The Seduction of the Divine

Thomas Merton's Experience of Love as Self-abandonment

Sonia Petisco

I turn in my sleep
Seeking a message
From the dark heart
Of secure night
A message of love [1]

Introduction: A Spark Blazing in the Night

A close analysis of Thomas Merton's love poetry can show us how he defies easy categorizations of love and questions the lingering rigidity and false certainty surrounding traditional patterns of discourse. My contention is that Merton's love poetry invites us once and again to plunge into that love which is 'terribly obscure and rare'[2], that love which cannot be defined and goes beyond any hierarchical or genre distinctions, questioning the concepts of 'self' and of 'God', and opening new paths towards real communion and understanding, real ecstasy and joy.

Certainly, the above quoted lines from 'Six Night Letters' explicitly illustrate Merton's emphasis on the dark night that the soul needs to pass through before experiencing such a love, something which joins him to the Western apophatic mystical tradition following after Plotinus and continued through the ages by such spiritual masters as Meister Eckhart and Saint John of the Cross. They all insist the need for poverty and detachment from pre-conceived ideas and systems, in order to achieve union with the Divine.

It was in a situation of spiritual darkness and physical helplessness when Merton had one of the most striking and unexpected experiences of his life. It took place in the spring of the year 1966, when he went to St

Joseph's hospital in Louisville (Kentucky) and met M., the nurse who took care of him after his spinal surgery.[3] He describes his condition of total brokenness, and his sense of complete loss of identity in his poem 'With the World in my Bloodstream', the first of *Eighteen Poems*, and the only one in which the nurse does not appear. In this poem we find Merton lying on his hospital bed, with water running inside the walls, 'and the musical machinery/all around overhead/plays upon his metal system'. In a state of complete physical fragility, he asks himself: 'but whose life lies here/and whose invented music sings?' [4] The poet has a strong intuition that the rhythmic life which breathes within himself is not his own, that he belongs to a much wider scheme for which he is just an instrument, a channel, an expression, even an invention. Moreover, he identifies this Life with the figure of Christ, his death and his resurrection: 'I am Christ's lost cell/His childhood and desert age/His descent into hell.'[5]

It is in the hospital that Merton gains the awareness of the extremely paradoxical character of Christ's love, and gains from his own experience a deeper understanding of Christ's words, 'Those who lose their life for my sake will find it.' (Mathew 16: 24-25). In the same poem he confesses: 'I am a lost spark in Eckhart's Castle', borrowing Meister Eckhart's metaphor of the divine 'spark' [6] (*scintilla animae* or *arca mentis*) which Eckhart described as 'free of all names, bare of all forms, ... empty and free' [7], 'something in the soul so closely akin to God that is already one with him and need never be united to him'.[8]

For Merton, M. will represent this divine spark within himself, this invisible light and virginal fecundity which is free of all definitions or categorizations but which is the source of endless creativity and joy: 'I always obey the spark that smacks like lightning/in the giant night' he sings in an expression of total self-surrender to his love for his nurse.[9] He is overcome by his feelings, lost in her light:

> You are utterly holy to me, you have become a focus of inaccessible light. Suns explode from the light you spread through my guts and torn with love for you my cry becomes a hemorrhage of wild and cool stars. I wake with the knowledge of my whole meaning, which is you. Our luck is irreversible. We are the chosen winners of sleep, whose secret light is now clear to us after five or six adventures.[10]

As the 'Lover transformed in and by the Beloved' of the Spiritual Canticle, or *'l'amante ne l'amato si transforma'* [the lover in the beloved is transformed] of Petrarch, so is Merton in M.'s light. Meeting her implied

finding the answer to his heart's innermost desire: 'It is midnight/you have come/bringing the truth I need.'[11] Now life offers Merton the possibility of enjoying the reciprocity of human love. 'He loved and was greatly loved', writes his biographer Michael Mott, highlighting how, for Merton, the experience enhanced his potential for love and for self-giving.[12] Merton's *Eighteen Poems* bear witness to this experience of selfless love, and express the certitude that beyond their individual selves there is an unsayable reality where, in the words of Eckhart, 'God glows and burns like a fire with all his abundance and rapture'.[13]

