



SOR MARÍA GERTRUDIS HORE AND HER CROSS: THE BURDEN OF DOUBT IN THE POETRY OF AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NUN¹

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Introduction

María Gertrudis Hore y Ley, the puzzling, enigmatic “medio mundana, medio monja” (Morand, *Una poetisa* 113) of late eighteenth-century Spain, has captivated the interest of a growing number of contemporary Spanish literary scholars. The comparatively prolific and talented poet rose to the literary ranks of many of her peers, including the likes of Nicolás Fernández de Moratín and José Cadalso. One early commentator, Eustaquio Fernández de Navarrete, defended her literary genius by reminding readers that Hore was well established in several prominent periodicals when Moratín and Cadalso were barely beginning to write, and even opined that Meléndez himself “could have taken lessons” from Hore (qtd. in Wilson 568). Another scholar asserts that Hore is “one of the few Spanish women writers of the late eighteenth century who has been recognized by the generations that followed her as an important figure of her era,” occupying an important position between Saint Teresa and Sor Juana of the Golden Age, and Fernán Caballero and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda of the Spanish Romantic period (Lewis 61).

It is not only Hore’s literary talent that has piqued scholarly interest; it is also the unusual circumstances in which she published her poetry —as a cloistered, married nun. While literary nuns were hardly an anomaly,² married nuns were. In fact, Hore’s earliest biographer, Nicolás Cambiaso of Cádiz, claimed that Hore was the first example the Western Church had witnessed of a married woman taking the veil (75). Such unusual circumstances, combined with her virtual literary anonymity (the majority of Hore’s printed works being published anonymously or under her initials), have somewhat obscured her work. Her literary reputation was further eclipsed after Romantic writer Fernán Caballero, alias for Cecilia Böhl de Faber, concocted a heavily fictionalized romantic legend about Hore (involving an adulterous escapade, a murdered but miraculously resurrected

¹ This essay won the Pilar Sáenz Annual Student Essay Prize from the Ibero-American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (IASECS).

² Bolufer Peruga states that during the eighteenth century, one-third of women writers came from the religious profession (“Mujeres y Letras”).

lover, and penitent retreat into the convent) for her 1857 work *Relaciones* (Morand, "Primer Acercamiento" 173). While recent scholarship has done much to recover Hore's literary contributions and biographical details, one other facet of Hore's life and work remains misunderstood and largely neglected: the complex religious sensibilities expressed in her unpublished manuscripts and poems.

Frédérique Morand has noted that the debate over María Gertrudis Hore's religious vocation, or lack thereof, has been a significant theme in Hore's historiography. Scholars have speculated about the motives that led Hore to abandon her spouse and her luxurious lifestyle as the city's "Hija del Sol" just at the height of her social splendor, and whether she did so for religious reasons. Explanations have hovered around polarizing possibilities about Hore's shallow theatricality, worldly disillusionment, disappointed love, vexed vanity, pious penitence, or punitive, coerced exile.³ These suppositions, however, fail to accurately reflect the sentiments expressed in her work, which reveal the anguished uncertainty of a socially successful but spiritually weak woman in an unusual liminal space, in which she strives to adapt to a cloistered life, seek a spiritual conversion, and maintain strong ties with the secular, literary world of eighteenth-century Cádiz.

While most scholars have largely ignored or sanitized the complex religious sentiments in Hore's works, Elizabeth Lewis and Constance Sullivan have ventured to find in Hore's work an earnest spiritual element,

³ Cambiaso cited a report of Hore's Mother Superior to substantiate his claim that she was a pious soul who, disillusioned with the attractions and stale applause of the world, entered the convent in a valiant sacrifice of pleasure and fame (75-76). Caballero's myth enshrined her as beautiful socialite who penitently secluded herself in the convent after an adulterous catastrophe, then lived thereafter a "vida ejemplar" and "murió como una santa (Morand, "Primer Acercamiento" 173; Caballero 170), and Cueto doctored her work to present a "religiosa feliz" (Morand 68). Adolfo Castro, a year after Caballero's publication, considered the possibility of conventual exile for adultery or because of an aversion to the idea of growing old in the sight of the world that adored her as young and beautiful (Morand, *Una poetisa* 70). Contemporary scholarship has produced just as many varied explanations: Sebold attributes her decision to her egotistical sense of melodrama, after which she lived as a shallow and spoiled religious hypocrite (297, 302-303) while Palacios Fernández argues for a sincere religious conversion that resulted in a literature full of "versos de sincero arrepentimiento" y "amor a Dios" (93-94). Mónica Bolufer Peruga contends a lack of pure religious vocation, if not a poetic one ("Escritura femenina"), while Elizabeth Lewis believes she sought a refuge for her writing in the intimate walls of the convent (87), and Morand argues that Hore was forced into the convent because of adultery (a not uncommon solution for "loose" women in early modern Catholic locales ["El papel de las monjas 46"]) and almost exclusively interprets Hore's work through the lens of a bitter and unjust exile (*Una poetisa* 77).

though Lewis attributes it to the conflict between her “desire to serve God and her desire to write” (83), which I will argue represents only one facet of her spiritual wrestle. I agree with Sullivan’s assessment that much of Hore’s work revealed a “desperate introspection through poetry into her own tortured soul—a soul cold to God that begged for the internal fire of a sure faith” (174), though Sullivan’s sparse summary needs significant substantiation, something I will attempt to provide here through a more comprehensive analysis of Hore’s religiously-themed manuscripts.

