

There is much rich material here, rightly undermining any easy assumption of any pan-Celtic or Gaelic common religious culture. Two points are perhaps worth raising. Firstly, though the project is focused on the archipelago some reference if not a full chapter might be made to the Breton experience and the work of Elizabeth Tingle on another Celtic tradition facing a centralising political power. Secondly, as the work of Augustine Baker reveals, recovery of late medieval devotional literature to inform seventeenth century debates was not confined to the Celtic parts of the archipelago, any more than was the search for a distinctive historical tradition. Brief mention of these in the editorial sections would have enhanced an already rich volume.

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Mary C. Erler, *Reading and Writing During the Dissolution: Monks, Friars, and Nuns 1530-1558*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. xi + 203, £55, ISBN: 978 1 10703 979 7

Using a relatively small body of written evidence to trace the multiplicity of responses to Henry VIII's programme of dissolution, as well as the networks of association and influence among religious and laypeople during the English Reformation, is a massive endeavour. The scattered and fragmentary evidence that remains in letters, inscriptions within books, bequests, and dedications, for example, furnishes only a small number of clues which can shed light on a wider and more complex landscape of shifting belief and policy that distinguishes this turbulent period. For this reason, Mary C. Erler's *Reading and Writing During the Dissolution* stands as a singular accomplishment, presenting a series of case studies which meticulously weave together evidence from letters, chronicles, and devotional texts to create vivid and nuanced portraits of professed men and women seeking to negotiate unprecedented changes in religious life. Six chapters survey writing in various genres by male and female religious whose loyalties run the spectrum from openly embracing reformist belief to actively defending traditional orthodoxy.

London's last anchorite Simon Appulby and his *Fruyte of Redempcyon* are the focus of Chapter 1. Erler's title 'Looking Backward?' signals her interrogation of an individual whose vocation and writing appear deeply conservative and more in tune with the religious climate of the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. Just

as Appulby's anchoritic vocation at All Hallows London Wall points backward a century, so too does his one printed work, which delivers an equally conservative statement of late medieval piety. Printed in 1514, the same year of his profession, Appulby's vernacular *Fruyte* makes available for lay readers the *Antidotarius Animae*, itself an abbreviated version of the anonymous *Meditationes de vita et beneficiis Jesu Christi, siue gratiarum actiones* published in Cologne in 1488. Drawing parallels between Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (c.1410) and Appulby's own contemplative text, Erler notes that the latter work also received ecclesiastical endorsement. She speculates that the presence of Bishop Fitzjames's recommendation in the text implies that the work's production may have been part of an 'episcopal initiative' (p. 28). Erler also suggests that the republication of the *Fruyte* sixteen years later on 21 May 1530 was likely driven by John Stokesley, the new bishop of London. Eager to bolster a conservative theological position, Stokesley may have looked to Appulby's vernacular narrative of Christ's life to counter the appeal of direct scriptural access, which remained an issue with the arrival in England of a revised edition of William Tyndale's New Testament printed on 17 January 1530.

The anonymous *Greyfriars Chronicle*, which spans the years 1538 to 1556, is the subject of Chapter 2. Found in BL MS Cotton Vitellius F.xii along with other Franciscan material related to the London community, the *Chronicle* offers a strikingly neutral account of changes underway in the capital during these years. Erler highlights the difficulty of attempting to evaluate the author's position by noting that even the execution of the Carthusian brothers, Thomas More, John Fisher, and the Franciscan John Forest are 'registered with careful neutrality' (p. 41). She posits that such detachment coupled with equivocal or ambiguous statements on religious matters—the 1534 entry simply observes that 'this year was the bishop of Rome's power put down' (p. 42)—may reflect the multiple positions held within the community, which ranged from upholding orthodoxy to embracing a more enthusiastic reforming impulse. Erler's chapter proceeds to trace these different positions in more detail by scrutinising the documentary evidence: the letters by the warden Thomas Chapman to Thomas Cromwell and Richard Neville, as well as the wills of two brothers, John Baker (†1570) and Albert Copeman (†1572). Erler's readings of Chapman's letters draw attention to the anxieties the warden felt over future uncertainty along with his simultaneous expressions of a desire to support the king's agenda for winning over the community. The testaments of Baker and Copeman suggest additional complexity as both echo a willingness to accommodate religious change although retaining

a Catholic position. Erler's work in drawing information from the wills as well as the networks of association is especially compelling, providing a glimpse into the life of the community post-dissolution.

Chapters 3 and 4 are organised around portraits of religious women who were promoted, often at an early stage of their lives as professed nuns, to high-ranking positions in both their own and other communities largely on account of assistance from their patron, Thomas Cromwell. Erler's two chapters explore the comprehensive networks of clients and supporters Cromwell cultivated within religious communities. Mary Robertson has studied such systems of association in a secular context, and Erler provides a window into a religious one by using letters from four women to explore the ways in which Cromwell identified influential individuals who were already part of the existing order and who were sympathetic to reform in order to promote them and thereby advance his own reforming agenda. Erler links the religious sympathies of these women with that of their family, especially their brothers, who themselves were clients of Cromwell. Especially remarkable is the degree of intimacy and boldness displayed in their correspondences. Morpheta Kingsmill's 'spirited and hard-hitting' (p. 72) missive to Thomas Wriothesley—intended ultimately for the eyes of Cromwell—is simply one instance of the strong personalities revealed by these correspondences. Likewise, Margaret Vernon's letters to Cromwell, of which we possess twenty-one in total, offer the most compelling and complex portrait of the relationship that existed between a nun and the king's chief minister. Appointed prioress of Sopwell, St Mary de Pré, and Little Marlow, and finally becoming abbess of Malling, Vernon distinguished herself as an extraordinary administrator whose external appointments assisted the process of centralisation while simultaneously allowing her to speedily ascend the ranks. Her twenty-one letters—'[i]ntimate, chatty, and thoroughly personal' (p. 88)—also show Vernon's concern to locate advantageous positions for those in her charge, especially for the community at Malling. Above all, Erler uses these letters to reconstruct the complex relationship that evolved from a friendship rooted in a shared interest in reform to one of patron-client in which the two became mutually dependant, as Cromwell advocated for her advancement while at the same time entrusting his son Gregory's early education to her at Little Marlow.

