Laws That Refuse To Be Stated: The Post-Sectarian Spiritualities of Emerson, Thoreau, and D. T. Suzuki

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DAISETZ TEITARO SUZUKI (1870–1966), the renowned Japanese interpreter of Zen Buddhism, described reading Ralph Waldo Emerson for the first time as akin to "making acquaintance with myself," to "digging down into the recesses of my own thought."[1] Suzuki spent a lifetime explaining Zen to Westerners, and in the early 1950s, he delivered a series of lectures at Columbia University that precipitated the "Zen boom." Among his more devoted readers, he counted such luminaries as John Cage, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Aldous Huxley, J. D. Salinger, Martin Heidegger, and Carl Jung.[2]

Despite Suzuki's success in promulgating Zen, contemporary critics have characterized his writings as idiosyncratic, experiential interpretations of a highly ritualized discipline, or else as simply inauthentic.[3] Scholars have examined how Emanuel

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[1] D. T. Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), pp. 343–44.

[2] Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America,* 3rd ed. (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1992), pp. 196, 210; Winthrop Sargent, "Profile: Great Simplicity, Dr. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki," *New Yorker,* 31 August 1957, p. 34.

[3] See Robert Sharf's "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42.3 (1995): 228–83; T. Griffith Foulk, "Ritual in Japanese Zen

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Swedenborg's mysticism and William James's descriptions of religious experience shaped Suzuki's philosophy. But at least seven years before he first read James or Swedenborg, Suzuki encountered Emerson, to whom he would return time and again.[4] Not only was one of his first articles devoted to Emerson, but Suzuki titled two of his early books in English *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series)* (1927) and *Essays in Zen Buddhism (Second Series)* (1933) in homage to Emerson's *Essays: First Series* and *Essays*: *Second Series*. Certain aspects of Suzuki's belief system sound distinctly Emersonian; for example, he describes Zen as a religion of "self-reliance," which penetrates "directly into one's original Nature."[5] Whereas these few correspondences have hitherto been acknowledged, the scholarly research linking Suzuki and Emerson has not advanced beyond them.[6] The crucial questions of why Suzuki was fascinated with Emerson, what aspects of his thought Emerson may have influenced, and how he approached that other quintessential transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau have not been addressed.

Buddhism," *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 21–83; and Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 52–74.

[4]For Suzuki and James, see Robert Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism,* ed. Donald S. Lopez (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 125, and D. A. Dilworth, "The Initial Formations of 'Pure Experience' in Nishida Kitarō and William James," *Monumenta Nipponica* 24.1–2 (1969): 102. For Suzuki and Swedenborg, see Thomas Tweed, "American Occultism and Japanese Buddhism: Albert J. Edmunds and D. T. Suzuki, a Translocative History," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 32.2 (2005): 249–81. Suzuki encountered James sometime between 1904 and 1911, and he became interested in Swedenborg in 1903.

[5]Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture,* p. 6, and D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series)* (London: Luzac, 1927), p. 220.

[6]The two brief previous discussions of Suzuki and Emerson are George Leonard's *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 151–52, and Lawrence Buell's *Emerson* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 196–97. In addition, David McMahan describes Suzuki as "a Buddhist modernist," who reframes Buddhism to engage with Romantic ideas like primitivism, spontaneity, artwork, and nature; however, McMahan ultimately treats Suzuki's writing as a blend of German Idealism, American transcendentalism, and English Romanticism. See his *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 117–48, quotation p. 135.

Suzuki's enduring interest in Emerson and Thoreau can be traced through six of his writings, spanning fifty-four years, which have yet to be translated into and published in English. In the earliest of those Japanese publications, "Zen Theory of Emerson" (1896), Suzuki identifies themes in Emerson's writing that would ground his own philosophy and—as he modeled his reformation of the Zen tradition on Emerson's divergence from Unitarianism—that would continue to inspire his version of Zen as it reached its maturity. As he sought to tailor transcendentalism to contemporary events, Suzuki came to treat the transcendentalists—Thoreau in particular—as representatives of an Eastern way of thinking about the world, specifically a return to nature and protest against modernization.

The recuperation of Suzuki's intellectual cosmopolitanism is especially timely in light of our present emphasis on the transnational aspects of American literature, all the more so with regard to Emerson, who has been characterized as a Saidian Orientalist, objectifying and feminizing Asia; or else as a shallow reader of Asian texts, apt to confuse Buddhism and Hinduism.[7] But if Suzuki's discipleship is any indication, Emerson's understanding of the East was more than superficial and, in turn (even if we acknowledge that Suzuki was an Easterner intent on Westernization), the sage of Concord's impact on Easterners has been far greater than scholars have heretofore realized. Finally, though these issues exceed the scope of this article, the synergy between Emerson and Suzuki provides

[7]For the transnational movement in American studies, see Wai Chee Dimock, "Introduction: Planet and America, Set and Subset," in *Shades of the Planet,* ed. Dimock and Lawrence Buell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 1–16. Malini Schueller claims that Emerson treats Asia as a "feminized, disembodied spirit" which he defines against male nationhood (*U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790–1889* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 158. Arthur Versluis is among those who, in describing Emerson and Eastern thought, have focused on Hinduism, insufficiently treating any deep affinities or correspondences between Emerson and Buddhism (*American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], p. 78). On the other hand, Buell's *Emerson* lays the foundations for Emerson as a global figure who read Hindu, Buddhist, and Persian texts and whose devotees have been found in places ranging from Cuba to Ukraine (see, e.g., pp. 325–34). For Saidian Orientalism, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; repr. New York: Vintage Books, 2003), though Said himself wrote that in America prior to World War II, "there was no deeply invested tradition of Orientalism" (p. 290).

tantalizing hints as to the enormous popularity of the Beat movement of the 1950s as well as to why Zen and Emersonianism continue to play a role within our current spiritual culture.[8]

Suzuki's Context: Japanese Buddhism under Attack in Meiji Japan

Though he never graduated from college, though he was never ordained as a novice monk, D. T. Suzuki would become probably the most internationally influential arbiter of Zen thought in the twentieth century. Born in Kanazawa in 1870, he entered a Japan that just two years before had overthrown and dismantled the feudal domain of the shogunate, a powerful elite that had dominated the country for over four hundred fifty years. The ensuing socioeconomic dislocation plunged Suzuki's family, once of the samurai class, into penury, a situation exacerbated by his father's death when Suzuki was only six years old. Spiritually adrift for most of his early life, Suzuki began commuting to Engakuji, the renowned Zen Buddhist training monastery, while a student at Tokyo Imperial University in 1891.[9] The Buddhism he studied under the abbot, Shaku Sōen (1860–1919), was undoubtedly unorthodox. Traditionally, and even in the present day, Zen has been among the most formalized and mythical branches of Buddhism, concerned foremost with rituals such as chanting sutras, burning incense, and sometimes offering food and drink designed to bestow merit (*kudoku*) or "virtue" on ancestral spirits. Although most novices leave the training hall after a rather brief time and limited

[8]Suzuki's ideas may have appealed to Americans because they tapped into an already extant current of alternative spirituality, what Leigh Eric Schmidt (*Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* [New York: Harper Collins, 2005]) calls "America's seeker culture." Its characteristics include mystical experience, an appreciation of solitude, a belief in the universality of religions, and an emphasis on meditation, all of which feature prominently in Suzuki's philosophy. Unsurprisingly, Schmidt turns to none other than Emerson and Thoreau as having initiated this alternative spirituality (pp. 140, 14–17).

[9]D. T. Suzuki, "Early Memories," *A Zen Life: D. T. Suzuki Remembered,* ed. Masao Abe (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), pp. 3–9. Also, Suzuki, "An Autobiographical Account," *A Zen Life,* pp. 13–19.

instruction to return to family temples, those few Zen monks who remain and attempt to become masters (*rōshi*) often spend ten or fifteen years perfecting their practice of various ceremonies and rites. Meditation is a regimented, social activity, in which proper posture and a collected countenance are of paramount importance, and the koans—cryptic statements like "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"—employed by the Rinzai sect are intended to help structure ritualized dialogic exchanges rather than to elude the rational intellect and trigger a mystical experience. In fact, inner experience is rarely, if ever, mentioned.[10]

Diverging from this traditional, highly regimented practice, Suzuki's understanding of Zen was filtered through a radical reform movement known as *shin bukkyō,* or New Buddhism, to which Shaku Sōen subscribed. During the early Meiji (1868–1912) and late Tokugawa (1603–1868) periods, a virulent anti-Buddhist movement referred to as *haibutsu kishaku*—which characterized Buddhism as corrupt, at odds with science, and opposed to indigenous Japanese culture—took hold.[11] Various factors contributed to the rise and perpetuation of *haibutsu kishaku,* including a longstanding nativist disdain toward Buddhism as a foreign religious interloper; popular resentment about the financial burden of supporting Buddhist institutions; a state-sponsored attempt to define Shintoism as the official religion; and a political desire to divert funds toward defense and modernization.[12] As the movement gained momentum, it shut down, razed, or expropriated over forty thousand Buddhist temples, forcibly laicized monks and priests, and destroyed numerous artifacts.[13]

[10]Foulk, "Ritual in Japanese Zen Buddhism," pp. 25, 39–40, 62–63, and Sharf, "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," pp. 243, 249.

