

Confessing Nuns: Gender, Hierarchy, and
Institutionalized Power in Early Modern Hispanic
Literature

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation discusses the inversion of power dynamics between nuns and the Catholic Church during the Early Modern period in Spain and in the New World. I study how Santa Teresa de Ávila, Catalina de Erauso, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz use traditional modes of male thought and action regarding feminine weakness in order to realize their own agendas and participate in arenas generally forbidden to women. In analyzing how these women reinforce the weaknesses and strengths of the gender binary through written confession, I am able to trace their appropriation of power and authoritative voice in spaces traditionally associated with men. Longevity in the space of power depended greatly on the ability and desire to perpetuate the reputation of woman as the daughter of Eve and reinforce the system of male dominance. Despite the fact that the texts in this study span almost two centuries, the nuns exemplify some of the salient social issues in Early Modern Spain: the impact of the Council of Trent, the reaction to heterodox female practices, and the relationships between the colonies and the metropolis. Santa Teresa appropriated the male space through a hyperbolic adherence to monastic norms. Through her compliance, the saint was able to adopt an instructive role with her confessors. In contrast, Sor Juana rejects the typical conventual role and avoids appropriate gender norms through the study of secular texts. Her unwillingness to comply with her confessors' wishes regarding a return to tradition even further

solidifies her role as a threat to the Church. Catalina de Erauso completely abandons her femininity and acquires authority by preserving notions of male superiority. In becoming a male, she is able to perform masculinity and refuse the inherited weaknesses of Eve. Ultimately, these women used their texts as written confessions in an attempt to prove their orthodoxy and conceal their transgressions.

Keywords: nuns, gender, power, convent, Early Modern, confession

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CHAPTER I

Introduction: Women in the Male Space

During the Hispanic Early Modern period, the concept of a writing nun was a conundrum that the ecclesiastic hierarchy facilitated in order to measure female compliance with Catholic dogma. Through self-representation, women were able to participate in a portion of society that, prior to the Protestant Reformation (1517-1555), was almost exclusively a male activity. While confessors often requested autobiographical texts of their penitents, the writing process led to an unintended inversion of power dynamics. The female appropriation of the male space posed a great threat to the balance of power between disciple and the Church. A confessor, the chosen mediator between God and humankind, exercised a power awarded by the Institution; and, as far as Catholic ideology was concerned, this power came directly from Christ. Women of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, unable to outwardly usurp an assumedly divine authority and privileged identity reserved exclusively for the male, gained authority either in the religious or secular environment by astutely subverting the norms of the ecclesiastic hierarchy. In many cases, nuns were empowered paradoxically through a hyperbolic adherence to monastic vows and sacraments as outlined by the Council of Trent, while others rejected the behavioral tenets required of all female religious and women external to the cloister. Submission to how the hierarchy defined the limits of gender determined the longevity of a feminine authoritative voice.

During Counter Reformation Europe, power dynamics were tied to religion and the body and its functions. Male clerics ascribed their claim to authority to divine privilege and based their judgment of female divergence from traditional monastic and feminine modes of behavior on anatomical lack. In my view, early modern power was only as stable as its connection to divine principles, or its capacity to be restructured according to Catholic standards of orthodoxy. Two ways that women could engage power were to dangerously claim Christ as a proponent of their particular ascent to authority, or to reinforce the gender binary by positioning male as the superior being. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine specific cases of three writers who, both in spite of and as a result of the controlling presence of the Church, circumvented the patriarchy and acquired an authoritative presence. Santa Teresa de Ávila (1515-1582), the Carmelite reformer who subverted conventual norms through strict compliance with monastic expectations; Catalina de Erauso (1585?-1650), an escaped novitiate who usurped the space of male gender performance; and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695), a Hieronymite nun who defiantly repudiated ecclesiastic expectations of feminine behavior, are all women with traceable and definitive trajectories of power in the male space. Despite the fact that the texts in this study span almost two centuries, the nuns exemplify some of the salient social issues in early modern Spain: the impact of the Council of Trent, the reaction to heterodox female practices, and the relationships between the colonies and the metropolis.

The connecting agent that intertwines the experiences of these women is the use of their texts as both a tool for confession and a mechanism for protecting their entrance into heterodoxy. I contend that in order to avoid too directly claiming a right to authoritative discourses as women, Santa Teresa, Catalina de Erauso, and Sor Juana all resorted to, or at least attempted to affect, the image of the repentant female. To appeal to the male conception of woman as inept demonstrates feminine knowledge of the limitations of female power in the masculine sphere. In characterizing themselves in their confessions, at least in part, as ignorant, inferior, and sinful, these nuns participate in what Michel Foucault identifies in his *History of Sexuality* as a quest for revealing truths:

Since the Middle Ages at least, Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth . . . The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in . . . the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires . . . One confesses in public and in private . . . Western man has become a confessing animal (58-9).

The seemingly innate impulse to expose one's interiority with the intention of extirpating the soul of wrongdoing solidifies Catholic ideology in European religious and secular culture. However, perhaps the most immediate question regarding Foucault's claim on the influence of the practice of confession is not whether the act was, in fact, as wide-spread as he had imagined; but rather what type of truth did

Catholics, and more specifically Catholic women, intend to acknowledge upon confessing? While each nun analyzed in this dissertation clearly adheres to the practice of confession as a protective measure, they approach the sacrament with the knowledge of what men regard as divinely supported truth about feminine inferiority and attempt to use this attitude to their own benefit. Although confession became an annual sacramental requirement for all Catholics during Counter Reformation Europe, for women, the practice not only meant compliance with institutional specifications, but as a result of the infamy attributed to the female gender because of Eve's role in the fall of man, the confessional also provided an opportunity for women to acknowledge and perpetuate gender normative ideologies of feminine weakness.

In order to comprehend the singularity and significance of Santa Teresa, Catalina de Erauso, and Sor Juana in their individual stances of power and as threats to the Church, it is vital to contextualize the male conception of female as the daughter of Eve. The biblical creation story offers an illuminating point of departure for understanding the dangers of the radical authoritative postures of these women. Genesis provides doctrinal support for the necessity of culturally and religiously sanctioned female oppression. The detailed description of the first woman, that is to say before her consumption of the forbidden fruit, portrays her as secondary to male. There are two versions of creation, both of which capitalize on different principles and, in turn, produce two different modes of thought as it relates to heteronormative roles between men and women. The first states:

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Genesis 1: 27-28).¹

The first appearance of the creation myth is not regarded as the definitive staple of gender norm establishment. Chronologically focused, the initial narration does not place importance on the male nor does it situate the female in an inferior position. In fact, this version of the story is somewhat vague in that it passively describes that God created man and woman and then instructed them to populate the earth. A focus on the holistic nature of God’s creation seemingly delineates a more equal playing field in terms of gender equality. Man was not appointed as the master of the earth nor was woman created as man’s companion.

In contrast, the second reference to creation in Genesis II is the emergence of the role of female as male’s companion. Catholics used this more detailed account of creation to emphasize the secondary role of woman:

So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord

¹ All biblical passages in this dissertation are from the New International Version (BibleGateway.com).

God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man (2:20-22).

Rather than highlighting creation in the general sense, Genesis II establishes the importance of the male figure and assures an androcentric interpretation of creation. This more detailed relation of the story solidifies female existence as dependent and contingent on male presence. As a gift to Adam, God created Eve from and for man. This representation of the first female serves as a springboard for the notion of feminine inferiority in that woman is a companion, and by virtue of having originated from man's rib, represents a less perfect version of God's image. The Bible, while not necessarily stating directly the inferiority of women, constructs the idea of female as second to male. From the early modern perspective, any deviation from this divinely authenticated order of importance could constitute a disregard for God's intention for woman as man's companion. Nonetheless, the order of the creation of man and woman is not what led to the commonly held idea that female was naturally inclined toward sin. Eve's role in the fall of man was the Catholic Church's motivation for treating women as a potential danger to men and the Institution, and is the reason why Santa Teresa, Catalina, and Sor Juana are transgressive figures when set against the backdrop of the early modern feminine ideal of passivity, ignorance, and subordination.

The concept of wisdom and knowledge as male privilege is the most threatening source of power for women and is the primary means by which Santa Teresa, Catalina de Erauso, and Sor Juana move in and out of the male spaces of

authority. The basis of man's view of feminine learning stems from Eve's attraction to the apple. The first three chapters of Genesis also construct the reputation of women as inclined toward sin. From the generalized explanation of creation in Genesis I, to establishing male as the dominant being in II, III highlights Eve as not only secondary to man, but highly susceptible to evil. Male claim to divine privilege begins with Eve's interaction with the serpent in the Garden of Eden:

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' " "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked . . . (Genesis 3: 2-7).

Due to her desire for wisdom and an attraction to the visually appealing fruit, Eve disobeyed God. Although both ignore God's command, the ease with which the serpent influences Eve along with the portrayal of her as the temptress of Adam, justifies the male distrust of female character. If Eve plays the role of villain, despite Adam's willingness to eat of the fruit, the male is then characterized as a victim. Her insubordination sets a biblical precedent for the female gender as disobedient,

wicked, and overly desirous of wisdom. Eve's influence over Adam to perpetuate the sin initiated by woman categorizes the man not only as the gender with less inclination toward evil according to biblical standards, but also as having fallen prey to the schemes and treachery of Eve. Treatises on proper behavior and the female incapacity to acquire intellectual knowledge were largely inspired by Eve's role in the fall of man and were used as the fundamental justification for restricting female access to education. For these reasons, female confession and male vigilance were particularly important.²

The cultural demand for penance created a dependency in Catholic Europe on men who were able to absolve Catholics of their sins. As Foucault references, confession became a quotidian tool to mentally relieve oneself of guilt and shame. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) officially addressed the sacrament as a necessity during their fourteenth of twenty-five sessions, calling for a more strict observation of confession and thereby initiating a form of religious control over Europe.³ The

² Considering Eve's disobedience and proclivity to evil, women confessed more to prove their pure intentions. Patrick O'Banion maintains that "Although it is difficult to document quantitatively, a raft of anecdotal evidence suggests that many people, especially women, confessed much more often than the church demanded" (38).

³ The Council described confession in the following way: "But the acts of the penitent himself, to wit, contrition, confession and satisfaction, are as it were the matter of this sacrament. Which acts, inasmuch as they are, by God's institution, required in the penitent for the integrity of the sacrament, and for the full and perfect remission of sins, are for this reason called the parts of penance. But the thing signified indeed and the effect of this sacrament, as far as regards its force and efficacy, *is reconciliation with God* [my emphasis], which sometimes, in persons who are pious and who receive this sacrament with devotion, want to be followed by peace and serenity of conscience, with exceeding consolation of spirit . . . Penitence was indeed at all times necessary, in order to attain to grace and justice, for all men who had defiled themselves by any mortal sin, even for those who begged to be washed by the sacrament of Baptism; that so, their perverseness renounced and amended, they might, with a hatred of sin and a godly sorrow of mind, detest so great an offence of God. Wherefore the prophet says; be converted and do penance for all your iniquities, and iniquity shall not be your ruin. The Lord also said; Except you do penance, you shall also likewise perish; and Peter, the prince of the apostles, recommending penitence to sinners who were about to be initiated

confessional became a tool of power from within the pulpit and produced a method to gauge and enforce orthodoxy. As Cordula Van Wyhe maintains, Tridentine decrees could not be enforced in a consistent and universal manner (7); however, the overarching goal of penance was that of reconciliation with God for those who defiled their bodies and souls with sin. To refuse confession was to publicly scorn God and forsake His call for the sacrament of penance upon his resurrection. In other words, should a Catholic evade compliance with this sacramental requirement, they would be denied reconciliation and entrance into heaven. The confessor operates as the vehicle by which this practice can be realized and is God's voice on earth that absolves sinners of their indiscretions on His behalf. Penitents practiced the sacrament of confession with this knowledge. In this way, confession works as a protective measure and allows the sinner to avoid eternal damnation; or even further, as is the case with these women, inquisitorial intervention. Nonetheless, women not only had to meet religious standards of orthodoxy but also had to comply with exemplary models of gender behavior. Clerics often interpreted divergent actions as blasphemy.

Given that confession became the most effective tool to measure compliance with Catholic dogma among all disciples, to confess female weakness served as a

by baptism, said; Do penance, and be baptized every one you. Nevertheless, neither before the coming of Christ was penitence a sacrament, nor is it such, since His coming, to any previously to baptism. But the Lord then principally instituted the sacrament of penance, when, being raised from the dead, He breathed upon His disciples, saying Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. By which action so signal, and words so clear, the consent of all the Fathers has ever understood, that the power of forgiving and retaining sins was communicated to the apostles and their lawful successors, for the reconciling of the faithful who have fallen after baptism" (Ed. and trans. J. Waterworth 92-93).

source of self-preservation. The goal was not necessarily to confess a particular sin, either venial or mortal, but rather to acknowledge woman's place in the gendered hierarchy. In terms of female empowerment, the revelation of male truth is the driving force behind the inversion of the confessor-penitent power dynamic. Santa Teresa, Sor Juana, and Catalina participate fully in Foucault's notion of the westernized human as a "confessing animal"; yet, because of their gender and knowledge of the Institution as the system that both delegated and reclaimed authority, they were amenable to revealing weakness. To acknowledge weakness served as a vehicle to further enable their empowerment.

Although confession in the public and private sense seemed to place the confessor, or at least the male, at the controlling end of the power dynamic, Patrick J. O'Banion argues that the line between penitent and spiritual director was not so one-dimensional:

The power that flowed from it [the confessional] . . . did not flow in one direction, for the sacrament [of confession] was as much a system of inclusion as of exclusion, as much an affair of the laity as of the clergy, as much a means by which laypeople were empowered as a method by which the powerful remained in control. In confession, power was negotiated, not forfeited (7).⁴

Penitents, both those in the laity and the convent, through their own act of self-characterization in the confessional were able to control their confessors'

⁴ In his text, *The Sacrament of Penance and Religious Life in Golden Age Spain*, O'Banion references Foucault's view of knowledge as synonymous with power and suggests that the confessional was a "rich fount of knowledge" (7).

interpretation of their lives. Women were excluded from the benefits of power reaped by the confessor in the penitent-priest relationship. Nevertheless, O'Banion's reference to the paradox of simultaneous exclusion and inclusion engendered an instability in the hierarchy that allowed women, provided that they appealed to male beliefs on feminine lack, the opportunity to engage in acts of authority, at times even becoming the instructors and interpreters of their own religious experience. Empowered women had to outwardly acknowledge their inability while internally pursuing a more elevated status than the image of the sinful female as portrayed by the Institution.

Independent of the institutional involvement in the empowerment of these women, each had to resort to perpetuating ideas of feminine weakness and ignorance in order to conceal her appropriation of male-like authority. Santa Teresa, Catalina, and Sor Juana all follow a similar pattern of backtracking. Once feminine power becomes transgressive or serves as a threat to the male institution of Catholicism, the female must relinquish the acquired power, at least at the discursive level, and adopt a role that is better suited to her gender. I surmise that the nuns discussed in this dissertation are remembered both historically and in literature due in large part to their identities as iconic female transgressors of Catholic and societal preoccupations with feminine behavior.

At the core of Eve's transgression was the desire to obtain a prohibited type of wisdom. The fruit was forbidden to both male and female; yet it is Eve who acted on her desire to obtain the knowledge of God. After consuming the fruit, and in

acquiring, the forbidden knowledge, God punishes her along with Adam. In terms of the initial attraction to divine wisdom, there is another important idea concerning chronology. With the second creation story in Genesis II, the role of man as the first created being and woman's subsequent appearance as a result of man, the importance of the male is clear. Conversely, Eve is the first to rebel against God's command while male plays a secondary role. In this way, biblical history portrays man as the superior being and woman as ravenous for forbidden knowledge. The sins of Eve concretize future conceptions of women and their incapability to process wisdom in a godly manner.⁵

Throughout history, men have viewed the female pursuit of knowledge with great suspicion. Nuns were restricted to prayer and devotionals while clergymen had access to the scholarly aspect of religion and theology. Each nun in this dissertation acquired a different category of wisdom in accordance with their distinct conventual experiences that proved to be a danger to the sacred Institution of the Church as well as to themselves. Santa Teresa discovered a mystical wisdom

⁵ While the narration of Eve strongly influenced male perception of female, Catholicism did allow the introduction of a feminine figure of influence. Eve's participation in the fall of man in the Garden of Eden necessitates a redemption. The Virgin Mary inverts the original sin and provides solace and redemption for those who seek it. The popularity of Mariology begins as early as the second and third centuries and continues today. In the second and third centuries the devotion to the Virgin Mary begins to grow due to the relationship between Eve and the Virgin created by the fathers of the Church. The Virgin's sole purpose is to invert the sins of Eve. Between the fourth and seventh centuries, the Virgin Mary acquires the role of mediator or even messenger and is able to intercede in favor of the sinner before God. This key role places a female character between God and the son of man. Finally, the Virgin reaches her peak of popularity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. By the birth of each nun discussed in this dissertation, the Virgin Mary has already found herself at the very epicenter of the Catholic faith for centuries. Her role has been polished and solidified as a model or prototype for which all women, especially women religious, should aspire to emulate. Yet again, any blatant deviation from this submissive, obedient, and maternal figure would suggest an intentional rupture in the prescribed mode of religious behavior as portrayed by the Catholic Church.

that she believed was planted in her spirit almost against her own will. This type of wisdom overstepped the Church hierarchy by discarding the need for a mediator. She acquires a confessorial type of knowledge in that she claims that God instills His passion directly in her. Catalina de Erauso obtains mundane wisdom only available to the phallus-bearing male. The societal insight she acquires through altering her lifestyle is a knowledge that the male obtains through free movement, an experience otherwise unavailable to biological women. Sor Juana's wisdom is purely intellectual and is a male approach to understanding the world and the mysteries of God. The ability to publically pursue knowledge and publish texts as a professed nun not only represented a type of wisdom, but also an access to the scholarly space, a very small circle reserved for only certain types of men. The cultural preoccupation with controlling the feminine experience and reinforcing gender constructs manifested in various forms in the lives of these women.

Evidence of the early modern desire to prevent deviation from the norm can be seen in the publication of various behavioral and doctrinal manuals. In order to properly administer the sacraments to all disciples, pedagogical essays and treatises began to appear with the intention of properly arming confessors with adequate tools to aid their penitents.⁶ Among the most at risk for perceived violations of Catholic practices were, of course, the daughters of Eve. While this culture of control had its genesis in the Church among confessors, it eventually spread to more secular spaces. As a result of the obsession with maintaining the Catholic image of virtue,

⁶ O'Banion affirms that "between 1550 and 1700 more than one hundred advice manuals were written for confessors and penitents, and the vast majority of these underwent multiple printings or editions" (32).

men assigned parameters to feminine comportment resulting in widely disseminated male-authored texts of proper conduct.

Manuals of feminine behavior became the norm with the growth of Humanism and resulted in multiple treatises on how men should treat women considering their natural inclinations. These types of texts contextualize the trends of male thought toward femininity in that while they are aimed at the general Christian woman, they represent the ideas of feminine weakness that are attributed in large part to the fall of man at the hand of Eve. In view of this biblical portrayal of the feminine proclivity towards sin, Mary Elizabeth Perry explains that “religious beliefs permeated gender ideology,” and “enclosure” and “purity” were used as tools for protecting the sanctity of Catholic beliefs (6). As a result of Eve’s thirst for a forbidden knowledge, the early modern male approached women with caution. Juan Luis Vives in his *Instruction of the Christian Woman*, published in 1523, advocates for a basic form of education for all women that should begin at birth, “At the moment in life when the young girl begins to show an interest in letters and for acquiring knowledge, she should begin with learning that which concerns the education of the spirit and the care and governing of the home.”⁷ Vives, who by

⁷ “En el momento de la vida en el que la joven muestre ya su aptitud para las letras y para el conocimiento de las cosas, debe empezar el aprendizaje de aquellos que atañe tanto a la educación del espíritu como al cuidado y gobierno de la casa” (Chap. III). Vives divided his text, *La formación de la mujer cristiana*, into three chapters all addressing different stages of life for women: I. Maidens (*Doncellas*), II. Married Women (*Casadas*), and III. Widowers (*Viudas*). This division demonstrates the male preoccupation with all stages of female life and attests to the desire to control the feminine experience. The proper education began with the *doncella* and instilled within her the appropriate forms of education that would prepare her for marriage and eventual widowhood: “Pero en relación con la doncella, puesto que no la queremos tan docta como púdica y virtuosa, toda la preocupación de los padres debe centrarse en que no se le pegue ningún vicio o ningún defecto . . .” (Chap. III). [“But in

twenty-first-century standards would be considered a misogynist, progressively argued for an education that restricted women to the domestic spaces.⁸ The primary concern was to busy the feminine mind with familial tasks, but not to overwhelm her weak will power with abstract thoughts and intellect. Perhaps the most unexpected aspect of the lives of Santa Teresa, Catalina, and Sor Juana is that despite a male fear of female intentions, the Church, at least for a period, either solicited or eventually approved, if only temporarily of their lifestyles and/or writings.

My last concern regarding women is the idea of a writing nun. There is little precedence for female writing in Medieval Castile.⁹ Ronald E. Surtz goes on to highlight that writing was even more dangerous than speaking and could easily become public property (5). However, although writing was an activity typically associated with men, the Protestant Reformation produced an Institution-wide paranoia in the Catholic agenda that led to the standard practice of female monastic writing. Self-writing became a rich part of religious culture in order to combat the heretical ideas that sought to eliminate some of Catholicism's most cherished sacraments.

In convent writing, nuns had a unique manner in which they could advocate for their own writing process. Sherry Velasco asserts, "one of the frequent narrative

terms of the maiden, given that we don't want her learned so much as modest and virtuous, the main concern of all parents should be that she not acquire a single vice or defect . . ." (my translation).

⁸ Manuals for women of all social conditions began to appear. Fray Luis de León in his *The Perfect Wife/La perfecta casada* published in 1583 (with six successive editions) describes the proper behavior not of all females, but rather of the married woman.

⁹ Surtz affirms that "the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries can boast of but a handful of female authors . . . Nearly all are nuns, Leonor López de Córdoba and Florencia Pinar being the notable exceptions" (1). Among the few notable nuns is Teresa de Cartagena (1425-?), author of *Arboleda de los enfermos* and *Admiración operum Dey*.

strategies employed by women writers in the convent involves the frequent dictation of God's word, that is, the literary nun posing as mere scribe for the 'real' author" (135). Both Santa Teresa and Sor Juana make this argument in significant yet distinct ways, both advocating for their own brand of authority, either mystical or intellectual, as divinely inspired. As a result of the growing threat of Protestantism in early modern Catholic Europe, life writing, a form of documented confession, became the norm for many women. Self-representation allowed women to construct their own image and present themselves to the general public in such a way that would garner favor with the hierarchy. A retrospective view allowed a type of feminine agency that converted the writer into a guide to her own interiority. This shift in power dynamics places the female as the author not only of her text, but as the controller of how her character and Catholic persona is received. While some conventual writings such as Santa Teresa's *Libro de la vida* were used as didactic texts for nuns, novitiates, *beatas*, and those who had interest in mystical union, others were documented evidence of transgressive and seemingly anti-institutional ideologies as was the case with Sor Juana. The primary question becomes: How is a text deemed as orthodox or heretical? Aside from remaining within the parameters of Catholicism, these women had to ensure that their writing at least appeared to be gender normative. To know one's role in the gendered hierarchy was to acquire the ability to circumvent the system of control.

Whether it was through a confessorial call for the explanation of the trajectory of a spiritual life as with Santa Teresa, a transvested source of Catholic

propaganda such as Catalina, or a request to redact an opinion on spiritual matters as with Sor Juana, the Church allowed these women to adopt a degree of controlled authority. In this sense, the Church plays a central role in their gender deviance; and ultimately, in their presence in the male space. A significant point in this investigation is to highlight confession and the recognition of femaleness as a last resort in order to conceal female empowerment and transgression of hierarchical norms. While it is unclear as to why Catalina de Erauso decided to write about her adventures as a *conquistador(a)*, Santa Teresa and Sor Juana wrote both on behalf of and in spite of the Church.

In chapter two, "Santa Teresa as Confessor," I analyze Santa Teresa of Ávila's appropriation of instructive discourse in her autohagiographical account, *Libro de la vida*. The saint's greatest accomplishment in terms of female empowerment is her ability to sufficiently project an attitude of humility and female ignorance while simultaneously interpreting her own interiority and instructing the men who intended to be the interpreters of her experience. The nun inverts the role of penitent and spiritual director as it relates to her intimate relationship with the divine. In *Libro*, once the instructed becomes the instructor, Teresa makes use of the convention of feminine ignorance to defer authority to her confessors. In allowing members of hierarchy to modify what she has presented to be divine truth she demonstrates her knowledge of power dynamics as well as how to maintain a lasting freedom as a writing nun. Santa Teresa recognizes the importance of male involvement in the lives of female religious. Explaining her mystic experience

instilled her with a type of power that her inexperienced confessors, those who desired to gauge her orthodoxy, simply did not have. Santa Teresa's manipulation of discourses is the most relevant to her triumph in the authoritative space.

In lieu of depending on the guidance of a mediator between humankind and God, the saint evolved spiritually through a highly personalized yet protestant-like prayer practice. The figure of the confessor became less important in Santa Teresa's spiritual evolution; thus, requiring a detailed explanation of her mystical contact with her Creator. The Carmelite nun's use of excessive humility rhetoric, characteristic of female monastic writing both in Spain and the New World, facilitated and concealed her adoption of the role of teacher of her trajectory of mystic practice to her own confessors. Although Santa Teresa encountered a great deal of resistance within the ecclesiastic hierarchy, she spent twenty years without the guidance of a personal spiritual director.

I dedicate chapter three, "Catalina the Conquistadora," to a close study of the masculine performance of the (in)famous Lieutenant Nun, Catalina de Erauso, in her text, *Historia de la monja alférez, Catalina de Erauso, escrita por ella misma*. The controversy regarding the true authorship of this text does not detract from the importance of this figure as a product of early modern Spain's societal, religious, and political preoccupations with feminine virtue and the female body. In the context of the New World as a feminized space, Erauso is able to exercise power by performing a credible phallus-free masculinity in converting her external identity into that of a man. What begins as artifice and costuming in the Iberian Peninsula, evolves into a

developed selfhood in the New World that allows Catalina to actively perpetuate European constructs of masculinity.

Early modern transatlantic scholars have tried with some success to celebrate the figure of the gender ambiguous Catalina. However, an attempt to conceive this figure from a typical queer perspective produces an immediate dilemma. To base a reading of this text on the basis of sexuality or gender identity skews the nuances of Catalina de Erauso as a literary and historical presence. Due to a lack of textual evidence to verify her sexual desires and gender identification, the validity of her masculine performance is the primary focus of this study.

Performativity is Erauso's point of entry into the masculine sphere of New World Spanish elitism. Her power comes from her own projection and creation of maleness and masculinity and is protected by the King and Pope.

In chapter four, "Sor Juana the Intellectual," I address a widely studied nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, who transgressed both the cloister and secular world by entering into corrective and literary discourses. *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea* is a public document that describes the nun's motivations for her pursuit of intellect, intending to liberate herself from the image of transgressive nun; yet, instead, and more importantly for the context of this dissertation, gives the impression that she is just as worthy to interpret scripture, an otherwise male privilege, as man himself. Sor Juana unapologetically uses the male space of intellectualism as a source of entertainment and power.

Unlike Santa Teresa and Catalina de Erauso, while Sor Juana boasted a wide readership and support system in Spain via courtly patronage, the nun angered the highest spiritual authorities in New Spain, and as result, she engaged in a discursive battle in an attempt to prove her obedience and compliance with monastic expectations. Upon debunking the institutional interpretation of the Pauline decree for female silence as well as the general male impression of her character as a disobedient nun, Sor Juana solidifies her reputation as a danger to New Spain's church and ecclesiastic authority and pays the price for her defiance.¹⁰

In my conclusion I will consider the similarities in the processes of empowerment of each nun. Given the varying degrees of their compliance with gendered modes of behavior and Catholic designations and parameters for femaleness, Santa Teresa, Catalina, and Sor Juana each had wildly distinct cases within the realm of male-reserved power. The exemplarity of each woman within her unique display of authority contributed greatly to their historical and literary presence from the Early Modern period through the twenty first century. The conclusion will explore whether or not the most significant manifestation of power is that which endures despite ecclesiastic pressure for a return to more traditional monastic observation of feminine behavior. Does longevity suggest a more significant usurping of male power? Although the *confesora*, the *conquistadora*, and the intellectual had vastly different conventual experiences and levels of success in terms of their influence in the male space, individually contextualizing their lives in

¹⁰ St. Paul's decree: "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says" (I Corinthians 14:34).

relation to gender, hierarchy, and institutionalized power can more clearly elucidate the experiences of all three women.

CHAPTER II

Santa Teresa as Confessor

“... if women were to achieve any sort of power or status through religion, it had to be in ways that circumvented the patriarchal Church hierarchy.”¹¹

“I found no other teacher, or confessor rather, who understood me, though I sought one for twenty years ...”¹²

Female mystic empowerment during Counter Reformation Spain required a skillful oscillation between ignorant and incapable daughter and authoritative rhetorician. For a woman religious, longevity in the space of power was the result of a two-fold process determined by her willingness to outwardly acknowledge an inability to interpret the mysteries of Christ, yet also to simultaneously pursue an internal and unmediated contact with God. Santa Teresa de Ávila's (1515-1582) autohagiographical account, *Libro de la vida*, published posthumously in 1588, illuminates the borderline heretical practice of recollective prayer and contributes greatly to modern understanding of the socio-political and religious structure of sixteenth-century Spain.¹³ The saint's insight regarding how to obtain a closer relationship with her Creator in addition to her prowess as a reformer was what eventually led to her canonization in 1622 and being proclaimed doctor of the Church in 1970. Teresa's commitment to mystic religiosity can be found in her

¹¹ (Ronald E. Surtz 6).

¹² “... yo no hallé maestro, digo confesor, que me entendiese, aunque le busqué, en veinte años ...” (137).

¹³ Recollective prayer rejects the complete intellectualization as well as the use of the senses for conceptualizing the grandiosity of God. A direct connection with the Creator is established by rejecting mundane faculties such as sight or touch and by aspiring to evade any sense of reason. Recollection represents the opposite of logic and is the direct link between Santa Teresa and divine enlightenment.

letters, poetry, and didactic texts.¹⁴ Nevertheless, her prayer practice proved to be a form of internalized spirituality that at times too closely resembled the definitive Protestant doctrine of an unmediated relationship with the divine. Despite living the reality of the Spanish Renaissance, a period marked by constant suspicion of a nun's predisposition to demonic influence and carnality, Teresa was able to avoid Inquisitorial trial and punishment for her elimination of the Institution as mediator in her relationship with God, effectively giving her a source of power that did not depend on male instruction, intervention, or authority.

Teresa's successful appropriation of instructive power is a direct result of her ability to manipulate the discourses of authority and humility, and to anticipate hierarchical interpretations of her mystic episodes. As a devout Catholic, the saint was aware of the Tridentine requirement for confession and spiritual guidance. Accordingly, her willingness to invite confessorial input about her interactions with God while also explaining His divine wisdom to her confessors is the key to Teresa's evasion of inquisitorial punishment and her longevity in the space of power. *Libro de la vida* serves as an important tool for examining Teresian empowerment as a process of claiming an ineffable connection to godly wisdom while granting male access to her experience. By both adhering to and rejecting her traditional monastic role, she both perpetuates and renounces the Church as an effective tool for

¹⁴ Teresa's subject matter varied somewhat yet always included a combination of the prayer practice of recollection (*Libro de la vida*, 1562-1565), the road to spiritual perfection through contemplation (*Camino de perfección*, 1564-1567), and spiritual development through works or service and prayer (*Las moradas*, 1577).

connecting penitents to the divine.

Teresa's unique ability to represent herself textually while simultaneously adjusting the parameters of her confessor's role in her religious experience is vital to her empowerment. In his seminal text on identity fashioning, Stephen Greenblatt says of the malleability of the Renaissance identity, "... the power to impose a shape upon oneself is an aspect of the more general power to control identity – that of others at least as often as one's own" (1). By molding her identity through self-examination, she not only controls the institutional perception of her intentions by projecting a determined image of herself, but she also redefines how male power is able to manifest in her life. In a sense, the saint creates her own instructive power, and restructures the authoritative capabilities of the men around her. Teresa controls her identity through a selective process of self-disclosure, framing a male-like autonomy as feminine weakness. The combination of humble and authoritative elements from each side of the gender binary grants her the opportunity to examine her life and even the Church from an interpretative lens that most men, particularly those in direct authority over Teresa, could not access. She cannot openly claim male power, yet her access to divinity through mystic experience transcends the institutional definition of female capability.

In requiring Teresa to write the story of her life, the Church inadvertently participates in a continuous process of female empowerment and provides her a platform to exercise an instructive voice. The foundation of her authority is based on a conscientious discursive system of relinquishment and recuperation of female

power. The saint periodically abandons her authoritative voice by cultivating the idea of masculine privilege upon oppressing women through humility discourse. If such a move allows the nun to invert the gendered power dynamic, at the same time, she parodically perpetuates the stereotype of feminine ignorance and the propensity to sin for all daughters of Eve. The alternation between authoritative self-representation and a feigned submission to her confessors characterized by self-deprecation, enabled Teresa to establish and maintain a position of power within the hierarchy. Through the instruction of male guides in her mystic experience, the nun replaces the image of the submissive and ignorant woman by subverting the logical power structure between penitent and clergyman. Teresa's nonthreatening approach to explaining her relationship with God to her confessors stems from her familiarity with the dangers of female religiosity in sixteenth-century Europe.

Santa Teresa's struggle as a mystic nun is the product of Spain's tumultuous political and religious climate. However, the nun's motivation for reforming and reinvigorating conventual and monastic spaces aligned perfectly with the overall intentions of the Counter Reformation. In this way, the saint managed to present herself as doctrinally faithful, yet transgressed the clear intention of an institutional call for self-examination through life-writing. Before closely examining specific chapters of *Libro de la vida*, it is vital to situate the saint within the proper historic-religious context. I will highlight the dangers of practicing sixteenth-century Spanish Christian mysticism, the threatening presence of the Inquisition, and finally, the

genesis of the *vida espiritual* as genre. By examining these individual elements, a modern reader is able to comprehend the scope of Teresa's transgressive movement into the traditionally male space of power and instruction by way of the compliant acts of self-examination, interpretation, and presentation.

Perilous Times for a Woman Religious

The Spanish Inquisition became an official instrument of control against heresy in the Iberian Peninsula in 1478 by petition of the Catholic Monarchs.¹⁵ Ferdinand and Isabella's objective of eradicating all Judaizers, those who continued Jewish practices post-conversion, led to prejudice based on *pureza de sangre*, a concept that came to be synonymous with Spanish honor and nobility. Following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, the *conversos*, or descendants of converted Jews, and *moriscos*, converted Muslims, were forced to live in a Spain divided according to a New and Old Christian pedigree. Teresa's family name was stigmatized by this divisive social structure because of her paternal grandfather, Juan Sánchez de Toledo (1440-1507), who was tried as a Judaizer by the Holy Office.

