

WRITING ANXIETY IN TERESA'S *INTERIOR CASTLE*

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OPENED AT ITS mystical center, the history of Christian spirituality jolts the mind with the singular idea that reality in its hidden, yet perduring essence is remarkably quite different from the way our ordinary judgments and perceptions tell us it is. There are revelatory moments of special intensity that make this assertion compelling: a dying child's comprehension and acceptance of suffering, dread at the thought of one's own mortality, the universe's disclosure as inexplicably personal, magnanimous, or kind. Yet with a surer grasp than the rest of us, mystics claim these privileged moments as definitive in two important ways. First, they affirm through a cognitive judgment that their experience of the divine is true, that is, that the manner in which God is self-revealing to them actually corresponds to God's transcendent reality. Second, they seek to integrate the irreducibility of this personal revelation into the ordinary by reshaping their lives and behavior around a mystical center.

Examined by the Inquisition about her private experience, and believing herself called to reform a spiritually decaying order with no other means than spiritual insight and fortitude, Teresa of Avila became a writer in order to convince her religious world of the cognitive character of what passed between her soul and God, and of the relevance of such experience for transforming the life of her nuns. Inevitably, the attempt encountered a variety of obstacles, some trivial, others invidious, that called into play, at the deepest level of her self-awareness, suspicions and fears regarding the validity and the authenticity of those mystical claims. I will argue in this article that Teresa's treatise, *Interior Castle* (1577), is her most trenchant response to such suspicions and fears about the mystical life. My thesis is that this masterpiece of spiritual self-knowledge presents a cogent defense (1) of the various truth claims of mystical experience, in spite of her famous difficulties in communicating its exact nature and quality, and (2) of the human capacity, finite though it might be, to integrate the experience of divine union into temporal existence.

I will distinguish four kinds of fear in the *Interior Castle*, and then show how each dialectically moves the soul and the will of the mystic to deeper levels of spiritual experience and understanding. I will begin by examining the first three Mansions as a dialectical movement between two kinds of fear: (1) fear of death and the suffering caused by sin, and (2) fear of the Lord, or biblical piety. In subsequent sections, I

will discuss how Teresa's initial experience of fear becomes, in the properly supernatural Mansions, an experience of fear as (3) radical self-doubt, and as (4) existential anxiety or groundlessness. Finally, I will argue that Teresa's understanding of fear constitutes a compelling defense of Christian mysticism by the way in which she links both her existential fears and writing anxiety to the death agony and passion of Christ. Writing, understood as a way of conforming the will to the divine, is, paradoxically like the cross itself, a symptom of human finitude and sinfulness, as well as an act of transforming redemption.

MYSTICAL WRITING AS PARADOX

The integration of mystical union with worldly existence is both a necessary and an urgent task because it occurs, according to Teresa, "in the most interior place of all and in the soul's greatest depths," a realm of pure subjectivity, which has itself been cleansed of all contact with the body and the external world.¹ Thus, the anxiety (*temor*) that envelops her soul at every command of her spiritual directors to produce a written account of her mystical experiences transcribes in the public realm of language and meaning her spiritual anxiety at stating for herself that which perhaps cannot be stated and at manifesting to the world a realm of pure mystical union, which might in fact divide her from the natural world as experienced in her corporeal and sinful self:

Few tasks which I have been commanded to undertake by obedience have been so difficult as this present one of writing about matters relating to prayer: for one reason, because I do not feel that the Lord has given me either the spirituality (*espritu*) or the desire for it. . . . My will very gladly resolves to attempt this task although the prospect seems to cause my physical nature great distress.²

¹ See *El Castillo Interior, Moradas VII*, Chap. 1, Par. 7 [7.1.7], in *Obras Completas*, ed. Fr. Tomas de la Cruz, C.D. (Burgos: Editorial Monte Carmelo, 1982). Further, at 7.2.7, Teresa writes of those who have put away from them "everything corporeal and . . . leave the soul in a state of pure spirituality (*en puro espritu*), so that it might be joined with Uncreated Spirit in this celestial union."

² *Interior Castle*, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers (New York: Doubleday-Image, 1989) Prologue. I will follow Peers's usually reliable translation, but will add the original when I judge it to be useful. Teresa makes it clear from the Prologue that although her theme is *cosas de oración*, her main concern is to address her sisters' doubts (*dudas de oración*), especially doubts about deception in prayer, either by the devil or by the imagination. My interpretation of Teresa's text takes these concerns and doubts about prayer seriously and differs, consequently, from recent accounts that seek a hermeneutical key either in Teresa's feminist consciousness, or in the ecclesiastical situation of her time. I do not dispute that these wider contexts add to our understanding of Teresa and her writings, only that they seem to overlook the function of mysticism in itself. See Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1990) esp. 35; and Joseph Chorpenning, "St. Teresa's Presentation of Her Religious Experience," in *Centenary of St. Teresa: Catholic University Symposium, Oc-*

The act of mystical writing focuses attention dramatically on the author's dilemma of trying to create a text which by its own subjective genesis seems to supplant the divine source of the mystical dialogue in the soul. I want to elaborate this point, since it touches the root of Teresa's self-understanding. In a series of important works dealing precisely with this issue, the late Michel de Certeau argued that the resurgence of mystical literature in the 16th century sprang directly from a radical sense of loss, in an increasingly corrupt Church and society, of the two most important manifestations of the temporal certitude of Christian belief: ecclesiastical institutions and the authority of Sacred Scripture.³ De Certeau analyzed the formal characteristics of mystical discourses, which create their own ideal "space," and in which the mystic's ego can interact with divine inspiration to produce a transcendent utterance all its own. Yet, how can the mystic's desire for a divine Thou "cross through a language that betrays it by sending the addressee a different message, or by replacing the statement of an idea with utterance by an 'I' "? This linguistic distress engenders the "mystic space," in which a new world in the form of a text, outside the field of ordinary knowledge, arises.⁴

The issue, which de Certeau's work highlights, is our modern skepticism regarding the very possibility of a traditional understanding of revelation, a skepticism that cuts to the heart of mysticism itself. In the *Interior Castle*, Teresa expresses constant frustration at her inability to make the content of her intellectual illuminations understandable in discursive language:

Do not suppose that the understanding can attain to Him, merely by trying to think of Him as within the soul, or the imagination, by picturing Him as there. . . . Let [the soul] try . . . to put a stop to all discursive reasoning (*el discurrir del entendimiento*).⁵

tober 15-17, 1982, ed. John Sullivan, O.C.D., Carmelite Studies 3 (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1984) 152-71.

³ De Certeau's thesis is summarized in the phrase *un manquant fait écrire*. Writing, then, is the historical subject's response to the historical loss of the sure presence of the incarnate Word. But if mystical writing is to initiate a new beginning for the Word in time, it must allow the divine Other to speak through it. The paradoxical situation ensues, according to de Certeau, that the mystical text or poem must "write itself" and thereby "communicate a secret, hidden truth that is *not* its own" (*La fable mystique* [Paris: Gallimard, 1982] 24). It is interesting to compare de Certeau's later work to his earlier, less skeptical study, "Mystique au XVIIe siècle: Le problème du langage 'mystique,'" in *L'Homme devant Dieu: Mélanges offerts au Père Henri de Lubac* (Paris: Aubier, 1964) 2.267-91.

⁴ See de Certeau's article "Mystic Speech," in his *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989) 88-89. Plato reflected deeply on the question of how human speech could receive and express the *logos* of Being without distortion. His metaphorical answer in the *Philebus* (38a6) was that a psychic demiurge wrote onto the soul a true copy of the *logos*. For an important recent discussion, see Stanley Rosen, *The Question of Being* (New Haven: Yale University, 1993) 69-79.

⁵ *Moradas* 4.3.3 and 7.

