



Happening to Oneself: Zen, Taoism, and Jungian Individuation as Paths to Spirituality in Edward Gorey’s *The Object Lesson* and Shel Silverstein’s *The Missing Piece*.

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Abstract

Carl Jung writes in *Psychology and Religion: West and East* that “It is not I who create myself, rather I happen to myself.” This surprisingly Taoist statement is perhaps a perfect way to define the distinction between spirituality and religion in children’s picture books. While religious children’s books can be easily identified and classified based on the religious system to which they ascribe, spirituality in children’s picture books is much harder to pin down, and can be extended to any book that provides an imaginative mental playground with enough freedom to allow a child to “happen” to itself. This article seeks to further explicate Jung’s theory of individuation by looking at Taoism and Zen Buddhism in children’s literature. Specifically, it examines Edward Gorey’s *The Object Lesson* and Shel Silverstein’s *The Missing Piece* as exemplary texts for this explication.

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Carl Jung writes in *Psychology and Religion: West and East* that “It is not I who create myself, rather I happen to myself” (qtd. in Rosen 15). This surprisingly Taoist statement is perhaps a perfect way to define the separation between spirituality and religion in children’s picture books. While religion is about imposing an outside system on a child through a story with an agenda, spirituality is something that happens all on its own through a child’s own

imagination, and while religious children's books can be easily identified and classified based on the religious system to which they ascribe, spirituality in children's picture books is much harder to pin down, and can be extended to any book that provides an imaginative mental playground with enough freedom to allow a child to "happen" to itself¹. I propose that one path to the creation of this self-built spirituality is through a Taoist or Zen Buddhist reading of children's books, especially when related to Jung's theory of individuation as a moment of intense spiritual growth or enlightenment; when viewed through a Taoist lens, this process of attaining a higher knowledge of self and the universe can be useful and applicable to people of any faith system—or no faith system at all. This article seeks to further explicate Jung's theory of individuation using Taoism and Zen Buddhism as a way of understanding spirituality (as differentiated from religion) in children's literature with Edward Gorey's *The Object Lesson* and Shel Silverstein's *The Missing Piece* as exemplary texts for demonstrating this distinction.

To use Zen and Taoism as examples of spirituality as differentiated from religion might seem contradictory since Zen is technically classified as a form of Buddhism and the sayings of Lao-Tzu in the *Tao-Te-Ching*² have been classified into a system of thought known as Taoism. However, several factors contribute to my alternate claim that Zen and Taoism can rise above religious sectarianism, especially as a lens for understanding individuation in children's literature. The first is D.T. Suzuki's³ explanation of Zen's essence:

When a Zen master was once asked what Zen was, he replied, "Your everyday thought." Is this not plain and most straightforward? It has nothing to do with any sectarian spirit. Christians as well as Buddhists can practice Zen just as big fish and small fish are both contentedly living in the same ocean. Zen is the ocean, Zen is the air, Zen is the mountain, Zen is thunder and lightning, the spring flower, summer heat, and winter snow; nay, more than that, Zen is the man (45).

Thus, as Suzuki sees it, and as we will discover more when we discuss the question of Zen in relation to individuation Zen is a way of understanding—or perhaps more accurately, a way of existing.

Taoism, similarly, rises above the easy classification as a religion which scholars tend to use for it. As the opening line of the *Tao-Te-Ching* informs

¹ Religion and spirituality are hard to differentiate, and as used in this paper religion will refer to external rites, practices, or creeds while spirituality will refer to the wholeness (or individuation) attained on one's own apart from such external systems. Religion, of course, can help engender spirituality, and spirituality might lead some to seek out religion, but recognizing the difference between the two is vital to this argument.

² The *Tao Te Ching*, written in the fourth or third century BCE, has become the major text responsible for the dissemination and understanding of Taoism. Its primal importance for Taoism is akin to that of the New Testament in Christianity.

³ Suzuki was a Japanese Zen master who taught at Columbia University in the 1950s. His book *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism* is largely credited with bringing Zen to a western, English speaking audience.

us, “Tao called Tao is not Tao.” Like Zen, Tao is un-categorical, and as soon as we think we have explained it, it is no longer there. As the following dialogue, quoted by Alan Watts, between two well-known Zen masters informs us, Tao, like Zen, is simply what is:

Chao-Chao asked, “What is the Tao?”

