

Marriage as Unifying Theme in *La bienaventurada Madre Santa Teresa de Jesús*

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Abstract: This essay analyzes the presence of the theme of marriage within the hagiographic comedy *La bienaventurada Madre Santa Teresa de Jesús*, attributed to Lope de Vega, in order to suggest that the wedding functions both as a thematic space within which the plot, action, and dramatic elements of the work gain unity and intelligibility, as well as a socio-philosophical unifier of the divine and human spheres of the human experience presented in the aforementioned drama.

Keywords: Lope de Vega – Teresa de Jesús – Spanish Mysticism – Golden Age Drama.

I. Introduction

Among the *comedias de santos* attributed to Lope de Vega, *La bienaventurada Madre Santa Teresa de Jesús* has only begun to receive sustained academic attention within the last few decades. Among the modest number of intellectuals who have analyzed it, figures such as Antonio Cao, Robert Morrison, and Bárbara Mujica have noted difficulties regarding various facets of the work, including the true identity of its author, its date of composition, and an apparent lack of dramatic unity throughout the text. This essay seeks to acknowledge and build upon the research of the aforementioned writers, as well as upon the works of A. A. Parker, Elma Dassbach, Jonathan Thacker, and others, in seeking to identify the presence of a unifying theme within *La bienaventurada Madre*. An analysis of *La bienaventurada Madre* reveals that such a unifying element can indeed be found within and throughout the drama in the theme and imagery of marriage, especially that which occurs between Teresa and Jesus. The nuptial reality, therefore, serves as the thematic base that unites the action and plot of the work, permitting the reader to understand its multifaceted scenes holistically. In addition,

marriage fulfills another notable function, which is the integration of the divine and human spheres within which the action of the drama takes place. This union of the spiritual and material planes is significant, as it potentially confirms the theory of marriage as a unifying theme of the Lopean *comedia* by situating it within the cultural worldview of the Spanish Golden Age, a worldview which understood the relationship between the divine and profane spheres of the human experience as a positive one.

II. Literary and Cultural Background

In order to identify the presence of a nuptial theme in *La bienaventurada Madre Santa Teresa de Jesús* and its importance to the work as a whole, it is first necessary to summarize the prominence and influence of the religious and profane elements of Spanish baroque culture, where each element encountered its most potent expression, and how Lope (referred to in this work as the author for the sake of simplicity) or a member of his school would have understood the relationship which existed between the spiritual, the banal, the wedding, and the *comedia* in general. It is beyond the scope of this work to provide any sort of holistic comment on the diverse array of factions and facets of both the religious and the secular aspects of Spanish Golden Age society. Rather, this article seeks to merely recognize their existence and importance while highlighting some of their more prevalent avenues of expression. In his work *Lope de Vega and the Comedia de Santos*, Robert Morrison postulates that neither the culture nor the drama of the Siglo de Oro can be understood without reference to the Lopean *comedia* and the Catholic Church (19).¹ Regarding the first of these realities, he states:

It is widely agreed that the theater of Golden Age Spain represented the popular taste, portrayed the society of the day, achieved audience identification, and met with popular acclaim. That the plays of Lope de Vega not only did all these things, but did them in a complete and representative way, is equally conceded. (21)

¹ Expanding upon his statement and the relationship between Lopean drama and Catholicism, Morrison notes: “the second pervading influence on the people of Golden Age Spain was the drama, especially that of Lope de Vega. Deleito y Pifuela, writing about Philip IV, asserted that the Church and the theater were two great forces in the Spain of the poet-king (‘Vida madrileña’ 12: 48, 387), and, suggesting the joining of the two forces . . . observed that there was ‘intimo consorcio y a veces pintoresco maridaje entre la iglesia y el teatro’ (373) . . . the Church provided endless subjects for the drama . . . [and] professional actors and actresses often performed in convents and monasteries, many of which afforded all the customary theatrical devices and refinements” (19).

The popular aspect of Golden Age culture therefore found expression within the dramas of the Lope and his school. This expression was most commonly recognized within the comical and carnal elements of such works, although it likewise featured within the central conflicts of love and honor which so often characterized the Lopean *comedia*. In reference to the importance of such aspects not only to the *comedia* but to baroque culture in general, Ignacio Arellano states that “a nadie se le oculta la importancia de las burlas y sus modalidades en la literatura del Siglo de Oro” (5), and likewise, José Antonio Mateo Royo declares:

The nucleus of the comedy, the main part of the usual representation in permanent theatres, consisted of romantic troubles between a knight and a lady, mixed often with conflicts of honor. The popular perspective was represented by the servants of the couple. Their realism and mockery produced a deliberate contrast with the ideals of their masters. Popular folksongs and traditions were incorporated and reinterpreted [. . . as well as] many aspects of popular culture: dances, burlesques, carnivalesque elements. (181)

In other words, the profane, “material” dimension of the human condition found a profound avenue for expression within the theater of the Golden Age and especially in the works of Lope de Vega and of his school. Equally notable, however, is the strong presence of the Catholic Church in every aspect of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spanish society, including within the *corrales* themselves. Elaine M. Canning notes that “any dramatist writing during Spain’s Golden Age was acutely aware that he was writing for a public obsessed by fe, salvación, gracia divina, condenación and of course Dios” (*Lope de Vega’s comedias de tema religioso* 9), and Morrison goes so far as to declare that “Religion was the part of life to which all other parts related. Of all the characteristics of the Spanish people, religion was so important in their life and soul that it became their most conspicuous trait . . . The Spanish outlook upon all matters was essentially that of the Catholic faith” (6). For Morrison, while the works of Lope were the pinnacle of popular expression in Spanish culture, one of the most prominent aspects of the Catholic religion during this time was mysticism, a type of spirituality in which individuals sought their fusion, “as children of God, with Him to whom they gave themselves entirely . . . It was, in essence, a union with God in this life” (17). Mysticism thus served as the height of Catholic spirituality during the Golden Age and gave rise to figures such as Juan de la Cruz, Luis de León, and Santa Teresa de Jesús.

