István Janó

SOME ASPECTS OF THE JAPANESE IMPACT UPON ANGLO-SAXON CIVILIZATION

The magic East, which lived in the imagination of European people as the distant, misty origin of human life, the cradle of history, has had an enormous appeal for a large number of voyagers, artists, writers and poets through many centuries. This magic fascination, which has lasted ever since and which seems to be taking new directions in our time, is not easy to account for. One of the reasons might be sought in the increasing feeling of pessimism brought about by the belief, commonly held from the Middle Ages on, that mankind has been corrupted since the Fall of Man, and that this process of deterioration reached its climax in our century. The gradual decay of the old system of values based on Christian tradition resulted in a heated attempt to find something that could open new horizons and provide a new world-conception. It was inevitable that exotic, hitherto "unspoiled" civilizations should be discovered for new sources of inspiration. Many writers and poets, as well as philosophers have looked to the Orient to find new forms of expression which could give a further impetus to the development of Western culture. Although India and China, which belong to the greatest ancient civilizations of the world, with extraordinary achievements in philosophy and art - the culture

of the T'ang dynasty of China is often referred to as the finest in the world - have exerted a great influence on the West, it is Japan, a country with a comparatively shorter history of cultural traditions, which has been most influential upon Western civilization since about the second half of the last century. The basic aim of this essay is an attempt to give a brief survey of some of the most conspicuous forms of the Japanese influence upon Anglo-Saxon culture, covering literature, philosophy and fine arts as well.

I.

Although Marco Polo, the famous voyager of the Middle Ages, mentions the name of Japan in one of his travel accounts, the country was actually opened to the Western mind in 1549, when St. Francis of Xavier began his mission to convert the Japanese to Christianity. During the two years of his visit he discovered a remarkably clever and peculiarly civilized people who proved to be responsive to his missionary efforts. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the number of converts amounted to no less than 300,000, and, although St. Francis' careful work was undone by Japan' military leader, Toyotomi Hideyoshi - who banned Christianity in 1587 - it has remained influential until the present day. Subsequent to the historical achievement of St. Francis of Xavier, the curiosity of Europe was aroused by this Far Eastern country, and the lively interest, ranging form excited and often exaggerated enthusiasm to a mature comprehension of its traditions and adaptation of its literary forms, has not slackened since.

The first contact between Europe and Japan in the form of the Jesuits' visit and missionary work resulted in a revaluation of previous notions and misconceptions about Oriental civilizations. The missionaries' experiences led thinkers to draw comparisons between a restless, provincial and in many respects "barbarous" Europe, and a highly cultured, intelligent people with a stable family and social system, refined arts and crafts, and a responsiveness to and ready absorption of foreign cultural influences.

Although the country chose to isolate itself from the rest of the world until 1854, the Western image of Japan created by the Jesuits had not changed for about two and a half centuries, and may be described best with John Stalker's words: "Let not the Europeans any longer flatter themselves with the empty notions of having surpassed all the world... The glory of one country, Japan alone, has exceeded in beauty and magnificence all the pride of the Vatican and Pantheon heretofore."[1]

The rediscovery of Japan was brought about by Commodore Matthew Perry, who asked the military government of the country to end the policy of isolationism, a request which was eventually granted by the shogun Tokugawa Iesada in 1854. This event of historical importance, confirmed by the visit of a Japanese mission to America in 1860 to ratify the treaty initiated by Perry, produced a new wave of interest in Japan.

Nathaniel Hawthorne considered the Far Eastern country to be an excellent literary subject[2], and Walt Whitman, who realized the significance of the Orient, hailed the new meet-

ing between East and West in some of his poems[3]. In the meantime, Ernest Fenollosa, an American Orientalist, who spent some time in Japan, made an attempt "to condense my experiences of two hemispheres, and my study of their history".[4] In his poems he compared the contact between East and West to a twofold marriage, and he was among the first to borrow and adapt elements of Japanese poetry. Fenollosa's literary oeuvre has mainly lost its attraction for today's reader, but his ideas exerted a great influence on succeeding generations. Ezra Pound, himself an admirer of Fenollosa's art, has summed up his career best: "In America and Europe he cannot be looked upon as a mere searcher after exotics. His mind was constantly filled with parallels and comparisons between eastern and western art. To him the exotic was a means of fructification."[5]

England's attitude towards the newly discovered Far Eastern empire was at the beginning far from the enthusiasm of the American literary élite. The country, acknowledged to be the Glory of Europe, chose to treat Japan with unjust condescension, still uncertain whether to regard it as a civilized or a barbarous nation. This wavering between two extremes of evaluation is manifest in the works of Charles MacFarlane, a British author of minor importance in the second half of the nineteenth century. The obvious disparity of the American and British assessment of the Japanese culture might be explained by the fact that America, the meeting-ground of foreign tradition, looked in similar terms on Japan, a country which was destined not so much to create new ideas but to

adapt and re-create what other countries had to offer. England, on the other hand, starting from the self-sufficient position of a country that had given the greatest creative geniuses to the world, obviously set much less value on Japan.