As Carole Slade highlights:

¹⁵ Pope Lucius III created the episcopal Inquisition through the bull, *Ad Abolendam* (1184), in order to combat heresy in southern France and northern Italy. In 1231, Pope Gregory IX (1170-1241) initiated the Papal Inquisition. While it had yet to become a tool used in the entire Iberian Peninsula, various tribunals all over Europe participated in this Papal Inquisition. Upon uniting their two kingdoms in 1469, Isabella (Castile) and Ferdinand (Aragon) sought to rid their realms of heretical practices, more specifically, apostasy by part of the Jews. Initially, Pope Sixtus IV redacted the bull, *Exigit Sinceras Devotionis Affectus*, granting the Catholic Kings the right to establish the Inquisition in Castile. In turn, this gave them both religious as well as political authorities in their kingdom. According to Helen Rawlings, the brutality of the Inquisition's activities reached such a point that Sixtus IV threatened to usurp control of the Aragonese Inquisition: "Sixtus IV conceded, but later regretted, the relinquishing of papal authority over what was to become an awesome instrument of repression and intimidation . . ." (6-7).

Juan Sánchez declared himself and his family guilty of unspecified acts of heresy and apostasy . . . In 1484, he complied with the ritual for absolution, the humiliation of walking, on seven consecutive Fridays, through the streets of Toledo wearing a *sambenito*, a bright yellow kneelength tunic embroidered with black crosses and flames to identify him as a Judaizer.

Teresa's father, six years old at the time, accompanied him on these walks. As a reminder of their disgrace, their tunics were put on permanent display in the cathedral (69-70).¹⁶

This form of inquisitorial punishment was sufficient to ruin Juan's family name and reputation, causing him to flee the city of Toledo for Ávila in an attempt to rebuild his life. The fear of once again being denounced as heretics was surely experienced by the entire family. In fact, the preoccupation with concealing the family's partial *converso* origin proved to be a cause for worry; however, Juan managed to purchase his identity as an Old Christian.¹⁷ Stepping into the sphere of Old Christendom provided Teresa's family with adequate protection against the intrinsic suspicion of apostasy. The purchase of noble blood and Sánchez's subsequent denouncement by

¹⁶ In *Directorium Inquisitorum* (1376?), Nicolás Eymeric (1316-1399), an Inquisitor General for the Aragonese crown, outlines the punishment for the *hereje arrepentido* [repentant heretic]: "Se acostumbra a adjuntar a la absolución la pena de que lleven cruces delante y detrás . . ." (85). [It's customary to add to absolution the pain of wearing/bearing crosses in the front and back . . .]. Slade maintains that the *Directorium* served as the definitive authority on inquisitorial practice and procedures during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (9). A variation of this punishment was still in practice almost a century later.

¹⁷ "Gossip did reach Avila about his condemnation in Toledo, but at this time Spanish society provided many ways of fabricating an Old Christian background. In 1500, he purchased a certificate of pure blood (*ejecutoria*), which permitted him to step into the social role of a nobleman . . ." (Slade 70). Teresa's grandfather even adopts his wife's name, Cepeda, to avoid the stigma of his newly tarnished surname. Now an Old Christian, Juan was allowed to practice business, yet was denounced by his competitors as "false nobility" in 1519 when Teresa was four years old (70).

professional competition suggests the transient nature of nobility and class in Spain during the sixteenth century.

The reign of Charles V (1516-1556) produced a more culturally receptive Spain and created a new variety of autonomous spiritual intellectualism that posed a great threat to the ultimate control of the Catholic Church. A prominent figurehead of the wave of progressive Christian ideologies was Erasmus (1466-1536), one of the great humanist thinkers of the Renaissance, who promoted the movement of Christian Humanism. Rawlings maintains that through this new religious ideology, Erasmus:

encouraged the wider interpretation of biblical scholarship via its classical routes, leading to a revitalised expression of belief . . . He called for a reformed, less ritualistic, more tolerant faith, that accommodated intellectual freedom, private prayer and meditation . . . Erasmus hoped that . . . spiritual reconciliation might be achieved between traditionalists and reformists within the Christian Church (27-8).

The growing popularity of Christianity in Europe as accessible to all led to the publication of the Bible in the vernacular and its sale by 1522, making scripture available to the masses.¹⁸ Men and women were able to meet privately to discuss doctrine and some even felt that they were illumined or enlightened by the Holy Spirit. These private meetings reversed the concept of medieval scholastic theology that maintained the knowledge of the scriptures within a closed circle of learned

¹⁸ More specifically in Spain, in an attempt to gain control over the Protestant threat, in 1551 the Spanish Index banned all vernacular Bibles asserting that scriptural authenticity was solely found in the Latin Vulgate Bible.

clergymen. Alison Weber affirms that the illuminists or *alumbrados* rejected various staples of Catholic dogma: sacramental mediation and the Church as interpreter of scripture.¹⁹ Inevitably, this created a sect of believers that suddenly did not need a priest to explain the mysteries of the Trinity or the Passion of Christ. These surges in Protestant-like departures from traditional Catholic thought would later provoke problems with the highly internalized practice and ineffable spiritual benefits of Teresa's branch of Christian mysticism. The dangerous intersection between mystic practice and the *alumbrados* was the primary source of Teresa's struggle with the Inquisition, and necessitated a continuous quest to prove her compliance with the sacraments in writing her life.

Teresa's *vida espiritual* is one of the most telling pieces of evidence for highlighting her role as equally compliant and empowered. This genre served as the most effective tool for verifying a nun's degree of compliance with the newly redacted Tridentine decrees. Santa Teresa uses St. Augustine's *Confessions* as a model for her own self-representation.²⁰ The Augustinian model, written *a posteriori*, gave Teresa the opportunity to skillfully situate her life story in alignment

¹⁹ "In 1525 the Inquisition published an edict against the *alumbrados* . . . as far as can be determined from the edict, the *alumbrados*' heresy was one of the protestantism *sensu latu*: they denied the necessity of any sacramental intermediary between God and man and thus rejected the efficacy of external works as well as the authority of the Church to interpret Scripture" (Weber 23).

²⁰ Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was and continues to be a crucial figure in western Christianity. In *Confessions*, St. Augustine wrote of his life from childhood through his conversion giving details of his family and friends, miserable sin stained life, emotional anguish for his wicked nature, and the saving grace of God. Men, both before and during the Early Modern period had the capability to be more open about their specific sinful behavior than women. The saint wrote of his sins of lust and sexual impurity, debauchery, and even thievery. Teresa departs from this seemingly full disclosure and opts for identifying herself as a terrible sinner without specifying the actual behavior engaged. Gari Laguardia comments, ". . . those chapters which concern her life before taking up her religious vocation are the vaguest of all" (523).

with the principles of Catholicism, in addition to the reformed aspects of enclosure. As outlined by Kathryn McKnight, the gender specific genre of the *vida*, common to nuns both in Spain and the New World, “emerged out of the relationship between confessors and the women whose spiritual lives they directed” and represented “the first modern narrative explorations of the human psyche and facilitated the development of a discourse on mystic practice” (18). Teresa paints a perfect image of the *vida* as genre, and gives the reader an account of her mystical experiences and hierarchical persecution.

Above all, this personal narration speaks to the dynamic between nun and confessor. A nun could not write without the directive input of a spiritual director who represented the controlling voice of the Counter Reformation. Kathleen Myers affirms that the confessor codified the narration (6). Referencing the confessor is essential given that the entire text revolves around the desire of her guide to convey her story of conversion. Teresa’s familiarity with the decree demanding a more strict observation of the visions of nuns and of lay people is clearly visible in her attempt to textually demonstrate obedience to the confessorial request to write her *vida*: “... then I went to my confessor ...” and “... if they don’t demand of me anything else ...” (329).²¹ The spiritual director was not an inquisitor, but rather

²¹ “luego fui a mi confesor”, “si no me mandaren otra cosa” (329). As is to be expected, Teresa had many confessors throughout her life as a professed nun. In *Libro de la vida*, the nun includes both older accounts she had previously written and current experiences. As a result, just as Teresa’s text spans over several years of mystic practice, she also textually addresses multiple confessors without naming them directly. Some of the most influential confessors were Juan de Padranos, Domingo Báñez, and Dominican priest, Pedro Ibáñez.

the authority figure with the charge of perpetuating Catholic ideology through narrations in which they imposed certain thematic and structural parameters.

Out of simple obedience to her confessor, Teresa recounted her trajectory and ultimate conversion in an attempt to illuminate what she believed to be an activity that served as her direct link to God, vindicating herself as a doctrinally compliant nun. The saint was able to construct her own image and direct her confessor towards a positive interpretation of her life. What made female mystic empowerment distinctly dangerous in sixteenth-century Spain versus its medieval antecedent were the suspicions generated by the political struggles for reformation between the Catholic and Protestant churches. Teresa was undoubtedly familiar with the inquisitorial punishment of Magdalena de la Cruz of Córdoba (1487-1560), a professed nun of the Franciscan Order. Geraldine McKendrick and Angus MacKay discuss the common delay of the Inquisition in accumulating evidence in order to target a single visionary for interrogation, one such case being that of Magdalena who gained a great degree of fame and notoriety for her ecstasies and visions (94). She was so highly revered that Phillip II was wrapped in her clothing as an infant in order to protect the future king from demonic attacks. After many years of mystical practice, Magdalena fell gravely ill, causing her to confess that she had been possessed repeatedly by demons and that these evil entities were the source of her visions and ecstasies. This confession reversed her saint-like reputation and condemned her to perpetual silence and imprisonment in 1546 when Teresa was thirty-one years old. Some of the saint's confessors attributed her spiritual behavior

and prayer life on numerous occasions to demonic delusions. While writing her own *vida* between 1562 and 1565, Santa Teresa surely considered the plight of Magdalena de la Cruz as a valued visionary turned sinner.

The vast majority of mystical relationships, both in the Middle Ages as well as the Renaissance, were between individual women and God. This, of course, does not imply that men did not gain notoriety for mystic experience, often times through the use of carnal imagery.²² Andrea Dickens claims that as a result of the gender dynamics associated with both intellectual and experiential (mystical) theology, women, unwelcome in the lettered sphere of theological practice, produced a higher volume of mystical texts with a typically affective tone (5).²³ Dickens' categorization of relationships with Christ separates the manifestation of religious experience according to sex. A difference in how men and women communicated with and conceptualized the presence of God resulted in distinct types of knowledge, creating

²² Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591) is the most widely known male Spanish mystic of Early Modern Spain. In his *Noche oscura del alma*, an immensely famous poem that personifies the concept of mysticism, Juan transforms himself into the bride of Christ, narrating the mystical union through the only medium available to describe the ecstasy experienced, carnal discourse. Peter Tyler posits, "both John of the Cross and Teresa of Ávila use a *performative discourse* to work on the reader's affect as much as their intellect" (64). Interestingly enough, Santa Teresa and Juan were close friends, sharing a mutual disgust for the relaxed state and worldly interest of accruing wealth of the Carmelite Order and desired that it readopt its original primitive condition. The two collaborated in reforming and jumpstarting various convents such as the first male installment of the Discalced Carmelite Order in 1568. Another male mystic of the period, Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), authored the *Spiritual Exercises* (1522-1524), a type of manual on contemplative prayer and meditation that encouraged and taught nuns, clerics, novitiates, and even the laity to learn to connect one's mind with the will of God, so that the truth of Christ may be revealed. Following these exercises allowed the individual to increase their discernment of the will of God.

²³ Fraeters underscores the centrality of affect within mysticism, "Recognizing the value of affect as an agent of mystical union, the monks cultivated meditation techniques meant to inflame the heart. Because of this, images took pride of place. Whereas discursive words have to be mentally processed and understood before they can move the heart, images were thought to be able to touch and move the heart immediately, thus providing an added value in devotional practices. Images, real ones as well as visualizations and spiritual visions, elicit intensity or the fire of compunction (*ardor compunctionis*) that has the power to engage the viewer in an anagogical movement from the visible to the invisible . . . all the way into the divine . . ." (182).

a paradox regarding spiritual gender performance from within the Church. A marked divergence between two battling forms of knowledge, theological or textual and experiential, represents two forms of power. The first is institutional and goes unquestioned, while the second is mystic power that utilizes affect and serves as the definitive characteristic of female mystic religiosity. Affect made union more feasible and suggests that women could have a more direct and pure relationship with the divine based on their gendered predisposition to emotional intimate connections. In other words, a nun's greatest strength as a mystic is found in her most widely proclaimed weakness as a woman. These two forms of power generate an immediate contradiction of terms as it relates to the penitent-confessor relationship.

Various paradoxes comprise the tension between female mystic expression and confessorial presence. The first is the idea of a confessor, inexperienced in the stages of mystical union, being responsible for judging the authenticity of a mystical experience; while the other, is the value placed on female religiosity by the Church. If the Institution represents the path by which disciples must access God, what happens to the Church when a female mystic builds a self-sufficient relationship with Christ via experiential knowledge? From the male perspective, holding the keys to spiritual intellectualism gives the confessor the credibility to properly advise nuns. However, the female mystic more easily obtains spiritual power, as she divinely acquires the mysteries of Christ through mystical union while theologians only philosophize about the scriptures' intended meaning. Nevertheless, it was in

fact a confessor who was the only appropriate person to decode experiential knowledge not having himself passed through the mystical stages of prayer and union. From Teresa's perspective as a female mystic, not only does a lack of experience discount the confessor as a proper mediator for her relationship with God, but it also places a woman as more receptive to Christ and more efficient at interpreting His will through her ecstasies. The mundane theological power structure based on the right to textual interpretation is threatened by a presumed celestial favor that is more readily available to the assumedly weaker sex. If an individual confessor as representative of the authority of the Church is deemed an incompetent source of mystic spiritual knowledge, then, he is inadequate at successfully mediating Teresa's relationship with God.

Gender as the determinant for religious experience served as a restriction for a woman in the public space of Catholicism yet empowered her in the private sphere of internalized spirituality. In recognizing the role of men as the only appropriate gender to become officially versed in Latin, as well as theology, women inadvertently perpetuated notions of clerical superiority in acting out a more emotionally charged mystical account, and subsequently, a gender appropriate form of religious encounter with God. Not only did women acknowledge the intellectual prowess of men in the Church, but also men revered the female as more directly linked to God. Elizabeth Knuth calls attention to Teresa's reaction of "joyous tears" upon experiencing union with Christ (134). This type of reaction would seem to conserve the idea of women as emotionally unstable or weak, thereby stabilizing the

male as the grounded, more capable spiritual vessel, instructor, and authority figure. Though the propensity of women to fall into heretical acts of sin more easily than men was a commonly held belief, Dickens identifies the male contradictory dependency on women:

Men said that women were weak and therefore more prone to heresy, and thus needed more guidance, could not teach religious matters and needed men to establish the bounds of orthodoxy for them. On the other hand, the prayers of women were recognized to be more efficacious than those of men, so women were sought out in desperate situations (1).

Although the secularized version of feminine affect was often attributed to hysterical lust, it seems that the alleged affective demeanor of the female mystic served a purpose when direct communication with God became necessary. Women could perform gender appropriate behavior in the religious environment according to the perceived spiritual and moral inferiority of the female gender. While this does not necessarily perpetuate the assumed innate affective nature of all daughters of Eve, it does show that women, more specifically female mystics, were cognizant of the gender constructs concerning theology and its practice.

As a result of the paradox associated with an inexperienced confessor serving as her spiritual guide, Teresa turned to mystical didactic texts to fill the instructive void. The saint initiated her contemplative process upon reading Francisco de Osuna's (1492? -1540?) *El tercer abecedario*, a text that she not only used for her recollective prayer practice, but also, in lieu of an unlearned confessor as her

preferred form of spiritual guidance. Mary E. Giles describes the Osunian fundamentals as follows:

For Osuna, recollection is prayer: It includes vocal prayer, to the extent that mental concentration is employed; mental prayer; and, more importantly, passive prayer . . . recollection is our constant alertness and receptivity to God, punctuated by moments of intense awareness of the divine, moments when recollection becomes immediate, experiential union between creature and Creator and wisdom is poured into the soul without our understanding how and whence. Although the way of recollection is primarily affective, intellectual endeavor is necessary (29).²⁴

If the goal was to unite spiritually and emotionally with the Creator through experiencing recollection, the individual pursuing God had to take caution not to overly intellectualize the unitive experience. However, a certain degree of intellect was crucial in order to recognize the various stages of collecting oneself.²⁵

²⁴ Osuna published various maxims, more specifically six, assigning them an alphabetical theme, giving his truths a didactic purpose. One must follow the ABCs so that they may efficiently practice the entire alphabet. Published in 1527, *El tercer abecedario* or *The Third Alphabet*, served as a step-by-step manual on, as well as a defense of recollection. Structurally, this text is divided into twenty-three treatises covering various concepts from purity to humility. The first five treatises serve as a preparatory process for those who wished to participate, whereas the sixth begins to illuminate the practice of recollection. The sixth would have been of particular interest to Teresa. In his prologue, Osuna sets up the experiential nature of mystical experience: "Because some matters of mystical theology cannot be understood in ordinary language nor comprehended without immediate experience of them . . ." (39). Although Teresa masterfully describes her visions in the most simplest of terms, Osuna's statement gives cohesion to her affirming that she is unable to fully explain the experience. Additionally, Osuna highlights the possibility of everyone being capable of engaging in communion with God: ". . . just as available to you, whoever you are, as to other people, for you are no less made in the image of God than others . . ." (47).

²⁵ Elena Carrera underscores Osuna's perspective on the importance of operating under the two types of theology: speculative or intellectual *versus* mystical or "hidden" theology, the most valuable being mystical. (48). Additionally, Carrera states, "Osuna made a distinction between vocal prayer, in which memory expresses itself through words, sensible prayer, in which the understanding

By foregrounding an exclusively intellectual or male approach to deciphering the will of God, the female mystic recognizes the male path to divine enlightenment as inefficient and highlights the emotional and visionary aspect of mystic experience as a secure form of spiritual gender performance. In claiming a direct access to God by way of recollection, Teresa presents her wisdom gained through spiritual union as God's will, signaling any confessorial attempt to debunk her experience as discrediting God himself.

Teresian Humility: The Key to an Instructive Voice

Humility is the most important ingredient of Teresian empowerment and serves the double function of protecting the nun against the accusations of her detractors in the external space of the Church, and facilitating the evolution of her mystic prayer practice. Although a humble approach to life writing was also customary for men, the expectation for a female religious was more exaggerated. As Alison Weber outlines, men who wrote similar types of texts typically only alluded to ideas of humility in the prologue, while Teresa included at least two references of humility rhetoric on each page throughout her entire *vida* (50). In this way, Teresa transgresses the confines of nun-confessor obedience by both appropriating

expresses itself through words, and mental prayer, in which the will expresses itself through actions (Tercer 13. 1-5). Based on introspection, the method of mental prayer known as recollection aimed at passing beyond the bodily, the sensible and even the intelligible, by means of faith and love. For its practice he recommended finding a dark and quiet place where it was possible to recollect one's senses, beginning with one's eyes closed or lowered and focused on one point, and doing this for at least two hours a day, one before and one after noon. But he also emphasized that to make the transition from the external senses to the inner world easier, one needed to persevere in the practice of mortification, humility, obedience and love" (47).

confessorial authority and excessively adhering to her role as penitent. She is able to redefine her own reality of femininity by marshaling a discourse of feminine humility, essentially, empowering herself over the priests with whom she was discursively battling. While power in and of itself is not a masculine characteristic, the appropriation of an instructive role, an otherwise male privilege, represents a clear inversion of power dynamics from within the Church.

Libro not only documents the nun's rejection of a secular life through a close adherence to the sacraments, but also provides an episodic body of evidence of her unique inversion of power. Gwendolyn Barnes Karol characterizes the Counter Reformation as the producer of a culture of control (51). Teresa's account is textual evidence of this claim as can be seen in her desire to overtly reveal her compliance with institutional axioms. As a female mystic, Teresa had to adhere to two modes of humility discourse, one based on her branch of ecstatic religiosity and the other on her gender. In order to enter into mystical union with God, she openly rejects intellectual arrogance and projects excessive humility as encouraged by her textual mentor, Francisco de Osuna, "Humility is the basis for every devotion and the root of every tree that is to bear fruit . . . Without humility we can offer God nothing . . . humility alone exalts those who enter within its protection" (494). The second facet of humility was based on the recognition of gender norms that required the nun to demonstrate a certain degree of dependency on male guidance. If, as Alison Weber states, mystic experience was non-hierarchical and anti-institutional, Teresa had no choice but to reinforce her narration with norms associated with the relevance of

the Church in her experience (35). In upholding the superiority of clergymen as the appropriate source of directive presence within the Church, the saint appears to be a submissive nun by maintaining her compliance within the social system and protects herself from possible misinterpretation.

The effectiveness of Teresa's humility discourse is dependent on her self-characterization of wickedness. In the *vida espiritual*, a nun had to display knowledge of the female religious' place from within the Institution. To proclaim an outright sense of authority was to risk an accusation of heresy. Teresa, in keeping with the stylistic convention of female convent writing, presents herself as the worst of all people, who consciously rebelled against the will of God. To portray herself in this manner allowed for a clear need for man and Christ in her wicked life. The saint implores her readers in the prologue of her *vida*:

I ask that whoever reads this story of my life to bear in mind how terrible it has been . . . and how among the saints who were converted to God, I have not found one who can give me comfort. Because I believe that after the Lord called them, they did not return to a life of sin. Not only did I become worse, but, as it seems, I deliberately resisted God's grace.²⁶

The repetitive mention of an inclination to evil induced the early modern confessor or inquisitor to consider Teresa's gender as a key determinant in her tendency toward sinful acts. In a sense, describing herself in these terms appears to be

²⁶ " . . . pido . . . tenga delante de los ojos quien este discurso de mi vida leyere, que ha sido tan ruin, y que no he hallado santo de los que se tornaron a Dios con quien me consolar. Porque considero que, después que el Señor los llamaba, no le tornaban a ofender: yo no solo tornaba a ser peor, sino que parece traía estudio a resistir las Mercedes que Su Majestad me hacía . . . " (117).

counterintuitive to a process of female empowerment in that it does nothing to further Teresa's role as an authoritative figure; but, by the same token, it enables her to later resist the system that she initially perpetuates.

Santa Teresa's self-deprecating humility is normative by virtue of having placed herself within a category of weakness. In her study, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*, Alison Weber refers to this system of the reification of the male belief in feminine weakness and its concurrent resistance as Teresa's defense strategy (36). In presenting this type of stratagem as a mode of discourse, Weber identifies a rhetoric of femininity. She indicates that as opposed to writing stylistically as a woman, Teresa wrote "as she believed women were perceived to speak" and that what many have referred to as a Teresian "rhetoric for women" was actually a "rhetoric of femininity" (11). Teresa is attempting to survive as a figure trapped within an ecclesiastical system; yet she is incapable of publicly utilizing its male-reserved powers.

Although Weber's conception of *Libro* as following a rhetoric of femininity correctly represents Teresa's knowledge of how women were perceived to have behaved and interacted, as a discursive construct, it seems to be a misnomer given that it reveals more about masculinity and maleness than femaleness. I contend that this discourse falls more appropriately in the realm of a rhetoric of masculinity. The nun wrote according to male notions of femininity and belittled her gender in order to project her compliance with Catholic dogma. Conceptions of femininity were based on the male interpretation of female ability and character. It is factual that

Teresa was female and clear that she reiterated a stance of feminine feebleness. To that end, it could only be befitting to reference her humility as a necessary mechanism of a rhetoric of masculinity. Her ability to use it to her advantage as a woman is what makes her text unique. In a sense, her humility represents a mere formality. Surtz claims, “. . . women writers had to develop textual strategies designed to make up for their lack of authority” (6). Teresa consciously participates in the gendered discourse in order to comply with the task demanded of her, the writing of her *vida*.²⁷

The recurrent masking of the authoritative voice in a discourse of conformity is the definitive characteristic of Teresa’s empowerment. Most relevant in the introductory passage is the manner in which the saint encloses the alleged source of divine mercies in her life in a rhetoric of obedience, correction, and feminine weakness. She presents her humility from the onset by describing her purpose and addressing her audience by categorizing her writing as not of her own volition, but rather as a form of obedience to spiritual directors. Teresa proclaims, “. . . as they have commanded that I write my method of prayer and the mercies that the Lord has bestowed upon me”²⁸ The mystic does not presumptuously usurp the male pen by voluntarily redacting a treatise on the benefits of mystical prayer, but instead submits to the command for a detailed summary of her experience. The double

²⁷ Weber suggests a great paradox in Teresa’s quest for *captatio benevolentiae* or acquiring the benevolence of her reader. On one hand, humility provides “authenticity” to her religious experience, yet, upon presenting herself as excessively humble, she instantly loses the humility that she may have garnered (47).

²⁸ “. . . como me han mandado . . . para que escriba mi modo de oración y las mercedes que el Señor me ha hecho . . .” (118).

intention is clear in that she outwardly acknowledges her place in the gendered system by exercising obedience while also referencing the mystical content of her narrative as divinely inspired and unmediated.

After clarifying her authorial intentions as an act of obedience to her confessors, Teresa defers instructive authority to her directors by assigning them a purpose in her narrative, that of aiding in the correction of her weakness. The saint reinforces the idea of female dependency on male wisdom upon requesting male intervention, “. . . with clarity I will speak of my terrible sins and horrible life . . . so that from here on out, they, knowing me better, may help my weakness . . .”²⁹

Teresa appears to welcome correction in the general sense; however, at the semantic level, the nun mentions her overarching goal to explain the prayer of recollection, only to then redirect male participation in her spiritual journey to the more generalized space of sin. She acknowledges the importance of a superior male while simultaneously restricting his corrective abilities to a space that seemingly excludes mystical knowledge. Santa Teresa fashions an identity based on what Greenblatt calls an “adherence to mere outward ceremony” (3). Just as surely as a man was expected to exercise authority, conversely, a woman was assumed to practice a gender-specific type of humility. The nun does not invite a male interpretation of her mystical knowledge. The strategic separation of the goal of the narrative from the subsequent invitation for correction draws attention away from the prayer practice itself and refocuses the reader on Teresa’s compliance with the

²⁹ “. . . con claridad dijera mis grandes pecados y ruin vida . . . y para que de aquí adelante, conociéndome ellos mejor, ayuden a mi flaqueza . . .” (117-18).

sacramental need for correction via confession, a practice largely based on gender dynamics.

Teresa begins her first of forty chapters in the *vida* by counterbalancing her wickedness in highlighting the exemplary Catholic influences in her childhood. As an integral part of her strategy to convince her confessors of her honest intentions in her pursuit of mystical union, she highlights her inclination toward worldly ideals such as vanity, which parallels her ultimate conversion and foreshadows the pending turning point in her wickedness. In presenting her inclination to sin, the saint constructs herself as a hopeless figure reliant on the mercies of God and man. Teresa describes her youth to her confessors primarily by emphasizing her godless intentions prior to conversion. The clear distinction between secular and spiritual lifestyles corroborates a need for excessive humility in order to more prominently feature her conversion. One such example is Teresa's explanation of her family dynamic. Despite the Christian influence of her family, young Teresa deviated from the standard set by her parents:

Having virtuous and God fearing parents would have helped me if I wasn't so terrible . . . We were three sisters and nine brothers and all resembled their parents . . . in goodness except for me . . . I am filled with shame when I recall the good to which the Lord inclined me, and what a terrible use I made of it . . . Growing up, I began to discover the natural gifts which our Lord had given

me . . . I made use of every one of them, as I shall now explain, to offend him.³⁰

This description of her parents underscores the role of free will and the power to choose to follow God. Teresa secures a positive interpretation of her experience by providing the details of her mother as venerating the saints, an important detail outlined in the final session of the Council of Trent, and her father as a compassionate charitable man, a characteristic that aligns with one of Catholicism's principal claims to salvation, works.³¹ To briefly outline the story of her virtuous upbringing and her successive rejection of all things good provided the nun with clear precedent to represent herself as weak, thereby perpetuating sixteenth-century notions of femaleness and necessitating divine and confessorial guidance.

Teresa makes great effort not only to underscore her propensity to sin, but also her own ignorance and senselessness as a woman. The support of spiritual directors, especially if petitioned by the Inquisition, aided a nun in evading a trial. Therefore, acknowledging a clergyman's intellect and superior discerning abilities in contrast with the nun's unlearned sensibilities was the most efficient way of proving that she was familiar with her role as penitent and pupil. Teresa demonstrated this familiarity by contrasting her senselessness with the wisdom of her reader. Due to the dangerous intersection between Illuminism and Mysticism, the saint's

³⁰ "El tener padres virtuosos y temerosos de Dios me bastara, si yo no fuera tan ruin...éramos tres hermanas y nueve hermanos, todos parecieron a sus padres . . . en ser virtuosos, sino fui yo . . . pasando de esta edad, que comencé a entender las gracias de naturaleza que el Señor me había dado . . . de todas me comencé a ayudar para ofenderle como ahora diré" (119, 121-22).

³¹ " . . . the saints, who reign together with Christ, offer up their own prayers to God for men; that it is good and useful suppliantly to invoke them, and to have recourse to their prayers . . ." (25th session). "My father was very charitable with the poor, and was good with the sick and his servants; so much in fact, that he could never own slaves . . ." ["Era mi padre hombre de mucha caridad con los pobres y piadad con los enfermos, y aun con los criados; tanta, que jamás se pudo acabar con él tuviese esclavos..." (120)].

explanations regarding concepts such as tears, rapture, union, and fire would have been of great interest to the spiritual director. Surtz maintains that these types of private revelations completely sidestepped the Church hierarchy (9). Teresa had the task of explaining a direct access to God while attempting to show the relevance of the clergymen. As a woman discussing an ineffable experience with God, Teresa offsets the controversial subject matter with bouts of feminine ignorance and weakness of mind. One such example is in chapter nineteen when she addresses her confessor apologetically for having deviated from the task of outlining her prayer practice:

I think I have digressed sufficiently as it is. I barely know what I have said. It cannot be otherwise, and Your Reverence must suffer these intervals; for, when I consider what God has borne with from me, and find myself in my present state, it doesn't take much to lose the thread of what I am saying and of what I still have to say. May it please the Lord that any nonsense I talk shall be of this kind and may His Majesty never allow me to go against Him . . .³²

Teresa depicts the instability of her mental faculties in the description of her prayer practice as a form of penitence for the confessor. This speaks to the nun's knowledge of the more intellectualized approach to divinity of men. Alluding to a lack of knowledge shows both an authorial and reader's presence, and reestablishes

³² " . . . que es salir de propósito, y creo harto he salido. Casi no sé lo que me he dicho. No puede ser menos . . . sino que ha Vuestra Merced de sufrir estos intervalos; porque cuando veo lo que Dios me ha sufrido y me veo en este estado, no es mucho pierda el tino de lo que digo y he de decir. Plega al Señor que siempre sean estos mis desatinos y que no primate ya Su Majestad tenga yo poder para ser contra Él un punto" (259).

the power dynamic by reminding the confessor that he is still the authority figure to whom she directs her account.

There is a clear ambiguity between the saint's humble posture in bowing to God's intermediaries on earth, and an interest in proclaiming her version of His divine truth. Teresa not only acknowledges her reader, but she also directly addresses the concept of power dynamics in the explanation of her mystic practice. In her *vida*, the saint often speaks directly to God with the knowledge that her confessors will scrutinize this oratory. In this way, she is able to portray herself as a submissive nun by praying about her displaced desire for authority:

O Lord, if You were to give me the license to proclaim this aloud, they wouldn't believe me, as with many who can speak of it in a way very different from me. But at least I should myself have satisfaction. If I could make others understand just a single one of these truths. I do not know what I should do afterwards, for I am untrustworthy; despite my being who I am, I keep experiencing strong and consuming impulses to say this to those in authority. But as I can do no more, my Lord, I turn to You, to beg of You a remedy for everything³³

Two primary statements in this prayer epitomize the fundamentals of Teresa's approach to safely explaining her prayer practice. First, she references the knowledge acquired during mystic unions as "truths" which suggests that even her

³³ "¡Oh Señor! Si me diérais estado para decir a voces esto, no me creyeran (como hacen a muchos que lo saben decir de otra suerte que yo); mas al menos satisfaciérame yo. Paréceme que tuviera en poco la vida por dar a entender una sola verdad de éstas; no sé después lo que hiciera, que no hay que fiar de mí. Con ser la que soy me dan grandes ímpetus por decir esto a los que Mandan, que me deshacen. De que no puedo más, tórnome a Vos, Señor mío, a pedirlos remedio para todo . . ." (277).

confessors could benefit from her divine revelation. Second, she incorporates humility rhetoric by identifying herself as unworthy and recognizing her desire to publically speak her truth to authority figures as displaced. Antonio Pérez Romero asserts that this “putting down” of women is nothing more than a “lip service” formula for her protection (159). In a public manner, she turns to God for a remedy rather than being accused of speaking out of spiritual turn. In the saint’s familiarity with her position, she refuses to speak, yet, in writing her desire makes it known to man that she wishes to subvert the norm, softening the reception of this fact by presenting it as impractical. Simply put, she communicates through writing what she dare not say. The saint’s prayer appeals to the male belief in female weakness while also proving that she does not actively pursue power.

This particular plea could be considered a sign of humility before God, as she does turn to him in her moment of distress in her lack of authority to speak truth. However, this is a performative humility before man in that she is publicly proclaiming what she lacks, power. In writing this public prayer, Teresa’s audience can see that while she experiences a phenomenon that can be viewed as heretical, she does not allow this mystical learning to alter her interpretation of the hierarchical system of authority. The primary threat of Illuminism, and, in turn, of Mysticism, was that the power moved from the Institution to the hands of laypeople, or in this case, a woman. Aware of this threat, Teresa is able to address a desire for power, yet categorizes it as inappropriate. The saint anticipates a misinterpretation of her text and practice. Additionally, after discussing a desire to instruct her

confessor, she resituates the confessor in his authoritative role by reminding him that he holds the power to destroy her narration should he find it irreverent, “I am being very daring, your Reverence must destroy this if you find it inappropriate.”³⁴ Although she recognizes her desire as inappropriate, she still states that he may destroy it. This is an excessive reiteration of Teresa’s acknowledgment of the supremacy of the male hierarchy in the interpretation of her *vida*. The Teresian cycle of humility, subversion of the norm, and then a return to humility is present in her prayer.

