Mass-Market Monk: Thomas Merton in the Paperback Revolution Part I: New American Library

By **Patricia A. Burton**

> It's the summer of 1958. . . . in Port Alberni, on Vancouver Island. I am downtown in a drugstore, looking among the paperbacks for something to read, when I notice a book with a lurid cover. It depicts a number of small figures in various painful or suggestive poses; and there in the foreground, a larger figure, a man in a monastic cowl, with the hood pulled over his head. The title of the book: *The Seven Storey Mountain*, by the man who wrote that book with the curious binding, Thomas Merton. I smile now at the come-ons on the cover: 'A Widely Acclaimed Bestseller'; 'The Revealing Experience of a Man Who Withdrew From the World.' Couldn't resist, had to buy it. . . . I still have that well-read edition, now held together by an elastic band.
>
> Donald Grayston[1]

Encounter in a Drugstore

Why on earth was Thomas Merton hanging around in a drugstore in Port Alberni, folded into an indecorous cover? He was doing what he always did, and continues to do: participating in his times and reaching out for new readers. At that time he was floating on the crest of a wave called "the paperback revolution," tempting readers wherever they could be found. Along with paperbacks, his writing was also an idea whose time had come. Up until World War II, American publishers "thought that book-buying Americans simply didn't want paperback books and that the American masses were not readers – an elitist conviction that pervaded the industry."[2] The publishing business was in a sorry state, as described in the Cheney Report, commissioned in 1931 by the National Association of Book Publishers, which was

> a scathing denunciation of publishing practices of the day. Editorial, distribution, management, economic, and promotional procedures were criticized as unorganized and inadequate, waste was unnecessarily high. . . . The sale of books was roughly parallel to the sale of such luxury items as jewelry, cut flowers and automobiles. This was due, in part, to the distribution machinery and number of outlets for books. In the entire country there were only some four thousand places where a book could be purchased [and among these] only five hundred or so legitimate bookstores that warranted regular visits from publishers' salesmen. . . . In two-thirds of America's counties, there were no bookstores at all. (Davis 16)

Patricia A. Burton

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The sad state of things prompted Robert de Graff in 1939 to set up Pocket Books, the first publisher to distribute lists of paperbacks of distinctive quality, with bright, plastic-coated covers and stained edges, at the very appealing price of 25 cents apiece. There are various myths about how the price came to be determined, but de Graff's economics depended on selling massive quantities of books at a low individual price (see Davis 39). His first list consisted of just ten titles, ranging from the recent best-seller *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton to a mystery by Agatha Christie, from a set of Shakespeare tragedies to the popular children's classic *Bambi* by Felix Salton. "The overnight and overwhelming success of the Pocket Books venture in New York was unprecedented in American publishing history" (Davis 13). Of course other publishers immediately began to jump on the bandwagon and the field was soon thriving.[3]

Figure 1: A Cover of Covers:
Piet Schreuders, *Paperbacks, U.S.A.*

What was "revolutionary" about these paperbacks in general was the entirely new placement of the product, in places where books (particularly good books) had not been before: drugstores, bus and train stations, airports, tobacco shops, department stores, church vestibules, college book stores, newspaper and magazine sellers. There had always been "pulp fiction," hard-boiled detective stories or westerns or mysteries with covers depicting women in various states of undress. But this was a new kind of book, a reprint of an already-proven best-seller in hard cover or a world classic long out of copyright, and sometimes a "made book," a series of selections made by the paperback publisher (Davis 81). To be clear about the definition: *mass-market paperback* is the term used for the rack-sized paperbound book that was introduced by Pocket Books in the United States in 1939 and sold principally through periodical distributors in drugstores, chain stores, bus stations and airport terminals – that is, the mass market. By contrast, *trade* (or "quality") paperbacks were introduced later and sold through college stores and the general bookstore trade. Today, the distinction has blurred because both types of books are almost universally available (see Davis xii).