The master [Nan-ch’uan] replied, “Your ordinary consciousness is the Tao.”

“How can one return into accord with it?”

“By intending to accord you immediately deviate.”

“But without intention, how can one know the Tao?”

“The Tao,” said the master, “belongs neither to knowing nor to not knowing. Knowing is false understanding; not knowing is blind ignorance. If you really understand the Tao beyond doubt, it’s like the empty sky. Why drag in right and wrong?”(38).

Thus, both Suzuki and Watts explain Zen and Tao as “everyday thought” or “ordinary consciousness,” and both also describe it as nature—simply what things are.

While Zen and Taoism are far from common as a theoretical framework for western literature, a few scholars have made the connection, usually, however, only in reference to poetry, as Claudia Milstead does in her 1998 dissertation, *The Zen of Modern Poetry: Reading Eliot, Stevens, and Williams in a Zen Context*. Other scholars make the obvious connection between western writers of Haiku and Zen, such as Richard Iadonisi in his MELUS article “‘I am Nobody’: the Haiku of Richard Wright.” Interestingly, Iadonisi actually argues with previous scholarship which attempts to use the Zen origin of haiku to discount elements of race and politics in Wright’s haiku. In any event, the closest most scholars get to using Zen as a theoretical framework for examining spirituality in literature, is Kyle Gillette’s “Zen and the Art of Negation in Samuel Beckett’s ‘Not I.’” Even here, however, Gillette focuses more on the religious rituals and temple practice of Zen than on Zen as a philosophical framework or a path to the creation of a self-built spirituality, and certainly he doesn’t even venture close to a Jungian reading of Zen in literature. Taoism, barely ever mentioned, is often limited to oblique discussions in relation to eco-criticism.

Zen and Taoism are used by scholars of children’s literature even less frequently.⁴ “Books with a Clear Heart: The Koans of Play and the Picture Books of Ezra Jack Keats” published in *The Lion and the Unicorn* is the most

⁴ Sandra Lindow and Dena Bain explore Taoism in Ursula Le Guin’s Earthsea Cycle, publishing in *Foundation: The International Review of Science Fiction* and *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy* respectively. However, the *Earthsea Cycle* doesn’t fit the genre of children’s picture books being examined here, and while Lindow does discuss religious fundamentalism as separate from the spirituality offered in Taoism, neither author attempts a connection between Jungian synchronicity, individuation and Taoism as I am doing here.

direct articles on the subject to appear in a children's literature journal. W. Nikola-Lisa and O. Fred Donaldson discuss play theory using a smorgasboard of Zen and Taoist ideas to argue that play for a very young child offers the open, empty Buddha mind preached in Zen. Where my argument goes a step beyond Nikola-Lisa and Donaldson is in my incorporation of Jung and his theory of individuation. While these authors do reference psychological play theory, they fail to directly link these psychological ideas to Zen Buddhism and Tao, something that Jung has very clearly done, and which should not be ignored in a Jungian reading of these texts.

One other author is worthy of mention. Benjamin Hoff, whose New York Times bestseller *The Tao of Pooh* uses A.A. Milne's Winnie the Pooh stories to explain elements of Taoism. This popular philosophy/self-help book and its sequel, *The Te of Piglet* come close, perhaps, to what I am attempting with Edward Gorey and Shel Silverstein, with a few important differences. First, these books were written using Winnie the Pooh to explain Taoism, not using Taoism as an academic framework for understanding Winnie the Pooh. Second, once again, they do not make the essential connection between Carl Jung's individuation and finding wholeness in the Tao. This connection is essential to my approach using Taoism as an academic framework for children's literature because through Jung we find a way to approach spiritual health and wholeness—individuation—without the bias of someone trying to indoctrinate young children into a specific religion.

Edward Gorey and Carl Jung

Edward Gorey scholarship is sadly lacking. Perhaps this has something to do with uncertainty—people don't know whether he is really a children's author or not with his grim themes (death, sex, depression). But on the other hand, he writes picture books, a genre that has long been recognized as appropriate for young children.⁵

Gorey himself recognizes that not everything he has attempted appeals to children. "When I first started out," he says in an interview with Jane Merrill Filstrup, "I wasn't trying to write for children because I didn't know any children" (21). He continues, "however, I have thought that more of my work might have been for children than anybody would ever publish on a juvenile list" (22). He goes on to say that *The Doubtful Guest* was for children, and later in the interview he discusses his fan mail, saying that many children loved *The Curious Sofa*, a story with a barely concealed subtext about the sexual exploits of a young woman in a series of orgies. While Gorey lists the repetitious language as a possible reason for children's intrigue with this story, the reason for his controversy as a children's author is clear.