Yet writing as a public act of communication must ultimately make use of images from the imagination and concepts from the understanding, if it is not simply to yield to the mystic's desire to remain hidden and withdrawn in her private, mystical realm. No one knew or appreciated the attractiveness of this hidden, ideal space as well as Teresa. In fact it remained, for all its dangers, the principal selling point to those who might wish to follow her:

And considering how strictly you are cloistered, my sisters, how few opportunities you have of recreation . . . I think it will be a great consolation for you . . . to take your delight in this Interior Castle, for you can enter it and walk about it at any time.⁶

But problems associated with mystical hiddenness, e.g. an apparently absolute preoccupation with the self, were immediately apparent to Teresa:

The soul is doubtful as to what has really happened until it has had a good deal of experience of it. It wonders if the whole thing was imagination, if it has been asleep, if the favour was a gift of God, or if the devil was transfigured into an angel of light. It retains a thousand suspicions, and it is well that it should, for, as I have said, we can sometimes be deceived in this respect, even by our own nature.⁷

The more the soul progresses in divine union, the more it seeks to leave the external world behind to enjoy its own purely spiritual repose and peace. It is here that the mystical experience itself and its implicit truth claims are most vulnerable to skeptical interpretation. For how can the mystic ascribe truth to her experiences, if she cannot integrate them into her corporeal and temporal being in the world, or if they exist in what appears to be a dream state within the soul?⁸ The inability to integrate mystical states of union into concrete existence plunges the mystic into an existential state of doubt and anxiety regarding the very meaning and value of the experience.⁹

⁶ Ibid. Conclusión, par. 1.

⁷ Ibid. 5.1.5. And for Kierkegaard's negative evaluation of the mystical as a choice against the temporal self, see *Either/Or*, vol. 2, ed. H. Hong and E. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University, 1987) 242–52.

⁸ Louis Dupré has argued convincingly that one of the essential features of the Transcendent is the power to encompass its own opposite, the finite or worldly, within its own sacred sphere of being: "In its tendency to absorb everything the Transcendent manifests its unique power of integration. The ability to reconcile opposites (including its own opposite) under an ultimate unity—the *coincidentia oppositorum*—is as essential to religion as its dialectical opposition to the profane" (*The Other Dimension* [New York: Seabury, 1979] 18).

⁹ In fact, Henri Bergson suggested that such a difficulty was intrinsic to mysticism. Commenting on the soul's experience of ecstasy, he writes, "An imperceptible anxiety, hovering above the ecstasy, descends and clings to it like its shadow." The ecstasy is indeed a kind of rest, but the quest for union is incomplete, for "however close the union

The interesting issue, however, is the self-identity of the mystic, her ability to accept and understand herself as the privileged place of divine manifestation, and the importance of Teresa's text is that she responded intellectually, as a woman and a mystic to be sure, but always intellectually, to the ambiguities and perplexities of spiritual identity in the world. For self-identity touches upon the fundamental philosophical question that mysticism poses, namely, how the finite subject can either receive or participate in divine life—in other words, how *mediation* between the divine and the human is possible. This means, quite simply, that if the two sides of a spiritual relation are to be brought into union, there needs to be some point of contact that allows each side to participate in the being of the other. The purpose of such contact will be to transform existing differences into moments of participatory union.

I will argue that for Teresa such a point of mediating union between God and the existential subject is the human will: in an obscure way, the will serves two masters—bodily appetite and spiritual aspiration—but unlike a house divided, it stands because of the opposition and tension between spiritual union and worldly existence.¹⁰ Teresa's act of writing can itself be viewed as a metaphor of the will's interest to join God and the world, and of its desire to communicate, through the finite conventions and limitations of language, a vision of divine union with transformative power. Nonetheless, Teresa's act of mediating God to the world in writing remains a deeply conflicted and ambiguous act of a will that must negate itself—"self-erasure" in de Certeau's phrase—so that God might speak, even while searching its memory for the right words and images to make itself understood in human terms. Her metaphor in the Prologue sets the tone for the paradoxical writing acts to follow:

Indeed, I am afraid that I shall do little but repeat myself, for I write as mechanically (*al pie de la letra*) as birds taught to speak, which knowing nothing but what is taught them and what they hear, repeat the same things

with God may be, it could be final only if it were total. . . . But though the soul becomes, in thought and feeling, absorbed in God, something of it remains outside; that something is the will, whence the soul's action, if it acted, would quite naturally proceed. Its life, then, is not yet divine. The soul is aware of this, hence its vague disquietude, hence the agitation in repose which is the striking feature of what we call complete mysticism" (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1935] 230–31). This is an astute observation especially in light of Teresa's mystical fears.

¹⁰ Since the concept of the will is in itself ambiguous and variously interpreted in the contemporary literature, I will restrict myself to Augustine's understanding of it in *The City of God*, bk. 14. There Augustine rejects the notion of the will as an abstract, rationalistic capacity for self-determination, but considers it to be a complex, emotional and rational, nexus of diverse forces and passions. The point could be argued that Teresa understood this natural ambivalence of the will from her reading of Augustine's *Confessions*.

again and again. If the Lord wishes me to say anything new, His Majesty will teach it me . . . and, if I am successful in anything that I might say, they will of course understand that it does not come from me.¹¹

Yet, the more the soul learns to depend upon God's grace and goodness alone, the greater its doubts about its own psychic integration and the sharper its memory of past failings. Such is Teresa's state of mind that she concludes her description of supernatural union, or "spiritual marriage," at the end of the Seventh Mansion with a personal confession of confusion and guilt: "As I say this to you I am full of confusion (*harta confusión mía*) and by the same Lord I beg you not to forget this poor miserable creature in your prayers." And immediately thereafter in the Epilogue, she entrusts to her readers a somewhat bizarre confidence: ". . . and beg [His Majesty] to pardon my sins and set me free from Purgatory, where, perhaps, by the mercy of God, I shall be when this is given you to read."¹²

This conflict within Teresa's understanding of mysticism in the context of a flawed life supports William James's contention that, far from dissolving all appearances of finite or empirical reality into one, undifferentiated state of union, mystical consciousness remains deeply puzzled about its experience of contending realms of reality.¹³ My

¹¹ *Moradas*, "Prólogo" par. 2 and 4. And at 7.1.1 she prays, "If it be His Majesty's will, may it please Him to guide my pen, and give me to understand how I may tell you of the many things which there are to be said and which God reveals to every soul that He brings into this Mansion."

¹² *Ibid.* 7.4.16 and "Conclusión" par. 4.

¹³ James writes of mystical states that "they break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based upon the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth" (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lectures 16 and 17: "Mysticism" [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1985] 335). For an important development of this thesis, see Alfred Schutz, "Don Quixote and the Problem of Reality," in his *Collected Papers 2: Studies in Social Theory*, ed. Arvid Brodersen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964). A seminal paper by Joseph Maréchal on the mind's affirmation of reality takes issue with James's empirical starting point as well as with his conclusion that our sense of "reality" is the result of an election from several possibilities ("On the Feeling of Presence in Mystics and Non-Mystics," in his *Studies in the Psychology of the Mystics*, trans. Algar Thorold [Albany, N.Y.: Magi Books, 1964] 55-110 at 83-85). For Maréchal the affirmation of reality is based neither on pure feeling, nor on logical inference, but on the mind's original openness to assimilate and to become one with absolute Being. "The affirmation of reality, then, is nothing else than the expression of the fundamental tendency of the mind to unification in and with the Absolute . . . objects are real in the manner and to the extent to which they converge towards the total unity of the mind" (*ibid.* 101). Although I think this is perfectly consistent with Teresa's understanding of the source of her own certitude regarding mystical experience, it does not fully deny the ability of the subject to step outside of the immediate presence of divine Being in order to examine critically extratranscendent causes of the mystical phenomena in question. At the very least, temporal finitude means that the human person can be both one in self-identity, yet many in ways of being and knowing. As a result, the "unity of the mind" of which Maréchal writes is not quite as straightforward as he implies.

point is that there cannot be anything like epistemic incorrigibility when it comes to judgments about the truth claims of mystical experience. For this reason, I will argue that Teresa's existential anxiety about her mystical experiences assumes for her text and for her life structural and ontological importance.

