Mary C. Erler. *Reading and Writing during the Dissolution: Monks, Friars, and Nuns 1530–1558*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. 211. $90.00 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2015.207

England's monastic houses, central to pre-Reformation religious life, were the first to suffer from the religious changes after 1530. The beginning of the end of monasticism, as Mary Erler's beautifully crafted book reminds us, was a slow, complicated process, full of reversals and unexpected shifts—a testimony to the fragmentary nature of England's Reformation and its high personal cost. Composed of six individual case studies, Erler's *Reading and Writing during the Dissolution* highlights some of the twists and turns of that process while analyzing the rich literary output that preceded and accompanied the dismantling of religious life. In terms of religious writing at least, it seems clear that English monasticism was part of a northern European movement of creative renewal, cut off in its flowering. Yet the currents of Reformation came from within the cloister just as much as from without. If the varied accounts here could be said to suggest any single historical interpretation, it is that pre-Reformation monasticism was anything but static.

In the first chapter Erler looks at the life of London's last anchorite, Simon Appulby, whose work *The Fruyte of Redempcyon* (1517) attempted to inspire scripturally based religious devotion among a widening audience eager for printed vernacular instruction. Like many of the texts discussed in this book, his work shows the overlap between orthodoxy and reform. Appulby died in 1537 uncertain of the future; his will (included in an appendix) made provision for the next anchorite, but he was also clear-sighted about the possibility that he might never be replaced. In a careful exploration of Appulby's neighborhood, Erler shows the many ways in which the anchorite was embedded in the local community.

In the second chapter, Erler explores the world of the *Greyfriars Chronicle*, whose author, in displaying loyalty to both the Royal Supremacy and the traditional doctrine of the sacraments, epitomizes the complications of Henrician religious identity. It is not clear, for example, what we should make of the former Franciscan whose will demonstrated reformed notions of salvation yet who wanted to be buried within his old monastic enclosure. The evidence suggests that the community remained at least partially intact following dissolution: twelve former friars remained in the immediate neighborhood, but their sense of connectedness was not necessarily an indicator of traditional beliefs. Religious change in this era was partial, personal, gradual, and contingent on many separate developments and debates.

Erler's third and fourth chapters deal with "Cromwell's nuns." In chapter 3 she looks at Abbess Katherine Bulkeley of Godstow, Morpheta Kingsmill (the last prioress of Wherwell), and Joan Fane (the last prioress of Dartford's Dominican house of nuns). All three were relatively young, all three were dependent on the patronage of Thomas Cromwell, but each responded differently to the imperatives of dissolution. Bulkeley was on cordial terms with her great patron, and her letters articulate her impatience with monasticism, "not doubting but this garment and fashion of life doth nothing prevail toward our justifying before God" (70). Yet she sought to preserve Godstow, in part because she had already expunged, she claimed, "all superstitious ceremonies" (70), showing how little the end result of the Dissolution was clearly foreseen at the time. Kingsmill can be seen from her will to have partly preserved her community yet without any indication of traditional religious beliefs. In contrast, Elizabeth Shelley, abbess of Saint Mary's Winchester, defied attempts to break up her community and left an unequivocally traditional will, with the bequest of a chalice to Winchester College that was to be given back to her nunnery "in case it be restored and come up again." Fane, meanwhile, seems from several indications to have been inclined towards reform, keeping apart from the remnant of her community that lived together in Kent after dissolution, was refounded under Mary I, and then went into exile after Elizabeth's accession. In chapter 4 Erler looks in detail at Margaret Vernon, whose twenty-one letters to Cromwell

(also included in an appendix) show a sustained friendship between the two, and whose series of appointments, culminating with the post of abbess of Malling in Kent, suggests that Cromwell, too, may not initially have envisaged the Dissolution as the total annihilation of English monasticism. Again the picture is one of complexity and fragmentation.

In the last two chapters, Erler concentrates on religious texts and the monastic and former monastic communities that produced and circulated them. In the fifth chapter she looks at "refugee Reformation" and the experiences of those intellectuals and religious who started leaving the country from 1534 onwards. If sixteenth-century Catholicism was an international movement, then exiles and their works were often the "conduits" of its ideas. Erler also examines the exile community in the Low Countries and the personal links and shared texts that bound that community together. In the final chapter, she addresses Richard Whitford's last work, which, remarkably, was written after his monastery at Syon had been dissolved. Erler locates the work both within the context of Whitford's own life and output and that of monastic texts more generally. Whitford's vocation as a religious writer seemingly survived the Dissolution just as his community lived on in private houses and, later, in exile.

Erler's book is many things: a valuable evocation of Tudor London; a painstaking reconstruction of religious communities before, during, and after the Dissolution; a penetrating analysis of some of the key texts from this period; and a careful history of the manuscript and printed sources involved. It is not a direct contribution to any single historical debate, yet it has important implications for many ongoing conversations about the role of vernacular religious culture, the condition of pre-Reformation monasticism, the workings of religious communities, and the experience of religious change. A work of meticulous scholarship, *Reading and Writing during the Dissolution* will be a rich source of both detail and insight for many.

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David Coast. *News and Rumour in Jacobean England: Information, Court Politics and Diplomacy, 1618–25*. Politics, Culture, and Society in Early Modern Britain. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014. Pp. 288. $110.00 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2015.208

Contemporary observers of Jacobean England thought that an appetite for news was one of the distinctive attributes of their age. Asking after news, preached Thomas Lushington, was "the common preface and introduction to all our talk." Since the 1980s, historians and literary critics have shared that fascination; as David Coast observes in his useful new book, *News and Rumour in Jacobean England*, news culture has arguably become "an independent research agenda for the political history of early modern Britain" (3).

Coast's work is based on close study of the Trumbull correspondence, an immensely rich resource that Thomas Cogswell called "the basic starting place for any study of Jacobean England" (*The Blessed Revolution*, 1989, 324). Surprisingly few historians have really exploited these papers, perhaps a tribute to just how immensely rich they are. William Trumbull, the Stuart agent in Brussels, received weekly newsletters from multiple, well-placed correspondents in England and abroad. Thanks to the survival of these papers, the second half of James I's reign is incomparably better documented than the first, or indeed than most of his son's. Coast has not used the entire archive, but he has read the material from 1618 to 1624 (supplemented by material from the State Papers) and explicated them with care and imagination. For anyone hoping to get a sense of what is in these newsletters, how they worked, and what can be done with them, Coast's book will be essential.