This initial air of condescension on the part of Victorian England, however, yielded soon to an entirely different attitude towards the Oriental country, brought about by a sudden interest in Japanese art, painting, porcelain and lacquerware. The Japanese vogue was immediately reflected by the literature of the period, and several poets and writers, though failing to grasp the real significance of the Orient, considered Japan a suitable literary subject. Sir Edwin Arnold, a poet and writer of travel-sketches, proved to be highly responsive to Japanese culture. Besides showing a keen interest in Buddhism, he was well-read in Japanese poetry as well. He not only translated Japanese poems into English, but wrote some of his own in the tradition of the haiku and waka.[6] Rudyard Kipling also contributed to the popularization of the Far Eastern country in Western Europe. A traveller in Japan, he was fascinated by the refined culture and superb architecture of the country. His impressions are poured out in a number of enthusiastic travel-sketches and poems which reveal a keen artistic perception and a profound comprehension of the Oriental civilization.[7]

Besides poetry, Japan appears in Western fiction as well, offering interesting, often exotic material for various novelists,most of whom had travelled in Japan. One of the

most typical forms of fiction using Japanese subject matter is the travel book, produced by the hundreds in this period. They are based mostly on tales, legends or events in Japanese history, conveying an atmosphere of misty exoticism and providing a distorted, romantic image of the country. In general "Japan was described as on the one hand, fairy-like, quaint, childish, toy-like, polite and honest, while on the other hand it was called proud, militaristic, cruel, revengeful, and treacherous."[8]

The other type of fiction is the so-called story of desertion, the finest example of which is, undoubtedly, *Madame Butterfly*, a novel written by John Luther Long. The novel was brought to stage by David Belasco, the famous American playwright, and made into a splendid and uniquely popular opera by Giacomo Puccini. The play, though more closely resembling melodrama than tragedy with the usual irresponsible, rakish naval officer and the disappointed Japanese woman, is a remarkable literary accomplishment because, by setting two moral codes against each other, it attempts to give a more authentic, more realistic picture of Japan.

The first remarkable synthesis of Japanese and Western cultural traditions in fiction was realized by Lafcadio Hearn, an American writer, who died as a Japanese citizen in Tokyo. - Despite the fact that he had no more than a moderate knowledge of the Japanese laguage - a handicap which he managed to overcome by an extremely sensitive personality akin to the spirit of the Japanese people and an intuitive understanding for their cultural traditions - he belongs to the few who are

said to have really understood nineteenth-century Japan. His restless spirit and insatiable desire to explore new territories of learning led him to discover the literature, the art and the religion of his adopted country. The tone of his numerous prose works published during his stay in Japan between 1894 and 1904 varies from a conscious exoticization of "that land of lovely mists, gentle and sensitive if rather bloodless people, cherry blossoms, and amiable legends"[9] to an attempt to give an objective picture of the country, free from romanticism and traditional misconceptions. Hearn's literary merit lies in the artistic adaptation of foreign material in Western literature and a highly original style, superbly adequate to the subject matter, as well as in his "keeping Japan alive in the minds of writers till the day when a new generation of poets might turn to Japan for one of its sources of ideas and verifications of artistic principle."[10]

The example of these and many other writers and poets clearly shows that by the turn of the century Western interest in Japan was becoming more serious than it had previously been - in recognition of the fact that Japan was well on the way to turning from a distant, exotic country into a world-power.

These unparalleled phenomena of manifold cultural interrelationships, however, were by no means confined to England and America. France also began to develop an intelligent interest in Oriental cultures, which originally took the shape of a vogue for Chinese fine arts. Chinese exoticism,

however, took new directions in 1856 when Félix Bracquemond discovered several masterworks of the Japanese painter, Hokusai, in the possession of the printer Delâtre. Bracquemond's interest was soon shared by some of the most prominent French artists and critics, and attention came to be focussed upon Japanese art, with special regard to a unique genre, the wood-block print. - The art of woodcut, *hanga* or *ukiyoe* in Japanese, which was introduced to Japan from China in the wake of Buddhism,became the national mode of engraving and was carried to marvellous perfection. For a long period the woodcut was confined to religious images, but the themes of the later prints show a great variety from scenes taken from the everyday life of common people and portraits of actors, beautiful ladies and courtesans to landscapes and illustrations to contemporary literary works. The greatest masters of the genre include Kitagawa Utamaro, whose prints depicting the sensuous beauty of women ("bijinga") are incomparable; Katsushika Hokusai, who found new inspiration in landscape; and Andoo Hiroshige, who rendered every aspect of his country with extraordinary intimacy and freshness. - The masterpieces of Japanese block-print art did not only attain an unexpected popularity in France, but, more importantly, they came to serve as models of technique and theoretical basis for French Impressionism. Manet, Monet, Degas, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Duret regarded the Japanese as "the first and finest Impressionists." They found in the peculiarly stylized features, the unusual combination of colours, and the uncommon perspectives of the block-prints a liberation from academic formal-

