

# EMBLEMS OF BIRDS: Birds as Symbols of Grace in Three Poems of Thomas Merton

by Sheila M. Hempstead

In Merton's poems and prose it is abundantly clear that he reveled in observing nature. He wrote in *No Man is an Island*: "There are some men for whom a tree has no reality until they think of cutting it down, for whom an animal has no value until it enters the slaughterhouse, men who never look at anything until they decide to abuse it and who never even notice what they do not want to destroy."<sup>1</sup> Merton also knew these were those people for whom nature was there to be exploited.

In *New Seeds of Contemplation* he wrote: "It is God's love that speaks to me in the birds, streams and seeds."<sup>2</sup> Bird references occur in at least fifty-eight of Merton's poems and abound in all of his journals. *A Vow of Conversation*, especially, contains many references to birds. In *The Sign of Jonas* Merton vividly describes in great detail the scene when a hawk disturbs his prayer:

Then like lightning it happened a hawk came down like a bullet, and shot straight into the middle of the starlings the hawk got his talons into the one bird he had nailed It was a terrible and yet beautiful thing, that lightning flight, straight as an arrow He stayed in the field like a king with the killed bird, and nothing else came near him He took his time.<sup>3</sup>

Unable to pray, Merton associates the hawk with the lords of the Middle Ages and of the Arabs hawking on

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1. Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island* (New York Dell, 1957), p. 248.

2. Thomas Merton, *A Thomas Merton Reader*; edited by Thomas P McDonnell (Garden City, New York Doubleday Image Books, 1974), p. 428.

3. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (Garden City, New York Doubleday Image Books, 1956), p 267. Hereafter referred to in the text as SJ. References to Merton's other works will be from the following sources: DQ—*Disputed Questions* (New York Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1960); CP—*The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York New Directions, 1977); VC—*A Vow of Conversation: Journals 1964-1965*; edited by Naomi Burton Stone (New York Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1988); DS—*Day of a Stranger* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1961); AI—*The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*; edited by Naomi Burton Stone, et. al. (New York New Directions, 1973); CB—*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, New York Doubleday Image Books, 1968)



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on the desert's edge. He comes to realize "the terrible fact that some men love war. But in the end I think that hawk is to be studied by saints and contemplatives; because he knows his business. I wish I knew my business as well as he does his" (SJ, pp. 267-268).

Two poems of this study, *Elias—Variations on a Theme* and *Stranger* were published in *The Strange Islands* in 1957. The third poem, *O Sweet Irrational Worship*, was published in *Emblems of a Season of Fury* in 1963. In these three poems, I believe, Merton creates a new landscape. The bird, as part of that landscape, is a symbol of transcendence which reveals God's grace. Patrick F. O'Connell notes in his excellent study of the poem *Elias—Variations on a Theme* that "the bird . . . transfigures the entire landscape."<sup>4</sup>

Several poems, including *Elias* and *Stranger* were written for the Carmelite nuns of New York, representing, as Merton explained, in the preface to *The Strange Islands*, "what the author had going through his head in the Christmas season of 1954."<sup>5</sup> However, Merton also wrote in *Disputed Questions* that "if Elias stands as a model of all Carmelites, there is another and more ideal figure than that of the prophet: the figure of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel who, even more than Elias, embodies in herself the perfection of the Carmelite ideal" (DQ, p.2D). He goes on to say that "Elias represents the exterior, the more material ideal. But the Virgin Mary is the symbol of and source of the interior spirit of Carmel" (DQ, p. 228). While I suggest that the birds in these poems symbolize grace, I think that Mary is present too, as represented by Merton as "the symbol and source of the interior spirit of Carmel." Merton's comments on grace in *The Sign of Jonas* should also be noted: "The fact that the Holy Father has proclaimed this a Holy Year means that he has turned it over to Our Lady and that she will make her influence felt in many ways that will make us glad . . . it would be foolish to talk of grace without talking of her" (SJ, p. 256). This reference to grace and Our Lady was written by Merton four years before he wrote the poem *Elias—Variations on a Theme*.

