

A Bee in His Bonnet: Thomas Merton, Emily Dickinson and Sister Mary James Power

By **John P. Collins**

On March 6, 1949, Thomas Merton wrote in his journal: “Sister James, in Malden, sent me her book on Emily Dickinson and I am happy to dip into it and find one person in the world – Emily – with my own aspirations though in a different way. I wish I had Emily’s good sense.”¹ The book in question was *In the Name of the Bee: The Significance of Emily Dickinson*,² published six years earlier by Sister Mary James Power, SSND (1894-1967), and the gift was part of an ongoing relationship that has received no previous attention, but is of interest both in itself and as prompting one of the relatively few comments by Merton about a poet whom he would later list as one of the five American authors who influenced him the most.³ Thus some consideration of the life and work of “Sister James” and her contact with Merton can provide insight into an early, relatively minor, but warm and mutually appreciative friendship, as well as a point of entry into the matter of Merton’s sense of kinship with Dickinson.⁴

Sister Mary James Power was born on July 21, 1894 in Cambridge, Massachusetts and after attending public school up to the fourth grade, she entered St. Peter’s School in Cambridge, graduating in 1908. She spent her next four years at Cambridge Latin School, studying Latin, Greek, French, German and English, as well as science and all the mathematics courses, completing the normally five-year curriculum in four years. On January 6, 1913, Power joined the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Baltimore, Maryland; she was formally received into the order on August 6, 1914 and professed on July 22, 1916. She subsequently received a bachelor’s degree from St. John’s University in 1923, a master’s from Fordham University in 1926, and a Ph.D. from Fordham ten years later. Her major field of study was English with minors in Latin, History and Education. After teaching grammar school on Long Island between 1915 and 1919, and high school in Brooklyn between 1919 and 1922, Sr. James spent close to forty years at Girls Catholic High School in Malden, Massachusetts, both as a teacher and as principal from 1939 to 1961. She then served as dean and professor of English at the College of Notre Dame in Wilton, Connecticut, the order’s provincial headquarters, until her death on October 1, 1967. She was the author of two books, *Poets at Prayer*, published in 1938,⁵ and *In the Name of the Bee*. She also contributed to various scholarly and professional publications including the *Catholic Encyclopedia for Home and School*.

John P. Collins served on the faculty of the College of the Holy Cross, Worcester State University and the International Education Program Inc. He has published articles in *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, *The Merton Annual*, *The Merton Seasonal* and *Religion and the Arts*. For over a decade he has contributed a monthly column on Thomas Merton to the Worcester, MA Catholic Free Press and served for a similar length of time as facilitator for the Shrewsbury, MA chapter of the International Thomas Merton Society.



John Collins with Sr. Carolyn Andrewes

The SSND archives in Wilton contain a number of items that provide evidence for Sister James' contact with Thomas Merton. The earliest is probably a short note from Merton written on the back of a religious card⁶ thanking her for the gift of her first book: "+JHS Many thanks for your most enjoyable 'Poets at Prayer'. This poet is praying for you – Don't forget to pray for him. In Cordo Jesu fr. m. Louis ocso."⁷ While the note is undated, it was apparently written sometime in the mid-1940s, after the publication at least of Merton's first volume of verse, *Thirty Poems*,⁸ since this would be the most likely occasion for Sister James to have become aware of Merton as poet.

A second card (a picture of Our Lady of Fatima with a small printed inscription – "Marist Missionary Sisters") was evidently a response to a premature expression of congratulations on Merton's ordination, which must have been sent to Merton in late April 1949. His handwritten note on the verso of the card reads: "Dear Sister James – Your beautiful card and offering were just one *month too early*. It is planned to hold the ordinations here on Ascension Day, May 26th. So I am glad you will all keep praying and in return I will remember you and all yours in my first Mass. What a tremendous day it will be, with the angels rejoicing over this converted sinner! In Corde Jesu h. fr. Louis." After the ordination Merton sent Sister James his ordination card, but apparently unaccompanied by any personal note.⁹



Sr. Mary James Power, SSND

The only extant letter from Merton to Sister James is dated November 22, 1948. He writes:

Dear Sister James:

Many thanks for your kind letter and the gift for the monastery, which it contained. I do not know that I envy you reading the *Mountain* out loud. It is pretty long . . . If it palls, offer the penance up for me, please! I was glad to hear that Don Kenny [*sic*] is still in the land of the living. Thank you also for your kind review of *Exile* which I think, you overpraise. We soon go on retreat, so please pray for me – and for so many people who have written in asking for prayers. I wouldn't even dare to open a letter if I didn't know I had the whole Mystical Body with me, to take care of what is usually inside.

