

A Map of the Whole Territory

Review of

More Than Silence: A Bibliography of Thomas Merton

(ATLA Bibliography Series, No. 55)

By Patricia A. Burton

with Albert Romkema

Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press & American Theological Library Association, 2008

xxiv + 210 pages / \$60.00 cloth

Reviewed by **Bonnie Thurston**

R. Justin Harkins, Series Editor of the American Theological Library Association, in his Foreword calls Patricia Burton's most recent volume "an indispensable resource for scholars interested in Merton" (ix). Similarly Paul M. Pearson, Director and Archivist of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, notes that "scholars and Merton aficionados around the world owe an immeasurable debt to the valiant work of Patricia Burton" (xi). These superlatives are entirely accurate and almost do justice to this magisterial, wonderful and – dare I say it? – *entertaining* work of scholarship. Patricia Burton (author of *Merton Vade Mecum: A Road-Map for Readers* [1998] and, with Marquita E. Breit and Paul M. Pearson, *'About Merton': Secondary Sources 1945-2000* [2002]) has done it again.

This bibliography has two primary parts; the apparatus in each is accessible and easy to use. The first (1-94) is a listing of Merton's work arranged (and this in itself gives a glimpse of the scope of his output) by the following categories: prose works, poetry, letters, edits/selections/composites, translations, contributions to other books, visual arts, musical settings, rare & collectable. I looked up a favorite title, *Thoughts in Solitude*, in "Prose Works" (36-37). The entry includes a note on the contents of the book (by chapter), its publication history in the United States (including hard copy, mass market paperback, trade paperback and special editions), and then its publication history in the British press and *sixteen* different languages, several with multiple editions. Similarly, the entry for each volume of poetry includes a complete table of contents (each poem listed separately) and, again, a detailed publication history in English and other languages. Each entry is, indeed, "a readable story of the book's history" (xviii) and, well, *fun* to read. I first picked up the bibliography intending to skim its contents for a few moments . . . and checked my watch an hour later. This is a compelling history of Merton's prodigious creativity.

Bonnie Thurston, a founding member and third president of the International Thomas Merton Society, is former William F. Orr Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, now living in solitude in West Virginia. She is author of numerous books on the New Testament and early Christian Spirituality, most recently *The Spiritual Landscape of Mark* (2008), and edited *Merton & Buddhism: Wisdom, Emptiness & Everyday Mind* (2007).

The second major section of the work (95-184) is “an unconventional but highly accessible ‘Title Finder’” (Harkins, ix), an alphabetical list, indicating the genre of the work, which is effectively a chronicle of each bit of Merton’s writing, not only the many books, but individual pieces like poems and letters and previously unpublished teaching notes. For example, I looked up “Love Winter When the Plant Says Nothing” (135). After the genre designation (poem), I noted its first publication was in *The Catholic Worker* (June 1960) and that thereafter it was printed in *Emblems of a Season of Fury* (1963), *Collected Poems* (1977), and *In the Dark Before Dawn: New Selected Poems* (2005). Additionally it appears as one of the Niles-Merton Songs (1981) and in two German translations (1966 and 1992). Such detailed entries lead Burton to remark “that, if anything, the rate at which Merton is quoted and anthologized is rising rather than falling” (xvii). Her work includes the currently anthologized material.

Beyond the individual entries, this work, the first new bibliography on Merton in about twenty years, provides a fascinating history of Merton bibliographies (xiv-xv, xx) and, indeed, of the art (for such it is in Burton’s hands) of bibliography. (I was delighted to see mention of Fredson Bowers, dean of American bibliography, and professor at my old alma mater.) This work is the first to provide the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and the first to include Merton’s visual arts (with appropriate homage paid to Roger Lipsey). As if there were any question, the author’s generosity is apparent in her inclusion of “Search Notes” (xxi) and instructions on how to search library catalogues and Merton sites on the web. Addresses for on-line resources, Merton Societies and Sites are thoughtfully provided (xxii). Those who collect “Mertoniana” will find the section on rare books by Albert Romkema (owner of a vast private collection of Merton’s work) of particular interest (85-94). The volume ends with a standard index (185-210) listing Merton’s writing in English and translation.

The scope of the detailed work represented here, and the careful intelligence with which it is usefully arranged, is simply staggering. As the introduction claims, this really *is* “an overview of the subject, a map of the whole territory” (xiv). How, in future, any serious Merton scholar could fail to consult and cite this volume is unimaginable – which leads to my one concern: the cost of the volume. Although the work is worth every penny of the \$60 it costs, I doubt, alas, that many Merton scholars will be able to afford it. So, gentle reader, please encourage your local libraries to buy it!

Patricia Burton quips that for the bibliographer, “Merton will always be a moving target.” This particular bibliography “is not an obituary for a long-mummified literary figure: it is a report from the front. There will always be more to find” (xiv) – and happily for those of us who depend on her work, we can be assured that Patty will find it, record it, and present it to us in a comprehensible and useable format. If you are seriously interested in Merton, and you haven’t yet written Patty Burton a thank-you letter, shame on you.