

*From the Irish American News, September, 2019*

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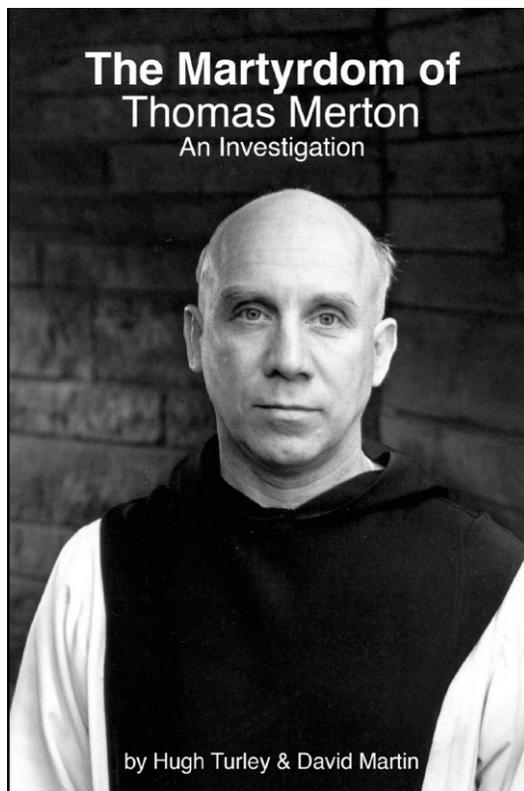
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# Was Thomas Merton Murdered?

By Sabina Clarke



**The Martyrdom of Thomas Merton: An Investigation**  
by Hugh Turley and David Martin  
McCabe Publishing, Hyattsville  
2018

The most intriguing character in the mystery surrounding the sudden death of the Trappist monk, writer, poet and theologian Thomas Merton in 1968 in Thailand is the French priest Father Francois de Grunne -- the last person seen with Merton and the last person to see Merton alive.

After completing the morning session of the Asiatic Conference Merton and de Grunne were seen walking together back to the cottage where they stayed for a brief respite before returning for the afternoon session of the conference. A few hours later Merton was dead.

De Grunne was also the first person to discover Merton's body and the first person to describe his death as an "accident". Hours before he was heard pacing the floor above Merton's bungalow by Father Celestine Say who -- was trying to rest and on the other side of the bungalow-separated by a mesh curtain.

Also as observed by others, de Grunne's behavior was described as being quite odd and jittery and his statements contradictory.

Not until the publication of this provocative book there has never been an investigation into the strange circumstances surrounding Thomas Merton's death. In their research, the authors discovered that Merton was critical of the propagandistic nature of the U.S. news media and openly criticized it. He was also an outspoken critic of the Vietnam War. He did not believe the reporting on the death of JFK.

The authors saw parallels between why Kennedy was killed and why Merton may have been killed. They unearthed never before seen documents which prompt legitimate questions about the official story disseminated by the news media about how Thomas Merton died.

They raise questions which point to a probable cover-up by Thai officials, the U.S. Government, the Abbot at Gethsemane, the U.S. news media and the likely involvement of the Central Intelligence Agency, the CIA—who could easily rely on cooperation with Thai officials because of the mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries—and on others through coercion.

The official Thai police report lists heart attack as the cause of Merton's death even though he had no history of heart disease and there was no autopsy as required by Thai law.

The U.S. news media dutifully reported the cause of death as electrocution by a faulty fan—a scenario promoted by Brother Patrick Hart, the Abbot at Gethsemane—even though the Abbot admitted he had no proof for his theory. The image I had at the time was of a Merton in a ramshackle substandard hotel with no amenities when in fact he was staying in a fairly modern facility with amenities.

Eventually, the story of Merton being electrocuted was embellished with Merton stepping out of the shower and then being electrocuted by a faulty fan--- in an attempt to add more credence to this false narrative-- essentially make Merton culpable for his own death through carelessness. This last scenario morphed into the official version that most people remember and has held fast to this day.

What now seems more like a fairytale was readily embraced by the general public at that time and promoted by the U.S. news media, the Catholic Press and Brother Patrick Hart who oddly failed to request an autopsy on Merton's body and who evidenced no interest in how or why Merton's strange and sudden death.

Completely ignored was the fact that Merton was dressed in shorts when his body was found completely dry—suggesting that he did not step out of the shower which was shared with Father Celestine Say in a room divided by a thin metal mesh. Father Say

would have heard Merton take a shower-which he stated. Or Merton was already dead when Father Say got to his room.

What is also puzzling is the fact that a large gaping wound on the back of Merton's head was not even mentioned in the official police report and no questions asked about how Merton may have sustained it. Then after Merton's body was embalmed, there was the extraordinary and unusual transport of his body by the U.S. military on a plane back to the United States with the bodies of war veterans.

No autopsy was ever performed on Merton in Thailand or in the United States and no real or competent police investigation was ever conducted. There were multiple misspellings of witnesses' names making it difficult or even impossible to verify them. With all these mistakes and omissions and the cursory police report on a prominent American, it is plausible to suggest that perhaps the misspellings of witnesses' names was a blatant attempt to make it difficult if not impossible to verify them.

Based on the authors' extensive research and access to existing official documents, they conclude that there was an obvious agenda by Thai officials and the U.S. government and the U.S. Press to promote an active disinformation campaign.

The Vietnam War was waging—the government wanted no interference. Merton was a peacemaker. That-- they suggest was enough to seal his fate.