THE DIALECTIC OF FEAR

Although no thematic study of the role of fear in the *Interior Castle* has been undertaken, it seems to me that Teresa's frequent allusions to fear, both in the initial, nonmystical Mansions, as well as in the later, supernatural ones, force the following question upon the reader: Does her treatment of fear provide critical insight regarding the soul's progression through the mystical castle of its interior life?¹⁴ As I have stated, the central question of mysticism concerns the possibility of mediation. How, then, does fear mediate between two radically different types of being, the sinful soul and the divine, that we encounter at the beginning of the *Interior Castle*? Teresa begins her account with the famous simile: "I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond," and because this crystal is the image of God, "we can hardly form any conception [*entender*] of the soul's great dignity and beauty." Fear first appears with the sinful soul's acknowledgement of its profound difference from its true self, understood as its actual spiritual essence—an insight that compels it on its journey of self-discovery. Difference provokes fear because it carries with it the immediate perception in the soul of its own *nonbeing*, and of the very real possibility that ignorance of its nature involves death:

It is no small pity and should cause us no little shame that, through our own fault, we do not understand ourselves or know who we are. Would it not be a sign of great ignorance, my daughters, if a person were asked who he was and could not say? . . . Though this is a great stupidity, our own is incomparably greater if we make no attempt to discover what we are, and only know that we are living in these bodies.¹⁵

Such a person is in a state of self-contradiction, or "exile," simply because the splendor of the divine image in the center of the soul remains, even when the soul finds itself with "a thick black cloth placed over the crystal." Nonetheless, Teresa warns that

when the soul, through its own fault, leaves this spring [of life] and becomes rooted in a pool of pitch-black, evil smelling water, it produces nothing but misery and filth. . . . It is of [mortal sin], daughters, that we should walk in fear

¹⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar's examination of fear in Christian existence, *Der Christ und die Angst* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1989), provides important biblical and theological background to the concept. I will make use of one of his points below.

¹⁵ *Moradas* 1.1.2.

(*andar temerosas*), and this from which in our prayers we must beg God to deliver us.¹⁶

Sin alienates the soul from the authentic actions of a human being and fills it with dread at the helplessness and futility of its nonbeing. Comparing souls that must endure such exile to paralyzed bodies, she writes:

They possess feet and hands but they cannot control them. . . . So accustomed have they grown to living all the time with the reptiles and other creatures to be found in the outer court of the castle that they have almost become like them . . . there is nothing that can be done for them.¹⁷

Fear begins, then, with the realization of having become unlike one's spiritual essence, the result of having disfigured the soul and covered its light. Yet, as a dialectical state of being, that is, as a state of tension between concrete existence and spiritual identity, fear initiates a further development, because knowledge of one's sinfulness implies the possibility of an unblemished, pure identity: darkness and death become visible to human perception only with the appearance of light. Existential contrast thus awakens the soul to gratitude for the Lord's unfailing mercy and favor in preserving its life even when it was dead due to sin. Such an appreciation directs the person away from herself and in humility towards God:

Whenever she did any good thing . . . she betook herself straightway to its Source, realizing that without His help we are powerless. . . . Believe me, the soul must sometimes emerge from self-knowledge and soar aloft in meditation upon the greatness and the majesty of its God. Doing this will help it realize its own baseness.¹⁸

Teresa's initial experience of seeing herself outside the sphere of divine being and life is transformed by humility into genuine fear of the Lord and reverence in the presence of His mercy. Yet, she acknowledges that this kind of reverential fear by its very essence cannot supply for itself secure grounds or future guarantees of grace. Fear of the Lord is a constant confession of the soul's existential groundlessness and contingency:

For life without Thee is death many times over and constant dread (*temores*) at the possibility of losing Thee forever. . . . Remember some saints [sought to please only God] yet they fell into grave sins and we cannot be certain that He will give us His hand and help us renounce them.¹⁹

Again the act of writing, as the usurpation of the source of the text (or being) by the author's ego, conflicts with Teresa's experience of the fragility of mystical grace. Her inability to write fluently or glibly

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 1.2.3 and 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 1.2.5 and 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 1.1.6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 3.1.2.

about her memory of past sins comes to mirror the soul's lack of confidence in the transparency and truthfulness of its present intentions and claims: "But what can I do about it when I have lost so much through my own fault?"²⁰

Thus, at the end of the first part of the *Interior Castle*, Teresa's "writing anxiety" refers not only to the inner state of her soul when faced with the daunting task of becoming the author of her own spiritual experience, but, more significantly, it expresses her unwitting yet astute intentionality to communicate in writing this very state of existential insecurity: "All this is good, but, as I have said, it is not enough to justify us in laying aside our fears. . . . *Beatus vir, qui timet Dominum.*"²¹

THE DEEPER LIFE: SELF-DOUBT AND THE MYSTICAL LIFE

Teresa concludes the first part of the *Interior Castle* (Mansions 1–3) without being able to integrate satisfactorily her spiritual experiences either into the form of her writing or into her ordinary life. Moreover, her consciousness of her sinful and trivial past as a nun introduces a deeper dimension of fear in Mansions 5–6, one which I wish to characterize as radical self-doubt. Ironically, by opening to reflection a certain negative image of the finite self as sinful and wretched, humility leaves the person vulnerable to the more subtle suspicion that any claim to a privileged relation to the divine is little more than a veiled form of vanity and pride, caused either by a weak and imaginative nature or by the devil. In Mansions 4–7 both forms of doubt are epitomized by Teresa's constant refrain, "*Yo soy tan ruin*"—"I am such a wretched person."²²

Indeed, at the beginning of Mansion 4, the edgy inflection of her voice reveals increasing uneasiness about the act of writing, even suggesting that the stated goal of the Prologue, to produce an account of mystical graces to dispel doubts about prayer, might be something impossible to achieve:

²⁰ Ibid. 3.1.3. And in the same paragraph she writes, "I cannot say this without tears and great confusion when I realize that I am writing for those who are themselves capable of teaching me. . . . and ask Him to pardon this wretched and foolhardy woman."

²¹ Ibid. 3.1.4.

²² See, e.g., *Moradas* 4.1; 6.1 passim; 6.7 and 9; and even as late in her mystical progression as 7.1.2, on the point of relating the union or spiritual marriage, she declares, "Surely a creature as miserable as I must tremble to treat of anything so far beyond what I deserve to understand. And indeed I have been in a state of great confusion and have wondered if it will not be better for me in a few words to bring my account of this Mansion to an end." In other passages she even resorts to reptilian imagery to depict the state of her soul (see 5.2 and 6.4). For the classic text on her sinful past, see the *Autobiography* (*Vida*, in *Obras Completas*), esp. chaps. 6 and 24, which tells of her vision of herself in hell.

in so far as we now begin to touch the supernatural . . . as these Mansions are now getting near to the place where the King dwells, the understanding is incapable of describing them in any way accurately without being completely obscure to those devoid of experience.²³

Here Teresa uncovers the crux of the writing dilemma and begins to formulate an initial solution: so obscure and transcendent is the mystical realm that the Lord alone is able to depict it, but in ways that the understanding cannot follow. As a result, the only mystical truths that matter must now come from personal experience through which the soul grasps something of the divine communication. Yet this "answer" only poses another paradox: the more supernatural the spiritual relation between God and the soul becomes, the more the person is thrown back upon herself and the immediate experience of divine presence in the soul, and consequently the more vulnerable she becomes to the memory of past failings and to the idea that the whole experience is but the result of demonic deception or imagination.

