

process of growth and transformation that will move in directions that would surprise the Thomas Merton of December 5, 1941. Two days earlier he had written, "No more concern with opinions about worldly ideas, politics, or books: they are knocked out of me: and if I may come to be a Trappist, I hope they are knocked out of me for good!" (469); they may have been, temporarily, but not, fortunately, "for good." Likewise, when Father Philotheus cautions him "to be very careful about deciding to be a Trappist" and asks, "What about my vocation to be a writer?" Merton's response is: "That one has absolutely no meaning any more, as soon as he has said what he has said" (458). But the word "vocation" here, whether quoted from Philotheus or inserted, unwittingly, by Merton himself, resonates more strongly than the author of the journal would have realized at the time.

For *Run to the Mountain* is ultimately a story not of two separate vocations, but of a single vocation with two major dimensions, co-existing in a fruitful (though not always harmonious) tension that would make Thomas Merton the most widely read Cistercian in history. It is immensely stimulating and satisfying finally to have the opportunity to observe so directly this early stage, complex in its details, luminously simple in its conclusion, in the development of a vocation that would enable Thomas Merton to recognize and to realize his full identity as monk, as writer, as image of God and, as he wrote so memorably in the (second) "Fourth and Walnut" passage, as "a member of the human race."

## II

William H. Shannon

This first of a projected series of seven volumes of Merton journals actually comprises three journals that Merton kept: all of them prior to his entrance into the Abbey of Gethsemani. The first deals with his life while he lived on Perry Street in New York City, the second with his trip to Cuba (with a stopoff at Miami), the third with his life at St. Bonaventure University (where he taught for a year and a half). "The Cuban Interlude" (February 18, 1940–May 30, 1940) is the shortest of the three (76 pages) and contains some of the best descriptive writing in the book. The Perry Street journal (150 pages) covers the period from May 2, 1939 to February 13, 1940, and, among other things,

his acceptance (later to be rescinded) into the Franciscan Order. The final journal in this volume, the St. Bonaventure years (1940–1941) is the longest (240 pages). It details the story of his life as a teacher at the university, reaches a high point in his Holy Week visit to the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani, and brings the reader to the threshold of his entrance into the monastic life at Gethsemani.

Altogether these three groups of journals make up a remarkable book. In them we see a young unproved writer (he was in his mid-twenties and unpublished, save for articles in school papers and a few book reviews) flexing his literary muscles to his own obvious delight. There can be no question that Thomas Merton loved to write and was not sure from one day to the next what he might write about. At one point in the Perry Street journal he asks himself: "Why do I write so much about things about which I know so little?" (144). Setting aside the modesty implicit in the question (he often did know what he was talking about), the answer probably is: "Because you can't control your pen. Once it gets on a roll, you simply can not stop it. It is, as you yourself said 'a release for the things I am full of and must try to say'" (35).

The style of the Journal is not easy to describe: it varies considerably from one part to another. It is, I feel safe in saying, quite uniformly good writing. It can be clever, casual, breezy; witty, sprightly, dynamic, enthusiastic; frivolous, conceited, arrogant, dogmatic, overly erudite. But it is often serious, pensive, impressive, insightful, and profound. There are splendid passages of reflection that touch deeply into the human soul and there are passages of fun and humor when he plays with ideas and words and sentences and shows a sharp eye for the foibles in human nature, including his own. His penchant for superlatives is here, as it will be in his later writings. Thus, "Lorca is easily the best religious poet of this century" (106), and not many pages later: "[Joyce] happens to be the best writer in this century" (153); still later, "*Robinson Crusoe* may be one of the best books ever written" (317).

Were the journals, as we now have them, completely spontaneous, that is to say, just as he wrote them on the spur of the moment, without any emendations? Perhaps a good bit of the journals were. Yet considering the size of the ledger-type book in which he wrote, for instance, the Bonaventure journal, it seems clear that it must have been his custom to carry a notebook with him in which he jotted his reflections and then transferred them to the ledger book. Were changes made in the transfer?

