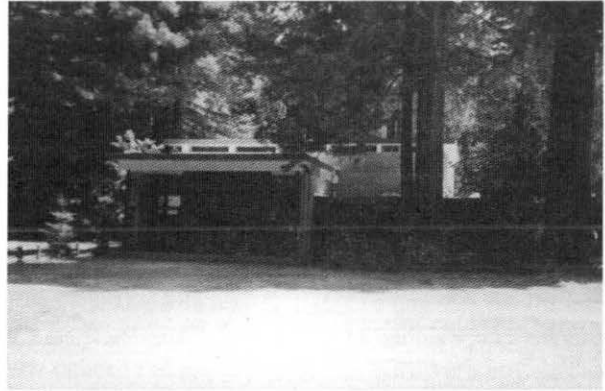


# Pacific Dreams: Meditating Merton at the Redwoods

By J. T. Ledbetter

## I. Lost in the Woods

Somewhere in dusktime of the sleeping pines and nurselogs and ferns curling their tendrils towards last light caught in the tops of trees, you walked in that line-backer way, camera dangling from your belt, not seeing/thinking of those leaning against the buildings, talking in the twilight, or thinking of God perhaps or dinner, perhaps, yes, perhaps all of them just as you thought about them after your day on the coast where tides off Mendocino Cape carved chunks out of the continent and broke against the rocks

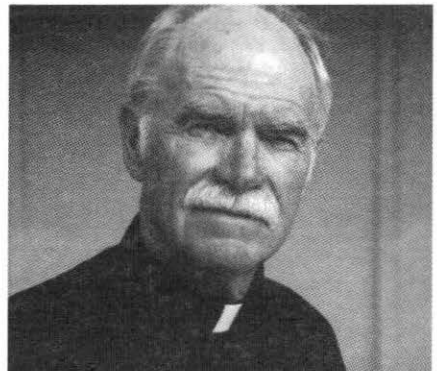


Monastery of the Redwoods, Whitethorn, CA

...

... somewhere in this garden surrounded by trees and quiet you lost another part of yourself, another piece of Thomas Merton, monk, poet, seeker . . . thinker . . . passionate man and listener to voices heard and unheard . . .

... what was the day on the beach? better than hot clinging days in Kentucky when your spirit hung about you like a wet sheet . . . better than the cool shade of the church in October when you believed as if for the first time that God liked fall better than summer . . . better than the last touch of your heart you felt those agonizing days when you made the great discovery, the great mistake, the great leap and found yourself twisted into odd shapes wearing your robe and stole and long sleeves full of notes and books and love letters and secret names that tore at your heart and spilled at last onto pages held up to light by so many who could not believe you were in them, by others who found themselves by your side as you stumbled and leapt and tried to prove by not proving, live by not living, doubting by not doubting that everything was real and earnest and terribly, terribly sad and hilarious and those who stood by you or away from you with their hearts in the palms of their hands,



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**Pacific Shoreline.**

closed in wonder or prayer they took for wine, your hands folded and throwing a pine cone, your arms at your side and swinging up and down as you ran into the surf to the amazement and surprise of those who watched you, like those who watched Thoreau chasing the loon on Walden Pond, wishing you were truly nuts so they wouldn't have to wish they could do it too, join you and Henry David in the canoe or run like crazy up and down the beach, jumping over the chocolate lab coming out of nowhere . . . to laugh with you there in the shelter of the Cove . . .

### III. Names

You taste names like wine / fish / oats / grain and beer deep down in your guts where names



**Sunset: Pacific Coast near Mendocino**

concelebrating with you what life should be and not often is . . .

### II. Shelter Cove

Shelter Cove does not shelter. It is a myth, a tradition, a thing kept away from the prying eyes of tourists in baggy shorts and porkpie hats with two cameras tied around their necks their petty dreams and uncircumcised wallets hanging out for driftwood and rosaries made of pirated ivory and their names carved into a redwood where you stood, your eyes half-

become shadows of yourself and you breathe places as if drugged and we take them and place them in our mouths and hearts as if from that secret crack in the earth where vapors mesmerized the only woman with promises and warnings in her mouth for those who could understand or believe or want to believe as you wanted to believe that Needle Rock and Bear Harbor were more than names that Adam would have gotten around to if he hadn't stumbled on Gnus and everything beginning with Z . . .

