

# Prophetic Orientations:

## Merton's Social Critique in 'A Picture of Lee Ying' and 'Paper Cranes'

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#### Introduction

A recurring motif in Thomas Merton's poetry, from its earliest period<sup>1</sup> to the last years of his life, most notably in his well-known poem 'Grace's House',<sup>2</sup> is the image of the innocent child as gifted with a kind of intuitive sacramental awareness of the divine presence in creation, a perception that is too often obscured or effaced by adults who try to force reality, including other people, perhaps even these very children, to conform to their own expectations. During the final decade of his life (1958-1968), when his poetry increasingly reflects his engagement in the crucial social issues of his time, including war, racism and poverty, poems such as 'And the Children of Birmingham'<sup>3</sup> and 'Picture of a Black Child with a White Doll'<sup>4</sup> highlight the role of young people as witnesses to the gap between the world as the Creator intended it and the world as distorted and degraded by human selfishness, prejudice and exploitation of others and of the earth itself. During this same period, marked also by Merton's deepening interest in and respect for oriental cultural and religious traditions, his commitment to social justice and his attraction to the Far East are woven together in two poems that share a focus on young Asian women victimized by political oppression and war, written in strikingly different styles and contrasting tones, which together provide a thematic balance representing complementary dimensions of the prophetic vision that characterizes much of Merton's work in both prose and verse during one of the most creative periods of his life.

#### A Picture of Lee Ying

On May 19, 1962, Merton wrote in his journal: 'Heartbreaking picture of a Chinese refugee girl collapsed in sorrow at the borders of Hong Kong,

where hundreds of thousands are now refused and turned back into Red China by the British. Mass for the refugees this morning.'<sup>5</sup> The picture to which he refers is an Associated Press photograph of a young woman, wearing what appears to be a denim jacket and jeans, sitting on the ground, leaning on her left arm, her left leg stretched out and right leg bent at the knee, supporting her right elbow; she holds a large white handkerchief up to her face with her right hand; only her eyes, squeezed shut, are visible above her hand and the handkerchief. The caption of the photograph reads: 'POINT OF NO RETURN - Lee Ying, only 19, has to go home again. That's Red China, across the way from Hong Kong. Terror and misery from which she fled make up Lee Ying's future. But the British authorities, alarmed by a rising wave of refugees from Red China, send them back from Hong Kong. Lee Ying shows she faces a grim future.'<sup>6</sup> This young refugee was one of thousands fleeing from the famine resulting from the failed Chinese Communist 'Great Leap Forward' campaign of 1958-61 who were refused entry into the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong.<sup>7</sup>



Associated Press  
POINT OF NO RETURN—Lee Ying, only 19, has to go home again. That's Red China, across the way from Hong Kong. Terror and misery from which she fled make up Lee Ying's future. But the British authorities, alarmed by a rising wave of refugees from Red China, send them back from Hong Kong. Lee Ying shows she faces a grim future.

In response, Merton wrote 'A Picture of Lee Ying'<sup>8</sup> in the clipped, punctuation-less, 'antipoetic' form that he had developed in this period to critique both social injustices and the often absurd and banal responses of the media to contemporary crises.<sup>9</sup> It is a savagely ironic meditation on the photo and its caption, which present a catastrophic social and political upheaval from a 'human interest' perspective in which a helpless individual victimized by forces beyond her control is made an object of sympathy, but at the same time is subjected to further exploitation in the service of an ideological purpose generally taken so much for granted by the audience as to go unnoticed without a deconstruction such as that which the re-vision of the poem provides.

The first three lines form an initial subunit that proceeds by a process of repetition with variation and incremental addition of further detail:

She wears old clothes she holds a borrowed handkerchief  
and her sorrow shows us the papers have bad news again  
today Lee Ying only 19 has to return to China

Days on foot with little or no food the last six days on water  
alone now she must turn back

Three hundred thousand like her must turn back to China  
there is no room say the officials in Hong Kong you must go  
back where you came from (ll. 1-3)

