

## Six Poems

by J. T. Ledbetter

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### Gethsemani Abbey (remembering)

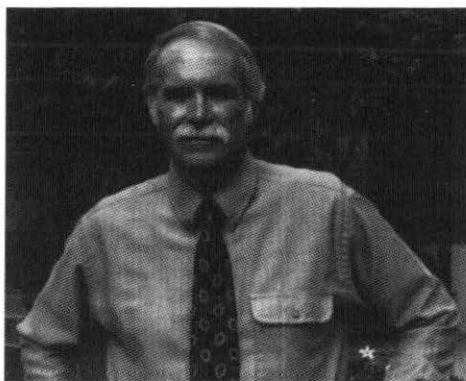
From Merton's hermitage  
I watched the Abbey fade in the dusk  
where monks blended in the shadows  
of the crows circling above the iron trees.  
The Kentucky knobs humped  
on the horizon like knuckles,  
and I thought of my father on the farm  
in Illinois, watching his maples fade  
into the same night, waiting for me.

And I thought of the day before  
when my Aunt Emma opened her book  
on Revelation and praised God for it  
and for the TV ministry,  
and looked me in the eye  
and asked if I was saved.

Then there was the business of the 21 shrimp  
my father said we had to get at Carlyle Lake  
on Tuesday night because that's the only time  
you got the 21  
otherwise it was something like 12  
and then not with the cole slaw.

So we drove through the Illinois night,  
my father silhouetted in the blue dash light,  
hungry to please me,  
talking of woods,  
how it was time to come home.

And I caught his eyes in the mirror,  
thinking of my plane waiting in the darkness  
like my Aunt's fiery cherubim with their wings  
covering their feet.]



J. T. LEDBETTER

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**we follow you still  
(for Merton)**

what are you doing there  
beneath the iron trees  
this time of night?  
late, even for a monk

what thoughts flail  
you worse even than the discipline  
they handed you in 41

by now of course you know  
the late nights beneath  
the cold stars and  
the long walks by  
the pond won't change anything —  
not really —  
or the long hours looking into  
that darkness you searched  
for so long  
hours biting back tears  
you thought washed away by  
private expiation so long ago

and now  
to be found out by love  
at this time of life —  
in this way — when all that  
had been settled and put away  
only to find your heart burning  
with a fire (that must be visible  
to others) but leaves you standing  
praying and working . . .  
your words hard  
like struck fire from mica  
as you pray the hours  
and fight your way through  
the psalms that echo the ancient cries

but you should know that  
we follow you in your rounds  
sucking from you some  
secret sign —  
and we, who would be healed,  
finger the hem of your robe  
because we all burn with you — you  
who are human  
when we thought you were an ikon  
of the life we sing, so blithely lead . . .

leaving you among your trees  
and hidden pools in the shale rocks . . .  
where none can touch you —  
none can offer counsel  
for your tired heart —  
knowing you live as we do —  
and how good, dear brother,  
that is to know  
as we follow you still . . .  
all our days

**Herakleitos' River**  
**(for T. M.)**

after the bells  
after the long hours  
and short commons  
after the dreams and signs  
the trailing sounds  
down the cloister  
after all the waiting  
broken pencils  
and damaged Royal keys

your bare feet on foreign grass  
your ikon asleep or dreaming  
(of you?)  
telling you something we cannot hear  
whispering the secrets you were born with  
and for awhile forgot

after the searching  
finding again and again the center  
now at last opening in your heart  
like a river  
or the echo of your own voice  
calling you to light  
through a darkness we know about  
but refuse — cannot see — must not acknowledge

after all this in books  
in pictures  
in words tumbling like the sea  
washing against us  
cleansing  
brightening our souls  
these words & dreams of yours  
call us on  
like bright pebbles beneath the stream  
you stepped in once  
and smiling  
washed away to God

**tracking Merton**  
**(for Father Michael: Abbey of Gethsemani, Kentucky)**

along this way / YESYESYESYES  
he slid in his berkonstocks  
with apple lifted in his hand  
wound with beard and blackness  
in the cold church where candles  
speared here and there in chants

night came slowly with hints  
of rain in the trees along the house  
where windows blinked at crows  
circling and booming from big guns  
at Ft. Knox where someone locked up  
something glittering from upstate eyes  
and photogs blasting the couple  
from Dubuque forever in b/w with  
xtra glossies for cousins in L.A.

and of course the moon had to shine  
on his grave and show the old marker  
carved by some old hand some old  
brother now gone on to whatever awaits  
them after years behind the wall  
as one old timer put it / like that /  
behind the wall / he said / as if I would  
see the humor there

still it was fine night and I saw  
all the crosses in fine lines stuck  
like picket fence in green grass and  
knew he was under there somewhere not  
so much sleeping as maybe trying to  
think of another book to write or maybe  
another way of saying "goodby old Abbot"  
and I guess he found it

### Abbey Winter

The maples by the cinder road are wet  
and give no hint of color as they had  
a few days past when looking made you sad  
with aching joy, knowing nature let  
you find the trees in autumn red and gold  
on just this day, or in the amber light  
of dusk when oaks and maples shake their bright  
slender branches in the blowing cold.  
Our lands and dreams are locked in ice tonight.  
The tops of trees are white as puffs of breath  
and all the world is white and still as death  
beneath the winter moon's pale, feeble light  
that draws across the pond, as moonlight weaves  
the shadows of the clouds upon the leaves.

### Fox at Monk's Pond

Now the fox has come to sit and stare  
at me across the pond, beside the barn,  
and bark and shake himself as if to warn  
of winter coming on the silver air.  
He will not cross to where I wait, although  
he moves in circles, there, beneath the trees.  
His brush is stiff against the falling snow  
that hides him from me in the gathering gloom,  
but still I hear him growling in the dark  
and one, sharp, sudden answering bark  
from somewhere in these woods so like a tomb.  
And I must go and leave the fox alone  
to move in dappled light from bark and stone.