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Introduction

A Tale of Two Communities

La mujer huyo a la soledad donde tenía un lugar preparado por Dios.
(The woman fled into solitude in the desert, where she had a place prepared for her by God.)

Revelation 12:6

On a trip to Mexico City several years ago, I came across a plaque tucked away in a dark corner of the Catedral Metropolitana. The plaque bore the above-cited epigram, which comes from the Book of Revelation. It refers to a woman who, after having done battle in heaven with a great red dragon with seven crowned heads and ten horns, gives birth to a male child. God then takes the child and places him on a throne, sending the woman away into the desert, to a site of solitude he has prepared for her. I am obviously glossing over a great deal of the context in which this quotation appears in the Book of Revelation. However, I am simply echoing the lack of context in which this exact phrase first came to my attention. The plaque, appearing as it does on the wall of the supreme symbol of the power of the Church in Mexico built at the height of its powers in the baroque period,[1] highlights the historical attitude of the Catholic Church toward women throughout the many centuries of its existence. It also perfectly exemplifies the attitude of the colonial Mexican Church to the nuns who were supposed to live by its rules in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mexico.

In this book, I argue that for the Mexican ecclesiastical authorities, the convent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries functioned as the special place, the ideal place, of solitude prepared by God for women. I have chosen to focus on these two centuries in particular because of the rich reserves of both printed matter and archival material I was able to uncover from this time period. Moreover, the seventeenth century with its still lingering post-Tridentine fervor was

a time when the Church tightened its control of all aspects of religious life. The convents and their inhabitants came under intense scrutiny and vigilance as the ecclesiastical authorities worried about the implications of religious women's singularity. The eighteenth century is a contradictory time for the convents. Against a backdrop of political reform and Enlightenment ideals, the convents became places where some members of the Church hoped to perpetuate—often, ironically, in the name of reform—the misogynist ideals of Trent laid down two centuries before.

The Mexican colonial context derives, of course, from the Western Christian tradition, from which it inherited a complex series of gender ideologies and prejudices honed over the centuries since the very first years of the Early Church.[2] The idea of a place of solitude cut off from society had informed the initial desires to cloister female religious in the first few centuries of Christianity.[3] Cloister, initially adopted as "a means to an end" (Makowski 126) to protect all-female communities from marauding invaders, eventually developed in the Middle Ages into "an end in itself" (126). Enclosure became something gender based—and biased—that strove to protect society from women's carnality and, in turn, to protect weak-willed women from compromising their own virtue. Peter of Abelard (1079–1142) summed up the ideal of solitude in a letter to the Abbess Heloise: "Solitude [. . .] is all the more necessary for your woman's frailty, inasmuch as for our [men's] part we are less attacked by the conflicts of carnal temptations and less likely to stray toward bodily things through the senses" (qtd. in Makowski 31). In theory, the convent space provided the Church with the perfect site from which to keep women in solitude. This they believed served their purpose well: many women could be simultaneously withdrawn from society, as a result making vigilance more feasible.

Tracing the trajectory of the politics of cloister inherited by the Mexican convents, we see that until the thirteenth century, the enclosure of female communities had been a rather patchy and haphazard affair, entrusted to each specific order for enforcement. People entered and left the cloister freely. Many communities did not observe enclosure and were thus able to administer their own affairs and be involved in matters that required women to travel outside the convent. Despite the vigilance of the Church authorities, scholars of female monasticism agree that female houses enjoyed a period of relative autonomy up until the twelfth century (see Johnson; McNamara; Makowski). This was the period of the so-called double monastery in which female abbesses, wielding considerable power, often ruled over male houses as well. Obviously, we should not regard the early medieval period as fostering a proto-feminist utopia, but instead should view it in the context of the Church's embrace of a relative spiritual commonality (Johnson 3–5). However, dissenting voices warning against the dangers of women and power were always present, and by the middle years of the twelfth century, as Penelope Johnson points out, "a hostile backlash slammed the door on female monastic equality" (5). Many factors contributed to this change in climate for women in monastic orders beginning in this period. With the closure of the double monasteries, the exclusion of women from many male orders, the growth of the friar's movement in which men freely wandered the lands preaching, and the university clerical education to which only men had access, by the twelfth century the Church had begun to definitively marginalize women religious.

The Church worked hard to generate an ideology that would justify and sustain this subordination of women. They relied on what McNamara calls "complex myths of fragility, vulnerability, and incompetence" that would serve to disguise what she terms "the structural realities denying women self-sufficiency" (*Sisters* 261). One of the watershed moments in this generation and institutionalization of misogynistic mythmaking came in 1298 with the promulgation of the decree known as *Periculoso* by Pope Boniface VIII. *Periculoso*, so called after the first word in the Latin text, laid the cornerstone for the Church's suppression of relative female autonomy. The Pope found the notion of female religious who strayed from the convent walls, engaging in wandering or preaching, to be especially egregious. Obviously, it was more difficult to control and discipline women once flexibility of movement was permitted. *Periculoso* claimed to protect women from ill-intentioned men, but more significantly, from themselves. One has only to look at the first lines of the edict to realize the true impetus behind the decree: "Wishing to provide for the dangerous and abominable situation of certain nuns, who casting off the reins of respectability and impudently abandoning nunnish modesty and the natural bashfulness of their sex, sometimes rove about outside of their monasteries, to the injury of that to which by free choice they vowed their chastity, to the disgrace and dishonor of the religious life and the temptation of many . . ." (qtd. in Makowski 133–35).[4]

The decree marked the beginning of the official establishment of gender differences between monks and nuns, with its mandate of cloister for women based solely on the weaknesses associated with their gender.[5] No similar legislation was enacted for the male houses (Makowski 3). Moreover, this gender bias stood in sharp contrast to Boniface's claim, and those of *Periculoso*'s subsequent commentators, of monastic spiritual equality between the sexes (125). This has been called the "paradox of *Periculoso*" (56). Church authorities were able to justify

this enormous inconsistency by citing the singular relationship between women and chastity, what one could almost call an obsession with female sexual purity (127), that would extend far beyond *Periculoso* into the era of the Council of Trent, and into the post-Tridentine context of the colonial Mexican Church.

Scholars of female monasticism have noted, however, that chastity has often been a source of empowerment for nuns (Perry; McNamara). Since the very beginnings of the Christian Church, women in particular had been attracted by the freedom celibacy accorded them (McNamara, *Sisters* 47). However, as the institutionalization of the Church progressed throughout the centuries, men in power in the Church attempted to co-opt the concept of chastity, using it as a tool to enhance their own dominance while simultaneously controlling and subduing the authority of women. Moreover, men could abdicate from personal responsibility for chastity by projecting the female body as the site of purity and thus "the vessels of their [own] redemption" (49). As the influence of women waned in the Church, the symbolic value of their chastity took on more and more importance. The symbolism attached to female chastity became a mainstay of the Church's outlook. It was still firmly in existence in the periods of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Mexico, where it became even more pressing in the New World context, as I shall go on to explore later in this book.

Beginning in the Middle Ages, the emblematic importance society attributed to chastity rendered it an inherently misogynist ideal that intended to essentialize the female body and cast it as the locus of society's redemption from sin.[6] Virginity under these terms could not be viewed in any way as liberating, as it effectively functioned as a "device for the virtual immobilization of women" (McNamara, *Sisters* 323). Enclosure, conceived of principally to protect women's chastity, was also a misogynist act as it denied women agency in the care and control of their own physical movements, thus necessitating the handing over of other responsibilities, among them economic, to men.[7] Women were not encouraged to cultivate manly qualities, but were instead redefined as the guardians of purity (321–22). The burden of the role of "guardian of purity" was a heavy one, and women in particular were doomed to failure from the outset. The Christian tradition, as the Mexican case I examine in this book will bear out, considered women to be the very incarnation of sin, while at the same time investing them with all the symbolism of purity in order to wipe away the sins of others (Glantz, "El cuerpo" 179–80; Burns 24). Woman's identity was based on her corporeality (Ibsen, "The Hiding Places" 261)—an ambivalent referent at best and one prone to conflictive interpretations. Thus, the idealization of women had its counterpart in the mistrust and denigration of women, as the

Church constantly struggled to make them fit into an unrealistic ideal of the Church's own making.

Boniface's decree created the "bedrock" (Makowski 127) of female religious enclosure, upon which the Church would build and obsessively rebuild. The Church constantly struggled to effectively enforce enclosure, as well as to control just how women lived their lives once shut away in the cloister. Formal enclosure, begun with *Periculoso*, was stringently revisited at the Council of Trent, where it was ratified in the final session on December 3, 1568. Female orders were to observe strict universal enclosure, both passive and active,[8] upon pain of punishment, according to the mandates laid out in Boniface XVIII's *Periculoso*:

> The holy council [. . .] commands all bishops that [. . .] they make it their special care that in all monasteries subject to them by their own authority and in others by the authority of the Apostolic See, the enclosure of nuns be restored wherever it has been violated and that it be preserved where it has not been violated: restraining with ecclesiastical censures and other penalties, every appeal being set aside, the disobedient and gainsayers, even summoning for this purpose, if need be, the aid of the secular arm. (qtd. in Schroeder, 220–21)

Women were forbidden to go out of their convent unless they had first gained episcopal permission. For McNamara, this ratification of what she calls the "hostile sentiments of fourteenth century popes" was a blow to any female autonomy gained through "bitter struggles" in the intervening centuries between *Periculoso* and its commentators,[9] and the ratification at Trent.[10]

The Council of Trent ushered in a period of masculinist reform of a Catholic Church under threat from the onslaught of Protestantism. The Church, on the offensive, became the Church militant, an organization in which there was to be no active role for women. The mandate of enclosure sums up the attitude to women that prevailed. They were both troublesome and not equipped to take on the mantle of this active and combative Church. The Counter-Reformation Church aimed to control the faithful and strengthened the male ecclesiastical hierarchy in order to do so. The primacy of the sacraments was to be the centerpiece of the Church's onslaught, and thus women were ruled out of active participation in consolidating the Catholic faith. Male religious orders formed during the Counter-Reformation—including the Jesuits, Oratorians, and Theatines—deliberately made ordination a requirement for admission, thus excluding women from their Christianizing projects (McNamara, *Sisters* 490). Male clergy often scorned women who wished to actively participate in the battle,

condemning their devotion as "hysteria or even fraud" (490). Manifestations of ardent or militant religiosity were not to be valued unless sanctioned first by the ecclesiastical authorities, who took a poor view of anything that fell outside of their purview.

The Mexican convents, whose foundations coincided with the galvanization of the Counter-Reformation,[11] inherited the complex and prohibitive gender ideologies developed in the Western Christian tradition. These ideologies were then shaped and influenced by the cultural specificities of the New World context. The New World's first female convent—Nuestra Señora de la Concepción—was founded in Mexico City in 1540. By the 1580s, four new convents had been established in the viceregal capital. Of twenty-one convents to be founded in Mexico in the colonial period, eleven were founded between 1540 and 1601 (Holler 5). Scholars have commented on the symbolic importance held by convents of cloistered female religious in the colonization project of New Spain. For Elisa Sampson Vera Tudela, communities of enclosed elite white women represented proof of the "resounding civility of a society that could regulate its own reproduction so successfully that many of its women could be reserved in marriage for the Deity" (41). Moreover, prestige was at stake as the Mexican Church attempted to establish its position—not without a certain sense of urgency—in the "long-held tradition of female monasticism" (Holler 7). The New World context fed this desire to establish prestige. While its mission—vast territories populated by heathens ripe for conversion—gave it energy and dynamism, it also challenged the maintenance of long-held religious traditions. The establishment and population of the convents represented "a precocious patriotic desire to defend New Spain from all charges of inferiority by intervening in the issue of the New World's difference and the modes of infusing its representation with authority" (Sampson Vera Tudela 11).

These hostile circumstances and cultural exigencies put pressure on the authorities to ensure the control of the New World convent community. More than ever, the ecclesiastical authorities were faced with the desire to ensure the production and maintenance of female docile bodies in the special space of solitude God had prepared for women.[12] The gender bias traditionally displayed by the Church in its treatment of male and female monastics was heightened in the New World context. The relegation of women to a contemplative role (while many men were charged with an active mission), begun in the Middle Ages and heightened in the militant years of the Counter-Reformation, was carried over and intensified in colonial New Spain. The regular orders—initially the Franciscans, Augustinians, and Dominicans—were charged with the evangelization

of the Indians in New Spain. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought them as well the responsibilities of the education of the rising criollo population (and, of course, we see the rise to prominence of the Jesuits in this period). The "in the world" activity (Holler 20) of the male orders threw even more into relief the cloistering of women who were to be dead to the world.[13] Women were important to the colonial project, but it was an importance predicated on their stasis and immobilization.

Taking a *longue durée* look at the gender ideologies inherited by the Mexican convents, we find that the enclosure of female communities had never ceased to cause difficulties for the Church throughout its history. The results of its obsessive will to contain and control caused their own set of problems as enclosure brought together multiple female bodies without the normalizing and stabilizing effects of the male presence. The flip side of this fear was the eroticization of the convent space. The same isolation and separateness the Church needed to fulfill its wish to control and contain inspired a fascination and titillation in those who contemplated the phenomenon of the cloistered convent of women. Kate Chedgzoy has written: "Historically, the Catholic Church has been a place that empowers women in ways unavailable to them elsewhere in the culture, but which is at the same time profoundly invested in a nexus of problematic sexual ideologies" (64). The overarching emphasis on the control of the female body in didactic texts and conduct manuals that appear throughout the history of enclosed female monasticism foregrounded female corporeality, highlighting the dangerous sexual overtones that have always attended it. Moreover, as abundant examples from history attest, the border separating the body of the prostitute from the body of the nun was a traditionally unstable one. McNamara quotes the Carolingian convent reformers of the eleventh century who described many convents as *lupanaria* or brothels. As she says, these types of comments say more about the "male imagination" than they actually do about female behavior, with the enclosed nature of the convent space—like that of the brothel—provoking "thoughts of mysterious and forbidden women" on the part of the vivid imaginations of "enterprising men" (*Sisters* 372).

