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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Nuns writing: Translation, textual mobility and transnational networks</th>
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Abstract
Post-Reformation Catholic religious orders provided women with privileged, multi-layered spaces for authorship, readership, and textual transmission. Exile and travel were imperative for British and Irish women religious, exposing them to cross-cultural encounters and international influences. Convent membership nurtured as co-extensive a set of identities – national and transnational, individual and communal – that, in other contexts, were perceived as conflicting. The kinds of writing produced in these convents ranged from obituary and chronicle history to religious rules and devotional translations. They were required for the female religious community; they addressed, documented, and shaped that female readership. But these texts also participated in the Counter-Reformation effort and sustained interest beyond their initial, female audience. The religious orders, with their pan-European reach, functioned as transnational networks for the circulation of women’s writings. This wider transmission and reception illuminates questions relating to gender and authorial credit – itself a complex topic when convent identity prizes the collective and collaborative over individual authorship or attribution.

This chapter grounds its discussion of these issues in the devotional and life writings associated with Mary Ward and Lucy Knatchbull, the translations made by English and Irish Poor Clares, and Susan Hawley’s account of the Sepulchrine convent at Liège.

Keywords
Nuns, life writing, translation, textual transmission, readership, exile, travel, authorship

Chapter 14
Nuns’ Writing: Translation, Textual Mobility and Transnational Networks
Marie-Louise Coolahan

From the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s, British and Irish women who wished to enter religious life were forced abroad. The decision to leave worldly concerns behind now entailed, paradoxically, a process of engagement with other countries and languages. The first exiled English convent was founded in Brussels in 1598 by recusants (Mary Percy, Dorothy and Gertrude Arundell) fleeing persecution in England. To enter religious life was also to engage with the writing culture of Counter-Reformation Catholicism. Dorothy Arundell composed a martyrlogical life of her spiritual mentor John Cornelius, who had been executed in 1594 following a raid on the Arundells’ Chideock Castle, Dorset. This document was testament to his fortitude and the signs of divine approbation; recounting two miraculous events, her life of Cornelius was incorporated to Jesuit collections that aimed to buoy the faithful across Europe. It was translated into Spanish, Italian and Latin. The Catholic religious orders created and sustained textual as well as personal networks; indeed, for enclosed women religious, it was textual exchange that facilitated their contributions to

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1 ‘bound by monastic vows’; see OED, ‘religious’ B n. 1.
devotional currents, spiritual controversies and worldly developments. Exposure to the
canals of communication available to the religious orders—institutions that transcended the
national—opened up the means of textual mobility and exchange, although not necessarily
the markers of female authorship. As Elizabeth Patton has shown, Arundell’s text was usually
integrated to Jesuit histories without attribution. Authorial credit is a complex issue for
writers who were nuns; convent identity prized the collective and collaborative over
individual authorship. But the failure of the male orders to acknowledge Arundell points also
to the wider social leeriness of women’s writing. Moreover, their control over the means of
circulation highlights the layers of mediation at play in nuns’ textual production.
Not only their experiences of persecution but also their devotional activities impelled
nuns to produce texts of all kinds in post-Reformation Europe. The emphasis on vernacular
texts of instruction impacted on the religious orders, and translations of convent rules and
constitutions were increasingly necessary for women who travelled to join foreign convents
or establish their own foundations. The kinds of writing produced in convents ranged from
obituary and chronicle history to religious rules and devotional translations, as well as
profession and financial records. These were texts required by the community; they
addressed, documented and shaped that female readership. They were vital sources of
authority when controversies arose—which they did, frequently. But these texts also
participated in the Counter-Reformation effort and therefore sustained interest beyond their
initial audiences. The religious orders, with their pan-European reach, functioned as
transnational networks for the transmission and distribution of nuns’ writings.
The challenges of accessing writing by women religious—often in continuous use by
convents, sometimes suppressed by church authorities, and always problematic for the
hegemonic narrative of Protestant England—has meant that the study of writing by women
religious has languished behind other forms of early modern women’s writing. Enclosure as
well as the ongoing value of the texts have mitigated against public access to archival
holdings. As Jaime Goodrich has observed, the lack of fit with the single-author paradigm
may also account for this omission from the feminist recovery project. However, scholarship
in this area has burgeoned in the twenty-first century. The groundbreaking Who were the
Nuns? project, led by Caroline Bowden, has established the membership of all the exiled
English convents, spearheading a publication programme that has so far amassed six volumes
of edited texts and one essay collection. The thriving hub of devotional writing produced by
the English Benedictines in Cambrai and Paris, stimulated by their confessor Augustine
Baker, and the writings of the Carmelite order have been edited and analysed;. Scholars
have directed attention to reading and writing practices in the convents, as well as spirituality
and devotional exercise, visual and musical culture, life writing and translation, enclosure and

