THOMAS MERTON AND HIS MESSAGE
TO THE POET

by

Joy Elvey Lamm

Approved by

Daniel F. Hurley
Chairman, Thesis Committee

Thomas A. McGowan
Professor of English

Vola Eula Irmscher
Professor of English

Loyd H. Hilton
Chairman, Department of English

Richard H. Rupp
Dean of the Graduate School

Department of English
Appalachian State University
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Joy Elvey Lamm
Boone, North Carolina

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Department of English
Appalachian State University

THESIS ABSTRACT

In "Thomas Merton and His Message To The Poet," I chose Merton (a contemporary Cistercian monk and writer) as my subject and his message to the poet as my particular topic because it seemed to me that Merton's life and writing were the embodiment of paradox. Today many people are struggling with the paradoxes of self and society in a bewildering and disordered world. If they are poets, they attempt to express these concrete paradoxes in abstract, yet living, symbols. But how does one resolve? And how does one symbolize the conflict?

It is to these two questions that Thomas Merton addressed both his writing and his life. As a contemplative, he was able to pierce deeply the mystery of paradox. As a poet, he faced the struggle of symbolizing that mystery. By examining many of his essays, letters, lectures, and accounts from friends, I attempted to piece together Merton's message about how he reconciled the paradoxes of his own life and how he perceived the creative response of other poets to a world of divisiveness, sterility, repression, and manipulation.

The essential statement that Merton made is that the primary vocation of both monk and poet is TO BE: to be whole, to be beyond the divisiveness and senseless rituals of society, to be human, to be in touch with the essence of things. It is to proclaim a world in which all people may participate in such being and in the recovery of innocence beyond paradox through grace and love. In this sense the poet is a revolutionary and a marginal person who withdraws to the margin of society in order to perceive, to communicate, and to find communion with God and with one's fellow man. In my study, I discovered that Thomas Merton's life was the embodiment of this message to all people.

Contents

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Spirituality" (cited elsewhere in this paper), was valuable in providing a basis for my study of Merton's thought.

I. Prelude

In a 1960 essay called "First and Last Thoughts," Thomas Merton revealed his own concept of himself as writer: "It is possible to doubt whether I have become a monk (a doubt I have to live with), but it is not possible to doubt that I am a writer. . . . Disconcerting, disedifying [sic] as it is, this seems to be my lot and my vocation. It is what God has given me in order that I might give it back to Him."[1] Beyond all the paradoxes of his life, Merton held to this belief that his task, in serving God and man, was to write. The ability to write had been his gift of grace from God. Nevertheless, it took Merton a lifetime of struggling to accept the paradoxes of being both a writer and a man of religion, of being both a part of, and apart from, the life of the world.

In 1968, at the age of 54, Merton appeared to have touched the deepest center of peace within himself. Such peace revealed a synthesis and a cohesiveness of life which he experienced most vividly while he journeyed that year on a pilgrimage through Asia. However, what seemed to foretell the culminating period of inner reconciliation for him ended all too abruptly in his death. Accidental, untimely, that death became the final paradox about Merton. What wisdom he might have shared had he returned from that

journeying will remain for speculation. But in returning to Merton's writing and life, one may discover the legacy of Merton's message which calls out to all people seeking to understand and transcend the paradoxes of their lives.

II. The Paradox of Callings

Thomas Merton lived the life of a monk in the Abbey of Gethesemani for twenty-seven years. During that time he wrote and published more than sixty books, forty pamphlets, and 400 essays on theology, social and literary criticism, philosophical and religious meditations, and religious and social poetry.[2] Having become known for his writing before he entered monastic life, he continued to be a prolific and profound writer whose works influenced and "touched" Catholics and non-Catholics, scholars and non-scholars alike.

Whether Merton was a poet of significance will continue to be debated among scholars; but it is possible to observe that the range of Merton's abilities and interests (from his complex intellectual studies to his free-wheeling poetry) has produced conflicting critical focuses in Merton scholarship. Theologians tend to view Merton's writing as revelation of divine faith; they see Merton as the monk who wanted to be a saint and thus led a life of self-denial and study in pursuit of God's will.[3] Literary critics observe Merton as writer, as poet. Usually, if such critics are Catholic, they see Merton's poetic expression as the Incarnational imaging of the universe and find that it strikes at the most resonant chords of their own religious

experience.[4] If the critics are not Catholic, they are usually less kind to Merton, for they often see a man so out of touch with the world and its symbols that he could not integrate those symbols into a meaningful poetic statement.[5] Finally, social critics present Merton as the "involved," "modern" monk who participated in the problems and issues of the world. For them Merton was a lively reformer in contact with the great social figures of his day.[6]

As an analysis, this paper will touch on all these aspects of Thomas Merton as they bear on his relationship with, and message to, other poets. It is important to recognize that Merton himself never fully reconciled the complexities of his life or the conflicting roles of the religious man and the poet/writer. But it was of continuing concern to him that he could not effectively be both, and yet could renounce neither. Although Merton wrote in 1958 that "poetic intuition may ruin our rest in God beyond all images," and that "hidden and more spiritual gifts are infinitely greater than . . . art," he could never quite reconcile this paradox of callings during his life at Gethsemani.[7]

Initially, Merton sought to make his poetry "serve" his religion and thus to justify the poetic calling. In such articles as "Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal," 1958, and "Reality, Art, and Prayer," 1955, he carefully developed a theory of poetics which would bring about such

a justification. For instance, he writes, "The Christian poet should be . . . a voice of the Church and of the Holy Spirit, [who] sings again the magnalia Dei, praising God and pointing out the wonder of his ways."[8] Earlier, he had said, "The mind that responds to the intellectual and spiritual values that lie hidden in a poem . . . discovers a spiritual vitality that lifts it above itself . . . and makes it present to itself on a level of being that it did not know it could ever achieve."[9] Thus Merton, in his early formative years, saw poetry as a means to spirituality, a mediating potential between God and man.

In his maturity, Merton apparently realized that a poem can make a statement which is its own reason for being and which does not have to be justified as a means of achieving spirituality.[10] In a 1960's letter to his lifelong friend Bob Lax, Merton wrote: "Every man got one poem, and when he stumbles on it he got to make it smaller and smaller and blacker and blacker and then it will finally convince."[11] Merton here is speaking of the freedom of the poet to let the reason for the poem exist within the poem itself. Merton came to believe that a great poem is a reality which embodies an encounter with life and which "stands in its own right."[12]

This tension between the artist and the monk in Merton's poetic statements was also evident in his life, so that there was never any permanent reconciliation between

Merton, the writer, and Merton, the man of religion. In the last years of his life, however, Merton did express an acceptance which transcended these paradoxes:

> I have had to accept the fact that my life is almost totally paradoxical. I have had to learn gradually to get along without apologizing for the fact, even to myself. . . . I have become convinced that the very contradictions in my life are in some ways signs of God's mercy to me; if only because someone so complicated and so prone to confusion and self-defeat could hardly survive for long without special mercy. . . .
>
> Consequently I think I can accept the situation with simplicity. Paradoxically, I have found peace because I have always been dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction which sometimes used to worry me and has certainly, I know, worried others has helped me to move freely and even gaily with the stream of life.[13]

Thus Merton was a complex, alive human being who defied the simple classification and labels that various critics have attempted to put on him. As Father Matthew Kelty (a Trappist monk and formerly a novice under Merton's guidance) wrote of him: "There was a kind of truth about him that got under your skin, into your heart. He belonged to nobody, free as a bird. He could not be categorized, labelled, pigeon-holed. And he had a vision. . . ."[14]

Merton's vision was the vision he sought to share with the poets whom he considered priestly because they embodied the sanctity of existence through their writing, and because they lived (both physically and spiritually) in the world of the contemplative. His vision captures the wholeness of life which exists beyond its divisiveness, its paradoxes.

