

Radiant Darkness: The Dawning into Reality

CHRISTINE M. BOCHEN

THE TITLE FOR MY TALK, “Radiant Darkness’: Dawning into Reality,” is inspired, as is the theme of this meeting, by Thomas Merton’s *Day of a Stranger*. *Day of a Stranger* offers readers insight into Thomas Merton—as a contemplative, social critic, and poet who, in the radiant darkness of contemplation, awakens to the light of Reality. Merton wrote *Day of a Stranger* in response to an invitation from Ludovico Silva, a South American editor who was thinking of doing a book on a day in the life of poets. As was often the case with Merton’s articles and essays, *Day of a Stranger* underwent several revisions and expansions. On the cover page of the third draft, Merton hand wrote the note:

These pages were written in answer to a request from a South American editor to describe a ‘typical day’ in my life. The day was sometime in May 1965. Since then this has been rewritten & slightly amplified.

Before discussing the final version, published in the United States, I want to set the “typical day” which Merton describes in *Day of a Stranger* in the context of Merton’s days in May, 1965.

May 1965: A View from Merton’s Journal

For years Merton had longed for the solitude of the hermitage, glorying in those all-too-brief interludes when he was able to retreat to the woodshed, which he affectionately named St. Anne’s, or disappear, for a few hours, into the nearby woods. In August 1965, Merton would begin living full time in the hermitage. But this was May, and he was moving back and forth between the hermitage and the monastery, spending as much time as he was able in the hermitage. He was still expected to be present at the monastery for liturgy, for

conferences he was giving to the novices, and for a meal with the community. Nevertheless, Merton was relishing his newly found freedom. Life in the hermitage was full of joy for him, but he soon learned that living alone was not free of demands. Merton found that the tasks of housekeeping and food preparation could be burdensome on occasion and he even complained about the effort that living alone required. For example, in January 1965, on the vigil of his fiftieth birthday, he interrupted more serious reflections with the observation that “work takes up so much time and there can be so much. Just keeping the place clean is already a big task. Then there is the wood to be chopped.” I must admit that there is a part of me that took great delight in Merton’s observations on the joys of housekeeping! In the years to come, he would discover that living in solitude could entail more serious hardships and challenges. But, in May 1965, we find Merton celebrating the blessings afforded by his solitary life and deeply grateful that he was able to spend much of his day in the hermitage.

Merton’s journal entries for May – there are ten in all – allow us to glimpse what his life was like and, as might be expected, to preview themes that surface in *Day of a Stranger*.¹ In the first entry, we note Merton’s close attention to his natural environment. On May 1, 1965, Merton writes:

Perfectly beautiful spring weather – sky utterly cloudless all day – birds singing all around the hermitage—deep green grass. When I am here, all the time towhees and tanagers are at peace, not worried, and with their constant singing I always know where they are. It is a wonderful companionship to have them constantly within the very small circle of woods which is their area and mine—where they have their nests and I have mine. Sometimes the woodthrush comes, but only on special occasions like the evening of St Robert’s day. Last evening I interrupted my meditation to watch a half a dozen savannah sparrows outside my bedroom.²

This journal entry, like countless others, invites us into Merton’s world as he evokes a sense of the place in which he lives. But his journal entries also record what he is writing, reading and doing.

Early in May 1965, Merton finishes the first draft of an essay called ‘Contemplation and Ecumenism.’ He reports that he is working on Chuang Tzu, and by month’s end, he has finished his renderings of Chuang Tzu and is “exhilarated by the effect of all of them.”³ He is

pleased to receive a Catalan translation of *Black Revolution*—which has already appeared in French, English and German.⁴