It is important to note at this point, however, that contrary to the opinion held by certain former intellectuals, the religious and popular dimensions of Spanish baroque culture did not always exist in a strict dichotomy of conflict.² More often than not, in fact,

² The dichotomous view of the sacred and the profane, or the popular and the official, finds one of its most recognized expressions in Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of Carnival, which he held “was immense in

they were integrated or synthesized within the cultural expressions of the age, and therefore one should not be surprised that both appear within the works of Lope de Vega and his followers. According to Victor Dixon, “Lope’s knowledge of Spain and everything Spanish was immense” (25). Likewise, Morrison states that “Lope’s plays as a reflection of the society of his day have been declared without peer. He is the incarnation of his age, with a profound knowledge and . . . understanding of the society around him” (21). Such a developed understanding of Golden Age society would of course include a reflection of its popular aspect, and indeed, the presence of such a dimension within the theatrical works of Lope and his school has already been noted. However, given the importance of Catholicism and especially mysticism in all aspects of Spanish life, it follows that Lope’s work would also have included an ample dose of the religious element of the human experience. Morrison supports such an observation, noting that “the early 1590s saw the peak of Spanish mysticism . . . since Lope de Vega was then about thirty, it would be difficult to deny that he was influenced by the mystics” (18). This fusion of theatrical styles and cultural elements, of the rough and the holy, is in fact indicative of Lopean theatre, as is shown by his employ of the *tragicomedia*, the “mingled drama,” which reveals a reality in which “king and clown . . . nunnery and brothel, blank verse and bawdy prose, share the same world” (Harris 96). Thus, the theater of Lope de Vega can be understood as a vibrant cultural expression not only of the popular aspects of Golden Age society, but of the religious-official elements as well. As a final note, it is worth mentioning that given the prevalence of the sacred and profane and their diverse manifestations within the society of Lope’s time, their influence can be said to extend to the other dramatists of his school as well. Thus, while many intellectuals have indicated the strong Lopean identity of *La bienaventurada Madre*,³ even if Lope himself were not the author, the cultural

the Renaissance and the Middle Ages. A boundless world of humorous forms and manifestations opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture” (4). However, in more recent years, scholars have begun to question such a strict delineation of these two facets of the human condition. See, for example, Royo, pp. 166-67, and Canning, “Sacred Souls and Sinners,” p. 158.

³ Various scholars in recent years have affirmed the Lopean identity of *La bienaventurada Madre* and the strong possibility of Lope as the author, including Bruerton and Griswold (498), Mujica, who notes that “most scholars believe that Lope wrote *Santa Teresa de Jesús* either for the beatification of Teresa de Jesús in 1614 or for her canonization in 1622” (*A New Anthology* 170), and Velasco, who likewise states: “theatergoers could see moving images depicting scenes from Teresa’s life in two hagiographic plays during the period when Teresa’s supporters were preparing her case for beatification and canonization that were attributed to Lope de Vega (*La bienaventurada Madre Santa Teresa de Jesús*, written between 1590–1604, and *Vida y muerte de Santa Teresa de Jesús*, written between 1620–1630), as well as in post-canonization plays” (222). Drawing on the research of Bruerton, Elisa Aragone Terni, and others, as well as on the existence of a 1606 comedia *La Madre Teresa de Jesús*, mentioned in *Diario de un estudiante de Salamanca. La coronica inedita de Girolamo de Sommaia (1603-1607)*, and the 1614 mention of a work titled *La vida de la Santa Madre* performed in celebration of the beatification of Teresa, Joan Oleza Simó and the contributors of ARTELOPE (artelope.uv.es) postulate that *La bienaventurada Madre* is most likely originally by Lope, although the version that exists today is a revision of the original work, probably done by Vélez in 1638. DiPuccio encapsulates this current of thought, recognizing at the very least the Lopean identity of the work

reality within which the work was written, of which Lope was perhaps the pinnacle, remains more or less the same as regards its importance to the composition and comprehension of the drama.

A key expression of the co-mingling of the religious and profane dimensions of the human experience can be found in the language and imagery of the wedding, which appears to occupy a central and unique place both within the works of the Spanish mystics and in the writings of Lope de Vega and his school. Building upon his already noted definition of the mystics' goal of union between the soul and God, Morrison notes that such a union was based "on the concept of marriage; after all, the Bible portrays a marital union between Christ and His Church and between Him and each elected soul" (17). Thus, the highest end of mystic spirituality was commonly expressed using marital terms. Drawing from the Old Testament's *Song of Songs*, Christian mystics including Teresa de Jesús, Juan de la Cruz, Luis de León, Tomás de Aquino, and Brígida de Suecia elected to describe the height of the mystical experience as nuptial in character.⁴ For example, Teresa Hancock-Palmer notes that "Teresa of Ávila experienced the Song of Songs as an enactment of mental prayer and spiritual marriage, and taught her spiritual daughters to perform it as such" (43), and Bruce Wardropper recognizes nuptiality as a hallmark of nearly all Christian mysticism.⁵ In regards to the exact nature of the mystical wedding and the soul's intimate union with the Godhead, Alisa J. Tigchelaar remarks that it is a union which must be understood "as the interiorization of the divine life of the Trinity into a Christ-like self . . . union with God is in no way superficial to the self, nor does it remove the self from its authentic created existence, but rather deepens and transforms it" (42-43). A. A. Parker follows a similar line of thought in *The Philosophy of Love* when he notes that "what the Spanish Mystics claim to experience is actual union with God, the union of spirit with spirit which is achieved by contemplative prayer. St. John of the Cross says that this union is an intellectual intuition of the divinity; but it is at the same time, and above all, an act of love" (75). In other words, the mystical marriage can be defined as the almost constant union of the soul with God, a union-in-grace understood to be the highest form of participation in the Divine Life (Garrigou-Lagrange 56). Although this union is undoubtedly fullest in heaven, many mystics, following the teachings of Aquinas,

in question, when she notes that "in all likelihood, somewhere between 1604 and 1622, merely 22 to 40 years following her death in 1582, Lope, or possibly another Golden Age dramatist, wrote a play, or perhaps two different plays, about Teresa" (398).

⁴ Garrigou-Lagrange lists Dyonisius, Augustine, Aquinas, Luis de Leon, and Teresa among those mystics whose mannerisms and theologies are akin to Juan de la Cruz (24-25), and in his article "Mira mis llagas? Heridas divinas en las obras de Brígida de Suecia y Teresa de Jesús," Ryan Giles notes that both Teresa de Jesús and Brígida de Suecia characterize their union with God in marital terms which are strikingly similar (35-36).

