

Introduction

The Other Voice

In 1635, Margaret of the Mother of God, the forty-eight-year-old lay sister of the royal convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns in Brussels, asked her prioress for some writing paper (fig. 1; see “Carmelites,” “Discalced Carmelites,” and “Teresians” in glossary). The prioress duly issued Sister Margaret with this relatively expensive commodity, notwithstanding that she did not know why Margaret needed it. Margaret’s confessor, Father Gracián de la Cruz, had asked her to write a spiritual autobiography to “better know the state of her soul” (1635 Autobiography, Appendix B1, 261 and B4, 277; Appendix D, 277). Her autobiography is therefore an example of the *vida pro mandato* (autobiography by mandate), in other words, a narrative written at the behest of someone else, which was a common, female literary genre in early modern Europe. In 1635 Margaret wrote an autobiography describing her early childhood, adolescence, and early years in the convent. This text was followed by two diaries in 1636 and 1637 composed of individual entries that record the workings of her inner life and relation to God. Thus, these three texts have different temporal perspectives. While her 1635 text records significant life events from a forty-year period earlier in her life, the two subsequent texts are more immediate and detailed recordings of her daily or weekly spiritual experiences. We have therefore termed the 1635 text with its biographical emphasis an “autobiography” and the two subsequent texts “diaries.” In 1643, on the orders of her confessor, Margaret authored another text, a medical self-report documenting her illnesses. She also authored one devotional text, the date of which is unknown, but it seems to have been occasioned by the renewal of her vows, customarily celebrated at certain points in a nun’s life. The extent and scope of Margaret’s literary enterprise is impressive in light of her many exhausting tasks in the kitchen and the infirmary of the convent. Given that Teresian nuns were only allowed a bed (typically a pallet or mattress of straw), a prie-dieu (prayer-desk), and some simple, devotional prints in their cells, it is likely that Margaret wrote the diaries at night in her cell (possibly by candlelight) or during her spare minutes at the kitchen table.¹

1. It is unclear exactly under what circumstances Margaret wrote her diary, but, even as a lay sister, she seems to have had a private cell, as is evident from her remarks that the prioress directed her, “Daughter, go to your cell for a while,” and that she “was quite fond of sleeping alone” (1635 Autobiography, 79). There is evidence that she also wrote in the kitchen, as she prefaces one paragraph in her 1635 Autobiography, “Now that I am in the kitchen, I shall tell the rest” (1635 Autobiography, 89). On the interior furnishings of nuns’ cells, see St. Teresa, “Constitutions,” *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, ed. and trans. by E. Allison Peers, 3 vols. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), 3:222 (hereafter *CWST*).

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Autobiographies and diaries by women were collaborative ventures which evolved from the original mandate, as Alison Weber argues for Saint Teresa's autobiography, to a "*casus extremus* of the temporal and spatial expansiveness of the 'social text.' ... [A] woman's 'private' religious experience, when textualized, became a social event, or series of events, through which men and women negotiated their imperfectly convergent goals and beliefs."² Margaret's diary was subject to the same process. The diary was a register for the emotional, spiritual, and theological guidance she received from her confessor, while it served, in turn, as a basis for discussion when they came together for informal, nonsacramental meetings at the grille (a grating separating the nuns from their visitors in the convent parlor), the confessional (a small, enclosed, wooden booth where priest and penitent, separated by a grid, meet for the sacrament of penance or reconciliation), or in the convent church.³ Writing was also a means for Margaret to document her experiences during the long periods when her confessor was absent, and frequently her text takes the shape of an imaginary conversation with him. Her writings therefore document the complex roles confessors played in the lives of early modern women. They were not only priests invested with the power to absolve sins through the sacrament of penance but also spiritual directors, role models, soul-mates, and champions of their confessants' causes in life and after death.⁴ Margaret not only takes care to give evidence of the absolute obedience she owes to her confessor, but she also ever so tentatively asserts her authority in spiritual matters.

Shortly after Margaret died, on March 11, 1646, at the age of fifty-nine, Father Gracián started to promote her diary, the existence of which was hitherto unknown (even to Margaret, who thought he had burned the notebooks once they were no longer required). This campaign generated various testimonies and letters, which are reproduced in appendices A–D. These documents suggest that her confessor saw in Margaret a potential case for beatification, if not sanctification. Appendices A–C are testimonies by Father Gracián himself, fellow nuns, and Margaret's brother, indicating the veracity of her diaries, her virtues, and her providential and intercessory powers in life and death. Appendix A is an undated report on the progress of Margaret's final illness and death. It was probably commissioned by Father Gracián at the time of his wider dissemination of Sister

2. Alison Weber, "The Three Lives of the Vida: The Uses of Convent Autobiography," in *Women, Texts, and Authority in Early Modern Spain*, ed. Marta Vicente and Luis Corteguera (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 120.

3. See, for example, the passage in her 1637 diary: "When you repeated to me the heavenly favors I had received in my life it was very painful and disconcerting, especially when you repeated what I had written," 176.

4. For nonsacramental meetings of spiritual direction and the complex and close relationships between confessors and their female penitents, see Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitents, 1450–1750* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), 22–23.

Margaret's diary in the 1650s. Consequently, the author is likely to be either Sister Teresa de Jesús or Sister Margarita de Jesús, who both served as prioress during this decade. This report not only gives valuable information on Margaret's medical history, but also on how Margaret, in the eyes of her fellow nuns, lived up to the ideals of a virtuous Christian death during her final days and hours. Appendix B compiles five posthumous testimonies to Margaret's virtues by Father Gracián himself, the two prioresses, Teresa de Jesús and Margarita de Jesús, one fellow sister, Magdalena Florencia de la Cruz, to whom Margaret was particularly close, and Friar Jacobo de Santa María de la Victoria, the Discalced Carmelite friar, who dispensed the Last Rite to Sister Margaret on her death bed (for "Last Rite" see Appendix A, n. 7). Appendix C brings together three testimonies by an anonymous author, her brother Antonio, and Sister Margarita de Jesús, all stating that Sister Margaret appeared to them after her death and that she had entered heaven. Appendix D presents texts which are not primarily concerned with providing evidence of Margaret's sanctity and salvation, but they testify to the wider circulation of her texts. A few years after Margaret's death, Father Gracián organized the making of copies and abridged translations of Margaret's original Spanish text into French and Dutch. These texts were distributed to female convents within Brabant and also further afield to the male branch of the order in Rome, Vienna, and France.⁵ This dissemination entailed a lively correspondence (reproduced in Appendix D), which presents unique and compelling testimony to the wider reception and shared vision of Margaret's writings by the broader Teresian community. Paul Arblaster's essay in this volume examines the surviving French and Dutch translations of her texts, which circulated beyond Teresian convents, and offers a detailed discussion of the editing of these translations, their dissemination, and the reactions of their wider audience. Arblaster's essay not only complements the texts in Appendix D, but also reveals in greater detail the editorial practices which male clerics applied to Margaret's texts. The surviving translations and the material on the reactions to Margaret's text offer the historian a unique opportunity to gain further insight into the afterlife of early modern female texts. In this way, this volume hopes to provide a general overview of all of Margaret's writings, their copying, and their reception.