William Peryn's *Spiritual Exercyses* and its dedicatees, Dorothy Clement and Katherine Palmer, form the basis of Erler's discussion in Chapter 5, on religious exiles on the continent as 'privileged conduits for European theological and devotional thought' (p. 108). As the title suggests, Peryn's *Exercyses* draws on Ignatian spirituality, although by

way of Nicholas van Ess's *Exercitia theologicae mysticae*, which Peryn's work translates into English. Peryn's work further draws on Hendrik Herp's *A Mirror of Perfection*, which was known at Syon Abbey and read by William Bonde. The first rector of the Brethren of the Common Life at Delft and later a friar, Herp's spirituality incorporated elements that drew from the Franciscan tradition and from that of *Devotio moderna*. In delineating the spiritual and devotional environment from which Peryn's book arose—'Jesuit, Carthusian, strongly mystical, female-influenced' (p. 110)—Erlar highlights the way in which physical proximity further enabled continental religious thought to influence the exiled community of English Catholics, many of whom were based in Louvain. Peryn himself was a Dominican who preached against Lutherans during the reign of Henry VIII and was later forced into exile. He was recalled from the Netherlands on two occasions: first, in 1543 when he returned possibly to serve as chaplain to the orthodox bishop of London, Edmund Bonner, and a little over a decade later by Queen Mary and Stephen Gardiner to assist in re-establishing the Dominican house in London. Erlar's discussion of the two dedicatees—one a Poor Clare and daughter of Thomas More's protégés John Clement and Margaret Gigg, the other a Syon nun who led the Birgittine community to Dendermonde in 1539—further illustrates the intersection of traditions and synthesis of continental spirituality that resulted from this diaspora of English Catholics in the mid-sixteenth century.

The Syon brother Richard Whitford and his *Dyuers Holy Instrucyons* are the subject of the book's final chapter. This text, a compilation of four works written at various points during his tenure at Syon, is unique among Whitford's writing as it was printed in 1541—two years after the Brigittines were expelled from their house in Isleworth. Hypothesising that the entire collection was prompted by the suggestion of an anonymous brother to whom Whitford alludes in several prefaces—possibly the lay brother John Massey—Erlar argues that the collection illustrates 'the continuation of some form of community life' (p. 132). As a result of this effort to preserve the communities to which Syon formerly directed its pastoral guidance, each text, according to Erlar, omits any explicit mention of recent history. To what extent were these texts revised before publication? In the case of the compilation's first work, *Pacience*, Erlar concedes that it is impossible to know whether Whitford reworked the text before it went to press in 1541, and proceeds to note that 'it seems not to reflect the turbulence of the 1530s in which Syon was involved' (134). Certainly, no explicit reference is made to the executions that took place between 1534 and 1535, which included the Syon brother Richard Reynolds. However, the themes developed in each work—the *Boke of Pacience*; *A Worke of Dyuers Impediments*

*and Lettes of Perfection*; the pseudo-Isidorian *Counsels*; and, finally, an excerpt of his own sermon *On Detraction*—were highly appropriate for Catholics living in a post-Catholic England. In addition to her meticulous work in linking texts to wider spiritual and intellectual developments on the continent, Erler offers the rather provocative and quite sensible position that this work above all evinces continuation: first, of Whitford as author of works on spiritual direction; second, of the conservation—in some form—of monastic community; and finally, of an audience still eager for Syon books.

Mary Erler's monograph adds much to a scholarly conversation that is once more attracting broad interest and forcing reconsiderations of previous assumptions. Much of what makes this book so rich is the meticulous detail Erler provides in delineating the multiple positions available to religious—aligning with more pronounced reforming impulses; advocating for renewal within existing institutional frameworks; or, like many, straddling both camps by seeking to adapt religious life to the spiritual climate in England as it evolved.

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Jeremy L. Smith, *Verse & Voice in Byrd's Song Collections of 1588 and 1589*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016, pp. 337, £60, ISBN: 978-1-78327-082-8

In 1976, Hugh Aveling declared in the *Handle and the Axe* that so-called Catholic 'apologists...have always done their best to prove that recusants provided most of the glory of the Elizabethan age', citing the example of William Byrd. This, he continued, was 'special pleading' because Byrd himself was a 'conformist and most of his religious compositions were for the Anglican liturgy'. Moreover, he concluded dismissively, 'the creative achievements of...English Catholics are much what we should expect of a small nonconformist community'. Thankfully, recent scholars have demonstrated the importance of English Catholics and their creative achievements for the literature, music and politics of the age. Furthermore, musicologists including John Harley, Joseph Kerman, Craig Monson and Kerry McCarthy have significantly enhanced our understanding of Byrd's position as a Catholic recusant, loyal servant of the Crown, and vital cultural figure in Elizabethan and Jacobean religious politics. Much of this scholarship has focused on