

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

Mystics and Quietism" [ch. 14]). But the subtitle is quite properly "story" not "stories": the author emphasizes the developments and continuities (as well as changes and even discontinuities) of the mystical tradition and the relationships and influences that connect his various subjects, rather than treating them in isolation from one another and their times.

Harpur states at the very beginning of his work that it is "not aimed at theologians or other specialists but at those who have little or no knowledge of the subject matter and who wish to dip their toes into the vast ocean of mysticism" (p. ix), and indeed readers who are already familiar with the field will find little here that is new. This does not mean, however, that the treatment is hackneyed or superficial. The author has clearly done his homework, as his references to primary source materials and to multi-volume works such as Bernard McGinn's *The Presence of God* and the *Crossroad World Spirituality* volumes attest, and he has summarized the material in an attractive and incisive fashion. He presupposes no previous knowledge of the subject, providing in his Introduction helpful definitions of mysticism and contemplation, a brief analysis of the distinction between apophatic and cataphatic mysticism, an overview of the traditional three ways (purgation, illumination, union) and other helpful orientation notes. Each chapter, typically ten to twelve pages, begins with an overview of the main events of the period, both secular and religious, and often includes brief mention of other significant figures not to be discussed in detail (for instance Charles de Foucauld and Simone Weil in the final chapter). Then each of the mystics representing that era is considered according to a standard pattern: a brief paragraph relating him or her to the historical context, a presentation of biographical highlights, and a capsule summary of the mystic's teaching. None of the sketches runs more than about four pages, so the material is obviously compressed, but Harpur has generally done a fine job in getting to the heart of the teaching of each of the figures chosen. As he acknowledges, this is no more than dipping a toe in the ocean, but he does provide encouragement to his readers to wade, or plunge, in deeper after these initial contacts, and his extensive bibliography (pp. 235-41) provides ample resources for doing so (though an arrangement that grouped works according to periods or specific figures rather than simply alphabetically might have been more useful).

There are some built-in drawbacks to the approach the author has taken, which he acknowledges but doesn't completely overcome. His interest in symmetry and continuity leads him to give relatively the same amount of space and attention to historical periods with little inclination or sympathy toward mysticism, like the Enlightenment (ch. 15) and the nineteenth century (ch. 16), as to high points of the tradition like the fourth century, the Age of Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa (ch. 3) or the twelfth century of Bernard and Hildegard (ch. 5) – though he does give multiple chapters to the geographically varied mysticism of the fourteenth century, which spans Germany (ch. 8), England (ch. 10), and Italy (ch. 11). There is also the problem that Orthodox mysticism (ch. 9) and Protestant mysticism (ch. 12) are restricted to single chapters – though in the latter case further Protestant figures appear in chapters 15 and 16. Perhaps the least satisfactory chapter is the penultimate one on “Romantics and Nature Mysticism,” which bridges the period between the Enlightenment and the twentieth century by focusing on the English poets Blake and Wordsworth, an anomalous shift in genre evidently due to the perceived scarcity of writers of mystical prose during the period (comparable figures such as Crashaw or Traherne in the seventeenth century, or Jacopone da Todi and Dante at the beginning of the fourteenth, don't rate even a mention, though they are certainly closer to the main line of the Christian mystical tradition than the two Romantics); the discussions are interesting in themselves, and while Blake is clearly an heir of Jacob Boehme, discussed in chapter 12 – as well as being an (unmentioned) influence on Merton, to be considered in the following chapter – Wordsworth's “mysticism” and his Christianity were largely successive and mutually exclusive phases of his life, so he fits somewhat awkwardly within the overall development of the “story” Harpur is telling.