There were problems at first because books could not practically be treated as dated material like magazines, taken off the stand and sent back when they did not sell by the date of the next batch. American News Company, the largest newsstand distributor, created problems, and de Graff solved them by selling through independent wholesalers: "By 1941, 600 independent distributors had signed up to carry 'Pocket Books.' . . . It was this approach to distribution, with the country divided into territories and an individual sales force supervising distribution, display and sales all the way down to retail level . . . which has to be considered the radical departure from past practices brought about by Pocket Books."[4]

The mass-market paperbacks were sorely needed in the US in the promotion of reading as a pastime and in the general education of people. Even by 1958, as Frank L. Schick has noted, "There are about 9000 outlets of all kinds and sizes for hard cover books in the United States . . . but only about 500 can be considered to be effective stores, adequately stocked," which he calls an

"appallingly small number of stores for an adult population of 98,000,000" (Schick 102). Kenneth C. Davis describes growing up in Mount Vernon, New York, a sizeable city with "no legitimate bookstore," so that his exploration of books was conducted at Bob's Luncheonette and at the Public Library, which had racks of paperbacks. He describes his own education by paperback, and that of others who wrote to him (Davis xiii-xiv).

There had been paperback successes in Europe, with Kurt Enoch's Albatross selling English language books into Europe, and of course Allen Lane's Penguin Books in England, which garnered new attention when it escaped the bookstores and was placed in Woolworth chain stores, thus being seen by many thousands of new buyers (see Davis 25-27). Now it was time for the US to follow suit.

War and After

The Americans who went to war in 1941 may not have been readers, but books were one of the few distractions they could carry with them. They asked for books, lots of books, any kind of books, and regular paperback publishers were overwhelmed by the demand. Finally the US command, worried about morale, obliged them (in collaboration with mainstream publishers) with the free program "Armed Services Editions," whose "overwhelming success was not only a boon to the soldier but proved to a still dubious publishing industry that Americans not only would read paperbacks, they would read them by the millions" (Davis 68). "More than 120 million copies were distributed, but only a fraction survived the rigors of wartime. 1,322 titles were published over four years from 1943 until 1946."[5] These were odd, fragile editions, wider than they were long, printed in two columns and stapled together (see Davis 72).

Of interest to Merton's readers in the paperback revolution is New American Library, founded in 1947 by seasoned publishers Kurt Enoch and Victor Weybright as a buy-out of the struggling Penguin USA franchise at the time. From the beginning it was a reprinter with a difference, going for the best quality in literature, particularly good American quality, and distributing it as "Good Reading for the Millions."[6] Following the Penguin style, they started two paperback imprints: Signet for fiction and lighter works, Mentor for non-fiction and weightier ones – like Penguins and Pelicans in England. Weybright had also set out to "prevent the establishment of a double standard – one for the rich, another for the poor, i.e. one for the $5.00 book in the nation's 1,200 book shops, another for the 25-cent book in over a hundred thousand retail outlets."[7] He courted hard-cover publishers: that was how the paperback reprint business worked. When paperback reprinters sighted a suitably best-selling title in hard cover, they made bids direct to its hard-cover publisher for a license covering a certain length of time, at a certain overall price. The bids were sealed, and the competition between publishers became intense. Thus New American Library would have been dealing with Harcourt, not with Merton himself or even his agent (see Bonn, *Traffic* 18). They campaigned under the banner "luster and lucre" – that is, we can promote good literature and make money at the same time. Weybright was also fond of another phrase: "By virtue of having the most *bookish* reprint list, we have the most bookish and most rapidly growing audience" (Bonn, *Traffic* 29).

Figure 2: ***Seven Storey Mountain*** **as a Signet Double: First Printing**

Weybright credited the "instinctive radar" of Arabel Porter, a Swarthmore-educated co-ordinating editor at NAL, with finding *The Seven Storey Mountain* (*SSM*) along with titles from Norman Mailer, James Jones and Flannery O'Connor among others (Weybright 191). *SSM* had a big problem: it was two or three times the size of the normal 25-cent book, and profit margins were already slim in the business. Though the industry was wary of breaking the price barrier, Kurt Enoch "proposed a series of 'Double Volumes' priced at 50 cents" (Bonn, *Traffic* 27-28). Weybright, when searching for new titles, cited *Forever Amber* by Kathleen Winsor and *The Naked and the Dead* by Norman Mailer as double-volume successes, so Thomas Merton had taken up with some interesting companions among the brightly illustrated covers on New American Library's specially designed racks. On Merton's second reprint there was another strategy for getting long books into print: James Jones's *From Here to Eternity* was the first of the Signet "Triples" selling at 75 cents, and *The Seven Storey Mountain* on its second printing followed suit.[8] There is also another odd feature about this edition of *SSM*. Signet books were usually works of fiction, and it might have seemed that Merton's autobiography would be more suitable for the Mentor imprint. Why was it sharing NAL racks in stores with all those novels? It was a moment of genius in marketing. The great storytelling quality of Merton's book, and its proven appeal to all kinds of readers in a broad market, made it a natural as a Signet.