This question is different from the one which the editor, Patrick Hart, O.C.S.O., asks in his introduction, namely, whether the Cuban journal (which exists only in typed form) was directly transferred from a written journal or if it was something reworked at a later date. Hart, in consultation with Robert Lax, concluded that the immediacy of the writing was sufficient to convince them that these entries were direct transfers from a journal and therefore had a rightful place in *Run to the Mountain*. I agree completely with that evaluation. The question I want to ask is a different one, namely, did Merton, when he transferred material from his shorter notebooks to the extant journals, make corrections, additions, and even do some (perhaps, at times, considerable) rewriting?

I believe the answer must be in the affirmative. My reason for saying this is that Merton had a passionate desire to publish. He tried to persuade himself that he did not. For example, he wonders whether the urge to write is vanity (35). His answer is no, as long as he doesn't think of it "in terms of its being published and read." He states very clearly: "This stuff is not written for anyone to read." These words were written on October 1, 1939. A little over a year later, on December 3, 1940, he admits, in effect, that when he wrote those words he was being less than honest with himself:

Why would I write anything, if not to be read? *This journal is written for publication.* It's about time I realized that, and wrote it with some art. All that screaming last year, to convince myself a journal was worth writing but not to be read. If a journal is for publication, then you can tear pages out, emend it, correct it, write with art (271, italics added).

I suggest that he not only did this sort of polishing of his jottings after making this "confession," but probably had been doing it all along.

These journals present us with a writer who had a prodigious memory. In reading *Run to the Mountain*, I was fascinated by the many events of his past that he recalls, as something happening on the day he is writing reminds him of an event of yesteryear. On January 18, 1940, for instance, thinking of picnics, he recalls the afternoon at Oakham when Tom and Iris Bennett came to visit him and they went to tea, taking with them one of his schoolmates, Tabacovici, the Romanian (141). Again, he mentions a day in 1928 at St. Antonin "in which father and I ran a race up the middle of the street and I was astonished that he beat me so badly" (290). Recalling a sign he had

seen on the Long Island Railroad, he asks: "What is this terrific importance that memory seems to have for me?" (58). In response we might quote back at him what he quotes about St. Augustine: "Walsh quotes Gilson or someone saying [that] what Augustine is interested in is his own religious experience: he narrates it over and over" (83).

By May 1939, when this Journal begins, Merton's reception into the Roman Catholic Church was a year and a half behind him. But the influence of it remained strong and colored so much of what he wrote. In a variety of ways he does, like Augustine, "narrate it over and over." He muses on the relationship of this wonderful power of recall to spirituality, and tells us, somewhat ruefully, that St. John of the Cross says the memory must be completely darkened (35). That would be no easy task for Thomas Merton.

The Journal is often wonderfully descriptive. He was always fond of guide books, he tells us. While he may have used a guide book for the details of his descriptions, his narrative picture of Havana, for instance, as he disembarked from the ship and entered the city, is a gem of descriptive writing. Similar descriptive passages abound. In fact, I think it can be said that Merton was better at describing places than people.

A good bit of the narrowness of Roman Catholic thought in the early forties is painfully evident in this Journal. There are the stereotypes of Jews and Protestants so typical of the Catholicism of that time. He tells us that purgatory burns with the same fires as those of hell, the one difference being that the souls in purgatory burn with love not with hate. Even the recent, quite conservative, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has pretty much put out those fires. But Merton was writing in 1941.

I was intrigued by two unexpected omissions in the Journal. I remember so vividly from *Seven Storey Mountain* Merton's pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Cobre during his visit to Cuba. At the basilica, he promised the *Caridad del Cobre* that, if she would enable him to be a priest, his first Mass would be in her honor. It was a promise that he kept. Yet strangely, there is no mention in the Journal of such a promise or even of a visit to Cobre. In the Journal he mentions getting only into the province of Camaguey, not to the more eastern one, Oriente, where Cobre is located.

