

volume also eloquently show that studies on wartime thought and Japanism can no longer be pursued without reference to Buddhism.

Among the conditions that made it possible to compile this epoch-making volume, perhaps the most important is that Japanese scholars have been liberated from their obsession with pursuing the wartime responsibilities of Japanese Buddhists. This is due in large part to the fact that the contributors included in this volume are relatively young: both of the editors were born in 1980 and many of the contributors were born after 1975. Moreover, the fact that the contributors do not necessarily locate themselves in a discursive field that intersects with established Buddhist schools has also made it possible for them to approach their subject critically. Describing the editorial policy of the volume, Nawa writes, “We tried to distance ourselves as much as possible from the sort of arguments about war responsibility that are found in earlier studies. This is because, even if we pursue the matter of Buddhist war responsibilities, it is hard to see how it would contribute to solving the problems of the present” (p. 540). This, of course, does not mean that the problem of the war responsibilities of Japanese Buddhists is being ignored. Rather, without glossing over the fact that many problems of the postwar Japanese system have been carried over from wartime Japan, the aim of the volume is to advance the study of war responsibilities to a higher level. There is no question that this volume will have a major impact on future scholarship in the field.

(Translated by Robert F. Rhodes)

The Awakening of Modern Japanese Fiction: Path Literature and an Interpretation of Buddhism. By Michihiro Ama. Albany: SUNY Press, 2021. 342 pages. Hardcover. ISBN-13: 978-1-4384-8141-8.

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This book will be welcomed by anyone interested in the spiritual sources of modern Japanese literature, and in particular, the profound influence Buddhism continued to exert on that literature in the early twentieth century, despite the mounting incursions from the Judeo-Christian West. As the author, Michihiro Ama, points out, Western scholars of Japanese literature have largely ignored or underestimated this influence, which of course makes this book all the more welcome. The writers dealt with include four of the most popular novelists of the period: Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916), Tayama Katai 田山花袋 (1872–1930), Shiga Naoya 志賀直哉 (1883–1971), and Matsuoka Yuzuru 松岡譲 (1891–1969), as well as, interestingly, less popularly known,

though important Buddhist priests such as Kiyozawa Manshi 清沢満之 (1863–1903) and Akegarasu Haya 暁烏敏 (1877–1954). For the first time in English, partial translations of Akegarasu's confessional memoir, *Before and After My Rebirth* (*Kōsei no zengo* 更生の前後, 1920) and Matsuoka's best-selling Shin Buddhist historical novel, *Guardians of the Dharma Castle* (*Hōjō o mamoru hitobito* 法城を護る人々, 1923–1926) are helpfully appended to the book.

If one looks for “Buddhist influence” in modern Japanese fiction, one can of course find it in many different varieties and intensities, ranging from an explicit engagement with Buddhist ideas and practices to a vague aura of Buddhist presence in the cultural background. At the direct or explicit end of the spectrum is a work such as Sōseki's *The Gate* (*Mon* 門, 1910) in which the protagonist Sosuke struggles towards enlightenment through Zen practice—not very successfully, it seems, although Ama points to hints in the text that he will persevere with his Zen training nonetheless. Of all major modern Japanese novelists, Sōseki is probably the one who engaged most sympathetically with Buddhism—or perhaps one should say nostalgically, since he hoped Zen might offer him some relief from the neurosis and alienation he suffered, in his view, as a condition of modernity. Thus it is understandable that, as Ama tells us, this “study initially began as an exploration of Sōseki and Buddhism,” and that “Sōseki is the thread that binds the contexts of this book” (p. 8). And that, of course, is also to be welcomed, given both Sōseki's great stature in modern Japanese literature and his intense but ultimately unfulfilled engagement with Buddhism.

