CANCIONERO POETRY AS RELIGIOUS PRACTICE: THE VALLADOLID DISCALCED CARMELITE CONVENT'S *LIBRO DE ROMANCES Y COPLAS*

EL CANÇONER POÈTIC COM A PRÀCTICA RELIGIOSA: *EL LIBRO DE ROMANCES Y COPLAS* DEL CONVENT DE CARMELITES DESCALCES DE VALLADOLID

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Abstract: The *Libro de romances y coplas del Carmelo de Valladolid* is the best-known of the early modern Spanish convent compilations of poetry. While its metrical forms and themes reflect similarities with those of other *cancioneros* of that period, they also remain deeply embedded in the beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and actions of cloistered women, living together in community and from a range of social classes. Despite social differences, however, the priorities and concerns of the Discalced Carmelite Order prevail; the collective product demonstrates a common goal, tied to specific religious practices. This essay explores in depth how, both thematically and technically, the verses in the volume take up three salient preoccupations manifested in the volume: the celebration of Christmas, the taking of the veil, and the practices of (inner) spirituality.

Key words: *cancionero*, Cecilia del Nacimiento, Christmas, Discalced Carmelites, inner spirituality, poetry, nuns' professions.

Resum: El *Libro de romances y coplas del Carmelo de Valladolid* és el més conegut dels cançoners conventuals de la primera edat moderna. Tot i que les seues formes mètriques i els seus temes reflecteixen semblances amb els d'altres cançoners de l'època, també parteixen de i es queden incrustats en les creences, els pensaments, els sentiments i les accions de dones recloses que vivien en comunitat i venien de diverses classes socials. Malgrat les diferències, tanmateix, les prioritats i preocupacions de l'orde carmelita descalça dominen en el tom; el producte col·lectiu demostra una meta en comú, enllaçada amb pràctiques religioses específiques. Aquest estudi explora a fons com, temàticament i tècnica, els versos del cançoner manifesten tres interessos que destaquen: la celebració de Nadal, la presa de l'hàbit i el vel i la pràctica de l'espiritualitat interior.

Caplletra 67 (Tardor, 2019), p. 187-207. ISSN 0214-8188, ISSN versió electrònica 2386-7159
Rebut: 07/01/2019. Acceptat: 24/03/2019. DOI: 10.7203/Caplletra.67.15378

Paraules clau: cançoner, Carmelites Descalces, Cecilia del Nacimiento, espiritualitat interioritzada, Nadal, poesia, presa de l'hàbit.

Compiled during the years between St. Teresa of Ávila's death in 1582 and her beatification in 1614,[1] the *Libro de romances y coplas del Carmelo de Valladolid* offers one example of how early modern women religious in Spain understood, expressed, and practiced their spirituality. Although filtered through poetic and religious conventions, their literary voices, dedicated to the ideals of Catholicism and the Order to which they were devoted, emerge as reflections of their beliefs, feelings, and actions. Conforming to the desire to create a «memoria colectiva autorrepresentativa» (Baranda 2016: 169), the poetry manifests a collective conventual poetic practice, one that created a group identity.[2] Certainly the best-known and most-studied of the convent *cancioneros* in Spain, the *Libro* also echoes and reflects the forms and functions of both popular and *high* early modern cultural production. In that sense, it constitutes a clear example of Nieves Baranda's affirmation (2016: 171):

> Las monjas participaron en todas las corrientes de poesía religiosa que se desarrollan a partir de la segunda mitad del xvi: versiones de los salmos, poesía petrarquista a lo divino, los cantos devotos, la estética del conceptismo sacro y el romancero espiritual.

In terms of form, then, and also content, the *Libro* bears a close relationship to others produced in the Order during the period, including the one from Medina del Campo, studied by Ana Álvarez Pellitero, and those in Cataluña, studied by Aurèlia Pessarrodona and Verònica Zaragoza Gómez.

Frequently, critics have denigrated the poetic quality of the verses produced in early modern convents. Baranda, for instance, suggests that they are «carentes en gran parte de originalidad o valor estético» (2016: 166). Nevertheless convent poetry (as well as music and other art forms) served an extremely vital function in the nuns' daily life. The collective nature of creative enterprise was especially important in the Discalced Carmelite Order, as Electa Arenal & Stacey Schlau pointed out (2010: 38);

1. Asserted in the Introduction to the facsimile edition of the *Libro*, edited by Víctor García de la Concha & Ana Álvarez Pellitero, p. xxi.

2. This idea is paraphrased from Verònica Zaragoza's essay on the *cancionero* of the Barcelona Discalced Carmelite convent (2017: 618).

the making of a *cancionero*, a compilation of poetry, emphasized the commonality of women engaged in a highly focused spiritual quest.[3] Teresian Rules provided for a daily recreation period to combat boredom and advance religious goals; the *Libro* constitutes one concrete example of the collective endeavors undertaken under the auspices of education and entertainment, behind convent walls. This aspect of poetry-making is evident in many other convents of the Order (and other Orders as well); basing her assertion on those of several other critics, Zaragoza (2017: 625) notes about the Barcelona convent compendium that:

> […] el Cancionero demuestra como en el Carmelo Descalzo las diversas manifestaciones culturales tales como la poesía, el baile, la música y el teatro se fusionaban al servicio de la devoción comunitaria, y servían por igual para amenizar el ambiente conventual en determinadas fiestas.