[11]Sharf translates *haibutsu kishaku* as "abolishing Buddhism and destroying [the teachings of] Sākyamuni" in "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," p. 109.

[12]Judith Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and the Columbia Exposition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 116–18.

[13]James Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs of Meiji Japan: Buddhism and Its Persecution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 7.

To ensure Buddhism's continued existence in Japan, its leaders set out to radically reshape popular beliefs about the religion, revising its image from a wasteful, hermitic, and unscientific religion into a modern, all-embracing spirituality. Buddhism embodied a universal spiritual truth, these religious figures and intellectuals maintained, one that the Japanese could spread throughout Asia, thus purifying lesser versions of Buddhism.[14] The New Buddhists hoped that they would win the battle for the soul of Japan and solidify Buddhism as the basis of a new national identity, but they understood that they would do so only if they were able to secure the allegiance of young, elite, Western-educated males who were hailing either Christianity or materialist philosophy as the ideology of modernity. To justify themselves to this group, the New Buddhists cast Mahayana Buddhism as a tradition that was at once uniquely Japanese but also universal, a religion that, unlike Christianity, was compatible with science and Western philosophy. Buddhist temples, so long criticized as removed from and parasitic on society, began to encourage lay practitioners, recruiting influential members of society and bright young men to proselytize their belief system. One of these youths was D. T. Suzuki.[15]

The reformers attempted to garner international prestige for Buddhism by tackling the scholarship of Max Müller and T. W. Rhys Davids, who recognized a kinship between Buddhism and Western philosophy but who had elevated Hinayana Buddhism over the supposedly belated and derivative Mahayana. The New Buddhists countered that the Buddha had delivered Mahayana doctrine—his first, final, and only complete teaching—directly.[16] Inspired in part by trends in nineteenth-century Protestant Christianity, New Buddhists encouraged humanitarian deeds and social engagement and insisted that their religion, inspired by "a love that is unbounded and infinite," called forth man's "deepest sympathy and tenderest humanity,"

[14]Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," pp. 109–11.

[15]Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West,* pp. 118–22, 126–27.

[16]Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West,* pp. 118–21, 207–9.

extending even to his "very enemies."[17] Also following the Christian example in the areas of scriptural hermeneutics and revisionism, New Buddhists issued bibles, distilled spiritual texts, and compiled chronologies of the Buddha's life and the historical transmission of his teachings.[18]

In 1893, Suzuki's mentor, Shaku Sōen, addressed the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago. Sōen's speech, "The Law of Cause and Effect" (translated into English by Suzuki and edited by the famous novelist Natsume Soseki), states that Buddhism espouses the belief that the world is governed by a single principle, the law of cause and effect, and that every "cause must be preceded by another cause," into an infinite regression. According to this law, an individual's actions in present and past lives completely determine his condition of happiness or haplessness. Unlike Christianity, Buddhism is under no obligation to posit and then justify the existence of an omnipotent, omnibeneficent creator to account for theodicy and cosmogony, for the "sacred Buddha" did not create this law of nature; he is only its "first discoverer."[19] Drawing on both philosophical and scientific discourses, Sōen deploys the same *a posteriori* reasoning that led Aristotle to induce the existence of an unmoved mover; indeed, Buddhism's law of cause and effect, as Sōen expresses it, resembles the law of conservation of energy in physics. Thus, Sōen casts Buddhism as a rational religion, poised to take center stage in the unfolding drama of modernity.[20]

[17]Horin Toki, "Buddhism in Japan," *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893,* ed. John Henry Barrows, 2 vols. (Chicago: Parliament Publishing Company, 1893),1:546; Soyen Shaku, "Reply to a Christian Critic," *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot: A Classic of American Buddhism* (1906; repr. New York: Three Leaves Press, 2004), p. 112. Soyen Shaku is an alternate spelling of Shaku Sōen with the Japanese surname, Shaku, coming second.

[18]Ketelaar, *Of Heretics and Martyrs,* pp. 156, 163, 195–212.

[19]Shaku Sōen, "The Law of Cause and Effect, as Taught by Buddha" (lecture at the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 18 September 1893), published in *The World's Parliament of Religions,* 2:829–31. Suzuki's translation and Soseki's emendations are not attributed in Barrows's compilation, but they are noted in Suzuki, "An Autobiographical Account," *A Zen Life,* pp. 18–19.

[20]Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West,* pp. 211–13.

Suzuki's first written publication in Japanese was a translation of Paul Carus's *The Gospel of Buddha* (1894; trans. 1895). Carus had been present for Shaku Sōen's speech at the World's Parliament of Religions and, stirred by it, began infusing his own monist ideas into Buddhism to describe it to an American audience as a universal religion founded in science and rationality. Born in Ilsenburg, Germany and educated at Tübingen, Carus had emigrated to the United States in 1884.[21] After he married, he became the editor of Open Court Publishing Company, which his father-in-law, Edward C. Hegeler, had founded to disseminate works in the areas of philosophy, religion, and science.[22] In their Japanese writings about Carus, Sōen and Suzuki both herald him as an exemplary Westerner, one who, with a doctorate in German philosophy no less (German philosophy being particularly in vogue among intelligentsia in Meiji Japan), could appreciate the religious superiority of Japanese Buddhism. They would certainly have recognized the radical unorthodoxy of Carus's account, for he cites wholly fabricated scriptures alongside traditional Buddhist texts and casually relocates a decimal point to move a prophesied date forward from 5,000 years in the future to 500, thereby casting Jesus Christ as Maitrēa, the Buddha of kindness. Despite such creative tinkering, Sōen and Suzuki nonetheless promoted *The Gospel of Buddha* because it presents Buddhism as a modern, scientific religion that could and should spread throughout the West.[23]

In 1897, Suzuki, hoping to learn more about Western philosophy and syncretic spirituality, presumably with the ultimate aim of becoming a more effective advocate for Buddhism in the West, traveled to La Salle, Illinois, to work for and study under Carus. Buddhism needed a more persuasive spokesperson in America because, in some respects, Shaku Sōen had failed at the Parliament of World Religions. Though the New Buddhists' claims persuaded certain audience members of Mahayana

[21] Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," p. 117.

[22] Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake,* p. 138.

[23] Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West,* pp. 227–31, 235–39, 245–50.

Buddhism's authority and universalist potentiality, many academics and Christian clergymen continued to dismiss the Japanese faith as nihilistic, inauthentic, and even heretical. Realizing he needed to better understand his antagonists to convert them, Sōen probably encouraged his protégé to travel to Illinois to study under this idiosyncratic German philosopher in order to gain firsthand insight into American intellectual and spiritual culture. Thus, for the next eleven years, when not saddled with Carus's menial household chores like chopping firewood and cooking or accompanying Sōen on his 1905 lecture tour of America, Suzuki would publish and edit articles for Carus's journals and help Carus translate the *Tao Te Ching* and other works into English.[24]

Toward the end of his sojourn in America, writing in "The Zen Sect of Buddhism" (1906–7), Suzuki would first describe Zen in English as an experiential, mystical religion that scorns outside authority and defies textual transmission. At the Parliament of World Religions, Shaku Sōen had spoken about Eastern Buddhism only generally. It would appear as if, in this essay, Suzuki first began to realize that his formulation of Zen could have a particular currency with Americans.[25] But his realization appears to have been more gradual than epiphanic, for although Suzuki continued to publish about Buddhism as a whole, his writings about Zen did not gain traction in the West until the publication of *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series)* in 1927.[26]

Suzuki's First Encounter with Transcendentalism: A Zen Theory of Emerson

But before his 1907 essay and before Suzuki even left Japan, he had already begun to develop these nascent ideas about

[24] Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West,* pp. 222–27, 259–63, and Martin Verhoeven, intro. to *The Gospel of Buddha According to Old Records,* by Paul Carus (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 2004), pp. 44–46.