Two other significant examples Ama offers of novels that may be regarded from a Buddhist perspective as “path literature”—that is, as stories of “spiritual growth that leads to the attainment of Buddhist realization” (p. 2)—are Tayama Katai's *The Miracle of a Buddhist Monk* (*Aru sō no kiseki* ある僧の奇蹟, 1917) and Shiga Naoya's *A Dark Night's Passing* (*Anya kōro* 暗夜行路, 1921–1937). Of these two, the Shiga novel is the more ambiguous case—the protagonist Kensaku's relation with Zen is sometimes openly adversarial—and perhaps for this reason Ama's central argument, it seems to me, begins to go slightly astray at this point.

On the one hand, Ama writes of Kensaku's “turning of the mind” and “Buddhist awakening,” but on the other hand he objects to my suggestion, in my book on Shiga, that Kensaku's mystical experience of rapturous union with nature on Mount Daisen 大山, in the celebrated scene that forms the culminating climax of the novel, might be compared to a Zen satori, albeit one attained “naturally,” outside of formal Zen practice (pp. 184–85).¹ Since Ama has already referred to Kensaku's “Buddhist awakening” (p. 7), the reader might wonder whether he thinks that “Buddhist awakening” is somehow different to satori and, if so, in what ways? He never specifies. Nonetheless,

¹ Starrs 1998, pp. 106–17.

whether this is a contradiction in Ama's argument or not, I think we should examine his objections more closely, since they encourage us to rethink the question of how exactly Buddhism is relevant to our interpretation of modern Japanese fiction.

In my view, the beautifully written Mount Daisen scene that ends *A Dark Night's Passing* is the most convincing depiction of a satori experience in all of modern Japanese fiction—there are a number of other famous examples, for instance in novels by Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成 (1899–1972) and Mishima Yukio 三島由紀夫 (1925–1970), but none of these, in my view, is as compelling and powerfully moving as Shiga's. Thus, I would have expected Ama to present it as the supreme example of what this book purports to be about: the “awakening” of modern Japanese fiction. But Ama rejects this view for two reasons: because Kensaku has already had earlier experiences of union with nature, independently of any Zen influence, and “because there is no discussion of Buddhist philosophy” (pp. 184–85). But this begs the question: Is the Buddhist interpretation of a work of Japanese fiction only appropriate when the protagonist's experience is presented in explicit and orthodox Buddhist terms? If this is the position Ama adopts here, then surely it threatens to undermine, or severely restrict, the larger purpose of his book: to demonstrate that modern Japanese writers live, willy-nilly, in a profoundly Buddhist cultural context—even when ostensibly they oppose Buddhism as an established religion, as does Shiga's hero with his proud refusal, as he puts it, to sit “humbly at the feet of some smug Zen priest.”² To me Kensaku's dialectical relation with Zen only makes his naturally achieved satori all the more convincing.

In fact, whereas Ama seems to think that Kensaku's experience is “Buddhist” but not satori, I am more inclined to take the opposite view: that it is satori but not necessarily Buddhist. Obviously one cannot claim that Kensaku attained his “enlightenment” by any orthodox Zen methods such as zazen, koan study, or direct mind-to-mind transmission from a “smug” Zen master. But, on the other hand, it does seem reasonable to assume that Kensaku—and Shiga himself, who had a similar experience—were especially receptive to what R. C. Zaehner called “natural mysticism”³ because of their cultural heritage, which included in particular the “nature-friendly” Buddho-Daoist culture of Zen. Zen, we should also remember, was still relatively vibrant—and indeed undergoing something of a renaissance among writers, artists, and intellectuals—in early twentieth-century Japan.

But how do we determine whether Kensaku's experience is really satori? First of all, no one in the Zen world has ever argued, to my knowledge, that satori is possible only through Zen training—and even less has anyone argued that it can be obtained only through the study of Zen philosophy! As D. T. Suzuki tells us: “By them [the early

² Shiga 1976, p. 187.

³ Zaehner 1957.