It becomes translated, in words and action, into an insistence on wholeness in one's creative response to the sacredness of life, in giving that life joy and care, in bringing forth love.[15]

Such a vision became clear, however, only after Merton had experienced years of intense internal struggle. For many readers and associates of Merton's early years the question of who and what Thomas Merton was going to be continued to be asked. Everyone who has heard of Merton seems to know of a rather worldly, flamboyant young man, a promising writer and intellectual, who at the age of 27 renounced the problems, politics, and possibilities of the world for a life of asceticism as a monk of the Cistercian Order of Strict Observance.[16] For those first ten years of monastic life, Merton endured the hardships of bitter cold, strict fasts, uninterrupted silence, long hours of communal prayer, prolonged illness, and deep theological studies. Nevertheless, he continued to write and to maintain some contacts with the literary world beyond the confines of the monastery. The ascetic life and the secular contacts seemed only to intensify the profound struggle Merton felt as he sought to reconcile his creative spirit with his priestly calling in the light of God's will.[17]

Direct evidence of such a struggle is revealed in correspondence between Merton and Mark Van Doren, who had been his professor and literary mentor at Columbia University.

In 1956, Van Doren visited Merton at Gethsemani and shortly thereafter wrote to him. He enclosed a poem (later published as "Prophet"[18]) and wrote that it was Merton himself who was captured in the poem--his suffering, his "wrestling with solitude":

> And the only difference in his smile was
> It sorrowed more . . .
> His merriment was graven.
> As if he knew now where it started from,
> And what the flavor.

Evidently responding to Merton's anguish, Van Doren added, "And I doubt that you are washed literally of everything. You couldn't be . . . . For instance, of your created person, which is why I sent the poem--to show that someone saw that person."[19]

It is interesting to note that Merton himself, in his preface to A Thomas Merton Reader, saw that period after the 1956 letter as his most significant period of writing and creativity. He had recently turned forty years old. Until his death in 1968, he was to become increasingly open and responsive to the world of art and literature; the crucial social issues of the time, such as social alienation, the civil rights movement, ecological destruction, and nuclear armament; and the integration of other religious and philosophical systems, especially those of the East, into his own contemplation and creativity. His voluminous correspondence with leaders in all these movements, and the increasing number of visitors to the Abbey, are clear

evidence of his developing interest and participation in a complex world.

One indication of this increased involvement comes in Walter Sutton's definition of Merton as a "culture poet." Sutton concludes, in examining Merton's last two volumes of poetry, that Merton makes a radical departure from his early sensibilities when he uses absurd and fragmented language (and an "antipoetic mixture of sense and apparent nonsense") to portray "the accelerating breakdown of modern civilization."[20] Sutton was correct in observing that these last two volumes of poetry (Cables to the Ace[21] and The Geography of Lograire[22]) radically changed the focus of Merton's statements. Heretofore, his meditative verse had sought to direct man to God; now Merton seemed to be showing man to himself, leaving the "realm of the spirit . . . two doors down the hall" with the admonition that "there you can obtain more soul than you are ready to cope with, Buster."[23] In the two books, Merton attempts a reintegration of universal, historical symbols with the contemporary experiences of ordinary people, explaining, "In this wide-angle mosaic of poems and dreams I have without scruple mixed what is my own experience with what is almost everybody else's."[24] Such reintegration of universal symbols and the internalization of their images was made possible as Merton's life was first tentatively, then tenuously, integrated with that of the larger world.

From this perspective, it is possible to observe that the major failing in Merton's earlier poems came from precisely this lack of an ability to internalize the images and symbols of the world from which he had retreated. There was a lack of an integrative cultural basis for his expression beyond the theological, or at least a lack of a solid and pervasive enough base to give his poetry depth and continuity. Merton himself realized this failing and commented on its source: "Monks do not seem to be able to write so well--and it is as if our professional spirituality sometimes veiled our contact with the naked realities inside us."[25]

He goes on to lament this loss of meaning for which such contacts are vital: "It is depressing that those who love God and serve him sometimes write so badly. . . . I am not talking about grammar and syntax, but about having something to say and saying it in sentences that are not half dead."[26] Elsewhere, Merton makes a nearly brutal statement about the failing of his poetry: "I now know that my own poems about the world's suffering have been inadequate: they have not solved anything, they have only camouflaged the problem because, after all, I do not really understand."[27] By accepting his particular limitations, Merton was ultimately able to become aware of and sensitive to those who were most directly in contact with the realities of a suffering world.

Merton's insights into the nature of the poet and the poet's task were ultimately derived in large measure, therefore, from his compassionate and appreciative communication with those who had made the vocation of poet their primary calling. Although he did not see the vocations, or callings, of the poet and the monk as mutually exclusive, Merton did believe that his calling to be a poet was a secondary, and necessarily limited, expression of a life directed toward unitive worship. It was an "absurd life," he admitted, but also a life in which freedom and joy in union with Christ became possible for him.[28]

As he gradually expanded his identity to include a more universal, concrete religious expression, Merton was able to liberate himself from some of the strictures of the prescribed liturgical, monastic life. He was able to accept the discoveries he made about the underlying unity of various modes of life and various religious and philosophical modes of thought. At the end of his life, while leading the life of a hermit within the monastic community, the vision of a wholeness which transcended artificial boundaries became incorporated into his work and his world. In a posthumous evaluation of Thomas Merton as poet, Ralph Sturm writes:

> In his very latest poetry Merton seems to have begun to come close to the center of himself after his long years of search. He no longer speaks of contemplation but rather of dreams. His dreaming seems much more

> genuinely contemplative because he is no longer worried about God, Catholicism, monasticism. He is no longer posing as their defender. The reader can easily sense a new and highly personal ideological freedom. The poet seems to have achieved a really liberated contemplation.[29]

The final proof of Merton's liberation came in his journey to Asia from which he never returned. On December 10, 1968, at the age of 54, he was accidentally electrocuted by a fan in his room in Bangkok where he was attending a meeting of religious leaders. The Asian journey became the intellectual and spiritual culmination of his life as he experienced a world teeming with rich symbols of culture, religion, and life. As he was taking off in the airplane which was to carry him to Asia, Merton wrote: "I am going home, to the home where I have never been in this body, where I have never been in this washable suit . . . where I have never been with these suitcases . . . ."[30] And he prayed, "May I not come back without having settled the great affair and found also the great compassion, mahakaruna."[31]

