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Santa Teresa's Ecstasies: Pain and Pleasure  
in Counter-Reformation Spain

by

Beatriz Urrea

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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Chairperson of Supervisory Committee

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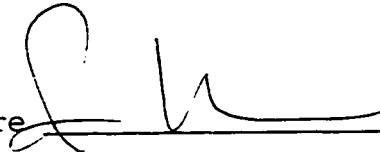


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University of Washington

Abstract

Santa Teresa's Ecstasies: Pain and Pleasure  
in Counter-Reformation Spain

by Beatriz Urrea

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In this dissertation I analyze the presence of the body and desire in the writings of the Spanish mystic, Santa Teresa de Avila. Such presence is perplexing if we consider that the author experiences and writes about her intensely physical encounters with the divine in the midst of the Spanish Counter-Reformation, a period marked by a mistrust of unorthodox religious experiences, women, and female sexuality. Through her adult years Teresa de Avila is subjected to the constant scrutiny of ecclesiastic and inquisitorial authorities, and perceived by many of her contemporaries as a "loose" and dangerous woman. But only thirty-two years after her death, the once chastised nun is suddenly beatified, and then canonized.

Following Alison Weber's argument in Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity, that Teresa's sudden canonization occurs in great measure because of the writer's astute rhetorical manipulation of her audience, I analyze the salient eroticism in Teresa's accounts of mystic union vis-a-vis the coercive atmosphere that surrounds her. It is my contention that the writer brings in pain as she speaks of the delights of mystic union. In this way she mutes, and yet subtly maintains, the existence of a corporeal pleasure that comes dangerously close to a female sexuality both censured and feared in Counter-Reformation Spain.

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*To my parents, Marta and Jaime,  
with gratitude, admiration, and love*



## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the presence of the body and desire in the writings of medieval female mystics has been the focus of much attention.<sup>1</sup> Most of the studies that have been published center on the period we know as the High Middle Ages (twelfth through fifteenth century), and on the geographical area of Western Europe, with the noticeable exception of Spain. Spain's exclusion from these studies can be accounted for by the late arrival to the Iberian country of the intense wave of mystical enthusiasm that sweeps over Western Europe at the time. Although the reasons for this phenomenon have not yet been adduced sufficiently, such a delayed arrival most likely has to do with Spain's partial isolation from the rest of Western Europe during its long tenure as a culture where Christianity, Judaism, and Islam coexisted.

Significantly, the wave of mystical fervor reaches Spain as the Jewish and Islamic populations are forced either to convert to Christianity or face expulsion from the country, and as a series of formerly separate kingdoms unite into what is to become the first modern state. Spain's early entrance into modernity carries with it changes that affect the general fabric of society, and especially the situation of women. As the state

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<sup>1</sup> See the works of Caroline Walker Bynum, Karma Lochrie, and Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, to mention but a few.

consolidates and unifies its power, it relies on extracting powerful individuals from their groups and granting them special favors, hence creating alliances that lessen organized opposition to the Crown. These individuals are almost without exception male. Women witness at this time the weakening of the power and influence they had enjoyed in their communities as mothers and keepers of the land. They are socially displaced as secondary and inferior. Indeed, they become a major ideological threat, that "other" that through seductive ways may lure the male individual away from his commitment to the emerging state.

As the sixteenth century progresses, the all-powerful Spanish Empire must contend with the antagonism of newly-forming Western European nations, and with the menace of the Protestant Reformation. Thus begins in Spain the period we know as the Counter-Reformation, a century and a half (mid-sixteenth to late-seventeenth) marked by war, economic decay, and a growing hostility to women and female sexuality. This is the world in which Teresa de Avila reaches adulthood.

Teresa de Avila, foundress of the Discalced Carmelites and a woman of great charm and intelligence, is also a mystic who experiences with and through her body the delights of divine union. Teresa's mystical encounters often are accompanied by visible physical manifestations: moans, cries, and even levitation. And her writings speak

of her experiences in a vividly corporeal language. The author's audacity, at a time when women and female sexuality are intensely censored, does not come without a price. She has to contend with several inquisitorial investigations and vicious gossip about her "reputation," particularly as it pertains to her relationships with confessors. But although such persecution plagues her through her adult years, she surprisingly manages always to come out intact. And, astonishingly, she is beatified only thirty-two years after her death.

In her recent work Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity, Alison Weber addresses the phenomenon of Teresa's sudden beatification and canonization after a life of conflict with ecclesiastic and inquisitorial authorities. Weber points out Teresa's cleverness as she delineates a series of rhetorical strategies the writer uses to manipulate her many readers. Through emphasizing her ignorance, humility, and lack of sophistication, Weber contends, Teresa is able to write what she wants, and yet persuade her readers of her "feminine inferiority" and innocence.

In this work I will be following Weber's idea of a rhetorical strategy consciously adopted by Teresa, as I discuss the mystic's vividly corporeal accounts of mystic union in light of her "reputation" and the increasingly misogynous environment in Spain. It is my contention that

the mystic writer brings together pleasure and pain in an effort to mute the former and minimize the salient eroticism of her accounts, and hence make these palatable to ecclesiastic and inquisitorial authorities. This fusion of pleasure and pain is prominent in her first, autobiographical text, La vida (1562). However, through three inquisitorial investigations and increasingly harsh gossip, the writer becomes aware that she must further diminish the presence of the body and desire in her writings. And so in her last mystical text, Las moradas (1577), pain and pleasure remain, albeit considerably weakened by a series of new and competing strategies.

In the chapter that follows I introduce Teresa's strategy of fusing pain and pleasure, as it appears in her famous account in La vida of the "transverberation" by the angel. I also address Gian Lorenzo Bernini's sculpture portraying this event, and contrast it with the virtual lack of renderings by Spanish artists of Teresa and the angel around the time of her beatification and canonization. In the second chapter I consider the role of the body and pleasure in the mystical tradition that informs Santa Teresa. I continue in the third and fourth chapters with a discussion of the transformations that take place in Spanish society as it enters into the modern era, and how these transformations affect women, the religious arena, and Teresa's life. And finally, in the fifth and

sixth chapters, I analyze the Castilian writer's two major mystical works, La vida and Las moradas, focusing on her strategy to blend pleasure and pain in order to say what she must while still protecting her order and herself from the Inquisition's insistent and watchful eyes.

## CHAPTER I

### THE TRANSVERBERATION OF SANTA TERESA: PLEASURE, PAIN, AND REPRESSION IN ART AND TEXT

Batter my heart, three person'd God. . . .  
Take me to you, imprison mee, for I  
Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

- John Donne  
*Holy Sonnets XIV*

#### I. Corporeality and the Language of Desire in Religious Ecstasy: The Mystical Tradition that Nourishes Santa Teresa

The experience of religious ecstasy, as described by mystics of most religions, is the culmination of the soul's complete surrender to what it perceives as the one transcendent entity, the source of all life. This surrender is customarily viewed as an act of love generated by the soul's desire to unite with its creator:

Attraction, desire, and union as the fulfillment of desire; this is the way Life works, in the highest as in the lowest things. The mystic's outlook, indeed, is the lover's outlook. It has the same element of wildness, the same quality of selfless and quixotic devotion, the same combination of rapture and humility. (Underhill 89)

Desire appears in the Greek, "Oriental," and Christian sources of Christian mysticism, as the force that generates

and nourishes both the movement of the human soul toward God, and of God toward his creation. The image that best expresses this motion initiated and sustained through desire is the mystic circle. This image appears in Plato, continues its trajectory in Plotinus, and is finally absorbed into Christianity through Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite. Essentially, the image of the mystic circle presupposes the existence of a single source of being from which derives all creation, a creation that is capable of returning to its maker. To visually simplify this abstract notion, we can picture the source of being at the zenith of the circle. As the source of being desires to create something other than itself, it moves out of itself in a downward progression that culminates at the nadir of the circle with the creation of the physical world. The physical world of multiplicity, in turn, desires to reunite with its maker, and thereby initiates its upward movement of return toward the zenith, the one. As the unity becomes multiplicity in the process of descent, so does spirit become matter. Likewise, as the multiple becomes one in the process of ascent, so does matter become spirit. The process of descent and ascent is a never ending cycle, just as the circle is a symbol of eternity. Therefore, the source of being and its creation, and the worlds of spirit and matter, although different, are one and the same forever.

The mystic, as a passionate lover, seeks to reach a state of perfect consummation of his or her love for God. The path to be followed will be a spiritual journey that will increasingly distance itself from the world of matter: the journey of ascent delineated in the image of the mystic circle. But, as Plato reveals through Socrates' voice in Phaedrus, the process of apprehending the ultimate idea or Form of Beauty--the source of being--is generated by the physical desire that flows when the lover sees the beloved (92-98). In the same way, the journey of the mystic begins in the world of physical matter. Thus, in the early stages of the journey, while in prayer, the Christian mystic's desire for God's love often finds as its immediate object the image of Christ in all his physicality. But more importantly and paradoxically, since the path that leads to God marks a growing separation from the world of matter, the body often remains present at the higher stages of the mystical journey in the form of pain, and in some cases in moments of physical pleasure.

This presence of the body is unmistakable in the writings of Santa Teresa de Jesús, also known as Santa Teresa de Avila (1515-1582). In her autobiography La vida (1562), the Castilian Saint describes her mystical journey as a long and painful process initiated after a disease that nearly kills her. It is this realization of her own extreme physical frailty that drives her to seek the love



of God. Following the teachings of the Franciscan monk Francisco de Osuna in his Abecedario espiritual (1527), Santa Teresa embarks on the path of mystic ascent progressively through the prayers of recollection, quiet, and union (Peers 16). The three forms of prayer are meditative states whereby the soul gradually distances itself from the world of the senses to finally become united with God.

As had been the case with most medieval Christian mystics, Santa Teresa adheres to the doctrine of *imitatio Christi*, which maintains that by emulating Christ's human life, the Christian believer is able to establish an intimate relationship with God. Focusing on the image of Christ, preferably the image of the Christ who suffers in the flesh for man's spiritual salvation, and experiencing in her own self that suffering, Santa Teresa is able feel God's presence and surrender to his love. In Camino de perfección (1564),<sup>1</sup> the book she wrote as a spiritual and community guide for the order she founded, the Discalced Carmelites, Teresa advises her nuns to begin the process of recollection by looking at Christ: "No os pido ahora que penséis en El, ni que saquéis muchos conceptos, ni que hagáis grandes y delicadas consideraciones con vuestro entendimiento; no os pido más que le miréis" (XLII: 274).

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<sup>1</sup> This book underwent two subsequent revisions by Santa Teresa herself, in 1569 and 1579. I am following the first version, completed in 1564, and known as the Códice del Escorial.

But while most other mystics abandon their reflection on the physical humanity of Jesus in advanced levels of prayer, Santa Teresa resists, for, as she states in La vida, "Esto de apartarse de lo corpóreo bueno debe ser, cierto, pues gente tan espiritual lo dice; mas, a mi parecer, ha de ser estando el alma muy aprovechada, porque hasta en esto, está claro, se ha de buscar el Criador por las criaturas," and she adds, "nosotros no somos ángeles sino que tenemos cuerpo" (XXII: 101).

As Santa Teresa attempts to recount a reality that all mystics describe as "ineffable," she draws from a long literary tradition of Christian mysticism, and thus embraces the language that best describes religious rapture: the language of love. Santa Teresa's earlier literary renderings of her mystical journey are permeated by expressions of desire and pleasure, and by a corporeality, both literal and figurative, that is problematic when considering the volatile environment that surrounds her. Yet, as we shall see La vida, this unequivocal presence of a language of corporeal desire and pleasure most often appears mitigated by its coexistence with expressions of physical pain and suffering. Through this strategy, Santa Teresa attempts insistently, although not always successfully, given the very corporeality of

pain and its intricate relationship with pleasure, to erase any hint of sexuality from her text.<sup>2</sup>

But significantly, this strategy undergoes a transformation in her later work, the mystical treatise Las moradas (1577). Here we witness the Castilian mystic's effort to minimize the presence of the body altogether, in its experience of both pleasure and pain. As I will argue throughout this study of Teresa's two major mystical texts, the shift is intimately linked with an intensifying obsession with female sexuality and the need to control it in the Spain of the Counter-Reformation. And more precisely, it is directly related to accusations of sexual improprieties leveled against Teresa in Seville in 1576 and brought before the Inquisition. Santa Teresa succeeded in defending herself and her order, but the events deeply marked her and her literary rendering of the participation of the body in the mystical experience.

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<sup>2</sup> The relationship between pain and pleasure is explored by numerous thinkers. As we will see in the following chapter, Saint Augustine comments on the heightening of physical pleasure that may be provoked by the experience of pain. Centuries later the Marquis de Sade scandalously probes into the sexual dimension of the same dynamics, eventually labeled "sado-masochism" in part after him (see Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings). In the psychoanalytic arena, Freud's disciple Wilhelm Reich writes extensively about the dynamics between pleasure and pain, and identifies the two experiences as belonging to the realm of the physical and the erotic, not as opposites, but as the two ends of the same spectrum (see Character Analysis).

## II. Santa Teresa's Transverberation

The complex literary portrayal of a divine pleasure that seems uncontainable within the boundaries of spirit is never more graphically represented than in Santa Teresa's famous account of her "transverberation" or transfixing by the angel in chapter XXIX of her autobiography, La vida:

Quiso el Señor que viese aquí algunas veces esta visión; veía un ángel cabe mí hacia el lado izquierdo en forma corporal, lo que no suelo ver sino por maravilla. Aunque muchas veces se me representan ángeles, es sin verlos, sino como la visión pasada, que dije primero. Esta visión quiso el Señor la viese así. No era grande, sino pequeño, hermoso mucho, el rostro tan encendido que parecía de los ángeles muy subidos, que parecen todos se abrasan. Deben ser los que llaman querubines, que los nombres no me los dicen; más bien veo que en el cielo hay tanta diferencia de unos ángeles a otros, y de otros a otros, que no lo sabría decir. Veíale en las manos un dardo de oro largo, y al fin del hierro me parecía tener un poco de fuego. Este me parecía meter por el corazón algunas veces y que me llegaba a las entrañas. Al sacarle, me parecía las llevaba consigo, y me

dejaba toda abrasada en amor grande de Dios.  
 Era tan grande el dolor, que me hacía dar  
 aquellos quejidos; y tan excesiva la suavidad  
 que me pone este grandísimo dolor, que no hay  
 desear que se quite, ni se contenta el alma con  
 menos que Dios. No es dolor corporal, sino  
 espiritual, aunque no deja de participar el  
 cuerpo algo, y aún hartó. Es un requiebro tan  
 suave que pasa entre el alma y Dios, que suplico  
 yo a su bondad lo dé a gustar a quien pensare  
 que miento. (131)

The passage brims over with passion and physicality. The moment itself is presented as a corporeal vision. Throughout her works, Santa Teresa describes and attempts to qualify each of her religious experiences within a hierarchical order ranging from less to more advanced in the spiritual path leading to God. In most cases she has visions that fit into one of the three categories delineated by St. Augustine: corporeal, imaginary, and intellectual. The first is perceived through the physical senses, the second is apprehended as an image represented through the inner eye, and the third is grasped directly by the understanding without the aid of the imagination. Even though she usually specifies the type of vision as she is describing it, Santa Teresa, like her early biographers and

the supporters of her canonization, takes care to emphasize that she rarely experiences corporeal visions.

This comes as no surprise, since, in her own words, "Dicen los que saben mejor que yo, que [la visión corporal] . . . es la más baja y adonde más ilusiones puede hacer el demonio . . ." (XXVIII: 123). As we shall see in Chapter IV, the persecution of illuminist sects, the *alumbrados*, and other non-orthodox religious circles is pervasive during Teresa's adult years. Such persecution is justified by Church authorities, who interpret these groups' supposedly intense displays of religious fervor as resulting from demonic possession often linked with sexual licentiousness (Weber, "Saint Teresa" 172). Given the circumstances, it is no wonder that Teresa makes a point of insisting on her virtual lack of corporeal visions.

But the transverberation, which she describes following several imaginary visions of the body of Christ in chapter XXVIII, as a fairly advanced state of rapture, is a corporeal vision, and her body a full participant in the scene that unfolds. Santa Teresa begins her account of the experience by indicating that the angel appears in physical form and to her left side. From the start the mystic establishes the corporeal nature of the event, yet she undermines its prominence by adding that she has had this type of vision--corporeal, that is--only rarely, and

that all her previous encounters with angels have been of the imaginary kind.

After these introductory words of justification for the physical nature of the occurrence, she proceeds to describe the angel's physical attributes: his size, his beauty, the ardor of his face. But her description is suddenly truncated by a rather dry reflection on the angel's place within the angelical family, as defined by Christian dogma and in the canonical work written in the third century by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, The Celestial Hierarchies. The Saint stumbles as she tries to place him in the right category, erroneously concluding that he must be a cherubim (the angel is really a seraphim, "los más subidos" in the hierarchy). This reflection marks a break in the intensity that is just emerging in the narrative through the physical description of the angel. It is as if she has to brace herself by interjecting some critical reflection, or else her words will flow out too quickly and too ardently.

After this interruption, the narrative proceeds: the image of the lance appears, fiery and imposing. Immediately she feels that the angel plunges it into her heart, not once but a number of times, piercing her to her deepest center, and taking her entrails along each time he retracts the lance. The description, of a highly charged eroticism, now flows unrestrained in a crescendo in which pleasure

and pain appear in such proximity that they could become interchangeable. As the angel's fiery dagger penetrates her body, she is left aflame in the love of God. She moans from the pain, but the delight provoked by this pain is such that she does not want it to end: the pain has become pleasure. And now, at the height of this ecstatic moment, Santa Teresa the writer again breaks the flow, once more to justify the undeniable presence of the body and of its very real although dangerous delights. This justification summarizes in one brief sentence the struggle we will see throughout her writings: her need to recount truthfully her mystical experiences, and yet her awareness of the subversive presence of pleasure and the body therein. Santa Teresa excuses herself: "No es dolor corporal, sino espiritual, aunque no deja de participar el cuerpo algo, y aun harto." The pain she is speaking of is the pain that has been and is delight: the pain that is pleasure. At the beginning of this sentence she attempts to reduce the complex experience to pain alone, and define it simply as a spiritual occurrence; but midway she cannot maintain such assertion: the body also participates, and plenty. After this paradoxical and revealing statement, Santa Teresa returns to the experience, and picking up at the climactic moment already achieved, she unwinds the narrative intensity by focusing on the soft sensation of pleasure that remains, the wooing that takes place--"un requiebro



tan suave"--between God and the soul. Curiously, it is the very delight in this wooing what may prove to others the trustworthiness of her account, if God allows them to experience it. Although stylistically this is a rather twisted construction in which she begs God to grant this sensation to her judging audience, in her last sentence she affirms the authenticity of the experience, and the unequivocal and essential role of desire and physical pleasure in this powerful moment of divine rapture.

The image of the transfixed heart was no novelty in Santa Teresa's time. It had been a familiar artistic and literary conceit through Europe in the High Middle Ages and early Renaissance, and was often used as a metaphor for the onset of romantic love: Cupid pierces the lover's breast with an arrow shot from his bow.<sup>3</sup> Santa Teresa's literary portrayal of the transverberation undoubtedly draws from this tradition, presenting a vital rendition reminiscent not only of the wounded Christ in the cross, but also of the sexual act: from the clearly phallic image of the fiery lance, to the angel repeatedly thrusting his weapon into the Saint's heart, to Teresa's moans, and the intensity of her pain/pleasure. The whole event could be construed as a metaphorical portrayal of the moment of sexual union.

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<sup>3</sup> For a full exploration of this topic see Thomas Hyde's The Poetic Theology of Love.

But this erotic intensity is not limited to her literary rendition of one event. Santa Teresa's ecstatic experiences were the focus of much speculation and gossip, for they often were accompanied by visible physical signs. Santa Teresa experienced the transverberation a number of times, the earliest between 1559 and 1562 in the house of her friend Guiomar de Ulloa, and the last at the Convento de la Encarnación in Avila between 1571-74 (XXIX: 180, ft. 1). Marcelle Auclair describes the external manifestations of one such instance in her biography of the Saint. One evening at the Encarnación, Ana Gutiérrez,

one of the nuns in the convent, rushed downstairs on hearing cries and groans coming from Doña Teresa de Ahumada's cell . . . . her countenance was aflame with the glow and radiance of ecstasy; slowly she returned to consciousness of the world around her . . . . When she had been thus transpierced and consumed by divine love, she remained "as it were, stupefied" . . . . She complained of feeling great heat and asked Ana Gutiérrez to cut her hair, to give her some small relief. (96-97)

Teresa's spiritual experience does not simply occur internally, but reveals itself outwardly in her body. The pain and pleasure that she ardently describes in her written account, come forth through her voice, and her face

appears transformed, elated. Immediately after the event her body feels the heat generated by the intense moment of divine love. Such external manifestations, known as *incendium amoris*, were commonly experienced and described by Christian mystics, and were often presented as proof of their sanctity (Sackville-West 5). But in Santa Teresa's Spain these visible signs are regarded with suspicion. They are reminiscent of a female sexuality that poses a major threat to the code of male honor, and that also places Teresa in proximity to the persecuted *alumbrados* (Cruz and Perry xvii-xx).

Her frequent external signs of divine rapture, and the mistaken assumptions of their being sexually motivated, are a source of deep sorrow for the Saint. Not only is she convinced that her experiences are not of a sexual nature and that they are in no way similar to those of the *alumbrados*, she is also perfectly aware of the danger of such mis-judgments. But her ecstatic experiences, often accompanied by external manifestations, will periodically recur during her lifetime, and upon the command of her confessors and in response to the gossip generated by these occurrences, she will have to describe them meticulously in her writings.

Of all her descriptions of the different levels and types of experiences in the mystical journey, the account of the transverberation stands out before our modern eyes

for its insistent physicality, its erotic ardor and vibrancy. Certainly it must have had a similar effect on its earliest readers, namely, Santa Teresa's confessors, who insisted that La vida should not circulate openly, and most importantly, that it should not be read by women, who are more susceptible than men to the seductions of the devil. But in spite of censorship, La vida and Santa Teresa's other works begin to be published throughout Europe only a year after her death in 1582. In a matter of two decades, and following hundreds of miracles brought about through the intercession of relics from Teresa's body, the Castilian nun becomes the object of devotion for Catholics across Western Europe. People desire and request her canonization. Curiously, the transverberation by the angel is cited as solid proof of her sanctity in Pope Gregory XV's 1622 Bull for her canonization: "elle vit un ange lui percer le coeur d'un trait enflammé. Ces faveurs célestes développèrent dans son coeur un tel incendie d'amour qu'elle prononça, sous l'inspiration de Dieu, le voeu héroïque de faire toujours ce qu'elle croirat le plus parfait et le plus glorieux pour Dieu" (qtd. in *Sacré Coeur* 2: 472). Santa Teresa's canonization is granted by the Vatican in 1622. From this time on, the transverberation is the subject of multiple artistic renderings throughout Western Europe, and by the 1640's it is accepted and recognized as Santa Teresa's trademark (Lavin 1: 84).

### III. Bernini's Ecstasy of Saint Teresa

Gian Lorenzo Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* is without a doubt the most famous rendering of the transverberation. The sculptural piece was commissioned in 1647 by Cardinal Federigo Coronaro for his sepulchral chapel in the Roman church of Santa Maria della Vittoria. Upon its completion in 1652, it was met with universal approbation even in Church circles and was regarded as "a highlight on the itinerary of any cultivated visitor to the Holy City" (Bauer 84).

The *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* stands as a dramatic artistic scene where architecture, painting, and sculpture blend into a spectacle of great complexity and beauty. Santa Teresa and the angel appear in the center, set back behind a proscenium-like opening and framed by two large marble columns. Carved in relief on the left and right side walls are two groups of four figures, all members of the Coronaro family. The eight figures sculpted as busts and in a space that resembles a theatre box, bear witness to the scene that unfolds before them. The mortuary pavement of the chapel, in black marble, features two large medallions with skeletons that rise in prayer and exultation toward the figure that looms above. As the eye moves up, it encounters first a small altarpiece with the scene of the Eucharist, and then, as if floating in the

air, the white marble sculpture of Saint Teresa and the angel. Behind them flashes a shower of golden rays that appears to descend from the painted image of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove at the center of the vault. The effect of the rays is heightened by a source of natural light: a yellow-glazed oculus placed in the cupola (Figures 1.1, 1.2). As Howard Hibbard explains in his biography of Bernini, the group of Santa Teresa and the angel

is so situated that we can receive only one view of it, and since it is within a space separate from ours, we cannot tell whether it is precisely in the round or merely a very high relief. Moreover, the natural daylight that falls on the figures from a source above and behind is part of the group as are the gilded rays behind; the whole miraculous vision is produced by a light we do not understand . . . . Bernini shows us Teresa's vision and its source as if by divine revelation. (134-35)

And just as in Teresa's account of the transverberation body and soul participate at once in the experience of mystical union, here architecture, sculpture, and painting lose their traditional independence and join to portray a single moment of divine rapture.

The complex scene revealed in Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* can be interpreted as the timeless motion of

the human soul in search of God, and its completion in a loving union that is both physical and spiritual. In a movement of ascent that parallels the mystical journey and that is followed by the spectator's eye, humanity rises eagerly from the grave in the dark marble pavement; Christ offers his flesh and blood at the altar as a source of eternal life; Teresa's body and soul surrender to this act of love; members of the Coronaro family bear witness; and the love of God in the form of the Holy Spirit descends, bathing Teresa's ecstasy in its golden glow.

Santa Teresa's account of the transverberation is faithfully portrayed in the marble sculpture that stands center stage seemingly suspended in a dreamlike, visionary twilight (Figure 1.3). The saint and the seraph appear to belong to the same sphere of reality, a reality spatially located between heaven and earth. The saint lies on clouds, her upper body is drawn back, and yet straining forward and upward. Her abdomen and chest collapse in a contraction, and her arms and legs are pulled somewhat into the body; the whole pose immediately gives us the impression of a convulsion, a spasmodic and involuntary physical movement. Her lovely head bends back at the neck, as if following and flowing out of the contraction. The eyes are half-closed under heavy lids, and rolled back almost completely "so that the iris is only visible as a faint shadow on the upper edge of the white of the orb"

(Bauer 84). The nostrils seem to quiver, and she appears to be breathing, her mouth warm and moist under the tenuous light, and half opened in a deep moan (Figure 1.4). Her hands burn with agitation; the fingers of the left hand drop down slightly bent and gently reaching down, while in the right hand the cramped curling of the fingers mirrors the contraction of abdomen and chest (Figure 1.5). The feet are tense. The right foot, almost hidden by the thick drapery of Teresa's habit, strongly presses against the cloud that sits beneath her; and the left foot, replicating the gesture of the left hand and completing a movement that extends through the whole leg, strains downward in such tension that the toes draw apart and curl up ever so slightly (Figure 1.6).

The drapery of her rumpled habit resonates with her inner vibrancy, with the strong agitation of her body in its transport (Petersson 93). She is enveloped in flame-like folds of material. The angel delicately lifts her body by grasping her habit with the left hand. And holding the spear with his right, he prepares to thrust it into her heart. The angel's "rostro encendido" is illuminated by a radiant, almost mischievous smile. The feathers in his outstretched wings and the locks of his hair curl upward like tiny tongues of flame (Petersson 101). His dress wraps itself around his body like a twist of flame that flows away from the Saint, in the opposite direction from



the movement that is about to occur. This dislocated motion suggests that, as in Teresa's account, the thrusting of the spear is repetitive. The cherub has already pierced her heart at least once, and prepares to do it once again. The blazing folds of Teresa's garment are broken and irregular, as if animated by a discharge of energy flowing in a diagonal line that extends from the spear through the angel's fiery garments and his left hand into her very heart. And while the highest folds of her habit appear light and buoyant, they grow increasingly heavy as they descend along her body. Teresa, "toda abrasada en amor grande de Dios," is being simultaneously lifted by God's eternal love, and pulled down by the perishable world of matter: she is at once body and spirit. It is in this space that Teresa experiences her divine rapture.

In his portrayal of the transverberation, Bernini poignantly translates into marble Santa Teresa's passionate account. Suspended between heaven and earth, Teresa and her angel come alive, their garments aflame with God's divine love. The seraph's face is radiant, and his body ready to thrust the fiery lance into her heart. Teresa surrenders. Her shoulders and head strain upward, as if lifted by the light that shines down from above. Her neck gives in, and her lips part in a moan that speaks of delightful pain. In this sweet agony, her whole lower body contracts, and the hands and feet tense up, resisting a

force that seems to drag her down. Like Santa Teresa's account, Bernini's sculpture is transparently erotic. The Italian master has captured what the Saint rhetorically tries to conceal, to no avail: her experience of delightful pain is spiritual, "aunque no deja de participar el cuerpo algo, y aun harto."

#### IV. Art and the Transverberation in Spain

Bernini's passionate rendition of the transverberation in *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* is a representative example of post-tridentine art. As José Luis Bouza Alvarez explains in Religiosidad contrarreformista y cultura simbólica del Barroco,

frente al desapego de lo externo y formal,  
propio de la religiosidad paulina y agustiniana  
de los protestantes, de Erasmo y los erasmistas,  
el Concilio de Trento reafirmará el valor del  
auxilio de los sentidos en las manifestaciones  
de devoción, y exaltará - en contraposición al  
interiorismo heterodoxo - el culto a imágenes y  
reliquias . . . (32)

Artistic images now appear excessive in their expression of feeling and emotion, and prove to be effective instruments in the mobilization of the Catholic masses toward what Julio Caro Baroja calls a piety "sin medida ni discreción" (qtd. in Bouza Alvarez 44). In a contraposition typical of

the Baroque, we simultaneously find in the art of this period darkness and light, hideousness and beauty, pain and delight, body and soul. Thematically, we witness a profusion of graphic images of martyrs in all their passion and agony, and saints in the thralls of religious ecstasy. In fact,

L'extase, voilà dans l'art de ce temps la grande nouveauté . . . . C'est par une sorte de fièvre intérieure que l'art du XVIIe siècle diffère de celui du XVe et du commencement du XVIe. Passion, ferveur brûlante, désir éperdu de Dieu allant jusqu'à l'anéantissement, voilà qui remplace l'adorable sérénité, l'amour qui se tait de Fra Angelico . . . (Mâle 199-200)

Both contemporary and ancient saints, dating from Saint Paul the apostle, are now portrayed in moments of religious rapture, in all their physicality, and yet painfully straining to escape their human nature and lose themselves in God (Gutiérrez Rueda 79).

As Emile Mâle affirms in his masterpiece on post-tridentine art, L'Art Religieux de la Fin du XVIe Siècle, du XVIIe Siècle et du XVIIIe Siècle, it is in its depictions of ecstatic mystics that Spain triumphs (201). However, the development of this motif in Santa Teresa's country presents certain peculiarities that are worth noting. In the works of Spanish artists the body often

appears immobile and as if left behind; the experience shows entirely in the face, and specifically in the eyes of the saint (201). This concentration of affect in the small area of the face seems surprising when considering that Spanish art, since the fifteenth century and throughout the period at hand, stands out in Europe for its expressive intensity and tactile quality, often in the form of bloody, lacerated figures (Gómez-Moreno 11). Gregorio Fernández's polychromes of Christ's passion, for instance, are famous for their vivid, even erotic representation of physical suffering. One of these images, *Cristo yacente* (1614-15), comes to mind (Figures 1.7, 1.8):

With its battered and beautiful body and its necrophiliac exaltation of death, it exposes the spectator to the danger of sadomasochistic catastrophe. The eroticized violence inherent in the naked reclining Jesus has always been there as repressed subtext of the Passion in Christian art, but the *Cristo yacente* now has allowed it to become unacceptably overt by representing a dead-but-desirable divinity with an inescapable immediacy . . . . Records show that the owners of this image, the Confraternity of the Vera Cruz, staged yearly reenactments of the Flagellation during Holy Week, and their reverence to the statue presumably echoes their

physical involvement in the staging the event illustrates. As Martín González has demonstrated, a detailed rendition of wounds is recorded as stipulated in confraternal contracts, and other statues by Fernández also conform with the demand for veristic lesions, showing wood encrusted with cork to simulate coagulated blood. (McKim-Smith 22-23)

Considering this graphic emphasis on pain in Spanish representations of Christ's passion and death, the minimal expression of emotion in its ecstatic saints is definitely perplexing. Aside from this enigmatic feature, another intriguing peculiarity in seventeenth century Spanish portrayals of saints in ecstasy is that, while female figures are abundantly represented in the rest of Western Europe, most saints depicted in Spain are male. We thus find Murillo's San Diego de Alcalá, and Zurbarán's and Pedro de Mena's Saint Francis of Assisi, among many others (Mâle 201).

In the case of Santa Teresa, Henri Guerlin, in agreement with other art historians, affirms that "Les artistes sont plu à représenter la réformatrice du Carmel au moment où un ange brandit une flèche, le trait de l'amour divin, qu'il va lui enfoncer dans le coeur . . . . C'est là l'épisode le plus caractéristique" (62). And indeed, as I have already observed, the artistic image of

this most graphic of Santa Teresa's ecstasies appears again and again throughout Western Europe in the seventeenth century: "no hay otra visión más representada ni en la escultura ni en la pintura" (Gutiérrez Rueda 113). But curiously it is almost non-existent in Spain. Laura Gutiérrez Rueda, in her "Ensayo de iconografía teresiana," can account for only five minor depictions of this event in Spain through the seventeenth century, as opposed to twenty-four in the rest of Catholic Europe. Of these five pieces, I have only been able to find a reproduction of the first one that appears in Spain, an engraving for the cover of fray Bartolomé de Segura's Amaçona cristiana dated 1619 (Figure 1.9). The depiction is almost wooden in its lack of emotion. Santa Teresa appears kneeling, her eyes looking down, her arms half-extended, and the angel, at some distance and to her right, shows reduced in size, holding the lance with both hands. It reminds one of a Medieval piece, devoid of the realism so characteristic of Spanish art, particularly in the seventeenth century, and very clearly lacking the intensity in the eyes that is the trademark of Spanish depictions of saints in ecstasy. Two of the other Spanish portrayals of the transverberation, as Gutiérrez Rueda describes them, show Santa Teresa with a little angel, who instead of the lance in his hands holds a pen and a book (113). In contrast with these passionless Spanish renderings of the transverberation, we find in the

rest of Europe not only Bernini's masterpiece, but several other works of art that represent the emotional and physical vehemence of Santa Teresa's own account. Among these are Bernardo Strozzi's and Palma Giovane's paintings from the 1610's, both titled *The Transverberation of St. Teresa* (Figures 1.10, 1.11).

Notably, none of the major painters or sculptors of seventeenth century Spain, not even Zurbarán, "el pintor de los éxtasis" (Gutiérrez Rueda 71), will try his hand at portraying Santa Teresa's vivid account of the transverberation. They rather choose to depict Santa Teresa the writer, by far the most common artistic image of Teresa in her country at the time:

Los pintores españoles del siglo XVII, que tan buenas muestras dejaron de asuntos religiosos, no se esmeraron con Santa Teresa y no hicieron de ella ni un cuadro comparable con el resto de sus obras. No compusieron nada nuevo. Se limitaron a pintar a la Santa recibiendo la inspiración divina mientras escribía. Raras veces nos muestran . . . otra de las escenas más repetidas por otros pintores: la Transverberación. (70)

In contrast with the scant five portrayals of the transverberation, we now find in Spain forty-six dated renderings of Santa Teresa the writer, as opposed to twelve

in the rest of Europe. Major painters like Diego Velázquez, José de Ribera, Francisco Zurbarán, and Alonso del Arco, and sculptors such as Gregorio Fernández, Alonso Cano, and Pedro de Mena, all represent the Saint with an open book and a pen in her hand (Figures 1.12, 1.13, 1.14).

The image also stands as the favored figure of Santa Teresa in all major Spanish processions celebrating her beatification in 1614. Diego de San José, in his description of the celebration in Avila, describes the figure leading the procession as "una imagen de nuestra Santa madre Teresa vestida ricamente: en la mano izquierda, libro y palma; en la derecha, una pluma, insignias de Virgen y Doctora" (qtd. in Gutiérrez Rueda 64). It is interesting to note that in conjunction with the image of Santa Teresa as writer, we find the palm, symbol of virginity (Weber, Teresa of Avila 3).

Curiously, I have only found one mention of an image reminiscent of the transverberation in the beatification festivities that take place in Madrid. This piece was presented as part of a Rebus Contest (Certamen de Jeroglíficos) in honor of Teresa. In the words of a contemporary chronicler:

Pintóse la Santa Madre como niña metida entre unos vapores, o humos delicados, y a un lado una mano que sale de entre unas nubes envaynando una espada, y la Santa como que no yva hazia ella.



Al otro lado una hoguera, y que sobre ella venían del Cielo unos resplandores. De la hoguera salía una cadena hacia el corazón de la Santa que estaba un poco descubierto, desde los resplandores de la hoguera: "Ignem veni mittere in terram". En la cadena "In vi,culis charitatis". La Española: Ahumada tiene el fervor, - que no hay para voz espada, - que ha de ser la que es ahumada, - Mártir del fuego de Amor. (qtd. in Gutiérrez Rueda 118)

The passage is amusing in its witty verbal and visual concepts alluding to one of Teresa's last names, Ahumada. The image itself carries three crucial elements of the Saint's text: lance, fire (*hoguera*), and heart. We are missing, however, the physicality and the implicit eroticism of her account: the angel is absent, and Santa Teresa is depicted as a child and almost invisible amidst the smoke. This portrayal of Teresa as child is reminiscent of the insistence on her virginity in the procession image of Teresa the writer. Teresa is, as it were, de-sexualized. Her heart appears separated from her child's body, and chained to the fire. The hand that brandishes the sword is also body-less. And the caption that seeks to clarify the conceptual intricacy of the image presents the chained, burning heart as proof of her martyrdom, and thus her sanctity. The only piece that

alludes to her transverberation in these national festivities does away with any suggestion of physicality or pleasure and focuses on her tortured, suffering, and disembodied heart.

