

# THE MERTON TREE REVISITED

## A Photo-Essay

by **Paul Quenon**, O.C.S.O.

In July of 1987 I visited Redwoods Monastery, a Trappistine foundation in Whitethorn, California, and was kindly driven to the coast nearby at Needle Rock. Some readers may be familiar with this tree which first appeared in *Monks Pond*.



It is still standing. A bit more spare, but just as dead as it was when Merton photographed it twenty years ago. The nuns call it **The Merton Tree**.



Miraculously, no initials have been carved on its surface, despite the nearby bathing site, and it remains untouched by anything other than breeze, light and shadow.



It seems, itself, to describe a strange alphabet of undeciphered meaning, spending on the wind



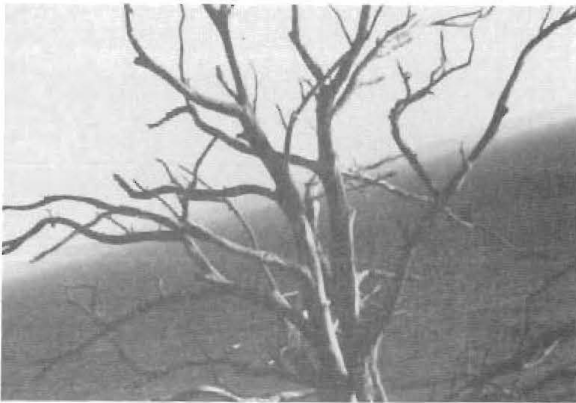
coarse innuendoes and a snarled syntax,



an inner argument with itself by which it achieves  
the symmetry and balance that has kept it standing  
for decades



while the tide ebbs and the moon swells



and the earth tilts before the face of the sun.



The tree that Merton's camera exposed rawboned  
under the overcast sky retains its own secret even  
in the sharp shadows of a Pacific sunset.

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