The Ultimate Role-Reversal: Teresa as Confessor and Spiritual Guide

Santa Teresa walks a dangerous line between humble servant and authoritative advocate of mystical union. Conceivably the most shocking sections of Teresa’s *vida* are those in which she clearly transforms into the unofficial spiritual director, guiding and reorienting the socially superior man towards spiritual betterment. In actively directing the path of a male, she is not only disregarding the Pauline call for female silence, but also arrogating authority in speaking the mystical truth about which she prays to God. Similar to Catalina de Erauso, the saint abandons her position of daughter and moves into the domain of father. If Teresa is able to transform into a confessor, her directors become penitents. She reverses the paternal relationship and becomes a type of intermediary between God and man.

A vida espiritual was intended to be a written confession to the spiritual

³⁴ “Mucho me atrevo. Rómpalo vuesa merced si mal le parece . . .” (277).

director. Bearing this in mind, Teresa's transformation from instructed to instructor is a clear inversion of roles. Fully aware of the gender dynamics of her vocation, as can be seen in her humility discourse, as well as the Inquisition's immediate action based merely on suspicion, the saint took on the treacherous task of advising and instructing without abandoning the one component that protected her, humility. While there are many inconsistencies in *Libro de la vida* regarding the presence and abilities of her spiritual advisors, publicly rejecting the need for an intermediary would mean the repudiation of the sacrament of confession, a heinous act of heresy as outlined by the Council of Trent. Teresa needed to disassociate herself from Protestantism.

A common point of discussion throughout *Libro* is the negative impact of regressing back to a state of simple vocal prayer after having experienced recollection. As a proponent of mystical union, Teresa emphasizes the danger of having too much confidence in one's ability to reach such a spiritual elevation. The advice she gives promotes the idea of surrounding oneself with religious company in addition to a spiritual mentor to aid in keeping pride at bay, "It was this [pride] that ruined me; and, for this and for all things, there is a great need for a teacher and of interaction with spiritual people."³⁵ Teresa demonstrates two sets of dichotomies: faith versus confidence and humility versus diligence. The key component of these contrasting elements is the nun's recognition of a need for a director to evaluate her experience in conjunction with her behavior. Effectively, she upholds the

³⁵ "Esto fue lo que a mí me destruyó; y para esto y para todo hay gran necesidad de maestro y trato con personas espirituales" (261).

incapability of women to properly discern the gospel without the help of men. Teresa perpetuates what Andrea Dickens refers to as the male tendency to “establish the bounds of orthodoxy” specifically for women (1). The Roman Catholic Church believed that men serving as confessors were chosen by God to lead laymen according to His pleasure and will. Consequently, Teresa had to at least acknowledge this fundamental standard. Nonetheless, directly contrasting this acknowledgement in addition to her previous prayer regarding the inappropriateness of her desire to share truths, the saint later speaks of a doctrine communicated to her directly by God that she wishes to share with other weak souls:

... the trickery that the devil can do hereafter ... to persons who are not strong in virtue ... for they are not strong enough ... to expose themselves to the dangers of sin ... however deep their desires and resolutions may be.

This is excellent doctrine, and it is not mine, but has been taught to me by God therefore I would like people as ignorant as I am to know of it.³⁶

Rather than providing excessive details of the knowledge shared with her by Christ, the emphasis strategically falls on the idea that this is not a doctrine of her own invention, nor does it require the interpretive intervention of man. Teresa demonstrates her ability to sidestep the male interpretation by stating that the message that she shares comes directly from God.

³⁶ “... el engaño que aquí puede hacer el demonio después ... a personas no crecidas en las virtudes ... porque aquí no quedan fortalecidas tanto que baste ... para ponerse en las ocasiones y peligros, por grandes deseos y determinaciones que tengan. Es ecelente dotrina, y no mía, sino enseñada de Dios; y así querría que personas ignorantes, como yo, la supiesen” (261).

The content of her shared doctrine regarding the deception of Satan is less important than the way she, against Tridentine doctrine, sidelines the confessor. Teresa's words serve as a parallel between her manner of acquiring knowledge and what was presumed to be the appropriate avenue for distinguishing the will of God. Yet according to this passage, a confessor, meant to play the role of interpreter of doctrines, visions and the like, was not a necessity in the nun's religious experience. It is clear that Teresa did not need a man to intervene on her behalf. The nullification of this figure implies that her earlier statement of support in favor of a spiritual teacher represents an adherence to monastic conventions and expectations with respect to the reverence of spiritual mentorship. Teresa cloaks her spiritual observations in a protective rhetoric of normativity.

It would be erroneous to suggest that Santa Teresa rejected all forms of authoritative leadership. The saint clearly valued the spiritual insight of learned and mystically experienced confessors. While she follows her own advice with respect to the need for a mentor, it would seem that her intent in referencing this type of directive assistance diverges from how a reader might have actually interpreted her advocacy for this supposed necessity in a nun's spiritual evolution. Captivated by Osuna's method of prayer, she was determined to strive for union. Santa Teresa openly admitted to substituting this text for a confessor while also defending herself in stating that she had no choice, "I found no other teacher, or confessor rather, who understood me, though I sought one for twenty years...This did me great harm, as I often relapsed...a guide could have helped me to avoid the instances in which I could

offend God.”³⁷ The charge Teresa brings against the position of confessor is not an invalidation of its importance, but rather a critique of how few men were actually capable of meeting her criteria in order to successfully guide her in the way of perfection. In a sense, this refuted the role of the confessor specifically in her life while still recognizing the benefit it could serve for another. Teresa writes in contradictions, explaining away certain concepts as unnecessary, only to then state that she could have potentially benefited from them. The saint later affirms that it was God’s will that she not procure a director, and that books and prayer served as the best forms of spiritual enlightenment and guidance.³⁸

Although the rejection of a confessor seems to be a blatant disregard for the role of the male figures in Teresa’s life, she does not discount men altogether, but replaces them with God himself. Man could not challenge God as a source of knowledge, nor that He could potentially reveal himself through mystical union. Nonetheless, a confessor’s method of challenging Teresa’s alleged divine doctrine was by accusing her of demonic delusions. This accusation both maintains the omniscience and power of God while simultaneously forcing her back into the feminine role of weakness with a propensity to sinful acts.

Chapters five and twenty represent the most blunt attacks in the entire *vida* on the possible role of a confessor in her life. Teresa often criticizes spiritual

³⁷ “... yo no hallé maestro, digo confesor, que me entendiese, aunque le busqué, en veinte años después desto que digo, que me hizo harto daño para tornar muchas veces atrás...porque todavía me ayudara a salir de las ocasiones que tuve para ofender a Dios” (137).

³⁸ “It seems that the Lord did not intend for me to find someone who could teach me . . . I did not dare pray without a book . . . “Ahora me parece que proveyó el Señor que yo no hallase quien me enseñase . . . jamás osaba comenzar a tener oración sin un libro . . . ” (139).

directors in general without mentioning specific names, thus protecting herself from retaliation by the implicated. In line with Osuna's call for equal parts of both intellect and experience, Teresa valued the idea of a learned confessor, "I have always been attracted by learning, although confessors with only a bit of it have done my soul great harm, because they weren't as lettered as I would've liked . . . a truly learned man has never led me astray."³⁹ The very reason the saint spent two decades in search of a confessor is because she could not find one who was well-versed both in general biblical doctrine as well as in the prayer of recollection. Teresa's spirituality was based on text and heart or experience. She did not believe that unlearned confessors intended to retard her spiritual growth, though she stated that her soul would regress should she prostrate herself before such ignorance. An even more interesting notion is her reversal of man's belief in female inferiority. She speaks of a confessor's lack of intelligence and spiritual intellect much like one would speak of a child, " . . . the others didn't intend to lead me astray, they simply knew no better."⁴⁰ In fact, she goes into great detail discussing the process of rapture due to her fear that confessors would cause great suffering in other nuns who could potentially experience this degree of union. Teresa suggests that while confessors may have experiential knowledge of mystical prayer, the possibility that their abilities would surpass her own was unlikely. Additionally, she describes the confessors with no experience of recollection to such a degree that they would

³⁹ " . . . que siempre fui amiga de letras, aunque gran daño hicieron a mi alma confesores medio letrados; porque no los tenía de tan buenas letras como quisiera...y buen letrado nunca me engañó" (142).

⁴⁰ "Estotros tampoco me debían de querer engañar, sino no sabían más . . ." (142).

assume that a nun was dead before interpreting their state as that of rapture:

... and if those who are directing such women have not experienced them, they may think that, when experiencing rapture, they ought to be dead, especially if they are unlearned. It is a shame that such suffering should be caused by confessors who do not understand this... Perhaps I do not know what I am saying; but...Your Reverence will understand it, for the Lord has already given you experience of it, although, given that this happened recently, you may not have considered the matter as fully as I.⁴¹

Teresa highlights what she interprets to be a lack of experience in the general population of confessors only to then partially retract her previous comments with “second-guessing” rhetoric. Although she acknowledges her reader’s wisdom regarding mystical practice, she points out that he will not have meditated on its divine implications as fully as she. Rather than deferring to male privilege, she places the male in the realm of female ignorance. Man occupies the place of the intellectually erring being who is inept at providing guidance and interpreting doctrine in a way that is applicable to Teresa’s spiritual goals. Through this exchanging of roles, the saint has officially usurped the authority traditionally reserved for men.

The inability of many confessors to distinguish venial from mortal sins provides the nun with multiple opportunities to commandeer a more directive

⁴¹ “Si los que gobiernan no han pasado por esto, por ventura les parecerá que han de estar como muertas en arrobamiento, en especial si no son letrados; y lástima lo que se padece con los confesores que no lo entienden...Quizá yo no sé lo que digo; vuesa merced lo entenderá...pues el Señor le ha ya dado espriencia de ellos, aunque como no es de mucho tiempo, quizá no había mirádolo tanto como yo” (272).

presence. The most relevant example of role reversal in Teresa's *vida espiritual* is when her confessor shows himself as less knowledgeable and more prone to fall into sexual sin. By virtue of her vocation, Teresa represented the epitome of chastity. Similar to Catalina de Erauso, virginity made her a credible source by which to produce a corrective discourse directed at a confessor who, by virtue of his carnal desires and actions, performed confessorial rectitude poorly. For instance, while Teresa is ill, she begins to confess to an intelligent Dominican priest. He taught her a great deal, yet began to demonstrate an excessive affection toward Teresa, causing her discomfort. It became apparent he sought a sexual relationship with the nun. Teresa's great love for God would not allow her to commit such a grave offense against her own virtue. The priest then resorts to describing to her his predicament of sexual immorality, a continuous flaw in his spiritual performance for seven full years. At this point, the male becomes the wrongdoer and Teresa the corrector. The misdeed was no secret yet no one addressed the flaw, "It was known by the public to the extent that he lost his honor and reputation and no one dared to speak to him."⁴² Teresa shares a very poignant message regarding how a penitent's loyalty to her confessor can affect one's relationship with God, "Cursed be such loyalty when it means being disloyal to God! This is a common folly in the world . . . we consider it a virtue not to end friendships even if they cause us to act against God's will."⁴³ The

⁴² "Era cosa tan pública, que tenía perdida la honra y la fama, y nadie le osaba hablar . . ." (143).

⁴³ "¡Maldita sea tal ley que se estiende hasta ser contra la de Dios! Es un desatino que se usa en el mundo...y tenemos por virtud, aunque sea ir contra Él, no quebrantar esta amistad" (143).

saint could not conceive ending her relationship with the Dominican due to personal loyalties, ultimately portraying the role of this particular intermediary as a burden. Instead of leading her closer to God, the man's presence hinders the nun's spiritual evolution towards mystic practice.

When narrating this occurrence with the confessor, Teresa assumes the role of interpreter of spiritual authenticity and character. In writing about her involvement with the Dominican, she is able to create a representation of the male in question in the manner deemed most appropriate according to her divine learning, mystical unions, and spiritual intellect. The confessor is in need of a female intervention. Carole Slade highlights that men primarily decided how to represent women in Renaissance Europe and that, "Representation thus serves to define the relative value of male and female, or gender relationship. He who represents, then, controls the social construction of gender . . . Individuals construct their own gender principally by absorbing societal representations" (1-2). Those who had knowledge of the Dominican's sexual immorality believed that a woman seduced him into wearing an enchanted amulet, which maintained him in a condition of sin. Teresa simply advised him to cast it into the river, thereby releasing him of the enchantment. Again we see a double intention in Teresa's advice to the confessor. In adopting the role of advisor, she exercises an authority over the male. Additionally, she relates this story so that it may aid in the maintenance of the sexual purity of men seduced by ungodly women. However, she also calls attention to the perceived

true nature of a woman separated from the will of God, “I will say what I saw in order to warn men to be on their guard against women who attempt to do such things... (women, who are obligated to lead chaste lives even more than men)... you cannot entrust them with a single thing.”⁴⁴ Teresa first advises the confessor, then claims to share his struggle as an anecdotal warning to men about females lacking in virtue. Despite the male being the more acceptable source of controlling the gendered social constructions in the eyes of early modern society, Teresa manages to absorb the societal representations of the confessorial role and maintain gender norms. This ability to invert the norm proves that women within conventual enclosure were more influential than it may seem.

Elizabeth Leffeldt’s ideas on the influence of spiritual women can also be applied to the transitive nature of power both in the secular and spiritual environments. She states that “A spiritual vocation did not render Spanish religious women silent and removed . . . Boundaries between the sacred and the secular were being constantly redefined” (13). A spiritual vocation did speak to the supposed level of chastity and virtue of the nun. However, becoming a nun did not render women powerless in every sense. Teresa not only reveals to her immoral confessor the path to redemption, thereby appropriating the full powers of the spiritual director, but she also demonstrates how to perform appropriate ecclesiastic masculinity. The nun’s newly found privilege of power in the traditionally male space is based on her chastity, a source of power that the confessor has lost.

⁴⁴ “...diré esto que yo vi, para aviso de que se guarden los hombres de mujeres que este trato quieren tener...(que ellas más que los hombres son obligadas a tener honestidad), que ninguna cosa de ellas pueden confiar...” (144).

Although this interaction takes place within the confines of a religious and moral dilemma, it goes beyond the spiritual cloister and passes into the secular realm of gender performance. Through reading the episode of the lustful confessor, a modern reader of Teresa's *vida* can learn how male religiosity was constructed, deconstructed, and redefined by a woman religious. The Dominican confessor displays the secular unchaste side of maleness, which is that of sexual vice. In transforming into an instructor, Teresa corrects her confessor's masculine performance in such a way that it corresponds to his authoritative and spiritual position in the Church.

The episode of the Dominican relates directly with Teresa's attitude towards the outward spiritual appearance of men of the Church leading what seems to be religious lives. According to the saint, there are spiritual men living in sin, such as the Dominican priest, and also those who assume that their dogmatic routines and intellectualization of the scriptures indicate a strong relationship with their Creator:

One laughs to themselves upon seeing men of prayer, leading the religious life making a fuss concerning honor, which this soul has long beneath its feet.

They say that it is discretion and authority due to their positions in order to take advantage. But the soul knows well that if they subordinated the authority of their positions to the love of God they would do more good in a day than in ten years.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ "Ríese entre sí algunas veces cuando ve a personas graves de oración y religión hacer mucho caso de unos puntos de honra que esta alma tiene ya debajo de los pies. Dicen que es discreción y autoridad de su estado para más aprovechar. Sabe ella muy bien que aprovecharía más en un día que pospusiese aquella autoridad de estado por amor de Dios, que con ella en diez años" (280).

Teresa refers to the religious man's earthly authority, which serves no purpose, as laughable, suggesting that they shift the focus of this misplaced power from man over to God. In this daring statement, Teresa highlights what she perceives to be a misuse of clerical authority and questions their devotion to Christ. Through mystic prayer, God instills knowledge directly into Teresa's soul. She does not understand His message with her mind but with the soul's eye. The nun recognizes the clerical tendency to view spirituality in conjunction with a position of authority in the Church. A soul that is truly enlightened by God, such as Teresa's, is capable of discerning an authority that is grounded in the love of God, rather than in the assumed power of their vocation.

Teresa often showed herself distrustful of her confessors' ability to properly guide her spiritual life, yet knew that she needed to dote on their abilities in order to avoid inquisitorial intervention. Eliminating the middleman undoubtedly created a tension in Teresa's reader. Her inversion of power was cause for concern and garnered the saint strict observation and scrutiny. Despite the high volume of seemingly bold comments regarding the questionable efficacy of inexperienced spiritual directors, Teresa managed to correct the flaws in their performance as well as contribute to an understanding of mystical union.

Affectively Effective: The Mystical, Teresa, and the Divine

I now turn to the implications of the saint's relationship with God. Nuns, incapable of participating in intellectualism as I will later discuss in relation to Sor

Juana, were compelled to discover other avenues of authority. In the Christian mystic tradition, the highest form of communion with God could be realized through visions, raptures, and dreams. With regard to women, these experiences served as their primary source of authority among learned men. Although Teresa teaches her confessors about her prayer practice, her most detailed experiential knowledge stems from varying levels of union with Christ. These episodes with the divine give cohesion to her life post conversion. The documentation of these experiences was meant to serve as proof of the nun's virtue and godliness, but also evidenced her process of empowerment as a female surpassing the exclusively intellectual parameters of theology. In spite of the difficulties the saint faced in narrating the encounters, her command of explaining the convergence of the human soul with the divine allows the reader to comprehend the notion of an inner contemplation giving way to an extracorporeal interaction. Teresa's most significant mystic episodes include visions of Christ at her side, seeing his hands, face, and wounds, and the transverberation of her heart. By obtaining the knowledge of God in such a way that involves intellect in that she comprehends mystical union, yet concurrently rejects it as the sole means for interpreting the unitive experience, Teresa was able to conceptualize the essence of God more efficiently than many theologians.⁴⁶

For Teresa, recollective prayer seemed to be the only truly legitimate way to maintain an intimate relationship with God. The thought of regressing from

⁴⁶ Barbara Mujica says of intellect, "The learned are less likely to experience the divine presence than simpler people . . . because they tend to intellectualize, to apply passages from Scripture, to explicate and debate. By engaging the understanding, they thwart the surrender of the will...Teresa argues that experience, intuition, and tradition are better guides than the intellect" (65). This is precisely why mysticism was associated with affect and women. Intellect neither relies on intuition nor experience.

recollection to a more typical or vocal prayer is clearly an undesirable manner of communication with the divine, as it does not allow the soul to escape the body. The saint declares, “to live like the rest; to recite vocally out of obligation; and not to practice mental prayer . . . I had an outward appearance of goodness.”⁴⁷ Teresa alludes to an interesting distinction between vocal and mystical prayer. She highlights the traditional form of prayer as a manner, at least in her case, of maintaining appearances much like the men who place value in professional authority within the Church. In short, prayer as a more performative practice was deceiving and did not confirm an internal relationship with the Creator. In contrast, the prayer of union depended on God and not a human manifestation of compliance with tradition. Vocalized prayer was based on repetition and memorization and did not allow spiritual growth. This religious discourse prohibited any deviation in how one could conceive Christ. For the mystic, inner prayer was synonymous of true devotion.

Andrea Dickens brings light to the ramifications of female mystic practice when juxtaposed with male authority. She states, “God’s power trumps human forms of power. The conveyance of power allows mystical commission to trump earthly authority, and thus the weak women have a strong power (and deeper wisdom or truth from God) than theologians” (6). This is precisely why mysticism was dangerous in that it posed a threat to theology. In a sense, a mystical relationship enables women to ignore earthly authorities, while claiming obedience

⁴⁷ “ . . . andar como los muchos . . . rezar lo que estaba obligada y vocalmente . . . no tener oración mental y tanto trato con Dios . . . porque en lo exterior tenía buenas apariencias” (157).

to the Creator, the entity that confessors conceptualized for women. In her attempt at explaining the benefits of union, Teresa's goal was to provoke souls to covet this experience, "But the Lord will help me in this because His Majesty knows that after being obedient, it is my intention to entice souls."⁴⁸ The nun's desire to incite others towards mysticism represents a complex paradox within Catholicism. Gwendolyn Barnes Karol notes that the direct access to God constituted an open challenge to Church practices (52). On one hand, Santa Teresa is compliant with the writing of her *vida espiritual*, while on the other she pursues an avenue of divinity that discards the confessor.

The saint outlines each mystical experience clearly through the use of simple narration, metaphors, and the veneration of (mystic) saints. This strategy appealed to the male tendency to use logic in order to explain religious experience. At the basic level, mysticism is the encounter between God and human. Veerle Fraeters describes the three forms of visions as outlined by Augustine: *visio corporalis*, which relies exclusively on physical sight; *visio spiritualis*, an inner vision characterized by the presence of mental images; and finally *visio intellectualis*, a form of sight that allows the seer to perceive divine truths (178). Fraeters goes on to equate visions with sanctity. If the highest levels of righteousness were so tightly tied to the figure of the visionary, Teresa was understandably compelled to pursue this pathway of spiritual enlightenment.

⁴⁸ "Mas creo esto del Señor (que sabe Su Majestad que, después de obedecer, es mi intención engolosinar las almas...)...que me ha en ella de ayudar " (250).

The saint describes her first significant vision of the appearance of Christ at her side as the epitome of a celestial language in that only the person for whom the message is intended can understand this particular way of speech. She describes a complex experience in simple terms while also proclaiming her inability to do so. During a day honoring St. Peter, the nun recalls:

I saw Christ at my side, or rather, I was conscious of Him, for neither with the eyes of the body nor those of the soul did I see anything . . . there is an unseen light, which illumines the understanding so that the soul may take pleasure in such a blessing.⁴⁹

Teresa presents this experience as the inevitable reception of knowledge, aligning perfectly with *visio intellectualis*. God presents directly to the soul what he wishes it to comprehend without the use of intermediaries, images, or even words. When Teresa's confessor asks how she knows that He communicates this knowledge with her, she describes it as food that "appears in the stomach without having eaten and without knowledge of how it got there."⁵⁰ Rhetorically speaking, the metaphor of food is similar to Teresa's previous statement about the appearance of the unsolicited wisdom regarding the deceptive nature of Satan. She relinquishes any responsibility for the divine doctrine and attributes it to God's will. Through an intellectual vision, God's truth simply appears independent of the nun's actions. This

⁴⁹ " . . . vi cabe mí, u sentí, por mejor decir, que con los ojos del cuerpo ni del alma no vi nada . . . una luz que, sin ver luz, alumbra el entendimiento para que goce el alma tan gran bien" (325-6).

⁵⁰ "Es como cuando ya está el manjar en el estómago sin comerle ni saber nosotros cómo se puso allí" (328).

knowledge comes to be as the Creator finds an appropriate vessel. In this case, He has decided to instill His truth in a woman.

As with the metaphor of food, the saint gives various simplified examples of mystic episodes relating the encounters with quotidian interactions. There is simply an exchange between God and the soul. Teresa describes the mutual understanding as similar to how two people who share a great love for one another can communicate without the use of language. This comparison shows a psychological and mental understanding of human emotion. The nun uses sentiment to describe her relationship with God partly because this mode of linguistic expression is all that was available to describe an intense emotional exchange, and also, because it was effective.

Little by little, Christ reveals more of himself to Teresa. What begins as a sense of his presence soon becomes the sight of his hands, face, and wounds. Although receiving God's knowledge represented a higher form of vision, physical sight often provided a more believable experience for the nun while conversely enabling the confessor to attribute the sight to the woman's imagination. This attribution leads to accusations of demonic delusion.⁵¹ In fact, the *visio spiritualis* planted seeds of doubt even within Teresa, causing her to wonder if she had deceived both herself in addition to her confessor. The saint even mentions that the devil has, in fact, appeared before her in an attempt to impersonate God's glory. Soon after her initial vision, God grants Teresa gradual sightings of his body, "the

⁵¹ "Some were certain that I was possessed and wished to exorcize me". ["Tan cierto les parecía que tenía demonio, que me querían conjurar algunas personas" (348)].

Lord was pleased to show me nothing but His hands, which were of great beauty . . . Some days later I also saw that Divine face, which seemed to leave me absorbed.”⁵² Given the nun’s fear of visions, she believed that Christ revealed himself in stages so as not to overwhelm her weak body and soul. It is here that Teresa is claiming to have first-hand experience with visualizing Christ’s body. As a result of their lack of experience with visionary communication, Teresa clarifies for her confessor, “It might seem to Your Reverence that no great effort would have been required to behold those hands and beautiful face. But there is great beauty in glorified bodies.”⁵³ Teresa’s description is clearly instructive in that she is explaining the physical form of what confessors will have read in scripture. The saint maintains that even the most creative of minds couldn’t possibly invent the beauty of Christ’s glorious white hands. While explaining the act of seeing Christ in the physical form and providing the confessor with an air of authority for interpretation, Teresa tips the balance of power yet again by instructing her spiritual director from the perspective of someone who has not experienced mystical visions. This is not a sight to behold as a result of one’s effort. Barbara Mujica affirms that for Teresa, true knowledge required divine enlightenment (64). To experience the physical wholeness of God provided the saint with a knowledge base that her confessors couldn’t possibly have.

The experience of transverberation is by far Teresa’s most carnal experience

⁵² “ . . . quiso el Señor mostrarme solas las manos con tan grandísima hermosura . . . Desde a pocos días vi también aquel divino rostro, que de el todo me parece me dejó asorta” (335).

⁵³ “Parecerá a vuesa merced que no era menester mucho esfuerzo para ver unas manos y rostro tan hermoso. Sonlo tantos los cuerpos glorificados . . .” (336).

with the divine. It closely resembles Juan de la Cruz's conversion from male to female so that he could become one with God. The principal difference is that Teresa is already a woman. Simply put, for the context of this dissertation, transverberation occurs when a man or woman gives God complete power and control over their lives resulting in a spiritual piercing of the heart, typically by a flaming sharp object. In describing Augustine's approach to the reading of scriptures, that of *lectio divina*, an intense contemplation on each passage, Elena Carrera emphasizes the importance of biblical teachings being understood by the heart (22). Metaphorically, the piercing of Teresa's heart serves as the perfect physical representation of the peak of spiritual elevation. This painful ecstasy symbolizes the full submission of the disciple and the most intimate of unions with God, completely embodying the concept of Christ as a husband or lover. Francis and Toni Perior Gross describe Teresa's prayer life as a "character of stillness . . . waiting for the Divine Lover" (65). The nun explains the painfully erotic scene:

In his hands I saw a long golden spear . . . it seemed to have a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart so many times that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out . . . he left me ablaze with a great love for God. The pain was so great that it made me moan; and so excessive was the softness of this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it.⁵⁴

This experience caused Teresa a sweet pain. She notes that God even gave her

⁵⁴ "Veíale en la mano un dardo . . . y al fin parecía tener fuego. Éste me parecía meter por el corazón algunas veces que me llegaba a las entrañas. Al sacarle . . . me dejaba toda abrasada en amor grande de Dios. Era grande el dolor que me hacía dar aquellos quejidos, y tan ecesiva la suavidad que me pone este grandísimo dolor, que no hay desear que se quite . . ." (353).

raptures such as this in public. In mentioning the talk regarding her mystic experiences, she both acknowledges and debunks potential slander against her encounters. One of the saint's greatest rhetorical tools was anticipation. The nun took it upon herself as the creator of her textual life to foresee questions that could arise regarding the legitimacy of her mystical unions. Although she wrote her *vida* long after the experiences she retold, it was essential that she address opinions that would contradict her form of communication with God. In this way, Teresa drives her reader towards an interpretation of compliance.

Teresa's explanations of her visions and raptures are conveyed in such a way that she does not allow room for the misinterpretation of her advocacy for the Catholic Church. In narrating her episodes she even desires that those who may think she is lying, experience the same occurrence. The explanations of her relationship with God had to seem concrete in that they could be easily associated with Christ. Still, she incorporates a sufficient amount of humility references. It is impossible to determine whether or not Teresa intended to invite her confessors to interpret her experience only to then deem their intellectualized contribution as insignificant, or if she truly sought their counsel. Teresa identified with Osuna's belief in the value of experiential knowledge. Through experience and a certain degree of feigned ineptness at understanding her relationship with God as fully as her confessors, Teresa was able to freely express her view of the encounters.

Conclusion

Libro de la vida is built around excessive contrasts. Upon outwardly conforming to the ceremonial-like practice of life writing, Teresa fashioned an account of an internal relationship with Christ. In many ways, the saint transformed herself into a spiritual director, guiding her confessors towards a more virtuous religious experience. Explaining her prayer to confessors gave her power. She became the teacher of her own interiority, describing to her advisors what took place with the soul and how it was affected. In this manner, the confessor unknowingly requests the instruction of the penitent. Teresa's spiritual directors served as the catalysts for the evolution of the saint's female empowerment. In the retelling of her life, the nun displays full knowledge of the spiritual hierarchy in which she operated. It is because of her knowledge of this system that she was able to invert its principles and assume an instructive role. Teresa is able to appropriate the traditionally male space of confessorial guidance due to her ability to present herself as an ignorant and nonsensical woman. The saint's ability to marshal humility discourse allowed her to reinforce the hierarchy while also resisting it. Her eventual canonization proves that although Teresa subverted the norm, she was able to textually represent herself in accordance with hierarchical ideologies of gender while creating and maintaining her own female authority.

CHAPTER III

Catalina the Conquistadora

“... os venero como una de las personas más notables de este mundo.”⁵⁵

“Erauso is a very difficult character to celebrate or recover.”⁵⁶

Santa Teresa de Ávila successfully evaded inquisitorial punishment because she aligned her individualized mystic prayer practice with the hierarchical requirement of penance. Although she spent two decades without a confessor, the saint clearly outlines in her text the need and desire for a mystically experienced spiritual director. Given her participation in a gender appropriate religious experience, the opposite of Sor Juana, Santa Teresa was nonthreatening to the Church. Moving outside of the cloister, Catalina de Erauso (1585?-1650) flees convent life in order to alter her societal self-image to move freely as a male. In the face of mortal punishment, her willingness to confess female weakness and prove her intact virtue portrays her as an asset to the Catholic Church.

For the early modern scholar, Catalina de Erauso represents a paradox in various ways. The title given to her during her lifetime, *La monja alférez*, has generated critical interest as it relates to gender, masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and performativity in early modern Spanish culture. Although she never officially professed to any religious order, Erauso has been historically referred to as the

⁵⁵ After Catalina reveals her anatomical identity to the Bishop of Guamanga, she submits to a physical examination in order to prove that her virginity remains intact. He reacts in this manner, “I revere you as one of the most notable persons of this world” (161, my translation). Note: From this point, I will use my own translations.

⁵⁶ (Marcia Ochoa 55).

monja alférez. This title includes two distinct genders and attests to Catalina's experiences both as a male and a female. To be a *monja* is indicative of a woman religious whereas *alférez*, a military term, exclusively refers to the male sex. While some might affirm that this epithet is a contradiction, in actuality, the conflation of femaleness with femininity and maleness with masculinity is reconfigured as an alternative to these bipartite structures. The manifestation of Catalina's alterity, that of masculine female presence, in addition to her successful appropriation of the male space and how her persona is received by the public and enabled by the King and Pope, are the elements that make Erauso a notable case study from a queer perspective.

At the age of four, Catalina's parents, Miguel de Erauso and María Pérez de Galarra, placed her in the Dominican convent of *San Sebastián el Antiguo* in Basque Country, Spain. In this convent Catalina should have passed through the process of becoming a novitiate, to then officially dedicate herself to the convent and to the Catholic cause as a nun. As Erauso's text confirms, conventual enclosure did not await this would-be nun. When she was fifteen years of age, there was a violent incident in which the nun superior, doña Catalina de Aliri, struck Erauso.⁵⁷ Although the Lieutenant Nun does not directly cite this maltreatment as the cause of her decision to transform into a male, it is directly after mentioning this altercation in the text that Erauso commences her description of the change from feminine to

⁵⁷ Ángel Esteban, editor of the edition of Erauso's text used for this dissertation, cites Joaquín María de Ferrer, who is responsible for the initial publication of Erauso's narrative in 1829, maintaining the historical existence of Aliri in this particular order: "Profesó esta monja en el año de 1605, y falleció en 1657, habiendo sido priora quince años" (94). ["This nun professed in the year 1605 and died in 1657, having been a prioress for 15 years"].

masculine selfhood. Taking advantage of her aunt's position in the convent, also a nun in *El antiguo*, Erauso steals the keys to the exit and escapes into the forest. From her novitiate clothing, Catalina fashions her first manly façade.

The reader is not exposed to any sort of conscious point of epiphany in which the *monja alférez* decides that she is in fact male. As critics of her text, we can assume that Erauso gave thought to the emergence of her male disguise, yet her actions serve as our only guide to her behavior. She simply acts using the available resources for escape. From this point, Erauso develops a somewhat picaresque existence in that she moves from master to master, initially as a page, under her newly created male persona, Francisco Loyola. Throughout the text, Erauso changes her male name multiple times in order to adapt to each of her new surroundings. The teenager has various encounters with family members such as her father and uncle. Her father, who happens to be an old friend of her current master, arrives and speaks with Catalina's new employer about his recently escaped daughter. Miguel's continued search for her is significant in that it suggests that further travel will be necessary in order to avoid the risk of being discovered by her family.

After some time in Spain, Catalina finally makes it to the New World where she leaves behind her initial imitation of the Spanish man, and assimilates to her own *conquistador* persona. While in the New World, she engages in typical male behaviors such as gambling, fighting, warrior aggression, flirtation, and even the murder of multiple men, including her own brother, who, of course, does not recognize her. The climax of Erauso's narrative is when she reveals her anatomical

identity to the bishop of Guamanga to avoid punishment for murder. Upon proving that her virginity is intact, she is placed under the protection of the bishop and is no longer culpable for her crime because of her biological identity. After remaining in conventual enclosure for two years and five months at the request of her new spiritual protector, she is able to return to Spain following his death, as she technically never transitioned from her position as a novitiate, “I was there [the convent] for two years and five months until word returned from Spain that I was not, nor had I ever been, a professed nun.”⁵⁸ As she leaves the convent, she has obtained a celebrity status as *la monja alférez* and highlights, “ . . . we couldn’t avoid all the curious onlookers who came to see the Lieutenant Nun.”⁵⁹ Upon returning to Europe, she requests a lifetime pension and is granted papal permission to continue her life as a man.⁶⁰

Catalina seemingly took part in the early modern European cultural and literary convention of cross-dressing. Women disguising themselves as men became the theatrical norm in the *comedias* and was even outlined as comically necessary in Lope de Vega’s *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*, “Women . . . if they change their costumes, may it be in such a way that is forgivable, because the male disguise is usually delightful.”⁶¹ Not solely a theatrical tool, female cross-dressing

⁵⁸ “Allí me estuve cabales dos años y cinco meses, hasta que volvió de España razón bastante de cómo no era yo ni había sido monja profesa . . .” (164).

⁵⁹ “ . . . ya no podíamos valernos de tanta gente curiosa que venía a ver a la Monja Alférez”(163).

⁶⁰ Following her favor with Pope Urban VIII and King Phillip IV, Catalina returned to Mexico in 1630 and lived the rest of her life as a mule-driver until her death in 1650.