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2 See Elizabeth Patton, ‘From Community to Convent: The Collective Spiritual Life of Post-
Reformation Englishwomen in Dorothy Arundell’s Biography of John Cornelius’, in Caroline
Bowden and James E. Kelly (eds.), The English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800 (Farnham:
3 Jaime Goodrich, Faithful Translators: Authorship, Gender, and Religion in Early Modern
4 Who were the Nuns? A Prosopographical Study of the English Convents in Exile 1600-1800
http://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/index.html [date accessed 25 July 2016]; Caroline Bowden
(gen. ed.), English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012-
2013); Bowden and Kelly, (eds.), English Convents in Exile.
the perception of nuns in mainstream English culture. This growth complements the wealth of scholarship on women religious in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the New World.\footnote{Space constraints forbid citation here of all but the most recent studies. For examples, see Jenna Lay, \textit{Beyond the Cloister: Catholic Englishwomen and Early Modern Literary Culture} (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Jennifer Hillman, \textit{Female Piety and the Catholic Reformation in France} (London: Routledge, 2015); and Nicky Hallett, \textit{The Senses in Religious Communities, 1600-1800} (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).}

This chapter focuses on the conditions of exile and mobility that informed the production and circulation of nuns’ writing. Translation was a prerequisite for textual exchange, the means of knowledge transfer. The translator was creator and adaptor as well as mediator of the original for new readers. Women religious were highly attuned to their audiences, retooling the texts they translated in order to serve their own, often polemical, purposes. But this was not solely a female preserve. Male confessors and spiritual directors—as well as fellow travellers outside the convent—collaborated with the nuns and mediated their texts. The study of nuns’ writing inevitably provokes questions about the nature of authorship (individual, plural, collaborative), the idea of ‘authentic’ texts, the layering of identity, the gendering of spirituality and power, as well as translation and transmission. This discussion begins with Mary Ward, whose radical proposal for a non-enclosed order thrust her into conflict with the authorities. The centrality of texts to the struggle of her ‘institute’ is evident from their translation and suppression. The battle over Ward’s reputation is complemented by consideration of the life of the Benedictine Lucy Knatchbull, whose original writings were reproduced by her biographer as proofs of piety that also reveal the immersion of women religious in a writerly devotional culture. The analogy drawn between Knatchbull and St Teresa elevates the former, but founding saints were equally important as models of behaviour in testing times, as is evident from writings of the English and Irish Poor Clares. The appeal of the religious order as sanctuary from such insecurity lies at the heart of the advertisement for the Sepulchrine lifestyle at Liège, published in the early Interregnum.

\textbf{Mary Ward, Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary/Congregation of Jesus}

Mary Ward (1585-1645) is a unique figure of the period, whose inspiration of controversy, admiration and hostility across Europe makes her an extreme but all the more illustrative case that highlights the conflict between gender and authority and, consequently, the importance of reputation management. Ward was a Yorkshire recusant who left home in 1606 for the Walloon town of Saint Omer, then under jurisdiction of the Spanish Netherlands and consequently a hive of exiled Catholic activity. Ward was accepted only as a lay sister rather than choir nun; the latter were retired from the world in order to dedicate themselves wholly to devotion whereas the former liaised between convent and outside world, combining spiritual with manual work (sometimes begging). She was inspired to found the first English convent of this order, ultimately located at Gravelines, in 1607. Prior to full profession in May 1609, Ward received divine direction that this was not to be her vocation. Returning to England for missionary work, she experienced a vision (known as the ‘Glory Vision’) assuring her of a different path, which was finally revealed to her in another vision in 1611. She was to establish a non-enclosed order, grounded in the principles of the Jesuit constitutions and pedagogical mission.

Ward’s absolute insistence on fulfilling this vision led her into conflict with church authorities, including the various popes of her time. Initially well received by Bishop Blaes of Saint Omer, the project was a success and her institute expanded quickly to Liège, Cologne, Trier, Rome, Naples, Perugia, Munich, Vienna and Pressburg (Bratislava) despite periods of arrest in England and worsening health. In pursuit of her mission, Ward criss-crossed Europe,
often travelling on foot with her companions, sometimes offered coaches by aristocratic supporters. The flurry of expansions hit a brick wall at Prague, where local opposition prevented a new house opening.

Many of these foundations were short-lived; opposition to her radical project mounted as fast as her new houses. The sticking points were significant, and gendered. Ignatius Loyola had prohibited the Jesuits from cultivating a women’s order, and the directive of convent enclosure had been retrenched at the Council of Trent (1545-63). The Ursuline order, whose founder Angela Merici proposed a similar mission, was formally enclosed in 1572. More importantly, Jesuits were not subordinate to local bishops; Ward’s proposal was for a community of women who would take vows but operate in the world under a female superior, directly under the authority of Rome. This was unacceptable to the hierarchy. Pope Urban VIII finally ordered the suppression of Ward’s institute via a papal bull in 1631.

