

THE MERTON PHENOMENON

IN 1987:

A Bibliographic Survey

by **Robert E. Daggy**

Brother Patrick Hart has written in the foreword to a new book on Merton: "As the twentieth anniversary of Thomas Merton's death is commemorated, we are once again confronted with the mystery of this monk whose life and work continue to have considerable impact on both religious and secular society. How does one account for this phenomenon?"¹ This essay attempts, not so much to explain the phenomenon (or rather that part of it connected with continuing publication of material *by* and *about* Merton), as to report on it, focusing on materials published from late 1986 through 1987. It was a middling year in Merton publication, not exactly quiet, but not so overwhelming as some years have been. Several important items appeared, much of the work dealing with familiar Merton studies "themes": silence, solitude, self, and what I like to

1. Anne E. Carr, *A Search for Wisdom and Spirit: Thomas Merton's Theology of Self*; foreword by Brother Patrick Hart (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1988), p. vii.

call the "phenomenon" writings, those which seek to introduce Merton to a new audience (frequently one previously unfamiliar with him) or to provide a short, basic overview of the Merton career.² One of the better of these phenomenon articles to appear in 1987 is Bonnie Bowman Thurston's "Thomas Merton: Symbol of a Century," *Vision Quest* 1:4 (Winter 1987), pp. 1-2. Significantly, perhaps, this article was written for a Disciples of Christ publication and in short and snappy fashion, Thurston gives an overview of Merton which shows, in part, why he has been important to the twentieth century. She says:

His life demonstrates that new insights do not necessarily need to conform to old ones. Merton's life shows that ideas about any subject can be outgrown or worn out. When a theory is no longer serviceable, when it causes discomfort or no longer fits, it can be discarded from the intellectual and theological wardrobe. Merton suggests that to cling to an outgrown idea is to refuse to mature, to choose emotional and intellectual discomfort, to distort the nature of reality.

In "Thomas Merton's 'Bluejeans' Spirituality," *Holy Cross* 8:3 (Autumn 1986), Fr. Bernard Van Waes, O.H.C. introduces Merton to those who receive the newsletter from the Anglican (Episcopal) monastery at West Park, New York. He says:

Like many prophetic figures, it is possible that his greatest influence is yet to be evaluated. I would like to remember him as a man who was profoundly rooted in the great tradition of Christian prayer and spirituality common to East and West alike, and whose clarity and insight energized the contemporary search for meaning in ordering and interpreting our world. It is a "bluejeans"/everyman spirituality not restricted to an elite or religious audience, but for all.

Also in this category (in Roman Catholic publications) were Mary Fidelia Chmiel's three-part "Merton: Symbol of True Conversion" in *Pittsburgh Catholic*; Mary de Lourdes Muench's quite brief "Merton, on Fire" in *Sisters Today* (June/ July 1987); and Portia Webster's "Thomas Merton: A Man for All Generations," *Living Prayer* 20:1 (January/ February 1987). The last is an account of Webster's experiences with Merton during his visit to Our Lady of the Redwoods in California before he left for Asia. She says, in reference to Merton's conferences: "[He] radiated a deep and profound respect for the dignity of each person present . . . for the unique quality that

2. These essays and articles usually have titles or sub-titles which point to the "phenomenon" aspect: "Conscience of an Era;" "He Summed Up an Era;" "Moving toward Sainthood;" "Our Man for All Seasons;" "Phenomenon [!] and Poet;" "Spiritual Guide for the '80s;" "Man for All Times;" "Columbus of the Human Spirit;" "Pathfinder;" "Explorer of Inner Space;" etc.

was the singular essence of any person, thing or idea." Her article provoked the only response in a "Letter to the Editor" of any during this time period. Myriam Dardenne of Redwoods wrote (printed in the July/ August 1987 issue of *Living Prayer*) that she felt some of the events were presented out of context and that she wished to "dissociate [herself] from the view of Redwoods and Mother Myriam" in the article.

These "phenomenon writings" show that Merton's impact continues as does the simple fact that most of his major books remain in print, in paperback editions for the most part it is true, but in print.³ Some have appeared in *facsimile reprints*. In late 1986, Unicorn Press published, at \$6.00, a reprint edition of *Cables to the Ace*, thus bringing that volume of poetry back into print in individual edition. New Directions issued a facsimile reprint of the 1949 edition of *Seeds of Contemplation* at \$18.95, making available that original work without the additions and emendations contained in *New Seeds of Contemplation*. Both reproduce, fairly faithfully, the look of the original editions. *Seeds of Contemplation*, and its redaction *New Seeds*, continue to provoke interest and Mitch Finley, a writer who seems ubiquitous in this period, discusses *New Seeds* in his book, *Catholic Spiritual Classics: Introductions to Twelve Classics of Christian Spirituality* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1987), pp. 64-69. Finley notes:

If there is one word that might be used to describe the spirit of Thomas Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*, that word might be "iconoclastic." It's a word that refers to the ancient practice of idol smashing. To be an iconoclast is to shatter false gods. Merton does this with regard to romanticized notions of contemplation, ideas of God, and ideas of spirituality which by-pass relationships with other people.

