

THE LAST JOURNALS OF THOMAS MERTON AND ANAIS NIN

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In the posthumous *Asian Journal* (1973), the fourth of his Asian books and in certain respects a further crystalization of his thoughts on the East and hence a companion volume to *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (1965), *Mystics and Zen Masters* (1967), and *Zen and The Birds of Appetite* (1968), Thomas Merton at the Mim Tea Estate unpacks his books, for which he repeatedly pays extra baggage charges. Among his travelling books is Anaïs Nin's *Under The Glass Bell*, a collection of short stories. He copies one particular sentence from the short story, "The All-Seeing," into his notebook.

. . .The roving gaze of the mariner who never attaches himself to what he sees, whose very glance is roving, floating, sailing enormous space around them, with a sense of the distance one can put between oneself and one's desires, the sense of the enormousness of the world and of the tides and currents that carry us onward.¹

Merton, a mariner in experiences, dreams, ideas and feelings, who struggled to free himself from desires and who found a degree of detachment necessary for his own mental health, not surprisingly would find this Nin sentence congenial. Notably, however, it is Nin the storyteller rather than Nin the diarist to whom Merton makes his

1. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, Eds. Naomi Burton Stone, Patrick Hart, James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 151. Hereafter referred to in the text as *AJ*.

acquaintance. And, as Nin's journals, (which is what Nin usually called her ongoing autobiography and her British publisher called them as opposed to her American publisher's word of choice, diaries), were not brought before the public until 1966, it is reasonable to assume that Merton may not have read her diaries at all, though he certainly would have heard of them through the writings of Henry Miller. Ironically, then, Merton the master journal-keeper of one of the longest, most continuous records of what it is to be a man in the twentieth century would be unfamiliar with the longest, most continuous record of what it is to be a woman in the twentieth century.

Nin's journals, handwritten in brown and purple ink, comprise 35,000 pages and, by her own estimate, 200 volumes.² At age eleven she begins keeping a journal in the form of an extended "love letter" to her father who has abandoned the family in Paris and precipitates the family's immigration to the United States. Since Nin's mother would not permit the sending of the letters, they become private journals of her anguish and abandonment. She is unsuccessful in her attempts to call her father home and restore a broken family, but she continues journal-keeping into her seventies. Merton's journal-keeping, on the other hand, initiated by his mother as Tom's Book to keep New Zealand relatives up-to-date on his shenanigans, begins when he is about thirteen and ends when he is fifty-three. The journals are in part an attempt to lavish motherly attention on an uprooted, disconnected and abandoned self. By the time Merton enters the Gethsemani Monastery at age twenty-four he is an orphan, having lost his mother, father, grandparents and brother. He learns to rely on the journal, spiral notebooks for readings and bound notebooks for his own thoughts,³ as a kind of second self in which he writes himself into existence, and finds his identity by keeping a close record of his mental and emotional experiences.

Over sixty years of journal-keeping for Nin and over forty years of journal-keeping for Merton put the twentieth century on record through the filters of two sensitive artists. Curiously, too, in the final journals of both writers, (Merton's *The Asian Journal* of 1968 [published in 1973] and Nin's *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, Volume Seven, 1966-1974 [published in 1980]), they undertake an Asian

2. Deidre Blair, "The French Sensualists—Colette and Anaïs Nin", Lecture delivered at the International Festival of Authors, (Harbourfront, Toronto, Ontario, October 19, 1990). Hereafter referred to in the text as *Deidre Blair*.

3. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), p. 160. Hereafter referred to in the text as *SMTM*.

journey: Merton to India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Thailand, and Nin to Japan, Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand and Bali. They even stop in some of the same places and write about the same things. For example, Nin characterizes Singapore as

Mixed races in the street could have been interesting but they were drowned in noise. Cars, rickshaws and bicycles jangle and compete, then the riders insult each other. Dirt. Open sewers. Open shops. Much hawking...⁴

Merton depicts Singapore as "the city of transistors, tape recorders, cameras, perfumes, silk shirts, fine liquors. . ." which "has a Chinese kind of practicality and reality along with the big Western buildings which, as it happens, are clean and well-kept" (*AJ*, p. 237). Both journal-keepers evoke sensuous details for their descriptions, though they differ on the details. Nin emphasizes the dirt, and Merton the cleanliness of the city. More significantly, Merton uses the present tense which seems more immediate, personal and intimate than Nin's use of the past.