Texts were central to the institute’s battle for survival. Ward’s letters and petitions to members of the church hierarchy made the case time and again for the integrity of her vision and its divine sanction. During her imprisonment in Germany in 1631, she smuggled out instructions to her followers by writing letters in lemon juice. Her ingenuity in textual communication also extended to glass. In London in 1618, she called on Lambeth Palace (home to the archbishop of Canterbury): ‘she left her Name, and that she had beene there to see him written in the glasse Window with a Diamond.’ In doing so she joined such exalted company as Elizabeth I, Lady Jane Grey and Mary, Queen of Scots, whose window verses were made during their incarcerations. There are allusions to window poems throughout the seventeenth century, although the only surviving early modern examples in England are the quatrains by Katherine Philips at Haddon Hall, Derbyshire, recently discovered by Elizabeth Hageman. All Ward’s texts were preserved, translated and circulated by her female followers. Their transmission was an act of defiance. Church authorities did their utmost to suppress relevant documentation: the Vatican archives concerning Ward were not accessible until the 1980s. Moreover, the key texts themselves have only recently emerged in the public domain. The first edition of the multi-lingual Ward’s writings, in German, was published in 2007, followed by a selective English edition of the major works in 2008. Despite her international notoriety, then, Mary Ward is representative of the tardy arrival of nuns’ writings to scholarly debates about early modern women.

**Autobiographical Fragments**

Ward’s consciousness of a public audience for her story is clear from the survival of seven autobiographical fragments. None are finished; these are drafts toward a fuller narrative of her life. In an introduction, Ward makes a rhetorical move that is typical of nuns’ writing

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(and not unlike the modesty topos employed more widely by early modern women): legitimacy and authority are located in the male superior.\textsuperscript{11} Self-assertion is masked by apparent deference to male direction. Father Robert Lee charged Ward to write her story, to do so before any trip to England, where ‘my life or liberty might be endaingered’ and to ‘leave yt sealed upp with our company’ for safekeeping.\textsuperscript{12} The longest and most cohesive of these fragments was composed in Italian, 1624-1626. The fragments focus on her childhood, reworking specific episodes that illustrated her spiritual awakening and evolution; they resemble drafts toward a \textit{bildungsroman}. Her family’s recusant credentials are the starting-point, her parents and grandmother having been imprisoned on various occasions for their beliefs (two relatives were convicted gunpowder plotters).\textsuperscript{13} Deliveries from adversity—such as arranged marriage or a house fire—are presented as signs of divine providence (another trope that was not limited to Catholic women’s life writing).\textsuperscript{14} The Italian fragment relates in affective terms her emotions and shifting motivations in deliberating over leaving the Walloon convent, founding and then leaving the English Poor Clare convent, and her ‘Glory Vision’.\textsuperscript{15} This latter revelation—the foundation of her driving mission—was consistently rewritten in her letters and petitions.

‘A Briefe Relation’

For the women who took up Ward’s vision, there was an imperative to defend and vindicate their founder, who had been vilified at the highest levels of the church. ‘A Briefe Relation. Of the holy Life, and happy Death, of our dearest Mother, of blessed memory, Mistress Mary Ward’ was a biography composed in the years immediately following her death, between 1645 and 1650, by her companion Mary Poyntz with the assistance of Winefried Wigmore. As with Ward’s autobiography, the spur to composition is attributed to male authority: the Spanish Carmelite and supporter, Dominicus a Jesu Maria, ‘wou’d often Times tell us, we must not be so ungratfull, as to let her Life and Example passe without note, not onely for our owne, but others their profit’.\textsuperscript{16} From the outset, then, this life-writing project was intended for wider circulation. Wigmore translated it into French before 1657. Another seventeenth-century French copy survives, as does a German translation dating from the early eighteenth century. Their recent editor, Christina Kenworthy-Browne, argues that the two earliest manuscripts of the English text derive from an earlier copytext. In addition to these three English manuscripts, one German and two French translated copies, an \textit{Italian Life}, possibly also written by Mary Poyntz when superior of the institute and based in Rome between 1654 and 1662, is extant.\textsuperscript{17}

The struggle to implement her ideas played out as a contest over Ward’s public reputation. As early as 1617, she was perceived to be dangerous as much as pious. The archbishop of Canterbury reportedly stated ‘she did more hurt then 6 Jesuits’.\textsuperscript{18} Technically

\textsuperscript{11} Nicky Hallett cites Teresa of Avila (1515-82) as an influential model for this; see Nicky Hallett, ‘Shakespeare’s Sisters: Anon and the Authors in Early Modern Convents’, in Bowden and Kelly, \textit{English Convents in Exile}, 140.

\textsuperscript{12} Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), \textit{Mary Ward}, p. 104.


\textsuperscript{14} See, for example, the spiritual autobiography of Mary Rich, countess of Warwick, whose refusal to marry her father’s choice is presented as providential; BL Add. MS 27,357, fol. 4.

\textsuperscript{15} See Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), \textit{Mary Ward}, 121-40, for an English translation.


\textsuperscript{17} Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), \textit{Mary Ward}, 1-2; Wallace, \textit{Strong Women}, 140.

