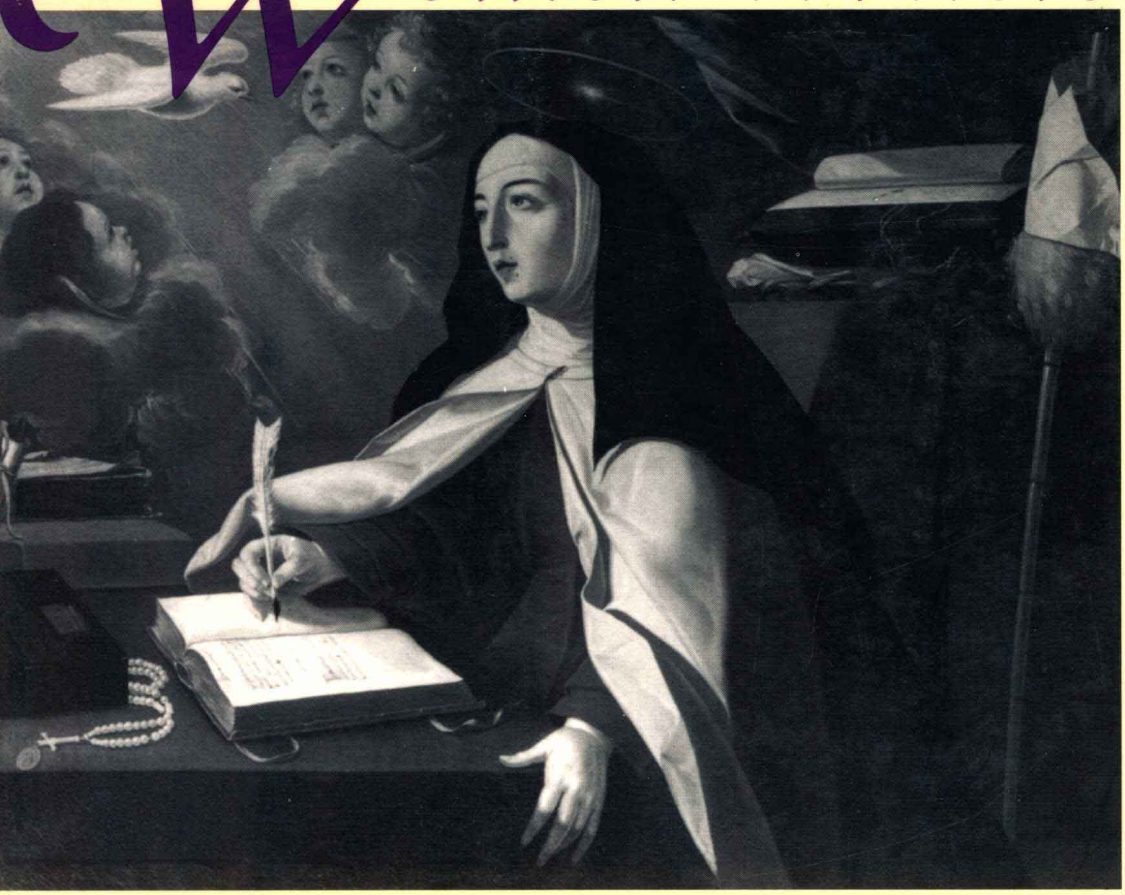
Women Writers of Early Modern Spain



SOPHIA'S DAUGHTERS

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Preface

IN AN ARTICLE published in the proceedings of the twenty-first Jornadas de Teatro Clásico, held in Almagro, Spain, in July 1998, James A. Parr points out that 99 percent of early modern Spanish plays were written by men. Because, in his view, anthologies of early modern women's writing do not provide a representative selection of canonical works, Parr questions their validity. To use as a textbook an anthology of plays written by women would be, he says, a "falsificación total de la época y de la comedia nueva como género" (132). Parr is a scholar for whom I have the utmost esteem, and he has raised a serious issue that merits our consideration.

Why an anthology of early modern women's writing? I have expressed on many occasions my wholehearted agreement with James Parr regarding the value of maintaining and propagating what is conventionally called the Golden Age canon—those works that have withstood the test of time and continue to be considered, centuries after their creation, the greatest literary treasures of an extraordinarily fertile period. I do not envision undergraduate survey courses in which Leonor de Meneses replaces Cervantes or Ángela de Azevedo supplants Calderón. Yet this book meets a definite need, especially in the present academic environment.

Although men wrote 99 percent of Golden Age texts, more than 50 percent of Spain's population during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries consisted of women. The fact that so few women wrote increases rather than diminishes the importance of those who did. The women writers of early modern Spain speak for many. If it were not for them, we would have no opportunity to hear female voices of the period. These women bring unfamiliar perspectives to familiar themes and allow us to form a more accurate notion of early modern Spanish society. They provide us with alternate outlooks. Their writing proves that much of what my generation of scholars learned about early modern women in graduate school (that they were

uniformly passive, submissive, and subservient) was simply wrong. As Mary D. Garrard writes in *The Washington Post* (30 March 2002), "Properly understood, feminism is not an ideology, but a corrective. It aims to uncover the 'masculinist' ideological bias that has pervaded history and to set things in more objective perspective." By making the writing of early modern Spanish women more accessible, I hope to contribute to a broader, more accurate view of early modern society and letters.

