Alchemical and Theological Hermaphrodites, Their Eros and Ethics

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In 2008, there was a recrudescence of the longstanding debate about Francis Bacon's Latin phrase "vexationes artium." Historians of science have traditionally credited Bacon (1561-1626) with pivotal contributions to the development of the scientific method. Often translated "vexations of art," Bacon's "vexationes" are rendered "tortures" or "torment of art" by historians who see in his experimental program a willingness to bind Nature in order to wrest knowledge from her forcibly and painfully. Brian Vickers would have none of it. In the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vickers complained that Carolyn Merchant and other historians who saw violence in Bacon's "vexationes" were discrediting "Bacon, and the Scientific Revolution to which he contributed" (117). The same journal issue contained an article by Merchant, "Secrets of Nature: The Bacon Debates Revisited," and a response to Vickers by Katherine Park. What Merchant called "The Bacon Debates," constitute one of the more spectacular, if sometimes spectacularly meanspirited, examples of historians attempting to terms with the frequently troubling, sometimes violent rhetorical figures of early modern science (e.g. Eamon 1994, Bauer 2019). Another such example is the debate surrounding the hermaphroditic body in alchemical and religious discourses.

Images and descriptions of hermaphroditic bodies and intersex people were, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park argue, singularly common during the early modern period (1995, 419). It is no surprise, then, that existence of intersex people, as well as the texts that recounted their lives, were familiar to people in Spain.[1] Juan Sánchez Valdés de la Plata said that "hombres de ambas naturas" were part of everyone's quotidian reality: "cada día los vemos en España" (1598, 130r). Authors of early modern alchemical texts were not immune to the interest Daston and Park identified. The "'alchemical hermaphrodite' is one of the most famous symbols of alchemy" and represented a "fusion of two opposing entities" or even the Philosophers' Stone (Karpenko et al. 2024, 410). Whether or not Spaniards' familiarity with the histories of intersex people made *alchemical* depictions of hermaphroditic bodies more comprehensible, alchemy "was not concerned with any actual case of intersex birth," according to Leah DeVun. Instead, "the alchemical hermaphrodite was merely a metaphor" (DeVun 2008, 194-195).

Theologians, like alchemists, wrote a great deal about hermaphrodites without referring directly to the lived experiences of intersex people.[2] Whereas alchemists attributed sexual identities to "bodies" such as mercury and sulfur, substances that actually existed, theologians imagined bodies that *might* exist: human bodies that so completely combined male and female that the result was a perfect, even a holy balance. I call this imagined body the "theological hermaphrodite," a modal heuristic that allowed theologians to consider how nature's infinite variety could be mapped onto gendered sacraments, such as marriage and ordination, as well as

[1] The sixteenth-century life of Eleno de Céspedes became an object of study for historians with Céspedes' inclusion among the "curiosísimos retratos" collected by Francisco R. de Uhagón (Uhagón 1896, iv) and the longer study by Llanas Aguilamido eight years later. Although this article deals with the hermaphrodite as an analytical category for alchemists, preachers, and theologians, rather than with the lives of intersex people, my thinking is influenced by important studies by Mercedes Alcalá Galán, Israel Burshatin, Richard Cleminson and Francisco Vázquez García, Víctor Pueyo, Elena del Río Parra, and François Soyer.

[2] This is not to say that alchemical and theological discussions of the bodies and substances authors called hermaphrodites did not contribute to attitudes towards intersex people. I discuss some of those attitudes below.

help explain the similitudes between divine creation and human procreation. In other words, the hermaphrodite allowed theologians to resolve deontic doubts (e.g. who ought to be allowed to become a priest), as well as metaphysical questions (whether a womb was necessary to divine creation as it was to human procreation).

Both alchemical and theological hermaphrodites offered authors a way to speak about balance, perfection, and generative potential. DeVun explains that the "contradictory aspects" of the alchemical hermaphrodite were "its doubled sex, encompassing both male and female, and its lack of defined sex, neither male nor female" (DeVun, 207). This quality of being "both and neither" was, DeVun explains, not only an essential part of Ovid's myth of Hermaphroditus, but also one of the reasons Ovid's story "provided a particularly apt model for alchemists" (DeVun, 194). The same "both and neither" quality proved useful to the Spanish theologians and preachers who found it embodied in the phoenix, for example. For alchemists, the phoenix might symbolize the Philosophers' Stone. For theologians, on the other hand, the phoenix was a canonical simile though which divine power was imagined in terms of the presence of male and female virtues in a single body.

The texts in which these symbols, similes, and figures appear, whether alchemical or theological, often sound similar to one another even when their authors have very different objectives. Not surprisingly, the discursive practices of alchemy and theology sometimes shared rhetorical antecedents and influenced one another. By comparing the figurative regimes that represented the hermaphrodite in theology and alchemy, suggesting the ways in which they influenced one another, and outlining the attempts to erase or subdue the violent and unruly tendencies of the hermaphrodite, I show how the crosspollination between alchemical and theological hermaphrodites shaped an ethics of the theological hermaphrodite.

Alchemical hermaphrodites, alchemical sermons

Today, "alchemical hermaphrodite" is a term used by historians of alchemy to refer to two-sexed entities in alchemy's material and discursive domains (Nummedal 2021). Within alchemy's material practices, the hermaphrodite was a product, something to be made. Alchemists called a variety of the substances they worked with hermaphrodites. Even Albert the Great had called substances hermaphroditic, although Lawrence Principe clarifies that "for Albert the term hermaphroditic merely expresses a mixed nature where the 'male' complexion of hot-dry coexists with the 'female' complexion of wet-cold" (2011, 219). More specifically, Antonio Ricciardi described a particular substance, gold, as a hermaphrodite because gold combined and held in balance Venus and Mercury, sun and moon (1591, I.98v).[3] The alchemists who imagined the Philosophers' Stone to be a hermaphrodite had a rich vocabulary to refer to the two-sexed entities that they sought to create. The Benedictine Esteban Villa called the hermaphroditic Stone "infans" because "su generacion es tan parecida a la humana" (Villa 1647, 115r). (The terms "infans" and "filius philosophorum" were often used interchangeably.) To make his "Tintura o Medicina universal," Juan Guerrero joined the "fixed made volatile" and the "volatile made fixed," and "juntos se hace un compuesto de dos," which he called "Rebis" (Guerrero 1682, 12r.) The alchemical Rebis was the "harmonious and stable state consequent upon the union" of contraries

[3] Ricciardi follows Giovanni Braccesco's *Il Legno della vita* (1542), in which Braccesco claims to have discovered the medicine that the biblical patriarchs used to live 900 years.

that was "often figured as a hermaphrodite" (Roberts 1994, 89).[4] The Dominican Donato d'Eremita said that his lifegiving "elixir vitae" was "a marriage of the male and female that gives birth to a new life" (Gianfrancesco 2018, 261). The same terminological richness that existed in the Hispanic Monarchy could be found across Europe. Whether it described gold, the Philosophers' Stone, or a more ordinary substance, the alchemical hermaphrodite was the desired outcome of technical mastery that imitated and perfected natural processes.