Recovering and understanding the religious dimension of Hore’s writings is valuable to a fuller reconstruction of this important literary figure. On a broader level, Hore’s poetry provides a rare glimpse into the lived religious experience of eighteenth century Spanish women. The historiography of 18th century Spanish women tends primarily to treat the issues of *tertulias*, education, legal rights, social mores, and literary representations, while the broader cultural historiography often focuses on overarching themes of Bourbon reforms, ecclesiastical politics, colonial encounters, and intra-European dealings. In neither approach, however, is the dimension of religious experience typically addressed—an important facet of the human experience itself, as well as of the societal experience in Catholic Spain. A deeper look at the context and content of María Gertrudis Hore’s unpublished poems can advance a more nuanced history of Spanish women and enrich our understanding of eighteenth-century Spanish culture.

Of course, gleaning autobiographical data from literature is a tenuous, if important, business; as one scholar expressed it, the “question of the relation between the life of the poet and the poems is always, and particularly today, a critical focus of argument in literary theory. The balance between a reader’s external knowledge of a poet’s life and work, on the one hand, and the autonomy of the poem, on the other, is always debatable” (Barnstone 66). Hence, the following analysis tries to be sensitive to the mediated nature of all texts, especially while assessing the “sincerity of lyric expression” (Weber 41).

The Transition from Secular to Religious Life

María Gertrudis Hore y Ley, born in 1742, was raised in Cádiz by wealthy mercantile Irish parents. At age nineteen, she married one of her father’s business partners, Esteban Fleming, in what eventually became an unhappy arrangement due to the failure of business relations between the two families (Jaffe 176). But as an educated, beautiful, and talented woman, Hore became a beloved participant in the literary and social scene,⁴ and

⁴ See Hore’s exchange of poetic letters with Don Gonzalo de Cañas and other members of Don Antonio Ulloa’s *tertulia* in Morand’s anthology: “Despedida que dejó escrita al marchar de Cádiz a Madrid, *la Hija del Sol*, para las damas de la tertulia de Don Antonio Ulloa,” “Respuesta de Don Gonzalo de Cañas,” and

according to Cambiaso, garnered the nickname "Hija del Sol" to "significar...cuánto brillaba entre las otras damas por su dulcísima voz y hechiceros encantos y melifluos versos, y ostentación en su persona y casa" (qtd. in Morand, *Vivencia* 17-18).

At twenty-six years of age, Hore's first poetic pursuits bore fruit in the form of two anonymous poems included in a compilation by the Ayuntamiento de Cádiz honoring the twelve-year old prodigy María Rosario Cepeda (Morand, *Una poetisa* 54). Hore's poems, praising the young girl's talents and offering advice against the distractions and dangers of love and wasteful idleness, also reveal traces of envy for the "fama admirada" she herself was not able to achieve. "No pudiendo imitarte," she admits, "a celebrarte, solamente atiendo" ("Endechas Reales" 41, 43-44).⁵ However, an acute awareness of her own gifts is disclosed by the audacious epigraphs to the same poems: "Una dama adoptiva de Febo, y como tal, major Thalia" and "De la misma reina de las musas" ("Endechas Reales" and "Romance Heroico"). These unabashed allusions to reining over the muses and descending from Apollo, the god of eloquence and poetry, provide a foretaste to the spiritual anxieties that will surface in her later poems as she struggles to reconcile her pride, ambition, and spiritual uncertainty.

Ten years later, during which time she seems to have born and lost a son (Morand, "¿Qué sabemos?"), she entered the Convento de la Purísima Concepción de Santa María of Cádiz in 1778 at the age of thirty-six with the permission of her husband. She professed in 1780 after year's novitiate, and selected the name Sor María de la Cruz for her conventual identity. The name provides tempting clues to scholars about the nature of her unusual admission into the convent. Did she choose the name, as Cambiaso believed, as a contrite sinner, clinging to the "only hope in which the penitent should trust?" (qtd. in Sullivan 159). Or did the cross represent an instrument of torture and punishment, a fitting allegory for the punitive "death" Hore experienced upon being forced into the convent, as Morand argues (*Una poetisa* 77)? Perhaps the name was chosen for an exemplar, after Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the most famous literary nun of the Golden Age? Or perhaps after San Juan de la Cruz, another renowned Spanish poet and mystic whose most famous poem, "Noche oscura del alma," spoke of the affliction of divine silence? Hore's surviving papers do not address the subject, but some religious significance seems very likely. Of equal

"Respuesta de la Hija del Sol." Russell Sebold suggests the likelihood that Hore crossed paths with Iriarte and Cadalso in the Madrid *tertulias* (296). Bolufer also notes her travels between Cádiz and Madrid to attend some of the more illustrious literary *tertulias* ("Escritura femenina").

