

# Protesting War Through Poetry: Thomas Merton & Emily Dickinson

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## Introduction

A year before Merton's untimely death in 1968, Mario Falsina wrote to him seeking advice with writing her thesis. In his reply Merton includes a list of 'European and American thinkers who have influenced me'. He specifically names five Americans, one of whom is Emily Dickinson.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, in a letter of 1959 to Bob Lax, a fellow poet and former Columbia University classmate, he wrote more playfully: 'I am having a mystical flirtation with Emily Dickinson.'<sup>2</sup>

About the same time, Merton made his most widely known statement about Dickinson in an introductory footnote to his essay 'Notes For a philosophy of Solitude'. There he said that the solitary life is not the exclusive domain of monks but can be shared by lay persons too, like David Thoreau and Emily Dickinson.<sup>3</sup>

A journal entry from 1949 indicates that Merton was looking forward to reading Sister Mary James Power's book entitled *In the Name of the Bee: The Significance of Emily Dickinson*.<sup>4</sup> Years later in a letter to editor Robert Giroux, he expressed enjoyment in reading Dickinson's poetry in an anthology of poetry. He states, 'I am already greatly enjoying the anthology ... glad to have so much Emily Dickinson', which evidently marks a significant engagement with Dickinson since reading *In the Name of the Bee*.<sup>5</sup>

Through these few references and especially with his reading of the Power's book, one might conclude that Merton may have identified Dickinson as a fellow solitary enjoying the fruits of contemplation. Although Dickinson's vacillating belief in God did not parallel Merton's contemplative prayer life, the two were not unlikely partners of protest.

In this paper I focus on their shared protest against war, which were similar in kind but different in degree.

### The Merton-Dickinson Kinship

Ironically, one of the very few commentaries by Merton on Dickinson's poetry was a poem that he interpreted as a protest poem. In his remarks to the novices regarding the poem, 'I taste a liquor never brewed',<sup>6</sup> Merton contends:

In Emily Dickinson, the important thing to realize in her is this basic, fundamental protest against puritanical society, but a protest not of a beatnik type. It's a spiritual protest of a higher type. So the thing that is important in Emily Dickinson is actually the spiritual protest. Well, come on, spell it out – what is the spiritual protest that's here against puritanical society implied in this poem?<sup>7</sup>

Merton then questions the novices about the protest. They respond with various comments and after an exchange about drunken seraphs in the poem, Merton explains that:

[The] spiritual statement that's implied in this, you see ... is this idea that I am living in a puritanical society – it's for the birds, it's useless. With all of their rigidity and so forth they don't realize that the way to get to heaven is by happiness, by love, and by joy, and so forth and so forth. So as I say, for the importance of this poem, however, you have to be able to conceive who the author is to get it.<sup>8</sup>

Merton, indeed, had found kinship with Dickinson through her poetry and, especially, her protest poetry. Richard Sewall, for 40 years professor of English at Yale University, concurs that her whole career was a continual rebellion against her puritanical heritage and society: "I do not respect 'doctrines'", she said at one point, and especially (she made clear) the Puritan doctrine of innate sin.<sup>9</sup>

When Dickinson departed from the local Congregational Church she penned these well-known poetic words:

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church –  
I keep it, staying at Home –

With a Bobolink for a Chorister –  
And an Orchard, for a Dome –<sup>10</sup>

Dickinson not only rejected the doctrine of original sin, but she had a stormy relationship with a God who seemed indifferent to suffering and death. Even 'if suffering did not preclude God's existence', questions arose in the poet's mind about 'what *kind* of God he is' and how could she relate to him. Dickinson's ambivalent and combative relationship with God, the Father, was not extended to Jesus, the Son, who suffered a cruel execution, but even he seemed to Dickinson, at times, as remote and unresponsive as God the Father.<sup>11</sup>

Dickinson's vacillating religious views are not unrelated to her Civil War poetry. To underscore Dickinson's ambivalence toward God, I quote a line from a letter that she drafted to judge Otis Phillips Lord: '[We] both believe and disbelieve a hundred times an Hour, which keeps Believing nimble.' Expanding on this idea James McIntosh asserts that 'believing for intense moments in a spiritual life without permanently subscribing to any received system of belief, is a key experience, an obsessive subject, and a stimulus to expression for Dickinson.'<sup>12</sup>

