Hermann Hesse and Thomas Merton:
Countercultural Affinities

> But the longing to get on the other side of everything already settled, this makes me, and everybody like me, a road sign to the future. Hermann Hesse
> *Wandering:* Farmhouse

> There is another side of Kanchengunga and of every mountain---the side that has never been photographed and turned into postcards. That is the only side worth seeing. Thomas Merton
> November 19 1968

I

It is rather surprising, given the fact that Hermann Hesse and Thomas Merton are two of the pre-eminent countercultural ikons of the latter half of the 20th century, that few are the articles, books or essays that have brought them together and pondered their obvious affinities. John Collins has, in a suggestive way, pointed to affinities between Hesse and Merton by reflecting on Merton's readings of Hesse's *Journey to the East, Steppenwolf* and *Siddhartha*, but beyond Collins' two articles, there is nothing of substance and significance that examines the countercultural affinities between Hesse and Merton (and there are many). Hopefully, this missive will correct such a lack and omission.

Hesse was a generation older than Merton, being born in 1877, Merton being born in 1915, but both men were acutely sensitive to the pressing issues of western culture and many of the dominant dangers that threatened to undermine and negate the deeper longings that make for

a more meaningful life journey. I have, since the 1970s, read most of Merton's books and written a few books and articles on Merton and Hesse has been a fellow pilgrim of sorts for many a decade. I have spent some lovely time at Hesse's home on the upper rock knoll in Montagnola in Switzerland, imbibing the landscape, air, site and scenery that so held Hesse and from which most of his writings were birthed. So, in some ways, Hesse and Merton have been mentors of sorts for me on my journey. This essay is my way of repaying them for all they have taught me and passed my way.

Theodore Ziolkowski (a fine Hesse scholar) penned "Saint Hesse among the Hippies" (American-German Review: v. 35, no. 2, 1969) many a decade ago and the 1990 graduating essay by James Black, *Hesse and the Hippies: The Sociology of a Literary Phenomenon* tells its own convincing tale. Ziolkowski and Black make it abundantly clear that Hesse was one of the primary portals for many counterculture types in the 1960s-1970s into a vision of faith and life that could not be co-opted by a scientistic, secular or technological notion of the human journey or the literary Sanhedrin of the time. There were many writers and activists that shaped, formed and inspired the counterculture, but Hesse's multiple writings (poems, prose, novels, paintings etc) acted as a rite of passage for many into the counterculture. Many of the hippies of the 1960s-1970s seriously misread Hesse and reduced him to a shallow plaything of their notion of a counterculture (which led, in some ways, to his virtual disappearance the last few decades), but, at a deeper and more substantive level, for those who read Hesse aright, he was a counterculture alternate to the establishment ethos of the 1960s-1970s (even though he died in 1962). Hesse had anticipated, though, through his soul searching and layered political commentaries such as *If the War Goes On* (1948) a close relationship between the contemplative and the political.

William Shannon, in his compact and succinct book, *Something of a*

*Rebel: Thomas Merton: His Life and Works: An Introduction (*1997), rightly suggests Merton has been read in two ways: "one, ascetic, conservative, traditional and monastic; the other, radical, independent and somewhat akin to beats and hippies and poets (p. 127). It is the Merton that is "akin to beats and hippies and poets" who has much affinity with Hesse among the hippies. Many of Merton's writings in the 1960s did have many an affinity with the counterculture. I have dealt with this in my recently edited, *Thomas Merton and the Counterculture: A Golden String* (2016) and my earlier *Thomas Merton and the Beats of the North Cascades* (2006). There can be no doubt, therefore, that both Hesse and Merton were on frontstage within the Christian and Interfaith counterculture of the 1960s-1970s. What were, though, their affinities that have often been ignored in writings about Hesse and Merton?