Laid low by a “bug,” Merton spends a couple days in the infirmary reading Martin Ling’s *Ancient Beliefs and Modern Superstitions*, “a good chunk” of Volume I of De Lubac’s *Exégèse médiévale*, and Herbert Read’s *Green Child*. Of these, he notes that De Lubac was “the most exciting.”⁵ Later in the month, he notes that he has finished De Lubac’s book and has “a good little book on Camus.” When he recovers from the “bug,” he has visitors, including Jay Laughlin with whom he goes to see Victor Hammer; a priest and an architect working on the design of a new Poor Clare Monastery in Chicago who came to Gethsemani seeking Merton’s advice; Sister Mary Luke Tobin, a Loretto sister and one of two women observers appointed to the Second Vatican Council, with whom he discusses the revised Schema of Religious; Dom Philip, a Benedictine Prior from California, from whom Merton hears about monasticism in Africa. Merton is anticipating visits from Zalman Schachter, Dan Berrigan and Jim Douglass. During the month he also wrote twenty-one letters to correspondents—among them D.T. Suzuki, Etta Gullick, Ernesto Cardenal, Jim Forest, Pope Paul VI, Daniel Berrigan, James Douglas, A. M. Allchin, and Clayton Eshleman.

But Merton’s hours were not all filled with activity. As was his practice, he spent many hours in silence and prayer. Words of scripture – he was reading *Ecclesiasticus* in the Latin Septuagint – speak to his heart. Reading “The Lord has plucked up proud men by their roots, and planted the lowly in their place,” (Ecc. 10:18 [15]), Merton thinks

If I were more fully attentive to the word of God I would be much less troubled and disturbed by the events of our time: not that I would be indifferent or passive, but I could gain the strength of union with the deepest currents in history, the sacred currents which run opposite to those on the surface a great deal of the time!⁶

He feels the need for “‘attention’ and ‘listening,’ for I have come to the most serious moments of my life.”⁷ And he experiences moments of deep peace:

one lovely dawn after another. Such peace! Meditation with fireflies, mist in the valley, last quarter of the moon, distant owls—gradual inner awakening and centering in peace and harmony of love and gratitude.⁸

But there is no peace in the world. Merton hears rumors that President Johnson is claiming to have discovered Communist missile

bases in Santo Domingo and is sending in the Marines. He is disturbed by an article on ‘Escalation’ by Herbert Kahn, which Merton thinks is full of “technological doubletalk” that ignores the fact that people, millions of people, could die in a nuclear event. Kahn “explicitly treats various ‘reasonable’ ways in which all kinds of ‘conventional’ acts of war and harassment, and also nuclear weapons, can and may be used ‘for bargaining’” and speaks of “‘slow motion counter property war,’ ‘constrained force reduction salvo,’ ‘constrained disarming attack,’ then of course ‘slow motion countercity war’ in which the game becomes ‘city trading’ – a nice ‘test of nerves’” – all “‘practicable’” as long as it is “‘controlled.’”⁹ And Merton remarks

the word *control* will be enough to convince a number of Catholic theologians and bishops that this is a perfectly legitimate application of double effect. The moral theology of hell!! What bastards!¹⁰

On May 22, 1965, he writes,

Grey dawn. A blood red sun, furious among the pines (it will soon be hidden in clouds). That darn black hound is baying in the hollow after some rabbit he will never catch. Deep grass in the field, dark green English woods (for we have had good rains). The bombing goes on in Viet Nam. The whole thinking of this country is awry on war: basic conviction that force is the only thing that is effective.¹¹

The natural landscape with its greyness, blood red sun, and baying hound mirrors a disturbed national psyche. Still his solitude is full of promise:

Whole day at the hermitage. I have come to see that only these days in solitude are really full and ‘whole’ for me. The others are partly wasted.

All of this tells us something about what Merton’s life was like in May 1965—not simply by reporting what he was doing and thinking but by drawing attention to the mix of silence and activity which reveals both Merton’s desire for solitude and his engagement in the world. This was the context in which Merton wrote the first two versions of *Day of a Stranger*. Later when he was living full time in the hermitage, Merton revised and expanded what he had written in May 1965.

