

Absence

YOU'RE BACK. Two years is a long time.
I should ask where you've been;
was I so dense, so unteachable?

Not that I have any right to your company.
You are free to choose your fireside.
Perhaps you think the anguish time well spent:

Stroking an empty page with my fingers,
Scanning the distant hillside for any movement
That could be the far-off footsteps of a poem.

A Postcard for Thomas Merton

AT FOURTH and Walnut today, it's just
Any old crowd milling: I guess it always was.
But you're there too among them, helping us remember.
And from these books you get under my skin,
Firing the ache for something whole and simple: the truth.

It's funny how the cheese and the conflicts
Don't matter now. There's so much cheese
We have to deal with. But you needed that, too:
It had its place in the mountain climb, one of many paths
Leading to the crossed roads of your heart.

I want to thank you for staying with them all; not going
Anywhere much: letting those roads worry you awake.
Smile on us then, reclining at you must now, at home
Among buddhas, saints and outcasts; their familiar.
And pray for blessing on our small wits,
And on our turbulent, distracted hearts.