Parr concedes that compilations of women's writing do serve "para llamar la atención a la situación de las mujeres de la época, marginadas y oprimidas desde luego" (132). But we do not need anthologies such as this one to convince us that early modern society placed tremendous constraints on women. Theologians, moralists, novelists, and playwrights of the period provide ample material from which we can draw conclusions regarding the repressive nature of Spanish social codes, and not only for women. What much of the writing included here brings to light is that writing women used language to assert themselves, to establish their authority, and in some cases even to protest. Thus, writing itself became a means of resisting oppression.

The images early modern men created of women do not necessarily correspond to those early modern women created of themselves. Much of the writing in this collection depicts active, thinking women. If Garcilaso and Herrera envisage beautiful, pure, silent, and aloof ladies identified only by their poetic pseudonyms, Ramírez de Guzmán transforms the *dama* into a flesh-and-blood rebel with the wit and vocabulary to mock such idealization. If Fray Luis de León stresses the modesty, discretion, and obedience of Teresa de Jesús in his brief biography, Teresa's writing reveals her to have been an energetic, politically astute, no-nonsense woman with a sense of humor and real charisma. Her humility, rather than enfeebling her, deepened her awareness of God's working in her life, which gave her the self-confidence to negotiate the founding of seventeen convents and to assert her own authority (usually with prudence and tact) in the face of opposition. In writing about Saint Teresa, her spiritual daughters stress her leadership abilities and her feistiness, as well as her spiritual wisdom. María de San José, Ana de San Bartolomé, María de San Alberto, and Cecilia del Nacimiento, four of her Carmelite disciples, were, like Teresa, clever, dynamic, creative women whose accomplishments put the lie to the conventional image of the fragile, submissive female religious. Their writing, much of which has only recently become known, has highlighted the importance of convents as centers of female intellectual activity in early modern Spain and has elucidated many of the intricacies of the Catholic reform. As researchers explore the archives of more and more religious houses in both Spain and the Americas, we will undoubtedly discover even more literary treasures, contributing to our understanding of this aspect of Spanish intellectual history.

Male authors of early modern drama produced many feisty, forceful, and quick-witted female characters. However, stories and plays written by women sometimes offer alternate perspectives on issues central to the *comedia*. Although not all Golden Age plays revolve around honor, in those that involve love triangles or adultery (real, imagined, or potential), honor is usually the primary concern of both women and men. Even though scholars now doubt the historical accuracy of the behavior of Calderonian honor heroes, current research shows that

the honor plays do in fact reflect the authentic social concerns of Spain's male-dominated society. Characters such as Mencía in Calderón's *El médico de su honra* have been cited to show that women shared the preoccupation with honor and accepted the honor code without demur. Plays by Ana Caro and Leonor de la Cueva throw such truisms into question either by mocking the archetypal honor hero or by ignoring the topic of honor altogether. Texts written by women allow us to see that some early modern women, at least, held alternative points of view.

Women writers turn object into subject and give that subject voice. Early modern novelists such as María de Zayas and Mariana de Carvajal articulate women's concerns in a way that male authors usually do not. These writers were not feminists in the modern, political sense. That is, they were not concerned with issues of political empowerment or of equal opportunity. However, they do expose masculinist biases and sometimes offer alternative models for female behavior. Some of Zayas's female protagonists are robust nonconformists who actively pursue their own objectives. Others are victims of the treachery not only of men, but also of other women. By depicting both, Zayas shows that women can be tough and independent, but also that societal values often contrive to incapacitate women. One of the functions of Zayas's frame stories is to express unconventional views regarding women—such as their need for education and protection. (Zayas suggests that women learn to wield the sword in order to take their defense into their own hands.) Carvajal, in contrast, is more concerned with the struggle of impoverished aristocratic women for survival in a society that offers them few means of supporting themselves.

National literary canons are not set in stone. Harold Bloom, one of academia's most avid defenders of the Western canon, notes that "no secular canon is ever closed" (37). All canons evolve as tastes and priorities change and as the literary corpus expands. It is not surprising, then, that the growing accessibility of texts by early modern Spanish women writers has led to an amplification of the Spanish literary canon. For example, twenty years ago Ana Caro was practically unknown and almost never included in courses on Golden Age theater. Today, her plays are taught along with those of Lope and Calderón.

