

Redeeming the Rhinoceros: The Healing Power of the Night Spirit and the Dawn Air

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FOR DEVOTED READERS OF THOMAS MERTON the sixties were a traumatic and challenging time. The quiet voice of monasticism had seemingly disappeared into the Gethsemani woods and the new Merton was disturbing and could grate on his readers' sensibilities. The reaction of some readers was noted by Merton writing in a letter of 1968 'Conservative Catholics in Louisville are burning my books because I am opposed to the Viet Nam war. The whole thing is ridiculous.'¹

It is not necessary even to open his books from the sixties to encounter this change, it is evident in the titles alone. The titles of his early books – *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *The Sign of Jonas*, *The Ascent to Truth*, *Seeds of Contemplation*, *Bread in the Wilderness*, *The Living Bread*, *Thoughts in Solitude* and *Life and Holiness* – titles which conjure up images from the scriptures and literature, images of the monk's fervent spiritual journey, these titles have gone. As Merton himself says, he is no longer 'roaring in the old tunnel.'² In contrast, the reader encounters titles such as *Emblems of a Season of Fury*, *Raids on the Unspeakable*, *Seeds of Destruction* and *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* ending with, for many people, Merton's two most incomprehensible works, his epic poems *Cables to the Ace*, subtitled *Familiar Liturgies of Misunderstanding*, and *The Geography of Lograire*.

In this paper I want to look in more detail at *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* as I think it not only sets out the issues Merton is concerned with in this period but also he suggests a way of living with these issues and, of possibly resolving them, a way based on his own experience.

The title of this book, *Conjectures Of A Guilty Bystander*,³ points to some of the changes and developments taking place in Merton's life at this

time. In an essay Merton published in 1958 entitled 'Letter to an Innocent Bystander' the changes in his attitude to the world can be seen as he reflects on his position as 'an innocent bystander.'⁴ He suggests that if he, or another person, were 'bystanding' from a sense of inertia this could be a 'source of our guilt.'⁵ He questions whether non-participation is possible and whether complicity can be avoided. Merton then looks at the role of intellectuals as bystanders, pondering how they could stand between those in power and authority and the majority who find themselves subject to such people. From this position Merton suggests that the vocation of the innocent bystander is to speak the truth at all costs.

The position of the innocent bystander, among whom Merton includes himself, is vastly different from the position he held in his early years at Gethsemani. The beginnings of this change can be seen in *The Sign of Jonas* as Merton discovers through his work as Master of Scholastics that his new desert was compassion, and the change continued from there, developing rapidly in the final years of the fifties. By 1959 Merton is beginning to question the term 'innocent' bystander moving towards the term 'guilty' bystander instead. This can be seen most clearly in letters Merton wrote to Czeslaw Milosz where he questions his use of the term innocent suggesting that the only answer he knows is 'to be responsible to everybody, to take upon oneself all the guilt.'⁶ This essay was written in the year of Merton's Louisville epiphany⁷ and at a time when his correspondence was burgeoning, particularly with his contacts in Latin America. It was a year marking a distinctive change in Merton and, by the time he was preparing *Conjectures* for publication, the enormous broadening of his horizons in the fifties and early sixties resulted in Merton changing his view of himself from that of an 'innocent bystander' to a 'guilty bystander.'

Conjectures is 'a confrontation of twentieth-century questions in the light of a monastic commitment, which' Merton says, 'inevitably makes one something of a "bystander"' (CGB, p.vi). But during the challenging events of this period, innocent bystanding was no longer possible; just to bystand made a person guilty because they were a part of the human race and therefore deeply implicated. In his introduction to a Japanese edition of *The Seven Storey Mountain* in 1963 Merton expressed this succinctly writing

...the monastery is not an "escape from the world." On the contrary, by being in the monastery I take my true part in all the struggles and sufferings of the world...by my monastic life and vows I am saying *No* to all the concentration camps, the aerial bombardments, the staged political trials, the judicial murders, the racial injustices, the economic tyrannies, and the whole socio-economic apparatus which seems geared for nothing but global destruction in spite of all its fair words in favor of peace.⁸

And again, in his 1966 essay 'Is the World a Problem?' in *Contemplation in a World of Action*, he spoke in more personal terms of his involvement with the world:

That I should have been born in 1915, that I should be the contemporary of Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Viet Nam and the Watts riots, are things about which I was not first consulted. Yet they are also events in which, whether I like it or not, I am deeply and personally involved.⁹

Merton comes to the conclusion in *Conjectures* that instead of bystanding 'you must be willing, if necessary, to become a disturbing and therefore an undesired person, one who is not wanted because he upsets the general dream' (CGB, p.83). Merton's awareness of events in the world prompted him to become for some, including his own order,¹⁰ a disturbing and undesired person as he felt 'the time had come to move from the role of bystander (guilty by association and silence) to that of declared witness.'¹¹ The position he was taking in relation to the events of his day from within the monastery is reflected in one of the epigrams Merton used on the title page of *Conjectures* (a quote from Po Chu-i):

My life is like the crane who cries a few times
under the pine tree
And like the silent light from the lamp
in the bamboo grove.

Similarly the other epigram taken from Deuteronomy – 'Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there' – reflects Merton's own experience of God's mercy, an experience which consequently enabled him to reach out to others with compassion and mercy.

Conjectures is divided into five parts each of which has a sub-title and epigrams indicative of the essence of that chapter. Before looking at some of the major themes of *Conjectures* it is worth looking at the structure of the book. In the first part, entitled 'Barth's Dream,' Merton

begins by recounting a dream experienced by Karl Barth the theologian. In the dream the composer Mozart implies Barth would be saved more by 'the Mozart in himself than by his theology.' Merton suggests that Barth's attraction to the music of Mozart was an attempt to awaken the 'hidden sophianic Mozart in himself,' to awaken the "'divine" child' and concludes his account by telling Barth to 'trust in the divine mercy' as 'Christ remains a child in you' and 'your books (and mine) matter less than we might think! There is in us a Mozart who will be our salvation' (CGB, pp.3-4). In the first part of *Conjectures*, Merton presents a myriad of issues to his reader: questions about the monastery, the church, his relationship to the world, peace, Gandhi, race issues and the exploration of space. The title given to this chapter, 'Barth's Dream,' serves to present a contrast between the issues and questions Merton raises, and the presence of a higher wisdom, the wisdom of the monk and the solitary on the margins.¹²

In the second part of *Conjectures*, 'Truth and Violence: An Interesting Era,' Merton paints a picture of the early part of the sixties as 'an interesting era,' a phrase taken from a story told by Camus. In Camus' story a wise man prayed regularly to be spared 'from living in an interesting era' and Camus suggests that since we are not wise 'the Divinity has not spared us, and we are living in an interesting era' (CGB, p.51). In this chapter Merton discusses many issues he was developing an interest in relating to truth and violence, suggesting that humanity has perverted its understanding of truth, and what is desired is 'not the truth, but rather that our lie should be proved "right," and our iniquity be vindicated as "just."' Everyone is convinced they 'desire the truth above all' but what 'we desire is not "the truth" so much as "to be in the right"' (CGB, p.65) and violence comes from this perversion of truth, as 'a truthful man cannot long remain violent' (CGB, p.71). For Merton there is a confrontation with a choice: 'either to live by the truth or be destroyed' (CGB, p.79)—a choice he himself had come to terms with. To live by the truth, for Merton, is to do all things in the name of the *logos*, the word who is truth, Christ. Following the truth will then be a way of love and compassion. The period in which Merton was writing this was the height of the cold war when truth was being perverted in many areas of life. Merton concludes this chapter by suggesting that calling this era, 'the era of disaster and fulfillment,' interesting could be to underestimate it (CGB, p.113).

Part three, 'The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air' is a pivotal chapter, drawing on the wisdom images of part one and laying key foundations for the remainder of the book. Earlier in the fifties Merton had read Pound's translations of the Ox Mountain parable by Meng Tzu, in which the 'night spirit' and the 'dawn breath' are important 'in restoring life to the forest that has been cut down.' Through rest and recuperation 'in the night and the dawn' the trees will return. Similarly 'with human nature. Without the night spirit, the dawn breath, silence, passivity, rest, man's nature cannot be itself' (CGB, pp.122-123). Meng Tzu's approach is one that would obviously appeal to Merton with his longing for solitude and in this chapter he presents it as a solution both for himself³ and for the world. The Ox Mountain parable could also be seen as a metaphor for Merton's experience at this stage of his life and I will return to the pivotal effect of the night spirit and the dawn air upon Merton when I examine some of the themes of *Conjectures*, its effect is also evident in the change of direction in the remaining two sections of the book.