Love, Human & Divine - Paradise Regained

Certainly, in Merton's love poetry the boundaries between the human and the divine converge, and the poems' passionate depths transform them from the sensual to the mystical. This is not something new in poetry: Merton is continuing a whole tradition of human-divine love poetry which includes *The Song of Songs* and mystical poets such as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux or Saint John of the Cross. Moreover, it is not difficult to observe a subtle influence from the Sufi love poetry, most particularly Ibn'al Arabi and the Persian poet Rumi for whom 'Love is the One who masters all things'.[14]

Through his love for M., Merton now has a clearer, deeper awareness of God, shown in poems like 'Louisville Airport' or 'Six Night Letters': 'This is God's own love He makes in us', he tells her, 'we bring glad life/to all white-waving fields/to our handsome earth/and we go worshipping together/all over the world's heaven.'[15] It is as if God would recognize and love Himself in the two lovers, as the famous hadith of the Hidden Treasure reads: 'I was a treasure that was not known, so I loved to be known. Hence I created the creatures and I made Myself known to them, and thus they came to know Me.'[16] Both lovers seek the joy and bliss of knowing, seeing, and witnessing God in His self-disclosure. Moreover, in 'Aubade on a Cloudy Morning', the poet is grateful that 'the person of Love' (that is, Christ himself) 'has been thank God granted us again',[17] allowing the two lovers to experience a mystical union in which Christ is the tie that binds, even though they are far away from each other.[18]

With a new contemplative gaze, Merton and M., according to Mott, 'dwelled in the threshold of a love which was even unknown to them'.[19] They experience an open, spontaneous creative relationship through which they learn how to see the world with a transcendental vision and to celebrate in intimate company the joy of living: 'Together we create the light of this one day for each other. This is love's Genesis, always

beginning and never ending. We are at all times the first day of creation.'[20] We, as readers, are taking part in this celebration of the creative power of the imagination, and also in an endless development of the first and infinite instant in which everything is born out of a redemptive light, thus breaking the traditional lineal conception of time, and bringing us to that 'here' and 'now', that 'point of intersection between the timeless and time',[21] that place where there is no future, and therefore, no death. As Merton declares seven times in 'I Always Obey My Nurse', 'God did not make death.'[22]

This ceaseless search for the beginning, 'the first day of creation', accounts for the recurrence of a wide range of biblical images referring to Paradise which appear in *Eighteen Poems.* Thus, for example, in 'Six Night Letters', Merton can write:

> This is the morning when God
> Takes you out of my side
> To be my companion
> Glory and worship
>
> O my divided rib
> It is good to be willing
> To be taken apart
> To come together
> .....
>
> Sun will shine
> From our two bodies
> When we walk in paradise wood
> Looking and inventing
> One May of love [23]

Such a theme also occurs several times in his journal from this time. For example, in an entry of 4th November, 1966, and after his reading of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Merton recreates Eden: 'M. and I are, for many reasons, Adam and Eve.'[24] Merton is seeking the original childlike innocence and purity of Eden, aiming at the reconciliation of opposites, that *coincidentia opppositorum* where all contraries become one: 'Writing to you/is like writing to my heart/You are myself'[25], he tells M., in a mutual experience of love as non-possession, a love that overcomes the male-female dichotomy, all separation, all dualism. And so, for Merton and M., 'You' and 'I' become one.[26]

Hagia Sophia: Communion of Hearts and Bodies

Through beautifully rendered verses, what Merton is really doing is questioning the very concept of identity based on difference and unveiling the hidden mystery, the holy wisdom underlying our constructed egos: "You come to me like a cry/Born of my own abyss and wild/Gulf born of my mystery/Breaking out of the untranslated heart-song/Of my most secret planets", he writes in 'Six Night Letters'.[27] The poem "Certain Proverbs Arise Out of Dreams" harks back to the Spring of 1958 when Merton dreams of a young Jewish girl who 'says her name is Proverb'.[28] A few days later he writes her a letter, attempting to articulate his feelings:

> I think what I most want to say is that I treasure, in you, the revelation of your virginal solitude. In your marvellous, innocent, love you are utterly alone: yet you have given your love to me, why I cannot imagine. And with it you have given me yourself and all the innocent wonder of your solitude ... And so, I give you everything.[29]

Four years later, in 1962, Merton published a somehow prophetic poem, *Hagia Sophia,* in which he imagines himself in hospital, being awakened by the soft voice of a nurse who awakens the helpless Merton 'out of languor and darkness' when he 'who has defended himself, fought for himself in sickness, planned for himself, guarded himself, loved himself alone' is 'killed at last by exhaustion'.[30] In a journal entry relating to a hospital visit from July 1960, which apparently was the inspiration for 'Hagia Sophia', a gentle voice awakens Merton 'not for conquest and pleasure, but for the far deeper wisdom of love, and joy and communion'.[31] And in his journal from November 1964 he records dreaming of Proverb again: 'Last night — my dream of the Chinese "princess" has haunted me all day ("Proverb" again). This lovely and familiar archetypal person ... comes to me in various mysterious ways in my dreams! ... I felt ... the sense of her understanding, of her "knowing" and loving me, yet not merely in my individuality and everyday self.[32]

For Merton, M. comes as the physical realization of Proverb and Sophia, not only nursing his body, but also giving new impetus to both their lives, as he writes in 'Certain Proverbs Arise out of Dreams': 'Why has God created you to be in the center of my being ... I wake with the knowledge of my whole meaning which is you.'[33] In this regard, one could say that the lovers experience a true spiritual communion:

> We know love is a school where lovers go
> To learn each other
> Forming each other with inexhaustible care
> Like patient mothers
> Slowly building in long silences
> And repeated consent
> Over and over
> Each other's innocent new body [34]

Indeed, *Eighteen Poems* shares its inspiration with the work of constructive theologians and their retrieval of love as incarnate, corporeal reality. As Scott Holland has underlined, 'the relationship to the Infinite is not a knowledge but a desire. The relationship to the Infinite is not *gnosis* but an eros toward God and an eros toward the world.'[35] Certainly, poems such as 'Louisville Airport, May 5, 1966' and 'May Song' depict an experience of such love where the lovers have abandoned themselves to this wisdom of the body, and where the ardour of the lover becomes a delicate yearning for the encounter with the Beloved:

> Lend me for God's love
> Your life boat
> Your saving body
> Save my body for I die
> Cool me for I am destroyed
> By too much perfection.[36]

We are confronted with a new perception of love not just as an sterile abstraction but as, in the words of Ibn al-Arabi, 'a knowledge of tasting'.[37] For the lovers, through ecstasy and passion, the concept of an individual body is supplanted by an experience of a communal or mystical body. They lose their belief in the individual self as separated from all the rest.[38] Merton's love poetry is pervaded by glimpses which point towards the questioning of individual corporeality and the liberation of the body from the paws of human consciousness. In the poem above we do not really know what the term 'body' refers to; what we call 'body' loses itself in the realm of the Unknown, allowing us to put into question the concept of an isolated self. Ending the poem Merton writes, 'O lonely boat/carry me away/across the sea of wine/O small strong boat/bring me my child', evidencing a rapture on the brink of fulfilment.

For Merton, old patterns of thought regarding concepts such as 'self' and 'body' need to be set aside before one can truly love another. As he expressed in 'Six Night Letters':

> Love wins
> Because it is bad business
> And loses everything
> Love can never really begin
> Until both lovers are bankrupt [39]

Such a view of the paradoxical nature of love echoes the lines of St John of the Cross: 'In order to possess what you do not possess/you must go through the way of dispossession.' In other words, perfect love does not claim anything, it has no needs or desires, and it 'runs well when it runs by itself/without the help of man'[40], that is to say, without the intervention of human will or human efforts for its realization. As Saint Bernard has pointed out, perfect holiness, perfect freedom and perfect love consist in actually having no will other than the will of God.[41]