⁵ All cited poems of María Gertrudis Hore y Ley are found in Morand's anthology, listed by title and verse.

significance, however, is the fact that she signed the published works sent from her conventual cell with the initials of her social name, H.D.S. (Hija del Sol), not her religious name.

Russell Sebold interprets her choice of signature as Hore's "recuerdo de su epíteto y éxitos de niña mimada de la sociedad elegante" (302), and in light of her poetry's style (the popular, secular salon fashion of the Rococo, with Anacreontic themes and meters), concludes Hore lacked any semblance of religious sincerity. However, not only does the content of her unpublished works expose a much more intimate and troubled spiritual and emotional landscape (which will be discussed in detail shortly), but the context in which she was writing can shed light on the religious difficulties that plagued nuns, laymen, and leader alike.

Religious Context

Hore would not have been an exception if indeed her spiritual vocation were uncertain or fraught, contrary to Russell indictments of her supposed religious hypocrisy. Sound spiritual conversions and devoted professors of the faith seemed hard to come by in eighteenth century Spain. Many of Spain's elites were concerned with overcoming the aesthetic excesses of the Baroque, the dogmatic ignorance of scholasticism, and the superstitions of popular Catholic practices. The realm of religious reform was a sensitive one in a country long characterized by a strong marriage between church and state, and one rife with divisions and contentions among Jansenists, Jesuits, the Inquisition board, the clergy, the nobility, and the monarchy. Aside from the overarching ecclesiastical-political struggles over power and authority, there was an increasing preoccupation among reformers about the weak foundations of faith in a country that prided itself on being the fortress of Catholicism. Maintaining rigorous levels of orthodoxy and devotion was crucially important to the Spanish Catholic Church, and its reputation for doctrinal purity and strict orthodoxy was fiercely defended (Sanchez-Blanco 84).

Ecclesiastical efforts to bolster committed orthodoxy apparently suffered from a lack of sincere, interior spiritual devotion among lay participants (Mestre 150). One scholar notes the astonishment expressed by foreign travelers upon experiencing the "lack of dignity that Spaniards showed in their churches despite their dogmatic formalism of belief," manifest in the Spaniards' cavalier habits of dressing statues of the cathedrals in seasonal, fashionable attire. Even the child Jesus was at times "dressed as a canon, at others as a doctor or lawyer with a wig and carrying a cane with a golden hilt" (Crow 232). Such frivolity was not lost on the Spanish reformers; one magazine lamented the showmanship and vanity that characterized religious services completely devoid of religious fervor: "Women come in and march down the main aisle right to the main altar attracting the attention of every male present. Others mount the Presbytery

in order to be seen by everyone in the congregation. A meal lasting three hours can be a delightful affair, a dance lasting five or six hours can be a wonderful evening's entertainment; but a mass that lasts half an hour is insufferable, even if one is not kept on his knees" (Crow 232).

Even amidst the various disagreements over reform, there arose a unified "demand for a pure and internal Christianity...from the clear realization that the faith of the vast majority of the population rested on weak foundations" (Callahan 48). Sermons after mid-century expressed a growing ecclesiastical pessimism, brooding over Spain's status as a "Christian nation that had forgotten the basic obligations of religion, thereby inviting the vengeance of the Almighty" (Callahan 49). Clergy fretted over the "spirit of libertinism and dissolution... corrupting the morality and the customs of the nation," and the church developed a "theocratic and defensive view of itself as the only hope for the protection of Christian Spain," particularly after the outbreak of the French Revolution (Callahan 49).

The cloistered communities of nuns were not immune to such concerns and criticisms; the relaxation of morals, the extravagance, and the luxury of the *vida privada* that characterized most convents (including Santa María, the one Hore would join [Morand, *Vivencia* 286]) incited state reforms throughout Spain and Spanish America in the eighteenth century (Díaz 35; Lavrin 182). "Enlightened" critics challenged the monastic life as "decadent, wasteful, corrupt, ostentatious, and untrue to the precepts of 'true' Christianity," and Catholic and state reformers hastened to restore a more rigorous, simplified and dignified environment to the convents (Chowning 6-7).

In a study on church and society in 18th century Cádiz, one scholar follows the persistent struggle within the city's three convents to "aumentar el rigorismo conventual" (Morgado García 174). Nuns in favor of reform wrote letters to superiors, complaining of conventual abuses such as the loss of silence, the use of transparent, face-revealing veils, rebelliousness among the novitiates, and other forms of slackening in cloistered life (173). Prelates and superiors responded by multiplying or reinforcing rules to eliminate the presence of men, limit contact with the secular world (including family, to many nuns' chagrin), dramatically simplify the dress code and prohibit jewelry and finery. Don Francisco Javier de Utrera, the prelate of Santa María, was even compelled to issue constant warnings against "diversiones domésticas" (like baking confections), the scandalous racket around Carnival and festival days, the frivolity of dress, and the poor influence of the secular inmates or the clearly unconverted or unrepentant (174-176).