In a brief entry in the fourth section of *Conjectures* Merton points to Thoreau as someone who experienced the night spirit and the dawn air. Set against the industrial and affluent image of America, 'Thoreau's idleness (as "inspector of snowstorms") was an incomparable gift and its fruits were blessings that America has never really learned to appreciate.' After offering his gift to America, Thoreau, in Merton's words, 'went his way, without following the advice of his neighbors. He took the fork in the road' (CGB, p.227). Merton takes that phrase, 'The Fork in the Road,' as his title for this chapter reflecting a movement in his life as presented in *Conjectures*. After Merton's awakening to the importance of the night spirit and the dawn air (a gradual discovery over many years but which, in *Conjectures*, he actually names for the first time) he can approach the questions and problems he was facing earlier in the book with a new sense of freedom and a lightness of touch. The effect upon him of the night spirit and the dawn air is summed up in one of his epigrams for this chapter where Lieh Tzu says 'life comes without warning.'

The final chapter of *Conjectures*, 'The Madman Runs to the East,' takes its title from one of Merton's epigrams for the chapter, a Zen Proverb:

The madman runs to the East
and his keeper runs to the East:
Both are running to the East,
Their purposes differ.

In writing *Conjectures* Merton has, like many people of his day, been asking questions about the problems facing society. Having turned his back on the world by his entry into the monastery Merton is now, through his questions, returning to the world but from a different perspective, the difference between the madman and his keeper. Both are going in the same direction, but their reasons for doing so are vastly different. His final section of *Conjectures* focuses much more on the immediate, placing an emphasis on the beauty of life that is present at all times, the beauty he originally pointed to in Mozart at the beginning of the book. This beauty is continually renewed by the night spirit and the dawn air and signifies God's presence in the world. Worldliness, Merton can now say, is acceptable providing it is of the 'right kind,' the worldliness 'which sees the world redeemed in Christ' (CGB, p.289).

Having looked briefly at the structure of *Conjectures* I want to look more closely at some of the themes Merton develops in this book. The themes I want to deal with here will be the more personal themes rather than Merton's conjectures about war, race, and other such areas—namely his growing appreciation in his life of place, of nature, and his changing relationship to the world.

The Place of Nature and the Nature of Place in *Conjectures*

In *The Sign of Jonas*, one theme that grew in prominence over the course of the book was the importance to Merton of physical place. The effect of place and environment on Merton becomes increasingly important throughout the course of *Conjectures*. Every section of the book contains frequent references to place and to the nature surrounding Merton at Gethsemane.

The increasing importance of place and nature to Merton can be seen to stem from his vow of stability. In *The Sign of Jonas* stability seems to be a problem Merton has to come to terms with; by contrast, in *Conjectures* it is his salvation. This vow serves the purpose of stopping the monk from running and forces him to start an inner journey into God.¹⁴ In Merton's case his vow of stability forced him to stop running, especially the wandering of his youth, and to delve into his own inner self and to journey towards God. Paradoxically, for much of his monastic life, Merton appears fairly unstable, moving from one crisis to the next searching for more and more solitude or for permission to travel or to do other things which many did not

consider particularly monastic. Through being forced to stop running and to face his inner self Merton came to terms with himself and discovered an inner stability.

The stability of place Merton found at Gethsemani, especially compared to the sense of homelessness and exile of his youth, were essential to his development as a person. The Cistercian writer Charles Cummings has pointed out the importance of stability to human development saying that 'reaching one's full human and spiritual potential seems to be facilitated by some degree of stability in a peaceful place where one can be at ease, sort things out, and develop a feeling of being a fully existing, unique individual.'¹⁵ Over the course of *Conjectures* it is possible to see Merton's growing sense of having discovered that 'stability in a peaceful place' and the effect this has on him making him increasingly aware of both his surroundings and the natural life he shared with those surroundings.