The poem begins with a brief description of the girl's appearance in the photograph (with the imagined detail of the handkerchief being borrowed, presumably from a male fellow traveler given its size and color) followed by information drawn from the caption on her name and age (directly quoted) and fate (altered to specify precisely to where it is she has to return). There is an oddness about the phrasing in the reference to the newspapers here: rather than the papers showing her sorrow, 'her sorrow shows us the papers have bad news again today' – the anguish displayed in the photograph is immediately reduced to simply this particular day's example of the customary, expected 'bad news'. The ability of 'us' – the readers of the papers – to respond to this tragedy on any profound level is immediately, if subtly, called into question, a concern that will become the principal focus in the latter part of the poem. The details on the journey that follow, either imagined or drawn from a different source, lead to the same concluding assertion, expressed in different words, with the terminology of the two versions then combined in the following line and applied to all the rest of the rejected refugees. This reiteration insistently drives home the main point of the story, culminating in the switch from third to second person as the British officials are imagined as speaking to Lee Ying and her companions directly, finally stating the cause of their exclusion from Hong Kong, though the phrasing – 'there is no room say the officials' – while not overtly questioning the validity of this claim, does not provide any corroboration for it either.

The next three lines call attention to the absurdity of the caption heading, a fatuously inappropriate cliché that is an indicator of the superficiality of the paper's engagement with the situation it is illustrating and describing:

*Point of no return* is the caption but this is meaningless she  
must return that is the story

She would not weep if she had reached a point of no return  
what she wants is not to return

There is no place for her and no point for thousands like her  
there is no point (ll. 4-6)

These lines consider successively each of the three main words of the caption: yet another variation on the basic 'story' combines 'return' (l. 1) with 'must' (ll. 2, 3) and goes on to juxtapose 'no return' with 'not to return'; then 'no return' is replaced by 'no place' (echoing the 'no room' of line 3) and 'no point'. The latter phrase, repeated to refer first to Lee Ying herself and then to the 'thousands like her', means both that there is no 'point of no return', no point at which the goal of escape is reached, but also that there is no point, no purpose, to her long trek and that of the other refugees: their journey has been literally pointless, purposeless, completely futile.

The third subunit highlights the word 'alarm', borrowed from the caption along with 'refugees' and 'authorities':

Their flight from bad news to worse news has caused alarm

Refugees suffer and authorities feel alarm the press does not  
take sides (ll. 7-8)

The original 'bad news' was the desperate situation that motivated the exodus in the first place, but the worse news is evidently the overwhelming number of refugees that threaten to inundate Hong Kong and that cause alarm for the authorities. While circumstances are bad for the 'refugees' – a term laden with irony since they are being denied refuge – they are worse for the authorities; the alarm of the latter exceeds the suffering of the former, and so provides the rationale for their exclusion. Meanwhile the press supposedly simply reports the facts objectively, without favoring one group or the other, remaining neutral, that is, in this confrontation of the powerful with the powerless.

In the fourth subunit, the focus shifts from the government bureaucracy and the press to the general public, the audience of newspaper readers responding to the story in their own collective voice, marked by a prodigious degree of complacency and superficiality:

We know all about the sorrow of Lee Ying one glance is  
enough we look at something else

She must go back where she came from no more need be said

Whenever the authorities are alarmed everyone must return  
to China

We too know all about sorrow we have seen it in the movies  
(ll. 9-12)

The crass presumption of the claim to know 'all about' Lee Ying's sorrow, which is after all simply another instance of the 'bad news' regularly purveyed by the papers (as 'her sorrow shows' in the poem's first line) and therefore needs only a quick glance to 'get' the story before moving on to some other item, presumably more upbeat, leads to a thoughtless endorsement of the official position on the refugees. Line 10 simply repeats the authorities' decision from line 3, altering the direct address there to third-person statement, and dismissing any further need for discussion. The 'Whenever' of the following line makes this incident simply one instance of a general principle – the authorities' alarm is the determining factor in establishing policy, a policy that is applied universally, to 'everyone' (which of course is factually nonsensical – obviously not 'everyone', without qualification, 'must return to China', an inappropriate restatement, in still another variation, of the indisputable assertion that substitutes for any attempt at logical argumentation). This segment ends with an inclusion, as 'We know all about the sorrow of Lee Ying' is generalized to become 'We too know all about sorrow'; what she knows by experience 'we' know by watching movies, an ersatz experience that actually makes it impossible to identify with her plight because emotions have been vulgarized into cheap sentimentality: 'one glance is enough' because 'we have seen it' already, unrecognized testimony to the manipulative power of the media to produce an illusion of insight and empathy.

