

Upending Hegemonic Masculinity in Soror Maria do Céu's *Clavel, y Rosa*

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Abstract: While most early modern authors align themselves with normative views on gender, Soror Maria do Céu (1658-1753) resists and subverts this tradition in her play *Clavel, y Rosa, breve comedia aludida a los desposorios de María y Joseph* (Carnation and Rose, a brief play on the marriage of Mary and Joseph, 1736). She achieves this in part by creating “feminine” male characters and assigning “masculine” characteristics to her female characters. Soror Maria affords more power and authority to women in her *comedia*, and she likewise undermines the validity of early modern social expectations related to men and masculinity by scrutinizing gender norms. In the end, Soror Maria creates a space of negotiation between the masculine and the feminine that allows for a reassessment of what it meant to be a man in late seventeenth-century Iberia.

Keywords: Portugal, convent theater, gender norms, Virgin Mary, conduct literature

Early modern Iberian philosophical treatises, such as Fray Luis de León's *La perfecta casada* (The perfect wife, 1583) and Francisco Manuel de Melo's *Carta de guia de casados* (1651), often discuss characteristics widely believed to be inherent in men or in women. Men, for example, tend to serve as the seat of reason and good conscience. Attributes such as bravery, industriousness, and virtue also define this prescriptive masculinity, which stems largely from Aristotelian beliefs about gender. In his *Politics*, Aristotle not only endeavors to

define the characteristics of both men and women but also seeks to advise them on marriage relationships and other gendered forms of behavior. As one might imagine, a variety of normative and prescriptive texts that appear in the early modern period reflect the sensibilities of the time; in general, they identify traits such as fickleness, cowardice, idleness, and imperfection as negative, feminine actions. By extension, men who display feminine characteristics or wear feminine or feminized clothing likewise find their character questioned.

While a good deal of early modern Iberian literature aligns itself with views on gender then widely held, Soror Maria do Céu (1658-1753) works to resist and subvert this tradition in her play *Clavel, y Rosa, breve comedia aludida a los desposorios de María y Joseph* (Carnation and Rose, a brief play on the marriage of Mary and Joseph, 1736). She achieves this in part by creating “feminine” male characters and assigning “masculine” characteristics to female characters, a move that compels readers to rethink and reevaluate these norms. Soror Maria not only endows women with more power and authority, but she also undermines the validity of early modern social expectations related to men and masculinity. In this way, her work effectively upends hegemonic masculinity.

Early Modern Men and Masculinity

By the end of the Iberian Middle Ages, there existed many treatises and even dictionaries that clearly outlined and delineated what it meant to be masculine. Good examples are Luisa María de Padilla’s six conduct manuals (published between 1637 and 1644) and Gabriel de la Gasca y Espinosa’s *Manual de avisos para el perfecto cortesano* (Manual of advice for the perfect courtier, 1681). These texts were popular and widely read. As Shifra Armon points out:

Normative literature, that is, books that taught one how to act, either before God or man, comprised some of the first texts mass-produced by the printing press. [...] While the Church monopolized the market for books related to religious action, the parallel field of secular conduct literature became one of the earliest success stories in the history of Western print culture. (26)

This type of literature explicitly defined what it meant to be a man in early modern Iberia, and one of its principal concerns was “propriety of attire, manners, and speech” (Armon 27). According to Elizabeth Lefffeldt, these texts “describe a performative masculinity by which a man demonstrates and displays his ability to be sexually assertive, to provide, to procreate, and to protect the sexuality of female members of his family” (464). François Soyer goes further, arguing that so-called masculine actions and appearances were woven into the fabric of Iberian society: “a well-established set of norms governing sexual behavior, social conduct, clothing and outward physical appearance played an extremely important role in influencing perceptions and formulating how early modern Spaniards and Portuguese determined an individual’s gender” (287). Early modern philosophers also “measured masculine virtue against a yardstick of fortitude or constancy. By contrast, female inconstancy made women untrustworthy, weak, and inferior” (Armon 95).

If men did not live up to gendered expectations, especially if they behaved in ways considered feminine, they could find themselves in danger of losing their social status. Even seemingly benign activities could make a man suspect. In 1637, for example, a man named Manuel João, who worked as cook in a seminary in the northern Portuguese city of Viseu, was arrested on charges of sodomy by Coimbra’s inquisitorial tribunal. The authorities based their accusation partly on witness testimony that he did women’s work, that he “sifted wheat and kneaded the dough, spun thread at the spinning wheel” and participated in “outres misteres pertencentes às mulheres” (Soyer 21). As this case shows, non-hegemonic masculinity could lead to serious accusations and consequences.

