



# Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination

*Ross Labrie*

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Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was a Roman Catholic priest, a Trappist monk, a social activist, and a poet. Author of the celebrated autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain*, Merton has been described as the most important American religious writer of the past hundred years. One of the notable characteristics of Merton's writing, both in poetry and in prose, was his seamless intermingling of religious and Romantic elements, an intermingling that, because of his gifts as a writer and because of his enormous influence, has had the effect of making widespread a distinctive form of religious thought and expression. In *Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination*, Ross Labrie reveals the breadth of Merton's intellectual reach by taking an original and systematic look at Merton's thought, which is generally regarded as eclectic and unsystematic.

What captured Merton's attention about Romanticism and mysticism and what held his attention virtually all his life was his consciousness of the ontological significance of unity and wholeness. Even though he was far from being a systematic thinker, Merton's writings form a coherent whole when considered from the point of view of his emphasis on unity and wholeness. Labrie skillfully examines Merton's letters, journals, and individual works to show the full expanse of his contribution. By using insights from the Romantic literary tradition and from the mystical tradition, the author is able to make sense of Merton's writings from all periods of his life. Although Labrie covers such sweeping topics as consciousness, self, being, nature, time, myth, culture, and individuation, remaining focused on Merton's specific, unique contributions in each area.

This thought-provoking work, which takes into account material from the recent full publication of Merton's journals and from his Columbia University notebooks on Romanticism, not only shows Merton's intellectual growth but provides a look at his expansive interests as well. *Thomas Merton and the Inclusive Imagination* will make a significant contribution to Merton studies.

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