[25] Suzuki, "The Zen Sect of Buddhism," *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 5 (1906–7): 8–44.

[26] Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," pp. 121–22.

Zen while reading Emerson. Suzuki's early Japanese essay "Zen Theory of Emerson" (1896) presents four insights about Zen derived from the American transcendentalist: spiritual truth is ineffable; spiritual truth is intuitive; purification must be achieved through meditation; and forgetfulness of self precedes the final revelation of spiritual truth.

Quoting from Emerson's "The Over-Soul" (1841), Suzuki expresses his skepticism that spiritual revelation can be captured in language. Spiritual truth expressed in words, he avers, is "really no answer to the questions you ask."[27] Language may serve as the foundation of our civilization, but spiritual laws elude linguistic utterance. They "refuse to be adequately stated," he observes with reference to Emerson's "Divinity School Address" (1838), and yet we adamantly cling to language because we fear ignorance.[28] Because "God is not in heaven, but in you," Suzuki insists, spiritual truth must be apprehended through one's intuition (*SDZ,* 30:46). He finds his inspiration in Emerson's descriptions of truth as "guarded by one stern condition . . . intuition," which "cannot be received second hand."[29] Suzuki continues to assert that a transcendent divinity who issues commands from on high is a fallacious and impersonal conception of God, "worth half a penny," and like "a second-hand article that we do not touch" (*SDZ,* 30:46). Attempts to approach God through logical and empirical investigation likewise represent "a wastefully trifling place that Zen quite rightly avoids" (*SDZ,* 30:44).

[27] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson,* ed. Edward Waldo Emerson, 12 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903–4), 2:283, quoted in Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki, "Emason no zengakuron" エマソンの禅学論 ["Zen Theory of Emerson"], *Zenshū,* no. 14 (March 1896), reprinted in *Suzuki Daisetsu Zenshū* 鈴木大拙禅集, ed. Shin'ichi Hisamatsu, Yamaguchi Susumi, and Furuta Shōkin, 40 vols. (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1999–2003), 30:43. *Suzuki Daisetsu Zenshū* will hereafter be referred to as *SDZ*. All quotations from *SDZ* that are not Suzuki's quotations from Emerson or Thoreau are my own translations from the Japanese, and page references to *SDZ* will be incorporated in the text. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* will hereafter be referred to as *CW*.

[28] Emerson, "Divinity School Address," *CW,* 1:121, quoted in Suzuki, "Zen Theory of Emerson," *SDZ,* 30:44.

[29] Emerson, "Divinity School Address," *CW,* 1:126–27, quoted in Suzuki, "Zen Theory of Emerson," *SDZ,* 30:45.

The intuition's access to spiritual truth, Suzuki maintains, is enhanced through the practice of meditation. In "The Over-Soul," Emerson approvingly quotes Christ as urging man to "go into the closet and shut the door," which Suzuki interprets as support for meditation.[30] In Suzuki's view, Emerson raises the topic of meditation again in "Self-Reliance" (1841): "Thus all concentrates; let us not rove; let us sit at home with the cause. Let us stun and astonish the intruding rabble of men and books and institutions, by a simple declaration of the divine fact. Bid the invaders take their shoes from off their feet for God is here within."[31] Although an alternative reading of "thus all concentrates" might be "all is focused within the individual," Suzuki takes the phrase to mean that "the individual meditates" and, thus, by sitting "at home" will realize the God within.

Even though Emerson generally seems more content to let his self-reliant imagination soar without regard for the constrictive routines of meditation and asceticism and even though the emphasis on meditation appears to be Suzuki's attempt to read the meditative practices of Zen into Emerson's thought, other passages do offer some support for Suzuki's reading. A few paragraphs before the passage Suzuki quotes from "Self-Reliance," Emerson describes what might be seen as a purifying, spiritual enlightenment arising through meditation, "an hour of vision" in which "nothing . . . can be called gratitude nor properly joy" and "identity and eternal causation" become clear.[32] In "Culture" (1860), Emerson values a "systematic discipline" by which "all men may be made heroes," and in "Self-Reliance," he speaks of the virtues of a person "throw[ing] himself unhesitatingly on his thought."[33]

[30] Emerson, "The Over-Soul," *CW,* 2:294, quoted in Suzuki, "Zen Theory of Emerson," *SDZ,* 30:47.

[31] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *CW,* 2:71, quoted in Suzuki, "Zen Theory of Emerson," *SDZ,* 30:47.

[32] Emerson, "Self Reliance," *CW,* 2:69.

[33] Emerson, "Culture," *CW,* 4:139, and "Self-Reliance," *CW,* 2:89. Some countercultural spiritual figures likewise read meditation into Emerson's thought. Felix Adler, a popular lecturer who founded the Ethical Culture movement, was an avid reader

Through meditation, Suzuki insists, Emerson understands that the "confusion of the senses" and the "10,000 connections" binding individuals to their world will be forgotten so that we can "let Heaven live fully inside, so that to the outside, we can emit full, brightening glory" (*SDZ,* 30:47).

Suzuki takes forgetfulness to be the aim of meditation, an assertion he grounds in Emerson's statement in "Circles" (1841) that "we seek with insatiable desire . . . to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory, and to do something without knowing how or why."[34] We seek forgetfulness because only by abandoning ourselves and the trappings of civilization can we realize what remains: the divine presence. "Without withering, there is no budding," Suzuki contends; "without dying, there is no living" (*SDZ,* 30:48). This mystical experience of self-abandonment or forgetfulness allows us to finally perceive the religious truths that transcend cultural and sectarian boundaries. As Emerson understands, forgetfulness characterizes "the trances of Socrates, the 'union' of Plotinus, the vision of Porphyry, the conversion of Paul, the aurora of Behmen, the convulsions of George Fox and his Quakers, [and] the illumination of Swedenborg."[35] Suzuki's clarification of forgetfulness, and his connection of it to Emerson and enthusiasm, was likely intended to combat a Western characterization of Buddhism as nihilistic, a criticism that spread to Japan and originated in the English translation of Nirvana as "annihilation."[36] In *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot,*

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of Emerson and enjoined people "to dedicate an hour . . . to seeing one's life in all its relations." Ralph Waldo Trine, a Bostonian and spiritual activist who appears to have had much in common with his namesake, instructed his readers to engage in "meditation, realization, treatment or whatever term" to grasp "the Infinite Spirit of Life," an expression that reminds us of the Over-Soul. See Schimdt, *Restless Souls,* pp. 145, 156.

[34]Emerson, "Circles," *CW,* 2:321, quoted in Suzuki, "Zen Theory of Emerson," *SDZ,* 30:48.

[35]Emerson, "The Over-Soul," *CW,* 2:282, quoted in Suzuki, "Zen Theory of Emerson," *SDZ,* 30:49.

[36]Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake,* p. 60.

Shaku Sōen pointedly denied that "Nirvana . . . involves the extinction of love and life," and Suzuki was still pursuing that refutation as late as 1964 in his *Introduction to Zen Buddhism*.[37]

Up to a point, "Zen Theory of Emerson" can be read as an apologia for Zen from the perspective of New Buddhism. Suzuki treats Emerson as a Westerner who, like Carus, possesses the extraordinary perspicacity to recognize the ultimate truth of Zen and to value it over Christianity. Adopting the simultaneously universalist and nativist discourse of New Buddhism, Suzuki echoes Emerson's syncretic bundling of various religious experiences from Socrates to Swedenborg but also insists that Zen is "a special religion of the East" that should be disseminated throughout the world. "In the places Confucianism reaches, Zen enters," Suzuki claims. "Daoism and Christianity come to Zen in the end" (*SDZ,* 30:50, 42). Even long after Buddhism's status was once again secure in Japan, Suzuki continued to trumpet "Zen . . . [as] the ultimate fact of all religions," the fountainhead of "every intellectual effort" and "every religious faith."[38]

On the other hand, Suzuki's description of Emerson qua Zen apologist also diverges from a New Buddhist orientation in some important respects. Unlike Shaku Sōen and Paul Carus, Suzuki does not insist on the primacy of science and philosophy; rather, he suggests the epistemological limits of those disciplines insofar as he stresses that spiritual truth is ineffable. The empiricist epistemological premises of Sōen's speech, in other words, are quietly and implicitly rejected in favor of intuition and self-forgetfulness, the only sure means of apprehending divinity.

