

**Abstract** (suitable for media release)

Portland State University Professor Michael McGregor is nearing completion of his first book, *The Wisdom of Simplicity*, the first comprehensive biography of Robert Lax, an influential 20<sup>th</sup> century American poet little-known in the U.S.

After a successful early career that included frequent publication in *The New Yorker* and a first book (*The Circus of the Sun*) one critic called “the finest volume of poems published by an English-speaking poet of the generation which comes in T.S. Eliot’s wake,” Lax fled the Greenwich Village poetry scene to spend his last four decades on remote Greek islands. There, his simple life mirrored that of his lifelong friend, the monk and bestselling writer Thomas Merton, who credited Lax with having a major impact on his spiritual development.

Living among humble fishermen and sponge divers, Lax developed a spare style that influenced a generation of avant-garde writers in both Europe and the U.S. Jack Kerouac called him “one of the great original voices of our times” and *New York Times* critic Richard Kostelanetz described him as “one of America’s greatest experimental poets.”

McGregor met Lax in 1985 and visited with him every year until his death at 84 in 2000. By then, Lax had published over 300 poems and 30 books.