In Christo Rege, fr. M. Louis

The reference to "Don Kenny" is to a former teaching colleague of Merton at St. Bonaventure College, F. Donald Kenney, who later became a successful business leader; his connection with Sister James is unknown.¹⁰

The mention of the "kind review" refers to Merton's book *Exile Ends in Glory*;¹¹ it appeared in *The Pilot*, the weekly newspaper of the Boston Archdiocese¹² (see the Appendix of this article for the complete text). A review by Sister James of another Merton book is not mentioned in the correspondence but is preserved in the SSND archives. Entitled "Poised Against Heaven: The Tears of the Blind Lions,"¹³ it is a very favorable notice of Merton's fifth volume of poetry,¹⁴ accompanied by a photo of hooded monks having a meal while another monk is standing on a balcony reading to them (see the Appendix for the complete text).

Merton also sent to Sister James drafts of two essays that would subsequently appear in the lay Catholic journal *The Commonweal* (as it was then called) in 1947: "Poetry and the Contemplative

Life”¹⁵ and “The Trappists Go to Utah.”¹⁶ The latter essay is accompanied by copies of two letters written to C. G. Paulding, the magazine’s managing editor, the first, dated August 8, 1947, offering the article for publication and the second, dated five days later, providing some minor alterations. In 1949, Merton reciprocated Sister James’ gift of *In the Name of the Bee* by sending her a copy of the newly published *Seeds of Contemplation*,¹⁷ with an inscription that read: “t JHS. To Sister Mary James S.S.N.D. An eye for an eye and a book for a book – and a prayer for a prayer. God bless you and keep you. Fr. M. Louis O.C.R.”

While there are almost no further items connecting Merton and Sister James in the SSND archives,¹⁸ Sister Carolyn Andrewes, archivist for the Wilton Province, recalls her friend and mentor’s deep admiration for Merton from the years when Sister Carolyn was a student of Sister James at Girls Catholic High School in Malden, from which she graduated in 1949. According to Sister Carolyn, her homeroom teacher talked about Thomas Merton and his writings on an almost daily basis; even Emily Dickinson took “2nd place” to Thomas Merton in 1949. Commenting on the material in the archives, she notes: “I found that Sister James knew and was quite well known by Thomas Merton even before she began telling us about him in class.”¹⁹

In the Name of the Bee, the book on Emily Dickinson which Sister Mary James Power published in 1943 and sent to Thomas Merton in 1949, is a resolutely “Catholic” reading of the poetry of the nineteenth-century literary recluse, seeing her as a contemplative akin to some of the great mystical figures of the Christian tradition such as St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila.²⁰ Commenting on a February 1852 letter written to her future sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert, in which Dickinson encourages her not to go to church but to “come with me this morning to the church within our hearts, where the bells are always ringing and the preacher whose name is Love shall intercede for us” (Power, *Bee* 11-12), Sister James goes so far as to declare:

It delights us to find . . . that the substance of Emily’s creed was that of the Angelic Doctor [i.e. St. Thomas Aquinas]: Love. And, as a faithful disciple, she walked in its shadow . . . [T]his ever-present shade was the abiding protection of God, Whose Being is Love and Whose Kingdom is Love. Loving mankind, He created for it a universe of Beauty. And man, made to His Own Image and Likeness, He placed in full dominion over it. His Own Attribute, Supreme Love, was to be the Primal, the Efficient, and the Ultimate Cause of man’s existence here. (Power, *Bee* 24)

According to Sister James, “Contemplation, then, was Emily’s chosen kingdom. And the key of her kingdom was Love” (Power, *Bee* 57). Summing up her view of Dickinson as the poet reached the end of her life, the author writes:

[T]hose whom she loved she saw identified with that Supreme love that makes all things one. The closing years of her retirement kept renewing her service to that Unifying Love, until on May 14, 1886 she wrote a little note to her cousins: “Called Back.” She had anticipated the summons which she was to answer the next day. It was a summons to that Love in Whose Presence she had walked with the companion of her soul, “Finite Infinity,” and with Whom, as she lay still in white, she had completed [her] mystic union. (Power, *Bee* 138)²¹

