Three Zen Anecdotes

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://dc.cod.edu/plr/vol2/iss1/24
My anxiety is not for those who know all, dear brother —
It's for those who watch and wait and wonder —
For those who long to hope.

You are not so different as you think;
You who set yourselves against each other
Like knights with jousting poles on steeds
Of black or white.

You both long.
You both wait.
You both cry and live in fear.

But there is another way.
A letter to my uncle: Dear Lloyd,
You think you know
But there is another way.

We'll no more know the war machine and yet know earth.
There is no way to keep both.
You were young when you fought and loved
during the first world war, when eulogies
were still handsome.
You wrote of trenches and battlefields and Bill,
who asked you to get one for him before he
died of the flu.

Who was the one you were to get?
One so far removed?
Did he long?
Did he love?
Did he care?
Did he belong to earth...
As you did?

Why was he to be removed?
The trees are green, and the grass grows high;
The sky is blue and the clouds blow by.
The honeysuckle smell is strong and sweet.
It blows in my window.
Earth lives.
The birds sing.
Earth lives.
How long, O Lord, how long?
Not with a bang — not with a whimper —
But with joy and honor and
Glory to the Lamb that was slain.
This slave earth pours out its truth on us —
Its purity,
Its beauty,
Its torment.
Its soul,
Its fire,
Its ruggedness.
Its trembling...

As it waits for the sons of man to be freed.
The trees are green,
The grass grows high;
The sky is blue and the clouds blow by.
How long will you last, Earth?
How long will you be?

And the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord,
As the waters that cover the sea.

— St. Louis, Mo.
1971

Walking into an old town bar is like traveling back through
a time warp. The darkness that looms inside has escaped
time, along with a wooden bar that has black filled notches
worn smooth by decade after decade of elbow rubbing. The
present view of pickup trucks outside is distorted by window
panes of the past to look like horses of long ago. Handcrafted
ceiling tiles, and copper taps are impervious to the passing
of time. A ghostly image faintly visible in an ancient cut glass
mirror never changes. All of them, except the novaday in-
habitants, can avoid the clutches of time.

Three Zen Anecdotes

Two monks were walking by a stream one day. The first
monk thought he heard a fish jump out of the water.
"Did a fish just jump out of the water?" he asked the
second monk.
"Yes" replied the second monk.
MORAL: Things are not always as they seem, but very often,
they are.

Two fish were swimming in a stream when a monk passed by.
The first fish asked, "What was that?"
"It was a mouse walking by" said the second fish.
MORAL: Sometimes things are just as they seem, but fish
aren't extremely bright creatures.

A monk was walking by a stream when he observed another
monk splashing up and down in the water.
"What are you doing?" the first monk asked.
"Quiet," said the other, "I am a large fish without scales
and I am listening for passing monks."
MORAL: Sometimes things are just as they seem, but the
people involved are absurd.

1982

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