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Thomas M. Carr, ed., *The Cloister and the World: Early Modern Convent Voices. Studies in Early Modern France*, volume 11. Charlottesville, VA: Rookwood Press, Inc., 2007. 267 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$49.95 U. S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-886365-64-4.

Review by Susan E. Dinan, William Paterson University.

Thomas Carr has compiled an important collection of essays that examines convents and the writings of nuns in France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Professor Carr, who has previously published *Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric* as well as an edition of Antoine Arnauld's *Réflexions sur l'éloquence des prédicateurs*, is well positioned to assemble this collection. It offers an excellent introduction to the state of the field, especially for those writing in English. In his introduction, Carr discusses the important work of Barbara Diefendorf and others, showing the rich rewards of studying convent records, and surveys literature in English and French nicely, so a reader new to this topic can see how the essays fit into larger conversations about convent writing. The eleven essays that follow include his "From the Cloister to the World: Mainstreaming Early Modern French Convent Writing—An *État présent*," which calls for a broader recognition of the importance of writings by religious women and argues that they need to be studied by scholars of literature and of history.

One of the volume's particular strengths is its multi-disciplinarity. The very need for such an approach is demonstrated by Carr's somewhat unfortunate lamentation that modern literary scholars have ignored French nuns and their writings by. He calls it a "neglected field," (p. 9) especially in comparison to studies of Hispanic nuns' writings. Carr is correct, Hispanic nuns are the topic of more research by literary scholars and historians than are any other religious women. However, given the fact that his collection draws from a number of authors who teach in different departments (languages, literature, and history), who are at different stages in their careers, who have different areas of interest, and who all successfully examine the writings of nuns, it appears as if French nuns might be less neglected than he asserts. Readers will agree with Carr that more studies of the writings of French nuns would be very valuable, and his rich essay collection provides readers a great variety of sources and methods with which to examine them.

Elisabeth Wengler is currently completing a book manuscript entitled *Women, Religion, and Agency in Reformation Geneva*, which draws on convent chronicles from 1526 to 1535, at the moment when the community of the Poor Clares of Geneva was struggling against Guillaume Farel and other Protestant reformers. In this essay, Wengler emphasizes that convent chronicles are a rich source because they let readers know how nuns understood themselves and their community. When Calvin's ministers entered the convent to preach, they declared the nuns' vocation worthless; the nuns responded by stuffing wax in their ears or by making so much noise Farel could not finish preaching. The nuns highlighted their commitment to community and virginity, and argued that their special relationship with Christ gave their lives value. While the nuns asserted their status as opponents of heretics, Farel and other ministers defined them a threat to the establishment of political and religious order.

Gary Ferguson examines the literary powerhouse that was the Dominican convent at Poissy in the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, where nuns commonly wrote poetry and hymns, sometimes in Latin. Ferguson explains that there were two types of Dominican communities: some were lax; others enforced strict discipline. The nuns at the convent at Poissy enjoyed considerable freedom from enclosure in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The nuns could hold and bequeath

private property, including books, which proved critical for the convent's literary production. Ferguson's work is particularly interesting because the nuns at Poissy were not writing spiritual autobiographies under male guidance. Men played a very small role in nun's writing and publishing at Poissy, and the nuns could write because they did not have to obey strict rules. This ended when the Catholic Reformation Church insisted upon stricter enclosure.

Susan Broomhall studies convent chronicles from the first half of the sixteenth century to understand more fully family ties, social class, and patronage in Benedictine communities. To show what changes in convent rules meant to nuns, she examines the journal and chronicle of one Benedictine community. As other historians have noted, convents were permeable, and Broomhall shows that Church officials believed that this convent needed reform to improve enclosure, ensure greater separation from the local community, and to keep the nuns in and the men out. As local bishops ushered in reforms, there was not a uniform implementation of enclosure. Broomhall demonstrates how the journal describes relative social cohesion within the convent. Family ties, she shows, proved critical for financial and social patronage of the nuns, and allowed the convent to thrive in the sixteenth century.

Katherine Dauge-Roth examines a possessed young Ursuline who preached sermons. Dauge-Roth's story is fascinating because she analyses the possession as a ventriloquistic model for speech. Louyse Capeau was a vessel through which the demon spoke. Unlike many demons, hers preached orthodox sermons, which made the nun a preacher; the author argues that her vocation is understandable in light of teaching ministry of Ursulines. In this case, Dauge-Roth points out that female speech challenged the authority of Paul, who argued that women should be silent. Dauge-Roth speculates that the nun might have allowed herself to be ventriloquized to be an actor in the event: Capeau "found possibilities for expression surpass[ing] all her exorcists' intentions" (p. 83). In conclusion, Dauge-Roth asks if Capeau was registering a complaint about the state of the Ursuline order after it was enclosed, meditating on how contemplative nuns might make their voices heard.

Claire L. Carlin examines the only marriage manual written by a French ecclesiastic woman, Jeanne de Cambry, who also authored many letters and several volumes of writings. Her admirers claimed that she had ecstatic visions of Jesus at three, took a vow of virginity at ten, and planned to care for her parents and work for a living; however, her father insisted that she enter a convent when she was twenty-three. Initially, Cambry believed that God had called her to create a new religious order; the pope, however, made her a prioress and charged her with reforming an Augustinian house at Menin, near Lille, a region then under Spanish rule. While prioress, Cambry subjected herself to severe mortifications and believed that she had a holy command to write. Like other authors in this volume, Carlin explains that Cambry's confessor questioned the legitimacy of her writing, but despite his objections (and unlike some other women in this collection), she kept writing. Carlin finds her marriage manual, written in 1631 and published in 1655, to be her most intriguing work. Carlin's evidence supports the interpretation that the Catholic Reformation church sought to reinvigorate marriage in the face of Protestant claims that it was not a sacrament. Cambry's manual stressed the need for increased emotional and physical closeness between spouses and asserted that husbands and wives share power and responsibility. More than half of the treatise is dedicated to parenting. Carlin states that in Cambry's life readers can see the diversity of women's convent writings.