The Oriental Hotel in Bangkok, which played host to the likes of Joseph Conrad and Somerset Maugham, elicits comment from the two more recent sojourners. Nin has this to say about the hotel:

The Oriental is the oldest and most famous hotel. I stay in the old wing where I love the teakwood rooms and the beautiful gardens sloping down to the river.... I open my window and see the wide river glittering in the evening light. An Esso sign on the banks outshines the other lights. I had hoped to see Bangkok before its destruction by Western culture. . . . (*VII*, p. 30).

And Merton this:

I go to the Oriental, which is thoroughly quiet. The road from the airport could be a road from any airport—from Louisville to Gethsemani in summer. The same smell of hot night and burning garbage, the same Pepsi billboards. But the shops are grated up with accordion grilles, the stucco is falling off

4. Anaïs Nin, Vol. VII *The Diary of Anaïs Nin: 1966-1974*, Ed. Gunthler Stuhlmann, (San Diego: HBJ, 1980), p. 32. Hereafter referred to in the text as *VII*.

everything, and the signs in Thai are to me unintelligible (AJ, p. 13).

In his return stay in the hotel, his residence is "a fine split level dwelling high over the river" entered "through an open veranda on the other side, looking out over the city" (AJ, p. 253). In these entries Nin's use of the present tense coincides with Merton's, her physical detail matches or exceeds his, her moral indignation is more overt, and both remark on the presence of American capitalism—Esso and Pepsi—in the Thai landscape.

In his book on diarists and journal-keepers, Thomas Mallon yokes Nin and Merton together under the umbrella of "Pilgrims."⁵ Convergences of geography recur as do convergences of family history and life story. Nin was born in Paris, and wrote her earliest journals in French. Merton was born on the French-Spanish border in Prades, and maintained fluency in French throughout his life. Both lost their parents at an early age: Merton's by death, Nin's by exile in the case of her father and estrangement in the case of her mother. Both Merton and Nin were brought to the United States, and Nin, perhaps even more than Merton, kept the perspective of the outsider. Both had artistic parents. Nin's mother was a singer, her father a composer and her brother a pianist. Merton's father was a painter and his mother a student of dance, the visual arts, and a journal-keeper. Both had lifelong attachments to the arts and contact with famous artists and intellectuals. Among Nin's friends were Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell in the novel, Artaud in theatre, Noguchi in sculpture and Otto Rank in psychoanalysis. Among Merton's correspondents were Ad Rhinehardt in painting, Erich Fromm in psychoanalysis, Boris Pasternak in poetry, and Czeslaw Milosz, a poet, who sometimes turns his hand to journal-keeping as in this wonderful Mertonian invocation dated November 8, 1987. Milosz informs us of his ambition to write a novel set in Rome or "a monastery like Our Lady of Gethsemani, Kentucky, where people of various professions and views used to come to visit Thomas Merton. Merton himself, with all his contradictory desires, would appear in the novel, not only discussing Duns Scotus

5. Thomas Mallon, Ed., *A Book of One's Own: People and Their Diaries*, (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1984), pp. 83-110.

with Maritain (who visited him, too), but also thrashing around politically."⁶

Both Merton and Nin were polymaths. Nin became a great many things, including her own publisher, a model, a writer of exotica, a novelist, a dancer, a lay psychoanalyst, a lecturer, a feminist; so too Merton became a great many things, including an unsuccessful novelist, a teacher in the public system and in the monastery, a monk, a poet, a hermit, a letter writer, a photographer and artist, and a brilliant student of Zen. Robert Giroux, the publisher of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, has pillaged the alphabet for Merton, finding an occupation for each letter⁷ and one could do the same for Nin; both had enormous appetites for life in its many dimensions.

Further connections can be made between Merton and Nin in the contents of their last journals, which are remarkably similar. In the same way that Merton's Asian journal is a travelogue, a photo album, a reading list—quintessential Merton as the back cover rightly proclaims—a book of quotations, a manual on meditation and even a menu and bar list, so Nin's Asian journal is a travelogue, a photo album, a book of letters received and sent, a reading list—she carried D.H. Lawrence with her, for example, as Merton did—a dream diary and so on. Their final journals are such grab-bags that one is reminded of Derrida's words on the postcard: is the stamp central or the address or the picture or the message?⁸ In *The Asian Journal*, does the text consist of travel observations and reflections, and the subtext of quoted readings or is it the reverse? The Merton text, for example, put together by several editorial hands, is so riddled with editorial comment, bibliography, speeches, poems and letters, and the Nin text so studded with letters as to resemble an epistolary novel, that the journals seem less a single flowering of a form than a garden of forms. *The Asian Journal* in particular is pre-eminently the sort of book that Walter Benjamin aspired to⁹, consisting more of quotation and reactive thought than of original thought, the sort of book Noam

6. Daniel Halpern, Ed., *Our Private Lives: Journals, Notebooks, and Diaries* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), p. 295.