Equally impressive -- some would say amazing -- is that the majority of the more than forty books written about Merton remain in-print and available. Doubleday re-issued a paperback edition [\$4.95] of Raymond H. Bailey's *Thomas Merton on Mysticism*, first published in 1975. Bailey did not revise this relatively early study of Merton and a major weakness in re-issue is that it fails to confront or discuss the serial publication of *The Inner*

3. Notable exceptions are Merton's two early hagiographies, *Exile Ends in Glory* and *What Are These Wounds?*, which he rated "Bad" and "Awful" respectively in his evaluation of his own books. Individual volumes of poetry, following the publication of *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* in 1977, are mostly unavailable. Four of the more than twenty books compiled and edited after his death in 1968 have gone out-of-print at the time of this writing: *A Catch of Anti-Letters/ Thomas Merton and Robert Lax* (1978); *Day of a Stranger* (1981); *The Geography of Holiness: The Photography of Thomas Merton*, edited by Deba Prasad Patnaik (1980); and *Introductions East and West: The Foreign Prefaces of Thomas Merton*, edited by Robert E. Daggy (1981). Limited editions -- such as *Early Poems/ 1940-42* (1971); *Eighteen Poems* (1986 - 250 copies); *Hagia Sophia* (1978 - 50 copies); *Letters from Tom*, edited by W. H. Ferry (1984 - 500 copies); and *Boris Pasternak/ Thomas Merton, Six Letters* (1973 - 150 copies) -- are expensive and largely unavailable.

Experience in Cistercian Studies or intervening scholarship on this work. On the other hand, Farrar, Straus & Giroux has published a revised edition of William H. Shannon's *Thomas Merton's Dark Path* (omitting the original subtitle: *The Inner Experience of a Contemplative*) [\$8.95] which, of course, discusses the writing and development of *The Inner Experience*. The revision consists of the addition of a sixteen page "Prologue: Six Years Later." *The Inner Experience*, now available in off-print format, was discussed by Mitch Finley in a review-essay for popular consumption, "Contemplation on the Brink," *National Catholic Reporter* 23:26 (24 April 1987), pp. 9-10. Finley concludes: "[*The Inner Experience*] is one of the most important studies of the contemplative spirit to appear in the second half of the 20th century." Finley also did a review-essay of four recent studies, "Four Profiles of the Many-Sided Thomas Merton," in *Our Sunday Visitor* 75:39 (25 January 1987), p. 7. He covers Patrick Hart's "trilogy" of essay collections: *Thomas Merton/ Monk: A Monastic Tribute* [enlarged edition]; *The Message of Thomas Merton*; and *The Legacy of Thomas Merton*. He also discusses Victor A. Kramer's *Thomas Merton*, first published in 1984 as part of Twayne's United States Authors Series. This latter book went quickly out-of-print, but has been revised, altered and re-published by Cistercian Publications under the title, *Thomas Merton: Monk and Artist* [\$14.95].

Previously unpublished Merton material appeared during the year. Though published in mid-1986, Merton's *Eighteen Poems*, a compilation of poetry written to and for the student nurse in 1966, aroused perhaps the most interest in 1987 -- an interest picqued even more by the fact that most people were unable to obtain or own the book. 250 copies, at \$200 each, were issued by New Directions. This "discreet" publication was printed in a handsome, boxed edition by Yolla Bolly Press of California. Anthony T. Padovano commented in *The Merton Seasonal*:

The poems are love poems by Merton, two years before his death, to a woman he loved and who, it seems, enriched his life. The story of the relationship has been told before, enigmatically and passionately. . . . How shall we receive these poems and the love they bring us? Our response may be hesitant as we balance the individual's right to one's own life and charism with the claims of communities and commitments to define us in ways we do not always choose. As we answer this question, we reveal our understanding of God and religious life, of human love and of creation itself. Merton invites us to rejoice with him. Are we receptive to the invitation?⁴

4. Anthony T. Padovano, "Eighteen Poems: A Commentary," *Merton Seasonal* 11:4 (Autumn 1986), pp. 14-15.

Though interest in the "nurse incident" continues to attract attention (the other two "biggies" always seem to be the circumstances of Merton's death in Bangkok and his relationship with Dom James Fox) and though this incident has been covered sufficiently, it would seem, by Michael Mott, John Howard Griffin, and most recently Basil Pennington, interest has not extended to Merton and women in general. Little has been done on this topic though several, most notably Bonnie Bowman Thurston, are doing preliminary work in the area. For this reason, long-time writer on Merton, Thomas P. McDonnell, makes a significant contribution with his "Thomas Merton and the Feminine Principle," *Vortex* 1:2 (Fall 1987), pp. 10, 29-30. Certainly not exhaustive, it does point the way to lines of inquiry which might shed light on the total Merton experience in its discussion of Merton's mother, Rosemary Ruether, the nurse, and some other women.

