

Merton's particular word choices, to the music his new language creates, which of course are what determine whether, and how, a translation becomes a genuine poem in its own right. Poks recognizes this missing dimension at the very outset of her work (13), and rightly points out that attempting to provide detailed comparisons of originals and translations would swell the book beyond reasonable bounds; but it would have been helpful to focus on the qualities of the translation *qua* translation for at least a few key passages, or perhaps for a single poem, for each of the poets discussed. It is telling in this regard that the one bilingual collection of Merton's translations, the ten poems and translations of Pablo Antonio Cuadra included in *The Jaguar and the Moon* (1971), published posthumously but planned by Merton himself, is not mentioned at all by Poks.

Notwithstanding these undeveloped aspects of Merton's translation work, Poks' volume makes a major contribution to elucidating Merton's enthusiastic response to the wisdom of Latin America as articulated by these poets, and to situating this response in relationship to other aspects of his maturing vision in the final decade of his life. She makes a convincing case that in listening to, and enabling others to listen to, "the voice of the New Man . . . in the poetry, written and unwritten," of Latin America, Merton was experiencing a prefiguring of "the eschatological new creation" and sharing in the process by which "the hemisphere was becoming conscious of its vocation to redeem the world" (258). It is a matter of some wonder, and a cause for much gratitude, that a young Central European scholar has explored in such breadth and depth these spiritual and cultural bonds uniting the Western hemisphere in the spirit and the writing of one monk-poet – at once a sign of Merton's own ability to transcend geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries, and a salutary reminder that voices on what might seem to be the margins can often provide central insights for those willing and able to attend to them.

Patrick F. O'Connell

SMOCK, Frederick, *Pax Intransigentibus: A Meditation on the Poetry of Thomas Merton* (Frankfurt, Kentucky: Broadstone Books, 2007), pp. 91. ISBN-13: 978-0-9721144-6-2 (cloth). \$25.00.

These days, it seems that people tend to have three reactions to poetry: They ignore it (most people); they ridicule it (see Jim Ber-

hle's website Americanpoetry.biz); or, in rare occasions, they deeply appreciate its power to lift the human soul. Frederick Smock, a poet himself, falls firmly into the last camp, and it is refreshing to read his serious and moving ruminations on the poetry of Thomas Merton.

Smock's book is a short one, yet it is one that the reader can amble through slowly, stopping to ponder both Smock's and Merton's insights along the way. Smock allows both his and Merton's life to intersect, but *Pax Intransigentibus* is, thankfully, not a self-indulgent memoir or an attempt to spin off of Merton's fame. We have all read those brands of books, and they are, unfortunately, becoming increasingly more popular. Smock's book is both humble and revealing.

Smock begins with the profound realization that both he, as a boy, and Merton heard the same artillery shells exploding as troops practiced firing at Fort Knox, near both Louisville and the abbey of Gethsemani. The horror of war surrounds us, he points out, and it is the poet's job to articulate the name for that particular horror. Smock points out how Merton's poetry was, like any serious poet's, a struggle "to give a name to the nameless" (14-15). Merton strove during his whole brief life to particularize abstractions like silence, spirit, violence, and love. Many poets fail quickly in their endeavors to do so and descend into shallow irony or cynicism. Merton did not, but he also did not achieve the greatness of those he chose to emulate.

And that point is one thing that sticks with me as consider Smock's book. Merton was a great man. A major spiritual figure, obviously. As Smock points out, he was named a "Catholic Geshe" by the Dalai Lama (57). Such a title is "conferred not on the basis of intellect, or training, but on the basis of character" (57). But was he a great poet? As a reader, and a poet myself, I cannot help but feel a little uneasy when Smock chooses to put excerpts from Merton's poetry up against lines from Auden, Milosz, and Basho, among others. When juxtaposed with that of his betters, Merton's poetry often comes off as, well, facile. For instance, the point of the stanza from Merton's poem "In Silence" (28) could be easily boiled down to the old cliché, "just be yourself." Merton the poet strikes me at times as a poor man's Robert Bly, a deep image poet who just can't seem to find the right deep image. There's no shame in this, and Merton himself understood how hard it was to get a poem right. And his best poetry is rewarding. Smock never questions Merton's

abilities, though. Generally, he takes a “I-am-not-worthy” attitude toward Merton’s poetic output.

But, in fairness to Smock, his book is a mediation, not a critique. It is filled with insights to ponder. Merton’s forays into Islam and his attempts to achieve a “radical ecumenism” (69); his disparagement of the materialism of the United States; his ceaseless humility as he became an important world figure—all are worthy of our consideration as we head into a century that looks to be marked by hardship, a century where superficial spirituality and mindless consumerism will not provide us with the answers we need. *Pax Intransigentibus* is the kind of book that tries to provide some answers we do need and, perhaps, are too afraid to confront. It is well worth reading.

Kevin Griffith

PORTER, J.S. *Thomas Merton: Hermit at the Heart of Things* (Ottawa, Canada: Novalis, 2008), PP. 215. ISBN 978-2-89646-008-3. \$24.95.

This isn’t the book for those who like linear and analytical studies. It is more likely the sort of book for those who like personal and impressionistic accounts of writers who reach deep into the impressionist’s psyche and won’t let go. Dionysian rather than Apollonian if you like. On the one hand you are never quite sure, in spite of the table of contents, where you will be taken next. On the other hand there are fine moments of illumination as you journey through the book. The journey is Merton’s in the first instance, but it is also Porter’s as he retrospectively charts his own course from a family background in Ulster Protestantism to the universally human, spiritual consciousness that in Merton, the Roman Catholic monk, comes to engage him. The labels of course slip away as both Porter and Merton are depicted moving towards an inclusive but certainly not a reductive spirituality.

Here are a few examples of the gold in the ore. Writing about Merton’s handwriting, Porter observes that the early script is “tight,” reflective of a “linear, moralistic, serious,” monk and writer. Later, in the case of the *Asian Journal*, for example, the writing becomes a “hen-scratch,” reflective of a man who had become “looser, more tolerant, funnier, less sure of himself.” Another point of illumination occurs when Porter brings out the precise influence of Hannah Arendt on Merton’s writing about Eichmann. There is a spray of light too when Porter notices the unexpected and