7. Robert Giroux, "The Seven Storey Mountain: The Making of a Spiritual Classic," Keynote address at First General Meeting of ITMS, (Bellarmine College: Louisville, KY, May 25-28, 1989). Hereafter referred to in the text as *Giroux*.

8. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Trans. G.C. Spivak, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U.P., 1976), p. 13.

9. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations, Essays, and Reflections*, Ed. Hannah Arendt, Trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 8.

Chomsky likes to write in which the notes exceed the text, and the sort of book Jonathan Swift wrote in *A Tale of the Tub*. There are as many "endings" to Merton's book as there are beginnings to Swift's. The last journal entry is Dec. 8th, followed by a postscript, followed by Part Two, complementary reading, and brought to a slow conclusion with nine appendixes, a bibliography, a glossary, picture credits and an index. The journal proper ends on page 239, yet the book goes on to page 445.

To recognize similarities in their life stories and in the contents of their final journals ought not to lead to the denial of differences. Merton and Nin have their differences as journal-keepers. Merton, as much the window as the mirror, makes more political reference than Nin, for example. Lax's arresting phrase, "hermit at the heart of things" (back cover of *Road to Joy*) acquires social and political resonance inasmuch as Merton succeeds in turning Gethsemani into a centre for political comment. His opposition to the Viet Nam war, his championing of civil rights, his advocacy of peace, his criticism of capitalism are all well known, and hinted at, if not explicitly stated, in *The Asian Journal*. The monk in his cabin in one sense writes to no one but himself, and in another sense he addresses the world. Merton's humour is also stronger than Nin's; his observations on nature are more frequent. In *The Asian Journal* he writes charmingly of dogs and yaks, of magpies and wrens, of bees and butterflies. For example:

Two white butterflies alight on separate flowers. They rise, play together briefly, accidentally, in the air, then departed in different directions (*AJ*, p. 107).

Nin, on the other hand, is more self-consciously literary, more a philosopher and theorist of the journal as an art form, and in her *Asian journal* compared to Merton's, more insistent on taking her inner temperature, recording seismic shifts in her psyche. She speaks of the journal "as a way of orienting ourselves to our inner lives . . . It's a moment of stopping life in order to become aware of it,"¹⁰ "a way to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospec-

10. Anaïs Nin, *A Woman Speaks: The Lectures, Seminars, and Interviews of Anaïs Nin*, Ed. Evelyn J. Hinz, (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1975), p. 160. Hereafter referred to in the text as *WS*.

tion."¹¹ Nin posits two human needs in relation to creative writing: the need to document one's day to day life, the inner journey, and the need to leave something permanent behind, the myth. The first need Nin argues is met by journal-writing, and the second, by fiction which transforms experience into myth (*WS*, p. 191). Nin's practice, however, contradicts her theory in that her own journal-keeping, more successfully than her novels, transforms document into myth: the quotidian is made permanent; the timebound achieves timelessness.

Nin's professed way of writing a journal is to follow a dictum of Jung's: proceed from the dream outwards.¹² Dreams play a significant role in Volume VII. She dreams of black boys, of death, of dogs, of a house in a storm, of D.H. Lawrence, of her mother, of a white cat and so on. Merton records his dreams less frequently, but as tellingly. He dreams of Buddhist clothes, of the south of France, of a balloon.

Last night I dreamed that I was, temporarily, back at Gethsemani. I was dressed in a Buddhist monk's habit, but with more black and red and gold, a "Zen habit," in color more Tibetan than Zen.

Other recent dreams, dimly remembered. Strange towns. Towns in the south of France. Working my way along the Riviera. How to get to the "next place"? I forget what the problem is, or if it is solved.

Another: I'm in some town and have a small, silvery toy balloon, but it has a dangerous explosive gas in it. I throw it in the air and hope it will float completely away before anything happens. It rises too slowly, departs too slowly—but nothing happens. The dream changes (*AJ*, 107).

