

OF FILMS, COURSES AND HOSTELS:

Merton Films, Merton Courses and Weeks with Thomas Merton (Naturally)

— by **Robert E. Daggy**

1984 is already, and promises to be even more so, one of the busiest years in Merton Studies. Though publication of books by and about Merton has been steadily increasing since his death, this year will have seen two signal and significant events in Merton Studies plus more new publications and the forecast of yet more new publications to come.

One event will be the publication of the long-awaited “official biography” of Thomas Merton. Written by Michael Mott and titled **The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton**, this biography (for which Mott had access to materials unavailable to other scholars) has been slated by the publishers, Houghton Mifflin, for publication in November 1984. An event indeed!

The other event, and one much closer in time, was the nation-wide premier of the television documentary, **Merton: a Film Biography of Thomas Merton**, on PBS June 5, 1984. *Merton* was written, produced and directed by Paul Wilkes and co-produced by Audrey L. Glynn. It was the first major television documentary presented in the United States on Merton. There have been a number of local television programs — semi-documentaries, talk shows, discussions — aired on Merton, and, of course, there was the National Public Radio “Thomas Merton: a Profile” done on Susan Stamberg’s nationwide radio show, *All Things Considered*, but this was the first such television offering.

It may not be entirely appropriate for a curator, especially a curator who sat on the Advisory Board for *Merton*, to praise the production unduly. Yet since all advance reviews (including that by Basil Pennington which is the lead article of this issue) have been favorable and since I feel myself that I have seldom seen a documentary as fine as this one, I will proceed to praise. *Merton* is a balanced and carefully nuanced presentation of the Merton life. Given Merton’s own aversion to the media (see, for instance, George Kilcourse’s review on pp. 14-15 of this issue) and given the fact that he left instructions in his Trust Agreement that no autobiographical materials of his were ever to be “filmed, or dramatized on radio or presented on television,” I only hoped from the beginning that Merton would be depicted with dignity, restraint and clarity. *Merton* does all that and more — and it does it brilliantly. It should be equally interesting to those already familiar with Merton and to those who had never heard of him before. If, by chance, any of our readers missed the show in its first airing, I urge them to watch for it in re-screenings. You will find it well worth it.

Paul Wilkes and Audrey L. Glynn also prepared a stunning “Viewer’s Guide to the Film Biography.” Eight pages long, the guide is available from The Merton Project, 431 Pacific Street, Brooklyn, New York 11217, or, while supplies last, from The Thomas Merton Studies Center. In addition, Wilkes has edited a companion book to *Merton*, *Merton: By Those Who Knew Him Best*, a compilation from the interviews done for the documentary. Harper & Row will publish it later in 1984.

Peter Pauper Press has published a new book by Anthony Padovano, author of *The Human Journey: Thomas Merton, Symbol of a Century* and of the cassette tapes, *Thomas Merton: a Life for our Times*. A short (just 64 pages) book, titled **Contemplation and Compassion: Thomas Merton's Vision**, it is intended to be an introduction to basic themes in Merton — an introduction which combines excerpts from Merton himself with Padovano's short, terse comments. The book is being marketed as a suitable text for use in Merton classes and conferences.

And while speaking of Merton classes, it is nice to announce that Bellarmine College will offer its first 3-hour, credit class in Merton Studies in the Fall Term of 1984. The course is titled "Thomas Merton: Introduction to His Life and Thought" and will be offered Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7:15 to 8:30 P.M. I will teach this first "Merton Studies" class, described in our Fall schedule thusly: "As an introduction to Merton's life and writing, the course will focus initially on the events and influences which shaped Merton's life and thought, followed by a survey of the significant areas in which he wrote and worked, i.e. religious experience and renewal; literature; comparative religions; and social criticism and theory." The appearance of the documentary and of Tony Padovano's *Contemplation and Compassion*, both of which may be utilized in this and other classes, is fortuitous.

Fortuitous also is the appearance of these two Merton items just before the second Elderhostel "**A Week with Thomas Merton**," which will be held at the Thomas Merton Studies Center from June 24 to June 30, 1984. As co-ordinator for faculty and instruction of the Elderhostel Week last year, I can say that I have rarely enjoyed myself more than I did during that week. The success and enjoyment of last year's "Week" was due to many factors: the combined talents of our guest faculty, Rev. George A. Kilcourse, Dr. Don R. Osborn and poet Ron Seitz; to the performance of the "Niles-Merton Song Cycle;" to the highlight of a picnic at Merton's Hermitage, but none of this would have happened without one person, the General Co-ordinator for the "Week", Dr. Nancy A. Howard, Dean of Academic Affairs at Bellarmine College. The Elderhostel program was largely Dr. Howard's brainchild and she had long wanted to develop such a program for Senior Citizens on our campus. To say that she did it splendidly the first year is to say the minimum that might be said. Now Assistant to the President of Bellarmine College, she has acted as General Co-ordinator again this year. Dr. Bonnie Bowman Thurston, Dr. Don R. Osborn and Ron Seitz are guest faculty for this year and I am again Co-ordinator for Faculty and Instruction, but it is Dr. Howard who ties it all together, who does those thousand and one little things that make any such program an enjoyable and profitable experience. We are fortunate to have in this issue essays by Drs. Thurston and Osborn and a poem by Mr. Seitz. As editor of the SEASONAL, I would have liked to have had a contribution from Dr. Howard, but in lieu of that, I have written this, not for her but to her.

Praise for a documentary — no little effusion for an Elderhostel — ebullience, no doubt, but it is at times such as this that I am proud of my association with the Merton "industry." And it is at times such as this that I may as well say so. So, said of films, courses and hostels.



Dr. NANCY A. HOWARD