The discovery of writings by early modern women writers has stimulated the creation of new courses. These will not replace standard surveys, but will enrich the curriculum by offering stimulating texts by a heretofore nearly unrepresented segment of the population. Such courses are necessary if we are to provide our students with the most complete view possible of early modern Spain. Yet, until now, no textbook has been available for such courses. Although a number of genre-specific anthologies are on the market (for example, Teresa Soufas's *Women's Acts* for theater, Judith Whitenack and Gwyn Campbell's *Zayas and Her Sisters* for fiction, Julián Olivares and Elizabeth Boyce's *Tras el espejo la musa escribe* for poetry), professors wishing to assign readings from a variety of genres in order to give their students a sense of the breadth of early modern Spanish women's writing have had to photocopy materials, ask their students to buy complete works of which they assign only a portion, or order several different collections that, usually published by small academic presses, are often expensive and difficult to find. *Early Modern Spanish Women Writers* is designed to solve this problem.

Early Modern Spanish Women Writers includes selections by fifteen authors that cover a broad range of early modern women's writing and represent all genres. In most cases, units are short enough to be covered in one or two weeks. Obscure words, complex structures, and problematical geographical or historical allusions are clarified in notes. Whenever practical, definitions are given in Spanish. Each selection is preceded by an in-depth introduction covering pertinent biographical information, comments on the author's approach and style, an overview of pertinent criticism, and an analysis of the selection. Each unit concludes with topics for discussion.

Until now, Spanish women writers have been largely excluded from discussions of early modern women's writing. Some of the best-known women's historians and theorists (Margaret King, Constance Jordan, Joan Ferrante, and Joan Kelly-Gadol, for example) hardly mention Spain. In her anthology *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation* (1987), Katharina Wilson includes only one Spaniard, Saint Teresa, although every other significant national literature is represented by five to seven authors. In Wilson and Frank Warnke's *Women Writers of the Seventeenth Century* (1989), Spain fares better. Still, most new books on early modern women's writing continue to omit Spain. Equally disconcerting is the belief held by some Hispanists that Spain was the *only* European nation to produce a significant number of early modern women writers. Clearly, better articulation across national cultures is needed. For this reason, I begin this collection with a general introduction that places early modern Spanish women's writing within the broader context of early modern Europe. The introduction provides background material on the position of women in society, issues involving writing women and women-authored texts, an overview of women's writing, and some comments on feminist criticism. The book concludes with a selected bibliography designed to help researchers and students pursue independent study.

An anthology by definition requires a selection of texts. Many more women were writing in early modern Spain than could be included here. Of the convent writers, I selected four of Saint Teresa's Carmelite disciples because their works together paint a vivid picture of the conflicts and intrigues that plagued the reform after Teresa's death. Sisters from other orders are mentioned in the introduction. Of the secular writers, I included those who have attracted critical attention or who offer a particularly unconventional perspective, such as Ramírez de Guzmán. I had initially planned to include selections attributed to Oliva Sabuco de Nantes, one of the few early modern women credited with writing a medical treatise. Her father originally ascribed two books to her, the *Nueva filosofía* and *Vera medicina.* However, in his will he withdrew his affirmation of her authorship, claiming to have written the books himself. Today many scholars doubt that Doña Oliva actually wrote the books.

I owe the subtitle of this book, *Sophia's Daughters,* to two dear friends and colleagues, Sharon Voros and María Moux, both professors at the United States Naval Academy. While having dinner during the 2000 South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference, the three of us were discussing possible titles. We began to play with the names of goddesses and feminine icons that might convey the notion of female intellect, talent, and spirituality—figures such as Minerva, Diana, and Talia. Sharon Voros came up with Sophia, emblem of di-

vine Wisdom, the feminine aspect of God, and of human knowledge. To her and to María Moux I offer my heartfelt thanks.

I also wish to thank the scores of investigators whose pioneering work in early modern women's writing brought to light new texts or provided new interpretations of familiar ones. For decades scholars were dependent on Manuel Serrano y Sanz's *Biblioteca de autoras españolas*, originally published in 1905, for texts by and information about early modern women writers. Today, thanks to groundbreaking research in the field, new material is gradually becoming accessible. I especially wish to express my gratitude to Judith Whitenack and Gwyn Campbell, who made their 2001 edition of Leonor de Meneses's novel available to me before it was published and granted me permission to use segments of it. I am also indebted to Electa Arenal, Stacey Schlau, Georgina Sabat de Rivers, Julián Olivares, and Elizabeth S. Boyce for their exemplary editions. I thank Sharon Voros of the United States Naval Academy, Nieves Romero-Diaz of Mount Holyoke College, Yvonne Jehenson of the University of Hartford, Amy Williamson of the University of Arizona, and Joan Cammarata of Manhattan College for reviewing the manuscript. The following colleagues offered their suggestions, insight, and encouragement, for which I am grateful: Emily Francomano, Amy Williamsen, Susan Paun de García, Joan Cammarata, Yvonne Jehensen, and Rev. Ildefonso Moriones, O.D.C. Special thanks go to Rev. Jeffrey von Arx, S.J., Rev. William Watson, S.J., and Rev. Stephen Fields, S.J., friends whose guidance played a vital role in the conception of this book; to Mary Jane Peluso, publisher at Yale University Press, whose enthusiasm and support made this project possible; and to Emily Saglimbeni, assistant to the publisher, and her successor, Gretchen Rings, whose editorial expertise helped bring it to fruition. And, as always, to my beloved husband, Mauro, who traipsed through Spanish convents with me as I gathered material.