The notable infrequency of Spanish portrayals of Santa Teresa's transverberation is even more bewildering after the celebration of her canonization in 1622. As the Bullarium romanum shows, during the Counter-Reformation the Catholic Church ascribed great importance to the visions and ecstasies of saints: "extases et visions étaient comme le sceau même de la sainteté . . ." (Mâle 155). The transverberation, as I have already indicated, is cited in Pope Gregory XV's Bull as proof of Teresa's sanctity, and it also appears as the largest image of the Saint in the banners that decorated Saint Peter's Basilica on the day of her canonization in 1622. In this canonical image we find Teresa simultaneously represented as writer and ecstatic mystic: she shows standing next to an open book and pen on her desk, while waiting for the angel suspended on her left to plunge the fiery dagger into her heart (Figure 1.15). As Gutiérrez Rueda points out, "la iconografía de Santa Teresa, como la de todos los santos de su siglo, sigue los temas que más importancia han recibido en la canonización y en los documentos preparatorios a ésta . . . . La transverberación y la Santa como escritora serán, pues, los asuntos más repetidos al tratar de ella" (6). Santa Teresa

the writer, as we have seen, is indeed the subject of multiple artistic representations in seventeenth century Spain, but Santa Teresa transfixed by the angel remains almost invisible. This fact seems almost absurd when we recall that in 1654 Pope Benedict XIII institutes the Transverberation of the Heart of Saint Teresa as one of the feasts of the Roman Catholic Church (Salinger 108).

Before addressing this puzzling phenomenon, I would like to venture an explanation of an issue that remains unanswered and that is clearly relevant: the minimal expression of emotion in the portrayals of ecstatic saints in Spain at this time, in contrast with the excessively graphic representations of Christ's human suffering. As we shall see in more detail in the following chapters, the religious atmosphere in Santa Teresa's country is severely restrictive after the 1520's. In the first two decades of the sixteenth century, and in keeping with the clamor for religious reform that sweeps throughout Europe, Spain sees an opening to new ideas, particularly those of the humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam. These new ideas, which centered around establishing a personal and intimate relationship with God, are soon adopted by some believers who meet regularly to discuss the Bible.

As Martin Luther's reform gains momentum, ecclesiastic authorities in Spain begin to look with suspicion on these groups, mostly known by the names of *alumbrados* or

*iluminados*. And so their persecution ensues. As early as 1525, and throughout the next one hundred and fifty years, they are systematically accused, tried, and condemned by the Holy Inquisition. Very often the accusations focus on their excessive external manifestations of religious experiences, ostensibly leading to sexual improprieties, and perceived as the work of the devil. In view of this situation, it seems reasonable to speculate that artists would choose to minimize the physical signs that often accompany the mystical experience of ecstasy in an effort to avoid suggesting any relation of the saintly to the persecuted *alumbrados*.

If we consider that a significant number of *alumbrados* were women, some of whom took on significant leadership roles by virtue of their ecstatic experiences (Weber, "Saint Teresa" 172), we may begin to understand why women were not depicted as mystics, and why Santa Teresa's transverberation is almost inexistent in seventeenth century Spanish art. As we will see in Chapter III, the social and political developments in sixteenth and seventeenth century Spain contribute to a rising obsession with male honor, *honra*, and to the perception that any expression of female sexuality is a danger, and must therefore be controlled. Given the salient eroticism in Santa Teresa's accounts of her mystical experiences, it comes as no surprise that Spanish artists at the time opt

to portray her in the role of writer. But what of Teresa's writings? How are they able to withstand the insistent scrutiny of Church officials and the Inquisition?

The image mentioned earlier that appears in the 1614 procession celebrating Teresa's beatification in Madrid, may offer some hints as to the posthumous success of her writings, and her beatification only thirty years after her death. In this rendering alluding to the transverberation, we find Santa Teresa's disembodied and transfixed heart chained to the source of fire, standing alone as proof of her painful martyrdom (Gutiérrez Rueda 118). The figure of the martyr in the Christian tradition is revered precisely because it mirrors Christ's human suffering. Santa Teresa is presented here as "Mártir del fuego de Amor": it is her pain that validates her religious experiences, and raises her to the level of sainthood. Significantly, this is a pain that is devoid of corporeality.

In Santa Teresa's account of the transverberation, and in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's faithful rendering of her text, pleasure and pain appear in conjunction. Judging from the multiple artistic portrayals of Christ's lacerated body and this last depiction of Santa Teresa's pierced heart, and considering the influential tradition of *imitatio Christi*, we could conclude that in her time physical suffering was not only accepted but desired as a necessary component of the spiritual journey. However, upon observing the lack of

physicality expressed in Spanish depictions of mystics, and the disembodied quality of Teresa's pierced heart in the rendering paraded in the procession for her beatification, it becomes apparent that corporeality in itself is problematic, and that vivid depictions of the human body in pain may also be considered excessive and inappropriate in Santa Teresa's time and place.

In the Saint's earlier writings on her experiences of mystic union we find that the element of pleasure almost invariably appears juxtaposed with physical pain. This is, I believe, a rhetorical strategy that Teresa adopts in order to minimize the dangerous presence of the body and its pleasure, and thereby to protect her person, her writings, and her order from the scrutinizing gaze of the Spanish Inquisition. Her autobiography, La vida, is approved by her confessors, but Santa Teresa is accused before the Inquisition all the same. After several harrowing encounters with Inquisitorial authorities, perhaps she feels that her strategy was barely sufficient in her first text, and so she proceeds to minimize further the presence of the body, in pleasure and pain, in her later mystical treatise, Las moradas.

In the five chapters that follow I will first discuss the role of the body and the language of desire in the mystical traditions that inform Teresa's experiences and writings. Then, I will address the political, social, and

religious environment of sixteenth century Spain, and its repercussions on the situation of women in general and Santa Teresa in particular. And finally, I will engage in a literary analysis of the rhetorical intersection of pain and pleasure and its dwindling presence in Santa Teresa's accounts of mystic union..

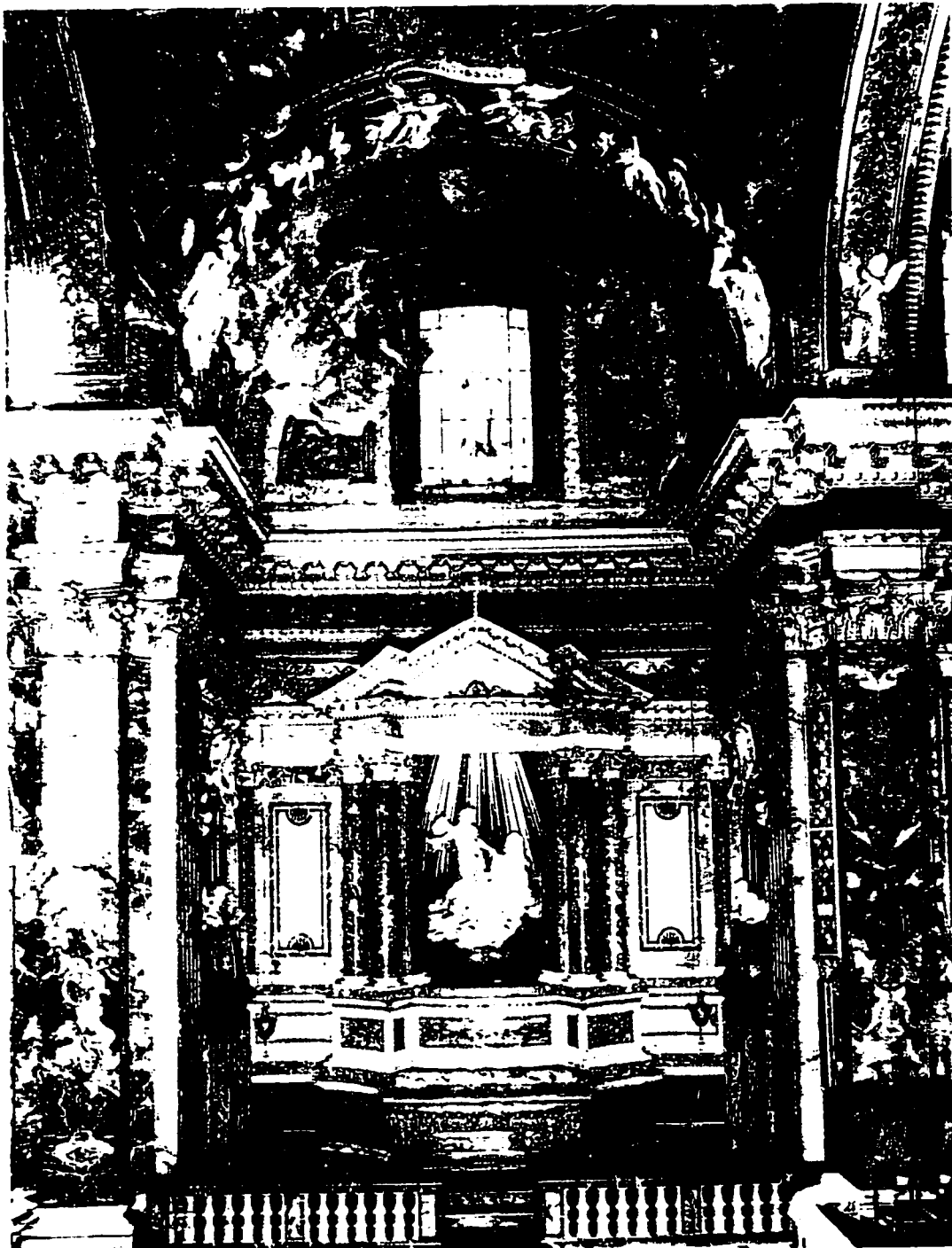


Figure 1.1 - Gianlorenzo Bernini, Coronaro chapel. Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome (1647-52).



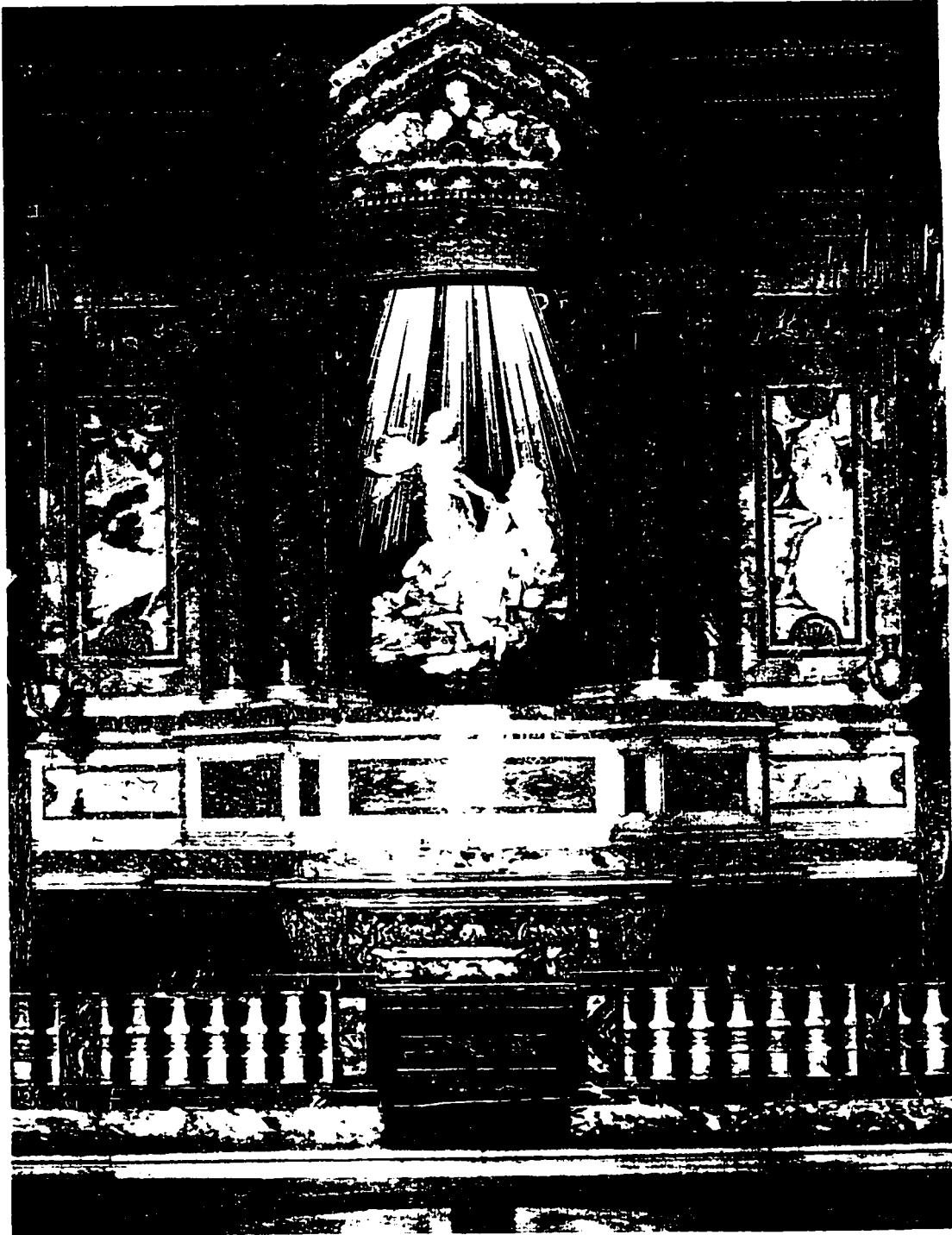


Figure 1.2 - Bernini, Coronaro chapel. Santa Maria della Vittoria.



Figure 1.3 - Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa*, Coronaro chapel. Santa Maria della Vittoria.



Figure 1.4 - Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (detail),  
Coronaro chapel. Santa Maria della Vittoria.



Figure 1.5 - Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (detail),  
Coronaro chapel. Santa Maria della Vittoria.



Figure 1.6 - Bernini, *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (detail),  
Coronaro chapel. Santa Maria della Vittoria.



Figure 1.7 - Gregorio Fernández, Cristo yacente.



Figure 1.8 - Gregorio Fernández, Cristo yacente (detail).



Figure 1.9 - Anonymous, *Transverberation of Saint Teresa*, engraving (De Segura, Amaçona, 1619, detail).





Figure 1.10 - Bernardo Strozzi, *Transverberation of Saint Teresa*.



Figure 1.11 - Palma Giovane, *Transverberation of Saint Teresa*.



Figure 1.12 - Diego Velázquez, *Santa Teresa*.



Figure 1.13 - Alonso del Arco, *Santa Teresa de Jesús*.



Figure 1.14 - Gregorio Fernández. *Imagen de Santa Teresa.*



Figure 1.15 - Matthäus Greuter, *Life of Saint Teresa* (detail).

## CHAPTER II

### DESIRE, THE BODY, PAIN, AND PLEASURE IN THE TRADITIONS THAT INFLUENCE SANTA TERESA'S SPIRITUALITY

#### I. Reading the Mystics: Influences on Santa Teresa's Spirituality

The religious writings of Santa Teresa de Jesús are embedded in a mystical tradition that dates as far back as the Greeks. This tradition informs and influences her experience of God and colors the literary expression of that experience.

It is known that, in spite of continual allusions in her writings to her own ignorance, Santa Teresa was an avid reader (Weber 50; Silverio de Santa Teresa 594). However, references in her work to the breadth of her exposure to spiritual texts are few and far between, and little has been discovered by scholars. Santa Teresa's own reluctance to reveal the extent of her knowledge, and our lack of success in discovering what she avoided telling, most certainly have to do with Counter-Reformation censorship and with this period's growing mistrust of unorthodox religious experiences and of women.

As Alison Weber explains in Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity, in a successful effort to consolidate its power and crush any shadow of religious dissent or threat to its authority, the Inquisition by the middle of the sixteenth century bans the laity's access to

most sacred texts. Women in particular are excluded, as they "were deemed to be mentally incapable of understanding the texts and inherently susceptible to diabolical influence" (29). The complexities of this exclusive ideology will be discussed in the following chapter. For now, these historical circumstances help explain why Santa Teresa would be unwilling to disclose much about her experience and knowledge of mystical texts.

Most of Santa Teresa's comments on her readings appear in her first book and autobiography, La vida. Here we learn that since childhood she is an avid reader of the lives of saints (I:29), and that her first spiritual awakening occurs while reading Francisco de Osuna's Tercer abecedario espiritual (1527) (La vida IV:35). We also discover that she read the Confessions (397-401) of St. Augustine, the Vita Christi (1474) of Ludolf of Saxony ("El Cartujano") and Thomas à Kempis' The Imitation of Christ (c. 1434), and probably also the writings of Catherine of Siena (La vida IX:54; XXXVIII:173; XXII:101). In addition to Osuna, she was also familiar with the works of other Spanish Franciscans, among them Bernardino de Laredo, Pedro de Alcántara, Alonso de Madrid, and Luis de Granada, all of them slightly her seniors.

As we shall discuss in Chapters III and IV, the powerful and yet ambiguous presence of desire, pleasure,



and the body in the mystical writings of Santa Teresa is to a large extent molded by her history and environment. But her approach to these subjects is also profoundly influenced by Platonic and Neoplatonic thought, particularly as it is embraced by Christianity. While Santa Teresa tells us that she read Augustine's Confessions, we probably never will find out whether she had access to the works of Plato, Plotinus, or Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, all of them key figures in the development of Christian mysticism in the West. What little we know of her readings, however, indicates that at least indirectly their ideas reached her. As Evelyn Underhill stresses in her masterpiece Mysticism: The Preeminent Study in the Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness, medieval mysticism in Western Europe and fifteenth and sixteenth century Franciscan spirituality in Spain are deeply influenced by the writings of these four figures (456-57).

In this chapter we will explore perceptions of the body and desire in the Platonic, Neoplatonic, and medieval mystical traditions that we can assume inform the writings of Santa Teresa. We also will look briefly at these themes in the Islamic and Jewish mystical traditions which may have influenced her work and experiences but that, given the persecution of these ethnic groups in Spain during her lifetime, and her own Jewish blood, she would never

acknowledge. Finally, we will discuss the role of physical pain and of pleasure in the development of Christianity.

## II. Mysticism and the language of eros

In the Symposium and through the words of the wise Diotima of Mantinea in her dialogue with Socrates, Plato identifies Love with the mythological figure of Eros, and defines him as a daimon, a being neither human nor divine, but rather a mediator. Eros, says Diotima, is

neither mortal nor immortal, but a mean between the two. . . . He is a great spirit, and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal. . . . For God mingles not with man; but through Love all the intercourse and converse of gods with men, whether they be awake or asleep, is carried on. (Dialogues 534-5)

As the being that dwells between the two realms and whose function is to engage them both, Eros embodies the force of desire, the same desire that generates the mystic's journey toward union with God. Diotima indicates that this desire initially emerges from an encounter with human physical beauty: "For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to seek the company of corporal

beauty ..." (541). Thus, eros encompasses all experiences of love, from the physical urgency of the human being to unite with another human being, to the need to find himself or herself with and in the divine.

In spite of the ambiguous portrayal of the physical body and its human desire in both the Neoplatonic and Judeo-Christian traditions, which we will discuss in brief, Christian mystics consistently favor the language of human love, that is, erotic language, as the most appropriate to recount their experiences with the divine (Howe 213). Indeed, the visibly libidinal desire in King Solomon's Song of Songs, is not only a source of systematic reflection for Christian mystics, particularly throughout the medieval period, but also a narrative they will repeatedly draw from in their attempts to find a language through which they can express the ineffable bliss of mystical rapture. As Evelyn Underhill indicates:

the mystic loved the Song of Songs because he there saw reflected, as in a mirror, the most secret experiences of his soul. The sense of a desire that was insatiable, of a personal fellowship so real, inward, and intense that it could only be compared with the closest link of human love, of an intercourse that was no mere spiritual self-indulgence, but was rooted in the primal duties and necessities of life . . . all

these he found symbolized and suggested, their unendurable glories veiled in a merciful mist, in the poetry which man has invented to honour that august passion in which the merely human draws nearest to the divine. (137)

The transparent eroticism of King Solomon's book has not been overlooked by Biblical exegetes, who have continually felt the need to elucidate the work's emphasis on the joys of carnal love. The book, described as "l'un des livres les plus controversés de toute l'Écriture" (Monlégon 77), has through the centuries generated an enormous amount of expository literature both in the Judaic and Christian traditions. Within this exegetical movement, the Catholic Church has almost invariably sided with the allegorical interpretation that views Christ as the groom, and the Church as his bride (Murphy 11). The Canticle's open celebration of the joys of human love is obviously a delicate matter, and one the Church has deemed in need of continuous re-evaluation.

Santa Teresa herself writes around 1566 a commentary to the Song of Songs entitled Meditaciones sobre el Cantar de los Cantares and also known as Conceptos del amor de Dios. Composed between La vida and Las moradas, the commentary is a kind of treatise on the mystical journey, and focuses on some of the most physical verses of

Solomon's Song. Although the author attempts to interpret the biblical poem in an allegorical manner, and follow traditional Christian exegesis, the text openly displays the presence of the corporeal in the experience of divine union. Not surprisingly, she is ordered to burn her work (Howe, "St. Teresa's *Meditaciones*" 49).

As we observed in the previous chapter, Santa Teresa's mystical language is forcefully erotic and clearly presents the body as a full participant in her encounters with the divine. Her transverberation is the instance that most memorably portrays this unequivocal physicality in both language and experience, but the same corporeality is present in most of her mystical encounters and writings. And what is most compromising, it is often externally noticeable in the form of tension, heat, cries and moans, and even levitation. These physical manifestations of her divine experiences, in conjunction with Christianity's habitual mistrust of corporeality and erotic desire, particularly in women, in great measure led to Inquisitorial censorship of her work and surveillance over her person.

Santa Teresa's writings reflect the weight of her oppressive circumstances. We find in most of her mystical accounts, as with the transverberation, a transparent tension between the urgency of rendering the experience in passionate corporeal language and the need to censor or

justify that same language. Her vision of the body is indeed highly contradictory. On the one hand she emphasizes the crucial role our physical nature in our search for the divine, as we observed in her affirmation that God is to be found in Christ's suffering humanity, for "nosotros no somos ángeles sino que tenemos cuerpo" (La vida, XXII: 102). On the other hand she repeatedly represents the body as the major obstacle to our fulfillment in God: "paréceme me tiene atada este cuerpo, por no ser para servir a Dios en nada . . ." (Cuentas de consciencia, I: 452). Such mistrust of the body is indicative of Santa Teresa's personal circumstances, but it also permeates the traditions that most clearly inform Christian mysticism, from Plato to Neoplatonic and Judeo-Christian religious thought. In the remainder of this chapter we will trace the presence of the body in these traditions, as well as in Islamic and Jewish mysticism particular to medieval Spain. This exploration will help elucidate the complex role of the body, and its experiences of pleasure and pain, in the mystical writings of Santa Teresa de Jesús.

### III. The Body as Initiator and Obstacle in Plato and Plotinus

In both Phaedrus and the Symposium, Plato indicates that the erotic movement toward the apprehension of Beauty

must of necessity begin with physical longing for union with another human being. Plato's affirmation certainly validates corporeal existence and gives a place to libidinal desire, but we must not forget that in his eyes their function is simply initiatory. Once this powerful erotic energy is generated, the individual must transcend corporal desire in a process of sublimation that culminates in the apprehension of the form of Beauty. The Christian mystical path certainly resembles this process of ascent, but as we see in Santa Teresa's transverberation, the literary portrayal of the body and of a pleasure that is embodied also appears at times in higher stages of her mystical journey.

Although in Phaedrus and the Symposium the physical body and libidinal desire are indispensable as parts of our human quest for truth, Plato's view of these two aspects of experience is markedly different in other works. The most obvious example is his dialogue Phaedo, a narration of Socrates' last hours by his beloved disciple, after whom the dialogue is named. Here Socrates addresses the pupil's questions about his own impending death and his understanding of what is to come after this earthly life.

In the dialogue the philosopher propounds his belief in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. For Socrates the soul is an immortal entity imprisoned in a

mortal and physical body. As Paul Ricoeur indicates in The Symbolism of Evil, the antecedents of such a view are found in the Orphic tradition and its creation myth. In the myth, the infant Dionysius is assassinated by the cruel Titans, who then boil and devour the members of the god. Filled with rage, Zeus punishes their deed by blasting them with lightning. From their ashes he then creates the human race. Hence, the human being at once participates in the evil nature of the Titans and the divine nature of Dionysius: this mixture constitutes the present condition of humanity. Although the myth does not present the body as the origin of evil, it does suggest that the soul brings with it an anterior evil, which it expiates in the body. And in becoming an instrument of expiation, the body becomes a place of exile and punishment (282-84).

In his reflections about death, Socrates makes it clear that the philosopher, in his search for the Forms, must completely sever himself from the desires of the body in order to liberate his soul fully upon death:

In this present life, we think that we make the nearest approach to knowledge when we have the least possible intercourse or communion with the body, and do not suffer the contagion of the bodily nature, but keep ourselves pure until the hour when God himself is pleased to release us. And thus getting rid of the foolishness of the



body we may expect to be pure and hold converse with the pure, and to know of ourselves all that exists in perfection unalloyed, which, I take it, is no other than the truth. For the impure are not permitted to lay hold of the pure.

(Dialogues 417-18)

A few words stand out in Socrates' statement: "contagion," "perfection unalloyed," "pure," "impure." The problem at hand is one of mixture: divine and human, soul and body. Only by denying the body, and hence attempting to undo his cumbersome hybrid nature, will the human being be able to encounter his divine self, and therefore succeed in beholding the Forms. If this denial of the body is not sought and accomplished in life, the person will be punished with reincarnation: a return to the prison of human corporeality.

In Phaedo Socrates' words pointedly reveal that the body is nothing but an obstacle, a source of contamination that binds us and separates us from the Truth. But this invalidating portrayal of corporeality clearly contradicts Plato's own positive depiction of the body as initiator of the journey toward Beauty in Phaedrus and the Symposium. R. Hackforth indicates in his commented edition of Phaedrus that Plato wavers to the end between the religious, Orphic-Pythagorean conception of the divine soul essentially divorced from all physical functions, and a more secular

and scientific conception of soul as essentially a source of motion that cannot be set apart from the body (76-77). This ambiguous perception of the body, and of its relationship with the soul, is also present to different degrees in the works of the one pagan and two Christian Neoplatonic writers that most directly influence Christian mysticism: Plotinus, Saint Augustine, and Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (Underhill 456).

For Plotinus the human soul essentially moves from and through desire. By its very nature the soul knows that it must return to its creator, and by means of its desire for that creator it is able to ascend from the world of matter to the world of spirit and finally become one with its source. This process is evidently a derivation of Plato's conception of the philosopher's journey toward apprehending the Forms. But as Paul Friedlander indicates, we witness in Plotinus (204-270 A.D.) a de-sensualization of Plato, a reticence to locate the beginning of the divine quest in desire for the physical body (56). Indeed, Plotinus tends to focus on the dynamics between the divine and the human soul and says little about human physicality. When he does discuss it, his inclination is to present it in the same light as Plato in his dialogue Phaedo: the body as prison of the soul (Plotinus 66). However, we do find that Plotinus indirectly suggests that the body also plays the

role of initiator in the quest for the divine, for through the physical beauty of the body the soul is able to recall that there is a first cause from which this beauty derives:

Clearly [the beauty of bodily forms] is something detected at first glance, something that the soul - remembering - names, recognizes, gives welcome to, and fuses with. . . . We therefore suggest that the soul, being what it is and related to the reality above it, is delighted when it sees any signs of kinship of anything akin to itself, takes its own to itself, and is stirred to new awareness of whence and what it really is. (35-6)

The physical world, deriving from the One and in its likeness, reminds the human being that all life originates in this single source of being. Embodied reality therefore functions as the spark that ignites the soul's desire to seek and fuse with its creator. So although Plotinus' general stance toward the body is one of denial, we still find in his work an echo of Plato's complex acknowledgment of its essential role in the soul's quest for the truth. Plotinus' pagan doctrine merges with Christian thought in the figures of St. Augustine (354-430) and the nameless writer who adopted the name of St. Paul's friend, Dionysius the Areopagite, and who wrote between 475-525. Their

contributions will color Christianity's complex perceptions of the body.

#### IV. Christianity's Gendered Body: Paul and Augustine

Christianity's understanding of the physical body has been problematic since the religion's earliest days. In his book The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Western Christianity, Peter Brown describes the contradictory perceptions of the body from before the time of St. Paul in the two cultures that inform and provide a space for the development of Christianity: the Judaic and Roman cultures. He then charts the increasingly complex Christian attitude toward the body that will culminate in the West in the works of St. Augustine. Throughout this trajectory, Brown underlines that the body will consistently appear as the lower term of a binary structure, and that it will be equated with the female gender. Such identification of women and corporeality will have powerful repercussions in the development of medieval Christian mysticism, and later on in the works of Santa Teresa.

According to Brown, the Roman (pagan) tradition viewed the body as "different from the soul, as intractable as were women, slaves, and the opaque and restless populace of the cities" (26). In this perception of the body there is

an initial duality that can be summarized in a series of binary oppositions that favor the first term: soul/body, male/female, free man/slave. But, as Brown explains, the Roman's view of the body was not a cause for great tension, for the body was seen as an important part of the human being, and the source of procreation. And, as in the social hierarchy where men had complete power over women and slaves, the soul was totally capable of keeping the body under control, and most often did so.

The Jewish tradition held very similar views of the body: it was different from the soul or spirit and inferior, but necessary all the same. The body did not pose any serious problems. What did indeed capture the Judaic culture's attention was the concept of the heart as the locus of the human will. The true believer must possess a "single heart," a heart that would soften and yield to God. If the will took over, directing the person's life solely toward the achievement of his own goals, the human heart could turn to stone. Curiously, "singleness of heart . . . was a profoundly male virtue: upright men tended to regard women as the causes, par excellence, of 'double-hearted' behavior" (39). Again the opposition appears, and now where it really matters to the Jewish people: single-heart is to double-heart as male is to female.

In the early days of Christianity the notion of singleness of heart was vigorously taken up by Paul of Tarsus. St. Paul, in his mission of spreading Christianity, presented the concept of singleness of heart through the antithesis spirit/flesh, where spirit represented the will in its desire to yield to God, while flesh stood for the will that wants to act only in its own interest. But Paul, in order to keep his message brief and simple, expressed himself in such a way that the concepts of flesh and body collapsed into one: "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh . . . I see in my members another Law at war with the Law of my mind . . . Wretched the man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (quoted in Brown 47). The antithesis spirit/flesh, now turned into spirit/body, will permeate Christianity to our day, bringing about a tainted vision of the body.

Now, if St. Paul's opposition between spirit and body is a reconfiguration of the Jewish binary pair single-heart/double heart, we can readily observe that this new division spirit/body is also connected with the opposites male/female. Thus, from a combination of Roman and Jewish sources, the body and women are lumped together in the company of sin. It is important to note, however, that when St. Paul spoke of the body in itself, he portrayed it as a vessel, perishable and weak, but able to receive the

spirit of Christ (51). So the picture becomes more complicated: on the one hand we have a tainted flesh that becomes stained body, and on the other hand we have a body that is capable of admitting the presence of the divine spirit; and hovering around the opposition is the presence of the female who by her very nature is body herself. This contradictory view of human physicality will survive throughout the history of Western Christianity, but each one of its two elements will become predominant at different times. Thus, we will see with some overlap two different ways of approaching the question of the body from the fifth through the fifteenth century: one view that generally favors the split binary pair and its devaluation of physicality from the time of Augustine roughly through the twelfth century, and another view that focuses on the divine nature of Christ's body and therefore tends to highlight the role of corporeality from the thirteenth through the fifteenth century (Bynum 316-17; 251-52).

Saint Augustine's perception of the body is mainly a re-working of St. Paul's original discussion of the binary relationship spirit/flesh, only now with sexuality playing a significant role. Augustine was originally a Manichean. For Manicheans, truth could only survive where the spirit was freed from matter; so Augustine's initial view of the relationship between soul or spirit (essentially equivalents for Augustine) and body was essentially dual.

As he became a Christian, this notion was reinforced, for his conversion took place while he listened to the teachings of Ambrose. Ambrose propounded a world of hard antitheses, which clearly defined the boundaries he deemed necessary to give cohesiveness to the early Christian society of the Roman Empire (Brown 347). These antitheses included Christian/pagan; Catholic/heretic; Church/*saeculum*; soul/body. The *saeculum* was described as the world of sensuality, "of concern for the worldly advantage, and of readiness and compromise, with the great-beguiling female figures who threatened always to 'effeminate' the male resolve of the mind" (347). Again we find women and body linked as the second term of the antithesis.

As with St. Paul, for Augustine the source of sin is not originally the body, but the will. In fact, he proclaimed that God created men to multiply, and therefore sexuality was an indispensable part of the divine plan. Man's Paradisial condition was essentially marked by harmony and wholeness, and by the joint operation of body and soul (Bottomley 91). However, this original unity that Adam and Eve experienced was severed through their rebellious act of will. As soon as they made their own wills resistant to God: "their bodies were touched with a disturbing new sense of the alien, in the form of sexual sensations that escaped their control. The body could no



longer be embraced entirely by the will" (417). The obstacle is not the body itself, which Augustine often praises as God's most glorious creation, but its corruptible nature, its lack of subordination and obedience to the soul's higher faculties: mind, reason, and will. Once the body begins to act of its own accord the human being is subject to

the lustful excitement of the organs of generation, and this lust not only takes possession of the whole body and its outward members but also makes itself felt inwardly so that it moves the whole man with a passion in which mental emotion is mingled with bodily appetite, so that the resulting pleasure is the greatest of all bodily pleasures. Indeed, so possessing is this pleasure that, at the moment of time in which it reaches its consummation, all mental activity is suspended. (quoted in Bottomley 84)

As with Plato, the problem is one of mixture of natures, and also of man's inherent inability to maintain the hierarchical dynamics of mind/reason/will and body in the proper order intended by God: the first in control of the second. Incidentally, Augustine's belief in the equality of men and women as creatures of God is not incompatible with this notion of a natural hierarchy, where men are akin

to spirit and women to body, and thus the second should and must be subjected to the first (Miles 119).

Augustine coincides with Plotinus in affirming that the fallen human body carries within it the resonance of God's divinity, and also espouses the Christian belief that the body will recover its intended divine nature in full harmony with the soul after death and through the intercession of Christ on the day of the last judgment. However, during its earthly existence the body will essentially remain an obstacle in man's spiritual journey, and a constant reminder of his difference and distance from God. Augustine's belief in a natural hierarchy that places women on the side of this divine and yet rebellious body will only strengthen Christianity's consistent portrayal of women as defined solely through their physicality.<sup>1</sup>

Augustine's view of the body will prevail in the West until the early years of the thirteenth century, at which time a shift takes place, as Carolyn Walker-Bynum indicates in her book Holy Feast and Holy Fast and more recently, in Fragmentation and Redemption. Around these years, several heretical movements gain prominence throughout Western Europe. The most powerful of these groups, the Cathars, rejected the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ, resting

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical representations of women consistently place them as virgins, mothers, or whores. In the three cases woman's very identity, marked either by virtue or by sin, derives from the sexual status of her body.

on the premise of "a cosmic dichotomy between spirit and matter" (252). The Cathars and their exclusively dualistic approach to Christianity were considered a major threat to the orthodox Church. And so, as a response to this threat and its sharp separation of spirit and body, around this time we begin to see a shift in focus in the Catholic Church: theology and doctrine draw away from the mystery of the resurrection, and toward the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ. The Christ to be adored is no longer Augustine's image of the King who sits by his father's side in the day of the last judgment, but rather the Son who is flesh and blood, and as such is crucified to atone for our sins. As Bynum points out, "behind these shifts in metaphor and in theology lies a heightened concern with matter, with corporeality, with sensuality" (Holy Feast 252).

These shifts as observed in mystical literature are also connected to the resurgence of Dionysian thought throughout the upper Middle Ages. In her important study on mysticism, Evelyn Underhill underlines the enormous influence of the Pseudo-Dionysius' writings on the works and experiences of medieval mystics:

Particularly in the fourteenth century, the golden age of mystical literature, the phrase "Dionysius saith" is of continual recurrence: and has for those who use it much the same

weight as quotations from the Bible or the great fathers of the Church. (457)

By virtue of its Judaeo-Christian and Platonic antecedents, Dionysius' position toward the body remains problematic and ambiguous. However, in contrast to Augustine, the unknown author essentially portrays the world of matter, and by extension the body, as divine and inherently good. His stance will facilitate the adoption of a medieval vision of the body that is still paradoxical, but that favors corporeality as the primary mediator between the human and the divine.

#### V. The Genderless and Divine Body: Dionysius the Pseudo Areopagite

As observed in the last chapter, in both the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions, the image of the circle stands as the preferred metaphor to portray the descent of the divine into the world of creation, and the ascent of the same world of creation toward its origin or source. In his most substantial works, The Divine Names, The Celestial Hierarchy, and The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy, Dionysius takes this image of the circle and places it within the framework of the Scriptures. From here, he fashions an extremely complicated system of triadic hierarchies based on his interpretation of Biblical imagery. In this way he

delineates the inner structure of a twofold universe consisting of the angelic and the human, and conforming to a divine order. While Dionysius' conception of the universe is twofold, it is not dualistic in nature. For him every form of existence participates in its own measure in the divine plan (The Divine Names 82).