Why should we be interested, all these years later, in the form of a book? Is not one copy as good as another? Perhaps because, as bibliographer Robert Darnton has indicated, "everything about a book bears the mark of cultural conventions – not just the language in which it is written, but its typography, layout, format, binding, and even the advertising used to sell it. Each of these elements orients the reader, directing his or her response. The reader also brings a great deal to the text – expectations, attitudes, values, and opinions – and these, too, have cultural determinants."[9] We are now in an era where an e-book can be delivered to us without "physical characteristics" but simply as a bitstream. The people who sell e-books, Amazon and others, have tried to restore the "look and feel" experience of browsing in a bookstore by providing information, sometimes even inviting us to "look inside" a book, connecting it to other books that seem related ("people who bought this book also bought . . ."), offering to sell us other books in combination with it at special prices, and providing both editorial and customer reviews. They have certainly had success in selling e-books.

Technology aside, books still exist as physical entities although their appearance may change over time. We have to think ourselves back to the era when James Avati painted while Merton prayed, perhaps remembering (if we are old enough) the effect of those bright new twirling racks with their colorful and arresting contents (see Davis 106). That journey of the imagination may also tell us something about the readers of that time, by way of the appeals made to them by publishers: "our knowledge of production and distribution can compensate, to a certain extent, for the limitations of our knowledge of reception" (Darnton 184). Then the physical book may help us understand the world in which it was read and the readers who encountered it, and its reprinting history may tell us how lasting its appeal was.

Where Merton and Avati Met

James Avati found out at about age 13 that he "just loved the experience of putting paint down – regardless of the composition or what the subject was – the actual physical experience of putting paint on a brush and putting it somewhere."[10] He had come to paperback illustration through a long

Figure 3: Avati Biography by Schreuders and Fulton

route toward what he wished: to be a "serious" artist. Graduating from Princeton with an architecture degree (paid for by a generous uncle), Avati found himself in the middle of the depression and without work, as so many were. As Merton was moving to Gethsemani when the US went to war, Avati was being drafted. He served as a radio operator in the European theatre, participating in the Battle of the Bulge. He painted when he could, using a tiny watercolor kit. When peace broke out, soldiers awaiting repatriation were treated to various educational experiences: Avati "was invited to follow a fine arts course at the Army University in Biarritz" in quite palatial surroundings. He took an eight-week introductory course and then "an advanced term, which ended December 26 [1945]" (Schreuders & Fulton 19-20). Then, back home again, he scrounged for jobs. Funding through the GI Bill helped him set up in business as an illustrator and get a competent agent, and he began to get work. His interest was in "the great old paintings" but also "the people swarming the streets, the subways, the towns – the ordinary people of my world" (Schreuders & Fulton 20). He still continued to struggle, disliking the graphic art he was required to produce for advertisements, taking odd jobs to make ends meet (he had a wife and children by this time) until "one day, when Jim was on the roof of a house being built, he got a call from the New American Library. He was sent a book. He made a sketch. And before he knew it, he was in the paperback business for the rest of his working life" (Schreuders & Fulton 24). His realistic skills made his covers an instant hit, and his work was soon in demand by several publishers, but he settled with NAL for quite a long period. The work was hugely demanding: in 1949 and 1950 he produced 46 covers for the Signet paperback line. The cover assignments from NAL were immediately stimulating. He responded to the emotions the stories produced within himself. "'In essence,' he wrote years later, 'I tried to people a mood, the mood generated by the book. Sometimes, I managed to do it'" (Schreuders & Fulton 29). And "the 'Avati style' took hold. Soon he had many imitators in the book cover business. James Avati's fully painted illustrations, which began in 1949, were ideally suited for the bordered cover formats used by Signet and others. Avati's unadorned realistic style, combined with his controlled shadings of browns and grays, gave paperback cover art an honesty and emotional depth that the pulp-style and magazine illustrations lacked. His publisher called them 'Rembrandt-like.'"[11] His method indicated his seriousness about the procedure. He always read the book, then slept on it – or tried to – as he reported: "I used to lie awake nights thinking about covers. . . . And then I got a hunch: it would come like an image in my head" (Schreuders & Fulton 36). The method was cinematic. He made sketches and conferred with the publisher's designers, hired models and made photographs to depict the scenes he wanted, and was always exacting about the details. He would paint with the photos beside him. "He studied the black-and-white prints for the way the light hit a face or a piece of clothing while inserting the facial expression he sought and adding color" (Schreuders & Fulton 37). In comparing some of the still-extant drab black and white photographs with the paintings, it is amazing to see how he put life, color and expression into the scene until the painting really sprang off the page. He drove all over the countryside looking for picturesque buildings, preferably those that were falling apart, because this suited the dark backgrounds he painted. He had to pay models out of his own pocket,[12]