I have described the central issue of mysticism as that of the finite mediation of the divine, and now the necessary and unavoidable mediation of the divine by human subjectivity seems to raise serious doubts about the genetic cause of the mystical event itself. At the end of Mansion 4.1, Teresa seeks new ways to free "the poor soul" from the suffering caused by such thoughts by attempting to distinguish the necessary working of the will and the understanding of the soul:

But it is necessary and His Majesty's will that we should take proper measures and learn to understand ourselves, and not blame our souls for what is the work of our weak imagination and our nature and the devil.²⁴

Yet, it remains a fact of our nature that although spiritual movements might begin in the immaterial soul, they affect the whole person, including one's passions and even sexual feelings and responses.²⁵

²³ *Moradas*, 4.1.2.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 4.1.14. She had just written that "neither the will nor the understanding must cease working" (4.1.13). Thus it is significant to note that when it comes time to "understand ourselves" and the difference between the soul as pure spirit and its critical faculties (will, understanding, and memory), she has to rely on the finite understanding to do so. The point I wish to stress is that in order to understand the soul, we must view it "objectively", i.e. from the point of view of the critical understanding; the soul even in relation to itself is necessarily mediated by the body and the mind. This lack of pure, unmediated self-presence might be the most important manifestation of human finitude.

²⁵ *Ibid.* And at 4.2.1, she writes of spiritual consolations, or *gustos de Dios*, "I think I was talking about spiritual consolations and explaining how they are sometimes bound up with our passions (*envueltos con nuestras pasiones*). They often cause fits of sobbing." On the possibility of integrating the erotic and the mystical, see Weber, *Rhetoric of Femininity* 59–61, 121; and Otger Steggink, "Experiencia de Dios y afectividad: Cuán afectiva es la mística? y cuán mística es la afectividad en Teresa de Jesús?" in *Congreso Internacional Teresiano, 4–7 Octubre, 1982*, ed. T. Egidio Martínez et al. (Salamanca, 1983) 2.1057–74. Although Simone de Beauvoir rejects mystical aims, she is quite sympathetic to Teresa's attempt at integration; see her *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam, 1952) 632–38.

Teresa sums up her conception of the natural mediation of divine presence in one remarkable passage:

It seems to me that the feelings which come to us from Divine Things are as purely natural as these, except that their source is nobler. . . . To put it briefly, worldly joys have their source in our own nature and end in God, whereas spiritual consolations have their source in God, but we experience them in a natural way and enjoy them as much as we enjoy those I have already mentioned, and indeed much more. Oh, Jesus! How I wish I could make myself clear about this! For I think I can see a very marked difference between these two things and yet I am not clever enough to make my meaning plain: May the Lord explain it for me!²⁶

There certainly must be a difference in the specific quality of the experience of divine graces to distinguish them from purely natural affects, but Teresa cannot find the conceptual means to make such a difference hold:

I know little about these passions of the soul; if I knew more, perhaps I could make the thing clear, and explain what proceeds from sensuality and what from our own nature. But I am stupid; I could explain this state if only I could understand (*entendiera*) my own experience of it.²⁷

In Mansions 4 and 5, Teresa begins to outline a strategy for dealing with this vexing problem of the genetic cause of mystical experience and its subsequent mediation by human subjectivity. Both questions force her to consider and to accept a deeper level of fear in the face of a radical self-doubt that calls into question the authenticity of her mystical claims. The mystical mingling of transcendent and human elements within finite subjectivity leads dialectically to further self-knowledge by compelling Teresa to separate all extraneous features of her mystical experience (imagery, thoughts, sensibility, bodily awareness, etc.) from the bare center of the soul itself, where the experience occurs.²⁸ When the soul "withdraws into itself" (*encogimiento*) and touches the depths of created spirit, then, Teresa explains, critical self-reflection and thought are left outside where, apart from the soul, they suffer the assaults of "venomous creatures." In the interior of the soul, turmoil of the body and confusion in the imagination and the understanding have no place; desire dies to itself; even the will, if not left totally outside, at least is quieted and prepared for union with God.²⁹

²⁶ *Moradas* 4.1.4.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 4.1.5.

²⁸ See *Ibid.* 4.1.9–14. George Mavrodes has drawn attention to the similarity between Teresa's strategy and Descartes's method; see his "Real v. Deceptive Mystical Experiences," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven Katz (New York: Oxford University, 1978) 235–58.

²⁹ *Moradas* 4.3.3. The key point for Teresa is to let the Lord work in the soul as he wishes: "When His Majesty wishes the working of the understanding to cease, He employs it in another manner, and illumines the soul's knowledge to so much higher a

The result is to secure within "the castle of the soul" a purely spiritual dwelling for the mystical presence of God, a dwelling which is beyond doubt and suspicion, simply because it is experienced by the mystic as a totally other, separate reality. Here, Teresa asserts, "God implants Himself."³⁰ The condition for attaining this kind of self-withdrawal Teresa had previously specified as humility, the virtue by which the soul unburdens itself of all selfish desires and seeks only to be of service to the Lord; but now she adds that the soul must be made "completely foolish" in order to receive divine wisdom. The fact of being made foolish, by which she means both unknowing and powerless, may allow the soul to be completely absorbed in the divine presence, but it begs the epistemic question of certitude and truth. Teresa forthrightly asks herself, "How does the soul see it and understand it if it can neither see nor understand?"³¹

Her answer is that the experience of divine presence in the center of the soul is self-verifying (i.e. without need of external criteria of truth), "because of a certainty (*certidumbre*) which remains in the soul and which can be put there only by God."³² Her claim seems to be that she has entered a realm of being within the soul that is both ontologically and epistemically free of all nondivine interference or determination from finite sources. She means, then, that her mystical experience is certain just because it is so radically different from any experience which might be compatible with the hypothesis of self-deception or demonic influence. Yet her certainty is bought at a certain price.

For both the passivity of the quieted will and the state of "foolishness" of the soul's critical faculties indicate that the whole person, as a concrete corporeal and temporal being, is not in fact part of the purely spiritual divine relation; thus certitude is had at the expense of psychosomatic unity. The mystical state might be real in itself and, for the individual beyond doubt, but it threatens to become inhuman and self-alienating, if it cannot be thought of as an integral moment of subjectivity. Consequently, tension with the worldly, temporal self remains acute and disturbing:

degree than any we can ourselves attain that He leads it into a state of absorption, in which, without knowing how, it is much better instructed" (4.3.6).

³⁰ "Fija Dios a sí mismo en lo interior de aquel alma" (5.1.9).

³¹ *Ibid.* 5.1.10.

³² *Ibid.* See G. Mavrodes, "Real v. Deceptive" esp. 251. Hans Flasche has analyzed Teresa's frequent use of the verb *parecer* in the *Interior Castle* and concludes that it indicates the manner by which she shifts the burden of truth onto her own personal experience of union with God; see his "El problema de la certeza en el 'Castillo Interior,'" in *Congreso Internacional Teresiano, 4-7 Octubre, 1982*, 2.447-58. Similarly, Trueman Dicken argues that Teresa's understanding of the validity of her mystical experience is based on the conformity of her will to God. He wrongly surmises however, that "St. Teresa herself does not pretend that her account of union is anything but subjective. . . . She does not seek either to analyze or explain it" (*The Crucible of Love: A Study of the Mysticism of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963] 411-13).