\textsuperscript{18} Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), \textit{Mary Ward}, 21.
not nuns, as their institute was denied papal approbation, Ward and her followers attracted a range of popular epithets, from ‘English Ladies’, through to the more derogatory ‘Jesuitesses’ and ‘galloping girls’—the latter capturing the threat of women operating independently in the world.19 On her final return to England in 1639, her reputation preceded her; her ‘Ennemyes had bee so bold as to make it passe for an undoubted truth that she was a condemned prisoner for Life in the Inquisition, and nothing but her presence cou’d have cleared this thruth [sic].20 She was subjected to surveillance as she travelled Europe—spies were appointed by the Vatican, the English government and the Inquisition. This very public notoriety is balanced in the biography by naming her champions: among others, the rulers of the Spanish Netherlands Isabella of Spain and Albrecht VII of Austria, Elector Maximilian I and Elisabeth of Bavaria, and Emperor Ferdinand II. This alignment of forces has led David Wallace to interpret the clash as one of northern versus southern European worldviews and temperaments.21

Ward’s determined, unshakeable persistence makes her story one of gender, power and resistance. Her first papal audience in 1622 is described in explicitly gendered terms in the ‘Briefe Relation’. Gregory XV ‘received her with all fatherly and benigne expresssions’, avering that ‘much good can come by woemen’.22 The dissimulation of church authorities in their solicitous reception of Ward in person but implacable hostility to her ideas is resolved in the text by emphasizing Ward’s own recourse to divine will. Her insistence on her personal vocation and its divine sanction allowed her to position herself as simultaneously subordinate and unyielding: ‘to desist if his Holynes and their Eminencyes thought good she cou’d, but alter or take other she cou’d not’.23 This dogged refusal to give up on her goal is reiterated throughout the narrative. The assertion of qualities of modesty, obedience and submission is a crucial part of her biographer’s strategy. Without fail, Ward’s response to all opposition is generous and magnanimous—at no point is she tempted to descend to criticism of her male superiors. The biographer foregrounds episodes of the life that present compliance as characteristic. For example, when her spiritual advisors regret having directed her toward the Walloon convent, Ward insists on submitting to the order’s authorities (subsequently, their General Visitor confirms to her that she is free to choose).24 There is an element of having one’s cake and eating it here: her advisors suffer torments of conscience for their misguided counsel, Ward is obedient to all, yet she leaves the convent without blemish. This apparently oxymoronic submission to church ruling and commitment to her (transgressive) vision is held in tension, even at the moments of starkest conflict—as, for example, when her schools were closed in 1628, ‘the true Servant of Christ having long since learned the value of Obedience, humbly submitted, and enjoyed as much peace as if the thing had bee of her owne procuring’.25

Like many accounts of pious lives in the period, the ‘Briefe Relation’ identifies signals of divine approbation. The biographer is careful not to tip into forthright claims to sanctity but she ensures they hover over her narrative. For example, Ward’s first word as a child, ‘Jesus’, is represented as prodigious: ‘as it were marked out for heaven, before the time Babes use to speake’. As in other Catholic lives, the groundwork is laid for future

19 Wallace, Strong Women, 170-1; see 180-3 for discussion of the Ward-figure in contemporary English drama.
21 Wallace, Strong Women, 134.
22 Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), Mary Ward, 24-5.
23 Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), Mary Ward, 38.
24 Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), Mary Ward, 10-11.
beatification by recounting putative miraculous occurrences. Reportage distances the biographer from such imputations. An English Protestant convert, rather than the narrator, remarks of Ward that ‘there never was such a Woman but the sacred Mother of God’. Her delivery from seemingly fatal illness in 1631 causes her physician to exclaim that ‘to recover in any place had been miracle playne enough, but to recover in that place ... was that God wou’d make it more then playne to be seen to the confusion and reprehension of her Ennemyes’. In a perfect about-face, the double agent assigned to spy on her by the Inquisition, posing as her confessor in Italy, ‘by occasion of seeing her admirable Life and conversation, wrote such an Information as they said was not onely sufficient for a Justification, but even a Canonization’. Such accounts of her impact abound, functioning as third-party corroboration of Ward’s extraordinary piety and sanctity.

Reliable testimony is the foundation of successful Catholic biography. Poyntz, who was born in 1604, was too young to have been present during the events of her subject’s childhood and time in Saint Omer. Nevertheless, she deployed the first-person narrative voice from the outset, in order to secure her text’s status as eye-witness documentation—if not witness to the event described, then at one remove. For example, the generosity of Ward’s father is attested: ‘and my selfe have heard it spoken of’. Her visit with Ward to the latter’s childhood home allows for the fusion of memory, reportage and eye-witness testimony: ‘I being at Newby with [Ward] ... the Lady Blakestone recounted with great feeling, the memory was to that Day kept in that Towne’. Her proximity renders credible the use of direct speech in accounts of Ward’s various meetings with clerical authorities and it licenses statements such as ‘she was wont to recount’. These devices gloss over the moments of slippage between authenticated and recounted speech. Hence, the layers of testimony and reportage, of first- and third-person account, of memory and invention, sustain each other to form a narrative that is equal parts defence, vindication, counter-propaganda and record for the canonization process.