In its scope and format, Margaret's spiritual autobiography is unique for the first generation of Discalced Carmelite nuns in the Low Countries, who carried forward the torch after St. Teresa had died in 1582.⁶ Her voice is from the bottom of the convent's hierarchy. Margaret came from a lower-middle-class family in

5. Confessors frequently promoted the writings of their deceased female penitents; see Bilinkoff, *Related Lives*, 28.

6. For the second generation Discalced Carmelites, see *The Heirs of St. Teresa of Ávila: Defenders and Disseminators of the Founding Mother's Legacy*, ed. Christopher C. Wilson (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2006).

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North Brabant, today a region of the Netherlands. When she entered the convent, Margaret was fluent only in Dutch. It is difficult to ascertain whether she learned Spanish in the convent. However, given that she grew up in military and aristocratic circles where some knowledge of French or Spanish was customary, she may have already had a basic competence. Nevertheless, her main duty as a young lay sister was to serve the community through her manual labour in the kitchen as cook and cleaner. The communal duty of her fellow sisters as choir nuns was the singing of the liturgy and the canonical hours (the eight prayers of the day, see “Canonical hours” in glossary), a duty which was deemed higher in status than manual labor. For example, Margaret documents her exclusion from the duties of a choir nun when writing that she was “quite fond also of going to the Divine Office and hearing the sisters sing” (1635 Autobiography, 92). These divergent values placed on manual and spiritual work are also reflected in the superior social and financial status of choir nuns, most of whom came from affluent families and were supported by sizable dowries. The hierarchy of age and offices (older nuns held more senior and responsible offices) among the choir nuns overlaid this basic polarization between lay sisters and choir nuns.⁷

Margaret, however, successfully broke down the social, spatial, and linguistic barriers that prevented her from having a voice within the female community of the Brussels convent and patriarchal society at large. She learned Spanish and formulated an idiosyncratic yet empowering form of piety in response to her social standing. The kitchen became for her a spiritual space where bodily labor was translated into a means of accessing the divine.⁸ For Margaret, bodily labor was an expression of her spiritual ideal of simplicity and nakedness; an ideal “cooked up” from her own eclectic blend of Franciscan and Teresian spiritual principles. Her voice from the kitchen developed to express her individuality and authority.

The body, for unprivileged women like Margaret, was a “territory” of spiritual power and problems. St. Teresa promoted an idea of body and soul as complementary rather than conflictive parts in the struggle to ascend to God. Margaret’s diary records the constant challenge she faced to adjust and correct the balance between them. Her bodily and olfactory penitential exercises, for example, function as a psychological stabilizer by harmonizing body and soul in moments of contemplation. This foregrounding of the body meant that unprivileged women like Margaret could forge feminine forms of an intensely physio-somatic mysticism independent of the theological erudition and ecclesiastical institutions

7. Sister Margaret mentions the office of the “novice mistress,” the “cellaress,” the “clothing mistress,” and the “turn keeper,” who answered the bell at the visitor’s gate.

8. Cristina Mazzoni argues that kitchens in convents were “a theological space, a mystical room” where “manual labor nourishes the bonds of community and nurtures the life of the mind.” Cristina Mazzoni, *The Women in God’s Kitchen: Cooking, Eating, and Spiritual Writing* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2005), 144.

which were not accessible to them.⁹ And it was not merely cooking and cleaning that were spiritual experiences for Margaret, but also her bodily humors and chronic disease.¹⁰ As lay sister of the royal convent in Brussels, Margaret was a servant of the Habsburg court, and as such she had access to the best medical care in the land. For example, during the acute stages of her illness, she was treated by a team of top doctors, Dr. Alvarez, Dr. Paz, and Dr. Pons, the three personal physicians to the rulers of the Spanish Netherlands, who at this time was the Cardinal Infante Ferdinand of Austria, younger brother of King Philip IV of Spain.¹¹ Her careful documentation of her illnesses and the therapies she received offers us new insights into the interlacing of medicine and female sanctity in early modern Europe.

In her diary, the topography of the kitchen, writing, medicine, and spirituality are closely related themes. Hence Margaret's bodily mysticism challenges conventional notions of the physiological boundaries of the human body and the interchange with its material environment in early modern society.¹² Her voice can only be properly located by investigating the osmotic process between herself as

9. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Sara Kay and Miri Rubin, eds., *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Karma Lochrie, "The Language of Transgression: Body, Flesh, and Word in Mystical Discourse," in *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 115–39; Bert Roest, "Dealing with Brother Ass: Bodily Aspects of the Franciscan Sanctification of the Self," in *The Invention of Saintliness*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (London: Routledge, 2002), 163–84. Margaret engaged with a range of highly traditional body-focused, penitential practices such as food rituals, sleep deprivation, olfactory and gustatory self-castigation, which created visible physio-emotional changes. They evoked tears, bleeding, sweat, pain, and feelings of exhilaration, exhaustion, joy, and anxiety.

10. In the past two decades, scholars have begun to explore the spiritual and social role of disease and illness in convent communities; see Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau, eds., *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works*, a bilingual anthology with translations by Amanda Powell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 75–76 and 374–78 for excerpts from the diary of Madre Maria Magdalena de Lorravaquio Muñoz, who suffered from a variety of illnesses for thirty-three years. For more references on the topic of nuns and disease, see the section "Studies in the History of Medicine—Medicine and Sanctity" in the bibliography.

11. See 1635 Autobiography, 125, nn. 153–155; and 1643 Letter to Her Confessor, 236 n. 265. For the specific treatments she received, see 1635 Autobiography, 121–127 and notes.

12. For a new contribution to the problem of body, soul, and environment, see Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). For English nuns in Antwerp on these issues, see Nicky Hallett, *The Senses in Religious Communities, 1600–1800: Early Modern "Convents of Pleasure"* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2013). For reading and writing as a multisensorial experience, see Helen Smith, "More swete vnto the eare / than holsome for ye mynde': Embodying Early Modern Women's Reading," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2010): 413–32.