Merton's Asian Journal is the record of his intense interest in and excitement about these myriad living symbols which took him beyond the ironic despair (of Cables and Geography, for instance) to the integration and final simplicity of "beingness." It was the beingness, the now-ness, he had known and believed in at Gethesemani and which he had come finally to experience in the world. This transition is nowhere clearer than in the poetry which was

woven into the journal as it welled up in him. For instance, in the "Talelo" poem of the Journal, Merton writes:

> Weep not. Talelo.
> Love has lotus feet
> Like the new blossoms
> Bells are on her ankles.
> Talelo.
> You who came to drink on earth
> Poisoned milk
> Weep no more . . .
>
> Kiss kiss one sandy sparrow
> And coins tinkle on the wrist
> Bells on the ankles of girls at the churns.
> Talelo . . . .[32]

The "Talelo" poem speaks for itself. It is alive and captures the symbols of the world as it also speaks of the "carp . . . leaping in the red-rice" and the "slow cows . . . heavy with milk" and "the girls [who] go to wash in the river." Merton is simply there in that moment. The experience exists concretely and in the present.

The longest poem of the Asian Journal is "Kandy Express," an eternal picture, a scene beyond time which was Merton's as he rode a train through the Ceylon countryside:

> Train speeds gladly amid paddy and
> coconut--saying "Mahinda, Mahindi, Mahinda!"
>
> Buffaloes swimming, great muzzles
> yawning up out of the green brown water.
>
> Great train monster--Buddhabuddha!
> Sawing everything down to tea's smallest leaf.
>
> High blue mountains begin to show
> their heads in distance.

Magelagoda. Buddha shrine on station platform.

"The people, pleased with one another and happy dancing
their children in their hands, dwelt with open doors!"

A white crane standing in sunny water
briefly shakes herself.
Another flies low over green paddy and alights . . . .

Girl is beautifully cool and wet.
Boy flings clods of earth at tethered cow.
Woman scrubs another woman's back.
Bathers and launderers everywhere. . . .

That which grew slowly toward me Friday
Flies rapidly away from me Tuesday.
I have seen that buffalo before.
I have seen that boy before.

No man twice crosses the same river.

I have seen that felled coconut trunk before . . . .

(Asian Journal, p. 222-228)

Merton was never able to "cross the same river" back to his home of Gethsemani. His death was in many ways the fulfillment of his life; but it was also the great paradox of his life--a life that had been filled with the complex experiences of being both monk and poet, being essentially an ascetic while exuberantly loving the life of the world, and being a man separated from mankind and yet devoted to it. All these things defy any attempts to categorize Merton or fix him with a neat phrase. His friend James Forest put it this way when he spoke at Merton's death:

> Now Merton is dead.
> His face was like Picasso's.
> In the winter he wore a Navy-type stocking cap.

In his hermitage there is probably still some of the candy and beer he used to keep for visitors, and his ancient patchwork quilt is probably still on his bed and his 1957 Sengai calendar from Japan surely still hangs on the wall.

In his files somewhere are letters from Thich Nhat Hanh, Martin Luther King, A.J. Muste, Dorothy Day, Flannery O'Connor, James Baldwin, John Howard Griffin, D.T. Suzuki, Henry Miller, W.H. Ferry, Hasidic rabbis, poets, musicians, conscientious objectors, resistors [sic], mystics.

His friend the black snake is probably still in the outhouse. . . .[33]

III. The Quest for "Connections"

The struggles and conflicts Merton was involved in as a writer and monk were not limited by the boundaries of his own experience, however much their origins lay there. He saw his own quest as lonely and unique, but paradoxically he felt its indissoluble ties to the quests of other writers who were also attempting to create alternatives to a dehumanizing, destructive, super-technological world. An understanding of Merton's concern about the poet's "calling" in that world (and apart from it) is available at least partially from an analysis of his correspondence and relationships with other writers and his attempts to put other poets in touch with each other. Merton's view of the poet's vocation is presented in the many statements he made about the life he and others had chosen.[34]

Whether encouraging and admonishing young poets, helping to develop a solidarity among diverse poets, or writing on the role of the poet, Merton always sought to find meaningful "connections." For him there were such connections in all the diverse elements of living and the diverse modes of life. He sought to express the connections between his life and others, one artist's work and another's, the poet's mode of life and the priest's mode of life--all in order to discover the fresh and vital associations of each.[35]

For instance, Merton was able to establish what was for him a very deep association with a poet whose historical, political, and cultural backgrounds were in many ways the antithesis of his own: through his correspondence with the Russian poet, novelist, and intellectual, Boris Pasternak, a strong spiritual kinship developed which impressed Merton deeply. Merton initiated the exchange of letters because, as he wrote to Pasternak,

> It is as if we met on a deeper level of life in which individuals are not separate beings. In the language familiar to me as a Catholic monk it is as if we were known to one another in God. . . . It is true that a person always remains a person and utterly separate and apart from every other person. But it is equally true that each person is destined to reach with others an understanding and a unity which transcend individuality.[36]

Merton's kinship with other poets is also exemplified by the unity he felt with Latin American poets such as Ernesto Cardenal (who had been a novice at Gethsemani under Merton's tutelage), Pablo Antonio Cuadra, Cesar Vallejo, Alfonso Cortes, Jorge Carrera Andrade, Nicanor Parra, Octavio Paz, and Gabriela Mistral. He believed these and other Latin American poets to be most "alive, to have something honest to say, to be sincerely concerned with life and with humanity." He respected and felt a kinship with their mature response to bitterness and to hope beyond the "sterile impasse of the academic poets of the U.S. where they do nothing except play esoteric language tricks."[37]

And he felt that he could share their deeper response of feeling.

Merton, along with his Latin American counterparts, stressed the need for political and individual autonomy in the quest for authentic relationships between people, ideas, and words. The examination of these relationships occurs time and again in the many book reviews he wrote on poetry throughout the world. In the reviews, Merton chose to define the poet's individuality as expressed through his art and his response to life. For instance, Merton singled out the contribution of a favorite poet, Louis Zukofsky, as one of renewed innocence in Zukofsky's response to the immediacy of experience and in his original use of language to capture that immediacy:

> Not only does [Zukofsky] have an inexhaustible, childlike curiousity about words . . . not only does he with marvelous tenderness place them in situations in which they quietly explode with new colors: he is also deeply attuned to the other music that is beyond words, the music of ideas . . . of the expectations that the word begins to open up for the first time.[38]

Merton went beyond an interest in a poet's work, or even the poet as poet, to become interested in the poet as person. And so he developed personal relationships with many of the poets he wrote about (like Zukofsky) through his correspondence with them, searching for connections in their thoughts and lives. His files contain letters to and from scores of writers, from William Carlos Williams and Raissa Maritain to Henry Miller and Sr. Therese Lentfoehr--

all unique individuals, but all sharing a common understanding of the writer in the world.