There are five areas I will lightly but not substantively land on when dealing with the affinities between Hesse and Merton: 1) pioneers of the 20th century contemplative renaissance, 2) west meets east, 3) contemplation and the arts, 4) contemplation and correspondence and 5) contemplation and prophetic vision. Each of these areas placed Hesse and Merton in a countercultural position in regards to the prevailing and dominant cultural ethos of their time and era.

II
Pioneers of 20th Century Contemplative Renaissance

The West has been significantly dominated since the 16th century by a reversal of the *vita contemplativa* by the *vita activa.* The Western classical tradition once held high the *vita contemplativa* as a way of knowing and being from which the *vita activa* emerged in a wise and just manner. The rise of the protestant work ethic (and its secularization) has meant the *vita activa* has come to define and shape identity, the soul and society in the west. Even though the language of

liberty is viewed as the great good, most are merely victims of their drivenness, hence not truly free. Hesse and Merton realized, all too clearly, how and why the contemplative way had been marginalized and banished and the consequences of such a cultural and spiritual reality. Both also realized that for a civilization to be truly free, fit and healthy, the contemplative way had to be retrieved and recalled. This would mean, though, digging deep into the divided and conflicted souls of those who had too substantively imbibed and internalized the *vita activa.*

Hesse was, of course, much more the novelist than Merton, and in most of his novels he examines and explores the complex nature of the human soul, desires gone askew, temperaments off balance and the longing for recovery, unity and inner equilibrium. Novels such as *Demian, Narcissus and Goldmund* and *Steppenwolf* illuminate, in graphic depth and detail, the tensions and clashes that emerge when the inner quest is not properly ordered. The resolution to such novels does emerge, though, in an initial way, in *Siddharta* and a more mature manner in *Journey to the East* and *The Glass Bead Game* (Hesse's final and most mature novel). It is significant in such novels that Hesse holds high and clarifies the meaning of the contemplative, *The Glass Bead Game* being Hesse's summa on the issue and one of the reasons Hesse won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946.

It would be impossible to read Merton without becoming aware of his passion to dive and delve ever deeper into the contemplative journey. The Epilogue in *The Seven Story Mountain* touches on "Active and Contemplative Orders', one of Merton's early books was *Seeds of Contemplation* (the more mature version being *New Seeds of Contemplation)* and most of Merton's writings, in the 1950s, in one genre or another, dealt with the contemplative journey. In fact, I think it could be argued that Merton was, probably, one of the most significant miners of the mother lode of the contemplative in the latter

half of the 20th century. Merton saw all so clearly that the West had become addicted to the *vita activa* and such an addiction had become an oppressive bondage. The contemplative path was the means to liberate an imprisoned culture from such an addiction. It is significant that of the eight themes that Shannon sees as defining Merton's journey, the contemplative (2: "Prayer: The Journey Toward Interiority: Contemplative Spirituality) is a core one.

There can be little doubt that Hesse and Merton, like the perennial canaries in the mine shaft, felt the toxins of the modern *vita activa* and, in their different ways, they questioned such an imperial way of knowing and being. Hesse was not a monk like Merton, but his life at Montagnola in southern Switzerland certainly embodied a contemplative dimension. Merton was monk, but one of his perpetual frustrations was the way the monastic life which was, in principle, meant to be contemplative, had become excessively busy and active.

III
West Meets East

There has been an unhealthy but understandable tendency by many raised in the West to assume the West is about science, industry, secularism and a hyper activism but lacking in wisdom and the contemplative. This has meant many of the more astute and sensitive westerners have pitted the knowledge driven activist West against the more wisdom oriented and contemplative East. Such a simplistic dualism, of course, distorts both the Occident and Orient, but this has been a tendency amongst some of the more naïve. The West and East, in such a scenario, are either seen as complementary or, worse case, the West is demonized and the East idealized (or the reverse can occur, also). How did Hesse and Merton approach the Western and Eastern civilizational realities?