Prologue: Sophia, Emblem of Female Wisdom

THE WORD *SOPHIA* is Greek for "wisdom." It is the root of words such as *philosophy* (love of wisdom), *theosophy* (God's wisdom), and *sophist* (literally, wise man, although generally used to mean one who uses specious reasoning). The Christian notion of wisdom is androgynous, but because the Greek word is feminine, Sophia came to be associated with the female aspect of God and with Female Wisdom. In Western culture, Wisdom is nearly always allegorized in a female figure. Sometimes called the Mother of All or Lady Wisdom, Sophia fused with Eve or Mary in Judeo-Christian iconography. The Greek *Hagia Sophia,* meaning Divine or Holy Wisdom, was translated into Spanish and other Romance languages as Saint Sophia (Santa Sofía), thereby personifying the abstract figure.

A growing body of evidence shows that many cultures have allegorized the principle of wisdom in some sort of *magna mater,* or Great Mother. Ancient, pre-Christian religions produced Cybele, Rhea, Danu, and a host of other feminine figures associated with Wisdom. Isis, an Egyptian goddess whose cult was widespread in the Greco-Roman world, took on magical-mystical qualities that gave her power over darkness, the elements, and the transformation of beings. The religious syncretism of the second century A.D. gave her various identities in the Greek belief system.

Perhaps the Sophia figure comes to us most directly from the Old Testament Book of Wisdom. The author, a Hellenized Jew using Greek modes of expression, personifies Wisdom, describing her as a light, a guide, an "untarnished mirror" that shows us God's goodness: "She is a breath of the power of God, pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty" (7:25). Solomon, the wise king, sings: "Wisdom I loved and searched for from my youth; I resolved to have her as my bride, I fell in love with her beauty" (8:2). Some scholars have argued that the biblical character Wisdom is a real individual, not a mere allegory. Susan Cady Cole, Marian Ronan,

and Hal Taussig assert in *Wisdom's Feast: Sophia in Study and Celebration* that "Sophia is a real Biblical person . . . a real part of the Jewish and Christian traditions" (10) about whom information abounds in the Bible: "There is more material on Sophia in the Hebrew scripture than there is about almost any other figure" (15). This notion may well be an "aberration," as some critics have charged,[1] but the allegorical representation of Wisdom as a woman has enjoyed a long history in Judeo-Christian tradition. It gave rise to a great and varied Sophianic tradition, which reinvents itself perennially and appears in countless forms throughout history.

Some scholars have linked Isis, Sophia, and Mary. Arthur Versluis notes that "in Judaism by the time of Christ, there was a developed Wisdom tradition" (3). Christianity brought a more radical notion of Sophia as Gnostic sects, appearing very early in the movement, promoted the belief that salvation depends upon inner knowledge or enlightenment from God, which liberates the individual from ignorance and evil. Although each Gnostic sect was autonomous, all shared a body of myths. Sophia, the Mother of Creation, was the Divine Feminine heroine who evolves into the Goddess and incarnation of Wisdom.[2] With the development of Christianity, devotion to Mary replaces goddess worship, although not immediately. What Caitlin Matthews calls the "Marian takeover" does not begin to occur until the fifth century when, in 431, at the Council of Ephesus, Mary is formally declared Mother of God or God-Bearer, echoes of titles previously assigned to the Goddess (Matthews 191).

Cole, Ronan, and Taussig argue that because of the patriarchal structure of Judaism and Christianity, the feminine dimension of Wisdom almost dissolved into oblivion. In their view, when the feminine Sophia image began to grow menacingly strong, male theologians began to repress it. They attribute the downgrading and eventual disappearance of Sophia in great part to Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.–A.D. 42), a Hellenized Jew, whose notion of the Logos took over the traditional role of Sophia. In Philo's system, the Logos is the most encompassing entity except God and is called the Mediator between God and Man. The Logos contains the sum of all Ideas—powers and spiritual forms that create, foresee, give laws, and so on. These forms were sometimes considered distinct persons. Sophia, Wisdom, was the first of the potencies of the Logos and is sometimes called the mother of the Logos. Cole, Ronan, and Taussig argue that Philo substituted the Logos for Sophia until the Logos took over divine roles, including "the principle of order" and "the intermediary between God and humanity" (11). Eventually, according to these authors, Christ replaced Sophia as the incarnation of divine wisdom and merged with her. During the Christological disputes of the third and fourth centuries, "the early church fathers, in their efforts to clarify Christ as equal to God the Father, abandoned references to Jesus as Sophia incarnate. At that point, Sophia disappears from western theological consideration" (11).

