

wrestled with what they could see in their time. To what extent did they succeed in transcending the (false) self as people themselves shaped by *la technique* and its pervasive rationality mediated in, and reinforced, by the rapid and extensive technologies of the Cold War era? If they did succeed to a sufficient degree, to see what was happening, then perhaps the 'illusion of freedom' is rather more of an illusion itself. Such a conclusion would give us cause for a cautious hope that, with great effort, we in our digital age might do likewise.

Eric Stoddart teaches Practical Theology at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. His principal research interest lies in contemporary everyday surveillance – as a cultural response and its impact upon social justice.

Merton & Waugh: A Monk, A Crusty Old Man & *The Seven Storey Mountain*

Edited by Mary Frances Coady

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This is a delightful little book, beautifully produced, containing such letters as survive from the correspondence between Thomas Merton and Evelyn Waugh between the years 1948 and 1952. There are thirteen letters from Merton and seven from Waugh, although unfortunately the Waugh Estate has only permitted two-thirds of the letters from Waugh to be printed. The editor, Mary Frances Coady, provides a very readable, lively running commentary, as well as an amusing account of Waugh's American lecture tour of 1949. She also offers some annotation, though she is not always as helpful as she might be: she calls Ronald Knox's book *Enthusiasm* 'a history of Christian religious movements', but fails to make clear the specific nature of these movements; again, a note is surely needed to explain the significance of Merton's remark that 'the Jesuits will not be too angry with anything I say about contemplation if I drub the quietists for a few pages in every book.'

In 1948 Waugh was sent the proofs of the autobiography by an unknown American Trappist monk by the New York publishing company Harcourt Brace, with a request for a 'puff' for the book. The publisher more than doubled the print run on receiving Waugh's enthusiastic praise of *The Seven Storey Mountain* – 'This book may well prove to be of permanent interest in the history of religious experience.' Although the original manuscript had already been cut by almost half, including the

omission of descriptions of the author's sexual affairs as a young man that had been demanded by the Trappist censors, to create the English edition, which he had been asked to edit, Waugh made many further excisions of material which he considered impeded the narrative flow of the story of conversion. The book was also given the new title of *Elected Silence*, the first two words of Hopkins's poem 'The Habit of Perfection'. Waugh ruthlessly deleted whatever he considered repetitive, verbose or unnecessarily explanatory. Excessive self-castigation was also eliminated, as well as anything that was purely speculative. And the rigidly orthodox critic had no time for pious triumphalism. Merton seems to have had no objection to the change of title and to have been delighted by Waugh's editing.

Merton had originally written to Waugh to thank him for his commendation of *The Seven Storey Mountain* and to ask for his advice as to how he could become a better writer since he hardly ever saw any reviews of his books and had no one to whom he could look for criticism. Waugh's response was that he should try to write 'a few things really well' rather than 'a great number carelessly'. In a later letter he mentioned the same fault he had noted when editing *The Seven Storey Mountain*: 'You tend to be diffuse, saying the same thing more than once.' In return, Merton was not slow to offer the notoriously crotchety English novelist spiritual advice: 'Don't be afraid to have a great devotion to Our Lady and say the Rosary a lot. Do you have any time for mental prayer? You have the gifts that grace works on and if you are not something of a contemplative already, you should be.' The idea of him engaging in contemplative prayer clearly alarmed Waugh. After reading *Seeds of Contemplation*, Waugh wrote somewhat tartly that he was 'impressed' by the young monk's spiritual 'assurance' – 'Except perhaps that an experienced director would not, as you sometimes seem to do, press the need of contemplation on all so eagerly. ... Is there not a slight hint of bustle and salesmanship about the way you want to scoop us all into a higher grade than we are fit for?'

The words 'bustle' and 'salesmanship' remind one that Merton was an American monk in an American monastery belonging to a rapidly growing American Church full of activity and bustle. Merton himself was not uncritical: 'We have a big showy front. Behind it – there is a lot of good will that loses itself in useless activity and human ambition and display.' If Merton was writing too much it was because he was under obedience. 'Father Abbot', he told Waugh, 'gives me a typewriter and says "write" ...' The reason was not literary or spiritual: 'We have to raise money to build some new monasteries and there is a flood of vocations.' Indeed, it seems that Merton complained to the abbot general on a

visitation about 'his growing dissatisfaction with the businesslike atmosphere ... where work with machines was taking a central place, leaving monks with less and less time for reading and contemplation.'

Merton's work was writing, and he felt overworked. But the work itself was highly unusual in a Trappist monastery. As Waugh put it (though not to Merton): 'I don't think it possible to combine a Trappist's life with that of a professional writer. Cheese and liqueurs are the proper products of the contemplative life.' But it was not just that Merton had become a professional writer - he had become a religious and literary celebrity. What Waugh should have said was that it is not possible to be a celebrity and also to be a Trappist monk. A spiritually wiser abbot, less driven by the need to raise money, far from urging Merton to write would surely have told the young monk that *The Seven Storey Mountain* had been of great apologetic value but that it was now time to devote himself to becoming a contemplative monk whose manual work would attract no publicity and would not be distracting and stressful in the way that intellectual and literary work was bound to be.

The problem was that the monastery wanted the huge royalties Merton was bringing in, while at the same time the paradox of being an enclosed Trappist monk as well as a prolific author of best-selling books was central to Merton's fame and celebrity. Both monastery and monk needed the other - but not quite for the right reasons. What in the end would have become of this essentially unhealthy relationship we shall never know as Merton died in an accident at the early age of 53.

Ian Ker is a Senior Research Fellow at Blackfriars Hall, Oxford. His books include *John Henry Newman: A Biography* (1988), *The Catholic Revival in English Literature 1845-1961* (2003), *G.K. Chesterton: A Biography* (2011), and *Newman on Vatican II* (2014).

Thomas Merton and the Noonday Demon: The Camaldoli Correspondence

Donald Grayston

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The discovery by Donald Grayston in the summer of 2008 of the forgotten correspondence between, primarily, Thomas Merton and Anselmo Giabbani in the years 1952-1956 can be read and studied at a variety of levels. There is, at the simplest and most elementary level, the struggle of