ism, declaring that Japanese paintings defied the rigid, traditional rules of composition and achieved a beauty of the artist's own devising. Although contemporary Japanese critics condemned the art of the block-prints for lacking a universal meaning in depicting human activities at a static, transitory moment, Japanese ukiyoe, paradoxically enough, remained one of the most fertile sources of French Impressionism.

It was James Whistler, an American who studied in France and spent most of his life in England, who succeeded in combining the Oriental interests of all the three countries. Being a member of the group of the French Impressionists, he began as a collector of Japanese and Chinese works of art, block-prints, lacquerware, etc. The first paintings of his own in the Japanese tradition are imitations of his models both in composition and subject matter, but he gradually managed to absorb the stylistic elements of the block-prints, and he developed a refined, mature style entirely of his own. When one of his critics wrote: "Never have the elements of Eastern and Western art been so originally united as in these poems of night and space"[11], he also alluded to one of the most remarkable characteristics of Impressionism: its quality to unite fine arts, music and literature. This interpenetration of arts and poetry accounts for the fact that the significance of Whistler's ideas was recognized not only by painters, but poets and writers as well.

II.

The turn of the century witnessed a poetic revival launched by a new generation of experimenters. The origins of the movement are to be sought in France where the interest of the Impressionists in Japanese art was taken up by promiient figures of literature Literary-minded travellers in Japan familiarized the French public with translations and imitations of Japanese poetry. It was Paul-Louis Couchoud, who is said to have started the vogue of haiku in French poetry,[12] and his practice was soon followed by a number of poets who integrated elements of the Japanese verse in their own poetry. In 1910 Marcel Revon published his famous *Anthologie de La Littérature Japonaise*, and La Nouvelle Revue Francaise contributed to the popularization of this Japanese poetic form by holding haiku competitions. - A brief survey of the history of the genre may perhaps throw light on why haiku assumed such a central position in the new poetic movement.

Haiku is the shortest form of Japanese verse, consisting of seventeen syllables - with lines of five, seven, and five syllables - , and is alternately called "hokku" or "haikai". It is a complete poem by itself, and in its short compass it can give a picture and mood, and in the hands of a master considerably more. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, the form was used for light, inconsequential verse and word play, but it came into its own with Matsuo Bashoo. His haiku are simple and direct pictures of actual scenes, from which one gets not only the effect of a temporary mood,

but, also a true and noble spirit. According to his rules, each haiku must state or imply one of the seasons, a fact which suggests the high degree to which the form is devoted to natural subjects and natural images. These images are conventional symbols derived from the eclectic heritage of Taoism, Buddhism, and Shintoism (e.g. cuckoo as the symbol of loneliness, fir-tree as that of longevity and peace, etc). The greatest masters Bashoo, Taniguchi Buson, Kobayashi Issa, and Masaoka Shiki had a large share in elaborating and further refining this unique form of poetry, whose most outstanding features are: condensation, definite imagery, simple, unembellished style and lack of didacticism.

This poetic technique was accepted as a literary model by a group of young poets, including F.S. Flint, J. Campbell, F. Farr, E. Storer and F.W. Tancred, who founded the so-called Poets' Club in 1908. Their leader was T.E. Hulme, the prominent English philosopher and literary theoretician, who is said to have started the new poetic movement. His literary principles were influenced by two sources of inspiration: Japanese and modern French symbolist poetry. The clever combination of these two sources with free verse produced a highly original and revolutionary poetic style, the Imagist technique. The "New Poetry" propounded by Hulme broke with Romanticism, and was characterized by accuracy and conciseness, lack of sentamentality and precise imagery usually taken from nature. - In the next two years after its formation, new figures like Richard Aldington, Amy Lowell, John Gould Fletcher became associated with the Poets' Club, whose leadership

was gradually taken over from Hulme by the greatest of Imagists, Ezra Pound.