Day of a Stranger

Three versions of *Day of a Stranger* have been published. The first version, Merton’s, original draft, was only four pages long. It has

been published in *Dancing in the Water of Life*, Volume 5 of Thomas Merton's journals.¹² Merton sent the second version, revised and expanded to eight and one-half pages, to Ludovico Silva. Merton had written and rewritten the piece quickly: Silva enthusiastically acknowledged receipt of 'Day of a Stranger' in a letter dated June 2, 1965. Silva's wife, Rosita, translated the piece into Spanish. Although the book on days in the lives of poets which Silva had planned never came to be – Merton was the only poet who responded – 'Dia de un Extraño' was published in Caracas, in the first issue (July-August-September 1966) of a literary magazine entitled *Papeles*.¹³ Merton reworked the text of 'Day of a Stranger,' which he had sent to Latin America, to produce a revised and expanded third version of 'Day of a Stranger.'¹⁴ The final eleven-page typescript of 'Day of a Stranger,' as it was published in the USA differs only slightly from the third version.¹⁵ 'Day of a Stranger' was accepted for publication in the *Hudson Review* on December 14, 1966 and appeared in the Summer 1967 issue of the magazine. In 1981, Robert E. Daggy published *Day of a Stranger* as a handsome, small book with a selection of Merton's photographs and a fine introduction.¹⁶

Speaking to a Latin American Audience

Merton opens the first draft with lines which he retains through all the revisions: "The hills are blue and hot. There is a brown, dusty field in the bottom of the valley. I hear a machine, a bird, a clock. The clouds are high and enormous."¹⁷ Looking up he sees a jet probably on its way from Chicago to Miami and recalls that he has also seen "the plane with the bomb in it" flying over him.¹⁸ "Like everyone else I live under the bomb. But unlike most people I live in the woods."¹⁹ Merton goes on to describe the mental ecology – "a mental balance of spirits" – in his corner of the woods, contrasting it with the non-ecology or unbalance of the world around him. This is a passage Robert E. Daggy had in mind when he characterized Merton's first draft as "short, terse, angry."²⁰ The passage, which Merton deleted when he revised the piece, reveals Merton's intense frustration with American society as well as his strong identification with Latin America. Merton writes:

there is the non-ecology, the destructive unbalance of nature, poisoned and unsettled by bombs, by fallout, by exploitation: the land ruined, the waters contaminated, the soil charged with chemicals, ravaged with machinery, the houses of farmers falling apart because everybody goes to the city and stays there... There is no poverty so great as that of the prosperous, no wretchedness so dismal as affluence. Wealth is poison. There is no misery to compare with that which exists where technology has been a total success. I know that these are hard sayings, and that they are unbearable when they are said in other countries where so many lack everything. But do you imagine that if you become prosperous as the United States you will no longer have needs? Here the needs are even greater. Full bellies have not brought peace and satisfaction but dementia, and in any case not all bellies are full either. But the dementia is the same for all.²¹

In another passage, Merton reports that as he goes down into the valley and sees the field where the monks are planting corn, he is deeply moved:

After dawn I go down into the valley, first under the pines, then under tall oaks, then down a sharp incline, past an old barn, out into the field where they are now planting corn. Later in the summer the corn will be tall and sacred and the wind will whisper through the thousands of leaves and stalks as if all the spirits of the Maya were there. I weep in the corn for what was done in past ages, in the carnage that brought America the dignity of having a 'history.' I live alone with blood of the Indians on my head.²²

Looking back into the past and aware of the present, Merton sees a nation intent upon ruin and destruction; blind to reality; powerful and immoral—a nation in which he is a stranger.

Soon I will cut bread, eat supper, say psalms, sit in the back room as the sun sets, as the birds sing outside the window, as silence descends on the valley, as night descends. As night descends on a nation intent upon ruin, upon destruction, blind, deaf to protest, crafty, powerful, unintelligent. It is necessary to be alone, to be not part of this, to be in the exile of silence, to be in a manner of speaking a political prisoner. No matter where in the world he may be, no matter what may be his power of protest, or his means of expression, the poet finds himself ultimately where I am. Alone, silent, with the obligation of being very careful not to say what he does not mean, not to let himself be persuaded to say merely what another wants him to say, not to say, what his own past work has led others to expect him to say. The poet has to be free from everyone else, and first of all from himself, because it is through this "self" that he is captured by others.

Freedom is found under the dark tree that springs up in the center of night and of silence, the paradise tree, the axis mundi, which is also the Cross.²³

As monk and poet, he is a stranger.