⁶¹ “Las damas . . . si mudaren traje, sea de modo que pueda perdonarse, porque suele el disfraz varonil agradar mucho” (vv. 280-83). Lope de Vega directed this essay to the Academy of Madrid in 1609 as a new way to conceive theater.

was practiced not infrequently in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe and had multiple causes. Although the Inquisition punished both men and women for acts of sodomy and cross-dressing, it was expected that a woman would desire to elevate her spiritual and social status by becoming a man. The notion of a man becoming a woman represented a desire to lower oneself from the position of the divinely privileged male to the sinful daughter of Eve. In their study of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Holland, Rudolf Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol cite the existence of one hundred and nineteen documented female cross-dressers, highlighting:

the pressures which led to the decision of cross-dressing could be both material, such as poverty, or emotional, such as patriotic fervor or love for another woman, or a combination of these . . . Cases of cross-dressing drew most attention when the disguised women courted or married other women (2, 4).

While the direct motive for Catalina's transformation from female to male is unclear, just as was the case in Dekker and van de Pol's study, the text clearly shows that she never married nor seemed to have true intentions of marrying another woman. Additionally, although her historical presence has been fictionalized through various mediums, such as plays, short stories, and even film adaptations, most of which capitalize on her role as a cross-dresser, the Lieutenant Nun's initial entrance into

the world of gender transgression, that of a means for escape, evolved into an entire lifestyle that challenged the Catholic faith and civil law.⁶²

Perhaps the most shocking aspect of Catalina's life stems from the Catholic Church's stance on her gender transgression. Pope Urban VIII enabled the Lieutenant Nun to maintain her male persona, insofar as she did not continue to offend her fellow man:

I told him briefly . . . the story of my life and adventures, my sex and virginity. His holiness was amazed of such things, and graciously permitted me to continue my life in men's clothing, encouraging me to pursue an honest life from then on, without causing harm to my fellow man.⁶³

During a period when cross-dressing was biblically scorned in Deuteronomy 22:5, yet theatrically prized, the Pope, in response to Erauso's intact virginity and services she had rendered to the crown in the New World, situationally alters the Catholic stance on transvestism and female behavior.⁶⁴ Catalina's sinful acts as a murderer, gambler, liar, seducer, and violator of biblical prescriptions, were erased. As a result of confessing her anatomical identity, the Catholic Church is able to reclaim Erauso's

⁶² Juan Pérez de Montalbán's play, *Comedia famosa de la monja alférez*, written during Catalina's lifetime (1626?), seems to highlight her same-sex desire, while Erauso's text itself does not. In fact, as Ángel Esteban suggests, Montalbán's play was in production when Erauso returned from the New World after revealing her physical identity, which suggests the extent of her reputation and fame in the Iberian Peninsula even before her return (40). The film adaptation, *La monja alférez*, released in 1944 by director Emilio Gómez Muriel and starring the Mexican beauty, María Félix, certainly also takes its own creative license with regard to Erauso's sexual identity and paints her as a clearly heterosexual trans vested woman.

⁶³ " . . . referíle en breve . . . mi vida y corridas, mi sexo y virginidad; y mostró su santidad extrañar tal caso, y con afabilidad me concedió licencia para seguir mi vida en hábito de hombre, encargándome la prosecución honesta en adelante, y la abstinencia en ofender al prójimo" (173).

⁶⁴ "A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this" (Deuteronomy 22:5).

unscathed feminine virtue and military service to convert her image as transgressor into that of compliant Catholic warrior. Dekker and van de Pol note the usefulness of an individual who exhibits both exemplary male traits of militaristic prowess, as well as maintains chastity as a female:

In histories of female soldiers and sailors . . . a theme repeatedly emerges in which they are received at court and rewarded . . . but female soldiers certainly had a propaganda value: the monarch could show to the world that even women rallied under his banners (95-6).

Given that the crown and the Church were one in the same, Catalina's military service proved to be a useful tool to both monarchy and Church. Sherry Velasco describes this propaganda value as the "detainment of a Lieutenant Nun epidemic" (80). By imposing Catholic parameters on the Lieutenant Nun's male persona, the Pope was able to control the societal reception of Catalina's gender transgression as well as circumvent further displays of female deviation from normative behavior.

As far as what the transition from womanhood to manhood meant for Catalina de Erauso, the implications are not so directly linked to civic and religious ideologies. What begins as a mere imitative disguise through the cutting of hair and the fashioning of an impromptu costume, slowly transitions into an adaptive behavior based on European masculine norms, only to then morph into a feminine masculinity that exclusively belongs to Catalina, that of a self-made female masculine being. Erauso's masculinity, provided that her female anatomy stayed hidden, fell within the lines of socially and culturally sanctioned manhood. Yet,

despite the believability of her male persona, the modern critic often attributes the Lieutenant Nun's successful performance of seventeenth-century masculinity to lesbianism, transgenderism, transexuality, and imitation.

Many Erauso scholars resort to speculation in order to offer a possible glimpse into Catalina's identity. However, the aspects of Erauso's life pertaining to her psychological and emotional motivations for transitioning into a male as well as her elusive sexual orientation are and will remain cloaked in mystery. For scholars such as Sherry Velasco, the *monja aflérez's* cross-dressing and the episodes of flirtation with other women within the text are sufficient to support categorizing Catalina as lesbian, transvestite, or even transgender. Velasco defends her use of codifying Catalina's alleged sexual attraction to women by making an interesting yet debatable point regarding same-sex attraction during the period, "... 'lesbian' is perhaps less anachronistic than other terms, given that during the early modern period, 'lesbian' and other variations . . . were, in fact, associated with women who were attracted to other women" (2).⁶⁵ Despite the fact that many of Erauso's interactions with women might easily be considered suggestive or even homoerotic by twenty-first century standards, I contest the use of these classifying terms of sexual preference and gender identity due to a lack of concrete textual evidence.

⁶⁵ Velasco published a book entitled, *Lesbians of Early Modern Spain*, in which she dedicates her chapter "Transgender Lesbian Celebrities" to figures such as Catalina de Erauso, Elena de Céspedes, and Queen Christina of Sweden. Although I question Velasco's limiting terminology, as it does not allow for alternative masculinities, in addition to the fact that the term lesbian seems to reject the possibility of true transgenderism, she rightfully refers to these transgressors as revealing "imperial Spain's cultural anxieties regarding gender, sex identification, desire, race, nation, and politics" (68). In a second book, *Lieutenant Nun: Transgenderism, Lesbian Desire, and Catalina de Erauso*, Velasco also refers to Catalina as a "transgendered lesbian figure" as well as "Spain's first lesbian hero" (X, 43). Velasco not only labels Erauso in this manner, but also titles her publications using these limiting categories.

Other scholars have come close to highlighting Erauso as a legitimate participant of masculine performance, but have fallen short upon allowing recuperative queer discourses to overshadow Catalina's most obvious trait. Chloe Rutter-Jensen cites J. Halberstam's text, *Female Masculinity*, a study that has influenced my own conception of Catalina de Erauso as a masculine presence, only to then veer off into the uncertain direction of trans-identities:

Perhaps Erauso embodies a prototype of female masculinity. In this conjunction, Erauso occupies a *queer* place, particularly due to the absence of a noun, category or tag that articulates precisely the transformation of her gender/sex. Erauso's case suggests a discursive side of transexuality, which does not require surgery.⁶⁶

In my view, Rutter-Jensen's interpretation becomes problematic in that it bases Catalina's identification on female masculinity with a subcategory of transexuality or transgenderism. While I concur with the notion of female masculinity given that Erauso clearly exhibits masculine behavior in accordance with the norms of the

⁶⁶ "Tal vez Erauso encarna un prototipo de masculinidad femenina. En esta conjunción, Erauso ocupa un lugar *queer*, particularmente por la ausencia de un nombre, categoría o etiqueta que articule precisamente la transformación de su género/sexo...El caso de Erauso sugiere un lado discursivo de la transexualidad, el cual no necesita de la cirugía" (92). J. Halberstam is a pioneer in the field of gender studies and has called critical attention to female performance of masculinities. In essence, Halberstam rejects the notion of a white male as the only appropriate source of masculine performativity, defends the legitimacy of female alternatives, and highlights various female queer identities such as "bull dykes" and "drag kings" that can be categorized as masculine. While *Female Masculinity* loosely influences my conception of Catalina de Erauso's masculine performance, the theory is not without flaws. Melinda Spencer emphasizes that the majority of the text studies "masculinity in women that are associated with sexual variance" (151). To study female masculinity exclusively in those who demonstrate some degree of same-sex sexual attraction or clear gender identity alterity leaves women who may identify as heterosexual and perform a certain degree of masculinity in a space of less importance. In the case of Catalina, her sexual orientation is unclear, which, in actuality, makes her masculinity more prominent in that her performance cannot be attributed to sexual attraction and trans identities.

early modern period, my opinion is that there is not enough textual evidence to support the idea of transgenderism or even transexuality, if in fact, these are thought of in terms of personal identification by part of Erauso. In other words, the reader can't be sure if Catalina actually identifies as male, or if she simply performs this identity so that her transgressions can be deemed acceptable in the public eye.

Although Rutter-Jensen admits to there being strengths and weaknesses in using recuperative terms, her reading through a "trans-sexual lens" pathologizes a historic figure of which we have no psychological records. We are forced to simply interpret what we are given, a masculine presence. Catalina does not provide her reader with any sense of psychological interiority. The reader only sees Erauso's actions but does not have any insight into her actual identification. Referring to Catalina as lesbian, transgender, or even intersex, while it may be done in an attempt to recuperate past sexualities, seems to erase some of the individual nuances that make this early modern figure interesting from a queer perspective. The most accurate way to refer to Catalina is by using the term "masculine" and by conceiving her as a figure performing a legitimate and period-appropriate masculinity.

The question of masculinity both in Spain and the New World is crucial when considering Catalina's successful appropriation of the male space. Throughout early modern Europe, notions of masculinity seemed to alternate between religion, military service, sexual prowess, and nobility. Elizabeth Leffeldt speaks of the attempt of seventeenth-century writers to recuperate a masculine ideal, "The

seventeenth-century participants . . . made deliberate choices in defining a proper code of manhood . . . they advocated several models of masculinity, differentiated primarily by class" (466-7). Although Erauso was of noble blood as a female, upon making herself a boy and working as a page, she socially demotes herself, and, in a sense, approaches the world of masculinity from a perspective that is innately less valued in the Iberian Peninsula. Despite the rigid class-based standards of masculinity in Europe, the passage to the New World created a different set of rules for how Spaniards conceptualized masculine and feminine performance.

For the European, the savagery of the New World's native population, uneducated and untitled, was similar in importance to the disposable and powerless European woman. Margarita Zamora delineates the Spanish ideology regarding the differences between the Old and New Worlds according to Christopher Columbus' early characterization of the Indies:

the Indians are defined through a series of gender specific oppositions that are hierarchized in Western culture: courage/cowardice, activity/passivity, strength/weakness, intellect/body. In activating these cultural dichotomies, Columbian writing ultimately interprets the difference between Europeans and Indians as a gender difference, not in the sexual or biological sense, but as difference ideologized and inscribed onto a cultural economy where gender becomes fundamentally a question of value, power, and dominance

(173-4).⁶⁷

Given that gender and notions of masculine and feminine performativity are based on societal preoccupations, Europeans viewed the New World, clearly lacking the same cultural ideologies, as a highly feminized space.⁶⁸ The Spaniards are masculine by virtue of their identity as Europeans and the privilege and titles that this entails, which, in turn, makes the natives the counterpoint to this clearly defined masculinity. If New World masculine performance is defined in relation to gaining power and dominating the native population, Catalina's entrance into Spanish America represents a different reality in which her masculine persona is not policed according to nobility, but rather to her presence as a perceived European man in the feminized space of the New World. This shift in westernized constructs of gender allowed Catalina to more easily perform masculinity in an environment where men obtained power by way of aggression, violence, and capitalism.

A common issue within Erausian scholarship seems to be the incapability of divorcing the concept of masculinity from the male body. The conflation of a masculine persona with maleness often results in critics basing their judgment of Catalina on what she lacks, thus, rejecting Erauso as a performer of masculinity.

Given the absence of an allegedly indispensable anatomical component towards

⁶⁷ Similarly, Todd W. Reeser describes the excess and lack of courage of the native population. The excess manifested in the form of cannibalism and aggression towards initial Spanish presence, while the lack surged from the subsequent victory of the Spanish in various New World battles. Reeser claims, "Since the Renaissance maintained the etymological link between *andreia* (courage) and *andros* (man), the Spaniards...are implicitly framed as moderately masculine, between the alternating excess and lack of the feminized natives" (226).

⁶⁸ Louis Montrose draws attention to the feminization of the Spanish American colonies throughout Western Europe as can be seen in the "... allegorical personifications of the Americas as a female nude with feathered headdress ..." which "... had begun to appear in paintings and engravings, on maps and title pages ..." (3).

achieving masculine status, critics such as Christopher Kark attribute and reduce Catalina's persona to mere imitation:

For Erauso to conceal herself in masculine attire and discourse is thus an imitation of masculine behavior . . . What this requires is the constant invocation of the speech and behavior of a quintessential Spanish *tercio*, to wit, a short temper, a penchant for gambling, and hyperbolic bravado in the face of danger . . . (538).

Erauso's attire and discourse change from her time as a page in the Iberian Peninsula, to her exploits in the gambling houses and on the battlefield, all the way to her reemergence in society as a woman. Nonetheless, the clothing and masculine discursive elements do not represent an imitation of masculine behavior but rather a distinct gender performance at different stages in her life as a man. Kark's insistence on Catalina's "hyperbolic bravado" and "imitation of masculine behavior" is precisely the sort of masculinity policing that J. Halberstam seeks to eradicate, ". . . masculinity must not and cannot and should not reduce down to the male body and its effects . . . female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing" (1). The scraps of which Halberstam speaks manifest themselves in the form of Erauso's perceived imitative behavior. To associate seventeenth-century masculinity exclusively with the male body is to ignore Catalina de Erauso's most definitive and textually supported trait: her masculine performance in the male space.

Kark is not the first critic to call attention to a seemingly short temper. Stephanie Merrim, a highly respected scholar of early modern Hispanic literature, refers to Catalina as “incorrigibly aggressive” and a “violent peleona (female fighter)” (178, 181). Current critics radicalize the aggressive tendencies of Erauso because they do not view her as what she actually is in her text, a warrior, but rather as a woman imitating a *conquistador*. Reference to Catalina’s aggression and her inclination towards violence seems to be based on the critic’s knowledge of her anatomical state rather than the violent reality of the male sphere in the New World. In lieu of intentionally reducing Erauso’s eccentricities to speculative queer sexualities and identities or complete imitation of masculine norms, perhaps it will be more advantageous to address what made her role as a man believable to everyone, her female masculinity.

While many have described Catalina de Erauso’s performance as a male, very few have studied her as a legitimate source of masculinity without categorizing her even further. To study Erauso from this perspective allows me to implicate the Church in this particular isolated event, as, in and of itself, the queering entity. My interpretation of *La monja alférez* as a text will serve as a departure from previous critical contributions in that while taking the historical aspects into account, my main objective is to consider the queerness of Catalina de Erauso, especially as can be seen in the manifestation of her unique appropriation of the male space, in addition to the role of the Catholic Church as her enabler.

Perhaps the most thought provoking aspect of the case of the *monja alférez* comes from the fact that she was one of the few exceptions to what Halberstam refers to as “the general disbelief in female masculinity.” Given the circumstances of her fame, royal pension, and papal favor, it is apparent that the most important contemporary figures needed no convincing as to the validity of her masculinity. Although the modern day queer scholar associates the alteration of gender with the trans movement, in the case of the *monja alférez*, we see the Church allowing this seemingly trans identity to flourish. In other words, if the Pope did not find grounds to punish her or reverse her established identity insofar as she maintained her virginity, she was, by virtue of her actions in conjunction with her professed condition, gender normative. Very simply, this required the denial of sexual expression. In order to more clearly decipher Catalina de Erauso’s masculine persona, I divide her life into three distinct stages of masculinity: imitation, adaptation, and assimilation.

From the Convent to the New World: Imitation and Adaptation

The Lieutenant Nun’s initial step towards masculinity is the emergence of her ability to auto-create or modify her external identity. After the altercation with doña Catalina de Aliri, the reader experiences Erauso’s reactionary tendencies through her feigned illness, which was ultimately used in order to set her plan for escape in motion. Given that we are not provided with details on the Lieutenant Nun’s thought processes, the audience must speculate as to the emotions that certain experiences

would have provoked. Before Erauso abandons her female life, she informs the audience of what her escape accomplishes, the successful evasion of transitioning from novitiate to nun.⁶⁹ The reference to the female vocation serves as a parallel to her future conquistador identity. Unlike Santa Teresa and Sor Juana, Catalina trades a life of enclosure and subjugation for one of danger and the opportunity to move freely as a man.

Erauso's initial transition from female to male, that is to say the external façade, is based entirely on imitation. However, there is a clearly marked difference between Catalina's change of clothing and the theatrical convention of cross-dressing. There is no stated or implied temporary motive for such a drastic change. Catalina is not seeking refuge in a male disguise to travel safely from one town to the next, to spy on an ex-lover, or to deceive someone. In acknowledging Catalina's imitation of male clothing as her introduction to the male sphere, I do not disregard her ability as a transvested woman to perform normative masculinity as efficiently as a biological male.

Before the reader is exposed to Erauso's New World masculinity, the clothes must speak for the soon-to-be ex-novitiate. Clothing is what initially allows her to move uninhibited out in the open without the protection of the cloister. Catalina describes the necessary hand tools and the moment in which she executes her escape, "I went to my aunt's cell; I took some scissors, thread, and a needle. I took

⁶⁹ "Where I lived until the age of 15, when I would then profess as a nun" / "donde me crié hasta tener quince años, y entonces se trató de mi profesión" (94).

some of the pieces of eight that were sitting there; I took the keys to the convent.”⁷⁰

In her study dedicated to the disguised or dressed body and its implications for identity in the personal narrations of the Golden Age, Encarnación Juárez Almendros maintains that, “. . . appearances reflect, among other functions, cultural paradigms and preoccupations of the period and confirm the capacity for auto-creation of the protagonists . . . clothing is a language that speaks for the individual and constructs the subject.”⁷¹ Almendros makes a valid point in highlighting the role of appearance as an indicator of societal preoccupations. The habit and scapular of a nun served as external proof of her relationship and dedication to God. One of the purposes of enclosure and the habit was to safeguard the nun from her supposed propensity to sexual deviance. Erauso’s alteration of external identity created an escape from a religious institution that sought to protect (or control) her virtue as a female by demanding her compliance with Catholic dogma.

Although it is unclear as to whether or not Catalina identifies as male, for critic Rutter-Jensen, the tearing and cutting of her habit is the closest thing to gender reassignment surgery for the period. While the critic aptly asserts that referring to Catalina as simply a transvestite disregards her life and accomplishments as a man (90), as it exclusively highlights her change in clothing and not behavior, she replaces one form of recuperative terminology, and opts for

⁷⁰ “. . . fuime a la celda de mi tía; tomé allí unas tijeras y hilo, y una aguja; tomé unos reales de a ocho que allí estaban, tomé las llaves del convento . . .” (95).

⁷¹ “. . . las apariencias reflejan, entre otras funciones, paradigmas culturales y preocupaciones de la época y confirman la capacidad de auto creación de los protagonistas . . . la ropa es un lenguaje que habla por el individuo y construye al sujeto” (2), *El cuerpo vestido y la construcción de la identidad en las narrativas autobiográficas del Siglo de Oro* (2006).

another: identifying the Lieutenant Nun's text as a transsexual narrative. Although it is impossible to determine what Erauso's male clothing meant for her sexuality or gender identity, we can say that Erauso used this disguise as a form of passing freely without revealing her anatomical identity. Catalina utilizes the only tangible remaining pieces of her female and religious life, reshapes them, and uses the scraps for her newly established persona.

Upon creating a new identity, Catalina rejects the three acceptable roles for women during seventeenth-century Spain: that of nun, wife, and daughter. The new male character and abandonment of femininity will later re-fuse to form her epithet, *la monja alférez*. When she arrives to the last of many doors that lead to the street, before crossing the threshold and escaping her expected duties, Erauso tosses her scapular aside and exits to an unfamiliar street.⁷² Exiting to a street that is completely unknown to Catalina speaks to the environment of enclosure in which she found herself and currently flees. Additionally, tossing the scapular carelessly to the side is a pivotal and symbolic moment in the life of the *monja alférez*, a life of change, free from the binding impositions of the female sex imposed by conventual life. Now on the street, she takes refuge in a chestnut grove to initiate her re-creation, "I was there for three days planning and cutting myself a suit of clothes. With the blue woolen bodice I made a pair of trousers, and with the green petticoat I

⁷² "... at the last one, that was the door to the street, I left my scapular and exited to the street without having ever seen it" ["... en la última, que fue la de la calle, dejé mi escapulario y me salí a la calle sin haberla visto" (95)].

wore underneath, a doublet and hose. I left my nun's habit lying there . . . ”⁷³

Spending three days sewing an adequate disguise demonstrates a deep familiarity by part of Erauso regarding the expectations of maleness and dress. The very outfit created is, of course, done in such a manner as to project an image of masculinity in accordance with the early modern Spanish ideal.

The most jarring moment for Catalina in the performance of her new identity is the change in reality based on gender. Male attire and movement provide the Lieutenant Nun with a new set of social expectations. Erauso is now experiencing what Joan Cammarata refers to as the “public sphere” which was accessible only to men, and has left the “private sphere,” associated exclusively with the weaker sex (2).⁷⁴ The public sphere allows men to move, communicate, and work as they wish. Movement, in essence, is masculinity. When Erauso leaves the chestnut grove with her new clothing, the new gender-specific standards land her in a new type of enclosure, jail. Upon arriving in Bilbao, Erauso is surrounded by a group of boys. Her reaction to what she perceives as a threatening presence is to throw stones, which injures one of the group. She is then arrested and must wait until the other has recuperated before she can be released, “They held me in jail for a long month until the boy healed.”⁷⁵ The experience of this different sphere of interaction

⁷³ “ . . . estuve tres días trazando y acomodándome y cortando de vestir. Corté e híceme de una basquiña de paño azul con que me hallaba, unos calzones; de un faldellín verde de perpetuán que traía debajo de una ropilla y polainas: el hábito me lo dejé por allí” (95).

⁷⁴ In his article, “The Problematics of Gender/Genre in *Vida i sucesos de la monja* alférez,” Rainer H. Goetz refers to this public versus private sphere dichotomy as the “father” versus the “mother world”: “. . . Catalina separates from the mother and begins to identify with the father world and its code, based predominantly on violence and deception . . . ” (101).

⁷⁵ “. . . tuviéronme en la cárcel un largo mes hasta que él hubo de sanar” (97).

characterized by gender is what most significantly marks the Lieutenant Nun's initial change from imitation of male dress to adaptation of male behavior. Erauso is able to experience the positive aspect of movement in addition to the repercussions for maleness in the punishment of her assault.

Catalina uses the Iberian Peninsula and her experiences with various masters as a page in order to experiment with her own credibility as a male. Her participation in jobs reserved exclusively for young boys allows her to not simply be seen as a male, but also to perform as one. In an attempt to explain Catalina's newly adopted lifestyle, Mary Elizabeth Perry suggests that Erauso was "... not only to dress as a male, but also to engage in a 'stylized repetition of acts' ... which could inscribe gender on the body ..." (397). Perry's claim regarding a "repetition of acts" not only describes the Lieutenant Nun's persona, but the performance of masculinity in general. If gender is truly a cultural construct, this would mean that Erauso, provided that she had knowledge of her culture's conception of maleness, could easily perform these acts in accordance with Spain's gender parameters. Donning the name Francisco Loyola, Catalina quickly sees that her identity as a boy is not put into question after two encounters with men.

Deceiving a member of her family is Erauso's personal evidence that she is projecting what appears to others as a legitimate state of masculinity. Settling in Valladolid as the page of don Juan de Idiáquez, long time friend of her father, Catalina goes unnoticed by both men. From Bilbao, she moves directly to Estella, once again working as a page for a new master, don Carlos de Arellano. In my view,

Catalina deviates from the typical picaresque plot line in that while being treated splendidly, she leaves the newly acquired life of comfort and security, “treated well and well dressed . . . without any other cause than my desire, I left that comfort.”⁷⁶ She simply leaves based on what can only be judged as a whim. Catalina moves in pursuit of an ideal or environment that has yet to be named. After going unrecognized in her city of birth by her mother during mass, she initiates what will be her biggest change in reality yet. The Lieutenant Nun moves from the space of the vagabond adolescent boy to that of the New World *conquistador*, a reality exclusively associated with men.

Erauso’s new position as *grumete*, or cabin boy, marks the beginning of a series of events that show Catalina as exhibiting a more aggressive masculine persona, not only in dress, and profession, but also with the added element of various hostile and dangerous environments. Catalina continues to change masters as it suits her until she sets sail for the New World under the service of her uncle. We are first introduced to the perils of this changing reality and what is to come with the text’s first occurrence of death, “We sailed on to *Nombre de Dios*, and were there for nine days. Many of our men died, which caused us to take great haste in departing.”⁷⁷ Although this particular incident of death positions Erauso in her new environment, that of imminent danger, she must brave these conditions to obtain what she seeks, just as the others are in search of wealth, land, and fame. Life at sea

⁷⁶ “ . . . bien tratado y bien vestido . . . sin más causa que mi gusto, dejé aquella comodidad” (97).

⁷⁷ “ . . . pasamos a Nombre de Dios, y estuvimos allí nueve días, muriéndonos en ellos mucha gente, lo cual hizo dar mucha prisa a partir” (99).

is not simply the New World from the perspective of the Spanish Crown, but it is a new world for this unseasoned cabin boy.

During the maritime experience, Catalina begins to assimilate to what Halberstam refers to as a category of masculinity that is non-intrusive and respected by all, “heroic masculinities” (1).⁷⁸ These are the displays of masculinity that are most palatable in the social sphere and respect the cultural definition of masculine performance. As Halberstam mentions, the presence of female masculinity provides insight into how masculinity is constructed. If in the New World, masculinity is most visible through militaristic or dangerous environments, then one must assume that Catalina, through the survival of her first life or death experience, is proof of how masculinity is constructed. It is in this instance that the reader begins to question Catalina’s ability to survive, given that there is no textual support for how she was able to evade death. Whether it is due to shipwrecks or New World diseases, we are spared the crucial details regarding what took the lives of many of her fellow sailors or her survival. Nonetheless, her first brush with death inspires the reader to view her in more masculine terms. Allyson Poska comments on women dressing as men and performing masculinity in early modern Spain, “Imposters performing masculinity . . . provide insight into cultural expectations of men” (7). I agree with Poska in that the women who dress as men and perform masculinity can provide

⁷⁸ “ . . . although we have a difficult time defining masculinity, as a society we have little trouble in recognizing it, and indeed we spend massive amounts of time and money ratifying and supporting the versions of masculinity that we enjoy and trust; many of these ‘heroic masculinities’ depend absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities . . . far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity” (1).

insight into the cultural expectations of men. However, the word “impostor” discounts their masculinity and deems it illegitimate, once again, perpetuating the inseparability of masculinity from maleness.

In chapter three of *Historia de la monja alférez*, Catalina finally discovers a certain degree of security. Not only does she obtain professional responsibility but she also acquires a sense of aggression and violence, which give way to what has most often been described as same-sex attraction. From this chapter on, Catalina begins to exhibit what can be termed not only as female masculinity as Halberstam would describe it, but also could be more specifically termed *conquistadora* masculinity. While some might categorize my term *conquistadora*, denoting a female *conquistador*, as removing Catalina from her projected role as man, it is actually intended to do the opposite. In modifying the gender of this title, I am recognizing her as a woman who is capable of embodying the male *conquistador* role. Dressing as a man gives Catalina the license to express this masculinity.

After stealing five hundred pesos from her uncle, Erauso moves to the next master, the merchant Juan de Urquiza, who presents her a new realm of possibilities within the New World, capitalism. The master provides Erauso with a great deal of responsibility, charging her with sending a shipment of goods in his absence. Upon seeing her diligence in this matter, he rewards her with a position in a shop in which she handles products as well as cash. Through this newly acquired position, the reader sees a common occurrence in the Americas, or perhaps what could be considered a major motivation for passage to the New World, accumulating wealth.

Catalina is given various instructions on how to look after the shop in Urquiza's absence. Not only does she receive a steady salary, a significant motive for men to travel from an economically struggling Spain, but also she is given clothing, a cook, and slaves to assist in her work, "My master received me warmly . . . he then made me two suits . . . he left two slaves at my service, a black woman to cook for me, and three pesos for daily spending."⁷⁹ All of these helpful tools not only reiterate the geographical, racial, social, and economical differences between Spain and the New World, but also represent another avenue by which the Lieutenant Nun perpetuates and thereby assimilates to New World masculinity. In accepting help from the *negra*, Catalina, disguised as a male, allows the subjugation of a racially inferior female, requiring the woman to perform the role that corresponds to the female gender, that of caretaker. Catalina's perpetuation of masculine superiority over the submissive female epitomizes a more negative aspect of Halberstam's concept of female masculinity in that this behavior "coincides with the excesses of male supremacy" (9). In abandoning her own female identity, Erauso participates in having other women to perform their gender.

After describing the details of her new position and all that it entails, the protagonist provides the reader with a rare narrative element in *Historia* regarding her current state, foreshadowing, "Who would have said this serenity could be so

⁷⁹ "me recibió mi amo con gran cariño . . . hízome luego al punto dos vestidos . . . dejóme dos esclavos que me sirviesen, y una negra que me guisase; y tres pesos señalados para el gasto de cada día . . ." (102).

short-lived, and that struggles were just around the corner!"⁸⁰ The reader can instantly assume that there will be a shift in Erauso's good fortune. Immediately following this rare yet blind glimpse into the future, we witness a crucial and necessary characteristic of masculine men in the New World, the propensity for violence.

Violence is omnipresent in many narrations situated in early modern Spain and the New World, as can be seen in the *crónicas, relaciones*, and even the picaresque. Catalina is often judged through her displays of violence, particularly by Erauso critics, as performing a hyperbolic masculinity, "For Erauso, the negation of her femininity required her to be hypermasculine, in this case being more violent than most biological men" (Poska 7). According to this reading, Erauso abandons her femininity simply by adopting more violent tendencies. It is true; Erauso displays a developed sense of aggression as well as seemingly murderous compulsions, traits that she clearly did not exhibit in the Iberian Peninsula while performing femininity. I question whether Erauso's perceived hyper masculinity can be attributed to the reader or critic's knowledge of Catalina's biological identity. In viewing Catalina as an impostor or even an actress, the critic can't help but juxtapose her disguised feminine identity with her created male persona. This juxtaposition impedes viewing the Lieutenant Nun as a credible source of masculinity, and instead, provokes a more exaggerated and artificial interpretation of her male character. To decode such a complex figure by reducing her

⁸⁰ "¡Quién me dijera que esta serenidad me durase tan poco, y que presto de ella había de pasar a grandes trabajos!" (103).

performance to artifice is to reject masculinity as a cultural construct. While many scholars would be quick to agree with gender as a product of culture, critics like Poska seem unwilling to credit an early modern female as being capable of accessing and successfully practicing these cultural standards while under the physical guise of a man. As readers, we do not receive an inner dialogue that directs us to properly interpret Erauso's motivations for aggression from a female perspective. Therefore, it behooves us as modern day critics to view Erauso from a standpoint of masculine performance as opposed to sexual identity.

For Spanish men in the New World, any perceived offence of honor required vengeance, more often than not, in the drawing of swords. Catalina adapts and assimilates to the violent tendencies of the New World, just as any born-male would have been required to do. In fact, Catalina's behavior at time proves to be the opposite of Poska's suggestion regarding Erauso's tendency to be more violent than most biological men. One such case is clear in the theater, which happens to be the first instance of trouble to which Catalina previously alluded. In this entertainment venue Erauso allows her readers, whomever they may be, to witness what would have been viewed during early modern Spanish culture as the epitome of masculinity, an attempt to protect one's physical body as well as public honor. Catalina narrates an abridged version of the altercation:

On a day of rest I was in my chair at the theater, when a certain Reyes arrived, and placed his chair directly in front of mine. It was so close up I couldn't see a thing. I asked him to move over a bit, but he responded in a

nasty tone, and I gave him back a little of the same. Then he told me I'd better disappear, or he'd cut my face. Given that I found myself unarmed, except for a dagger, I left, furious, and with a couple of friends at my side who followed along trying to calm me down.⁸¹

In referring to the other man involved as *un fulano*, Erauso draws attention to the altercation itself as opposed to the actual other involved in the conflict. The full identity of Reyes is unimportant.

What comes after the non-descript form of identifying her opponent is textual evidence that Reyes is clearly the aggressor and Catalina initially plays a passive role in the argument, "I asked him to move over a little." The man responds to Erauso's request with a threat. Through this interaction, Reyes is the character in the episode that attempts to appear more violent than Catalina. Critics who cite this episode do not dedicate much space, if any, to Reyes' aggression. This oversight in the aggression of Catalina's opponent is due to the Erausian scholar's attempt at highlighting the Lieutenant Nun's departure from gender-appropriate behavior. The initial and most blatant form of aggression is ignored given the gender of the aggressor. The attempt by Erauso's friends to calm her reminds the reader that she has settled into her New World persona within her new surroundings. Not only does she have a job, but also male companions. The most crucial information is that which conveys Catalina as masculine without relying on hyperbole as some critics

⁸¹ Estábame un día de fiesta en la comedia en mi asiento que había tomado...un fulano Reyes vino y me puso otro tan delante y tan arrimado que me impedía la vista. Pedíle que lo apartase un poco, respondió desabridamente, y yo a él, y díjome que me fuese de allí, que me cortaría la cara. Yo me hallé sin armas, más que una daga, salíme de allí con sentimiento. Entendido por unos amigos, me siguieron y sosegaron. (103).

suggest. The dispute establishes the commonplace of daily altercations between men in the New World. The most pertinent details are explicitly stated and underscore the threat of physical harm in addition to Erauso's lack of weaponry to defend herself. A man without arms is defenseless.

