

Anne Jacobson Schutte. *By Force and Fear: Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe*.

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Schutte's meticulous analysis of 978 petitions to Rome's Sacred Congregation of the Council for release from monastic vows between 1668 and 1793 reveals that interpretations of forced monachization have been severely limited; her fresh perspectives, felicitously conveyed and a pleasure to read, are inevitably eye-opening. She first examines in detail the literary tradition that shaped common, skewed assumptions about forced monachization as a female predicament whose victims longed to marry and seethed with libidinous desires. Her extensive literary testimony to this view can also be supplemented by music, ranging from the sixteenth-century *Madre non me far monaca* to some thirty operas between Thomas Clayton's *Rosamund* (1707) and Hindemith's *Sancta Susanna* (1922), ringing changes on similar themes.

The most surprising revelation from Schutte's Vatican sources is that forced monachization may not have been chiefly a women's issue: more than eighty percent of these petitions came from males. Her careful elucidation of how forced monachization impacted the lives of young men as well as women is worth stressing, not only because it is surprising and compelling, but also because reviews of her earlier *Aspiring Saints* (2001) tend to overlook the fact that she afforded similarly revealing equal representation to both sexes in that book as well. *By Force and Fear* puts real faces on dozens of ordinary men and women from Cuba to Kiev, who confronted this unwelcome reality. Even early modernists who have studied related archival material will likely find Schutte's brief vignettes arresting.

Throughout the period basic realities scarcely changed. Schutte vividly demonstrates how the chief motivation remained financial: to preserve the patrimony for a single (almost invariably male) offspring. The methods of force and fear had a numbing sameness: verbal and physical abuse; restrictive diets and inadequate clothing compared to favored siblings; imprisonment at home (Ludovico Martinelli from Rimini was compelled to sleep in an attic amid dove and hen droppings [256–57]); beatings and even poisoning (in Milan Giuseppe Bettè's stepfather beat him “to a pulp,” then fed him poisoned soup — a workman knocked it off the table just in time but the family cat lapped it up and was never seen again [163–64]); securing the aid of some obliging religious (beata Juana de la Incarnación at San Bernardo in Málaga warned Antonia Ramírez de Arellano that eight legions of demons would drag her off to hell if she declined to profess [201]). “Reverential fear”

made offspring unwilling to oppose parental will openly until their abusers had gone to their reward. Fathers adamantly adhered to the principle of *patria potestas*, despite confessors' occasional remonstrations. When parents expressed regret, it was usually not for their abusive acts but for their illegal objectives.

Evil stepparents, often in collusion with stepsiblings or younger half-siblings, populate Schutte's cases as often as they crop up in Cinderella, Snow White, and Mother Hulda. As one secretary of the Congregation of the Council observed, "For a long time, it has been the case that when [widowed] men take new wives, the spouses, overcome by love for their own children, come to hate those from the first marriage and want to put them out of the way" (256). The fates of fairy tale heroes and heroines can pale by comparison with those of Schutte's protagonists. Hansel and Gretel's father and stepmother merely sent them off to fend for themselves in the forest. Anne-Marie Beauregard of Chambéry's father "threatened that he'd send me into Switzerland, giving me only a dress made of sackcloth, and that I'd live there in those parts on bread and water without ever hearing from him" if she refused to enter a convent (193). Twelve-year-old Bernardo de Jesús Maria e José's father forced him to become an Observant Franciscan in Portugal, then sent him packing all the way to a monastic house in Madras (199).

But Schutte's protagonists can betray determination, persistence (often extending over decades, given parental longevity and Rome's glacial pace), and sharp-witted resourcefulness to rival that of fairy tale characters. Having agreed to hand over Rome's decree restoring her to lay status in return for an increase in her convent living allowance, Maria Ana de Sosa Fagundes of Campo Maior, Portugal instead gave her unsuspecting father the wrong Latin document. When he died she played the trump card she had held in reserve (196).

By contrast with their fairy tale counterparts, however, Schutte's successful petitioners confronted uncertain, far from rosy futures. Many men became secular priests: on their terms, a happy ending to their misadventure. Women had no such option. Few could expect a warm welcome back home, for oftentimes families resolutely opposed their release from monastic vows. When these women disappeared from the historical record, as they inevitably did, most did not live "happily ever after."

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