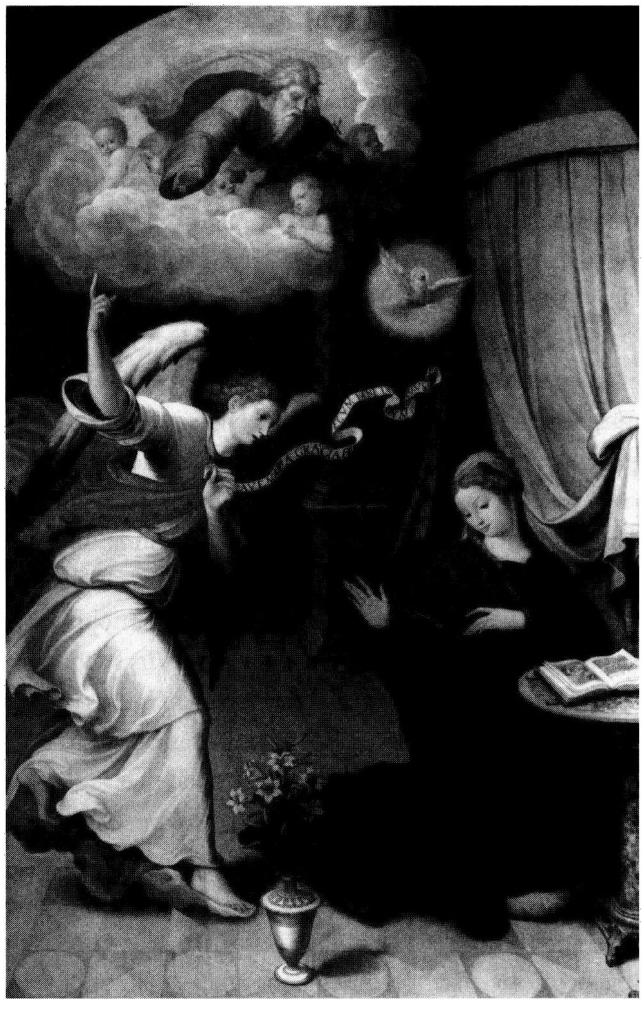
1. In a contentious Internet article, Father William Most writes, "Among other aberrations, many feminists seem to be trying to present Sophia, Wisdom, as a goddess. . . . Surely the OT writers never thought of her as a separate person, still less as a goddess. . . . [Feminists] notice that Sophia is feminine—what ignorance! Yes, it is grammatically feminine in Latin, Greek, and in Hebrew—but that grammatical gender has nothing whatsoever to do with real sex: it is only a grammatical convention. . . . The use of a symbol must not be confused with reality or a real person."
2. For a detailed description of the development of Sophia in Gnosticism, see Matthews 145–73.

Yet modern scholars have shown that throughout the Middle Ages and well into the early modern period, Sophianic currents appear again and again. Orthodox churches describe Sophia as a feminine hypostasis, alongside God the Father, who gives cohesion to the Creation. Wolfgang Heller points out that an exact definition of Sophia is impossible because her presence in Christian thought precedes the formulation of doctrine (929). Still, the *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* offers this explanation of Wisdom, cross-referenced as Sophia: "a gift of the Holy Spirit that, according to Catholic theology, is a special grace of the Spirit to help one practice virtue more perfectly. Wisdom is a kind of knowledge in the sense that it allows one to understand God's purposes and the divine will" (1328). Thus, Sophia/Wisdom is not book learning, but inner enlightenment or mystical knowledge. Saint Paul distinguished between this sort of wisdom and the empty wisdom of Greek learning. Divine wisdom "is not a human virtue or a skill that can be acquired through self-effort," but a gift from God (*Encyclopedia of Catholicism* 1328).

In the West, figures such as Synagogia and Ecclesia—often at odds with one another—sometimes take over the function of Sophia. Between A.D. 600 and 800 Saint Anne, mother of Mary, begins to occupy the role of wisdom figure in Christian iconography. The patron of fertile childbearing, Saint Anne is often depicted teaching the Virgin to read from the book of Wisdom (Matthews 199). However, the feminine element in religious imagery is not limited to female figures. As far back as Saint Anselm (1033–1109), the image of Jesus as *mother* begins to appear in Christian writing. Joan Ferrante has demonstrated that in the twelfth century, allegorical literature increasingly personifies key concepts as women, and, as Caroline Walker Bynum has shown, by the late Middle Ages, the association of Christ with the feminine was not uncommon. The maternal image of Jesus did not originate among women writers, nor was it promoted by them, but seems to be related to the rise in affective piety in reformed monasteries and the general feminization of religious imagery (Bynum, *Jesus* 146). (See the introduction to "Teresa de Jesús.")