This collective voice of the public then turns to address Lee Ying directly, as it will continue to do for the remainder of the poem:

You have our sympathy Miss Lee Ying you must go where we  
are sorry for your future

Too bad some people get all the rough breaks the authorities  
regret

Refugees from China have caused alarm

When the authorities are alarmed what can you do

You can return to China

Their alarm is worse than your sorrow (ll. 13-18)

The purely conventional expression of sympathy here is subtly reoriented, presumably due more to the power of the media to shape public opinion than to conscious intent on the part of the speakers, to include Lee Ying's 'future' – the oppressive conditions she must once again endure under Communist rule, not explicitly described in the poem but identified in the caption as the 'Terror and misery from which she fled' that will now once again 'make up Lee Ying's future'; in fact the whole point of the photo seems to be expressed in the concluding sentence: 'Lee Ying shows she faces a grim future.' The political usefulness of this perspective will become evident later in the poem, but for now this pitiable future is simply one more of 'all' the inevitable 'rough breaks' that 'some people' (that is, some other people – not 'everyone' after all) 'must' put up with, which the authorities 'regret' (standard bureaucratic phrasing, as in 'we regret to inform you . . .') but for which they take no responsibility, since the circumstances are to be regarded as beyond their control. In fact the refugees themselves are to be regarded as the cause, the authorities' alarm the effect – they have triggered the process that leads to their own expulsion. The stock phrase 'what can you do' has the implied answer 'nothing' – but in this case the refugees can do something – 'You can return to China' – as though this is a solution, a way of doing something to alleviate, not their own sorrow, but the authorities' alarm, since the latter is now explicitly identified as worse than the former. The sardonic implication is that while the authorities cannot help the refugees out of their dilemma, they can relieve the authorities from theirs – and the substitution of 'can' for 'has to' (l. 1) and 'must' (l. 11) in reference to their 'return to China' implies volition rather than coercion, a comforting, reassuring, albeit fallacious, manipulation of language to reinforce one's own position rather than to reveal and communicate truth.

The next two subsections begin with an identical request, focusing first on a further exculpation of the authorities:

Please do not look only at the dark side in private life these  
are kind men

They are only obeying orders

Over there is Red China where you will remain in future

There also the authorities are alarmed and they too obey  
orders (ll. 19-22)

There is a kind of triple extenuation of the officials here: they are kind in their private life, therefore not to be equated with their cruel actions. They are simply following orders, and therefore are not to be blamed for their decisions. Finally, they are no different from the Communist officials in 'Red China where you will remain in future' (picking up the reference from l. 13), who are likewise alarmed and obedient to higher authority. The implications of this last point are that since the situation where you are going is actually not much different from that where you are now, the future should not be considered as 'dark' as it appears, a rationalization more apt to reduce the authorities' sense of guilt than the refugees' pain.

The repetition of the admonition, however, takes a very different approach to encouraging a more optimistic attitude on the part of Lee Ying and her companions. If the previous section blurred the differences between the two sides in attempting to reassure her that life under Communist bureaucrats would not be totally dark, these lines emphasize the superiority of the 'free world' to a totalitarian regime and indicate how one crucial dimension of that superiority can be enhanced by this very incident:

Please do not look only at the dark side

All the newspapers in the free world explain why you return  
their readers understand how you feel

You have the sympathy of millions

As a tribute to your sorrow we resolve to spend more money  
on nuclear weapons there is always a bright side (ll. 23-26)

The press, being 'free' to report without censorship, is able first to 'explain why you return', that is, to provide justification for the authorities' decision, and then to attract 'the sympathy of millions' for Lee

Ying's plight, bringing her publicity, making her famous, revealing how she feels, as compensation for the failure of her quest for freedom. Of course this 'sympathy' is cold comfort for Lee Ying herself, who is made aware of it only in the imaginary scenario of the speaker here; but its real importance, its positive practical consequence, is to function as a motivating force for a political policy. Her predicament can be used as a weapon in the propaganda war between East and West (as indeed it is in the description accompanying her photo in the newspapers). The ultimate 'bright side' for the speaker is that the story of Lee Ying can serve as a justification for increasing military spending, construed as a way of honoring her, of taking her side against her oppressors (conveniently shifting the focus away from the Western authorities' responsibility for her return), ignoring the fact that if the nuclear weapons her story is to help fund were actually used against China they would likely kill Lee Ying along with millions of others.

