

taken for granted by most monks and nuns that this is the heart and soul of the monastic enterprise, but 50 years ago it was not so. In fact, there were plenty of monks who thought Merton put altogether too much emphasis on contemplation to the detriment of community and apostolic activity.

In Merton's case, the specific form that this quest took was his desire to be a hermit. For many years that request was denied almost automatically, since Trappist life was so markedly cenobitic. That is, there was almost no place in that life for individual spontaneity and freedom apart from the activities of the group. And it did not help Merton that Gethsemani was flooded with novices in those days.

For his part, Leclercq was very sympathetic. Although he himself had no eremitical inclinations, he recognized well that solitary life was a very important part of the early history of monasticism. Like Merton, he understood that monastic communities are much healthier when they offer their members some latitude in regard to aloneness. And so he did not hesitate to use his influence in Rome and elsewhere to win at least some freedom for Merton and his fellow hermits.

These letters are very readable. Not only are they well edited by Patrick Hart, but they are written by two of the best monastic writers of the century. True, Leclercq is writing in a second language, but he still does fine. Much better than he did with his spoken English, which was almost incomprehensible. Merton, of course, could flat out write. Indeed, he could not not write; he would die if he could not write. That's why his firm resolution to cease writing upon becoming novice-master is so ludicrous.

This correspondence is also made fascinating by the fact that it occurred at such a momentous time for the whole Church and the monastic world. Even though things seemed to be booming, with many new foundations and full novitiates, both of them sensed that the old regime was about to collapse. They could see that it was too rigid, too arrogant, too European to perdure. Hence they were both fascinated by new monastic developments in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Personally, these letters served to increase my respect for Leclercq. I have always thought there was something grotesque about his constant roaming of the earth giving conferences and lectures. What kind of stability is that? And yet, he turns out to be an excellent ambassador for monastic renewal. He comes through as level-headed, relatively optimistic, and not given to harsh judgments, even of the Vatican!

For his part, Merton seems less serene and more prone to a blacker view of things. Of course, he was a genius, and he no doubt saw better than Leclercq the depths of foolishness around him in both Church and State. But these letters also suggest that it would have helped his disposition and his worldview if the Trappist superiors had seen fit to allow him to see more of the monastic world, if not the secular world. That way, it would not have taken him so long to have his '4th and Walnut' experience.

Terrence G. Kardong

SHANNON, William, Christine Bochen and Patrick O'Connell (eds.), *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 556. ISBN 1-57075-426-8 (hardback). \$50.

Having read something that I wrote about Thomas Merton a while ago, a friend observed that he had gone out to buy a dictionary comprehensive enough to contain

the word 'apophatic' in order to better understand what it was that I was saying about Merton's approach to contemplation. As it happens, 'apophaticism' is the title of one of the entries in *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*, a book that has arrived not a minute too soon.

The *Encyclopedia* is very welcome, especially in clarifying Merton's understanding of particular ideas and in pointing to seminal terms that defined his major interests. There are a number of different categories for the entries. There are entries on all of Merton's published and certain unpublished books and pamphlets, over 100 of them (Merton's taped conferences are excluded); there are entries on some selected topics deemed essential to understanding his works; there are entries on living people who were important in his life and with whom in many instances he corresponded; and there are entries on a number of the places where Merton lived. The authors concede that decisions about what topics to include were difficult as were decisions about the length to give to particular entries. I would have liked to see a longer, separate entry on Merton's MA thesis, 'Nature and Art in William Blake' instead of having to do with a paragraph included in the entry on Merton's *Literary Essays* and undoubtedly other readers will have similar disappointments. But the weight of the whole in this case is more important than the sum of the parts. There are also questions that might arise about the length of the entries. For example, the entry on the slender volume, the *Eighteen Poems*, is longer than that on *The Seven Storey Mountain*, the book by which Merton is best known. On the other hand, one realizes that copies of *The Seven Storey Mountain* are readily available whereas *Eighteen Poems* was published in a limited-run, hard-to-obtain edition. No doubt the length of this entry was also influenced by the considerable biographical interest in the subject matter of the poems, which have to do with Merton's romantic relationship with M. On the whole it can be said that the writers have done a formidable job in compiling an immense amount of material virtually all of which is useful to those interested in Thomas Merton.

The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia comes equipped with a number of black-and-white photographs of places and people associated with Merton's life—a picture of Oakham Chapel, for example, and more than one photo of Merton's brother John Paul, a picture of Dom James Fox, of Naomi Burton Stone, photographs of Merton's hermitage, of the Dalai Lama and Abbot Timothy Kelly kneeling together in prayer at Merton's grave. There are reproductions of some of Merton's drawings, including some from his days at Columbia—as well as examples of his photographic art. These are all welcome, and one only wishes that dates had been appended to the pictures and more of the locations identified. The cross-referencing at the end of the entries is very helpful. At the end of the entry on Edward Rice (Merton's longtime friend and biographer), for example, there is a reference to *The Road to Joy* in which Merton's letters to Rice have been published.