and often used his own family and even himself. All the time, he was dealing with the fact that the picture had to be intelligible after reduction to the tiny size of a paperback cover.

Avati's painting for *Seven Storey Mountain* is one of the few in which he depicted a composite of many figures. The small vignettes with people suggest the seven deadly sins, and the dark craggy landscape brings the idea of Mount Purgatory. The eye-catching figure of the monk at the center is praying, presumably for the world. Arranged around him are small scenes with groups of people. The light strikes down across the picture from the upper left. At the opposite corner, lower right, three people look up toward the left with frightened expressions: one man, out of frame, holds his hand upward to keep the light out of his eyes. In the center foreground a group depicts a snobbish lady in furs, an apparent sycophant and a gossip pointing and speaking behind his hand. Clockwise to the left a young woman holds a baby on her knee, and the foot supporting it is bare. The scarf around her head and shoulders is blue – perhaps a suggestion of the Blessed Virgin? In the upper left, there is a scene that might have come from the cover of a pulp thriller: a young man has just shot an older, well-dressed man and taken his wallet. Standing over him and reaching out for the wallet is Merton's quintessential "incandescent floozie,"[13] sin in high heels and a tight sweater. (The model who posed for the young man was probably Avati himself.) Balancing that group, on the upper right two lightly clad men are fighting desperately over a knife, on one of the crags of the mountain. There is another element: around the picture roughly at the compass points and depicted at a smaller scale are four elderly people. An old man at the bottom front of the picture stares sadly out of the frame.[14] Above on the far left a stooped, grey-haired woman has turned and is walking out of frame so that we see only her back. Just above dead center of the picture a man walks with a cane. He is holding his hand on his hip and his elbow juts up under the jacket slung around his shoulders. The pose suggests deformity, disability. Far right is an older woman in ragged clothes, in a pose that indicates confusion, fear and perhaps hostility (and demonstrating Avati's talent for incarnating ideas in pictures of people's gestures and expressions). These four are somewhat smaller than the group vignettes, and they bring a complexity to the small universe depicted here. Somehow it all fits together, and we see it as a whole. Avati's later appraisal of the picture:

> This essentially represents the bad habits of human nature, like gossip, greed, thievery, poverty, our ability to argue over trivialities. The fact that I had to paint it with contemporary costumes bothered me somewhat when I was painting it. I was thinking how people like Michelangelo would have done it – costumes would have made it timeless somehow, at least in my mind. I was struggling with that; I wanted to have that monumentality which I really couldn't achieve, but I was doing the best I could. Now that I see it again, I think it's maybe better this way; I like it now. The only thing that was changed by the editors was that I originally had a little bit more of the masked fellow's face showing, and I covered that up a bit. (Schreuders & Fulton 126)

