

Jupiter Bound: A Used Book Review
by David Robinson

Tao Te Ching translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English

The Tao alone nourishes and brings everything to fulfillment.
— from chapter 41, *Tao Te Ching*

I met Xian at a state university in the South in Fall 1983. Over tea, we shared our stories. He was a visiting scholar from a university in northwest China. I invited him over for tea. He invited me over the great western divide into a new world, the world of Chinese wisdom specifically, into the *Tao Te Ching*.

The legendary author of the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao-Tsu, an older contemporary of Confucius lived in northwest China, 500 years before Jesus walked the paths of Palestine. Lao-Tsu's book is a short text of only 5000 Chinese characters, but one of the best loved Chinese works in English translation.

I remember asking Xian what he thought was a good translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. He pointed me to Lin Yutang's version, *The Wisdom of Lao-tse*, complete with annotations from the writings of Chuang-Tsu. That was eight years ago.

A few months ago, while browsing at Jupiter's Books in Cannon Beach, I found another translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (Vintage Books, 1972, \$11.50 used). More poetic than Lin Yutang's scholarly work, Feng's translation is served up on Jane English's gorgeously simple black and white photo-plates, garnished with Feng's calligraphy of the Chinese text.

During the past months, I've read these two translations, the scholarly and the poetic, side by side, allowing Lao-Tsu's oriental wisdom to season and nourish my western worldview. It has been like sitting down to a summer-long, \$1 course gourmet Chinese feast.

A well aged wine is meant to be enjoyed slowly, a gourmet meal received course by course. Too much reading in our culture is the mass-produced, fast food variety, intended to be gulped down without ever engaging the heart.

Sacred reading is different. The Latin term "lectio divina" guides us into a different way of reading, a slow, meditative reading which feeds the soul. Wisdom literature calls for this kind of reading. Sip by sip, course by course, we allow the richness, creativity and nourishment of the feast to enter and enrich our lives.

The *Tao Te Ching* remains for me a great mystery. One of its basic teachings is that life's greatest gifts are served to us in mystery, like the wonder and surprise of meeting Xian among the 17,000 other university students on that campus, 8 years ago.

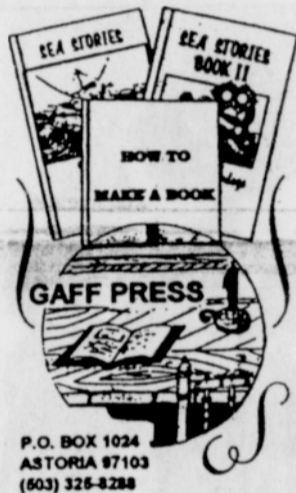
I didn't know then what I know now, that I would become a richer person from my friendships with two men of Northwest China: a modern day Chinese scholar and an ancient and wise Chinese poet.



Having both a bookstore and a newspaper, we get lots of press releases, and information about new books. Well, we got a note from Paul Barrett of Gaff Press, Box 1024, Astoria, Or. 97103 (you will need this information in just a minute). It seems Paul, who's books, *Sea Stories*, *Sea Stories II*, and *How to Make a Book*, are in an honored place in our library, has a new one coming called, "I'll be Home in Half-an-Hour". It is about drinking. Here is an excerpt from the introduction,

"As in my two books of *Sea Stories*, I've written here on a subject with which I have had significant, first-hand experience. I did quit drinking, but I also quit fishing, another dangerous activity. Both bore times of great sadness — but also of uproarious humor. — During my commercial ocean fishing exposure I lost many friends to the sea; so have I lost many to alcohol. This, of course does not mean either liquor or seawater is inherently bad, only that they're both potentially hazardous, and that both inevitably demands a price which is sometimes existence."

Friend Paul is not only a very good writer, and human being, he has written, printed, bound, distributed and sold well over 12,000 copies of his books. This man deserves a grant or a Pulitzer or something. But, what he asks is just a little help in getting his new effort printed and out in time for the Holidays. So, if you want a copy (we ordered two) send him \$10 for each copy, and he will send you a receipt immediately and your book will be delivered postpaid by Nov. 15th. His other books are also available at \$15 each. We can think of no better channel to support the arts than giving support directly to the artist.



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The faith in which I was brought up assured me that I was better than other people; I was saved, they were damned....Our hymns were loaded with arrogance - selfcongratulation on how cozy we were with the Almighty and what a high opinion he had of us, what hell everybody else would catch come Judgement Day.

Robert Heinlein



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I don't want to investigate
those feelings that leave me
flat on my back
staring at the ceiling.

I have no desire
to prove my perspective
in the guise of a poem
or a letter to the editor.

Words have become so political
I hate you could mean I hate you.

Goodbyes are in order.
I slip on my coat,
pull down my cap
and wrap my scarf
around my neck twice,
once for luck
and once for something
I could not say.

Louis Sohn

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