This 'bright side' is distinguished from the happy ending of a Hollywood movie, deliberately depicted as an unbelievable fantasy of blatantly melodramatic clichés of rescue and romance (with one of the authorities, already identified as 'kind' in private life) for a single individual that simply relegates the fate of the rest of the refugees to oblivion:

If this were only a movie a boat would be available have you  
ever seen our movies they end happily

You would lean at the rail with 'him' the sun would set on  
China kiss and fade

You would marry one of the kind authorities

In our movies there is no law higher than love in real life duty  
is higher

You would not want the authorities to neglect duty (ll. 27-31)

The effect of elaborating this obviously untenable outcome to the story is to make the speaker's elevation of duty over love appear by contrast to be the only realistic attitude, the only admissible alternative. The connotations of duty, particularly as juxtaposed with love, suggest a sacrifice of one's own personal feelings and desires to a greater good, a higher law. The speaker even urges Lee Ying herself to endorse this interpretation, to acknowledge the legitimacy of the authorities' position,

and so to ratify her own rejection. Yet this assumption of what it means to 'neglect duty' in such circumstances is certainly open to question, even though not acknowledged here. Labeling an abject failure to help as 'duty' rather than a dereliction of duty is either a myopic rationalization or an act of shameless cynicism. Language is being used to obscure and distort the truth rather than to express it.

Each of the final three lines, while basically standing on its own, contributes to the summing up of what has preceded:

How do you like the image of the free world sorry you cannot stay

This is the first and last time we will see you in our papers

When you are back home remember us we will be having a good time (ll. 32-34)

First Lee Ying is asked a question but is allowed no opportunity to respond, as if there is no time for her to answer because she must leave immediately, just in case her evaluation is negative. The phrase 'image of the free world', addressed to someone deprived of any experience of that freedom, suggests that the image is just that, an illusory appearance belied by the reality that she 'cannot stay', another instance of a plausible but specious substitution of slogans for insights. The frank statement that she will never be seen again in the newspaper suggests that not only can she not 'stay' in the 'free world' but she will not even retain the attention and interest of the papers' readers: once she disappears from view she will disappear from memory as well. The assurance of sympathy and understanding given earlier is now recognized to be evanescent at best. Finally comes the ultimate irony: after implying she will no longer be remembered, she is told to 'remember us' when she is 'back home' (words found in the caption but not used in the poem until now) – which is where one really belongs, after all. What she is to remember, basically, is how much better off we are here than she is there: 'we will be having a good time' – as banal a phrase as could possibly be used – and she presumably will not. This chillingly insensitive final comment essentially relegates Lee Ying to the status of a representative of an inferior rival system – both her desire to leave and her return home with 'the image of the free world' in her memory are evidence of the superiority of the way of life from which she has been excluded. Her role has finally become to provide 'us' with the comforting reassurance that we are indeed 'having a

good time' by measuring it against her 'bad news.'

In a June 7, 1962 letter to his friend John Wu, Merton provides his own evaluation of 'A Picture of Lee Ying':

I hesitate to send you the enclosed angry and bitter poem. It is savage, and its savagery hits everything in sight, so that it is not kind to anyone, even to the poor and desperate Chinese girl whose picture broke my heart and suggested the poem. I wish I could have said something full of mercy and love that would have been worthy of the situation, but I have only used her plight to attack the hypocrisy of those who find no room for the Chinese refugees, and who always have a very good reason. And the sad plight of a whole society which nods approval, while pronouncing a few formulas of regret. I suppose I should not get angry, and that it represents a weakness in myself to get excited about the awful tragedies that are everywhere in the world. They are too awful for human protest to be meaningful, so people seem to think. I protest anyway, I am still primitive enough, I have not caught up with this century.<sup>10</sup>

While Merton's unease with the negative tone of the poem, evident as well in remarks on other social commentaries of the period,<sup>11</sup> needs to be kept in context as an overall evaluation of the effectiveness of the poem, it does reflect his awareness that prophetic speech requires not just denunciation but annunciation, not just critique of oppression and injustice but a recognition and affirmation of hope, of the ultimate triumph of truth and love promised by the gospel. This complementary perspective is evident in a second poem in which a young Asian woman is featured as a representative figure particularly suited to focus attention on a social issue crucial to the welfare of all humanity.