⁵ "El misticismo de la Iglesia es fundamentalmente nupcial y está fundado en la relación del amor entre Cristo y la Iglesia, así como entre Cristo y cada alma elegida en particular" (Wardropper 67).

believed that “fundamentally the life of grace and the life of glory are the same supernatural life, the same charity” (Garrigou-Lagrange 121).⁶ Thus:

According to Saint John of the Cross, the full perfection attainable in this life is found only in the transforming union, or the spiritual marriage. . . . This state represents the full development of charity; perfect love accepts any work or suffering whatever for God, and even finds a holy joy in suffering. . . . It is, in short, God himself who communicates Himself to the soul . . . and transforms it in Himself. (Garrigou-Lagrange 153-54)

In other words, the union described by the mystical wedding is not only the end and perfection of the Christian mystic, but of all Christians both individually and as a community.⁷ Therefore, the theme of marriage can be understood as central to the religious dimension of baroque Spain.

However, the centrality of marriage is also a feature of the Lopean *comedia*. In her book *Marriage in Early Modern Spain: Conjugal Doctrine in Lope, Cervantes, and Calderón*, Gabriela Carrión declares that “Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Pedro Calderón de la Barca, among many others, regularly represent marriage in their dramatic works either as the starting point of tragedy or as the happy end of comedy, suggesting the centrality of the conjugal bond” (xii). Likewise, Mujica defines Lope’s *comedia* as “a play featuring characters of the minor nobility that ends favorably for the protagonists, often in a wedding” (*A New Anthology* 666), and she notes that “it was Lope who definitely set the number of acts —called *jornadas*— at three. The formula was *exposicion, nudo, desenlace*. In the first act, the dramatic problem is laid out. In the second, the plot is brought to a head. In the third, the dilemma is resolved” (*A New Anthology* 8). In other words, within the Lopean *comedia* one can generally expect to find a coherent development of plot which ends with the happy marriage of the protagonists. However, Mujica also struggles to find a true dramatic unity of action within many of Lope’s works. Whereas Thacker declares that “in the matter of the so-called unity of action he [Lope] reveals himself to be a follower of Aristotle, arguing that a play should maintain its focus on its central ‘acción’ (plot/storyline) without introducing extraneous episodes or detachable scenes” (113),

⁶ For example, Garrigou-Lagrange states that “whenever Saint Teresa touches on the question of grace, her doctrine is similar to that of Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas. Saint John of the Cross always assumes the truth of this doctrine” (110-11).

⁷ Elaborating on this line of thought, Parker notes: “Luis De Leon says that there are three things to be considered in the marriage of Christ and His church. The first is the ‘uniting and close union,’ and the word he uses for ‘uniting’ is *ayuntamiento*, which was the word for copulation. The second is ‘sweetness and delight’... that results from this union. The third is the circumstances in which marriage finds its expression. Since, he continues, Christ is the husband not only of the church as a whole, but also of each one of its members, these factors must all combine in the relation of the believer to Christ” (*A Philosophy of Love* 88).

Mujica states that “Lope . . . rejected the three unities of time, place, and action . . . the unity of action signified that a plot should be cohesive and without subplots or extraneous complications” (*A New Anthology* 8). For Mujica, this apparent lack of dramatic unity is especially present in Lope’s hagiographic comedies, such as *La bienaventurada Madre*, which she classifies as “a straightforward celebration of a woman who, in Lope’s day, was bringing prestige to Spain and restoring national pride through her canonization” (*A New Anthology* 170). One of three works relating the life of Santa Teresa attributed to Lope (Mujica, *A New Anthology* 170) and most likely published by 1614,⁸ this drama is composed of three acts which center upon three important “epochs” within the life of the protagonist St. Teresa: her decision to enter the convent and reject secular life; the transverberation, divine intervention in her life, and the continuation of Teresa’s founding of reformed convents; and finally, her miracles and death, which results in her total union with God (Mujica, “Performing Sanctity” 188-89). Due to the inclusion of several subplots as well as the selective presentation of different facets of the life of Teresa rather than a continuously developing storyline, Mujica and Morrison have noted the difficulty of identifying the presence of any real dramatic unity in this work apart from that provided by the protagonist herself. For example, Morrison notes that:

At least half of Lope’s saints’ plays . . . can be described as a series of events and tableaux joined together only by the presence of the principal character or characters. The evidence suggests that many theater-goers preferred this plan. They liked seeing brief scenes depicting the character or miracles of their saints, rather than a well-constructed conflict building through two acts and resolved in the third. (94)

Mujica observes this lack of unity of action in *La bienaventurada Madre* in particular (*A New Anthology* 171), especially in the fragmentation of the plot’s development and in the contrasting juxtaposition between the divine and human dimensions which appear in the drama (“Performing Sanctity” 191). More specifically, she states: “the first act portrays Teresa in the secular world. Here Lope uses all the tried and true devices of a *comedia de enredos* and exploits the traditional themes of honor and love” (“Performing Sanctity” 189); however, acts II and III “depict Teresa in another dimension, already a saint in intimate contact with God. The play omits most of her 20 formative years” (*A New Anthology* 174). Thus, in *La bienaventurada Madre* there is at least the appearance of a lack of unity between the three sections of the drama. This lack of dramatic unity extends to the relationship which exists between the religious and popular dimensions of the work as well, and to the actions which take place within each sphere, establishing an artificial division between the human element of the first act and the divine ambiance of the others.

⁸ See my previous footnote on page 5 for a summary of scholarly thought on the authorship and date of publication of *La bienaventurada Madre*.

It is within the debate concerning the presence of a unity of action within Lope's *comedias de santos* that the theme of marriage gains such significance. Its importance to Lope's dramas has already been stated. However, its function and the effects of its presence have not. Not only does marriage unify the action of *La bienaventurada Madre* and the supposedly contradictory divine and human spheres present within the work, but there is in fact a strong precedent for understanding the wedding as a unifying element in many Lopean *comedias*, specifically due to its identity as a *theme*. According to A. A. Parker, in baroque theater:

What the dramatist offers us . . . is a complete action . . . that discloses a theme that has a significant bearing on experience, a theme that can be taken out of the particular action and universalized in the form of an important judgment on some aspect of human life. I want to insist upon this distinction between action and theme because it is fundamental . . . [in] the Spanish drama . . . the normal criterion of unity of action must be replaced by that of unity of theme, and it is in this way that the apparent duality of many Spanish plays is resolved. I refer to those that have two plots, a main plot and a subplot with different actions or with a different dramatic tone. The relation of the one plot to the other must be looked for in the relation of each to the theme. ("The Approach to the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age" 43-44)