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perceiving subject and the perceived environment. This requires us to replace the dualist view of body and mind with a notion of her body as an interlaced system in which, as Andrew Weir phrases it, “different parts were connected to each other by veins, arteries ... and canals like the bile duct. Solids, such as food and faeces, liquids such as the humours (including blood), ... and more tenuous matter such as air, vapours, smokes and the vital and animal spirits all travelled through the body bringing life, health and disease.”¹³ It is this expanded, multilayered body which pervades Margaret’s writings as her conduit to God. She experienced her body as a porous matter deeply affected, as will be shown in this introduction, by her bodily fluids, food, and environment, as well as by nonphysical forces such as demons, the devil, Christ, the dead, and others who could concurrently or intermittently inhabit it. The vocabulary with which she described the resulting sensations emphasizes this experience of her body as permeable and transmutable. She felt her body, for instance, on occasions to have been exchanged for another, to have been pierced or turned inside out, or the heaviness of pain pouring through it (1635 *Autobiography*, 88, 97, 98, 107, 122; 1636 *Diary*, 161, 1637 *Diary*, 228).

Within the series *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe*, Sister Margaret therefore addresses rarely treated topics and issues of female writing. Her texts and the documented reactions to them are an important heritage of female religious culture in the seventeenth-century Low Countries. They record the experience of conflicting entities such as Protestant vs. Catholic, burgher vs. nobility, Flemish vs. Spanish, convent community vs. individual, the medical and religious communities and their understanding of the healthy vs. the sick, the sacred vs. raw biology, etc. Margaret’s writings register this encounter of differing groups and experiences at the social, linguistic, and spiritual-emotional levels. However, Sister Margaret also shows us that these demarcations are not absolute. Their blurring creates the picture of an extraordinarily complex historical reality in which an individual such as Margaret could creatively forge an identity that transgresses boundaries. For example, the attestation of the nobly born Sister Magdalena Florencia de la Cruz of Margaret’s divinely inspired assistance to her miraculous cure from muscle weakness illustrates how a lowly lay sister like Margaret could become a spiritual role model and inspirational friend to a woman who was so decidedly above her in station and rank (Appendix B5). The geography of the kitchen and her detailed recording of illness and pain disclose the indelible meshing of spirituality and medicine in female religiosity beyond generalized, bodily experiences down to the microlevels of the very fluids and fibers of her body. For Margaret, her body was a mere sack of putrefying matter whose indomitable desires had to be battled. Yet, her flesh could also transmute into much more. Whether in its very pain-wracked state of physical and mental

13. Andrew Weir, *Knowledge and Practise in English Medicine, 1550–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 134.

illness or in its strong state of health, Margaret ultimately took pride and joy in her body as a tool for God.

A Life in the Midst of the Eighty Years' War

Margaret's early family life was profoundly affected by the Eighty Years' War (also called the Dutch Revolt), so called because it lasted from ca. 1568 to 1648. This protracted conflict pulverized the old religious-political structure of the Low Countries. Like other conflicts in early modern Europe, the Dutch Revolt had a myriad of intertwined constitutional and religious causes. At the end of the fifteenth century, the Low Countries were not a political unity, but a loose conglomerate of seventeen provinces, each consisting of quasi-independently ruled counties and cities, roughly the area of present-day Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and part of Northern France, ruled by the dukes of Burgundy of the House of Valois. The most important areas were the county of Flanders and the Duchy of Brabant in the south and the counties of Holland and Zeeland, the Prince-Bishopric of Utrecht, the Duchy of Guelders (roughly present-day Gelderland), and the Lordships of Friesland and Groningen in the north (see fig. 2). With the marriage of the last descendant of the house of Burgundy, Mary I of Valois, Duchess of Burgundy (1457–1482), to Maximilian I of Habsburg (1459–1519), emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, in 1482, the provinces were absorbed into the domains of the House of Habsburg.¹⁴ Through a two-pronged strategy of negotiation and military coercion, Maximilian's grandson, Charles V of Habsburg (1500–1558), emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and king of Spain, had united all seventeen provinces under his rule by 1543.¹⁵ The cornerstones of his political approach were administrative centralization, the enforcement of taxation, an organizational reform of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands and

14. This excluded the Duchy of Burgundy itself, which, with an appeal to Salic law, had been reabsorbed into France upon the death of Mary's father, Charles the Bold.

15. Bob Haak, *The Golden Age: Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, rev. ed. (Zwolle: Waanders Publishers, 2003), 14. For an interesting comparison of the causes of the revolt in the Netherlands and the Wars of Religion in France, see Henk van Nierop, "Similar Problems, Different Outcomes: The Revolt of the Netherlands and the Wars of Religion in France," *A Miracle Mirrored: The Dutch Republic in European Perspective*, ed. Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26–56. For overviews of the Eighty Years' War, see Peter Geyl, *The Revolt in the Netherlands, 1555–1609*, 2nd ed. (London: Benn 1980); Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (London: Penguin Books, 1980); Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 184–96; Graham Darby, ed., *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt* (London: Routledge, 2001); Paul Arblaster, *A History of the Low Countries* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 96–132. Helpful editions of key primary sources include Peter Limm, *The Dutch Revolt* (London: Longman, 1989); and Martin van Gelderen, *The Dutch Revolt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).



Fig. 2) Map of the seventeen provinces of the Low Countries in 1609 (Peter Sutton, *The Spanish Netherlands*, 106).

the defeat of Protestant heresies which, after initial repression, were tolerated by local authorities and had rapidly gained ground, in particular among the lower nobility.¹⁶ The imposition of a more centralized system of government infringed

16. The Protestant heresies in question were those of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the Anabaptists (who rejected the baptism of infants), who had attacked the basic tenets and structures of the Catholic Church as part of the European-wide Protestant Reformation. This vast and diverse movement is generally believed to have been inaugurated when Luther, a German monk and professor of theology,

upon the customary laws and traditions, the so-called ancient liberties, of the individual provinces. These charters of freedom had been granted to them by their Burgundian and earlier medieval lords. Gradually yet inexorably, the implementation of Charles's policies laid the seeds for revolt, which ignited in 1564, nine years into the reign of his son Philip II, king of Spain (1527–1598). Philip pursued a more rigorous enforcement of antiheresy laws and sought to establish an autonomous ecclesiastical organization in the realm via the creation of fourteen new bishoprics (instead of the old three) spearheaded by bishops appointed by the Crown. This push towards an ever more absolutist-leaning royal power threatened to curtail the influence and patronage of the patrician leaders of the towns and the lower and upper nobility.¹⁷ In a New Year's Eve speech, William of Orange (1533–1584, also called William the Silent), one of the foremost nobles of the land, demanded freedom of religion and the abolition of the Spanish Inquisition. The nobility around William, however, soon lost control of Calvinist preachers, who had been incensed by the brutal persecution of Protestants. In the summer of 1566, the preachers called for an all-out attack on the very fabric of Catholic life by inciting the crowds to destroy the numerous religious images found in the churches of the Low Countries. This iconoclasm was followed by two more rebellions against Spanish domination, which erupted successively in 1572 and 1576.