The poor were not the only ones to suffer for failing to live up to gender norms. Noble and educated men could also come under scrutiny because of suspect behavior. António José Teixeira examines the case of António Homem, a “conego doutoral da sé de Coimbra” (Teixeira 7). Already suspect because of a new Christian lineage on his father’s side, the Inquisition justified its involvement based on his actions. As Teixeira explains, António Homem was arrested because he “gostava de beber vinho demasiadamente, o que n’algumas ocasiões lhe fazia bastante mal, e estimava a companhia de moços, sem comtudo peccar com elles por forma” (27-28). For Homem’s crimes of excessive drinking and untoward socializing, the authorities burned him to death in a Lisbon *auto*

da fé in 1624. By strictly adhering to the admonitions set forth in normative literature, men could avoid such a fate.

Dictionaries from the early modern period also shed light on the ways in which writers codified and defined masculinity in the Iberian Peninsula. In his *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (Treasure of the Castilian or Spanish language, 1611), Sebastián de Covarrubias cites Cicero and Plato as well as the Bible in his discussion of the term *hombre*. He also references a popular maxim: “No todos son hombres los que mean a la pared” ‘Not all who piss on the wall are men’ (475). In other words, masculinity is based on behavior as well as biology. As Covarrubias explains it: “si[g]nifica que no todos los hombres por naturaleza son hombres en valor, prudencia, y en fortaleza [...] y assi no por solo mear a la pared es uno hombre, sino por hazer cosas de hombre de razon y seso” ‘it means that not all men by nature are men in terms of valor, prudence, and strength [...] and thus one is not a man solely because he can piss on a wall but because he does what reasonable and sensible men do’ (475). The fourth volume of the *Diccionario de autoridades* (Dictionary of authorities, 1734) also cites this adage: “no todos los hombres por serlo merecen este nombre, y que solo es digno de él el que está adornado de valor, prudencia y fortaleza” ‘not all men deserve this name, and only he that is adorned with courage, prudence, and strength merits it.’ In Portugal, the fourth volume of Raphael Bluteau’s *Vocabulario portuguez e latino* (published in several volumes between 1712 and 1728) indicates that the term *homem* is used not only in the general sense but also “quando o queremos distinguir da molher” (44). Bluteau’s dictionary also calls man an earthly god and insists that nothing is greater than man: “no mundo não ha cousa mayor, que o homem” (43). Bluteau also comments on the scarcity of men who live up to conventional standards of masculinity: “raro he o homem hom[em]” (44). Additionally, the fifth volume contains the definition for “masculino,” which reads, “[c]ousa concernente ao sexo mais nobre” (352).

Beyond dictionaries, many other Iberian texts dealt with gender. In *La perfecta casada*, a widely read and popular treatise on married women, Fray Luis de León argues that men possess “limpieza, firmeza, y unidad” ‘cleanliness, constancy, and unity’ (13) and that men’s natural state is to be “dotado de entendimiento y razón” ‘endowed with understanding and reason’ (31). What is more, Fray Luis states as fact that “la perfección del hombre [...] consiste principalmente en el bien obrar” ‘the perfection of man [...] consists principally

in doing good works' (30). Francisco de Quevedo, in his *España defendida* (Spain defended, c.1609), considers vanity the worst of all vices, since it leads men to dress effeminately and even confuse their gender (85). He accuses such men of seeming to regret that they were born male (85). Padre António Vieira admits in his "Sermão da primeira sexta-feira da Quaresma" (1644) that men, like women, are inconsistent and alterable. However, he states that while women are fickle by nature, men become so because of the negative influence of women, particularly their mothers: "A mulher inconstante por condição, o homem inconstante por nascimento; a mulher, como a lua, por natureza; o homem, como o mar, por influência" (11). Here Vieira considers men's flaws to stem from being born to a woman; correct masculine conduct, then, was necessary if men were to fight against the nefarious power that women exercise over them.

Another Portuguese author, Francisco Manuel de Melo, published his *Carta de guia de casados* in 1651. Like Fray Luis's text, this prescriptive treatise also sheds light on early modern concepts of masculinity and addresses anxieties surrounding gender. In an introductory appellation to the reader, the publisher of the *Carta* asserts that because of the inherent "fragilidade" (8) of women, men (particularly married men) must be the ones to "sustentar sua casa em honra, e sem perigo" (6). The author argues that only through proper (i.e., masculine) behavior can men avoid dangers such as "os desgostos, a desordem dos affectos, aquelle temer tudo, não fiar de nada, o queixume que doe, a vingança que arrisca, a ruim lei que desespera, os ciumes que abração, os amores que consomem, a honra em occasião, a saude diminuida, a vida arriscada, e o que he mais, a consciencia sempre quiexosa" (14-15). Such are the consequences of a disorderly life, which result from a failure to adhere to accepted gender expectations. Men must be men, which principally means that they must avoid excess and shoulder responsibility with strength and aplomb. Such culturally constructed gender norms play out in very different ways in Maria do Céu's *Clavel, y Rosa*, where evidence of gendered disorder and disordered gender abounds.¹

