

us that he 'respected James Laughlin's desire that the present volume include, like the others in the Norton series, many more Merton letters than his own' (p. xxvii). While one wants to applaud Laughlin for his desire, so it seems, to foreground his writers, one nonetheless wishes that Laughlin was more present in the text. His importance to twentieth-century American letters and culture in general, and to Merton's development as a writer in particular, cannot be underestimated; it would be a delight to delve more deeply, more broadly, into the publisher himself.

Secondly, an astute reader will discover that as the correspondence nears its end (say from 1966 onward), Merton begins to change the way in which he signs his letters. Prior to this period, he nearly always signs with some use of 'Christ', as in, 'Cordially in Christ' (p. 265). However, Merton comes to discontinue this practice, preferring lines like, 'All the best' (p. 279). One wonders why. Is this an indication of a deepening friendship, where the formality of the priestly farewell is no longer needed? Is it an indication, coincident with Merton's interest in non-Christian religions, specifically Zen, that a theological/metaphysical change is afoot? One wishes that Cooper would have addressed this in his introduction. As the editor of this correspondence, and as a very advanced reader of Merton (see his *Thomas Merton's Art of Denial: The Evolution of a Radical Humanist* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989]), Cooper might be able to provide insight into the sign of the signature.

Bradford T. Stull

SHANNON, William H., *'Something of a Rebel': Thomas Merton, his Life and Works. An Introduction* (Cincinnati: St Anthony Messenger Press, 1997), pp. 175. \$9.95 paperback. ISBN 0-86716-272-4.

It is a delicate and daring task to attempt to tell the story of a person's life. Surely the author of such a work must be flooded and barraged with a torrent of ideas and images. What is the most appropriate metaphor, the ideal point of departure, the container that will carry the message and best communicate the essence as well as nuance of personality? This is the toil of gladness that William Shannon has set for himself in attempting to introduce the life and works of Thomas Merton to a new and wider audience.

'Something of a REBEL': after so long a time, the title stirred my imagination and lured me to make an appointment wherein I laid hopes on encountering a sprite, a tumble of words, a yank of phrases, that could and would somehow jump-start the wearisome mystical desires of my boomer-aged soul. My generation was suckled on the rebellious pap of the 1960s and perhaps the appointment I was making regarding this book's title, was a naive desire to feel once again a fresh hint of hope that Merton's words so often spawned.

But at my age one should know that you don't make appointments unless you're willing to be disappointed. Shannon states outright in his introduction, 'Some might question my using the word "rebel" in the title of a book about Gethsemani's famous monk'. I must admit I didn't question it; it seemed right, a good point of departure, though it needed to be given more breadth and depth. I imagined a discussion of how the shallow, self-absorbed rebel, himself a metaphor of our age, was transformed into a creative spirit and resolved his rebellion. It is true, Merton was a rebel who resisted accepted conventions, as Shannon suggests. This

is the etymological meaning by which he intends Merton as 'rebel' to be understood. However, the spirit of revolution and rebellion is hostile to a revolution of the spirit. In the end, the spirit of the rash rebel was reeled and whirled about by God's Spirit until he became the brother of God and knew the Christ of burnt men.

The introduction to this book is the only place where the author focuses on the notion of Merton as rebel, and this in outline form. There is a great case here and a subject that needs development. It is my intuitive belief that Msgr Shannon wants to write the book that coincides with this introduction and theme.

On the other hand, the book he has written has achieved its intended purpose in a unique and thoughtful way. William Shannon is one of the leading authorities on the life and works of Thomas Merton. He was the general editor of Merton's letters and as a result has achieved a real grasp of the monk's complex character. A request was made of him to write a book that would introduce people to Merton's life and works. Interestingly, Shannon begins in the middle of Merton's life and moves outward, back and forth, weaving and interlocking significant places, people and thoughts suchwise that a real personality emerges. He touches on key themes in Merton's life and presents them in a way that even seasoned readers do not feel they are laboring over old material. At times even a seasoned reader of Merton may be delightfully surprised to discover a new piece of information or an insight that they may have missed along their way.