Although Catalina does not explain her lack of weaponry, she cites this as the sole reason for which she did not resort to violence in this particular instance. Poska posits that "cross-dressing women and hermaphrodites asserted their manliness by carrying weapons and using them when necessary" (12). Although it must be true that cross-dressers did, in fact, carry arms to protect themselves, it would be erroneous to assume that a man in this time period would be in public without a formidable weapon. For this reason, a modification of vocabulary is necessary here, changing "manliness" to "themselves," as the original term maintains the inseparability of masculinity from the male body and rejects the notion of a female masculinity altogether.⁸² Poska's statement destabilizes a common norm associated with the anatomically male sex, that of the carrying of arms, to highlight the perceived desire for hypermasculinization of hermaphrodites and cross-dressers. Many Erauso critics seem to be unwilling to simply use the term "masculine" or "masculino" without utilizing an accompanying adverb such as "super" or "hyper." One such example can be discovered in Soraya Sánchez García's article where she describes Catalina's text, "... Catalina simplifies her life to heroic, brave, and super

⁸² Cross-dressing women and hermaphrodites asserted **themselves** by carrying weapons and using them when necessary (my modification).

masculine events.”⁸³ The knowledge that Erauso is anatomically female, affects the way we describe her experience as a male. In a sense, our language forces her back into the feminine role in which she was born. A crucial element to understanding Catalina’s masculinity is to recognize her environment. New World masculine performance is often most visible in situations involving violence, a necessary tool for the recuperation of honor due to a public assault.

The public altercation between Reyes and Catalina cannot go unresolved in the masculine sphere. Erauso’s most prized possession, at least at this point in the narration, is no longer her virginity given that the world now views her as a man, but rather her honor. The following day, Catalina executes a clear act of revenge upon seeing Reyes, “Reyes walked past the door, first one way and then the other. I closed the shop, grabbed a knife, and went to a barber to grind the blade to a saw-toothed edge, and then, I put on my sword; the first I ever wore.”⁸⁴ There could be no clearer intention for violence than having a knife sharpened and fashioned to have a saw-toothed edge. Additionally, Erauso highlights that this is her first experience carrying a sword, symbolizing yet another moment that solidifies her place in Halberstam’s concept of heroic masculinities. Typically, Halberstam uses this concept to codify an anatomically male figure performing culturally accepted acts of masculinity. Interestingly enough, at this point in the narration, Catalina is a man in the eyes of the men around her. She is taking an active part, not only in the recuperation of her honor, but also, is contributing to and perpetuating the cultural

⁸³ “ . . . Catalina simplifica su vida a hechos heroicos, valientes y súper masculinos” (web).

⁸⁴ “Pasó por la puerta Reyes y volvió a pasar . . . cerré mi tienda, tomé un cuchillo, fuime a un barbero e hícelo amolar y picar el filo, como sierra; púseme mi espada, que fue la primera que ceñí . . . ” (103).

construct of masculinity through the recognition of a weapon as a necessary tool to exact vengeance. The altercation ends in Catalina slitting Reyes' face with the famous line, "This is the face that gets cut . . ." as well as stabbing his companion.⁸⁵ Although she takes refuge in a church, she is arrested for her crime, yet eventually released at the request of her master, don Juan de Urquiza. While she is under the service of this master, we see what many scholars have referred to as sexual desire or even lesbianism.

Historically, desire has played a crucial role in the interpretation of the Lieutenant Nun's historical and literary presence. Catalina's unclear gender identity and sexual preference complicate the episodes involving potential physical attraction and flirtation. As far as the text is concerned, queer sexualities and interpretations of Erauso's sexual identity and preference should not be limited to one definitive category. Even with the lack of textual support, if one views lesbianism as a viable possibility in *Historia de la monja alférez*, Catalina would also have to be interpreted from a transgender perspective given her form of dress. The problem with deeming Erauso a lesbian, although it appeases a certain critical inclination, is that it also brings to light another issue in the realm of queer studies. Categorizing Catalina a female to male trans figure, and additionally qualifying her as a lesbian, seems to be counterproductive to what queer readings intend to accomplish. In other words, referring to a possibly trans person as a lesbian discounts the masculinity and identity of a trans person. In a sense, this type of

⁸⁵ "Esta es la cara que se corta . . ." (103).

categorization destabilizes the norm, and then restabilizes it with a seemingly more acceptable queer identity, in this case, that of lesbianism. Although sexual desire is arguably what makes Erauso such a memorable case in literature and history, what is more important in these interactions with women is how Catalina performs masculinity through the male prerogative of movement, violence, and military service. These vehicles for masculinity can be seen with two females associated with Catalina's masters and with one from the New World indigenous population.

The first and least convincing instance of potential attraction comes about as advice from Urquiza. In order to avoid further conflicts with Reyes as well as with the law, Erauso's master suggests that she remedies this bad blood by agreeing to marry the aunt of Reyes' wife, doña Beatriz de Cárdenas. Catalina shows that Urquiza's motives are not completely in favor of his employee's freedom and safety, but rather they are centered on carnal desires and monetary gain. The description of her interaction with Beatriz provokes my interpretation from the perspective of female masculinity as opposed to a definitive sexual preference:

It's worth noting that this Beatriz . . . was my master's lover, and it was his intention to have us both secure, me for his service, and her for his pleasure. And it seems that they worked the whole thing out between the two . . . I was at this woman's house and she would caress me . . . she asked that I not return to the church and to stay there. One night she locked me in her room and declared that come hell or high water that I was going to sleep with her, pushing me to such a point that I had to slap her and get out of there. Then I

told my master that I would not agree to such a marriage for anything in the world.⁸⁶

We can draw two pieces of information from this portion of Erauso's text. First, Catalina's retrospective view of the encounter informs the reader that Beatriz's desire for Erauso was unlikely, as she deems all to be a set-up by Urquiza and his lover. Furthermore, if Urquiza sought to marry Erauso to Beatriz, this would indicate that there is no actual sexual attraction on either end between the two. Catalina clearly has no interest, while Beatriz simply participates in the game orchestrated by Urquiza. Although the presence of sexual attraction is non-existent in this case, it is the first time that we see Catalina's persona confronted with yet another reality experienced within the male sphere, that of carnal interaction, unacceptable for any unwed woman, yet expected with the man. According to Lehfeltdt, "Though not defined by sexual purity in the way that women were, men's bodies also had to meet sexual requirements. Early modern manhood was defined through sexual performance" (1077). Catalina avoids sexual performance as a means for projecting manhood and instead opts for the second important conclusion we can take from this segment of the text, movement and even violence.

Catalina has what could be termed a type of masculine reaction to Beatriz's overt sexuality in that her behavior turns violent. This episode is crucial to my

⁸⁶ "Es de saber que esta doña Beatriz . . . era dama de mi amo, y él miraba a tenernos seguros, a mí para servicio y a ella para gusto . . . iba a la casa de aquella señora, y ella me acariciaba mucho . . . pedía que no volviese a la iglesia de noche, y me quedase allá; y una noche me encerró y se declaró en que a pesar del diancho había de dormir con ella, y me apretó en esto tanto, que hube de alargar la mano y salirme; y dije luego a mi amo, que de tal casamiento no había que tratar, porque por todo el mundo yo no lo haría . . . (104-5).

interpretation of Catalina de Erauso as performing female masculinity during an experience typically associated with males. Although Erauso does not embody maleness, as she does not engage in penetrative sex with Beatriz, she does maintain a specific type of masculinity. Catalina fails to project maleness, as this term simply cannot be disconnected from the male body. In refusing to sexually perform, Erauso does not attempt to follow through with what could be viewed as manly during the time period. If manhood is defined by sexual performance, Catalina is not a man. Catalina continues to operate within her own feminine masculinity, yet violently rejects the possibility of sexual experience, which, inadvertently, positions her as masculine but not manly. In contrast, if masculinity is defined in part by virility, honor, and military practice, Catalina is, indeed, masculine. Erauso's refusal to accede to Urquiza's proposal and her subsequent departure, or more simplistically, her movement away from the set-up, marks a more passive projection of her masculinity. Marcia Ochoa fittingly describes the Lieutenant Nun's ability to leave "at the drop of a hat" as a significant part of her masculinity (72). Having left a space designed to hold women in, Catalina is able to abandon cities and people as she sees fit.

Erauso shows masculine agency, not only by refusing Urquiza's proposition, but also by running from commitment and responsibility. Unlike a woman, Erauso's honor or financial stability does not depend on a marital union. Her perpetuation of the masculinity of the time period is that she exercises her right, as a perceived man, to choose not to follow through on matrimonial commitments. Masculinity is

indicative of the freedom of choice and free will. The blatant disregard for people who are not white Spaniards can be seen on various occasions. After being rescued from starvation, Erauso is taken in by a lady who she describes as “a mixed woman, daughter of a Spanish man and an Indian woman.”⁸⁷ The lady provides Catalina with a bed, clothing, food, and even a job as manager of her estate. Erauso considered this caring treatment as enticement to marry the woman’s daughter. True to imperial character, Catalina exhibits a strong sense of racial superiority by describing the daughter as, “ . . . black and ugly as the devil, the opposite of my preference, which was always in favor of pretty faces.”⁸⁸ Nora E. Jaffary suggests that “ . . . the propagation of Christianity served as justification for Europe’s initial domination of the New World and, once having established a presence in the Americas, for communicating the idea of European cultural superiority to its inhabitants” (7). Catalina goes along with the plans to marry only to delay the wedding for two months; ultimately abandoning the mother and daughter in a fashion that I choose to call a queer runaway groom. She is murderous and racist, both of which perpetuate the concept of Spanish power or New World masculinity.

The most widely cited and remembered episode of alleged desire or the more popular yet potentially erroneous categorization, homoerotic interaction, can be discovered when Catalina switches masters yet again, and, thanks to the money, clothing, and letter of recommendation by part of Juan de Urquiza, puts herself at the service of Diego de Solarte, a rich merchant. In Lima Erauso again finds

⁸⁷ “una señora mestiza, hija de Español y de India” (122).

⁸⁸ “ . . . negra y fea como un diablo, contraria a mi gusto, que fue siempre de buenas caras” (122).

contentment, monetary gain, and professional responsibility. However, true to her vagabond masculine existence, nine months after beginning this new position, Erauso is asked to leave due to her inappropriate behavior with the sisters of Solarte's wife:

At the end of nine months, he told me I should make my living elsewhere; the reason being that there were two young ladies in the house, his wife's sisters, with whom I frolicked and teased. One in particular had taken a liking to me, and one day, when she and I were in the parlor, I had my head on her lap and she was combing my hair while I ran my hand up and down her legs. Diego de Solarte happened to pass by the window, and saw us through the grate, just as she was telling me I should go to Potosí and seek my fortune, and that we could be married.⁸⁹

Although the physical element of this episode certainly attracts queer attention, the interaction between Catalina and the other woman is difficult if not impossible to decode. The relationship is clearly physical, yet the coquetry to which we are exposed is limiting. Catalina tells us that she played and frolicked with this woman. Due to the lack of details regarding the specifics of this interaction as well as the nature of the relationship and motives behind their playful flirtation, it could even be described, if only one-sided from Erauso's perspective, as a romantic friendship.

Catalina wrote or at least dictated the story of her life *a posteriori*. For this reason,

⁸⁹ Al cabo de nueve meses me dijo que buscasse mi vida en otra parte; y fue la causa que tenía en casa dos doncellas hermanas de su mujer, con las cuales, y sobre todo con una que más se me inclinó, solía yo más jugar y triscar. Y un día, estando en el estrado peinándome acostado en sus faldas, y andándole en las piernas, llegó acaso a una reja por donde nos vio y oyó a ella que me decía que fuese al Potosí y buscasse dineros, y nos casaríamos" (109).

just as with Santa Teresa's *vida*, it is safe to assume that she does not include each detail of her experience within the narration, but rather provides the details that could portray her in a positive light. Any behavior that could be deemed sinful would have been avoided in her transcription.

Catalina is able to maintain both sexual purity as a man and avoid sodomy as a woman, two factors that will work in her favor upon revealing her anatomical identity later in the narration. Sodomy, although viewed as an atrocity between men, was also considered *contra natura* for women, yet was more forgivable due to the lack of an organ for penetration.⁹⁰ The Spanish reader or audience was accustomed to the transvested woman, but not to the sexually transgressive female.⁹¹ Catalina maintains an appropriate level of comfort within the early modern reader through what they would simply view as a popular theatrical convention of the period. Perhaps the question now is: Where can her masculinity be found in this episode? There is a bit of a departure between the relationship with this woman and that of Beatriz. As far as we can tell, there is some degree of reciprocity at least at the physical level. With respect to sexual orientation, Erauso's motives are simply unintelligible. Catalina could have been flirting as a way to maintain her male disguise. Equally so, we are unable to determine exactly what " . . . andándole en las piernas" is to mean in its entirety. It is impossible to confirm whether or not Erauso penetrated the woman with her fingers, or simply tickled her

⁹⁰Federico Garza Carvajal maintains that "Sodomy between women did not alter the economy of the creation, because there was no possibility of coitus involving dissipated semen, and unlike sodomy between men, sodomy between women did not directly offend the image of God" (54).

⁹¹ As Adrienne Martín affirms, there was neither proof nor denouncement of sexual transgression (37).

inner-thigh. Given the uncertainty of the sexual dynamic in this situation, the focus should center on what can be determined from this episode as it pertains to such an eccentric character. With this woman, Catalina does not have to flee at the mention of marriage. Her master takes this option away from her, leaving Erauso with no other choice but to participate in perhaps the most universal display of masculine performance, military service.

Catalina's most indisputable display of masculinity manifests in the form of military prowess. After being dismissed from her position under Solarte, Erauso feels that she has no other choice but to enter into the sphere of military service, "I found myself in an uncomfortable spot with no work. At that time, they were organizing six companies for Chile, and I joined one, signing on as a soldier, and received the allotted salary of two hundred eighty pesos."⁹² Her reaction to Solarte's dismissal is, in and of itself, indicative of masculinity.⁹³ The resourceful Catalina, yet again, has found a source of income, and after having changed from master to master, she finally enters fully into an undeniable representation of early modern masculine performance, the soldier. Solarte later regrets his decision upon hearing that Erauso has become a soldier and offers to annul her enlistment. Catalina rejects this offer given her desire for movement, which I again equate with masculinity

⁹² "Hallábame desacomodado y muy remoto de favor. Estábase allí entonces levantando seis compañías para Chile; yo me llegué a una y senté plaza de soldado, y recibí luego doscientos ochenta pesos que me dieron de sueldo" (109).

⁹³ "Erauso es despedida y su solución al dilema es típica y románticamente masculina al perderse una relación sentimental: se inscribe como soldado y se marcha a la guerra . . ." (Martín 37). "Erauso is fired and her solution to the dilemma is typical and romantically masculine...she signs up as a soldier and goes off to war"

itself, “It was my desire to see the world.”⁹⁴ Catalina seems to be motivated by monetary advancement and the desire to move freely.

The Big Revelation: From Soldier to Monja Alférez

Since transitioning to the New World, Erauso has stabbed, fought, and killed on numerous occasions on behalf of her honor as a man. In this way, her masculinity is indisputable. Becoming a soldier propels Erauso into a world of continuous violence and brutality. Catalina’s life as a soldier offers a different image of the New World as well as of Spain than has been seen thus far in her narration. The imperial mindset is clearly present in the battles in which Erauso participates.

Once officially a Spanish soldier, fighting on behalf of the Spanish Crown for the conversion of the indigenous population, Erauso fully assimilates to *conquistadora* masculinity. In her warrior behavior, which is often described as exaggerated in that it represents an aspiration towards an unobtainable real or actual masculinity that can only be obtained by the phallus-bearing male, Erauso shows herself more brave, daring, and resilient than many of her fellow soldiers. Perry describes her *conquistadora* masculinity as follows, “Erauso engaged in many brawls . . . In these rituals of insult, quick retort, and armed response, Erauso acted out of warrior ethos that had become somewhat anachronistic in post-Reconquest Spain, but appeared very appropriate in the frontier settlements of the New World. Male honor required immediate defense . . . ” (401). Although it would seem that she

⁹⁴ “...era mi inclinación andar y ver mundo” (110).

could not reach an even greater level of New World masculinity, she surpasses many of her fellow *conquistadores* in her feats of bravery and military prowess.

Additionally, Catholic ideologies, an element that Catalina has abandoned up to this point, resurfaces when she reveals herself to the bishop of Guamanga and upon returning to Spain. From the Spanish perspective, the New World represented a kill-or-be-killed type of environment as is evidenced by the encounter with Reyes.

Catalina de Erauso acted out of necessity and in accordance with her self-established male honor and patriotism. While violence is the principal theme for many of her experiences in the New World, to avoid the death sentence for murder, Catalina is forced to relinquish her male identity and confess her anatomical condition. This confession represents the temporary death of her external masculine persona, yet rescues her from mortal punishment. In a sense, she trades physical death for the death of her perceived maleness.

In order to comprehend Erauso's transition from Spanish man to soldier, it is necessary to consider the brutal reality of the *conquistador*. If the critical scholarship dedicated to deciphering Erauso as a literary and historical figure viewed her as what she was prior to revealing herself to the bishop of Guamanga, an official soldier for the Spanish Crown, she would simply be viewed as any other *conquistador* of the period. Our knowledge of what she lacks dictates how we conceive her character. The focus on lack is a heterosexist interpretation of Catalina's historical presence. Disregarding Erauso as a *conquistador* creates a

biased interpretation of the historical veracity and value of the text. In her anthology entitled *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*, Monique Wittig states:

The straight mind develops a totalizing interpretation of history, social reality, culture, language, and all the subjective phenomena at the same time.

I can only underline the oppressive character that the straight mind is clothed in in its tendency to immediately universalize its production of concepts into general laws which claim to hold true for all societies, all epochs, all individuals (27).

Wittig's statement regarding the straight mind's molding of concepts into general laws independent of the time period and culture can be easily applied to the historical notion of who can be a *conquistador*. As far as the modern reader is concerned, one of the most universal yet unconscious laws for this important historical and political position is being a male. If one is not male, they simply could not be considered a *conquistador*.

The limiting interpretation of Catalina's convincing performance of *conquistador* masculinity perpetuates the necessity for a phallus in order to display personality characteristics and actions typically associated with maleness. Rainer H. Goetz thus argues, "... if it were not for the knowledge of the author's biological sex, the overwhelming majority of the experiences narrated in the *Vida i sucesos* could have been written by a man" (100). Goetz is clearly convinced of the validity of her masculinity, yet still can't separate Catalina's performance from maleness. Goetz then goes on to affirm:

... she presents herself as a stereotypical Golden Age male whose masculinity surpasses that of most of her male contemporaries. The majority of her violent altercations with other men originate from a seemingly overzealous preoccupation with male honor: she is quick to feel insulted or slighted, and equally quick to prove her manliness with a sword (100).

I question the concept of an “overzealous preoccupation” with male honor.

Ironically enough, even though Goetz points out that this text could have been written by a man, he seems to abandon this notion when commenting on Catalina’s desire to protect her masculine honor. If she were a man, he would not refer to her desire to protect and recuperate honor through violence as overzealous. The use of violence to recuperate honor can be seen in the *comedias* of the time period: *Las mocedades del Cid*, *El médico de su honra*, and many more.

Upon becoming a soldier, Catalina must defend two distinct forms of honor that are perpetually under attack: her honor as a Spanish man, and her imperial or patriotic honor. She defends her honor in the only way that was available and uses force as a means for achieving compliance and conversion among the indigenous population.⁹⁵ Catalina comments, “We were always armed . . . due to the heavy invasion of the Indians.”⁹⁶ The Lieutenant Nun perpetuates warrior masculinities by utilizing weapons to ensure the cooperation of the natives. Her reference to the

⁹⁵ Bruce A. Erickson describes the motive behind the necessary violence in the New World, “the military objectives of expansion and defence cannot be separated from the religious aim of converting the native population and creating a Christian society . . . pacification and conversion required the violence that defined and shaped the frontier . . . In the absence of stable institutions, power, expressed through the violence of discipline, was the predominant language spoken between peoples” (31).

⁹⁶ “estábamos siempre con las armas en la mano . . . por la gran invasión de los indios . . .” (113).

invasion of Indians demonstrates her imperialistic mentality in terms of rights to land and movement.

The most significant episode of imperial violence is during the battle of Valdivia where she is awarded the title that will eventually form part of her eternal epithet, *alférez*.⁹⁷ Catalina participates in this battle under interesting pretenses. Upon entering Chile, Erauso meets her brother, captain Miguel de Erauso, who had left San Sebastián for military service when she was just two years old. When hearing Catalina's place of birth, he reacts, "He let go of his pen and hugged me, asking questions about his parents, sisters, and about his little sister, Catalina the nun."⁹⁸ She spends the next three years eating at his table and serving as his soldier without being discovered. Additionally, Catalina often accompanied Miguel to the house of his mistress and at times she would go alone. After being warned not to do this, Catalina goes alone to visit the woman, only to find herself in a violent altercation with her brother. She is then banished to Paicabí, her intended destination with her previous captain prior to working under her brother.

In this locale, Catalina engages in full-on warfare. Nora E. Jaffary states, "In both history and popular culture, warfare is understood as the archetypal male activity, and frontiers are depicted as the definitive male space" (29). Through Catalina's experiences as a warrior, we as Erauso critics today are able to determine

⁹⁷ The order in which I discuss certain instances of violence and brutality is not necessarily the order in which it appears in the narration. Due to the episodic nature of the text, I have grouped a few episodes together that are not chronologically accurate for the purpose of demonstrating topical ideas.

⁹⁸ "soltó la pluma y me abrazó, y fue haciendo preguntas por su padre y madre, y hermanas, y por su hermanita Catalina la monja" (112).

how masculinity was constructed and awarded in a militaristic fashion. The indigenous take the town of Valdivia, and with it, the Spanish imperial honor, “It wasn’t going well. They killed many people: captains, my lieutenant, and they took our flag.”⁹⁹ This is Catalina’s defining moment of militaristic prowess as she and two others take off after the flag, not only to recuperate this inanimate object, but, in turn, their honor as soldiers:

... trampling and slashing, receiving some wounds in return. Before long, one of the three of us fell dead, and the two of us continued. We arrived at the flag, but then the other went down, wounded by a lance. My leg was badly wounded, but I killed the chief who was carrying the flag and snatched it away ... I was badly hurt, with three arrows in me and a gash from a lance in my left shoulder ... I fell from my horse. A few men came to my side, among them my brother¹⁰⁰

Following the recuperation of the flag, Catalina has contributed so completely to masculine notions of bravery that she is named *alférez* as a reward for her service. Later on in the narration, we even see that Erauso survives the elements and hunger while her anatomically male companions perish.¹⁰¹ Erauso’s very survival perpetuates the concept of perseverance through hostile Indian territories as well

⁹⁹ “Nos fue mal y nos mataron mucha gente y capitanes, y a mi alférez, y llevaron la bandera” (113-14).

¹⁰⁰ ... atropellando y matando, y recibiendo daño: en breve cayó muerto uno de los tres. Proseguimos los dos. Llegamos a la bandera, cayó de un bote de lanza mi compañero. Yo recibí un mal golpe en una pierna, maté al cacique que la llevaba y quitésela... malherido y pasado de tres flechas y de una lanza en el hombro izquierdo ... caí luego del caballo. Acudieronme algunos, y entre ellos mi hermano ... (114).

¹⁰¹ “Seguimos la cordillera arriba ... sin topar ... en ... un bocado de pan, y rara vez agua, y algunas yerbezuelas y animalejos ...” (120). [“We ascended into the mountains ... we didn’t find even a mouthful of bread, and only rarely some water or a clump of herbs, or small animals ...”].

as the elements as something only the most masculine of figures could have been assumed to accomplish.

Little by little, Catalina de Erauso's violent demeanor becomes problematic. Now a lieutenant, her brutality and imperial mindset intensify on and off the battlefield. At this point in her narration, Erauso paints a more vivid picture of her masculine persona in all of its defects and vices. While staying in Concepción, the *alférez* enters with a fellow lieutenant into a gambling house, a common masculine vice. It is during a game that Catalina's companion accuses her of being a cuckold, or an otherwise effeminized man, an insult that is far worse than being a woman.¹⁰² After all, being a man represents a divinely elevated status to which women are physically incapable of aspiring. The female desire to match this level of elevation was understandable; however, an already divinely privileged male being accused of cuckoldry, is an affront that cannot go unpunished. Even worse than a woman is a man who allows a female to be the dominant party in the marriage. Despite the presence of various witnesses, and her friendship with the man, Catalina draws her sword to avenge this insult and is later arrested for the murder of her friend, a judge, and a lieutenant. Her reaction is yet another example of Halberstam's notion of women demonstrating a capacity to contribute to or perpetuate constructs of masculinity. She enjoys masculine privilege if only for a limited period and the consequences of being male.

¹⁰² "... fue corriendo el juego, y en una diferencia que se ofreció, presentes muchos alrededor, me dijo que mentía como cornudo: yo saqué la espada y entrécela por el pecho" (116). ["The game was running smoothly, when a misunderstanding presented itself, with many people around, my friend told me that I lied like a cuckold. I drew my sword and ran it into his chest"].

The turning point of this episode is when Juan de Silva requests that Erauso participate in a duel in which each man is to bring a partner. It turns out that Erauso kills her own brother in the struggle. Initially, Miguel de Erauso's presence serves as a narrative reminder of what Catalina lacks and from where she comes. If for a moment the reader is to forget about her anatomical structure, the mere mention of a character with a familial connection repaints the initial feminine image with which we are aware from the beginning of the narrative. Additionally, when her brother is present, there seems to be a strong element of competition, even more so than with other male companions and enemies. This can be seen when Catalina is banished to Paicabí. Miguel has the power and privilege associated with masculinity in that he is the source of his sister's banishment. When Catalina served as a threat to his relationship with the mistress, he saw to it that she was removed. This represents a power struggle between two men. The difference is in the varying degrees of power to which both have access. Through Miguel's death, in addition to witnessing the recuperation of her contribution to masculinity free from familial threat, we see a rare glimpse into Catalina's psyche, "I was stunned . . . they buried him . . . I watched from the choir . . . God knows how painful it was!"¹⁰³ This emotional reaction is one of the few moments that we see her extracted from the harsh and violent reality of the New World.

¹⁰³ "Yo quedé atónito . . . lo enterraron . . . viéndolo yo desde el coro, ¡sabe Dios con qué dolor!" (118). Goetz also mentions this short-lived insight on Catalina's interiority: "This episode is one of the few where she allows herself to express any personal feelings, mentioning the pain she felt at his burial" (98).

Catalina's continuous mixture of vice with personal honor in the gambling houses not only represents how her masculinity often manifested outwardly, but also the voluntary undoing of her masculine shell as a result of meeting the infamous Cid. Erauso meets this figure when she enters into the house of a friend to gamble, an episode in which she makes considerable effort to describe to the reader, "... the game was going well when a dark, hairy, tall, menacing man that everyone called *el Nuevo Cid* sat down next to me."¹⁰⁴ His very name, *el nuevo Cid*, draws on the medieval Spanish literary figure from *Cantar del mio Cid*, who epitomizes militaristic masculinity, bravery, and loyalty. The details involving the Cid's stature and virility serve as a parallel to his impending defeat at the hands of Catalina. Erauso describes the Cid as a dishonorable man in that he steals portions of her winnings and exits. In what seems like a challenge to her masculinity, the Cid returns and takes yet another amount of Catalina's money. With this second affront, she simply places her dagger on the table awaiting the third attempt, "I felt it coming, and stabbed his hand to the table with my dagger. I stood up, took out my sword, the others took out theirs, and then the Cid's friends joined in."¹⁰⁵ The violent response to the Cid's dishonor tips the scale of masculinity back in favor of Catalina, and, yet again, contributes to notions of modern masculinity by manifesting

¹⁰⁴ "... fue corriendo el juego; arrimóse a mí el Nuevo Cid, que era un hombre moreno, velloso, muy alto, que con la presencia espantaba, y llamábanle el Cid" (152).

¹⁰⁵ "Sentílo venir, y con la daga clavéle la mano contra la mesa. Levantéme, saqué la espada, sacáronla los presentes, acudieron otros amigos del Cid" (152).

masculine prowess through physical force. Ultimately, Erauso kills *el nuevo Cid*, initiating a chain reaction that leads directly to her first of two confessions.¹⁰⁶

Catalina de Erauso confesses her anatomical state on two different occasions. Her initial confession takes place after being severely wounded in the brawl with *el Cid*. The concerned citizens that took her for surgery were so unnerved by the condition of her soul that they would not allow for a surgeon before she confessed. She confesses her anatomical state to father Luis Ferrer de Valencia for fear of dying, “seeing that I was dying, I revealed the truth about myself.”¹⁰⁷ Although Ferrer is astonished, he absolves Erauso of her sins, and stays at her side for fourteen hours. While the twenty-first century reader eagerly awaits the revelation, there is never any mention of this priest again, nor are we informed of whether or not he divulged this information to anyone. Although this is the first moment in which she reveals the truth regarding her physically feminine anatomy, nothing of merit happens that would affect Erauso’s masculine persona. We are simply informed of the astonishment of the priest with no consequences for her transgressions. Ferrer does not attempt to force Erauso back into the submissive role that corresponds to her recently confessed physical state, but rather exhibits the same emotional reaction that a secular reader may have had. Notably, the initial confession is anticlimactic.

¹⁰⁶ “... caí en tierra echando un mar de sangre ... Yo me levanté con ansias de muerte, y vide al Cid a la puerta de la iglesia ... ‘Perro, ¿todavía vives?’ ... Tiróme una estocada y apartéla con la daga, y tiréle otra con tal suerte, que se la entré por la boca del estómago ... y cayó pidiendo confesión ... expiró luego” (153). [“I fell to the ground bleeding a sea of blood. I stood up, feeling like death, and saw The Cid standing by the church door ... ‘You dog! You’re still alive?’ ... he thrust at me with his blade and I blocked the blow with my dagger, and with some luck, I stabbed him in the soft spot of his stomach, and he fell to the ground, pleading to confess ... then he died.].

¹⁰⁷ “... viéndome yo morir, declaré mi estado” (153)

However, it is the second confession that leads to Catalina's international fame and mythification as a figure with both male and female characteristics.

As it turns out, masculinity and its often-violent manifestations have limitations within the legal sphere. Catalina's performance of *conquistadora* masculinity becomes problematic for the first time when she reveals exactly what she lacks. She comes out of the proverbial closet during an attempt to save her own life, and as a result, receives the other half of her epithet, *monja*, a technically undeserved title. It is from this point that she temporarily returns to her submissive feminine state. This fact begs the question: Did Catalina view her gender transitivity as sinful? Although Catalina as an ex-novitiate was surely familiar with the biblical prohibition of transvestism, revealing her anatomy was clearly based on the desire for survival. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this sinful behavior is that Catalina knew that upon revealing herself a woman, she could be saved from punishment. The revelation shows a clear knowledge of the male notion of feminine weakness during seventeenth-century Hispanic culture while simultaneously bringing out the limitations and benefits of Erauso's gender hybridity.

After recuperating, Erauso flees from Cuzco to Guamanga to escape the law as well as the Cid's friends looking to avenge his death. The narrative tension grows greater on her trip as she manages to evade these men. Upon her arrival in Guamanga, true to her masculine vices, she goes to a gambling house. It is in this locale that the law discovers Erauso and continues pursuing her until she is taken in and protected by the bishop of Guamanga, "You are safe with me and I give you my

word that I will get you out of here safely, even if it costs me my life.”¹⁰⁸ Catalina’s entire narration up to this point has built towards this episode with the bishop. His house and influence serve as a fortress to the *alférez*. After all, it is this man of the cloth that stands between Catalina and certain mortal punishment. With the relief that accompanies this protective gesture, Erauso narrates certain insignificant details to the bishop until feeling what she describes as divinely given tranquility. This sense of comfort causes her to confess all:

Sir, the truth is this: I am a woman. I was born in such and such place, and am the daughter of this woman and that man, who placed me at such an age in a convent with a certain aunt. I grew up there, took the habit, became a novice, and before taking my vows, I left the convent . . . dressed up, cut my hair . . . embarked . . . killed . . . wounded . . . wreaked havoc . . . until stopping in this moment.¹⁰⁹

Erauso does not enter into details regarding her parents, aunt, place of birth, the name of the convent, or specifically how she has sinned within the text. The most descriptive element of her confession is the most relevant to her safety from punishment: “soy mujer.” In revealing this, the deeply moved bishop, crying profusely, still not completely convinced, will undo everything that Catalina has constructed in an attempt to restore the divinely appointed order of gender and performativity.

¹⁰⁸ “Que seguro está conmigo, y le doy palabra de sacarle a salvo aunque me cueste cuanto soy” (159).

¹⁰⁹ Señor, la verdad es ésta: que soy mujer, que nací en tal parte, hija de fulana y sutana; que me entraron de tal edad en tal convento, con fulana mi tía; que allí me crié; que tomé el hábito; que tuve noviciado; que estando para profesar, por tal ocasión me salí . . . me vestí, me corté el cabello . . . me embarqué . . . maté, herí . . . maleé . . . hasta venir a parar en lo presente . . . (160).

Not only have we seen Catalina's awareness of how masculinity is constructed through her violent yet masculine outbursts, but now, she demonstrates her familiarity with how masculine performance is policed upon addressing the bishop's doubts regarding her condition, "Sir, it is the truth. If it will remove all doubts, other women may examine me. I will submit to this."¹¹⁰ Catalina suggests this physical invasion of the body in order to prove that she is a born woman. Catalina acknowledges seventeenth-century classifications of gender in that she transforms her desire into discourse, which Foucault describes as a new imperative established during the Counter Reformation (21). This clear knowledge confirms the legitimacy of Foucault's rejection of the repressive hypothesis regarding issues of sexuality and the body.¹¹¹ Erauso demonstrates a familiarity with gender norms that ultimately relies on bodies as the most basic manner of categorization. Up until this point in her text, she has not converted her identity into a discursive element that relies on the physical body to confirm its veracity. Once her intact hymen is confirmed, she is provided with common comforts associated with feminine needs, such as a decent room, and protection, all provided by her new protector, the bishop of Guamanga, who views her as one of the "most notable

¹¹⁰ "Señor, es así, y si quiere salir de duda...por experiencia de matronas, yo llana estoy" (161).

¹¹¹ Foucault rejects the idea that discourses on sexuality were repressed prior to the nineteenth century. In fact, he maintains that there was a "scheme for transforming sex into discourse" that "had been devised long before in an ascetic and monastic setting. The seventeenth century made it a rule for everyone" (20). Wiesner-Hanks goes on to affirm, "Whether the impetus came from the papacy or other church and secular officials, regulating the sexual lives of both clergy and lay people was a key part of Catholic . . . reform . . ." (131).

persons of this world.” It is at this point that Catalina informs us of the rise of her fame, yet does not explain how her case is so quickly divulged or by whom.¹¹²

After revealing her identity for the second time, Catalina is officially incapable of contributing to masculinity, as she has been forced to return to the type of conventual enclosure from which she fled in the Iberian Peninsula some twenty years prior. This is the moment when Catalina achieves celebrity status. In fact, it is so extreme that upon traveling to the convent of *Santa Clara de Guamanga*, she feels that the entire town is in the street to receive her, and has no choice but to avoid the main entrance. Additionally, not only did she receive frequent visits from the bishop, but even among the nuns, she is a celebrity as they received her with lighted candles and hugs. Catalina comments on her reentrance into the convent and her reputation, “News of this spread like wild fire.”¹¹³ The general public knowledge of Erauso’s double identity is significant because it serves as evidence that women could alter certain standards of gender if their virtue remained intact. The most interesting and perhaps even the most queer facet of Catalina’s revelation is the reaction of the men and women religious as well as the townspeople. The astonishment, reverence, and curiosity of the people do not correspond to the biblical principles that maintain the detestable nature of those who cross-dress; but, shows the understanding that Catalina has violated the gender norm. The knowledge of this violation as well as the

¹¹² “Parece que el caso se divulgó, y era inmenso el concurso que allí acudió, sin poderse excusar la entrada a personajes, por más que yo lo sentía . . .” (161). [“It seems that word of my case had spread; the crowds grew immensely, and those of name and position had to be let in, no matter how much I disliked it . . .”].

