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Marcela de San Félix's Mystic Theology through Drama: Platonic and Augustinian "Influences"

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Resumo: Este projeto é centralmente um estudo sobre os textos dramáticos trinitários espanhóis de Marcela de San Félix, séc. XVII. O estudo sugere significativos pomtos de contato entre esses textos e *O Banquete* de Platão e o *De Trinitate* de Agostinho.
Palavras Chave: Agostinho, Marcela de San Félix, misticismo, *De Trinitate*, Platão, *Banquete*.

Abstract: This project is most centrally a study of seventeenth-century Spanish Trinitarian Marcela de San Félix's dramatic texts. It suggests significant points of contact between these texts and Plato's *Symposium* and Augustine's *On the Trinity* to show how literary, noetic and in the case of Augustine, doctrinal commonalities shed light on Marcela's plays and allow for deeper consideration of a key question: to what extent and by what definition the Trinitarian nun might be regarded a literary mystic and theologian. As per the two leading themes of the volume, the paper presents mystic practice and expression as a fundamentally noetic project related to human striving or "being," and suggests that like in the *Symposium* teaching and learning are fundamental textual examples of Marcela's articulation of real-world application of the contemplative life.
Keywords: Augustine, Marcela de San Félix, mysticism, *On the Trinity*, Plato, *Symposium*.

Introduction:

In one of her longer spiritual colloquies, *Muerte del apetito*, seventeenth-century Spanish nun Marcela de San Félix dramatically presents a soul, *Alma*, in the first faltering stages of desiring her divine Beloved. Viewing spiritual sisters look on as allegorized virtues, played by nun actresses, assist an initially skittish *Alma* on her way, thus participating in the journey of the Soul toward mystically imbued union with the Christian Godhead. At one point in this first play in an arguable series, *Desnudez*, a virtue who at once symbolizes a complete stripping away of the earthly self before God and insinuates the "physical" nudity of erotic mystical union,[2] is dialoguing with another virtue, *Mortificación*. The convent audience witnesses the following, as Marcela highlights the presence of doctrine in this context:

> DESN. Mi condición es afable
> para los que me conocen
> y aborrecen este mundo
> con todas sus pretensiones,
> pareceres y opiniones,
> y a Dios buscan solamente,
> sin apego o interés.
> ALMA Muy difícil pienso que es.
> DESN. Sí, pero todo se puede
> en Aquél que nos conforta.
> MORT. Desnudez, ¿por qué andas corta
> en decir a lo que vienes?
> Paréceme que previenes

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[2]This is in juxtaposition with the self-centered and thus sinful nudity encouraged by the play's antagonist, *Apetito*.

mucha doctrina y estrecha.
DESN. Siempre la traigo hecha,
no tengo que prevenir. (l. 781-96)

In light of their setting and especially given the complex symbolic significance of *Desnudez*, one implication of these lines might be that neither ascetic practice/mystical union nor the successful spiritual seeking that must preface it manifest themselves aside from doctrine, or even perhaps that their exercise is somehow facilitated by doctrinal wisdom. Indeed, the plays on study here, written by post-Tridentine Spanish nun San Félix (1605-1687) at an unknown point in her cloistered life,[3] show that the intelligent and educated Trinitarian was intuitively doctrinaire, and perhaps unusually so.[4] She was at least familiar with Saint Augustine of Hippo,[5] whose fourth-century defense of the Trinity in answer to heresy in such works as *Confessions* and *On the Trinity* also provided seminal advances in the understanding of this notoriously difficult doctrine for the Christian Church. As I will argue and hope to demonstrate, a particularly Augustinian perception of the Trinity manifests itself in Marcela's plays, and may contribute to how we might understand her mystical tendencies. Of course, the particular connection between Augustine and Marcela de San Félix that I suggest begins to shed some light on the title of this article. To further illustrate the connections between the main figures of this study, Augustine was a theologian and mystic whose doctrinal and mystical philosophies were, by anyone's estimation, decidedly Neoplatonist[6] in some important ways. However, this is but one very general reason why we can defend a presentation of

[3] As Electa Arenal and Georgina Sabat–Rivers note in their groundbreaking anthology of Marcela's works, *Literatura Conventual Femenina: Sor Marcela de san Félix, hija de Lope de Vega*. *Obra completa*, "no sabemos ni cómo ni cómo empezó a escribir poesía Marcela" (16). Her conventual production is likewise largely undated, although one play attributed to her notes the year 1653, or when Marcela was in her late forties. Given the literary quality and spiritual and doctrinal maturity that Marcela demonstrates in the *coloquios*, it is likely that they were also written when she was more mature.

[4] As to the doctrinal emphases in Marcela's work, thinking varies, and has perhaps evolved from the seminal studies onwards. By way of example, one initial study suggests that the nun's dramas offer "un mínimo de doctrina cristiana básica que era la que convenía a un grupo de mujeres de variado nivel de instrucción cuya meta era practicar las virtudes" (Sabat de Rivers "Literatura manuscrita," 448-49) while more recent scholarship sees "complex theological themes" and "major and minor facets of Catholic dogma and Christian doctrine" (Arenal 237) in the nun's poems. Perhaps both ideas are true: nuns with lesser capacities or intellectual opportunities might come away with sound enticements for moral behavior, while others could see how the fundamental theological concepts motivate the drama and, as I will argue, in the final analysis diminished the value of virtuous behavior for itself. Perhaps the plays even instructed women forward on such a continuum; as Alison Weber has convincingly argued in various more recent studies, academic skills such as reading and writing could be and were acquired or improved in the convent (see, for example, "Introduction to María de San José Salazar [1548-1603]," pages 9-13). The same could potentially hold true for doctrinal acuity.

[5] As Electa Arenal memorably argues in the case of certain of the nun's famous father's poems: "Whether Marcela read them then, later, or never, these and other religious writings by [Lope de Vega nevertheless] weave an authentic tapestry of the religious culture that nurtured her" (241). Certainly the same can be said of the general doctrinal culture in which Marcela participated, which took much of its Trinitarian thinking from Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, among others.

[6] And perhaps problematically so. In his excellent article on the ontological, "social" and economic nature of the Trinity, theologian Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., argues that through Neolatonism, "simplicity doctrine" enters Augustine's dogma, which intimates an understanding of the persons of the Trinity that needs to be "confessionally tightened up." The ambiguities that Augustine presents in *On the Trinity* (for example) on the issue Plantinga addresses—he says, "I do not myself believe that Augustine was content with affirming one generic divine essence and one Trinity; I believe what he says in effect also affirms that *there is only one person*" ("Social Trinity" 38, emphasis mine)—have of course since been tightened. The extent to which Augustine's thinking on the Trinity is less than crystal clear by today's Christian ecumenical standards has indirect bearing on the present project in ways that will be developed further along.

some aspects of Plato's *Symposium* in a study of a post-Tridentine Spanish nun. More concretely, what I hope to show is that the Greek dialogue shares striking and meaningful similarities with the Spanish plays. These points of contact and comparison in turn make way for the discussion of and expansion on several relevant and interrelated topics, most centrally an analysis of Marcela's plays from the perspective of her doctrinal emphases and possible status as a (literary) mystic. So, we begin with the *Symposium* and its *eros*-guided and -infused dialogue, emphasizing points that the work shares with those of the Trinitarian nun. Then, we move into a consideration of the nature of specifically Christian *eros* (*agape*/*caritas*) and its relationship to Christian mysticism. From there, we review Augustine as a Trinitarian theologian and mystic practitioner/philosopher and suggest his possible "influence" on Marcela in these regards. Finally, we consider Marcela and her plays in the light of a few salient points taken from Plato and Augustine, both to analyze the dramatic texts from this nuanced perspective and to orient ourselves toward a few important questions as concerns Marcela's somewhat debated status as a mystic: Was Marcela more of a mystic than she has traditionally been credited as? Rather than merely relying on those definitions of mysticism contemporaneous of Marcela, can we consider recent discussions of what mysticism is to help us answer this question more meaningfully? And related to that, is such an apparently "decontextualized" mode of inquiry legitimate, and if so, how does this relate to the question of Marcela's potential status?

Plato's *Symposium*

Some might question a project that forwards understanding a seventeenth-century Catholic cloistered Spanish nun through a Greek philosopher whose work she very likely never accessed directly. Of course, the most obvious point of contact, the complex issue of Plato's influence on Christian mysticism, has been much studied. Beyond this, among others of Plato's dialogues (*Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*), the *Symposium* centrally considers the noetic journey of the soul towards some sort of union with divine principles—indistinguishably beauty, the good—or knowledge, fueled by *eros*-provoked desire. We will see further on that this journey and its components—the noetic element, a desiring subject or soul, the importance of *eros*, and so forth—operate centrally in Marcela as well, in her Trinitarian "ascetic-mystical" (Arenal 247)[7] context. The importance of the noetic aspect itself bears further initial reflection, though, as we consider both the general connections between the *Symposium* and san Félix's mystically-imbued-journey plays *and* a defense of their comparison. The website for the Institute of Noetic Sciences reminds us that "for centuries, philosophers from Plato forward have used the term *noetic* to refer to experiences that pioneering psychologist William James (1902) described as: '…states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority.'" ([qtd. in] "What are" n.p.). The site goes on to explain what this statement implies, namely that human (individual) consciousness, or psyche, brings as much to bear on existence *per se* as do perceived existential "realities" traditionally defined, [8] whether immaterial or material.

[7]Arenal uses this term, both creatively and accurately I believe, to denote the difficulty of categorizing the exact nature of pieces in Marcela's literary *corpus* that refer to contemplative spiritual practices. This ambiguity, of course, extends to the nun herself.

[8] As is to be expected, the website focuses on the material or "scientific" aspect: "From a purely materialist, mechanistic perspective, all subjective—noetic—experience arises from physical matter, and consciousness is simply a byproduct of brain and body processes. But there is another perspective, suggesting a far more complex relationship between the physical and the [noetic]. The noetic sciences apply a scientific lens to the study of subjective experience and to ways that consciousness may influence the physical world…" (n.p.). The present project further assumes that non-material phenomena which are

This consideration has many implications, but one important one for this context is this: it is arguably not necessary for Marcela to have read the *Symposium* to have come up with the same or similar "states of insight into depths of truth" as did Plato, and to express them in a similarly appropriate literary context. One "influence," then, could be a reading of Plato, which she most likely did not enjoy. Another could be Marcela's particular meeting of, and similar reading of, or intuition about, a given metaphysical "reality." Indeed, similarly to Plato's dialogues, her dramatic pieces reveal the process of the development of the psyche suggested by the what is arguably (as with the *Symposium*) the works' main theme: noetic activity itself—its nature, its human subject and the discoveries that subject makes as it recognizes within itself and follows the desires that motivate it: the thing or things that the subject most loves.[9] We turn first, however, to the Greek "play."

The *Symposium*, we recall, is a dialogue (within a dialogue) that clarifies what love is in a "communal" fashion; all participants contribute, both constructively and distractingly, to the "best" definition thereof, the definition which ultimately presents a framework for other worthy loves. This best love is—as per Diotima through Socrates (and, ultimately, one might suppose, Plato himself[10])— divinely inspired knowing. Unveiling this truth, Diotima concurrently suggests what noesis-touched things are worth desiring as love's object(s), and beyond that, how they are to be loved with Love's[11] help and to what end: "The person who studies beautiful things correctly and in their proper order, and who then comes to the final stage of the activities of love, will suddenly see something astonishing that is beautiful in its nature" (210c). According to the quote, however, to assume that conclusion or final achievement is all there is to it is to miss the point of the main theme: noetic *activity*, not summative assessment thereof. The participants in the dialogue, dinner-party guests of different ages and professions, demonstrate this theme by their very act of participation in the debating. Although some scholarship seems to emphasize that the successive dialogues are error-prone attempts at truth that must ultimately be discarded and supplanted by Socrates/Diotima's truth,[12] most stress that this partially true assessment might be assigned a caveat by those who understand both the role that discourse plays in the dialogue and the ultimately valid position that every man holds therein by virtue of his very participation: each individual reveals the condition of his psyche—with its "respective capacities and susceptibilities" (Reeve n.p.)—and the

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considered "real" are equally shaped by the individual consciousness, or subjective experience. Thus, we focus here on the non-material (or philosophical/psycho-spiritual) aspect *of "reality," as it meets the individual consciousness*.

[9] To this extent, "noetic" has also been described as inner wisdom, direct knowing, and subjective understanding, all helpful phrases which define the noetic as the inextricable link between what we know on the one hand, and our individual inner processes and principle desires on the other.

[10] I understand this point to be debatable. Some philosophers seem to attribute the whole line of thinking (or noetizing?) present in the *Symposium* to the philosopher himself as a demonstration of his theory of the Forms, while others, perhaps taking the literary form of the piece more into the question, are less conclusive.

[11] Except where indicated, I use William S. Cobb's translation of the *Symposium* (and the *Phaedrus*). Cobb distinguishes between *eros* the god and *eros* the mediating drive with capital and lower-case consonants (Love/love), respectively. I will follow this pattern when referencing Cobb's work, and similarly respect the choices of other scholars in terms of representation of the Greek word. I will make my own uses of "*eros*" clear as we go along.

[12] It appears that rather stagnant impressions of greater and greater approximation to a "correct answer" have long since been abandoned in traditional scholarship, although maybe vestiges remain in (for example) SparkNotes' statement: "The dialogue's structure mirrors the progression Diotima describes of pursuing beauty in increasingly refined and generalized forms. Each speech in the dialogue takes us a step closer to understanding the true nature of love" (n.p.). (Of course, this generalization is likely a simplification designed to help college students with the text; nevertheless, if we consult the *Symposium* itself, we might instead be tempted to refrain from contributing easy, linear answers to the young!)

desires that give form and direction to his motives and actions when he speaks. Here, a couple of examples from the dialogue will have to suffice: Taking his turn, Pausanias, reveals that *eros* is both earthly and heavenly, positive and negative, disorienting and orderly:[13] "So, loving and Love are not in every case noble and deserving of praise, but the loving that points us in a noble direction is" (181a). Aside from that presumably correct distinction, Pausanias offers the key connection of Love to the virtues. But the speech is marked by unhelpful digressions. Eryximachus, in turn, beneficially mentions that love governs things other than human subjects with statements such as, "Not only does [Love] arise in human souls in response to beautiful people and many other things as well, but he also exists in other things, in the bodies of all animals and even the plants that grow in the ground" (186a), and follows up on Pausanias' idea that *eros* can be both constructive and destructive, distinguishing the bad from "the Love that brings about good with judiciousness …" (188d). Nonetheless, this medical doctor potentially misses out on the opportunity to further true dialogue. The self-referential blowhard gestures that pock his contribution do not consider the participation of others in what he is saying and thus arguably provide examples of limiting the good to the "a single body" (of knowledge, here) (210b) instead of the general: "The master physician is the person who can distinguish the noble and the shameful Loves in these cases …" (186c-d). For his part, Agathon, who gives a rather canned and lifeless "performance," later redeems himself somewhat. He establishes, in dialogue (what else?) with Socrates, a key aspect of desire: love wants *something* in particular, a something that the lover does not currently have (200a-b).

These examples illustrate not only the nature and goal of the project at hand and the role of each participant in it, but they make clear the (literary) suitability of the dialogue form for the ultimately praxis-oriented message. As we previously recalled, the *Symposium* is from beginning to end a "dialogue within a dialogue," that at the same time depends upon the contributions of absent parties, such as Diotima. As we have seen, Socrates/Diotima's more conclusive statements to a certain extent "depend on" those that have gone before. One of many reasons for this initial and continued narrative layering is arguably to highlight the entire dialogue as a series of (love) stories, or *logoi*. As C. D. C. Reeve recognizes, the story aspect is one thing that leads us to understand that the speeches are not just "cool bits of theorizing," (n.p.), but vital activity; the stories must, in the final analysis, be "coherently *livable*" (n.p., emphasis mine). The noetic project at the dinner party itself helps clarify which stories are likely to be livable and which ones aren't, again, bearing in mind the capacities and highest desires of the individual "noetizers." Beyond the story-(personal) history connection, we are also reminded through a dialogue format that stories are vitally didactic and directed toward life growth, since they assume not just concrete knowledge, but narrative trajectory. As we see in the *Phaedrus*: "the student must observe these things as they are in real life, and actually being put into practice, and be able to follow them with keen perception" (271 d-e) (qtd. in Reeve, n.p.). As Argentinian philosopher María Angélica Fierro demonstrates, in the *Symposium*, "Socrates' capacity to give a true report about Eros …" (*Plato's Theory* 24) allows participants to realign their "semblances" (23) of the truth in ways that are ultimately guides: "the fact that our lives are dominated by passions or Eros … opens up the chance of being ruled [in life] by the best and most authentic form of passion: the love of the truth … or, if this is not possible, at least as a second best, to the leading passion of our life as well oriented as possible" (25). Some dialoguers seem to do better here than others. For example, in spite of regular remedial attention from Socrates, Alcibiades, as Alessandra Fussi notes, "was not inspired by the philosophical ascent when he caught a glimpse of

[13] Like diverse aspects of each of the speeches?

divine beauty in Socrates. Rather, he remained trapped in his own main obsession…" (253). He serves as a warning. The story aspect of a dialogue also, of course, intimates listeners, companions to Apollodorus, just as the narrative's innate inticracies anticipate a creation of desire in those listeners: "…the bizarre and complex narrative structure of the *Symposium* as a whole corresponds with Plato's conception of desire, insofar as it involves an erotic effect on the reader, provoking both emptiness and longing-constitutive characteristics of Eros—with regard to the real meaning of the text" (Fierro *Plato'sTheory*, 26). For important reasons, then, listeners need not turn a deaf ear. But neither are listeners passive recipients. As Stanley Rosen clarifies, "rigorous attention to the dramatic context of an argument [is] key to Plato's intentions—and hence … an essential part of the argument itself" (xxxix). This is so, says Rosen, most primarily because dialogue, as opposed to the written word, evokes "speech in the psyche of the man who understands" (xlvi) in a way that the written word does not. The *Symposium*-as-dialogue is thus "a game having as its pedagogic function the teaching of the natures and habits of man's psyche" (xlvii), "an existential portrait" (l), a living and moving invitation not just to read (or look and listen), but to live according to one's highest true desires. The dialogue format itself, then, is its own key instrument, reemphasizing the *Symposium's* main theme—the recognition of one's own psyche.

The dialogue format, beginning with dusty travelers on a road and ending with, ostensibly, sleepy and semi-drunken party pitter-patter, also serves to remind us that this vital activity, as "individual" as it is in some regards given that no one psyche is alike, is also both praxis imbued and oriented, as well as communal. William S. Cobb states that "this movement toward interpreting erôs [is] the key to human *being* in general" (12); he appears to suggest that without it we do not truly live, and we must *live* with it. Yes, asserts Rosen, "the philosopher must discover the complete or more adequate formulation of the highest themes for himself, by his own noetic activity …" (xlv-xlvi), but "philosophy is a condition of the psyche *and so a way of life* (xlviii, emphasis mine) and "must reflect its context, or manner in which it emerges in human life" (l). And, as dialogue emphasizes, we cannot do this alone, nor would we want to. Everyone, after all, eventually stopped thinking on porches and came to the party, or really wanted to. In her excellent book *Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire*, Frisbee C. C. Sheffield posits a convincing case for why the community aspect is not merely a nice but incidental derivative of the noetic project, but essential, positing that this dialogue, far from deemphasizing the mundane, appropriately frames it and thus elevates it. From this essential argument, Sheffield is free to assert that certain "real-world" aspects of the dialogue, rather than distractions from noetic activity, are appropriate examples of it. In this context, she reminds us that "the [environment] itself was one which [very appropriately] attempted to make *erôs* work towards certain cultural norms" (6). She carries this idea forward this way:

> The description of *erôs* as having an intermediary nature does suggest that communicating back from gods to men … [is] part of [its] proper nature. That is to say that *erôs* is fulfilled not only in moving away from particular things to the form, but also in moving back down towards particular mortal things again. (179)

As such, "rational, or deliberative desire" (51), as per the title of her study, guides us so that "our desires embody our values and beliefs about what is worth having or doing. Insofar as they do so, they are an important part of our ethical lives" (4). Returning to what we have highlighted here about the *Symposium* itself, it appears that Sheffield's conclusions are highly defensible. As she points out, the dinner-party context and the opportunity to teach the youth of Athens that the *Symposium* centrally

is, already indicate noetic activity's ultimately earth-inscribed nature and its centrally moral aim. That is to say, the *Symposium*-as-event, which exemplifies in a practical way that dialogue is to issue in ethical behavior, is also a type of fourth-century-BC Montessori classroom. It would seem that this (to some extent mutual) teaching-learning opportunity thus serves the *Symposium*'s goals as Sheffield highlights them analogically; for the well initiated it is one example of "community service," but it is also an incentive for the newcomers: As the *Phaedrus* asserts, "one must be able to perceive and distinguish … accurately when one observes [these matters] actually occurring in practice; otherwise, one won't yet have any advantage from what one heard when one was attending lectures before" (271e).

In summary, what we have seen and defended about the *Symposium* are these main things: Since the dialogue is about noetic activity, or discerning one's true desires, it offers the opportunity for participatory revelation and maturation of the psyche, where these desires reside. The "dramatic" format both displays and clarifies the nature of that process and invokes participation in what is ultimately a vital aspect of human *being*. Further, the message and the format of the *Symposium* reveal, as per Sheffield, that noetic activity at its best at least issues in (if not centrally involves) moral and world-oriented behavior. Finally, teaching and learning is an example of this since, as the *Phaedrus* tells us, the advantage of the lecture is not the lecture *per se*, but the application thereof. When we turn to Marcela de San Félix and her dramatic texts,[14] we will make connections along just these lines. For now, more on Sheffield. As I have indicated, this scholar's work assumes the importance of the vital project to Plato's text; she indicates that the Greek philosopher "…was clearly struck by the idea that the real aim of our desires is unknown to us—that we do not know what we *really* want—and the *Symposium* is an attempt—or rather, a series of attempts—to answer that question" (2). Fierro emphasizes that vital connection thus: el despliegue y dirección del deseo conductor del alma [es] lo que determina en último término el significado de nuestra vida" ("Alma encarnada" n.p.). Although no person can impose a "desire" on another, and to that extent the desire in question is highly subjective or individual, as is its pursuit, Sheffield is at pains to indicate the potential connections between erotic quest in Plato and the needs of others.[15] Careful to attribute nothing on this specific level to the Greek philosopher himself but to defend herself on the basis of what the noetic dialogue offers or permits, she concludes, for example, that "the account is neither incompatible with, nor fails to accommodate, the kind of care and concern we would hope a flourishing individual to exhibit toward his peers" (181) since the search "motivates the [desiring agent of the higher mysteries] to search for improving *logoi*, and so to turn to other bearers of beauty," to value the soul above the body in a way that, ultimately, "cares for another soul" (174).[16] In short,

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[14] As Cobb notes, "the *Symposium* could easily be presented as drama" (2); here, the similarities between the dialogue and dramatic, as the opportunities they offer, will be assumed.

[15]In fact, fully twenty percent of her book is dedicated directly to this issue. Chapter five is titled "Socrates' Speech: Concern for Others?," and six argues against a quote from another academic: "'*Nothing to do with Human Affairs?*'"

[16] This is not to say that Sheffield elides the importance of the body in this economy. Perhaps following on Martha Nussbaum's seminal 1980's work on the *Symposium*—through which she introduces the idea of human "fragility" as central, and thus asserts that in spite of itself the attention in the work ends downward on the human rather than the Formal—Sheffield is more lately joined by, for example, Fierro. Relying on the *Phaedo*, Fierro's recent articles include ones on reconsidering the dynamic and even -necessary link between body and soul for noetic activity. She says that,

el dualismo 'cuerpo-alma' que propone allí Platón no consiste, como en el dualismo cartesiano en su interpretación habitual, en dos sustancias escencialmente escindidas … su concepción es más bien que el alma, por naturaleza simple, pura y racional, se halla *de hecho* entremezclada con el sôma, el cual ***no es un mero soporte biológico sino generador de aspectos que hoy denominaríamos psicológicos o mentales*** …. Esto no implica un desprecio del sôma mortal *en toto*, sino más bien su apropiada

again, the search for meaning of the individual that we see in the *Symposium* seemingly has an indisputably vital, and arguably communal or relational, aspect.

Relational Love and Christian *Eros*

Although some do take a different argument than the likes of Sheffield and Fierro in terms of Plato's work, it is interesting that at least two philosophers argue so well for this connection in this context and, perhaps, in the spirit and dialogical permissibility of the theme, even desire it so themselves. Other modern and contemporary thinkers on the desire of the psyche/soul and the pursuit of meaning in life—Victor Frankl, Michel de Certeau and Thomas Merton, among others—would not find this odd; they too take the interactive nature of this journey with the here and now and with other humans as logical, and even a given.[17] We discuss them further later on. Of course, the idea of the essential connection between desiring or motivational love—the "*eros"* distinctive in Plato—on the one hand and interpersonal relationship on the other is not by any means recent. Christian theorizing on *eros* from Origen[18] onward makes that point clear. Influenced not only by Neoplatonism but also by (Origen's) sound Christian theology, Augustine saw *caritas* correctly perceived as a synthesis of *agape* and *eros* because *eros* is the love we assume in desiring to be like God in Christ. Inversely and relatedly, Origen and Augustine also believed, together with many other thinkers, that the love of God for us bears elements of *eros,* since for example it motivated the humanity of Christ, a descent born of a subject seeking the love of the (human) other. Contemporary theologian Gillian T.W. Ahlgren articulates the connection thus: "*Eros* is the force, in humanity, which stirs us to seek God—an echo of God's movement toward humanity in Christ" ("Julian of Norwich's" 38).[19] Indeed, it is with distinguished others that I believe that to consider that God's *caritas* love is also *eros,*[20] allows us to express most clearly central doctrinal truths about Christian love, and to highlight derivative aspects of this love the best. As we have suggested, the most central thing that Christian *eros* highlights is the exact nature of our love relationship with God. Words chosen by Cornelius Plantinga for another context illustrate beautifully the biblical implications for humans: that this love in turn colors our relationships with others to the extent that in certain important regards they are, if not indistinguishable, inseparable. Planginga says: "according to Paul, Hebrews, and the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ's pattern of life in the world reproduces the inner life of God…. In John's gospel, for example, the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father back…. We might almost say that the [three] persons within God show each other divine *hospitality*…. Each loves and glorifies the other…. I think we could say that hospitality thrives within the triune life of God and then spreads wonderfully to the creatures of God" (*Engaging* 20, 21). Because of the clear

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organización a fin de ortorgarle su veradero significado y transcendencia. ("Dualismo cuerpo-alma" n.p., **emphasis mine**)

[17] Additionally, see Lawrence L. Lapierre's article "A Model for Describing Spirituality" (*Journal of Religion and Health* 33.2 (1994): 153-61). This article succinctly presents other current thinkers who link "spirituality" to journey, meaning and purpose, and ultimately, time-and-place and community.

[18] One scholar notes that "one of the foundational hermeneutical principles in Origen's treatise is that, in God, *eros* is inseparable from *agape"* (Ahlgren "Julian of Norwich's," 40).

[19] As Louise Nelstrop, Kevin Magill and Bradley B. Onishi note, thinkers from Pseudo-Dionysius on have located the same divine approximation and invitation in creation: God's movement outside himself in creation is an example of his erotic love, which is a designated and unifying force, evoking love in return from its recipients (86).

[20] Of course, scholars of Christianity from Reformation theologian Anders Nygren to philosopher Alice von Hildebrand have chosen to maintain a distinction between *eros* and what to them stands alone as the highest form of Christian love: *agape* or *caritas.* As is well known, Nygren thinks the two loves are entirely incompatible; von Hildebrand differentiates for her own purposes (see, for example, "Eros and Agape" *catholicculture.org*. Catholic Culture, n.d. Web.).

theological and praxis-oriented centrality of Christian *eros-caritas*, and for what it will bring to the remainder of this study, we now take a look at what some additional scholarship to date offers on God's erotically imbued love.

With Plantinga, Alghren centrally notes the relational and imitative component of Christian *eros*. She says that that "the desire to be one with Christ begins to order all human desire … in extending ourselves to one another in love, we are participating in God's erotic desire for us" (46); after the Trinity's example, "the impulse toward self-diffusion, of finding and knowing and defining personhood through intersubjectivity is, by its nature, erotic" (49). Citing fourteenth-century mystic Julian of Norwich, Ahlgren further points out that *eros*, which pivotally manifests itself through longing, points to the personal (as opposed to disinterested) nature of God's love. In *Showings*, the fourteenth-century mystic says:

> "For as truly as there is in God a quality of pity and compassion, so truly is there in God a quality of thirst and longing; and the power of the longing in Christ enables us to respond to his longing …. And this quality of longing and thirst comes from God's everlasting goodness, just as the quality of pity comes from his everlasting goodness. And though he may have both longing and pity, they are different qualities as I see them; and this is characteristic of spiritual thirst…." (40-41)

Exegeting Julian, Ahlgren notes that "through Christ, humanity is characterized by the same kind of longing" (41), a longing to love other people through being like Christ. Indeed, it would seem that Ahlgren's central ideas on the *eros* aspects of love echo (as do Plantinga's) foundational verses of the biblical theology of love particularly well, as in John and Matthew:

> [16] For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (New International Version, John 3:16)
> [37] Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' [38] This is the first and greatest commandment. [39] And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22)

In his *The Four Loves*, British Christian apologist and literary scholar C. S. Lewis, agrees that *eros* provides necessary elements to a correct theological understanding of divine love: "one Need-love, the greatest of all, either coincides with or at least makes a main ingredient in man's highest, healthiest and most realistic spiritual condition" (4). His central rational is the same as the one we have just seen. Thus, Lewis also alludes to the particularity of *eros* suggested by Julian of Norwich, saying "*eros* … is necessarily [initially] between two only" (61), but ends with the human-bound imitative aspect of our love for God. His logic, as is often the case, is whimsically expressed, but precise: Yes, *caritas* is ultimately incomplete if not ultimately shared disinterestedly with others, *but* there cannot be the third element (the other human) without God's love for the individual human-lover first. There are not three without *two*, he seems to say. Lewis' convincing argument in favor of *eros* is also, in a certain regard, analogical. The desirous "journey" that *erotic* love implies hearkens to the extent to which our image-bearing love must be imitative not only in likeness, but a "nearness of approach" (5); He considers that it is not enough to bear God's likeness, which we all do, but that we must approximate God in action and attitude. Finally, for Lewis *eros* uniquely "obliterates the distinction between giving and receiving" (96), a facet that agapic love's unilateral accent could diminish. This

emphasis, clearly linked to the "two-only" aspect, is magnificently expressed by Cardinal Avery Dulles thus:

> eros inclines us to receive the gifts of God; agape impels us to pass on to others what we ourselves have received. Eros, then, corresponds to the ascending moment of the spiritual life whereby we turn to God …. Eros and agape belong together as two phases of the same process. If we did not receive, we would have nothing to give; and if we were not disposed to give, we would be spiritually unprepared to receive. (n.p.)

As concerns this necessary issue of *eros* in sacrificial love, and thus the indisputable connection between them, Fr. James V. Schall follows on Pope *Benedict* XVI's 2005 encyclical on the topic, *Deus caritas est*. He emphasizes that *eros* also brings to the question the bodily or earth-bound nature of both Christ's initiating and fully human *agape,* and that which we share with our neighbor: "It is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves" (n.p.). Bernard McGinn highlights the same spiritual-corporeal ideas through *eros* in the metaphor of the marriage bed; erotic love "moves beyond the marriage bed into the world in childbirth" ("The Language" 214). Additional contributions highlight other helpful aspects of *eros*-as-*agape*: Also hearkening to the encyclical, Micheal Sweeny, O.P., makes most of the preceding points, adding that Christian *eros* is freely and passionately chosen, as contrasted with the more "obligatory" central nature of *agape*. And Nicola Masch suggests among other things that *eros* evokes both the everyday-ness of the love and its quality, on the human side, of ultimate mystery: "passion … knows and insists, even foolishly, that the [search's] answer is not its understanding but its desperate and everyday experience, and so lives with the questions…." (77). Finally, Mark McIntosh offers an interesting symbolic metaphor in a Christian mystic context which works for us also as a segue; he views the erotic language of mystic text itself as a "performative" (101) dance that artistically evokes the action of God-human approximation. With this ecumenically rich theological *and* relational take on Christian *eros,* we turn our attention to the use of *eros* in Christian mystical contexts *per se*, beginning with Augustine's *On the Trinity*. The Trinitarian understanding that Augustine expresses in this text, as well as its erotic and mystically-imbued nature, will in turn serve (with the *Symposium*) our understanding of the central aspect of this study: a broadened analysis of Marcela de san Félix's dramatic texts.[21]

Augustine's *On the Trinity*

We discuss further along how Augustine's Trinitarian doctrine rather thoroughly permeates Marcela's longer dramatic works and to what end. For now, one section of her Lord's Supper play, *Coloquio espiritual del Santísimo Sacramento,* presents an unmistakable succinct clue of his influence. *Alma*, again with the help of attending virtues, is on a journey to an unmistakably mystically suffused Communion table, where:

> ALMA: Dice Cristo, dueño mío,
> sabiduría sin tasa:
> 'Aquel que come mi carne

[21] As Denise N. Baker centrally clarifies in her 1993 article "Julian of Norwich and Anchoritic Literature," the influence of Augustine's *De trinitate* on the nun's mystical theology is clear. However, Baker denies the likelihood of direct influence. Direct influence is similarly unlikely in the case of Marcela de san Félix.

y bebe mi sangre santa, en
mí está, y yo en él.'
FERVOR: Por eternidades largas
así sea, y sí sera
teniendo perseverancia
en buscarle y comerle,
pues nos impele y nos llama.
'Comed, amigos,' nos dice,
'del manjar que sólo basta,
y embriagaos, carísimos,
pues que se os da en abundancia.'
(l. 796-809)

The Second Person's clear mystic presence in the preceding lines hints that the ascending journey presented soon thereafter is, after the emphases of Marcela's order as well as that of Augustine, necessarily Triune. The following obvious reference to one of the main (human-ascribed) Trinitarian analogies of *On the Trinity*—understanding, memory, and will—further clarifies Marcella's Augustinian influence:

PUREZA: Aquesta comida sacia
no sólo el gusto, también
el entendimiento alcanza
parte en aqueste banquete.
FERVOR: Todas las potencias baña,
ennoblece los sentidos
y compone cuerpo y alma.
Al entendimiento alumbra,
a la memoria la ata
el movimiento veloz
de las cosas sin substancia;
la voluntad enamora
y de lo human la aparta. (l. 783-95)

We recall that Augustine wrote his *On the Trinity* over the period of almost his entire adult lifetime. "Underscor[ing] his image-mysticism" (Egan and Wallace 32), it presents in a series of fifteen books the contemplative odyssey of the soul seeking after the God of the Trinity. As with the *Symposium*, this is both a rational pursuit and one whose "object" is ultimately incomprehensible by the human intellect alone. As in the Platonic text, the pursuit of the soul is motivated by a type of "unfulfilled" desire that in Augustine's case is explained biblically[22] and expressed thus in Book XV:

> Why then does he so seek, if he comprehends that which he seeks to be incomprehensible, unless because he may not give over seeking so long as he makes progress in the inquiry itself into things incomprehensible, and becomes ever better and better while seeking so great a good, which is both sought in order to be found and found in order to be sought? For … the words of Ecclesiasticus may be taken in this meaning … it is both sought in order that it may be found more sweetly, and found that it may be sought more eagerly.

[22] Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Sirach, is an Old Testament deuterocanonical book, and forms part of the Roman Church's biblical corpus.

Jimmy Chan articulately sums up both the message and the narrative arc of *On the Trinity* when he says that Augustine wished to convince his readers that "salvation and spiritual growth [are] connected with knowing oneself as images of the Triune God, from whom they came and toward whom they go, with a dynamic tendency to union realized by likeness to a God who is love" (n.p.). For Augustine, this pursuit is grounded in the rational mind, and expressed in three analogized and advancing parts, as the ascent to the Trinity shifts from visible to contemplative. In spite of the centrality of the human intellect in this pursuit, the real fuel is human faith through Christ's redemption: it is *faith* in the Word-made-flesh which seeks understanding (famously, *fides quaerens intellectum*), that advances this project. Ultimately, the intellect is likewise deemphasized by the fact that our most *basic* "knowledge" about God, all that we can fully "know," his love, is what unites us with the Godhead. Indeed, for Augustine, *affective and erotic* "love [is] the key attribute of the God of the Trinity, to the extent that it can even be used to analogize the Trinity" (n.p.), and therefore, love what we are to use to seek God even as we seek more of it, as Augustine centrally addresses in Book XV.

I present this simplified review of *On the Trinity* ultimately for what it offers Marcela de San Félix in the Christian mystic context of specifically *eros*-based[23] Trinitarian theology. Equally relevant to the current project, though, is the text's central treatment of incarnation theology in particular, which as we have already suggested, brings through sacrifice the agapic result of Christ's *eros*. Chan notes that Book XV "can be thought of as symbolically conveying an incarnation theology: The Word of God descends into the world, and the Trinity seekers ascend and look [to the] Triune God for more inspiration" (n.p.). For Augustine, it is clear that our contemplative ascent is predicated on Christ's descent. Nevertheless Book XIV also shows that Augustine thought that in the final analysis the true image of God is found in the *contemplative* area of the *inner man*. What are we to make of this? We have seen that Christian *eros* suggests a necessary issue of agapic human love for fellows. And, bearing witness to the successful ecumenical "tighten[ing] up" ("Social Trinity" 38) of the doctrine since Augustine, Plantinga suggests that Trinitarian *perichoresis*—divine love and hospitality among the Persons themselves (*Engaging* 20)—is to be more than contemplated.[24] Indeed, we do not bear the triadic image without issue in action. Scholars have not missed the limited and decentralized treatment of this connection in *On the Trinity*; some even consider it a not insignificant omission in Augustine's work.[25] Chan defends Augustine by pointing out that the Tagastian had a different focus: "Augustine is obviously tilted towards concerns on [the] ontological Trinity and personal contemplation of its mystery as opposed to [the] economic Trinity…" that Plantinga emphasizes, with its community orientation.[26] Chan additionally reasons that the mystic philosopher does use *On the Trinity* to remind readers "once again the Spirit is the gift of God to humans," and that it is simply and finally an issue of what "Augustine's Trinitarian models do not accomplish" (n.p.); in other words, Augustine, like Plato, just didn't take things that far, or not directly anyway. Other scholarship finds other ways to exonerate the Saint on this point. Spark

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[23] As noted before, Augustine's idea of God love is *caritas*, a fusion between *agape* and *eros*. His discussion of God's erotic love in *On the Trinity* is primarily offered in Book IX.

[24] We recall of course that Sheffield makes a similar point about the *Symposium*, understanding and explicating what she sees as the integral nature of communal activity to noetic work in the dialogue.

[25] For example, Millard J. Erikson takes issue with the "individualistic context" (332) of *one* soul image-bearing Tri-unity because it overlooks communal implications. Colin E. Gunton questions the interiority of the systems, which he says lead to the perception of the Persons of God as existing in a "self-enclosed circle" (86). In his opinion, this emphasis deflects attention from the need for real-world outcomes.

[26] Indeed, Augustine never does tie in his divine Triads with their functions, nor does he suggest in his theorizing exactly how or why human image bearing implies community.

Notes says of the more famous *Confessions* that "Augustine is following an underlying structure. This structure depends on his view (which is not explicitly mentioned in the work) that the story of *a* soul's return to God is essentially the same as the story of the return to God *of creation as a whole*. Thus, the last four books of the *Confessions*, in their deep vindication of Christianity, focus primarily on details of the world's existence in God rather than Augustine's own ascent to God" (n.p., emphasis mine). Perhaps it is fair to question whether this same communal understanding, though fundamentally under-explored, governed *On the Trinity* as well: Perhaps the one soul's love-search for God stood in for the group, and thus by further implication that others are inextricably taken up in the one's love for God, "three" being implied in C. S. Lewis' initial "between two only." Indeed, John Peter Kenny's original and well-received thinking on the *Confessions* might have originated the Spark Notes commentary; Kenny relies on the connection Augustine makes between incarnational and creational theology in *The Mysticism of Saint Augustine: Rereading the Confessions*. His defense of a world connection in the priest's most famous work, according to James Wetzel, is that "if we allow that point its play, then it makes sense to pair the ascent to God in book VII with [Christ's] descent to the flesh in book VII; the two are aspects of a single contemplation" (n.p.) The point again seems to be that, after all, the fact that there is but one actor, and a contemplative at that, does *not* negate a communal emphasis in Augustine (as Erikson and Gunton suggest of *On the Trinity* [see n24]).

To restate the central point at hand right now, sound Trinitarian theology demands issue in active community-based love, to the extent that (as Sheffield has done with Plato's *Symposium*) scholarship has tried to "find" these points in Augustine or at least prove that there are no inherent incompatibilities. We might consider the reconciliations potentially convincing, and I do, especially in light of the treatment he does give love of fellows, such as this from Book IX:

> For as you ought to enjoy yourself, not in yourself, but in Him who made you, so also him whom you love as yourself. Let us enjoy [and love], therefore, both ourselves and our brethren in the Lord; and hence let us not dare to yield, and as it were to relax, ourselves to ourselves in the direction downwards. [27]

However, it also could be worth questioning what sort of things might have prompted Augustine to stop short of investigating the fuller picture entirely *within his triadic theorizing*.[28] Chan suggests, we recall, that Augustine had another primary

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[27]This portion from Book VIII makes the point even more clearly:

What therefore does love love, except that which we love with love? But this, to begin from that which is nearest to us, is our brother. And listen how greatly the Apostle John commends brotherly love: He that loves his brother abides in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. It is manifest that he placed the perfection of righteousness in the love of our brother; for he certainly is perfect in whom there is no occasion of stumbling. *And yet he seems to have passed by the love of God in silence; which he never would have done, unless because he intends God to be understood in brotherly love itself*. For in this same epistle, a little further on, he says most plainly thus: Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not, knows not God; for God is love (emphasis mine).

On a related plane, we might note that Augustine does not disparage the body in favor of the soul, favoring a more complex viewpoint, as in "On Care to be Had for the Dead," in which body and soul are viewed as the perfect unity of two substances: "In no wise are the bodies thus to be spurned . . . . For these pertain not to ornament or aid which is applied from without but to the very nature of man" (n.p.).

[28] Scholar of mysticism Bernard McGinn calls this Augustine's "doctrinal 'grammar' of orthodox Trinitarian belief," highlighting the importance of this systematization for itself to Augustine's theology (*The Essential* 193).

agenda: the exploration of the soul's relationship with an emphatically ontological Trinity rather than Plantinga's "social" one. Perhaps Augustine considered that investigating the connections between ascent and real-world communal activity were just not his bailiwick, and perhaps he just didn't have time. After all, it famously took him years and years to be satisfied with what he *did* choose to focus on! Then again, maybe Plantinga's suggestion that Augustine, in the end, "affirms that there is only one person" ("Social Trinity" 38) as well as one essence is accurate, and kept the priest from seeing the full glory and import of Trinitarian *perichoresis*, which could have lead him to sideline human approximation of it. What is clear and might have to do with this question, is the fact that the trinities that Augustine ascribes to human beings are never made directly analogous with the divine Trinity in any way. Further, the use the monk does wish to make of the analogies is not always entirely obvious. As one scholarly website puts it, Augustine's struggle with his conception of human trinities makes it "difficult to understand how [he] intends to bring this discussion of the trinities in human beings to any relevant conclusion" ("On the" n.p.). The same site notes that in later books "Augustine works to reverse the centrifugal tendencies of his discussion of the trinities in human beings and unify them as a whole" and that he does this *not* by holding them up "as *exact* analogues to that in God, but as a ladder…" (n.p., emphasis mine); for Augustine, "we do not find in ourselves a single Trinity like that of God, but … we do find a series of them that we can ascend, and in so doing we may approach the divine Trinity and a deeper understanding of God" (n.p.). Indeed, although Augustine struggled long with both the nature of his analogous human trinities and their application for his project; at best, according to some scholars of mysticism such as Bernard McGinn, Augustine's human triads are "*distant* analog[ies]" (193 *The Essential*, emphasis mine) of the Divine: Augustine did not seem to consider a trinity, clearly "analogous" in a different way than the "distant" ones that he did choose, composed of both human and Divine. [29] He obviously ultimately decided that for his particular analogies to serve his (emphatically ontological) purposes, the T/trinities had to be "of one substance." However, might not the *unitive* project of the ascent not suggest a Divine/human "blending"? And might not a central aspect of the definition of Divine erotic love according to Lewis and Dulles and so many others—the two necessarily becoming three, an aspect Augustine does acknowledge, although not systematically—suggest such an "analogical analogy" as well: a sort of love triad composed of both Divine and mortal? For her part, Marcela de San Félix appeared to think so, for one striking difference between her triadic applications and those of Augustine is precisely her suggestion of Divine-human triads in her plays that are *directly* analogical. Following a brief introduction of the Spanish nun, the next portion of this study begins with Marcela's "enhanced" use of Augustinian T/trinitarian analogies and the implications for the general themes under consideration.

Marcela de San Félix

Born in 1605, Marcela de San Félix[30] was the daughter of Spain's most famous and prodigious Golden Age *literato*, Lope de Vega. Her father's literary genius, which Marcela clearly inherited, influenced the nun positively, as the turbulence of her growing-up years did to the negative. Marcela entered the Trinitarian

[29] Of course, I must emphasize this difference; any human-Divine blending emphasizes "social" image bearing and not ontological likeness.

[30] Unfortunately given that not many are familiar with Marcela de San Félix, I am unable to present as much background on the nun as I might like here. Scholarship to date, especially initial studies on the nun, present what is known about the *madrileña* and offer fine summaries of her literary corpus. Please see these studies in the limited bibliography on Marcela de San Félix presented at the end of this study. Most notable are the seminal and extensive independent and collaborative projects of Electa Arenal and Georgina Sabat de Rivers.

convent of San Ildefonso when she was sixteen years of age in what many scholars view as an earnest spiritual commitment with pragmatic components: the illegitimate[31] young woman could not marry as befitted her paternal station, and according to many, marrying would not have suited her independent and literary nature anyhow. Until her death in her early eighties, Marcela served many roles in her convent, both basic and central, including those of prelate and teacher to novices. She was also that particular convent's most preeminent seventeenth-century playwright. The nun's literary-doctrinal didacticism for young initiates in a Trinitarian context specifically interests us here; as Susan Smith notes, Marcela is especially known for her "theological lessons" (148).[32] An examination of some key aspects of Marcela's doctrinal emphases will help us understand just what she is arguably teaching. In a former article, I argue that San Félix's central didactic point is obedience born of love of God. I analyze a play convincingly[33] attributed to the nun, *Breve festejo*, which shows Virtues aiding a human soul on a mystically imbued journey to the Christ of the manger: "[the play] reflects the Godhead on earth under circumstances that permit both the quasi-transcendent Virtues and the nuns, acting together, access to the Virgin Mary, as it is through her specifically that they define themselves in Christ" (12). I show that the Virtues lead the seeking and desiring Soul toward union with what is ultimately a Triune Godhead mirroring itself in redemptive action. We see how the play likewise posits interdependent human (or quasi-human, in the case of the Virtues) triadic analogies: the "three" Magi serve this point metaphorically and anticipatorily, and are eventually joined in obedience with another triad. This further triad is composed of the Virtues, Fortaleza (who is the Psyche or Soul figure, representing nuns), and the Virgin Mary. The study goes on to suggest how *Breve festejo* finally posits the human-Divine triad of virtue-infused nuns, the Mother Mary and Christ through grammatical shifting of the second person from human to Divine, and *caritas*-centered transverberation in anticipation of mystic union: "the result of this is an exchange of agapic love between the [ultimately] Divine 'tú' and a third-person beloved that spiritually prefaces [the] eroticism of the mystic union to come thus: 'en la fineza de amarte, / lo que das, ofrecerte'" (20). In the same article, I suggest that the obedience to the Godhead that Christ and humans share in this context has a definite goal, also strongly alluded to in the play: the restoration of a lost Paradise. As I point out, in *Breve festejo*, this Paradise is clearly evoked in the Edenic allusions of the Unitive moment with which the play ends.

Although my original emphases were other, here I highlight the following about *Breve festejo*: First, Marcela, like Augustine in *On the Trinity*, suggests the mystic union of a specifically Trinitarian deity and human beings whose approach to the mystic Deity—here, the Christ child—are likewise presented in threes. Again, however, unlike Augustine, Marcella allows for a triadic analogy that includes both the human and the Divine: In Marcela, these elements—the earth-born Christ and the human mortal—obey the One God in a unity that is mystical, and yet clearly *agapically-oriented*, eros. Finally, this obedience *specifically* issues in the restoration of a lost Paradise reflected on earth, in an Edenic landscape. As a preface to our study on the desire of the Soul-psyche in other Marcelian plays, I would like to suggest that Marcela's different choice *vis a vis* triadic analogies, and its attendant emphases, strongly suggest what some find missing—and even troublingly so in given cases—in Augustine: a clearly related emphasis on community-oriented action. Indeed, it seems that in *Breve festejo*, San Félix leaves her viewers with three rather solid theological

[31] Marcela was the daughter of one of Lope's mistresses, the actress Micaela de Luján.
[32] As Arenal further points out, "Sor Marcela was admired by respected ecclesiastics in her own time" (236).
[33] See Smith's "Notes on a Newly Discovered Play: Is Marcela de san Félix the Author?"

hints on this point: 1.) the mystic practitioner is united both imitatively and triadically with an *earth-bound* [yet Triune] Christ, 2.) the erotic love of the mystic union's emphatically *agapic* nature suggests from a theological perspective *necessary* issue in love of other humans,[34] and 3.) the obedience highlighted in the process leads specifically toward an ultimate Redemption that once did find its expression *on earth*, and thus must, even if imperfectly, necessarily continue to do so. The upshot of the theology reflected so clearly and ably in *Breve festejo*, then, is that (ascetic or) mystic practice and earthly redemptive activity appear inextricably doctrinally linked, and thus practically so as well.

I think that it is possible that at some level Marcela was handing this entire complex package to all nuns who viewed all her plays, as in the central play of this study, *Muerte del apetito*, referenced at the outset. Of course, the more experienced and theologically astute probably could understand her quite well, while initiates received more preliminary encouragement. That is, in participating in the drama as persons learning or versed in Catholic doctrine, the nuns were experiencing the following, either in review or as instruction: the spiritual desire of the Soul, first falteringly expressed against competing wishes and in semi inarticulate understandings, and then more ably in the mystic paradigm, should issue in worldly activity. Now at this point, in addition to those of Augustine, the earlier suggested connections to Plato's *Symposium* should begin to make good sense. Indeed, although we acknowledge clear Marcelian distinctives— the Christian emphases on the one hand, and communal tie-ins that are perhaps more doctrinally essential than implicit on the other—I believe that the key aspects that we have pointed out regarding Plato's dialogue can fruitfully inform our study of *Muerte del apetito*, since they arguably occur here as well. These are, again: 1.) the participatory nature of noetic activity, which is the discovery of desire and correlative maturation of the psyche, 2.) a dramatic format that both supports and clarifies the nature of that process, 3.) the fact that noetic activity is a vital aspect of human *being*, and 4.) a more recent approach to the Platonic text: world behavior or community action, of which teaching and learning is a textually central example, are at least compatible elements.

Coloquio espiritual intitulado "Muerte del apetito" in Context

Six of Marcela de San Félix's longer plays, which "fusionan elementos del teatro popular renacentista con formas litúrgicas y líricas" (Arenal and Sabat de Rivers 36), have survived confessor-prompted burnings. *Muerte del apetito* represents the first in a series of four that posit a Soul learning how to, and eventually defeating, the desires of the world in favor of those of the convent. As in *Breve festejo*, *Alma* is aided by allegorized Virtues in this difficult process, which is at least strongly suggestive of a Trinitarian mystical union with a clear Cristocentric emphasis at various points.[35] In

[34] It is clear, of course, that Marcela de San Félix expressed mystical connection in terms of erotic love for other reasons also, and not just to suggest the *caritas* connection that implies human activity; I would be remiss not to acknowledge this. Even if women had scant access to traditional mystical literature, Marcela likely read San Juan. Additionally, as Weber mentions, "profane love poetry *a lo divino* was an established tradition by the 1570s…." ("Could Women" 187); she also mentions Latin poetry and Scripture. Sandra Wawrytko, who consideres that "the most distinctive and pervasive element of feminine mysticism is eros, manifested as both passionate outpourings and erotic overtones imagery" (203), mentions Song of Songs also: "passionate erotic language transported to the spiritual plane" (204). For their part, Arenal and Stacey Schlau posit that sublimated physical sexuality resulted in its "free reign in the spiritualized erotic imagination" (30). Arenal adds to this other Carmelite women poets and potential sublimation of early psycho-sexual trauma (246), to which Marcela may very well have been exposed in her somewhat chaotic and unsupervised childhood.

[35] These mystical allusions are found in all six of the nun's plays to a greater or lesser extent. The mystical emphases in particular draw a doctrinal and practice-oriented connection between the "series"

the play on study centrally here, *Alma* is guided by *Mortificación*, who helps her to eschew worldly goods outside of their correct context and, eventually "kill" her own self-will. *Alma's* various attempts to rid herself of lustful *Apetito* throughout the play provide humor to the piece, and the intervention of the two Virtues on display, *Mortificación* and *Desnudez* (nakedness), lend dramatic tension. This tension comes in part from the fact that the Virtues, as is their common role, provide a spiritual vehicle for the perfection of the Soul in stark contrast to competing momentary temptations. Indeed, as Robert C. Roberts reminds us, as per Aristotle, virtues are linked to what motivates humans in that they are most centrally "complex dispositions to … desires …" (293). Again according to Aristotle through the same scholar, assumed in awareness of a goal, virtues "manage" passing impulses such that one gets what one really wants. Thus, the Virtues lend much to the arguably noetic project that is *Muerte del apetito*, as they are finally selected in order to achieve the Love of God (or union), and we see, better employed or assumed thereafter.[36] Of course, in these "tempranas versions de psico-drama" (Arenal and Sabat-Rivers 38), each nun—whether audience, actor or other—participates in this vital activity, and not just *Alma*.[37] Each understands or does not, accepts or does not, the highest articulation of what Love is, presented through the dramatic text: Rosen's "speech in the psyche of the [wo]man who understands" (xlvi). Each must, one assumes, decide, along with *Alma* (as do the participants in the *Symposium* in their own similarly established context[38]) whether to follow the distracting self-dominated contributions of *Apetito* to the topic of desire, or desire's true object according to the Virtues: Love of God.

It is important to reiterate, however, that this dichotomy, as strongly as it is presented by Marcela in *Muerte*, cannot by way of Catholic theology be entirely facile. Indeed, Marcela never presents the issue of love (desire) on a "uniquely" human plane as a simple one, as Lisa Vollendorf has also pointed out, remarking at length on the "expansive view of love in sor Marcela's work" in general. Using many textual examples, Vollendorf convincingly argues that Marcela repeatedly shows us that human love can lead one to error, certainly, but also to God, in a sense. She points out that Marcela's plays show that human love—maternal, sororial—can be a distraction, but also an aid to, or correlative of, God Love: the plays "portra[y] love as necessary for the community and its individuals. Love forms part of the healthy homosocial environment, in other words, just as it is a requirement for each nun's spiritual journey… love can be complicated. Soul must learn to distinguish between healthy and detrimental love" (105).[39] How does Marcela do this? How does she "distinguish," so that her pupils and fellows do not falsely over-dichotomize worldly and spiritual love even as they watch plays that clearly vilify certain aspects of the former? An interesting article on the issue of desire and the primacy of the Divine in the "economy" of (true) love, which Marcela clearly believes in, can be helpfully instructive here. It also provides us with a workable vocabulary for discussing desire

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plays and her two others: *Coloquio espiritual del nacimiento* and *Coloquio espiritual del Santísimo Sacramento*. We discuss aspects of this connection further along.

[36] In like fashion, we recall, Augustine suggests in *On the Trinity* that knowledge somehow both prefaces and follows the faith-induced love that produces greater love-"knowledge" of God. Perhaps it is useful to think of Marcela's virtues as types of God-infused "knowledge," also. This after the idea that the noetic project is an active sort of "knowing," or articulation of, what one truly desires: here, God-love.

[37] In fact, some plays do not have a Soul figure within the play; the Virtues stand in directly for the nuns and every nun is invited to align herself with them: "los personajes alegóricos comparten su identidad con personas reales y … las reales, las monjas, viven ansiando lograr la perfección de las virtudes espirituales" (Arenal and Sabat-Rivers 48-49).

[38] As Claire Colebrook points out in an article on the role narrative plays in the development of the psyche, Martha Nussbaum "has insisted on the integral role that literature, as an arena for collective self-formation, has played in Greek ethics" (90).

[39] See *The Lives of Women: A New History of Inquisitional Spain*, pp. 100-106.

in *Muerte*. In "Dialectics of Desire and the Psychopathology of Alterity: From Levinas to Keirkegaard via Lacan," philosopher Brian Harding discusses the nature of desire from a Catholic perspective. In brief, he suggests that to understand the issue correctly, we might rely on a Kierkegaardian "corrective" of one disparity he sees between the French philosopher and psychoanalyst. As Harding points out, Emmanuel Levinas posits that desire is essentially "subjectivity based on a relationship with with an other rather than pure reflexivity" (406). Harding goes on to suggest that, from a Catholic viewpoint, the problem with Levinas' central theorizing is that "the paradigmatic other is the human other" and "God … is … merely derivative of just dealings with the other" (407). Harding suggests using Lacan to intimate the problems that a Christian might see with Levinas. The psychoanalyst, of course, discusses desire in terms of the Name-of-the-Father and *objet petit a*. According to him, we recall, existential desires are ever only truly satisfied when, as Harding puts it, "something non-phenominological functions as the Name-of-the-Father" (414), thus avoiding the fetishizing of human interactions that Harding sees as the Christian "problem" in Levinas' theorizing. In the end, Harding suggests that Soren Kierkegaard, in whose opinion "the religious imperative [necessarily] precedes the imperative to love one's neighbor," can provide a Catholic corrective of sorts to Levinas, through a Christianization of Lacan's thought: "Kierkegaard's conception of the relationship of the self to God as being of primary importance maintains the … hierarchical schema I described in Lacan's work: God-love comes before neighbor love" (416). As problematic as comparative studies of Levinas and Lacan might be in other terms, Harding's effort to bridge them on such a specific level through Kierkegaard is useful for our purposes, illustrating Marcela's work well, since what she is arguably doing from the start in *Muerte del apetito* is positing an *Alma* as a desiring subject who learns how to avoid such fetishizing, certainly, but without, I think, missing the essential relationship of God Love and appropriate love for the created order.[40]

The beginning of this first *coloquio espiritual* presents the nun figure before she has taken monastic vows, and seemingly unwilling to consider such a path: "que ni yo vivo en clausura / ni trato de perfección …" (l. 51-52). *Mortificación*, the virtue that attends *Alma*, initially encourages her to put down her own passions, stating the main problem: "a los vanos antojos / quieres, Alma, complacer" (l. 5-6). Disliking the Virtue's "rígida condición" (l. 31), however, *Alma* instead states of God that "mi pretensión es gozarle / mas por no por tanta estrechura" (l. 49-50) as she perceives is necessary. Indeed, because the conditions *Mortificación* imposes appear to involve only self *denial*, and *Alma* feels the deep-seated (existential) desire and longing *for something* suggested by "gozar" (as opposed to "mortificar"), she is easily drawn into *Apetito*'s sway when he arrives. This allegorized *objet petit a*, or cause of desire, meets *Alma*'s fundamental (need-to-)desire with his own thinly veiled sexuality: He enters, saying, "¿… soy hombre de hecho? / Nunca quedo satisfecho, / mis deseos me consumen; / que estoy contento presumen / cuando todo lo deseo. / Por cuanto veo, me muero: nunca se sacia mi ser" (l. 96-102). As such, he immediately asks for food, hinting suggestively, "que mucho más pediré" (l. 118). He also suggests to *Alma* a

[40]Of course, perhaps as a result of this long-held strong connection in Catholic Spain, even Spanish existentialist philosopher Miguel de Unamuno struggled long and hard with the God imperative as he sensed it, famously in spite of himself. As Jan E. Evans points out in her new book, *Miguel de Unamuno's Quest for Faith: A Kierkegaardian Understanding of Unamuno's Struggle to Believe*, both the Danish Christian philosopher and the Spanish thinker consider that "God" is central to both living and "loving" (others, ostensibly) as we seek after meaning/truth, although Kierkegaard ultimately professed belief and Unamuno famously questioned it. Evans quotes Unamuno on this point:
[Unamuno] unequivocally points to our need for God when he says, "Y necesitamos a Dios para salvar la conciencia; no para pensar la existencia, sino para vivirla; no para saber por qué y cómo es, sino para sentir para qué es. El amor es un contrasentido si no hay Dios." (103)

walk through el Prado, Madrid's main city park, and later insists that he needs to sleep and will do so naked: "Quiero dormir un poquito; / yo me voy presto a la cama. / … me quiero desnudar, / que el calor me da fatiga" (l. 197-98; 203-204). He invites *Alma* along: "también tú te duermes, / que aquesto te importa (l. 199-200). Alarmed by where things seem to be going, *Mortificación* indicates through an allegorical recasting of the historically imbued Adam and Eve that longing for the Divine is also possible, thus suggesting early on that mortification of one's own self-oriented desires does not ultimately lead to the *lack* of desire itself that *Alma* might originally have supposed. In important juxtaposition to *Apetito*'s Prado, the biblical first husband and wife are in a perfect "amenísimo bosque / un jardín tan delicioso / que es a la Gloria conforme …" (l. 217-19). The implication of the contrastive parallel is that by putting down the passions that *Apetito* is inciting, a better fulfillment of *Alma*'s yearning is somehow available. *Mortificación* tells *Alma* that, "gozaba[n] de suma paz; sin rebelión las pasiones," (l. 226-27) and again: " … En prosperidades tantas / los dos amantes conformes, pacíficos en sí mismos, rendían sus corazones" (l. 243-46). However, when Adam and Eve desire to be like God—"como unos dioses" (l. 263)—, thus suggesting that they do not need God and can fulfill their own desires much as *Alma* is trying to do at the outset, they end up with exactly the opposite result. They are cut off from their true desire and left with a broken mess: "al instante, las pasiones, / apetitos y sentidos / guerra publican a voces, y todos, desordenados, /sólo en maldad conformes, … acometieron al hombre" (l. 269-73, 275). Naturally, *Alma* is encouraged to avoid the same fate by distaining the advances of *Apetito*.

At this point in the play, *Alma* does appear ready to mend her ways, saying to *Mortificación*: "admirada y suspendida tu relación me ha dejado" (l. 304-305). But this pause lasts only briefly as *Alma* is pulled back into uncertain advance toward *Apetito*, which is again fueled by the idea that exclusively human passions fulfill longing or desire, while celestial priorities are built on nothing more than the thankless and ultimately avoidant task of repelling earthly ones through mortification. As *Apetito* would have it with respect to *Mortificación*: "pues el Alma de mí gusta / y a vos teme solamente" (l. 337-38), doubting even Adam's supposed loyalty: "¿Aun Adán no está siguro, / metido en su paraíso, / de vos?" (l. 310-12). Indeed, *Alma* again seems prepared to give up on spiritual fulfillment and chase again after *Apetito*, saying, "si soy moza y soy mujer, / que me parece imposible" (l. 458-59). Now, however, *Mortificación* wisely seems to determine that she must instruct her charge in the ways of God's love more directly and overtly than she has done with the Adam and Eve metaphor, first making sure that *Alma* is desirous—"Dime, Alma, lo que quisieres / con sencilla corazón" (l. 527-28)—even if she is not perfectly virtuous: "que aún te faltan más virtudes" (l. 402). *Alma*'s inclination at this point dramatically shifts in favor of the Divine when she hears that, even in absence of her own virtues, "[e]l [divino] amor lo hará posible" (l. 459). When *Alma* recommits herself to searching after God, *Mortificación* reveals a mystically imbued God as "amante, pero que gusta que oculten sus caricias" (l. 559-60). With something celestial *to desire*, then, *Alma* continues forward. Still unversed in the ways of loving God, however, she at first falls for what is ultimately a spiritualized *objet petit a*: loving the exterior signs of God's grace rather than Him for himself. She says: "… presumía yo / que podia consolarme / con los regalos de Dios" but is told by another spiritual tutor, *Desnudez*: "en deleites no repares / aunque sean más divinos" (922-24, 903-904), and finally, "consolarte muy bien puedes, pero *desearlos no*, / … que fuera dejar el dueño / por estar mirando el don" (l. 924-25).[41] Indeed, the final answer is to "buscar desnudo amor, / y sin criado interés" (l. 934-35). Finally, *Alma* is able to at least take steps toward moving beyond this more advanced shortfall. She begins to love God

[41] Later, we are reminded that virtues are symptoms of God-love rather than causes of it with these words: "que es *indicio* de humildad / que en deseo te fundes" (l. 1277-78, emphasis mine).

appropriately, giving herself up to him, a surrender that is again expressed in mystical metaphors: "darle nuestro amor / y encendernos en el suyo; / sólo por amante pudo / hacer finezas iguales" (l. 1260-64). The end result of this mutual love is abandonment of *objet petit a* for a Kierkegaard-influenced "name-of-the-Father," in whom Alma is finally able to see herself once she kills off *Apetito*. Perhaps somewhat ironically, *Mortificación*, the same Virtue through whom *Alma* saw only renunciation of desire before, is finally able to show *Alma* the true object of her desire: "Traeré un espejo, / no para [Apetito], para ti, / donde te contemples, Alma, / y sea Cristo Jesús / ator-mentado y en cruz" (l. 1490-94). To this, *Alma* significantly responds: "¡Oh, qué bien sabe… / después de penar, gozar!" (l. 1515-1516). Relieved of the need to practice the Virtues perfectly from the outset, and versed in the folly of such an act, she is without her own merit brought to the point of loving God through the crucified Christ.

The ways that Marcela de San Félix intimates or expresses mystical union in futher plays reinforce the significance of the earth-bound aspect of God-love suggested by the Christ-crucified reference at the end of *Muerte del apetito*. As we have already suggested by way of example through *Breve festejo*, union with Christ on earth is unmistakably mystically cast, and the *eros* is significantly agapic. Other plays function similarly. *Coloquio espiritual del nacimiento* also presents Virtues through whom the nuns can visualize themselves, again doubly invited by a Virgin Mary parallel, as lovers of the Christ child:

> [P]ara fiesta tan del cielo,
> *aunque en tierra se goza*,
> no han de tener los sentidos
> su parte, como en las otras.
> Todo lo vil y lo grosero,
> todo lo sensible arroja
> y echa de sí con espíritu;
> el espíritu que logra
> íntimamente finezas
> que le elevan y enamoran,
> que le elevan de lo bajo,
> y en lo supremo colocan.
> Y por esto …,
> espirituales pastoras
> somos de este nacimiento
> de la sigunda persona
> de la Trinidad sagrada." (l. 217-33, emphasis mine)

In the same play, redemption, significantly theologically linked to the birth and the crucifixion, is also presented through the unmistakably mystical casting of the Lord's Supper:

> [Cristo] se anquiló de forma
> que se anonadó y deshizo,
> y si en la boca le toma,
> no le masca y le consume,
> y él la une y la transforma
> en sí, que con esto paga
> el albergue que su esposa
> le da en su pecho y su alma." (l. 166-72)

But it is the arrival at Christ's birth that receives final significant dramatic attention:

en [É]l mismo nos transforman
con la soberana union.
¿No veis al Niño y su madre?
¿No veis su guarda mayor,
el santo y divino esposo
ardiendo en fuego de amor?" (l. 841-48)

The interesting suggestion throughout the play is ultimately that internal spiritual practices, undertaken in daily life as well as intimated on stage, better prepare the nuns to take on *physical* journeys, such as those to the Table and the stables of the play. Marcela reminds fellows that, "no hay posta más veloz / que actos internos y vivos / para acercarnos a Dios. / Y tan cerca de él nos ponen …" (l. 838-41), even as this proximity is physical as well as spiritual within the same dramas. Indeed, generally speaking, it seems that what the Virtues-nuns really ultimately desire within the play is to arrive at the embodied Christ of history through the disembodied one of ascetic-mysticism. Since the Christ-centered mystical union "staged" in *Nacimiento* represents or stands in for the "actos internos y vivos" that form part of everyday life, these internal acts by extension thus seem specifically designed to lead to embodied acts in the world. Spiritual practices would seem to exist to aid physical journeys in life as well.[42]

Coloquio espiritual del santísimo sacramento, Marcela's other play outside of the formation series,[43] similarly inscribes mystical union in an interrelated series of earthly Cristocentric events, and with the same doctrinal and practical implications as *Nacimiento*.[44] The play opens with *Alma* as a "dueño" getting dressed up for her lover, but with adornments that evoke virtues rather than physical enhancements. In this play as well, redemption is linked to the birth as "el Verbo soberano / en blanco pan se disfraza" (l. 127-28), but only after he "se nos baja / a unas entrañas muy puras / y en ellas el Verbo encarna" (l. 138-40). The "divino bocado" (l. 180) is at once a baby born in a "pesebre / cubierto de telerañas" (l. 141-42), the boy who gets lost at twelve years of age—"que se pierda de sus padres / y que le busquen con ansias" (l. 151-52)—and the crucified Son: "Que en aquella noche misma / que de venderle trataban, / de prenderle y matarle, / esta mesa nos prepara, / este manjar nos sazona / lleno de todas las gracias, / … / enamorado del Alma" (l. 168-75). As was the death of Christ, those representative meals that occur in the place and time that the play metonymically represents are earthly acts.[45] But they are also mystical. Marcela describes them in these words for the singular practicant: "comerás al mismo Dios / … celebrando las bodas" (l. 326, 324), since "esto hacen los deseos / de la hostia regalada": "el néctar divino baña / de suavedad y dulzura, / y el pecho con fuego abraza" (l. 308-309, 305-307). Around the Table itself, Christ responds to communicants with his own wooing gifts, again in the singular since union is directly implied: the "celestial olor / clavellina del costado" (l. 409-10), "dando licencia el amor, / deposita en tus entrañas / todo su gusto y sabor. / Y con violencia suave, / [el amor] negocia que tu Amador / no se ausente de tu pecho …" (l. 413-19). The worldly issue of the love shared during this mystical meal is, of course, suggested in the play by the Christ of various ages that seamlessly becomes the Second-Person mystical

[42]As Arenal and Sabat de Rivers remind us, on other occasions interior recollection, a character "regalado de Dios," serves precisely the same function: to "unir lo material con lo espiritual" (49).

[43] We recall that four plays present the gradual spiritual maturation of a Soul, and the other two plays, which we now discuss, support the doctrinal and practical significance of that maturation of desire.

[44] Susan Smith has already noted the interrelated nature of these important aspects of Marcela's dramatic texts: "[S]he presents a doctrinal belief on one level, while at the same time the spectator receives instruction in the importance of virtue and recognizes practical advice for shared conventual life" (163).

[45] We notice that the verb tenses are meaningfully agrammatical, joining the death with the preparation of the table: "esta mesa nos prepara…" "…aquella misma noche / que de venderle trataban."

divinity, as above. But Marcela also reminds her fellows that "te has de estar amando / de una [a] otra communion / con gran desvelo y cuidado" (l. 424-26). Returning to the main play on study, *Muerte del apetito*, San Félix here suggests that this between-time God-oriented love is quite necessarily communal. First, her Adam-and-Eve metaphor strongly insinuates that from a theological standpoint God-love is legitimately expressed on earth and among creatures; "al Supremo Dueño adoren" (l. 239) "tranquilamente pasa[ndo] / la vida con su consorte" (l. 228-29). Adam and Eve are also "dueño[s] absoluto[s]" (l. 222), cultivating their garden, taking care of the animals and so forth in "dominio conforme" (l. 219) to that of God: the first couple loves God precisely by serving his image *through* earthly tasks. The same thing is required of the nuns at a pivotal moment in *Muerte* when Divine love is revealed as the causal solution not only for getting rid of *Apetito,*[46] but for correct earthly activity. Speaking of *Oración* (mental prayer), *Alma* says: "oculto sus mercedes" (l. 534), perhaps suggesting a misperceived necessity for separation between ascetic practice and life. Meaningfully, *Mortificación* responds: "Bien manifestarlas puedes, / mas no ha de ser con palabras / *sino con la vida y obras*" (l. 535-37, emphasis mine). As was the case with Plato's *Symposium*, Marcela's plays meaningfully demonstrate this very thing by analogy, given that they are teaching and learning opportunities for the entire body that suggest the intimate connection between ascetic-mystical life and world-oriented activity.[47]

Returning to similar suggestions as Marcela makes them in *Santísimo sacramento* particularly, we further note that more recently expressed Catholic doctrine also emphasizes the implicit and necessary connection between Communion and human community. As Mary Beth Bonacci reminds us, Pope John Paul II notably and consistently refused to consider the idea of "community" aside from the practice of the Lord's Supper, and vice versa. For the former Church head, "[t]he Catholic parish is not supposed to be merely a 'service station' where we drop in, receive our sacraments and leave with no regard for those around us. In the Eucharist, we approach the altar … as a 'community of believers.'" Bonacci further notes that "The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that '[i]t is the whole community, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates' (1140)" (n.p.). Similarly in Marcela, the *singular* mystical ingestion of Christ that we have emphasized is nevertheless at the

[46] Virtues are, again, not primarily causal, but symptomatic, much as Augustine's initial "knowledge" is only "real" when it is informed by Love in faith.

[47] As Arenal has pointed out, participation in ordinary life for the recollected post-Tridentine nun in seventeenth-century Spain must be understood in a particular context, very different from that of today: "The transitions between solitude and the busy life of the convent with its many connections to the world *extramuros,* … created apprehension and frustration, fomenting the dread of losing the connection with God, as exemplified in the *Romance*, 'De una alma que temía distraerse al salir de un retiro' (248). This sort of fear is certainly well documented elsewhere also. Perhaps, however, Marcela's other work as we discuss it here shows what particular sort of daily labors might be deemed especially valuable in this same context, such as the instruction, literary expression and entertainment implied in the act of drama. Regardless, it is of course clear that although the physical world should receive its due to the extent that it also uniquely reflects God's order and love, it must ultimately serve the spiritual one, as in this Marcelian poem, "A la soledad de las celdas," which Arenal also references:

Que la celda material
ha de servir como caja
que guarda la interior celda
donde el Esposo descansa.
Que si faltase el espíritu
y la oración en el alma,
más que santa religiosa,
será mujer encerrada (l. 85-92).

same time, and somewhat indistinguishably from a grammatical standpoint, for the many: "esta mesa *nos* prepara, / este manjar *nos* sazona / lleno de todas las gracias, / … / enamorado del Alma (emphasis mine). Interestingly enough, it is precisely this sort of "plurality" (among other things) that has led some to question whether Marcela's writings can legitimately be described as mystical. So we turn now from defending the point that Marcela's noetically oriented plays encourage individual aspirants to view any sort of ascetic practice, and most centrally mysticism, as meaningfully earth-connected along with the theological rationales, to the (surprisingly?) related issue of her inclusion in the mystical cannon.

Is Marcela de San Félix a Literary Mystic?

From the earliest studies on the nun's writings in the late eighties, Marcela de San Félix's mystical bent has been well noted. In their introduction to the first San Félix anthology, Arenal and Sabat de Rivers noted the nun's "vocabulario místico amoroso" (43), and Sabat de Rivers has suggested in another study that Marcella "revitaliza … elementos de la literatura mística" ("Literatura manuscrita" 440). A few years earlier, in fact, this scholar was among the first to claim the title of mystic author for Marcela in her study on the *Soledades*, one in particular of which presents the "poquísimas composiciones por la que quizás podríamos reclamar el título de mística para sor Marcela ya que nos ofrece atisbos de unión con la divinidad" ("Soledades" 33). This initial hesitancy is not surprising in spite of strong Early Modern Spanish female presence in the resurgence of mystical practice,[48] since fewer nuns seemingly articulated themselves in writing around the tradition, and not in ways traditionally deemed equal to those of men. Weber's "Could Women Write Mystical Poetry? The Literary Daughters of Juan de la Cruz" convincingly articulates the various probable reasons why women's mystical writing was likely never very common and, if it was, has not much survived. She suggests that women had limited access to the tradition to begin with, and that from the standpoint of dominant perspectives on what mystical literature was supposed to resemble, would have been perceived as inferior. Female mystical production liberally included what by traditional definitions (San Juan de la Cruz was, of course, one important Spanish standard by which others have been measured) would be considered weakening features, most notably: plurality, by which "the coherence of the fictive 'I' is weakened" (195), allegorisis and doctrinal explanations. Of course, all of these features are centrally present in San Félix's plays, as are guiding intermediaries, which according to Arenal, "*strictly speaking* … denot[e] an ascetic rather than a mystic experience" even when mystical union is clearly referenced (247, emphasis mine). These scholars and others,[49] however, speak encouragingly to the inclusion of women within the mystical cannon.

A brief historical contextualization of Christian mysticism within Early Modern Spain will help us see two things: why women such as Marcela de San Félix might have been considered inferior as literary mystics, and why, within the same context as well as a synchronic one, they perhaps should not have been and are worthy of the inclusion they are beginning to achieve. In the first place, we again recall that Saint John of the Cross was perhaps the standard for mystical expression in Early

[48]Indeed, as Ahlgren notes, Teresa of Avila herself was a prime reason why "the Roman Catholic church eventually endorsed the mystical way as an important part of Counter-Reformation Catholic identity" ("Negotiating Sanctity" 380). Weber tells us that in her letters to her prioresses, Teresa often reminded them that overseeing the mystical experiences of fellow sisters under their charge was a centrally important duty ("Dear Daughter" 254).

[49] As far as Early Modern Spain is concerned, for example, Evelyn Toft has written on Cecilia del Nacimiento's mystical texts. (See "Joy in the Presence of the Bridegroom: The Contemplative Poetry of Cecilia del Nacimiento." *Studia mystica* 22 (2001): 83-96.)