Indeed, amidst the "growing concern in Enlightenment Spain that many girls who took the veil lacked any real vocation" (Harrison 54), the distracting presence of the non-religious in the convents was no help.

Convents housed not only nuns, but served as “albergues eventuales de niños, internados para jóvenes, locales para solteras, refugios para viudas, residencias para ancianas,” and even permanent rehabilitation centers for adulteresses (Morand, “El papel” 47). Perhaps not always so permanent; the lewd, foul-mouthed doña Josefa Delgado, who was deposited at the convent of Santa María in 1786 by a husband fed up with her adulterous affairs, proved too much for Don Francisco and was hastily relocated elsewhere (Morgado García 176).

Attempts at establishing “un estado de clausura lo más rígido posible” (173) met with mixed reactions: some nuns zealously championed them, while others openly protested the encroachments upon their accustomed lifestyle. The suffocating regulations, in the words of a furious doña Juana Falcón, “nos va poniendo en una desesperación” because “quieren precisarnos a vivir en lo que no quisimos” (177). The tensions in the conventual interior often resulted in “distintas banderías que pugnaban durante las elecciones de abadesa,” exposing a disconcerting lack of unity or harmony among the nuns (178).

On the surface, then, it is hardly shocking that María Gertrudis Hore’s religious vocation is of questionable commitment. The abrupt transition from a highly successful secular life—possible coerced for adultery, as Morand has argued—could only have complicated the pursuit of religious devotion that already seemed elusive to so many in Spain at this time. An analysis of some of her more intimate, unpublished poems reveals much more than frivolity or dissolution, however. A poignant mixture of doubt, hope, bitterness, love, and uncertainty emerge from the verses. There seems to be substantial evidence to demonstrate that while religious devotion did not come easily to María Gertrudis, it was not for lack of concern or effort.

Poetic Traces of Religious Sensibility

María Gertrudis Hore was a highly unusual literary nun. The literary productions of most nuns, with a few exceptions,⁶ were confined to writings *por mandato* by their superiors. Such works included histories of their order, of notable spiritual predecessors, or spiritual autobiographies of their own mystical experiences (Bolufer, “Representaciones” 30). However, virtually all fourteen of Hore’s poems that were published in the periodicals were secular in nature. While she wrote, translated, and glossed several

⁶ Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, of course, published enormous amounts of non-religious poetry; María de San Alberto and Cecilia del Nacimiento were sisters who joined the Valladolid convent of the discalced Carmelites and participated in external poetry competitions that allowed them to keep “one foot in the secular and the other in the spiritual world by means of their writing.” (*Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works* (Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlauf) 147.

religious works at the request of her convent (Sullivan 180), vestiges of Hore's religious interior are best manifest in her unedited and unpublished works. Even there, however, her writings do not follow the traditional trajectory of writings *por mandato*; instead of celebrating the life of obedience or mystical visions of God, Hore dwells largely on spiritual struggle, insecurity and doubt.

Among the religiously natured works of María Gertrudis Hore, three prominent themes emerge: conversion from the secular world to the spiritual, the consecration of her talents, and spiritual doubt. However, the lack of dates on most of her unpublished manuscripts makes a clear trajectory difficult to establish; creating a coherent picture is also complicated by the puzzling discrepancies between Hore's religious manuscripts and the secular, bucolic, and sometimes self-aggrandizing poetry that she submitted for publication while in the convent. While Hore's secular poetry convinced Sebold that Hore lacked authentic religious fervor (302), other scholars have suggested a more moderate mixture of attempted devotion and a competing need to assert her poetic identity and talents (Lewis 83; Sullivan 174).

María Hore's self-assured ambitiousness was a fairly constant theme throughout much of her poetry. The immodest pseudonyms mentioned earlier take center stage via an extended mythic metaphor in one of her earliest poems (not submitted for publication until years into her religious profession). "Estaba Apolo en el Parnaso un día" is a sonnet that tells of "Fenisa" (one of the various pseudonyms Hore used) arriving at Parnaso (the mythic center of poetry and learning) to find Apollo "repartiendo guirnaldas diferentes" (2). Seeing everyone else with crowns adorning their foreheads, Fenisa asks boldly, "¿dónde está...la corona mía?" (8). Upon learning that "la riqueza" is not permitted in Apollo's realm, Fenisa readily replies "con presteza," "si esto no más en mí te desagrada,/ coróname que admito la probreza" (13-14). Lewis finds in this sonnet a fusion of the sacred and the mythic; evidence of Hore's "earnest struggle" between her "desire to serve God and her desire to write" (83), while Sebold finds a strain of pre-romantic egotism (300). The poem's unabashed self-confidence, and the contrast in later poems that used the same imagery in a much more religious light, makes it likely that the poem was not a sacred-mythic fusion, but a proclamation of the poet's own gifts.

