

on Merton's engagement of the Death of God Theology.

Finally, it is in "A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra Concerning Giants" that Merton's acceptance of modernity came clean. Here his humanism and his critique became truly radical. His poetry became a poetry of dissent and eventually evolved into anti-poetry. So taken with the power of language, Merton even engaged in an early form of criticism of what we would call today "double-speak." With his criticism of language, Merton has finally traversed the distance from salvation *from* the world (the ideal of the young monk) to salvation *of* the world (the obsession of the secular hermit). While his humanism was eminently practical, Cooper points out that it was constructed from the traditional theological justifications of: the concept of redemptive love and its empowering doctrine of the Incarnation; a New Testament theology stressing the primacy of the human person over the claims of legalistic religion; and the mandate of forgiveness fundamental to Christian ethical standards.

It is difficult to situate this book among the veritable flood of books written about Merton. At times it can be demanding of the reader. The depth of the criticism and interpretation would indicate that this book would appeal to those who have a fairly good acquaintance with the details of Merton's life and, at least, a working knowledge of his writings. Nonetheless this book is so well written that even a newcomer to Merton could benefit greatly from it. In the final analysis, it is that most rare of all gems: a book that is both scholarly and "a good read."

J. S. PORTER Replies To
PATRICK F. O'CONNELL'S Review of *THE THOMAS MERTON POEMS*
("A Caravan for Merton," *Merton Seasonal*, Summer 1989)

Professor O'Connell's review of my book is generous, even gracious. I thank him sincerely, for example, for his perceptive recognition of the recurrent amphibian metaphor, which he terms a "master image," as I think the metaphor is a useful way to "get at" aspects of Merton's complex life and character.

May I, however, quarrel gently with his apparent unease with the documentary poetic form, with my "becoming" Merton. In the Canadian poetic tradition it is not unusual to engage in "the daring and risky strategy" of becoming someone else, of donning a mask and speaking through it. Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Modie*, Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, and Gwendolyn MacEwen's *The T. E. Lawrence Poems* furnish a few examples of a form in which a poet takes on the spirit of someone else, blends research with the imagination, and dramatizes quirks of character and pivotal events in the subject's life. Although documentary poetry appears to be rare in American literature, one need not restrict oneself to Canadian literature for examples of mask wearing.

Professor O'Connell cannot be unfamiliar with the writings of Jonathan Swift in which for artistic purposes Swift pretends to be someone else — an economist and mathematician in *A Modest Proposal*, a journalist in *A Tale of the Tub*, or a nominal Christian in *Against Abolishing Christianity*. While Swift wears the masks, his own face from time to time protrudes, and however varied the narrators, the narratives bear Swift's unmistakable signature.

Interestingly, Merton himself used masks. Witness his love of aliases in letters (Wang, Home, Roosevelt, etc.), and his amazing powers of entering into someone else's point of view whether in his translations of French and Latin American poetry, in his Zen essays, in his remaking of Chuang Tzu, called "a mirror of Merton" by Abbot John Eudes Bamberger, or in his reconstruction of the sayings of the fourth century Desert Fathers. Any "translation," it seems to me, will bear the mark of the original and of the translator. The translation is not necessarily judged on its literalness, but often on its fidelity to the spirit of the original. In wearing a mask one does not remove one's own face. When a North American Indian, for instance, puts on the mask of the coyote in a ceremonial dance, he gains strength and freedom from the identification, but neither he nor those who watch suffer from the illusion that he *is* a coyote.

I could go on, but more specific rebuttals might be considered bad manners for I am very grateful for Professor O'Connell's serious and insightful attention to the book and his, on the whole, balanced and judicious appraisal of it.