### Dickinson, Theodicy and War

Religion is a paradigm through which Dickinson interpreted the war. It is a failed paradigm but she does not completely discard it.<sup>13</sup> However, unlike her contemporaries, Dickinson pushed back the impulse to defend the suffering and anguish of the war in terms of 'metaphysical justification'.<sup>14</sup> Dickinson questioned the problem of death as having redemptive value. For her, '[the] war broadened the problem of theodicy beyond the question of consolation for personal sorrow to embrace the whole order of existence.'<sup>15</sup>

Dickinson was constantly searching for some purpose or justification for suffering and anguish, thereby 'giving it place and hence significance'.<sup>16</sup> Shira Wolosky comments that '[death] challenged theodicy, but also made it more compelling. Without redemptive love, Dickinson's universe threatened to collapse into an inexplicable and cruel chaos.'<sup>17</sup>

Dickinson's 'Believing nimble' and scepticism about the redemptive value of suffering and death is a key to understanding some of her poems written during the Civil War (1861-1865), identified by some scholars as poems directly related to the war. For Wolosky:

The first striking feature of [the] war poems is the fundamental and commanding place they give to the problem of theodicy. Dickinson's war poems are persistently structured around the problem of justifying evil or suffering, or rather, of justifying, a God who permits, at the very least, so much evil and suffering to pervade his world. The war seemed to her an agony of suffering and love.<sup>18</sup>

Isolated from her immediate neighbors and family by a self-imposed seclusion in her home in Amherst, Massachusetts, Dickinson was seemingly detached from the Civil War. But she had ready access to many newspapers and publications that came into her home. Her father, Edward, was a Civil War Union activist and he gave a stirring patriotic war speech at Amherst College. She was also aware of her brother Austin's payment of \$500 to purchase a stand-in to go in his place to the war.

While there are at least eight references to the Civil War peppered throughout Dickinson's correspondence and some of her elegiac poems can be linked to this correspondence<sup>19</sup> scholars disagree about whether they are explicit references to the war or implicit, metaphorical expressions of an anguish over the war as it related to her inner strife and turmoil.

Helen Vendler maintains that Dickinson wrote few specific war poems because she was committed 'to absolute authenticity of expression' which prevented her from penning the voice of the combatants. However, the voice of a citizen 'or of collective citizenry' was available which gave rise to the poem 'It feels a shame to be Alive' which I will present later in this paper.<sup>20</sup>

Contrary to Vendler's view, Thomas Ford, Leigh-Anne Urbanowicz Marcellin, Karen Dandurand and Shira Wolosky contend that Dickinson's poetry clearly reflects the militant imagery of the Civil War.<sup>21</sup> Wolosky, in both her early and later work, contextualizes Dickinson's war poetry within the poet's metaphysical uncertainties as discussed above.

I conjecture that when Dickinson read in the *Springfield Republican* about the Battle of Antietam which took place on September 17, 1862, her 'Believing nimble' was sorely challenged. More Americans died in that battle than any other single day in our nation's history.

Indeed, about the same time, in the Fall of 1862, she wrote the poem, 'The Name of it is Autumn' which has been interpreted by Tyler B. Hoffman<sup>22</sup> not as a nature poem, but as a response by the poet to the

horror of the bloodshed at Antietam:

The name – of it – is 'Autumn' –  
The hue – of it – is Blood –  
An Artery – upon the Hill –  
A Vein – along the Road –

Great Globules – in the Alleys –  
And Oh, the Shower of Stain –  
When Winds – upset the Basin –  
And spill the Scarlet Rain –

It sprinkles Bonnets – far below –  
It gathers ruddy Pools –  
Then – eddies like a Rose – away –  
Upon Vermilion Wheels –<sup>23</sup>

David Cody states that Hoffman may be the first person to connect this poem to the Civil War and the word 'Autumn' is an 'attempt to trope the linguistic contours of the name "Antietam"'<sup>24</sup> The imagery of the blood, arteries and veins represent the carriers of blood which spill 'the scarlet rain'.<sup>25</sup>

According to Tyler Hoffman, Dickinson describes a disemboweled landscape:

The violence [of the battle] is so intense... that [Dickinson's] metaphor spills over into the second stanza. There the 'Great Globules' clogging the alleys do double duty figuratively: they represent the leaves that have fallen from the trees and, more shockingly, the coagulated blood of fallen soldiers.<sup>26</sup>

Faith Barrett has termed 'Autumn' and 'They Dropped Like Flakes' as 'the landscapes of war' poetry.<sup>27</sup> She contends that a battlefield massacre is represented in the first stanza by falling snow flakes standing as a metaphor for soldiers falling in battle. In the next two lines the metaphor for fallen soldiers changes to shooting stars and petals falling from a rose:<sup>28</sup>

They dropped like Flakes –  
They dropped like Stars –

Like Petals from a Rose –  
When suddenly across the June  
A wind with fingers – goes –<sup>29</sup>

Barrett declares: 'The sequence of images – from the falling snows of winter to the falling "Petals" of June – suggests that the rapid accumulation of dead bodies is as inevitable as the rapid changing of seasons.'<sup>30</sup>

A third war poem by Emily Dickinson poem begins with the line, 'It feels a shame to be Alive.'<sup>31</sup> Helen Vendler states: 'This 1863 poem about the Civil War dead ... does not invoke the conventions of elegy; it is, rather, a meditation on justice. Do the citizens at home deserve the sacrifice made by the dead?' In the first stanza, Dickinson calls upon shame and envy as she ponders her response to the dead:<sup>32</sup>

It feels a shame to be Alive –  
When Men so brave – are dead –  
One envies the Distinguished Dust –  
Permitted – such a Head –<sup>33</sup>

A sardonic moment is revealed in the third stanza as Dickinson obliquely references war profiteering. The 'lives' or heaps of bodies is the price paid for the heaped up dollars reaped by profiteers of war:<sup>34</sup>

The price is great – Sublimely paid –  
Do we deserve – A thing –  
That lives – like Dollars – must be piled  
Before we may obtain? <sup>35</sup>

According to Vendler the implied answer to line two is 'No'. As citizens we do not deserve the sacrifices made by our soldiers.<sup>36</sup>

In the final stanza, Dickinson compares the dead soldiers to 'Saviors' or Jesus Christ 'who died for human salvation':<sup>37</sup>

It may be – a Renown to live –  
I think the Men who die –  
Those unsustained – Saviors –  
Present Divinity – <sup>38</sup>

Vendler maintains that the phrase 'unsustained – Saviors' places the dead soldiers along with 'Jesus who cried out from the Cross to his Father, "Why hast thou forsaken me?"'. The soldiers 'have saved the country' even though they have died 'unsustained' by faith.<sup>39</sup>

### Merton and Sustained Faith in Time of War

A poem written by Thomas Merton during the Vietnam era echoes Dickinson's war profiteers motif in the poem cited above. The poem is called 'The Great Men of Former Times' and the opening two lines read: Today I met Von Clausewitz / At the Stock Exchange.<sup>40</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz was the author of the classic book, *On War* (1832), a Napoleonic conception of warfare which is still studied at West Point and the Army War Colleges. Throughout the poem Merton makes several references to the stock exchange, and mentions Lord Nelson, Napoleon and the Duke of Wellington in the second stanza. In the third stanza Merton references these military leaders when speaking to Von Clausewitz:

And I said to Clausewitz  
At the Stock Exchange:  
"Don't you know, men,  
That all the wars are over?  
We fight no more:  
It is sufficient to 'deter.'"  
And they replied:  
"You are wrong, and we will prove it  
By killing you:  
We will prove it by killing you."<sup>41</sup>

Merton was not unaware of the relationship between war and the vacillations of the stock market. While he was on the Asian trip and a month before his untimely death on December 10, 1968, Merton was reading a discarded paper in Northern India that chronicled the smart rally of the Bombay stock market which was linked to an order to halt the bombing over Vietnam given by President Lyndon Johnson. According to one news account, the order 'imparted firmness to the market'.<sup>42</sup>

In a journal entry, Merton wrote about the relationship of war and profiteering. He declares: 'Probably the computers are telling them (President Lyndon Johnson and his advisors) [that] they need... [the Vietnam War] to go on and get bigger and that it can be fought without



serious danger to the U.S. – on the contrary that it will be very profitable.’<sup>43</sup> Of course, Merton’s statement in the journal entry brings to mind President Eisenhower’s Farewell Speech on January 17, 1961 about the dangers of corruption related to the Military-Industrial Complex.<sup>44</sup>