[37]Soēn, "Reply to a Christian Critic," *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot,* pp. 111–12. Soēn is quoting from a lecture delivered by John H. Barrows, "Christianity and Buddhism," which was covered in the 13 January 1896 issue of the *Chicago Tribune*. See D. T. Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), pp. 18–27.

[38]D. T. Suzuki, "Practical Methods of Zen Instruction," *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki,* ed. William Barrett (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 111.

Splitting with Unitarianism and New Buddhism: From Historical Religion to Personal Spirituality

Much as New Buddhism reformed orthodox Buddhism in Suzuki's time, so did Unitarianism reform a more orthodox Protestantism to accord with science and the dictates of reason. Dispelling the oppressive Calvinist doctrine of the total depravity of the soul, Unitarians maintained that human nature was perfectible, that God's divine creation was exquisite and orderly, and that natural laws governed the universe. The written record of miracles, the suspension of those natural laws, illustrates Christ's divinity with rational certainty, because, though ancient, this record was subject to verification by witnesses. That said, as time went by, Unitarians—ever eager to derive the existence of a higher law of morality from the scientific laws of nature—were obliged to perform some rather contorted hermeneutic acrobatics to reconcile their supposedly historical account of the Bible with contemporary scientific findings. Even though they rejected spiritual enthusiasm as not empirically verifiable, Unitarians nevertheless held that an innate moral sense suggested the existence of a higher power.[39]

New Buddhism was the crucible for Suzuki's thought; Unitarianism was the crucible for Emerson's spirituality. Recognizing the parity in their situations, Suzuki turned to Emerson for guidance. Emerson had not attempted to apprehend divinity through empirical observation and a radical reinterpretation of scripture; rather, he embraced pure intuition. In "Self-Reliance," he states, "God is here within"; God does not reveal himself at the bidding of some external religious authority.[40] Unlike Unitarians who conceived of Jesus as a historical figure—what Emerson would call a "noxious exaggeration about the person of Jesus"—Emerson treats Jesus as a representative man who discovered spirituality within himself and who enjoined his followers to do likewise, not to adhere to particular

[39]Barbara Packer, *The Transcendentalists* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), pp. 1–19.

[40]Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *CW*, 2:71.

religious rituals like communion.[41] Thus, Emerson does not take a stand against science, history, and rationality, nor does he attempt to justify his spirituality through them; consequently, he dodges the thorny Biblical hermeneutics in which the Unitarians were obliged to engage. Emerson had been ordained a Unitarian clergyman, and his spirituality remained compatible with certain Unitarian ideas: nature as evidence of God's design, art as "the gratification of a divine instinct," or the existence of an individual moral sense, to name a few.[42] But these ideas would become more radical in form and expression when transposed into transcendentalism. Nature becomes a manifestation of God, art rises to a form of spiritual revelation, and self-reliance emerges as the supreme religious and ethical principle.[43]

Both Emerson and Suzuki were aligned with religious traditions that had purged themselves to accommodate science and rationality, but both thinkers responded by redefining spirituality as intuitive and thus free from the mandates not only of logic but of institutional authority as well. Though he would assert that in diverging from Unitarianism, Emerson was, in fact, inadvertently "explaining Zen," Suzuki reveals his awareness of the circumstances of his precursor's heterodoxy:

> From the Unitarian perspective, [Emerson] . . . was a founder of their sect, but from my perspective, he left what is today called Unitarianism a long time ago. Unitarianism uses scientific truth, creates principles based on critical research; they are people of weak intuitive faith, but Emerson emphasized intuitive faith. From the beginning, he did not repel science, but did not believe we could have complete knowledge of everything in the universe through scientific truth. [*SDZ,* 30:43]

[41] Emerson, "The Divinity School Address," *CW,* 1:130.

[42] William Ellery Channing, "Milton's Treatise on Christian Doctrine," *Christian Examiner and Theological Review* 3 (1826): 33.

[43] I have based my account of Emersonianism developing out of Unitarianism on Lawrence Buell, *Literary Transcendentalism: Style and Vision in the American Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 21–75, 145–65, and Packer, *The Transcendentalists,* pp. 1–19.

In the spirit of Emerson's separation from Unitarianism, Suzuki rejects tradition as the essence of Zen.[44] He opens "Zen Theory of Emerson" by summoning common associations for Zen: seated meditation, being scolded with a stick, dialogues. He quickly dismisses such images because "in Zen religion, there is not Zen" (*SDZ,* 30:42); instead, Zen is a religion of personal intuition. Although he still officially associates himself with Zen and publicly identifies Emerson as an accidental disciple rather than as an inspiration, Suzuki nonetheless recasts Zen in the mold of transcendentalism, a post-Unitarian, post-Christian spirituality that abandons traditional ritual for intuition and that privileges the individual over the establishment.

Some of those who have levied attacks against Suzuki, both during his lifetime and posthumously, have criticized precisely that emphasis on intuition and ineffability at the expense of tradition. In a 1953 debate, Chinese scholar Hu Shih disparaged Suzuki's ahistorical characterization of Zen as "irrational, illogical and beyond the ken of human understanding."[45] According to Shih, Suzuki employs koans in which Zen masters describe the Buddha as "three pounds of Hemp" or "a dried piece of dung" to argue that Zen treats the nature of the Buddha as ineffable, which must be understood on a personal level.[46] But Shih contends that these same anecdotes are evidence instead of divergent movements

[44]Snodgrass argues that Suzuki too identifies Zen with a religion of science and philosophy (*Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West,* pp. 262–64). The quotation she uses to substantiate her claim—"philosophical thought in this 20th century runs parallel to Mahayana Buddhism"—is actually from Alan Watts's preface to Suzuki's *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (1907; repr. New York: Schochken Books, 1963), p. xiii. Nevertheless, she makes a valid point. In *Outlines,* Suzuki does lean toward the rationality of New Buddhism, describing how Buddhism "emphasizes the rational element of religion more than any other religious teachings" (p. 81), but he continues to argue that science ignores "the ultimate significance of the religious consciousness" (p. 84). If the earlier Suzuki did occasionally tend toward rationality, his Emersonian proclivity to look beyond the limits of science and reason was present from the very beginning and intensified as his life progressed.

[45]D. T. Suzuki, *Living by Zen* (Tokyo: Sanseido Press, 1949), p. 20, quoted in Hu Shih "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China: Its History and Method," *Philosophy East and West* 3.1 (1953): 3.

[46]Shih, "Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism in China," p. 22.

within historical Buddhism toward either nihilism or naturalism. In response, Suzuki claims that Shih approaches Zen as a disinterested historian rather than as a mystical practitioner: “Zen must be understood from the inside, not from the outside,” he opines.[47] This vocabulary of “inside” and “outside” echoes a similar comment in “Zen Theory of Emerson”: “Christ did not seek God outside, but looked inside” (*SDZ,* 30:46). Suzuki's criticism of Shih thus echoes Emerson's of empiricist philosophers who speak “from without, as spectators merely.”[48]

When, more recently, Robert Sharf upbraids Suzuki for deviating from traditional Zen, the discrepancies he uncovers bear a remarkable similarity to certain tenets of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American and European thought that Emerson absorbed or tinctured. “Enlightenment” is achieved in private, not in a public ceremony. *Satori,* this experience of sudden enlightenment that Suzuki heralds as the essential component of Zen, is strongly influenced by William James's formulation of experiential, post-sectarian spirituality, for which Emerson served as a forerunner. In fact, the Japanese conceptual nouns for experience, *keiken* and *taiken,* are Meiji-era inventions. Suzuki characterizes the koan as a paradox designed to elude the rational intellect rather than as a complicated form of textual exegesis.[49] Indeed, Suzuki's interpretation of the koan strongly resembles Coleridge's reading of Kant (an important influence on Emerson) that “truth [is] *beyond* conception and inexpressible” and will appear to the Understanding as fraught with contradiction, as in the case of “Before Abraham was, I am” or “The soul is all in every part.”[50] At one point, Suzuki even explains the koan “What is your original face before you

[47]D. T. Suzuki, “Zen: A Reply to Hu Shih,” *Philosophy East and West* 3.1 (1953): 26.

[48]Emerson, “The Over-Soul,” *CW,* 2:287, quoted in Suzuki, “Zen Theory of Emerson,” *SDZ,* 30:46.