Hesse grew up in a prominent German pietistic family (Swabian Pietism) with many a connection via missionary and educational work to India. Hesse came in time to question substantive aspects of his Swabian pietism, but he also had a deep respect for such a heritage. This is clearly spelled out in "The Fourth Life" which did not make it into *The Glass Bead Game*. The first and longer version of "The Fourth Life" walks the reader into the nuanced pathway of Hesse's early years. Hesse realized, only too clearly, that his German pietistic upbringing tended to distort the sheer breadth and depth of Christianity, hence his ongoing attraction for the contemplative depths of the Roman Catholic tradition we see played out in *The Glass Bead Game*, Father Jacobus and the Benedictines being tutors and teachers to Joseph Knecht (Magister Ludi). "Father Confessor" in *The Glass Bead Game* walks the attentive reader into the wisdom and contemplative dimensions of patristic and desert spirituality that so attracted Merton (*The Wisdom of the Desert)*. "The Father Confessor" life, in some ways, anticipates Merton's *The Wisdom of the Desert*. There is much more that could be said about Hesse's critical yet appreciative understanding of both Roman Catholic and German pietistic Lutheranism. Hesse judiciously weighed, again and again, the riches offered by the West, but he also realized the East had much to offer that had been lost by the West. I mentioned above that *Siddharta* was one of Hesse's early forays into the East (it was translated into English in 1951 and published by New Directions who Merton often published with), and this missive has held many—Siddharta is not the enlightened Buddha but rather a man in search of meaning in a world that often demeans, distorts or offers multiple distractions and diversions from meaning—obviously, Indian thought, Hinduism and Buddhism loom large and factor significantly in this primer of the 1920s. But, Hesse's deeper probes into the Orient and the Orient-Occident are in *The Journey to the East* and *The Glass Bead Game.*

The fact that Hesse drew judiciously and discerningly from the Western Christian Tradition (ignored by many) must also be balanced by the fact he had a keen and abiding interest in the contributions from the Eastern heritage. Hesse's earliest book, *Peter Camenzind* (1904) is a running commentary of sorts on east-west spirituality and the wisdom offered by the best of both traditions just as his earlier short story, *Friends* (1907-1908), highlights the literary fact that genuine friends will be guided in their quest for deeper contemplative insight by mining both the wisdom of the west and east. Much of Hesse's mid- and later life writings return again and again to the need to draw from the best of the wisdom traditions of the world while also critically reflecting on their questionable elements. As mentioned above, *The Journey to the East* and *The Glass Bead Game* bring together some of Hesse's finest thinking on the west-east dialogue.

The fact Thomas Merton was drawn to the Roman Catholic Church as the Tridentine paradigm was waning meant that he both accepted such a model but doubted its staying power. *The Seven Storey Mountain* (even though selling well but not reflecting Merton at its mature best) lacked any substantive sense of Merton engaging the East-West issue. The guru the young Merton met, Brahmachari, did suggest Merton delve into his own tradition before he wandered afield into the Orient. Most of Merton's journey in the 1940s-1950s embodied and reflected the advice of the Hindu sage. But, by the late 1950s-1960s, Merton was very much on the same page as was Hesse decades earlier. Zen Buddhism was in vogue at the time, and Merton's dialogues with D.T. Suzuki are well known and noted. Merton explored others aspects of Buddhism with the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh and Buddhist monks so well recorded in *The Asian Journal* (in which he wrote a Preface to the Indian classic *The Bhagavad Gita).* Merton also was keen on understanding Judaism in its mystical forms and his friendship with Abraham Heschel is foundational in this area. Islamic Sufism and Hinduism (Merton's primer on Gandhi is a must read) also drew Merton

as did 1st Nations spirituality as reflected in *Ishi Means Man*. The Chinese Taoist heritage also had a substantive impact on Merton's journey as reflected in *Mystics and Zen Masters* and *The Way of Chuang Tzu.* The primer, with an introduction by the Canadian, George Woodcock, *Thomas Merton: Thoughts on the East* (New Directions book: 1995) is a portal into Merton's commitment to understanding the Occident on its terms while being deeply grounded in the contemplative vision of Christianity, also.