In other words, the dramatic unity that exists in the works of Lope and his school is much more a unity of theme than of place, time, characterization, or the development of a central conflict. Given the centrality of the wedding to the *comedia*, Parker's observations would suggest that marriage could function as a theme that unites the action of the different spheres and elements of a given play. An understanding of the role of theme as the unifying element of a drama is also significant as such a viewpoint is in agreement not only with the observations of Thacker, who postulates that Lope conserves a unity of action in his works (113-14), but at the same time admits the validity of the observations of Mujica regarding the presence of a multiplicity of plots within the Lopean drama. Such a multiplicity of storylines no longer necessarily creates a fragmentation of the work, since *tema*, not *trama*, grants the *comedia* unity and intelligibility. It is also important to recognize, as Thacker has already mentioned, that the notion of "action" being analyzed in this instance is Aristotelian in its origins. For Aristotle, there is an essential relation between the end or goal of an object and its action and nature. In his *Physics*, for example, he declares: "for the 'what' and the 'that for the sake of which' are one, while the primary source of motion is the same in species as these" (II. 7. 26-27). That is, there is an intimate union between the end of an object, its essence, and its action. The unity of thematic action potentially conserved by Lope, therefore, can be seen as a teleological unity which recognizes at least implicitly the relationship between the goal —marriage— and the

components of an object, which are in this case the action, plot, and characters of the *comedia*. This observation does not mean that Lope was completely, or even generally, Aristotelian in his actual employ of action, time, and place in his *comedias*. Rather, it merely seeks to note that the understanding of the relationship between goal, essence, and action during Lope's time would have received an influence from the theories of Aristotle; hence, an Aristotelian notion of such elements should at least be consulted when seeking to define their functions and relationships.

Additionally, and perhaps most notably, an understanding of marriage as a unifying theme permits the integration of the divine and human spheres of a drama such as *La bienaventurada Madre*, the synthesis of which has already been recognized as a cultural reality of the Golden Age. According to Robert ter Horst, Lope was a dramatist for whom "sensuality is spiritual and . . . spirituality is sensual. In his life and art, Lope thoroughly confuses, commingles, and compounds sex and religion, so that the one becomes a function of the other" (120); that is, for Lope, the divine and human were inseparably intertwined within the *comedia*, just as they were within the human condition itself. And while Mujica notes the difficulty of encountering dramatic unity within the hagiographic comedy in particular, Morrison states that a true integration of the divine and human spheres "is perhaps seldom better manifested than in the *comedia de santos*" (19). Elaine Canning notes the same when she states that in the *comedias de santos*, "it is through the intricate fusion of *lo Sagrado* and *lo profano*, the sacred and the profane, that plot development, action, thematic concerns and audience expectations are determined and explored" ("Sacred Souls and Sinners" 147). Thus, the hagiographic comedy contains and reveals not only the religious element of Spanish Golden Age society, but its profane aspects as well. Thomas R. Case distinguishes three integral factors belonging to most plays of the hagiographic genre: the inclusion of a Catholic saint as protagonist, a setting which includes historical-religious elements as well as political ones, and the promulgation of Catholic doctrine, especially as it was pronounced at the Council of Trent (19-20).⁹ These three elements noted by Case refer specifically to the hagiographic identity of the *comedias de santos*; that is, to their religious aspect. However, as was already noted, the hagiographic *comedia* was also inundated, both in its essence and its elements, by the

⁹ More specifically, Case states: "Now that so many critics have given such serious consideration to what a *comedia de santos* is, especially in Lope's production, we can better give the genre a close definition. First of all, a *comedia de santos* deals with a saint, either canonized by the Catholic Church or by popular acclamation . . . A second point which is essential for the *comedia de santos* is a historical framework. Saints are the necessary leaders of a militant church. They are also national heroes . . . A third element which I believe is part and parcel of the *comedia de santos* is the restating and confirming of Catholic doctrine as proclaimed by the Council of Trent . . . The genre itself owes much of its very existence to these tenets, for the cult of the saints was a very important part of the declarations. This point is not emphasized strongly enough... The *comedia de santos* and the auto sacramental have their origin and theological basis in the teaching of this famous council" (19-20).

popular dimension of Spanish baroque culture and theater.¹⁰ In fact, Mujica notes that it was “one of the most popular dramatic genres of the 17th century . . . nearly every major early modern Spanish playwright wrote hagiographic plays” (*A New Anthology* 170). Thus, Dassbach remarks that in the *comedias de santos*:

Existe un equilibrio entre sus tres elementos: religioso, espectacular y profano. En ellas, estos elementos están bien integrados, de forma que, desde sus respectivas funciones, los tres contribuyen al éxito de la comedia; del elemento religioso emana la fuerza dramática de la comedia; del sobrenatural depende el valor visual y espectacular de la misma; mientras que el elemento profano proporciona entretenimiento (164).

This “equilibrium” of elements finds its unifying expression in the theme of marriage, a theme which Dassbach notes is equally prevalent even in dramas whose protagonists are figures who have taken a vow of chastity, and which brings about the integration of plot, theme, and action:

Dentro de las tramas secundarias, es la intriga de tipo amoroso la que predomina en las comedias de santos. Con frecuencia esta trama tiene como protagonista a la santa o santo y no se desarrolla paralelamente a la trama religiosa, sino que está integrada en la misma... funciona en relación a la trama principal, es decir, a la trama religiosa (131).

Therefore, one can find in the most profound expressions of both the divine and human spheres of the Golden Age —Lope and Catholicism— the integration and interaction of spirituality and carnality, an integration which is characterized especially in nuptial terms.

III. Analysis

The theme of marriage and nuptial imagery is not difficult to find in the first act of *La bienaventurada Madre Santa Teresa de Jesús*, which presents itself with all the elements of a secular *comedia*. According to Mujica, “as a master playwright, Lope knew that no matter how appealing his subject, he must entice his spectators. The first act portrays Teresa *in* the secular world. Here Lope uses all the tried and true devices of a *comedia de enredos* and exploits the traditional themes of honor and love” (“Performing Sanctity” 189). Thus, one would expect to find nuptial motifs throughout the first

¹⁰ For example, Gryj states that “el sistema de personajes [en las *comedias de santos*], por ejemplo, es el mismo que el de otras obras de la Comedia Nueva, con las variaciones pertinentes cuando son necesarias. Los protagonistas masculinos y femeninos se configuran como galanes y damas, o tienen rasgos que se aproximan, sobre todo si se trata de santos que tienen una vida secular antes de convertirse o de alcanzar la santidad” (45).

jornada, and indeed, such elements are integral to it. The centrality of the wedding is manifested firstly in the actions of the two *galanes* that seek to obtain the hand of Teresa: Don Ramiro and Don Diego. In reference to this aspect of act I, Dassbach declares:

La comedia comienza con una intriga amorosa que tiene como protagonista a Teresa, a la que se disputan dos pretendientes. Esta situación propia de la comedia de capa y espada se desarrolla en un tono desenfadado y alegre. Se presenta a la futura santa como amante de diversiones mundanas . . . los pretendientes aparecen compitiendo por su mano y creando una serie de situaciones típicas de la comedia profana . . . mensajes amorosos . . . entradas secretas en el aposento . . . celos y malentendidos . . . y peleas (132).