[49]Sharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism,” pp. 107–8, and “Buddhist Modernism and Meditative Experience,” pp. 248–49; Buell, *Emerson*, pp. 181–85.

[50]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character on the Several Grounds of Prudence, Morality and Religion* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1825), p. 226.

were born?" with the question of "Who are you before Abraham was born?"[51]

Given his creative, Western-inflected characterization of Zen, one might wonder why Suzuki never distanced himself from Buddhism, a riddle that likely resists thorough resolution. Perhaps his belief in a living religion—that "every healthy and energetic religion . . . has adapted itself to the ever-changing environment"—obviated the need to forsake the Zen establishment.[52] If traditional religions are always evolving, declarations of allegiance or disavowal become superfluous. Indeed, in *Zen and Japanese Culture,* Suzuki emphasizes that Japanese Zen developed by way of Chinese Chan (itself an adaptation of Buddhism originating in India) and that Zen was "adaptable to the character of the Japanese people." Though, in later life, he appears to have been somewhat disillusioned by the evolution of Allen Ginsberg and Alan Watts's libertarian Beat Zen, he may have realized that America would inevitably endow Zen with a character of its own.[53] In addition, Suzuki may have had pragmatic reasons for remaining within the Zen fold. Mid-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America held two competing images of the East: on the one hand, Eastern philosophy was nihilistic and pessimistic; on the other, it provided fundamental insight into the nature of reality, which Arthur Versluis refers to as "positive Orientalism."[54] Emerson espoused both beliefs at varying points in his career. In an 1842 journal entry, he describes how "the remorseless Buddhism lies all around, threatening with death and night."[55] In "Experience" (1844), however, he invokes the wisdom of Mencius's "vast-flowing vigor" to suggest that "our life seems not so much present, as prospective."[56] This Heraclitean

[51] Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism,* p. 74.

[52] Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism,* p. 14.

[53] Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture,* p. 346. For Suzuki's disillusionment, see Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights,* p. 58, and Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," p. 130.

[54] Versluis, *American Transcendentalism,* p. 5.

[55] Emerson, quoted in Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake*, p. 60.

[56] Mencius, quoted in Emerson, "Experience," *CW,* 3:73.

disposition, which increasingly marks Emerson's later work, amplifies his receptivity to classical Eastern thought. In addition to Emerson's invocations, a variety of developments promoted this positive Orientalism in the West, including Eastern explorations by such New England elites as William Sturgis Bigelow (1850–1926), the first American convert to Buddhism, and the 1879 publication of Edwin Arnold's best-selling poem *The Light of Asia*.[57] During Suzuki's lifetime, positive Orientalism would become sufficiently pervasive that Suzuki could appeal to a popular American audience by describing "Zen . . . [as] a unique product of the Oriental mind."[58]

Altogether, Suzuki appears to have embraced Emerson both in defense of his interpretation of Buddhism against Western critics and as a deviation from New Buddhism as well as traditional Japanese Zen. Suzuki employs Emerson to oppose Japanese thought again insofar as he saw Emerson as repudiating the philosophy of conformity and self-discipline espoused by the Japanese government and couched in Confucian thought. Looking back on his early encounter with Emerson many years later, Suzuki would remember feeling "refreshed," released from the stifling atmosphere of "government verboten."[59] On the other hand, one might also speculate that Emerson appealed to Suzuki, perhaps unconsciously, because his philosophy bore a kinship to, while also extending, authoritarian Japanese political ideology and Confucian precepts.

Like Suzuki, many Japanese students who studied Emerson in the Meiji period felt as if they were encountering their own ideas in his writing.[60] They were also enraptured with authors like Samuel Smiles and Benjamin Franklin, probably because

[57]For a discussion of three New Englanders—Bigelow, Percival Lowell, and George Cabot Lodge—who embraced the East as a hedge against modernism, see T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), pp. 225–41.

[58]Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism,* p. 69.

[59]Suzuki, "Meiji no seishin to jyū," 明治精神と自由 ["Meiji Spirit and Freedom"], *East and West* (Tokyo: Tōri Shoin, 1948), reprinted in *SDZ,* 21:214.

[60]Bunshō Jugaku, *A Bibliography of Ralph Waldo Emerson in Japan from 1878 to 1935* (Kyoto: Sunward, 1947), p. xvii.

they valued the homiletic qualities of the prose and the emphasis upon self-help as extensions of feudalist authoritarian precepts and culturally embedded Confucian values that encouraged self-discipline and self-cultivation.[61] Immediately before he describes his encounter with Emerson in "Meiji Spirit and Freedom," Suzuki relates that Smiles's dictum in *Self-Help* that "Heaven helps those who help themselves" "moved my young heart" and inspired a generation of young people when the Meiji government was impoverished and stricken by bank panics after having been obliged to crush various rebellions (*SDZ,* 21:212). Like the writing of Smiles and Franklin, Emerson's prose, laced as it is with aphorisms, would have felt familiar to Suzuki and yet would have represented a new discursive mode that accentuated the limitations of language. The Confucianist importance of self-purification, which rendered Smiles's self-help advice so attractive, reappears in self-reliance. As we can see from Emerson and Thoreau's fondness for passages such as "Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again," hierarchical Confucian values harmonize with nonconformist Emersonian self-reliance in surprising ways on subjects like self-cultivation and the importance of nature.[62] Indeed, in his copy of *Representative Men,* Suzuki underlined gnomic passages emphasizing the potency of the individual and natural hierarchies, for instance, that "He who is great is what he is from nature" or that "Nature exists entirely in leasts."[63] But there is also discord between transcendentalism and Confucianism, and Emerson's elevation of the self to metaphysical prominence extends the more pragmatically oriented Confucian thought to a level that would have been wholly

[61]Hirakawa Sukehiro, "Japan's Turn to the West," vol. 5 of *The Cambridge History of Japan,* ed. Marius B. Jansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 477–87.

[62]Confucius, quoted in Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854), ed. J. Lyndon Shanley (2004; repr., Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 88. For more on the relationship between Emersonianism and Neo-Confucianism, see Yoshio Takanishi, "Emerson, Japan and Neo-Confucianism," *Emerson Society Quarterly* 48.1/2 (2002): 41–69.

[63]Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Representative Men* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1894), pp. 9, 107, Library of D. T. Suzuki, Matsugaoka Bunko, Kita-kamakura, Japan.

unknown and yet uncannily familiar to the Meiji-educated Suzuki.

Over the course of his lifetime, Suzuki's thought would evolve as he responded to contemporary intellectual trends like existentialism and psychology, as he grappled with ideas of asceticism, and as he developed an account of *satori* in the wake of reading William James's accounts of religious experience. Still, the four spiritual tenets he outlined in "Zen Theory of Emerson"—ineffability, intuition, meditation, and forgetfulness—would persist in Suzukian Zen in one incarnation or another. For example, in a 1927 essay, "Satori, or Enlightenment," Suzuki returns to the ineffability of enlightenment: "Those who have experienced it are always at a loss to explain it coherently or logically. When it is explained at all, either in words or gestures, its content more or less undergoes a mutilation." "Intuitive insight" is one of the qualities inherent in enlightenment, for enlightenment must proceed from oneself:

> Just as we cannot make a horse drink against his will, the taking hold of the ultimate reality is to be done by oneself. Just as the flower blooms out of its inner necessity, the looking into one's own nature must be the outcome of one's own inner overflowing. This is where Zen is so personal and subjective, in the sense of being inner and creative.

"Looking into one's own nature" suggests contemplation or meditation, which Suzuki emphasizes by once more invoking Emerson's word from "Self-Reliance," "concentration" ("a high degree of concentration"), in the examples of Nangaku, who suffered "mental anguish and tribulation" during his eight-year quest for enlightenment, or of Koho, who did not sleep or eat but focused on one question for six days. Suzuki concludes with an account of the forgetfulness inherent in *satori:* "The mirror of mind or the field of consciousness then seems to be so thoroughly swept clean as not to leave a particle of dust on it."[64]

[64]D. T. Suzuki, "Satori, or Enlightenment," in *Selected Writings,* pp. 103, 96, 102, 99, 102.

