

JUPITER BOUND: A Used Book Review
By David Robinson

Disputed Questions, by Thomas Merton (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, New York, 1960) 1960 price, \$3.95; First Edition used price in 1995, \$30.

You can keep your glossy-covered, best-selling, how-to paperbacks. The best of them are wild flowers. The worst are weeds. Most are out of print before the ink is dry. Of the thousands of books published each year, how many will still be read in fifty years?

I've begun to buy "classic" hard back books for my kids. I want them to have friends with strong spines. I look for books that have outlasted their first printing. I look for books with roots, writing that smells of old growth, something that's been through a war or two.

"Hey, I've got something you might find interesting; just got it in." I was speaking with the owner of a used book store on the Oregon Coast. Knowing I'm a Merton reader, he brought out a 1960 first edition copy of Merton's *Disputed Questions*. Good binding, dust jacket still on, in good condition, pages slightly aged, smelling of good earth and wisdom.

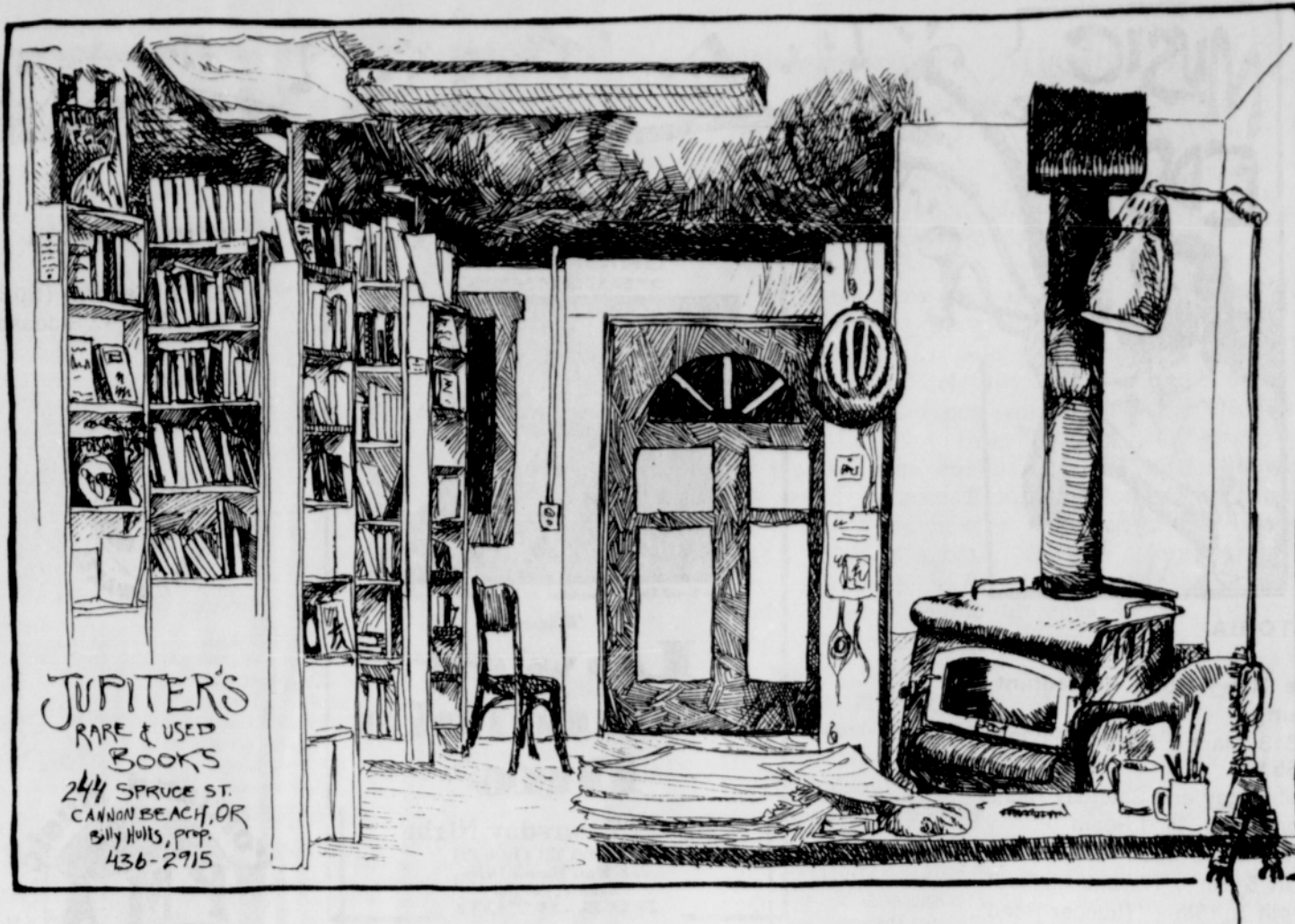
Like walking into a bibliophile's personal library, I opened to the table of contents of *Disputed Questions*. Standing before me were ancient trees, old growth wisdom, great roots of faith and spirituality. Matthew Fox once wrote, "All spirituality is about roots. All spirituality is about living a non-superficial and therefore a deep, rooted, or radical (from 'radix' = root) life."

Merton's collection of essays meander among ancient forest paths, seeking relationships between the spiritual and the social realms of our existence. He transports his reader to Mount Athos in northern Greece, the site of one of the oldest monastic communities in the world. We climb with St. John of the Ladder into the rare air of the spirituality of Mount Sinai. We run into St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Bernard, the 12th century monastic reformer.

Merton is at his best in his essays which wrestle with living a life of rooted faith in our modern violent world. Great trees have good roots, and endure the tempest. Boris Pasternak, author of *Dr. Zhivago*, is such a well rooted author and man of faith. Merton, having corresponded with Pasternak in 1958-59, devotes his longest essay to this fellow writer.

"Pasternak stands first of all for the great spiritual values that are under attack in our materialistic world. . . He stands for the freedom and nobility of the individual person, for man the image of God. . . He stands for courageous, independent loyalty to his own conscience, and for the refusal to compromise with slogans and rationalizations imposed by compulsion."

As the prophet Jeremiah once declared: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." In *Disputed Questions*, as in his several dozen other books, Thomas Merton stands at the crossroads of faith and modern society, and points to the ancient paths where we too may find rest for our souls.



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Ronnie Shakes

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