In his project of interpretation, Dionysius presents eros as the force that generates the circular movement of God's extroversion into the world of matter and the return of that world of matter to its creator. All of creation is originated in a God who yearns to give of himself and fiercely desires to be desired. The culmination of this divine yearning comes forth in God's act of becoming human flesh in the figure of his son Jesus Christ, whose very body will be sacrificed in order to make possible humankind's re-union with and in its maker. The Pseudo-Areopagite explains that, in keeping with the primary role of Christ's humanity, the sensual and erotic imagery in the Scriptures represents, in words, the longing for this re-union which is entirely possible because we are made in God's image and likeness and are therefore divine in body and soul (81-2; 92).

Dionysius is not much concerned with the physical body, but rather with meticulously describing the intricate system of triadic hierarchies in the created universe as a way to affirm our human capability to directly communicate

and unite with God. When he does address the subject of the body, his vision is in keeping with what we have seen in the Platonic and Judaeo-Christian traditions. Thus, on the one hand Dionysius envisions the body as a yoke that binds the human spirit, but on the other he considers it an intended and necessary participant in God's plan. As he indicates, the body is by its very nature good:

It is . . . obvious that the body is not the cause of evil in the soul. Evil does not require a body. . . . Evil in minds, souls, and in bodies is a weakness and a defect in the condition of their natural virtues. There is no truth in the common assertion that evil is inherently in matter *qua* matter, since matter too has a share in the cosmos, in beauty and form. . . . Surely matter cannot be evil. . . . If it has some kind of being then it must derive from the Good, since every being owes its origin to the Good. (92)

Dionysius' lack of concern with the body as problem is suggested by its scant appearance in his writings. In this passage the writer's relative ease with the body is manifested in the swift shift from "body" to "matter," and in the implication that as matter, the body is an essential part of creation, and hence divine. Augustine's preoccupation with the human body's tendency toward

disorder, and its constant impending danger is nowhere to be seen in the works of Dionysius.

What the unknown author does indeed point out is that the person who wants to achieve divinity during this earthly life must become increasingly detached from his or her own corporeality:

The man who is indeed divine, who has the right to commune with the divine realities, who, to the greatest possible extent, has been lifted up into conformity with God through complete and perfect divinization, such a man if he is truly indifferent to the realities of the flesh (apart from the necessities of nature over which he will not delay) will have arrived at the highest possible measure of divinization and will be both the temple and the companion of the Spirit of the Deity. (The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 216).

This notion of an indispensable distancing of the soul from the needs of the body is, as we discussed in Chapter I, a common and frequently necessary step in the mystic's path toward ecstatic union with God.

Dionysius' perception of the human body unequivocally echoes the ambiguous representations we have observed in the two traditions that most strongly inform Christian mysticism. Nevertheless, because his conception of the

universe is non-dualistic in nature, we do not find in his writings the sharp contradictions in the relationship between spirit/soul and body especially present in the works of Plato and Augustine. This characteristic is also evidenced in Dionysius' total indifference to human sexuality and gender dynamics. The body, as represented by the Pseudo-Areopagite, is not associated with either male or female. It is simply seen as an intrinsic part of God's circular motion of extroversion and return. Certainly, in the journey of humankind's return to its maker the body must be increasingly surrendered in favor of the spirit. But even after death, upon resurrection, the body does remain present (The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 247) and poses no substantial problem to the human being in his or her search for the divine.

#### VI. Body as Mediator in the High Middle Ages

Given the enormous influence of Dionysius' writings from the ninth century on, and the shift in doctrinal focus from Christ the God to Christ the man that takes place around the thirteenth century, it is not surprising to find that the dichotomies embedded in the Christian West since before Augustine's time lose some of their edge. The Christian conception of body and soul as established by Augustinian thought is quite complex, but essentially



divisive. The vision that now emerges maintains the same ambiguous and contradictory vision of the body, but mainly focuses on the role of the human body, particularly the suffering human body, as the necessary mediator for union with and in God. As Carolyn Walker-Bynum explains in Holy Fast and Holy Feast, to medieval mystics and spiritual writers, "intellect, soul, and sensory faculties were not divided, with a separate vocabulary to refer to each. Rather, God was known with senses that were a fusion of all the human being's capacities to experience" (151). Body and soul are no longer set apart, but together seek fulfillment in the love of God.

Central to this new role of the body as instrument of transcendence is the spiritual theme of *imitatio Christi*, which originated with the Cistercian order in the eleventh century as the practice of affective meditation on the events of Christ's life, but that by the late twelfth century had far exceeded the boundaries of quiet prayer. With the doctrinal shift taking place in Catholic Europe at this time we see a growing emphasis on the belief that Christ's humanity is truly flesh and blood. Because it is precisely through his tortured body that Christ atones for human sin and makes salvation possible, the emulation of this very suffering becomes the best means to transcend our sinful nature and intimately experience God. Thus, from the end of the twelfth century on the practice of *imitatio*

no longer simply entails feeling or understanding Christ's Passion, but actually experiencing in one's own body the pain and agony of the crucified Christ (255-6).

Significantly, this is a time of thriving religious activity for women: many communities of pious women emerge, and a good number of women come to adopt whole-heartedly the ascetic doctrine of *imitatio Christi* and embrace the sacrament of the Eucharist as central in their piety. In these practices the aim is to become one with Christ, united with him in his bleeding and suffering body:

"Imitation" meant union--fusion--with that ultimate body which is the body of Christ. The goal of religious women was thus to realize the opportunity of physicality. They strove not to eradicate body but to merge their own humiliating and painful flesh with that flesh whose agony, espoused by choice, was salvation. Luxuriating in Christ's physicality, they found there the lifting up--the redemption--of their own. (246)

As we have discussed, women carried the weight of their tainted corporeality from before the early days of the Christian religion. What seems to happen now is that, taking notice of the growing Catholic focus on the crucifixion, women turn the body into an asset, a means of communion with the divine. It cannot be forgotten,

however, that this same female body, "their own humiliating and painful flesh" (246), does not cease to be devalued; and that this devaluation is paradoxical, since it is precisely women's corporeality that best represents Christ's humanity, that humanity which made salvation possible.

In spite of the historically misogynous Christian world view, as firmly rooted in the High Middle Ages as ever, many of these pious women become respected leaders and even saints by virtue of their powerful mystical experiences and their role as healers (Petroff 6).<sup>2</sup> In most cases they either write about such experiences or dictate them to a second party, usually their male confessors, and the writings spread in autobiographical or biographical form.<sup>3</sup> Just as in Santa Teresa's transverberation, their narratives overflow with eroticism and physicality. These women's intense yearning for communion with Christ's lacerated body is fulfilled in their own joyful and truly pleasurable experience of Christ's human pain. As Bynum points out:

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<sup>2</sup> As Petroff herself indicates, it is also true that several of these women suffer some degree of persecution precisely because of their role as leaders and teachers. The Dutchwoman Marguerite Porete (XIII-XIV centuries), for instance, meets such audacity at the stake (15-16).

<sup>3</sup> Some such women are Hildegard of Bingen (Germany 1098-1179), Clare of Assisi (Italy 1195-1253), Mechtild of Magdeburg (Germany 1210?-1297?), Margery Kempe (England, XIV century), Julian of Norwich (England 1342-1416?), Catherine of Siena (Italy 1347-1380), and Angela of Foligno (Italy 1248-1309).

We cannot understand medieval religiosity until we realize how different such probing and embracing of body as pain-pleasure is from most modern notions of body, in which pleasure and pain are seen as opposites and the cultivation of pain is rejected as pathological. In understanding this difference it is helpful to remember how little medieval people could do to mitigate discomfort of any kind. Thus medieval metaphors and symbols express the *experiencing* of body more than the *controlling* of it. Sensations and senses that we differentiate from one another tend to be fused in medieval piety, where satiation is described as "hungry" and discomfort is called "delicious." To deny bodily responses toward the world is often, to a medieval writer, to release torrents of bodily energy toward God. (245-6)

The acknowledgment of pain and pleasure as mutually inclusive in these women's mystical encounters with the divine seems to mirror the later medieval insistence on the belief that Christ's divinity is inseparable from his human physicality. In their experiences and their writings, apparently opposite notions--pain and pleasure, body and soul--dissolve.

In Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism, Elizabeth Petroff identifies such experiences of union in God's love as deriving from a desire that, unlike a masculine yearning that is born of separation and ever-deferring satisfaction, emerges from a primal, non-dualistic, and contiguous sexuality (56). This feminine desire, defined by French feminist critics with the term *jouissance*, is decidedly threatening to a male-centered society, for it undermines the dichotomies on which its power rests. The danger of female desire, associated at the time with an uncontrollable and "voracious" sexual nature, is certainly acknowledged by Church authorities (Bynum, Holy Feast 217). But with a few exceptions the destruction of such danger is not actively sought, most probably because the prevalence of pain in these women's spiritual experiences essentially conforms to the Church's doctrinal emphasis on the divine value of Christ's crucifixion.

Santa Teresa's own accounts of mystic union draw from some of these women's writings. Early on in her own autobiography the Saint narrates how since her childhood she has been an avid reader of *vidas de santos* (La vida, I: 29). Then she lists Catherine of Siena as an example when she discusses the importance of emulating Christ's physical suffering. The practice of *imitatio Christi* is essential

for Santa Teresa since "por esta puerta hemos de entrar, si queremos nos muestre la soberana Majestad grandes secretos," and because, as I have quoted earlier, "esto de apartarse de lo corpóreo bueno deve ser, cierto, pues gente tan espiritual lo dice; mas, a mi parecer, ha de ser estando el alma muy aprovechada , porque hasta esto, está claro se ha de buscar el Criador por sus criaturas" (XXII: 101). Such strategic mention of Catherine of Siena at this particular moment indicates a familiarity if not with her writings, at least with her religious persona. The same could be said of her familiarity with notions of the body explored by other medieval women mystics, three of whom experienced "transverberations" not unlike her own.<sup>4</sup>

It must be noted, however, that although this rich medieval tradition certainly reaches Spain, it does not flourish in Spanish soil. The Iberian country gives birth to some of the most passionate Christian mystics of all time, but this occurs anachronistically late in regards to the rest of Europe, namely in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This curious phenomenon is probably the result of Spain's unique history: the seven-hundred year-long coexistence of Christian, Islamic, and Jewish cultures and religions. Interestingly, a mystical movement does develop

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<sup>4</sup> Hadewijch of Antwerp (Netherlands, XIII century), Umiltà of Faenza (Italy 1226-1310) (Petroff 193, 210), and Beatrice of Nazareth (Flanders, XIII Century) (Bynum 160).

in medieval Spain, but mainly within the Islamic and Jewish religions.

#### VII. Positive Renditions of the Body in Medieval Spanish Islam and Judaism

Literary critics such as Miguel Asín Palacios, Luce López-Baralt, Catherine Swietlicki, and Mario Satz have demonstrated convincingly the extensive influence of Islamic and Jewish sources on the works of later Spanish mystics such as Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz. Although none of these critics specifically focuses on the subject of the body in the two traditions as they are absorbed into Christian mysticism, they do touch upon the role of corporeality as part of the mystical process, and conclude that "no hay, en la cultura semítica, una condena de la carne, y por ello lo divino y lo humano resultan ser dos caras de la misma experiencia" (Satz 41). Indeed, Christianity's problematic conception of the body and physical desire is not present in either of these semitic religions.

According to Asín Palacios, the Islamic mystical tradition of Sufism clearly weighs on the writings of Spanish mystics, and is in itself strongly influenced by Christian asceticism (7). Originally Islam, the doctrine of Mohammed, sees no urgency in submitting the flesh to the

spirit. But in the Sufi tradition we observe the Neoplatonic and Christian use of erotic language to express the desire for union with God, in conjunction with the notion of a necessary distancing of the self from the world of matter (Satz 211). However, the desire of the flesh and its fulfillment in sexual union

elévase a la más alta idealidad, para servir de noble símbolo del amor místico. . . . la ascensión del alma hacia Dios, el éxtasis, la intuición de la divina esencia, la naturaleza y efectos del amor místico - se explican bajo el velo de apasionadas estrofas que plásticamente describen y cantan las delicias del amor sexual.

(Asín Palacios 245-6)

So we find that in spite of that need to detach the spiritual from the material that Asín Palacios identifies as decidedly Christian, the body and its sexual desire are favored as direct manifestations, and as symbols of divine love. The Spanish Sufi mystic Abenarabi de Murcia (1164-1240) himself affirms that corporeal love is universal or divine love, for every expression of our human longing for the divine is born from within our physical body (quoted in Asín Palacios 487).

For its part, Jewish mystical thought as revealed in thirteenth century Spanish Cabala not only conceives of human sexuality as a direct manifestation of the divine,



but actually emphasizes that marital sexual activity is essential in the mystic journey (McGinn 216). Similar to Neoplatonism, Cabalistic thought centers on a theory of emanation. From his oneness, Yaweh fashions the world by extroverting his own self into a creation that is in his likeness, but that in this case is essentially polarized into a female and a male principle. Divine ecstasy then requires the harmonic re-union of these feminine and masculine aspects of God (Satz 127). As Bernard McGinn indicates in "The Language of Love in Christian and Jewish Mysticism," the Cabalistic text entitled Holy Letter specifies that procreative intercourse between a man and a woman "is at once mystical--'sexual union can be a means of spiritual elevation when it is properly practiced'--as well as creative--'through the act they become partners with God in the act of creation'" (McGuinn 221). The desiring body is no obstacle, symbol, or metaphor, but the actual site of mystical fulfillment: Spanish Cabalist mysticism is fully and shamelessly embodied.

While it seems evident from theoretical parallels and the use of similar imagery that the works of Spanish Christian mystics are directly influenced by Sufism and the Cabala, it is also true that the specific literary sources of such influence remain unknown (López-Baralt 399). Spanish mystics are consistently reticent about revealing much information on their readings, an attitude that is

perfectly understandable given the atmosphere of severe religious censorship in Spain at the time, and that in the case of mystics of Jewish blood such as Santa Teresa and San Juan de la Cruz would seem quite necessary.

In light of the powerful erotic component in Santa Teresa's mystical writings, and considering the significant factor of her Jewish ancestry,<sup>5</sup> the question arises whether any of these Cabalist texts reached her hands, or even whether the information was available to her orally. As of now these questions remain unanswered. However, given the power of tradition and culture, it is likely that some elements of Judaism were present in Teresa's immediate environment during her formative years. It does not seem rash to speculate that perhaps some of the tension evident in Santa Teresa's literary portrayal of mystical ecstasy has to do not only with the inherently ambiguous perception of physicality in Christianity and Christian mysticism, but also with the conflictive encounter between Jewish and Christian world views. Her frequent censorship of corporeality, paradoxical in light the vivid presence of

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<sup>5</sup> While hidden for centuries after her canonization, it is now a well-known fact that Teresa's grandfather, a cloth trader from Toledo originally named Juan Sánchez, was nominally a converted Christian but secretly a Jew. For this reason in 1485 he and his family were forced to march through the streets of the city wearing the infamous *sambenito* for seven consecutive Fridays. Teresa's father, then only a boy, would long remember the humiliation he experienced as he and his family were cursed, spit upon, and stoned. Following this event, the family changed its name to Cepeda, and moved to Avila (Lincoln 1-3).

the body in her writings, is, I believe, related to her tenuous position as a *woman* of Jewish extraction. These matters will be explored in the chapters to come.

#### VIII. Pain and Pleasure in the Christian Religion

Thus far we have discussed with some detail the roles and perceptions of the body in the traditions that influence Santa Teresa's writings. Like her medieval predecessors, Teresa often writes about experiencing God with and in her flesh, through pleasure and pain. The exalted value given to pain in Christianity is clearly related to the redeeming role of Christ's physical suffering on the cross, and as we shall see, to the creation of a Christian subjectivity and community. Bodily pleasure, on the contrary, is an experience commonly denied by this same religion, particularly when it is not accompanied by and subjected to pain. What is it in Christianity that engenders these dynamics?

We have already commented on the historical developments taking place in Western Europe in the High Middle Ages. These changes bring about a shift in focus from Christ's resurrection to his crucifixion, and lead to the widespread practice of *imitatio Christi*. But Christianity's institutionalized perception and exercise of pain as virtue does not begin here. It is inherent in the

religion since its earliest days, and is actually crucial to its identity.

In her recently published work The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era, Judith Perkins traces the formation of the Christian subject as a "suffering self." She explains that the prevailing Hellenistic cultural discourse of the human self as a rational mind/soul exerting control over a body whose needs and desires inhibit that soul's attainment of perfection loses ground by the second century. At this time a new conception begins to take its place: "that of a mind/soul joined to a body liable to pain and suffering, in need of outside attention and direction." This change reflects the progressive disintegration of the Roman empire, and marks the emergence of Christianity as a social and political entity that ultimately achieves institutional power (3).

In the Roman empire, power was manifested and the social order reified through public displays such as the torture and death of criminals and martyrs. These large civic events graphically exhibited the destruction of those who declined to submit to the rules of the state. Torture, as Perkins reminds us, although experienced as pain, is meant to be interpreted as power:

Traditionally injuring other people, killing them, provided a method of establishing

dominance, of establishing in explicit terms the winner and loser. Bruises, wounds, broken bodies, provided unassailable, palpable evidence of realized power. But Christian discourse reverses this equation and thus redefines some of the most basic signifiers in any culture--the body, pain, and death. (115)

Christians refuse to read their martyrs' broken bodies as a sign of subjection. Instead, they "reverse the reading, insisting on interpreting them as symbols of victory over society's power" (117). By refusing to accept their suffering bodies as defeat, Christians deny the social order that surrounds them.

Christians, however, do not renounce power. Rather, they reject the existing social structure for another, where power will be their own. This desired state is certainly attainable, but only after death. Then all will be judged and those who died as martyrs will at last triumph. The suffering body, significantly, resurrects intact, and glorified, achieves immortal life (122-3).

The Christian subject, then, is fashioned against the standing order as suffering self, and Christianity is constructed as a community focused on suffering and made up of sufferers (208). Physical pain and death have become for this Christian community sources of empowerment, for they represent a reversal of its fate, and the victory that

is to come (122-3). Given the absolutely essential role of pain in the formation of the Christian subject, and the institutionally strategic focus of the Catholic Church on Christ's human suffering just prior to Santa Teresa's time, it is not surprising to find the experience of pain as a constant in her work. Pain, at least in her earlier writings, is her power and her defense.

The presence of physical pleasure which we see in her writings is more difficult to trace in the early Christian world. The subject is alluded to but not directly addressed until Saint Augustine. In his masterful autobiography, the Confessions, Augustine poignantly describes his struggle with sexual desire (Books I-IX). Of all sins, it is lust that as a young man keeps him chained to the disorderly world of matter, and that remains most threatening in his later years, after his conversion. In our previous discussion of corporeality, we saw that for Augustine the body is an essential component of our humanity and of God's plan. But from the time of the fall it has been an instrument of disorder, continuously destabilizing through the willful independence of the sexual organs the proper hierarchy of mind in control of matter. When sexual pleasure takes over, the sensation is so intensely overpowering that man's higher faculty of rational thought fails to maintain its appropriate status.

For this reason physical pleasure is to be avoided, and sexual activity limited to procreation (Bottomley 84-85).

Augustine makes a distinction between this carnal pleasure and what he considers true and legitimate pleasure: our human love for the soul's beauty. Such pleasure is fulfilled through the peaceful, quiet love of one's neighbor; it is attained through disembodied desire (Miles 128). Augustine's view of pleasure will become dominant in Western Christendom for centuries to come.

Interestingly, as he addresses the subject of pleasure--even legitimate pleasure--Augustine is quick to point out the crucial role of suffering therein:

Augustine was acutely aware of the role of disease, disequilibrium, and tension in producing pleasure. . . . In contrast to God, who is always the same, rejoicing in the spiritual and material creation, human beings require the cyclic oscillation of deprivation and satisfaction if they are to achieve the greatest pleasure. Even the ordinary pleasures of life are sought by purposely cultivating "difficulty and discomfort which are voluntary and self-chosen." Hunger and thirst create pleasure in eating and drinking; lengthy engagements produce pleasure in sexual satisfaction that would not exist if marriage were quicker. Alternations

"between deprivation and fulfillment, between discord and harmony" characterize not only "disgraceful" pleasures but also legitimate pleasures. "Everywhere we find that the more pain there is first, the more joy there is after." (Miles 64-5)

This understanding of pleasure and the seemingly inherent participation of pain or suffering in its realization, seems congruent with the ambiguous portrayals of the body we have observed in the traditions that inform Christian mysticism.<sup>6</sup> For our body is divine and as such a vehicle toward God; but it is at the same time the most palpable symbol of our otherness and our distance from the divine. The prevalence of pain even in pleasure appears as a reminder of this distance, and yet paradoxically confirms through the figure of Jesus Christ and the notion of the Christian suffering self that this distance is surmountable after death. The Christian subject's experience of pain decidedly marks that separation from God that is intrinsic to the human condition, but also and more importantly, brings to the foreground his well-earned entitlement to eternal power.

This conception of a divine pleasure that seems irrevocably bound to suffering is prevalent throughout the

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<sup>6</sup> With the notable exceptions of Islamic and Jewish perceptions of the body as they appear in Spanish Sufism and Cabala.



Middle Ages, and is acknowledged particularly in the writings of women mystics. Judging from our first encounter with Santa Teresa's mystical expression in Chapter I, the same appears to be the case in her historical moment, or at least in her writings. We should not doubt Teresa's truthfulness in recounting her intense sensations of pain and pleasure in the different stages of her mystical journey. However, it is my contention that in her earlier works Santa Teresa chooses to emphasize the element of pain at crucial narrative moments in order to temper the clearly subversive character of pleasure in her experiences. Then, after several close encounters with Inquisitorial authorities, and through a marked shift in her approach to language, she diminishes the presence of the body altogether, in pleasure and in pain, and as far as she can without jeopardizing the truthfulness of her account. In the following two chapters we will explore the possible historical and personal reasons for Teresa's adoption of these rhetorical strategies, and in the final chapters we will analyze these strategies as they are revealed in La vida and Las moradas.

### CHAPTER III

#### SANTA TERESA'S SPAIN: SEXUALITY AND THE FEMININE IN THE EARLY MODERN STATE

##### I. Santa Teresa and Her Times: An Introduction

The presence of the body in Santa Teresa's mystical writings is undeniably problematic. In keeping with the ambiguity toward the body prevalent in the traditions that inform Christian mysticism and in Christianity itself, we find in her texts both an urgent need and a reticence to express the ineffable experience of union with God in a language that is viscerally physical. Such language, in addition to the often external and corporeal manifestations of the Saint's experiences, and her "reputation," awakens the suspicion of confessors and prelates, and finally the Inquisition.

The social, political and religious climate during Santa Teresa's adult years is anything but mild. Spain, emerging as the first modern European state, is in the midst of its conquest of the Americas while attempting also to quench the religious unrest that endangers its control over the Netherlands (Elliott 134). The threat of Luther's Reformation looms menacingly over Catholicism and the Spanish crown. And so, with the ecumenical Council of Trent (1545-63), assembled to restore and strengthen a deeply fragmented Catholic Church, begins the period we

know as the Counter-Reformation. This century-and-a-half (mid-sixteenth to late seventeenth century) sees the progressive disintegration of the Spanish empire both politically and economically, and a growing need for and exercise of control by Church and state in most aspects of Spanish life, particularly those that most concern our discussion of Santa Teresa: women, sexuality, and religion.

## II. The Dominator Model and the Judeo-Christian Tradition: The Systematic Suppression of Women and Sexuality

In her recently published Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body, Riane Eisler convincingly sets forth her theory of the evolution of two distinct and mutually exclusive visions of sexuality, women, and the body existent from the earliest days of the human species. Drawing from archaeological data, Eisler explains that in response to specific climactic circumstances, prehistoric human groups appear to have grown into either partnership or domination-based societies.

The first type of social organization--the partnership model--arises in the fertile areas of the planet, where nature is plentiful and agriculture blossoms. Here, people actively venerate the feminine creative principle and create myths and rites of alignment with the life-generating powers of nature. Sexuality, as the source of

human life, is perceived as sacred and experienced as pleasurable, and woman stands as man's equal. The second type--the dominator model--develops in less hospitable, more marginal regions. Due to the harshness of every-day existence, the inhabitants of these areas interpret the powers that govern the universe as un giving and punitive. A life of scarcity favors the creation of rituals and myths that attempt to somehow placate and control the unreliable forces of nature, and the development of brutal competition and rule by the most powerful. Mainly present among hunters and herders, this behavior becomes institutionalized in societies that encourage war, the subordination of women to men, and religiously-sanctioned violence against women and children, for they represent erratic and uncontrollable life. Such societies systematically repress sexual expression, propounding a sexuality that affirms the domination of the male, and that confuses the experience of pleasure with pain to the point of idealizing the latter (100-102). As Eisler indicates:

It is this institutionalization of trauma or pain and suffering--and of violence and domination in relations between parents and children, masters and slaves, rulers and subjects, nations and nations, and men and women--that has to varying degrees been our cultural legacy. (102)

Such is certainly the legacy of the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Old Testament's initial book, Genesis, almost immediately places us in the midst of a pastoral society that embraces violence as a way of life. The story of the brothers Cain and Abel portrays the struggle between the two lifestyles described by Eisler: herding and cultivating the land. Significantly and without explanation, Yahweh prefers Abel, the shepherd. In the rage of rejection Cain kills his brother, thus unraveling the wrath of his God, who turns the land barren to Cain's hands, and condemns him and his people to a nomadic--and pastoral--existence (Gen. 4). We must add that the brothers are the progeny of Eve, the first woman created after and from the first man, and the source of the Fall. It is pleasure and desire that draw Eve to the forbidden fruit:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was *pleasant* to the eyes, and a tree to be *desired* to make one wise, she took of the fruit and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. [My italics] (3.6)

The immediate effect of Adam and Eve's transgression is their feeling of shame over their naked bodies. This unmistakable chastisement of corporeality is further accentuated in God's punishment of the woman: from now on

her childbearing will be plagued by pain and sorrow. That is, her capacity to bring about life is rendered sinful by the memory of the Fall, and her right to unqualified pleasure is annulled. In tandem with this depreciation of her generative powers and her pleasure, God's second penalty to the woman is that her husband shall rule over her (Gen. 16). Thus begins the history of the people of Israel: a nomadic and pastoral community that rejects the body and woman as sinful and therefore encourages their subjection; and a society that shuns pleasure in favor of pain, and that, as we witness throughout the Old Testament, violently asserts its rights over other lands and peoples.

Clearly, Christianity has its origins in this dominator-based social structure. Despite its early days of oppression under Roman rule, the Christian religion is embraced as the official religion upon Constantine's conversion in the third century of this era. The normalization of pain and the suppression of pleasure in Christianity's Judaic background play a significant role in the new religion's idealization of physical suffering. Pain, as we discussed in the last chapter, is crucial to the formation of the Christian subject, and later on to the Church's control over its flock.

But it takes several centuries for Catholicism to assert itself as the religion of Western Europe. The fall of the Roman Empire, and centuries of invasions from

Germanic tribes, leave the region in political chaos. Rome's sophisticated network of control disintegrates, and we witness a return to small agrarian communities, now controlled by feudal lords. It is not until the ninth century, when the worst of the invasions is over, that the Catholic Church begins to establish alliances with regional aristocracies and monarchies, thus becoming a powerful institution exerting spiritual, political, and economic influence throughout Western Europe (Cantor 155-60; 173-83). As it increases its wealth and control, it systematically encourages the exercise of violence by engaging in a series of holy wars which aim is to "recover" the long lost sacred land, Jerusalem. As Norman F. Cantor points out in The Civilization of the Middle Ages, an important legacy of the four Crusades between 1095 and 1204, "was the lesson that it taught Europeans--that it is right and fitting to kill and destroy in the service of Christian ideals" (301). The dominator model is firmly established in Medieval Europe: violence, control over the religious "other," and the glorification of pain over pleasure prevail.

### III. The Erotization of Pain in the Medieval Church and in Medieval Female Mystics

A strictly hierarchical organization controlled by men, the Catholic Church sees a threat in the life and pleasure-affirming qualities of sexuality. As it grows in power and influence, the Church increasingly promotes the vilification of sex as the locus of sin, and woman as the source of its danger. By minimizing the value of physical pleasure and exalting pain and suffering as the prerequisites for eternal salvation, the Church distracts believers from seeking alternatives to violence, oppression, and war; and it reinforces the hold of the dominator model and the institutionalization of male control (Eisler 153). Such dynamics uphold

a world where pain is not only ubiquitous but exalted, a world in which man is constantly exhorted to turn against man, against woman, and even against himself--against his own body, which (along with woman) must be dominated and controlled. For both are now seen as lowly and disgusting, as is everything that is not of a higher "spiritual" realm in this earthly "vale of tears." Not surprisingly then, what we also find is a world where accepting pain and suffering from one's beloved . . . has become the ultimate eroticism. (155)



We have already witnessed this erotization of pain in the thought of one of the most influential figures in Western Christianity, Saint Augustine of Hippo. For him the experience of physical suffering is crucial to the enhancement of carnal--and sinful-- pleasure, but also of disembodied--and legitimate--pleasure.

In the case of late medieval women mystics, and as Carolyn Walker-Bynum has observed in Holy Feast and Holy Fast, pleasure is inseparable from pain in the experience of divine union or "sacred marriage" (151). The medieval notion of "sacred marriage" as the consummation of human desire for the divine originates in the twelfth century in Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs. Moving away from the traditional interpretation of Christ as the bridegroom and the Church as its bride, Bernard encourages those embracing monastic life "to consider *themselves* the brides of Christ--to anoint and bejewel themselves inwardly and ready themselves in every way for the kiss of Christ--for the experience, that is, of mystical union with God" (Flinders 2). From then onward mysticism and eroticism are bound conspicuously, for divine union is nothing other than the lover's fulfillment in the beloved.

Particularly for women, and in connection with social and economic changes that take place from the thirteenth century on and that we will address shortly, this erotic

encounter is about pleasure *and* pain. In imitation of Christ's human suffering and in preparation for their sacred marriage to Christ, women flagellate and starve themselves, and deform their faces with acid. They bind their limbs, pierce, bruise, and cut their bodies (Maitland 127). And once in ecstasy pain remains an indispensable component of the experience. Bynum has indicated that such vividly erotic experiences--in their pleasure and in their pain--do not result, as some scholars have argued, from sublimated sexual desire. Rather, they are the expression of sexual feelings set free (Holy Feast 248).

As we observed in the previous chapter, the wave of mystical enthusiasm that sweeps over Western Europe in the High Middle Ages does not seize Spain until the later part of the fifteenth century. The phenomenon, with its excessive physicality and emotion, both reaches its climax and becomes a major source of Inquisitorial concern in the following century, precisely during Teresa de Avila's lifetime. Given the erotic component of religious ecstasy, and the increasing mistrust of female sexuality and unorthodox religious experiences in Counter-Reformation Spain, the presence of pleasure *and* of pain in Santa Teresa's mystical accounts is bound to attract undesired attention.

IV. The Early Modern State: Individualism and the  
Subjugation of Women

Spain initiates Europe's passage into modernity toward the end of the fifteenth century and under the joint leadership of the Catholic monarchs, Isabel and Fernando. Pulling together the strengths of the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, the monarchs fashion a national and then an imperial project that involves the unification of most of the Iberian peninsula and the conquest of the Americas. As Ruth El Saffar indicates in "The Evolution of Psyche Under Empire: Literary Reflections of Spain in the Sixteenth Century," the centralization of power that this project entails is achieved through the systematic alienation of potentially powerful ethnic and religious groups--namely, Jews, Moors, and "heretics"--, and also through the formation of *individual* alliances between the Crown and members of the Church, the nobility, and an emerging merchant class. The strategy is essentially one of "divide and conquer." By fragmenting formerly cooperative social groups, and by extracting individuals from their groups, and granting them dignity and identification apart from their places and peoples of origin, the Crown is able to maintain a tight rein over its newly forming empire (165-6). José Antonio Maravall points out that this growing emphasis on the importance of the individual is crucial to the birth of modernity and of the state as its political

unit: "sin tener en cuenta la presencia de ese sustrato de individualismo, no se comprende el fenómeno del Estado moderno" (I, 408). And this individual, for all practical and ideological purposes, is male (El Saffar, "Evolution" 166).

The emergence of this male "individual" as indispensable to the development of the early modern state is unequivocally linked with the progressive change from an agrarian to an entrepreneurial economy that begins to occur as early as the thirteenth century. Between the fifth and thirteenth centuries, and coinciding with an attenuation of the strict dominator model that helped to sustain the Roman Empire, the principal means of survival throughout Western Europe is cultivation of the land. Economically and politically, territories are divided into small communities that respond to local feudal lords; the nuclear structure is the extended family that works together to extract goods from the soil. While it is true that these are not peaceful times, and that medieval society is anything but egalitarian, this type of socio-economic organization encourages a relationship of partnership among its members. Both men and women actively contribute to the economic well-being of their social group. As indispensable members of the community, women have the same rights to property as men have, and also exercise a considerable degree of power as healers and sorceresses by virtue of their biological

connection with fertility and the earth (El Saffar "Literary Reflections" 12). But the changes that take place through the region from the thirteenth century on bring this period to an end. By the sixteenth century the dominator model--in the guise of the modern state and with Spain as its prototype--is again firmly set in place.

The transition from an agricultural to an entrepreneurial economy brings about a progressive move from small communities whose livelihood depended on the economic contribution of all of its members, including women, into larger urban centers largely sustained by the individual dealings of males who seek employment outside the home. By the sixteenth century extended kinship ties grow weaker, and women's direct participation in the economy diminishes considerably. Now the survival of women and their children most often depends on the husband's earning power. We observe at this time a growing division between the private and public domains, a division that is unquestionably gender-based, and that leads to a shift of power in the family toward the male provider. Not coincidentally, the emerging state legally encourages the subordination of the wife to the head of the household, the husband (El Saffar, "Evolution" 188, footnote 15). In keeping with the dominator model, the survival of the new socio-political and economic unit depends on the

empowerment of men through a collective differentiation from the feminine:

The drive toward individuality . . . engaged men in a need to disidentify not only with the natural world, and with nature, but with the image of the mother who represented the ties to tribal groupings and to the imponderables of life and death. As that which consistently eludes and undercuts the system, the mother and the feminine in general represent a threat, which, like the earth and nature and all other elements that challenge stability and order, must be subdued. (169)

This subjugation of nature and the feminine goes hand in hand with an increasing vilification of women, and gives way to the witch-hunting craze that rages throughout Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

#### V. Women, Sexuality, and Devil Worship: The Witch

The official position of the medieval Church toward female healers and sorceresses--"witches"--up until the fourteenth century is one of non-recognition (El Saffar, "Literary Reflections" 12). Traditionally performed by women for its association with the powers of fertility and nature, witchcraft involves the use of herbs and

incantations to promote healing, and to bring about changes in fortune, particularly pertaining to love. Because ecclesiastical authorities do not acknowledge these powers, women are allowed to practice their crafts and rituals freely, and come to wield considerable influence in their communities. But this situation drastically changes with the dawning of modern Europe, and its newly invigorated adherence to the dominator model. Women's relationship to the earth and fertility, and therefore their sexuality, pose a major threat to an emerging modern state built on domination and exclusion, and the glorification of the male individual.

Hence, a new definition of witchcraft emerges toward the later part of the fourteenth century, a definition that combines traditional sorcery with a novel diabolism. The witch is no longer just perceived as a healer and a worker of incantations; she becomes a servant of the devil. Increasingly this relationship acquires sexual undertones, and by the peak of the witch-hunt fury that coincides precisely with Santa Teresa's adult years, the witch has turned into Satan's sexual slave (Klaits 50-51). Now more than ever women represent that very sexuality that dominator societies intensely fear. Their bodies are "by nature" the source of perversion and sin, and as such must be subdued and controlled.

Instrumental to this growing perception of women is the witch-hunting treatise published in 1486 by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, the Malleus Maleficarum (The Witch's Hammer). The text is sanctioned by Pope Innocent VIII and carries in its Preface his famous Bull of 1484, the Summis desiderantes affectibus, in which the Pontiff laments the power and prevalence of witch organizations throughout the Christian world, and emphasizes the need to eliminate them. The Malleus Maleficarum is henceforth adopted by European jurisprudence. It "lay on the bench of every judge, on the desk of every magistrate. It was the ultimate, irrefutable, unarguable authority" in the battle against the newly defined heresy: witchcraft (Summers xiv). Seeing at least thirty editions between its original date of publication and 1669, Kramer and Sprenger's book is widely read in Protestant and Catholic Europe alike, and proves to be crucial in spreading the emerging ideology that equates women with the devil, sexuality, and sin.

The first rhetorical detail that strikes the modern reader when opening the Malleus Maleficarum is the overwhelming prevalence of the feminine pronoun: the witch is, except in extremely rare circumstances, a "she." One of the initial sections, entitled "Question IV," directly addresses this phenomenon. Quoting from various sources ranging from the Bible to Cicero, the authors are emphatic in their conclusion: women are more prone to engage in the



practice of witchcraft than men because women embody evil. It was Eve, led by the promise of pleasure, who was tempted by the serpent and who seduced Adam; it was she who brought on the death and damnation of humanity.