In the Name of the Bee was written well before the scholarly upsurge in Dickinson studies that began with Thomas Johnson's critical edition of Dickinson's poetry in 1955²² and has continued in both textual and interpretive articles and monographs²³ as well as biographical interpretations²⁴ right up to the present. The current scholarly consensus would certainly not endorse Sister James' overtly Catholic reading of Dickinson's work, and generally finds the poet much more skeptical and spiritually ambivalent than the portrait of the assured contemplative drawn by Sister James. Nonetheless the book was generally well received when it appeared. There are eleven book reviews in the SSND archives at Wilton. Eight are from Catholic publications, one from a secular publication, and two are unidentified.²⁵ Ten of the reviews are favorable and laud the efforts of Sister James to identify Emily Dickinson with Catholicism. For example, a February 19, 1944 review from *Ave Maria* magazine comments, "In this little volume Sister Mary James demonstrates, we believe, that whatever religion Emily Dickinson embraced formally as a result of her Puritan upbringing, she was in thought and at heart always Catholic." *The Yale Review* notes that Dickinson "would have thought of herself as a recusant, but her poetic imagery is derived from a symbolism curiously in harmony with the cultural heritage of the [Catholic] Church." A March 1944 review in *The Sign*, a Catholic publication, is less supportive of the point of view presented by Sister James: "The thesis – that Miss Dickinson was a Catholic without knowing it – is ably, if a little too ecstatically, defended. The book is strewn with quotations that might better have been omitted, as they are not used as the basis for analysis or criticism, and the objective facts are too few in number and too exuberantly passed over for sound criticism."

Thomas Merton makes no further comment on *In the Name of the Bee*, and it is not known if he did more than "dip into" it, but it is noteworthy that his characterization of Dickinson as "one person in the world . . . with my own aspirations though in a different way" and his praise of her "good sense" represent the first expression of his appreciation for her solitary poetic vocation, a perspective that will recur in the brief later comments he will make about her, so it is reasonable to assume that Sister James' book had a positive effect on his knowledge of and enthusiasm for Dickinson and her work.

Merton's only earlier extant comment on Dickinson is found in a journal entry for March 18, 1941, in response to a rejection notice about his early poem "The Philosophers."²⁶ He writes: "The first insult of the day . . . was when I found the letter from *New Yorker* saying a poem containing a parody on 'Beauty is truth etc. . . ' was a parody of Emily Dickinson and their readers would mostly be unfamiliar with that poem 'of hers' so they couldn't use it. I never read a line of Emily Dickinson."²⁷ The reference is to the lines "Two mandrakes were discussing life / And Truth and Beauty in the other room" (ll. 8-9). As Patrick O'Connell notes in his discussion of the poem,

The reference to "the other room" is . . . apparently an allusion to Emily Dickinson's poem #449, "I died for Beauty," in which the speaker is "In an adjoining Room" (l. 4) to one who died for Truth, and says "We talked between the Rooms" (l. 10). The mandrakes' conversation, of course, covers these very topics, though their words reflect Dickinson less directly than a source that she herself probably was alluding to, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, – that is all, / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" – the famous final lines of John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn."²⁸

With regard to Merton's claim never to have read a line of Dickinson, O'Connell comments, "If this last statement is literally true then there is a remarkable coincidence of phrasing; it may rather

be an overstatement in reaction to the failure to recognize the more central parody of Keats.²⁹ But in any case the premonastic Merton of 1940 had not yet recognized Emily Dickinson as a kindred spirit, and once in the monastery had probably not had occasion to read her until Sister James' book arrived, so the change in perspective reflected in his 1949 journal comment would seem to be due in large part to his (re)discovery of Dickinson in the pages of *In the Name of the Bee*.