¹¹³ “Corrió la noticia de este suceso por todas partes” (162).

loophole that presents itself in Erauso's narration, speaks volumes about the discourse on sex and gender during the seventeenth-century.

From Papal and Royal Approval to . . .

In 1620, after five months of enclosure, Catalina's conventual life in *Santa Clara de Guamanga* comes to a halt after the sudden death of the bishop of Guamanga. She then comes under the protection of the archbishop of Lima, don Bartolomé Lobo Guerrero, who allows her to choose her new convent where she stays for more than two years, *la Santísima Trinidad*. However, after this period of time, the Lieutenant Nun's life drastically changes yet again when news arrives from Spain proclaiming that she never officially transitioned from novitiate to nun, nullifying her current position in her second conventual enclosure in the New World. Catalina's immediate exit from the religious world paradoxically marks her entrance into royal, and even more confusingly, papal favor. Erauso sets sail for Spain in 1624, in which time she readopts her masculine persona, cutting a man's face during a gambling game. Upon arriving in Spain, the spread of her fame surfaces and she must avoid hoards of people at every turn. Catalina's new life in Europe is very similar to that of the New World, fraught with intermittent arrests, one under the accusation of being a Spanish spy, robberies, insults, and of course, murder in defense of her Spanish honor.¹¹⁴ This represents Erauso's transition back

¹¹⁴ While in Italy, Catalina comes across an Italian who insists that Spaniards are arrogant: "Según eso será soberbio usted, que los españoles lo son . . . Yo los veo a todos que son una *merda*" (172). ["Based on that, you must be arrogant. This is the way of the Spaniard . . . I view you all as jack assess"].

into contributing to masculinity and how it is constructed by violent force. Finally she comes before the king in 1625 to request a lifetime pension worth eight hundred crowns for services rendered to her country in the conquest of Chile. While the approval of the royal pension may seem odd to the contemporary reader, Catalina's military service facilitates her communication with the King and Pope.

The most perplexing element of this narration is not Catalina de Erauso's identity or behavior, but rather the role of Pope Urban VIII as enabler of her queerness. With the bishop of Guamanga, Catalina was forced to reenter the convent and abandon her masculine persona. In contrast, the Pope allows her to live life as a man. Just as with the bishop of Guamanga, in the midst of her confession, there is but one relevant detail in her case, that of her virginity. In granting her this permission, at least with this particular event, the Pope has indirectly promoted the idea that if you deny yourself sexual expression, you can be as queer as you desire. Catalina was enabled by the Catholic Church to continue being a man, independent of her murderous, vengeful, and vice-filled past. However, with regard to her indiscretions as a male warrior, the Pope directly states that she must avoid behavior that could be offensive.

Within queer theory, religion is most often a repressive institution. In viewing ourselves as sexually liberated, it is our tendency to view the early modern Spanish Catholic Church as the opposite. In the case of the Lieutenant Nun, there is a line of intersection between Catholicism and queerness in that the Church is the queering agent given Catalina's compliance with biblical prescriptions of feminine

virtue. The public knowledge of her condition as *la monja alférez* causes the Pope to set a new imperative, which causes a shift in Catalina's ability to perform New World masculinity to her fullest potential. Provided that the Lieutenant Nun complies with this newly established restriction, the Pope has re-conceptualized the Catholic stance on gender transgression, and for Catalina, provides a mechanism to produce a type of queerness. While it may seem that Catalina was separated from Catholic dogma, she actually participates wholly in a practice that works in favor of the spread of Catholic influence, confession. Foucault's conception of western man as a "confessing animal" is important because it highlights human kind's dependence on absolution in exchange for confession of one's wrongdoings.

Although viewing Catalina as a queer agent seemingly negates Catholic influence over her persona, in actuality, it is this very influence that pushes her to confess, forces her back into the feminine docile role, and then thrusts her back into the masculine sphere that she clearly favors. This cyclical system reinforces the necessity for self-examination. Catalina's three primary confessions gain her notoriety and survival (Bishop of Guamanga), money and militaristic honor (King Felipe), and papal permission to continue life as a man (Pope Urban VIII). Her private confessions have produced a public discourse on gender constructs, which are then used in favor of the Empire and the Church. Given that she maintains her feminine virtue and kills members of the indigenous population, the Church converts what is today interpreted as a transgressive woman into propaganda for reconversion. What modern readers view as a wild form of gender transgression,

the Catholic Church reconceptualized into a normative and useful source of Catholic ideology by controlling how she is able to practice her masculinity.

Conclusion

Catalina de Erauso is a compelling case in literary, historical, and queer studies. From a critical perspective, even while taking past and present ideologies into consideration, it is inevitable that we categorize her behavior and identity at least to a certain extent. Whether she was lesbian, transgender, or simply a transvested heterosexual woman cannot be claimed definitively. What can be confirmed is her clear appropriation of the male space, her dependency on confession as a safe-haven, and Pope Urban's involvement in establishing a new gender imperative exclusively for the Lieutenant Nun. These elements all speak to the fluidity of gender and performativity during seventeenth-century Spain and the New World. Although the liberated twenty-first-century sexual being cannot help but view early modern sexuality as repressed, this modern construction of sexual practice and gender performativity serves as a form of repression to eccentric historical characters such as the Lieutenant Nun. The Catholic Church did not seek to reverse Catalina's desire to live as a man, nor to punish her sins committed in the New World. In a sense, the Church queers Catalina even further by giving an official stamp of approval for continued gender transgression. The Pope extends an open invitation to continue the practice of masculinity with accompanying rules, thereby filtering and also appropriating Erauso's eccentric male and female personas.

Catalina's willingness to confess her female identity both saves her life and enables her to continue in the space of male dominance.

CHAPTER IV

Sor Juana the Intellectual

“... when the slave, protesting her humility and unworthiness, outwits the master, the latter is forced into a dangerous acknowledgement of defeat that puts hierarchical authority at risk.”¹¹⁵

“Am I perchance a heretic? And if I were, could I become saintly solely through coercion?”¹¹⁶

For the early modern nun, one of the safest avenues by which to exercise authority over clergymen was through the instructive discourse used to describe mystic experience. Santa Teresa de Ávila took advantage of this sole entry point for women into religious and instructive rhetoric. In contrast, outside of the cloister, Catalina de Erauso rejected the roles of daughter, wife, and nun, and elevated her social condition by living the life of a Spanish man. Given the circumstances of Santa Teresa's dogmatically acceptable use of mystic practice and Catalina's fame as a usable source of Catholic propaganda, the Church deemed their entrance into spaces of authority as gender normative and non-heretical. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651-1695) problematizes these situationally acceptable forms of female authority in the sacred and secular spaces by fusing the two environments. As a writing nun and intellectual, she encountered a great deal of ecclesiastic resistance, as her simultaneous involvement in Church and Court violated the ideal of monastic enclosure and absolute separation from worldly influence.

¹¹⁵ Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (39).

¹¹⁶ From Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's letter dismissing her confessor, Antonio Núñez de Miranda (500).

The life of Sor Juana exemplifies the opposition of obedience and transgression and demonstrates female acknowledgement of the relationship between gender and power dynamics in seventeenth-century New Spain. Her appropriation of authority is the most dangerous type of female transgression from within Church hierarchy in that she corrects male understanding of scripture by way of intellect. Scriptural interpretation was an area reserved exclusively for men. Her entrance into the area of letters was a violation not only of what men believed to be the limits of female mental ability, but also of monastic norms.¹¹⁷ Sor Juana subverted the conventions of the cloister in two primary ways. First, even if at the request of powerful patrons, the nun entered into the public male space of intellectualism via literary production. Second, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, a friend and spiritual authority, convinced Sor Juana to express her disagreement with the sermon of an influential priest. In the midst of hierarchical disapproval of her activity in the public sphere, Sor Juana's *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea* responds to the attack on her role as obedient nun. Despite her sporadic use of humility rhetoric,

¹¹⁷ While her sonnets and plays are not germane to this chapter, in order to comprehend Sor Juana's reputation as a female writer and famous figure with access to public discourse, it is important to point out the nun's literary production particularly in her decade of splendor, the 1680s. Already firmly indoctrinated in the Catholic faith, at the age of eight, she composed a poem dedicated to the Eucharist. As an adolescent and adult, she composed various celebratory and funerary sonnets often for members of court. By today's literary standards, many of her poems had strong amorous and/or feminist undertones as can be seen in "Hombres necios" ("Foolish Men") or "Detente sombra" ("Halt, Shadow"). "Primero sueño" ("First Dream"), Juana's longest and, as the nun alleges, her only willfully written poem, capitalizes on the capacity for human intellect. In her most famous dramatic work, "Los empeños de una casa" [1683] ("The Trials of a Noble House"), de la Cruz paints a vivid picture of the courtly frustrations of love. Among Sor Juana's other famous works are, the sacramental play "El divino narciso" [1689] ("The Divine Narcissus"), and various *villancicos* (carols) and *loas* (verses written before the first act of a play). In this chapter, I will only focus on *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea*. I use this text as my sole source of analysis for Sor Juana's empowerment because it is her only known autobiographical work. Additionally, the text serves as a document of her defense of intellect and simultaneously adheres to the *vida espiritual* genre.

she uses the text as a corrective tool for the Institution-wide misinterpretation of the Pauline injunction for female silence and the male mischaracterization of her intentions as an erudite nun.

The Catholic Church temporarily tolerated Sor Juana's entrance into the male dominated world of writing for a period because her literary success provided financial support to her convent.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, her public power was temporary and depended greatly on her compliance with the wishes of the religious and secular authorities with power over her. The following pages analyze Sor Juana's rise to power and her fall in the context of her place in the church hierarchy. In viewing the nun's articulation of power in *La Respuesta* as a cyclical system from its initial stage of powerlessness via the monastic norm of false humility, to empowerment based on a desire to correct male hierarchical understanding of scripture, and ending with a regression back to powerlessness, I am able to trace Sor Juana's trajectory to power in *La Respuesta*. Her greatest threat to the ecclesiastic hierarchy is her claim to be able to interpret God's will for herself via private study of worldly texts.

Critics have studied the works of Sor Juana from the theoretical perspectives of feminist studies, religion, autobiography, and multiculturalism. *La Respuesta* is a work that allows the reader to clearly separate Sor Juana's contradictory roles. A seventeenth-century text declaring the worthiness of females approximates what the modern critic associates with the feminist movement. Accordingly, the

¹¹⁸ Sor Juana began writing as a nun in 1674 and wrote continuously until around 1690 following the publication of *La carta atenagórica*.

traditional feminist approach aligns with Electa Arenal's reading of *La Respuesta* as "an essential document of seventeenth-century feminism" (174). Nonetheless, the variation in Sor Juana feminist scholarship continues to evolve. Stephanie Merrim proposes an interpretation of the nun's persona that conceives her in a two-fold manner: as a woman who writes and as a writing woman (21). In viewing the nun as merely an "exceptional woman," Sor Juana critics underestimate the value of the author's contribution to literature.

In some senses, Octavio Paz makes the opposite argument and claims that the nun moves towards masculinization, only to then opt for the advocacy of women, given that she can only aspire to be like men by writing and not actually transform into a man, "That 'like' is a bridge and, simultaneously, the sign of distance that cannot be bridged. That is why . . . she . . . turns against men, defends women, and anticipates modern feminism" (112). Paz suggests that Sor Juana's defense of women is largely based on her inability to become a man. Due to anatomical lack, the critic posits that she settled to defend the gender in which she was trapped.

In order to understand the full weight of Sor Juana's *La Respuesta* as a textual negotiation of pastoral authority, it is vital to contextualize her life and position historically within the complex social, economic, and religious strati of New Spain's Church and Court. In sharing her journey to literacy, Sor Juana reveals her identity as gender-divergent and defiant from the beginning. Although she is known as the first prolific female writer of Latin America, very little biographical information is

known about her. Born an illegitimate *criolla* in Nepantla, Mexico, Juana Inés de Asbaje y Santillana was a self-described autodidact and child prodigy. Her first biographer, father Diego Calleja, who corresponded with her in her later life, describes her as learning to read “in a flash” at an early age, calling books “her most intimate and familiar companions.”¹¹⁹ As outlined in *La Respuesta*, at the age of three, the nun coaxed her sister’s instructor into teaching her to read and later tried to convince her mother to allow her to cross dress so she could attend university in Mexico. Her fervor for learning reached such an extreme that while learning Latin, Sor Juana would cut her hair as punishment for not realizing her language goals. Without a father in the household, she favored her grandfather, a man with a large library. According to Octavio Paz, this library symbolized Sor Juana’s access to a masculine world unavailable to the women of her family and even to most men: the sphere of intellectualism, accessible only to clerics and scholars (79). This access to the public realm of learning serves as a parallel to Sor Juana’s participation via intellect in a more exclusive ecclesiastic space later in her life.

The definitive characteristic of Sor Juana’s power and longevity in the masculine sphere is the duality of her experience as both monastically private and intellectually public. As a result of her reputation as a female genius, in 1664, five years before taking monastic vows, Sor Juana joined the viceregal court as a lady-in-waiting to the wife of the Marquis de Mancera, Leonor Carreto. She participated fully

¹¹⁹ “de corrido . . . su más íntimo y familiar comercio” (17, 28).

in the appropriate social festivities and wrote at the behest of her patrons.¹²⁰ The relationships with members of court undoubtedly underwrote her later freedoms as a writing nun. Despite Sor Juana's reputation as beautiful, talented, and intelligent, for unconfirmed reasons the nun withdrew from court in 1667. Many women entered the cloister either to avoid marriage or to pursue a life more tailored to their personal interests. In theory, the vows of enclosure, obedience, chastity, and poverty were crucial to all orders. However, these tenets were more strictly enforced in some orders more than others. Sor Juana entered the convent of St. Joseph of the Discalced Carmelite Order, known for its strict adherence to self-mortification, fasting, and prayer; she quickly left due to illness. In 1669 the convent of St. Jerome of the Hieronymite Order provided her with a more comfortable lifestyle compared to that of the Carmelites. The new order afforded Sor Juana a servant, a two-story cell, a library, and visitors, which seemingly violates the vows of enclosure and poverty and granted her access to the public. The mutually beneficial relationship between Sor Juana and the convent of St. Jerome played a crucial role in her access to the secular space.

Convents depended greatly on the patronage of the wealthy in order to maintain their lifestyles. In other words, the survival of religious institutions in New

¹²⁰ In order to test the extent of Juana's intelligence, the Marquis organized a panel of scholars from various fields (History, Philosophy, Mathematics, etc.) to determine whether or not her intelligence was a result of being well read or if she also possessed the natural gift of logic. The result of this event deemed her the most intelligent female in New Spain. Sor Juana's powerful admirers at Court, such as the Marquise de la Laguna published a great deal of her work in Spain, garnering her world fame as the *Décima Musa* (The Tenth Muse) and *La Fénix Americana* (The American Phoenix). The second epithet proves her intellectual and creative worth in the Spanish-speaking world as it places her in the same literary category as the famous playwright, Lope de Vega, *el fénix de los ingenios* ("The Phoenix of Wits").

Spain was directly related to a thriving and wealthy court. Asunción Lavrin maintains that this dependency was due to economic struggle and that the seventeenth century had large economic fluctuations due to irregularities in mine production:

Within this economic frame there was a definitive formation of an economic elite, possessing vast fortunes, whose members were general sponsors of the Church and particularly of the feminine institutions. Feminine enclosures depended almost exclusively on individual or family philanthropy . . .

Sponsors . . . were heirs to a hierarchical society in which religion provided spaces for protecting socially and racially elite women.¹²¹

This perpetuation of hierarchy affected Sor Juana in two key ways. In order to receive support she had to creatively prostrate herself to the literary whims of the members of court as well as the Church. Moreover, should she ever fall out of favor with her supporters in court, any deviance from her role as a nun would be subject to harsh scrutiny and potential punishment by church authorities. Sor Juana's position as a nun with access to the public became increasingly difficult to maintain due to what Electa Arenal refers to as the "conflicting redefinitions" of rule and fascination with hierarchies (VIII). Although the Church often did not always approve of Sor Juana writing at the request of court members, St. Jerome thrived

¹²¹ "Dentro de este encuadre económico se verificó la formación de una élite económica, poseedora de grandes fortunas, cuyos miembros fueron los patronos de la Iglesia en general y de las fundaciones femeninas en particular. Esa clase de hacendados, mineros y mercaderes estuvo fuertemente ligada a la Iglesia y le proporcionó los capitales necesarios para fundaciones . . . Los claustros femeninos dependieron casi exclusivamente de esa filantropía individual o familiar de la élite . . . Los patronos . . . fueron los perpetuadores de una sociedad jerárquica en la cual la religión proveyó nichos para la protección de la mujer de la élite social y racial" (36-7).

through the financial support of her admirers. Not only did her reputation provide money for the convent, but also, according to Pamela Kirk, the institution garnered a great deal of fame: the nun's "move from the court to the convent allowed her to continue to study and be able to accept commissions to write because they enhanced the reputation of her convent" (23). Her access to court served as a financial resource to St. Jerome, yet, also proved to be a threat to ecclesiastical novo-Hispanic giants such as Francisco Aguiar y Seijas, archbishop and the highest spiritual authority in New Spain, Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, close friend and Bishop of Puebla, and Antonio Núñez de Miranda, her longtime spiritual director and Censor for the Tribunal of New Spain's Holy Office.

Sor Juana's empowerment depended on tolerance from the hierarchical system that characterized the Spanish Empire. The relationship of power-giver and recipient only stretched as far as the nun's obedience and recognition of her role in the gendered system of dominance. Her influence became problematic given the ultimate control that the ecclesiastic hierarchy had over the freedom of its nuns. In light of her religious vocation, the Church determined the limitations of her feminine agency. Ultimately, Sor Juana was a failure at embodying the monastic convention of holy ignorance and refused to participate in the only institutionally acceptable role in which nuns were permitted to contribute to religion through writing, that of the contemplative mystic. Contrarily, taking part in a dangerous game of corrective discourse, Sor Juana's authority manifested in her public intellectual rebuke of a well known priest.

Despite Sor Juana's high output of writing during the 1680s, the publication of her critique of *Sermão do mandato*, written forty years earlier by highly acclaimed Portuguese Jesuit priest António Vieira about the *finezas*, or greatest gifts of Christ to humankind, marked the beginning of the end of her freedom as a writer and led to her public reputation as a transgressive nun. Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz (1637-1699), a close friend, and by virtue of his hierarchical position as bishop, spiritual authority to Sor Juana, insisted that she officially write her opinions regarding the sermon's weak points and then published the critique in 1690 without her consent. He also added a new title, *La carta atenagórica* or "The Letter Worthy of Athena" and a prefatory letter using the pseudonym Filotea, in which he admonished her pursuit of worldly intellectual stimulation and encouraged the nun to be more like the archetypal mystic female religious, Santa Teresa de Ávila. *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea* or *The Response to Sister Philotea*, written one year later in 1691 and published posthumously in 1700, is Sor Juana's response to her friend's admonishment: a public defense of her pursuit of knowledge.¹²² The act of complying with Fernández's request to critique the sermon was a double-edged sword; had she disobeyed, she would have rebelled against church authority. However, in her obedience, Sor Juana initiated a power struggle between female and Institution that eventually led to her obligatory renunciation of writing all together.¹²³

¹²² *La Respuesta* was published in Madrid by Manuel Ruiz de Murga.

¹²³ The ultimate consequence for entering the male space of intellect and correction was to renounce her life of scholarly pursuit in 1693. One year before her death in 1695, Sor Juana assumed the appropriate position of the humble nun by rededicating her life to the cloister, and named herself the

The Problem with Letters

Although a letter is often intended to be private, epistolary texts can quickly become public property. Considering Sor Juana's role, both as a lettered woman and as a writer of letters, is key in comprehending her ultimate silence. She wrote three letters that contributed largely to her image within the Church as a danger to the Institution. The nun addressed the first letter to Antonio Núñez de Miranda in 1682, dismissing him as her confessor; the second, *La carta atenagórica*, was the critique of Vieira written at the request of Fernández, and the third, *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea*, took the form of self preservation and defense against the public attack on her character. Each of these documents serves as public evidence of Sor Juana's monastic heterodoxy and traces the trajectory of her appropriation and subsequent renunciation of power.

Núñez, Aguiar y Seijas, and Fernández all controlled Sor Juana at different points in her life and demanded that she conform to a more traditional female monastic role. Antonio Núñez de Miranda, one of Sor Juana's earliest spiritual directors and detractors, disagreed with her involvement in courtly life. Electa Arenal and Amanda Powell describe Núñez as "extremely ascetic . . . For him . . . gender determined duty as well as destiny; the use of reason was an exclusively masculine privilege" (5). A writer himself, the Censor wrote multiple treatises on the appropriate behavior of women in the monastic setting. Kathleen Myers highlights Núñez's extremist ideologies by highlighting his departure from the Church's notion

worst of all women in her own blood, "I have been and continue being the worst woman in existence. I ask all my sisters for forgiveness . . . I, the world's worst" / " . . . he sido y soy la peor que ha habido. A todas pido perdón . . . Yo, la peor del mundo" (*Obras Completas* 876).

of nuns as “Brides of Christ,” maintaining that they should consider themselves not as brides, but rather as “widows of Christ,” dedicating themselves solely to conventual life (98). This metaphoric death from the world was assumed to aid the nun’s relationship with the divine. Sor Juana’s clear advocacy for female education within the convent and her activity external to the cloister conflicted with her director’s role as a traditionalist in favor of extreme self-denial and enclosure, and thus engendered a turbulent relationship between confessor and penitent. The Censor was not subtle in his disagreement with Sor Juana’s role as a writing nun and according to his penitent’s letter of dismissal, he took multiple opportunities to publicly scorn her activities.¹²⁴

Núñez’s views of writing as a male activity, coupled with his knowledge of the livelihood of the convent as dependent on the maintenance of a congenial relationship with members of court created a tension that led to his dismissal as Sor Juana’s confessor. Just as with Santa Teresa de Ávila and her refusal to take on a confessor who did not share her perspective on the benefits of mystic practice, it was Sor Juana’s prerogative to dismiss a spiritual director who did not understand her intellectualized path to godliness. Nonetheless, Sor Juana is surprisingly direct and polarizing in her letter to her spiritual authority, addressing the idea of her responsibility to her patrons as an institution-wide struggle, not only related to her own fame:

¹²⁴ “Various persons have informed me . . . you denounce my actions with such bitter exaggeration as to suggest a public scandal . . .” (495).

What fault was it of mine that Their Excellencies were pleased with me? . . .
 Could I regret their honoring me with their visits? Y.R. knows very well I
 could not, as you could not during the time of Their Excellencies the Marquis
 and Marquise de Mancera, for on many occasions I have heard Y.R. complain
 of the duties which attendance on Their Excellencies caused you to miss . . .
 (498).

Sor Juana equates her experience with that of her confessor. In a sense, she
 equalizes the two, which suggests that men and women in monasticism can share a
 similar position. This is precisely the type of gender likening discourse which Núñez
 desired to eradicate in all nuns, particularly his most prized and celebrated.
 Asunción Lavrin draws attention to Núñez's dedication and loyalty to Sor Juana's
 vocation as a one-sided effort in that he supported her both morally and financially
 without receiving the desired outcome in return.¹²⁵ Despite a nun's prerogative to
 choose a confessor as she saw fit, dismissing the Censor of the Inquisition likely did
 not improve Sor Juana's chance for continued involvement in both the private and
 public spaces. The nun's letter of dismissal details her reasoning for breaking with
 her confessor and highlights Núñez's key complaint about his penitent: her

¹²⁵ Given that Sor Juana had no familial support, Núñez negotiated the payment of her dowry for entry into the convent with a wealthy member of court. Despite Núñez's moral and financial involvement in Sor Juana's success as a Hieronymite nun, he was unable to control the outcome of his investment. Lavrin opines that "Father Antonio invested much hope in Sor Juana. He spent a considerable amount on her profession, inviting this flower of the viceregal court . . . It's understandable that he would be disappointed with Sor Juana's secular writing, and according to his biographer, he did everything in his power to hinder her fame." ["El padre Antonio tenía muchas esperanzas cifradas en SJ. Se gastó una suma considerable en su profesión, invitó a la flor de la corte virreinal . . . Es comprensible que se sintiera decepcionado con la escritura secular de SJ, y según su biógrafo hizo todo lo que pudo por estorbar 'la publicidad' . . ." (59-60)].

inappropriate involvement in the public sphere, an issue that would later resurface in Fernández's preface of the *Carta atenagórica*.¹²⁶

Just as Núñez's perspective on the nun's participation in literary production outside the convent is clear in her letter, so too is Sor Juana's ideology on female intellect. Despite the nun's harsh tone, she is careful to agree with her confessor in stating the inappropriate nature of men serving as teachers to women in that it provokes an impure exchange. In an attempt to justify her independent study of secular texts, Sor Juana acknowledges the mixture of women with men in the school setting as a detriment to feminine honor, "... for I am not unaware that to study publicly in schools is not seemly for a woman's honor, because this gives occasion for familiarity with men, and is sufficient reason for barring them from public studies" (498). In this way, Sor Juana astutely appeals to the Catholic concern with feminine virtue; thus, protecting the genesis, intention, and continuation of her scholarly life. As a result of her virtuous inclination towards learning, Sor Juana declares that Núñez should not judge her so harshly given that her studies are exclusively a private endeavor. The concept of a natural and spiritual inclination towards learning which initially appears in this letter, later resurfaced as *La Respuesta's* primary argument. In a sense, her dismissal of Núñez could be considered a precursor to the defense of her role as a scholarly nun and author.

Sor Juana led an active literary life relatively free of controversy before writing her second incriminating letter, historically known as "The Letter Worthy of

¹²⁶ "My studies have not been to the harm or detriment of any person having been so extremely private . . . but I have learned only from myself and my work . . . but private and individual study, who has forbidden that to women?" (498).

Athena,” which addressed what she viewed as Vieira’s faulty interpretation of Christ’s greatest gift to humanity.¹²⁷ The Portuguese priest deviated from the teachings of the Fathers of the Church (Thomas Aquinas, John Chrysostom, and St. Augustine), suggesting that Christ’s *fineza*, or gift to the world, was his love of humankind without the hope for reciprocation.¹²⁸ Sor Juana countered this idea, stating that the most valuable contribution of Christ to sinners was to grant free will. She defended that the lack of gift was the gift itself, one’s own judgment and control over their destiny. In arriving at this conclusion, the nun has a clear sense of logic that relies exclusively on her own interpretation of scripture. According to Pamela Kirk, in order to produce a theological document as a woman, Sor Juana had to present her text in the form of correspondence, as she could not officially participate in theological debate via spiritual treatise (94).¹²⁹ In writing her evaluation of the sermon in the form of a letter, she is able to indirectly enter the ecclesiastic space of

¹²⁷ Sor Juana initially titled her critique “Crisis de un sermón” / “Crisis/Critique of a Sermon”. Upon publishing the text, Fernández changed the title to “La carta atenagórica” / “The Letter Worthy of Athena”. Although Fernández’s ultimate goal was to scold the nun, with the new title, he draws attention to Sor Juana’s erudite presentation of the critique of Vieira. The new title serves as a compliment while the preface of the letter was an attack on what the nun could only view as an act of obedience to a spiritual authority. Pamela Kirk suggests that changing the title was also a protective measure: By retitling the letter, Fernández removes Sor Juana from the “‘inappropriate’ public sphere of a critic of sermons and puts her back in the, at least ostensibly, private sphere of letter writing” (101). Given the close relationship between Sor Juana and Fernández, Kirk’s theory regarding the title is probably true. Nonetheless, simply changing the title does not reposition Sor Juana into the realm of privacy. The subject matter is still the same.

¹²⁸ Lisa Powell maintains that Juana did not debunk his argument, but rather the way that Vieira defended his opinion (19).

¹²⁹ Kirk highlights the commonplace of the epistolary tradition in Renaissance society: “letter writing manuals were produced, the most famous being that of Erasmus...She [Sor Juana] knew the famous letters of antiquity, which included those of the patron saints of her order St. Jerome. Closer to her own period were examples of letters used as tools of polemics...Letters could also function as an informal frame for pedagogy and spiritual direction, as many collections of letters of churchmen to pious women attest . . .” (96).

correction. Sor Juana reiterates throughout *La carta atenagórica* that she writes out of obedience. The repetitive clarification of her obedient act shows her knowledge that the text could be read by someone other than Fernández. The publication of her letter gave Sor Juana a new reputation within the Church in New Spain and likely provided strong grounds to the nun's three detractors to officially silence her.

Independent of her well-developed argument in favor of her perspective of Christ's love, Fernández coaxed Sor Juana into making an irreversible mistake. The nun appropriates what José Pascual Buxo refers to as an unacceptable use of discursive elements that were reserved for masculine intelligence (95). Simply put, the Church reserved this form of corrective theological discourse for only certain types of men. Fernández requests that his friend enter into this space of discourse knowing the dangers that this vocational and gender deviance would present for Sor Juana both as a writing woman and as an obedient nun. As Dorothy Schons mentions, the letter was even considered heretical in New Spain yet was published as common orthodoxy in Spain (51).¹³⁰ The drastic difference of reception of the published text speaks to the degree of variation between what different inquisitorial censors deemed as heretical and non-heretical. Jean Franco emphasizes that the literature of Europe was starting to become a separate entity from Church and

¹³⁰ "...the *Crisis* [Sor Juana's title for *La carta atenagórica*] was receiving wide publicity. In 1692 it was published in Mallorca. In the same year it was reprinted in the second volume of her works, and in the following year it appeared again in the second edition of that volume. It was received with great enthusiasm in Spain. Why did it arouse a storm of criticism in Mexico? Was it heretical? It was so considered there . . . In Spain . . . Navarro Vélez . . . Censor appointed by the Inquisition . . . declared that it contained nothing contrary to the faith. That it was so strongly condemned in Mexico is due to the fact that conditions there were different. The Jesuits were all powerful. They were practically in control of the Inquisition. Father Vieyra was a Jesuit, and it was felt that the *Crisis* was an attack on that order" (Schons 51).

court, while in New Spain there “was as yet no possibility of a literature that was not closely bound to courtly or religious patronage” (26). Just as the nun had already isolated Núñez, she indirectly scorned her highest spiritual authority, Aguiar y Seijas to whom, according to Kirk, Vieira’s sermon was dedicated (82).¹³¹ By writing a text out of obedience, Sor Juana unknowingly provides the three most highly ranked men in New Spain’s Church with documented evidence of her deviation from monastic tradition.

Although the content of *La carta atenagórica* was out of turn for a female, its publication in and of itself did not require a response. Fernández’s discursive disguise as Philotea is the most important antecedent that contributed to *La Respuesta*. The name Philotea, meaning “Lover of God” in Greek, added an extra rhetorical element that Sor Juana had to uphold in her response. Although the bishop converted himself into her vocational and gender equal, Sor Juana could not risk directly refuting his evaluation of her text and had to take part in Fernández’s game of false identity. As Kirk maintains, the nun knew it was her friend because a “simple nun could not grant permission to publish . . .” (110).¹³² If power was found

¹³¹ “The arrival in 1682 of Francisco Aguiar y Seijas as archbishop of Mexico City – and thus Sor Juana’s direct ecclesiastical superior – put a powerful voice among her detractors. Aguiar y Seijas was very conservative in his views of religious life, women’s roles, and the frivolity of secular entertainments, such as those Sor Juana wrote, and of poetry contests, in which she participated” (Kirk 16). Elías Trabulse points to how the offense to Aguiar y Seijas parallels his involvement in the overseeing of her silence: confiscation of her belongings, her final testament, and rededication to the Catholic faith (155).

¹³² Julie Bokser suggests that the use of the disguise “deflects the actual wielding of authority” (10). The possible deflection of power is problematic when juxtaposed with Kirk’s theory. Women, and particularly nuns, did not have access to publishing. If this is true, the authority would only be more pronounced given that Fernández had the prerogative not only to publish, but also to disguise, or in this particular case to feminize, his authority solely at the rhetorical level. As with all other monastic texts, rhetorical structures influence the message greatly.

in the ability to publish a given document, the bishop's motivation behind publishing Sor Juana's critique becomes all the more polemical given that she is criticized, at least rhetorically, by another nun. Fernández, through the guise of Sister Philotea, affects godly wisdom that comes as a result of "her" compliance with the religious gender binary and its corresponding vocational parameters. If a less intelligent and uncelebrated woman was capable of recognizing Sor Juana's divergence from God's intended path, what then does that imply for Sor Juana's salvation? The male to female transformation was a manner of encasing his admonishment, and added a shock value that would not have been present had he corrected her as a man. In his demand, Fernández plays the role of director; yet, in berating her in the disguise of a nun, transforms himself into her gender equal. In this way, Fernández is able to control how the public interprets his public rebuke of another nun.

The tone of Philotea's letter to Sor Juana is reminiscent of the nun's dismissal of Antonio Núñez as her confessor, wrought with due respect in addition to merciless candor. First and foremost, in his preface to Sor Juana's critique of the sermon, Fernández makes it a point to acknowledge his admiration of her brilliance in suggesting that Vieira take pride in being refuted by a woman:

... no one who reads your treatise can deny that you trimmed your quill even more deftly than ... Father Vieira ... and that they could take pride in being refuted by a woman who is an honor to her sex ... I, at least, have admired the lively wit of your conceits, the intelligence of your proofs, and

the vigorous clarity . . . clarity being the inseparable companion of wisdom
(223).¹³³

Fernández, in his transvested disguise, categorizes his friend as an exceptional woman. This description paints the nun as privileged and different from other females. Her intelligence and logic surpassed that of a celebrated priest. The acknowledgment of the nun's worthy interpretation of Christ's love and her correction of a man softens his later attack of labeling her as irreverent and dismissive of her true duties as a nun. Despite Fernández's opinion of Sor Juana as more intelligent than most men, her participation in the intellectual world does not align with her vocation.

