

## From Silence to Advocacy: Identity and the Written Word in Medieval and Early Modern Italian Convents.

Dissertation Defense: Anna Love

This project uses multiple cultural forms of communication – iconic works from Dante to Tarabotti, sermons, rules, letters, and treatises – to examine the movement from silence to advocacy in the written expression of identity among Italian female religious from the early 14th until the mid-17th century. This is not a seamless trajectory. We find instances of advocacy for anomalous female religious identity in the Trecento and imposed silence in the Seicento. And yet, due to the rise in female literacy – especially in their ability and need to write – we can trace a progression from relative silence in early historical and literary views of nuns' lives to strident advocacy voiced by female religious for the expression of their identities as more than “brides of Christ”. From their origins as simple recorders of convent finances and writing to patrons and family, the female religious also began writing for recreation, the education of novices, and to preserve convent memory, history, and privileges for future sisters. Their appropriation of the written word increased with time and in privileged locales, and with it their ability to document and more clearly define and control their identities.



This study examines the treatment of nuns in early Italian literature and traces how female religious adopted roles in the production and dissemination of texts. It suggests that nuns' conquest of the written word took many forms – not all of them perhaps considered “literature”. The case studies from Giordano da Pisa and Dante to the letters of Scolastica Rondinelli and the treatises of Arcangela Tarabotti demonstrate what we can document as the leading roles of female religious in the appropriation of the written word to express female rather than purely institutional identities.

Friday, May 4, 2015

9:30 am

Indiana Memorial Union

Sassafras Room

### Committee

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