Avati came to be called "King of Book Covers," much imitated in the realist style that characterized the paperback artists that followed. Although he participated in the luster of the era, he was not party to the lucre, being paid relatively little for the more than 600 covers he decorated over his career. No attempt was made to keep track of the original oil on cardboard paintings after they had become covers; they were given away, allowed to drift here and there. Some wound up in

the NAL warehouse from which Avati's friends liberated quite a few in 1982. A battle over rights ensued, until somebody with connections prompted Otis Chandler, chairman of the Times-Mirror Co. (parent of NAL) to send a message down the line: "Give Avati His Paintings Back!" (Schreuders & Fulton 75-76). Among those rescued was *The Seven Storey Mountain*, sometimes characterized as his masterpiece (Schreuders & Fulton 45). Some of the paintings were sold to give Avati a more pleasant retirement, and the *SSM* one went for $5,000.[15] More recently, there has been a revival in collecting the books and appreciating the art. A major show was staged in Brabant, Netherlands, and Avati's pictures may still be viewed on-line, including the *SSM* cover painting and one of the two sketches for it.[16]

There have been the inevitable comparisons with Norman Rockwell, another painter who wanted to be a "real artist" but was far too realist for the tastes of the art world in his time.[17] Colleague Stanley Meltzoff characterizes the comparison thus: "Norman Rockwell pictured Americans as we would like to be at our best; Avati shows our neighbors at their most typical. [He] confronts the underside of everyone's experience with which great fiction deals . . . the gritty realism of American life once recorded by the novelists of American society" (Schreuders & Fulton 8).

Changes of Cover

The history of *Seven Storey Mountain* and NAL was by no means over when the third printing was succeeded by a fourth with a different cover. Had some Prince of the Church been offended, picked up the phone perhaps, and complained to the publisher? That is not likely, but there was a reason: the book was following a new trend in design which had perhaps been prompted by a series of sensational censorship trials, and the setting up in May, 1952 of the House of Representatives Select Committee on Pornographic Materials (nicknamed "The Gathings Committee") which had begun with the stance that "the kind of filthy sex books sold at the corner store . . . are affecting the youth of our country," thus starting with a foregone conclusion (Davis 220).

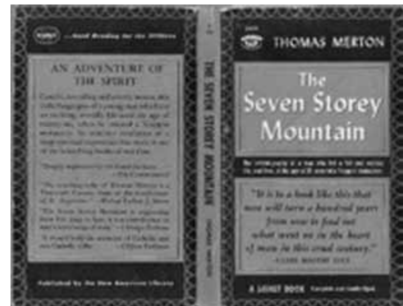

Figure 4: The Second Cover: Printings 4 - 7

Victor Weybright waded into the trials and the bannings and wrote eloquent letters defending the business, particularly one to the committee describing the workings of the reprint industry and the "cross-section of better literature being written today" and printed by paperback publishers (Davis 232-33). "But by the beginning of the 1950s, the sensational cover had taken over the paperback racks. Sadly, at the moment that the paperback book was beginning to win praise for its contribution in improving literacy and spreading the market for writers, the trend toward exploitation blackened the industry's image" (Davis 141). Armed with the negative findings of the Gathings committee, other organizations went into action, like the Decent Literature Committee of Our Lady Help of Christians Roman Catholic Church, which attacked their local paperback racks rather as Carrie Nation had done with her little axe in the saloons (see Davis 237). There were still sensationalist covers visible in quantity. David Dempsey, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January, 1953, commented on the dual personality of the paperback industry: "Their product is a highly competitive melange of serious literature and trash, of self-help and pseudo-science, of sex and inspiration. . . . This explains

why Edith Hamilton's *The Greek Way* and the novels of Kathleen Winsor can be sold bust by jowl on drug counters. . . . If the reprints have done nothing else, they have taken the classics away from the protective custody of the pedants" (quoted in Davis 178).[18]

In 1947 a worried group of cover designers, "recognizing the sexual morass into which their field threatened to sink, established the Book Jacket Designers Guild," particularly going after cover designs that bore no relation to the contents of the book. They disbanded eight years later, not having been able to subdue the chaos (see Schreuders 107-109). In truth the paperback rack frontier was as chaotic as the wild west for a few years, and we have to keep in mind that even for high-minded NAL editors cherishing great literature, the reality of the business was that their top-selling author of all time was Mickey Spillane (see Davis 180-85). Gradually however, the industry grew up and became more sophisticated. The overall effect was "a definite toning down in the area of cover illustrations" although it "probably had as much to do with changing trends in illustration as with censors" (Davis 240).