Emphasizing “abandonment” and “forgetting ourselves” as the heart of Emerson’s thought, Stanley Cavell comments that “everything depends upon your realization of abandonment. For the significance of leaving lies in its discovery that you have settled something.”[65] The notion that in order to attain enlightenment, life as we know it must be forgotten becomes crucial to Suzuki’s conceptualization of *satori;* from forgetfulness, life is rebuilt, “fuller of joy than anything you ever experienced before,” or, as he writes in “Zen Theory of Emerson,” “without withering, there is no budding.”[66]

Thoreau: An Americanized Buddha

In 1904, while working for Paul Carus at Open Court Publishing, Suzuki traveled to the East Coast. At Boston he saw the manuscripts of Emerson and Hawthorne, and at nearby Concord, he stood before their graves; knowing little about Thoreau, however, he did not visit Walden. That same year, thirty-one pages of excerpts from Thoreau’s diaries were published in the *Atlantic*. As he delved into them, Suzuki became enraptured with Thoreau, and in his “From the American Countryside” (1905), he refers to the transcendentalist as “unsurpassed in history.” In Emerson’s writing, a spirit of meditation and self-denial are obscured by his striving for popularity and high culture, whereas Thoreau, Suzuki decides, embodies the lifestyle of “an Eastern ascetic”—unmarried, socially aloof, and dwelling alone “in a dirty, thatched hut.”[67]

In 1899, Paul Carus wrote a letter to Daniel Carter Beard, the famous illustrator of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* and founder of the Sons of Daniel Boone (which would later become the Boy Scouts). Carus fervently hoped that Beard might prove “an artist who would succeed in *Americanising the Buddha* ideal, modernizing the figure, depriving it of its

[65] Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (San Francisco: North Point, 1981), p. 138.

[66] Suzuki, *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism,* p. 67, and “Zen Theory of Emerson,” *SDZ,* 30:48.

[67] Suzuki, “Beikoku no inaka dayori,” 米国の田舎だより [“From the American Countryside”], *Shin Bukkyō* 6, no. 5 (1905): 348–54, reprinted in *SDZ,* 30:379.

Asiatic peculiarities" by depicting not simply a contemplative, meditative Buddha but one engaged in the activities of daily life, "an artistic conception of the Buddha in the various phases of his lifework."[68] Whether or not Carus shared his vision with Suzuki, this unrealized visual image of an Americanized Buddha accords quite well with Suzuki's representation of Thoreau in prose.

Characterizing Thoreau as a man who recognized the superiority of Eastern ideals and lived accordingly, Suzuki quotes from the *Atlantic* excerpt of Thoreau's journal:

> What extracts from the Vedas I have read fall on me like the light of a higher and purer luminary, which describes a loftier course through a purer stratum,—free from particulars, simple, universal. The Vedas contains a sensible account of God. The religion and philosophy of the Hebrews are those of a wilder and ruder tribe, wanting the civility and intellectual refinement and subtlety of the Hindoos.[69]

Although he blurs the lines separating Indian from Japanese religions, Suzuki claims that Buddhism offers the ultimate revelation, more civilized and universally relevant than Christianity's. He is also pleased to note a justification for forgetfulness in Thoreau's journals: "It is only by forgetting yourself that you

[68]Paul Carus to Daniel C. Beard, 13 December 1899, quoted in Martin J. Verhoeven, "Americanising the Buddha: Paul Carus and the Transformation of Asian Thought," in *The Faces of Buddhism in America,* ed. Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 207–8. Although it is unclear to precisely what extent, Carus was familiar with Emerson as well, quoting from Emerson's poem "Each and All" in *The History of the Devil and the Idea of Evil: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Chicago: Open Court, 1900) to illustrate monism—"All are needed by each one, / Nothing is good or fair alone" (p. 463)—and mentioning the Oversoul in *Nietzsche and Other Exponents of Individualism* (Chicago: Open Court, 1914), p. 41.

[69]"Thoreau's Journal II," *Atlantic Monthly,* February 1905, p. 232, quoted in Suzuki, "From the American Countryside," *SDZ,* 30:381. In this article, Suzuki includes all quotations from Thoreau in English. In a *Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) (ed. Carl Hovde [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980]), Thoreau would echo this assessment of Asian religions, highly controversial among his Christian readers: "I trust that some may be as near and dear to Buddha, or Christ, or Swedenborg, who are without the pale of their churches. It is necessary not to be Christian, to appreciate the beauty and significance of the life of Christ. I know that some will have hard thoughts of me, when they hear their Christ named beside my Buddha, yet I am sure that I am willing they should love their Christ more than my Buddha, for the love is the main thing, and I like him too" (p. 67).

draw near to him [God],"[70] a thought Suzuki locates as "truly appearing in the essence of Buddhism" (*SDZ,* 30:381).

In quoting Thoreau in praise of Eastern religions and forgetfulness, Suzuki neglects Thoreau the thinker of opposites or antinomies, as illustrated, for example, by the chapter titles of *Walden:* "Solitude" balanced by "Visitors," "Higher Laws" followed by "Brute Neighbors." Thoreau may praise "the refinement and subtlety of Hindoos," but Suzuki disregards the next paragraph in the *Atlantic*'s publication of Thoreau's journal:

> I do not prefer one religion or philosophy to another. I have no sympathy with the bigotry and ignorance which make transient and partial and provide distinctions between one man's faith or form of faith and another's—as Christian and heathen. I pray to be delivered from narrowness, partiality, exaggeration, bigotry. To the philosopher, all sects, all nations, are alike. I like Brahma, Hari, Buddha, the Great Spirit, as well as God.[71]

Thoreau praises Hinduism, the passage seems to imply, not because he conceives of Eastern ideas as embodying the ultimate truth but because he is opposed to bigotry and parochialism. His disdain for the extremity of the Protestant work ethic—"the better part of the man is soon ploughed into the soil for compost"—as well as for the guilt and "repentance" espoused by Judeo-Christian religions may underlie his praise for Hinduism's "calmness and gentleness."[72]

When Suzuki returns to Thoreau some years later in "The Future Problems of Individual Freedom and Buddhism" (1933), he takes Thoreau to represent "a person with the Eastern spirit of Nature," "a Pratyeka Buddha," a Buddha who lives by himself and achieves enlightenment on his own, as opposed

[70]"Thoreau's Journal II," p. 231, quoted in Suzuki, "From the American Countryside," *SDZ,* 30:380.

[71]"Thoreau's Journal II," p. 232.

[72]Thoreau, *Walden,* p. 5; "Thoreau's Journal II," pp. 232, quoted in Suzuki, "From the American Countryside," *SDZ,* 30:381.

to a *bodhisattva* who proselytizes Buddhism to the masses.[73] Since its inception, transcendentalism, which was "Eastern-like" and marked by "Buddhist influence," dominated "Western religious culture," but that Buddhist influence is waning as materialism and mechanization are "being carried to extremes" (*SDZ,* 32:42). Suzuki quotes a passage from *Walden* to alert both Americans and Japanese to the dangers of the trend:

> Men have an indistinct notion that if they keep up this activity of joint stocks and spades long enough all will at length ride somewhere, in next to no time, and for nothing; but though a crowd rushes to the depot, and the conductor shouts "All aboard!" when the smoke is blown away and the vapor condensed, it will be perceived that a few are riding, but the rest are run over—and it will be called, and will be, "A melancholy accident." [*SDZ,* 32:43]

To prevent materialism and industry from devaluing human life, Suzuki decides, "we need to devise an Eastern standpoint so that we do not get run over" (*SDZ,* 32:43).

Although throughout his lifetime his descriptions of Thoreau tended to be positive, in his conclusion to "The Future Problems of Individual Freedom and Buddhism," Suzuki concedes a shortcoming of Thoreauvian ideology: "There are many places where the absolute individual escape of Thoreau, of an ascetic is not good enough. We can see, in these places, points which we greatly need to address" (*SDZ,* 32:43). The fundamental point that needed to be addressed was one of social engagement. Much of Suzuki's writing about transcendentalism is reiterative, but this Emerson-like criticism of Thoreau does not emerge in his other discussions of transcendentalism. The doubt he expresses about Thoreau suggests that Suzuki was grappling with the matter of individual engagement in his own philosophy; indeed, the question of Zen's relationship to the world would perplex Suzuki throughout his life. In his

[73]D. T. Suzuki, "Kongo ni okeru kojinteki jiyū no mondai to bukkyō," 今後における個人的自由の問題と仏教 ["The Future Problems of Individual Freedom and Buddhism"], *Shindō* 8.7 (1933), reprinted in *SDZ,* 32:42.

early Japanese work *New Theory of Religion* (1896), he describes "religion as an entity with the state as its body," and in *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (1907), remembering criticisms of Buddhism as world-denying or nihilistic, he insists that "the ideal of the Buddhist life," which is full of love and energy, is set against the "ascetic practice of some monks."[74] But twenty-eight years later in "Love of Nature" (1936), an essay revised and reprinted in *Zen and Japanese Culture,* he would defend asceticism's diminished material comforts by describing civilization as "the losing of the soul."[75] His reference to Thoreau in the same essay suggests that Thoreau served as a kind of touchstone in his meditations about engagement.