It is some ten years later, however, that Merton's enthusiasm for Dickinson truly surfaces, presumably from an immersion in the poetry itself rather than from returning to Sister James' commentary. In a December 29, 1959 letter to Robert Lax, Merton writes:

I am having a mystical flirtation with Emily Dickinson. Love knows not the calendar and hath no patience with ages, and thus there is also no lack of conformity with the vow of chastity. Thus no one shall to the wedding of true minds admit impediment. All I ask is why does it have to be Emily Dickinson? I guess it must be that utterly reprehensible Joan Bennet streak coming out again. Didn't I tell you in my last letter it was the deluge? Well, truly, it is.³⁰

At about the same time, he makes his most widely known statement about Dickinson in an introductory footnote to his essay "Notes for a Philosophy of Solitude," where he writes:

I am speaking of the solitary spirit which is really essential to the monastic view of life, but which is not confined to monasteries. Nor is it limited to men and women who have consecrated their lives to God by vow. Therefore, though I am treating of the traditional concept of the *monachos*, or solitary, I am deliberately discarding everything that can conjure up the artificial image of the monk in a cowl, dwelling in a medieval cloister. In this way I intend obviously, not to disparage or to reject the monastic institution, but to set aside all its accidentals and externals, so that they will not interfere with my view of what seems to me to be deepest and most essential. But by that same token, the "solitary" of these pages is never necessarily a "monk" (juridically) at all. He may well be a layman, and of the sort most remote from cloistered life, like Thoreau or Emily Dickinson.³¹

Thus a shared devotion to solitude is clearly the basis of Merton's "mystical flirtation" and the "wedding of true minds"³² with Dickinson.

A later comment on Dickinson in an unpublished letter makes clear, however, that Merton is not prepared to consider Dickinson the full-fledged mystic that Sister James had described. Writing on March 3, 1964 to a "Sister Janet," Merton remarks:

the idea that Emily was a "mystic" must be taken with a large grain of salt. One could not find too much evidence that she was a Christian mystic in the full sense of the word. But she was one of those people who was open to spiritual and even mystical experience, by temperament, and by the circumstances of her life. I would call her in a general way religious and open to grace and of course the fact of her reaction against the conventional religiosity of her milieu might have something to do with this. Her life as a "recluse" is not unrelated to this either.

Merton goes on to say that Dickinson is probably a distant relative to the English mystical tradition, mentioning the recluses "Julian of Norwich, Rolle, Cloud of Unknowing etc." He continues: "The

English spiritual tradition tends to be one of personal and solitary quests and therefore nonconformity, and the mystic is often a non-conformist by necessity (it is forced on him). Probably the thing of mine that would be most relevant for Emily would be ‘Notes on [sic] a Philosophy of Solitude’ in *Disputed Questions*. . . . [L]et us not insist that Emily was in the full sense a mystic. It would only cause confusion.”³³

A final commentary on Dickinson by Merton comes in one of a series of conferences on poetry that he gave in the first half of 1965, shortly before retiring as novice master at the Abbey of Gethsemani and taking up full-time residence in his hermitage. On January 29, 1965,³⁴ Merton discusses with his novices Dickinson’s poem “I taste a liquor never brewed –” (Johnson 149 [#214]), which he presents as a kind of protest poem. He remarks:

In Emily Dickinson, the important thing to realize in her is this basic, fundamental protest against puritanical society, but a protest not of a beatnik type. It’s a spiritual protest of a higher type. So the thing that is important in Emily Dickinson is actually the spiritual protest. Well, come on, spell it out – what is the spiritual protest that’s here against puritanical society implied in this poem?

The novices respond with comments about various lines of the poem. After an exchange about her mention of “drunken Seraphs,” Merton explains:

[T]he spiritual statement that’s implied in this, you see . . . is this idea that I am living in a puritanical society – it’s for the birds, it’s useless. With all of their rigidity and so forth they don’t realize that the way to get to heaven is by happiness, by love, and by joy, and so forth and so forth. So as I say, for the importance of this poem, however, you have to be able to conceive who the author is to get it.

Thus Merton’s final picture of Emily Dickinson is of the “Inebriate of Air” intoxicated by the beauty of creation, the “Debauchee of Dew . . . Leaning against the – Sun” – if not a mystic in the full sense of the word, at least a figure in revolt against the narrow religious orthodoxy of her day and open to the transcendent exaltation of an experience of the simple pleasures of the natural world that bears at least a strong resemblance to natural contemplation. In the March 25, 1967 letter to Mario Falsina in which Merton lists Dickinson as one of the five American authors who have most influenced him, he begins by focusing on his “idea of the world . . . as God’s good creation,” and continues: “I have the good fortune to live in close contact with nature, how should I not love this world, and love it with passion? I understand the joy of St. Francis amid the creatures! God manifests himself in his creation, and everything that he has made speaks of him” (*RJ* 347-48). It is this passionate love for the world, as well as a vocation to solitude, that Merton shares with Dickinson and that he finds in her poetry. If this is a less doctrinally “Catholic” approach to Dickinson than that of Sister Mary James Power, it is nonetheless evident that the two shared a common love for the recluse of Amherst, and it is quite likely that “dip[ping] into” Sister James’ enthusiastic study of the poet served as an initial catalyst for Merton’s own growing, if largely hidden, sense of spiritual kinship with his nineteenth-century predecessor.