Women, stress the authors, are by nature more physical than men, "as is clear from their many carnal abominations" (44). In their wickedness three vices stand out: infidelity, ambition, and lust. The last is by far the dominant, and the one that determines women's natural affinity to witchcraft, for "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable. . . . Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort even with devils" (47). But women's lust does not only lead to their own damnation as the sexual servants of the devil. What is worse, it can also bring about the downfall of men. For through their demonic pacts, witches are able to control men's sexuality and their own fertility, thus snatching away the power and virtue that rightfully belongs to the male. These fears are evident in Pope Innocent's 1484 Bull, which lists

[the] seven methods by which women infect with witchcraft the venereal act and the conception of the womb: First, by inclining the minds of men to inordinate passion; second, by obstructing their generative force; third, by removing the members accommodated to that act;

fourth, by changing men into beasts by their magic act; fifth, by destroying the generative force in women; sixth, by procuring abortion; seventh, by offering children to devils, beside other animals and fruit of the earth with which they work to do much harm. (47)

In the introductory wording of this paragraph: "women infect with witchcraft the venereal act and the conception of the womb," the accusation is not leveled against witches, but against women. Women embody carnal lust, and carnal lust is the source of witchcraft. According to such logic, all women are potential witches.

As for men, the peril does not simply lie in the fact that through their lusts women inflame their sexual desire, and thus lead them to eternal damnation. Probably worse, women's overpowering sexuality may render men impotent and even turn them into beasts. Furthermore, if women are able to control their own fertility, how can men insure their mastery through their progeny? If witchcraft thrives--that is, if the threat of female sexuality goes unchecked--men's rightful dominance over women may be annulled.

The misogynist ideology of early modern Europe is clearly laid out in the Malleus Maleficarum: sexual desire is sinful, women are voraciously sexual by virtue of their physicality, therefore women are the embodiment of sin. Significantly, their power to heal and cast spells also

originates in their fallen sexuality, now further stained by intercourse with the devil himself. The threat to male authority appears insurmountable; the danger has to be stopped.

And so begins the period of the witch hunts, often described as one of the most terrible instances of man's inhumanity to man, but more accurately, a tragically vivid instance of man's inhumanity to *woman*. Thousands, and perhaps even millions of women are victims.<sup>1</sup> As Joseph Klaitz indicates in Servants of Satan: The Age of the Witch Hunts, the persecution of witches does not reach its peak until the middle of the sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth century. It is during this period that accusations of sexual excess become a dominant theme in the witches' trials (51). It is also at this time that the modern state asserts itself as a political unit in Western Europe, and that Santa Teresa's Spain enters the period we know as the Counter-Reformation.

As eminent historians Julio Caro Baroja and Henry Kamen have pointed out, the Spanish Inquisition is relatively lenient in its treatment of witchcraft, particularly when compared to Germany and France (Caro

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<sup>1</sup> Estimates of the number of executions resulting from accusations of witchcraft between the late fifteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries vary. More than ten thousand cases have been documented, leading scholars to believe that actual numbers range much higher, anywhere between the tens of thousands and several million. Scholars do agree on one point, however, and this is that between 80 and 90 percent of those accused and executed were women (Noddings 44).

Baroja, Las brujas 197; Kamen 208). However, in spite of comparatively few executions, allegations of witchcraft are vigorously persecuted and prosecuted in Spain well into the seventeenth century (Kamen 214). While in the early years of the Inquisition most cases brought to trial have to do with the illegal practice of the Jewish or Moslem religions, by the late sixteenth and throughout the seventeenth centuries, more than half of the offenses prosecuted by the Inquisition are those known as *delitos menores*. Of these *delitos menores* witchcraft and sorcery rank highest among women, and not surprisingly, seldom appear among men, leading historian María Helena Sánchez Ortega to conclude: "el elevadísimo porcentaje de féminas que son procesadas por prácticas supersticiosas y brujería . . . . convierte a estas causas, de alguna manera, en un problema fundamentalmente femenino" (207). Just as in the rest of Europe, the feminine is equated with unbridled and dangerous sexuality, and with a marked propensity to sin. It *must* be held under control.

#### VI. Threat and Control of the Feminine in Counter-Reformation Spain

The rejection of the feminine that comes with the rise of modernity is particularly crucial to a Spanish state that is emerging as a world empire. Oriented toward

expansion, exploration, and conquest, the Spanish Crown relies on males to sustain an increasingly large and indispensable army, and a growing bureaucracy. With the promise of fame and fortune, the Crown systematically attracts young men and boys away from their communities and into the cities, requiring that they give up their relationship to the land and to women. Once they have severed ties with their original environments as they enter schools, the military, or service to noblemen at court, these young men bond solely with their male masters. Thus unfolds a new vision of manhood conditioned by hard-won independence and detachment from women, be they mothers or lovers (El Saffar, Rapture Encaged 66).

Not surprisingly, if we recall the patterns of control in dominator-based societies, the rise of a male individualism dependent on the negation of the feminine coincides with a concerted effort by both Church and State to suppress sexuality:

Codes of honor and celibacy emphasized the dangers of relations with women. Those codes, as satirical works of the period suggest, were frequently broken, but the important point is that the image a man had to protect involved his affirmation of independence from the demands of the flesh--his self mastery. (66)

The flesh and sexuality, as we discussed both in the previous section and the last chapter, have been equated traditionally in Judeo-Christian tradition with evil and women. While this ideology is always in place in the Christian world, in periods where the dominant model is in recession, its virulence appears to be minimized. To some degree such was the case in medieval Spain (Sánchez Ortega 233). But the environment of relative sexual tolerance in medieval Spain comes to an end with its leading entrance into modernity. The free expression of sexuality is a threat to a growing empire whose unity and survival depend on the suppression of an "other" defined by race and gender. It is here that the codes of honor to which El Saffar alludes come into play.

As the Spanish historian J.H. Elliott has observed, the question of male honor becomes an obsession in sixteenth and seventeenth century Spain. In this period a man's honor (*honra*) not only defines his inner worth, but also, and more importantly, how this worth is evaluated by society (133). The code of honor--or codes, in El Saffar's interpretation--provides a means to do just that. Honor is measured in two ways: first, through the sexual conduct of the man's wife and daughters, and secondly, through his proven purity of blood. The first measure of honor obviously depends on the suppression of sexuality, specifically female sexuality. The second, although less

noticeably so, also requires the curtailing of sexual freedom. For the contamination of a man's Christian blood with Jewish ancestry originates in the sexual contact between the two "races." El Saffar adds that the code of honor is continuously breached, thus suggesting that, as Michel Foucault affirms (101), social mechanisms of control always allow for some degree of resistance. However, the Spanish code of honor will remain, at least until the disintegration of the Spanish empire, the social paradigm that defines the male individual. It will be most fiercely defended during the Counter-Reformation, a century-and-a-half marked by sustained paranoia of heresy and moral disorder.

Clearly, the primary menace to men's fulfillment of the code of honor is women. For women, as the Malleus Maleficarum incontestably propounds, embody sexuality, and the regulation of sexuality is essential to the maintenance of the code. With their inherent carnality and excessive lust, women continually threaten to lead men to shame and dishonor. This threat can only be lessened through one strategy: severely controlling their every move.

Thus arise a number of social prescriptions that seek to ensure women's chastity and men's honor. In Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville, Mary Elizabeth Perry observes that many of these prescriptions are set forth in print in numerous *diálogos* on women's behavior that appear

throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Juan de Espinosa's Diálogo en laude de las mugeres (1580) is a typical example.

Ostensibly written to defend women from accusations raised against their nature and their character, Espinosa's dialogue is in actuality more critical than laudatory. The question that it really addresses is how to distinguish a good woman from a bad one (Perry 7). As this is accomplished, the parameters of proper and improper female conduct are set forth clearly. Essentially, bad women are those whose behavior resists domination: they are "litigiosas, iracundas, rixosas, parleras de demasiada lengua y zelosas, meretrices, engañadoras, adúltricas y falsas." Good women, on the other hand, are an open ground for male control: "quietas, mansas, taciturnas, parcas, modestas, continentes, castas y prudentes" (Espinosa 209). Such good behavior, argues the author, requires their enclosure, be it in their father's or their husband's home, or in the convent (217, 219).

Espinosa's call to women's obedience, humility, silence, and chastity, and this most important need for their enclosure, appears again and again in these *diálogos*, and in manuals of similar nature like Fray Luis de León's La perfecta casada (1583). Such works are the literary crystallization of a social environment that seeks to minimize female power and influence, and that goes as far



as curtailing women's rights to property, education,<sup>2</sup> and even the care of their own children.<sup>3</sup>

While the prescription of women's enclosure assists men in their attempt to enforce these restrictions, its primary purpose is to help men tackle their most urgent concern: their wife and daughters' sexual conduct. Since the early days of the empire, and particularly after the tightening of morals brought about by the Council of Trent<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> José Antonio Maravall explains:

El cambio de la posición de la mujer en la esfera de las relaciones socioeconómicas y la pérdida de su activo papel en ellas, debía traer consigo una serie de consecuencias y, en primer lugar, estas referentes al nivel de educación: ya que no va a intervenir en los negocios del matrimonio, no necesita ni siquiera leer, escribir y contar, menos aún poseer otros variados conocimientos. (La picaresca desde la historia social 653)

<sup>3</sup> Ruth El Saffar observes that toward the late sixteenth and seventeenth century it becomes common practice for women of the upper classes throughout Western Europe to leave their infants to the care of wet nurses. To this subtle denial of a women's right to rear their children is added the increasingly common removal of male children from their homes as early as the age of seven for educational purposes (Rapture Encaged 9, 75)

<sup>4</sup> Marriage prescriptions throughout Catholic Europe become stricter after the tridentine decree on matrimony reform: couples can no longer live under the same roof until married, the ceremony is to be performed only by the parish priest and in the presence of at least two witnesses, and it must be publicly announced at least three times before it takes place (Cannons and Decrees 183-84). As Augustin Redondo observes, the Spanish monarchy plays a substantial role in tridentine reforms that ultimately seek to regulate sexual behavior:

Il est manifeste que, sur le plan normatif, le Concile de Trente a joué un rôle déterminant en officialisant certaines demandes . . . en matière de mariage et de morale sexuelle. Il a permis à la monarchie absolue des Habsbourg--qui a fait siennes les décisions conciliaires--de mieux contrôler les esprits et les comportements dans le domaine de l'amour, donc de conforter les structures sociales et religieuses, et cela par l'intermédiaire de la justice civile, de l'Inquisition, des évêques et des prêtres. (11-12)

and enforced throughout the Counter-Reformation, chastity is perceived as a woman's greatest virtue, but also her most vulnerable quality. Married women are to be chaste, except when their husbands require otherwise and for the sole purpose of reproduction. As for single women, they must remain virgins so as to ensure a lawful marriage or entry into a convent. But even though a woman's virginity lies precisely in her body, she is not to consider it her own. The Jesuit priest Tomás Sánchez makes this social reality clear in his Controversias del Santísimo Matrimonio (1603):

La mujer virgen no es dueña de su claustro virginal, de tal manera que pueda usar de él . . . Las mujeres son fáciles para la liviandad y frágiles para resistir; por eso la naturaleza les dio vergüenza y el claustro virginal que les sirviese como freno en el uso del placer, que produce casi siempre la pérdida de la prole y la pone en el camino de la prostitución . . . La naturaleza le dio a la hembra ese claustro como dote, para que el marido pudiese estar más cierto de su propia prole y la amase más,

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In keeping with such measures, and considering the substantial threat posed by female sexuality, provisions for the enclosure of nuns also become stricter and are more rigidly enforced from the time of the Council (Cannons and Decrees 220-21).

teniendo la seguridad de haberla desflorado.

(Quoted in Aler Gay 240-41)

As the excerpt reveals, a woman's virginity defines her economic and social worth: it is her dowry, and as such it belongs to her future spouse.<sup>5</sup> While it is not hers to administer, its being socially required helps the woman guard herself from her natural propensity to lust and promiscuity. Also, and more interestingly, it protects her from experiencing pleasure, and a woman's pleasure is clearly an enormous threat: it endangers the man's progeny. Ruth El Saffar observes that

Whereas in medieval medical opinion both men and women emitted seed as a requisite to conception, causing theologians to urge husbands to ensure their wife's orgasm as well as their own, gynecology in the seventeenth century reverted to the Aristotelian idea of the womb as nothing more than the vessel in which the homunculus from the sperm of the male was nurtured.

("Literary Reflections" 10)

This ideological transformation in medical discourse goes hand in hand with Western Europe's entry into modernity and its concurrent suppression of women's sexuality. A woman's sexual pleasure is not only not necessary, it is a menace

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<sup>5</sup> The dowry system is also in place for nuns. In their case the spouse is Jesus Christ; their virtue is his to have.

to the survival of the human race. Furthermore, as the Jesuit Sánchez pointedly stresses, the experience of pleasure awakens the woman's insatiable sexual appetite. It makes her uncontrollable: a whore. Not surprisingly, and taking into account the personal circumstances we will discuss in the following chapter, Santa Teresa will feel compelled to minimize rhetorically the presence of her own pleasure as she describes her experiences of mystic union.

In this repressive environment, men's attempts to eliminate the threat of female sexuality are continuous and insistent. Evidently, it is easier to control those women who are under men's jurisdiction in the private sphere: their wives and daughters. But what of "public" women, women whose livelihood depends on that very sexuality that must be subdued, and whose trade men avidly seek? The answer is once again enclosure.

Legal prescriptions regulating prostitution make their first appearance in Spain toward the end of the fourteenth century. Initial regulations require that prostitutes wear insignias or head coverings to distinguish them from respectable women, and limit their trade to certain areas. In larger urban centers of the South, namely Valencia, Seville, and Málaga, the legally permitted area is restricted to the brothel. Such state-supported enclosure of prostitutes in public houses becomes the norm in most Spanish cities and towns by the early sixteenth century.

But by this time, city ordinances additionally demand that the women refrain from working on Sundays and feast days, and instead attend Church. Royal authorities, for their part, order local officials to enforce laws against free-lance prostitution. And significantly, the administration of public brothels, which in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had been in the hands men or women commonly known as *hostaleros*, becomes a strictly male prerogative<sup>6</sup> (Perry, "Magdalens and Jezebels" 126-27). With Spain's entry into modernity prostitutes not only lose the freedom to practice their trade where they please; they are also deprived of the right to administer themselves.

During the Counter-Reformation brothels become subject to even closer supervision by the state. Stricter regulations over economic transactions between prostitutes and brothel *padres* reduce the latter's power *vis-a-vis* local authorities, and the former's already minimal economic independence. At the same time, the spread of syphilis through major ports leads government officials in many cities to demand legally the medical examination of prostitutes. Brothel administrators are responsible for enforcing these new laws, and for discharging any prostitute who shows signs of contamination. But expelling infected women from the brothel only augments an existing

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<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, at this time most Western European brothels are administered by women (Perry, Gender and Disorder 150).

and disturbing problem: wandering prostitutes. These "uncontrollable" women are a threat to public health, morality, and men. Whether infected or not, they must be enclosed. Their options are three: marriage, the Magdalen house, or prison (131-35).

Given their histories and the Spanish obsession with male honor, prostitutes (be they wandering or enclosed) are not likely to marry. When they do, it is thanks to charitable dowries granted by pious individuals. Like other women, such reformed prostitutes are regarded as property. Once they are able to show their economic worth through the only possible means left to them, a dowry, they may find an interested party and get married, and lead the regular, enclosed existence of a Spanish wife. The second option for both illegal and legal prostitutes who seek to reform is the Magdalen house. Named after Mary Magdalen, the fallen woman who upon meeting Jesus converts from her sinful life, these "convents" for receiving, sheltering, and reforming prostitutes, exist from the fourteenth century, and they flourish with the heightened moral piety of the Counter-Reformation. As Perry indicates, former prostitutes who voluntarily enter these houses often are treated with severity and are expected to follow a regimen of work and prayer that will correct their sinfulness (133). But most importantly, and in keeping with tridentine regulations over conventual life, they are to

remain enclosed. The final option, available and enforced for unrepented, wandering prostitutes, is swift and cruel punishment: prison, without a doubt the harshest form of female enclosure (135-37).

In both Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville, and her more recent article "Magdalens and Jezebels in Counter-Reformation Spain," Mary Elizabeth Perry consistently emphasizes that despite all efforts, the Spanish empire's male-dominated Church and State cannot subdue female sexuality fully: women still engage in pre-marital sex, adultery, and prostitution. The reigning atmosphere of suspicion toward women in early modern Spain, and particularly during the Counter-Reformation era, is probably intensified by men's frustration over this failure. Yet women will seek ways to challenge and express themselves within the restrictions of such an environment, and in spite of great obstacles, they sometimes will fulfill their needs and desires. Santa Teresa de Avila is one of these remarkable figures. During her lifetime the participation of women in the religious arena is first admired and then feared. Being conscious of such changes, Teresa manipulates her writings accordingly and is able to portray her experiences truthfully, if not always fully. In the chapter that follows, we will look at the complex dynamics between social control and female spirituality

over this period, and at Teresa de Jesús' history as a woman and religious figure.



## CHAPTER IV

### WOMEN, SEXUALITY, AND RELIGION: THE SHADOW OF HERESY IN TERESA DE JESUS'S LIFE

#### I. Individualism and Religious Activity in the Early Decades of Sixteenth Century Spain

Western Europe's entry into the modern era is accompanied by an intense and widespread urge for religious reform. The powerful late medieval Church is rife with corruption: ostentation, sexual laxity, and economic abuse. Moreover, the core teachings of Christianity, love and compassion, almost have been annulled by an obsessive emphasis on Church dogma and ritual. By the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century, discontent is rampant. Change is both needed and sought (Ozment 208-211).

The increasing importance ascribed to the individual in this period of transition contributes to a growing desire on the part of believers to experience their faith intimately, and to worship without many of the cumbersome regulations set in place by the Church apparatus. In Germany and the Netherlands, such desire leads to the Protestant Reformation. By mid-sixteenth century Spain will be the principal force behind the movement to counter this Protestant heresy. But towards the latter part of the fifteenth and in the earlier decades of the sixteenth century, the emerging empire also partakes of the general

atmosphere of religious renovation that spreads throughout Western Europe. Crucial to this phenomenon in Spain are the devotional practices of mendicant orders and the dissemination of the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Among the mendicant orders, the Franciscans lead the way in what becomes a widely popular form of worship known as silent prayer or prayer of recollection. As the name implies, this devotional practice which seeks God's presence in the believer's own heart is performed in silence and individually. In order to achieve the intended spiritual fulfillment in God, the believer must follow a series of exercises that will purify the soul progressively of earthly passions and desires (Bataillon I, 195-96). Such techniques will be meticulously detailed in Osuna's treatise Tercer abecedario espiritual (1527), the text that by her account inspires Santa Teresa to embrace a life of contemplation (La vida 4, 35).

By the last decade of the fifteenth century, the spiritual practices introduced by mendicant orders are vigorously supported by the powerful Cardenal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, a Franciscan himself, and regent of the Spanish empire from 1506 to 1516. Under his tutelage, Spain experiences a period of intense intellectual and religious activity. It is with his encouragement that the works of the Christian humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam are introduced into Spain, translated, and printed multiple

times.<sup>1</sup> Erasmus' thought can be summarized in two words: *philosophia Christi*. This philosophy calls for a return to the simplicity of Christ's teachings, and for a faith that is not to be argued, but lived. According to Erasmus, the word of Christ must reach intimately each and every individual, man or woman; and so, logically, the Bible must be translated into all the languages of the earth (Bataillon I, 87-88). As with the Franciscan practice of recollection, Erasmus' ideas emphasize the importance of individual experience, and implicitly minimize the relevance of Church dogma and ritual. Given the perceived threat of Lutheranism, and Spain's leading role in the counter movement to suppress it, Erasmus' immensely popular works soon become subject to Inquisitorial censorship. By mid-century they are suppressed.

Although at first sight Erasmus' thought appears to suggest that women are men's equals in the eyes of God, it is worth noting that Christian humanism is inspired by the same glorification of the individual that is essential to the development of the modern state and that thrives on the systematic subjugation of women. Spanish Christian humanists, as well as Erasmus himself, consistently reinforce the notion that women should be obedient and

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the most frequently published are Enquiridio o manual del cavallero christiano (1526), Los colloquios de Erasmo (1529), and Colloquio intitulado institucion del matrimonio christiano (1528).

submissive to men.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, and in glaring contradiction of the idea that women as well as men should be able to read and study the word of God, these highly educated men affirm that women's primary social role is that of wife. As such, women should receive minimal instruction in letters and sciences, and focus on those occupations that are proper to their sex: sewing, cooking, embroidering (Pérez 20).

But women are not deterred from participating in the religious excitement that sweeps over Spain in the early decades of the century. They seize the opportunity at hand, and often play leading roles as visionaries, ecstasies and prophets, particularly as members of the ill-fated illuminist sects.

## II. The Alumbradas: Women, Religion, and the Threat of Female Sexuality

Women's participation in the religious arena is both critical and abundant in the early part of the sixteenth century, and although progressively diminished, it remains a sore spot for the Inquisition and the Church throughout the Counter-Reformation era. Curiously, many female figures who become known and later are persecuted for their

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<sup>2</sup> See Juan Luis Vives's Instrucción de la mujer christiana (1529) and Fray Luis de León's La perfecta casada (1583), as well as Erasmus' own Colloquio intitulado del matrimonio christiano (1528).

roles as visionaries, ecstasies, and prophets, are not professed nuns but lay religious women known as *beatas*. These *beatas* take private vows of chastity and service to God, and most of the time are under the protection and direction of a priest. They frequently lead contemplative lives outside the walls of the convent and often care for the sick and poor (Perry, Culture and Control 97).

The *beatas* play a central role as leaders and members of the *alumbrado* or illuminist movement that emerges in the second decade of the sixteenth century, and that is condemned as heresy in 1524 (Márquez 65). From this time on, the *alumbrados* will be persecuted systematically by the Inquisition. But in spite of Inquisitorial efforts to eliminate them, *alumbrado* groups--with their strong female contingent--appear again and again throughout the Peninsula until the end of the seventeenth century. Although the characteristics of these groups vary according to time and place, the members of the movement are generally identified as "todos aquellos que llegaban al convencimiento de estar particularmente ilustrados por Dios" (Llorca 56). They live intensely pious lives, often experience revelations, ecstasies, and visions, and in the company of other members discuss the Bible and practice silent prayer.

Significantly, a considerable number of *alumbrados* are of *converso* origin and women, a phenomenon that becomes understandable if we take into consideration the current

atmosphere of religious intolerance toward the first and of growing repression toward the second (Caro Baroja, Las formas complejas 470). By belonging to a movement that empowers them by virtue of their personal and special relationship with God, they are able to distance themselves psychologically from those religious and political mechanisms that seek to control them. Evidently, this gives both Church and State even more fuel to justify their persecution and oppression of *alumbrados*, *conversos*, and women, especially once the Lutheran reform is under way.

In the first two decades of the century, and under the leadership of Cardenal Cisneros, several female visionaries gain great notoriety and power. Among them the most prominent figure is María de Santo Domingo, commonly known as "la Beata de Piedrahita." Originally from Salamanca, María de Santo Domingo (b. 1486) lives most of her life in Avila. From an early age she dedicates herself to prayer and engages in acts of penance. As her spiritual practices become more intense, she begins to experience ecstasies, revelations, and the gift of prophecy. In the atmosphere of religious fervor that surrounds her, such occurrences are interpreted as favors from God. María de Santo Domingo soon becomes famous throughout Castile, and is personally sought and recognized by King Fernando and Cardenal Cisneros (Llorca 43). As the appointed reformer of Dominican convents in Toledo, her power and influence, as

well as her religious raptures, increase. But it is not long before the independent-minded woman begins to encounter resistance from Dominican authorities. Within a period of two years, 1508 to 1510, she is subjected to four trials, the last two under the supervision of Pope Julius II. The *Beata* comes out triumphant, but she is relegated to isolation in the convent of Aldeanueva, to which she had been appointed perpetual prioress at the peak of her fame in 1508.

Although the *alumbrados* are not defined as a sect until after the time of her trials, and María de Santo Domingo is not a member of any *alumbrado* group, she often is considered an *alumbrada* by virtue of her style of worship and her experiences. And what is most pertinent to our study, the accusations leveled against the *Beata* in her four trials raise the same issues of sexual misbehavior that will appear time after time in other *alumbrado* trials. At the peak of her glory, the *Beata* is a young and apparently beautiful woman. In moments of religious ecstasy she frequently dances before an entourage of admirers, and sometimes asks others to dance with her. Her detractors accuse her of being an exhibitionist and of faking her raptures, emphasizing that "the sight of a young, attractive woman exhibiting her body and perhaps even her long, flowing hair, in public would seem a 'matter of lasciviousness' (*cosa de liviandad*)" (Bilinkoff 27) As

Bilinkoff also indicates, there are further reasons to suspect her sexual purity:

Even her supporters admitted that María frequently kept the company of friars, without female escort. She maintained a particularly close, some felt, unhealthy, relationship with her confessor, Diego de Vitoria. . . . Many witnesses commented on the "excessive familiarities" between María de Santo Domingo and Diego de Vitoria, and other friars. Clergymen reportedly spent entire nights in her cell, sitting on or even leaning on her bed.

(27)

As we will continue to observe, the intimate relation between confessor and female penitent is ideal for bringing to the surface deeply suppressed desires. Rumors and scandals about illicit sexual relationships between the two parties were common, and frequently accurate. The extent of María's involvement with her confessor and other friars is not known, and in any case, the rumors were hushed upon her acquittal. But the fact remains that the accusations raised against her target her reputation, and associate her ecstatic experiences with an uncontrollable and much feared female sexuality. The same will occur in the trials of



full-fledged *alumbradas* that begin as early as 1524 and continue well into the seventeenth century.<sup>3</sup>

The word *alumbrado* in itself carries sexual undertones from its first appearance. According to Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, it is initially used in a letter written in 1512 by Fray Antonio de Pastrana to Cardenal Cisneros regarding a visionary friar "alumbrado con las tinieblas de Satanás." The friar had received a revelation demanding that he have sexual relations with several saintly women so as to beget prophets (quoted in Márquez 71). The word will continue to be used often mockingly and with sexual innuendo to refer to people "illuminated" by God's grace.

The main groups of *alumbrados* that gain notoriety and are persecuted during Santa Teresa's lifetime are those of Toledo and of Llerena. The *alumbrados* of Toledo are different from any other such group in that they do not encourage any type of vision, ecstasy or rapture. Rather, they embrace a peculiar form of contemplation known as *dexamiento*. Profoundly inspired by the mystical writings of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, this practice requires an emptying of the self, and a letting go (*dejarse*) of that self until it is completely filled by God's divine love. Even though the practice of *dexamiento* does not exhibit any

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<sup>3</sup> See Antonio Márquez Los Alumbrados: Orígenes y filosofía (1525-1559) and Bernardino Llorca's La Inquisición española y los Alumbrados (1509-1667).

external signs that may be misconstrued as indecorous, the implications of being filled by the love of God lead to similar problems. For if one's human self is nothing but God's love, then any action that one takes originates in God. Therefore, one cannot sin: one is impeccable. The *alumbrados'* conviction of their invulnerability to sin obviously can, and in several cases ostensibly does, lead to sexual misconduct (Márquez 181-82). Once again, intensely personal religious experience and sexuality coincide.

The Toledo group emerges around 1515, and is composed of people from this city and surrounding areas such as Guadalajara, Pastrana, Cifuentes, La Salceda, and Valladolid. Its leading figures are both men and women, but it is a woman, Isabel de la Cruz, who stands as its "verdadera madre y maestra" (101). According to accusations raised against her and fellow *alumbrados* Pedro Ruíz de Alcaraz and Gaspar de Bedoya, which result in their trial of 1524 and the Edict banning all *alumbrado* activity in 1525, it is Isabel who initiates the practice of *dexamiento* and who is responsible for its dissemination throughout Castile (67). The records of Isabel's trial have not survived, but judging from those of Alcaraz's trial, it is likely that she is also sentenced to life imprisonment.

Although there is no evidence of sexual misconduct in the case of Isabel, the issue comes up all the same. In the summary of her accusations she is denounced as follows:

dice un testigo que su prelado le había mandado  
que ciertos hombres no entrasen en su casa,  
porque debido a ello se levantaba murmuración  
entre algunos. No obstante esto, la rea no  
quiso conformarse con este precepto. (Art. 10,  
#108, quoted in Márquez 276)

Interpreted by her accusers as proof of sexual misconduct, Isabel's "liberal" behavior is compounded by her refusal to obey a male superior: the threat of female sexuality is clearly a threat to male authority. This situation is aggravated by the fact that she is the mastermind of a religious practice, *dexamiento*, that in its final consequences eliminates any need for moral regulations, and implicitly opens the door to an increasingly feared sexuality.

The rumors surrounding Isabel's behavior with male friends become proven fact in the case of the second major spiritual guide to the *alumbrados* of Toledo, Francisca Hernández (Llorca 68). In her trial, Francisca is accused of and admits to having sexual relations with fellow *alumbrado* Antonio de Medrano, and to at least accepting the presence of other men in her bed:

Preguntada si se holgava esta declarante quel dicho Medrano la besase y retoçase y tentase lascivamente, dixo que esta declarante pensava que la tenía aquella caridad, que esta declarante le tenía al dicho M. por Dios, e por eso lo consentía. Preguntada si es verdad que alguna persona se acostava en la cama desta declarante algunas noches, dixo que algunas vezes, estando mala esta declarante, ivan adonde estava echada esta declarante Tovar y M. Cabrera y Villareal, y que algunas veces se echava en la cama a donde estava esta declarante, encima de la ropa el dicho M. a dormir un rato. (quoted in Llorca 290)

Francisca openly acknowledges her improper sexual behavior, and what is more, justifies it as involving God. Now even clearer and more dangerously than in the cases of María de Santo Domingo and Isabel de la Cruz, the boundaries between the sexual and the spiritual are undone.

As with Isabel de Santo Domingo, the full records of Francisca Hernández's trial have been lost (Bataillon I, 11). It is known that she is incarcerated during the time of her trial, and we can assume that she testifies under torture, as this was common Inquisitorial procedure for heresy. This raises important questions as to the veracity of her testimony, as well as that of any other person so

treated when accused of heresy. The truth as to Francisca's improper sexual conduct will never be known. But as was the case with María de Santo Domingo and Isabel de la Cruz, and will also be the case with the *alumbradas* of Llerena and other prominent *beatas*, the issue of sexuality is central to her role as a "fallen" female religious figure.

The *alumbrados* of Toledo disappear as a group by 1539. Many--among them a good number of women--are required to parade half-naked in a series of *autos de fe* that begin in 1529, and are then sent to prison (Márquez 67-68). But the *alumbrado* problem is far from over. In Santa Teresa's lifetime, and at a particularly dangerous moment for her, a new group comes to the foreground in Llerena, Extremadura.

The *alumbrados* of Llerena, in existence between 1570 and 1582, are primarily known, accused, and tried for scandalous sexual behavior. The Inquisitorial acts of their trials have been lost, but a series of detailed *Memorials* remain. These were written by the Dominican Fray Alonso de la Fuente, one of the key figures in the discovery and punishment of this *alumbrado* group, and, significantly, one Santa Teresa's main detractors. In addition, a Relación de las proposiciones que castigaron el año 1575 en el auto público probably authored by an inquisitor, and some chronicles written by historians contemporary to the events have also been preserved (Llorca

103-04).<sup>4</sup> One of these historians, Fray Alonso Fernández initiates his first of three *relatos*, dated 1579, with the following description:

En tiempos del Obispo Fr. Martín de Córdoba, se levantó una gente de Extremadura, en la ciudad de Llerena y pueblos comarcanos que, engañada de las leyes vestiales de la carne y nueva luz que fingían, persuadían a los simples ignorantes ser el verdadero espíritu errado, con que querían alumbrar las almas de sus secuaces. Por eso se llamaron alumbrados y venían a parar sus leyes a obedecer el imperio de la carne. (quoted in Llorca 105)

The *alumbrados* of Llerena embrace practices like silent prayer and prayer of recollection; and like those of Toledo, only with greater vehemence and liberality, as the description above suggests, they are convinced of their impeccability from sin. While it is true that except for one woman,<sup>5</sup> the leaders of the sect are men, and, but for

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<sup>4</sup> As Bernardino Llorca indicates, all of the texts preserved are written by declared enemies of the group (103). Given the viciously repressive stance of the Church and the Inquisition at this time, it is doubtful that their interpretation of events would in any significant way differ from that of Inquisitorial authorities. Once again, the accusations and proof of sexual misconduct against this group of *alumbrados* should be read with the Spanish atmosphere of sexual repression and misogyny in mind.

<sup>5</sup> At fifty years of age, this woman, Mari González, is much older than the great majority of the *alumbradas* of Llerena. She is considered a teacher and spiritual guide, and is accused of facilitating sexual encounters between the priests and their young female followers in her own house (Llorca 109).

one, all priests, the great contingent of *alumbrados* in Llerena--the "simples ignorantes"--are women.

These women, apparently all of them young and single, become *beatas* under the guidance of priests who roam the Extremaduran countryside in search of female followers. Once the women join the group, the priests become their sole confessors, and dangerously close relationships ensue. Accusations of sexual improprieties between *beatas* and confessors abound. Those leveled against the priest Hernando Alvarez in Fray Alonso Fernández's 1579 document are an example:

Testificaron contra él mucho número de testigos . . . que con las Beatas, sus hijas de confesión (comulgándolas muy a menudo), tenía deshonestidades graves de besos y abrazos y tocamientos torpes . . . y les decía y daba a entender que aquello no era pecado y ellas, creyéndolo así, se comulgaban sin hazer consçiencia de ello; confesó haber tenido las dichas deshonestidades y que les decía no ser aquello pecado, quando aquellos tocamientos se hacían para ayudallas a llevar con los trabajos y aflicçiones que passavam con los ejercicios que les enseñava. . . . (Quoted in Llorca 107)

The exercises Hernández alludes to are essentially whippings, the use of cilices, and fasts followed by hours of silent prayer focused on Christ's wounds. Such practices often lead these women to experience ecstasies and visions that come dangerously close to sexual orgasm:

Las que hacen esta oración y exercitan en ella, sienten calores, ardores y dolores en partes determinadas del cuerpo, corazón, en el pecho, en las espaldas, en el brazo izquierdo y en los lugares de las llagas; tienen desmayos, arrobamientos y ahogamientos de pecho, cansancio, regalos, rabias, saltos en el corazón y ansias y otros extraños afectos , y ellos les dicen que son de Dios y el Espíritu Santo. Ay algunas beatas destas que, haciendo esta oración y contemplación, ven visiones y oyen ruidos y voces, reciben grandes miedos y temores, no pueden ver imágenes ni cosas de devoción, diciendo que están llenas de Dios, que no les cabe más; les parece que Christo, en quien están contemplando, les aparece en figura de hombre .

. . . (Relación de las proposiciones quoted in Llorca 297-98)

Unfortunately for the those of us who have been unable to locate the anonymous text, Bernardino Llorca saves our sensibilities from further outrage by eliminating the



paragraph's closing comments: "las siguientes expresiones son de un realismo tal, que no podemos transcribirlas aquí, y demuestran claramente hasta qué extremo de ilusión llegaban en realidad los alumbrados de Llerena y los peligros reales que ofrecía esta secta" (298).

It is anybody's guess what these "expresiones" say. But judging from where the declarations are cut off, it is likely that some kind of sexual exchange ensues between the *beata* experiencing the ecstasy and this Christ "en figura de hombre."

Undoubtedly, according to the surviving records, these women's religious raptures involve some form of sexual release that is set off by the image of physical pain and that in itself involves pain. All of which is in keeping with Riane Eisler's theory that the repression of sexuality in a dominator-type society often results in a favoring of pain over pleasure, and in confusing the latter with the former. The prominent role of pain in the *beatas'* experiences should thus shield them from scandal. But pain appears in tandem with symptoms that are clearly reminiscent of sexual pleasure: bodily heat, rapid heartbeat, deep breathing. And, what is worse, these moments of religious ecstasy where desire, pain, and pleasure coincide, take place under the guidance of the very men who become the *beatas'* lovers. The life of the spirit has been dangerously trespassed by the urgings of

the flesh, and no amount of pain can undo this scandalous reality.

Remaining records show that punishment for the *alumbrados* of Llerena is swift and rigorous: a series of *autos de fe* between 1575 and 1581, whippings, torture, incarceration, fines, and enclosure in convents and monasteries (Llorca 120-121). And while it is true that the male leaders are more harshly punished than their female followers by virtue of their responsibility as priests, it is the women's virtue that has been tainted, and it is they who have most dangerously crossed the boundaries between the sexual and the spiritual. The Llerena trials are the last large outburst of *alumbrado* activity during Teresa's lifetime, and, as we shall see, they will profoundly affect her through the rest of her life. Shortly after the scandals begin, Santa Teresa herself will be repeatedly accused of illuminism, and will be investigated by the Inquisition on counts of sexual misbehavior, excessive mortification, and unorthodox religious practices (Lincoln 90-91). After her death, more *alumbrado* scandals will erupt, always involving accusations of sexual misconduct and dangerously erotic religious occurrences primarily experienced by women.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Llorca on *alumbrado* scandals in Seville (1620-1630) and Madrid (1628-38) (155-191).