When *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* was edited from his journals and published, the editors decided to begin with his flight east on 15 October 1968. He had, however, left the Abbey of Gethsemani several weeks before and had spent the period from 17 September to 2 October in Alaska. He left, as usual, two different journal accounts of his time in Alaska and I have edited these into a version published in limited edition by Turkey Press of Isla Vista, California. Called *The Alaskan Journal of Thomas Merton*, it also includes an appendix of surviving letters and postcards written by Merton while in Alaska. New Directions will publish a trade edition in 1989 which will be called *Thomas Merton in Alaska* and which will contain the journal, the letters, as well as the conferences which Merton gave in Alaska. The limited edition is reviewed in this volume by Lawrence S. Cunningham. I conclude my "Introduction" with the statement:

It is clear that Merton liked Alaska, that he thought about the possibilities of living there, or at least thought about it *while* he was there. This part of the trip doubtless helped prepare him, a man unused to travel for more than twenty years, for the more arduous and longer Asian stint. We shall, of course, never know, since he died in Bangkok, whether Merton would ever have become a "monk of Gethsemani" in Alaska. He did say: "If I am to be a hermit in the U. S., Alaska is probably the place for it." Parts of Alaska definitely appealed to him. When Lake Aleknagik "spoke" to him and he answered, "Is this it?" he did not know that it would not be it, that a different destiny lay ahead. But his brief experience in Alaska was a positive and enjoyable one. After it, the monk of Gethsemani was off to California and Asia convinced that Alaska would provide "ideal solitude" in the United States.

Interest in Merton's journals is reflected in at least three publications. The

current fascination for journal-keeping may, in fact, provide a partial explanation for the "phenomenon" of continuing interest in Merton since so much of his writing, so much of his exploration of himself, was in journal form. Doubleday has attempted to capitalize on both these interests -- journal-keeping and Merton -- in a boxed, slickly produced publication called *Keeping a Spiritual Journal with Thomas Merton* [\$14.95]. The best news about this publication -- it is not really a book as such -- is that it marks a return to Merton editing by his own editor, Naomi Burton Stone. Each page contains at the top a Merton quotation enclosed in a green box -- all too often with a great deal of unnecessary and jarring "white space." Several lines are marked off for each day so a person may keep "journal entries." No specific dates are given so that the publication might be used in any year. Unfortunately, and contrary to Merton's practice, each day is allotted six or seven lines (is Sunday really more a seven-line day than any other?) which can be frustrating if one has more to write and equally frustrating if one has less. Merton's practice was to record what he had to record regardless of length, but the approach here gives *Keeping a Spiritual Journal with Thomas Merton* a canned, commercial and gimmicky feel which gets in the way of Stone's careful and judicious selection of quotations. She cannot be faulted for the book's format perhaps, but she can be commended for citing her sources -- the reader is given the source and page number for each quotation and can thus pursue further reading if prompted by the short quotation. Other "quotation books," such as Thomas P. McDonnell's *Blaze of Recognition (Through the Year with Thomas Merton in paperback)*, have not pinpointed sources as Stone has and she has thus provided the reader with a much better introduction and guide to pursuing further reading in Merton's books. The publication is reviewed in this volume by Sister Mary Luke Tobin.

Two "essays" dealt with Merton's *Asian Journal*: John Howard Griffin's "Thomas Merton's Last Journal," *Vortex* 1:2 (Fall 1987), pp. 1, 4-5, 29 and Irving Sussman's "The Last Words of Thomas Merton," *Way* 43:3 (May-June 1987), pp. 2-14. The former is a reprinting (without that being made clear) of Griffin's original review of *The Asian Journal* which appeared under the title "The Last Words of Thomas Merton" in *National Catholic Reporter* in 1973. It is an interesting review, as reviews go, but I question its reprinting in this form, even with the title change. I think, as I have for some time, that Griffin would be better served by the publication of a carefully edited volume of his writings on Merton, rather than by these piecemeal publications which add little to the Griffin canon and call on the

reader or scholar to go to many different sources in order to view Griffin's writings on Merton as a whole. Sussman's essay is not really about Merton's last words (unless one considers the whole of the bulky *Asian Journal* his "last words"), but is actually a precis of the journal held together by lengthy quotes. As so often occurs when reading those who write about Merton, the reader would do better to go to the Merton source itself. I am reminded of a remark by Francine du Plessix Gray in a review she wrote several years ago: "[The] only valuable passages are the extensive quotes from Merton's own work."⁵ Gray herself has included a piece on Merton written several years ago, "Thomas Merton: Man and Monk," in the collection of her "Selected Nonfiction," *Adam & Eve and the City* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987). Another of the "phenomenon writings" (originally a review-essay), it was (and is) Gray's attempt to explain Merton's impact in the twentieth century.⁶

In the interview in this volume, Matthew Kelty, O.C.S.O., explains, in part, why Merton taped so many of his lectures to the novices at Gethsemani. Over six hundred of these talks/lectures/conferences are housed at the Thomas Merton Studies Center. A new series of MERTON TAPES has been edited by Clarence Thomson from the Master Tapes at the Center and published by Credence Cassettes, a division of the *National Catholic Reporter*. For those who were unable or who never got around to acquiring any of the tapes published some years ago by Electronic Paperbacks, this new series has nineteen tapes, over 90% of which are previously unpublished. The series includes eight cassettes (16 talks) on PRAYER; one on ART & BEAUTY; three on RAINER MARIA RILKE; two on WILLIAM FAULKNER; two on EARLY CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY; and three on MONASTIC SPIRITUALITY. Each cassette tape sells for \$7.95.