In that poem Merton celebrates the four elements: fire, air, water, and earth, The bird and Elias are centered within a natural, external landscape and a supernatural, internal landscape. In the opening stanza the natural landscape is finely etched with the "blunt pine" and "winter sun" as "the pathway dies" and "the wilds begin," revealing where "the bird abides/ Where the ground is warm/ And sings alone" (CP, pp.239-240). The bird announces the moment of grace. In the prose poem *Hagia Sophia* Merton writes: "Out of the silence Light is spoken. We do not hear it or see it until it is spoken" (CP, p.363). This message of grace, however, is sung by a solitary bird in the "wilds." The wilds here, as Therese Lentfoehr writes in *Words and Silence, are "in the spirit akin to Eckhart's wilderness"* (Lentfoehr, p. 107). The wilds are an hospitable landscape for the singing bird and the silent God.

The injunction to Elias to listen to "the southern wind," "to the words," and "to the ground," echoes the biblical account of Elias in The Book of Kings where he listened for God in the fire, in the earthquake, and in the strong wind. Elias found God was not in those things, but God was found in the gentle breeze. In the following stanza, the poet Merton and the prophet Elias appear to merge in the place where God may be found:

(Where the bird abides  
And sings alone).

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4. Patrick F. O'Connell, "The Geography of Solitude Thomas Merton's *Elias: Variations on a Theme*," *The Merton Annual* 1 (New York AMS Press, 1988), p. 154. Hereafter referred to in the text as O'Connell.

5. Thomas Merton, *The Strange Islands* (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1957), preface. See also Therese Lentfoehr, *Words and Silence On the Poetry of Thomas Merton* (New York New Directions, 1979), p 29; hereafter referred to in the text as Lentfoehr.

The sun grows pale  
 Where passes One  
 Who bends no blade, no fern.  
 Listen to His word.

Thus God is not to be perceived by any visible movement as he “passes” and “bends no fern.” It is the audible sound of the solitary bird singing as an angel of grace that recognizes and announces the presence of the “One” who causes the mighty sun to grow pale. O’Connell notes that “the parenthetical inclusion of the bird here is a reminder that it too has a sacramental dimension” (O’Connell, p. 156). Elias will recognize the place where God is to be found by the bird that sings alone.

This place, a wilderness with actual and metaphoric associations, is the place of God’s promise where the bird is a sign of God’s love—a symbol of grace.

“Where the fields end  
 Thou shalt be My friend.  
 Where the bird is gone  
 Thou shalt be My son.” (CP, p. 241)

The bird refers back to the bird singing in the wilderness and also becomes a prophetic metaphor for Jesus. The formal refrain using the term “Thou” and with the capitalization of My in “My friend” and “My son,” is the voice of God speaking to Elias, to Merton, and to the reader of the poem. Immediately following God’s promise, the scene changes abruptly with the reminder of the dangers to prophets in the holy city of Jerusalem, and Elias is asked to listen to the Old Testament image of the Holy Spirit as “the covering wing” of Yahweh brooding over the turbulence of Jerusalem. The question is in parentheses as was the injunction that asks Elias to listen to “where the bird . . . sings alone,” thus describing the place where God’s word and promise are to be found.

The first variation’s last stanza ends with a variation on the first stanza. However, now the pathway becomes fields and the wilderness transforms into cosmic symbols of stars of the heavens: “Where the fields end/ And the stars begin.” The movement to heaven returns back to earth in the next line, as Elias must listen to the “rain,” “seed,” and “stone.” The seed needs the rain to enable it to grow after its seeming death in the earth during the winter and suggests the parable that Jesus gives where the seed must enter the dark earth and die before it can live. The stone has no life which points back to the last line of the previous stanza where the stone is used to torture and take the lives of the prophets and bears their blood. God’s promise is reiterated, as the variation ends with the same refrain which Elias hears where “passes One/ Who bends no blade.” And we hear again the promise that it is in the place “where the bird is gone/ Thou shalt be My son.” Both Elias and Jesus retreated into the wilderness to renew their strength through prayer and both emerged strong in commitment in faith and obedience to the will of God.

