

Life Writing for the Counter-Reformation: The English Translation and Reception of Teresa de Ávila's Autobiography

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On December 19, 2017 in Paris, the art world was stunned by a record-breaking sale of a self-portrait by a seventeenth-century woman artist—Artemesia Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as St. Catherine*—which fetched EUR 2.36 million at auction.¹ This was not the first time that Gentileschi had painted herself as St. Catherine; there is a painting on the same theme with a very similar composition in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. In the portrait the figure is immediately identified as St. Catherine by the martyr's palm and the distinctive spiked wheel; the identity of the model had long remained obscure, but is clearly established by comparison with other known self-portraits as Gentileschi herself.² While the immediate reason for using her own image for this portrait of St. Catherine may be pragmatic—early modern social and cultural expectations precluded the use of live models by a female artist—the implications of this complex self-identification are intriguing for thinking about various forms of life writing and self-narratives as they emerge and develop over the course of the seventeenth century. Even if Gentileschi is her own most proximate model, the process of painting herself requires an intense level of fixation on the physical self, in this instance compounded by the necessity of using a mirror. While the mirror as an object bears tropological meaning as inappropriate self-regard and vanity for women in particular, it may also be pressed into service for purposes of self-examination and discipline, as Tobie Matthew asserts concerning Teresa de Ávila:

[S]hee resolved, to worke with Perspectiue-Glasses, of different, yea, & euen contrarie kindes. For, when she described her Vertues; she serued her self, of a Diminishing-glasse; which made them seem to[o] little, as to be no more, then a kind of Nothing. But, on the other side, when she gaue account of her Imperfec-

tions, she would, by no means know them, by anie other name, then of Vices and Sinnes: because she tooke a Multiplying-Glasse, to her self.³

For Gentileschi the focus on the physical self might be seen to be offset or recontextualized by the evident identification with the heroic figure of St. Catherine, soliciting in the viewer a different kind of introspective self-regard, that of the exemplary heroine. Just as the artist reframes the representation of her *self* through the figure of St. Catherine, so too the viewer must encounter the subject through the framing device of St. Catherine, here at the very least displacing the dubious sexuality of the female artist by the chaste martyrdom of the saint. Equally, the subject's direct, even impudent, gaze suggests ways in which ideas about the self might conflict with the abnegation of self implied by the choice of exemplar.

This article takes the example of Teresa de Ávila and the dissemination, translation, circulation, and reception of her writings as one way of thinking about the development of life writing by women in this period. It argues that the modes of self-writing adopted from medieval and theological precedents play a key role in the development of exemplary lives. The deployment of the spiritual life in the Counter-Reformation is marked by the emergence of a new generic hybrid, characterized by the attempt to persuade the reader of the *authenticity* of the speaker's experiences. While links and connections are often diffuse and difficult to prove with precision, the writings of Teresa de Ávila circulated very widely, and they demonstrate the complex interrelationship between apparently separate spheres and discourses—public/private, religious/lay, self/other—in the development of self-writing.⁴ The evidence from translation practices points to a ready market for the writings of Teresa de Ávila, the *Life* in particular; arguably its focus on domesticated forms of meditation links the Ignatian tradition with interior, familial spaces and fills the meditative “gap” that came into close focus for Protestant women at the court of Henrietta Maria, leading John Cosin, for example, to write *A Collection of Private Devotions* (1627) for them. Given her role in the foundation of the order, the writings of Teresa de Ávila are crucial to the Continental Carmelite foundations, and they are also frequently represented in portraits and referenced in nuns' own life writings as providing the spur for their vocations.⁵ Direct evidence of ownership is rarer, but as Caroline Bowden notes, Tobie Matthew's 1642 English translation of de Ávila's *Life, The Flaming Hart*, was “a book found in many libraries.”⁶ *The Reception and Circulation of Early Modern Women's Writing, 1550–1700* (RECIRC) project

has identified a number of copies changing hands through book auction catalogues.⁷ Most of these owners are Protestant, not Catholic, suggesting the importance of thinking about life writing through a range of confessional frameworks and across a number of institutional and noninstitutional sites. For example, Edward, second Viscount Conway, a prominent royalist military officer, owned a Spanish edition of Teresa's works published in Madrid in 1622.⁸ As Bowden notes, many of the same titles appear in both Protestant and Catholic libraries.⁹ The multiconfessional appeal of Teresa's *Life* is evidenced, too, by readers' annotations. In response to printed marginalia in Matthew's 1642 translation that states, "This Saint you see, was certainly no Protestant," a reader of the copy now in the Folger Library has written, "I say that she was Protestant."¹⁰ This article focuses on three strands in relation to Teresa de Ávila's self-writings: it builds on scholarship that questions the view that the origin of life writing as a genre was uniquely Protestant; it suggests the ways in which Teresa, by modeling the ideal spiritual life, functions as a source of authority for life writing; and it argues for the rising cultural prominence of Teresa's *Life*, facilitated by print networks in particular. The 1611 and 1642 English translations will be shown to mark two distinct phases establishing Teresa de Ávila as an exemplar for the spiritual life and for the writing of the exemplary life narrative.

The example of Teresa de Ávila can be understood through multiple frames: her influence is directly textual (through the translation and reception of her writings), institutional (through the establishment of religious houses committed to her rule and vision), but also more diffuse (through her authority and exemplary status broadly construed). This article focuses primarily on one of the two seventeenth-century English translations of de Ávila's *vida*. The first, produced in 1611, was facilitated by the circle of English Catholic women who actively made use of their own lay networks to advance the mission of Catholic reconversion. The second, in 1642, was very closely associated with the English Carmelite community in Antwerp.¹¹ Undertaken by Tobie Matthew at the request of the mother superior, this translation was positioned to take advantage of Matthew's own wide-ranging European networks, but was facilitated by the uniquely hybrid communities of mid-century Antwerp. In both cases, the figure of Teresa de Ávila provided a valuable model and precedent for complex negotiations of authority, as well as an easily assimilable example of writing about the self.¹² Teresa de Ávila carefully and consciously manipulated contemporary debates and issues to promote her particular—and highly influential—spiritual vision. In turn, her readers also used her writings in highly instrumental ways to

support or authorize their own activities, including self-writing in a variety of forms, acting upon a vocation, or a self-regarding engagement with the “theatricality” of Catholicism.