Bynum explains that the image of the motherhood of Christ "expressed three aspects of Christian belief about Christ's role in the economy of salvation. First, Christ's sacrificial death on the cross, which generated redemption, was described as a mother giving birth; second, Christ's love for the soul was seen as the unquestioning pity and tenderness of a mother for her child; third, Christ's feeding of the soul with himself (his body and blood) in the Eucharist was described as a mother nursing her baby" (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 158). In painting, Christ is sometimes depicted as offering his wound with a gesture that evokes a mother offering the breast.[3] In men's writing, the use of female imagery applied to men was used to convey self-denial and renunciation of worldly goods, while in women writers it became a symbol of an "almost genderless self" (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 175). The intensified emphasis on Eucharistic piety and the flowering of female mysticism in the thirteenth century reinforced the feminiza-

3. In *Fragmentation*, Bynum reproduces a painting by Quirzio of Murano (fl. 1460–78) showing "a sweet-faced Christ offering the wound in his side with the lifting gesture so often used by the Virgin in offering her breast" (110). In a triptych by Goswyn van der Weyden done in 1507, Christ offers his wound while, in a parallel gesture, Mary offers her breast (Bynum, *Fragmentation* 115).



La Anunciación [The Annunciation], by Juan Correa de Vivar. The Virgin is depicted reading from the Book of Wisdom.

tion of Christ imagery, as religious experience centered increasingly on Christ's love and sacrifice for the individual. Julian of Norwich (1342–ca. 1423) systematically equates the power of God to fatherhood and the wisdom of God to motherhood: "God almighty is our loving Father, and God all wisdom is our loving Mother" (293). She describes God as a "wise mother" who guides and purifies us through his/her grace (301). True wisdom, for writers such as Julian, flows from the experiential knowledge of God, from the kindling of the flame within that produces what Saint John of the Cross will call, a century and a half later, "este saber no sabiendo." By associating God's Wisdom with motherhood, Julian is drawing on a centuries-old Sophianic tradition. Teresa de Jesús will likewise avail herself of maternal images of God to communicate the incommunicable outflow of love that is the essence of the mystical union.

Sapiential writing commonly—but not always—distinguishes between Wisdom and book learning. In Proverbs 9, Wisdom sends out her seven virginal handmaidens to invite everyone to her feast. "The Middle Ages transformed them into the daughters of Sophia, the

Sophianic examining board of the Seven Liberal Arts" (Matthews 235). The seven pillars of Wisdom's house became the seven pillars of Western academic education: Rhetoric, Dialectic, Grammar, Music, Arithmetic, Astronomy, and Geometry. At the Portail Royal at Chartres, Mary herself stands at the center of her handmaidens, the Liberal Arts (Matthews 236). Although modern culture has created fissures between religion and science and between science and the arts, the early modern mind did not see these areas as mutually exclusive. The quest for truth, whether through science, philosophy, theology, poetry or art, was a quest for the transcendent. Until the Cartesian revolution at the beginning of the seventeenth century, early modern cosmographers, even those who clashed with the Church, were profoundly spiritual men who sought to understand the miracle of God's creation rather than to disprove God's existence. The image of Sophia (or the Virgin) surrounded by the liberal arts conveys the notion that the search for knowledge was consistent with the desire for Wisdom.

Versluis notes that "even though the Gnostic tradition of Sophia per se does not seem to have continued, the divine feminine nonetheless appears time and again, often apparently conjoined to an actual woman" (5). The early modern resurgence of Neoplatonism, a highly complex philosophical-metaphysical system with a centuries-old history, advanced Sophianic thought by promoting the notion of the lady as a conduit to the divine. Courtly love, a concept that had dominated Provençal erotic poetry during the twelfth century, conceived of woman as a superior being to which the knight renders homage. The knight's lady was never his wife, but a woman inaccessible because she was of a superior class, married to someone else, or simply disdainful. The more unattainable the cruel and distant lady, the more the knight deemed her worthy of his love. Provençal poetry depicts knights performing daring and courageous deeds to honor their ladies and prove their worth. Eventually the adoration of the lady turned into a kind of religion demanding absolute devotion and extraordinary sacrifices on the part of the lover. As the deification of women met with increased opposition from moralists, poets and philosophers sought means of reconciling courtly love with Christianity.

Early modern Neoplatonism built on Plato's theory of forms, according to which everything that exists in the world is a reflection of a divine idea that exists independently of its earthly manifestation. Thus, the harmony of man-made music was seen as a reflection of divine Harmony; the quest for scientific truth became the quest for divine Truth; beauty found in nature, art, or woman was considered an earthly manifestation of divine Beauty. By contemplating the beauty of the loved one, man drew nearer to God. Versluis sees a continuation of the Sophianic tradition in Dante's Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova* and the *Divine Comedy,* for example (5).

Likewise, Petrarch's Lady (Laura) becomes a light through which the poet achieves true Knowledge, a heart "that by such intellect / and by such virtue enlightens the air" (CCXL).[4] The dead Laura is a divine being whose purity serves the poet as an example, a light so bright she astounds even the angels (CCCXLVI). Fernando de Herrera, Spain's consummate Neoplatonist, identifies his Lady as Luz or Sol, whose presence illuminates, elevating the poet-lover

4. *Voi, con quel cor, che di sí chiaro ingegno, / Di sí alta vertute el cielo alluma...*

and drawing him out of his confusion and nearer to God: "Serena Luz, en quien presente espera / divino amor, qu'enciende i junto enfrena / el noble pecho, qu'en mortal cadena / al alto Olimpo levantars' aspira..." (XXXVIII).

