

FINDING GOD IN ALL THINGS: TERESA OF ÁVILA'S USE OF THE FAMILIAR

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ABSTRACT

Even a superficial reader of Saint Teresa's works will notice the abundance of images that fill the pages. Why does Teresa use so many images? Where do they come from? What do they tell us about her inner life and her and the world she inhabits?

The objective of my dissertation is to analyze the metaphors that Teresa of Ávila uses in her four major works: *Libro de la vida* (begun in 1562 and completed in 1565), *El camino de perfección* (c. 1566), *Las fundaciones* (1573), and *Las moradas* or *El castillo interior* (1577). I will focus first on Teresa's biography, especially the sources and essence of her spirituality, in order to explain her need for images. Next, I will explore images drawn from both literary sources and from Teresa's everyday life. In addition, I will show how Teresa's choice of images provides us with knowledge about early modern Spain. Teresa's images taken from the natural world, the world of merchants and markets, money and jewels, the *domus*, or the hearth, and architecture, become the mediating bodies whose overarching purpose is to show the inward movement of mental prayer. Thus, Teresa is able to translate her own apophatic experiences kataphatically, and so reconcile the tension between the "image-less" experience of ineffable transcendence and a didactic expression grounded in images.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the friendship and memory of my sister-in-law, Theodora (Roula) Anagnostakis and my Georgetown classmate, Karalyn Schneider-Diaz.

Let nothing disturb you
Let nothing disturb you.
Let nothing upset you.
Everything changes.
God alone is unchanging.
With patience all things are possible.
Whoever has God lacks nothing.
God alone is enough.

St. Teresa of Ávila

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INTRODUCTION

Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582), one of the most famous mystics of sixteenth-century Spain, was influential in transforming spiritual thought in her period. Her writing, which reflects her mystical journey into the innermost depths of her soul to find God through *recogimiento* or recollection, did not exist in a vacuum. The Bible served Teresa as a source of imagery. By the time Teresa began to write, the 1559 Valdés Index had prohibited most translations of the Bible as well as many religious books by contemporary authors. However, Teresa would have been familiar with such imagery through previous readings and through sermons, which were replete with Biblical imagery. In addition, Teresa's predecessors, among whom were Francisco de Osuna, Bernardo de Laredo, and Pedro de Alcántara, provided models for expressing spiritual experience through imagery taken from the everyday, material world.

Writing in colloquial prose, Teresa makes use of "harto groseras comparaciones" in order to express spiritual experience that defies comprehension. Throughout her writing she integrates familiar imagery taken from the everyday "sensible" world of her sixteenth-century Castilian environment in order to communicate her message to her audience. Through imagery grounded in shared experience, Teresa seeks to describe the steps toward mystical union in ways that will be intelligible to people who may not have experienced it. Such homey language also helps to protect Teresa from accusations of pretentiousness and pride (since women were forbidden to sermonize or teach doctrine) by depicting her as a simple, uneducated, plain-spoken woman.

Teresa explains her mystical journey through diverse metaphors for the soul and God. The soul is a "mariposa" (moth). It begins its life as a lowly "worm" or caterpillar that "dies" to its old life (suffers a conversion) to be reborn as a moth that is drawn to the light. Or the soul is a

“tortuga” (a turtle) that retracts into itself, moving inward toward darkness. God is a “King” waiting for his Bride in the innermost mansion of the diamond castle that is the soul. Teresa repeatedly searches for the right metaphor to make her spiritual experience understood. Only through imagery can Teresa explain the essence of her spirituality to her confessors, Inquisitors, nuns, and other readers.

In the *Book of her Life* or *Libro de la vida* (begun in 1562 and completed in 1565), written at the request of her spiritual directors, Teresa gives an account of her method of prayer and describes her life from within the interior convent walls. Because this book falls into the hands of the Inquisitors, it is not accessible to her nuns. At their insistence and at the request of her confessor, Friar Domingo Báñez, to “write something about prayer,” Teresa produces her *Way of Perfection* or *Camino de perfección* (c. 1566). This book, primarily a defense of mental prayer for women, serves as a didactic work for nuns, advocating the contemplative ideal that was fundamental to her reform. Here, like Saint Augustine, Teresa explains how to find God within oneself, carefully detailing the differences between the prayer of active and infused recollection. *Way of Perfection*, which outlines the instruction of her sisters at St. Joseph’s while stressing the importance of fortifying and defending her Carmelite community against Protestants and against the “small temptations of the devil,” is the least controversial of her writings.

In her *Book of Foundations* or *Libro de las fundaciones* (1573), Teresa details her efforts to establish her “dove-cotes,” as she calls her houses or convents, throughout Spain, “without even a *maravedí*,” thanks to God’s guidance. The *Book of Foundations* illustrates how she networks and uses her political acumen. It also shows her practical side, how she manages to

borrow meager straw mattresses and utensils for her convents, for example. In addition, Teresa proves to be a shrewd businesswoman, procuring silk hangings for convents through her patrons' generous donations. *Foundations* illustrates how knowledgeable Teresa was about matters of commerce, fundraising, and law, which explains why she often had recourse to metaphors related to these areas when describing spiritual issues.

Teresa's final book, *Interior Castle* or *Castillo interior*, also called *Las moradas* (1577), abounds in metaphors. Written at the behest of Father Jerónimo Gracián, one of her dearest friends and a cherished spiritual director, it describes the soul's journey to God through the metaphor of an interior castle made of diamond or very fine glass and divided into seven mansions or dwelling places, each with many chambers. The gateway into the castle is prayer. The progress of the soul entails an unending battle against sin, depicted through such metaphors of evil as insects, lizards, snakes, and other repulsive creatures, which represent worldly things (money, honor, power) and human frailties (fear, anger, jealousy, etc.). These *impedimentos* to the soul's progress linger on the periphery of the castle, preventing it from moving inward. The senses and the faculties (the vassals), which mediate between the soul and the world, often endanger the soul, since they are "engulfed in the world and in their pleasure and vanities" (*IC* 1:2:12). But the faculties can also function as castle guards who protect the soul and fight against these *impedimentos*. Throughout the book, Teresa fine-tunes these metaphors. For example, the faculties are like relatives: they can be annoying, but we are forced to live with them, and sometimes they can be helpful. Our backsliding is like a poison: too much backsliding can destroy the soul, just as too much poison can destroy the body. However, a tiny bit can have a positive effect: "Even a fall from God will draw out good, as does the seller of an antidote who drinks some poison in order to see if the antidote is effective" (*IC* 2: 1:9). Thus, slight

backsliding can serve to demonstrate to the soul its own vulnerability, which can strengthen it against future temptations. By means of metaphors such as these, taken from everyday life, Teresa makes her teaching palatable and accessible.

This study analyzes the metaphors that Teresa of Ávila uses in her four major works: *Book of her Life*, *Way of Perfection*, *Book of Foundations*, and *Interior Castle*, metaphors drawn from literary sources as well as from her everyday life. Although Teresa's works were intended as guidebooks on interior prayer, they serve as a window into not only the religious, but also the social and economic environment of her society. For that reason, her choices of everyday images are especially important because they provide us with knowledge about early modern Spain. In recent years, scholars have examined Teresa's words from theological, psychological, literary, and feminist perspectives. Through a meticulous examination of her metaphors, I hope to increase our knowledge of Teresa's world and how it nurtures her creative processes. In this way I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ways in which Teresa's spirituality was grounded in the commonplace, and how she used the commonplace to describe the extraordinary.

Teresa's Formation

As the child of a *converso* merchant growing up in Ávila, Teresa had access to both written and visual imagery. Although less than 20% of the Spanish population at that time was literate – and the proportion was even smaller for women – it was not unusual for *converso* families to teach their daughters as well as their sons to read and write. In her *Life*, Teresa states that at an early age she read chivalric novels, books that were rich in imagery depicting the struggle against Evil as represented by snakes, serpents, monsters, enchanters, and malevolent

natural forces. Even after giving up these novels, she would still have been exposed to this imagery through the *Flos Santorem*, (*Lives of the Saints*), in which Christian saints were depicted in much the same ways as knightly heroes.

Teresa would also have had access to a rich tradition of spiritual imagery through the Bible, books, sermons, and spiritual conversations. The writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, Saint Augustine, Ludolph of Saxony, and Saint Thomas Aquinas inspired the Spanish mystics to use images when speaking of the meditative and contemplative stages of prayer. Contemporary spiritual writers, such as Osuna, Laredo, and Pedro de Alcántara, also influenced Teresa's thinking.

Before 1559, the year the Valdés Index prohibited most Spanish translations of the Bible, the reading aloud of devotional books and of the Bible within a "circle of listeners" was one way to access the written culture (Surtz 13). According to Carrera, *lectio divina* was "the best way of obtaining God's help in understanding the words of Scripture...[as] it had purifying and strengthening effects on the soul moved by desire" (22). *Lectio divina* was important within monastic life as the reading was done in a way that the repetition of the words allowed the message to be inscribed upon the memory of the monks or nuns.

It is not clear to what extent Teresa herself read the Bible prior to the 1559 prohibition, but her imagery does reflect a familiarity with both the Old and the New Testament. As a sixteenth-century woman, Teresa did not learn Latin, so that after 1559, her best access to the Bible, so rich in the metaphors and imagery that revealed the profound mysteries of God, was probably through sermons. As Teresa explains in her *Meditations*, "For one word of His will contain within itself a thousand mysteries, and thus our understanding is only very elementary,

[as] there are some words in the *Song of Songs* that could have been said in another style” (1.2; 3). Like the Biblical metaphors of the *Song of Songs*, Teresa uses metaphors from common and familiar objects. From metaphors of food for the soul, or the wine from God that supplies the fortitude and virtue that souls require on their journey, to the seductive images of a passionate longing of a lover, Teresa interprets each the “passage in [her] own way, even though [her] understanding of it may not be in accord with what is meant” (*Meditations* 1.8).

Images in the Scriptures served to excite people to devotion. This justified “images on the grounds that man needs material symbols of God precisely because of his inability to ascend directly to the realm of the spiritual. Without images the divine remained inaccessible to ordinary mortals” (Freedberg 164). This process of ascent from the visible that is seen in the sensible world of man to the invisible world of God is brought about by pictures, signs, or symbols. “Since the divine is not at all sensible, or susceptible to the normal responses of the senses, but only exists on the level of pure spirit, we can only perceive it by means of objectification in the form of images” (Freedberg 166).

In the sixteenth century, the translations of Augustine’s writings in the vernacular made his works more accessible and served as an important inspirational source for secular as well religious writers in Spain. By reading Augustine’s *Confessions*, Teresa sees how the saint’s struggles resonate in her own life. Like him, Teresa wants to follow the spiritual progress of

recollected persons, in teaching them to consider the Lord as very deep within their souls; such a thought is much more alluring and fruitful than thinking of Him as outside oneself, as I mentioned at other times. Particularly, the glorious St. Augustine speaks about this

for neither in the market place nor in pleasures nor anywhere else that he sought God did he find Him as he did when he sought Him within himself (*Life* 40.6).

Augustine, who was influenced by Paul's Epistles, saw looking inward at one's soul as a pilgrimage. It is this spiritual quest of ascent towards God through interiority that Teresa impresses upon her readers, because she believes that, like St. Augustine, we can experience a conversion similar to his and find God within ourselves.

Another important influence on Teresa was the *Vita Christi* by Ludolph of Saxony, which was translated into Spanish in 1502 and 1503 by Ambrosio de Montesino, and printed in Alcalá. The *Vita Christi* focused on the practice of compassionate meditation, which involved the contemplation of images from the life of Christ, in order to guide the soul to find God. Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi* impressed upon Teresa the need for individuals to use images of Christ's humanity to lead into a dialogue between God and the soul.

Similarly, Aquinas considered images (in churches) to be useful, for three purposes:

- 1) for the instruction of the unlettered, who might learn from them as if from books
- 2) so that the mystery of the Incarnation and the examples of the saints might remain more firmly in our memory by being daily represented to our eyes;
- 3) to excite the emotions which are more effectively aroused by things seen than by things heard (Freedberg 162).

Teresa was introduced to the spiritual movement of *devotio moderna*, a religious movement that began in the Netherlands and quickly spread through France and Spain, through

the writings of Francisco de Osuna (*Life* 4.7).¹ *Devotio moderna*, which drew on apophaticism, stressed a uniqueness of prayer that was an “inward focus on the presence of God achieved through benumbing the senses and reason, which leads to negation of the self in order to attain pure and direct reception of God’s will” (Mujica *Skepticism* 60). Although this type of spirituality leads to a state that transcends image, as Evelyn Underhill argues, the mystic “cannot wholly do without symbol and image, inadequate to his vision though they must always be, for his experience must be expressed if it is to be communicated, as its actuality is inexpressible except in some side-long way, some hint or parallel which will stimulate the dormant intuition of the reader, and convey...something beyond its surface sense” (*Mysticism* 78). Teresa became familiar with this type of prayer through Francisco de Osuna’s writing.

El tercer abecedario (1527) by Francisco de Osuna, which Teresa read at her uncle’s house while convalescing, became the most influential guide in her spiritual formation. Teresa, claiming she did not know how to pray, found consolation as she read Osuna’s book. At the core of Osuna’s process of recollection is the inner or spiritual journey to God through three stages of prayer: first, mental or vocal prayer using the Lord’s Prayer; second, meditative prayer, bringing up thoughts of the Church or God through images; and third, mental or spiritual prayer moving beyond words in order to withdraw inwardly until the soul ultimately reaches union with God. Through this process, individuals follow the “via negativa,” negative or apophatic spirituality, which involves the stripping away of all anthropomorphic representations of God. When the soul is quiet and tranquil, it seeks God beyond images. But for Osuna, recollection first begins with meditating on some aspect of divine reality, whether the names of God, the Scriptures, or an

¹ During her first year at the Incarnation, Teresa became seriously ill. On her way to her sister’s house at Castellanos de la Cañada, Teresa stopped at her uncle’s house. It is there that Teresa read and was first introduced to Osuna’s *Third Spiritual Alphabet*. This spiritual guide, in the form of an “alphabet” was the basis for her spiritual formation of mental prayer.

aspect of Christ's life. In order to enter into a Prayer of Quiet, individuals need to gradually dim or extinguish the external sensible world in order to approach the internal stage where union with God is attained. For Osuna, spiritual prayer for recollection involves personal effort on the part of the individual, as "God listens best when individuals pray without words, in silence" (qtd. Di Salvo 97). To better express his recollection, Osuna used many images taken from the everyday, such as the sea urchin, the glass or crystal of the divine light, the river flowing from the "region of delights," wheat, fire, the dark night, and the diamond (Di Salvo 101-102).

La subida del Monte Si3n (1534) by Fray Bernardo de Laredo, was another influence on Teresa's prayer and imagery. Through Laredo's *Subida*, Teresa sees that individuals first seek self-knowledge through "aniquilaci3n," and then follow Christ's steps as they set out through a cleansing process or spiritual dryness in God's quiet contemplation. Lastly, individuals reach the "quietud de pura contemplaci3n" of the soul. In his prayer of recollection, Laredo describes his journey to the ascent of Si3n, which involves arming the soul with "horses, bridles, reins, spurs, for these are the virtues that the soul must possess" (DiSalvo 127). Laredo's final part of quiet contemplation is compared to a "type of spiritual harvest where the quiet sterility of winter, the rains which are one's tears, and the toils of tilling the land, brings an abundant harvest for the soul" (DiSalvo 132). This spiritual harvest though, is attained only after the laboring, cultivating, and tilling of the physical body. Whether the soul recollects itself within "s3 mismo" or "fuera de s3," the ultimate is reaching God within the center. Similar to Osuna, Laredo uses many images of animals to express interiority and further emphasize recollection. "Un erizo, o una tortuga, o un gal3pago son animales que se encierran dentro en s3, y cuando est3n encerrados obran guardando su vida en muy callada quietud, y nadie los ve en lo interior" (qtd. DiSalvo 359). As we shall see, Teresa finds comparable images to show interiority: the inwardness of

the turtle or sea urchin; the moth that dies, only to be reborn; or the palmetto—tough on the outside but tender and tasty on the inside. Through this imagery, Teresa differentiates between the “interior” part of the soul, the place where her spiritual activity takes place and where the soul reaches a communication with God in seclusion, and the “exterior” part, where “worldly joys” occur. Teresa’s “exterior” world consisted of the “thousand vanities,” and enclosure within those vanities did not allow her “spirit” to proceed as “lord but as slave.” It was these impediments or vanities that kept Teresa from shutting herself within herself, “(which was [her] whole manner of procedure in prayer)” (*Life* 7.17).

In addition to Laredo, Teresa was exposed to the writings of Pedro de Alcántara:

I could do nothing but draw comparisons in order to explain myself. And, indeed, there is no comparison that fits this kind of vision very well. Since this vision is among the most sublime (as I was afterward told by a very holy and spiritual man, whose name is Friar Peter of Alcántara and of whom I shall speak later . . .) (*Life* 27.3).

In her struggles to find suitable wording when writing about her mystical experience, Teresa explains to her readers how Alcántara aided her in understanding her faith:

This holy man enlightened me about everything and explained it to me, and he told me not to be grieved but that I should praise God and be so certain that all was from His Spirit that with the exception of the faith nothing could for me be truer or more believable (*Life* 30.5).

Although religious and vernacular sources helped form her concepts of apophatic or “imageless-ness” prayer, Teresa could not totally reject the importance of images in prayer.

Teresa saw images or paintings of the Lord, or a “good book written in the vernacular” as necessary in the kataphatic expression and in recollection. This is because the basic tenet of Christianity, “at the heart of the New Testament is the appearance of God’s revelation in the humanly visible form of Christ. Through Christ, the divine...becomes knowable by means of evidence mediated by the senses” (qtd. Mujica “Apophatic” 745). It is necessary to grasp Christ’s human nature by representing him as man. In Chapter IV of her *Life*, Teresa explains the importance of entering into dialogue with God by visualizing the Humanity of Christ. The written word, along with painted or sculpted images known to Teresa, such as *Ecce Homo*, helped her pray in the early stages of her spiritual life. However, in her writing, Teresa drew not only from these inherited images, but also from her everyday life. In “Female Mystics, Visions, and Iconography”, Chiara Frugoni affirms that many mystics “were particularly attentive to images drawn from their everyday experiences, the seedbed for their interior meditation” (133). Imagery dependent on inherited biblical passages, painted or sculpted images, or on everyday experience, was needed to reach the “ineffable,” as only by objectifying through images could the divine be understood.

Sixteenth-century Spain was saturated with religious imagery evident not only in public buildings, but also in the decoration of private homes. Ávila was a rich city with elaborate churches filled with religious statues and paintings. These images served as a way to affect individuals emotionally and were instruments of consolation. Teresa drew from all these sources, as well as from her own life experience.

This preliminary chapter has shown how Teresa’s metaphors reflect her religious formation. Next, we shall see how her choice of images also provides us with knowledge about

early modern Spain. For instance, her description of the silkworm brings to mind the merchant way of life of her *converso* father and grandfather as silk merchants, while the labor of watering the garden and toiling to remove the “malas hierbas” reflects the aridity of dry Castile and the agricultural importance of Spain. Whether retreating into convents or retreating to the innermost center to find God through architectural space, Teresa takes us on a physical and spiritual journey. Along the way, we will learn how her conscious choice of homey comparisons to illustrate the ordinary life of her day allowed her to impress her readers with the vitality of her spiritual experiences.

CHAPTER ONE

The Natural World and the Interior World.

As a Catholic woman of *converso* background, Teresa had to be careful when advancing the reform of her order because her insistence on mental prayer, through which the individual sought a personal and intimate relationship with God, put her at odds with officially sanctioned Church prayer practices. Historically, the sixteenth century was a period of conflict, with the shadow of the Inquisition looming large over groups such as the *alumbrados* who thought that spiritual enlightenment came directly from God. Many in the Church hierarchy feared that the cultivation of such beliefs might lead to spiritual autonomy. Among the *alumbrados* were many *conversos* who were suspect and persecuted by the Inquisition. Teresa avoided this fate by treading carefully. Determined to show the essence of her spirituality, Teresa turns not to theology, but to images taken from nature. She uses these images to give meaning to her mystical experiences and to show the spiritual journey embedded in God's creation. In other words, she employs images that range from gestures to natural objects to generate symbols, "anything...that is disengaged from its mere actuality and used to impose meaning upon experience" (Geertz 45).

Teresa divides her descriptions of the spiritual journey into two parts. The first is meditative or active. During this stage, the person prepares his or her soul for what is to come. Once the journey starts, the soul moves into an interior world, the world of mental prayer. During the first stage, individuals must tend their soul, seeking spiritual nourishment through books, sermons, images, meditation, and vocal prayer. It is in this stage where the soul prepares itself for God's intervention. The second part of the journey is the contemplative or passive

stage. As the soul grows in prayerfulness, God assumes agency. The individual need no longer work at preparing the soul, but rather remains passive so that God can enter and illuminate it. By expressing the spiritual journey in metaphors and images from nature, Teresa is able to safely validate mental prayer, for if interiority is reflected in nature, then it follows that interior prayer is part of the natural order of things.

Throughout her writing Teresa expresses herself through *comparaciones*. As an unlettered woman, or *mujercilla*, as she constantly calls herself, Teresa relies on the metaphors taken from the exterior world to find the language necessary to make the spiritual experience palatable and accessible to her readers, including Inquisitors and censors, lay individuals, and her beloved nuns. Teresa weaves a complex tapestry, piling metaphor upon metaphor; and it is these images taken from the natural world that “tighten the link with language... [and are] indispensable for conveying a complex spiritual meaning through a visible image” (Dupré *Passage* 239). Thus, she is able to give a deeper symbolic meaning to her mystical experiences.

Teresa’s inspiration for her natural metaphors came from her experiences with nature, including her contact with her family’s silk and wool trade, as well as from her familiarity with spiritual sources and, plausibly, with many of the vernacular books on natural history that were in wide-circulation in early modern Europe. We know that Teresa did have a tremendous affinity for reading. As she explains early in her *Life*, she and her mother spent much of their free time reading books of chivalry and other good books, and Teresa measured her happiness with always having a new book to read (*Life* 2.1). Her father, who was also “fond of reading good books [,] ...had books in Spanish for his children to read” (*Life* 1.1). His library could easily have contained books by “Boethius, Cicero, Seneca, Vergil, Juan de Padilla, and Diego de

Guzmán,” (Hamilton, Elizabeth 18) as well as lives of saints, books of chivalry and books on “nature and virtues of animals and plants... [and bestiaries that] were ...written and read in the Middle Ages [and on], with other aims than conveying philosophical or medical knowledge of the natural world” (Ogilvie 97). For our purposes, the most important books on the list were the natural history books that provided a link between the material world and the spiritual and were seen as a “symbolic representation of certain moral or theological truths. Animals and plants were not simply to provide for the physical needs of humanity, but also to serve for higher spiritual and moral needs” (Harrison 464). Naturally, books such as these illuminated a “reverence for nature” (Casey 45).

The spiritualization of the natural world in literature was, of course, not new in Teresa’s time. Many of the early Christian fathers, such as Origen (185-254), Basil the Great (330-379), and his brother Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) had used animal images

to enforce moral teachings or to illustrate theological tenets. [Even] the so-called *Claves Scripturae Sacrae*...were to be used as keys not only for unlocking the spiritual treasure of the Holy Writ, but also for disclosing the mystical meaning of all natural things...[and] the early Christian evangelists and patristic theologians were especially fond of drawing illustrations of spiritual truths and elucidations of scriptural texts (Evans 16, 22).

Moving to the sixteenth century, we find the humanist Juan Luis Vives, whose natural history encyclopedia *De tradendis disciplinis* (1531) modeled after Pliny, revealed many aspects of nature. With the expansion of print culture, this type of literature was widely produced in the vernacular, to “give valuable insight into the views of nature available to a broad lay audience” that was not necessarily literate in Latin (Crowther-Heyck 253). The vast variety of topics

“encompassing all aspects of the natural world: stars and planets, animals, birds, fish, plants, trees, minerals, gemstones, metals, and natural marvels” offered by these books fueled individuals’ curiosity (Crowther-Heyck 253); and they became bestsellers, alongside books of chivalry and lives of saints.

Well into the sixteenth century, “[t]he vernacular world of courtly romance appreciated nature, in particular a managed nature of gardens and groves, as a setting for adventure... Meanwhile, in the intellectual circles of cloister and university, the things of this world were subordinated to the spiritual and the world to come” (Ogilvie 100). Teresa’s natural world, with many of her unconventional images, became a blueprint for elucidating her message of interiority. The abundance of metaphors from the natural world in Teresa’s writing creates a bridge from external sixteenth-century Spain to her internal world of spiritual union.

A Mujercilla, not a Theologian

Teresa was dealing with some very delicate spiritual issues that could potentially raise the suspicion of heresy. Many in the Church hierarchy took a strong stance against mental prayer, emphasizing instead the importance of the rituals of the Church, especially for uneducated lay people. In contrast, for Teresa, mental prayer was the most effective way to communicate with God. For safety’s sake, Teresa emphatically states on a number of occasions that she writes reluctantly and that any serious spiritual writing should be done by theologians:

Why do you want me to write? Let the theologians do it! They have studied. I am ignorant and wouldn’t know how to put things. I should get the terms mixed up and do more harm than good. So many good books have been written about prayer. For the love of God, leave me to my spinning, to reciting the Office and attending to my obligations

like the rest of the sisters. I am not cut out to write books and have neither the health nor the intelligence to do it (qtd. Silverio 27).²

Rather than as a would-be theologian, Teresa depicts herself as a “humble, lowly *mujercilla*,” who needs to impress the importance of *recogimiento* (or recollection) and mental prayer on her sisters and others. Urged by her spiritual directors to write about prayer, Teresa was complying, albeit reluctantly, with orders from “persons of great learning” (*IC*, Prologue 4). Setting aside her “continual sickness” and daily tasks, Teresa presents herself as an unpretentious little nun who writes only in obedience to “learned men.”

Lacking a university education, Teresa nevertheless wishes to express her experiences in the most effective way possible, choosing to fill her simple writing with metaphors drawn from everyday experience. In order to justify herself, she explains that she could not have written without special supernatural assistance. By identifying God as the primary agent in the creation of her texts, she avoids accusations of presumptuousness. She, a simple woman, has no pretensions of being a literary artist or an intellectual; she is simply one of God’s vehicles. As she points out, “I’m literally, just like the parrots that are taught to speak; they know no more than what they hear or are show, and they often repeat it. If the Lord wants me to say something new, His Majesty will provide” (*IC*, Prologue 2). God was always at her side, ready to intervene; it was God’s word that she relied on.

² According to the introduction of the Silverio edition, this quote is from Jerónimo Gracián. See P. Silverio’s “Dulcuario del verdadero espíritu” Chap. V., *Interior Castle: St. Teresa of Ávila* (27).

Sources of Natural Imagery

Throughout her writing Teresa informs readers that she has either “read or heard” the metaphors she uses. Teresa did not write in a vacuum; her writing reflects “a rich literary tradition which [she] incorporates into [her] mystical works” (Howe *Mystical* 21). Like other Carmelite mystics, she “turned to classical and traditional sources in order to draw comparisons between the animal kingdom and . . . mystical experiences” (Howe *Mystical* 59). Besides drawing from the Bible, from writers such as Pliny or Isidore of Seville, or from the available vernacular natural history texts available in early modern Europe, Teresa resorts to images drawn from her sensible world, from nature’s animate and inanimate world, to convey her mystical experiences. For Teresa as for contemporaries, intertwining the spiritual with the everyday was natural, but it was only a starting point for expressing spiritual truths. Many of Teresa’s images derive from the common root metaphors that major religions share, for example, the Garden of Eden. But Teresa moves beyond the Bible as a source of metaphor. Biblical accounts treat nature as a place of divine presence and consolation, a place where people could practice meditation and asceticism. Especially significant is the notion of God’s presence in nature. The Franciscan tradition, of which Saints Francis of Assisi (c.1182-1226) and Bonaventure (1221-1274) were founders, sees “nature, as God’s creation, a place where human beings can come close to God” (Per Binde 19). For mystics, natural elements were a means “to communicate to the Christian the transcendent, mystical, and unspeakable qualities of God much better than could be learnt from theological discourses based on written tradition” (Per Binde 19). For Teresa, the use of language from her natural world was one way to shy away from the “theological” language that as a woman she dared not use and of which she claimed ignorance.

By doing so, Teresa carefully circumvented her descriptions of mental prayer and avoided raising suspicion.

Individuals in early modern Spain relied heavily on their agricultural world for subsistence and, as a result, were familiar with many of the processes of nature. Many widely circulated vernacular texts focused on the natural world, as individuals became more curious about “animals, plants, minerals, and natural marvels” (Crowther-Heyck 253), perhaps even drawing on translations of such devotional books as the fourteenth-century *Imitation of Christ*, which “point[ed] to a more widespread attitude that plants and animals should be studied for the spiritual lessons they can teach, not out of mere curiosity” (Ogilvie 101-102). For those literate individuals in the sixteenth century who were not able to read in Latin, these natural history texts represented a way to become familiar with the divine creation of nature. The contemplation of nature became a means of practicing piety, as this type of books intertwined the divine with the mundane (Crowther-Heyck 256).

Teresa, who loved to read, may well have enjoyed and had access to this type of book. Even if she did not read books of natural history herself, she would at least have heard of them through her contacts with learned men. It is noteworthy that Teresa, while convalescing at her uncle’s house, noted that he “spent his time reading good books in the vernacular” (*Life* 3.4). Unlike the many spiritual books that were censored because of teachings that seemed dangerous and heretical, these vernacular natural history books were readily available. These books were more than just natural history; they reflected the grandeur of God’s creation, and “[r]eading books about insects, animals, and plants helps humankind to praise and better know the creator and cause of all things” (Barrera-Osorio 113).

Peers describes Teresa as “an observant nun who utilizes ants, bees, birds (*aves*, *avecitas*), butterflies, caterpillars, cobwebs, doves, eagles, flies, hedgehogs, hens, lizards ...” in her writing (*Saint Teresa* 90-91). She does so not just because she was “attracted by small animals,” as Peers contends (*Saint Teresa* 91); Teresa was indeed fascinated with all of God’s creation, but she found that it was by focusing on the smallest of creatures, such as the silkworm, that she could make interiority visible to laypeople.

Teresa’s affinity for reading, her contact with the intellectual community, and her struggle to express herself in terms that common people could understand, impelled her to draw on images around her, to make “the spiritual world perceptible to the material world” (Howe *Mystical* 49). For example, water, her favorite natural element, permeates her descriptions of the stages of mystical experiences. Whether speaking of the dark depths of the silkworm’s chrysalis stage, the resurrection of the white butterfly, the cultivation of the virtues in God’s garden, or the minute fauna that reflects God’s grandeur, Teresa attests to God’s power and to an acute awareness of God’s presence in all things.

Water - a Metaphor for Prayer

While Teresa’s writing is filled with natural imagery of all kinds, water is perhaps her most important metaphor. She says in *Life* that because water is the very staff of life, it represents the most complete connection between the material world and God. Water used as a metaphor represents human journey, re-birth, or in an even broader context, a circulation of ideas. As Strang acknowledges, “the imagery of water [shows] an awareness that water is literally ‘substantial’ to human being[-s]” (160). Water is perhaps the only element of the material world that is essential to all living things, with its “generative” powers attaining more

than the spiritual level of baptism and rebirth. At a domestic or social level, O'Rourke Boyle observes,

[t]he sources of water for a Spanish town – spring, fountains, [and] streams – were womanly places for drawing the drinking and cooking water for households. The laundry was frequently taken just outside a town to the banks of a river, where the women would scrub the linen and wash their hair (*Loyola's* 137).

Water was not only central to domestic and social life, but also to economic life and was especially vital for the population of Castile during the sixteenth century. As the population grew, considerable agricultural expansion was necessary to supply the demand for food. The material landscape of Spain relied on water for survival, since an increased consumption of fruit, legumes, wheat, wine, mutton, and silk imposed a greater demand of land cultivation (*Vives Economic* 357). Castilian farmers relied on irrigation from the nearby rivers or streams, but this was only possible when the river water was accessible. As Casey points out, “[a] major challenge facing the Spanish farmer was that of the sheer lack of water for cultivation” (43). Irrigating from water wells or by hand was often necessary, for the “[s]heer lack of rainfall was compounded by the inability to retain and store water,” as Bilinkoff explains (*Ávila* 58). Individuals living on higher ground desperately needed more water, while those living on lower ground, “complained of flooding” (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 58). In the 1520s, the people of *Ávila* constructed “new fountains, pipes and wells...and call[ed] in outside ‘experts’ [in]... an effort to find new sources of water and ways of storing it” (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 58). It should not surprise us, then, that Teresa, who “grew up in a city that experienced a perpetual shortage of water” (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 58), portrays an agricultural society dependent on the soil for subsistence and on

the water necessary for the farmland to flourish. For Teresa, water was more than a metaphor for prayer; it was a reality central to her own agricultural society.

Teresa describes three appealing properties of water: cooling, cleansing, and satisfying or thirst-quenching, which explain in part her fondness “of this element, that [she] has observed . . . more attentively than other things” (*IC* 4:2.2). Of course, Teresa is also aware of water’s additional qualities. As Howe points out, both sacred and profane writers see water as a transitory element that expresses the “ineffable in its most essential forms” (*Mystical* 282). In *Spiritual Pilgrims*, Welch describes Teresa’s use of water as conveying “the sense of hidden riches and depths within the human person [in] . . . an attempt to express the psychological effects of God’s activity within her” (65). Teresa’s water “analogy underscores God’s dual role as both source and end of the living waters which impel and sustain the mystic” (Howe *Mystical* 284). Water to the mystic has transformative powers, guiding individuals through still waters or raging oceans until it becomes a symbol representing union with God.