In important ways, this biography is an example of civil war writing by women. Residing in London in 1639, the heightened tensions of imminent war render Ward’s earlier clandestine recusant lifestyle impossible; the concluding episodes of the life relate the women’s removal to Yorkshire and experiences of the siege of York in 1644. The narrative remains on-message. Their safe passage, first to the remote Hutton Rugby, then Heworth, thence the city of York, and then out of York again following the successful parliamentarian siege, is attributed to providence. In particular, their evasion of the soldiers’ notice as they pass within and without the city walls and the ‘very remarquable’ preservation of the chapel and Ward’s own chamber from destruction at Heworth are presented as signs of God’s protection. The perspective on events offered here is neither parliamentarian nor royalist. The imperative to reiterate and reinforce Ward’s piety and sanctity renders secondary the political allegiances at stake in the civil wars. But it is warfare that jeopardizes the community and forces its evacuation. Mobility and enclosure—apparent opposites—are reconciled, as Wallace observes, through Ward’s presence: the various lives ‘record Mary Ward’s charismatic transformations of a carriage, a bedroom, or alehouse lodgings into sanctified space, suggestive of religious enclosure’. The ‘crucial point’, he argues, ‘is that a female community be allowed to impose and regulate an enclosure of one’s own’ (his italics). If the ‘Briefe Relation’ is, as Wallace has argued, part hagiography and part romance, it is also a rebuttal and a conduct book. Born of the same moment as narratives that processed

26 Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), Mary Ward, 22, 52 and 57.
27 Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), Mary Ward, 3 and 12.
28 Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), Mary Ward, 71.
29 Wallace, Strong Women, 174 and 140.
the civil wars but also such bestselling guides as Jeremy Taylor’s Rules and Exercises of Holy Living (1650) and Holy Dying (1651), the lives of divinely noticed women offered models of good behaviour in times of adversity.

Ward was an outlier—this is why she was so troubling to the hierarchy. The circulation and transmission of her story were vital in the face of suppression. It was necessary to produce and exchange texts in order to counter derogatory apppellations and uphold the institute’s good name. But more broadly, the particular value of the religious life (whether Catholic or Protestant) to inspire others required that it be distributed. The community did not confine themselves to the written word. A series of fifty paintings, known as The Painted Life, were commissioned by Ward’s companions in the seventeenth century. They are now held in Augsburg, by the Congregation of Jesus—the name intended for her institute by Ward, and formally permitted only as recently as 2004 (known as the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary from 1749). The promulgation of her reputation in the face of such hostility has been as resolute as Ward herself.

Lucy Knatchbull, Benedictines

Although the preservation and transmission of many texts authored by women religious was mediated by women, their genesis was often presented as collaborative with the male confessor, as we have seen. Yet the agents involved in the production of nuns’ writings could also be more hands-on. With collective authorship, the boundaries between individual contributions are often indistinct and the limitations of the single-author model of authorial credit become apparent. Such is the case with the writings of Elizabeth (in religion Lucy) Knatchbull (1584-1629), who left England at the age of seventeen to join the exiled Benedictine convent at Brussels, subsequently becoming first abbess of the same order’s community at Ghent. Like Ward, Knatchbull was urged by her confessor to write her own life. The autobiography that survives covers her time in Brussels. It is the first part of Toby Matthew’s life, on which he worked between 1642 and 1651. Matthew was a prolific devotional writer, translator and polemicist. Son of the Protestant archbishop of York, he was exiled three times from England due to his conversion to Catholicism and proselytizing activities. His biography of Knatchbull, based on her own writings, circulated in at least two manuscript versions. However, its tenor is markedly more focused on interior spirituality than that of Mary Ward.

‘The relation of the holy and happy life and death of the Ladye Lucie Knatchbull’ is framed by Knatchbull’s own writings. The first section is comprised of her autobiography; the second, Matthew’s account of her spiritual life; the third, his selection of her letters. Hence, the text is a generic amalgam: a biography that is also an edition, comprising autobiography, letters and meditations. The drama of her autobiography lies in its access to Knatchbull’s acute experience of faith. Beginning with her realisation of her vocation and continuing into her profession and early years in Brussels, the paradigm is one of extremes: periods of crisis alleviated by ‘Comforts’, moments of intense, mystical assurance that result from the application of the Ignatian model of spiritual meditation (itself controversial within many communities). Her own accounts are recycled by Matthew in the biography that

31 All professed names are supplied; however, individuals are cited here according to the name by which they are currently best known.
follows. Knatchbull describes a particular vision as occurring on St Teresa’s feast day; the experience is similar to ‘Coming out of a most delightful trance’. She describes ‘our Lords drawing my affections to him, and & [sic] the Sunnes drawing of vapours from the earth; and the eye of understanding ... as a beame of Moates to pass from mee to our Lord with this my Soule beganne to be wise; for now she was made soberly drunke’. In his summary account of her six visions, Matthew retells this story, revising her description and reiterating her words: ‘he was pleased to draw her then as some beam of Moates might passe, or as the Sunne drawse vapours up from the earth, and she sayth, this favour made her become wise, and Soberly Drunk ... as out of a most delightfull Trance’.34 Repetition drives home the language for the reader, ensuring that its significance is not lost. The autobiography is presented as evidence of her mystical experience both on its own terms and reworked for conventional biography.