### III. Devil Seduction, Pleasure, and Pain: More Scandals Involving Women and Religion

Given the relationship between women, sexuality, and the devil firmly established by the late fifteenth century, and reinforced in the renowned Malleus Maleficarum, it is not surprising to find that visions, revelations, and ecstasies experienced by women are often interpreted as evidence of seduction by the devil. As Alison Weber observes, one notorious case that has immediate and lasting impact throughout Spain and for Santa Teresa in particular, is that of a nun of the Poor Claire order, Magdalena de la Cruz ("Santa Teresa, Demonologist" 173).

In the days of Cisneros' reform and for close to forty years, Magdalena experiences revelations and ecstasies that mark her body with Christ's stigmata and the wound inflicted on the left side of his chest. Early on, the nun becomes a celebrity, and is worshipped by numerous followers, among them King Felipe II himself (Llorca 98). But in 1546, and under suspicion of fakery, the prominent religious figure is subjected to an Inquisitorial examination. As Weber observes, "what was apparently accepted earlier in Magdalena's career as a beatific vision of Christ under questioning elicited a confession of nocturnal visits by a seductive and gallant Devil who offered pleasure, power, and prestige" (173).

Upon interrogation, Magdalena admits to experiencing carnal delights with the Devil, and attributes many of her visions and ecstasies to diabolic intervention. The former celebrity escapes the death sentence, but is condemned to perpetual silence and imprisonment (173). Magdalena de la Cruz's case is representative of the shift in attitude toward "unorthodox" religious experiences that takes place at the onset of the Spanish Counter-Reformation. Her investigation and its results coincide with and certainly influence the growing mistrust of female visionaries and mystics on the part of the Church and the Inquisition.

In La mujer y la sexualidad en el antiguo régimen María Helena Sánchez Ortega observes that with the onset of the Counter-Reformation there is not only an increase in the number of trials of witches, but also of female visionaries, known as *ilusas* or *iludentes*, who frequently have illicit sexual relationships with their confessors and followers. Just as in the case of Magdalena de la Cruz, the figure of the devil looms menacingly in both situations. Women accused of witchcraft are said to engage in sexual orgies where they copulate with their male counterparts and with the devil. As for *ilusas* and *iludentes*, the raptures, ecstasies, and revelations for which they are followed, and which unleash their own carnal lusts, are ostensibly nothing but deceptions of Satan, who often seeks their favors himself (33-35). Judging from

these trials, the border between the already over-sexualized witch and the female religious figure is becoming alarmingly malleable.

Being a woman and a mystic, Santa Teresa will have to contend with an early modern Spanish society rigidly encased in a dominator model, and acutely suspicious of women and female sexuality. For twenty years she is told by confessors and prelates that her raptures and ecstasies are brought on by the devil, but she insistently defends herself from such accusations. In her early autobiographical work, La vida, Teresa chooses to bring together pain and pleasure in order to minimize the salient eroticism of her ecstasies. Such a strategy would appear to be in keeping with the long medieval tradition of female mystics like Catherine of Siena and Angela de Foligno, whose highly erotic religious experiences involve and even confuse both elements.<sup>7</sup> But after the shameful events in Llerena, where pain, pleasure, and sexuality suspiciously coincide with female religiosity, a rhetorical emphasis on pain no longer seems appropriate as a means to take attention away from the very real and problematic presence of female corporeality and pleasure.

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<sup>7</sup> Both of these women's works are translated under the supervision of Cardenal Cisneros (Bataillon I, 57). Santa Teresa was certainly familiar with their texts, and most probably read them (see La vida XX:1 101, and Luis Santullano's notes in his edition of La vida XX: 134).

The effects of Llerena are only worsened by a series of scandalous trials that occur around the same time, and that involve sado-masochistic practices between *beatas* and their confessors. According to Inquisitorial records, the friars and priests, known as *flagelantes*:

llevados por su celo penitencial imponían penitencias de disciplinas a sus hijas de confesión . . . , que les administraban ellos mismos. A veces, a mano limpia, otras, las más, con látigos y vergajos de cuerdas e incluso de hierro, y siempre, con las sayas levantadas, a carne descubierta. (Sánchez Ortega 38)

The erotic implications of such interactions do not go unnoticed by the Inquisition, and the incriminated parties are persecuted and tried as heretics (48-9). Once again pain, pleasure, and women are perilously associated.

Teresa will have to face the Holy Tribunal on more than one occasion and under accusations that portray her as an immoral and heretical *alumbrada*. The effects of these harrowing encounters will be inscribed in her last mystical work, Las moradas, where the body, pleasure, and pain appear significantly obscured.

#### IV. Teresa de Jesús' Early Years: The "Ways of the World"

The environment of suspicion toward unorthodox religious experiences, women, and sexuality in Counter-Reformation Spain, and the ongoing persecution of female figures whose spiritual practices appear dangerously physical, have a profound effect on Teresa de Jesús' life and her writings. As a professed nun, Teresa is subject to multiple accusations and three Inquisitorial processes, and her books suffer the same fate before and after her death. But rumors about Teresa's "reputation" begin to spread years before she becomes ordained, and decades before her name appears under the heading of *alumbrada* in the annals of the Inquisition (Llamas Martínez 98).

Scant and ambiguous as they may be, the only first-hand references we have about Teresa's adolescence appear in the early part of her autobiography, La vida. In a brief second chapter, the author narrates the events that lead her father to place her, against her will, in an Augustinian convent, with the hope of hushing perilous gossip about her *honra*. As she tells it, while a young and beautiful adolescent, "comecé a traer galas y a desear contentar en parecer bien" (II: 30). Such vanities are heightened by her friendship with a female relative, who "era de tan livianos tratos que mi madre había mucho procurado desviar que tratase en casa (parece adivinava el

mal que por ella me había de venir)..." (II: 31).

Unfortunately, Teresa's mother dies, and without her surveillance and against her father and older sister's wishes, Teresa continues to spend time with this "loose" young woman, who "me parece me imprimía sus condiciones" (II: 31).

The extent of such "condiciones" is uncertain, for her statements are far from clear. On the one hand, she emphasizes that the fear of losing her *honra* torments her, and that this fear saves her from completely falling. On the other hand, she admits to doing "muchas cosas" against her *honra* and justifying them with the thought that they will not be known. With the aid of her relative and servants, the young beauty puts herself and her family in a terribly perilous position. Her account of the situation is fascinating in all its silences, ambiguities, and contradictions:

Al principio dañáronme las cosas dichas--a lo que me parece--y no debía ser suya la culpa, sino mía; porque después mi malicia para el mal bastava, junto con tener criadas, que para todo mal hallava en ellas buen aparejo. . . . Y pues nunca era inclinada a mucho mal--porque cosas deshonestas naturalmente aborrecía--, sino a pasatiempos de buena conversación; mas puesta en ocasión, estaba en la mano del peligro, y ponía



en el a mi padre y hermanos. De los cuales me  
 libró Dios de manera que se parece bien  
 procurava contra mi voluntad que del todo no se  
 me perdiese, aunque no pudo ser tan secreto que  
 no huviese harta quiebra de mi honra y sospecha  
 en mi padre. (III: 31)

In the first place, rumors--"las cosas dichas"--are spreading, and in spite of the author's rhetorical nonchalance--"a lo que me parece"--they are harmful. Teresa openly acknowledges her evil nature, and adds that it is worsened by the help of her maids. Her silence here is telling, for we can only guess what it is that her maids do to further the young woman's propensity for evil. In her engaging biography of the Castilian mystic, Teresa: A Woman, Victoria Lincoln speculates that her maids probably assisted her in slipping in and out of the house secretly, by dark (15), a hypothesis that seems not far fetched given the "cosas dichas" which result in her tainted honor.

But Teresa's acknowledgment of her "malicia" is quickly followed by a contradictory statement. She now informs the reader that she was never "inclinada a mucho mal" and that she abhorred all dishonesties. However, the circumstances led her astray, placing her father's and siblings' honor at risk. The contradictions are glaring: first she is full of malice, next she is not inclined to evil, and finally the circumstances do her in. This

stylistic strategy of presenting the facts in an ambiguous manner so that the truth is said and yet also covered up or diluted, will be a constant in Teresa's writings, and will appear repeatedly when she addresses her visions and raptures, as we will shall have occasion to see.

The narrative game continues: God delivers her from losing her virtue, yet rumors are serious enough that her *honra*, and that of her father, suffer greatly. In Teresa's Spain, losing one's *honra* is, in the eyes of the community, tantamount to losing one's virtue. Hence the ambiguity of her statement: perhaps she has not lost her virginity, yet her behavior and the talk surrounding it are grave enough that her honor is, if not totally lost, at least seriously damaged. Teresa's astutely placed "yet" (*aunque*) will come up again and again as she writes about her mystical experiences. For now, the damage has been done, and her father's only course is to send her to a convent temporarily in an attempt to silence the gossip, control her behavior, and clear the family name.

Thus begins Teresa's religious life, for what is intended to be a temporary solution to the problem of Teresa's unbecoming conduct leads to her profession as a Carmelite nun four years later, at the age of twenty. In the five succeeding chapters, and again in a manner full of silences and ambiguities, the future Saint portrays the twenty years that follow as a "mar tempestuoso" in which

she wavers between the life of the spirit and the ways of the world:

por una parte me llamava Dios, por otra yo  
 seguía a el mundo, dábanme gran contento todas  
 las cosas de Dios, teníanme atadas las del  
 mundo; parece que quería concertar estos dos  
 contrarios--tan enemigos uno del otro--como es  
 vida espiritual, y contentos, gustos y  
 pasatiempos sensuales. (VII: 47)

This struggle is present from the earliest years of her religious life. Curiously, Teresa's resolve to become a nun is impelled by a serious illness that leaves her weak and fearful of eternal damnation (III: 33), and that is probably connected with a pervasive sense of guilt over the "muchas cosas" that took place while she lived at her father's house. Following her friend Juana Suárez, Teresa decides to join the Carmelites at La Encarnación, a fairly lax, unenclosed convent, where nuns are remarkably free to come and go as they please, and to regularly take *devotos*, bored young married men who for all practical purposes court them under the guise of seeking spiritual guidance (Lincoln 23). After a year of "grandes desasosiegos," the now professed nun falls ill once again, nearly dies while convalescing at her sister's home, and survives only to return to La Encarnación sick and crippled. As Lincoln points out, Teresa promptly blames her breakdown on "la

mudanza de la vida y de los manjares" (La vida IV: 35), but does not reveal the actual cause of her illness until three chapters later, in an oddly placed and easily overlooked narrative flashback (Lincoln 22-23).

Once professed, and before her second illness, Teresa becomes the convent beauty and the center of many *devotos'* attentions (23). As she tells it in the beginning of the seventh chapter,

Pues así comencé de pasatiempo en pasatiempo,  
de vanidad en vanidad, de ocasión en ocasión, a  
meterme tanto en muy grandes ocasiones y andar  
tan estragada mi alma, que ya yo tenía vergüenza  
de en tan particular amistad, como es tratar de  
oración, tornarme a llegar a Dios; ayudóme esto  
que, como crecieron los pecados, comencóme a  
faltar el gusto y regalo en las cosas de virtud.  
(43)

Judging from these words, Teresa has returned to her old ways, and has done so in spite of her recent spiritual vows. The writer goes on to explain that her dealings with male admirers "no es de culpar a la casa adonde estava" (43). However, after a short digression, she astutely and indirectly returns to the "casa" by telling us where she should have gone and did not, thus alluding to where she indeed went: "por esto me parece a mí me hizo harto daño no estar en monesterio encerrado . . ." And after shifting

back to herself, and blaming her "grandes ocasiones" on her own malice, she advises all parents to take her word. If they want to safeguard their daughters' honor, they should rather marry them to someone of a lower station than

meterlas en monesterios semajantes, si no son muy bien inclinadas . . . . u se la (sic.) tenga en su casa; porque si quiere ser ruin, no se podrá encubrir sino poco tiempo, y acá muy mucho . . . . y a las veces las pobrecitas no tienen culpa, porque se van por lo que hallan. Y es lástima que muchas se quieren apartar del mundo y, pensando que se van a servir al Señor y a apartar de los peligros del mundo, se hallan en diez mundos juntos, que ni saben cómo se valer ni remediar; que la mocedad y sensualidad y demonio las convida y enclina a seguir algunas cosas que son de el mismo mundo, ve allí lo que tiene por bueno, por manera de decir. (44)

Such advise, placed in close succession to the mystic's acknowledged misbehavior and purportedly on behalf of young women whose *honra* is at stake, is a concealed act of self defense. The manipulation is blatant: yes, Teresa-- disguised as the third person "pobrecita hija"-- is an evil and fallen woman, *but* she is not fully to blame, as her environment has provided even more "ocasiones" to sin than those she would have encountered under her father's roof.

Here again, Teresa says without saying, and in doing so she is deceptively truthful, and hence successful in defending herself before rumors and accusations.<sup>8</sup>

In these often cryptic five chapters (III-VII), Teresa does not mention names, but does say that there is a "persona" for whom she feels a special "afición" and whose company is particularly dangerous (VII: 45). Lincoln indicates that this person is García de Toledo, the very same confessor who years later orders her to write La vida, and who insists "[que] moderase el contar mis pecados," to which she adds that they already "harto hermoseados van" (V: 40). We do not know how far Teresa and García's relationship went, though Lincoln suspects that they may have been lovers (37). The fact that years later García orders her to write her autobiography, emphasizing that she not overdo it in the telling of her sins, at least suggests that García has need to clear his name as well as hers. But García is only one of many confessors with whom the mystic establishes perilously close relationships and whose careers become endangered by association with Teresa de Jesús.

Since the early days at La Encarnación and until her death, incessant rumors spread about the mystic and her

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<sup>8</sup> As we will discuss later, Teresa writes her autobiography at the order of one of her confessors, García de Toledo, and under the watchful eye of the Inquisition (Llamas Martínez 228, 230). Thus her need to recount her life--and her sins--in a roundabout way.

confessors. Their talks are long and intense, and Teresa's male spiritual guides are invariably charmed by her grace and intelligence (Lincoln 36-37). Although little is proven, at least seven priests, among them García de Toledo, are sent away by their superiors once gossip about the ecstatic nun and them grows too pervasive (73, 79, 138). One such instance, involving her most revered spiritual father Jerónimo Gracián, ultimately will be linked with two Inquisitorial investigations out of which Teresa will emerge cleared, yet damaged in the public eye.

While Teresa is ill for the second time and away at her sister's farm house (1536), her uncle Pedro introduces her to the devotional manuals of Francisco de Osuna. It is upon her reading of the Tercer abecedario espiritual that she decides to engage in the practice of quiet prayer as a means to fully give herself to the life of the spirit and grow closer to God (La vida IV: 35). Her resolve remains strong and intact during the three years of her convalescence, but once she is healed, her struggle and the torment accompanying it resume. While her commitment to prayer helps sustain her, she falls again and again:

Y con levantarme y mal--pues tornava a caer--y en vida tan baja de perfección, que ningun caso casi hacía de pecados veniales, y los mortales, aunque los temía, no como había de ser, pues no me apartava de los peligros, sé decir que es una

de las vidas más penosas que se puede imaginar; porque ni yo gozava de Dios, ni traía contento del mundo. Cuando estava en los contentos de el mundo, en acordarme lo que devía a Dios era con pena; cuando estava con Dios, las afeciones del mundo me desosegavan. (VIII: 49)

This inner turmoil will last a long time; the mystic, as we have mentioned, indicates that she wavers between the ways of the spirit and the ways of the world for twenty tortuous years. But two events will temper the intensity of her struggle and reassure her that she is moving closer to God. In the ninth chapter of La vida, Teresa describes a vivid experience that forever alters her life:<sup>9</sup>

Acaeciecióme que entrando un día en el oratorio, vi una imagen que habían traído allí a guardar, que se había buscado para cierta fiesta que se hacía en casa. Era de Cristo muy llagado, y tan devota, que en mirándola, toda me turbó de verle tal, porque representava bien lo que pasó por nosotros. Fue tanto lo que sentí de lo mal que había agradecido aquellas llagas, que el corazón parece se me partía, y arrojéme cabe El con grandísimo derramamiento de lágrimas,

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<sup>9</sup> Teresa does not indicate exactly when these two events occur. According to Lincoln's biography, they probably take place closely after her father's death in 1543 (34-38).



suplicándole me fortaleciese ya de una vez para  
no ofenderle. (53)

From this moment on, the young nun will meditate regularly on the Passion of Christ, attempting to feel him inside her in all his loneliness and pain. Significantly, she also will begin to receive "mercedes" from God in the form of visions and ecstatic raptures that will involve pain but now often in conjunction with a distinct and dangerous sensation of pleasure as well. These experiences, which her spiritual advisors for years interpret as demonically induced, will be the source of both great joy and sorrow for Teresa. For they will allow her to experience divine love, and yet they also will lead many of her contemporaries to label her an *alumbrada*.<sup>10</sup>

The other critical--and telling--event that occurs around the year 1545 is what Lincoln calls Teresa's "second conversion," her reading of Augustine's Confessions.<sup>11</sup> Again in the ninth chapter, the mystic describes her experience as follows:

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<sup>10</sup> As Angela Selke points out in "El iluminismo de los conversos y la Inquisición," most *alumbrados* are of converso origin (620-21). Given the corporeality of Teresa's mystical experiences, certainly reminiscent of Medieval Jewish mysticism in Spain, and her own tainted blood, accusations against her are grounded on more than one count, and are therefore cause for grave concern.

<sup>11</sup> Her "first conversion" would be, according to Lincoln, Teresa's earlier decision to become a nun, a decision primarily driven by guilt and fear.

Como comecé a leer las "Confesiones", paréceme me vía yo allí. . . . Cuando llegué a su conversión y leí cómo oyó aquella voz en el huerto, no me parece sino que el Señor me la dio a mí, según sintió mi corazón; estuve por gran rato que toda me deshacía de lágrimas, y entre mí mesma con gran aflección y fatiga. (54)

As Lincoln is quick to point out, Augustine, a man plagued by lust who for many years prayed "God, make me chaste--but not yet," decisively turns away from the pleasures of the flesh upon hearing the voice in the garden, which commands him to open the Bible and read. As he opens the holy book, Augustine stumbles upon the following words by Saint Paul: "Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in whoring and lasciviousness, not in quarrelings and jealousy, but take on the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ and give no more thought to the lusts of the flesh" (quoted in Lincoln 40). Up to this point, Teresa's struggles with the ways of the world revolved primarily around her dealings with men. Now, after seeing herself in Augustine, and realizing that the fallen can indeed be redeemed, she will face her spiritual journey with renewed conviction and vigor. While it is true that she will continue to feel a special and intense devotion toward several of her confessors, in

particular Martín Gutiérrez and Jerónimo Gracián,<sup>12</sup> her love of them does not wrench her apart as in earlier years. But the rumors that accompanied her early inner turmoil will not cease, and these in conjunction with growing suspicion about her ecstatic experiences and accusations of illuminism, ultimately will bring her before the Inquisition.

#### V. Teresa and the Inquisition

Although allegations about Teresa de Jesús' illuminism begin to spread when it becomes known that she has intense and often visible ecstatic experiences, it is not until 1574 and in Córdoba that formal accusations are raised against her on those grounds. According to Llamas Martínez, the Inquisitorial records of the accusations have not survived. However, all indications are that they were not severe and mainly revolved around Teresa's acquaintance with a Dr. Carleval, who was himself persecuted for illuminist practices (35). While the Córdoba episode appears to have been rather mild, a second and concurrent event turned out to be considerably more serious. Teresa's autobiography, La vida, is seized by the Holy Tribunal in Madrid and subjected to a thorough investigation. Once again, the charges are of illuminism.

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<sup>12</sup> Gutiérrez was her confessor around the 1565, and Gracián between 1570 and her death in 1582.

This unfortunate affair should come as no surprise, for the Castilian mystic's writing of La vida is itself the consequence of damaging talk about both her excessive religious experiences and questionable dealings with confessors. Initially the manuscript is "una larga cuenta de consciencia," undivided and brief. The first draft is finished in 1562, but soon after García de Toledo and another of Teresa's confessors, Domingo Báñez, ask her to enlarge it precisely in those sections where she speaks of her raptures and ecstasies. The second and final draft in forty chapters is finished in 1565 (231-33). Apparently her final manuscript, in spite of being a strictly personal exercise, is copied several times and read by many. Given the growing Counter-Reformation paranoia concerning unorthodox religious experiences, it seems almost logical that the Inquisition seizes the work. The date, 1574, is of particular interest, since this is the moment when the *alumbrado* scandals of Llerena are achieving their greatest turbulence.

The Córdoba investigation amounted to little, and that of her autobiography results in the general approval of the book, with some significant reservations. Appointed its censor by the Holy Tribunal, Domingo Báñez writes in 1575 a final report, which appears as an appendix to La vida in various editions of Teresa de Jesús' works. Báñez approves the work as theologically sound and praises Teresa as an

experienced, discreet, and humble spiritual figure.

However,

Sólo una cosa hay en este libro que poder reparar, y con razón, basta examinarla muy bien, y es que tiene muchas revelaciones y visiones, las cuales siempre son de mucho temer, especialmente en mujeres, que son más fáciles en creer que son de Dios y en poner en ellas la santidad, como quiera que no consista en ellas, antes se han de tener por trabajos peligrosos para los que pretenden perfección; porque acostumbra Satanás transformarse en ángel de luz y engañar las almas curiosas y poco humildes, como en nuestros tiempos se ha visto. (La vida 190)

The only matter for concern in Teresa's autobiography is, as expected, her ecstatic experiences. The sexual undertones of Báñez's objections rest on the standing belief in women's lustful natures and in their often intimate dealings with the devil. Ecstatic experiences, deception ("engaño") and demonic seduction are in women dangerously close, and this is acutely evident in Inquisitorial reports written around this same time (in the 1570's) by Alonso de la Fuente upon the *alumbrado* scandals in Llerena. As Llamas Martínez tells it, de la Fuente indicates in one report

que vio por sus propios ojos en más de veinte pueblos de aquella región, que multitud de mujeres y de hombres se arrebataban y desmayaban, y sentían la presencia de Dios y todos los efectos espirituales de que habla la Madre Teresa en el libro de su Vida. Y que si la mujer era ramera y profana era más capaz y sentía más en breve dichos efectos. En otro documento afirma que los alumbrados de Extremadura, e igualmente los que anidaban en el obispado de Jaén, descubiertos años adelante, padecían frecuentemente el rapto de las potencias, quedando como muertos. Este fenómeno dominaba de un modo especial a las mujeres, que quedaban como despulsadas. En dicho rapto "padecían y eran oprimidas del demonio y eran súcubas". (19)

Llamas Martínez's rendition of de la Fuente's words makes clear the similarity between these *alumbrados*' experiences and those of the future Saint. The resemblance is particularly alarming as it pertains to the women's behavior. For them, the intensity of the occurrences is directly related to sexual mis-conduct--as we know, Teresa's "reputation" is a delicate matter--. Furthermore, female *alumbradas* are sexually ravaged by the devil in those instances where the faculties of the soul become

suspended and their bodies remains as if dead--in La vida Teresa admits to experiencing these symptoms often while in ecstasy--. For reasons such as these, the Castilian mystic's experiences and her writings on the subject are causes for concern.<sup>13</sup>

Despite his reservations, Báñez does approve the book. This, I shall argue, is partly due to the author's clever association of pain and pleasure in the description of her experiences. But the Inquisitorial censor is firm and clear on one point:

Y resuélvome en que este libro no está para que se comunique a quienquiera, sino a los hombres doctos y de experiencia y discreción cristiana. El está muy a propósito para del fin para que se escrivió, que fue dar noticia esta religiosa de su alma a los que la han de guiar, para no ser engañada. (La vida 191)

The book is authorized, but it is to be read only by those who are theologically protected against its dangers. Certainly, women are not within this group. Santa Teresa's first dealings with the Inquisition in 1574-75 leave her clear, yet considerably shaken and isolated. The

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<sup>13</sup> Soon after Teresa's death in 1582, de la Fuente will write five accusatory reports of the mystic's works, bringing up similar allegations. Although he refrains from making accusations against Teresa herself, de la Fuente does not hesitate to attack her words severely (See Llamas Martínez 395-444).

subsequent investigation in Seville will prove even more damaging.

The events that unravel in Seville between 1575 and 1579 are involved and complicated. In great measure they are the result of an on-going political struggle between the Calced and Discalced Carmelites, at the time considered a single order.<sup>14</sup> Teresa's decision to found a Discalced convent in Seville is an outright act of disobedience to the Carmelite General's order not to do so in Andalusia. Although the thought of disobeying the maximum authority of the order torments the Discalced foundress,<sup>15</sup> she chooses to do so all the same, upon the urgings of her spiritual advisor, Father Jerónimo Gracián.

Gracián, Visitor to the Andalusian Discalced, meets Teresa for the first time a few months before her arrival in Seville (1575) and after almost a year of correspondence. Their first encounter in Beas is a

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<sup>14</sup> For a full account of these events see Lincoln, 183-207.

<sup>15</sup> Teresa de Avila's role as reformer of the Carmelite order and foundress of sixteen Discalced convents throughout Spain in the last twenty years of her life, is in itself highly problematic. Given newly established Tridentine prescriptions of enclosure for nuns, and the increasingly repressive stance toward women in Spain, the future Saint's ceaseless traveling further damages an image already tainted by accusations of illuminism (with all the weight that such accusations entail). The precariousness of Teresa's position is evident in Papal Nuncio Sega's indictment of the religious figure as a "fémina inquieta, andariega, desobediente y contumaz, que a título de devoción inventaba malas doctrinas, andando fuera de la clausura contra el orden del concilio tridentino y prelados..." (quoted as footnote in Cartas 254: 935).



revelation to the Saint, who experiences an intense rapture ("arrobamiento") within days:

Parecióme ver junto a mí a nuestro Señor Jesucristo de la forma que Su Majestad se me suele representar; y hacia su lado derecho estaba el mismo maestro Gracián. Tomó el Señor su mano derecha y la mía, y juntólas, y díjome que éste quería tomase en su lugar toda mi vida y que entrambos nos conformásemos en todo, porque convenía así. (Cuentas de conciencia 29: 466)

This divine vision, a spiritual betrothal of sorts, leads the mystic to vow eternal obedience to her new confessor (Luti 36). Teresa's and Gracián's intimate relationship will elicit much undesirable gossip from its inception and will be central to the accusations leveled against the mystic in the years to come.

According to Llamas Martínez, the Inquisitorial investigation that takes place in Seville against Santa Teresa involves two distinct moments, one between 1575 and 1576, and the other between 1578 and 1579. The events and the tone of the accusations in both cases are interrelated: they essentially portray Teresa as an immoral and shameless *alumbrada* (Llamas Martínez 74-75). Although once again the Inquisitorial documents pertaining to the investigation have not survived, several secondary sources that refer to

the events are extant. Among them are individual accounts of the events, retractions written by several of the accusers, and the Procesos de beatificación y canonización de Santa Teresa de Jesús (53).

The initial accusation raised against Teresa between 1575 and 1576 comes from within the convent. María del Corro, a rich middle-aged widow turned novice, feeble-minded and frustrated according Llamas Martínez, decides to formally denounce the foundress for engaging in illuminist and unchaste practices. Del Corro's accusations are seconded by a "confesor melancólico" whose identity is uncertain to this day, and several other people outside the walls of the convent (80).

From Teresa's own accounts we know that during this period she experiences an inordinate number of visions and raptures (Cuentas de consciencia 32-52: 469-474). Given the concurrent *alumbrado* scandals in Extremadura and Jaén, and the often external manifestations of Teresa's mystical encounters, we can speculate that, all neurosis aside, del Corro may have observed some strange behaviors in her superior, and that this, in conjunction with her own personal unhappiness, may have led her to instigate the rumors that result in a good number of "testimonios" raised against the foundress' person. In his biography of Teresa de Avila, her contemporary Diego de Yepes recalls:

Fueron tantos los testimonios . . . que a la dicha Madre y a sus hijas se levantaron, que no perdonaron a nada, pues pusieron mácula y falta en su honestidad, diciendo de ella lo último que de una de mal se puede decir. (quoted in Llamas Martínez 74)

Judging from this fairly discreet passage, it is probable that the slanders are partly sexual in nature. But Yepes does not go into detail, a gesture that should not surprise us, since with his work he is adamantly promoting the mystic's canonization. The silenced facts are unveiled centuries later by Lincoln, who writes Teresa's biography with the stated purpose of portraying her as a woman of flesh and blood, not a saint or saint-to be:

The word, in essence, was that Teresa was a whore and a whoremonger, and Gracián her most recent lover, who had discredited his whole Order, the Reform and the Mitigation alike, by his affair with a woman not only notorious for her sexual excesses, but as an *alumbrada*, a heretic. (231)

Teresa's tainted *honra* is a scandal, and the relationship with her beloved spiritual advisor not only furthers her already soiled image, but also magnifies the standing apprehension toward her spirituality. On all counts and

now more than ever, she is publicly perceived as an *alumbrada*.

To make matters worse, del Corro also accuses Teresa of flogging her nuns in a manner reminiscent of that of the *flagelantes* described by Sánchez Ortega (Llamas Martínez 72). Again, her ostensibly excessive and sinful sexuality stands in the forefront. At this point, Teresa is yet to write her mystical treatise Las moradas; these events, as we shall discuss in our final chapter, will have a profound effect on her rendering of desire, pleasure, and pain in her accounts of mystic union in her last mystical text.

Once the accusations are presented before the tribunal, a fierce investigation ensues. The convent is visited repeatedly by Inquisitorial authorities, who brutally scrutinize the nuns' every move (86). Even though the final report has not survived, we know that in spite of the huge scandal, Teresa is cleared of all accusations. This turn of events, according to Llamas Martínez, probably has to do with del Corro's questionable character and her inability to substantiate her claims, and to Teresa's impeccable self-defense (123).

The second round of accusations against Teresa, between 1578 and 1578, are essentially of the same nature, only more vicious. Once again, the scandal originates within the convent, this time in the person of the novice Beatriz de la Madre de Dios. According to Lincoln, Beatriz

is smitten with Gracián the first time she sees him preach (214). Her jealousy of the foundress engenders an animosity toward her superior that will only increase upon Teresa's response to the novice's own visions and ecstasies.

From her earliest days in the convent and in the company of several other nuns, Beatriz de la Madre de Dios engages in acts of penance and begins to experience raptures and visions which she and the other women painstakingly record in writing. María de San José, Prioress of the convent in Seville, informs Teresa of these occurrences. Ironically, the mystic orders the nuns to stop writing about such things, and to sever their relationship with confessor Garciálvarez, who not only approves but encourages their experiences and writings.

Given Teresa's personal history, her decision to silence the nuns and cut short their intimacy with Garciálvarez appears unfair, if not malicious. Before passing judgment, however, we must remember that Teresa has just undergone a grueling Inquisitorial investigation that has left her *honra* and her spiritual image severely damaged. The foundress may have felt frightened for herself and her daughters. Coincidentally, around this time Teresa is again experiencing raptures and visions in public, and unable to control them, feels anxious and distressed. In a letter written to her brother Lorenzo in

January 1577 (the same year in which she writes Las moradas and the problems with Beatriz begin), the author poignantly expresses her grief:

Desde antes que escribiese a vuestra merced me han tornado los arrobamientos y hame dado pena; porque es (cuando han sido algunas veces) en público, y ansí me ha acaecido en maitines. Ni basta resistir ni se puede disimular. Quedo tan corridísima que me querría meter no sé dónde. Harto ruego a Dios que me quite esto en público; pídaselo vuestra merced, que trai hartos inconvenientes y no me parece es más oración.  
(Cartas 173: 844)

And after describing some of these *arrobamientos*, Teresa closes the discussion: "Harto he dicho. Lo demás no es para carta ni aún para decir" (844). Clearly, experiencing divine rapture in public is cause for concern, and even fear. Teresa knows that it is dangerous to even write or speak of such occurrences. Her fear will determine her stance toward the visionary nuns in Seville, and will reveal itself in her rendering of desire, pleasure and pain in Las moradas.

Beatriz, Garciálvarez, and the other visionary nuns' response to the foundress' prohibitions is clever and focused: they raise a scandal and call in the Inquisition, all of this with the assistance of the Calced friars, at

the time virulently opposed to the Reform. The charges seriously involve Gracián, but go beyond him. After an Inquisitorial investigation even more brutal than the one of 1576, most of the denouncers retract their accusations. It is from their retractions that we learn something of the nature of the charges. Margarita de la Concepción's statement is the most explicit. It has been said, she affirms:

que dicen tener [el Padre Gracián] una vez a una niña llamada Teresica entre las piernas delante de las mismas hermanas, y que aquel instante dijo nuestra Madre Fundadora: quién fuera tu Teresica. . . . que entrando una vez su Reverencia en el convento a negocios, se quedó a solas con nuestra Madre Superiora por espacio de un día, cerrada la puerta de una celda. . . . que estaba su Reverencia el P. Gracián desabrido porque no le daban un hábito y que nuestra Madre Fundadora había dicho: ¿pues qué quiere Fr. Jerónimo que haga por él, no basta que de cuatro días entrado le hice prior y visitador? ¿Qué más quiere? (quoted in Llamas Martínez 204-05)

Surely, we find more innuendo than blatant slander here. Most probably the detractors are trying to protect their own skin, and therefore soften their tone. However, we do

have other accounts of the events that relate the coarseness of the accusations.

In her Libro de las recreaciones Seville's Prioress María de San José at once acknowledges the explicitly sexual content of the libels raised against the foundress. Her accusers make use of:

las más abominables y sucias palabras que se pueden imaginar, que las que mejor se pueden decir son tales, que no son para nombrarlas; mas para que se vea la malicia del demonio diré alguna: Decían: "aquella vieja tal la habían de entregar a blancos y negros, para que se hartase de ser mala, y que traía mujeres mozas de un lugar a otro con achaque de fundaciones, para que lo fuesen." (quoted in Llamas Martínez 158)

Teresa's escapades, according to rumor, are no longer limited to her confessors, but include even black men. Even worse, the foundress not only engages in sinful behavior herself, she leads younger women to do the same. San José, by the way, has censored herself and gives us only a taste of the scandal. We are left to guess what the other "abominables y sucias palabras" were. We do know, from the testimony of Petronila Bautista in the Procesos de beatificación y canonización de Santa Teresa, that they went as far accusing the future Saint of incest: "Fue tanto lo que la Santa Madre padeció en la honra, que estando en



la fundación del convento de Sevilla no faltó quien dijo que había enviado a la India unos hijos que tenía, con un hermano suyo" (II: 580).<sup>16</sup>

These vile accusations are accompanied once again by criticism of her mystical experiences and charges of illuminism. As both Llamas Martínez and Lincoln tell it, the scandal reaches exorbitant proportions (174; 323). It begins to taper off only when the Holy Tribunal clears Teresa of all charges in April 1579 upon obtaining her accusers' retractions. But the scandal raises a specter that will accompany the mystic until her death. She will have to contend with gratuitous insults, and even physical aggression,<sup>17</sup> in the remaining three years of her life.

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<sup>16</sup> In this three-volume work, composed of multiple testimonies about the life, spirituality, and founding work of Santa Teresa, many of the witnesses indicate that Teresa de Jesús was repeatedly the subject of "testimonios y murmuraciones." Yet, details about such rumors are few and far between, an understandable phenomenon if we consider that the testimonies are compiled in order to prove her sanctity (I: vii). Unbecoming details about the mystic and reformer are evidently avoided when possible. Mother Petronila's testimony is a rare exception.

<sup>17</sup> Llamas Martínez reports an unfortunate episode in the year 1580 and the town of Montalbán:

Cuando la Madre Teresa y su comitiva llegaron a la villa, los vecinos se encontraban en la iglesia. El pueblo estaba de fiesta. Se honraba a Nuestra Señora. Los peregrinos se dirigieron directamente a la iglesia. El pueblo debía estar ya a la expectativa, porque, al punto de ver a la Madre Teresa, se formó un gran murmullo. Ella imperturbable, se llegó a recibir la sagrada comunión. El vulgo no pudo contener su indignación; el pueblo alborotado se encaró con la Madre Reformadora, afeando su conducta y reprendiéndola por haberse atrevido a recibir la sagrada comunión. La juzgaban indigna de tal merced, pensando que era persona de mala vida, visionaria e iluminada. (188)

Even after she dies, as indicated earlier, accusations will be raised by Alonso de la Fuente against her books, on the grounds of illuminism and heresy. They will be virtually ignored by the Holy Tribunal (Llamas Martínez 340, 381).

Closely following her death, and upon the discovery of her incorrupt body, the controversial figure of Teresa de Jesús is catapulted into sainthood. While it is true that the main motive of her canonization is the state of her body after death, her life and written works also are hailed as divinely inspired (Santa Teresa, I: xxix). Judging from Teresa's tumultuous personal history, and the suspicious eroticism and corporeality of her religious experiences as portrayed in her writings, her sudden canonization appears puzzling, if not absurd. In the next and final two chapters I will account for the eventual and remarkable acceptance of Teresa de Jesús' mystical works (and her life), by studying the rhetorical strategies she develops in her first and last mystical texts, La vida and Las moradas.

