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The metaphor of battle in the mysticism of Teresa of Avila

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THE METAPHOR OF BATTLE IN THE MYSTICISM OF TERESA OF AVILA

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of

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by

Ana María Carvajal Jaramillo

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A mi hermosa familia por el afecto irremplazable, por ser luz infinita.

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ABSTRACT

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This research examines the metaphor of religious life understood as chivalric battle in the mysticism of Saint Teresa of Avila. With the purpose of studying her use of this metaphorical concept extracted from the romances of chivalry, I have analyzed her *Autobiography*, as a sample of prose work, as well as the poems “Loas a la cruz”, “Ya no durmáis”, and “Muero porque no muero”, as examples of her poetry. In all of these writings the Saint insisted on the vision of spirituality undertaken as a knight’s deed. The theory of the Monomyth by Joseph Campbell has been applied to the analysis of the *Autobiography*, and as a result, it has been possible to evidence the vision that the Saint had of herself as a kind of chivalric heroine. The theory of metaphors designed by George Lakeoff and Mark Johnson has been used to read the poems mentioned above, and it has helped to unveil the centrality of the metaphorical concept of mysticism as battle in the worldview of Teresa. Indeed, the romances of chivalry served Teresa as the source of a language that allowed her to express her understanding of religious life in a familiar language, distant from the refinement of theology. But more importantly, these books of knighthood facilitated the development of a whole vision of mystical love in the terms of chivalry.

INTRODUCTION

It is unnecessary to state the significance of Saint Teresa of Avila for the history of mysticism or her influence on Spanish literature. For centuries, critics have acknowledged the relevance of her figure, and have devoted their lives to the study of her texts. Her stature as mystic and writer is incontestable. However, it is interesting to notice how much the orthodoxy of this great Carmelite has been challenged over the last sixty years.¹ She has traditionally been regarded as a paradigm of obedience to the hierarchies of the Church: she was canonized only 35 years after her death, and Pope Paul VI proclaimed her Doctor of the Church in 1970 (Green 33). Indeed, submission was pivotal to Teresa, as it can be inferred from her exclamation at deathbed: “Al fin, muero hija de la Iglesia” (de la madre de Dios and Steggink 983), but new findings and interpretations have started to unveil a more heterodox side of *Teresian* writings.

An Unorthodox Saint in an Orthodox Context

Ever since Américo Castro made public the discovery made by Alonso Cortés of significant proof of her Jewish background in 1946 (Barrientos 59), a new light has been

¹ Especially through the works of scholars such as Alison Weber, Gillian Ahlgren, and Antonio Pérez-Romero, among others.

shed on the study of Saint Teresa. Teófanés Egido, Gareth Davies, and Deirdre Green,² among others, have analyzed the influence of this Jewish legacy in the Saint's life and writings. In sixteenth century Spain, a woman who spoke publicly about religion defied the social order. But Teresa went even further, as she also claimed to have mystic experiences while hiding her convert origins. She put herself at great risk, and not surprisingly, she was denounced to the Inquisition and investigated by it at least five times during her lifetime (Mujica, "Teresa of Avila").

The founder of the Discalced Carmelites met three conditions that made her highly suspicious for the Inquisitors: she was a woman who discussed religion, she was a mystic, and she came from a family of Jewish *conversos* (Green 154). Green also explains in detail that her view of mysticism, which deeply valued raptures and contemplation of a personal Deity, was going "directly against the dominant Scholastic mystical tradition of her day" (65). The mystic forms endorsed by Scholasticism were focused on the contemplation of an abstract God that transcended all forms. Therefore, all images and symbols of divinity had to be renounced. This was exactly the opposite of what Teresa did and taught.

Given the religious and social circumstances of Spain in the sixteenth century, one must wonder how Teresa managed to avoid being dragged to the stake. And, in truth, this is a question that has not been completely answered. Even her tenacious work as reformer was questioned, as it both gained her credibility in the eyes of some of her opponents, and it allowed others to accuse her of violating the enclosure commanded by

² See their respective works: "The Historical Setting of St. Teresa's Life"; "St. Teresa and the Jewish Question"; and *Gold in the Crucible*.

the Council of Trent (Weber 4). Indeed, Teresa was forced to travel constantly, as was required by the foundation of 17 new convents and monasteries, and this entailed a disruption of her cloistered life. In any case, it is undeniable that both her personality and her talent for writing played a significant role in dissipating the doubts of the Inquisitors.

Many critics have argued that it was the protection of some nobles, and even that of King Philip II himself, that kept Teresa safe from the flames of the Holy Inquisition. However, King Philip also protected other visionary women such as Magdalena de la Cruz and María de la Visitación. The reputation of nun Magdalena was such that, at birth, the future king was wrapped in her habit, as it was thought it would defend him from evil spiritual forces. Nevertheless, both these women ended up incarcerated by the Inquisition (Imirizaldu 37), which asserts that royal protection was insufficient to obstruct inquisitorial mandates. This is precisely why critics like Allison Weber and Gillian T. W. Ahlgren have insisted on pointing at Teresa's use of language as the key to understand her way of thinking, and even as a tool for evading a tragic end.

Allison Weber, in particular, has analyzed Teresa's use of language from a gender perspective. She has concluded that her style, often defined as very feminine or as having an oral simplicity, might actually contain an undercover strategy of empowerment (15). According to Weber, whenever Teresa acknowledged the misogynistic ideas of her time, she was defending the legitimacy of her own spiritual experiences, as well as her right to disobey Pauline silence (39). Teresa accepted the idea, common in her time, of women's inferiority and their state of ignorance, but she recurred to God's grace to explain why some women could understand religion and even challenge theologians' erudition. Her

concessions served a pragmatic purpose that also helped her to remain away from accusations of being an *alumburada*, that is, a heretic.

The Reformation started by Martin Luther during Teresa's lifetime had placed the Catholic Church in a defensive position, and thus, every departure from the hierarchical authority was regarded as heresy and was severely punished. Religious writings were the privilege of clerics and theologians, who discussed various aspects of Catholic doctrine, and all publications on religious matters, especially if written by women or laymen, were meticulously analyzed by the Inquisition (Weber 29). Even earlier attempts of translating the Bible from Latin to the vernacular languages (suggested by Erasmus) were put to a halt. As a result, access to religious education was firmly controlled by men of the cloth, who had to follow specific guidelines in order to observe the Church's doctrine.

The Language of Teresa

Amidst such turmoil, it was only logic that Saint Teresa's writings would become suspicious of heresy. Her *Autobiography*, in Spanish called *Libro de la vida*, remained under the custody of the Holy Inquisition for thirteen years. Moreover, only 7 years after her death a group of theologians suggested that the Inquisition should burn all of her books (Weber 35). Her activity as writer was repeatedly questioned and denounced, as it became a nuisance for many clergymen. Felipe Sega, the Papal Nuncio, was one of the voices that expressed his concern for this woman who did not comply with the orthodoxy of the Church. He described her as:

Una fémina inquieta, andariega, desobediente y contumaz, que a título de devoción inventaba malas doctrinas, andando fuera de la clausura contra el

orden del concilio tridentino y preladados, enseñando como maestra contra lo que San Pablo enseñó mandando que las mujeres no enseñasen. (Fernández Collado 345)

It is astonishing that, despite all the difficulties that arose from her resistance to this controlled historical context, Teresa managed to survive. Not only that, but she quickly became a Saint, and even a co-patron of Spain. In order to decipher the strategies she used (whether consciously or unconsciously) to move from being an almost heretic to Doctor of the Church, critics have resorted to the study of her use of language, as mentioned before. After all, it is the primary evidence that remains of her thoughts and ideas, and of the way she chose to express them. When comparing Teresa to many other mystics such as Juan de Ávila or fray Luis de León, who suffered a harsh fate in the hands of the Inquisition, it is easy to conclude that her very calculated writings paved the way for her peaceful death as daughter of the Church.

This study acknowledges Teresa's language as the instrument through which her way of thinking can be understood, but also as the key that allowed her to escape the fury of the Inquisitors. My analysis is focused on her utilization of a speech that is characteristic of chivalric romances and that included the traditions of lovesickness and courtly love. In recurring to this specific language of books of knighthood she was also saluting a genre that theologians frowned upon. Indeed, it was a gesture of further defiance. But it is also relevant to point out that, despite the fact that many clerics criticized the popular romances of chivalry, in Spanish *libros de caballerías* (from here on referred to as *libros*), none of them were included in the Index of Prohibited Books by the Inquisition. Only a 1554 work by a Jerónimo de San Pedro suffered such a fate

because he compared the story of Christ to that of a knight³ in the subgenre *caballerías a lo divino* (Slade 305). It may be possible that the romances of chivalry shared with Teresa's writings a language that allowed all of these texts to elude the inquisitorial flames. Nevertheless, this hypothesis exceeds the limits of this research, and it remains an issue to be considered and explored.

However, Teresa confesses to have read *libros* as a young girl, and even tells us of her fascination with them: "Era tan extremo lo que en esto me embebía, que si no tenía libro nuevo, no me parece tenía contento" (*Obras* 36)⁴. Consequently, Saint Teresa's writings are filled with strong images that connect her religious experiences with the very well-known knight stories of her time. This also meant that her literary transparency is distant from the intricacy of the religious texts written by theologians, and, instead, is closely related to the familiarity of *libros*. These books were written for the entertainment of all social classes, and it is possible to presume that they were read in public, out loud (Frenk 27). The approachability of these texts was largely responsible for their unprecedented popularity.

In many ways, the style of Saint Teresa imitates the orality of *libros*. Ahlgren suggests that her function as teacher could account for the simplicity of her writings: "She knew that her works would be read not only in private but aloud to groups of people,

³ In a way, the historical interpretation of knights as mystics (their quest for the Holy Land, the Grail, their devotion to relics, and their defense of Christendom) was well accepted in the Spanish society of the sixteenth century. Saint Teresa's writings could be interpreted as the inversion of this tradition, where the knight is no longer a mystic, but the mystic becomes a knight.

⁴ All of Saint Teresa's writings are cited from the critical edition of her complete works (*Obras completas*) by Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink and shall be cited as *Obras*.

during recreation and in the refectory” (70). Teresa’s approachability entailed a recognition that expanded well beyond the walls of convents, as she opened up a new pathway to religious experience for a great number of unlettered believers who had been kept in the dark by the rigid control of orthodoxy exerted by the Church. Ahlgren cites several testimonies collected during the process held by the Catholic Church to canonize Teresa. Many witnesses stated that they had found a light of spiritual edification in her books (151).

This work aims at contributing to the debate on a new analysis of Saint Teresa and her writings, in the light of recent claims that defend a more unorthodox nature of her interpretation of religion. However, it is not within the goals of this research to neither defend nor question the orthodoxy of Saint Teresa. Contemporary scholars, such as Antonio Pérez-Romero have argued that in talking about her “these traditional epithets [. . . defender of the faith, champion of Counter-Reformist Catholicism] can no longer be taken at face value” (207). Nevertheless, throughout this work underlies the consideration of Teresa as a mystic, and as such, her life is interpreted as a true quest for God. Either way, a revision of her writings to uncover new and challenging aspects of her way of thinking is necessary, and every effort that leads to a fuller comprehension of Saint Teresa must be made.

The present study suggests that Teresa’s motivation to recur to the language from *libros de caballerías* lies on her comprehension of religious experience in terms of battle, and the perception of herself as a kind of heroine or knight. This statement implies that, for Teresa, spirituality was a combat against enemies, both from within and without, and sometimes, outer enemies happened to be the referees of orthodoxy of her time. However

the Saint was, above all, a woman of faith, and religious life also meant a constant effort to achieve perfect union with God. This idea of the ultimate union is present in the knight's aspiration to obtain the hand of his lady. Marriage would constitute for him the end of all suffering, as would be death for Teresa.

To a certain extent, romances of chivalry paved the way for the popularity of *Teresian* texts, and the familiarity of the language she used to speak about religious matters helped her to reach wider audiences (Casale 58). Her use of metaphors from tales of knights was greatly responsible for the popularization of Teresa's "gran dios de las caballerías" (*Obras* 544), who could be fully comprehended by the believers of her time. In 1622, when she was canonized, and again in 1970, after being proclaimed as Doctor of the Church, Teresa rose as a female heroic figure that had defeated, not only her own demons, but the institutionalized orthodoxy, which had finally yielded to her mysticism. Her very lucid use of chivalric language and the potency of her writings modeled a figure of herself that could be interpreted as both a knight and a saint.

Thesis

The thesis defended by this study is that Saint Teresa of Avila chose to use the language from *libros de caballería* because she understood religious experience in the metaphorical terms of the battle of knights. The presence of this metaphor is not only frequent, but systematic in her texts, and so, it is possible to conclude that her entire conception of religiosity and spirituality is permeated by the idea of war. Her perception of mystics, and therefore, of herself, is linked to her conception of heroes, of knights. Among the many consequences of apprehending interior life in such terms were the

option for a solitary road in which Teresa would be constantly tried, a unique understanding of divinity, and above all, the promise of ultimate union with God.

Chapter Objectives

The first chapter is dedicated to the analysis of Saint Teresa's *Autobiography*. This section demonstrates how, by using the language from romances of chivalry, Teresa presented herself as a knight who fought a rough spiritual battle. In order to accomplish this, I use Joseph Campbell's theory of the Monomyth, and I identify each one of the main stages of the hero's journey with Teresa's own retelling of her story. The goal of this exercise is not only to evidence Teresa's use of the language from *libros* but also to corroborate an impression of herself that could be identified as a hero, as a knight.

The second chapter analyzes the use of the metaphor of spiritual life as battle in some of Teresa's poems. For this, I recurred to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's theory of metaphors. I also trace some of the images used by Saint Teresa back to their original source in *libros*. The purpose is to compare how Teresa transferred the language of courtly love and battles to the realm of spirituality, while acknowledging that her vision of religious life as that of a knight is pervasive to all of her thinking. Indeed, it transcended her writings and became part of the very essence of her worldview.