The secession of the provinces from the Spanish Crown deepened when on January 23, 1579, the counties of Holland, Zeeland, and parts of the Prince-Bishopric of Utrecht signed an alliance, the so-called Union of Utrecht, declaring their commitment to act in unison in matters of war and peace. In the same year, this confederation was joined by the city of Ghent, parts of the county of Guelders, the cities of Antwerp, Breda, Ypres, Brussels, and others. The Union of Utrecht was a reaction to the Union of Arras in which southern cities and counties, such as the states of Hainaut, Artois, and later also the Walloon provinces, Namur, Luxembourg, and Limburg, declared their loyalty to the king of Spain. The Union of Utrecht and the Union of Arras were the inception of the split of the seventeen provinces of the Low Countries into the seven seditious northern provinces and the "obedient," mainly Catholic, southern provinces controlled by Spain. Two years later, on July 26, 1581, the provinces in revolt, Brabant, Gelderland, Zutphen, Flanders, Holland, Utrecht, Friesland, Overijssel, and Mechelen, took the radical and unprecedented step of ratifying the Act of Abjuration, which

nailed his Ninety-Five Theses, a critical disputation of church practices and abuses, to the doors of the All Saints' Church in the German town of Wittenberg, on October 31, 1517. See Andrew Johnston, *The Protestant Reformation in Europe* (London: Longman, 1991); Donald K. McKim, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Andrew Pettegree, ed., *The Reformation World* (London: Routledge, 2000); Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

17. Arblaster, *A History of the Low Countries*, 126.

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officially deposed Philip II of Spain as sovereign and de facto declared the seven, more northerly provinces as independent. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Dutch Revolt merged into the greater European conflict of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) and was ultimately resolved only two years after Sister Margaret's death with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.¹⁸ A series of peace treaties formally recognized the independence of the seven northern Protestant provinces of the Low Countries from Catholic Spain and their status as a new nation state, henceforth known as the Dutch Republic, while the "obedient" southernmost provinces evolved into modern Belgium with the constitutional concept of monarchy preserved.

The conflicts underlying the Eighty Years' War revolved around the basic ideologies, practices, and beliefs of early modern societies, in short, the (fundamental) mental grid of a person's identity in this period. Not only the very nature of the constitutional relations between prince and subject were debated, but the tenaciously fought military struggle ripped communities apart and generated ever-changing frontiers and borders.¹⁹ For example, Antwerp, the largest city and the Low Countries' economic and financial center, was sacked November 4, 1576, when unpaid Spanish soldiers mutinied. They plundered the city killing more than eight thousand people and burning down eight hundred houses in what has become known as the "Spanish fury."²⁰ Consequently, Antwerp became proactive in the anti-Spanish revolt and joined the Union of Utrecht only to be reconquered by Alessandro Farnese (1545–1592), governor general of the Spanish Netherlands, after a year-long siege lasting from July 1584 until August 1585. The borders imposed by military outcomes cut across confessional and linguistic divisions, thus reinforcing political fragility and generating large refugee populations and exiled communities beyond the Low Countries throughout the period.²¹

18. Klaus Bussmann and Heinz Schilling, eds., *1648, War and Peace in Europe, Volume 1: Politics, Religion, Law, and Society* (Münster: Westfälisches Landesmuseum, 1998); Peter H. Wilson, *Europe's Tragedy: A New History of the Thirty Years' War* (London: Penguin, 2010).

19. For example, the 1581 Act of Abjuration stated that the power of the prince rested in his subjects. In short, royal authority was contractual and not absolute: "God did not create the people slaves to their prince, to obey his commands, whether right or wrong, but rather the prince for the sake of the subjects (without which he could be no prince), to govern them according to equity, to love and support them." *The Library of Original Sources, Volume 4: 9th to 16th Century*, ed. Oliver J. Thatcher (1904; repr. Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 190.

20. See, for example, Geoffrey Parker, "Mutiny and Discontent in the Spanish Army of Flanders, 1572–1607," in *Spain and the Netherlands, 1559–1669: Ten Studies*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (London: Fontana, 1979), 113 ff.; Peter Arnade, "The City Defeated and Defended: Civism as Political Identity in The Habsburg-Burgundian Netherlands," in *Networks, Regions, and Nations: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300–1650*, ed. Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 212.

21. Geert Janssen, "The Counter-Reformation of the Refugee: Exile and the Shaping of Catholic Militancy in the Dutch Revolt," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63, no. 4 (2012): 671–92.

Religious institutions such as convents and monasteries were no exception. Many convents in the Low Countries and neighboring Germany were invaded and plundered, leading to a significant number of uprooted religious communities.²² Nuns recorded their experiences of war. A nun from 's-Hertogenbosch (also called Den Bosch), a town in northern Brabant, left us with one of the most graphic accounts of the Spanish sack of the city of Mechelen on October 2, 1572, a royally sanctioned revenge for hosting rebel troops:

And then they entered the city of Mechlin and took everything that they could get. They could have filled 80 ships with the goods they took. This lasted for three days.... They pulled the clothing from the women, the children, the men, the priests, and cut off women's fingers for their rings.... Oh, the lamentation and oppression there was cannot be expressed by any tongue! ... they took all of it, leaving nothing, and great hunger was suffered.... the cold winter is coming and they have little to wear nor beds to sleep in nor money to purchase, for anyone with debtors or rents could not collect, because it was forbidden. Oh, many went away to Antwerp and elsewhere, begging at doors, who had been rich and wealthy. Oh, our dear Lord comfort them and all oppressed hearts!²³

This account illustrates the social fluctuation caused by war where overnight the rich joined the armies of the destitute. However, not only nuns, but also secular Catholic women in the Low Countries picked up their pens to intervene in the religious debates and political events they witnessed. For example, Anna Bijns (1483–1575), an unmarried Antwerp schoolteacher, was a widely celebrated author of anti-Lutheran poems and other verses.²⁴ Indeed, Sister Margaret's 1635

22. The history of Dutch and Flemish nuns and their experience as refugees, immigrants, and exiled communities during this period remains under-researched. However, scholarly publications on English convents in the Spanish Low Countries are available; see Caroline Bowden, ed., *English Convents in Exile, 1600–1800*, 3 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012); Claire Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Paul Arblaster, "The Infanta and the English Benedictine Nuns: Mary Percy's Memories in 1634," *Recusant History* 23 (1997): 508–27.

23. Paul Arblaster, trans. and ed., *The Dutch Revolt: A Chronicle of the First Ten Years by a Nun of 's-Hertogenbosch* (Oxford: Davenant Press, 2001), 24. A nun from the Cistercian abbey of Aywières in Brabant also recorded her experiences of the Dutch Revolt in *Mémoire de ce qui est arrivé à l'abbaye d'Aywières pendant les guerres des ans 1567 et 1568, or Plusiers faits memorables arrivé pendant les guerres depuis l'an 1567 et 1568* transcribed by C.-B. De Ridder, *Analectes pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique de la Belgique* (A.H.E.B.) 6 (1869): 304–27.