In their introduction to the two-volume facsimile edition and transcription of the *Libro*, García de la Concha & Álvarez Pellitero, co-editors of the book, affirm that the collection contains 132 poems, as well as five partial or complete copied poems and a final annotation in prose, 80% of which were copied by one Sister, Isabel del Sacramento (xix). Despite the title of the volume, only twelve *coplas* and *romances* appear in its pages (xlvi); there are also few *liras* (xlvii). The majority of poems in popular meters in the *Libro* were sung (xlix); indeed, several scholars have pointed out the importance of music in the convents (e.g., Baranda 2013: 287; Ugofsky-Méndez 2014: 71; Zaragoza 2017: 625). Elsewhere, Baranda underscored that the use of popular meters reflected not only a didactic purpose, but also «[…] un modelo compositivo fácilmente imitable, incluso pensado para generar esa imitación» (2016: 183).

Nevertheless, although the *Libro* certainly leans heavily on traditional meters, poetry based in a more conventionally literary mode appears as well. Mostly, contemporary scholars assume that biological siblings Cecilia del Nacimiento and María de San Alberto (Sobrino Morillas) authored those poems informed by a background in formal education. Both served as convent leaders, holding several different offices throughout their lives, but they also fomented cultural production. Critics, though, have traditionally argued that the younger Cecilia del Nacimiento was a better poet than her sister (e.g., García de la Concha & Álvarez Pellitero 1982: xv), an assertion that perhaps reflects canonical norms more than quality of verses. The Sobrino sisters' contributions as community and cultural principals may help to explain a key difference of this *Libro* and the Barcelona *cancionero*: the frequent use of a first-person singular speaker rather than a first-person plural one that Zaragoza notes (2017: 628).

3. Stacey Schlau (2017) has developed this idea in her essay about the poetry of two of St. Teresa's closest spiritual daughters, Ana de San Bartolomé and María de San José (Salazar).

The editors of the *Libro* divide it into nine thematic cycles: Christmas, Eucharist, Holy Trinity, Virgin Mary, saints, habits and veils, asceticism and religious life, and two additional series (xix-xxi). Categories are similarly organized in the Barcelona *cancionero*, although Zaragoza adds one for mystical union and another for holidays and festivities other than Christmas (2017: 621).[4] In the Valladolid *Libro* the verses develop expected tropes —especially Christmas, professions, spiritual matters, and doctrine— in a variety of poetic forms; they are authored by the Sisters or transcribed from other authors and from widely-circulating volumes of poetry such as López de Ubeda's *Vergel*. In this essay, I focus on poetry written by convent denizens, about three salient thematic strands poeticized in the volume: a religious holiday (the birth of Jesus), an important ritual of convent life (taking of the veil), and spiritual concepts and practices (inner religiosity); the last two are, of course, deeply intertwined.

1. RHYMED SENTIMENTALITY: CELEBRATING THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Declaring that, «El cancionero de Valladolid es el primero de los grandes cancioneros de las carmelitas descalzas», Miguel Marón García-Bermejo Giner also notes that, «en él, como en todos, el número de los poemas navideños es superior a los demás» (1990: 405). Clearly, the same is true for other, similar *cancioneros*, for example the volume produced in Medina del Campo convent (Álvarez Pellitero 1983: 629). Eighty-three poems in the Valladolid *Libro* elaborate on Jesus's birth; most are in popular meters, particularly *coplas* and *villancicos*. Indeed, Ugofsky-Méndez affirms that the *villancico* is the most important poetic form in the Christmas cycle (2014: 166).

These poems manifest a recurring trope: the paradoxical continuity of the sweet innocence of the Christ child who will/did become the divinity who sacrifices himself for humanity. Poem 16, for instance, while brief, highlights in simple yet eloquent language the juxtaposition between the unsullied child and the sacrificial adult lamb:

> A niño tal dulçe y blando
> alma mia ben y adora
> que aunque el pesebre llora
> en el çielo esta rreinando (15)[5]

4. Tellingly, given the implicit importance of St. Teresa of Ávila in this *cancionero*, most of the poems are rendered in Spanish, not Catalan (Zaragoza 2017: 618).

5. Throughout, I use García de la Concha & Álvarez Pellitero's numbering of the poems, as well as their transcription (including their choice to retain original spelling). Page numbers refer to the same edition.

Throughout the next two stanzas, the contrast between Jesus's «humildad» and his «magestad» is discerned through faith; the soul metaphorically experiences the sun at midnight and the stars at noon, due to the existence of God within.

The verses frequently focus on family relationships, especially those between mother and child. Naturally therefore, Mary plays a central role, because of her maternal qualifications. Through the biology of motherhood, the female body, generally associated with sin in Catholic doctrine, gains positive significance. Ugofsky-Méndez affirms that, rather than being an object of shame or associated with evil, «puede ser entero, perfecto, luminoso […] incluso provisor de vida para el niño Dios» (2014: 109-110). The Virgin's child is beautiful, the poetic voice announces in poem 34, adding to her value as a mother: «bente con migo miguel / beras un niño chiquito / ques mil beçes mas bonito / que Juanico el de ysabel» (28). In the poem, Jesus and John the Baptist are placed in competition, in order to emphasize the superiority of the former over the latter.