'Day of a Stranger' is not the first piece Merton wrote for a Latin American audience. In 1961, he wrote 'A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants' in which he decried the abominable behavior of the superpowers – the United States and the Soviet Union – who flagrantly abuse their power—economic in the case of the USA, and political in the case of the USSR. In letters to his numerous Latin American correspondents, Merton spoke often and eloquently of his sense of kinship with Latin American writers and his strong sense of identification with Latin American people. He was hopeful that writers and poets – who speak the truth – would be a force for life in Latin America and that Latin America will be the hope of the world.²⁴ Merton's preface to the Spanish translation of *The Complete Works of Thomas Merton*, written in 1958 and published in *Honorable Reader*, echoes these sentiments.²⁵

As he revised the first draft, Merton tempered his anger and softened his tone. Robert E. Daggy observed that Merton "became less concerned with conveying his message of danger and destruction and more concerned with relating the messages he received during the day—much the same message, of course, but the mood shifts."²⁶ One passage, which Merton deleted from the version of 'Day of a Stranger' published in Latin America as he expanded the piece for publication in America, elaborates on his identity as a stranger. Following the statement – "I live in the woods as a reminder that I am free not to be a number. There is, in fact, a choice." – Merton had written:

I do not intend to belong to the world of squares that is constituted by the abdication of choice; or be the fraudulent choice (the mass-roar in the public square or the assent to the televised grimace).

I do not intend to be citizen number 152037. I do not consent to be poet number 2291. I do not recognize myself as the classified anti-social and subversive element that I probably am in the file of a department in a department. Perhaps I have been ingested by an IBM machine in Washington, but they cannot digest me. I am indigestible: a priest who cannot be swallowed, a monk notoriously discussed as one of the problems of the contemporary Church by earnest seminarists, wearing bright spectacles in Rome.

I have not chosen to be acceptable. I have not chosen to be unacceptable. I have nothing personal to do with the present indigestion of officials, of critics, of clerics, of housewives, of amateur sociologists. It is their indigestion. I offer them no advice.²⁷

Citizen, poet, monk, priest—Merton is the alien, the stranger, the marginal person.

'Day of a Stranger,' revised and expanded for publication in Latin America and once again for publication in the United States, becomes subtler and more effective as Merton's spiritual vision informs the text in a more explicit way.

Day of a Stranger: Merton's Spiritual Vision

Merton had been invited to write about a day in the life of a poet. He did that and more as he revealed himself as poet and monk – and a special kind of monk at that – a hermit, living alone in the woods. *Day of a Stranger* not only succeeds in portraying "a day" in Merton's life but also in drawing a richly nuanced portrait of Merton in his simplicity and complexity. *Day of a Stranger* allows us to glimpse something of the many facets of Merton's life and of his many interests. All the themes that define Merton's life and writing in the mid- and late sixties are evident in *Day of a Stranger*, where we encounter the contemplative, the social critic, and the poet. Merton's incisive critique of contemporary culture, his passion for peace, his sense of rootedness in the world of nature, his company of intellectual and spiritual soul mates – all are in evidence in *Day of a Stranger* – all rooted in his contemplative spirituality. Merton's contemplative vision frames and grounds *Day of a Stranger* just as his contemplative spirituality framed and grounded his life.

At the center of *Day of a Stranger* is a passage that expresses Merton's contemplative practice and provides a glimpse of the vision that flows from contemplation. In this passage, Merton describes how he rises in the darkness of night to pray the psalms of the Liturgy of the Hours and rest in the silence of night. Light breaks in: first, the candlelight; then, the light of truth spoken in psalms; finally, in silence, God's word of mercy – great mercy – a word which cleanses Merton, purifies him, and makes him whole. The silence of the night is broken by words of prayer and the words heard in prayer draw him into a deeper silence. So it is that the darkness of night becomes

radiant with light. Once more Reality dawns and, in its radiant light, Merton sees through illusion.

I am out of bed at two-fifteen in the morning when the night is darkest and most silent...I find myself in the primordial lostness of night, solitude, forest, peace, a mind awake in the dark, looking for a light, not totally reconciled to being out of bed. A light appears, and in the light an icon. There is now in the large darkness a small room of radiance with psalms in it. The psalms grow up silently by themselves without effort like plants in this light which is favorable to them. The plants hold themselves up on stems which have a single consistency, that of mercy, or rather great mercy. *Magna misericordia*. In the formlessness of night and silence a word then pronounces itself: Mercy. It is surrounded by other words of lesser consequence: "destroy iniquity" "wash me" "purify" "I know my iniquity." *Peccavi*. Concepts without interest in the world of business, war, politics, culture, etc. Concepts also often without interest to ecclesiastics.