Teresa de Ávila’s writings provide ways in which we can complicate a dominant narrative about how various forms of autobiography emerged from largely Protestant practices of self-examination.¹³ Her precedent and influence suggest that modes of self-writing are powerfully imitative, iterative, and performative, often designed explicitly to achieve a specific set of effects on the reader (moral and spiritual reformation, refutation of opposition); secondly, that self-writing adopts modes of articulation found in less obviously individualized narratives; and third, that the development of self-writing in English owes a good deal to Catholic habits of self-examination, spiritual exercises, and forms of meditation.¹⁴ De Ávila and her English translators and imitators were heavily influenced by the generic innovations driven by (mostly) French writers—François de Sales, Pierre Camus, Nicolas Caussin—and by a reinvigoration of the traditional saint’s life for a specifically post-Tridentine readership, most obviously represented by *The History of the Angelicall Virgin Glorious S. Clare* (1635). These elements are in active dialogue through a number of networks linking Continental Catholics and the court of Henrietta Maria, to whom English translations of de Sales, Camus, and other Catholic saints’ lives were dedicated in the 1630s. These relationships culminate in connections that cross confessional lines while reinforcing other types of group identities—most notably class identities, but also royalist ones, particularly in mid-seventeenth-century Antwerp. In the life of Mary Cotton (in religion Sr. Mary of the Blessed Trinity), we find this intriguing connection between Henrietta Maria’s court and the exiled convents through the complex figure of Margaret Cavendish:

[W]hen she [i.e., Mary] came to be Religious the Dutchess of New Castle being then here was much taken with her as being extream pretty, entertained her at her own house dressed her with her own hands for her Entry like a Nimph and lead her in her self.¹⁵

Cavendish is clearly interested in what she perceives as the theatricality of the clothing ceremony. The statement that Cavendish took Cotton from her own house to the Carmelite convent—a short distance and possibly part of the “tour” through the city of Antwerp that Cavendish describes in her own autobiography—indicates that Cavendish had some direct acquaintance

with the English Carmelite sisters.¹⁶ In addition, Cavendish's own interest both in life writing and in the kinds of moral but entertaining tales current at the court of Henrietta Maria (where Cavendish was a lady-in-waiting) further connects her to the Carmelite community. The final point of correspondence lies in Cavendish's own recurrent use of the image and metaphor of the cloister as a way of delineating a conceptual space for female intellectual autonomy and endeavor. A direct link between the two circles is provided by the figure of Suzanne Du Verger: in her English translation of Camus's *Admirable Events* (1639), which was dedicated to Henrietta Maria, Du Verger responds directly to Cavendish's reflections on monastic life, which were written in Antwerp and published as *The World's Olio* (1655).¹⁷

De Ávila's far-reaching influence enables a fuller understanding of the ways in which texts, ideas, and modes of articulation criss-crossed Europe and moved between languages and religious professions, exploiting print networks to enhance cultural position and spiritual authority. A large body of critical and historical work has established the importance of the exiled English convents to the development of long overlooked genres—spiritual autobiography, chronicle history—in which women writers played key roles. Nicky Hallett, for example, has drawn attention to the existence of a significant corpus of “spiritual self-writing” by women, arguing that the convent setting for literary production is critical to the modes of writing produced there: “the conditions within which life-writing was produced shaped the form and content of the narratives.”¹⁸ The accumulated evidence suggests that convents and religious orders were catalysts for developing biography and autobiography, as the experience of exile likely proved to be particularly conducive to a need for recording or asserting the significance of the choice of religious life through the writer's native language.¹⁹ These religious communities were often precarious, dependent on donors and patrons for support. A steady stream of vocations was also vital for their survival. This precarity had to do with the new foundations' contested relationships to church authority; they frequently sought a level of autonomy and self-governance that was incompatible with a strictly patriarchal understanding of the relationship of female religious communities to the church hierarchy. These two factors meant that exiled religious communities were porous (what Caroline Bowden terms “the semi-permeable enclosure wall”) despite their strong commitment to post-Tridentine *clausura*, and a significant part of their mission was to proselytize by primarily *textual* means.²⁰ In addition, their status as largely Anglophone communities meant they were likely to make connections with other English speakers.²¹ Thus, as two decades of innovative

scholarship has demonstrated, the English convents in exile were engaged in constant traffic beyond the convent wall through conversation, translation, and other forms of textual, material, and interpersonal exchange. Such exchange often involved movement across the boundaries separating the sacred and the secular, national languages, and confessional allegiances. In many instances these women's writings moved into broader circulation in manuscript and in print, such as the lives of Lucy Knatchbull, of Elizabeth Cary written by her daughters, and of Dorothy Lawson, to name but three.²² What the example of the English convents in exile demonstrates is that community is hugely important as a vehicle for culture, as textual and other forms of exchange serve to promulgate religious commitments but also to cement a community's ties to the historical contingencies of its context, both past and future.

