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## Robert Giroux Speaks About Thomas Merton: An Interview from the Thomas Merton Oral History

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## Robert Giroux Speaks About Thomas Merton: An Interview from the Thomas Merton Oral History\*

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Victor A. Kramer

The purpose of the Thomas Merton Oral History Project is to gather information about Merton which may prove of benefit for scholars who investigate Merton's life and works in the future. The persons interviewed so far have all been either fellow monks or extremely close literary associates. Robert Giroux's interview reflects both a great respect for Merton and Giroux's own concerns about judicious use of language.

Mr. Giroux, as one of Merton's most significant editors, is also the editor of numerous major writers, including T.S. Eliot, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Jean Stafford, Walker Percy, and many others. He is the author of a study of Shakespeare's sonnets, *The Book Known as Q*, published here and in England. He edited and introduced *The Complete Stories* of Flannery O'Connor, John Berryman's critical essays, *The Freedom of the Poet*, *The Collected Prose of Elizabeth Bishop*, and—for publication early in 1987—*The Collected Prose of Robert Lowell*. His articles and book reviews have been widely published. Giroux is able to interpret Merton's life and work from the perspective of editor and friend, as well as that of someone long involved with modern writing and publishing. He is chairman of the editorial board of the New York publishing firm, Farrar, Straus, Giroux.

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Question: Could we begin with the question, what was your association with Thomas Merton?

Answer: Well, it was threefold: friend, editor, publisher. First, as a friend, actually as a Columbia College classmate. I was in

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\*This is a transcript of an interview made for archival purposes in 1982. It has been edited by the interviewee.



the Class of 1936; Merton was 1937. In college, one year's difference is enormous, so I didn't see too much of him when he was a sophomore, but by the time I became a senior Merton was known to me as a talented and interesting person. It was clear that he was better educated than most of my classmates. He had come from Clare College Cambridge. He had been "sent down" from the university for causes unknown to me. He first came to my attention when his name appeared in the undergraduate humor magazine, *Jester*, which had cartoons, jokes, parodies, satires, and so forth. His associates on that magazine were Edward Rice, Robert Lax, and, I think, Sy Freedgood. And also Ad Reinhardt—who later became a famous artist. Ad drew the covers of *Jester*, very cubistic in style, and other drawings.

Second, as an editor. Later in 1935, at the end of my junior year, I became editor of *The Columbia Review*; this was the undergraduate literary magazine, and Tom came to see me as its editor. He had written a story about a street accident. It was overlong, I thought, and I cut it. He was a good writer, with a narrative gift and vivid style. Much later, after he had become a monk, I got out the old issue of the magazine and reread his story—it was about death, about the meaninglessness of existence as it then seemed to him. He had seen someone killed in the street, and the man was just lying there, and Tom zeroed in on this open pack of cigarettes, lying in a pool of blood.

I found Tom a terribly interesting fellow. It never remotely occurred to me that he had any interest in religion. He was mainly interested in jazz, and had a record collection of his own. He was also interested in movies. We went a couple of times to the Marx Brothers comedies, W.C. Fields, Charlie Chaplin, and Preston Sturges. He had a comic sense which was very strong.

Question: When you think back about those first months or years when you knew him, can you remember any physical characteristics about him, anything that stands out?

Answer: Oh, yes. Physically he changed very little. He was a strong, stocky, sturdy-looking fellow. He had already begun to bald. He was quite blond and fair skinned. That stocky and substantial look got more so in later years; it struck me



again when I first saw him in his monk's habit. There was also a puckish air about him; he'd laugh easily and quickly—he had a great sense of the absurd.

Question: After you graduated and he remained on at Columbia, did you see him?

Answer: No, I lost touch. I got a job in radio at CBS until '39, three years, and then I became a junior editor at Harcourt, Brace and Company. Around January 1940 I received a manuscript from the literary agency Curtis Brown, sent by Naomi Burton, my friend. It was a novel by Thomas "Something" Merton, and I didn't connect it with Tom Merton in college. A first novel, called *The Labyrinth*, about a young man floundering around in Greenwich Village, obviously autobiographical. I think I told Naomi that it lacked a resolution—the hero was still floundering around in the last chapter. I thought he had writing talent and asked Naomi if I could see any other work of his. When I had lunch with Naomi later she said, "By the way, you didn't seem to realize the author was your old classmate, Tom Merton!" I didn't connect it at the time; I had lost sight of him. Another manuscript of his she sent me was *The Journal of My Escape from the Nazis*. (K: That would have been in the fall of '41?) Probably the fall of '41, and I turned it down. As a first book it was hopeless at that time. Naomi herself published it, when she became an editor at Doubleday many years later. There was one other book, I can't remember what it was called, but in *The Seven Storey Mountain* he said he burned it. (K: I think it was *The Man in the Sycamore Tree* manuscript.) Yes, it may have been *The Man in the Sycamore Tree*. (K: I think that's where Ed Rice got his title.) I think you're right. At any rate, Tom said he destroyed *The Labyrinth* and *The Man in the Sycamore Tree*. The next thing that happened was our curious meeting.