Several books in translation were reprinted and two new translations of Merton appeared in Poland: *Contemplative Prayer [Modlitwa Kontemplacyjna]*, translated into Polish by Mirosław Dybowski and published by W Drodze; and a volume of selected poems [*Wybor Wierszy*], edited by Jerzy Illg, published by Znak, with translations by a dozen Polish poets including Nobel Laureate Czesław Miłosz.

5. Francine du Plessix Gray, "The Ordeal of Thomas Merton," *New York Times Book Review* (19 October 1980), p. 30.

6. Originally published in *The New Republic* 180:21 (26 May 1979), pp. 23, 26, 28-30, it was a review-essay on four recently published books: Merton's *Love and Living*; edited by Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1979); *A Catch of Anti-Letters/Thomas Merton and Robert Lax* (Kansas City: Sheed, Andrews & McMeel, 1978); George Woodcock, *Thomas Merton: Monk and Poet* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978); and Gerald S. Twomey, *Thomas Merton: Prophet in the Belly of a Paradox* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

Cistercian Studies continued its serialization of Merton's "St. Aelred of Rievaulx," edited by Brother Patrick Hart, with the third instalment in the first issue of 1987. The second and third numbers contained scholarly articles by William H. Shannon and Walter E. Conn. Shannon's "Thomas Merton and the Quest for Self-Identity" (22:2, pp. 172-189) continues the theme of the search for self which has played through much of his writing on Merton.⁷ Conn's "Merton's Religious Development: The Monastic Years" (22:3, pp. 262-289) is a re-working of a chapter from his *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986). The book is reviewed in this issue by Dewey Weiss Kramer.

The Merton Seasonal of Bellarmine College, heretofore the only publication devoted to Merton and his concerns, appeared quarterly and contained some unpublished Merton material. The Winter issue (12:1) contained a letter from Merton to poet James Edmund Magner who had visited the Abbey of Gethsemani in 1968 during a period of intense personal stress. Merton concluded his letter of counsel and advice with: "... unlimited trust is the only sane root of all the rest of it. If one can't trust then it is mad to turn the other cheek . . . etc. And if one can't trust one can only pray to be able to until eventually one becomes able." The Spring issue (12:2) featured Patrick O'Connell's "Sunken Islands: Two and One-Fifth Unpublished Merton Poems," an exciting discussion of his discovery of unpublished Merton material. The "one-fifth" was a section from "Elias: Variations on a Theme" which was inadvertently omitted in final publication, apparently without even Merton himself noticing the omission. The other two -- "The Sting of Conscience (Letter to Graham Greene)" and "Thoughts in an Airliner" -- remained unpublished for different reasons, both involving Merton's editor, Naomi Burton Stone. This article is an example of the "detective work" which can often make scholarship such fun, for the writer and the reader. O'Connell adds a significant portion to the meandering and bewildering maze of Merton's publication history. His contributions to textual analysis, including the one on "Elias" in this volume, point to an area of Merton scholarship relatively untouched by Merton scholars (more on this later from George Kilcourse). He also wrote another article in this period -- "'Is the World a Problem?': Merton, Rahner and Clark on the Diaspora Church," *American Benedictine Review* 37:4

7. See, for example, "Thomas Merton and the Discovery of the Real Self," *Cistercian Studies* 13 (1978), pp. 298-308; reprinted in *The Message of Thomas Merton*; edited by Brother Patrick Hart (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), pp. 192-203.

(December 1986, pp. 349-369 -- which discusses Merton in relation to two other twentieth-century figures and follows a line of scholarship which occurs frequently in Merton studies: the comparison (I call them "the comparative articles") of Merton with another significant person or persons.

Such comparisons are useful for understanding Merton's thoughts in relation to another person or for adding perspective, but, more often than not, they have helped us understand relationships within his own life, and, thus, our understanding of the Merton "journey." The Summer issue of *The Merton Seasonal* (12:3) was dedicated to Dom James Fox, O.C.S.O. (1896-1987), Merton's abbot for twenty years, who died Good Friday at the Abbey of Gethsemani. In addition to comments and reflections on Dom James by Brother Patrick Hart and Father Matthew Kelty, there was my "Dom James and 'Good Father Louis': A Reminiscence," a compilation of published and unpublished material by Dom James on Merton and his relationship with him.