In a lecture entitled "Zen and the Japanese Spirit" (1935), Suzuki explores Thoreau's woodland solitude in greater depth than previously. He is especially attracted to a passage from *Walden* in which Thoreau describes how the sound of rain brings a reprieve from loneliness, which Suzuki quotes in its entirety in the revised form of the lecture in *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1959):

> I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy, and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.[76]

[74]Suzuki, "A New Theory of Religion," *SDZ,* 27:139, quoted in and translated by Kirita Kiyohide, "D. T. Suzuki on Society and the State," *Rude Awakenings: Zen, the Kyoto School, and the Question of Nationalism,* ed. James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), p. 54; Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism,* p. 53.

[75]Suzuki, "Love of Nature," *The Eastern Buddhist* 7.1 (1936): 82.

[76]Thoreau, *Walden,* p. 132, quoted in Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture,* pp. 342–43.

For Suzuki, the passage recalls the Noh play "Rain and Moon," whose author, the poet Saigyo, relates a similar spiritual experience with nature:

> The moon gradually came up, and though there was no snow and no frost, as far as the eye could see, the field and the opposing mountains looked completely white. He doubted that the light of the moon could be that bright and wondered whether the scene could have been caused by evening frost. Shining from a thousand *ri* away, the moonlight dazzled everywhere. But suddenly, with a gust of wind came the pitter-patter sound of the rain. When he looked outside, the moon was as pure white as before, but with the gust of wind, the autumn leaves on the tree fell, and the sound of the falling leaves was like rain.[77]

Thoreau and Saigyo recount a gradually dawning recognition that "the thing most intimate to us" is not other humans but a cultural universal, nature (*SDZ,* 16:94). When Suzuki revisits the two stories as he addresses an American audience in *Zen and Japanese Culture,* he treats them as representative of "the poetic sensibility of the nature-loving Japanese," of which Thoreau has but an "inkling."[78] However, when explaining the pairing for a Japanese audience in "Zen and the Japanese Spirit," Suzuki attempts to counteract the perception that America is a "materialist country" by observing that "there are a considerable number of people with conceptual, intellectual tendencies" who still read Thoreau and Emerson today (*SDZ,* 16:93). Both narratives were originally delivered in 1935, and for both audiences Suzuki emphasizes the extent to which "Oriental thoughts and feelings filtered into the American mind."[79]

In his 1948 "What Japanese Spirituality Becomes," Suzuki uses Thoreau's rainy-day revelation to illustrate the benefits of spiritual understanding over those available through science.

[77] Suzuki, "Zen to nihonjin no kishitsu" 禅と日本人の気質 ["Zen and the Japanese Spirit"] (lecture for Japanese Cultural Society, Spring 1935), *One True World* (Tokyo: Kondō Shoten, 1941), reprinted in *SDZ,* 16:91. A *ri* is an old Japanese unit of distance, approximately 2.44 miles.

[78] Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture,* pp. 341–42.

[79] Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture,* p. 343.

Noting that in the late 1940s, a telescope two hundred inches in diameter was being built in Arizona to extend the visible limits of the universe, Suzuki maintains that the actual limits of the universe will, nonetheless, always remain beyond the grasp of science. "Beyond that, there is always a beyond that."[80] But through the sounds of the rain, Thoreau was able to "become one with the rain, become one with heaven and earth," to reach a "place of infinite expansion," to discover the secrets of the universe and peer beyond the capacities of any telescope (*SDZ*, 21:393).

This interpretation of Thoreau's rainy-day experience seems at least partially indebted to Emerson. The theme of "Circles"—that no truth or knowledge is so permanent that it will not one day be superseded—is counterbalanced by the claim of "The Over-Soul"—that an eternal Unity underlying all things can be found within the individual soul. When a man experiences this Over-Soul, Emerson dramatically declares, "the universe . . . [becomes] represented in an atom, a moment of time."[81] Emerson's essays predate, both historically and in Suzuki's reading experience, Thoreau's published reports about the widening horizon of his own being, a project harmonious with Suzuki's philosophy. Thoreau's revelation emerges from ecstasies, moments in which he is overwhelmed by a sensuous appreciation of nature and feels as if he stands beside himself, all of which he encapsulates in a journal entry as "an indescribable infinite all-absorbing divine heavenly pleasure, a sense of elevation & expansion."[82]

Although he was attracted to Thoreau's asceticism, Suzuki had much more in common with Emerson, a fellow lecturer-author who was committed to popularizing heterodox religious beliefs. If, as Robert Sattelmeyer remarks, Emerson's Thoreau

[80] Suzuki, "Nihonteki reiseiteki naru mono" ["What Japanese Spirituality Becomes"] (lecture for *Ryūmonsha,* Japan Industry Club, Tokyo, 23 April 1948), *Ryūmon Zasshi,* no. 675 (July 1948), reprinted in *SDZ,* 21:393.

[81] Emerson, "The Oversoul," *CW,* 2:297.

[82] Thoreau, quoted in Alan D. Hodder, *Thoreau's Ecstatic Witness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 48. For more on Thoreau's ecstasies and their relation to the project of *Walden,* see Hodder, pp. 27–69.

is "a character of his [own] devising," Suzuki adopts that character when he writes about Thoreau.[83] In "From the American Countryside," Suzuki echoes Emerson's depictions of Thoreau as "a bachelor of thought and nature" and "a hermit and ascetic" when he portrays the man he never met as an "Eastern ascetic" "without really close friends" (*SDZ,* 30:379). In fact, Suzuki recirculates two biographical inaccuracies embedded in Emerson's eulogy for his fellow Concordian: that Thoreau abandoned the pencil trade, and that in his naturalism he disdained formal biology and zoology. But unlike Emerson, Suzuki does not dismiss Thoreau's fondness for rusticity and isolation as tantamount to being the "captain of a huckleberry party."[84] Instead, Suzuki treats Thoreau as a champion of nature in an industrialized world.

In a section of *East and West* (1948) entitled "Meiji Spirit and Freedom," Suzuki returns to Emerson as an embodiment of "spiritual freedom" in his most overtly political analysis of transcendentalism.[85] The Meiji Restoration marked the collapse of Japanese isolationism, and with the influx of change, Emerson served as a kind of intellectual call to arms for Japanese youth. The restlessness of the Meiji period was reflected in nineteenth-century America's "ethos of longing for new things," and Emerson presented a fresh interpretation of old traditions, "Eastern ideas filtered through the mind of young lively Americans" (*SDZ,* 21:214–15). Nonetheless, Japanese scholars did not adopt Americans' spirit of "autonomy and independence" (*SDZ,* 21:215). They may have transcribed the songs of the West's courtly muses, but they did not locate in them their own inspiration. The Japanese lost World War II, Suzuki charged, because they embraced the regularity and rigidity of totalitarianism, because they could not move beyond their "imitative mentality and custom of rote memorization" (*SDZ,* 21:216).

[83]Robert Sattelmeyer, "Thoreau and Emerson," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thoreau,* ed. Joel Myerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 37.

[84]Emerson, "Thoreau," *CW,* 10:480.

[85]Suzuki, "Meiji Spirit and Freedom," *SDZ,* 21:216.

For Suzuki, the ensuing struggle between communism and capitalism is marked by a similar confusion about freedom. Communism espouses the freedom of "considering all equal," a leveling of socioeconomic status, whereas capitalism touts the freedom of "differentiation, liberalism," a freedom of financial achievement. Both ideologies, Suzuki claims, are inadequate; both lack "spiritual freedom" (perhaps more accurately but more obscurely rendered in English as "spiritual liberalism") (*SDZ,* 21:216). By spiritual freedom, Suzuki does not mean freedom of religion; rather, as he explains in *Essays on Zen Buddhism (First Series),* he considers it a state of absolute individual creativity. For a spiritually free person, "the sole authority in his religious life will have to be found within himself." He will reject "traditionalism or institutionalism," and "his actions[,] . . . so long as they are the inevitable overflow of his inner life[,] . . . are good, even holy."[86] Found in Emerson and the *Avatamsaka Sutra,* spiritual freedom imparts "a principle to deal with the various relationships of modern human, collective life" (*SDZ,* 21:216). To illustrate, Suzuki quotes a passage in which Emerson entreats his readers to value "what moves in your heart," the glory that, "through a crack in the window[,] . . . shines in and falls on your head."[87] If a society does not permit individuals the freedom to exercise this spontaneous creative and spiritual power, it is doomed to failure.

