

Silence as the Path to Joy in the Poetry of Thomas Merton and T.S. Eliot

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*'Whereof what we cannot speak
we should be silent.'*

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*

After becoming acquainted with Thomas Merton's and T.S. Eliot's lives and works, on the surface it seems that they had not much in common: Merton was a Roman Catholic monk and priest; Eliot a vestryman in the Anglican High Church. The former was initially acknowledged as a writer of religious best sellers written in an easily accessible style; the latter a literary craftsman accused of writing for a literary elite.

Nevertheless, there are striking parallels in their biographies as well as in their central preoccupations. Both Merton and Eliot studied English Literature, one at Columbia, the other at Harvard, and both were devoted to teaching although, in Eliot's case, only practised for a short period of time. Their literary passion led them to engage deeply in lifelong reading and study, something which is reflected in the richness of allusions and influences which pervade their poetry. They also shared a profound admiration for the French symbolists and they were both involved with experimentation in poetry and the use of avant-garde techniques. In this regard, Eliot (together with Ezra Pound and Wallace Stevens) became one of the main representatives of Anglo-Saxon modernism, and Merton can be considered as a high exponent of the anti-poetry movement started by South-American poets such as Nicanor Parra. Furthermore, they themselves became literary critics, creating their own poetics based on an 'escape from personality'¹ in favour of traditional community, and they showed a great concern for social issues, courageously denouncing the

spiritual decay and secularisation of Western culture.

Both Eliot and Merton experienced a sudden religious conversion which led them to adopt a more transcendental vision of reality. They felt a deep fascination with Christian mysticism as is manifest in their keen interest in the ascetic realism of Julian of Norwich and St. John of the Cross, and also in their common attraction to oriental spirituality, most particularly Buddhism and Hinduism. In this sense, both the Anglo-American man of letters and the contemplative Trappist monk did fall under a common category: they were great spiritual seekers.

Indeed, the whole poetic corpus of both Merton and Eliot attests to a passionate life search devoted to the fulfilment of an intimate desire: the mystical union with God through contemplative silence and prayer. However, this mystical inclination was apparently overshadowed by their writing vocation, and both writers suffered a lifelong struggle between the contemplative experience and the aesthetic thrust² (which Eliot described as 'an intolerable wrestle with words and meanings'³) and a continual self-sacrifice. And yet, they were able to overcome all contradictions, building up a whole imaginative world solid and consistent enough to create what Yeats, referring to Shelley's poetry, called 'a room for the soul'.⁴

This article will try to shed light on the use of themes, symbols and images that characterise their understanding of silence as a path to joy, a polyhedral concept which has different dimensions involving mindfulness or conscious awareness, the soul's purification leading to freedom and love, and commitment to the unknown through faith and courage. I will mainly concentrate on their mature poetic works: namely, Merton's *The Strange Islands* (1957), *Emblems of a Season of Fury* (1963) and *Cables to the Ace* (1968); and Eliot's *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets* (1943), described by Merton as the greatest spiritual poem of the twentieth century.⁵ The methodology I shall follow is based on a close reading and interpretation of some of their most significant poems, not only in order to 'understand' them, but to 'experience' them, so that we can have access to both the 'experience' and the 'meaning' and at the same time enjoy, as we read, those 'moments of happiness', that 'sudden illumination'⁶ which both Eliot and Merton have attempted to articulate.

Silence as Listening: the paradise ear

As Merton pointed out in his autobiography, he heard about T.S. Eliot from the English Master at Oakham 'who had just come down from Cambridge and read me aloud *The Hollow Men*'.⁷ Later on Merton would

do a closer reading of his collected poems as part of his degree at Columbia University, trying to imitate him as he was writing his own poems. In one of his diaries, Merton made some comments on *Four Quartets* in which he underlined that his own poetry should be 'sharp and precise like Eliot or else quit.'⁸

Deeply moved by the visionary quality and penetrating force of Eliot's verses, Merton learnt from this high priest of modern poetry that a silent life was essential to unmask illusion and discover true identity, and to this silence — understood as an act of worship to God and as a response to His grace⁹— he tried to devote his whole existence once he had decided to enter the Cistercian monastery of Our Lady of Gethsemani: 'My life is a listening, His is a speaking. My salvation is to hear and respond. For this my life has to be silent. Hence my silence is my salvation.'¹⁰