Throughout his monastic life, Merton was willing to communicate with, to advise, and to learn from other writers. He did so in his own quiet, careful, generous, scholarly, and very human way. Mark Van Doren once wrote, "[I] stopped very often to say to myself, 'How completely Tom remains himself, even when he is expounding the doctrine of others.' I don't mean that a self is intruded or even seems conscious of itself: but there it is, authenticating every lesson." Van Doren saw that as Merton became involved in writing about or assisting others, he gave proof of his own existence so that, as he told Merton, ". . . other things and persons can exist through you."[39]

In concrete ways, Merton did make possible the existence of the works of other poets and of journals for the publication of poets' works. He himself contributed to innumerable small, often "underground" magazines, and he was especially sympathetic with those which, in getting started, most needed the assistance of an established writer. He was also interested in helping other writers get into print, though he continued to caution that a poet's primary task was to be free of the pressure to publish. His most active endeavor in this latter regard was his publication, from the monastery, of four issues of a quarterly called MonksPond [sic] in which he solicited manuscripts

from a diverse group of writers. Issues were published in spring, summer, winter, and fall of 1968. It was a short-lived venture, primarily because of its inordinate demands on his time and energy, but through it Merton became directly involved with the literary world.

As Merton's interest in promising writers became more focused, he kept in touch with those seeking outlets for their work. He encouraged them; but he stressed that the poet must be free to create poems out of the depths of his experience, rather than out of the need of any commercial market. As he told Ron Seitz once, "Just write. Do it. Be free. Maybe someday someone will come along and take it away from you."[40] He knew that it was difficult to avoid the temptations, the traps of commercialism; but Merton continued to remind poets of their task. Seitz recalls that "Tom wasn't in any contest to prove himself. He helped me away from the idea that I have to justify my existence by what I produce. . . . But it's very difficult not to want to be top gun or get in Time. It's part of our American consciousness."[41]

Merton also stressed a deeper consciousness in which the poet's integrity and the sharing of his art with others who would appreciate it were valued more than commercial success. In a circular letter to poet-friends, he wrote:

> To the many who have written to me about their poetry, how to get it published and so on. As if I knew! Some of the best poets in the country have great difficulty getting their poems published commercially in book form. Most of their stuff appears in little magazines and a lot of it is circulated in mimeograph or other cheap processes. . . . The idea that anything good has to appear between hard covers is a pure myth and you should stop being obsessed by it. Do you want to be read or do you want to have the imagined "status" of a book publication that may or may not mean being read? . . . You yourself have to find out who is likely to be interested in your poems. I can't tell you. It is a question of your own relationships, part of your own life.[42]

Merton was constantly concerned about poets who destroyed the integrity of their work through vanity. He questioned the value of what he himself wrote, realizing even then that his irritation with its flaws was a sign of his own vanity. In a letter to some Smith College students (for whom he had written a poem), Merton spoke of the intrinsic worth of poetry, centering on the concept of "connections":

> The great thing in life is to share the best one has, no matter how poor it may be. The sharing gives it value. . . . What you read and liked of mine I shall like better now because you all enjoyed them: I will like them because of all of you. I will like them because they are more yours than mine.[43]

Merton emphasized time and again this need for the "sharing" of poetry and the common experiences of those committed to expression through art. He saw this as the primary means of solidifying a transpolitical commitment to basic and enduring human values. In 1964, at a Mexico City gathering of poets from 15 American republics, Merton delivered a message by proxy which reinforced his perspective and expressed the philosophical bond of the poet-participants:

> We who are poets know that the reason for a poem is not discovered until the poem itself exists. The reason for a living act is realized only in the act itself. This meeting is a spontaneous explosion of hopes . . . a living expression of the belief that there are now in the world new people, new poets who are not under the tutelage to [sic] established political systems or cultural structures--whether communist or capitalist--but who dare to hope in their own vision of reality and of the future. This meeting is united in a flame of hope [which] . . . is a new fire. The reason for the fire cannot be apparent to one who is not warmed by it. The reason for being here will not be found until all have walked together, without afterthought, into contradictions and possibilities.[44]

IV. The Poet as Prophet of Wholeness

> Who is to say what poets and artists as a species are thinking and doing? The world is full of poets. . . . [They] blossom on all the bushes. Who can generalize about them except perhaps to say that they all tend to start out looking for something that can't be found merely by selling insurance or automobiles.
>
> --Merton, Raids on the Unspeakable (p. 169)

No matter how they all "start out," what often happens to the poet in this age of mass psychosis, Merton said, is that he is "driven crazy in his search for the vital symbols that have been buried alive under a mountain of cultural garbage," and he often ends up destroying himself.[45] Since he tends to have an acutely sensitive awareness of the disastrous situation of the world, he is most prone to despair. The true poet, however, continues to seek symbols from the depths of existence. Often what he finds is "starvation, madness, frustration and death."[46] And yet, beyond the acceptance of even these stark symbols of a decaying society, Merton believes there is an essential wholeness which defies life's divisiveness and deadness. If this potential for imaging wholeness is perceived by the poet, his poetry will reflect such perception.

For Merton, then, the true poet becomes a kind of prophet of wholeness, integrating its elements of joy and anguish into a celebration of life, an affirmation of what

Kilcourse calls the "essential Optimism" and "the essential Incarnational density of the world."[47] Ron Seitz recalls Merton's own explanation of the poet's means of affirming and celebrating life's wholeness through poetry:

> Tom once said, 'Poems do not make sense except as part of the whole creation that exists precisely for love, for free, for nothing, unnecessary. In the whole that is unnecessary, every small thing becomes necessary. For when the All is gratuitous, every single thing is seen to be wanted, to be important, to have its own unique part in the big gift of all things to each other.' So the poet loves life, and loves it to live itself in us--which it will if we let it.[48]

To Merton this affirmation of wholeness, of gift, of what was to him God-likeness, is a mystical process in which the poet joins his own creative intellect with the wisdom which is the "word of God and Human Nature--Divinity and Sophia."[49] In an often quoted passage, he reveals the mystical nature of such union:

> There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. . . . This is at once my own being, my own nature, and the Gift of my Creator's Thought and Art within me, speaking as Hagia Sophia, speaking as my sister, Wisdom.[50]

In these mystical terms, the poet becomes a sort of priest in revealing the marriage of man's nature and the Creator's wisdom to bring forth wholeness. Indeed, because of the Incarnation, when the poet reveals the truth of man, he also reveals some of the truth about God. In one of his lectures to novices, Merton explained this idea and went on to say that if you talk about man in the wholeness of his life

experiences, you will pierce some of man's mystery (which is also the mystery of God because God became Man in Christ). Merton saw the true poet as having the ability to pierce this mystery and reveal it.[51] Such an ability to reveal and concretize the "mystery" through the images of poetry defines the poet in Merton's terms.