Alchemy's descriptions of substances as hermaphrodites, "often as bicephalous or bicorporal," formed part of a larger, material tradition of representing natural processes and laboratory techniques in terms of sex and sexual violence (Principe 2011, 216). Although the "binary of 'male/female' offered an easy way to express other kinds of opposite pairings in nature, such as alchemical sulfur and mercury," as Nummedal observes, many of alchemy's more vexatious techniques did not lend themselves to Albert's description of a happy meeting between opposites of hot-dry and wet-cold (Nummedal 2021, 123). Alchemists created alloys and compounds at high temperatures. They dissolved, separated, analyzed with strong acids. Many alchemists saw the same processes of synthesis and analysis at work in cataclysmic natural phenomena, such as volcanoes (Cocco 2013, 161-166). And it was not always the case that alchemists were joining opposites; sometimes, they forged bonds between, or among, like substances. As a consequence, alchemists developed a language of generativity and change, homogeneity and heterogeneity, that accommodated many forms of coupling, conjoining, and proliferation.

The iconography of these couplings and conjoinings has fascinated and confused readers. This is in part because sex as it is represented in this iconography is not always represented as consensual, is not limited to male/female binaries, and might even seem unnatural. Incest, rape, or the comingling of men's semen in an artificial womb might feature in an alchemical text's imagery. This would seem to be nearly inevitable when invoking Ovid's story of Hermaphroditus, born the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, who were brother and sister. The nymph Salmacis was overcome with desire when she spied Hermaphroditus and she attempted to rape him. While he resisted, Salmacis cried out, begging the gods to keep them together. The gods obliged, fusing their bodies. Upon Hermaphroditus' request, anyone who bathed in the pool in which he had been raped was transformed into a two-sexed person. From these mythological roots, the particular Hermaphroditus became a much more capacious hermaphrodite. Within alchemy's discursive practices, "both in word and image," alchemical "concepts" often appeared "as male and female human bodies who marry, copulate, merge into bicephalous 'hermaphrodites,' and procreate" (Nummedal 2021, 123).

The images are arresting. Although Raimon Arola and other historians disagree, Principe contends that some of the more famous images of hermaphroditic bodies in the emblems of Michael Maier (1568-1622), for example, are decidedly removed from the laboratory realities of practicing alchemists (Arola 2021, 50-51; Principe 2012, 190). Didier Kahn says that this is in part because Maier's focus was actually to teach alchemists' poetics, "since the very subject of poetry had first been to conceal alchemical allegories and enigmas" (Kahn 2017, n.p.). Alchemists famously enciphered their knowledge behind the veil of impenetrable signs, decknamen ("cover words"), or "debajo de enigmas, caracteres y nombres equivocos" (Guerrero 1682, 20v). It may well be those representations of bicephalous, bicorporal, and naked alchemical hermaphrodites

[4] Although the etymology of "Rebis" might appear straightforward – "re" and "bis" seem to conjure "two things" – DeVun cautions that the root is probably Arabic (DeVun 2008, 199-200). Peter J. Forshaw explains the conventional ways that alchemists likened the Rebis to the phoenix (Forshaw 2025, 185-190).

were simply a kind of code that had precise, specific referents for alchemists. It is even possible that the surplus of meaning in descriptions of incest, violence, and so on, acts as semantic fortification against the intrusions of the uninitiated. However, it is surely the representations' excess of signification – and the reader's delight, confusion, and probably prurience – that explains their unabated power. Alchemists may have intended to constrain the meanings of the hermaphrodites they depicted and described, but their depictions and descriptions were ungovernable signs.

It was precisely the cognate power of alchemy and emblems to produce an unanticipated abundance of signification that Achille Bocchi sought to represent in his *Symbolicarum quaestionum de universo genere* of 1555. In an emblem about emblematic representation, Bocchi allegorized the emblem's production of meaning by depicting the Franciscan alchemist Berthold Schwarz's (apocryphal) invention of gunpowder. [insert figure 1] Not anticipating the power that the substances he was working with contained, Schwartz accidentally triggered the explosion in which he died. Elizabeth Watson summarizes the emblem's meaning: "What happens in an emblem or symbol is an explosion of meaning ignited by the spark from the impact of a tiny picture, motto, and poem coming together" (1993, 116). Alchemy, Bocchi implied, was a metaphor for unpredictable or unexpectedly abundant signification: "Magnam parva facit favilla flammam," [a small spark makes a great flame] (Bocchi 1555, 240).

The Franciscan preacher, Diego de Arce (1553-1617), glossed Bocchi's emblem in detail, recommending it to preachers who were writing sermons about the dangers of desire or about Shechem's rape of Dinah in Genesis 34. Bocchi's emblem, Arce says, is perfect for illustrating that "de muy pequeños principios, de un mirar, de una palabrilla, de un nosequé, de casi un nada, se suele levantar un fuego" (1606, 164). This leads to Arce's instruction to preachers, a long passage that begins: "A este propósito puede traer el Predicador la pintura que entre sus símbolos hace Achiles Bochio, de la invención de la pólvora, aplicándola al intento de que hablamos" (1606, 164r-v). In short, Arce finds in alchemy and in emblems a model for the unpredictable production of excess, whether in substances or in sermons.

The explosive power of alchemical emblems was also well known to the authors of richly illustrated books on alchemy. In an emblem in Maier's *Symbola aureae mensae duodecim nationum* (1617), Albert the Great points to a bicephalous hermaphrodite with the superscriptio "Omnes concordant in uno qui est bifidus" [all are harmonized in the one divided in two] (Maier 1617, 238). [insert figure 2]. Maier's Albert pictured here is certainly a long way from Principe's above comments on Albert, who merely used "hermaphroditic" to speak of hot-dry coexisting with wet-cold. Admittedly, Principe makes clear that Maier is something of a special case. Maier's *Symbola aureae* is series of twelve portraits in the form of alchemical meditations rather than a practical manual. (In this sense, it is like Esteban Villa's *Libro de las vidas de los doze Principes de la Medicina* of 1647.) Maier, Heinrich Khunrath, Johann Daniel Mylius, and other authors of these stunning books understood that excess of signification could easily become an object of fascination for readers and, as their books attest, these authors sought to maximize both the excess and the fascination that followed upon it.

