

are all like himself and like Merton, that is seekers emerging from an arcane Roman Catholic background. In fact, some of us belong to Churches which completed such a pilgrimage a long time ago. This perhaps enables us to have a keener perception of Merton's exemplary, but nonetheless localised, witness.

The final section is 'The Merton Library - What to Read First' and again is exemplary, for so many people, like my priest friend, do not know where to start. After reading this they will have no doubt. Moreover the section is totally up to date and is able, because of Shannon's unique position in Merton scholarship, to quote from unpublished work and to point towards work that is still in preparation but which will appear in due course.

As a guide for the newcomer to Merton's work this book is unsurpassed.

Melvyn Matthews

Thomas Merton. *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage*. Ed. with Introduction by Robert E. Daggy. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997) pp.363, £19.99. ISBN 0-06-065482-1.

This, the fifth of the seven projected volumes of Thomas Merton's complete journals, covers Merton's move to becoming a full-time hermit at Gethsemani, the fulfilment of a deep desire for solitude that had haunted Merton from his earliest days in the monastery. It begins in August 1963 when Merton was living as a part-time solitary and traces the gradual expansion of the amount of time he was allowed to spend at the hermitage until, in August 1965, he was allowed to stand down as Master of Novices and take up full-time residence there. This volume concludes at the end of 1965 allowing us to see Merton's reflections on his first few months as a hermit.

Some parts of this journal will already be familiar to readers as it contains journal entries that were prepared for publication by Merton in the journal *A Vow of Conversation*, as well as his account of his visit to New York to meet the Zen scholar D.T. Suzuki and an early version of his essay *Day of a Stranger*. Having said that, I would estimate that over half of the material in this journal is previously unpublished and even those parts previously published in *Vow* can read quite differently in their unedited form. *A Vow of Conversation* leaves the reader with the impression that Merton had effortlessly made the transition to life as a full-time hermit whereas, in *Dancing*, this transition appears far from easy and a visit from

his former novice Ernesto Cardenal brings to the surface the instability Merton experienced with the move.

Dancing in the Waters of Life begins with a masterful introduction by Robert Daggy which highlights the central movements in this volume - Merton's move to the hermitage, his movement into his middle years with the increasing health difficulties he was experiencing, and his continuing efforts to work out the paradoxes in his own life. At times in this journal we see Merton at his most free and yet, almost in the next sentence he can be highly introspective and obsessed with certain aspects of his life. This tension runs throughout this volume and, as Daggy points out, accounts "for the highs and lows, the joy and the despair, the enthusiasm and the carping." (xii-xiii.) Merton's own sense of this continuing movement in his life, of the dance, comes over clearly in a passage he wrote in January 1964:

"The need for constant self-revision, growth, leaving behind, renunciation of yesterday, yet in continuity with all yesterdays...my ideas are always changing, always moving around one center, always seeing the center from somewhere else. I will always be accused of inconsistencies - and will no longer be there to hear the accusation."(67.)

Dancing in the Water of Life allows us the most direct contact with Merton of any of the journals yet published. The difficulties of this period which Merton writes about, the tensions, his continuing ill health and his coming to terms with middle age and the absurd world of the sixties can make this volume sound like the ravings of a man obsessed with himself. Yet there is a fine balance here between the madman and the prophet, as was frequently the case with the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures. When one considers the books, essays and letters Merton was writings at this time - *Emblems of a Season of Fury*, *Seeds of Destruction*, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, *Seasons of Celebration*, *Gandhi on Non-Violence*, along with such classics essays as "Rain and the Rhinoceros," "Day of a Stranger," and his "Message to Poets" - it is the stature of the prophet which becomes evident and this journal gives us an intimate insight into the dynamics of the prophet.

In this journal we can see the sources to which Merton was turning for his own spiritual and intellectual nourishment. Of particular interest to Merton in this period are Rainer Maria Rilke, Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The Church Fathers, scripture and the religious writings of other traditions are all evident along with a growing awareness of his natural surroundings, brought about partly through a growing closeness to nature and its rhythms in his life at the hermitage:

"Came up to the hermitage at 4 a.m. The moon poured down silence over the woods, and the frosty grass sparkled faintly. More than two hours of prayer in firelight. The sun appeared and rose at 6:45. Sweet pungent smell of hickory smoke, and silence, silence."(93.)

Although not as intensely involved in the peace movement as he was earlier in the sixties Merton's awareness of the issues confronting it is clearly still evident as is his grasp of a wide range of national and international issues - race relations and civil rights, the space race, American politics, Viet Nam and the effects of the Vatican Council.

In all the journals of Thomas Merton references can be found to the various anniversaries that were important to him - his birthday, baptism, entry to Gethsemani, the dates on which he took his vows and his ordination to the priesthood. In this journal the dominant such date is his fiftieth birthday. Throughout this journal Merton makes references to a variety of health problems and the vigil of his fiftieth birthday provides the occasion for an extended reflection on his life connecting his present self with various moments in his life from Oakham, through Cambridge and Columbia to his life at Gethsemani and the friends who had influenced him along the way concluding "Why go on? *Deo gratias* [thank God] for all of them." (199.) As he approaches middle age Merton is more than ever able to see the unity of his life and discovers, in the midst of his vulnerability, a new sense of happiness which he had not experienced previously, writing "Lay in bed realizing that what I was, was *happy*. Said the strange word 'happiness' and realized that it was there, not as an 'it' or object. It simply was. And I was that." (177.)

This is a journal full of movement, from Merton's daily journeys between the hermitage and the monastery, through his frequent visits to Louisville, to his first ever return visit to New York since entering Gethsemani. There is also the movement of his restless spirit, of his continuing debates with the abbot, the order, the church and the wider society of his day. The rhythm of this movement gives it at times the feeling of a dance, one in which Merton dances very lightly, touching on spiritual masters down through the ages and calling his reader to undertake the same dance in their own life and to join in the general dance of creation.

Paul M Pearson.