Teresa de Ávila was a transcontinental phenomenon, feeding into a wave of post-Tridentine issues and questions that shaped the articulation of early modern spirituality. Crucially, the *Life* frames ways of speaking about selfhood and of situating individual devotion within a framework of reception. These articulations were devised with a specific audience in mind. Unlike for earlier mystical writings, de Ávila's *Life* has more than just a divine audience: the proselytizing impulse presupposes a particular *type* of imagined relationship between the writer as believer and her readers. This relationship is indebted to the idea that the author is actually present in the text, to the capacity of ideas and texts to move across boundaries, to the specifically textual world of early modern spirituality, and to the expectation that a shared text would be recycled for future use (spiritual or otherwise). This set of broad epistemic developments depended on particular types of traffic—physical, textual, personal—focused on specific networks and nodal points which criss-cross early modern Europe, transecting other networks and kinds of identities. The context of mid-seventeenth-century Antwerp is a crucible for these kinds of exchanges, with networks and connections reaching back to the court of Henrietta Maria through figures like the Cavendishes, John Cosin (the minister who married the Cavendishes), and Tobie Matthew, de Ávila's translator and the great champion of the Antwerp Carmel, who most likely met the Cavendishes in Antwerp.²³ Matthew had been actively involved in using translation as a means of disseminating Catholic spiritual lives since his own conversion. He, too, was closely linked to the court of Henrietta Maria through his relationships to Endymion Porter, Kenelm Digby, and Walter Montague.²⁴

De Ávila's conduct in relation to her inquisitors and confessors was

a concerted attempt to establish authority and to create a particular framework for her voice and her writings. As Alison Weber notes, “Teresa did not write for an invisible public. . . . [T]he solitary act of writing was inevitably an expression of social relationships.”²⁵ This presupposes an absent, though embodied and actualized, interlocutor as a precondition for articulation. It proves to be highly adaptable and crucially important for women writers who are often writing without a public readership. Teresa de Ávila’s spiritual status is key to her careful engagement with her readership: it entails unsettling the crippling metaphorical linkage between circulation and sexualization. Her major works were composed in the 1560s, printed in Spain in the late 1580s, and translated into the European vernaculars (sometimes more than once) over the course of the seventeenth century, and her influence, unlike that of many early modern women writers, remained constant among both Christian and secular readers. I have argued elsewhere that life writing does not exist in any recognizably modern (i.e., individualized) form in 1550, but that it manifests in multiple ways by 1700 (although few examples conform to modern expectations).²⁶ This suggests not so much a specific process of influence, but points to a capacity to speak to an emergent spiritual discourse and to calibrate generic and textual production to the demands of a growing readership versed in an increasing range of types of prose writing.

It is particularly notable that the Counter-Reformation effort to make use of Teresa de Ávila and her writings as a key tool for proselytizing involved women at its center. Both the 1611 and 1642 English translations of her *vida* were directly linked to the English Carmelite house in Antwerp. In both cases, women are positioned as intended readers, and they are cited as the driving force behind the decision to translate. The 1611 translation was motivated by the determination of the missionary Luisa de Carvajal to bring about the reconversion of England. She traveled from Spain to London with the 1611 translator, Michael Walpole, staying at St. Omer and later drawing on the assistance of the Jesuit priest Henry Garnet and the recusant Anne Vaux, leading supporters of the Catholic cause. De Carvajal was a writer in her own right and composed her own spiritual autobiography.²⁷ These connections testify to a specifically female dimension of devotion to Teresa that elicited an imitative practice of her reformist activity. The close links between the complex and intriguing figure of Tobie Matthew and the English Carmelite house in Antwerp are well known. In dedicating *The Flaming Hart, or The Life of the Glorious S. Teresa* to Henrietta Maria in 1642, Matthew notes that it is Teresa “[t]o whome . . . yow carry an extraordinary deuotion; and not only deuotion to her selfe, but affection also, to

the holy Religious women of her Angelicall Order.”²⁸ The translation is of a piece with a range of Catholic and proto-Catholic devotional texts dedicated to Henrietta Maria and members of her court in the late 1630s, many of which reveal similar investments in a feminized devotion focused on the inner spiritual life, often deploying established secular forms and genres to the end of spiritual self-improvement. The lines of connection between the exiled religious communities and the particular forms of religious practice at the court of Henrietta Maria operate in the larger social and cultural context of royalist exiles such as those in Antwerp through the 1640s and 1650s. The two English translations of Teresa’s *Life* tie into what J. P. Vander Motten and Katrien Daemen-De Gelder term “the wave of veneration, both before and after her canonization in March 1622.”²⁹ This included translations into French (1604), Dutch (1609), Portuguese (1628), Italian (1602, 1604, 1613, 1618, and 1641), and Latin (1621). The 1611 translation along with Adriaen Collaert’s pictorial depiction of her life in *Vita B. Virginis Teresiae a Iesu* (Antwerp, 1613) is one strand in a concerted effort to cement Teresa in devotional culture, leading up to her beatification in April 1614, an event that Rubens capitalizes upon in his 1615 portrait—one of a number of representations undertaken by him, culminating in the altarpiece completed around 1630–33 in Rubens’s workshop for the Church of the Discalced Carmelites in Antwerp, which depicts Saint Teresa interceding for souls in purgatory.³⁰

Tobie Matthew’s 1642 translation partakes of the coordinated effort to distribute Teresa’s writings and image to advance Catholic doctrine and spirituality by reappropriating elements of Protestant devotion, and in doing so it helps to cement Teresa de Ávila in the minds of the reading public as an exemplar of the spiritual life. The choice of Matthew as the translator enabled the work to more effectively access textual networks, for he was a prodigious correspondent as well as a highly active translator of Catholic spiritual lives in particular. His preface makes a point of saying that the translation was commissioned by the mother superior of the Carmelite house in Antwerp: “I was moued . . . by the Reuerend Mother *Superiour* of the *English Teresian-Carmelites*, at Antwerpe . . . to Translate, out of *Spanish*, into *English*.”³¹ This was Margaret Mostyn, whose own vocation was heavily influenced by Teresa de Ávila.³² The *Life*, framed as a first-person narrative with extensive detail on the meditative method practiced by Teresa, has a good deal in common with self-help guides to spirituality that were so widespread in England in the seventeenth century. John Cosin’s *Collection of Private Devotions* from 1627 provides one example, but there are many others

