

lessness before God helped Merton in his inter-faith dialogue with Buddhists. Williams traces this line of development in Merton's thinking through a variety of journal entries pointing to an understanding of the self as nothing before God, a 'recognition that my reality rests "like a feather on the breath of God"' (p.75) and leading him to suggest that 'Merton is in revolt against the *seriousness* of the self-image,' (p.78) a theme readers of Merton are all too aware of in his work. Williams concludes by pointing to Merton's own ongoing struggle with the self, especially in relation to his 1966 affair with the young nurse from Louisville.

As the final essay in this collection concludes by referring to this affair so this volume itself closes with a poem written by Rowan Williams entitled 'Thomas Merton: Summer 1966,' a poem referring to that same tangled love affair. The essays in this volume are complimented by the addition of two other brief but astute pieces, a Preface by Jim Forest and an Afterword by Metropolitan Kallistos Ware of Diokleia.

Although physically this appears a slim volume, do not be deceived. The essays in *A Silent Action* are among some of the finest and most perceptive written about Merton's life and thought. They demand that the reader engage with Merton's thinking in a lively and thoughtful manner and in the light of the world in which we are living now.

Although the essays were originally written many years apart and for a variety of different conferences and anniversaries the themes they tackle are quintessential Merton, and they are as timeless and as applicable now as when they were penned.

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The Wounded Heart of Thomas Merton

Robert Waldron
Paulist Press
New York, 2011
ISBN 9780809146840
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£14.50

This is a book for Merton scholars seeking to explore and explain his deepest psychological motivation throughout life. Waldron has set himself an ambitious task, and is asking his readers to expend significant intellectual effort to follow him, as he proceeds unshakeably, like a bloodhound on the scent of his quarry: Merton's wounded heart.

His thesis is clearly set out in Chapter One: 'To understand the *man* Thomas Merton, we must begin with his relationship with his mother', who dies when he is six years old. Waldron has it that this loss meant thereafter, 'With his

mother absent, so is absent the feminine and all that the feminine implies: physical security, affection, human touch, attention, emotional security, and motherly nurturing'. Merton, he says, develops a pattern of being alone that comes to dominate his life.

Throughout this book's ten chapters, Waldron invokes the analytical psychology of Carl Jung, particularly that involving the ideal balance between the masculine and feminine principles, *animus* and *anima*. In this regard, says Waldron, 'Merton is off to a bad start'. Learning in his teens that his father is fatally ill, we are told, 'The wounded boy is now even more wounded, again alone with no one to turn to'.

This insecure, depressive Merton, who later – disgusted with his own depravity – turns to Christianity and monasticism, re-integrating himself little by little through writing, dreams, poetry, contemplation and worship, is presented to us sympathetically in commendable detail by an author who has clearly researched Merton's texts extensively for his evidence.

Everything cited is considered as supporting this Jungian thesis, which might make some readers suspect unrealistic uniformity of interpretation. Chapter Six, for example, includes a survey of ten of Merton's dreams recorded between 1957 and 1968. About one, from February 1965, Merton writes, 'Last night I had a curious and mov-

ing dream about a "black mother". I was in a place somewhere I had been as a child...' Waldron, quoting the dream in full, adds, 'In this dream the black mother is described as having a face that is "severe". This is the exact word Merton uses to describe his natural mother, but there is a difference in the black mother: She exudes warmth, unlike his natural mother, who was portrayed as a distant mother, intellectually interested in observing her son's development, but perhaps miserly in her expression of affection and love.'

The problem with Waldron's explanation, for me, is that there are many Thomas Mertons. Each of us has our own version, and for our own reasons. Those for whom Merton is a guide, mentor and friend will be uncomfortable with Waldron's somewhat pitiful, doubt-ridden, self-castigating version, even if he does eventually admit, in a final 'Coda', that, 'In his last 1968 journal entries he (Merton) appeared to be a far happier, far more whole man than the fragmented one who first entered the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1941'.

For me, the life, writings and teachings of Thomas Merton have value only insofar as they contribute to a person's psychological, and especially spiritual, development; insofar as they encourage us towards mindful awareness, enabling us to discover Christ, the True Self within.

Waldron's account is interesting, but it does not add significantly to the accounts – and the treasure-house of wisdom – to be found in Merton's books like *Seven Storey Mountain*, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, *Love and Living*, *No Man Is An Island*, his published diaries, and the rest. I recommend reading one or several of these first. I admire Bob Waldron immensely, but he has not here superseded the master. Read or re-read Merton, focus on the inspiration rather than any possible angst that informs his work, and Waldron's book, worthy and worthwhile for a few Merton aficionados though it may be, becomes essentially a sideshow.

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**The Return to the Mystical
Ludwig Wittgenstein, Teresa of Avila
and the Christian Mystical Tradition**

Peter Tyler

Continuum

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At first sight Teresa of Avila and Ludwig Wittgenstein are an unlikely pairing separated as they

are by time, gender, social position, and culture, and with one an acknowledged Christian thinker and the other not. Yet it is a mark of the great easing up of writing and thinking about – and experiencing – spirituality that it is possible today to pursue unlikely combinations (in traditional terms) and to explore new openings. The book's argument is that their texts – particularly Teresa's *Interior Castle* and those of the later Wittgenstein (including material newly translated) – share special and distinctive features. They are not intended to pass information on or to add to bodies of knowledge. Instead they embody a deconstructive and reconstructive style, using ordinary language, that involve and implicate the reader and that, essentially, are intended to transform the reader's way of being.

This intention is quite well documented in Wittgenstein who spent hours ordering and reordering his short texts, and intentionally added punctuation and unexpected words to slow the reader down and stop them dashing on to the next section. Wittgenstein didn't want us to build up thinking methodologies, but to stop our thoughts from pointlessly going round and round like a trapped fly. In the light of his texts one could see more or less the whole of modern philosophy from Descartes to Hegel as a dead end into which we have been lured by the fallacy that philosophy could follow the building block approach