Let us renounce our self-love and self-will, and our attachment to worldly things. Let us practice penance, prayer, mortification, obedience. . . . Let the silkworm die . . . let it die, as in fact it does when it has completed the work which it was created to do. Then we shall see God and shall ourselves be as completely hidden in His Greatness as is this little worm in its cocoon. . . . By comparison with the abode it has had, everything it sees on earth leaves it dissatisfied. . . . It is no longer bound by ties of relationship, friendship or property. . . . Everything wearies it, because it has proved that it can find no true rest in the creatures.³³

Has the soul ceased to be a creature, at least in desire? But is not desire always the mark of finite being, or can there be a desire at one with divine desire? Try as the soul might, however, the world, the body, and the temporal self cannot be long forgotten or denied. These rightful claims of finite subjectivity are never far from Teresa's mind:

May His Majesty Himself be our Mansion as He is in this prayer of union which we ourselves spin (*labrándola*). When I say that He will be our Mansion and we can construct (*fabricar*) it for ourselves, I seem to be suggesting that we can subtract or add to Him. But of course we cannot possibly do that!³⁴

Teresa realizes that her attempt to give an account of the soul's "spinning" as a condition of God's presence is apt to be misunderstood, for the possibility exists, as Feuerbach would later opine, that the stuff of mystical phenomena is nothing but the product of human yearning for infinite being.³⁵ Nonetheless, this spinning of an abode for God in the soul is the subject's necessary contribution to a complex process of divine nearing and parting, drawing and repelling, loving and wounding that Teresa calls spiritual or divine betrothal, biblically based on the Song of Songs.³⁶ The betrothal is not only a preparation for union, but it enlarges the soul's receptive capacity for love by initiating moments of contact, which are themselves degrees of union: "It is all a union of love with love, and its operations are entirely pure, and so delicate and gentle that there is no way of describing them."³⁷ Yet, because of the contingency of the process and the freedom of the beloved, the soul is more aware of the possibility that she could lose everything.

SELF-DOUBT AND ANXIETY IN MANSIONS 6 AND 7

The persistence of corporeal and psychological fact keeps the soul from an absolute identification with its divine abode. In the midst of

³³ *Moradas* 5.2.8; similarly 5.4.10. ³⁴ *Ibid.* 5.2.5.

³⁵ See Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (New York: Harper, 1957), and *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Manfred Vogel (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986) esp. par. 7 and 8.

³⁶ As in the Song of Songs, the thwarting of final union with the Beloved serves to purify and to increase desire in the soul. Teresa comments: "When, therefore, the aforementioned fire is not kindled in the will, and the presence of God is not felt, we must needs seek it . . . as the Bride sought it in the *Songs*" (*Moradas* 6.7.9).

³⁷ *Ibid.* 5.4.3.

the deepening spiritual contact with the Betrothed, the third kind of fear, self-doubt, works against the temptation experienced by the mystic to protect and safeguard the spiritual realm by isolating it from the sources of deception or worldly otherness.³⁸ "Our duty now," Teresa writes, "is to continue living this present life, and yet to die of our own free will."³⁹ In these later Mansions, she begins a fundamental reflection on the Christian experience of temporality: being in time while awaiting final salvation. To be temporal means to live in the concrete, temporal world, biologically, physically and psychologically conditioned by forces other than free will or grace, yet desiring to "spin" all of this into a fitting abode for divine union.

In Mansion 6, Teresa expresses the full weight, darkness, and aridity, which these temporal determinations instill.⁴⁰ The experience of being subjected to irrational forces begins only after the will has turned to God, and desire, inflamed by love, yearns restlessly for the divine substance. Ironically, only at the point of purified desire does "everything really seem to be lost," for now the earth, and all that belongs to it, is too heavy to permit the soul to fly on its own. This spiritual aridity achieves its full effect in the soul's experience of being bare, exposed to hostile elements, and suspended without hope between two opposing and self-sufficient realms—the divine and the material world. Teresa notes that it seems to the soul that in fact it has never known (*acordado*) God, and never will know Him. So alien has He become that it is as if she hears His Majesty spoken of

at a great distance. . . . For there are many things which assault her soul with an interior oppression so keenly felt and so intolerable that I do not know to what it can be compared, save to the torment of those who suffer in hell, for in this spiritual tempest no consolation is possible.⁴¹

In this state of darkness and absence, consciousness of sin and radical self-doubt force Teresa to reinterpret her entire spiritual experi-

³⁸ Note how Teresa's use of imagery changes from the combative and masculine images of castle and warrior to the more receptive and feminine images of dwelling place and spouse. This demonstrates a fundamental change, I would argue, in her conception of the body and thus of the value of the finite in the mystical life; see Francisco Márquez Villanueva, "El símil del Castillo Interior: Sentido y génesis," in *Congreso Internacional Teresiano* 2.495–524.

³⁹ *Moradas* 5.3.5.

⁴⁰ According to my interpretation, Mansion 6 is Teresa's account of the "dark night" of the soul, but, unlike the classic account offered by John of the Cross, for whom the dark night was essentially the work of God, Teresa considers nondivine causes of the night, for example, the devil, the imagination, mental disease, all of which serve to intensify the dangers of such an abyss.

⁴¹ *Moradas* 6.1.9. And at 6.1.11, her memory has become so infected by the present oppression and absence of God that she exclaims, "yet this grace is buried so deeply that the soul seems not to feel the smallest spark of any love for God, nor has it ever done so. If it has done anything good, or His Majesty has granted it any favor, the whole thing seems to it like a dream or a fancy: all it knows for certain is that it has sinned."

ence. Totally exposed to such fears, she suspects that all past consolations and graces were her own creation: a poetic trope for an obscure loss and furtive restoration. Yet her greatest suffering and distress continues to reside in the mind, frequently exacerbated by scrupulous and inexperienced confessors, whose misgivings abrade her already strained sensitivity about the incompatibility of mystical experience and human imperfection. Such doubts, which she ascribes to a confessor, are of a piece with fears about the origin of her present condition:

He thinks that people to whom God grants these favours must be angels; and, as this is impossible while they are in the body, he attributes the whole thing to melancholy or to the devil. The world is so full of melancholy that this certainly does not surprise me . . . and the devil makes so much use of it to work harm, that confessors have very good cause to be afraid of it and to watch for it very carefully.⁴²

Francisco Márquez Villanueva has drawn a connection between Teresa's undeniable preoccupation with psychosomatic causes of spiritual states and 16th-century medical studies of melancholy.⁴³ He argues that Teresa had read a medical treatise, *Remedio de cuerpos humanos* (1542), in which its renowned author, Dr. Luis Lobera de Avila, presented a mechanistic conception of anatomy, the body being controlled by its *capitán*, the brain. Mental diseases could disrupt the smooth functioning of the entire mechanism, and chief among them Lobera listed "melancholy," which tended to corrupt the judgment and so inclined the soul to attacks of depression and anxiety. Moreover, "this disease often is caused by the devil," Lobera wrote in a somewhat speculative vein. This pronouncement is echoed by Teresa in her book of *Foundations*.⁴⁴

Bodily existence, including psychological moods, is a constant counterweight to mystical presence, but of greater significance to Teresa is the tension in the soul itself between its created or perceptible operations and its purely spiritual essence or center. Stretched to its finite limits by spiritual oppression, the soul begins to sense, even to touch, its "non-other" self, a dimension of pure spirit "proceeding from the very depth of the soul" (*de lo muy interior del alma*).⁴⁵ As a result of

⁴² *Ibid.* 6.1.8.

⁴³ See Márquez Villanueva, "El símil del Castillo Interior" 503-8.

⁴⁴ See *Libro de las Fundaciones* (7.2), in *Obras Completas*. And in *Moradas* 6.2.5, Teresa goes out of her way to deny the influences of melancholy on her mystical experiences. The relation between the body and its influence on the soul remained, however, a life-long worry and preoccupation to Teresa. As she observed in the *Life*, "We are so miserable because our poor little souls are imprisoned and made to participate in the miseries of the body, and the changes of the time, along with upheaval in the humors, often inhibit a person, without any fault of her own, from doing what she wills" (*Vida* 11.16).

