

matched (though one might think of poets such as Mary Oliver and Denise Levertov, perhaps, as exceptions) – what Berry in his foreword describes as a ‘post-critical naiveté’ (p. 15) which respects the otherness of the natural world yet also insists on a vital, saving connection between the natural world and human beings: a saving connection which goes both ways.

It is good – perhaps essential – to be reminded of these things, and this little book does so, ably assisted by John Giuliani’s quiet and graceful line drawings. If I have a hesitation about this anthology, it is one that pertains to the making of any such collection. Merton’s observations and reflections on nature have necessarily been taken out of their original contexts in order to be gathered and concentrated into one volume whose focus is on that one topic; and there is both gain and loss in that process. The gain is precisely in the intensity of the focus on the natural world, and the raising of the question of humanity’s relationship to the natural world within Merton’s spirituality and writings. The loss is in the de-contextualisation of Merton’s relation to the natural world from the wider arena of his life and his other, theological, spiritual and political concerns. This has the effect sometimes of lessening the impact of his comments on nature rather than strengthening them. In reading Merton’s journals, one of the things the reader experiences is the extraordinary juxtaposition of daily minutiae, issues, people and concerns that made up the tapestry of Merton’s life and spiritual universe. What he had for breakfast, the books he is reading, the people he has heard from and is writing to, the manual

work he is employed in doing, his reaction to the US government’s latest policy, his sense of God in prayer – these are all mixed up alongside acute observations on rain, flowers, mountain, birds, cows in the pasture. It is precisely their juxtaposition and interrelationship that creates the theological perspective and the mystical awareness that is particular to Merton. Without the specificity of the sausages for breakfast, the letter from a friend, the Aquinas he is reading, the brother who sang out of tune in Vespers, his notes on nature are in danger of becoming sentimentalised and sanitised.

So, for me, this anthology has most value if it drives the reader back to a wider, larger reading of Merton, in which one might recapture his idiosyncratic and complex spirituality, in which the painterly aestheticism and mystical awareness join hands with the voracious intellectual appetite, the vast capacity for friendship and the wide-ranging spiritual sympathies – as well as with the struggles, restlessness and woundedness of the man.

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Angelic Mistakes: The Art of Thomas Merton

Roger Lipsey, foreword by Paul Pearson
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Dr Lipsey has succeeded remarkably in producing this illustrated text providing both artistic insight and spiritual con-

templation from the later calligraphic work of Thomas Merton. As Paul Pearson suggests: 'Merton's visual art in the 1960s is a question mark, asking us to pause and reflect on what we are seeing and on the meaning of the spiritual, not just in art but in every part of our lives' (p.xvii).

These calligraphies and accompanying texts lead us on a journey into Merton's reflection and expression.

Analysis of Merton's early artistic work as a student is provided, with further perspectives on his art after entry into the monastery. Distancing himself from traditional devotional images we catch sight of his increasing fascination with Zen Buddhism against the background of contemporary abstract art. Merton's leap into the practice of abstract art and his enthusiasm for sharing his work was an unanticipated discovery of a new language, a new way of searching' (p.17).

That 'there would have been no art without the hermitage' (p.148) reveals how crucially formative the solitude of the place was both as artist's studio and contemplative space.

Lipsey's comment on how the calligraphy of Japanese priest-artist meets the Cistercian illuminated manuscript tradition in Merton vividly recalls the Citeaux mss. in Dijon, as if providentially waiting for the right person for this conjuncture to occur, something Merton might have instinctively perceived.

The influence of Suzuki, Ad Reinhardt and others is confirmed here as substantive. Merton's discovery of the volume *The Tao of Painting by Mai-Mai Sze* provides a fascinating insight into his encounter with a discipline which 'conversed in a luminous language that

did not chill or kill art; it helped call it into being. Their language and perspective did not supersede everything Merton had known and felt in the past; it confirmed and extended, invited new explorations.'

What is particularly delightful in this volume is the account of Merton's fascination with types and qualities of paper used for his prints, and the way in which he extracted different (and sometimes expensive) materials from his friends.

Given Merton's childhood awareness and Cistercian Romanesque it is surprising that there is no comment on the evident likeness between image 24 (p.109) and the architecture of early Cistercian windows such as those at Le Thoronet or Senanque.

The lively fish of image 4 (p.69) perhaps reflects Merton's own swimming against the stream. Does image 13 (p.87) reveal shades of a hidden Buddha or Christ in a mandorla (or both)?

The chapters on Friends, Unlikely Peers and Exhibitions, bring us into the world of Merton's closest circle, with glimpses of the influence of Uffert Wilke and Ad Reinhardt, and with an endearing account of Robert Hammer, leaving one with a sense that one has missed something, not having met him personally.

The concluding chapter from professionals analysing Merton's technique and how it was recovered provides a sense of standing at the hermit's shoulder as the process develops, of being there at the moment of revelation of the final print.

More detailed research is required where the author repeats the popular misnomer that Bernard of Clairvaux founded the Cistercian order (p.151). While Bernard may have been its brightest light,

Merton himself reminded us that Robert of Molesme, Alberic and Stephen Harding were the order's founding fathers, since he wrote articles on all three and their relationship to the order's origins.

Merton's later art engages all of him – heart, mind, hand, perception and spirituality – as if expressing a new contemplative wholeness, a perspective longing for its time.

Typically, Merton says of his calligraphies: 'no need to categorize these marks. It is better if they remain unidentified vestiges, signatures of someone who is not around' (p.61). Thankfully for us these marks are still around, signifying Merton's continued presence, calling us to see into the heart of things. Roger Lipsey has done us a considerable service in making these prints accessible in the kind of edition which invites the reader to make many return visits to its pages.

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Signs of Peace: The Interfaith Letters of Thomas Merton

William Apel

Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York

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£10.99

By a strange coincidence I had just started reading Jim Forest's foreword in Thomas Merton's banned book *Peace in the Post-Christian Era* when this book arrived for me to review. Jim Forest quotes Merton as saying, 'Whether we

like it or not we have to admit we are already living in a post-Christian world... Not only non-Christians but even Christians themselves tend to dismiss the Gospel ethic on non-violence as "sentimental". The last paragraph of the foreword contains these words: "Were he (Merton) alive today and no longer hobbled by censorship, perhaps he would set to work on updating *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*. But many paragraphs, even chapters would remain unaltered". Merton's prescience likewise shines through this book of letters to men and women of different faith traditions, all of whom became his friends.

William Apel explores through Merton's letters to them (including some of the replies they make to him) how a deeper friendship and understanding develops between them both, and, as is frequently noted, a profounder realisation of the common ground that is uncovered. This is a book that can be read by those who are already familiar with Merton's writings or who may be coming to him for the first time. In fact, I would say that the latter group of readers may be very pleasantly surprised by what they find. The book is particularly valuable for Christians and indeed those of other faiths at this time of interfaith meeting and a search for genuine dialogue.

Some of these correspondents can easily be classified. There is a Sufi, a Jew, two Zen Buddhists, a Christian (a Baptist Seminary Professor who is described as "an expansive Protestant") and a Quaker. But with others it is not so easy. John Wu, for example, who was born and raised in China, and was converted to Catholicism as an adult but who "never abandoned the great truths of the Confu-