In the Bible it was the ravens that sustained Elias in his first trial, while the bird in Merton’s poem is a song bird, possibly a thrush or a warbler. This can be deduced from the geographic location of Trappist, Kentucky, habitat and the song of the wood thrush, with which Merton was familiar. In *A Vow of Conversation: Journals 1964-1965*, he writes on Low Sunday, April 25, 1965: “Thunder over the valley. Fork lightning and very black rain out there beyond the monastery. And all the birds sing, especially a wood thrush in a cedar tree.” Two days prior, he noted, “A pine warbler was caught in the novitiate scriptorium beating against the window and I got a good look at him, letting him out. A couple of towhees are always busy near the hermitage” (VC, p.177). In May 1965 Merton wrote in *Day of a Stranger*:

"I know there are trees here. I know there are birds here. I know the birds in fact very well, for there are precise pairs of bird (two each of fifteen or twenty species) living in the immediate area of my cabin. I share this particular place with them: we form an ecological balance. This harmony gives the idea of 'place' a new configuration" (*DS*, p. 33). It should be noted that these quotations are taken from works written a decade after the poem *Elias*. Nevertheless, I believe that Merton, with his love for nature and his astute and critical eye for detail in the natural world, along with the many references to particular species of birds in his earliest works, knew his birds.

The serious and prophetic tone of the first variation is replaced by an ironic and paradoxical tone in the second variation. Merton uses Blake's line "Bring me my chariot of fire" (CP, p. 241) from the poem *Jerusalem*, thus successfully using the parodistic technique later employed in the long poem, *The Geography of Lograire*. Birds as symbols of grace link the Old Testament prophet Elias to the New Testament Christ in Gethsemani and again to the present moment of Gethsemani Abbey where Merton is writing the poem. The first lines situate the author of the poem in the woods of Gethsemani where stands an old wagon used to store tools (and which Brother Patrick Hart recalls forty years later). However, in *The Sign of Jonas*, Merton describes a junk wagon which he sees while he is in the hospital in Louisville, November 6, 1950: "First I heard its bells ringing. The wagon seemed to be all bells, like a Chinese temple .... On top of it all sat the driver with his dog .... He did not look to right or left, and I would have approached with great respect what seemed to be solid mysticism. But I stood a hundred yards off, enchanted by the light on the mule's harness, enchanted by the temple bells" (SJ, p. 299). Recalling the wagon a month later back at Gethsemani, December 13, 1950, the Feast of Saint Lucy, he writes: "The junk wagon I saw in Louisville comes back to me like the memory of something very precious once seen in the Orient .... I dreamt last night that I saw the wagon once again" (SJ, p. 307). Thus the enchantment with the wagon impressed Merton enough to enter his personal dream. Since the poem *Elias* was written four years later, it is entirely possible that Merton had both wagons in mind, the one that stands in the woods of Gethsemani and the enchantingly mystical one in Louisville.

The garrulous complaint: "There were supposed to be/ Not birds but spirits of flames/ Around the old wagon" brings the presence and activity of living natural birds in the negative, but premier, position of "not birds" to begin the line. At finding not flames, not supernatural wings, but live and active birds, the birds link, paradoxically and ironically, the wilderness of both Elijah and Christ with the "wilds" of Merton's woods at Gethsemani. The variation gathers momentum with the "rain," "fire," and "storm." The use of parentheses and repetition of words serves to accentuate the fragmentation and chaos which gradually accelerate into a dizzy vortex, culminating in "my old trailer faster and faster it stands still/ Faster and faster it stays where it has always been." Merton, master of the parodistic technique and the mystic who knew the value of paradox, uses the comparative form "faster" that is precise in its meaning of increasing speed. I disagree with O'Connell's ingenious interpretation of the word "faster" when he states: "This sense of being [encompassing everything] is expressed in the play on the word 'faster,' here meaning not 'with greater speed,' but exactly the opposite, 'more firmly emplaced, more steadfast'" (O'Connell, p. 165). On the contrary, when one makes a thing secure, one may make it more fast but never faster. Faster, I contend, implies speed: furthermore, the sense of swiftness comes from the idea of keeping close to what is in motion or pursued. This variation which begins with the birds around the "old wagon" takes on the swift physical motion of birds in flight. Yet in the middle of this rapid motion is the solid stillness of the rain soaked stationary, earthbound wagon. It stays where it has always been, firmly centered in the middle of the fluttering activity of birds.