Correspondence between Merton and Robert Barton, a doctoral student, focused on the monk’s Vietnam-era poem, ‘Fall of 66’, which was published in *The New York Review of Books* in December 1966. In their correspondence Barton asked Merton for clarification of some aspects of the poem regarding the myths as related to King Arthur.<sup>45</sup> Alluding to the poem, Ross Labrie states that Merton ‘frequently incorporated established myths in his writings in order to acclimatize his readers to ... the power of myth in the history of culture.’<sup>46</sup> Merton would parallel myths with ‘the world of realpolitik’<sup>47</sup> as he did in the poem ‘Fall of 66’ with his allusions to the war machine created by the leaders in Washington. In one of his two letters to Barton, Merton states: ‘The Washington people are obviously driven on by a cheap mythology – the second-hand chivalry which rescues a maiden Asian nation (inferior nations are maidens) in distress, attached by a dragon etc.’<sup>48</sup> I quote the second stanza from ‘Fall of 66’:

Now Patria sets her stone vision  
Toward the computer castles in the vortex;  
Is critical of mist;  
She alarms the police  
And points a cold marble finger  
In a general direction:  
('There in the Far East, are the malefactors!')<sup>49</sup>

Thus, from Merton’s letter to Barton and the second stanza of ‘Fall of 1966’, we are rendered an image of our paternalistic nation complete with computer technology coming to the rescue of South Vietnam from the ‘malefactors’, North Vietnam, allied with the dragon, China.

In the final stanza there is clear evidence of the American war machine and reference to the nuclear bombs ready to be launched from the underground silos and submarines:

Win what? The Earth shakes.  
The war is busy in the underground  
And hell is ready in the submarines.<sup>50</sup>

Alas, Merton sounds a final tone of futility: ‘Win what?’

There is a group of so-called early war poems written by Merton; and I am indebted to Patrick O’Connell for collectively analyzing those from three different volumes of verse in an article entitled, ‘The Landscapes of Disaster: The War Poems of Thomas Merton’.<sup>51</sup>

These poems consider the early World War II period before the direct involvement of the United States in the hostilities. O’Connell states: ‘[Grouping these poems] provides an opportunity both to observe Merton’s struggles with the moral, political and spiritual issues of war ... and to see him trying to articulate these struggles in poems that are aesthetically coherent and intellectually and emotionally effective.’<sup>52</sup>

In many ways these poems resemble Merton’s narration in his posthumous novel, *My Argument with the Gestapo*. Also Merton’s autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain* and his early journal entries provide the context for the poems. In a late 1930s journal entry, Merton states the following:

The whole world is filled with the blood and anger and violence and lust our sins and self-will have brought upon us, my own sins as much as anybody else’s: Hitler, Stalin are not alone responsible. I am too, and everybody is, insofar as he has been violent and lustful and proud and greedy and ambitious.<sup>53</sup>

O’Connell contends that Merton’s ‘prose writing of the period’ reflected his views about ‘the loss of moral and religious clarity and conviction in Western “Christian” society as a whole’.<sup>54</sup>

I note that the early Merton poems are somewhat akin to Emily Dickinson’s war poems, which like most of her poetry, were densely metaphorical to the point of obscurity.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Harold Bloom declares: ‘Of all poets writing in English in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I judge Emily Dickinson to present us with the most authentic cognitive difficulties.’<sup>56</sup>

For a brief analysis of one of Merton’s early war poems, I have selected ‘The Bombarded City’ which mentions the impact of war in its title, unlike the other poems in the group. Note the surreal imagery in the opening stanza of the poem:

Now let no man abide  
 In the lunar wood  
 The place of blood.  
 Let no man abide here,  
 Not even in a dream,  
 Not in the lunar forest of this undersea.<sup>57</sup>

The lunar imagery is frightening and, according to Ross Labrie, a 'nightmarish scene' is used to depict the 'terror of war' overshadowing 'the horrible fantasies about it' envisioned by the mind.<sup>58</sup>

