

Commendably Comprehensive Compilation

Review of
 “About Merton”: *Secondary Sources 1945 – 2000:*
A Bibliographical Workbook

Compiled by Marquita Breit, Patricia A. Burton and Paul M. Pearson
 Louisville, KY: Thomas Merton Foundation, 2002
 ix + 248 pages / \$40 paperbound

Reviewed by **William H. Shannon**

It is fair to say that no spiritual writer of the past century has been the subject of more study, reflection and evaluation than Thomas Merton. Confronted with a bewildering amount of such writings, the scholarly community, as well as the general reader interested in Thomas Merton, is deeply indebted to the three compilers of this huge bibliographical work that brings together what has been written “about Thomas Merton.” This work complements bibliographical work already done by Patricia Burton, namely, her Index to the Merton letters and her *Vade Mecum*, a splendid achievement that covers books, articles, introductions, etc., written by Thomas Merton himself.

Clearly Patricia Burton was the initiating force behind this volume and its organization. The volume includes material previously put together by Marquita Breit and the late Robert E. Daggy in the *Comprehensive Bibliography* of works by and about Merton, published in 1986, and hitherto uncollected materials from the fifteen years that followed. Dr. Paul Pearson, curator of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, had, in his role as curator, special access to materials about Merton and has also made substantial contributions to *About Merton*, particularly in his comprehensive catalogue of theses and dissertations on Merton.

This work is published not by one of the usual publishing houses, but by the Thomas Merton Foundation, located in Louisville, which funded and supported publication of this material. The work measures 8 ½" by 11" and has a soft cover and a spiral binding. The three compilers of *About Merton* set a modest goal for themselves indicated by the subtitle of the work: a *Workbook*. The intent of this subtitle is to enlist the help of scholars and readers in locating missing items that can be included in future editions. I would want to say, though, that the careful research that so obviously went into preparing this work indicates that very little will be found that needs to be added – at least for the time period covered by this book. In preparing this review, I tried to discover something the editors may have omitted. I looked, for instance, to see if a brief exchange of letters in the (London) *Tablet* between Monica Furlong and myself about Merton and his abbot, Dom James Fox, had been included. Sure enough it is there.

William H. Shannon is the founding president of the International Thomas Merton Society, the General Editor of the Merton Letters, the author of a number of works on Merton including *Thomas Merton's Paradise Journey* and *Silent Lamp: The Thomas Merton Story*, and most recently coauthor of *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*. His edition of Merton's *The Inner Experience* will be published by HarperCollins in the summer of this year.

Anyone preparing to use this bibliography should spend some time getting acquainted with the arrangement of the material. This means a careful study of the "Table of Contents." There are 14 categories of entries, several with subdivisions. There are (1) Books about Merton, including, among others, critical studies, biographies, devotional works, books for young people; (2) Parts of Books; (3) Editorial Contributions to works by and about Merton; (4) Reviews of Books by Merton; (5) the Reviewers; (6) Articles and Essays; (7) Bibliographical Essays; (8) Theses and Dissertations; (9) Cistercian Bulletins; (10) Newspaper Articles, Letters to the Editor; (11) Interviews; (12) Poetry about Merton; (13) The Arts (with nine sub-headings); (14) Selected Media. In addition to all these carefully arranged materials, there are 55 pages of Index that prove extremely helpful as another way of approaching the material in this work.

About Merton makes no attempt to evaluate the items it contains, nor should it. Clearly, not everything written about Merton is of equal value; in fact, some items might well have remained unwritten. Yet including them is an unavoidable risk involved in writing a *comprehensive* bibliography. For the intent of a bibliography is to inform, not to judge.

The three editors of this splendid achievement deserve an enthusiastic expression of appreciation from all those interested in Merton and seeking to achieve – through the eyes of the many who have written about Merton – deeper insights into the contributions that Gethsemani's most famous monk has made to American letters and spirituality. I am confident they will receive such commendation.