Other poems celebrate Mary's role as mother. The speaker in poem 41, for instance, exclaims: «viva viva viva / la virgen doncella / que tray la fe viva / y el rregistro della / muestra dios en hella / oy sa tribunal» (34). Indeed, in poem 45, Mary is placed center stage as a shepherd in her own right, within the framework of maternity: «yo la vi rreçien parida / ala pastora garrida» in whose womb God was born as a man, «en el bientre virginal / de la pastora […]» (37). And in poem 53, the speaker suggests that Mary deserves a place to stay, because «[…] dios haençerrado en ella / quien rremedie nuestros males»; whoever offers her refuge will be well-paid «con lo que naçera della». Further, the poem mourns the lack of hospitality that Mary finds, «estoy con grande dolor / rreyna mia y mi señora / que se llega ya la ora / de naçer el rredentor / y en los honbres no ay amor / ni quieren dale posada» (44). In another (poem 62), Mary achieves parity with the Christ Child, in their role of loving advocates of humanity: «su hijo y la virgen santa / anvos [ambos] arden en llamas de amor / y el niño llora y la virgen canta / por hel bien del pecador» (52-53).

The Virgin Mary as mother is the poetic voice in poem 54 (44-45). She addresses a nun, first calling her «hermana», with a plea for shelter in her heart for the family, including Jesus and Joseph, especially because Christ has come to lovingly console humanity: «que en mi bientre biene / con grande aficiçion» (45). In one stanza she implores:

> abreme hermana
> hermana y esposa
> no seas pereçosa
> en dejar la cama

quiere al que te ama
con tanta afiçion
y dame [posada] (45)

Reciprocity is expected: humankind should welcome its savior wholeheartedly, in exchange for divine love. Mary as mother becomes the spokesperson and advocate for this relationship, based in God's love above all: «tu dios bien aqui / muy enamorado / y amor a ordenado / que nazca de my / biene para ty» (45). Along with the demand for mutuality, total devotion from the recipients of the divinity's sacred love is required. Above all, the holiday is celebrated as this form of interchange between Jesus and humankind.

Poem 70, which Father Gerardo de la Cruz attributed to either María de san Alberto or Cecilia del Nacimiento, begins with an epigraph in Latin, «Mater ad puerun jesum» (mother of the Child Jesus). The sonnet is structured as an apostrophe directed to Jesus Christ.

[…] es posible mi dios que aveis estado
en mis pobres entrañas rrecogido
y es posible señor que os he parido
y siendo madre virgen e quedado […] (60)

In these lines, the insistence on «es posible» as an introduction to biological motherhood contrasts with the certainty of «sin duda» that precedes the glorious news proclaimed by angels of the fulfillment of humankind's yearning for a savior.

At times, the poetic voice is inserted into the sacred family unit, usually with a homely note and in irregular popular meter. In poem 20, for instance, the speaker scolds the Christ child for crying, claiming that he makes his father and mother, and the speaker («sinner») suffer: «[…] no lloreis donçel hermoso / […] / que lastimais vuestra madre / con beros tan lastimoso / […] / no lloreis / que no es justo» (18). The tone here is one of intimacy and familiarity: the poetic voice takes on the role of scolding parent, enjoining the Christ child to stop, in the name of harming those who love him. In keeping with the holiday, the emphasis on (the holy) family and celebration, on feelings of joy and intimacy, constitutes a significant recurring element in the poetry celebrating the birth of Jesus.

The representation of intimacy within the Holy Family, and especially between mother and child, is evident in poem 64, in which Jesus addresses his mother. A brief *villancico* entitled «a la çircunçision» celebrates the holiday which in the early modern period was denominated the Feast of the Circumcision of Christ, but which today is referred to as the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus or the Octave Day of the

Nativity of the Lord, also the Solemnity of Mary. The ceremony of circumcision was viewed as Jesus's first giving of his blood, symbolically presaging the crucifixion. In the poem, the apostrophe focuses on Jesus's celebration of his love of humanity, communicated through the spilling of blood as an expression of his desire for humanity's redemption. He notes:

> es tanto el amor que tengo
> con estos hyjos de adan
> que mis deleytes estan
> en morir y a eso bengo
> Y pues que de morir tengo
> madre mia no es rraçon
> sino que de yo mi sangre
> por la vmana rredençion. (54)

The paradoxical feeling of joy associated with the speaker's knowing that he will certainly die as a sacrifice counteracts the implicit sadness that a mother might feel in losing her child. Highlighting Christ's sacrifice for humanity, a basic tenet of dogma, reminds readers (and listeners) of the mother's sacrifice as well. Appropriately for the register in which it is written, the poem assumes human feelings in both sacred figures.

A gloss of «entrad bereis a dios estar llorando» in five *octavas reales* attributed to María de San Alberto by Father Gerardo de la Cruz (poem 48, p. 39-40), offers a conceptually complex treatment of the sorrow engendered by Christ's sacrifice, knowledge of which shadows the joy of his birth. Certain lines strongly suggest that the audience is the group of nuns who participate in the celebration: «oy se ofreçe el esposo por la esposa / oy se nos dio la paz çeso la guerra […]» (39). Framed as a divine mystery, the lines exhort the listeners to pay close attention to the message. Reinforcing the urgency, the first three stanzas each begin with a command: «oyd […] un misterio divino y admirable», «bed […] con esta rredençion grande y copiosa / se bajaron los çielos ala tierra», and «entrad bereis la fuente dela bida» (39). Subsequently, doctrine is poeticized, made explicit, in verses such as «bereis la vmanidad estar vnida / al vervo con que el mundo se engrandece / quien en tan alto bien no esta pensando» (4). In sum, the lesson to be learned becomes absolutely clear: «porque quien tiene a dios, todo lo tiene» (40).