¹ Within a decade of Soror Maria's publication of *Clavel, y Rosa*, several treatises appeared that directly addressed gender. Although Benito Jerónimo Feijóo's 1726 essay "Defensa de las mujeres" 'Defense of women' caused an uproar in Spain, evidence of the reception of Feijóo's text in Portugal is scarce. Four years later, a writer named Paula da Graça wrote *Bondade das mulheres vendicada e malícia dos homens manifesta* as a response to an earlier text, *Malícias das mulheres*. While both texts defend women, neither addresses issues of masculinity other than suggesting that men should not treat women in the traditional manner.

Early Modern Convent Theater

At first blush, it may seem strange that cloistered women would compose texts dealing with masculinity. However, representing and even undermining gender norms was integral to the creative endeavors of nun playwrights during the early modern period. Alison Weber explains that while some early modern monastic texts were clearly shaped and informed by the “anxiety of authorship,” we also find “more confident voices in works of devotion or moral instruction intended for an intra-monastic readership” (35).² For convent playwrights, their enclosure and cultivation of “genres that did not obviously transgress injunctions against women’s theological discourse” (Weber 36) allowed them to explore gendered themes almost unchecked. Evidence remains of a rich artistic and literary life that flourished *intramuros* even though many of the details of early modern convents and their inhabitants have been erased by catastrophic natural disasters, human involvement, and time itself. We know that nuns painted, wove tapestries, cooked, sang, and wrote literature, including plays that they performed for other nuns in their convents. Almost always allegorical and often self-referential, these plays adapted and modified both religious and secular traditions to fit within the framework of the cloistered space and monastic life. Adhering to the Horatian adage of *dulce et utile*, these plays entertained the nuns while also instructing and edifying them.³

Soror Maria do Céu (1658-1753) was one of Portugal’s most prominent convent playwrights. Born into a noble family, she had access to private tutors and she was already known for her poetry by the time she entered the Franciscan Mosteiro da Nossa Senhora da Esperança in Lisbon in 1676. She served twice as abbess, once as portress, and once as mistress of novices. A prolific writer, Soror Maria and her works, written in Latin, Portuguese, and Spanish, were well known and widely praised.

Soror Maria’s convent play *Clavel, y Rosa* introduces male characters (re)presenting nonhegemonic masculinity. Although it has received little critical attention, it offers considerable insight into gendered relations in the early

² On the “anxiety of authorship,” see Gilbert and Gubar 51.

³ For more on convent theater in early modern Europe, see Arenal and Schlau; Hegstrom; Arenal and Sabat de Rivers; Smith and Sabat de Rivers; and Weaver.

modern period.⁴ The plot of this allegorical drama is simple: the Virgin Mary chooses her husband from a variety of suitors. The allegory, however, is more complex. Rosa (Mary), is a flower residing in a garden among many other flowers, each with its own characteristics and personality. Some flowers act as suitors and others as advisors as Rosa ponders whom she should marry before settling finally on Clavel (Joseph). Throughout this process, Rosa exhibits traditionally masculine qualities, while Clavel and his counterparts act in traditionally feminine ways.

“Feminine” Suitors

Rather than waiting to be wooed by a suitor or married off by her father, Rosa has the unique opportunity to choose her husband from among her male counterparts. Another female character, Mosqueta, assists her and has the responsibility of announcing the upcoming nuptials. In short order, three suitors, Lyrio, Narciso, and Bienmequiere, parade past Rosa in an attempt to prove their worth in a kind of inverse beauty pageant. First comes Lyrio, whose principal flaw is extreme arrogance. The next suitor to speak, Narciso, is excessively vain. In fact, Rosa reacts very negatively to Narciso’s vanity, stating, “O, quanto el Narciso precia / Su amor propio” ‘Oh, how Narciso prizes / his self-love’ and “Me enoja su prezuncion” ‘His presumption angers me’ (283). Bienmequiere, the third in line to address Rosa, not only describes himself as “la flor del amor” ‘the flower of love’ (258) but also claims that he *is* love embodied, an allusion to Venus. This excess pride does not work in his favor; rather, as an amplification of self-worth, it diminishes his suitability for marriage. Indeed, Rosa does not pay him much attention and instead asks Mosqueta to identify the lone suitor not brazen enough to approach her.