This fear of female community has been described as a fear of "contagion" (Auerbach 14). This disease imagery epitomizes the distrust the Church felt toward these communities of women. At the turn of the first century, Clement of Rome criticized female virgins who chose to come together in communal religious activities, dismissing these pious endeavors as "masks for idleness and unwarranted curiosity" (qtd. in McNamara, *Sisters* 41). In his text on female spirituality, *De virginibus*, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan and Doctor of the Church

(340–97), proclaimed that "women were not of the sex that lives in common" (qtd. in McNamara, *Sisters* 54). It was sentiments such as these that had inspired the Church to co-opt the female community in order to better control it, culminating in *Periculoso*. Yet, the Church never entirely succeeded in converting the enclosed convent community into its own creature. The convent continued to exist as an entity that constantly threatened to escape from its handlers. To this end, endless examples of recommendations and legislation aimed at better controlling how women actually lived their lives in convent communities populated the landscape of ecclesiastical history, both before and after Trent. This great quantity of prescriptive texts notwithstanding, there was a great deal of slippage between the *de jure* ideal community desired by the authorities and the *de facto* convent community as experienced and created by the women who inhabited it. The Church attempted to control every aspect of convent life, in the most excruciatingly minute detail. This same excruciating detail, however, coupled with the vast quantity of texts of this kind, serves only to reveal the anxiety brought about by the knowledge that, in effect, the female community always lay beyond the control of the authorities.

It is through this disjuncture between the idealized community of the authorities and the reality of the lived community of the convent inhabitants that I propose to show how Mexican nuns challenged the prescriptions the male ecclesiastic authorities laid down. By examining these acts of subversion, we can elucidate further the status of female religious in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mexico, simultaneously exposing weaknesses and anxieties in an ecclesiastical power structure that was deemed to be monolithic and all-encompassing. Reading archival material side by side with published literary works, I propose to uncover the lived experiences of women that belie the rigid controls male clerics mandated in their prescriptive texts. In her study of nuns in medieval France, Penelope Johnson has underscored the importance of just such a technique in order to elucidate the world as it was and not as it should be (7). She draws a distinction between what she calls "documents of practice," which indicate the lived reality of women in the convent, and "documents of theory," which she classifies as the array of prescriptive treatises and theological tracts that "reveal what church leaders thought the world should be, in contrast to what it was" (7).

Despite this important distinction, it is essential to remember that even documents of practice do not always give us complete access to how women experienced the world. A complexity of registers and polyphony of voices often mediated and characterized even these types of documents. One must weigh

the overreaching discursive power of men in positions of authority against the silencing of women, who had no access to the authority that conferred this kind of discursive power (Perry 9–11). In order to get at the lived reality of women, one must often read between the lines—not only of the official reports and treatises, but also of those texts that are written in their own words. It is imperative to read all texts with the knowledge that they have most always been "filtered through the reporting of those at the center of power" (9). It cannot be assumed that, although women may have spoken the words on the page or even written them with their own hand, other, more powerful voices have not intruded into the text.[14]

We must always value the importance of the subtext when reading historical documents concerning women's history. I believe we can decode this subtext through a careful reading that involves the recognition of the historical context, together with the employment of a gender critique that elaborates a different reading strategy that will call into question issues of agency. I use a gender studies critique to question the "transparency of facts" (Scott 1066), opening up the possibility for human agency and disproving the position that these texts were written in a vacuum in which negation, resistance, and reinterpretation played no part (1066). This gendered critique cannot be carried out successfully, however, without a close reading of texts that also display the motivations of men as they attempt to control women's behavior. An elucidation of patriarchal discourses aimed at women as subjects of control will help us go beyond "truncating binary paradigms" (Powers 19) in which women are often posited as victims and men as the perpetrators of their oppression.

Despite this unequal balance of power, the enclosed convent did possess value for women. Many scholars of female monasticism (see, for example, McNamara; Perry; Arenal and Schlau) have highlighted the ways that cloistering could empower its inhabitants. McNamara cites the case of Teresa of Ávila, who envisioned the cloistered convent space as the perfect "staging ground" for her missionary vocation:

> The more strictly her nuns could fortify themselves behind their walls, the more effectively they could send their spirits soaring to heaven or out across the globe. Enclosure and silence, discipline and mental prayer were intended to train the nun as a militant participant in the Christianizing mission. (*Sisters* 515)

These same critics have also cited the greater opportunities women had for education in the convent, both in the Hispanic tradition and elsewhere, although

as I have shown, the Church had severely curtailed these by the Middle Ages. These greater opportunities notwithstanding, it is not my intention to portray the convent as a utopian feminist space where nuns lived side by side in perfect harmony. First of all, the idea of a feminist consciousness as it is understood in our twenty-first-century context would, of course, be completely anachronistic. While not completely discounting any of these claims, I argue that it was the existence of a community that women reconfigured on their terms that gave these nuns the opportunities these critics outline. It is my contention that women in convents mobilized themselves into alliances and communities, formed on their own terms, to engage with patriarchal controls and thus reshape their experience of community in a multitude of ways.

Another caveat is essential here. We must be wary of the tendency to both essentialize and idealize female communities of the historical past, remaining cognizant of the exclusionary tactics often practiced in these communities (D'Monté and Pohl 6). Scholars must resist the temptation to "strongly and blindly believe in the viability and political rectitude of all-female space" (6). Archival work has shown that communities of female religious did not always live peaceably; tales of discord, factionalism, and even violence have emerged through historical investigation. Convent communities in colonial seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mexico were highly hierarchical and stratified in terms of race and class.[15] The issues of race and class operational within the convent walls could often mirror those in the *siglo*—the outside world. Nuns of the black veil, the highest rank one could attain, were almost always elite white women. Moreover, white women in the cloister had servants who were most often not white and not of their class, and in addition they often possessed slaves. Discord and disparity existed at all levels. However, one must consider this discord in the context in which it took place and in which it has been reported. Community disharmony was not exclusive to the female gender, an oft-portrayed stereotype. Male religious were as prone to conflict and internecine strife as were their female counterparts. As Penelope Johnson has written, the structure of monastic life was based on the family model, and so, as in many families, conflict was inevitable in both male and female communities:

> The erosion of family community occurred in houses of both religious men and religious women, so quarreling and violence do not seem to have been specifically gender linked. Rather, people who lived close together in the cloister might care a great deal about other members of the community, but also nurse resentments exaggerated by lack of privacy. Family members resent and compete with each other as well as loving one another. (250)

The way these instances of discord among female religious have captured the popular imagination throughout history, as well as the critics' pens, shows again a clear prejudice against women. This image of conflict in the convent community belongs to a more general gender bias that casts alliance between women as something impossible due to their conflictive natures and their desire to win the approval of masculine society at the expense of other women. Compared to a vast corpus of scholarship on male friendship and alliance, almost nothing exists on similar relationships between women, and where we find such information, it is often cast in the light of aberration or exception to the rule:

> Men's alliances, formalized in such institutions as the guild, government, law, church and university, left behind records, architecture, and literature that have invited generations of scholars to codify them. As a result, entire libraries are filled with books analyzing men's connections. The relations among women [. . .] have proved not only less visible but also more difficult to reconstruct, often because women did not formally record their activities or seek memorialization in material structures. (Frye and Robertson 3)

Moreover, men—who controlled access to official discourses—were not all that keen to acknowledge female alliances and other manifestations of community, let alone memorialize them in formal written records.

Silencing tactics were used to control the writing of autobiography and hagiography by and about nuns. These life writings of "exemplary" women emphasize the virtue of solitude and often depict the subject as the victim of ill-treatment at the hands of other members of the community, who are never individualized but rather appear as an "anonymous mass of persecutors" (Ibsen, *Women's Spiritual Autobiography* 72). The intrinsic worth of solitude is further emphasized by the fact that hagiographers often choose to define the worth of their subject based on the mortification to which she would submit her body (73). Ibsen highlights what she calls the "specific historical context of documents written in Colonial Spanish America" to understand why these ecclesiastical biographers "emphasize the lives of women more attuned to bodily mortification than political authority in the convent" (74). Women were only to achieve political authority under the strict supervision of the (male) Church hierarchy. True, abbesses did wield power over the members of their communities, but

in their historical period and sociocultural context that power, more symbolic than real, favored the authorities over the convent community of whom the abbess was "mother."[16] Even so, if we read beyond the official discourse, which sought to promote conflict and circumscribe agency, we can find examples of female alliance and positive representations of female community that challenge the view of community the Church authorities constructed. There is, then, what I call a "double discourse" of community. In this book I analyze this double discourse as manifested in the discursive strategies the Church employed to control community. In counterpoint, I study the acts by and between women that go against that imposition of community and strive to redefine it.

An important point to discuss before I go any further is what the word "community" actually means. We always use it to refer to the group of nuns who inhabited a particular convent. Yet, what are we really saying when we use "community" in this context? There are indeed many variables and contexts at play in the definition of the word (D'Monté and Pohl 3–4). Community carries with it the connotation of a safe haven, a place to which one can retreat voluntarily—in times of trouble, perhaps (Bauman 32). However, we also use the word to refer to those groups who are constrained and disciplined in the way they live their common lives, such as schools and prisons. Indeed, the convent space has always borne striking similarities to the prison space, and the Mexican cloistered communities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were no exception. Although membership was in most cases (but not always) voluntary, those external to the community mediated and controlled life within it. The Church authorities operated a panoptic regime over the female houses (if not architecturally, most definitely symbolically), with a network of confessors and priests all conducting surveillance and reporting their findings to the relevant authorities—a perfect example of Foucault's theorizing of the capillaries of power.

In what sense can we consider a coerced community, such as the one I have outlined above, to be a "community"? Once again I come back to the question of what do we mean when we use this term; what are we trying to articulate? I believe a coerced community—such as that which the Church authorities attempted to impose—is not a community at all, as it lacks the element of voluntariness. We cannot consider the "communal life" the Church authorities desired as a true community, since it was legislated from outside, by those who were not its members. The ecclesiastic authorities desired a community in which sameness and a shared (non)identity were operational. In her theorizing of community, Shane Phelan has described this type of fixing of identity as a "form of

oppression" (245), in which identities are consolidated and reified, thus allowing no room for agency on the part of a community's members. Phelan has drawn the distinction between what she calls "a voluntarist conception of community and a use of that conception to distinguish stigmatized, externally imposed identities from valorized, self-fashioned ones" (237). The "externally imposed community" attempts to insert its members into a "reified concept that pre-exists its members" (239). Yet this cannot be considered as a community, for community is by definition dynamic and changing, its identity constituted by those who inhabit it and not vice versa. Although community does give its members a sense of mutuality and shared bonds (236) it does not erase individuality or essentialize identities. Phelan cites Jean-Luc Nancy's definition of "being-in-common" (as developed in his *The Inoperative Community*), and it is useful here for the definition of community I propose. For Nancy, this concept signals a group of individuals who, while they may share certain commonalities, still remain singular beings. He writes: "Being in common means that singular beings are present themselves and appear only to the extent they compear (*comparaissent*), to the extent that they are exposed, presented, or offered to one another" (Nancy 58).[17]

It is this definition of community that women in the convent ascribed to as they formed bonds, alliances, friendships, and micro- and macro-communities of different kinds that stood in opposition to the controlled community that the Church authorities attempted to impose from outside. Theoretically, this outwardly imposed community, with its all-encompassing panoptic gaze, negated the need for agency and action on the part of nuns and other women in the convent. As prescriptive and didactic texts of the period claimed, these women were "muertas al mundo" (dead to the world) and ideally—as this book will show—dead to each other, their only sanctioned relationships being with their divine husband and his earthly intermediary, the confessor. In furtherance of this goal, these women were not to be individuals, were not to display any singularity in their behavior; instead they were to be an amorphous mass of docile bodies who lived according to the strict rules the ecclesiastical hierarchy laid down.

Women challenged the autonomy of the ecclesiastic authorities by forming counter-communities in acts of solidarity that allied individuals. Hannah Arendt's theorizing of the attainment of power through collective action sheds light on the construction of female solidarity. Community is not attained through a fixed shared identity, but instead is realized through collective action. In her analysis of Arendt's theory, Amy Allen writes:

> Hannah Arendt provides feminists with the resources necessary for reformulating solidarity as a kind of power that emerges out of concerted action—as something that is achieved through action in concert, rather than as the sister-feeling that automatically results from the sharing of a pre-given, fixed, and hence repressive, identity. (104)

Allen here reads Arendt's work in order to analyze conceptions of power through the lens of feminist theory. Her ultimate goal is to overturn the "multiple axes of stratification affecting women in contemporary Western societies" (2). Her argument, I believe, can also be used to elucidate the situation of colonial Mexican nuns. Joan Scott's insistence on the importance of using gender theory to study historical uses of power supports my point. She advocates the use of theory as a way to dismantle and challenge what she calls "the fixed and permanent quality of the binary opposition" and calls for "a genuine historicization and deconstruction of the terms of sexual difference" (1065).