that either provide examples of prayer and devotional practice or delineate the characteristics of the ideal devout believer.³³ The vehicle of the life narrative, refracted through its origins in saints' lives of the traditionally hagiographical type, became a rhetorically powerful agent of religious change, as the outpouring of seventeenth-century religious lives attests. The genre of the life narrative frames the often modest efforts of individuals in terms of the spiritual achievements of martyrs, saints, and mystics from the past—de Ávila's writings deftly combine domesticated details with rigorous modeling of spiritual discipline—but more than following an abstract method, as helpful as that might be, the reader is aided most by emulating the living exemplar animated through the text. Matthew's translation contributes to keeping the convent and its mission actively in the minds of the English, "a forceful advertisement of the convent's English identity."³⁴ The translation itself is fundamentally different in character from the 1611 one in which style is functional rather than eloquent, and Matthew's comments in the preface regarding the deficiencies of the earlier translation would seem to derive directly from Mostyn's own knowledge of the Walpole translation—presumably the one that played a pivotal role in the development of her own vocation:

[O]n the one side, he seemed to haue lost a little of the puritie of his owne *English* Toung, and, on the other, not to haue acquired enough of the *Spanish*. . . . Some places being therfore very obscure, and manie other, more then a little, mis-vnderstood, the Booke was not so well receiued, nor so gladly, & greedily read, as it deserued.³⁵

Matthew's translation, then, is for a different age and readership, one habituated to more stylishly enticing writing, but also to the idea of writing as a form of spiritual sustenance that is "greedily read."

Teresa was one of comparatively few saints to be canonized less than fifty years after her death; prior to the seventeenth century, canonization was afforded almost exclusively to figures from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The canonization of Charles Borromeo (d. 1584) by Paul V in 1610 broke this pattern, and four of the five individuals canonized by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 had been dead for less than seventy years: Francis Xavier (d. 1552), Ignatius of Loyola (d. 1556), Philip Neri (d. 1595), and Teresa de Ávila (d. 1582). All of these canonizations took advantage of the proselytizing potential of print. The most notable is Ignatius (English translations of

the *Devout Meditations* were printed in 1618, 1623, and 1624), although he is the only one whose works were disseminated to a degree anything like those of Teresa de Ávila. The role of Tobie Matthew in bringing into circulation not just the writings of Teresa herself, but also those of the nuns in the English Carmelite house in Antwerp (notably the life of Lucy Knatchbull), indicates that he was tapping into a changing discursive mode that facilitated the expression of the self, designed specifically for the active emulation of others. That Teresa's *Life* (authorized by her status as saint) circulated in print and that of Knatchbull in manuscript suggests a calibrated understanding of each work's function and likely audience. This mode of spiritual life writing focuses often on the quotidian alongside the exceptional, advancing the idea that spiritual fulfilment arises out of domestic piety, and that household spaces can facilitate religious devotion in ways parallel to religious spaces. These models were developed out of long-standing Catholic traditions and practices, not least the Ignatian model of meditation. As Peter Burke remarks, "[I]ntrospection and self-examination were not Protestant monopolies at this period. . . . [T]hese practices were part of the preparation for confession."³⁶ That Teresa's writings are at least in part a justificatory response to the skepticism of her confessors about her visions further complicates any notion of emergent or autonomous selfhood, pointing instead to a far more complex nexus for the reception of the rhetorically performed and produced self—a dynamic that Matthew dwells on at length in his preface to *The Flaming Hart*. Rather than presenting Teresa's text as the outpourings of an autonomous individual in isolation, Matthew repeatedly draws attention to the relational nature of Teresa's writings in terms of "how highlie this life . . . is authorised," how worthy it is of emulation. He intends that "a *Preface* of mine owne . . . might open the Readers eye, the more easilie to behold the Saint, when she followed [in the life itself]; and so also, to giue some notice of her Children, who are following her."³⁷ Here Teresa de Ávila is put forward as the *text*, the form in which the reader may behold the saint and the model to which her followers, "her Children," are to aspire. By means of this generative text, Matthew, as directed by Mostyn, was to keep the knowledge of the exiled English religious communities alive at a time of threat and instability.

These materials are part of a wide and complex network of written texts showing that the most interior of writings were explicitly conceived in terms of a readership external to the Carmelite community itself and that the focus of this most complex of prose narratives adopting the "I" persona represents a clear break with many of the existing conventions for writing

a life.³⁸ Meredith Skura summarizes these as follows: “older writing about oneself appeared only in scattered passages and was incidental to other purposes; or it was allegorical; or it presented the author’s life as moral exemplar rather than individual experience; or it did not talk about the development of personality.”³⁹ Teresa’s own autobiography and spiritual writings might be seen to embody many of the key features (and paradoxes) of the developing genre of life writing as it emerges over the course of the seventeenth century. Nicky Hallett has suggested that these texts have a unique relationship with time, but some of these features (reading the life backwards through its final moments, for example) can be found in a range of both Protestant and Catholic self-writings. The model of discourse in these works produced in direct response to the scrutiny of an authoritative male is common to much devotional writing by women, irrespective of confession. Like many other self-narratives of the seventeenth century, each reader involved in the transmission of the text attempts to derive his or her authority via a clear line of descent from actual lived proximity to the individual who is the subject of the narrative. This is a key trope in the relatively novel form of the living—or recently living—exemplar from Foxe onwards.⁴⁰ Geoffrey Scott’s research on portraiture also sheds light on the importance of descent as a form of authority and the ways in which drawing attention to such connections served to underscore the history, origins, and provenance of the exiled religious orders, the Teresians in particular. As Scott notes, portraits of Teresa “introduced nuns to viewers, starved of any mental picture of the female religious life,” and just as the English Carmelites were “following” the textual exemplar of their foundress, so too the visual representation makes the same set of lineal links: the 1576 portrait of Teresa de Ávila, engraved by Martin Vanden Enden, for example, forms the frontispiece to Matthew’s translation.⁴¹ The founding prioress of the English Carmelites in Antwerp, Anne Worsley (1588–1644), in religion Anne of the Ascension, stresses in her life narrative her own line of descent from Anne of St. Bartholomew, and in turn from Teresa de Ávila herself.⁴²