The pastoral novels offer perhaps the best examples of Sophianic figures of any in Spanish literature. In Montemayor's *Siete libros de la Diana,* the wise woman Felicia *(la sabia Felicia)* is the character who occupies the role of the Logos, establishing order and bringing fulfillment. In Montemayor's novel love is a religion requiring rites and sacrifices. If self-denial purifies a lover and brings him closer to God, then Felicia's palace is an erotic haven in which each believer finds his just reward. At the center of Felicia's palace sits Orpheus by a silver fountain. The Christianization of mythological beings was vigorously promoted in the early modern period; Apollo was frequently depicted as a God figure and Orpheus, the poetic child of Apollo, occupied the role of Christ. Bruno Damiani points out that in Montemayor's novel, Orpheus performs a Christ-like function "by serving as an inspirational force to the weary pilgrims, and as the messenger and 'angel' of Felicia that paves the way for the imminent and miraculous intervention" of the wise woman (93). Felicia, like Mary, mediates to bring the fallen to redemption and reward the faithful. Her *aguas encantadas* are analogous to holy water, which, through the rite of baptism, makes possible man's salvation (Damiani 103). It is the encounter with Felicia that completes the Neoplatonic allegory: union with God achieved through Love.

Polinesta, the wise woman of Lope de Vega's pastoral novel *La Arcadia,* provides a different kind of Sophianic example. Unlike Felicia, Polinesta does not use magic to unite estranged lovers, but instead, promotes the seven liberal arts as a means to distract them. She argues that time will cure the melancholy caused by unrequited love and recommends study as a better means to occupy the mind. She argues further that love is merely the pastime of the rich and indolent and categorically rejects the idea that suffering leads to purification. The fifth book of *La Arcadia* has been criticized for its long and pedantic descriptions of the arts and sciences.[5] However, Polinesta is an important addition to the Sophianic tradition because she demonstrates the enduring, but evolving, nature of the Wisdom allegory. Whereas Montemayor, and later Gaspar Gil Polo, personify Wisdom as a spiritual intermediary, the illuminating guide whose intercession results in soul-purifying love, Lope, writing a half-century later, depicts her as a teacher. Learning, not love, uplifts the individual in *La Arcadia.* This is not to say that Lope rejects love, but by the end of the century Neoplatonism is in decline and is no longer thought to offer a valid response to human striving.

Sophianic writing culminates in Spain in the allegorical plays of Calderón, in which Wisdom finds its purest theological expression. *Sabiduría* appears in many of Calderón's *loas* and *autos sacramentales,* dressed "as a lady," *de dama* (in contrast with *Ignorancia,* who is dressed as a rustic, *de villana*). Some of these are works that deal directly with the Mass. In the *loa* to *El nuevo palacio del Retiro,* for example, *Sabiduría* offers wheat to make the host. In works such as *Los misterios de la misa* and *¿Quién hallará mujer fuerte?* she identifies herself clearly as a gift of the Holy Spirit and as an attribute of God. In the former she explains: "Yo soy del Eterno Padre

5. See Mujica, *Iberian Pastoral Characters,* 243–45.

/ un atributo, a su esencia / tan junto, que como él, / sin fin, ni principio eterna / en su mente estoy." Furthermore, she is "la sabiduría inmensa de Dios," and "del Espíritu Santo / noble don..." She repeats almost the same definition in the latter play: "Yo soy del Eterno Padre / una sustancia, a su esencia / tan una, que soy con él, / sin fin ni principio, eterna. / En su mente estoy, y como / al Hijo en su mente engendra, / soy atributo del Hijo, / y para más excelencias, / soy del Espíritu Santo / alto don..." In the *loa* to *Llamados y escogidos* she is the Wisdom of the Church that opposes "ateísmo, idolatría / y hebraísmo." In Calderón's allegorical dramas, Wisdom is always represented, according to the ancient principles of Sophianic writing, as the feminine aspect of God, omniscient, eternal and loving.

Owing in large part to the importance that Catholicism assigns to feminine manifestations of the divine and to the Virgin Mother, and owing also to the important role allegory plays in early modern Catholic art and literature, Sophia fares better under Catholicism than Protestantism. Nevertheless, the Christian theosophical school, which begins early in the seventeenth century with the writings of Jacob Böhme (1575–1624), both serves as a "complement to Protestantism" and reveals "a strikingly different aspect of Protestantism" (Versluis 6). Theosophy, in its exaltation of the divine Sophia, is "the animating essence of non-sectarian spirituality" (Versluis 6). Versluis has brought to light many heretofore unknown works of European theosophy, which appear in his *Wisdom's Book: The Sophia Anthology.*

Sophia is a complex allegory. She is God's Wisdom. She is spiritual illumination or enlightenment achieved through God's blessing. She can also be human learning that leads to a greater appreciation of God and creation, as well as an understanding of self. Sophia is always depicted as a feminine presence. Sometimes she is represented as a rose, symbolizing the spiritual whole, and sometimes as a world disk, with the sciences and arts gathered around her. Because they incarnate the female wisdom of their time, the women included in this book are truly Sophia's daughters.