Both versions draw attention to the occasion: the feast day of St Teresa. Matthew’s penultimate publication in his lifetime was a translation of Teresa’s autobiography, The Flaming Hart (1642), and its influence is evident throughout his biography of Knatchbull. In this particular instance, as Nicky Hallett has noted, the image of the vapours of the sun echoes Teresa’s description of spiritual understanding as a light that is ‘more cleare then the Sunne’. Knatchbull had considered founding an English Teresian house and echoes Teresa’s The Interior Castle elsewhere in her autobiography, when she compares her revelations to ‘flashes of Lighting’. Matthew’s biography regularly draws attention to the parallels between his two biographical subjects, even quoting extensively from his Flaming Hart to illustrate their similarity.35

The life of St Teresa offered an approved, influential model of behaviour for women religious. It performed a dual function when applied to the life of another, as here, suggesting both the biographical subject’s aspirational model but also a homologous exaltation of the subject herself. Mary Ward’s biographer was careful to place overt terms of sanctity in the mouths of her protagonists; Poyntz herself did not argue straightforwardly for the miraculous effects of her subject. Similarly, Matthew attempts to disavow the suggestion of equivalence. ‘Nott yett that I am so foolish, as to Compare this Blessed Creature with those Saincts’, the biographer states in one breath yet in the next:

But I thinke I may safely affirme, that certainly both these and those were of the self-same kind, in the supernaturall way though yet different as much as you will in the degree, and who soever will take the paines, and pleasure to read of Saint Teresas [sic] Life of the flaming hart; will clearly find the truth of that which I am delivering here.36

A tangle of qualifications, this sentence both asserts and denies the parallel being drawn, leaving the ultimate judgement to the reader (and conveniently signalling his own recent work in the process). Moreover, the reader’s response surely rests on assessment of Matthew as editor. If the autobiography is faithfully transcribed, the origin of the Teresian influence rests with Knatchbull herself. But if Matthew’s editorial approach was interventionist, it would have implications for our understanding of collective authorship in this instance, as well as for the feminist goal of recovering a woman’s writing. Such suspicions might be allayed by Matthew’s determination, in the third part, to have Knatchbull speak for herself by publishing a range of letters and fragments.

The limitations of biography led Matthew to experiment with a different kind of narrative. Seeking the best way to represent her virtues, he resolved on ‘a different, and

35 Hallett, ‘Life of Knatchbull’, 169, 387 n24; 166, 387n12; 163, 386n5; and 187-8.
perhaps fitter way’. The reader remains central and the promise of the ‘authentic’ text lies in intimate access: ‘Namely by letting you see, what passed even between God and her self in that kind; as also between her & her Ghostly Fathers, and other Spirituall frinds, to whome she gave inward notice of her self, for this in fine will amount, to be also a kind of history of her life’. The middleman-biographer aims to disappear. For the vanishing trick to work, the reader must accept his editorial scrupulosity (and ignore her/his now-voyeuristic position). Seven of Knatchbull’s letters to her confessor are reproduced expressly as ‘Evidence ... which proves the Spiritt, and the Sanctitie of her Soule ... all of them written with her owne hand’. Further proofs of her piety are selected from her ‘Scattered Papers’. Matthew claims these quotations to be verbatim: ‘they beginne as followeth word, for word’. Two examples of her spiritual exercises—‘Her Contemplation upon the Circumcition’ and ‘Her Contemplation upon the Ecce home [John 19:5]’—are also printed. These are representative, Matthew writes: ‘the account ... of every Meditation is written, and is still remaining, and declared in her owne hand) they are soo very many and would take up soo much roome, as that it would make this discourse to bigg’—recalling the decision-making process of Anthony Walker, editing his wife’s Protestant meditations half a century later. This editorial self-reflexivity in itself suggests fidelity to Knatchbull’s originals and, by extension, that Matthew elaborated upon rather than initiated the Teresian analogies. This is further supported by his concern to validate the text by consulting Knatchbull’s confessor—an action which causes Knatchbull’s literary legacy to run almost out of control. Matthew’s motivation was ‘to learne of him, as an eye witnes who was likely to know most of the matter; whether al that which I had sett downe and shewed to him, had bine rightly conceaved, and well declared by me Concerning her’. Not only does the confessor confirm its accuracy but he produces additional texts written by Knatchbull, which Matthew cannot resist reproducing consecutively, ‘without any intermixed discourse’ of interpretation. Ten more meditations follow.

