

# Book Reviews

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## **On the Seventh Wave**

David Hodges

Caldey Island, Tenby, 2016

Available through: [www.caldey-island.co.uk](http://www.caldey-island.co.uk)

ISBN 978-0-95668-843-9 (pbk) 62 pages

£8.50

I have in my work room at home a framed print of a quote by William Butler Yeats that I bought on a trip to Dublin. Taken from *The Celtic Twilight*, Yeats's hybrid of story and essay, the author issues an invitation:

We can make our minds so like still water that beings may gather about us that they may see, it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer life because of our quiet.

The notion that the stillness achieved in some may help others towards a life of greater clarity serves as a reminder to both strive for still water within, and seek it out in others.

Reading the latest volume of poetry by David Hodges, a monk at the Cistercian Abbey on Caldey Island off the South Coast of Wales, is just such an experience; an opportunity to see life more clearly through the absorption of his poems, and benefit from the stillness of their writer. Precise and distinctive, the poems in this collection are both accessible

and challenging; a delicate skill in the poet's hands, to serve up a meal as nourishing as it is elegant. There is a quiet introspection about them that might be expected, but the volume is not without the rhythm, flow and power we find naturally in life.

It hardly needs saying that there is an inherent subjectivity in poetry reviewing. Nevertheless, for me, it seems evident that the raw physicality and presence of David's poems is in harmony with their inherent call to go within, to introspection. This doesn't feel contradictory. Rather, it's a natural journey in the reading process. The ordinary beauty, or rather, the beauty of the ordinary, and extraordinary, that David conveys, is firmly anchored in his island setting with its flora and fauna. So 'Island Foraging' starts:

My friend, the herbalist from Myddfai,  
spots sorrel, sea spinach,  
golden samphire  
on the island cliffs.  
She loves to forage,  
could live in the wild.

And yet such lines lead us unflinchingly through liturgy, memory and reflection on life, as in the closing stanzas of 'Me and My Shadow':

Coming to light in prayer,  
My shadow self  
I tried to overcome.

Dying to self,  
in the full brightness of the Son  
my shadow and I are one.

From the thoughtful 'Island Foraging', to the ultimately deflated nature of 'A Meeting of Old Friends', from the sheer beauty of 'The Love of a Dying Friend' to the crystalline clarity of 'That Other Life', from the electric vividness of 'Kingfisher' to the raw power of 'Anger', these poems reflect the thoughts, feelings and activities of life lived. Together they work to make *On the Seventh Wave* an ideal resource for our own inner journey. The sense that a "fiercer life" is there for the taking in these poems cannot be ignored.

**Elizabeth Holmes** is a writer, teacher and lecturer, currently undertaking a PhD in her spare time on Thomas Merton's monastic theology and interreligious dialogues. She serves on the committee of the TMS and is the poetry editor of the Journal.

**Note:** Two poems from this volume, 'Lectio (1)' & 'Lectio (2)', were included in the previous edition of *The Merton Journal*, Vol. 23.2, Advent 2016.

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### **Illuminating the Way: Embracing the Wisdom of Monks and Mystics**

Christine Vaulters Painter

Sorin Books, Notre Dame, Indiana, 2016

ISBN 978-1-93349-593-4 (pbk) 224 pages

\$17.95

In this book the author, a Benedictine oblate and online abbess for Abbey of the Arts, takes us on a journey through the inner life accompanied by twelve great monastics, poets and mystics from across the ages.

Her approach is firmly grounded in the field of expressive arts. This comes from an understanding that each of us speaks a variety of languages. In our culture we tend to emphasize and promote the language of science, logic and verbal analysis as the superior way of knowing. But we have multiple ways of knowing - musical, poetic, visual, kinaesthetic, intuitive - which are often ignored or undervalued. She considers that these ways of knowing give us insights into both our interior and exterior landscape which are not fully available through cognitive ways of knowing. They widen our capacity to see the holy in all that we do and experience.

She employs Jungian archetypes to identify a particular aspect of twelve individuals, encouraging us to explore the archetypes within ourselves. Her choice is wide-reaching: Miriam - the Prophet, King David - the Sovereign, Francis of Assisi - the Fool, Mary - the Mother, Dorothy Day - the Orphan, Amma Syncletica - the warrior, Brigid of Kildare - the Healer, Brendan - the Navigator and Pilgrim, Benedict of Nursia - the Sage, Rainer Maria Rilke - the Artist, Hildegard of Bingen - the Visionary, and Thomas Merton - the Monk.

Amma Syncletica is cited in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. She came from a wealthy family and gave it all up to join the monastic