

On The Sudden Death of Thomas Merton

By John McGuckin

Bright moonbird
with mandala face
rising in the night over a Kentucky hill
flying, motionless, over dark pine fringes.
He came home,
closing the door on silence, behind and before,
“stuffing the window with herbs”*
knowing in the end that all his fears were laughed out;
geshe Tom,
up a sycamore tree,
laughing for all he’s worth.

He also came home
who put the book down, then,
tasting fear all those years ago
like metal on the tongue.
You were too near then,
too close for comfort by half.

“Wiser now, suffered – see?”
and coming home was heartened
that in a moment there may come
the flashing instant
and it may be done.

* Lu Yun, “The Valley Wind” (fourth century)



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