24. Kristiaan Aercke, "Word as Weapon in a Holy Mission: Anna Bijns," in *Women's Writing from the Low Countries, 1200–1875: A Bilingual Anthology*, ed. Lia van Gemert, et al. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam

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autobiography has to be counted among these valuable textual source materials on the religious-political conflict of the Dutch Revolt and the Thirty Years' War authored by women.²⁵ The trauma of war and the striving for material and physical security dominate the first part of her 1635 autobiography. It gives an important insight into the political and religious choices individuals and families made in a society undergoing a dramatic shake-up of ancient loyalties and localities.

The spectrum of religious identities in the Low Countries was complex as a result of the European-wide Protestant Reformation.²⁶ Protestants openly criticized and contradicted the Catholic doctrines about life, death, and salvation, which the Church had taught to be unalterable and sacred. Conversions from Catholicism to Protestantism and back again within one family were not uncommon.²⁷ Margaret, however, came from a family with a deep-seated commitment to Spain and the orthodox faith, allegiances which strengthened rather than buckled under the ideological and physical attack by Protestant forces.²⁸ Families like these were particularly motivated by the intense and strict piety of the Catholic Reform (or Counter-Reformation). The cornerstone was the Council of Trent (1551–1563), which reaffirmed the articles of faith, condemned Protestant heresies, and issued reform legislation in response to Protestant criticisms.²⁹ How-

University Press, 2010), 160–72; see also the entry for Katharina Boudewijns in the same volume (222–31).

25. See, for example, Charlotte Woodford, *Nuns as Historians in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); or Nicky Hallett, *Lives of Spirit: English Carmelite Self-Writing of the Early Modern Period* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), 1–6; and Jeanne de Jussie, *The Short Chronicle: A Poor Clare's Account of the Reformation of Geneva*, trans. and ed. Carrie F. Klaus, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

26. See n. 15 and 22.

27. Judith Pollmann, *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565–1641)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 1–12; and the seventeenth-century case-study in Craig Harline, *Conversions: Two Family Stories from the Reformation and Modern America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011).

28. For the formation of Catholic identities in the Netherlands after 1585, see Judith Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520–1635* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

29. The phase after the Council of Trent is therefore referred to as post-Tridentine; John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013); Simon Ditchfield, "Tridentine Catholicism," in Alexandra Bamji, Geert H. Janssen, and Mary Laven, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), 15–31. The standard work for the ecclesiastical history in the Netherlands is Ludovicus Jocabus Rogier's *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de 16e en de 17e eeuw*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Urbi et Orbi, 1945–47). The best scholarly edition of the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent in Latin with facing translation is to be found in G. Alberigo, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: From Nicaea to Vatican II*, trans. Norman Tanner, 2 vols. (London: Sheed and Ward; Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990). For a convenient online edition in the English translation by J. Waterworth of 1848, see *The Council of Trent: The Canons and Decrees of the*

ever, the simple yet fervent Catholicism that Margaret's parents practiced seems to have been born out of family tradition rather than the conscious, intellectual engagement with opposing doctrinal points of view.

By the time Margaret came of age, the spirit of Catholic renewal resonated in the southern Netherlands. In 1598, Philip II settled on consolidating Spanish rule over the remaining ten loyal Netherlandish provinces by devolving power to his eldest daughter, the Infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia (1566–1633) and her husband, the Archduke Albert of Austria (1559–1621), fourth son of the Emperor Maximilian II (1527–1576), who were appointed as co-sovereigns of the Netherlands.³⁰ Albert and Isabel's primary goal was to secure their subjects' confessional allegiance to the Catholic Church and political allegiance to the Spanish crown.³¹ The archdukes spearheaded a comprehensive restoration of Catholic life that quickly erased all trace of the destruction that various waves of iconoclasm and war had wrought upon churches and convents since 1566.

Albert and Isabel brought a Spanish flair to Catholicism in the Low Countries through the promotion of Iberian saints and Spanish spirituality. The importation of the order of St. Teresa of Ávila and her Discalced Carmelite nuns (also later known as the "Spanish Carmel") to Brussels was a cornerstone of this hispanicization of the religious life in Brabant and beyond. St. Teresa, issuing her call for the return to the primal, monastic values of the Carmelites, had become the most prominent, female figurehead within the Catholic Reform movement. Not surprisingly, patronage of the Discalced Carmelite order was a Spanish Habsburg tradition. The foundation of the convent of Teresian nuns in immediate proximity to the archducal residence in Brussels in 1607 was a high profile campaign mounted personally by the Infanta Isabel. This royal convent had a symbolic and practical function: it was, spiritually and socially, an elite foundation under the auspices of the archducal court and a mother house from where the spread of the order into other cities in the Low Countries and Germany was organized. The royal convent was therefore not a frontline community situated in or close

Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent (London: Dolman, 1848), Hanover Historical Texts Project, Hanover College Dept. of History, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent.html>.

30. General introductions to the reign of the archdukes are Luc Duerloo and Werner Thomas, eds., *Albert and Isabella, 1598–1621, 2 vols.* (Brussels: Brepols, 1998); Cordula van Wyhe, ed., *Isabel Clara Eugenia: Female Sovereignty in the Courts of Madrid and Brussels* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica; London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2012). A useful, shorter overview is Peter C. Sutton, "The Spanish Netherlands in the Age of Rubens," in *The Age of Rubens*, ed. P. C. Sutton (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1993), 106–31. For a well-illustrated, wider overview of the history of the Low Countries, see J. C. H. Blom and E. Lamberts, eds., *History of the Low Countries*, trans. James C. Kennedy (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006).

31. For the confessional and dynastic motivations of the archdukes, see specifically Luc Duerloo, *Dynasty and Piety: Archduke Albert (1598–1621) and Habsburg Political Culture in an Age of Religious Wars* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012).

to Protestant territories, but one of the epicenters of the Catholic Reform movement at the heart of the administrative hub of the Spanish Netherlands. On one level, however, Margaret's entry into this convent in 1607 represented a continued engagement with war and its religious dissension. After all, she had joined the aristocratic corps of the Infanta's personal prayer force. This idea of the convent as a powerhouse of prayer cast the nuns into the role of being warriors for God, who prayed for the concerns of the country. Jacques Blaseus (1540–1618), bishop of Namur, expressed this clearly in his funeral oration for King Philip II when declaring that the colleges and convents he founded were “Arsenals and Magazines of munitions and arms ... against the armies of errors and heresies.”³² Yet, on another level, the protection of the convent walls and the fervent quality of her faith were for Margaret the comfort and stability she needed to overcome the trauma of her childhood and the ravages of war beyond.

