film is meant to appeal to youth; its ambient soundtrack is immediately recognizable to a young audience who know and admire much of the music and musicians who contributed to the film. Indeed, much of the film's pacing and editing is very similar to contemporary music videos. Finally, that the film is fully aware of itself as a film is demonstrated by the frequent use of onscreen text and literal stops, reversals, and fast forwards. This approach achieves a jerky, edgy effect that is relevant to today's new digital media, but it also echoes the tone and rhythm of the Merton poem.

At one point in *Original Child Bomb*, we hear from a Japanese woman who recounts the story of her young daughter who survived the bombing only to die a few months later of a seizure caused by radiation effects. The mother remembers her grief, and says "but I suppose you cannot undo the past." Merton certainly hoped to redeem the past with his poem, and this film adaptation has the same aim. A terrible beauty was indeed born in August 1945, and though the human capacity for hope, compassion, and empathy was not destroyed by the bombs, it certainly needs constant nurturing from generation to generation.

Original Child Bomb is essential viewing for anyone who wants to be reminded of the responsibility we have to teach today's young people the lessons of past failures. Though the film does contain some graphic, even shocking images, it is certainly appropriate for high school and college audiences, and is highly recommended for classroom use. When the film concluded, my class literally left the room in stunned silence. But silence, as Merton knew so well, can be a remarkable catalyst for action.

David King

SHANNON, William H., *Thomas Merton: An Introduction* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005), pp. xiv-199. ISBN 0-86716-710-6 (paperback). $16.95.

As expected from William Shannon, this is an excellent book. It is a revision of his *Something of a Rebel* (1997), which I have not read, and now will not need to. In the introduction, Shannon makes it clear that although he has changed this title, he is not backing away from its idea of Merton as in some sense a rebel. And in what sense? In his refusal "to be content with the *status quo* when it no longer nourished the human spirit" (p. 2), and in his ongoing work of making his faith and his monastic tradition truly his own in response to conventionality in all its forms.

For Shannon, the pivotal moment in Merton's life was his baptism in Corpus Christi Church in New York on November 16, 1938. Rather than give simply a chronological outline of Merton's life, he begins with an account of the summer of 1939 which Merton and his closest friends spent in Olean, New York, writing the Great American Novel and generally enjoying life, a time when the freshness of his baptismal experience was still with Merton, and before he found his monastic vocation.

From that summer in Olean, Shannon harks back to Merton's birth in France, his sojourns in various countries before and after the death of, first, his mother, and then his father, and his time at Cambridge and Columbia; and he looks forward to Merton's time of teaching at St. Bonaventure College and his 27 years as a monk of Gethsemani. He identifies two miracles of these monastic years (this is what Merton needs for canonization, right?): first, that Merton stayed at Gethsemani in the face of every temptation and provocation; and second, given the constraints of the monastic timetable, "the staggering amount of writing ... that leaped out from his old banged-up typewriter" (p. 33). In outlining Merton's monastic years, he includes all the major elements—his years of preparation for profession and ordination, his years of teaching and pastoral responsibility as master of scholastics and master of novices, and the hermitage years. The one omission that I found curious in this section was the lack of any reference to the time of emotional or psychic breakdown (if that is the right word) between early fall of 1949 and December 1950 which Merton describes in *The Sign of Jonas,* a time which in my own view is very important for our understanding of the shift from the earlier Merton to later Merton.

The second chapter begins provocatively with its very title: "Is Merton for today, or is he passé?" The answer is predictable, but the question is still important. Acknowledging that Merton's popularity had begun to wane before his death, he asserts that since his death in 1968 his popularity has only increased, attributing this to the genuineness which comes so strongly through his writing, his ability to articulate the human condition, his respect for and interest in the people he encountered, his bursting of the bounds of the cultural limitation typical of monks, Americans and Catholics in his time, and his astonishing capacity (something to which I can personally attest) to act as spiritual-director-at-a-distance for thousands upon thousands.