There can be no doubt that Merton, like Hesse, in their commitment to the contemplative way, turned to the Orient and Occident for guidance and wisdom. Both men thoughtfully weighed the pro-contra of such civilizational ways of interpreting the contemplative journey. There was none of the idealizing of the East, denigrating of the West in their more mature reflections. Hesse, like Merton, attempted to draw together the best of both traditions in their thinking and life. I don't think they can be reduced to syncretists or pluralists, though. There is much more to them than such trendy interpretive approaches. I think both men, for different reasons, can be seen as committed Christians with a high view (higher than most) of common grace or natural theology. This deeper catholic notion has often led to their being misunderstood by those with a more dogmatic and rational approach to the contemplative way and interfaith dialogue.

IV
Contemplation and the Arts

There has been, sadly so, a narrow way of viewing philosophy in the last few centuries. A certain form of empiricism and science has come to dominate and philosophical positivism has genuflected to such a methodology. Reason is then seen as a faculty or organ that brings to the clearing objective knowledge via inductive, deductive or sense driven empirical research. This has meant that philosophy as the

longing or love of wisdom has been reduced to defining terms, language games and logic. This approach to philosophy has tended to undermine and undercut the classical and historic understanding of philosophy as a contemplative journey into insight, wisdom and transformation.

The historic fact that philosophy has been, to some degree, co-opted by positivism has meant that those committed to the deeper and older meaning of philosophy have often turned to the arts as a means of knowing and being. Hesse and Merton were certainly no uncritical fans of philosophy as positivism and both men expressed their contemplative journey much more through artistic means than a narrow philosophic process. This is one of the reasons their appeal has been so far-reaching in the 20th century (and beyond).

Jacob Burckhardt was, in the latter half of the 19th century, a creative cultural historian who articulated, in a way few were doing at the time, alternate ways to interpret the Italian Renaissance and Classical Greek thought. Burckhardt lived most of his most fruitful years in Basel, and Hesse, as a young and feeling-his-way artist, spent time in Basel. It was impossible to live in Basel and not come under the spell of Burckhardt. Jacob Burkhardt, for different reasons, had an unusual impact on both the life and writings of Nietzsche and Hesse. Burkhardt, for good or ill, tended to be suspicious (and there were reasons to be so) of those who took an uncritical attitude towards the state and church (and their uneasy union). Burkhardt held culture, at its purest and best, as a countervailing and necessary antidote to the failings and pretensions of state and church, politics and religion. There is a sense that Nietzsche (whom Hesse admired at times and wrote an article on) and Hesse were indebted to Burkhardt's high view of culture as higher and more substantive than religion and politics, although Hesse, unlike Nietzsche, did recognize that there are worrisome tendencies when the more aesthetic aspects of culture become ends in themselves. Hesse

certainly held a higher commitment to the faith journey than did Burkhardt and Nietzsche, and he lived the trying tension between religion and culture but shared the suspicion of Burkhardt and Nietzsche about politics and a too high a view of state authority. Needless to say, Hesse saw the outworking of such an uncritical notion of the state in Germany throughout much of the first half of the 20th century.

The young Hesse, as I mentioned above, was born into a much respected German pietistic family that had many a connection with India. Hesse turned away from such a way of understanding the faith journey in his late teens and very much immersed himself in the broader German and European cultural ethos (much to the chagrin of some of his family). Literature, music and the arts won and drew the maturing Hesse and his earliest publications, *Romantic Songs* (1896), *One Hour After Midnight* (1898) and *Posthumous Writings and Poems of Herman Lauscher* (1901) although not selling well (the last better than the former two books of poetry and prose), did reflect an obvious turn to the romantic way of seeing and literary culture (a sort of surreal and dreamlike aestheticism) as a rebuke of sorts to an unfeeling and crass world of politics, religion and the captains of industry.