⁵ Obviously, the lines between these two genres, picture books and children's books, are crossed all the time, especially in the recent rise in popularity of graphic novels both for adult and young adult audiences.

Kevin Shortsleeve, one of the few scholars to deal with Gorey, quotes an interview with him in which he directly claims to write for children: “a lot of my books I’ve intended for children primarily,” he says (27). Shortsleeve’s article in *Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* sets out to prove exactly this point, that “of the seventy books examined, I could easily argue that forty-eight of them were appropriate for many children” (Shortsleeve 38). In fact, Shortsleeve believes that Gorey adds to the proud tradition of nonsense literature by connecting surrealism, postmodernism and Dadaism with children’s nonsense verse. While he doesn’t consider a Taoist or Zen read of Gorey’s writing, he includes some helpful quotes by both Gorey and reviewers about the way in which Gorey’s work should be read which parallel nicely with a Taoist interpretation. I will examine these in detail later.

While Shortsleeve has claimed that Gorey is a children’s author, he takes his argument a step further claiming that Gorey’s children’s stories should also be understood psychologically. Kenneth Kidd references an unpublished essay by Shortsleeve in his article “Psychoanalysis and Children’s Literature: A Case for Complementarity.” Kidd argues not just for the usefulness of psychoanalysis of children’s literature, but argues that psychoanalysis should in fact inform the creation of this literature as well. He quotes Shortsleeve’s essay “The Object (Relations) Lesson: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Edward Gorey and the Characters in His Books,” as a prime example of fiction created from a psychoanalytical perspective. This furthers my argument that Gorey can be read in relation to Jung, specifically in relation to Jung’s theory of individuation as a Zen or Taoist experience.

My argument for Zen Buddhism and Taoism as frameworks for examining spirituality in children’s books without endorsing a religious agenda hinges on the connection between Jung’s theory of individuation and the spiritual wholeness offered in Taoism and Zen Buddhism. The connection is easier to make than might be expected. David Rosen, professor of Jungian psychology at Texas A&M University says in the introduction to his book, *The Tao of Jung*, that “by the end of this book, it will be apparent that Jung’s psychology (and the individuation process) is virtually the same as the Taoist Way of Integrity. Both come about by letting go of ego and surrendering to the Self or the Tao” (10).

Jung himself comments on the similarities between psychotherapy and Zen satori (sudden enlightenment) in the forward he wrote for D.T. Suzuki’s *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. Psychotherapy’s “goal is transformation; not indeed a predetermined, but rather an indeterminable, change, the only criterion of which is the disappearance of I-ness” (25). This disappearance of I-ness is another way of describing individuation, a merging of conscious and unconscious for the creation of a whole and sound personality. This is also the language he uses to describe satori: “the conscious is only a part of the spiritual, and is never therefore capable of spiritual completeness: for that the indefinite

expansion of the unconscious is needed” (28). Later, speaking of Faust and Zarathustra as the closest examples of satori in Western literature, he says that:

One can scarcely expect a cultured public who have only just begun to hear about the dim world of the soul to be able to form any adequate conception of the spiritual state of a man who has fallen into the confusions of the individuation process, by which term I have designated the ‘becoming whole’ (Ganzwerdung)” (28; emphasis in original).

So it seems that both the Zen process of satori and Taoism can be described in terms of Jung’s theory of individuation.

Edward Gorey and Taoist I Ching

Because of their connection to Jungian individuation, Zen Buddhism and Taoism could be used as critical lenses for any number of texts. However, this paper focuses on spirituality in children’s literature, and specifically on Edward Gorey’s *The Object Lesson* as an example of the Taoist text the *I Ching* and the Zen Koan, as well as Shel Silverstein’s *The Missing Piece* as an example of Zen satori.