Entries on the people in Merton's life are generally informative and balanced although there are moments when the pressure of opinion is felt more strongly than is usually the case in a work of this sort. An instance is William Shannon's comment in the entry on Dom James Fox that in spite of Merton's 'problems' with James Fox, his 'diatribes against his abbot' in his journals are 'excessive and unappreciative of the important role' that Dom James played in his life' (p. 160). Somehow the sharpness of the word 'diatribes' catches the reader unexpectedly. This comment to be sure is followed up by the less controversial observation that at times, especially in the case of Merton's relationship with M, Dom James showed a 'remarkable insight into

Merton's needs in ways that one could hardly have expected' (p. 160). Typically, in encyclopedias of writing one thumbs through entries that are framed in such a way that controversial matters are labeled as such so that the reader is made aware of the sides involved in a particular issue.

Moreover, in *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* there are instances where one feels that one is reading not just summaries and analyses of generally accepted knowledge and opinion but individualized commentary that may not always be related specifically to Merton's own writing and thought. Such is the case with the entry on Merton's letters, for example. There, William Shannon contributes a number of remarks on the art of epistolary writing, including a reference to Virginia Woolf, and an observation about the uncertain fate of letters once they are in the possession of their recipients. Inoffensive as this is, it seems curiously gratuitous in that it is not sourced in Merton's own writings but rather presented as a sort of general prefatory discourse about letters and writing that could, one feels, encompass not only Merton's letter-writing but that of a great many others. As was the case noted above in connection with Dom James, there is also in this instance the prick of opinion. In contrast to his letters, for example, Merton's journals are described as often tending to be 'overly introspective and self-occupied' (p. 256). Here, Shannon appears to have departed from analysis and classification and to have entered an area of strong evaluation – in apparent contradiction to the claim in the Introduction that the entries about books (here the journals) would be to 'inform, not to critique' (p. xvii). Somehow, with that word 'overly' Shannon, without abandoning the role of the encyclopedia writer, leads us into an area of controversy – at least this reader felt so led. I realize what Shannon means to say about Merton. Indeed, I have occasionally found myself confessing to others that I am introspective to a fault. With Merton, I would argue, the case is different.

The reason is that Merton's journals can be seen as a dialectical writing environment in which he looked at his own ideas and character in a way that showed him searching for the sort of inclusive vision that a concentrated attentiveness, altered perception and changing perspective could attain. As is generally understood, the self for Merton was not only a personal site but an ontological one. In some ways, then, the introspective path was the right one for Merton, who sought within the clouded waters of the self the creator who formed him. None of this, of course, is news to William Shannon. The reader may experience a somewhat similar experience of surprise at the end of Christine Bochen's entry on Thomas Merton's understanding of and relationship to women: 'One wonders', Bochen concludes, what Merton 'would say about women today?' (p. 539) Perhaps one does; perhaps one doesn't. No doubt my own reaction in this matter is itself replete with opinion although somehow the conventions of review writing appear to accommodate this sort of thing whereas those of encyclopedia writing in general have not. Perhaps what I am saying, then, is that this encyclopedia is not in some ways conventional – for better, most of the time, and, occasionally, for worse.

For better, for example, is William Shannon's fine, concise entry on Merton's ideas about the subconscious. Shannon provides us with helpful guidance to reading Merton in a very important area, one that is difficult to resolve in Merton's thought and writing. Shannon leaves us, though, with a clear sense of Merton's bearings by means of Merton's placing of the unconscious either 'below or above our conscious mind' (p. 501). A strength of *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* is the authors' plumbing

of their subjects, thus surpassing the sort of merely formal classifying that often characterizes encyclopedia writing. Another good example of this is Shannon's excellent article on 'contemplation', a matter about which he has written elsewhere with discernment and authority. Shannon shows how Merton's ideas about contemplation evolved throughout his life and writing — from the early booklet *What Is Contemplation?* through *News Seeds of Contemplation* to the transitional, partly-published 'The Inner Experience' and the later collection of essays, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*. The long entry bristles with interesting, informative comment, which includes at times illuminating fragments from Merton's poetry. While the entry is weakened by the occasional truism ('Reaching this higher realm of experience is no easy task today'), most of the sentences illuminate a profound understanding of Merton's consciousness — as in: 'Experiencing the Reality of God in contemplation makes it possible for the contemplative to experience created reality as it truly is' (pp. 81, 83). Shannon takes the perception one step further in noting that in Merton's view when 'we become aware of our total dependence on God and the same dependence of all reality on God, we experience a sense of interdependence with all God's people and a sense of the responsibility we have toward them' (p. 84). Thus, Shannon shows the connectedness of all things in Merton's thought, here demonstrating Merton's breaking of the conventional belief about the separateness of contemplation and social responsibility.