Yet Hore's ambition seems to be tempered by developing religious aspirations that are evident in one of the earliest religious productions in Hore's poetic career, a novena published shortly before entering the convent in 1778. In the introduction, Hore explains that while worshiping in the Convento de Santa María beneath a rendering of the crucified Christ, she was struck by a "vivísimo deseo de componer una [novena] al Señor de la Esperanza." Most Novenas venerated the suffering Christ, and while "Todas las Efigies de Cristo Nuestro Redentor son iguales para nuestra

veneración,” she defends the idea that “el fervor se anima más con unas que con otras, según la inclinación, o sensibilidad de cada Sujeto” (“Novena” 161). Not only did Hore reject the trend of women’s religious writing that focused intensely on the suffering body or the suffering Christ (Weber 44), but she chose to forge a devotional path following her *own* inclinations to worship the Christ of Hope.

This confidence in her own subjectivity, accompanied by continual supplications for protection against the enticements of pride and worldly fame, suggests an early and ongoing struggle to reconcile her ambitions and attachments to the world with the humility necessary for true devotion. The series of prayers continually calls upon God’s “infinita Bondad” and “imponderable Amor” as protection against her “humana fragilidad” (163) the “apego[s] al Mundo” and its “engaños,” “falsa brillantez” (165), “falsas glorias” (176) and approbation (173), the temptation to “vacilar en la peligrosa Carrera de esta miserable vida” (169), and the “soberbia” that afflicts “ojos atrevidos” (172). Hore’s pleas for fortification against worldly enticements grow even more specific as the novena progresses; in the penultimate prayer, the supplicant pleads for the memory of Christ to render her mind immune to “el aprecio que muestre [el Mundo] de cualquier talento, que como don de nuestra Soberana mano, sólo a Vos debe agradar, y a Vos sólo debe emplearse” (180). The acute awareness of her own talents and the need to consecrate them to God will resurface in later guilt-riddled poems. By the end of the novena, however, Christ’s own example of long-suffering and humility have apparently made her detest “los obsequios, y aplausos” of the world (177); after all, she reassures God (or herself)—“¿cómo podrá un Esclavo/ recibir atenciones/ de quien desprecia al Amo?” (177). A sense of conversion is struggling to take hold.

The anxious focus on acquiring modesty (172) and conquering self-love, pride, and a desire for the world’s love (176) seems wholly unique to Hore’s novena. A brief examination of several other novenas published during this time period reflect more general themes of worship, praise, devotion to particular saints, petitions for forgiveness and sanctification, or requests for souls in purgatory.⁷ Hore’s novena is a prime example of one of

⁷ See, for example, *Novena y breve relación del origen de la milagrosa imagen de Nuestra Señora de Consolación* by Joachin Camacho (Mexico: Imprenta del Nuevo Rezado: 1753); *Novena del glorioso patriarca S. Joaquin, padre de Maria SS.ma y abuelo de Christo Señor Nuestro* by Juan Nadal (Barcelona: 1760); *Novena de la Admirable Milagrosa Protector de imposibles, la coronada Esposa de Jesu-Christo, y Abogada de todas las enfermedades, Santa Rita de Casia* by la Viuda de Miguel de Ortega (Portal de las Flores: 1747); *Novena para rogar a Dios nuestro Señor por las benditas almas del purgatorio, y por los que están en pecado mortal*, by Agustín Ubách (Plaza Nueva: 1760); *Novena a la siempre venerable sma [santísima] Cruz; para celebrar sus tres festividades y para refugio de los fieles*, by D. Manuel Ximenez Carreño (Cádiz: 1790).

those rare texts that allow "closer access to women's experiences than to their self-conscious manipulation of those experiences to meet the expectations of readers, inquisitors, or others for whom the texts were fashioned" (Vollendorf 104). In a medium designed for general, devotional use, Hore inserts themes, anxieties, and yearnings unique to her own experience.

Another poem written months later, just days after her admission into the convent (Sullivan 160), depicts at least some measure of success in overcoming her attachments to vain ambitions and worldly aspirations. "Hasta cuándo, Gerarda" was published in the *Diario de Madrid* in 1795, representing an exception to her otherwise-secular printed poetry. Viewed as one of her more unquestionably autobiographical poems (Salgado 299), "Hasta cuándo, Gerarda" is a stark contrast to an earlier poetic exchange between the two friends "Gerarda" and "Fenisa" (another pseudonym for Hore). The earlier poem, "A Gerarda, la vida de la corte," was clearly written in Hore's secular days at court, and recounts the dazzling sensory world of music, dance, distractions, and passion (21, 25-26, 36). In contrast, "Hasta cuándo, Gerarda" reads as Anacreontic in form but certainly not content; it is a sober warning to her dear friend of the heartache that comes from squandering one's intellect and wit on frivolity, vanity, and love. Hore regretfully recalls the days when she, too, "templaba el instrumento, / creyéndole sonoro," only to find it was "cuando mas descompuesto" (14-16). Although in those days "Yo lloré ingraticudes, / yo celebraba afectos, / empleando en delirios / la dulzura del metro" (21-24), now she is "arrepentida / de tan frívolo empleo" (25-26) and "solo a dignos asuntos / dedicarle pretendo" (27-28). With her newfound dedication to use her gifts for "worthier matters," she no longer pledges allegiance to the garland-granting Apollo; Hore has found a new Phoebus and a new, sacred Parnassus (61). She urges her friend to seek this "nuevo Febo" in "nuestra común amiga... / ella te preste especies / a tus primeros versos" (49-52). In all likelihood, this "común amiga" is the Virgin Mary, whom Hore addresses often in later poems and religious works. Under her inspiration, the poet assures Gerarda that she will see "caer marchitas / esas rosas de Venus, / y perder la fragancia, / que te encantó algún tiempo" (57-60), just as the poet herself learned to break free of the world's enchantments in order to soar to a higher aesthetic and spiritual plane.