The other omission is even more remarkable. The Bonaventure journal tells us nothing of the critical events that occurred in the summer of 1940. It was in August of that summer that Merton was scheduled

to enter the Franciscan Order. Early in the summer he had gone to the cottage in Olean, and since it was crowded that June, he asked to be allowed to live at the monastery of St. Bonaventure. Permission was given and the summer was going well, until suddenly he was stricken with the fear that he had no right to enter the order or to become a priest. He had not come clean with Fr. Edmund Murphy when they had talked of his entering the Franciscans. He had not told him about his past. Father Edmund did not know him. In a fit of scruples he hastened back to New York, hoping Father Edmund would tell him that he had nothing to worry about. But Father Edmund did not. Eventually he advised Merton to withdraw his application. Merton went across Seventh Street to the Capuchin Church, where, almost hysterical, he entered the confessional. The priest was not helpful. He left the confessional in tears, all his dreams destroyed.

Yet, if he could not be a priest, he could at least say the office that priests said each day. He went to Benziger's book store and bought a set of breviaries. On the return to Olean on August 4, he said the office for the first time. It was the office for feast of St. John Vianney, the patron saint of diocesan priests.

Since there would be no novitiate for him, he had to look for work. He applied for a teaching position at St. Bonaventure and was accepted by the university president, Fr. Thomas Plassman, as an instructor in English literature.

These harrowing events of the summer of 1940 were certainly important events in Merton's life. Yet in the fairly brief entries for that summer in the Bonaventure journal nothing is said about any of them. A strange omission indeed. All I can venture is the conjecture that they cut wounds too deep for him to write about at the time, even though he wrote of them in some detail later in *The Seven Storey Mountain*.

The climactic event of the Journal is without doubt his visit to the Trappist monastery of Gethsemani during Holy Week of 1941. He was ecstatic. "This is the center of America. I had wondered what was holding the country together. . . . It is this monastery . . . the only real city in America—in a desert" (333). His journal entries are full of love for the monastic life and joy at being at Gethsemani. There are many quotations from St. Bernard's *De Diligendo Deo*. Little could he have realized then that one day his own writings would be compared favorably with St. Bernard's.

There still remained the fear that his past had created an impediment that would debar him from the priesthood. Back at St.

Bonaventure, he finally summoned up the courage to ask one of the friars, Father Philotheus, who promptly told him that no such impediment existed. He writes to Gethsemani and awaits the answer. It is on this note of expectancy, and with a prayer that he may renounce everything and belong entirely to the Lord, that this impressive Journal concludes.

One regret I must express. The footnotes are few, the index is skimpy. I presume this was an editorial policy (the publisher's perhaps?). More generous footnotes clarifying names, places, topics, and a more extensive index would have assisted the serious reader and enhanced the book's value. But, that being said, readers can approach this Journal with high expectations. They will not be disappointed.

### III

*David A. King*

It is Saturday, September 30, 1939, a damp early autumn evening in New York City. The twenty-four-year-old Thomas Merton returns to his small room on Perry Street. He is cold, tired, perhaps a bit hungry, but he decides to write for a while in the new journal he started in the spring. "I don't really feel like writing anything much at all. Can't feel that anything I would write down would have any importance" (30). He remembers then, suddenly, that "there is one good thing to be thankful for to God: . . . found out about Saint Philomena" (30), and in recalling this "blessed little Saint, flower of martyrs" (30), Merton realizes "what excuse is there for misery and unhappiness then, when there is the intercession before the throne of God of such a saint as this" (31):

Not only her, then, but all the Saints; not only the saints, but the angels, and above the angels, their Queen, Mary, the Mother of God and Queen of heaven sitting before the throne of God above the nine choirs and the seraphim, all filled with love and mercy and interceding for us before God himself who loves us most of all, because in Him is all love, and he gave his body and blood in sacrifice for us upon the cross. But that body and blood, that sacrifice is daily perpetuated in the churches, and the church herself is there, a great everlasting source of wisdom and consolation (31).