

Paul J. Spaeth, DEALING WITH TEXTS

I recall with great pleasure the moment in which I discovered, sitting on the booksellers table at this past summer's General Meeting at St. Bonaventure University, the newly published volume containing the premonastic journals of Thomas Merton. After eagerly purchasing a copy I took it back to my office in the Library and spent most of the rest of the afternoon browsing through its pages. It should be no wonder that this publication would interest me so, since the book is so intimately linked not only to the University Library where I work but also to the town in which I live. The original texts from which this material in the book were transcribed are part of the Merton Archives kept in the Library. A major portion of this material was written while Merton was either staying on campus or at the Marcus family cottage in the hills behind the College.

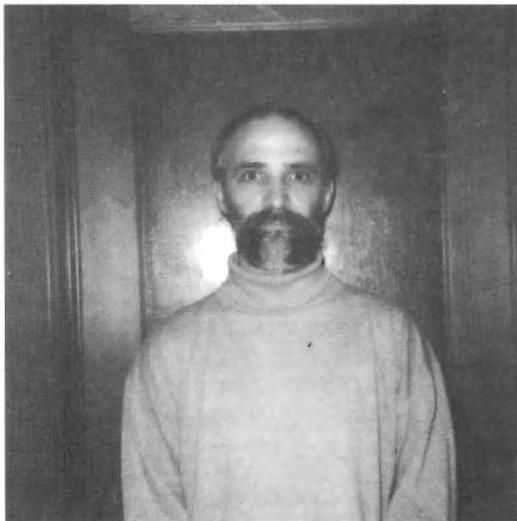
Most reviews of *Run to the Mountain* will deal with what Merton wrote about; both his thoughts and what he did during this period of his life. However, because of my close connection to the source materials of this publication, my comments will deal with technical matters concerning the published text and its relation to manuscript, typescript and other published sources. *Run to the Mountain* consists of three parts, each of which was transcribed from a different manuscript or typescript source from the Merton Archives at St. Bonaventure University.

The first section ("Perry Street, New York") was transcribed from a manuscript of 233 pages of text and three pages of line drawings. The whole is contained within a bound ledger-style notebook. There are sixty pages which have been torn out, most probably by Merton himself. The manuscript seems to be transcribed fully. Three of the line drawings from this manuscript have been used on the title pages for each of the sections of the published book.

The second part ("Cuban Interlude") was transcribed from a typescript that is part of a larger collection of materials usually referred to as the Fitzgerald File. When Merton left St. Bonaevnture he had given the material to Richard Fitzgerald, who was then studying for the priesthood. More than thirty years later Fr. Fitzgerald returned the material to St. Bonaventure, placing it in the Archives under the care of Fr. Irenaeus Herscher. This file consists of 385 loose sheets of unlined notebook paper that contain both manuscript and typescript pages along with many full page line drawings. The pages of text contain novel fragments, essays, literary reviews, copies of letters, poems, research notes on Dante and journal entries. What has been transcribed in *Run to the Mountain* is a typescript section of sixty seven leaves.

The third part ("Saint Bonaventure's, New York") was transcribed from a manuscript of 258 pages. There are twenty two pages which have been torn out. This text, like the Perry Street Journal, was written in a bound ledger-style notebook. The transcription is of the whole text.

In the preface of *Run to the Mountain* Brother Patrick Hart states that, "The editorial decision was made early on to publish the journals just as Merton wrote them . . . with a bare minimum of editing." Now if the three archival items described above were the only sources to be tapped for the text of Merton's premonastic journals things would be fine, but, in fact, these three do not contain the whole picture. The first problem that arises is that there are three additional journal entries, not part of the Cuban journal, which are part of the Fitzgerald File. These three entries were not transcribed in *Run to the Mountain*, but these were not the only texts that were overlooked.



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There are two other items that are related to each other and which, would say, should have been taken into account in the publication being reviewed. The first item is another typescript notebook owned by the Merton Archives at St. Bonaventure University which contains journal entries from the premonastic period. The notebook has been called "The Brown Journal" simply because of the color of the binder in which it is kept.