Nin's brother has called her journals the best novels that she ever wrote (Deidre Blair). Notwithstanding her claim to write spontaneously we know from Deidre Blair, her biographer-to-be, how polished, how laboured, how contrived, how edited and re-edited her journals are. Nin belongs to the French literary tradition of the journal going back to Montaigne's autobiographical essays in the

11. Anaïs Nin, Vol. V, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin: 1947-1955*, Ed. Gunthler Stuhlmann, (San Diego: HCJ, 1974), p. 149. Hereafter referred to in the text as *V*.

12. Anaïs Nin, *The Novel of the Future*, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1968), p. 5. Hereafter referred to in the text as *NF*.

sixteenth century and running through Rousseau's *Confessions* in the eighteenth century to Andre Gide's journals and Proust's novels in the twentieth century. The personal documentary form thrives on close examination of the self, a word whose meaning solidifies around 1674 in the modern sense of "a permanent subject of successive and varying states of consciousness."¹³

Merton too has connections to the literary tradition of the journal, even the fictional journal, as his first published novel is originally entitled *Journal of My Escape From the Nazis*, but his journals also owe something to the New World tradition of journal-keeping, from Christopher Columbus in the fifteenth century, to Samuel Sewall in the seventeenth and Emerson and Thoreau in the nineteenth, in which the stranger in a new land records his observations. Additionally, his journals connect with the spiritual tradition of the journal going back to Saint Augustine and running through Pascal's *Pensées* to Jonathan Edwards to Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Merton's work partakes of these three traditions, and *The Asian Journal* in particular embraces aspects of all three: a man dialoguing with his soul, a stranger observing a new place, and a literary man fully at ease with his form.

The journal as an art form engenders Merton's best writing, and the fullest expression of his personality. In a letter to June J. Yungblut, March 6, 1968, for example, he writes: "The work I feel more happy about is at once more personal, more literary, more contemplative. Books like *Conjectures*, *New Seeds*, *Sign of Jonas*, *Raids....*"¹⁴ Two of these books, *The Sign of Jonas* and *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, are journals while *New Seeds* is journal-like in form. In his 1967 rating system, he evaluates *Conjectures* and *Jonas* as among his "better" books.¹⁵ In *The Secular Journal* he comments that he has grown tired of reading novels and that the journal is the kind of thing he likes to read and write. "Galley proofs of *Secular Journal* make it clear to me that my best writing has always been in Journals and such things—notebooks" (*SMTM*, p. 310).

In his finished journals he refines journal jottings into meditations, works somewhat akin to Pascal's *Pensées*, whereas his

13. Anthony Storr, *Solitude*, (London: Flamingo, 1988), p. 79.

14. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, Ed. William H. Shannon, (London: Faber Paperbacks, 1989), p. 641.

15. Thomas Merton, *Introductions East and West: The Foreign Prefaces of Thomas Merton*, Ed. Robert E. Daggy, (Oakville, Ontario: Mosail Press, 1981), pp. 2, 125. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Introductions*.

"unfinished" *Asian Journal* is written in haste, "almost stenographically" (*AJ*, p. vi) in phrases and put into sentences by the editors—a maquette rather than a finished piece of sculpture. And yet, strangely, the words Merton uses to describe *Conjectures* (1965) can as easily be applied to *The Asian Journal* "a series of sketches and meditations, some poetic and literary, other historical and even theological, fitted together in a spontaneous, informal, philosophic scheme in such a way that they react upon each other."¹⁶

Merton's close friend, Robert Lax, observes that "in his journals Merton came closest in a verbal medium to the spontaneous self-expression that he achieved in his calligraphies."¹⁷

The Asian Journal, in particular, written on the run as it were, may be likened to one of his Zen drawings, a kind of word jazz or Zen writing in which the quick of life, with little interference from a meddling ego or an analytical self-censor, is captured by the quick of the form. *The Asian Journal* is not "a sketch of what might have been" (*SMTM*, p. 543) as Mott tends to dismiss it, but a sketch of what was in three months of a poet-monk's life.

The journal form authenticates Merton's intuition that spiritual and artistic concerns can be braided.

