attached to a concept called "success." Working without concern for success or failure, the poet, like the Zen teacher, does just as Williams did. He continued trying to express the ineffable even when he was physically disabled and could scarcely guide his fingers to the typewriter keys. This suggests that what drove Williams was not the hope that he would reach an impossible goal, but his love of the attempt. His true love affair was not with words, but with poetry.

In his never-ending attempt to express the ineffable, Williams exhibited a Zen-like posture. But his seeming irrationality, like that of Eliot and Stevens, can be understood when viewed from a Zen perspective. Eliot, Stevens, and Williams embraced an unconventional way of seeing the world, and that way was the way of Zen.

Afterword

Pointing toward the Way

The conclusion of this study is, appropriately, also a beginning. After attempting to establish that Zen concepts are found in the poems of T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams, and that understanding those concepts illuminates the poems, this study points to beginnings for other studies.

To readers who now want to know more about Zen, I recommend *Understanding Zen* by Benjamin Radcliff and Amy Radcliff and *The Zen Eye*, which is a collection of talks on Zen by Sokei-an Shigetsu Sasaki. For those who are ready for more complex discussions, I suggest *Zen and Western Thought* by Masao Abe. *How the Swans Came to the Lake* by Rick Fields is recommended as an informative history of Buddhism in the United States.

As Fields points out, Buddhism, and Zen in particular, has gradually become more prevalent in this country. Although an element of that prevalence is certainly faddishness, Zen centers for serious study are also emerging. Those who are aware of Zen-like ideas see them everywhere, not only in popular culture but also in art and literature. If Zen continues to spread, so will the impulse to read art and literature in a Zen context. Other literature besides the poems of this study will no doubt

yield new meaning when read in a Zen context.

Among the most intriguing surprises of this research has been the discovery of the presence of Sokei-an Shigetsu Sasaki in the company of William Carlos Williams' literary cronies in New York between 1916 and 1919. After Sasaki returned to New York in 1930, he became involved with Ruth Fuller, whom he married shortly before his death in 1945. Through Fuller, who was from a wealthy Chicago family, Sasaki would have met a number of influential Americans, whom he in turn may have influenced.

Readily available information on Sasaki focuses on his contribution to Zen in America. Unpublished letters and journals, especially Williams' and Bodenheim's, might disclose what part, if any, Sasaki played in American writers' understanding of Chinese and Japanese poetry and philosophy. Unpublished documents might also reveal whether Wallace Stevens ever met Sasaki.

In addition, Sasaki's own writing might be worthy of study. In a 1958 memoir, one of Sasaki's friends characterized his writing as "crisp, clear, and unusual" (Fields 178). While he was living in the United States, Sasaki wrote articles about his experiences in Japanese for Japanese-American newspapers (Farkas xvi) and for newspapers and journals in Japan (Fields 178). A collection of his articles and a book of poems were published in Japan, with one of the books going into four printings (Farkas xvi).

Sasaki was familiar enough with English and American literature to use verses from *Alice in Wonderland* as capping phrases in koan study (Watts, Way 167). His writing might well prove popular among American readers.

Stevens' unpublished papers may hold answers to several questions about the poet's connections with the East. When Leonard van Geyzel sent Stevens the pamphlet by Nyanatiloka, he alluded to another book about Buddhism he had offered to send. Learning more about the van Geyzel-Stevens correspondence might shed light on the extent of Stevens' knowledge of Buddhism and Hinduism. The fact that Stevens used the passage referring to the *Bhagavad Gita* as the epigraph to "Lettres d'un Soldat" appears to indicate that he had some knowledge of and interest in the *Gita*. If he didn't model the poems of the sequence on the *Gita*, why did he use the passage in the epigraph? Unpublished documents in Stevens' papers may reveal which translation of the *Gita* Stevens read, what he thought of the text, and whether the missing poems of the sequence can be found.

Likewise, the *Gita* suggests new areas of study for Eliot scholars, too. Helen Gardner considered Eliot's reference to the *Gita* in "Dry Salvages" an error. P.S. Sri and others have characterized it differently, and this study suggests that the *Gita* may be alluded to in "Little Gidding"

as well. It may be time to reassess the role of the *Gita* in all the poems of *Four Quartets*. Such a study might become a formidable project.

This project began with the vague idea that references to "Eastern thought" seemed to permeate the poems of Eliot and other modern poets, and that understanding those references would help the reader to understand the poems. When the research began, I was surprised to learn how much contact Eliot, Stevens, and Williams had with Eastern texts, and further surprised to find hints that even more proof of Eastern contact may lie hidden in unpublished material. The intent of this study, however, was to focus on the Eastern concepts in the text and their meaning, not how they got there, so I did not further pursue the area of contact with specific texts. Some studies have already documented how Eastern texts have reached Western poets, but it appears that there is more to be told.

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