Listening to Nature became for Merton and for Eliot one of the main paths towards silent contemplation, as well as an instrument for recovering 'the paradise ear'¹¹ or what Prof. Fernando Beltrán Llavador has called 'a pray-ear'.¹² Indeed, the recreation of natural spaces in all their beauty and diversity plays an important role in Merton's and in Eliot's later poetry, which is full of physical imagery. They showed a predilection for that 'invisible fecundity'¹³ shining in all visible things, that Thomist notion of *claritas* or glory of form glowing through matter, what Hopkins would describe as the 'inscape' of things. This might be the reason why they enjoyed writing poems about the winter season, as they considered the dryness of that season an inexhaustible source of inner life. In the opening stanza of Eliot's *Little Gidding*, the silence of winter stands as a lucid metaphor of spiritual death but also of spiritual birth, anticipating the paradoxical character of the contemplative life:

Midwinter spring is its own season
Sempiternal though sodden towards sundown,
Suspended in time, between pole and tropic.
When the short day is brightest, with frost and fire
The brief sun flames the ice, on pond and ditches,
In windless cold that is the heart's heat,
Reflecting in a watery mirror
A glare that is blindness in the early afternoon.
And glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier,
Stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire
In the dark time of the year. Between melting and freezing
The soul's sap quivers.¹⁴

In Merton's poem 'Love Winter when the Plant says nothing' we encounter the same idea of a secret, intense and neverending life hidden by the snow and barrenness of winter. According to Alan Altany, it is a poem about the emptiness, silence, ineffability and creative darkness of the mystical experience.¹⁵ But the paradox is that the emptiness is the fullness, the fullness the emptiness; the darkness is the light, the light the darkness:

O little forests, meekly
Touch the snow with low branches!
O covered stones
Hide the house of growth!

Secret
Vegetal words,
Unlettered water,
Daily zero.

Pray undistracted
Curled tree
Carved in steel—
Buried zenith!

Fire, turn inward
To your weak fort,
To a burly infant spot,
A house of nothing.

O peace, bless this mad place:
Silence, love this growth.

O silence, golden zero
Unsetting sun.

Love winter when the plant says nothing.¹⁶

There are other instances in Merton's and in Eliot's later poetry in which the careful listening to the natural world leads our poets to experience the ecstasy, the identification with the object of contemplation through a kind of individual death. At the end of *The Dry Salvages* Eliot describes

one of these happy and unexpected epiphanies in the flux of time which are assurances of a reality that transcends the very flow. Making use of a stream of sense-perception images which give an impression of immediacy, the poet creates a sacred space, opening the recipient to a more expansive, less egoistic perspective:

For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music
While the music lasts. There are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought, and action.¹⁷

The extraordinary and timeless communion 'hinted' at in these meditative verses is also present in Merton's Zen influenced poem, 'O Sweet Irrational Worship', where we find beautifully rendered lines in which the poet's self is lost in the depths of a silence greater than himself so that the dichotomy between the observer and the observed is momentarily overcome.¹⁸ Here the movement of the poem is from the life of the senses to the life of the spirit, from meditation to contemplation; and there is a sense of joy in it as the poet sings in simple imagery of oneness with all existence, pointing to the possibility for everyone to reach final integration through a direct, unitive experience that is empty of abstractions:

Wind and a bobwhite
And the afternoon sun

By ceasing to question the sun
I have become light,

Bird and wind.

My leaves sing.

I am earth, earth

All these lighted things
Grow from my heart.¹⁹

Listening to Nature's silent language came to be one of Merton's and Eliot's main paths of true spiritual communion with the divine, as well as a means of detachment from human preconceived ideas about the self and the world. With their poetry they were implicitly hinting at the dethronement of man as the owner of Logos, so that things around us can recover their own speech and engage in a honest dialogue beyond the objective/subjective dichotomy. Only then (they claimed) can the paradise ear be restored, awakening in us a new sacramental awareness of the mystery of Life.

Silence as Self-transcendence: the apophatic path

Silence plays a particularly important role in Merton's and Eliot's later poetry, corresponding with their own spiritual journey into the Unknown and their growing concern for self-transcendence.²⁰ Indeed, both poets were aware of the fact that union with God implies a slow and progressive burning away of the false self, a surrender of the ego — 'the shadow' as Eliot calls it — in order to embrace the otherness.