Both Allen and Scott challenge the traditional view of the monolithic nature of patriarchal power in which the existence of female agency was always obscured or denied. Scott claims: "We need to replace the notion that social power is unified, coherent and centralized with something like Foucault's conception of power as dispersed constellations of unequal relationships discursively constructed in social 'fields of force'" (1067). By seeing power as constructed in these social fields of force, writes Scott, we can also see the possibility of human agency challenging and dislocating this discourse of power. She describes this seizure of agency as "the attempt [. . .] to construct an identity, a life, a set of relationships, a society with certain limits and with language—that at once sets boundaries and contains the possibility for negation, resistance, reinterpretation, the play of metaphoric invention and imagination" (1067).

In this book, I analyze both the "certain limits" and the language "that sets boundaries" alongside these possibilities for "negation" and "resistance." I scrutinize the discursive structures the Church utilized to contrive their fields of force and to contain and control convent communities. In counterpoint to this, I also examine how women in the convent constructed communities, alliances, and friendships within these fields of force to both challenge them and reformulate them. It is my belief that the two opposing views exist in mutual tension, each one constructing itself in response to the other. While many studies of convent culture in the colonial period have focused on individuals or nuns as writers of spiritual *vidas* (lives, or autobiographies), here I analyze how women form alliances, friendships, and communities within the convent, engaging with and

subverting the view of community the authorities held, in which they desired its inhabitants to be "muertas al mundo."

In chapter 2, "Death and the Maiden: Buried Alive in the New World Cloister," I consider two texts written by Antonio Núñez de Miranda, the Mexican Jesuit priest and erstwhile confessor of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. He was exceptionally interested in the control of the convent space, and in two of his tracts—the *Plática doctrinal que hizo el Padre Núñez de la Compañía de Jesús en la Profesión de una Religiosa del Monasterio de San Lorenzo* (printed in 1697) and the *Cartilla de la doctrina religiosa dispuesta por uno de la Compañía de Jesús para dos niñas hijas espirituales suyas, que se crían para monjas y desean serlo con toda perfección* (printed in 1698)—he specifies the exact nature of convent living.[18] The two texts are very different in tone, using different registers and strategies to accomplish the same ambition: the discursive control and choreography of every aspect of a nun's life in the convent. Through a close reading of these didactic treatises, I trace the elements of the colonial Mexican Church's construction of the ideal convent community, examining its methods and motivations.

Chapter 3, "The Community of Lovers: *Mala amistad* in the Convent," examines a case from the eighteenth-century Mexican Inquisition of a nun accused of a *mala amistad* (an illicit relationship) with a servant girl. In this chapter, I explore literary and didactic materials concerning "particular" (a euphemism for aberrant) friendships between women in the convent. Through this analysis, I show how a double discourse hides the fear of homoerotic contact between women behind prohibitions against factionalism and lack of rigor in religious observance. The chapter also examines how the Inquisition forged a connection between illness and female homoerotic relationships, using this somatic correlation to further discredit the nun. I also study the importance of the role of the confessor in this process of censure. It is, of course, the perspective of the ecclesiastic authorities that emerges owing to its control of information via record keeping. Yet, reading through the rhetoric of disapproval and manipulation, one can trace the vestiges of a relationship between the two women, grounded in a passionate attachment that challenged the carefully controlled community the authorities wished to impose.

In chapter 4, "Mobilizing Community: The Fight against *vida común*," I also study historical documents from eighteenth-century Mexico, in which I analyze the ecclesiastical and secular authorities' attempts to reconfigure convent communities to better fit the paradigms of male control through the imposition of the so-called *vida común*—the Church's imposition of communal life on

convents that had hitherto enjoyed private living conditions. Using documents from the same period, I also study the political mobilization of communities and micro-communities of nuns in protest against this reconfiguration of their communities. This case study affords me the opportunity to analyze the different perceptions of community that existed across the gender divide.

Chapter 5, "Sor Juana, Serafina, and the Nuns of the Casa del Placer: Intellectual Alliance and Learned Community," looks at how women formed intellectual alliances and communities in the convent in defiance of the Church's proscription of this kind of activity. The chapter takes Sor Juana as its protagonist, discussing her participation in two different female alliances. This is a reading that goes against the popularly held critical belief in her intense solitude. I examine the seventeenth-century *Carta de Serafina de Cristo* (*Letter of Serafina de Cristo*) to show how women wielded the pen in support of each other and the *Enigmas ofrecidos a la Casa del Placer* (*Enigmas Offered to the House of Pleasure*) to explore the creation of a virtual community by Sor Juana and a group of Portuguese nuns, from which the women wrote safely for and to each other.

These conflicting views of community expose a double discourse in which solidarity among women, in its varying forms, is pitted against the concept of indistinguishable docile bodies living in communal solitude. Through these acts of community, alliance, and friendship, nuns challenged the desires of the Church to control every aspect of their convent lives. Though not always ultimately successful, they did force the ecclesiastical authorities into a defensive position in which their anxiety regarding the control of the convent communities clearly emerges. It is, I believe, important to draw attention to this slippage between the intent of gendered processes of control and the reality of women's responses to them. An examination of these subversions and dislocations of patriarchal control encourages us to look beyond the historically and socially created vulnerabilities of women in the convent in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Mexico to elucidate their role in both their communities and in the social order as historical actors and protagonists in colonial Mexican society.

2

Death and the Maiden

Buried Alive in the New World Cloister

As the Church moved into the New World, it brought along its centurie
triarchal and misogynist philosophy. The convent, moreover, took on
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2

Death and the Maiden

Buried Alive in the New World Cloister

As the Church moved into the New World, it brought along its centuries-old patriarchal and misogynist philosophy. The convent, moreover, took on an added importance for the Church in this new environment, intensifying the ecclesiastical authorities' desire to enclose and control its inhabitants. Asunción Lavrin describes the function of the New World cloister in the following terms:

> Un convento era un lugar de refugio y protección para mujeres cuyo nacimiento en la elite colonial no había sido acompañado de suficiente riqueza familiar para protegerla de un matrimonio desigual. La mujer, representada en todos los textos pedagógicos y forenses como un ser débil y sujeto a toda clase de peligros, necesitaba "recogerse" si no en su propio hogar, en una institución dedicada a ese fin. ("La celda" 143)[1]

Convents became sources of civic pride—the ultimate in enclosed spaces—as the New World Church strove to compete with its counterpart in the metropolis (Lavrin, "La celda" 153). Elisa Sampson Vera Tudela has described the New World convent as "a fortress for [white, Spanish] cultural values" (40). It also served another symbolic purpose: a community of virgins wiped away both past and future sins of those that lived *extramuros* (outside the walls) at least in the male imagination. This symbolism held no power for women and was as much an essentializing gesture as the depiction of them as creatures of unstable morality. Margo Glantz has written:

> El convento opera como un mecanismo de sustitución: las religiosas, seres débiles, inocentes, practicantes de las virtudes teologales—son caritativas y humildes, obedientes, castas, abnegadas—ejercen en su contra un suplicio corporal para ayudar a borrar los pecados del mundo. ("El cuerpo" 178)[2]

These women were to be offered up, devoid of agency, like the virgins of old in order to satiate a God angry at the sins of those who were allowed to sin, safe in the knowledge that someone else would pay the price. Glantz refers to the nuns as "chivos expiatorios" (scapegoats) ("El cuerpo" 179). Female religious were thus deemed not to be in possession of their own bodies, because society wanted them for a different purpose. This appropriation was, however, an enterprise fraught with danger owing to the corruptible nature of the flesh of she who was to be the vessel of purification. There existed a tremendous irony in the fact that the very image of sin was to be the upholder of purity.

For the ecclesiastical and civic authorities, the perfect community was one in which they controlled and regulated each member's every movement, gesture, and word (Moraña, *Mujer y cultura* 7–8). The convent space resembled a highly symbolic labyrinth in which women had to negotiate a complex web of discourse and discipline that governed their behavior. In such a rigidly controlled atmosphere, the Church viewed women as transgressive from the outset; only by strict adherence to the rules could they meet the standard of acceptable female behavior. Regulatory texts such as convent *costumbreros* (handbooks)—of which men were always the authors—dictated a model of female behavior in which women were to obey the ideals of obedience, chastity, humility, poverty, and enclosure, denying the body at the expense of the spirit. To this end, the authorities subjected the body of the nun to myriad forms of manipulation and control mechanisms that they "textually codified in confession manuals and the rules and constitutions of each religious order" (Ibsen, "The Hiding Places" 251). While male orders were of course subject to control, with the regulations for each laid down in their governing institutions, their situation was a very different one. As I discussed in the previous chapter, men's mission in the New World was an active, apostolic one. Male religious did have responsibilities in their monastery—study, choir, and prayer, for example—but they also had something women did not have: freedom to leave the monastery. Many positions outside the monastery were open to male religious—both ecclesiastic and academic. All these positions entailed them moving around the city or town where they lived. Many of these jobs also brought with them exoneration from the more contemplative and monastery-bound aspects of their vocation (Rubial, "Varones en comunidad" 170). Moreover, the monasteries were open to visitors—both religious and secular (except, of course, women)—and were often the scene of lively secular activities such as banquets, theatrical productions, *tertulias* (social or literary gatherings), and card games. Free time was seemingly ample—an excess of personnel led to what Antonio Rubial terms "poca labor

ministerial," or few ministerial responsibilities (173). Outside the monastery, some monks would engage in unbecoming activities such as visiting prostitutes, gambling, and walking armed around the city (175). Prohibitions, of course, existed against such activities, but the fact that they were even possible underscores the enormous gulf between life in community for religious men and for religious women. There was so much more at stake in the regulation of the overdetermined, enclosed female space of the convent than in the male monastery.

It stands to reason, then, that so many more prescriptive texts existed for women than for men. The control of discourse belonged squarely in the masculine purview, and religious rhetoric was no exception. Women figured in the discursive realm only in the abstract—either as essentialized visions of purity in the usually male-authored hagiographies or as objects for instruction, discipline, and control (Ibsen, *Women's Spiritual Autobiography* 12). Mabel Moraña describes the ecclesiastical authorities' strategy in the following terms:

> La sumisión del cuerpo al espíritu es constantemente enfatizada y simbolizada a través de la gestualidad individual y de las actividades prescritas a todos los que integran la familia conventual. El papel del confesor, el régimen de castigos y de penitencias, así como la consistente obligación de negar el yo sometiéndolo por medios de la represión doctrinaria y la autocensura son aspectos insoslayables de la vida religiosa, que contribuyen a explicar los términos en los que va formalizándose el imaginario eclesiástico-letrado en la Colonia como expresión y trasgresión de una subalternidad planificada hasta en sus más mínimos detalles en beneficio del Poder. (*Mujer y cultura* 13)[3]

The Church wanted to create a controlled community of female religious in which they could erase the female body—along with any attendant singularity—as far as possible. In its place, they envisioned a body without agency that would carry out a series of highly-controlled movements. They intended to transform the convent space into a disciplinary institution inhabited by a community of docile bodies. Moraña refers to this vision of the convent space as "un recinto panóptico controlado por el dogma y la autoridad masculina" (a panoptic enclosure controlled by dogma and male authority) (*Mujer y cultura* 14). Sherrill Cohen has studied the creation and function of women's asylums since 1500. She writes that Western patriarchal society itself has historically functioned as a "panoptic regime" in which females are "watched, measured, judged and corrected when they deviate from prescriptions" (6). The New World cloister represents an ideal exemplum of this model, in which

the Church discursively accounted for and controlled every aspect of the nuns' behavior.

One of the most renowned, prolific, and fervently obsessed of these ecclesiastical writers was the Jesuit priest Antonio Núñez de Miranda. He is best known today as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's confessor, with whom she enjoyed an antagonistic relationship. In his day he was a powerful member of the Church, head of the influential Congregación de la Purísima, *calificador* (inspector) of the Inquisition, and distinguished even among the ranks of the Jesuits as a great intellect and scholar (Muriel 72). He authored twenty-nine works between the years 1664 and 1712, of which he addressed eleven directly or indirectly to nuns (74). Octavio Paz glibly claims "su especialidad eran las monjas" (nuns were his specialty) (148). Josefina Muriel describes the purpose behind the large number of texts Núñez dedicated to this one subject:

> Sus obras tienen como propósito moverlas a vivir la vida religiosa que habían profesado de acuerdo con el contenido de los votos, haciendo hincapié en lo que le constaba que era violado con más frecuencia y que producían relajación en la vida conventual en perjuicio aun de las monjas más observantes. (74)[4]

In my view, Muriel underestimates the purpose and tone of these texts. A close reading reveals them as highly structured discourses of power that attempt to intimidate the nuns into observing a communal life that fits with the wishes of the Church, one in which docile bodies live side by side, ostensibly living and working in community but ordered to prize solitude as the ultimate manifestation of righteousness.

Núñez writes with what has been termed "el gusto barroco por el tremendismo" (the baroque taste for the shocking) (Bravo, "La excepción" 264) as he attempts to manipulate and control the behavior of the nuns who constitute his audience. In this chapter, I analyze two of Núñez's texts: the *Cartilla de la doctrina religiosa dispuesta por uno de la Compañía de Jesús para dos niñas hijas espirituales suyas, que se crían para monjas y desean serlo con toda perfección* (printed in 1698) and the *Plática doctrinal que hizo el Padre Núñez de la Compañía de Jesús en la Profesión de una Religiosa del Monasterio de San Lorenzo* (printed in 1697).[5] Because the texts vary sharply in both genre and tone, they make an excellent comparative study of the author's range and abilities. These particular texts also expose the anxiety provoked by the convent space, as we see the lengths to which the writer is prepared to go to find the expressive model that best conveys his message of dominance. However, despite the differences, Núñez's purpose is the same in both texts: to manipulate and control the behavior of the nuns, who are literally a captive audience, and to ensure that the life of the community conforms to the exact specifications of the Church.