In the second stanza there are these last two lines: 'Curse of the little children killed! / Curse of the little children killed!' <sup>59</sup> O'Connell states that although the guilt of those that have caused the death of the innocents is greater in proportion to other deaths, the resolution of the curse is unclear.<sup>60</sup> O'Connell's comment at the end of this long poem is that Merton 'had the wisdom to challenge the prevailing notion that suffering death can serve as a justification for inflicting death.'<sup>61</sup>

I would be remiss if I did not mention Thomas Merton's best-known war poem about his brother, John Paul, who was killed during World War II, called 'For My Brother: Reported Missing in Action, 1943'.<sup>62</sup> The poem is an elegy for his brother who died in a life raft after being shot down over the English Channel in April 1943. Merton expresses his 'anguished awareness' of the separation between John Paul and himself caused by distance, uncertainty and death as expressed in the first two lines in the second stanza: 'Where, in what desolate and smokey country / Lies your poor body, lost and dead?' <sup>63</sup>

When Merton learned of the death of his brother, he states in his autobiography: 'I passed the *pieta* at the corner of the cloister, and buried my will and my natural affections and all the rest in the wounded side of the dead Christ.'<sup>64</sup> Merton, however, was able to reconcile the loss of his brother with his acceptance of the Paschal mystery which he had celebrated at Gethsemani only two days before learning of his death. Patrick O'Connell maintains that Merton's poem about his brother 'communicates a spirit of profound trust and hope'.<sup>65</sup> Within the Paschal mystery, Merton saw the connection between suffering and contemplation. He declared that 'contemplation is simply the penetration, by divine wisdom, into the mystery of God's love, in the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.'<sup>66</sup>

In contrast Emily Dickinson viewed the dead soldiers of the Civil War who performed the ultimate sacrifice of dying for their country as

'unsustained' by faith and placed alongside a forsaken Jesus.

## Conclusion

In conclusion both Thomas Merton and Emily Dickinson eschewed the suffering and death of war. The poets differed, however, in their views about the redemptive value of the suffering caused by war. Merton, in both his prose and poetry, viewed war through the lens of personal complicity and cited the decadence of Western civilization as a major causal factor. Although he lamented the death and suffering of war, he was able to reconcile it with his understanding and acceptance of the reality of original sin, and he embraced the Paschal mystery as the key to the recovery of paradise through contemplative prayer.

In contrast, Emily Dickinson rejected original sin and had a contentious relationship with God the Father, and at times, with the Son. She resented God's seeming indifference to suffering and wavered incessantly about her Christian beliefs.

It seems, however, that in her final days, Dickinson may have felt the peace of a 'sustained' faith. In the final week before her death, she penned a letter to her cousins, Louise and Frances Norcross, in which she simply stated, 'Called Back'. Some decades after her death, niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi included the message 'Called Back' on Emily Dickinson's grave stone.<sup>67</sup>

## Notes

1. Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy, Letters of Thomas Merton to New and Old Friends*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1989), p. 349 [3/25/1967]. The other four American thinkers are: Thoreau, Faulkner, William Carlos Williams and Mark Van Doren.
2. Thomas Merton and Robert Lax, *When Prophecy Still Had a Voice: The Letters of Thomas Merton and Robert Lax*, ed. Arthur W. Biddle (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), p. 183 [12/29/1959].
3. Thomas Merton, *Disputed Questions* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1960), p. 177.
4. Thomas Merton, *Entering the Silence: Becoming a Monk and Writer, Journals vol.2:1941-1952*, ed. Jonathan Montaldo (San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1996), p. 288 [3/6/1949].
5. Robert Giroux and Thomas Merton, *The Letters of Robert Giroux and Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Samway S.J. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), p. 183. I am indebted to Patrick F. O'Connell who brought this citation to my attention before the publication of the book. Thomas Merton had just finished reading *The Major Poets: English and American*, ed. Charles Monroe Coffin (New York: Harcourt Brace and World,

