

Two Poems

By J. S. Porter

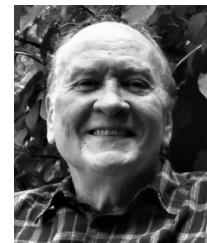
Hybrid Tom

“If Thomas Merton had been a writer and not a monk, we would never have heard of him.
If Thomas Merton had been a monk and not a writer, we would never have heard of him.”

That’s Mary Gordon talking.
Is she right?
More right than wrong, that’s for sure.
If monk-only, a footnote:
Thomas Merton born Prades, France,
died Bangkok, Thailand – and the dates.
If writer-only, a footnote:
Translator of Latin American poetry,
and *The Way of Chuang-Tzu*.
An essay? “The Root of War Is Fear.”
But both together, writer and monk, then
*Day of a Stranger, Hagia Sophia, New Seeds of
Contemplation, The Asian Journal, Learning to Love,*
“War and the Crisis of Language” and so on.

In the dog world, mongrels seem to live longer.
In the spirit world, mongrels seem to live longer.

J. S. Porter, poet and essayist, is author of *Thomas Merton: Hermit at the Heart of Things* (2008) and most recently is the co-author with Susan McCaslin of *Superabundantly Alive: Thomas Merton’s Dance with the Feminine* (Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake, 2019).



J. S. Porter

A Glosa for Merton

for Lynn Szabo

“[T]he poet finds himself ultimately where I am. Alone, silent, with the obligation of being very careful not to say what he does not mean, not to let himself be persuaded to say merely what another wants him to say, not to say what his own past work has led others to expect him to say.”

Thomas Merton: *Day of a Stranger* [unpublished draft]

It's the *Hamlet* thing.
 Everyone, even monks sworn-to-silence,
 in the word business, slowly
 building a self by words and questions:
 Why do I need to write?
 What do I want to say?
 For whom do I write?
 Maybe not knowing is better than knowing.
 I don't know. I'm *alone, silent*.
Be careful not to say what you don't mean.

One friend wishes you more silence, more emptiness.
 Why bother?
 Breath is such a chore, and shaped breath can be a bore.
 Another friend says say things people want to buy.
 Books that scare, books that keep you turning pages.
 Why continue with things that have such small appeal?
 If you're not making money, is it real?
 More honor in silence, less vanity, and yet,
Don't be persuaded to say merely what another wants you to say.

Another book on spirit, book and word?
 Please.
 Who wants it?
 Who needs it?
 Can't you find a new direction?
 Write on dreamers and their dreams.
 Write on things you know nothing about, learn as the reader learns.
 That saves you from repetition.
 Say what you discover as you discover it.
Don't say what your past work has led others to expect you to say.