Whatever the intent, *Seven Storey Mountain*, still a Signet Triple with a triangle logo on the cover, came out in November 1956 with a tasteful dark blue cover with text on gold plaques in letters edged with red. The cover blurb was by Clare Boothe Luce: "It is to a book like this that men will turn a hundred years from now to find out what went on in the heart of man in this cruel century." The thickness of the book had however diminished, due to the use of thinner paper. The book remained a triple until the sixth printing, when the triangle was removed from the cover, but the price stayed at 75 cents. The eighth printing brought a new cover (it is likely that cover changes happened as the agreement was renewed with the hard-cover publisher, since these were limited-time licenses). It was April 1961, and the cover shows a new sensibility: it is white, with purple and fuscia decorations, quite suitable for the oncoming flower-child era. The front blurb changed as well: gone was Claire Boothe Luce, replaced by "The autobiography of a man who led a full and worldly life and then, at the age of 26, entered a Trappist monastery." That blurb stayed for the rest of the run, which went to 18 printings.

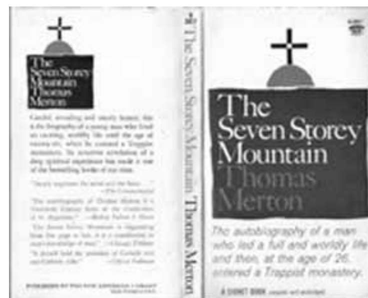

Figure 5: SSM Third Cover: Printings 8 - 12

The ninth printing had 100 pages less than the eighth, but not because of abridgment. The company simply reset the type to save on paper, so the ninth is technically a new edition. The tenth printing was a publication of The New American Library of Canada Limited ("Cover printed in the U.S.A." on the back), perhaps indicating the successful move by NAL to extend its publications beyond the US (see Davis 279-80). On the twelfth, the price printed on the cover rose to ninety-five cents. On the thirteenth the cover changed again, adopting what became a standard Signet drab green background, with the title in white in a black box and the author's name below in blue. (No copy of the fourteenth printing has been located.) Interestingly, under Merton's name is the phrase "Author of *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*," which indicates that Signet was capitalizing on the promotion of *Conjectures*, which had been featured with quotes and photographs in *Life Magazine*.[19] Finally on the last two printings, 17 and 18, the book became a Mentor Book with a blue band across the top of the cover and a printed price of $1.95, but otherwise the same overall cover design it had had since the thirteenth. The publisher stopped dating the printings after number nine in March, 1962.

Eighteen printings over 16 years comes to more than one per year during Merton's lifetime. It is evident that NAL kept track of the book and refreshed it often, and that probably indicates its success when it was introduced to readers in the thousands.

As to the numbers of copies printed, it is possible to do a quick calculation. The front cover of the Harvest/HBJ edition (a trade paperback with the typeset of the original hardcover) states: "Over one million copies sold."[20] The Mott biography of Merton relates: "In all, 600,000 copies of the original cloth edition were sold, before the figures of later editions, paperback sales, and translations."[21] What brings up the total to one million copies is the 400,000 that must have sold in mass-market paperback, both from NAL Signet (1952-1968?) and later Image Books (1970 to 1976, when the first Harvest edition was printed).

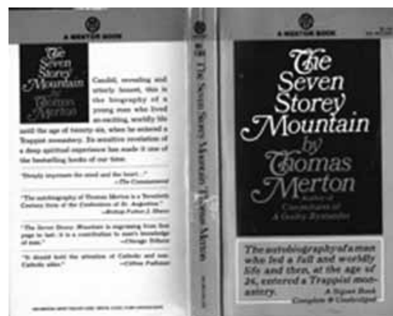

Figure 6: Finally a Mentor Book: Printings 17 - 18

By the time of Merton's death in 1968, however, the revolution was losing steam: in 1969 the *New York Times Book Review* asked: "Is the Paperback Revolution Dead?" It had slowed down somewhat, and run off into other channels (like the trade paperbacks of the original hard-cover publishers) but the world was never going to go back to the book scarcity that had existed before World War II (see Davis 333). Merton was riding the wave at its highest, in the fifties and sixties. It is hard to date the last printing of NAL's *Seven Storey Mountain*, but after Merton's death the book reappeared as a paperback of the Doubleday Image imprint (of which, more in part 2 of this article) in 1970.[22]