This might principally be the reason why they showed a keen interest in the mystical apophatic tradition, as represented above all by Saint John of the Cross in his *Dark Night of the Soul* which Eliot explicitly calls 'the darkness of God'.²¹ Eliot had begun to read Saint John of the Cross at Harvard University in the academic year 1913-14 and had re-read him during the twenties. Merton began to study his works in 1938 and recognised them as worthy of the greatest respect, although it would take him some time to fully understand their message. Considered as a discipline of contemplation, Eliot describes the apophatic way closely in the third section of *Burnt Norton*, where he plays on words to drive home the meaning: 'Descend lower, descend only/ into the world of perpetual solitude,/ world not world, but that which is not world,.../ internal darkness, deprivation/ and destitution of all property.'²² These are powerful expressions full of resonances in which Eliot praises that inner solitude and silence which Merton so much strived for, not only in his ascetical practices but also in all their mystical and metaphysical significance.²³

In the third movement of *East Coker*, Eliot continues to reflect on that condition of complete spiritual humility, vacuity, and nothingness which is necessary if you are to achieve the fullness of being in this life.

Using a series of haunting rhythmic anaphoras and a *jeu de paradoxes* clearly inspired by St. John of the Cross's *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* I.xiii.II, the poet creates a texture of trans-temporal tradition and keeps insisting on this 'way of negation':

In order to arrive at what you do not know
 You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
 In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by the way of dispossession.
 In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are not.
 And what you do not know is the only thing you know
 And what you own is what you do not own
 And where you are is where you are not.²⁴

With conviction and great creative force, the last lines of Eliot's quotation embody 'the wisdom of humility' and echo Merton's poem, 'In Silence', where the lyrical voice emphasises the mystery lying within or beyond our own selves: 'Do not/ think of what you are/ still less of/ what you may one day be./ Rather/ be what you are (but who?) be/ the unthinkable one/ you do not know.'²⁵ Like Eliot, Merton was an 'apophatic poet', or in the words of Susan McCaslin, a 'poet of unknowing' or a 'no language poet'.²⁶ In one of his journals, Merton describes himself as 'a lover of the dark Cloud',²⁷ and in *Cables to the Ace*, he uses language to cancel out or undo language, adopting the same transcendental and penitential tone as the one employed by Eliot:

. . . Waste. Emptiness. Total poverty of the Creator: yet from this poverty springs everything. The waste is inexhaustible. Infinite Zero. Everything comes from this desert Nothing. Everything wants to return to it and cannot. For who can return 'nowhere'? But for each of us there is a point of nowhere in the middle of movement, a point of nothingness in the midst of being: the incomparable point, not to be discovered by insight. If you seek it you do not find it. If you stop seeking, it is there.²⁸

It is precisely in this wise ignorance of contemplation, this Eckhartian concept of 'perfect poverty' as a main attribute of the inmost 'I', where Merton and Eliot also found an everlasting source of peace and

fulfilment. Like the saints, they tried to occupy themselves with a 'lifetime's death in love/, ardour ... and self-surrender.'²⁹ This death-in-life and life-in-death is to be regarded as the liberation from already-established patterns of thought, but also, and most importantly, as the recovery of children's innocence, what the Christian contemplative tradition calls 'purity of heart'. Because as Christ said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.' (Matthew 18:3)

Silence and language: raids on the unspeakable

Although Merton and Eliot would have liked to remain in the pure silence of the contemplative experience, their creative impulse compelled them to write and share with others the fruits of contemplation. However, both authors were aware of the inherent limitations of language when trying to approach God, and they found it hard to express with words the ineffable experience of the divine.

In the fifth movement of *Burnt Norton*, Eliot openly admits that his words: ' . . strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden / Under the tension, slip, slide, perish, / Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, / will not stay still.'³⁰ Despite this fact, he thinks that the task of the poet is to revive words, to 'purify the dialect of the tribe' so that the common word may be forced, in the hands of a master, of language to take on a new solidity, a new sharpness of outline, and even a meaning which is different from the accepted one.

Like Eliot, Merton in *The Tower of Babel* meditates on language and the instability of words which create reality as fast as they are eaten by it. As he observes, 'History is a dialogue between/ forward and backward / going inevitably forward/ by the misuse of words.'³¹ As opposed to that historical semantic word, which has no essential meaning, in his morality play the poet develops the same theology of the Word that can be traced in Eliot's poetic output; a theology based on the regenerative Word of God as the only antidote to the word of fear ruling the contemporary world.

However, there are periods within human history when the Word of God is not heard, and that experience both poets portray as a kind of waste land in which the Word is denied: In *Ash Wednesday* Eliot describes how the divine Word — which he, like Merton, describes as a silent word³² — has been rejected:

Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard,
 The Word without a word, the Word within
 The world and for the world;
 And the light shone in darkness and
 Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
 About the centre of the silent Word.³³

Eliot did discern an intimate relationship between silence and the Word of God. Nevertheless, this Word cannot be heard because there is not enough silence in the World: 'Where shall the word be found, where will the word/ resound? Not here, there is not enough silence.'³⁴ In a similar vein, Merton also complained about the fact that the Word cannot be apprehended because there are too many false ideologies which, through propaganda, have penetrated into people's minds, influencing and manipulating their opinions and thoughts, thus creating division and disagreement. In his poetic drama, *The Tower of Babel*, he underlines the disintegrating nature of political and commercial discourses within the democratic State:

RAPHAEL:

They think they speak the same
 Language, that they are of one
 Mind.