Strikingly similar language appears in another epistolary poem, this time addressed to her cousin, "Amado primo mío." Amidst the poem's refrains of conversion and consecration of the poet's talents, however, emerges an edge of bitterness that distinguishes this poem's tone from the more moralizing tenor of Hore's letter to Gerarda. The poem, another subverted Anacreontic, begins abruptly with the announcement that she has burned

all her old papers (not wholly true, as surviving collections attest), and now only “místicas poesías” are allowed her pen (8). She is unable to discuss with her cousin any “profanos asuntos,” or any already-distant memories of the world she has quite given up both emotionally and intellectually. “Ya mi numen rehusa / la invocación Antigua / del mentido Parnaso / y sus fingidas Ninfas” (13-16), she writes cuttingly of her old muses and gods, who are no longer simply sources of frivolity, as she had admonished Gerarda, but of lies and deceptions. Their spell is broken, she asserts, “desde que a mi frente / ciño la hermosa cifra / Del *veni electa mea*, / que aseguró mi dicha” (17-20).

The crown of roses from Venus, which has long since fallen “deshojadas / pisadas y marchitas” (21-24), has been replaced with the crown of salvation; the illusory happiness of the world, with the true happiness of God’s election. The poet has abandoned the “Deidad fementida” in order to be the “dichosa Víctima” “del amor divino” (28, 27) (with the Baroque paradoxical word choice drawing attention to its subtle meaning). “Mirtos y Ergastos,” the old flames that starred in her pastoral love poems of yore,⁸ have been forgotten and replaced by the “pastor más amante / le dediqué mi vida” (29-32). She closes the letter with an adamant reminder to her cousin that if he will find it impossible to acquire those papers of the past, which had only served as fuel for “unas memorias / ya de mi aborrecidas”; thus, she tautly concludes, “en esto no te puede / servir tu afecta prima” (35-38).

Hore’s confidence in her own conversion and assured salvation, however bitterly won, is agonizingly suspended in another “mística poesía”: the silva “A Jesús.” While Hore often subverts poetic devices, such as using the traditionally amorous Anacreontic form for somber themes, the silva here is apropos, as it is typically used for emotional narrations or soliloquies (Lauer “Silva”). “A Jesús” is highly emotional, in some moments nearing distasteful excess.⁹ The poem’s emotional rhetoric makes frequent use of intensifying words (like “tan” and “tanto/a”), successive repetition of verbs (“suspended, suspended” and “volved, volved,” etc.), highly visual metaphors, and expressive punctuation. The poem centers on Christ’s crucifixion, fixating on his broken body, spilled blood, and the pain caused by the sins of the world—in particular, her own. The poet alternatively pleads for mercy and condemns herself for her spiritually reckless life: “Yo aquella que atrevida / el campo de la vida / corrí desenfrenada, / cual bestia

⁸ See “Acróstico forzado: Mirteo Mio,” “Idilio,” “Madrigal,” and “Endechas: A mirtito, *Zagal, el más bello*” in Morand’s anthology.

⁹ Russell Sebold, while going to unnecessarily caustic extremes, points to Hore’s privileging of her own sins as the deepest source of Christ’s suffering (superseding even that of God the Father’s abandonment) as evidence of her insufferable egotism (306).

desbocada / cuando bárbara y necia no veía / lo mucho que os debía" (53-58). The poet attempts to review her sins, but is quickly overwhelmed by the sheer volume, and instead, focuses only on one crime: "Yo recibí el talento / y no solo con él nada ganaba, / mas con modo violento / solo para perderlo negociaba" (69-72). Lewis points out the scriptural undertones in Hore's guilt for squandering her gift, like the foolish servants in the parable of the talents (89). The poet's efforts to consecrate her gift of poetry to worthier uses, as expressed in her earlier poems and novena, seem to have failed. One wonders if this is, perhaps, evidence of regret over her decision to submit only secular and fairly frivolous poetry for publication, or for a failure to purify her motives from worldly gains. If this poem was written near the end of her life, as Sullivan suggests (177), then it is possible that she is lamenting her past literary choices. In any case, Hore concludes the *silva* by reassuring herself of Jesus' capacity to satisfy "la deuda que mi culpa ha contraído," for which she promises endless praise, remembrance, obedience and devotion (83).