Poem 46 constructs a battle between love and God, glossing the four-line stanza that ends, «y pudo tanto el amor / que dio con dios en el suelo» (38). Interestingly, the conflict between the two causes God to send his son to earth, out of love for humankind: «amor yço a dios que diese / asu hyjo en rreconpensa» (38). In the final *octava*, the subject, Justice, sacrifices his child to right the wrongs of humanity,

in spite of not wanting to harm a son whom he loves so much. Thus love becomes the ultimate act of loss: in giving what he most values, God sets an example of the necessary pain of connection, of the suffering required in order to achieve spiritual perfection. In that sense, he becomes a model for the women who have chosen to dedicate their lives to religion.

Another salient aspect of the Christmas poetry in the *Libro* is the relationship of the adoring worshipper with the loving divinity. One of Cecilia del Nacimiento's sonnets, poem 69, begins with the theme of the Incarnation as God's clothing (*Libro* 59, fn). The poem revolves around the fit of divine love, using the tropes of courtly love. Further, it connects that experience to the nuns' choice to profess:

> […] mas dios en el nuevo avito estrechado
> de dulçe fuego preso asy decía
> amor amor quan dulçe y quan amargo
> quan blando y duro suave y desabrido
> […]
> que quanto mas me trahes afligido
> dulce enemigo mio mas te quiero (60)

In these lines, the paradoxical, contradictory feelings of the lover who yearns reflect the malaise associated with this tradition, but in the service of spiritual practices. The antitheses are resolved in the last two lines: «que quanto mas me trahes afligido / dulçe enemigo mio mas te quiero» (60). Unlike the poem that precedes this one, the sentiment is expressed through a masculine voice.

On the other hand, the speaker in the poem 68 is unequivocally female. Blurring the line between the roles of mother and lover, she affirms in the first three lines, «A los pechos de mi madre / esta ya mi dulçe amado / donde yo he deseado» (59); and in the last stanza asserts:

> […] porque yo le llame hermano
> me llama hermana y esposa
> y porque no sea medrosa
> se viste como aldeano
> y con su derecha mano
> me abraça mi dulce amado
> y mi bien tan deseado (59)

Again the literary tradition of courtly love is evident, with a twist: the divine figure dresses as a peasant so as not to intimidate the speaker.

As Ugofsky-Méndez has pointed out, «Constantemente, las autoras del cancionero [de Valladolid] perciben el amor como la vida, ésta que ellas encuentran en

la presencia de su Amado» (2014: 40). In an even more direct manner than poem 68, poem 82, «coplas del naçimiento», reflects the Discalced Carmelite (and other Orders') tendency to borrow heavily from the language of the courtly love tradition to express the sentiments of the penitent for the divinity. The poem expresses intense yearning for the beloved, intensified by the «experience of reciprocated love» (Carrera 2009: 742). Triggered by the sight of God's «ojuelos amorosos y hermosos», the soul is left «abrasando» (72).

2. A MARRIAGE OF CHOICE: POEMS FOR NUNS' PROFESSIONS

Naturally, the question of love for the divinity also permeates the poems written for nuns' professions and performed during those ceremonies. Nieves Baranda's detailed review of the observance of taking the veil highlights the elements of spectacle that informed this event. Both a private and public occasion, the celebration of nuns' professions occurred in a social context that reflected social stratification and organization. Baranda notes, «La ceremonia de toma de velo o de profesión revestía gran importancia no solo para la monja, que era el centro del acto, sino para su entorno social» (2013: 284). The first part of the ritual was private, held within convent walls and only for the nuns of the convent; this was followed by a ceremony in the church, which included a public swearing of the vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity, as well as a commitment to permanent enclosure (Baranda 2013: 285). The prescribed procedures included visual components such as the physical transformation of the woman into the nun, seen principally in the change in clothing, and often the donning of a crown of flowers to celebrate the sacred marriage. But also, sound remained paramount: music sung by the nuns or professional singers, especially *villancicos*, always accompanied the proceedings (Baranda 2016: 174).

In the *Libro* twenty-four *villancicos* and *coplas*, one made up of *octavas*, two *liras*, and one composed in *tercetos* are dedicated to this celebration. Clearly, popular meters dominate, although a few poems influenced by Italian verse also appear (Ugofksy-Méndez 2011: 98). As in most convent *cancioneros,* the theme of profession as a wedding prevails, including its wide range of sub-topics detailing the history of the courtship, often with a pastoral element (Baranda 2013: 288). Additionally, in the Valladolid *Libro* a recurring major motif concerns the obligations that attend the new nun's status, as she learns to become the bride of Christ.

A poetry constructed with juxtapositions —between life and death, material and spiritual wealth, freedom and imprisonment, sacrifice and joy, secular and

divine love— teaches the rules of Catholic behavior and thought, and particularly of St. Teresa's Constitution. Not surprisingly, Cecilia del Nacimiento and María de San Alberto, both of whom served as Mistress of Novices and as Mother Superior during their tenure in the convent, reflected leadership roles in their writing, including the poems in this collection. Not surprisingly, many of those celebrating professions were attributed to the two sisters by Father Gerardo de Santa Cruz, their first editor. This follows from the natural link between pedagogy and rhymed verses as entertainment that emerges in the texts written for the celebration of the taking of the veil. Clearly, the occasion offered the opportunity to reinforce conformity to convent and the Order's expectations and norms, especially since the verses were so often sung in chorus by the members of the community.