The *Cartilla de la doctrina religiosa*

In the first of Núñez de Miranda's texts that I explore in this chapter, he assumes the benevolently exasperated tone of a paterfamilias gently nudging his daughters onto the right path in order to help them better fulfill their religious vocations. He structures the *Cartilla* in the form of an imaginary dialogue between himself, in his role as spiritual advisor and confessor, and two novices of an unnamed convent who have purportedly spent their young lives there being educated by the nuns. Now they themselves want to take the veil. The text assumes the form of an always supercilious, occasionally playful dialogue between the priest and his two spiritual daughters. Núñez divides it into various sections; with each one, he takes the opportunity to expound in great detail on the responsibility of a cloistered nun, clearly establishing his and the Church's vision of community in which a clear-cut gendered binary of power appears. Núñez's pseudodialogue leaves nothing to chance, nor any room for interpretation. He dedicates the first section of the text to what exactly it means to be a nun. Thereafter, he explains the four vows a nun must take to profess: poverty, chastity, obedience, and enclosure. Subsequently, he touches on various topics, including which acts may lead to "pecado mortal," how to adhere exactly to the timetable of prayer during each day, how to vote correctly in the elections of the convent *preladas* (female superiors), as well as how to best obey one's confessor. Núñez finishes the *Cartilla* expounding on how to become the perfect bride of Christ, repeating and embellishing many of the points he has already made in previous sections so as to remove any possible ambiguity from what he has communicated to his "interlocutors."

Núñez's textual assumption of the voices of the young novices is an integral tool in his war of words. It affords him the opportunity to engage in a power play in which he, as official representative of the Church, emerges as the voice of reason and knowledge guiding the formless, ignorant minds of the novices. This gendered act of ventriloquized speech mediates the responses of the others. It creates the ideal nun, the docile body par excellence—one who responds perfectly to the requirements of the Church authorities because she has no will of her own. By fashioning the voices of the novices in the dialogue, Núñez inscribes them into a binary that highlights the power of the male voice and its superior

discursive position (Parker and Willhardt 202). Núñez's hagiographer, Juan de Oviedo, praises him for the way he expresses his ideas in this text:

> Dio a la estampa un cuadernillo con título de *Cartilla de la doctrina religiosa*, en que por modo de diálogo de preguntas, y respuestas, allana con admirable método, claridad y brevedad, quántos tropiezos de dificultad se les pueden ofrecer a las Religiosas [. . .] sin el embarazo de sentencias y de citas y con grande claridad y suavidad en el estilo. (qtd. in Alatorre, "La carta de Sor Juana" 612)[6]

Employing and repeating words and expressions such as "claridad," "brevedad," and "suavidad en el estilo," Oviedo presents the dialogue as a transparent vehicle for the communication of simple information for neophyte nuns on how to avoid the possible pitfalls of convent life. However, there is nothing natural or transparent about the invention of the fictitious interlocutors of whom Núñez avails himself in the creation of his fake dialogue. Elizabeth Harvey has analyzed similar discursive maneuvers—male appropriations of the feminine voice—in English texts of the early modern period. She terms this tactic "transvestite ventriloquism" (1). The male-authored texts she studies in her book *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* all employ a female voice—often, in the process, erasing the gender of the author, at least superficially (1). Even though Núñez in no way erases his gender in the *Cartilla*, the analysis that Harvey brings to these texts is most definitely applicable to the use of transvestite ventriloquism he employs in his invention of the young female interlocutors.

The Jesuit organizes the conversation along gender lines and in turn structures these along power lines, with the male voice—his voice—unequivocally occupying the seat of power. The ventriloquized voices of the novices function as a springboard from which Núñez launches his power play. He establishes a subordinate locus of enunciation for the novices in relation to his own, thus underscoring the Church's construction of gender roles as being at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of power and agency (Harvey 32). As a dialogue, Núñez's text is particularly effective in displaying these unequal power relations. In the very first few lines, he clearly sets out the rules: he is in charge; he is the keeper and dispenser of knowledge. The "novices," in turn, embody the very blankest of blank slates—lacking even their own desires—upon which he will project his vision of convent life and convent community. The novices ask him in the opening lines of the *Cartilla*: "Padre amantísimo [. . .] dínos ahora las obligaciones de su altísimo estado, y enséñanos el modo de cumplirlas, suave y eficazmente; y

en primer lugar muéstranos ¿para qué fin, y con qué intención, *hemos de desear y procurar ser monjas*?" (1, emphasis mine).[7] These first lines establish the tone of this text in which the young women must appeal to Núñez's wisdom to even understand their own wishes. The personalities, or lack thereof, of the novices (dis)embody the perfect nun who seeks information and accepts answers. Continuing in this vein, the interlocutors are not identifiable as individuals. They always speak in chorus, and we have no idea of their names (Núñez refers to them only as "hijas mías") (my daughters). The textual reproduction of femininity that occurs in the *Cartilla* firmly establishes the goals of the ecclesiastical authorities for the convent communities. They want to create and maintain a gender-based hierarchy, as well as foster a lack of both personality and singularity on the part of the inhabitants of the convents, which in turn would lead to an unquestioning acceptance of all rules the Church laid down.

While there is no doubt that Núñez's act of cross-gendering perpetuates an inequity with its mediation of women's speech (Parker and Willhardt 194), this very act also serves to expose the fear the specter of uncontrolled female utterances provokes, underscoring the patriarchal establishment's anxiety about the stability of gender roles. Harvey explains: "In male appropriations of feminine voices we can see what is most desired and most feared about women and why male authors might have wished to occupy that cultural space, however contingently and provisionally" (32). Moreover, as I go on to examine, this assumption of the female voice and creation of a female (non)personality illustrates the "separation between male representation and female experience" (Trill 35). In the chapters to follow, I show how women's lives in convent communities did not conform to the rigid standards clergy such as Núñez de Miranda laid down in their didactic texts.

After seeking information about what they should desire, the novices then ask Núñez how to achieve it: "¿Y qué entenderémos por ser monjas, o qué es serlo?" (And what should we understand by being nuns, or what does it mean to be one?) (2), thus offering Núñez a tabula rasa from which he can begin his ideological warfare. The principal element of Núñez's ideology, a distinguishing feature of both of the texts I analyze in this chapter, is the importance of the complete denial of self, mind, and body, which he refers to as "holocausto"—the offering of the body in sacrifice. In his list of what they must sacrifice to God in this holy immolation, Núñez leaves nothing to the imagination. The nun must basically obliterate her very being in order to give herself freely to God. When the novices ask for clarification, he responds, making use of a fire-and-brimstone rhetoric popular in the baroque Church: "Que es un sacrificarse a Dios toda

entera una virgen, con todo su cuerpo, alma, potencias, sentidos, haberes y quereres, sin reservar cosa alguna de sí para sí, ni para el mundo, ni carne ni sangre; sino que todas las sacrifica a Dios en el fuego sagrado de su caridad" (3).[8]

Margo Glantz offers the following analysis of the concept of *holocausto* and its relation to the trope of the sacrifice of the female body in early modern Mexico:

> Son vírgenes ofrecidas en holocausto, como en la Antigüedad, semejantes a las víctimas sacrifíciales inmoladas por un sacerdote durante una ceremonia ritual. Es más, su cuerpo mismo se transforma en un espacio sagrado, cuando al suplicarse se constituyen de manera simultánea en altar, víctimas y sacerdotes, es decir concentran en su corporeidad todos los elementos del sacrificio y de la víctima propiciatoria. ("El cuerpo" 178–79)[9]

When the novices inquire just how they can achieve *holocausto*, Núñez gives them the four basic tenets that form the framework of his argument: "Por medio de la profesión solemne de los cuatros votos, de pobreza, castidad, obediencia, y clausura con las reglas y constituciones del orden, y santas costumbres de su convento" (3).[10] Before tackling a detailed description of each vow, he responds to a question from the novices regarding exactly what such a promise entails: "Déjala obligada [la promesa] a cumplir lo prometido al pie de la letra" ([The promise] obliges her to carry out what she promised to the letter of the law) (4). He thus leaves the young women in no doubt: the word of the Church authorities is to be final.

"Profanidad y exorbitancia" (Profanity and exorbitance): The Vow of Poverty

With blind obedience as his backdrop, Núñez responds in detail to the question posed about the first vow: "¿A qué obliga el voto de pobreza?" (What does the vow of poverty entail?) (6). He responds succinctly: "A no dar, no recibir, ni prestar, ni gastar, ni disponer en manera alguna de cosa de valor, sin licencia general o particular, formal o interpretativa del superior legítimo" (7).[11] Women in the convent shall not exchange objects of any value either with each other or with outsiders without the permission of the authorities. The Church greatly frowned upon the exchange of gifts between women in the convent. Teresa of Ávila mentions this prohibition in chapter 5 of *Camino de perfección*, "Declara la primera de estas tres cosas, qué es amor de próximo; y lo que dañan amistades particulares" (In which she outlines the first of three things, which is love of our

neighbour; and the harm particular friendships cause) (42). Teresa dedicates this chapter to an exposition of the perils of particular friendships, which often manifest themselves in the exchange of gifts. Teresa writes: "Y hace otros daños para la comunidad muy notorios; porque de aquí viene el no amar tanto a todas, el sentir el agravio que se hace aquélla, *el deseo tener para regalarla*, el buscar tiempo para hablar" (44, emphasis mine).[12]

Núñez echoes this anti-gift-giving sentiment in his text. When his interlocutors press him for a specific example of the dangers of such an activity (7), he recites the story of "una gran señora" who comes one day to the convent, whereupon an object belonging to one of the nuns strikes her fancy ("agradada de una alhajuela de una religiosa") (7). The lady requests the object, and because she is a personage of such importance ("por ser de tanta autoridad") (7), the nun gives it to her. This action, however, as Núñez tells his avid "listeners," the authorities do not permit without first granting a special license. The ecclesiastical authorities' prohibition on gifts goes beyond merely not wishing the nuns to own "worldly goods," but rather speaks to the powerful connection between the giving of gifts and friendships. Ronald Sharp dedicates an entire chapter of his book *Friendship and Literature* to the importance of gift exchange in relationships. He writes: "The language of exchange, particularly of gift exchange, seems to be the appropriate language for describing friendships" (87–88). He describes the richness of gift-giving as a metaphor for friendship, explaining how the gift joins people together with its symbolic attributes of love and attachment (85). Most importantly for Sharp, the gift strengthens friendship, inspiring a circular movement that becomes perpetual: "When the gift moves in a circle its motion is beyond the control of the personal ego, and so each bearer must be a part of the group and each donation is an act of faith" (97).

Clerics such as Núñez reacted with great hostility to such acts, fearing the power of gift-giving to solidify the bonds of friendship. In response to a question about the degree of sin involved in such activities, Núñez speaks very emphatically:

> Siempre que se da o recibe, presta o enajena cualquier cosa, sin verdadera licencia del legítimo superior, se quebranta el voto de la pobreza con culpa de propiedad, la cual si la material es grave, será pecado mortal, y si es leve se queda en venial por parvedad o pequeñez de la material. (8, emphasis mine)[13]

In a related topic, Núñez expounds in an absolutist fashion on the posses-

sion of personal and decorative adornments. He believes that both undermine the vow of poverty and contravene the Church's idea of the perfect community by highlighting a woman's singularity. His language, overflowing with baroque hyperbole, leaves the listener in no doubt of the dangers he perceives in such distinguishing objects:

> En todas las cosas, alhajas, vestuario interior y exterior, comida, gasto, celda y criadas &c.; porque todas deben ser modestas y templadas como de pobres religiosas y si en las rejas, convites o regalos, hicieseis gasto superfluo o exorbitante, o en la celda o persona usaseis alhajas tan preciosas y costosas que parezcan o huelan a profanidad secular, o ajena disformamente de la pobreza y modestia religiosa; yo al menos no alcanzo como se pueda excusar de culpa grave, conforme a la medida o desmedida de su profanidad u exorbitancia. (12–13)[14]

Núñez's profuse and bombastic baroque rhetoric surpasses itself as he has his two young novice interlocutors ask of him: "Y ¿cuáles y cuántas son estas, para que podamos huir de ellas y evitarlas con horror muy de lejos?" (And what and how many are these, so we can flee from them, and avoid them with horror from afar?) (13). Feigning exasperation at their ignorance and perpetual questions ("¡O, válgame Dios, y qué impertinentes y preguntonas estáis!" [O Lord give me strength, what impertinent and inquisitive girls you are!]) (13), Núñez refuses to name these evils lest the mere mention corrupt their innocence ("que aun nombradas empañan su decencia" [to even name them would tarnish your decency]) (13). He does, however, take the opportunity to rail against what he considers to be the excesses and sins of the *siglo* (the world outside the convent), blasting the evils of its "confusa babilonia de ropa, vestuarios, joyas, adornos [. . .] y otras doscientas mil baratijas" (Babylonian confusion of clothing, costumes, jewels, adornments and two hundred thousand other cheap trinkets) (13). He does not use the word "babilonia" in the dialogue accidentally. Here he clearly refers to that disorderly female par excellence—the Whore of Babylon—who appears in the Book of Revelation, richly adorned and drinking the blood of saints:

> The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet color and richly glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls, her hand holding a golden cup full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And on her forehead a name was written, a mystery: Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and the abomination of the earth. (Revelation 17:1–6)

The luxury problem was not confined to the *siglo*. The authorities protested constantly against the use of adornments the nuns affected in the more liberal convents. Asunción Lavrin writes of the *calzada* (calced, literally "shod") convents: "By the end of the seventeenth century, for example, they had adopted the use of such fine materials and such fashionable lace and adornments in their habits that they ran into the stern condemnation of a devoted archbishop and several other minor clerical authorities" ("Value and Meaning" 375–76). Octavio Paz refers to the inhabitants of the Convent of Jesús María, who at the end of the seventeenth century were apparently sporting "pulseras de azabache, anillos y plisados el escapulario y las tocas" (jet bracelets, rings and pleated scapular and wimple) (162).