The further Hesse journeyed in his pilgrimage through time the more poetry and prose are balanced by the classical works of music (which work themselves, again and again, into Hesse's writings) and painting. In fact, painting comes to play a substantive role in Hesse's life, and there is definite contemplative quality in his thousands of paintings. Unfortunately, most commentators on Hesse have tended to focus on his writings, but such an approach misses the central role that art played in Hesse's life from WWI afterwards. There can be no doubt, though, that for Hesse, music, literature and painting were the means and pathway that revealed to him the deeper realities of life and the means to express his contemplative vision. It is significant that in *The*

Glass Bead Game music is the genre by which harmony and unity are brought forth from fragmentation and discrete academic disciplines amongst the Castilians.

Thomas Merton was certainly not drawn to positivism as a way of doing philosophy. Like Hesse, literature was his way of doing philosophy and the broader artistic ethos drew him. Merton had, as a mentor and model of sorts, his father and mother (who were both artists). Owen and Ruth Merton stood very much within the French impressionistic school and both studied with the much respected Canadian artist, Percyval Tudor-Hart. The relationship between Tudor-Hart and Owen Merton was so close that in the biography of Tudor-Hart by Alasdair Alpin MacGregor, *Percyval Tudor-Hart: 1873-1954: Portrait of an Artist* (1961) a full chapter (IV) is dedicated to Owen Merton ("Tudor-Hart's Interest In Owen Merton: 1887-1931). Thomas Merton, unlike Hesse, grew up in an artistic and bohemian context before the untimely deaths of his mother, then father. Owen Merton was very much a servant of the artistic muses and culture and Thomas Merton imbibed such a way of being.

Merton was a poet, like Hesse, and although he was certainly not the gifted novelist that Hesse was (Merton's novels, *The Straights of Dover, Labyrinth* and *My Arguments with the Gestapo* were not the highest quality) both men were fine and probing poets. Most of Merton's earliest published books of poetry when in the monastery, *Thirty Poems* (1944), *Man in the Divided Sea* (1946), *Figures for an Apocalypse* (1948) and *Tears of the Blind Lions (1949)* are, in many ways, much more informative and insightful pathways into Merton's spiritual and literary journey than are his initial autobiography (*The Seven Storey Mountain*), biography-hagiography of Mother M. Berchmans (which he thought one of his worst books alongside *What are these Wounds?*) and his first stab at a book length prose discussion of the contemplative life (*Seeds of Contemplation*). But, it is in the appendix of sorts in *Figures for an*

Apocalypse that we get a sense of Merton's thoughts on the relationship between poetry and contemplation. "Poetry and the Contemplative Life: An Essay" makes the needful yet obvious case that the arts and poetry, to be specific, are a finer and fitter way to live into and from a contemplative vision than a narrow way of doing philosophy that reduces the mind to logic and language chess games of the calculating mind.

There was much more to Merton, though, in his artistic journey than a literary rather than a pinched and constrictive way of understanding the relationship between thought, imagination and experience. Merton took to Zen sketches, photography, pop, jazz, folk music and various types of icons as means of living into the contemplative pathway. Merton was, more than Hesse, as a monk, grounded and rooted in a more disciplined monastic and religious life, but both were keenly alert to the role of culture and the arts as a suggestive way to the contemplative core and centre of our all too human journey. Hesse was not a Cistercian monk, but the contemplative monastic way factors large in his many novels, novellas and short stories. There was, in short, something deeply catholic about Hesse and this obstinate fact brings him close to Merton both in the areas of culture and religious life.

