

it all the more important not to let it slip by unnoticed. If it is lost to me, it is lost to the universe as a human sensation. I am grateful to be here to live this moment of life in the way I alone can" (43).

In this passage and many others, Quenon elucidates the usefulness of the monk's seemingly useless life. Monastic life, he writes, is not proof of God but witness, "which is quite another thing. Witness does not take God as a settled matter. It operates by a different power, not by reason but by love. It operates like the force of gravity which draws one down to a level deeper than questions about the yes or no of God. It is life itself shaping and growing into a sign of transcendence" (37). Bearing witness at this deeper level, Quenon speculates about connection to beings on distant planets through the practice of prayer, reminds himself that our problems are not as bad as those elsewhere ("We don't know what hells exist out there" [61]), and comes to important conclusions about how to live in solitude and community. In one entry, for example, he writes these words we need to hear and remember in today's world: "Fear without compassion makes the heart close, while the open-heart practices hospitality. A welcoming heart is the natural human condition. The door shuts. We are trapped inside with our fear. Fear makes a poor housemate; it cannot be sent away unless the door is opened" (107).

Michael N. McGregor

STEEM, Matthew and Wayne Northey, eds., *The Scholar-Gipsy: Thrownness, Memoricide & The Great Tradition: Liber Amicorum for Ron S. Dart*, 2 vols. (Abbotsford, BC: St. Macrina Press, 2023), pp. 701 (vol.1). ISBN 979-8-3204-2651-8 (paper) \$18.31; pp. 399 (vol. 2). ISBN 979-8-3204-1296-2 (paper) \$14.62.

Ron Dart is a scholar of remarkable breadth. Over the course of more than three decades of teaching political science, philosophy and religious studies at the University of the Fraser Valley in British Columbia, he has produced a body of work that defies narrow academic classification. Best known for his writings on Thomas Merton and on the Canadian philosopher George Grant – two thinkers who profoundly shaped his own intellectual outlook – Dart has also written on figures as diverse as C. S. Lewis, Stephen Leacock, Erasmus, T. S. Eliot, Herman Hesse, Allen Ginsburg, Jordan Peterson and Evelyn Underhill. His scholarship is marked by a deep concern for the *vita contemplativa* as a necessary counterbalance to the frenetic *vita activa* that defines much of modern life.

Dart's concern for the *vita contemplativa* finds some of its fullest expression in his long engagement with Merton. A co-founder of the

Canadian Thomas Merton Society, he has authored numerous articles on Merton, as well as the book *Thomas Merton and the Beats of the North Cascades*.¹ He also edited *Thomas Merton and the Counterculture: A Golden String*² and *White Gulls & Wild Birds: Essays on C. S. Lewis, Inklings and Friends & Thomas Merton*.³ Merton's contemplative theology resonates with Dart's own efforts to recover a spiritually rooted and deeply humane vision of political and cultural life.

Dart is also recognized as one of the leading exponents of the High Tory tradition in political philosophy, combining respect for inherited moral wisdom with a concern for the common good that allows a robust role for the state. A peace activist who consistently resists ideological straightjackets, Dart holds together values often thought to be in tension: freedom and order, faith and reason, contemplation and action.

It is fitting that a scholar so devoted to both contemplation and civic virtue should be honored with a *Liber Amicorum* reflecting those very ideals. To mark Dart's retirement from teaching in 2023, his colleagues, students and friends have assembled a substantial two-volume Festschrift, aptly titled *The Scholar-Gipsy*. Edited by Matthew Steem and Wayne Northey, the collection gathers eighty-two essays organized under four headings – academic, interdisciplinary, political and student reflections – testifying to both the range of Dart's influence and the deep affection he has inspired. The volumes include forewords by each of the editors, two autobiographical essays⁴ and a loving tribute by his wife Karin.⁵

Though the volumes traverse an extraordinary range of subjects, readers of *The Merton Annual* will be especially drawn to the handful of essays directly engaging Dart's work on Thomas Merton, though some of them are more personal than scholarly in nature. The standout among them is Katherine Bubel's "Comings and Goings: A Weaving for Ron" (1.272-94), which insightfully explores a key theme in Merton's thought – the relationship between the *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa* – which is also a central theme in Dart's own reflections. Bubel brings George Grant into the discussion as well, noting how he viewed the severing of the *vita activa* from the *vita contemplativa* as having deformed North American

1. Ron Dart, *Thomas Merton and the Beats of the North Cascades*, expanded ed. (North Vancouver, BC: Prospect Press, 20008).

2. Ron Dart, ed., *Thomas Merton and the Counterculture: A Golden String* (Abbotsford, BC: St. Macrina Press, 2016).

3. Ron Dart, ed., *White Gulls & Wild Birds: Essays on C. S. Lewis, Inklings and Friends & Thomas Merton* (Abbotsford, BC: St. Macrina Press, 2015).