Brother John Albert, O.C.S.O., of the Trappist monastery at Conyers, Georgia, contributed two "comparative articles": the first, "Two Studies in Chuang Tzu: Thomas Merton and Oscar Wilde," (12:1, pp. 5-14) pairs Merton with someone who, at first glance, would appear a strange bedfellow, but Brother John demonstrates the relevance of his comparison by showing how these two, who had more in common than one might expect, played, in their different periods, a significant role in explicating Chuang Tzu and Taoism to the West. Merton's role is further demonstrated in *Eastern Spirituality in America: Selected Writings*; edited by Robert S. Ellwood (New York/ Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987) -- a volume in the "Sources of American Spirituality Series" -- by the inclusion of excerpts from *The Way of Chuang Tzu* in the section on Taoism. Ellwood quotes Michael Mott as saying "the model for Merton of the hidden life was Chuang Tzu" and points to Merton's influence: "There is unfortunately little work available on Taoism or Taoist influence in America. On Merton, on the other hand, a vast literature can be found" (p. 196). Brother John's other contribution to *The Merton Seasonal* -- in the "International Issue" (12:4) which announces the formation of THE INTERNATIONAL THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY (about which, more later) -- is "Thomas Merton and the Dalai Lama: A Special Friendship Remembered" (pp. 19-23), a reflection on that friendship stimulated by Brother John's own personal encounter with His Holiness during his 1987 visit to the United States.

The Kentucky Review, edited by James D. Birchfield, devoted its

Summer issue to "A Thomas Merton Symposium" with a collection of some of the best and most readable essays yet done on Merton. Three of these are "comparative articles," examinations of Merton's relationships with three of his Kentucky friends: artist Victor Hammer, folksinger John Jacob Niles, and photographer Ralph Eugene Meatyard. These, as well as Brother John's article on Merton and the Dalai Lama, demonstrate, to borrow John Howard Griffin's words, that many people "knew the quality of his friendship."⁸ We can find in these friendships further elucidation of Merton's search for self. David D. Cooper's "Victor Hammer and Thomas Merton: A Friendship *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*" (pp. 5-28) is a careful and thorough examination of the friendship's development even in difficult moments when they disagreed. Their professional collaboration on limited editions of Merton's work is shown through extensive use of the correspondence between Merton and Hammer (and with Hammer's wife, Carolyn). Finally, Cooper shows us Merton's great sorrow at Hammer's death in 1967. He wrote to Carolyn Hammer: "This [bereavement] is somehow different [than others], because there was no one like Victor. Just no one. And for such a loss there are no compensations" (p. 26). This may well be the best thing that Cooper has written on Merton, an essay worthy of the friendship and one which gives the entire issue value.

Christopher Meatyard, son of Merton's friend Gene Meatyard, contributed an article about his father and Merton, "Merton's 'Zen Camera' and Contemplative Photography" (pp. 122-144). He begins his essay: "If Thomas Merton and the photographer Ralph Eugene Meatyard were alive today and someone came up to them and asked if each would write something about the other, Gene and Tom would look at each other, grin, and roll with laughter. They were happy men" (p. 122). The younger Meatyard captures something of that happiness in an essay with more substance than mere anecdote and tribute. His decision to "explore the commitment of Thomas Merton to photography and visual communication" was itself a happy one, one which shows that commitment in relation to a deep friendship. The inclusion of a dozen Meatyard photographs (some of Merton) and a few Merton visuals is a bonus.

Less satisfying perhaps as an exploration of a friendship is Kerstin P. Warner's "'For Me Nothing Has Ever Been the Same:' Composing the Niles-Merton Songs, 1967-1970" (pp. 29-43). Her brief introduction leaves

8. See "Thomas Merton: His Friends Remember Him," edited with an introduction by Jack Wintz, O.F.M., *St. Anthony Messenger* 86:7 (December 1978), p. 39.

the reader wanting to know more about Merton and Niles and their friendship, but her critical catalogue of the twenty-two songs in the "Niles-Merton Cycle" gives the piece value, and her closing quotation (from Niles) from which she took her title -- "It was the most moving musical and creative experience of my entire life . . . For me nothing has ever been the same" -- is itself a moving commentary on this friendship.

A different glimpse of a Merton friendship is given by Victor A. Kramer in "Robert Giroux Speaks about Thomas Merton: An Interview from the Thomas Merton Oral History" (pp. 44-58). Kramer has done good service to Merton studies in his collection and transcription of several interviews with people who knew Merton, providing as he puts it "information about Merton which may prove of benefit for scholars who investigate Merton's life and works in the future" (p. 44).⁹ Giroux, Columbia friend, editor and eventual publisher, speaks with candor about his relationship with Merton, making no claim to having known him other than as he did. The interview reflects, as Kramer says, "Giroux's own concerns about the judicious use of language." Documentation of yet another enduring Merton friendship came available in 1987 from another source with the publication of George Hendrick's edition of *The Selected Letters of Mark Van Doren* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987) [\$30.00]. It includes forty letters from Van Doren to Merton (Merton's letters are not included) between 1942 and 1968.¹⁰ Victor Kramer reviews these letters in this volume.

Another interview with Robert Giroux appeared earlier in the year in Columbia University's *Newman Journal*. This special issue was introduced with: "To some, it may seem odd that the terribly modern students at Columbia College, in the thralls of one of the most secular cities in the world, should take interest in a Trappist monk. Yet, this spring we do so because Thomas Merton (CC '38) was more than just a monk, poet, artist and author; he was one of the leading spiritual voices of our age." Drawings, cartoons, photographs and poems drawn from the Sister Therese Lentfoehr Collection of Mertoniana at Columbia are scattered throughout the issue. There is a section, called "Prayer" here, which contains excerpts

9. See Victor A. Kramer, *A Thomas Merton Oral History: Transcriptions of Taped Interviews* (Decatur, Georgia: Deweylands Press, 1985) and "A Conversation with Walker Percy about Thomas Merton" in *Conversations with Walker Percy*; edited by Lewis A. Larson and Victor A. Kramer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), pp. 309-320.

