

Poetry & Contemplation: *The Evolution of Thomas Merton's Aesthetic*

WHEN THOMAS MERTON'S essay "Poetry and the Contemplative Life" appeared in *The Commonweal* on July 4, 1947, the author was still more than a year away from becoming a household name after his autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, became a best-seller. He was known, if at all, as a Trappist monk who had published two volumes of verse with the avant-garde New Directions Press. By the time a revised version of this essay, now entitled "Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal," was published in the same magazine some eleven years later, on October 24, 1958, Merton had become the best known monk in America and perhaps in the world, author of close to twenty books on various aspects of Christian spiritual life. In the intervening years, much more than his reputation had changed for Merton. As he was about to enter on what would turn out to be the final decade of his life, Merton had begun once again to turn with interest and compassion to the world beyond the monastery walls, to engage in the social criticism, the interreligious dialogue, the correspondence and personal contacts with an extraordinary range of artists and thinkers, that continue to make Merton a fascinating and influential figure more than thirty years after his death. Among other things, these developments had a significant effect on his approach to poetry, both in practice and in theory. A comparison of the two versions of his essay

reveals not only how his ideas on artistic creativity had evolved, but how this evolution is characteristic of the broader transformation that would mark Merton's life and writing in the 1960s.

The structure of "Poetry and the Contemplative Life," the 1947 version of this essay, consists in a lengthy introduction followed by a three-part central section and a brief conclusion. The introduction focuses on the second term in the title, and tries to provide a clear explanation of what is meant by "the contemplative life." Merton first points out that the contemplative life is not simply to be identified with the life of those in contemplative religious orders. As "a life entirely occupied with God – with love and knowledge of God" (FA 95), the contemplative life is intended for everyone: "It is the life for which we were created, and which will eventually be our everlasting joy in heaven" (FA 95). While few people experience the fullness of union with God in this life, in varying degrees a taste of contemplation is available to many: on the most basic level, "a kind of natural contemplation of God" (FA 95) is possible for the artist, the philosopher, the virtuous pagan; it does not necessarily have any formal religious link to Christianity. On the level of "active contemplation" is to be found the baptized Christian making use of all the sources of grace available through the Church: this level depends upon the co-operation of the human will

with the activity of grace in the soul. The third and highest level is contemplation in the strict sense, passive or infused or mystical contemplation, in which the human will is simply receptive to the transforming presence of God at work in ways that transcend the soul's natural capacities. Quoting from Gregory the Great, Aquinas and Bonaventure, Merton maintains that this level of contemplation, "an experimental knowledge of God's goodness 'tasted' and 'possessed' by a vital contact in the depths of the soul" (FA 97), is "the normal term of the Christian life even on earth" (FA 96), though it remains a pure gift beyond what can be achieved by human effort, and though relatively few are actually ready to receive the gift in their earthly lives.

Having provided this overview, Merton then turns to the relationship of contemplation with art. His first point is that contemplation, both active and passive, has much to offer the poet, since "it brings us into the closest contact with the one subject matter that is truly worthy of a Christian poet: God as He is seen by faith, in revelation, or in the intimate experience of the soul illumined by the gifts of the Holy Ghost" (FA 97). He emphasizes the power of the liturgy both to form aesthetic and literary taste and to bring the artist into contact with Christ the Word, "fount of all art because He is...the fount of all grace and wisdom" (FA 98). He goes on to lament the fact that Christian poets continue to follow "indifferent and mediocre secular models" (FA 99) rather than to respond to the riches available in Christian liturgical life. While he echoes Jacques Maritain in calling poetry "an art, a natural skill, a virtue of the practical intellect" (FA 99), and acknowl-

edges that inspiration is no substitute for technical mastery, he stresses equally that "technique is barren without inspiration" (FA 100). He encourages Catholic writers and poets to lead lives of active contemplation that will draw them closer to Christ through the disciplines of liturgy, penance, prayer and spiritual reading.