Over the course of his career, Suzuki's thought evolved to embrace transcendentalism as an "Eastern solution" to the problems of modernity, a solution he saw embodied in Thoreau's life but that he advocated in terms borrowed from Emerson. Suzuki's engagement with transcendentalism does not exonerate him from the charge levied against him in recent years: that his writing developed out of, and perhaps even contributed to, the Japanese nationalism that fueled World

[86] Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism (First Series),* p. 62.

[87] Suzuki, "Meiji Spirit and Freedom," *SDZ,* 21:213–14. As I have not been able to locate the source, the passage from Emerson may be apocryphal or a paraphrase, both of which occur from time to time in Suzuki's quotations. Nevertheless, rejecting authority in favor of a spirituality grounded in the individual is classic Emerson.

War II.[88] Shaku Sōen, who advocated Japanese military aggression, quotes from Emerson's "Brahma" to suggest the metaphysical identity of the "red slayer" and the "slain." Suzuki also became fond of quoting the poem, albeit in books without overt apologies for war; still, the poem is derived from *The Bhagavad-Gita,* in which Krishna argues that the illusory nature of the material world can provide a justification for killing.[89] Suzuki also appears to border on complicity with Japanese nationalism when he summons the transcendentalists to demonstrate that the West recognized the ascendency of Eastern ideas, that Zen underlies and supersedes all other faiths. At the turn of the century, this claim for Japanese Buddhism's superiority was frequently invoked to justify Japanese imperialism in Asia.[90]

Yet despite any latent or overt nationalism, Suzuki's thought is permeated with a universalism that cannot be denied. Writing for audiences in both Japan and the United States, Suzuki constructs Thoreau and Emerson as Western exemplars of Eastern ideas to promote cross-cultural understanding. In an attempt to disarm Japanese prejudices against Americans, he marches out Emerson and Thoreau to show that Americans are motivated less by "materialist dollar worship" than by "the urgency of the pursuit of ideals."[91] A number of Americans

[88]For Suzuki as nativistic, see Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," and Brian Daizen Victoria, *Zen at War,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), pp. 105–12 in particular.

[89]Sōen, *Sermons of a Buddhist Abbot,* p. 23. Suzuki quotes "Brahma" in *Zen and Japanese Culture,* p. 312; *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, ed. Christmas Humphreys, (Florence: Routledge, 1957), pp. 95–96; and *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind* (1949; repr. London: Rider, 1969), pp. 118–19. I should note that as editor, translator, and occasional ghostwriter, Suzuki may have inserted "Brahma" into Shaku Sōen's book (Snodgrass, *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West,* p. 262). For Emerson, Thoreau, and *The Bhagavad Gita*, see also Buell, *Emerson,* pp. 177–80, and Dimock, *Through Other Continents,* pp. 7–22. Sōen alludes to the metaphysical oneness of the "red slayer" and the "slain," but Perry Miller characterized the students of his generation as meeting "the serene pronouncements of Brahma with cries of dissent." As participants in World War II, they doubted that the slayer and slain could be identical ("From Edwards to Emerson," in *Errand into the Wilderness* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956], p. 186).

[90]Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," pp. 110–11.

[91]Suzuki, "What Japanese Spirituality Becomes," *SDZ,* 21:390. In this light, statements like Faure's that "If he [Suzuki] praised writers such as Henri [*sic*] David

have a contemplative, Eastern-like side to their personalities, for they "love freedom, and there are many who love philosophy, literature, and religion." Their insights, if allowed to flow across cultures, may refresh staid Eastern concepts, a process that Suzuki understands he has begun: "What is at the base of consciousness, what flows through the unconscious, has now become foreign letters, literatures, and ideas, because of the readings of people like me. Because of these readings, foreign ideas will naturally enter our hearts deeply."[92]

Just as he helped liberalize the worldview of the Japanese elite, Suzuki helped alter that of the American cultural elite as well. I must constrain myself to the briefest of treatments here, but the subject is ripe for further exploration. John Cage has commented that Suzuki encouraged him to compose music that would "let the sounds be themselves," music that would widen his audience's perspective to help them perceive what they had never seen before.[93] Allen Ginsberg describes Buddhism as having "liberated contemporary poetry from any solid ideological fixation," for Zen taught the Beats contradiction, irrationality, and freedom.[94] In addition, Amy Hungerford has argued that Ginsberg aimed to create a poetic sound that would transform the reader who pronounced it aloud, a practice he based on Hindu and Buddhist chants that would metamorphose the chanter into the God whose name he chants. Perhaps Ginsberg was influenced by Suzuki's fondness for Emerson's belief that "God is here within," that Jesus Christ was but a representative man who realized that "Through me, God acts; through me, speaks."[95] In J. D. Salinger's *Franny*

Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson, it is only because he detected an Oriental influence in their writings" seem reductive (*Chan Insights and Oversights,* p. 63).

[92] Suzuki, "Zen and the Japanese Spirit," *SDZ,* 16:92, 96.

[93] Richard Kostelanetz, *Conversing with Cage* (1987; repr. New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 44.

[94] Allen Ginsberg, "Spontaneous Intelligence," *Tricycle,* Fall 1995, http://www.tricycle.com/special-section/spontaneous-intelligence, accessed 13 August 2011.

[95] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," and "The Divinity School Address," *CW* 2:71, 1:129, quoted in Suzuki, "Zen Theory of Emerson," *SDZ*, 30:47, 46. Amy Hungerford, *Postmodern Belief: American Literature and Religion since 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 28–44.

and Zooey, the older siblings, Seymour and Buddy, direct the eponymous protagonists' syncretic religious education toward a condition espoused by "Dr. Suzuki [who] says somewhere that to be in a state of pure consciousness—*satori*—is to be with God before he said, Let there be light." The novel can easily be read as Franny's quest to recover this primeval, spiritual state amidst the ego, affect, and bombast of her society, a search that culminates finally in a heartfelt conversation with her brother, which is followed by a dial tone, "the best possible substitute for the primordial silence itself."[96]

Such a brief list only begins to touch on the myriad ways in which Suzuki's ideas were diffused throughout contemporary American music, poetry, and fiction. There is, however, some commonality in the reception of his philosophy: in all three cases, Zen appears to entail Emerson and Suzuki's theme of forgetfulness, a reorientation of one's perspective on life, an escape from the staid, familiar understandings of one's own reality. We may be forgiven if, for a moment, we are disappointed that Suzuki's philosophy was not entirely fresh, that some of our favorite artists thought they had been inspired by mystical visions of Japanese Zen when, all the while, some all-too-familiar New Englanders stood just behind the curtain.[97] Or perhaps, fitting the *Wizard of Oz* metaphor, we might conclude that these twentieth-century American artists had within themselves the life- and art-altering inspiration they needed all along, a contention of which Suzuki—who always

[96]J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey* (New York: Little, Brown, 1961), pp. 65, 202. For the dial tone as related to Suzuki's thought, see Hungerford, *Postmodern Belief,* pp. 8–14.

[97]To be fair, both Ginsberg and Cage seem to have observed the resemblance between Suzuki's ideas and transcendentalism, though not the extent and nature of the transmission. Cage wrote in 1968, "in reading the *Journal* of Thoreau, of course, I find all of those ideas from the Orient there, because he actually got them, as I did, from the Orient" (*Conversing with Cage,* p. 56). Ginsberg observes that he, like the transcendentalists, is "a flaky Buddhist," and that "historically there's been some kind of respect for Buddhist tradition, Buddhist imagery, calm and contemplation, Buddhist brooding or Buddhist implacability, Buddhist stillness in US literature from the Transcendentalists to Sherwood Anderson" ("Spontaneous Intelligence," *Tricycle,* Fall 1995).

described Zen in the Emersonian language of accessing "the real nature of *one's own* mind or soul"—would likely have approved.[98]

[98] Suzuki, *Introduction to Zen Buddhism,* p. 10; my italics.

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