The introduction of two *galanes* serves another important function as well, which is the characterization of Teresa as a *dama*; that is, as a recipient of amorous desires. According to J. Dann Cazés Gryj, the *comedias de santos* “suelen incluir algún tipo de trama amorosa, siempre afín a la figura dramática de la dama” (45). Therefore, the identification of Teresa as a *dama* reveals that, in addition to being the protagonist of the primary plot (the story of her life), she will also be the principal recipient of the amorous intentions of various suitors throughout the drama. In addition, the characterization of Don Diego and Don Ramiro as suitors who are truly interested in marriage (as opposed to merely *burladores*) can be found in their own words. For example, thinking that he has the favor of Teresa and her father, Don Ramiro exclaims, “ya puedo llamarme esposo” (Vega, *La bienaventurada Madre*, I, v. 278), and believing the same a little later, Don Diego states: “llegar quiero como esposo” (I, v. 637). Additionally, Teresa herself, speaking with Don Diego, admits that “caso que yo sea casada, vos, primo, seréis mi esposo” (I, v. 765). Thus, the amorous intrigue that inundates the first act of *La bienaventurada Madre* is essentially nuptial in character.

The presence of marital elements in act I of *La bienaventurada Madre* as found in the characters of Don Diego, Don Ramiro, and Teresa is therefore very evident; however, such a presence does not necessarily indicate that the theme of nuptial love will feature as an integral aspect to the entirety of the drama, or even throughout the entirety of the first act. As has already been mentioned, a large part of act I revolves around the decision of Teresa to enter the convent, thereby rejecting the reality of marriage and choosing that of chastity instead. Thus, it is extremely significant that the figure of God is presented, not only in the first act but across the drama, as a *galán* that seeks to marry Teresa as well. The actions and will of God (which clearly occupy a central place in the work), are thus intimately connected with mystical union and therefore the theme of marriage. DiPuccio recognizes this tendency across the genre of the *comedias de santos* in general, stating:

Perhaps the most stunning divergence from Golden Age aesthetic as well as religious practice is the unorthodox characterization of God as possessive suitor. Lope . . . exploits the mystical poets' talent for casting God or Jesus as the Spouse or Lover and portraying unions with God as simultaneously existing on the mystical and sexual levels. One need look no further than Santa Teresa's own ¡Oh, dichosa tal zagala! . . . These ideas are even more provocative when they move from the conceptual poem to the visual stage . . . to *La bienaventurada madre*. Furthermore, the staging of a human God becomes even more intriguing when He competes with other males for the object of His desire and maintains a very Golden Age attitude . . . the dramatists rearrange the dynamics of the traditional love triangle. (384-85)

The characterization of God as a suitor presents itself most clearly in the first *jornada* through the comic dispute which occurs between "El Sacristan" and Leonido. This conflict is also the conversation that Teresa interprets as the will of God, after hearing (and misinterpreting) only the words of the Sacristan, "con Cristo se puede ir" (I, v. 818), as an answer to her question: "Dios, ¿con cual marido iré?" (I, v. 817). The role of the Sacristan as a representative of the Church, the convent, and in this scene, God, is not difficult to see. However, it is important to note that Leonido is also the *criado*, or servant, or Don Diego, the cousin with which Teresa wanted to marry. Thus, the Sacristan and Leonido can be understood as representatives of their "Lords;" that is, of the two rival *galanes* that both seek Teresa's hand. The characterization of Don Diego and "Don" Dios as rival suitors is made more evident by the literal fight that takes place between the Sacristan and Leonido, as is noted in the stage directions before verse 834: "*Dale Leonido un rempujón al Sacristan,*" and in the debate, which the Sacristan wins, between the two about who can and cannot "enter" into the convent, the place where the heart of Teresa is literally located. Additionally, the identity of God as victorious suitor and future husband is furthered in the words of Teresa's father, Don Alonso. Upon hearing the decision of Teresa to enter the convent, he comments: "tuyo [Dios] ha de ser el esposo," (I, v. 901). Likewise, the words of Don Diego, the defeated suitor, reflect the same understanding when he exclaims: "de esposo se ha mejorado" (I, v. 934). According to Dipuccio, "in the hagiographic tradition . . . a surprisingly human God courts, marries, gets involved in duels, and feels jealousy. God, as seen in these plays, recalls any number of galanes from the secular tradition" (384). Thus, the identification of God as a suitor serves to maintain the centrality of marriage in relation to the plot and action of *La bienaventurada Madre*.

Additionally, the presence of the theme of marriage in the first act of *La bienaventurada Madre* serves as a "thematic space" within which the interaction and union of the spiritual and popular dimensions of the work can occur. This integration takes place especially through the fusion of profane humor with divine providence, and it too

can be found in the already referenced scene between the Sacristan, Teresa, and Leonido. Regarding the presence of the comic aspect of the *comedias de santos*, an aspect which was generally associated with the popular, non-religious element of Spanish culture, Dassbach observes that:

Al adaptar el material hagiográfico a la escena y dar a la comedia de santos una estructura similar a la de la comedia secular, son incorporados . . . unas situaciones y conflictos propios de la comedia profana que se desarrollan a la par que la materia hagiográfica . . . Dentro de los elementos profanos . . . se encuentran . . . una trama secundaria de carácter profano, personajes cómicos y temas seculares (126).