After demonstrating that contemplation has much to offer poetry, Merton then makes the case that the converse is also true, that poetry has something valuable to offer contemplation: "the poetic sense may be a remote disposition for mystical prayer" (FA 101) because an authentic aesthetic experience is much deeper than mere sensual

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stimulation, and in fact goes beyond even rational apprehension. Because it makes possible a "connatural" knowing of the object "by a kind of affective identification" (FA 102) rather than by analysis, it serves as a natural analogue of mystical experience, as Maritain had maintained. Another author cited by Merton even claims that artistic perception involves the same psychological processes that accompany infused contemplation, a position that can be traced back to Bonaventure and Augustine. By engaging not just the so-called "inferior soul," that aspect of the soul that makes practical judgments about external things, but the "superior" soul, the "inner sanctuary which is the substance of the soul itself" (FA 103), the quiet, peaceful center of the soul beyond sense and beyond reasoning, but accessible to aesthetic intuition, "the natural contem-

plation of the artist or the metaphysician" makes the soul "well prepared for infused contemplation" (FA 104). The artist will have a greater degree of detachment from "sensible satisfactions and imaginable thrills" (FA 104), will be less subject to sentimentality and the "insatiable emotional vulgarity" (FA 105) that is too often a substitute for genuine religious experience. While infused contemplation is an absolutely free gift from God that cannot be attained through one's own powers, one can at least clear away the obstacles of selfishness and sensuality and of "attachment to human reasoning and analysis" (FA 107).

But while aesthetic intuition and artistic creativity can play an important role in spiritual growth, beyond a certain point poetry and contemplation can begin to pull in different directions. This is the third and final point Merton makes in the article: when contemplation begins to become more passive, even the activity of art can become a hindrance: "it is precisely here," Merton states, "that the esthetic instinct changes its colors and, from being a precious gift becomes a fatal handicap" (FA 108). The problem is a conflict of ends: "The artist enters into himself in order to work. For him, the 'superior' soul is a forge where inspiration kindles a fire of white heat, a crucible for the transformation of natural images into new, created forms. But the mystic enters into himself, not in order to work but to pass through the center of his own soul and lose himself in the mystery and secrecy and infinite, transcendent reality of God living and working within him" (FA 108). Whereas the infused contemplative ex-

perience is passive and receptive, allowing God to do His transforming work within the soul, the artistic experience remains active and creative, interested in what happens within the artist, however significant it may be in itself, primarily as raw material for the art. The higher good risks being sacrificed for the lower, the perfecting of the soul for the perfecting of the work: "because of this tragic promethean tendency to exploit every experience as material for 'creation,'" the artist may remain "all his life on the threshold" (FA 109) of union with God, without every fully surrendering to the call to abandon everything for the love of God.

Merton's conclusion, then, is that while poetry can be of great assistance during the early stages of contemplative life, to cling to poetic activity as one moves toward the higher levels of infused contemplation is to risk arresting further spiritual development. "In such an event," he states, "there is only one course for the poet to take, for his own individual sanctification: the *ruthless and complete sacrifice of his art*" (FA 109-10). Art belongs to the temporal dimension, and for all its virtues, cannot compare with contemplative realization, which lifts one into contact with the eternal. To prefer the first to the second is evidence of a failure in vision and in values, a choice of one's own creativity over God's creative work within oneself. Part of dying to oneself is dying to one's artistic accomplishments.

Merton does, however, leave some room for flexibility at the very end of the essay: personal moral certainty, or the desire of a religious superior, that one should continue to write for the benefit of others, could be a sign that in a particular case this "ruthless sacrifice"

is not called for; and while this will make for a continued painful struggle between the demands of art and the demands of contemplation, since such an exceptional situation "will not take away distractions, or make God abrogate the laws of the spiritual life" (FA 111), Merton concludes that some comfort may be taken from the teaching of St. Thomas that sharing the fruits of contemplation is more meritorious than simply enjoying them oneself, and there is no one better prepared than the artist to articulate "what is essentially inexpressible" (FA 111).

A number of observations can be made on Merton's argument in this essay. First, it is quite logically organized and clearly expressed: Merton makes a strong case both for the mutual contributions and for the potential conflicts of poetry and contemplation. Second, despite his ultimately negative conclusion, in the body of the essay Merton makes quite high claims for the spiritual significance of art as both an analogue to and a preparation for contemplation; he certainly is not denigrating the creative process of art. Third, the essay is marked by a degree of subordination of concrete experience to abstract formulation, as when Merton speaks of "the infinite distance between the gifts of nature and those of grace, between the natural and the supernatural order, time and eternity, man and God" (FA 110); there is a certain categorical rigidity, a stress on distinctions rather than connections, and despite the focus on Christ, a de-emphasis on the incarnational, the divine presence within creation. Fourth, the dilemma as posed seems to be a somewhat rarified one: the reader might wonder how many artists have reached a stage of spiritual development at which the issue Merton