Tension and Crisis

Unfortunately there was not always agreement and harmony between M and Merton. On some occasions, the poet employs language which is shot through with tension and angst, like for example in 'Never Call a Babysitter in a Thunderstorm' or in the dramatic monologues of poems such as 'Aubade on a Cloudy Mourning', 'Evening: Long Distance Call' and 'For M. in October'. These compositions, coming towards the end of the relationship, illustrate the torment of the lovers' separation and the heartfelt absence, and they do so through images of incompleteness and death:

> But what can we do? True love
> Is sometimes a celebration
> Of agony
> We are torn apart
>
> The half moon stands in the sky
> We are separate in strange places
> Home is strange
> For the desolate
> Never say we love

> Only because love is sweet
> What is sweet about this bitter
> Division? It is death
> It is the devil's kingdom
> We are two half-people wandering
> In two lost worlds [42]

And in 'Cancer Blues' their love is seen as a serious illness, M. being invoked by the poet as 'a magic healer' who can 'love away' Merton's 'cancer of the heart'. Nevertheless, there is always a longing to attain some sort of union:

> If we could come together like two parts
> Of one love song
> Two chords going hand in hand
> A perfect arrangement
> And be two parts of the same secret
> .....
> But I am alone,
> Alone walking up and down
> Leaning on the silly wind
> And talking out loud like a madman
>
> 'If only you and I
> Were possible.' [43]

During the five months of his relationship with M., Merton suffered a severe identity crisis. It was a time for unmasking and revelation, and his love for M. brought to the surface deep questions about his life, its purpose, and in, particular, his vocation. His relationship with her was in clear contradiction, not only with his vows of silence and obedience, but also with his vow of chastity. As he wrote in 'Aubade on a Cloudy Morning', 'I am at war with my own heart'.[44] And nine days before writing the poem, he recorded in his journal that: 'I just don't know what to do with my life, finding myself so much loved, and loving so much, when according to all standards it is all wrong, absurd, insane.'[45] For Merton there was a clear dichotomy between his ideal about what a monk should be and his true self full of contradictions. Apart from this inner conflict, there was the possibility of a public scandal.

Until the late 1950s, there had been hardly any feminine influences in Merton's life. He had lost his mother at the age of six, his father subsequently having turbulent relationships with women until his death ten years later; and Merton had only superficial dealings with women until entering Gethsemani. The embracing of his love for M. implied tension and crisis, but it was also the beginning of a radical transformation of his whole being which led him to the integration of different sides of his personality: the contemplative, the creative and the human. Moreover, as I have previously suggested, it was due to M. that he came to grasp the real meaning of *Hagia Sophia*, 'the femininity which is present in every heart and is at the same time original and endlessly fruitful'.[46] Thanks to her he could hear the voice of the female unknown, the cry of Eve, questioning the law of reality and prohibition, that overwhelming tyranny which attempts to convince us that things are as they are, and cannot be otherwise. By overcoming his alienation from the feminine nature within, he reached a fresh awareness of his true self, as hidden in the ground of Love:

> Love without need without name
> Without answer without problem
> Love is the way and love is the home.[47]

Conclusion: Love as self-forgetfulness

If 'Love is the way and love is the home' can be thought of as Merton's essential message, it is important for us to realize that we do not really know what 'Love' is. Rather we should question ourselves about the uses of this word instead of taking its meaning for granted. For many people its limited meaning is summed up by Merton in 'The Day of a Stranger': 'Who said "Love"? Love is in the movies.'[48] Merton's love poetry gives us a far deeper insight into the possibilities of 'love', whilst at the same time offering alerting us to the potential duplicity of its use and the possible contradictions within the word 'love'.