The Bible also communicates in figures and allegories and so demands interpretation. As Cristóbal de Fonseca said, "quiso Dios que hubiese muchas escuridades en la sagrada Escritura para que dellos resultasen muchos pareceres" (397). But these "muchas escuridades" are not supposed to keep the ignorant from Biblical truths necessary to salvation. A preacher may want to inspire wonder among his congregants, but his sermon has to be comprehensible. Despite basic differences between alchemy and theology as systems of signification, they often sound very

similar. Alchemical texts can sound liturgical, and "mystical declarations of the nature of the Stone can sound like the Athanasian or Nicene Creed" (Roberts 1994, 82). This was the case for Franciscan alchemists; Zachary A Matus says that the "religious and even the liturgical world of the Franciscans left an impact on their alchemical works" (Matus 2017, 1).

Alchemists and preachers also represented sacraments such as penance and marriage in very similar terms. The hermaphrodite could symbolize a "mystical union," or "the ideal unity of married love," as I discuss below in the cases of Alonso López Magdaleno and Pablo de la Cruz (Guilbert 2002, 17). For an alchemical enthusiast, such as Giraldo París (b. 1536), and for the Franciscan, Luis de Mesa, penance in Purgatory might be imagined as a process of alchemical purification (Rey Bueno 2010, 55; Mesa 1678, 437-438). Similarly, for Pierre-Jean Fabre (1588-1658) penance was symbolized in the alchemical process of calcination (Debus 2002, 75). Fabre, explains Principe, "did not reduce alchemy entirely to theological allegory; rather, he saw practical laboratory work and phenomena as coexistent and coextensive with theological truths, and naturally linked to them." (*The Secrets of Alchemy* 202).

The existence of overlapping imagery in alchemical and theological texts is partly due to the fact that many alchemists were members of religious orders, and, when they were not, alchemists, monks and friars read one another's works. Fabre's *Alchymista christianus* (1632) was "perhaps the most extended use of chymical observations to point at theological truths" (201). It is not surprising, then, that it was held in the library of the Dominican friary of Santa Caterina (or Catalina) in Barcelona (Bech i Borràs et al., 1996). The libraries of monasteries and friaries sometimes had significant collections of books on alchemy; an extraordinary example is that of the Benedictine monastery of San Juan, in which the monastery's pharmacy had its own library of some 600 books during the seventeenth century, many of them about alchemy (Núñez 2003, 16).

In a previous article, I demonstrated the importance of alchemy in sermons (Slater 2014-2018). Preachers did draw ideas for conceits that would astound congregants directly from alchemical texts, but the work of writing sermons was made much easier by encyclopedias and compendia. Books such as *La vera dichiaratione* (1587) by the Augustinian monk Evangelista Quattrami repackaged the ideas of Paracelsus (1493-1541) and his followers, such as Gerhard Dorn (c. 1530 – 1584); Quattrami characterized alchemy as a generative, productive process that, like human sex, created substances by joining male and female (53). Especially helpful to preachers was Ricciardi's *Commentaria Symbolica* (generally cited in sermons as "Ricardo Brixiense"). The *Commentaria* organized, summarized, and indexed the ideas of alchemical authorities such John of Garland (active c. 1220), Giovanni Aurelio Augurello (1441–1524), Jacques Gohory (1520-1576), and Giovanni Battista Nazari (active c. 1570). Ricciardi seems to have swallowed Dorn's *Dictionarium Theophrasti Paracelsi* (1583) whole, citing it 68 times, by my count, in just the first volume. Ricciardi would be an influence on preachers such as the Augustinians Pedro de Valderrama and Carlos de la Concepción, as well as the Franciscans Juan de Madrid and Juan de Mora. Even fairly conservative works, such as the Jesuit Bernardo Cesi's *Minerologia* (1636), introduced preachers such as José de Barcia y Zambrana to the chymical works of Johann Daniel Mylius (d. 1642).

Medieval and early modern sermons did not represent alchemy as a spiritual practice, as José Rodríguez Guerrero has demonstrated, but rather as a familiar discipline that allowed Catholics to understand articles of faith through comparisons to natural processes and laboratory

techniques (Rodríguez 2014-2018, 25; Rodríguez, forthcoming).[5] For example, José de Jesús María explained that "la distilacion de las quintas essencias" was an "ejemplo material [que] nos ayudará a declarar esta materia tan espiritual" (Planes 1667, 238).[6] Alchemy appeared so regularly in sermons, in fact, that sermons may have shaped the sensibilities of alchemists. Forshaw conjectures that the alchemist Heinrich Khunrath (1560-1605) emphasizes the "analogical harmony between Christ and the Stone," in part due to sermons: "It almost seems as though Khunrath is responding to preachers making use of alchemical motifs in their sermons and is recycling their language for his own theo-alchemical agenda" (Forshaw 2025, II.535).[7]

Sex, class, and variety

The early modern fascination with hermaphroditic bodies, noted by Daston and Park, is obvious in Spanish sermons and other vernacular works by religious authors. Bodies that are identifiable neither as entirely male nor entirely female, or are identifiable as equally male and female, often serve as theological test cases. This is for two reasons. The first is that hermaphroditic bodies trouble the stable gender categories upon which sacraments such as marriage and ordination rely. I return to this in the next paragraph. The second is that hermaphroditic bodies illustrate the infinite variety of nature. That variety includes extraordinary bodies that might be understood as portents, or as instances of monstrosity and deformity or, Paula Findlen explains, as examples of Nature's playfulness, i.e. *lusus* (Findlen 1990). For Baltasar de Vitoria, a Franciscan, the hermaphroditic body was a marvelous example of nature's ludic spirit: "fue [el Hermafrodito] un artificio grande de naturaleza, para mostrarse varia y admirable" (Vitoria 1657, 60). Francisco Toledo said that "el Hermafrodita que tiene entrambos sexos" was just as natural as someone born with only three toes on one foot (Toledo 1627, 59). Toledo, a Jesuit, contended that this was not an "irregularidad" or "irrita" that could put a believer beyond the hope of salvation or exclude them from membership in the mystical body of the church. Instead, it was well within the range of natural variation. It followed, then, that intersex people could marry and be ordained.

Finden explains that a discussion of nature's playfulness and variety illuminates "aspects of pre-Linnaean taxonomy, in particular the need for alternative categories in classifying problematic phenomena" (Findlen 1990, 293). For early modern Spanish authors, the hermaphrodite was a problematizing phenomenon that helped to describe both the limits of natural classes and the nature of those limits. In a well-known emblem by Sebastián de Covarrubias, "la barbuda de Peñaranda" declares "Soy varón, soy mujer, soy un tercero" (Pinet 2016, 115-116; Horswell 2005, 62-64). Covarrubias's verse captures a crucial aspect of the myth of Hermaphroditus: the "fusion of male and female sexed parts into a biform body that was, as Ovid claimed, both and neither" (DeVun 2008, 194).