10. Merton's letters to Van Doren will lead off the second volume of the Merton correspondence, *The Road to Joy: The Letters of Thomas Merton to New and Old Friends*; selected and edited by Robert E. Daggy. Farrar, Straus & Giroux has scheduled a September 1988 publication date.

from a taped journal sent to Sr. Therese in 1966, but, while it has some interesting observations on prayer, the lack of introduction, commentary or editorial apparatus leaves the piece without context. Articles by Columbia students Luciano Siracusano and Joseph Seyler, in addition to a poem by Merton's friend Robert Lax, are included with the Giroux interview. The interview, in this case, also reflects Giroux's concern for "judicious use of language," but contains more about their experience at Columbia as well as their later "professional" relationship. Another tribute to Merton from Columbia had come in December with Paul Wilkes' "The Transformation of Thomas Merton," *Columbia* 12:3 (December 1986), pp. 32-36. Based primarily on Merton's own account in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, the "teaser" for this article reads: "College has changed the course of many lives, but few as radically as that of Thomas Merton" (p. 33). Wilkes, concludes, fittingly, that "the years at Columbia proved to be among the most crucial in Merton's life" (p. 36).

Wilkes, despite the fact that he tells us little that Merton has not told us himself about those crucial college years, explores territory in Merton's "geography" which has been traversed much less than the later monastic years.¹¹ Merton lived nearly half his life before he entered the Abbey of Gethsemani, a half crucial indeed in the final story of his search for self, but it is a much less documented period even by Merton himself. Sources for studying this period (or at least the period up to 1931) have gradually come available with the discovery that several hundreds of his father's letters and a few of his mother's have survived in collections at Smith College, the University of Texas at Austin, Yale University, and the private archives of Richard Bassett. Using these sources -- and later materials from the Merton corpus, such as *Eighteen Poems* -- I have attempted to reconstruct the years from 1921 to 1926 in "Birthday Theology: A Reflection on Thomas Merton and the Bermuda Menage," a fifth essay in *The Kentucky Review* "Merton

11. Merton gives the fullest account of his childhood and young adult years in *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948), but important allusions appear in other writings such as *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966), *Cables to the Ace* (1967), *The Geography of Lograire* (1969), as well as in *Eighteen Poems*. Monica Furlong gets Merton to conversion and into the monastery in the first one-third of *Merton: A Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980). Michael Mott appears, in *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), to get Merton to conversion in one-sixth of his biography and to Gethsemani in the first one-third, but his use of flash-backs and flash-forwards, beyond confusing the chronology somewhat, makes it difficult to ascertain just how much of the book is devoted to Merton's pre-monastic years. James Forest spends roughly one-half of *Thomas Merton: A Pictorial Biography* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) getting Merton to Gethsemani, a fact which reflects the half-and-half division of Merton's life. Two books for young people are glosses on *The Seven Storey Mountain* and add little to Merton's account of his early life: David R. Collins, *Thomas Merton: Monk with a Mission* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1981) and Cornelia and Irving Sussman, *Thomas Merton: The Daring Young Man on the Flying Belltower* (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

Symposium" (pp. 62-89). Passages from the first draft of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, deleted from the final published version, which shed light on this five-year period are included.

The final three essays in *The Kentucky Review* explore areas other than Merton's friendships and childhood. In "Thomas Merton as Theologian: An Appreciation" (pp. 90-97), Lawrence S. Cunningham presents a pellucid and persuasive discussion that, to me, dispenses once and for all with the notion that Merton was *not* a theologian. Though he admits that Merton was "not a theologian in any obvious sense of the term," he quotes Evagrius who once wrote "if you are a theologian you pray in truth; if you pray in truth, you are a theologian." Taken in that sense, Cunningham states: "We cannot only justify our essay's title but add, further, that in that sense Thomas Merton was probably the greatest theologian that this country produced in the twentieth century" (p. 91). In assessing Merton as a continuing phenomenon, Cunningham concludes: "... The socially relevant clerics of the 1960s are now, at best, footnotes to church history while the irrelevant monk is still an inspiration and a model for those who thirst for that deepened experience of being human" (p. 96).