From Soldiers' Camp to Convent: The Early Life of Sister Margaret

Margaret was born in 1587 at the height of an intense Spanish military offensive during the Eighty Years' War led by Alessandro Farnese against the Dutch rebels. Margaret's father, Sebastiaan Van Noort, was junior officer (ensign) in a German regiment of the Habsburg forces under the command of Colonel Francisco Verdugo (1537–1595). Between 1581 and 1597 Verdugo, in his position as governor of the northeast, led a prolonged attempt to reconquer the northeastern part of the Low Countries for King Philip II of Spain. The campaign, however, began to falter when Alexander Parma's troops were called to France and, under pressure from a rebellious local populace, the city of Groningen fell to the enemy in 1594.

Margaret's birthplace, the village of Farmsum (or Formeshem), is situated directly south of Delfzijl on the very edge of the Netherlands (just across the river Ems from the German town of Emden). It is very likely that at the time of Margaret's birth her father was stationed at the royal garrison in Delfzijl (fig. 2), which had been responsible for the control of the province of Groningen since 1568.³³

32. Jacques Blaseus, *Sermon funebre faict par le Rever[endiss]me évesque de Namur, Messire Jacques Blaseus, aux funerailles du tres catholique, treshault & trespuissa[n]t Prince & Monarque Philippe 2. Roy des Espaignes &c. celebraz en Brusselles en leglise de Ste. Goedele, le dernier jour de dece[m]bre, de lan 1598. en la prese[n]ce du Sere[niss]me Prince André cardinal d'Austrice, gouverneur des Pays Bas, cap. gen. &c.* (Brussels: Rutger Velpius, 1599), 28. For a more detailed discussion of this topos, see Cordula van Wyhe, “Court and Convent: The Infanta Isabella and Her Franciscan Confessor Andrés de Soto,” *Sixteenth Century* 35, no. 2 (2004): 426; Jean Terrier, *Portraits des S S Vertus de la Vierge: contemplées par feue S.A.S.M. Isabelle Clere Eugenie Infante d'Espagne*, ed. Cordula van Wyhe (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, Dept. of French, 2002), xxxiii–xxxvi, with more references to St. Teresa of Ávila's idea that nuns are warriors in the fight against heresy.

33. Wiebe Jannes Formsma, *De Ommelander strijd voor zelfstandigheid in de 16e eeuw, 1536–1599* (Assen, Neth.: Van Gorcum, 1938), 138.

The first part of Margaret's autobiography gives a unique and vivid insight into the life of soldiers' families, which typically followed the army on military campaigns. Margaret's mother and her six siblings (four sisters and two brothers) were largely itinerant, living in a tent and moving about by horse and cart, in constant fear of being bombarded, "overtaken by the enemy," robbed, or raped. Margaret portrays a hectic, indigent family life (1635 Autobiography, 70). The family seems to have battled with a chronic lack of money, time, firewood, or the equipment to prepare food, at times eating raw meat or scavenging flesh off a horse's carcass, shot probably by soldiers in their own desperation to find a meal. Given that Sebastiaan Van Noort was not an ordinary foot soldier but an officer, these privations have to be understood as a consequence of the destruction and chaos of war rather than an indication of the family's low social status or economic destitution. Indeed, Francisco Verdugo himself partly accords the blame for the disastrous outcome of the Friesland campaign to ill-conceived Spanish policy directives and the lack of men and material.³⁴ Margaret narrates how, when helping her father with the preparation of mines and trenches, she was ordered to collect rocks from the streets for the cannon, which lacked proper ammunition. Sebastiaan Van Noort, seems to have been aware that Francisco Verdugo's campaign to repossess the northeastern parts of the Netherlands was ultimately doomed to failure. According to Margaret, he said, "Friesland was sure to revert to heresy" (1635 Autobiography, 66). Mismanaged campaigns were not a new problem. The Spanish Crown was chronically short of money throughout the Eighty Years' War, and soldiers' wages were in arrears. The sack of Antwerp, mentioned above, was only the first of many crises.³⁵

Margaret's parents were both born in cities that remained islands of religious orthodoxy in a Protestant sea. Sebastiaan Van Noort was a native of Waalwijk, a village near 's-Hertogenbosch in the northern part of the Duchy of Brabant (now the province of North Brabant in the Netherlands). 's-Hertogenbosch (fig. 2) was one of the chief cities in Brabant that took the side of the Habsburgs during the Dutch Revolt and only fell to the United Provinces of the north in 1629 after a prolonged siege by Frederik Hendrik (1584–1647), Prince of Orange and stadtholder (or Lord Lieutenant) of Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Guelders, and Overijssel

34. Francisco Verdugo, *Commentaar van Kolonel Francisco Verdugo op de oorlog in Frisa gedurende de veertien jaar welke hij gouverneur en kapitein-generaal was van die staat, etc.*, typewritten manuscript (Edinburgh, 1967), 50–51, 86. There is a Spanish edition on the *Internet Archive*, based on the 1610 publication: *Comentario del coronel Francisco Verdugo: De la Guerra de Frisia, en XIV Años Que Fué Gobernador y Capitain General de aquel Estado Y Ejército por el Rey Don Felipe II, Nuestro Señor* (Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1872), <http://archive.org/stream/comentariodelco00vallgoog#page/n9/mode/2up>. See also Raymond P. Fagel, "Alexander Farnese and Francisco Verdugo: The War in the North-East," in *Alexander Farnese and the Low Countries*, edited by Hans Cools, Krista De Jonge, and Sebastiaan Derks (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

35. For the broader picture of the misery of early modern warfare and its effect on the wider population, see Lauro Martines, *Furies: War in Europe, 1450–1700* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

from 1625 to 1647 (making him the quasi-head of state).³⁶ Her mother, Gertrude Bervarts, came from the little town of Oudmunster, near Oldenzaal (fig. 2), a municipality of the province of Overijssel in the eastern Netherlands, near the border with Germany. Oldenzaal also was an enclave of Roman Catholicism during the Dutch Revolt. It was a part of the Oversticht (Overijssel, Drenthe, and the town of Groningen) which, along with the Nedersticht (Utrecht), belonged to the feudal overlordship of the Catholic diocese of Utrecht. Significantly, Oudmunster was the seat of the oldest chapter in the diocese and as such a focal point of Catholic life.³⁷ It was her mother, according to Margaret, who cared for the Catholic upbringing of her children. The children attended Mass held in tents in the open countryside and recited daily prayers and devotions. Margaret also supplemented her education by reading religious books. Catholic life lived in the midst of the military conflict with the Protestant enemy may have fueled Margaret's piety and given her an identity as a child of war. She herself states that during the difficult early months of her noviciate, "Only the drums of the militia guilds consoled me night and morning, and they cheered and comforted me because I had been raised in war" (1635 Autobiography, 78).