. . . here you watched the birds and counted crows and took off your shoes and walked into the great Pacific ocean where you felt the unmistakable tug of the orient or of the north / of the souls swimming in incredible deeps / memories of friends there, pictures of loves there and whistles and

taxis of New York and blaring bands and coughing sailors hanging over the bars where you listened and clapped and heard melodies you could name but didn't because you knew what you heard had no name . . .

. . . names from your past growing out of the deep trenches just now finding your bare feet / bestowing and talking, licking them with salt-smooth fingers as the sun sets inside the blue bowl of water, drowning like fire, sending up spray touching early stars that you praised as you said the Psalms knowing they are psalms beneath the cradle of Him you seek there in your dungarees and barefeet and maybe the beret maybe not maybe nothing on your bald head taking the twilight in your eyes and wanting it to stay there forever lost in the abandoned house, that hollow beneath the trees where a small trailer might fit maybe another place just over the line of rocks down the beach or in the woods where the Stellar Jays complained about your oafish intrusion your constant yapping your beautiful meditations they could only complain about, waiting for you, needing your translation for them for their song to be carried to the throne of God . . . no, not waiting, not needing you and you knew, felt, tasted this truth in your mouth that nothing waits, needs, wants . . . everything is praise is joy is goodness and beauty carried away by its own power, its own mystery to the throne of God that sits in the abandoned house and in the ugly trailer in the corner of the redwoods in the Abbeys and Churches and Synagogues scattered like leaves across the land and in the minds of those who cannot / will not / must not set foot in them but whose praise finds the mark, maybe in this cold blue pacific running over a couple of bare white feet . . .

#### IV. Dominique of the Redwoods



**Sr. Dominique, OCSO**

Dominique watched you / talked with you and brought you tea and cookies and you watched the flaring gowns of the chancel dancers your mouth hot from the day's sun . . . your mind sunk in the cool deeps of the liturgy light across the evening spaces reserved for air and psalms and candles . . . Dominique of the smile . . . Dominique of the memories of Holland's water and dress and distances kept in her heart of hearts as penance as sacrifice as gifts for the One she sought / came to / was sent to find: and you Merton, thanking her for kindness . . . taking another cookie then back to sleep . . . to prayers for the Sisters their heads bent in silence sending up prayers like birds for you lost in their woods where only they hear what you have heard and have forgotten and will hear again as you catch your breath at Polonnaruwa because your heart has at last heard, not your ears, not your mind but your heart in these far woods where one bird winds its scarlet thread

of song among the bells as you lie with your hands beneath your head and smile in the dark for you are on the way at last . . . you will be there . . . wherever there is . . . whatever THERE is . . .

. . . goodnight monk . . .

. . . sleep in the rocking of the sea and in the spice of the pines and in the grace of the Word that is in your heart and on your lips . . .

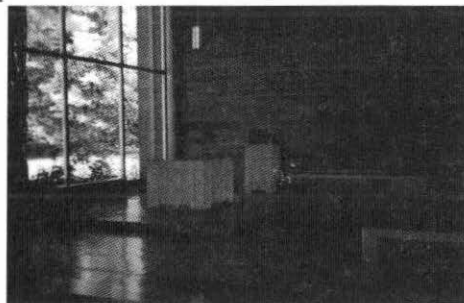
somewhere bare feet curl away from the cold water

somewhere a boy / and a girl dance along the shore  
and see each other for the first time

it is moonlight and the water beads up  
in pearls

somewhere you walk head down humming  
a bit of song you heard once sitting  
on the grass watching planes take off  
in Kentucky  
watching the air lift dreams just beyond your reach  
yet touching you  
taking you

this ocean is waiting  
these pines sleep in moonlight  
these Sisters dance in their dreams  
these people wind among the lost dirt roads  
to find this place  
this Abbey



**Chapel and Altar, Redwoods**

you are not there / you have gone to the north  
you are never there / you are forever flying into the sun  
into life and the only Love you ever wanted . . .

### **Recuerdo**

*The sound of the sea is a lonely sound  
when the long day is dying,  
with the silver tide slipping away  
and the deep woods sighing.  
For here in the shadow of alders and firs  
the heart is ever trying  
to hear the voice from far away  
at night, with the sea gulls crying.*