The Place of Nature

In *The Sign of Jonas* Merton notes the natural world around him more frequently as the journal develops, especially after his appointment as forester. This trend continues in *Conjectures* especially from the third section onwards. Part three begins with a description of the valley awakening in the early morning—an apposite beginning to the section titled 'The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air.' Having spent the previous section looking at the challenges and questions raised by the modern world Merton, in his description of dawn and the gradual awakening of nature, points to a different kind of wisdom than that of the human world, the wisdom he had earlier pointed to in his references to Mozart. He describes the early morning as 'the most wonderful moment of the day . . . when creation in its innocence asks permission to "be" once again, as it did on the first morning that ever was' and at that moment of dawn 'all wisdom seeks to collect and manifest itself at that blind sweet point.'

In the Ox Mountain parable Merton found an expression of his experience of the effect nature had upon him, especially the effect of the woods and of nature in the very early hours of the morning a time when he, as a Cistercian monk, was awake as nature itself began to awaken. The understanding of nature Merton found in Meng Tzu's parable fits into his own expression of 'paradise consciousness' so, in the early morning, Merton discovers 'an unspeakable secret: paradise is

all around us and we do not understand,' the 'dawn deacon' cries out 'wisdom' but 'we don't attend' (CGB, pp.117-118).¹⁶

Merton's own arrangement of *The Ox Mountain Parable* was published in 1960 in a limited edition of one hundred copies by Victor Hammer. In his introduction to the parable, Merton draws a parallel between the violence, war and chaos of Meng Tzu's age and our own age. He wrote:

One of his [Meng Tzu's] central intuitions was that human nature was basically good, but that this basic goodness was destroyed by evil acts, and had tactfully to be brought out by right education, education in "humaneness." The great man, said Mencius, is the man who has not lost the heart of a child. This statement was not meant to be sentimental. It implied the serious duty to preserve the spontaneous and deep natural instinct to love, that instinct which is protected by the mysterious action of life itself and of providence, but which is destroyed by the wilfulness, the passionate arbitrariness of man's greed... This is a parable of mercy. Note especially the emphasis of Meng Tzu on the "night wind" which is here rendered "night spirit", the merciful, pervasive and mysterious influence of unconscious nature which, according to him, as long as it is not tampered with, heals and revives man's good tendencies, his "right mind."¹⁷

It is interesting to note here Merton's stress upon the need to keep 'the heart of a child,' once more echoing his words to Karl Barth, as well as his description of the parable as a 'parable of mercy.'

The Nature of Place

In *Conjectures* a theme intimately connected to that of nature is the continuing growth in the importance of place to Merton. In *The Seven Storey Mountain* there is a strong contrast between the instability of Merton's life before joining Gethsemani and his early years in the monastery. The early part of his autobiography contained descriptions of the many journeys Merton undertook and alongside his lack of a stable family background, his sense of homelessness and exile were prominent. Over the course of *The Sign of Jonas*, place gradually took on an important role in Merton's life and writing. This trend continues in *Conjectures* and besides being noticeable in his careful and detailed references to nature Merton also makes some very specific references to the importance place has for him.

Merton's attitude to place changes markedly from section three of *Conjectures* onwards. In one entry contained in the section 'The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air,' probably dating from the early sixties, Merton begins by describing 'the "way" up through the woods' and how he 'appreciate[s] the beauty and the solemnity' of it, going on to describe the sunrise before stating: 'it is essential to experience all the times and moods of one good place. No one will ever be able to say how essential, how truly part of a genuine life this is—to experience all the times and moods of one good place.' (CGB, p.161)

Merton's statement about 'one good place' seems to be brought about by the effect upon him of his natural surroundings and by being allowed to spend a limited amount of time in solitude at the hermitage. The influence of these two factors on Merton can be seen in an entry in his personal journal from December 1960, in which Merton records one of the first evenings he spent at the hermitage:

Lit candles in the dusk. *Haec requies mea in saeculum saeculi* [This is my resting place forever] - the sense of a journey ended, of wandering at an end. *The first time in my life I ever really felt I had come home and that my waiting and looking were ended.*

A burst of sun through the window. Wind in the pines. Fire in the grate. Silence over the whole valley.¹⁸

In this quote Merton combines the natural surroundings and the solitude of the hermitage creating a sense of having, at last, found a home. Merton's vow of stability enables him to notice the physical space around him, space that, as he states elsewhere, he never noticed when he was in the world and more mobile. Dwelling 'for long periods in one place among familiar, congenial surroundings'¹⁹ was essential for Merton to come to know God and to know himself.