- Inc., 1954). See John P. Collins, 'A Bee in His Bonnet: Thomas Merton, Emily Dickinson and Sister Mary James Power', *The Merton Seasonal*, Vol.38, No.4 (Winter 2013), p. 21, Endnote 30.
6. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), (J 214), pp. 98-99. To assist the reader, I have provided the Thomas H. Johnson numbering system preceded by the letter (J). Very few of Emily Dickinson's poems have titles. For further details see pp. v-xi of the introduction to this volume.
  7. Thomas Merton, *Seeing the World in a Grain of Sand: Thomas Merton on Poetry* [17 lectures on 7 CDs] (Rockville, Maryland: Now You Know the Media, 2013) #9: 'Expressions of Spiritual Experience'.
  8. *Seeing the World in a Grain of Sand: Thomas Merton on Poetry* #9, 'Expressions of Spiritual Experience'.
  9. Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 19.
  10. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (J 324), pp. 153-154.
  11. Patrick J. Keane, *Emily Dickinson's Approving God, Divine Design and the Problem of Suffering* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2008), p. 2.
  12. James McIntosh, *Nimble Believing: Dickinson and the Unknown* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, The University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 1.
  13. *Emily Dickinson*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008), p. 179.
  14. *Emily Dickinson*, p. 180.
  15. Shira Wolosky, *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 68. For a comprehensive understanding of Emily Dickinson's scepticism about the redemptive value of suffering and death as it relates to the Civil War see Wolosky, Chapter Three entitled 'War as a Theodicean Problem', pp. 64-98.
  16. Bloom, *Emily Dickinson*, pp. 175-176.
  17. Wolosky, *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War*, p. 68.
  18. Bloom, *Emily Dickinson*, p.175. Shira Wolosky notes that Emily Dickinson wrote over half of her poems during the Civil War which suggests that anguish and suffering of war were a major concern for her, albeit, the poems were heavily shrouded in metaphor and do not overtly refer to any particular battle or political event. Wolosky, *Emily Dickinson*, pp. 172-176.
  19. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, Vol. 2, eds. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 371-446.
  20. Helen Vendler, *Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 239.

21. Peggy Henderson Murphy, *Isolated But Not Oblivious: A Re-evaluation of Emily Dickinson's Relationship to the Civil War* (Saarbrücken, Germany: VOM Publishing House Ltd., 2010), p. iii.
22. Tyler Hoffman 'Emily Dickinson and the Limit of War', *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, Volume 3, Number 2, (Fall 1994), p. 16.
23. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (J 656), pp. 326-327.
24. David Cody, 'Blood in the Basin: The Civil War in Emily Dickinson's "The name-of-it-is 'Autumn'"', *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 12.1 (2003), p. 42.
25. 'Blood in the Basin', p. 38.
26. Tyler Hoffman 'Emily Dickinson and the Limit of War', *The Emily Dickinson Journal*. Volume 3, Number 2, (Fall 1994), p. 9.
27. *Critical Insights, Emily Dickinson*, ed., J. Brooks Bouson (Pasadena, California: Salem Press Inc., 2011), p. 337.
28. *Critical Insights, Emily Dickinson*, pp. 337-338.
29. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (J 409), pp. 194-195.
30. *Critical Insights, Emily Dickinson*, p. 338.
31. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (J 444), p. 213.
32. *Dickinson, Selected Poems and Commentaries*, pp. 239-240.
33. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (J 444), p. 213.
34. *Dickinson, Selected Poems and Commentaries*, p. 241.
35. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (J 444), p. 213.
36. *Dickinson, Selected Poems and Commentaries*, p. 241.
37. *Dickinson, Selected Poems and Commentaries*, p. 241.
38. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (J 444), p. 213.
39. *Dickinson, Selected Poems and Commentaries*, p. 242.
40. Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977), p. 623.
41. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 623-624.
42. Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 99.
43. Thomas Merton, *Learning to Love, Exploring Solitude and Freedom*, Journal 6, ed. Christine M. Bochen (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), p. 224.
44. See *Documents of American History*, ed. Henry Steele Commager (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), p. 667.
45. *The Road to Joy*, pp. 356-358 [8/11/1967 and 9/25/1967].
46. Ross Labrie, *Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2001), p. 180.
47. *Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination*, p. 180.
48. *The Road to Joy*, p. 357 [8/11/1967].
49. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 644.
50. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 644.
51. Patrick F. O'Connell, 'Landscapes of Disaster: The War Poems of Thomas Merton', *The Merton Annual*, Vol. 19 (2006), pp. 178-233.



