

becoming more conscious of the divine has its 'ups and downs'. Waldron does well to elucidate the precarious nature of such a journey, of the Christian journey. As an experienced contemplative poet himself, I think interested readers will find Waldron's book both challenging and hopeful.

Glenn Crider

GUNN, Robert Jingen, *Journeys into Emptiness: Dōgen, Merton, Jung and the Quest for Transformation* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000), pp. 360. ISBN 0-8091-3933-2 (paperback). \$19.95.

This book concerns 'the experience of emptiness' in the biographies of several men, principally Soto Zen founder Dōgen, Thomas Merton, and Carl Jung. In the Preface, Gunn asserts the real object of analysis is 'the experience—not the concept—of emptiness' which he regards as comparable across religious traditions and cultural differences (p. xi). Each of the men treated in the book, Gunn says, found their own tradition limited and inadequate; they were 'bound up in' their traditions (p. xiii).

Gunn moves rapidly from one religious tradition to the next, blurring distinctions. Bodhidharma's grave, empty but for one sandal, becomes 'an Eastern parallel to the resurrected Christ' (p. 30). Similarity can be found anywhere, of course, but the doctrinal contexts of these two empty graves are quite distinct. Gunn has a highly eclectic sense of context, which sometimes presents fragments of highly complex scholastic debates (for example, on Buddha nature, p. 40; or the sudden-gradual debates, p. 43). Gunn's writing style is very accessible and his portraits seem quite intimate. Not being in any sense an expert on Merton or Jung, I will focus attention on the chapter on Buddhist teachers, 'Embracing Emptiness in the East', which draws a highly abbreviated lineage from Sakyamuni Buddha to Dōgen, by way of Nagarjuna, Bodhidharma, and Hui Neng. Gunn presents a simplified view of Buddhist history, consisting of a few great men and their inner crises. He psychologizes Buddha's life story as if it were simply true, or as if Buddha had spoken from the psychiatrist's couch. He ignores the mythic rewriting, which long ago transformed the life of Buddha from personal reminiscences to encoded doctrine. However one might wish to read biographies of the Buddha or any hagiographies for 'the experience—not the concept', it is impossible to really escape doctrine.

The death of Buddha's mother just days after his (miraculous) birth is treated 'from the depth psychological point of view, [as] a foundational experience of emptiness, a deep psychic wound that provides an underlying motivation for a profound, relentless and determined spiritual search' (p. 14). His psychotherapist's reading of these narratives also filters out any sense of the truly miraculous, while in other places biographical data is presented uncritically, as for example, when we are told that Bodhidharma 'cut off his eyelids' (p. 5). Interestingly—and very typical of modern Western writing about Buddhism—almost none of the sources Gunn uses to describe Buddha's spiritual development are actually scriptural. Instead, he relies on modern paraphrases and interpretations, often of a partisan nature. He seems to adopt uncritically Mahayana's patronizing caricature of so-called Hinayana, Soto Zen diatribes against Tendai, and the 'sudden' (p. 63) teaching's straw man of 'gradual' practice (p. 67).

So what does 'the experience of emptiness' mean? When does it occur? In Buddhist terms – in one sense – all experiences are experiences of emptiness; in another sense, there are specific moments at which this truth is realized (awakening or enlightenment experiences). But Gunn's usage of 'emptiness' and 'the experience of emptiness' seems to have no definitional stability. He notes that 'emptiness' usually implies negation, the result of a trauma or the lack of value or meaning. Most frequently death (of parents especially) is given as an example of the painful 'experiences of emptiness' which sometimes (but not always) make us ask fundamental questions of personal identity. However, 'what begins as a negative experience of emptiness ends as a positive, or perhaps beyond that, a neutral experience' (p. 1). This experience is one of heightened consciousness and a sense of the absolute. Gunn says we tend to ignore these experiences and go on as before, a regression clearly regarded in this book as a lamentable turning back from the 'Quest for Transformation'. On the other hand, following this experience has its price: leaving behind family and one's body, giving up everything. Often, the use of the term 'experience of emptiness' is clearly intended as a positive awakening moment, plus subsequent experiences seen in that new light. He regards this sense of emptiness as 'a way of living, of being fully alive, productive and creative' (p. xi). It leads to self-realization and mindfulness of the here-and-now, in contrast to conventional consciousness. Hence 'the experience of emptiness' is ultimately desirable, and Gunn presents an imperative to clarify your consciousness, 'Befriend your unconscious!' and 'Wake up!' (p. 275). 'The experience of emptiness' is also experienced in the body, 'often in the lower abdomen, the *dan tian*' (p. 3). 'It may render one breathless or speechless...on the verge of tears...an effluence of deep emotion' (p. 3). Gunn notes that all three of the men described in this book used some form of yoga.