Presently
 We shall discover that they are
 Only of one voice. Many minds,
 Many thoughts signifying nothing.
 Many words, many plans
 Without purpose. Divided hearts,
 Weak hands.³⁵

In this world of confusion, it is not possible to reach a unifying sapiential awareness, that universal Law about which Heraclitus talks in the fragment that serves as an epigraph to Eliot's *Four Quartets*: 'Although the Logos ('Word') is common to all, the majority of people live as though they had a wisdom of their own.'³⁶ As a result of human misunderstanding, Logos has been divided into particular or private opinions which clash against each other, words have been reduced to mere sound and fury, and silence has been expelled: 'Let there never again be any silence' claims the leader of the Tower. 'Let tongues never be

still. For if there be silence, our history will instantly be unmade, and if we stop talking we will cease to exist. . . . Let silence be crucified!'³⁷

Despite the overwhelming threat of empty rhetoric and the prevalence of a totalitarian mentality, Merton and Eliot, through their poetry, give us a continuous invitation to the hearkening of the silent Word, the poetic-prophetic Word, the Word that was 'in the beginning' (*In principio erat Verbum*), the Word that spoke on the Mountain and that was given in the desert. In Merton's 'Elias—Variation on a Theme' the lyrical voice warns: 'O listen, Elias/ . . . listen to His word. "Where the fields end/ Thou shalt be My friend./ Where the bird is gone/ Thou shalt be My son".'³⁸

They did not ignore that this language was quite dangerous as it is a true weapon of destruction of the false ideals which rule our daily lives, but nevertheless they agreed on letting it speak through their verses, even though they knew that there are 'shrieking voices, scolding, mocking, or merely chattering'³⁹ which are always assailing the Living Word. Sometimes both poets would have preferred to follow Shakespeare's recommendation to 'love and be silent'.⁴⁰ Still, they tried to learn to use words ('for us, there is only the trying' says Eliot) and to do raids on the inarticulate in 'the fight to recover what has been lost/ and found and lost again and again.'⁴¹

Conclusion

We could conclude from this survey of poetic imagery and themes that both Eliot and Merton regarded silence as the place of self-abandonment and true communion with the divine beyond the imprisonment of one's own egoism. Moreover, they considered that silence could liberate people who are bound by their own designs, awakening in them a new awareness of that which lies outside and beyond political ideologies, social structures or philosophical systems, and allowing them to listen to the Word in the desert, which is always a word of denial, never private, always communal. A Word which decentralizes man as the owner of Reason, restoring the lost dialogue between 'I' and the otherness.⁴²

Above all, through beautifully rendered lines, Merton and Eliot show us that Silence speaks but cannot be spoken about because it is the realm where life unfolds 'in all its unpredictability and all its freedom'.⁴³ It is in this freedom — the freedom of human knowledge and the freedom of one's own self conformed by that knowledge — that both poets found a true source of joy and action: the joy of unknowing, the radical openness of wonder and exploration of the endless possibilities of life and art.

Because, as Eliot wrote, 'what we call the beginning is often the end/ and to make an end is to make a beginning.'⁴⁴ Surely, the last lesson we can take from these poets is that, in the mastery of poetry as much as in the mastery of the full consciousness, the un/learning process is infinite.

I would like to close these reflections by quoting from one of Merton's *Thoughts in Solitude*. They are one of the highest expressions of his understanding of silence as a loving self-surrender, and they communicate the joy of holistic awareness to which we are all called. Let God allow us to grasp and experience their true meaning: 'Let me seek, then, the gift of silence, and poverty, and solitude, where everything I touch is turned into prayer: where the sky is my prayer, the birds are my prayer, the winds in the tree is my prayer, for God is all in all.'⁴⁵