Regulating a body that was "both and neither" or "un tercero" was a recurring theme in works of moral theology and manuals for confessors.[8] Most authors came down about where

[5] Sermons were not alone in this. González Acevedo finds Pedro Calderón de la Barca's refrences to alchemy in the *auto sacramental* entitled *La vida es sueño* "una clara orientación catequética" (Acevedo González 2013, 397). On alchemical allusions in the *comedia* also titled *La vida es sueño,* see De Armas 1992.

[6] The book that the Carthusian Bernardino Planes published as *Concordancia mistica* in 1667 was written by the Carmelite José de Jesús María before 1629.

[7] Authors writhing in the Spanish vernacular, such as Guerrero, generally refer to Khunrath as Henrico Conrado (Guerrero 1682, 11v).

[8] In this article, I do not deal with the Church's attempts to regulate intersex identities and lives. But these systems of regulation were pervasive and dealt with such subjects as the selling of hermaphrodite slaves (whether the male or female sex predominated), betting on the sex of an unborn child in cases in which the mother "pariere hermafrodito,"

Henrique de Villalobos did: hermaphrodites could marry according to their predominant sex, determined by the organ they used to urinate (Villalobos 1637, 387). Villalobos admitted, however, that there could be cases in which neither sex predominated, in which case the person could freely choose which sex would define their married identity: "si es igual en ambos sexos, puede usar del que quisiere" (Villalobos 1634, 160). They only catch was that they had to forswear the use of the other gender identity and sexual organ. In theory, it was also the case that someone who had married as a woman might remarry as a man in cases where neither sex predominated. Pedro de Orozco held that this would be possible as long as during the second marriage they did not revert to the use the sexual organ that they had used in their first: "Pero si enviudando, de hecho se casa y varía de sexo, como si el primer Matrimonio usó del de varón y el segundo del de hembra, el Matrimonio es válido" (Orozco 1635, 532).[9] The theological hermaphrodite was most valuable for thought experiments precisely when the body it supposed was most improbable: a perfect balance of male and female, with equally fertile male and female reproductive organs.

Because they were improbable, the imagined or supposed anatomy and physiology of the theological hermaphrodite had little in common with medical theories about actual, biological sex. Pueyo explains that medical diagnoses of hermaphroditism did not depend on an individual's anatomy; according to physicians, hermaphroditism was a latent condition that might or might not manifest at a later date (Pueyo 2016, 93). As such, physicians' beliefs about actual bodies are clearly at odds with Villalobos' modal contention that the sexes *could* be differentiated consistently based on how someone urinated. And in *El entretenido* (1673), Antonio Sánchez Tórtoles is dubious that a hermaphrodite of the kind that Orozco imagined – a body in which neither sex predominated and both sets of sexual organs were equally fertile – actually existed (Sánchez Tórtoles 1673, 171-172).

In fact, it is quite clear that the theologians who declared that hermaphrodites of the kind they supposed could be ordained and marry were not advocating for the ordination or marriage of intersex people. The theological hermaphrodite was a hypothetical that tended to make theologians uncomfortable when their thought experiments threatened to impinge on the world of actual living, breathing people. We can sense this in Juan Machado de Chaves's grudging agreement with Francisco Toledo that hermaphrodites could participate fully in the sacraments (Machado de Chaves 1646, 149). Alonso de Vega, a Minim, stated his rejection of Toledo's position as his personal opinion: "a mí me parece que no debe ser ordenado el hermafrodita" (Vega 1602, 73). Jerónimo García, however, dismissed the notion that an intersex person could take holy orders, whether as a monk or a nun, as a logical impossibility: "lo cierto es que en ninguno de los dos estados puede profesar" (García 1648, 103).

Because discourses in which the theological hermaphrodite appears describe improbably or impossibly idealized beings, and therefore are not genuine attempts to regulate actual human lives or to structure Catholic devotion, these discourses probably had little bearing on the lives of intersex Catholics. Nummedal says much the same thing about the "feminist or queer discursive potential" of the alchemical hermaphrodite: "it has been difficult to link this aspect of alchemy to arguments for women's social equality or empowerment, or to acceptance of (not to mention appreciation for) same-sex partnerships, nonnormative gender, or intersex people" (Nummedal 2021, 129). Of course, Spanish civil and ecclesiastical authorities possessed formal and informal

and under what conditions a hermaphrodite could testify during legal proceedings (Hevia Bolaño 1619, 126, 668; Ribera 1610, 15v).

[9] Orozco is not well known, but Martín de filla (1635-1709), a high-ranking Capuchin friar, said nearly the same thing: "si enviudare y casare según el otro sexo, será válido el Matrimonio" (Torrecilla 1696, 623).

ways of ordering the lives of intersex people. The theological hermaphrodite, however, was an imagined being, a heuristic to think through the taxonomic difficulties and sacramental conundrums that could be caused by the existence of "both and neither" bodies in a divinely created, marvelously varied natural world.

One from two, many from one

In addition to helping Spanish ecclesiastics refine their sacramental and moral theology, theologians used the hermaphrodite to solve two problems. The first had to do with the relationship of divine creation to human procreation: if God created the cosmos to teach humankind about him, created humankind in his image, and God is one, why did he make human procreation depend on two bodies, male and female? At stake in this question is how multiplicity comes from unicity, which we might call the "ex uno plura" problem. The second of these two problems is how to understand the fusion of bodies, or the production of one body from more than one, whether that one body refers to the mystical body of the Church, or the spiritual union of God and a particular believer, or the union of bodies in coitus. This "one from two" problem concerns the relationship of production to reproduction, which we might call the "omnes concordant in uno" problem. Although the distinction between the "ex uno plura" and the "omnes concordant in uno" problems is meaningful for theologians, they are both iterations of what Mark Dorrian describes as fundamental concern of Platonic metaphysics: "the fear of multiplicity within unity, of 'the many in the one'" (310). To examine the nature of the distinction and relatedness of the two problems, I will examine the "one from two" or "omnes concordant in uno" problem first.

Spanish ecclesiastics had sophisticated rhetorical tools to describe the making of a hermaphrodite and the fusion of two or more bodies into a single body, whether physical or spiritual. Metallurgical images of the creation of one body from more than one were especially common in sermons and devotional works. For Francisco Durán, a Franciscan, sex for married couples was the "junta" of "dos quereres y voluntades" that would be melted down into a single "voluntad," as if it were a substance: "fraguada y acrisolada en el crisol de la encendida caridad y amor" (320). Just as spouses became one substance, so too did Christ's Incarnation marry the divine and human, literally "desposándose," to create one individual or "supuesto": "desposandose y uniendo a sí nuestra naturaleza humana, haciendo de dos naturalezas un supuesto divino" (320).[10] In the same way, argues Durán, the mystical body of the church integrates many bodies through "congregación" and "junta," the same word he used to describe spousal intercourse. Sex makes one body, whether it unites man and wife, divine and human, or the bodies of believers.

