

a wide range of traditions and the ordinary in everyday life. The book is structured to complement this approach. The short chapters make it accessible, with opportunities to pause for reflection, and there are engaging questions at the end of each chapter for those who wish to extend and deepen their personal enquiry.

This is a hopeful and optimistic book. Integrating psychology and narrative, Culliford mines his long and varied experience as a psychiatrist for stories of his patients – profoundly human and often very moving.

We hear also aspects of his own story – important relationships and events from different stages in his own life enriched by significant dreams and an imaginative inner world, and given meaning by his personal spiritual journey.

There is an interesting chapter on the evidence based work of the Spirituality and Psychiatry SIG focussing on the relevance of spirituality in the context of health care. There is some helpful material on the healing power of painful emotions, and he writes compellingly about meditation and the transformative power of the practice of *zazen* in Zen Buddhism. He addresses the issue of happiness in the context of the current cultural malaise, and expands on Fowler's stages of faith to discuss some of the problems with democracy and how personal responsibility and the development of the 'contemplative sabbath mind' might assist with this.

Culliford describes himself as a Universalist Christian – a practicing Anglican who is open to the spiritual truths of other traditions including 'non-believers'. In this he acknowledges a lasting debt to Thomas Merton. Indeed the book is

dedicated to the many friends and followers of Thomas Merton. This open-hearted holistic perspective makes the book accessible and illuminating to a wide readership.

I think it will be especially helpful to those who, in this determinedly secular and 'ungovernably consumerist' time, may be experiencing, perhaps despite themselves, the tentative and unexpected stirrings of spiritual consciousness.

**Heather Lyons** has worked in social work, education and student mental health. She is a group analyst and a committee member of the Thomas Merton Society.

### Thomas Merton and the Beats of the North Cascades

Ron Dart

(with illustrations by Arnold Shives)

Prospect Press,

North Vancouver BC, 2005.

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The central question that Ron Dart addresses in this slim volume concerns the tension between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* represented by the mountain tops versus the demands and distractions of everyday life down below in the cities. This is the recurring theme as he explores how this plays out for Thomas Merton and, as various counterpoints, the writings and lives of the "Beats of the North Cascades." Specifically Dart identifies these as Kenneth Rexroth, cast in the role of "contemplative elder" along

with Merton himself; Jack Kerouac, who is somewhat caricatured as miscreant younger brother; and then Gary Snyder and Cid Corman (along with Philip Whalen) who are presented as most clearly drawing together perspectives from both East and West.

Recurrent throughout the book also is the theme of the mountains as a "contemplative metaphor of transformation." Drawing on Dante's metaphor of the mountain, as Merton had done before, Dart speaks of the "purgatorial hike" which anyone who has done any hiking in mountainous regions can well identify with. Essentially Dart brings together Merton's life-struggle between his contemplative vocation and the demands of active life, a metaphorical ascent, with the concrete experience of three writers/poets who had spent time in the North Cascades and then written about it.

Kenneth Rexroth, an older statesman of the west-coast poetry scene, had spent time in the Cascades as a young man in the 1920s and can be considered as a precursor to the Beats. Jack Kerouac famous author of *On The Road*, *Dharma Bums* etc., unwillingly crowned "King of the Beats," had originally coined the term "beat generation", conscious of many layers of meaning, not least the spiritual ideas of *beatific* and *beatitude*. Gary Snyder came from Oregon and had spent his youth in the mountains including time working on logging camps and as a fire-lookout. In the mid-1950s he was a student of Japanese culture in San Francisco where he met east-coast beats Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac who immortalized him (you could say *beatified* him) as Japhy Ryder, the hero in *Dharma Bums*.

The value of this book, which is divided into three essays setting Merton alongside each of the above characters in turn (plus an introduction and appendix), is principally the way it serves as a taster and introduction for these themes for those who would like to take them further. It's a bit like trail-markers indicating the way to go to explore various stretches of terrain. In this regard the bibliography is particularly useful. I for one have made a note to obtain a copy of Kenneth Rexroth's *An Autobiographical Novel*. Also I'd be interested to take a look at *The Catholic Counterculture in America 1933-1962* by James Fisher, though I'm wary of such partisan approaches. The book also delineates a number of specific future projects for those prepared to take up the challenge. In particular, a detailed comparison of Kerouac's account of his experience on Desolation Peak in the latter chapters of *Dharma Bums* with that contained in *Lonesome Traveler*. More generally, the hope is expressed for a fuller exploration of Thomas Merton and the Beats.

Mention should also be made of the illustrations by Vancouver artist (climber and explorer) Arnold Shives. These include the oil reproduction on the cover together with seven relief prints distributed throughout the book. The latter in particular in their black and white stark simplicity play their part in transporting the reader to the rugged outcrops physically and spiritually with which these pages are concerned.

**Angus Stuart**, a former chair of the Thomas Merton Society (2000-04), is an Anglican priest in West Vancouver, Canada.