Merton's four and a half pages (he is paired with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin as exemplars of “The Modern Age”) provide a competent introduction to his life and thought within the small compass allowed, relying exclusively on *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *New Seeds of Contemplation* and, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, *The Ascent to Truth* to sketch in his teaching on contemplation and the true and false self. While Merton's mature interest in social and political issues and in Eastern religious thought is mentioned, these aspects are left undeveloped; more attention is paid to his familiarity with Freud and Jung, in “a world in which psychology and

the psychoanalytic movement have made their mark" (p. 209), not an area that would probably occur to most commentators limited to so brief a scope, but a way of relating Merton's interest in the self to that of his age. Harpur mentions that Merton "had at least two spiritual experiences that affected him profoundly" (p. 210), then identifies them as his sense of his dead father's presence while in Rome at age eighteen and his awareness of the divine presence in the Havana church during his 1940 visit—rather than the "Fourth and Walnut" and Polonnaruwa experiences, neither of which is touched on at all, that most readers at all familiar with Merton's life would probably expect. But his final paragraph on the spiritual journey, the passage through the wilderness and discovery of peace "in the heart of this darkness" (p. 213), ends the discussion, and the "story" proper, on an authentic Mertonian note.

Harpur concludes the book with a brief Epilogue that looks to the future, recognizing a decreasing interest in institutional Christianity in the West, due in large part, he suggests, to the Church's failure to satisfy people's "hunger for spiritual and mystical experience" (p. 216). He sees signs of hope in the development of various "grassroots initiatives" that have arisen to meet this need, including Taizé, interest in Celtic spirituality (about which he is somewhat ambivalent in so far as it has become faddish—an attitude similar to Merton's feelings about Zen in the '60s), Creation spirituality (about which he could perhaps be a bit more ambivalent), and various retreat movements, including some that might be unfamiliar to an American audience (Julian Gatherings and the Quiet Garden movement); somewhat surprisingly, perhaps, there is no mention of centering prayer and its organizational arm, Contemplative Outreach, or of the World Community for Christian Meditation, associated with the Benedictines John Main and Lawrence Freeman. Harpur concludes that the various movements he has mentioned "are positive signs that Christianity is capable of renewing itself spiritually and that its long contemplative tradition still has relevance today" (p. 219); he also cautions that mystical experience is not an end in itself, not an effort to attain "personal ecstasy in a cocoon of peacefulness" (p. 219), but rather a way of participating in the divine life of compassion and love—the "Love Burning in the Soul" of the book's title—that extends itself to all humanity and all creation. This sane, balanced perspective, which characterizes the entire book, makes it an effective and attractive primer for those being introduced, or discover-

ing for themselves, the rich Christian mystical/contemplative tradition.

Patrick F. O'Connell

WEIS, Monica, *Thomas Merton's Gethsemani: Landscapes of Paradise*, photographs by Harry L. Hinkle (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005), pp. 157. ISBN 0-8131-2347-8 (hardcover). \$29.95.

One cannot read far into Merton's writings, from books to poems to journals, before being introduced to the natural landscapes of Gethsemani; its "green ice and its dead trees and silences" (p. 78). Commentary on deer, day, sky, heat, poison ivy and weather are typical first lines of many of his journal entries. And yet, with all so many books about Merton's spirituality, only one recent volume, Kathleen Deignan's *When the Trees Say Nothing: Thomas Merton's Writings on Nature*,¹ has addressed this significant source for Merton's prayer life. The current volume fills this gap.

In *Thomas Merton's Gethsemani: Landscapes of Paradise*, a Merton scholar and a Kentucky photographer have joined forces to produce a visual paradise, a "beautiful book with many windows" (p. 1) says Jonathan Montaldo in the book's "Introduction." Patrick Hart's "Foreword" suggests this elegant volume calls us to our own pilgrimage through the Kentucky landscape that formed and fed Merton's spiritual life. Merton lived on the margins of the worlds here; it was his desert as well as his desert island. In these woods, ice storms and visits from wildlife, Merton refined his ecological and sacramental vision, where each creature is "God coming to us" (p. 97). This book invites us to walk in the actual steps of Father Louis. Prose and pictures intertwine, with Merton's own voice and photographs peeking through those of Weis and Hinkle. Here amidst the knobs, mists and woods of central Kentucky, Weis and Hinkle beckon us to participate in the peace of this place.

The Introduction and five chapters are orchestrated to mimic the trajectory of Merton's life at Gethsemani. Merton first arrived at the abbey after dark in April, 1941, and already saw the landscape unfolding as soul music. Hinkle offers a photograph of a starry night, one Merton might have seen that first night on the "pale ribbon of road" that led to Trappist, Kentucky. Hinkle's photographs locate Merton's favorite haunts and hideouts. His photographs, each beautifully showcased with plenty of white space