I ran into him in Scribner's bookstore on Fifth Avenue, just browsing around at lunch time. Somebody touched my arm, and it was Tom Merton. He looked exactly as he did in college. He said, "I've just been over to *The New Yorker*." Obviously he had been doing a lot of writing. I had read his book reviews in the *New York Times Book Review*. He was a very capable reviewer of any book he picked up,



knowledgeable and articulate always. He said, "The New Yorker wants me to write about Gethsemani." And I said, "Gethsemani, what's that?" "A Trappist monastery in Kentucky. I went there to make a retreat." This was the first inkling I had of his conversion. And I said, "Well, that sounds terribly interesting, Tom. I hope you are going to write it." "Oh, I wouldn't think of it! I could never write about it." He didn't explain why, and of course he didn't have to.

The next contact was Mark Van Doren, our teacher at Columbia, who phoned and said, "You know, Merton has become a Trappist." I recalled our encounter at Scribner's, and Mark said, "Yes, we'll never hear from Tom again."

Question: Let's see . . . this probably would have been in 1942 or so?

Answer: Whenever he went in . . . late 1941 or early 1942. Mark said, "Yes, he left me his manuscript of poems, his thirty poems, and I've already sent them to James Laughlin at *New Directions*, because Jay is a good poetry publisher. You know that Tom took a vow of silence? It means he's forever lost to the world." Little did we know. My third fate was to become Merton's publisher, five years later, with *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Naomi sent it to me in '46 or '47, and we published it in '48. I give the full publishing story in my *Bowker Lecture*.<sup>\*</sup> I read *The Seven Storey Mountain* and thought it marvelous. It needed some cutting, which Tom did. I went to my boss, Donald Brace, a marvelous old man, and asked him to read it. He said, "Oh, I'm not really interested in monastic life." I said, "Well, Mr. Brace, it's not about monastic life. It's an autobiography, telling why he ended up in a monastery." And he said, "Do you think we'll lose money if we publish it?" "I'm certain we won't," I said, "but I don't think it will be a best seller—it's too special." Well, we decided to print 5,000 copies. I sent three advance proof copies without expecting to get replies, to Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, and Clare Booth Luce. Each of

<sup>\*</sup>*The Education of an Editor* by Robert Giroux, Ninth of the Richard Rogers Bowker Memorial Lectures, New Series (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1982).



them wrote me a marvelous letter. I remember Graham Greene's especially, because it was rather witty. He said, "This is an unusual book, but I must say Merton's grim view of Cambridge University seems a bit exaggerated. He sounds like George Fox, the Quaker, writing about 'bloody Litchfield,' with blood flowing in the streets of peaceful little Litchfield." This amused Merton too. Greene also praised the book, and I had three fine quotes on the jacket of the first edition of *The Seven Storey Mountain*. We had to do a second printing before publication—20,000 copies. We knew then that the sales were going to be unusual. Within the first twelve months, I believe, copy No. 100,000 came from the press, and I had a special binding done for it. I was going to Gethsemani with Laughlin and Rice and Lax for Tom's ordination. (K: Now, had you gone before then? That was the first time?) That was the first time visitors were allowed. (K: So you took that copy down when he was ordained?) It was a sort of ordination present. There is a photo somewhere of the occasion with Tom standing in the doorway, and we're all looking up at him. I think we stayed two or three days or a weekend. We were given guest accommodations, and Father Abbot, Dom James Fox, was very nice to us.

Question: Now did you have occasion to talk with Merton, on a one-to-one basis?

Answer: Oh, yes. Despite the rule of silence, I could see him and talk to him, without any restriction, when he was free. I stayed in my room, and he had to follow the Order's daily routine. Getting up at 2:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. was a little too much for me. They had put me in Cardinal Dougherty's room. He had been the patron, old Cardinal Dougherty, a particular patron of the Trappists, and in earlier years he went there every summer, on retreat. His room was enormous, with a big brass bed, and not as comfortable as the guest cells.