I said earlier that according to a story recounted by Watts, “your ordinary consciousness is the Tao” (38). Shortsleeve quotes an interview with Gorey in which he echoes this very thought: “I write about everyday life” (31). While this might seem doubtful to some (after all, what does a Wuggly Ump have to do with everyday life?), it is a clue that Gorey was up to something more than just children’s nonsense. In fact, when Gorey’s theory about how his stories were written and how they were to be read is compared to Jung’s theory of how to read the *I Ching* (an ancient Taoist text), we find that Gorey was striving to represent what he himself called “an ineffable reality beneath it all” which could also be called Tao (Filstrup 31). While Gorey’s intent as an author (and even the intent of the implied author) is not necessary to my argument for his work as an example of spirituality in children’s literature, Gorey does describe himself as influenced by Taoism, saying in an interview with the *New Yorker* that “if anything, I’m Taoist. You know, the Way. Go with the flow. Keep in tune with it all” (Schiff 88). Regardless of Gorey’s intentions, the Taoist *I Ching* and Gorey’s *The Object Lesson* can be read in much the same way.

The *I Ching*, known in translation as the Book of Changes, is an ancient Chinese fortune telling text that predates even Lao Tse’s *Tao Te Ching*. The book works when the reader casts a set of sticks or flips a number of coins which then determine which passages are to be read and which passages take primary importance in the interpretation. Jung, in writing the “Forward”⁶ which appears in the 1950 Wilhelm/Baynes translation, says that the chance answers of the *I Ching* are a way of exploring the unconscious. When he asked

⁶ The German word “Vorwort” is translated as “Forward” by Wilhelm and Baynes.

the *I Ching* what it thought of his efforts to present this book to the western world, he interpreted part of its answer like this: “It [*I Ching*] conceives of itself as a cult utensil serving to provide spiritual nourishment for the unconscious elements or forces (‘spiritual agencies’) that have been projected as gods” (xxviii). These “gods” or “spiritual agencies” are good words for the kind of non-sectarian spirituality that Taoism can provide in understanding children’s literature.

The *I Ching*’s meaning is based on the principle of synchronicity as opposed to western causality. Synchronicity is the belief that everything, including opposites (yin and yang), arises mutually (Watts 23). Upon the casting of the sticks or the flipping of the coin, every physical cause that makes these objects fall just so is connected with everything happening in the entire universe and with the sparking synapses of the person casting the sticks. Thus, for every moment in time, for every question asked, there is only one possible answer, the one received. According to Sonu Shamdasani, editor of *The Red Book*, Jung first began work on the phenomenon of synchronicity when he had repeated dreams of a massive flood that covered all of Europe. When World War I broke out shortly thereafter, he knew that through this dream he had tapped into the collective unconscious. His subconscious had interpreted all of the acausal connections inherent in everyday life and the collective unconscious to achieve this insight (viii).

Edward Gorey saw these same acausal connections as crucial to the theory of how his books were to be read:

I’m beginning to feel that if you create something, you’re killing a lot of other things. And the way I write, since I do leave out most of the connections, and very little is pinned down, I feel that I’m doing a minimum of damage to other possibilities that might arise in the reader’s mind (Schiff 93).

Or as Jung put it in his forward, “Don’t you see how useful the *I Ching* is in making you project your hitherto unrealized thoughts into its abstruse symbolism?” (xxxix). The language of Gorey and Jung similarly emphasizes the importance of unrestrained possibilities in helping people achieve their own understanding, or for the purposes of this paper, helping children achieve some sort of spiritual wholeness or individuation apart from indoctrination into any particular religious system.

The prime example of this kind of open possibility is Gorey’s picture book *The Object Lesson*. On the surface a macabre nonsense book, the story is also perhaps a play on object relations theory and definitely an open realm of possibility for allowing the merging of conscious and unconscious which is also sought through the *I Ching*. The book begins simply enough:

It was already Thursday,

*but his lordship's artificial limb could not be found;*⁷

However, this simple (if strange) beginning, is suddenly complicated by the introduction of a causal word, “therefore.”

*therefore, having directed the servants to fill the baths,
he seized the tongs
and set out at once for the edge of the lake.*

Just as the *I Ching* thwarts causality in favor of synchronicity, Gorey presents us with an expectation of cause and effect, only to divert our attention toward something seemingly unrelated—baths, tongs, and the lake. The sudden disparity creates the same kind of mental jarring that Zen Koans create in an attempt to shake the disciple of Zen into satori, or enlightenment.