Richard Aldington was first impressed by the block-prints of two great masters, Hokusai and Utamaro, then by Arthur Waley's superb translations of Japanese prose and poetry. Amy Lowell had perhaps the most profound knowledge of Japanese art and culture among the members of the Poets' Club. Her brother, who stayed in Japan for a long time, sent home books on the country and Oriental works of art. "All through my childhood", Amy Lowell wrote, "these books and works of art made Japan so vivid to my imagination that I cannot realize that I have never been there."[13] She preserved her fondness for Japanese art all her life, and her childhood impressions were translated into the language of poetry. Some of her poems evoke the vague, floating atmosphere of the block-prints, others show her familiarity with haiku and other forms of Japanese poetry. - John Gould Fletcher's interest in Japan started with his reading translations of Japanese art and philosophy. Influenced by Fenollosa's works on Japanese art and its philosophical background, he became familiar with the mystic doctrines of Zen Buddhism. His first poems bear the heavy burden of his philosophical studies, but the later ones show a shift from art and philosophy to haiku. What he admires most in this poetic form is "the universalized emotion derived from a natural fact" and "the expression of the emotion in the fewest possible terms".[14] Fletcher grasped the essence of haiku perhaps better than the other members of the Poets' Club, but his efforts to put his theories into

practice produced a poetry disappointing on the whole; either because of his conventional use of exotic materials and settings or his juxtaposition of unnatural, dissonant images. - Besides poetry, he wrote some remarkable essays in which he emphasized the importance of haiku for the whole Imagist movement: "I should say that the influence of haiku on the Imagists was much more considerable than almost anyone has suspected. It helped them make their poems concise, full of direct feeling of nature.[15]

An objective assessment of the literary merit of the Imagists seems today to require a concentration not so much on their poetic accomplishment itself, but rather on their formulation of new aesthetic principles and their preoccupation with opening new fields for modern poetry by absorbing and assimilating various literary influences from Japanese poetry to French Impressionism and Symbolism. Their experiments prove that Oriental poetic techniques can serve as a basis for establishing modern poetic theory and practice.

This, in some respects ambivalent evaluation certainly does not hold true of Ezra Pound, whose literary oeuvre itself, though still the subject of heated controversies, seems to belong to the greatest achievements twentieth-century poetry can boast of. Graduating from the University of Pennsylvania, he began his literary career in Europe. His first volume of poetry, *A lume spento*, was published in Venice in 1908. The next year he established himself in London and remained there until 1920. He met W.B. Yeats and their acquaintance soon matured into sincere friendship. His second

he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that a sense, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk.[16] This conception contributed to formulate the central thesis of Pound's poetry: the image, which is "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time... It is the presentation of such an image which gives that sudden sense of liberation; that sense of freedom from time and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art."[17]

The definition of image led Pound to take a step further, and, influenced by Fenollosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, he set himself the nearly impossible task of exploring the mysterious world of the ideograms, i.e., the Sino-Japanese written characters. It is a well-known fact that both languages employ the Chinese characters, which, in some respects, may be regarded as abstract representations of ideas. As a matter of fact, in prehistoric times, a number of characters were direct representations of things or ideas. But even in those times, most of the characters were already symbols of particular words in the language, which means that they were not strictly ideographs (symbols of ideas), but logographs (symbols of words). According to traditional classification, the characters are grouped into five categories: 1. pictographs, 2. simple ideographs, 3. compound ideographs, 4. phonetic loans (i.e. borrowing the use of a homonymous word for writing something

volume of verse, *Personnae*, which appeared in 1909, made him one of the leading figures in the avant-garde circles of London.

The decisive period in his artistic development are the years from 1912 to 1914, when he became associated with the Poets' Club, and, under the influence of Fenollosa's works, began to devote himself to the study of Japanese poetry. In an article published in *The Fortnightly*, 1914, he revealed how Japanese haiku influenced him in forming his literary principles:

"Three years ago (1911) in Paris I got out of a 'metro' train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face and another and another... And that evening... I found suddenly the expression... not in speech, but in sudden splotches of colour. It was just that - a 'pattern' or hardly a pattern if by pattern you mean something with a repeat in it. But it was a word, the beginning for me of a new language in colour." This experience inspired one of his best-known verses in the tradition of haiku.

> "The apparition of these faces in a crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough."

Pound adapted the haiku technique in a number of short poems and in the *Cantos* as well, and used it to form his literary theory, laying the emphasis - similarly to the poetic principles of the members of the Poets' Club - on compactness and natural imagery. "I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man uses 'symbols'

which cannot be pictured or indicated graphically), and 5. phonetic compounds, consisting of a phonetic, giving the sound, and a signific, giving the meaning.

Starting from the ideogrammic quality of the characters, Pound conceived them as a new kind of metaphor, whose poetic message depended upon the interrelationship of the component elements. Based on this conception, he invented the so-called super-pository technique, adapted in his own poems in the haiku tradition, which involved the use of a vivid passage, as in the case of a compound ideogram.[18] - At present it is extremely difficult to decide whether Pound's conception was correct or not. Scientists tend to agree that pictorial representation or composition according to logical rules are characteristic for only a limited number of characters. The majority of them is made up by phonetic compounds, yet in an undefinable number of cases there is an obscure, mainly inextricable relation between signific and phonetic. This fact indicates that Pound might have been mistaken in his conception. His error was soon found out and ridiculed by his critics, who are liable to obscure the fact that even through a misconception, Pound succeeded in extending his Imagistic technique and opening new territories for modern poetry by combining Western and Oriental literary traditions.