Maria do Céu does not cast all qualities traditionally gendered as feminine in a negative light. Clavel, the only one among the suitors who deems himself unworthy of Rosa’s interest, uses a traditionally Christian and feminine rhetoric

⁴ This play is not available in any modern edition and the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal houses the only known source text. Ana Hatherly states, “não consta que alguma vez tenham sido representadas no nosso século, nem tão pouco comentadas (ou até talvez lidas) pela maior parte dos estudiosos da literatura portuguesa. A explicação para esse facto é simples: o teatro produzido por autores portugueses no período barroco (e não só no reinado de D. João V) deve ser a área da história da nossa literatura menos conhecida e estudada” (5-6).

of abject humility to describe himself. This rhetoric of humility was common among early modern nun authors, as Arenal and Schlau explain: “Formulas of obedience, greeting, self-deprecation, respect, gratitude, and closing were often used by convent writers” (15). While authors usually employed these tools to protect and give authority to their texts, Soror Maria extends them to her characters. It is essential to recognize the Christian context of this play. Soror Maria wrote *Clavel, y Rosa* in the convent, and monastic gender norms may not align perfectly with those in play in society at large. In the context of monastic life, Clavel’s behavior reflects appropriate religious masculinity. As a member of the Holy Family and the husband of the Virgin Mary, Catholic tradition dictates that Joseph would have lived a sort of monastic lifestyle, at least in terms of perpetual celibacy. However, while Clavel arguably fits the monastic ideal, he does not truly live a monastic life. Rather, he exists and operates in the world and therefore is subject to its standards.

After Rosa sees each of her suitors and evaluates them in turn, she asks them to return to the very same place the next day, explaining that the first suitor to arrive will earn a favor from her. Everyone leaves the stage except for Clavel, who is determined not to lose his chance to receive a kindness from Rosa. Although he tries to remain awake, he cannot keep his eyes open. Once Clavel falls asleep, Amor Perfecto enters the stage and begins to sing to the slumbering suitor, encouraging Clavel’s amorous intentions with song. The divine figure then disappears and Clavel awakens, frightened. Upon finding himself alone onstage, and with Amor’s song echoing in his ears, he launches into a short soliloquy. He meekly states, “No he de salir a hablarla de atrevido / por que no piense que el favor le pido. / Ella me mirará, si la fortuna / me levanta, más alto que la luna” ‘I must not be so daring as to speak to her / so that she does not think that I ask her for a favor. / She will look at me, if fortune / raises me up higher than the moon’ (264). He dares only to hope that Rosa might look his way, since speaking with such a divine being seems far out of his reach.⁵

Because of Clavel’s humility, he proves to be the only flower worthy of Rosa. The stage directions indicate that when the four male flowers appear onstage, “el Clavel queda retirado” ‘Clavel remains behind’ (256). He speaks only once—in

⁵ Clavel’s stance resonates with the love poetry of the Italian *stilnovisti* of the late thirteenth-century, and of Dante Alighieri’s poetic subject in *Vita nuova* (New life) and the *Commedia* (Comedy), which elevates specific women to divine status.

an aside—until addressed directly by Rosa. While at first Rosa chides his timidity by stating, “Mui poco valor tenéis” ‘You have very little courage’ (259), his humility soon endears him to her. He claims: “Solo merezco en mirar / que no llego a merecer” ‘I only deserve to look / as I am not worthy’ (260), which leads Rosa to declare him courteous and piques her interest.

Clavel’s self-effacing behavior is not in line with the gendered norms found in Diego de Saavedra Fajardo’s treatise, *Idea de un principe politico christiano* (Idea of a Christian politician prince, 1640). Saavedra Fajardo states: “Quien duda desconfia de su mérito. Quien disimula confiesa su indignidad. La modestia se queda atrás despreciada” ‘He who doubts distrusts his merit. He who dissembles confesses his unworthiness. Modesty is left behind, disregarded’ (209). Armon expounds on this idea, explaining that an early modern man must seize his opportunity for advancement or self-promotion and not let his position be usurped by a competitor, since any loss of face or public slight related to inaction or humility could erode one’s social capital (65). Clavel’s humility and self-doubt, however, improves Rosa’s estimation of him. In fact, upon making her final decision regarding which suitor she will accept, she eventually declares, “Ninguno mejor que el Clavel me está” ‘No one is better for me than Clavel’ (308). Indeed, Clavel’s self-effacement never wanes throughout the play. In the third act, after each suitor tells Rosa of his dream, Clavel’s aside is very different from that of his counterparts. His “O’ como me temo indigno” ‘Oh, how I fear myself unworthy’ appears in stark contrast to the reactions of the other suitors when they contemplate their chances of winning Rosa’s hand in marriage. Lyrio believes that those around him see him as “alentado” ‘encouraged,’ Bienmequiere haughtily declares, “Quien duda que soy el nobio” ‘Who doubts that I am the betrothed,’ and Lyrio arrogantly proclaims, “Quien duda que a mi grandeza se ha de llegar el laurel” ‘Who doubts that my greatness will receive the laurel wreath’ (296). Only Clavel doubts that he will receive Rosa’s favors. He laments, “Quien duda que todos pueden / Mejor que yo merecer” ‘Who doubts that all can be more deserving than I’ (296). The three conceited suitors consistently display this unbecoming conduct, which is made worse when seen in contrast to Clavel’s actions and words.