Question: Were you given a tour of the monastery?

Answer: Tom took us around and showed us everything, the monk's cells, the refectory, the basilica, his office—this was before he had his own hermitage.

Question: And you went back from time to time? (RG: Yes.) I'm wondering, did you notice changes during those years when



you went back in terms of how the monastery . . .

Answer: Oh, yes, it grew. You see, the success of *The Seven Storey Mountain* was extraordinary. This was before the days of paperback, you must remember, and it sold close to 600,000 copies in cloth. I was aware that, because of his vow of poverty, the royalties were going not to Merton but to the monastery. Fr. James told us that several daughterhouses were built on the first royalties of *The Seven Storey Mountain* out West. You may have seen photographs of how they started in Quonset huts. Tom was very cheerful and happy, as far as I could tell. He seemed particularly so after his ordination. He was soon made Master of Novices. He liked that. If you are an artist, a writer, and if you're suited to the monastic life, it's terribly well organized for you. Tom had his own study; it was a kind of a vault, an old-fashioned room with big iron doors which had been turned into a little library, where he had his typewriter. He followed the schedule or office of the monastery, worked out hour by hour, almost by minute. You knew at every moment where you were supposed to be. He *had* to be in that study at particular times, and he got a lot of work done. His first abbot, Dom Frederick Dunne, recognized that Merton was a writer and ordered him to write *The Seven Storey Mountain*.

Tom and I talked about the crank mail we were getting. After the enormous success of *Seven Storey Mountain*, things began to be a little embarrassing. I would get letters, sometimes from clergymen, saying "Why can't you make this talking Trappist shut up?" Very unfair, but typical, and I had a standard reply, a little card which said, "Dear Sir: Are you not aware that writing is a form of meditation?" Tom was rather amused, but the criticism got to him. I think he developed intellectually and spiritually in an amazing way. He matured more spectacularly than anybody I know, and I've known a lot of writers and artists. Since I happened to know him as a callow undergraduate, so to speak, I observed a longer span of development in his case. He became more and more serious, more and more involved with social action—the fight against nuclear war—in a way that one could not have foreseen, early on.

Question: Did Merton handle his own business correspondence?



How was that done?

Answer: Well, there were two sources for correspondence. I only corresponded with Tom and his editor. Naomi Burton handled the business end of publishing for the monastery, and I dealt with her about contracts and so on. Dom James represented the monastery as the owner of the copyrights; Merton was never really interested. I must say he was honestly and genuinely an artist. He was naturally curious, and Naomi would tell him the rights had been sold in France or Japan or that Waugh wanted to edit the British edition, but that's an author's interest rather than purely business interest.

Question: Well, you've already said something about his physical appearance and his sense of humor. I wonder if you want to say anything further? Does anything else come to mind?

Answer: There's a marvelous picture Ed Rice took of Tom in a farmer's hat, a straw hat. He is in his white Trappist habit with a black scapula (the tunic that goes over the white robe), and he's wearing a straw hat, and he looked just like a farmer. He also told us that many of the monks lived to great ages—80 and 90 years. The outdoor life was very healthy. And I asked, "Do *you* do any farming?" He said, "Yes, every once in a while I do work in the fields, and I like the physical activity." He said, "You know, when a monk dies here, instead of gloom and weeping, everyone is happy. He's finally won his reward."

Comment: In fact he was out in the fields more or less on a regular basis like any other monk.

Answer: Yes. I think until he became Master of Novices. Then he was assigned other duties when his intellectual gifts were needed. He had to do what they told him to do, under the vow of Obedience. (K: And he was perfectly happy doing it?) Oh, he accepted that. He never questioned this vow, certainly not in the early days. It was only later when he wanted to be a hermit; and was reading and writing about the eremitic tradition and had a yearning for that, but that's a different story.

Question: So your feeling is that his attitude towards Gethsemani was very, very positive throughout that whole period? I mean he didn't have any reservations about being there?



Answer: No, and his wonderful sense of humor helped him. I think the Abbot was more worried about the problem of celebrity than Tom was. I remember one incident in those early days, when I used to go down every other year when I was making an editorial scouting tour. On one of those occasions, I was with him in the outer courtyard, and a visitor about to make a retreat came up to us and said, "I want to find Thomas Merton. Can you tell me where he is?" And Merton, standing next to me, said, "You mean Brother Louis?" "Yes, I think he's called Brother Louis, or perhaps Father Louis by now." Merton said, "Well, all I can tell you is he's around here someplace, but he's not supposed to see visitors." He never revealed his identity, real deadpan, and the visitor said, "Thank you very much," and went looking for Thomas Merton. So he was not about to exploit his own notoriety or celebrity. Tom was really much more sophisticated than I think Father Abbot realized.

