

REVIEWS



Gaby Hoffmann, (left to right) Christina Ricci, Thora Birch, and Ashleigh Aston Moore star in 'Now and Then.'

Films offer faulty fare

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'Copycat'

Twisted thriller in which a San Francisco homicide detective (Holly Hunter) tries to nab a serial killer with the reluctant aid of an expert criminal psychologist (Sigourney Weaver) still traumatized by an encounter with a patient. Directed by Jon Amiel, the plot has interest until disintegrating into a horror show. Excessive violence and gore, brief nudity and much rough language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'Mallrats'

Sophomoric saga of two youths (Jeremy London and Jason Lee) running amok in a mall after being rejected by their girlfriends (Claire Forlani and Shannen Doherty). Writer-director Kevin Smith plumbs the gutter for laughs but finds only mindless tedium. Sexual situations, nudity, drug abuse and constant gross language. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is O — morally offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R — restricted.

'Now and Then'

Four friends from childhood (Rita Wilson, Demi Moore, Rosie O'Donnell and Melanie Griffith) recall how they helped each other face problems when they were 12 in 1970 suburbia. Director Lesli Linka Glatter casts a glow over memories of the cusp of adolescence, but with scant story and character development, the result is a sweet but shallow salute to supportive friendships. Fleeting nudity and some sexual references. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

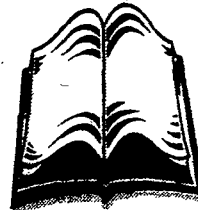
'Three Wishes' (Savoy)

Fable-like drama about a boy (Joseph Mazzello) in 1955 suburbia who hopes his widowed mom (Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio) will marry the kind-hearted drifter (Patrick Swayze) who has come into their lives. Director Martha Coolidge spins a well-observed story of decent people coping with life's problems, but the story is weakened by a subplot in which a brother comes to believe he has magical powers. Fleeting nudity and a crude expression. The U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG — parental guidance suggested.

Journal reveals young Merton

Run to the Mountain: A Story of a Vocation, edited by Trappist Brother Patrick Hart; Harper San Francisco, New York (1995); 478 pp., \$27.50.

By Frank Allen
Catholic News Service



**BOOK
REVIEW**

Novelist, poet, Trappist monk — Thomas Merton is a man of contradictions. Despite voluminous writings, it is difficult to know how to categorize this pilgrim of the spirit.

When Merton died in 1968 in Bangkok, Thailand, he left behind over 800,000 words of unpublished journals and letters. Under the stipulation of his trust, 25 years had to elapse before his journals could be published.

The first of these journals, *Run to the Mountain: A Story of a Vocation*, edited and introduced by Brother Patrick Hart, Merton's last secretary and general editor of the journals, covers three years, 1939-1941, just before Merton entered a monastery where he was to spend the rest of his life.

It is the first of seven volumes of journals that are to be published in chronological order with very little editing.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), born in France, converted to Catholicism, earned a master's in English at Columbia University, taught at St. Bonaventure University in Olean, N.Y., then entered the Cistercian Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky.

From the isolation of a monastery and later as a hermit, he became a leading social voice in the '60s for ecumenical and liturgical revival, interracial justice and peace.

His 1948 autobiography, *Seven Storey Mountain*, depicting how he found spiritual calm in the midst of Cold War and nuclear anxiety, became a best seller. In 1959, *The Secular Journal*, revised selections from his journals, gave an overview of his movement toward a contemplative life.

Studying in New York (the journal begins on May 2, 1939), living in Greenwich Village, Merton was trying to get novels published. (This first part is sometimes called "The Perry Street Journal.")

After a trip to Cuba and work as a staff volunteer at the Friendship House in Harlem, the narrative dramatically breaks off on Dec. 5, 1941, two days before Pearl

Harbor, with Merton having received a I-A notice from the draft board.

Ironically about to be drafted, this eloquent poet, choosing the austere Trappist life, became one of the century's great advocates of peace.

"There's a huge gap between the monastery and the world," Merton says after his first visit to Gethsemani at Easter 1941.

The 460 pages of this pre-monastic journal, against a backdrop of political turmoil and impending world war, is as precise as a guidebook and "Lebensgefühl" (full of life), as Merton refers to it. It combines the texture of a Thomas Wolfe novel and mystical desire of a prophet to find "some perfect city."

One day he's analyzing Dylan Thomas, the next the Feast of the Holy Family. To this inveterate reader, maker of lists and lover of words, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson combined, rebel and man of the cloister, everything has sacredness.

The inner dialogue between intellectual assertiveness and moral self-surrender, the need to embrace the world versus the need to seek grace, is idealistic and deeply felt.

One enjoys the company of this worldly humanitarian who sought to heal conflict between the secular and the spiritual.

"I am beginning to know," says Merton in 1941, "more surely now that there is nothing for me but to pray and do penance and belong to Christ in poverty, in my whole life and without compromise."

This journal may not make a case for those who wish to make a saint of Merton, but it does reveal a man for whom life was a gift to be cherished.

"Perhaps his best writing" is contained in his journal, asserts Brother Hart, "where he was expressing what was deepest in his heart."

When all the journals are published, it is likely that they will take place with the famous journals of Henry David Thoreau, G.M. Hopkins, Edmund Wilson, and perhaps be seen as an American version of St. Augustine's *Confessions*.

Allen, a longtime English professor, is now a college administrator.

Run to the Mountain: A Story of a Vocation may be purchased at your bookstore or ordered prepaid from HarperCollins



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