

# Reviews Books

## A symphony to the silence

**The Power of Silence:  
The riches that lie within**

Graham Turner  
Bloomsbury Continuum  
£16.99 (hardback)

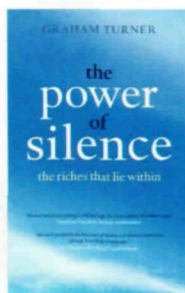
I must admit that I struggled with this book for the first few pages. It seemed like an awfully noisy thing to do, to write about silence, and the cover didn't help – festooned with quotes about silence. But then I hit “Playing with silence” – the chapter about music – and the book exploded. Graham Turner, a former correspondent on *The Scotsman*, *Telegraph* and *Sunday Times*, interviews musicians about their interplay with silence. The danger is not to “let the music breathe ... it's the spirit of the age” explains one. The music, another says, lies “between the notes ... ah, that is where the art resides!” Similarly, in the chapter about acting, the book says: “Playing the silences is as important as playing the words” and that's the essence of the “God-given” ability to “open an audience”.

We visit Trappist monks in Thomas Merton's monastery. They're not so hushed up as they used to be, and as for the monk who's wired to Twitter “because I write haikus every day” – I had to wonder if it wasn't time to confiscate his computer. There are many other amusing encounters: The old Quaker woman busily and bossily pressing Graham to buy *Peace News*; meditators taking off with “yogic flying” while quelling city crime rates.

As part of Graham's exploration of “interior locutions” we hear the wonderful Richard Rohr on silence as the opening to the Holy Spirit. There's a revealing chapter on psychotherapy and the debate around whether a patient should be helped, or only listened to. We meet mountaineers and former gunmen. There's a murderer in a Scottish jail whose sentence has been transformed by the Prison Ashram Project.

Finally, we go to Egypt and meet a latter day St Anthony, wrestling with the devil in a desert cell where “silence strips a man naked” before God. I thought at first this was a noisy book, but soon it turned to music. Here is gem-studded wonder, both spoken and unspoken – a richly human symphony. ●

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‘Noise soon turned to music’