One way in which Teresa expresses water’s transformative power is by distinguishing between the kinds of prayer that occur in what she calls her outer and innermost mansions of her *Interior Castle*. As Welch observes,

The first type of prayer is active meditation and it is the prayer of the first three dwelling places. The second type of prayer is a supernatural, infused prayer that is characteristic of the last three dwelling places. The middle dwelling place, the fourth, is [for Teresa], the place of transition (63).

Teresa’s final or fourth mansion reveals the Prayer of Quiet, which provides a more direct path to God. Here, Teresa has recourse to the symbolism of water to explore how mental prayer aids

in spiritual progress. Whether water comes in the form of tears, torrents of rain, or in fountains or basins, it is ideal for expressing interiority.

To understand it better, let us suppose that we are looking at two fountains, the basins of which can be filled with water...these two basins can be filled with water in different ways: the water in one comes from a long distance, by means of numerous conduits; but the other, has been constructed at the very source of the water and fills without making any noise. If the flow of water is abundant, as in the case we are speaking of, a great stream still runs from it after it has been filled; no skill is necessary here and no conduits have to be made for the water is flowing all the time (*IC 4:2.3*).

In the first basin, which is not near the source (God's presence), it is necessary to wait and pray patiently in order for the water to journey to the basin of the fountain and begin to fill.

For just as all the streamlets that flow from a clear spring area as clear as the spring itself, so the works of a soul in grace are pleasing in the eye of God and of men, since they proceed from this spring of life, in which the soul is as a tree planted. It would give no shade and yield no fruit if it proceeded not thence, for the spring sustains it and prevents it from drying up and causes it to produce good fruit. When the soul, on the other hand, through its own fault, leaves this spring and becomes rooted in a pool of pitch-black, evil-smelling water, it produces nothing but misery and filth (*IC 1:2.2*).

The second basin, constructed near the water source, symbolizes her Prayer of Quiet. The images of abundant flowing water express passive prayer, where there is no need to exert effort, nor to rely on conduits to bring water to the basin of the fountain. In the Prayer of Quiet, prayer is

like the flowing spring in which the water does not come through aqueducts – the soul restrains itself or is restrained in its realization that it doesn't understand what it desires; and so the mind wanders from one extreme to the other, like a fool unable to rest in anything (*IC* 4:3.8).

Here, where recollection begins with the awakening of the soul and God's assistance, less effort is needed on the part of the individual. When prayer is like water, pure, springing directly from the source, it is the best. Teresa is suggesting here that pure prayer operates with no conduits, in other words, without priests or other spiritual guides, just with a direct line to God. And when this direct connection happens, tears flow freely and the soul is in God's hands.

Water is a clear spring that gives and life and nourishes the soul. However, for Teresa, water can also be found in the pool of pitch-black, evil-smelling muck where the soul reaches its lowest depth of darkness. This dark and stagnant water that accompanies the onset of the individual's spiritual journey will be transformed into life-giving and sustaining water once the individual has navigated through the concentric circles that lead towards the Beloved. Teresa is constantly stressing the interior movement of the soul and the importance of its spiritual progress. She does this using imagery, by populating the water in the moat surrounding her crystalline or diamond-like castle with serpents representing the *impedimentos* or evil distractions that the soul encounters on its journey to the purified brilliance of the innermost center of the castle, the seventh mansion, where God resides. Along the way, vocal prayer, preferably "recited in solitude" (*Way* 24.2) helps to annihilate distracting thoughts and lead to mental prayer.

The recurring image in the Bible of water, in the form of "[r]ain watering the thirsty earth that the gardens and fields may flourish . . . has penetrated deeply into ordinary religious

devotion” (Ewer15). Teresa, who had either “read or heard” the Bible, finds water to be a convenient metaphor for explaining her spirituality, using it to guide individuals through still waters or raging oceans until it becomes a symbol representing union with God. Teresa’s most important use of water imagery, however, is her metaphor of the Four Waters, which correspond to the four stages of contemplative prayer. It is not hard to chart where the comparison comes from. In addition to her surroundings, Teresa could have drawn on the Biblical image where the Four Rivers are ascribed to the Four Gospels, which flow “from the inner Throne of God in order to irrigate the earth with the waters of life” (Webber 191).

Teresa’s metaphor of the Four Waters in *Life* enables her to explore the process and outcome of mental prayer. Using this metaphor, Teresa shows how individuals can progress through the four stages of prayer, two active or meditative states and two passive or contemplative states, in order to reach the final union with God:

Let us now consider how this garden can be watered, that we may know what we have to do, what labour it will cost us, if the gain outweighs the labour, and for how long this labour must be borne. It seems to me that the garden can be watered in four ways by taking water from a well, which costs us much labour; or by a waterwheel and buckets, when the water is drawn by a windlass – I have drawn it thus at times. It is less laborious than the other way and gives more water; or by a stream or a brook, which waters the ground much better, for it becomes more thoroughly saturated, and there is less need to water it often, and the gardener’s labour is much less; or by showers of rain, when the Lord Himself waters it without any labour of ours, and this way is incomparably better than any of those which have been described (*Life* 11.7).

The first two stages, the preparatory or active stages, form the active component of prayer. Individuals at the early stage are burdened with aridity and dryness, something that Teresa herself often experienced. This stage requires active participation of individuals so that they can become open to the power of prayer. Intense human effort is necessary for prayer to lead to spiritual growth at this stage, just as human exertion is required to draw water from a well. The second stage of mystical progress, when the soul has at its disposal a metaphorical waterwheel, is less laborious; but it still takes human effort, to run water through the symbolic aqueducts, that is, to achieve an optimal relationship with God. The purpose of these first two stages is to prepare individuals to receive God when they enter into the last two or passive stages, where God takes a more active role in the watering. The third stage of watering, or the Prayer of Union, comes easily:

[T]he water [is] flowing from a river or spring. By this means the garden is irrigated with much less labor, although some labor is required to direct the flow of the water. The Lord so desires to help the gardener here that He Himself becomes practically the gardener and the one who does everything (*Life* 16.1)

Now, the garden is watered by the rivers or streams that are gently guided by the individual. The ground becomes more fully soaked, and watering is not as frequent, thus requiring even less effort for the gardener. Here, the soul plays a smaller role than before, as water flows more freely and Christ assumes a greater commanding power as He becomes the gardener and the “creator of the water” (*Life* 17.2). In the second passive state, mystical union, the “heavenly water [or rainfall]... in its abundance soaks and saturates this entire garden...this water from

heaven often comes when the gardener is least expecting it” (*Life* 18.9). This last stage culminates in the “sleep of the faculties,” when the soul feels the presence of God.

Teresa’s use of water imagery extends beyond the stages of prayer, taking in as well torments and calm seas, ships and their sails. The beginning of the sixteenth century witnessed Spain’s Imperial expansion and colonization in the New World as well as the East. The New World offered adventure, political and economic expansion and trade, material wealth, and even the ability to evangelize the “savages” who inhabited the Americas. Although the number of those who embarked to the New World is not known, accounts of official registers mention “15,480 from 1509 to 1558” and approximately 120,000 émigrés to America by the middle of the sixteenth-century (Vives *Economic* 333). Like many, Teresa was aware of their long and perilous journeys, as seven of her nine brothers ventured to the New World. Cognizant of a seafaring tradition from such commercial centers as Barcelona, Cadiz, Valencia, and Malaga, Teresa relates the soul’s interior progression to the progress made by a person who travels by ship: “[W]ith a little wind he reaches the end of his journey in a few days. But those who go by land take longer” (*Way* 28.6).³ This metaphor of journey by ship becomes an ideal way for Teresa to talk about the process of recollection. Beginning by enclosing themselves “within [the] little heaven of our soul,” (in other words, on board a spiritual “ship”), individuals, Teresa advises, “will be able to travel far quickly” (*Way* 28.6). She continues with the metaphor:

Those who know how to recollect themselves are already out to sea...For even though they may not have got completely away from land, they do what they can during the time

³ The ship as a metaphor for the soul was a common medieval trope. According to Boon, Ludolphus utilized the “pilot of the ship, how the ship is entered, the significance of the winds and billow, of the lee of Christ, and the calming of the sea ... [as a] moral explanation...as the faithful soul” (qtd. 286).

to get free from it by recollecting their senses within ... For we are at sea and journeying along this way. But there are times when tired from our travels, we experience that the Lord calms our faculties and quiets the soul (*Way* 28.6; 30.6).

For example, in the Fourth Dwelling, the basins used in watering are easily and gently filled by the troughs of water; and in the progression into the Sixth Dwelling, God “lets loose the springs of water and doesn’t allow the sea to go beyond its boundaries, lets loose the spring from which the water in this trough flows. With a powerful impulse, a huge wave rises up so forcefully that it lifts high this little bark that is our soul...”(*IC* 6:5.3). Teresa implores God to calm the seas so that “this ship, which is the Church, [does] not always have to journey in a tempest like this. Save us, Lord, for we are perishing”(*IC* 6:11.6) in tempestuous waters. And, with union, the tempestuous waters are left behind.

Teresa faced many tempests daily. They ranged from choosing the appropriate spiritual advisor, assuring enclosure of the Carmelite nuns, founding and running monasteries, combating heresies, advancing her reform, and, most importantly, finding the most appropriate and least threatening way to express mental prayer. Teresa understands that spiritual progress can advance at a faster pace when the sails are filled with calm winds so that the ship can navigate through placid waters of recollection rather than tempestuous storms -- the distracting thoughts that do not allow individuals to recollect.⁴

⁴ In the *Third Spiritual Alphabet*, Osuna describes similar imagery from which Teresa may have well drawn. According to Osuna, the experienced sailors “scrutinize their route with...diligence and even more. For the pilot, who is always apprehensive of dangerous places, oversees the navigation of the vessel ...[Each of Osuna’s] exercises of virtue and sanctity is a little ship ... the sails are our desires, which are to be pure and clean, for the port of destination is knowledge of God, who will not be seen except by the pure of heart... The topmast is love of God...The ship’s compass is faith, by which the rudder is governed, and the helm is discretion...The pilot is good counsel who, if he does not want to go off course, is guided by his navigating chart of Holy Scripture... And the soul where grace dwells is...the ship in which we sail safely through the sea of this world to the port of salvation” (Osuna 139-142).

The Garden of Delight

Once Teresa has set up the structure of the spiritual journey through the element of water, the other natural images fall neatly in line. The garden metaphor, (*Life* 15.9), recreates the four stages of prayer outlined in the Four Waters metaphor. The garden, a reflection of the paradisiacal Garden of Eden, has as many multivalent associations as water and is rich in symbolic meaning. Like water, the garden was important for basic sustenance. Thus, garden imagery would have been as easily understood by her readers as her water imagery.

The early modern period in Spain brought many challenges to the peasant economy, which depended on agriculture. Small parcels of land, including garden plots for growing vegetables, were given to the peasants by nobles (Vassberg 128). These garden plots, which were an integral part of the daily life of Castilian landowners and peasants, also provided daily sustenance for the nuns of sixteenth-century Spain. In addition, convent gardens served as a source for medicinal herbs for convent use. Because of the aridity of the Spanish landscape, watering and irrigating these gardens was necessary to yield an abundance of food, fruits, and trees. Teresa finds the garden a useful metaphor for expressing her interiority because garden images would have had just as direct an association as water images to Teresa's readers, both literate and illiterate.

Convent gardens allowed nuns to cultivate and grow their own herbs, fruits, and vegetables and even to have their own wells for water so that they could be self-sufficient. Gardens did more than beautify the landscape; they provided a space for the cultivation of herbs,

an important source for medicinal compounds.⁵ It is noteworthy that the writings of Teresa's twelfth-century predecessor, Hildegard of Bingen, demonstrated her familiarity with plants that could be "collected from the woods and fields or grown in the monastery garden" (Flanagan 84).

Teresa, the voracious reader, would have drawn her garden imagery not only from the Bible, but also from secular literature. In the secular novels that she had read as a child, the garden was often a "locus amoenus," an idyllic place where lovers met. Images of "the garden, replete with flowers, fruits, [and] trees...figure in literature from the Bible, Greek and Latin poetry, medieval literature, the *cancionero* and mystical works which immediately precede those of the Spanish Carmelites" (Howe *Mystical* 93). Plants portrayed as religious symbols "were common in medieval sermons and discourse, as it was considered that even the smallest plant or insect reflected the wonder of God's creation and his divine purpose" (Fisher 7). Whether Teresa drew from Genesis and "the earthly paradise of Eden (Gen. 2:5-17), the enclosed garden of the Canticle (4:12 and 5:10), the garden of Gethsemane (Matt.26:36)" (Howe *Mystical* 95), or the vernacular histories, Teresa sees the garden as a reminder of God's benevolent nature as well as of human sin.

Drawing from her natural world, Teresa describes the soul as a *huerta* (garden) and God as a gardener or *hortelano*, thereby linking her language to an image that individuals of sixteenth-century Spain could understand. Cultivation and irrigation of the land were to produce not only tangible products for a growing population, but also to make understandable the intangible abundance of God's grace. Without ever straying from Catholic dogma and doctrines,

⁵ "It is easy to understand why herbals were popular. In an age when learned physicians' fees were unaffordable to most people, and most medicines were compounded of plants, vernacular herbals provided a relatively inexpensive source of up-to-date medical information. By the 1560s, most herbals included an index to maladies so that the proper cure could easily be found" (Ogilvie 37).

Teresa carefully sheds light on how the natural world, like books, stimulates recollection as part of mental prayer, helping her “to look at fields, or water, or flowers, [as within] these things [she] found remembrance of the creator... [all this] awakened and recollected [her] and served as a good book and reminded [her] of [her] ingratitude and sins” (*Life* 9.5).

Teresa crafts her images of the garden into four stages of spiritual ascent, much as she did with the Four Waters metaphor. Just as the farmer sows seed to cultivate plants, the individual needs to sow the seeds of prayer and cultivate them in order for them to grow and provide an abundant harvest. Only through diligent labor can the peasant farmer reap the harvest. Similarly, individuals need to labor during the early stages of their prayers of interiority, as only after fruitful labor will they reap the bounty of union with God. Just as the farmer must weed his plot so that his seeds will grow, so must the prayerful individual remove “the dry weeds” (sinful acts or thoughts, obsessions, pretensions) so that his spirit will grow. “But if the soil is still hardened in the earth and has a lot of briars, as I did in the beginning, and is still not so removed from occasions ... the ground will dry up again” (*Life* 19.3). The briars, the abominable weeds, and the hardened earth are the exterior trials from which individuals must detach themselves in order progress inwardly. Disillusioned with the emphasis on vocal prayer, Teresa saw the prayer of recollection as a way of focusing on God without the distractions of words, which were the essence of vocal prayer. Only by moving through each stage of prayer until reaching the final stage can individuals truly see or smell the fragrant flowers and reap the bounty of the metaphorical harvested garden that represents unity with God.

In *Life* Teresa uses the analogy of a gardener to explain the beginning stage of prayer. Beginners in prayer, like the gardener, must start by cultivating “a garden on very barren soil,

full of abominable weeds” (*Life* 11.5). By weeding and planting “good seed... [a]nd with the help of God we must strive like good gardeners to get these plants to grow and take pains to water them so that they don’t wither but come to bud and flower and give forth a most pleasant fragrance” (*Life* 11.6). These weeds are the sins, the obstructions and distractions that keep individuals from entering the first stage of prayer. Removing them prepares the soul for the spiritual journey. The preparation is not easy:

It [the soul] undergoes much tribulation because the Lord desires that it seem to the poor gardener that everything acquired in watering and keeping the garden up is being lost. This dryness amounts to an authentic weeding and pulling up of the remaining bad growth by its roots, no matter how small it may be (*Life* 15.9).

Only by overcoming daily trials will the individual be able to achieve deeper recollection and prayer. Spiritual growth, like growing plants from seed, is a slow and gradual process. It requires words, thoughts, and acts. The gardening simile is apt here because, as Montefiore says, the “the ideas of ploughing, sowing and reaping” are transferences “from the material to the spiritual” (636).

With God’s help, the individual’s effort slowly transforms the patch of weeds into a garden, where “trees are beginning to bud so as to blossom and afterward give fruit – and also the flowers and carnations so as to give forth their fragrance” (*Life* 15.9). Teresa, who has experienced this stage of prayer often, considers her “soul as a garden” where the “little flowers of virtue... [begin] to bloom” (*Life* 15.9) and where she begins to feel the presence of God. The blooming flowers represent the spiritual qualities that God bestows upon individuals who practice prayer and devotion to God. It is within the enclosed confines of the garden that the

soul is able to cultivate the virtues bestowed by God and thus to experience mystical union. Teresa, who endured the trials of aridity, knew the difficult path of prayer, a path on which she learned that only through the soul's gaining humility was it possible to see the flowers growing and to enjoy their fragrance (*Life* 16.3) in the contemplative's garden. If the soil is well cultivated by trials, persecutions, criticism, and illnesses – for few there must be who reach this stage without them – and if it is softened by living in great detachment from self-interest, it is almost never dry (*Life* 19.3). The shadow of the Inquisition and persecutions by the Calced Carmelites (members of her own order who resisted the reforms she proposed) were part of Teresa's everyday life. She never names her persecutors, but she criticizes them in this subtle, indirect way. Moreover, in her own way, Teresa is also telling her detractors that she is willing to face trials and persecutions because they add water to her spiritual garden. Much like the abundant water that softens the soil, detachment aids prayer in the last stage and God is then always present.

The Spiritual Journey through Humble Animals

Having established the metaphor of cultivating the garden for the spiritual journey, Teresa expands her corpus of metaphors to include the animal kingdom. Through animal imagery, Teresa shows that only with divine help can the soul overcome the perils that it encounters in its quest for salvation. Teresa writes, as Allison Peers remarks, “not abstractly, but in terms of her own experience” (*Saint Teresa de Jesús* 86), showing, as Howe states, “a decided preference for the ordinary, the domestic, and the humble” (*Mystical* 85). Teresa's animal and insect images range from the “gusanillo” (lowly worm) to the lion; however, she shows an

affinity for the smaller animals. By choosing images from the animal kingdom to exemplify interiority, Teresa again shows the internal progression or transformation of the individual soul.

From Silkworm to Butterfly – Transformation of the Soul

Except for her exposure to the silkworm trade through her family, Teresa's sources for the specific animal imagery she uses are unclear. We cannot know for sure whether she relied directly or indirectly on images "from Greek and Latin literature, traditional myths and beliefs concerning fauna catalogued in part by writers such as Pliny and Isidore of Seville, the folk tradition of the *romancero* and the bestiaries, and ... the Bible" (Howe *Mystical* 59). However, the plethora of images from the animal world that she uses leads us to believe that she was exposed to these images either from the sources above or the natural history books that were in circulation at the time. As Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle states:

Animals, biological and legendary, were especially examined in the bestiaries, popular manuals that exploited natural history for moral doctrine. The beasts became a repertory of metaphors applicable to the meaning of the universe and of man. Symbolic interpretations of animals could and did conflict, however. A single image evoked a multiplicity of significant associations (*Loyola's Acts* 116).

Just as in the case of her water and garden imagery, it was most likely that "multiplicity of significant associations" that drew Teresa to the use of animal imagery. However, it was the image of the silkworm and its metamorphosis that seems to have captured her imagination the most, since it became her most dynamic image of the soul entering into union with God through

an interior progression. Let us look at how she developed this key metaphor, second in importance only to water in her stock of images.

Introduced in Spain as early as the eighth century by the Arabs, silk weaving became an important economic mainstay for Spain up to the eighteenth-century. During the sixteenth century, silk was an expensive textile and a luxurious commodity in European markets, one that fostered both the agricultural and the urban economy. With agricultural techniques such as irrigation that were implemented by the Moors in areas of Spain such as Valencia, “the cultivation of the mulberry trees increased [well into the eighteenth century], to create one of Spain’s most dynamic agricultural economies” (Sarasúa 31). Within Spain, silk manufacturing was primarily in the hands of women, who “took care of the silkworms, collected the fresh mulberry leaves and fed the cocoons” (Sarasúa 31). As trade within Europe expanded, so did the demand for these artisans skilled in producing the luxurious commodity of silk. As silk and wool merchants, Teresa’s father and grandfather had access to the production of the silkworm; and, since the manufacturing of the silk was primarily women’s work, Teresa herself may have been involved. Although any direct involvement with silkworm cultivation on her part is explained nowhere in her writing, her detailed descriptions of the silkworm’s life cycle suggest close knowledge of its growth and transformation.

The silk industry flourished in Toledo, Granada, and Valencia, where many peasant families were involved in the silk industry either directly in the manufacture of silk or in spinning at home. Spinning was often by “widows and poor girls” (Casey 62). In order to sustain the silkworm and the silk industry, the mulberry was a “vital commercial crop of early

modern Spain” (Casey 54) and of subsistence for the peasantry. Casey details the picking of the mulberry leaf on March 19 (St. Joseph’s Day):

. . . grubs fed on the [mulberry] leaves between then and the first week in May when the delicate business of unraveling the cocoons and giving a first twist to the thread could begin . . . [as the peasants] aimed to finish and sell the thread by Saint John’s Day (24 June) when they would need cash to pay their landlord (62).

Teresa exhibits in-depth knowledge of the process by which the silkworms nourish themselves on the mulberry leaf and spin silk. Because she was so familiar with the silk industry of Ávila, it is not surprising that Teresa devised the metaphors of the silkworm and the cocoon to describe the process of recollection to people of a similar cultural milieu to hers, especially her nuns, in language that they were able to understand.

Teresa is very careful first to compare the immature silkworm to the Christian who also needs to grow spiritually, in this case through Church-sanctioned means of penance, prayer, and mortification:

This silkworm, then, starts to live when by the heat of the Holy Spirit it begins to benefit through the general help given to us all by God and through the remedies left by Him to His Church, by going to confession, reading good books, and hearing sermons, which are the remedies that a soul, dead in its carelessness and sins and placed in the midst of occasions, can make use of. It then begins to live and to sustain itself by these things, and by good meditations, until it is grown. Its being grown is what is relevant to what I’m saying, for these other things have little importance here (*IC* 5:2.3).

When reflecting on the way that individuals can grow into spiritual maturity, Teresa emphasizes the “remedies” of the Church: going to confession, reading good books, and hearing sermons” (*IC* 5:2.3). Although Teresa was undoubtedly sincere about the importance of these activities, by stressing them, she was also reassuring those who might question her orthodoxy. This frees her to move next to the heart of the silkworm metaphor: interiority and the spiritual transformation that comes from it.

The silkworm’s cocooning itself in its silken thread represents the soul’s movement inward, that is, recollection. Through interiority souls experience spiritual quiet. The senses become numb and the outside worldly concerns dim, with the disappearing of worldly concerns, enabling the soul to enter into the quintessential darkness, and sense the divine. For Teresa, recollection is best compared to the “wonderful way in which silk is made – a way which no one could invent but God”(*IC* 5:2.2). In the Fifth Dwelling of her *Interior Castle*, Teresa uses the metaphor of the silkworm to describe the soul:

You must have already heard about His marvels manifested in the way silk originates, for only He could have invented something like that. The silkworms come from seeds about the size of little grains of pepper. (I have never seen this but heard of it, and so if something in the explanation gets distorted it won’t be my fault). When the warm weather comes and the leaves begin to appear on the mulberry tree, the seeds start to live, for they are dead until then. The worms nourish themselves on mulberry leaves until, having grown to full size, they settle on some twigs. There with their little mouths they themselves go about spinning the silk and making some very thick little cocoons in which

they enclose themselves. The silkworm, which is fat and ugly, then dies, and a little white butterfly, which is very pretty, comes forth from the cocoon (5:2.2)

In spinning its cocoon, the silkworm retreats interiorly from the external world. In preparation for union with God, the soul, like the silkworm, is involved in repetitive labor, in the soul's case, a labor that shows humble service to God.

By feeding on the mulberry leaves, the silkworm grows, spins its "very thick cocoons," only to die within its enclosed space. Similarly, the soul is transformed through prayer and recollection; it "dies" to the external world and then, again like the worm, it is reborn. "The worm is an archetypal image of earth, dissolution, and death; the butterfly, of healing, transcendence, and transformation" (Seelaus 208). For Teresa, the spiritual death and rebirth of the soul bring to mind the death and resurrection of Christ:

When it is full grown, then, as I wrote at the beginning, it starts to spin its silk and to build this house in which it is to die. This house may be understood here to mean Christ...Let the silk worm die, let it die, as in fact it does when it has completed the work it was created to do. Then we shall be as completely hidden in His greatness as is this little worm in its cocoon...in this kind of union (*IC* 5:2.7).

Thus, like the silkworm entering its cocoon, the soul interiorly withdraws from the world, when, "in this state of prayer . . . [it is] quite dead to the world... [only to come] out a little white butterfly" (*IC* 5:2.8).

Finally, Teresa uses the image of the silkworm emerging as a butterfly as a metaphor of transformation. She impresses upon her readers that if this process were "not seen and recounted

to us as having happened in other times, who would believe it?”(*IC* 5:2.2). Miraculously, it seems, the “worm that is fat and ugly” and “so disgusting” is transformed into a “little white butterfly” (*IC* 5:2.7). This movement of the worm from cocooning itself to its eventual emergence as a butterfly symbolizes the soul’s movement inward in search of God. In order for the butterfly to emerge, the worm must die, enclosed in the darkness of the cocoon. Similarly, for Teresa, the soul must go into darkness (recollection) so that it can emerge into the light (union). The soul would like to die in this darkness, “which allows for deep contact between the soul and God” (Welch 139); but it cannot die until God calls it. The soul, “bound” in chains to earthly concerns, can only be free with God’s help:

Oh, poor little butterfly, bound with so many chains which do not let you fly where you would like! Have pity on it, my God! Ordain that it might somehow fulfill its desires for your honor and glory. Do not be mindful of the little it deserves and of its lowly nature. You have the power, Lord, to make the great sea and the large river Jordan roll back and allow the children of Israel to pass. Yet, do not take pity on this little butterfly! Helped by your strength, it can suffer many trials; it is determined to do so and desires to suffer them. Extend Your powerful arm, Lord, that this soul might not spend its life in things so base. Let Your grandeur appear in a creature so feminine and lowly, whatever the cost to her, so that the world may know that this grandeur is not hers at all and may praise You (*IC* 6:6.4)

This prayer is a very telling one. Teresa may be hinting that she is the “lowly” creature that has been touched by God through the transformation of interior prayer, who is begging God to reveal His grandeur to her, no matter what the cost. Teresa loved the Church, she devoted her life to

God, and she truly felt the power of interior prayer and wanted her readers to see that power expressed in her so that they, too, would be led down the path Teresa was laying out for them.

Teresa continues to appeal to the analogy of the silkworm's transformation when describing the inquietude that the soul feels when longing for God in the "dark night":

Oh, now, to see the restlessness of this little butterfly, even though it has never been quieter and calmer in its life, is something to praise God for! And the difficulty is that it doesn't know where to alight and rest. Since it has experienced such wonderful rest, all that it sees on earth displeases it, especially if God gives it this wine often. Almost each time it gains new treasure. It no longer has any esteem for the work it did while a worm, which was to weave the cocoon little by little; it now has wings. How can it be happy walking step by step when it can fly? On account of its desires, everything it can do for God becomes little in its own eyes. It doesn't wonder as much at what the saints suffered now that it understands through experience how the Lord helps and transforms a soul, for it doesn't recognize itself or its image. The weakness it previously seemed to have with regard to doing penance it now finds is its strength. Its attachment to relatives or friends or wealth (for neither its actions, nor its determination, nor its desire to withdraw were enough; rather, in its opinion, it was more attached to everything) is now so looked upon that it grieves when obliged to do what is necessary in this regard so as not to offend God. Everything wearies it, for it has learned through experience that creatures cannot give it true rest" (*IC 5:2.8*).

Significantly, this is one of the few times that this very strong woman admits the difficulty of what she has set out to do—she can never have true rest. Teresa must describe her spiritual

journey carefully because the spiritual union she has experienced could be considered too similar to the illuminative experiences expressed by the *alumbrados*. The very notion of direct knowledge of God unmediated by the Church was suspect. Small wonder, then, that she used the indirect expression of poetic imagery when she wrote about her spiritual life.

The Infinitely Small but Industrious Bees

In the sixteenth century, bees, like many other animals, took on a spiritual significance, as everything in the natural order has its place, and the bees, like the flies and wasps, reflect God's sensible way of ordering the universe. Similar to "writers of the Baroque period [who] are fascinated by the resemblance between the infinitely large and the infinitely small" (Norford 422), Teresa finds the "infinitely small" bees an appropriate metaphor to express the dynamic quality of man's humility, organization, and cleanliness. The metaphor of the bee was not a new image for Teresa or for any of her predecessors. From classical times on, the bee has assumed many meanings. In Egypt, because of its association with the sun, it was considered a "symbol of the soul." In Greece, it could signify "virginity" or be a "symbol of death and resurrection." Aristotle, Pliny, Homer, and Virgil are among those who have written about bees and their characteristics. Besides their religious connotations, bees have been compared to soldiers in Homer's *Iliad* and have been "associated with armies of enemies [in the Old Testament]...and even ...with love" (Ferber 21-22).

For her part, Teresa stresses the importance of the bee's humility and industriousness. In *Interior Castle*, the soul progresses gradually from the murky waters of the outer circles to the innermost circle, the Seventh Dwelling, where it will encounter God in all His brilliance. The first dwellings are, according to Rowan Williams, "the place where we are struggling to break

free from obsessive and defensive concern with self: where we have begun, however ineptly, to turn our attention to God in thought and prayer” (*Teresa of Ávila* 116). This happens in the beginning stage of recollection, the room of self-knowledge that Teresa compares to the bee’s activity of industriousness and humility:

Let it walk through these dwelling places which are up above, down below, and to the sides, since God has given it such dignity. Don’t force it to stay a long time in one room alone...For humility, like the bee making honey in the beehive, is always at work.

Without it, everything goes wrong. But let’s remember that the bee doesn’t fail to leave the beehive and fly about gathering nectar from the flowers. So it is with the soul in the room of self-knowledge; let it believe me and fly sometimes to ponder the grandeur and majesty of its God. Here it will discover its lowliness better than by thinking of itself, and be freer from the vermin that enter the first rooms, those of self-knowledge”(IC 1:2.8).

The extension of the bee, the honeycomb, with its many compartments and spherical construction, resembles the castle structure with its many dwellings that Teresa develops in *Interior Castle*. Bees and other images associated with them become “emblematic devices to convey spiritual truth... [as they] represent those devout souls earnestly engaged in leading the Christ-life; the flowers symbolize something numinous – prayer, dogma, spiritual books, heavenly inspirations; the honey is an analogue for whatever results from the contact between the devout soul and the numinous object” (Bertonasco 80). For Teresa, the numinous objects that she uses for recollection are spiritual books of meditation.

The action of the bees entering the beehive serves as a journey metaphor, akin to the soul entering the interior castle with its concentric circles to find God, the silkworm entering into its cocoon to find darkness, or the individual's peeling of the outer layers of the *palmetto* to reach its sweet center; all of them move into the confines of an inner space. That is a journey that Teresa repeats over and over, since she believes that it is a journey the soul must take repeatedly if it wishes to rest in God's presence and eventually be rewarded with the Kingdom of Heaven:

The gain will be clearly seen; we will understand, when beginning to pray, that the bees are approaching and entering the beehive to make honey. And this recollection will be effected without our effort because the Lord has desired that, during the time the faculties are drawn inward, the soul and its will may merit to have this dominion. When the soul does no more than give a sign that it wishes to be recollected, the senses obey it and become recollected. Even though they go out again afterward, their having already surrendered is a great thing; for they go out as captives and subjects and do not cause the harm they did previously. And when the will calls them back again, they come more quickly, until after many of these entries the Lord wills that they rest entirely in perfect contemplation (*Way 28.7*).

Other Fauna

Teresa, who searches for any way she can to express the importance of interiority and the pitfalls surrounding her, finds other images from the natural world to reflect this interior movement. One of these is the hedgehog which Francisco de Osuna, in his *Third Spiritual Alphabet*, compares to "the recollected person" because he "is like the hedgehog who contracts his body and retreats into himself without concern for anything outside" (173). Teresa pairs the

image of the hedgehog with that of the turtle, observing that the movement inward of both is voluntary. Recognizing that “God is within us” (*IC* 6:3.3), Teresa understands the motivation of these symbolic creatures, but she points out that recollection for individuals entails God working with them to reach union.

But one noticeably senses a gentle drawing inward, as anyone who goes through this will observe, for I don’t know how to make it clearer. It seems to me I have read where it was compared to a hedgehog curling up or a turtle drawing into its shell (The one who wrote this example must have understood the experience well.) But these creatures draw inward whenever they want. In the case of this recollection, it doesn’t come when we want it but when God wants to grant us the favor (*IC* 6:3.3).

In explaining the first degree of prayer, Teresa proclaims that “all things can be done in God” (according to St. Paul) (*Life* 13.3). However, in this stage, the presence of a “spiritual master” is important for individuals, who need guidance in their interior progression. Still, not all spiritual masters are created equal, and Teresa has no reservations about criticizing abusive confessors or those who opposed her movement, as she does here, where she invokes the lowly toad to find fault with such distasteful mentors:

These first acts of determination are very important, although in this initial stage it is necessary to hold back a little and be bound by discretion and the opinion of a spiritual master. But souls should be careful that he isn’t the kind that will teach them to be toads or that will be satisfied in merely showing them how to catch little lizards (*Life* 13.3).

