

Tzu: simplicity, patience, compassion.

The final (poetic) word is left for Robinson Jeffers, who speaks, like Prospero, of our years laboring under the sun, "Enormous repose after, enormous repose before, the flash of activity." He hears in the silence that surrounds our lives the "nothing" which is the source of all of our noise—as if this silence is the treasure we've been seeking with all of our words:

Stars burn, grass grows, men breathe: as a man finding treasure says "Ah!" but the treasure's the essence; Before the man spoke it was there, and after he has spoken he gathers it, inexhaustible treasure.

—Doug Thorpe

Doug Thorpe is the author of *A New Earth, a study of the religious language of The Pearl, Herbert's The Temple, and Blake's Jerusalem*, forthcoming from Catholic University of America Press.

The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination

Translated by William C. Chittick. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989. Pp. xxii + 478. \$74.95, cloth, \$24.95, paper.

IN THE STUDY of mysticism, one of the greatest needs is for reliable translations of authoritative works. Translations are valuable not only because they provide the basis for a thorough understanding of the subject by the reading public, but also because knowledge of a subject as complex as a mystical tradition is fully tested only by the task of rendering its conclusions into another language. The Islamic mystical tradition is remarkably extensive; only a fraction of the major literary works have made the transition from manuscript to printed book, and of these only a few

are available in good translations. We have all the more reason, then, to welcome William Chittick's extensive anthology of translations from the magnum opus of classical Sufism, the *Futuhat al-Makkiya* of the Andalusian master Muhyi al-Din Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240).

The present work is the latest in a series of scholarly translations that Chittick has made from Arabic and Persian sources. His previous translations include *The Sufi Path of Love*, a selection from the poems of Rumi arranged by subject (reviewed in PARABOLA IX:1) as well as *A Shi'ite Anthology*. His translation work is meticulous and systematic and its thoroughness reflects a long dedication to the subject.

The Meccan Openings, as Chittick translates the title, is an enormous encyclopedia of mystical thought and practice belonging to the mature period of Ibn al-'Arabi's life; the annotated edition of the text by Osman Yahia is expected to take up 17,000 pages. Having greater access to this definitive work will permit readers to correct the somewhat one-sided portrait of Ibn al-'Arabi that has resulted from the tendency to concentrate on his short work on prophecy, *Fusus al-Hikam* (translated by R.W.J. Austin as *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Paulist Press, 1981). By presenting a more direct and comprehensive picture of Ibn al-'Arabi's practical spiritual teachings and his emphasis on knowledge of Islamic religious sciences, Chittick hopes to counterbalance both the overly systematic and philosophical interpretation of Toshihiko Izutsu and the gnostic theophanism of Henry Corbin. Thus, as the subtitle indicates, this anthology stresses both the metaphysical aspect of Ibn al-'Arabi's thought and his presentation of the world of the "imaginal."

The book is arranged themat-

ically, beginning with a brief overview by Chittick, followed by six chapters on theology, ontology, epistemology, hermeneutics, soteriology, and consummation. Although the book is quite large (printed in double columns on a large page), admirers of Ibn al-'Arabi will doubtless be glad to learn that Chittick has prepared another ten chapters on cosmology, anthropology, and the cosmic role of the perfect man for a future publication. It is impossible to summarize here all the subjects treated in the volume, but the reader's attention should be drawn to the important sections on "Cosmic Imagination," "Understanding the Koran," and "Transcending the Gods of Belief."

Chittick's method of selection rests on his recognition of the interrelated character of Ibn al-'Arabi's writing. Sections both brief and long from different parts of *The Meccan Openings* are placed in context and introduced by extensive comments. The annotation is full enough to satisfy specialists, but its valuable comments on translated passages should not be overlooked by the general reader. The translation of Arabic technical terms is a difficult task, in which one must often choose between inadequate existing English terms and awkward and unfamiliar neologisms. While Chittick's choices of equivalents sometimes tend to the abstract and prolix, they will be carefully considered by scholars in the field.

Chittick introduces this book by saying, "Somewhere along the line, the Western intellectual tradition took a wrong turn." His hope is that the work of Ibn al-'Arabi can serve as a source for the renovation of the Western tradition, especially in terms of rediscovering the spiritual and cosmic dimensions of the imagination. Through the work of Corbin, psychologists such as James Hillman have discovered the power of Ibn al-'Arabi's

work; philosophers and theologians may now with much greater confidence approach his metaphysics.

Some readers new to the subject may find the Ibn al-'Arabi phenomenon mystifying at first, and they may even feel that the admiration directed at him is excessive, granted the difficulty and allusiveness of his thought. Formidable though it is, it should be emphasized that his work exerts a subtle fascination upon those who are able to study it, and Chittick has now made this material considerably more accessible. This anthology will remain a standard resource and reference both for the study of Sufism in particular and for mystical thought in general.

—Carl W. Ernst

Carl W. Ernst is the author of Words of Ecstasy in Sufism (SUNY Press, 1984). He is associate professor of religion at Pomona College in Claremont, California.

Mysteries of the Dream-Time: The Spiritual Life of Australian Aborigines

By James Cowan. Dorset, England: Prism Press, 1989; Lindfield, NSW: Unity Press, 1989. Pp. 128. \$10.95, paper.

BY SPENDING time with members of a people whose spiritual beliefs contrasted so profoundly with his own, James Cowan was led to a re-examination of the human condition in general as well as of the specific fate that has befallen the religious life of Australian indigenous communities. In this work, "The Dreaming"—the Australian original mythic time, a time when the Sky Heroes lived on the earth, and a time when they left on the earth visible signs of that eternal moment of creation—is presented in its manifold expressions. Cowan devotes chapters to the "Karadji," the bearers of tribal