If the crucible of love, Durán's "crisol de la encendida caridad," could unite bodies, love could also analyze or separate them, according to Juan de los Ángeles (1536-1609). Drawing on Aristotle's *Meteorology* book IV, Juan de los Ángeles argued that mystical contemplation – through the liquefactive power ("liquefacción") of vivifying love ("amor vivifico") – could both synthesize bodies, and analyze (i.e. separate) bodies: "congregar y unir las cosas homogéneas y separar las heterogéneas" (1600, 162r). The heat of divine love could melt down homogenous bodies into a uniform liquid, like melted wax, and rend apart heterogeneous bodies into constituent parts. Book IV of the *Meteorology* was also an important text for alchemists. In fact, Juan de los Ángeles was plumbing Aristotle's language for terminology to describe mystical experience at the very moment

[10] "Supuesto," or "suppositum" in Latin, is a theological term particuarly associated with Thomism denoting an individual being that has substance, is complete or whole (in the sense that it is not part of another), and has a particular kind of nature (meaning that it is distinct from its nature). It can roughly be thought of here as an individual, as distinct from the nature of that individual. On supposita, see West.

that his contemporary, Andreas Libavius (c. 1550-1616), was drawing on the *Meteorology* to develop an atomist theory of Paracelsian analysis (Newman, 66-82).

Of course, conjoining or integrating male and female in order to create a single body, whether homogeneous or heterogeneous, is not the same as creating a two-sexed or hermaphroditic body. Even when authors use sex as a metaphor for the formation of a single, hermaphroditic body, they do not always imply that these synthesized bodies are capable of procreation. For example, the Cistercian Juan Caramuel de Lobkowitz (1606-1682) invoked the myth of Hermaphroditus to proclaim that Spain was where Mercury and Venus were joined. Caramuel simply meant that Spain was "un ramillete de todas las perfecciones," an amalgam of excellences, not a model of hermaphroditic reproduction (Caramuel 54).

For the fourth-century Ambrose of Milan, however, divine creation was to be understood in terms of the generativity of God's spiritual offices, male and female: "ita etiam Patris spiritalis est vulva, interioris arcanum, de qua tamquam ex genitali alvo processit Filius" [So, too, the spiritual Father has a uterus, a mystery hidden within Him, from which the Son came forth as from a generative womb].[11] The Carmelite preacher Cristóbal de Avendaño, quotes and paraphrases Ambrose in a Lenten sermon preached in Madrid in 1622: "la fecundidad y eminencia del Padre entra en vez de consorte y compañera para tener hijo, porque tiene, dice Ambrosio, el Eterno padre una virtud secreta que hace como oficio de Madre" (205). Even more literally, Pedro de Abreu says that God the father acts like the heat of the sun, while God as mother, "madre de sus criaturas," births these "criaturas" as if from a "silla de la parida" (1610, 167). Given that Ambrose's formulation could lead to an astrological, obstetric tangle, figures such as the phoenix – which combines, on the one hand, the procreative power of two sexes in a single body with, on the other, an account of the heat necessary to bring forth offspring – would seem to be more apt.[12]

The first-century pope, Clement of Rome, described the phoenix as a "signum mirabile" or "a wonderful sign of our resurrection"; it was, he said, an example of how "from one seed many ["ex uno plura"] arise and bring forth fruit" (Roberts et al., 1968 I:12). The Dominican Fernando Dávalos de Ribera would translate Clement's "signum mirabile" as "un símbolo admirable de la resurrección de los muertos" (1640, 290). Dávalos was a Dominican friar active in Perú during the first decades of the seventeenth century and his *Luz contra la culpa* (1640) follows Clement closely. Dávalos says that the phoenix "hace el oficio de los dos géneros, masculino y femenino, sin tener hembra y sin serlo, porque no es engendrada ni engendra." The phoenix is both and neither, "su principio y su fin," alpha and omega, but not figuratively: "no en sombra sino en verdad, no en imagen sino en original" (290). Dávalos is not talking about alchemy, but it is striking that a historian writing on the hermaphroditic Philosopher's Stone, in this case Kathleen P. Long, sounds so much like Dávalos's borrowing from Clement: "The Stone is thus the origin and end point of the universe, the alpha and omega, self-engendering and self destroying. This duality and self-sufficiency links the hermaphroditic stone to the phoenix" (Long 1995,12). The similarities between alchemical and homiletic discourses do not demonstrate mutual influence, but rather they suggest why mutual influence was possible.

[11] Although Ambrose's word "vulva" is often translated "womb" in English, a reviewer of this manuscript pointed out that a more accurate English translation for the Latin vulva would be uterus or vagina. I am grateful for the correction.

[12] In addition to the phoenix, preachers could have written sermons about hares, which were often believed to be hermaphrodites. Avendaño suggested that the behemoth in Job 40 was a hermaphrodite (1626, 249). Neither hares nor the behemoth were likely to embody a marvelous sign.

Clement's use of the phoenix has obvious theological attractions. As Dávalos' borrowing indicates, the phoenix as a figure helps explain divine creation in terms of human procreation: male and female are necessary, in a logical sense, but two gods or cosmological dualism is not. The phoenix was useful for other reasons. It was natural, not miraculous. José Pellicer de Ossau y Tovar (1602-1679) remarked with rather more pith than elegance, "Sino la podemos matar, milagro es" (Pellicer, 251r). It had a regular lifecycle, reproducing every 500 years. This predictability meant the phoenix was not extraordinary. Because it was natural and predictable, it was indicative of and not an exception to, the cosmic order. Better still, it was known to ancient authorities. Of course, the phoenix didn't actually exist but, as Hernando Castrillo explained, its inexistence would not diminish the power of Clement's figure (1649, 27). All of these arguments were relatively commonplace and all can be found in Pellicer's *El fenix y su historia natural* (1630), cited by Castrillo.

Clement and those who would follow him closely, such as Tertullian, only hint at the larger problems and confusions that the phoenix helps them avoid, namely Platonic, Neoplatonic, and Gnostic ways of describing the presence of two sexes in one body. In Plato's *Symposium,* Aristophanes speaks of the earliest humans as Androgynes: beings that combined male and female anatomies in bodies that possessed four legs, four arms, and two heads. When the gods divided Androgynes in two, male and female, humans as we now know them went in search of their other halves. This yearning to be reunited explains sexual desire. Whereas in the *Symposium,* androgyny is human beings' original state, Gnostic theologians believe that biological sex will be transcended in resurrection at the end of time. According to Gnostics, human beings will either return to or attain an androgynous body that is undefined and undefiled by sex.