Sacramental Visions of the World

Among Merton's wide and varied interests referred to in *Conjectures*, two groups in particular attracted him because, I would suggest, of their emphasis on nature and place. In the entries immediately following on from Merton's reflection on the awakening valley at the beginning of 'The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air' he refers to the Shakers and the Celts.

There is no time to explore Merton's interest in these two groups now, but I would just like to draw a parallel between Merton's essay 'Rain and the Rhinoceros'²⁰ in which he describes some of the times

he had spent in the woods, in solitude, living a life very different from that of an average Cistercian monk in his day, and the stories of some of the Celtic monks. Merton describes very simply an evening spent at the building where he would eventually become a hermit in 1965:

I came up here from the monastery last night...and put some oatmeal on the Coleman stove for supper. It boiled over while I was listening to the rain... The night became very dark. The rain surrounded the whole cabin with its enormous virginal myth, a whole world of meaning, of secrecy, of silence, of rumor. Think of it: all that speech pouring down, selling nothing, judging nobody, drenching the thick mulch of dead leaves, soaking the trees, filling the gullies and crannies of the wood with water, washing out the places where men have stripped the hillside!²¹

In the same manner as some of Merton's descriptions of nature and place in *Conjectures* this passage celebrates a wisdom and a way of life reminiscent of some of the Celtic hermits in solitude on their islands surrounded by the ocean and the elements. For Merton, the wind and the rain and the darkness and the solitude of the night in his cabin had a restoring effect similar to 'The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air' in *The Ox Mountain Parable*. The rain helped to heal the damage done to the woods by men who had 'stripped the hillside' and it also had a similar effect on Merton as he continues:

...in this wilderness I have learned how to sleep again. Here I am not alien. The trees I know, the night I know, the rain I know. I close my eyes and instantly sink into the whole rainy world of which I am a part, and the world goes on with me in it, for I am not alien to it.

In his essay 'Rain and the Rhinoceros' Merton brings together his own experience of life in the hermitage, where he experienced in 'one good place' the effect of 'the night spirit and the dawn air' with some reflections on the writings of a sixth century hermit, Philoxenos, suggesting that in the modern world similar insights are not found in the writings of theologians but in the meditations of the existentialists and the Theater of the Absurd. In Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros*, as all Berenger's friends and fellow citizens gradually become rhinoceroses, he is faced with the crises that he no longer resembles anyone and 'solitude and dissent become more and more impossible, more and more absurd.' For Ionesco rhinocerositis is the sickness that lies in wait 'for those who have lost the sense and the taste for solitude'—for those who are no longer open to the experience of the night spirit and the dawn air.

A New Perspective on the World and His Life

In *Conjectures* a dominant question for Merton is the Christian's relationship to the modern world. Over the course of *Conjectures* Merton is struggling with his response to the world. From the very beginning of the book his approach is more open than previously. Early on in *Conjectures* he suggests the *Rule of St Benedict* contains 'nothing whatever of the Ghetto spirit' (CGB, p.6) in its attitude to the world and Merton adopts Benedict's attitude to the world and not that of the Cistercian Order which at the time he was writing was still very closed. Throughout *Conjectures* the list of topics Merton writes about and the various people with whom he is in contact reflects a universal vision of the world from within the confines of the monastery, a vision he expressed in his introduction to an Argentine edition of his work:

In the silence of the countryside and the forest, in the cloistered solitude of my monastery, I have discovered the whole Western Hemisphere. Here I have been able, through the grace of God, to explore the New World.²²

Merton approaches the question of his attitude to the world directly a number of times in *Conjectures*, an attitude now based on his belief that 'God became man, because every man is potentially Christ' (CGB, p.69). This stress on the importance of the incarnation continues throughout *Conjectures*. When Merton is passing through the novitiate on his fire watch, he feels Christ 'was as truly present here, in a certain way, as upstairs in the Chapel' (CGB, p.193) and this feeling is not confined to the monastery as attested to by the revelatory experience Merton had on a visit to Louisville in March 1958. Although the account was elaborated by Merton in his preparation of this material for publication, the essence was there in his original text. On the corner of a busy street in Louisville, Merton was 'overwhelmed with the realization that I love all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers' (CGB, p.140). Significantly this incident is placed by Merton in the pivotal chapter of *Conjectures*, 'The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air.'