Paramount to this framework, the three vows always sworn at this ceremony —poverty, chastity, and obedience— function as an initial basic guide. While in poem 203, they form the basis of a love relationship couched in the terminology of courtly love («mi amado para my / yo para solo mi amado / tres beçes se lo he jurado en los votos que le di» [171]), in poem 200, poverty, chastity, and obedience are also portrayed as blows to the devil. Indeed, the addressee's act of renouncing the world constitutes a direct strike against the enemy:

> quando al mundo rrenunçiastes
> le dejastes lastimado
> mas ya le tienen atado
> los votos conque le atastes (169)

Here, on the occasion of celebrating the taking of the veil, the poetic voice attributes an active role to the woman who leaves "the world" for enclosure in the convent, implicitly challenging the conventional passive stance assumed to be appropriate to the female gender.

A series of juxtapositions framing the theme of spiritual marriage recur, especially when poeticizing the new nun's marriage to Jesus. Lines such as, «o Riquisima pobreça / y muy libre sugeçion […]» (168) suggest the intent to engender joy based on this difficult choice. Poem 196, which Father Gerardo attributes to Cecilia del Nacimiento, depicts the three vows as a useful tool for achieving the desired goal of marriage to Jesus; paradoxically, chastity creates the desire in God for the new nun to become his spouse: «[…] castidad a oy engendrado / mil deseos del señor / que preso de vuestro amor / se a con vos oy deposado» (166). Of course, the trope of the freedom derived from giving oneself fully to the divinity, another paradox, this one of submitting voluntarily to enslavement, appears as well: «pero libre abeis quedado /

siendo esclava del señor» (166). Even as the three vows are presented as parallel to three wounds of the crucifixion —«Con tres clavos se a oy errado / vna esclava del señor»— the speaker affirms that «la pobreça es un tesoro» (166).

As well as the spiritual wealth inherent to becoming a bride of Christ, pastoral elements reinforce the framework of nuptials made explicit in the symbolism of the ceremony of the taking of the veil. The recurring use of the term «pastora» to refer to the professing woman (as well as to the Virgin Mary) alternates with the metaphor of the hunted deer who eventually succumbs to divine pursuit. Class stratification, generally so rigid in secular early modern society as well as in the Church, is blurred through profession as a Discalced Carmelite nun. Within a pastoral context, the nun-shepherdess becomes at the same time an aristocrat: «al Carmelo hermanas / a ver la pastora / ques ya gran señora» (176-77). The event has the power, as mentioned previously, to challenge the devil:

> […] corrase el demonio
> y goçese el suelo
> pues que pone velo
> oy nuestra pastora
> y es ya gran señora (177)

It is easy to imagine the chorus of Sisters singing together the easily-remembered lyrics during the ceremony. The joyous tone and celebratory words reinforce the commitment to religious enclosure and community for new members of the group.

Two poems use the pastoral lexicon of the domesticated woodland, with the metaphor of the new nun as a deer that God hunts, to drive home the religious lesson of rebirth through marriage to the divinity. Attributed by Father Gerardo to Cecilia del Nacimiento, poem 195 notes that death to the world means new life: «oy se acaba de morir / la çierva que yrio el amor / y en dios que fue el caçador / torna de nuevo a vivir» (165). And poem 220 reinforces the idea: «A las ziervas que ha tirado / el diuino caçador / muertas oy las ha dejado / con las flechas del amor» (186).

One of the well-known poems of the collection, the *tercetos* that Father Gerardo attributed to María de San Alberto, takes up other benefits of professing as a Discalced Carmelite nun. Beginning with «la inmensa magestad del alto zielo / con soberano amor os ha traydo / al sacro y alto monte del carmelo» (187), succeeding stanzas enumerate the reasons for becoming a Discalced Carmelite. A reference to the commitment to poverty and austerity made explicit in St. Teresa's Rules clarifies expected patterns of thought and behavior:

gustais de ser por cristo pobreçitas
humildes y abatidas enel suelo
por que enla eternidad esten escritas

por eso os acogistes al carmelo
buscando enel lo aspero y mas duro
sabiendo ques camino para el zielo (188)

Here, the «vosotras» subject engages in a dialogue among Sisters, from a more experienced nun to the newly-professed, perhaps. The verses reinforce the choice to enter the convent and remain behind its walls, at a moment of great solemnity but also undoubtedly of some trepidation.

Ultimately, since that choice is to become a bride of Christ, wedding imagery naturally abounds in the poems dedicated to profession. Utilizing both formal and informal registers, the lexicon and ideology in these verses exhibit the cultural and religious environment in which they were written and shared. In keeping with their role of reinforcing the rules that the new members of the Order were to live by, several of the poems possibly written by the two convent leaders Cecilia del Nacimiento and María de San Alberto utilize the imagery of marriage to highlight the decision to embrace religious enclosure.

Two succeeding poems, perhaps written for the same occasion, number 217, a series of five *octavas* ostensibly by María de San Alberto, and number 218, six *liras* ostensibly by Cecilia del Nacimiento, celebrate and teach the beauty of the beloved, attained at the cost of becoming dead to the world. Both refer to «esposas» in the plural, suggesting that more than one nun professed on that day.