Some conclusions: Literature, contemplative, solitude, Latin America, Asia, Zen, Islam etc., all these things come together in my life. It would be madness for me to attempt to create a monastic life for myself by excluding all these.¹⁸

This insight forms slowly as the Merton of the 1948 *Seven Storey Mountain* felt that he had to make a choice between writing and the spirit. In speaking about himself as if he were someone else, he writes: "He generates books in the silence that ought to be sweet with the infinitely productive darkness of contemplation."¹⁹

In the 1953 journal, *The Sign of Jonas*, he cautions: "It is not much fun to live the spiritual life with the spiritual equipment of an artist" (*Furlong*, 170). And as late as the 1959 *Secular Journal of*

16. Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 5-6.

17. Ross Labrie, *The Art of Thomas Merton*, (Fort Worth: Texas U.P., 1979), p. 53.

18. Thomas Merton, *A Vow of Conversation, Journals 1964-1965*, Ed. Naomi Burton Stone (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1989), p. 62.

19. Monica Furlong, *Merton: A Biography*, (London: Collins, 1980), p. 139. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Furlong*.

Thomas Merton, originally entitled *The Cuban Journal*, Merton implies a dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular. However, by 1963 he bristles with the suggestion that he is a spiritual writer. "In the first place I think I have written much and published too much. Some early work resulted in my being classified as a 'spiritual writer,' or worse still, an 'inspirational writer,' a category to which I seriously object..."²⁰ And certainly by 1964, by which time he is deeply attached to Zen, he no longer imposes artificial boundaries between the artistic and the spiritual, the secular and the sacred. He acknowledges the journal as the one form in which his myriad of interests can co-exist amicably.

The Asian Journal, for example, comprising "Asian Notes," the continuing journal for 1968 ("The Hawk's Dream"), and a small pocket notebook (*SMTM*, p. 543), effortlessly blends things spiritual and things secular, travelogue and meditative quotation. Indeed, the quotations from his readings often reinforce, echo and "react upon" the shifting attitudes and stances in the narrative. For example, Merton cites T.R.V. Murti's *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* over twenty times, which along with Giuseppe Tucci's *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala*, makes it the most frequently quoted book in *The Asian Journal* and the book which provides much of the journal's intellectual underpinning. Merton makes reference to Murti's

... 'knowledge devoid of distinction,' ...

Absolute reality is not set over against empirical reality. The empirical, liberated from conventional thought forms [,] is identical with the absolute. (*AJ*, p. 115)

Hence, not escape from the world into idealism, but the transformation of consciousness by the detached and compassionate acceptance of the empirical world in its interrelatedness. (*AJ*, p. 116)

The essence of the Madhyamika attitude . . . consists in not allowing oneself to be entangled in views and theories, but, just to observe the nature of things without standpoints (*AJ*, p. 137).

Merton's way of writing a journal, and in particular the construction of *The Asian Journal*, closely mirrors Murti's words, which, in turn, do not seem far from Nin's phrasing: ". . . The roving

20. B. Harte and C. Riley, Eds., *200 Contemporary Authors: Bibliographies of Selected Leading Writers of Today with Critical and Personal Sidelights*, (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1969), p. 186.

gaze of the mariner who never attaches himself to what he sees . . ." (*VII*, p. 151). Merton communicates "knowledge devoid of distinction," soccer scores along with arcane spiritual theories; he is concerned with the "interrelatedness" of things, philosophies and butterflies; and he observes "the nature of things" without any particular attachment or standpoint other than that of a marginal man, a monk.

The journal form also gives Merton the opportunity to relieve his personal tensions. He goes on his Asian journey with questions for which he hopes he will find answers, and with conflicts which he hopes to resolve. On November 18 he chides himself: "Too much movement. Too much 'looking for' something: an answer, a vision, 'something other.' And this breeds illusion. illusion that there is 'something else . . .'" (*AJ*, p. 148). Later he writes, "Now suppose some loon comes up to me and says, 'Have you found the real Asia?' I am at a loss to know what one means by 'the real Asia.' It is all real as far as I can see" (*AJ*, p. 149). It seems to me that Merton on his final journey learns to be present wherever he is, to be attentive to the now, and if not to resolve his tensions fully, at least to see and understand them from "a higher standpoint" (*AJ*, p. 102). Again, his dreams are telling. His problem of how to get to the next place is dissolved in his forgetting what the problem is; the balloon with the explosive gas which he tries to throw away refuses to go away, but neither does it explode.

