

**Valuable Book Group, LLC**  
**Specialists in Rare and Antiquarian Golf Books**  
**Newsletter and Book Review for the Serious Collector**

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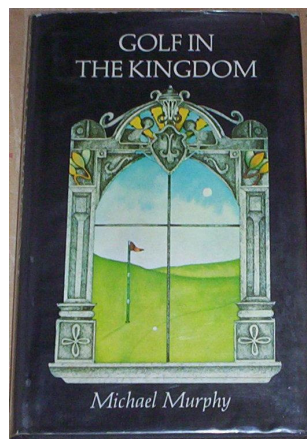
## **Golf in the Kingdom**

A masterpiece or over-rated trash? This month's newsletter touches on a golf book that stirs strong feelings and controversy. *Golf in the Kingdom* was first published in 1972 and written by Stanford educated Michael Murphy, founder of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California.

To give a sense of the strong emotions about the book we take a sample from *Amazon* reviews. Amazon's one-star rating doesn't mean you didn't like the book, their two-star rating is reserved for that; one-star means, "I hate it." The feelings of those giving the lowly one-star to *Golf in the Kingdom*: "psycho-babble; severe waste of time; If I had a fireplace handy it would have gone into the flames; pretentious twaddle; tedious and lecturing; how does a high school level writer even get published; the prose is forced and overly descriptive."

At the other end of the spectrum, the five-star reviews: "I consider this my golf bible; Murphy's magic is infinite and simple; found it to be awe-inspiring; I have read it at least five times and each time I find something new; the best golf book ever."

What ignites such disparate feelings on both ends of the spectrum? Well, the book is quite deep, and delves into meta-physics, mysticism and Eastern philosophies. Certainly it is a golf story, one of the mysterious teacher Shivas Irons and the hermit Seamus MacDuff. By any standard Murphy did not write a conventional novel. Those looking for a traditional narrative, as you have seen, literally hate the book. Those looking for deeper meaning and a williness to explore how golf can be used to find a greater purpose, love the book.



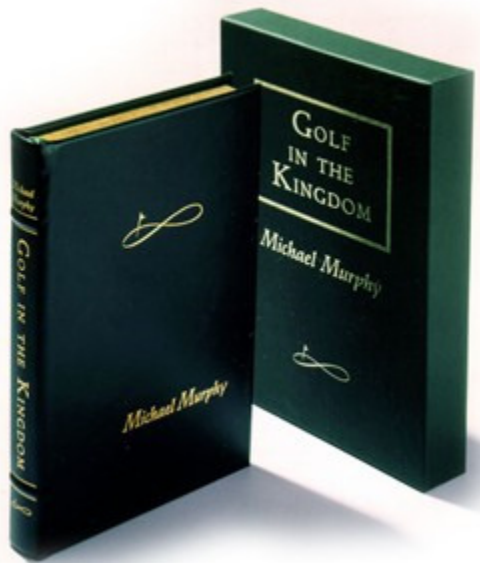
*First edition with original dustjacket*

My own personal view is somewhere in the middle. The book doesn't ignite my passions, nor do I hate it. Murphy wrote a compelling and interesting, if non-linear book. The 'Kingdom' he refers to is the Kingdom of Fife in Scotland, and the golf story in the beginning of the book is interesting and well written. As the book goes on, the writing gets difficult to follow, a little too mystical and rambles a bit. A fabulous golf book cover-to-cover it is not, although approached in the right frame of mind, it is a good book and allows you to expand your mind. Clearly, not everyone wants to spend a lot of time reading about the whiteness of the ball or the mystery of the hole, which strikes some as naval gazing. The faux Scottish words throughout the book can also begin to grate on the reader, a small sample follows, "...he was the sensation o' the house, regalin' fower or five o' the lassies wi'his stories and winnin' smile, a regular satyer on the face o't." Page-after-page, sentence-after-sentence of these begin to tax the mind.

One thing that is indisputable is that the book was (is) a huge commercial success. It has sold over one million copies (not many golf books can claim that), has been translated into nineteen languages, and spawned a society and a movie. Name another golf book where you can go on-line and buy branded gear or one that has its own Wikipedia entry.

When I asked learned people in the golf industry about influential golf books, they also split along the same lines as the disparate opinions on *Amazon*. Both Lorne Rubenstein and John Updike mention that the book clearly influenced them. Although I was only asking the thought-leaders about favorites that inspired them, two others (who will remain nameless), told me unprompted that they hated it.

From a collector's standpoint two editions are worth focusing on and have become difficult to find. The original 1972 Viking Press first edition, with an unclipped dustjacket, with a price of \$7.95 (D & J M38830) or the signed slipcased edition of 500 published in 1997 by Broadway Books (D & J M38860).



*Signed, limited edition of Golf in the Kingdom*

Although he was talking about life and golf when he wrote the prose, Murphy himself sums up the two views of *Golf in the Kingdom* pretty well in the book, “We tend to see everything as part of a journey. But other men have not been so concerned to get somewhere else—take the Hindus with their endless cycles of time or the Chinese Tao. Getting somewhere else is not necessarily central to the human condition.” If you want a definitive story with a definitive ending and lots of golf, you will likely be in the one-star group. If you are open to a long discussion of philosophy using golf as a backdrop without a definitive end, you will likely be in the five-star group.