A decade later, in *The Asian Journal*, Merton juxtaposes movement and non-movement in a similar way. Describing his remarkable and illuminating experience at seeing the massive, stone-carved Buddhas at Polonnaruwa, he writes succinctly: "I don't know what else remains but I have now seen and have pierced through the surface and have gone beyond the shadow and disguise .... the great figures, motionless, yet with the lines in full movement, waves of vesture and bodily form; [are] a beautiful and holy vision" (AI, p. 236). The motionless Buddhas contain full movement in themselves, whereas in the poem *Elias* the stationary, inanimate wagon remains in woods surrounded by animated creatures, the activity of birds. As in the first variation, the birds are symbols of grace, active first in song and then in flight. They lead, as does the still bird in *Stranger*, toward the "point beyond all objects into the silence where nothing can be said,"<sup>6</sup> and "where passes One/ Who bends no blade, no fern."

The concluding stanza of the second variation unifies, with irony and humor, all the preceding fragments of motion: the storm, the vortex, the wind, the birds, with the stationary, yet punished trailer. It stands alone "(Against all the better intentions of the owners)" and is miraculously transformed. It

... becomes  
The House of God  
The Gate of Heaven  
("My chariot of fire")

Merton, poet and prophet, and the weather-beaten wagon are not swept up to the heavens. They both remain at Gethsemani. Yet, paradoxically, despite monastic restrictions and rules ("intentions of the owners"), the wagon becomes for Merton a metaphor for the House of God and the Gate of Heaven. In this case, Merton succeeds in uniting the biblical Jerusalem with Blake's Jerusalem and the newly created Jerusalem in the woods of Gethsemani.

Unlike the first two variations the third focuses on two components of the landscape, the animate seed as a symbol of promise, and the inanimate stone, a weapon used against prophets. The bird is absent in this variation. In the unpublished fourth variation,<sup>7</sup> the biblical earthquake, fire and storm become a cosmic turmoil. Storms situate the author in a wild landscape, and like the biblical Elias, Merton finds God is not in these tumultuous things. The song of the bird, however, is echoed in "the small voice, outside, on which the stars stand focused/ Poised as on a clear center." This "silent voice/ The perfectly True" is the "Other" and the "One/ Who bends no blade" and who promises sonship and friendship in the first variation.

The rich landscape of Kentucky in the second variation, "where blue hills/ Hide the fading rain," diminishes in the fifth. Here the rain comes "To fix an exhausted mountain." The bleak landscape frames the confessions of the poet, the false prophet, "a man without silence,/ A man without patience, with too many/ Questions" and a man who has "blamed God/ Thinking to blame only men," and who could be "Neither accepted nor rejected" for he has "no message" and is "lost together with the others" (CP, pp. 243-244).

However, the concluding sixth variation returns to the opening variation with new hope and confidence.

Under the blunt pine  
I who am not sent  
Remain ....

6. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York New Directions, 1965), p 160

7. Patrick F. O'Connell, "Sunken Islands Two and One-Fifth Unpublished Merton Poems," *The Merton Seasonal* 12: 2 (Spring 1987), p. 6. The numbering of the stanzas of *Elias* includes these originally unpublished lines.

While evoking the image of the still trailer in the woods, Merton's

. . . journey has begun.  
 Here the bird abides  
 And sings on top of the forgotten  
 Storm.

The voice of grace tenaciously persists and rises above the "forgotten/ Storm." The bird of grace simply "is" for "He sings no particular message," yet he is true to the "hymn" he sings, his own "pattern." In *Day of a Stranger* Merton the hermit delivers a sermon to the birds: "Esteemed friends, birds of noble lineage, I have no message to you except this: be what you are: be birds. Thus you will be your own sermon to yourselves! Reply: 'Even this is one sermon too many!'" (DS, p. 51). Wallace Stevens employs the bird in a similar theme in his poem *Variations on a Summer Day*:

I

Say of the gulls that they are flying  
 In light blue air over dark blue sea.

II

A music more than a breath, but less  
 Than the wind, sub-music like sub-speech.  
 A repetition of unconscious things,  
 Letters of rock and water, words  
 Of the visible elements and of ours.

....