Chinese Zen masters] *satori* was placed above sutra-learning and scholarly discussions of the sastras and was identified with Zen itself.”⁴ Furthermore, he tells us, *satori* is “the perception of Reality itself,” and reality, of course, is not the exclusive property of any one particular spiritual tradition (although some religions may claim it is). The key passage that describes Kensaku’s experience reads as follows (in Edwin McClellan’s fine translation):

He [Kensaku] felt his exhaustion turn into a strange state of rapture. He could feel his mind and his body both gradually merging into this great nature that surrounded him. It was not nature that was visible to the eyes; rather, it was like a limitless body of air that wrapped itself around him, this tiny creature no larger than a poppy seed. To be gently drawn into it, and there be restored, was a pleasure beyond the power of words to describe.⁵

Whereas on earlier occasions Kensaku had resisted nature’s embrace, now his physical and mental exhaustion causes him to surrender completely. To quote Suzuki again: “*Satori* comes upon a man unawares, when he feels that he has exhausted his whole being.”⁶ Kensaku’s surrender of body and mind reminds us also of the expression that inspired Dōgen’s *satori*, *shinjin datsuraku* 身心脱落 (casting off body and mind). Being absorbed into nature frees Kensaku of his body/mind, expands his consciousness, and allows him to experience *muga mushin* 無我無心 (no-self, no-mind), a rapturous spiritual state of emptiness in which the subject/object duality between self and nature vanishes. (“It was not nature that was visible to the eyes; rather, it was like a limitless body of air that wrapped itself around him.”) These are all marks of *satori*. As Suzuki puts it: “Life becomes more enjoyable and its expanse broadens to include the universe itself.”⁷ And, “The world now appears as if dressed in a new garment, which seems to cover up all the unsightliness of dualism, which is called delusion in Buddhist phraseology.”⁸ Most importantly, there is a sense of a loving, compassionate presence at the heart of nature: Kensaku feels he is being “gently drawn into it,” there to “be restored.” Anyone who has experienced some level of *samadhi* in meditation will recognize both the cognitive and the emotional accuracy and authenticity of this description. It may not be a “full awakening,” but certainly it is moving in the right direction. To judge the tree by its fruit, we may note also that the novel ends with Kensaku’s profound transformation for the better, as his long-suffering wife gratefully recognizes:

⁴ Suzuki 1964, p. 96.

⁵ Shiga 1976, p. 400.

⁶ Suzuki 1964, p. 95.

⁷ Suzuki 1964, p. 95.

⁸ Suzuki 1964, p. 98.

Without saying anything Kensaku looked at her. His gaze was like a caress. She thought she had never seen such gentleness, such love, in anyone's eyes before. She was about to say, "Everything is all right now," but she refrained, for in the presence of such contentment and quiet, the words seemed hollow.⁹

As Suzuki says of the aftereffects of satori: "All your mental activities will now be working to a different key, which will be more satisfying, more peaceful, and fuller of joy than anything you ever experienced before. The tone of life will be altered."¹⁰

Of course, the greatness and profundity of Shiga's novel is not contingent upon our giving it a Buddhist interpretation. But if one chooses to offer such an interpretation, as Ama purports to do here, then why not acknowledge the obvious affinities between Kensaku's mystical experience and a Zen satori? Whether these affinities are a result of direct or indirect Zen influence, or are purely coincidental—Kensaku's Daisen experience being seen as entirely the outcome of his lifelong psychological struggles—is of course open to debate and may not ultimately be determinable one way or the other.

Finally, one might ask if it makes any significant difference whether Kensaku's experience is satori or not? Surely it does make a difference if one wishes to interpret the novel from a Buddhist perspective because, as Suzuki notes: "*Satori* is the *raison d'être* of Zen without which Zen is no Zen."¹¹ Thus, if it is true, as I believe, that Kensaku's experience is the most convincing depiction of satori in any modern Japanese novel, then surely this is a significant fact if we are interested in the Buddhist "awakening" of modern Japanese fiction?

At any rate, my disagreement with Ama on this one point does not lessen my gratitude for his excellent study, which no doubt will encourage further research in this fascinating but rather neglected area.

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⁹ Shiga 1976, p. 407.

¹⁰ Suzuki 1964, p. 97.

¹¹ Suzuki 1964, p. 95.