Renaissance Neoplatonists such as Marsilio Ficino and León Hebreo believed that Adam was created with two sexes. The explanation for this was that in Genesis 1:27, God created male and female in his image: "in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." After God created Adam in Genesis 2, and before he created Eve, there existed Adam, male and female. In other words, there existed one body and two sexes, which must have been Adam. Neoplatonic interpreters such as Hebreo read the creation of Eve from Adam's rib to be a literal sundering of Adam's two-sexed body. Pedro Sánchez de Viana thought this was ludicrous (42r). In his commentaries of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1589), Sánchez de Viana summarizes Aristophanes' tale in the *Symposium*, and then Neoplatonic theories of love, beauty and attraction, citing Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, León Hebreo, and Marsilio Ficino (37r).[13] Although he rejects the idea that Adam was a hermaphrodite, Sánchez de Viana finds entirely plausible Hebreo's secondary interpretation, that Plato imperfectly copied older Mosaic traditions in which Adam and Eve together allegorize all of humankind, encompassing male and female (Sánchez de Viana, 42v-43r). Rather than being caught up in these niceties, Clement's phoenix simile sidestepped Gnostic heresies and the exegetical fallacies of Neoplatonists. And although Clement's formulation was very well known, the two-sexed phoenix as a symbol of resurrection was known to even more Spanish ecclesiastics thanks to Tertullian (c. 155-c. 220), an admirer of Clement's, an indefatigable foe of Gnostics, and one of the great prose stylists of the early church.

Tertullian, even more clearly than Clement, used the phoenix as a natural example of the presence of male and female powers within a single body that was capable of sexual reproduction. But Tertullian added a flourish that would both mystify and be understood as mystery by preachers, reopening the door to questions about the hermaphrodite. Puzzlingly, Tertullian attempted to

[13] Hernán Matzkevich has recently surveyed scholarship on the considerable popularity of León Hebreo's philosophy (Matzkevich 2024, 60).

expand on Clement's conceit of the phoenix by misquoting Psalm 92, which normally reads "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree." In Tertullian's version, however, phoenix is substituted for palm: "The righteous shall flourish like the phoenix" (*Ante-Nicene Fathers* III:594). Tertullian is almost certainly aware that palm trees were called *Phoenix* by Theophrastus and others. Pellicer notes the ancient palm/phoenix connection (9v), and Carl Linneaus, following Theophrastus, even named a genus of palm trees that includes the date palm *Phoenix*.[14] However, the confusion among Tertullian's readers had to do with sex, and very clearly stemmed from the fact that date palms are dioecious, having distinct male trees and female trees. (Most plants are monoecious, meaning each individual plant has both male and female flowers.) Barcia y Zambrana, bishop of Cádiz and perhaps the most significant preacher of the final decades of the seventeenth century, wondered, "¿Fenix y Palma? ¿Cómo es esto?" (1694, 83).

Barcia answers his question by positing that Tertullian was speaking about the virgin Mary's conception of Christ when he confused the palm and the phoenix. Barcia adduces two explanations to his interpretation. First, the phoenix reproduces through male and female virtues without the need of coitus (Barcia 1694, 83). Second, palm trees are "símbolo del desposorio" because individual plants are either male or female – there is "entre las palmas él y ella" – and they do not need to be grafted to bring forth fruit. Because grafting requires the insertion of a foreign "injerto," grafted trees are less virginal, and the palm, more so. Palm trees fascinated Barcia and his contemporaries because the males and females propagated themselves over expanses without visibly touching. Perhaps human beings might similarly be able, as Thomas Browne (1605-1682) put it, "to fornicate at a distance" (Browne 2020, III. 44). Browne discusses the veracity of a story, attributed to Ibn Rushd (Averroes), of a woman who conceived without "corporeal and carnal contaction [sic]" when she bathed in a tub that contained a measure of human semen. The interest in seminal emissions responsible for contactless conception were, in fact, microcosmic considerations of macrocosmic theories of generation, such as that of "panspermia." For the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), "panspermia" suggested that "God inserted this seminal *spiritus*," or primordial seed, "into the chaotic matter for the propagation of living beings" (Hirai 2007, 79). Consequently, we all might be bathed in a seminal, generative *spiritus*. If Tertullian referred to the phoenix in the hope of speaking about two sexes in one body while avoiding the baggage associated with Ovid's Hermaphroditus, it did not work.

Alonso López Magdaleno's sermon on Teresa de Jesús took Tertullian's exchange of phoenix for palm as an opportunity to meditate on marriage and the intimacy of mystical extasy. "¡Deseo investigar." exclaimed López Magdaleno, "la razón porque a dos naturalezas tan distintas, como son la Palma arbol y la Fenix ave, las equivocan con un mismo nombre!" (363). The reason, he explains, is that the terminological confusion mirrors the mystical union of Teresa, wife, and Christ, husband. Theirs would be a nuptial "transformación tan recíproca" that it would mirror the confusion of palm and phoenix:

> Pues si en virtud de otorgarse Jesús por Esposo de Teresa y de admitir a esta por su Esposa, se alternó entre Jesús y Teresa una transformación tan reciproca, que Cristo se confiesa por

[14] It is not clear precisely where the association between palm trees and the phoenix originated, whether it was due to the sunshine necessary to ripen dates, the life-sustaining powers attributed to dates, or simply that dates were cultivated and eaten by Phoenicians (Popenoe). What is clear, however, is that Tertullian's substitution of phoenix for palm has no reasonable philological or exegetical justification.

> de Teresa y a ella la recibe por suya. …equivóquese justamente la Palma de Teresa con el Fénix de Jesús Sacramentado. (364)[15]

In his explication of Tertullian's mysterious substitution, López Magdaleno followed a marked pattern set out by Avendaño, Dávalos de Ribera, and many others. As we have seen, Spanish preachers and authors were acutely aware that for Christianity's most important early theologians, God's creation could be understood in terms of procreation, and that God's power was illuminated by the presence of male and female generativity in a single, natural body.

Excess of meaning and the ethics of exegesis

Alchemical texts, explains DeVun, "played upon the metaphorical parallelism of the philosophers' stone and Jesus Christ to claim Christ him/herself as a hermaphrodite, the perfect combination of contraries – masculine and feminine, human and divine – in one body" (DeVun 2008, 195). In some ways, this is very peculiar. Almost every aspect of the Hermaphroditus myth and its retellings make it difficult to moralize (or Christianize). There are certainly Bible stories about rape and incest, such as Shechem's rape of Dinah, mentioned above, and Amnon's rape of his half-sister Tamar (2 Samuel). (Many exegetes also categorized Abraham's claim that his wife Sarah was actually his sister as incest.) But in satirical poetry, a hermaphrodite is an effeminate, half man, not a perfect union of balanced excellences (e.g. "Doña Inflamación," n.p.). Venus or Aphrodite was a symbol of promiscuity. Mercury or Hermes was often associated with inconstancy, duplicity, androgyny, and effeminacy (De Armas 1992, 305; Kavey 2007, 131-132). For Juan Pérez de Moya, the myth of Hermaphroditus was the story of equality where there should have been dominance (144). For Sánchez de Viana, Salmacis was simply "deshonesta" (84v). None of this is present in the theological hermaphrodite as we have examined the figure so far.