George A. Kilcourse ventures into relatively uncharted territory which he calls "a *terra incognita*" in "The Paradise Ear: Thomas Merton, Poet" (pp. 98-121). The territory is that of Merton's "diverse and lengthy" poetry canon and, while Kilcourse readily and rightly admits that he cannot exhaust the topic in an essay of this length, he does manage to provide one of the best *shorter* overviews of Merton as a poet. In his last paragraph, he says:

A brief appreciation of Thomas Merton, poet, cannot presume to explore all the dimensions of this multifaceted, talented person; but it can invite both Merton scholars and readers to include more thoughtfully this dimension of the integral Merton in their study. I dare to envision Merton studies venturing beyond the plateau of these nearly twenty years of significant and valuable theological and spiritual investigation. A truly interdisciplinary scrutiny of his mature writings awaits. (p. 119)

The last essay in the book, but by no means the least important as a reference tool for Merton scholars, is William J. Marshall's "The Thomas Merton Collection at the University of Kentucky" (pp. 145-153). He describes in as great detail as possible this small, choice collection which includes, in addition to the Hammer correspondence, Merton's exchanges with Erich Fromm, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, and Boris Pasternak. His essay, a valuable one, stands as nearly the only published attempt to survey a major

collection of Merton materials.¹²

The "international" aspect of the Merton phenomenon was given recognition in May when a group of representative Merton scholars meeting at the Thomas Merton Studies Center in Louisville, Kentucky, announced the formation of THE INTERNATIONAL THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY (ITMS) to promote understanding and appreciation and to encourage research and study in relation to his work. The first President, William H. Shannon, had been instrumental in organizing "A Thomas Merton Conference" at the University of London which occurred earlier in May. At that conference Canon A. M. Allchin spoke on "Merton the Monk;" Kenneth Leech on "Thomas Merton, Social Activist;" and Shannon on "Merton the Person." Other officers of the ITMS are Robert E. Daggy, Vice-President; Christine M. Bochen, Corresponding Secretary; and Bonnie Bowman Thurston, Recording Secretary-Treasurer. Certainly the Society's formation reflects international interest but so also does the number of people writing and speaking about Merton in various parts of the world. Constant Broos of Rijmenam, Belgium, coordinated the third "Merton-Weekend" held in Belgium. A unique feature of these programs is that they are held in a different Abbey each year. Speakers have included Edward Buysse, Charles Dumont, O.C.S.O., James Forest, and Henri J. M. Nouwen.

In scholarly areas, Antonio Spolverato completed a doctoral dissertation, titled *Thomas Merton: Dalla Filosofia alla Contemplazione*, at the University of Padua. Vietnamese-born Joseph Dat-Tien-Vu, O.P., did a lengthy (250 pages) master's thesis at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, California, which examined the "self" theme and called *The Recovery of Paradise: A Search for the Self according to Thomas Merton*. Thomas A. Del Prete, on the American scene, finished his doctoral dissertation at Harvard University, titled "The Formation of the Whole Person": *An Interpretative Study of Thomas Merton's Ideas on Education*. This area of the Merton experience has been almost unexplored by scholars, but Del Prete reminds us that Merton spent a considerable portion of his life and energies, both before and after his entrance into Gethsemani, engaged in teaching and that his writings of the "formation of the whole person" and "self-discovery" confront basic concepts in

12. The only other published account is M. Basil Pennington's "The Merton Collection at Boston College," *Merton Seasonal* 11:1 (Winter 1986), pp. 8-10. The published bibliographies do not locate materials though it may be assumed that unpublished materials listed in Breit/ Daggy, *Thomas Merton: A Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1986) are part of the collection at Bellarmine College.

education. He concludes his abstract by saying:

Viewed from Merton's contemplative perspective, the meaning of education assumes an existential dimension that encompasses at once person and community, knowledge and wisdom. It is this depth and breadth which recommends Merton's understanding of education for special consideration in modern educational discussion.

Theses in progress include: Fr. Enda Cunningham from Dublin, Ireland, at the Collegio Teutonico in Vatican City (*Grace as the Self-Communication of God the Holy Spirit in the Thought of Thomas Merton*); Vivian Ligo of Belgium at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (*The Language of Paradox in the Confessions of Augustine and The Seven Storey Mountain of Thomas Merton*); and Fr. Thumma Gnana Prakash of Nalgonda, India at the Gregorian University in Rome (*Beams of Love in Transcendancy: The Experience and Thought of Thomas Merton*). One unfortunate circumstance during the year which the ITMS may eventually help to correct by diffusing information and materials on Merton was the case of Br. Adrian Magnait who had planned to do a thesis on Merton's philosophy of silence at the University of Santo Tomas in Manila, The Philippines. He finally wrote: "By reasons of time constraints and lack of references, I was obliged to change my topic to that on which our libraries have plenty of reference materials."

The Autumn issue of *The Merton Seasonal*, in addition to the essay on the Dalai Lama and Merton by Br. John Albert, featured three other "international" pieces. Cyrus Lee contributed "Teaching Thomas Merton in China" (pp. 9-13), an account of his experiences at the Central China University of Sciences and Technology in Wuhan. He attempted to introduce his students to Merton through a comparative course in American Literature. Lee concluded:

As a result of my last trip to China, one of the prestigious universities of China has agreed to sponsor a Sino-American conference (and dialogue) on "Chinese Humanism and Western Spirituality." It is up to us in the West now. Merton died in Thailand without ever visiting China. Shall we carry his message to the Chinese?