Such desperate devotion and tenuous assurance are replaced with doubt and emptiness in several of her other religious poems. In the plaintive poem of unknown date, "No doy muestras de amarte, ¿qué pena?" the poet addresses "amorosas quejas" (3) to God, her "Eterno gozo mío" (1), and expresses a mixture of self-doubt, anguish, and confusion regarding the poet's spiritual standing and literary talents. A pained Hore wonders why God has permitted her to use her talents "sin amor tuyo" (5), and why she has been denied the flame of faith for which she has been pleading in her efforts to "engolfarme / en tu Divinidad" (11-12). After all, she reproaches him, it is "grande atrevimiento / el querer demostrar / algo de tu grandeza / sin saberlo explicar" (13-16). (Importantly, if this poem is of later date, then the burden of guilt for her hollow poetry has shifted from herself to God). "Viento Sereno, hermoso / Fuego, amor caridad," she pleads—"haz que yo participe / de tu inmenso volcán," (21-24). Lacking such divine fire, "frialdad" reigns in her "pecho...tan helado" (51-52, 54); yet the icy numbness brings no relief from anguish to a heart that "se quisiera inflamar" (55-56). The poem trails off, unable to find further words to give voice to the "dolor casi infinito" (61), and leaves her unexpressed pain to God's knowledge alone.

By the time she wrote her "Meditación," likely sometime in the last years of her life (Sullivan 174), Hore's yearnings for the flames of faith and divine love seem to have been swallowed up in the numbing sadness that before, she so earnestly resisted. The epistolary poem, addressed to a friend from whom she has just received "dulcísimos metros" (1), has a strikingly melancholy tone, eliciting the label "pre-romántico" (Sebold 304) and comparisons by critics with other *fin de siglo* Enlightenment writers such as Cadalso and Meléndez Valdés (Lewis 83). Amidst her reverie of weariness, death, and pain, she shifts the tone, perhaps ironically, to celebrate the

blunting effects of her melancholy. “¡Qué estado tan feliz! quien le conoce / no apetece más gustos ni más dichas, pues libre del temor y la esperanza / era de la nada, y nada le lastima” (21-24). Though Hore does not give an exact cause for her melancholy (at one point she wonders “¿Qué me aflige?” [71]), she closes the poem on a note of envy for her friend’s happy life in that “otro mundo” (81). If this poem was indeed written during her later years,¹⁰ then perhaps her yearning for the life outside the convent signals a high degree of spiritual frustration and exhaustion.

Her final mystic poem, “A vos, padre amoroso,” is the richest and most poignant expression of her spiritual interior. It conveys a mixture of resignation, supplication, contrition, introspection, resistance, and doubt. Unlike the frenzied *silva* “A Jesús,” the petitions and confessions in this poem are expressed more laconically, though still expressively, with exclamations and questions scattered throughout the half-prayer, half-soliloquy.

The poem begins with a series of metaphors presenting herself to God as a broken, contrite dependent who has overcome her rebellion and resistance: she is the “nueva pródiga” arrived at the “umbral nativo” (3-4); the “fugitive esclava” come to “pedir los grillos” of her “dueño absoluto”; the “descarriada oveja / viene dando balido” to the “pastor amado”; the “rebelde vasalla” imploring the “rey soberano,” the “humilde criatura” pleading for help from the “Criador eterno” (1-20). Though undeserving, she petitions God’s help to heal her body of its weakness and pain; if not that, then at least the “noble despego / que tanto necesito” (47-48).

Then, suddenly responding to what appears to be a distressing divine silence, the poet shifts from humble supplications to anxious doubt. “Pero ¡ay de mí! ¿qué espero, / Cuando en mi pecho frío / no prenden las centellas de vuestro amor divino?” (61-64). The absence of any spark of divine love is greeted with greater consternation than in her poem “No doy muestras de amarte, ¿qué pena?”, but similarly, she finds herself unable to connect with God in the privation of his love. The icy silence grows mutual: “Cuando el perdón anhelo / Señor de mis delitos, / las voces aun me faltan / para poder pedirlo” (65-68). Swerving back to safer waters, the poet then reassures her “Jesús amado” (73) that her heart is “arrepentido” (76). After all, she reassures him (or herself), she has lost her taste for the treacherous

¹⁰ Elizabeth Franklin Lewis believes this poem was written before she entered the convent, interpreting the poet’s envy for her friend’s life in “another world” as a secular woman looking with envy at the life of a cloistered friend. It seems to me, however, that the melancholic tone fits more with her later works, and that she is, in fact, envying the life of friends outside the convent. The reference to the nation’s harsh laws that imprison her seems a likely reference to her forced entry into the convent for her adultery, in line with Morand’s compelling thesis. This verse, combined with the troubled tone of her later poems, makes it seem very possible she had grown frustrated with her cloistered life

world: "Ya del mundo detesto / el ponzoñoso brillo / los traidores halagos / los necios atractivos" (77-80). Doubt sets in, however, upon a moment of introspection: "Mas ¡ay de mí! ¿quién sabe / si este es rancor altivo / por lo mal que ha pagado / el mundo mis servicios?" (81-84). Clearly, the poet is not convinced of her own motives and attachments; perhaps the supposedly righteous contempt she feels towards the world is only haughty resentment for its ingratitude. Although she assures the Lord that she wishes to detest the world "sólo por vos, Dios mío," she cannot deny the "bienes infinitos" it has provided her (87-88); the bonds are hard to break.