What did it all mean, for the readers who came upon these paperbacks? Jim Forest's memory follows on Donald Grayston's, and gives us a hint of what was happening:

> I recall being an eighteen-year-old boy waiting for a bus in Manhattan's Port Authority Bus Terminal. It was 1959 and I was on leave from my Navy job at the U.S. Weather Bureau. Christmas was a few days away. . . . With a little time on my hands, I was browsing a carousel full of paperback books that was off to one side of the waiting room's newsstand and came upon a book with the odd title *The Seven Storey Mountain*, by someone named Thomas Merton. The author's name meant nothing to me. It was, the jacket announced, "the autobiography of a young man who led a full and worldly life and then, at the age of 26, entered a Trappist monastery." . . . It proved to be a can't-put-it-down read for me. In the bus going up the Hudson Valley, I can recall occasionally looking up from the text to gaze out the window at the heavy snow that was falling that night. Merton's story has ever since been linked in my mind with the silent ballet of snow flakes twirling under street lights.[23]

Forest's story is emblematic of the way many people "met Merton." A traveler with a new book for company is liminal, in a special personal place, neither here nor there, and perhaps both solitary and vulnerable. It is one of the states in which Merton appeals, as he becomes companion and friend on the road to somewhere, New York or Jerusalem, Louisville or Emmaus. And that connection once made is something that most people will never forget.

1. Donald Grayston, "*Non Finis Quaerendi*: My Journey with Thomas Merton," *The Merton Journal* 21.1 (Eastertide 2014) 3.
2. Kenneth C. Davis, *Two-Bit Culture: The Paperbacking of America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984) 33; subsequent references will be cited as "Davis" parenthetically in the text.
3. An interactive timeline of paperback development through the 1940s and 1950s can be found on the web site *The Paperback Revolution* (http://www.crcstudio.org/paperbacks/revolution.php) [note: the Timeline opens a new window and may also collapse it to the bottom of the screen; click on the window name to see the Timeline].
4. Frank L. Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America: The History of Paperbacks and Their European Background* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1958) 129; subsequent references will be cited as "Schick" parenthetically in the text.
5. See http://www.armedserviceseditions.com/ for details, statistics and illustrations. The books have found a long afterlife in lively trading on eBay under the search term "Armed Services Editions."
6. Thomas L. Bonn, *Heavy Traffic and High Culture: New American Library as Literary Gatekeeper in the Paperback Revolution* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989) 169-95; subsequent references will be cited as "Bonn, *Traffic*" parenthetically in the text.
7. Victor Weybright, *The Making of a Publisher: A Life in the Twentieth Century Book Revolution* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1968) 203; subsequent references will be cited as "Weybright" parenthetically in the text.
8. In researching this article, I have never observed another book which went from a double to a triple at NAL. The first printing must have given them great confidence in the ability to raise the price and still sell the book. It appears that it was also the only nonfiction book for which James Avati ever did cover art.
9. Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996) 186-87; subsequent references will be cited as "Darnton" parenthetically in the text. There is, indeed, an entire book about the startling number of things which surround the text block of a book: Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), originally published in French as *Seuils* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1987). Darnton was trying to understand readers by observing the behavior of publishers, something which I am hoping to do here. One assumes that publishers are rational, and that they do not reprint books unless there is a demand for them, and reprints may alert us to the popularity of an author.
10. Piet Schreuders and Kenneth Fulton, *The Paperback Art of James Avati* (Hampton Falls, NH: Donald M. Grant, 2005) 13; subsequent references will be cited as "Schreuders & Fulton" parenthetically in the text. Information about Avati's life is condensed from Chapter One, "A Life in Paperbacks: A Biographical Sketch" (13-86). The second part of the book, "The Paintings" (87-176), gives many examples of Avati's style, including his covers for New American Library (177-83) and for other publishers (185-94). *The Seven Storey Mountain* occupies a double-page spread (126-27), with the large painting on the left, and two preliminary color sketches on the right, together with a thumbnail of the final cover, with notes. Another source is a reissue (Spring 2008) of the magazine *Illustration* 1.1 (2001), originally put together via desk-top publication in 48 pages; the reissue has a new design and layout, no ads ("From the Editor" 1) and runs to 64 pages. The article "The Paperback Art of James Avati" is by Piet Schreuders (25-45), and includes "James Avati Paperback covers – A Checklist" (46-47). The art for *Seven Storey Mountain* occupies page 45, with a large reproduction of the picture and a small preliminary color sketch. In addition to the first two sources is a VHS tape, *James Avati, King of Bookcovers* (copyright VPRO Television, The Netherlands; Distributor: West Long Branch, NJ: Kultur, 2000). We see Avati visiting childhood haunts, also Princeton where he got his degree, and Petaluma, California where he ultimately settled, talking to Stanley Meltzoff, who wrote the preface to *The Paperback Art* and painted a picture of Avati working in his studio, also reproduced in that book. In it the artist is surrounded by his children and some favorite models in little vignettes all around him. He is frowning with concentration, studying his photos and preliminary sketches and painting. Avati's feet are entirely off the ground and he is standing in mid-air as he paints, so Meltzoff's picture canonizes someone much admired in the world of illustration. Avati died at Petaluma on February 27, 2005.
11. Thomas L. Bonn, *Under Cover: An Illustrated History of American Mass Market Paperbacks* (New York: Penguin, 1982) 102; subsequent references will be cited as "Bonn, *Under Cover*" parenthetically in the text.
12. See Piet Schreuders, *Paperbacks U.S.A.: A Graphic History 1939-1957*, translated from Dutch by Josh Pachter (San Diego CA: Blue Dolphin Enterprises, 1981) 124; subsequent references will be cited as "Schreuders" parenthetically in the text.
13. See the December 21, 1961 letter to W. H. Ferry in Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985) 205. Avati himself said "it was always man-woman . . . one of the universals, after all, is man-woman" (Schreuders & Fulton 31).