Furthermore, Rosa’s suitors practice a behavior that Armon considers a medieval (not early modern) standard of masculinity: authentic speech (65). The idea here is that men should speak their mind, even when their speech is negative

or offensive. Armon argues that during the medieval period, authenticity was more highly valued than social sensitivity or tact. Unfortunately for Lyrio and his counterparts, the early modern expectations were that men should practice self-restraint, even in their language. Armon explains that “authenticity took cover behind a carefully cultivated mask of affability” and that “self-concealment came to be regarded not as a vice but as [...] a new masculine virtue” (67). Rosa’s suitors do not employ this dissimulation to curry favor with her. Indeed, all the suitors except Clavel reveal their egocentricity as they argue over who deserves the unreachable Rosa:

Bien mequiere: *Yo* fui el primero en llegar.
Narciso: *Yo* el primero en la atención.
Lyrio: *Yo* el primero en la partida.
Bien mequiere: *Yo* que el bien me quiere soy
Narciso: *Yo* fui...
Lyrio: *Yo* he sido...
Mosqueta: Y ninguno ha valido un caracol.
Lyrio: *Mi* disvelo...
Narciso: *Mi* cuidado... (268; emphasis my own)

[Bien mequiere: *I* was the first to arrive.
Narciso: *I* the first in attention.
Lyrio: *I* the first to leave.
Bien mequiere: *I* am he who is well-loved.
Narciso: *I* was...
Lyrio: *I* have been . . .
Mosqueta: And not one is worth a snail.
Lyrio: *My* wakefulness...
Narciso: *My* care...]

Their unabashed expression of self-love, arrogance, and pride repulses Rosa. On the other hand, Clavel says nothing out of reverence, and his silence and reticence endears him to her. The other suitors, convinced of their great worth, leave one by one while pronouncing their greatness:

Lyrio: Otro podrá ser más fino / mas no podrá ser mayor.
Narciso: Otro habrá de más fineza / pero de más gala no.
Bien mequiere: Otro si de mayor dicha / mas no de mayor valor. (269)

[Lyrio: Another may be finer, but he could not be greater.
Narciso: Another may be more refined, but not better adorned.
Bien mequiere: Another may be more fortunate, but not of greater value.]

These masculine characters engage in decidedly unmasculine behavior by way of this vocal expression of extreme hubris. Clavel alone stands out from his counterparts by not calling attention to himself. When he finally expresses his desire to know whom Rosa chooses and humbly laments, “Nó mereciendo ser yo” ‘I am undeserving,’ Rosa explains to him, “ya llevaes el favor” ‘you already have my favor’ (270). He is the best choice precisely because he thinks that he is unworthy of her affection.

Another unseemly behavior eschewed by Clavel but embraced by his competitors is that of letting jealousy dictate their actions. This negative emotion appears in contradiction to early modern thought about hegemonic masculinity. As Francisco Manuel e Melo points out in his *Carta de guia de casados*, “para não ser hum homem cioso, convém que seja prudente” (102). Man should be, first and foremost, rational and prudent. When addressing Amor perfeito in Act II, Clavel explains, “Aunque me dexes temores / Nunca me puedes dar zelos” ‘although you leave me with fears / You can never make me jealous’ (271). He knows that he is unworthy of Rosa’s love and attention. In his estimation, only someone who thinks that he deserves Rosa could be jealous of other suitors, thus revealing yet again his extreme humility. Self-effacement protects Clavel from the ills of jealousy. The other flowers, particularly Girassol, cannot imagine love without jealousy. Girassol defends jealousy as a product of true love, saying, “nó puede en querer / Haver incendio sin llama” ‘in love there cannot / be a fire without flame’ (272). In other words, where there is smoke, there is fire. When Girassol sings a song that intertwines the concepts of love and jealousy, Clavel claims that such an “alto empleo” ‘high position’ (273) is beyond his understanding. Ostensibly, the artistry of Girassol’s music is what lies outside Clavel’s grasp. His lack of understanding, however, reveals his unpretentious nature rather than simple-mindedness.