Question: When you'd get a manuscript from Merton, would you say that generally it required a good bit of editing?

Answer: Less and less as the years went on, because he became more and more skillful. He got to be a better writer. I worried about his enormous output, but it was enormous because it was so well organized. He had many publishers. Jay Laughlin did not only his poems but also *Seeds of Contemplation*, which was a tremendous success. We were all good friends. Once when I encountered Laughlin at Gethsemani, he had a copy of Jean Genet's *Notre Dame des Fleurs*, the French edition, which amused me to find in that particular milieu. (K: Probably gave it to Merton . . . ) Of course, Merton could read French. The thing that people forget about Merton is that he was born and went to school in France, and spoke French perfectly. When the French Abbot General or French visitors would come, Tom always acted as interpreter. He was very good at other foreign languages too. Tom was an intellectual, a linguist, a highly educated man, who never ceased learning. He really learned a great deal after he went into the monastery. In my *Bowker Lecture* I report that Mark Van Doren and I thought he was going to be cut off from the world forever. Instead, he became a kind of magnet and focal point for thinking men



and women and leading intellectuals all over the world. He received letters that Boris Pasternak sent him from Russia. Dr. Suzuki in Japan, the great Zen expert, got in touch with him. He had an enormous correspondence. It was very intelligent and forward-looking of the monastery to permit that. Later on, he felt unreasonable restrictions were put upon him. He was absolutely forbidden to publish anything on nuclear warfare, and this embittered him. "Imagine, a monk writing against war—what a scandal!" was the way he put it, and he was right. He did not publish, but privately circulated, his *Cold War Letters* among his friends. At long last we can now read them.

Once in a while I got a glimmer of not dissatisfaction, but let's say monotony. Once I had brought along some phonograph records of Edith Sitwell reading the text of *Facade*, her own poems, set against William Walton's music. He couldn't play them at the monastery. I can't remember where it was, some neighbor's, some person's house, and we played them there. Tom and I had a beer, and Tom was just delighted, rolling with laughter. He loved Edith Sitwell's intonations on those records. I think this was a release for him, a break in the routine and a breath of air. But, no, he never directly expressed dissatisfaction—except his longing to be a hermit. That came out in his writing.

Comment: I think it's already clear in *The Sign of Jonas* that he was thinking about that.

Answer: Absolutely. And of course there is the story of the near suppression of *The Sign of Jonas*. You know that story. (K: Yes, I do.) I tell it in the *Bowker Lecture*. All the manuscripts to be published were first cleared by the censors, fellow monks who were appointed by the Abbot. I'm sure some of the censors were merely not his intellectual equals, and a little too prone to split hairs and nit-pick. This caused him a certain amount of pain, but he was a good sport about it. *The Sign of Jonas* had not only been cleared by the monastery and contracted for, but it was in galley proofs. The abbot went to France for a general chapter of the Cistercian Order, and he called me about a month later, on his way back, and said, "I'm sorry. We can't publish the book." When I asked why, he said, "I'm not at liberty to tell



you why." And I said, "It must have something to do with your visit to the Abbot General in France." He said, "Yes, Bob, but there's no point in going into it. We'll reimburse the publisher for all their expenses of setting the book up and so on. This matter is beyond appeal." I said, "Well, I understand the decision and realize it's out of your control. But I'd like to write a letter to Jacques Maritain." He said, "Bob, there's no point in doing anything about this."

Nevertheless, I did write Maritain at Princeton. I knew the seat of trouble was the French language and the French mentality. I guessed that some young French monk who did not read English got to the Abbot General and had him squash it on the grounds that the book was not in the tradition of the Cistercian Order. I explained all this to Maritain, who had met Merton and admired him. The distinguished philosopher and author, Jacques Maritain, wrote in elegant French that, as a fellow-Frenchman, he appealed to the Abbot General to reconsider this decision. After all, St. Bernard, the greatest of Cistercians, had published many books, including meditations and so on. That did it. I think Dom James was amazed at the turnaround. The clue was that Maritain, writing to another Frenchman in his own language, made it clear the suppression of this book would cause a scandal. Maritain's letter was a masterpiece of French rhetoric; it was also true.