VII

One sparrow is worth a thousand gulls,  
 When it sings. The gull sits in chimney-tops.  
 He mocks the guinea, challenges  
 The crow, inciting various modes.  
 The sparrow requites one, without intent.<sup>8</sup>

The bird's fidelity to his own unique being, a pattern that is the pattern of total freedom, is no different from the pattern, or genetic code of the seed and the cell, or the structure of salt, snow or drop of rain. In the following stanza the snow, rain, river, bird and pine tree speak the truth of each one's essence of being. The pattern each one follows is without compulsion, without arbitrary pain, and is therefore the pattern of freedom of spirit. Similarly, O'Connell points to the influence on Merton of Duns Scotus, thirteenth century Franciscan, and his ideas on the sacramentality of the natural world and on individual identity (O'Connell, pp.181-182). As a "free man," Merton, poet and prophet, "is not alone as busy men are/ But as birds are." And as the "bird abides . . . And sings alone," so the free man sings alone. However, the free man's song is "not invented by himself alone/ Or for himself, but for the universe also." This extension of man's "inscrutable pattern" of freedom affects not just the earth's landscape but is extended to the entire universe.

8. Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems* (New York Vintage Books, 1982), p. 232.

The conclusion of the poem ends in the center of what might be described as a verbal portrait of a mandala.<sup>9</sup> The “blunt pine” beneath which Merton sits is a part of the external concrete landscape, part of the pattern, the meditation in which Merton and Elias become “[their] own geography.” The external world also reflects the inner spiritual landscape of Merton and Elias. The parenthetical statement: “(Supposing geography to be necessary at all),” suggests that geography, or the pattern of the landscape as mapped-out instructions, may not be necessary after all. Nonetheless, the poet then describes a pattern in which Elias changes:

Under the blunt pine  
Elias becomes his own geography  
(Supposing geography to be necessary at all),  
Elias becomes his own wild bird, with God in the center,  
His own wide field which nobody owns,  
His own pattern, surrounding the Spirit  
By which he is himself surrounded:

For the free man’s road has neither beginning nor end. (CP,  
p.245)

The movement of the entire poem ends in the transformation of Merton and Elias who become “the wild bird, with God in the center.” The singing bird is an external gift of grace, not unlike the Eucharistic grace and manna, which sustain and prepare Merton and Elias for their respective journeys. This short stanza describes a new landscape. It also encloses geography, Merton and Elias as the wild bird with God in the center as they become the “wide field which nobody owns.” Thus Merton and Elias are free as is the bird. Each sings the final song of “His own pattern” which surrounds the Spirit of God and is in turn surrounded by that Spirit. That which is enclosed within is that which surrounds without. The paradoxical verbal mandala completely captures the wholeness and holiness of God’s presence, and also completes the poem in a full circular movement. The swirling noisy vortex ends in a series of stationary, silent, concentric circles: “For the free man’s road has neither beginning nor end.”

The silent circular motion of the poem *Elias* is again precisely described in the poem *The Stranger*. However, in the first three stanzas of *Stranger*, the statement is voiced that “when no one listens/ To the quiet trees” or “notices/ The sun in the pool and more,” God as “inward stranger” is then present. The pivotal center of the poem is the one bird. The bird notices all these things:

One bird sits still  
Watching the work of God:  
One turning leaf,  
Two falling blossoms,  
Ten circles upon the pond. (CP, p. 290)

The opening statements end in the stillness and in the solitude of “one bird” who symbolizes the gift of grace. The bird sees the particulars: The “leaf,” “blossoms,” “circles upon the pond,” and in the following stanza, “one cloud,” and “two shadows.” All of these coalesce into “the light that is One” in the “inward Stranger/ Whom I have never seen.” The bird is the moment of grace in which Merton the poet finds the presence of God within himself. He exults in the knowledge of the bird and the “vast light.” Both are “still” and show that the inner stranger’s “Light is One.”

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9. For further commentary on *Elias*, see George Woodcock, *Thomas Merton, Monk and Poet: Critical Study* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1978), p 76

Merton himself becomes one with this same “Light is One” in the quaternity of the sun, sky, wind and bird in *O Sweet Irrational Worship*. The title of the poem is significant in its extravagance and absurdity. We know immediately that the poem is not about reason and rationality. However, the bobwhite or quail is the perfect symbol of an ordinary bird that inhabits fields and thickets and may be observed most often by its call during summer. Common Bobwhite, *Colinus virginianus*, belongs to the Family *Phasianidae*, commonly called Quail. Interestingly, the quail figures in an episode in Exodus 16: 13 when the children of Israel found themselves dying of hunger in the desert wilderness, and Yahweh, as a sign of His grace and nurturing love, provided meat in the evening: “Quails flew up and covered the camp.” The call is distinctive and reflects its name with a rising and descending intonation: bob/— white. The wind often carries the bobwhite’s call. Years later, Merton writes in *A Vow of Conversation* of the quail’s song: “What a pure and lovely sound. The sound of perfect innocence” (VC, p. 93).