These adornments notwithstanding, it is an awfully big leap from jet bracelets to the Whore of Babylon. This image, however, reflects the historical associations made between the nun and the prostitute. The fact that Núñez invokes the image of the Whore of Babylon to describe the clothing—and by extension, the moral climate of the *siglo*—speaks to the patriarchal authorities' dread of the innate corruptibility and sinfulness of women. Moreover, in the former's eyes only a very flimsy border separated the body of the nun from that of the prostitute. The border between these two archetypes of femininity easily collapsed, quickly turning the virgin into the harlot (although not, of course, the other way around). Janice Raymond refers to the "age-old hetero-relational tactic of transmogrifying the virgin—she who is untouched by men—into the prostitute—she who is despoiled and constantly handled by men" (74). In early modern Seville, for example, there existed a spillover in terminology referring to both brothels and convents, with the madam of a convent often referred to as "abbess" (Perry 46). The prostitute also wielded a symbolic significance in society: "Regarded as vessels to collect the filth of the flesh, prostitutes were seen as a necessary evil to prevent the worse sins of homosexuality, incest, rape, and seductions of honorable women" (47). Just as nuns expiated the sins of society through their immaculate behavior, at the other end of the spectrum the prostitute fulfilled the same function. The symbols of Eve and Mary were thus two sides of the same coin, and at times the distinction was not clear.

Here, in this discussion of the importance of strict adherence to the vow of poverty, runs an undercurrent of sex and sensuality as Núñez, with his Babylonian imagery, hints at the intimacy between these two emblematic figures of womanhood. He will make this sexual threat more explicit in the next section of the *Cartilla*, in which he tackles the importance of the vow of chastity.

Empty Vessels: The Vow of Chastity

Núñez has his novices ingenuously ask of him: "Y el voto de castidad, ¿qué es o en qué consiste?" (What is the vow of chastity, or of what does it consist?) (18), once again providing him with a completely blank canvas onto which he can project his moralizing. He describes the chaste body of the nun:

> Así el alma pura, y casto cuerpo de las religiosas esposas de Cristo son vasos purísimos, consagrados por sus votos al culto divino y servicio de Dios; y permitirlos, o consentirlos a cualquier humano amor o profano divertimiento, pareciera profanar los vasos sagrados en abusos indignos y culpables. (19)[15]

Opening the discussion on chastity, Núñez highlights the responsibility of the nun to be better than all other women: "Yo juzgo eleva tanta la dignidad de su persona a la esposa de Cristo, y las obligaciones de su sagrado, que puede representar en prudente estimación culpa grave en una religiosa, la que en una secular se pudiera juzgar muy leve" (19).[16] He mentions this by way of an introduction to the abhorrent topic of "las devociones de las señoras religiosas" (20), which, he explains, constitute a mortal sin and must be avoided at all costs.

The very strictures of the vow of chastity and the intensity of the symbolism society invested in it projected a complex web of erotic ideologies onto this chaste body that offered a flip side to the promotion of the nun as the site of purity. The idea of a chaste woman locked up in a convent with only other women for company inspired in men—both secular and religious—the practice of *devociones*, the cult of admiration of female religious. Octavio Paz compares these *devociones* with modern-day society's cult of celebrity: "Una curiosa y extendida costumbre: así como hay los aficionados a las cómicas, las cantantes, las bailarinas o las campeonas de tenis, había los que cortejaban a las monjas" (164–65).[17] Paz, I imagine, makes this comparison based on the same level of inaccessibility and mystery that surrounds both the celebrity and the cloistered nun. The comparison, although amusing, is superficial. It is important to investigate the specificity of the situation of the nun in colonial Mexico to understand what set of circumstances led her to become the subject of these ardent *devociones*.

Men gained access to the objects of their affection through visits to the convent's *locutorio* (visiting room), although the ecclesiastical authorities constantly proscribed this activity.[18] According to Paz, at times the nuns received their visitors with their faces scandalously uncovered and did not always remain, as they should, behind the wooden *rejas* (grill) (164). Paz's description of the nuns' role in these relationships or *devociones* implicitly places the nun in the role of seducer, with her uncovered face and lack of modesty. He echoes here the attitudes of the time, as exemplified in tracts and treatises written by male clergy such as Núñez de Miranda, which held that women—in essence—threatened male virtue and honor (McNamara, *Sisters* 492). The unveiled nun emerging from behind the safety (for whom, one might ask) of the *reja* tempts otherwise virtuous men to commit sinful acts.

Still, the Church was its own worst enemy in this battle to keep the dangerous female body free from sin. The more symbolism it attached to the nun as the vessel of purity, the more fascinated and drawn to her men became because of her inaccessibility. The convent walls provided the perfect space for the projection of all kinds of perversities, which were often manifested in satirical literature. Despite the differences in both genre and purpose, these satirical texts exist in a continuum with regulatory texts such as those authored by Núñez de Miranda, and their examination sheds light on the complex web of gender ideologies that engendered fears such as those displayed by our Jesuit.

Manuel Ferrer Chivite has studied what he calls "burlerías monjiles" (nunnish satires) in Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He first addresses those works that depict the misery of a woman confined to a convent, one who ostensibly would be far happier married. Implicit in the texts of both the poets and Ferrer Chivite who studies them is the idea that any man would be better than none:

> Ante esa tesitura de convento o himeneo, sin duda que un porcentaje máximo de dichas españolas tendería a optar por lo segundo. Pero desgraciadamente [. . .] uno piensa el bayo otro el que lo ensilla, y aunque todo este supuesto máximo porcentaje prefiriera el matrimonio, siendo los padres los que ensillaban el bayo bien se entiende que muchas de esas doncellas —y aun más de una que ya no lo debía ser tanto—se vieron obligadas a aceptar la otra posibilidad, lo que no quiere decir en absoluto, claro está, que para las mismas fuera ésa la solución más envidiable. (38)[19]

Obviously there were women who entered the convent against their will. However, the evidence Ferrer Chivite offers here is not particularly convincing, based as it is on satirical poems written by men.

Ferrer Chivite formulates his argument around the popular trope of the "manless woman" as somehow lacking or wanting. The celibate nun, living in an all-female community, lacks male company, and thus her erotic wants and needs—women are nothing if not carnal, after all—are not met. As women, the

nuns necessarily seek the attentions of longed-for men, these *galanes de monjas* or nuns' gallants. The nunnish satires thus validate the centuries-old claim that enclosure protects society from women and their fleshly desires.[20] Ferrer Chivite quotes from Quevedo's *El buscón*, in which the poet suggests both the nuns' depravity and their dominion over their suitor. Quevedo, ever the enthusiastic misogynist, writes that to be the nun's gallant is to be the Antichrist's suitor ("pretendiente de Antecristo, [que] es lo mismo que galán de monjas") (61).

Back across the Atlantic in Mexico, we find another text similar in spirit to the "burlerías monjiles." A poem attributed to "el bachiller Pedro Muñoz de Castro, dominico" (the graduate Pedro Muñoz de Castro, Dominican monk),[21] probably written around the early eighteenth century,[22] is the New World's version of the satire men had for centuries directed against the eroticized body of the nun.

Vivo tan cobijado de monjillas
dice Don Juan con todas sus agallas
que no de estar contento hasta acabarlas
no me mate el Señor hasta extinguirlas.

Los padres, quiero yo, que en volandillas
a las hijas dispongan el casarlas,
y si no, menos daño que enmonjarlas
será se acomoden a putillas.

Alcanzar con la mano las estrellas
Será más fácil que encerrar las pollas
sin gallo en el corral oh, Jaramillas!

Ya sé que aunque decís que sois doncellas,
más queréis galas, telas y bambollas,
maridos o galanes, que cogullas.[23]

The poem expresses in cruder language the subtext of Núñez de Miranda's extravagant baroque rhetoric on chastity. While Núñez tries, unsuccessfully, to erase the body of the nun, the anonymous author of this poem foregrounds it, holding it up as the root of all sin and corruption. Both impulses, the repressive and the erotic, are two sides of the same coin of a male fantasy that struggles with concurrent feelings of repulsion and attraction.

The author wastes no time in sexualizing the body of the nun. In the first

stanza, he establishes the link between *monja* (nun) and Don Juan, leaving the reader in no doubt of his opinion of female religious. In fact, it is Don Juan himself who speaks in this poem, which is voiced almost entirely in the first person.[24] In the first line, the poet depicts the nun as a sexual predator. It is not Don Juan—the world's greatest seducer of women—who seeks to corrupt the innocent nun, but rather the "monjillas" who pursue and throw themselves at him, literally covering or perhaps smothering him ("cobijar") with their lustful bodies. He, in turn, will happily have his way with all of them and appeals to God for strength to be able to meet the challenge: "no me mate el Señor hasta extinguirlas." The use of the words "acabar" and "extinguir" here have a double meaning that introduces a violent tone to the poet's sexualization of the nun's body. Don Juan wants to have his way with them—to finish them off, in the sexual sense—but perhaps he also wants to kill them.

In the second stanza, the poet echoes the popular trope of the convent as a poor substitute for marriage. The first two lines of the stanza depict Don Juan in philanthropic and seemingly moral mode, desiring that parents quickly marry off their daughters rather than send them to the convent. However, in the last two lines, the sexual vocabulary returns as he seizes on another familiar trope: the very fine line separating the brothel from the convent. It would be, he declares, less harmful for them to be "putillas" than "monjillas." In the third stanza he explains his belief: it is impossible for women to live together in community without the male presence. This statement can be read on two levels: on the first that a woman needs the normalizing presence of the man to live morally and well and on the second that the nun, closely connected to the prostitute, is so lascivious that she cannot live without a man to fulfill her voracious needs. Although the poet connects these two concepts, in the final stanza he highlights the second one. Nuns are not pious brides of Christ, obeying the vows of poverty and chastity, but have more in common with Núñez's invocation of the Whore of Babylon with her sinful trappings of luxury. The poet juxtaposes the clothing the nun should wear, "cogullas,"[25] with what she desires: "galas, telas y bambollas." Don Juan connects extravagance in dress to licentious behavior as he adds "maridos o galanes" to the list of things desired by the nuns who claim to be "doncellas" but are patently anything but.

This brief textual detour away from Núñez's text shows us that despite the moral rectitude of the Jesuit's discourse, his work has points in common with more salaciously oriented texts in its representation of the fragile border between the nun and the prostitute. As we return to Núñez, we find him bringing the section on chastity to a close, summing up his argument by repeating

his warnings against *devociones* both in and out of the convent. He advises the novices to be vigilant of their senses, especially "ojos, oídos y lengua" (eyes, ears and tongue), precisely those that open her up to contact with other people. He finishes with a dramatic exhortation to humility and chastity: "¡O cuántas al fin cayeron, y cuán torpemente, sólo porque vanamente aseguradas pensaron que no podían caer! Sed muy humildes hijas mías, y Dios os conserverá muy castas" (22).[26]

"Al pie de la letra": The Vow of Obedience

In the *Cartilla*, Núñez also presents his views on the vow of obedience. Here he establishes a gendered hierarchy of power that places the nun at several removes from a direct connection with God. Moreover, the existence of this hierarchy and the control mechanisms in place that sustain it point explicitly to a coerced community that undercuts any voluntary action on the part of its members. When the novices ask Núñez to explain the elements that make up the vow of obedience, he replies: "En sujetar a los prelados y preladas toda su persona y acciones, con un mismo juicio y voluntad, que es la primera y principal sujeción" (22–23).[27] The Church does not require members of the "community" to have agency, as blind and unquestioning obedience is owed to the prelates. Núñez declares that they owe this obedience to both *prelados* and *preladas*. At times this female intermediary stood in solidarity with her daughters, but the masculine power structure of the Church co-opted her position and used her as their instrument to the detriment of the nuns to whom she was supposedly mother. María Dolores Bravo describes the subordinate role of the abbess:

> Al igual que en la vida laica, la figura masculina detenta la autoridad última que rige cada una de las conciencias que le están subordinadas. Esto es la configuración de una sociedad patriarcal. La madre sólo juega un rol subalterno de mediadora, vicaria auténtica entre el irrebatible verbo patriarcal y los hijos. En un convento femenino sucede lo mismo, y aunque la Abadesa o Superiora detenta un mando indiscutible dentro del limitado ámbito del claustro, la jurisdicción espiritual última la ejerce el Prelado o Visitador de la orden masculina correspondiente. ("El costumbrero" 161–62)[28]

A far more powerful figure in the life of a community of female religious was the confessor. When the novices ask how they should obey their confessor, Núñez is absolutely unequivocal on the subject: "Al pie de la letra, inviolablemente, sin duda, interpretación, ni dilación. Y si en este artículo no os vencéis con heroica resolución, siempre estará sobresaltado y peligrado vuestro espíritu" (25).[29] The relationship between nun and confessor was, in theory, the only close relationship the Church sanctioned for the cloistered nun. Kristine Ibsen sees this relationship, and its pivotal role in the observance of the vow of obedience, as linked to what I have identified as the coerced community with its abomination of manifestations of individuality:

> Because of women's inherent vulnerability towards sin, the precept of obedience was specifically fostered by Church doctrine as a means of containing dangerous manifestations of individuality in general and feminine singularity in particular. Emphasizing pride as an element that could lead to condemnation of the soul, this doctrine, channeled through the direct influence of the confessor, ensured the male authority upon which ecclesiastical hierarchy depended. The confessor's authority lay in his position as an instrument of Christ's power in the world, the intercessor between God and Man. ("The Hiding Places" 265n.5)

The importance of this intercessor between earth and heaven was even more crucial when the earthbound individual was a woman. As we can see from Núñez de Miranda's vehemence regarding the level of obedience owed the confessor, the nun was supposed to give herself over, body and soul, to her spiritual director.