"The Brown Journal" consists of sixty leaves which contain twenty five entries dated from July of 1940 to December of 1941. Three of those entries are not actually journal entries but are more like literary experiments. Four of the entries are not represented in any way in the material which was transcribed for *Run to the Mountain*. The eighteen entries that are left in "The Brown Journal" are edited versions of entries which appear in handwritten form in the Bonaventure Journal. The entries are edited in two ways. Some consist of word-for-word excerpts, while others are portions of fuller entries that have had their wording revised. This revision was either made for the sake of improving the style alone or for the sake of modifying or adding to what was being said. Sometimes the revision is so extensive that it is hard to compare the earlier and later texts.

This brings us to the second item and that is the familiar 1959 publication entitled *The Secular Journal of Thomas Merton*. This book follows the same style of editing that is present in "The Brown Journal." But, in the case of *The Secular Journal*, the material is drawn from all three of the texts transcribed in *Run to the Mountain* instead of just one. What we have in *Run to the Mountain* is the raw material which was used to fashion both *The Secular Journal* and the entries in "The Brown Journal."

Both of these last mentioned texts must have been edited before Merton left St. Bonaventure College in December of 1941 because Merton gave away the texts on which they were based at that time (the Perry Street and Bonaventure Journals to Mark Van Doren and the Fitzgerald File to Richard Fitzgerald). When *The Secular Journal* was finally going to be published eighteen years later, Merton looked once again at the original material from which it had been drawn, but ended up by adding very little to the text. At least this is what he related to F. Irenaeus Herscher in a letter dated 4 May 1958.

So where does all this talk about these other texts leave us? We are left with this: there are three textual traditions (actually four if we factor in *The Seven Storey Mountain* that are autobiographical and that deal with the same period of Thomas Merton's life. Each is different and there has been no attempt to harmonize the accounts.

Numerous examples could be given as to the dramatic changes among these texts, but perhaps the best ones to cite are the four dated entries which appear in all three items. Two of these entries (1/2/41 and 4/11/41) begin in the same way in all three texts but then Merton chooses one section of the *Run* material to work with in "The Brown Journal" and a different section to work with in *The Secular Journal*. What is even more interesting are the entries for 4/10/41 and 4/18/41. In these two entries Merton writes about the same things in three different ways in each of the three journals. These examples show the use of the *Run to the Mountain* texts as the raw material for *The Secular Journal* and "The Brown Journal," but it also provides some evidence for the independence of these last two works.

These examples also clearly show the care and labor that Merton was devoting to these writings in both selection and revision. This can be seen by comparing the arrangement of the two published volumes. In looking at the table of contents of *Run to the Mountain*, we see three sections that correspond to three different archival texts. When we compare that to the table of contents of *The Secular Journal*, we see that Merton has refashioned the material in order to direct the reader's attention to the most important events and periods of time in his life. Merton was quoted by Michael Mott as saying, "Galley proofs of *Secular Journal* make it clear to me that my best writing has always been in journals and such things . . ." (*The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton*, p. 310). Merton made this statement after he had a chance to compare together the material he had chosen and fashioned into *The Secular Journal* to its sources in the *Run to the Mountain* material.

This brings us to a dilemma: should we bring into print materials that the author himself has rejected for publication? I would say, with some hesitancy, that we should, but that we should do it with great care. The care of which I speak consists of providing adequate historical and textual background to the document in

hand so that readers know, as they read, what its relation is to other drafts and other writings that the author produced. This is what Merton himself says about the process of writing his journals,

Why would I write anything, if not to be read? This journal is written for publication. It is about time I realized that, and wrote with some art If a journal is written for publication, then you can tear pages out of it, emend it, correct it, write with art.

(*Run to the Mountain*, p. 271)

Merton did “write with art” when he edited *The Secular Journal* from the *Run to the Mountain* material. My point is not that *Run* should not have been published, but rather that the reader should have been made aware of the other texts for which it was the source. It seems that in relation to Merton telling his own story the first writing in order of importance is *The Seven Storey Mountain*, followed by *The Secular Journal*, and lastly *Run to the Mountain*. All are important in and of themselves in that they fill out our portrait of the life of Thomas Merton. There is an order of importance to the texts, and because of this a fuller type of historical/textual introduction should have been written or perhaps even an attempt at harmonizing the published texts with the typescript of “The Brown Journal.”

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Jack Kelly is a writer and photographer who lives in New York and is coauthor, with his wife Marcia, of the book series *Sanctuaries: A Guide to Lodgings in Monasteries, Abbeys and Retreats* and a book of meal-time blessings *One Hundred Graces*. He recently spent a “very peaceful and wonderful” night in Merton’s hermitage at Gethsemani.

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