Catholicism, however, not only constituted the family's religious identity, but also represented a means to provide for the four daughters. The Low Countries had a dense topography of convents and monasteries with a great diversity of religious orders. The choice for a young woman like Margaret was considerable, ranging from lay communities such as the Beguines, who lived and worked for their keep in semimonastic institutions without full vows, to the reformed and fully enclosed contemplative orders such as the Unshod Franciscans (also called Poor Clares). Margaret, however, seems to have sought at a very early stage in her life the strictest form of female religiosity, that of a choir nun in a fully enclosed order (see "Enclosure" in glossary). This, as she writes, had been her ultimate aspiration in life, because she "wanted to be safely cloistered in order to serve God" (1643 Letter to Her Confessor, 238). Her wish may not only have been motivated by personal ambition or piety, but also by a psychological need for the protection and privilege of full monastic enclosure after the traumas of a childhood spent in the midst of a brutal and unrelenting war. And yet she was prevented from securing a position as choir nun, either because of her lowly position or because of the threat of Protestant forces overrunning the areas where the convents she

36. 's-Hertogenbosch was one of the Four Chief Cities of Brabant, and only became a bishopric as one of the "new bishoprics" erected by Charles V and Philip II. Although, it suffered sporadic outbreaks of the 1566 iconoclasm, it remained one of the staunch Catholic strongholds in the Northern Provinces long after it had fallen to the Dutch.

37. For Catholic life in Overijssel before and after its occupation by Dutch forces, see Rogier, *Geschiedenis*, 1:224–25 and 543–57. Perhaps, in memory of her mother 'Gertrude', Margaret lists Saint Gertrude among the saints she especially prays to in her autobiography; see 1635 Autobiography, 116 and 136, n. 160.

hoped to enter were situated. Her father ordered instead that the daughters should go to Brabant and enter religious institutions. The insistence on Brabant was not incidental. The area had been reconquered for the Spanish crown by Alessandro Farnese in 1585, as mentioned above, and by the time Margaret arrived in Brussels in 1603 at the age of sixteen to take up a position as a chambermaid, the area was well advanced in the archdukes' far-reaching re-Catholicization.

On August 5, 1606, the Infanta Isabel had despatched a personal invitation to Ana de Jesús (1545–1621), spiritual coworker of St. Teresa of Ávila, to found a convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns in Brussels.³⁸ Ana de Jesús was then the prioress of the Teresian convent in Paris and known to the Infanta from her time at the court in Madrid. On January 22, 1607, Ana, accompanied by five other nuns, arrived in Brussels. In the Netherlands the Discalced Carmelites, initially at least, were perceived as exponents of an especially severe and extreme Spanish manner of piety. This cultural difference could generate risible stereotypes. Margaret reports that her mistress held the exaggerated view that the Teresians were “an austere and penitential Order where they ate only cooking oil and drank water . . . slept on hard beds, . . . did many penances and walked barefoot and were very rigorous Spaniards” (1635 Autobiography, 72). Yet, despite her misgivings, Margaret's mistress was instrumental in inspiring her with Discalced Carmelite spirituality by reading St. Teresa's autobiography aloud to her in improvised translation. Margaret's experience is shared by many other women across Europe whose vocations were owed to the availability of St. Teresa's texts.³⁹ Her mistress also seems to have facilitated the all-important interview with the Infanta Isabel's Franciscan confessor, Andrés de Soto (1552–1621), who assisted with the preparations for the arrival of Ana de Jesús and her sisters.⁴⁰ At a later stage, she also supported the foundation by giving alms, the collection and distribution of which became one of Margaret's duties. Ultimately, Margaret's admission to the royal convent depended on an interview with Ana de Jesús, the newly instituted prioress. The Teresian Constitutions stipulated that a vocation for prayer rather than financial capital should determine the admission process,⁴¹ but the circumstances of the foundation in Brussels hindered full observation of this requirement. The first generation of nuns in the royal convent were mainly recruited from the ranks of aristocratic families, who had close connections to the archducal court and in some cases to the Infanta herself.⁴² Given that preference was shown to

38. Isabel's letter is reprinted in Ana de Jesús [Ana de Lobera], *Écrits et Documents*, ed. Antonio Fortes and Restituto Palmero, trans. Chantal Colonge (Toulouse: Editions du Carmel, 2001), 508–9.

39. Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, 18. For the dissemination of St. Teresa's writings, see 1635 Autobiography, 71, n. 22; and 1643 Letter to Her Confessor, n. 238, n. 269.

40. Van Wyhe, “Court and Convent,” 425–38.

41. CWST, “Constitutions,” 3:224.

42. Terrier, *Portraits*, appendix 2; see also Cordula van Wyhe, “Piety and Politics in the Royal Convent of Discalced Carmelite Nuns in Brussels, 1607–1646,” *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 100, no. 1 (2005):

vocations from the Flemish and Spanish nobility, Margaret failed in her application to be admitted as a fully veiled choir nun. However, Ana de Jesús saw in Margaret, who possessed according to her own description “a large body” and robust nature, the strong and healthy lay sister that the Teresian Constitutions demanded (1635 *Autobiography*, 70, 75 n. 39, 77, 80, 82, Appendix B1).⁴³

The Convent Kitchen as a Social and Spiritual Space

Lay sisters, as Silvia Evangelisti adroitly phrased it, “were admitted to the convent not to run it but to serve.”⁴⁴ The work of a lay sister consisted of menial jobs such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and attending to the sick in the infirmary.⁴⁵ Although choir nuns worked regular shifts in the kitchen and the infirmary, it was not as fixed and permanent an occupation as for the lay sister.⁴⁶ The kitchen was a segregated space possibly in the basement or ground floor, in proximity to the storehouse and the refectory. The convent in Brussels had three lay sisters, two of whom lived outside the convent in order that they might organize the procurement and delivery of food and goods.⁴⁷ Margaret was not only responsible for cooking and cleaning, but possibly also for liaising with the externally housed lay sisters and for ordering and storing the goods.⁴⁸ The life and status of a lay sister was therefore different from that of a choir nun, who lived in full enclosure and had to be sufficiently conversant with Latin to recite the liturgies of the hours and the Eucharist.⁴⁹ Although Margaret’s diary is sprinkled with references in Latin, her spelling mistakes indicate that she had no formal training, while

457–87.