Question: Did Merton send you the journal that follows *The Sign of Jonas*, which is called *A Vow of Conversation*? (RG: No.) It's in manuscript, but it's never been published.

Answer: It probably was never passed by the censors. I never saw it. But *The Sign of Jonas* was miraculously released and it was a big success. But you know, it was beginning to be clear that this maverick and artist, Thomas Merton—and you know, artists always make trouble for ordinary human beings—lived in a monastic community, with its rules and regulations, all of which he tried to follow, and outsiders, like Jacques Maritain, rescued his work from irrational and unjust decisions.

Question: Did Merton ever indicate to you any opinions about his various abbots?

Answer: No, though he did talk about Abbot Dunne, his first



abbot (K: whom he was very fond of . . . ) . . . very fond of him, and I said, "To me, you now seem a bit embarrassed about your first success, *The Seven Storey Mountain*. How did you come to write it?" "Didn't I ever tell you, Bob, Abbot Dunne *ordered* me to write it." I said, "He must have been a brilliant man—he knew you were meant to be a writer." Tom was also embarrassed about the second prose book he was ordered to write, the biography of a Trappistine nun, published in Milwaukee by the Bruce Publishing Company.

Question: Well, I had a question about whether you think it was difficult for Merton to be a monk and a writer. In some places he expresses some doubts about whether he could do both. He even published an essay about poetry and contemplation, saying perhaps he shouldn't write poetry, and later he changed his mind.

Answer: I know. No, it's always difficult to be a writer. It's also difficult to be a monk. It's difficult to be good at anything. But I think he remained truly a monk, right up to the end. He was as much a monk in Thailand in his last days, as he was in Gethsemani. Yes, it was difficult for him, but there wasn't a real dichotomy for him between the two roles. On the contrary, I think that leading the monastic life seemed to suit him, and made his creative life more productive.

Question: Do you remember if he ever indicated any special concern about life in the monastery, about his duties as teacher, or as Novice master? Did he ever talk about any of those things?

Answer: He often sent me the syllabi, or syllabuses, the reading lists he prepared for the novices. They were marvelous! He was a damned good Novice Master, and the novices who had him were lucky. He knew a great deal of the history of the Cistercian Order, as well as the other orders, and he was interested in history generally. He had a tremendous grasp of it. Once he said, "If I were a monk in France, I would be consuming wine, since it's the drink of the country and that's the rule. In the United States," he said, "I proposed to Father Abbot that we should drink beer, since it is the national drink of the whole United States." I thought it an intelligent proposal. The abbot's response was, "Why, Father Louis!



Imagine the scandal that would be created if we put hundreds of empty beer cans out for the trash-collector and our neighbors saw them!" Tom thought the monastery was a big scandal just being there. "People in Kentucky are scandalized by the fact that we exist." Yet he was not ill-natured. He was not a bad sport about it. But he realized what he was up against. He could not have beer, except when a friend turned up.

Question: Well, there are some nice stories about Merton during those final two, three, four years, where he would sneak off to Louisville, and he would have a meal or he would say a home liturgy in someone's home. I wonder if maybe he didn't have occasion from time to time to go and visit in Louisville, even earlier than those years?

Answer: I heard about that later, and I must say I sympathized with him. Of course, he occasionally broke the rules, and it was wrong. But he observed them much more than he broke them.

Comment: Well, like listening to the recording of Sitwell. (RG: Yes, that was breaking the rules.) It was finally very good that he did it.

Answer: I know. But he was proving he was only human. Monks are capable of committing sin, just like other human beings.

Question: Well, apparently, you think Merton's contact with persons outside the monastery . . . by correspondence or through visiting . . . was very valuable for him?

Answer: Absolutely.

Question: Did you ever recommend any other particular writer for him to read or do you know of any writer that he became interested in?

Answer: He had a very wide range, he was eclectic. He read everything he could get his hands on. He had read enormously before becoming a monk. He liked me to bring books, and I would usually bring things like Graham Greene's novels, or books that he wouldn't be likely to get ordinarily.

Question: I wonder if you can recall when you first talked with him about Flannery O'Connor?

Answer: I probably brought *Wise Blood*. When I published it, I either brought it down or sent it to him. I was never certain



he would get such books. But I remember after we began to publish her, he found her a very interesting writer, Flannery O'Connor. And when I went to see her in Georgia, she was interested in some of his books, especially *The Sign of Jonas*. He was slightly older than Flannery, but they seemed to be two of the most interesting Catholic intellectuals who lived in the middle of this century. It was a great privilege to know both of them.