raises actually becomes a personal problem. Fifth, despite the objective presentation, some of the personal tensions Merton himself was feeling at the time between his identity as monk and his identity as writer almost certainly are evident in the article. It is impossible to determine to what extent Merton thought his writing was interfering with his spiritual growth, and it is doubtful that he would have considered himself, at that time or later, as being at the point of entering the unitive phase of the spiritual life, but it is clear from his letters and his journals that he was experiencing the strain of his dual vocation acutely at the time of writing this essay. Within a year of its appearance, he had decided to give up writing poetry, and in fact did not publish a new volume of verse between 1949 and 1957. While he certainly did not stop writing, he shifted his focus to more traditional forms of meditative prose reflections, found in such books as *Seeds of Contemplation* (1949), *No Man Is An Island* (1955), and *Thoughts in Solitude* (1958), which along with his journal are the most characteristic, and arguably the most significant, work dating from the period 1948-1958. So while framed in terms of an objective diagnosis and universally applicable solution to the problem of the religious poet, the essay is perhaps most significant as it provides insight into its author's state of mind and spirit at a critical point in his early career.

When he returned to the essay more than ten years later, Merton was at another turning point in his life as both monk and writer, when the clear-cut certainties that had marked his early years in the monastery no longer seemed adequate as advice to others or as a description of his own experience. Life

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in its existential richness and messiness did not conform neatly to the categories and distinctions of well-defined theories, however logical and intellectually satisfying they might be in the abstract. As Merton stated in the headnote to the revised version of his essay, "*the confident pronouncements made in my early writing lay more and more heavily on my conscience as a writer and as a priest*" (LE 338), and prompted him to revisit his earlier argument, which he now saw as having "*stated a 'problem' and tried to apply a rather crude 'solution'*" (LE 338). But by failing to emphasize strongly enough that "*true contemplation is inseparable from life and from the dynamism of life - which includes work, creation, production, fruitfulness, and above all love*" (LE 339), by tending to present contemplation "*as a separate department of life*" rather than as "*the very fullness of a fully integrated life*," the "problem" of the earlier version of the essay Merton now considers to be "*largely, an illusion, created by this division of life into formally separate compartments of 'action' and 'contemplation'*" (LE 339). It is to rectify this misapprehension that Merton rewrites his essay and arrives at a strikingly different conclusion about the relationship between artistic creativity and contemplative realization. The overall structure and much of the actual content of the two versions of the essay remain the same, but by significant additions and judicious alterations in each of the major sections, "Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal" contrasts markedly with its predecessor both in its tone and in its main point.

The change is already evident in the introductory description of contemplation, which begins with seven paragraphs of completely new material that situate the topic firmly in the context

of contemporary society, in which an interest in contemplation may be dismissed as absurdly irrelevant or condescendingly regarded as "a safe and rather bourgeois 'cause'" (LE 339) that provides an illusion of security for those overwhelmed by "an age of science and technology, in which man finds himself bewildered and disoriented" (LE 339). Yet it is Merton's contention that in the face of "almost hopeless alienation," there is nothing more urgent than the "fully determined efforts of a small minority of men to recover some kind of contact with their own inner depths, to recapture the freshness and truth of their own subjectivity, and to go on from there not only to God but to the spirit of other men" (LE 340). The change in tone, and even in terminology, from the earlier version of the essay is immediately apparent: the framework of scholasticism has given way to a more existential outlook, an emphasis on the concrete situation of daily experience. Equally noteworthy is the new awareness of the communal dimension of contemplation, which is now recognized to lead one not to God alone but to "the spirit," the authentic inner identity, of other people as well.