Modern Spain. His was, of course, an apophatic mysticism, that of the negative way, infinite and largely unspoken, "lest God be thought to be just another reality" (McGinn *The Essential*, 281). His mystic writings therefore avoided, for example, the community orientation (attendant virtues, plural voices) and explanatory features (doctrinal substantiation, allegory) present in Marcela's texts. In *Mujeres, conventos y formas de la religiosidad barroca*, José Luis Sánchez discusses what was regarded as weakening in the practice of asceticism and mysticism by women in Spain from the thirteenth century forward: "desde principios del siglo va ganando terreno, favorecida primero por el recelo ante la novedad de la oración mental, y más tarde por las corrientes contrarreformistas, otra forma de entender la oración mental y espiritualidad: *la meditación imaginativa* de la humanidad de Cristo" (207). Sánchez reminds us that the increasing popularity of Ignacian spirituality, with its "sobrevaloración de lo plástico y y realista, emocional y sensible" (211) and attendant emphasis on the human Christ, "produc[ía] una alteración sustancial del modelo platónico y propiamente místico" (214) according to some thinking at the time. Sánchez reminds us that these changes, when considered in light of the famous Baroque crisis of religious faith, came to be viewed as "la altura de la norma y la acción antimística de la Contrarreforma." The fact that the human Christ entered the mystic picture so centrally, then, was negatively regarded in this context by some as part of "el proceso que transformaba a la espiritualidad mística en piedad barroca" (218), and was largely associated with women. In short, according to this way of thinking, movement away from Platonic ideals was caused by diminished faith and spiritual uncertainty or immaturity rather than a different idea of or attitude toward mysticism.

As scholar of mysticism Guillermo Serés points out, however, at the same time mystic practice (and, by extension, writing) was understood as an impossibility apart from Christ: "Y si para Platón y los neoplatónicos el alma entraba en contacto con Dios de manera casi instintiva …. Para los padres [espirituales cristianos], en cambio, el reencuentro era sólo posible gracias a un acto caritativo de un Dios condesciente, pues el alma *per se* no estaba preparada" (25). He goes on to say that for the Christian (mystic), the soul "está en Dios, porque de Él procede, y allí debe volver, con la mediación de su Hijo …. Sólo mediante el *Verbum incarnatum*, Cristo, pues en Él están unidas las naturalezas divina y humana …" (25).[50] Even if some religious authorities viewed Christocentric mystic emphases or expression as a weakening of a more "correct" Neoplatonic understanding or application, then, others appeared to defend it, at least doctrinally; Serés succinctly shows us why. As is well known, E. Allison Peers views seventeenth-century Spanish mysticism particularly favorably, and perhaps even *for* its emphases rather than in spite of them. He points out that it is "concrete, practical, personal, experiential, active," indicating that practitioners hearkened back to medieval practices in their desire for practical application: "[M]ost are renowned in more fields of activity than one—as writers, thinkers, founders, organizers, poets, preachers, saints" (n.p.). Edward Howells notes an active connection

[50] Serés' intricate analysis of the effects of (Neo)platonic thought on Christian mysticism and the ways in which the "anologías, reales o forzadas" (28) are useful and not is impossible to consider further here. However, his understanding of the relationship between the Incarnation and mystical human introspection is presented thus:

[L]a tesis central de la Encarnación, pero *a contraris* del modo platónico: el anhelo del alma de ver a Dios y transformarse en É les un eco, una respuesta, del amore de Dios por nosotros (de su *infusio caritatis*), materializado en su transformación en hombre, en su deseo de convertirse en uno con nosotros, o sea, en su *descensus*…. Por lo tanto, el alma conoce a Dios y se transforma en Él mediante su posesión amorosa (de Él) en sí misma, a través de un proceso de purificación introspectiva…, que la lleva a descubrir y contemplar lo que le asemeja a Dios…." (32)

as well, demonstrating in his study on San Juan and Santa Teresa how for these mystics "…union is to be understood as the interiorization of the divine life of the Trinity into a Christ-like self;" "union with God is in no way superficial to the self, nor does it remove the self from its authentic created existence, but rather deepens and transforms it" (125). For her part, Ahlgren views Ignatian practice as distinctly similar to the best of mysticism rather than a weakening influence that some, according to Sánchez, may have perceived: "The Ignatian framework for mental prayer … encouraged intuitive correlations between scriptural narrative and human experience" ("Teaching Teresa" 174), while mystical life reveals a "theological synthesis" on the "human-divine partnership, learned through Christ" (173). Elizabeth Rhodes agrees:

> Perfectly balanced between contemplation and action, the exercises are a method, not a text; living words, they were designed to be *made*, not read…. This balance between knowing oneself and knowing God intimately and accomplishing with others the work in the world that God needed to be done, is deeply imprinted on the *Exercises* and became a hallmark of Spanish Catholic mysticism. (52)

I submit and hope to have shown that this hallmark is to a certain extent present in Marcela de San Félix's mystical drama, even as the connection between Ignacian spirituality and mysticism that Ahlgren supports is strongly implied as well.[51] Furthermore, the connections that Howells ascribes to Teresa and even Juan de la Cruz between created existence and mysticism seem present in Marcela's work, too.

Some recent work by McGinn certainly indirectly invites us to consider Marcela de San Félix a legitimate mystic and mystic author. As a scholar, McGinn is known for insisting that mysticism must be considered in its historical context; according to him, mystics are "authors whose writings are shaped by the ecclesial and societal developments of their time" (Nelstrop, *et al.* 36). For McGinn, the primacy of the contextual background and the truth that is revealed in mysticism at a given time are central considerations; as such, he considers it limiting and misguided, for example, to understand Christian mysticism as a simple appropriation of Neoplatonic thought.[52] That said, however, in a recent well-received anthology on Christian mysticism, McGinn considers the practice from its "essential or synchronic" (*The Essential* xi) perspective, of which a central aspect is "the way in which the mystics invite us to imagine and even explore an inner transformation of the self based on a new understanding of the human relation to God" (xiii). While acknowledging the fact that some "Christian mystics affirm the superiority of the apophatic way" (281) shown in John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart, for example, McGinn draws equal attention to "positive" mystical ways throughout history. He features, for instance, mystics such as Clairvaux who "[find] God in erotic love and [worldly or] sense experience" (281-82), and nature mystics, who "[discern] God's presence in, with, and through his beautiful creation" (282). Within the latter category, for example, he offers that Francis of Assisi might be considered a mystical writer given "his sense of God's presence in the world and in his own life" (290). With all of this, McGinn reminds us that "the very term *mystical* … entered Christianity primarily as a way to describe the inner sense of the Bible" (3), or perhaps, the (activation of an) inner desire for a life that corresponds with biblical narrative such as we see in San Félix's arguably noetic

[51] For their part, Arenal and Sabat de Rivers note that the title *coloquio* is "de raigambre jesuítica" (37), which perhaps further strengthens the idea of a connection.

[52] We recall the "modelo platónico y propiamente místico" (214) that according to Sánchez applied to a great extent in Baroque Spain.

approach. Indeed, it is certainly defensible that Marcela strongly presents these aspects, central to the original application of the term within Christianity, in her "journey" plays.

Recalling Marcela's surviving dramatic texts, we remember that they present different types of journeys that are nevertheless meaningfully linked. On the one hand, four dramas represent the journey of a Soul towards greater maturity and connection with God. On the other, Marcela recalls various biblical journeys and the nuns are invited on them. Finally, the dramatist traces the process of ascetic-mystical life and suggests its connection to "physical" life. In a deep sense, then, these travels connect the biblical narrative to the inner and outer life of the nun practitioner. That is, as a whole, Marcela's plays meaningfully demonstrate the original application of the term "mystic" in Christianity that McGinn shares and uses as the crux of his 2006 *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*. Contemporary mystics themselves have likely contributed to McGinn's scholarly and mystical emphases with their own practices and writings, which bear the markers that McGinn stresses; he includes some of these figures in his book (and is a mystic himself). In terms of this project, a couple of contemporary examples will have to suffice. On twentieth-century Jesuit mystic and scholar Michel de Certeau, historical theologian Philip Sheldrake says that the Ignatian's "mysticism pointed towards a quite different approach to the Christian tradition. This was to be not a set of structures or a body of doctrines, but a practice, an action …. a continual transgression of fixed points …. Christianity as a journey," since "[t]he Christian community carries the fabled tale of Christ…" (n.p.). Certeau himself said of this journey: "It is this action which transcends, whereas speeches and institutions circumscribe…" ("How is" 151). Of the person that makes it, de Certeau notes that "he or she is a mystic who cannot stop walking…. Desire creates an excess…. It makes one go further, elsewhere" (*The Mystic Fable* 299) into discipleship. Other recent mystics from varied monastic traditions share similar emphases. For example, according to Brother John Albert (O.C.S.O.), Trappist monk and mystic Thomas Merton repudiated aspects of his more traditionalist *Seven Storey Mountain* with the idea that true Christian monasticism and mysticism were based on their live connection to world-based journey: "the ongoing invitation from Christ requir[es] the response of continuous conversion, the purification of desires…" (115); "the authentic Christian mystical tradition … sees the world of created matter and human society as ground for divine revelation" (113). Indeed, it seems that contemporary monastics[53] and mystics share McGinn's emphases, the glimmerings of which I maintain we might see in Marcela de San Félix.

In a 1924 article titled "The Truth of Mysticism," religious historian Wendell Marshall Thomas suggested the influence that the theories of "psychology" were then having on mystic practice to the extent that "fettered mysticism" (65), or socially and institutionally inscribed mysticism, was seemingly giving weigh to a newer understanding, the understanding defended by McGinn and supported by practicing mystics de Certeau and Merton. "Reality is grasped more fully," Thomas says, "in self-conscious development, when meanings are not merely followed, but selected, organized, controlled, and enjoyed, so as to engender a feeling of resourceful and happy intimacy with the world" (62). He continues, "[b]ut if a wide and varied contact with things and persons is denied, mysticism cannot give us union with the supreme reality" (65). Thomas' early understanding of the contribution of "psychology" to mystical practice appears to be, to a certain extent, resonant with psychoanalytical

[53] Jaques Leclercq is but one other well-known example, articulating that "[a] certain experience of the realities of faith, a certain 'lived faith,' is at one and the same time the condition for and the result of monastic theology" (264).

ideology[54] that both de Certeau and Merton ascribed to and applied to their mysticism, notions that shared in common the idea that desire and meaning are commonly generated within a subject that is freely engaged in the world. Marcela de San Félix, however, clearly did not enjoy the privilege of such applicable more recent theorizing. Nor did she likely have access to texts by mystics before her time who joyfully inscribed mystical practice in worldly activity or landscape. (As McGinn shows us, what Thomas seemed to view as new contributions perhaps were not.) Furthermore, she existed in a milieu that to a certain extent was suspicious of Ignatian influence on mysticism and to a large extent held suspect female mystical writings. And she was a cloistered post-Tridentine Spanish nun.[55] However, here we have considered that it might be defensible that Marcela's brand of mysticism, rather than representing a cheapening of a more "authentic" tradition, was actually a type of distant precursor to a sort of mystic practice that was at once more true to the original use of the word in Christianity and potentially more inclusive of biblical narrative or wholistic, as recent ideas posit. Thus, we might suggest in conclusion that Marcela de San Félix is potentially worthy of the title of literary mystic and theologian.

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[54] One of the best known psychoanalysts to theorize about the connection between "the search for ultimate meaning" (*Man's Search* 17) and the everyday "response-in-action" (29) that contact with this supreme reality both engenders and requires is, of course, Viktor Frankl. I am uncertain whether or not either de Certeau or Merton knew or read Frankl, but the psychoanalytic theories and practices he generated appear very resonant with the mystics' approaches and practices.

[55] In light of her milieu, I am not suggesting that Marcela's mystical theology was like that of Thomas, de Certeau and Merton; I rather propose that the type of mysticism she seemed to inscribe in her dramas bears some early resemblance to that of these later theologian-mystics in a way that I find both meaningful and indicative of her worth as a mystic theologian from McGinn's "essential or synchronic" perspective.

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