The first lines of the first *octava* refer to Mt. Carmel as the pastoral space in which the sacred marriage occurs, implying the privilege of joining the Discalced Carmelite Order: «A la cunbre del monte os ha subido / el celestial esposo enamorado / porque mejor gozeis en lo ascondido / los pastos gruesos del divino amado». In the next stanza, which emphasizes the suffering required to be «entre los dulzes brazos del amado» (183-84), the pastoral theme continues. And the penultimate stanza, a portrait of *imitation*, intensifies emotion; after describing a Christ «pobre humilde y despreziado», followed by crucifixion, the speaker suggests, «pues quanto es el amor muy mas subido / gusta de asemejarse a su querido». Finally, the last stanza plays with the literal and metaphoric meanings of death:

dichosa muerte y llena de ventura
donde muriendo a todo aveis hallado
vida que sobre todo os asigura
el eterno vivir que abeis buscado (184)

Becoming dead to the world brings eternal life. This is a Catholic tenet, but also it is especially a Carmelite motif. The promise of future spiritual immortality through the joining in matrimony with the divinity enables the new nuns to celebrate: «gozad gozad esposas la hermosura / que os ofreze en si mismo buestro amado […]» (184).

Immediately following, the *liras* also harp on the new wives' powerful feelings toward their loved one, while at the same time suggesting that they have consciously worked toward this marriage, trod the path toward spiritual improvement, if not perfection. The first stanza notes that, «[…] las dos esposas del amado / con obras de valia / calramente an mostrado / quel corazon de amor esta abrasado» (184). Again the theme of death in exchange for new life is emphasized, and linked to the subject's new status as a professed nun:

> gozosa y dulze muerte
> pues que muriendo a todo lo criado
> os ha cabido en suerte
> un dios enamorado
> quel coraçon de amor tiene abrasado (185)

Here the language of courtly love merges with the paradox of spiritual rebirth to embrace the new bride of Christ. The refrain, the last line, reminds the listening audience of the importance of giving one's heart completely to the being who sacrificed everything for humankind.

A poem in popular meter reinforces the message, but in a far more informal register, and with a first-person singular poetic voice.[6] Clearly meant to be sung, poem 201 repeats words and lines, with an easily-followed rhythm, primarily repeating variations of «oy me desposo». Its penultimate stanza moves to a «nosotros» with «oy nos casamos los dos», claiming reciprocity, while the last *octava* begins with «el me promete la gloria» and then the speaker pledges «la bida y la memoria / y el alma y el pensamiento» (170). The bridegroom is thereby inserted directly into the ceremony, as a living person, equal in his joy and commitment to the bride. A subsequent poem (number 203) returns the professing nun to center stage, as she gives herself completely: «[…] que soy toda / del que todo se me ha dado» (171).[7]

Another recurring trope evident in poems in this thematic cluster of the *Libro* embraces the paradox of enclosure and sacrifice combined with holy marriage. Although Mother Teresa (and some of her disciples) traveled a great deal, she had required in her

6. Father Gerardo attributes this poem to Cecilia del Nacimiento as well.
7. This poem also is attributed to Cecilia del Nacimiento by Father Gerardo.

Rules, in keeping with the norms established at the Council of Trent, that her spiritual daughters commit to remaining behind convent walls. Poem 202 is structured around the dichotomy between «dichoso movimiento» and «dichoso ençerramiento».[8] Written in *liras*, an Italianate form, the verses nevertheless repeat variations of the same lines multiple times, facilitating choral repetition. They communicate the enormous spiritual benefit of «destierro benuroso», so long as, «biene el coraçon de amor llagado» (170-71). Other poems communicate the same message; number 204, for instance, asserts that, «es muy dulçe la prision / al alma questa rrendida / y el ser sugeta y bençida / tiene por triunfo y blazon» (171). The poem goes on to remind the listeners / readers that «No pierde la libertad / la que de dios es esclava» and «las cadenas son de amor», so they do not truly force commitment to religious life. Yet another poem (number 219) directly addresses how the women dedicated to the convent and the Order become spiritually wealthy through their dedication to religious life: «si es la cosa mas preziosa / el ser de cristo querida / que sera estar escojida / por hija hermana y esposa / este bien os ha alcançado / descanso vida y Reposo / el cautiverio amoroso / que por dios aveis tomado» (185). Here, family relationships accrue to the new bride of Christ, as well as the paradoxical enclosure that offers freedom from earthly desires.

Other poems explore the doctrine of transubstantiation, but with reference to the celebration of profession. Undoubtedly meant to be sung, number 205 reverts to popular stock characters in its explanation of the sacred sacrifice that results in true joy: «yo domingo tanboritero / convido todo el otero / para festejar de vero / la boda y la desposada» (173). What is most intriguing, however, is that he addresses the new nun, saying:

> tomad señora un siliçio
> para matar todo viçio
> […]
> en lugar de las gallinas
> ofrezco estas disciplina
> que pareçen joyas dinas
> de tan devota casada

He then goes on to state that, «No os ofrezco yo capones / sino estas meditaciones […]» (173). Strangely, the unusual contrast of religious self-discipline and food served at a party does not seem out of place in this poetic register; it may have even engendered laughter. Another poem, number 208, attributed by Father Gerardo to Cecilia del Nacimiento, creates a framework of exchange between the two participants while

8. Also attributed by Father Gerardo to Cecilia del Nacimiento.

directly referring to taking communion: «Hermana si os dais a vos / algo es mas no gran cosa / pues en comida preçiosa / se os da a vos el mismo dios» (175).