Merton's *Eighteen Poems* are the beautifully poetic expression of his relationship with M. as well as a record of a paradisiacal, timeless love, a *sapientia cordis* in which 'you' and 'I' cease to be two people in order to become One in Christ. Ultimately, if there is something we can learn from Merton's love poetry, this might be the proverb revealed to him in sleep:

> Who would have guessed this? No harm ever comes to
> the one who loses himself entirely in the love of another.[49]

Notes

1. Thomas Merton, 'Six Night Letters - I' in *Eighteen Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1985), ll. 15-19. The volume is a collection of poems to and for the student nurse, M., written in 1966. To date, as a collection, they have only been published in a limited edition of 250 copies though all but 2 of the poems have been published elsewhere. For further details of the poems see the entry for *Eighteen Poems* by Patrick O'Connnell in *The Thomas Merton Encyclopedia*, Shannon, Bochen & O'Connell (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), pp. 128-132.
2. Thomas Merton, 'Louisville Airport, May 5, 1966' *in Eighteen Poems*, l. 15.
3. In one of his journals he openly describes the experience of this encounter: 'I cannot regard this as "just an episode". It is a profound event in my life and one which will have entered deeply into my heart to alter and transform my whole climate of thought and experience: for in her I now realize I had found something, someone, that I had been looking for all my life.' *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton (1966-1967)*, ed. Christine M. Bochen (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1997), p. 328. In all Merton's writings about the nurse, she is never named, being solely referred to as M.
4. *Eighteen Poems*, 'With the World in my Bloodstream', ll. 3-5, 23-24.
5. 'With the World in my Bloodstream', ll. 91-93. For a detailed commentary on this poem see Sonia Petisco and Fernando Beltrán Llavador, *Thomas Merton's World Discourse: Economic Globalization vs Religious Universality*, in *The World in My Bloodstream: Thomas Merton's Universal Embrace*, Proceedings of the Thomas Merton's Society of Great Britain and Ireland, ed. Angus Stuart (Great Britain: Three Peaks Press, 2004), p. 172.
6. 'With the World in my Bloodstream', ll. 83. Merton became acquainted with the work of Meister Eckhart as a student in Columbia University (1935-1939), but it is at the end of the 50s and during the 60s when he plunges into the work of the fourteenth-century German mystic. This coincided with his in-depth study of Zen Buddhism. In fact, it was Merton's reading of D.T. Suzuki which spurred on his interest in Eckhart: 'Whatever Zen may be, however you define it, it is somehow there in Eckhart' – Thomas Merton, *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 13.
7. See Meister Eckhart, *The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises, and Defense*, College & McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), pp. 177-180.
8. Quoted by Thomas Merton in *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, p. 11. Merton rephrased it as 'His Name written in us; as our poverty, as our indigence, as our dependence, as our sonship.' Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Doubleday Image Paperback, 1968), p. 158.
9. *Eighteen Poems*, 'I Always Obey My Nurse', ll. 35-36.
10. *Eighteen Poems*, 'Certain Proverbs Arise Out of Dreams', final stanza. Here Merton uses the symbol of 'light', present in many religious traditions, in reference to 'ecstasy' and 'unitive love'. See Mircea Eliade, 'Experiences of

the Mystic Light', in *The Two and the One* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), pp. 19-17.

11. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Six Night Letters - I', ll. 40-42.
12. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), p. 438.
13. *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation,* ed. Raymond Bernard Blakney (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), p. 211.
14. Merton was highly interested in Islam, above all in Sufism and the work of Yelaleddin Rumi (Afganistan, 1202-1273). He also voraciously read Ibn'Al Arabi and he kept a wide correspondence with Sufies and Sufi scholars such as Louis Massignon, Abdul Aziz and Reza Arasteh. See Erlinda Paguio, "Islamic Themes in Merton's Poetry", in *Merton and Sufism,* ed. Rob Baker (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999), pp. 89-100.
15. *Eighteen Poems,* "Louisville Airport', l. 21 & 'Six Night Letters II', ll. 23-27.
16. William C. Chittick, *The Divine Roots of Human Love,* in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Ibn'Al Arabi*, art.cit., p. 13.
17. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Aubade on a Cloudy Mornng', ll. 34-35.
18. As Merton explains in one of his lectures to the novices, 'the purpose of the spiritual life is to bring us to a kind of love in which we no longer love ourselves except for God's sake. In that case, the inner law is charity, purity of heart, complete freedom.' (Thomas Merton, 'Pure Love', Credence Cassettes, AA2136).
19. Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton,* op.cit., p. 453. It should be born in mind that we cannot, for the present at least, form a rounded view of their relationship. Merton only refers to his nurse as M., few facts about her have come to light, and she has never talked about their relationship. The contents of his letters to her are unknown, and, as he records in his journal on August 20, 1968, 'Today, among all things, I burned M's letters.'
20. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Certain Proverbs Arise Out of Dreams', 12th stanza.
21. M.C. Bradbrook, *T.S. Eliot* (London: Longmans, Green & Co. 1951), p. 30.
22. *Eighteen Poems,* 'I Always Obey My Nurse'.
23. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Six Night Letters - II', ll. 6-13, 18-22.
24. *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton,* p. 157.
25. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Six Night Letters - VI', ll. 8-10.
26. For an expansion of this theme see: Sonia Petisco, '"Sophia, the Unknown, the Dark, the Nameless": Questioning the Male-Female Dichotomy through Thomas Merton's Poetry', in *Universal Vision: A Centenary Celebration of Thomas Merton,* ed. Fiona Gardner, Keith Griffin and Peter Ellis (Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2014), pp. 99-116.
27. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Six Night Letters - I', ll. 30-34.
28. Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's Life,* Vol. 3, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), entry for February 28, 1958, pp. 175-6.

29. *A Search for Solitude*, Entry for March 4, 1958, p. 176.
30. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977), 'Hagia Sophia', pp. 364, 365. The poem was originally published in *Emblems of a Season of Fury* (1963).
31. Thomas Merton, *Turning Toward the World: The Pivotal Years,* ed. Victor Kramer (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), pp. 17-18.
32. Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life*, Vol. 5, ed. Robert Daggy (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), pp. 167-168.
33. *Eighteen Poems*, 'Certain Proverbs Arise Out of Dreams', final stanza.
34. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Six Night Letters - IV', ll. 27-34.
35. Scott Holland as quoted by Margolzata Poks in '"Love Wins Because It is Bad Business": The World Reedemed in Christ in Eighteen Poems', *The Merton Annual,* vol. 27 (2014), p. 86.
36. *Eighteen Poems*, 'May Song', ll. 47-52.
37. Ibn al-Arabi quoted by William C. Chittick, *The Divine Roots of Human Love,* art. cit., p. 14.
38. My contention would be that there is not such a thing as an individual body if there is not an awareness of myself as an individual separated from all the rest.
39. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Six Night Letters - V', ll. 8-13.
40. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Six Night Letters - V', ll. 20-22.
41. Thomas Merton, 'Pure Love', Credence Cassettes, AA2136.
42. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Evening: Long Distance Call', ll. 19-33.
43. *Eighteen Poems,* 'For M. in October', ll. 13-17,26-31.
44. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Aubade on a Cloudy Morning', l. 44.
45. *Learning to Love: The Journals of Thomas Merton,* May 4, 1966, p. 50.
46. Quoted by Pilar Satué, "Edith Stein and Thomas Merton: Vía de holocausto en un mundo violento", *Cistercium* Nº 228/229, July-December 2002, p. 603.
47. Quoted by Sister Thérèse Lentfoehr, *Words and Silence: On the Poetry of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1979), p. 69. This is an earlier version of the poem 'With the World in My Bloodstream'. The final version reads: 'Love without need and without name/bleeds in the empty problem/ and the spark without identity/circles the empty ceiling."
48. 'Day of a Stranger', *The Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas P. McDonnell (New York: Doubleday Image, 1989), p. 433.
49. *Eighteen Poems,* 'Certain Proverbs Arise Out of Dreams', 7th stanza.

Sonia Petisco has a PhD in English Studies from the University Complutense of Madrid and an MSc in Applied Linguistics from Edinburgh University. Her main research interests focus on language, mysticism, and the discourse of identity. Sonia's second book entitled *Thomas Merton´s Poetics of Self Dissolution* was published in 2016 by University of Valencia Publishing Press.