4. "The Scholar-Gipsy: Thrownness, Memoricide, and the Great Tradition" (1.1-29) and "A Brief Personal Sketch" (2.1-29).

5. "In Search of the Golden Key" (1.30-33; 2.30-33).

civilization. Bubel discusses how Merton resisted any attempt to sever contemplation from action, insisting that contemplation is not an escape from the world but a spiritual practice that penetrates to the very core of existence, transforming human consciousness and allowing outward action to arise from inner truth and love. She also highlights Merton's "dialectic of life and death" (see 1.281-87), a spirituality that affirms life even when it brings the unwelcome realization that one's days are few and numbered. As Merton writes,⁶ "life affirms itself by consenting to end" (1.283). For him, the religious life involves both relinquishment and affirmation – dying to self that leads to a reawakening into a deeper love of life. Bubel's discussion of this dimension of Merton's spirituality carries a special poignancy, framed as it is by the death of her sister.

A number of other essays also address Dart's work on Merton. Barry Morris observes that Dart offered a rare constructive critique of Merton for failing to develop a clear methodology that links spirituality to social justice.⁷ Merton's monastic vocation, in Dart's view, set limits on his capacity for direct political engagement. Doug Beardsley⁸ recalls the Eighth General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society, where Dart delivered an address reflecting on the thought of Merton and George Grant, titled "Hawk's Dream, Owl's Insights."⁹ J. S. Porter¹⁰ notes that Dart described Merton as a "wild bird," a monk who dared to speak out on the pressing issues of his time. He commends Dart for sharing that same daring spirit, particularly in his willingness to speak up for the Palestinian cause. Rev. Judith Hardcastle¹¹ details Dart's many contributions to Canada's Merton community and his lifelong effort to keep Merton's legacy alive. Lynn Szabo¹² reports her earliest memory of Dart, when he handed her a first edition of Merton's *Cables to the Ace*,¹³ and describes their collegial relationship, rooted in a shared love of Merton and sustained through years of teaching and reflection.

The Scholar-Gipsy volumes are not only a tribute to Dart's scholarship

6. "Seven Words" in Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 101.

7. "Ron Dart's Critical Ideas, Themes, Thrusts & Legacy of Challenges in the Service of Vital Balances: An Urban Minister's Indebted Contribution" (1.446-73).

8. "The Poignant Misery of Remembering" (1.536-49).

9. Ron Dart, "Thomas Merton and George Grant: Hawk's Dream, Owl's Insight," *The Merton Annual* 17 (2004) 120-36.

10. "Ron Dart: Synthesizing Splendour" (1.536-49).

11. "A Tribute to Ron Dart" (1.602-607).

12. "The Bounty of Our Acquaintance" (1.663-71).

13. Thomas Merton, *Cables to the Ace or Familiar Liturgies of Misunderstanding* (New York: New Directions, 1968).

but also to his vocation as teacher, mentor and friend. As the sub-title *Liber Amicorum* suggests, these essays are as much acts of gratitude as analysis. They are rich with heartfelt tributes to Dart's generosity and kindness, as well as his genuine interest in the lives of others. Readers interested in his wide-ranging thought will find a gold mine of intellectual stimulation leavened with much personal warmth. Taken together, these essays offer an inspiring portrait of what it means to live the *vita contemplativa* in the company of friends, embodying both the classical ideal of the philosophical life and the distinctively Christian union of charity and contemplation. For those drawn to Merton, this collection bears witness to the continuing vitality of the contemplative tradition that both Dart and Merton sought, in their own ways, to renew.

George A. Dunn & Xu Xiaoyan

HALL, Cassidy, *Queering Contemplation: Finding Queerness in the Roots and Future of Contemplative Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2024), pp. x + 170. ISBN: 978-1-5064-9339-8 (cloth) \$25.99.

Whether organized as families, tribes, congregations, nations or in some other social configuration, people who are marginalized, harassed, legislated against, denied membership, denied health care and denigrated from church pulpits need heroic voices around which they can rally. Cassidy Hall raises such a voice for the LGBTQIA+ panoply of allied communities that for much too long have suffered – and continue to suffer – the consequences of an alarming level of malevolent human behavior that tramples the fundamental cosmic tenet expressed in the Golden Rule and leaves sick at heart anyone whose faith leans on the Beatitudes. Hall's book offers hope and encouragement and an aura of friendship, as she serves as example of and witness to a convergence of queerness and a contemplative attitude toward the world.

Rev. Hall (she/her/hers) is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, and with her experience as a counselor, her seminary studies specializing in contemplative spirituality and queer theology, her creative filmmaking and her extensive visitations to monasteries across the United States, her personal story acts like a centripetal force pulling everything nearby towards it as she explains how the coping skills she learned as a child – such as going “into my room to pause, feel big emotions, or go away from others to simply center, gather, or clear my mind” (2) – laid the foundation for what evolved into a genuine contemplative worldview. *Queering Contemplation* is not a technical treatise but rather an invitation to re-visit and re-interpret certain concepts and practices long associated