

argued, this kind of openness was possible because of Merton's deep, abiding faith in the risen Christ. He knew himself quite well and remained deeply grounded within the life of a contemplative monk and a disciple of Christ committed to the pursuit of peace and social justice. His faith liberated him to be spiritually free – genuinely open to believers and seekers, to both those within the faith and those outside of it. There was no defensiveness on Merton's part. In sum, Merton's expansive and deeply grounded “yes to God” may well be his greatest contribution to our contemporary quest for God.² He accepted truth wherever it could be found – continuing always to bask in the brilliant light of the living Christ.

1. Mary Luke Tobin, *Hope Is an Open Door* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1981) 72; subsequent references will be cited as “Tobin” parenthetically in the text.
2. See Thomas Merton, *The Springs of Contemplation: A Retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani*, ed. Jane Marie Richardson, SL (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1992) 268, 274.

The Trickster-Monk's New Creation

By David J. Belcastro

When we think of Thomas Merton's contributions to his and subsequent generations, the list becomes longer with each new publication. There is one contribution, however, as yet not fully acknowledged. It is a gift that identifies him with a long tradition of tricksters who have the knack of turning everything inside out – or perhaps more accurately everything outside in. That is to say, the trickster who lives on the margin of society recognizes that something has been left out that needs to be brought back in – something essential for life to flourish. While glimpsed throughout much of his writings, it is most clearly stated in an essay entitled “Learning to Live”:

A few years ago a man who was compiling a book entitled *Success* wrote and asked me to contribute a statement on how I got to be a success. I replied indignantly that I was not able to consider myself a success in any terms that had a meaning to me. I swore I had spent my life strenuously avoiding success. If it so happened that I had once written a best seller, this was a pure accident, due to inattention and naïveté, and I would take very good care never to do the same again. If I had a message to my contemporaries, I said, it was surely this: Be anything you like, be madmen, drunks, and bastards of every shape and form, but at all costs avoid one thing: *success*.¹

These words are more than a biographical note from the life of an odd character for his times. They represent the holy folly of a trickster-prophet who embodied the contradictions of his age. On the one hand, it was/is an age that publically broadcasts holiness, compassion and justice. And, on



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the other hand, it was/is a narcissistic age promoting fifteen minutes of Warholian fame. Merton struggled long and hard with his own desire to be recognized. He, no less than the rest of us, resisted the dominical call to “deny the self, take up the cross and follow” the one for whom to live is to die. His struggle, however, was that of a trickster looking for an opening in the fortress of a “selfie society” – an opening to the freedom of love in which the soul thrives. His journey from an ambitious young man seeking notoriety as an American writer to that of an ordinary man living simply, quietly and honestly in the woods, was a creative act whereby that which had become lost in the modern world was restored in a small house not far from the Abbey of Gethsemani. Like Hermes, Merton’s life and words carry an invaluable message for humanity.

In an age where there is much talk about “being yourself” I reserve to myself the right to forget about being myself, since in any case there is very little chance of my being anybody else. Rather it seems to me that when one is too intent on “being himself” he runs the risk of impersonating a shadow.²

1. Thomas Merton, *Love and Living*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone and Brother Patrick Hart (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979) 11.
2. Thomas Merton, *Day of a Stranger* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, 1981) 31.

Thomas Merton: Longing Yet Belonging – Belonging Yet Longing

By Fernando Beltrán Llavador

On April 8, 1950, Holy Saturday, Thomas Merton noted in his journal: “Everything is waiting for the Resurrection.”¹ Merton’s double condition – of homelessness and at-homeness-in-the-world; his being both filled with hope and deeply aware of contradictions in his own life and in society; the paradox of the gift and need of presence within absence; words in the midst of, stemming from, and aiming at silence, as a way of listening and responding to God’s Word; his detachment yet involvement in the concrete problems of his own time; days lived as a stranger even if more and more convinced of the good of togetherness in genuine community – all of these, in the light of a longing for a Presence which no thing will ever fully satisfy, together with an infinite belonging which nothing can threaten, touch deep personal chords and have a mirror-

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