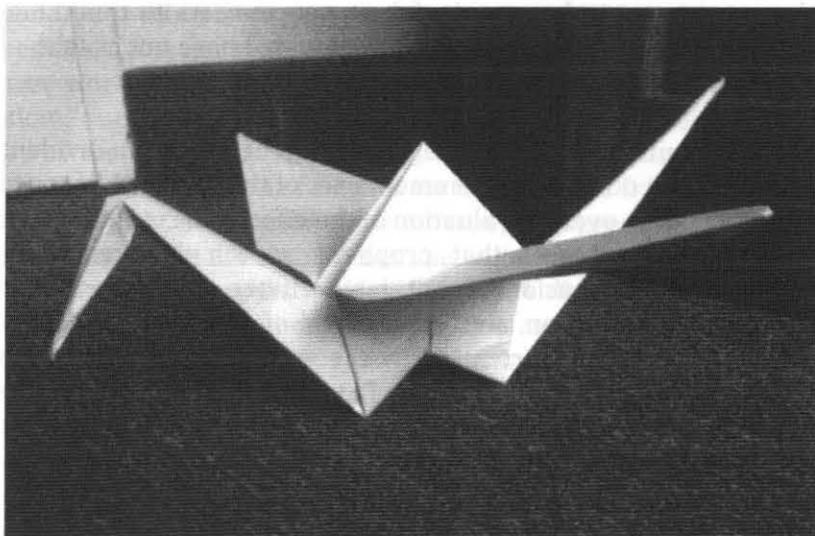
### Paper Cranes

On May 17, 1964, almost exactly two years after first taking note of Lee Ying's 'heartbreaking' picture, Merton wrote in his journal:

Yesterday, on the Vigil, a group of the Hibakusha on the World Peace Mission Pilgrimage came out here .... I think the one who impressed me most was the most silent, Mrs. Tayoshi. She was always thoughtful, said nothing, very much

apart yet very warm and good. All she did was come up silently and with a little smile slip a folded crane on the table (I had read them a poem on Paper Cranes). After they had all gone, it was Mrs. Tayoshi's paper crane that remained silent and eloquent, the most valid statement of the whole afternoon.<sup>12</sup>

It is not clear from this reference whether Merton's poem 'Paper Cranes'<sup>13</sup> was written specifically in anticipation of the visit of these survivors of the 1945 atomic bombs;<sup>14</sup> the subtitle '(The Hibakusha Come to Gethsemani)' would suggest a direct connection, but could have been added subsequent to the meeting. In any case the poem was a particularly appropriate reading for this encounter. In a May 31 letter to his Brazilian friend and translator Sr. M. Emmanuel, Merton writes: 'Here is a poem I read to some survivors of the bombing of Hiroshima when they came through here. "Paper cranes" are little folded birds they make as the symbol of their peace movement.'<sup>15</sup>



The origami crane is associated particularly with the figure of Sadako Sasaki, the young Hiroshima victim who died of radiation-caused leukemia in 1955 at the age of twelve after folding more than a thousand paper birds, the number traditionally associated with the granting of a wish, which has from that point been specifically linked with the desire for an end to war. The plaque on the statue of Sadako holding a golden crane, erected in 1958 in the Peace Park at Hiroshima, reads: 'This is our

cry, this is our prayer, peace in the world.'<sup>16</sup> While Merton presumably was acquainted with this story, he focuses not on the tragedy of the child's premature death, but on the image of the fragile bird she created, a symbol of hope representing an ideal to be recognized and affirmed as ultimately more powerful than the forces of destruction and conquest.

The poem begins with a question and its answer:

How can we tell a paper bird  
Is stronger than a hawk  
When it has no metal for talons?  
It needs no power to kill  
Because it is not hungry. (ll. 1-5)<sup>17</sup>

The question is not whether the paper bird is stronger than the hawk, but how to tell that it is in fact stronger. It is a matter of discernment, the ability to perceive the source of true strength. The conventional criterion – evidence of physical superiority – is lacking: there is no metal for talons, actually, no talons at all. (Of course a hawk's talons are not metal either, so the comparison suggests that the actual bird here, its name associated with those who favor military aggressiveness, represents metaphorically a weapon, a plane or missile, designed for offensive attack – armed, perhaps, with a nuclear device.) Crane (specifically identified only in the title) is juxtaposed to hawk, paper to metal, with the conviction that the former is stronger, but the question is what substantiates this claim. The proposed answer is that true strength consists not in the ability to dominate and destroy one's prey, but in having no need to hunt and kill because one is free from hunger. On one level, there is obviously no need – the bird is made of paper! But hunger here is to be understood as not simply an appetite for food but a desire for dominance, for the ability and capacity to consume, to absorb 'the other'. The paper bird is already complete, already 'full', with no need for conquest, for victory. Genuine strength is recognized as inner integrity, a self-realization detached from comparison and competition, a freedom from neediness.

