

me.' That opened up for Merton a whole new religious world, which is captured, in miniature, in this pocket book.

Thurston recalls other times and places, when Merton's interests are fired up in the area of other religions. She recalls the account of the occasion at Oakham School in the late 1920s when he argued the pro-Gandhi side in a debate (and lost). Much later on, Merton was convinced there was a real possibility of contact on a deep level between contemplative and monastic tradition in the West and the various contemplative traditions in the East.

A lot of subjects are briefly covered, and each more mouth watering than the last. On Landscape; Gurus; Dharma; the Self; Zen; the Contemplative Life; Enlightenment; Solitude; Fasting; Possessions; Meditation; Non-Violence, are but a few.

Those of you who know anything about Merton will know he didn't live in a world of half measures. In fact it is almost impossible to conceive how he did all that he did; which makes me think it's probable that these won't be the last of the little books.

There is also a helpful glossary, which in its litany is almost tantamount to prayer. I'll leave you to guess what or who Gelupta is, and the place 'Yellow Hats' has in the thought of Thomas Merton.

One can't help feeling that Merton was deeply imbued with the zeit-

geist of the sixties for better or for worse. Better for the ability to spread wings, experiment, be fearless, or shocking, or both. He lived life at a breakneck speed, absorbing information and ideas as if there was no tomorrow. He is one of the world's phenomena, and it is good that small volumes such as these, of easily accessible material, are being produced for a new generation to wonder at, and be absorbed by.

We are much indebted to Paul Pearson and Bonnie Thurston for all their work—no doubt, in some ways, a labour of love. We are also grateful to New Directions for floating the project into the unknown.

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### **Thomas Merton: Monk on the Edge**

Edited by Ross Labrie  
and Angus Stuart

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In an age saturated with Thomas Merton's own prolific work and the ever-expansive collection of secondary literature about Merton's life and writing, it can seem at times unbelievable that there remains anything new to add to this broad

corpus. Additionally, and probably because of this large library of Merton-related literature, the test of worthwhile publications on the subject has, in my opinion, grown increasingly more challenging. The question can be put simply: does this book contribute to the elucidation of Merton's thought, the broadening of readership, or the illumination of some previously unknown or under-appreciated dimension of this twentieth-century monk's life and work?

As far as the new volume *Thomas Merton: Monk on the Edge* is concerned, I think it does meet at least the minimal threshold of a worthy contribution to the already large Merton library. In greater or lesser ways, this collection of essays answers my threefold question in the affirmative: it provides interesting studies that help elucidate Merton's thought; it is published by the Thomas Merton Society of Canada, thereby contributing to efforts to increase interest in Merton's work, especially outside the United States; and, in varying ways, it highlights several dimensions of Merton's work that have been under-appreciated, even if many of the wider themes are already rather familiar to Merton scholars and enthusiasts.

Edited by Ross Labrie (the current president of the Thomas Merton Society of Canada) and Angus Stuart (a former head of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland and an editor of several

essay collections on Merton in the UK), *Thomas Merton: Monk on the Edge* contains ten essays, plus a lengthy introduction and a brief afterward. While the volume includes a foreword by the estimable Brother Patrick Hart, O.C.S.O, Merton's former secretary, it reads less like a foreword and more like a slightly longer book endorsement, containing four brief paragraphs in total.

This is a diverse volume, which opens with a personal and reflective introduction by Labrie, in which he introduces us more to Merton's work and its contemporary relevance from Labrie's own experience, rather than introducing us to the volume's content itself. That said, Labrie's approach is accessible, personal, and interesting. It is followed by the first essay, 'Prophecy and Contemplation,' by Michael Higgins, a well-known Henri Nouwen scholar and someone who has long been interested in the work of Merton, having defended a doctoral thesis on Merton's poetry in 1979 and later published several books on his spirituality. Tracing the contours of Merton's prophetic and contemplative vocation through the use of poetry (especially Merton's interest in Blake), Higgins argues that Merton's social location as monk provided the condition for much of his worldview in this regard.

Susan McCaslin, a prolific poet and emerita professor of Douglas College (British Columbia), ex-

plores four well-known liminal moments in Merton's chronology that together constitute his lifelong experience of mysticism in her essay, 'Merton's Mystical Visions: A Widening Circle'. Bruce Ward, a professor of religious studies at Laurentian University (Ontario), examines the apocalyptic thought of Merton's later work, especially in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, in his essay, 'Apocalypse and Modernity'.

Paul Dekar, the author of the recent book, *Thomas Merton: Twentieth-Century Wisdom for Twenty-First-Century Living*, which focuses on the way Merton's writing is particularly relevant for a technologically saturated age, discusses the connection between technology and ecological consciousness in his essay, 'Technology and the Loss of Paradise.' Angus Stuart's essay, 'Merton and the Beats', provides us with exactly what the title suggests: a brief survey of Merton's similarity to and appreciation for the famous Beat writers of the early twentieth century.

According to a division of four phases, Ron Dart, a professor of political science, offers a survey of Merton's progressive concern for peacemaking in his aptly, if simply, titled essay, 'Peacemaker'. The following chapter follows Dart's focus on peacemaking well. Ryan Scruggs, a young instructor at Alberta Bible College in Calgary, provides an introductory essay to Merton's ecumenical and interreligious engagement in his essay,

'Interreligious Dialogue'.

Picking up again the theme of mysticism, the next two authors offer particular examinations of Merton's experience and work. The first is Donald Grayston, a former ITMS president, in his essay, 'Thomas Merton in Asia: The Polonaruwa Illumination'. The second is Lynn Szabo, professor of literature and poetry, in her essay, 'The Mystical Ecology of Thomas Merton's Poetics'. The final essay in this volume is Labrie's own additional contribution, 'Merton on Atheism in Camus'.

As one can immediately tell from the contents, this volume is a diverse collection without a singular thematic thread apart from the desire to 'capture something of the breadth of Merton's interests and sensibility and in particular his openness both to the ancient world and to modernity'. Insofar as this is the task, its goal is reasonably accomplished. For those Merton scholars who are well versed in the particularities of each of the respective themes collected in the volume, this book might not live up to exceptionally high expectations for novelty. Two possible exceptions might include Ward's essay, 'Apocalypse and Modernity', and Labrie's 'Merton on Atheism in Camus'. Both of these chapters offer sustained and close readings of primary sources and provide insightful interpretations.

The greatest weakness of this volume is not related to the text at

all but, rather, has to do with its publication and minimal availability. It is an attractive volume, well designed and formatted, but it is not widely accessible from commercial booksellers. At the time of this review, the book is only available ordered directly from the Thomas Merton Society of Canada, which presents a challenge for those in the United States and Europe, and makes obtaining the book inconvenient for Canadians who might otherwise prefer to order from Amazon.ca or a local bookstore.

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