Introduction

UNTIL VERY RECENTLY we knew little about the daily life of women in medieval and early modern Europe. Although in the past thirty years dozens of studies have provided relevant new information, our grasp of women's history remains sketchy. One difficulty is that most of the documents from which specialists draw conclusions—moral treatises, legal documents, municipal and church records, literary pieces, and illustrations—were created by men, although more texts by women are emerging. Another is that researchers sometimes offer radically conflicting interpretations of the available data. For example, Robert Fossier argues that in spite of the misogyny of the clergy, women enjoyed exceptional power and freedom in the eleventh and twelfth centuries at all levels of society, whereas most other scholars conclude that women in fact lost ground owing to their increased numbers, which diminished their value, and to the hostility of the Church.[1] From the records on hand it appears that the feminization of Wisdom, the adoration of Mary, and even the identification of Jesus with motherhood did not translate into a positive attitude toward women, nor did the idealization of the lady in courtly and Neoplatonist literature.

Treatises from the late Middle Ages insist on women's physical, moral, and spiritual weakness. The following text from the *Liber Decem Capitulorum*, by Marbod of Rennes (c. 1035–1123), is typical:

> Countless are the traps which the scheming enemy has set throughout the world's paths and plains; but among them the greatest—and the one scarcely anybody can evade—is woman. Woman the unhappy source, evil root, and corrupt offshoot,

1. See Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq's discussion of the controversy in "The Feudal Order."

who brings to birth every sort of outrage throughout the world. . . . Her sex is envious, capricious, irascible, avaricious, as well as intemperate with drink and voracious in the stomach. . . . Armed with these vices, woman subverts the world.[2]

In a similar vein, Walter Map (1140–1209), archdeacon of Oxford, wrote to a friend: "The very best woman (who is rarer than the phoenix) cannot be loved without the bitterness of fear, anxiety, and frequent misfortune. Wicked women, however—who swarm so abundantly that no place is free from their wickedness—sting sharply when they are loved." Andreas Capellanes, associated with the French court in the twelfth century, wrote in *De Amore,* "The female sex is . . . disposed to every evil. Every woman fearlessly commits every major sin in the world on a slender pretext." Jean Gerson (1363–1429), chancellor of the University of Paris, argued that women are "easily seduced, and determined seducers." However, Gerson did admire certain outstanding women, among them the writer Christine de Pizan and Joan of Arc.[3]

Some scholars caution that this antifeminist material was generally written by celibate clergy, men who had a particular interest in demonizing what they had renounced. Yet it is an oversimplification to attribute medieval misogyny to sour grapes. Theologians had inherited a glut of writing that depicted woman as the daughter of Eve, the prototypical sinner who disobeyed God and brought disaster upon the human race. If woman suffered excruciating pain during childbirth and sometimes died of hemorrhages, this was the price she paid for her evil, libidinous nature. Only Mary, conceived without sin, was exempt from punishment. Tertullian, Jerome, and Augustine supplied medieval writers with an arsenal of arguments to use against women. Classical sources provided misogynist views as well. Mythology provided the example of Pandora who, like Eve, unleashed evil on the human race. Aristotle taught that woman was an imperfect creature, the result of a flawed conception. Greek psychology held that the four elements (earth, fire, air, and water) were expressed in human beings as "humors" (black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm). Men, who shared the principles of earth and fire, were dry and hot; women, who shared the principles of air and water, were damp and cold, which made them flighty and phlegmatic. Furthermore, woman was thought to be controlled by her uterus, *hysteria* in Greek, and, therefore, by nature hysterical. Such views would continue to resonate in the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas and well into the early modern period.[4]

Late medieval fiction reflects this bias. The *Libro de los engaños e los sayamientos de las mujeres* (1253) contains racy tales of wicked, wily women, although some critics believe the work reveals the anonymous author's underlying admiration of them. Perhaps the most famous example is *Le Roman de la Rose,* by Jean de Meun (1240–1305), which was grafted onto Guil-

2. Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended,* 100–101. The "scheming enemy" is the devil.
3. Map and Capellanus are quoted in Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended,* 106 and 124, respectively. Some scholars believe that Capellanus is satirizing the extreme misogynists of his day, whereas others argue that this is what he really thinks. Blamires comments on the "strident misogyny" of the passage and concludes, "If a hoax, it has gone wrong" (116). Gerson is quoted in Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother,* 136.
4. See Soufas, *Melancholy and the Secular Mind in Spanish Golden Age Literature,* 5–6.