



Thomas Merton and James Laughlin: Selected Letters

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The remarkable development of Thomas Merton—monk, poet, and social critic—as documented in nearly thirty years of correspondence with his publisher.

Thomas Merton may have seemed an unlikely candidate for a best-selling author. Cloistered in a remote Kentucky monastery, Merton struggled as a young man to reconcile the contemplative life he sought as a monk and his very public passion for writing. Publisher James Laughlin saw Merton's talent and played the muse, encouraging him with the poems, essays, and diaries of other writers and publishing nearly everything Merton sent in return.

Ironically, the very society Merton rejected upon entering the monastery embraced his work, bringing him publishing success only dreamed of by more eager authors. Soon Merton discovered he had a podium, a voice, and a responsibility that weighed as heavily on him as his previous quest for silence. Laughlin's encouragement remained constant throughout, as political ally, publishing adviser, and supporting friend.

Nearly thirty years of rich correspondence documents this strong literary and personal relationship and traces the remarkable development of Merton's vision: from an early focus on matters internal and religious, to a tremendous world view encompassing issues of race, politics, war, and the spiritual decay of modern society.

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