## CHAPTER V

### LANGUAGE, CORPOREALITY, AND MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IN *LA VIDA*

#### I. *La vida* and *Las moradas*: Two approaches to Language

The corporeality present in the mystical experiences and writings of medieval women is, as we observed in Chapter II, related to the Christian notion of an "inherent" female fleshliness. Female mystics acknowledge and use this fleshliness to their advantage as the practice of *imitatio Christi* gains prominence in Western Christianity. The intense physicality of their experiences, particularly as it pertains to the literary rendition of the various stages of the mystical journey, is decidedly problematic for commentators on these matters today. In her recent book *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, Karma Lochrie indicates that until recently literary critics have tended to look with suspicion at the highly sensual and corporeal language used by medieval female mystics. When comparing these women's works to those of male contemporaries whose language also is markedly sensual, critics often claim that the corporeality present in the mystical writings of the latter is strictly metaphorical and hence more elevated (5-6). As Lochrie points out, their argument rests on "unquestioned assumptions about the superiority of one kind of language and mystical experience over another," and on taboos about

female fleshliness that date as far back as the early days of Christianity (6). Such thinking reveals a need to continue to debase women by equating them with the "less than respectable" body. It also betrays a literary need to sever the physical from the spiritual by marking a sharp and value-ridden distinction between the literal and the metaphorical.

Yet, a boundary between the physical and the spiritual is not clearly defined or even sought in the Middle Ages. It is by virtue of this fluidity between the world of matter and the world of spirit that the image of the human, suffering body of Christ is not only worshipped but literally imitated. The need of recent critics to mark a sharp distinction between the spirit and the body, and the figurative and literal as they interpret the works of medieval mystics, reflects an ideological shift in the conception of language that takes place around Santa Teresa's lifetime, and that is revealed in distinct approaches to the question of language in the Castilian mystic's earliest and latest mystical texts, La vida and Las moradas. We have considered this shift from political, economic, and social perspectives in our discussion of the rise of the modern European state and the development of the idea of the individual in Chapter III. Now we will look at it as it pertains to language.

In The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, the French philosopher Michel Foucault explains that in the Western world, from Antiquity and up until the end of the sixteenth century, knowledge rested on an intricate system of similarities or resemblances: "the universe was folded upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man" (17).<sup>1</sup> The cosmos was understood to be constituted by entities that continuously mirrored each other, each one of them in its form and substance analogous to the other, and ultimately to God.<sup>2</sup> Within this epistemological system of resemblances, language functioned as one more mirror, similar to nature, to man, to God, and as such, as real and present as that which it reflected: "language and things were endlessly interwoven" (54).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The most vivid example that comes to mind is the science of Astrology, which drew a complex system of relationships between the physical, emotional, and spiritual characteristics of the human being and the alignment and attributes of the sun, moon, and planets. As microcosm and macrocosm they resembled each other and were subject to one another's influences.

<sup>2</sup> This helps explain some of the basic beliefs of the Judaeo-Christian tradition: man's creation in God's image and likeness, God's incarnation in his human son, Jesus Christ, and the human desire to emulate Christ's human suffering as a way to merge with the divine.

<sup>3</sup> This system of resemblances and its relationship with literature in the Hispanic tradition has been studied by Francisco Rico in El pequeño mundo del hombre, and by Otis H. Green in the second of his four-volume work, Spain and the Western Tradition.

In keeping with such non-divisive understanding of the world, knowledge, and language, it is not surprising to find that in the Western mystical tradition the body, although problematic, is never fully severed from the spirit, but is rather viewed as a lower manifestation of it, and a such, usually considered necessary for the mystical journey. Toward the High Middle Ages this lack of boundaries becomes even more pronounced, and is especially evident in the experiences and writings of female mystics. Pain and pleasure, and body and spirit coexist in the search for and attainment of divine union. In the same way, the language used to express these experiences is at once figurative and literal. As Lochrie indicates in her work on Margery Kempe, what we witness in these writings is the breakdown of our contemporary insistence on establishing a demarcation between modes of experience (physical as opposed to spiritual) and registers of meaning (literal versus figurative) (70).

The shift into our contemporary need to divide and demarcate, in knowledge as in language, begins roughly in the early decades of the seventeenth century (Foucault 42-43). This transformation takes place in tandem with the economic, political, and social changes we described in our third chapter: the emergence of the modern European state, and the separation of the individual from his community. The literary work that best exemplifies these changes in

the perception of the reality and of language is, according to Foucault, Don Quixote. As he declares, in Cervantes' masterpiece

writing has ceased to be the prose of the world; resemblances and signs have dissolved their former alliance; similitudes have become deceptive and verge upon visionary madness; things remain stubbornly within their ironic identity: they are no longer anything but what they are; words wander off on their own, without content, without resemblance to fill their emptiness; they are no longer the marks of things; they lie sleeping between the pages of books and covered in dust. (47-48)

Don Quixote's mirroring of the valiant knight becomes the tragi-comic mimicry of a fantastic realm of words that vanishes into thin air. Language has lost its embeddedness in the world. Words and things are estranged from each other, and the first now simply functions to arbitrarily name the second. No resemblance, no similitude exists between the two entities: language has essentially become a system of representation, a divisive "art of naming" (43). Not surprisingly, what we know as the Baroque period is plagued by an obsessive insistence on the representational dimension of language as defined by metaphor, simile, and allegory (51).

This transformation in the conception of language is reflected in Santa Teresa's major mystical texts, La vida (1562) and Las moradas (1577), two works separated by fifteen tumultuous years in which the writer is plagued by continuous gossip and slander, and two Inquisitorial investigations. Teresa is from very early on acutely aware of the dangers inherent in her mystical experiences and writings, and particularly in the presence of the body therein. While such awareness certainly shows in La vida, this first work remains within the medieval tradition in that the corporeal and the spiritual, as well as language and experience seem to merge, with minimal need for explanation or justification. Words are not arbitrary signs for things; they have an intrinsic relationship with them. This lack of demarcation and divisiveness shows in Teresa's continuous and astute rhetorical juxtaposition and near confusion of pain and pleasure, a strategy that, as we indicated in our discussion of the transverberation and will further elaborate, helps to validate her experiences in her early years. Such a tendency to fuse elements that to our modern sensibilities may appear different or even opposite, also shows in other rhetorical choices. First, an endless and unpredictable alternation of narrative voices, mainly between the autobiographical "I" and the distanced and descriptive third person singular. Secondly, a fusion between genres, as autobiography suddenly turns



into and merges with treatise toward the middle of the work. And finally, a series of passionately revealing declarations in which the mystic lets her audience know that she is at that moment in a state of rapture. That is, God is speaking through her, and through her body she is transcribing God's utterances, setting them to paper. Her words are not an arbitrary representation of the divine; they are the divine.

In Las moradas, on the other hand, we will find a continuous need on the part of the author to set boundaries, to separate the corporeal from the spiritual, and to emphasize the distinction between the language she uses and the reality it represents. The work, a treatise on the seven stages of spiritual development leading to mystical union, is essentially an allegory of the soul, its central image, a castle with a series of rooms--seven *moradas*--that must be progressively inhabited in order to reach its center, that is, God. From the very beginning Teresa pointedly establishes that language falters in matters of the spirit, and that she will have to make use of a *comparación*<sup>4</sup> in order to express herself. The

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<sup>4</sup> As Víctor García de la Concha indicates in El arte literario de Santa Teresa, the Castilian author ignores the poetic terminology used during her time to distinguish among different types of figurative language, i.e., simile, metaphor, and allegory. As far as Teresa is concerned, they are all *comparaciones*, and she leaves it at that (241). Alison Weber has pointed out that Santa Teresa makes concerted efforts to conceal the fact that she is an avid reader, and a fairly well-educated woman. This is not surprising, given the fact that educated women are looked upon with growing suspicion after the

central allegory is addressed with some consistency and stands as the structural frame of the text. But this primary image of the soul as a castle with its seven *moradas* will undergo endless transformations, into silk worm, butterfly, Christ's bride, to mention a few, thus becoming a series of concatenated *comparaciones*, as the author affirms again and again. Such fluidity in the author's use of imagery does remind us of that same lack of boundaries that sets her autobiography La vida within a conception of language, knowledge, and reality that rest on a system of resemblances, and where words and things are intricately bound to each other.

However, in the case of Las moradas, the similitude between Teresa's words and the reality they seek to address is at once shattered by her insistent disavowal of language as an instrument incapable of accurately portraying the journey toward and union with the divine. Instead, as Alison Weber suggests in Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity, such fluidity in her use of imagery is part of a strategy to bring to the surface corporeal and erotic language while at the same time diminishing its importance (111-14). By developing other, less threatening,

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first *alumbrado* trials, where female leaders played decisive roles (Santa Teresa and the Rhetoric 22-23; 50). Teresa's failure to use the current poetic terminology for figurative language in her mystical texts is probably one more way to appear ignorant and uneducated.

*comparaciones*, Teresa is able to dilute the vehemence of those that seem to portray most accurately the intensity of human desire for God and its consummation in Him: images of love, physicality, pleasure, and even pain. We will observe in our coming discussion that pleasure and pain do appear, sometimes intertwined, in this later work. But the corporeality of these experiences is minimized, as they are most often presented as merely figurative language, that is, arbitrary representations of the real experience.

Through these rhetorical strategies of justification and dilution, and hence an approach to language that is markedly different from that of her earlier work, Santa Teresa strives to relate her experiential knowledge of the mystical journey as truthfully as possible and in a way that will be palatable to ecclesiastical authorities. This transformation reveals the brilliance of Teresa the writer, and her accurate reading of the changes taking place in Spain and the Western world toward the later part of the sixteenth and the early decades of the seventeenth century. But it also, and more poignantly, brings to light the intensity of Teresa's convictions and her endurance in a tremendously difficult--and painful--period of her life.

In this chapter and the next I will analyze La vida and Las moradas from the perspective of this change in Santa Teresa's approach to language. Teresa's use of

language and her rhetorical juxtaposition of pain and pleasure is consistent throughout La vida. But because our analysis is essentially comparative and we have to contend with differences in genre, autobiography versus treatise, we will limit our discussion primarily to that part of it that has a closest generic similarity to Las moradas, the treatise of the four waters inserted within the autobiography. This will allow us to observe with greater precision the differences in the author's rhetorical strategies as we study the two mystical texts.

## II. Fluid Boundaries in La Vida

### a. The Writing of La Vida

Teresa de Jesús writes her first, autobiographical text in obedience to the command of her confessor, García de Toledo. Prior to writing it, dangerous rumors surround the Castilian nun, who is held suspect not only by virtue of ecstatic trances reminiscent of those experienced by *beatas* and *alumbradas*, but also on account of alleged intimate relationships with various of her confessors. García, one such confessor, orders Teresa to write with the outright objective of authenticating her spiritual life, and probably also for the indirect effect of clearing his own name. He will receive the completed text in 1565, and proceed to hand it to several of his colleagues, who are to

read and evaluate it. Father Báñez's official *censura* in acceptance of the book will not appear until 1575.

Although the text is copied and does circulate among various members of the aristocracy, the intended readership from the moment of its conception under the order of García de Toledo, and after Báñez's *censura*, is the ecclesiastic community. The author is well aware of this fact and will carefully construct a text in which she can portray her mystical experiences truthfully, and yet in a way that will appear acceptable to her intended audience.

As observed in our discussion of mysticism, desire, and corporeality in Chapter II, the physical body is usually present in the mystical journey as the instrument through and from which this process is initiated. Christian mystics of different periods will choose to dwell on the corporeality of their experiences to varying degrees, and yet will always be aware of the problematic nature of the physical body. For the body is at once the spirit's holy vessel, and the source of the fall.

Santa Teresa most certainly belongs to this tradition. She is perfectly aware of the problematic place of the body in her search for the divine. Such awareness is heightened by a growing mistrust of the feminine--and the feminine and the body are deeply connected in the Christian tradition--in early modern Europe, and particularly in her native Spain. However, Teresa experiences her union with God in a

way that unquestionably involves the body. And so, in order to portray her experiences as honestly as possible, she will choose to bring together pain and pleasure rhetorically in an effort to minimize the real and dangerous presence of the latter. Furthermore, throughout her biographical account and in the treatise inserted within it, she will strategically place the element of pain as a frame for that divine pleasure which is at once physical and spiritual, and that comes too close to a female sexuality that is increasingly perceived as a threat.

b. A Life of Mercedes Inscribed by Pain: A Frame Within a Frame

Christ's physical suffering and his death on the cross is what redeems humanity after the fall. Hence, the image of the believer whose body is subjected to pain and endures it, in imitation of Christ, is not only elevated through Christian dogma but serves to define the Christian community itself. Teresa de Jesús, a firm believer and a mystic profoundly influenced by her readings on the lives of saints, undoubtedly experiences physical suffering throughout her spiritual journey.<sup>5</sup> But in her writings,

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<sup>5</sup> As Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell observe in Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, patient physical suffering--self-inflicted in most cases--and illness are the two most consistent themes in hagiographic accounts of women between the eleventh and seventeenth centuries (233-34).

this suffering seldom appears on its own; rather, it shows in close proximity to intense sensations of divine pleasure.

Caroline Walker-Bynum has pointed out in several of her works that pain and pleasure are inseparable from each other in the writings of medieval female mystics.<sup>6</sup> While we do not know the extent of Teresa's exposure to such texts, we do know that she is familiar with several of these figures and their works. Like them, the future Spanish Saint seeks to feel Christ's suffering in her own being, and in doing so also senses the greatest of delights. Because most of these female writers are either saints or highly revered religious figures, it is not unlikely that Teresa internalizes and emulates some of their attitudes in her quest for God as well as in her writings. That pain is present in her experiences is undeniable. But this element is so carefully introduced and then ingeniously placed throughout the narrative of La vida that we cannot help but conclude that the author has a strategy in mind. After all, as Alison Weber convincingly demonstrates, the Castilian mystic is always aware of her audience, and knows what and whom to address, and where (14-16). Given her personal and historical circumstances as well as the acceptability of pain in the Christian tradition, as reflected in the lives of saints and the

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<sup>6</sup> See my discussion of Bynum in Chapter II.

works of medieval female mystics, adopting such a strategy would seem not only appropriate but necessary. While we will focus primarily on the treatise of the four waters in our analysis of La vida, the overall structure of her autobiographical work is worth addressing, for it reveals the same strategy we will observe in the treatise: Teresa rhetorically frames the pleasures of her mystical search and of her encounter with God within intense physical suffering.

The author's first reference to physical discomfort occurs in an indirect manner in the first chapter of La vida. As she draws a succinct picture of her early childhood and family life, she refers to her mother as a woman who possessed "muchas virtudes," the most salient one being that she "pasó la vida con grandes enfermedades" (I:29). From the very first chapter illness is established as a positive experience, one that is closely related to virtue, and by extension, to God. From this point on, and until the end of her autobiographical work, physical suffering will plague the Saint's life and fill her text.

As described in our last chapter, after her mother's death and ostensibly under the influence of a flirtatious cousin, Teresa embraces a life of vanities that puts her honor in danger, and leads her father to send her temporarily to a convent of the Augustinian order. Within the walls of the cloister, the charming adolescent



continues to feed "el gusto de mi sensualidad y vanidad" (III:33). Then, roughly a year into her stay, illness strikes. As the author tells it: "en ese tiempo, aunque yo no andava descuidada de mi remedio, andava más ganoso el Señor de disponerme para el estado que me estava mejor: diome una gran enfermedad, que huve de tornar a casa de mi padre" (III:33). Teresa's rhetorical ingenuity stands out: a paragraph earlier she acknowledges that at the time she would rather please "el gusto de mi sensualidad y vanidad" than develop a virtuous life. Now she cleverly hushes the severity of such affirmation by indicating that she was not unaware of the path she ought to be following. But more to our point, God leads Teresa to her true vocation and to himself by making her ill. After recuperating from this illness at her father's house and then at her sister's, she decides to seek that vocation, and at the age of twenty she takes the habit at the Carmelite convent of La Encarnación.

But Teresa once again slips into a life of "pasatiempos" and "vanidades." This fall is even more dangerous to her reputation and her spirit than the first one, given the presence of a "particular amistad," in all likelihood the priest who later orders her to write La vida, García de Toledo (Lincoln 24). But it is three chapters after she describes at length the details of her next and almost fatal illness that we learn this. For Teresa astutely reverses the order of events in her

narration so as to bring to the forefront her illness, while delaying and muting her account of the events that brought it on. Yet, in a careful reading of the text we find that the pattern is once again in place: the immediate cause of Teresa's illness is weakness of the flesh, and its effect is the renewal of her spiritual commitment.

Teresa's description of her second illness is intensely graphic. During her first year at La Encarnación, she suffers from "desmayos" and "mal del corazón." After a year's time, her health has deteriorated to such degree that she is sent to her sister's country house in search of a cure. Throughout her stay she is subjected to several treatments that cause her "grandísimo tormento" (IV:35). It is during this time that she first engages in the practice of quiet prayer, learned from her study of Francisco de Osuna's Tercer abecedario espiritual. Soon God's gifts start to pour in: "Comenzó el Señor a regalarme tanto por este camino que me hacía merced de darme oración de quietud, y alguna vez llegava a unión, aunque yo no entendía qué era lo uno ni lo otro . . . " (IV:36).

But her illness worsens. The pains and fevers become so unbearable that she loses consciousness for four days, during which time she is given Extreme Unction, and wax is poured on her eyelids, as she appears to be dead (V:39-40).

Yet the young woman comes back, extremely weak and wracked by pain:

Quedé de estos cuatro días de parajismo de manera que sólo el Señor puede saber los incomfortables tormentos que sentía en mí: la lengua hecha pedazos de mordida; la garganta, de no haver pasado nada y de la gran flaqueza que me ahogava, que aun el agua no podía pasar; toda me parecía estava descoyuntada; con grandísimo desatino en la cabeza; toda encogida, hecha un ovillo--porque en esto paró el tormento de aquellos días--, sin poderme menear, ni pie, ni mano; ni cabeza, más que si estuviera muerta, si no me meneavan; sólo un dedo me parece podía menear de la mano derecha. (V:40)

Following this excruciating experience, Teresa remains paralyzed. It takes her three years to be able to walk and regain her strength. In the meantime, she repents from all the sins she feels brought on her sickness, and she embraces wholeheartedly a life of prayer. The young nun also becomes devoted to Saint Joseph, who succeeds in guarding her at times when her honor and the loss of her soul are at stake: "Es cosa que espanta las grandes mercedes que me ha hecho Dios por medio de este bienaventurado santo, de los peligros de que me ha librado, así de cuerpo como de alma. . . ." (VI:42). Clearly the

physical body is a full participant in this episode of her life, both as the site of the illness and of the mercies granted to her by God. And as with her first sickness, physical suffering leads her to embark once again on her search for God.

But the flesh is weak, and Teresa falls yet again into a life of vanities. Out of guilt she renounces silent prayer for over one year, and then goes back to it, all the while plagued by temptation and malicious gossip. According to her own account, from her arrival in the first Augustinian convent the mystic endures twenty long years of torments, during which time she oscillates between the ways of the world and the ways of God. And then the struggle abates, for Teresa undergoes her final and true conversion upon encountering a statue of Christ's wounded body. As she lays eyes on it, she feels within her own body all of Christ's suffering: "el corazón parece se me partía, y arrojéme cabe El con grandísimo derramamiento de lágrimas . . ." (IX:53). It is through Christ's own pain which becomes hers, and which translates physically into tears, that Teresa is finally able to embrace her calling.

To this point the author has described her childhood, youth, and initial years as a professed nun. Narratively, these have served as an introduction to the text that really matters and that she has been ordered to write: the account of her mystical experiences. Along this

introductory path, we have observed a pattern of illness followed by divine mercies. Teresa's encounter with Christ's wounded figure marks the final stage of this introductory section, for immediately after recounting it she will begin to "declarar las mercedes que el Señor le hacía en la oración," as the caption to Chapter X indicates (55).

Physical suffering has served, from its first appearance as Teresa's mother's worthiest virtue and to this moment, as the necessary preface to a life of prayer and of fulfillment in God. And just as it now opens the door narratively to the author's detailed accounts of her experiences of divine ecstasy, so will it serve to close it and simultaneously complete the mystic writer's autobiography. For in the mystical anecdote with which she finishes La vida, Santa Teresa will not only endure suffering, she will desire it:

Estava una vez en oración y vino la hora de ir a dormir, y yo estava con hartos dolores y había de tener el vómito ordinario. Como me vi tan atada de mí y el espíritu por otra parte quiriendo tiempo para sí, vime tan fatigada que comencé a llorar mucho y a afligirme. . . . estando en esta pena, me apareció el Señor y regaló mucho, y me dijo que hiciese yo estas cosas por amor de El y lo pasase, que era

menester ahora mi vida. . . . Y así ahora no me parece hay para vivir sino para esto, y lo que más de voluntad pido a Dios; dígole algunas veces con toda ella: Señor, u morir u padecer; no os pido otra cosa para mí. (XL:188)

Teresa's delightful vision of God--his "regalo"--is brought on by her own physical pain, and her emotional despair at having to struggle between the conflicting demands of a diseased body and an eager spirit. As with most mystics, the Saint experiences her corporeality as simultaneously cumbersome and necessary. For the anguish caused by its diseased presence is intensely real. And yet, it is this same painful corporeality that leads her to the pleasure of God's revelation. And His revelation will in turn lead her back to her own, suffering flesh. God wants her to endure--as His own son did, we surmise--and His desire, and His pain, are hers to have.

Given its strategic presence in the introductory section of La vida as well as in this final account, we can readily observe that the element of pain functions as a framing device: it opens and closes Teresa's narration of her often vividly erotic mystical experiences, and serves to draw the reader's attention from Teresa's weaknesses of the flesh. This same framing device will appear in the treatise of the four waters, and, in conjunction with the author's continuous juxtaposition of pain and pleasure,

will successfully minimize the salient corporeality and the presence of pleasure in the author's mystical encounters with the divine.

c. Pain and Pleasure, the Figurative and the Literal:  
Fluidity in the Treatise of the Four Waters

The treatise of the four waters comprises eleven chapters (XI-XXII), and is both inserted and embedded in the fabric of Teresa de Jesús' autobiographical piece. For what the writer presents as a sequentially ordered theological explanation of the four stages of prayer that lead to union with God is ceaselessly punctuated by references to her own experience. This overlapping of genres becomes increasingly insistent in the later chapters of the series, in which the reader often is unable to distinguish between one and the other. Likewise, her use of what appears to be allegorical language is so intimately bound with her personal, and often vividly physical experiences, that the distinction between the figurative and the literal comes undone. Significantly, such fluidity of boundaries is inherent in the very image she chooses as central in the treatise: the image of water.

Santa Teresa's portrayal of the four stages of prayer ostensibly appears in allegorical form. The soul that seeks fulfillment in God is represented as a gardener who

needs to water his own soil in order for it to bear flower and fruit. This is accomplished in four different and progressive ways: by drawing water from a well, through a water wheel, by directing water from a river, and finally by allowing rain to do the work for him. But the seemingly representational nature of the treatise is alluded to ironically and only once, at the beginning of Chapter XI:

Havré de aprovecharme de alguna comparación . .  
 . y escribir simplemente lo que me mandan; mas  
 este lenguaje de espíritu es tan malo de  
 declarar a los que no saben letras, como yo, que  
 havré de buscar algún modo, y podrá ser las  
 menos veces acierte a que venga bien la  
 comparación; servirá de dar recreación a vuestra  
 merced de ver tanta torpeza. (59)

As a manner of introduction, the author downplays her authority in matters of the spirit by indicating that she will have to make use of a *comparación*, for ignorant people like herself have no other language with which to speak about such things. But she will find a way, she insists, admitting that her comparison may not be fully adequate, but that at least it will serve to entertain her reader. While this initial declaration may seem to indicate that Teresa's approach to language here is strictly representational, we must not forget that, as Alison Weber observes in her discussion of La vida, the author is in a



bind. Teresa is a woman, and women, according to Church dogma, should remain silent when matters of the spirit are at stake. Obviously, she has to speak because she had been ordered to do so by her superiors. But she must be careful to appear as uneducated and as self-effacing as possible. With this in mind, she adopts the strategy of emphasizing her own ignorance (36-38), but she does so with subtle irony. For while she acknowledges that she is ignorant by virtue of having to resort to a *comparación*, her self-possessed and humorous tone suggest otherwise: she may not know about such things, but she will manage--"havré de buscar algún modo"-- and if the comparison does not do, well, at least it will be a source of amusement. Here, Teresa is not focusing on the inability of language itself to accurately portray that which it is speaking about (as she will do again and again in Las moradas), but rather on appearing humble and ignorant. Significantly, this will be the one and only time in the treatise that she will refer to her use of a *comparación* without emphasizing that the given comparison has been revealed to her directly by God. Her figurative language is not unfit but divine, and therefore intimately bound to that which it conveys.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> One such instance occurs in Chapter XVI as the author describes the third water, which suddenly turns into her own experience: "me dio el Señor hoy, acabando de comulgar, esta oración . . . y me puso estas comparaciones y enseñó la manera de decirlo y lo que ha de hacer aquí el alma . . . " (77).

(1) The First Water: Stepping in Through Pain

Just as we observed in the overarching structure of La vida, the beginning of this journey in search of God is fraught with suffering. Teresa is quick to point out that the four stages all "llevan sus cruces." However, in this initial stage, where the gardener is physically exerting himself to draw water from a well in order to nourish his barren land, one will find "el mayor trabajo" (XI:59). As the soul first turns inward in meditation it will experience great loneliness and despair. While in this state of deep sorrow, one must turn to Christ's human life and share in his suffering: "ayúdele a llevar la cruz," exhorts the Saint, "y piense que toda la vida vivió en ella" (60).

Immediately after this exhortation, the author slides into her own experience: "su precio tienen estos trabajos (como quien los pasó muchos años, que cuando una gota de agua sacava de este bendito pozo, pensava me hacía Dios merced)" (60). The rhetorical transition takes place subtly. The author already has moved from a distanced description of the first water to an exhortation in second person. Now, she proceeds to bring into the foreground her own experience of suffering by making a veiled reference to a third person, "quien los pasó," which immediately turns into first in the same sentence: "me hacía Dios." Such

fluidity of narrative voices permeates Teresa's autobiography, and especially her treatise, which, as the narrative polyphony in itself suggests, is not only treatise, but also autobiography. In the words of Víctor García de la Concha: "Ya no cabe, por consiguiente, hablar de equidistancia entre el tratado y la biografía: la historia personal se hace teoría teológica y/o ésta se concreta vitalmente en lo biográfico" (112). In the same way, the four waters that Teresa initially presents as a *comparación*, and that to our modern sensibilities may appear as an allegorical representation of a spiritual reality, merge here into the experiential. For as Teresa refers to her own suffering, she threads in the image of the well and portrays her own physical exertion before it: "cuando una gota de agua [yo] sacava de este bendito pozo . . ." Such literal and personal appropriation of the image of the first water goes unexplained, a phenomenon that in her later work, Las moradas, will almost never occur. And so we find, that from this initial stage of the journey, the fluid nature of water is embodied in the lack of boundaries between treatise and autobiography, and literal and figurative language.

The same corporeality that shows in Teresa's portrayal of herself extracting water from the well, will be manifest again and again throughout the remainder of the treatise, and will be crucial to its development, particularly as it

pertains to the strategic juxtaposition of pain and pleasure. The problematic nature of the body will not go underscored. The necessary and yet conflictive nature of its presence in the mystical journey is tangible in this first work by the future Saint, and from its very beginning. For while Teresa insists on the importance of "abrazar la cruz desde el principio," and emphasizes the fact that as one does so, one must emulate the Saints, who engaged in penitence and gave up their physical health for their love of God, she also warns about the imminent danger of paying too much attention to "tan mal huésped como el cuerpo" (XI:62).

And yet the body is indeed present. And the author rhetorically underlines the importance of such presence in the closing remarks of the first water:

Pues tornando a lo que yo decía de pensar a Cristo en la columna, es bueno discurrir un rato y pensar las penas que allí tuvo, y por qué las tuvo, y el amor con que las pasó; mas que no se canse siempre en andar a buscar esto, sino que se esté allí con El, acallando el entendimiento. Si pudiese ocuparle en que mire que le mira, y le acompañe, y hable, y pida, y se humille y regale con El, y acuerde que no merecía estar allí: cuando pudiese hacer esto--aunque sea al principio de comenzar oración--hallará grande

provecho, y hace muchos provechos esta manera de oración; al menos hallóle mi alma. (XIII:69)

In this, her last statement of the first stage of prayer, Santa Teresa highlights what must be the believer's primary focus: the image of Christ's wounded body in the cross. As Teresa has already indicated in Chapter IX, and now reiterates at the end of the paragraph, such is the very image that brought about her conversion and that allowed her to experience the delights of God's divine presence. The point here, she stresses, is not only to *think* about Christ's suffering, but to *be* with him in his suffering: to see and be seen by him, to talk to him, to suffer with him, and delight ("regalarse") in him. Teresa's language is unequivocally corporeal. And the form of prayer itself most certainly involves the body, for the senses are actively engaged in the experience at every step of the way. Interestingly, we find the author's first reference to pleasure here, as the first water comes to an end. Pain and suffering have already been established, just like in the larger autobiographical text, as the door through which we must step in order to receive God's gifts. The threshold has almost been passed, and pleasure subtly makes its entrance.

(2) The Second Water: Pain and Pleasure through  
Teresa's Divinely Inspired Voice

In the second stage of prayer, which Teresa defines as the "oración de recogimiento," and in which the powers of the soul--memory, will, and intellect--begin to turn inward as in a meditative state, the water no longer needs to be drawn through the will and effort of the gardener. Because it now flows from a water wheel, the "trabajos" are less, and the "gustos" begin to surge. But suffering is still slightly experienced in this mode of prayer: "las lágrimas que Dios aquí da, ya van con gozo. . . . se va ya esta alma subiendo de su miseria y dásela ya un poco de noticia de los gustos de la gloria" (XIV:70). And as the misery grows dimmer, God's presence looms larger, and becomes more intimate: "quiere Dios por su grandeza que entienda esta alma que está Su Majestad tan cerca de ella que ya no ha menester enviarle consejos, sino hablar ella mesma con El, y no a voces, porque está ya tan cerca que en meneando los labios la entiende" (70). God's closeness to the soul reveals itself through a vividly corporeal image: the lips articulating the words the soul seeks to express. Interestingly, Santa Teresa at once acknowledges the boldness of her statement: "parece impertinente decir esto." But, she cleverly ignores its most salient aspect--its physicality--, and explains her impertinence as the suggestion that God may not be with us at all times: "pues

sabemos que siempre nos entiende y está con nosotros" (70).

And she continues:

En esto no hay que dudar es así, mas quiere  
este Emperador y Señor nuestro que entendamos  
aquí que nos entiende y lo que hace su  
presencia, y que quiere particularmente comenzar  
a obrar en el alma en la gran satisfacción  
interior y exterior que la da . . . (70-71)

The satisfaction of God's presence is clearly felt within and without. That is, the world of the physical senses--the body already present in the salient image of the lips--partakes of the experience.

And now, while reflecting upon this satisfaction, Teresa seems to doubt her ability to speak about the experience: "ni aun yo sé cómo darlo a entender, porque para hartas cosas eran menester letras" (71). Once again she is bringing her ignorance to the foreground, and thereby drawing attention away from language itself. And soon thereafter, she dispels any doubt that may remain about the intimacy between her words and that which they relate. For, as she declares, the spirit is within her as she writes:

mas si el espíritu falta, no hay más concertar  
este lenguaje que si fuese algaravía, a manera  
de decir, aunque hayan muchos años pasado en  
oración. Y así me parece grandísima ventaja

cuando lo escribo estar en ello, porque veo  
claro no soy yo quien lo dice, que ni lo ordeno  
con el entendimiento ni sé después cómo lo  
acerté a decir. (71)

God is unmistakably speaking through the mystic writer.  
And because God is himself the ultimate reality, her  
language does not merely represent, but *is* that reality.

The sensation of delight framed by suffering  
passionately comes forth yet again in this second water as  
Santa Teresa directly addresses God:

¡Oh Señor mío y Bien mío!, que no puedo decir  
esto sin lágrimas y gran regalo de mi alma . . .  
y si no es por nuestra culpa, nos podemos gozar  
con Vos y que Vos os holgáis con nosotros, pues  
decís ser vuestro deleite estar con los hijos de  
los hombres. (XIV:72)

Referring to the act of saying/writing while divinely  
inspired, the mystic highlights the bittersweet quality of  
these second waters, where physical tears fuse with joy.  
But the pleasure is not only hers; it is also experienced  
by God, who enjoys and is enjoyed by his creation.  
Teresa's choice of words here is significant, for the verb  
"holgarse," and, as well as "gozar," can imply physical and  
sexual enjoyment.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, such language could be

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<sup>8</sup> *Holgar*: derived from the Latin *follicare*, and also spelled *folgar* in early Castilian (Corominas "holgar"). *Folgar*: "holgar; tener ayuntamiento carnal" (Diccionario de la lengua española). *Gozar*:



considered suspicious, given the historical moment in which the mystic writer lives. She can evidently foresee this, and so right away she proceeds to address the question of demonic deception. If the sensation felt during and after this experience of prayer is one of tranquillity and peacefulness, affirms the author, one can rest assured that the devil has not managed to interfere. Immediately thereafter, Teresa declares:

Por esto, y por muchas otras cosas, avisé yo en el primer modo de oración--en la primera agua--que es gran negociación comenzar las almas oración, comenzándose a desasir de todo género de contentos y entrar determinadas a sólo llevar la cruz a Cristo . . . (XV:75)

Yet again, and at a strategic place in the narrative, for the second waters are coming to an end, Teresa emphasizes the need to take on Christ's suffering. In this way she is able to downplay rhetorically the boldness of her earlier passionate exclamation, where she describes the pleasure of God's presence as a "gozar" and an "holgarse."

### (3) Pain and Pleasure Intertwined in the Third Water

Pain, pleasure, and the body come together at the beginning of the third stage of prayer, in which the water

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"conocer carnalmente a una mujer; sentir placer, experimentar suaves y gratas emociones" (Real Academia Española, Diccionario de la lengua española).

flows from a river and into the garden, its flow directed by the watchful gardener. In these third waters, the meditative state is higher, and the powers of the soul are held as in a dream. While they remain active, they are unable to understand how. The delight experienced in such state is so great that it becomes an agony:

El gusto y la suavidad y deleite es más sin  
comparación que lo pasado; es que da el agua a  
la garganta a esta alma--de la gracia--, que no  
puede ya ir adelante, ni sabe cómo, ni tornar  
atrás; querría gozar de grandísima gloria. . . .  
Yo no sé otros términos cómo lo decir ni cómo lo  
declarar, ni entonces saber el alma qué hacer;  
porque ni sabe si hable, ni si calle, ni si se  
ría, ni si lllore; es un glorioso desatino, una  
celestial locura, adonde se desprende la  
verdadera sabiduría, y es deleitosísima manera  
de gozar el alma (XVI:77)

In this passionate description, pleasure and agony coexist in a way reminiscent of the transverberation. The delightful sensation portrayed is fueled by a desire so intense that the soul just wants total dissolution, surrender, death. And in this unabated desire for death lies the agony, an agony that the French critic Georges Bataille has equated with the sensation of rupture at the climax of the sexual act (107).

The corporeal is clearly embedded in Teresa's erotic account. In an image that resembles that of God's moving lips in the previous water, here the water unleashes the overwhelming sensation of pleasure once it reaches the throat. This seemingly odd insertion of a distinct part of the body in juxtaposition with the image of water--of what we would interpret as the literal and the figurative--goes unacknowledged and unexplained, leading the reader to believe that the physical indeed partakes in the experience. Curiously, the author then doubts her ability to speak of such things, and in a way not unlike her continuous disavowals of language as a merely figurative tool in Las moradas. However, the apparent reference to language as representational is at once obscured. The not knowing how to declare immediately turns into a not knowing what the soul wants to do, whether to laugh or to cry, two clearly corporeal activities that now go unquestioned as far as language is concerned. The passage significantly closes without further mention of the act of declaring, and with two oxymorons--"glorioso desatino"; "celestial locura"--that echo the merging of delight and agony so central to this third stage of prayer.

And soon thereafter the Saint passionately reflects on this glorious state: "¡Oh, válame Dios, cual está un alma cuando está así! Toda ella querría fuese lenguas para alabar a el Señor ..." (XVI:78). Continuing the pattern

"labios" and "garganta" (second and third waters), the author now brings in the corporeal figure of "lenguas." This striking image leads Teresa's third person narrative into an account of her own experience. While in this glorious state, declares the mystic, a given "persona" would write "coplas muy sentidas declarando su pena," since "todo su cuerpo y alma querría se despedasaze para mostrar el gozo que con esta pena siente" (XVII:78). All those who knew Teresa were aware of her love of writing and her fondness for *coplas*, and would thus deduce that the "persona" she is alluding to is herself. Never until this point in the treatise of the four waters, has the body appeared so unashamedly prominent, and in so direct a reference to the author's own person. It is no coincidence that her narrative is skillfully guarded by a pleasure that merges with pain. This reminds us at once of the mystic's account of her encounter with the fiery angel:

Era tan grande el dolor, que me hacía dar aquellos quejidos; y tan excesiva la suavidad que me pone este grandísimo dolor, que no hay desear se quite, ni se contenta el alma con menos que Dios. No es dolor corporal, sino espiritual, aunque no deja de participar el cuerpo, y aún harto. (La vida XXIX:131)

Teresa's body, in the treatise as in the rest of La vida, partakes in the mystical event, and experiences a pleasure that is coexistent with pain.

