

Bernard FAURE, *Visions of Power: Imagining Medieval Japanese Buddhism*. Translated from the French by Phyllis Brooks. Princeton University Press, 1996. 329 pp. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN 0-691-03758-2.

IN THIS BOOK BERNARD FAURE brings his learning and sophistication to bear on a single figure, the reforming Sōtō patriarch Keizan Jōkin (1268-1325), thus giving new concreteness to the postmodern rereading of Zen tradition. Faure's work is part of the ongoing scholarly rediscovery of the colorful practices stemming from Indian tantra, Taoism, and folk religion that permeated the Buddhist tradition and that cannot be treated as merely surface acculturation. His closest colleague in this enterprise is the late Michel Strickmann, and some pages in Faure's book, such as the rambling discussion of icons (pp. 236-74), can be read as a running dialogue with STRICKMANN'S posthumous masterpiece *Mantras et mandarins* (1996).

Faure focuses on the dimension of the *imaginaire* in Zen culture, by which he means the imaginary world of an individual or group, with special emphasis on “miraculous, magic, and marvelous” aspects (p. 11). The term also carries the Lacanian associations with narcissistic delusion. Since all religious traditions have robed themselves in the prestige of the imaginary, in both senses, Faure’s psychoanalysis of Sōtō Zen has implications that reach very far indeed. A characteristic defence-reaction built into religious ideologies is the tendency to mask or deny pluralism and inconsistency, both diachronic and synchronic, in the history of the tradition. The slogan minted by Vincent of Lérins in 434 CE, *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est* (What has everywhere, always, and by all been believed), is an instance of this self-stylization of tradition in which every wrinkle of inconsistency is ironed out. Despite its practical uselessness as a criterion of orthodoxy, the slogan was ritually invoked in doctrinal controversy, exerting a hypnotic hold on the Christian imagination as it held out the narcissistic mirage of an unbroken self-image.

But Faure is a liberator rather than a debunker of Zen tradition. For to recognize the pervasiveness of the *imaginaire* is to discover many hidden layers of creativity that a rigid focus on meditation and Buddhist philosophy had thrown into the shade. Zen constructed a ritual universe, which far from being a regression from the purity of its original inspiration provides the nourishing milieu for bodily and spiritual cultivation. The new discipline of “ritual studies” testifies to the growing awareness that ritual stands alongside doctrine and spirituality as a constitutive dimension of religious worlds. Faure shows that this is true of Zen also. Polemic against empty ritualism goes hand in hand with a thorough ritualization of everyday life. Despite a rhetoric of contempt for the body, ritual integrated the body—albeit one “from which sex and desire were firmly banished” (pp. 198–99)—into the Buddha-way. Faure approaches the tension between spiritualist and somatic tendencies in a deconstructive style, revealing that rather than stolidly transmitting an invariant formula the Zen tradition enacts a constant critical reflection on the various strands it holds together and is always imaginatively reinventing their relations.

The relationship between Buddhism and local Japanese religion has been a happier one than that between Christianity and the “genius of paganism” in the West. Despite his role as a Zen master, “Keizan was completely immersed in local cults and legends from the time of his childhood. His entire work reflects and maintains this tension between two fundamentally opposed realms of thought” (p. 4), a duality Faure links with the Buddhist polarity of ultimate truth and conventional truth. Zen is “rationalist and demythologizing” and renounces the imagination, especially the realm of popular superstition, yet Keizan’s world is “impregnated with the marvelous” (p. 8), so that “his theoretical statements almost always stand in opposition to his actual practice” (p. 9). His Zen thrives on the rich imaginative life that it constantly denies. Faure emphasizes tensions and fault-lines, in contrast to the blander view that “Keizan’s true importance was his ability to combine the monastic religion of Zen meditation with the simple religious sentiments of rural

Japanese” and that the “shamanistic and seemingly eccentric aspects of his personality” were entirely at the service of Zen practice (BODIFORD 1993, pp. 84, 88). But even if such “skillful means” often “came to predominate over the ends” (p. 113), and are quantitatively more in evidence than what is claimed to be essential, nonetheless it may be possible to privilege these ends as the hermeneutic key to the tradition. In refusing to minimize the existential status of Keizan’s embrace of the spirit-world, Faure may play down such topics as meditation, which he rarely mentions and which he calls “primarily a physical technique” (p. 198).

Faure’s critique reaches down to the level of epistemology, raising such questions as the following: Did Keizan fully believe in the Zen discourse he used, or in the spirits he was prone to recognize at work in everyday happenings? Did belief found his practice, or should we say with Wittgenstein that “the practice does not spring from the view, but both of them are there” (p. 23)? Does Keizan’s imaginary world form a system, or is the system always only virtual, “the result of an attempt on the part of the analyst to find coherence” (p. 26)?

Faure is able to sketch Keizan’s psychology on the basis of the little-studied *Record of Tōhoku*; he discusses the role of “the mother, the soul sister, and the intercession of Kannon” in his life (p. 43); Keizan put into practice the ideal of male-female equality that Dōgen merely preached; his “dream world” was “nurtured by the feminine, maternal realm” (p. 46) (compare FAURE 1991, pp. 209–30, 242–45). Dreams played an important role in spiritual transmission, underlining the peculiar nature of its historicity that is “reminiscent of the Christian Church, unrolling in a time of a higher order” (p. 50). Thus the *Denkōroku* (translated four times recently: CLEARY 1992, COOK 1991, NISHIYAMA 1994, YOKOI 1993) places the sequence of patriarchs in a mythic time: “Each awakening goes back to the awakening *in illo tempore* of the Buddha, to the ‘eternal solstice’” (p. 54). Though Keizan was “an avid historian” (BODIFORD 1993, p. 85), the stories collected in the *Denkōroku* are more in the nature of koans than of essays in biography, so their mythic quality is unsurprising. Faure concedes that much of Keizan’s *imaginaire* is less individual than typical of the Zen ideology in general.

This book is at its best when it focuses on Keizan, and could with profit have sacrificed some farfetched and misleading references (Theodore of Studios, p. 267; Baudelaire, p. 192). Its account of Keizan is a convincing conquest of historical vision, and opens up the exciting prospect of similar treatment for a whole gallery of figures from the Buddhist past.

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