

Thomas Merton's Literary Estate: What Is Left to Be Published?

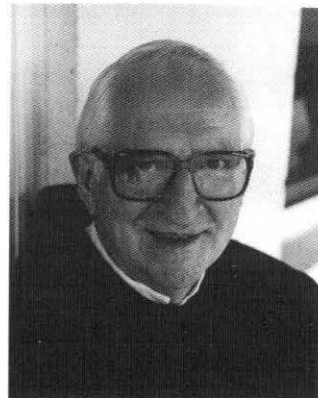
By Patrick Hart, OCSO

It is no secret that Father Louis/Thomas Merton left an enormous amount of unpublished material when he took off for Asia in the fall of 1968. With his tragic death on December 10th of the same year in Bangkok, his manuscripts, the many unpublished letters, journals and notes came under the jurisdiction of the Merton Legacy Trust, according to the Trust Agreement which was drawn up in the fall of 1967. The current Trustees are Robert Giroux, Anne McCormick and Tommie O'Callaghan.

By early 1976, Father Clyde Crews, Director of the Merton Center at Bellarmine College, along with myself, felt it was time to launch a publication to let interested persons know something of the Merton archives housed in the "Merton Room" of the old Library on the first floor of what is now Horrigan Hall. The idea was to let Merton readers know what books were being scheduled for publication following Merton's death, and also to alert persons to events pertaining to the ongoing interest in Merton's writings and various conferences that were beginning to take place throughout the world. Thus was born *The Merton Seasonal*.

First to be published after Merton's death was *The Climate of Monastic Prayer* (1969), later published under the title *Contemplative Prayer*. *The Asian Journal*, which had been promised to James Laughlin for New Directions, came next. It took several years to try to decipher the handwriting of this holographic journal from Asia, edited by Naomi Burton, James Laughlin and myself, but it finally did appear in 1973. A number of other collections were published during the decades following Merton's death, such as: *Love and Living*, *The Monastic Journey*, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, *The Collected Poems* and *The Literary Essays*. Beginning in 1985 five volumes of Merton's letters began appearing under the general editorship of William H. Shannon, and finally the seven volumes of the journals (1995-1998). With this accomplished, I am often asked: what is left to be published?

To return to the Merton letters project, certainly the five published volumes did not nearly exhaust possibilities for further publication. In fact, since their publication, there have been a number of volumes published which contained both sides of the correspondence, such as those of Merton with Rosemary Ruether, James Laughlin, "Ping" Ferry, Czeslaw Milosz, Ad Reinhardt, Ernesto Cardenal (in Spanish), Boris Pasternak, and Daisetz T. Suzuki. At present the University Press of Kentucky is planning to publish the complete correspondence between Robert Lax and Thomas Merton, edited by Arthur "Bill" Biddle, which should be ready towards the end of this



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Brother Patrick Hart, OCSO, Thomas Merton's last secretary, edited many of the posthumous publications of Thomas Merton, including the first and last volumes of Merton's complete journals, for which he served as general editor. He also was the third editor of *The Merton Seasonal*, serving in an interim capacity during 1997.

year or early 2001. There is also the John C. H. Wu / Thomas Merton correspondence which is being edited by John Wu, Jr. and Jonathan Montaldo. Christine Bochen has begun the preliminary work of editing a volume of the Naomi Burton correspondence with Merton. At the same time I am preparing a similar volume which will contain all the Jean Leclercq / Thomas Merton letters. I am sure there must be many more sets of correspondence awaiting publication, such as those of Merton with Jacques Maritain, Catherine de Hueck Doherty, Daniel Berrigan, James Forest, June Yungblut and Etta Gullick among others. In addition, there are still hundreds of unpublished Merton letters in the Merton Archives of Bellarmine University

Then we come to Merton's monastic conference notes, which Cistercian Publications of Western Michigan University has contracted for with the Merton Trust. A dozen volumes are under review at present, although there are many others of this genre at Bellarmine and other Merton collections; the first volume, entitled *Cassian and the Fathers*, is being edited by Patrick O'Connell. Another volume on the twelfth-century Cistercians, edited by Father Chrysogonus Waddell of Gethsemani, has been appearing serially in *Liturgy OCSO* magazine. Lawrence S. Cunningham of Notre Dame has begun work on a volume in this series titled *An Introduction to Ascetical and Mystical Theology*. Meanwhile, I have been editing the short biographical sketches of Thomas Merton's *Modern Biographical Sketches of the Cistercian Blesseds and Saints*, which Merton wrote while still in temporary vows at Gethsemani in the mid-forties. Some of these sketches, on St. Malachy the Irishman, the Three Founders of Cîteaux (Saints Robert, Alberic and Stephen Harding), Bl. William of St. Thierry, and St. Lutgarde, have been appearing in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* and the complete series will eventually be published by Cistercian Publications in book form.

There are also Merton's reading notebooks (sometimes called working notebooks) which are becoming available on the Internet through the industry of Patrick Graham, Director of the Pitts Library at Emory University in Atlanta. There are some fifty reading notebooks in the Bellarmine College Merton Collection and another twenty volumes at other colleges. This long-range project may take some years before the transcriptions are ready for the Internet. With Emory University student assistance, these volumes are being digitized, after which the transcriptions will be made available on the Internet. (Jonathan Montaldo has already transcribed four of these notebooks.)

I would like to toss out the idea of doing something creative with the nearly five hundred taped conferences of Merton that have not as yet been released by Credence Cassettes or Electronic Paperbacks – and then a step further to the possibility of transcribing these (or some of them) on to the printed page?

Finally, how about the literally hundreds of Merton photographs and drawings? There has been some discussion on the possibility of mounting the best of both the drawings and photographs for traveling exhibitions. Two earlier books (John Howard Griffin's *A Hidden Wholeness* and Deba Patnaik's *Geography of Holiness*) have been out of print for a long time. Has anyone thought of resurrecting the Merton calendars which Naomi Burton and I brought out in three editions (1979-1981), using both photographs and drawings? They seem to be crying out to be seen, used, and treasured again in the new millennium. Of course any such project would have to be negotiated through the Merton Legacy Trust in the person of Mrs. Anne H. McCormick, 670 West End Ave., Apt. 14-E, New York, NY. She is the Trustee who handles all contracts and permissions for the Trust. Any brilliant publishing schemes or suggestions in regard to what is left of the Merton Literary Estate should be directed to her for consideration.