Teresa's use of animal imagery in this passage is a deliberate rhetorical strategy, whose purpose is to protect her from possible repercussions from Inquisitors. At the same time it is a brilliant artistic touch.

Even if they are fortunate enough to pick a worthy spiritual master for their spiritual journey, individuals can expect to encounter serpents and vipers along the way. Like the "abominable weeds," the *sabandijas* or reptiles and vipers that Teresa introduces in *Interior Castle* represent the negative forces or impediments that prevent the soul from entering the beginning stages of recollection. These temptations, worldly distractions brought on by the devil or the failings of the soul, keep individuals from entering the castle and prevent the soul's progression in prayer, making their spiritual concentration difficult. Like the "evil-smelling water" in the moat that they inhabit, the reptiles block the way of individuals who want to enter the castle.

There are many bad things – snakes and vipers and poisonous creatures – which have come in with the soul that they prevent it from seeing the light. It is as if one were to enter a place flooded by sunlight with his eyes so full of dust that he could hardly open them. The room itself is light enough, but he cannot enjoy the light because he is prevented from doing so by these wild beasts and animals, which force him to close his eyes to everything but themselves.

This seems to me to be the condition of a soul which...is so completely absorbed in things of the world and so deeply immersed...in possessions or honors or business, that, although as a matter of fact it would like to gaze at the castle and enjoy its beauty, it is prevented from doing so, and seems quite unable to free itself from all these

impediments...being among such poisonous things, it cannot, at some time or another, escape being bitten by them (*IC* 1:2.14).

Teresa warns her readers that “he [the devil] must have in each room many legions of devils to fight souls off even when they try to go from one room to the other”(*IC* 2:1.3). For Teresa, the battle with the serpents and devils occurs constantly, as “[t]he blows from the artillery strike in such a way that one cannot fail to hear. It is in this stage that the devils represent these snakes [worldly things] and the temporal pleasure of the present as though almost eternal” (*IC* 2:1.3). The battle is both spiritual and psychological as individuals progress toward union with God. Individuals need to receive spiritual nourishment to overcome the darkness of the castle’s outer circles.

One can only imagine the fear that Teresa must have provoked in individuals with her visions of crawling vermin in the walls. Sixteenth-century Castilian peasants were most likely able to relate to these visions of evil as they were familiar with devastating droughts, plagues, and famine. In 1504-06, Spain began suffering from severe crop failures and epidemics, which unfortunately lasted for fifty-four years. Droughts and extreme hot weather brought on locust plagues. According to Vassberg, large “migratory swarms,” along with “aphids and various worms,” left only devastation in Spain (199). Given such occurrences during Teresa’s lifetime, it was natural that she would invoke them to impress upon individuals the same forces of “evil” that she described in her writing.

Besides their acquaintance with home-grown animals, people were also exposed to many others in a world beyond their own, images of similar animals or exotic ones found in the new lands that were discovered as part of European expansion and depicted in sixteenth-century

literature and art. Whether the snakes found in legends of Marco Polo's travels or the "creepy, crawly creatures, such as menaced the paintings of Hieronymous Bosch on the walls of the royal palace, El Escorial" (*Divine Domesticity* 246) had any impact on Teresa's use of these vile creatures, as O'Rourke contends, we cannot know for sure. What we do know is that she experienced first-hand many natural events that had an impact on her sixteenth-century world. She was also exposed to a plethora of art and literature as well as to biblical sources, all of which she was able to use in writing about her mystical experiences and in explaining the importance of mental prayer. For Teresa to fill her writing with page after page with metaphor, she had to be an extremely knowledgeable individual, not only theologically, but also about facts and events about which she feigned to have only "heard or read."

On Eagle's Wings

Images from the avian world were not new in Teresa's time. Accounts of birds, their habits, and their migratory patterns appear often in the Bible as well as in Classical literature. In Jerome, for example, the migratory patterns of storks, turtledoves, and cranes are explained: "Even the stork in the sky knows her seasons, and the turtledove, swift and crane, keep the time of their coming" (Jer. viii 7). There is a reference to a bird species in the *Song of Songs*, in the passage that speaks of the passing of the winter season and the beginning of the new life of spring: "For now the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. The blossoms have appeared in the land, the time of pruning has come; the song of the turtledove is heard in our land" ("Song" ii 11–12); and in Job, the southern migration of the hawk is revealed: "Is it by your wisdom that the hawk grows pinions, spreads his wings to the south?" (Job xxxix 26) (Forti 54). Visions of

these birds and many more were also found in the iconographic schemes of murals and block-books.

One of the principal avian species with religious significance is the eagle. As Bartal points out:

[t]he ascent to heaven on the wings of an eagle [found in both Classical literature and art] is linked to love and eternal life and [i]n the Biblical sense this act is perceived more as an act of rescue, [where] Moses uses this metaphor to describe the Divine rescue of the people of Israel from the bondage of Egypt (Ex. 18, 4) (80).

Eventually, the fusion of both traditions, classical and biblical, resulted in the invention of the “metaphor of the wings [to] symbolize elation, freedom and release from earthly bond. The powerful eagle appears as the divine power – a means by which mankind can reach a higher sphere” (Bartal 80). According to Bartal, these images were most likely inspired by German female mystics:

For Hildegard of Bingen, the wings symbolize humility – the sign of Christ’s humanity, and for Mechthild, [t]he bird is the human soul, which by its wings can free itself from its earthly desires; the wings are the wings of love, the vehicle for human salvation (82).

In her writing, Teresa favors the eagle for her metaphor of interiority, but she also relies on other birds, such as the hen, turtledove, and phoenix, all of which were part of the everyday life of peasants in the agricultural society of sixteenth-century Spain. She chooses the hen and the eagle to show the stages of the mystical progression of the soul’s journey. Without neglecting biblical references to the hen’s motherly nurturing of her chicks, “[a]s a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not”

(Matt. 23.37), she is especially fond of using the image of the hen to represent the slow, difficult journey of interiority.

It seems to me now that this manner of procedure is a desire to reconcile body and soul so as to preserve one's rest here below and enjoy God up above. And if we walk in justice and cling to virtue, this will come about – but we would be advancing at the speed of a hen! Never in this way will one reach freedom of spirit (*Life* 13.5).

Teresa also has recourse to the hen when she contrasts the slow-paced and restricted movement of a fettered chicken to the eagle's flight, where individuals are in the state of union or rapture.

I would like us to recall the many years that have passed since we made profession and began to practice prayer, and not to disturb those who in a short time make more progress, causing them to turn back in order to walk at our pace; nor would I want to make those who fly like eagles with the favors God grants them to advance like fettered chickens (*Life* 39.12).

Similar to the hen that is fettered, the eaglet “is still a fledgling. It can leave the nest, and God takes it out; but it is not ready to fly. The virtues are not yet strong, nor does it have the experience to recognize dangers, nor does it know the harm done by relying upon oneself” (*Life* 19.14). Like the beginning stages of watering of the garden, the soul, or eaglet, needs to gradually grow and progress into the next stage, where it will await God's help when, like the torrents of rain that drench the garden, it will be in union or rapture. “But in these raptures most often there is no remedy; rather, without any forethought or any help there frequently comes a force so swift and powerful that one sees and feels this cloud or mighty eagle raise it up and

carry it aloft on its wings”(Life 20.3). Similar metaphors are found in the Bible, where other birds of prey, like the eagle, either train their young to fly or carry them when they do not yet have the strength to fly (Deut. xxxii.11). The fledgling is also the *avecita*, little bird or “unpracticed soul,” that grows weary because, like the soul, it needs to practice prayer. Then God, puts “it into the nest, where it may repose” (Life 13.18) until its wings have strengthened enough for it again to have the ability to fly (Life 20.22), so that it can then continue its journey of mystical advancement.

As we know, Teresa does have an affinity for “small creatures,” which helps explain her delight in the outcome or transformation of the fledgling, for the *avecita* eventually turns into an eagle and it is the eagle that soars to the heavens. In *Relations*, she explains that “[t]his little bird of the spirit seems to have escaped out of this wretchedness of the flesh, out of the prison of this body, and now, disentangled therefrom, is able to be more intent on that which the Lord is giving it”(8).

The eagle is arguably Teresa’s most powerful metaphor. In literature, the eagle, the king of birds, is endowed with the “ability to look at the [bright] sun, without blinking and from aloft can gaze into the depths of the ocean...and see the fish” (Allen 8). In the New Testament, Christ is often compared to the eagle:

He draws us towards Him by right, as the eagle catches the fish. Christ can gaze upon God, without being blinded, as the eagle can look at the sun; and as the eagle bears its offspring aloft, so will an angel carry our souls to present them before God, who will receive the good and reject the evil. The restoration of the youth of the eagle, by dipping itself in the water, signifies the baptism of this mortal life (Allen 8).

The eagle flying toward the brightness of the sun reminds Teresa of the flight or upward movement of the soul towards God, while “the flying on the wings of an eagle represents the ability of the individual human soul to gain eternity through divine love, which leads to immortality” (Bartal 87):

It is not yet so much a child of this powerful eagle that it can gaze steadily at this sun. But for the little time that it holds its eyes open, it sees that it is itself filled with mud... When it beholds this divine Sun, the brightness dazzles it; when it looks at itself, the mud covers its eyes; blind is this little dove. So very frequently, it is left totally blind, absorbed, frightened, and in a swoon from the many grandeurs that it sees (*Life* 20.28, 29).

In rapture, Teresa is blinded, absorbed, and frightened by what she may experience when she finds communion with God. The contrast of blindness and sight and the blinding light of the sun paradoxically show the brightness of interior illumination. The eagle represents all the power, hope, and even commitment Teresa has to experiencing that over and over. No matter how many trials Teresa has to endure, no matter how weary she may be at times, it is the flight of the eagle that she not only aspires to herself, but also wants for all her readers. Nelson Pike suggests “Teresa did not herself fly – she was *raised*, as by an eagle” in her state of rapture (77). It is the upward motion of a weightless soul airborne during rapture.

Without disregarding traditional images, such as the dove, butterfly, or phoenix, used by many mystical writers and in the Scriptures, Teresa coins unconventional images taken from nature to enrich her store of “spiritual language, the only linguistic means of attempting to make visible the invisible,” as Slade asserts (27). However, with images from nature, Teresa draws her readers’ attention to the world around us, the “yearly harvest, the sower and his seed, the leaven

in the loaf, the grain of mustard-seed, the lilies of the field, the action of fire, worms, moth, rust, bread, wine, and water, the mystery of the wind, unseen and yet felt – each one of these is shown to contain and exemplify a great and abiding truth” (Spurgeon 10).

CHAPTER TWO

Merchants and Markets

Business, or *negocios*, is an intriguingly dominant theme in Teresa of Ávila's writing, especially in her mature work, *Foundations*. Whether discussing traded goods, dowries, or almsgiving, she constructs metaphors of transaction that show not only that there is great concern about business in her world, but also that people were familiar with business practice. But these metaphors also point to something more. First, this emphasis on business illustrates the transition from feudalism to capitalism in mid-sixteenth-century Spain, which from 1500 to 1800 experienced tremendous economic growth. Second, it illustrates Teresa's awareness that through business, she, a lowly woman, was able to exercise power in her very stratified and patriarchal society. Furthermore, because she is writing for nuns, she becomes a living example of how, even in their severely subordinated state, they can use their knowledge of business to achieve reform.

Teresa of Ávila had an advantage over many of her contemporaries. Not only was she educated, but she also grew up in a business culture and enjoyed a fairly affluent family lifestyle. Money provided her with material comforts from the family's prosperous business of woolens and silks. In addition, money also enabled her *converso* father, Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda to purchase a patent of nobility. The *pleito de hidalguía* was a legal way for *conversos* to establish "their status as 'gentlemen' and [claim] certain privileges, notably exemption from taxation" (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 64). Many of these "new men," as Bilinkoff calls them, saw the *pleitos* as a means of social advancement in a society that marginalized *conversos*. Teresa's paternal grandfather, Juan Sánchez, was a case in point, winning his *pleito de hidalguía* in 1485. The title

of nobility allowed *conversos* like Juan Sánchez to assert their self-worth. However, it was also fraught with peril, as it exposed *conversos* to severe discrimination. As Gareth Davies writes,

concern with the *converso* phenomenon has brought with it the realization that conversion to Christianity was not a simple operation, in which the color of the cards was changed overnight...the decision of those thousands of former Jews to convert to Christianity was made more difficult by the discrimination they now suffered (56).

Teresa's grandfather was no exception. In 1485, Juan Sánchez, now a wealthy man, was convicted of judaizing in Toledo. As Mary Luti states,

his run-in with the Inquisition probably left his fortune depleted, since penitents were normally required to turn over a large fraction of all they were worth as part of the often elaborate penance. But it is likely that the public humiliation of his exposure, even more than the partial confiscation of his fortune, caused him to pull up stakes and attempt a new life in Ávila (19).

No one knows for sure if he was judaizing, but it seems plausible that as a result of the investigation, Sánchez experienced humiliation and decided to move to Ávila. He and two of his sons had been forced to march through the streets to the churches of Toledo on seven consecutive Fridays while wearing a *sambenito* (a yellow robe with a black cross) (Mujica *Lettered* 19). Ávila, with its Jewish, Muslim, and Christian population offered Sánchez the opportunity of starting a new life in a city that was known for its silk and wool trade, and as Mujica states, "he would be able to carve out a niche for himself" (*Lettered* 20). After purchasing his patent of nobility, Juan Sánchez changed his surname to Cepeda. Changing names

was a common practice for *conversos*, as it was one way to establish their “pure lineage.” Many *conversos*, like the men in Teresa’s family “became great financiers, good artisans, and excellent public officials” (Vives *Economic* 249).

It is not certain if Teresa was aware of her lineage or if any of the family’s daily practices might have led someone to suspect her parents’ Jewish background. What is interesting is that in her writing, Teresa stresses that “He [God] told me that lineage and social status mattered not at all in the judgment of God” (*F* 15.16) when it comes to prayer or professing into convent life. This is not a surprising stance for a woman in her position to take. However, there is another aspect of “lineage” that was in fact extremely important. Because social status could be bought and sold (through the *pleito de hidalguía*), the social hierarchy was not fixed, but somewhat flexible. Even *conversos* could be empowered through business.

Finding Power in Capitalism

During Teresa’s lifetime, Spain was rapidly making the transition from feudalism to capitalism, a transition that brought significant economic development for everyone in Spain, especially the powerless peasants (Maravall 166–167). As Vives notes:

The rustic was told so many times that labor was degrading that he believed it. [T]he tenant farmer and laborer lost faith in their work...They worked because there was no alternative. If they did not they would have nothing to eat. They had to work hard for mere subsistence: at any sort of activity they toiled from sunup to sundown, in exchange for a miserable wage that did not even cover vital necessities. Even the taxes demanded of him brought him down financially (*Economic* 341).

Unlike the *hidalgo*, who enjoyed freedom from onerous taxes, the poor commoner faced severe financial strain from taxes, especially if he lived in one of the country's extremely arid regions, where many depended mainly on agriculture for subsistence. Teresa, who was from an agricultural area and well-traveled throughout Spain, must have been knowledgeable about the economic situation of the country to judge from the plethora of agricultural references in her books.

The burgeoning capitalist system enabled peasants to find new ways to gain employment. As a city dweller, Teresa was most likely well aware of the influx of peasants into the city. Bilinkoff explains that "Ávila, like many other European cities, experienced intense growth and development" in the sixteenth century (*Ávila* 53). The building of roads to facilitate the "feverish urban activity" and the creation of jobs within the domestic service area or in textile production attracted many peasants to Teresa's city (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 55). Since conditions were so difficult for farmers and laborers, many peasants saw the shift to urban areas as an upward move. They thought cities, with their industrial expansion, would be a panacea for them. Because they were able to make a choice about where they would live, no matter what their new living conditions might be, peasants felt a modicum of power.

For her part, Teresa found stable ground in the economic and cultural shift from feudalism to capitalism, taking advantage of the new socioeconomic factors that paved the way for her reform. Thus, she gravitated toward commercial centers, such as Medina del Campo, Toledo, Segovia, and Seville, which possessed the population and economic resources to support religious houses and the type of people – merchants, professionals, bureaucrats – to whom her programs appealed (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 147). However, as a woman of *converso* background, Teresa

had to tread very lightly. She had to find a way to make her reform movement palatable to the Inquisitors and the hierarchy of the Church and of her order. This is why she initiates the reform from a position of humility, alluding to the Beatitude that praises this virtue:

[B]ecause of this humility, this King listens to me and lets me approach Him; and His guards do not throw me out, even though as an uneducated person I don't know how to speak to Him...He delights more in the unpolished manners of a humble shepherd who He realizes would say more if he knew more than He does in the talk of very wise and learned men, however elegant their discourse, if they don't walk in humility (*Way* 22.4).

Besides recalling the message of this Beatitude, that “the meek shall inherit the earth,” Teresa is also expanding on what it promises. In the spiritual kingdom, she can approach the King as a humble “shepherd,” for she has more power than the “wise and learned men,” no matter how elegant they are. As Mujica explains, “[h]umility in its Christian sense is not groveling to superiors, but ‘knowing one’s place and taking it’” (*Lettered* 57). In other words, paradoxically, humility becomes a source of power. This is reflected in the emerging capitalism through the mercantilist trades, whereby the “meek,” meaning those who are not landed gentry in feudalistic terms, have a say, Biblically sanctioned, to do something with the fruits of the earth. We should keep in mind, though, that Teresa was making a spiritual point about humility.

Once she has challenged the traditional social hierarchy by establishing the right of every individual to address the Lord, she is able to show her nuns how to start finding power in the very thing that may be taking power from them. She reminds them that their “miserable” world isn't nearly as wretched as that of those who seemingly have everything:

It's true that upon approaching Him one understands immediately, just as with lords here below; for when they tell us who their father was and about the millions they get in rent and of their title of dignity, there's no more to know...here below people in paying honor don't take into account the persons themselves however much these persons may deserve the honor, but their wealth... (*Way 22.4*).

The power Teresa wants her nuns to find is the spiritual power that resides in themselves. But, she is also very clear - those feudal lords who measure their value and their worth by their possessions are in fact very poor. The only honor they have is the honor their vassals give them. Vassals, however, do not honor their lord so much as they fear him. Teresa is able to ground her arguments in the very fact that the feudal lords are empty —they have no spiritual worth:

Praise God very much, daughters, because you have left something so wretched, where men pay attention not to what they have within themselves but to what their tenant farmers and vassals have; and if these men lack subordinates then no honor is paid them (*Way 22.5*).

For Teresa and her nuns, their life of God is “richer” than any feudal lord's. Through her choice of words, Teresa is simply responding to the world she knows, finding arguments in the Bible to support her spiritual stance. Teresa makes the spiritual argument that power resides in one's personal relationship to God. This argument resonates in the new social and economic order in which it is possible to better oneself and become materially richer by abandoning an oppressive situation. For women, Teresa's argument implies empowerment. Through prayer, women can become as spiritually rich as men, and poor people can become as spiritually rich as their social superiors. Thus, prayer is a social equalizer that combats both gender and economic inequality.

All Things Bought and Sold

In order to implement reforms within her order, Teresa needs the authority and power found in new convents in which nuns can practice mental prayer and devote themselves entirely to God, just as men had been doing for decades in reformed male monasteries. Founding and running convents required acute business skills and the ability to handle the “minutiae of effective management” (Mujica *Lettered* 142). Teresa is constantly faced with the tasks of buying, remodeling, maintaining, and furnishing houses for which she had to find sources of funding as well as resources for feeding and caring for her charges. But Teresa is living in a very dangerous world. As the daughter of a *converso* and a champion of mental prayer, she is vulnerable to Inquisitorial persecution. Teresa’s business skills empower her to found and manage convents, but she cannot appear too overbearing, “uppity,” or manly, for in the patriarchal Catholic society in which she lives, pride in women is considered an egregious and punishable sin. While she recognizes the empowerment she derives from her business competence, she is careful to avoid appearing arrogant.

“As a daughter of a merchant, Teresa undoubtedly learned about the importance of contracts and procedures as a young girl” (Mujica *Lettered* 146), and it was these experiences from the business world that provided her with the images of business that she uses throughout her writing: transactions, buying and lending, and rights of ownership (*Way* 29.12). It is obvious that her exposure to business and legal matters played an important role in her convent life. Whether writing contracts for convents, remodeling dilapidated houses for her nuns, procuring patents, or managing convent finances and dowries, Teresa shows her acute business acumen. Although business negotiations fell into the patriarchal realm, Teresa showed that in spite of her

limited education, she could take charge of the household or convent, protect the rights of the nuns, and deal with any legal matters necessary in establishing and running her convents.

Sixteenth-century women had to know “about provisioning, attending to the illnesses of the household, protecting the estates in the absences of fathers, brothers, and husbands, and dealing with legal matters that were vital to the smooth running of estates” (Whitehead *Women* 48).

Teresa’s consummate business skills enabled her to show her capabilities as a woman and by doing so, ironically, not to pose a threat to authorities.

Wool - a most useful commodity

With the increase in urban population during the early modern period in many European countries, the production and consumption of cloth became a “vital component of domestic production and international trade... [in the time span of] 1350-1650” (Richardson 3). Changes in the cloth culture during the transition from feudalism to capitalism were affected by urban growth. Of importance for my purpose is the “fundamental connection between the material and the spiritual” (Richardson 15) with respect to one of the most important commodities in early modern Spain – wool.

Wool was one of the most important commodities of late fifteenth-century Spain, and, as it turns out, one of the most useful for Teresa.⁶ Compared to silk, which was considered too rich and luxurious even for nobles to wear, wool, especially “sayal” or the coarser wool could

⁶ “For centuries, wool was Spain’s principal export and source of foreign exchange” (Ringrose *Madrid* 177). Industry, especially the wool industry, expanded, in the areas of “Segovia, Toledo, and Cuenca [followed by] Ávila, Córdoba, Baeze, and Ubeda The outstanding centre was Segovia, which by about 1580 had some 600 looms and produced about 13,000 (to 16,000) pieces of cloth a year” (Kamen *Spain 1469—1714* 169). Segovia, with its proximity “to the best of the shearing stations of the Mesta, and...to the best merino wool, increased its production dramatically over the 16th c from around 2,000 to as many as 16,000 cloths a year...”(Casey 61). Córdoba rivaled Segovia, with its 17,000 to 18,000 cloths (Casey 62). These cities, along with Cuenca, were at the forefront as European centers of the wool production in Spain during the sixteenth century.

be used by anyone. In its unrefined form, it was a fiber for the masses, being just vulgar enough not to attract attention, while more refined woolens were prized by the upper classes. Wool production, which fostered agricultural growth and stimulated the economy, allowed farmers to turn the land owned by the elite into grazing areas, thereby creating very lucrative industries that ultimately contributed to the self-sufficiency of individuals. The cloth industry was indispensable to Spain's economic growth.

Teresa, who knew wool and silk firsthand from her family's business, was familiar with the importance of these marketable commodities both in Spain and abroad. She did not use the high-quality wool from merino sheep, which was often exported, to clothe her nuns. For Teresa and the Unmitigated Carmelites, the coarser "sayal" prescribed by the Unmitigated rule was more appropriate because it was a reflection of their spirituality. Teresa makes sure that her readers, including the Inquisitors, clearly understand this point.

The ideal of poverty was essential to the reform. According to Swanson, the vow of poverty was part of a penitential trend "which developed in spirituality from the late twelfth century" (106). Like many of her predecessors, Teresa and her Carmelite Sisters were committed to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The renunciation of worldly goods, a major theme in the New Testament,⁷ was essential to Teresa's convictions. For the nuns, monasteries provided a place to live without earthly treasures, and the clothing they chose was a reflection of that poverty. As Linge explains, poverty is "the highest 'virtue' precisely because it is the *abandonment* of all such intentions and personal acquisition. In renouncing all creatures

⁷ In "Mysticism, Poverty and Reason in the Thought of Meister Eckhart" *Journal of the American Academy of Religions*, Vol.46, No. 4 (Dec., 1978). 465-88, David Linge sees that "the center of [Meister Eckhart's] teaching is the possibility of the individual Christian experiencing union with God, unmediated by likeness or concept, and the importance of poverty as the preparatory means for mystical experience" (470).

and all conditions for creaturehood – space, time and self – poverty *has* no object” (Linge 480). The ascetic life required the rule of poverty, as “[d]etachment of the will from all desire of possessions is the inner reality...it is the poor in spirit...who are to be spiritually blessed” (Underhill 211).

As Discalced Carmelites, Teresa and her sisters lived an austere hermetic life within the convents and “made themselves externally recognizable through their coarse wool habits and their bare feet” (*F* 23). And as Teresa explains, “although no one was able to see our faces, since we always wore large veils in front of them, it was enough for the people to see us with the veils, the white, coarse woolen mantles we wore, and our sandals of hemp” (*F* 24:13).⁸ These veils and hemp shoes were the coarse reminder that these nuns, the brides of Christ, were very poor. For Teresa, abandoning the fineries that she was used to as a child and choosing the life of poverty as reflected in the dress of the nuns, only reinforced the ideals of poverty and the ascetic life that fostered devotion.

It is not an easy life, Teresa warns her nuns: “Another day or number of days you will be unable to bear the coarse tunics, but this won’t be permanent” (*F* 15.14). Once the wearer becomes accustomed to her habit, she can exult in her inner happiness, realizing that poverty provides “freedom in having so little esteem for temporal goods, for lack of these goods brings an increase of interior good” (*F* 15.15). For Teresa, habits

should be made of coarse cloth or rough wool, and only as much wool as is necessary should be used. The sleeves should be narrow, no wider at the opening than at the

⁸ It is interesting to note that Ruth Pike sees that some Moriscos in the Seville area were considered skilled artisans. Some “fashioned objects out of hemp and espart grass, including the popular *alpargates* (hempen sandals)” (161). However, popular though these hemp sandals were, the rough sandals worn by the nuns denoted poverty, not fashion.

shoulder. Circular, without pleats, and no larger in the back than in the front, the habit should extend to the feet...Let sandals made from hemp be worn and, for the sake of modesty, stockings of rough wool or of cloth made from rough tow (*Constitutions no. 12*).

As Mujica notes, Teresa's preoccupation with clothing was also evident in her *Letters*. "Since you are wearing tunics of worsted wool," Teresa writes in one letter, "you can wear underskirts made of the same material without any imperfection. I much prefer this to fine wool" (*Letters I, 9 Sept 1576:1*). Teresa often insists that her nuns' habits be coarse, the "coarser the better" (*Letters I, 22 Sept. 1576:4*). However, Teresa is "willing to modify rules according to circumstance (climate, health of the nuns, etc.)" (*Mujica Lettered 149*). For the extreme heat of Andalucía, she recommends light material for the underskirts (*Mujica Lettered 149*), and always considers the comfort of her nuns. However, Teresa's main preoccupation with the clothes the nuns wore was precisely because she wanted their garments to reflect the disdain for worldly wealth and detachment from the world that was a fundamental element of Discalced Carmelite life.

Her concern with woolens is not limited to Discalced Carmelite habits. In her description of the great ascetic and mystic Friar Peter of Alcántara, Teresa points out that "he never put up his cowl; he wore nothing on his feet, nor did he wear any clothes other than a coarse serge habit with nothing else to cover the body—that was as tight as could be—and a short mantle over it made of the same material" (*Life 27.17*). In Teresa's writing, coarse wool becomes a symbol of the detachment fundamental to spiritual reform. Stark poverty signified by rough wool clothes, straw mattresses, meager wool blankets, and not even "a stick of wood to make a fire to cook a

sardine” (*F* 15.13) enables one to devote oneself entirely to God, as worldly comforts were a distraction. Sacrifice of comfort, explains Teresa, “carries in its wake another kind of fullness and tranquility” (*F* 15.15). This type of language places Teresa squarely within the framework of Church orthodoxy. Through the plethora of referents to coarse wool as a sign of poverty, Teresa not only shows her virtuous intentions, but she also places herself in the domestic domain, where these everyday images and activities were familiar to women. By making herself conventionally woman and less threatening, Teresa also sends a subtle message to her nuns. By choosing the habit, women could, just like men, become active followers of Christ and make their own choices when it came to prayer.

The commodity wool, then, becomes a means to exert control over one’s spiritual life, just as it had allowed Teresa’s father and other *conversos* to exert control over their financial life. Teresa would have been well aware of the importance of wool as a means to both spiritual and economic empowerment. As Hentschell contends,

Cloth is important as an object in and of itself in serving a vital function in the lives of subjects; it ‘operates’ as a source of clothing, an object of manufacture, a product for international trade and thus intersects with the subject at many turns...Cloth comes to represent something more for the subject than its mere materiality (7-8).

During the sixteenth century, the market for the luxurious merino wool and silk allowed artisans and merchants, many of whom were *conversos*, to contribute to the flourishing Castilian economy. *Conversos* formed part of the diverse social and ethnic fabric of sixteenth-century Ávila, where people “organized themselves in barrios or neighborhoods according to occupation, rank, and ethnic diversity” (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 4). It was in these barrios that such

merchants became the financiers of Castilian Spain. Wool production was for the *abulenses*, the backbone of their economy, and Ávila, where Teresa grew up, was one of the important centers of Castile's wool trade. Medina del Campo, where Teresa founded her second convent, was an important center of wool marketing from the late fifteenth until well into the late sixteenth centuries (Phillips *Spain's Golden Fleece* 176). Many Spanish wool merchants from northern regions traveled to Ávila, as well as to Medina del Campo to buy wool. Because wool was an important commodity for trade within Spain, Europe, and even the New World, it allowed men like Teresa's grandfather and father, who were not landed gentry, to make a very comfortable life for themselves. It provided them with disposable wealth, which was something that under the feudal system, only aristocrats had enjoyed.

After the fourteenth century, the wool trade made rich people out of previous outcasts. According to Bilinkoff, Ávila's "new men" formed "tightknit" circles and "were active in Ávila's expanding economy, particularly in the lucrative wool trade, in finance and moneylending, in tax farming, and in the liberal professions" (*Ávila* 63). "Since trade was associated with social stigma, it was left to outsiders and foreigners" (Pike, R. 22). Many mercantile families, such as the Cepedas, who had bought their titles of nobility and moved into the upper echelons of nobility, invested in commerce. It is within this economic climate that Teresa's *converso* family successfully traded and transacted business with its many contacts within Spain and possibly even throughout Europe with its wool.

Teresa never refers directly to the economic power of wool, but it is clear that she internalized a sense of wool's value for enriching its owner. While wool brought material wealth to Ávila's merchants, it brought spiritual riches to the nuns by enabling them to choose the habit

of *sayal*. It empowered them by providing the means to reach a higher spiritual plane, in spite of the misgivings of the hierarchies of the Church and the Carmelite order about interiority and mental prayer. Because Teresa was cognizant of the monetary worth of wool, her choice of coarse wool for habits made the vow of poverty more than symbolic. Discalced Carmelite nuns were to take the vow of poverty seriously, giving up all luxuries. In their place the poor wool, which clothed their everyday life, became a means through which nuns could achieve spiritual wealth. Wearing coarse cloth and the plain brown habits of the nuns represented, as Bilinkoff explains, “the tradition of imitating the humility and poverty of Christ” (*Ávila* 131).

Teresa as Shrewd Businesswoman

Commodities, which represent the material aspect of business, are the tangible products that are bought and sold. Because Teresa was familiar with commodity culture, she was able to cast salvation in the language of business. This enabled her to gain support for her convents. Choosing the spiritual life is a kind of investment and the individual has power because he or she can make that choice. Choosing convent life affords the individual with a degree of economic self-sufficiency because it divorces her from her main source of wealth and her family. Even though many nuns entered the convent with dowries, once there, they had to support the monastic community through work—growing vegetables, spinning wool, etc. Teresa congratulates the nuns of the Seville convent on selling their goods to the community (Mujica *Lettered* 205). With economic self-sufficiency comes a degree of spiritual self-sufficiency, for, although nuns are dependent on priests for the sacraments and for spiritual guidance, through mental prayer they are able to achieve a direct and personal relationship with God. Teresa’s wish for her nuns is that that they find their own path to God.

Alms – salvation of the soul

The primary source of monetary income for convents was donations in the form of alms and dowries. As early as the fourth century, the Church made almsgiving part of the “familiar economic language of lending and loans in order to communicate how lay people might better invest their surplus resources” (Caner 331). In the sixteenth century, almsgiving was seen as a means by which “one could literally buy one’s way into heaven—or at least improve one’s chances of ever getting there” (Casey 232). The Council of Trent (1545–1563) reinforced this position by making almsgiving a condition for salvation.⁹ By giving to the poor one could live in imitation of Christ, work toward salvation, and avoid the “gates of hell.” Thus, one was making an “investment” when “atoning for sin, achieving salvation, or otherwise justifying oneself before God” (Caner 331), and therefore, salvation was a commodity that could be “purchased” through almsgiving. Teresa used almsgiving as both a spiritual and economic tool. In the spiritual realm, almsgiving provided a means to practice charity in a way sanctioned by the Catholic Church. By advocating almsgiving, Teresa could reinforce the Council of Trent’s idea that salvation could be achieved through “exterior things like works of charity” (*Life* 11.16). She mentions in *Life* that even as young child she “gave what alms [she] could” (*Life* 1.5), thereby establishing herself as a charitable Christian.