Finally, the conclusions will try to elucidate what the consequences of choosing to interpret spirituality as battle had for Saint Teresa. Paradoxically, while Teresa saw herself as a knight that had to fight a harsh battle on her own, the use of the language from *libros* gave her a tremendous popularity that turned her into an icon for the Catholic masses. Her stature became such that her canonization ended up being an official

validation of the mysticism that the Counter-Reformation ideals had persecuted so harshly through the Inquisition.⁵ To conclude, I indicate how the influence of *libros* contributed to create an image of Teresa as a solitary mystic warrior. It is precisely this image which has been venerated by the crowds as one of the holiest figures in the history of Catholicism.

⁵ Gillian T. W. Ahlgren explains the canonization of Teresa as “the result of three factors: a rather dogged campaign on her behalf by the Spanish crown and several nobles; the successful construction of a female role model who was able to represent most of the virtues associated with femininity while overcoming the negative attributes associated with womanhood; and, perhaps most important, the Roman Catholic Church’s endorsement of the mystical way as an important part of the Counter-Reformation identity” (147).

CHAPTER 1: SAINT TERESA'S LIFE AS A KNIGHT IN HER *AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of Saint Teresa's *Autobiography* in light of the theory of the Monomyth by Joseph Campbell. In the account of her own story, Teresa reveals herself as a heroine who counters several enemies, both from within and without. Some of the external trials that the Saint had to face were the confrontations with confessors and theologians regarding mystical experiences, the struggle to consolidate the reformation of the Carmelite order, and even her own body, which permanently battled against illness. Inner trials, perhaps the harshest for Teresa, included her validation of mental prayer and the experience of a mystical (marital) union with God. All of these feats, described by the words of the Saint, can be easily interpreted as heroic deeds.

In all likelihood Teresa had a specific kind of hero in mind. During the Spanish sixteenth century, romances of chivalry gained a great popularity and an influence from which the Saint of Avila did not escape. With the purpose of understanding Teresa's suggestion of her life as a knightly quest, this chapter is structured around the stages of the hero's journey indicated by Campbell: Departure, Initiation, and Return. A great number of Teresa's life experiences are matched to each of these stages and several of its sub-steps. This organization is parallel to the Saint's vision of her spiritual efforts with a knight's deeds, and, at the same time, it facilitates the identification of the

language from *libros*. Numerous metaphors from that genre of books infiltrated Teresa's writings. Such metaphors will also be examined in the present chapter.

Campbell thoroughly described how the need for a hero emerges in times of crisis, when the hope for a better world seems to fade. "Only birth can conquer death" (11), but it must be the birth of something new. Campbell retells the story of Theseus, the hero who defeated the Minotaur, and highlights the fact that this man was an outsider; he came from a foreign land. Saint Teresa too was an outsider. In times of strenuous orthodox control exerted by the Inquisition, Teresa spoke about religion while being a woman, a descendant from Jewish converts and a mystic. Her heroic accomplishments included the foundation of the Discalced Carmelites, her successful resistance to institutional power, and even the incorporation of her mysticism into the orthodoxy of the Church⁶.

But perhaps a more lasting achievement was her *determinada determinación* (*Obras* 323) in consolidating a new way of expressing religious experience, and in helping to structure an eminent apology of the mystical path in Catholicism (Ahlgren 168). Campbell, elaborating on the myth of Theseus remembers the role of Ariadne and her thread, which ultimately allowed the hero to successfully return from the labyrinth (18). Saint Teresa's saving thread might be precisely her calculated use of the language from *libros*, which acknowledged her as a heroine. Paradoxically, while to some Saint Teresa ended up becoming the champion that countered the patriarchal values of the Inquisition, to others, she became a knight that conquered a spiritual union with the divine. Her heroic nature, however, has remained unquestioned.

⁶ This may be inferred from her proclamation as Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI in 1970.

Departure

The Call to Adventure

When defining the first step in the hero's journey, the call to adventure, Campbell immediately refers the reader to the mystical realm: "It may sound the call to some high historical undertaking. Or it may mark the dawn of religious illumination. As apprehended by the mystic, it marks what has been termed 'the awakening of the self'" (42). This awakening will change the hero's life forever, and it will imply a certain type of death and rebirth (43). In Teresa's life the call to adventure is easily identifiable. In the first chapter of her *Autobiography* the Saint explains how her virtuous parents constantly incited her to be good. It is at least significant that she uses the verb *despertar*, "to awake" to refer to her spiritual awareness:

El tener padres virtuosos y temerosos de Dios me bastara, si yo no fuera tan ruin, con lo que el Señor me favorecía para ser buena . . . Con el cuidado que mi madre tenía de hacernos rezar y ponernos en ser devotos de nuestra Señora y de algunos santos, comenzó a despertarme, de edad –a mi parecer– de seis u siete años. Ayudávame no ver en mis padres favor sino para la virtud. Tenían muchas. (34)

A few paragraphs later, the Saint admits to have felt an interior beckoning that from her earliest childhood incited her to entertain heroic thoughts: "Como vía los martirios que por Dios las santas pasavan, parecíame compravan muy barato el ir a gozar de Dios" (35). Even as a young girl Teresa escaped home with one of her brothers in an attempt to go to the Holy Land, like crusaders (indeed like knights) to fight against the

infidels: “Concertávamos irnos a tierra de moros, pidiendo por amor de Dios, para que allá nos descabezasen” (35). Furthermore, after reading that the eternal punishment or glory was to last forever, Teresa and her brother would feel so in awe that they would often repeat, as a battle cry: “¡Para siempre, siempre, siempre!” (35).

The premature death of her mother, when the Saint was only fourteen, allowed her to have an unexpected freedom during the crucial teenage years. When writing on the matter, Teresa refuses to go into detail, but it seems as if she managed to have enough contact with male counterparts to put her *honra* (honor) at risk. That situation, however, was terminated when, forced by the circumstances, Teresa was put in a monastery. The way in which she narrates the events is impregnated with a sense of predestination, much like the lives of fantastic knights whose grand future is always hidden in the simplest happenings of their early years:

Y pues nunca era inclinada a mucho mal –porque cosas deshonestas naturalmente las aborrecía– . . . mas puesta en la ocasión, estava en la mano el peligro, y ponía en él a mi padre y hermanos. De los cuales me libró Dios de manera que se parece bien procurava contra mi voluntad que del todo no me perdiese . . . Porque no me parece había tres meses que andava en estas vanidades, cuando me llevaron a un monasterio que había en este lugar. (38)

The Saint insists on how again and again she felt the urge of achieving virtue, and how she repeatedly fell away from it. Teresa interprets the end of these vacillations as the result of divine intervention: “no me dejaba el demonio de tentar, y buscar los de fuera cómo me desasosegar con recaudos . . . presto se acabó, y comenzó mi alma a tornarse a

acostumbrar en el bien de mi primera edad y vi la gran merced que hace Dios a quien pone en compañía de buenos. Paréceme andava Su Majestad mirando y remirando por dónde me podía tornar a Sí” (38). It may be inferred, from the author’s perspective, that there was a greater plan for her than to remain the subject of human hesitation between good and evil. Teresa, just like the knights from *libros*, believed there was a greater fate reserved for her.

Refusal of the Call

“Muchos son los llamados y pocos los escogidos”⁷, quotes Teresa from the Bible in chapter 3 of her *Autobiography* (39). After having to stay at a monastery in order to avoid more speculation that may irreparably hurt her honor, she met a nun who greatly shaped her determination to become a religious woman herself. However, the process was not a smooth one, and the Saint kept numerous doubts regarding this decision: “Estos buenos pensamientos de ser monja me venían algunas veces, y luego se me quitavan, y no podía persuadirme a serlo” (39). Teresa described this state of uncertainty as a battle: “En esta batalla estuve tres meses, forzándome a mí mesma con esta razón: que los trabajos y penas de ser monja no podían ser mayor que la del purgatorio, y que yo había bien merecido el infierno” (40).

Campbell thoroughly analyzes the importance that many myths and tales concede to the refusal that the hero often makes of the call to adventure. This unwillingness to accept the call is typically the expression of a fear of change in the state of things, and it

⁷ *La Sagrada Biblia de la Familia Católica*, Mt. 20, 16. This version differs slightly from the one quoted by Saint Teresa, as it says: “Muchos empero son los llamados, mas pocos los escogidos”.

becomes the stagnation of the hero's life and world: "Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom . . . the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved" (49). Teresa had to face the predicament of answering or not the call to several of her heroic enterprises. At first, not only did she reject becoming a nun, but she also tried to refuse to engage in mental prayer, or to undertake her project of reformation, and even to fight against the mistrust of her confessors.⁸

It is not possible to deny that too much was at stake for Teresa. Throughout the course of her narration she ends up accepting the challenges and trials that circumstances presented her, convinced that she was guided by the will of God.⁹ The possibility of becoming a religious woman was particularly hard for her father, the son of a Jewish convert. Teresa knew that he would oppose her determination, and decided to act without his consent. In a quick move she engaged in a path that would change the course of her life: "En estos días que andava con estas determinaciones, había persuadido a un hermano mío a que se metiese fraile . . . y concertamos entrambos de irnos un día, muy de mañana, al monasterio adonde estaba aquella mi amiga . . . en esta postrera determinación ya yo estaba de suerte, que a cualquiera que pensara servir más a Dios u mi padre quisiera, fuera" (41).

⁸ See chapters 3, 7, 15, 21, 23, 25, 29, 32, and 33 of Saint Teresa's *Autobiography*.

⁹ Refer to pages 14 and 15 of the present work. Also, the first four chapters of the book are, according to her own interpretation, the manifestation of the will of God in Teresa's life. See in her *Autobiography* the final three paragraphs of chapter 2, for example, where the Saint acknowledges that God wanted her for Himself, and also, the end of chapter 21, where she describes her own life as an example.

Campbell seems to believe that there is a deeper meaning that underlies the confusion and hesitation of the hero: “sometimes the predicament following an obstinate refusal of the call proves to be the occasion of a providential revelation of some unsuspected principle of release” (53). And such was the case of Teresa. After a long process of denial, she finally surrendered to a powerful spiritual force that determined, not only her acceptance of the cloth, but also her initiation on the mystical path. Not surprisingly, she described her resolution as being the result of a divine predestination, which is often a recurrent sign of the hero¹⁰.

En tomando el hábito, luego me dio el Señor a entender cómo favorece a los que se hacen fuerza para servirle . . . A la hora me dio un tan gran contento de tener aquel estado, que nunca jamás me faltó hasta hoy, y mudó Dios la sequedad que tenía mi alma en grandísima ternura. Dávanme deleite todas las cosas de religión, y es verdad que andava algunas veces barriendo en horas que yo solía ocupar en mi regalo y gala, y acordándoseme que estaba libre de aquello, me dava un nuevo gozo, que yo me espantava y no podía entender por dónde venía. (41)

Supernatural Aid

A great part of Teresa’s life was intertwined with the supernatural. Many of her problems with the Inquisition had their roots precisely on the fact that she claimed to have experienced mystical raptures. These spiritual events were of great importance to

¹⁰ Refer to the introduction to Axayácatl Campos García Rojas’s article “Las señales y marcas del destino heroico en ‘El libro del caballero Zifar’: Garfín y Roboán”.

the Saint, as they reassured her faith and nurtured her relation with God. In fact, they could very well be categorized as supernatural aid. However, for the purposes of this research, these spiritual experiences will not be considered for analysis. Instead, I will focus on the concept as defined by Campbell: “For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure . . . who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (57).

Campbell provides a thorough description of the significance of this protective figure, and stresses the importance it holds for the hero:

What such a figure represents is the benign, protecting power of destiny . . . a reassurance . . . that though omnipotence may seem to be endangered by the threshold passages and life awakenings, protective power is always and ever present within the sanctuary of the heart . . . Having responded to his own call, and continuing to follow courageously as the consequences unfold, the hero finds all the forces of the unconscious at his side. (59)

Throughout Saint Teresa’s life, many protective figures appear to remind her of the great mission she was to undertake. One of the first ones, right after she had taken her vows as a nun, was her uncle Pedro Sánchez de Cepeda. Perhaps without foreseeing the great resonance it would have, he made a precious gift to his niece. This present, equivalent to the thread of Ariadne or the amulets in mythology, would initiate Teresa in mental prayer, which would become the path for her mystical experiences: “Cuando iba, me dio aquel tío mío . . . un libro; llámase «Tercer Abecedario», que trata de enseñar oración de recogimiento; y puesto que este primer año había leído buenos libros . . . , no

sabía cómo proceder en oración ni cómo recogerme, y así holguéme mucho con él y determinéme a seguir aquel camino con todas mis fuerzas” (42).

The fact that this gesture from his uncle constituted the guidance described by Campbell as supernatural aid lies in the very words Teresa used to illustrate the great influence that this book would have for her spiritual life: “comencé a tener ratos de soledad y a confesarme a menudo y comenzar aquel camino, tiniendo a aquel libro por maestro; porque yo no hallé maestro –digo confessor– que me entendiese” (43). The book became a master for her, and for some time, the only one. Under the direction of this tutor, Teresa started to follow a path that would take her to the zenith of Spanish mysticism.

