

Jupiter Bound, a Used Book Review
By David Robinson

The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton
(New Direction Books, 1968, \$7.50 (Used))

The road is better than the end. So wrote Cervantes. So lived Thomas Merton. For many pilgrims along the subterranean way of the spiritual life, Merton's lamp shines brightly. Spelunking in realms seldom seen in the daylight of ordinary consciousness, Merton leads his readers to those deep waters usually found only by contemplatives willing to transverse below the crust of creed and credential.

His last writing before his death in 1968, published posthumously, is *The Asian Journal*. Like stumbling onto a glass ball on the beach, I found a like-new copy of Merton's journal in a hole in the wall used bookstore in Cannon Beach; glad to pay only \$7.50 for the treasure.

Thomas Merton, 1915-1968, entered the Catholic Trappist order at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky at age 26. The world was at war. A wise Abbot encouraged the young novice to write. Through the middle decades of this violent century, Merton the writer mined the rich depths of Christian pacifism, social justice and prayer.

Trappist monks take a lifelong vow of stability, meaning they stay at the monastery for life. A Trappist monastery is a cloistered community of monks set apart from the highways of this world to better devote their attention to the interior highways of the life of prayer in spiritual journey with God.

Strange then that Merton's last several months on the planet found him on the road across Asia, through India, into Himalayas, to Ceylon and across to Thailand. *The Asian Journal* is Merton's personal diary of his road trip.

Crammed with snippets from a wide range of eastern authors, interspersed with Merton's laconic reflections on daily life in a foreign land as well as his own black and white photos, and laced with detailed notations on little known aspects of even lesser known schools of eastern religious thought, *The Asian Journal* serves up a sumptuous feast for the soul.

Attached to the *Journal*, call it a publisher's padding if you like, are annoyingly helpful annotations, a glossary of terms to bring us western illiterates on board, and complimentary reading in the appendixes full of Merton's lectures and letters written while on pilgrimage.

His last lecture, printed in full in *The Asian Journal*, entitled "Marxism and Monastic Perspectives", was delivered on December 10th, 1968. A few hours later, Merton was found dead in his Bangkok hotel room, having suffered a severe electrical shock from a faulty wire.

Thank God Merton wrote. How many millions of us in Bookland have found our footing along the road with the assistance of this wise guide. More than a guide, Merton was ever an explorer, challenging all who dare read his stuff to discover the adventure of journeying the pathways of the spiritual life with God.



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Of Monks and Owls
By Margi Curtis

Sunday, April 2nd, our little Coaster Theatre was host to the Gyuto Monks of Tibet. Those present were invited along to another plane as a small group of holy men chanted prayers for World Peace. Probably 90 minutes elapsed, but time was a blurry element. It is not surprising that "chant" is the root word of "enchant". These prayers did.

The Gyuto Monks are on the edge of becoming another endangered species, one which has the ability to produce a full 3 note chord in on single projection of the voice. This ability has been recognised by those who study such phenomena to be a unique occurrence anywhere in the known world. Nevertheless, Tibet's neighbors, the Chinese, are aggressively involved in destroying their native culture in the effort to steal their land. Another (not another!) story of lambs against the Lion.

The Monks came to America, hoping to raise money by sharing first-hand what they are about, and in so doing saving their way of life.

Before the chanting began, I looked around the sold-out theatre, to the faces of the waiting folk. Most of whom were the light skinned Western type, and probably a good many raised up under the auspices of Christianity. It was Sunday too. Here we sat, in our corner of the world, sometimes referred to as 'God's Country', and what was it we were hoping for? Why had we come? If it were only to contribute to a good cause, that could be done without attending. Open-minded and spiritually hungry, malnourished on the empty calories of a material culture?

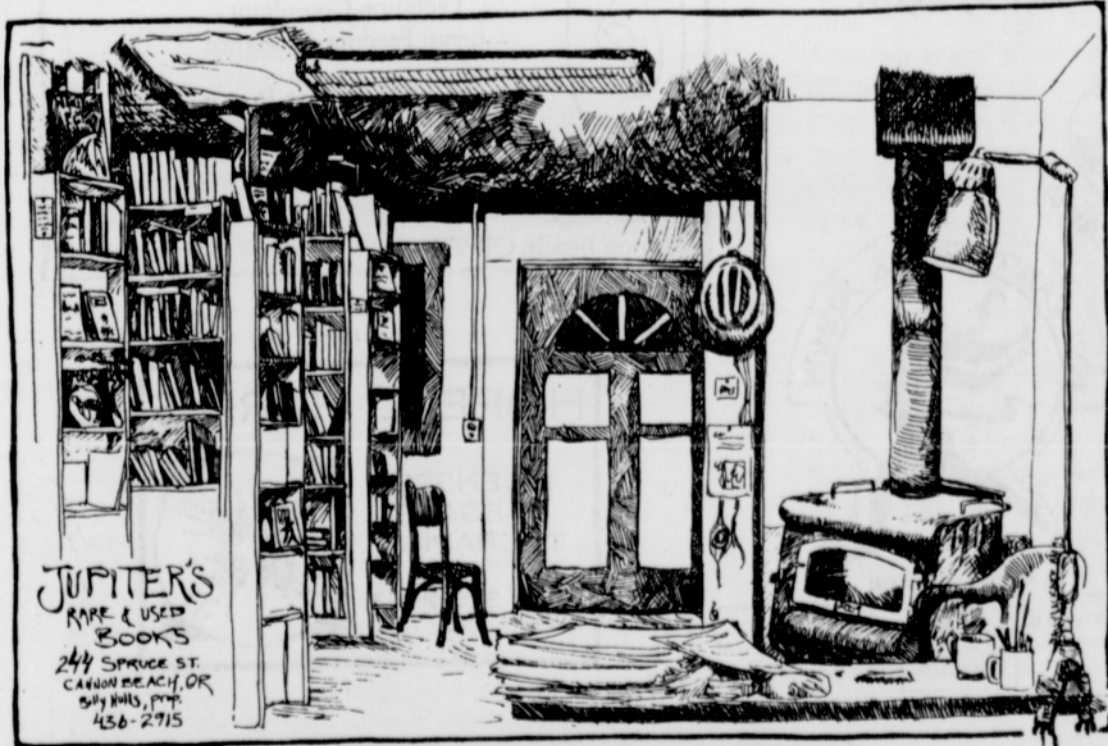
Shortly after this experience, I scanned a new science book directed toward school-aged kids titled 'Spotted Owl, Bird of the Ancient Forests'. On the cover, a picture of this hapless little bird. It looked so small, so vulnerable, so innocent. . . Another image, an engine sales and repair shop (chainsaw dealer, among other things) in a logging/mill town. On the shelf sits a somewhat dusty box labeled "Spotted Owl Stew Mix", supposed to be humorous in a mean bitter way, i.e. "We eat those bird for dinner!"

Will we ever find the balance, where the strong and powerful can appreciate characteristics which they themselves don't possess? It would take sacrifices on the part of the comfortable to protect the vulnerable. Seems to be virtually impossible to legislate compassion.

In the Gyuto Monks' program, it was explained that this single voiced chord is only possible to emit when the individual has attained spiritual enlightenment. It must be a thrill when the student monk finally gets it, when the sound happens after hours (years?) of intense practice. To know this signifies one is where one wants to be, a small way to measure the immeasurable. I find myself envious of this simplicity and wondering at the magnitude of what else we've already lost.

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Patriotism is as fierce as a fever, pitiless as the grave, blind as a stone, and irrational as a headless hen. Ambrose Bierce



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