Before moving into a consideration of the "various levels of contemplation" (LE 341), retained in large part from the original essay, Merton highlights aspects of contemplation that received little attention in the previous version, but that he now recognizes as crucial for developing a mature and healthy spirituality. First, contemplation is not a function of some distinct "religious" part of the self, but involves and transforms the entire person. "The contemplative," he writes, "is one who seeks to know the meaning of life not only

with his head but with his whole being, by living it in depth and in purity, and thus uniting himself to the very Source of Life" (LE 340). Contemplation is presented as the antithesis and the antidote to a life of superficiality and conformity, a challenge and corrective to a belief that life has no meaning. But contemplation challenges as well the presumption that the meaning of life can be glibly summed up or definitively explained. At the heart of contemplation is paradox, "All in Nothing" (LE 341), a Word beyond language: "Contemplation is experience of God in Man, God in the world, God in Christ: it is an obscure intuition of God Himself, and this intuition is a gift of God Who reveals Himself in His very hiddenness as One unknown" (LE 340). Any attempt to define the "content" of contemplative experience immediately distorts it because it is beyond words, beyond concepts, in a sense beyond the category of "experience" itself, since it is a revelation of hiddenness, a knowing of that which remains unknown. Yet part of the paradox is that the hidden Reality encountered in contemplation is also totally present, "infinitely actual" (LE 340); if from one perspective contemplation, like its analogues art and worship and love, can be said to lead one "into the realms that transcend the material conduct of everyday life," from another it enables one to discover "in the midst of ordinary life itself...a new and transcendent meaning" which can "transfigure the whole of life" (LE 340-41). Contemplation is less about seeing different things than about seeing the same things differently, seeing reality as it is rather than as we want it - or fear it - to be. Finally, it is significant that Merton now joins love, by which he

means not just love of God but of other human beings, with art and worship as analogous and preliminary forms of contemplative awareness, of self-transcendence. It is not the conflict but the continuity between "profane" and "sacred" dimensions that now is given primary emphasis: the divine immanence, "God in Man, God in the world, God in Christ," does not compromise but confirms divine transcendence: there is nowhere God is not, and therefore nowhere God cannot be encountered. This shift in focus does not contradict anything said in the earlier version of the essay, but it signals a greater receptivity to and respect for the power of creation, including the process of human creativity, to manifest the Creator.

As Merton goes on to distinguish between active and infused contemplation, he now stresses that "infused wisdom" is a deepening and perfecting on one's humanity because it identifies one completely with the person of Jesus, fully human and fully divine. Christian contemplation is no neoplatonic "flight of the alone to the Alone" for Merton, but brings one into communion with other people and with all creation as they are found in God through Christ. It is profoundly Christological, ecclesiological and paschal, a way to be united with Christ "in the glory that is radiated mystically by His risen and transfigured Humanity," and so "to become in the highest sense a fruitful and strong member of Christ," by accepting "a share in His sufferings and death, that we may rise with Him in the participation of His glory" (LE 343). Far from a rarified or esoteric experience,

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contemplation for Merton, especially in this version of the essay, is simply the Christian life in its full depth and intensity.

By recasting his explanation of contemplation in terms of the contemporary search for meaning and authenticity, Merton makes the links between contemplation and art more readily evident. As previously, he emphasizes the positive impact of contemplation on poetry, but in keeping with the greater stress on the particular and concrete he mentions specific models for the Christian poet, not only David and the Old Testament prophets but examples of "the true Christian poet" such as "Dante, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis, Jacopone da Todi, Hopkins, Paul Claudel," writers in whom "we find it hard to distinguish between the

inspiration of the prophet and mystic and the purely poetic enthusiasm of great artistic genius" (LE 344); before even raising the issue of the tension between poetry and contemplation, he has provided evidence that the two can be, and have been, complementary rather than contradictory.

Another important addition to this section recognizes inspiration for the Christian poet not only in the sacred setting of the liturgy but in the

apparently more secular environment of everyday experience: "To the true Christian poet, the whole world and all the incidents of life tend to be sacraments—signs of God, signs of His love working in the world" (LE 345). Though not all poets are mystics in the strict sense, the genuine poet shares a "'prophetic' intuition" (LE 345) that perceives the inner spiritual dimension of

ordinary events and objects. This insight is found even in those who may not be professed believers; while Merton repeats his earlier recommendation that the Christian poet read the scriptures and the great contemplative saints, he now adds, "But no one can be a poet without reading the good poets of his own time—T. S. Eliot, Auden, Spender, Rilke, Pasternak, Dylan Thomas, García Lorca. One might add that a fully integrated vision of our time and of its spirit presupposes some contact with the genius of Baudelaire and Rimbaud, who are Christians turned inside out" (LE 346). Merton rejects a disincarnate, "spiritual" conception of religious poetry as detached from "worldly" concerns in favor of "a fully integrated vision of our time and of its spirit," a vision that penetrates but is not limited by its physical, intellectual, social, political, cultural surroundings. While not conforming to "the decadent standards of a materialistic world" (LE 346), the poet assisted by contemplation does not on that account shun or denigrate the world, but seeks to recover and communicate an existential awareness of the world as God's good creation, distorted and stained by human selfishness, but redeemed and restored by the incarnate and glorified Christ.

