Glyn Redworth, ed. and Christopher J. Henstock, assoc. ed.

The Letters of Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza. 2 vols. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012. Pp. xlix + 308 + 358. Hb, £195/\$335.

As far as historians of the early modern period are concerned, C. S. Lewis's "mad, bad, or God" argument has pretty much set the parameters for discussion of Luisa de Carvajal, with a slight, less prosaic twist to "mad, bad, or a nun." Yet within that rather confused analysis is recognition that Luisa and her activities were seriously unusual in the religious tumult of early modern Europe.

Born to a wealthy, well-connected aristocratic family in Spain in 1566, Luisa de Carvajal (as she is commonly known) was orphaned at a young age and was subsequently raised with the children of Philip II, including the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, who would go on to govern the Spanish Netherlands. Against the wishes of her extended family, Luisa established what can best be described as a community of holy women (or *beatas*) among whom to live. She and this fledgling community developed extremely close ties with the Jesuits, basing themselves within the Society's Madrid headquarters for a period. Increasingly fascinated by the concept of martyrdom—then a live issue in Europe, particularly in England, and one that had been heightened by the discovery of Rome's catacombs in the latter half of the previous century—Luisa became captivated by the martyrdom account of an English Jesuit, Henry Walpole, written by his countryman, Joseph Creswell, S.J. This interest was further piqued by her move to live next door to the English College at Valladolid, which was founded and staffed by Jesuits, and her growing acquaintance there with Henry Walpole's brothers, in particular Michael.

Convinced that her future lay among England's persecuted Catholics, Luisa travelled to England in 1605 at the arrangement of Michael Walpole, S.J., who made use of the English Jesuits' networks for smuggling people into their home country, where the practice of Catholicism was officially proscribed. Luisa lived in London, sheltering English missionary priests—particularly Jesuits—in her home. Along with several English women who joined her "in community," she collected relics of English martyrs and sent them to the continent, as well as distributing illegal catechetical literature and generally proving to be a nuisance to the Spanish ambassador in London. Luisa died in 1613, and her first biographer was her former confessor, Michael Walpole, S.J. It was his work that was used in the quickly launched efforts to establish the process for her canonization.

Having previously published a biography of Luisa (*The She-Apostle: The Extraordinary Life and Death of Luisa de Carvajal*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Glyn Redworth, along with contributing editor Christopher J. Henstock

and translator David McGrath, presents over 180 letters penned by Luisa between 1598 and her death in 1613. In short, this is of huge service to historians of the early modern period, opening up a wealth of material in English rather than the Spanish language in which it was originally written. The two volumes truly are a goldmine, providing insights into not only religious aspects of the period, but the political and social atmosphere of London more generally. Some insights show how little has changed in 400 years: Luisa at one point complains to the Spanish recipient of her letter about how bad the English food and diet was.

On one level then, this collection is of immense value. Yet there is a caveat: due to the lack of footnotes and the minimal editorial analysis proffered for each letter, the two volumes feel more like a trip to an archive—admittedly a particularly rich one—rather than an interpretive printing of texts. Redworth's short introduction is interesting and admittedly points out that these letters are a companion to his biography; indeed, a prospective reader would need to know Luisa's story to get the most out of the volumes at hand. Regarding the interpretation Redworth does offer in his introduction, this reviewer for one is pleased to see a tempering of his previously expressed conviction that Luisa, rather than Mary Ward, was the trailblazer when it came to unenclosed women religious. His suggestion that the English Jesuits manipulated Luisa, particularly to gain access to her wealth—in Spain, she had directed funds previously allotted for the native Jesuit province to the founding of an English novitiate at Louvain—has several flaws. First, as Victor Houlston has pointed out, there is no surviving evidence of correspondence between Luisa and the English Jesuit master tactician Robert Persons ("Robert Persons's Precarious Correspondence," *JJS* 1.4 [2014]: 544). Second, and more fundamentally, this does not convince as an explanation for what Luisa was up to and why her activities were given such backing. Yes, she was offering a form of public relations for the English Catholic population in an effort to persuade the Spanish to continue to provide financial and diplomatic support, but there seems to be more than that at play. Reading through the letters, Luisa repeatedly serves up prime nuggets of intelligence for her Spanish contacts on wide-ranging matters, most notably English political treaties and marriage negotiations, not to mention events in Ireland. She even offers advice on how to proceed in light of these pieces of information. Far from being a mad gossip, she appears to have been serving multiple functions.

As with any translation, there are editorial calls to be made. The most contentious of these is the decision by Redworth and McGrath to render the Jesuits as the "Company of Jesus," so frequently referred to as "the Company." Apart from this making them sound like an adjunct to Mary Ward's companions, this does raise questions about the interpretation of early modern terminology, as

it seems highly unlikely that Luisa really intended this understanding of her phrase. There are also a few errors: for example, at one point the Benedictine George Gervase is incorrectly identified as a Jesuit; unlike the ironically titled Little John of Robin Hood folklore, the Jesuit lay brother Nicholas Owen earned his moniker because he really was small in stature; and the term “transubstantiated bread” will probably cause historians of religion sleepless nights.

Nevertheless, if the reader is willing to treat *The Letters of Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza* as a trip to a wonderful archive, they will be richly rewarded.

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