The author has vehemently emphasized the presence of the body in the third stage of prayer, and has done so in a way that rhetorically minimizes the role of pleasure, and that at once discloses and hides Teresa's own identity. Now that the most delicate aspect of the experience--its corporeality--has been openly, and cleverly, acknowledged, the narrative voice turns to itself. Teresa reveals that at this precise moment in her narration, the same thing that occurred to that "persona" is happening to her: she is writing while in the midst of divine rapture: "pues cuando esto escribo no estoy fuera de esta santa locura celestial por vuestra bondad y misericordia" (78). The author's body is not only present in this third stage of prayer; it is also, as Karma Lochrie puts it in her work on Margery Kempe, "translated into a written corpus" (Lochrie 6). For through Teresa's physical act of writing, God's word becomes matter. Her corporeality is one more means by which the divine reveals itself to the world. Here we find yet again the fluidity inherent in the element of water and in medieval consciousness: body and soul, pain and pleasure, life and death, literal and figurative language, and even body and text do not appear as distinct entities,

but rather come together as indispensable participants of the mystical experience. Significantly, we also find that Teresa's interlocutor is no longer the reader but God ("vuestra bondad"). The fluidity of the waters reaches even her "lenguas para alabar a el Señor" (XVI:78).

(4) A Glorification of Pain in the Fourth Water

Santa Teresa describes the fourth and last stage of prayer at length. Here, the gardener need not work, for the water that nurtures his soil comes directly from the heavens in the form of rain. The powers of the soul stand suspended and indistinguishable from each other, becoming one with and in the presence of the divine. While this is essentially the level in which the soul fully unites with God, it can be and is experienced in a number of ways, some higher than others. Teresa begins her discussion with the lower of these stages, the prayer of union, a state where the primary sensation is one of sweet delight:

Acá no hay sentir, sino gozar sin entender lo que se goza. Entiéndese que se goza un bien adonde juntos se encierran todos los bienes. Océpanse todos los sentidos de este gozo, de manera que no queda ninguno desocupado para poder en otra cosa exterior ni interiormente.  
(XVIII:82)

While from Teresa's own words--"no hay sentir"--it appears that the senses are not involved in these fourth waters, they are actively occupied. Their involvement is indeed so complete, both internally and externally, that nothing can distract them from the pleasure they experience, and therefore "no hay sentir" outside of the ecstatic moment. The erotically charged "gozo" is all present in this prayer of union, and, as Teresa's words suggest, the whole being--body and soul--partakes in the experience.

Shortly after this initial description, Santa Teresa once again addresses the act of writing:

No diré cosa que no la haya experimentado mucho.  
Y es así que, cuando comencé esta postrera agua  
a escribir, que me parecía imposible saber  
tratar cosa más que hablar en griego; con esto  
lo dejé y fui a comulgar. Bendito sea el Señor  
que así favorece a los ignorantes. . . . Aclaró  
Dios mi entendimiento, unas veces con palabras y  
otras puniéndome delante cómo lo había de decir  
. . . (83)

Evidently, judging from this passage and others we have discussed, Teresa is concerned about the difficulty of putting into words what most mystics agree is ineffable: the experience of becoming one with God (Underhill 42). But as before, her preoccupations are soon dispelled. Upon receiving Christ's body and blood through the sacrament of

communion, her language becomes divinely inspired. Once again her body serves as the instrument through which God's words literally take shape. Just as with her mystical experiences, her language is both physical and spiritual.

Following this digression, Teresa returns to the prayer of union. In this state, declares the mystic, the soul is left with a feeling of tenderness so overwhelming "que se querría deshacer, no de pena, sino de unas lágrimas gozosas" (XIX:85). While pain is not really present at this moment, the experience is certainly bittersweet, and the body is undoubtedly involved, as Teresa will ascertain as she proceeds: "acaecídome ha algunas veces en este término de oración . . . de verme llena de agua que sin pena distilava con tanto ímpetu y presteza que parece lo echava de sí aquella nube del cielo . . . "(85).

Completing the pattern lips, throat, and tongues, Teresa now brings her entire physical being into the account. The water inundates her whole body, and is then expelled in the form of tears. Interestingly, the author likens her body to the cloud from which the fourth water falls in the form of rain to nurture the garden of the soul. Literary image and physical body coalesce: Teresa's use of language dissolves the boundaries between physical and spiritual, and literal and figurative.

After discussing the prayer of union, Teresa continues her narrative by describing and attempting to draw a



distinction between two more elevated forms of prayer within the same fourth water: "arrobamiento, u elevamiento, u arrebatamiento . . . [que] también se llama éxtasi" (XX:89) and *ímpetu*. The effects of these two higher forms of mystical experience are, like with the prayer of union, both interior and exterior. But in the highest state, the *ímpetu*, physical pain will play a visibly prominent role.

As the writer describes it, in the early moments of the *ímpetu*, the body appears to lose its connection with the soul, for it begins to grow cold "aunque con grandísima suavidad y deleite" (90). Then, just like water is drawn from the earth and into the cloud that brings on the rains of the fourth water, one feels a force that seeks to lift one's entire being off the ground. At this narrative point, Teresa suddenly turns to her own experience. God's force, she declares, is overwhelming. Sometimes, when the sensation would envelop her, she could resist it, but most often she was unable to do so, and the force "me llevaba el alma, y aun casi ordinario la cabeza tras ella, sin poderla tener, y algunas todo el cuerpo hasta levantarle" (90). Such instances of levitation are a source of deep sorrow for the mystic, for they generally occur before her sisters and sometimes while at church and in the presence of strangers. Several times Teresa has to ask her fellow nuns to hold on to her so as to keep her body from elevating. Yet her efforts are to no avail: "tendíame en el suelo, y

allegávanse a tenerme el cuerpo, y todavía se echava a ver". The mystic's grief and her urge to hide such occurrences are understandable, given the growing mistrust of women, sexuality, and unorthodox religious experiences in mid-sixteenth century Spain. But in spite of all her efforts to mute them, these very experiences, in conjunction with vicious gossip about her relationships with confessors, lead her directly into the arms of the Inquisition nine years after concluding La vida. Teresa's first two painful encounters with Inquisitorial authorities will have a significant effect on her approach to language in her later mystical text, Las moradas, as we shall have occasion to see.

Once the mystic has graphically described her experiences of levitation, she continues her narrative by abruptly shifting her tone to address not García de Toledo and the other *letrados*, but God. Teresa begs of God to stop granting her such delightful mercies.<sup>9</sup> And yet, her

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<sup>9</sup> Teresa's despair over receiving God's gifts seems almost absurd. She is resisting an advanced experience of God basically to avoid social incrimination. But what could any amount of human suffering mean compared with the possibility of merging with the divine? The best answer appears to lie in Teresa's complex and all too human personality. As Victoria Lincoln points out repeatedly in her biography of the Saint, Teresa was a woman of flesh and blood, at times courageous and bold, but also often fearful. The severity of the events taking place around her (the persecution of *beatas* and *conversos*, and the growing mistrust of women, female sexuality, and unorthodox religious experiences) affected not only her written work, but also her daily life. The consistent threat of Inquisitorial action over her person seems to have overpowered her desire for God, or at least did so in some of her written--and to be censured--mystical accounts.

requests go unheard, for "[Dios] no parece se contenta con llevar tan de veras el alma a Sí, sino que quiere el cuerpo, aun siendo tan mortal y de tierra tan sucia como por tantas ofensas se ha hecho" (91). This statement not only reminds us of the fluidity so characteristic of author's narrative voice. It also portrays a desire that is reciprocal: Teresa wants God and God wants Teresa. And it poignantly reveals the problematic and yet unequivocal presence of the body throughout Teresa's mystical journey, both in her experience of God and God's of her. As we indicated in our second chapter, most mystics acknowledge the corporeal in the early stages of their spiritual development, and then increasingly disassociate themselves from it. But such is obviously not the case with Santa Teresa de Avila, who will insist on the central role of the body throughout the progressive journey of the human toward the divine.

In this last stage of the treatise of the four waters, the mystic's strategy once again will be to bring into her narrative the glorification of physical pain. After experiencing God's powerful force pulling one's self toward Him, recounts the mystic, a deep sensation of sadness ensues. This sadness is felt both physically and spiritually, for the soul is left hovering between heaven and earth: "paréceme que está así el alma, que ni del cielo le viene consuelo ni está en él, ni de la tierra le

quiere ni está en ella, sino como crucificada entre el cielo y la tierra, padeciendo sin venirle socorro de ningún cabo" (92). The torment, "un martirio sabroso," increases the soul's desire, and brings with it such joy that all the soul wants is death. The body can barely withstand the excessive suffering of this crucifixion. And now, in one more abrupt narrative shift into her voice of personal experience, the mystic relates how

algunas veces se me quitan todos los pulsos casi . . . y las canillas [quedan] muy abiertas y las manos tan yertas que yo no las puedo algunas veces juntar, y así me queda dolor hasta otro día en los pulsos y en el cuerpo, que parece me han descoyuntado. (92)

Her *padecer* shows externally in the body, and remains with the body even after the *ímpetu* has ended.

As Teresa sums up the complete experience of *ímpetu* a few paragraphs later, she chooses to focus on the element of suffering yet again:

este tormento . . . es tan sabroso y ve el alma que es de tanto precio que ya le quiere más que todos los otros regalos que solía tener. Parécele más seguro, porque es camino de cruz y en sí tiene un gusto de muy valor a mi parecer, porque no participa con el cuerpo sino pena, y

el alma es la que padece y goza sola del gozo y  
 contento que da este padecer. (93)

It is because of suffering that the *ímpetu* remains the most desirable and elevated of all the stages in the spiritual journey. Significantly, the cross that loomed so prominently in the introductory pages of the treatise at once reappears as that which dominates in this much desired state of divine union. The pleasure alluded to in the "grandísima suavidad y deleite" felt by the body at the onset of the *ímpetu*, now shows as experienced by the soul alone. The body does participate at the climax of this ecstatic moment, but only as far as pain is concerned. Here, Teresa succeeds in manipulating her audience in her favor at a particularly crucial point, for she is about to address the "mil persecuciones" she has undergone because of her visible experiences of rapture (95). By emphasizing the physical suffering inherent in the highest state of divine union (*ímpetu*) just before relating the persecutions she has been subjected to, she astutely brings to the reader's mind the excruciating moments of physical torment endured by Christian saints, and also successfully tones down any hint of sexual impropriety suggested by her previous mention of corporeal pleasure. In addition, by rhetorically focusing on physical pain in these closing remarks, the author starts paving the way into the concluding chapter of the treatise, where she passionately

defends the role of the body in the mystical journey, once again parting from the image with which she began: Christ's physical suffering at the cross.

The final chapter of the treatise of the four waters begins with an indictment of spiritual books and men who claim that the only way to reach a state of spiritual illumination is to detach oneself from God's creation. Through her use of cleverly subservient language--"a mi parecer"; "si a vuestra merced le pareciere bien"; "podría ser haverle menester" (XXII:100)--Santa Teresa is able to vindicate her belief in the central role of the corporeal in the human search for the divine, a belief that springs forth from her own experience. And in her experience, guided by these very men and books, the worst mistake she ever made was to try to distance herself from the corporeal:

Y avisan mucho que aparten de sí toda imaginación corpórea y que se lleguen a contemplar en la Divinidad; porque dicen que, aunque sea la Humanidad de Cristo, a los que llegan ya tan adelante, que embaraza u impide a la más perfecta contemplación. . . . Paréceme a mí que si tuvieran la fe como la tuvieron después que vino el Espíritu Santo, de que era Dios y hombre, no les impidiera, y que considerarse en cuadrada manera y que está Dios

en todas partes, y verse engolfado en El, es lo que han de procurar. Esto bien me parece a mí algunas veces; mas apartarse del todo de Cristo y que entre en cuenta este divino Cuerpo con nuestras miserias ni con todo lo criado, no lo puedo sufrir. (100)

In spite of cushioning the forcefulness of her statement through the strategic placement of "paréceme" and "me parece," Teresa makes her point with unquestionable self-assurance: those who seek to eliminate the corporeal from their spiritual quest have lost sight of the truth as revealed by the Holy Spirit. This truth is that Christ is both God and man, and that his body is divine. The act of distancing oneself from the corporeal is an error. And this the author makes clear as she addresses her God and ponders how she could possibly have forsaken Him by straying from his son's divine body: "¡Oh, Señor de mi alma y Bien mío, Jesucristo crucificado! No me acuerdo vez de esta opinión que tuve que no me da pena, y me parece que hice una gran traición, aunque con ignorancia" (100).

At once, Teresa exhorts her readers to follow Christ in his Passion: "¿Y no le miraremos tan fatigado y hecho pedazos, corriendo sangre, cansado por los caminos, perseguido de los que hacía tanto bien, no creído por los apóstoles?" (101). Just like those saints who suffered as Christ did,--and she lists San Francisco, San Antonio de

Padua, San Bernardo, and significantly, Santa Catalina de Siena--so must one surrender the self and imitate Christ in all his pain and sorrow, for "veo yo claro . . . que, para contentar a Dios y que nos haga grandes mercedes, quiere sea por manos de esta Humanidad sacratísima, en quien dijo Su Majestad se deleita" (101). And now that pain has been established as the culmination of the journey, Santa Teresa feels free to return to her defense of the body by movingly proclaiming, "nosotros no somos ángeles, sino que tenemos cuerpo" (103).

With this final chapter, Teresa de Jesús closes her treatise in the same way that she begins it: by heightening the importance of being with Christ and experiencing his physical suffering on the cross. As with the overarching structure of the autobiography, we find here a carefully constructed rhetorical frame. The foregrounding of pain as the salient aspect in the initial and concluding stages of the mystical journey, as well as the continuous and fluid interweaving of physical suffering with pleasure, serves to mute the very real and delicate presence of the latter throughout the text. And this same fluidity that we observe in the repeated juxtaposition of physical pain and pleasure is also present in the author's narrative voice, and in her use of language. For the writer's voice constantly drifts between the position of descriptive and distanced narrator and that of personal experience. And



her language blurs that boundary between words and things which, according to Foucault, emerges at the dawning of modernity. Teresa's voice is God's own, as she repeatedly acknowledges writing while divinely inspired. Her words do not represent, but rather embody that which they relate; there is no separation between the literal and the figurative in her text. Teresa de Jesús' approach to language in this first mystical work belongs within a pre-modern world view.

But this approach to language will change in her last mystical text, after the author is forced to contend with harsher gossip and two inquisitorial investigations. In writing Las moradas Santa Teresa will adopt an approach to language that emphasizes its representational character, and hence underlines the irrevocable distance between the figurative and the literal, and between words and things. Through this strategy, she will be able to continue to speak about the increasingly dangerous role of desire and the body in the mystical journey in a way that will prove acceptable to ecclesiastical and inquisitorial authorities, and that will place her within an early modern view of reality and of the world.

## CHAPTER VI

### DIVISION AND REPRESENTATION IN *LAS MORADAS*

#### I. The Writing of *Las Moradas*

Santa Teresa writes the *Moradas del castillo interior*, generally known as *Las moradas*, between June and October, 1577 at the order of her beloved confessor, Father Jerónimo Gracián. This timing is crucial, for it has been only one year since the completion of the first severe inquisitorial investigation against her, and three years from the time *La vida* was seized by the Holy Tribunal in Córdoba. As we indicated in our last chapter, Teresa is officially cleared of wrongdoing in both of these incidents, but her reputation remains damaged, and she is now more than ever publicly perceived as just another *alumbrada*. The brutal gossip about her questionable moral conduct focuses primarily on her relationship with Father Gracián. Gracián, described by Victoria Lincoln as a weak and ambitious young man, is painfully aware of such gossip, and decides--just as García de Toledo did fifteen years earlier--to order Teresa to write yet another text in which to justify her ecstatic experiences (239-40). While already approved by Inquisitorial authorities, *La vida* is still being held by the Holy Tribunal. And so Gracián seizes the opportunity. He tells his spiritual daughter that since her nuns cannot have *La vida* for

spiritual guidance, "[que] haga memoria de lo que se le acordare y de otras cosas, y escriba otro libro" (quoted in Obras completas 363). And so, from its inception, Las moradas is conceived as a substitute for La vida: a text in which the author describes the mystical journey in a manner that portrays it as God given, and that helps clear Teresa's reputation as well as that of her current confessor.

As Victoria Lincoln explains in her biography of Teresa, Gracián expects the mystic to write the book with her fellow sisters in mind, and in such a way that it can be published without stirring a negative reaction from Inquisitorial authorities (287). And so, following her confessor's wishes and in an effort to protect herself and her order, Teresa will adopt a series of new strategies that will further minimize the corporeality present in her experiences of mystic union, be it in pleasure or in pain. First, she chooses to write her account in the form of a treatise. In the treatise the soul is allegorically represented as a castle with seven chambers. Each one of these chambers--or spiritual stages--is progressively inhabited as the believer grows closer to God. The journey ends in the last and seventh chamber, located at the center of the castle, as the soul and God become one. Although in its form the treatise of the interior castle

is reminiscent of that of the four waters in La vida, we find considerable differences in Teresa's later work. Here she leaves out practically all references to her personal experience; the fusion between treatise and autobiography we observed in La vida is inexistent in the later work. Through this strategy of eliminating the autobiographical, she succeeds in establishing a much needed distance between her own physical and spiritual desire, and the corporeal imagery present in the literary text.

Secondly, she barely develops the allegory of the castle itself; instead, she inundates the text with diverse metaphors that turn up in a seemingly haphazard way, and through which she seeks to dilute the erotic intensity a few, key images. One such image is the highly sensual figure of the Spiritual Bride. The figure originating in King Solomon's Song of Songs, captures the vehemence and desire of the soul in its search for God. Significantly, it appears toward the climax of the journey and in the company of a corporeal language that vividly describes sensations of pleasure and of pain. Such dangerous language of erotic spirituality is concealed by a proliferation of attenuating metaphors, as Alison Weber points out. Through this "rhetoric of obfuscation," Teresa is able to describe the mystical journey as she has

experienced it, and, more than ever before, draw attention away from its salient eroticism (99).

Finally, her approach to language is markedly different from that found in her earlier mystical text. For in Las moradas she emphasizes continuously the representational character of her words. The whole treatise--and especially at narrative moments when physical pain and/or pleasure stand out--is punctuated by the author's acknowledgment that she is making use of comparisons to get her point across. As far as she is concerned now, language by its very nature falters; it will never succeed in accurately portraying mundane things, let alone the things of God. Hence, Teresa is able to further distance experience from language, literal from figurative, body from text. This new approach exemplifies what Michel Foucault considers the essential rupture brought on by early modern consciousness: reality, knowledge, and experience are no longer shaped by a system of resemblances, but rather by one of identities and differences (50).

## II. A Weakened Frame of Pain

Just as in La vida, the experience of pain rhetorically encloses the textual body of Las moradas. Such coincidence may suggest that pain is so central to Teresa's personal understanding and experience of the

mystical journey that it must appear in a prominent narrative location. It may also indicate, as the similar device did in her autobiography, that the author is adopting a strategy in order to minimize the experience of pleasure in this later mystical text. But this second hypothesis is not entirely accurate, for the opening reference to pain in the mystic's later work presents the experience of physical suffering as an obstacle rather than a vehicle. In the opening words of the prologue, the author admits that few things have been as difficult for her as writing this piece. For the past three months, Teresa concedes, she has been suffering from severe headaches, and her weakness has been such, "que aun los negocios forzosos escribo con pena." And while she has done as she must--she has written this treatise--, "el natural parece se aflige mucho; porque no me ha dado el Señor tanta virtud que el pelear con la enfermedad continua y con ocupaciones de mucha manera se pueda hacer sin gran contradicción suya" (364). The body, "el natural," appears as it has before: a problem. But while in La vida its difficult nature was accounted for in the form of an aside and in an unimportant narrative moment, here it stands glaringly in what is likely the most self-conscious narrative moment of a text: its opening paragraph. This initial, and personal, experience of pain is not

equivalent to virtue, as it was in the case of her mother's suffering in the early chapters of Teresa's autobiography. Neither is it the door through which her soul steps onto the mystical path. Rather, it is an experience that leaves her frail and forlorn, and retards the very project it introduces.

Significantly, in this same initial paragraph the Saint also questions her ability to talk about matters of the spirit, and even worse, God's willingness to grant her the appropriate language to do so: "no me parece me da el Señor espíritu para hacerlo ni deseo." Here the author establishes the general stance she will take toward language throughout the treatise of the interior castle: language and the experience of the divine are two separate and distinct entities, and in this work she will never be able to bridge the gap.

Both pain and language appear weakened in the first paragraph of Las moradas. Given recent accusations against Teresa that go as far as charging her with having sexual relations with Father Gracián and personally flagellating her nuns, Teresa knows that she has to be extremely careful while writing this second account of the mystical journey. Pain, as Teresa's contemporaries are willing to recognize, can come dangerously close to pleasure. We need only remember the scandalous trials of priests who at once flagellate and become involved

sexually with their spiritual daughters to realize how perilous are the accusations raised against Teresa. It is no surprise, then, that here pain appears as faded as it does; and that the symbiotic relationship between the divine, the text, language, and the body upheld by the author's divinely inspired words in La vida, is in this prologue simply nowhere to be found.

But while the opening segment of Teresa's framing device is considerably weak, its closing segment is certainly not. Physical pain, as we shall see when we discuss the *Séptimas Moradas*, looms prominent in the closing chapter of the treatise. Teresa's final championing of physical suffering is, I shall argue, one last passionate attempt to bring the body back into sight. But this she does only after having progressively erased it through the strategies outlined above. Pain is present again in her final chapter, but it will be a token of sorts, an act of defiance once the castle has been fashioned and those observing its construction have been properly tamed.

### III. Rhetorical Strategies Established in the First Three Moradas

The first three *moradas* of the interior castle, where the soul must face its solitude and the aridity of finding



itself still too distant from God, are roughly equivalent to the initial stage of prayer in La vida's treatise of the four waters. But Santa Teresa's new account of these trying beginnings is markedly different. As we shall see, the three initial *moradas* seem to serve primarily as a narrative ground in which the author introduces and establishes her newly adopted literary strategies. Only in the *Moradas segundas*, and very briefly, does the author address what she made central in La vida's first water: the importance of imitating Christ's suffering at the cross. And she does so in such a way as to further diminish its already minimal presence.

Santa Teresa introduces the central allegory of the interior castle in the first paragraph of the *Moradas primeras*. As she relates it, she had been begging God to speak for her, "porque yo no atinava a cosa que decir," when suddenly "se me ofreció" the image of "un castillo todo de un diamante u muy claro cristal, adonde hay muchos aposentos, así como en el cielo hay muchas moradas" (1:364). Although it may seem that the image of the castle comes to her by divine inspiration, the author is careful never to say so. In sharp contrast with La vida, where more than once she acknowledges the presence of God's voice in her words, here she is elusive and non-committal. Instead of affirming that God gives her the image, she chooses to avoid direct reference to divine inspiration and

thereby blur the origin of the metaphor by using the nebulous pronoun "se" (in "se me ofreció"). Judging from her earlier work, one would surmise that she believes that the image comes to her from God. But these are different times, and being still under the scrutiny of the Holy Tribunal, Teresa needs to be prudent. The elusiveness she shows in this opening remark will be a constant throughout the text. The author time after time will beg her creator to assist her, but her call for help will remain unanswered. God's divine presence will never be acknowledged in her words, and so Teresa's last mystical text will no longer be infused with that corporeality Karma Lochrie refers to in her work on Margery Kempe, and which we observed in La vida. In Las moradas the mystic no longer physically translates her Creator's divine utterances into a written corpus. Body and text appear severed in this early modern piece where language and things have become estranged.

The first three *moradas* consist of the lower and more peripheral chambers of the castle. After beginning the narration of the initial, and more distant chamber, by establishing that the treatise will revolve around the image of a castle, Teresa cautions her nuns:

Es menester que vais advertidas a esta  
comparación; quizá será Dios servido pueda por  
ella daros algo a entender de las mercedes que

es Dios servido hacer a las almas y las  
diferencias que hay en ellas, hasta donde yo  
hubiere entendido que es posible . . . (1:365)

Teresa's warning is clear: this is a comparison, and as such, is not to be confused with the actual experience. Here, the self-assured stance the mystic generally exhibited in La vida has vanished. Now she doubts not only the capability of her selected comparison to represent the various stages of the mystical journey, but her own understanding of the journey itself. The author closes this initial chapter of the first *moradas*<sup>1</sup> with the same tone of insecurity, now further highlighted by a final act of begging God's assistance that remains rhetorically unanswered: "Havéis de tener paciencia," she asks of her nuns, "porque no sabré dar a entender yo cómo yo tengo entendido algunas cosas de oración . . . y aun plega el Señor atine yo a decir algo . . . " (1:367).

The second and final chapter of the first *moradas* begins with the image of "este castillo tan resplandeciente y hermoso," to be immediately followed by a series of competing metaphors: "esta perla oriental, este árbol de vida que está plantado en las mismas aguas de la vida," and "un palmito . . . que tiene muchas coberturas" (1:367; 369). Such is an introduction of sorts to what Weber has

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<sup>1</sup> Except for the second *morada*, all others are divided into two or more chapters.

called the "rhetoric of obfuscation," a device the writer will use at those crucial moments where she brings physical pain and/or pleasure to the foreground. In the midst of laying out these three metaphors, Teresa returns to the topic of language. She stresses yet again that she must make use of "semejantes comparaciones," since "son tan oscuras de entender estas cosas interiores, que a quien tan poco sabe como yo, forzado havrá de decir muchas cosas superfluas y aun desatinadas, para decir alguna que acierte" (368). In these *Primeras moradas*, Teresa resolutely acknowledges that language falters. Her use of metaphors, though necessary, is just a poor and inaccurate attempt to express the ineffable; words and the things of God are distinct and unrelated entities.

Physical pain, the door through which the soul first enters the divine journey in La vida, is significantly absent from the *Primeras moradas*. It seems that the author would rather establish at this initial stage of her narrative her new approach to language and the "rhetoric of obfuscation." But pain does appear, albeit succinctly, in the *Segundas moradas*. Here the author describes the state of spiritual aridity in which the soul finds itself by emphasizing that this is a time of "hartos trabajos," and, as in La vida, by exhorting her audience: "abrazaos con la cruz que vuestro Esposo llevó sobre Sí y entended que ésta ha de ser vuestra empresa; la que más pudiere padecer que

padezca más por El y será mejor librada" (374). Yet now she adds, as she did--to our surprise--in the treatise of the four waters' closing remarks, "para los trabajos exteriores bien determinadas estáis conque os regale Dios en lo interior" (374). As we know from La vida, the trial of enduring physical suffering allows the believer to eventually receive God's delightful mercies. But here Teresa further specifies that the pain is to be experienced by the body, and the pleasure by the spirit. Such setting apart of pain and the body from pleasure and the spirit mirrors the author's approach to genre and to language in the text: treatise and autobiography, and words and things are distinct and separate.

This sole instance where the corporeal is literally present in the three initial *moradas*, appears framed and toned down by the author's more thorough and emphatic attention to the difficulties of language and representation. As she did in the first chamber, Teresa brings up her distrust of language in the *Moradas terceras*:

Por cierto, hijas mías, que estoy con tanto temor escribiendo esto, que no sé cómo lo escribo ni cómo vivo cuando se me acuerda, que es muy muchas veces. Pedidle, hijas mías, que viva Su Majestad en mí siempre, porque si no es así, ¿qué siguiridad puede tener una vida tan mal gastada como la mía? (1:376).

In this seemingly confessional statement directed at her nuns, Teresa admits to being afraid, and acknowledges yet again her insecurity, her incapability of accurately representing that which she knows through experience. The mystic's clever portrayal of her fear, her unworthiness, and the problematic nature of language, strategically serves to distance her person from her text, and is meant to protect herself from further conflict with inquisitorial and ecclesiastic authorities.

To complete the *Terceras moradas*, Teresa introduces yet another metaphor, now to portray the uneasy sensation of desire for God experienced by the soul at this stage: the image of the landowner who wants more land and yet feels uncomfortable about his likely greed. As she develops the image, Teresa emphasizes one more time the representational quality of her words, and hence the irrevocable distance between the figurative and the literal: "eso de las comparaciones no es lo que pasa . . ." (2:379). And, interestingly, at once she exhorts her sisters to surrender to God, to not mind their physical health and give themselves wholly to the experience at hand. This suggestion of the inevitable need to embrace physical suffering throughout the journey is followed by the author's subtle mention of God's mercies, and her indication that in the following *moradas* she will address the distinction between two different types of divine

pleasure: *gustos* and *contentos*. We find here Teresa's strategy of juxtaposing a new metaphor that she readily disavows as nothing but language, and the presence--albeit dim and just in passing--of pleasure and pain. The author will continue to use this strategy in a much more visible manner, as pain and pleasure really make their entrance in the *moradas* to come.

IV. A Clever Introduction to Pain, Pleasure, and Erotic Imagery in the Fourth and Fifth *Moradas*

Santa Teresa begins the *Moradas cuartas* by warning her audience that she will now speak of "cosas muy sobrenaturales" (1:382), adding:

es dificultísimo de dar a entender si Su  
Majestad no lo hace, como en otra parte que se  
escribió hasta donde yo había entendido (catorce  
años ha, poco más o menos); aunque un poco más  
luz tengo destas mercedes que el Señor hace a  
algunas almas, es diferente el saberlas decir.  
Hágalo Su Majestad, si se ha de seguir algún  
provecho; y si no, no. (382)

The writer at once admits that if God does not grant the words, speaking about supernatural things is impossible. And in a most daring and unexpected twist, she alludes to her autobiography, acknowledging that in writing this

earlier work God did grant her the words. As for this text, all she can do is to ask for His assistance. We sense here a daring in the tone of Teresa's literary voice that at once suggests awareness of the circumstances that increasingly limit her from speaking openly, and confidence in her ability to say without saying. Teresa cannot admit that her current language is divinely inspired, as this would bring together God's spiritual presence, and the author's own and very physical act of writing. She knows that she now needs to draw boundaries, to separate body from spirit, language from things. The mystic probably feels safe enough to mention that her language was God given in La vida, since the book was cleared by the Holy Tribunal before the recent and damaging events in Seville. But in her present work the situation is different. Her self-confidence in light of the environment that surrounds her, and her frustration are both palpable in her closing remark: "Hágalo Su Majestad, si se ha de seguir algún provecho; y si no, no." The implication here is that God's inspiration will remain with her, as was the case in La vida. But her last words "y si no, no" show her irritation as well as her rhetorical cleverness. Teresa will write without making known God's divine presence if that is what is necessary for her text, her order, and herself to survive.



Once Teresa has alluded to her changed approach to language in this second mystical treatise, she begins to draw a distinction between two types of mercies that are first experienced in the fourth *moradas*: *contentos* and *gustos*. In her discussion, which extends through the three chapters of the fourth chamber, the writer continually shifts back and forth between the two mercies. Because from this point on the mystic's narrative becomes increasingly detailed and complicated, we will limit ourselves to addressing the chapters and/or passages that best serve our discussion, and will analyze Teresa's rendering of *gustos* and *contentos* separately.

The mercies known as *contentos*, the author initially explains, originate in "nuestro natural" and end up in God (1:383-84). For it is through the physical and willful act of prayer that these divine gifts come to be experienced. The focus of prayer at this point must be Christ's Passion. By totally surrendering to his suffering, one begins to feel a joyous sensation of grief that frequently gives way to tears. Pain and pleasure are both present here, and experienced at once. Teresa confesses to having witnessed such tears, and in an unusual reference to herself, admits to having shed them herself: "aun me han acaecido alguna vez" (383). And, back in her impersonal voice, she continues describing these tears as "unas lágrimas congojosas, que en alguna manera parece las mueve la

pasión" (383). But, as if catching herself in a potentially dangerous situation, she proceeds to emphasize that she is just saying this, but she really knows nothing about such things as passion and sensuality: "yo sé poco de estas pasiones del alma . . . y lo que procede de la sensualidad y de nuestro natural; porque soy muy torpe, que yo me supiera declarar si como he pasado por ello lo entendiera" (383). And so, her earlier autobiographical reference is essentially annulled.

. The corporeal aspect of these *contentos*--physical suffering and tears--appears even more prominently in the next two chapters, but never without an appropriate disavowal of language and/or personal experience close at hand. In the second chapter, Teresa opens the narrative by conceding, "es todo desconcierto cuanto digo" (385), and then immediately returning to her description of the mercies. She explains that the *contentos*

algunas veces van envueltos con nuestras pasiones, train consigo unos alborotos de sollozos, y aun a personas he oído que se les aprieta el pecho y aun vienen movimientos exteriores, que no se pueden ir a la mano; y es la fuerza de manera que les hace salir sangre de narices y cosas así de penosas. (385)

To the reader of La vida, it may seem that Teresa is alluding here to the intensely erotic experience of the

transverberation, where the angel stabs her repeatedly in the heart, and she is left moaning, and all aflame in the love of God. But the author immediately dispels any such association. For she continues her narrative by declaring point blank: "desto no sé decir nada, porque no he pasado por ello . . ." (385). Teresa's rhetorical manipulation is blatant and twofold: she does not know how to speak of such things--language falters--, and her personal life has nothing to do with them anyway. Language, experience, text, and body stand irrevocably apart.

As for the *gustos*, they "comienzan de Dios, y siéntelos el natural tanto y goza tanto de ellos como gozan los que tengo dichos, y mucho más" (1:383). In contrast to the *contentos*, these mercies spring forth from God without any effort on one's part. But, just like with the *contentos*, here the body also participates, and experiences pleasure to an even greater degree. We should remember that the word "gozo" often carries within it some sexual innuendo. It is therefore surprising that the author would make so bold and dangerous a statement. But Teresa is aware of this, and she astutely completes her description with the following exclamation: "¡Oh Jesús, y qué deseo tengo de saber declararme en esto!" (383). By asking of God to give her the proper words, she is implying that she does not have recourse to those words just yet. The

pattern is again in place: Teresa justifies the all too clear presence of the corporeal in her experiences and her text by subtly laying the blame on the deficiencies of language.

Teresa strategically continues to describe the *gustos* through the use of a new metaphor: water. Although she does not make any reference to her treatise of the four waters, the author does admit being "amiga de este elemento," and uses two of the images she previously developed in La vida: the water wheel and the river.<sup>2</sup> She does not spend time on the image of the water wheel, which she compares to the prayer of recollection and likens to God's *contentos*. She does, however, work through the image of the river, which stands for the prayer of quiet, and the experience of divine *gustos*. This river water emerges from God's very being, and brings forth

grandísima paz y quietud y suavidad de lo muy interior de nosotros mismos, yo no sé hacia dónde ni cómo, ni aquel contento y deleite se siente como los de acá en el corazón--digo en su principio, que después todo lo hinche--, vase revertiendo esta agua por todas las moradas hasta llegar a el cuerpo, que por eso dije que

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<sup>2</sup>The figure of the garden that needs to be nourished by water does not appear graphically, but is implicit in the narration.

comienza en Dios y acaba en nosotros . . .

(2:386)

Just as in La vida, here Teresa's language is also intensely corporeal. And, what is more, the metaphor of water again seems to merge with the physicality of the ecstatic moment. The boundaries between text and experience, and literal and figurative language relax for a brief moment.

But the author connects the figure of water with yet another image in an effort to obscure this sudden excess of pleasure and corporeality which, incidentally, holds no narrative connection with her personal experience. The soul feels this, she continues, like a "fragancia--digamos ahora--como si en aquel hondón interior estuviese un brasero adonde echasen olorosos perfumes . . . el calor y el humo penetra toda el alma y aun hartas veces--como he dicho--participa el cuerpo" (386). The fragrance now appears as a simile, which, by its very nature, establishes a distance between the image and that which it stands for. Teresa's description is still highly sensual, and definitely includes the corporeal. But its sensuousness and physicality at once collapse. For the author immediately disclaims what she has just said: "Mirad, entendedme, que ni se siente calor, ni se huele olor, que más delicada cosa es que estas cosas, sino para dároslo a entender" (386). The mystic's images are just figures--

language--, imperfect instruments by which to make oneself understood; the heat and the scent described in her narrative do not really exist, and neither does, we infer, the body which is penetrated by them. Pain, pleasure, and the body certainly exist in this account of the fourth chamber but, as through the remainder of the treatise, they do so as part of a rhetorical web that serves to diminish their suspicious prominence and intensity.

The *Moradas quintas* function in the narration as a transitional stage between God's first mercies, described in the fourth chamber, and more advanced, and intensely erotic experiences of rapture related in detail in the *Moradas sextas*. In the current chamber, Teresa begins to speak of the experience of union, which initially resembles the *gustos* of the previous chamber in its overwhelming sensation of pleasure; only now she makes a point of emphasizing that the body does not participate in the ecstatic moment. The soul, she explains, is asleep to the things of the world, and its delight is "sobre todos los gozos de la tierra y sobre todos los deleites y sobre todos los contentos" (1:393). Shortly thereafter, she introduces the figure of the *Esposa* (394), an image that originates in King Solomon's intensely erotic Song of Song, and that will be central in her rendering of the sixth *moradas*. Teresa once again seems to be strategically fashioning her narrative by muting the role of the body at a crucial

point: right before alluding to a Biblical text and image that stand out for their corporeality, and that, as we shall see in our discussion of the sixth *moradas*, are decidedly dangerous at this historical moment.

This early stage in the complex experience of union, however, is not only one of pleasure, it also includes suffering. In the second chapter the author stresses that from here on it is not just about "descanso y regalo" (397). The trials to come will be many, for the soul has already tasted God's delights, and its desire for Him has become even more impetuous and demanding. The pain of those moments when His presence is not felt is such, "que llega a lo íntimo de las entrañas . . . [y] parece desmenuza el alma y la muele" (397). But one must endure, and wait. And in such aching patience lies great delight: "¡Oh gran deleite, padecer en hacer la voluntad de Dios!" (398). Teresa's account of the pain endured by the soul while at this stage is vividly corporeal, and once again reminiscent of her transverberation. But her ardent words are embedded within an acknowledged *comparación*, and lose their rhetorical force because the narrative attention is mainly focused on the given metaphor: the image of the silk worm that becomes a butterfly.