The aforementioned scene of *La bienaventurada Madre* is an excellent example of such an incorporation. Mujica notes that “curiously, the few scholars who have examined this play do not comment on the very funny circumstances under which Teresa decides to take her vows . . . The entire first act is secular and suffused with humor . . . although Lope insinuates that Teresa is always guided by God” (*A New Anthology* 174). In other words, humor is central to the first act of this *comedia*, but divine providence is just as integral, and for Lope, the two were not necessarily in conflict. Dassbach states that “la causación divina es una parte orgánica del argumento de la comedia de santos” (95), and Mujica likewise declares that:

It may seem curious that Teresa’s first spiritual awakening takes place during a humorous scene . . . Rather than diminish the sacredness of the moment . . . humor might have had the contrary effect. Distracted by laughter, spectators may have been suddenly jolted into the realization of God’s mystical communication with Teresa through the Sacristan’s words. The humor may well have heightened the audience’s awareness of the mysterious and unexpected ways in which God imparts spiritual knowledge and of Teresa’s receptiveness to God’s will. (“Performing Sanctity” 191)

In addition, the same integration of popular humor and the Divine Plan can be found in the “prophetic” words of Teresa’s father, Don Alonso, when Teresa first tells him (as a way to get out of trouble) that she wants to be a nun. According to Morrison, “Alonso, in sarcasm -and prognostication- says that he can see it all now: a convent of descalzas, Teresa’s shining example, heaven opening to her, the fasts of her days and the prayerful transports of her nights, blood coming from her body even after burial, and great respect for her relics” (105); “Ya te imagino una santa;/ Milagros podrás hacer . . .” (I, vv. 574-75). However, Teresa’s response, “lo que me dices burlando/ podrá Dios hacer de veras” (I, vv. 602-03), signifies the intimate relationship which exists between human activity and

divine causality. In sum, the existence of a marked connection between the divine and secular spheres of the first act of *La bienaventurada Madre* is evident, as is the fact that this connection takes place within the “thematic space” of marriage.

The presence of nuptial love as a fundamental aspect of the first *jornada* of *La bienaventurada Madre* is quite clear. It is also not surprising, given the already noted prevalence of the wedding as theme and end of the secular *comedias* of Lope, which are the model for this first section of the dramatized history of Santa Teresa. However, nuptial language is perhaps most explicit in the second act of the text, especially in the presentation of three principal events: the transverberation, the ecclesial notice granting Teresa permission to found her new convents, and the debate between Teresa and the Christ Child concerning “cruces y higas.” Regarding the first of these elements, Mujica notes that in the second act, Teresa already occupies the ‘divine sphere’ of the human condition and is “in intimate contact with God” (*A New Anthology* 174). However, following the tradition of mystical theology, she also recognizes that “the culmination of the play is Teresa’s mystical marriage and union with Christ in death [in act III]” (“Performing Sanctity” 197). In reality, however, one can speak of the presence of a ‘double marriage’ between Teresa and God in *La bienaventurada Madre*. The first takes place in the second act during the transverberation scene, which can be defined as an act of consummation, and the second at the end of the work in the total union between God and Teresa that occurs with the latter’s death.¹¹ Thus, Antonio Cao is not incorrect when he states that “el segundo [...] acto] se centra en su matrimonio espiritual” (301), and neither is Morrison when he notes that “the mystical nature of Teresa’s relationship to God is underlined several times; in act II, she addresses the Child Jesus as ‘husband’ and directs to Him words of tender endearment” (110). The language and action of the transverberation scene; that is, of the mystical union of the soul of Teresa with the love of God (*Amor Divino*), is completely nuptial in character. Such nuptiality can be seen in the response of Teresa after receiving the “golpe” of the angelic lance that symbolizes Divine Love, a love that causes “pena, dolor, contento y alegría” (II, v. 953):

¹¹ The presence of multiple mystical weddings and a gradation of the soul’s union with God can be better understood by recalling the previously quoted section from Garrigou-Lagrange, in which he states that “fundamentally the life of grace and the life of glory are the same supernatural life, the same charity, with two differences. Here on earth, God is known only in the obscurity of faith, not in the clarity of vision. In addition, we hope to possess God in an inadmissible manner; but as long as we are on earth, we can lose him through our own fault. In spite of these two differences, it is the same life” (121). In other words, the union of the mystic’s soul with God on earth and in heaven are different not in essence, but in degree. The degree to which an individual can participate in the Divine Life on this earth, even if he or she does so as perfectly as they are able, is obviously a lesser perfection due to the defects of the body and the limits of the human intellect and will while bound by this world. Within the Beatific Vision, the extent to which one can know and love God is obviously greater.

Herid, herid con golpes más continos;
 Dejadme el pecho, si gustáis, rasgado

 Pues a vos, dulce Esposo, os dio Longinos

 En cuyas aguas vivas dé a mi fragua
 El dardo el fuego, y vierta fuente el agua (II, vv. 963-75).

The title of “Esposo” that Teresa gives to God makes the marital element of this encounter between the two explicit. Likewise, the contraposition between “dolor” and “placer,” pleasure and pain, which is traditionally associated with both mystical and erotic love, is very strongly manifested in the words of Teresa quoted above. Finally, the action of the scene, which is the penetration of Teresa with the lance of Divine Love, has connotations which are clearly sexual in nature.¹² Therefore, the transverberation can be understood to function as the spiritual consummation between “la Dama Teresa” and “el Galán Dios,” a consummation that divinizes the humanity of Teresa, permitting her to participate in the life and love of her husband.

The nuptial union between Teresa and Christ that supposedly exists after the moment of the transverberation is manifested once again in the scene between Teresa, Mariano, and the Abbess within which the priest Mariano reveals to Teresa the ecclesiastical notice approving her plans to found reformed convents. In this encounter, Teresa, already the spouse of Christ at least to a certain extent, chooses to change her name to that of her husband: “desde hoy, Teresa de Jesús soy/ y este nombre se me da” (II, vv. 1233-34). This decision signifies the new identity of Teresa as the bride of Christ, an identity which includes a union of persons and therefore of wills. Thus, after the transverberation, Teresa functions as a representative of her husband and His salvific desires in the world. This specific aspect of the identity of Teresa is manifested in the notice she receives from the Church authorities giving her permission to found her reformed convents, a work that is not only her will but that of God as well (II, vv. 1471-74). Although it is the Church which grants Teresa permission to continue her efforts, it is Teresa herself that takes on the active role in founding such convents in the first place and in asking the ecclesial hierarchy for their permission to go on doing so. Thus, it is