There were many other protective figures who intervened in Saint Teresa’s journey, both from the physical and metaphysical realms. Among the latter type are the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph. In the first chapter of the *Autobiography*, Teresa narrates how, after her mother’s death, she asked the Virgin Mary to receive her as daughter. Throughout her life the Carmelite felt the protection of this spiritual guide (35). Later on, in chapter 6, Teresa remembers having taken Saint Joseph as advocate and mentor. His patronage was so significant that Teresa named the first of the convents she founded after him (51). Additionally, one of the most important persons that supported the Saint was father Diego de Cetina, who assured her of the divine origin of her mystical raptures and led her back into the path of mental prayer:

Dijo ser espíritu de Dios muy conocidamente, sino que era menester tornar de nuevo a la oración . . . pues Dios me hacía tan particulares mercedes; que qué sabía si por mis medios quería el Señor hacer bien a muchas personas, y otras cosas (que parece profetizó lo que después el Señor ha

hecho conmigo); que tenía mucha culpa si no respondía a las mercedes que Dios me hacía . . . Dejóme consolada y esforzada . . . Quedé determinada de no salir de lo que me mandase en ninguna cosa, y así lo hice hasta hoy. (131)

But perhaps the greatest counselor for Teresa was fray Pedro de Alcántara. This religious man met her precisely at a time when her confessors and superiors became very suspicious of her visions. Most of them believed those experiences to be either fake or demonic and were encouraging Teresa to repress them. Desperate and confused, Teresa found unexpected guidance from this pious Franciscan, whose gentle orientation provided the Saint with enough resolution to continue on her mystical path:

Como le di cuenta, en suma, de mi vida y manera de proceder de oración, con la mayor claridad que yo supe . . . Casi a los principios vi que me entendía por experiencia, que era todo lo que yo había menester . . . Este santo hombre me dio luz en todo y me lo declaró, y dijo que no tuviese pena, sino que alabase a Dios y estuviese tan cierta que era espíritu suyo, que si no era la fe, cosa más verdadera no podía haver ni que tanto pudiese creer. Y él se consolava mucho conmigo y hacíame todo favor y merced. (159)

The Crossing of the First Threshold

Campbell describes the encounter of the hero with the primary obstacle that he must overcome in order to enter the uncanny world of adventure: “the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the ‘threshold guardian’ at the entrance to the zone of

magnified power. Such custodians bound the world in the four directions . . . Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger” (64). In more than one occasion Teresa reached the limits of the world she knew to enter the land of mystery. The most important example of crossing of the threshold was the moment when, after escaping her father’s house and against his will, she took vows as a Carmelite nun:

Acuérdaseme, a todo mi parecer y con verdad, que, cuando salí de casa de mi padre, no creo será más el sentimiento cuando me muera; porque me parece cada hueso se me apartava por sí, que, como no había amor de Dios que quitase el amor del padre y parientes, era todo haciéndome una fuerza tan grande que, si el Señor no me ayudara, no bastaran mis consideraciones para ir adelante. (41)

The guardian of this first threshold was her own fear of turning her back on the world she knew: her family, especially her father. After having announced to him that she was determined to take the vows, he could only agree to accept her doing so after his death. For Teresa there was no other choice but to carry on with her purpose, even in defiance of her father, for which she had to flee home. Her determination corresponded to what was required of a decision that would entail crucial consequences. The act of entering the convent serves as a metaphor for the commencement of a new life. But just as Campbell anticipated, before the road of trials can begin, the hero must descend into a world of obscurity, in order to die, at least symbolically.

The Belly of the Whale

“The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died” (74). This is the way in which Campbell describes the meaning of this new stage in the hero’s journey. Right after stepping out of the region of comfort and tradition, the hero is submerged into the darkness where he will be forced to experience a new birth. And this is exactly what Saint Teresa tells her readers that happened right after she took vows.

Teresa’s health was always very fragile, and her own body often grew to be the source of ruthless trials. Shortly after becoming a nun, Teresa suffered a paroxysm that lasted for four days. This sudden symptom of a strange illness (one over which physicians still debate) shook her family and close friends, and took her to the limits of death: “Diome aquella noche un parajismo [paroxismo], que me duró estar sin ningún sentido cuatro días, poco menos. En esto me dieron el Sacramento de la Unción, y cada hora u memento pensaban espirava . . . Teníanme a veces por tan muerta, que hasta la cera me hallé después en los ojos” (48).

Her relatives and the people at her monastery were expecting that the Saint would inevitably die. The whole experience was so meaningful for Teresa that, when regarded in perspective, it made her feel that she had gained essential knowledge about life and death. Her way of dealing with confession and her idea of venial sins changed definitely after this episode. She would even go as far as to say that never again she withheld from confessing even the smallest actions she regarded as sins:

La pena de mi padre era grande de no me haver dejado confesar . . .
 teniendo día y medio abierta la sepultura en mi monesterio, esperando el
 cuerpo allá . . . quiso el Señor tornase en mí. Luego me quise confesar.
 Comulgué con hartas lágrimas; mas, a mi parecer, que no eran con el
 sentimiento y pena de sólo haver ofendido a Dios, que bastara para
 salvarme, si el engaño que traía de los que me habían dicho no eran
 algunas cosas pecado mortal –que cierto he visto después lo eran– no me
 aprovechara . . . nunca, después que comencé a comulgar, dejé cosa por
 confesar que yo pensase era pecado, aunque fuese venial, que le dejase de
 confesar. (48)

Initiation

The Road of Trials

This stage contains, for many mythologies, the most prolific set of adventures reserved for the hero. According to Campbell, after having crossed the threshold “the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials” (81). For Saint Teresa, this path of trials lasted throughout her life. Until her very last breath she struggled with her inner self while facing the persecution from her enemies. The challenges she had to face, as mentioned earlier, included her vindication of mystical experiences and mental prayer, her strenuous work in the foundation of convents, her defense of accusations of unorthodoxy, and even a

fight against her own body that continuously succumbed to disease. Nevertheless, for Teresa, her biggest challenge was mental prayer. Her own idea of sin and humility often alienated her from it, and hence, from God:

Pues así comencé de pasatiempo en pasatiempo, de vanidad en vanidad, de ocasión en ocasión, a meterme tanto en muy grandes ocasiones y andar tan estragada mi alma en muchas vanidades, que ya yo tenía vergüenza de en tan particular amistad, como es tratar de oración, tornarme a llegar a Dios; y ayudóme a esto que, como crecieron los pecados, comencé a faltar el gusto y regalo en las cosas de virtud . . . Este fue el más terrible engaño que el demonio me podía hacer debajo de parecer humildad, que comencé a temer de tener oración, de verme tan perdida. (52)

For Teresa, all exterior challenges were easier than her inner struggle. She placed a great part of her energy in trying to find a mystical union with God. Therefore, prayer was of the utmost importance. She states that the thought of guilt and false humility used as self-justification to remain away from prayer was her major trial: “Y ésta, como después diré, fue la mayor tentación que tuve, que por ella me iba a acabar de perder, que con la oración un día ofendía a Dios y tornava otros a recogerme y apartarme más de la ocasión” (55). The pursuit of a way to God lasted for two decades. And it is interesting to notice how the Saint relies on the metaphor of the stormy sea¹¹, a frequent image of *libros*, to describe the religious transformation she experienced:

¹¹ The stormy sea is a frequent image in both romances of chivalry and Byzantine romances. Cervantes collects this tradition, started probably with Heliodorus’s *Aethiopica*, in *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda*, and it becomes an important literary resource in *Novela del amante liberal*, part of his *Novelas ejemplares*. But the

Pasé este mar tempestuoso casi veinte años con estas caídas y con levantarme y mal –pues tornava a caer– y en vida tan baja de perfección, que ningún caso casi hacía de pecados veniales; y los mortales, aunque los temía, no como había de ser, pues no me apartava de los peligros. Sé decir que es una de las vidas penosas que me parece se puede imaginar; porque ni yo gozava de Dios ni traía contento en el mundo. Cuando estaba en los contentos de el mundo, en acordarme lo que devía a Dios era con pena; cuando estaba con Dios, las afeciones del mundo me desasosegaban. Ello es una guerra tan penosa, que no sé cómo un mes la pude sufrir, cuantimás tantos años. (60)

From this point on Teresa's raptures became more intense. This reinforced her on the path of mental prayer, but her quest for mystical union continued throughout her life. Regarding her exterior trials, it is important to note that her persecutors never stopped accusing her, even years after her death.¹² In several parts of her *Autobiography*, Teresa subtly makes her own defense.¹³ In chapter 23, for example, she tells how one of her confessors determined that her religious experiences were the result of evil spirits. The

allegory of life as a stormy sea is also present in Fray Luis de León's "Canción de la vida solitaria", and it is possible that both he and Teresa may have become familiarized with this image through Byzantine romances and *libros*.

¹² Ahlgren makes a thorough analysis of Teresa's critics and accusers, including all the details of the debate of the Saint's orthodoxy, in chapter 5 of *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*.

¹³ There are remarkable similarities in the terms that Saint Teresa and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (in her famous "Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz") use for their own defense in the face of accusations from theologians. The work of Kathleen Ann Myers, *Neither Saints nor Sinners: Writing the Lives of Women in Spanish America*, explores the concept of confession in the autobiographies of Hispanic women of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The influence of Teresa on many women writers is noteworthy.

Saint bitterly complains of his lack of knowledge and dubious intentions: “Y en esto hablo como quien le cuesta harto trabajo no le tener algunas personas con quien he tratado mi oración, sino preguntando unos y otros, por bien me han hecho harto daño, que se han divulgado cosas que estuvieran bien secretas” (130).

She was requested by her confessors to submit the *Autobiography* with the purpose of evaluating its orthodoxy as well as the meaning of her visions. The answer was disheartening for Teresa: “Venida la respuesta, que yo harto temor esperaba, y habiendo encomendado a muchas personas que me encomendasen a Dios, y yo con harta oración aquellos días, con harta fatiga vino a mí y díjome que a todo su parecer de entrambos era demonio” (130). There can be no doubt that for the Saint, theologians became, at times, her worst of enemies. She expresses it with no hint of elusiveness: “Levántense contra mí todos los letrados, persíganme todas las cosas criadas, atorméntenme los demonios; no me faltéis Vos, Señor, que ya tengo experiencia de la ganancia que sacáis a quien sólo en Vos confía” (139).

This quotation from her *Autobiography* is also revealing of how she thought of herself as a warrior. It is a beckoning not only of the exterior forces that persecuted her, but also of her own trust in God. This phrase echoes the knights’ battle cry, and resembles their attitude when, in the face of combat, they would recall the virtue of their ladies to obtain the necessary strength to face danger. Saint Teresa is sure of her victory in face of all dangers. She trusts that God will grant her the triumph over every enemy much in the same way in which every knight trusted their ladies’ beauty to inspire their

strength and lead them to victory. We see this same kind of resolution in every hero from romances of chivalry, from Amadís to even Don Quijote.¹⁴

Teresa also criticized the simplicity with which confessors labeled as demonic every religious experience they could not understand. She asks God for the wisdom to differentiate good from evil, and lashes out against the obtuseness of some men of cloth: “Es sin duda que tengo ya más miedo a los que tan grande le tienen a el demonio que a él mismo; porque él no me puede hacer nada, y estotros, en especial si son confesores, inquietan mucho, y he pasado algunos años de tan gran trabajo, que ahora me espanto cómo lo he podido sufrir” (140). On the other hand, her body was also a constant defiance, and a source of great pain: “Acaeciame algunas veces . . . estar con grandísimos trabajos de alma junto con tormentos y dolores de cuerpo, de males tan recios, que no podía valerme” (160).

Finally, the project of foundations caused her a great deal of difficulties. Immediately after she received a vision in which God commanded her to found the monastery of Saint Joseph, Teresa realized how exhausting was the task she would have to undertake: “Yo sentí grandísima pena, porque en parte se me representaron los grandes desasosiegos y trabajos que me había de costar” (176). But what began as the institution of one convent soon became a reformation, which, in turn, implied a rough dispute with the Carmelites: “Estava muy malquista en todo mi monesterio, porque quería hacer monesterio más encerrado. Decían que las afrentava, que allí podía también servir a Dios,

¹⁴ Chapter 45 of the *Amadís* presents an interesting episode in which Amadís actually entrusts himself to the Virgin Mary. In chapter 13 of the first part of *Don Quijote* there is a discussion between a secondary character and don Quijote on this matter.

pues había otras mijores que yo; que no tenía amor a la casa, que mejor era procurar renta para ella que para otra parte. Unas decían que me echasen en la cárcel” (178).

The trouble of gathering sufficient resources to start the foundations was not minor. However, facing the opposition from her confessors was much more complicated:

Lo que mucho me fatigó fue una vez que mi confesor, como si yo huviera hecho cosa contra su voluntad . . . y así en esta multitud de persecuciones que a mí me parecía había de venirme consuelo, me escribió que ya vería que era todo sueño en lo que había sucedido, que me enmendase de allí adelante en no querer salir con nada ni hablar más en ello, pues vía el escándalo que había sucedido. (179)

Teresa was even threatened to be taken to the Inquisitors: “También comenzó aquí el demonio, de una persona en otra, procurar se entendiese que había yo visto alguna revelación en este negocio, y ivan a mí con mucho miedo a decirme que andavan los tiempos recios y que podría ser me levantasen algo y fuesen a los inquisidores” (179). These trials continued for many years, and until her death she was accused of being an *alumbrada*. Even her closest friends turned their backs on Teresa when the conflict with the members of her order reached its pinnacle. Her inner strength, however, prevailed, and as a heroine, she overcame every obstacle. But there can be no uncertainty on the fact that her life was, indeed, a road of trials:

Hallava tantos inconvenientes para tener renta y vía ser tanta causa de inquietud y aun distraición, que no hacía sino disputar con los letrados. Escrivílo a el religioso dominico que nos ayudava; envióme escritos dos pliegos de contradición y teología para que no lo hiciese, y así me lo

decía que lo había estudiado mucho. Yo le respondí que para no seguir mi llamamiento y el voto que tenía hecho de pobreza y los consejos de Cristo con toda perfección, que no quería aprovecharme de teología, ni con sus letras en este caso me hiciese merced. (191)

The Meeting with the Goddess

Campbell describes this stage as a “mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World” (91). This feminine figure is the condensation of all human desire, of all longing for beauty and completion. But she also has a terrible side to her, for she is at the same time the symbol of death and destruction: “Thus she unites the ‘good’ and the ‘bad,’ exhibiting the two modes of the remembered mother, not as personal only, but as universal” (95). In the case of Saint Teresa the gender role is reversed, as she is the heroine-woman who seeks the husband-God. Nevertheless, the quest is still the same. The description of Campbell, reinterpreted for Teresa’s male-God is highly significant: “Woman [God], in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known” (97).

Throughout her life, Teresa repeatedly experienced visions and raptures that linked her with the divine. However, certain episodes gained more relevance than others because of the consequences they had or because of the great metaphorical content they carried. Without a doubt, the Transverberation of Saint Teresa’s Heart has become the pinnacle image of Spanish mysticism. This spiritual union is meaningful for the purposes of this investigation in more than one sense. First, Teresa’s depiction is of exceptional expressive value. Through her words it is possible to understand the depth of her ecstasy,

and to see in it the mystical marriage that Campbell describes. And second, the language she uses to portray her experience comes from the tradition of courtly love, which might have reached her through *libros*.

As Alexander Parker states in *The Philosophy of Love in Spanish Literature, 1480-1680*, “the central element in this connection of the late Spanish form of Courtly Love with mysticism is the concept of suffering” (76). The lover feels such a desperate urgency to be united with the loved one that life becomes an unbearable time of suffering for as long as this union is delayed. Parker describes this feeling: “The man who loves must seek to be loved in return; hope of this fulfilment promises joy, but fear that he will not receive it, still more the awareness that he will never receive it, make him suffer to the verge of despair” (77). It is possible to see this hint of courtly love expression in the words that Teresa uses to describe this vision where both, joy and pain are so entangled that they almost seem to be one and the same thing. At the same time, this intertwining reminds us of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ that are found in Campbell’s idea of the Goddess of the World:

Era tan grande el dolor que me hacía dar aquellos quejidos, y tan excesiva la suavidad que me pone este grandísimo dolor, que no hay desear que se quite, ni se contenta el alma con menos que Dios. No es dolor corporal, sino espiritual, aunque no deja de participar el cuerpo algo, y aun harto. Es un requiebro tan suave que pasa entre el alma y Dios, que suplico yo a su bondad lo dé a gustar a quien pensare que miento. Los días que durava esto andava como embovada; no quisiera ver ni hablar, sino abrazarme

con mi pena, que para mí era mayor gloria que cuantas hay en todo lo criado. (158)

The image of an angel piercing through Saint Teresa's heart is one of the most popular icons of mysticism in the Catholic Church. It gathers the idea of marital union through sexual intercourse, and a feeling of surrendering to the power of the divine. It combines the physical with the metaphysical, the profane with the sacred, the masculine with the feminine, the pleasure and the pain. This very moment of Teresa's life is a great example of Campbell's idea of the meeting with the Goddess, as it represents the presence of every set of opposites in one single unit. This is the point of no return for the heroine, for her understanding of the sacred world has turned her into a chosen one. Her own person no longer belongs to one world, but to the intersection where both dimensions connect. Such is Teresa's meeting with God.

Atonement with the Father

Mercy and wrath are the opposing qualities found in the father figure, according to Campbell (107). After the mystical marriage with the mother-Goddess, the hero is meant to master the new world into which he has submerged. In order to do this, he must be tested by his father and prove the knowledge he acquired: "Whether he knows it or not, and no matter what his position in society, the father is the initiating priest through whom the young being passes on into the larger world" (115). The initiation of the hero is consolidated in the confrontation with the paternal figure, at this point turned into a source of wrath. But when the young man has proven himself worthy, he receives the mercy of the father, and becomes ready to replace him.

Campbell describes this unfolding of the hero in the language of mythology: “The invested one has been divested of his mere humanity and is representative of an impersonal cosmic force. He is the twice-born: he has become himself the father. And he is competent, consequently, now to enact himself the role of the initiator, the guide” (116). For the purposes of the interpretation of Saint Teresa as hero, I have recurred to the reversal of gender roles once again. This time I take the Church to be the father figure, just as I have interpreted God as the female-Deity. The reason for this lies in the contradictory impulses of rejection and acknowledgment that Teresa experienced when being both, persecuted and endorsed (even canonized) by the Catholic Church.

Campbell’s words suit appropriately the dualistic role of the religious institution in Teresa’s life: “the grace that pours into the universe through the sun door is the same as the energy of the bolt that annihilates and is itself indestructible . . . the fire blazing in the sun glows also in the fertilizing storm . . . The paradox of creation, the coming of the forms of time out of eternity, is the germinal secret of the father. It can never be quite explained” (124). It was through the Catholic Church that Teresa could develop her faith and her own religious life. However, the path she charted to achieve the union with God pushed the limits of orthodoxy to the point that it opened the gate to the suspicion of the Holy Inquisition. Teresa’s encounters with divinity become the source of apprehension for Church officials.

But Teresa was not an easy target for the inquisitors. She was more willing to obey them than to oppose them, and it is likely that her praise of obedience kept her safe from a terrible fate: “Siempre que el Señor me mandava una cosa en la oración, si el confessor me decía otra, me tornava el mesmo Señor a decir que le odebeciese; después

Su Majestad le volvía para que me lo tornase a mandar” (142). Her appealing personality would often play a significant role in her defense. In the course of her harshest criticism against certain confessors, she would still outsmart the trepidation of her accusers. In chapter 29 of her *Autobiography*, she remembers how one of her confessors, convinced of the evil origin of her visions, commanded her to resist and disregard her visions of Christ.

A mí me era esto gran pena; porque, como yo no podía creer sino que era Dios, era cosa terrible para mí. Y tampoco podía . . . desear se me quitase; mas, en fin, hacía cuanto me mandaban . . . Dávame este dar higas grandísima pena cuando vía esta visión del Señor; porque cuando yo le vía presente, si me hicieran pedazos, no pudiera yo creer que era demonio . . . Acordávame de las injurias que le havían hecho los judíos, y suplicávale me persdonase, pues yo lo hacía por obedecer a el que tenía en su lugar, y que no me culpase, pues eran los ministros que El tenía puestos en su Iglesia. Decíame que no se me diese nada, que bien hacía en obedecer, mas que El haría que se entendiese la verdad. Cuando me quitavan la oración, me pareció se había enojado. Díjome que les dijese que ya aquello era tiranía. (155-6)

Her words are a tough accusation of tyranny. She complains to God because of the injustice of his ministers. It is surprising that, in the midst of such tensions between Teresa and the Church, only forty years after her death and against many opponents, the Carmelite of Avila was canonized. The acceptance of her status within the hierarchy of the Church was also an acknowledgement of the mystical way that, for so many years,

the Holy Inquisition had opposed. The recognition of the validity of Teresa's particular form of mysticism was made even more evident with Pope Paul VI's proclamation of her as Doctor of the Church. Saint Teresa herself, on her deathbed, found solace on the idea of feeling reconciled with the institution, and thus her last words: "Al fin muero hija de la Iglesia" (de la Madre de Dios and Steggink 983).

The Ultimate Boon

When the hero meets the gods, he searches for their grace and immortality. Campbell explains that it is their boon of eternal wisdom what humanity craves for, and not the gods in themselves: "The gods and goddesses then are to be understood as embodiments and custodians of the elixir of the Imperishable Being but not themselves the Ultimate in its primary state. What the hero seeks through his intercourse with them is therefore not finally themselves, but their grace" (155). However, in order to obtain this precious gift, the hero must be tested, and he must prove himself worthy. Teresa's visions often left her with a sense of love that moved her innermost fibers. At times, however, the Saint thought she had lost this grace, and the feeling was of unbearable despair:

Acuérdome que me dio en aquellas horas de oración aquella noche un afligimiento grande de pensar si estaba en enemistad de Dios; y como no podía yo saber si estaba en gracia u no . . . y apretávame esta pena; suplicávale no lo primitiese, toda regalada y derretida en lágrimas. Entonces entendí que bien me podía consolar y estar cierta que estaba en gracia, porque semejante amor de Dios y hacer Su Majestad aquellas

mercedes y sentimientos que dava a el alma, que no se compadecía hacerse a alma que estuviese en pecado mortal. (186-7)

Saint Teresa, being the exceptional mystic that she was, had a first-class experience of this grace that Campbell calls the ultimate boon. Her words reveal a profound understanding of the great consequences that derived from being the receiver of this supernatural benevolence: “Hase de notar también que en cada merced que el Señor me hacía de visión u revelación quedava mi alma con alguna gran ganancia, y con algunas visiones quedava con muchas. De ver a Cristo me quedó imprimida su grandísima hermosura, y la tengo hoy día” (204). Campbell emphasizes the irony of many myths in which, despite the hero’s great efforts to win the favor of the gods, once he meets them he asks them for material things, and loses sight of the ultimate boon (163). Nevertheless, this was not the case of Teresa:

Cuando estava con aquella señora que he dicho, me acaeció una vez, estando yo mala del corazón . . . como era de mucha caridad, hízome sacar joyas de oro y piedras, que las tenía de gran valor . . . Ella pensó que me alegraran; yo estaba riéndome entre mí y habiendo lástima de ver lo que estiman los hombres, acordándome de lo que nos tiene guardado el Señor . . . Esto es un gran señorío para el alma, tan grande que no sé si lo entenderá sino quien lo posee. (208)

It is important to notice how Teresa initially laughed, but then moved on to a feeling of pity. These two reactions place the Saint in the position of someone who has surpassed the test of detachment from the material world. She identified grace, and distinguished it from the corporeal reality. A few sentences later, Teresa readily confirms

that this moral capacity is not the product of her own doing, but again, the result of God's grace. Nevertheless, her spiritual superiority and her two-way communication with divinity outlined a vision of herself that put her in the position of the heroine, the knight that has finally become worthy of the ultimate boon.

Return

The Crossing of the Return Threshold

In Campbell's words, "the first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life" (189). In Teresa's case, the visions, raptures, and commotion of her mystical encounters with divinity entailed a harsh alienation from her peers and from the public. Indeed, being misunderstood is inevitable for the returning hero, and a foreseeable consequence of submerging into the mystic realm. When referring to her unrelenting raptures she tried to explain: "Pues viendo yo lo poco u nonada que podía hacer para no tener estos ímpetus tan grandes, también temía de tenerlos . . . Vía que no me entendía nadie, que esto muy claro lo entendía yo; mas no lo osava decir sino a mi confesor" (158).

Spain's obsession with honor (*la honra*) often complicated matters for Saint Teresa. Rumors spread about her ecstasies, and she was judged of being either a heretic, a lunatic, or possessed by an evil spirit. She was certainly a controversial figure of her time, but soon learned to disregard public opinion in favor of her own relation to the divine. In

chapter 31 of her *Autobiography* Teresa clearly establishes the rivalry between these two spheres: “Andas procurando juntarte con Dios por unión, y queremos seguir sus consejos de Cristo cargado de injurias y testimonios, ¿y queremos muy entera nuestra honra y crédito?” (171). From her point of view it is impossible to entertain both *honra* and God. In order to return to the world, the hero must remain faithful to the virtues of the supernatural realm.

Perhaps one of the most difficult episodes in Teresa’s life was the foundation of the monastery of Saint Joseph in Avila, in 1562. The town opposed the foundation of the monastery, mainly because of economic reasons, as it was not to have any rent, but the nuns were to live of the alms of the community. Despite the fact that Teresa received a Papal sanction to carry on with the foundation, the Saint’s project was threatened to be taken down by the public, and she was even obliged to move back to the Convent of the Incarnation (de la Madre de Dios and Steggink 218). The Saint retells how she suffered, not for her own defamation, but for the discredit of those who were helping her:

Era tanto el alboroto de el pueblo, que no se hablaba en otra cosa, y todos condenarme e ir a el provincial y a mi monesterio. Yo ninguna pena tenía de cuanto decían de mí más que si no lo dijeran, sino temor si se había de deshacer. Esto me dava gran pena y ver que perdían crédito las personas que me ayudavan y el mucho trabajo que pasavan, que de lo que decían de mí antes me parece me holgava. (199)

Campbell leaves no doubt about how important it is for the hero to adapt again to the world from which he came: “The returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world” (194). For Teresa it was not easy to find comfort in

ordinary life. In the following quote, it is interesting to notice how her enumeration of daily activities such as eating, sleeping, and dealing with others, is also the expression of nuisance. She does not hesitate to qualify life as miserable. However, the Saint always found solace in prayer, and took advantage of her extraordinary understanding of mysticism. Her unquestionable adaptation to the world allowed her to carry on with the foundation of 16 additional monasteries:

Es cierto que yo me he regalado hoy con el Señor y atrevido a quejarme de Su Majestad, y le he dicho: “¿Cómo, Dios mío, que no basta que me tenéis en esta miserable vida, y que por amor de Vos paso por ello, y quiero vivir adonde todo es embarazos para no gozaros, sino que he de comer y dormir y negociar y tratar con todos, y todo lo paso por amor de Vos; pues bien sabéis, Señor mío, que me es tormento grandísimo, y que tan poquitos ratos como me quedan para gozar de Vos, os me escondáis?”. (205)

Master of the Two Worlds

Quite often, the returning hero is bestowed with the capacity to move between the world of the divine and the material world. “Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back –not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other– is the talent of the master” (Campbell, 196). Only a true hero is capable of beholding the light of the ultimate truth and is able to understand its meaning in ordinary life. Teresa acknowledges that with her mystical experiences, a new life began for her: “Es otro libro nuevo de aquí adelante,

digo otra vida nueva. La de hasta aquí era mía; la que he vivido desde que comencé a declarar estas cosas de oración es que vivía Dios en mí” (126).

From that point on, Saint Teresa lost fear of demons, symbols of the incarnation of evil. Her mastery over these representatives of the underworld is the center of the following passage:

Pues si este Señor es poderoso, como veo que lo es, y sé que lo es, y que son sus esclavos los demonios . . . siendo yo sierva de este Señor y Rey, ¿qué mal me puede ellos hacer a mí? ¿Por qué no he yo de tener fortaleza para combatirme con todo el infierno? Tomava una cruz en la mano y parecía verdaderamente darme Dios ánimo, que yo me vi otra en un breve tiempo, que no temiera tomarme con ellos a brazos, que me parecía fácilmente con aquella cruz los venciera a todos; y así dije: “ahora venid todos, que siendo sierva del Señor, yo quiero ver qué me podéis hacer”. Es sin duda que me parecía me habían miedo, porque yo quedé sosegada y tan sin temor de todos ellos, que se me quitaron todos los miedos que solía tener, hasta hoy. (139)

Campbell describes the great importance of the eradication of the self, which includes the extinction of fear, in order to live the transcendental reality: “The individual, through prolonged psychological disciplines, gives up completely all attachment to his personal limitations, idiosyncrasies, hopes and fears, no longer resists the self-annihilation that is a prerequisite to rebirth in the realization of truth” (204). Teresa insistently expressed the loss of fear she felt, even of death, after having experienced the

mystical union with God. She recalls how raptures eliminated the pain and suffering that are inevitable within the corporal existence:

Quedóme también poco miedo a la muerte, a quien yo siempre temía mucho; ahora paréceme facilísima cosa para quien sirve a Dios, porque en un memento se ve el alma libre de esta cárcel y puesta en descanso. Que este llevar Dios el espíritu y mostrarle cosas tan excelentes en estos arrebatamientos, paréceme a mí conforma mucho a cuando sale un alma del cuerpo, que en un instante se ve en todo este bien. (208)

Campbell presents the example of the Transfiguration of Christ, with Peter, James and John as witnesses of the revelation of divinity. This moment of beholding the immutable is central to understand Teresa as the heroine that experiences the divine and, despite rejecting the pleasures and pains from the material world, is able to solve pragmatic issues and even lead a successful reform of her religious order. Throughout her *Autobiography*, the Saint describes the awe of standing before the Transcendent, and the consequent feeling of the material world as something of little worth:

Desde a un poco, fue tan arrebatado mi espíritu, que casi me pareció estaba del todo fuera del cuerpo; al menos no se entiende que se vive en él. Vi a la Humanidad sacratísima con más excesiva gloria que jamás la había visto. Representóseme por una noticia admirable y clara estar metido en los pechos de el Padre. Esto no sabré yo decir cómo es, porque, sin ver, me pareció me vi presente de aquella Divinidad. Quedé tan espantada y de tal manera, que me parece pasaron algunos días que no podía tornar en mí; y siempre me parecía traía presente aquella majestad del Hijo de Dios . . .

Esta misma visión he visto otras tres veces. Es, a mi parecer, la más subida visión que el Señor me ha hecho merced que vea, y traí consigo grandísimos provechos. Parece que purifica el alma en gran manera, y quita la fuerza casi de el todo a esta nuestra sensualidad. Es una llama grande que parece abrasa y aniquila todos los deseos de la vida. (211)

Freedom to Live

“The hero is the conscious vehicle of the terrible, wonderful Law, whether his work be that of butcher, jockey, or king” (Campbell, 206). The author of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* suggests that only the hero is able to detach himself from the consequences of his actions in the material realm. He is aware of the transmutation of everything, and he acknowledges the unchangeable essence of the divine. Teresa, enlightened by the ecstasy of witnessing the divine, often regarded with contempt the joys and sufferings of ordinary life. She also became capable of recognizing that her own limitations were removed by the grace of God. This allowed her to acquire a sense of moral superiority that is possible to perceive in her words:

Andando más el tiempo, me ha acaecido y acaece esto algunas veces: ívame el Señor mostrando más grandes secretos; porque querer ver el alma más de lo que se le representa, no hay ningún remedio, ni es posible, y así no vía más de lo que cada vez quería el Señor mostrarme. Era tanto, que lo menos bastava para quedar espantada y muy aprovechada el alma para estimar y tener en poco todas las cosas de la vida. (207)

She insists several times on the unworthiness of material things, and uses the idea of death as an alternative to the misery of living that is typical of the courtly love tradition: “Bendito sea vuestro nombre y misericordia, que –al menos a mí– conocida mejoría he visto en mi alma. Después quisiera ella estarse siempre allí y no tornar a vivir, porque fue grande el desprecio que me quedó de todo lo de acá. Parecíame basura, y veo yo cuán bajamente nos ocupamos los que nos detenemos en ello” (208). She continues to develop this line of thinking over the following pages of her *Autobiography*, until she finally states that the corporeal realm has a nature similar to that of dreams, an essence that the spiritual hero interprets as a hoax:

Todo me parece sueño lo que veo –y que es burla– con los ojos del cuerpo; lo que he ya visto con los de el alma, es lo que ella desea, y como se ve lejos, éste es el morir. En fin, es grandísima la merced que el Señor hace a quien da semejantes visiones, porque la ayuda mucho, y también a llevar una pesada cruz, porque todo no la satisface, todo le da en el rostro. Y si el Señor no primitiese a veces se olvidase, aunque se torna a acordar, no sé cómo se podría vivir. (209)

Campbell reminds us that “the hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he is” (209). This essence of Being was understood as the ultimate truth by Teresa. After having so many experiences of encounters with the divine, she finally describes the very core of mystical understanding, and the ineffability of that which is understood. For her, the grace of God is also the embodiment of Truth:

Entendí grandísimas verdades sobre esta Verdad, más que si muchos letrados me lo huvieran enseñado. Paréceme que en ninguna manera me

podieran imprimir así, ni tan claramente se me diera a entender la vanidad de este mundo. Esta verdad que digo se me dio a entender, es en sí misma verdad y es sin principio ni fin, y todas las demás verdades dependen de esta verdad, como todos los demás amores de este amor y todas las demás grandezas de esta grandeza, aunque esto va dicho oscuro para la claridad con que a mí el Señor quiso se me diese a entender. (224)

Chapter Conclusions

This chapter presented an analysis of several episodes in the life of Saint Teresa of Avila interpreted in the light of the theory of the Monomyth by Joseph Campbell. The purpose of juxtaposing these two elements was to suggest that, either consciously or unconsciously, Teresa might have communicated a vision of herself that corresponds to the hero as portrayed in the work of Campbell. It is important to consider that the analysis made in this chapter is based on the account that the Carmelite does of her own life in her *Autobiography*. Therefore, it was her words that easily fitted into the stages of the hero's cycle structured by Campbell. Teresa, while describing herself as "miserable, poco humilde y mucho atrevida" (229), may have written her life story with a heroic aspiration, even if not being aware of it.

There can be no question of the great importance that heroes have in every society around the world. But in sixteenth century Spain, *libros* had shaped a very specific kind of hero, and this analysis has found evidence of Teresa's use of the language from chivalric stories into her own religious writings. Not only did the Saint recur to metaphors often used in these books of adventure, but she even developed the idea of a

spirituality that resembles the life of knight heroes. She frequently compares prayer to battle, religious people to warriors, the soul to a fortress, faith to a standard, life to captivity, mystical union to conjugal union, God to a King¹⁵. It is possible to presume that the Saint could have imagined her own life as that of a mystic heroine, as the result of a natural development of her peculiar vision of religious life.

But if the metaphors she chose to use and the identification of her life episodes with the hero journey's stages are not enough evidence to assert Teresa's image of herself as a knight, there is one last extract from her *Autobiography* that is central to determine her intention to portray herself as soldier, as warrior, as heroine:

Vime estando en oración, en un gran campo a solas, en rededor de mí mucha gente de diferentes maneras que me tenían rodeada; todas me parece tenían armas en las manos para ofenderme: unas, lanzas; otras, espadas; otras, dagas, y otras, estoques muy largos. En fin, yo no podía salir por ninguna parte sin que me pusiese a peligro de muerte, y sola, sin persona que hallase de mi parte. Estando mi espíritu en esta aflicción, que no sabía qué me hacer, alcé los ojos a el cielo y vi a Cristo, no en el cielo, sino bien alto de mí en el aire, que tendía la mano hacia mí, y desde allí me favorecía de manera, que yo no temía toda la otra gente, ni ellos, aunque querían, me podían hacer daño. (220)

There is little room left for doubting that Teresa had, at least, an unconscious idea of her embodiment of the knight. Although her battle belonged to the spiritual and not to the physical realm, the power of her metaphors and the consistency of her use of chivalric

¹⁵ See, respectively, pages 44, 71, 100, 114, 118, 158, and 204 of the *Autobiography*.

language lead the reader to believe that her whole conception of spirituality was deeply founded in her idea of the knight heroes. Her metaphors carry a symbolic content that is not limited to expression, but that reflects the very fundamentals of her perception of life. The following chapter is dedicated to the study of the metaphors extracted from *libros* used by Saint Teresa in some of her poems. After this brief examination of her prose (the *Autobiography*), an analysis of her poems might help to elucidate some of the consequences derived from her notion of the Saint-knight.

CHAPTER 2: THE METAPHOR OF SPIRITUAL LIFE AS BATTLE IN TERESA'S POEMS

Introduction

In the first chapter of this work it was stated that Saint Teresa had a vision of herself that included several key features that were typical of the knights from romances of chivalry. By analyzing various episodes from her *Autobiography* in contrast with Joseph Campbell's theory of the Monomyth, it was possible to identify in the narration of her life an intention (whether conscious or not) to portray herself as a heroine. In the present chapter I study three of Teresa's poems in the light of the theory of metaphors developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, with the purpose of further proving that the Carmelite promoted a vision of spirituality as a battle, and of the saints as knights. These ideas were so fundamental to her conception of religious life that they shaped her understanding of mysticism and of her relation to the divine.

In *Metaphors We Live by*, Lakoff and Johnson revise the importance of metaphor, and state that "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (3). According to this, our actions and reality are structured around a system of concepts that is based on metaphor, so that our comprehension of the world is necessarily attached to metaphorical images. In defining what this crucial concept is, Lakoff and Johnson affirm that "the essence of metaphor is

understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (5). So in this sense, it is possible to state that Teresa experienced mysticism in terms of battle, and understood her religious efforts in terms of a hero’s deeds.

Lakoff and Johnson explain that “because the metaphorical concept is systematic, the language we use to talk about that aspect of the concept is systematic” (7). And so, if the central metaphor in Teresa’s writings is that spiritual life is a battle, from there on, many other metaphors derive, as mentioned in the previous chapter: God is King, faith is a standard, the soul is a fortress, souls are to be won or lost, religious men and women are captains, life is captivity. Moreover, this metaphorical network was coherent with the system of values of the society in which it originated. It is unlikely that Teresa was alone in perceiving spirituality as battle, or that she built this conception using nothing but her imagination.¹⁶ The system of metaphorical concepts in a given society depends on its axiological values (Lakoff and Johnson 22). Therefore, Teresa’s own ideas might have been a reflection of notions already present in the culture of her time.

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of three of Teresa’s poems: “Loas a la cruz”, “Ya no durmáis”, and “Muero porque no muero”. In each one of them I examine the language used by the Saint that derives from her conception of spiritual life as battle. The analysis begins with the identification of all supporting metaphors that echo this conception of religiosity as a sort of knightly combat, and tries to include a brief description of the origin and meaning of her poetic resources. The chapter finishes with the examination of the consequences that it entailed for Teresa’s life to understand her

¹⁶ Saint Ignatius of Loyola is a crucial figure in the construction of the metaphor of spirituality as battle. His *Spiritual Exercises* are an important expression of this idea.

own mysticism as permeated by the values of *libros*. Indeed, a religious life assumed in terms of battle, implied for the Carmelite a very specific kind of relation to the Church and to her own order. The battle of the knight, after all, is one that is fought alone.

Loas a la cruz

“Loas a la cruz”

*Cruz, descanso sabroso de mi vida,
Vos seáis la bienvenida.*

¡Oh bandera, en cuyo amparo
El más flaco será fuerte!
¡Oh, vida de nuestra muerte,
Que bien la has resucitado!
Al león has amansado,
Pues por ti perdió la vida,
Vos seáis la bienvenida.

Quien no os ama está cautivo
Y ajeno de libertad;
Quien a vos quiere allegar
No tendrá en nada desvío.
¡Oh dichoso poderío
Donde el mal no halla cabida!
Vos seáis la bienvenida.

Vos fuisteis la libertad
De nuestro gran cautiverio;
Por vos se reparó mi mal
Con tan costoso remedio,
Para con Dios fuiste medio
De alegría conseguida.
Vos seáis la bienvenida.

In her poem “Loas a la cruz”, Saint Teresa uses several metaphors that come directly from the chivalric world, such as those of the standard, the lion, lovesickness, and captivity. Ranging from the battlefield metaphors and all the way to the courtly love

tradition that crystallized in the knights' speech to their ladies, Teresa recurs to this literary convention to express her love for God. Quite possibly, her poems were not written with the intention to be read but sung by the nuns in the reformed convents.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Teresa's growing reputation over the years propelled the compilation of scattered pieces of poetry whose authorship, at least in part, is still widely questioned today.¹⁸ Whatever the case, this unintentionality became one of the most prominent features of the work of the Saint, and thus, "Loas a la cruz" exhibits a musicality and metric flexibility that may indicate precisely the original function of the poem. Furthermore, the repetition of the last verse at the end of each stanza confirms the poem to be, actually, a song.

The first stanza of the poem begins by comparing the cross to a *bandera*, a banner: "¡Oh bandera, en cuyo amparo/ El más flaco será fuerte!". The text makes a clear reference to the banners that were used as symbols of identity and merit by the medieval warriors and knights in *libros*.¹⁹ By calling the cross a standard, Teresa is implying that the spiritual life resembles a battle, as suggested by Ramiro Casale (35). The Cross, being the ultimate symbol of sacrifice in Christianity, reunites the virtues of the Christian God much in the same way as the banner symbolized the virtues of the knight. In her book

¹⁷ Elena Carrera, for instance, states in an article on Teresa's "Muero porque no muero": "The following *letrilla*, glossed in Teresa's 'Muero' poem, might have been among the cancionero-type songs of human love used in Teresa's convents as means of cultivating love and affective union with God" (738).

¹⁸ On the compilation and purpose of Saint Teresa's poems, refer to the work of Eric W. Vogt, *The Complete Poetry of St. Teresa of Avila* and of E. Allison Peers, *The Complete Works of St. Teresa of Jesus*.

¹⁹ For a thorough description of banners as symbols and their use in the medieval battlefield, refer to the second chapter of Robert Jones's work *Bloodied Banners: Martial Display on the Medieval Battlefield*.

Camino de perfección (Way of Perfection), Teresa develops this idea of the cross as a standard, and even compares religious people to standard-bearers, as we can see in the passage that follows:

Porque aunque en las batallas el alférez no pelea, no por eso deja de ir en gran peligro, y en lo interior debe de trabajar más que todos; porque como lleva la bandera, no se puede defender, y aunque le hagan pedazos no la ha de dejar de las manos. Así los contemplativos han de llevar levantada la bandera de la humildad y sufrir cuantos golpes les dieren sin dar ninguno; porque su oficio es padecer como Cristo, llevar en alto la cruz (308)

The standard occupies a place of great significance in the language of Teresa. It is a symbol of the commitment to spirituality and sacrifice, and in the poem studied here it is also a source of inner strength and courage. Throughout her work, the Saint elaborates on these virtues, which she takes from the chivalric world and accommodates them to the religious life. As inner strength and courage are praised in both spheres, they allow Teresa to fully develop this outstanding adaptation of a war emblem to the world of spirituality, and to insist on the image of spiritual life as a battle, of nuns and monks as knights, on faith as standard, on the cross as a banner.

The poem continues: “¡Oh, vida de nuestra muerte,/ Que bien la has resucitado!”. This topic reminds us of the long traditions of lovesickness and courtly love that appear in many of the Spanish sentimental romances of the Golden Age. The idea mentioned in the poem of a life that is death, or a death that is life (which is essential to courtly love),

frequently emerges in *libros* as well.²⁰ This topic is greatly significant in the work of Teresa because it addresses the issue of the afterlife. For the Saint, the living experience is always lacking, ever incomplete. Full satisfaction may come only after death, when each individual attains salvation and can finally stand in front of God. But Saint Teresa was no different than many knights and characters that regarded life as a suffering so great that only death could be of remedy.²¹

The enamored young men in the works of Diego de San Pedro insist vehemently on describing life as a kind of death. In *Cárcel de amor* (*The Prison of Love*) the metaphor is transformed into an allegory and Leriano is literally imprisoned, not only by his un-corresponded love, but by a jail that houses all despair and sadness. In *Tratado de amores entre Arnalte y Lucenda* (*The Love between Arnalte and Lucenda*) the introductory song, as well as the song that Arnalte sings to the author, speak explicitly about this:

Si mi mal no ha de morir
y mi daño ha de crecer,
no sé qué pueda perder
que pierda más que en vivir.

²⁰ The dialogue between Elisena and Perion in Chapter 1 of *Amadis* is a good example of this dialectic vision of life and death. The concept of life regarded as death is fully developed in sentimental romances, even more so than in romances of chivalry. Such is the case of Diego de San Pedro's works *The Prison of Love* and *The Love between Arnalte and Lucenda*. Remarkably, it is Saint Teresa herself who takes this idea to the limits of its expression in her famous poem "Muero porque no muero" which will be analyzed at the end of this chapter.

²¹ For a greater analysis of lovesickness and its appearance in *libros* refer to Lucila Lobato Osorio. *Caballeros enfermos de amor: Amadís de Gaula y Oliveros de Castilla*. Universitat de València, 2012. Internet resource.

Pues si mi dicha es perdida,
 y mi dolor es tan fuerte,
 ¿para qué es temer la muerte
 pues en ella está la vida? (109)

Saint Teresa was aware of the tradition of courtly love, and it is unlikely that this idea of life as death could have escaped her. She must have encountered it either directly in the famous sentimental romances or in the books of chivalry which she confessed to have read avidly during her early years.²² The Saint, as in so many other cases, used this literary convention and transferred it to the spiritual realm. In her work, death is synonymous with ordinary life, sin, and weakness. Life, deprived of God's perfection, can only be accepted as a kind of death. And death, being a pathway to the afterlife, is welcomed as the beginning of a more real, more fulfilled life. In the same way, knights, deprived of the love from their ladies, aspired to nothing other than death.²³

The following line in the poem returns to a very popular image from romances of chivalry: "Al león has amansado,/ Pues por ti perdió la vida". The lion is one of the most recurrent topics in the books of knights. Some of the Spanish *libros* that include an important appearance of a lion are the famous *Amadís de Gaula*, *Sergas de Esplandián* (whose main character was breastfed by a lioness), *Palmerín de Olivia*, *Belianís de Grecia*, and *Cristalián de España*, among others. But this tradition goes beyond romances of chivalry, and even extends to the legend of Richard the Lionheart and to the

²² She widely discusses her early readings in Chapter 2 of her *Libro de la vida (Autobiography)*.

²³ Such is, for instance the case of Amadís in the episode of la Peña Pobre. Refer to chapters XLVIII-LII of the second book of *Amadís de Gaula* by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo.

Spanish epic poem, *Cantar de mio Cid*.²⁴ Again and again the authors of *libros* offer the readers a vibrant comparison between the invincible knights and the fierce king of the jungle. Even Cervantes cannot resist the idea, and Don Quijote, in spite of himself, confronts a lion and survives the attempt in chapter XVII of the second part of *Don Quijote de la Mancha*.

Teresa's lion, on the other hand, has been tamed. Garci-Gómez studies the long tradition of the reverent lion, and describes this creature as “el león que se muestra civilizado, mesurado, humilde, zalamero, avergonzado [...] en presencia de un personaje extraordinario, en acatamiento y testimonio de su carisma, numen, gracia, virtud, cualidad sobrehumana, divina” (256). It is hard to tell how the lion in the Saint's poem was tamed, or by whom, but it seems that is the magnificence of the cross which makes him reverential. The reference is obscure, as it appears that this lion is also the sacrificed Christ: “pues por ti perdió la vida”. Regardless of the intention of the author, it is important to bear in mind that the mention of the lion in a mystic poem, is only possible within the metaphorical concept of spiritual life as battle.

This image of the lion is so meaningful that it continues to be used even in more recent times, as in C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, where the lion serves as a Christian allegory. It is not a surprise that the Irish author makes abundant references to the chivalric tradition. Just like Teresa's lion, Lewis's is also a metaphor of God's sacrifice, and perhaps also a metaphor for the power of man over sin. Whatever may be

²⁴ Miguel Garci-Gómez analyzes the tradition of the reverent lion in some of the most important Spanish medieval works. The interested reader may refer to his article “La tradición del león reverente: glosas para los episodios en el Mío Cid, Palmerín de Olivia, Don Quijote y otros”.

the case, Teresa used this image as a bridge that allowed her to communicate religious ideas through a kind of language that moves within the limits of battles, knights, and *libros*.

The following verses of the poem state: “Quien no os ama está cautivo/ Y ajeno de libertad”. The focus of language is again set on the sentimental romances of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. *Cárcel de amor*, perhaps like no other text, develops the idea of lovesickness. The disease of love includes despair, lack of appetite, constant sadness, and the feeling of being captive. What's more, it can only be cured by either marriage or intercourse (Lobato Osorio 114). Lovesickness is a prison that only the loved one can destroy. Teresa operates under the same logic, but for her, love is directed towards the cross, that is, towards divinity. The absence of love for God equals captivity, and only death can ultimately liberate the soul.

The topic of captivity and freedom reemerges a few verses ahead: “Vos fuisteis la libertad/ De nuestro gran cautiverio”. However, this time it is followed by a new suggestion: “Por vos se reparó mi mal/ Con tan costoso remedio”. The word *remedio* (remedy) emphasizes the idea of lovesickness, and it reminds us of the melancholy that attacked young men when their love was not corresponded (Lobato Osorio 115). Amadís, Oliveros, Flores, and also Leriano, Arnalte, Calisto, and every shepherd in pastoral novels were victims of this disease. Saint Teresa adapts various elements from *libros* into her own literary production, and she systematically builds on the metaphor of spiritual life as battle by depicting the idea of the solitary struggle that is the quest for connection with divinity.

Ya no durmáis

“Ya no durmáis”

*Todos los que militáis
Debajo desta bandera,
Ya no durmáis, no durmáis,
Pues que no hay paz en la tierra.*

Ya como capitán fuerte
Quiso nuestro Dios morir,
Comencémosle a seguir,
Pues que le dimos la muerte,
¡Oh, qué venturosa suerte
Se le siguió desta guerra!
*Ya no durmáis, no durmáis,
Pues Dios falta de la tierra.*

Con grande contentamiento
Se ofrece a morir en cruz
Por darnos a todos luz
Con su grande sufrimiento,
¡Oh, glorioso vencimiento!
¡Oh, dichosa aquesta guerra!
*Ya no durmáis, no durmáis,
Pues Dios falta de la tierra.*

No haya ningún cobarde,
Aventuremos la vida,
Pues no hay quien mejor la guarde
Que el que la da por perdida.
Pues Jesús es nuestra guía
Y el premio de aquesta guerra,
*Ya no durmáis, no durmáis,
Porque no hay paz en la tierra.*

Ofrezcámonos de veras
A morir por Cristo todas,
Y en las celestiales bodas
Estaremos placenteras;
Sigamos estas banderas,
Pues Cristo va en delantera;
*No hay que temer, no durmáis,
Pues que no hay paz en la tierra.*

This poem could simply be described as a call to arms. Teresa unambiguously recurs to the language of battle. From a first glance, the bellicose terms are easily identifiable: *militate*, *standard*, *death*, *captain*, and *defeat*, among others. The word *guerra*, war, appears in three of the four stanzas. Just as in the poem “Loas a la cruz”, previously analyzed, the author returns to the image of the standard, and uses it twice throughout the text. Possibly, “Ya no durmáis” is the piece of poetry from Saint Teresa that makes the most references to war. However, it is important to consider that she used this language only to refer to spiritual life. For the reader it becomes clear that this call to arms is, in fact, a call to religiosity and engagement in following Christ’s example. Undeniably, Teresa’s understanding of religious life implied the metaphor of battle, which in turn transformed her into a knight.

The first stanza of the poem is the center around which the composition revolves. The *letrilla* begins: “Todos los que militáis/ Debajo desta bandera,/ Ya no durmáis, no durmáis,/ Pues que no hay paz en la tierra”. The first verb that the Saint uses, *militáis* (to *militate*), sets the tone for the entire poem. After each *estribillo* a call to arms and to arise from sleep is heard. Rising from sleep to action is a common situation for knights in romances of chivalry.²⁵ As the text develops into a request to act, the metaphor of spirituality as battle becomes clearer. Teresa also revisited the image of the banner²⁶, *bandera*, as the symbol of faith, and identified those who fight under the banner with those willing to undertake the challenge of pursuing a relation with God. It is to these

²⁵ See, for example, chapter 115 in the fourth book of *Amadís de Gaula*, in which Esplandián, son of Amadís, awakes him from sleep and exhorts him to go to battle.

²⁶ The image of the banner is central to the first poem analyzed in this chapter, “Loas a la cruz”. For more information on the role of the banner, refer to Jones’s work *Bloodied Banners: Martial Display on the Medieval Battlefield*.

people that the poem is addressed. They are the ones who are being called to fight under the guidance of Christ for the peace of the Earth.

The poem continues by comparing God to a captain: “Ya como capitán fuerte/ Quiso nuestro Dios morir/ Comencémosle a seguir,/ Pues que le dimos la muerte”. In her *Autobiography*, Teresa also uses the image of the captain, but instead of being the metaphor of Christ, it serves as the representation of religious people and spiritual leaders: “Si el que comienza se esfuerza con el favor de Dios a llegar a la cumbre de la perfección, creo jamás va solo a el cielo; siempre lleva mucha gente tras sí; como a buen capitán, le da Dios quien vaya en su compañía” (71). In the poem, Christ is the strong leader with the will to sacrifice himself. This idea, in contrast with what she states in her *Libro de la vida*, turns religious people into the warriors willing to follow him, and even to die alongside with him. Teresa envisions herself as one of these fighters.

The second stanza moves on to talk about the crucifixion. Despite the fact that the author underscores the great suffering that the death of Christ implied, she rates it as a victory: “¡Oh, glorioso vencimiento!/ ¡Oh, dichosa aquesta guerra!”. The central metaphor to Teresa’s grasp on religiosity materializes in the word *guerra*, war. The defeat of the enemy is nothing other than the triumph of God over death and sin. The war is joyous only in so much as it is the conquest of good over evil. The participation of religious people in this war is interpreted by the Saint as an act of heroism. This idea, present in the poem, may be reinforced by her words in the *Autobiography*: “Ya, ya me parece se acabaron los que las gentes tenían por locos, de verlos hacer obras heroicas de verdaderos amadores de Cristo” (146).

The third stanza reflects on the very *Teresian* paradox of the life that is preserved when is lost, and lost when preserved: “No haya ningún cobarde,/ Aventuremos la vida,/ Pues no hay quien mejor la guarde/ Que el que la da por perdida”. The use of the adjective *cobarde*, coward, and of the verb *aventurar*, to adventure, reinforce the idea of a call to action. In a way, this exhortation to conquer fear and to risk the own life echoes the battle cry that was used before and during combat in the European military of the late Middle Ages.²⁷ As Jones states: “It is in the use of audible forms that we begin to see the unconscious psychological effects of display most clearly. The unifying effect of shouting a common war-cry [. . .] gave a sense of common feeling and thus bolstered morale” (77).

The poem then continues by establishing what the ultimate purpose of war is: “Pues Jesús es nuestra guía/ Y el premio de aquesta guerra”. Jesus is the leader, the captain, but also the *premio*, the prize won for fighting the war. In the last stanza of the piece the prize to be won crystallizes as marriage: “Y en las celestiales bodas/ Estaremos placenteras”. This scheme of fighting the ultimate battle to earn wedding as prize is consistent in most *libros*. Many knights, after completing the severest deed, earn the hand of their beloved ladies. Such is the case of most knights in the *Amadís* cycle, and all of the *Palmerines*. Furthermore, the very idea of a book of chivalry implies the wedding of the hero and his lady as final outcome. For Saint Teresa, life is the final struggle that can

²⁷ Jones makes an extended analysis of the sounds in the medieval battlefield. His study encompasses not only the meaning and use of battle cries, but other audible forms, such as the presence of musical instruments. Refer to the fourth chapter of his work, already cited here, *Bloodied Banners: Martial Display on the Medieval Battlefield*.

only be followed, if properly fought, by the definitive union with divinity. Only then will there be true joy.

The following lines in the poem are dedicated to exhort the religious warriors to follow the banner of Christ: “Sigamos estas banderas,/ Pues Cristo va en delantera”. The banner, as seen previously in this chapter, is the symbol of faith, and an element of identity (Jones 33). The central metaphor of religiosity as war is strengthened by portraying Christ as the leader that goes in the front line. The *estribillo* in the very last two verses of the poem reinforce this idea, while experiencing a slight change: “No hay que temer, no durmáis,/ Pues que no hay paz en la tierra”. The author encourages battlers to put fear aside, to wake from sleep, and to be prepared for the definitive war. The entire sense of the poem expresses the consolidation of an apprehension of spirituality that passes through the idea of struggle.

Given the context set by the romances of chivalry, the Spanish Reconquista, and the Crusades against heresy that took place in Europe up until the fifteenth century, it is no surprise that Saint Teresa perceived inner life as a kind of confrontation. The metaphorical concept here, as Lakoff and Johnson indicate, is systematic (7), and Teresa’s piece exhibits how permeated by this metaphor was, not only her poetic work, but her whole way of thinking. “Ya no durmáis” may be, among Saint Teresa’s writings, the best evidence to assert that her conception of spiritual life was cut across by the idea of struggle, war and heroism. This, in turn, placed her in the position of a warrior with a specific function within the battle, and as a result, her mentality pushed her to recognize herself as a heroine with a destiny.

Muero porque no muero

“Muero porque no muero”

*Vivo sin vivir en mí
Y tan alta vida espero
Que muero porque no muero.*

Vivo ya fuera de mí
Después que muero de amor,
Porque vivo en el Señor que me quiso para Sí.

Cuando el corazón le di
Puso en él este letrero:
Que muero porque no muero.

Esta divina prisión
Del amor con que yo vivo
Ha hecho a Dios mi cautivo
Y libre mi corazón;
Y causa en mí tal pasión
Ver a Dios mi prisionero
Que muero porque no muero.

¡Ay, qué larga es esta vida,
Qué duros estos destierros,
Esta cárcel y estos hierros
En que el alma está metida!
Sólo esperar la salida
Me causa dolor tan fiero,
Que muero porque no muero.

¡Ay, qué vida tan amarga
Do no se goza el Señor!
Porque si es dulce el amor,
No lo es la esperanza larga:
Quíteme Dios esta carga
Más pesada que el acero,
Que muero porque no muero.

Sólo con la confianza
Vivo de que he de morir,
Porque muriendo el vivir
Me asegura mi esperanza.
Muerte do el vivir se alcanza,

No tardes, que te espero,
Que muero porque no muero.

Mira que el amor es fuerte;
 Vida, no me seas molesta,
 Mira que sólo te resta,
 Para ganarte, perderte;
 Venga ya la dulce muerte,
 Venga el morir muy ligero,
Que muero porque no muero.

Aquella vida de arriba,
 Que es la vida verdadera,
 Hasta que esta vida muera
 No se goza estando viva.
 Muerte, no seas esquiva;
 Viva muriendo primero,
Que muero porque no muero.

Vida, ¿qué puedo yo darle
 A mi Dios que vive en mí,
 Si no es perderte a ti
 Para mejor a Él gozarle?
 Quiero muriendo alcanzarle,
 Pues a Él solo es al que quiero.
Que muero porque no muero.

This is perhaps Saint Teresa's most popular piece of poetry. The idea of a death that is life and a life that is a kind of death constitutes the very core of the poem. And it is central to Teresa's conception of religious life. So far, the poems studied in the present chapter have revolved around the notion of spirituality as battle, and it has been discussed here how this metaphor is the key to deciphering the influence of *libros* in the thoughts and writings of the Saint. However, it is now important to note that the action in these books unfolded mainly, not in one, but in two scenarios: the battlefield and the court. It is not by chance that these are, in turn, the settings of Teresa's poems. "Muero porque no

muero” belongs to the court setting, since it revolves around the notion of love as it appears in the knights stories.

However, the fact that the poem is more focused on the romantic side of *libros* does not imply that it lacks the language of war. From a quick glance, it is possible to identify various literary images from the latter realm, such as the prison, captivity, irons, steel, death, and to win and lose, among others. This means that the notion of religiosity as a battle is still the reigning metaphor of Teresa’s thinking, except that in this particular piece, she grasps her own self as the enamored knight that is not fighting outer enemies, but his own yearning of union with his lady. In this poem, Teresa depicts her love of God with the kind of suffering that is seen in the male characters of sentimental romances and chivalry books of the Spanish fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In doing so she continues a long literary tradition, and becomes remarkable in transferring it to the jurisdiction of religious writing.

The poem opens with the *estribillo* that is repeated at the end of each stanza, and that constitutes the very essence of the piece: “Vivo sin vivir en mí/ Y tan alta vida espero/ “Que muero porque no muero”. Teresa longs for an afterlife that brings the promise of a perfect union with God, and that puts an end to the pain of not fulfilling her love for the divine. It is appropriate to recall here the song of Arnalte in *Tratado de amores de Arnalte y Lucenda*, cited in the analysis of “Loas a la cruz”. Just like Teresa, some male characters in sentimental romances and *libros* aspire to a death that would terminate a life so deeply marked by suffering, that it becomes intolerable. And just like

her, these gentlemen engage in an exercise of disowning their life in order to consider the worthiness of annihilation.²⁸

Arnalte, in his sad song, still insists on aspiring to death much in the same terms as Teresa does in the poem:

Este, triste más que hombre
 Que muere porque no muere,
 Bivirá cuando biviere
 Sin su nombre. (114)

It is interesting to notice how the first stanza of Teresa's poem contains a strong suggestion of conjugal union: "Vivo ya fuera de mí/ Después que muero de amor./ Porque vivo en el Señor que me quiso para Sí". To die of love, *morir de amor*, is an expression used in Spanish to describe a love and adoration so strong that the lover feels to be close to death. Teresa affirms that she is dying of love and at the same time, that she lives outside of herself. She declares to be living in God, and uses the verb *querer*, to want, in order to insinuate the idea of romantic love. Much in the same way, knights and lovers of sentimental romances declared that they lived only for their ladies, and continuously felt to almost die of love. Such was the case of Leriano in *Cárcel de amor*, who lay in bed to die after having been rejected by Laureola, his lady.²⁹

²⁸ Consider the episode of La Peña Pobre in *Amadís de Gaula* when, after being unfairly accused of infidelity by his lady Oriana, Amadís changes his name to Beltenebros and does penitence by rejecting all worldly glories and engaging in a feeling of great sorrow.

²⁹ It is also the case of Oliveros de Castilla, who becomes so ill after falling in love with Helena that he reaches the verge of death. Refer to Lucila Lobato Osorio's article previously cited in this chapter.

Leriano is known for having inhabited a physical prison where his desire kept him as captive. Such is the course that takes Teresa's poem, as it dives into the topic of imprisonment: "Esta divina prisión/ Del amor con que yo vivo/ Ha hecho a Dios mi cautivo/ Y libre mi corazón". Unsatisfied love held Leriano as prisoner. In the case of the poem, it is God who suffers captivity, although the prison itself remains the same. Teresa's love has turned God into her prisoner, and in holding him captive she experiences freedom. Her love, thus, is satisfied by retaining her object of desire. But the following lines bring back the idea of unfulfillment: "Y causa en mí tal pasión/ Ver a Dios mi prisionero/ Que muero porque no muero". Her passion for this imprisoned God is such that, once more, death becomes the ultimate possibility of reaching completeness.

Captivity described by Teresa as lack of freedom due to a total submission to love was a common feeling for the knights in *libros*. The young Amadís, after having fallen in love with Oriana calls himself a captive three times in just a short paragraph:

Ay, cativo Donzel del Mar, sin linaje y sin bien, ¿cómo fueste tan osado de meter en tu corazón y tu amor en poder de aquella que vale más que las otras todas de bondad y fermosura y de linaje? ¡O cativo!, por cualquier destas tres cosas no devía ser osado el mejor cavallero del mundo de la amar, que más es ella fermosa que el mejor cavallero en armas, y más vale la su bondad que la riqueza del mayor hombre del mundo, y yo cativo que no sé quién so, que bivo con trabajo de tal locura que moriré amando sin jelo osar decir. (*Amadís* 306)

In her *Autobiography* Teresa further develops this idea of captivity. After stating that everything needs to be risked for the sake of God, the Saint exclaims: "¡Oh gran

libertad, tener por cautiverio haver de vivir y tratar conforme a las leyes de el mundo!, que como ésta se alcance de el Señor, no hay esclavo que no lo arrisque todo por rescatarse y tornar a su tierra” (95). Her exclamation is paradoxical, since she acknowledges herself as prisoner of the world, not of love of God as in the poem. But a quick examination allows the reader to understand that she is recognizing that liberation only comes from divinity, and that she is a slave that is hoping to risk it all in order to gain freedom. Her captivity is dualistic, as she is the prisoner of her love for God and, at the same time, of her inability to live outside the material world.

The following stanza deeply explores the same matter: “¡Ay, qué larga es esta vida,/ Qué duros estos destierros,/ Esta cárcel y estos hierros/ En que el alma está metida!”. Prison is explicitly named, but Teresa also mentions exile. And exile plays a significant role in *El cantar de mio Cid*, the great Spanish epic poem. El Cid is probably the first knight in the history of Spanish literature. His story revolves around his efforts to regain the favor of King Alfonso VI, who had punished him unjustly with banishment. Exile, in the poem, is equaled to captivity. The soul is deprived of its freedom, and life is regarded as a kind of burden. And again, the only way out of this desperate situation is death: “Sólo esperar la salida/ Me causa dolor tan fiero,/ Que muero porque no muero”.

Teresa then moves on to consider life, when deprived of God, as bitter. She contrasts the sweetness of love with the unpleasant taste of a long wait for the final union with divinity. And then she compares life with a heavy load: “Quíteme Dios esta carga/ Más pesada que el acero,/ Que muero porque no muero”. Just one stanza earlier Teresa had mentioned the irons within jail, and here she evokes the image of steel when referring to a burden. Clearly, she is still speaking about imprisonment, and she yearns for death as

the termination of suffering: “Sólo con la confianza/ Vivo de que he de morir,/ Porque muriendo el vivir/ Me asegura mi esperanza”. Death is the ultimate hope of starting to live a true life. And the author awaits anxiously for death, as the only salvation to despair: “Muerte do el vivir se alcanza,/ No tardes, que te espero”.

The poem then continues by depicting life as a kind of hindrance that stands in the way of perfect love and union: “Vida, no me seas molesta,/ Mira que sólo te resta,/ Para ganarte, perderte”. It is interesting to notice how Teresa uses the verbs *ganar*, to win, and *perder*, to lose, to refer to life. Indeed, such language is an echo of Mark 8, 35.³⁰ But it is also the expression that Teresa used throughout her *Autobiography*, to refer to the souls that were to be won or lost for God.³¹ Furthermore, these are also the terms used by knights to speak about a city or a fortress that was conquered and controlled or lost and destroyed. It is, indeed, a language that sparks from the world of war and battle. When speaking of a life that is to be won and lost, Teresa is further building on the metaphor of religious life as battle, the center of her conception of mysticism.

Teresa amplifies the significance of death as a true life that can be genuinely cherished: “Aquella vida de arriba,/ Que es la vida verdadera,/ Hasta que esta vida muera/ No se goza estando viva”. Knights in romances of chivalry often considered their own existence as a kind of suffering. Fulfillment for them was not found in triumph over

³⁰ “For whoever wants to save their life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”

³¹ For instance, in chapter 14 of her *Autobiography* Teresa states: “No lo primitáis, Señor, ni queráis se pierda alma que con tantos trabajos comprastes y tantas veces de nuevo la habéis tornado a rescatar y quitar de los dientes del espantoso dragón” (87). She uses the verb *perder*, to lose, but even more interestingly, she uses the image of the dragon to represent the incarnation of evil. The dragon is a frequent adversary in romances of chivalry.

enemies, but in the matrimony that would definitely unite them with their ladies. This is evidenced in the fact that no ending of *libros* is possible without the wedding between the hero and his lady. Much like in the *Teresian* sense, their life prior to marriage (union) was a life of sacrifice, struggle and incompleteness. And every heroic action was meant to earn them the favor of their loved ones. In the world of the Saint of Avila death is the end of an exhausting fight and the promise of the authentic life that will bring fulfillment: “Muerte, no seas esquivia;/ Viva muriendo primero”.

The last stanza of the poem is almost a self-exhortation to lose life as an offering to God. The purpose of this action is *gozar*, to enjoy divinity: “Vida, ¿qué puedo yo darle/ A mi Dios que vive en mí,/ Si no es perderte a ti/ Para mejor a Él gozarle?”. Nevertheless, *gozar* is a verb that is often –though not always– used in *libros* and sentimental romances to refer to sexual intercourse, or at least to some kind of passionate expression.³² It is quite revealing that Teresa thinks of God as something to be enjoyed. The notion of romantic love in her relation to the divine is further emphasized in the following lines: “Quiero muriendo alcanzarle,/ Pues a Él solo es al que quiero”. *Quiero*, the verb to want, is repeated twice in the last two verses. Teresa expresses her desire to reach divinity, and then stresses that it is only God she wants. Desire is fundamental to her conception of religiosity and it models her way of relating to God. This verb gives way to the emergence of the metaphor of spiritual life as battle, not so much from the perspective of the fighting hero, but of the enamored knight.

³² Such is the case in chapters 39, 56, 69, 73, and 80 of *Amadís de Gaula*.

Chapter Conclusions

The examination of Saint Teresa's poetry has revealed her understanding of religious life as a kind of battle, and also the perception of herself as a heroine. This metaphorical way of assuming her own spirituality required the choice for a mystical path. The battle of the knight is fought alone in the same way that the quest for union with God is the individual struggle of the mystic. However, given the harsh circumstances regarding the control of orthodoxy in the Spain of Teresa's time, her mysticism could only entail certain complications in her relation with the Church, and even with the hierarchy within her own order. It is the purpose of this final part of the chapter to consider the consequences faced by the Saint that derived from understanding mysticism as permeated by the values of *libros*.

Teresa's poems make an uninhibited use of images and metaphors as, unlike her prose, they were not to suffer a very rigorous censorship by her confessors or theologians. Her pieces of poetry were not written with the purpose to be read, but to be used as songs during religious occasions. Because of this, her poems belonged to a more private sphere, and they were only regarded as literary pieces many years after Teresa's death (Barrientos 422). In her poems it is possible to see the full extension of her metaphorical conceptuality, thus the apparition of the knight and the battle images is more consistent and frequent than in her prose work. Furthermore, the poems studied in this chapter may be interpreted as microcosms where metaphors expand creating a reality of their own.

In "Ya no durmáis" nothing other than a call to arms is heard, and the reader witnesses a world of knights preparing for the final battle. "Loas a la cruz" is the welcoming of the standard, and again the reader stands in front of a banner that

symbolizes the identity and virtues of the hero. Finally, “Muero porque no muero” is the expression of love of the enamored knight in the terms of the traditions of lovesickness and courtly love. It is a cry of yearning for the everlasting union of the lover with the loved one. This unrestrained use of the images that spring from romances of chivalry reflects a clear apprehension of spirituality as a war. But every war has two sides; a hero and his enemies. Teresa, as the heroine she may have thought to be (whether consciously or not), faced many different kinds of opponents, both from within and without.

These enemies have been widely discussed in the first chapter of this work. Some of them, as may be recalled, include her confessors and theologians, some of her fellow Carmelites, and her own idea of mental prayer and mystical experiences. However, what is truly important to notice is that Teresa’s option for the mystical path turned her into a solitary fighter. Just like a knight, she set off to battle on her own against the enemies that rose to fight her. Her effort to reach a perfect union with God meant at times the confrontation against the institutions that were to support her, and to which she had initially recurred to start her spiritual journey, such as the Church and her religious order. Feeling to be walking down a road of perils all alone, it is no wonder that Teresa saw herself as a knight in the face of destiny, and spirituality as her ultimate war.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has analyzed Saint Teresa's prose, specifically her *Autobiography*, and her poetry, specifically the poems "Loas a la cruz", "Ya no durmáis", and "Muero porque no muero". These pieces of her written work have exposed the Saint's comprehension of religious life in the metaphorical terms of a battle or war, and of herself as a kind of heroine. With the purpose of evidencing how thoroughly these metaphors permeated her reasoning, I have used Campbell's theory of the Monomyth, as well as Lakoff and Johnson's idea of metaphorical thinking. The examination of her texts in the light of literary theory has revealed a clear determination of Saint Teresa to use images from *libros* as a vehicle for her spiritual endeavor.

Teresa the Knight

In several occasions in her *Autobiography*, Teresa recurs to images from chivalric battle to explain her spiritual experience. For instance, she compares the religious books she used for guidance in prayer to a shield that would protect her during battle: "En todos éstos, si no era acabando de comulgar, jamás osava comenzar a tener oración sin un libro; que tanto temía mi alma estar sin él en oración como si con mucha gente fuera a pelear. Con este remedio, que era como una compañía u escudo en que había de recibir los golpes de los muchos pensamientos, andava consolada" (44). Teresa also compares

mystics to soldiers: “Excelentes espaldas se hacen ya gente determinada arriscar mil vidas por Dios y desean que se les ofrezca en qué perderlas. Son como soldados que, por ganar el despojo y hacerse con él ricos, desean que haya guerra; tienen entendido no lo pueden ser sino por aquí” (188).

Even the visions she often had are shaped in the language of this reigning metaphor of mystics as knights and spiritual life as battle:

Otra vez, estando en Maitines en el coro, se me representaron y pusieron delante seis u siete, me parece serían, de esta mesma Orden [Santo Domingo], con espadas en las manos. Pienso que se da en esto a entender han de defender la fe; porque otra vez, estando en oración, se arrebató mi espíritu: parecióme estar en un gran campo, adonde se combatían muchos, y éstos de esta Orden peleaban con gran hervor. Tenían los rostros hermosos y muy encendidos, y echaban muchos en el suelo vencidos, otros matavan. Parecíame esta batalla contra los herejes. (226)

Saint Teresa is fully aware of the heroic nature of the mystic love of God, and as such she states: “Señor, u morir u padecer” (228). In just a few simple words she expresses her commitment to suffer or die for love, as did the knights in *libros*, who were willing to die for their ladies. But she also recognizes the heroism of other religious people that did the same, and of women in particular: “Mujeres eran otras y han hecho cosas heroicas por amor de Vos” (117). She acknowledges the heroism of the spiritual realm by using the images that have been analyzed in this research. Even God is exemplified by Teresa as a captain that leads his troops through his own example: “No me ha venido trabajo que, mirándoos a Vos cuál estuviste delante de los jueces, no se me

haga bueno de sufrir. Con tan buen amigo presente, con tan buen capitán que se puso en lo primero en el padecer, todo se puede sufrir” (122).

The Cost of Being a Mystic-Knight

A Solitary Battle

As was suggested at the end of the second chapter, perceiving herself as a knight implied undertaking a lonely path. The mystical way to the ultimate union with God is a road of trials that have to be overcome with little help from others, and whose final goal has to be attained by the mystic alone. In the same way, the hero in romances of chivalry had to prove himself worthy by submitting to all kinds of tests that would ultimately lead to never-ending joy after marrying his beloved lady. Teresa opted for a path that put her in confrontation with the Holy Inquisition and with the most zealous Carmelites. And in defending against them her individual experience of spirituality, she often felt alone: “Porque para caer, había muchos amigos que me ayudasen; para levantarme, hallávame tan sola, que ahora me espanto cómo no me estava siempre caída, y alabo la misericordia de Dios, que era sólo El que me dava la mano” (59).

The loneliness of the battle she fought implied, at times, the confrontation against all things, including theologians, *letrados*, as we saw in the first chapter, where the following quotation was analyzed: “Levántense contra mí todos los letrados, persíganme todas las cosas criadas, atorméntenme los demonios; no me faltéis Vos, Señor, que ya tengo experiencia de la ganancia que sacáis a quien sólo en Vos confía” (139). However,

Teresa became a very popular figure, not only during her lifetime, but especially after her death.³³ Paradoxically, her choice to undertake the mystical path, despite the harsh consequences that this conveyed, turned her into a symbol of spiritual effort, and an icon of the saint-knight. The very idea of religious life as battle continued to be a very common way of interpreting religiosity in the Catholic world, in large part, thanks to the writings and teachings of Teresa. Nevertheless, the price she paid for being a warrior and a saint was to suffer, not just solitude, but even persecution.

Persecution

The reasons that shaped Teresa's need to resort to this particular type of language are not easy to grasp. The consequences, on the other hand, appeared almost instantly. The religious conditions in Saint Teresa's time were harshly controlled by the Inquisition. She was investigated by this ubiquitous institution at least five times, as we are told by Barbara Mujica in her essay "Teresa of Ávila" (3). Teresa not only was an outspoken woman, but she also descended from Jewish converts, and intended to reform the religious order to which she pertained. All of these were serious matters for the Holy Inquisition, but none of them were as questionable as her mystical raptures. And Teresa's mysticism, founded on her experience of divinity, constituted the very essence of her religious understanding, which she sought to express in the language of knight stories.

³³ Rosa Rossi declares in the closing statement of her book *Teresa de Avila: biografía de una escritora* that after the publication made by Fray Luis de León of Saint Teresa's work in 1588 she became a literary phenomenon: "Desde entonces Teresa de Jesús nunca ha cesado de tener lectores. Una más de las grandes famas póstumas" (289).

The literary blossoming of the Spanish Golden Age, and especially of *libros*, had a tremendous influence on the writings of Saint Teresa of Avila, although it also created several obstacles for a woman who wrote about religious matters. Most religious books published and read during her time could only escape censorship if they were written by theologians, and in a language so dogmatic and specialized that they were out of reach for common folks (Weber 29). This may be why, either purposely or not, Teresa found in her own readings of the past, a language that, without becoming uncanny, offered the possibility of explaining her spiritual message in a familiar way. The result, as we have seen along this research, is a work full of vivid images that empower the very *Teresian* idea of an interior life that is similar to a battle, to the war of a knight.

It is not easy to understand how Saint Teresa survived the turmoil caused by her mystical raptures within the highest ranks of the Catholic Church. Her *Autobiography*, after having received the approval of father Domingo Báñez, was confiscated by the Inquisition for thirteen years (Weber 35). It is interesting, however, that the long debate on whether or not Teresa's books should be burned, was eventually settled with her canonization. Likewise, it is important to recall that *libros*, despite being frowned upon by the Inquisitors, also escaped the Valdés Index of Forbidden Books. Perhaps both Teresa's writings as well as the books of knights, shared a kind of language that might have served as shield against the flames of the inquisitorial stake. This question deserves a thorough analysis, but it falls beyond the scope of the present research. For now, I recur to Teresa's language and rhetoric as her main instruments of circumventing the threats that accompanied throughout her life.

Language, indeed, may be the key to understand the miraculous survival of knighthood in *libros* and *Teresian* texts, despite the many objections of the Holy Inquisition. Ramiro Casale makes an interesting analysis of the Christian virtues that were present in many of the heroes in knight books, such as courage, generosity, obedience, and humility (34), and compares them to the virtues most defended by Teresa. Quite possibly, the coherence between the systems of moral values in romances of chivalry and in the religious realm of sixteenth century Spain helped to absolve the many faults of these books in the eyes of the Church. Only when the subgenre of *caballerías a lo divino* appeared, the Church decided to act by adding it to the Index of Prohibited Books.

Judging solely from the point of view of what triggered the intervention of the Inquisitors, it is not unlikely that the orthodoxy of the Church was able to accept the stories of knights who acted as mystics. Their lonely lives, their sacrifice, their fidelity to the ladies they loved, their purity of intentions seemed to gain sufficient legitimacy from the Church officials, despite the liberties these books took on moral matters, such as premarital intercourse. Only when it was mystics or Saints acting as knights did the Inquisition feel a threat of heresy. This was certainly the case of Teresa, as well as the case of many others, such as Juan de la Cruz, and of the persecuted subgenre *caballerías a lo divino*. But once again, this matter is not easy to prove, and exceeds the limits of this work. However, I would like to raise the issue here with the intention of returning to it in my doctoral dissertation.

A Metaphorical Interpretation of Religion

The full development of the metaphor of religiosity as battle is central to understand Saint Teresa's comprehension of mysticism and her relation with the divine. This particular way of conceiving spirituality is still a great tradition within Catholicism, and although it is not possible to sustain that Teresa is responsible for the creation of this worldview, it is undeniable that she played a central role in the diffusion of the perception of the religious person as a hero, as a knight. Her victory as the fighter that countered a rigid control of orthodoxy is well presented in the work of Gillian T. Ahlgren, but it is evidenced also in the acknowledgment of her mysticism as part of the doctrine of the Catholic Church, when Pope Paul VI proclaimed Teresa as Doctor of the Church. This title, reserved until then only for men, is granted to the saints that are considered as teachers and masters of Christianity.

The proclamation of the founder of the Discalced Carmelites as Doctor of the Church was a final recognition of Saint Teresa's mysticism, but also, the acceptance of her vision of spiritual life. Teresa has been, for the past five centuries, a beloved figure that Christians have admired, not only for her exceptional relation with divinity, but also for her *determinada determinación* (Obras 323) in surmounting every obstacle in the way of her desired union with God. Her courage to face enemies, both from internal or external origin, exhibits the attitude of a true heroine. Her writings, with an overwhelming presence of images from *libros*, offer the reader the final vision of a mystical path in the terms of the battle of a knight. Teresa fought this battle, and won it on her own. Her heroic nature as a holy woman still astounds her readers of today.

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