The parallel comparison in the lines that follow consists simply in statement – any further questioning is at most implicit:

Wilder and wiser than eagles  
It ranges round the world  
Without enemies  
And free of cravings. (ll. 6-9)<sup>18</sup>

Here the focus shifts to another genus of raptor, one that also has certain symbolic connotations, associated specifically with American military might, though this identification remains implicit and is not essential to the point being made. The double term of this comparison, while linked by alliteration, is somewhat paradoxical, or at least unusual. The first is the more surprising, but if wildness is equated with freedom, with being unconfined by a necessity to satisfy one's desires, the eagle is more constrained than the paper bird, which is likewise 'wiser' because it possesses a deeper awareness of the underlying unity of all reality than is found in a worldview built on a perception of duality, of dominance and subjugation. The crane is able to go anywhere and everywhere in unrestricted freedom. It has 'no enemies' not so much because it is not seen as a threat by others, unnoticed by those on the watch for rivals, but because it refuses to categorize others as enemies, to make separation and suspicion an interpretive framework and the struggle for supremacy a motivating force; it affirms unity even in the face of divisive attitudes and acts, a profession of faith in the ultimate oneness of all that is the mark of genuine wisdom.<sup>19</sup> It is not subject to the bondage of addictive habits, inner compulsions, 'cravings' for self-affirmation and self-assertion that Buddhism calls *tanha*, the source of *dukkha*, suffering or radical dis-ease; it is release from *tanha* that brings release from *dukkha*, as the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha proclaim.<sup>20</sup> Thus the first half of the poem concludes with a recognition of the paper crane as a symbol of detachment that is identified with true liberation and authentic nonviolence.

In the second half of the poem attention turns from the bird to the bird's maker, the child who is presumably to be identified with Sadako, but not with her alone. It begins with a startling assertion:

The child's hand  
Folding these wings  
Wins no wars and ends them all. (ll. 10-12)

On a literal level, of course, this statement is groundless. It defies the facts of history. To make sense it must be understood in an eschatological context, as a prophecy, a proclamation of hope, a rejection of the illusory promise of 'a war to end all wars' and a refusal to accept the inevitability of unending violence, injustice and oppression. It is important that the figure forming this icon of peace is a casualty of a catastrophic event who transcends her identity as victim to become a creator, a begetter of beauty more powerful than death. The child's hand is participating in the divine creativity itself, recapitulating the primordial calling of creatures

into being and foreshadowing the ultimate fulfillment of the reign of God, the peaceable kingdom. Such a child is an epiphany of Wisdom, Sophia (Prajna in the Buddhist tradition<sup>21</sup>), the one playing before God at the creation of the universe in chapter 8 of the Book of Proverbs, of whom Merton writes in his great prose-poem *Hagia Sophia*,<sup>22</sup> the child who is ultimately to be identified with Wisdom incarnate, the seemingly powerless Christ who nevertheless 'Wins no wars and ends them all', through whom all things came to be and in whom all things will ultimately be reconciled.

The final section of the poem moves from hand to heart to eye:

Thoughts of a child's heart  
Without care, without weapons!  
So the child's eye  
Gives life to what it loves  
Kind as the innocent sun  
And lovelier than all dragons! (ll. 13-18)<sup>23</sup>

To think with the heart of a child is to know not through detached, objective analysis but to know experientially,<sup>24</sup> to know with the innermost self, the whole self, and to cherish what it knows; it is wisdom, a knowledge inseparable from love.<sup>25</sup> It is to know with the simplicity, trust and freedom of the child unburdened by care, by anxiety, with the ability to 'let be'<sup>26</sup> and therefore without a need to defend one's possessions or one's positions – again, a liberation from *dukkha* through detachment from self. Finally the eye of a child is recognized as life-giving, on one level an affirmation of the power of the imagination in creative play to bring a beloved toy – here the origami bird – to life, and in a deeper sense, the power of wisdom to love the world into being. The comparison to the sun, suggestive of the love and mercy of the God who makes the sun shine on the just and unjust (Mt. 5:45) and of the creative power of the Word, the sun of righteousness (Mal. 3:20), the true light that enlightens all (Jn. 1:9), seems initially to refer to the eye of the child, kind and innocent.<sup>27</sup> But the parallel phrasing of the final line, reminiscent of the earlier comparisons to hawk and eagles, indicates that the reference is primarily to 'what it loves', to the paper bird, which reflects the kindness of its maker just as the disciples are to be perfect as their Father is perfect, and which is 'lovelier than all dragons' – encompassing both the protective, benevolent dragons of the orient and the terrifying, fire-breathing monsters of western legend. In its simple beauty, a beauty infused with and by love, the origami crane is thus presented in this culminating image as a universal symbol transcending

the dichotomy between east and west represented by the ambiguous dragon. Its radiant loveliness is a sign of the ultimate unity of all creation that is discerned at the world's beginning, that will be restored at the world's end, that can become visible and tangible in the present, through hand and heart and eye of children and of those who in becoming like children are able to share in the life-giving power and wisdom and love (and loveliness) of the Creator.