After briefly addressing Sor Juana's strengths, the bishop quickly shows the lack of intersection between her natural gifts and her vocation as a professed nun. According to Fernández, Sor Juana had used her intellect for the secular world. The improper application of her intelligence was at the core of male disapproval of Sor Juana's dual participation in both cloister and court. Fernández even highlights that he is not a part of the school of thought that believes that female writers should be silenced or rebuked, addressing the widely cited Pauline injunction for female silence, and defends that it was not St. Paul's desire that women not study, but

¹³³ "... quien leyere su apología de V. md. no podrá negar que cortó la pluma más delgada que ambos y que pudieran gloriarse de verse impugnados de una mujer que es honra de su sexo. Yo, a lo menos, he admirado la viveza de los conceptos, la discreción de sus pruebas y la enérgica claridad con que convence el asunto, compañera inseparable de la sabiduría.

rather that a female's education not produce arrogance.¹³⁴ Effectively, Sor Juana's friend distances himself from her misogynist detractors.

Fernández's position in favor of female learning makes Sor Juana's defense all the more difficult. In spite of his support for the education of women, he seeks to adjust the outlets of the nun's intellect, suggesting that she concentrate her efforts on the scriptures. A statement that clearly resonates is his attempt to direct Sor Juana towards a more acceptable conventual path; he affirms his desire that the nun imitate Santa Teresa in subject matter: "My judgment is not such a harsh censor as to dislike poetry . . . knowing that St. Teresa . . . and other saints canonized this ability with their own verses; but I could wish you would imitate them . . . in your choice of subject matter . . ." (225).¹³⁵ Reference to the mystic saint highlights Mysticism as the only appropriate vocational form of writing from within the convent. Far from the practice of recollection, Fernández acknowledges Sor Juana's intelligence, yet warns her that she has deviated to an unacceptable level, "It is a pity when a person of great understanding stoops to lowly, swindling matters on earth...but once it [one's understanding] rests down on the ground, may it not sink

¹³⁴ "I do not approve of the commonplace views of those who rebuke women for reading and writing, because a great many have applied themselves to this study and yet been praised by Saint Jerome. It is true that Saint Paul says that women should not teach, but he does not command that women should not study in order to learn, for he wished only to avoid the risk of haughtiness in our sex, which is always so given to vanity" (225). In referencing "our sex" and how women are prone to "vanity," Fernández included himself, again under the guise of a female nun, and highlights the very reasons for which Sor Juana is unaware of her sin. The nun's vanity is not found in ephemeral beauty, but rather in her ability to outwit men.

¹³⁵ "No es mi juicio tan austero censor que esté mal con los versos . . . después que Santa Teresa . . . y otros santos canonizaron con los suyos esta habilidad; pero deseara que les imitara . . . en la elección de los asuntos" (224).

still further, considering what happens in hell” (229).¹³⁶ He scolds Sor Juana in her disregard for the Catholic faith by signaling her preoccupation with the mundane. Should the nun continue on the path of secular letters, God will punish her. The allusion to pity and hell are the most relevant pieces of Philotea’s preface. Buxo calls the letter morally threatening (100). The nun’s continued divergence from appropriate monastic activities is not only irreverent to her position as nun, but also threatens her salvation. As far as Sor Juana was concerned, this open attack necessitated a response, *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea*.

Sor Juana incorporates various genres into the content, structure, and division of *La Respuesta*: the *vida espiritual*, the letter, spiritual treatises, and judicial writings. I attribute the adoption of multiple rhetorical elements from diverse texts to Sor Juana’s primary goal of defending and persuading. The sporadic use of these discursive tools both strengthens her own argument in favor of scriptural reinterpretation and at times, provides more ammunition for Fernández regarding the nun’s transgressive practices. Frederick Luciani divides the text into four cohesive parts: exordium, in which the nun sets up the customary rhetoric of humility; the narration, where she describes her trajectory of intellect; the proofs, in which she provides a long list of intelligent and influential women throughout antiquity to serve as evidence for her advocacy, followed by her reinterpretation of St. Paul’s decree; and the peroration, where she claims to no longer defend herself

¹³⁶ “Lástima es que un tan gran entendimiento, de tal manera se abata a las rateras noticias de la tierra . . . y ya que se humille al suelo, que no baje más abajo, considerando lo que pasa en el Infierno” (228).

(83).¹³⁷ The use of classical rhetorical norms allowed Sor Juana to structure her response in a way that was intellectually comprehensible to her erudite reader.

Although there are diverse possible readings of *La Respuesta*, early modernists must address the nun's unsteady dual identity: that of nun and of intellectual. From the perspective of Núñez, Aguiar y Seijas, and Fernández, this paradox, that of embodying the appropriate feminine condition of nun, and the inappropriate right to intellectual discourse, shows that Sor Juana had an ambiguous level of commitment to monasticism; yet, as a result of her gender and position in the Church, was unable to rightfully dedicate herself to intellect. In fact, she indicates her highest priority in *La Respuesta* when writing of her struggle to balance her conventual responsibilities with her personal goals of study:

I took the veil because, although I knew I would find in religious life many things that would be quite opposed to my character . . . it would, given my absolute unwillingness to enter into marriage, be the least unfitting and the most decent state I could choose, with regard to the assurance I desired of my salvation . . . instead of explanations and exercises I had interruptions,

¹³⁷ Exordium = lines 1 to 215, narration = lines 216-844, proofs = lines 845-1418, and peroration = lines 1419 to 1438. Clearly the longest section is the proof which begins with a presentation of female intellectual precedence only giving way to Sor Juana's call for a reinterpretation of St. Paul's decree for female silence in the Church. De la Cruz uses female presence, highlighting important women such as Christina Queen of Sweden, Abigail, and Esther who were of considerable significance in the areas of prophecy, persuasion, perseverance, and other qualities. The list of historical precedence does not exclusively serve to prove female ability, but also to frame her impending corrective discourse on male spiritual logic regarding the Pauline injunction.

posed not only by my religious duties . . . but by all those other things
 incidental to life in a community (51, 59).¹³⁸

Sor Juana acknowledges her motivation for entering the cloister as a direct result of her disinterest in marriage and as the most suitable opportunity to foster her own relationship with God as she sees fit. Entering the convent allows Sor Juana to pursue godliness through private study; however, her monastic vocation also prohibits such a male-like desire in its nuns. She uses the convent to participate in a world that the Church intended to maintain separate from nuns.

In order to accurately interpret *La Respuesta*, I approach the work from a dual perspective, and identify the text as an epistolary document whose author attempts to adopt the fundamental motifs of the *vida espiritual*. This is the only form of writing that spiritual confessors allowed the majority of nuns to employ. Contrary to Paz's view of Sor Juana's use of feminine forms of writing as well as her advocacy for females as a result of her inability to become a man, the nun utilized the obvious aspects of autohagiography, such as false humility and the genesis of her spiritual life, because she was defending what New Spain's spiritual authorities interpreted as a borderline heretical entrance into the male arena of theological debate. Sor Juana was able to take advantage of a genre that was familiar to members of ecclesiastic hierarchy. Kathleen Myers views Sor Juana's text as an appropriation of only the essential aspects of the autohagiographical genre, stating that the nun uses

¹³⁸ "Entréme religiosa, porque aunque conocía que tenía el estado de cosas . . . muchas repugnantes a mi genio, con todo, para la total negación que tenía al matrimonio, era lo menos desproporcionado y lo más decente que podía elegir en materia de la seguridad que deseaba de mi salvación . . . y en vez de explicación y ejercicio, muchos estorbos, no solo los de mis religiosas obligaciones...sino de aquellas cosas accesorias de una comunidad . . ." (50, 58).

a minimal number of humility references in order to “cover her assertive response to cultural expectations for women” and “simultaneously . . . rejects it [the *vida espiritual*] as inadequate” (468).¹³⁹ Sor Juana’s engagement in the double discourse demonstrates her fear of the Holy Office and her inability to reconcile her position of courtly prestige with her lack of authority as a woman in the Church.

The question of processes of power is crucial to understanding the nun’s fate and renunciation of private study and writing. The cyclical relinquishment and usurping of power is clearly evident in *La Respuesta* and serves as evidence both of Sor Juana’s rhetorical brilliance and negligence. With clergymen at the helm of this power system, the nun could neither earn nor rightfully possess a lasting and definitive position of authority. As a writing nun, Sor Juana was simultaneously immersed in and excluded from the hierarchy. Without the patronage of powerful court members, Sor Juana’s continuous pursuit of study no longer benefited the Church.

The fundamental difference between *La carta atenagórica* and *La Respuesta* is characterized by the limitations of gender in public discourse. In *La carta*, Sor Juana defends the fathers of the Church, arguing against Vieira using institutional doctrine as the basis of her critique.¹⁴⁰ For a woman to defer to traditional male

¹³⁹ Similarly, Josefina Ludmer interprets the dissonance caused by Sor Juana’s use and rejection of the *vida* as a recognition of her role in the power structure and describes it as “ . . . a matter of a relative and positional not knowing: not knowing how to speak to one in a superior position, a not knowing that clearly implies recognition of the other’s authority . . . a specific social relation transferred to discourse” (88).

¹⁴⁰ Sor Juana uses one of the highest authorities in Christian history to combat what she has deemed a misinterpretation of Christ’s passion. In *La carta atenagórica*, she debunks Vieira’s opinion on Christ’s greatest gift to humankind by agreeing with St. Augustine, one of the founding fathers of western Christianity: “Siento con San Agustín que la mayor fineza de Cristo fue morir . . . lo más

authority, such as that of St. Augustine, was in alignment with the natural order. Yet, Fernández, upon requesting a written copy of her critique, was arguably aware that the readers, whomever they may be, would interpret her daring correction of Vieira, albeit with an Augustinian mode of thought, as misplaced boldness. She departs from this stance in *La Respuesta*, opting for a more female dominated perspective, only using masculine support when referencing scripture. A woman religious was only as powerful as her will and determination to acknowledge her proclivity toward sin, deception, and ignorance. Despite the nun's calculated presentation in *La Respuesta* of a historical precedence of female philosophers and intellectuals as well as projecting an attitude of reverence towards the Holy Office, she only sporadically adopts the period-appropriate autohagiographic topos of excessive humility. She disregards her place in the hierarchy while also being cognizant of her audience. The nun's lack of attention to a more strict adherence to monastic humility discourse, a measure that could have potentially saved her life, instead painted her as a danger to the Institution. Sor Juana acquired a definitive agency and authorial voice from within the cloister; yet given her position as a daughter of the order to which she professed, she operated on temporary agency. The nun's continued freedom depended on her compliance with the very antithesis of her nature, an attitude of submission and ignorance.

A necessary question is whether or not we can consider Sor Juana to have actually possessed true authority given that spiritual directors granted this agency

apreciable en el hombre es la vida y la honra, y ambas cosas da Cristo en su afrentosa muerte" ["I agree with St. Augustine that Christ's greatest gift was his own death. The most valuable thing in a man is his life and his honor, and Christ gave both of these through his death"]. (My translation).

in accordance with her courtly prestige. To recognize the ecclesiastic hierarchy as the source of her agency does not suggest that female power relied on male authority, but rather that Sor Juana's freedom as a writing nun depended on the financial need of the convent. The nun's vocational position within the Church demanded her role as perpetuator of the Catholic ideal, effectively deeming any divergence from male spiritual dominance as heretical. To frame her reentrance into corrective discourse in *La Respuesta*, Sor Juana points out the restraints of her gender while simultaneously calling for the inclusion of women in intellectual pursuits.

Powerlessly Empowered: A Cyclical System

As a result of Sor Juana's growing stature which was perceived as a threat to New Spain's ecclesiastic hierarchy, the nun had to carefully approach her response to Fernández. Frederick Luciani refers to Sor Juana's desire to respond as a necessary opportunity to reverse the "disparate images" of her involvement in secular writing as a nun, thereby vindicating herself in the eyes of her readers (82). Initially forced by the requirement of monastic obedience to Fernández to publically correct Vieira in *La carta*, the nun then had to address the paradoxical backlash to her submissive behavior in *La Respuesta*. Since Philotea directly warned her of the dangers of arrogance in her worldly study and the production of mundane texts, Sor Juana needed to retreat from traditional masculine logic and wisdom characteristic of *La carta*, and now appear to demonstrate a sense of powerlessness before her

accuser.¹⁴¹ Although the initial emergence of a professed lack of power demonstrates her knowledge of the constraints of womanhood in the Church, her later call for inclusion only served to highlight her transgression even further.

Indisputably, the most significant threat posed in *La Respuesta* is her convincing but paradoxical argument regarding her unworthiness as an ignorant female to interpret scripture, only to then challenge the institutional mentality of the Pauline injunction for female silence. Sor Juana creates a contradictory authorial voice of spiritual penitent in her self-characterization as ignorant, and of secular intellectual in her defense and restructuring of St. Paul's notion of feminine capability. In this way, the text upholds Bokser's theory on the nun's experience as both a reinforcement and contradiction of male supremacy (10-11). Yolanda Martínez San Miguel depicts this behavioral paradox as two systems of control: Sor Juana's *yo obediente* and her *negra inclinación* toward acquiring knowledge (276). As a nun, Sor Juana must submit to the hierarchy; yet, as an intellectual inspired by God, she is inclined to compose pieces of literature that seem to contradict her monastic vocation. This division of the feminine subject is accurate throughout much of *La Respuesta*, particularly during the *vida*-like segments adopted in order to direct her reader toward a more positive reception of her text. However, although Martínez's bipartite control theory accurately describes Sor Juana's struggle under hierarchy, it is limiting in that it suggests a desire for equal distribution of both

¹⁴¹ According to Fernández, his motivation for publishing *La carta* along with his prefatory letter was so that she could see herself more suitably through his document. While he does not directly refer to Sor Juana as arrogant, he connects general female learning with arrogance: "Any learning that leads women to haughtiness cannot please God . . ." / "Letras que engendran elación, no las quiere Dios en la mujer . . ." (224-225).

rhetorical preoccupations in the response. On the contrary, Sor Juana must abandon one in order to utilize the other. In fact, the nun's response is a contradiction of ideas.

Sor Juana not only adapts to the humble rhetoric expected of nuns, but also begins her letter by providing an account of her youth, making use of the clergyman's familiarity with monastic life writing. Kathleen Myers refers to this appeal to her reader as a process of encoding (460). The fundamental difference between the nun's history and a typical *vida espiritual* is that unlike Santa Teresa, Sor Juana's disclosure of life events traces her journey to intellectualism as opposed to demonstrating a conversion from a sinful existence to the mystic experience. She encloses her upbringing in a familiar structure that Rosa Pérez Perelmuter contends is a demonstration of her knowledge of the epistolary conventions of even the most erudite of masculine intellectualism (152). In fusing these narrative structures, Sor Juana appeals to both male and female codes of behavior. Most salient to the response is the basis around which she centers her argument, the right to include herself in the closed erudite circle of traditionally male intellectuals. As outlined by Frederick Luciani, in attempting to distance herself from the image of the deviant nun, Sor Juana creates a rhetorical web in which she intends to show her compliance under the hierarchy by unifying her separate identities as nun and intellectual, yet actually highlights the differences (124-5). The nun outlined how secular studies could aid her in the journey to divine understanding, while at the same time, she more clearly underscored the inequalities.

Sor Juana's highly polemical image as an intellectual nun in New Spanish society required a more traditional monastic presentation of her persona in her response to Fernández. Although the text was not published until after her death, it was not only a response to Philotea, but also to the readers of *La carta atenagórica* as a public document. Accordingly, the sole manner in which Sor Juana could appropriately open her letter was by establishing a satisfactory standard of humility and lowliness in conjunction with the magnanimity of her addressee(s). To that end, *La Respuesta* establishes an exaggerated rapport of respect, making use of proper titles and terms of endearment, "Most illustrious Lady, my Lady . . ." (39).¹⁴² Although the nun was clearly aware of the publisher of *La carta*, she needed to keep up rhetorical appearances in addressing Fernández as a colleague. In maintaining the bishop's conventual identity, the text reveals the first instance of power dynamics as early as the greeting. Sor Juana upholds standards of collegiality. By demonstrating respect for what she knows to be a guise, the nun situates herself rightfully below Fernández by pretending to show deference to Philotea.

The metaphorical costuming of Fernández was not simply a method for correcting Sor Juana's participation in the secular sphere, but also symbolizes a conspicuous institutional representation that a powerless woman could simply never challenge. Jean Franco proposes that a male " . . . may represent an entire institution while female never more than an individual. Even as transvestite the Bishop still wields male authority under female guise. He had not become 'not male'

¹⁴² "Muy ilustre Señora, mi Señora" (38).

by exercising this fictional disguise" (43). In relation to power dynamics, Sor Juana attempts to avoid "becoming male" by not directly identifying her friend as the source of the admonishment. To exercise the direct authority to correct or rebuke another person was a practice that exclusively belonged to males. If Sor Juana had openly identified Fernández, she would have perpetuated her image as a masculinized corrector, originally created in the preface of *La carta atenagórica*. Unmasking her fellow nun would be a direct assault to Fernández and his institutional power, resulting in more public scandal and accusations regarding the orthodoxy of her vocation. To some degree, Sor Juana perpetuates the Institution by making efforts to feminize her discourse and acknowledge the bishop's authority. The overarching goal of Núñez, Aguiar y Seijas, and Fernández was the definitive feminization of Sor Juana's persona, essentially ridding her of all interpretative license and wisdom. Despite loosely upholding the self-deprecating descriptions of her intelligence and writing, a particularity of the *vida espiritual*, the nun's later divergence from this inferior form of communication nullifies her attempt to produce a credible nun-like submission to institutional hierarchy.

Just as Philotea hyperbolically complimented the nun's intelligence, Sor Juana adopts flattery and projects her own unworthiness as the introduction of her response. Most crucial to the nun's proximate denouncement of *La carta's* accusatory preface, is her initial adoration of its contents. She refers to the letter as "immensely learned, prudent, devout, and loving letter . . ." (39).¹⁴³ Each of these

¹⁴³ " . . . doctísima, discretísima, santísima y amorosísima carta . . ." (38).

adjectives recognizes the superiority of Philotea over the nun. In referencing her “colleague” as immensely learned, Sor Juana acknowledges Fernández as an educated and wise man, offsetting her reputation as the most learned woman in New Spain, and placing the ecclesiastic male back in his rightful position, the scholarly arena. Describing the admonishment as “devout, prudent, and loving” positions Philotea within the realm of spiritual credibility, effectively, validating Fernández’s critical evaluation of Sor Juana’s fundamental flaw as a nun. In fact, de la Cruz claims that Philotea has done her a great honor and favor by publishing such an unworthy text that she describes as “drafts and scratches” (39).¹⁴⁴ Despite characterizing herself and her writings as unworthy, the nun has a double intention in highlighting these positive attributes. Sor Juana’s feigned adoration of her colleague is short-lived as her letter digresses, revealing her view of the publication of her text as distasteful.

The general structure of *La Respuesta a Sor Filotea* oscillates between gratitude and disapproval. De la Cruz’s true intention comes to light when she alludes to her judgment of the publication of *La carta*. While initially attempting to portray herself as a humble daughter, Sor Juana’s continuous reference to the publication as “as excessive as it was unexpected” highlights that it was against her will, thereby contradicting her earlier rhetoric of humility in referencing Philotea’s letter as learned and loving (39).¹⁴⁵ Julie Bokser describes this early appearance of power dynamics as a “hyperlertness to who is in charge (who is subject to whom?),

¹⁴⁴ “mis borrones” (38).

¹⁴⁵ “tan excesivo como no esperado” (38).

and with strategies regarding how to wield, acknowledge and subvert authority” (10). Bokser’s description of the subversion is relevant to Sor Juana’s own perspective of her critique of the Portuguese priest as an act of obedience. In labeling the letter as “excessive” and “unexpected,” Sor Juana begins to recuperate a sense of power by indirectly deeming *La carta*’s contents as nonthreatening and disagreeing with her friend’s accusatory assessment of her commitment to the cloister, “. . . By chance, am I something more than a poor nun, the slightest creature on earth and the least worthy drawing your attention? Well, *why then has thou spoken this word to me?*” (41).¹⁴⁶ Not only does Sor Juana resent her very public “outing” as a non-compliant nun, but she also disregards *La carta*’s contents as notable from the institutional perspective. The nun is unable to acknowledge the letter as transgressive given that it was a product of her obedience. An inability to cohesively relate her “colleague’s” positive appraisal of her intelligence with his negative interpretation of her critique produces a narrative tension in her response. Through the use of a back and forth rhetoric, the nun complies with the necessary monastic humility rhetoric only at face value. In other words, Sor Juana, who was literarily capable of adhering to the humble discourse of writing nuns, chose to include bouts of uncertainty and ignorance as mere pretense, later opting for a higher level argument in favor of female intellect.

¹⁴⁶ Juana begins this question in Spanish and then ends with Latin; yet another element of the *Respuesta* that showcases her erudite approach to her defense. “¿Por ventura soy más que una pobre monja, la más mínima criatura del mundo y la más indigna de ocupar vuestra atención? *Pues quare locutus es mihi sermonem istum? Et unde hoc mihi?*” (40).

The emergence of her alleged powerlessness does not simply end with references to Sor Juana's unworthiness and the acknowledgement of her addressee. The nun presents two crucial issues that produce a conundrum soon after their initial mention:

Is it to be wondered that, at the very first step, I should meet with two obstacles that sent my dull pen stumbling? The first (and to me the most insuperable) is the question of how to respond to your . . . letter. For when I consider how . . . St. Thomas Aquinas, on being asked of his silence before his teacher . . . responded that he kept quiet because he could say nothing worthy . . . then how much more fitting it is that I should keep quiet . . . The second obstacle is the question of how to render my thanks for the favor . . . a favor . . . that . . . cannot be bounded by the confines of speech (39).¹⁴⁷

De la Cruz appeals to her reader's knowledge base by turning to a known instance of silence between a male and his teacher. Not only does this suggest her awareness of Philotea's identity at a rhetorical level in that she uses a male-centered anecdote, but also because she presents a scenario in which the pupil, under the instructor's infinite knowledge and superiority, views silence as the only viable option.

Suggesting that it would be even more suitable for her as a woman to adopt the same behavior represents an auto-adjustment of Sor Juana's gender performance as determined by the gender of her alleged colleague. To affirm an inability to properly

¹⁴⁷ "¿Qué mucho si, al primer paso, encontraba para tropezar mi torpe pluma dos imposibles? El primero (y para mí el más riguroso) es saber responder a vuestra . . . carta. Y si veo preguntado, Santo Tomás, de su silencio con . . . su maestro, respondió que callaba porque nada sabía decir digno de Alberto, con cuánta mayor razón callaría . . . El Segundo imposible es saber agradecerlos [el] . . . favor . . . que no . . . se puede estrechar a lo limitado de las voces" (38).

respond heightens the wisdom and magnitude of the statements issued by Fernández. She continues with identifiably male anecdotes in likening herself to St. John, who was unable to verbalize his experience in the third heaven. In acknowledging an inability to speak, St. John declares the grandiosity of the message in remaining silent, resulting in a more effectual communication of the experience. Josefina Ludmer suggests that the uncertainty in how to address the sugar-coated attack on her moral character stems from Sor Juana not being able to respond “from a position of subordination” (88). Justly, the initial lack of knowledge in how to respond is not necessarily related to a rhetoric of ignorance, but rather to an inability to submit herself to a presence that is charged with authority simply based on gender and hierarchical position. The male accuser has the power, and the female accused is innately guilty by virtue of her gender. The inability to convincingly subordinate herself led to her obligatory silence.

The second obstacle that Sor Juana faced was the task of showing gratitude for her corrector’s contribution to her spiritual life. Necessary to the nun’s response was expressing the value of Philotea’s intervention, “ . . . I can offer nothing more than amazement, instead of thanks, declaring that I am unable to thank you . . . for what I owe you. It is not false humility, my Lady, but the candid truth of my very soul” (41).¹⁴⁸ Initially, the most valuable component of this statement is the concept of a debt that can never be repaid. The gender of power dynamics is clear in that she takes into account the roles of debtor and the indebted. If women had no basis to

¹⁴⁸ “ . . . en vez de gracias, diciendo que no soy capaz de agradecerlos...lo que os debo. No es afectada modestia, Señora, sino ingenua verdad de toda mi alma . . . ” (40).

offer wisdom in return, yet were granted guidance by the only rightful bearers of knowledge, man, a nun is only capable of filling the space of incapability. Female has nothing to offer male that could be of any value. The second noteworthy element is Sor Juana's direct mention of false humility. Modesty as artifice is not simply a twenty-first century academic conception of early modern monastic writing, but was an expected practice encouraged by spiritual authorities. Sor Juana felt compelled to differentiate her gratitude and praise from that of the typical affective recognition of a nun's lowly condition as female, showing both her own and her reader's awareness of the appropriate conventions of writing nuns. While exhibiting ignorance was an obligatory process, confessors were aware of a nun's inclination towards obedience in this manner, simply based on expectation. The expectation of ignorance explains Sor Juana's attempt at projecting a weakness that she later contradicts.

In outwardly referencing false humility, a concept known to all nuns and those within the spiritual hierarchy, Sor Juana manipulates her addressee's interpretation towards a more amicable outcome. The early modern reader surely would have expected *La Respuesta* to be excessively apologetic regarding her views on Vieira's *finezas*. Contrary to this expectation, although Sor Juana reinforces the image of the "proper nun," she then reverses the apologetic tone of inferiority by addressing *La carta atenagórica*, and reestablishing her role as a corrector of clergymen in describing the priest as well-spoken, even when he misspeaks, "...indeed how well the Lusitanian Phoenix speaks (but when is he not well-spoken,

even he when he speaks ill?).”¹⁴⁹ Fernández’s general critique of Sor Juana is the reversal of her characterization of Vieira in that he praises her content yet admonishes her for being the improper gender to take part in the discrediting a man of the cloth. Vieira could misinterpret the sacred texts and even debunk the Fathers of the Church as a result of his gender. In contrast, institutional power dynamics, always favoring the male, placed Sor Juana in a dangerous position, regardless of the accuracy of her criticism.

Sor Juana transitions from a discourse of pseudo humility to what seems to be a blatant attack on her publisher. Only a page later, she declares that she no longer suffers the previously mentioned indecisiveness of knowing if and how to respond: “. . . the obstacles I described at the outset no longer seem entirely insuperable . . . For one who had the letter printed, unbeknownst to me, who titled it and underwrote its cost, and who thus honored it . . . what will such a one not do? What not forgive?” (43).¹⁵⁰ Sor Juana daringly invokes the practice of forgiveness and points to her accuser as unable to forgive feminine weakness. Consequently, she shows that in his unwillingness to pardon her, Fernández lacks the mercy and grace of God. If the institutional role of the members of the spiritual hierarchy was to grant forgiveness in the context of the confessional, Sor Juana’s evaluation of her friend suggests a disregard for his ecclesiastic responsibility. The nun goes as far as to unofficially expose Philotea in regarding his berating as “pastoral

¹⁴⁹ “. . . y dice muy bien el Fénix Lusitano (pero ¿cuándo no dice bien, aun cuando no dice bien?) . . .” (42).

¹⁵⁰ “. . . ya no me parecen imposibles los [obstáculos] que puse al principio . . . porque quien hizo imprimir la Carta tan sin noticia mía, quien la intituló, quien la costeó, quien la honró . . . ¿qué no hará? ¿qué no perdonará?” (42).

insinuation”(45).¹⁵¹ Sor Juana not only indirectly reveals her publisher, but she also uncovers his true intentions in publishing the preface, “I recognize full well that your most prudent warning touches not on the letter [*La carta atenagórica*], but on the many writings of mine on humane matters” (45).¹⁵² With these candid affirmations, so begins her departure from excessive humility as adopted from the *vida espiritual*. The misplaced boldness begins with her abandonment of the image of the proper nun, who represents the epitome of obedience and cowers before the Institution, giving way to an articulation of the validity and well-intentioned pursuit of intellect supported by female precedence. Sor Juana’s ascent to empowerment cancels any previous allusion to modesty. While she recognized the necessary rhetorical games to participate in discursive spaces, she quickly discarded these tools in order to divulge and defend a personal truth that contradicted institutional and gender norms.

The Power of Correction

In spite of Sor Juana’s clear attempt at conveying a humble attitude before her addressees, the defense of her motivations in the pursuit of intellect and its corresponding validity far outweigh the weak and inconsistent references to feminine ignorance. Truthfully, at the core of her response was the desire to correct the misinterpretation of her interest in mundane scholarly pursuits. In contrast, Santa Teresa utilized gender appropriate forms of mystic discourse, even if she did

¹⁵¹ “pastoral insinuación” (44).

¹⁵² “Bien conozco que no cae sobre ella vuestra cuerdisima advertencia, sino sobre lo mucho que habréis visto de asuntos humanos que he escrito . . .” (44).

take this opportunity to correct confessorial understanding of her unions with God. Catalina de Erauso avoids the dangers of theological and intellectual debate altogether by remaining in the secular world. Sor Juana only partially maintained this feminine rhetorical tool. Her weak projection of humility suggests that she never appreciated her friend's correction. The portions of the letter that evoke a sense of power are the true contents of Sor Juana's response. The nun implies that hierarchical intervention has not and will not affect her pursuit of knowledge, "... my inclination to letters was marked by such passion ... that neither the reprimands of others ... nor reflections of my own ... have sufficed to make me abandon my pursuit of this native impulse that He [God] himself bestowed on me ..." (47).¹⁵³ In the same way that Santa Teresa describes her mystical knowledge as a gift from God, Sor Juana regards her desire to learn as divinely placed and therefore impossibly expelled.

Sor Juana articulates her power by correcting how her detractors conceive her intentions as a scholar. Her response to Fernández/Philotea is summarized by the following:

I do not study in order to write, nor far less in order to teach (which would be boundless arrogance of me), but simply to see; whether by studying I may become less ignorant. This is my answer, and these are my feelings. My writing has never proceeded from any dictate of my own, but a force beyond me ... He [God] knows that I have prayed that He snuff out the light

¹⁵³ "... fue ... ponderosa la inclinación a las letras, que ni ajeas reprensiones ... ni propias reflejas ... han bastado a que deje de seguir este natural impulse que Dios puso en mí" (46).

of my intellect, leaving only enough to keep his law. For more than that is too much, some would say, in a woman; and there are even those who say that it is harmful . . . (47).¹⁵⁴

She separates herself from the attack of arrogance in presenting gender awareness as a factor in her response, particularly in addressing her ineptitude at teaching and all that it would imply for a nun. The acknowledgement of gender as a determinant of the right to participate in spiritual and secular instruction is an important element in *La Respuesta*, specifically in connection with teaching from the pulpit. Rather than defending her right to adopt male instructive roles, Sor Juana frames the letter as a defense of the female capacity for participation in the scholarly sphere external to the Church. The nun's recognition of the dangers of her intelligence moves her to even ask God to remove her inclination to letters, essentially becoming a martyr to her own intellect. While she avoids directly connecting her knowledge to sacred matters, the nun makes use of language that relates her intelligence to a word typically associated with God, light. If God is the great illuminator, and source of all wisdom, then He must be the root of her inclination. The nun characterizes her attraction to secular studies and writing as His chosen avenue for her life on earth, a gift that God refuses to remove.

The turning point in *La Respuesta* is marked by a change in rhetorical stratagems. After adhering to the seemingly hyperbolic yet necessary requirements

¹⁵⁴ "Yo no estudio para escribir, ni menos para enseñar (que fuera en mí desmedida soberbia), sino solo por ver si con estudiar ignoro menos. Así lo respondo y así lo siento. El escribir nunca ha sido dictamen propio, sino fuerza ajena . . . Su majestad sabe por qué y para qué, y sabe que le he pedido que apague la luz de mi entendimiento dejando solo lo que baste para guardar su Ley, pues lo demás sobra, según algunos, en una mujer; y aun hay quien diga que daña" (46).

of proper letter writing to an authority figure, Sor Juana overtly accepts the challenge of recuperating her credibility against the attacks of the Institution, “... I declare that I receive in my very soul your most holy admonition to apply my study to Holy Scripture: for although it arrives in the guise of counsel, it shall have for me the weight of law...” (45).¹⁵⁵ Rosa Pérez Perelmuter calls the modern reader’s attention to the transition from a collegial form of speech to judicial language, and describes the initial game affecting gender equality as a ruse or illusion, which the nun then substitutes with defensive speech such as “proposition,” “argument,” and “confirmation” (152). The refashioning of the cordial tone represents an intent to instruct, correct, and inform. One of Sor Juana’s primary goals was to demonstrate the interrelation between the study of various academic areas as a necessary and supplemental component to fully comprehend biblical history, or, in other words, she values secular studies as a means for understanding divine mysteries. Yet, as a learned and informed female, de la Cruz had to present a convincing defense of the genesis of her intellectual curiosity.

The most relevant aspect of Sor Juana’s argument is that the foundation of her power is built on God, the source of her intellect. Given the nun’s gender, a divinely inspired desire to continue her path toward heaven through study was the only manner to safely proclaim an inclination to letters. While she claims Christ as the depositor of her fervor for knowledge, the nun is simultaneously quick to highlight her fear of addressing sacred texts. This aversion situates her writings as

¹⁵⁵ “... que recibo en mi alma vuestra santísima amonestación de aplicar el estudio a Libros Sagrados, que aunque viene en traje de consejo, tendrá para mí sustancia de precepto...” (42, 44).

nonthreatening to God, and, in turn, nondestructive to church doctrine, “ . . . me having written little on sacred matters has sprung from no dislike, nor from lack of application, but rather from a surfeit of awe toward those letters, which I know myself to be so unworthy of understanding” (45).¹⁵⁶ Sor Juana addresses Fernández’s remarks regarding the applicability of her pursuit of knowledge to spiritual truths, and momentarily regresses back to a state of gender-based inferiority. Throughout the remainder of her response, the nun’s regression to the feminine condition emerges exclusively when referencing intellectual and instructive access to church doctrine. Sor Juana claims no sense of power over spirituality and overtly acknowledges the assumed ignorance characteristic of her gender.

Sor Juana knew that there was too much biblical precedence based in the logic of men that highlighted the weakness of females to suggest a space for women within Church hierarchy. She even perpetuates the idea of females as incapable of understanding the mysteries of God. In a sense, this reverses her image as corrector of Vieira’s *finezas* and appeals to the public’s principles of androcentric spiritual understanding. The nun does not simply profess her unworthiness to dialogue about sacred writing, but additionally she affirms that such involvement would be contrary to the customs of the Institution:

Then how should I dare take these up in my unworthy hands, when sex, and age, and above all our customs oppose it? And thus I confess that often this

¹⁵⁶ “ . . . el no haber escrito mucho de asuntos sagrados no ha sido desafición, ni de aplicación la falta, sino sobra de temor y reverencia debida a aquellas Sagradas Letras, para cuya inteligencia yo me conozco tan incapaz” (44).

very fear has snatched the pen from my hand and has made the subject
 matter retreat back toward that intellect from which it wished to flow . . .