14. This was probably what Avati called his "favorite old man. He was very accommodating, always taking out his false teeth for me" (Schreuders & Fulton 33).
15. Email from Piet Schreuders, Feb 8, 2010.
16. http://www.cubra.nl/avati/jamesavatisevenstorymountainthomasmerton.htm shows the finished painting; http://www.cubra.nl/avati/sketchjamesavatithomasmerton.htm shows one of the preliminary sketches (he usually did just one sketch, but in this case, probably because of the complexity of the painting, he prepared two).
17. Rockwell himself is now having a renaissance, with some pictures commanding millions at auction (*New York Times International Weekly* [7-8 June 2014] 10), so perhaps realism is not so bad after all.
18. In *Under Cover*, Thomas L. Bonn called the covers "two-fisted, double-breasted, four-color broadsides" (103), another way of saying "bust by jowl."
19. *Life* 61 (5 August 1966) 60-73. This serves also to date the thirteenth printing of *SSM* as no earlier than *Life*'s publication date.
20. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) tp verso: "First Harvest/HBJ edition 1978."
21. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984) 247. Mott's source is Robert Giroux, "The Education of an Editor" (1981 Bowker Memorial Lecture), *Publisher's Weekly* 221.2 (8 January 1982).
22. Another note about NAL and Merton: in April of 1952, just before the mass market publication of *SSM* and with editorship by Ariel Porter, the publisher "sponsored the first mass market literary magazine, *New World Writing*, much welcomed by the American literary scene" (Bonn, *Traffic* 26). NAL's editors felt that "if the experiment worked, it would attest to the existence of a large, unacknowledged American audience for serious fiction, poetry, drama and belles-lettres. At the same time it would prove to a disdainful literary community that the paperback wasn't all trash." The magazine "represented the best and brightest ever published by an American paperback house" (Davis 191). The back cover blurb read, in part: "The sort of material included in this First Mentor Selection has formerly been found only in a few literary magazines of comparatively limited readership. . . . [NAL] now makes available throughout the world selections of important contemporary writing at a modest price." Its first issue included a poem by Merton, "Sports without Blood: A Letter to Dylan Thomas" (*New World Writing: First Mentor Selection* [New York: New American Library, 1952] 74-77). The first print run was 100,000 copies – the price: 50 cents. The magazine continued as an NAL publication until 1959, having put out 15 issues (Davis 192).
23. Jim Forest, "Meeting Thomas Merton," *The Merton Journal* 10.2 (2003) 44-45.

Figure 7: NAL Magazine