Appendix

EXILE ENDS IN GLORY, by Thomas Merton, Bruce, Milwaukee, 1948. Pp. 311. \$3.75.

Exile Ends in Glory is another contribution to Cisterciana by Thomas Merton, the young Trappist poet. Like its companion volume, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, his autobiography, this life of Mother Berchmans, the Trappistine, is not only “a book for all time.” It is also a book for the present time. It does today “plain.”

Apart from its publication on the eve of the arrival of some Irish Cistercians on our shores, it is timely in the over-worked phrase of the day: “the ways and means” to an appreciation of the meaning of Christian life. Cistercian life, in the perfection, is Christian life, in its fullness. Its “ways and means” are reverence and honor, solicitude and care for all one’s brethren in the cloister. “See, how they love one another,” we hear of the early Christians.

Mother Berchmans loved all God’s creation. She loved France. Her heart’s Jerusalem, she called it. She loved the Cistercian Monastery at Laval. (She wanted to live and die there.) But she answered the call of her Lover Whom she could not see to leave her homeland to revive the foundation of Our Lady of the Angels in Japan. Love is never lazy, never careless. Love acts.

It was exile for the young Cistercian nun to pronounce the vow of stability in Japan, the vow to remain there until death. Yet her heart was not in exile. With the gift of infused love, it sang its “Canticle of Gratitude.” It thanked God for everything, for the lack of all consolation in her exile, even for the boredom of creatures.

In her many offices as sacristan, portress, guest mistress, sales manager of the cheeses, cellarer, and Novice Mistress Mother Berchmans followed the Little Way of Love. In the legion of little souls, Saint Therese of Lisieux was the “Little Captain”; Mother Berchmans, the Little Standard Bearer. But the Little Way never conflicted with the Cistercian Way, the way of simplicity and sublimity. Nor did sanctity stifle her sense of humor. Neither poverty nor suffering, hardships nor inconvenience could lessen it. She wrote Laval:

. . . Yes, I am to become Mistress of our little Choir Novices – I who can scarcely stammer a few words of Japanese. Once upon a time the good God willed to make use of the jaw-bone of an ass to destroy the Philistines. Today He is about to make use of the whole animal in order to train His spouses . . .

If the book is for all time, it is also for all classes. Young persons will admire the courage of Mother Berchmans; older persons, her poise and balance, her confidence and sacrifice. All will be fascinated by the understanding, the sympathy, the detail with which the author presents this physical and spiritual Odyssey of Trappist Life. True to his mission as poet, Thomas Merton sees into the life of things. Equally plainly he shows them to us. And just as consistently as a maker of verse, he never confuses poetry and prose when he is writing the latter.

Sister Mary James, S. S.N. D.

Poised Against Heaven

THE TEARS OF THE BLIND LIONS, by Thomas Merton, published by New Directions. 32 pp., \$1.25.

Thomas Merton's latest volume is the work of a professional poet. Like his preceding volumes, *A Man in a Divided Sea* and *Figures for an Apocalypse*, *The Tears of the Blind Lions* places him in the tradition of the Metaphysicals, then of Hopkins, later of Eliot, and, still later, of Robert Lowell.

Between even natural love and its expression through the written or spoken word, there is a disproportion. Love suffers with articulation. Unmistakably, then, as Leon Bloy says, when those who love God try to talk about Him, their words are blind lions looking for springs in the desert. As a Cistercian and as a biblical Eliot, Thomas Merton will continue to traffic in "blind lions." For, whether the "speechless Trappist" is working under an August sky in the "deaf-and-dumb fields, waiting to be shaved of hay . . . While locusts fry their music in the sycamores," or whether he sits "hooded in the lectern waiting for the monks to come," poems are born, he writes, "In the trough of my human heart." Always spiritual, not always religious, they are always startling in their metaphors, stark in their contrasts.