Notes

1. In his essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Eliot develops his theory about the impersonal character that all poetic endeavour should have. See T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, (London: Faber, 1951), p.12.
2. In the case of Merton, he publicly claims that when poetry bars the way to true contemplation, the only choice for the poet is the 'ruthless and complete sacrifice of his art'. See Thomas Merton, 'Poetry and the Contemplative Life', *The Commonweal* 46 (4 July 1947), pp. 280-286. Driven by this conviction, Merton would stop writing poetry from 1949 until 1957, when he ended up by acknowledging that the poet and the contemplative may be able to co-exist. See 'Poetry and the Contemplative Life: A Reappraisal', in Thomas Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1981), pp. 128-133.
3. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1980), p. 134.
4. Quoted by T.S. Eliot in 'What is minor poetry', *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), p. 50.
5. Thomas Merton, 'T.S. Eliot and Prayer', Credence Cassettes AA2808.
6. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 142.
7. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1948), p. 80.
8. Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (San Diego, USA: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1981), p. 94.
9. Thomas Merton, 'Silence', Credence Cassettes AA2133.
10. Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (London: Burn & Oates, 1987 4th imp.), p. 72.
11. Merton uses this phrase for the title of his review of *All: The Collected Short Poems, 1956-1964*, by Louis Zukofsky. According to Merton, 'Zukofsky's poems... spring from a ground of immense silence and love which extends beyond them infinitely in all directions. This one must hear with a paradise ear.' See *The*

Literary Essays of Thomas Merton, pp. 128-133.

12. Fernando Beltrán Llavador, 'Brother Silence, Sister Word: Merton's Conversion and Conversation in Solitude and Society' in *Your Heart is My Hermitage* (London: Thomas Merton Society, 1996), p. 114.
13. Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977), p. 363.
14. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 138.
15. Alan Altany, 'Thomas Merton's Poetry: Emblems of a Sacred Season'. Available at www.thomasmertonsociety.org.uk/index.php?page=4#org, p. 17.
16. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 353.
17. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 136.
18. This is what Merton called 'deep silence' or 'endless silence', which implies the mystic's total immersion in the depths of a silence greater than the self (see Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas*, p. 192; and *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* [Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1953], p. 154). For a general description of different types of silence and their role in religious belief, see John F. Teahan's article 'The Place of Silence in Thomas Merton's Life and Thought', *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 61, No.4, October 1981, pp. 364-367. This essay gives a thorough account of Merton's theory of silence as reflected in many of his texts; it also provides a thorough analysis of Christian but also Eastern influences shaping his understanding and practice of silence, particularly monastic and mystical writers but also modern poets and thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Eliot.
19. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 344.
20. See Lynn Szabo, 'The Sound of Sheer Silence: a Study in the Poetics of Thomas Merton', *The Merton Annual*, Vol. 13 (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 213.
21. It is highly likely that Eliot discovered Saint John of the Cross through quotations of his work in William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) or in Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* (1911). For the influence of the saint on Merton see: Erlinda Paguio, 'Thomas Merton and the Saints of Carmel', *Spiritual Life*, Summer 1996.
22. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 125.
23. Silence in Merton's life cannot fully be understood without appreciating the corresponding place of solitude, and the intimate relationship between them is one of the most striking themes in his work. Needless to say that this solitude was not conceived by Merton as a synonym of isolation but as the deepest expression of shared love. See Thomas Merton, *Disputed Questions* (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), pp. 101-102.
24. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 127.
25. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 281.
26. Susan McCaslin, 'Transformative Solitudes: Merton and Rilke at the Pivot of Silence', *The Merton Seasonal*, Vol. 35, No.1, Spring 2010, p. 18.
27. Quoted by Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984), p. 362.

28. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 452.
29. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 139.
30. *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 121.
31. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 255.
32. In his notes for a course given at Gethsemani Abbey Merton explains: 'As silence is to speech so the Father is to the Son ... To hear and possess the silence of the Father is the real objective of reception of the Word.' Thomas Merton, 'Ascetical and Mystical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism', mimeographed, Louisville, Ky.: Bellarmine College, 1961, p.16.
33. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 65. Eliot's phrasing 'the word unheard, unspoken' suggests that he has in mind John 1:1.
34. *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 65.
35. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 249.
36. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 117. The epigraph is only given in the original Greek and many readers will consequently miss its relevance to the poem.
37. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 250.
38. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*, p. 240.
39. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 64.
40. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by G.K. Hunter (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 28.
41. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 140.
42. As David Belcastro has pointed out in his study of Luce Irigaray's theory on gender as a paradigm for an appreciation of cultural diversity, 'all such social constructs become meaningless when dwarfed as they are by the expansive unknown reality of the ineffable to which silence witnesses.' David Belcastro, 'Merton and Camus on Silence as the Language of Resistance', *The Merton Seasonal*, Vol. 38, No.3, Fall 2013, p. 19.
43. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable*, New York: New Directions, 1966, p. 159.
44. T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays (1909-1950)*, p. 144.
45. Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1956), p. 3

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