

FOR THOMAS MERTON

A Poem

by **Justine Merritt**

This spring a novice,
in a decade when there are no novices,
handed me a book.
Me,
a former angry atheist
in a century when atheists turned to suicide
but not to God.

In that book
I found a yearbook editor,
like me;
bright,
like me;
who ran from church and faith
until one day
he beat upon doors to say
"I'm here."

He found a place called Gethsemani
and I closed the book,
his mountain,
and raced again,
alone,
save for God.

And so,
I met Teresa,
explaining mysticism
when she would rather spin;
Teilhard, frown on,
who loved the earth as I
and I waited to write a letter
to a former yearbook editor
in a place called Gethsemani.

I traveled,
loved,
searched;
then to the library and the card file
to find that man again.

My eyes moved (1915-1968)
and my heart said
no.
This is a different Merton
because Louis of Gethsemani
still lives.
But card,
some yellowed (1915-)
after card (1915-1968)
said the man who drank, smoked,
traveled, read, moved, swore, prayed —
that man was dead.

Then I found him,
with appropriate footnotes,
lying on a stone,
under a terrible mechanical fan,
"still bleeding slightly"
in Bangkok.

Dead.

And the loss sent me reeling.

Thomas Merton —
Louis of Gethsemani —
dead?

I think not.

Teresa sits beside me each day,
 listing favors from her Lord;
 explaining, her translator says,
 in idiomatic Spanish
 (Latin phonetically spelled)
 how God through Christ has blessed her.

I think not.

Teilhard sits beside me each day,
 struggling to match the heavens to his earth,
 while a young German — Dietrich,
 loving his land,
 sits also,
 explaining Paul as well as Christ
 while authority prepares his death.

I think not.

Jeremiah,
 Ezekiel,
 David too,
 live in a community of souls
 who found their glory in God.

Dead?

I think not.

Thomas Merton, like love,
 lives
 and sits beside me;
 nudging, nudging
 until I find my place, my space
 in a decade,
 in a century
 where I've found God.



JUSTINE MERRITT

□ **Justine Merritt** is the originator and organizer of "The Peace Ribbon," a project whereby persons from all over the United States and abroad painted or embroidered segments of a ten mile long ribbon which was wrapped around the Pentagon in August 1985. She is at work on a book about the project, tentatively titled *Sew to Speak*. She is a frequent lecturer on the empowerment of women through the ribbon experience and was one of the speakers at "The Merton Festival" held at St. Bonaventure University in Olean, New York, on October 16-17, 1988.