While the discussion of the contribution made by poetry to contemplation is the section of the revised essay that follows the original version most closely, additions and alterations in individual sentences and even specific phrases contribute significantly to the overall difference in tone. For example, in the midst of an almost verbatim repetition of the original presentation of aesthetic intuition as psychologically akin to mystical experience, Merton

adds two important comments that counter an overly introverted focus on the inner self: God is found not only through the mirror of the soul but "through the inner spiritual reality (the *logos*) of the created thing," according to the teaching "of the Greek Fathers about *theoria physica*, or 'natural contemplation'" (LE 347), by which they meant not natural as distinguished from supernatural but the natural world, the cosmos, as an epiphany of the divine, what Merton had already referred to as a sacramental consciousness. After returning to the original version for the distinction between "inferior" and "superior" soul, he then adds the explicit warning that the "passage from the exterior to the interior has nothing to do with concentration or introspection. It is a transit from objectivization to knowledge by intuition and connaturality" (LE 348). As subsequent additions and changes reiterate, Merton sees this refusal to objectivize, a rejection of the desire to analyze and so to control reality, as the hallmark of both contemplative and aesthetic awareness. Just as in mystical contemplation "we are no longer facing God as an 'object' of experience or as a concept which we apprehend," but "are united to Him in the mystery of love and its transcendent subjectivity," so "the aesthetic intuition is also beyond objectivity—it 'sees' by identifying itself spiritually with what it contemplates" (LE 348). Where the original essay said of the soul, "As long as it rests in creatures, it cannot possess God and be possessed by Him" (FA 106), the revised version changes the first clause to make clear that it is not creation but the human attitude toward creation that is at the root of the problem: "rests in creatures" becomes "rests

in things for their own sake, seen and possessed as 'objects' to gratify our own self-love" (LE 349-50). In the very next sentence, where "attachment to human reasoning and analysis" (FA 107) had been cited as an obstacle to contemplation, now it is more specifically "attachment to objectivized human reason and analysis" (LE 350). The cumulative effect of these seemingly minor changes is to put increased emphasis on the continuity between art and contemplation in their common transcendence of objectivizing, analytical consciousness, and to focus on the revelatory dimension of creation more than on its potential to serve as a distraction and a hindrance to contemplative fulfillment. While these changes do not eliminate the possibility of a conflict between art and contemplation, they do contribute to forming a standpoint from which the alternatives will appear less clear-cut and starkly opposed than in the original essay.

In the revised version, Merton does not minimize the problem he had raised in "Poetry and the Contemplative Life." The temptation for the poet to sacrifice spiritual growth for the sake of artistic productivity is still quite evident, though it is now described as "a real danger" (LE 350) rather than as the more absolute "fatal handicap" (FA 108). While the description of the tension between being and doing is retained from the earlier version, Merton now adds almost a full paragraph that considers the problem in terms of the tendency to objectify, to "withdraw from the mystery of identification with Reality beyond forms and objectivized concepts, and...return to the realm of subject and object" (LE 351). Without directly stating it, Merton seems to imply that such a choice not only blocks

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the growth of contemplative awareness but ultimately frustrates as well the artistic process itself, since he had already claimed that genuine aesthetic intuition also transcends the division between subject and object to attain a kind of knowledge by identification. To "objectivize his own experience and seek to exploit and employ it for its own sake" makes the artist "less creative" (LE 351), no longer in harmony with the work of the Creator Spirit. Thus subtly, and perhaps without being fully aware of it, Merton confirms the intrinsic link between art and contemplation by suggesting that to choose art in preference to contemplation is actually to undermine as well the very activity one has chosen.