Hermaphroditus meant so many things – positive and negative – that the theological hermaphrodite demanded an ethics or set of practices that could enable its use while preserving doctrinal discipline. In other words, an excess of meaning required an ethics of exegesis. There were two strategies by which authors sought to avoid or constrain the problematic associations with Hermaphroditus while using the theological hermaphrodite as heuristic. The first was to do the hard work of moralizing the myth of Hermaphroditus to explain the sacraments, as Pedro Calderón de la Barca had done with other myths in his *autos sacramentales* such as *El divino Jasón*.[16] The second was to reterritorialize the figure.

Pablo de la Cruz (d. 1631) chose the former: the improbable work of simultaneously moralizing both Ovid's telling of the myth of Hermaphroditus and Plato's story about the Androgyne in the *Symposium*. For Pablo de la Cruz, Plato is "el divino filósofo" who enciphers the "más altos y teológicos sentidos" (238v-239r). Citing the *Symposium* in a marginal note to an encomium on Jesus' putative father, Joseph, Pablo de la Cruz begins at the beginning: "los primeros hombres" each had "dos cuerpos entre sí unidos, el uno de varón y el otro de hembra" (238v). It is as if, Pablo de la Cruz says, Plato himself "había leído las divinas Escrituras," so clearly is Plato's story an echo of Adam's exclamation that Eve was, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." This was not without precedent. Marian Rothstein identifies a broader tradition in

[15] López Magdaleno's sermon would be anthologized four years later in the *Colectánea de sermones y assumptos predicables* (Núñez 1680).

[16] Both Quattrami (1587, 221) and Villa (1647, 113r) relate the belief that Jason's quest was an alchemical allegory and that the Golden Fleece was an alchemical book.

which "the longing for the other of Plato's figure is merged with the Mosaic androgyne, man and wife as one flesh" (409). However, the merging is so complete in Pablo de la Cruz's text that the *Symposium* and Genesis sound like versions of the same text: "Prosiguiendo pues la fábula de Platón… el amor excesivo (aunque entonces no más de espiritual) que a Eva tuvo Adán, le hizo comer del fruto vedado" (239r). It almost sounds as if Plato were the author of Genesis.

Next, without mentioning Hermaphroditus explicitly for the time being, Pablo de la Cruz begins methodically marshaling all of the commonplaces his contemporaries negatively associated with the myth: monstrousness, rape, and incest. He briefly contextualizes Adam and Eve's being of one flesh via the three-bodied, three-headed Geryon. Tamar and Amnon illustrate the dangers of lasciviousness. Abraham calls Sarah his sister because theirs is an ideal, nearly platonic love. Shechem's circumcision, following his rape of Dinah, symbolizes the passage of desire from carnal to spiritual (240r-v). In all of these cases, Pablo de la Cruz finds the same instruction: "es adultero con su propia mujer, aquel que la ama ardientemente; esto es siguiendo en el amor el fuego de la sensualidad" (241r). If spouses "no se arrojaran precipitadamente al carnal ayuntamiento," they would find the perfect love of Adam and Eve, and they would become one person, just as in Plato's story: "ser entrambos una misma persona, como Platón en su fábula decía." One can hardly tell whether Pablo de la Cruz refers to Eden or the Androgyne.

Having willfully confused the *Symposium* and the Bible, Pablo de la Cruz next starts overlaying the myth of Hermaphroditus. Ovid himself, Pablo de la Cruz believes, alluded to Adam and Eve as Androgyne in the myth of Hermaphroditus: "A esto me parece que alude otra [fábula] semejante que Ovidio cuenta de la Ninfa llamada Salmacis" (241r-v). Again, the union of two bodies returns Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, just as it returned Adam and Eve, to the primordial union described by Plato: "la integridad que según Platón […] habían perdido" (241v). Gone is any mention of rape or wantonness. Salmacis and Hermaphroditus are united in a pool of water, which illustrates not concupiscence, but "la virtud de la templanza y castidad" which is symbolized by the "saludable y fresco baño, con que se tiempla el fuego de la concupisencia" (241v).

By becoming one body, bathed in a platonic love that cools the heat of desire, returning to their primordial androgyny, married couples become a spiritual Hermaphroditus: "En este fesco baño se juntan los casados con espiritual amor, vuelvense a unir como fueron criados; hacense un espiritual Hermaphrodito" (242r). Although this is an especially developed instance, Pablo de la Cruz's object is the same as we saw previously in references to the theological hermaphrodite: to illustrate sacramental perfection. By so methodically consolidating Adam and Eve, Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, and Plato's Androgyne, Pablo de la Cruz creates a narrative synthesis that mirrors the fusions of hermaphroditic bodies. It is a synthesis that confuses systematically.

The same confusion, proliferation, and overlaying of meaning can be found in fairly technical alchemical illustrations. Giambattista Della Porta believed that "distillationis artem alchimiae germanam" [the art of distillation is alchemy's twin sister] (2).[17] In his distillation manual, *De distillatione libri IX* (1608), an illustration of a "double pelican still" or "double circulatory," shows two naked figures facing the reader, embracing. [Insert figure 3] Compositionally, Della Porta's illustration strikes a middle ground between the famous bicorporal hermaphrodite of the *Aurora consurgens* studied by DeVun and the bicephalous hermaphrodite in a 1595 translation of the *Metamorphoses* entitled *Las transformaciones de Ovidio* (DeVun 2008,

[17] I thank John Rundin for his translation of the passages of Della Porta's *De distillatione libri IX.*

206).[18] This is not Hermes and Aphrodite nor Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, however. Della Porta simply calls them "twins":

> …two vessels, of which each is connected to the other, and what one receives, it returns to the other; each of the two is fastened to the other at the other's belly with its beak, just as twin brothers embrace each mutually. Accordingly, they call these vessels twins. (Della Porta 40)

The similarity to alchemical hermaphrodites is highlighted by Della Porta's explanation that the exchange of fluids between the two vessels perfects the spirit or liquor being distilled. Alchemical hermaphrodites always seem to be erasing important borders between consent and force, natural and unnatural, providing us with an "optimistic message contained within an often violent narrative" (Long 2016, 156). This was precisely the kind of erasure of borders that Filippo Picinelli, an Augustinian of Milan, sought to correct.

Among Spanish ecclesiastics and preachers of the late seventeenth century, I find no iconographic manual more widely cited than Picinelli's *Mundus Symbolicus* (published first in Italian in 1653 and in Latin in 1681). The *Mundus symbolicus* is divided into two parts, "corpora naturalia" and "corpora artificialia," and both parts contain a significant number of references to alchemy. In one instance, Picinelli's reimagining and moralization of alchemical iconography were understood to be a correction to Della Porta's twins.