The increasing use of contemporary figures as one modality of exemplarity suggests a particular kind of response to a perceived “crisis”—the need to enlarge upon the long-established and conventional authorities and subjects by extending the illustration of virtues into the realm of the experiential. This frequently involves a husband or other male relative or associate, such as a confessor or spiritual director mediating the narrative, which frequently turns out to be written in the first-person voice of the female persona, as in the case of the highly popular *Christal Glasse for*

Christian Women by Phillip Stubbes (1591). As Michael Mascuch observes, its subject, Katherine Stubbes, is “one of the first *ordinary* people to have been (albeit posthumously, and at her husband’s initiative) identified by a voice individualized through an extended narrative performance.”⁴³ The use of direct speech is an important feature of these texts, partly because it lends authenticity through the illusion of the presence of voice—reinforced when read aloud, a daily practice in many convents—but also because it creates a ligature between style and person, so that the individual is thought to be embodied in the words attributed to her.⁴⁴

In the case of the Michael Walpole’s 1611 translation of Teresa’s *Life*, this lived connection is clear. The text preserves the dedication to Ana de Jesus (d. 1621), a close personal associate of Teresa, who had gone over the head of the friar in charge of the foundation of Discalced Carmelites in Madrid, appealing to Pope Sixtus V in order to preserve fidelity to Teresa’s Constitutions at the monastery. She was supported in these actions by Luis de León (a hugely important figure in the development of spiritual life writing), who wrote the dedication. Walpole translates this dedication wholesale from the Spanish edition of Teresa’s complete works, published in 1588 and based on a text preserved by Ana de Jesus which she provided to Luis de León. The framing of the text draws upon the familiar “teach and delight” *topos* familiar from the humanist tradition:

[T]hey conteyne very holesome and Catholike doctrine, and in my opinion, they are exceeding profitable for all such, as shall read them. . . . And all this with such facillity and sweetnesse of the one syde, and on the other with such significant words, that none will read them, but if he be spirituall, he will fynd great profit; and if he be not spiritual, he will desyre to be, and wilbe encouraged to go forward in that way.⁴⁵

Luis de León is also a key figure of authority in Matthew’s translation some thirty years later—unsurprisingly, given that both translations worked from the same source, León’s rather problematic edition. Matthew includes a lengthy account of Teresa’s character written by León, which Matthew styles as “two liuing Images, or Pictures, of her self, which she lefte amongst vs; and those are, her Daughters, & her Bookes; which serue . . . for very faithfull witnesses.”⁴⁶ Once again, a familiar set of tropes and *topoi* is mobilized for the sake of elevating Teresa as a worthy subject (and object). The idea that the text itself is spiritually improving, that it presents an image of the

self in which character can be discerned, and that “Bookes” can be equated with “Daughters”—namely, the Carmelite nuns themselves—reveals with great clarity the role and function of the *Life*. Here are two very familiar images that evoke the securing of future reputation: the text and the family. Another text closely associated with the English Carmelites at Antwerp, *The Mirror of Created Perfection* (a life of the Virgin Mary) by John Falconer (1632), and dedicated to Sister Agnes Rosendale, underscores the role of spiritual lives in forming and authorizing women’s decisions to pursue a religious vocation:

I haue purposely heer collected [the Blessed Mother’s] Life . . .
That English gentelwomen also, hapning by this occasion to read
this history of your exemplar Vocation to Religion, and feru-
ourous prosecution thereof (rather touched by me indeed, then
fully related) may learne therby, how to leaue worldly friends and
temptations behind them.⁴⁷

These texts, together with Matthew’s life of Lucy Knatchbull, provide models of narrative virtue and rhetorical rectitude that underpin the sisters’ own writings—their “letters, devotions, [and] confessions”—that were ultimately compiled in the convent’s chronicle of their history, now in St. Helen’s Carmelite Convent.⁴⁸ The pattern of movement of texts beyond the convent walls happens frequently enough not to be accidental, but to be part of a conscious effort to position nuns as figures of exemplary piety for the emulation of others.

Teresa de Ávila is a figure who quickly establishes cult status, not solely through the contemplation and circulation of miracles and sacred objects but through *reading* and readers’ engagement with the record of her life. Matthew places heavy emphasis on Teresa’s own role as author, expressing her authority in locutions such as the title page note that the work is a “History of her Life, . . . written by the Saint her selfe,” or in paratextual material like the preface, which extols “that Life of hers, which she wrote, with that most holy, and wise hand of her owne, which I heer present.”⁴⁹ This marks a notable difference from other types of mystical writing, in which the person/writer is secondary to the vision itself. The iconography of Teresa focuses heavily on her as an inspirational and exemplary individual. A significant number of the pictorial representations feature the solitary saint, often with few other objects, as the primary locus of the viewer’s gaze. Like other works which present exemplary figures, Teresa’s writings offer her

as the object of contemplation, a model for readers to follow and emulate. Matthew's dedicatee, Henrietta Maria, is to lead her "Troope, which may adresse it selfe, to the imitation of [Teresa's] Heroicall actions."⁵⁰ This linkage of religious devotion and heroism is indicative of a discursive shift evident in secular as well as religious texts.⁵¹ Matthew's lengthy preface returns repeatedly to the question of authority, and particularly to the way in which the authority of Teresa's *Life* is derived from her person and from her text. He carefully places her work in a direct line of descent from Augustine—the *Confessions* is often seen as the first example of what we now call life writing, and Matthew undertook its first translation into English—and focuses upon the *ethos* of the speaker, the combination of character and experience. Sainthood confers a particular kind of authority based on personal truth:

[T]hese Morall parts will keep them from deceiuing others: so, the Intellectuall, will secure them, from being deceaued themselves; and will make them define, and diuide, and suspect, and doubt, and aske, before they fullie resolute, to beleieue; & much more, before they will publish things, to the world.⁵²

And it is *ethos*, albeit in modified and domesticated form, that underlies the assumptions and structures of both biography and autobiography in the period. When individuals sat down and wrote narratives about their lives and experiences, they rarely did so assuming that their inner lives were interesting per se to others; rather they did so because they felt there was something to be learned from their experiences. In the case of Teresa de Ávila, the assumption is that the subjective inner life merits attention in its own right, but that its enduring significance, its futurity, lies in the life's objective value for contemplation and emulation:

They looked vpon her whole life, with the eyes of a Religious kind of reason; And she, with those, euen of a kind of inordinate passion, (as a man may say) of deuotion. They, looked vpon her, as men, who being informed, euen by her self, of the Case, are most fitt, through their indifferencie, to be the Iudge; Whereas she, looked vpon her self, as a meer Partie; who must not, in her owne Case, be trusted, by anie meanes, so well, as her Iudge.⁵³

What is significant here is the process of articulation, the need to submit to an external authority being reworked as a sign of humility. Again, this dynamic is a notable feature of other life writing as the impetus to formu-

late the expression of the self in relation to a series of external agents and discourses, sometimes a person, sometimes a text (or texts), sometimes a cultural or ideological pressure urging conformity: “self-description . . . referred to understandings of oneself *within* a wider frame, and more often than not individuality was marked less by how one stood *out* than by how effectively one fitted *in*.”⁵⁴

Teresa’s writings, particularly her autobiographical writings, partook in a carefully orchestrated campaign of Counter-Reformation proselytization that established not only a network of religious houses but also a network of thought and contemplation across Europe. The key players involved with circulating the works of Teresa were by and large lay people operating in close collaboration with houses on the Continent but outside of the religious orders *per se*. The reception of Teresa’s writings, in terms of the use and reuse of her example for the purpose of creating communities, was critical to this process. Teresa de Ávila was foundational in both a literal and a conceptual sense, and her cult took a largely unprecedented form. Her effective mastery of the mode of self-writing might justly lead her to be viewed, in Foucault’s terms, as a “founder . . . of discursivity.” Foucault means the set of conditions and circumstances that enable a particular author or text to exert influence beyond its simple textual manifestation: “in the sphere of discourse one can be the author of much more than a book—one can be the author of a theory, tradition, or discipline in which other books and authors will in turn find a place.”⁵⁵ Teresa’s gender and religious status certainly factored in key ways into the development of these newly imagined modes of discursive articulation—which is not to downplay the clear lines of descent from medieval mysticism, nor the links to larger movements promoting individualized spirituality and devotion. Her gender and religious status were also crucial to the formation of reception networks that were forged from common experiences of exile and isolation. While Teresa’s writings were a source of inspiration and emulation across the confessional divide and across the gender divide, she had a particular appeal for women, who often acted as crucial agents of conversion and reconversion, particularly in England. Likewise, the repeated references by English nuns to Teresa de Ávila’s writings as agents of conversion add a pointed urgency to the projects of translating her works, particularly those connected to the court of Henrietta Maria. In turn, this led to a complex relationship to male and especially ecclesiastical authority. Teresa de Ávila herself was engaged in a protracted and intensive effort to validate her spiritual visions. This struggle had the effect of both publicizing and authorizing Teresa *herself* as

an authentic witness to the divine in the face of an oppositional, tradition-defending church. This must have had strong appeal in a century that was profoundly concerned with rearticulating the relationships between individual and collective state or religious authority.



Notes

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- 1 Paul Jeromak, “Newly Discovered Artemisia Gentileschi Painting Sells for EUR 2.4m at Auction in Paris,” *Art Newspaper*, Dec. 20, 2017, at theartnewspaper.com/news/newly-discovered-artemisia-gentileschi-painting-realises-eur2-4m-at-auction-in-paris.
- 2 The painting was bought by the National Gallery, London, and will be put on display in 2019. See *National Gallery*, “The National Gallery Acquires Artemisia Gentileschi Self Portrait,” July 2018, at nationalgallery.org.uk/about-us/press-and-media/press-releases/the-national-gallery-acquires-artemisia-gentileschi-self-portrait.
- 3 Teresa de Ávila, *The Flaming Hart, or The Life of the Glorious S. Teresa*, trans. Tobie Matthew (Antwerp, 1642), sig. 2*1r.
- 4 There is a large critical literature on life writing/self-writing; of particular significance are Kathleen Lynch, *Protestant Autobiography in the Seventeenth-Century Anglophone World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Adam Smyth, ed., *A History of English Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Sharon Cadman Seelig, *Autobiography and Gender in Early Modern Literature: Reading Women’s Lives, 1600–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 5 Mary Birkbeck, for example, notes that the *Life* of Teresa led her to the Carmelites; see Nicky Hallett, ed., *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800: Life Writing*, vol 1. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), 100.
- 6 Caroline Bowden, “Building Catholic Libraries in Exile: The English Convents and Their Book Collections in the Seventeenth Century,” *British Catholic History* 32, no. 3 (2015): 343–82, at 370.
- 7 For a description of the RECIRC project, see *RECIRC: The Reception and Circulation of Early Modern Women’s Writing, 1550–1700*, National University of Ireland, Galway, at recirc.nuigalway.ie.
- 8 Most of these owners of Teresa’s works come from the later part of the seventeenth century. Personal communication with Dr. Mark Empey, NUI Galway.
- 9 Bowden, “Building Catholic Libraries,” 375.