The journal, the most democratic of art forms, even in a certain respect, for all its diffuseness over compactness, the most Zen-like of verbal forms, puts all entries on an equal plane; no one part aristocratically acts as the centre of the whole: the form is inherently anti-climactic and serendipitous. What is stumbled upon is commented upon; the miraculous lies in the mundane, the extraordinary in the commonplace; "it is all real." As Nin frequently notes, the journal form has no climax, no resolutions of conflict, no denouement, only more entries. She describes journal-keeping this way:

As the diarist does not know the future, he reaches no conclusion, no synthesis, which is an artificial product of the intellect. The diary is true to becoming and continuum. (*NF*, 153)

In *The Asian Journal*, for example, Merton records his response to the Buddha statues in Polonnaruwa, but it is not a Road-to-

Damascus transformative experience in which he is one thing before the experience and another after it. However deeply he was affected by the serenity of the statues, Merton carries on with his life and his observations. He gives as much time and space to everyday details as he does to mystical experience. For example, he complains about his cold and sore throat, which plague him throughout his trip (*AJ*, p. 166). He buys too many books in San Francisco (*AJ*, p. 4); he notes that stocks are up in Hong Kong (*AJ*, p. 8); there is no complimentary champagne on route to Bangkok (*AJ*, p. 9); a soldier reads the Bible on his way to Vietnam, Hong Kong beats Singapore in the Ho Ho Soccer Cup (*AJ*, p. 9); Paz resigns as Mexican ambassador to India, Jackie Kennedy remarries (*AJ*, p. 31); Johnson stops the bombing, two magpies are fighting in a tree (*AJ*, p. 91), and he prefers Ceylonese beer to Indian (*AJ*, p. 215). What one is tempted to extract, and extrapolate on, his encounter at Polonnaruwa, and his talk at Bangkok—are all simply part of the goulash. The fecundity of the form spawns a marsh of impressions and meditations. Politics, alcohol, nature, gossip, books, personal health and Tibetan mysticism mingle in the ecstasy of memory. Organizationally, too, the book mitigates against a climactic interpretation: Merton's concern that he may have spoiled Polonnaruwa by talking too much about it precedes his viewing of the statues, page 230 as opposed to page 233.

Nin's last journal begins with her reaction to Japan, and ends with her response to Bali. Between these ports of call she acknowledges a positive reception to her journals, she receives an abundance of "fan" mail; she battles cancer; she records her dreams; she delivers commencement addresses at colleges and so on. In her final journal no one event or thought or feeling or dream dominates another: no epiphany or peak experience subordinates all others; everything "reacts upon" everything else. In the democracy of the journal, each experience is given its own space and voice. For example, one of the charming aspects of Volume VII is its attention to food. Nin's journal is a "Babette's Feast" of culinary delights. About Japan, for example, she writes:

I am eating a variety of vegetables I do not know. I recognize small green pepper, eggplant, watercress and cucumber—and a variation of the sweet potato, parsnip, dandelion, cucumber flower. I eat fried chrysanthemums... Only the Japanese would think of serving red watermelon in a green plate. Or wrap rice in green leaves (*VII*, p. 20).

Although she writes more novels than Merton and has larger ambitions for them, Nin acknowledges the journal as her most expressive form. As early as her third adolescent journal, she boldly claims: "I have come to the point where I feel that this is the form of expression with which I am most familiar and the one which I am most strongly attached to . . ." ²¹ Throughout her journals she variously refers to them as her "confidante," "strainer," "a house of the spirit," "a laboratory," "a refuge," "a sanctuary," "an island," "Prince of Princes," "King on earth," "my kief, hashish, and opium pipe," "the only steadfast friend I have." She tenaciously clings to her journals despite the exhortations from her psychoanalysts, René Allendy and Otto Rank, to drop them.

She speaks of her journals at times as "a paper womb," ²² in the double sense of storage: a repository, and a birth canal. "Woman does not forget . . . that everything that is born of her is planted in her" (*Scholar*, 41). She contrasts the male tendency towards detachment and dissection with the female tendency towards attachment and connection.

