

# The Shower

(for Thomas Merton)

Wandering alone  
along the walls of Gethsemani,  
among white crosses,  
I stop and wonder:

So far away  
on that second Tuesday in December,  
did the water feel any different to him  
during that final, fateful shower?

Did the soap yield more lather?  
Did the light from the lamp  
shine with more radiance  
than usual?

I hope so.  
I hope it was a shower gloriously unlike any  
other,  
one where his body glowed  
and the steam rose slowly like morning fog,  
reddening his skin  
like the leaves of dogwoods in fall.

Perhaps surprised by the heat,  
he revelled in its offering,  
submitting directly to its current  
until his skin wrinkled  
and a grin of still relief crept to his lips.  
After all, one never knows what to expect  
from a Red Cross in Bangkok.

As the water streamed down his back,  
dropping like diamonds into palms,  
I hope it felt like the fingers of a lover  
caressing his shoulders  
beckoning and soothing.

Later, as the towel ranged across his chest,  
and he envisioned abbots and monks,  
novelists and poets  
friends and a certain Louisville nurse,  
I hope his broad smile extended  
like the Kentucky palisades,  
rising from the river in quiet splendour,  
like outstretched arms.

So many paths  
denied or deferred;  
So many paths  
offered and shown.

Yes, this is how I prefer to think  
of his last day in Thailand,  
emerging from a shower  
with the clarity of a winter sunrise:  
the calmed assurance,  
the courageous devotion,  
the serene foreboding  
in the face of invocation.

The humble, bidden steps;  
the mournful, obliging fan.