One of Picinelli's most curious illustrations is of rather squat, solid distillation apparatus sitting atop a masonry furnace (1681, 105). The illustration is finely executed but rather uninspiring. The slow dripping of volatilized spirits distilled by the heat of the furnace is an allegory of Mary Magdalene's tears in John 20.[19] Picinelli's furnace and still is perhaps the least erotic early modern representation of Mary Magdalene (who was often represented in art as a repentant prostitute, sometimes nearly naked, sometimes luxuriously hirsute, and occasionally both). But the erotic subtext is still discernable.

Picinelli takes one of the mottos he assigns to the distillation apparatus, "Calor elicit imbres," from *Amorum Emblemata* (1608), a book of emblems by Otto van Veen, a follower of Paracelsus.[20] In Van Veen's image, a cherubic Eros or putto sheds tears aside an alembic distilling droplets of liquor. On its surface, the motto "Calor elicit imbres" refers to the hydrologic cycle – heat brings forth rain – but the implication is that the heat of passionate love is painful and causes tears, just as the heating forces distilled droplets from the alembic. Picinelli reterritorializes this nexus of signification – meteorological (rain), physiological (tears), mythological (Eros), technical (alembic) – overwriting what Pablo de la Cruz called "el fuego de la concupisencia" with Mary Magdalene's penitential tears, and simultaneously substituting the heavy, solid distillation apparatus for the eroticized representations of the repentant prostitute. Picinelli instructs the reader that "Representarás a la Magdalena o a cualquier otro triste amante con el emblema del alambique o destilador […] destilando abundantes gotitas" (Picinelli 2012, 97). Picinelli's *Mundus symbolicus* was influential because it so effectively rewrote iconography, reassigning well-known

[18] The 1595 *Transformaciones de Ovidio* included a set of illustrations that were copies of a version of an original that had first been published almost half a century before; the plates used in 1595 would be reused across six more editions for another 55 years (Biblioteca Digital Ovidiana).

[19] I examine the influence of this passage of the *Mundus Symbolicus* on Barcia y Zambrana in "Alchemical Sermons in Spain" (Slater 2014-2018, 300-302). In that article, I discuss neither Picinelli's debt to Otto van Veen nor Núñez's citation of Picinelli.

[20] On Van Veen's Paracelsianism, see Hedesan 2021.

texts to new signifying ends. As Sagrario López explains, Picinelli "no reproduce más que los *lemmata* de los emblemas, pero estructura su colección en una taxonomía en que atiende a las *picturae* que se agrupan en distintas categorías abarcando todo un universo o mundo simbólico" (2012, 37).

It is striking to see how Picinelli's project of resignification is reproduced in Esteban Núñez's adaptation of Della Porta's twins. Núñez was "monje boticario" or monk apothecary at the famed Benedictine monastery of San Juan in Burgos. He was also the author of a manuscript on alchemical distillation entitled *Miropolio general y racional de botica* that, if published, would have extended the work of his predecessor Esteban Villa. The *Miropolio* (c. 1680) combines original insights, technical expertise, and even humorous quips, with vernacular paraphrases of famous works of alchemy: *De priscorum Philosophorum* (1603) by Joseph Duchesne (1544-1609, known as Quercetanus) and Pierre-Jean Fabre's *Panchymicus, seu Anatomia totius Universi Opus* (1646), as well as works by Leonardo Fioravanti (1517-1588), Paracelsus, Mylius, and many others, including Della Porta.

In the proem to *De distillatione libri IX*, Della Porta does not hide his enthusiasm for the wonders of distillation: "Sed inter innumeras et varias artes et scientias quas in mundo monstrifica hominum ingenia peperere nulla est profecto distillationis arti anteferenda" (1608. n.p.). Núñez translates this faithfully (without attribution) in the *Miropolio*: "Ninguna de cuantas cosas ha inventado el hombre se debe anteponer a la destilación" (2003, 181). For the next several pages, Núñez translates, paraphrases, condenses, and amplifies Della Porta's text. Just when it seems he is about to treat Della Porta's chapter nineteen, which features the double pelican or twins, Núñez abruptly changes course, and immediately before moving on, cites Picinelli's *Mundus symbolicus* on distilled waters (Núñez 2003, 187). All of the complications and troubling allusions that might have accompanied Della Porta's twins are overwritten by Núñez using Picinelli's moralized alchemy. Instead of moralizing the alchemical hermaphrodite, the Benedictine Núñez makes a palimpsest, hiding the twins behind new symbolic world. Where Pablo de la Cruz sought to integrate and synthesize by treating disparate sources as if they were homogenous, Núnez sought to cut, eliminate, and separate, drawing on new iconographic sources. The explosive, unruly signifying power of these the theological and alchemical hermaphrodites meant that they were difficult to erase, even if they were overwritten.

Conclusion

Early modern Spanish ecclesiastics had a marvelous variety of rhetorical tools with which to talk about two-sexed bodies. As we have seen, some of these strategies drew on the canonical theology of the patriarchs of the early Church, others on Neoplatonic reconsiderations of the traditions of Antiquity, and still others drew on iconographic reforms. The theological hermaphrodite, whether imagined as Adam and Eve, Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, Phoenix, Androgyne, or all of these at once, constituted a highly developed, highly conventionalized, and disciplined way to speak about generation and creation, making and production. Both because Clement and Tertullian had used the phoenix to speak about resurrection and eternal life, and because the theological hermaphrodite shared many features of the hermaphrodite in alchemical discourses, mutual influence was inevitable. It was never, however, straightforward. As in the case of the phoenix, alchemical and theological hermaphrodites constituted metaphorical systems that used similar vehicles, if often to refer to different tenors.

As I was writing this article, I learned that my colleagues at other universities were prohibited from teaching the passages of Plato's *Symposium* about Androgynes, as well as the

theological, homiletic, and scientific traditions associated with alchemical and theological hermaphrodites (Blinder 2026; Goodman 2025). Apparently, those who believe in nature's infinite variety are radicals out of step with today's politics; their fellow radicals would seem to include anyone who finds it helpful to interrogate taxonomic systems via "both and neither" challenges, and Nominalists, and even Clement of Rome. Thinking about this, I was, on the one hand, nonplussed. Theologians and philosophers had spent millennia thinking through these problems and laying out their conclusions in the foundational texts of Western civilization. It had been nearly a given for all of recorded history that nature's variety might not easily be mapped onto gendered social configurations. Could the gender ideologies of Ambrose of Milan really be causing anxiety? On the other hand, however, I was heartened to know that neither the radicalism of early Christians, who believed that they were recovering the lost unity of Adam's two sexes, nor the power of Tertullian's prose had lost their ability to startle (Meeks 1974, 167-168). If the vexations of "The Bacon Debates" suggested that consensus was a long way off, perhaps the theological hermaphrodite has yet more work to do.

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