Control and Containment: The Vow of Enclosure

Finally, the *Cartilla* addresses the last vow, that of enclosure. As usual, Núñez's comments mix intense baroque rhetoric as he thunderously warns of mortal sin and prosaic details as he delineates the directives the nuns should blindly obey. Firstly, he claims that no one must be allowed in or out of the convent without special permission from the prelate. The person specified as "el legítimo prelado" (the legitimate prelate) may only be the "señor arzobispo o obispo" (the reverend archbishop or bishop) as the jurisdiction of the abbess "no alcanza esta línea" (does not extend this far) (25–26). This is a prime example of how the virtual panopticon functioned in the female convent space. By controlling movement in and out of the convent to create both passive and active enclosure, the ecclesiastical authorities hoped to maintain the immutability of the "community" they had planned.

This issue of ingress and egress proved most slippery, inciting constant anxieties that manifested themselves in proclamations and prohibitions. One of these anxieties centered on the visits of the vicereine, who as the representative of the Queen had the right to enter at will the convents of female religious in New Spain (Lavrin, "Value and Meaning" 378). This liberty of entrance greatly dis-

turbed the authorities. It is not difficult to see why. As the wife of the viceroy, the vicereine embodied a dangerous female power that threatened to undermine the influence of the Church, if that power were put to the service of female alliance and friendship. A celebrated example of just this kind of influence can be found in the case of Sor Juana, who enjoyed the protection of the Condesa de Paredes from 1680 to 1686 when she was in Mexico—a protection that afforded the nun liberty to write and enjoy intellectual pursuits, albeit for a limited time. In 1690 a *cédula* (official document) was issued that restricted the number of times a vicereine and her entourage could enter a convent in New Spain (378).

Beyond the Vows: Mortal Sins

Núñez dedicates over half the *Cartilla* to his vehement replies to the novices' questions on other aspects of convent life, attempting to ensure he has left no room for improvisation in his choreography of convent life. Having exhausted the structure of the vows, he frames his proscriptions around questions regarding what other behaviors—besides the breaking of the vows—could lead to mortal sin (27). His first recommendation concerns the use of the *oficio divino*,[30] that is, how the nuns are to conduct their daily worship of God. The detail Núñez brings to his guidelines on observing, without distraction, the rites of the *oficio divino*, speaks to the ecclesiastical authorities' desire to leave no space for any activity that may jeopardize the community of women living in shared solitude. Nothing, he emphasizes, should be allowed to interrupt the adherence to the timetable of the Divine Office:

> Maitines se pueden ya por costumbre rezar desde las cuatro de la tarde antecedente, o poco antes, hasta las doce de la noche del día siguiente. Pasadas estas horas no se pueden rezar los maitines del día antecedente, porque ya pasó todo su tiempo: antes de las cuatro, media hora se puede empezar, porque ya las empieza a reconocer, y aun con causa justa se podrán rezar a las tres. (32)[31]

If the nuns feel a pressing need to alter anything, they should do so only in the extreme case of "raro y gravísimo embarazo" (unusual and most serious impediment) (32) and then only after consulting the works of the Church Fathers (32) through the offices of a "buen varón, como el confesor o el padre espiritual" (a worthy man, such as the confessor or spiritual father) (35). This last comment indicates the gender bias Núñez holds with regard to religious practice and adherence to doctrine. Even though there was no explicit gendering of the

oficio divino—it was to be practiced by all—Núñez believes women need special guidance.

The novices ask him if there is any difference between male and female religious in the dispensations that the ecclesiastic authorities may give to not always thoroughly observe the Divine Office. He does not mince words in explaining why he believes women less capable of the rigors of this activity:

> Yo juzgo que sí la hay [una razón], y la razón acumulada de muchas; porque la debilidad del seso, la flaqueza del sujeto, la peregrinidad ignorada de la lengua latina, la dificultad y embarazo de las lecciones y rúbricas, con lo menos constante de la obligación [...] y parece abren puerta a la diferencia y facilitan la excusa en las religiosas de esta obligación con menor causa que en los varones eclesiásticos, cuyo título y precepto es indubitable; la fuerza mayor, la facilidad y la expedición en la latinidad y rezo, mucha: y así podrá prudentemente juzgarse por bastante excusa en una religiosa, la que no parecería bastante para excusar a un religioso o clérigo; pero siempre y en todo caso de duda, debéis consultar al prudente confesor y estar a su parecer. (39–40)[32]

With this answer, Núñez exemplifies the belief the Church held for centuries concerning commonality of observance between the sexes. Here he highlights the judgment that women had inferior brainpower, thus accentuating the power of the confessor and other male prelates in supposedly determining the functioning of life in the all-female convent space. The claim is self-serving and circular, as the New World cloister provided no real educational opportunities for women and certainly did not encourage or facilitate the studying of Latin.

When the novices ask him to mention another obligation, the incorrect fulfillment of which could also lead to mortal sin, Núñez mentions the issue of voting in convent elections. According to him, "se puede con grande facilidad pecar" (it is very easy to sin) (47) by not behaving correctly on these occasions. This part of Núñez's text blatantly reveals the coerced community that the Church wished to impose on the convent space. In the instructions that follow, Núñez sweeps away the need for agency on the part of any woman in the community, including the abbess, as he tries to put in place mechanisms that would rigidly monitor and manipulate the convent space. Obviously, the ideal abbess is one who is the pawn of the authorities. According to Núñez, one can "pecar gravemente" (gravely sin) during the process of elections by choosing "la indigna" (the unworthy woman). Núñez cites the long list of abuses that the

"indigna" may commit, the most egregious of which is the formation of factions and the improper behavior this implies: "los empeños, agencias, bandos, parcialidades, medios ilícitos, que no se pueden aplicar a fines torcidos con las discordias, odios, murmuraciones, quejas, sentimientos, baldones, testimonios, publicación de defectos graves, injurias e inquietudes" (48).[33]

Núñez's extraordinarily detailed and repetitive list of types of relationships and their attendant behaviors reveals the fear the Church experienced when it considered the possibility of empowerment such relationships presented. Obviously, factionalism had its negative and unpleasant side for women in the convent, but the positive side of such relationships was the strength women gained through alliance and communal action. The Church feared anything that threatened the coerced community of docile bodies, and this explains Núñez's articulation ad nauseam of every possible synonym for factions and the dangers to which they give rise. Indeed, he instructs that in the choosing of an abbess the novices must first purge themselves of "todo afecto terreno y respeto humano" (all earthly affection and human respect), something the Church would like to see operational at all times. However, if they have any doubts, they must never discuss the matter with their sisters, "huyendo no sólo de juntas y conferencias en común; pero aun de pláticas particulares" (fleeing from not only communal gatherings[,] but also from private chats) (49). They must turn instead to the confessor, chaplain, spiritual father, or seemingly any man on hand (49).

Concluding the Conversation

Núñez's text loses structure toward the end, as if he were trying to ensure he has closed off the possibility for agency by addressing every minute detail of convent life. The questions and answers come rapidly and range from specific queries, "Y ¿es necesaria disposición para comulgar, el confesarse antes?" (And is it necessary to confess before taking communion?) (58)—the answer here being yes—to more general and wide-ranging questions, "¿Cómo seremos muy santas?" (How may we be especially saintly?), which is answered with "Queriendo con heroica resolución, y amor fuerte y verdadero" (By wanting it with heroic resolution and stong and steadfast love) (66). He gets himself back on track, however, with his final recommendation, which functions as the perfect conclusion, symbolizing as it does the complete conformity with all he has demanded of the novices during the *Cartilla*. The initial question reads: "¿Cuál es la principal obligación de una religiosa, en cuanto esposa de Cristo?" (What is a nun's primary obligation in her capacity as bride of Christ?) (64).

Núñez's reply encapsulates the central theme of his argument: "Amar únicamente a su Esposo de todo su corazón, sobre todo las cosas criadas, queriendo antes perderlas todas que ofenderle en nada" (To love only her Husband with all her heart, forsaking all created things, wishing to free herself from everything rather than offend Him in any way). The "cosas criadas," he makes clear in subsequent statements, refer to the other members of the convent. Núñez constantly invokes the importance of the *comunidad*, stressing that the novices must render complete obedience to it: "Acudir indefectiblemente a la comunidad. ¡O que virtud ésta!" (To bow unfailingly to the wishes of the community. O what virtue is that!) (65). However, he juxtaposes this with what he believes life in community to entail:

> El estaros retiradas, dejadas y calladas en vuestra rincón, mientras la precisa obligación no os compeliere a salir. Cuidar de sí: descuidar de las otras: no saber, no ver, no oír, no gustar ni tocar, ni aun oler de lejos nada [. . .] la suprema independencia, y santo desprecio de toda cosa y persona criada. ¿Una esposa verdadera de Cristo se ha de dejar prendar ni aun pender, ni aun imaginar de cosa o persona criada? ¡O que indignidad tan digna de abominarse aun soñada! Ya no habéis de tratar sino con ángeles del cielo, y vuestro Esposo, de criaturas como si no las hubiera en el mundo para vosotras. Dios y vosotras. Dios y vosotras, y no más en todo el mundo. (68–72)[34]

What, then, is this community that Núñez envisions? It is certainly not one in which alliances and friendships are forged, but rather a community of collective solitude. As at many other times in the text, Núñez moves quickly from high-flown rhetoric, such as that in the passage above, to simple and straightforward information, as if he didn't quite trust his audience to understand him. Querying Núñez' statements, the novices seek clarification: "Pues ¿no hemos de tener nuestras amigas, dependencias, visitas y rejas algunas decentes y lícitas?" (So we must not receive friends, dependents, and visitors at the grill even if they are decent and permitted?) (73). This issue has proved itself to be the pivotal one throughout the *Cartilla*, as Núñez himself underscores, saying: "Esa no es preguntar para acabar la cartilla, sino para empezar un tratado entero" (This is not a question with which to begin this primer, but rather to begin a whole new treatise) (73). To be a perfect bride of Christ, one needs to be not only dead to the world but also dead to the so-called community.

The *Plática Doctrinal*

The concept of the living death enjoyed by the perfect bride of Christ forms the core of the *Plática doctrinal que hizo el Padre Antonio Núñez de la Compañia de Jesús en la profesión de una señora religiosa del convento de San Lorenzo*. Images of death permeate this text, as the author describes not only the ceremony of profession itself but also the responsibilities inherent once the novice becomes a true bride of Christ. Here, the Jesuit's tone picks up on those moments in the *Cartilla* when he leaves aside his benevolent and didactic manner and instead embraces a sinister baroque rhetoric that paints macabre images of death, *vanitas*, and the devil. Again, as in the *Cartilla*, Núñez's text exposes the dichotomy of society's fear and fascination with the female body: the lustful female is despised for her incarnation of sin, but at the same time her body becomes the site of a tangled web of perverse projections of desire. In the *Plática*, Núñez takes these obsessions to an extreme degree, concocting a complicated and contradictory rhetoric predicated on images of death and immobility. The purpose behind this rhetoric is to stress that the only intimate relationship the nun may have is with Christ. In the *Plática*, Núñez returns time and time again to the theme of necessary solitude and the prohibition against human relationships of any kind (barring that of spiritual father and daughter, which is a relationship the Church believed it could control). However, such is the fervor of the author to indoctrinate his listeners with this idea that he overdetermines the intimate bonds between the nun and her divine husband, rendering it the site of erotic connection.

Núñez begins his sermon with a citation from the *Song of Songs*, a text in which the sensual bodies of the lovers loom large: "Ven del líbano, esposa mía; ven del líbano: bajo a coronarte reina desde la empinada cabeza, desde la coronada cumbre y volada frente de los encumbrados montes Amaná, Sanir y Hermon. Sal de las peligradas madrigueras de los leones, y de las peñascosas grutas de los pardos" (77).[35] Núñez describes this citation as the "Amorosa vocación; y nupcial convite del Esposo a su virgina esposa, en el cap. 4 al V. 8 de su castísmo epitalámio" (Loving vocation; and the Husband's nuptial invitation to his virginal bride, in chapter 4, verse 8 of his chaste epithalamium) (77). As always the Jesuit priest speaks with great authority, but here he passes over the fact that the *Song of Songs* could not really be considered "castísimo," and that perhaps the Beloved in this text is not the most appropriate role model he could have chosen for the perfect bride of Christ.