Despite Clavel's earlier claims that he is immune to jealousy, in the second act, he seems to undermine his earlier statement as he differentiates between kinds of jealousy. According to him, "zelos villanos" 'indecorous jealousy' and "zelos grosseros" 'improper jealousy' (285) only lead to pain, not respect, while the positive manifestation of this emotion proves the lover's affection for his beloved. After Clavel's speech, the other flowers in the garden, led by Jacinto, burst into applause offstage while the other suitors express their inability to understand this praise, revealing that they are victims of the bad kind of jealousy:

Lyrio: Y porque entre todos el / La sentencia mereció,

Narciso: Porque màs honor alcança?

Bien mequiere: Porque más Gloria ganó? (287)

[Lyrio: And why out of all of us did he merit being chosen?

Narciso: Because he has more honor?

Bien mequiere: Because he has won more glory?]

These three feminized suitors are ruled by emotion and never express the rational thinking expected of men during the early modern period. Through these male characters, who behave in ways tolerated in women and abhorred in men, Soror Maria calls attention to and scrutinizes gender norms that celebrate supposed masculine virtues and paint so-called feminine characteristics as deleterious.

Compared with contemporaneous convent theater, Soror Maria do Céu's male characters stand apart. In other early modern plays by women religious, male characters are typically either righteous (Divino, Ángel, Dios, Entendimiento, Esposo, don Juan de Austria) or wicked (Mundo, Engaño, Demónio, Apetito, Ali Baxá) but not submissive. They may be well-meaning but ignorant (Pastor) or misguided (Celo Indiscreto) and therefore dismissed or corrected by the female characters, but unlike Clavel they are never subservient. In fact, the typical pictorial representations of Joseph utilize the regal lily to signify Mary's husband rather than the humble carnation. In Soror Maria's play, Lyrio's principal characteristic is arrogance and Clavel plays his humble foil.

“Masculine” Women

Toward the beginning of *Clavel, y Rosa*, Soror Maria establishes Mosqueta as a servant to Rosa, somewhat like the traditional *criada* role. Mosqueta even says “si fuera galán” ‘if I were a gentleman’ (261) while imagining herself in the place of the hapless suitors as Rosa tells them to return the next day to complete a task so she can see who will be the most attentive and quickest to obey. Each suitor responds positively to the challenge:

Lyrio: Yo con prisas...

Narciso: Yo con alas...

Bienmequiere: Yo con ansias...

Clavel: Volaré. (261)

[Lyrio: I quickly...

Narciso: I with wings...

Bienmequiere: I anxiously...

Clavel: I will fly.]

Rosa expects the men to wake early to rise to the occasion, and she hopes Clavel will come out on top. Her request echoes Fray Luis’s assertion that “no sólo la casa, sino también la salud, pide a la buena mujer que madrugue” ‘not only the house, but also well-being, asks the good woman to rise early’ (63). In this case, however, the tables are turned as the female protagonist requires her male counterparts to behave in a way traditionally expected of women. The self-absorbed suitors’ inability to live up to this expectation lowers Rosa’s estimation of them. Bienmequiere offers his excuse first: “Por el aurora aguardé / para coger su albor” ‘I waited for the aurora / to catch the daybreak (265). Narciso follows, explaining that he was only late because he was looking in the mirror and making himself pretty as a favor to Rosa. Lyrio claims that he left at night to arrive on time, but he still falls behind Clavel in devotion. Rosa, clearly in a position of authority and power within the structure of the play, strongly chastises each one in turn with phrases such as “Muy mal me entendéis, que yo / estimo la prontitud” ‘You do not understand me well, as I / value promptness’ (266) and “Yo hermosura no os pedí, / sino disvelo” ‘I did not ask you for beauty / rather

wakefulness' (266). Only Clavel escapes this verbal lashing. He does so by exceeding the norms of feminine behavior. He did not arise early to arrive first; rather, he never left.

The first act ends with a preliminary judgment in favor of Clavel, and as the second act begins, he reflects on and revels in his love for Rosa. He states, "Magestad tan soberana / No ha de mirar como humana, / Aunque esté como muger" 'such sovereign majesty is not to be seen as human even though it may be in the form of a woman' (271). He later declares her to be "una hija del Sol, [...] una luz pura, / que esta quazi deidad, y es creatura / a quien mortal ninguno se halla digno" 'a daughter of the sun, [...] a pure light, that is almost deity, and is a creature of whom no mortal is found worthy' (274). Since the action of the play takes place long before Mary fulfills her sacred role as the mother of Christ, we first identify her as simply a woman (an imperfect human) and not yet divine. However, Soror Maria treats her as if she had already attained that elevated status. Soror Maria figuratively places Rosa/Mary above the other characters around her. In fact, Rosa herself even claims that she is free of passion since she has yet to see the color of human feelings (281). In other words, although she physically occupies an earthly realm, her soul resides on a higher plane.

