

Thomas Merton's Works and Days

Review of

Merton Vade Mecum: A Quick-Reference Bibliographic Handbook

by Patricia A. Burton

Forward by Patrick F. O'Connell

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Reviewed by **Bonnie Thurston**

Thomas Merton wrote a lot. Thomas Merton probably wrote too much. And now many of us have probably written too much about the too much Thomas Merton wrote. But "Hear ye! Hear ye!" long-time International Thomas Merton Society member, Patricia A. Burton of Toronto, Canada, has actually produced a *new*, one-of-a-kind Merton resource. No, it's not a biography, or a bibliography or a critical study or a review of a critical study or a journal or a letter or a poem. It's a way to help the rest of us keep track of "all of the above" which Merton himself wrote.

Burton's *Merton Vade Mecum*, described as "a Quick-Reference Bibliographic Handbook," isn't really a bibliography, especially if you think of bibliographies as dry-as-dust lists. It is the most complete study we have of what Merton wrote and published in English between 1931 and his death, and of everything of Merton's published in English from his death through 1998. To say that I am enthusiastic about this work is sublime understatement.

The work is composed of three parts. Part I is "A Thomas Merton Timeline," from 1931 to the 1990s. What it does (as the section title indicates) is to lay out chronologically what Merton wrote on a day-to-day basis. Burton gives us the date, the type of writing (letter, journal entry, essay, poem, etc.), its name or title, its entry page, the published volume in which it appears and the publication/publisher. She lists his personal writing and publications as they appeared and intersperses in italics a listing of the touchstone events in Merton's life to orient the reader to the biographical context of the writing. What this means is that the interested Mertonian can trace exactly what Merton was writing, and what of his was being published, day by day. And the care with and detail in which Patricia has presented Merton's writing means one knows whether a work is presently in print and exactly where to find it if it is.

Part II, the “Publications List,” is an alphabetic listing of (you guessed it!) *everything* Merton wrote in English, both published sources and numerous unpublished manuscripts. The principle of organization is alphabetic, but for each listing Burton also provides the date, entry page, volume, and publication or publisher. The special value of this section of her work is that one can see at a glance how Merton “recycled” essays, poems and ideas. We learn what was published in multiple places and where and when. Part III, “Notes,” provides further information on significant entries in Parts I and II. Burton explains that her intent “is to identify the interconnections of various versions of Merton’s works, and also to provide other bibliographic material which may be of interest.”

If these weren’t riches enough, there are appendices. Appendix I provides the provenance of the essays in Merton’s collections (a list of periodicals or other sources from which essays that later appeared in books were taken). Appendix II is a listing of Merton’s works that have appeared in *Cistercian Studies* and other Cistercian publications, in *The Merton Seasonal* and in *The Merton Annual*. Appendix III is a comprehensive sorting out of the materials associated with the never-published *Peace in a Post-Christian Era*, the only complete collation of this material of which I have knowledge (which suggests to me that Burton could probably provide us with a very fine article or monograph or book on this material).

Merton Vade Mecum represents a staggering amount of work. We are all enormously in Patricia Burton’s debt for the detail and attentiveness with which she has undertaken it. I say all of us because while Parts II and III may be of more interest to Merton scholars, Part I makes fascinating reading for anyone interested in Merton’s life, habits of work (and prayer) and patterns of friendship. While the work is not exhaustive (it doesn’t include juvenilia or foreign-language or overseas publications), it is the best way I know to explore exactly what Merton was writing at any given point in his life. And it is of immeasurable importance in tracing the development of his thought on issues of all kinds.

I am grateful for this new work on Merton, very grateful, and think it represents a needed addition to Merton studies. I am grateful to Patricia Burton for providing it to us, and I am grateful that the Thomas Merton Center Foundation will be making it widely available.