A case study reinforces a similar juxtaposition in poems that name one of the celebrants: «No busque el mundo a ysabel / […] / que jesus la ha cautivado / Y ella se muere por el» (167). Poem 197 focuses on her sacrifices; not only has she renounced the world, but she has given up freedom in order to become Jesus's captive. The poetic voice informs us: «en el desierto sentada / ablando asu dulçe amado / todo el mundo a despreçiado / conoçiendo que no es nada / y de si misma olbidada / desea vivir en el / teniendo por gran bentura / que ya no viva ysabel». The lesson is summarized in the last stanza: «quien muere desta manera / hace de la tierra çielo» (167). Another poem (number 206) notes, «Estimad en mucho el velo / ysabel que abeis tomado / pues el mundo os a tapado / y os ha descubierto el çielo» (174). The lines clearly infer that there is no greater gift, made possible not only by divine mercy and free will, but also by adhesion to the Order that this Isabel has joined.

3. LOVE AND SELF-DISCIPLINE: POETICIZING THE PRACTICE OF INNER SPIRITUALITY

Discalced Carmelite spirituality emphasizes inner-directed contemplation. St. Teresa's early modern spiritual daughters spent much time and energy in interior meditation and prayer; that activity finds an echo in their poetry. Olivares & Boyce note that, «[…] uno de los objetivos de la poesía sacra es la expresión de la abnegación del yo, de la limpieza del alma, de tal modo que pueda servir de espejo para reflejar el amor del Divino Amante» (2012: 22). Poetic expression is, however, gendered. When expressing their willingness to sacrifice, to humble themselves, to reveal their souls, male writers of religious poetry may feminize their discourse (Olivares & Boyce 2012: 23). But for women poets, the problem of writing religious poetry, «era el de expresar su propia relación femenina con el objeto de su deseo, Dios, en un discurso poético ya feminizado» (Olivares & Boyce 2012: 24). Affective content and a tone of familiarity to God or Christ characterize female religious discourse in general (Olivares 1995, 119); for the writers/compilers of the Valladolid *Libro*, these characteristics emerge, but only partly.

Love as life, love of the divinity that transforms exile into joy, recurs as a thematic constant. These nun-poets' primary role model, the Founding Mother, wrote verses demonstrating the importance of giving oneself completely, and also lovingly, to the object of worship (Carrera 2009: 742):

> […] Teresa's 'Muero porque no muero' suggests that the experience of reciprocated love can also be intensified by wilful desire, and that desire can help the lover move towards, and become transformed into, the beloved.

The path toward union may contain obstacles, but it is always portrayed as truly precious, with a rich reward at the end. As described in the previous section, the works in this *cancionero* consciously and purposefully apply the philosophy and theology of the Order to conventual practices. The pedagogical intent extends to the practices of attaining intimacy with divine figures, often, as described above, expressed in language borrowed from the courtly love tradition.

Poem 230, which Father Gerardo attributes to Juliana de la Magdalena, a *canción* in quartets, is entirely an apostrophe to the divine lover who offers compensation for the speaker's travails. In fact, the poem begins with a plea for intimacy and voice: «A ti dire mis quejas y dolores / […] / o quanto y que me cuestan tus amores». Tropes from the courtly love tradition equate absence with death («[…] la dura muerte de tu ausencia»), even as they celebrate the fervor and passion experienced in surrendering the mind, body, and soul:

> alegre conpañia y muy gustosa
> haçes dios mio al alma que te ama
> y en ver que tu la quieres por esposa
> su amor se ençiende y arde en viva llama (215)

Here again, a paradox is invoked. While «el trato y conpañia de la gente / la [al alma] haçe soledad triste y amarga», the solitude of prayer and spiritual contemplation lead to the joy found in the lover's company. The speaker also repeatedly refers to the spark, the metaphorical fire experienced in the love between herself and God. Transferring the sensuality of body in secular poetry to the pleasures of the soul, the poem articulates the path toward union. Wilful desire indeed.

The same poem incorporates tropes of mystical verse: God as the food of life, material life as exile from God, and the often-used theme of life as death and death as life: «acabese señor este destierro / y bea yo sin velo tu hermosura / que tanto quanto vivo tanto muero / con increyble ansia y amargura» (215). Yearning for the godhead's beauty, the «I» still cannot let go of worldly emotions. Ultimately, the soul seeks what only the divinity can accomplish: «desata ya señor el alma mia / de la cadena dura y muy pesada / del cuerpo que la tiene rreprimida / cautiva triste amarga y congojada» (215). Only the divinity can offer freedom from material concerns, from the body itself, which here imprisons the soul. The use of five succeeding adjectives to reinforce the feeling of entrapment enjoins the reader/listener to dedicate herself to seek union with the divine lover.

The *coplas* that make up poem 294 also describe the suffering and emptiness of the loss of the loved one, utilizing language reminiscent of the troubadours:

> pues que mi bien se ausento
> y en su lugar me dejo
> suspiros ansia y tormento
>
> el no le poder seguir
> me causa un dolor tan fiero
> que muero porque no muero (272)

Here the poetic voice combines the anguish of the abandoned soul, exiled in a «dura prision» with repetition of the line, «muero porque no muero», so significant in Discalced Carmelite ideology and lexicon. The speaker only bears her suffering because she knows she will die, and thus be freed to rejoin him.

A series of sonnets that Father Gerardo attributes to Cecilia del Nacimiento treat similar concerns. The first, poem 251, is addressed to a recalcitrant sinner, who is scolded for refusing to recognize the need to reject the world, possibly because he thinks that God has forgotten him. The poetic voice comments that on the contrary, «de ti tiene dios tanto y tal cuydado / que mira lo que esta mas escondido», so that the sinner should wake up («despierta loco»), because their life will be carefully judged, «como el que escudriña con linterna» (239).