¹² For example, Giles states: “Varios escritores han señalado la conexión entre la lanza blandida durante la Pasión y el mito de Cupido... Mitógrafos, teólogos y poetas medievales ya habían reinterpretado a este antiguo dios greco-romano, creando una alegorización cristianizante. Se combinaban en el proceso motivos que se pueden rastrear hasta las obras amatorias de Ovidio, así como el corazón herido en el *Cantar de los Cantares* (4: 9), que había leído Teresa con tanto cuidado, y el evangelio de San Juan, donde se lee la famosa frase “Deus caritas est” (4:8). Como un dios de amor totalmente purificado de cupiditas, una gran cantidad de escritores medievales representaban a Cristo no sólo como receptor, sino también como autor de heridas amorosas, ya sea directamente o a través de mensajeros celestiales alados, generalmente con flechas, lanzas o espadas” (43–44).

significant that when Teresa receives her authorization from the Church, Lope presents it in prose, and not in verse. (Mujica, *A New Anthology* 201). Mujica notes that “es una convención literaria que los galanes empleen el soneto para sus notas mientras que las damas utilicen la prosa, que es una forma menos culta” (*A New Anthology* 136), but in this drama, the only sonnet is recited by Teresa in the third act, just before her death (III, vv. 2458-70), and the letter from the official Church is the only example of prose. This last fact, coupled with the traditional status of the Church as “the ultimate wife, wedded to Christ, the ultimate husband” (Carrión 22), suggests that the prosaic response of the ecclesiastic authorities to the “advances” of Teresa emphasizes the masculine characterization of Teresa and at the same time the reality of her marital union with God and the Divine Will.¹³

The final section of the second act which emphasizes the identity of Teresa as already married to Christ is the scene of ‘cruces y higas,’ within which Teresa, striving to follow the misguided counsels of her confessor Mariano (who thought that her visions were from the devil), gives “unas higas” to the Christ Child when he appears to her. According to Velasco,

The higa, in fact, was an obscene phallic figure that dated back to antiquity ... a symbol of the ancient god Priapus whose primary attribute was a hyperbolic erect phallus... its origin is not only superstitious and idolatrous but so lewd and abhorrent that a religious person can't even think about. (224-225)

At the beginning of this scene, Teresa is obviously traumatized at the idea of having to “dar la higa” to Christ.¹⁴ Nonetheless, she obeys her confessor, saying to the Christ Child: “los pasos tomado tengo; higas y cruces prevengo” (II, v. 1375). However, what is notable is Teresa’s response after Christ assures her that it really is He, and not the devil, who is appearing to her. To demonstrate her love for Him, Teresa exclaims: “tomad mil higas, mi Esposo;/ que en nadie mi dulce amor/ las puede emplear mejor/ que en un Niño tan hermoso” (II, v. 1427-30). Thus, in this scene Teresa can in some sense be seen as reciprocating the erotic acts bestowed upon her by Christ at the moment of the

¹³ This masculine characterization of Teresa is consistent with the manner in which female mystics often expressed the reality of their union with God. For example, Elizabeth Rhodes states that “in the case of women and men alike, the way in which the ecstasy of union is represented may gravitate toward the inversions of standard social expectations (women empowered, men released into restful bliss), if for nothing else than to emphasize the distinction of the experience from that which is known” (208).

¹⁴ Lope’s audience would have likewise been shocked at the use of such a gesture by a saint, especially when directed towards a divine figure. Velasco recognizes this reality, stating: “Lope took full advantage of his and his audience’s knowledge of both popular and learned notions of the higa... Lope responds to the risk of shocking (and potentially alienating) his audience by rewriting Teresa’s traumatic experience into one of poignant piety” (225, 229). Thus, the “higa” scene is a prominent example of the fusion of the sacred and profane.

transverberation. The connection between the words “higa” and “Esposo,” which appear almost next to each other in the same line, is quite evident, as are the obscene, profane, and sexual connotations of the “higa” gesture. Likewise, the paradoxes of “pleasure and plain” and of “sacred and profane,” exemplified in this scene by the “higa” and the “cruz,” once again suggest sexual relations, and therefore nuptial ones as well. The divinization of such a vulgar gesture manifests the function of marriage as a unifier of the divine and human dimensions of *La bienaventurada Madre*. However, at the same time it reveals the humanization of God. In other words, in this drama there is no subsumption of the profane sphere and its total replacement with the spiritual; rather, with the deification of the banal comes the incarnation of the divine.¹⁵ As a final note, it is significant that “Lope plays on the phonological similarity between ‘higas de obediencia’ and ‘hijas de obediencia’ [figs/daughters of obedience]” (Velasco 230). This exchange reinforces the identity of Teresa as spouse of God and therefore as a spiritual mother of the sons and daughters in her reformed convents, a vocation noted in the text by Mariano: “siendo virgen hallada,/ con sus hijos se ha de honrar” (II, vv. 1005-06). In sum, marriage and nuptial love are central to act II of *La bienaventurada Madre* with respect to plot development, the action of the drama, and the characterization of its central characters.

The function of the wedding as a central theme which unifies and gives intelligibility to the action of *La bienaventurada Madre* continues in act III, and its presence is perhaps just as clear in the third act as it is in the second. While the same emphasis on marriage is kept, especially at the end of the work, Lope builds on the “higas/hijas” motif and replaces sexual language with maternal imagery in order to signify the characterization of Teresa as spouse of God and therefore mother of His children. According to Mujica, “the third act of the play is devoted to Teresa’s miracles” (*A New Anthology* 177); that is, to the divine intervention which God works through the intercession of Teresa. The divinization of Teresa that occurs in the second act thus extends throughout the third by means of the miracles she works, miracles which are not anti-natural, but supernatural, and at the same time spectacular. Dassbach notes that “para el creyente, el poder sobrenatural del santo constituye el principal atributo de santidad” (91). That is to say, in the *comedias* of Lope and in Catholic theology in general, miracles serve as a sign of the sanctity of its worker, and thus of his or her intimate union with God and their participation in the perfection of the Divine Act. Therefore, the miracle not only

¹⁵ Concerning the relationship between divine and human nature in religious Golden Age literature, Barbara J. Oberlander states: “This insertion of the supernatural into the natural is the union which is the basis of the elevation of the human race to a participation in the divinity of the Head... the flesh of the God-man, which contains the fullness of the divinity, becomes a revivifying flesh from which supernatural life comes forth to man. By the fact and manner of the Incarnation the Son of God has made of His corporal union with the human race the basis of His supernatural union with it” (94-95). Likewise, Tigchelaar notes that for the mystic, “union is to be understood as the interiorization of the divine life of the Trinity into a Christ-like self... union with God is in no way superficial to the self, nor does it remove the self from its authentic created existence, but rather deepens and transforms it” (42-43).

demonstrates the union that exists between the saint and God, but it also elevates, or divinizes, the world around the saint, who functions as an “incarnation” of the Divine Will. According to Dassbach, “a través del poder milagrosos del santo se consigue... mostrar el poder divino y la presencia de la divinidad en este mundo, al mismo tiempo que se hace más asequible al creyente el mundo del más allá” (93). Thus, the miracles worked by Teresa are not only evidence of her own union with God, but also of the process of the divinization of her society, a process which manifests the unification of the spiritual and material dimensions.