### Conclusion

Unfortunately, at present the issues raised by these poems of Thomas Merton have taken on a renewed contemporary relevance, as once again refugees fleeing violence and hunger by the thousands are being blocked by the alarm of authorities from reaching havens of safety and security, or are subjected to sudden, arbitrary deportation, while the threat of nuclear proliferation and a renewed arms race is greater than it has been in decades. Fortunately, these compelling expressions of Merton's commitment to the good news of the reign of God in the midst of the bad news of marginalization, exclusion and exploitation of the powerless can still provide insight and inspiration. They challenge readers confronted with a plethora of fake news, ideological spin and 'alternative facts' to support and celebrate the courage and resilience of the least ones, children of the kingdom, and to recognize and defend the intrinsic dignity and inherent rights of every person with words of wisdom and by prophetic action.

### Notes

1. See for example, 'Aubade: Lake Erie', 'The Winter's Night', 'Evening', 'St. Agnes: A Responsory' and 'The Holy Child's Song', all from Merton's first published book of verse, *Thirty Poems* (Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1944); *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977), pp. 35, 38, 41-42, 54-55, 55-56.
2. Thomas Merton, *Emblems of a Season of Fury* (New York: New Directions, 1963) 28-29; *Collected Poems*, pp. 330-31.
3. *Emblems*, pp. 32-35; *Collected Poems*, pp. 335-337.
4. *Collected Poems*, pp. 626-627.
5. Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years. Journals, vol. 4: 1960-1963*, ed. Victor A. Kramer (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 220.
6. A copy of the photograph, sent to Merton by his friend W. H. 'Ping' Ferry, is in the archives of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY. (I am grateful to Paul Pearson & Mark Meade for their help in providing a copy of the original photo — *Editor*)

7. For contemporary coverage of the event see: 'Editorial: China's Refugees: Something Can Be Done Now' *Life* 52.18 (May 4, 1962) 4; 'Hong Kong: Refugees Rejected' *Life* 52.23 (June 8, 1962) 40-42; available at: <http://hongwrong.com/hong-kong-refugees>.
8. *Emblems*, pp. 20-22; *Collected Poems*, pp. 322-324.
9. Poems written in a similar style from the same period include: 'Chant to Be Used in Processions around a Site with Furnaces' (*ESF* 43-47; *CP* 345-49); *Original Child Bomb* (New York: New Directions, 1961; *CP* 291-302); 'Plessy vs. Ferguson: Theme and Variations' (*CP* 651-55). Like 'A Picture of Lee Ying', the principal source of each of these poems is a specific text, whereas the raw materials of the later book-length antipoem sequence *Cables to the Ace* (New York: New Directions, 1968) are much more diverse.
10. Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1985).
11. See the similar comments on 'Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants' in his September 19, 1961 journal entry in *Turning Towards the World*, pp. 162-63.
12. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life: Seeking Peace in the Hermitage. Journals, vol. 5: 1963-1965*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997) 104-105. The vigil is that of the Feast of Pentecost, as is made explicit in the slightly revised version of this passage found in Thomas Merton, *A Vow of Conversation: Journals 1964-1965*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988), pp. 49-50.
13. 'Paper Cranes' remained unpublished until it was included in the 'Uncollected Poems' section of *Collected Poems*.
14. For Merton's subsequent correspondence with one of these visitors, see William Apel, 'Hiroshima Notes: The Friendship of Thomas Merton and Hiromu Morashita', *The Merton Journal* 22.1 (Easter 2015), pp. 8-17.
15. *The Hidden Ground of Love*, p. 191.
16. The story of Sadako has become well known in the West especially through Eleanor Coerr's novel for young readers, *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (New York: Putnam Juvenile, 1977). For an on-line version of a special exhibit on Sadako at Hiroshima, see: [http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum\\_e/exhibit\\_e/exh0107\\_e/exh01071\\_e.html](http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/virtual/VirtualMuseum_e/exhibit_e/exh0107_e/exh01071_e.html).
17. In an earlier draft of the poem, now in the archives of the Butler Library at Columbia University, the entire section is phrased as a question, reading: '... talons / Feels no hunger / Knows no hate, having no need?'
18. Lines 8-9 in the earlier draft read: 'Without suspicion / And without cravings.'
19. See Merton's description of wisdom as a way of knowing 'which transcends and unites, . . . which dwells in body and soul together and which, more by means of myth, of rite, of contemplation, than by scientific experiment, opens the door to a life in which the individual is not lost in the cosmos and in society but found in them.' Thomas Merton, ed., *Gandhi on Non-Violence*:

*Selected Texts from Non-Violence in Peace and War* (New York: New Directions, 1965), p. 1.

