



Crux: The Letters of James Dickey

James Dickey

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James Dickey was a great poet, a legend of the reading circuit, and -- after the best-selling **Deliverance** and its celebrated movie version -- a celebrity. This rich collection, reaching from 1943 to his death in 1997, and from a fledgling poet to an ailing man of letters, constitutes a vibrant short course in literature and poetry since World War II. From a 1959 letter: "For a long time I have been trying to do two things in poetry, both of which I have been told I should not do. The first is to get away, by whatever means, from the idea of a poem as objet d'art. . . . The other is to be able to make statements, one after the other: this happens, this happens, then this happens. To go with all this, I have also been trying to assert connections in nature where none exist: to make the world do what I say, rather than what it actually does." Matthew J. Bruccoli, James Dickey's literary personal representative, notes in his introduction: "The letters assembled in this volume represent perhaps twenty percent of James Dickey's located correspondence. The double rationale for selection was first to document the growth of a major writer -- how a scarcely educated jock discovered that he possessed genius and that writing was the only thing that counted -- then, second, to document the ways he fulfilled his genius and advanced his career. . . . The best letters here are the ones about writing . . . his correspondence documents the accuracy of his critical judgments." Dickey's correspondents include John Berryman, Harold Bloom, Philip Booth, Richard Howard, Denise Levertov, Robert Lowell, Donald Hall, James Merrill, Ezra Pound, Anne Sexton, Mark Strand, Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wilbur, and James Wright. Entertaining and erudite, these letters reveal the fierce, complicated literary intellect of the man John Updike called "the high-flyer of American poets."

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