43. St. Teresa of Ávila merely codified tradition when requiring in her Constitutions that “[t]he lay sisters to be received must be strong, and they must be known to have a desire to serve the Lord.... They must wear no veil over their faces, nor may they be given the black veil” (CWST, “Constitutions,” 3:225). A seventeenth-century account of the foundation of the Brussels convent states that Margaret, “une fille fort vertueuses,” was given the religious name “Mother of the God” in commemoration of the Virgin’s appearance to her several years before prophesying her future vocation as a Teresian nun; see ACDC, MS II. 1, *Fondation du carmel de Bruxelles. Copie tirée du livre du P. Louis de S. Therese*, fol. 27r.

44. Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life, 1450–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30; see also Walker, *Gender and Politics*, 20–30, 83–87.

45. No archival documents of Sister Margaret’s exact duties survive, but the register of the lay sister’s daily and weekly chores at the English Carmelite convent in Antwerp is a good point of reference; see Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, 111–12.

46. CWST, “Constitutions,” 3:225. Margaret’s nobly born fellow sister Magdalena Florencia de la Cruz is documented to have worked in the kitchen (Appendix B5).

47. ACDC, MS II. 2, *Copies de l’Acte de foundation du carmel du Bruxelles par Albert et Isabelle*, n. fol.

48. There was, however, the separate office of the “store-room keeper” (CWST, “Constitutions,” 3:225).

49. Ana de San Bartolomé, *Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Darcy Donahue, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 11.

nevertheless understanding their meaning.⁵⁰ This social distinction between lay sisters and choir nuns was also expressed in their habit: lay sisters wore the white veil of a novice, while choir nuns wore a black veil, sign of full profession and as such a mark of the ontologically transformative power of consecration.⁵¹ Lay sisters and novices were also treated as one junior group in the weekly meetings of the chapter of faults which adjudicated the penal code. Neither had a say in the procedures and usually had to step forward first to confess to their failures.⁵² Lay sisters therefore exemplify the friction between the democratic credo of the Teresian conventual model and its actual social stratification.⁵³ However, for some choir nuns a lay sister's service was a spiritual ideal rather than a social necessity. For example, the English nun Sister Winifried of St. Teresa (1622–1740), from the Carmelite convent in Antwerp, voluntarily chose the life of a lay sister over that of a choir nun. The dichotomies between lay profession and full professed choir nuns could be at times inverted.⁵⁴ Sister Margaret's experience also illustrates this relative fluidity of social demarcations in convent communities.

Margaret gives a strong sense of her social and linguistic isolation within the convent community during her first year as lay sister. She could not yet converse fluently in Spanish, the language chiefly spoken by her fellow sisters, and was physically isolated in the kitchen for most of the day (she only seems to have had a “kitchen companion”). The combination of the long absences of Ana de Jesús, who was spearheading the foundation of other convents, and an inexperienced novice sister placed in charge of the junior members of the convent, seem to have aggravated this loneliness. There were other problems to overcome. According to Margaret, her early days and weeks in the convent were shaped by the discord between her lowly status as a still unprofessed lay sister and her trust in her own abilities in matters of household maintenance and management. She accuses herself of vanity when writing that she took pride in her natural inclination for

50. St. Teresa equally strove to comprehend the words of the scripture in Latin without any tutoring. Carol Slade, *St. Teresa of Avila: Author of a Heroic Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 43.

51. Cordula van Wyhe, “The Making and Meaning of the Franciscan Habit at Spanish Habsburg Courts,” in *Spanish Fashion at the Courts of Early Modern Europe*, ed. José-Luis Colomer and Amalia Descalzo (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica; London: Paul Holberton), 1:251–91; Cordelia Warr, *Dressing for Heaven: Religious Clothing in Italy, 1215–1545* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 204–13.

52. For more information on chapter meetings, see 1635 Autobiography, 77, n. 50. For the basic Teresian guidelines on chapter meetings, see *CWST*, “Visitations,” 3:247 and 3:231. See also Paul Arblaster's essay in this volume, 55.

53. For a full discussion of the egalitarian aspects of the Reformed Carmel, see Jodi Bilinkoff, *The Avila of St. Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1989), 123–37.

54. Hallett, *Lives of Spirit*, 19, and for the lives of lay sisters in this community see chaps. 19, 37 and 39.

cleanliness to the extent that she “assumed [she] could do things better than the others, even govern the convent” (1635 Autobiography, 87). However, Margaret’s thrift brought about a conflict with the convent community, and she soon had to present herself to the “chapter of faults.” The emotional stress of being the underclass of the convent found expression in Margaret’s feeling that she was hunted and harassed by the devil and demons. Like any person in early modern Europe, she believed and experienced them to be real and capable of physically and emotionally tempting and torturing her.⁵⁵ Margaret’s vocation turned into feelings of vulnerability and a lack of self-worth when the demons told her that she “would always be the youngest and would have to work hard and everyone would scold and scorn [her] and [she] would not be able to bear it” (1635 Autobiography, 75; see also Paul Arblaster’s essay, 55–56).

Two events radically changed Margaret’s life in the convent. Although she had never been taught how to cook, Margaret soon began to perceive the kitchen as more than a working environment. Adopting the humorous idiom of St. Teresa, Margaret writes about her spiritual experience of the kitchen, that “[a]t times, even with a frying pan in my hand, I feel my soul lifted out of me and placed into God” (1637 Diary, 223). The sensory experiences of kitchen work offered occasions for penitential exercises leading to ceaseless meditations on the Passion of Christ. When near the cooking fire she was reminded of purgatory, and when tired and sweaty she felt especially close to Christ’s exhaustion on the road to Calvary. Margaret describes how she deliberately cleaned the kitchen with her bare hands until her skin was raw, only to aggravate the pain by then rubbing salt into her wounds; how she breathed deeply when encountering a foul smell in order to emulate Christ’s suffering; or how she would deliberately clean drains and the privy with her hands and even put her finger with the bodily excretions of her sisters into her mouth.⁵⁶ Indeed, kitchen terminology pervades Margaret’s text, such as, for example, when she describes how Christ sat in her lap and inflamed her heart greatly with love while she was washing turnips for a meal. In another passage, she even compares her body being sliced open like a turnip during a painful surgery, as will be mentioned later in this introduction. This sanctification of her work environment enabled her to embrace “kitchen work” as her “first calling” (1635 Autobiography, 79). Indeed, Sister Teresa de Jesús repeatedly remarked upon Margaret’s enthusiasm in her testimony when stating that she worked

55. For an introduction to ideas of demons in early modern society, see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 161–78. For a compelling example of the break-down between an individual nun and her convent community in the Low Countries, see the story of Sister Margaret Smulders from the Franciscan Grey Sisters in Leuven by Graig Harline, *The Burdens of Sister Margaret: Inside a Seventeenth-Century Convent*, 2nd abridged ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000).

56. See Paul Arblaster’s essay in this volume for later editions and interpretations of Margaret’s more extreme penances, 12–13.