The entries on Merton's books of poetry, most of them by Patrick O'Connell, are analytical and illuminating, amounting in many instances to short yet highly finished essays. In the case of the *Eighteen Poems*, a slim volume still, at this writing, unavailable to most readers, O'Connell provides considerable textual detail in tracing the development in the poems of the relationship with M up to the point where Merton, as O'Connell puts it sensitively, both 'embraces the bond of shared experience and accepts the necessity of letting go of the other and of the possibilities she embodies' (p. 132). With a judicious eye for subtleties in phrasing, O'Connell weighs carefully the strength and flow of feeling in the poems helping the reader through nuanced lines — as in 'The Harmonies of Excess' where Merton's underlying ambivalence about the relationship with M is described as at once both 'positive' and 'problematic' (p. 129). As with a number of the entries in *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* those on Merton's poetry are often enriched by significant details about the genesis of the books in addition to significant materials related to their publishing history.

Among the heterogeneous, felicitous contents of *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* is the entry on 'Tom's Book', an unpublished diary kept by Ruth Merton about her infant son. There is also the valuable entry on Merton's use of the phrase '*le point vierge*', in which Christine Bochen traces Merton's use of this elusive phrase to Louis Massignon and then follows its appearances in Merton's writings. There are items in the encyclopedia on books by Merton whose worth has been questioned by Merton himself and yet whose value to the reader's knowledge of Merton is brought out by the skill of the *Encyclopedia's* writers. An example is the entry on the early book, *What Are These Wounds?* The book was commissioned by Dom Frederic Dunne to create interest in Cistercian saints, in this case in the medieval, Flemish saint, Lutgarde of Aywieres. In retrospect Merton regarded the book as something of a flat project from the start, but Christine Bochen in writing about it brings out its usefulness to the Merton reader by showing how the face of Merton himself emerges from the text he

created about St Lutgarde. Commenting on the saint, for example, whose beauty he at one point captured in a very pleasing line-drawing, Merton regretted that St Lutgarde lacked the ‘“Benedictine plainness” and the Cistercian ‘technique of humility which consists in a kind of protective coloring, by which the monk simply disappears into the background of the common, everyday life, like those birds and animals whose plumage and fur make them almost indistinguishable from their surroundings’ (p. 526).

To say that *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* is an important resource for Merton readers would be to state the obvious. In all likelihood it will come to occupy a place such as that occupied by Michael Mott’s comprehensive biography of Merton as a standard reference work in the area. The reason for the book’s importance issues primarily from the challenge posed to the Merton reader, who must canvass Merton’s writings in order to try to piece together the varied and evolving meanings of particular ideas in those writings as he developed as a thinker and writer. The authors of *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia* have done much of this work for us, allowing us to orient ourselves as to where Merton’s thinking was at a particular stage in his career. Now that we have the book, we are likely to wonder how it was that we got along without it before.

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TAYLOR, Terrence A. (ed.), *A Thomas Merton Curriculum* (Louisville, KY: The Thomas Merton Foundation, 2002).

Thomas Merton dedicated *No Man Is an Island* to the scholastics studying for the priesthood at the Abbey of Gethsemani, writing that they ‘will perhaps recognize in it some notions they have received in spiritual direction’.¹ Merton was Master of Scholastics during the time that he wrote the book in the early 1950s, a role that combined teaching and individual spiritual guidance. The dedication was appropriate in that the book grew from what Merton learned about what the scholastics needed in their spiritual formation.

Merton had taught introductory conferences to novice monks for over a year prior to assuming his duties in the scholasticate in June 1951, but the new role was much more encompassing and demanding. After six months Merton reflected in his journal, ‘I have stumbled around a lot, and on many days we have gone around in circles and fallen into ditches because the blind was leading the blind...I do not know if they have discovered anything new, or if they are able to love God more or if I have helped them in any way to find themselves, which is to say: to lose themselves’.² Searching for his own direction as a teacher and spiritual guide, Merton came to realize how much he had assumed that his students understood of the basic truths on which the spiritual life is founded, how much more he needed to address them if he was to help his students on the path of self-discovery. His uncertainty gave way to the conviction

1. Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), p. x.

2. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1953), p. 323.