But a great poet has to be more than a "seer," a contemplative who has visions of this "mystery." He must also be a "creator" or "maker" in order to embody the vision with skill in the medium of language.[52] Merton warns, however, that this power to use language must not fall back on "magic" in attempts at "absurd and servile manipulations of reality."[53] The "magic" Merton refers to is the magic used by the businessman, the politician, or the propagandist who believes he has ultimate power to recreate and represent reality in his own terms (or "image") through this manipulation of language. For such a person, manipulation of language is a tool for the usurpation of power. But Merton declares that the true poet does not participate in such wizardry:

> For the poet there is precisely no magic. There is only life in all its unpredictability and all its freedom. All magic is a ruthless venture in manipulation, a vicious circle, a self-fulfilling prophecy.[54]

Merton warns of the strong temptation of the poet to give in to "wizardry"; indeed, he sees it as endemic in much of modern art. For him it is a degradation of the

potential of that art, so that it becomes nothing more than a cult in which the poet is the "high priest" and his work has demonic qualities. Merton defines such a poet as a "professional mystic-in-reverse"[55] who feels he has to be offensive, to be insulting, in order for the customer to "buy him." And if the poet takes on this role, he will assume for the customer "the task of not conforming with 'ordinary decent people.'"[56] Such a poet sells himself to a materialistic society in a sort of pseudo-rebellion against nothingness. It is a pseudo-rebellion for the poet himself because he is only participating in the society and culture he despises; and a pseudo-rebellion for the society since it does nothing but observe the non-conformity and allow itself to be passively appeased by it.

For Merton, the poet's participation in cultural gimmickry is a negation of his true prophetic and sacramentalizing functions. The poet can never fulfill such functions by "selling himself to the customer" since this fulfillment requires that the poet discard the trappings of the materialistic society in a deeper search to recover some vision of truth, some authentic meaning. In his "Message to Poets," Merton declares: "If we are to remain united . . . against all power that poisons man, and subjects him to the mystifications of bureaucracy, commerce and the police

state, we must refuse the price tag. . . . We must reject seductions of publicity."[57]

In the same statement, Merton places the poet in the context of the Heraklitean world where there is no obsession with superficial separateness. It is also the world where "all things change," where "you cannot step twice into the same stream; for fresh waters are ever flowing upon you."[58] The poet, in his manifestation of truth, establishes himself in this "world" which is beyond petty divisiveness and in which every moment is new. The poetry that emerges from such contact will capture truth as it reveals itself, as if for the first time, in the poet's contact with that everflowing river. In order to make that contact, Merton warns, the poet must realize that "[n]o one can enter the river wearing the garments of public and collective ideas. He must feel the water on his skin . . . ."[59] When such contact is made, the poet joins the cosmic dance of life. It is a purification, an immersion, a baptism; and so Merton calls to the poets, "Come dervishes: here is the water of life. Dance in it."[60]

This metaphor of coming to the river (or the ever-changing stream) where one must come naked brings the poet into contact with the destiny of becoming himself. It is a symbol of purification which Merton adopted from Herakleitos to represent what he himself had experienced in his own monastic life. He saw this rite of purification as one

point of commonality between the priest and the poet in their seeking of a higher mystical or spiritual destiny.

Merton uses another symbol, the symbol of fire, to define the process of purification in which the seeker is "burned" by the "harmony-in-conflict" that takes place within him.[61] An essential wholeness is reached, Merton believed, only through an acceptance of conflict. Such conflict bears pain and sacrifice in its purifying "fire"; it is the sign of being alive and striving for spiritual growth. For Merton, it is the only way to be integrated into an "evolving present, a world that is real and fully engaged in organic development."[62] It is man's way to himself as he leaves behind the banal, the death-bearing conformity, and the past which cannot be recovered. Merton reminds the poet that the pain of such growth is inevitable:

> Not to be without words in a season of effort. Not to be without a vow in the summer of harvest. What have the signs promised on the lonely hill? Word and work have their measure, and so does pain. Look in your own life and see if you find it.[63]

Merton's salvation, and the salvation he saw for others in living beyond the paradox of harmony-in-conflict which creates such pain, was the salvation of divine grace. For Merton such grace was the sign of absolute unity, a cosmic unity reaching beyond all the elements of discord in the individual's growth. Merton fully recognized the need for such grace in overcoming the paradoxes of life:

> Without the grace of God there could be no unity, no simplicity in our lives: only contradiction. We can produce an illusory coherence, we can impose on life our intellectual systems and we can enforce upon our minds a certain strained and artificial peace. But this is not peace . . . .[64]

In recognizing the salvation of God's grace, not only does one attune oneself to such peace, but he also becomes aware of the liberty to be himself that accepting the divine will implies. The "seeds" of this will then become the seeds of individual identity, reality, happiness, and sanctity. Thus, all people, but especially those who are artists and poets, are called to choose truth as a means of active participation in creative freedom.[65] It is a truth which is personal, which goes beyond societal myths and doctrines concerning "freedom" and "art."[66]

The artist, Merton writes, has his own job to do, and that job will not be a show. Everything about his life will not become a bizarre spectacle for the public, since such a life is none of the public's business. Everything that the poet writes, moreover, will not be absolutely original--only, perhaps, an attempt to recover the old in a new mode. The true poet will learn, as Merton learned in the rigors of monastic life, to let go of the idea of self, to take himself "with more than one grain of salt."[67] In his "Message to Poets," in fact, Merton stresses the need for a freedom and integrity within the poet which will allow him to go beyond the preoccupation and preservation of a limited view

of himself and his "role in society." He implores the poets not to allow themselves to be pitted against one another in political, literary, or cultural terms; not to allow themselves to be dismembered by the press; not to allow themselves to become the scapegoats of a doubting society; and, most important, not to become categorized in society's terms. In remaining outside such categories, the poet is a "monk" and the most ordinary of persons. His poetry is "the flowering of ordinary possibilities . . . the fruit of ordinary and natural choice."[68] He is not cunning, and thus he retains an "ingrained innocence," a hope on which his art depends.[69]

The poet's vocation, then, rests on his ability to be in the most elemental context of that verb: to be whole, to be at peace, to be beyond the divisiveness of society, to be beyond the demands and the senseless rituals of that society, to be free in God's will and through His grace. It is to be in touch with the essences of things, to be human, to love that humanness, and to love all mankind as it participates in the "dance" of being. The poet's vocation calls him to the role of prophet in proclaiming a world where all people may partake in such new being and in the recovery of innocence toward which all these qualities point.

V: The Poet's Life in the "Marginal" World: The Recovery of Unity

Thomas Merton envisioned the poet as "called" to a particular kind of life: to a life set apart (an almost contemplative life as the poet seeks to return to that which is quintessential), yet paradoxically called to a life of "connections" with all humanity. Sister Marion Cotty reveals some of the essence of this life set apart, this contemplative mode, when she writes (quoting from Merton himself): "There are times when he [the contemplative] must leave things 'lovely among the lemon trees' and 'turn toward the stone mountain to the treeless places' because he has received a Word whose joy presses him forward and whose thought may not be spoken in a moment."[70] In this sense, the contemplative life is expressed as a mode of solitary activity rather than passivity, an expressed movement (however interior) to a higher plane of existence.

