

Through these books, we at Luther are working to provide inclusive scholarship in the areas of Bible, history, and theology. We hope you enjoy reading more about these books in the following reviews.

Jennifer Wojciechowski
Luther Seminary

THE HABIT OF POETRY: THE LITERARY LIVES OF NUNS IN MID-CENTURY AMERICA, by Nick Ripatrazone, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023. 125 pages. \$28.99.

The Habit of Poetry by Nick Ripatrazone explores the lives of five nuns over the introduction and four chapters. Ripatrazone's goal was to highlight the literary contributions of nuns in mid-century America, a demographic often overlooked and misunderstood by both literary scholars and broader American society. The book straddles a line between serving as a work of mid-century religious and literary history and a biography of five individual sisters.

The overall structure of the book devotes the introduction to Sister Mary Madeleva Wolff, and one chapter each to Jessica Powers, Sister Mary Bernetta Quinn, Madeline DeFrees, and Sister Maura Eichner. Ripatrazone is careful to explore the personal history of each nun, as well as exploring their relationships with their faith, their religious living, and the literary world of the mid-century. While they did not cohesively or intentionally write together as a cohort, they were all contemporaries who corresponded and knew of each other's works and careers.

The book struggles to be cohesive. Attempting to allow each sister's work to stand on its own without relationship to the other sisters detracted from the author's efforts to highlight this as a "literary renaissance," as the dust jacket description promises. Regrettably, he also fails to engage with a systematic exploration of the world these sisters interacted with. He quotes a literary critic who was surprised at the size and accolades of the works coming out of private liberal arts women's schools run by nuns, and "in the spirit of charity" defends his remarks as "incredulity of scope rather than expectations of gender" (66), explaining that the reduced faculty, student populations, and fundings were seen as a limit while refusing to glance at why women's colleges would be underfunded or poorly staffed.

Where *The Habit of Poetry* excels, however, is in humanizing and celebrating the biographies of the nuns. Each sister is given space to shine in this book, with profiles following them from childhood through the height of their literary career. With nuns often poorly understood by broader American culture and society, this book allows them to be real human beings who struggle with faith, career choices, a sense of purpose, and recognition—all without detracting from or minimizing their faith or vocation. The book also excels at highlighting a self-conscious effort by religious and lay Catholics to confront and change anti-Catholic attitudes in American culture more broadly. Ripatrazzone pays careful attention to the position faith plays for each author, and to their relationships with it.

This book is a good resource for people interested in exploring the personal lives of religious sisters, or in finding more poets to explore in depth. While it struggles to offer deeper insights in some areas, it nevertheless would be a good read for those interested in religious poetry or religious living.

Bryant Kumlin
Minneapolis, MN

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