Other words: Blood. Guile. Anger. The way that is not good. The way of blood, guile, anger, war.

Out there the hills in the dark lie southward. The way over the hills is blood, guile, dark, anger, death, Selma, Birmingham, Mississippi. Nearer than these, the atomic city, from which each day a freight car of fissionable material is brought to be laid carefully beside the gold in the underground vault which is at the heart of this nation.

"Their mouth is the opening of the grave; their tongues are set in motion by lies; their heart is void."

Blood, lies, fire, hate, the opening of the grave, void. Mercy, great mercy.²⁸

And then Merton adds.

The birds begin to wake. It will soon be dawn. In an hour or two the towns will wake, and men will enjoy everywhere the great luminous smiles of production and business.²⁹

In this passage, Merton describes how he prays in the middle of the night—with words and without them. In darkness radiant with light, he sees, with striking clarity, the Reality within and, in the light of the interior vision, he recognizes what others cannot. Observing what is happening in Selma and Birmingham, in Mississippi and in Vietnam, Merton speaks a prophetic word—naming the way of death for what it is and contrasting it with the way of mercy. "Blood, lies, fire, hate, the opening of the grave, void.

Mercy, great mercy."³⁰ "Mercy, great mercy" is at once a prayer in the face of darkness and a promise of forgiveness and life.

Day of a Stranger is full of contrasts: darkness and light, light breaking into the darkness. *Day of a Stranger* portrays contrasting worlds: Merton's world, with its ecology, interdependence, balance, harmony, is contrasted with the world beyond the hermitage—a world that intrudes with its sounds of jets and the Strategic Air Command plane with the bomb in it. While Merton knows the precise pairs of birds with whom he shares the woods, the metal bird with a scientific egg in its breast, threatening death, flies overhead. Balance and unbalance!

Mindful of the critters with whom he shares the woods, Merton recognizes the natural ecology in which he has a place. But Merton is also aware of the people who are present with him in his solitude constituting "a mental ecology...a living balance of spirits in this corner of the woods" where there is room "for many other songs besides those of the birds." Mindful of their presence Merton invokes their names—as in a litany of praise gathering in the writers who are so much a part of his own spirit and who are for him a life-giving community.

Of Vallejo, for instance. Or Rilke, or René Char, Montale and Zukofsky, Ungaretti, Edwin Muir and Quasimondo or some Greeks. Or the dry, disconcerting voice of Nicanor Parra, the poet of the sneeze. Here also is Chuang Tzu whose climate is perhaps most the climate of this silent corner of the woods. A climate in which there is not need for explanation. Here is the reassuring companionship of many silent Tzu's and Fu's; Kung Tzu, Lao Tzu, Meng Tzu, Tu Fu. And Hui Neng. And Chao-Chu. And the drawings of Sengai. And a big graceful scroll from Suzuki. Here also is a Syrian hermit called Philoxenus. An Algerian cenobite called Camus. Here is the challenging prose of Tertullian, with the dry catarrh of Sartre. Here the voluble dissonances of Auden, with the golden sounds of John of Salisbury. Here is the deep vegetation of that more ancient forest in which the angry birds, Isaias and Jeremias, sing. Here should be, and are, feminine voices from Angela of Foligno to Flannery O'Connor, Theresa of Avila, Juliana of Norwich, and, more personally and warmly still, Raïssa Maritain. It is good to choose the voices that will be heard in these woods, but they also choose themselves, and send themselves to be present in this silence. In any case, there is no lack of voices.³¹

The voices of men and women that fill his space are real for Merton. He hears them as voices present in the silence. Together, they form a community that Merton experiences in solitude.

