

Creativity and a “4”:

Thomas Merton’s Developing Style

by **Robert E. Daggy**

In the years since his death in 1968, Thomas Merton has been written about, talked about, discussed, profiled and analyzed. It is no surprise, then, that those interested in the Enneagram — the currently popular gauge to personality traits and manifestations — should attempt to place Merton into one of the categories of the enneagram. *Merton: An Enneagram Profile* by Suzanne Zuercher, OSB, is reviewed in this issue. Zuercher, along with other students of the enneagram, concludes that Merton is a “4.” I know so little about the enneagram that I really don’t know what that means, but I do know that “4’s” are supposed to be romantic, temperamental, often artistic, and usually creative — all of which seems to profile Merton.

Certainly Merton, from his student days onward, was creative, seeing himself as an artist. All this he took into the monastery with him, gradually developing his “secular” style to fit the patterns of his “contemplative life,” melding the two into tandem vocations. Though he could remark that it is not much fun to live the contemplative life with the equipment of an artist, he steadily moved to resolve the contradictions he sensed. He did this, in part, by adapting traditional forms to his own creative thrust. Mary Murray offers us insights into how Merton altered the methodology of various disciplines in his own creative way, thus making *The Waters of Siloe* more “Merton” than standard history. Patrick O’Connell shows in his essay on Merton’s eulogy to Federico Garcia Lorca that he was influenced by other writers and poets (most point to T. S. Eliot as the most important influence), but even before the monastery imbued his work with his own creative spirit. Monica Weis, SSJ, points out that even Merton’s early poetry was judged by critics to transmit the contemplative tradition in a fresh and vital way.

Merton’s creativity led him to some unusual productions. Among these are four extant poems he wrote in French. After more than thirty years, Carolyn Hammer has printed another fine Hammer edition featuring these four poems, an edition as lovely to read, hold, and view as any printed by her and her late husband, Victor. While preparing this edition, I wrote a commentary on those French poems which is included in this issue.

We conclude, as usual, with a bibliography of Recent Publications by and about Merton — interesting once again in demonstrating the world-wide interest in Merton and the ever increasing impact of this creative “4.”