

Three Unpublished Poems on Mythological Themes

By **Thomas Merton**

Included in the file of materials that Thomas Merton's mentor and friend Mark Van Doren deposited in the Columbia University Library is a large number of poems by Merton. Among these are fourteen pieces, mainly from the pre-monastic and early monastic period, that were never published in individual volumes of Merton's verse and do not appear in the "Uncollected Poems" section of Merton's Collected Poems. (The only pre-monastic verse included in this section are six poems published in Columbia Poetry [1939]). These previously unpublished poems will appear in the four issues of Volume 25 of The Merton Seasonal, with the permission of the Merton Legacy Trust.

AENEAS

Here is your Aeneas,
Your world-champion,
Loving the weather of lights;

Named
(For getting away with his bag of gods
The night of the collapse)
The boyscout of the year.

Born to win;
Ready to write out, both-handed
The heaviest of histories: the Roman,
One in a hundred!

Wait til he covers Italy with his iron standards;
He'll trade you any shaven Trojan
For all your coonskin Sabines.

Wait til he gets those humorous Etruscans,
He'll feed them to the torrents of the Appenines
He'll feed them to the birds.

Columbia – Van Doren File (encl. in 11/7/45 letter); 3-ring paper with authorial corrections
16 torrents . . . Appenines] *added in pencil after cancelled birds!* 17 He'll . . . birds.] *added in pencil*

CIRCE

Now Circe grows like an azalea
In the silk and cotton garden of her bedroom,
Eating the everlasting hours of summer, one by one,
Like apricots,

While, idle, in her lap,
The novel of deserted Dido lies neglected;
Breeze from the boardwalk ruffles the flamingoes of her gown,
And cools her sentimental flesh.

O, Circe loves the sun because it shines like ginger,
And loves the sodawater sea,
And loves the brand new world as bright as candy,
Since in it, everywhere,
Widows, for hopeless love, have died in tears:

Tears show on the anointed cheeks of happy Circe,
While somewhere, out of mind,
Her hundred sluggish husbands
Shine, in the swimming pools, like swine.

Thomas James Merton
St Bonaventure
New York.

Columbia – Van Doren File (encl. in 11/7/45 letter); 3-ring paper; identical second copy on cream paper (also encl. in 11/7/45 letter)

DIDO

Tyrian dinners sued the weary stranger
 To farm her fallows, harvest kings and queens;
 Yet Cadmus was a planter, and his vintage
 Is already wine in Aeneas' perjured veins.

Ropes and canvas, and the chandler's tackle
 Have bought a storm, a squiring in a cave;
 The little cousin, with his glancing arrow,
 Has taken gold, gold all that we have!

But crowns are off. Now he's a prebendary;
 His beadle's hood is up around his ears;
 The gods are back aboard that are his cargo;
 They're fed on blood of soldiers, and not tears.

Venus was got by nets, but not her baby.
 Towns that would burn have taught him to beware.
 Where is the Trojan, with his careless navy?
 They sailed away from Carthage: that's a pyre.

Columbia – Van Doren File (encl. in 11/7/45 letter); 3-ring paper with authorial correction
 10 beadle's] *added in pencil in margin to replace cancelled deacon's*