A classic example of a Zen Koan is the story of Joshu, who upon returning from an excursion to his monastery is told of an argument which had broken out earlier in the day over who owned a particular cat. The master, attempting to put an end to the dispute, tells his pupils that anyone who can “say a good word” can have the cat. Otherwise, the master would cut it in half. When no one speaks, the master does as he had threatened and cuts the cat in half. When Joshu returns to the monastery later that day and is told by the master of the gruesome death he inflicted on the cat and the inability of anyone at the monastery to save it by saying a good word, Joshu takes off his sandals, puts them on his head, and walks out. “If you had been there,” the master says, “you could have saved the cat” (Reps, Nyogen 129).

What truth did Joshu discover in this absurd response to his master’s story? If there were a precise answer, the story would lose its power. It is through the enigma of Joshu’s action that we achieve enlightenment, that we come to a true understanding of the primary force at the core of the universe and the uniqueness of our being—individuation.

Gorey’s story continues in this vein, introducing us to a ghost called the Throttlefoot Spectre, and while readers are busy trying to discern the significance of a piece of string with which the specter is playing, the main character suddenly sits down beside the statue of Corrupted Endeavor “to await the arrival of autumn.” Again, the sudden switch to something as full of meaning as a statue of Corrupted Endeavor could potentially create sudden and new synapse connections, distracting the child’s consciousness just long enough perhaps for something she was unaware of to emerge from the depths of her own unconscious. Behold, satori. Behold, individuation.

In a sort of meta-fictional twist, the characters in the story achieve this enlightenment through unexpected association as well:

⁷ Gorey’s *Amphigory*, in which this story appears, does not use page numbers.

*On the shore a bat, or possibly an umbrella
disengaged itself from the shrubbery,
causing those nearby to recollect the miseries of childhood.*

While certainly not an uplifting experience, this flow of memories from the past, this self-realization through an unexpected physical phenomenon (the bat or umbrella), is exactly the kind of solitary, concrete truth which Zen seeks to isolate and psychoanalysis seeks to bring up from the unconscious to help produce individuation.

Shel Silverstein and Zen

I've used the term "wholeness" to describe the result of Jung's individuation process, the merging of the conscious and the unconscious. Silverstein's *The Missing Piece* is literally about wholeness, as a circle minus a wedge rolls and bumps through rain and sun, heat and snow, swamps and jungles singing:

*Oh I'm lookin' for my missin' piece
I'm lookin' for my missin' piece
Hi-dee-ho, here I go,
Lookin' for my missin' piece.*

A surface reading of this text would be about relationships and the paradoxical need for complementarity versus the need for each individual to be complete on her or his own. As the circle traipses across the page, enjoying beetles and butterflies, it encounters many wedges of many shapes and sizes, some too sharp, some too small, some too big, some too square. Finally, it finds the perfect piece. But it holds it too loosely, and loses it. It finds another fit, but holds it too tightly and breaks it—all easy metaphors for the pitfalls and difficulties of relationships.

Again it finds the perfect piece, but now, with a piece in its mouth, it can no longer sing, and finds itself rolling faster and faster, missing the butterflies and beetles, and having no time to smell the flowers. "Aha," it thought. "So that's how it is!" and it gently sets the perfect piece down and rolls on, enjoying the day alone, and eventually picking up its song again, "Oh I'm lookin' for my missin' piece."

Several crucial aspects of Zen are evident in this simple story. First is the Zen concept of Satori or enlightenment. Suzuki says that "satori means the unfolding of a new world hitherto unperceived in the confusion of a dualistic mind" (88). In Buddhism, much emphasis is placed on the dualism of existence and non-existence, and while many western philosophies and religions emphasize existence overcoming non-existence (Christian resurrection, Nietzsche's Übermensch overcoming nihilism), traditional Buddhism emphasizes overcoming existence with non-existence (escaping the torture of

reincarnation and attaining nirvana). Zen neither affirms nor denies existence, but seeks to go one step beyond through satori.

Similarly, in *The Missing Piece* we see the circle's initial obsession with its own emptiness and fullness, non-existence and existence in the form of its own missing piece. Only when it begins to sing again (this time a song celebrating its existence), it suddenly has, quite literally, an "Aha" moment, realizing that full and empty are just opposite ends of a physical spectrum of existence and really have nothing at all to do with happiness. This "Aha" moment, or satori, always accompanies a similar realization in Zen literature.