The poet's calling takes him into a special realm of existence, a living out of what Merton called the "country of loneliness and of a kind of hunger, of silence, of perplexity, of waiting, of strange hopes: where men expect the impossible to be born. . . ."[71] It is the "country" where the poet lives with the realization of the desolation of man, of his self-imprisonment, and yet where he remains

with the hope, and the expression of such hope, that a new world will rise up; and in his hope and his prophesying, the poet prepares the hearer for the "new World" of meaning and joy.[72] It is the "country" where the poet "enters into a purifying struggle against conceptual knowledge in which he 'sweats out' his attachment to images, ideas and symbols"[73] in order to apprehend reality in its immediacy, in its "isness" much as Zen practitioners do.[74]

The bond created among those who inhabit this "silent country" becomes the bond between the monk-writer Thomas Merton and the many poets who have also chosen to "live" there. It becomes an especially strong bond between Merton and other Catholic poets whom he felt might most fully realize the sacramental nature of such a life. Merton believed that what was needed was more "contemplative" poets who were not monks, but who would integrate their religion, work, thought, and patterns of living into a "vital, harmonious unity."[75] He felt that such patterns of living were essential in this time which he called "the time of the end," the time of the void, the time when man "finds no room for himself in himself," the time when man cannot believe that he has depths of creativity beyond the void.[76]

Indeed, Merton was addressing himself to this "time of the end" in his 1964 "Message to Poets" delivered to those who were gathered together around their common bond of loneliness and secret hopes.[77] He saw these poets as the

"ministers of silence . . . needed to cure all victims of absurdity who lie dying of contrived joy"; they were, in fact, "dervishes made with secret therapeutic love. . . ." Merton called out to these poets who had chosen a life set apart by its deep search for meaning: "Let us then say 'yes' to our own nobility by embracing the insecurity and the abjection that a dervish existence entails."[78]

This life set apart, this calling to loneliness, to silence was essential, Merton believed, in awakening the poet to the potentials within himself, to the life which accepts and goes beyond absurdity to its harmony and essential unity. But he saw it vital in a further regard, and that was in preparing the person to give, to relate meaningfully to his world. For if the poet had a special calling to be in touch with humanity, then he must be purified through the "uncluttering of his mind"[79] in order to be whole and compassionate. James Forest relates a significant comment which Merton once made to him: "Those who have providentially been stirred . . . to renew human imagination, those who try to use their lives to give meaning to communion and community, love, hope, and happiness, they most of all must have entered into a now-ness in which moments, men and events can be savored."[80]

For Merton, this existence in, and expression of, "now-ness" necessarily implied an appreciation of the "useless" on the part of the poet. Since that which simply

"is" can not be used as a tool of cynical manipulation by the politician or the entrepreneur, Merton felt that the artist "must serenely defend his right to be completely useless."[81] In his often-quoted essay, "Rain and the Rhinoceros," Merton develops the idea of "uselessness." He is talking specifically about the fact that, for him, "rain is a festival" and that he celebrates "its gratuity and its meaninglessness." He hears it talking to him alone, in the woods, and says that as long as the rain "talks" he is going to listen, not because it is a fun thing to do (because "having fun" is beside the point), but simply because the rain <u>is</u> and because he simply can <u>be</u> through it.[82] Merton ends the essay (which is, in broader terms, a piercing examination of modern man's sacrifice of himself for "the herd") by quoting, and thus reaffirming, Ionesco on uselessness:

> The universal and modern man is . . . a prisoner of necessity, who cannot understand that a thing might perhaps be without usefulness; nor does he understand that, at bottom, it is the useful that may be useless and back-breaking burden. If one does not understand the usefulness of the useless and the uselessness of the useful, one cannot understand art. And a country where art is not understood is a country of slaves and robots. . . .[83]

In his later years, Merton saw that language itself was a "useful tool" of society. Both listening and silence were becoming obsolete in the "smoke" of language, and Merton felt that "since language has become a medium in which we are totally immersed, there is no longer any need

to say anything. The saying says itself all around us. No one need attend."[84] In <u>Cables to the Ace</u>, Merton presents language in a totally useless way to illustrate his thesis that "there is no longer any need to say anything":

> Atoms are bound to go said Nobel
> Prize-waging Physic swinger
> In an unpacked science stadium announcement
> Wednesday
> He was clapped into recognition
> When he was discovered
> Suddenly full of crowds.
>
> (p. 34)

Merton always returned, however, to the affirmation that there was a possibility of presenting valid poetry which was "fully alive" in its language and in its ability to assert "its reality by its power to generate imaginative life."[85] Such possibility becomes reality in a poem when the poet puts "words together in such a way that they exercise a mysterious and vital reactivity among themselves, and so release their secret content of associations to produce in the reader an experience that enriches the depths of his spirit."[86] Such poetry becomes, for Merton, "a kind of recovery of paradise . . . a renewal of vision and hearing so that he who reads and understands recognizes that here is a new start, a new creation." Why does he believe this to be so? Because, he says, "the <u>language</u> itself is getting another chance. . . ."[87] Merton uses Louis Zukofsky as an example of how the poet may recover the language itself:

> [Zukofsky] explores all the musical possibilities of ordinary talk about ordinary things. . . . But because his music is well found, it is no longer ordinary (i.e. empty) talk, and the language of everyday becomes charged with expectation--the language of paradise.[88]

This "language of paradise" is made possible by the essential "innocence" of the poet and his faith in the unity of creation so that he can forget his self-imposed limitations and abandon himself "to the immense creative power of a love too great to be seen or comprehended."[89] It is a love which is the "pinnacle of freedom and of a fully personalized consciousness"; a love solidified in contradiction and conflict;[90] a love which Merton called "the only revolutionary force . . . capable of producing anything new."[91]

Here, then, is where the poet joins the calling of apart-ness with the calling of connected-ness. When the poet chooses to use the creative power of union in love to bring forth "the new," he becomes "obligated to his fellow-man in the concrete." At this point, his work assumes value by being a "work of love and justice"; and it becomes "revolutionary" by requiring the artist to assert his own freedom, to go beyond the role society asks him to assume, in creating the new.[92] By Merton's definition, "All great writing is in some sense revolutionary. Life itself is revolutionary, because it constantly strives to surpass itself."[93]

What the poet says, then, and how he lives are inseparable. He has a "moral obligation" to uphold his own truth and freedom in his life as well as in his art so that he may maintain the integrity of both.[94] Thus, the poet must be awake to the moments of human crisis, those moments when one is "challenged in the roots of his own existence"; and, Merton asserts, he must respond to the crisis <u>through his poetry</u> instead of with endless laments and confessionals.[95] Merton saw that the "silence" of poetry could speak out in a resistance which would survive in crises past the shouting, the ambiguous protests of traditionally shrill dissenters. He felt this was an important thing for all artists to understand, to act upon, since

> . . . totalism and massive conformism are not restricted to police states. . . . Any power structure thriving on militarism and crisis is bound to silence dissent sooner or later. It is quite conceivable that even in America, writers may one day find themselves in a position . . . in which their silence says more than a vocal protest that might prove ambiguous, useless--or fatal.[96]