52. *The Merton Annual* 19, p. 178.
53. Thomas Merton, *Run to the Mountain: The Story of a Vocation, Journal 1*, ed. Patrick Hart O.C.S.O (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), p. 31.
54. *The Merton Annual* 19, pp. 222-223.
55. These early war poems written on the cusp of World War II are not typical war poems as written by Wilfred Owen or Siegfried Sassoon. Merton's poems are characterized by a variety of poetic devices including metaphor, 'dream, myth, parody, ghost story [and] archetypal symbols'. *The Merton Annual* 19, p. 222. Thomas Merton's later war poetry had a more documentary style as exemplified by poems entitled, 'Original Child Bomb' and 'Chant to Be Used in Processions Around a Site with Furnaces'. *The Merton Annual* 19, p. 233.
56. Bloom, *Emily Dickinson*, p. 1.
57. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, pp. 75-76.
58. *Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination*, p. 157.
59. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 76.
60. *The Merton Annual* 19, p. 214.
61. *The Merton Annual* 19, p. 218.
62. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, pp. 35-36.
63. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 36.
64. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948), p. 402.
65. Patrick O'Connell, 'Grief Transfigured, Merton's Elegy on His Brother', *The Merton Seasonal*, Vol. 18, No.1 (Winter 1993), p. 15.
66. Thomas Merton, *No Man is an Island* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1955), pp. 88-89. For a study of the Paschal Mystery as related to the unity of contemplation see: Patrick F. O'Connell, 'The Paschal Heart of Merton's Spirituality', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 31.3 (1996), pp. 352-355.
67. This final Emily Dickinson letter sent to her cousins, Louise and Frances Norcross, was dated May 1886. The complete content of the letter was as follows: 'Little Cousins, Called Back. Emily.' She died on May 15, 1886 at the age of 56. The words 'Called Back' refer to a letter to Louise and Frances Norcross dated January 14, 1885. In this letter she referred to a book entitled *Called Back* by Hugh Conway. For the content of both letters see: *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 314-315 and p. 330. 'Originally... [Emily Dickinson's] grave was marked by a low granite stone with her initials, E.E.D., but some decades later niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi replaced it with a marble slab bearing the message "Called Back"'. See: *Emily Dickinson Museum, Special Topics*, 'Emily Dickinson and Death', <https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/death>.

**John Collins** has contributed articles to all of the Thomas Merton journals as well as *Religion and the Arts*, *The Emily Dickinson International Society Bulletin* and *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*. He is the producer of the Cable TV program *A Literary Forum* and co-producer of the Cable TV program *Thomas Merton - His Life and Works*. John was awarded the 'Louie' award at the ITMS 2015 Centenary conference.

### **from Pope Francis' Address to the US Congress — 24/09/15**

My visit takes place at a time when men and women of good will are marking the anniversaries of several great Americans. . . They shaped fundamental values which will endure forever in the spirit of the American people. . . These men and women offer us a way of seeing and interpreting reality. . . I would like to mention four of these Americans: Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton.

.....

A century ago, at the beginning of the Great War, which Pope Benedict XV termed a 'pointless slaughter', another notable American was born: the Cistercian monk Thomas Merton. He remains a source of spiritual inspiration and a guide for many people. In his autobiography he wrote: 'I came into the world. Free by nature, in the image of God, I was nevertheless the prisoner of my own violence and my own selfishness, in the image of the world into which I was born. That world was the picture of Hell, full of men like myself, loving God, and yet hating him; born to love him, living instead in fear of hopeless self-contradictory hungers.' Merton was above all a man of prayer, a thinker who challenged the certitudes of his time and opened new horizons for souls and for the Church. He was also a man of dialogue, a promoter of peace between peoples and religions.

.....

Three sons and a daughter of this land, four individuals and four dreams: Lincoln, liberty; Martin Luther King, liberty in plurality and non-exclusion; Dorothy Day, social justice and the rights of persons; and Thomas Merton, the capacity for dialogue and openness to God.

Four representatives of the American people.

.....

*Each daily session of Congress starts with a prayer. Pieces by Merton have been used on several occasions. On April 18th, 1962, Merton's 'Prayer for Peace', specifically written for Congress at the height of the Cold War, was read out by Frank Kowalski, a Connecticut Democrat. Its full text may be found in several anthologies of Merton's works.*