All this adds up to Merton's role as public intellectual, or "American prophet," as Robert Inchausti calls him. Given the brevity of this chapter, however, Shannon might well have included in it the section of the next chapter in which he sets forth a paradigm of views of Merton based on responses to *The Seven Storey Mountain.* One group, small and shrinking I cannot doubt, sees Merton as still the apostle of *contemptus mundi,* and thus faithful to the original insights of the autobiography. A second group sees him as having betrayed the monastic vision of the *Mountain* either by becoming a secular humanist, a position with which Shannon firmly disagrees, or as having betrayed its Christian vision by his explorations of psychoanalysis, Eastern religion and Communism, with David Cooper as emblematic of the first sub-group, and Alice von Hildebrand as representative of the second. The third group, to which Shannon himself belongs, and in which I would also locate myself, sees Merton as having moved beyond the narrowness and rigidity of his autobiography to a pluralistic and integrative worldview. As Shannon concludes, if Merton's autobiography "continues to appeal to a whole new generation of readers, this is not because of, but in spite of, its theological stance. For today's readers the magnanimity of the writer somehow transcends the narrowness of his theology" (p. 62).

In the rest of this chapter, Shannon deals with the eight major themes of Merton's writings, which he lists as interiority, prayer, God, human identity, community/person and collectivity/individual, freedom as the expression of one's inner truth, and Zen. Each of these is manifestly essential for a broad understanding of Merton; and Shannon's summaries of them are balanced and helpful.

Then comes a very practical chapter: how to read Merton, given his massive and unsystematic corpus. He shares with the reader Merton's own classification of his major writings, including the famous graph (p. 126); and he acknowledges frankly that Merton could write badly as well as eloquently. Beside this he affirms that Merton's writing continued to improve as time went on, simply because he continued to write, and, I would add, to write in dialogical response to his constructive critics. Where then to start? Shannon opts for the *SSM* as the book with which to begin, and he expands on his choice with a very interesting commentary on the titles of its chapters. After the *SSM,* he lists *The Sign of Jonas, No Man Is An Island, New Seeds of Contemplation, Conjectures of a Guilty*

Bystander, Zen and the Birds of Appetite and the *Asian Journal* as first-order choices. Beyond these, of course, lie the vast reaches of the published letters and journals, which offer to the careful student a source of information and perspective which can richly contextualize the reading of the major works.

I am regularly asked to advise beginning readers of Thomas Merton on how to start and continue their initial acquaintance with this ever-searching monk, writer and pilgrim. For the foreseeable future, this book will be my suggested starting-place, given the depth of its scholarship in limited compass, its accessible and balanced treatment of man and writings, and its practicality. I have already suggested, in fact, to the Thomas Merton Society of Canada, that at future public events we keep a supply of this book on hand for immediate response to this kind of inquiry. Once again our gratitude goes to William Shannon for a uniquely useful contribution to our knowledge and understanding of Thomas Merton.

Donald Grayston

HARPUR, James, *Love Burning in the Soul: The Story of the Christian Mystics, from Saint Paul to Thomas Merton* (Boston: New Seeds, 2005), pp. xi + 241. ISBN 1-59030-112-9 (paperback). $16.95.

The subtitle of this historical survey of the Christian mystical tradition is a helpful indicator of the book's approach and its value – as well as of its interest to the reader of *The Merton Annual*. Harpur, a poet and literature professor from University College, Cork, takes a predominantly narrative approach to his subject: his "story of the Christian mystics" emphasizes the figures he considers the outstanding representatives of the Christian spiritual tradition from its beginnings through the twentieth century. Forty-nine figures are discussed, one of them, the influential neo-Platonist Plotinus, a non-Christian; most of the thirty-nine men and ten women are familiar names, though a few, like the Beguine Marguerite Porete (burned at the stake in Paris in 1310), have become prominent only relatively recently. (Actually the first figure discussed is Jesus himself, though including him as one of the "brackets" in the subtitle apparently seemed to author or publisher a bit presumptuous.) Each of the seventeen chronologically ordered chapters typically focuses on two or three mystical writers from a particular era (four for "The Rhineland Mystics" [ch. 8] and "The English Flowering" [ch. 10] and a perhaps excessive five [one a Spaniard!] for "French