The *Song of Songs* was a controversial text in the early modern Hispanic world, causing problems for such Church luminaries as Fray Luis de León, Teresa de Ávila, and Juan de la Cruz. According to Francis Landy, interpreting the *Song* has always been a challenge, given that its metaphors are "wonderfully perplexing, sometimes surreal in their juxtaposition of extreme incongruities, their baroque development, their cultivation of disproportion" (310). In the text, a series of "intricate connections between the beauty of the Lover or the Beloved and the world" foregrounds the preeminence of the physical beauty of both Lover and Beloved, male and female (309). These descriptions are highly evocative of sensory qualities and accentuate the physicality of the love between the two.

Moreover, the Beloved is depicted as both sexually aggressive and adventurous. Landy writes:

> The dominance and initiative of the Beloved are the poem's most astonishing characteristics. Metaphorically aligned with a feminine aspect of divinity, associated with the celestial bodies, the land, and fertility, the Beloved reverses the predominately patriarchal power of the Bible. Male political power is enthralled to her [in the figure of the Lover who is also a King]. (317)

However, the Beloved's power does not last forever. She suffers the fate of sexually adventurous women in a patriarchal society and pays the price for her daring: her family casts her out, shepherds despise her, and watchmen beat her (317). Yet, despite her sexual transgressions, she is still reunited with the Lover.[36]

Why did Núñez choose this sexually charged text to begin his sermon? It is an unusual option for a sermon that seeks to outlaw and erase corporeality and sensuality. Perhaps he was responding to the trope of the sexually adventurous woman whom society punishes for her sins? This is possible, as time and time again he compares the sins of Lebanon—from where the Beloved comes—to the virtue of Jerusalem from where the Lover calls her. Núñez turns the barren and rocky Lebanon of the *Song* into the *siglo*; he refers to it further on in the sermon as "los peligrados bosques, infames montes y sangrientas fieras del siglo, temporalidades y vicios del mundo" (the dangerous forests, infamous mountains and bloodthirsty wild beasts of the outside world with its temporalities and worldly vices) (80) where women can only sin. And he transforms Jerusalem into the convent—"la Jerusalén pacífica y sagrada Sión de la religión" (the peaceful Jerusalem and sacred Zion of religion) (80)—where the woman can live in perfect probity with her divine husband. He threads the metaphor of the Song throughout the first half of the text, using it as a backdrop against which he places the perfect wife. The nun, like the Beloved, must give herself entirely

to her husband, eschewing all worldly temptations. Subtly, but nonetheless distinctly, his text projects perversity on the nun's body, his use of the Song framing his sermon within a discourse of erotism and corporeality, which is what he has precisely sought to obliterate.

Relinquishing the Body: The Lady Vanishes

After quoting from the Song, Núñez describes how it is important for the nun to surrender her body to God, a symbolic action that forms the core of the ceremony of profession. Before detailing the various rites involved in the ceremony, he wants to make sure his audience realizes the importance of what they are doing—that by handing their bodies over to God, these young women are offering up their greatest commodity. Their bodies may not be so special (indeed they are not, as he will make clear), but if they prize them, if they believe what they are offering to God is really valuable, the offering will then be transformed into something of value:

> Quien da un diamante de altísimo fondo y valor exquisito, pensando que sólo da un contentible vidrio, agravia con su vileza, como si de en realidad de verdad ofreciera solo éste; mas si suponiendo con error prudente que era un carbunclo imperial, ofreciese de hecho un ordinario vidrio, merece sin controversia en la aceptación grata del que recibe. (76)[37]

He continues in this vein, describing the relinquishing of the nun's body to God as "una dádiva tan magnífica" (a most magnificent gift) (76). It is his job in this sermon, he says, to make them aware of the precious gift they are giving to God. This text is a clear attempt at indoctrination, to make sure the nuns realize their bodies may no longer afford them any individuality or agency, and Núñez spells out ("breve y claro") exactly what the Church expects of them:

> Profesar una señora religiosa es, desposarse reina con Cristo; y desposarse reina es, entregarse toda por entero con todo su ser, cuerpo y alma, a la voluntad de su Esposo: es quedar toda de Cristo, con todas sus dependencias, quereres y haberes; y no en nada suya, ni aun en el albedrío; porque todo se ofrece en holocausto por virtud de la profesión. (80)[38]

Here, once again, his attempt to deemphasize the importance of the female body only serves to foreground it. Before initiating any action, the nun must ask herself: "¿Esto será del gusto de mi Esposo?" (Will this be to my husband's liking?) (82–83). His subtext here is very clear: will her actions also be pleasing

to the male authorities that rule over the convent in their role as intermedia between the wife and her divine husband—they to whom the nun owes "obe encia ciega y sincera" (unquestioning and genuine obedience) (93)?

Núñez wants to make it clear that once the nun's body belongs to God may no longer be the site of individualizing activities. For him, such manifes tions of singularity can only be attributed to the devil. The Church will r sanction even those that may be considered approved acts ("calificadas") su as "la religión, penitencia, mortificación, oración, éxtasis y revelaciones" (pie penitence, mortification, prayer, raptures and visions) (83) without prior a proval from the "padre espiritual." The male ecclesiastical hierarchy encourag extreme acts of religious observance such as self-mortification and peniten as long as they remained firmly within the control of the confessor. The bo must at all times be monitored. Núñez, however, doesn't stop here: the body the nun is a sacrificial object "como un vaso, ropa o res" (like a vessel, garme or beast) (97). The nun, then, has as much agency as these objects, and she (ists only as an offering made to God: "se llama la profesión sacrificio, oblaci y más propiamente holocausto" (the profession is a sacrifice, offering or, mo accurately, holocaust) (97).

Núñez progressively takes agency away from the nun as his sermon continu She starts off as the keeper of a precious body, but once she has given this g to God, she becomes a docile body who only does His bidding (or really that his earthly male intermediaries). Following this, he turns her into an object be sacrificed—a chalice, an item of clothing, a sacred cow. These images are ju the warm-up for Núñez's crowning image of the nun's reified body: that of t corpse.

Death and the Maiden: From Thanatos to Eros and Back Again

From here on in, Núñez's text focuses on the dead body of the nun. He structur his text around the ceremony of profession, describing each rite involved ar the symbolism attached, as well as the responsibilities each implies. In order set the scene, to create this macabre mood of death and renunciation, he deta what awaits the nun who is about to undergo the ceremony of profession. Tl backdrop is reminiscent of a gothic horror novel, as he re-creates the funere procession that accompanies the nun to the chapel. Núñez's scene uses elemen of chiaroscuro that suggest the dualities of life and death. That darkness pr dominates in this crypt-like scene is no accident, as the nun is to go triumphant to her death rejecting the light of the (evil) outside world:

> La primera ceremonia es, llevar toda la comunidad con luces en las manos a la profesa, como si la acompañaran de entierro muerta de amor, que se va por su pie a la sepultura hasta el coro bajo, donde de antes de llegar al comulgatorio que es el tálamo de sus bodas, prostrada a lo de difunta le dicen las letanías de agonizantes. (99)[39]

There is no escaping the images of death in Núñez's description of the ceremony. But the dead body is also an erotic body. The conflation of the nuptial bed with the deathbed does not erase the female body. Instead, the very image of the prostrate and immobile female body awaiting the attentions of her heavenly bridegroom becomes erotically charged in a way that fulfills male fantasies of the female body.

The dead woman was an even more perfect version of the patriarchal ideal of enclosed or contained woman in the baroque period. Georgina Dopico-Black has commented on the symbolism of the body of the dead wife in Calderon's *El médico de su honra* (*The Surgeon of his Honor*). She writes of the playwright's inscription of the wife's "perfection within the absolute stillness and total containment of death" (118), which she interprets as "the culminating moment of an escalating process throughout the play that seeks to enclose—and even encorpse—the female body, as a means to control her erotic agency and the male anxiety it provokes" (118). Here, Núñez also details the rites involved in the profession ceremony in the form of an escalation, the culmination of which is the burial of the "dead" body of the nun within the four walls of the convent.

This notion of a dead, contained body has much to do with the contradictory role of the body in Christianity. As Beth Ann Bassein writes:

> Christianity sets the soul so far out in front that when the body asserts itself it is beaten back with such vigor that, at some moments in history, it literally was totally destroyed. Ironically, harnessing the body is one important means to an end which Christianity seeks, and without the body to combat and become the source of sin, much of the whole edifice would crumble. (18)

This is exactly what occurs in Núñez's text, written in a time when the Church tried to erase the body—especially the female body. Núñez hangs the entire rationale of his sermon on the framework of the erased body, but in doing so must evoke it time and time again until the nun's body dominates the text. Treating the baroque period, Margo Glantz has spoken of the female body and its inevitable discursive presence ("presencia insoslayable en el discurso") (270). Núñez

further underscores this trope, structuring his sermon as he does around the deadly nuptials of the *Sponsa Dei* and her holy bridegroom.

The death/desire relationship loomed large in the culture of the baroque in which Núñez lived and wrote (Dollimore, *Death, Desire, and Loss* xi), and his text is a superlative example of "la fusión antagónica de Eros y Thanatos" (Bravo, "Erotismo y represión" 133). Valerie Traub has written of the "eroticized yet chaste corpse" of the female body in Shakespeare, suggesting that it implies not only "the connection between sexuality and death [. . .] but also suggests that sexuality is finally safely engaged in only with the dead" (*Desire and Anxiety* 33). It is this trope that operates in Núñez's text. He eroticizes the dead, chaste body of the nun/bride, which is "fetishized to the extent that it is utterly devoid from the rest of her being" (33) and thus embodies "a masculine fantasy of a female essence wonderfully devoid of that which makes women so problematic: change, movement, inconstancy, unpredictability—in short, life" (32).

Núñez informs his audience that during the whole process of the novitiate, the neophyte nun has been slowly dying in preparation for her final demise: "todo el año del noviciado, está como agonizando con las ansias de dejar el mundo" (she spends the whole of the novitiate year as if dying of the desire to leave the world behind) (99). Not only is the novice going to die at the end of her novitiate but also she is anxious to do so—*dying* to do so—and so finally leave the evil and corrupt world behind her. What is more, not only will the nun leave the evil of the world behind her when she professes—she will be "muerta al mundo"—but she will be dead to all but her divine husband and his intermediaries. Thus, with this discursive maneuver, Núñez hopes to fulfill their ideal of the perfect convent community, the collective solitude for women the Church had always upheld as the ideal solution to the necessary containment of women. These women are not only dead to the world but also dead to each other:

> Profesar, es morir al mundo, y al amor propio y a todas las cosas criadas, para vivir sólo a su Esposo. Para todo ha de estar muerta y sepultada sin padres, parientes, amigas, dependencias, cumplimientos, visitas, y en una palabra a todo amor de criatura, respondiendo de todo: los muertos ni visitan ni son visitados; no saben de cortesanía ni de cumplimientos. ¿Quién regala a un muerto, o quiere que le regale? (100)[40]

Here Núñez returns, with a rather unsubtle touch of sarcasm, to his obsession with the liveliness of convent life. If these women are dead, how can they possibly have contact either with the outside world or with each other? They are the ultimate docile bodies—dead bodies—unable to contaminate and infect each

other with their propensity to sin. Núñez doesn't stop here. Not only are these bodies to be docile, but also they are to be abject: they are to inspire repulsion in all those who look upon them. Only then can the ever-tempting female body, as Núñez claims, "apagar y resfriar los más ardientes bochornos de la concupiscencia" (extinguish and cool off that most burning shame of the lusts of the flesh) (100). The brides of Christ, declares the Jesuit, "no se contentan con no amar a hombres; sino que desean ser aborrecidas de todos, y que huyan de ellas como de un cuerpo muerto. A esta causa aborrecen su misma hermosura y prendas, de modo que desean ser muertas por verse afeadas, y tan horribles, que huyan de ellas todas" (101).[41] They are corpses, and as such must say goodbye to any worldly beauty they may enjoy.

The association of the body of the female religious with abjection loomed large in baroque New Spain and other Catholic countries. The rhetoric of men like Núñez was designed to penetrate the minds of nuns and other women—Bassein refers to fervor on the part of women to destroy their bodies by engaging in abject acts. She refers to the excesses of female saints, who were held up as role models, such as "drinking the water lepers have washed their feet in and cleaning up with the tongue the vomit and excrement belonging to the patient" (Bassein 32). Acts such as these show women as susceptible to a "life-denying kind of existence that in many instances presupposes a tropism toward death" (33). If women were indeed more susceptible to these acts, it was because men with power over women, such as Núñez, crafted a life-denying rhetoric with this end in mind.