(45).¹⁵⁷

The clear distinction made between profane hobbies and religious tradition simultaneously builds Sor Juana up as both capable and completely useless. She points to “customs” and acknowledges her sex as disqualifying. In turn, the self-proclaimed uselessness of the nun necessitates the intervention and guidance of the Institution, a confessor or spiritual director. The double discourse is an attempt to manipulate ecclesiastic interpretation of the nun’s public image, directing the hierarchy towards viewing her as spiritually ignorant and erudite, religiously unworthy and intellectually commendable, fearful of inquisitorial punishment and fearless in her pursuit of knowledge.

This series of oppositions, which Sor Juana attempts to make live in harmony, only serves to more clearly define the nun’s heterodoxy. Frederick Luciani considers her response to Fernández an attempt to reverse the inconsistencies found in *La carta* and refers to this reversal as an act of “subject positioning” and “compulsory or strategic adaptations to circumstances, institutions, or discourses in which the masculine and the feminine are primary terms” (18). Sor Juana downplays a previous projection of her character and intellect and highlights a more gender-appropriate and vocationally practical response for a nun. She preserves the gender

¹⁵⁷ “Pues ¿cómo me atreviera yo a tomarlo en mis indignas manos, repugnándolo el sexo, la edad y sobre todo las costumbres? Y así confieso que muchas veces este temor me ha quitado la pluma de la mano y ha hecho retroceder los asuntos hacia el mismo entendimiento de quien quería brotar . . .” (44).

binary as a method for affecting compliance and recognition according to Catholic dogma. For these reasons, the nun maintains that the source of her power is God, yet holds secular intellect as her main point of advocacy, avoiding spiritual texts as her creative outlet. Her consistent argument in favor of purely secular scholarly interests safeguards her position and facilitates her efforts to demonstrate a worthiness for a type of knowledge that was unrelated to the ecclesiastic masculine space. Fear motivates Sor Juana's game of oppositional rhetoric alternating between her abilities and unworthiness. The anxiety is not merely implied or deduced from this segment of *La Respuesta* as she goes on to name the source of her apprehension, the Inquisition.

Sor Juana confirms her awareness of the gendered system of hierarchy by highlighting the source of her fear of contributing to sacred texts. By admitting her fear of the Holy Office, Sor Juana rejects Fernández's directive commentary urging her toward Holy Scripture and presents herself as incapable of contributing to writings on divine matters:

... this very fear has snatched the pen from my hand and has made the subject matter retreat back toward that intellect from which it wished to flow; an impediment I did not stumble across with profane subjects, for a heresy against art is not punished by the Holy Office but rather by wits with their laughter and critics with their censure (45).¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ "... este temor me ha quitado la pluma de la mano y ha hecho retroceder los asuntos hacia el mismo entendimiento de quien querían brotar; el cual inconveniente no topaba en los asuntos profanos, pues una herejía contra el arte no la castiga el Santo Oficio, sino los discretos con risa y los críticos con censura" (44).

After more than a decade of rebelling against the wishes of Núñez and Fernández, Sor Juana now acknowledges the authority of those who control her freedom. Recognizing the policing agent of the Church demonstrates the nun's effort to place herself at the weak end of the power differential. She not only suggests that she is not worthy, but also that she is incapable. The nun claims that her fear served as an impediment to her writing process. Inquisitorial threat and decree prohibited all women from writing spiritual treatises. In referencing the laughable and "heretical" practices regarding artistic expression in the secular world, the nun acknowledges the participation of a female in spiritual writing as heresy. In this way, Sor Juana agrees, at least on paper, with masculine ideology as it relates to doctrinal practices within the Church. Despite claiming a sense of anxiety regarding sacred writing, Sor Juana validates her literary production by emphasizing that she has only written one work of her own volition, affirming that the rest were out of obligation. Consequently, having only willfully produced one text, de la Cruz indirectly blames the Church for her ironic predicament.

The concept of writing as an impediment is fraught with paradox. Given the financial dependency of convents on members of court, the nun's obligations to her patrons and those to the Church were of equal importance. Sor Juana had to channel her intelligence into writing. By showing the interrelation between court and church as in her letter of dismissal to Núñez, Sor Juana indirectly reverses the responsibility of her alleged transgression from herself to the Institution. The oscillating game of culpability creates a critical curiosity about the true reasoning behind the nun's

forced silence at the end of her life. Stephanie Merrim poses the question: “Was she persecuted for being an intellectual or for being a woman?” (11). In short, the nun was persecuted for being a female writer, a writing nun, and a female intellectual.

The three contributing factors to her literary demise were profoundly based on the gender binary that she both rebelled against and upheld. Josu Bijuesca simplifies the question of her persecution by simply stating that the only truly heretical action for which de la Cruz was culpable was being a woman (105). Bijuesca’s theory calls for a reexamination of Sor Juana’s statement about the Inquisition as a deterrent for her writing. Conceivably the more direct question would certainly be: What truly impeded the nun’s entrance into scriptural interpretation? Under the surface, her authorial impediment was her gender and not her intellectual capacity to contribute to sacred texts. Even Fernández acknowledged her extensive erudition. The nun’s apprehension was well founded when considering Vieira’s departure from the Fathers of the Church. The priest’s gender enabled him to debunk three of Catholicism’s spiritual giants with little to no biblical support. In other words, the Jesuit’s opinions, based in his own creation of masculine logic, were validated as a result of his ability to participate in the hierarchy. Gender is Sor Juana’s impediment to open intellectualism and is a key factor in understanding her position in the power struggle.

Both Sor Juana and her spiritual authorities use the same God to provoke a different interpretation of the nun’s role in the cloister. Sor Juana appropriates the male logic of the supremacy of God’s will in order to protect her own feminine

agency. An attempt at reconciling the life that she believed was to be hers and the life designed by the hierarchy produced a contradiction of terms. Despite the nun's proper recognition of her place in the spectrum of spiritual male discourse, the efficiency of her logic was stifled by the fact that she was a woman. Sor Juana questions how worldly authorities can deem God's desires as transgressive. Furthermore, she claims an attempt at concealing her fame as a writing nun yet is unsuccessful due to her confessor's desire for the continued support of patrons in the convent, "... what I did to try to conceal my name and renown from the public; he did not, however, allow me to do this, telling me it was temptation ..." (49).¹⁵⁹ The nun affirms that she attempted to be compliant with the monastic demand for humility but fails as a result of her confessor's wishes.

The enigma is present when considering how the weakness of incapability shifts from Sor Juana and the writing of sacred texts to the members of hierarchy. If the clergymen are unable to decipher God's desires for her, they are incompetent at providing the nun with proper instruction toward intellectual and ultimately spiritual betterment. This realization erases the power dynamics on the earthly plane and shifts the power to its source, God. Sor Juana not only portrays the desire of the hierarchy to remove her from the public eye as unnecessary, but also as contrary to God's will. In a sense, this represents not just a corrective commentary on the male misinterpretation of her objectives, but also for God's intention. The problem here is in the notion that a woman was capable of interpreting God's will

¹⁵⁹ "... lo que intenté en orden a esconder mi nombre, y que no me lo permitió, diciendo que era tentación ..." (46, 48).

for her own life. At the very core of the confessor-penitent relationship was the male's church-appointed credentials to determine God's desires for the spiritual lives of his conventual daughters. Similar to Santa Teresa, Sor Juana requires no assistance.

Eliminating the middleman between female and Christ created a power imbalance positioning de la Cruz as the controlling agent. In claiming access to God through intellectualism, Sor Juana defends that God inclined her to intellect and thanks her Creator for directing her towards letters and "not some other vice" (61).¹⁶⁰ In mentioning learning as the less sinful of possible vices, the nun implies that her accuser has exaggerated the deviance of her character. The audacious tone of this statement suggests a misplaced use of hierarchical authority. Sor Juana is not suggesting that she become the authority figure, but rather she highlights an adjustment to how the hierarchy, at least as it pertains to her perceived transgressive nature, might conceive its authority over her. Sor Juana is threatening because she converts the male into an obsolete instrument.

If there is no need for an intermediary to interpret the nun's experiences, this represents a knowledge-based non-experiential practice similar to mysticism in that it is an experience controlled by the woman that facilitates her direct access to the divine. Even more, Sor Juana utilizes a noun that was characteristic of mystic discourse as a means for presenting her desire for knowledge, "... I so caught fire

¹⁶⁰ "y no a otro vicio" (60).

with the desire to learn . . . ” (49).¹⁶¹ An allusion to flames or fire could easily have been thought to direct her readers to relate her experience with a more acceptable form of feminine religious life writing. Bijuesca rightly points to the sociopolitical reality of the convent during the period, emphasizing that Sor Juana lived in a reality where confessors strived for their daughters to be mystics (103-4). Mystical prayer was a less transgressive form of communication with God. Nonetheless, Sor Juana attributed this constant confessorial urge toward more orthodox monastic practices as jealousy of her fame.

The idea of possessing a trait that made the nun distinguishable not just from other nuns, but also from the learned men of the Church, engendered a great deal of discord in the New Spanish hierarchy. Sor Juana’s accolades and fame led her to attribute the male backlash to envy. To begin her attack on the envious detractors, she transforms from accused into accuser, calling attention to those who gain any amount of notoriety:

Truly, my Lady, at times I ponder how it is that a person who achieves high significance – or rather, who is granted significance by God, for He alone can do this – is received as the common enemy. For that person seems to others to usurp the applause they deserve or to draw off and dam up the admiration to which they had aspired, and so they persecute that person (63).¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ “ . . . me encendí yo de manera en el deseo de saber leer” (48).

¹⁶² “Cierto, señora mía, que algunas veces me pongo a considerar que el que se señala – o le señala Dios, que es quien sólo lo puede hacer – es recibido como enemigo común. Porque parece a algunos que usurpa los aplausos que ellos merecen o que hace estanque de las admiraciones a que aspiraban, y así le persiguen” (62).

The most important concept pertaining to the nun's theory of jealousy is how de la Cruz defines "high significance" as granted by God. In referencing the type of recognition she receives as "high" or divinely inspired and achieved through obedience to God, she indirectly makes a distinction between the assumedly lower and earthly significance of the male hierarchy and her own. During the seventeenth century, clergymen were significant as a result of their gender and position in the Church. This instructive notion serves to strengthen the view of her fervor for knowledge as a celestial gift. If by pursuing intellect she is acceding to God's will, the subsequent reward of courtly success fortifies her argument. Sor Juana questions how a man could doubt a celestial gift.

The concept of significance brings to light yet another parallel when comparing Sor Juana as a person made significant by God, and the men who, as representatives of the Institution, granted value to their subjects under the claimed authority of their vocation. If men of religious distinction such as Aguiar y Seijas, Núñez de Miranda, and Fernández advocated for the destruction of a seemingly compliant public female figure, Sor Juana's accusation, in turn, makes a villain of the Institution. This conception is an inversion of Jean Franco's concept of one male as representative of the entire Church while female is but a single individual. In Sor Juana claiming a God-granted significance, she circumvents the earthly authority of the members who assigned or withheld godly significance to or from their subjects. In other words, one man represented the Institution, whereas Sor Juana's claim situates her as a direct representative of God, at least as it relates to His desire for

her role in Church and court. The jealousy of certain members of hierarchy, whom the nun does not directly identify, could be said to have emerged from Sor Juana's success.

The readers of the day would have had no problem relating the idea of jealousy with *La Respuesta* directly to the publisher of *La carta atenagórica*. Philotea's preface accomplishes precisely what Sor Juana condemns in that he criticizes her open participation in secular writing. While it cannot be confirmed with historical documentation, the widespread acceptance of Sor Juana's writings in Spain *versus* New Spain as well as the nun's direct allusion to envy would suggest jealousy as the main culprit for the animosity between Sor Juana and New Spanish hierarchy. The nun overtly highlights the way men in the Church viewed her, deeming those who obtain this level of recognition, particularly women, as this degree of fame would not have been worthy of public discourse for a man, as an enemy of the Institution. Presumably, more than an enemy, she summarizes the male perspective of her transgressions as a form of rivalry.

Sor Juana does not simply allude to envy through her differentiation between high versus low significance, but she also mentions the source of the hierarchical envy. She suggests that her literary brilliance is not the center of her detractors' jealousy, but rather what comes as a result of courtly admiration, applause. The applause was certainly to be understood literally, yet as modern readers we can view the meaning behind the fandom, power. Public attention is not the most significant thing usurped, but rather the authority in the ability to achieve and

maintain wide readership as a female. The support of readers in Spain kept Sor Juana afloat for several years. Only as the political, economic, and social problems began to mount, did her success begin to wane.

Given the commonplace of writing for clergymen, the nun's reference to "they persecute" could only refer to the three men who played the most significant role in New Spain's Institution. These men could only aspire to achieve the public support that Sor Juana achieved as a result of her obedience to God. If the nun was right in affirming that she did not represent a risk to the Church as a collective body of God's servants, logic can only suggest that Sor Juana was a threat to the morale of the men who surrounded her. José Pascual Buxo suggests that de la Cruz's ultimate silence was a result of her insistence on continuing to study despite the wishes of powerful figures such as Aguiar y Seijas (79).

The most interesting facet of the proofs section, which in part was assumed to show a dominant female precedence of intelligence throughout antiquity, is that this evidence does not necessarily accomplish what traditional feminist readings claim in regard to Sor Juana's advocacy for female education. In actuality, while the female capacity to be intelligent and participate in scholarly pursuits is a strong overarching theme in *La Respuesta*, mention of the historical presence of intelligent women seems only to frame her true intent, which was that of the correction of the male interpretation of the Pauline injunction, a space she previously claimed to be unworthy to address. The proofs section more strongly highlights what the nun judges to be male misinterpretation as opposed to female intellectual capability. The

transition in intention, or the abandonment of the proof, exemplifies not the female antecedents to her own writing and studies, but rather it strengthens the hierarchical argument made by her critics alleging Sor Juana's entrance into inappropriate masculine spaces.

Sor Juana's last power play is the most dangerous. In the narration, the nun presents herself as fearfully incapable of contributing to the interpretation of Holy Scriptures. However, she boldly addresses the most highly cited biblical reference used to oppress women and isolate their influence from the hierarchy, 1 Corinthians 14:34.¹⁶³ Despite the fact that Sor Juana professes to be a humble ignorant nun, fearful of potential repercussion of the Holy Office, an attempt to correct a staple of spiritual masculine logic based on saintly principle represents the boldest commentary in Sor Juana's writing. The discussion of a clergyman's tendency to misinterpret the Pauline decree of female silence redirects the nun's focus from her role as a spiritually inferior and incapable nun who writes and studies secular texts, and corrector of the male impression of her character, to yet another level of spiritually corrective discourse that transcends her initial transgression regarding Christ's greatest gift to humanity in *La carta atenagórica*. In this way, *La Respuesta* both rejects and confirms Fernández's claims about Sor Juana's overstepping of the gendered boundaries.

The previous adherence to gender norms in regards to church doctrine gives way to Sor Juana urging her accusers to adopt her own interpretation of St. Paul's

¹⁶³ "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says."

decree on women in the Church. The nun bases her primary corrective point in *La Respuesta* on the power of interpretation in which she questions, challenges, and debunks the male view of the Pauline decree and redefines how it should be understood. Sor Juana suggests that St. Paul intended for the opposite outcome with his decree, even going as far as to demand an explanation of her detractors citing the relevance of their interpretation. Sor Juana identifies the two methods of deciphering the meaning of the traditionally oppressive verse:

... I would like these interpreters and expounders of St. Paul to explain to me how they understand the passage ... For they must understand it either materially, to mean the pulpit and the lecture hall, or formally, to mean the community of all believers, which is to say the Church (89, 91).¹⁶⁴

In declaring that there are two manners in which one can decode St. Paul's words, de la Cruz demonstrates a clear understanding of both her own scriptural logic as well as that of her accusers. After defining both forms of interpretation, the first maintaining the inappropriate nature of women officially instructing from within the pulpit, and the second that they refrain from any and all categories of instructing, writing, and learning, Sor Juana affirms that the material sense is the only accurate or true form of interpretation. As a result of this direct challenge, Sor Juana placed herself in danger in three key ways. First, she challenged her detractors to a rhetorical dual, requiring a logical explanation of the traditional understanding of the Pauline decree from those who controlled her access to court.

¹⁶⁴ "... yo quisiera que estos intérpretes y expositores de San Pablo me explicaran cómo entienden aquel lugar: *Mulieres in Ecclesia taceant*. Porque o lo han de entender de lo material de los púlpitos y cátedras, o de lo formal de la universidad de los fieles, que es la Iglesia" (88, 90).

She then questions the second method of interpretation and claims an inconsistency in the Church in having allowed certain women such as Santa Teresa to become famed writers of the Institution. Finally, she restructures the injunction and assigns it new meaning as a more gender-inclusive decree, calling for the right for virtuous women to instruct other females.

In *La Respuesta*, the nun never attempts to prove a feminine superiority over men in the scholarly or spiritual field, but rather to promote gender equality as can be reflected in intellectual capability. Sor Juana simply argues for the inclusion of worthy women. The proofs section is evidence of the worthiness of women to such a degree as they match and at times surpass male intellect. Despite claiming an aversion to refutation, she provides her own definition for St. Paul's decree which she assigns validity not only in using Pauline language, but includes the ideas of the highly respected scripture professor, Dr. Juan Díaz de Arce. In referencing Arce, who was an advocate for female education, Sor Juana claims that the professor along with St. Paul, did not intend for infinite female silence:

... women are not allowed to lecture publicly ... but ... studying, writing, and teaching privately is not only permitted but most beneficial ... not ... all women should do so, but only those whom God may have seen fit to endow with special virtue ... and who are very mature and erudite and possess the necessary talents and requirements for such a sacred occupation.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ "Leer públicamente en las cátedras y predicar en los púlpitos, no es lícito a las mujeres, pero que el estudiar, escribir y enseñar privadamente, no sólo les es lícito, pero muy provechoso ... esto no se debe entender con todas sino que aquellas a quienes hubiere Dios dotado de especial virtud ... y que

The nun converts what the hierarchy viewed as a limitation into a usable source of feminine agency. De la Cruz uses gender to help her cause, recognizing it as a potentially dangerous area, yet not for the same reason as men. While recognizing female strength was a top priority in the nun's text, to acknowledge feminine weakness and incapability was equally important. In specifying that only "very mature and erudite" women should participate in the private instruction of other females, Sor Juana limits the applicability of her call for instructive rights to certain types of women.

Sor Juana's view of woman to woman teaching dynamics as beneficial indicates a need for female instruction, the complete opposite of what spiritual directors viewed as an appropriate use of the female monastic vocation. According to Sor Juana, the male misinterpretation of the decree has served as a detriment to the women both within and outside of the Church, "Yet all this could be avoided if there were old women of sound education, as St. Paul desires" (85).¹⁶⁶ Sor Juana directly interprets scripture and claims to have more thorough knowledge of the saint's desires as they relate to the instruction of sacred tradition. In this instance, she usurps instructive, interpretational, and corrective power. Clearly recognizing the dangers in her boldness the nun assigned relevance to the male within the lives of the women for whom she intended to advocate. Sor Juana delegates a portion of significance to men much like the Church hierarchy was charged to do with its disciples. The recognition of the pulpit and the confessional as exclusively male

fueren muy proyectas y eruditas y tuvieran el talento y requisitos necesarios para tan sagrado empleo . . ." (80).

¹⁶⁶ " . . . lo cual se excusara si hubiera ancianas doctas, como quiere San Pablo" (84).

spaces relinquished some of the power claimed in identifying a serious lack in the Church.

The most radical statement is not necessarily the notion that women should instruct other women, but rather that men were capable of having significantly more, less, or an equal level of ignorance and or incapability as females: “ . . . and so just is this distinction that not only women, but who are held to be so incompetent, but also men, who simply because they are men think themselves wise . . . ” (81).¹⁶⁷ Powell and Arenal foreground Sor Juana’s view of both male and female having the capacity to be “fit” or “unfit” for learning and scriptural interpretation as radical (130). The nun does not simply call for female inclusion in the realm of intellectualism, but also for male inclusion in ignorance. She recognizes that not all women should be permitted to teach, yet, makes a bold parallel in asserting that for the same reasons, some men should also be excluded from public instructive discourses. Foolishness and wisdom are not gender-specific characteristics. Sor Juana’s ability to describe herself while conveying a message about the generic female is clear in that she describes herself as mature, knowledgeable, and erudite. De la Cruz does not simply imply that she is more capable of interpreting scripture, but also she addresses the lack of intelligence of those who uphold the traditional meaning for female silence, referring to them as “mere grammarians” with “four terms of logic” which provokes them to cling to the traditional mode of thought. Considering the lack of knowledge and reasoning skills by part of these men, Sor

¹⁶⁷ “Y esto es tan justo que no sólo a las mujeres, que por tan ineptas están tenidas, sino a los hombres, que sólo serlo piensan que son sabios . . . ” (80).

Juana redefines the idea of biblical female silence with logical and scriptural support.

The nun makes a calculated, ingenious, and risky defense of her own interpretation of St. Paul's view on women in the Church. Although she doesn't claim that women should invade the pulpit, she does cite the importance of a more structured and mandated instructive role for nuns with other nuns and women. Sor Juana's language speaks to a desire not only to refashion the general male logic associated with the decree, but also to "reclaim and confirm St. Paul's description" (85).¹⁶⁸ Ending her forbidden entrance in the space of scriptural interpretation and adjusting the traditional mode of understanding female involvement in instruction, Sor Juana places herself within a less transgressive stage of what she claims Paul deems as acceptable. Despite having demonstrated the capacity for female intellect and instructive capability, Sor Juana admits that it is not her desire to participate in the Church in this manner. She simultaneously highlights female capability while also professing a lack of personal desire. In some sense, if her readers found her corrective discourse too subversive, Sor Juana provided herself the protective measure of not wishing to participate in what she has so strongly defended. The clarity of her intention behind refusing to act on that which she defends is found in her important question: "Where is my transgression if I refrain from even that

¹⁶⁸ " . . . que es reclamo u concordante del *bene docentes* de San Pablo . . . " (84).

which is permissible?" (91).¹⁶⁹ In this way, Sor Juana is able to foresee potential ecclesiastic refutation of her call for reinterpretation.

Despite the nun declaring that she would never again lift a pen in her defense, the damage to her public image as an obedient nun had already been done. Sor Juana's boldness certainly played a factor in the Church silencing her voice. In order to escape this fate for the sake of her freedom as an intellectual nun, she needed to avoid the interpretation of biblical texts and corrective measures altogether. Her claim to understand St. Paul's true desire suggests a biblical familiarity that seemingly surpassed that of her spiritual directors. Sor Juana both projected an image of superior intelligence and the capacity for accessing God's will more efficiently than men. Her goal to correct the traditional interpretation was a dangerous game, particularly with its placement towards the end of *La Respuesta*. The correction would have been the most memorable content for her reader. Sor Juana begins by suggesting a misunderstanding of her dedication to Catholicism, but then uses the borrowed platform given to her by Fernández's published challenge to her character, as an opportunity to affirm a misinterpretation of the male comprehension of a canonized member of the Church. In short, the nun claims that the hierarchy is incorrect in their thinking, interpreting, directing, and teaching as it pertains to women. This bold accusation went beyond the triangle of power that surrounded Sor Juana and ultimately signaled the Institution as flawed.

¹⁶⁹ "Pues ¿en qué ha estado el delito, si aun lo que es lícito a las mujeres . . . no hago yo . . ." (90).

La Respuesta a Sor Filotea provides insightful and incriminating evidence of Sor Juana's notion of female involvement in hierarchical power dynamics. Superficially, the nun followed all necessary rhetorical stratagems as a method of cloaking her corrective intentions, yet her clear departure from affective modesty was only exacerbated by her correction of male interpretation of scripture. Sor Juana was fully cognizant of the transgressive nature behind her critique of the Institution, which only makes her approach to redacting *La Respuesta* all the more confusing in terms of understanding the nun's persona. The modern critic may find it difficult to attribute her boldness to a lack of understanding the severity of her statements. After all, Sor Juana was able to use both logic based on male understanding as well as the appropriate tools for female expression, completely comprehending both, in order to present a fundamental gendered flaw that she identified in the Church. For the first time in the New World, the inferior female had an official platform to criticize the very men who provided her the permission to write. This opportunity reverses Fernández's ironic encouragement to write her opinion in the *La carta atenagórica*, and serves as a much wider scale critique than her ideas about Vieira. Ultimately, Sor Juana's refusal to exclusively pursue either the cloister like Santa Teresa or avoid the convent altogether and live as a man like Catalina de Erauso, solidified her image of disobedience and deviation from traditional monasticism. Although Sor Juana turns to humility rhetoric at certain points in *La Respuesta*, the loss of her Spanish patrons and her inability to properly negotiate power led to her silence.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions: Inclinations Toward Good or Evil

As originally postulated in the introduction to this study, early modern women could enter the space of power and autonomy either through an excessive adherence to monastic expectations or by rejecting norms of feminine behavior altogether. Moreover, women who utilized either of these modes of empowerment had to recognize the ecclesiastic mentality regarding the dangerous inclinations of females in the male sphere. Santa Teresa de Ávila, Catalina de Erauso, and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz demonstrated their familiarity with this male concern definitively by revealing what men would interpret as feminine weakness. Knowledge of the limitations of the female gender in the convent provoked both Santa Teresa and Sor Juana to affect the conventual norm of false humility, while in the secular space Catalina avoided the requirement of gender deprecation by concealing her biological identity for as long as possible. Whether they reinforced Catholic dogma or the superiority of men, female religious could use male beliefs about feminine inclination toward sin to their advantage. The ultimate critical curiosity when viewing these women in reference to gender, hierarchy, and institutionalized power is whether or not we can consider their appropriation of the male space as a success or a failure, and what the individual experiences of these three women, regardless of the geographical, social, and religious differences in their conventual and secular interactions, can reveal about the other two.

While scholars have separately studied Santa Teresa, Catalina, and Sor Juana from various critical disciplines, interpreting their texts collectively provides a clearer view not only of how females could circumvent the patriarchy in similar ways both in the Iberian Peninsula and the New World, but it also shows what types of transgressive behaviors were more tolerable in the eyes of the Church. In other words, the potentially sinful or blasphemous identities studied in this dissertation reveal almost as much about the Institution as they do about Santa Teresa, Catalina, and Sor Juana. From the confessorial perspective, the inheritance of Eve's inclination toward evil was inevitable for all women. The key to success in the male space was to prove that their inclination was gender normative.

Ultimately, hierarchical problems arose because clerics associated Eve's perceived inclination towards evil and disobedience with the three clear yet distinct inclinations of Santa Teresa, Catalina, and Sor Juana. I attribute the success of Santa Teresa and Catalina, and the eventual silence of Sor Juana to a phenomenon that each nun experienced, the idea of an inevitable attraction to knowledge.

Individually, these nuns were inclined to either acquire the wisdom of God directly from the source without the aid of man, to experience the world through free movement, or to explore divinity through the study of secular texts. These inclinations, all largely and exclusively linked to clerical, scholarly, or male privilege, proved to be problematic for these women as each of them, to a degree, disregard male entitlement and pursue their own agenda either in the cloister or the secular space.

Despite the variation in their stories, the inclination of each woman reveals a great deal about the experiences of the three women as individually different, but equally interpreted by men as possible threats to the ecclesiastic hierarchy. The most logical question regarding these women is: If Santa Teresa, Catalina, and Sor Juana truly posed a threat to the hierarchy, why were two out of the three allowed to continue in the pursuit of their own ideal? The primary distinction is found in the degree of danger posed by each nun to the ultimate control of the Church. Santa Teresa reinforced Catholic standards and even went on to be a Carmelite reformer. Similarly, but from a wildly different angle, Catalina de Erauso also upheld the standards of patriotism and the Catholic fight for the conversion of the indigenous peoples. Conversely, Sor Juana threatened the divinely awarded authority of the Censor, the bishop, and the archbishop of New Spain by directly challenging the interpretational abilities of all men in the Institution of the Church. I attribute the longevity they achieved, or lack thereof, in the authoritative space to their ability to align their inclinations with appropriate gender norms. Although the behavior of Santa Teresa, Catalina, and Sor Juana aroused male suspicion regarding their compliance with Catholic standards, the hierarchy could pardon and even enable their entrance into the male world if they could logically link their inclination to Catholicism and gender normative behavior. The women who are able to simultaneously appeal to the male perspective of feminine weakness and attribute their inclination to the divine were able to protect themselves from punishment.

Santa Teresa presents herself as a champion of conformity in regards to Tridentine norms. Her inclination to seek the knowledge of God directly without the aid of a male mediator was a moderately safe and completely successful means to appropriate power. The emotionally charged element of Mysticism corresponded to her gender and had historical precedence among men and women in the Church. Her ecstasies only partially raised suspicion because of the commonalities with Illuminism. The saint masks her seemingly heretical prayer practice and the use of instructive rhetoric in two primary forms. The first is her observance of the monastic structures of the *vida espiritual*. In her willingness to submit to her confessors' demands to write the story of her life from sin to conversion, Santa Teresa presents herself as a submissive nun. In redacting *Libro de la vida*, she is able to continuously refer to her writing as an obedient act. The references to her compliance serve as a reminder to her readers that she does not write of her own volition.

The second way that Santa Teresa softens the reception of her inclination was through the proper and excessive use of humility rhetoric. The saint professes her extreme ignorance and defers interpretational right to her confessors, the opposite of Sor Juana. Teresa particularly turns to the concept of holy ignorance in order to cloak her role as instructor of her own interiority and as corrector of the ecclesiastic role of her Dominican confessor. Although she uses the story of his sexual immorality as anecdotal advice for other men, she parallels her role as interpreter of male religious experience with the idea of female as man's sexual

temptress. In referring to the female as the source of the male's temptation, she, as a woman, highlights the female inclination towards evil while simultaneously underscoring her mystic experience as divine. Her attention to offsetting her episodes of instruction with humility and her gender-appropriate mystic subject matter are key to her success.

Catalina desired to see the world. The Lieutenant Nun's only way to experience Spain and the New World was to escape a life of enclosure through changing herself into a male. In lieu of challenging the hierarchy as a woman, Catalina becomes part of the male system of dominance. She assimilates to the privileged sex and perpetuates masculinized standards of capitalism, warrior aggression, and patriotism. In this way, Catalina acquires worldly experiences unavailable to women. In reinforcing the gender binary the Lieutenant Nun appeases notions of male superiority. In a sense, her desire to live as a man only perpetuates the male characterization of female as weak. She demonstrates the opposite inclination of Eve, not to be an enlightened female, but to be an experienced and knowledgeable male. Her success as a man was directly connected to her virginity as a woman. Catalina's male inclination depended on the maintenance of the feminine ideal, virtue. Through abandoning and then exploiting feminine feebleness, she is able to perpetuate male, Catholic, and racial superiority so completely in the New World that the Pope and King can find no fault in her gender transgression. The Catholic Church recognizes Catalina's desire as more of a

man's inclination. A male, provided that he benefits the crown and faith, has no marked predisposition to evil.

Sor Juana is the epitome of the obedient nun in that she accedes to the wishes of the convent by maintaining the patronage of high members of court, and to the members of court by continuing to write. Yet, simultaneous involvement in both cloister and the public negates the vow of enclosure. Essentially, she attempts to redefine the limits of the gender binary between penitent and confessor while also claiming to adhere to it. Sor Juana directly challenges the Church by rejecting the traditional duties of the female religious. Her inclination is two-sided in that she not only suggests that she should be able to study, but, also shows that her knowledge gives her equal rights and abilities to pursue Christ privately without the interpretational input of the male cleric. In contrast to Santa Teresa and Catalina, although Sor Juana attempts to describe her inclination as divinely inspired, she is unable to reconcile worldly studies, monastic responsibilities, and the open threat she poses to the men who demand a return to tradition.

Sor Juana desires knowledge reserved for theologians in the Church or intellectuals in the secular world. In referring to her desire as a *negra inclinación*, she clearly recognizes the dangers of her inclination. Still, she attempts to adjust the male interpretation of scripture that advocates for the subjugation of women. At the moment when Sor Juana's involvement in the public becomes too great, that is to say with the publication of *La carta atenagórica*, her inclination no longer benefits

the convent. Without the financial benefit of her patrons, Sor Juana's inclination toward knowledge too closely resembles that of Eve.

Despite the vocational and performative differences between Catalina and Santa Teresa, both realize inclinations that are religiously and socially acceptable: a desire to be closer to God, and a desire to abandon femininity. Since Eve, man has portrayed woman in such a way that teaches women that an interest in wisdom is shameful. Viewing Santa Teresa alongside Catalina enables us as critics to understand the ease with which the Lieutenant nun receives papal and royal approval to continue her life as a man. The average nun had to defer all religious and secular authority to the male and demonstrate ignorance. Catalina, like Santa Teresa, outwardly recognized the limitations and weakness of her own gender. However, rather than complying with her pending vows as a nun, she abandons the cloister to live the life of a man as a female. From the perspective of the Church, her manner of recognizing female propensity to sin as a daughter of Eve was the refusal of her own femininity. In rejecting her role as a woman, she receives the highest praise for her services rendered to the crown and Church. In contrast, Santa Teresa constantly dealt with the threat of inquisitorial intervention. This shows the precariousness of the struggle of the early modern nun who devoted herself to God and the convent.

Sor Juana is only similar to Santa Teresa in that they are both professed nuns and chose to enter into corrective rhetoric with their confessors. Her greatest advantage later served as her disadvantage. In departing from many of the staples of

female monasticism such as enclosure and poverty, Sor Juana only gives her detractors more evidence with which to later demand her compliance. Rather than break with the specifications of the Church in regards to female religious, Catalina simply opts out of conventual life and femininity altogether. Catalina's identity was perfectly acceptable as a source of Catholic propaganda. In contrast, given Sor Juana's disinterest in adopting the male mentality regarding female education, the Church could not use her inclination toward worldly intellect for the betterment of Church or nation.

When considering the cases of these three women, although the convent often provided a female with a life more tailored to individual interests, the secular space seemed to be safer for the early modern woman as long as she abandoned her gender. The Church forces Santa Teresa and Sor Juana into the non-normative space of self-interpretation and public correction only to later criticize their obedience. A fundamental difference between Santa Teresa and Sor Juana is that Teresa acknowledges her desire for male-like power as displaced and also encourages her confessors to correct this behavior and even destroy her document. Sor Juana refuses to perpetuate male belief in feminine incapability and defends her divergence from the traditional monastic path to divinity. Her call for inclusion in the area of intellectualism only further accentuates the tolerability of Santa Teresa's dedication to compliance and Catalina's resolve to abandon the requirements of femaleness. The Church only authorized and enabled behavior that clerics could restructure and re-present to society as common orthodoxy. For the female

religious, the sole acceptable form of power was through Mysticism. Conversely, for a woman in the secular space, an abandonment of femininity that had a propaganda value for the Church could also be deemed acceptable. Early modern women were not as powerless as twenty-first century gender norms might suggest. Provided that they were familiar with logic based on male intelligence and beliefs regarding feminine inclination, women could manipulate male thought in order to realize their own agenda. Whether they were successful or not depended on how well they adhered to the strict rules of gender performance.

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