While from one perspective this might seem to make even more cogent the original proposal to make "a *ruthless and complete sacrifice*" of one's art, by modifying the logic of the earlier version, in which art and contemplation were seen at this level as mutually exclusive alternatives, these added comments prepare for a more flexible, less doctrinaire conclusion, in which the continuity between poetry and contemplation is not inevitably ruptured by a call to divine union. Merton does at first seem to have reached the same point in this version as in the original essay: despite the helpful role of poetry in the earlier stages of the contemplative journey, "when we are entering the realm of true contemplation," he writes, "where eternal happiness is tasted in anticipation, poetic intuition may ruin our rest in God 'beyond all images'" (LE 352). But the operative word here is "may," not "will" or "must": if abstract logic leads to one conclusion, the particular circum-

stances of concrete lived reality may reveal a very different one, or rather many different ones. The firm statements of the original essay are now recast in much less definitive terms: "one might at first be tempted to say that there is only one course for the poet to take, . . . the *ruthless and complete sacrifice of his art*" (LE 352): what had been a virtually unqualified assertion is now to be considered a temptation! The old unquestioned distinctions have now become conditional: "If there is an infinite distance between the gifts of nature and those of grace, between the natural and the supernatural order, man and God, then should not one always reject the natural for the supernatural, the temporal for the eternal, the human for the divine?" (LE 352). But what Merton has learned in the years separating this second version of the essay from the first is that the distance is in fact not infinite in the context of actual human experience, that in practice nature and grace, the human and the divine, cannot and should not be kept in separate compartments. Old certainties have been tempered by the evidence of new experience: "when one has seen something of the ways of God, one remembers that there is a vast difference between the logic of men and the logic of God. There is indeed no human logic in the ways of interior prayer, only Divine paradox" (LE 352). It is impossible, even impious, Merton now realizes, to attempt to predetermine the will of God for an individual person on the basis of some set of abstract principles. What may appear from the outside to be "the most perfect thing" to choose may in fact be an expression of one's own will rather than the will of God: "experience teaches us that the most perfect choice . . . is

the choice of what God has willed for us, even though it may be, in itself, less perfect, and indeed less 'spiritual'" (LE 352). Merton voices a healthy suspicion of any position - particularly his own of ten years before - that claims there is "an absolute clean-cut 'either/or' choice between 'art' and 'mystical prayer'" (LE 352). He has let go of the security, which is also the confinement, of abstract certitudes. He is now able to envision a whole range of possibilities, only one of which is that an artist might be called to stop writing to enter more deeply into prayer: if this is the case, it is "not because this is a general law binding all artist-contemplatives, but because it is the will of God in this particular, concrete case" (LE 352-53). It might equally well happen in a specific instance that a poet serves God best by being an artist and letting go of "aspirations for a deep mystical life" (LE 353) to which one has not been called; and certainly God is powerful enough to make it possible "that a man should remain *at the same time a mystic and a poet* and ascend to the greatest heights of poetic creation and of mystical prayer without any evident contradiction between them" (LE 353). While Merton brings the essay to a close by affirming that spiritual gifts are "infinitely greater" than art, and that if an artist "is called upon to make an exclusive choice of one or the other" (LE 354), art should give way to prayer, the whole thrust of his conclusion is that the necessity of such a choice is by no means inevitable or even normative: in rethinking the issue he had raised a decade earlier, Merton takes a position that is perhaps less self-assured but more reassuring in its affirmation of art, and by extension all authentic human activity, as compatible

with and contributing to even the deepest relationship with God.

In reading "Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal," it would be easy enough to see it just as a rationale for Merton's own practice, and like the earlier version it certainly has biographical relevance: Merton had resumed composing poetry on a regular basis only in the mid-1950s, and came to identify himself as a poet with increasing frequency during the last ten years of his life as he devoted more and more time and energy to writing in verse. But it would be simplistic to regard this revised essay as nothing more than a self-justifying *apologia* for his second thoughts about the "*ruthless and complete sacrifice of his art*" that he may have thought he had made. The personal liberation from a restrictive mind-set that Merton may have considered necessary in 1947 is also made available to his readers, who are invited to move beyond a perspective in which, as Merton writes in his headnote, art and contemplation are "*regarded as 'things' which happen or 'objects' which one can 'have'*" to situating them in "*the much more mysterious realm of what one 'is' - or rather 'who' one is*" (338-39). Reading the two versions of the essay together provides an unusual opportunity to trace the broadening and deepening of Merton's personalistic vision that not only signals a renewed interest in and increased production of poetry during the final decade of his life but reflects the increased openness to the world outside the monastery that will make his life and work during this final period so fruitful and so challenging.

LE: *Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, edited by Patrick Hart; New York, New Directions 1984.
FA: *Figures For An Apocalypse*

There is indeed no human logic in the ways of interior prayer, only Divine paradox...