The Church authorities actually encouraged extreme manifestations of penitence, such as these acts of self-mortification and abjection, as long as the confessor first granted permission. These acts exemplified two tenets of the Christian experience in the Hispanic baroque: pain and obedience (Ibsen, *Women's Spiritual Autobiography* 71).[42] The benefits for the clergy were numerous. Acts of extreme penitence, as described by some New World nuns, served to isolate the nun from other members of the community and thus fulfilled the Church's desire to keep the woman in solitude. Moreover, a confessor whose spiritual daughter committed acts of extreme self-mortification could gain reflected glory. These acts, when committed to writing at the instigation of the confessor, became celebrated in society. The mortification of the body appealed to baroque society's fascination with the grotesque, and the female body was an ideal site. As Ibsen writes: "The grotesque fascination of the reader for graphic descriptions of mutilated bodies further reveals the sadistic implications of commodification of the female body as narrations glory in the most gruesome details

of aesthetic practice" (74). Nuns were taught to believe that this was the mo to which they must aspire in hopes that "through this methodical manipulati of the body the ideological apparatus was inscribed on the individual subject ity" with the effect that, with their energies engaged in self-monitoring and se abuse, "control over their bodies—and their minds—was ensured at all tim (75).[43]

These images of abjection also reminded women that their physical char were fleeting. In both the *Cartilla* and the *Plática*, Núñez condemns fem adornments and vanity. In this section of the *Plática* in particular, he promo a ghastly mixture of death and abjection, seizing on the popular *vanitas* trope the triumph of death over beauty. Several artists of the baroque period explor the affinity between women and *vanitas* with their representations of "dea and the maiden," which showed Death's conquest of female beauty. One su artist was Hans Baldung-Grien whose 1510 *Death and the Maiden* shows t decomposing, almost skeletal form of Death tugging at the long, flowing h of a beautiful and naked young woman. The woman is oblivious to Deat presence as she gazes into her hand mirror, her attitude appearing to waver b tween modesty and seductiveness. The painter's moral warning emanates fr this image where the vain maiden, gazing fondly at her own reflected beau remains unaware of the inexorable fate that awaits her: Beneath the pristi beauty of young womanhood lurks the rotting corpse of death. The arti Death is clearly masculine, a seducer; but there is no doubt that the you woman is complicit in her own corruption. Núñez's text has many points common with Baldung-Grien's painting: the pervasive evocation of death, t description of a grotesque, rotting body, the representation of vanity—fem vanity—as immoral and sinful, with woman's propensity to incite lust in who look upon her.

A useful weapon in the furtherance of this rhetorical style was the trope the female virgin martyr. In the *Plática*, Núñez invokes Santa Inés, who, acco ing to the Jesuit, on being led to her execution explained to those who w mourning the impending loss of her beauty: "Perezca y muera esta corporal h mosura que los hombres miran con ojos menos castos, que a cambio de que me quieran así deseo ya verme muerta, despedazada y repodrida para causar horror" (101).[44] The invocation of one of the female virgin martyrs strengthe the image of the female erotic body that emerges from the *Plática*, unders ing the duality conferred on the female body. Female sexual attraction is to flaunted before it is destroyed. The female virgin martyrs of the early Christi tradition are described in hagiographic literature as young—usually just ent

ing puberty—and endowed with a beauty that seduces all who look upon them. Their faith in the Christian God and their dedication to the consecrated life is often revealed when they refuse to marry pagan nobles (Petroff 68 n. 6). This negation of marriage unleashes what Elizabeth Petroff has described as the sexual sadism inherent in the virgin-martyr legends, in which beautiful young women are "publicly stripped naked, whipped, [and] exposed to various tortures at the hands of men" (63 n. 8).

This voyeuristic gaze that traps and objectifies the naked female body does not, as Martha Easton points out, figure in the legends of the male martyrs (57). Easton takes this notion of sexual sadism and voyeurism one step further, describing the treatment meted out to young women in these legends as a form of "sexual molestation" that renders a rather "mundane" literary account "visually prurient" (57). Núñez captures the prurience inherent in the tone and images of these legends with his representation of a passive female body prostrating herself before God. Purity is erotic, in other words.

"Retirada, cubierta, tapada" (Hidden away, covered, concealed): Christ's Slave

At the end of the ceremony of profession, the nun steps up to the *tálamo*—the area symbolizing the marriage bed—where she acknowledges the obligation of her vows and claims she does so of her own free will. Núñez is quite insistent on this point, and he cites the ruling of the Council of Trent that threatened excommunication to anyone who forcibly remitted a woman to the convent. There is, however, some irony present in this insistence on the nun entering under free will, since she is subsequently expected to relinquish it. Once she has said her vows, she must then answer three of her beloved's wishes ("vocaciones de su querido") (113). Núñez describes them as "grados y escalones por donde se sube al tálamo de su virginales bodas" (the steps and stairs by which she ascends to her virginal nuptial bed) (112). The wedding ceremony itself begins the trajectory of the nuns' death-in-life, in which they must consent to go on

> creciendo de virtud en virtud, como de hora en hora, hasta el último flamante medio día de coronación, correspondiendo con esta temporal fineza y perfección sucesiva, aquella instantánea adelantada providencia, con que abaeterno las escogió el Rey de los cielos por esposas. (113)[45]

In the first of these declarations, the nun promises to be vigilant of her body and thus circumspect in all her actions. Her body, as we have seen, no longer belongs to her. Secondly, she promises that she has renounced ("despreciado") the earthly kingdom and all that it entails. At the mention of this, Núñez cannot resist a digression, in the form of a tirade, into one of his pet topics—disgustingly immoral "galas profanas y atavíos peligrosos del mundo" (profane finery and pernicious worldly garb) (116). He even mentions how some of these adornments have been taken up in the convent and hectors his audience, asking: "¿Qué asco y enfado causará a Dios y a sus ángeles, ver que una reina del cielo, esposa de su Rey, así estime y pompee los asquerosos andrajos de los esclavos prisioneros de la tierra o del infierno?" (117).[46]

The nun makes the third and final declaration while she kneels with her eyes cast down and her arms crossed over her breast. She claims to be Christ's slave and promises to show her status in every aspect of her life in the convent. Once these three declarations have been made, she is finally given the object that will most identify her as a nun: "la insignia del velo negro" (the insignia of the black veil) (123). The veil symbolizes her being stripped of all the evil associated with the world—"los viciosos fueros del mundo, abusos y costumbres malas" (the dissolute laws, excesses and immoral practices) (123)—and her acceptance of her divine husband as her only lover. According to Núñez this is the most important aspect of the taking of the veil, and he stresses the importance of not only not loving anyone else but also of not being loved either. This, he claims, is of paramount importance—especially for women—as it goes against "la natural ambición de las mujeres, aun de las más honestas a lo humano, que no suele pesarles ser amadas y celebradas" (the natural desires of women who, even the most virtuous among them, like to be loved and admired) (124).

Just as the veil serves to identify the nun, it will conversely also serve to *dis*-identify her, erasing both her individuality and her body: "El cual se extiende al que cubre no sólo la cabeza y cuello sino el rostro todo y pecho, para que ninguno pueda verlo ni aficionársele. Por eso ha de vivir siempre, y toda encerrada dentro de su velo, donde retirada, cubierta y tapada, parece mejor al Esposo" (124–25).[47] Yet this dis-identification does not signify a shared experience with other brides of Christ. This is not a communal burial space but rather an individual and intimate tomb wherein she must only commune with her husband: "*Intra velum*: debajo de tu velo o lazos, dentro de tus tocas: allá, allá, a solas con tu Esposo" (*Intra velum*: underneath your veil, within your wimple: there, there alone with your Husband) (125).

The final element in the wedding ceremony is the ring "aquella partícula hilativa o conclusiva" (that binding or definitive component) (131). The ring is not merely a ring but also a crown: "y le llama corona, no sólo porque corona el

dedo anular y por este el corazon, que se comunican por una arteria [. . .] sino porque haciéndola verdaderamente esposa del Rey del cielo la corona reina, pues desposarse con el rey es ser reina" (134).[48] According to Núñez, this great honor brings with it enormous responsibilities as well as a debt of gratitude:

> Aquí el agradecimiento debido a tanto beneficio: el decoro conveniente a tanta dignidad. [. . .] Ajena de todos, como quien se ve libre del fuego mundano y horno babilónico de sus abrasadas dependencias, da reconocidas las gracias al Padre de su Esposo y Señor Jesucristo, por cuyos méritos la libró de tan voraz incendio, y de su tizne y calor noscivo, y la sublimó al estado celeste de angélica pureza. (134)[49]

Once she has attained this state of angelic purity, the woman becomes untouchable, monumentalized. This discursive gesture has much in common with the other predominant trope in the *Plática*, the dead body of the nun. Both function as strategies of containment, and both help to quell masculine anxieties about female sexuality.

These tropes form a continuum that seeks to reify the woman's body so as to render her absent. All that remains is a chimerical vision of the nun that serves as a symbolic force of virtue in society. The vision can only be a chimera, however, for the reality represents disorder and sin and has therefore, supposedly, been erased.

As both the ceremony and Núñez's text reach their close, the priest officiating gives the nun a ring, along with with a palm leaf—"la palma de tu virginidad." The "imperial novia" recognizes the spiritual adornments she is receiving, while rejecting "la infame cadena de sus yerros en la obscura masmorra de la carne, como vil esclava de su apetito" (the ignoble bondage of her errors in the flesh's dark dungeon, appetite's vile slave) (138). Society can confer no greater honor, says Núñez, than that of the *Sponsa Dei*: "Virgen, esposa de Cristo, no hay más que decir, ni pedir, ni desear" (Virgin, Bride of Christ, there is nothing more to say or desire) (139). Finally, the *prelado*, as God's earthly intermediary, hands over the newlywed to the care of the *superiora* (Mother Superior), who must watch over her every move until the moment when her death-in-life, her convent life, is over and she is joined with her heavenly husband for eternity.

Núñez supposedly gave this sermon on the day of the profession of a nun in the Convent of San Lorenzo. His text was meant to be heard as well as read, and it is easy to imagine the terrible thrall in which Núñez held his audience with his macabre rhetoric of death and denial. Like any good fire-and-brimstone

preacher, he brings his text to a hair-raising climax, designed to leave his audience convinced that no other road can be taken other than the one he lays out in his sermon. In the last section of his tract, he returns to a technique he employed in the *Cartilla*: assuming the first-person feminine voice of the Esposa and dramatically offering himself up devoid of all agency to God:

> Tomad allá mi corazón y mi voluntad; poseed mi cuerpo y mi alma; tomad mis potencias y sentidos; disponed de todo como en cosas propias; mandad, desmandad, haced y deshaced, que toda estoy a vuestra disposición y albedrío &c. ¡O y así sea! Y sea para siempre, sin fin ni interrupción. Amén. (145)[50]

In this case, his ventriloquism serves to make his words more immediate. He uses the dead body of the nun as a staging ground from which to launch his commandments. After all, she has no voice of her own. And so the *Plática* ends. The nun is left without free will, body, or soul, and finally, in the culminating gesture, without voice. Not only does the Church, here via Núñez, obliterate her body but also it feigns her own voice to do so. The transformation is complete, the tomb is sealed, and the maiden is dead.

In Conclusion: Back from the Dead

María Dolores Bravo has called the *Plática doctrinal* an "espléndido y terrible discurso de poder" (a splendid and terrible discourse of power) ("Erotismo" 126). The *Cartilla*, in a different way, is also a highly structured discourse of power. We cannot underestimate the discursive force texts such as Núñez's wielded over seventeenth-century colonial Mexican society.[51] Octavio Paz has characterized intellectual life in Mexico as a "cultura de púlpito y cátedra" (culture dominated by pulpit and university) (84). Núñez, the all-powerful learned Jesuit, would have been viewed as a leading intellectual figure of his time. However, the power of someone even as awe-inspiring as Antonio Núñez de Miranda was not monolithic. The texts themselves, with their desperate discourse of containment and control, belie the success of the Church's claim of community in which each woman, shrouded in her veil, should sit anonymously in her "rincón" (corner).

Speaking of early modern England, Valerie Traub has warned against allowing the "seemingly relentless power of [masculine] containment" ("Desire and Anxiety" 49) to take us in. She advises us to go beyond it to see "the possibility of female agency [that emerges] in excess of masculine control" ("Desire and Anxi-

ety" 49). The following chapters will examine these "excesses" that challenge the control the Church authorities in colonial Mexico carefully and obsessively laid down, as Núñez de Miranda exemplifies here. Far from dead, the New World nun was alive and well, finding strength in acts of alliance and community that challenged the Church's proscriptions.

3

The Community of Lovers

Mala amistad in the Convent

El estar también en conocimiento de lo que es comunidad de mujeres,
entre las cuales nunca falta quien con la luz se ciegue por gustar de sombras.
(The importance of knowing what a community of women is like—wherein there
is always someone blinded by the light for too great a love of the shadows.)

Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, *Paraíso Occidental,* Libro Tercero-XXII, 317

On an unspecified day in September 1792, an eighteen-year-old professed nun, Sor María Josefa Ildefonsa de San Juan Bautista of the *concepcionista* Convent of Jesús María in Mexico City, wrote a letter of denunciation to the Inquisition. The letter concerned the activities of one Tomás, whose last name she was unable to recall. In her denunciation, the young nun described how she had heard it said that Tomás was a sorcerer, "un mago." She had contacted him, she said, as she wanted to break her vows and abandon the convent, so as not to be separated from a servant girl who wanted to leave. She alleged that Tomás gave her a book, one whose pages were all blank, "no había letras ninguna" (there was no writing whatsoever) (f. 1). A series of extremely complicated instructions followed: if she needed to get in touch with him, she simply had to place any correspondence in the book, and magically he would receive it. He would also send correspondence to her in the same fashion. She must only read the papers at night, as during the day they would simply appear to be blank, and after reading them, she should immediately burn them. If she did not follow these rules exactly, "no habrá nada" (there will be nothing) (f. 1). Using this method, Tomás would inform her of when she was to leave the convent. He would arrange this so it would appear to the convent community that she was still physically present: "estaba [Tomás] pronto a sacarme sin que me vieran ni supieran nada pues podía ser que les pareciera a las de acá que estaba yo y no faltaba y yo estar a donde quisiera sin que me