Around the turn of the century, Western interest turned to the traditional forms of Japanese drama, among which *nōh* was to become one of the most fertile sources of inspiration for Western dramatists. - Nōh, one of the classical Japanese dramatic forms, was created by Kan'ami and Seami Motokiyo

toward the end of the fourteenth century. Originally a fashionable entertainment of the aristocracy, it became later open to common people, too, exerting a great influence upon the puppet theatre and the kabuki, which appeared as late as the end of the sixteenth century. In the traditional nōh repertoire we find pieces praising the prosperity of the country, plays dealing with warriors and historical characters among others. Some are set in an entirely real world; in others supernatural beings, ghosts, demons, appear. The plays are written in poetic form, using a variety of complex literary devices. The actors are all male, singers and dancers at the same time, wearing fourteenth-century costumes and in some roles masks, too. The performance is usually accompanied by two or three drummers and flutist. A chorus of six or more men chants the narrative parts of the play and sometimes the words of the characters. Originally nōh was played in outdoor theatres, but now most stages are constructed within a building. The stage walls are decorated with stylized pine trees and painted bamboo designs. Scenery is usually also stylized, merely suggesting the objects.

Despite the fact that nōh is the most complex of Japanese literary forms, it exerted a great influence on many poets and playwrights of the 20th century, above all on Ezra Pound and William Butler Yeats. They studied nōh together,[19] and they both found its basic techniques well in keeping with their own conceptions.

Pound's profound interest in the genre led him to translate and re-create some of the best pieces, and to inte-

grate its artistic principles into his poetic theory. Since the ideal noh play is organized around a single natural image and has the same high degree and excellence of technique as haiku, it provided him with a method to construct larger poems. The best-known example of the use of this technique are the *Cantos*, which abound in references to noh dramas, Japanese art and religion, whose logical coherence is achieved by the unifying power of certain archetypal images in the manner of noh.

The other poet, greatly indebted to the technique of noh, W.B. Yeats, belongs with Pound to the greatest figures of twentieth-century literature. His poetry is also a unique synthesis of the most diverse literary influences: the Anglo-Irish cultural heritage, English Aestheticism, French Impressionism and Symbolism. Attracted to mystical metaphysics and occultism, theosophy and astrology from his early youth, he soon found his way to the séances of Madame Blavatsky, and to the sophisticated Rhymers' Club, where he is said to have been introduced to Japanese art by Arthur Symons. Ezra Pound, whom he met in 1911, urged him to acquire a thorough knowledge of Japanese literature. After a period of studying noh, references to Japan began to appear in his poetry. To him, the far-away country meant the model of an ideal, aristocratic culture with its refined arts and exquisite literature.[20] Noh itself provided him with new techniques for his dramatic art, and the element of dance intensified the symbolism of his non-dramatic poetry as well. In 1916 Yeats published *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, a volume containing

ences in a higher synthesis.

The literary and artistic activity of Pound and Yeats created an unexpected vogue for Japanese poetry and art among young American intellectuals. Besides a large number of minor figures, whose disappointingly low-quality poetry enjoyed, nevertheless, a tremendous popularity, some of the greatest poets of twentieth-century American literature, Conrad Aiken, William Carlos Williams, Archibald MacLeish, tried their hands at composing poems in the haiku tradition. Wallace Stevens, whose poetry is often alleged to be obscure and esoteric, also professed a keen interest in Oriental art as well as Japanese and Chinese poetry. His poetry abound in referencs to block-prints and porcelain, Chinese sages and Japanese courtesans. Many of his poems which derive their titles from series of block-prints like Hiroshige's *Eight Views of Oomi*, Hokusai's *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*, or Utamaro's *Seasons*, evokes the spirit of haiku, both in technique and subject matter.

Another generation of poets decided to break with the traditionally exoticizing literary treatment of Japan, and aimed at achieving an entirely different way of approach. Edmund Blunden, the spiritual leader of this group, recorded his experiences in Japan in poems and essays which convey an unbiased, realistic image of the country, free from both supercilious condescension and unjustified enthusiasm. - For the most part, William Plomer's poetry shows the same realistic intent in trying to grasp the true essence of the Japanese spirit. Although he generally treats the country with sympathetic love, more often than not he makes satirical and

critical comments on the dark sides of the Japanese way of life. - The poetry of William Empson, one of the most important figures of New Criticism, who was lecturing on English literature at the Tokyo Bunrika University from 1931 to 1934, and the National University of Peking from 1937 to 1939, gives evidence of the same tendency towards realism.