"The Quickening of St. John the Baptist" is alive with the Merton metaphor. Jesus' first mission on earth was in Mary. She carried Him to Elizabeth when yet there was no stirring under her heart. Only the belief that God would fulfil His Word in her was there. But little (as yet unnamed) John

Wakes in his mother's body,
Bounds with the echoes of discovery,
before the Tabernacle of the Lord.

Here Thomas Merton interprets the life of contemplation:

Night is our diocese and silence is our ministry
Poverty our charity and helplessness our tongue-tied sermon . . . :
Cooled in the flame of God's dark fire
Washed in His gladness like a vesture of new flame
We burn like eagles in His invincible awareness
And bound and bounce with happiness,
Leap in the womb, our cloud, our faith, our element,
Our contemplation, our anticipated heaven
Till Mother Church sings like an Evangelist.

In "Christopher Columbus," Sandburg's rough realism and Frost's stone walls come to life with a Marian refrain playing in and out of the verses. Columbus is more than a discoverer. He is a Christopher carrying Christ and Mary to a land of primitive, natural innocence. Now that land is lost in the freezing lovelessness of Satanic sin. Over this ghastly spectre the "blind lions" groan

What will you do tomorrow America
Found and lost so soon? . . .
The devils are sailing for your harbors
Launching their false doves into the air to fly for your sands.
They bend over their tillers with little fox faces,

Grin like dollars through their fur,
And their meat-eating sails fly down and fold upon your shores.

Break open a dozen cities. Let traffic bleed upon the land
And hug your hundred and twenty million paupers in a vise without escape
While they are mapped and verified,
Plotted, printed, catalogued, numbered and categorized
And sold to the doctors of your sham discovery. . . .

All the lyrics (and there are nineteen) protest against materialism. Greed for gold has made the
“Dry Places” where bushes live without water. There
No cars go by
Where dogs are barking at the desert,
Now not one lame miner
Sits on the rotten verandah.
Works in the irons where Judas’ shadow dwells.

But Love will transform those places where death is buried in the hills with the gold, those
places where those who mine gold mine death. It will
Hew a city from the side of their hill

and find its gold in the sheaves of wheat that stand solemnly like incense hanging in the apse of the
Church at High Mass.

There is one of the contrasts that mark Merton’s poetry. They have the starkness of hell poised
eternally against the splendor of heaven. “Senescente Mundo,” the concluding poem, is memorable
for that concept. When the whole universe, aging now, is resolved by “uninhibited atoms,” when
earth has condemned herself to hell, then a bright new world will rise from the sea and

Surprise this cinder with new holiness,
Thomas Merton feels, because a whisper has ruffled the surface of the chalice wine and a priest’s
fingers have held aloft the Christ: His Peace imposes silence on the evidence against us.

Sister Mary James, S.S.N.D.

1. Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer. Journals, vol. 2: 1941-1952*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 288.
2. Sister Mary James Power, *In the Name of the Bee: The Significance of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943); subsequent references will be cited as “Power, *Bee*” parenthetically in the text. The book was reissued in 1970 by Biblo and Tannen, New York. The title comes from Dickinson’s poem “The Gentian weaves her fringes,” which concludes: “In the name of the Bee – / And of the Butterfly – / And of the Breeze – Amen!” (*The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, 3 vols. [New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1955] 20-21 [#18]; subsequent references will be cited as “Johnson” parenthetically in the text). The copy sent to Merton is in the Abbey of Gethsemani Library, with the inscription: “For frater Marie Louis and the Abbey of Gethsemani as a reminder for an occasional prayer. / Sister Mary James, S.S.N.D. / Malden, Mass”; it contains no marginalia or other markings.
3. Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy: Letters to New and Old Friends*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989) 349 [March 25, 1967 letter to Mario Falsina]; subsequent references will be cited as “*RJ*” parenthetically in the text. The other American authors mentioned are Thoreau, Faulkner, William Carlos Williams and Mark Van Doren.