One satori story recounted by Nyogen Senzaki and Paul Reps recounts the story of a young disciple of Zen who visits Zen Master Dokuon of Shokoku, claiming to have achieved enlightenment: "The mind, Buddha, and sentient beings, after all, do not exist," he says. "The true nature of phenomenon is emptiness." The master sits smoking and saying nothing for a few minutes. Suddenly, he beats the student with his pipe, which understandably gets a rise of anger out of the student. "If nothing exists," says the master, "where did this anger come from?" (92). The student suddenly achieves satori, realizing that the beauty of existence comes not from asserting or denying existence, but rather from somewhere much deeper and more primal, what Jung would call the merging of the conscious and unconscious.

Significantly, after setting down its "found" piece, the circle continues rolling, singing its song, only to stop, and with a look of pure ecstasy on its "face," let a butterfly land on it. Even more significantly, the circle has disappeared completely from the last four pages, the first two featuring only the butterfly, the object of the circle's attention, and the last two featuring only the ground and the empty sky. It's as if Silverstein is declaring that something more significant rests upon these two pages than even the circle itself—neither existence nor non-existence, just things as they are. Readers can experience a similar "Aha" moment, realizing in the last four pages of beauty (the butterfly) and empty sky whatever it is their unconscious have to tell them, having a spiritual experience of their own creation exempt from the trappings of conventional, organized religion. The circle has realized that it is complete without a piece, and the child has learned that she or he is complete apart from anything exterior.⁸

⁸ Karen Coats does a Lacanian read of *The Missing Piece* in her book *Looking Glasses and Neverlands*. The two reads, Jung and Lacan, present striking similarities, especially in Lacan's theory of *objet petits autres*, or as Coats translates it, "objects with a little otherness" (81). Like Jung's theory of the unconscious as holding an integral and mysterious part of human nature that alone can fulfill us, Lacan sees this *objet a* as also holding a mysterious desire that we want to fulfill. However, the two theories differ in that Jung believes people can fulfill this desire through individuation (or *satori*) while Lacan argues that the desire exists for its own sake with the search for fulfillment as the ultimate fulfillment of itself. In both cases, nevertheless, desire plays a necessary role in our ongoing psychic development, and in both reads the circle in *The Missing Piece* discovers that perhaps it was never really missing anything after all (Coats 82).

This discussion of the empty pages leads naturally into the next way that this book illustrates Zen—the ten cow-herding pictures. The ten cow-herding pictures, a visual representation of the Zen path through satori and beyond bears striking similarity, even in artistic style (both are simple line drawings featuring circles), to *The Missing Piece*. While the circle in Silverstein’s book is searching for a missing piece (which I have characterized above as a manifestation of existence and non-existence which must be overcome), the person in the ten cow-herding pictures is searching for a bull, also signifying existence and non-existence, or differently stated, perhaps an intellectual understanding of ontology or religion. If we compare the bull with the piece and the person with circle, the two stories, except for slight variations in order of the steps, are fairly analogous.

In the first picture, *The Search for the Bull*, we are introduced to the hero of the story, a person depicted by woodblock artist Tomikichiro Tokuriki as a young boy.⁹ He is looking for something. In the next picture, *Discovering the Footprints*, this young boy sees hoof prints—his first evidence that the bull which he is searching for exists. Just like the circle, he is trying to find completeness in something outside of himself. But just as the circle finds its first few pieces which nevertheless do not quite fit, the boy does not feel complete. He still wants the bull and the circle still wants its piece.

In the third picture, *Perceiving the Bull*, the boy catches a glimpse of the bull disappearing behind a tree but can’t quite catch it, just as the circle finds its first piece that fits but holds it too loosely so that it slips away. Number four is *Catching the Bull*. As the boy lassoes the bull’s leg, he is wrestling intellectually with religion, trying to make it fill his need, but force is never adequate for creating meaning, just as the circle tries to hold the second “fitting” piece too tightly and makes it crumble to pieces.

As the boy triumphantly pulls the bull around by the nose in the fifth picture, *Taming the Bull*, he has found what he thinks is meaning. He has intellectually conquered religion just as the circle has found a piece that fits and that wants to be with it, but will either of them be happy now that they have found what they thought they wanted?

⁹ The figure in the drawing always speaks in first person in the original text by Kakuan and is thus genderless. However, the woodblock prints shown here by Kyoto artist Tomikichiro Tokuriki depict the person in search of the bull as a boy who later becomes the fat, happy monk at the end of the series and is thus referred to as “he” throughout this paper (*Reps* 132-155).