Early modern definitions of *homem*, such as the one included in Bluteau's dictionary, assumed men to be superior to women, a result of Catholic theology indicating that men are nearer to perfection than are their female counterparts and therefore closer to God. This hierarchy of God, man, woman is an essential tenet of Catholic doctrine that pervades even modern iterations of Christianity. As the *Diccionario de autoridades* states, man was made in God's image and by his hand. The Latin Vulgate states in Genesis 1:27, "[E]t creavit Deus hominem ad imaginem suam ad imaginem Dei creavit illum masculum et feminam creavit eos" 'And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them.' Woman seems almost an afterthought, permanently distant from the divine. However, in *Clavel, y Rosa*, Soror Maria negates Mary's natural human state and moves her toward her eventual glorified state.⁶

⁶ Catholic doctrine sets Mary apart from birth as the vessel of God. In convent plays, however, she is often held up as a concrete example for the nuns in attendance to follow. In other words, she is someone with whom nuns can identify, as she and they find themselves in the paradoxical condition of being both virgin and mother—a flesh and blood example of celestial potential.

Male Misreading and Misinterpretation

The theme of dreams and how their interpretation or misinterpretation relates to reality dominates the third act of *Clavel, y Rosa*. The first dream to be revealed belongs to Rosa. She sees the heavens fall to the earth and into her lap, thus foreshadowing her divine role as the mother of Christ, a heavenly being who will condescend to live as a mortal. While her dream is easily interpreted as divine revelation foreshadowing the birth of Christ, the dreams revealed by her suitors are much harder to interpret and classify. Narciso's dream, as is to be expected, centers on waters that serve as a mirror. By tasting these waters, he becomes even more beautiful (292). He believes that this imagining confirms his beliefs about the superiority of his appearance. Lyrio's dream is also self-centered; he sees himself in his mind's eye as tall and great, with "pompa, lustre, y gentileza" 'pomp, luster, and graciousness' (293). Rosa, of course, immediately recognizes and rejects the vanity of this dream. In turn, Bienmequiere dreams about a glorious and pure wedding, attended by stars. The sun, which Bienmequiere perceived as representing himself, necessarily fills the role of the bridegroom.

These suitors misinterpret their dreams precisely because they are blinded by the "feminine" weaknesses of excessive self-love and egotism. Although these nocturnal imaginings seem less than portentous, Mosqueta foreshadows the end of the play when she warns the flowers that what they describe to Rosa are not merely dreams but rather presages of things to come: "ni siempre, o flores, / El sueño, sueño es" 'not always, oh flowers, is a dream a dream' (294). The three suitors then ask Rosa to interpret the dreams, which she deigns to do even though "nó es justo se examine / Con curiosidad infiel / Del oculto lo sagrado / Antes de dexarse ver" 'it is not right that the sacred part of what is hidden be examined with unfaithful curiosity before coming to light' (294). Rosa first explains Bienmequiere's dream of the wedding. Here she sees her own marriage carried out according to the will of her father. This union will bring to pass "estos futuros" these futures' (295) and will be "embidia de los Cielos" 'envy of the Heavens' and "gloria del Vergel" 'glory of the Orchard' (295). At this point, all the suitors but one engage in a misreading. Narciso, Lyrio, and Bienmequiere are self-centered enough to express confidence that they have been chosen as the bridegroom. Only Clavel repeatedly reveals his doubts, which stem from a deep-

seated humility that borders on self-deprecation. Soror Maria presents this self-effacement as admirable.

What is more, Clavel is the only one who does not openly admit that he had a dream. Only when pressed by Rosa does he reveal his nocturnal vision, despite feeling “*dudozo entre sombras*” ‘doubtful among the shadows’ (296). Utilizing the allegorical language related to the mystical union, he reveals an experience that is both painful and sweet. Clavel says that in his dream he was among flowers that “*con sus espinos me picavan*” ‘poked me with their thorns’ (297). Intriguingly, Clavel is the only one of the four suitors who suffers pain during his reverie. While the others see only their own beauty or good fortune, Clavel’s bittersweet experience reflects that of a much more elevated group of people: saints. The act of being pierced during a divine vision is not only a very gendered experience but also one often shared by mystics. Although both male and female mystics reported interactions of this nature, being pierced by a divine manifestation places mystics such as Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Teresa of Avila, and Saint John of the Cross in a position of submission traditionally reserved for women. Clavel’s phallic dream is both “*suave, y cruel*” ‘gentle and cruel’ (297) and it places him in a passive and subservient position contrary to his supposed masculinity. Although Clavel expresses his feelings about the dream, Mosqueta is the one who correctly interprets it. She explains that the blue flowers whose thorns pierced Clavel represent the envy he feels. In other words, his current experience is painful but will later bring joy, thus reflecting the process by which Rosa eventually chooses Clavel as her partner.