The poet may experience a "connectedness" with the world in the solidarity of such silent dissent. Since the poet lives in a world where politics are decisive, politics can destroy his art and his life. Thus, he is in some way committed to joining others in "seeking political solutions to problems that endanger the freedom of man."[97] This solidarity in a political society depends, in large measure, upon the ability of those seeking man's freedom to "enter

upon a dialogue that will really lead to peace and to a fruitful age for man and his world."[98] The success of such dialogue, for the poet, rests with his realization that "this world is at once his and everybody's," and that his attempts to create the kind of world in which he, and others like him, wish to live must grow out of this realization. The world which he attempts to create, then, will not be a fully public or a purely private model, but will grow out of his participation with all humanity and will be "recorded in authentically personal images."[99] Merton declares that such images, though personal, have to be based upon a recognition that we are first of all human beings, and that "our humanity takes precedent, as an existential and irreversible fact, over any limited, willed commitment . . . of absolute belief . . . ." To put it another way, Merton says "our commitments are good insofar as they help us to fulfill our primary vocation: to be men. If they make us less human, then there is something wrong somewhere."[100]

An important question for Merton, then, becomes "How do you know when <u>your</u> revolution has developed sclerosis?"[101] How do you know when your commitments are no longer focused upon creating a better world but simply feeling more alive because you are participating in a "cause"? Merton distinguishes between the genuine protest of the artist against the alienation of mankind because of

economic, moral, political, or cultural crises (which is a protest having the potential for asserting creativity and bringing forth great art) and the protest of the artist who has lost his ability to articulate and finds expression only by "gestures equivalent to dashing his brains out against the wall."[102] The poet must distinguish between true creativity and "tongue-tied frustration, helplessness, and self-hate."[103] Thus, the artist/poet must find some way to act and to create with purpose, with a <u>willing</u> toward the future. He must make a decision, based on his own finiteness, his limitations, his existential situation, which will allow him to participate "not [in] the abstract world of the public but [in] the concrete world of living men."[104] It is a personal choice, an acceptance of freedom that allows the poet to be "a presence, a voice, an option in the actions of the real world," rather than part of the "anonymous mass."[105]

Merton found Boris Pasternak to be an exemplary figure of the artist who asserts his own humanity and its possibilities for all people within the limits of his freedom. Pasternak, having miraculously survived the internal struggles and bloodshed of Russia, was not able, rationally, to resist the tyranny of the Soviet system through political activism. But he found an even stronger form of resistance "in creativity, in life-affirming love for a few friends, in faith that the future will turn out right in spite of

everything."[106] Merton viewed Pasternak's stance as a profound assertion of humanity, a powerful assertion that man's life has meaning beyond political systems and the meaninglessness of a dehumanized society. For Merton, Pasternak's silent, unrelenting resistance symbolized the resistance of all poets and artists who are committed to and connected with the "roots" of humanity:

> This is the last and strongest kind of resistance left for those who have been pushed to the wall . . . who have nothing left but to celebrate life itself not in ideology but in poetry, work and friendship. . . . If they are to be destroyed, let it be for this last loyalty to a human measure![107]

In an informal talk at Calcutta, India, in the last days of his life, Merton spoke of the solidarity of those who affirm life in a "free-floating existence under a state of risk." He called such people, "marginal people," people who are outside the establishment, who deliberately withdraw "to the margin of society with a view to deepening fundamental human experience." Monks and poets are such marginal people who are "deliberately irrelevant because they accept the irrefutability of death while seeking that which is beyond death in order to overcome the dichotomy of life and death. For such people, life is openness to "gift" from God and from others, bringing forth the possibility of communication on the deepest level. It is a communication "beyond words . . . beyond speech . . . beyond concept."[108] Merton ended his Calcutta statement with this affirmation:

> "My dear brothers, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are."[109]

VI. Postscript: A Message to the Poet

Thomas Merton has left this poetic statement of promise for those like him who inhabit "the secret country," the "marginal world" of belief and risk and love and care and hope:

> After that we'll meet in some kingdom they forgot
> and there the found will play the songs of the sent.
> Surely a big bird with all the shades of light will
> beat against our windows. We will then gladly consent to the kindness of rays and recover the warm
> knowledge of each other we once had under those
> young trees in another May. (It is a big bird flies
> right out of the center of the sun) . . . .
>
> (from Cables to the Ace, p. 52)

Footnotes

[1]Thomas Merton, A Thomas Merton Reader (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1962), p. ix.

[2]For the most complete listings of literature by and about Thomas Merton, see Frank Dell'Isola, Thomas Merton: A Bibliography (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956); and Marquita Breit, Thomas Merton: A Bibliography (American Theological Library Association Bibliography Series, No. 2, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1974). Ms. Breit's compilation includes 927 primary entries and 1801 secondary entries, indicating the scope and influence of Merton's work.

At his death in 1968, Merton also left behind many unpublished manuscripts and journal notes which the Merton Legacy Trust will continue to publish. These materials are located in the Thomas Merton Collection, Bellarmine College, Louisville, Ky., and may be examined by special permission of the Trustees.

[3]See, for example, Patrick Tolbert, "The Spiritual World," Theologia, 12 (January, 1952), 22-24.

[4]See, for example, J.A. Thielen, "Poet of the Contemplative Life," Catholic World, 169 (May, 1949), 86-90; and Sister Mary Julian Baird, "Blake, Hopkins and Thomas Merton," Catholic World, 183 (April, 1956), 46-49.

[5]See, for example, Carol Johnson, "The Vision and The Poem," Poetry, 96 (September, 1960), 387-390.

[6]See, for example, James H. Forest, "The Gift of Merton," Commonweal, 89 (January 10, 1969), 462-466.

[7]Thomas Merton, "Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal," Commonweal, 69 (October 24, 1958), 91.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Thomas Merton, "Reality, Art and Prayer," Commonweal, 61 (March 25, 1955), 658.

[10]Thomas Merton, Raids on the Unspeakable (New York: New Direction, 1964), p. 155.

[11]Thomas Merton, "A Catch of Antiletters," Voyages, 165 (Winter-Spring, 1968), 50.

[12]Thomas Merton, "Rilke: Poetry and Imagination," Tape #60:7, Thomas Merton Collection, Bellarmine College, Louisville, Ky.

[13]Thomas Merton, A Thomas Merton Reader, pp. ix - x.

[14]Matthew Kelty, "Some Reminiscences of Thomas Merton," Cistercian Studies 4 (No. II, 1969), 175.

[15]For a thorough and scholarly examination of the concept of wholeness and sacrality in Merton's writing and life, see George A. Kilcourse, Jr., "Incarnation as the Integrating Principle in Thomas Merton's Poetry and Spirituality," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Fordham University, N.Y., 1974.
This thesis relies in part on Kilcourse's investigation with regard to the concept of Incarnation.

[16]See Seven-Storey Mountain (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1948), Merton's autobiographical account of his life and conversion experience which led to the Abbey of Gethsemani. Merton was to spend the rest of his life refuting the image he had created of himself in that book of a "superficially pious, rather rigid and somewhat narrow-minded young monk" (Raids on the Unspeakable, p. 172).
Merton told Thomas McDonnell in a 1967 interview "Since I am supposed to have made an extreme and absolute renunciation (which I haven't really), people imagine that I am living in a state of inhuman desperation. . . . The life I am living may not be totally simple in every respect, but it is not . . . inhumanly hard. . . . I am no more unhappy than anybody else." (Thomas McDonnell, "An Interview with Thomas Merton," Motive, October, 1967, p. 36).