It is important to note that both for Hesse and Merton, both being romantics of a higher level, Culture and Nature had much in common. It is virtually impossible to read Hesse's writings from beginning to end without sensing and seeing his sensitive attitude towards Nature. Hesse was acutely aware that Nature had much to teach and as development accelerated and cities became more dehumanizing, Nature, when understood aright, had much to teach the soul and society---such is the romantic way. Merton, in this sense, was no different from Hesse. Both men were ecological pioneers. Monasteries, by their nature, are experiments in sustainable living and most monasteries are located far from cities. Monica Weis, more than most, has astutely seen how

Merton and the monastic life embody a view of ecological consciousness. *Thomas Merton's Gethsemani: Landscapes of Paradise* (2005) is a visual and textual delight of a read that places Merton's understanding of the monastic way within a historic environmental vision. The emergence by Merton, in the 1960s, in a more conscious way, via John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson and aboriginal spirituality speaks much about the way he threaded together the monastic vision of the new world with many of the pressing challenges of the growing ecological concerns of the planet.

Hesse and Merton, therefore, had a unique way, as high romantics, of threading together Culture and Nature in their writings and life in a way that can still inspire and challenge those alert to the pertinent issues of our ethos and age.

V
Contemplation and Correspondence

Hesse and Merton, for different reasons, through their confessional style of writing, won the hearts and minds of many in the 20th century. The sheer honesty and vulnerability in their poetry, novels and life drew many to both men. Readers could not help but sense in the journey of Hesse and Merton a rare gift and ability to speak to each person on their pilgrimage through time. The fact that both men needed solitude and silence to go deeper into places of insight and revelation was often missed by those who crudely and boorishly often, without invitation, arrived at their homes and hermitages expecting a generous welcome. Many were the moments when Hesse and Merton responded with legitimate frustration when religious tourists of sorts trespassed on the silence of their sacred seasons of contemplative silence. This did not mean, though, Hesse and Merton did not have a sense of responsibility to respond to those who contacted them.

The deeper the dives of Hesse and Merton, the more they recognized and realized their unity with others and the vast chasm between human longing and the lived reality of fragmentation and alienation. Many were the letters that arrived at Gethsemani and Hesse's home in Montagnola, advice being sought from sages that offered life-giving advice for the soul and society. And, extremely generous were the oft gracious letters in reply to the questions that emerged from meaningful places. The volumes of letters now collected in multiple tomes speaks much about the way Hesse and Merton linked together their contemplative journeys and the implication of such pilgrimages in responding to the needs and questions of others.

The publication of *Soul of the Age: Selected Letters of Hermann Hesse: 1891-1962* (1991) made it more than obvious that a significant element of Hesse's literary life was correspondence. It has been estimated that there are more than 30,000 letters in the Hesse archives and Hesse kept more than 40,000 letters that had been sent his way. Some have suggested that almost 1/3 of Hesse's working hours were devoted to responding in letters. There were, of course, Hesse's letters with the literati of his time such as Thomas Mann (*The Hesse—Mann Letters*: 2005), but for a fuller read of Hesse's vast correspondence, "Hermann Hesse: "Writer, guru, searcher" by Gabriele Ochsenbein (August 9 2012) fills in many a detail. Those who linger too long only on Hesse the writer, painter and musician miss, at an equally important level, Hesse the correspondent. It is Hesse the correspondent that speaks much about the man behind the artistic productions. At one level, Hesse was seen by many as reclusive and yet, at a more significant level, his many letters make it clear he was most giving of his time and energy.

There are those who have compared Merton's *Seven Storey Mountain* with John Henry Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Newman once said, "The true life of a man is in his letters". This is certainly the case with

Hesse and Merton. William Shannon has suggested that “letters are a way of building and sustaining friendships. In the Merton letters you get to meet his many friends throughout the world. Letters give an insight into a person’s humanness and concerns in ways that may not appear in books written for a general public. And, above all, Thomas Merton was a superb letter writer” (*Something of a Rebel*, p. 169).

There are five packed volumes of letters written by Merton to a diverse audience: 1) *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns, 2) The Road to Joy: Letters to New and Old Friends, 3) The School of Charity: Letters on Religious Renewal and Spiritual Direction, 4) The Courage for Truth: Letters to Writers* and 5) *Witness to Freedom: Letters in Times of Crises*. Each of these superb volumes of letters speaks much about a Merton who took careful time and attention to address a wide range of timely and timeless topics. The sheer literary output in the letters walks the reader into the life and soul of a man who took his vocation with much seriousness yet knew how to laugh at himself when ideas and issues were taken with too much seriousness.

