

gious practice. Of course, it could not be otherwise, Merton was a spiritual explorer, and he, like Suzuki, opened up passages that western students of Buddhism will long be wandering. Habito's essay avoids the well-trod path through Merton's academic and intellectual engagement with Buddhism. Turning the glass around, Habito looks at Merton's spiritual journey through the lens of the Sanbo Kyodan Lineage that combines elements of both Soto and Rinzai Zen traditions. From this perspective, Merton's becomes an exemplary Zen life, from his experience of *dukha*, the dissatisfaction or suffering resulting in the abandonment of ordinary life for a life of contemplation, to his experience of shared suffering of the epiphany at Fourth & Walnut, Merton's life is revealed as *nothing but ordinary*.

The third section of essays is concerned with Merton's art. Essays by Lipsey and Pearson explore the development of his spare visual style in both brushwork and photography. Thurston's essay on his poetry reveals that same light touch in his poetry. Together, the three essays may provide the most telling portrait of Merton. There is such a haunted, ethereal quality to his work, as if it is always pointing to something just the other side of the visible world. Merton's poetry and artwork seem to draw us to a place beyond sign and language, toward an immediacy of the spirit.

This collection of essays is a wonderful celebration of Merton's years of thought and experience with Buddhism. The editor, Bonnie B. Thurston, has done an excellent job of putting together a compelling portrait of a spiritual master. It should be required reading for anyone interested in this aspect of Merton's spiritual journey. The book could also function as an excellent introduction to the history of Buddhism in America. It is a truly beautiful book, both for its lush illustrations and the vision of Merton it evokes.

Craig Burgdof

Thomas Merton., *Echoing Silence: Thomas Merton on the Vocation of Writing*. Edited with an Introduction by Robert Inchausti (Boston & London: New Seeds Books, 2007), pp, xiii + 215. ISBN 978-1-59030-348-1. \$14.00 (paperback).

The book's title and cover photo serve the reader well. "Echoing Silence" evokes Merton's paradoxical embrace of two vocations – that of a contemplative *and* that of a writer – while the picture of Merton's hermitage worktable, standing against a backdrop of

full bookshelves, invites the viewer to imagine Thomas Merton reading and writing in a space cleared by solitude and silence yet resonant with the wisdom and witness of countless saints, sages and fellow writers that together comprised the "living balance of spirits" of which Merton wrote in *Day of a Stranger*.

In a brief introduction, Robert Inchausti traces in broad strokes Merton's growth as a writer from the teenager wanting "to discover who he was and what he believed" to the "culture critic" in dialogue with an intellectually and religiously diverse and divided world. Inchausti's selections enable the reader to glimpse what Glenn Hinson once termed "the many faces of Thomas Merton" and witness the development of his thought as well as its breadth. Merton was a man of many interests as evidenced in the topics addressed in these pages: art, Buddhism, Camus, communication, creativity, culture, God, Pasternak, peace, poetry, religion, silence, truth, war, wisdom – to name just a few. Although, as Inchausti reminds us, Merton "moved in and out of particular interests, phases, roles and theories, what is most consistent – what defines his attitude, orientation, style and contribution is his perennial return to origins, to emptiness, and to God." The monk grew as a writer and the writer's growth was informed by his being a monk.

While focused on Merton the writer, the selections allow the reader to glimpse something of the young convert of *Seven Story Mountain*, the earnest monk, the explorer of the inner life, the courageous prophet, the life-long student and critic of literature, and the hermit in dialogue with writers and religious leaders all over the world. What comes through in this volume, as in all of Merton's writing, is something Merton himself realized when he wrote in *The Sign of Jonas*: "Every book I write is a mirror of my own character and conscience." Reading *Echoing Silence*, one might dare to say that almost every line Merton wrote was such a mirror.

The book is divided into six parts: "Writing as a Spiritual Calling," "The Christian Writer in the Modern World," "On Poetry," "On Other Writers" "On His Own Writing," and "Advice to Writers." Each part consists of selections, ranging from a few lines to a page or two in length. The selections are drawn from the many different genres in which Merton wrote – essays and books, letters and journals, autobiography and poetry. Time wise, the selections span three decades from the forties to the sixties. A closer look at several parts of the book will serve to illustrate the depth and breadth of selections, skillfully selected by Inchausti.