As a convent administrator, part of Teresa’s job involved the overseeing of alms collection and engaging in prayer for donors who did give to the Church. She explains in *Constitutions* that “Each day after supper, or collation, when the Sisters are gathered together,

⁹ According to the catechism of the Council of Trent (IV, p.9) “That prayer may be fervent and efficacious, fasting and almsgiving must be added This triple remedy was therefore divinely ordained to aid man towards the attainment of salvation; for whereas of God by holy prayer; redeem our offenses against man by almsdeeds”(qtd. Eire 233).

the turnkeeper should announce what was given that day in alms, naming the donors so that all may take care to pray that God will repay them” (no.25). Teresa turns almsgiving into a business by making prayer a commodity. The nuns will “repay” the donors by praying for them. This practice empowers Teresa to solicit funds for her convents in an entirely orthodox way. Teresa stresses that she and her nuns “live the spiritual life as [they] do... from alms, without begging” (*Life* 36.29). Thus, while firmly reinforcing the vow of poverty that she and her Discalced nuns followed, Teresa was also creating a means for their survival.

Teresa made sure that her readers understood that it was not she who was providing for herself and her nuns, reiterating repeatedly that God provided through alms. In her references to “temporal matters,” Teresa states:

Let them live always on alms and without any income, but insofar as possible let there be no begging. Great must be the need that makes them resort to begging. Rather, they should help themselves with the work of their hands, as St. Paul did; the Lord will provide what they need... Their earnings must not come from work requiring careful attention to fine details but from spinning and sewing or other refined labor that does not so occupy the mind as to keep it from the Lord. Nor should they do work with gold or silver. Neither should there be any haggling over what is offered for their work.... [Instead, they should] graciously accept what is given. If they see that the amount offered is insufficient, they should not take on the work (*Constitutions* no. 9).

Following the steps of St. Paul and the Lord is what matters most to Teresa, as any preoccupation with money or alms, “won’t make the other change his thinking nor will it inspire him with the idea to give alms. Leave this worrying to the One who can move all, for He is the

Lord of money and of those who earn money” (*Way* 2.2). Even while maintaining her orthodox stance regarding poverty, humility, charity, and obedience, Teresa saw almsgiving as a way to continue and strengthen her reform agenda. Although she always put the spiritual aspect first, she knew well that almsgiving played an important role in maintaining convents.

Teresa is not interested in accumulating money for its own sake. She makes it clear that her ultimate goal is the salvation of her nuns as well as that of individuals who were “freed from hell because of the alms [they] gave them” (*Way* 2.10). Teresa knows she must fund her reform movement and is always acutely aware of the financial needs of her convents:

[I]t is very important that the expenses not exceed the income even though the community may have to go without something. For if they spend in accordance with their means, those houses founded with an income will have enough and get along very well, glory to God. Otherwise, if the community begins to go into debt, it will gradually be ruined. For in the event of great need, it will seem inhuman to major superiors to forbid individuals to keep money earned from their work or that relatives provide for them or similar things that are the practice now in different monasteries. I would unquestionably prefer to see a monastery dissolved than to see it reach such a state. This is why I said that a lack of care in temporal matters can cause great harm in spiritual matters... (*Visitation* no.10).

Although motivated by the desire to provide the ascetic life that would lead her nuns to spiritual salvation, Teresa knew that convents were in a sense a business venture. Convents had to be financially viable to succeed, which meant that sometime rules had to be changed or suspended.

Teresa wanted her nuns to be happy and healthy so that they could devote themselves entirely to spiritual perfection and not be distracted by material needs. This is why, in spite of the austerity she promoted in the convents, she made sure basic goods were provided there: “I would have desired the possibility that nothing be lacking. In sum, my intention was the intention of the weak and wretched person that I am – although I did have some good motives besides those involving my own comfort” (*Way* 1.1). Calling herself “weak and wretched” was, as Bilinkoff explains, Teresa’s “defensive strategy”, employing “disarming modesty to concede to women’s intellectual inferiority in a way that frees her to explore a new theological vocabulary” (*Rhetoric* 36, 38). Teresa realized that some comfort is necessary to achieve spiritual perfection. Comfort in the convents meant living a secluded life in which the nuns were “to pray, well and good” (*Way* 2.9) “because they are much obliged to pray continually for the souls of their benefactors, since their food comes from them. The Lord also desires that, even though it comes from Him, we show gratitude to those persons through whose means He gives this food to us” (*Way* 2.10). Teresa gives all the glory to God, who works through those who provide alms.

Dowries and convent finance

Although Teresa insisted that no potential postulant be turned away for lack of a dowry, as a businesswoman, she was well aware of the importance of dowries in funding convents. Candidates for Discalced Carmelite life were usually admitted at the age of seventeen and were to be judged on their desire “to give up everything for the enjoyment of everlasting abundance” (*Way* 2.1). An applicant, Teresa stresses,

should not be turned away because she has no alms to give the house; and this has always been the procedure. Should she desire to give an alms to the house, and hold it for that

reason, she should not be refused profession if afterward she does not for some reason give it, nor should the nuns try to get the money through litigation. Let them be careful so as not to be motivated by self-interest. Little by little greed could so enter that they would look more to the alms than to the goodness and quality of the person. This should in no way be done, for doing so would be a great evil. They must ever keep in mind their profession of poverty that they might always in everything give off its fragrance. Let them reflect that it is not money that will sustain them but faith, perfection, and trust in God alone (*Constitutions* no. 21).

Teresa warned the nuns to place their faith in God and be patient, lest “sooner or later these cares [about whether others will give them] alms . . . become habitual” (*Way* 2.3).

Yet, Teresa actively sought sources of income for her convents. Securing donations and inheritances for the convents was necessary for guaranteeing their financial independence. That she understood this is clear from her account of the case of a certain Catalina de Tolosa, who had made arrangements so that

after her death . . . her two daughters, who were to make profession in our monastery of Palencia . . . would transfer to this house their inheritance that would have been promised to Palencia at their profession. And to another daughter, who desired to receive the habit here, she has left the family estate which amounts to as much as the income she wanted to provide. The only drawback is that these goods cannot be used at once, but I have always held that we will not be in want. The Lord who provides that alms be given to our other monasteries founded in poverty will awaken some to give them here, or will provide the means by which nuns can support themselves. Since no monastery had been founded

under such conditions, I sometimes begged the Lord that since He had desired that this foundation be made He ordain that it be helped and have what is necessary... (*F* 31.48).

While this long quote shows a devout Teresa giving the glory to God, it also shows how, in a very carefully guarded way, she is helping her nuns see the importance of almsgiving in the financing of convents. Besides allowing nuns to establish their self-sufficiency within their community, almsgiving makes them financially secure, so that they can devote their time entirely to prayer and devotion to God.

In addition to almsgiving, dowries had always been an essential element of convent finance. Since the Middle Ages, the family was the matrix of the relationship between the convents and the secular society, as families maintained their ties with daughters who entered convents. Dowries and maintenance allowances were part of the familial responsibility for novices and were important for the convents, which relied heavily on dowries and allowances for financial support.

The economic reality of the dowries given to girls strongly impacted the way of life in sixteenth-century Spain: “Most convents in the late Renaissance and early modern period were aristocratic institutions, because a spiritual marriage, like a secular one, required a dowry, although a much smaller one” (Brown 118). It was advantageous for convents to harbor nuns or novices from aristocratic families because they attracted rich patrons from prominent community members, which resulted in generous donations to the convents. Sizable dowries were required for entering prestigious convents in the sixteenth century. Such dowries did not consist solely of monetary or land donations; they could also include “rich gifts of furniture, gold brocade for the decoration of the church, gold-embroidered silk shirts, and so on” (Brown 120).

Teresa attempted to abolish social hierarchy in her convents. She eliminated “background checks” into lineage as well as the use of titles, even *doña*. In *Meditations*, she states:

A king would be happy and pleased if he saw a little shepherd he loved looking spellbound at the royal brocade and wondering what it is and how it was made (1.8).

Rather than in titles or inherited wealth, a nun’s value resides in her spiritual self; Teresa believes that riches should be measured in terms of spiritual, not material gifts. By preventing richer nuns from lording it over poorer ones, Teresa wants to make it possible for all nuns to stand close to God, to have that close communion with Him.

This ideal of equality for all was just that: an ideal. The nuns, who lived strictly cloistered within the convent space, were acutely aware of their families’ financial worth. Moreover, there was tension between what Teresa wanted for her nuns spiritually and what she knew needed to be achieved through business. As Mujica states,

[m]oney is a frequent theme in her letters to [Gracián]; she mentions dowries and legacies repeatedly: ‘Now a postulant, very capable and talented, has received the habit here. Her patrimony is valued at twenty thousand ducats. But we don’t think she will leave much to the house in comparison with what she could, for she is very attached to her blood sisters’ (*Lettered* 111; *Letters* 2, 7 July 1579:2).

In another letter concerning the economic stability of the Seville Carmel, Teresa “suggests that María de San José accept a nun and her sister with dowries large enough to cover [the tax on the property of Seville Carmel], even though one of the girls is only fourteen years old” (Mujica *Lettered* 122; *Letters* I, 18 June 1576:3). The age of entering as a novice was seventeen, but

Teresa was willing to bend the rules for the sake of her foundations, even if it meant admitting an under-aged novice in order to secure her dowry.

As Mujica explains, “[m]oney was a constant source of conflict” (*Lettered* 122) for Teresa, as maintaining convents for nuns with no source of income was no easy task. Fortunately, Teresa, a shrewd businesswoman, knew how to manipulate circumstances in order to find available money, whether through loans or dowries. Her letters reveal that she often appealed to her network of acquaintances for monetary resources, as when she writes to her nuns in Valladolid:

[Teresa] proceeds like the expert fundraiser...by [invoking] the nuns’ sense of duty and sisterhood: ‘I want you to keep in mind that from the time that house was founded, I have never asked you...to accept a nun without a dowry or anything else of consequence, which has not been the case with other communities...I am worried that what is so important for the service of God might fail for lack of money’ (Mujica *Lettered* 129; *Letters* 2, 31 May 1579:1).

In most convents, the “fixed yearly maintenance allowances or *alimentos* [from families were used] to cover their daughters’ incidental expenses beyond those met by the convent . . . [and] . . . [c]onvents also required other payments” (Lehfeldt “Discipline” 648). These incidental expenses for a nun could range from “1,000 *ducados* for her dowry; 50 *ducados* of *alimentos* during the year of her novitiate; 140 *ducados* for wax and other necessities on the day of her profession; 200 *reales* for an altar cloth when she took the habit; and 50 *ducados* yearly for her necessities, clothes, and furnishings” (Lehfeldt “Discipline” 647). Teresa’s father “agreed to provide twenty-five *fanegas* of grain or two hundred gold ducats a year...and pay the costs of

entrance and profession at [Teresa's] convent" (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 114). In addition, her dowry consisted of "items of cloth, a bed . . . sheets, pillows . . . as well as habits, mantle, and cloaks of the choice woolens from which the Cepeda family derived much of its income" (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 114). Useful items such as bedding were more than welcome in the convents because they became communal property. As Teresa explains in one of her letters, "because of a windfall produced by María de San José's dowry. . . [t]his is why we all wear the same habit, that we might help one another, for what belongs to one belongs to all" (*Letters* 2, 31 May 1579:4). Dowries shared by all allowed nuns to gain self-sufficiency as a monastic community.

When Teresa first entered the convent, she did so as an aristocrat. "Cepeda money and connections guaranteed for her the title of *Doña*" (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 114). As a reflection of noble lineage, this title was important both inside the convent and in secular society. "The 'half-monastic, half-hidalgo world' of Encarnación essentially reproduced in microcosm the conditions of abulense society and perpetuated the issues of class, caste, and 'honor'" (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 113). Teresa, who advocated the mitigated rule of the Carmelites, saw the social distinctions of the aristocratic milieu as one that detracted from the true religious life of the monasteries. Although Teresa claimed to have enjoyed "things that are usually esteemed in the world" (*Life* 7.2; 5.1), she saw the importance of following the religious life of poverty. Accordingly, she worked to eliminate distinctions of social class by imposing austerity and eliminating titles in the convent. She knew that not all women who entered convents did so for

the religious life, and she condemned other convents for their materialism quite openly.¹⁰ As Concha explains,

[Hay] otras mujeres hidalgas, movidas también más por problemas sociales que por vocación. Eran las ‘doñas’, que disponían de cámaras amplias, con un zaguán, cocina y cuarto de estar, y que con frecuencia, llevaban consigo amigas, familiares o alguna que otra servidora (24).

In her life, Teresa became a shrewd businesswoman who wanted the best for her nuns. For her, the best return on her investment was the space in which to extend her reform of the Mitigated Carmelites, so that they could pray as they wanted, and worship God, not as someone told them to, but in the way they thought best. As the daughter of a *converso*, Teresa had to be ever vigilant. As a nun who saw mental prayer or recollection as an important part of the religious life, she also had to keep in mind the scrutiny of the Inquisition. In her writing, Teresa finds the language of business as an appropriate instrument with which to help her nuns see the possibilities of empowerment within their strongly patriarchal sixteenth-century society. By using language that they could understand, Teresa asserts her community’s self-sufficiency in both the material and the spiritual world. In this way, Teresa shows herself not only to be a shrewd businesswoman, but also a very smart rhetorician.¹¹

¹⁰ Even at the Incarnation, Teresa saw that many of the nuns did not observe the strict rules of enclosure. The rules were so lax that some of them would even sell their cells to novices (Concha 24).

¹¹ As Mujica explains, “[a]s foundress, Teresa had a global view of the reform and all the female Carmels, which, she believed, gave her the authority to make certain macromanagement decisions, including which postulants to accept where” (*Lettered* 125).

CHAPTER THREE

Money and Jewels - God's Spiritual Wealth

During the Middle Ages Spain, like much of the rest of Europe, was plagued with many costly wars and insurmountable debt. Even commercial trade involving the exchange of goods such as wool, raw silk, salt, iron, olives, olive oil, cereals, and fruits was not enough to help the country's "economic infirmity" (Reitzer 222). The answer to the country's economic ills came with the discovery and exploration of the New World, which as Cameron explains, "was an age of commercial exploitation and imperial expansion" (207). By plundering the wealth of the newly conquered countries, mid-sixteenth-century Spain received "a stream of bullion which helped to lubricate Europe's economic activities and enabled the colonial societies to acquire from Europe the commodities they were unwilling or unable to produce locally" (Elliot *Empires* 118).

European economic activity in the sixteenth century relied heavily on trade. As Stein quotes from Michel Morineau's *Incroyables gazettes et fabeuleaux metales*, "It was not just the king of Spain who was interested in the precious metals, but all the merchants of Sevilla, all the agents of foreign merchants at Sevilla, and all the merchants of Antwerp, Augsburg, Genoa and Rouen, who hastened to garner the profits on what they had exported" (qtd. Stein 3). In all of these markets precious metals and jewels were valued, not only as items of exchange, but also as an expression of power and prestige. The New World yielded to "Spain's thirsting treasury numberless shipments of gold, silver, and precious stones" (Muller 7), with most of the precious metals landing in the coffers of the monarchy.

The monarchy was not alone in benefiting from the deluge of gold, silver, and precious stones imported from the colonies. Many elite families in such cities as Seville, Toledo, and Madrid benefitted from the wealth arriving from the New World, as social success came increasingly to be measured by economic success. Seville, for example, became a booming port town, with gold, silver, and jewels from the New World coming through its harbors daily and where many *converso* families became involved in financing exchanges between Spain and the New World. All over Spain people now demanded a more ostentatious and luxurious lifestyle. As a result, Vives contends, “[t]he nobility, the clergy, and the bourgeoisie ruined themselves because of their desire to dazzle others with jewels, clothing, and ornaments” (*Economic* 284). In response to the demand, goldsmiths and silversmiths throughout Spain, especially in large cities like Barcelona or Seville, carefully “transformed [precious metals] into articles of religious cult or of bodily adornment” (Malagón-Barcelo 115), sometimes to excess. A compendium of jewels provided to Ferdinand and Isabella included diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and pearls, intricately worked in many different designs, as part of gold collars, necklaces, crowns, sash-like or neck chains, beads, buckles, bracelets, earrings, or rings. Crosses, either on pendants or hanging from rosaries, were also often laden with jewels. Besides the gems that adorned the attire of the aristocracy and the clergy, striking riches were also to be found in churches, with their chalices, crowns, and *custodias*, objects that held the Host. Altars, such as one in La Merced at Valladolid, were “covered with beautiful gold and silver vessels” and decorated with “ornaments of gold, silver and precious stones, crowns of “inestimable value” (Williams, L. 104). In the fifteenth century many *custodias* were embellished with crystal, gold, precious stones. Ávila’s *custodia*, which could have been seen by Teresa, weighed “one hundred and forty pounds” (Williams, L. 96). The weight, however, was not as impressive as the valuable

workmanship of these objects, which were found in many cathedrals throughout Spain, such as those in Burgos, Seville, Córdoba, Madrid, and Toledo (Williams, L. 96), many of the cities that Teresa had visited and where she had sometimes established convents.

With such extravagance surrounding her, Teresa knew the value of jewels and precious stones. Diamonds, crystals, pearls, inlaid precious stones, and enamels were all “significant symbols” that reflected the saint’s commodity culture. As a nun and a mystic, she drew on them for images in her writing and used them to explain her mystical experiences.

The belief that precious stones were endowed with supernatural powers was common in literature, both in the ancient world and in the European Middle Ages. As Howe points out, “[i]n their consideration of gold, jewels, and precious stones, the [Christian] mystics maintain an essentially positive polarity by equating them with God and his gifts” (*Mystical* 140). Precious jewels, like mystical experiences, are invaluable. Jewels have monetary worth as part of the visible material world, but these same precious jewels, diamonds, gold, and silver also symbolize the spiritual richness of the mystical experience. Everyone, even a simple *mujercilla* like Teresa, could understand the importance and value of such jewels because all levels of society would have been familiar with the display of wealth found in churches and with the ostentatious lifestyle of the aristocracy and the clergy. It was natural, then, for Teresa to describe the soul as filled “with the enamel and inlays of precious stones and pearls of virtue” (*Meditaciones* 6.11). She also had recourse to imagery involving jewels to speak of rapture, likening it to receiving a precious jewel:

a very beautiful golden necklace to which was attached a highly valuable cross. This gold and these stones are incomparably different from earthly ones. Their beauty is very

different from what is imaginable here below....everything here ... on earth in comparison is like a sketch made from soot, so to speak (*Life* 33.14).

Because this gold-encrusted cross with precious stones was given to her by the Virgin, Teresa sees that the earthly richness of the necklace pales in comparison to the promise of heavenly rewards. She explains that she knew that the “vision was from God” because it had left her “recollected in prayer” (*Life* 33.15).

In her most polished piece, *Interior Castle*, Teresa writes that the Lord’s palace is “of a single diamond or of very clear crystal” (1:1.1), a very costly dwelling “built of gold and precious stones” (*Way* 28.9). In the innermost center of this palace (i.e., the soul), the King is found, “seated upon an extremely valuable throne, which is your heart” (*Way* 29.9). Swietlicki notes that because of her *converso* background, Teresa could have been influenced by Cabala, where “the heavenly palaces are also of precious stone, usually hard, diamondlike sapphire (from the Hebrew *sappir*, ‘radiance of God’)” (55). In the following passage Teresa’s description of the soul seems to echo this Cabalistic imagery: “[T]hink of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal in which there are many dwelling places, just as in heaven there are many mansions”(IC 1:1.1). Whatever her source, Teresa was intent on describing the richness of the mystical union, one that had to be explained in terms understandable to individuals who had never experienced it. For her, the sensory images associated with jewelry could call to mind glorious heavenly places, thus allying richness, power, and prestige with God and prayer.

If we did not know that Teresa, a nun subject to the vow of poverty, was familiar with actual physical jewels, we might guess that she had developed the use of imagery based on

jewels solely from reading works that employed such imagery. As the daughter of a woman from a wealthy landed family, the young Teresa wanted “to dress in finery...to please and look pretty, taking great care of [her] hands and hair and about perfumes and all the empty things in which one can indulge” (*Life* 2.2). Jewels and precious stones would have been part of her affluent family’s possessions. In addition, their dealings with aristocratic circles would have exposed her to riches and finery. Nevertheless, the grown Teresa rejects riches, as the following passage shows:

I was ill with heart sickness... [and Luisa de la Cerda, a ‘charitable’ lady], gave orders that I be shown some of her jewels of gold and precious stone that were very valuable, especially one of the diamonds that was appraised highly. She thought they would make me happy. Recalling what the Lord has kept for us, I was laughing to myself and feeling pity at the sight of what people esteem. And I thought of how impossible it would be for me, even if I tried, to esteem those things if the Lord didn’t remove from my memory the things He had shown me. In this way the soul has great dominion, so great that I don’t know whether anyone who doesn’t possess this dominion will understand it. It is the detachment proper and natural to us because it comes without labor on our part. God does it all, for His Majesty shows these truths in such a way, and they are so imprinted in the soul, that it is seen clearly we couldn’t acquire them by ourselves in this way and in so short a time (*Life* 38.4).

Teresa had many acquaintances within the aristocracy, from whom she regularly sought financial help for founding convents. Her relationship with such persons of nobility as Doña Luisa de la Cerda and the Duchess of Alba brought Teresa into their homes, where precious jewels were

accessible for her to see. After their father's death, the children of the Duchess insisted on having Teresa stay with their mother. This stay provided Teresa with images of wealth that helped her to elucidate "the hidden things of God" (*IC* 6:4.7). She remembers having entered a room in the house that was like the "treasure chamber of a king or great lord...where there are countless kinds of glass and earthen vessels and other things so arranged that almost all these objects are seen upon entering"(*IC* 6:4.8).¹² Teresa, "amazed on entering...wondered what benefit could be gained from that conglomeration of things, and [she] saw that one could praise the Lord at seeing so many different kinds of objects" (*IC* 6:4.8). The many material objects, precious jewels, adornments, and riches that she saw there, became images with which she could convey spiritual meaning. At first, Teresa was, as Slade notes, so "overwhelmed" with the scene in front of her (*St. Teresa* 105) that she could not describe it, as "none of those pieces has remained in my memory any more than if I had never seen them, nor would I know how to explain the workmanship of any of them" (*IC* 6:4.8). For Teresa, what she saw within the room and the conglomeration of things that she could not remember is like the "soul...left with that representation of the grandeurs it saw; but it cannot describe any of them"(*IC* 6:4.8). Still, "wanting to find some comparison by which to explain" (*IC* 6:4.8) God's grandeur that "remains so fixed in [the] soul" (*IC* 6:4.6), Teresa resorts to using her intellectual vision to recall the images that are "inscribed in the interior part of the soul and are never forgotten" (*IC* 6:4.6).

Teresa's extended stay with the Duchess, "at the insistence of [her] superiors" (*IC* 6:4.8), would no doubt have allowed her to see her wearing jewels. Priscilla E. Muller's study *Jewels of*

¹² China earthenware vessels were part of Toledo's tradition. Toledo, influenced by *mudéjar* art, produced its pottery throughout Spain; its factories were concentrated in Toledo, especially in Talavera de la Reina. As part of its expansion efforts, Toledo factories saw profit by turning to exporting to the New World.

Spain from 1500-1800 includes a repertoire of precious jewels, *cintas*, and *collares* that had been commissioned for numerous Spanish aristocrats, including the Duchess of Alba. Among these were gold *cintas* made in 1571 in Milan “and crystal beads and buttons bought there awaited Spanish garniture since silversmithing...was better done in Spain” (Muller 43). From the 1560s to the 1580s, the Duchess also had made for her a variety of *collares* of pearls and precious stones and adornments of lion and camel pendants enameled on “gold with ruby, diamonds and pendant pearl” (Muller 93). Although Teresa does not comment on the workmanship of any of the pieces in the Duchess of Alba’s room, for her, the magnificence of the material objects that she saw would have seemed insignificant in light of the brilliance or splendor that she found in God’s divine presence.

As a nun, Teresa knows that material goods in our world are transient in nature and that riches are to be renounced in order to “have treasure in heaven” (Matt. 19:21), which far outweighs the riches of this earth. Teresa’s way of perfection was to embrace the vows of poverty by sacrificing worldly, material things in order to seek the highest attainable union with God. Her mercantile background allowed her to be exposed to a materialistic side of life where she saw the value of gold, silver, and jewels first-hand. In addition, through her intimacy with aristocratic circles, which exposed her to the homes and daily lives of devout, yet noble women, she had a close-up view of precious jewels, their designs, and the intricate workmanship with which they had been crafted. In *Meditations* Teresa again references gold, carats, precious stones, and enamels:

His Majesty is embellishing with His gifts this gold He has prepared and tested so as to see how many carats the soul’s love is This soul, which is the gold, no more moves

or works during this time than if it were in fact gold. And divine Wisdom, happy to see it thus . . . makes a thousand designs in the gold with inlays of precious stones and enamels (6:11).

Following in the path of many of her predecessors and drawing on her personal familiarity with the adornments of the nobility, Teresa chose to use imagery involving jewels to convey the splendor and incalculable value of her mystical experiences. Given the reward that awaited her at the end of the arduous journey to the innermost dwelling, she freely submitted to renouncing earthly goods and following a life of poverty in order to attain the spiritual riches of heaven.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Feminine Space of Domesticity – the Hearth

Finding God among the Pots and Pans

Teresa's main goal in her writing is to express her mystical experiences. However, because she lived during a time that limited woman's use of theological language, she cannot speak directly about these experiences, instead resorting to images from the world around her. Whether employing images from her business, natural, or domestic world, Teresa's "apophatic writing is replete with 'neutral' or 'profane' (not religious) images...which take on spiritual meaning in context" (Mujica "Apophatic" 747). Since she wrote at the behest of her confessor, Teresa was at pains to find the right words or, as Geertz explains, "significant symbols – words for the most part but also gestures, drawings, musical sounds, mechanical devices like clocks, or natural objects like jewels – anything, in fact, that is disengaged from its mere actuality and used to impose meaning upon experience" (45). By invoking "significant symbols," Teresa is consciously using a language that her readers can understand, one that "translates" the language of her mystical experience. The aim of this chapter is to discuss how her references to the material world, made up of domestic objects and foodstuffs from her sixteenth-century commodity culture, give us insight into her spirituality and her mystical experience. When we inspect how Teresa appeals to imagery based on food and domestic objects, we do more than open a window on sixteenth-century Spain; we situate Teresa in the context of Spanish womanhood in her time. Her informal colloquial language does not come across as theological, nor does it echo the spiritual treatises of her male counterparts at the time. Rather, by employing metaphors taken from everyday life, Teresa strengthens her position in two ways: she makes her

message accessible to everyone, and she exploits the realm of domesticity to make herself less threatening to the authorities. In order for Teresa to move from the exterior material world to her inner spiritual one, she seeks God everywhere, even “among the pots and pans” (*Life* 5.8).

Although Teresa lived at a time several centuries later than the medieval women mystics who were her forerunners, she, like them, had to contend with the restrictions imposed on women by patriarchal society, which continued to view the place of the perfect Christian woman as the home, the *domus*, the hearth. Following the lead of her thirteenth- and fourteenth-century spiritual sisters, she found it natural to have recourse to a language replete with metaphors from her domestic world when attempting to convey her mystical experiences to her nuns and assorted other readers.

In order to be able to express mystical experience, mystics need “symbol and image,” as Evelyn Underhill explains, because the mystical experience “must be expressed if it is to be communicated, and its actuality is inexpressible except in some side-long way...something beyond its surface sense” (79). When Teresa sought to express her mystical experiences, she had to find a bridge linking the temporal world to the eternal, “from the visible to the invisible” (Inge 73). The domestic world, the place that many cultures have identified with women, becomes the source of Teresa’s voice for her mystical expression. Because she sought to employ the “language used between women” (*IC*, Prologue 4), Teresa naturally gravitated toward images of domesticity-- household objects and foods that women controlled within a home. In the *domus*, or house, women were the responsible agents. It was, however, a restricted sphere, one that was subject to rules made by men.

Sixteenth-Century Patriarchal Society and Enclosure of Women

In its efforts to strengthen the foundation of the Catholic Church, the Council of Trent (1545-1563), following the preaching of the apostle Paul, imposed a strict enclosure on women and called for them to be obedient and silent. Drawing on many classical writings, Church fathers fostered the idea of women's inferiority to men. Many Biblical sources reinforced the idea that women "should be subordinate, even as the law says" (I Cor. 14:34-35). Whether they were to be punished for Eve's sins, were considered "hysterical" by nature, or were compared to the Virgin Mary, women were expected to be passive, subservient to men, and even protected from straying into any deviance from their role as clearly defined by church and society.

In the patriarchal society of sixteenth-century Spain, men's religious writing was one way to silence women. At a time when women were expected to be meek and were not allowed to speak about religious practices either orally or in writing, the male religious leaders of the early modern period saw physical enclosure as a way of "separating the sacred from the profane, and also for protecting the social order" (Perry 6). By limiting woman's sphere of activity to the home, or as in Teresa's case, the convent, women could be kept "in-check". As Margaret King observes in *Women of the Renaissance*, "injunctions of the preachers and the humanists alike restricted woman to the home, to silence, to plainness; they required a total flattening of her expressive will, her body, her voice, her ornament"(39-40). Nevertheless, against all odds, Teresa entered the patriarchal realm of writers, breaking the silence and finding her voice through her writing. Unlike the theological works of her male counterparts, Teresa's homey language "underscored the many moments of spiritual growth" that she had experienced (Arenal and Schlauf "Stratagems" 26).

The “woman speak” that replaced theological language in Teresa’s attempt to communicate the nature of mystical experience was not only a natural result of her limited education; it was also a spontaneous reaction to the patriarchal environment in which she lived. By limiting women’s education, men were able to assume power in government, the professions and guilds, and education while at the same time placing restrictions on women by confining them to the home or, in the case of many widows and orphans, the convent. A few of these convent-dwellers did eventually assume some power through the church, but only because their roles as prioresses (or novice mistresses, chroniclers, accountants, or herbalists) afforded them some authority. It is perhaps not surprising that Teresa, as a woman of *converso* origin, found it prudent to tread lightly in the power arena. Thus, she constantly downplayed her authority, stressing her weakness and ignorance as a woman. As Bynum explains:

Women writers were aware of the idea that woman is to man as flesh is to spirit...By and large, however, women did not draw from the traditional notion of a symbolic dichotomy between male and female any sense of incapacity for virtue, for spiritual growth, or for salvation. Women writers tended either to ignore their own gender, using androgynous imagery for the self (as did Gertrude the Great and Hadewijch), or to embrace their femaleness (as did Margery Kempe), as a sign of closeness to Christ (*Holy Feast* 263).

“Femaleness” called to mind the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, who served both as a moral and spiritual figure. Embracing their “femaleness” led women writers to employ the language of their domestic world, the locus of femininity. Like her predecessors, Teresa is well aware of the duties women were supposed to perform and the tasks that made up domestic life, as women’s femininity was tied to their roles within this space.

The perfect education for Christian women, as outlined by fifteenth-century humanists, continued to garner attention from moralists in Teresa's world. Texts such as Juan Luis Vives's *De institutione feminae Christianae* (*Instrucción de la mujer Cristiana* (1524), Erasmus's *Christiani matrimonii institutio* (1525), and Fray Luis de León's *La perfecta casada* (1583), situated women's role within a patriarchal society. One of the most important humanists of his era, Vives was preoccupied with a woman's chastity, frailty, and idleness. He believed that women should be able to read (knowing Latin being only ornamental for women but necessary for males); but that maidens should go out as little as possible (in order to remain chaste), staying as busy as possible within the house. Erasmus ridicules the "fashionable education of girls" (qtd. Sowards 86) and is quick to conclude that "[girls] would do better set to weaving cloth" (qtd. Sowards 86). And in his treatise *La perfecta casada* (1583), Fray Luis de León carefully argues that the virtuous behavior of a Christian wife is only to be found within the domestic sphere. Although both Vives and Erasmus supported education for women, they disapproved of their reading such fiction as the popular chivalric books that were in vogue during the sixteenth century, considering them dangerous for women, prescribing instead the reading of devotional literature. For the humanists, industrious domestic activities -- such as spinning or weaving, anything pertaining to "clothwork"-- were ways to keep women "in check," productive, and virtuous. The old expression "Idle hands are the devil's workshop" is a perfect expression of the humanists' idea, as "[i]dleness was thought to lead women astray, whereas industry was a fundamental virtue" (Shimizu 77).

Enclosure within the house allowed women to be seen as good wives - not only modest, but also industrious. Among the most honorable kinds of industrious work for women was spinning. Any type of cloth-working activity allowed a woman to "demonstrate her chastity,

wisdom, honesty, and industry” (Orlin 187). Spinning, often done as a means of survival, was not only restricted to lower social classes. Fray Luis specifically mentions that even women of the higher echelons of society should spin linen or wool. In *Formación de la mujer cristiana* (1523), Fray Luis also suggests that women should fill their free time (after spinning and work in the kitchen) with reading, in order to combat idleness.

Even though, as Bleyerveld observes, “[i]n the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the moral education of girls and women...concentrated on their present or future tasks as wife, mother and lady of the house”(220), not all females spent their lives within the domestic sphere as dutiful wives. Some chose instead the enclosure of religious life, which offered them an alternative hearth and home, where domestic activities enabled them, like their married sisters, to be deemed obedient, chaste, silent, and “invisible to the larger world” (Orlin 184). Convent life offered women a safe and silent refuge where they could aspire to the same ideal roles as those outlined by the humanists and the Church for women in secular society. Teresa accepted that obedience was required of young ladies, and she would have understood that girlish vanities were inappropriate for grown women. As a young girl, Teresa had desired to dress in finery to “look pretty... [with] all the things in which one can indulge...for [she] was vain” (*Life* 2.2). Teresa knew that women were expected to be passive and that frivolities were to be avoided. They were to stay at home, going out only to attend church, and even then only if they wore veils and were accompanied by family members, so that they could prepare for their future roles as wives and mothers.

For Teresa, as a cloistered nun of the Unmitigated Carmelites subject to strict vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, the convent represented the home, *domus*, or hearth, the place

where women performed their everyday activities. Domestic work for Teresa was a “proof of love.” This is why she insisted that nuns “strive in household duties to relieve others of work All these things, not to mention the great good they contain in themselves, help very much to further peace and conformity between the Sisters” (*Way* 8.9). Teresa viewed writing, which she had been commanded to do, as essential to her vow of obedience, but she regretted that it kept her from such household duties as spinning:

For I am without learning or a good life, without instruction from a learned man or from any other person . . . and almost stealing time, and regretfully because it prevents me from spinning and this is a poor house with many things to be done (*Life* 10.7).

Eventually, Teresa found a way to merge her attention to her domestic duties with her responsibility to write about her experiences. It was Teresa’s beloved confessor and firm supporter, Gracián, who perhaps sent her the signal to explain mental prayer indirectly by suggesting that she write in a “language used between women” (*IC*, Prologue 4). By eschewing theological language in favor of a colloquial, feminine tone, Teresa understood that she could not only avoid the Inquisition’s scrutiny and suspicion, but she could also better communicate her experiences. As Weber explains, “Teresa’s ‘rhetoric for women’ was a ‘rhetoric of femininity’ . . . a strategy which exploited certain stereotypes about women’s character and language Teresa wrote as she believed women were *perceived* to speak” (*Rhetoric* 11). Teresa herself bears witness to this notion:

[Among] [t]he persons of great learning . . . [t]he one who ordered me to write told me that the nuns in these monasteries of our Lady of Mt. Carmel need someone to answer their questions about prayer and that he thought they would better understand the language

used between women, and that because of the love they bore me they would pay more attention to what I would tell them (*IC*, Prologue 4).

By portraying herself as a *mujercilla ruin y flaca*, and thus embracing ignorance, incompetence, and timidity, Teresa legitimizes her strength as a woman; her claim to ignorance was, as Weber explains, “a defense strategy” (*Rhetoric* 36). Throughout her writing, Teresa acknowledges her “incompetence, which [as she explains], necessitated God’s intervention” (Weber *Rhetoric* 38). She finds the use of comparisons in womanly language as *her* way of theological discourse, perhaps buoyed by the traditional belief that God grants women more spiritual favors because of their weakness (*Life* 11.14). As a woman, Teresa “recognizes women’s limitations [and argues that] [s]ince God favors the weak... woman’s frailty is a blessing” (Mujica “Was Teresa of Ávila” 75). Nevertheless, Teresa was no shrinking violet in real life. It comes as no surprise that her investment in the power of the feminine word led her to pay special attention in her writings to the domestic sphere because in the *domus*, or house, women were the responsible agents. As we shall see, she delighted in dwelling on comparisons involving household objects and foods because they were items that were under women’s control.

Domestic World – Mirror of Femininity

Everyday images in early modern society played an important role, as Fumerton argues: “Foregrounded are the common person, the marginal, women, the domestic, and everyday speech as well as familiar things: mirrors, horses, books, foodstuffs, paintings, architecture, laundry baskets, embroidery, conduct manuals, money, graffiti” (*Renaissance* 7). Teresa’s imagery draws on many of the familiar “things” mentioned by Fumerton. By examining the household objects that Teresa uses in her writing (furniture and other domestic objects, such as

pots, pans, dishes, mirrors, wax, food and drink, etc.), we can determine which consumer goods were put to use as domestic objects in homes in early modern Spain.

Early women's writing sheds light not only on the experiences and roles of women and their lives within the domestic sphere, but also on their spirituality. In *Staging Domesticity*, Wendy Wall argues that "the household harbored supposedly indigenous rituals, languages, and was associated with femininity, lower-class servitude..." (6). In Teresa's writing, the household provides the everyday setting for practices imposed by the strict patriarchal society while at the same time placing the feminine world of the *domus* at the forefront. For many female mystics, the kitchen was certainly their source of divine encounters. It was in God's kitchen that they encountered the divine, thus "they did not hesitate to use culinary terms and images, to compare spiritual flavors with the sensations on their taste buds, to understand their preparation and ingestion of food as continuous with their spiritual training and sacramental gifts" (Mazzoni 2). Teresa was no exception. By manipulating household imagery, Teresa uses her womanhood to express her spirituality in an understandable way.

Teresa embraced the ideals of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The renouncing of worldly goods was one of the sacrifices that Teresa and her sisters performed in return for God's love, as their lives were dedicated to making a living doing what they were taught as young girls. Teresa assumed a responsible role in this context by establishing convents and insisting on their self-sufficiency. She stressed the need to live on alms and to avoid begging, even though alms alone were often not sufficient. Although she did not object to nuns working for pay when necessary, she was careful to point out that "[t]heir earning must not come from work requiring careful attention to fine details but from spinning and sewing or other unrefined labor that does

not so occupy the mind as to keep it from the Lord. Nor should they do work with gold or silver” (*Constitutions* 9 -321).¹³ Nuns, when not engaged in contemplation, sometimes sold products of their labor to raise much needed money for their convents, which “helps us to understand the vibrancy of the conventual experience” (Mujica *Lettered* 205).¹⁴ Nevertheless, Teresa makes it clear in *Constitutions* that the primary business of the nuns is spiritual even though it did involve labor:

In the summer they should arise at five and remain in prayer until six. In the winter they should rise at six and remain in prayer until seven. Immediately after prayer, they will say the Hours up to Nine, unless the day is a solemn feast...Mass will be said at eight o'clock in the summer and at nine in the winter.

...All of that time not taken up with community life and duties should be spent by each Sister in the cell or hermitage designated by the prioress; in sum, in a place where she can be recollected and, on those days that are not feast days, occupied in doing some work. By withdrawing in solitude in this way, we fulfill what the rule commands: that each one should be alone (no.2.8).

By performing some type of work, for example, spinning or cooking, the nuns could recollect by “withdrawing in solitude.” Part and parcel of recollecting themselves was the practice of fasting. This was especially true of female ascetics, for whom fasting was arguably the most powerful

¹³ Teresa’s mention of gold or silver can plausibly refer to “needlework generally practiced in the higher social strata [that] was decorative” for any type of fancy stitchery (Orlin, *Material London* 187). Aristocratic women were subjugated by sewing or embroidering more than the lower strata of society; their materials, whether fine silk or embroidery stitchery, would have been interspersed with threads of gold and silver as a reflection of their social status.

¹⁴ Teresa’s letters reveal first-hand details on the “minutiae of convent life in early modern Spain”, and the “[m]ention of nuns singing, celebrating, reading, cooking, preparing cures, writing, sewing, and even raising money by selling their products” contributed to this “vibrancy” that the Sisters experienced (Mujica *Lettered* 205).

symbol of their religious devotion because it constituted the self-sacrifice necessary to attain union with God.

Fasting – a Spiritual Perspective

For Teresa as well as for the medieval mystics who preceded her, food represented “sacrifice and service” (Bynum *Holy Feast* 30). Hildegard of Bingen (d.1179), Hadwijch (d. 1220), Catherine of Siena (d. 1380), and Catherine of Genoa (d.1510) showed how, as women mystics, they were able to situate their feminine roles in understandable terms for women. Hildegard’s writing provides an extensive catalogue of foods, herbs, and diseases and cures and reflects her “relationship with the cosmos, the world of created things” (Flanagan 93). Flanagan sees that Hildegard’s “scientific writing...appears, often in rather different forms, in her theological writings...and [shows] the interrelations of divinity, humanity, and the natural world” (105, 213). Hildegard is able to speak about the common everyday, whether about food or cooking, and relate it theologically in a feminine language understandable by the women of her time. Hadewijch (d.1220) saw loving union through the images of eating, tasting, and seeing interiorly. For her, the activity of ingesting the Eucharist was what brought about spiritual nourishment. Speaking of Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa, Bynum explains that “concentration on eating and drinking, on bread and blood, [were] the crucial images for encounter with God...and obsessive fasting and Eucharistic piety were key elements in their religious practices...[F]asting and feeding became *lived* metaphors for them” (*Holy Feast* 165).

Fasting was an integral element of the mystical experience. As Bynum asserts, “[t]o the more contemplative nun, [both] fasting and illness (the two were frequently indistinguishable)

were preparation and occasion for mystical union, for being fed by Christ” (*Holy Feast* 130). In addition, “[n]ot eating was preparation for Eucharist; it was also renunciation of the world and union with the agony of Christ’s redeeming death” (*Holy Feast* 133). Teresa practiced fasting as an important part of her life as a nun, since she strictly followed the rules of her Carmelite Order:

Our Primitive Rule tells us to pray without ceasing. Provided we do this with all possible care (and it is the most important thing of all) we shall not fail to observe the fasts, disciplines and periods of silence which the Order commands; for, as you know, if prayer is to be genuine it must be reinforced with these things—prayer cannot be accompanied by self-indulgence (*Way* 4.2)

The Mitigated rule allowed nuns to eat meat three times a week, but Teresa “abrogated [this rule] in favor of the original rule of Saint Albert, which allowed meat only in the case of illness” (*Letters* 1, 26 Nov 1576:20).

Although Teresa insisted on adhering to the austerity of her order, she did not want to see any of her nuns deprive themselves of food as a means of mortification because she recognized the harmful impact that food deprivation could have on physical health. She always advised in the interest of her nuns’ well-being, carefully pointing out that fasts were “observed from the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, which is in September, until Easter, with the exception of Sundays. Meat must never be eaten unless out of necessity as the rule prescribes” (*Constitutions* no.11). Defending the moderate nature of the rule, Teresa states, “Now, although there is some austerity because meat is never eaten without necessity and there is an eight-month fast and other things...this is still in many respects considered small by the Sisters” (*Life* 36.27). Mujica

observes that Teresa's caring and often motherly attitude toward her nuns is seen in many of her letters, as when: "In a letter to María de San José, Teresa expresses her concern about a community in Paterna, where the nuns suffered from hunger" (Mujica *Lettered* 151; *Letters* I, 26 November 1576:2). Conversely, Teresa voices displeasure at the fasts of the prioress Juana del Espíritu Santo and her sisters "because they have eaten nothing but the bread supplied by the monastery [and] they are drained of energy" (*Letters* 27, September 1572:45.1). Kavanaugh, commenting on this circumstance, explains, "[a]lthough there were rich monasteries, the Incarnation was a poor one. The daily ration of food for each nun in 1565 was 5 ¼ ounces of bread and about 4 ounces of meat" (*Letters* Vol. 1, 45: 27 September, 1572).

As an obedient nun, Teresa knew that fasting was part of self-sacrifice. As a practical woman imbued with common sense, she also knew that sometimes it was appropriate to make exceptions to the rules. Teresa extends the exceptions even to Gracián, who was "forced...to go hungry" because of the Calced persecutions (*Letters* 2, 14 August 1578:9). Knowing the importance of meat for an individual's health, Teresa insists that María "feed [Gracián] meat, even though the nuns must do without" (*Letters* 1, 31 October 1576:5). When convents were situated in areas where fish, the staple of fasts, was hard to come by, Teresa also made exceptions. She explains, "If it seems too rigorous to abstain from meat, the foundation could be made like the one made on Palm Sunday in Malagón. It could easily be done since there are bulls that enable us to do so. We approved their having an income in Malagón and eating meat, since there was no possibility of doing otherwise in that place" (*Letters* I, 23 October 1576:9).

Through food metaphors Teresa describes the ineffable as she engages her readers with "kitchen philosophies, or cooking and eating lessons, raised by other holy women writers"

(Mazzoni 125). Food becomes the nourishment not only of the body, but also of the soul; after all, we should follow God's guidance for daily sustenance because "His Majesty knows better than we what is fitting for us to eat" (*Life* 13.15).

Food and Foodstuffs as Domestic/ Feminine Imagery

Like her predecessors, Teresa brought the natural world into the interior feminine space of the kitchen. Women were able to use their familiarity with the domestic sphere, whether with cooking or with the medicinal use of foodstuffs, to apply their knowledge within their feminine world. Teresa is no exception - the household language she uses is a "predominately female area of domestic speech" (Kavey 104). It was within

the private domain of the kitchen, the garden, and the bedside, where recipes govern the health of every member of the household by determining diet, a significant aspect of humoral medicine, and governing the preparation and administration of medicines... [that]...[w]omen's acts of creation occurred [and it was] in the kitchen, where they kept the tools and ingredients required to make a range of household products (Kavey 107; 114).

Teresa asserts her feminine role through domestic imagery. Bynum tells us that, "[c]loistered women were as likely as women in the world to use graphic domestic images for self and God" (*Holy Feast* 28). The stock of domestic images ranged from womanly roles (such as nursing mothers or brides of Christ) to food. In the early modern period, it could include furniture or pots and pans – anything belonging to "household stuff." Teresa's imagery runs the gamut, from Biblical inspiration to real-life experience, as Montefiore notices: "Of what goes on

within a household not the least important part are the doings in the kitchen. It is not surprising therefore, that we get many metaphors borrowed from cooking or from food and drink – all the more so as with a solemn feast religious ideas are clearly associated” (668). Naturally, then, she is particularly fond of transformative images with religious overtones, such as bread, wine, and salt.

Bread, Grain, Wheat – From Daily Life to the Eucharist

Teresa’s imagery of bread and grains not only symbolizes the Eucharist as a form of spiritual nourishment, it also shows the cultural context of her daily life. Bread, so prevalent as a religious symbol, was also the most basic dietary item in Spain at that time.¹⁵ For the sixteenth-century consumer, rich or poor, bread made from wheat was an integral part of the daily fare. Deleito y Piñuela underlines this fact, telling us that King Philip IV’s own *sumiller de panetería*, saw to it that wheat was bought and given to the “*panetier* para conveccionar el pan” (131), adding that after the *panetier* served the pastries, bread, and fruit, the “*trinchante* ponía el pan que sobraba en una fuente de plata, entregándole, con destino a los pobres, al limosnero mayor, y éste al mozo de limosna” (134). As a form of charity, the excess bread was given to the poor. The poor who were not lucky enough to eat the crumbs from the royal table consumed “lower-quality bread sometimes made of barley rather than wheat” (Trigg 239). Barley, as Mount explains, was “alimento de la clase campesina, cuyo pan – no tan blanco, precisamente, como el que alimentaba a los señores – podía hallarse...constituido por una mezcla en la que, junto al

¹⁵ In the Mediterranean world, which was rich in wheat production, wheat was one of the most important basic staples of food. As such, it was an important economic commodity. Vives notes that in 1599, Madrid’s population of 65,000 consumed almost twice as much wheat as in Valladolid, with its population of 40,000 (109). As a result of such high demand, wheat prices steadily rose and peaked around the late 1500s (*Economic* 111).

trigo, aparecen la cebada, o el centeno, o incluso la avena...” (qtd. Mount 50). Even in biblical times, barley was a common food available to the poor and it came to symbolize poverty.

For the general public in a Catholic country, whether rich or poor, wheat for bread represented more than a staple of the nation’s economy. Its food value was not limited to daily sustenance; it was “a religious necessity as the main ingredient in Communion wafers” (Trigg 242). The longstanding tradition of the pureness of the wheat for the host was spelled out in Alfonso X’s *Siete Partidas*:

Et este país á que llaman hostia ha de ser de farina de trigo, amasada tan solamiente con agua sin levadura et sin otro mezclamiento ninguno, et débelo facer el clérigo muy limpiamente...Et este pan múdase verdaderamente en el cuerpo de nuestro señor Iesu Cristo... (1: 79-80) (qtd. Mount 50).

Already in the Bible, wheat was an important food plant, being mentioned 175 times (Moldenke 155). For instance, “Wheat was trodden out by oxen (Deuteronomy 25:4), pressed out by a wooden wheel (Isaiah 28:28) or threshed with a flail (I Chronicles 21:20-23, Isaiah 41: 15-16), and then winnowed with a fan and sifted” (Moldenke 156). In addition, God’s land was one “of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey” (Deuteronomy 8:6-8). As a staple of biblical times, wheat was a primary source of nourishment, the “staff of life...and the most symbolic of Christian foods” (Mazzoni 27). However, like many other images in the Bible, wheat was also subject to metaphoric use. For example, wheat is a transforming symbol representing dying and resurrection, as Jesus explains: “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (Jn. 12:24). Jesus alludes to the transformative power of wheat, too, at the Last Supper, when he

shares bread and wine, representing his body and blood, with the apostles. The representation of bread in the Eucharist dates back to “[e]arly Christian writers [who] saw the Eucharist as spiritual refreshment and as a pledge of the church’s unity, as the bread of heaven and the one body of Christ” (Bynum *Holy Feast* 48).

Teresa makes use of both the literal and metaphoric meaning of bread: bread is the sustenance of life as well as a form of spiritual nourishment. For Teresa,

[t]here is no stage of prayer so sublime that it isn’t necessary to return often to the beginning. Along this path of prayer, self knowledge and the thought of one’s sins is the bread with which all palates must be fed no matter how delicate they may be: they cannot be sustained without this bread. It must be eaten within bounds, nonetheless... (*Life* 13.16).

This bread, for Teresa, provides both spiritual and bodily nourishment, but individuals must eat it “within bounds” or in moderation, on their path to prayer. Metaphorically, it will make possible the necessary spiritual growth for individuals. Like other women mystics, Teresa sees “God as food” (Bynum *Holy Feast* 116) and takes great effort to differentiate the spiritual bread from bread as sustenance:

He has given us this most sacred bread forever. His Majesty gave us...the manna and nourishment of His humanity that we might find Him at will and not die of hunger, save through our own fault. In no matter how many ways the soul may desire to eat, it will find delight and consolation in the most Blessed Sacrament. I don’t want to think the

Lord had in mind the other bread that is used for our bodily needs and nourishment; nor would I want you to have that in mind (*Way* 34.2).

Here, Teresa exalts the superiority of the communion bread, recommending that her nuns concern themselves with satisfying their spiritual hunger, which was just as important as satisfying as physical hunger:

Don't worry about the other bread, those of you who have...surrendered yourselves to the will of God...there are other times for working and for earning your bread. Have no fear that you will be in want of bread if you are not wanting in what you have said about the surrender of yourselves to God's will... (*Way* 34.4).

The lesson could not have been lost on Teresa's charges. The familiar presence of bread on their table and of its sublime form at communion would have been part of their everyday existence. "Bread is the ultimate gift: gift of bodily sustenance, gift of spiritual growth, gift of sacrifice, of plenty" (Mazzoni 26). By linking the symbolic religious with the secular meaning, Teresa was exploiting a mainstay of Spanish life (the cultivation of grains for the production of a food staple and a religious necessity) as a vivid image found in much of the devotional literature and one that was easily comprehended by her sisters. The Eucharist, or the partaking of the Host, was part of the Christian ritual, making possible the ingestion of the divine and thereby the bonding of the human person and God.¹⁶

¹⁶ As Mazzoni writes, "Bread is a connection to God through a disconnection from the body, but it is also an object of circulation that ties the monastic to her superiors and to her followers, under the sign of humility; it is thus also a link in the mystical chain of being in the body of Christ. Bread, hardened and scanty, is the obverse of pleasure in eating, surely, but it also binds the uncommonly holy saint to the numerous poor whose bread was also, by necessity and not by miracle, hardened and scanty" (32).

Wine - The Cup of Faith

Although the meals in Discalced Carmelite convents were a far cry from the elaborate banquets of the aristocrats, they included the basic Mediterranean foodstuffs important to Spain – bread and wine (Bynum “Fast, Feast, and Flesh” 139). Drinking wine at communion is, of course, central to Christian worship, where it recalls Jesus’s last meal, where He drank wine and said to his disciples, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (Corinthians 1). Found throughout the Bible, especially in the Song of Songs, wine plays an important role in Teresa’s writing. Since women were not permitted to read the Bible, it is probable that Teresa’s exposure to biblical language trickled down from her participation in a circle of readers, a common practice among sixteenth-century women. For Teresa, the wine that provides a “gladdening of the heart” (GN 27:28) becomes the image of transformation and fortitude needed to prepare the soul for the bridal chamber:

For a greater or less amount can be given a person to drink, a good or a better wine, and the wine will leave him more or less inebriated and intoxicated. So with the favors of the Lord; to one He gives a little wine of devotion, to another more, with another He increases it in such a way that the person begins to go out from himself, from his sensuality, and from all earthly things (*Meditations* 6.3).

The soul, fortified from drinking wine from the wine cellar, becomes fortified, and like food, provides nourishment to the body and soul. The idea of “inebriation of the soul” with wine was not a new metaphorical use. Metaphors of drinking and divine inebriation were also present in the work of other mystical writers. Even for Catherine of Siena, (d.1380)

the soul becomes drunk. And after it...has reached the place [of the teaching of the crucified Christ] and [has been] drunk to the full, it tastes the food of patience, the odor of virtue, and such a desire to bear the cross that it does not seem that it could ever be satiated...and then the soul becomes like a drunken man; the more he drinks the more he wants to drink... (qtd. Bynum "Fast, Feast, and Flesh" 144).

The image of entering the wine cellar or "bodega" symbolizes the interior journey made by the soul as it is overcome with "divine inebriation." At the center of this metaphorical wine cellar is, as Howe explains, the "end and...beginning, the very essence of [the mystic's] experience, God himself, who leads [Teresa] to transforming union in spiritual marriage. In its very non-specificity, centro is a quintessential symbol of the ineffable mystical union" (*Mystical* 172). Here, in the passive stage of the Prayer of Quiet, the soul reaches the state of inebriation.

Salt of the Earth

In addition to bread and wine, two of the staples of Teresa's commodity culture, she drew on a third, salt, which was another important product for sixteenth-century Spain. In the early modern period, meat and vegetables that were not dried were preserved by salting. The "supply of salt is very necessary and important," affirmed the Valencian Cortes of 1563, "both for the life of man and for the preservation of the herbs, and...other kinds of food" (Casey 54-55). Although Teresa does not directly mention the value of salt as a preservative, she is aware that the fish that her brother sent her on many occasions were preserved with salt, as without it, it would have been more apt to spoil. Because of the "good salt-pans along its coast ... [Spain] was ...one of the principal sources of supply for the rest of Europe" (Casey 55). With its good salt-pans, its trading posts for meat and fish, and "the intense evaporation produced by heat"

(Vives *Economic* 358), southern Spain had a definite advantage in the salt market, both in the Spanish and European markets. As Vives points out, the salt beds of “Puerto de Santa María produced more than 100,000 *cahices* of salt a year, and ... on occasion as many as fifty or sixty foreign ships at a time were on hand to load it” (*Economic* 358). Thus, without a doubt salt was an important economic staple for all of Spain.

In addition to its economic importance, salt is also used metaphorically in biblical writing and even in our everyday speech, in different contexts and meanings and with different connotations, generally of a positive nature, such as friendship, peace, and wisdom. Today, the metaphor of “taking something with a grain of salt” means not taking things too seriously or too literally. This saying has both figurative and natural dimensions that can be applied to the metaphoric use of salt. On the one hand, the apostle Paul extols the virtue of metaphorical salt, where he has it represent the wisdom that Jesus taught his disciples: “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:5). In the Sermon on the Mount, on the other hand, Jesus tells His followers, "you are the salt of the earth but if the salt has lost its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men" (Matthew 5:13). Salt, which does not in itself have the property to lose flavor, can only have its properties changed if combined with other elements that would cause it to be useless. Jesus compares His disciples to salt because they, like salt, function like enhancements, giving meaning to the Word of God in the world. However, because salt, when combined with other elements (such as earth, water, or air), becomes worthless, the disciples, must similarly avoid contamination in order to retain their value.

Because Teresa was well aware of salt's worth as a preservative and for seasoning food, and because it was powerfully used in the Bible, Teresa employed it to explain the importance of mental prayer in her endeavor to reform her order:

Such prayer is better than prayers practiced for many years in which one never, either in the beginning or afterward, succeeds in resolving to do anything at all for God – except some tiny little things, like grains of salt, that have no weight or bulk and could be carried in a sparrow's beak, and that we do not consider to be a mortification or a great effect of prayer (*Life* 30.13).

Here a grain of salt is like vocal prayer in that it has little value because it does not in a noticeable way deepen the relationship between the person who practices it and God. That is so because when vocal prayer is practiced mechanically, it becomes ritualistic and loses its meaning. The real goal of Teresa's reform, the reason she works so subtly but so hard to empower her nuns, is that she wants their prayers, whether mental or oral, to have weight with God; and to have that weight, prayers need to put the practitioner in direct communication with God. Prayer requires concentration and mental effort. Although her preference is for mental prayer, Teresa knows that there is no "right way" to pray; prayer itself is what is invaluable. If someone cannot advance beyond recited prayer, it makes no difference to God, who hears everyone's prayer. But, prayer there must be, as Teresa warns in an image-filled passage whose pinnacle invokes the deadening potential of salt. Those who fail to practice prayer eventually become so wrapped up

in external matters that there is no remedy [and] [t]hey are now so used to dealing always with the insects and vermin that are in the wall surrounding the castle that they have

become almost like them... If these souls do not strive to understand and cure their great misery, they will be changed into statues of salt, unable to turn their heads to look at themselves, just as Lot's wife was changed for having turned her head"(IC 1:1.7).

Fortunately, a happier fate awaits those souls sweetened by true spiritual devotion.

The "Sweet Flavor" of Teresa of Ávila

"Spirituality and sweetness... [are] excellent tablemates," says Mazzoni (48). Although Teresa is not writing a cookbook, she has peppered her writing with the sweetness of divine wisdom. The ineffable ecstasy of the mystical experience is conveyed by analogies to mundane objects, which ultimately allow us to see and further understand her experiences. From the sweet pain of the dart that transfixes her heart in the transverberation to the sweetness of the lips in her exegetical *Song of Songs*, Teresa's "sugary sanctity" can be seen throughout her writing, even though, as Mazzoni explains, "the mixture of sweetness and gender, of honey, sugar, and sainthood, is not the main course of holy women's stories, but rather, like dessert... a delightful tidbit often hidden within the folds of writings more interested in the main dish of deprivation as a path to sanctity"(48). Teresa's comparisons serve as a didactic tool, one that uses the "material and spiritual worlds as a means of understanding the spiritual" (Slade *St. Teresa* 85). By identifying and appropriating foodstuffs and in this case, metaphors of sweetness, Teresa is shaping her female identity. In spite of constantly portraying herself as a weak and frail *mujercilla*, Teresa's pervasive female image as a woman in the kitchen shows her ability to be a nurturing and dynamic force that turns her coarse comparisons, regarded as "chatty woman's talk" (Mazzoni 126), into theological explanations that "produced the desired perlocutionary effect" (Weber *Rhetoric* 105,159).

Of course, Teresa is not alone in using sweetness to describe God or mystical union. The Bible, especially the *Song of Songs*, employs images of honey, honeycomb, sweet fruit, and milk and honey, to name but a few of its many references to “sweetness.” Teresa skillfully interweaves many of these biblical allusions into her writing, especially in her *Meditations on the Song of Songs*.¹⁷ Many of Teresa’s predecessors – Hadewijch of Antwerp, Margaret Ebner, Angela of Foligno, Margery Kemp, Elisabeth of Schönau, and Julian of Norwich – were mystical writers whose works brought God’s divine sweetness to lay readers (Mazzoni 49). Although Teresa probably had not read these women’s writing, she may well have been exposed to some of it because of a strong oral tradition.¹⁸ More to the point, Teresa was also exposed to other writers who employed similar images in their writing. Peter Alcántara, for example, addressed the difference between temporal and spiritual sweetness: “Other things that will prevent the partaking of God’s sweetness and the development of a good conscience and spiritual joy are what [Alcántara] calls the pleasures of worldly consolations including the delicacy and overabundance of food and drink” (DiSalvo 146).

Some form of sweetness becomes a metaphor for the consolation of love, the passionate encounter between the Bride and Spouse, or the sweet kiss of the Beloved. With God’s “sweet voice,” “sweet intoxication,” and “sweet devotion,” Teresa finds the sweetness of God even in her kitchen among the pots and pans. The term “gustatory theology” is a fitting way to describe Teresa’s imagery, as it “articulates religious truths and understandings of the divine and spiritual world through gastronomical language” (Lee, H. 65), especially “sweetness.” In the Sixth

¹⁷ Although she did not have direct access to the Bible [because of the vernacular translations banned by the 1559 Valdez Index], Teresa was surrounded by a flowering of religious literature in sixteenth-century Spain.

¹⁸ Since many female visionaries were illiterate, oral reading was one way to disseminate spiritual readings of the “Bible, saints’ lives, apocryphal traditions, and major medieval spirituality” to them (Surtz 13). Spiritual readings became “important component[-s] of the daily and weekly routine”(Howe *Education* 62).

Mansion, the soul enters the state of “spiritual betrothal,” where Teresa explains that the “Lord awakens the soul” (*IC* 6:2.2); ...[a]nd the pain is great, although delightful and sweet”(*IC* 6:2.2). It is the sense of taste that reflects transformation, an intense pain equated paradoxically with sweetness. “God transforms tastes and sustains the soul through a heavenly form of sustenance described primarily through a vocabulary of physical nourishment. Appetite is the lens through which [Teresa] reads not just her body, but also her soul” (Lee, H. 83). As Underhill explains, “the exalted and impersonal language [of mystics] goes...with homely parallels drawn from the most sweet and common incidents of daily life” (*Mysticism* 253).

For Teresa, one such homely parallel was the sweet fragrance that emanated from the scents added to the flames of the commonplace brazier found in sixteenth-century homes.¹⁹ Teresa aptly translates this sweet-smelling perfume from the brazier’s interior depth into a metaphorical “fragrance” that is sensed during a mystical experience:

[There is an]...idea of expansion...heavenly water begins to rise from this spring...that is deep within us, it swells and expands our whole interior being, producing ineffable blessings...It perceives a fragrance...as though there were in that interior depth a brazier giving off sweet-smelling perfumes. No light is seen, nor is the place seen where the brazier is; but the warmth and the fragrant fumes spread through the entire soul...See now that you understand me; no heat is felt, nor is there the scent of any perfume, for the experience is more delicate than an experience of these things (*IC* 4:2.6).

¹⁹ In the sixteenth century, homes were often furnished with “large metal braziers mounted on wooden stands in which were burnt olive stones, which gave off very little odor” (Defourneaux 149).

For Teresa, the concrete image of the brazier, accompanied by the visual representations of darkness and light, represents the beginning of a transformation of God's action in the individual's soul. Because Teresa found it particularly difficult to express this stage of prayer, she resorted to a plethora of paradoxical elements. She understands that God's contemplation begins as a mysterious and divine spark, which enkindles a fire that bursts into flames of love: "It's as though, from this fire enkindled in the brazier that is my God, a spark leapt forth and so struck the soul that the flaming fire was felt by it" (*IC* 6:2.4). Teresa, who had read Osuna's *Third Spiritual Alphabet* thoroughly, could have been inspired here by the "little spark" mentioned by him:

In these grades of recollection the understanding is never so far silenced as to be entirely inactive, for it always retains a little spark that suffices to show contemplatives that they are experiencing something that comes from God (Osuna 155).

From the heat that emanates from the flames and is not felt, to the sweet-smelling perfumes from the brazier, Teresa searches for tangible evidence in order to explain how God's grace can bring the soul within the recollected state. Like other mystics she finds that sweet smells, sweet tastes, and sweet sensations are useful for elucidating God's divine work. As we saw in Chapter One, Teresa liked to use honey as a spiritual metaphor, no doubt recalling Biblical imagery invoking that sweet substance: "Pleasing words are a honeycomb, sweet to the taste and healthful to the body" (Proverbs 16:24) or the "land of milk and honey" (Ps. 19:9-10).

A Sweet Reward for Honest Labor: The Prickly Palmetto

Teresa knew that just as the body requires nutritious food, the soul needs the nourishment of God's presence. Even though individuals grow weary along the spiritual path, they must continue down the arduous road, but only after resting in God's presence. "There is a time for one thing and a time for another, so that the soul may not be wearied with always eating the same food. The foods are very tasty and nourishing, and once the palate has grown used to them they bring great sustenance to the life of the soul, together with many other benefits" (*IC* 1: 2.8). Enjoying this spiritual nourishment, Teresa explains, is comparable to eating the *palmetto*. Both activities involve the activity of moving inward. Her architectural construct of the castle, with its concentric circles placed above, below, and to the sides, was meant to show a similar movement interiorly to reach the innermost circle, where God resides (*IC* 1: 2.8). Similarly, it is necessary for someone preparing a palmetto for eating to peel away its "many leaves surrounding and covering the tasty part that can be eaten" (*IC* 1:2.8). Teresa knew that only the more seasoned cook would be able to remove the prickly layers in order to reach the tasty succulent part – the sweet center and the only edible part of the plant, which was common to many parts of Spain. The "tasty morsel" (Mazzoni 127) of the palmetto was a food with which her sisters were most likely familiar and to have eaten on occasion. The castle, especially one made of precious jewels and diamonds, however, was not familiar to these women, nor would they have had the opportunity to enter into any castle, let alone the imagined one of precious jewels and diamonds that "came to [her] mind" (*IC* 1:1.1). It is plausible, as Swietlicki suggests, that Teresa's use of the palmetto to make the soul's process of interiority more palpable was inspired here by the

image of the Zoharic nut, whose exterior covering must also be taken away to expose its rich center.²⁰

Symbolically, the outer hard exterior of the nut or in Teresa's case, the prickly outer layers of the palmetto, serve to keep the evil forces of vermin and other poisonous creatures that enter the first rooms of the interior castle at bay. Only through prayer can individuals leave these first rooms, which are "still absorbed in the world and engulfed in their pleasure and vanities" (*IC* 1: 2.12). The preoccupations of worldly distractions and vanities of life must be given up in order to enter the second dwelling place in the soul's progression to the innermost circle, the sweet reward of the prickly palmetto.

Sweetmeats and Other Desirable Gifts

The daily life of Teresa and her nuns, despite its essential austerity, was not without sweets, whether of local confection or contributed by benefactors. In order for the convents to be self-sufficient, the nuns often made sweets or pastries to use as gifts. The gifts ranged from candy to seasonal quinces, jams and preserves, and water scented with orange blossoms. Throughout Spain, especially in the region around Seville, the abundance of fruits gave the nuns the raw materials for their jams and preserves, which they could exchange for such items as orange-blossoms or orange-water, often mentioned in Teresa's writing.²¹

²⁰ The hard outer shell resembles exterior "things," and the "*husk or shell*...is a symbol of evil or impurity in the Cabala" (72). In the *Zohar*, Swietlicki finds the

Zoharic nut or palm image. [of]...a Midrash of the sixth Canticle (v.2): 'I went into the garden of nuts...for, as the nut has a shell surrounding it and protecting the kernel inside, so it is with everything sacred: the sacred principle occupies the interior, whilst the 'other side; [coarse, evil] encircles it on the exterior'(4.233a-b) (qtd. Swietlicki 72).

²¹ In much of Spain, and especially in Seville, as Ruth Pike points out,

The practice of gift exchange with the world outside the convent walls was vital to the well-being of the nuns and of those who depended on them. For the nuns, embracing vows of poverty meant accepting the collective sharing of the resources and work within the convents: “Nuns were required to be productive, as work would keep them away from immoral thoughts and conversations. They would engage in embroidering and knitting, and prepare herbal remedies, jams, cakes, and biscuits” (Evangelisti 5). After the Council of Trent, which restricted begging or accepting economic assistance outside the convent wall, the nuns had to rely principally on their enclosure for their economic subsistence. The gifts that made their way into the enclosure would certainly have eased the burden. Teresa chronicles that foodstuffs, money, and goods, were exchanged between the nuns. It is important to note, though, that the “intended recipients of the gifts received by the nuns were not just the nuns themselves, but also all those social groups who associated themselves with the convent” (Evangelisti 19). Thus, the objects exchanged between the nuns or donated by relatives or acquaintances linked the interior convent to the exterior world. In her writing, especially in her letters, Teresa often expresses thanks for gifts. In a letter to Mother María de San José of Seville, Teresa acknowledges in detail the gifts she has received from her before reminding her that gifts must always be sent out of charity: “They wouldn’t let me give away the water scented with orange blossoms because it’s good for the prioress’s health, and it helps me too...Ask the mother of the Portuguese nun for some more in my name and send it to us. Do it out of charity, that’s the condition” (Mujica *Lettered* 228). It is not surprising that Teresa emphasizes the importance of charity, as ever since the medieval

[h]oney, sugar, and fruits of all kinds were abundant in the city and surrounding area, and made up a good part of her exports abroad. Sugar, although not grown in Seville, was easily accessible at neighboring [areas]. As for fruits, all of the Sevillian region was an orchard... (23).

From May through the summer months, orange and citrus trees and other fruit-bearing trees gave “off an odor so sweet that there is nothing like it in all the world” (qtd. 23).

period, charitable giving had been, for the Catholic Church, the surest way to attain salvation. Not only that: on a practical level, some monasteries were so poor that they had to rely on charitable donations from other convents or townspeople for their very survival.

Among the items that nuns exchanged with one another were natural remedies. The orange blossom water mentioned by Teresa was only one of these. Others were medicinal plants, as the following passage shows: “But what an idea you had to send me the scorzonera! [a medicinal herb] I hardly ate any, for I had been left with a loathing for anything sweet. Nonetheless, I have greatly prized your care in sending things to the sisters...” (*Letters I*, Segovia, End of June 1574:3). In another letter to María, Teresa asks for “coubaril resin, which was mixed with rose-colored sugar to make pastilles for rheumatism” (*Letters I*, 26 January 1577:10) and for “some crystallized orange blossoms, dry, and sprinkled with sugar...Otherwise send the sweets. But I prefer the orange blossoms...even if only a small quantity” (*Letters I*, 9 April 1577:5). Teresa includes sweet ingredients in her general descriptions of “homeopathic cures popular during her time” (Mujica *Lettered* 155), presumably to make for easier consumption. Because the austerity of convent life did not afford nuns the economic means to purchase certain herbs or ingredients, many convents or monasteries resorted to growing what they could in their own gardens.

With her frequent allusions to sweets and medicinal herbs, Teresa is impressing upon her female community the importance of “the ties formed among women based on interests in common...centering on roles in the kitchen” (Blodgett 276). What goes on there is more than simply practicing domestic skills. Indeed, as Montefiore explains, “of what goes on within a household, not the least important part are the doings in the kitchen” (668). Whether cooking

jams, preserves, or biscuits, Teresa and her nuns knew that life within the convent, and especially within its kitchen, provided a way through the “labor of love...[to]welcome God into one’s kitchen” (Mazzoni 130).

Household Work – A Way of Prayer

Teresa’s labor of love goes beyond foodstuffs, pots and pans, and the kitchen garden. Household work in general provided a means for the nuns to move from the material to the spiritual. Given the restrictions of enclosure for sixteenth-century women, it was important for them to follow a daily routine, including meditation, within the domestic setting. In “[t]he *Décor puellarum* of John the Carthusian of Venice (d. 1483),” we read about “a daily routine for a young girl, encouraging a regime of meditation while engaged on domestic tasks” (Swanson 124). Whether within an aristocratic household like the one where such a child lived, or behind convent walls, “the household’s potential as a religious body and focus for devotional instruction must be acknowledged” (Swanson 125). Just as attending mass and reading or listening to devotional works in culture circles provided some opportunity for women’s spiritual development; the domestic sphere could do so as well. Swanson illustrates this by conjuring up a familiar biblical story, while reminding us that in

the battle between Mary and Martha, between the contemplative and the active lives, within the household Martha would generally win, except in occasional individual cases. The household might not be organized to create a deeply religious life for everyone, but it could permit individual members to find some personal spiritual fulfillment, to provide – in the contrast between active and contemplative lives – that ideal of the *via media* (125).

As a nun, Teresa accepted the life of obedience and devotion that was a central aspect of the Carmelite rule, which involved a retreat from the outside world, leading to detachment from all exterior distractions. Detachment was, for Teresa, an essential part of mental prayer, which was not based on the Church and its rituals, such as the recitation of the Our Father or other oral ways of prayer, but rather on a more individual, personal, direct relationship with God. Finding the way to this direct communion with God can involve many different scenarios, which can lead to numerous ways to describe the inner experience with God, as many “forms of language [are] used to communicate inner transformation” (McGinn “The Language of Inner Experience” 160). For Teresa, any type of work can provide the detachment from the physical world that is necessary for direct communion with God, as she explains, “Well, come now, my daughters, don’t be sad when obedience draws you to involvement in exterior matters. Know that if it is in the kitchen, the Lord walks among the pots and pans helping you both interiorly and exteriorly” (*F* 5.8).

Finding God “among the pots and pans” not only encapsulates Teresa’s idea that any activity is worthwhile when performed mindfully and dedicated to God; it also demonstrates her having recourse to domestic, womanly language so that she will be understood by her nuns. However, as Weber notes through this quote, Teresa also recognizes that “fact that the economic situation of the early convents and the temperament of some nuns would not permit the intense dedication to the contemplative life she had originally envisioned” (*Rhetoric* 135). In *Interior Castle*, she uses the example of Mary and Martha to show that even in the everyday world, individuals can find God in all things, just as God walks among the pots and pans. Through the Martha and Mary metaphor, Teresa “radically seeks to reconcile the two sisters and what they stand for” (Mazzoni 129). Mary and Martha represent, as Claire Walker explains:

two kinds of religious vocation. Martha, who had busily provided hospitality for Christ, represents the active apostolate of charity and social action, while her sister Mary, who had ignored the bustle and listened to Christ's teaching, epitomizes contemplation and mysticism ("Mary and Martha" 398).

The Council of Trent, which imposed strict enclosure on monastic houses, insisted on the interiority of religious orders. As contemplative Marys, nuns were to adhere to a strict schedule of "prayer, manual labor, recreation, and religious obligations... [with] prayer dominat[-ing] the daily agenda" (Walker "Mary and Martha" 404). On the other hand, Martha's labors reflect the "temporal side of monastic life" (Walker "Mary and Martha" 408). For Teresa, the monastic life of household work or manual labor, whether embroidering, sewing, or cooking, was in essence an extension of the contemplative life, one that involved prayer and was "imbued with... moral and spiritual meaning" (Walker "Mary and Martha" 417). As Teresa explains:

Believe me, Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord and have Him always present and not host Him badly by failing to give Him something to eat. How would Mary, always seated at His feet, provide Him with food if her sister did not help her? His food is that in every way possible we draw souls that they may be saved and praise Him always (*IC 7:4.12*).

Both Mary and Martha provide a lesson of spirituality for Teresa. Both washing Jesus's feet as Mary did and cooking for him as Martha did reflect the labor of love that should be central to an individual's daily activity.

The austere life of the Carmelite convent had, as its main duty, a life of prayer and dedication to God. As Teresa saw,

discursive reflection they [nuns] can do at one time, and the other acts at another, so that the soul may not grow tired of always eating the same food. These acts are very delightful and helpful if one's taste becomes accustomed to them. They contain a great amount of sustenance giving the soul life and many benefits (*Life* 13.11).

Making sweets or preparing concoctions with orange-blossom water, doing laundry, and taking care of housecleaning duties, Teresa finds divine sweetness in every facet of her life, as she explains: "It is true, all the things of religious life delighted me, and it is true that sometimes while sweeping, during the hours I used to spend in self-indulgence and self-adornment, I realized that I was free of all that and experienced a new joy which amazed me" (*Life* 4.2). The epitome of this joy is found in Teresa's mystical experiences, the sweetness of which she endeavors to describe using the language of imagery, as we have seen.

Wax and seals – God's imprint

Among Teresa's daily activities, we can also include epistolary writing: she wrote thousands of letters in her lifetime. Her epistolary corpus, as Mujica points out, "provides readers with a privileged look not only into the author's personality and the politics of the Carmelite reform but also into every life in an early modern convent" (*Lettered* xiii).²² In addition, it well serves our purpose here for two reasons: first, it was a form of writing in which literate women participated routinely, though not exclusively; and second, because Teresa converted wax, the

²² Mujica, who carefully examines Teresa's letter-writing, cites estimates that Teresa wrote from 1200 to 15,000 letters that reveal "political maneuvers, her administrative acumen, and her interest in food, decoration, medicine, money, and domestic issues" (*Lettered* 203).

simple everyday substance that she used to seal her letters before sending them, into an expression of her spirituality.

Through her letters, Teresa appealed to many different authorities - confessors, Inquisitors, and even the King - to seek support for many reforms affecting daily life within the convents. However, Teresa's letters were not only about such weighty matters. She considered writing to be a labor of love, addressing cordial letters to other nuns and prioresses, discussing nuns' health issues and commenting on what they should eat and wear, or even just thanking contributors for their monetary assistance or for the jam they had sent. Whatever the topic for Teresa, letter-writing was an integral part of her life, akin to all her other "household" tasks.

Teresa paid special attention to safeguarding the contents of her important and formal letters, perhaps because, as Mujica notes, "[e]ven well-paid mail carriers were not always trustworthy" (*Lettered* 49). Before sending such letters, Teresa carefully sealed them with wax, a common practice at the time. According to McEwan, seals were considered "more than signatures. They were status symbols, and ...also provided an opportunity for an individual to make a statement about his or her family connections, social aspirations, group solidarities, and personal values" (7).²³ Their design served as a visual language and clues as to a user's identity (McEwan 82). Mujica gives an example of this in Teresa's case:

Teresa had at least two seals, one with a cross and bones and one with the letters IHS, which she mentions in a missive to her brother Lorenzo: 'I can't bear using this seal with

²³ The impression of a noble person's seal stamped into wax and affixed to a document testified to the presence of the seal's owner at the moment of sealing. The impressed image, then, derived its authenticity and meaning from the person who owned the seal, and served as a stand-in for the presence of the owner after the document had left his or her hands (Lee "Material and Meaning in Lead Pilgrim's Sign" 166).

the skull. I prefer the one with the monogram of Him whom I would like to have engraved on my heart as had St. Ignatius (*Lettered 59*; 2 January 1577:5).

It is not surprising to discover that Teresa, a prolific letter-writer, would choose to transform the wax seal, a common domestic object, into an image that would make her spirituality more comprehensible. The following passage about a stage in the progression toward mystical union, quoting directly from the Bible (“sealed with His seal,” John 6:27), is a case in point:

[The Soul] shall go thence sealed with His seal. In reality, the soul in that state does no more than the wax when a seal is impressed upon it – the wax does not impress itself; it is only for the impress; that is, it is soft – and it does not even soften itself so as to be prepared; it merely remains quiet and consenting (*Life 5: 2.13*).

In preparation for union, individuals must extinguish all exterior stimuli, must “remain quiet and consenting,” and must be soft and supple like the softened wax that is impressed by the seal. Just as the physical seal is placed on the soft wax, the spiritual seal is impressed on the humble and worthy soul in preparation for entering the sixth dwelling place.²⁴

The same wax that is used to seal letters forms the substance of another domestic object, candles, that Teresa employs to describe the mystical experience. This time she speaks of a pair of metaphorical candles, whose wicks and wax are fused, as an analogy to the union with God

²⁴ As Anderson writes, “Conveying the qualities of interiority and enclosure in the sense-imaginary of a *being-sealed*, St. Teresa’s analogy of the wax seal confirms a baptismal covenant that instructs the emergence of the soul, in and through the Word, as the emergence of the human subject into the ethical ground and substance of language. [Her analogy of the seal imprint is] a hollow and inverted form that incorporates the sense of being turned inside out” (352).

that can only occur when the soul is quiet enough to experience spiritual transformation. This description of the mystical union also invokes water imagery:

We might say that union is as if the ends of two wax candles were joined so that the light they give is one: the wicks and the wax and the light are all one; yet afterwards the one candle can be perfectly well separated from the other and the candles become two again, or the wick may be withdrawn from the wax. But here it is like rain falling from the heavens into a river or a spring; there is nothing but water there and it is impossible to divide or separate the water belonging to the river from that which fell from the heavens (*IC 7:2.4*).

To refine her description of mystical union – because the fusion of wax and wicks can be undone afterward – she introduces the second image, one that illustrates perfect union: the droplet of water that falls into a river or spring and becomes an integral part of that river or spring.

Through these comparisons, which bring out visual pictures that also appeal to the sense of touch, Teresa invites readers to contemplate visible and palpable everyday images as the means to see and understand mystical union.

As a faithful daughter of the Catholic Church who chose to follow the strict Carmelite rule of enclosure, Teresa found spirituality in her everyday life; whether serving others, exchanging gifts of homemade jams and biscuits, or writing letters and sealing them with her own seal, Teresa embodied the humanists' view of a woman's role. However, Teresa's main goal was to explain her mystical experiences; and thus her writing went beyond the womanly "chitchat." She finds that she can best communicate supernatural revelation not through

theological language, but rather through concrete expressions that are personal and directed mainly to her female audience, especially those within the convent walls. In addition, her use of female, homely language is an effective way of diverting any heretical suspicion from the Inquisition, which carefully scrutinized her writing.

As Mujica explains, Teresa's "amassment of disparate and sometimes incongruous metaphors...creates a kaleidoscope of images that overtaxes the mind, provoking a disintegration of logical connections that in effect deconstruct all rational notions of God" ("Apophatic" 744). Through her images of foodstuffs, for instance, she conveys how the soul "smells or tastes God...[with] the *odor* of God, or the *flavor* of God...What is smelled is God's 'sweet perfume,' and...the flavor detected when the soul perceives God by the spiritual sense of taste is 'sweetness without measure'"(Pike *Mystic Union* 59). For the enclosed women, the presence of God is everywhere because, as the ancient motto of the Benedictine Order teaches, "Orare est laborare, laborare est orare," to pray is to work, to work is to pray. Teresa's writing, with all its "incongruous metaphors," is but an attempt to contribute to a deepening spirituality and understanding of interiority by a frail *mujercilla*, through the sweetness of God's divine presence.

CHAPTER FIVE

Architectural Imagery - the Spiritual Journey

Recent scholarship on everyday life and culture in early modern times has placed a remarkable focus on architectural space. As a cultural artifact, the built environment must be understood within the context of its society, culture, and politics. Teresa uses architectural metaphors, such as castles, palaces, convents, and houses, to describe the process of interiorization of mental prayer. Her texts prove “both that aspects of physical space have helped facilitate [her] approach to God and that images and metaphors of physical space offer an effective means of describing mystical experience” (Davis 21). Essential to mystical writing is the ultimate goal of union with God through interiorization or *recollection*, the ongoing process in which the soul must detach from worldly distractions. For the mystic, the castle, palace, convent, and house, are the metaphors that suggest God’s secret dwelling place and only through progression *into* these edifices, can individuals move inward, “where God and the soul touch” (Dupré *Deeper Life* 24) and where the mystical experience takes place.

The contemplative life requires one to move inward, away from the exterior world. Consequently, Teresa advises her nuns, “[w]e must then disengage ourselves from everything so as to approach God interiorly and even in the midst of occupations withdraw ourselves” (*IC* 29.5). Most important in this process of moving inward is enclosure, which provides nuns with the environment necessary to dedicate their lives to prayer. As explained earlier in this dissertation, Teresa’s natural world provided her with familiar objects - such as the palmetto fruit, with its many layers that need to be peeled before reaching the succulent center, and the silkworm entering its cocoon - that she could employ to describe the soul’s inward movement in its search for God. Other such images come from the built environment. Enclosures like the

convent and cells, hermitages, and dovecots, as well as certain architectural details, such as doors and grilles in parlors, invite Teresa to deconstruct the outer layers where “material objects exist, [where] social life is enacted, texts are produced and circulated, language is exchanged and inscribed, and religious practice takes place” (Davis 21). Specifically, we shall see how the architectural artifact of monastic enclosure can lead to a life of solitude and prayer. By separating the nun from the lay population, the close confines of a cloister or convent cell provide the solitude necessary for reflection and spiritual development.

Teresa’s imagery was a result of an environment which was based on the “extreme saturation of the religious atmosphere and a marked tendency of thought to embody itself in images” (Huizinga 151). This final chapter will show how Teresa drew on her physical surroundings, the built environment that “lay close to her hand” (Peers *Saint Teresa de Jesús* 91), to construct the architectural images that she could safely and easily use to show her nuns the inward movement of mental prayer.

Castles, fortresses – the fortified soul

Joining a long line of writers who have sought a means to express the mystical experience, Teresa found one solution in metaphors of architectural space. From the castles and palaces that played such an important role in Spain’s history, Teresa constructs her most impressive and, arguably, her most analyzed architectural model – the interior castle. This metaphorical construct is, according to Teresa, a “precious and great edifice” (*IC* 2:1.7), built not on sand, but on a firm foundation.

Teresa's literary world, which comprised a variety of readings, would somehow have provided for inspiration for her images, especially the most widely analyzed - the castle metaphor. The chivalric novels in vogue during the sixteenth century (that she loved to read), works by her predecessors (such as Laredo and Osuna), and the passages in the Bible that speak of God's mansions, all could have contributed to Teresa's castle imagery. Even Sufi spiritual literature could have suggested a way for her to express mystical experiences, as López Baralt maintains: "Saint Teresa would not appear, then, to have 'invented' the beautiful plastic image of the interior castle, no matter how unusual it may have appeared to Western sensibilities: she simply elaborated it in ingenious detail, Christianized it and adapted it for her own ends" ("Teresa of Jesús" 185).

The built environment of the castle mirrors much of the historical context of sixteenth-century Spain, - the Reconquest, intense religious reform, and the attempt of the Catholic Monarchs to unify the country. Already during the war-torn Middle Ages, castles were omnipresent in Spain. In classical Latin, the term *castrum* "referred to a fort or fortress" (Nicholson 79); eventually, the term castle came to represent a fortified dwelling or even a fortified town. Nicholson, who describes the concentric castle of the Middle East, observes that this type of architectural design "must have been brought to the West by returning crusaders" (84). With centuries of the Muslim empire's domination in Spain, it is easy to see how the Muslim design became an integral part of castle design there. Its architectural form is that of a "so-called concentric castle, which has no central tower as a final point of retreat, but has a series of enclosing walls, one inside the other, punctuated by towers" (Nicholson 79). These castles, with their inner enclosures and high walls, were intended to protect the inhabitants from the enemy. The beauty and strength of Spain's castles were often described in sixteenth-century

literature, contributing to the growing symbolic importance of the castle. Nevertheless, castles at this time continued to function as defensive spaces: “The beauty of the castle in itself played a strategic purpose, for it would impress on others the power and authority of the owner of the castle” (Nicholson 85).

The cities of Toledo, Alcalá de Henares, and Teresa’s own Ávila, were well known for their fortified walls. The Ávila where Teresa grew up was surrounded with nine impressive fortified gates and eighty-eight towers, examples of military architecture that would have been very familiar to Teresa.²⁵ The medieval castles with built monasteries as part of their construction clearly mirrored the strong fortification of these towns. With their militaristic features, these “fortress-monasteries,” built with “stone and mortar,” were more than just ecclesiastical structures (Mann 102),²⁶ having been “designed to keep outsiders out and the inmates secure from the influences of the outside world” (Nicholson 68).²⁷ From the built environment of castles, monasteries, and “fortress-monasteries”, people could easily identify the marked connection between the heavenly and the terrestrial. Because fortified towns and more than two thousand castles were found throughout Spain, it was not surprising that castle imagery permeated spiritual literature and likely served as one of the sources for Teresa’s metaphorical castle.

²⁵ Many cities fortified their walls throughout the medieval period, and Ávila was no exception. “In Spain, the walls of the city of Ávila, were rebuilt between 1090 and 1099 and including 88 towers within the perimeter, were probably constructed reusing the Roman walls of the city” (Nicholson 70).

²⁶ “The Castle of Loarre in the province of Aragon is among the most celebrated of Spain’s renowned castles” (Mann 102). It is this castle that the “Aragonese king, Sancho Ramírez (r.1064-94), constructed a monumental Romanesque church dedicated to Saint Peter. This Romanesque-style complex fortress-monastery, with its “fortified towers and walls...monumentalized the legitimacy of the Christian hegemony” (Mann 102).

²⁷ As Nicholson explains, “In the Iberian Peninsula, where there was a frontier with the Muslims and in areas troubled by war...religious orders, who had sufficient liquid capital to build permanent defenses, constructed their buildings to protect themselves. The monasteries in the Iberian Peninsula have been described as ‘fortified ranch houses’” (68).

Teresa's castle is similar to the medieval archetype. Like its architectural model, Teresa's castle was meant to provide protection from the outside world; but in this case, the enemy consisted of religious, sexual, political, and social threats (Carrion 41). The list of the other "enemies" that distressed Teresa were many - from the havoc caused by the Lutherans in Europe (a "miserable sect," she called them), to the lost souls in the New World, to the devil's powers, all were imminent threats to the Catholic Church. These dangerous forces are portrayed metaphorically by the creatures that populate the moat surrounding the castle. Guarded by twin castle "sentries," prayer and the soul, Teresa's metaphorical military outpost attempts to ward off "small offenses against God" (*IC* 7:2.9). Nevertheless, when the main entry to the castle is opened, "the many bad things like snakes and vipers and poisonous creatures ... enter with the soul and don't allow it to be aware of the light" (*IC* 1:2.14). Once inside, the "reptiles which enter the first rooms" and "the legions of evil spirits in each room [that] prevent souls from passing from one [dwelling] to another" (*IC* 1:2.8; 1:2.12) have to be resisted if the soul is to be successful in its inward journey. Just as in the case of the physical castle that Nicholson describes, Teresa reserves power and authority for the King, whose inner chamber is the seventh and last mansion, "the interior world where there is room for so many and such attractive dwelling places...it is right that the soul be like this since within it there is a dwelling place for God" (*IC* 7:1.5).²⁸ The interior world was a place a place of peace and serenity (Carrion 41), where individuals were able to advance spiritually. In order to do so, they had to find their way through to the center, "or royal chamber where the King stays" (*IC* 1:2.8). This complex design, along with the metaphorical castle's "shape, form and colour, its dark and light shades, all play an important part in defining the symbolic meaning of the castle as a whole, which, in the

²⁸ God's "confidential business" here is spiritual betrothal, where the soul senses "an enkindling in the spirit in the manner of a cloud of magnificent splendor" (*IC* 7:1.6).

broadest sense, is an embattled, spiritual power, ever on the watch” (Cirlot 39). Through the complex, concentric circles of the castle, individuals need to overcome the obstacles and perils that prevented the mystic’s progress. Each of the mansions or dwelling places represents an inner quest, while the dark forces that lie in the environs of the castle attempt to block the way of those unprepared to enter God’s kingdom. However, through prayer, the obstacles and perils that threaten an individual’s progress can be subdued, opening the “doors of entry” to the castle and leading to the brilliant center.

Crystal and Diamond: Mirroring Solomon’s Temple

Teresa used the image of the castle not only in a conventional sense, but also in the Scriptural sense. Teresa’s image mirrors heaven’s dwelling place as found in the New Testament, where Jesus explains “In my Father’s house there are many places to live in”(John 14:2). Her construction of this image depended also on passages in Kings, Chronicles, and Ezekiel, where Solomon’s temple is described with precise architectural detail.

Solomon’s Temple, the Kingdom of God or Holy Jerusalem, was a concept that could only be grasped through Biblical references. By reflecting on them, individuals could start to formulate a vision of a castle, in all its glory and resplendent with jewels, and thereby to imagine the greatness of God. This perhaps explains why Teresa chose glass or crystal as the material for her imaginary castle. Solomon’s Temple, with its purported abundance of crystal and glass, including glass floors, was the source of many glass metaphors.²⁹ In the Bible, the glass-crystal metaphor is most prominent in the Revelations of St. John in the New Testament, where, “glass is ...likened to crystal” (Bletter 25) in the reference to a “sea of glass like unto crystal”

²⁹ Although Solomon’s Temple was not made of glass, as Bletter explains, “the materials [of] gold and water” are found in glass symbolism and may even be “misinterpreted as, or intentionally magnified into, translucent buildings of glass”(23-24).

(Revelations 4:6), since, as Bletter argues, “John’s vision of the New Jerusalem, too, points up the interchangeability of light, glass, crystal, precious stones, and gold as metaphors of a transcendent life” (25).³⁰ In Revelations, the city “glittered like some precious jewel of crystal clear diamond” (21:11 that “did not need the sun or the moon for light, since it was lit by the radiant glory of God...” (21:23). It was with these elements which Teresa knew from both the Bible and the built environment (for example, the radiant cathedrals in her midst, with their beautiful stained glass windows), that she endowed the images of the castle in her writings.

During the sixteenth century, allusions to Solomon’s temple served as a rhetorical device that allowed individuals to “imagine themselves moving through different rooms of the building while observing some of its features” (Hetherington 73). Taking her cue from this, Teresa constructs a vision of the dwelling places of heaven for individuals who were searching for spiritual truths in the Bible. She insists that they “imagine”:

Well, let us *imagine* that within us is an extremely rich palace, built entirely of gold and precious stones; in sum, built for a lord such as this. *Imagine*, too, as is indeed so, that you have a part to play in order for the palace to be so beautiful; for there is no edifice as beautiful as is a soul pure and full of virtues. The greater the virtues, the more resplendent the jewels. *Imagine*, also, that in this palace dwells this mighty King who has been gracious enough to become your Father; and that He is seated upon an extremely valuable throne, which is your heart (*Way* 29.9) [italics mine].

³⁰ “Revelations was also influenced by Ezekiel’s vision, in which the splendor of the spiritual realm is associated with precious stones. However, the meaning of the crystal metaphor is not as lucid as in Revelations, as can be seen in these passages from Ezekiel: And the likeness of the firmament upon the heads of the living creature was as the color of the terrible crystal stretched forth over their heads above (1:22)” (Bletter 25).

By “imagining” these particular spaces “built for the lord,” Teresa inscribes the images into the individual’s mind. Such “image-driven activities” were especially important in stirring up a mental visualization to bring individuals closer to God.³¹

This appeal to the imaginative memory of her daughters or sisters, who spent most of their lives within the confines of monasteries, was logical because Teresa knew that they could not have seen in person places that were most likely familiar to her from her travels. Unlike her, they did not associate with aristocratic circles, nor were they exposed to beautiful and resplendent castles in the countryside. Teresa, who did have noble connections and who spent the better part of her life traveling and establishing convents, could draw on mental images formed from her personal experiences, whereas the nuns had to learn about God’s kingdom as most other individuals did, by relying on images they were exposed to through Bible readings, sermons or instruction.³²

Window to Teresa’s world: convents

Teresa knew that, in order for the soul to find a spot in God’s presence, it would have to withdraw from worldly matters and devote itself to a spiritual life. Already as a child, she and her brother found refuge in playing and conjuring up “plans to be hermits” (*Life* 1.5). In the garden of her house, Teresa and her friends played and pretended to be nuns and even diligently

³¹ As López-Baralt expresses, “[m]any spiritual metaphors – especially architectonic ones – became popular in European spirituality precisely because of their attractive mnemonic character...[E]xactly the same thing happened with the Mother Reformer’s concentric simile, for she asked her spiritual daughters to bring it time and again to their memory. Perhaps the simile of the castles was transmitted as a mnemonic device during those silent dialogues between Christians and Muslims which our collective historical memory...’does not wish to remember’ [as Cervantes begins his famous masterpiece, *Don Quijote*], but which had to have taken place on peninsular soil” (“Teresa of Jesus ’198).

³² In his article, “El castillo interior y el ‘Arte de la memoria,’ Michael Gerli argues that “La explotación de la imagen del edificio es, por consiguiente, un deliberado recurso pedagógico determinado por el deseo de instruir y ganar prosélitos...A través de este ingenioso y sutil instrumento, Santa Teresa aspira a asegurar la perpetuación de su ideología espiritual y el futuro de su orden. El castillo que se retrata en las *Moradas*, más que un simple vehículo metafórico para resultar el viaje del alma al *sanctum sanctorum* de la perfección, resulta un astuto auxilio a la memoria cuyo propósito es aligerar el estudio, proporcionar la recordación, y estimular la propagación de las ideas teresianas” (162).

piled stones to replicate a local hermitage, only to have it topple down (*Life* 1.5).³³ Perhaps Teresa and her friends believed that imitating the construction of such a simple building would help them in their game of make-believe; but it also taught them another lesson, one that would be critical for success in later life, that a strong foundation was necessary both for physical buildings and for spiritual development. That she had learned this lesson well was evident in her assertion that, although a house should be small and humble, “[i]t should be as strong as possible. The wall should be high, and there should be a field where hermitages can be constructed so that the Sisters may be able to withdraw for prayer as our holy Fathers did” (*Constitutions* 32).

In spite of this early lesson, by the time Teresa entered the convent, she had been drawn into worldly ways by her upbringing in her family of *converso* merchants. As was explained in Chapter II, many *converso* artisans and financiers in Spain purchased patents of nobility to become titled, establish their lineage, and fit into society. Teresa’s father was no exception. Although his patent of nobility did not by any means raise the Cepeda family into an aristocratic milieu, it did guarantee Teresa certain privileges, even as a nun. As a result, when she entered the Incarnation, Teresa, like other wealthy sisters there, enjoyed a distinct and special treatment with

a large private apartment...as befit a woman of the station to which her family aspired.

Situated on two levels and connected by a staircase, it included facilities for cooking and eating...[where she could live along with her] youngest sister, Doña Juana, and several other relatives...The witty and popular Teresa de Ahumada attracted a circle of friends

³³ “The local hermitage was Nuestra Señora de las Vacas, whose ancient structure was a simple nave constructed of mud walls” (O’Rourke Boyle *Divine* 209).

and kin members in the convent, and her parlor became their meeting place (Bilinkoff *Ávila* 115).

Spiritual devotion at the Incarnation was indeed difficult with its lax rules and its one hundred and sixty nuns. With spirituality and mental prayer at the forefront, Teresa determined “that a monastery of women that allows freedom is a tremendous danger” (*Life* 7.3). The dangers that faced nuns in such an unrestrained environment were many – idle conversations, the compromising of piety and dedication to God (Lehfeldt “Discipline, Vocation” 1013), abusive confessors, and sexual advances, all of which ultimately kept nuns from their main responsibility – prayer. Accusing herself of having succumbed to dangers at times, Teresa admits having been “drawn from pastime to pastime, from vanity to vanity, from one occasion to another” (*Life* 7.1).

In time, Teresa came to understand that enclosure was, for contemplative nuns, a way of directing both the mind and the soul towards spiritual matters. “[T]he life of solitude [by physical as well as mental separation], was the outward sign of the individual’s spiritual enclosure in God” (Davis 35). The enclosed and restricted space of the convent, then, was meant to foster devotion among the nuns. The built environment within the convent – the cells, grilles, cloisters, and *locutorios* – reflected the solitary life of the Carmelite nuns and was meant to separate the secular and monastic worlds. Intent on embracing the Tridentine reforms, Teresa saw enclosure not only as a spiritual aid, but also as freedom from familial relations and from worldly concerns. In Teresa’s case, the close confines of a convent cell or cloister kept her and her religious sisters separate from the lay population, thus providing them the solitude and reflection necessary for spiritual development.

Unreformed convents were a microcosm of Spanish society, with a focus on those who had title, wealth, or status; and patrons, with their contributions of charitable gifts, brought social activity and “worldly preoccupations into the cloister” (Lehfeldt *Religious Women* 15). Although the financial backing of patrons was important, Teresa’s main goal was to devote herself and her nuns fully to prayer; and by doing so, “she was doing God’s will” (Mujica *Lettered* 203). Hoping to spare her nuns from the tug of war that she herself had experienced between her desire for mental prayer and the social activities that she had once enjoyed in the convent, she invokes St. Clare on the need for poverty:

in houses, clothing, words, and most of all in thought...and...[a]s St. Clare said, great walls are those of poverty. She said that it was with walls like these, and those of humility, that she wanted to enclose her monasteries...[I]f poverty is truly observed, recollection and all the other virtues will be much better fortified than with very sumptuous buildings. Be careful of buildings like these...The houses must be poor and small in every way. Let us in some manner resemble our King, who had no house but the stable in Bethlehem where He was born and the cross where He died. These were houses where there was little room for recreation (*Way* 3.8, 3.9).

This passage stresses why the built environment of seclusion was important for the nuns. Enclosure within the walls of poverty can, if observed properly, lead to recollection, and fortify such virtues as humility.

The most simple of abodes was sufficient for prayer according to Teresa, and by holding up for emulation Jesus’ tiny stable in Bethlehem, she recommends that the sisters make use of humble corners for spiritual withdrawal and mental prayer. Their cells were to be modest both in

size and in furnishings, thus assuring the privacy and humility necessary for devotion. The cells usually contained “a bed with a straw mattress, a *prie-Dieu*, a small table, one or more chairs, spiritual books, a crucifix and devotional images” (Dunn 157). Here, “[w]ithin the communal context of the convent, a nun’s cell formed a more private devotional space ... [and] fostered the meditative practices favored by the post-Tridentine Church. A nun’s cell was the site of her most intense and personal spiritual development” (Dunn 156). It was within the physical space of the cell that nuns were to accept their separation from the external world and its material possessions, to detach from worldly goods, and to follow the monastic religious life of poverty to better serve God. Small and meager cells were, for Teresa, a reflection of the call to poverty and a way of prayer, as genuine “prayer and comfortable living are incompatible” (*Way* 4.2). Trying to build a strong foundation of prayer without self-denial would be like “making houses out of straw”: there would be no way to advance in holiness. (*Way* 36.3).

The convents founded by Teresa throughout Spain were intentionally poor because they were meant to demonstrate that practicing the way of prayer was more important than building elaborate houses. Often relying on patrons and their donations, Teresa’s first foundations were in large rented or donated homes, where her first task was to fit them out according to the rules of enclosure so that the nuns could lodge there properly until more permanent houses were procured. Even in the temporary houses, the Carmelite rules of simplicity, poverty, and solitude reigned supreme. However, the voluntary solitude that characterized life in Teresa’s convents was far from miserable. Well aware that good health, like good living conditions, produced an “environment conducive to...prayer” (Mujica *Lettered* 155), Teresa paid special attention to her nuns’ health, diet, and sleeping habits. Her concern about these factors stemmed from the belief that food or sleep deprivation, and even mental illness, “could render a person susceptible to the

devil's ploys" (Mujica *Lettered* 153). Rather than a lonely existence in a grim environment, Teresa describes the cloistered nuns' life as happy and fulfilled: "No one but those who experience it will believe the joy that is felt in these foundations once we are enclosed where no secular persons can enter, for however much we love them it is not enough to take away this great consolation in finding ourselves alone" (*F* 31. 46). This is why Teresa compares taking nuns out of the cloister with

taking many fish from the river with a net; they cannot live until they are in the water again. So it is with souls accustomed to living in the running streams of their Spouse. When taken out of them and caught up in the net of worldly things, they do not truly live until they find themselves back in those waters (*F* 31.36).³⁴

Teresa knew that increasing the number of Carmelite foundations was important for extending her reform throughout Spain. The permanent residences that she founded, however, were to remain in line with the poverty and the contemplative life of the Unmitigated Rule. Her goal was to erect houses that "could be lived in" (*F* 14.1). The criterion for a livable house was straightforward: it should be simple and

³⁴ Here, Teresa mirrors the Carthusian monastic life, where "the life of the cell is as essential to the interior life as water is to fish" (Caldwell 18). Private cells were an integral part of the Carthusian life:

The inhabitant of the cell ought to take care diligently and assiduously neither to create nor accept occasions to go out of it, apart from those that are instituted by the rule. He should consider the cell as necessary to his life and health as water is to a fish or a sheepfold to a sheep. The longer he lives there, the more willingly he will stay; if he grows accustomed to leaving frequently and for trivial causes, he will soon think it hateful. And therefore it is ordained that he ask for what he needs at the hours appointed for that and that he keep very carefully the things he has received (Brantley 22).

Although there is no indication that Teresa would have been exposed to the Carthusian way of life, she was familiar with the eremitic life as reflected in writings of the desert fathers, such as Saint Jerome, which she read. Through the tradition of enclosure, the eremitic life was a "necessary condition of a truly contemplative life" (Brantley 33).

should never be adorned, nor should there be anything finely wrought, but the wood should be rough. Let the house be small and the rooms humble: something that fulfills rather than exceeds the need. It should be as strong as possible. The wall should be high, and there should be a field where hermitages can be constructed so that the Sisters may be able to withdraw for prayer as our holy Fathers did (*Constitutions* no. 32).

After all, neither the size of the house nor its design determined one's spirituality. Rather than focusing on comfort in the material world, Teresa would have us look to the afterlife:

By considering that the house will not be ours forever, but ours only for as short a time as this life lasts, even though that may be long, everything will be easy for us. We will see that the less we have here below, the more we will enjoy in eternity, where the dwelling places will be in conformity with the love with which we have imitated the life of our good Jesus (*Constitutions* 14. 5).

Spiritual considerations also caused Teresa to avoid excess while overseeing the expansion of her building enterprise, a project guided at every step by austerity and poverty and resting on a strong foundation of faith and humility. Esquivias describes well the relationship between the practical details of Teresa's building process and its spiritual underpinnings:

La solidez del edificio constituía una premisa imprescindible, aunque Teresa marca el límite de la economía, es decir, de la disponibilidad de medios y recursos, para evitar en cada caso gastos inútiles y para prevenir que en nombre de la firmeza se fomentase un desarrollo arquitectónico excesivo y contrario – por ello mismo – a sus ideas reformadoras y a su ascética concepción espiritual y religiosa (145)

Using the financial resources at hand, Teresa built her foundations without superfluous decoration that would take away from her goal of prayer. Anything in excess, whether decoration, large houses or cells, or even excessive talking and idle chatter, only distracted nuns from prayer and recollection. Thus, the architecture of enclosure contributed to the nuns' spiritual foundation of faith and humility by keeping them away from the distractions of daily life while giving them the kind of physical space that would promote their spiritual development: the "fortress-like appearance of convents emphasi[zed]...enclosure and separation, both inside the conventual church and out [and] visibly forged segregation and exclusivity in relation to lay people and implied – while simultaneously obscuring – the nuns' intimacy with the Divine" (Hills "Cities and Virgins" 54). In short, convent architecture clearly communicated the vows of chastity and piety to which the nuns had professed upon entering the convent. The design of the parlors, grilles, and *locutorios* found in early modern convents helped to articulate this enclosure, as we shall see.

Early modern convent parlors, which served to bring lay people together with the nuns, were outfitted with grilles or grates to restrict visibility between residents and visitors and to safeguard the nuns from any physical contact. However, because the parlors were usually "[l]ocated near the entrance to the convent, [they] represented the weak link in the chain of spiritual defense established by *clausura*" (Dunn "Spaces Shaped" 160). Parlor visits by relatives could substantially benefit nuns' communities by linking their convents to the social fabric of the city, thus enabling them to participate in networks of influence their (Dunn "Spaces Shaped" 161). However, contact with the secular world could easily distract the nuns, which is why Teresa sanctioned dealings with families or friends provide "spiritual consolation rather than recreation" (*Constitutions* no. 15). Always concerned with the mental outlook of her

novices, she allowed them to visit freely with their family and friends, especially if they were unhappy; however, she insisted that interaction among visitors focus on spiritual affairs and not on discussions of worldly affairs, which were detrimental to the spiritual life of cloistered nuns. Considering that parlors often “marked the site of a permeability in the cloister wall that failed to completely segregate the spiritual and lay world” (Dunn “Spaces Shaped” 161), Teresa adopted an exceedingly strict reform of enclosure in her foundations, employing architectural features dictated by the Church, which “sought to enforce reform with mortar” (Weaver 23) in convent construction. In early modern Italian convents, walls that separated the nuns from the outside world were strengthened, and doors and windows that overlooked the streets were closed to ensure strict enclosure (Weaver 23). Similar enclosure was also reflected in the convents of San José and the Incarnation. From the exterior, the

tapia definía, protegía y aislaba del exterior todo el ámbito interior del convento, que con excepción de la iglesia se consideraba en su totalidad zona de clausura, incluyendo como tal no solo las celdas y otros lugares cerrados para el aislamiento y vida de las religiosas, sino también las huertas y los espacios abiertos o al aire libre comprendidos dentro del muro (Esquivias 145).

Intent on employing the kind of conventual architecture that would provide the secluded intimacy necessary for recollection, Teresa did whatever she could on her own and with God’s help to achieve this aim. In the foundation of the house in Valladolid, she “arranged very secretly for workmen to come and begin building walls to provide for recollection, and other necessary things” (*F* 10.4). The walls of a Carmelite convent were not the only constructions that needed to be devoid of superfluous decorations in order to foster spirituality. The austere

grates and grilles of early modern convents, meant to further shield the nuns from curious on-lookers and to discourage any tempting physical contact with outsiders, also served to enforce enclosure. The double grates of early modern Florentine convents, for example, were made of “iron bars fixed at least one palm apart in the stone surrounding the opening: the lattice of bars was to have holes small enough to prevent one from putting a hand through” (Weddle 122).³⁵ The nuns’ voices were audible through the “sheets of perforated metal or drapes” that covered parlor grilles. These sheets restricted both visibility and the touching of nuns (Weaver 23). Similarly, convents of the discalced Carmelites in Spain, according to Lehfeldt, were

to have a strong iron grille through which conversations could be held...with gaps... [no] more than the width of three fingers. The cloistered side of the grille was to have a latticework of wood. [And] [t]he length of the grill was to be two yards, the height in keeping with the proportions of the existing architecture (“Discipline, Vocation” 1014).

The grille in the choir was to have a similar construction – of iron, with “the gaps in the grille...no larger than the width of four fingers. On the cloistered side of this grille there was to be a latticework of wood hung with a black veil” (Lehfeldt “Discipline, Vocation” 1015).

Grilles were not meant to be, in the least, subtle enclosures. Kavanaugh describes the grilles in Teresa’s parlors as “thick and covered with large blunted spikes of iron, an aggressive warning as though some treasure was being defended” (*Intro* Vol. 3, 26). In designing her foundations, Teresa places the construction of grates among her primary obligations. After the Toledo foundation, Teresa had to prepare the “little church, the grates, and other things” (*F*

³⁵ The construction of convents in early modern Spain was similar to that of Florentine convents. See Lehfeldt’s “Discipline, Vocation” 1014).

17.1). The importance of installing the grates shows that churches throughout Spain were housing the most precious of spiritual and material things. The “advertised confinement” represented by convent grilles showed the respectable cloistering of nuns and “that their separation from the world – was the guarantee of their virginity” (Hills “Cities and Virgins” 34). This is clear from how Teresa describes the protective details that any official inspector should find on a site visit. In order to avoid evil that could arise,

[h]e should observe especially whether there be two grates at the grille in the parlor, one on the outside and one on the inside, and whether they are such that no hand can reach through. This is very important. He should look at the confessionals and see to it that the curtains are nailed over the confessional window and that the Communion window is small. The door at the entrance should have two bolts and there should be two keys for the door to the enclosure, as the *Acts* ordain, one of which is kept by the portress and the other by the prioress...I have put it down here, for it is always necessary that these things be looked into and that the nuns see that the visitator does so, and thus there will be no carelessness about them (*Visitation* no. 15).

These grilles, often as high as cathedral ceilings, were an

alusión...a la fortaleza y a la defensa que el hombre ha de organizar en su vida para aislarse del mal, y en particular, combina la alegoría de la torre (escala entre el cielo y la tierra, y alusión a lo elevado) y la muralla (símbolo de protección contra influencias inferiores) (Olague-Felió y Alonso 97).

In spite of protecting religious spaces, grilles remained a call from the past. Grilles, or *rejas*, dating back to early Christian times were “vehicle[s] for decorative art” during the Gothic and Renaissance periods (Williams, L. 142). Grilles in many cathedrals throughout Spain were adorned with intricate details showing eternal salvation or the lives of saints or even the Passion of Christ (Olague-Feliu y Alonso 98). Teresa, however, prohibited any adornment of any sort in her foundations. Grilles, which had earlier served as an expressive religious decorative art, were, like wood, not to be “finely wrought” in any of her humble and simple monasteries (*Constitutions* no. 32).

Other spaces in the convent were similarly regulated. The *locutorios*, more often than not the center of the nuns’ social life, were a case in point. Because many conversations occurred in the *locutorios*, special attention had to be paid to their physical design. Doors, entryways to the convent, were to be bolted and keys kept by the portress. Strict control of accessibility by a physical separation prevented inappropriate activities on the part of both the nuns and visitors. To insure safety and any prevent inappropriate activity, “[o]lder nuns were appointed as *escuchas* or listeners and were supposed to monitor the conversations in the *locutorio*” (Lehfeldt “Discipline, Vocation” 1015). Teresa, having witnessed inappropriate behavior in a monastery that did not follow rules of strict enclosure led her to comment on the harmful effects of such misbehavior.

For being in a monastery I don’t think I could have been able to speak of such matters as taking the liberty to do something without permission, such as giving messages through holes in the wall, or at night; nor did I ever do so, for the Lord held me by His hand. It seemed to me – for I considered many things knowingly and purposely – that to risk the

reputation of so many who were so good, because of my own wretchedness, would have been very wrong; as if the other things I was doing were good! Still, the evil done was not so knowingly done (*Life* 7.2).

Teresa is plainly aware that one's behavior directly affects not only that individual, but also the monastic community. This explains the design of the built environment of the convent, with the stringent restrictions that governed the use of space within it; it was an environment constructed to separate the monastic world from the secular and to protect against all temptations. Teresa was well aware that the features of a house for religious were important because they "determine[d] how recollection is preserved" (*Visitation* no.15).

The strict impositions on convents were like "architectural and artistic investments ... [that] reveal how nuns sought to order their built environment in particular ways" (Lehfeldt "Spatial" 139). Teresa sought to have monasteries be livable, and at the same time, conducive to recollection. Enclosure was essential for this, but so were simple decorations, as shown by the following passage describing a cloister, which, decorated by

[t]he good Garciélvarez...looked on to the street. And in decorating the church he went to every extreme with many very nice altars and some other contrivances. Among these latter was a fount having orange-flower water which we neither requested nor even wanted; although afterward it did give us much devotion (*F* 25.12).

The "very nice altars" and the "fount" were probably more elaborate than what Teresa wanted to describe in detail, given that "[p]roviding their potential patrons with sumptuous altarpieces and

other objects of devotion may have been an attempt to curry support and gain devotional distinction” (Lehfeltdt “Spatial” 139).

Teresa often talks of her own flair for decorating, whether using images of Jesus or supervising the hanging of blue damask on the walls. She even had her hand in overseeing the decoration of a large hall, but downplayed her role, pointing out how “That lady [Doña Beatriz de Beamonte y Navarra] had decorated very well a large hall in which Mass was to be said, for the covered passageway leading to the church given us by the bishop had to be constructed...she let us use that hall, which was conducive to recollection” (*F* 30:8.9). Approvingly, Teresa sees that the covered passageway was another opportunity for interiority and recollection, as for “thirteen poor little women, any corner should be enough” (*Way* 3.9). That all monasteries be poor was Teresa’s call to the reformed Carmelite order. La “dicha pobreza obedecía a la aceptación de la austeridad tridentina auspiciada por la contrarreforma católica, que la propia santa de Ávila suscribió en su reforma del Carmelo” (Esquivias 149).

Houses, convents, or dwellings are the architectural metaphors of space that Teresa uses throughout her writing. Traditionally, the mystics saw the house, like the enclosed garden, as part of the “the feminine aspect of the universe” and “as a repository of wisdom” (Cirilot 153). Familiar images of “buildings, rooms, and furnishings, and the art of building itself” (Howe *Mystical* 121) not only reflected the feminine activities and a nun’s role as a woman within these structures, but also the process of recollection.

Dovecots, gardens, and hermitages: conventual imagery

As we have seen, the built environment of a cloistered convent is the physical locus of recollection. This physical/spiritual parallel is mirrored in Teresa's imagery, the objective of which is to guide nuns, who lacked any formal university education that might enable them to understand conventional images found in the Bible. "The Virgin Mary, for example, was alluded to in the Bible through sealed fountains, enclosed gardens, closed gates, lilies, thorn-less roses, and a dozen stars...Ivy connoted death, immortality, fidelity, attachment and faithful affection" (Adams 126). Teresa used a conversational style and everyday images in her writing to appeal to her audience because, as she often reiterated, she was just a *mujercilla* and not versed in theological language. Of course, we recognize that her greatest challenge was to simplify extraordinarily complex theological concepts without changing their spiritual meaning. Since sixteenth-century women were not allowed to be literate in Latin, the language of the Vulgate, and were to be silent on theological matters, Teresa had to circumvent how she wrote about prayer. Because of the cloud of suspicion that loomed over Teresa,³⁶ her safest route was through metaphors, which "encapsulate a basic tenet of Christina dogma, whether it be the Incarnation or the infinity of the Godhead" (Hamburger "Rothschild" 90), to be sure that her experiences would be seen to be "in conformity with Holy Scripture" (*Life* 34.11). From her everyday built environment, Teresa chose dovecots, gardens, and hermitages as appealing images that she could incorporate indirectly (and thus safely) into her writings to explain the process of interiorization.

³⁶ The Inquisition established in 1478, limited "the use of Spanish Bibles and prayer books. Most Spanish versions of the Bible were translated from the Hebrew by Jewish and Arabic scholars rather than from the Vulgate, the base for most other vernacular translations" (Slade "Saint Teresa's 'Meditaciones'"41).

In 1573, encouraged by the Jesuit Jerónimo Ripalda (*CWST* Vol. 3, 5), Teresa began writing her *Foundations*, the account of her effort to expand the Carmelite reform by establishing convents throughout Spain. She made seventeen foundations during her lifetime, no easy task for a religious woman who attached great importance to the cloistered life. Still, that it was the right thing to do had been revealed to Teresa as early as 1570, in visions of the Lord expressing His desire for the new foundations. Although the choice of their locations was left to her, she considered God himself to be the ultimate decision-maker, as He often guided her in her decisions. The success of her venture depended on the help of her nuns: “[Teresa] had to raise money, look for property and houses to rent or buy, and recruit nuns who could endure with all the needed virtues the inevitable problems accompanying her new monasteries” (*CWST* Vol. 3, 10). Many of the homes or foundations that were either bought or donated were uninhabitable. Whenever necessary, Teresa took it upon herself to decorate or even to “build walls to provide for recollection” (*F* 10.4). Teresa knew that recollection and “inner happiness” were more important than large elaborate houses with good accommodations, as she points out in the following passage:

What benefit is it to us that the house be large since it is only one small room that each one habitually uses? That it be well designed – what help is that to us? Indeed, if it isn’t well designed, we won’t then have to go around looking at the walls (*F* 14.5).

Whether the houses for her reform were small, uninhabitable, or in need of major renovations, Teresa was always striving to provide an interior space into which souls could withdraw.

Travelling throughout Spain in covered wagons and contending with the elements of severe heat, cold, and heavy rains, Teresa remained undaunted. Her travels took her through the

countryside, where dovecots, gardens, and hermitages were abundant. These became images that acted as springboards for descriptions of interiority. Familiar to people in the sixteenth century, these were not stock images found in mystical language, but were part of the everyday life.

Dovecots

The dove, a conventional Christian symbol of the Holy Spirit, was an integral part of spiritual literature and art of the sixteenth century. It harks back to Matthew's description of Jesus's baptism, when "he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him" (3:17). Teresa often used birds and their environment as "symbols of the soul or of aspects of mystical advancement" (Howe *Mystical* 66). With her frequent travels, Teresa more than likely would have seen the dovecots that were built to provide shelter and food for doves or pigeons. Dovecots were often found in gardens, including convent gardens, or near manor houses. Architectural features of dovecots, such as their small entrances, latticed windows, and double trellises, were meant to protect the "birds from the invasion of snakes and other vermin" (Cooke 6); the food placed inside, as Teresa observes, was meant to draw the birds into these structures. Although the entrance to a dovecot was small, "the whole expand[ed] inwards to the breadth of a foot ... [with] the nests appear[ing] to have been circular" (Cooke 6). Within an individual dovecot there could be as many as 2,000 *boulins*, small nest-holes usually housing two birds. Whatever it was that impressed Teresa about dovecots, whether their intricate circular construction and massive walls or their expanding interiors, we cannot be sure. In any case, the dovecot was a "safe" image for Teresa to use when explaining mental prayer.

The image of the dovecot serves to elucidate the gathering of the soul's faculties in the process of recollection:

The other two faculties [memory and intellect] help the will to be capable of enjoying so much good – although sometimes it happens that even though the will is united, they are very unhelpful. But then it shouldn't pay attention to them; rather it should remain in its joy and quietude. Because, if the will desires to gather in these faculties, they both get lost. They are like doves that are dissatisfied with the food the owner of the dovecot gives them without their having to work. They go to look for food elsewhere, but they find it so scarce that they return (*Life* 14.3).

Similarly, Teresa implies, the soul will return again and again to prayer, as the ultimate source of spiritual nourishment, a generous gift from God. In the same chapter of her *Life*, Teresa describes another location where the soul can commune with the divine, a spot that was an integral part of convent life: the garden.

Enclosed garden – cultivation of the soul

Besides permitting the nuns the nuns' self-subsistence, gardens added an important dimension to the central symbolic feature of convent architecture: enclosure. As areas of solitude that allowed the spiritual process of mental prayer to progress and as places of reprieve from the confinement and rigidity of monastic life, gardens contributed to the movement from worldly matters into the soul, a spatial transfer that we have already seen to be at the heart of the convent and of the castle. Progression toward God is a metaphorical ascent for Teresa, as the contemplative detaches himself or herself from the material world. There is much work to be done in the various stages of the spiritual process. The contemplative or passive stages, which constitute the culmination of the process, must be practiced in seclusion; and for many contemplatives, this solitude was easily found within the walls of the monastic garden.

The garden, which means enclosure, is a space that is usually set apart from a primary dwelling. It may take the form of a well-cultivated area, a plot where flowers, plants, herbs, and fruit are cultivated. As early as the Old Testament, the word garden was used metaphorically, as in the paradisiacal Garden of Eden, where God is the master gardener.³⁷ The trees in the Garden of Eden in Genesis are not only a source of food, but also pleasant to behold (2:9). Teresa's *Interior Castle* recalls paradisiacal images of the garden. At one point she refers to the tree of life - "this spring of life, in which the soul is as a tree planted" (*IC* 1:2.2)—and at another, to the "celestial spring" -- "the spirit ... made one with the celestial water" (*IC* 7:2.9).³⁸ The tree of life as language for the "soul implies a relation between the processes of contemplative prayer and a return to the virgin earth and the Garden of Eden" (Anderson 337).

The kind of garden imagery favored by Teresa was not limited to the Old Testament. The tree of life, for instance, was also found in "Middle Eastern mythologies long before any biblical books were compiled" (Davidson 4). Similar imagery of trees, clear springs, and flowers is also prevalent in the idyllic *locus amoenus* found in medieval and Renaissance literature and poetry. Actual gardens with groves of trees were a central part of medieval gardens and could have influenced medieval and Renaissance writers as well as Teresa. By the same token, in *Interior Castle*, the castle (or soul) is compared in beauty and splendor to "this Orient pearl, this tree of

³⁷ As Chorpenning notes,

[1] God plants the garden of Eden and of the soul...and [2] God makes the trees and plants of these gardens grow... [3] there are four waters associated with each garden...[4] God appoints humankind as the gardener who is to care for and cultivate these gardens, [and] [5] God is present in both gardens to enjoy them (*Divine* 32-63).

³⁸ In Genesis, the tree of life, with its fruits of immortality, was found in the Garden of Eden (2:9; 3:22); in Revelations, it leads to Paradise: "To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (Revelation 2:7). In the Apocryphal writings, it is the tree of life that is nourished from the life-giving waters; and from it will emanate fragrances, blooming leaves, wood that does not wither, and even the sweet savor of an ointment (2 Esdras 2:12).

life, planted in the living waters of life – namely God” (1:2.1).³⁹ In the New Testament, Christ associates pearls with paradise: “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he has found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it (Matt. 13:45,46), and St. John pictures the Heavenly City with twelve gates of pearls (Rev. 11:21). By drawing the parallel between pearls, often praised for their purity and their inestimable value, and the celestial kingdom, Teresa clearly demonstrates that she knows how to manipulate imagery based on biblical language to describe the earthly paradise that is sustained by prayer.

Gardens played an important part in monastic life even in earlier Christian times. Already in the fourth century, monks were known not only to withdraw from society and into the desert, but “[i]n a visible as well as a spiritual way, the monks made the desert blossom ... [with their many] ... flourishing agricultural projects – gardens of vegetables for the use of the monks and their visitors, green plants growing which were never there before, [and] peasant farming in a rich soil, gardens for trees” (Ward 14). When constructing their monasteries, monks searched for “fertile land, a good water supply, temperate climate, peaceful surroundings, security, and the natural beauty of the landscape” (Talbot 37). The fertile land, abundant water, and good climate were necessary ingredients for producing an abundant garden. All this constituted “an environment conducive to contemplation and spiritual progress” (Talbot 37), an important ideal for monastic communities.

In the Middle Ages, plots adjacent to monasteries were often either purchased or donated. Whenever monasteries were established in urban areas, monks transformed their monastery

³⁹ López-Baralt details the sharing of the cosmic tree by writers from diverse cultures, who, like Teresa, link the tree with water. López-Baralt finds the symbols of the tree to be most common among the Muslims and concludes that “[s]omehow the ancient Muslim image seems to have found its way to St. Teresa in the Spanish sixteenth century” (“The Sufi *Trobar clus* and Spanish Mysticism Part III 3).

gardens or courtyards to make them resemble the open spaces of the rural areas. Sometimes their goal was to reflect more closely the life of the desert fathers; other times they wanted to mirror a lush natural setting, abounding in beautiful plants, bubbling springs, and sweet water (Talbot 62). Their embellished gardens, whether in the rural or urban centers, served a “secondary purpose: the creation of miniature versions of paradise on earth, where the abbot as spiritual gardener could nurture his seeding with the waters of instruction in the scriptures and the patristic tradition to encourage the monks’ spiritual growth” (Talbot 67). In the case of a lack of water, the monks “had to rely on rainwater from cisterns ... [and even in the driest of areas, excavations of] “monasteries and hermitages in the Judean desert have uncovered detailed evidence about the systems of channels, cisterns, and rock pools” that were vital for the horticulture as well as the everyday life within the monasteries (Talbot 42). Carrying water by hand from springs, streams, or wells was common; and the use of dug channels or aqueducts also provided for the monks’ personal needs and for watering their garden. Gardens, which were often attached to hermitages, were not only for personal sustenance, but also a way to indulge in manual labor and provide sustenance to others.

Many medieval texts present both a visual and a written representation of what was grown at the time, thus documenting Europeans’ knowledge of a large variety of plants and of gardening.⁴⁰ Everyone, irrelevant of social class, gardened, whether planting kitchen gardens replete with vegetables and fruit for consumption, orchards with a plentiful supply of fruit, or pleasure gardens filled with ponds, flowers, trees, and hedges cut in labyrinth-like patterns.⁴¹

⁴⁰ In *Medieval Gardens*, Sylvia Landsberg argues that details of garden features in “manuscript illustrations, medieval paintings, etchings and woodcuts are not to be thought of merely as adornment, but as vivid documentary evidence” (7).

⁴¹ Landsberg enumerates several kinds of gardens: as “herbers, or small enclosed gardens” filled with aromatic herbs; orchards, surrounded by a boundary and planted with a wide variety of fruit trees, trellises, shade alleys, and vines; “pleasure parks, or little parks”, with groves of trees, wild animals, and garden birds; and “kitchen or utilitarian gardens”, which contained “food and medicinal plants “...(13-31).

Teresa uses a variety of garden terms in her writing: *huerta* or *jardín* (lush and verdant), *huerto* (orchard), and *vergel* (pleasure garden). In *Life*, Teresa refers to both *huerta* and *vergel* in describing “how these trees are beginning to bud so as to blossom and afterward give fruit – and also the flowers and carnations so as to give forth their fragrance” (14.9), perhaps even alluding to her own garden. A humorous passage has Teresa advising one of her most obedient nuns to plant a thin and rotten cucumber in the “little vegetable garden [they] had” (*F* 1.3). These “kitchen gardens,” as Lottman (328) calls them, were an important part of the convent as they supplied the nuns with vegetables and fruit for personal consumption as well as herbs both for cooking and for medicinal purposes.

Writing to Ambrosio Mariano in Madrid, Teresa describes the accommodations that she had secured for herself and her nuns in what seems to have been a wealthy house in Seville, with an enclosed inner courtyard that reflected the Moorish influence in the Andalusian city. “The patio looks like it was made of *alcorza* [a white paste of sugar and starch, used in making candy and other sweets] ... Off the inner patio there are nice rooms ... The garden is delightful, the views magnificent. It cost us a lot of trouble, but I consider it all worthwhile” (*Letters* I, 106; 9 May 1576: 7). Teresa was, of course, aware of Spain’s Islamic past, which she referenced in her writing.⁴² It is plausible that she had it in mind when describing the seven dwelling places of her castle, all of which have “lovely gardens and fountains and labyrinths” (*IC*, Epilogue 452). In the course of her travels throughout Spain, Teresa’s exposure to aristocratic homes could have easily provided the source for her images of gardens, fountains, basins, trees, orchards, and water. The clearest evidence for this in her writings is her minute account of a home in Seville,

⁴² In describing the second degree of prayer, Teresa explains, “I write without the time and calm for it...I should like to have time, because when the Lord gives the spirit, things are put down with ease and in a much better way. Putting them down is then like copying a model you have before your eyes. But if the spirit is lacking, it is more difficult to speak about these things than to speak Arabic, as the saying goes ...” (*Life* 14.9).

where she established St. Joseph: “La casa era frontera a la huerta de San Francisco, por detrás lindaba el Arenal, o playa de Sevilla, con vistas a la torre del Oro y al Puerto. También las almenas y torreones del Castillo de la Inquisición de Triana caían a la vista” (Efren y Steggink 591).

Seville, like many cities throughout Spain, had water piped in from the countryside. The water flow from Caños de Carmona was brought to Seville by deep underground conduits. Aqueducts brought the water close to the city gates, and it was then distributed to the various churches, monasteries, homes, or plazas that were equipped with water fountains or spouts (Pike, R. 10). As astute as Teresa was, she would have been well aware of the watering systems of the city.⁴³ She would also have known just how to appeal to the people there to get the water flowing to her convent. After all, when necessary, this practical woman could even take charge of designing her own well.

Teresa’s inspiration for the garden/ water metaphor was not limited to world around her. Another source, which ought not to be overlooked, is St. Peter of Alcántara’s books on prayer and meditation. Teresa, who had met the author, recommended his works and those of Luis de Granada, calling them “good books” that should be available to the nuns. Good books, after all, are “sustenance for the soul” (*Constitutions* no.8). According to Peers, St. Peter of Alcántara (who Peers suggests is a “Teresan”) “anticipates St. Teresa’s similitude of the Waters” (*Studies* 115):

⁴³ Similarly, Teresa would have known that Ávila’s lack of rainfall, much like in many other cities, presented major challenges to the Spanish farmers. The farmers were also faced with the technological challenges of tapping the rivers for water. However, because the rivers ran through broken terrain, their uneven flow presented problems for irrigation purposes (Casey *Early Modern* 43). In many regions, little was done in the early modern period to the irrigation infrastructure of aqueducts, canals, cisterns, and wells that was already in existence during the Roman and Muslim occupation.

Just so the gardener, watering a patch of ground, after filling it with water, turns off the flow of the current and allows the water to soak in and disperse itself over the depths of the earth; when all that it has received is drained away, the gardener turns on the flow from the spring once more, that it may receive more and more, and be better watered (qtd. Peers *Studies* 115).

Even if she recalled St. Peter of Alcántara's image when she was developing the garden/ water metaphor, Teresa finds that the everyday work of the agricultural society of Spain was best suited to her description of prayer. Just like Teresa, who suffered aridity in prayer, many people were faced with the arid and weed-infested soil that would not yield any fruits, vegetables, or flowers if the proper preparation had not occurred.

Water was not only a vehicle for prayer; it was also a factor when Teresa was siting her foundations. She considered "the water and the view" as vital to her selection of a property to buy and was always willing to pay more than the house was worth if it offered these features (*Letters* I, 103; 19 February 1576:2). Here is a description of her dream location: "el conjunto monasterial, constituido por un claustro, celdas, coro, sala capitular, refectorio, cocina, y las ermitas, distribuidas por la huerta, todo cobijado por las altas paredes de la cerca" (Gonzalez 350). And, of course, Teresa always appreciated the beauty of nature, especially when it involved the presence of water. In her letter to Ana de la Encarnación in 1574, she enthuses over the nearby river: "[a]nd from my hermitage, and also from where I sleep, there's a view of the river – I can enjoy it while in bed, a most refreshing experience for me" (*Letters* I, 59; Middle of January 1574: 59). Suffering from many infirmities, Teresa would have delighted in the river view and the solitude of the hermitage where she could truly recollect.

The *topos/locus* of the garden was the place where “the soul begins to be recollected” (*Life* 14.2). Essential to life in Teresa’s view was nature and solitude. In the isolation of the garden individuals can detach themselves from worldly distractions or trials and persecutions in order to pursue union with God through mental prayer. For Teresa, images of fields, water, and flowers are reminders of the Creator and, serve, like good devotional books, as a vehicle for spiritual recollection (*Life* 7.1; *R* 4.1). This is why the garden evoked spiritual significance for Teresa.

Hermitages - An Extension of the Cloister Garden

The *hortus conclusus* or cloister garden, with its high walls that restricted vision and distractions from the outside world, was more than a solitary place where nuns could meditate and pray or than a “space that brought them relief from the rigors and confinement of *clausura*” (Dunn “Space” 159). From tilling the soil to sowing the seed, from watering the garden and keeping it free of weeds, those “abominable” plants that can reproduce abundantly and disturb the garden’s harmonious order, the cloister garden was “a model for the culture of the soul” (O’Rourke Boyle *Divine* 91).

As a young girl, the Teresa who pretended to be a nun and built convents and hermitages learned early the importance of building on a strong foundation when she “tried to make hermitages by piling up some little stones which afterwards would quickly fall down again” (*Life* 1.34).⁴⁴ Later, when she undertook actual building projects, she put that lesson to good use, whether constructing the convent buildings where nuns were to live modestly, their walled gardens, or chapels on the convent grounds, where “the Sisters may be able to withdraw for

⁴⁴ In “Home, Sweet Home: Teresa de Jesús: *Mudéjar Architecture, and the Place of Mysticism in Early Modern Spain*,” Carrión interprets the *pedrecillas* that Teresa uses in her writing as “a sign of *mudéjar* design, evocative of the ‘style’ of brick architecture” (353). For his part, Gonzalo Borrás Gualis notes that “not all the medieval Spanish brick architecture is *mudéjar*, nor is all *mudéjar* architecture built of brick” (qtd. Carrión “Home” 353).

prayer as our holy Fathers did” (*Constitutions* 32). Although Teresa desired poverty, as poverty in “houses, clothing, words, and most of all in thought [brings about] recollection and all the other virtues will be much better fortified than with very sumptuous buildings” (*Way* 3.8), she was nothing if not a practical woman. Therefore, she tells her charges: “If it is necessary because of the extremely secluded life you live to have a stretch of land (and this even helps prayer and devotion) with some hermitages where you can withdraw to pray, well and good” (*Way* 3.9). This was Teresa’s main goal for constructing hermitages in gardens – retreats for prayer, away from the distracting world.

Early on in her reform, Teresa had to defend the construction of hermitages to the Town Council of Ávila because of a suit brought about by the city’s water inspector, Lázaro Dávila. The hermitages in the Carmel of San José supposedly would, because of their size and location, “cast shadows on nearby fountains, chilling them and freezing the municipal water supply in the winter” (*Mujica Lettered* 38). Teresa promptly defended the hermitages, claiming that their removal would cause undue distress to her nuns (*Mujica Lettered* 38). Although her pleas went unheeded, and Teresa did have to remove the hermitages, she remained undaunted.

In her account of the first monastery of discalced Carmelite friars, Teresa clarifies that a suitable hermitage accommodation can be one small room, without unnecessary decoration. To illustrate, she depicts two small hermitages, “where one could do no more than either lie down or sit. Both were filled with hay because the place was very cold, and the roof almost touched one’s head. Each had a little window facing the altar and a stone for a pillow” (*F* 14.7). In detailing how the Carmelite friars materialized the hermitages to reflect the topos of the desert, De Ceballos situates their hermitages away from the daily distractions of many urban centers,

often areas surrounded by trees and waters. These hermitages had “una capilla rodeada de celdas individuales, pero también de un refectorio y otros aposentos donde hacer vida común o cenobítica” (De Ceballos 139). Hermitages with altars allowed the devotees to pass their time away from worldly distractions. There were, however, more elaborate hermitages, with cells, a small kitchen, or even small gardens (De Ceballos 139).

“Both the hermitage and the convent are ...where the soul [could] take refuge from the world” (Woshinsky 66). Hermitages for nuns had much in common with the monastic life, as Esquivias outlines:

las Clarisas Franciscanas Descalzas, que no podían, por causa de la rigurosa clausura endurecida por el Concilio de Trento, salir para hacer vida retirada en montes y desiertos, tuvieron en la huerta y jardín del monasterio unas llamadas ‘casitas’ o reducidas celdas donde se retiraban por turno a la oración en soledad (138).

For Teresa and her nuns, hermitages offered spiritual consolation, whether praying for themselves or for others. On many occasions Teresa desired to help those who were either afflicted with illnesses or were tempted to dishonor God. On one occasion, after Fray Alonso Maldonado had recounted his travels to the Indies and informed her of “the many souls that were being lost there for want of Christian instruction [Teresa], grief-stricken over the loss of so many souls...went to a hermitage with many tears” (*F* 1.7). At times, though, Teresa felt overwhelmed by her inability to pray. Then, too, Teresa was drawn to the solace of a hermitage: “Being in such a state, I went to a secluded hermitage (for we have them in this monastery); and

while in the one with the painting of Christ at the pillar,” Teresa implored God to grant her favors (*Life* 39.3).⁴⁵

Teresa took care in deciding where to place hermitages, and she always made sure to take part in their construction and decoration. She liked to situate them on the secluded sides of convents or facing gardens. “Our Lady of Nazareth of the Annunciation... Teresa’s favorite... [was] facing west, where she liked her vistas” (Slade *Progress* 99). In case nuns faced any “aridity” in prayer, Teresa sought to have books, such as “the vernacular edition of St. Gregory’s *Moral* and the *Life of Christ* by the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony” (Slade *Progress* 99), on hand in the hermitage. For Teresa, the seclusion of hermitages was a welcome means of escaping from the distractions of worldly affairs. It was the imposed solitude of hermitages and enclosed gardens that Teresa desired for herself and her nuns, who never tired of “being alone.” It is likely that they felt greater “torment” when they had visitors and that whoever among them had the opportunity to “stay in a hermitage considered herself the luckiest” (*F* 1.6).

Clearly, Teresa knew that hermitages, with a good foundation, provided the necessary space for spiritual retreat and contemplation, similar to the hermitic life of the desert fathers. Teresa was often seen “withdrawing into solitude to pray and read, speaking much about God, [being] fond of having His image painted and put up in many places and of having an oratory and seeking in it the things that promote devotion, not engaging in fault-finding or other things of this sort that have the appearance of virtue” (*Life* 7.2).

⁴⁵ Such frescoes were meant to spur the devotion of nuns as they retreated in hermitages. Frescoes were also a reaffirmation of the “legitimacy and usefulness of religious images” as laid out by the 25th session of the Council of Trent (Woshinsky 41).

Pilgrimage - Teresa in her labyrinthine journey

Teresa's images of enclosure reflect a journey, much like pilgrimage, where the "door of entry into [the interior castle] is prayer and recollection" (*IC* 1:1.7). Abandoning the external world involves a major personal transformation. To convey this idea, Teresa uses a journey metaphor focused on the labyrinth, which serves to show the difficulties of the path to interiority. Because "[t]he life of prayer is experienced as a journey" (Welch 97), journey is one of the most important themes in Teresa's writing. Teresa invites readers to undertake the journey or pilgrimage and guides them through arduous and dangerous paths, employing such architectural metaphors as moats filled with vermin and concentric circles or dwellings, with the soul "going somewhere" (Welch 97). For Teresa, the everyday metaphors of a pilgrimage describe the long, difficult journey towards the ultimate goal – spiritual union.

Olabarrieta, who has examined the influence of Ramon Llull on Santa Teresa, sees that

[t]he symbol of *journey* points adequately to two well-defined ways – the pre-mystical, that is, the ascetical way, and the mystical. Both of them are two stages or phases of the *one* road to the Beloved. The ascetic way is road and key and door to that inner kingdom which Santa Teresa has so adequately termed her *cielito*, and which becomes for the mystic Lover a true heaven on earth...The journeying must go on (metaphorically) until the final goal is attained – transforming union through love (20).

Pilgrimage as a metaphor encapsulates the difficulties of spiritual progression that mystics faced on their journey to reach the final destination, God. This metaphorical pilgrimage described "the progress of man's bodily life from birth to death and of his spiritual life from

earth to heaven” (Webb 154). Travelers on Teresa’s “road to perfection” embodied this pilgrimage as they progressed carefully through the interior mansions of the spiritual castle. Through each mansion or dwelling, the soul “walked,” reflecting “the social impermanence of such a dwelling,” or forever moving on (O’Rourke Boyle *Divine* 239). The goal for Teresa’s pilgrim was always the same – reaching the center, whether it was the center of the interior castle, or the seventh dwelling place, or the succulent center of the palmetto. Like Teresa’s image of the interior castle, with its concentric circles, images of journey all involve a movement similar to that necessary for negotiating labyrinths, which, as Curry explains, are ways “to discover the sacred in everyday life” (8).⁴⁶ “[W]hether in spiritual or secular use, the labyrinth seems to represent a path to be followed, however long and difficult, to reach the center, the object of the journey” (Curry 21).⁴⁷ Although it is uncertain where the tradition of walking in a labyrinth path began, it was common practice for many in ancient and medieval traditions. Floors, with labyrinthine patterns can be seen in many churches, with a prime example in the Cathedrals of Chartres or Amiens in France (Curry 4). Even if people could not physically experience a pilgrimage, walking along the twists and turns of the labyrinth within churches (or sometimes even gardens) allowed them to have the same transformative experience, one where “[t]he spiritual and physical merge into a walking meditation” (Curry 6).

Teresa’s metaphorical pilgrimage draws on the monastic ideal of “a greater perfection of the inner life” (Webb 68). Avoiding theological language, as always, Teresa advises her

⁴⁶ “The opening through which labyrinth walkers begin their journey is called the ‘mouth’ or entrance. The walkway or trail of the labyrinth is the ‘path’ [and] the sides of the path are the ‘walls’ (Curry 30).

⁴⁷ Since labyrinths can be seen as a process of birth and renewal, they became symbols representing pilgrimages during the Middle Ages (Curry 21), when many people desired to go to the Holy Land. However, the dangers of the Crusades kept many from traveling to the Holy Land; and, as a result, “massive cathedrals were designated pilgrimage shrines throughout Europe [and] labyrinths were constructed as part of the pilgrimage” (Curry 31).

daughters not to be frightened on the “divine journey which is the royal road to heaven,” in spite of the many dangers along the way, especially the ones set in place by the devil, because a “great treasure is gained by traveling this road.” The end, she explains, “which is to drink from this water of life,” is “well worth the effort of prayer” (*Way* 21.2, 5).

The pilgrimage to the center of the castle is not easy at first, when, Teresa explains, individuals are “weighed down with this mud of our human misery, which is not so with those who ascend to the remaining rooms” (*IC* 3:2.9). To move through every dwelling place, these pilgrims have to combat serpents and devils, the dark evils, such as the individual’s shortcomings and faults, that lurk in the environs of the castle.⁴⁸ Teresa likens these battles to spiritual warfare of the Second Mansions, where the evils represent the worldly things of life that only feed distractions and ultimately prevent individuals from praying. Teresa knew that this would be no easy feat for individuals so preoccupied with external affairs and “so used to dealing always with the insects and vermin that are in the wall surrounding the castle that they [souls] have become almost like them” (*IC* 1.6). Having noticed their lack of prayer, she chides them:

What is this, Christians, that you say mental prayer isn’t necessary? Do you understand yourselves? Indeed, I don’t think you do, and so you desire that we all be misled. You don’t know what mental prayer is, or how vocal prayer should be recited, or what contemplation is, for if you did you wouldn’t on the one hand condemn with what the other hand you praise (*Way* 22.2, 3).

⁴⁸ As Ricardo Arias writes, “El camino está erizado de peligros: bifurcaciones, encrucijadas. La primera decisión entre del bien y del mal no basta, pues los enemigos del hombre tratarán de apartarlo del buen camino...El peregrinar físico es a veces símbolo y medio del progreso hacia Dios” (150).

Mental prayer, like the pilgrims' journey through the labyrinth, was a solitary practice. Teresa saw both as ways for individuals to be liberated from the everyday burdens of life. As Curry explains:

The solitary experience of the lone pilgrim walking the labyrinth, in an allegory of the religious life, could also [like mental prayer] be seen as an invitation to a direct experience of the divine. Many religious leaders distrusted such experiences, believing that it was necessary to have mediators— the priests— between the worshipper and the sacred. They did not believe that individuals were able to truly discover, encounter, and comprehend Truth on their own (33).

This is why Teresa had to be so careful when writing about theological matters. It explains why, drawing on her “ignorance” as a woman, she belittled herself by stating that she did not know terms used in “mystical theology.” Through this rhetorical sleight of hand she was able to craft her language to talk about mental prayer and thereby facilitate others to experience God (Weber 38-39).

Architectural imagery plays an important role in Teresa's writing. Whether mirroring the opulent castles that dotted the countryside as a reminder of Spain's past, from the romance literature that was popular in Spain, or reflecting the Biblical Solomon's Temple, Teresa finds a most intricate symbol in the castle. For Teresa, the beauty of the castle, which is the soul, “is centered in the rough setting of the diamond, and in the outer wall of the castle - that is to say, in these bodies of ours” (*IC* 1:1.1). Through the metaphor of the castle Teresa guides the reader through the process of interiorization. She shows that the journey inward is not easily undertaken, as the soul needs to travel through a spherical castle, with dwellings situated “some above, others below, others at each side,” to the most center mansion or dwelling, “where the

most secret things pass between God and the soul” (*IC* 1:13). Prayer, the main door, does not always guarantee an individual’s entry into the castle, but it is the first step of the soul’s journey through the seven mansions, to the innermost center where the “spiritual marriage is consummated...and [the] room where He dwells alone” (*IC* 7:1.5). That inner mansion, elucidates Teresa, is not “restricted to a corner but into an interior world where there is room for so many and such attractive dwelling places...since within it there is a dwelling place for God” (*IC* 7:1.5). In order to appeal to common individuals, ones who had never entered a castle, Teresa was able to make her experiences understandable through metaphor based on a concrete reality with which all of her readers were familiar. For mystics, the use of metaphor was, as Hamburger expresses, “a matter of religious necessity to express what would otherwise remain inexpressible” (“Rothschild” 278).

Nuns were not immune to the temptations and scandals of the secular world, even after withdrawing to conventual life. With the zeal of a committed reformer and with a limited number of nuns, Teresa set out to establish convents designed to allow the cultivation of a spiritual life that embraced the ideals of the Discalced Carmelites. She took care to see that the very arrangement of her convents would communicate these ideals and did so by creating a space akin to the eremitic world, to separate the nuns from their worldly ties. Besides the renunciation of worldly goods, Teresa insisted on detachment from the exterior world because she knew well how ties with relatives, familial expectations, and even idle chatter could be a harmful distraction and an external threat to the contemplative life. Teresa’s convents, with emphasis on enclosure, were meant to foster spirituality, which is why Teresa took charge of decorating convent interiors, so as to ensure the simplest kind of spiritual life. Convent parlors, *locutorios*, grilles, high walls, and hermitages, were meant to provide a physical barrier to the outside, since, as

Kavanaugh notes, this “architecture of the times manifests a fondness for protective constructions” (*CWST* Vol. 3, 26); it also reflects the spiritual journey of individuals as they retreat inwardly. Through her imagery, Teresa “traces the advances and backsliding of the soul as it navigates its way through the world towards holy ground” (Woshinsky 62). As the soul “divorces” itself from the outside world, it finds itself lost spiritually, whether in the labyrinth, the castle which guards against the sins and temptations of the world, or just retreating into the convent, hermitage, or dovecot, where “paradoxically, physical imprisonment brings spiritual liberation” (Woshinsky 66). In sum, Teresa’s architectural metaphors symbolize withdrawal from worldly life and moving inward spiritually via interior prayer or recollection, on the way to union with God.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The purpose of my dissertation was to explore the images used by Teresa in her writing - not only those taken from literary sources, but also those at her disposal in everyday life - and to show how these images became vehicles for expressing her mental prayer and her experiences as a mystic. A prolific writer, Teresa's images and metaphors provide insight about early modern Spain. As a woman, a *converso*, and a nun in sixteenth-century Spain, Teresa carefully chose her images to show the process of interiority, or recollection, that she had learned from reading Osuna's *Third Spiritual Alphabet* (1537). Following Osuna's method of prayer though, presented a radically untraditional way of prayer – one without the help of confessors or the rituals of the church, and one which sought out a more direct experience with God. Practicing mental prayer meant going against the established Catholic Church, whose dependence on confessors, rites, rituals, and vocal prayer was in essence its faith. To turn to a world of mental prayer entailed mirroring the beliefs of the *alumbrados*, who sought a direct discourse with God without the ecclesiastical ceremonies or dogma. This type of prayer also appealed to many *conversos* because they thought that interior prayer was a way to pray safely within the confines of their homes. In the eyes of the Inquisition, though, the *alumbrados*, as well as the *conversos*, presented threats to Catholic orthodoxy, which readily persecuted both groups. Asked to write about prayer, Teresa, obedient as she was, took on the challenge. However, in her explanations, she intentionally fills her pages with a homey language, woman-speak, chatty talk. Using this humble, deprecatory language, she explains simply to her nuns how to experience mental prayer. As a result of the fact that she is constantly seeking the right way to express the process of

interiority, her language abounds in images and metaphors. Teresa did not have to search far for her images – they were in the world around her, in her everyday world of nature, merchants and markets, jewels, the hearth, and architecture. Eschewing the dry theological language that was often incomprehensible to unlearned individuals, she favored language that all could understand. Teresa’s use of the familiar is her way of demonstrating how we truly find God in all things.

Teresa of Ávila’s mystical writing is arguably unparalleled in terms of its rich symbolism. In their effort to express their experiences with the divine, mystics have traditionally relied on imagery and symbols, as this was their only means to express the ineffable nature of their mystical experiences. “What gives the metaphor of God its enduring meaning is the very fact that it is rooted in something that is experienced as unconditionally real” (De Conick 34). Teresa writes about her own spiritual journey, especially in her masterpiece, *Interior Castle*, which shows the soul’s inward progression through mansions or dwellings to the true mystical union with God.

Teresa was a simple woman, *una mujercilla*, with the strength to take on the patriarchal hierarchy in order to establish her reforms and to explain mental prayer. Confident in every step of her journey, Teresa gave women the courage to pray. In the sixteenth-century patriarchal society she proved to women that, contrary to prevailing opinion, they were not “hollow inside,” but rather had strength. She did this by facing down a raft of male antifeminist sentiments: “it’s harmful to virtue,” “it’s not for women, for they will be susceptible to illusions,” “it’s better they stick to their sewing,” “they don’t need these delicacies,” “the Our Father and the Hail Mary are sufficient” (*Way* 21.2). Without rejecting the value of vocal prayer, she armed her nuns and women with the power to understand mental prayer or recollection. As a daughter of the church, she knew her duty as a nun. However, she also knew that if “anyone [should] tell you that prayer

is dangerous, consider him the real danger and run from him” (*Way* 21.7). Whatever Teresa said, she said carefully. Avoiding and even apologizing for not knowing what “mystical theology” was, she used circumlocutions to write about mental prayer. As Slade explains, “whenever Teresa wants to bring her reader back to earth, she uses homely comparisons and though these must have served (as critics often theorize) to remind her erudite readers of her humble – that is, nonthreatening – female identity, they also got her point across as swiftly and unambiguously as possible” (54). By extension, they may also have served to redirect the Inquisition’s eye away from her by masking her *converso* identity.

In Chapter One, Teresa engages readers with images of the natural world to unlock the “spiritual treasures” of the Bible. Natural history texts that rivaled devotional and chivalric ones in popularity could plausibly have influenced Teresa’s writing. Everything from the natural world – stars, planets, trees, metals, gemstones, and especially animals -- linked the natural world with the spiritual. During the early modern period Spain relied heavily on its agricultural world for subsistence. For peasants, the understanding of the nature and the world around them was essential. The aridity of much of the land in Spain, its lack of rainfall, and the importance of irrigation for the driest of regions were the source of images that common people could understand. Teresa, who describes the spells of difficulty in prayer that she experienced as aridity, translates water imagery (drawing water from a well, using the waterwheel or *noria*, irrigating from basins, relying on aqueducts, or anticipating God’s rain), into images of the stages of prayer. Like the symbolic Four Waters that explain the stages of prayer, the metaphorical garden also provides a way for Teresa to communicate her message about prayer. She assigns a role for the weeds: they are (like the *sabandijas* that surround the moat of the interior castle) the sins, human frailties, and worldly distractions, which must first be removed

before planting and irrigating any garden. For Teresa, the garden is the soul and the gardener is God. Still other natural images in the garden, from the silkworm to the glorious butterfly, from the lowly ant to the hedgehog that recoils, or the eagle that soars, are among Teresa's didactic representations. Even the industrious little bee serves a purpose in Teresa's garden. From its dynamic quality to its industriousness and humility, the bee entering the beehive becomes another image of interiority. Everything in nature delights Teresa, for everything in God's creation elucidates spiritual truth; but it is in the solitude of the garden where she can recollect.

Chapter Two establishes Teresa's remarkable business acumen, perhaps inherited or absorbed from the silk and wool business operated by her father and grandfather. Her tasks of establishing convents exposed her to buying property, handling business transactions, securing collateral, and funding every aspect of convent life, including even the details of decorating. The cloth that she selected for her nuns' habits represented an economic choice because it was durable and meant to last. From a spiritual perspective, these coarse wool habits symbolized the renunciation of worldly goods. In addition, they were meant to visually distinguish the Unmitigated Carmelite nuns from other orders.

Money was key to Teresa's success, not only as a careful manager, but also as a spiritual leader. As Mujica asserts, money was a constant focus for Teresa because it played an important part in Teresa's life, not only for personal gain, but also while working to establish her convents and spread her reform. Nuns' dowries, which included money, along with furnishings, blankets, and other goods, were essential for many convents in early modern period. Money was needed to buy and sustain convents.

Teresa, whose vows included poverty, knew that importance of maintaining the correct aristocratic contacts throughout her life. With such contacts as Doña Luisa de Cerda and the

Duchess of Alba, Teresa was exposed to the jewels and precious stones in which the aristocracy indulged, as explained in Chapter Three. Teresa, who was attracted to the niceties of life early on, knew the value of jewels and precious stones. As a nun, however, she “profited” from her exposure to them, not in the material sense, but rather in the spiritual. The carats of diamonds, the luster of jewels, the splendor of enamels, and the brilliance of gold became synonymous with spiritual wealth. Everyone from the monarchy to aristocrats and the commoners knew the value of such precious commodities, mainly because during the early modern period, Spain basked in wealth. Exploration of the New World, the trading of fine wool and silk, imperial expansion, and most of all, the bullion brought from the New World, filled the monarchy’s coffers. Many aristocrats and artisans reaped the benefit of the luxurious life, demanding more gold and precious jewels for their lavish and ostentatious lifestyles. The best enamellers were to be found in cities like Toledo, goldsmiths and silversmiths in Seville or Barcelona, all cities that Teresa had travelled to during her lifetime. The Christian mystic Teresa drew on her first-hand acquaintance with these rich objects of the material world to explain her spirituality: the carats of diamonds, the enamel and precious inlays, and the gold and precious stones that make up the elaborate and costly palace described by Teresa, all come to signify the worth of spiritual experience

Chapter Four develops perhaps Teresa’s most favorite place – the hearth, the *domus*, the feminine space of the kitchen, which is the source for her most famous quote on finding God among the pots and pans. Teresa’s domestic world was her “safe haven,” where she could safely display the kind of virtuous and industrious nature that was expected of sixteenth-century women. Within the confines of the hearth, she strengthens her role as a frail *mujercilla*, and through her “chatty woman’s talk,” converses about domestic and womanly activities. Weaving

cloth, spinning wool, working in the kitchen making sweets, or even preparing medicinal herbs, were some of the activities that were meant to keep women industrious and away from the frivolities of life. Like many of the female ascetics, Teresa saw fasting as an important part of the monastic life. As Bynum notes, both feeding and fasting were “*lived metaphors*” for these female ascetics (*Holy Feast* 165). Teresa, who defined the rules on fasting in her *Constitutions*, strongly recommended fasts, but because she paid such careful attention to the physical well-being of her nuns, she did caution that food deprivation drained the nuns of energy, something that was crucial in prayer. Bread, a mainstay of Spanish life, was important not only in satisfying physical hunger, but also in satisfying the spiritual hunger, through Communion. In the Eucharist, consecrated wine is a remembrance of Jesus’s death. In daily life, wine was an important staple in Spain’s early modern economy. In religious texts, both in the Bible and in mystical writing, wine became an image of transformation and fortitude. Wine provides the fortification for the soul, much like food provides for the strengthening the physical body and soul. The metaphoric soul becomes “inebriated” in the wine cellars, where mystical union occurs. Another item in Teresa’s kitchen, salt, also finds its way into Teresa’s writing. Both an important staple in early modern Spain and a frequent symbol in the Bible, it has numerous metaphorical uses in Teresa’s works. Sweetness permeates Teresa’s writing – not only to show the exchange of gifts of fruits and jams that nuns sent to each other, whether in gratitude or out of necessity, but also to show God’s “sweet” companionship. God’s voice and love are “sweet,” entering the wine cellar brings a “sweet intoxication” to the Bride, and even the arrow of God that pierced Teresa’s side in the transverberation was filled with a paradoxical “sweet pain.” Sweetness saturates the mystical writings of Teresa, much like her predecessors’, and this “sense

of taste...traditionally considered 'feminine,' especially when used emblematically or metaphorically" (Mazzoni 49), safely guides Teresa to God's presence.

Teresa's *domus* was the convent, where she practiced these activities and found time to dedicate to her epistolary writing, an activity in which women often participated. Her letters intensified the chatty "woman's" language that she used in her other books. They draw on images from the domestic realm, images that become as palatable as the sweet fruit on a plate. Through images of the hearth, Teresa shows Inquisitors and *letrados* that, by performing the womanly duties as previously outlined by humanists, she was not, in any way, teaching about theological matters. Teresa's "sweet" feminine language was her strongest tool to express her mystical experiences. It was understandable to women while at the same time following the directives of the humanists – staying within the enclosure of the convent and doing "womanly" duties, whereas all along, she was carving out a niche for mental prayer.

Chapter Five outlines the architectural images that stand at the forefront of her writing and draw the soul inward. Her most important architectural image is the castle, one reminiscent of the castles built in Spain, with their high walls, towers, and moats. Much research has been devoted to attempts to find the source for the castle imagery so common in spiritual literature. Perhaps we will never know for sure whether it was Sufi castle imagery as López-Baralt claims, the Biblical references to Solomon's temple as seen in Teresa's references, the *Zohar*, according to Swietlicki, or actual fortified buildings. In Spain, castles were mortar and stone edifices reminiscent of Spain's past. In real life as well as in chivalric literature, castles were meant to protect people from their evil enemies. In Teresa's imaginative world a castle embellished with precious stones, diamonds, and crystal, is the locus of an all-important journey. The point of entry, the gate, is prayer. Perhaps mesmerized by the chivalric novels she had read or even by

Solomon's castle that she most likely had heard about in sermons, Teresa transforms the typical mortar and stone edifice into a metaphorical castle where individuals could pray hard, through each of many concentric circles to reach God – a journey well worth undertaking. The physical barriers of the convent, the parlors, grilles, and *locutorios*, along with such associated areas as gardens, dovecots, and hermitages, were meant to separate the material world from the secular one and thereby to foster the solitude necessary for recollection. Labyrinthine paths, often found in churches and even gardens, represented for Teresa another “allegory of the religious life” (Curry 33). By walking alone through a labyrinth, just as by taking the solitary interior journey through her castle, individuals could have a transformative experience.

Fundamental to Teresa's writing are the images and metaphors of the everyday that provide a window into the daily life of sixteenth-century Spain. Metaphors dating back to the Bible were commonly used not only to communicate ideas, but also “to bind communities together” (Carswell 3). As in the writing of many mystics, metaphors in Teresa's writing became the language of everyday life, the social, cultural and economic milieu, while at the same time becoming a conduit between the sacred and the profane. “Human life is described as a mere puff of wind, dust and wild flowers, God's opponents are smoke, wax, thistle-down, and chaff while God is described as a stronghold for the oppressed, a rock, shield, fortress, light and shepherd” (Carswell 3). Although claiming that she is an ignorant *mujercilla*, Teresa obviously planned her writing with care. She often insists that she has to write hurriedly and does not have the time to review what she has written because of her many preoccupations. However, in spite of always concealing her intentions, she has masterfully accomplished her goal - to explain recollection. The heaping of images, the closing off of all external distraction, the drawing

inward in preparation for union with God – all this indisputably takes individuals upward to meet God.

Throughout this dissertation, I have looked into the imagery that is found in Teresa's writing. This ranges from the transformation of the lowly worm to the white butterfly, to the cultivation and watering of gardens, the recoiling of the hedgehog, the peeling of the many layers of the simple palmetto fruit to reach the succulent center, the combating of evil forces found in the castle environs, to the embarking on a spiritual journey through the concentric circles of the interior castle; in every case Teresa has found the most appropriate images necessary for teaching individuals about interiority and about the ineffability of God.

The language of the Bible, which contained sometimes obscure messages that allowed for many different interpretations, was accessible and understandable to the *letrados* or the learned of sixteenth-century society. The common individual, on the other hand, who was limited in education, could not easily understand or interpret this language. For them, images assumed a great importance because it allowed them to come closer to understanding the greatness of God or the importance of prayer. This is why Teresa, even when drawing on sources from the Scriptures, chose to give form and structure to her mystical experience through her imagery. Ordered by her (male) superiors to write about her experiences, Teresa had to tread carefully when expressing mystical experiences because she was a "mujercilla" and not a theologian. Teresa was a visionary, a feminist, and a daughter of the Church on a mission – to advance her reform, teach individuals about recollection and mental prayer, and guardedly explain her mystical experiences. In the process, Teresa found that by drawing on simple everyday imagery that sixteenth-century commoners could understand, she could make her case in point.

Everyday objects are interspersed throughout Teresa's writing, almost with the dizzying effect that is characteristic of the baroque period. As Dupré explains, "despite tensions, [social as well as religious] and inconsistencies, a comprehensive spiritual vision united Baroque culture" (*Modernity* 237). Like baroque artists who aspire to "an open-ended, dynamic representation" (Dupré *Modernity* 239), Teresa creates images, "mediating bodies." Her images "avoid...direct presentation of the divine. Instead, [she] symbolizes it through a cascade of earthly meditations" of everyday images (Dupré *Modernity* 239), and "without sacrificing truth[s], shows...imageless thoughts by means of images" (Hamburger "Rothschild" 529).

Teresa's fundamental challenge is how to safely show the importance of mental prayer, the inward preparation or recollection that she had read about in Osuna's *Third Spiritual Alphabet*. Recollection or inward centering draws on apophatism, the emptying of the mind in order to know God. Predictably, at some point in the process of recollection, "the effectiveness of language breaks down, and one must step outside of language" (Cleveland 2). We must keep in mind that the *letrados*, or the learned of Teresa's world, were presumably the only ones who were able to talk *about* God. However, Teresa safely obscures her "God-talk" – she speaks "about God [through] metaphors and analogies [of the everyday world]" to communicate God's nature (Cleveland 2). As we see in Turner's *Darkness of God*,

The cataphatic is, we might say, the verbose element in theology, it is the Christian mind deploying all the resources of language in the effort to express something about God, and in that straining to speak, theology uses as many voices as it can. It is the cataphatic in theology which causes its metaphor-ridden character, causes it to borrow vocabularies by analogy from many other discourses, whether of science, literature, art, sex, politics...or whatever. It is its cataphatic tendencies which account for the sheer *heaviness* of

theological language, its character of being linguistically *overburdened*...For in its cataphatic mode, theology is, we might say, a kind of verbal riot, an anarchy of discourse in which anything goes (20).

The apophatic and the cataphatic approaches in theology go hand in hand for Teresa.

Apophaticism is, as Mujica notes, “introspection and stillness” (“Apophatic” 642), and the ultimate goal of apophatic (or negative) spirituality “is to move beyond language to mystical experience: the ecstatic union with the Divine” (Cleveland 6). Teresa’s “amassment of disparate metaphors” is the way Teresa is able to “express the inexpressible” and safely teach her sisters about mental prayer (Mujica “Apophatic”741), thus safely reconciling the tension between the two.

Teresa, the so-called *mujercilla*, proved that she was more than a weak and ignorant woman, as she so often professed. She was a powerful woman who transformed her religious order and encouraged her audience of nuns to pursue spiritual perfection through prayer. She was also a notable writer, whose readers included not only her nuns, but also wrote a male audience. By way of her “woman-speak” language, she proved that she was truly a daughter of the Church, through her profound understanding of the very same mystical theology she professed she did not understand, and that she was, by all Church standards, worthy of being called Saint Teresa of Ávila.

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