⁴⁵ *Moradas* 6.2.1. One of the purposes of spiritual betrothal is to disclose to the soul a dimension of its own inner life heretofore hidden or unknown. Teresa often alludes to

contact with the Spouse, who resides in this interior depth, the soul feels itself to be wounded with a delectable and sweet pain, from which it would like never to be healed. These intimate operations of divine love deep within the essence of the soul appear to rational reflection as contradictory because the Spouse's call to the soul causes it such acute distress and pain. The puzzling array of images and impressions evoked by the following passage is due, in part, to the fact that the Spouse's being in the center of the soul can neither be understood nor appropriated by the faculties of the soul:

When He that has wounded it draws out the arrow, the bowels seem to come with it, so deeply does it feel this love . . . but, as the fire is not hot enough to burn it up, and the experience is very delectable, the soul continues to feel that pain and the mere touch suffices to produce that effect in it . . . for, just as the soul is about to become enkindled, the spark dies, and leaves the soul yearning once again to suffer that loving pain of which it is the cause.⁴⁶

In context, this deeply pondered passage is clearly designed by Teresa to meet head-on questions about the authenticity of her mystical claims. Yet both the sensual and contradictory quality of the experience, as well as her denial that its source could be in her own nature, only serve to increase suspicion and uncertainty. Let me put the issue somewhat differently. I believe that the manner in which she herself accounts for the occurrence is itself the cause of the problem. First, she

this aspect of the soul as if it were distinct from the created soul, almost divine in its nearness to the Spouse. She is hardly systematic in the terms she uses to describe this crucial distinction: "in the interior of the soul" (*en lo interior de aquel alma*) (5.1.9); "in its center," which she distinguishes from "the superior part" of the soul (7.1.5); "in respect to the essential part of the soul . . . there seems to be a division in the soul" (7.1.10); and finally, at 7.1.11, she distinguishes "soul" from "spirit." A similar distinction is implied, but not stated, in *Camino de Perfección* 31.2. Teresa is not only drawing upon the commonplace Scholastic division of the soul into three parts, "sensitive," "rational," and "intellectual," but is also, I believe, indirectly making use of a further distinction by St. Thomas between the faculties of the soul and its essence. Thomas writes that "there are many things in the soul distinct (*aliud*) from the essence, such as its power or capacity" (*Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 76, a.1).

⁴⁶ *Moradas*, 6.2.4. The sensual quality of this famous passage is brought out by repeated use of the verbs *sentir*, *tocar*, *herir*, *quemar*, *abrasar*, *encender*. After the purification of darkness, the soul begins to perceive the presence of God by means of its "spiritual senses" of feeling, seeing, hearing, and touching. For an account of this phenomenon, see the two articles by Karl Rahner, "The 'Spiritual Senses' according to Origen," and "The Doctrine of the 'Spiritual Senses' in the Middle Ages," in *Theological Investigations* 16, trans. David Morland (New York: Seabury, 1979) 81–103 and 104–34. Commenting on Origen, Rahner describes the dialectical relation between spirit and soul in the following way: "The fundamental idea calls for spirit to become soul, in so far as spirit separates itself from God as free element. The soul, likewise, is able to purify itself in the world and, by means of its return to God, to transform itself once again into spirit" (*ibid.* 119). This position is important not only for Rahner's notion of "spirit in the world," but also for Teresa. It seems that if in fact the "spiritual senses" can be purified, then there must be a nonempirical origin of "spirit" to affect them in ways that outer sense cannot.

insists that the call of the Lord is so clear and penetrating because it originates from within, "where He is." Second, He addresses her in a "language without intelligible form" (*que no es habla formada*), which no other aspect of the soul (sense, imagination, or understanding) could ever fabricate.⁴⁷ Thus both the claim that the origin of the call is within her but not from her, and the claim that it possesses an extraordinary intellectual nature and sensual quality provoke new doubts in the next chapter.

So doubts arise and the soul wonders if the whole thing came from the devil, or can have been the work of the imagination. Yet at the time it had no such doubts and it would have died in defense of their veracity . . . all these imaginings must be put into our minds by the devil in order to distress us and make us fearful.⁴⁸

Only at this point in the text does Teresa begin to consider several kinds of argument to prove the veracity of her mystical claims against doubts that such phenomena are caused by physical nature, melancholy, demonic deception, or mere fancy. The first argument turns on the fact that the soul's critical faculties remain active and awake even while the soul is withdrawn and absorbed in God: "Here all the senses and faculties are active, and there is no absorption; they are on the alert to discover what can be happening."⁴⁹ The temporal faculties of the soul are, in effect, detached from the experience, yet fully aware of what is happening. Teresa apparently believes that because the event is actually taking place and not merely remembered, and because both the will and the understanding are not absorbed but remain active and alert, this constitutes positive evidence against the threat of demonic deception. But is this really a proof? Does not the fact of the complete separation of the event from the soul's critical, rational powers rather increase our suspicions that the phenomena lack objective reality, or at least that they lack objective grounds of verification?

Teresa does not belabor the point, but moves to what is perhaps a stronger argument based on an experience of what she calls "intellectual vision," or a seeing with the "eyes of the soul." Such a vision does not rely on sensory images or representations to fill the soul with knowledge of divine things, but is a purely spiritual intuition of Christ's real presence to the soul. And because of the "vision," she "realized with certainty that it was Jesus Christ Who had revealed Himself to her in that way that she could not doubt it—I mean, could not doubt that that vision was there."⁵⁰ This is a significant qualifi-

⁴⁷ *Moradas* 6.2.3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 6.3.7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 6.2.5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 6.8.2. In an analysis of Teresa's understanding of prayer, E. Renault explains the intellectual vision as an intersubjective "regard," a wordless dialogue by which lovers exchange presences, leading ultimately to real union. But because such a contact,

cation, for it expresses misgivings about how to understand and interpret the event.

In response to her confessor's inquiry, "If you see nothing, how do you know it is Our Lord?" Teresa admits that she "did not know" (*que no sabía*). Still, "she knew" (*sabía*) that it was the Lord, that it was He who spoke, and that it was no fancy or whim. Thus she knows, but she does not know how she knows what she knows. Teresa's claim, similar to her interpretation of the transverberation event, is that within the experience itself there exists no compelling reason to place its veracity in question: unmediated presence felt in the essence of the soul is simply not susceptible to deception. Moreover, upon reflection the event is able to be integrated into past experiences of the Lord's presence. This prompts her to accept the perception of real presence as a genuine revelation: "She felt (*sentía*) Him walking with her, but not with the senses (*sentidos*) . . . but by means of another, more delicate way which is not possible to describe."⁵¹ Since no absolutely certain standard or criterion of an undoubtable past mystical experience exists, judgment as to the veracity of an actual case seems to be relative to the intensity and the coherence of the feelings in question. But if an experience can claim to be true only in the context of the whole fabric of a person's life, even an especially intense experience must still be tested, compared, analyzed, and finally judged on the basis of its coherence with the rest of experience.

Finally, Teresa acknowledges her lack of an objective criterion for judging particular mystical events by developing a further stage of the argument, based on the effects of mystical experiences in the soul.

Other things of the kind might be attributable to fancy, but this is not, for it brings such great benefits and produces such effects upon the interior life as could not occur if it were the result of melancholy. The devil, again, could not do so much good: were it his work, the soul would not have such peace and such constant desire to please God.⁵²

But, as Teresa herself realizes, an argument based on effects is purely negative, that is, it might help to discount certain demonic causes, but alone it will never suffice to prove positively the source of the experience. For effects, however good and virtuous in themselves, could surely follow from a physiological or psychological disposition.

according to Renault, requires an act of faith, it does not seem possible that it can supply grounds or proof for mystical claims; see his "La 'manière d'oraison' thérésienne," *Revue d'Histoire de la Spiritualité* 51 (1975) 43-72. For a further description of the experience, see Teresa's *Vida* 40.6.

⁵¹ *Moradas* 6.8.3.