Merton's horizons had begun to broaden rapidly in 1958. The mercy he felt so strongly in *The Sign of Jonas* led gradually to an overflowing of mercy and compassion from himself towards others: beginning with those with whom he was in contact in the monastery, the scholastics and then novices, through his expanding correspond-

ence, the stream of visitors who came to Gethsemani to see him and in his writings. Merton's 1963 collection of poetry poetically mirrors *Conjectures* and was aptly entitled *Emblems of a Season of Fury*.²³ The range of subjects covered reflects Merton's realisation of his need for other people, a need expressed in a letter of the same year to James Baldwin saying,

I am therefore not completely human until I have found myself in my African and Asian and Indonesian brother because he has the part of humanity which I lack.²⁴

The Merton writing in *Emblems of a Season of Fury* is no longer turning his back on the world and its problems but, as in *Conjectures*, is looking at them from his place on the margins and asking the important questions. His sense of being an exile and a pilgrim with 'no proper place in this world' made him feel 'the friend and brother of people everywhere,' especially exiles and pilgrims.²⁵

By the end of *Conjectures*, Merton conveys a very strong sense of being at home with himself, of having found a 'stability in a peaceful place' which allowed him to 'be at ease, sort things out, and develop a feeling of being a fully existing, unique individual, ready to deal with life and with God on their terms.'²⁶ Merton's sense of homelessness and exile are now expressed in a new, creative way seeing the monk as a solitary and marginal person, and in understanding his own need for solitude. He came to realise 'The Night Spirit and the Dawn Air,' discovered through some 'stability in a peaceful place,' gave him life and enhanced his prophetic and poetic voice so he could declare that life to others:

There is the hope, there is the world that remakes itself at God's command without consulting us. So the poet . . . sees only the world remaking itself in the live seed (CGB, pp.319-320).

As the figure of the prophet Jonas expressed Merton's understanding of the paradox of his life in the early fifties so the metaphor of the 'guilty bystander' encapsulated it a decade later. The compassion Merton discovered in *the Sign of Jonas* expands in *Conjectures* to embrace the world outside the cloister. Merton's sights are no longer set on a paradise reached by disowning the world. In *Conjectures* Merton sees God's presence in the world and in people outside the cloister and the 'deep and mute sense of compassion'²⁷ he had discovered in *The Sign of Jonas* finds a growing voice as seen in his title for this book which

expresses his interrelationship and unity with other people and with the world.

In Merton's later works his message, expressed most clearly in his introduction to *Raids on the Unspeakable*, is that Christian hope can stand in the void where every other hope stands frozen stiff before the face of the unspeakable. His message is be human in this most inhuman of ages and guard the image of man, for it is the image of God. And how are we to do this? In *Conjectures* Merton suggests a number of ways we can redeem the rhinoceros:

Through rediscovering solitude and experiencing some sense of stability in a peaceful place.

Through paying attention to 'the night spirit and the dawn air'

Through awareness of a deeper wisdom and finding the divine child in each one of us.

And, finally, through our experience of God's mercy which will ultimately bring each one of us out of slavery into the Promised Land.

Notes and References

1. Thomas Merton, *Striving Towards Being: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Czeslaw Milosz* (ed. Robert Faggen). New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997, p. 175
2. Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*. London, Sheldon Press, 1978, p. 395
3. Merton suggested a number of different titles for this book to his publisher including 'A Temperature of My Own,' (Thomas Merton. *Witness to Freedom*. (ed. William H. Shannon). New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994, p. 144) an interesting title reflecting the personal nature of his thought in it.
4. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable*. London, Burns & Oates, 1977, p. 34
5. *Ibid.* p. 37
6. Thomas Merton, *The Courage for Truth* (ed. Christine M. Bochen). New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1993, pp. 62, 64
7. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*. London, Burns & Oates, 1968, pp. 140-142. (Abbreviated to *Conjectures* or CGB.) Referred to in more detail later in this paper.
8. Thomas Merton, *Honorable Reader: Reflections on My Work* (ed. Robert E. Daggy). London, Fount Paperbacks, 1989, p. 74
9. Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*. London, George Allen & Unwin, 1971, p. 145
10. For a period in the early sixties Merton was prevented by his order from publishing on issues of war and the arms race.
11. Mott, Michael, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*. London, Sheldon Press, 1986, p. 368
12. His epigrams for this chapter reflect this contrast. The first from Kabir is a few lines from a song to Sadhu advising him to stop his 'buying and selling' and to