There can be no doubt, though, that Hesse and Merton realized the essential role that correspondence played in their engagement with the world and such an art form, sadly so, has been somewhat lost in our era. Hesse and Merton have still much to teach us about some of the basics of the human journey and the role of correspondence in such a way of being.

VI
Contemplation and Prophetic Vision

There has been an unhealthy and unhelpful tendency by many who turn to the meditative, contemplative and mystical way to ignore or

distance themselves from the threatening and oft complex demands of such issues as war and peace, crime and punishment, poverty and wealth, ecology and economics, and technology and techne as ways of knowing and being. Such an either-or approach tends to distort the nature of a mature vision of life and is more gnostic than unitive and integrative, holistic and holy. Merton, initially, slipped into such a way of thinking in his early monastic phase, but he grew out of it by the mid-late 1950s and 1960s. The fact that Hesse lived in Europe throughout some of the most turbulent decades of European history of the 20th century meant that he had to think seriously and substantively about the relationship between thought and action, contemplation and politics, literature and life and the trying tension of ultimate, penultimate and antepenultimate issues.

Hesse began *A Pictorial Biography* this way: "I was born toward the end of the modern times, shortly before the return of the Middle Ages, with the sign of the Archer on the ascendant and Jupiter in favourable aspect". Merton began *The Seven Storey Mountain* in a similar way: "On the last day of January 1915, under the sign of the Water Bearer, in a year of great war, and down in the shadow of some French mountains on the borders of Spain, I came into the World". Hesse certainly witnessed, in his life what the Archer and Jupiter could and did do. Merton was born when the Archer and Jupiter dominated. Both men could not retreat from the stubborn reality of war (much closer to Hesse than Merton) and the clash between war and peace was ever before them—they could not indulge in a cloistered virtue that never sallied forth.

It is significant to note that Hesse, when younger, co-edited the liberal weekly, *Marz*, which was founded in 1907 to critique the aggressive tendencies of Kaiser Wilhelm II. It was also at this period of time Hesse met Theodore Heuss (1884-1963) who was front and centre in literary and political life in Germany. Heuss became President of the Federal

Republic of Germany from 1949-1959. Heuss was a warm supporter of Hesse throughout the turbulent years of Hesse's political opposition to German political life. Conrad Haussmann (1857-1922), a regular contributor to *Marz*, and a member of the Reichstag, was friends with Hesse from 1908 until his death in 1922.

Hesse's friendship with political leaders such as Heuss and Haussmann and his involvement with a variety of literary and political journals and publications meant that Hesse was keenly alert and alive to the issues of his time and how he might respond to them. The publication of many of Hesse's political writings in *If the War goes on…….*covers, in thoughtful essay form, almost 30 articles from 1914-1948 that deal with the hawkish nature of the German political ethos and more peaceful ways Germany might have gone. The essays include such classics as "Zarathustra's Return", "War and Peace", "Thou Shalt Not Kill", "A Letter to Germany", "Message to the Nobel Prize Banquet" and "On Romain Rolland" (whom Hesse had a decades long friendship with).

*If the War goes on…..*covers more than 30 years of prose writing by Hesse that returns, again and again, to the war-peace dilemma that so dogged Europe in the 20th century. It cannot be denied that Hesse had a tendency to examine the deeper nature of the inner life at a spiritual and psychological level in a way that few did, but this did not deflect him from addressing the larger political issues of the time in a poignant and prophetic manner. The fact he was given the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946 speaks much about the quality of his life and writings and their impact on European literary, cultural and political life.