In the opening lines of the poem the time of day and landscape are sketched with clarity and economy:

Wind and a bobwhite  
And the afternoon sun. (CP, p. 344)

The movement of the poem proceeds with swiftness. In the next stanza Merton introduces himself into the landscape and he speaks to us:

By ceasing to question the sun  
I have become light,

Bird and wind.

The white of the space following “I have become light” causes us, for an instant, to see the light on the paper just before our eyes move on to the next line which completes the sentence. The white space unifies and illustrates Merton’s transformation into light. Thus in the five lines of the three opening stanzas the action of the wind begins and completes its own movement, and the bird, sun and Merton have remained united inside the center of this movement.

Throughout the action of the wind Merton is transformed into all three images, light, bird and wind. This remarkable and irrational transformation, enclosed and assisted by the wind, occurs because Merton ceases “to question the sun.” This declaration where Merton no longer questions the sun/ Son refutes his confession in the poem *Elias*, written six to eight years earlier, that “I have been a man without silence,/ A man without patience, with too many/ Questions. I have blamed God.” In *Hagia Sophia*, Merton writes: “The Sun burns in the sky like the face of God” (CP, p. 366). Both of these poems illustrate the enormous change in Merton’s perception and understanding of God. The many questions in *Elias* seem to dissolve in the light of his experience of God in *O Sweet Irrational Worship*, *The Stranger*, and *Hagia Sophia*.

In *O Sweet Irrational Worship* both the poem and Merton descend, as a bird does, first into the leaves of a tree and then down to the earth and into Merton’s heart where he is mystically joined with “All these lighted things” and all the things of the earth:

Out of my grass heart  
Rises the bobwhite.  
Out of my nameless weeds  
His foolish worship. (CP, p. 345)

The bobwhite is this sweet irration worship, the grace which arises from within Merton's heart, here symbolized as "grass" and "nameless weeds." The "nameless weeds" are also the garments which clothe Merton.

This poem is an excellent example of the "reconciliation of contraries," which constitutes the heart of Coleridge's aesthetic.<sup>10</sup> The poem also "justifies its form in its meaning" so completely that the reader, too, is transformed into "all those lighted things" in "His foolish worship" in the grace of the bobwhite. In *The Asian Journal*, a poem written for Merton by a Tibetan Rimpoche (Chogye Thiccen) suggests that Merton is "the sunshine" (AI, p. 123).

I believe these three poems exemplify the simplicity and the complexity of the genius of Merton. Anthony Padovano comments that "the genius of Merton lay in his capacity to renew his simplicity despite encroaching complexity. In this lay also the secret of his mysticism."<sup>11</sup> Merton, the solitary contemplative monk and prolific writer believed that the "sunrise is an event that calls forth solemn music in the very depths of man's nature, as if one's whole being had to attune itself to the cosmos and praise God for the new day, praise Him in the name of all the creatures that ever were or ever will be" (CB, p. 280). Describing another sunrise in the same journal, Merton emphasizes human's relationship with nature. First he describes the sun as "the enormous yolk of energy spreading and spreading as if to take over the entire sky" followed by "the ceremonies of the birds feeding in the wet grass" (CB, p. 294).

The landscape in each of the poems is transformed by the power of grace that is represented in the living bird. The symbol of the bird as grace is certainly not uncommon in literary history. However, Merton makes a departure from the traditional usage, as say in the "dove of peace" descending from the heavens. Merton's birds are a part of nature. Each is significant in his or her own unique landscape wherever it may be. We transform the exterior landscape which in turn transforms our interior landscape—the soul of psyche, that mysterious spark of God.

While the bird is a part of the natural world, it may still be seen as a symbol of grace. The bird image is also transformed through its unique significance in each of these poems. The sound, movement and stillness of the bird provide an image of the grace of God. The bird directs us toward the truth, to God, "For the free man's road has neither beginning nor end."

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10. Paul Fussell, *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York Random House, 1979), p 128 Note also Samuel T. Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria*; edited by I. A. Richards (New York Penguin Books, 1977), pp 524-525, 576-577.

11. Anthony T. Padovano, *The Human Journey: Thomas Merton, Symbol of a Century* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1982), p. 88.