Merton's solitude is radical. He is committed to a celibate life. With wry humor, Merton observes that

All monks, as is well known, are unmarried and hermits more unmarried than the rest of them. Not that I have anything against women...One might say I had decided to marry the silence of the forest. The sweet dark warmth of the whole world will have to be my wife. Out of the heart of that dark warmth comes the secret that is only heard in silence, but it is the root of all the secrets that are whispered by all the lovers in their beds all over the world. So perhaps I have an obligation to preserve the stillness, the silence, the poverty, the virginal point of pure nothingness which is at the center of all other loves. I attempt to cultivate this plant without comment in the middle of the night and water it with psalms and prophecies in silence.³²

In stillness, silence and solitude, he encounters the Reality which is at the Center. Although this encounter with the divine Reality in darkness is at the center of his apophatic spirituality, it important to note that Merton awakens to the sacred in the midst of the ordinary. The ordinary things of this world have a place in Merton's spirituality.

It is necessary for me to see the first point of light which begins to be dawn. It is necessary to be present alone at the resurrection of Day, in the blank silence when the sun appears. In this completely neutral instant I receive from the Eastern woods, the tall oaks, the one word "day," which is never the same. It is never spoken in any known language.³³

It is necessary to have a sense of place and a sense of time. It is necessary to be present to the day and attentive to the day's simple rituals—rituals that range from washing the coffeepot to addressing the king snake that has taken up residence in the outhouse. "Are you there, you bastard?" Merton asks. He sprays the bedroom. He closes all the windows on the south side, remembering to open those on the north side. He gets the water bottle, the rosary, and the watch. And when it is "time to visit the human race"³⁴ he walks to the monastery, noticing what he sees along the way and realizing that he has duties and obligations to perform there. Then, during the chanting of the Divine Office, as the monks chant the alleluia, he suddenly hears "only the one note. *Consonantia*: all notes, in their perfect distinctness, are yet blended into one."³⁵

Later, in the afternoon, he returns to that one note:

I sit in the cool back room, where words cease to resound, where all meanings are absorbed in the *consonantia* of heat, fragrant pine, quiet

wind, bird song and one central tonic note that is unheard and unuttered. This is no longer a time of obligations. In the silence of the afternoon all is present and all is inscrutable in one central tonic note to which every other sound ascends or descends, to which every other meaning aspires, in order to find its true fulfillment. To ask when the note will sound is to lose the afternoon: it has already sounded, and all things now hum with the resonance of its sounding.³⁶

Hearing the one note—which is unheard and unuttered, Merton is aware, present and awake. The "one note" that sounds in *consonantia* is an encounter with Reality. On May 23, 1965, Merton noted in his journal that he had responded to a letter from a man at McGill University "who thought all contemplation was a manifestation of narcissistic regression!" But Merton wrote, "That is just what it is not." Rather, contemplation is

A complete awakening of identity and of rapport! It implies an awareness, an acceptance of one's place in the whole. First the whole of creation, then the whole plan of Redemption—to find oneself in the great mystery of fulfillment which is the Mystery of Christ. *Consonantia* [harmony] and not *confusio* [confusion].³⁷

In the solitude of the hermitage, Merton glimpses that wholeness and harmony that informs all reality. Then he returns to his daily tasks—sweeping, cutting grass, writing, making the bed, and eating supper. Once again he prays the psalms. As night descends,

I become surrounded once again by all the silent Tzu's and Fu's (men without office and without obligation). The birds draw closer to their nests. I sit on the cool straw mat on the floor, considering the bed in which I will presently sleep alone under the ikon of the Nativity.

Meanwhile, the metal cherub of apocalypse passes over me in the clouds, treasuring its egg and its message.³⁸

So ends the *Day of a Stranger*.

Dawning into Reality

In *Day of a Stranger*, Merton draws us into his world and, in so doing, he teaches us how to live in our world. He calls us to enter into the radiant darkness and to let Reality dawn within us and within our world. He invites us to recognize the stranger beside us and the stranger within us. He calls us to awaken with him, to become minds "awake in the dark" through prayer and contemplation and solitude and silence.