- 10 Teresa de Ávila, *The Flaming Hart* (Antwerp, 1642), 377, Washington, D.C., Folger Shakespeare Library, shelfmark 152-787q. I am deeply grateful to Laura de Furio for bringing this example to my attention and for sharing her work with me.
- 11 The first of Teresa de Ávila's writings was her life narrative, *El libro de la vida* (1562–65), facilitated by her confessor, Pedro Ibáñez Diaz. See the modern edition in *Obras Completas*, ed. Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink, 8th ed. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1986). The English translations are by Michael Walpole, *The Lyf of the Mother Teresa of Iesus* (Antwerp, 1611); and by Tobie Matthew, *The Flaming Hart* (1642).
- 12 There is a vast scholarly literature on the writings of Teresa de Ávila, both in Spanish and in English. Of particular interest for this essay are Gillian T. W. Ahlgren, *Teresa de Ávila and the Politics of Sanctity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 67–84; Elena Carrera, *Teresa de Ávila's Autobiography: Authority, Power, and the Self in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Spain* (London: Legenda, 2005); Bárbara Mujica, *Teresa de Ávila: Lettered Woman* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Rhodes, "Teresa de Jesus's *Book* and the Reform of the Religious Man in Sixteenth-Century Spain," in *Gender, Catholicism, and Spirituality: Women and the Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200–1900*, ed. Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen Mangion (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 68–82; Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990); Alison Weber, ed., *Approaches to Teaching Teresa de Ávila and the Spanish Mystics* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009). Approaching Teresa de Ávila's prose through the framework of autobiography/life writing is a relatively recent trend, as Rainer H. Goetz notes in his entry on Teresa de Ávila in *The Encyclopaedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, ed. Margaretta Jolly, 2 vols. (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2013), 1:869–70, at 869. For recent work using this generic approach, see Elizabeth T. Howe, *Autobiographical Writing by Early Modern Hispanic Women* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2015); and Isabelle Poutrin, "Autobiographies," in *The Routledge Research Companion to Early Modern Spanish Women Writers*, ed. Nieves Baranda and Anne J. Cruz (New York: Routledge, 2018), 63–73. The essays in section 2, "Conventual Spaces," in this volume are particularly relevant.
- 13 See, for example, E. Pearlman, "Typological Autobiography in Seventeenth-Century England," *Biography* 8, no. 2 (1985): 95–118; Michael Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self: Autobiography and Self-Identity in England, 1591–1791* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997); Seelig, *Autobiography and Gender*; and essays in Ronald Bedford, Lloyd David, and Philippa Kelly, eds., *Early Modern English Lives: Autobiography and Self-Representation, 1500–1660* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007). These positions have been challenged by Kathleen Lynch in *Protestant Autobiography*.
- 14 On the influence of Teresa de Ávila more broadly, see Christia Mercer, "Descartes' Debt to Teresa de Ávila, or Why We Should Work on Women in the History of Philosophy," *Philosophical Studies* 174, no. 10 (2017): 2539–55.
- 15 See J. P. Vander Motten and Katrien Daemon-De Gelder, "Margaret Cavendish, the Antwerp Carmel, and *The Convent of Pleasure*," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren*

- Sprachen und Literaturen* 251, no. 1 (2014): 134–45, at 134. The full account of Mary Cotton’s life can be found in *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, pt. 2, vol. 4, *Life Writing II*, ed. Katrien Daemen-De Gelder, James E. Kelly, and Carmen M. Mangion (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), 232–35. Information on Mary Cotton’s biography can be found at *Who Were the Nuns? A Prosopographical Study of the English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, Queen Mary University of London, at wtn.history.qmul.ac.uk.
- 16 See Margaret Cavendish, “A true Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life,” published in *Natures Pictures* (London, 1656), 368–91; and *The Life of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle*, ed. C. H. Firth (London, 1886), 309.
- 17 See Justin Begley, “Confessional Disputes in the Republic of Letters: Susan Du Verger and Margaret Cavendish,” *Seventeenth Century* 34, no. 2 (2017): 1–27, at doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2017.1406819. For more on these links, see K. Narramore, “Du Verger’s Humble Reflections and Dedicatory Epistles as Public Sphere,” *Prose Studies* 35, no. 2 (2013): 139–53; and Brenda M. Hosington, “Fact and Fiction in Susan Du Verger’s Translations of Jean-Pierre Camus’s *Les Euenements singulieres*, *Les Relations morales*, and *Diotrephe, Histoire Valentine*,” in *Seventeenth-Century Fiction: Text and Transition*, ed. Jacqueline Glomski and Isabelle Moreau (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 115–29.
- 18 Nicky Hallett, “Shakespeare’s Sisters: Anon and the Authors in Early Modern Convents,” in *The English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800: Communities, Culture, and Identity*, ed. Caroline Bowden and James E. Kelly (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 139–55, at 139, 142.
- 19 On literary production in religious houses more generally, see the following essays in Bowden and Kelly, *English Convents in Exile*: Jenna D. Lay, “The Literary Lives of Nuns: Crafting Identities through Exile,” 71–86; Victoria Van Hyning, “Naming Names: Chroniclers, Scribes, and Editors of St. Monica’s Convent, Louvain, 1631–1906,” 87–108; and Jaime Goodrich, “Translating Lady Dorothy Percy: Authorship and Authority among Brussels Benedictines,” 109–38; and see also Caroline Bowden, “Collecting the Lives of Early Modern Women Religious: Obituary Writing and the Development of Collective Memory and Corporate Identity,” *Women’s History Review* 19, no. 1 (2010): 7–20; Marie-Louise Coolahan, “Identity Politics and Nuns’ Writing,” *Women’s Writing* 14, no. 2 (2007): 306–20; Jaime Goodrich, *Faithful Translators: Authorship, Gender, and Religion in Early Modern England* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2013); Cordula van Wyhe, ed., *Female Monasticism in Early Modern Europe: An Interdisciplinary View* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2008); Claire Walker, “‘Doe not suppose me a well mortified Nun dead to the world’: Letter Writing in Early Modern English Convents,” in *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing, 1450–1700*, ed. James Daybell (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 159–76; Nicky Hallett, “Philip Sidney in the Cloister: The Reading Habits of English Nuns in Seventeenth-century Antwerp,” *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (2012): 87–115.
- 20 Bowden, “Building Catholic Libraries,” 375.
- 21 See Emilie K. M. Murphy, “Language and Power in an English Convent in Exile, c. 1621–c.1631,” *Historical Journal* 62, no. 1 (2018): 101–25, at doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X17000437.

