

WAYMARKS

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For Martin

Biography

The New Statesman named James Thornton as one of 10 people who could change the world. Irish-American, James is also the author of *Client Earth* (Scribe 2018), co-authored with his husband Martin Goodman, which received the Judges' Selection, Business Book of the Year Award 2018, and the Green Prize for Sustainable Literature from Santa Monica Public Library. He has twice won Leader of the Year at the Business Green Awards. James is a Zen Buddhist priest, and founder and president of ClientEarth, the leading global not-for-profit law group. For his legal work, *The Financial Times* awarded him its Lifetime Achievement Award. He lives in London and Los Angeles.

'James Thornton speaks as both a poet who has colonised science and a scientist who speaks a poetic tongue.'

– E.O. Wilson

'James Thornton is a poet of deep wisdom and love!'

– Satish Kumar

Praise for James's previous two collections, *The Feynman Challenge* and *Notes from a Mountain Village*:

'Weaves quiet perception and poignant reflection on humans, animals, and landscape into a shimmering pattern of southern French light.'

– Olafur Eliasson

'A poignant and evocative paean to an ancient village high in the French Pyrenees, where the reinvigorating miracle of the natural world is tinged with reflections on mortality.'

– Homero Aridjis

'This is a generous book, happy to serve the curiosity, the wonder and humility of science, happening here and there in words that simply send a shudder - *Two black holes are about / to marry, a billion years ago* - through our sense of time and space.'

– Philip Gross

Other Books by James Thornton

Poetry

Notes from a Mountain Village

The Feynman Challenge

Novels

Immediate Harm

Sphinx: The Second Coming

Nonfiction

Client Earth

A Field Guide to the Soul

Introduction

People take selfies when they travel. I do too, but also make poems to capture an inside reflection of who this person was then.

These poems were written over lots of miles and years. You'll meet a number of characters. Sometimes it's clear from the description who they are, like the Belgian millionaire at dinner, the Chinese supreme court judge, or the beggar in the Beijing airport.

Sometimes they're named, and I'd like to briefly introduce these dramatis personae.

The first is *Martin* my husband, who is 'you' in a number of poems, and named in an ayahuasca poem from Amazonia.

Ram Dass was an American spiritual teacher. Earlier in life he was known as Dr Richard Alpert, when he taught psychology at Harvard. Together with Timothy Leary he launched the '60s psychedelic movement in America, then went on to study in India and became a spiritual teacher in his own right.

Poonja was one of the leading Indian sages of the 20th century. Regarded as a jivanmukta or liberated being, he taught Self-inquiry, a rigorous form of practice, in the tradition of Ramana Maharshi. Students from around the world came to visit him at a humble house in Lucknow.

Introduction

Maezumi Roshi was a seminal figure in bringing Zen from Japan to the West. Oxford University Press's scholarly *Zen Masters* studies him as one of the 10 significant figures in Zen history. He founded the Zen Center of Los Angeles, and began a lineage of Western Zen teachers. He was my own teacher for some ten years.

James Broughton was an American poet and filmmaker. He was a figure in the San Francisco Renaissance, which prefigured the Beats. He specialized in breaking boundaries, setting out the challenges of freedom to younger writers, and encouraging them on their way.

In this German Village

Thalheim, Germany

Winter in this German village:
I'm on a retreat
In the house of an Indian holy woman
who lives here.

I lie awake in the dark
listening alone to the owl
and the church bell's quarter hours.

Your letter was full of anger
and I worry you will leave me.
But my sadness is stronger:
feeling your pain, knowing I cannot remove it.

Sometimes

Dorndorf, Germany

Sometimes, when an old woman
in a soft carapace of fat
exuded over decades
by despair, looks up
with the eye of a girl
from her piece of cake

Sometimes, when a friend
who's dying of the virus
whose falling-out teeth
I'd find on the nightstand
who can't walk further
stops and says, "I've missed
until now, how each day
is full of wonder"

Sometimes, when we
through unfathomed grace
find the reverence
to enter the sanctuary
of another's subjectivity

We remember we are children
But we are always children
and must remember and remember
and remember until we
sleep in death and wake

Meteors

Thalheim, Germany

Late night walk between two towns
in the German countryside

investigating my relationship
with the material world

I look up at the sky
and ask for a shooting star

and there is a shooting star
I ask for another
and there is another

the game continues till five
have burned across the dark

I laugh
not because I believe I've commanded them
into being
but for the flow, the play