Merton, as mentioned above, came into the world "in a year of great war" and war shadowed him much of his life. Merton entered the monastery about the same time that Pearl Harbour was bombed and, like Hesse, he understood the impact of war, his brother being a victim

of it. Merton had to make a difficult decision, when younger, about whether he would become a Cistercian or join Catherine de Hueck Doherty in inner city New York. There is a direct line and lineage between Doherty and Dorothy Day (whom Merton supported in the *Catholic Worker*) as recounted in *Comrades Stumbling Along: The Friendship of Catherine de Heuck Doherty and Dorothy Day as Revealed through Their Letters* (2009). Merton did, when entering the monastery, for a few short years in the 1940s-1950s, retreat from the larger public and political fray, but such a decision was but a season in his journey. It is impossible to miss even in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (material taken from Merton's notebooks from 1956-1966) that Merton was aware of the larger world issues beyond the enclosed walls of the monastery. Needless to say, he was often opposed when he dared to raise the larger and troubling issues in his time such as civil rights, nuclear war, Vietnam, war and peace, ecological concerns, aboriginal rights and reform within the church. Merton, like Hesse, faced much opposition and many a friend parted paths with both men the further they went down more dovish paths. I have covered Merton's peacemaking journey in my article, "Peacemaker", in *Thomas Merton: Monk on the Edge* (2012). There is an historic consistency in Hesse's writings on the larger issues of war and peace that is lacking in Merton, but there is a short season intensity on the issues by Merton lacking in Hesse. But, there can be no doubt that both men took seriously the need to integrate the spiritual and psychological dimensions of the journey with the larger political and public aspects of life. And, both men, in the way they approached the inner and outer realities (and sought to integrate them) were decidedly countercultural. I don't think any reader of the life and writings of Hesse and Merton would equate them with the dominant establishment of the time—they were, in their different ways, prophetic canaries.

VII
Hesse and Merton: Countercultural Affinities

There are some historic connections between Hesse and Merton that have not been noticed. Hesse went to school for a time at the former Cistercian monastery in Maulbronn. Hesse was often drawn, in his writings, to the monastic and contemplative way. It was Henry Miller in the 1950s (when living in Big Sur) who encouraged the translation and publication by New Directions of Hesse's *Siddharta*. This was the book Merton read and found most valuable in the final leg of his journey in Asia. There is a fine correspondence between Miller and Merton (initiated by Miller) which I tracked and discuss in "Thomas Merton and Henry Miller: Our Faces" in *Thomas Merton and the Counterculture: A Golden String* (2016). The Hesse-Miller-Merton connection is worth the probing. Hesse was just emerging as a significant North American writer in the late 1950s-1960s as Merton was nearing the end of his journey. Hesse became a guru and ikon of sorts for many in North America in the counterculture of the 1960s-1970s. Merton, by the 1960s, like William Everson, was front and centre in the Roman Catholic counterculture and making inroads into the larger North American counterculture. Hesse was more decidedly European in his life and writings, but Merton spanned the Euro-American ethos in a way Hesse never did. The fact that Hesse died in 1962 (and was waning before that) meant that he never addressed many of the pressing issues of the 1960s in the way Merton could and did. Hesse died August 9 1962 with a copy of Augustine's *Confessions* on his chest. Merton died December 10 1968 after giving a controversial lecture on Marxism and Monasticism.

There can be no doubt that Hesse and Merton were significant prophetic canaries and embodied a countercultural vision. The way both turned to the contemplative as a corrective to an over indulgent *vita activa*, their subtle dialogue between West and East, their vision of

the relationship between contemplation and arts and culture, their notion of Culture and Nature as companions, their generous and gracious commitment to letter-writing, correspondence, friendship and last, but not insignificant, their sense of their role and responsibility to the larger public and political issues of their age and ethos must be noted. In each and all of these, Hesse and Merton had countercultural affinities. Hopefully, in time, others will recognize this obvious reality and much more will be written on the affinities between Hesse and Merton. Certainly a book is waiting to be birthed on such a topic.

Ron Dart