But it is still hard to understand what Gunn means by 'the experience of emptiness'. He writes, 'for all three traditions being studied here, emptiness may be viewed as the key to the paradox of selfhood: We must let go in order to have' (p. 6). Avoiding 'the experience of emptiness' perpetuates 'karma, sin, or neurosis' (p. 7), whereas the willing response to trauma can become an ongoing and authentic way of life. Gunn seems to see a similar plot structure in each of the men's biographies: the self is provoked by something existentially disagreeable, responds in initially painful ways and eventually in awakening, and then goes on to teach others.

While pervasively encouraging the sense that all religious virtuosi, including Jesus, have ultimately the same kind of experience, Gunn notes that 'emptiness' does have different meanings for Dōgen, Merton, and Jung (p. 9). In the cases of Merton and Jung, he explores a sequence of variations on the theme. In a series of reflections mostly of two or three pages each from pp. 140-80, Gunn describes how Merton weaved 'the many-colored threads of emptiness', namely: 'Emptiness as Loss, Loneliness and Impermanence', 'Emptiness as Moral and Spiritual Vacuity', 'Emptiness as Not Having, as Poverty', 'Emptiness as *Kenosis* along the Spiritual Path', 'Emptiness as Nothingness and Helplessness', 'Emptiness as Dread', 'Emptiness as Union with God', 'Emptiness as Anima/Animus Failure', 'Emptiness as Constituent in All Reality as Basis of Compassion', and 'The Emptiness of Emptiness'. In dealing with Carl Jung's life, Gunn gives us a similar range of definitional aspects: the 'Experience of Emptiness' as 'Psychological Abandonment',

and 'Psychological Dividedness', as 'Receptivity', as 'the Loneliness of Not Being Understood', and as 'Fate' (pp. 264-71).

The chapter on Buddhist teachers has no such classification, but shows similar ambiguities. For example, when did the Buddha's 'experience of emptiness' occur? Gunn writes as if he means the 'four sights' (old man, sick man, corpse, renunciate), prior to his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. At times, any disappointment or pain is an 'experience of emptiness', but at other points in the book, the term implies the transcendence of such pain. This hazy definition of the central term is ambiguous throughout the book.

Gunn associates the teacher-student relationship in medieval Buddhist monasticism with the relation of therapist and patient (pp. 53-54), though he later says they have distinct, if overlapping roles (p. 278). However, the relations of the three traditions represented by Dōgen, Merton and Jung are not equal here. Psychoanalysis functions as the over-arching or mediating discourse through which all the others are measured. For example, Gunn assumes the reality of 'splitting' (from psychoanalysis), and then says that this reality 'was accounted for mythologically in the story of the Garden of Eden' (p. 58). The story of the Good Samaritan is not about radical compassion or God's love, but about being 'free to respond to the needs of the moment', unlike 'people so caught up in their own thought' (p. 79). Nagarjuna's descent into the *Naga* (dragon) realm is interpreted: 'By going into the "foreign" territory where "strange" creatures called *nagas* live, Nagarjuna was able to forge an understanding of Buddhism that was ready to engage other foreign lands and cultures' (p. 22). In similar ways the miraculous and theological meanings are drained out of Christian and Buddhist narratives.

Informed by Perennial Philosophy and a highly synthetic imagination, this book moves among multiple biographies transforming historical detail into existential meaning. Much of my difficulty with this book is due to the fact that I am a historian, and I do not find this book sufficiently attentive to the historical situatedness of real peoples' lives. In a book which seeks to encourage in its readers a personal 'quest for transformation', a spiritual awakening to the here-and-now, it is not surprising that the there-and-then of Dōgen becomes a mirror instead of a window. It does treat the biographies in some historical detail, but in the end should be read as a theological text. As an addition to that genre, it may be welcomed as an opportunity to introduce Buddhists to Merton, Christians to Dōgen, and so on.

Eric Reinders

SHANNON, William, *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey: Writings on Contemplation* (Cincinnati, OH: St Anthony Messenger Press, 2000), pp. 307. ISBN 0-86716-348-8 (paperback). \$12.95; and *Silence on Fire: Prayer of Awareness* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2000), pp. 178. ISBN 0-8245-1848-9 (paperback). \$16.95.

William Shannon's *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey* is a compendium on contemplation. In this work, Shannon comprehensively and very skillfully treats: contemplation in Merton's various writings; Merton's insistence on the necessity of solitude for contemplation; and Merton's understanding of the importance of the world as part of the landscape of authentic contemplation. Likewise, Shannon