⁵² *Ibid.* 6.8.3. And see Mavrodes's refutation of Teresa's strategy in "Real v. Deceptive Experiences" 245. His point is simply that in order to know that an effect, however good it may appear, is not itself the product of the devil's deception, she needs another criterion to distinguish with certainty the works of God from those of the devil. But this is exactly what finite self-reflection can never possess.

In spite of its shortcomings, the second argument concerning the immediacy of divine presence in the center of the soul seems to be the stronger. Yet, as I have argued, the feeling of presence convinces only to the extent that Teresa experiences a division within her own subjectivity; the most secure and certain contact with the divine occurs at that point where the soul is most purely other than its finite self. "The essential part of her soul seemed never to move from that dwelling-place. So in a sense she felt that her soul was divided."⁵³ To make this point clearer, Teresa introduces a crucial distinction in her discussion of the soul's union with God in the Seventh Mansion:

The soul, I mean the spirit of this soul (*el espíritu de esta alma*), is made one with God, Who being likewise spirit (*es también espíritu*), has been pleased to reveal the love that He has for us. . . . For He has been pleased to unite Himself with His creature in such a way that they have become like two who cannot be separated from one another.⁵⁴

The soul as spirit is thus identical with itself yet different from itself; but because God can unite Himself to spirit, the soul is also identical yet different in respect to the divine. In the next paragraph, Teresa describes such a union, or "spiritual marriage," as a permanent state of union between the soul and God that cannot be disrupted, not even by the finite necessities of life. The spirit remains in God and, like the ends of two candles, "joined so that the light they give is one." The union is so complete that there is no longer any distinction or difference left to be made.⁵⁵

The condition for such a union, however, is the complete purification of spirit from all traces of the finite subject. And having put away from itself everything corporeal,

the soul [is left] in a state of pure spirituality (*en puro espíritu*), so that it might be joined with Uncreated Spirit in this celestial union. For it is quite certain

⁵³ *Moradas* 7.1.10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 7.2.3. Teresa is extending the distinction between soul and its essence one step further by conceiving spirit as somehow akin to the divine being. She has discovered, on the basis of her own experience, an insight that appears repeatedly in Christian mysticism: the distinction between the finite soul and its ground in spirit. I do not mean that the distinction is unequivocal throughout this diverse tradition; one should rather speak of a family resemblance. Of particular interest is Meister Eckhart's identification of *Seelenfünklein* and *Seelengrund* with *Gottesgrund*: "Here God's ground is my ground and my ground is God's ground" (*Die deutschen und lateinischen Werke*, I, ed. Josef Quint [Stuttgart: Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 1936] 450). Eckhart is completing a tradition, which he received from Pseudo-Dionysius, but which extends to Proclus and to the Stoic philosophers. For an extensive bibliography, see Peter Reiter, *Der Seele Grund* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1993).

⁵⁵ *Moradas* 7.2.4. "Or it is as if a tiny streamlet enters the sea, from which it will find no way of separating itself, or as if in a room there were two large windows through which the light streamed in: it enters in different places but it all becomes one" (*ibid.*). Teresa could hardly express the idea of union more strongly.

that, when we empty ourselves of all that is creature and rid ourselves of it for the love of God, that same Lord will fill our souls with Himself.⁵⁶

Teresa's final verdict on the relation between mysticism and human subjectivity, then, is that the deepest experience of the soul as spirit reveals a realm where self-relation implies self-transcendence, where one experiences the essence of subjectivity in the offer of love and freedom by divine Spirit. "When Our Lord brings the soul into this Mansion of His," Teresa explains, "this is the center of the soul itself . . . it seems on entering to be subject to none of the usual movements of the faculties and the imagination, which injure it and take away its peace."⁵⁷

EXISTENTIAL ANXIETY AND MYSTICAL UNION

Teresa's experience of spiritual betrothal and marriage, far from freeing the soul from all cares, seems only to have increased her sensibility to pain and fear. She speaks not only of the "strange solitude" that now surrounds her life, but also of the torment of companionship: "She thinks of herself as of a person suspended aloft, unable either to come down and rest anywhere on earth or to ascend into Heaven."⁵⁸

In the final two Mansions, the dilemma of understanding and writing about mystical experience gives way to the more pressing problem of existing within a threefold temporal and spatial enclosure: the body, the convent, and the world. Finite existence in the world appears as the source of further anxiety, necessitating on her part a deeper mediation between divine spirit and her own humanity. The insinuation of the finite into the mystic's life assumes an almost Nietzschean quality of revenge against her spiritual presumption of having completely done away with the material world:

Sometimes Our Lord leaves such souls to their own nature, and when that happens, all the poisonous things in the environs and mansions of this castle seem to come together to avenge themselves on them for the time during which they have not been able to have them in their power. . . . Such souls are not able to stop being afraid. And let whichever of you feels surest of herself fear most.⁵⁹

The authentic Christian center of Teresa's mysticism reveals itself only in confrontation with the existential fact of the finite world. The defining feature of the Christian mediation of the finite is a will cru-

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 7.2.7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 7.2.10. And commenting on the mystic's consciousness of a being both excessive yet identical with the self, James observes, ". . . great enough to be God; interior enough to be me" (*Varieties* 401 n. 22).

⁵⁸ *Moradas* 6.11.5. And in the next paragraph, she compares her life in the world to a constant death: ". . . although this would be not to die once, but to be always dying."

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 7.4.1 and 3. For Nietzsche's classic text on the revenge of the finite on the spiritual person, see *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, bk. 2 and 4, in *The Portable Nietzsche* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).

cified to the world and thus truly conformed in time to the particular historical humiliation and suffering of Christ. I have suggested that the controlling theme of Teresa's text, the anxiety of writing, not only represents the general insecurity of mystical experience, but more acutely, details the determination of her will, steeled and purified by divine touch, to engage the world by means of compassionate service. I would now like to suggest that the will's mediation of the mystical and the mundane has its source in the cognitive and existential groundlessness of the soul's spiritual, or "non-other," center—in other words, that the experience of anxious finitude is present in the essence of mystical union. How exactly does such a mediation come about? Why does the will, excluded from mystical contact, but braced by fear, desire to resume living and suffering once more?

Teresa writes that the soul, having enjoyed the most intimate union and communication with divine Spirit, returns to itself more fearful than ever of offending the Divine Majesty.⁶⁰ The soul's joy at mystical union with the divine Spouse turns into gratitude and desire to take upon itself "His business." These souls

turn back and look within themselves and remember that they have Him with them continually; and they are content with this and offer His Majesty their will to live as the most costly oblation they can give Him.⁶¹

As we have seen, Teresa's desire for self-knowledge in Mansion 1 led her to consider the soul's hidden essence as a reflection of God's beauty and, subsequently, to search for a mirror profound enough to glimpse its unclouded image. In Mansion 7, Teresa seems finally to be telling us that this mirror of self-knowledge is to be found in the crucified form of the human Christ. The defining moment occurs when the awakened soul identifies its mystical Spouse with the crucified Lord:

The desires of these souls are no longer for consolations or favours, for they have with them the Lord Himself. . . . His life was nothing but a continual torment and so He is making our life the same.

And if the will fails in any way, or weakens in its resolve, the Lord strengthens it with an interior impulse, proceeding directly from "the center of the soul."⁶² The will is moved, then, to connect mystical presence to worldly commitment on the basis of its contact with the love of the suffering Christ:

The second effect produced is a great desire to suffer, but this is not of such a kind as to disturb the soul, as it did previously. So extreme is her longing for the will of God to be done in her that whatever His Majesty does she considers to be for the best: if He wills that she should suffer, well and good; if not, she does not worry herself to death. . . . [Her] conception of glory is to be able in some way to help the Crucified.⁶³

⁶⁰ *Moradas* 7.2.9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 7.3.7.

⁶² *Ibid.* 7.3.8.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 7.3.4 and 6. It is significant that once the Spouse is recognized and loved as the crucified Lord, the soul's raptures cease altogether or become very rare; see 7.3.12.

