

# EMOTIONS IN TRANQUILLITY

Review of

## *THE GETHSEMANI POEMS*

by Ron Seitz

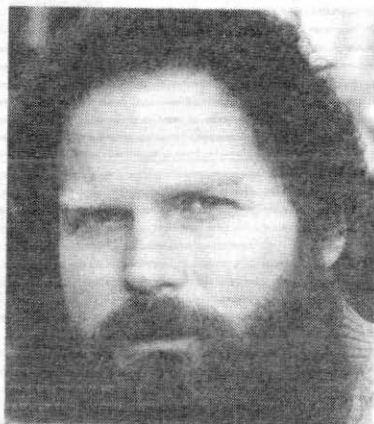
Monterey, Kentucky, Larkspur Press, 1985

—Reviewed by **Deba Prasad Patnaik**

Inspired by the Trappist monk-poet, Thomas Merton, and the Abbey of Gethsemani, Ron Seitz's poems are "emotions recollected in tranquillity." Appropriate to Merton's own spirit and the ambience of his monastery, a sense of quiet, simplicity and holiness combined with a touch of playfulness and humor and a feeling of affection informs the poems in this handsomely produced volume.

The majority of the poems are well-executed; feeling and language effectively and carefully matched. But a few are, to quote from one "slack/ on the edge of/ language" and appear to be "aborted poems" because of a deliberate quirkiness and allusiveness noticed in "Upon Reaching Thirty," "Dream of Dublin," "Carnival" and "When Writing Merton," for example. "Dream of Dublin" will serve to illustrate this:

so sang Joyce this morning &  
 a sinister word-slinger I was  
     in shades  
     panatela cloud & coffee  
     Tang dynasty mustache  
 a Wake to my 8 o'clock window  
 (aborted poems steaming the pane)  
 Age for my efforts! Time in my crawl!  
 all of it bombast & (truly now)  
 gone to hell



RON SEITZ

Deba Prasad Patnaik, a native of India currently residing in Ann Arbor, Michigan, is the editor of *GEOGRAPHY OF HOLINESS: THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF THOMAS MERTON* (1980). He also compiled and edited a book of poetic tributes to Merton, *A MERTON CONCELEBRATION* (1981). His other writings on Merton include "Syllables of the Great Song: Merton and Asian Religious Thought" in *THE MESSAGE OF THOMAS MERTON* (1981) and "Thomas Merton: Four More Storeys" (1979).

Seitz is at his best in poems such as "Monk," "To Tom Gone," "February," "Travaux-Piegan Tribe," "Midnight," "Signature," "Brother" and in the "Day of the Hermit" sequence. In these poems he demonstrates an unusual sincerity of feeling, syntactical experimentation, economy of language and a taut lyricism. "Brother" shows this:

because we're (both of us) the same  
 string pluck of that gypsy guitar  
 strung taut in our loins—  
     an ear to the rail of my vision  
     will do it

why me?      echo of other sweats  
 whiskered a stranger to your birth  
     (no rewrite on that windy step)  
 opened the dream slant      hum & beauty  
 of your dance      now crooked

    the eyeblink of your bell   roping me  
 's the answer  
 dear brother

Even though his subject matter easily lends itself to heavy philosophical cogitation in a poem, Seitz avoids obscurity and obtuseness by concentrating on the clarity and evocation of an experience and feeling and the appropriate use of language. From "Tom-foolery koan quips" he moves into "hushed signature" of "praise" and celebration "between silence and speech."

To quote the poem "Monk" illustrates his artistry:

your crisscross  
 in Time    yells  
             its light

splits space  
 with play

the whole  
 of your hand  
             shaking  
             the World

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Editor's Note: Five poems from this collection have appeared in *The Merton Seasonal*: "Signature: in Memory of Thomas Merton" (Summer 1984) and "Upon First Meeting T.M.;" "Noh Satori/ at Monks Pond;" "When Writing Merton" and "In Memory of Thomas Merton/ at the hermitage" (Autumn 1985).