

# “ALL-THE-THINGS-YOU-WANTED-TO-KNOW-ABOUT-MERTON”

Review of

*THOMAS MERTON: A COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY*

Compiled & Edited by

Marquita E. Breit & Robert E. Daggy

New York & London: Garland Publishing Company, 1986

710p. — \$78.00

—Reviewed by **William H. Shannon**

It was with joy and delight that I perused this *Comprehensive Bibliography*, compiled and edited by two faculty members of Bellarmine College, Marquita E. Breit (Technical Services Librarian) and Robert E. Daggy (Director of the Thomas Merton Studies Center). As I write this, I am well aware that “joy” and “delight” are not the words that leap spontaneously to mind for most people when they browse through *A Comprehensive Bibliography*, whether the subject be Thomas Merton or anyone else. Bibliographies are tools produced to meet a need. Somebody has to go through the drudgery of putting them together so that many more people may be spared the task of having to do the drudgery for themselves. This might well suggest that emotions of gratitude, possibly even sympathy, are certainly in order, but hardly “joy” and “delight.”

Still a reviewer has the right to choose his own descriptive terms and I am sticking with “joy” and “delight.” One can surely take joy and delight in a work so carefully (and, knowing the two persons who did this compilation, one feels it might even be appropriate to say, “lovingly”) executed, so judiciously organized, so painstakingly researched, and so helpful as a shortcut into research projects for scholars. Having had the opportunity of using Section II of this work (“Shorter Prose Writings by Thomas Merton”) in its pre-publication, mimeographed form, I can offer my own personal experience of the invaluable help that I have already received in Merton research from just one portion of this book.

It is, in the words, of the editors, “as far as possible the most comprehensive listing of publications by and about Thomas Merton, including items translated and/or published outside the United States.” (viii) The *Bibliography* is conveniently organized into seven sections.



WILLIAM H. SHANNON

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Msg. William H. Shannon, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at Nazareth College of Rochester, is the General Editor of *The Merton Letters* and editor of the first volume, *The Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience & Social Concerns* (1985). He is the author of *Thomas Merton's Dark Path: The Inner Experience of a Contemplative* (1981). He is currently at work on a book about Merton's “Cold War Letters.”

The first three sections, occupying 377 of the total 710 pages, cover all of Merton's works and are divided as follows; 17

(I) Books, Pamphlets and Limited Editions by Thomas Merton (164 pages. This section includes other language translations as well as references for locating critical essays and reviews. The table of contents for each book is given);

(II) Shorter Prose Writings by Thomas Merton (151 pages. This section includes essays, reviews, chapters in books, contributions to periodicals, journals and newspapers, as well as unpublished essays. This may well be the most valuable section of this work, since it helps to resolve the vexing problem Merton so frequently creates for researchers by his penchant for sending the same article — sometimes modified, sometimes not, sometimes with a new title, other times with the original title — to different journals.);

(III) Poetry by Thomas Merton (This section lists individual poems and indicates where they may be found in the *Collected Poems* or in a particular book of poems or elsewhere. The list of individual poems in particular books of poetry can be found in Section I (e.g. the list by name of the poems in *The Tears of the Blind Lions*).

Following the three sections of works *authored* by Merton are three sections *about* Thomas Merton;

(IV) Books, pamphlets and tapes about Thomas Merton (9 pages);

(V) Theses about Thomas Merton (10 pages. In all there are 91 theses, including 36 doctoral, 49 master's and 6 bachelor's. Eleven of these have been published and hence are also listed in Section IV.);

(VI) Articles, Essays, Poems and Reviews about Thomas Merton (153 pages. This is by far the largest section of items about Merton. It includes 985 such items.).

Finally there is a Section VII which contains Media Presentations and Sound Recordings by and *about* Thomas Merton. (7 pages).

Each item in the seven sections has a double number: the first is the section number; then following a period is the number of each item within the section. The double-numbering is most convenient. Whatever page you may open the book to, you know immediately by the initial number what section you are in.

The concluding part of the book is an extensive Index of 152 pages: a place to look for "all-the-things-you-wanted-to-know-about-Merton" but didn't know where to look for them.

This *Bibliography* is not just a book to be used as a help in research; it is also a book that needs to be studied. Though a brief review is not the place for such a study, *Thomas Merton: A Comprehensive Bibliography* offers a fine overview of the state of Merton studies at the present moment. The disproportion between the relatively small number of truly scholarly works on Merton and the huge number of relatively brief studies of his works force us to face some questions: though many items about Merton have been produced, is Merton scholarship still very much in its infancy or at best its adolescence? Do his writings call for and deserve more critical study? If the *Bibliography* suggests a "yes" to both these questions, it may also indicate some of the directions in which that scholarship and critical study might move.

Lest anyone believe that I think the compilers of this *Bibliography* are perfect, I note a couple of items they missed. "Blessed Are the Meek" was originally written by Merton for Hildegard Goss-Mayr for inclusion in a German journal *Der Christ in der Welt*, where it was published in the April-June, 1966 issue under the title "Selig Sind Die Sanftmutigen." This antedates the first listing in the *Bibliography* (p. 174) by a year. Also "Danish Non-Violent Resistance to Hitler" was first published in the July- August (1963) issue of *The Catholic Worker*. For this article Merton used the pseudonym of Benedict Moore. This name is included among the other pseudonyms used by Merton in a one page Appendix to the *Bibliography* (page 558), though the name is not mentioned in the Index. Some omissions of this sort are bound to occur in a work of such magnitude. They obviously do not call into question the enormous value of this remarkable book. A landmark in Merton studies, it is both boon and challenge to Merton scholars.