



A Pelican in the Wilderness: Hermits, Solitaires, and Recluses

Isabel Colegate

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From Lao-tse and the Buddha, St. Anthony and the early Celtic hermits, through Rousseau, Thoreau, Ruskin, and up to the present day, certain gifted persons have shown a vocation for living alone and apart, finding in simplicity and attention to nature a spiritual space to be explored and rejoiced in. Others, retreating from the world in scorn or cut off from it by scandal, have found that solitude is Hell, a pit of melancholy and morbid fancy. In this, her first work of nonfiction, novelist Isabel Colegate gives us the lives of the solitaires — male and female, medieval and modern, divinely inspired and patently fraudulent. But this is no mere gallery of saints and sinners, poets and misanthropes. It is also a reevaluation of solitude for our times, and a reminder that it is in solitude that the soul meets itself, refreshes itself, and from there goes out to join the communal dance.

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