

*Convents and Novices in Early Modern English Dramatic Works: In Medias Res.*  
Vanessa L. Rapatz.

Late Tudor and Stuart Drama: Gender, Performance, and Material Culture. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020. x + 180 pp. \$94.99.

---

The fascinating *Convents and Novices in Early Modern English Dramatic Works* by Vanessa L. Rapatz, part of the series Late Tudor and Stuart Drama: Gender, Performance, and Material Culture, examines representations of Catholic female religious communities in post-Reformation England. The volume's subtitle underscores the "middle space" (9–10) occupied by novices, existing outside of marital and Protestant religious norms, a position illustrated materially by Rapatz's focus on physically restrictive architecture. The author features three main examples of nunnery enclosures and entrances (and includes helpful photos)—the turn, the wall, and the grate, basing her study primarily upon the work of Helen Hills's 2004 work, *The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Neapolitan Convents*. Discussion of *The Jew of Malta* focuses on the turn, "a half-barrel device that rotated and allowed outsiders to pass alms into the enclosure without discovering the nuns inside" (22); analysis of *Measure for Measure* and *The Rover* concentrates on convent walls; and grates, "fortified entrance points" (23) allowing meetings with outsiders, are highlighted along with walls in convent dialogues and in Margaret Cavendish's closet dramas *The Religious* and *The Convent of Pleasure*. As an example of the way architecture functions, according to Rapatz, the turn in *The Jew of Malta* has multivalent signification: from the change of the Jew Barabbas's mansion to a convent, to his daughter Abigail's initial faux conversion to Catholicism as part of Barabbas's plot to regain riches from his home, to Abigail's genuine conversion and return to the convent. Cavendish's *Convent of Pleasure* uses walls to create a positive female space unavailable in the external world, while "refusing grates and other access points" (126) that might encourage female-male interaction.

There are times in which the work's architectural resonances seem a bit strained, most especially in the chapter on Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, where the focus on the wall seems to give out, though they generally aptly illustrate both the external and internal constraints on novices. One of the volume's key strengths is making connections among a diverse set of plays featuring novices; the introduction provides contexts for the broad era showcased in the volume, spanning most of the seventeenth century, by differentiating religious and political structures that underlie each drama discussed. While Rapatz showcases extensive research, there are places where an even deeper dive into primary sources would have strengthened the volume. The chapter on *The Convent of Pleasure*, for example, lacks in-depth coverage of Cavendish's important time as Queen Henrietta Maria's lady-in-waiting, living in a wealthy gynocentric environment that paralleled the nonreligious setting of her fictional convent. When discussing *The Rover*, more attention to Behn's complex attitude toward religion would have

been relevant, as Behn's staunch Royalism was both anti-Catholic during the reign of Charles II and tolerant of Catholicism when James II came to power, though Behn's oeuvre criticized all restrictive religious conventions, especially her poem "The Golden Age."

Nonetheless, *Convents and Novices in Early Modern English Dramatic Works* provides new discussions and insights into the dramas discussed, as well as the complexities of stage and literary representations of the convent in a post-Catholic society, and is important for scholars of early modern drama, women's studies, and religious history. Coverage of two lesser-known convent dialogues, *The English Nunne* (1642), likely originally directed toward a Dutch audience, and *Venus in the Cloister* (translated from the French, 1683), makes the volume unique. Rapatz considers these dialogues to be dramatic works; the first, a romance narrative and Catholic apologia for female religious enclosure, shows a positive view of walls as providing protection for chastity, while grates advertise the nun's virtue; the second, a set of satirical "whore dialogues" (77) presents convents as places of hidden eroticism, enabled by the secrecy of the walls' enclosure but allowing male-female contact through the grates. These works highlight the eras' diverse views of convents, in turn giving insight to the better-known stage and closet dramas' representations and potential interpretations for these medial spaces and the females who dwell within them.

Carol A. Blessing, *Point Loma Nazarene University*  
doi:10.1017/rqx.2022.93

*The Lives of Girls and Women from the Islamic World in Early Modern British Literature and Culture.* Bernadette Andrea.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. xii + 250 pp. \$65.

---

An exhilarating intervention in a growing field, Bernadette Andrea's *The Lives of Girls and Women from the Islamic World in Early Modern British Literature and Culture* develops and extends the themes of her earlier articles and influential monograph, *Women and Islam in Early Modern English Literature* (2007), but importantly opens up new possibilities. The book is built around five case studies, each of which concerns the traces of five women from Dar-al-Islam in early modern Britain, and innovatively recovers their influence on British culture. Andrea assembles a rich theoretical cast—Derrida, Malieckal, Said, Subrahmanyam, Spivak, Vizenor—and uses poststructuralist, postcolonial, feminist, and microhistorical approaches to counteract the ways in which these women have been insistently erased from an emerging Anglocentric discourse of empire, and overlooked by critics in recent decades.

The five women whose lives and influence Andrea reconstitutes came from different locations and had different trajectories, but their stories trace similar themes: Elen