Knatchbull’s writing is presented as proof of her sincerity and piety—but most of all, as evidence of the profundity of her mystical experience. Rather than the persistent conflicts with church hierarchy experienced by Mary Ward, inner spiritual struggle is the hallmark of Knatchbull’s life and writing. The lives and writings of both women were composed and circulated as models for imitation. Their points of difference from each other demonstrate how varied the models of exemplary Catholic womanhood could be in the seventeenth century. Like many life narratives of exemplary Protestant women, the signs of divine providence abound in these biographies. But the potential for sainthood lends Catholic biographies an edge that fuels their embrace of the miraculous.

Elizabeth Evelinge and Mary Bonaventure Browne, Poor Clares
For particular orders, their founding saint’s life was paradigmatic. It traversed houses and orders as well as languages. The English Poor Clares at Aire, for example, printed The History of the Angelicall Virgin Glorious S. Clare in 1635. This was an English translation from the French version by the Franciscan priest François Hendricq—itsel an extracted translation from the Latin history of his order by the Irish Franciscan Luke Wadding, Annales ordinis minorum, the first two volumes of which were published in 1625 and 1628. These

40 Hallett, ‘Life of Knatchbull’, 207.
were not straightforward translations; Hendricq’s version modified the text to suit his community at Saint Omer, and the Poor Clare version further alters the original, even to the extent of inserting a new chapter, as an intervention into a controversy over whether to follow local episcopal or Franciscan authority.41 The Franciscan order had a particular interest; St Clare had been inspired to establish her community by St Francis, her contemporary (this was exactly the kind of arrangement common among the religious orders and expressly prohibited by Loyola in his Jesuit constitutions). Their common heritage and shared goals meant that defined channels of circulation were in place and that textual interactions were mutual, multilingual and multi-directional.

Translation and adaptation were conditions of textual exchange among the religious orders, and this muddied the waters of attribution and authorial credit. Where communities of women religious produced translations of saints’ lives, as well as chronicles and obituaries, individual writerly contributions were often subsumed by the collective. As Hallett observes, such self-effacement was an inevitable corollary of subjugation to the collective as well as the divine, a product of doctrinal humility as well as strategic ‘positioning ... against inquisitorial review’.42 What’s more, as Jaime Goodrich has shown, anonymity in itself could enable individual nuns to align their personal views with those of the corporate body, ‘transforming their publications from the work of one nun into representations of English monasticism’.43 A culture in which foundational texts are exchanged, translated, adapted and repositioned for local use embraced fluid concepts of authorship. Hence, the attribution of the History of ... S. Clare is ambiguously presented. The dedication is signed by the collective but the title page identifies Catherine Bentley (in religion Magdalen Augustine; 1592-1659). Other authoritative sources, however, attribute this work (and the 1621 Life of St. Catherine of Bologna) to Elizabeth Evelinge (in religion Catherine Magdalen; 1597-1668).

Further extending the chain of textual transfer, Evelinge’s translation was appropriated by the Irish branch of the order in a translation of their foundational text, the chronicle history composed by Mary Bonaventure Browne. The Irish Poor Clares had been founded in 1629 by five nuns who had themselves professed in the exiled English convent at Gravelines, founded by Mary Ward. They carried with them the English vernacular texts that had been produced on the Continent: the Rule and revised constitutions, which had been printed in Flanders in 1621 and 1622, and also the life of their founder. Composed in the Irish language from her exile in Spain, Browne’s chronicle was carefully researched, the product of collaboration with the various host convents where her sisters had ended up after the banishment of all religious from Ireland in 1653 (ordered by Cromwell). It was sent to the Poor Clare convent in Galway when it was re-founded in 1672. The extant version is a late seventeenth-century translation from Irish to English, made in that convent (the original was destroyed during the Williamite Wars).44 Either Browne or her translator was familiar with Evelinge’s life of St Clare. The description of a military attack on the Bethlehem convent in

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42 Hallett, ‘Shakespeare’s Sisters’, 142.
1642 echoes that text, suggesting that its model of exemplary response to calamity was internalized by the nuns. Unlike the case of Knatchbull, whose own exemplarity is reinforced through her similarity to Teresa, here St Clare provides a model for how to cope with siege.

The religious order was the site of textual production, translation and exchange, and the mobility of texts facilitated the transhistorical modelling of exemplary female devotion as well as situational flexibility in dealing with circumstances of warfare. The ideal of enclosure could be challenging even for those who sought to meet it fully. The chronicle articulated and bonded communal identity. As a means to shape and claim ownership of the community’s story, it embraced collective rather than individual authorial credit. But the church’s insistence on enclosure—so great a problem for Mary Ward and her companions—is revealed as aspirational rather than always realistic in these texts. External events unavoidably impinge on these histories. They are not simply stories of enclosed, sealed-off devotional communities but also, inevitably, reflections of the experience of living through difficult times and religious persecution. The Irish Poor Clares, for example, were constantly on the move—from Dublin to Lough Ree and thence to found sister convents, to Galway as a consequence of the wars of the 1640s, and to exile on the Continent thereafter. As Hallett has shown of the exiled Carmelite convents, ‘Enclosure was often breached, sometimes for building work, or when the nuns gave hospitality to influential visitors’ such as exiled royalists. 45 Given the volatile and insecure political circumstances of early modern Europe, worldly events often forced communities of women religious out of the cloister.