He invites us to see things for what they are, to use language honestly honoring true meaning, to resist social manipulation, to live in harmony with nature and work to restore the ecological balance. He calls us to nurture a sense of place, a sense of time, a sense of connection, a sense of the present, a sense of mercy, a sense of hidden wholeness and harmony. He calls us to embrace reality. To do so, we must shed illusions about the world and, most of all, about ourselves, as Merton did. In the radiant darkness, he came to see himself as he was. In 1963, he wrote these words of comfort to his dying friend Jacques Maritain:

Dear Jacques, you are going on your journey to God. And perhaps I am too, though I suppose my eagerness to go is pretty wishful thinking for there is yet work to be done in my own life. There are great illusions to be gotten rid of and there is a false self that has to be taken off if it can be done. There is still much to change before I will really be living in the truth and in nothingness and in humility without any self-concern.³⁹

Less than two years later, on the vigil of his fiftieth birthday Merton wrote again about his need to be free:

What I find most in my whole life is illusion. Wanting to be something of which I had formed a concept. I hope I will get free of that now, because that is going to be the struggle. And yet I have to be something that I ought to be—I have to meet a certain demand for order and inner light and tranquility.⁴⁰

Yes, there were illusions in Merton's life as there are in ours. But there was a fundamental truth to his life because he knew the Truth. He came to know Truth as he awakened to radiant darkness and in that darkness to Reality.

Notes and References

1. Merton wrote in his journal on May 1, 10, 11, 15, 20, 22, 23, 25, 28, and 30. See *Dancing in the Water of Life*, ed. by Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).
2. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 245.
3. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 252. Merton's Chuang Tzu poems were published as *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (New York: New Directions, 1965).
4. Several of Merton's essays were published in May 1965 including "Rain and the Rhinoceros."
5. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 246.
6. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 248.

7. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 248.
8. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 250.
9. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 245.
10. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 245-246.
11. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 249.
12. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 239-242.
13. "Dia de un Extraño," *Papeles 1* (July-August-September 1966), 41-45. Unpublished letters from Ludovico Silva to Thomas Merton, dated May 26, 1966 and June 2, 1966 establish the circumstances of publication. Merton's letters to Silva appear in *The Courage for Truth*, ed. by Christine M. Bochen (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993), 223-232. I am grateful to Ginny Bear for her translation of the Silva letters.
14. This third version with Merton's handwritten and typed corrections and insertions is housed in the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky.
15. Several paragraphs, which Merton retained from version two and several lines he added to version three, were deleted from this final version. This typescript is also housed at the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky.
16. *Day of a Stranger* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith/A Peregrine Book, 1981), 63 pages. "Day of A Stranger," the third and final version, has been reprinted in *Thomas Merton Spiritual Master*, ed. Lawrence Cunningham (New York: Paulist, 1992).
17. First draft of "Day of a Stranger," *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 239.
18. First draft of "Day of a Stranger," *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 239.
19. First draft of "Day of a Stranger," *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 239.
20. Robert E. Daggy, Introduction to *Day of a Stranger*, 17.
21. First draft of "Day of a Stranger," *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 240.
22. First draft of "Day of a Stranger," *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 241.
23. Second draft of "Day of a Stranger." Typescript in the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University. Cited by Robert E. Daggy in Introduction to *Day of a Stranger*, 18-19.
24. For Merton's letters to Ernesto Cardenal and a host of other Latin American writers and poets, see *The Courage for Truth*.
25. Thomas Merton, "Preface to the Argentine Edition of *The Complete Works of Thomas Merton*," "Honorable Reader": Reflections on My Work, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 35-44.
26. *Day of a Stranger*, 19.
27. Second draft of "Day of a Stranger." Typescript in the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University. Cited by Robert E. Daggy in Introduction to *Day of a Stranger*, 20.
28. *Day of a Stranger*, 43-45.
29. *Day of a Stranger*, 45.
30. *Day of a Stranger*, 45.
31. *Day of a Stranger*, 35-37.
32. *Day of a Stranger*, 49. Merton speaks of this "virginal point of pure nothingness as "le point vierge." For example, see Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 158.
33. *Day of a Stranger*, 51.

34. *Day of a Stranger*, 53.
35. *Day of a Stranger*, 59.
36. *Day of a Stranger*, 61,
37. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 250.
38. *Day of a Stranger*, 63.
39. *The Courage for Truth*, 39.
40. *Dancing in the Water of Life*, 198.