Among the miraculous actions of Teresa in act III, there are two which receive substantial attention from Lope: one, the miracle of the miraculous blood of Teresa which saves Don Juan del Valle, and two: the resuscitation of Teresa’s nephew. In addition to revealing the intimate union between Teresa and her Divine Spouse, each miracle is notable in that it also characterizes Teresa as a spiritual mother, and thus as a mother of the children of God. First, in the miracle of Don Juan del Valle, the handkerchief of Don Juan, covered with the blood of Teresa, saves him from the murderous intentions of Don Diego (previously the suitor of both Teresa and her sister). Upon seeing that he has failed in his evil intentions due to the intervention of God, Don Diego repents and decides to enter one of the reformed convents founded by Teresa, exclaiming: “que yo no quiero enemigo/ por quien Dios milagros hace.../Pues tan encendido estoy,/ que propongo desde hoy/ ser fraile” (III, vv. 2033–34, 2045–57). After expressing this desire, he declares as he exits: “disponga el Eterno Padre/ lo que a mi corazón cuadre” (III, vv. 2109–10). Upon hearing thus, Teresa tells him, “adiós, hijo,” and he responds in kind, saying: “adiós, mi madre” (III, vv. 2112–13). Don Diego’s identification of God as his spiritual father and Teresa as his spiritual mother within the space of ten lines reinforces once again the identity of Teresa as the spouse of Christ. Regarding the second miracle, Mujica notes that “Teresa’s best-known miracle is probably the resuscitation of her dead nephew” (“Performing Sanctity” 196). Upon encountering the sadness of her sister and brother-in-law at the untimely passing of their child, Teresa insists that the boy is in fact not dead (III, v. 2278), and then begins to pray to God that he be resuscitated, saying: “viva este niño, mi Dios.../cumplid, aunque es fuerte cosa/ esta palabra que he dado;/ que el esposo está obligado/ a cumplir la de la esposa./ ¿No me habláis, niño querido?” (III, vv. 2290, 2294–98). The first two words of the boy when he awakes, “¡Madre, tía!” (III, v. 2299), can be read, of course, as greetings to his mother and to Teresa (¡Madre! ¡Tía!). However, they can also be understood as an exclamation of frustration or surprise directed solely at his aunt. Although it is impossible to be certain about how Lope intended this line to be read, it is worth noting that almost immediately afterwards, the child does in fact complain to Teresa for having taken him out of heaven and back into this world. Regardless of the true significance of these words, the prayer of Teresa, within which she refers to herself and God as husband and wife, is nuptial in essence. Likewise, the giving of the “spark” of life (“dar la luz” is, of course, a manner of saying “to give birth”) to a child “from heaven” strongly refers to the maternal identity of the protagonist.

Therefore, the theme of marriage is entirely intertwined with the miracles of Teresa. Regarding the maternal facet of Teresa and its connection to her miracles, DiPuccio declares:

Teresa ... registers two ... functions, namely wife and mother ... In *La bienaventurada Madre*, the more obvious example of this proxy parenting occurs when Teresa resuscitates her moribund nephew... If his mother, Doña Juana, brought life to Gonzalo the first time, Teresa brings him back to life for a second. A second example of Teresa's maternal propensities involves a former suitor... Don Diego, who earlier wooed Teresa as a potential spouse, now refers to her as 'mi madre'... In a sense, his love evolves from the sexual to the filial, given that Teresa goes from being the object of desire to mother superior who conceives a spiritual son. (390)

In other words, the unifying function of marriage manifests itself throughout the third act of *La bienaventurada Madre* through of the subtheme of the miracle, thereby revealing the union between God and Teresa by means of the fulfillment of the Divine Will in this life and world.

Finally, the last scene of *La bienaventurada Madre*, the death of the protagonist and her total union with God in heaven, can be defined as the wedding scene with which the majority of Lope's *comedias* end, as well as the goal and resolution of the drama's action. Speaking of this scene, Mujica declares that "the culmination of the play is Teresa's mystical marriage and union with Christ in death ... here *Amor Divino* (Divine Love) appears in the form of Christ carrying his crown of thorns. Recognizing him as true spouse, she takes his barbed headdress, which in her hands becomes laden with roses" ("Performing Sanctity" 197). Morrison likewise observes that "toward the end of act III Teresa and Christ exchange such pledges of mystical devotion as that about the thorns becoming roses" (110). Although there is much that could be said about this scene, the presence of the nuptial theme is simply clear. Teresa refers to God with phrases such as "mi divino Esposo justo" (III, v. 2501) and "mi Amor" (III, vv. 2558, 2574, 2588), and God responds to her in kind, saying "Esposa, no tengas miedo" (III, v. 2589), and "estrellas se han de volver,/ Esposa" (III, vv. 2576–77). Additionally, the contraposition between "rosa" and "espina" once again manifests the paradox of pleasure and pain which indicates both mystical and sexual imagery. Finally, the death of Teresa and her eternal union with Christ, a union traditionally described in nuptial terms, concretizes the matrimonial reality of this final encounter between Teresa and God.

IV. Conclusion

In sum, the fundamental role of marriage in unifying the action and permitting the development of the plot of *La bienaventurada Madre Santa Teresa de Jesús* is evident, as is the function of marriage as the ‘place’ within which the divine and profane spheres of the human experience are synthesized. In this Lopean drama, marital imagery and language inundates almost every aspect of the work. This inundation includes the secular elements of the first act, the divine plane of the second, and the divinization of Teresa and her community through the miracles presented in the third. All-powerful God is presented as a suitor, with nuptial intentions, and Teresa, a human, is characterized as the bride of Christ, with an intimate participation in the actions of her Divine Spouse. Therefore, the wedding, which is the happy ending and the final reason for which the plot of the *comedia* exists, is the element which unifies the vast diversity of themes, actions, spaces, and spheres presented throughout *La bienaventurada Madre*, thereby permitting Lope to express the human condition of Spanish baroque society.

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