Japan seems to have lost the position of an enticing, magic land of wonders it held through so many centuries. The two World Wars, improved transportation and communication, as well a growing familiarity with its culture and language, were to put an end to exoticism, enabling a new evaluation of the country on different, in many respects more sound and mature grounds.

III.

So far we have dwelt upon the revolutionary changes which took place in Western literature, poetry, drama and - to a lesser degree - fiction, stimulated at least in part by certain forms of Japanese art and literature, but our picture would not be complete without taking a brief look at the philosophical backgrounds of these changes. Various twentieth-century literary movements, like symbolism and decadence in poetry, went hand in hand with the spread of irrational philosophies, mysticism and occultism. All these trends shared a common distrust towards objective reality which hides the realm of essence form the eyes of the observer. Artists and philosophers supposed the existence of a mystical, transcendental reality, superimposed on the objective world, which

cannot be grasped through ordinary, discursive thinking. The only contact possible is through a higher faculty of mind: intuition.

The Oriental philophies centering on the mystic experience, like Taoism, Buddhism or Hinduism, have been discovered and intensively studied by intellectual circles in the Western world since about the beginning of the twentieth century. The newest discoveries in psychology, backed up by the experiments with narcotics, made possible a detailed description and interpretation of the mystic experience. Recent analyses have pointed out that the Enlightenment of the Oriental philosophies is in many respects similar to the ecstatic experiences Christian saints are supposed to have undergone. This apparent similarity was immediately made most of by missionaries of Oriental religions, who made an attempt to present their beliefs in an acceptable form by adapting them to Christian ideology. Meanwhile, Western psychologists and philosophers whole-heartedly devoted themselves to the analysis of the mystic experience, in order to define its relationship to religion, magia and arts.

From the philosophico-religious heritage of Japan it is Zen which has stirred the greatest excitement and commotion since about the Second World War. Zen, one of the most peculiar schools among Oriental religions, claims to transmit the essence or spirit of Buddhism. Its motto is:

> "A special transmission outside the Scriptures,
> No dependence on letters or words,
> Pointing directly at the Mind in every one of us,

And seeing into one's Nature, whereby one attains Buddhahood."

Strictly speaking, Zen is neither religion for philosophy nor psychology, but rather a way or a view of life, which is legendarily thought to have originated in India and to have been taken to China by Bodhidharma early in the sixth century A.D. Its actual origin was in China beginning with Huineng, regarded as the sixth patriarch. The principles of Zen became known to the Japanese in the Nara period (A.D. 710-784), but as an independent sect it is said to be dated from about 1200, when the monk Eisai founded Rinzai, one of the three existing Zen sects in Japan.

The word itself means "meditation" or "a concentrated state of consciousness", but Zen cannot be described aptly as the Meditation School, since the days of the Zen monk are not spent in idle passivity, but in hard work. Zen lays the emphasis not on meditation, but on intuition; which brings about a sudden awakening of a higher spiritual power, enabling a direct contact with reality itself. On the other hand, Zen does not reject meditation and concentration as unnecessary exercises of the mind. What it claims is that they are not inherently or automatically conducive to the attainment of the desired state of Enlightenment. - Satori, which corresponds to the Supreme Enlightenment, experienced by Guatama, is a realm beyond intellect, a mystic experience, whose contents cannot be described or interpreted in logical terms. Suzuki D.T., the best-known popularizer and explicator of Zen in the Western world, made an attempt to circumscribe it by

four original dramas, with an introduction in which he pointed out what noh had to offer to Western theatre. "In fact with the help of those plays... I have invented a form of drama, distinguished, indirect and symbolic... an aristocratic form... Therefore it is natural that I go to Asia for a stage-convention, for a chorus that has no part in the action and perhaps for those movements of the body copied from the Japanese marionette shows of the fourteenth century."[20]

In 1921 he wrote *Four Plays for Dancers*, which were designed for drawing-room performances against purely symbolic backgrounds, with masked actors employing a set of conventionalized movements and dances to the accompaniment of a drum, a gong, and a zither. The action of the plays is short, condensed, "reduced to its simplest form, or at any rate to as simple a form as it can be brought to without losing the sense of its place in the world. The characters that are involved in it are freed from everything that is not part of the action... The action is an energy, an eddy of life purified from everything but itself."[21]

Yeats' purpose was not to imitate a foreign literary source or to escape into an idealized dreamland, but to create a new form of poetic theatre based on ancient Irish legends and stories, in perfect harmony with the general objectives of the Irish Dramatic Movement. He found that noh fulfilled his ideal and dream of what the modern drama might be, and although his interest in Japanese literature shows but one side of his complex personality, it sheds light on how he managed to combine the most heterogenious cultural influ-

enumerating its most characteristic features. According to his definition, satori is an irrational, intuitive and transcendental experience, not to be attained by intellection. It centres around a supernatural kind of knowledge which is universal, absolute and untransmissible. Although it is sometimes spoken of in negativistic terms, satori implies a positive attitude towards the existing world, and goes hand in hand with a feeling of infinite calmness and peace, spiritual elevation and expansion. In this state of mind, the ego is temporarily suspended and it undergoes a perfect coalescence with the objective world. Contradictions disappear and oppositions merge into a higher synthesis of absolute Oneness.