The poet tries resolutely to focus on all that Jesus has suffered and passed through (expressed as a couplet, breaking from the four line-stanzas: "*¡Y vos lo habéis pasado! / ¡y vos lo habéis sufrido!*"), only to find herself wondering again: "¿Cómo *mi duro pecho / no brota agradecido / en lágrimas preciosas / en calientes suspiros?*" (103-106, italics in the original). In spite of her efforts, the poet finds her heart hardened and incapable of generating the devotion and gratitude that such thoughts should surely elicit in the truly penitent. Yet she reminds the Lord of his inspiration and assistance in the past (107-114), but in the absence of any direct response, the poet can only ask God for "la perseverancia / el don que ansiosa pido" (117-118) and "Madre amorosa" (the Virgin Mary), her "ayudad compasiva" (119, 121). Ultimately, she can willingly suffer her just deserts, as long she finishes with an "esperanza vivo" (130), sure of reuniting with the God "por quien suspiro" (132).

While "A vos, padre amoroso" reflects the most turbulent of Hore's religious reflections, the epistolary letter "A sus amigas" depicts her most composed ones. Interestingly, as the only religiously-natured poem that expresses any kind of equipoise and contentment, it conspicuously lacks any reference to God or her relationship to him; peace is found among friends and her work. "A sus amigas," apparently written the day of her religious profession (Morand, *Viviencia* 146) describes her "nueva existencia" (45-46) for close friends who had at one point "le hicieron los avisos" (16) against her decision to enter. It is told entirely in the third-person until the end, at which point she directly addresses her friends.

No anxiety, hollowness, or yearning mars the tranquility and simple pleasures of her new-found sanctuary; the chaos of the world is left behind (and note, it is the chaos of the world—not her own troubled faith). "En la santa quietud y sus murallas," the poet writes, "halló la paz, el gusto, la alegría, / los placers, el gozo y el sosiego / que en este caos de contrariedades / en vano procuró buscar su esmero." She speaks of awakening, carefree, to savor a beautiful sunrise; and "después de render como es *debido / al Santuario aquel primer momento*" (23-24), she dedicates "algunos ratos" to her labors, amuses herself with reading, and out of "gusto, y obligación), takes up her pen (25-28). The word "debido" is telling; the sanctuary makes no claim on her heart beyond the perfunctory

fulfillment of duty. Her greatest happiness, she writes, is found among the company of her fellow sisters: “Pero de cuantas dichas proporciona / este feliz retiro que poseo, / no hay alguna que tanto me complazca / como la amable sociedad de adentro” (33-36) The kindness, eagerness, playfulness, and doting attentions she receives fill her with pleasure. “Ved,” she asks her friends, “si en esta nueva vida / queda que apetecer a mis deseos” (45-46); she wants for nothing, she concludes, except for their letters. She signs the letter as “Doña María Hore (la hija del sol)”; not as Sor María Gertrudis de la Cruz, her religious name. The lack of spiritual preoccupation or identification may be the reason behind the poem’s uniquely calm, contented tenor.

Conclusion

It appears that Hore never quite managed to secure the spiritual serenity and divine assurance for which she continually struggled. The aching divine silences, the anxious efforts to reform, the confident declarations of her conversion, the reproaches and petitions, the cold hollowness, and the conflicting weaknesses and ambitions she describes throughout her poems produce a much more vivid and multifaceted interior landscape than what Hore’s current historiography would allow. A century and a half ago, it would have been more difficult to detect her spiritual feelings, thanks to Cueto’s liberal edits to some of her poems in his mid-19th century anthology. According to Morand’s assessment, Cueto “deseó dar imagen de una mujer piadosa y arrepentida, de una religiosa feliz en su nueva función de Esposa de Cristo,” and thus, withheld from publishing certain poems while making substantial modifications to others (Morand 68-71). Given the biographical and literary discoveries that have been accumulating in recent years, however, the time is ripe to incorporate this sparsely explored dimension into the scholarship on Sor María Gertrudis de la Cruz Hore.

Critics have disagreed over how to label Hore as a writer (Morand, *Una poetisa* 118). Hore will most likely never be easy to classify; she was neither a conventional religious writer, recording no mystical encounters nor histories of her order, nor was she a wholly secular writer of talented and charming salon poetry. Her resistance to easy categorization may be a reassuring sign that we are approaching a more accurate understanding of this literary figure. A better understanding of Hore’s personal experiences and writings can contribute to improved scholarship on several levels: a refinement and expansion of María Gertrudis Hore’s biography, a better glimpse at the lived religious experience of 18th century Spanish women, and as a result, a richer understanding of their long-obscured history;¹¹ and on an even

¹¹ Catherine Jaffe and Elizabeth Lewis have described the scholarship of Spanish Enlightenment women as “bring[ing] into focus a doubly effaced realm of history.” Not only has Spain’s Enlightenment received little attention within and without

broader level, a more nuanced grasp on eighteenth-century Spanish culture. Hore's poignant and expressive writings offer a rare opportunity to restore lost voices to the historical record.

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