simple that there is no need to make a commotion about it."[4]

Merton's early essays are *really just that simple*. And best read without commotion.

Gray Matthews

The Letters of Robert Giroux and Thomas Merton, edited by Patrick Samway, SJ, with a Foreword by Jonathan Montaldo (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), pp. x + 397. ISBN 978-0-268-01786-6 (paper) $29.

As with most epistolary adventures between famous individuals, readers get a greater glimpse of the tone and tenor of an ongoing relationship than mere biography can provide. The friendship between Thomas Merton and his editor and publisher Robert Giroux is a case in point. These two men, central to the American Catholic literary renaissance of the twentieth century, provide a fascinating history of the challenges both of them faced in their respective roles as celebrated Trappist writer and renowned publisher. In their correspondence one not only sees the ups and downs of their deep friendship for one another, but also finds a portal into the many important social, political and religious moments of the last century, especially during the exciting early years of the Second Vatican Council. The editor, Patrick Samway, does a fine job of carefully editing their correspondence so that one gets the measure of each of them, whether it be Merton's struggle with the censors of his Trappist Order or Giroux's struggle to maintain his personal and professional equilibrium with his famous friend. Through it all, though, we see the affectionate regard that both men had for each other.

Samway begins with a helpful introductory discussion summarizing the history of this friendship and their parallel journeys as writer and publisher: Merton and Giroux as college classmates at Columbia University and the influence upon them of a small cadre of friends and professors, including their English professor, Mark Van Doren; Merton's decision to enter religious life as Brother Louis at the Trappist monastery of Gethsemani, Kentucky; Giroux's rise as a publisher first with Harcourt, Brace and eventually at Farrar, Straus & Cudahy (later Farrar, Straus & Giroux); the play-by-play of getting *The Seven Storey Mountain* published, and the autobiography's incredible sensation with the general public; Giroux's growing fame as publisher to some of the great names of American arts and letters – T. S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, John Berryman and Flannery

4. Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton in Alaska: The Alaskan Conferences, Journals, and Letters*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (New York: New Directions, 1989) 143-44.

O'Connor, to name but a few; and, finally, Merton's own deepening spiritual development as he moved into a hermitage and explored dialogue with Asian religious traditions. Merton scholars and aficionados know much of this information already, but the letters give a more complete dimension to the difficulty Merton faced in getting the necessary permissions from his religious order to get *The Seven Storey Mountain* published and Giroux's patient negotiations to ease that approval along. One also learns that Merton had the same difficulty with his Trappist censors almost two decades later when he tried to publish his other important work over the crisis of nuclear war, *Seeds of Destruction*. What is fascinating as one reads their epistolary exchange is the wide-ranging interests that gripped Merton, both religious and political – from monastic renewal and interreligious dialogue to the political crises of the cold war and racial injustice in America. This volume gives us a nuanced understanding of the struggle that Merton faced between his monastic vocation and his desire to be a prophetic voice in the public square amidst the rapid changes that were taking place in both church and society. Through it all Merton continually grapples with his priorities: to be a monk first and a writer second. And yet in his letters to Giroux, at different points in Merton's life, we get a glimpse at how much of a sacrifice this vow of obedience to his religious order often was for him.

Much of their correspondence centers on Merton's literary affairs as his fame made more demands upon him and the concomitant misunderstandings that accrued between writer and publisher over the best way to nurture and protect Merton's status as an important writer of his day. Ironically, this misunderstanding is partially due to the fact that almost all communication at the Trappist monastery during this time was via postal letters and had to be approved – opened and read by the abbot of the monastery – before being handed over to Merton. We learn through their correspondence that sometimes Giroux's letters either didn't get to Merton in a timely manner or never made it into his hands at all. One such missing letter caused great consternation between the two of them. Merton, anxious to get as many things published as possible, and privately concerned that Giroux was holding up things on his end, made agreements with other publishers. From the beginning of their professional relationship Giroux had worked out a deal with Merton that the publisher New Directions could continue to issue Merton's works of poetry and contemplative essays. With this in mind, Merton naively entered into a contract in 1962 with the paperback giant Macmillan in order to garner a larger audience, all the while under contract with Giroux. Their exchanges suggest that an important letter from Giroux never made it to Merton. It

specified the legal ramifications of breaking their contract. As Samway puts it in his introduction, "Had Merton received Giroux's important letter of March 28, 1962, which for some unexplained reason never arrived in his mailbox, [Merton] would never have continued his relationship with Macmillan" (17). The letters suggest that this episode put a deepening strain on their professional relationship.

Beyond the correspondence on publication contracts, deadlines and page proofs, the letters often reveal their thoughts about their contemporary situation, and the men and women – writers, artists, politicians – that they both admired. One comes across some wonderful exchanges when Merton is alive to what is going on around him outside his monastery. Merton tells Giroux about his epistolary interchange with the Russian writer Boris Pasternak (222), and the monk's personal sadness at his death (247, 249). We read later about the Second Vatican Council as he and Giroux discuss their fascination with the pseudonymous writer, Xavier Rynne, and his "Letter from Vatican City," the ongoing insider's commentary serially published in *The New Yorker* magazine about the debates happening at the Council (291). And most of all, at least for this reviewer, we learn of Merton's admiration for his fellow Catholic writer Flannery O'Connor (332, 341, 360), who was, of course, also published by Giroux. Merton claimed that "Judgment Day," her greatest – and final – story before her death was "the best thing she ever wrote and one of the best stories anybody ever wrote" (342). The volume, as a whole, is an important contribution to Merton studies, and sheds light on the significance that publishers such as Giroux had on nurturing some of the great lights of twentieth-century Catholic intellectual life in America. Fr. Samway is to be commended for making this history available to us.

Mark Bosco, SJ

GRAYSTON, Donald, *Thomas Merton and the Noonday Demon: The Camaldoli Correspondence*, Foreword by Douglas E. Christie (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), pp. xxi + 297. ISBN: 978-1498209373 (paper) $37.00.

To say that Thomas Merton corresponded with a lot of people is to understate the fact. The Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY, the largest and most important repository of Merton's work, holds in its collection more than fifteen thousand pieces of his correspondence to over two thousand people. A fair amount of the best-known letters, at least from Merton's side of the discussion, was published under the editorial direction of William Shannon, Robert Daggy, Patrick Hart