'have done with your good and your bad' as 'there are no markets and shops in the land to which you go.' The other quote from Thomas Traherne suggests that, though an infant does not often realise it, when compared to the world and all its treasures the child is 'the cream and crown of all that round about did lie,' (CGB, p.1) pointing the reader in the direction of the important themes in part one, the wisdom figure of the child and the Mozart figure.

13. In a letter to Abdul Aziz Merton spoke of 'the hour of dawn when the world is silent and the new light is most pure,' as 'symbolizing the dawning of divine light in the stillness of our hearts.' Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love* (ed. William H. Shannon). New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985, p.46

14. Philip Sheldrake has suggested 'an engagement with "place" (as, for example, in desert monasticism's mystique of "the cell" or St Benedict's teaching on stability) may enable a spiritual, inner journey.' Philip Sheldrake, *Living Between Worlds: Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality*. London, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995, p.8

15. Charles Cummings, *Monastic Practices*, Cistercian Studies Series: no. 75. Kalamazoo, Michigan, Cistercian Publications, 1986, p.177; for a more detailed exploration of the relationship between journey and stability in Merton's life see:

Paul M. Pearson, 'The Whale and the Ivy: Journey and Stability in the Life and Writing of Thomas Merton,' *Hallel 21* (1996), pp.87-103

16. References to nature, to the birds, the sky, sun, moon and stars, the countryside, the weather and to other aspects of nature continue throughout the remainder of *Conjectures* and some have a Zen-like quality in their stark simplicity. Describing a vase of red and white carnations in the novitiate chapel Merton rapidly moves from describing the flowers into Zen-like reflections: 'Eternity. He passes. He remains. We pass. In and out. He passes. We remain. We are nothing. We are everything. He is in us. He is gone from us' and the 'flower is itself. The light is itself. The silence is itself. I am myself' (CGB, p.131). Later in *Conjectures* Merton reflects in a similar way on the dawn: 'Dark dawn. Streaks of pale red, under a few high clouds. A pattern of clothes lines, clothes pins, shadowy saplings. Abstraction. There is no way to capture it. Let it be' (CGB, p. 227). Similar references to nature occur in Merton's letters in the early sixties, especially his more personal letters. Merton tells Thérèse Lentfoehr on an occasion when a 'meadowlark' was singing outside the window, in the sun . . . and I thought I would go through the roof, it was so beautiful.' Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy* (ed. Robert E. Daggy). New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989, p.244

17. The Ox Mountain parable. [With notes and text arrangement (after the translation of I. A. Richards) by Thomas Merton] Lexington, KY, Stamperia del Santuccio, 1960

18. Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Journals of Thomas Merton* Vol. 4, 1960-1963 (ed Victor A. Kramer). San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1996, pp.79-80

19. James McMurry, 'On Being "At Home": Reflections of Monastic Stability in the Light of the Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel,' *Monastic Studies* 4 (1966), p.82

20. This essay, included in *Raids on the Unspeakable*, was completed by Merton in December 1964, although written during the period covered by *A Vow of Conversation* the substance of it is relevant to this discussion.

21. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable*, op. cit. pp. 7-8

22. Thomas Merton, *Honorable Reader*, *op. cit.* p.48
23. Besides poems which continued to reflect his reading of the Desert and the Church Fathers, the range of subjects covered in this volume is as wide and as varied as the subjects covered in *Conjectures*.
24. Thomas Merton, *The Courage for Truth*, *op. cit.* p. 245; see also *Contemplation in a World of Action*, *op. cit.* pp. 155-156
25. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love*, *op. cit.* p.52
26. Charles Cummings, *op. cit.* p.177
27. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*. London, Hollis & Carter, 1953, p.87