On the other hand, in poem 252 the speaker desires to discard worldly interests. Arranged as an apostrophe addressed to «mundo», it begins: «De ti mundo me aparto y tus amores / no tengo en algo tus prosperidades / pues todo es vanidad de vanidades / y tienen fine amargo tus dulçores» (239). The first tercet considers the role of free will through an evocative simile based in an ordinary pursuit: «bien como el pescador prende el pescado / el yerro en el çevo disfraçando / asi engañas tu al hombre descuydado» (239-40). Although the temptation to deviate from the spiritual path exists, we must see through the deception and maintain vigilance, so as not to succumb. The final two lines of the sonnet demonstrate through antithesis the value of rejection of worldly concerns: «porque tus ponpas honrras y rriqueças / que son sino consojas y tristeças» (240).

Other sonnets in this series directly address the «pensamientos banos» that impede the soul's joining with the divinity. Poem 267 links thought to deed, «vanos deseos» to «hechos torpes feos» (247), while the speaker in poem 268 scolds those thoughts for fleeing good and running toward evil (248). A solution is, however, at hand: «pensar virtud quien a vibido a viçio / a un pensamiento lo haçelle cuerdo / que graçia es menester y que egerçiçio / que ara la graçia en un coraçon lerdo […]» (248).

Thus, maintaining the yearning for the longed-for lover combined with focusing on carrying out prescribed exercises of self-control will lead to shedding the detritus of all forms of material interest.

A related concern is expressed in a poem also attributed to Cecilia del Nacimiento by Father Gerardo.[9] Poem 224, whose three *décimas* gloss the lines «por no quedar abnegada / en tan peligroso mar / no le quiero nabegar» (204). Reinforcing the notion that the speaker is unworthy, a tone of humility prevails. Lines such as, «parezeme gran sinpleza / pensar yo con mi bajeza / subir a tal perfeçion» (204) prepare the way for the imagery of human vagaries as dangerous seas. Indeed, those hazards (metaphorically the waves in the ocean) are especially treacherous for women. The poem ends with: «[…] y es muy cierto el peligrar / las mujeres por saber / y asi por no perezer / no te quiero nabegar» (205). Here, the female speaker rejects the perils of knowledge, so as not to drown, with this chilling warning.

Two poems treat doctrinal matters; the first, «Soneto a la passion», poem 260, contemplates Christ on the cross. Its first stanza presents the impossibility of dry eyes upon seeing «el rrostro y la figura deslustrada / y aquel dibino aspecto helado y yerto», and the second vividly describes «el tierno pecho abierto / la sangre a manos llenas derramada», leading to the third, which exclaims, «lloren mis ojos y agan triste llanto» (243-44). The poem includes two linked metaphors that summarize the power of Jesus's suffering: he can break apart «duras piedras» with his «coraçon mas que diamante fuerte». The diamond, symbol of brilliant light and strength of material, appears again in poem 269, a sonnet entitled, «a la yda de cristo al desierto». The verses construct an implicit battle between Christ, who triumphs over temptation because of his «saber ynmenso y admirable», and the devil, who is left «[…] miserable / bençida su maliçia y desterrado» because of his enemy's strength and resistance. The moral remains clear: «el alma que en si tiene aqueste amante / despida los temores yasigure / questa mucho mas fuerte que diamante» (248).

A *villancico* (poem 286) comparing religious life to a salad adds a light touch, in contrast to the serious tone of much of the *Libro*. Pedagogical in intent, it is presented as a ditty, witty and succinct. The speaker notes at the beginning:

> ensalada quiero hacer
> que todas podais comer
> de perfecto obedeçer
> sera muy bien savoreada (261)

9. In this paper, for lack of space, I have not discussed the question of Gerardo de la Cruz's attributions of authorship, although some contemporary scholars might challenge their accuracy.

She goes on to make the salad, a series of comparisons between the ingredients and religious virtues: «bien picada y muy curiosa / saçonada y olorosa / […] / la monja mortificada»; «la monja bien conpuesta» becomes «lechuga tan fresca»; parsley and herbs are also included: «umildad y contriçion / caridad con perfecçion / la voluntad muy negada». The dressing is added: oil («del mundo muy olbidada»), vinegar («los sentidos con la llave / que no los pueda abrir nadie / sino fuere la perlada»), and sugar and seasoning («amar de coraçon / y sufrir con discreçion») (262). In a tone and with language reminiscent of María de San José (Salazar)'s description of convent life in the *Libro de recreaciones*, the poem serves as a reminder of the collective laughter possible in an enclosed community. It also functions as a fitting introduction to the conclusion of this essay, since it suggests the notion of community and collective adherence to a Discalced Carmelite spiritual path and goals.

Libro de romances y coplas del Carmelo de Valladolid offers the twenty-first century reader a glimpse into convent cultural production during the second and third generations of the Discalced Carmelite reform movement. Written and compiled by the denizens of the Convento de la Concepción, the poems reflect the ways in which these women thought about and acted on the precepts learned from the Teresian Rules and the socio-cultural environment in which they lived. A variety of meters draw from the wide range of the poetic forms dominant during that period, especially those that lent themselves to choral singing and to aural learning. Necessarily, these verses were written not simply to entertain, but also to teach, across generations of women religious and within a decidedly Order-specific framework. Today, they remind us of the rich possibilities inherent in collective creative and artistic expression, even among those not privileged enough to have had access to formal learning. In a manner similar to other convent *cancioneros* of early modern Spain, including those produced in Cataluña, the volume exemplifies meaningful celebration and education through versification.

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