20. See Merton's comments in his essay 'The Zen Koan': 'Western man sees himself as a subject with various possibilities of fulfillment: a package of desires for things, or states, which can be "attained". ... Happiness consists in the full conscious certitude that he has in fact attained what he sought, that it is and remains his possession. But the basic tenet of Buddhism is that an identity built on this kind of consciousness is false. Such a "self" has no metaphysical status. If it exists at all, as a valid possibility, it can only be realized and enjoyed momentarily, and when it passes, it leaves behind it suffering, death, and the whole train of evils which are rooted in "craving". Such a consciousness is nothing but the illusory fire which is kindled by craving (*The Fire Sermon*). The consciousness which lies at the heart of Zen is quite different from this dialectic of craving, striving, and rest. It rests not in attainment but in non-attainment, and, really, the whole question of rest and attainment becomes irrelevant to it.' Thomas Merton, *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967), pp. 238-39.
21. Merton writes: 'The mature grasp of the primordial emptiness in which all things are one is Prajna, wisdom.' Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 68.
22. 'Sophia, the feminine child, is playing in the world, obvious and unseen, playing at all times before the Creator. Her delights are to be with the children of men. She is their sister. The core of life that exists in all things is tenderness, mercy, virginity, the Light, the Life considered as passive, as received, as given, as taken, as inexhaustibly renewed by the Gift of God. Sophia is Gift, is Spirit, *Donum Dei*. She is God-given and God Himself as Gift. God as all, and God reduced to Nothing: inexhaustible nothingness.' (*CP* 368)
23. The earlier draft omits the first two lines of this section, and reads 'Imaging the luckiest of birds / Lights with wrens, cranes and doves' rather than 'Gives life to what it loves.'
24. See Merton's reference to St. Paul's distinction between 'two kinds of wisdom: one which consists in the knowledge of words and statements, a rational, dialectical wisdom, and another which is at once a matter of paradox and of experience, and goes beyond the reach of reason.' *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, p. 55.
25. Merton calls wisdom 'a kind of knowledge by identification, an intersubjective knowledge, a communion in cosmic awareness and in nature ... a wisdom based on love.' Thomas Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart, OCSO (New York: New Directions, 1981), p. 108.
26. On this theme in Merton's work see Fiona Gardner, *The Only Mind Worth Having: Thomas Merton and the Child Mind* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).
27. See *Hagia Sophia*: 'The feminine principle in the world is the inexhaustible source of creative realizations of the Father's glory. She is His manifestation in radiant splendor! ... Sophia is the mercy of God in us. She is the tenderness with which the infinitely mysterious power of pardon turns the darkness of

our sins into the light of grace. She is the inexhaustible fountain of kindness .... So she does in us a greater work than that of Creation: the work of new being in grace, the work of pardon, the work of transformation from brightness to brightness.' *Collected Poems*, p. 369.

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**Joseph Tokasz**, a student of Patrick O'Connell, folded and photographed the origami crane on page 40.

## Donald Grayston 1939—2017

Sadly Donald passed away on October 24 this year. He was a Canadian, an Anglican priest, a tireless worker for peace and a great Merton scholar. He saw Merton as the outstanding spiritual guide for Christians of our time. He was a good friend of our society, contributing several articles to this journal. At our 2002 Oakham Conference, in his keynote speech, 'Merton as Transcultural Pioneer', he used Merton's essay 'Day of a Stranger' as a starting point. He concluded:

*Merton's day as a stranger is over. However, as we assimilate his insights into our own understanding, we find that our own day challenges us to embrace the universe in a way which will eventually make us no longer strangers, speaking of ethereal perceptions to our own secular and uncomprehending communities, but ourselves pioneers, both in our own place and transculturally, of a new norm of spiritual formation the very opposite of parochial or exclusive, indeed of a universal embrace. To this challenge that well-known 'stranger', Thomas Merton, summons us now.*

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.