4. Biographical information is found in the official permanent record for Sister Mary James Power, Congregation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Baltimore, MD, and from various obituaries in the SSND archives, Wilton, CT, which I visited on March 2, 2013; particular thanks is given to Sister Carolyn Andrewes, archivist of the Wilton province, for her gracious hospitality on the occasion of this visit and for permission to present and quote from the materials found in the archives, as well as to reproduce the photograph of Sister Mary James Power.
5. Sister Mary James Power, *Poets at Prayer* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1938). Two book reviews of *Poets at Prayer* are preserved in the SSND archives, neither including the publication name or date. The first, in which the reviewer is identified by the initials E. N., states: "The purpose of this book is 'to discover the attitude towards religion of some of the generally acknowledged leaders in contemporary English and American poetry,' and on the whole the purpose has been adequately fulfilled. . . . Unfortunately the mere discovery of the attitude of various contemporary poets on God and religion is not the most valuable kind of critical literature and there are many readers who will demand something more. . . . A poet's religious ideas are only sociologically important; his general view of the universe conditions his values as well as his choice of subject matter and consequently is a literary question as well. The author does not regard such a theme as within the limits of her essay. But if this omission will disappoint many who consider the divorce of theology and literature as a disastrous thing they may feel repaid by the careful collation of religious lines and the comparison of the poetry with the personal opinions of the different poets. The book . . . contains many hitherto unpublished letters from the poets under consideration." In the second review, entitled "Strong Hands of Prayer," John L. Foley writes: "For an age of chaos, change, and undeclared wars, *Poets at Prayer* is a light in our surrounding darkness. In his Foreword to the volume Dr. Henry W. Wells, of the Columbia University English Department, calls this an original and inspiring book." Foley explains that Sister Power divides the fourteen modern poets into three groups: "Book One: Lovers of Earthly Beauty," which includes Robinson Jeffers; "Book Two: Seekers after God," which includes Edwin Arlington Robinson; "Book Three: Poets Naturally Christian," which includes T. S. Eliot. Foley briefly describes several of the poets in each category with supporting quotations from letters sent to Sister James, including "six striking facsimile letters" from distinguished poets such as Robinson Jeffers, Thomas S. Jones, Jr. and T. S. Eliot. Foley remarks that the fact that "Sister Mary James Power was able to win from such [distinguished] poets, letters for publication about their religious attitudes is a tribute to her tact as well as faith."
6. The card has on the front side a representation of a dove holding an olive branch with the word "Pax"; there is also the symbol of a cross with a wreath.
7. All unpublished correspondence from Thomas Merton to Sister Mary James Power is quoted with permission from the Merton Legacy Trust.
8. Thomas Merton, *Thirty Poems* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1944).
9. On the front of the ordination card was a picture of a statue of Our Lady of Fontenay with the Child Jesus. On the back side of the card were the following printed words: "Our Lady of Fontenay, Cistercian 13th century / "He walked with God and was seen no more, because God took him." / (Gen. V. 24) / Pray for Rev. M. Louis, o.c.s.o. / Ordained Priest, May 26, 1949, Ascension Day / Basilica of Our Lady of Gethsemani, Kentucky".
10. Kenney's connection with Merton was mentioned in the Preface of a program document, dated March 17, 2001, announcing the donation by Kenney of paintings and prints by Renoir, Cezanne and Picasso to The Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts at Saint Bonaventure University, Olean, NY. Adjoining the Arts Center is the F. Donald Kenney Museum and Art Study Wing. Kenney (1918-1997) received his B.A. from the College of the Holy Cross in 1939, an M.A. from Harvard University in 1941 and an Ed.M. from St. Bonaventure in 1942. After his service in the Navy during World War II he studied at Oxford University and later received an MBA from Harvard University. Kenney was a prominent business leader, serving as Chairman of Goldman Sachs International Corporation from 1976 to his retirement in 1984. Permission is granted by the Saint Bonaventure Archives for use of the relevant source documents.
11. Thomas Merton, *Exile Ends in Glory: The Life of a Trappistine, Mother M. Berchmans, O.C.S.O.* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1948).
12. Sister Mary James, SSND, *Review of Exile Ends in Glory, The Pilot* 119 (Nov. 13, 1948) 4; the review, which is not preserved in the Wilton archives, has not previously been noted and appears in none of the Merton bibliographies.
13. Sister Mary James, SSND, "Poised Against Heaven: The Tears of the Blind Lions," *The Pilot* 120 (Dec. 17, 1949) 16; this review likewise appears in none of the Merton bibliographies.
14. Thomas Merton, *The Tears of the Blind Lions* (New York: New Directions, 1949).
15. Thomas Merton, "Poetry and the Contemplative Life," *The Commonweal* 46 (4 July 1947) 280-86; reprinted in slightly revised form in Thomas Merton, *Figures for an Apocalypse* (New York: New Directions, 1947) 93-111.
16. Thomas Merton, "The Trappists Go to Utah," *The Commonweal* 46 (29 August 1947) 470-73.

17. Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1949)
18. According to Sister Carolyn Andrewes there is one photograph of Merton dated 1961, which suggests that there may have been some continued contact between the two as late as this date (email from Sister Carolyn Andrewes to John P. Collins [2/17/2013]).
19. Email from Sister Carolyn Andrewes to John P. Collins [2/17/2013].
20. For example, she suggests that the poem “There is another Loneliness” has “accents of a mystic melody, remembrances of Teresa of Avila or St. John of the Cross” (Power, *Bee* 107).
21. “*Called Back* was a popular novella written by Hugh Conway (real name John Frederick Fargus). In a January 1885 letter, Dickinson called the book ‘a haunting story . . . greatly impressive to me.’” Those two words, “Called Back,” are the only words in her last known letter, written to her cousins Fannie and Loo Norcross in May 1886. Dickinson’s original tombstone simply had her initials, “E.E.D.,” inscribed on it. That headstone was later replaced by her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, who included Dickinson’s birth and death dates [12/10/1830-5/15/1886] as well as the phrase “Called Back” (Emily Dickinson Museum Online. www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/faq/#calledback).
22. See also R. W. Franklin, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).
23. Scholarly discussions particularly focused on the religious and spiritual aspects of Dickinson’s life and work include Roger Lundin, *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004) and James McIntosh, *Nimble Believing: Dickinson and the Unknown* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000).
24. See Thomas H. Johnson, *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* (New York: Atheneum/Macmillan, 1955); Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Alfred Habegger, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Modern Library, 2002).
25. The Catholic publications include the newspapers *The Catholic Transcript* (Hartford, CT) [1/13/1944]; *The Denver Catholic Register* [1/14/1944]; *Michigan Catholic* [1/14/1944]; *The Pilot* (Boston) [undated]; *The Tidings* (Los Angeles) [1/14/1944]; and the magazines *Ave Maria* [2/19/1944]; *The Catholic Digest* [3/1944]; *The Sign* [3/1944]. The one secular review (undated) appeared in *The Yale Review*.
26. Thomas Merton, *Early Poems: 1940-1942* (Lexington, KY: Anvil Press, 1971) 1; Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977) 3.
27. Thomas Merton, *Run to the Mountain: The Story of a Vocation. Journals, vol. 1: 1939-1941*, ed. Patrick Hart (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995) 322.
28. Patrick F. O’Connell, “Landscapes of Disaster: The War Poems of Thomas Merton,” *The Merton Annual* 19 (2006) 183-84; subsequent references will be cited as “O’Connell” in the text.
29. O’Connell 225, n. 21; the author also notes that an earlier draft of the poem “reads ‘in the neighbor room,’ even closer to Dickinson’s ‘adjoining room.’”
30. Thomas Merton and Robert Lax, *When Prophecy Still Had a Voice: The Letters of Thomas Merton & Robert Lax*, ed. Arthur W. Biddle (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2001) 183. In an unpublished October 11, 1954 letter to his editor Robert Giroux, Merton writes in reference to *The Major Poets: English and American*, ed. Charles Monroe Coffin (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1954), which Giroux had just sent: “I am already greatly enjoying the anthology . . . glad to have so much Emily Dickinson” – which evidently marks his first significant engagement with Dickinson since reading *In the Name of the Bee*.
31. Thomas Merton, *Disputed Questions* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1960) 177.
32. The phrase is of course an allusion to the opening lines of Shakespeare’s sonnet 116: “Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments . . .” (William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets*, ed. William Burto, rev. ed. [New York: Signet Classics, 1988] 156).
33. Unpublished letter from Thomas Merton to Sister Janet, 3/19/1964; quoted with permission of the Merton Legacy Trust. Merton Center Assistant Director Mark Meade indicates that since the letter was addressed to Sister Janet at the Holy Innocents Convent, Brooklyn, New York, it is probable that Sister Janet was a member of the Religious Sisters of Mercy (email from Mark Meade to John Collins: 8/5/2013).
34. Thomas Merton, *Seeing the World in a Grain of Sand: Thomas Merton on Poetry* [17 lectures on 7 CDs] (Rockville, MD: Now You Know Media, 2013) #9: “Expressions of Spiritual Experience.”