The author begins this second chapter by declaring again that she does not have the words to speak about the experience of union, "no creo sabré decir"; hence, she will

have to resort to figurative language: "para darlo mejor a entender, me quiero aprovechar de una comparación" (305). The chapter mostly consists of the author's development of the said comparison: the soul as the silk worm turned butterfly, who avidly seeks for a place to rest from her tiring and erratic fluttering. Teresa's graphic introduction of pain into the experience of union is most definitely framed, and weakened, by this more predominant image.

The mystic writer repeatedly underscores through the four chapters of these fifth *moradas*, her use of comparisons, and hence the figurative nature of her language. And she simultaneously emphasizes that her words falter, thereby suggesting that language stands apart from the experience of the divine, and is at most an imperfect mode of representation. Indeed, she closes her account of the fifth *moradas* by acknowledging her use of yet one more "grosera comparación, [porque] yo no hallo otra que más pueda dar a entender lo que pretendo . . ." (4:401). The "grosera comparación" is none other than the sacrament of holy matrimony.

Teresa is returning to the image of the *Esposa* she so skillfully introduced at the beginning of this chamber. Under the guise of crude yet necessary language, she now prepares her audience for the sixth *moradas*, where this *Esposa* and her betrothal are to play a central role. The



author at once justifies her choice of image by admitting: "en esto que tratamos jamás hay cosa que no sea espiritual" (4:401). That is, this coarse metaphor is not to be confused with the physical or sexual. And, besides, these are just deficient words; after all, about such divine things "no hay cómo se decir" (401).

The mystic briefly comments on the metaphor of marriage, but warns us: "todavía quiero más declararos lo que me parece que es esta oración de unión" (401). And that she will do in the long and detailed *Moradas sextas*. The fifth *moradas* remain as a sort of bridge in which the experiences described are not all that different from those of the previous chamber, and the bold images developed in the chapter to come--the *Esposa* and her marriage--are carefully brought into view. All along Teresa underlines the representational character of her language, and the absence of the body at such an elevated stage. And in such a way, she cleverly leads her audience into the controversial eleven chapters to come.

##### V. Spiritual Marriage and the *Moradas Sextas*

Santa Teresa devotes the longest and most detailed of the interior castle's seven *moradas* to the image of spiritual marriage. As Weber has pointed out, for the Castilian mystic spiritual marriage is "not just a literary motif, but a psychic reality" (114). In the private notes

Teresa writes as a sort of diary that is published after her death under the title Cuentas de conciencia (1619), she narrates the event as it did indeed occur to her in 1572. One day, while at the Convent of La Encarnación, and upon taking communion, Teresa has a vision. Christ appears to her, and shows her the nail that pierced his hand at the cross, saying:

'Mira este clavo, que es señal que serás mi esposa desde hoy; hasta ahora no lo havías merecido; de aquí en adelante, no sólo como Criador y como Rey y tu Dios mirarás mi honra, sino como verdadera esposa mía: mi honra es ya tuya y la tuya mía.' (Cuentas de conciencia XXV:465)

Interestingly, the object that symbolizes the sacramental union between Christ and herself is not a ring, but the nail that pierced Jesus' hand at the cross. The suggestion of His physical torment is conspicuously present at this moment of consummation and anticipated pleasure. Not surprisingly, pain and pleasure will appear more prominently than at any other point of Las moradas while she describes the experience of spiritual marriage in her account of the sixth and the seventh chambers.

As her own words show in these Cuentas de conciencia, the author literally has experienced the sacrament of divine matrimony. This fact alone stands as evidence that

the mystic's continuous justification of her all too passionate words as just figurative language is a necessary rhetorical strategy she must adopt, given the circumstances that surround her at the time she writes Las moradas. As we shall see in brief, Teresa's disavowals of this "grosera comparación" are constant and relentless, and are accompanied by a profusion of competing images which serve to diminish the salient eroticism inherent in the image itself. Likewise, and except for a particularly powerful moment in which Teresa seems to rebel against these strategies, and which we will address, she makes no reference to her personal experience, and in this way further distances her language from that which it conveys.

Teresa's *comparación* of the passionate yearning between the soul and her *Amado*, and their eventual marriage, originates in King Solomon's Song of Songs. In fact, several verses of the intensely erotic poem appear in the account of the sixth chamber. This is not the first time that the future Saint deals with the Biblical text. Between the years 1566 and 1567, and just after completing La vida, she writes a bold commentary on it. This work, published posthumously as Meditaciones sobre los Cantares (1611), is intended for her fellow sisters, as her repeated use of "vosotras" and "hijas mías" suggests. After circulating for years within convent walls, the book is

seized. In 1580, just as she receives word that Las moradas has successfully passed the scrutiny of its censors, Teresa is also ordered by the same authorities to burn her Meditaciones. The mystic readily complies with the command, yet, fortunately for us, several copies unknown to her remain extant, and the text survives (Obras completas 333).

Considering the similarity in content between the Meditaciones and this sixth chamber of the interior castle, the obvious question arises as to why one text and not the other is selected for elimination. The answer lies in the markedly different approach to language found in the two texts. We must remember that Teresa writes her commentary on the Canticles right around the time of La vida, and before she is submitted to the brutal inquisitorial investigations of 1575-76. In keeping with her view that her words originate in God and hence are intertwined with His creation, her stance in the Meditaciones is anything but prudent. More daringly than in La vida, the author celebrates the visibly erotic language of the Canticles as the "estilo" God has chosen to speak of the ardent desire between the human soul and Himself: "este lenguaje . . . [es] dicho por el Espíritu Santo. ¿Qué más era menester para encendernos en amor suyo y pensar que tomó este estilo no sin gran causa?" (Meditaciones I:335). Teresa boldly defends this language of love, and admits its divine

nature, as she exclaims: "¡Oh, qué lenguaje tan divino éste para mi propósito!" (VII:358). We certainly have not seen, and will not see, anything of this sort in Las moradas. To the contrary, in the later text, the author endeavors to highlight the representational, and therefore deficient nature, of a language that is most definitely not granted by God. Through this and the other strategies we have discussed, she succeeds in hushing down the eroticism and corporeality inherent in the image of marriage and in her references to King Solomon's text. And so it is no surprise that, after the excruciating investigations Teresa has to undergo between 1575 and 1579, this last, carefully worded text passes unharmed through the stern gaze of the censors, while the earlier piece is condemned to the flames, as any heretic would be.<sup>3</sup>

When she writes Las moradas in 1577, Teresa de Jesús is aware of the increasingly dangerous consequences of using a language that suggests pleasure, desire, and corporeality. Indeed, she must have been made painfully conscious of this even before her personal tribulations, and as early as 1572, when her fellow mystic Fray Luis de León is incarcerated under the accusation of making too literal a translation of the same Song of Songs she

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<sup>3</sup>It is not within the scope of our work to discuss Teresa's Meditaciones in detail. However, the text's intense eroticism certainly merits further study.

analyzed only five years earlier (Weber 118).<sup>4</sup> But spiritual marriage is not only a literary image for her; it is an actual experience. And Teresa evidently feels incapable of eliminating so significant an event from her current account of the mystical journey. And so, her words will remain passionately corporeal, and the sacrament of marriage will appear as the central image of the sixth and seventh *moradas*.

In the chapter that initiates the *Moradas sextas*, the author informs us that many will be the "trabajos interiores y exteriores" that the soul must endure until it fully consummates its union in the seventh and last chamber (1:404). As she has done before, Teresa begins the narrative by praying for "el favor del Espíritu Santo" (404), a grace that she will never acknowledge having received. She then continues by introducing the image of the soul as the Bride that has been wounded by the love of the Groom. The *Esposa* seeks to delight herself in her lover, but she must wait for the actual betrothal to take place. With words that stand out for their corporeality, she declares: "Está tan esculpida en el alma aquella vista [del Esposo], que todo su deseo es tornarla a gozar" (404). But sculpted figure, sensed vision, desire, and delight suddenly vanish, as the writer almost impatiently

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<sup>4</sup>The Biblical text in its vernacular version, by the way, had been censored, along with all the other books of the Bible, in the Inquisitorial Index of 1559 (Guillén 9).

clarifies: "ya he dicho que en esta oración no se ve nada, que se pueda decir ver . . . digo vista, por la comparación que puse" (404). Teresa readily emphasizes that she is using a comparison, and that her words are an inaccurate representation of the experience.

The author goes on to list the kinds of trials the soul is to undergo in the sixth chamber. The harshest and most valuable of these is the "enfermedades grandísimas" that will befall it. After graphically describing "recios dolores" and "martirios" experienced "en lo interior y exterior," Santa Teresa brings in a similarly graphic anecdote. It is about "una persona" who for the past forty years has barely spent a day without pain, but who will always be willing to imitate Christ's suffering at the cross. The person she alludes to is herself--as we know, Teresa's first serious illness came when she was approximately twenty years old, around 1535, and this book is written in 1577--. But the reference to her own experience is of necessity concealed, as is her surrender to physical pain. The author ends this first chapter with a reminder of the "pena" one must go through to enter the seventh chamber, and by enveloping this assertion with yet another disclaimer of her ability to speak of such things: "no he podido declarar más de lo dicho . . ." (407).

In the succeeding chapter Teresa turns to the *Esposa*, her beloved, and the delightful wound of desire, but not

without first accentuating the inability of language to speak of the things of God. The soul's desire, she declares, arises "por unos medios tan delicados, que el alma mesma no los entiende, ni yo creo acertaré decir para que lo entienda . . . que no sé comparación poner que cuadre" (2:407). Once she has disclaimed any connection between language and experience, she feels safe enough to proceed:

Siente [el alma] ser herida sabrosísimamente, mas no atina cómo ni quién la hirió; mas bien conoce ser cosa preciosa y jamás querría ser sana de aquella herida. Quéjase con palabras de amor, aun exteriores, sin poder hacer otra cosa, a su Esposo, porque entiende que está presente, mas no se quiere manifestar de manera que deje gozarse, y es harta pena, aunque sabrosa y dulce; y aunque quiera no tenerla, no puede; mas esto no querría jamás. (2:408)

The yearning soul feels pain and pleasure at once, and in a manner reminiscent of what Teresa herself experienced in her transverberation. But, significantly, here the author does not include herself, and does not either specify that the delightful suffering is indeed corporeal. And so, the physicality of the event--its pain and pleasure--appears diminished, and its relevance to Teresa's life is annulled. Yet the author does not stop here; she further camouflages



the perilous eroticism of her description by foregrounding yet one more time the irrevocable distance between language and the mystical encounter:

Deshaciéndome estoy, hermanas, por daros a  
entender esta operación de amor, y no sé cómo .  
. . ¡Oh, mi poderoso Dios, qué grandes son  
vuestros secretos y diferentes las cosas del  
espíritu a cuanto por acá se puede ver ni  
entender, pues con ninguna cosa se puede  
declarar ésta, tan pequeña para las muy grandes  
que obráis con las almas! (408)

Through the remainder of the chapter, the mystic continues to oscillate between vividly sensuous depictions of the soul's desire for its beloved and the "dolor sabroso" of sensing His presence without being able to become one with Him, and the inability of language to convey such matters. These constant rhetorical shifts are punctuated by the periodical appearance of competing images: *centella*, *silvido*, *olor grande*. And thus, pain and pleasure lose their salient presence and physicality, remaining just two more images in a complex web of failing words.

The moment of betrothal arrives in the fourth chapter. The author now describes how the senses become suspended as God reveals "cosas del cielo y visiones imaginarias" (414), and how the believer is left with a great will to perform

acts of penance. Interestingly, not once in the chapter does she speak of the pleasure and/or pain the soul experiences as it actually becomes Christ's beloved wife. In fact, the image of the *Esposa* itself is obfuscated by another series of rival metaphors: *mariposica*, *centella*, *fénix*, *camerín del gran Señor*. And so, the state of *arrobamiento* brought on by the spiritual betrothal comes across as an elusive, disembodied, and anti-climactic event.

But Santa Teresa is not satisfied with this rather flat rendering of the betrothal, and continues her discussion not only in the following chapter, but through the remainder of the sixth chamber. She begins the fifth chapter by declaring that there is another type of *arrobamiento*, which she also calls "vuelo del espíritu" (417). Here, "se siente un movimiento tan acelerado del alma, que parece es arrebatado el espíritu con una velocidad que pone hartó temor . . . (y aun algunos hemos leído que el cuerpo [va] con ella . . . " (417). All of a sudden, the body enters the picture, and yet the author is careful to assure us that she has just read about this, thereby implying that such a thing has never happened to her. We need only remember Teresa's graphic description of the anguish she feels when, in spite of herself, God lifts her off the ground in the presence of strangers, to realize that this is yet another rhetorical manipulation. Yes,

Teresa probably has read about this, but she also definitely has experienced it. However, this she cannot tell in 1577.

From now on, we notice a certain hesitance in the mystic's narration as to the participation of the body in this second type of betrothal or *arrobamiento*. The author affirms that the soul seems to leave the body, and then contradicts herself by adding, "[el alma] no puede decidir si está en el cuerpo u no . . ." (418), and, "Si esto todo está pasando en el cuerpo u no, yo no lo sabré decir; al menos ni juraría que está en el cuerpo, ni tampoco que está el cuerpo en el alma" (418). It is as if, from the beginning of this fifth chapter, Teresa feels that the body she so readily eliminated in the fourth, must of necessity appear as part of the experience; and yet, she knows that highlighting its presence in so elevated a state is a risk. And this in spite of her inclusion of competing metaphors for the newly wedded couple--*sol y rayos; arcabuz y pelota*--and her all too familiar disavowals of language as just representation.

The same hesitance is also present in chapter six. But now, in addition, the author makes specific references to those instances when the sweet torment of the *arrobamiento* manifests itself in public: "en esta morada son muy continos los arrobamientos, sin haver remedio de escusarlos, aunque sea en público, y luego las

persecuciones y mormuraciones . . ." (420). These public occurrences which include sensations of pain and pleasure that, in spite of Teresa's rhetorical efforts, seem suspiciously corporeal, are particularly problematic for women. For women, as the writer is quick to admit, suffer "del atamamiento que les hace su natural" (420). Santa Teresa acknowledges the traditional connection made by Christianity between the body and women, and understands that because of it and the increasingly severe stance toward her gender in recent years, she and her fellow sisters must be careful and prudent. And so she exhorts them to beware of excessive crying:

advertid que suele causar la complesión flaca cosas de estas penas, en especial si es en unas personas tiernas, que por cada cosita lloran. . . y como ya tienen entendido que las lágrimas son buenas, no se van a la mano ni querrían hacer otra cosa y ayudan cuanto pueden a ellas. Pretende el demonio aquí que se enflaquezcan de manera que después ni puedan tener oración ni guardar su regla. (421)

The shedding of tears that was so ardently advanced in the last stage of the treatise of the four waters, is now a cause for concern. In crying the excruciating delight of the "penas" experienced in the sixth *moradas* is made physically--and dangerously--evident. And so Teresa's

warns her nuns against excess, an excess that may suggest "feminine weakness" and that may lead others to accuse them of illuminist practices. However, the author immediately releases her nuns from responsibility by attributing the origin of such excess not to women, but to the devil. Through this strategy, she not only takes the blame away from her gender; she also subtly reminds her nuns of the possible consequences of allowing the physical--be it in pain or pleasure--to come into view. Although she never states these consequences, she certainly implies them: they could end up being charged, just like any *alumbrada*, with demonic deception. Teresa's aching awareness of this perilous historical moment becomes transparent, as she soon after exclaims: "¡Oh desventurados tiempos y miserable vida en la que ahora vivimos, y dichosas a las que les ha cabido tan buena suerte, que estén fuera de él!" (422).

To our amazement, and as if in an act of defiance against these "desventurados tiempos," the mystic's carefully crafted effacement of the corporeal comes undone in the following chapter. Santa Teresa opens the seventh chapter by reminding her sisters that suffering increases "mientras más se recibe de nuestro Dios" (423), and that the "dolor" that becomes greater will involve the memory of their sins. Then she inserts an anecdote of the now familiar "una persona" in order to illustrate this "dolor." So far, nothing looks different in her narrative. But soon

thereafter, Teresa brings up another matter that her fellow sisters must not forget: "la sacratísima Humanidad de nuestro Señor Jesucristo" (423). Suddenly, with great ardor, the author makes a reference to La vida, and proceeds to defend the participation of the body in this elevated stage of the mystical journey:

También os parecerá que quien goza de cosas tan altas no terná meditación en los misterios de la sacratísima humanidad de nuestro Señor Jesucristo, porque se ejercitará ya toda en amor. Esto es una cosa que escribí largo en otra parte, y aunque me han contradecido en ella y dicho que no lo entiendo (porque son caminos por donde lleva nuestro Señor, y que cuando ya han pasado de los principios es mejor tratar en cosas de la Divinidad y huir de las corpóreas), a mí no me harán confesar que es buen camino. Ya puede ser que me engañe y que digamos todos una cosa; mas vi que me quería engañar el demonio por ahí, y ansí estoy tan escarmentada, que pienso--aunque lo haya dicho más veces--decíroslo otra vez aquí . . . (424)

With a self-assurance that we have not seen before in Las moradas, the mystic audaciously refuses to accept her superiors' words of authority; she simply will not admit that the corporeal is not present in the experience of

God's highest mercies. And while for an instant she pretends to acknowledge that she may be wrong, with daring forcefulness Teresa at once declares that she will not be deceived by the devil as she was before (thus implying that her superiors are the ones under the evil creature's spell). And so she will go ahead and say what she really thinks anyway. It is no coincidence that the devil appears again at this particular narrative moment. As the author suggested in the previous chapter and makes explicit in reference to herself now, demonic deception is a frequent excuse to persecute those who physically experience the divine. And with great vehemence, Teresa goes on:

Yo no puedo pensar en qué piensan [mis superiores], porque apartados de todo lo corpóreo, para espíritus angélicos es estar siempre abrasados en amor, que no para los que vivimos en cuerpo mortal, que es menester trate y piense y se acompañe de . . . la sacratísima Humanidad de nuestro Señor Jesucristo. Y no puedo creer que lo hacen [negar la sacratísima humanidad], sino que no se entienden, y así harán daño a sí y a los otros. (424)

In this bold passage where Teresa virtually accuses her superiors for denying the corporeal at so high a mystical state, we find none of the caution we have observed in

every other chapter of her account of the interior castle. Here the author openly declares that we are human and have a physical body, and as such, we will encounter the divine in Christ's very own and sacred humanity, his flesh and blood. Teresa continues: "porque el mesmo Señor dice que [Jesús] es camino; tambien dice el Señor que es luz y que no puede ninguno ir a el Padre sino por El, y que me ve a mí ve a mi Padre" (424). And now, in a shift that is simply astonishing, she adds: "Dirán que se da otro sentido a estas palabras. Yo no sé esotros sentidos; con este que siempre siente mi alma ser verdad me ha ido muy bien" (424). Unexpectedly, the author vindicates the old relationship of resemblance between words and language. Christ's images as *camino*, *luz*, and physical presence that is perceived through the eyes, mean literally what they say. And so, Christ's body is indeed the place where we meet the divine. In two brief sentences, Teresa contradicts the notion she so meticulously has been fashioning of language as a representational and deficient tool and brings the body she has attempted to obscure again and again back into sight.

After returning to a vivid description of the soul's desire to "padecer algo por quien tanto padeció," the mystic modestly summarizes her bold argument: "Creo que queda dado a entender lo que conviene--por espirituales que sean--no huir tanto de cosas corpóreas . . ." (426). And



she proceeds to close the narration of the chapter with an anecdote, not now of "una persona" but of herself. In it the mystic concedes how mistaken she was to have thought, at one time in her life, that she could embark on the divine journey without embracing the humanity of Jesus Christ. And so, throughout this seventh chapter Teresa not only subverts the notion that language stands irrevocably separated from things, but she also destabilizes the boundaries she so painstakingly has set between the treatise and her personal life.

This sudden and adamant return to the vision of language, text, body, and mystical experience she espoused in La vida, is short lived. In chapters eight and ten the mystic describes a series of "visiones intelectuales" from which the body is conspicuously absent: "sentía . . . mas no con estos sentidos que podemos sentir . . ." (VIII:427); "estas no son visiones de la Sacratísima Humanidad, ni aunque digo que ve, no ve nada . . ." (X:433). And she also resumes the stance toward language she had so firmly established in this and all the previous *moradas*: "ansí son las cosas espirituales, que no se saben decir, mas entiéndese por ellas cuán bajo es nuestro natural para entender las grandezas de Dios . . ." (VIII:428); "Yo quisiera poder más a entender en este caso, mas no se puede decir" (X:434).

In chapter nine we initially sense that the author will go back to her bold stance of the seventh chapter. The narrative begins with a return to the "sacratísima Humanidad," and the same sensual language we observed before: Teresa speaks, for instance, of the "deleite" and "enorme tormento" of seeing "estos ojos tan hermosos y mansos y benignos del Señor . . ." (430) But she soon mutes the physicality of her words and the experience by specifying that this is all apprehended through the "vista interior", adding, "cuando es vista exterior no sabré decir de ello ninguna cosa" (430). Furthermore, she again inserts within her description a series of competing images--*piedra preciosa, relámpago, sol*-- that serve to heighten the acknowledged figurative nature of her language, and to weaken what we mistakenly assume to be the resurging presence of the corporeal (430).

The eleventh and final chapter of these long *Moradas sextas*, take us back to the image of the Bride and Groom, and again exhibit a language that is at once intensely erotic and carefully guarded. In this chapter, Santa Teresa describes the experience that follows the *arrobamiento* and purifies the soul before the consummation of its spiritual marriage in the final chamber, namely, the *ímpetu*. The *ímpetu* also appeared as the most elevated kind of mercy in the treatise of the four waters; and while Teresa's initial juxtaposition of pain and pleasure in that

account of the *ímpetu* ended up highlighting pain, the physical aspect of the experience appeared vindicated throughout. Here, on the contrary, the mystic's approach to the corporeal is one of denial. And her stance toward language definitely marks a separation between words and the experience of the divine.

Santa Teresa starts her narrative with the image of the *Esposo* and His beloved, now pictured not as the *Esposa*, but as the *mariposilla* introduced in the *Moradas quintas*. By using this competing metaphor of the butterfly, the author dilutes the eroticism inherent in the image of the bride who is about to consummate her marriage. The *mariposilla*, rather than the *Esposa*, pines away for her *Amado*, and her pain is increasingly greater as she receives more gifts from Him, for their union has not yet been fulfilled. When her suffering becomes almost unbearable, the *ímpetu* seizes her:

andándose está así el alma, abrasándose en sí  
mesma, acaece muchas veces . . . venir de otra  
parte--no se entiende de dónde ni cómo--un  
golpe, u como si viniese una saeta de fuego; no  
digo que es saeta, mas cualquier cosa que sea,  
se ve claro que no podía proceder de nuestro  
natural; tampoco es golpe, aunque digo golpe;  
mas agudamente hiere, y no es adonde acá se  
sienten las penas . . . sino en lo muy hondo y

íntimo del alma, adonde este rayo, que de presto  
 pasa todo cuanto halla de esta tierra nuestro  
 natural y lo deja hecho polvo, que por el tiempo  
 que dura es imposible tener memoria de cosa de  
 nuestro ser . . . (435)

Here again Teresa is recounting an experience almost identical in kind to the transverberation. But the differences in the two narratives are many and worth noting. For one, and as before, when the image of the *herida* appears in the sixth chamber, Teresa makes no reference to her personal experience. But more importantly, her account is now punctuated by continuous reminders that her words and the experience hold no resemblance: the *saeta de fuego* is not a *saeta*, the *golpe* is not a *golpe*, the *herida* is not an actual physical wound. And the corporeal intensity of this transfixion is further and finally undermined by the image of the *rayo* that suddenly enters and takes over the narrative. To conclude her carefully guarded account, Teresa appropriately adds, "quedo corta, no se puede decir" (435).

When she proceeds to describe the sensation of pain experienced at this moment, Teresa surprises us by stating that the soul begins to "dar grandes gritos"; but she does so only to clarify immediately: "este sentimiento no es en el cuerpo--como queda dicho--, sino en el interior del alma" (435). As we have observed before in these *moradas*,

Teresa uses corporeal language and derives power and intensity from it, to later retract and reclaim doctrinal legitimacy. Through this strategy of highlighting the corporeal and then justifying her words, her obfuscation of the principal image--the Bride that suffers the wound of love--, and her constant disclaimers of the physicality of the pain experienced, Santa Teresa nearly erases all eroticism from the concluding chapter of the *moradas* in which the spiritual betrothal takes place.

#### VI. A Last, Silenced Gasp in the *Moradas séptimas*

The *Moradas séptimas* is the stage where the union between the soul and her beloved is consummated. Because it is at this point that the sexual undertones of the metaphor of marriage are most dangerously present, Santa Teresa must be yet more careful to separate herself from her account of the experience, and to emphasize that her words hold no direct relationship with reality.

Not surprisingly, the mystic opens these last *moradas* with yet another unanswered prayer. In it she asks of God "[que] menee la pluma y me dé a entender cómo os diga algo de lo mucho que hay que decir y da Dios a entender a quien mete en esta morada" (1:438). But, as has always been the case in this, her last, mystical text, God's presence goes un-acknowledged. Teresa continues with an exclamation through which she essentially disclaims any relationship

between what she is about to declare and her personal experience:

¡Oh, gran Dios!, parece que tiembla una criatura tan miserable como yo de tratar en cosa tan ajena de lo que merezco entender. Y es verdad que he estado en gran confusión, pensando si será mejor acabar con pocas palabras esta morada, porque me parece que han de pensar que yo lo sé por experiencia, y hacéme grandísima vergüenza, porque, conociéndome la que soy, es terrible cosa. (438)

For those of us who are familiar with the writer's turbulent life and her "reputation," the passage is revealing and almost amusing in its scarcely concealed irony. Cleverly, and in an effort to protect herself, Teresa establishes her weakness and unworthiness, and then proceeds to admit her fear at having to relate something that she does not understand and of which she has no experience. If we recall, Teresa is ordered to write Las moradas as a substitute for her autobiography, La vida. In that first mystical text the author continually emphasizes that she writes from experience. Here, however, she must do the contrary. After all, the slightest reference to her own, vividly erotic mystical encounters could appear suspicious given her recent difficulties with the Inquisition. Teresa says as much, but in a way that is

skillfully veiled. In a twist that is astutely ambiguous, she maintains that, given who she is and her lack of experience--"conociéndome la que soy"--, she would be too embarrassed to admit having reached such elevated states. While it may seem that the mystic is excusing herself for speaking without knowing, those who are aware of her history and who have observed her skillful rhetorical manipulations know that such is not the case. The author actually is implying that to speak would be to risk the same fate as many of her contemporary *alumbradas*:

Having established that what she is about to relate has nothing to do with her personal life, Teresa goes on in this and the three remaining chapters to describe the consummation of the spiritual marriage. Now that God has witnessed the suffering inherent in the soul's desire for Him, he is ready to lead her into the seventh chamber. Here, "el Señor la junta consigo; mas es haciéndola ciega y muda . . . y quitándola el sentir cómo u de qué manera es aquella merced que goza . . ." (1:439). The soul experiences delight upon its union with the Creator. But, as Teresa is adamant to stress, the physical senses are not present at this moment, and they will not be present either when the enraptured soul finally apprehends the three persons of the Trinity: while the act of apprehending occurs "--podemos decir--por vista . . . no es vista con los ojos del cuerpo ni del alma . . ." (439). As these

passages of the first chapter illustrate, the mystic begins to relate the climactic moment of the journey in a way that de-sensualizes both the experience and the language she uses to portray it.

Santa Teresa continues to de-sensualize--and de-sexualize--the image of the consummated marriage in the following chapters. After indicating that upon the soul's first experience of divine union, God reveals His humanity and lets her know that they now belong to each other, the writer clarifies that there is no body in this vision, and justifies her language as nothing but *comparaciones*: "ya he dicho que aunque se ponen estas comparaciones--porque no hay otras más a mi propósito--, que se entienda que aquí no hay memoria de cuerpo más que si el alma no estuviese en él, sino sólo espíritu . . ." (441). Body and spirit are split apart, as are the figurative and the literal, language and experience, words and things.

Teresa proceeds to describe the "grandísimo deleite" felt at this point. At once she introduces a chain of images that, even more powerfully than before, serve to divert the reader's attention from the central image of the consummated marriage. The images--similes and metaphors--are water, light, the already familiar *mariposilla*, and, curiously, rays of milk emanating from God's breast. While with the first three figures, the author keeps her caution, with the last one it is as if her very soul pours out:



¡Oh, vida de mi vida y sustento que me sustentas!, y cosas de esta manera; porque de aquellos pechos divinos, adonde parece está Dios siempre sustentando el alma, salen unos rayos de leche que toda la gente del castillo conhorta, que parece quiere el Señor que gocen de alguna manera de lo mucho que goza el alma . . . (442)

As Carolyn Bynum has noted, this startling image of a male God who feeds his lover's soul with milk from his breast is not uncommon among medieval mystics (269-70). That Santa Teresa adopts it is significant, for through it she cleverly redirects what could be interpreted as sexual desire toward a nurturing and "safely" androgynous eroticism. And she harnesses the passion of her rendering of the image by stressing that in this stage of union we must distance ourselves "[de] todo lo que es corpóreo en el alma," and remain "en puro espíritu" (442).

Once the necessary separation between the physical and spiritual has been confirmed for a second time in the seventh chamber, the mystic refers to the "pena" that the soul experiences upon receiving so much and doing so little. It is at this highest state of mystical union, the author affirms, that we must practice acts of penance. The sudden appearance of the need to mortify the body is a rare occurrence in Santa Teresa's last mystical text. As Alison Weber has indicated, toward the end of her life and after

being relentlessly persecuted, the mystic is increasingly set against ascetic practices (140). Such a stance seems logical, given the recent scandals in Llerena, where religion, pain, pleasure, and female sexuality come together scandalously. But, in a gesture that contradicts this position and that stands as a dare of sorts, the author chooses to acknowledge at the final stage of the journey--as she did in La vida--the importance of imitating Christ's suffering.

Pain is hence present in Teresa's narrative, yet it is considerably weakened by its juxtaposition with competing images and the author's characteristic disavowal of language. Santa Teresa's mention of penance is structurally framed on the one hand by the assertion that one must sever oneself from all that is corporeal in the soul and remain spirit alone, and on the other by the appearance of two metaphors. Interestingly, the latter of these metaphors is the image of the sick body. The writer declares, about the experience of enduring *trabajos* while consumed by God's divine love, that: "Duélenos el cuerpo; mas si la cabeza está sana, no porque duele el cuerpo dolerá la cabeza" (443) That is, the suffering of the body must not contaminate the pleasure of the spirit. Pain and pleasure, previously always juxtaposed, now appear separated. And so do language and experience, as Teresa closes the chapter--ironically, we surmise--with the

following words: "Riéndome estoy de estas comparaciones, que no me contentan; mas no sé que otras. Pensad lo que quisierdes; ello es verdad lo que he dicho" (443).

In the third and last chapter Santa Teresa returns to this "deseo de padecer grande" experienced externally and the delight felt internally by the soul. Significantly, and in spite of such "padecer grande," the consummation of the spiritual marriage will hardly, if ever, be physically manifest: "en llegando aquí el alma, todos los arrobamientos se le quitan, si no es alguna vez, y ésta no con aquellos arrebatamientos y vuelos de espíritu; y son muy raras veces--y éstas casi siempre no en público como antes, que era muy ordinario" (445). The image of marriage continues to lose its corporeality and its relationship with physical experience. And its powerful eroticism becomes even more diluted when, upon commenting on the bridal kiss, the author brings in another chain of metaphors now not her own, but originating in the Bible. Santa Teresa completes her Biblical potpourri--*cierva herida, tabernáculo, paloma*--by confessing her ignorance on such matters: "¡Oh, Jesús, y quién supiera las muchas cosas de la Escritura que deve haver para dar a entender esta paz del alma!" (446). Even when her language proceeds from God himself, it falters; her words surely cannot be that which they represent.

The Castilian mystic closes the *Séptimas moradas* and her mystical treatise as she did in *La vida*, with a passionate and startling exhortation to take on Christ's suffering at the cross. Having weakened the corporeality of her words and of the mystical journey, Teresa now vindicates the place of the body in the soul's final surrender to Christ:

Es muy cierto que . . . [la unión] acude a todos los que están en el castillo, y aun el mismo cuerpo, que parece muchas veces no se siente; sino, esforzado con el esfuerzo que tiene el alma beviendo del vino de esta bodega adonde la ha traído su Esposo y no la deja salir, redunda en el flaco cuerpo, como aquí el manjar que se pone en el estómago da fuerza a la cabeza y a todo él. (4:448)

The author does not hesitate to bring together the erotic image of the Groom and Bride in their inebriation and the physical body. Indeed, she continues by once again bidding her nuns to follow in the example of the saints, and engage in the practice of acts of penance. It is as if Teresa cannot bear to end her last, and most detailed, mystical text without at least acknowledging one of the journey's most salient aspects: physical pain. But this is a heroic gasp which ends up being but a whiff of fresh air in a carefully controlled atmosphere. For Santa Teresa has

already accomplished what she sought out to do: to relate the experience of the mystical journey in a way that will prove acceptable to the authorities. And she has done so by obscuring the presence of the body--in pleasure and in pain--through the skillful use of the following rhetorical strategies: eliminating her personal experience from the account, juxtaposing the physical and erotic with a series of competing images, and acknowledging that language and the things of God hold no resemblance. In keeping with such strategies, the clever writer ends her treatise with words that silence her last daring gasp: "yo os digo que es harta confusión mía, y así os pido por el mesmo Señor que no olvidéis en vuestras oraciones esta pobre miserable" (450).

## CONCLUSION

The presence of the body is undeniable in Teresa de Jesús' two accounts of the mystical journey, La vida and Las moradas. Deeply indebted to mystical tradition, the Castilian saint believes that only through the corporeal can the human being embrace the path that leads to a fusion with the divine. Unlike most mystics, Santa Teresa is also convinced--and this from personal experience--that the body is not just an instrument whose initial presence fades away in the highest stages of the journey. It is rather a full participant in each and every level of the progressive encounter of the human with the divine. Such conviction is dangerous in a Spanish society that grows increasingly suspicious of women and their sexuality as it becomes the first modern European state. Once Spain enters the period we know as the Counter-Reformation, which is the time when Teresa de Avila begins writing her first mystical text, the need to control women's unbridled sexuality becomes a national obsession. In the religious arena, a series of events ostensibly linking women to unorthodox religious experiences and improper sexual conduct--notably the trials of *alumbradas* and *beatas*--further affect the way women, their bodies, and their sexuality are perceived, particularly when religious vocations are at stake.

Santa Teresa is perfectly aware of these circumstances, and indeed she is affected by continuous gossip about her religious experiences and relationships with confessors. When she is asked to write an autobiographical account of the spiritual journey (La vida), she finds ways to remain true to her experience and preserve the salient presence of a corporeal pleasure that is perilously reminiscent of this feared female sexuality. Her strategy is to emulate hagiographic accounts and writings by medieval female mystics where pleasure often appears in conjunction with pain in the mystical journey. Since pain has been a distinguishing and desirable experience for the Christian believer, its strategic presence as frame and as counterpart of pleasure in La vida protects Teresa's text from Inquisitorial condemnation.

After completing her first mystical text, and before starting a second one also under the command of her superiors, the author is subjected to two inquisitorial investigations. The second, which takes place between 1575 and 1576 in Seville, involves serious allegations of sexual misconduct between Teresa and her confessor and accusations that the mystic had inflicted excessive penance--flagellation--on her fellow sisters. Although the foundress of the Carmelites is absolved of wrongdoing, her reputation is damaged further by the Inquisitorial process. This event and the concurrent scandals in Extremadura (in

which young religious women are said to experience delightful anguish during ecstatic raptures and to engage in illicit sexual relations with their male spiritual guides) has a profound effect on Teresa's writing of her last mystical text. In Las moradas she exercises more caution than she did when writing La vida. Now, she is extremely careful when portraying the experience not only of physical pleasure but also of a pain that could appear dangerously sexual. To this end, and in an astute reading of a Spanish society that soon after her death will depict her as nearly devoid of corporeality, she adopts a series of strategies through which she manages to remain true to her experience of the divine while rhetorically diminishing even further the role of the body in pleasure and in pain. Teresa almost erases her personal experience from the account, and dilutes the erotic and corporeal through incorporating competing metaphors and adopting a new stance toward language.

While in La vida the author's approach to language and her understanding of reality and the world is in keeping with the system of resemblances Michel Foucault ascribes to the pre-modern West, in Las moradas her approach appears drastically changed. Here, Santa Teresa adheres to an emerging and Modern view of language, where words no longer necessarily hold a resemblance to things. Rather, they are arbitrary signs that only deficiently represent reality.



In correlation with this shift in the mystic's stance toward language, we find sharp differences between the two mystical texts. In La vida the salient and personal aspects of the mystical experience, and the ostensibly distanced account of the four waters are intimately related. The same fluidity we find in the central image of water is present in the relationship between treatise and autobiography, pain and pleasure, language and experience, the corporeal and the spiritual, and body and text. In Las moradas, in contrast, we witness a need to mark differences and set boundaries. Thus, the treatise is severed from autobiography, as is language from experience, the corporeal from the spiritual, and body from text. In this final mystical work Teresa enters the mode of consciousness of early modernity. By this means she succeeds again in protecting her writing, her order, and herself.

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