The first part, which explores "Writing as a Spiritual Calling" includes selections from texts written between 1941 and 1966 – in journals, in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and a host of essays. In these pages, we are reminded of Merton's life-long desire to be a writer, his struggle with being a monk *and* a writer, and his eventual coming to terms with the fact that he was called to be both and that these two vocations were interrelated. Perhaps Merton had this eventual resolution in mind when he wrote to Robert Menchin on January 15, 1966: "I have never for a moment questioned the vocation to be a monk, but I have had to settle many other questions about ways and means, the where and the how of being a monk... For me the monastery has not been a mere refuge. It has meant facing responsibility on the deepest level, and it has meant giving an account of myself to others..." And Merton gave such an account in what he wrote. "Silence," Merton observed in *No Man Is an Island* (1951), "does not exist in our lives for its own sake... silence is the mother of speech." The ultimate speech Merton had in mind was the life lived in Christ but it was through his writing that Merton gave voice to the life and to the silence.

The selections excerpted in the second part, entitled "The Christian Writer in the Modern World," show Merton grappling with the role of writers and poets. His reflections range widely; he speaks of the "Christian dimensions of creativity"; the freedom of the artist; and the responsibility of the writer to speak out against injustice, falsehood, totalitarianism, political ideology and expediency. The Christian writer cannot be "a bystander" in the face of "the illness of political language," the rhetoric of "war makers" and the "war machine" itself. "Our task," Merton writes, "is not suddenly to burst out into the dazzle of utter unadulterated truth but laboriously to reshape an accurate and honest language that will permit communication between men on all social and intellectual levels, instead of multiplying a Babel of esoteric and technical tongues which isolate men in their specialties" ("Camus and the Church" [1966]). As a Christian writer, Merton also felt himself called not only to engage the issues of the world around him but also to speak of the reality within. Thus, in responding to a request from Pope Paul VI for a "message of contemplatives to the world," Merton wrote: "My brother, perhaps in my solitude I have become as it were an explorer for you, a searcher in realms which you are not able to visit... I have been summoned to explore a desert area of man's heart...." This part of the book ends, and appropriately so,

with several passages from the talks Merton gave in Asia shortly before he died.

In subsequent parts of the book, Merton writes about the role of the poet, his solidarity with poets, and his hope for poetry as "a kind of recovery of paradise." As Merton put it in a review of *The Legend of Tucker Caliban*, "There is no revolution without prophetic sages." We read selections from Merton's letters to fellow writers, including Mark Van Doren, Boris Pasternak, Czeslaw Milosz, Napoleon Chow, James Baldwin, Henry Miller and Walker Percy as well as excerpts from Merton's literary essays particularly those pertaining to Pasternak and Camus. We read Merton's reflections "On His Own Writing," drawn from letters to monastic superiors and fellow monks that record Merton's struggles with censors and superiors, as well as from letters to working writers like himself whom he encourages and by whom he himself is encouraged.

The book ends with a short section of "Advice to Writers," gleaned from sources as varied as *The Inner Experience* and *The Way of Chuang Tzu*. Merton's advice is well summed up in a few lines in a letter to Ernesto Cardenal: "Basically our first duty today it to human truth in its existential reality, and this sooner or later brings us into confrontations with systems and power." Meant for writers, Merton's words offer advice to readers and a challenge as well.

Echoing Silence is "a keeper"—one of those books that invites a reader to return to its pages—again and again—to enjoy Merton's insight and wisdom. And like all good anthologies, it is likely motivate many a reader, as it does this one, to return to the sources from which these selections were so carefully drawn.

Christine M. Bochen

Soul Searching: The Journey of Thomas Merton. A Film by Morgan Atkinson

Virtually all of the images chronicling Thomas Merton's short but rich life belong to the genre of photography and not film. Other than a poor quality 8mm film of an October 10, 1968 address that Merton presented on Marxism in Bangkok, Thailand—shortly before his tragic and untimely death—we have been left with no other known archival film of any period in the life of the man who many agree was the greatest spiritual master to grace the North American continent in the twentieth century. There are indeed prodigious biographical accounts, along with now voluminous