Leslie Tuttle's rich article uses legal briefs to chronicle a long struggle that unfolded during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries between two factions of Franciscan nuns, each with a cadre of male supporters. A 1667 factum describes the seduction of the nuns of Sainte-Catherine-les-Provins by male Franciscan authorities, who were ostensibly responsible for guaranteeing their chastity. The nuns broke their vow of silence to write the factum, describing how nuns and friars united in a marriage-like ceremony. In an effort to undermine the nuns, the Franciscans countered that the nuns had not authored the text. Tuttle contextualizes the factum to show how it highlighted tensions over convent finances and governance, concerns about the status of lay and choir sisters, as well as conflicts between the archbishop of Sens, who was a Jansenist sympathizer, and members of religious communities in his

diocese. Tuttle characterizes the Catholic reforms of the period as “discouraging both the consumption and production of culture by nuns” (p. 133). But she also states that reformed convents “produced an additional reserve of symbolic power” for cloistered nuns, which explains the nuns’ unusual decision to publish their factum (p. 133). Tuttle asserts that this story demonstrates the permeability of convents and the complexity of trying to impose cloister after the Council of Trent.

Elizabeth Rapley examines death notices, which circulated from one convent to another, to understand how Visitandine nuns defined their vocation in this new religious community, founded by François de Sales and Jeanne de Chantal in 1610. The death notices provided a way for nuns to reiterate the teachings of their founders and to personify their institution. Rapley recognizes that eulogies tended toward the hagiographic, but she believes that they provided the nuns a place to write about the ideals of their community. The death notices show that Visitandine nuns had to obey unquestioningly all commands; articulating these imperatives helped promote unity in a community without a centralized structure. Chantal and de Sales extolled total and unquestioning obedience, regardless of the reasonableness of the command. The Visitandines believed that obedience led to contempt for self and detachment from self and others, which allowed the Lord to enter. Like the whole church in the seventeenth century, religious communities moved away from mysticism and toward utility; the Visitandine nuns found utility in prayer and love of God.

Barbara Woshinsky’s essay is the only one in this collection that examines nuns in fictional settings; she is interested in how laywomen used convents to defend themselves against male lovers or patriarchal family pressure. Madame de Villegieu’s *Mémoires de la vie de Henriette-Sylvie de Molière* tells the story of Sylvie, who over the course of six volumes resides in several convents, some as places of refuge, others as places of internment. Ultimately, she decides to enter a convent, not because she has grown more pious, but because it is her best option for a meaningful life.

Pauline Chaduc examines poetry and hymns in her contribution to this collection, which considers the life of Charlotte de Saint-Cyprien, a nun who stopped writing because Fenelon warned against curiosity and encouraged simplicity. Charlotte Peray was born to an illustrious Protestant family, but her uncle had converted to Catholicism and she entered the Nouvelles Catholiques on his advice. In 1686, Charlotte abjured her Protestant faith and she took the veil in 1687 in a ceremony during which Fenelon preached the sermon on the religious profession of a new convert. A year later, she took her religious name and adopted the rule of the discalced Carmelites. This authorized Charlotte, Chaduc explains, to correspond regularly with Fénelon as a “savant,” reflecting upon theology, writing poetry, and engaging him in religious controversies. Fenelon responded to her writings by claiming that they undermined her conversion and showed that she retained a Protestant nature, because she used reason and embraced intellectual piety. Good Catholics did not question authority, so Fénelon instructed her to cease writing. He permitted her to write personal poetry, if she did not share it with the world. Chaduc asserts that the poetry offered Charlotte a space of liberty, but clearly it was in a highly regulated space.

In the final essay, Daniel-Odon Hurel reads the constitution of a convent to describe the ways in which male superiors intervened to change texts written by women. He explains how Catherine de Bar made changes to the constitutions she wrote for her Benedictine community in accordance with critiques from Maurist directors and without consulting her fellow nuns. Carr’s book ends with an invaluable checklist of published writings by nuns. As Carr modestly explains, this list is just a first step: because religious orders did not compile their own writings, scholars do not know exactly how many writings exist in manuscript form.

What I find problematic about the collection is the consistently pessimistic tone, which presents the Catholic Reformation Church as empowering men to disempower women. In several articles readers learn how male authorities silenced nuns, or permitted them to write or speak in only limited and unusual circumstances. Even Rapley’s article, which examines the new and creative Visitandine community, focuses on how the organization sought to break the spirit of novices and nuns to ensure total obedience. Obviously, this was a critically important part of the community, but so were its novel

structure and willingness to admit women into the community who were unacceptable to other religious orders. Carr might have included an article about new contemplative orders that attracted large numbers of novices, or active religious communities that challenged the boundaries that Trent erected, but did not enforce. Only the Ferguson and Woshinsky essays show religious life as offering real opportunities to women. Readers may have difficulty understanding why convents were attractive to woman, sites where women learned and honed their writings abilities. This, however, is a minor criticism of an excellent book.

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Thomas M. Carr, "A Checklist of Published Writings in French by Early Modern Nuns"

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