Comment: You wrote a very nice introduction for her stories, where you tied the two together.

Answer: Yes. They were both unusual artists. Flannery had her problems. First of all she had lupus, and Regina, her mother, a marvelous woman, was running this farm, a widow, and she was keeping her daughter going. Flannery couldn't have lived anywhere else, from a medical point of view. Yet one morning Flannery's mother said—we were sitting at breakfast with Flannery—"Mr. Giroux, can't you get Flannery to write about *nice* people?" I looked at Flannery, thinking she'd wink or laugh. She was absolutely deadpan. A marvelous daughter and writer, who never confused art and life.

Question: Well, I've got a group of questions here . . . towards the end. Are there any anecdotes that don't fit any of these other categories?

Answer: I can't think of any other stories right now.

Comment: Many of the questions I've asked monks have been questions about the nature of monasticism, Merton's role, and whether or not his writings did have some specific effect upon the development of monasticism. They believed that he did indeed articulate certain needs, and clearly he did have an effect. I think that would be the majority.

Answer: There isn't any natural conflict between being an artist and intellectual and being a monk. In the old days, the men who went into the monasteries, like Erasmus, were the intellectuals. Writing and contemplation were not looked upon as contradictory vocations. You've asked me if I thought Merton had natural gifts as a writer. Yes, he had marvelous gifts, and they developed. (K: And he really developed those gifts . . . over the years, he became a more disciplined writer, and . . . ) More disciplined, deeper, a wider range, a conviction that the fruit of contemplation is



action.

Question: Well, what would you think was the most valuable aspect of his writing?

Answer: That he was a contemporary, who speaks to our day. (K: And you think it's because he is writing about himself?) Not only about himself, no. He's writing about us, about the very troubled era in which we live. This century is a horror. More people have been murdered, killed in World War I, World War II, the Holocaust, Vietnam, Korea, the Middle East than in any other century, with the nuclear arms race hanging over us for years. Merton and I were born at the beginning of the first World War. We all thought that the twentieth century was going to be the greatest, the most liberated, the most modern, the most progressive, and it has turned out to be one of the worst. He speaks to that point, and that is why he has found an audience.

Question: Do you think at the core of what he's doing, whether in poetry or prose, is the awareness of the way language is misused, the way people don't honor language?

Answer: Partly that, yes. I think illiteracy and infantilism and also the degradation of language, the Orwellian idea, are curses. (K: Merton had this great love of language. . . .) Yes, because he had a love of thinking. They're absolutely the same thing. Walker Percy has written brilliantly about this whole subject.

Question: Will Percy's book of new essays get published soon?

Answer: We published *The Message in the Bottle*, you know, which is about semiotics, and he is now writing *Lost in the Cosmos*. Man's uniqueness is that he speaks. Merton's idea about language was that if your language is debased and unclear, your thinking is. They are reflections of each other. The more clearly you think, the better you write; the better you express yourself, the more lucid you are. There's an absolute connection. Orwell was absolutely right about it—Newspeak, and phony language, and the treachery of language. It's used for propaganda and lies, advertising, commercializing, debasement.

Comment: Yes, Merton has a poem about this. I think it's entitled "Sincerity" . . . about how you don't have to worry about the liar; it's the one who has deceived himself and doesn't



even consider himself a liar. . . . He's the one that you really have to worry about.

Answer: I'll tell you one thing Merton was concerned about—the commercial aspects of work at the monastery. . . . (K: Right, right.) This disturbed him, for a good reason. He thought that it was against the tradition of the monastic order. They were there to pray, to meditate, to oppose commercialism. To work and make cheese and fruit cake, that's fine, but to *advertise* it!

Comment: Well, that's still a worry. Many of the monks are still concerned about that.

Answer: Right. Well, Merton was very consistent. The reason he has a growing audience is that he was a good thinker. In this age in which we live, his merits become clearer and clearer. And I think people will look back at him as a very significant figure in our time.

Question: Would you want to say one final thing about what you feel is the most important thing to be remembered about Merton? Does one thing come to mind?

Answer: Only that he spoke up. He spoke for the forces of the spirit and against materialism. He spoke up on behalf of what is best in mankind, in one of our worst ages. The non-violent alternative was to him extremely important in our age of violence, drugs, and death. Some protest had to be made by someone, to oppose all the garbage being thrown at us. It was his point that you oppose all the repression, all the hatred, all the violence, all the war, all the nuclear armaments, with non-violence. You oppose it with thought—and with the word. That is his greatest contribution.