A translation of Kurt Remele's "Conversation with Brother Patrick Hart" (pp. 16-18), originally published in Germany in *Geist und Leben* 60:2 (March-April 1987), explored in part the reasons for Merton's ongoing popularity. As Remele puts it: "In the German-speaking countries you can now see some kind of Merton renaissance."¹³ Finally, an edited version of

13. Remele points for his evidence to the re-issue of *The Seven Storey Mountain* (*Der Berg der sieben Stufen*, Köln: Benziger, 1985) and the new translations of *Contemplation in a World of Action* (*Im Einklang*

an interview with Australian actor Richard Moir, aired by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on 26 May 1987, and titled "Grains of Sand" (a reference to a Bob Dylan song), recounts the influence Merton has had on a well-known television and film personality. When asked how Merton's ideas have affected him, Moir responded: "I read a piece of Merton every day and I write it down and I just attempt to allow it to sink in. It's a sense of awe at everything."

A consistent theme in Merton's writings, naturally, and in work about him has been that of solitude. *Parabola* included an adaptation from *The Wisdom of the Desert*, titled "The Solitary Ones," in their Spring issue and it is clear that what Merton himself had to say about solitude still attracts readers. *Vision Quest*, in addition to the Thurston "phenomenon article," reprinted Dorothy LeBeau's "The Solitary Life of Thomas Merton" (1:4, Winter 1987, pp. 3-6), an essay which appeared originally in *Cistercian Studies* 20:4 (1985), pp. 332-337. Colman McCarthy's "In Search of Solitude," *New Age Journal* 3:3 (May-June 1987): pp. 38-39, 55, 61, 64) basically reported that Trappist monasteries "have become retreats for secular reflection," but discussed Merton and acknowledged the influence of "this life-enhancing priest and writer." Addresses of twelve Trappist monasteries who welcome visitors, which McCarthy calls "The Haunts of Ancient Peace," are given for those who might want to experience moments of quiet and solitude.

Two books about Merton, vastly different in scope and content, appeared in this period. The first, Brother Patrick Hart's *Thomas Merton: First and Last Memories*, was published in a limited edition of 250 copies by Necessity Press in Bardstown, Kentucky. Just twenty-two pages long with only ten pages of actual text, it is, with Jim Cantrell's fine drawings, a lovely book, lovely to see and hold, but hardly a full-fledged study of Merton. Rather, and this was its only intention, Brother Patrick Hart, in combining two short essays, has given us a flashing glimpse of two moments with Merton, a reminiscence that stands as it is, simple and telling without explanation or explication.¹⁴ The book is reviewed in this volume by Karl A. Plank.

mit sich und der Welt, Zurich: Herder, 1986); *Thomas Merton on Peace (Gewaltlosigkeit: Eine Alternative*, Koln: Benziger, 1986); and Monica Furlong's *Merton: A Biography (Alles, was ein Mensch sucht: Thomas Merton, ein exemplarisches Leben*, Freiburg: Herder, 1982). In addition to his interview was Johannes Werner's "Auf der Schwelle zum Schweigen, Annaeherungen an den Dichter Thomas Merton," *Erbe und Auftrag* 63 (October 1987), pp. 362-370.

14. "First Memories" was published as "He Loved the Woods and All Growing Things" in "Thomas Merton: His Friends Remember Him," edited by Jack Wintz, O.F.M., *St. Anthony Messenger* 86:7

The other book, M. Basil Pennington's *Thomas Merton, Brother Monk: The Quest for True Freedom*, is a much more ambitious and over-reaching production. Pennington originally projected a "monastic biography" and what he presents us gives us, as Walter H. Capps put it, "a rare opportunity to approach Merton from within the monastery." He sums up the content and structure, indeed the purpose, of the book by saying:

First of all there was Tom's quest for basic human freedom, which he exploited and abused. Then came his quest for the freedom of the faith and the fuller freedom of the monastic life. Within that life he continued to seek, finding a freedom to be open to all reality. He went on to seek the freedom of the eremitical life. In all of this he was seeking the freedom of final integration, which prepared him to enter into the ultimate freedom of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Though not a full-blown biography as such, it is certainly an important "biographical study" of Merton's years in the monastery. It is reviewed in this volume by a third "brother monk," Fr. John Eudes Bamberger, Abbot of Our Lady of the Genesee.

1987, though activity and publication continued apace, was thus not one of the busier years in Merton studies in the sense that production was not so massive as in other years. It was not, perhaps, a year in which a great amount of distinguished material was published, but it was a year which saw *The Alaskan Journal*, the fine essays in *The Kentucky Review Symposium*, Basil Pennington's biographical study, Tom Del Prete's dissertation, and the formation of THE INTERNATIONAL THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY. So it was certainly a year which saw significant additions to the general body and direction of Merton studies, a year in which the Merton phenomenon certainly continued.

(December 1978), p. 36. "Last Memories," originally "Last Mass in the Hermitage," has had a fuller publication history: *Cistercian Studies* 4 (1969), pp. 302-304; *Continuum* 7 (Winter-Spring 1969), pp. 213-215; *Monastic Exchange* (Summer 1969), pp. 85-86; *New Book Review* (October 1969), pp. 3-4; and in translation into German in *Seckauer Hefte* 32:3 (1969), pp. 97-98.