- 22 See Sir Tobie Matthew, *The Life of Lady Lucy Knatchbull*, ed. David Knowles (London: Steed and Ward, 1931); *The Lady Falkland, Her Life, by One of her Daughters*, in *The Tragedy of Mariam*, ed. Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and William Palmes, *The Life of Mrs. Dorothy Lawson, of St. Antony's* (London, 1855), also available at archive.org/details/lifemrsdorothy100lawsgoog.
- 23 On Margaret Cavendish's involvement with Catholicism in Antwerp, see Sarah H. Mendelson, "Concocting the World's Olio: Margaret Cavendish and Continental Influence," *Early Modern Literary Studies* special issue, no. 14 (2004): 1–34.
- 24 A. J. Loomie, "Matthew, Sir Toby [Tobie] (1577–1655)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)*, ed. David Cannadine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18343. See also Alan Stewart, *The Oxford History of Life Writing, Volume 2: Early Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 165–82. I am grateful to Professor Stewart for sharing this work with me in advance of publication.
- 25 Weber, *Rhetoric of Femininity*, 14.
- 26 Danielle Clarke, "Life Writing," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Prose, 1500–1640*, ed. Andrew Hadfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 452–67, at 452.
- 27 See Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza, *This Tight Embrace*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Rhodes (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2000). On the identity of "W.M.," see Kathleen T. Spinnenweber, "The 1611 English Translation of St. Teresa's Autobiography: A Possible Carmelite-Jesuit Collaboration," *SKASE Journal of Translation and Interpretation* 2, no. 1 (2007): 1–12, at 2.
- 28 Teresa de Ávila, *The Flaming Hart*, sig. *2v.
- 29 J. P. Vander Motten and Katrien Daemen-De Gelder, "A Cloistered Entrepôt: Sir Tobie Matthew and the English Carmel in Antwerp," *English Studies* 92, no. 5 (2011): 548–61, at 550.
- 30 See the 1615 portrait at *Wikimedia Commons*, at commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Teresa_of_Avila_dsc01644.jpg; and see the catalogue entry for Rubens's portrait of Teresa for the Discalced Carmelites at the *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, [metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437542](https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437542).
- 31 Teresa de Ávila, *The Flaming Hart*, sig. *5r.
- 32 See Edmund Bedingfield, *The Life of Margaret Mostyn* (London, 1878), 19.
- 33 See Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 97–256; and Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 34 Motten and Daemen-De Gelder, "A Cloistered Entrepôt," 551.
- 35 Teresa de Ávila, *The Flaming Hart*, sig. *5v.
- 36 Peter Burke, "Representations of the Self from Petrarch to Descartes," in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), 17–28, at 27.
- 37 Teresa de Ávila, *The Flaming Hart*, sig. *7r.
- 38 Matthew notes its difficulty in use of periods, parentheses, omission of conjunctions, as well as the problems of the Spanish text (*The Flaming Hart*, sig. *6r).

- 39 Meredith Skura, "A Mirror for Magistrates and the Beginnings of English Autobiography," *English Literary Renaissance* 36, no. 1 (2006): 26–56, at 26.
- 40 For a discussion of changing uses of the exemplar related to early modern women, see Danielle Clarke, "Renaissance Eloquence and Female Exemplarity: *Coriolanus*, *Cornelia*, and the *Matrona Docta*," *Renaissance Studies* 28, no. 1 (2014): 128–46.
- 41 Geoffrey Scott, "Cloistered Images: Representations of English Nuns, 1600–1800," in Bowden and Kelly, *English Convents in Exile*, 191–208, at 201.
- 42 Nicky Hallett, "Worsley, Anne [name in religion Anne of the Ascension] (1588–1644)," *ODNB Online*, May 29, 2014, at oxforddnb.com/search?q=anne+worsley&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true.
- 43 Mascuch, *Origins of the Individualist Self*, 55.
- 44 The complexities of the intersections between oral and written cultures lie outside the scope of this essay, but good background to the topic is provided by Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); and Mary Ellen Lamb and Karen Bamford, eds., *Oral Traditions and Gender in Early Modern Literary Texts* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008).
- 45 Teresa de Ávila, *The Lyf of the Mother Teresa of Jesus*, sig. *1v.
- 46 Teresa de Ávila, *The Flaming Hart*, sig. 4*2v.
- 47 John Falconer, *The Mirrour of Created Perfection* (St. Omer, 1632), sig. *5r.
- 48 Motten and Daemon-De Gelder, "A Cloistered Entrepôt," 6.
- 49 Teresa de Ávila, *The Flaming Hart*, sig. *3r.
- 50 Teresa de Ávila, sig. *3r.
- 51 See Mary Beth Rose, *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 55–84.
- 52 Teresa de Ávila, *The Flaming Hart*, sig. *7v.
- 53 Teresa de Ávila, sig. 2*2r.
- 54 Ronald Bedford, Lloyd David, and Philippa Kelly, eds., *Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 14.
- 55 Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James D. Faubion, *The Essential Works of Foucault*, vol. 2 (New York: New Press, 1998), 205–22, at 217, 216.