As Alan W. Watts, the famous American expert on Zen, points out, awakening is compatible with the affairs of everyday life; it is a spontaneous, natural phenomenon which may occur at any moment. Consequently, there can be no question of approaching it by stages, by the slow process of accumulation of knowledge. It must be realized in a single flash of insight.[22] This, however, does not mean that there are no devices which can be useful in producing awakening. Since satori lies beyond the world of ordinary logic, one has to break down the bars of the intellect, to get rid of the fetters of common everyday thinking. For this purpose, Zen masters have developed a unique method of instruction: the *kooan*. Generally speaking, the kooan is a nonsensical type of dialogue, with no logical coherence whatever between the questions and answers; or an irrational, puzzling dilemma, like the famous one concerning the sound of one hand clapping.

- This method may occasionally combine with an unexpected gesture of the part of the master. A laugh, an oath, a shout, a shaking, even a blow may do what years of meditation may have failed to achieve.

Between the two World Wars Zen Buddhism was known to and analyzed by only a limited number of intellectuals in the United States, but after the Second World War, especially in the 50s and 60s, it enjoyed a tremendous popularity among the members of the so-called Beat Generation, who believed that the basic tenets of Zen were compatible with their instinctive dissatisfaction with conformist American society. Starting from the allegedly benevolent effects of satori on the development of human personality, their ideologists claimed that Zen may contribute to establishing a new world based on universal peace and love. In this way, Zen became no less than the symbol of an unorganized and basically harmless protest against the world of the hated "squares". The Beatniks, however, failed to grasp the essence of Zen, an ancient way of life whose ends can achieved only through a lifetime of rigorous spiritual discipline. They have cried aloud the name of Zen and picked out random slogans from its ideology, but they have never been willing to adopt its ascetic discipline. What they seemed to have found most attractive in Zen was anti-conformism, spontaneity and the holiness of the personal impulse. By gradual detachment from the world, the Zen disciple finally achieves the point where, pure and holy in spirit, his self will be absorbed into the All. To the Beatniks, however, Zen purification has been reduced to a self-hypnosis attained by alcohol, drugs, sex and rock music.

Although experiments with narcotics have proved that psychedelic hallucinations may produce a state of mind not unlike the satori of Zen Buddhism, they not only lack the wholesome effect of developing one's personality and strengthening one's will-power, but they gradually bring about a complete disintegration of the ego. Missionaries of Zen and experts on Oriental philosophies most emphatically turned against this attenuated, shallow form of Zen Buddhism. They pointed out that for all its spontaneity, satori is an experience belonging to the world of psyche and has no politico-social implications whatever.

On this level, Beat Zen is no more than sensation-seeking which is the mark of an over-comfortable and disillusioned generation. Yet we are wrong to conclude that the role of Zen in Western culture was rather negative on the whole. The preoccupation with the mystic experience as propagated by Zen Buddhism led to a more mature understanding of Oriental philosophies and cultures in general, and the study of the various methods of meditation and concentration produced invaluable discoveries in the sphere of psychology as well.

IV.

Our investigations could by no means cover all aspects of the influence Japanese culture has had on the West. At the same time, we should bear in mind that the history of Western-Japanese cultural relations is far from having come to an end in our days. On the contrary, old techniques are being constantly revived and new forms appear day by day. -

At present, the Western world is witnessing the spread of the most diverse tendencies, from the growing popularity of the unique art of flower-arranging ("ikebana") to that of newly-discovered forms of Japanese theatre (kabuki and bunraku), as well as the Japanese film. According to an article published in the literary magazine *Bungei Shunjuu*,[23] haiku poetry continues to be cultivated in the United States, where contests are held annually and several periodicals (Modern Haiku, Dragonfly) are being published. The newest and most vigorous literary trend, however, seems to be the renaissance of fiction using Japanese material as subject matter. In his tremedously popular novel *Shoogun*, which was widely acclaimed in Japanese literary circles,[24] James Clavell gives an authentic picture of Japan in the early Tokugawa period. Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* has also become a bestseller.