**Susan Hawley, Sepulchrines**

Notwithstanding that reality, it is likely that this very instability drove women to join convents in the first place. The appeal of order, security and seclusion in times of strife was exploited by Susan (in religion, Mary of the Conception) Hawley (1622-1706) in her *Briefe Relation of the Order and Institute, of the English Religious Women at Liège*, printed in 1652, the year she became first prioress of that convent. Directly addressed to an English audience, this narrative is an advertisement for religious life. The text was explicitly pitched in terms of public relations, at an exhausted populace:

> These English Religious Women at Liège reflecting how little their Order is known in England, because this their only House of our Nation is but lately begun, have desired this short Paper should be publish’d. For they conceive their Institute to be so exceedingly agreeable and suitable to our English natures, that many by the knowledge of it, may be invited to serve God in it, who otherwise in the world may perish most miserably. 46

There was a real audience for this kind of material. It filled a vacuum lamented by Mary Ward, for whom the absence of information about religious orders meant that she could not choose which to enter: ‘for I had noe instructions tuchinge anie particulier Order, nor any means to inform my self in that living in a cuntrie infected etc. nether had I the curredg to aske anie one the difirence betwixt them’. 47

> These were Sepulchrine nuns, so called (as their pamphlet explains) because they were originally founded at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. They were the only exiled English house of this order, founded from the Flemish convent at Tongres in 1644, and therefore needed to pursue recruits more aggressively than well-established orders such as the

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47 Kenworthy-Browne (ed.), *Mary Ward*, 118.
Benedictines, who had seven English convents in France and the Low Countries. The *Briefe Relation* builds on the allure of retirement from the world by setting out in detail their origin narrative, citing such authorities as Saints Augustine, Ambrose and Basil. The emphasis on the order’s antiquity is designed to conjure up a nostalgic conservatism, stressing the roots of the community (which had, after all, only recently been founded).

Its Englishness was a key feature of the sales pitch. St Helena is claimed as ‘Patroness of our Monastery, and a most noble Empress of our Nation’; her adoption of the Sepulchrine habit neatly aligning her (legendary) national identity with that of the order.48 A typical day in the convent is described in order to give the reader a sense of the routine and regularity involved in convent life, making it resemble ‘a handbook for potential members’.49 Five different levels of membership are described. In addition to choir and lay sisters, common to all convents, circumscribed admission is open to three further categories: the disabled, ‘young Gentlewomen desirous of good breeding’ and—an option recommended particularly to her English audience as ‘A most happy state to be found no where else in our Nation’—retired dames:

These must be ancient Gentlewomen of Quality, or Ladies who desire to live a quiet, devout, retired life. They are not oblig’d to make any vow, tho’ it be commendable in them, if they make Vows obliging only for the time they stay in the Monastery. They live within the Inclosure in chambers apart, observing certain Rules very suitable to that devout state, as long as they continue in the Monastery ... They may wear any modest and grave Habit ... If they desire it, they may keep a maid.50

This is the convent as sojourn, as temporary retreat from the world, and it was potentially lucrative. The penultimate paragraph sets out the tariffs, competitively (‘no. where more moderate then here’): £300 for a choir sister; £400-500 ‘for a defective Sister’, depending on her disability; £26 per annum for a retired dame; and £15-20 for a student—‘All these foresaid summs to be paid at London’, upfront and in advance.51 The text’s promotional function is copper-fastened, finally, by geographical directions: ‘The best and shortest way from England to Liège, is by Holland to Rotterdam, thence to Boisleduc, then to Maestricht, so to Liege’.

**Conclusion**

Convent membership nurtured as co-extensive a set of identities that in other contexts were perceived as conflicting: nuns gave up their individual worldly identities when they took names in religion; they belonged to the particular house as well as to their nation; they belonged above all to the order, an affiliation that transcended country boundaries and allegiances in favour of commitment to the form of life and prayer prescribed in the order’s rule. These identities dovetailed together, ideally complementing each other. They facilitated textual translation and exchange, and informed a fluid, open-minded attitude to authorial attribution. Texts were central to these women’s vocations and practice, especially when controversy arose. The orders were transnational networks that facilitated the transmission of texts. Such exchanges depended on translation, and translation involved degrees of adaptation and transformation. Translation is also an act of mediation; the shepherding of nuns’ writing to wider circulation, by women and men, opens up new ways of understanding collaborative

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51 Hawley, *Briefe Relation*, 54.
composition just as the priority of communal identity compels us to probe the distinction between individual and collective credit. The study of nuns’ writing requires a capacious approach to authorship and the text. Finally, it is clear that if enclosure meant that textual mobility was essential, then forced evacuation and travel equally found their way into the texts produced by women religious. Writing generated in early modern convents—increasingly and exponentially available to modern scholars—warrants investigation for its perspectives on historical events as well as for the negotiation of internal politics and spirituality.

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