Not a single male character correctly interprets these presages. Narciso, Lyrio, and Bienmequiere see their visions as affirming their egotistic beliefs about their own worth. Clavel, while clearly void of the narcissism of his counterparts, misinterprets in a different way. He still does not understand that Rosa has chosen him. When Clavel dares to imagine himself at Rosa’s side, it is as if he sees “*un boron junto a un crystal*” ‘a stain next to a crystal’ (301). He even claims he is better off in his “*estado de excluido*” ‘excluded state’ (301) because if he were to be chosen by his beloved, this good fortune would be so intense that he would lose his mind: “*Su sabor no he de comprar / A costa de mi locura*” ‘I must not purchase its flavor at the cost of my sanity’ (302). Even when it is clear to the audience that Rosa has chosen her suitor, Clavel remains ignorant of her predilection until the moment she announces her choice. Not only does he

believe himself unworthy of her attention (“Dudo em mi temor fatal, / Que una Rosa Celestial, / Sea de un Clavel terreno” ‘I doubt in my fatal fear that a Celestial Rose would belong to a terrestrial Carnation’) but he cannot even imagine who might earn such a high honor (“O’ quien pudiera / Merecer Gloria tan alta, / Que a las Estrellas exalta” ‘Oh who could deserve such a glory so high that it exalts the stars’) (303). He, like his counterparts, misreads not only his dream but also the woman he aspires to marry and her consistent, subtle messages of approval. He misconstrues all types of texts placed before him.

This consistent misinterpretation on the part of the male characters stands in stark contrast to the correct and insightful interpretations carried out by the female characters. In a society in which men function as the seat of reason and in a religion that admonishes women to keep silent regarding religious matters, this juxtaposition reveals men acting in feminine ways alongside women who act in masculine ways.⁷ It was expected that men, particularly members of the clergy, should be able to not only speak of sacred topics with authority but also counsel others on faith, sin, and repentance. Women, however, were neither expected nor encouraged to interpret sacred texts or to counsel parishioners. Even claims of direct communication with God could prove dangerous for early modern women. The drastic role reversal in *Clavel, y Rosa* reveals an *intramuros* undermining of hegemonic masculinity as well as a questioning of gender roles in general.

Conclusion

Soror Maria lived and wrote in a society that strictly ordered and controlled gender roles for both men and women. Certain behaviors deemed feminine could subject a man to scrutiny and could even have dire consequences, as evidenced by the inquisitorial cases of Antonio Homem and Manuel João. Considering prescriptive Iberian treatises, the male characters in *Clavel, y Rosa* fail to live up to early modern gender norms for men. The behavior of Clavel, Bienmequiere, Narciso, and Lyrio are certainly not in keeping with late seventeenth-century

⁷ In the Latin Vulgate, 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 reads, “[M]ulieres in ecclesiis taceant non enim permittitur eis loqui sed subditas esse sicut et lex dicit / si quid autem volunt discere domi viros suos interrogent turpe est enim mulieri loqui in ecclesia” ‘Let women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak but to be subject, as also the law saith. But if they would learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is a shame for a woman to speak in the church.’

Iberian ideals of masculinity. However, while Rosa judges their egotism, she simultaneously valorizes Clavel's excess of humility and chooses him as her partner based on his consistent self-effacement. At the same time, Rosa eschews expectations for early modern women by behaving in ways traditionally reserved for men, particularly in terms of controlling the terms of her own marriage.

Clavel, y Rosa reveals a resistance to and even an inversion of early modern expectations of masculinity. Soror Maria portrays some supposedly feminine traits as not only acceptable but also virtuous when possessed by both men *and* women while other attributes and behaviors despised in women are similarly unsightly and distasteful when manifested by men. Conversely, so-called male behaviors and characteristics elevate a terrestrial female character to the level of the divine. Although a Portuguese convent seems an unlikely place to upend early modern Iberian norms of masculinity, Soror Maria nonetheless subverts, confuses, and resists prescriptive masculinity through the dominant Rosa, the meek Clavel, and an outlandish group of arrogant suitors. Beyond this, Soror Maria creates a space of negotiation between the masculine and the feminine that allows for a reassessment of what it meant to be an *homem* in late seventeenth-century Iberia.

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