

HUM 381-4: Thomas Merton: Life and Writings

Instructor: Donald Grayston / office at Harbour Centre, 2140 / 604-291-3544 / donald_grayston@sfu.ca / office hours: Tues 1.30 – 2.30 pm, Thur 11.30 – 12.30

Synopsis

A monk, a diarist and autobiographer, a poet, an artist, a social activist, a pilgrim, a dialogical figure on the boundaries between Christianity's past and future and between Christianity and other traditions, a hermit with a girlfriend, a Zen clown: Thomas Merton was all of these. In the view of many who have studied him, he is one of the three or four most significant spiritual writers of the 20th century. In this course we will begin to acquaint ourselves with Merton's life and times, and with his great themes: contemplation, violence and nonviolence, and the multi-faith encounter. We will conclude by reflecting on his contribution to the rethinking about war and peace taking place after Sept 11, 2001, and end by pondering the thought that at the time of his death he was speaking to us from the future, from perhaps 2050.

Class sessions will include lectures, discussions, videos and tapes, and visitors from the Thomas Merton Society of Canada. Students will also be welcomed to any of the various offerings of the TMSC which take place during the course.

Required Texts

Thomas Merton. *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948; reprinted in many later editions).
Lawrence S. Cunningham, *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master* (NY: Paulist, 1992).

Recommended Texts

Patrick Hart and Jonathan Montaldo, eds., *The Intimate Merton: His Life from His Journals* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1999).
Thomas Merton, *Peace in the Post-Christian Era*, ed. Patricia A. Burton, introd. Jim Forest (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004)
Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (NY: New Directions, 1965)

Grading

Annotated bibliography 25%; research paper 45%; class participation 15%; class presentation 15%.

Assignments

(1) Annotated bibliography: choose 6 items, of which at least three must be books (not including texts); write mini-reviews of each, giving both a description of content and your own assessment, about a page in length for each item: **due Feb 15**

(2) Research paper: 12-15 pp; you may also choose a right-brain equivalent, in which case it should be accompanied by a written rationale of 3-4 pages; your choice of topic--feel free to consult instructor: **due Mar 15**

(3) Class presentation: on the topic of your paper; up to 20 minutes total; first half you present, second half class responds; date TBA once class membership firm; do a one-page outline and bring enough copies for the class. Include on this summary page bibliographical info on the two most helpful sources you have used, and end with a question to kick off class discussion.

Standards

(1) Written submissions are to be typed or computer-printed. No handwritten papers will be accepted, nor will excuses for lateness related to computer difficulties--give yourself time! Double-space on one side or both sides of the paper, using a recognized academic form, MLA or APA (see also the *Style Guide* available from the English Department).

(2) Language: both for written work and in class discussion, gender-neutral or gender-inclusive, i.e., equally respectful of both women and men.

(3) Extensions: a one-week extension for either written assignment will be granted on request, no explanation necessary. Speak to the instructor or leave a voice-mail message. If no request is made, or if the project is submitted later than the extension date granted, or if no further extension for specific cause is negotiated, there will be a grading penalty of 10% on that assignment.

Calendar

Jan 11	Introduction: video
Jan 18	Overview of Merton's life and writings: read the <i>SSM</i>
Jan 25	Cunningham 63-106
Feb 1	Cunningham 107-64
Feb 8	Cunningham 165-213
Feb 15	Cunningham 214-22; annotated bibliography due
Feb 22	Cunningham 241-356
Mar 1	Cunningham 357-98, 421-31
Mar 8	Chuang Tzu (whole book)
Mar 15	Cunningham 223-37 and 399-420; research paper due
Mar 22	Multi-faith issues: beyond dialogue to communion
Mar 29	War and peace after Sept 11
Apr 5	Wrap-up and evaluation