All these phenomena show the consistent appeal of Japan to the West, from the activity of the Portuguese missionaries to the present day. Considering the four centuries of cultural relations between Japan and the West, two main types of influences can be observed: one of ideas and imaginative materials (Japanese tales, legends, historical events), and one of literary forms (haiku, noh, kabuki, etc). As a matter of fact, it was the second source which proved to be more fructifying, at least in our century, whereas the first one produced mainly exotic literature of little importance. The explanation for this situation seems to be that the twentieth century, a basically experimental era in literature, has been

searching for new forms of expression rather than "ready-made" materials handed down from past centuries. Having developed adaptable and stimulating literary forms, it was Japan of the Oriental civilizations which was able to meet this need of twentieth-century Western literature. Thus, it is no exaggeration to conclude that Japan, by refreshing and enriching European and American culture, has become the medium of Western understanding of the Orient.

N O T E S

1 Stalker, John: *Treatise on Japanning*. 1688, London.

2 Stewart, Randall: *The English Notebooks of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 1941, New York: M.L.A.

3 Whitman, Walt: *"Salud au Monde!", "Facing West from California's Shores", "A Broadway Pageant".*

4 Fenollosa, Ernest: *East and West... and Other Poems - Preface*, 1893, New York and Boston: T.Y. Crowell.

5 Fenollosa, Ernest: *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. by Ezra Pound, 1918.

6 Arnold, Sir Edwin: *The Light of Asia*, 1870, London: Trübner; Japonica. 1891, New York, Scribners.

7 Kipling, Rudyard: *From Sea to Sea*, 1925, New York;Scribners.

8 Ashmead, John: *The Idea of Japan 1853-1895*, unpublished.

9 Miner, Earl: *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature*, 1958, Princeton University Press, p. 62.

10 Ibid., p.96.

11 Hartman, Sadakichi: *A History of American Art*, 1903, 1903, London: Hutchinson.

12 J.B. Harmer: *Victory in Limbo, Imagisme 1908-1917*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1975, p. 129.

13 Amy Lowell's *Letter to Paul Hisada*, August 13, 1917.

14 Fletcher, John Gould: *Japanese Prints*, Boston: Four Seas Co., 1918.

15 Fletcher, John Gould: *Foreword to Kenneth Yasuda's "A Pepper Pod"*, 1947, New York: Knopf.

16 Pound, Ezra: *Pavannes and Divisions*, 1918, New York.

17 Pound, Ezra: *"A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste"*, Poetry, March, 1913.

18 Miner, Earl: *"Pound, Haiku and the Image"*, in Ezra Pound: *A Collection of Critical Essays*. Ed. By Walter Sutton.

19 Goodwin, K.L.: *The Influence of Ezra Pound*, Oxford University Press. 1966, pp. 95-99.

20 Yeats, William Butler: *Certain Noble Plays of Japan*, Foreword, 1916, Dundrum: Cuala Press.

21 Peacock, Ronald: *The Poet in the Theatre*, 1946, London.

22 Watts, Alan: *The Way of Zen*, Penguin Books Ltd., Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1970. pp. 101-103.

23 Kazuo, Satoo: *"Amerika haiku jijoo"*, Bungei Shunjuu, May, 1978.

24 Takao, Tokuoka: *"Besutoseraa 'Shoogun' no nipponjinron"*, Bungei Shunjuu, November, 1978.

R E F E R E N C E S

Coffman, Stanley. *Imagism: A Chapter for the History of Modern Poetry*. Norman, Oklahoma. 1951

Faucherau, Serge. *Lecture de la Poésie Américaine*, Paris. 1968

Fenollosa, Ernest. *The Masters of Ukiyoe*. 1896, New York

Fenollosa, Ernest. *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*. ed. by Ezra Pound. 1918

Gregory, Horace. *Amy Lowell: Portrait of the Poet in Her Time*. 1958. New York

Harmer, J.B. *Victory in Limbo. Imagisme 1908-1917*. London: Secker & Warburg

Hughes, Glenn. *Imagisme and the Imagistes*. Stanford, 1931

Humphries, Christmas. *Buddhism*, 1951, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd

Keene, Donald. *Japanese LIterature*, 1953, London

Miner, Earl. *The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature*. 1958. Princeton: UP

Miner, Earl. *Pound, Haiku and the Image*. in: *Ezra Pound: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by Walter Sutton*

Perkinson, Thomas. *A Casebook on the Beat*, 1961. New York

Seiichi, Yoshida. *Nippon bungaku gaisetsu*, 1962. Tokyo

Tetsutaroo, Suzuki Daisetsu. *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. 1927. London

Toki, Zenmaro. *The Japanese Noh Plays*. 1954. Tokyo

Waley, Arthur. *The Japanese Poetry*. 1919. Oxford

Waley, Arthur. *The Noh Plays of Japan*. 1950, New York

Watts, Alan. *The Way of Zen*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd.