

SOROR MARIA DO CÉU'S VIRGIN MARY AND THE MALE GAZE

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ABSTRACT: In her late-baroque play, *Clavel, y Rosa*, the Portuguese nun playwright Soror Maria do Céu incorporates an allegorical figure that embodies the active Virgin Mary that emerged in Europe during the medieval period. By doing so, Soror Maria creates a strong female protagonist that effectively escapes the male gaze of her multiple suitors onstage while simultaneously modeling appropriate behavior for the nun spectators of her play.

KEYWORDS: Virgin Mary; Male Gaze; Allegory; Convent Theater; Soror Maria do Céu.

RESUMO: Na sua peça do Barroco tardio, *Clavel, y Rosa*, a dramaturga conventual Soror Maria do Céu incorpora uma figura alegórica que personifica a Virgem Maria ativa que surgiu na Europa durante a época medieval. Assim, Soror Maria cria uma protagonista forte que efetivamente escapa ao olhar masculino dos seus pretendentes no cenário enquanto ela modela um comportamento apropriado para as freiras que iam assistir à sua peça.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Virgem Maria; Olhar masculino; Alegoria; Teatro conventual; Soror Maria do Céu.

From Sophocles's Antigone to George Bernard Shaw's Eliza to Tennessee Williams's Rose, the dramatic arts are replete with female figures who range from fierce to fragile. Despite their continuous presence throughout the history of theater, stage portrayals of female characters often do not reflect the lived realities of women. Instead, these representations are frequently nothing more than a projection of male fantasy. The technical term for the objectification of women as a means of achieving sexual stimulation is *scopophilia*, which is closely linked to the male gaze. Many critics, including Barbara Freedman and Laura Mulvey, have identified the negative effects of the male gaze. They suggest that the aestheticizing of the male gaze informs the concepts of theatricality and characterization. In other words, a dramatic character is theatrical only if "such

a person is aware that she is seen, reflects that awareness, and so deflects our look".¹ Just as a staged character deflects the public's gaze, a theatrical text makes the audience members aware of their own spectatorship.

Soror Maria do Céu (1658–1753)², a late-baroque Portuguese nun,³ wrote in a wide variety of literary genres.⁴ She penned several plays about the Virgin Mary, and her play *Clavel, y Rosa: Breve Comedia alludida a los desposorios de Maria y Joseph*,⁵ in particular, avoids the male gaze by presenting the Virgin Mary onstage in a manner that "leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer".⁶ This is accomplished by allegorizing St. Joseph as Clavel and by clearly recognizing the importance of the metonymous connection between rose, rose garden, and rosary, which reveals the traditional importance of the role of the Virgin Mary, who is often portrayed as active, beginning in the medieval period. Soror Maria's text adheres to this tradition, which enables Rosa, the protagonist and an allegorical stand-in for Mary, to undermine the

¹ FREEDMAN, Barbara – *Staging the Gaze: Postmodernism, Psychoanalysis, and Shakespearean Comedy*. Cornell UP, 1991 (1).

² In the prologue of *Triunfo do Rosario*, her name is listed as Maria do Ceo, which means Mary of Heaven. Modern Portuguese requires a different spelling of the word céu.

³ Born along to an aristocratic family with her twin sister on September 11, 1658, Soror Maria was baptized in Lisbon, Portugal. Although most sources cite 1658 as her birth year, a death announcement published in the *Gazeta de Lisboa* in 1753 lists the year of her birth as 1657. Ana Hatherly suggests that this was most likely nothing more than a "lapso de revisão" (xv). HATHERLY, Ana – "A Biografia de Sórora Maria do Ceo", *A Preciosa de Sórora Maria do Ceo*, Instituto Nacional de Investigação Científica, 1990, p. 6. She was the daughter of Dona Catarina de Távora (Frei António do Sacramento spells Maria's mother's name as *Catharina* rather than *Catherina*) and António D'Eca. SACRAMENTO, António do – *Historia Serafica da Ordem de S. Francisco na Provincia de Portugal*. Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, MS 703, p. 449. The author of the *Livro da fundação, ampliação & Sítio do Convento de N. Senhora da Piedade da Esperança* (held in the Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa) lists her father's name as Antonio de São e Castro (77). As a member of the nobility, Soror Maria had access to education through private tutors. Frei António states that she was both well-educated and pious, devoting herself to reading as well as to modesty and virtue. Early manuscripts by Soror Maria indicate that she had read texts by Lope de Vega, Luís de Camões, Luís de Góngora, and Francisco de Quevedo. She also dedicated poems to Padre António Vieira and read devotional texts, such as lives of the saints. Her intellect and studious nature also impressed one of the authors of the chronicle of the founding of her convent, who notes her "elevado entendimento" and "subtilissimo discurso". *Livro da fundação, ampliação & sítio do Convento de Nossa Senhora da Piedade da Esperança da cidade de Lisboa* (1620–1750). MS IL 103, p. 77. By the time she entered the Franciscan Convento da Esperança in Lisbon (now a fire station), she was already known for her poetry, and her experience *intramuros* certainly influenced her literary endeavors. In 1676, she took her vows and served once as mistress of novices, once as portress, and twice as abbess. Soror Maria died at the age of ninety-four on May 28, 1753 and the *Gazeta de Lisboa* published her obituary. Although Mendes dos Remédios indicates 1753 as the year of her death, Inocêncio da Silva, Garcia Peres, and Barbosa Machado list it as 1752. Also, the *Gazeta de Lisboa* lists the date as May 18, rather than May 28, which Ana Hatherly suggests could simply be a typographical error.

⁴ In total, nine books containing her literary works were published during her lifetime: *A fênix aparecida* (1715), *A Preciosa* (1731), *A Preciosa: Obras de misericórdia* (1733), *Aves ilustradas* (1734), *Obras várias e admiráveis* (1735), the first part of *Enganos do bosque* (1736), *Triunfo do Rosário* (1740), the second part of *Enganos do bosque* (1741), and *Obras varias y admirables* (1744).

⁵ Since no modern edition of this play exists, I employ the original spelling used in the 1740 publication.

⁶ BRECHT, Bertolt – *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett Hill and Wang, 1964, p. 91.

gaze of her male suitors, who prove unsuitable and unworthy when compared to her divinity and authority.

In other words, the characterization and portrayal of Mary upends audience expectations and requires the spectator to critically reevaluate this important religious figure whom post-Tridentine ecclesiastical leaders and artists often sought to portray as a passive being. Soror Maria's play defamiliarizes a well-known character and usurps the male gaze by inverting it and turning it back on itself. In this way, the playwright creates a female protagonist in the subject position who acts, rather than being acted upon, by objectifying her suitors, thereby offering convent audience members a bold Marian example to follow. Although Soror Maria's dramatic work frames Mary in her traditional position as exemplar, *Clavel, y Rosa* also emphasizes the power, agency, and subjectivity inherent in Mary's roles as wife, mother, and intercessor. These roles allow her to effectively escape the male gaze, adhering to a tradition that portrays Mary as assertive and active.

In *Clavel, y Rosa*, the spectator might expect the female protagonist, a young woman surrounded by eager male suitors, to serve as the object of the gaze. However, Rosa exhibits an acute awareness of this attempted objectification and successfully deflects it. By allowing Rosa to appropriate the gaze, the playwright creates a powerful female figure who upends the "active/male and passive/female" dichotomy and thereby breaks with some early modern models in favor of stronger conceptualizations of Mary.⁷ While many texts, including the Bible, portray the Virgin as meek and submissive,⁸ Soror Maria creates a Mary who is a strong, powerful, commanding presence and who demands the respect of the male characters. Donna Spivey Ellington points out that during the late Middle Ages, "[a]s Queen of Heaven after her Assumption, Mary was always portrayed as continuing the same close relationship with Jesus that she had enjoyed on earth, sitting at his right hand and ruling over the kingdom of Mercy as he administered the kingdom of Justice".⁹ The maintaining of this tradition of Marian authority rather than emphasizing Marian submissiveness reinforces Valerie Hegstrom's assertion that "the nuns who wrote plays created

⁷ MULVEY, Laura – *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

⁸ In the oft-cited first chapter of Luke, for example, Mary's role is limited to accepting her lot as the mother of the Christ Child, and she speaks only three times in order to affirm her humility and submission, despite her misgivings. She first responds to the angel Gabriel's announcement by asking, "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" (Luke 1:34), and then acquiesces to his command by saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). Her third speech, in response to her cousin, functions only to echo Elisabeth's praise of both her and Mary's miraculous conceptions. *The Bible*. Authorized King James Version, Intellectual Reserve, 2013.

⁹ SPIVEY ELLINGTON, Donna – *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*. Catholic University of America Press, 2001, p. 107.

female characters and allegorical figures who exercise control, power, and independence in their roles".¹⁰ Soror Maria's fictional Mary does just that.

Since *Clavel, y Rosa* is not widely known and is rarely studied, a short synopsis is in order. In this drama, Soror Maria introduces the spectators to a cast of allegorical characters. A young Mary, appearing as the character Rosa, must choose a husband from a number of qualified suitors, each represented by a type of flower. These suitors are Lyrio, Clavel, Narcizo, and Bien mequiere. Each floral suitor presents himself to the bride-to-be in the hopes of wooing her, touting his unique characteristics and boldly stating why she should choose him. The four competitors also compete in different ways to try to gain Rosa's favor. With Mosqueta as her mediator, she interacts with each candidate individually as she candidly uncovers and expounds upon his flaws and faults. Although each flower clearly believes he is Rosa's ideal mate, she systematically rejects each one. When, at last, Clavel presents himself to her, his humility and unpretentious self-effacement not only impress her but ultimately win her over, and she eventually chooses him as her husband. Although Rosa is ultimately subject to divine authority, as are all characters in the play, she exercises her agency to avoid objectification, thereby establishing her sovereignty over the male characters with which she shares the stage.

Although texts by writers such as Soror Maria often occupy liminal spaces in literary studies, critics should consider the significance of their contribution to the cultural atmosphere of the time period. When speaking of women writers such as Soror Maria, Vanda Anastácio explains that many archival sources point to "o envolvimento das mulheres do passado com a palavra escrita, quer enquanto produtoras, quer enquanto consumidoras".¹¹ Early modern Iberian women's writing, including texts penned in the convent, are beginning to form part of the broader literary canon. Indeed, more scholars have studied, and are now studying, this theater than ever before.¹² However, in the larger arena

¹⁰ HEGSTROM, Valerie "Theater in the Convent", *Engendering the Early Modern Stage: Women Playwrights in the Spanish Empire*, ed. Amy R. Williamsen. UP of the South, 1999, p. 213.

¹¹ ANASTÁCIO, Vanda – *Uma Antologia Improvável: A Escrita das Mulheres (Séculos XVI a XVIII)*. Relógio D'Água Editores, 2013, p. 20.

¹² While not a comprehensive list, the following scholarly works have contributed significantly to the field and these scholars continue to bring forgotten texts to light through literary criticism and new critical editions: *Voces del convento: Sor Marcela, la hija de Lope* (Georgina Sabat de Rivers, 1989); *Untold Sisters* (Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlaue, 1989); "The Female Trinity of Sor Marcela de San Félix" (Susan M. Smith) and "Theater in the Convent" (Valerie Hegstrom), both found in *Engendering the Early Modern Stage: Women Playwrights in the Spanish Empire* (1999); *Convent Theatre in Early Modern Italy: Spiritual Fun and Learning for Women* (Elissa Weaver, 2002); "Nuns as Writers" in *The Lives of Women: A New History of Inquisitional Spain* (Lisa Vollendorf, 2005); "El convento como espacio escénico y la monja como actriz: montajes teatrales en tres conventos de Valladolid, Madrid y Lisboa" *Letras en la celda: Cultura escrita de los conventos femeninos en la España moderna* (Valerie Hegstrom, 2016); and "Convent theater" in *The Routledge Research Companion to Early Modern Spanish Women Writers* (María del

of literary studies, convent dramas from Portugal such as *Clavel*, y *Rosa* are, as Hatherly asserts, “pouco comentadas (ou até talvez lidas) pela maior parte dos estudiosos da literatura portuguesa”.¹³ Indeed, since Hatherly published her works on Soror Maria in the late 1980s and early 1990s, very few scholars have studied this playwright.¹⁴ This oversight has occurred not only because many Portuguese playwrights during the Baroque period wrote in Spanish or Latin, but also because we know relatively little about the actual staging of convent plays when compared to the vast array of studies on the secular Iberian theater tradition.¹⁵ Additionally, Portuguese scholars often ignore works written in Spanish, while Spanish scholars generally consider literature from Portugal to be outside the scope of their studies. For the most part, scholarly studies of early modern Iberian literature—particularly Portuguese literature—do not recognize convent plays as an integral part of the larger phenomenon of Iberian theater, most likely due to the plays’ religious nature¹⁶ and limited audience as well as the overshadowing influence of Spain’s Golden Age theater during the time period.

Despite this unfortunate oversight, Hatherly insists that Soror Maria’s works are essential to “[uma] herança cultural que nos compele estimar e defender”.¹⁷ The critic recognizes the importance of Maria do Céu’s theater in the larger performance tradition.¹⁸ Since the publication of Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau’s *Untold Sisters* (1989),¹⁹ it has become clear that scholars of early modern Iberian theater should consider convent plays as part of the Spanish and Portuguese literary canons and as important cultural artifacts because they

Carmen Alarcón Román, 2017).

¹³ HATHERLY – *A Preciosa de Sôror Maria do Ceo*, p. 6.

¹⁴ Studies on Soror Maria’s texts after Ana Hatherly’s seminal works include Fabio Mario da Silva’s “A literatura como instrução. Uma leitura de Metáforas das Flores de Soror Maria do Céu” (2015); Isabel Morujão’s “Emblemas e Problemas em *Aves Ilustradas Em Avisos...* de Soror Maria Do Céu” in *Emblemática y religión en la Península Ibérica (Siglo de Oro)* (2010); Sara Augusto’s “A multiplicação das fábulas na ficção narrativa de Soror Maria do Céu” and “O papagaio ilustrado-lição e exemplo na ficção barroca” (2005); and José Ares Montes’s “Maria do Céu, Sôror: A Preciosa” (1992). A few scholars have also published editions of her works. My own article, “Upending Hegemonic Masculinity in Soror Maria do Céu’s *Clavel*, y *Rosa*” (2018), is the only contemporary study on Soror Maria’s theater.

¹⁵ For the purposes of this study, I define convent plays as all performative texts written by nuns or in the convent as well as dramatic performances realized in the convent.

¹⁶ As Lisa Vollendorf admits, “This lack of attention can be attributed to the problem of access to texts and to the tendency of those of us trained as secular humanists to shy away from religious topics”. VOLLENDORF, Lisa – “Nuns as Writers”. *The Lives of Women: A New History of Inquisitional Spain*. Vanderbilt UP, 2005, p. 95.

¹⁷ HATHERLY, *A Preciosa de Sôror Maria do Ceo*, p. 7.

¹⁸ Hatherly argues that it could be considered “uma espécie de epitome desse fim de época do Barroco português na sua vertente contrarreformista, culminância tardia dum estilo e duma maneira de conceber o mundo que iriam em breve ser destronados pela implantação das novas tendências racionalistas”. HATHERLY, *A Preciosa de Sôror Maria do Ceo*, p. 5.

¹⁹ This anthology does not include any of Soror Maria’s works. Vanda Anastácio’s *Antologia Improvável* does include works by Soror Maria, but omits her theater.

reflect the values and practices of the time period and give us significant insight into the lived realities of convent writers. *Clavel, y Rosa*, in particular, reveals the use of Mary as a strong, active figure on whom nuns could model their own spiritual progress.

In *Clavel, y Rosa*, the significance of Soror Maria's choice to cast the Virgin Mary as an allegorical rose would have been apparent for her nun audience, who surely recognized that Rosa not only serves as a symbol for the mother of Christ but also points toward the widely practiced Catholic tradition of rosary veneration. Hatherly believes that *Clavel, y Rosa* was performed during the celebration of the rosary, which occurred on October 7 as a commemoration of the 1571 Battle of Lepanto.²⁰ As is the case with the majority of convent theater, this play served to simultaneously educate and entertain, and it forms part of a long-standing and widespread Portuguese tradition of rosary veneration. This tradition, introduced in 1218 by Santo Domingo de Guzmán and connected to the Dominican order, reportedly began when Mary herself gave St. Dominic a rosary to represent her life intertwined with that of Christ.²¹ According to Frei Luís de Sousa, the Latin *rosario* becomes *rosal* (rose garden) in Portuguese and that the rose is the most logical choice to represent the Virgin.²² He includes thorns among the rose's positive qualities, since their power to protect the flower from harm makes them a symbol of "honestidade, e vergonha virginal"²³ that also allude to the crucifixion of Christ by referencing his crown of thorns, thereby symbolically connecting Mary to her son's suffering and sacrifice.

The connection between Mary, roses, and rose gardens is a long-established tradition that finds its origins in medieval "Mary gardens". These were "small, enclosed, and full of symbolism—containing flowers and herbs named after Mary, created and cared for in her honor".²⁴ Mary herself was known as the "flower of flowers",²⁵ as well as "noble rose," 'fragrant rose,' 'chaste rose,' 'rose of heaven,' 'rose of love,' and 'never-wilting rose'.²⁶ Although these traditions

²⁰ Pope Pius V attributed defeat of the Turks to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, portrayed as the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, as a result of the rosaries recited on that day; HATHERLY, *A Preciosa de Sôror Maria do Ceo*, p. 208.

²¹ In his *História de S. Domingos*, Frei Luís specifies that the rosary stands for "sua santa vida, seus trabalhos e glórias de mistura com a vida, e morte, e paixão, e gloriosa Ressurreição de Nosso Redentor". SOUSA, Frei Luís de – *História de S. Domingos*, Tomo I, ed. M. Lopes de Almeida. Lello & Irmão, 1977, p. 73.

²² He argues that it is the most noble of all flowers "por fineza da côr, por excellencia do cheiro, por utilidade da virtude: alegre a vista, deleita o olfacto, conforta o coração; e he conservadora da vida humana, . . . com o oleo em infusão, com a sustancia em conserva", SOUSA, *História de S. Domingos*, p. 73.

²³ SOUSA, *História de S. Domingos*, p. 73.

²⁴ KRYMOW, Vincenzina – *Mary's Flowers: Gardens, Legends & Meditations*. St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1999, p. 8.

²⁵ KRYMOW, *Mary's Flowers*, p. 12.

²⁶ Winston-Allen, Anne – *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages*. Penn State UP, 2005,

were not part of the official doctrine of the Catholic Church, they became so ingrained in early religious practice that believers would place flowers and herbs throughout the cathedral (including on altars) in her honor while priests wore “garlands and crowns of flowers”.²⁷ Medieval artists also depicted Mary with flowers and plants, often within an enclosed garden, known as a *hortus conclusus*, to represent her purity. Anne Winston-Allen notes that this same garden was also used to represent the “soul of the individual Christian” and that “[w]hen the garden has become the soul—or the soul a rose garden—the image of picking spiritual flowers from it to offer to the Virgin is a logical step. From there it is only a small step to the concept of the rosary”.²⁸ The rosary, therefore, points metonymically to the Virgin Mary and her virtues. By naming her Marian protagonist Rosa, Soror Maria reminds her audience of the central and essential role played by Mary in Catholic theology.

The widespread practice of praying with the rosary and the popularity of the rosary tradition helped make the Virgin Mary an important figure in medieval and early modern Iberia, especially as a prescriptive example of behavior for women. According to Catholic dogma, Mary was, like Christ himself, the product of an immaculate conception. During Soror Maria's lifetime, this concept was widely accepted although not official dogma.²⁹ It is clear from this text that even before the belief in Mary's immaculate conception became dogma, many popes, church officials, and church members subscribed to this idea. Many early texts and prayers even substituted the name of God with that of Mary. Her role in salvation was thus equated with that of Christ. While the post-Tridentine church generally supported the veneration of the Virgin and other saints, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) “tried to put an end to artistic freedom and playfulness with religious subjects”³⁰ and sought to control sacred images that represented “false doctrines and might be the occasion of grave error to the uneducated”.³¹ Many artists began to depict Mary in a way that emphasized her virginity, freed her from sexuality,³² and stressed

p. 88.

²⁷ KRYMOW, *Mary's Flowers*, p. 18.

²⁸ WINSTON-ALLEN, *Stories of the Rose*, p. 99.

²⁹ It became dogma in 1854, when Pius IX wrote the following in his *Ineffabilis Deus*: “We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful. This same treatise calls Mary “Reparatrix”, “Mediatrice”, and “Conciliatrix”. CATHOLIC CHURCH and John R. SHEETS – *Ineffabilis Deus: Defining the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: Apostolic Constitution of Pius IX, Issued December 8, 1854*. St. Paul Books & Media, 1854, p. 16, 2122.

³⁰ CATHOLIC CHURCH and SHEETS, *Ineffabilis Deus*, p. 209.

³¹ MÂLE, Emilie – *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages*. Princeton UP, 1987, p. 440.

³² The twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent declared that in portrayal of all saints, “all lasciviousness [must]

the importance of familial relationships. This is not to say that she was not simultaneously portrayed as the traditional Queen of Heaven.³³ Simon Yarrow points out that “the veneration of Mary, intimately grounded in biology and played out through ideas of gender difference, has stimulated profound and sometimes conflicted religious emotions in men and women. St. Mary presents a conundrum to Christian theology”.³⁴ During the early modern period, Mary becomes a complicated symbol and Soror Maria had to choose how to portray her protagonist.

Mary came to represent the impeccable, albeit impossible, standard of purity for women.³⁵ Women should be both virgins and mothers, reaching into the realm of the divine: “The image of Mary as both Virgin and Mother was an image shaped by men and held up as a complex ideal, which of course no real woman could fulfil”.³⁶ Mindy Nancarrow Taggard points out that the Virgin was an “impossible role model ever reminding women of their female inferiority”.³⁷ Clark Colahan argues that “worship of the feminine principle in the figure of one extraordinary, deified woman has done more harm than good to real women’s circumstances”.³⁸ Valerie Hegstrom also notes that Mary is a problematic personage, one who plays into “the unfair and unrealistic casting of female characters into the two dichotomous roles, Eve or Mary, sinner or saint. For ‘resisting’ readers, both models are undesirable, but Mary’s example is particularly oppressive because of its coercive nature in the lives of real women”.³⁹ This projection of male expectations onto female subjects is, of course, closely linked to the male gaze, not unlike the gaze of Rosa’s suitors in *Clavel, y Rosa*.

Nowhere did Mary’s example carry more weight than in the convent.⁴⁰

be avoided; in such wise that figures shall not be painted or adorned with a beauty exciting to lust”. *The Council of Trent: The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent*, Ed. and trans. J. Waterworth. Dolman, 1848, p. 235–36.

³³ Sally Cunneen notes that “a veritable orgy of crowns appeared on other statues and paintings of Mary; sometimes they were added to much older works that had been painted without them”. CUNNEEN, Sally – *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol*. Ballantine Books, 1996, p. 211.

³⁴ YARROW, Simon – *The Saints: A Short History*. Oxford UP, 2016, p. 103.

³⁵ Speaking of Mary, Catholic theologian Scott Hahn points out that “‘Virgin’ is, once and always, who she is” (103). HAHN, Scott – *Hail, Holy Queen*. Doubleday, 2001.

³⁶ WRIGHT, Rosemary Muir – *Sacred Distance: Representing the Virgin*. Manchester UP, 2006, p. xii.

³⁷ TAGGARD, Mindy Nancarrow – “Murillo’s *St. Anne Teaching the Virgin to Read* and the Question of Female Literacy and Learning in Golden Age Spain”. *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift: Journal of Art History* 68.1, 1999, p. 31.

³⁸ COLAHAN, Clark – *The Visions of Sor Maria de Agreda*. The U of Arizona P, 1994, p. 163.

³⁹ HEGSTROM, Valerie – “Maria do Ceo’s Mary in Heaven: *Rosa, y Clavel and Triunfo do Rosario*”. Conference presentation. University of New Mexico, 2000, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Nuns such as the late medieval Juana de la Cruz utilized their intimate connection with the Virgin Mary (here, in the form of mystic visions) to provide them with “critical authority” to teach and preach. BOON, Jessica – “Mother Juana de la Cruz: Marian Visions And Female Preaching”, *A New Companion to Hispanic Mysticism*. Brill, 2010, p. 133. Lesley Twomey argues that the way in which Isabel de Villena (1430-1490), another late medieval nun, presents the doctrine of the Conception in her *Vita Christi* (1497), “is an example of [the author’s

Speaking generally about Mary's influence on nuns, Asunción Lavrin explains that "Mary was the fixed star around which the lives of her professed daughters revolved. Her example was a source of inspiration, and in practical terms Mary was their shelter and helped them to achieve perfection".⁴¹ Although Mary may have been seen as an intermediary figure who could help nuns attain salvation, her absolute perfection was, of course, unattainable.⁴² For women religious, Mary served as the example *par excellence* of purity and righteousness—something that nuns continually strived for but could never achieve. Spivey Ellington asserts that the official portrayal of the Virgin Mary in the late Middle Ages "was rather different from the quiet, passive Virgin who will emerge in Catholic preaching after the Council of Trent".⁴³ During the Counter Reformation, Mary was still "lofty and powerful as queen of heaven, but probably more cherished above all as woman and loving mother".⁴⁴ Before the Council of Trent endeavored to modify and control (with varying degrees of success)⁴⁵ the official portrayal of the Virgin Mary, she had principally fulfilled an active role as a life-giving intercessor who often intervened on behalf of her adherents.

Thomas Thompson notes that "[t]he Council of Trent made few references to the Virgin Mary, but immediately after the Council there was a great increase in Marian devotion, fostered by the victory at the Battle of Lepanto, the approval of the rosary, and interest in the Immaculate Conception".⁴⁶ In the early modern period, the Virgin Mary was often seen as intercessor in military battles, such as Lepanto, and even an "asistente conquistadora"⁴⁷ in the conquest of the New World. Amy Remensnyder explores in depth this connection between the

intent to build a sense of community" within her convent. She also utilizes the metaphor of the Virgin Mary as "a house prepared for the Infant Christ" and therefore a sacred space, as is the convent. TWOMEY, Lesley K – *The Fabric of Marian Devotion in Isabel de Villena's Vita Christi*. Tamesis, 2013, p. 37–38.

⁴¹ LAVRIN, Asunción – *Brides of Christ: Conventual Life in Colonial Mexico*. Stanford UP, 2008, p. 104.

⁴² Additionally, Joelle Mellon notes that "[a]lthough the Virgin has been held up as a model for all women throughout history, it has always been widely accepted that she maintains a special relationship with nuns". MELLON, Joelle – *The Virgin Mary in the Perceptions of Women: Mother, Protector and Queen since the Middle Ages*. McFarland & Company, 2008, p. 115. Timothy Verdon explains that Mary was "a model for the nuns; 'Virgo virginum,' or 'Virgin exemplar of virginal women'". VERDON, Timothy – "Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea". *Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea*. Scala, 2014, p. 15. Taggard argues that "Mary was the paradigm of religious life" and that nuns believed that her service in the temple gave rise to rules of enclosure". TAGGARD, "Murillo's *Sr. Anne*", p. 40.

⁴³ SPIVEY ELLINGTON, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*, p. 143.

⁴⁴ RUBIN, Miri – "God-Bearer and Woman", *Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea*. Scala, 2014, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Miri Rubin notes instances in which popular devotion and unofficial shrines, such as a Carinthian pilgrimage site (Our Lady of Luggau) and a Portuguese sanctuary (Our Lady of Nazaré) became too popular to ignore and eventually enjoyed royal patronage. RUBIN, Miri – *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary*. Yale UP, 2009, p. 404–5.

⁴⁶ THOMPSON, Thomas – "Recovering Mary's Faith and her Role in the Church". *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*. U of Notre Dame P, 2017, p. 62.

⁴⁷ SÁNCHEZ, Miguel – *Imagen de la Virgen Maria, madre de Dios de Guadalupe, milagrosamente aparecida en la Ciudad de Mexico*. Imprenta da la Viuda de Bernardo Calderos, 1648, fol. 19r.

early modern Virgin Mary and war (both in Europe and abroad), serving “as patron of the reconquest”,⁴⁸ “loving mother of conversion”,⁴⁹ and a figure who played a “guiding role in the colonization of the Americas”.⁵⁰ Additionally, the Woman of the Apocalypse, a figure embroiled in the battle between good and evil, was seen as a representation of the mother of God (although others argued that she was solely a metaphor representing the Church itself). Although this conceptualization was utilized to strengthen the case for and justify Christian domination, it never served as a role model for early modern women. Indeed, this bellicose imagery was not intended as an example to women and certainly not applicable to their real, lived experiences. As Remensnyder observes,

The early modern Virgin emerged as a figure in many ways quite different from her medieval sister. Late sixteenth-century Catholic preachers imbued with the ideals of the Counter-Reformation articulated at the Council of Trent increasingly instructed their audiences to see Jesus' mother as a passive figure, a model of feminine obedience to God, rather than the powerful wonder-worker of medieval tradition. The brushes of some of Europe's greatest Baroque painters helped to strip away the power Mary had commanded in the Middle Ages.⁵¹

Eventually, Mary's lifelong virginity became paramount to all else, particularly once the Council of Trent declared celibacy and virginity superior to marriage.⁵² During the early modern period, theologians began to hold Mary up “as a model of the virgin life”⁵³ arguing that she led a contemplative, enclosed, pious, and private existence. Spivey Ellington also explains that the sixteenth-century Virgin was “humble, quiet, passive, and submissive, obedient always to the will of God. This obedience was proclaimed to be her greatest source of blessing, greater even than her motherhood of Christ”.⁵⁴ Thus, a passive auxiliary figure emerged alongside a more bellicose one.⁵⁵ Soror Maria's

⁴⁸ REMENSNYDER, Amy – *La Conquistadora*. Oxford UP, 2014, p. 34.

⁴⁹ REMENSNYDER, Amy – *La Conquistadora*, p. 195.

⁵⁰ REMENSNYDER, Amy – *La Conquistadora*, p. 218.

⁵¹ REMENSNYDER, Amy – *La Conquistadora*, p. 222–23.

⁵² Canon X of the twenty-fourth session of the Council of Trent states, “[i]f any one saith, that the marriage state is to be placed above the state of virginity, or of celibacy, and that it is not better and more blessed to remain in virginity, or in celibacy, than to be united in matrimony; let him be anathema”. *The Council of Trent*, Ed. and trans. Dolman, p. 195.

⁵³ SPIVEY ELLINGTON – *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*, p. 144.

⁵⁴ SPIVEY ELLINGTON – *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*, p. 142.

⁵⁵ Some early modern writers such as María de Ágreda (in her *Mística ciudad de Dios*) portrayed the Virgin Mary in a way that “breaks with the traditional model presented to women of the Virgin as only passively long-suffering” even though the dominant representation of the mother of Christ was “a rigorously, marvelously pure, asexual

Rosa follows in the footsteps of the active Mary, portraying her as strong rather than submissive. Rosa is not chosen, but rather chooses; another's will is not imposed on her, instead she actively asserts her own will throughout the play.

The active Mary is present in *Clavel, y Rosa*. By not allowing the male gaze to project its fantasy onto a female figure, Soror Maria permits her protagonist to appropriate this gaze and objectify the male characters in intriguing ways. The playwright utilizes the popular trope of Mary as Rose to metonymically create this unique cast and to employ the anthropomorphization of flowers as a means of characterization. These largely uncomplicated characters participate in an allegorical drama with a simple plot. As with other convent plays of the period, this dramatic work also reflects the convent space in which Maria do Céu and her sisters wrote and likely performed, since, as Henri Lefebvre points out, "the pre-existence of space conditions the subject's presence, his competence and performance".⁵⁶ *Clavel, y Rosa* must necessarily reflect the monastic experience because both place and practice comprise space. As the play opens, Rosa explains that she submits to her father's will by choosing a husband, although she would rather "ser adorno del Templo / . . . que en el Vergel / Despozorio".⁵⁷ The playwright indirectly references both cloistered, religious life as a vocation and the Catholic notion, based on Paul's admonition,⁵⁸ that a celibate life spent in the service of God is better than marriage. Mosqueta, charged with announcing the upcoming nuptials, asks about Rosa and her future husband. This inquiry affords the protagonist an opportunity not only to expound upon her own qualities but also to set herself up as superior to all other flowers. She declares that not one of the blooms in the garden can compare to her perfection, explaining, "[d]e la Açucena la tez / De la Violeta el olor / Del Jasmin la candidez / Del Lyrio la gravedad / La hermosura del Clavel / Lo celeste del Jacinto / Y de la Angelica el ser, / O' finalmente de todas / Lo mejor, era poner / Un imposible à ymitarlas".⁵⁹ She lists each one with an accompanying attribute in order to reveal their unsuccessful attempts to equal her in beauty and character.

As Rosa enumerates her counterparts' characteristics, she utilizes the same tactics employed by men to look at and objectify women. The allegorical nature of the play and the two-dimensionality of its figures facilitate Rosa's

person . . . whose primary function is childbearing". COLAHAN, *The Visions of Sor Maria de Agreda*, p. 163–64.

⁵⁶ LEFEBVRE, Henri – *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Blackwell Publishers, 1984, p. 57.

⁵⁷ CEO, Maria do – *Clavel, y Rosa. Enganos do Bosque, Dezenegados do Rio*. N.p., 1736, p. 250.

⁵⁸ In 1 Corinthians 8–9, Paul states, "I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn". This was interpreted by the Catholic Church as a case for celibacy and, in turn, monastic life. *The Bible*. Authorized King James Version, Intellectual Reserve, 2013.

⁵⁹ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 252.

objectification and simplification of the other flowers. As the previous quote indicates, she can reduce each one of them to a single quality—Violeta to scent, Açucena to solemnity, and Jazmin to naiveté. She also throws off the conventional convent topos of emphasizing her own humility, choosing instead to tout her considerable gifts, pointing out that she is “[m]aravilla con la flor, / Y deidad con la muger”.⁶⁰ She invokes her essential role in the salvation of mankind not only by placing herself on par with Christ but also by replacing him as the destroyer of that evil serpent that invaded the Garden of Eden and tempted Adam and Eve. She explains, “[a]unque en flores tal vez / Se esconde el Aspid, mi planta / Ha pizado sua altivez, / Y pudo una flor aqui / A una serpiente vencer”.⁶¹ She announces herself to be the “Reyna suya quantas flores / Nascen a ser”,⁶² which flowers reflect human attributes in order to indirectly and metaphorically deal with issues so sacred that “al tocarlas hade ser / Por sombras, ò por enigmas”.⁶³ She also refers to God as “el Divino Sol”⁶⁴ when explaining that this divine figure has gathered the most illustrious flowers together in order for her to choose her mate from among them. In an obvious inversion of traditional views on love and marriage, the woman chooses from among a select group of men rather than waiting to be chosen and wooed by her beloved or traded to a man by her father. In affording Rosa such agency, Soror Maria reinforces the idea that the Virgin Mary is an active subject and not a passive object.

Intriguingly, although Rosa's position as quasi-deity permits her to live “[s]in prezuncion de muger”,⁶⁵ she submits to her father's will that she marry, despite the fact that this decree scares her, and she finds herself vacillating “[e]ntre el genio, y el respeto, / Entre izencion, y poder”⁶⁶ before eventually assenting. While Rosa acquiesces to a volition not her own, Soror Maria makes it clear that her protagonist indeed has a choice. Rosa agrees to marry out of respect and obedience, and her use of the reflexive phrase “me sugete”⁶⁷ indicates that her father, God, does not forcefully subject her to his will. This is a decision made voluntarily, and not one coerced by a higher power. Rosa cooperatively consents to her father's request because her will is aligned with his. Moreover, the protagonist emphasizes that the Marian figure will preserve her immaculate

⁶⁰ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 253.

⁶¹ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 253.

⁶² CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 254.

⁶³ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 254.

⁶⁴ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 254.

⁶⁵ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 255.

⁶⁶ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 255.

⁶⁷ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 255.

purity and virtue despite her decision to marry. In other words, she alone controls her moral, mental, and physical states.

After Rosa thus proclaims her independence and asserts her power, the stage directions indicate, “[s]alen las flores galanes”,⁶⁸ and her suitors (all but Clavel) enter the stage. Their physical appearance plays an extremely important role in the drama, and this emphasis on physical beauty inverts the traditional portrayal of women—written by male authors—being identified either by their attractiveness or by their sexual purity, as Barbara Mujica has noted.⁶⁹ As each suitor presents himself, his physical appearance, which is metonymically connected to the flower he represents, creates a direct correlation to his character flaws, as when Lyrio identifies himself as “[e] Lyrio arrogante”.⁷⁰ Although Rosa's many suitors comment on her beauty as they vie for her hand, she turns their gaze back onto them in order to reveal their shortcomings.⁷¹

Soror Maria often references the gaze through mentions of seeing and looking, as when Rosa declares, “no es bien, / Que quien me *mira* me ignore, / Y me esconda a quien me ve” (emphasis added),⁷² or, “[t]an sola, y clara se ve, / Que la *miran* como una, / Y la adoran como en tres” (emphasis added).⁷³ Lyrio basks in the gaze of others, as he insists that he is “[e] mayor entre las flores; / Ansi que todas me *ven* / Principe, pues de los valles” (emphasis added).⁷⁴ Narciso, for his part, also portrays himself as an object of the gaze, noting, “como en mi se *ve* / Hermosura, y gracia, espero / Ser preferido”.⁷⁵ He then blatantly projects his own image onto Rosa, and his insistence that “[c]ierto es que ama cada uno / Su semejante”⁷⁶ reinforces Mulvey's assertion that “the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly”.⁷⁷ Soror Maria's protagonist, however, does not allow herself to be objectified in this way as she incredulously asks, “[v]os mi semejante sois?”.⁷⁸ When Narciso answers in the affirmative, Rosa proudly declares, “yo semejante no tuve, / Ni

⁶⁸ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 256.

⁶⁹ MUJICA, Barbara – *Teresa de Ávila: Lettered Woman*. Vanderbilt UP, 2009, p. 142.

⁷⁰ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 257.

⁷¹ Other convent playwrights such as Sor Marcela de San Félix create male characters who embody negative traits, such as *Apetito* and *Celo Indiscreto*. In many early modern allegorical convent plays, the female characters appear as positive examples for the nuns while the male characters possess no positive character traits for the nuns to emulate.

⁷² CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 251.

⁷³ CEO, – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 252.

⁷⁴ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 257.

⁷⁵ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 257.

⁷⁶ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 257.

⁷⁷ MULVEY – *Visual and Other Pleasures*, p.19.

⁷⁸ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 257.

tengo, ni hede tener”.⁷⁹ The other flowers mock this suitor's attempt at wooing the beautiful bride, and Mosqueta even invokes Narciso's act of looking and turns it on itself by calling up the image of a mirror, saying, “[v]aya-se el bobo al espejo, / Y lindo se mire en el”.⁸⁰ Rosa's rejection of Narciso forces his gaze to double back upon itself,⁸¹ finding its only appropriate expression in self-absorbed reflection.

After Narciso, the next flower to present himself is Bien mequiere, who self-identifies as “[l]a flor del amor”.⁸² When Rosa asks him what merit he possesses, he pompously declares that he does not embody or represent love but rather that he *is* love, the only true merit. The protagonist immediately dismisses him, insisting that “[a]dorar sin pertender”⁸³ is better than what he offers. Rosa does not even give the other flowers a chance at wooing her but rather asks Mosqueta to identify the one who hangs back from the others. Mosqueta identifies him as “[e]l Clavel, / Principe, que es de la sangre, / Y aun aspirante a ser Rey” and assumes him to be a “[g]alan vergonçozo / Que ama sin dexarse ver”.⁸⁴ Again, the playwright emphasizes the function of sight. Not only does Clavel not wish to be seen, but, by hiding behind the other flowers, he also keeps himself from seeing his beloved. Thus, he avoids objectifying or “styling” her according to his own desires. Clavel's refusal to see and be seen starkly contrasts with the behavior of his counterparts, and it soon becomes apparent to both the protagonist and the audience that while most of the male characters act vaingloriously, pompously, and in a silly way, only he, the humblest of the flowers, proves worthy of Rosa's attention. In this moment, the play once again allows the spectators to engage with the play in a self-conscious manner, recognizing the failings of mortal men while acknowledging the elevated standing of those who humble themselves before the divine. Like Clavel, the nuns in attendance must subject themselves to the will of celestial authority, while rejecting the haughtiness and vanity of the world, as does Rosa.

When Rosa questions this shy suitor as to why he does not approach despite his amorous intentions, he explains that respect makes him keep his distance even while faith impels him forward. This offers Soror Maria more opportunities to reference sight. The protagonist asks him if he does not *see* this as a contradiction (“Pois nó veis / Que implica contradiccion”), to which he

⁷⁹ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 258.

⁸⁰ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 258.

⁸¹ Narciso's name, of course, comes from the classical mythical figure of Narcissus, who starved to death while gazing upon his own reflection.

⁸² CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 258.

⁸³ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 258.

⁸⁴ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 259.

responds that fear, more than hope, is *seen* in his humility (“En mi humildad, que se ve / Mas miedo, que no esperança”).⁸⁵ She accuses him of cowardice and asks him what merits he possesses. He proclaims that he possesses but one: “Solo meresco em mirar / Que no llevo a merecer”.⁸⁶ Clavel’s gaze ultimately does not rest on Rosa but rather on his own insufficiency. If, as Mulvey suggests, scopophilia is narcissistic and therefore helps constitute the ego, then Clavel’s abject humility indicates his unwillingness to use Rosa “as an object of sexual stimulation through sight”.⁸⁷ Rosa, on the other hand, indicates her inclination to use sight as a way of judging between the suitors. When she asks them all to appear before her the next day, promising a reward for the first to arrive, an aside reveals her true motivation. She explains, “[q]uiero ver en esta accion, / Qual màs atento se ve, / Y si se adelanta a todos, / Como en lo màs, el Clavel”.⁸⁸ Clavel decides to stay the night in that very spot so that Rosa might see him first, thereby willingly subjecting himself to her gaze. The last line of his monologue is telling: “Duerman los ojos, que el coraçon vela”.⁸⁹ Thus, he once more relinquishes the power of sight as a sign of humility in the presence of someone he recognizes as superior to himself.

Once morning has come, Clavel’s second monologue indicates that “there are circumstances in which . . . there is pleasure in being looked at”,⁹⁰ as he hopefully proclaims, “[e]lla me mirará, si la fortuna, / Me levanta màs alto que la Luna”.⁹¹ Her gaze will not subjugate Clavel but rather will elevate him to heights previously unknown. The other suitors, however, do not share in this hope, since each arrives later than their rival does. Bien mequiere explains that he has arrived tardy because he was gathering pearls from the dawn for his beloved, while Narciso was detained by his desire to look his best for Rosa. The protagonist rejects the pearls in favor of promptness and abhors Narciso’s self-interest, which he unsuccessfully attempts to present as service to his beloved. Lyrio also arrives too late, unable to appear until the sun has risen. Only Clavel, who never actually left, “arrives” early enough to please Rosa, who declares in an aside, “[e]n todo el Clavel se mira / A los de màs superior”.⁹² Again, through her sight she recognizes his superiority when compared to his competitors. Just as Rosa is qualified to determine the worth of Clavel, the active Virgin

⁸⁵ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 259.

⁸⁶ CEO, – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 260.

⁸⁷ MULVEY – *Visual and Other Pleasures*, p. 18.

⁸⁸ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 261.

⁸⁹ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 262.

⁹⁰ MULVEY – *Visual and Other Pleasures*, p. 16.

⁹¹ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 264.

⁹² CEO, – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 268.

Mary's power and sovereignty afford her the authority to intervene in matters of salvation.

The second act references this authority in a long monologue by Clavel, in which he makes clear reference to the male gaze when he states, "beldad de tal ser / Magestad tan soberana / Nó hade mirar como humana, / Aunque esté como muger".⁹³ The male gaze has no power in the presence of female divinity. Girassol describes her as "una hija del Sol, . . . una luz pura, / Que està quazi deidad, y es creatura, / Aquien mortal ninguno se halla digno".⁹⁴ The idea of Mary as divinity is not new to Soror Maria's drama, since "late medieval preachers spoke of Mary's assumption and her position as Queen of Heaven and Mediatrix".⁹⁵ This concept of female divinity continually resurfaces throughout the play, most often when Rosa reminds her suitors of their necessary subjugation to her. These reminders color utterances such as Clavel's "[s]oy vuestro esclavo".⁹⁶ What is traditionally a customary courtly phrase used to show respect becomes quite literal. He is, indeed, subject to her and her will, as all earthly creatures must serve and obey their divine master. Although Catholic doctrine currently differentiates between the worship of veneration and the worship of adoration, so that a practitioner might venerate Mary as the mother of God but worship God alone, Soror Maria portrays Rosa as Godlike. Although the treatment of Mary may not be unique to this particular dramatic work, the convent space allows for a unique portrayal of her power and authority as exercised over a group of men, not women. It must have been satisfying for the nuns in attendance to mentally align themselves with the Marian figure by virtue of their sex, especially within a space such as the convent: "both oppressive and enabling, filled not only with authoritarian perils but also with possibilities for community, resistance, and emancipatory change".⁹⁷ In this way, the convent both controlled and freed its inhabitants.

In *Clavel, y Rosa*, the playwright showcases the upending of the traditional active/passive dichotomy and the reinstating of Marian control and power when Rosa allows all her suitors the chance to explain themselves, and in unison they meekly respond, "[a] vuestras plantas prostrados la permission / Agradecemos rendidos".⁹⁸ Predictably, the suitors do not do themselves any favors here. Lyrio begins by explaining how he has toned down his greatness in favor of love. Next,

⁹³ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 271.