[17]For an examination of Merton's poetry and life in this period, see James Thielen, "Thomas Merton: Poet of the Contemplative Life"; and Robert Lowell, "The Verses of Thomas Merton," Commonweal, 42 (June 22, 1945), 240-242.

[18]Mark Van Doren, "Prophet," 100 Poems (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 83.

[19]Letter from Mark Van Doren to Thomas Merton, dated only 1956, Thomas Merton Collection.

[20]Walter Sutton, American Free Verse (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 168.

[21]Thomas Merton, Cables to the Ace (New York: New Directions, 1968).

[22]Thomas Merton, The Geography of Lograire (New York: New Directions, 1969).

[23]Thomas Merton, Cables to the Ace, p. 1.

[24]Thomas Merton, The Geography of Lograire, p. 1.

[25]Thomas Merton Reader, p. 212.

[26]Ibid., p. 268.

[27]Ibid., p. 208.

[28]Thomas McDonnell, "An Interview with Thomas Merton," 37.

[29]Ralph Sturm, "Thomas Merton: Poetry," American Benedictine Review, 22 (1971), 19.

[30]Thomas Merton, The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 5.

[31]Ibid., p. 4.

[32]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[33]Forest, "The Gift of Merton," 465.

[34]Merton's explicit comments on the vocation, or calling, of the poet are examined in Chapter IV, pp. 23-31.

[35]For a more precise statement of this concept of "connections" see Kilcourse, pp. 7-8; John Howard Griffin, A Hidden Wholeness: The Visual World of Thomas Merton (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1970), pp. 2-3; Griffin, "In Search of Thomas Merton," The Thomas Merton Studies Center (Greensboro, N.C.: Unicorn Press, 1971), p. 18.

[36]Thomas Merton, Pasternak/Merton: Six Letters (Lexington, Ky.: King Library Press, University of Kentucky, 1973), p. 4.

[37]Quoted in Stefan's Baciu's "Latin America and Spain in the Poetic World of Thomas Merton," Revue de Literature Comparee, 41 (1967), 292.

[38]Thomas Merton, "Zukofsky: The Paradise Ear," The Critic (November, 1966), manuscript copy, p. 2.

[39]Letter from Van Doren to Merton, June 16, 1954, Thomas Merton Collection.

[40]Interview with Ron Seitz, conducted by Joy Lamm, March 15, 1974, Louisville, Ky.

[41]Interview with Ron Seitz, conducted by Cass Harris, "'Rest Empty' Is Writer's Philosophy," Louisville Record, 29 Je. 1972, p. 3, col. 1.

[42]Thomas Merton, "Christmas Morning Letter from Thomas Merton to Friends," Collected Essays, Vol. 1: The Man (unpublished bound volumes in Thomas Merton Collection), p. 157a.

[43]Unpublished letter from Merton to Amiya Chakravarty and his students at Smith College, April 13, 1967. I am indebted to Dr. Chakravarty for the use of this letter.

[44]Raids, pp. 155-56. Merton's "Message to Poets" is examined more thoroughly in Chapter V of this paper.

[45]Thomas Merton, "Poetry, Symbolism and Typology," Bread in the Wilderness (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1953), pp. 49-50.

[46]Ibid.

[47]Letter from George Kilcourse to Joy Lamm, April 22, 1974.

[48]Ron Seitz, "Who Tom Spoke Me," recorded lecture presented at Bellarmine College, 28 February 1972, Thomas Merton Collection.

[49]Thomas Merton, Emblems of A Season of Fury (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 61.

[50]Ibid.

[51]Thomas Merton, "Analysis of a Poem," Tape #54:6, Thomas Merton Collection.

[52]"Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal, p. 89.

[53]Thomas Merton, "The Catholic and Creativity," American Benedictine Review, 11 (September - December, 1966), 207.

[54]Raids, p. 159.

[55]"The Catholic and Creativity," pp. 202-03.

[56]Raids, pp. 169-70.

[57]Ibid., p. 158.

[58]From the Fragments of Herakleitos as recorded by Merton in Jubilee, 8 (September, 1960), 31.

[59]Raids, p. 161.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Thomas Merton, "Herakleitos the Obscure," Jubilee 8 (September, 1960), 24-25.

[62]Pasternak/Merton Letters, p. 8.

[63]Cables, p. 55.

[64]Thomas Merton Reader, p. xi.

[65]Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation (New York: New Directions, 1961), pp. 32-33.

[66]Raids, p. 167.

[67]Thomas Merton Reader, p. x.

[68]Raids, pp. 158, 160.

[69]Ibid., p. 156.

[70]Sister Marion Cotty, S.N.C., "Christian Wisdom and Merton's Poetry," M.A. Thesis (Boston College, August, 1966), p. 54. Bound copy in Thomas Merton Collection.

[71]Emblems, pp. 127-28.

[72]Thomas Merton Reader, p. 272.

[73]"The Catholic and Creativity," p. 204.

[74]For a further discussion of the role of Zen in the life and work of the artist, as well as the unifying concept behind the fusion of art and life and spirituality, see Merton, Mystics and Zen Masters (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, Inc., 1967); and Merton, Zen and the Birds of Appetite (New York: New Directions, 1968).

[75]"Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal," p. 89.

[76]Raids, p. 71.

[77]For a background discussion of Merton's "Message," see Chapter III, pp. 16-22.

[78]Raids, p. 160.

[79]Forest, "The Gift of Merton," p. 464.

[80]Ibid., p. 465.

[81]Raids, p. 168.

[82]Ibid., pp. 9-23.

[83]Ibid., p. 21.

[84]Cables, p. 3.

[85]"Zukofsky: The Paradise Ear," p. 3.

[86]Bread in the Wilderness, p. 43.

[87]"Zukofsky: The Paradise Ear," p. 1.

[88]Ibid.

[89]"The Catholic and Creativity," p. 208.

[90]Thomas Merton, "Introduction," for Ernesto Cardenal's To Live is To Love (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 12.

[91]Merton, Disputed Questions (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1960), p. 11.

[92]Raids, pp. 172-73.

[93]Disputed Questions, p. 10.

[94]Raids, pp. 170-71.

[95]Raids, pp. 2-3.

[96]Thomas Merton, book review of Pasternak's Letters to Georgian Friends, January, 1968, manuscript copy, pp. 5-6, Thomas Merton Collection.

[97]Raids, p. 171.

[98]Pasternak/Merton: Six Letters, pp. 5-6.

[99]Geography, p. 1.

[100]McDonnell, p. 35.

[101]Raids, p. 170.

[102]"The Catholic and Creativity," p. 198.

[103]Ibid.

[104]Mystics and Zen Masters, p. 266.

[105]Ibid.

[106]Review, Pasternak's Letters, p. 3.

[107]Ibid.

[108]"View of Monasticism," The Asian Journal, pp. 305-08.

[109]Ibid., p. 308.

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