Fig 1. Kakuan, Zen Master. *Taming the Bull. Zen Flesh, Zen Bones.* Comp. Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki. Tokyo: C.E. Tuttle, 1957. Print.

Just as Silverstein's circle tries to sing but can't because it has found its "missing" piece, in *Riding the Bull* the boy rides triumphantly playing the flute. Both the boy and the circle try to celebrate their accomplishment. By image number six, *The Bull Transcended*, the boy has successfully ridden the bull home and locked it safely away in a stall. But it's hard to tell if the look on his face is serenity and happiness, or if he realizes that having found the bull, he is still the exact same empty person that he was before. Similarly, the circle rolls along faster than ever before because it has found a piece that fits, but it is no happier than before. In fact, it has no time to enjoy the flowers and the butterfly.

Suddenly, in *Both Bull and Self Transcended*, the boy has a moment of satori, realizing that it was not the bull (intellectual command of existence and non-existence) that he wanted but something much deeper and more primal. Like the blank circle portrayed in Figure 2 below, Silverstein's circle has disappeared after its satori (Aha moment) leaving a blank page with nothing but the flat line of the ground.

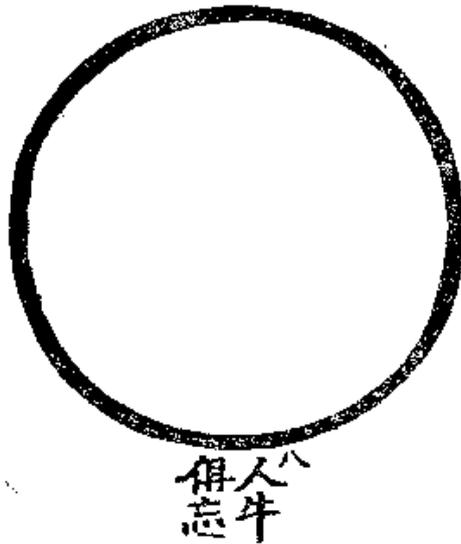


Fig 2. Kakuan, Zen Master. *Both Bull and Self Transcended. Zen Flesh, Zen Bones.* Comp. Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki. Tokyo: C.E. Tuttle, 1957. Print.

The final two images are especially significant. In *Reaching the Source* (Figure 3) the beauty of the world as it is can suddenly be recognized because it is separate from any need for meaning. Meaning already exists within, and the boy and the circle can now truly enjoy everything else because they are no longer trying to use it to fill their own perceived lack. In *The Missing Piece* the butterfly flutters happily across two blank pages.



Fig 3. Kakuan, Zen Master. *Reaching the Source. Zen Flesh, Zen Bones.* Comp. Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki. Tokyo: C.E. Tuttle, 1957. Print.

Like the fat happy monk who the boy has become in Figure 4 (*In the World*), traveling through the world, enjoying life, and giving gifts to others, the circle rolls on, singing the same song, but now with a totally different perspective, realizing that it was happy and complete all along. As stated above, Silverstein’s story, like the ten bull-herding pictures, prompts children to find their own “Aha” moment in the serene face of the complete-though-incomplete circle and the fluttering butterfly across blank pages of things as they are.



Fig 4. Kakuan, Zen Master. *In the World. Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*. Comp. Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki. Tokyo: C.E. Tuttle, 1957. Print.

The final image (above) is a perfect conclusion to this essay. Gorey and Silverstein both function as the enlightened gift giver, presenting their stories to everyone who needs or wants them, like Zen and Tao presenting opportunities for mental and spiritual growth by creating possibilities and leaving their interpretation to the reader as a way to grow and achieve individuation. In his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Jung outlines what he calls the law of conservation of psychic energy, which is that “for every piece of conscious life that loses its importance and value ... there arises a compensation in the unconscious” (209). Jung expresses in this book his idea that western society is on the cusp of great change, that scientific knowledge and materialism have grown so powerful and have so crippled western spirituality that somewhere in the collective unconscious of humanity a compensation must arise. This compensation, he argues, will come through eastern philosophies such as Zen and Tao. I believe that Silverstein’s *The Missing Piece* and Gorey’s *The Object Lesson* are two such spiritual compensations of the unconscious as he describes, saying that “these manifestations make us think of tiny, scattered islands in the ocean of mankind; in reality they are like the peaks of submarine mountain ranges of considerable

size” (210). Where else in children’s literature might these submarine mountain ranges of the mind appear?

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