⁹⁴ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 274.

⁹⁵ SPIVEY ELLINGTON – *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*, p. 103.

⁹⁶ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 278.

⁹⁷ SOJA, Edward W. – *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 87.

⁹⁸ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 281.

Narciso argues that he deserves Rosa's favor because he gave up his prodigious self-love for her sake. Bien mequiere, in turn, insists that only his love is true, but misguidedly uses the verbs *querer* and *amar* interchangeably,⁹⁹ which Clavel pointedly corrects in one of his rhetorically rich monologues. Clavel continues to chide the other suitors until he wins the title of "victor".¹⁰⁰ Intriguingly, although Rosa admits that Clavel does indeed deserve this honor, she warns him against a repeat of this uppity behavior, saying, "[e] laurel vuestro será, / Mas advertid desde oy, / Que en mi Palacio otra vez / Por semejante passion / No argumenteis, que aunque mas, / Assegure vuestra voz, / Su respeto, ò su pureza, / Adonde prezido yo, / Es opinion mui grossera / Para una hija del Sol".¹⁰¹ She allows him to opine with the express understanding that he will not do so on future occasions, and she confidently reminds him of her position of power.

In the third act, the playwright continues to emphasize the visual as each of the characters shares images seen in dreams the night before. These visions reinforce their characterization and rhetoric. When Narciso insists that only Rosa can interpret these dreams, she counters him by saying, "[n]o podré, / Que nó es justo se examine / Con curiosidad infiel / Del oculto lo sagrado / Antes de dexarse ver".¹⁰² Once again, Soror Maria warns against impertinent and improper looking. In this case, although Rosa refers to the workings of the unconscious mind as well as the sacred, her cautionary counsel could easily apply to the already expressed "curiosidad infiel" of the male characters.¹⁰³ Their reactions to Rosa—as she offers one collective interpretation for all their dreams—reference both looking and being looked at. Once she expresses that these dreams foreshadow her pending nuptials, Lyrio feels confident that he is seen as "alentado",¹⁰⁴ while Narciso and Bien mequiere allude to sight by again referring to what they saw in their dreams. Clavel alone forgoes looking or being looked at as he meekly responds in an aside, "[o] como me temo indigno".¹⁰⁵ He figuratively lowers his gaze in an expression of humility. Rosa eventually confronts Clavel, asking, "[v]os solo nõ haveis soñado?",¹⁰⁶ to which he responds in the affirmative but admits he is reluctant to share the images he saw, even though they position him as the preferred suitor.

⁹⁹ The semantic difference between these two verbs is much more marked in Portuguese than in Spanish. Rosa's admonition of Bien mequiere's word choice makes more sense when we consider that *querer* can be used to indicate lust as well as love, depending on the context. CEO, *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 283.

¹⁰⁰ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 287.

¹⁰¹ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 288-89.

¹⁰² CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 294.

¹⁰³ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 294.

¹⁰⁴ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 296.

¹⁰⁵ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 296.

¹⁰⁶ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 296.

Eventually, Rosa discovers Clavel's ignorance of his royal heritage¹⁰⁷ and reveals his identity to him. Tellingly, Clavel responds, "quando con vos me miro, / Aunque aqui tanto me honrais / Pareceme que estoy viendo / Un borron junto aun crystal".¹⁰⁸ Although his male gaze imagines Rosa as his partner, it does not render "woman into an apologist for the phallogocentric system that oppresses her".¹⁰⁹ Rather, it recognizes her role as a divine authoritative figure. Although Clavel is indeed a "Princepe de la sangre / Conjunto a la Magestad",¹¹⁰ his gaze only reinforces his inferior position. Rosa's superiority clearly elevates Clavel's standing while his humility and refusal to employ the male gaze in traditional ways make him worthy to wed Rosa. Sol Divino does appear at the end of the third act as a type of *deus ex machina* in order to make Rosa's choice official. Nevertheless, his role is seen as a formality, since his decision merely reflects Rosa's. Her will and agency are indeed the driving forces behind Sol's declaration.

A play centered on courtship and marriage might appear to have little relevance to the daily, physical, lived experiences of Franciscan nuns cloistered in a convent in Lisbon, but *Clavel, y Rosa* reveals truths about the space in which Soror Maria wrote and produced her play. Michel de Certeau insists that "places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state".¹¹¹ *Clavel, y Rosa*, however, allows us a unique insight into the enigmatic stories of convent life. Indeed, we can read the past through the play when we consider where and how the nuns produced it. Not only were the nuns in the Convento da Esperança spectators of Soror Maria's female-centric play; they were also its actors. Within the walls of the cloister, women played both Mary and Joseph. As Valerie Hegstrom and Amy Williamson indicate, "[i]n the convent, nun-actresses performed all the roles—female and male—in plays written by nun-playwrights before an all-female audience. This arrangement allows female actresses to perform gender in ways that will create meanings that resonate with their female audience members".¹¹² The context of the convent and the production of *Clavel, y Rosa* by and for women religious surely allowed Soror Maria and her sisters to deeply identify

¹⁰⁷ The first sixteen verses of the first chapter of Matthew trace Joseph's genealogy and reveal that he is a direct descendant not only of Abraham, but also of King David. He is, therefore, of royal blood.

¹⁰⁸ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 301.

¹⁰⁹ FREEDMAN – *Staging the Gaze*, 134.

¹¹⁰ CEO – *Clavel, y Rosa*, p. 301.

¹¹¹ DE CERTEAU, Michel – *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall. U of California P, 1984, p. 108.

¹¹² HEGSTROM, Valerie and Amy WILLIAMSON – "Gendered Matters: Engaging Research on Early Modern Dramaturgas in the Classroom", Long, Mary K., et al. *Teaching Gender Through Latin American, Latino, and Iberian Texts and Cultures*. Sense Publishers, 2015, p. 113.

with the active Virgin Mary as portrayed onstage.

Soror Maria chose to resist prescriptive patriarchal norms intended to relegate women to passive roles in both society and the church. As Edward W. Soja points out, “choosing marginality becomes a critical turning-point in the construction of other forms of counter-hegemonic or subaltern identity and more embracing communities of resistance”.¹¹³ In this case, the active Marian figure who counters the male gaze in *Clavel, y Rosa* embodies counterhegemonic identity; Soror Maria strengthened a version of the Virgin Mary that women could follow as they formed their own personal relationships with deity. This, of course, has implications for late baroque female spirituality on a larger scale and suggests the need for further exploration of the evolution of female spiritual practices in convent literature and art in the early eighteenth century. Soror Maria and her sisters could identify with Mary on different levels as mother, bride, and woman, and the convent space provided the perfect place for this reinforcement of an active, redemptive, and indispensable Mary.

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¹¹³ SOJA – *Thirdspace*, p. 97.