The reconciliation and integration of flesh and spirit, as manifested in the humanity of Christ, is not, however, a facile synthesis of opposites, but the patient endurance of the world's hatred and hostility that would seem to negate the possibility of a genuine relation between the sides.⁶⁴ For the passion of Christ reveals in specific detail that for a human will seeking the transcendent will of the Father, there can be neither resting place nor ground upon which to secure its temporal existence: "The more they are favored by God, the more timorous and fearful do they become concerning themselves."⁶⁵ How has the saint learned this lesson of existential groundlessness from her experience of mystical union?

In a monograph on fear, Hans Urs von Balthasar has distinguished the Christian experience of angst, as a graced participation in the mystery of the cross of Christ, from contemporary neurosis, which manifests nothing more than the individual's distorted psychological relation to the world. According to Balthasar, the Christian experience of angst discloses to the believer the possibility of blind hope and trust in an often silent God's power to save human life from the utter meaninglessness of pain and mortality. Angst, Balthasar contends, deepens the virtues of faith, love and hope by purifying them of all vestiges of self-interest and created support. "The obscuration of faith, love and hope is their fullest self-realization, which is precisely the opposite of the obscuration caused by sin. . . . In Christian angst the image of God in the soul is covered, like Church images during lent . . . as a proof that God has deemed a soul worthy of His most precious secrets."⁶⁶ Existential fear, provoked by one's helplessness and groundlessness in time, rids the soul of a too easy faith and offers in darkness the possibility of a salvation that is only the Lord's to bestow. Teresa strikes the same note at the end of the Seventh Mansion:

Do you know when people really become spiritual? It is when they become slaves of God and are branded with His sign, which is the sign of the Cross, in token that they have given Him their freedom. Then He can sell them as slaves to the whole world, as He Himself was sold. . . . For the foundation of the whole edifice is humility.⁶⁷

Humility mediates between the fearful soul and God by exposing the truth of the human condition: that we are in ourselves nothing, permeated and determined by our own temporal genesis and passing away, threatened constantly by nonbeing, yet offered mercy and hope by God. And this is true of Teresa, not in spite of her spiritual marriage, but in light of it.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 7.7.1-15 and 6.9.3. See Eamon Carroll, "The Saving Role of the Human Christ for St. Teresa," in *Centenary of St. Teresa* 133-51.

⁶⁵ *Moradas* 7.3.14.

⁶⁶ Balthasar, *Der Christ und die Angst* 53.

⁶⁷ *Moradas* 7.4.8. These words offend the contemporary ear accustomed to thinking of finite subjectivity as the authentic ground of human freedom and happiness.

God is Sovereign Truth and to be humble is to walk in truth, for it is absolutely true to say that we have no good thing in ourselves, but only misery and nothingness (*ser nada*); and anyone who fails to understand this is walking in falsehood.⁶⁸

The mystical intuition of "nothingness" in relation to God's being and truth increases one's anxiety and fear of "walking in falsehood," that is, one is faced with the persistent possibility that, as a finite being, one can simply go wrong, misunderstand, or misconstrue the subtle truths of spiritual identity, just because one has so little to go on outside of the experience itself. In this regard, Teresa brings the essential mystery and paradox of her spiritual life to dramatic relief: neither her cognitive judgments nor existential acts of trust and belief in her mystical Interlocutor can ever be finally established or anchored in temporal life. Because there are no sure grounds of mystical experience, any claim or judgment she makes might turn out to be foolishly mistaken.⁶⁹ Yet, it is precisely this blind hope and lack of worldly guarantees that bind her more closely to the humiliated and crucified Christ. And the mystic suffers, as Christ suffered in the passion, both in time and because of time: temporally extended by the memory of past grace and the hope of future salvation, while nailed to an obdurate present.

But the greatest trial that Teresa had to endure was the thought that in light of her clear memory of sin and weakness, her mystical claims might not reflect accurately who she was: How can "I" be the same subject of both mystical union and of the confusion, humiliation, and shame associated with materially determined existence outside the divine? Although writing is a symbol of such conflict, it is hardly its resolution. For the ambiguous literary form of the mystical text opens the experience to diverse interpretations and meanings that are beyond the author's control. This is the source of the author's shame and anxiety, as well as the source of Teresa's insistence that her experience of divine union is more than its public account could ever adequately convey.

There is urgency in writing out of fear because Teresa believes that something of profound importance is at stake in her writing, namely, that her claims of mystical union in the center of her finite being involve the judgment that something ultimately matters in human experience; that mystical claims are not reducible to perceptions of reality, but concern the deepest truth of how things really are between God and the soul. Certainly, confronted by the intractable reality of the everyday world, she is aware that her beliefs might be nothing more than the manifestation of neurosis, a fanciful illusion about some ideal being that she has either guiltily repressed or lost.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid. 6.10.7.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 7.3.14.

⁷⁰ See Alfred Schutz, "Don Quixote and the Problem of Reality" 156-57, which discusses the interplay between imagined or discovered private subuniverses.

Nevertheless, Teresa conceives her writing about fear as an invitation to her sisters to overcome their instinctive fears (fears that could inhibit the soul from imagining other forms of spiritual experience) and to yield their minds and wills to a divine offer of grace and freedom, which by definition can never be fully comprehended by finite mind. Teresa knows that mystical relation to the divine Majesty implies the most acute suffering due not simply to its conceptual transcendence, but also to an ontological difference in the manner of divine and human loving and desiring. Experience of the divine touch (love), so intimate that Teresa describes it as a kiss, arouses the fear that the reality revealed to us in such states, and which we so desire, might not be ours to hold within the limits of our finite being; that the most precious spiritual experience can be obtained only by love, a love that costs everything the person has ever possessed or desired.⁷¹

CONCLUSION

No one can ignore the prevailing skepticism of our culture regarding the possibility that a "divine language" could create a mystical text of both divine and human origin. In this article, I have identified the central problem of the Christian mystical tradition as the interplay between the privileged moment of divine revelation in the soul and that person's ability to integrate the mystical moment into the corporeal and temporal existence of the social world. I have argued that Teresa confronted this classical problem in her need and desire to produce a written account of her mystical life not only for herself, but also for a spiritually-tepid religious order, and for an openly-hostile and hidebound ecclesiastical culture.

I have argued further that in searching for conceptual means to clarify the phenomenon of spiritual marriage and to present her corresponding claims to genuine union as intellectually coherent and real, Teresa discovered on her own a traditional teaching concerning the real difference in the soul between its active faculties and a hidden dimension of pure spirit, where God dwells and unites the person to himself. Far from establishing the legitimacy of her cognitive truth claims, however, the division of finite subjectivity in itself only intensified Teresa's fears and doubts.

As a result of the paradoxical relationship in the finite subject between human and divine aspects, which intimately belong to each other, yet cannot be fully or clearly conceptualized, Teresa seems to suggest that no complete or satisfactory theory about how God is mediated by, or related to, human subjectivity in the temporal world is possible. To lack both cognitive and existential transparency about

⁷¹ *Moradas* 7.3.13. And see Rowan Williams's concise and excellent survey of Christian mysticism, *The Wound of Knowledge* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990) esp. chap. 8.

one's deepest and most personal acts and relations constitutes the essence of human finitude. But Teresa also knows that it will not do simply to write off mystical events as paradoxical and leave it at that. For the desire to live a fully rational and coherent life corresponds to the very essence of the Christian experience of an incarnate God, who demands the affirmation of the mystic's entire existence. This final mediation occurs when the graced will finds in the crucified Christ an object of desire that can only be fully known and loved in the world it has never left. Teresa believes that one can validly affirm the truth of mystical phenomena only to the extent to which the entire person is caught up in mystical grace: in possession of a new reality, faith is deeper than the fears and doubts of the mind.

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