God alone, creating, may be a beautiful spectacle. I don't know. Man's objectivity may be an imitation of this God so detached from us and human emotion. But a woman alone creating is not a beautiful spectacle. The woman was born mother, mistress, wife, sister, she was born to represent union, communion, communication, she was born to give birth to life, and not to insanity. ²³

Some feminists today may take issue with some of Nin's words, but the feminist artist, Judy Chicago, unapologetically quotes from Nin along similar lines: "I do not delude myself, as Man does, that I create in proud isolation . . . Woman's creation, far from being like Man's must be exactly like her creation of children; that is, it must come out of her own blood, englobed by her womb, nourished with her own milk. It must be a human creation, of flesh, it must be different

21. Anaïs Nin, *The Early Diary of Anaïs Nin: 1923-1927 Vol. III*, Trans. Jean Sherman, (San Diego: HBJ, 1976), p. 32.

22. Nancy Scholar, *Anaïs Nin*, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), p. 40. Hereafter referred to in the text as *Scholar*.

23. Anaïs Nin, Vol. II *The Diary of Anaïs Nin 1934-1939*, Ed. Gunthler Stuhlmann, (San Diego: HBJ, 1970), p. 234.

from Man's abstractions."²⁴ Nin's metaphors here come out of the body; creation is linked to the functions of the body. These are metaphors that a man, with a different physical experience from a woman's, could not use as naturally. And it is a strength of Nin's journals that however much she may detour into self-analysis, she never leaves the body or abandons the senses.

The journal for Nin is crucial to her identity. When her roots are severed in the family diaspora, the journal is her only link, if only imaginary, to the father root. When her self-image as a writer is buffeted by publishing firms rejecting her novels, the journal restores her confidence. As Northrop Frye reminds us, "The central story of all literature is the loss and regaining of identity."²⁵ In bold print Nin asks in *House of Incest: DOES ANYONE KNOW WHO I AM?*²⁶ It is the cry of journal-keepers, Merton and Nin, who create and maintain their identities by writing. As early as her first journal she writes, "Playing so many roles, dutiful daughter, devoted sister, mistress, protector, my father's new-found illusion, Henry's needed allpurpose friend, I had to find one place of truth, one dialogue without falsity."²⁷ The dismemberment of home, of family and of language makes Nin intimate with loss, and the symbolic repair²⁸ necessary to make herself whole again is attempted through her lifelong journal-keeping. As she puts it, "I had to create a world of my own, like a climate, a country, an atmosphere in which I could breathe, reign, and recreate myself when destroyed by living . . ." (V,149).

Merton too, of course, knows a great deal about loss. His family tree is completely cut down, leaving him as a branch disconnected from trunk and roots. He too abandons one country for another, one language for another, one lifestyle for another—the bohemian becomes a hermit; the poet, a monk. And the journal becomes for him a symbolic repair, a way of restoring lost things, of re-uniting the splinters of a fragmented self. Paradoxically, by employing the most narcissistic of art forms, both Nin and Merton are able to get out of

24. Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist*, Intro. by Anais Nin. (Garden City, NY, 1982), Frontispiece.

25. Northrop Frye, "On Teaching Literature," *On Education*, (Markham, Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1988), p. 137.

26. Anais Nin, *House of Incest*, (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1958), p. 26.

27. Anais Nin, Vol. I *The Diary of Anais Nin: 1931-1934*, Ed. Gunthler Syuhlmann, (San Diego: HBJ, 1969), p. 286.

28. Andrew Brink, *Loss and Symbolic Repair*, (Hamilton, Ontario, The Cromlech Press, McMaster University, 1977),

the self by getting further into the self, Nin largely through psychoanalysis and Merton largely through Zen. Before one can lose a self, one must find it. In Fryean terms, the quest-myth is the vehicle by which one pursues the identity-myth. As Michael Mott jests, "The koan for Thomas Merton might have been 'How does one write about self so that the self disappears?'. . . 'By exhausting the subject of self'" (*SMTM*, p. 366). In *The Sign of Jonas*, Merton's own way of putting it is, "Let me at least disappear into the writing I do."²⁹

Nin fears, as Merton does, the prison of self. Not for nothing are her favorite words the ones with the prefix "trans": "transcend, transmute, transform, transpose, transfigure" (VII, 264), words which connote getting out of the self, beyond the self, across to other selves. The prefix for Merton is surely "re": restore, remake, revitalize, retrieve, reform, words suggestive of something being lost and regained. Nin asserts that the "theme of the diary is always the personal, but it does not mean only a personal story: it means a personal relation to all things and people. The personal, if it is deep enough, becomes universal, mythical, symbolic; I never generalize, intellectualize. I see, I hear, I feel."³⁰ The personal holds within itself the seeds of the transpersonal. In speaking to the other, one is speaking to oneself, but also in speaking to oneself, one is speaking to the other. The boundaries between self and the other are dissolved. This is the central paradox of journal-writing. Merton's famous 1963 "Preface to the Japanese Edition of *The Seven Storey Mountain*" grapples with this paradox:

Therefore, most honorable reader, it is not as an author that I would speak to you, not as a story-teller, not as a philosopher, not as a friend only: I seek to speak to you, in some way, as your own self (*Introductions*, p. 47)

In his informal talk in Calcutta, October, 1968, part of *The Asian Journal*, Merton clarifies his sense of self by identifying himself as a monk and, as a monk, a marginal person connected to those relegated to the fringes of society: Afro-Americans, Latin Americans, native peoples, poets, hippies and the disenfranchised generally. Merton's self is in solidarity with the selves of those with

29. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1956), p. 27.

30. Anais Nin, Vol. IV *The Diary of Anais Nin: 1944-1947*, Ed. Gunthler Stuhlmann, (San Diego: HBJ, 1971), p. 172.

little or no identity: those who are "irrelevant," a word Merton uses in his talk. Nin's late correspondence, much of it included in her last journal, bears testimony to the truth of her assertion: "The more I developed my self, the less mine it became" (VII, 200). In letter after letter, readers inform her that in writing about herself she wrote about them.

Parts of myself long ago put to sleep have been gently wakened . . . I am sometimes afraid that my own personal growth will stop the moment your writing does. (VII, 203-204)

What she desired in her early journals, embodied by the Gaelic word "furravn" which means "talk that leads to intimacy," she, like Merton, achieves by her final journal (VII, 213).

I have called the journal the most democratic and narcissistic of art forms. It is also in Joyce Carol Oates' phrase the most seductive of forms (*Scholar*, Preface). We are seduced by the personal documenting of event and response, the verisimilitude of the form, a verisimilitude that writers as early as Defoe in *A Journal of the Plague Year* exploited for fictional purposes. We are attracted to other people's linen, other people's closets, other people's gossip. Merton's and Nin's journals are especially seductive because they have not all been published. Readers are tantalized into thinking that there must be more—and indeed, there will be more. *Henry and June*, from the unexpurgated journals, was brought to print in 1986 and to film in 1990 by Philip Kaufman. There are more journals to be published, though perhaps none steamier than *Henry and June* with its references to Nin's affairs with Henry and June Miller, her cousin Eduardo, and her psychoanalyst Dr. Allendy. Deidre Blair, the biographer of Beckett and Beauvoir, is at work on a Nin biography which will explicitly deal with her father's incest. Do we then re-interpret the Nin canon, especially the adolescent journals, with this new information?

In the next few years the private journals and correspondence of Merton will be published in which we are likely to read of his feelings for his son and his friend. Do we then reevaluate his previous journals in the light of the new journals or even reconstruct a new Asian journal? We will certainly need to ask ourselves difficult questions, questions that Merton himself would not have shirked: to what extent is Merton's becoming a monk a running away from responsibility for his son? To what extent is the Asian journey a running away from responsibility for a particular woman?

These questions may be viewed from a variety of vantage points. A psychoanalytical view may differ substantially, for example, from a spiritual view. But whatever our viewpoint, the questions need to be asked and responded to. What was private needs now to be public. We have it from no less an authority than Brother Patrick Hart that "Merton will never be completely understood until the correspondence and the journals are published".³¹

In the meantime, while we wait for more comprehensive responses to the journals of Nin and Merton, we have many of their final jottings, their last journeys. We have the jottings of a woman who, after decades of being in the literary waste land receives blessings with which all her life she had showered others. She is visited, written to, asked to speak, asked to endorse, has children named after her, and is finally acknowledged as a great writer. We have the jottings of a man whom Robert Giroux has described as possessing the greatest capacity for growth he had ever encountered in a writer (*Giroux*), taking photographs of children, wondering if it is good to give them money, criticizing himself for talking about mysteries and wonders, sensing the "enormousness of the world and the tides and currents that carry us onward" (*AJ*, p. 151). We have the last journals of two mariners who in writing their own stories wrote ours.

31. Patrick Hart, O.C.S.O., "'Das Ist Mein Personliches Gefuhl': A Conversation with Brother Patrick Hart," by Kurt Remele, *Merton Seasonal* 12, (Autumn 1987): No. 4, p. 17.