But one must remember the scope and intention of this book. It is not meant for those intimately familiar with the life and work of Merton. The author states over and over again: 'The intent of this book is to introduce Thomas Merton to you the reader...' The book is structured in four chapters, beginning with the life story which takes up about 41 pages. Shannon concisely assembles pertinent elements of Merton's life in a tight frame. This he does in small, historical vignettes.

In the second chapter he presents a short apologetic defending the view that Merton and his writings 'are still very much in'. After impressing the reader with Merton's prodigious output and unmaning popularity, Shannon goes on to describe what he believes are the real reasons to encounter and maintain a relationship with Merton. He stresses the genuine humanity that Merton exhibited as well as his ability to articulate the human condition. He discusses the compassionate side of the hidden monk and how much he revered and engaged with a variety of people. A large part of this chapter is dedicated to Merton's cosmopolitan tastes and interests which seemed to burst the bonds of cultural limitations. This chapter concludes with the suggestion that Merton, the reluctant spiritual director, has become just that for a host of people who may never engage in formal spiritual direction.

In Chapter 3 Shannon does a great service for new and old readers alike. He gathers in about 60 pages a gallery of themes and a list of Mertonian jargon to guide a potential reader through what might otherwise be a bog of unfamiliar and new territory.

In the final chapter entitled 'The Merton Library', the potential readers are invited to review the books that Merton wrote as well as to consider Merton's opinion of his own books. Graphs are presented and evaluations that Merton himself used to examine his own work are noted. After suggesting and commenting on some key books to read, *'Something of a Rebel'* concludes very simply with a recommended list of other Merton books.

Shannon quotes a passage from one of Merton's reading journals wherein Rainer Maria Rilke is quoted: 'A work of art is good only if it has sprung from necessity.' Merton used this line to evaluate his work. He was brutally honest in his self-evaluations. If this is a valid measure for a creative endeavor, then it seems that '*Something of a Rebel*' is not a work of art. But it never intended to be. It was born of a need to serve others. It serves well as an introduction, and I believe can serve the needs of those who will teach. Yet something-of-a-rebel-in-me would only add a note of encouragement to my humble brother Shannon: Write the other 'something of a rebel', the one that I feel still stirs in you of necessity.

David Mark Kocka

RASMUSSEN, Larry L., *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Ecology and Justice Series; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), pp. xvi + 366. Cloth, US \$29.95. ISBN 1-57075-086-6.

Within the first few pages of *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, Larry Rasmussen establishes that he will challenge the ethical norms and language which have dominated discussions about 'the environmental crisis' and 'sustainable development'. He intends to describe an ethic that recognizes humans as members of an interdependent earth community rather than as beings somehow above or separate from the environment which surrounds them. He notes that any sustainable future for humanity and the rest of the natural world will necessarily involve this entire community and will be more about social, environmental, spiritual and moral sustainability than sustainable development.

To fulfil this agenda, Rasmussen argues his case in three successive parts. 'Earth Scan' provides a historical overview and analysis of the science, policies and proposals which speak to the health of the entire planet. 'Earth Faith' (Part 2) proposes a 'conversion to earth' through a reconsideration of religion, ethics and human symbols, while Part 3 ('Earth Action') explores the type of responsibility and accountability which will inform an earth ethic determined to create a sustainable earth community.

In 'Earth Scan', Rasmussen notes that ever since humans have tilled the soil and settled into villages, they have stressed their surroundings. Humans have always been faced with issues of sustainability, but now our impact on the earth's ecosystems greatly overwhelms the planet's ability to endure and threatens our existence. When 'sustainable development' is extolled as a solution by business leaders, economists or policy makers, they advocate increasing human production and consumption to meet our expanded wants and needs while nevertheless staying within levels that can be sustained by nature. The dream of a life without limits fashioned to satisfy our every desire has become an institutionalized expectation, Rasmussen observes, as perpetual growth is considered to be both intrinsic to nature and inevitable in human development. (Is not the estimate of a government's 'success' often directly proportional to the increase in GDP?)

Rasmussen challenges the premises of this solution. He questions expansionist economic policies that assume unlimited growth on an obviously finite planet. He notes that we expect to solve social problems by allocating dividends from a growing economy rather than by equitably redistributing that held by the already affluent. He provides evidence that demonstrates how economic growth has not